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Indefinable Forces: How Teachers Negotiate Narratives of Ability and Inclusivity While Applying Universal Design for Learning

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INDEFINABLE FORCES:

HOW TEACHERS NEGOTIATE NARRATIVES OF ABILITY AND INCLUSIVITY WHILE APPLYING UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my husband Rich, whose unwavering support and belief in me has been limitless throughout this process. And to my children, Isabel, Joey, and Jackson, whose curiosity and silliness inspire all that I do. Finally, I dedicate this work to my parents, Jim and Louise, who have been models of care, patience, and perseverance for as long as I can remember.

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ABSTRACT

INDEFINABLE FORCES:

HOW TEACHERS NEGOTIATE NARRATIVES OF ABILITY AND INCLUSIVITY WHILE APPLYING UNIVERSAL DESIGN FOR LEARNING

by

Beth S. Fornauf

University of New Hampshire, May, 2020

Despite efforts of educators and advocates to include students with labeled disabilities in all aspects of public education, many are segregated, deprived of interactions with peers, and offered content lacking in rigor and relevance. In one New England state, public schools have the opportunity to participate in a statewide initiative that aims to combat such exclusion, and make learning more effective for all through Universal Design for Learning (UDL). UDL is a pedagogical framework focused on the design of instructional materials, methods, and environments to optimize teaching and learning for all students. This ethnographic case study explores how educators applying UDL articulate ability and perform inclusive pedagogy. I draw on critical discourse analysis as an analytical framework to explore how narratives of ability and inclusivity are constructed and contested through discourse and pedagogical performances. The findings suggest that educators' process of taking up UDL caused them to question dominant narratives of ability as a static, individual attribute, as well as narratives that position inclusivity as a function of special education service provision. At the same time, there is evidence that contesting these dominant historical narratives is a messy process, and hierarchical systems embedded in schools significantly constrain attempts to enact more transformative interpretations of ability and take up a critical discourse of ability. Although UDL may hold the promise of

advancing a paradigmatic shift in how ability and inclusivity play out in schools, more explicit engagement with these indefinable forces is essential to making this happen.

Prologue

As a newly hired and recently certified special education teacher, I had imagined my initial visit to my classroom to be the stuff of legend and meaning-making. I was supposed to walk in happily and confidently, if a little nervously, and create a beautiful welcoming space for my future students, complete with rug and rocking chair, and filled with natural light. As I walked into the building, I was not disappointed. The warm summer morning was bright and clear. I entered the sunny main office of the middle school I was greeted warmly by the school principal Cliff[1] *and the office staff.*

"Let me show you your space," Cliff said after I had been introduced to everyone. Grabbing his ring of keys, he led me out of the office and toward the elevator.

"Stairs are blocked," he said. "They're stripping the floors. But it'll be done before school starts."

I nodded, only half hearing what he was saying as I peeked into the classrooms lining the halls, many of which were already cheerily decorated and organized for the first day of school. I was busy imagining the possibilities for my bulletin boards as the elevator descended to the bottom floor of the school.

Cliff pushed aside the elevator gate with a rattle and we stepped out into a dark circular hallway. There were several classrooms, all closed and dark, some emitting eerie gray light that managed to seep in from the windows.

"Here we go," said Cliff as he jingled his keys again and unlocked the classroom ahead of us. "Welcome to the Learning Center."

I stepped inside and stopped. I quite literally could not go any farther. Tables, desks, bookshelves, and mountains of boxes created an obstacle course in the room so that I could barely see the windows on the opposite wall. Stepping forward wasn't an option so I shuffled sideways to allow Cliff to step in behind me. He stood in the doorway as, together, we surveyed the space.

[1] All names of persons, institutions, and towns are pseudonyms.

"This'll mostly be cleaned out," he said reassuringly. I scanned the space and spotted not one, but two yellowish refrigerators standing in the center of the room, buttressed by a large desk on one side and stacked filing cabinets on the other. This was a learning center?

"Some of the stuff will stay," Cliff continued. "You'll share this room with Nancy and Deb, they're great. Been around a long time. And Jenny's program is next door, so you all are close."

I nodded absentmindedly, trying not to show the panic I felt, and trying not to look like I wanted to crawl out of the building as though I'd never seen the place. I felt like I should say something, but I couldn't seem to speak. We stood in silence for a moment, taking in the mass of unwanted furniture before us. Finally I mustered, "Jenny's program?"

Cliff explained that Jenny was another special education teacher who taught a self-contained class. This was somewhat unusual in a middle school of 7th and 8th graders, where students typically had different teachers for different subjects. I would soon learn that her program was typically referred to as "life skills" and that this year she was also absorbing a new group of students who I would hear referred to as "behavior kids."

I tried to nod again, but might have only managed a blink. I looked around again and spotted three large desks. I asked Cliff about these, and he confirmed that yes, I would be sharing the space with two other case managers, and six ed techs (paraprofessionals), the latter of which were assigned to a specific team of teachers. This seemed like a lot of people to fit in a classroom, but Cliff explained that the ed techs provided support in the classrooms, and did not spend a lot of time in the Learning Center.

Eventually Cliff led me back to the elevator and up to the main level, where I met a few teachers, filled out some paperwork, and planned to return the next week once the school was in a more presentable state. I walked quickly to my car, turned the key, and tried to scrounge up some of the excitement I'd felt on the drive over. "It's just messy now," I thought, "It's just not ready yet. It's going to be great…"

One week later I returned for new teacher orientation to find a much cleaner, brighter, and more populated building. I, along with a handful of other new teachers, was given a tour of the building. I saw the top floor, which was home to several 8th grade classrooms and a spacious, bright room for the gifted and talented program. My basement classroom had dramatically improved, and although one refrigerator remained, it was no longer in the center of

the room. In fact it was convenient for storing food that I would later use in co-teaching math and reading lessons. In my corner of the room, I had a desk and a bookshelf. Several round tables populated the center of the room, making it look inviting and comfortable. I also saw Jenny's classroom, which was actually two adjoining rooms: one was similar to the Learning Center, but a bit smaller, and the other was a much smaller, darker, windowless room. Her classrooms were to the right of mine, flanked on the other side by stairs, and then the special education reading teacher's room. Four content-specific 8th grade classrooms rounded out the other side of the circular hallway. In the center of the hallway was the elevator shaft, the office of the School Psychological Service Provider, and the (also windowless) IEP meeting room.

Looking back on this visit, I think my initial account of this day was somewhat unfair. I have made some changes, not to the story's content, but to the primarily critical and decidedly un-reflective tone I used in my prior description of that day. While it is true that I was troubled by my initial visit – I saw as special education being relegated to the basement in an "out-of sight-out-of-mind" sort of way – I think the portrait I painted for myself was shortsighted and rather privileged. In my shortsightedness, I failed to account for the complex context in which my visit occurred: during the summer, when an understaffed team of custodians and administrators were trying to prepare the school for students, and teams of teachers were in transition. That is, many spaces were being reassigned and redesigned, and as a result much of the building was in flux. From my privileged vantage point (thirteen years removed from this visit) I took an unfairly deficit-based view of the school and the people in it.

That said, the events described above had a significant impact on my subsequent work as a teacher, graduate student, and researcher. Considering my initial visit, my first few years of teaching, and my assimilation into the social and professional norms of the schools in which I worked, several points in particular shaped my research trajectory, and inform this dissertation.

First, I felt that my surroundings, including the structural environment, as well as the pedagogical spaces created through organizational systems (e.g., tracking, ability groupings) shaped my understanding of what were normal and acceptable practices in schools. For example, pulling students on my caseload out of the classroom to reteach concepts became a sort of retrofitted intervention that I performed with regularity. This became so normalized I did not stop to consider how I might have worked with content area teachers to design lessons from the outset to be more accessible to all of the students in the room. Second, I adopted the vernacular of the school without critically considering how I was talking about students: *My* kids became the students I was responsible for – not only for teaching, but for protecting from a system in which they had not experienced much success. Yet my protection was doing little to support a sense of belonging or future success. Further, in focusing on sheltering students from the struggle to belong and succeed I was neglecting the opportunity to think about what was causing their marginalization, while simultaneously failing to consider what supports might be beneficial, and how to enact them. In short, I allowed my initial perceptions of the language of disability, spatial separation, and normalized instructional practices to play a deterministic role in shaping my work. While I had little issue assuming responsibility for students on my caseload, I began to assume that many of them *should* be with me in a separate space for at least part of the day, if only to allow them a space to feel welcome and competent. What I failed to realize at the time however, was that in internalizing ownership of "my kids" and taking up a discourse of responsibility and protection, I was establishing and reinforcing discursive practices that perpetuated narratives of powerlessness and incapability surrounding these students.

* * *

This dissertation is framed in part by my experience as a dually[2] certified general and special education teacher. During my tenure as a special educator and then elementary classroom teacher, I felt increasing discomfort about the ways in which ability served as a dividing force. A binary interpretation of ability sorted students and teachers into special or general education systems, and determined where, how, and with whom we worked. Although I considered myself an inclusive, collaborative teacher of *all* students, irrespective of labels, I was embedded in a system that significantly limited my opportunities to collaborate and include. And while I did not realize it at the time, the system extended even beyond the walls of the learning center, and the boundaries of the school grounds.

Teachers work in a complex web that interweaves the dual systems of special and general education, medicalized language of student ability, ambiguous discourses of inclusivity, and narrow norms of acceptable performance and behavior. This is not to say we were hopelessly entangled or trapped; my colleagues and I supported our students and one another unwaveringly. I highlight these factors only to point out that we faced - and as this dissertation will illustrate, teachers continue to face - a number of systemic constraints that shaped not only our practice, but also the ways in which we talked about, determined, and tried to understand student ability while advocating for inclusive education.

My intent in sharing this personal narrative is neither to berate myself nor criticize my former school. I still believe that my colleagues were – and remain – committed to all of their students. Rather, my purpose is to take notice of discursive, organizational, and instructional patterns from my own experience as a starting point for this study.

[2] Throughout this dissertation, references to dual certification refer to a teacher who is certified in special education and either elementary or secondary (content area) certification unless otherwise specified.

Chapter 1: Introduction

The enactment of academic and social inclusion for many school-age students is both inconsistent and contentious in practice (Artiles, Kozleski, Dorn, & Christensen, 2006; McDermott, Edgar, & Scarloss, 2011; Slee, 2011; Waitoller & King Thorius, 2015). Despite the best intentions of educators, there is often a sharp contrast between the concept of inclusion and the ways in which students - particularly those with labeled disabilities - are talked about, placed, and taught in P-12 schools (Ferri & Connor, 2007; Moore, 2016). Dynamics of discourse, pedagogy, and even the organization of learning environments shape and are shaped by dominant storylines, or narratives, of ability and inclusivity that exist in schools and society.

This study investigates how these narratives of ability and inclusivity are constructed in one New England elementary school. This particular elementary school serves as a promising site for examining such narratives, due in part to the educators' (teachers and administrators) self-described philosophical commitment to inclusion, as well as the school's participation in a professional learning opportunity aimed at schoolwide implementation of Universal Design for Learning (UDL). As I explain in a later section of this chapter, UDL is a pedagogical framework for teaching and learning (Rose & Meyer, 2002) with a theoretical grounding consistent with social models of disability (e.g., Oliver, 2009) that considers how individuals are *disabled by* their environments, as well as cultural theories (e.g., McDermott & Varenne, 1995; 1999) that consider the cultural context in which students come to be positioned as disabled.

Over the past decade, UDL has gained momentum as a promising framework for improving teaching and learning in both P12 and higher education, and facilitating inclusive pedagogy for all students, regardless of language, disability label, cultural background, etc. (Chita-Tegmark, Gravel, Serpa, Domings, & Rose, 2010; Lowrey, Hollingshead, & Howery, 2017; Rao, Ok, & Bryant, 2014). Unsurprisingly, this surge has captured the attention of

practitioners and researchers interested in exploring UDL as means of accessing the general education curriculum (e.g., Dymond et al., 2006), as an effective educational intervention (see Rao et al., 2014 for a review), or as a way to foster inclusive education (e.g., Lowrey & Smith, 2018). Notably, despite the steady increase in UDL research, there is a dearth of studies that foreground the experiences of practitioners, specifically P12 teachers and administrators actually taking up the work of UDL in classrooms (Lowrey et al., 2017).

This scarcity is further complicated by the ambiguity around UDL's links to varied, and sometimes incompatible strands of educational research and practice (Baglieri, 2016). Scholars have linked UDL with multicultural education (e.g., Pearson, 2015, Waitoller & Artiles, 2013), special education (e.g., King-Sears, 2014), culturally sustaining pedagogy (e.g., Alim et al., 2017; Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016), and Disability Studies (e.g., Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011; Mitchell, Snyder, & Ware, 2014), to name but a few. Some of these fields have pursued empirical research on UDL. For example, *Learning Disabilities Quarterly* published a two-part issue on UDL that aimed to "[apply] high-quality research indicators, operationalizes UDL interventions in ways that isolate the independent variable, and uses dependent variables focused on learning for students with and without LD" (King Sears, 2014, p. 69). Likewise, a number of studies have sought to examine some impact of UDL: for example, improving outcomes for students with intellectual disabilities (Lowrey et al., 2017), or the efficacy of UDL interventions for improving student performance (e.g., Coyne, Pisha, Dalton, Zeph, & Smith, 2012). Disparate as the aims of these studies may be, research on UDL across educational subfields is often concerned with establishing, maintaining, or advancing inclusive educational practices.

Building on this broad synthesis of UDL, and its emphasis on meeting the variable needs of all learners (Meyer, Rose, & Gordon, 2014), the current study assumes UDL's use as an *inclusive* educational framework. That said, "inclusive education" is not easily defined. As many scholars have discussed , the term is frequently debated and the concept contentious (e.g., Artiles et al., 2006; Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011; Kauffman & Badar, 2014; Slee, 2011). It is used in many traditions and in a variety of ways that attempting to arrive at a shared definition is both impractical and improbable, not to mention far beyond the scope of this dissertation.

For the purposes of this research, I draw on a definition of inclusive education put forth by scholars in Disability Studies in Education (DSE). As I will discuss later in this chapter, this definition conceptualizes inclusive education as a philosophy of pedagogy in which ways of learning and knowing are variable and diverse, (Baglieri, 2017), and normative assumptions of ability are interrogated (Graham and Slee, 2008). My choice in aligning my research with this definition relates back to some of the foundational language of UDL, as well as Universal Design.[3] UDL is defined as a framework for improving *teaching* and *learning* for all people (CAST, 2018) based on the variability in how humans learn (Meyer et al., 2014). In addition, both UDL and Disability Studies reject the idea of a mythical average learner (Meyer et al., 2014; Rose, 2017) or "normal child" (Baglieri et al., 2011) and view disability and disablement as cultural or social processes, rather than a pathological deficiency.

These definitions share considerable overlap, from their emphasis on re-imagining pedagogy and student learning, to their focus on multiple ways of knowing, and rejection of unquestioned norms of ability. It is these commonalities that compelled me to explore the

[3] Principles of UDL are based on tenets of Universal Design in architecture (Mace, Hardie, & Place, 1996), which I will describe in more detail in chapter 2.

possibility of situating UDL research on inclusive education explicitly within a DSE tradition; the current study aims to do this. In this research, I draw on the perspectives of educators to examine a particular context: an elementary school where educators are learning about and applying UDL in their practice. Educators at this school consider inclusive education to be a core part of the school's identity; Their definitions of inclusive education and identification of the school as inclusive are unpacked in this dissertation.

The following overarching research question guides this study: *How are narratives of ability and inclusivity constructed in an elementary school where educators are applying Universal Design for Learning?*

To address this question, there are two sub-questions:

- How do educators (teachers and administrators) in this school articulate notions of ability?
- How, if at all, do educators perform inclusive pedagogy through discourse, instruction, and the organization of the learning environment?

In the remainder of this chapter, I will explain in more detail the context for this research, an ethnographic case study of an elementary school where educators are learning to apply UDL. Specifically, I will describe the constructs of ability and inclusivity, both of which are central to current interpretations of UDL. Next, I offer a brief overview of UDL, including its history and development. I then state the problem this research aims to address, and offer a rationale for this study, including an a justification for examining these constructs through discourse and narratives. Finally, I close this chapter with a statement of my research questions.

The Indefinables: Ability and Inclusivity

Ability

Ability is a dominant, though often unseen, force in education. In fact, ability is rarely mentioned in education, unless as a means of defining its own boundaries and contours in contrast to *dis*ability. For many schools in the United States, the operationalization of ability is so deeply tied to student placement, performance, and definitions of success that its elusive nature and lack of definition are rarely considered (Ladwig & McPherson, 2017). Scholars have problematized the centrality of ability in schools, specifically exploring how notions of ability influence pedagogy (broadly defined to include curriculum and assessment), and thus wield power to reproduce or challenge inequities in the classroom (Ladwig & McPherson, 2017; Parekh, 2017) . Echoing Baglieri and colleagues (2011), Parekh noted that investigating ability "can also ignite further discussions on what constitutes 'disability,' including *how institutions disable* and respond to a diversity of bodies/minds" (2017, p. 324, emphasis added).

The disabling process varies, as do narratives of ability, depending on a range of school-specific factors. These include, but are not limited to whether (and how) students are grouped, whether groups are flexible, and where and with whom students have opportunities to learn. Yet it is not only the boundaries of disability that are blurred; the very meaning of the term is ambiguous. Despite this ambiguity however, schools continue to not only determine markers and levels of ability, but also to organize students according to it. This dissertation unpacks how teachers articulate these murky processes as well as how they subsequently operationalize notions of ability in their pedagogy and professional activities.

Inclusivity

The terms inclusion and inclusive education, while often used interchangeably, have different interpretations in the literature. In order to avoid ambiguity, and to account for varied interpretations of both terms by participants in this study, I use the term inclusivity throughout

this dissertation. As mentioned in the previous section, I draw on interpretations of scholars in DSE to conceptualize inclusivity as the educational approach of intentionally considering the possible ranges of ability, ways of knowing, and learning within a school. This definition urges teachers to question existing hierarchies that determine belonging in the classroom (Oyler, 2011), not only academically, but socially, linguistically and culturally as well. Thus, inclusivity does not assume a normative ideal of an "average" student around which to create a system that allows or disallows entry by disabled individuals; instead it represents a philosophy of pedagogy and participation, in which ways of learning and knowing are variable and diverse (Baglieri, Bejoian, Broderick, Connor, & Valle, 2011). While this definition encompasses the needs and interests of students with labeled disabilities, it is not focused solely on them (Baglieri, 2017).

In many schools, the very ideas of inclusion and inclusivity are bound either to service delivery for students with labeled disabilities (in self-contained or resources rooms), or to the process of admitting these students *into* general education (Graham & Slee, 2008). Each of these interpretations presupposes a hierarchical discourse of ability that not only suggests exclusion as the default position of students with labeled disabilities (Baglieri et. al., 2011), but also hints at an undefined standard of ability which students must attain in order to be included. This is why conceptualizing inclusivity as a service rather than an intentional practice has significant consequences: it can reinforce the legitimacy of hierarchies of belonging within a classroom. Further, those at the top – the normal, the able, and the professional – are able to make decisions on behalf of the others. This study examines both how inclusivity is talked about and performed by educators, and how these inform broader narratives within the school.

Universal Design for Learning: A Conceptual Shift in Practice

Developed by researchers from the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), an educational non-profit, UDL was created to extend the work of Universal Design in architecture to learning environments, while also drawing on technological innovations, neuroscience, and research in the learning sciences (Pisha & Coyne, 2001). Since the publication of Rose and Meyer's *Teaching in the Digital Age* in 2002*,* UDL has emerged as a possible framework for inclusive pedagogy (Liasidou, 2014) and instructional design. The theoretical foundations of UDL emphasize the variability of students in any given classroom, reject the myth of the "average" student around which many curricula and assessments are centered, and aim to reduce environmental and instructional barriers to learning (Meyer et al., 2014). UDL theory challenges educators to think about ways instructional choices and environments actively disable students.

Focused on the intentional design of learning environments, UDL resists a norm-centered, one-size-fits-all approach to teaching and learning (Meyer et al., 2014) that aligns with inclusive pedagogical approaches. In emphasizing variable patterns of learning among individuals UDL seems to be an obvious partner for inclusivity in practice. UDL's emphasis on situating disablement in the environment requires that educators pay attention to the ways taken-for-granted structures in schools may reinforce and construct disabling practices and systems.

Yet UDL, as a framework, is not without complications. CAST has developed a set of guidelines for UDL implementation that provide "a set of suggestions that can be applied to reduce barriers and maximize learning opportunities" (CAST, 2018). Because the intent of the guidelines – like UDL itself – is not prescriptive, there are challenges in understanding exactly how implementation plays out in schools. It is conceivable that a teacher could "do UDL," by implementing strategies and design principles consistent with the guidelines, but lacking actual engagement with the theory of UDL. Thus, it is crucial to not only examine how educators are

taking up UDL pedagogically (in their instructional practice and design of the environment), but also the discourse surrounding their pedagogy. The interaction of these discourses with the language of UDL, in the context of broader narratives of ability and inclusivity will be examined in the current study.

The Current Study

This study examines the narratives of ability and inclusivity that are constructed in an elementary school where teachers are learning about and applying UDL. Narratives, according to Gee (2014a), function as sense-making devices. In schools, narratives encompass not only the individual stories of teachers, but also how past experiences and understandings inform and shape future events, while simultaneously revealing "the unities, continuities and discontinuities, images and rhythms" that help individuals make meaning of their experiences (Clandinin, 2004, p. 123). In addition, narratives are temporal, and "anchored in local institutional cultures and their interpretive practices" that are maintained, revised, or countered by individuals within the local culture (Denzin, 2009, p. *xii*). In other words, narratives within an institution - in the current study, an elementary school - are comprised of discourses, and thus continuously evolving as they influence, instruct, and inform the actions of those within the institution (e.g., teachers, administrators).

At the same time, the actions, practices, and language used by these individuals can both reinforce larger narratives or, as this dissertation will illustrate, interrupt them through counternarratives. As the name suggests, counternarratives challenge accepted and seemingly "natural" stories by critiquing dominant assumptions and discourses that are embedded into such narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993; Solorzano & Yosso, 2001). The current study explores both "majoritarian" (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993) narratives of ability and inclusivity (e.g.,

medicalized and geographically-bound interpretations), as well as counternarratives that analyze, contest, and critique more dominant storylines (Broderick et al., 2012).

Discourse

Discourse is language in use within particular social contexts that takes into account what people say, as well as a variety of other factors (Gee, 2014a). Humans, as Gee argues, use language to do much more than communicate; they use language to do things and be things while engaging in particular activities. For example, in this study I examine the discourse of educators as they perform their roles as teachers and administrators. In these performances they adopt the language of teachers (education professional) and do things that teachers do in school (teach lessons, plan curriculum, etc.), that are particular to the context of school and the activity of teaching. Through this process, discourse takes on a reflexive property, in which the things that people say and do both defines and is defined by the context in which these actions occur (Gee, 2014). The way educators speak and perform their roles is informed to a great extent by the fact that they are in schools; at the same time, their language and actions shape what is expected of educators in schools. Because language "simultaneously reflects and constructs the context in which it is used" (Gee, 2014a, p. 120), discourse informs people's actions both locally and institutionally. Thus, educators shape and are shaped by the discourses in their classrooms, with professional colleagues, in their schools, and by society's definitions of educators.

Problem Statement

The concept of inclusivity as defined in this dissertation "invites us to think about the nature of the world we live in, a world that we prefer, and our role in shaping both of those worlds" (Slee, 2011, p. 14). Educators play a critical role in this sense, as they engage with and reconstruct ideological and political systems built into schools that stabilize the myth and power

of ability. Despite the best of intentions, educators' attempts to enact inclusive pedagogy are often hindered by powerful discursive forces, and dominant social and institutional narratives of ability, narratives they may simultaneously (and possibly unknowingly) reject and accept. These include dominant (potentially exclusionary) instructional practices, the organization of social and pedagogical spaces, hierarchical systems of sorting students on the basis of ability, and discourses that reinforces prevailing norms of ability and belonging. It is necessary to examine how educators negotiate and contest these forces in order to highlight how institutional and pedagogical narratives of ability and inclusivity are not only reproduced, but internalized by teachers and students, and subsequently reified as norms within schools.

These narratives are often underscored by a range of academic initiatives and accountability systems that reinforce the dominance of hierarchies of ability, and subsequent justifications of who belongs in the classroom. This case study is particularly unique as it involves UDL, which, although not developed as an "initiative" or accountability system, may be operationalized as a means to an end (e.g., improving performance on standardized assessments or reducing challenging behaviors). While I do not argue that UDL could not be employed productively in these ways, my understanding is that UDL was not intended as a simplistic intervention to addressing these types of "problems." Rather, it was created as a framework for designing flexible opportunities to address the multiple ways students can learn. As I will elaborate in chapter three, the state's department of education (SDOE) has offered schools in the state a chance to participate in a professional learning network grounded in UDL as a means of promoting inclusivity, while maintaining academic rigor and excellence for all students. The SDOE's interest in UDL echoes a federal endorsement of UDL principles in the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), defining UDL as a

> Scientifically valid framework for instructional practice that provides flexibility in the ways information is presented, in the ways students respond or demonstrate knowledge and skills, and in the ways students are engaged; and reduces barriers in instruction, provides appropriate accommodations, supports, and challenges, and maintains high achievement expectations for all students, including students with disabilities and students who are limited English proficient. (ESSA, 2015).

The singling out of students with disabilities and those with limited English proficiency at the end of this passage is significant, and highlights Popkewitz's (2009) contention that such language "inscribes comparative spaces" (p. 306). In focusing attention on *all* students, and then emphasizing the inclusion of those with disabilities or limited English proficiency, these students are inscribed as different from the rest of the population, yet worthy of "including" through application of, in this case, Universal Design for Learning. This reading of policy as appropriating – or perhaps misappropriating – UDL is critical when considering such curricular practices as means and ends. As a continuously evolving framework, UDL has the potential to promote inclusivity and destabilize the primacy of ability in schools. As a means to an end however, UDL runs the risk of becoming a cog in a machine that perpetuates hierarchies of ability (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016) and subsequently yields a reductionist interpretation of inclusivity focused on standards of performance and progress.

Rationale for this Study

An examination of narratives of ability and inclusivity in a UDL context is both necessary and long overdue. In order to truly facilitate inclusivity, the use of the UDL framework and its application must be investigated as a potential vehicle for disrupting heteronormative curriculum and practices that sustain hierarchies of ability, as well as race, class, and gender

(Alim et al., 2017; Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016). It has been suggested that UDL theory does not go far enough to deconstruct ableist practices and language (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016); this study examines the experiences of educators as they engage and negotiate narratives of ability and inclusivity while employing UDL. Prevailing narratives constructed in schools are often influenced by unquestioned assumptions about belonging, ability, and normalcy. Further, as these assumptions are interpreted and operationalized through discourse, pedagogy, and the design of the learning environment, educators may internalize (or resist) narratives that present ability and inclusivity in certain ways. The educators in this study are also learning the theory of UDL, and attempting to implement elements of the framework. During this process, educators will negotiate their understanding of UDL with not only their practice, but also existing narratives of ability and inclusivity. Such narratives need to be examined at the school level, which this case study aims to do, while accounting for how these narratives are informed by actors within the institution (e.g., teachers and administrators). Finally, exploring the ways that educators negotiate these narratives or construct counternarratives may help researchers understand the ways in which UDL functions as an inclusive pedagogical framework, and offer suggestions for refinement. Understanding the lived experiences of educators as they continue to develop in their understanding and application of UDL may also provide useful insight for UDL researchers wishing to continue to develop and critically refine the framework.

The ways in which narratives of ability and inclusivity operate in schools has been explored through empirical research in preservice teacher education (e.g. Young, 2011), and at the in-service level (practicing teachers) (e.g., Broderick et al., 2012; Naraian, 2010). I was only able to locate one study that drew on UDL as a framework for examining either of these constructs (e.g., Lowrey et al., 2017); however, while this study examined inclusive education

and UDL, it focused on a specific population of students (those labeled with intellectual disabilities), rather than analyzing schoolwide narratives. Because historically and culturally embedded notions of ability and inclusivity are often unexamined, and because UDL draws on a particular language around each of these concepts, drawing on critical discourse analysis (Gee, 2014a, 2014b) as a theoretical and analytical framework has the potential to shed light on naturalized patterns of language and pedagogy within the school.

This dissertation is divided into six chapters. The first chapter has framed this ethnographic case study of a New England elementary school participating in a professional learning initiative to implement UDL. In chapter two, I offer a conceptual framework that connects the fields of disability studies, critical geography, UDL, and critical discourse analysis and their interplay as factors in identifying narratives of ability and inclusivity. I also present a review relevant empirical literature that informs this study, paying particular attention to those that have explored ability or inclusivity through a Disability Studies lens, or have analyzed an institution's spatial and discursive patterns. In chapter three I outline the methods used to conduct this study, including further description of the context and participants, and data collection and analysis procedures. Chapters four and five describe the findings in detail, and address my research questions. Finally, in chapter six I present further discussion of the findings and connections to the literature, discuss implications of this study, and make recommendations for future research.

Chapter 2: Conceptual Framework and Review of the Literature

This dissertation is informed by research in Disability Studies in Education (DSE), social geography, and Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Disability Studies is an interdisciplinary field that conceptualizes disability as a social phenomenon, rather than an individual deficiency (Gabel, 2005; Taylor, 2006; Ware, 2005). In other words, one is defined as disabled based on social and cultural norms of the body and brain; deviance from such norms, exacerbated by stigmatization, disables individuals within a particular context (Taylor, 2006).

Generally speaking, this understanding of disability has not been widely accepted in schools. Under the purview of special education's more medically influenced processes of diagnosing and remediating disability (Brantlinger, 2006; Linton, 1994), schools have tended to conceptualize disability within the applied fields of medicine, psychology, and rehabilitation (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012). For the past two decades, scholars in DSE have taken up the challenge of not only re-conceptualizing disability in a field largely dominated by a medical model, but working against deficit-laden systems, including dominant discourses that support a hierarchical approach to ability and inclusivity in schools (Brantlinger, 2006).

Many scholars in DSE consider inclusive education a broad overarching goal of their work (Connor, Gabel, Gallagher, & Morton, 2008). Rather than emphasizing inclusivity as access to the general education curriculum, which presumes 1) fundamental differences between what students with identified disabilities and nondisabled students can and need to learn, and 2) that the general education curriculum is a neutral, acceptable source of learning (Cochran-Smith & Dudley-Marling, 2012; Danforth, Taff, & Ferguson, 2006), DSE compels educators to seek a more transformative approach. This means not only rejecting exclusionary instructional methods, but considering more pluralistic teaching practices that draw on diverse foundations of learning,

and resonate with a variety of students (Baglieri, 2017). In addition, DSE scholars have advocated for "cripping" the curriculum; that is, DSE seeks to trouble the "hegemony of normalcy" that dominates curriculum in formal schooling by questioning who belongs, who qualifies as an insider, and who makes such decisions (Connor & Gabel, 2013). It also requires critical consideration of the narratives of ability and inclusivity that influence discourse and pedagogy. Such "cripping" of course, would require a departure from the bureaucratic organizational systems (ability groupings, pull-out interventions, etc.) that are cornerstones of both formal American educational curriculum, and implicit within narratives constructed in many schools. In many schools, these practices are so commonplace and expected that they are viewed as both rational and necessary. But such practices reinforce the ideology of ability as a hierarchical system, and thus maintains the substatus of students with disabilities as somehow "lower" than non-disabled students. DSE attempts to not simply accommodate disability, but to bring disabled embodiment to the forefront, rather than considering it as an afterthought (Mitchell et al., 2014).

Recent work in the geography of disability and Universal Design (UD) have made similar arguments. The social geography of disability has garnered attention over the past two decades as scholars have identified environments as both disabling and exclusionary, and generally taken a more critical approach to considering issues of access and the experiences of disabled persons navigating an ableist society (Chouinard, Hall, & Wilton, 2010). Like discourse, social geographies inform social practices, inscribe normalcy, and reflect naturalized ideologies of cultural institutions (Gleeson, 2002).

Social geography is particularly relevant in the current study, not only due to inclusivity's persistent link to students' physical placement, but also due to the theoretical roots of UDL. As the name suggests, UDL is based on principles of Universal Design (UD) in architecture (Pisha & Coyne, 2001). UD focuses on design of spaces and products to increase usability by the broadest possible spectrum of people (Story, Mueller, & Mace, 1998), and has shed light on the benefits of accessible and barrier-free design of products and social spaces. UD, developed by Ron Mace in the 1970s, resulted in standards for architecture and housing, and accessibility amendments to the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) (Saxon, 1998). Yet at its core, UD goes beyond accessibility, and emphasizes intentionality in design to allow for user flexibility, as well as promoting belonging; in other words, simply allowing access to spaces for a wide range of users is insufficient. People need to be able to "work" the space - to navigate it, understand it, and move in it without undue stress (Dolmage, 2017).

While issues of access into public spaces are fairly commonplace in the United States – most people expect to see ramps, automatic doors or switches, and icons on signs – such issues may not consistently addressed throughout a building, or on the surrounding grounds. In fact, some scholars in both design (e.g., Corroto & Havenhand, 2015) and education (e.g., Imrie, 2010) have cautioned against the limitations of using UD as an accessibility checkpoint. Conflating UD and accessibility fails to recognize the political and economic values underlying exclusionary design practices. A technical fix to environmental barriers may be beneficial in the short term, but does not necessarily look to dismantle normalizing discourse around mobility or accessibility (Imrie, 2000), nor does it ask about who belongs, who has (and desires) access, or holds the power of granting access (often the professionals).

In addition to issues of access, space plays an ideological role, reinforcing ways that power is exercised to position different types of people in the fore and background of social spaces (Chouinard et al., 2010), or to signal who belongs and who is out of place (Kitchin, 1998). In other words, the ways in which one enters and navigates a space influences the norms of behavior in a particular space, in addition to reinforcing separation – individuals who can and cannot navigate a particular space have no opportunities for interaction (Butler & Bowlby, 1997). Thus, spaces can have an oppressive, normalizing function that reproduces messages of exclusion (Kitchin, 1998). In order to claim belonging or ownership of a space, one must conform - appear and act like others who occupy the space.

These issues of access, belonging, and normalization commonly arise in schools, particularly as they relate to issues of ability and inclusivity. Indeed, inclusivity is often measured by how much time students with labeled disabilities spend in the general classroom with their peers. Unsurprisingly, this tends to vary by disability category - or perhaps more accurately put, how able a student is considered - with students with high-incidence disabilities (e.g., learning disabilities, speech/language impairments) having the most inclusive experiences. The long history of disability in schools is so deeply tied to exclusionary placements that *dis*belonging is assumed (Baglieri et al., 2011), and the segregated spaces disabled students and their teachers occupy inscribe identities that mark them as separate, different, and in pursuit of the elusive general education classroom. Ironically, inclusivity's entanglement with where students learn is likely a primary reason that more transformative inclusive aims (such as those advocated for by many DSE scholars) have yet to be realized (Naraian, 2016).

In theory, UDL is consistent not only with foundational principles of UD, but with DSE's commitment and interpretations of inclusivity. As alluded to in the previous chapter, UDL is

focused on the multiple ways learning occurs across a spectrum of individuals, rather than perceived student deficiencies or remediation. Furthermore, UDL goes beyond access to curriculum – this perhaps, is where UDL is distinct from Universal Design. UDL theory aims to optimize learning, not merely performance, by valuing and fostering multiple ways of understanding, demonstrating, and engaging with new information (Rose & Gravel, 2009).

The researchers behind UDL have developed their framing of ability over the years, and now conceptualize disability as a process of disablement due to environmental, curricular, and instructional barriers (Gravel, Edwards, Buttimer, & Rose, 2015; Meyer et. al., 2014; Rose & Gravel, 2009). This framing is consistent with DSE theory, and part of what makes UDL so compelling as a practical framework. Its emphasis on both neurological and contextual variability is at odds with traditional medical models of disability. UDL has been endorsed by DSE scholars (Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011; Connor & Gabel, 2013; Mitchell et al., 2014) as a means of moving away from a bifurcated educational model in which general and special education function as primarily separate (and inherently unequal) systems under the umbrella of a free, appropriate public education (FAPE). Further, because UDL theory posits that design elements that are necessary for some are beneficial for all (Meyer, et. al., 2014), it is consistent with DSE's emphasis on a collective approach to education, rather than an individualistic model purported by traditional special education.

Still, as alluded to in chapter 1, a recent analysis by Waitoller and King Thorius (2016) noted that UDL, particularly when combined with culturally sustaining pedagogy (Paris & Alim, 2014), could go farther in pushing the long-established boundaries of ability in schools. UDL, they claim, would benefit from more deliberate dismantling of historical, hierarchical, and ableist

structures in schools. In order to truly align itself with Disability Studies/DSE and other emancipatory frameworks (e.g., feminist studies, Critical Race Theory), UDL must go beyond identifying barriers. UDL should, they argue, compel educators to consider *why* these barriers exist, and why and how they have been naturalized (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016).

The enactment of both UDL and DSE continue to evolve through research, and must be treated flexibly and used intentionally. Yet their complementary nature suggests that there is potential for a union that explicitly links a critical theoretical stance on ability with inclusive pedagogy at the classroom and institutional level. Each contributes to the dominant narratives about ability and inclusivity that are performed in a school. This study will explore how these performances are interpreted and operationalized, and are potentially instructive for teachers and administrators within the school, by examining not only instructional practices and environments that result from implementation of the UDL framework, but also by exploring the ways in which these practices and design decisions inform professional discourse within classrooms and spaces across the institution.

Framing This Study

This study draws on critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an analytical framework to explore how beliefs and practices within institutions become naturalized through discourse, and to understand how and why this naturalization occurs and how it affects participants' actions (Fairclough, 2010). Discourse, and language as a social practice, operates in intersecting domains: ways of interacting, representing, and being (Fairclough, 2010). These domains highlight how language functions locally (such as within a classroom) and institutionally (across the school and as policy), and the relationship between the two as they construct identities,

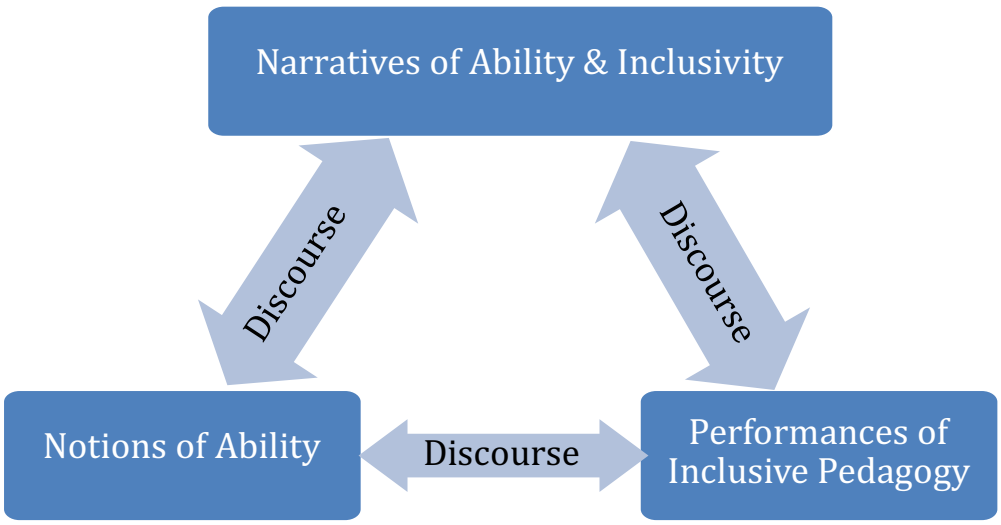
systems, and narratives within a school (Rogers, 2003). In the current study, I will argue that discourses of ability and inclusivity not only mutually inform one another, but also inform – and are informed by – broader narratives of ability and inclusivity that operate in the school and in society (see figure 2.1).

It is important to remember however, that micro interactions within a classroom or team meeting are not simply local; rather, they are constitutive of macro (system-wide) structures and processes within the school, which participants constantly reconstrue and reproduce through language (Fairclough, 2010). This language not only reproduces structures of functioning and power within the institution, but participants' own identities within it (Gee, 2014a). Identities here refer not to one's core sense of being, but rather to the "different ways of being in the world, at different times, for different reasons" (Gee, 2014b, p. 3). In this study for example, a teacher may take on a number of identities: for example, a content area expert in order to offer feedback to a student or colleague, a professional academic in order to establish authority within a particular space, or an advocate in order to defend a particular student or family. This list is far from exhaustive, but it is important to consider the multiple ways of being a teacher might embody within the complex role of being an educator in a particular context.

While this study examines narratives of ability and inclusivity, CDA, as theory and method, attends to personal, interactional, and institutional negotiations of language and identities (Rogers, 2003a). In this dissertation, these negotiations occur among notions of ability (as articulated by educators in formal and informal settings), performances of inclusive pedagogy (enacted through instructional strategies, organization of school spaces, and discourse), and historical, political, and educational constructions of ability and inclusivity at play within a

functioning system (e.g., a school) (see figure 2.1). CDA acknowledges both the ideology of systems, as well as the roles individuals play, or wish to portray, and the ways this is manifested in language, and extended to social action (Fairclough, 2010). In other words, institutional culture does not simply determine language and practices of microsystems within it; rather, institutional culture *informs* interactional and individual use of language and practice, which can also be used to reconstruct, reframe, or resist ideological norms of the institution (Gee 2014a). As discussed in the previous chapter, this is a process of reflexivity, meaning that language both reflects context, and constructs it in a certain way that takes into account multiple individual and interactional interpretations (Gee 2014a). What this interpretation recognizes are the flexible ways teachers might embody elements of multiple microsystems across roles and contexts, regardless of how proximal or distal these contexts may appear. For example, a teacher (in the role of professional) may employ the discourse of the institution within their classroom, even if the discourse may be at odds with their personal beliefs or understandings of a particular policy.

Figure 2.1. Conceptual model illustrating the role of discourse



Literature Review in Three Parts

As described in chapter one, the goal of this study is to explore the construction of school-wide discourses and narratives of ability and inclusivity in a context where educators are applying UDL. I therefore review several areas of literature to contextualize this research, and situate it within the conceptual framework described in the previous section.

This literature review is presented in three parts (see appendix A for a complete list of included publications). Each part contains a systematic review of empirical work in the areas of inquiry addressed in this dissertation. I begin in Part I by describing empirical research in the area of inclusive education that is specifically grounded within Disability Studies in Education. Part II explores the current landscape of UDL research in P-12 education settings. Finally, Part III synthesizes studies that examine the geographies of disability as they relate to educational settings. Across each of these sections I searched the Academic Search Complete, Education Source, and ERIC databases. I filtered results by peer-reviewed publications that were published in English. Additionally, I limited my search to studies conducted over the past 20 years. I chose this timeframe for two reasons. First, the early 2000s marked a time of development and growth for Disability Studies in Education (DSE), marked by the establishment of the DSE special interest group in the American Educational Research Association (AERA). Second, this time period coincides with the development of UDL by researchers at CAST (Pisha & Coyne, 2001;Rose & Meyer, 2002). Specific search terms and additional criteria are described in each of the following sections. I conclude this chapter by summarizing this literature, and situating my work within these overlapping arenas.

Part I: Disability Studies and Inclusive Education (n=17)

I conducted an electronic search of the databases listed above using the search terms "disability studies" and "inclusive education" OR "students with disabilities." This initial search yielded 152 studies. After eliminating conceptual and descriptive articles, I also excluded studies that were focused on postsecondary education in other content areas (e.g., history, art), or that focused on the experiences of students (rather than teachers). Application of these criteria resulted in 17 studies.

Within the last 20 years, there has been a rise in inclusive educational research specifically situated within Disability Studies or DSE. In particular, scholars have focused on teacher education research as a ripe source of study for how to prepare new teachers to enact inclusive pedagogies through a transformative DSE lens. Much of this work has focused on empirical research, exploring shifts in teacher perspectives on disability (e.g., Rice, 2006; Thomson, 2012), or conceptual pieces justifying a DSE stance in pre-service preparation (Ashby, 2012; Oyler, 2011).

Of the publications included in this review, the majority (n=10) focused on either on language of disability labels as possible impediments to inclusive education (Back, Keys, McMahon, & O'Neill, 2016; McCloskey, 2011), or teachers' experiences of inclusive education in the classroom, rather than at the preservice level. Two of these studies examined the interaction of affect and teachers' desire to enact inclusive practices (Naraian & Khoja-Moolji; Rood & Ashby, 2020). Specifically, these pieces highlighted the emotional strain placed on teachers while attempting to navigate deficit-based structures, and institutional narratives inconsistent with their beliefs.

Four publications explored the ways in which school and societal narratives of disability mediated teachers' professional practice (Broderick et al., 2012), established community,

(Naraian, 2011a), transparency (Naraian, 2011b), and social relationships. Of particular relevance to the current study are the narratives explored by Broderick and colleagues (2012). These authors problematize binaries of ability in schools (students are normal *or* abnormal, general *or* special, abled *or* disabled), and shed light on how curricular structures can legitimize a lack of rigor in special education curriculum, thus reinforce binaries. In other words, these teacher researchers found that performance in the general curriculum served as a sorting mechanism whereby some students received lower quality curriculum that perpetuated their disabled status. Consequently, teachers were faced with the choice of conforming to the hegemonic practices driven by accountability mandates (e.g., "teacher-proof" curricula), or resisting and risk being viewed as either noncompliant or unprofessional (Broderick et. al., 2012). Similarly, a study by Paugh & Dudley-Marling (2011) found that novice teachers who wanted to challenge deficit discourse in their schools were deeply embedded in a culture that embraced it. In analyzing the "teacher talk" of three novice teachers, the authors found that the use of educational terms and jargon act as ways of dividing the intentions of the teacher from the expected practices of the school. In other words, "resisting the deficit language that dominates the discourse of school failure threatened their identities as good, caring teachers who believe in the power and structures" of special education to remediate struggling students (p. 831). To fit in as professionals, these teachers needed to endorse the system of special education, not question it.

In both of these studies (Broderick et al., 2012; Paugh & Dudley-Marling, 2011), the authors noted that some teachers worked to reframe student ability and contest colleagues deficit-driven evaluations of certain students. In Broderick et al.'s study, some teachers contributed counternarratives to dominant notions of disability. In these counternarratives the

teachers resisted negative portrayals of disability in their schools. These authors provide hopeful accounts of their attempts to not only resist negative discourse and practice, but to persevere in promoting inclusive instructional practices.

Seven studies focused on the use of DSE as a framework in preservice teacher education. Several of these publications explored the divisions between special and general education at the preservice level (e.g., Iannacci & Graham, 2010; Jones, 2011; Young, 2008). Others examined how DSE perspectives might inform preservice teachers' understandings of disability, discerning between medicalized and social understandings (Naraian & Schlessinger, 2017; Tan & Padilla, 2019), and how this might inform their interactions with students and families (Sauer & Kasa, 2012). In general, these studies found that a DSE framework often compelled preservice teachers to reconsider their understandings of disability, yet the lasting impact of the DSE framework in exclusionary climates was uncertain (Rood & Ashby, 2017).

Two studies within this group looked at how preservice teachers negotiated inclusive identities in teacher preparation placements that used exclusionary practices (Rood & Ashby, 2017; Siuty, 2019). For example, Rood & Ashby examined tactics employed by preservice to subvert practices inconsistent with their beliefs (e.g., didactic teaching methods, pull-out interventions). In addition, the pre-service teachers described ways in which they forced the issue of inclusion with general educators who were, if not unwilling, sometimes unaware of how to teach inclusively. In several cases, the tenacity of the pre-service teachers in attempting to enact inclusive practices positioned them as aggressive or disruptive, while more subtle tactics allowed the teachers to remain within the system and maintain their identities, without advancing particular changes. This study captures the nuances of negotiating narratives of ability and inclusivity while also attempting to establish oneself as a collegial professional.

Taken together, these studies illustrate the power of language and school and societal narratives surrounding ability and inclusivity. This body of research also highlights several ways teachers interact with such narratives, including adopting and reinforcing the narratives and "learning" from them, or resisting them and developing counternarratives. In addition, the presence of such a small number of studies focused on examining inclusive education from a DSE stance suggests the need for further empirical research in this area, particularly through the experiences of practicing teachers.

Part II: UDL in P12 education (n=14)

For my review of the literature on UDL in P12 education, I conducted a search using the terms "Universal Design for Learning" (or "UDL") AND "inclusive education" OR "students with disabilities." I filtered results to exclude studies focused on postsecondary education (not teacher education), which resulted in 118 publications. After scanning abstracts, I eliminated articles that were not empirical research studies. I also eliminated studies that did not focus on teachers or instruction informed by UDL. For example, a number of studies examined the outcome of an intervention that was designed according to UDL principles (e.g., Coyne, Evans, & Karger, 2017) or the impact of UDL on student perceptions of learning (e.g., Kortering, McClannon, & Braziel, 2008). Application of these criteria resulted in 14 studies.

Two of the studies included in this group explored the impact of a UDL-based intervention on student outcomes. Both of these used quantitative methods to investigate whether the UDL framework was effective in increasing student engagement and autonomy (Katz, 2013) and improving performance in a science course (King-Sears et al., 2015). In these studies, the UDL framework itself was the intervention. Katz (2013) found that UDL was effective in

increasing student engagement, which is one of the principles of UDL. The study by King-Sears and colleagues did not yield significant results in improving student performance.

Several researchers explored the use of UDL in teacher education programs. Two of these sought to understand whether learning about the UDL framework could support teacher candidates in designing more inclusive lesson plans for students with disabilities (Kahn, Pigman, & Ottley, 2017; Owiny, Hollingshead, Barrio, & Stoneman, 2019). Others focused on whether knowledge of UDL could help prepare teachers for inclusive classrooms (Grande & Whalen, 2017; Lanterman & Applequist, 2018). In these studies, there was a general assumption that changes to teachers' beliefs - about inclusive classrooms, students with disabilities, and designing lesson plans - are indicative of changes in practice. While most of these studies did find that pre-service teachers were open to taking up UDL in their practice, it is uncertain how they might navigate terrain that is incompatible with this practice.

The remaining studies were particularly relevant to the current study due to their focus on either UDL professional learning or the use of UDL to support inclusive education. Cunningham and colleagues (2017) focused on a professional learning program in a catholic school, found that teachers who participated in the program were enthusiastic about UDL, but nervous about integrating flexibility into their instruction and assessments, and abandoning more traditional ways (Cunningham, Huchting, Fogarty, & Graf, 2017). This finding is not surprising given the significant shift in mindset and pedagogy that authentically engaging with UDL requires, and other research that suggests that resistance to inclusivity on the part of general educators may hinder application of UDL (Scott, 2018).

Three studies examined the stories of individual teachers as they employed the framework as a means of including specific populations of students, particularly those labeled

with intellectual disabilities (ID) (Lowrey et al., 2017; Lowrey, Hollingshead, Howrey & Bishop, 2017; Lowrey & Smith, 2018). While one study appeared to have a slightly less critical stance on inclusivity and UDL, operationalizing it as a means of access to general education (Lowrey et al., 2017[b]), the other attended to teacher discourse employed with respect to inclusion Lowrey et al., 2017[a]). Although building on the same data sources as the former study, the latter found and problematized the fact that teachers, despite their enthusiasm for inclusion, still spoke of students labeled with ID as separate, or the responsibility of the special education teacher. In a sense, UDL in the case of these teachers was understood as a way to teach all students in the classroom, but only bear responsibility for some; this is an example of UDL reinforcing the notion of inclusion as placement.

The remaining two studies focused on teachers drawing on UDL to redesign their pedagogy (Dymond et al., 2006; Gravel, 2018). In one of these studies, Gravel (2018) emphasized the flexibility afforded to co-teachers by the UDL guidelines to support students in disciplinary thinking practices in ELA . This was the only study I could locate that offered educators the chance to explicitly engage with the UDL guidelines, indicating that further research in this area is warranted.

Given this gap in the literature, more research is needed to explore both the use of UDL as a framework for inclusive pedagogy, and that privileges the experiences of teachers who are applying UDL. Further, although some studies explored the language used by teachers using UDL (e.g., Lowrey, Hollingshead, Howery, & Bishop, 2017), I could not locate any studies that explicitly employ CDA to analyze this language.

Part III: Geographies of Disability (n=10)

Finding studies exploring the geographies of disability within a school context was a challenge, mostly due to the different terms that have been used to examine the overlapping constructs of geography, disability, and inclusivity. I began by searching for key words "critical geography" and "inclusive education" OR "students with disabilities". This initial search yielded only one study. I then searched for studies using the terms "social space" or "geography" and "inclusive education" or "students with disabilities." While this search was far more productive, resulting in 110 publications, the majority were either not empirical, or did not specifically examine a school setting. Only 10 studies fit the criteria of being empirical studies focused on exploring the relationship between space and ability or disability. I also added UDL as a search term to social space and geography, but the three resulting publications had no connection with the present study.

Four studies in this section point to the fact that ability is constructed spatially in many schools, and that the designation of certain spaces within schools can reinforce hierarchies of ability for both teachers and students (Goodfellow, 2012; Holt, 2007; Ngcobo & Muthukrishna, 2011). Ncgobo and Muthukrishna (2011) found that placement of students led teachers to pathologize them on the basis of perceived deficits, and that spaces sometimes served a "normalizing" function. This finding was consistent with Holt, Lea, and Bowlby's (2012) study of special units in mainstream schools, who found that segregated places functioned to both "hold" deviant behaviors and to remediate them in order to afford students the benefits of inclusion. In addition to reinforcing hierarchies of ability, such fixed spaces also allude to a hierarchy of inclusivity, and how levels of normative function mark bodies as worthy (or not) of belonging.

School spaces have also become an identity marker for teachers, as well as students.

Two studies by Young (2008; 2011) exemplify systemic separation along special-general education lines in a teacher education program. Young found that separation in teacher education programs occurs along a special-general education binary that has deep roots. In the particular program she studied, there were separate field placements for general and special education pre-service teachers (as opposed to inclusive ones), separate spaces for coursework, and little interface between faculty who identified in either special *or* general education. Such bifurcation is suggestive of deep-rooted ideologies of special education as fundamentally separate and different that may have become naturalized within the teacher education program, and were subsequently reinforced through decisions about pedagogical space assignments.

This spatial separation of educators has appeared at the in-service level as well. Baustien's (2019) spatial study of a school found that special educators' identity (as separate) was constructed according to the spaces their students were perceived as "allowed" to travel. Likewise, Naraian's (2016) analysis of how teachers construct school spaces suggested that the existence of these boundaries (according to role) were often unquestioned by teachers. Teachers saw themselves as either insiders or outsiders in particular spaces, and the identities they constructed for themselves were largely tied to historical definitions of which teachers occupy which spaces.

As suggested by Waitoller & Annamma (2017) and Soja (2010), spaces, particularly those in schools, can reproduce social and educational inequities that run counter to inclusivity. The studies presented here reflect the "spatial turn" (Waitoller & Annamma, 2017) in inclusive education research by uncovering how space perpetuates not only systems of exclusion, but also the maintenance of separate teacher identities and bifurcated systems of general and special education.

Summary

In summary, the studies presented here reflect current research in the overlapping fields of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), inclusive education, the geography of disability, and UDL. The publications discussed in this chapter has explored how discourses of ability and inclusivity inform and constrain teachers' practices, and mutually reinforced by structures and systems of separation. In several of these studies, discourse serves a number of important functions. In perhaps its most basic sense, it can serve to sort and "other" students through labels and subsequent practices of exclusion. Additionally, discourse shared among teachers offers a chance at belonging to a particular community. Acquiescing to deficit discourse in some cases allowed teachers to be seen as professionals, or to fulfill a certain type of dual role (e.g., special-educator, guardian) that maintained a hierarchical status quo. Finally, these studies suggest the power of discourse to inform the construction of schoolwide narratives of ability and inclusivity.

As a result, these narratives need to be investigated through a careful analysis of discourse and attention to context. Because context is reflexive, CDA requires that researchers consider it when analyzing what participants are saying, doing, and being with language. The context of this study, a school-community that has taken efforts to adopt UDL is a ripe site for analyzing discourses surrounding ability and inclusivity, as these are central to UDL theory. This study is likely to be one of the first to draw on CDA as theory and method in a UDL context.

As noted in the first part of this chapter, conceptual links have been made between DSE and UDL (e.g., Baglieri et al., 2011; Mitchell et al., 2011). Yet empirical research linking these two fields has yet to emerge. Their common connections with inclusive education and the organization of learning environments suggest that research combining each of these fields of study is both warranted and overdue.

Chapter 3: Methods

This dissertation is an ethnographic case study (Merriam, 2009; Rogers, 2003a; Schram, 2006) of a New England elementary school in which a team of educators (teachers and administrators) are learning about and applying Universal Design for Learning (UDL). Recall the overarching research question and sub-research questions from chapter one:

- How are narratives of ability and inclusivity constructed in an elementary school where educators are applying Universal Design for Learning?
    - How do educators in this school articulate notions of ability?
    - How, if at all, do educators perform inclusive pedagogy through discourse, instruction, and the organization of the learning environment?

In this chapter, I explain how the study was designed and carried out to address these research questions. First, I present a description of the research design I employed in this study. Next I describe the context of this research. Because context is a crucial component of critical discourse analysis, I will describe the locus of this research – the elementary school – including its recent history of structural and organizational change. I will also provide background on the town, the professional learning opportunity, and the research participants. Finally, Next, I will describe data collection sources and procedures, and explain the methods used to analyze this corpus of data.

Research Design

Ethnographic Case Study Design

This case study analyzes narratives of ability and inclusivity that are enacted within an elementary school where educators are taking up UDL. Yet the process of authentically applying UDL is not simply a matter of implementing strategies; its emphasis on the *disablement* of learners and its discursive focus on variability is a theoretical and pragmatic shift for many

educators. I chose this time of professional learning and transition at the school to attempt to capture how educators experienced this process, and how these shifts might inform schoolwide narratives of ability and inclusivity.

As explained in the previous chapters, I employed critical discourse analysis (CDA) as an analytic framework. CDA attends to the interaction of language and identity (Gee, 2014a; Gee, 2014b) within the context of a school, where historical, social, and political constructions of ability and inclusivity are negotiated, contested, and reproduced. CDA as a method requires deep understanding of context. This includes not only a description of the setting's physical features (although these can be important), but also shared cultural knowledge, interactional histories, body and eye movements, and more (Gee, 2014a). Thus, gaining a full understanding of the social and cultural practices of participants within a setting enhances the CDA process. In her ethnographic case study of family literacy practices, Rogers (2003a) drew on CDA to apply a critical lens to her developing knowledge of the context, and suggested that the two methods were mutually enhancing: "Ethnography allows researchers to capture social, personal, and institutional histories in a way that discourse analysis does not" (p. 24). Because CDA requires us to identify and critique local, institutional, and societal contexts (Fairclough, 2003), ethnographic research can inform our understanding of this context by examining the experiences of participants within it.

Context of the Study

In this section, I describe the context of the school and town where the research took place, including both geographic and demographic details. Following Rogers' assertion that an ethnographic approach can shed light on complex, overlapping factors of the context, I also

provide descriptions of the historical and political landscape of the town and district, which have significant bearing on this research.

The City of Springdale Falls

Springdale Falls[4] is a small city of approximately 12,000 residents located in the northeastern United States[5]. Initially settled in 1793 and incorporated as a city in 1893, its northern border is the Springdale River (and falls) that separates Springdale Falls from a neighboring New England state. It is situated between two slightly larger cities in the state, each of which is home to a hospital within six miles and accessible by auto or public bus service from Springdale Falls. The city's largest employers are manufacturing and retail companies, and roughly one quarter of residents hold a bachelor's degree or higher. According to recent census data, approximately eight percent of residents live below the poverty level.

The downtown area features historic mill buildings, many of which have been converted to condominiums, restaurants, or small business. The bridge spanning the river allows pedestrians to walk between Springdale Falls and Bridgeton, which is a bordering town in the neighboring state. These downtown areas overlap, although most of the businesses (restaurants, shops, etc.) are in Springdale Falls. Heading southwest out of downtown the landscape becomes more residential, and it is here where the town's four schools – a high school, middle school, and two elementary schools – are located. Beyond the schools, Springdale Falls opens up to a more commercially developed area, containing strip malls, gas stations, and access to the state highway.

[4] All school and individual names are pseudonyms

[5] These data were retrieved from the town's website. I have not included the full citation however, in order to protect the identity of the participants and school.

Recent estimates (2017) of population density from the U.S. census bureau show that there are 1,213 persons per square mile of land, which is the fourth highest concentration in the state. According to recent reports, 83.5 percent of the residents identify as white, seven and a half percent as Asian, and three percent as either Hispanic or Latino/a, Black or African American, or multi-racial. English is the only language used in the majority of households (86 percent), although Asian languages are present in nine percent of households, which is significantly higher than the state average. The city is home to a large community of Indonesian immigrants (some sources estimate close to 2,000 of the city's residents are from Indonesia or of Indonesian descent). A number of Indonesian restaurants, cultural organizations, and festivals are a core part of the city's identity.

The School: Riverview Elementary

The Springdale Falls District is one of two districts located within the school administrative unit. Several New England states are organized under school administrative units, in which neighboring towns pool resources to educate all students, and are run by one superintendent. This study takes place at Riverview Elementary, one of the city's two elementary schools. While for many years Riverview was the only elementary school in the city serving students in grades K-5, a second school, Southside, opened in 2011 to accommodate a growing school-age (K-5) population. In general, students were assigned a school based on the location of their home within the district, although there were some exceptions. For example, teachers at both school were sometimes allowed to have their students attend the school at which they worked. In addition, all students who received English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL) services attended Southside, regardless of location. Southside was a larger school, and the number of students was greater. Geographically, the two schools are separated by only one mile.

Demographically, Riverview had a lower percentage of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch, which, as I describe below, had an impact on allocation of resources such as Title I funding.

In the spring of 2018, the Springdale Falls School Board voted to reorganize the two schools. Beginning in the fall of 2018, Southside would become a PreK-2nd grade school, and Riverview would serve students in grades 3-5. In a letter to parents, the interim superintendent cited three primary reasons for the change. First, the Board aimed to increase student safety by creating shorter bus routes with less travel time. Second, the Board projected increased student achievement through smaller class sizes, more balanced distribution of resources, and more streamlined response-to-intervention systems. Specifically, Riverview was unable to offer classes in technology and health due to staffing limitations. As a K-5 school, Southside had qualified for Title I funding, and had a higher proportion of students qualifying for free or reduced price lunch (57 percent to Riverview's 42 percent). According to a report to the school board by a district administrator, this prevented Riverview from adequately implementing Response-to-Intervention (RTI) due to its shortage of teachers for intervention program (positions often allocated to Title I teachers). In addition, Riverview's standardized test scores prior to the reorganization were generally much higher than Southside's (see table 3.1). Finally, resources such as ESOL programs, and a program dedicated to students with autism or behavioral challenges were projected for both schools after reorganization.[6] The placement of all ESOL students in the district at Southside had unintended consequences (e.g, these students were

[6] A self-contained program has not been initiated at Riverview, nor did I hear of any plans to create one. As I will discuss in chapters 4 and 5, such a program is inconsistent with Riverview's desire to be an inclusive school. One teacher spoke about a possible need for an autism program, but also stated that she and others were opposed to these types of exclusionary programs.

essentially segregated at Southside, rather than having the opportunity to attend the school attended by peers in their neighborhoods) (Alex, interview, 10/8/19).

Table 3.1.

Smarter Balanced performance for Southside and Riverview before reorganization (AY 2016-2017)

School/Free or Reduced price lunch percentage	**SBAC Math Scores (percent at or above proficient) by grade**			**SBAC Reading Scores (percent at or above proficient) by grade**		
	3rd	**4th**	**5th**	**3rd**	**4th**	**5th**
State average	55	51	47	54	56	61
Springdale Falls Elementary Schools combined	57	50	45	48	50	52
Southside – 57%	46	60	43	37	53	49
Riverview – 42%	85	35	51	76	46	61

The reorganization brought a significant amount of displacement for students and teachers. Riverview had previously identified itself as the "smaller school" in the district, with two classrooms per grade, and three special education teachers. Additionally, the school had long had a reputation of being an inclusive school, and its identity as such was one taken up proudly by teachers, administrators, and paraprofessionals. In informal conversations with teachers, many expressed concern about the school reorganization because of philosophical differences between the elementary schools related to inclusion. Simply put, there was a general sense that Riverview was inclusive, and Southside was not. This inclusivity was largely described as a function of space and service delivery, with all students in special education receiving support and

instruction within the general classroom for the majority of the day, and consistent collaboration in planning between special and general education teachers. Southside tended to adopt a "pull-out" model of special education, where students with IEPs were pulled out of the classroom to receive support or interventions in a specialized setting. As I will describe in chapter 5, the difference in these approaches caused some friction during the transition year.

Riverview currently serves approximately 360 students in third through fifth grade. The most recent demographic data indicates that the school is made up of mostly white students (approximately 78 percent), with approximately seven percent of students identifying as multi-racial, seven percent as Asian, six percent as Hispanic or Latino/a, and two percent as African American. Approximately half (49.5 percent) of students qualify for free or reduced priced lunch, which is slightly more than the district average. During the 2018-19 school year, 20 percent of students had identified disabilities.

I chose Riverview Elementary as a research site in part due to its participation in a state sponsored, grant-funded professional learning initiative, the Northeastern Universal Design for Learning Opportunity (NUDLO) which focuses on the implementation of UDL as a means to "fulfill longstanding aspirations to make education more effective for all, to offer inclusive learning environments that are also uncompromising in rigor and excellence" (grant proposal, p. 5)[7]. In partnership with CAST, the state department of education (SDOE) has established a multi-year initiative to support implementation of UDL in more than 60 public schools across the state.

In addition to its participation in NUDLO, Riverview was also chosen for this study because of its school-specific goals. Educators and administrators with whom I met while

[7] In order to protect identities of those involved in the NUDLO project, I have not included a specific citation and the grant does not appear in the reference list.

selecting a research site expressed a desire to promote an inclusive environment in their school. Additionally, during the research process several full and partial participants consistently expressed the desire to "keep getting better" in terms of their own pedagogical practices (fieldnotes, 9/26/19). The Riverview UDL team members have indicated that they would like to re-establish the school's identity as inclusive; specifically, many expressed a desire to eliminate "pull-out" approaches to educating students with disabilities that were revived during the school reorganization[8]. These educators framed the UDL initiative as consistent with the goal of getting back to inclusion, improving teaching, and improving learning for all kids (fieldnotes, 9/26/19).

The Professional Learning Opportunity

As alluded to in chapter one, the Northeastern Universal Design for Learning Opportunity (NUDLO) is a multi-year professional learning opportunity offered by CAST and the SDOE. In January of 2018 educators in public schools across the state were invited to apply to NUDLO, which is now in its third academic year. To join, schools had to complete an application sharing their goals for participating, and participate in a short conversation with a CAST Implementation Specialist. Schools were then asked to create a school-based UDL team consisting of a special education teacher, classroom teachers, an instructional coach, and an administrator, for a total of a six to 10-member team. This team met for two hours per month to work on UDL-related goals and implementation, and a team leader also had monthly phone calls with a dedicated Implementation Specialist. The Implementation Specialist also visited the school two-three times per year to support the team with instructional rounds[9] (City, Elmore,

[8] When the schools merged, there was a clash in philosophies and practices surrounding service delivery for students with disabilities. Specifically, students who came to Riverview from Southside had IEPs written to reflect a pullout model that was inconsistent with Riverview's model prior to reorganization. This will be discussed in greater detail in chapter 5.

[9] Instructional rounds are an inquiry process modeled after medical rounds in which educators observe one another and participate in a collaborative analysis to improve educators practice. Instructional rounds are one component of the professional learning offered through NUDLO.

Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009) and facilitated discussions about UDL. In addition, CAST provided professional learning that included three annual network-wide meetings, books, and online modules with UDL content and resources.

Of the four schools in the Springdale Falls District, Riverview and Springdale Falls Middle School were participating in NUDLO, and signed on during the first year (winter of 2018). Prior to NUDLO, educators from both schools had participated in other professional learning opportunities offered by CAST, and were eager for the opportunity to continue (Alex, interview, 10/8/19; UDL team meeting fieldnotes, 9/26/19). Again however, there was some disruption to UDL implementation during the elementary school reorganization, as teachers from Southside who came to teach at Riverview had not opted to participate in NUDLO; Riverview had committed to NUDLO before the official decision to reorganize the schools.

There were some tensions in NUDLO participation that accompanied school reorganization. The beginning of the 2018-2019 school year meant that a number of teachers from Southside School had moved to Riverview; Southside had not elected to participate in NUDLO (nor had the school previously participated in UDL professional learning), and many of the teachers were unfamiliar with UDL. Furthermore, one of the requirements for NUDLO participation was an investment from staff who were interested in being UDL team members (rather than a top-down decree from an administrator). As a result, an administrator interviewed all of the incoming Southside teachers to try to find some who might be both interested in and willing to serve on the school-based UDL team. During the 2018-2019 school year one member of the team had previously been at Southside; the remaining members were all teachers who had been at Riverview.[10]

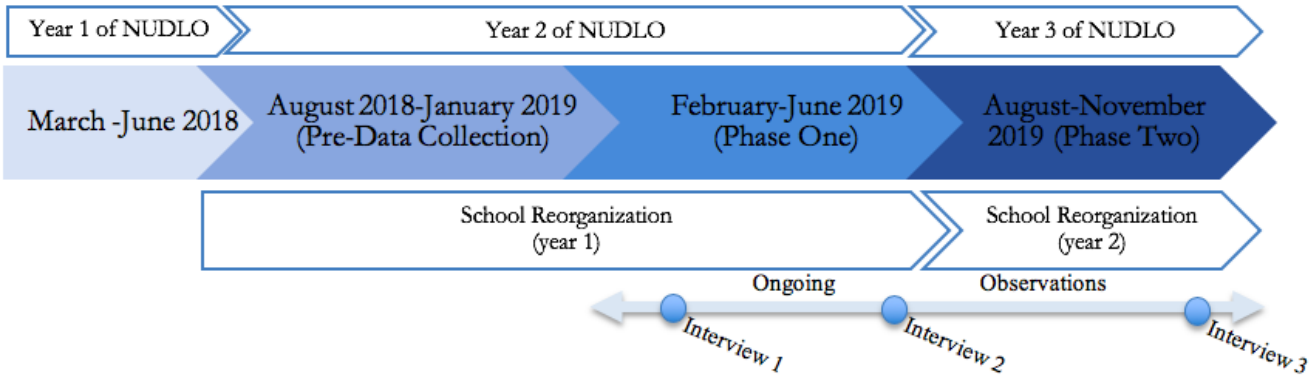
[10] The following year the teacher from Southside moved to a different school in the district; the current UDL team is all teachers who were previously at Riverview, and one who was a new hire from a different district.

Timeline

This study took place over the course of two (partial) academic years, which I have divided into two phases. Phase one occurred between February and June of the 2018-2019 academic year, and phase two occurred between late August and November of the 2019-2020 academic year. This coincided with Riverview's second (phase one) and third (phase two) academic years of participation in NUDLO. In addition, phase one occurred during the first year of the elementary school reorganization (see figure 3.1). There were some changes in staff between phases one and two. A full-time assistant principal was hired during the summer of 2019; additionally, there were a number of personnel changes at the classroom level. Each grade has six classroom teachers. In the 2019-2020 school year, there were two new teachers on the third grade team, one new teacher in fourth grade, and four new teachers in the fifth grade, for a total of seven new classroom teachers (out of 18 total grade-level teachers).

Figure 3.1.

Phases of NUDLO, Data Collection, and School Reorganization



Participants

To recruit participants for this study, I gave an informational presentation to educators at a school staff meeting in December of 2018. During this presentation I explained the project and the levels of participation, and told teachers I would email them an invitation to participate in the coming months. After securing approval from the University's Institutional Review Board (appendix B), I sent a recruitment email to all 25 eligible educators (teachers, instructional coaches, and administrators) in February of 2019, inviting them to participate.

There were two levels of participation in this study: full and partial. Full participants (n=5) consented to three one-on-one audio-recorded interviews, weekly classroom observations, and bi-monthly audio-recorded meeting observations. Partial participants (n=14) consented to being audio-recorded at meetings where full participants were present, and to their verbal contributions (captured via recordings and fieldnotes) to be included in analysis.

Four teachers and one administrator responded, indicating their intent to participate as full participants. Once I began data collection at the school I explained my study to teachers at grade level and UDL team meetings attended by full participants, and invited other teachers to participate as partial participants. All members of the UDL team consented to partial participation, and the grade level teams yielded a mixed response.

Of the five full participants, four were grade-level classroom teachers (two were members of the UDL team), and one was a building-level administrator who was also a part of the UDL team (see figure 3.2 for a map of participant classrooms). Of the partial participants, eight were grade-level classroom teachers, four were preservice teaching interns from a nearby university[11], one was an instructional coach, and one was a special education teacher.

[11] Riverview has a longstanding relationship with the university as a partnership school for teacher education interns. The university uses a competitive application process (more schools apply to host interns that the teacher education program can accommodate) to select schools as partners, which includes meetings and interviews between

Due to teacher turnover during the course of data collection, some participants were not present for the entire duration of data collection. Detailed descriptions of full participants are below. Information on all participants is provided in Table 3.2. In the detailed descriptions, I have included biographical information (drawn from teacher interviews) in order to provide a fuller background of each participant to better frame the discourse texts and pedagogical performances discussed in chapters 4 and 5.

Table 3.2

Participant information

Participant Pseudonym	Grade/role	Level of Participation	UDL Team Member	Years of Experience (as of phase one)	Phase of participation
Rachel	3rd grade	Full	No	1	One
Meghan	4th grade	Full	Yes	11	One and Two
Elyse	4th grade	Full	Yes	30	One and Two
Sarah	5th grade	Full	No	12	One and Two
Alex	Building level administrator	Full	Yes	18	One and Two
Claudia	3rd grade	Partial	Yes	4	One and Two
Carley	3rd grade	Partial	Yes	5	One and Two
Erin	5th grade	Partial	Yes	1	One
Kate	5th grade	Partial	Yes	3	Two
Jess	Special education	Partial	Yes	3	One and Two
Cherise	4th grade intern	Partial	Yes	0	One

representatives from the school and teacher education program. It was through this partnership that I first came to Riverview as an intern supervisor, which I explain in the "positionality" section of this chapter.

Drew	4th grade intern	Partial	Yes	0	One
Janae	4th grade intern	Partial	Yes	0	One
Kayla	5th grade intern	Partial	Yes	0	Two
Briana	Instructional coach	Partial	Yes	20	Two
Alanna	4th grade	Partial	No	--	One and Two
Tonia	4th grade	Partial	No	--	One and Two
Nicole	5th grade	Partial	No	--	Two
Valerie	5th grade	Partial	No	--	Two

Rachel, 3rd grade classroom teacher. Rachel participated in the study during phase one, from February through June of 2019. The 2018-2019 school year was her first as a full-time lead teacher, and her position at Riverview was a long-term (yearlong) substitute position for a teacher that was out on temporary family leave. She had inherited her classroom and materials from this 3rd grade teacher, but had also given it her own touch; for example, she decorated the room with visuals of cacti and succulents on storage bins, the job board, and student rosters. The classroom was in the west wing of the school, between the library and another third grade classroom, both of which were accessible by doors inside Rachel's room.

Prior to working at Riverview Rachel had worked for two years as an assistant teacher at an arts integration charter school in a neighboring state. She described her primary role there as instructional; she taught literacy and math lessons in small groups, and sometimes worked with students one-on-one, but was not responsible for overall planning (Rachel, interview, 4/1/19). She also provided support for the lead teacher in classroom management.

During her time as a teaching assistant Rachel also finished up her elementary teacher certification online. She stayed on at the school after completing her degree, and worked in some mixed-grade classrooms, using her free time to observe teachers and students from kindergarten through middle school. She is currently certified to teach elementary school in the state, as well as in the neighboring state where she lives. While she is originally from the Pacific Northwest, she is living in New England for the time being with her husband, who is in the military and stationed in the area.

In comparison to other full participants' classrooms, there were fewer adults in Rachel's classroom. As a first year teacher she was not eligible to have an intern, and the paraeducators who came into the room did so for a limited time during math or literacy. Several of her students also left the room for small group instruction during math and literacy. Her role as a solitary classroom teacher contrasted with her previous position, where there were always two adults in the room. Rachel said that she was transparent with her students about this: "I said that I'm a first-year teacher, I come from a school where we had two teachers in the classroom and so a lot of this stuff like - we're going to try out together" (interview, 4/1/19). Rachel indicated that she sometimes felt the strain of being on her own with a class of 21 students, but that she's learned a lot, and learned to be flexible and adapt.

Rachel was not a member of the school-based UDL team, but considered herself knowledgeable about UDL. She remembered learning about UDL in her education coursework during college, and felt that her previous school had embodied some tenets of UDL, particularly in terms of flexible teaching methods. She also reported that other teachers from Riverview had pointed out aspects of her classroom and instruction that were consistent with UDL, which pleased her.

In May of 2019 Rachel informed me that she had been offered and had accepted a permanent position at Riverview. Although the teacher she had been filling in for would be returning, another 3rd grade teacher had taken a middle school position and Rachel planned to fill that vacancy. After our second interview in early June however, Rachel informed me that she would not be returning to Riverview for the following school year. She did not elaborate on her reasons, but stated that she didn't think the school was a good fit for her.

Meghan, 4th grade classroom teacher. During phase one of this study Meghan was in her eleventh year of teaching, and her third year of teaching 4th grade (she continued as a 4th grade classroom teacher in phase two). She had previously been a special education teacher at the school for eight years, and is dually certified in the state to teach elementary (K-6) or special education (K-12). Meghan indicated that she liked being a classroom teacher, but that she would also be open to returning to her role as a special education teacher. She also acknowledged that she probably "got certain kids [in my class] because of my background" as a former special education teacher, but that in general she thought the school did a good job splitting up students with IEPs across all of the classrooms.

Meghan had an elementary education intern for the 2018-2019 school year. This was her first elementary intern, although she had hosted special education interns (both dual and single certification) during her time as a special education teacher. Riverview was often promoted as an ideal place for dual certification interns because of how closely the special education and classroom teachers worked together, and because of its philosophy of inclusion. Along with her intern Cherise (a partial participant), Meghan co-taught lessons and organized flexible small-groups for targeted instruction on a regular basis while I was observing in their room.

When Riverview officially joined NUDLO in February of 2018 Meghan signed on to be part of the school-based team. Although she had heard of UDL during the school's prior involvement with CAST – she recalled several colleagues presenting information about UDL at staff meetings – she did not get involved at that point because she was preparing to go on maternity leave. She was approached the following year about getting involved with UDL, but decided against it as it was her first year in a classroom teacher role. I asked Meghan why she eventually chose to be a part of the team, and she said that she felt the time was right, and that it was "up my alley," and because she was asked to do it (Meghan, interview, 4/17/19).

Meghan describes herself as a teacher who tries to do fun stuff in the classroom. She said that she wants to feel like she knows her students and wants them to know her. To this end, she talks about her personal life and shares stories – about family, growing up, etc. – and tries to be transparent and human: "I am not afraid to make mistakes in front of them and I'll just like make it a joke or like make it like, well, yeah, I made a mistake" (Meghan, interview, 4/17/19).

Meghan's classroom is located in the east wing of the school, and sits between a 6th grade classroom and another 4th grade classroom. Both are accessible by doors at either end of the classroom. This is her second classroom as a 4th grade teacher (she previously worked in Rachel's room before the reorganization). During phase one there were 20 students in the class, and during phase two there were 21 students.

Elyse, 4th grade classroom teacher. The 2018-2019 school year was Elyse's thirtieth year teaching elementary school. All but two of those years had been at Riverview, and she also interned at Riverview when she was getting her teaching degree. After graduation she worked for two years at a school in a neighboring town, but when the school was closed, she was able to get a full-time position at Riverview and has been at the school ever since. She is certified in

elementary education in the state, and in addition to fourth grade has taught in multi-age (3rd and 4th grade), and 3rd grade classrooms.

Phase one of data collection occurred during Elyse's first year on the UDL team. Although she recalled hearing about UDL several years ago, Elyse said that she really didn't know what it was at the time. She said that she volunteered to be a member of the school-based UDL team for several reasons, including personal curiosity, and for the chance to improve her teaching in some way. In addition, she felt like she had had the opportunity to work on several other school-based committees (e.g., instructional, leadership), and wanted to give other teachers the opportunity to experience those. Finally, the UDL guideline of recruiting interest (CAST, 2018), also resonated with her: "I'm all about trying new things to engage the students" (Elyse, interview, 4/17/19).

Of all of the classroom teachers at Riverview, Elyse has been there the longest. Three current teachers at the school are former interns of hers, and she had an intern during phases one and two of the study. She describes herself as someone who is always willing to be involved in things, to try new things, and to take risks. This was consistent with my observation of her in various settings. In both grade-level and UDL team meetings Elyse shares thoughts with her colleagues easily, but also makes an effort to step back and listen, and encourages others to share their ideas. Consequently, teachers tend to look to her as a leader, and her opinion is often sought by teachers in meetings or as a resource for ideas.

Elyse's classroom is the only grade-level classroom in the building that is not located in either wing (see figure 3.2). It is directly across from the rear entrance to the main office, and is between the occupational therapy room, and "The Safe Place[12]," a room staffed by special

[12] During my time in the field, the purpose and function of the Safe Place evolved significantly. I explain this in more detail in chapter 5.

educators and the guidance counselor where students may go for breaks. It also borders another 4th grade classroom. All of these adjacent rooms are accessible by doors within Elyse's room. Formerly the teachers' room, the space is equipped with a refrigerator, oven, sink, and cabinets, all of which are located in the rear of the room, away from student desks. After multiple room changes over the past several years, Elyse asked the principal if she could have this room, knowing she could share the resources with other teachers, and that she would be near the office "if they need me" (Elyse, interview 4/17/19). During phases one and two there were 21 students in the class.

Sarah, 5th grade classroom teacher. Similar to several of her colleagues, Sarah has spent the duration of her teaching career at Riverview. During phase one of this study Sarah was in her twelfth year of teaching, which was her eighth year as a 5th grade teacher. She spent one year as a 3rd grade teacher, and three as a 4th grade teacher, and also completed her teaching internship at Riverview.

Sarah was not a member of the UDL team; however, she felt that she knew a lot about it due to her collaboration with Briana[13], who was one of the first Riverview teachers to be involved with both NUDLO and the school's prior UDL work. This was prior to the school joining NUDLO, but Sarah feels that her understanding of UDL has evolved over the years, but that it involves things she and her colleagues already do: "If you're already differentiating, it's not that far of a leap" (Sarah, interview, 3/28/19).

Sarah describes herself as someone who likes to take on a leadership role within the school. This was consistent with my observations of her in faculty and team meetings. She often

[13] Briana is an instructional coach and partial participant. Prior to her coaching role however, she taught 5th grade, and she and Sarah collaborated quite a bit; Sarah felt that because the two co-planned so extensively, she knew a lot about UDL.

facilitated her grade-level team meetings during phase two, and is a member of several school-based committees. She is also in the process of obtaining her administrator certification, and is interested in eventually working as either and assistant principal or principal. She sees herself at Riverview long-term, and is a resident of Springdale Falls. She is also a parent; her oldest child attends Riverview, and her two younger children attend Southside.

Sarah's classroom is in the west wing of the building (see figure 3.2), situated between two other fifth grade classrooms that are accessed by doors within the room. During phase one of the study she had what was considered a small class, with only 18 students. During phase two she had 21 students. Sarah also had interns during phases one and two, and has hosted interns consistently over the past several years.

Alex, building level administrator. The 2018-2019 school year was Alex's second as an administrator of Riverview. Prior to that he had been the assistant principal at Springdale Falls Middle School, and he also had 12 years of teaching experience at the secondary (high school) level prior to his administrative roles. He spent all but two years working in the Springdale Falls District. Alex described his entry into leadership roles as beginning several years into his teaching career, when he was asked by school leaders to take on a coaching role during schoolwide implementation of behavior initiatives. He also served as math department chair for five years while at Springdale Falls High School.

In his third year as assistant principal at the middle school, an administrator from Riverview approached Alex and asked him to consider applying for her position, which she planned to leave at the end of the 2016-2017 school year. Alex said that he thought she wanted to leave the school with an administrator who knew the town and the school system. Although Alex had not previously worked at the elementary level, he emphasizes that he cares for kids of all

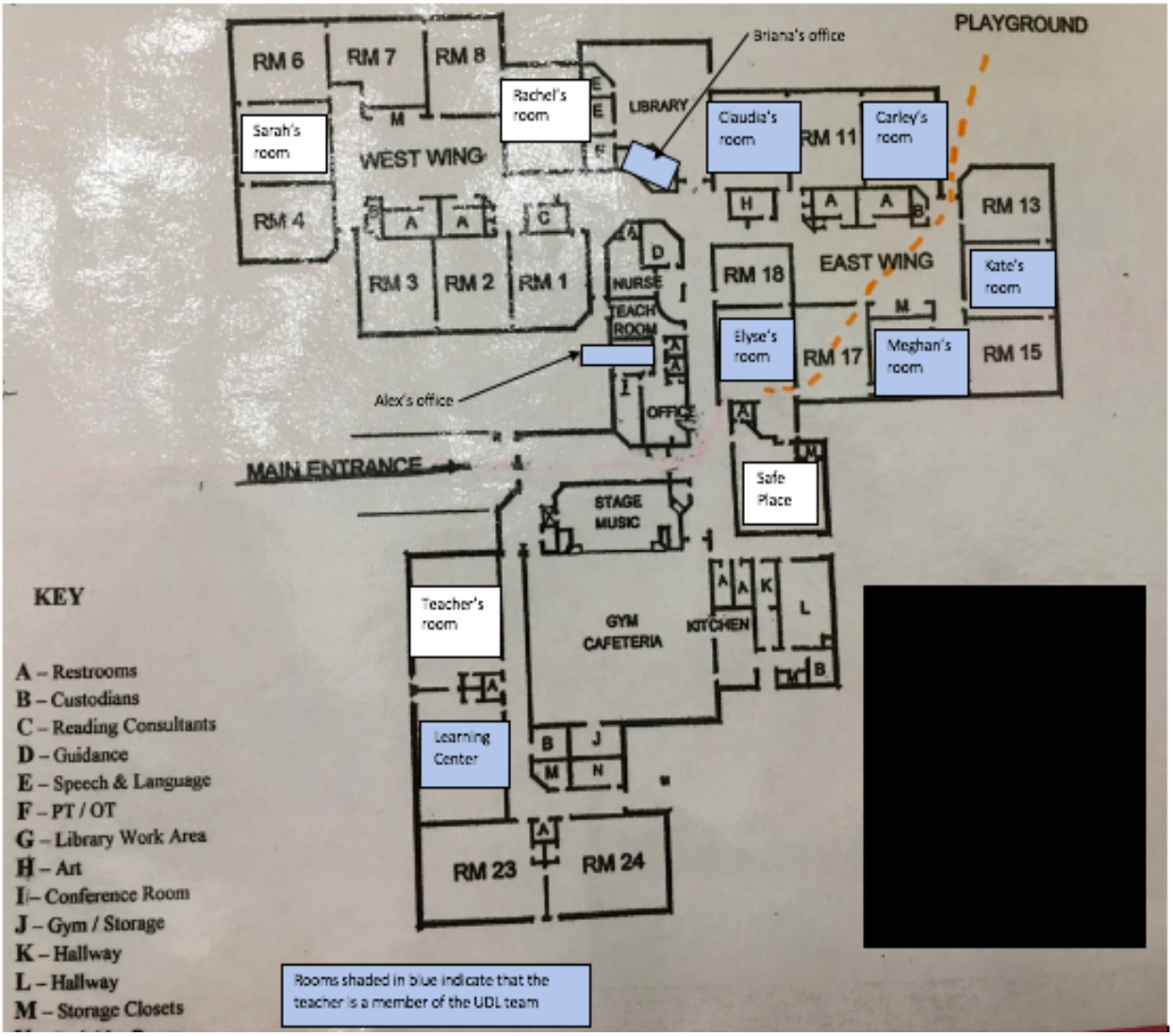
ages, and that he felt that it wasn't that different working with young students or high school students: "You need the same skills, it's just a different language" (Alex, interview, 10/8/19). Alex cited patience and a positive mindset as two of the needed skills.

Alex was involved with UDL implementation at the middle school prior to the start of NUDLO, during Riverview's initial work with CAST. At the time, he viewed UDL as an approach that connected "good practices" in a classroom with the goal of reaching all students (Alex, interview, 10/8/19). He drew a distinction between UDL and Differentiated Instruction, and felt that prior to UDL it was common to plan and teach to the "average" student. He said that thinking about planning for the whole group from the beginning was an "A-ha!" moment for him and many teachers he worked with at the time (Alex, interview, 10/8/19). Although Alex was a member of the UDL team, he did not attend monthly meetings due to other administrative commitments. However, he did attend all NUDLO professional learning events, and had been trained as a UDL presenter through CAST.

Alex's office is located within the main office, just beyond the secretary's desk where visitors sign into the school. That said, I rarely observed him in his office; he was frequently traveling throughout the building and recess grounds, in and out of classrooms, or in the adjacent conference room meeting with teachers.

Figure 3.2.

Map of Riverview Elementary School and Classrooms



Units of Analysis: Discourse, Pedagogy, and Space

In order to examine narratives of ability and inclusivity operating within multiple spheres of the school (e.g., in classrooms, at meetings, across the school as a whole), I sought to examine the Discourses of the school, pedagogical practices, and the organization of learning environments throughout the building. As Gee (2014a, 2014b) suggests, people do not just say things with language; rather they use language to take on certain identities, and to build (or destroy) things in the world. Through language, people can establish, enact, build or destroy significance, activities, identities, relationships, social goods, connections or ways of knowing

(Gee, 2014a, 2014b). Yet this building is not only done through language. In a school, educators can enact and build abstract things, like inclusivity and belonging in multiple ways: through how they teach, choices they offer, where they position students, and how accessible (or not) they make parts of the learning environment. Discourse, pedagogy, and space are constantly interacting and informing one another in schools and classrooms. In other words, there is reflexivity among Discourse, pedagogy, and space across an institution, informed by how certain spaces are perceived (e.g., a resource room or learning center), the teaching and learning taking place in these spaces (e.g., interventions, "benchmarking"), and the identities the spaces construct (special education student, general education teacher, etc.) (Naraian, 2016). The way spaces are perceived, positioned, and talked about helps shape their function and use, and aids in the construction of broader narratives of ability and inclusivity. These narratives not only assist educators in making sense of these spaces, but are also potentially instructive, *teaching educators how* to assign meanings to them. This research examines this interaction.

Positionality and Representation

I first visited Riverview Elementary School in the spring of 2015. I went to meet the principal at the time and to plan for the following academic year, when I would be supervising university teaching interns during their yearlong internship (practicum) experience at Riverview. This was a graduate assistantship appointment, and I would spend two consecutive years (2015-2016 and 2016-2017) supervising elementary and special education interns at Riverview; two of these interns would go on to become full-time teachers at the school, and one was a partial participant in this study.

As a result of my role as an intern supervisor, I worked closely with several of the teachers who mentored the interns. We met monthly for a variety of meetings, communicated via

email, and had informal conversations on a regular basis to discuss requirements and details of the interns and the program. In general, we had good, mutually supportive professional relationships. I worked with Meghan, Elyse, Sarah, and several partial participants during this time (they served as cooperating teachers). My role as a supervisor ended the year before Alex was hired as a building-level administrator.

After supervising at Riverview, I took on a research internship at CAST in February of 2018. My primary role was supporting research on NUDLO; however, I was also active in supporting its recruitment and rollout during the winter and spring of 2018. When my internship ended, I took a temporary position at CAST as interim network manager of NUDLO during the manager's maternity leave. I oversaw communication and operations having to do with NUDLO, and communicated frequently with participants, including teachers and administrators at Riverview. Thus, many educators at Riverview knew me either as a supervisor from the university, as someone who worked for CAST, or both. There were two instances where I interacted with members of the CAST-based NUDLO team; the first was at a NUDLO professional learning event where I observed participants, and the second was during an instructional rounds meeting facilitated by a CAST Implementation Specialist. Although I interacted with participants and CAST team members during each of these events, I did not actively participate in debriefs of lessons or observations.

My position at CAST ended in August of 2018, and I began actively researching schools in NUDLO as possible dissertation sites. I chose Riverview for the reasons indicated above, but had concerns about how my previous roles in and out of the school might affect my work. Initially I was concerned that my visits into classrooms would be seen as evaluative, particularly by teachers I did not know or those from Southside who were unfamiliar with me and with UDL.

Ultimately, I realized I had little control over this. While I was open with teachers about my intent to learn from them, I was also honest about the fact that while I had a good theoretical understanding of UDL, I had not enacted it as a teacher. One thing I was particularly interested in hearing from teachers was what the experience of taking up UDL was like. Although I had the opportunity to do this as an instructor at the university level during a summer course I taught, I did not personally experience the magnitude of what it meant to apply a UDL lens to an entire year of curriculum, instruction, methods, and environment.

I share this background to highlight my deep involvement with UDL as site of inquiry not only for this dissertation, but for my work as an instructor; further I wish to highlight my complex and shifting role as an insider/outsider at Riverview, and to acknowledge my awareness of how my presence may have influenced the way full participants performed or talked about UDL during my visits. Naturally my role and position as a researcher shifted over the course of my data collection, which I will describe further in the following subsections.

Data Sources and Analysis

I collected data from a variety of sources during my eight months in the field (e.g., Feb. - Nov., 2019; see table 3.3). These varied sources of data served to capture different aspects of the phenomena in authentic ways (Maxwell, 2013). For example, interviewing teachers about their design of space offers an explanation of their choices and decisions, but having maps drawn by students may show how those decisions are perceived. Likewise, observations of teachers' pedagogy may reveal how a lesson plays out, but cannot uncover the decision-making process behind the instruction. Additionally, multiple data sources can offer a means of triangulating data to check for validity in findings (Maxwell, 2013).

Table 3.3

Data sources

Type	Collection method	Phase	Quantity
Classroom observation of full participants	Fieldnotes	One and two	140 hours (approximately)
Grade-level meeting observation	Fieldnotes	One and two	12 hours
UDL meeting observation	Fieldnotes and audio recording	One and two	9 hours
Staff meeting observation	Fieldnotes	One and two	3 hours
UDL professional learning event observation		Two	6 hours
Photos of school and classrooms	Photos by researcher	One and two	142
Classroom and school tours	Video taken by researcher	One	3 classroom tours 1 school tour
Maps	Drawn by students of full participants	One and two	86
Written documents	Copies provided by participants	One and two	23

Participant Observation

In the fall of 2018 I began pre-data collection activities. As indicated previously, I had established relationships with teachers in the school for a variety of purposes. I conducted observations in full participants' classrooms two or three times per week. These observations varied in duration; sometimes I observed for one hour long subject block (e.g., reading, math), and other times for an entire morning or afternoon. I did not observe students during their weekly specials (e.g., art, physical education), or during lunch because they were not supervised by full participants at those times. I conducted some observations during recess when full participants were on duty[14].

[14] I did not seek student assent or parental consent because students were not the focus of the study, and no identifiable student-level data was collected. I consulted with members of the IRB to confirm that consent and assent were not necessary given the study's aims.

Teachers responded to my presence in the classroom in different ways. Elyse, for example, made a point of introducing me to students on my first day in her room (during phases one and two), and frequently asked students to show or explain things to me that seemed related to UDL. In one case she even had a student come to me when he needed help decoding directions on an assignment. Rachel also introduced me during my initial visit, provided me with copies of handouts, and often offered me food during snacks. Sarah did not introduce me to the class during either phase, but always greeted me warmly and explained assignments or decisions in detail when asked for clarification. Meghan introduced me to students during my first visit in phase two of the study, mentioned that some might recognize me from the previous year, and told the students they could ask me questions if they wanted or (with a laugh and smiling glance at me) pretend I wasn't there. Alex always greeted me cheerfully in the office, classrooms, and hallways, and frequently asked how my work was going. In general, the educators and staff at Riverview were extremely welcoming and accommodating, and over time began to notify me about professional learning days, visits with CAST, and special student events.

Likewise, student responses to my presence varied considerably. During phase one, since I arrived more than halfway through the school year, many students disregarded me and did not engage directly. As one student, Jackson, pointed out when getting confused about who I was, "there are so many adults in this building, I can't keep you all straight" (Meghan, fieldnotes, 4/1/19). In some sense, this served as an advantage in the sense that the impact of my presence as an outsider may have been reduced due to the frequency of classroom visitors. That said, there was variability in the way I was perceived and approached in different classrooms. Several students in Rachel's class began to come to me for help after I initially asked them some questions about what they were working on, and a handful of students from other classes who

were curious about me or what I was writing sometimes asked what I was doing or what I was writing about. My usual response was that I was there to learn about what they were working on or to learn from their teacher. In phase two I had the interesting experience of seeing some students for the second time; some students from Rachel's room moved up to Meghan and Elyse's classes, and some students from their classes moved up to Sarah. These students were generally a bit chattier with me, and it was interesting to see how differently some of the students acted after a summer and in a different setting. In general, I found that Jackson's assessment was accurate: there *were* a lot of adults in and out of classrooms and this, to a degree, may have made my presence somewhat unremarkable.

During this time I occasionally took notes on a clipboard using an observation protocol that detailed what students and teachers were doing; however, after the first month I found this format cumbersome and somewhat limiting in that it drew my attention away from small moments or episodes (Emerson, Fretz, & Shaw, 2011) in the classroom, and seemed too rigid a format for capturing the multiple ways inclusive pedagogy might take place. Thus, in early April 2019 I switched to taking notes or "jottings" during my school visits, and typing these up within 48 hours as fieldnotes that captured both descriptions and episodes of activity that occurred in classrooms and across the school (Emerson et al., 2011).

Although the major focus of my observations was in the classroom with full participants, I also observed spaces around the building to note patterns of use and travel. For example, the Safe Place was a destination for many students during phase one of the study, and saw a considerable amount of student traffic. I sometimes observed how many students and adults entered and exited the Safe Place to get a sense of how the space was used by teachers in the school. Additionally, I also observed where students traveled (on their own or in small groups),

including visits to the special education rooms or main office. I requested permission from the school administrators to conduct these observations, and looked for overall patterns in use and movement of space, rather than attending to the behavior or actions of individuals teachers and students in isolated events.

Finally, I also observed grade-level and UDL team meetings attended by full participants. As mentioned earlier in this chapter, all members of the UDL team consented to being audio-recorded during their meetings. I also took fieldnotes during these meetings to highlight interactions among participants and note topics that seemed to be of concern related to UDL. The UDL team met twice a month for an hour, and I attended all of these meetings through the beginning of November. In addition, I attended a UDL professional learning event with the team that took place in September 2019 and was facilitated by CAST. I also attended the team's instructional rounds meeting in October, which was facilitated by a CAST Implementation Specialist.

I was not able to secure consent to audio-record grade-level team meetings. I did however, attend these meetings two times per month and take fieldnotes on topics of discussion and general impressions about how full participants interacted and discussed issues related to ability and pedagogy during these meetings.

Analyzing fieldnotes. The corpus of observation data from my visits to the school yielded more than 100 pages of typed fieldnotes from more than 150 hours of observation (in classrooms and at meetings). To analyze these data, I drew on Emerson et al.'s (2011) approach to coding fieldnotes, and began by reading through this subset of data as a whole. This included fieldnotes from classroom observations, meeting observations, and observations of educators participating in professional learning events. While reading I used open coding (Emerson et al.,

2011) to document themes I noticed in reading the data. For example, in order to answer research sub-question two, how educators performed inclusive pedagogy, I drew on initial code memos to identify patterns of instruction in and across teachers' classrooms. I used Atlas.ti, (ATLAS.ti Scientific Software Development GmbH) a qualitative coding program, to keep track of codes I developed during analysis.

During the open coding process, I wrote code memos (Emerson et al., Saldana, 2016). These memos served several purposes. First, they helped identify patterns of discourse that cut across contexts and appeared to operate across the school. For example, discussions of student use of medication as a regulatory solution to behavior appeared in my informal conversations with teachers, at meetings, and in interviews. Second they helped me identify instructional norms operating within classrooms (e.g., whole-group focus lessons, positioning of paraprofessionals near students with labeled disabilities). Finally, they helped me define, operationalize, and refine my code choices in order to establish a consistent meaning.

Interviews

Over the course of eight months I conducted three hourlong semi-structured interviews with three of the full participants and two semi-structured interviews with Rachel and Alex. These interviews generally occurred in participants' classrooms, although in cases where a teaching intern was covering a participant's class we met in the teachers' room The first interview began with a classroom or building tour, and continued with an informal conversation about UDL, instruction, and participants' teaching background (see appendix C for interview protocols). These interviews served to help me, as an outsider, gain a sense of the processes and systems that are naturalized within the school (e.g., behavior management approaches, use of the

Safe Place). In addition, these initial conversations helped me identify the elements of UDL that were most salient for educators.

The second interview focused on analyzing student work and discussing the design of assignments. I asked teachers to talk me through an assignment that they had created or adapted, and to illustrate the assignment through an example of student work. This interview followed an observation during which I had observed students working on the assignment, or the teacher introducing it. These interviews elicited descriptions of their thought process in designing the lessons, and the ways they attended to variability in their planning. They also captured some elements of how assignments were modified or differentiated for students. In addition, I talked with participants in this interview about support students received during the observation, and their opinions on how support – particularly support of students with labeled disabilities – "worked" at the school.

The third interview employed stimulated recall technique to explore educators' responses to their practice (Lyle, 2003). Stimulated recall is a method for interviewing that fits well in naturalistic settings (such as schools) when cognitive or decision-making processes are usually internal to participants, and not observable by the researcher (Lyle, 2003). In an effort to explore full participants' process of enacting inclusive pedagogy and UDL, I hoped to elicit thought and decision-making processes during instruction through this type of interview. Prior to each interview I audio recorded a 10-15 minute lesson or portion of a lesson. I then selected an audio clip that contained an example of instruction (such as explaining to students how to do something) or direction (such as dividing students into working groups). I played these short (two or three minute) clips for the participants at the beginning of the third interview. These

interviews took place the day after the audio-recorded observation, and asked questions related to the clip to elicit narratives about instructional choices and the lesson design process.

Analysis of interview data (transcripts).

Formatting and initial coding. I analyzed transcripts from interviews and naturally occurring teacher talk in UDL team meetings. I used Temi (www.temi.com), a transcription service, to acquire transcripts of interviews and meetings. I then listened to the recordings while reading the transcripts to correct any inaccuracies and replace names with pseudonyms. Once the transcripts were accurately captured, I listened to them a third time to format them for CDA.

Formatting transcripts occurred concurrently with preliminary analysis and coding, which I present in several phases. During the first phase, I listened to recordings in sections, looking for intonation units and stress markers (words said with emphatic stress). I rewrote these words in all capital letters in the transcript to emphasize this stress. I also reorganized the transcripts into macro-lines, which are essentially "what counts as a sentence in speech" (Gee 2014a, p. 162). Gee (2014a) points out that speech sentences tend to be more loosely constructed than one would normally expect to see in written sentences, although such macro-lines still contain subjects and predicates, and link information to previous clauses within speech. He draws this distinction from "micro-lines," which are clauses that are not spoken as sentences, that may represent an idea within a section of spoken speech. I distinguished these lines by listening for intonations and contours of speech that denote finality or completion of a thought (Gee, 2014b). In formatting transcripts, I designated micro-lines with a single "/" symbol, and macro-lines with a double "//." Examples of this formatting appear in chapters 4 and 5.

During the second phase I reread the transcripts for sections of macro-lines devoted to a particular topic, event, or theme, and organized these into stanzas using the Stanza Building Tool

(Gee, 2014a; 2014b). I jotted notes about the possible stanza topic (Emerson et al., 2011; Saldaña, 2016). Stanzas varied in length, from as few as two lines to as many as 12. In meetings, I considered each change in speaker a new stanza, and sometimes speakers' contributions were more than one stanza. I used a combination of Descriptive and In Vivo coding (Saldaña, 2016) to code each stanza with a preliminary "topic" based on what the speaker said (some stanzas from meetings have the same topic). For example, one initial stanza topic was "immature students," which was revised in the next phase as one component of a larger story told by the participant. In some cases, stanzas did not contain information relevant to the research, and were not included in the analysis.

In the third phase, I organized the coded stanzas into stories that present a chain of thought or description of the same topic (Gee, 2014a). I reread the stanzas that shared similar topics and looked for how participants were presenting information. For example, during interviews, participants tended to present a claim in the first stanza, and then supply evidence in the next stanza, before making some sort of evaluation of the claim in the following stanza. This format varied among participants. Sarah's stories, for example, were quite consistent with this pattern, while Rachel's evaluations were threaded through her Discourse in short microlines. These elements appeared frequently enough that they provided a useful structure for coding groups of stanzas together as a unit devoted to a particular topic.

Critical discourse analysis. Gee's (2014a) approach to CDA distinguishes between "big D Discourse" and "little d discourse." The latter (discourse) refers to language in use in specific contexts, and the ways it is structured and sequenced to convey a particular meaning. The former (Discourse) foregrounds socially significant identities and goals in language through social

interactions, which encompass more than just language but "the social display of beliefs and values" such as gestures, environments, bodies, etc. (Gee, 2014a, p. 24).

After formatting transcripts, I began by analyzing interview data. I read through data for each participant individually, analyzing each of their three (or two) interview transcripts separately. In reading the transcripts I reviewed the codes and stanzas, and noted any recurring themes or motifs (Gee, 2014a) that appeared consistently. I specifically looked for descriptions of student ability, ability generally, inclusivity, and accounts of instructional practice (including groupings, strategies, etc.). I selected two to three excerpts from each transcript that related specifically to my research questions, and used Gee's theoretical (2014b) and building tools (2014a) to ask questions of the data in order to begin my analysis. I then formulated a hypothesis of what the speaker was saying, building, and trying to do in each excerpt, and proceeded to use Gee's (2014b) 28 tools of CDA to refine this hypothesis. To be clear in explaining the CDA process, I will use a concrete example from participant data.

An excerpt from Elyse's first interview (shared in appendix D) focused on describing the progress and performance of one student in her class who had been labeled with a learning disability. I chose to analyze this initially by using two tools: the (big C) Conversation Tool and the (big D) Discourse Tool (Gee, 2014b). I began by noting portions in the transcript where Elyse referred to professional Discourses of educators (in this case, assigning grade levels to readers), and Conversations (debates, issues) of which Elyse assumed I had knowledge (e.g., knowledge of disability labels; acceptance of labels as accurate or "true"). These tools suggested to me that Elyse was taking up the identity of a professional (the Identities Building Tool), who had the necessary knowledge and skills to evaluate and assess students, assign reading levels, recognize learning disabilities, and draw on tools or interventions to support her students. This

was my initial (and admittedly broad) hypothesis. I then worked my way through each of Gee's remaining 28 tools for CDA in order to refine this hypothesis.

Not all 28 tools were relevant in this transcript (e.g. the Intertextuality and Relationships Building Tools); in addition, some tools were used in initial formatting and coding (e.g. the Stanza, and Intonation Tools). As I worked my way through the tools, asking questions of the data, I verified my initial hypothesis about Elyse's identity as a professional, but was able to provide more nuance to the description. For example, while Elyse begins by describing the boy in terms of reading level and disability, she goes on to describe his struggles as a problem of access, rather than inherent "deficit." Her struggle to describe the boy is evident as she tacks back and forth between his "true" learning disability and what he is able to do. She mentions early on that the boy is a first grade reader, but in Elyse's description the boy evolves from being a first grade reader to being "smart" and having made great gains. Indeed, Elyse seems to identify a tension among the boy's label, what he is able to do, and his smartness; this tension also links her instruction to the ways UDL has influenced her classroom (through technology tools, for example). I continued this process of asking questions in order to support, alter, or contest my initial hypothesis.

My analysis of meeting transcripts initially proceeded in a similar way, first looking at coded stanzas within the data to identify themes within each meeting.[15] In these data however, I also attended to points of tension within the conversation (Fairclough, 2003; Rogers, 2003a; 2003b). These points of tension signal interruptions in discourse patterns, or potential conflicts or problems that might indicate conflict between identities, ways of seeing the world (or school or

[15] Although I attended 10 UDL team meetings during my study, I did not conduct a CDA on every meeting; two were focused on viewing instructional materials with very little conversation, and one was for planning purposes. These transcripts were not included in my analysis.

classroom), or (in particular in this study), ways of interpreting UDL. After I identified points of tension in meeting transcripts I again drew on Gee's theoretical and building tools as a starting point for analysis, and formulated hypotheses based on participants' language in meetings. I then moved through the remaining tools for more granular analysis of language to support, alter, or counter these hypotheses.

Written documents. I collected samples of agendas from teacher workshop days, instructional materials (many offered by participants), as well as materials used by the UDL team to engage in professional learning. These data were useful as I began to make sense of what was prioritized in terms of pedagogy at a school level, and how this was operationalized by teachers in their classrooms. For example, at one teacher workshop day during phase one, Alex emphasized the importance of developing clear goals as a key part of the UDL process. Later that month, a full participant took up goal-setting with individual students in reading and documented these goals on a bookmark.

I did not conduct formal separate analyses of these data; rather, they served to help contextualize the content and instruction in participants' classrooms, and the messages put forth to educators at staff events. These data sources were also useful in triggering my memory as I looked across my corpus of fieldnotes, and I was able to piece together grade level content trajectories, which were helpful in understanding educators' descriptions of assignments and student work.

Visual data (photos, maps, and video). I collected a variety of visual data over the course of this study. I took photos in classrooms of student artifacts – work samples, notes, etc. – in order to capture evidence of different elements of UDL in curriculum and assignments. I also took photos of the classrooms, including the layout of desks and resources, spaces for tools (e.g.,

pencils, crayons, fidgets), teacher messages, organizational systems, and personal spaces to get a sense of how the space functioned for the members of the classroom community, and to capture teachers' decisions in organizing the space. In addition, I aimed to understand the accessibility of the space and tools within it for students.

I also took photos outside of the classroom – the hallways, common areas, and grounds - to understand where classrooms, offices, and social spaces were located in relation to one another, and to determine accessibility throughout the school. Riverview is a school that utilizes much of the wall space for positive or instructional messaging. For example, there are cool-down "exercises" posted in both wings for students to utilize as a guide for de-escalating when they are upset. There are also inspirational quotes, images of popular fictional characters (e.g., Harry Potter), community news, and student work posted throughout the building.

In order to get a sense of how students perceived their classroom space, as well as the school as a whole, I asked full participants to invite their students to draw maps of their classrooms and the school[16]. During phase one students of full participants drew labeled maps of their classrooms. I received 38 maps, and used them to get a sense of how students viewed the spaces within the classroom as potential sites of exclusion, belonging, or learning. During phase two students drew labeled maps of the building. I used these 48 maps to try to understand which areas of the building emerged as important or highly visible to students, as well as which were invisible. Together, these data helped me understand who accessed certain spaces (and was permitted to access these spaces), and also helped me uncover what barriers and opportunities for mobility existed, and to some extent, for whom.

[16] These data did not contain identifiable information. Participation was voluntary and students who chose to draw maps were told not to include their names.

Analysis of visual data. I used a combination of approaches to analyze visual data, including maps and photographs of classrooms and common school areas. I began by writing short analytic memos (Emerson et al., 2011; Saldaña, 2016) about the maps (sorted by class) to note any patterns, major features, or anomalies. I generated these memos after receiving the maps (in June and October of 2019), and then again when I began analysis in November 2019. I then used an open coding approach (Emerson et al., 2011), similar to the way I coded fieldnotes, to analyze these maps and accompanying memos.

I also analyzed photos with the classroom and common areas. I used affective coding methods (emotion and values coding) (Saldaña, 2016) to explore how certain spaces within classrooms and the school were privileged or separated. Additionally, I used values coding to analyze displayed materials throughout the school.

Memos. I wrote reflective memos weekly during my fieldwork, mostly reflecting on questions that arose during observations or interviews, or exploring tensions within my work. These memos mostly served to help clarify my thinking around certain elements of observation. For example, in my early memos I wrote about how different teachers regulated the bodies and behaviors of students through management techniques and systems. In my later memos (from phase two), much of my focus was on my role within the classroom, and its changing nature. I consider these a data source in the sense that they set the stage for some of my analysis; although I read through my reflective memos often during data analysis, but did not specifically analyze them. In addition to reflective memos, I also wrote code memos to facilitate analysis of field notes.

Compilation of Data Sources and Validity

I initially attempted to look across codes from all data sources to identify commonalities related to ability or inclusivity. Due to the high volume of data collected, this proved too unwieldy. Instead, I focused on Discourse to lead my compilation; I began by focusing on topics of stories within meeting and interview transcripts, and then looking for further examples of these themes in fieldnotes and visual data. This was a long and iterative process. I began by creating table of themes, and then listing corresponding data sources to cross-reference in support of the themes (see appendix E), and revising these tables to refine and narrow each them to a few illustrative examples.

This process revealed consistency across data sources from participants, as well as between participants and school-level data. Triangulation of these data among sources supports, to some extent, the validity of the findings, as does my long-term presence in the field for data collection (Maxwell, 2013). Specific to the CDAs, Gee conceptualizes validity as convergence of the data during the process of applying the 28 tools of discourse analysis (Gee, 2014b). Although he emphasizes that there is no perfect analysis in which all of the tools point to the same conclusion, it is likely that an analysis is trustworthy when the use of the analytic tools result in a conclusion that supports the data. In addition, I would argue that my transparency in not only acknowledging by positionality and representation throughout this research, but also in continuing to reflect on the changing nature of my role as a researcher also substantiates the findings.

In the next two chapters, I highlight findings specific to my research question. Chapter 4 presents findings from CDA of interview and meeting transcripts that address how teacher talk about ability. Chapter 5 further explores this discourse in conjunction with findings from participant observation that describes how teachers take up inclusive pedagogy.

Chapter 4: Narratives of Ability

Chapters 4 and 5 present findings in response to my overarching research question, which asks how narratives of ability and inclusivity are constructed in an elementary school implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL). The findings presented in these chapters indicate that these narratives, in addition to being informed by educators' Discourse, pedagogy, and the organization of the school environment, are reflexive. That is, as educators inform and construct narratives of ability and inclusivity, their actions are also shaped by these narratives. In addition, these chapters offer evidence that educators also construct counternarratives that operate in tension with more traditional, dominant conceptions of ability in inclusivity.

I have divided the findings into two chapters, each devoted to addressing a separate research sub-question. Chapter 4 is focused on the first research sub-question, describing how educators in this school articulate notions of ability. Chapter 5 explores performances of inclusive pedagogy. The conceptual model below depicts the relationship between mutually informing narratives and counternarratives of ability and inclusivity, and how they are constructed by Discourse, environmental design of the space, and instruction (figure 4.1).

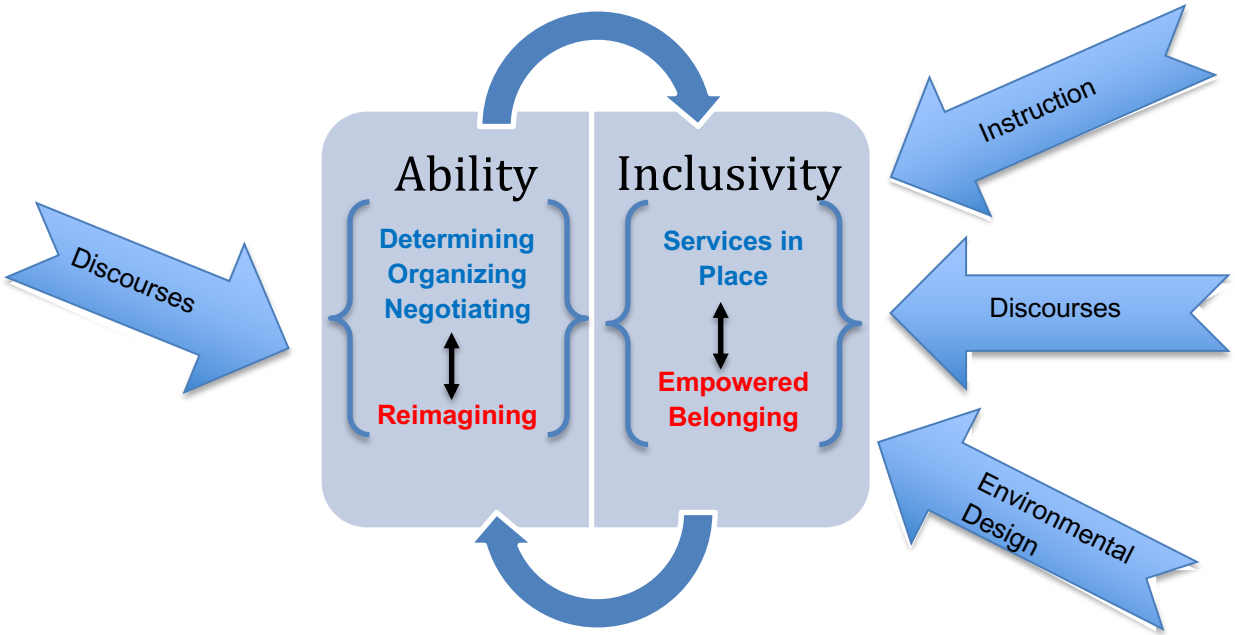
As discussed in chapter 3, I identified these narratives by an iterative process of analysis, beginning with the location of stories in Discourse, and extended to commonalities in other sources. Specifically, I looked for texts (excerpts from transcripts) that directly attended to student ability (or disability) and inclusivity, prioritizing texts that also engaged with aspects of UDL (e.g., access, variability). I looked across CDAs from all participants and meetings, followed by memos from my analyses of fieldnotes and visual data. After organizing these thematically as discussed in chapter 3, I categorized Discourses into themes related to ability. In

analyzing data among these themes, I found that several were complementary in contributing to overarching narratives about ability and inclusivity at Riverview.

This chapter is organized into three sections, each devoted to a narrative of ability which is informed by Discourse. Each narrative is divided into sections according to theme, and illustrative Discourse texts are shared within each of these sections. The narratives are illustrated in the right side of the conceptual model below. The first two sections describe the two major narratives of ability, indicated in blue text on the model. The first is that ability is something that can be organized and determined; the second is that ability is can be negotiated or mediated by manipulating instructional barriers. The third section discusses a counternarrative of ability that emerged (indicated in red text), which suggests that ability is a concept that can be re-imagined by focusing on less traditional indicators (e.g., effort rather than performance). Black arrows represent tensions in the findings.

Figure 4.1.

Conceptual model of narratives of ability and inclusivity



This chapter presents findings related to how educators in an elementary school implementing Universal Design for Learning (UDL) articulate notions of ability, and the ways these contribute to broader narratives of ability in classrooms and across the school. Recall from chapter 2 that Discourse (Gee, 2014b) is the use of language to say things, build (or destroy) things (e.g., identities, relationships, systems), and do things (e.g., enact a particular socially significant identity, participate in activities related to an identity or system). Thus, I focus the results on how these educators talk about, build, and shape multiple interpretations of ability.

In this chapter, I have drawn on interview data (e.g., transcripts) from full participants as a primary data source. Because these data were analyzed using critical discourse analysis (CDA) (Gee, 2014a; 2014b), which relies not only on language but also on context[17] I also refer to data collected through participant observation and documented in fieldnotes. I also share photos from the school common areas that reference interpretations of ability.

While the findings describe the construction of the narratives of ability, they also highlight tensions within these narratives, as well as between narratives and counternarratives – all of which exist and operate concurrently in the school. Educators articulated ability in certain ways that informed particular narratives; yet their Discourse also suggested ways in which they contested constraints on ability, and struggled to situate ability in a context that privileged "objective" or "scientific" knowledge (e.g., test scores) and the concept of smartness. I have highlighted these points of tension in each subsection. I conclude this chapter by summarizing the key findings.

Ability: Determined and Organized

[17] As explained in chapter 3, context includes setting as well as shared knowledge, institutional histories, gestures, etc.

Like many schools, Riverview employed a number of organizational systems designed to divide students into groups for targeted instruction (e.g., Response-to-Intervention), facilitate the delivery of services (e.g., Title I, special education), and measure and monitor student progress (e.g., literacy benchmarking). While the intent of these systems is to support learning by meeting students where they are, much of the language associated with these systems is often divisive and hierarchical (Ferri, 2012). Additionally, the establishment of and dependence on such systems by educators over time can result in their establishment as natural or true (Brantlinger, 2006).

Several systems in use at Riverview skirted outright hierarchical language by using euphemistic terms to talk about ability. For example, the teachers at Riverview used the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to assign reading levels (letters of the alphabet) to students according to expected grade-level performance (Fountas & Pinnell, 2008).[18] According to the program students reading between certain letters of the alphabet were generally considered to be on a particular grade level (for example, levels N through P were considered third grade level). In several instances educators referred to students *as* their letter (e.g., "Mr. [previous year teacher] told me that you're an M"; Elyse, fieldnotes, 9/24/19). Students were assessed twice per year by their classroom teacher or the literacy coach, with the exception of students who were considered below grade level. These students were assessed more frequently and received additional instruction in reading (fourth grade team meeting, fieldnotes, 9/20/19). Students seemed to know their level, and were expected to choose appropriate independent reading books based on their level (Elyse, fieldnotes, 9/24/19).

Another euphemism was the use of tiers to talk about students. The Response-to-Intervention (RTI) system was established in 2006 to improve the quality of instruction for

[18] Riverview uses the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmark Assessment System to assess students' reading three to five times per year, depending on the students' reading performance..

students with labeled disabilities, and to minimize inappropriate diagnosis of learning disabilities (U.S. Department of Education, n.d.). RTI models typically include three tiers of instruction: primary or tier one (classroom instruction in the general education setting); secondary or tier two ("a targeted or remedial intervention"); and tertiary or tier three (intensive individual interventions) (U.S. Department of Education, n.d., p. 23). Scholars in Disability Studies (e.g., Ferri, 2012) have critiqued RTI as an intervention model that does little more than reinforce segregation of students deemed at-risk of failure.

In conversations with teachers, I noticed that students sometimes were labeled as tiers themselves, rather than describing the tiers as sources of support (e.g., "she worked with the tier two kids"; Rachel, interview, 6/4/19). Students received interventions according to their assigned tiers during a designated intervention block known as the "what I need" or "WIN" block. Each grade level had its own WIN time, and students typically received intervention services two or four days per week, depending on their needs (reading, math, or both). Students in special education also received support during WIN time, sometimes receiving literacy instruction from their case manager. Students designated tier one remained in the classroom and usually did some type of enrichment activity or caught up on other work (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19).

Theme: Navigating Systems

I highlight the systems above to illustrate how certain organizational features may have informed educators' Discourse on student ability. In the following section I share results of a CDA from an interview with Elyse, where she describes her struggle to determine whether a student should be identified for special education. I then share a CDA from an interview with Rachel, in which she describes her understanding of the Riverview RTI system. Each of these excerpts reflects some amount of dissonance as participants describe student ability against the

backdrop of organizational systems, and reflects a possible constraint in the way teachers conceptualize ability in a hierarchical context.

Contesting "Identification"

Throughout my interviews with Elyse, she seemed to struggle with the ways in which context, both broader school systems (e.g., special education) and students' home and family circumstances, intersected with her views of student ability. Although she sometimes referred to disability labels as true (which I describe in more detail in the following section), she also questioned how parts of the special education system – identification and labeling in particular – function to benefit students. Additionally, in describing her students' needs and progress, Elyse constructed her teacher identity as one who, by taking the time to understand student circumstances and employ different instructional strategies, addressed the needs of her students and created an inclusive classroom.

Elyse shared the stories of two students in her fourth grade class, who had both (at some point) been labeled with a disability. Lines are numbered according to micro-lines, or what would be considered sentences in written text. When a line is accompanied by a lowercase letter, it means that there were longer pauses, but the speaker continued with her topic, and her intonation contour (the way in which she used inflection) suggested that the utterance was a continuous sentence. Words that appear in all capital letters were said with emphatic stress. Question marks in parentheses means that the speaker used an intonational rise that suggested a question or lack of certainty in the utterance. A double space indicates a new stanza (shift in topic) during the passage.

Excerpt 1:

Elyse:

1 Um I have another student who

1a has gone the OPPOSITE way.

2 because of his constant TARDIES/
2a and ABSENCES,
2b and MOTIVATION,
2c and ENGAGEMENT, and um—

3 he WAS in special ed,
3a and they tested him OUT.
4 And now he comes –

Researcher:
This year?

Elyse:
5 Last year.
6 Last year he got tested out.
7 So we pull him a LOT.

Excerpt 2:

Elyse:
1 I have another student that, um was identified,
2 I was questioning whether she should be CODED.

3 We sat down as a team and discovered that,
3a when she was younger she had a lot of absences, and TARDIES.
4 And because of that she had a lot of gaps in her learning.

5 So Craig, my intern,
5a took HER on as his student to TUTOR,
5b as part of the reading CLASS that he's doing.

6 And she has gone from an L,
6a he just tested her at an N,
6b and she had independence there.
7 And this is just since January.

The first student is characterized by factors that forced him to go the "opposite way." This directional is offered as an indication that Elyse had shifted from our previous topic (in which she told me about a student who had made significant progress), to an example of a child who had regressed in some way. In this passage, Elyse distanced herself from the student at first

by beginning with an account of the boy's problems with missing school, and difficulties with motivation and engagement. Although she still claimed ownership of the boy when she said "I have," the topic of the stanza is about factors that caused his regression. Two of these factors, absences and tardies, are explicitly external to the student (and the teacher) in the sense that they are not part of who he is or how he learns. Elyse's references to motivation and engagement however, are more ambiguous. It seems that Elyse has suggested that the student lacks motivation and engagement, but where the responsibility for this lies is unclear. In other words, Elyse did not say that the student was unmotivated or disengaged, simply that the two traits existed in some way. It is also possible that Elyse is referencing the UDL framework here, which relates to both motivation and engagement (engagement is a core principle of UDL). She did not elaborate further however, and stopped abruptly to move to a direct discussion of the student as "in special ed."

In the next stanza (lines 3 through 7) Elyse re-established a connection with the student when she described how she "pulled" him. Her description of pulling here is not about his being pulled out of the room, but that she (or perhaps her intern) pulled him for small group or one-on-one instruction. In other words, his "testing out" from special education (a decision from which she distances herself through use of "they") did not preclude the student from getting help. In addition, she presented the boy's challenges as almost entirely the result of context. Although their relationship was presented as somewhat adversarial (later in the interview she suggested that he behaved stubbornly at times), Elyse positioned herself as a teacher who engaged with and attended to his needs, specifically by pulling him into some sort of group. She recognized that the boy needed a particular kind of teacher support, despite no longer being eligible for special education services. That said, it is possible that in pulling the child into a group Elyse is in some

ways reproducing a special education setting within the classroom, a concept I will further highlight in chapter 5.

It is not clear here whether Elyse viewed the boy's "testing out" of special education as appropriate or not. The concept of testing him *out* suggests special education as a system or place in which he no longer had membership, and therefore no longer received support. She explored the special education identification process in the second excerpt when she questioned whether a girl should be coded (as disabled). In both cases Elyse recognized the contextual factors that have an impact on the students' performance, which signifies that she viewed the students as able in some way, and that decisions to test our or code children are complex. Elyse's questioning of the girl's coding seems to suggest that she was unsure whether it was necessary given the gaps in the girl's learning. In other words, the girl was disadvantaged by these circumstances, but she was not, as Elyse went on to illustrate, unable to learn. The girl's progress in reading suggests that coding her with a disability was likely unnecessary, but that one-on-one tutoring was effective in minimizing the learning gaps.

In the second excerpt, Elyse privileged one-on-one tutoring, which is related to a literacy course her intern took as part of his university requirements. The effectiveness of the tutoring (and the literacy course) were positioned as successful by Elyse, evidenced by the girl's progress through reading levels. In the interview, she went on to explicitly state that this student's success was a "true attest to that program," underscoring Elyse's valuing of the literacy course, and belief in the validity of the benchmark system which she (and the school at large) used to measure reading progress. Yet this also raises the issue of how Elyse viewed the student's agency in her learning. Was the girl's success a testament to the program or to the student

herself? The student was credited with attaining a level of independence, and yet Elyse seemed to emphasize the effectiveness of the intern and the program over the student herself.

In these excerpts Elyse did several things. She built a professional identity for herself as a teacher who could evaluate student progress, make effective instructional decisions, and mitigate gaps in learning, which she attributed to factors outside of school. She also established her classroom as inclusive by illustrating how she met the variable needs of her students (for example, pulling a student for small group instruction in the aftermath of being tested out of special education). In addition, Elyse also distanced herself from special education, or at least from the decisions related to the first student's placement. The second excerpt underscores this difference when Elyse talked about questioning a student's coding, and eventually supporting her intern to help overcome what appeared to be a disability through the use of a targeted intervention. I will return to Elyse's questioning of aspects of special education later in this chapter, when I share an excerpt about removing barriers and the "truth" of disability.

The Tier System

Like Elyse, Rachel's interview reflected constraints related to systems that organized students by ability. As a first year teacher, Rachel repeatedly spoke of how she felt pressure not only to comply with these systems (e.g., RTI, Title I), but also to keep pace with her colleagues. The two were, in fact, inextricably linked, particularly during phase one when special educators would often pull students from different classrooms into a specialized small group setting. Rachel explained that the students were often working on what was taught in class, and therefore all of the grade level teachers were expected to be on roughly the same lesson (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19).

The following conversation occurred during our second interview, when, having heard teachers refer to tiers for some time but realizing that I didn't truly understand what they meant, I asked Rachel to explain them to me (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19). In doing so, Rachel took on the Discourse of a professional who grasps concepts of grade-level performance, and the socially situated practice of sorting students according to whether they are at or above grade level. Yet even as she defined the tiers she remained detached from the practice, and did not state her involvement (if she had any) in assigning tiers.

Researcher:

So, so what do the tiers mean? Like if you had to define tier one, tier two, tier three, like what do those mean?

Rachel:

1 Tier one is you are like, on grade level,
1a you, or exceeding, um
2 you know the concepts that you should be, like know,
3 you meet standards.

4 Um, tier two I would say like
4a you need SOME scaffolding,
5 like you're maybe like a year behind or like a few months behind even as like,
5a in some cases they consider that tier two but um, you know,
5b JUST almost there but you need a little bit of help.

6 And then tier three is like you're a year more behind.
7 Um, in terms of where you should be academically.

8 And even SOME Kiddos who are like wicked smart.
9 Like I have a student who is WICKED smart at math,
9a but his BEHAVIORS get in the way SO much that he has missed like a whole year of math.
10 So he is pulled for that anyways because that's,
10a it's like a one-on-one tutor essentially for him, for THAT specific student.
11 And that, it's, not every kid gets that,
12 but like they've made it so that like,
12a that adult is like, that's his time to learn his math because,
12b he's not in class to do it, like, when he should be.

Although Rachel's Discourse consisted of hierarchical language (e.g., referring to students as "low, high, in the middle"), she distanced herself from both the special education and RTI processes. While she complied with requests to send students "to services" she did not express ownership in determining who received such services. Her discomfort with formal hierarchical labels (e.g., numbered tiers), despite her use of words like low and high to describe her students, is evident in this passage as she describes the tiers of the school's RTI system.

The first part of the passage situates Rachel as somewhat disconnected from RTI, or at least a bystander to the structure, over which she has little control. Although Rachel talks about the tiers in terms of a hypothetical student ("you"), it is the tiers, and not the student, that are the subjects of her sentences. Thus, Rachel may have viewed the tiers as some type of true standards of performance against which students were ranked. Yet her definitions also bore marks of ambiguity or uncertainty. For example, in lines 4 through 5, Rachel used "like" and "maybe" in her definition of tier two. It is possible that she was unclear on what exactly constituted tier two, whereas tiers one (being on grade level) and three (more than a year below grade level) had more definitive markers.

In lines 8 – 12b there is a noticeable shift in the style of Rachel's Discourse. While the first half of the passage employs a Discourse and identity as a professional who defines tiers in terms of performance, the second half of the passage emphasizes something entirely different: smartness. Rachel highlighted the smartness of one student to illustrate an exception to the structure that almost threatened its integrity. Rachel seemed to struggle with her support here. Although the student gets what he needs, he does not do math "when he should" and receives one-on-one support despite his being "wicked smart" in math. There is an unspoken addendum here, that behavior, and not merely academic performance or student ability, inform student

placement in tiers. This perhaps, speaks back to the uncertainty and detachment expressed in the first half of the passage. Rachel seemed conflicted about this, pointing out that not every kid got this type of treatment, and yet recognized that the student was also getting support that seemed to be beneficial. She did not outwardly question it, but her description points out that it was the student's behavior that has caused this exception, not his lack of ability. She also distances herself from the decisions to pull him; he is "hers" yet "they've made it" (line 12) and "he is pulled" (line 10). Again, she did not outwardly condemn nor critique this, and yet she hinted at some inequity here because "not every kid gets that." Further, some aspect of these decisions may have undermined her authority as a teacher. She did not make the decision about pulling students, nor was she the one who pulled kids; rather, an unidentified "they" had made it so that students got pulled *from* her classroom.

This passage illustrates some of the constraints on Rachel's practice, not only in the form of a tiered system of student support, but also in terms of the Discourse this system requires and encourages. In essence, the tier system forces Rachel, and arguably other teachers to view students as levels in a hierarchy; Rachel cedes control to the system, and relinquishes some control over exceptions, perhaps due to her status as a new teacher, or her lack of familiarity with the culture of Riverview. Either way, we again see a tension between teacher conceptions of student ability and structural operations of the school.

Theme: Privileged Forms of Knowledge

The two previous examples suggested that a hierarchical Discourse derived from organizational systems constrains the way teachers talk about student ability. In this section, I share examples of how teachers construct professional identities, and draw on these identities to make decisions that sort and divide students. I share excerpts from interviews with Sarah and

Rachel, both of whom uses informal hierarchical language (e.g., referring to students as "low and high") to talk about students. They support their claims by drawing on what I will call privileged knowledge; that is, formal assessments used to sort students, and in Sarah's case, her own experience as a veteran teacher.

Professional Authority

The following excerpt is from my first interview with Sarah, which took place after I had been visiting her classroom regularly for approximately one month (Sarah, interview, 3/28/19).

Sarah:

1 They're sort of LOW academically,
2 in general, across the board.

3 So we'll sit down for focus lesson I'll think everything went well,
3a I'll send them off and then I've got 10 kids going I don't get it!
4 I'm like, oh, okay.
5 So I've had to change a LOT of my teaching this year with that with this group.

Researcher:
So when you say low academically across the board, do you mean across all subjects or across the most of the group?
Sarah:

6 Both.
7 Both.
8 So they're um,
9 Like you know their MAP[19] scores their test scores are lower than what I typically see
9 Um, and I mean there's a FEW bright spots, and there's certainly kids who EXCEL and do very well but,
10 in general they're MUCH much lower than what I was used to getting in fifth grade.
11 More so in MATH than in READING,
11a they're a little bit more successful as readers.
12 Um but yeah they have a HARD time
12a with school.

[19] Measures of Academic Progress, sometimes referred to as the NWEA tests.

In response to my question about how she would describe her current group of students, Sarah made a claim, and went on to provide specific examples to support her claim. She described her interpretation of the students' ability, and then provided evidence from standardized test data, and her prior experience as a fifth grade teacher. In doing so, she built a socially significant teacher identity for herself as an assessor and evaluator of students. Additionally, she implied the accuracy of her evaluation by linking low test scores with what she had seen in the classroom over time (i.e., fifth grade norms of performance and comprehension).

Sarah's first few sentences presented the claim of her students being "sort of low," and she later clarified this to mean that both almost all of the students were sort of low and that they were low in all subjects. She went on to support her claim by saying that the students' test scores were below what she usually saw in fifth grade. The focus lessons to which she referred in line 3 are components of a whole-group workshop model Sarah employed for most of her instruction. This typically involves a 10-15 minute lesson on a specific skill, followed by 30-40 minutes of independent work. Although Sarah mentioned that she has had to change her teaching, she did not elaborate on what specific changes she had made (although this could have been due to my clarification question, which may have interrupted this chain of thought).

My interruption seemed to signal something to Sarah, as she then moved from more anecdotal descriptions (low, in general, across the board), to specific evidence of low academic performance: lower than expected MAP scores. Although she spoke generally of the group in this passage, Sarah did single out "a few bright spots." These students were not comparatively positioned as high, but as kids who excelled and did very well. In other words, students' highness or lowness was not the point of interest – how they *performed* is the topic of this stanza,

which is a contrast from the first stanza, where Sarah commented on students *as* low. In the first stanza low is a feature of her students: "they'[a]re sort of low academically."

Sarah closed out her description by saying that the students have a hard time with school, rather than learning (or some type of skill). The word choice here is notable, because it refers to the institution, rather than specifics of classroom performance to which Sarah had been referring. It also alludes to the possibility of other challenges the students have that are related to school, but not necessarily the classroom. Describing the students as having a hard time with school may also suggest that something about the institution (or a structure of the institution) was a challenge for students, rather than learning itself. Alternatively, Sarah may simply have been offering a summary of her evidence in support of her claim, and in doing so equating the students being "low" with their having a hard time with school. This interpretation suggests that lowness is not only a quality of the students, but that because of this it makes sense that these students would have a hard time with school.

Interestingly, despite Sarah's initial description of her class as "sort of low," the example she offers as evidence (lines 3-5) is more about miscommunication than the students' inherent lowness. In describing the miscommunication, where Sarah thinks the students understand a concept, but the students are actually confused, she also constructed her identity as a teacher with agency. In a sense, the first two stanzas offer a description of the class as somewhat of an anomaly; they are all generally low (which we later learn is unusual), and their lack of understanding (lines 3-4) was confusing to Sarah, who had to change her teaching. Although she did not elaborate on these changes, Sarah demonstrated her agency as a teacher who changed her teaching in order to meet student needs.

Overall, this passage is somewhat at odds with my observations. In the classroom, Sarah connects with her students in a very affectionate way, often calling students "my loves" or saying "yes dear" when a student approaches with a question. Over the course of my observations I rarely saw Sarah when she was not smiling while she taught. I mention this not to suggest that Sarah is not being honest or truthful, but merely to acknowledge that this interview may have felt performative for Sarah. Although we knew each other reasonably well, my role in her classroom had always been to observe interns, rather than her, and this shift which may have altered the dynamics of our relationship. In some ways, however, this disparity may suggest that Sarah is acknowledging the reality of the fact that her students are all in different places; her interactions with students may indicate that even while she is aware of difference among her students, she does not let this knowledge interfere with either her attitude toward them, nor her expectations of them.

Keeping Up with the Team: Differentiating Ability

Rachel also drew on privileged knowledge in our conversation about her students. Rather than assigning labels as general descriptors however, Rachel talked about student ability in the context of instructional groups. Of all of the teachers I observed, Rachel was the only one who had consistent student groups in different subjects. By consistent, I mean that she organized her instruction in small groups, not necessarily that the groups met daily and remained the same. In the previous section I illustrated how Rachel complied with the school's organizational systems. As a new teacher, however, it seemed that she felt the need to create her own systems as well, in order to meet the needs of her variable population of students.

When I asked her about her math groups, Rachel indicated that she likes doing groups and centers, and that after doing the initial unit as a whole group she felt she could tell who some

of the struggling math students were. In math she typically began with a warm-up for the whole group, before dividing the class into their groups and assigning each to a center through which the groups would rotate (meeting with Rachel for a mini-lesson was usually one of the centers) (Rachel, fieldnotes, 3/14/19). In the excerpt below, Rachel described her process for determining math groups. Like Sarah, she relied on assessment data, both a pre- and post-assessment from the curriculum unit (which she describes in a passage prior to this excerpt), and standardized test scores.

Rachel:

1 I didn't really have math groups that for our first unit I just kinda did a whole class thing.
2 Um, and then I could kind of figure out like,
2a Hey, these are my really high kids
2b these are my like, struggling kids.

3 So at first I did it like that, but then I took the NWEA[20] scores and grouped them that way.
4 So that they were closer in range and then tweaked it if I needed to if someone,
4a you know, was all of a sudden like getting this and this concept way faster,
4b and then they could be like pushed to the next group for some more CHALLENGING work or if someone needed to be brought down.
5 So I would make flops casually.

6 I don't think the kids TRULY like,
6a like, oh my gosh, like why is she moving me?
7 But I would make those flips if I had to.

8 And for the most part it worked out.
9 Like for the most part like my high group was challenged enough,
9a and I was a lot shorter with them about like, this is what you're doing,
9b here's like the ONE concept I'm going to teach you today,
9c Go DO it.
10 And like they were way more independent and then I could spend a lot more time with like my kids who are like,
10a we need a step by step by step kind of thing and,
10b tell me the steps again.
11 And so THAT worked out pretty well.

[20] Northwestern Education Association Measure of Academic Progress (MAP) tests were given twice a year (fall and spring) to students at Riverview to assess progress in reading and math.

In the first stanza, Rachel used the word "struggling" kids as a contrast to the high kids. This is an interesting shift as she had previously referred to them as "low kids"; "struggling" is a more active descriptor that suggests the possibility of progress, rather than a static marker of ability. Still, labeling students as such suggests that Rachel may be situating the struggle within the student, rather than the environment. In my observations, Rachel's groups typically met with her for a set time, and moved through a rotation of an activity (many of which were hands-on), and completing problem sets and exit tickets that were part of the school's math curriculum. This served to break up the math block and also allow her the opportunity to connect with all of the students at some point. Rachel was the primary adult in the room, although a paraprofessional typically came for 20 to 30 minutes to work with two or three students while they were at their centers.

In this passage, Rachel described the design of her math groups. Pedagogically, her design is consistent with principles of Differentiated Instruction (Tomlinson, 2001), in which teachers meet the diverse needs of their students through different types of instruction and instructional materials. She indicated that she had drawn on data to inform her choices about creating the groups, but that the groups were not permanent and some students had switched groups. She also suggested (lines 9 through 10b) that she was able to support students in a way that they need to be supported, breaking things down into steps for some, and offering challenges for others. Despite a hierarchical discourse of high and struggling students, Rachel's practice suggests a somewhat fluid conception of student ability; students can (theoretically) move between groups. While my observations supported her claim that students did not notice or object to her "flips" in grouping (I did not see students outwardly object), I did not arrive in her classroom until later in the school year. Presumably, at that point, the groups had become more static.

Throughout this interview, Rachel alluded several times to the fact that the groups aided in her time management. Keeping up with her colleagues in order to stay on pace for special education service providers and other interventions was a source of both guidance and stress for Rachel. While she liked being in roughly the same place as the other members of the third grade team, she also saw this as a somewhat frustrating constraint: "If *my* class needs to review a unit more I would like to be able to like hold my class back from that, whatever the next unit. But I can't because I have to push forward for special ed" (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19).

Privileging Medical and Scientific Knowledge

References to medical knowledge were common in my observations at Riverview, although there are limited references to this in interview or meeting transcripts. Often teachers referred to students being on or off "meds" in team meetings, and transitioning on or off of medication was often offered as an explanation for changes in student behavior. Additionally, students were occasionally described in general terms by their diagnosis. For example, in a fifth grade team meeting, Sarah was describing a student in her class who was a "classic ADHD kid" and seeking support from her team in how to help him focus on his work (fifth grade team meeting, 9/20/19). While these references to disability labels were not typically referred to in an outwardly negative way, they did seem to possess a certain degree of truth, or at least a universally acceptable definition. In the example above, all of Sarah's colleagues seemed to know what she meant by a "classic ADHD kid" and she did not elaborate further on this. In an example I will share in the next section, Elyse discusses a student with a "true learning disability" (Elyse, interview, 4/17/19). While disability was not necessarily constructed as negative by these educators, it was certainly constructed as a medically or professionally defined and diagnosed reality.

Additionally, interest in UDL seemed to be tied to its connection with neuroscience. In my first interview with Sarah, I asked her if anything in particular stood out to her about UDL, and she immediately said that she liked the fact that it was "based in brain science," because it added to its credibility: "I feel like when you base something *in* science and go no this is actually *how* the brain functions, and this is, you know, the parts of your brain that are working, I feel like that's a little more um, *persuasive* to some" (Sarah, interview, 3/28/19; italicized words said with emphatic stress). Sarah's assessment of UDL distinguishes it from other educational initiatives because she views it as having a scientific basis. While she did not elaborate on what she meant by scientific, it seems to suggest some type of truth or evidence-based knowledge that enhanced UDL's legitimacy.

A final example of how scientific or medical knowledge is privileged was evident in a school bulletin board. The photo below (figure 4.2) is of a bulletin board that was put up in October of phase two. The bulletin board shows pictures of famous individuals who have or allegedly had ADHD. These include contemporary celebrities such as Simone Biles and Adam Levine, as well as historical figures such as Leonardo da Vinci and Albert Einstein. In the center of the bulletin board are descriptions of what ADHD is and what causes it (figures 4.2 and 4.3). These descriptions are largely pathological: they describe what *doctors* know about it, that it is a medical term, and that people with ADHD have "differences" in their brains.

Figure 4.2.

ADHD Bulletin Board

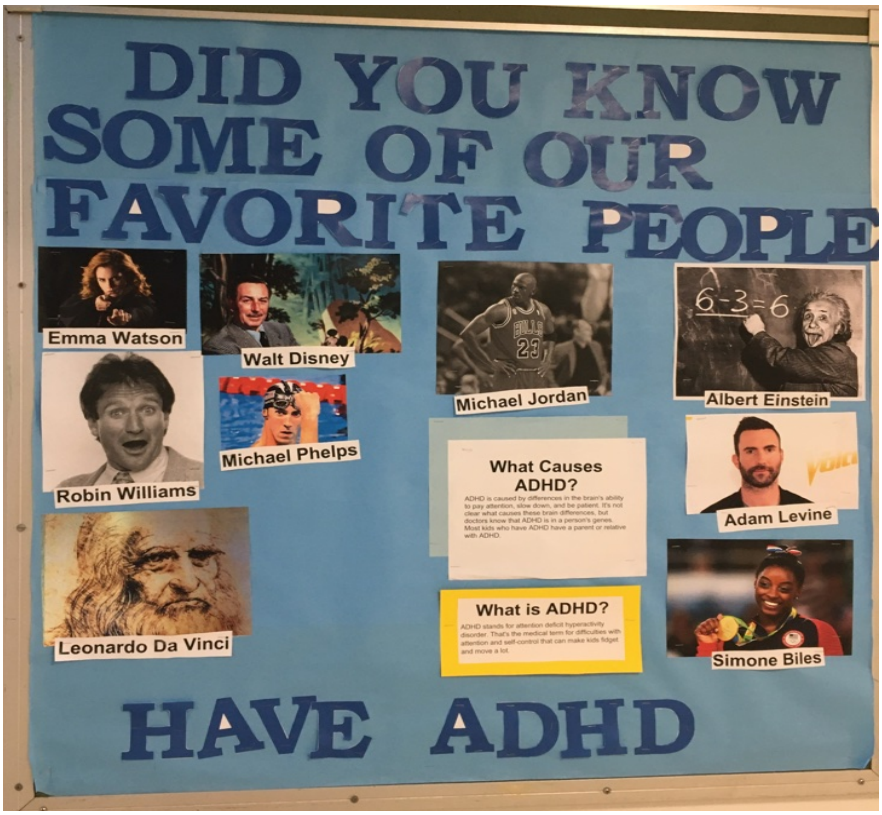
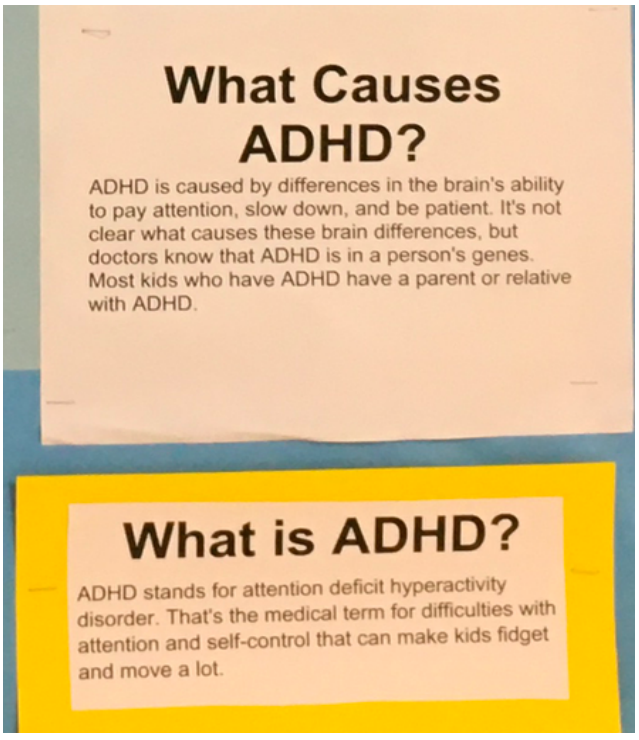


Figure 4.3.

Closeup of Bulletin Board Captions



This bulletin board quite literally stopped me in my tracks on one of my visits to the school. I was on my way to an observation and noticed the bulletin board, which is just outside of the library, in a highly trafficked area. I paused to read the descriptions, look at the photos, and try to discern how I felt about the bulletin board when a teacher passed by. I asked her who put it up, and while she was not sure she guessed that it was the guidance counselor. I did not notice anyone else, teacher or student, stop and look at the bulletin board during my time at Riverview.

My initial reaction to the board was positive; I was excited at the idea that the school was opening up a conversation about ADHD and even celebrating it. But the longer I looked at the bulletin board the more troubling it seemed. The board did not share any quotes or experiences from the individuals in the photos, but instead focused on what doctors know about ADHD. It did not offer any benefits or struggles that people with ADHD might experience, and did not offer a clear connection or offer resources for Riverview students who might have been diagnosed with ADHD.

Although the creator and goals of the bulletin board are unknown to me, I have included it here as an example of a Discourse that informs narratives of ability. From my perspective, this bulletin board highlighted the privileged knowledge of medicine, and sends a relatively ambiguous message to students about what it means to excel at something for individuals with ADHD. The language used in the description is distinctly pathologizing, describing students with ADHD as having genetically "different" brains. My reading of the text was that ADHD was presented as a definable, disabled reality that a few famous individuals have managed to overcome – the trope of the "supercrip" whose disability is acceptable because they can overcome it (Baglieri, 2017). When I asked participants about their thoughts on the bulletin

board however, few of them seemed to notice it. One speculated that one of the special education teachers had created it, but no one I spoke with shared any strong reaction to the content.

The Discourses presented above (identification, tiers, professional authority, differentiating ability, and medical/scientific knowledge) highlight the ways in which teachers' language and actions are constrained by systems within the school, and shaped by privileged sources of knowledge. These systems (e.g., RTI, benchmarking) facilitate and normalize the sorting and ranking of students based on ability. Although we see educators pushing against these constraints in some ways (for example, questioning coding), the ways in which the systems operate compels teachers to accept some degree of truth in their enactment. In relying on privileged knowledge (e.g., MAP scores, benchmarking) to maintain their existence, the organizational systems discussed in this chapter become streamlined forces that determine and organize student ability.

Negotiating Ability: Minimizing Barriers

The concept of minimizing barriers to student learning was discussed by a number of Riverview educators, including those who were not members of the school-based UDL team (staff meeting, fieldnotes, 4/12/19). Recall from chapter 2 that one component of UDL is identifying and minimizing any barriers to learning that interfere with students meeting instructional goals (Meyer et al., 2014). In my observations and informal conversations with teachers, many interpreted reducing barriers as offering alternatives to printed material (for example, through audio text). As Elyse explained, "If the purpose of the lesson is not reading, then why can't everybody have access to whatever tools they can use?" (Elyse, interview, 11/6/19).

While allowing access and reducing barriers appeared to be a clear path toward inclusive pedagogy for many participants, tensions also emerged in regard to student ability and smartness. In this section, I share CDAs from interviews with Sarah, Elyse, and Rachel as well as data from my observations of classrooms, meetings, and PD events. I have chosen to focus on these data, as they capture an emerging tension among how participants talk about student ability, how they conceptualize "smartness," and what constitutes disability.

Setting the Stage for Accessing Learning

My first encounters with the prevalence of barriers and access at Riverview occurred during phase one. During a schoolwide professional development day, Alex did a brief (approximately one hour) presentation on UDL for teachers and paraprofessionals entitled, "Universal Design for Learning: Setting Goals" (staff meeting, fieldnotes, 4/12/19). After introducing the topic and asking teachers to set a goal for the session, Alex chatted with me about UDL in general, and shared that teachers had latched onto the idea of barriers, but that he wanted to shift to more of an emphasis on clearly defined goals, (which would in turn support identifying barriers). He then shared several slides with the group, first connecting UDL with Universal Design in architecture and emphasizing design to "accommodate the widest spectrum of users, including those with disabilities, right from the start" (Alex, slideshow, 4/12/19). He then went on to highlight some fundamental assumptions of UDL, primarily that emphasized intentional design and access for everyone; specifically, he explained, using UDL meant planning for the whole group of students from the beginning. He also acknowledged that the "boxed" curricula that the school used were most likely inaccessible to many students, and that a singular approach to teaching it would not be aligned with UDL. "When UDL is really happening" he said, "your kids might all be doing different things" (Alex, fieldnotes, 4/12/19). In

closing, Alex spent time discussing how teachers could not only prioritize goal setting, but think about how to "separate the means from the ends."

I draw on Alex's UDL presentation because it foregrounds several features of the context that are helpful in understanding how teachers think about ability, and how Riverview's participation in NUDLO may heighten their attention to accessibility. In emphasizing that UDL is about access and design from the beginning for all students, Alex attempted to blur the line between UDL team members and the rest of the staff. In this event he neither referred to the UDL team nor looked to them for participation; nor did he mention Riverview's history as a school that had previously partnered with CAST. Yet he seemed to expect that all of the teachers had some familiarity with the UDL principles. This was perhaps a strategic move that echoed the larger issue of the Riverview-Southside merger. Recall that Southside teachers had *not* opted into the NUDLO network, but that those who moved over to Riverview were members of the network by default (even if they were not on the team). In de-privileging the boxed curricula (which was a division point among teachers as Southside teachers had used different programs) he positioned himself, and the teachers as critical, professional users of the materials; they had the freedom to modify and refine the goals and minimize existing barriers for their students. Furthermore, in making UDL about teaching *all* students, Alex also positioned the work of UDL as involving *all* teachers. Everyone was asked to set a goal, and then everyone was asked to practice with their grade-level team using actual content area standards.

In the next section, I share examples of educators attending to and grappling with the removal of barriers and the nature of student ability. These selections span phases one and two, some of which came only a short time after Alex's presentation. I chose these specific examples because they address the ways in which teachers contest traditional notions of smartness, but are

also bound to its Discourse. I also present evidence of teachers engaging with the Discourse of UDL, and the activities of removing barriers and enabling access.

Theme: Access and Progress

The concept of access can be viewed as an initial foray into UDL practice; it is the proverbial "low-hanging fruit" in the sense that it is relatively easy to identify barriers in access within the learning environment. As mentioned above, a number of teacher operationalized access as offering non-print sources of content. Barriers in access may also be easy for teachers to identify, particularly when drawing on the guidelines (Alex, fieldnotes, 4/12/19). At Riverview, the concept of access began to grow, as the following texts will illustrate, almost as a matter of justice. According to teachers, students had a right to access content through any modality. Yet at times, barriers, while identified, are not situated environmentally. While teachers are more than willing to give students what they need, in some cases they still situate problems as internal to the student.

Ability vs. (In)Attention

The ability to attend to instruction or learning tasks is a common challenge for teachers, and those at Riverview were no exception. Having learned the language of barriers however, paying attention was often contextualized as a component of engagement, and related to UDL. During phase two, Sarah described several students who had trouble attending to instruction and learning tasks; however, instead of framing this challenge in terms of the environment (for example, how she might minimize distractions), Sarah focused on trying to work around inattention in order to help the students complete their work.

In the following excerpt, Sarah draws a clear distinction between the student's academic ability and his ability to attend to his work. Yet she does not use hierarchical language in this

passage, choosing rather to use terms like “struggler” and “poor” to describe the student and his attention skills. In the excerpt she is showing me an example of one student’s writing assignment, which I observed students working on the previous day (interview, 10/21/19).

Sarah:

So this is AJ
He's the one I was talking to,
He was one with one enormous paragraph.
And he, um
he's someone that I would call a struggler not because he doesn't have decent ideas or know WHAT to do,
but his ATTENTION is so poor that getting anything done is really difficult for him.

So he's, he's very much like,
gets distracted by the thing in his DESK,
gets distracted by the kid next to him,
gets distracted, distracted, distracted.
And that's global across his entire day.

And so he's writing about, um the first time he went on a waterslide.
Um and it began with like, it was three sentences.
And so we've been able to get him to slowly um, expand his thinking.
and it's been a lot of like,
you say it to me out loud,
then let's plan it, then let's write it.

In the first stanza Sarah constructs AJ as a struggler who has good ideas, but whose poor attention prevents him from completing assignments. In fact, almost all of the information in this first stanza is subordinated to AJ’s poor attention, which Sarah goes on to describe as being distracted by everything around him in the second stanza. She closes this description by pointing out that AJ struggles with distractions across his entire day, and thus makes the claim that it is not simply writing or the particular assignment that are a barrier for him.

While Sarah has defined the issue as AJ’s poor attention, she indicates that her effort is largely focused on getting him to expand his thinking and produce writing. This suggests

somewhat of a mismatch; in other words, she does not discuss any efforts aimed at figuring out a solution to distractibility, but rather to meeting the requirements of the work. In other words, the barrier she has described is not external (distractions), but internal (AJ's difficulty in focusing). In some sense, AJ's distractibility is presented as a barrier to Sarah and her intern, who must take turns sitting with AJ to ensure that he produces something.

There is a tension here between Sarah's construction of AJ as a victim of distractions or as a student who lacks the ability to focus. Sarah seems to struggle with negotiating the skills she knows AJ possesses (having decent ideas and knowing what to do) and the necessity of getting things done (line 3b). Further, because Sarah generalizes this problem as "global across his entire day," she indicates that it is something she must manage in every subject. While Sarah does not directly assign a specific disability label to AJ, her explanation of how she addresses his distractibility puts the onus of his work largely on the teacher. Sarah and her intern sit with AJ and help him complete his work, presumably preventing him from getting distracted. This renders AJ's ability as almost unimportant, as it is not being emphasized; the barriers (things in the environment that AJ finds distracting), in this case, remains both unidentified and intact.

Engagement, Decoding, and Comprehension

Book groups were a common instructional feature at Riverview. As I will discuss in more detail in chapter 5, a number of participants used book groups throughout the year, and determined groups in a variety of ways, including reading "level" and interest. Teachers tended to view book groups as an opportunity to allow students to have conversations about their reading that were not teacher-driven, and to foster a sense of community and belonging in the classroom (Elyse, interview, 6/10/19). Book groups were especially common in the fourth grade,

which may be why, as fifth graders, students were expected to participate meaningfully in them without significant support from a teacher (Sarah, fieldnotes, 10/3/19).

On an October visit to Sarah's classroom, students were meeting in book groups to discuss fictional texts. After observing several group meetings, I was curious about how the groups were chosen. I consulted with Sarah, who explained that she largely disregarded reading level in favor of choice and engagement. Following book talks on each of the choices, students ranked their top three book preferences, and Sarah took this information and sorted students into groups by interest.

I was somewhat surprised by this, as the books seemed to represent a range of difficulty. Sarah explained that she did have some students who struggled with reading, but who were able to access the texts using audio books. I was curious if all students had access to the audio versions, but Sarah explained that the Book Right app was only available for students who receive special education services, and that the special education teacher had to load the app onto the students' laptops. Sarah gestured toward one student, a girl that I had often seen working with a paraprofessional in a small group, and explained that while the girl had trouble decoding words her comprehension was fine. "She shouldn't not have access" Sarah said, "simply because she can't decode" (Sarah, fieldnotes, 10/3/19).

I highlight this example for several reasons. First, this offers evidence of the prevalence of the UDL Discourses of access and engagement, even among teachers who were not on the UDL team. While Sarah considered herself familiar with UDL, she did not receive regular training; yet her prioritization of student engagement *over* reading level suggests her support of the idea that learning is both emotive and cognitive (Meyer et al., 2014). Second, although she did not explicitly state it, Sarah seemed frustrated by the fact that the audio app was only

available to students with IEPs. While Riverview had multiple reading apps available to all students on their Chromebooks, none had the extensive selection of Book Right, and Sarah expressed disappointment in the limitations of the other apps. Third, Sarah explicitly addresses reading as comprised of both decoding and comprehension, and seems to value the latter over the former. I highlight this distinction because challenges in decoding are issues raised in the next two excerpts by Elyse and Rachel, who recognize that trouble with decoding tends to signal disability, while simultaneously de-privileging comprehension as a critical component of reading. Finally, Sarah constructs access as a right for her student. In this case, inaccessible materials are a matter of justice that must be corrected.

Theme: Smartness as an Individual Property

The social construction of smartness is the foundational to maintenance of hierarchies in schools (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). Like ability, its existence is dependent on its other (or opposite, not-so-smartness; Dudley-Marling, 2004), and it is a privileged way of not only being in schools, but of acquiring the benefits that come with it (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). As these authors argue, smartness is rarely viewed as a collective property, and tends to be associated with an individual as a personal attribute. The following texts illustrate smartness powerful hold on the Discourse of school, and its problematic ties to ability and disability.

Smartness and the "Truth" of Disability

The ways in which access resonated with Elyse was evident in her descriptions of student learning. Like many of her colleagues, she framed access in relation to written material, and engaged with the idea of addressing barriers to student learning as providing access to content (although she did not explicitly use the term barrier). Below is an excerpt from our first interview, when I had been visiting Elyse' classroom regularly for more than a month (Elyse,

interview, 4/17/19). This interview took place one week after Alex's UDL presentation, and approximately three weeks after Elyse and the UDL team attended a UDL professional learning event. Note how the passage begins with Elyse's framing of a student, a fourth grader, in reference to his first grade-reading level, and ends with a somewhat different pronouncement of the boy's intelligence.

Researcher:
Any kids you can think of who've made remarkable progress?

Elyse:
Yes.
Um we have ONE student who is first grade reader (?),
and he has a TRUE learning disability.

I believe he's also dyslexic,
which, we don't have a lot of TRAINING here at this SCHOOL for dyslexia, um.

He uh, I have actually—
BECAUSE of UDL
BECAUSE of the CHROMEBOOKS we have done a lot of um READRIGHT.
which is the extension that can READ Google docs and things like that.

So he's able to ACCESS that.
And, he's able to SPEAK, and it types for him.
But the Chromebooks also have that capability as well.
So um the Chromebooks also have the capability of, of READING but it's not as FLUENT
so HE can ACCESS more mate[rials]—

He's a SMART boy.
He just has a LEARNING disability.

And so this HELPS him ACCESS all the CONTENT
that the other students have, and he can hear it and he –

he gives GREAT input.
Um so he is making nice gains, that way
And also within his reading.

In several ways, this excerpt illustrates how Elyse enacted the socially significant identity of a teacher. She engaged in the social language of teachers, which included assessing student skills and intelligence, using labels and/or academic jargon, and discussing technological tools as a way to support reading development. After describing the boy's skill level (first grade), which is linked to his learning disability and possible dyslexia, Elyse went on to provide evidence of how she (and her intern, indicated by "we") used technology to provide access to written material for the student. A closer look at this example however, suggests that several important things were happening in this passage.

The construction of ability and disability are in constant tension here. Although Elyse first insisted that the disability was "true" in line 2a, and looks to solidify the claim with a belief statement that he was also dyslexic, these are qualified statements. The boy's dyslexia is presented as a belief statement, rather than a statement of truth like his learning disability. Elyse further questions some of the truth of the dyslexia diagnosis when she adds that there is no training at the school for dyslexia. It's unclear from the passage why she discloses her (and arguably her colleagues') lack of knowledge around dyslexia. It could be to explain her use of the word "believe," a word that somewhat undermines her professional authority, and contrasts with her knowledge that the student's learning disability is "true." It might also be that Elyse was looking for a way to distance herself from the student's reading level; in other words, he is a "first grade reader" but she did not necessarily have the means to fix this, possibly due to lack of training in dyslexia. Yet Elyse was unwilling to detach herself from supporting the boy due to this lack of training. Instead, she positioned herself as a teacher who used technology (which in lines 5a and 5b was portrayed as operationalizing UDL) to allow the boy to access written material. In constructing this teacher identity for herself, Elyse also built her classroom as

inclusive. We saw her do this in the first section of this chapter, in which she "pulled" a boy (to work with him in a small group) who had been tested out of special education.

Elyse's facilitation of access in this passage opens up larger questions about whether the student is unable to decode written material or to comprehend it (or both). In other words, is he "print disabled" (Meyer et al., 2014) in that he is able to comprehend text but hindered by a barrier of reading the text? Lines 12 – 14 suggest this, when Elyse pointed out that by allowing the boy access to content that other students have (presumable "grade-level" content), he was able to participate (give great input) and progress (make great gains). This concept of access was raised frequently by Elyse and other participants, almost as a proxy for enacting UDL.

In addition to building her own identity as a teacher who drew on UDL and used technology to provide access to content, Elyse also built a new identity for the student in this passage. Despite an early claim that he *is* a first grade reader who *has* a true learning disability, Elyse went on to somewhat diminish this initial description, and constructed the student as an independent, able user of technology who contributed positively to the class (line 13). By the end of the passage, Elyse not only revised her initial description of the boy, who she concluded is "smart," but diminished the importance of his disability by adding the qualifier "just" in line 11. His participation in the class and Elyse's pronouncement of progress also seem to contest the boy's identity as a "first-grade" reader.

Yet Elyse stopped short of explicitly stating that the boy is *disabled by* print materials, or by acknowledging the role of context in determining disability. It seems to become clear to her that his ability was not defined by his challenges with decoding, and that the boy should not be denied certain social goods (literacy, participation in a classroom community) simply because of barriers of access. Additionally, her positioning of the boy as "smart" reflects a move away from

his identity as a first grade reader; this is a shift that Elyse constructed through her description of the boy's learning, but with which she also struggles. Can a "first-grade reader" be a "smart" fourth grader? Does "just" having a learning disability (line 11) negate that it is "true" (line 2a)? Clearly his reading level was not the only marker of ability for Elyse, who, on a number of occasions, had this boy teach me about his technology tools so that I could see "how he learns best" (fieldnotes 3/29/19).

This interview was not the first occasion she had described this child as smart while also referencing his label. During one informal chat, Elyse pointed the boy out to me as an example of the benefits of having technology in the classroom. "He's SPED to the max," she said, describing his struggles with reading (decoding), and then went on to tell me that he was "very smart" and that "math is his thing" (fieldnotes, 3/29/19). She recognized his strengths, and his ownership of and involvement with his own learning, yet seemed to have a hard time negotiating these with labels that suggested he was either deficient or "behind." Furthermore, Elye was attached to the ability marker of smartness, and clearly valued it as a social good. For Elyse, smartness is a valuable attribute, a positive descriptor, and possibly something even internal to or owned by individuals, but in this boy's case, obscured by his challenges with reading.

Does Not, Cannot, and Is: Ability and Smartness

Rachel also brought up the concept of smartness on several occasions. Recall from the first section of this chapter that when Rachel described the Riverview RTI system, she also mentioned a counterexample to the order of the system, a boy she described as "wicked smart in math" (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19). During that same interview, Rachel discussed the boy in further detail, again highlighting his smartness in math while also providing details about what the boy could not do. The following excerpt is Rachel's description of the student, whom she

discussed in response to my question about who the boy was and why he was frequently on an iPad and had only limited participation in class activities.

Rachel:

1 Um, and so/
2 the iPAD/
3 he does not like to read a book//
4 He can barely read at all//
5 Um, he can barely write at all//
6 He is wicked smart at math

7 So we
7a I gave him the option of an iPad.
7b to like lure him in here.
8 I was like, all my other kids are keeping books but I'm gonna let YOU be on the iPad.
9 Um, and I got him set up on like raz-kids and epic,
10 which are like reading apps.
11 And so he
11a um, does that.
12 and I don't mind it as long as he's like, doing what he should be doing.
13 And then we started doing like,
14 uh, I do reflex math on the iPads with the rest of my class.

15 And so he was doing that at first and then HE taught ME about prodigy,
15a which is like a math site.

16 So he's way more engaged in that because it's
16a applicable to his age
16b being able to play a video game.
17 Um, so he loves that.

Rachel went on to describe this student's activities in greater detail, repeatedly emphasizing the point that the iPad was acceptable to her as long as the student was using it appropriately (doing what he is supposed to be doing). It seemed important to Rachel that I understood that he was working, and she gave a long list of what the student did on the iPad and why he did it.

This passage begins with Rachel framing the iPad as a tool of access, in much the same way that Elyse framed Read-Write in the previous excerpt. In addition to simply allowing the student access to print material however, Rachel explained that she used it to "lure" the student into her classroom. He had been moved to her room mid-year due to a conflict with another third grade teacher, and initially refused to come to her room at all. In that sense, the iPad also provided access to the environment for this student, and in turn a way for Rachel to access him and begin to get to know him.

Rachel built a case for the iPad as academic and social tool, albeit one that she strictly controls. She also highlighted multiple benefits, and drew on specific evidence to illustrate the student's growth through his use of the iPad. Through her description, Rachel built the activity of creating options for this student to engage with content (lines 9-11a), connect with his peers[21], and act as an authority for the teacher (line 15). Later in the interview Rachel told me how this student had not only read/listened to a number of books on the iPad, but that he had also used it in his writing. While it was "really hard to decode" she shared that neither she nor the student's case manager had ever seen him produce so much writing (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19).

In this case, access was not only about print material, but also about increasing options for student engagement. Something about reading and listening on the iPad minimized a barrier for this student. Yet Rachel tacked back and forth between the student's inability to read and his lack of enjoyment in reading. She then emphasizes his "smartness" as though to build up what she has just destroyed through her assessment of his skills (that he could barely read or write) (lines 4-6). When the barrier of disengagement was removed, the student read. Could he actually

[21] Later in this passage, Rachel told me that the teachers discovered that this student could "battle" other students using a math game app, and that the games were mutually beneficial in improving both boys' behaviors and lack of engagement. The emphasis however, was more on reducing problematic behaviors that constructing the boys' collaborative learning or ability.

barely read - or did he struggle to decode words? As with Elyse and Sarah, Rachel seemed to struggle to distinguish reading from decoding, access from comprehension, and to conceptualize ability in the context of barriers.

Within this stanza there was a change from what the boy doesn't like (to read), to what he cannot do (read or write), to what he is (wicked smart at math). In addition, there was a noticeable vernacular shift. In lines 4 and 5, Rachel spoke with professional authority as a teacher who understood what the student would not and could not do. In line 6 she shifts to an everyday social language that is not consistent with her teacher identity. Her turn to describing the boy as "wicked smart" also draws on a different verb: is. Rather than referring to qualities, Rachel refers to his smartness as a component of identity here, highlighting (in a similar way to Elyse) the significance of smartness as a valuable social good.

In each of these examples there is evidence that the Discourse of UDL, particularly the emphasis on access and engagement, which resonates with Sarah, Elyse, and Rachel. Elyse's small step of providing options for accessing written material not only allows her to contest a student's labels (as a first grade reader or truly learning disabled), but to contextualize student performance (e.g., learning difficulties as a result of inaccessible text). Rachel's allowance of a non-traditional tool as foundational to her student's learning enables the boy to make progress, contests his depiction as someone who can barely read or write, and corroborates her claim that he is "wicked smart." In addition, these excerpts point to the possibility of inclusive classroom environments that not only accommodates student variability, but builds on student strengths, as those who had previously been unable to decode texts were now positioned as participating and contributing to group conversations, giving great input, and feeling a sense of belonging in the classroom. How these possibilities will play out against the backdrop of rank-and-sort systems

described in the first section of this chapter, and amidst hierarchical language remained a site of tension for participants throughout this research.

Emphasizing Intangibles: Re-Imagining Ability

The final theme I identified in how teachers articulate notions of ability contrasts somewhat with traditional notions of ability, particularly in a school context. The Discourse examples I highlight in this section are all taken from interviews with Meghan, who conceptualized ability in a unique way. I have selected excerpts from Meghan because, of all the participants, she tended to resist hierarchical Discourses. This was evidenced in my observations of Meghan's classroom when would offer asides about students that focused on their strengths.[22] I also share one example of visual data from a poster in the school's main hallway.

The teacher identity Meghan constructed through Discourse was of a quiet but knowledgeable professional who valued student effort and progress as much as (if not more than) academic performance, and who drew on various data to evaluate student learning. Additionally, Meghan's Discourse built a classroom climate in which community was valued, multiple learning modalities anticipated and accommodated, and public "mistakes" were a site of learning. That said, despite a somewhat non-traditional Discourse of ability as fluid and based on intangible skills, Meghan sometimes seemed to need to legitimize her claims about student ability. She often draws on outside sources - other teachers or student data - to support and solidify her claims.

Theme: Playing Down Ability

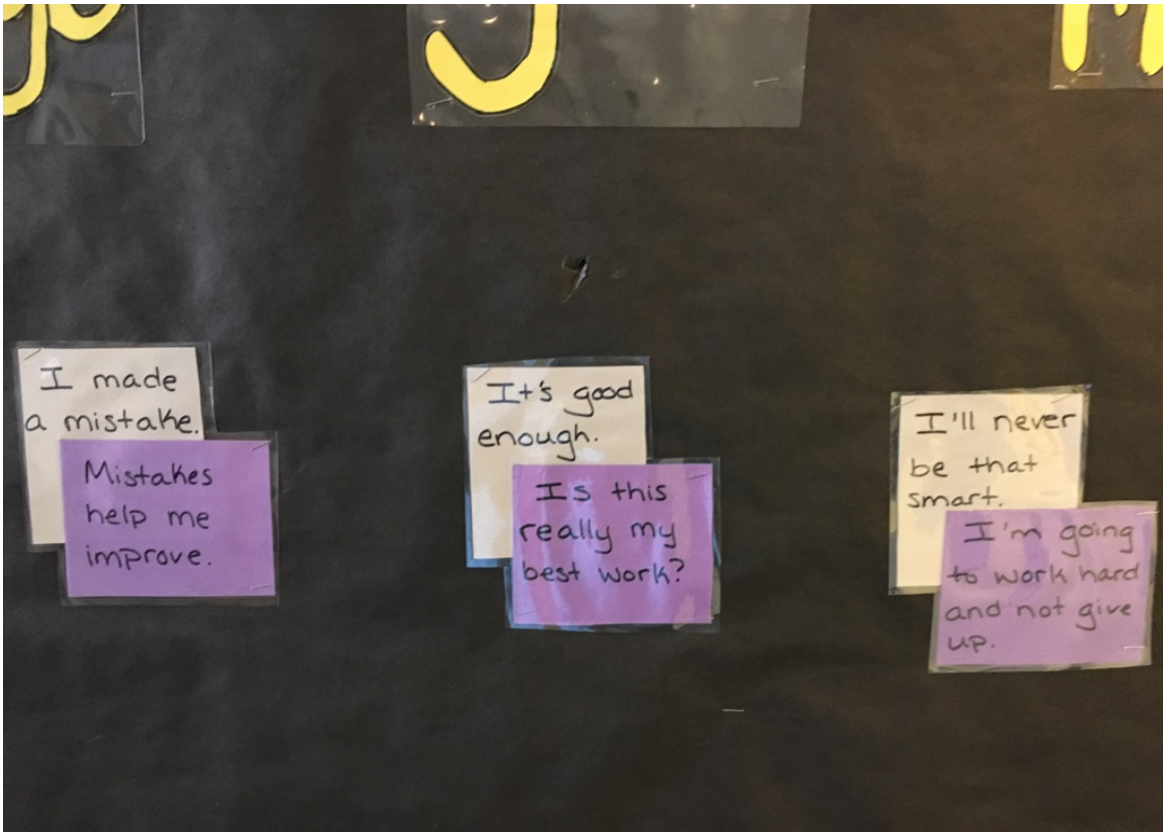
[22] For example, in one case she was showing me how she had taught her students to use the text-to-speech function, and emphasized that several students understood text better when they heard it (rather than suggesting that they were unable to comprehend print text)

Across each of the three interviews, Meghan emphasized her valuing of student effort and progress. While she recognized student variability and the presence of strengths and weaknesses, she tended to speak about what students could do in terms of skills (e.g., “they are working on number sense skills; interview, 11/6/19) rather than referring to their ability levels.

The emphasis on effort was also apparent outside of Meghan’s classroom as well. Each morning Alex offered a morning greeting and announcements over the loudspeaker, and these often included reminders for students to try their best. Additionally, the hallways were decorated with inspirational messages reminding students to take on a positive mindset and make good choices (figure 4.4).

Figure 4.4.

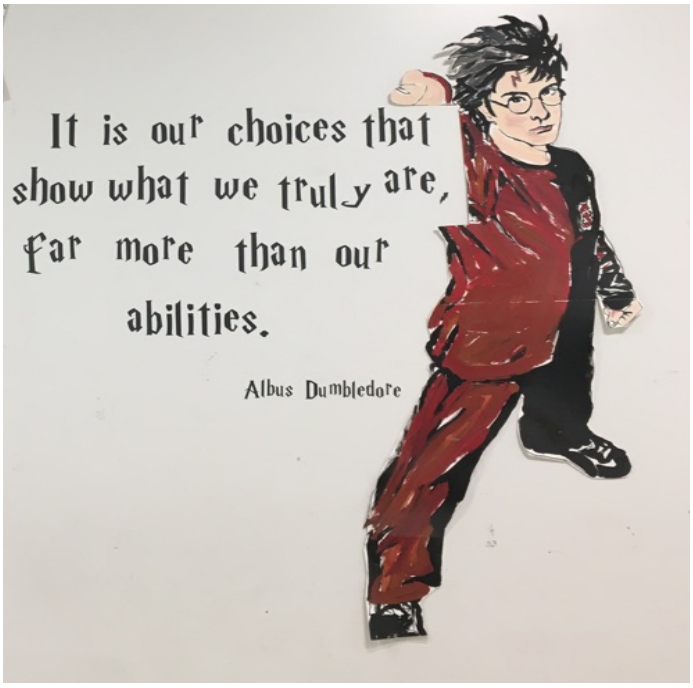
Change your mindset bulletin board



One display in particular directly de-emphasized ability as a defining personal feature. This display (figure 4.5), directly quoted a passage from the *Harry Potter* books, which was extremely popular with students at the school. It was posted in the main hallway outside of Elyse's room, which students passed on their way to both the east and west wings. Although I do not know the goals or person behind the display, it suggests that in some way the school embraces the idea of choices as a defining feature of who students are, rather than traditional notions of ability. This, along with other displays that emphasize kindness and belonging (which I will describe further in the next chapter) suggest a narrative that elevates student agency and emphasizes a positivity and community. That said, it must also be noted that this is the narrative consciously put forth by adults in the building; it is also echoed in some of the social emotional curricula and language used by teachers in the classroom. While I observed students taking part in these "lessons" on shifting mindsets, it was not something I noticed students taking up in casual conversation. Teachers however, used this language consistently with their students in lessons and informal conversations.

Figure 4.5.

Harry Potter *ability quote*



Elevating Effort

The excerpt below is from my first interview with Meghan, during April of the first year of the school reorganization. As discussed in chapter 3, the transition year was a difficult one, with a number of challenging behaviors and disciplinary incidents which were largely unanticipated. Despite the somewhat stressful climate, in the passage below Meghan describes her class quite simply as "good" (Meghan, interview, 4/17/19). Note Meghan's construction of her identity as a teacher who values certain attributes in her students, and as a facilitator of community in the somewhat divided context.

Meghan:

1 Um, I think as a GROUP they're a pretty
1a good class.
2 Like as far as behavior goes,
2a and even academically.
2 Um, they're HARD WORKERS.

3 I wouldn't necessarily say they're all like great like
4a ON the top of the game for academics, but they all TRY really hard.
4 Um, with a few exceptions.

5 Um, they/
6 have really come together with the reorganization and kind of melded as a class.
7 Actually just on Monday(?)
8a This, one day this week, it must've been Monday.
8 [I] went and picked them up from LIBRARY and they,
9a the librarian took me aside and said,
9 'I just want you to know that this class has really come together.
10 They work so well together now,
11a And they didn't at the beginning of the year,
11b And I know that's a big, like you're a big PART of that and it's just like great to see.'

11 So it was nice to HEAR that too(?)
12 Um, because….you know, like there's days where you're like,
13 Oh my GOD what is going ON?
14 What did I DO?/
15 What did I like, what CAN I do? (laughs)
16 So I think, like hearing those COMMENTS,
17a from people OUTSIDE of the room(?)
17 um, is a good REMINDER that they've come a long way.

Meghan's construction of her students as hard workers, and assignment of a collective identity (line 3) is noteworthy for several reasons. First, although she mentions both behavior and academics in lines 2 and 2a, these attributes are linked with the somewhat ambivalent descriptor "pretty good." She goes on to assign them the identity of hard workers, a claim she substantiates in the second stanza, after de-privileging being on top of the game for academics. Specifically, Meghan uses the qualifier "necessarily" to describe her assessment of students not being "on top of the game for academics," which allows her to foreground the information about how the students' effort (and to emphasize "try"). This, however, is where Meghan's assessment of her group ends, and she qualifies her claim in the final line of the stanza (line 5). Yet even this admission that there might be a few students who do not try as hard is almost an afterthought. She does not elaborate, and it seems almost as though this might be a throwaway comment, as she goes on to once again highlight the unity of the group in the second stanza.

In the third stanza (lines 6 – 11b), Meghan continued to reflect on her class as a whole, and illustrates her value of the way they have come together. Interestingly, she uses evidence from a colleague, the librarian, to reinforce this claim, which she substantiates with her own assessments in the third stanza, and revisits in an excerpt I will share later in this section. The librarian's story about the class coming together provides evidence for Meghan's initial claim in this stanza about how the class has "melded" and again elevates the formation of community as something that is important to Meghan. The account Meghan provides of the librarian's comment also introduces the idea that Meghan had something to do with the class coming together (line 11b). This seems to both bolster some uncertainty Meghan has, which she describes in some detail in the final stanza.

The final stanza of this excerpt shows a vernacular shift in Meghan's language. In the final stanza, Meghan goes from using a somewhat formal, professional way of speaking, to a very informal and exaggerated emotional style (14-16). The first three stanzas were very much about the students and their attributes and growth, while the final stanza is much more about Meghan's thoughts and feelings. While she begins by humbly acknowledging the librarian's comment, she also vents frustration that may be related to the school's merge or simply reflect the fact that teaching has its challenges. Either way, the comments seem to acknowledge some of the ownership in fostering community (which the librarian attributed to her in the previous stanza), but also recognizes that she, like her students can simply try (e.g., "what can I do?"). In restating how far the class has come, Meghan closes out her claim and reaffirms her classroom has a place where effort and progress are valued – perhaps over ability or being "on top of the game" academically. As further excerpts will illustrate, Meghan consistently attends to her class

as a group, both in terms of looking for progress and in terms of linking this progress with a sense of class community.

Theme: Learning as Participation

Throughout our conversations, Meghan continued to build her identity as a teacher who values intangible attributes as much as, if not more than traditional markers of success or ability. In addition to progress and effort, Meghan looked for evidence of students developing confidence in their learning. In almost every lesson she invited students to come to the SmartBoard to work through problems in both math and writing. It quickly became apparent to me as the observer that "mistakes" in this arena were expected and valued. On more than one occasion, students would attempt a math problem on the board and make mistakes without being interrupted or corrected. In fact, Meghan would not jump in until the student recognized the mistake and corrected it, in which case she would praise them for catching the error and learning from it. If a student got "stuck" she would invite them to ask for help from a friend or support them to work through it. This process of public mistake-making was normalized, and consistent with Meghan's emphasis on coming together as a class community, and making an effort. All students were invited and expected to demonstrate their knowledge, not only the students who performed best or fastest.

Building confidence in community. In the following excerpt, Meghan introduces confidence as another important intangible value in her classroom. Note how she begins by reflecting on how she sometimes gets focused on skills students are missing, and then draws on data to contradict this position, before offering an example of the ways students have developed confidence in the classroom. This passage is a response to my question about any patterns or instances of progress she's noted throughout the year.

Meghan:

1 Um, I think
1a I think like Cherise and I talk about it a LOT,
2 Um, where like I just wish that they would
2a like get THIS or be able to explain this better
2b or whatever.
3 But then when we stop and sit back and think or look back at the DATA that we have from the beginning of the year and then we're like, oh
3a they really HAVE come far.

4 I think one spot that I noticed that a LOT is in math(?)
5 Their confidence has grown a lot.
6 They are more likely to raise their hand and volunteer to explain things or to answer questions.
7 When I have them turn and talk with their PARTNER they like I actually HEAR them talking instead of just turning and looking at each other
7a or having one of them talk and the other listen like there.
8 It's a CONVERSATION which is nice to see.

In the first stanza, Meghan shares that student progress is something she frequently discusses with Cherise, her intern during phase one. In her recollection, Meghan and Cherise are initially conceptualizing students as having some sort of deficits or lacking skill. Meghan then recounts how the two have looked at data to find evidence of progress. Rather than elaborating on specific skills or improvements in test scores however, she goes on to describe growth in student confidence in stanza 2 (lines 4-8). Here Meghan demonstrates her emphasis on aspects of the learning process (e.g., participating in class conversations, explaining their thinking). Additionally, this passage underscores what I have observed in Meghan's lessons, that learning is collaborative, and that she values the development of the group's intangible skills, as much as traditional academic progress she can determine through looking at data. She frequently encouraged students to "take a risk" or "just give it a shot" and assuring them that they would be supported if they opted to work on the SmartBoard (Meghan, fieldnotes, 11/6/19).

In Meghan's classroom, student involvement – risk-taking and confidence building – drove her instruction. Her lessons always included an opportunity for students to take the lead in demonstrating or explaining content. Either by inviting students to show their work on the SmartBoard, or take her pointer to highlight examples she had projected onto the board, Meghan ensured that students interacted with her instruction not only verbally, but physically.

The following passage is an excerpt from my final interview with Meghan, in which we discussed a math lesson I had observed (Meghan, interview, 11/6/19). Line 4a refers to a snippet, which is a recording of the lesson that I played for Meghan during our interview. In this excerpt, Meghan talks about the process of making student sharing comfortable for her class.

Meghan:

1 I feel like I'm trying to get them to do that [participate] MORE
1a and be more um, willing to take a risk of coming up,
2 or at least raising their hand.

3 And I do feel that they're getting better at that.

4 Um, and I don't think
4a in that snippet
4b but I do think yesterday,
5 I had several kids come up and try to explain their work,
5a or their thinking or
6 do whatever it was that we were working on.

7 Um, and they're getting
7a more willing to do that.

8 And even, even just to
9 for SOME of them it's even just getting them to go up and DO it.
10 And then we'll get the explanation.

11 Um and then I think yesterday also I went
12 like I had, I had one student,
12a I had Mariah up there I think,
13 And then had someone else come up or like they were kind of,
13a doing it together.
14 Which was good.

As discussed in the previous section, Meghan values confidence-building. This passage is another example of how she is trying to support this process through her instruction. She recognizes that coming up to the board to explain their work is a risk, and that for some students even raising a hand or standing up front is a risk that she feels her class has been working on. In her effort to support this confidence-building, Meghan draws on another one of her values: community. In line 10 Meghan says "we'll get the explanation"; presumably she means that she and the class will support the student showing the work through a collaborative effort. In lines 13/13a she gives a specific example of this happening with her student Mariah. Mariah, Meghan says, does not typically like to come to the board and is very quiet. Yet when she took the risk she had the support of her classmates and they did the problem together. It is this working together and risk-taking that Meghan evaluates, in the final line, as good.

Unpacking Ability at Riverview

The findings presented in this chapter suggests that ability is conceptualized in a variety of different ways at Riverview, and that conceptions of ability evolve with changes in staff, routines, school culture, and increasing knowledge around UDL. While there is evidence that the concepts of access and engagement that feature prominently in the Discourse of UDL resonated with teachers, the forces of hierarchical systems and language, historical notions of smartness, and a privileged knowledge base continue to have a powerful hold on how teachers talk about ability.

In addition, while several participants seemed to approach the idea of situating "problems" (e.g., lack of comprehension) within the methods or materials, as Elyse did in one text, this tenet of UDL did not emerge prominently through either my observations or discourse

analyses. It is possible that the emphasis on barriers and access, which I will discuss further in chapter five, may have been an entry point for educators to begin applying UDL, but that they had not yet made the more paradigmatic shift to situating disability contextually.

In each of the examples described above, teachers consistently drew on professional Discourse to build particular identities, engage in activities consistent with those identities, and participate in the construction of systems of knowledge. Through this building, these educators have constructed, and in some cases contested narratives of ability that extend beyond their classroom, to the school at large, and in some ways to the broader society. Additionally, the Discourses described above illustrate tension that emerge within narratives of ability. I describe these tensions in more detail below.

Tension 1: Ability vs. smartness

The multiple descriptions of ability shared in this chapter point to the conclusion that participants understand ability as fluid and contextual. Meghan's reimagining of ability as a combination of effort, confidence building, and growth perhaps most directly supports this idea, particularly, when Meghan describes how her students from phase one "have come a long way." Her repeated elevation of effort and trying, and subordination of academic performance, contribute to a representation of ability as consisting of skills any student can possess and nurture, and any teacher can cultivate.

Elyse also emphasized progress in her description of the student who uses ReadWrite to access written material. Although Elyse initially described him according to a label, the more she considers his growth over the course of the year, the more she constructs him as a student who has made great gains. Likewise, Rachel's account of her student's use of the iPad further

supports the notion that given the appropriate tools, students who previously struggled can have the ability to not only access content, but engage with it in a meaningful way.

Data from my observations and interviews with Sarah both support and contest the idea of ability as dynamic. While her description of a student who can comprehend written material but not decode suggests a recognition that ability is contextual and ever-changing, her account of AJ, the student who struggles to write, offers a different view. In some ways, Sarah presents AJ's writing ability as "stuck" inside of him and as the teacher she must somehow pull it out. That said, it is possible that over the course of the school year Sarah will find a way to minimize the barriers that prevent AJ from attending, and that at the time of the interview she was still attempting to locate these.

Interestingly, ability seemed to be viewed as a distinctly separate entity than smartness by these participants. While ability was determined according to certain student skills - decoding, trying hard, producing writing - smartness was described as something internal to students. In other words, some students are smart. Smartness was clearly a valuable attribute to possess, but was often presented in contrast to student ability (or disability).

Although participants' meaning of smartness likely varies, what interests me more is how smartness was presented as fact. While ability had markers - MAP scores, student data, anecdotal support from other teachers - participants had only to state that a student was smart for it to be true. Furthermore, despite the prevalence of the Discourse of UDL, which emphasizes the learning context and the variability of students, smartness as a valuable property still emerged as an incontrovertible fact. What is it about smartness that makes it such a desirable social good, and what does its desirability and presentation as fact mean when compared with dynamic and flexible notions of ability?

Tension 2: Ability in Community v. Systemic Divisions

In several examples, educators highlighted how ability emerges and grows within a community of learners. This was emphasized by Meghan in her description of a math lesson in which students support each other while doing work at the board, as well as in her observation of how students talk with one another to answer questions during focus lessons. Sarah also supported this idea with her decision to place students in book groups according to what interested them, rather than relying on reading levels. This suggested that engagement and a supportive group of peers would be more effective means to learning than a decodable text. Rachel also spoke of the productivity of her math groups, which, although organized according to MAP data, were not static. Her decision to create small groups not only facilitated working relationships among her students, but allowed her to get to know them on a more individual basis as mathematicians (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19). In the next chapter, I will explore the idea of community more in depth as it relates to inclusive pedagogy.

Over the course of my time at Riverview, I have gained a thorough understanding of its organizational systems, including "push-in" instruction for special education (which I will discuss in further detail in chapter 5), and the RTI model. While there has been a move since phase one to support students with IEPs in the general education classroom, the system of labeling and coding students as disabled still constrains how teachers talk about student ability, and consequently sort students on the basis of ability. Disability labels, in combination with social goods such as "smartness," maintain a place of prominence at Riverview. For example, students need to have a labeled disability in order to access certain resources (e.g., audio reading apps), as Sarah explained in reference to her book groups. Additionally, maintenance of

boundaries around "tiers" of students compels educators to talk about students *as levels.* In doing so, students *become* these levels.

Such systems not only constrain the ways teachers talk about ability, they are incompatible with tenets of UDL. The tiers establish a hierarchy of ability, with tier 1 at the top, whereas UDL emphasizes student variability, and rejects processes that serve to rank and sort.

In the following chapter, I extend my analysis to educators' performances of inclusive pedagogy. I draw on Discourse, instructional strategies, and the organization of space to explore the construction of narratives of inclusivity. I will revisit some of the themes discussed in this chapter, particularly systemic constraints and hierarchical language, and their interactions with teachers' attempts to enact inclusivity.

Chapter 5: Narratives of Inclusivity

This chapter presents findings related to the second research sub-question, and describes how educators' performances of inclusive pedagogy inform narratives of inclusivity at Riverview. I identified these narratives through a similar process as described in chapter 4 for located narratives of ability, in which I began with Discourses from texts and identified themes, and looked for commonalities among data sources related to concepts of, in this case, inclusivity.

It is worth noting that the words "inclusive" and "inclusion" were used relatively interchangeably by full participants to describe a dichotomized system of service delivery (e.g., pull-out or push-in) for students with labeled disabilities or who exhibited challenging behaviors. Inclusion was often mentioned by participants as either an abstract philosophy of the school assumed to be a schoolwide aim or vision, or as a geographical site of teaching and learning occurring in the general classroom for all students.

In general, participants did not directly mention inclusion as a specific aspect of their own pedagogy. When I referenced the term in interviews or conversations, participants tended to speak at an institutional level. For example, when I asked a participant about a room with a sign labeled "Learning Center" near the teachers' room (with a list of special education teachers' names on the door), she explained, "It's primarily offices. They - they're trying to really push inclusion, you know?" (Elyse, interview, 6/10/19). This utterance was telling. Elyse's use of "they" suggests some degree of separation between herself and whomever is pushing inclusion. Whether this is because Elyse perceives the decision as unrelated to her, or one in which she is not involved is unclear. Additionally, she refutes my suggestion that the "Learning Center" is a space where students go when pulled from the classroom. Although I did not ask this directly, Elyse seemed to infer my meaning as questioning whether the space served as some sort of resource room. She seems to want her response to assure me that a) the space has a designated

purpose (offices) and b) a group of people - either administrators or teachers who occupy the space - are pushing for inclusion at Riverview (and as a result would not use the Learning Center as a resource room).

I attend to this utterance because it provides context for understanding one of the ways that narratives of inclusivity play out at Riverview. When participants conceptualized inclusion in reference to a specific place, it was often conflated with service delivery, and the structure of the special education system. Participants struggled to navigate the overlapping Discourses of special education processes and inclusive aims, which tended to result in students with labeled disabilities being marked as different in a variety of ways.

The other primary narrative of inclusivity operating in the school was quite different. When educators created opportunities for students to take ownership of their learning through movement - in classrooms and around the school - a much different conception of inclusion emerged. In these instances, educators drew on Discourses of belonging and empowerment; although they sometimes attended to specific places within the classroom, they focused more broadly on how *any* students (including but not solely focused on those with labeled disabilities) could "work" these places as members of the classroom and school community.

I explore these narratives for several reasons. First, in looking across formatted interview transcripts, motifs of place, special education, belonging, and movement appeared consistently as macrostructural or stanza topics among all five full participants. Second, these topics have direct connections with UDL theory, such as intentionally planning for variability (or not), and empowering learners. Finally, these narratives, despite being constructed by the same individuals, are in tension with one another, and represent vastly different interpretations of inclusivity. The Discourse of belonging through empowered movement, which draws on a

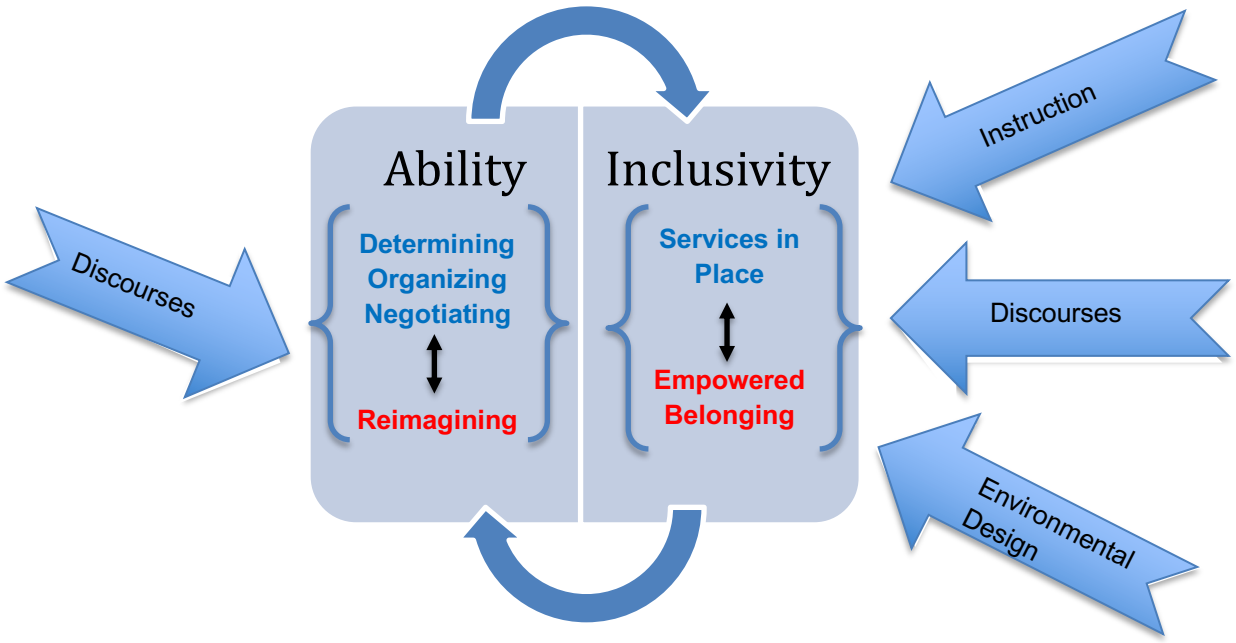
number of UDL tenets, acts as a counternarrative to the Discourses of difference and dichotomous services (push-in or pull-out) that are inherently limiting. The latter Discourses are strong, and rooted in normalized hierarchical systems that have persisted in schools for generations (Baglieri et al., 2011; Connor & Gable, 2013; Ferri & Connor, 2006).

I have organized this chapter into two sections. In the first section, I unpack the narrative of inclusivity as place (depicted in blue on the right side of figure 5.1). I begin with a description of pedagogical and organizational norms, including formal curricula, within many Riverview classrooms. Next, I provide an overview of the landscape of special education at Riverview, including the structure and organization of the system, and changes made from phase one to phase two. I then offer a selection of texts from full participants exploring the issue of service provision in the classroom, and how this subsequently marks students as different. In addition to these texts, I also share examples from fieldnotes of how this marking operates organizationally to exclude certain students within the borders of the classroom.

In the second section, I focus on the counter-narrative of inclusivity as empowered belonging (indicated in red on the conceptual model below). I share texts that demonstrate first how educators design their pedagogy, and second how they structure spaces to empower students. I then offer examples of support for this counternarrative by sharing student-drawn maps of schools and classrooms, and photos from across the school. On the conceptual model below, the large blue arrows represent the factors that inform and shape narratives of ability and inclusivity. The small black arrow represents the tension between the dominant and counternarrative of inclusivity.

Figure 5.1

Conceptual model of narratives of ability and inclusivity



Inclusivity as a Site of Special Education: A Narrative

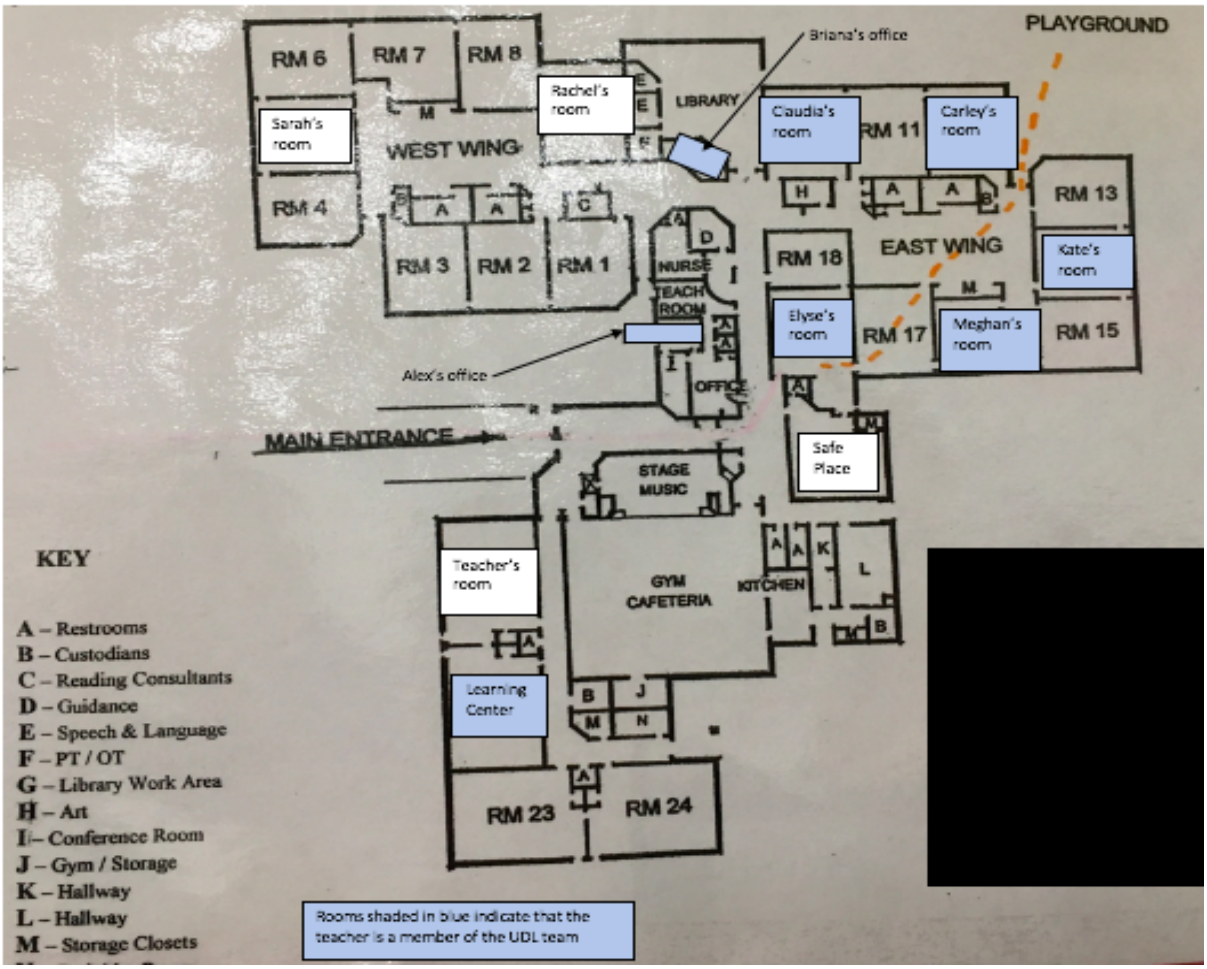
The Geographical and Pedagogical Landscape of Riverview Elementary

At various times in its history, Riverview has been known as both the "small school" or the "big school," depending on its enrollment in comparison to other elementary schools in the town. It's footprint has changed somewhat since the school was originally built, and a recent renovation to improve security at the front entrance was completed in August of 2019. The first with the addition of a south wing (see figure 5.2) that once contained two kindergarten classrooms, and now holds the teachers' break room, art classroom, and a "learning center," where special education case managers and some paraprofessionals have desks and keep confidential files (interview, 10/8/19). The change in footprint is somewhat noticeable upon

entry, where the original brick remains exposed in the front hallway. By and large however, the east and west wings of the building have traditionally been home to the grade-level classrooms, while the south wing is primarily offices and teacher rooms.

Figure 5.2.

Map of Riverview Elementary School and participant classrooms



Each wing has nine classrooms, restrooms, a water fountain, a small meeting room, and a large common area. The common areas (see figure 5.3) have steps where students sometimes go to work, take a break, or meet with teachers, and the space is also used for indoor recess. On and given day it was not unusual to see a few students seated on the steps either working in a small

group with an adult, or a teacher or administrator talking with a student. The walls are decorated by teachers from surrounding classrooms, and the school's service providers (e.g., occupational and speech therapists), special education teachers, and guidance counselor also post a variety of motivational and informational content throughout the school.

Figure 5.3.

Riverview common area, east wing

There are certain features that appear in all of the classrooms at Riverview, elements of the environment that are typical of many elementary schools. These include: a meeting area, or floor space that allows students to sit as a group in close proximity to the teacher; SmartBoards which teachers use for instruction, and were usually mounted on a wall in the meeting area; cubbies or hooks for student belongings; and doors that connect adjacent classrooms.

Additionally, each classroom houses a "Zen Den," a space that administrators have required of all classrooms in which students can go to "cool down" or gather themselves if they need a break, or are feeling stressed, agitated, or overwhelmed. Zen Dens typically contain a timer, various sensory activities and fidgets, and tips for self-regulation.

The Workshop Model: A Pedagogical Norm

Throughout my observations and informal conversations, I came to realize that where they taught lessons was an important aspect of their pedagogy. It was largely a cultural practice of Riverview teachers to conduct whole group lessons - or at least part of the lessons - in the classroom meeting area. Meghan and Sarah in particular seemed to emphasize the meeting area as central to these focus lessons. With the exception of a handful of students who sat in one of the seats closest to the meeting area, all students in these classrooms were expected to move, with their materials (e.g., binders, pencils), to the meeting area for instruction. In contrast, Elyse usually invited students to come to the meeting area, but was also comfortable with students remaining at their seats for the lesson. Rachel used the meeting area for some instruction, but it was typically only a warm-up or reflection. As I will discuss later in this chapter, Rachel was the only full participant who consistently resisted regular whole-group instruction.

The whole-group approach was loosely guided by a modified workshop model[23], in which teachers taught a brief focus or mini-lesson to the entire class. The typical structure began by teachers inviting students to the meeting area with their materials, followed by instruction in a particular content area (e.g., math, reading) on a specific topic (e.g., metric conversions, non-

[23] While the workshop and whole-group model are often viewed as opposites, my contention here is that the version of the workshop approach being employed still emphasized one-size-fits-all instruction during the lesson. In other words, the lesson was taught, and students who struggled were provided with re-teaching after the lesson, either by the classroom teacher or special education personnel. There was not sufficient evidence that lessons were assigned to consistently address student variability during the initial lesson.

fiction text features). Teachers usually relied on SmartBoards as a visual during this instruction, although in some cases they used a whiteboard or handwritten chart paper.

Focus lessons traditionally last 10-15 minutes, and while some teachers were fairly particular about keeping to this limit, others were more flexible. For example, Sarah consistently kept her lessons to fewer than 15 minutes, while Meghan tended to teach for 20-30 minutes, particularly in math, and would hold students in the lesson until she had a "gut" feeling that they were ready to attempt independent work (Meghan, interview, 11/6/19). After independent work time, teachers typically closed out the lesson by calling students back to the meeting area to discuss or share their work (interview, 11/6/19). Each class allotted one hour per day for math, reading, and writing, and 45 minutes each day for science or social studies.[24]

Although the teachers' instruction varied in style, the format typically followed an "I do, we do, you do" structure (Meghan, fieldnotes, 10/5/19; Sarah, interview, 10/21/19). In other words, instruction began with the teacher modeling a learning task, followed by guided practice in which students would attempt the task with support from the teacher, and then finally be given the opportunity to practice the skill independently. Some students received additional support from another adult (such as a paraprofessional or the special education teacher), and this typically occurred during independent work time.

Special Education: Organization and Changes Over Time

Riverview had four full-time special education case managers. Three of these case managers were assigned a grade (three, four, or five), and the fourth was described by Alex as working with students with more intensive needs (Alex, interview, 12/9/19). Four paraprofessionals were considered special education paraprofessionals, and were assigned to

[24] Teachers at Riverview sometimes used a dedicated block of time for science and social studies instruction, and sometimes embedded it into literacy (reading and/or writing) blocks. This varied depending on the content.

work with one of the case managers and assist them in providing student services (often reading, writing, or math support). There were also approximately 10 paraprofessionals assigned to specific students across the school, although these paraprofessionals sometimes split their time between two students in order to allow students to become comfortable with several adults, and to accommodate break times and lunches for the paraprofessionals.

The Inclusion Divide

During interviews with full participants, Riverview's identity as an inclusive school came up frequently. This was particularly salient in the aftermath of the school reorganization. In addition to changes in staffing and grade levels, the restructuring of schools in Springdale Falls also led to some clashes in instructional practice. The most divisive of these being the operation of special education and location of services. Southside had largely operated under what participants described as a "pull-out" system, in which students with IEPs received special education services in a specialized setting outside of the general education classroom (Meghan, interview, 4/17/19). This was at odds with both the historical philosophy and common practices at Riverview, whose teachers, as mentioned in chapter 3, prided themselves on their inclusive identity. While many discussions about "pull-out" services emphasized inclusion as a place, many participants indicated that "pushing in" services was an insufficient alternative. As Alex explained during a UDL team meeting, Riverview was working toward a "change the mindset from plugging students with differences into the classroom, and instead think about ways to change the classroom so that all students could have access" (UDL team meeting, 9/26/19). This goal was a primary driver for the school's initial involvement with UDL professional learning.

The two schools' special education systems were at odds with one another. Further complicating this divide was the language of Individualized Education Programs (IEP); students

from Southside had IEPs written to reflect their placement in specialized settings, and teachers at Riverview felt consequently bound to a system of service delivery that they were unable to change until the IEP could be re-written, and parents open to their children remaining in the general classroom (Elyse, interview, 4/17/19). Indeed, toward the end of phase one, several participants noted a shift in students working with special education staff in the room, and by the beginning of October (phase two) I rarely saw students pulled from the classroom for special education service delivery (Meghan, interview, 6/3/19; fieldnotes, 10/3/19).

Subtle organizational and pedagogical changes over the course of my data collection reflected not only the desire of participants and many within the school to reclaim a "push-in" model of special education, but also a tension in the transition. Although more students were staying and receiving special education support in the classroom during phase two of data collection (the second year of the reorganization), certain pedagogical practices marked students who received special education services as different, even within the boundaries of the classroom.

Placing Services

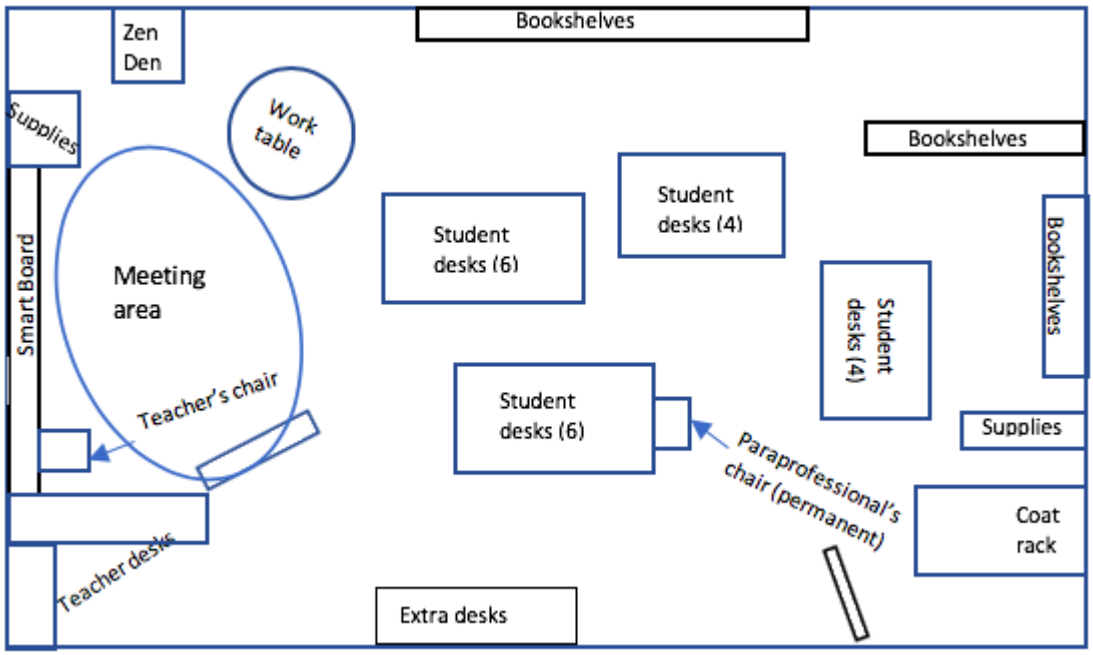
In this section I provide texts from Sarah, Meghan, Rachel, and Elyse to highlight how equating push-in services with inclusion is not only insufficient, but reveals questions and ambiguity around the purpose of some special education services, and the ways in which they are provided. Each of these texts is an excerpt(s) from individual interviews with participants. Each selection illuminates tensions these educators face in conceptualizing inclusion as place (e.g., "push-in"), as well as pedagogical constraints placed on their practice as they push against the system of special education.

Physical positioning of student support. The shift back to push-in student support and special education services at Riverview was widespread during phase two. Yet while students largely remained in the classroom during reading, writing, and math, there were tensions with the way the support was provided. Often this support was marked by the presence of a special education teacher or paraprofessional who either physically positioned themselves next to students with whom they planned to work, or pulled a group of students to an open work table.

This was perhaps most evident in Sarah's classroom (see figure 5.4), where one student, Jaspar, had full-time one-on-one paraprofessional support. A chair had been added to the Jaspar's table group, and while the rest of the class switched seats every few weeks, Jaspar and the paraprofessional remained in the same location. While the paraprofessional was clearly there to support Jaspar, she frequently engaged with other students at the table group. She also supported the development of relationship-building and collaboration between Jaspar and his peers. This involved making a book of photos for Jaspar to learn classmates' names, and taking a step back when a student wanted to read with or to him, or work with him on math games. Although Jaspar had "a completely separate [academic] program" (Sarah interview, 10/21/19) and was always accompanied by a paraprofessional, students seemed to view him as part of the class with whom they could work and talk. On several occasions I witnessed him playing math games with his peers, or another student would ask Sarah if they could read with him during reading workshop (Sarah, fieldnotes, 10/18/19; 10/22/19).

Figure 5.4.

Sarah's classroom layout



Sarah's classroom had other intermittent sources of support. These paraprofessionals typically came in to work with students in math and reading. In contrast to the paraprofessionals who worked with Jaspar – who seemed to be viewed as part of the classroom and with whom students engaged easily – the others met some resistance. There was some dissonance between Sarah and one paraprofessional, and the site of the support seemed to be a cause of concern for some students. In the excerpt below, Sarah describes this dissonance as a function of the subject (i.e., that students are more willing to accept help in math), and also to the threat of stigmatization.

Sarah:

1 [Para][25] and I had to kind of
1a TALK some things through at the beginning of the year cause HER plan was to just pull everyone to the [work] table,
2 during reading and writing.

3 And so I'm like no,

[25] I use bracketed roles to describe educators who are not participants in the study. In cases where educators are referred to and are either full or partial participants I have used the pseudonym listed in chapter 3.

3a like for SOME reason math
3b and reading writing are different in that regard.
4 Like MATH the kids seem to crave that like help and the kids are very WILLING to come to the table.

5 She had a REALLY hard time with [one student] at the beginning of the year
5a cause he REFUSED to come work with her
5b cause he didn't want to look,
5c like...stupid.
6 Like I need that help.

7 But if she just goes and VISITS them wherever they are,
8 it's the same thing I'm doing,
9 It's the same thing [intern] is doing,
10 It's the same thing Title One is doing when they come in.

This passage suggests that even when all students are in the room there is still some perceived stigmatization related to positioning. Although Sarah hesitates before saying the word, she believes that one student is afraid of looking stupid if he sits with a paraprofessional. Here is an open acknowledgement by Sarah that working with a paraprofessional marks students as different, a practice with which she seems to struggle. In lines 7-10, she attempts to normalize help from a paraprofessional by making it the same as what she or her intern offer.

This excerpt hints at some ambiguity in the purpose of this support. Sarah's description of her "talk" with the paraprofessional in the first stanza distinguishes the paraprofessional's approach from her own. Although Sarah does not explicitly state it, her distinction suggests that she has concerns with simply pulling kids to an alternate location. In the last stanza she refers to "visits" to kids. Indeed, often during independent work time Sarah and her intern would drift around the room and check in on students. In that way, she connects what the paraprofessional could do with what she and her intern do, and builds her classroom as a place where a number of adult professionals can offer support to all students. However, this also raises some ambiguity in the role of the paraprofessional. Simply doing the same thing Sarah and her intern do suggests

that the paraprofessionals either have expertise with certain types of students (that Sarah and her intern perhaps do not), or that they are simply extra bodies sent to ease the load of checking in with all students for the classroom teacher. However, because the paraprofessionals are sent to work with specific students suggests that the purpose of their time in the classroom to help students with IEP goals in a particular content area (e.g., math, reading) complete their assignments or to deliver some type of instruction.

Least restrictive separation. The following excerpts illustrate Sarah's struggle to negotiate student support (here again, special education services) with her instruction. Her description of special education and services in her room reflect both the Discourse of special education (e.g., the least restrictive environment) as well as the school's effort to reclaim a push-in approach to services. Also evident however, is the tension between the structural scheduling demands of the special education system and Sarah's own daily planning.

Sarah:

Excerpt 1

1 So we PRIMARILY try to do,
1a as least restrictive environment,
1b The working in the classrooms.
2 So it's MOSTLY push-in services.

3 Um so for READING I have,
3a um, [Paraprofessional] who comes in four times a week
4 right now she's coming in two times DURING my reading block,
4a and two times during what had been just my science and social studies block

5 So I sort of modified what I do,
6 Um and on the days that she comes in I have them working on
6a Words Their Way, spelling sorts, and some things like that
7 So it's at least
7a reading ADJACENT.
8 For what she's coming in to service them for.

Excerpt 2

1 Um, [Special education teacher] sits with them here,
1a and has all of her math students come TO the table.
2 Um, and then kind of HELPS them.
3 They can work at their own pace on the, the grade level work,
3a but she does sort of modify as needed or bring out like a different TOOL or remind them of tools they already HAVE,
3b um to help them through that process.

In the first excerpt, Sarah uses "we" as the subject, suggesting that it is not just special education that does the least restrictive environment (LRE), but rather Riverview as an institution. She then transitions into a more logistical discussion of how she attempts to address scheduling constraints placed on her teaching due to the limited availability of the paraprofessional. Note that she says, "I have them working on," a phrase that suggests that it is Sarah who decides the content of the services; she is unwilling to cede control of (or responsibility for) the students' academics to the paraprofessional (and by extension to special education).

In the second excerpt, Sarah goes further in talking through this tension, explaining that in math the special education teacher pulls a group to a table to do grade level work. It is not clear why students are receiving special education if they are doing grade level work. Indeed, later in this chapter I share excerpts from Rachel and Elyse that suggest uncertainty about why students need to be pulled or marked for small group instruction if they are working on similar material (the insinuation being that students do not need this targeted intervention if they are working "on grade level"). One theme that persists in Sarah's interview is *where* the work takes place. In both excerpts the instruction (or help, or services) are "push-in" which Sarah equates with least restrictive. And yet in the first excerpt in this section, Sarah acknowledged how students are marked by physical positioning of adult support.

There are several important takeaways from these excerpts. First, as "push-in" support increased, students were marked as different (and potentially perceived as "stupid") by working with an adult in a particular location (e.g., a side table). Sarah was typically very flexible with allowing students to work in locations across the room: on the floor, in the meeting area, or next to friends at desks. Even though most students do not remain at their desks, it is possible that students viewed being pulled to a table as a loss of autonomy. Second, "visits" to students wherever they are independently working seem to hold less stigma, as this model of support has been normalized by Sarah and her intern's practice. Third, the Discourse of special education (e.g., LRE, push-in services) used by Sarah suggests that special education operates at the institutional level. Her use of "we use least restrictive environment" suggests that this is a schoolwide policy, as opposed to one she decided on in her classroom. Finally, the logistics of carrying out push-in services interferes with Sarah's schedule. She has had to modify what she does in an attempt to make the students' services appear less obviously different. There is an implied rigidity of the system, perhaps underscoring the power of the IEP document that dictates services, that makes Sarah's adaptation of her classroom seem like the best option, certainly better than having students being completely disconnected from the content. Several of these themes reappear in texts from other participants.

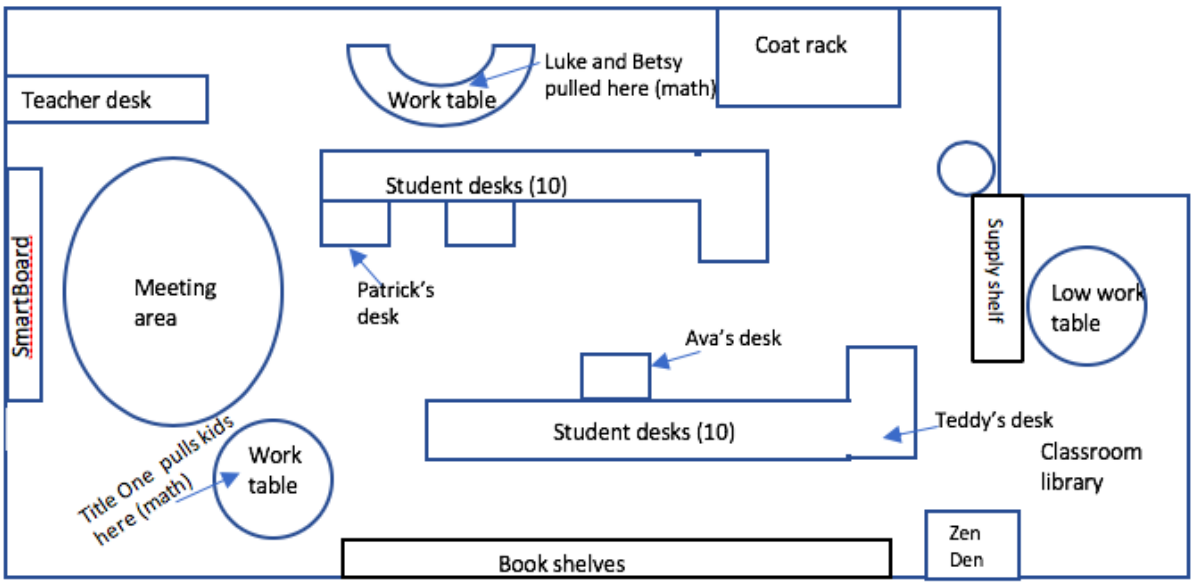
Here for whom? In Meghan's classroom, adult support functioned similarly to that of Sarah's class. Meghan had a student, Patrick, who had a one-on-one paraprofessional for most of the day. While this paraprofessional did not have a designated spot beside Patrick, she often pulled up a chair to sit near him (rather than pulling him to a different location). This lack of "assigned" seating seemed to allow more mobility for this paraprofessional. She would often go help other students during independent work time if Meghan was busy, although Patrick

frequently called her back. Patrick had learned to rely heavily on adult support; in my first two visits to the class he called me over and asked if I was there to be his "help person" (fieldnotes, 9/4/19; 9/11/19).

In contrast, another paraprofessional came in during math to work with another student Ava, typically on completing the independent work assignment. Additionally, the special education teacher came in to work with two students during math, usually on specific skills and using resources from a separate math program. The special education teacher pulled these students to a side table to work, while the paraprofessionals for Patrick and Ava pulled up chairs near the students. Interestingly, the students were positioned in desks that easily accommodated this pulling up of chairs, although Meghan never specifically stated this as a reason for the arrangement (see figure 5.5).

Figure 5.5.

Meghan's classroom layout



In Meghan's class, the paraprofessional who worked with Ava functions in a similar way to the one in Sarah's room who visited students. The special education teacher however, is providing specially designed instruction within the classroom. Meghan, as a former special education teacher, was familiar with the alternate program, and worked with the students when the special education teacher was not able to be in the room. The purposes and types of support students received was discussed by several participants and will be discussed later in this chapter.

In my first interview with Meghan, she told me that she felt the school was not as inclusive as it used to be. She attributed this to a variety of factors, mainly to teacher workload and differences in service provision between Riverview and Southside. In other words, Meghan did not see the school as less inclusive because of any particular trait of students. Rather, issues with reorganization and limitations of IEP language had a large impact on how inclusive the practices were during phase one of the research. In our final interview however, she said that she felt the school was becoming more inclusive, although not what it had once been when she worked in special education.

Meghan seemed generally pleased that students were receiving special education services in the classroom during phase two. She openly interacted with these teachers when they came to the class, and on days when they were unavailable took on their role herself, using resources provided by the special education teacher, or following up with specific students during independent work time. As an observer, I noticed that adults frequently came to the room (particularly during math), and that they were clearly "assigned" to particular students. In fact on several occasions Meghan dismissed students from the rug and named the students assigned to

each adult (e.g., “Luke and Betsy, [special education teacher] is here for you”; “Ava [paraprofessional] is here for you”) (Meghan, fieldnotes, 10/9/19).

The excerpt below is from my final interview with Meghan (11/6/19), in which she describes how she supports students during their independent work time (following a focus lesson). This passage again reflects Meghan’s interest in developing confidence in her students, but also a possible struggle with the assignment of teachers to students.

Formatting note: As with other excerpts, words in all capital letters were said with emphatic stress. In lines 3 and 12, I have placed **I** in bold to indicate that it was also said with emphatic stress. In line 12 I have used single quotation marks to indicate that Meghan is speaking from a student’s perspective (although not directly quoting him).

Meghan:
1 Um, there's definitely kids that I want to check on,
2 And again when [Title One teacher] is in here that's,
2a she's in here
2b supposedly for four kids,
3 and those are all four kids that **I** DO want to check in on.

4 Um, but then just whoever has
4a questions,
5 and then there's a couple more who
5a are CAPABLE but they are not confident.
6 So I want to make sure that I check in with them and just say
6a Oh look, see you got it.
7 Like, keep going,
7a and to build that confidence.

8 Like with Teddy yesterday he
9 He IS one that [Title One teacher] is supposed to work with, but he
9a doesn't like doing it.
10 He doesn't want to stick out,
11 but he doesn't mind sticking out calling ME over,
11a or [Patrick’s paraprofessional] or whoever, having like wait,
12 ‘**I** CALLED you over.’

In line 2b we see Meghan question something about the Title 1 specialist being here for certain students. She seems to recognize that these students needs a check-in, but is reluctant to relinquish control to the Title 1 teacher. Later in the interview she also says that she has the students who work with this teacher sit at the round table so that they can see her. She seems to want to emphasize her connectedness to these students, even though they are receiving support from another person. At the same time, Meghan constructed herself as quite separate from the Title One teacher. She underscores the fact that she wants to check in with the students, despite the fact that another teacher has been assigned to them. In contrast to the special education personnel mentioned above that she verbally assigns to Luke, Betsy, and Ava, Meghan may not have had a say in how or for whom the Title One teacher provides support. It is also possible that, because the Title One teacher started in phase two, Meghan has not developed the rapport that she has with the special education staff (with whom she worked closely when she was in special education).

In the second stanza, Meghan explains that she checks in on whoever has questions. She says this with a qualifier, "just" which suggests that she does not limit her check-ins to certain students, but that any are welcome to approach her. This type of check-in is distinct from what she intends in stanza one, indicating that those students need a different type of support from her other than just answering their question or helping with confidence as she describes in stanza two.

Finally, in stanza three Meghan offers the example of Teddy, one of the students for whom the Title One teacher comes. As with one the example in Sarah's excerpts, Teddy does not wish to sit at a table and "stick out." He, and perhaps Meghan as well, recognizes that sitting with that teacher in that location marks him as different and potentially less capable than his

classmates. He seems, through his willingness to call Meghan or another paraprofessional to him, to be open to adult support. Interestingly, Meghan describes this type of support as sticking out in Teddy's case (line 11), but Teddy apparently does not find it stigmatizing. As Meghan indicated, he was happy to have adults come to him, and indeed on several occasions asked me for help with assignments. This type of support is on his terms, and Meghan recognizes that distinction, quoting him as saying that he called the teacher over (line 12).

This text again illustrates a degree of stigmatization of students who are pulled to a place within the classroom in order to work with an adult. In Teddy's case, his concern is not with the help from a teacher, but with sticking out. It is worth noting here in Meghan's classroom, students often remain at their seats during independent work time, at least during math; thus, movement to a specific place marks students as different, and removes them from a place of comfort (their desks).

In addition, this text also suggests some resistance on Meghan's part to some aspect of the Title One support. We see this in her use of the word supposedly to describe who the teacher is there for; yet when Meghan assigns students to adults in special education she does so freely (as with Ava, Luke, and Betsy). It is unclear why this is the case, although Meghan's former role as a special education teacher may have given her more insight to what the special education personnel are doing in their work with students. Still, the addition of the Title One teacher (in October of 2019) to Meghan's classroom, and perhaps Teddy's aversion to the support, may have alerted Meghan to some of the ways that placement - even within the borders of the classroom - marks students as different in a potentially negative way.

The special education learning curve. While both Sarah and Meghan exhibited some knowledge of or control over the work that other adults (e.g., paraprofessionals, special

education teachers) did in their classrooms, Rachel felt somewhat uncertain over the role and purpose of student support. Although Rachel was often the only adult in her classroom, the literacy coach sometimes came in to work with a student during reading, and a paraprofessional came for approximately 20-30 minutes during math. This paraprofessional typically worked with two or three students in a small group on the same assignment as the rest of the class. Students with IEPs were typically pulled out of the classroom in reading and writing, usually to a nearby conference room.

When I asked Rachel to describe her understanding of how special education worked at Riverview she shared that it had been a big learning curve for her. She initially discussed the lack of consistency between Riverview and Southside IEPs, a concern echoed by all of the full participants during interviews[26]; however, Rachel's primary concern seemed to be with the work the special education staff was *doing* with students, in conjunction with *where* the work was taking place.

In my second interview with Rachel (6/4/19), we discussed her impressions of special education at Riverview, and how she perceived its impact on her instruction and her students. The following excerpt reveals some of Rachel's struggle to understand and justify what the special education staff did with students when they pulled them from the classroom. In other words, if students were pulled, Rachel seemed to think the instructional focus should be substantively different from what was happening in class. At the same time, she worried about students feeling "different" when they are pulled.

Rachel:

[26] The difference in the placement of services between Riverview and Southside IEPs and resulting tension was mentioned by each of the full participants in interviews. Elyse and Meghan specifically referred to the stress this placed on special education teachers. I was unable to learn more details about this from special education teachers as none opted for full participation.

1 So, there are times where I was like,
2 I really wish that like special ed was coming up with some, like
3 if you're going to pull a group of students,
3a that YOU came up with a lesson or whatever that pertained to THAT group of students' needs for that day that,
3b was in within the realm of our unit.
4 Like as long as we're, you know, relatively can be on the same units, um great but,
5 because they TAKE the work their doing in class and go do it with them,
5a and just have like that one on one help,
5b it was harder.

6 Um, but then at the same time it's also nice because I'm like, all right, this is what we're doing,
7 Like, and it doesn't make them feel like totally different,
7a you know, having to do something completely different than what their classmates are doing but…yeah.

Rachel's confusion over special education hints at her struggle to negotiate the Discourses of inclusion (pull-out and push-in) with the educational needs of her students, and the potential consequences of students leaving the room. As with Rachel's excerpts from chapter 4, she expressed concerns about pacing (line 4), although in this case she was concerned about students who are pulled out not being in the same physical place. Yet her reason for the concern, as we also saw in chapter 4, relates to the fact that all students who are pulled for special education come from different classrooms in the grade – and teachers are expected to be on roughly the same curricular units so that they can receive targeted support from special education. Additionally, Rachel seems to struggle with whether doing students' work with them is special education instruction or simply "help," and why this necessitates pulling these students.

This passage also alludes to the tension between Rachel's pedagogy and the larger systems at play in the school. Rachel separates herself from special education in line 3a, emphasizing the word "you" which refers to whomever is pulling students. Later, in line 5 she

talks about how "they take" the work – presumably work that she has designed or planned out. The use of "they" again distances her from the teachers who are pulling students, and "take" suggests that something is being taken from Rachel; this act of taking distances Rachel from her students - both physically and pedagogically. At the same time, in the second stanza, Rachel reconnects her teaching with her students through the content. She seems to value that all of her students can work on the same material, and no one is singled out as "that different," at least in terms of what students are learning.

Rachel's text points to the rigidity of the special education service delivery system, and the constraints it places on her practice. Her concerns with keeping up with her colleagues are amplified by the provision of student support services; the fact that students are pulled to a small group with other third graders requires that Rachel must be working on the same learning goals as other teachers so that the small group instruction is consistent. Like Sarah and Meghan's texts, Rachel draws on a Discourse of difference. Difference in each of these texts however, is not merely a proxy for disability, but as an indicator of need, "sticking out," or looking "stupid." These teachers are picking up on students' desires to look the same as their peers. In employing this Discourse of difference, students who are pulled are constructed as unlike those who are not pulled, regardless of whether they get pulled into a separate room or a place within the classroom. In addition, the lack of student autonomy in being pulled associates difference with disempowerment.

Their own agenda. As a veteran teacher, Elyse was able to recall changes in how special education and intervention worked at Riverview over the years. When Elyse spoke directly about inclusion, she conceptualized it in terms of students receiving services in the classroom, often reasserting Riverview's longstanding goal of claiming an inclusive school identity (Elyse,

interview, 6/10/19). Yet Elyse's memories of special education over the years, particularly the content taught by special education personnel, were remarkably similar to Rachel's critiques discussed in the previous section.

In the following excerpt from our second interview (6/10/19), Elyse describes the way special education functioned at Riverview many years ago. She conflates leveled literacy instruction (LLI)[27] and response-to-intervention (RTI) initially, but goes on to suggest that she sees LLI as a valuable part of reading instruction. She is also careful to assert her belief that no program will work for every student.

Elyse:
1 So bef-
2 PRE LLI or RTI when, um
2a I, I know that THEY had to
2b they had their own AGENDA sometimes
2c of what they had to teach.

3 So there was more like
3a Orton Gillingham or Wilson or things like THAT.
4 And I don't think that necessarily what we do with Lucy[28],
4a or even LLI works for EVERYBODY,
5 so you have to find what works for, for them.

6 But, um I think with the LLI PIECE that we have now
6a it provides an, an extra LEVEL for those students to get that direct
6b instruction in two different formats.
7 So they get the, if it's an LLI piece, they get that
8 And then with ME they get a whole,
8a the whole, you know, the DIFFERENT
9 and so they get tacked on both times

10 but sometimes the special ed person is not necessarily in the room
10a or they're just there as a person to support what, whatever it is that I'm doing.
11 So I think it's good in THAT sense where the kids get both.

[27] LLI is a Fountas and Pinnell reading intervention program that Riverview special education teachers use with students who have disabilities in reading during the WIN block, which is separate from the in-class reading block.
[28] Lucy refers to Lucy Calkins, author or Riverview's writing curriculum

In the first stanza Elyse set up special education as a system that once had its own agenda, and by extension its own curriculum. She then provided further clarification, citing specific approaches (e.g., Wilson) that special education teachers had (or were required) to teach, which was distinctly separate from what general educators taught. Elyse builds this former system as separate from general education, marking herself as outside of it by referring to "they" (special education) and "their" agenda (different goals, content, curricula).

In stanza three Elyse draws a contrast from the previous model in her description of what Riverview has now: the LLI piece, which Elyse views as something that supports what happens in the classroom. She has set up here a distinction between a former system where special education was separate, and the current system which is different from general education but also complementary (line 11). In fact, she constructs special education in a quite different way than the other texts. Elyse views her instruction as a consistent site of content and learning. LLI is an "extra" level that augments what she does in the classroom. Further, in the final stanza, Elyse positions the special ed person as a source of support for what *she* is doing in the classroom.

Elyse has asserted some professional authority and expertise here. First she suggests that the curriculum cannot be the driver of learning, because not everything works for every kid. So while she goes on to endorse what is done with LLI, it is a conditional endorsement, provided that it is a program that works for the individual child in question. Second she positions the content she offers as primary; the special ed person who comes in supports what she, Elyse, is doing. While Elyse finishes this section with a positive evaluation of kids getting both sources of literacy support, she does challenge the nature of in-class support. She points out that the special education teacher or paraprofessional is not only not always in the room, but that they are just there to support her content. The use of just in line 10a further subordinates the role of the in-

class support person, and positions them as an extra body in the room to alleviate the burden on the teacher. While Elyse seems more supportive of the current model of special education, she also builds special education as having more authority - and an identity as a literacy expert - under the previous model. In the current context, Elyse has positioned the program as effective, rather than the special education teachers or their pedagogy.

To be clear, I do not wish to suggest that Elyse does not value special education or the services they offer. Rather, I wish to once more highlight some of the ambiguity around the role of special education as a system within the institution of the school.

These texts are illustrative examples of the tensions that emerge when inclusivity is interpreted as placement and/or the delivery of services. In general, the location of the services is much clearer to educators that any description they offered of what services were. Yet they also engage with this tension, acknowledging that in some cases special education teachers are employed as extra bodies who can ease the burden of the classroom teachers. In my own experience as a special education teacher, this was a constant concern. I felt that my role in the classroom was often to help students with their classwork or homework, rather than to meaningfully collaborate with colleagues, or to teach.

There was little observed evidence of collaboration between special and general education teachers in the data; however, teachers did meet with the special education team weekly to co-plan and discuss specific students' IEP goals and needs. In general, general education teachers expressed positive personal and working relationships with special education teachers and paraprofessionals, and while the approach to working with students appeared to be to divvy up the group according to needs, it is likely that there was some co-planning involved (as evidenced by Meghan's account of Luke and Betsy's math program, interview, 11/6/19).

Although special educators and paraprofessionals tended to work with students on their caseload, they were in the room often enough that they would circulate and support any students who had questions. That said, Meghan also alluded to the fact that student IEPs often specified that a special education teacher had to deliver services, thereby limited who could work with student services. This suggests that students with labeled disabilities at Riverview were marked as different, as well as educators (teacher, paraprofessionals) in special education due to the language of the IEP document (Naraian, 2010; 2016). Thus, the logistics of interventions and ambiguity of special education services continued to be a site of constraint for teachers.

Inclusivity as Empowered Belonging: A Counternarrative

Despite pervasive dominant Discourse of difference and service delivery, there was evidence of a strong counternarrative of inclusivity at Riverview. Interestingly, this counternarrative did not emerge from direct conversations about inclusion. Rather, I drew on a variety of data sources to identify elements of educators' pedagogy, including their instructional methods and organizational choices, that related to students' sense of belonging and empowerment.

To describe the construction of this counternarrative, I begin by sharing texts from participants that focus on their instructional strategies, followed by texts that describe the design of flexible spaces within classrooms and across the school. I then share student-drawn maps and photos from across the school that support the construction of this counternarrative.

Reimagining Pedagogy

Despite the pervasive pedagogical norm of the whole-group/workshop model for instruction, there was evidence that teachers were willing to exercise some agency in how they adapted or extended the format to work with students' variable learning preferences. In other

words, while teachers' practice sometimes appeared structurally bound in terms of time and scheduling, the methods they used within the structure were flexible.

From Focus Lesson to Self-Selection

When I first met Sarah in 2015, she was one of a handful of teachers piloting the use of the whole-group instruction/workshop model in subjects other than reading and writing. In my observations during phases one and two of this research, Sarah built the instructional strategy of having all students sit in the meeting area for the focus lesson as a community learning activity. The meeting area was a site of collaborative learning in her classroom. Students were frequently invited to turn and talk to a neighbor to discuss ideas, and the format was casual. When I asked Sarah how she typically designed her lessons, she explained, "I try to make everything pretty basically in Lucy's, you know, workshop structure. So the 10 to 15 minute focus lesson, sometimes it's more of an I do, we do, you do. When we're first introducing topics it's more of like, direct teach something, and what do you think about it" (Sarah interview, 11/6/19). Students were expected to be turned toward the instruction (either Sarah or the SmartBoard), but were allowed to eat and stretch out in order to be comfortable.

While Sarah expected students to raise their hands and take turns sharing, she appeared committed to involving everyone, often asking for thoughts from people she hadn't heard from or giving plenty of wait time before calling on someone. There were a few exceptions to this during each phase. During phase one, one student was pulled from the room for the majority of literacy and math instruction. Although she did not have a one-to-one paraprofessional, she worked on math and literacy content that was different from that of her peers. She did regularly attend science and social studies in the classroom. In phase two, Jaspar, the student with the one-on-one paraprofessional, usually stayed at his seat, which was close to the meeting area.

Although he was often in the room instruction, Jaspar did not actively participate in focus lessons on a regular basis (although he did engage with independent work activities related to the content, with the support of the paraprofessional and other students). One other student in phase two had a difficult time joining the group, and preferred to wander the room, sometimes making noises. Over time however, she began to gradually join the group in the meeting area, often sitting at the round table near the back of the meeting area, or sitting or standing near another adult (e.g., the intern or a paraprofessional).

Occasionally, after finishing her focus lesson, which almost always lasted 15 minutes or less, Sarah gave students the option of working on their own or staying at the rug for additional practice with a skill. She framed this in a variety of ways, sometimes as extra help, and other times as simply more practice to develop confidence. In the excerpt below Sarah explained this decision in the context of maintaining a positive attitude toward math and empowering students (Sarah interview, 11/6/19).

Sarah:

So um I have ALWAYS found if I had given like a list of like,
I want you to stay, you to stay, you to stay,
the ATTITUDE towards math kind of went,
in PARTICULAR math,
went down the tubes.

But if I said like,
if you feel LIKE, you'd like to hear this again and stay,
they might not the FIRST time,
Um, but I have found,
kids are more willing to STAY for help if they've self-selected that versus me telling them
you need to come over here.

Here Sarah suggested that students began to get to know themselves as learners through this process. She says in line 7 that students might not stay the first time the option is given, but

that they become more willing when offered the opportunity. She also positioned the act of staying as getting help, and suggested that students who stayed were more willing to get help if it was their decision.

Sarah's claim makes sense, particularly if we think about her students from the first stanza who were reluctant to be pulled to the work table to work with a paraprofessional. Empowering students to choose their level of support allows them autonomy to decide what will work for them, and also acknowledge that this may change on any given day. Further, it highlights the fact that student understanding varies within content areas. In other words, if a student struggles with word problems, it does not necessarily mean that they are not competent at other math skills. Giving students the authority to decide when and if they need help normalizes individual strengths and weaknesses. I saw Sarah offer the self-selection option at least five times during my data collection, and the group of students differed each time.

Once students had self-selected into the group, Sarah usually briefly retaught the skill, and worked through a few more examples. In addition to supporting students, the process of inviting students to stay until they felt competent solidified the meeting area as a primary place for learning. Sarah therefore builds the meeting area not only as a place for content delivery, but also as a site of support and collaboration, and a place to transition from dependence to independence.

It is difficult to conclusively say whether students perceived the meeting area in this way. What does seem to be clear is that the meeting area did not have a negative stigma attached to it, as was the case for some students with the classroom work table. Students in Sarah's classroom moved so freely during independent work time however, that even the table was frequently reclaimed when not in use by an adult. Sarah encouraged quiet collaboration, and students often

used lap desks or clipboards to create workspaces around the room where they could be comfortable and productive (although Sarah occasionally had to move students who became distracted by their workspace choices).

The empowered movement described here is consistent with many aspects of the UDL framework. Specifically, students were given options to manage and monitor their learning, and the minimize threats and distraction. While I cannot definitively say that Sarah consciously made her pedagogical choices because of the UDL framework, her decisions to allow flexible movement and options for support were common enough educators with whom I spoke that they seem to be normalized cultural practices at Riverview.

Resisting the Whole-group/Workshop Paradigm

While whole-group instruction anchored by a focus lesson was the typical format, teachers did vary from this at times. Rachel preferred small instructional groups for most subjects (which usually followed a whole group warm-up). In large part, these groups were based on performance (gleaned from formative and summative assessments), and were fairly consistent.

Rachel deviated most significantly from the whole group instruction model on a daily basis. While her awareness of this difference is unknown, Rachel made the case for alternative types of instruction, specifically groups and centers, in both of my interviews with her. I was curious about Rachel's groupings, their derivation, and why she chose to use this approach when she was so often the only adult in her classroom. The following excerpt suggests that her decision to use groups and centers in writing was motivated by several factors, including a desire to maintain consistency and keep pace with her third grade colleagues, and to get to know her

students better academically. Yet throughout this passage Rachel draws on her professional autonomy as a teacher, for which she builds a case, and justifies with specific examples.

Rachel:

So I take
Lucy's teaching point,
and then I kind of
spin it and do my own thing because it is the first year I'm teaching her curriculum and,
I WAS getting really overwhelmed with just like the depth of her lessons
And trying to keep up with like,
the other team members and stuff so um.

I have a literacy coach here,
and SHE said you know like as long as you're teaching like,
the MAIN teaching point you can do what you want with
that piece.

Um so I do
we started doing the writing CENTERS so they're doing like ME,
which is the lesson,
spelling cursive and then free write (?)
Um and I have like packets for all those other ones except for the free write and.

It's just been more manageable.
I've been able to like,
touch in,
with ALL of them more,
instead of like trying to wander around the room and they're all following me asking me to go to the bathroom like,
I'm with the GROUP and,
you know what that means.

So it's just,
it's been a LOT easier for me to SIT and get to know them as
a writer or,
as a mathematician or a reader so.

In many ways the picture Rachel has painted is a transformative one. She is resisting the Riverview cultural practice of whole-group instruction as the standard, and simultaneously resisting strict adherence to the writing curriculum. To be clear, none of the participants,

including Alex, suggested that any of their curricula need to be followed with strict fidelity. Yet Rachel makes her case for deviating from the writing curriculum with support from an expert (the literacy coach, line 5), and cites evidence of the positives her instructional autonomy yields. In addition to being able to manage the curriculum and what the students are doing, she also gets to know them as writers.

We can see in the final stanza as well (line 14c) that Rachel suggests that her instructional approach not only has benefits in writing, but that it can be generalized. In working with smaller groups she can get to know students as mathematicians and readers as well. She simultaneously builds an intimate classroom in which she connects with her students, constructing in the process identities for her students as competent writers, readers, and mathematicians. Further, she maintains the pace of the team for instruction (lines 4, 4a) which, as we learned in chapter 4, is important to both her and to the operation of the special education system.

Empowered Participation

As alluded to in chapter 4, community-building was a priority of several participants. Specifically, Elyse sought to build community through access to content. For example, during the World War II unit the class participated in historical fiction book groups. The groups, of about four or five students, were organized according to reading level, and each book focused on events during the war. According to Elyse, finding books at various reading levels was a challenge; as a result, she made audiobooks an option for some students.

In the excerpt below, Elyse describes how she organized book groups, and options she made available for students who had difficulty accessing the texts. In the process, she talks about

how this type of access enabled students who might not have otherwise participated in discussions to be involved.

Elyse:

1 So each group was its own level.
2 So it went all the way from second, third,
2a third grade.
3 Well, my really low, low ones
3a Um that's when they could auditorily listen so they could ACCESS it.
4 And I gave a couple of other students the CHOICE of listening to it,
4a but they didn't want to.
5 They wanted to read it.
6 Um, so that way

7 Cause I couldn't find anything as low as Billy.
8 So, he was happy.
9 He has some great conversation
9a About what was going on.

10 So I had a couple that were a lot lower
10a and they were totally
10b loving the fact that they were part of the group.
11 And having conversations about what was going on.

In the first stanza, Elyse builds the activity of sorting students according to reading ability (or performance level), and assigning them levels (e.g., second-grade, low). She also draws a distinction between reading the text and accessing it through listening, suggesting some uncertainty in whether the goal of the book groups is comprehension or decoding. In the final lines of the first stanza Elyse describes students who didn't want to listen to the text, but wanted to read it. These sentences (lines 3/3a, 4/4a, 5) points to several important features. First, that only certain students were allowed to listen to book group texts, suggests that Elyse valued the decoding process as an important goal of this particular unit. Second, it highlights the fact that Elyse had a desire to include all of her students in the activity of book groups, regardless of their ascribed reading level, and affirms that Elyse views even students who read at a lower level as

her responsibility through the use of the possessive pronoun "my." The stanza then transitions into a particular case, "Billy" for whom Elyse had trouble finding a text he code decode.

This second stanza introduces the concept of belonging into this part of Elyse's narrative. Elyse introduces the affective element of book groups, and states that Billy not only was part of the conversation, but was happy about being part of the group, a claim which she extends to other "lower" students who were able to be involved as a result of their auditory access to the texts. Yet while Elyse indirectly recognizes that decoding (and potentially not comprehension) is a barrier for these students, her use of hierarchical language persists. While it is clearly important for her to have students feel a part of a group, her use of the words "low" and "lower" marks them as different, and potentially less able. Further, her description of not being able to find anything as low as Billy underscores not only a dichotomy of ability, but perceived levels of "lowness."

I acknowledge that in some ways the use of hierarchical language constrains Elyse's emphasis on belonging. Yet this excerpt highlights several dominant narratives that may shape her views. First, reading levels are such a naturalized part of school that I do not think Elyse, or any educator (myself included) would recognize them as problematic at first. Second, Elyse subordinates her hierarchical descriptions of lower students; the emphasis in this passage is on students feeling happy and successful as part of a learning community. Finally, this passage illustrates how pervasive and powerful hierarchical language is, even in a context focused on belonging, empowerment, and UDL.

There are many takeaways from these texts. Elyse, Rachel and Sarah's instructional approaches all offered models of empowerment and belonging that, while different from Sarah's work toward similar aims. By creating working groups for students, both Elyse and Rachel

designed for the variability of their students from the outset. Additionally, Rachel was able to manage her time with them so that she can get to know students on a more individual basis. As a beginning teacher with limited adult support in the classroom, this seems like an appropriate decision. Through the use of centers students are empowered to work independently at their own pace on assignments. Because each student belongs to one group, they are all part of smaller learning communities within the larger group, and were encouraged to collaborate within groups. Elyse removed a barrier of decoding to allow her students' engagement with texts focus their learning, rather than their challenges. Her students were empowered to participate meaningfully with their peers, and learn about a topic in the process.

Navigating Flexible Geographies: Inclusivity as Autonomous Movement

As alluded to in the previous section, students in participants' classrooms were generally empowered to move freely within the space. For example, students in Elyse's had a variety of options for workspaces, including work tables, the rug area, library nook, and their desks. Occasionally Elyse or her intern would pull students into groups to work on a particular skill, but the locations and makeup of these groups varied. Additionally, students were encouraged to utilize tools to support their learning. In Elyse, Sarah, and Meghan's classrooms students frequently used the audio features (e.g., text-to-speech) or audio book apps on their Chromebooks to follow along with books while they read.

Debriefing Instructional Rounds

Participants had the opportunity to see this flexibility firsthand during a session of instructional rounds (City, Elmore, Fiarman, & Teitel, 2009). Instructional rounds were part of the NUDLO professional learning program, and the UDL team members observed each other's

classrooms and noted patterns in instruction, student engagement, and organization. During observations, teachers documented their observations by using a protocol that asked two questions: what are teachers doing and what are students doing? Then then transferred each observation onto a sticky note, which they brought to a UDL team meeting facilitated by a CAST Implementation Specialist. After a brief review of the UDL guidelines, the team sorted the sticky notes according to each UDL principle (engagement, action & expression, and representation).

The following excerpt is from Briana, the school literacy coach and co-facilitator of the UDL team. She is describing patterns the team captured across classrooms that related to engagement. She begins with an overall assessment of what she noticed across the observations, and goes on to cite specific examples from the data.

Briana:

1 We thought overall
1a the teachers were really HELPING students promote um, their,
2 no facilitate their own PERSONAL COPING skills.

3 We have Zen dens,
4 we, we've
4a saw kids using ZenDens across the board.
5 We saw kids using things at their DESKS
5a getting up if they needed to get UP
5b use flexible seating,
5c move across the ROOM if they needed to.

6 Um, so that was strong.

In the first stanza, Briana focused on what teachers have done to support student coping skills, while in the second she moves more toward what students do. She made an interesting shift in word choice, from “helping” to “facilitating.” This suggested that students were not

directly prompted to use tools in support of their coping skills, but rather that the teacher had created an environment that facilitated these skills.

Briana then went on to highlight the ways students autonomously moved through classroom spaces. Although she begins again by simply stating that "we" (the teachers on the team) have Zen Dens, but then shifts the subject to position students as active users of Zen Dens. She then continues this thread, positioning students as active users of tools, and in control of their own decisions to use flexible seating or move around the classroom.

This excerpt illustrates that this type of student movement was common among teachers' classrooms (or at least the seven teachers on the UDL team). Certainly these practices were common in my observations of Meghan and Elyse, but in Rachel's classroom as well. Autonomous movement within the classroom had developed by this point as a common cultural practice at Riverview. There is not enough evidence to determine whether this movement was linked strictly to "coping skills" as Briana suggests. Rather, it seemed that the decisions students made were related to their preferred spaces for completing work. As the next section will discuss, students in need of intensive social-emotional support also had the option of accessing an alternative space.

The Safe Place

The Safe Place was located across from the rear entrance to the main office, and adjacent to Elyse's classroom. The room was the size of a traditional classroom, with space dividers sectioning off different sections of the room to create smaller spaces for students to work, eat, stretch, or relax.

The Safe Place evolved significantly over the course of this research. During phase one, students who exhibited challenging or dangerous behaviors often went there, and some students spent a large portion of their day in the room. When I asked teachers about this during phase one, they had mixed understandings of it. Rachel described it as a room that was initially designed for students to take breaks or receive support from a counselor or paraprofessional, but that had transitioned to a room where students went when they were melting down (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19). Elyse was troubled by this change in purpose as well, and felt that the shift had created a need for a self-contained classroom to manage student behaviors. In other words, students who were using the room for a break were being disturbed and influenced by students who were yelling or being disruptive (Elyse, interview, 4/17/19).

At the start of phase two the Safe Place was presented as having an entirely different purpose. On a tour of the school, Alex took me into the Safe Place, and described it as a place for students who may be agitated or upset, but emphasized that "it is *not* the crisis room" (Alex, interview, 10/11/19). In the following excerpt he describes the options available to students in the space, and the intent of the space as of the beginning of phase two.

Alex:

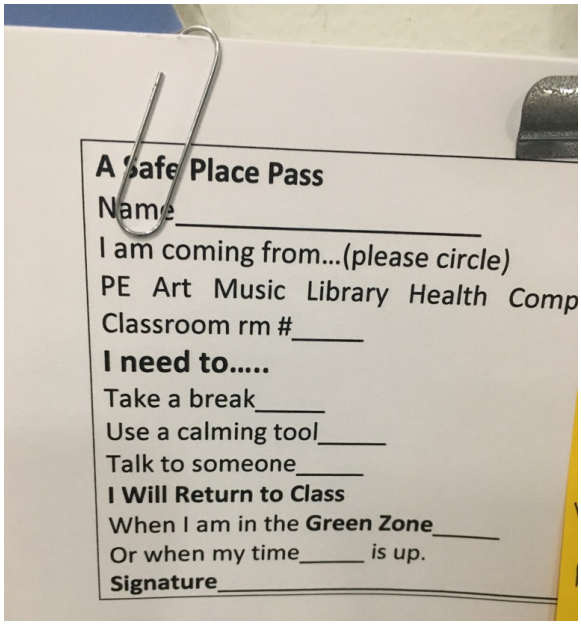
1 Now the SAFE place
2 the safe place, students can come here and ACCESS
2a uh, different TOOLS for self-regulation
3 Um, if they need to TALK to somebody, they will, you know
3a kind of say I need to TALK with someone.
4 Sometimes they'll play a GAME for five minutes.
5 Um, sometimes they'll sit in,
5a there's carpeted areas
5b Sort of more SEGREGATED and
5c LESS stimulus.
6 To chill,
6a to take a little chill.

7 And this is really for kids who need
8 I would say
8a An escape from the classroom.
9 Um sometimes kids BRING
9a WORK with them cause they just need a
9b quieter place to do some work.

In this passage, Alex builds the Safe Place as an option for students who need a break from the classroom, or for students to calm down. There is a room in the school for students who are melting down, but it was not publicized; rather, Alex indicated that students in crisis might be brought to that room by a teacher or administrator. In contrast, students could visit the Safe Place at any time, provided they asked their classroom teacher for a pass (see figure 5.6). The pass system was being piloted to minimize students taking advantage of the room, as well as to inform adults in the space of the students' purpose for being there.

Figure 5.6

Safe Place Pass



Although admission to the Safe Place was regulated, the decision to go there was entirely that of the student in phase two. In phase one, teachers often sent or discouraged students from visiting the Safe Place (Meghan, interview, 4/17/19). This shift suggested a recognition by Riverview educators that empowering students to recognize when they need a break would be a more productive means of supporting their coping skills than relying on a teacher to send them out of the room. In this sense, the boundaries of classrooms and the Safe Place were permeable. Any student was able to move between the spaces to seek support. In addition, this suggests that the Safe Place, despite being out of the classroom, may have been intended to promote a sense of belonging. Despite being a separate location, it seemed to offer a sense of safety and support for students looking for a break from their classrooms.[29]

I noticed differences in (for lack of a better term) traffic patterns around the Safe Place during phases one and two. During phase one, I sometimes sat outside of the Safe Place, and watched as a range of students came in and out. Sometimes students came in quietly; other times they were visibly upset or angry and accompanied by a teacher. Other times students brought lunch trays to the room with friends. Generally speaking however, the room appeared busy, sometimes with as many as eight students and four teachers entering or exiting during a span of 20 minutes. During phase two I noticed less traffic around the Safe Place, particularly with teachers. Alex confirmed this, as fewer teachers were based in there during phase two. I also noticed that the adults who were based in the Safe Place tended to be in classrooms quite often,

[29] While I do not have verbal student-level data to support this, I did notice that one student who frequently visited the Safe Place seemed to value it as a place to take breaks. Over the course of phase two, the students' visits were scheduled and decreased in duration. Additionally, the teacher reported that the student was more productive than in previous years.

or in the common areas talking with students. Additionally, during phase one there were four students who frequented the Safe Place, while during phase two only one student took frequent breaks there, and utilized the pass system to do so.

Together, these data indicate that participants provided students with opportunities to become empowered in how they learned, as well as in where they learned. This narrative of suggests that inclusivity not only encompasses the needs of students with labeled disabilities, but those who need a break, support with coping skills, or even extra time or practice in their learning. The development of student empowerment and belonging - regardless of need - illustrated in the texts above suggest that Riverview educators took up inclusivity pedagogically, and in the design of its spaces.

Learning and Movement

To further illustrate autonomous movement, I highlight several maps drawn by students of full participants. The first maps are from Meghan's students during phase one. These maps consistently included both student and teacher desks, as well as the SmartBoard and the rug (meeting area). The use of the word "rug" to capture the meeting area is interesting, in part because almost the entire classroom was carpeted, and also because it seemed clear that Meghan referred to the meeting area as "the rug." In fact, one student went so far as to label this area, in the largest letters, "The Rug." Another student, above a label for the SmartBoard, wrote the word "math." On yet another map, a student added, in addition to the label of "whiteboard" a message: "Good morning hello."

Two maps in particular stood out to me because of the students' decisions to place references to themselves into their maps. On student map A (figure 5.7), the student has

represented the places that they go, indicated at the top by the label “where I go = here.” The student labels “here” in six different locations around the room, including the rug, round side table, classroom library, and door. Looking at the map, these locations reflect that the student travels widely through the space, and that no area appears off limits. Arrows pointing out from the center of the room also seem to suggest that the student sits in a variety of places, and perhaps feels as though they belong in several spaces within the classroom.

Figure 5.7

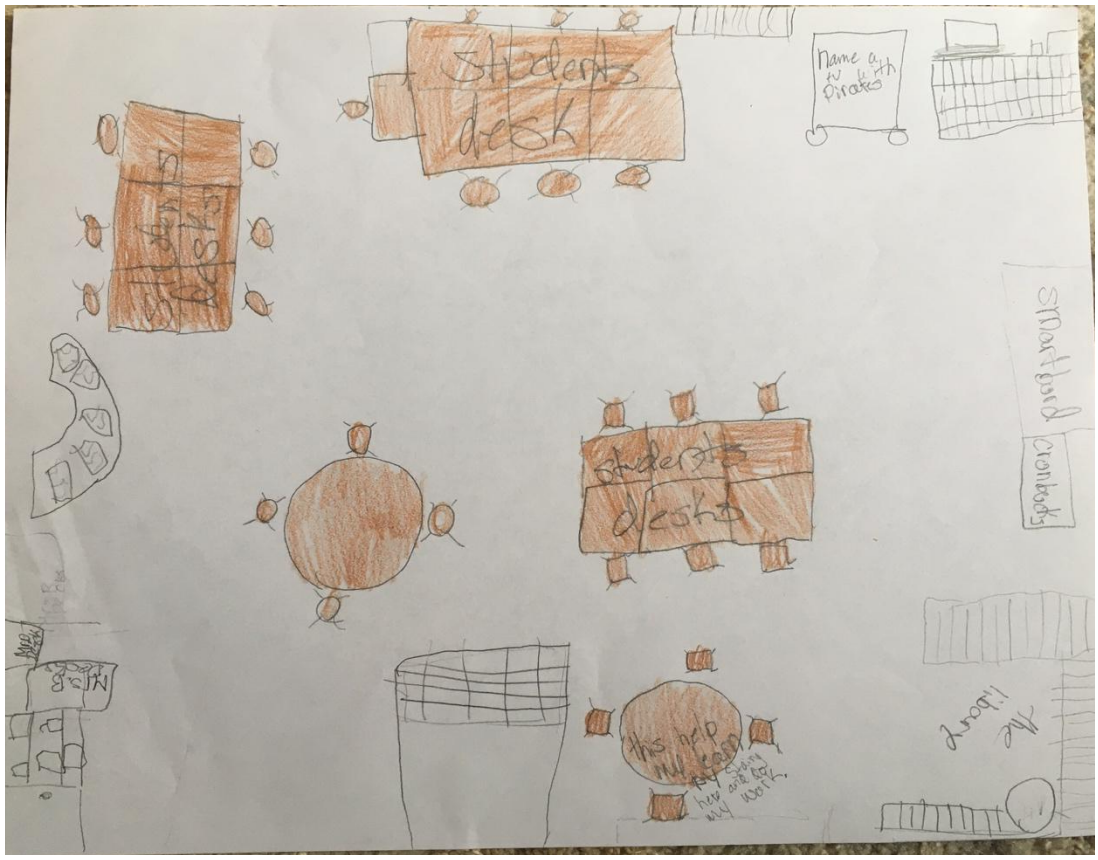
Student Map A

The other map, student map B (figure 5.8) also references the student, but only in one area: the side work table. In contrast to other labels that appear (student desks, SmartBoard) the student does not label the table by its name, but rather its function: “This help[s] me learn by sta[y]ing here and do[ing] my work.” In this case, the side table seems to be either a preferred or frequent location for the student to visit. It is not clear whether the student chooses to work there

on their own or with an adult, but either way it is positioned as a site of both learning and productivity. Staying and learning seem to be synonymous with doing work.

Figure 5.8.

Student map B

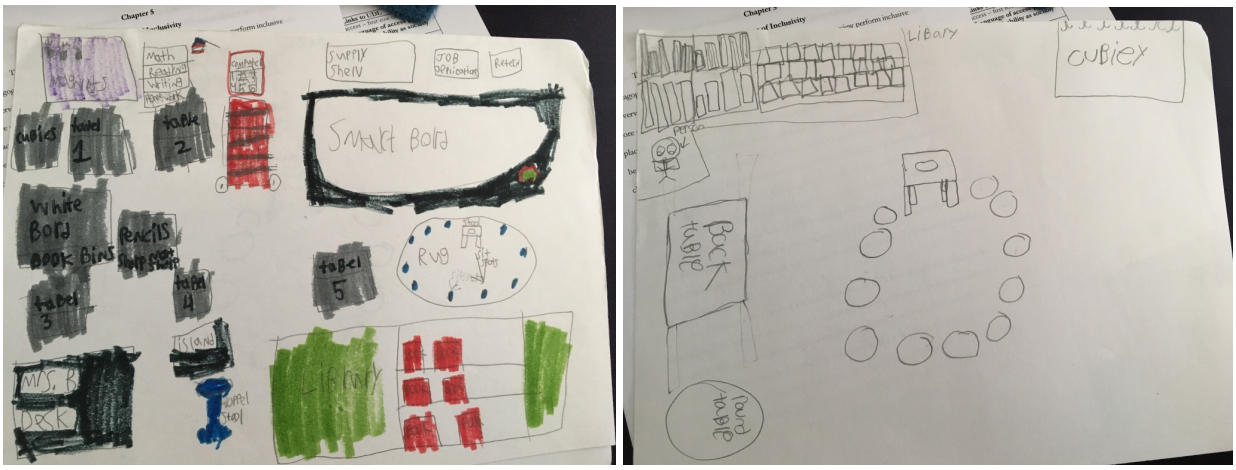


Sit Spots and Hatchlings: Drawing Belonging

Maps from Rachel's class seemed to reflect a sense of community and belonging. Of the 13 maps I received, five focused on the meeting area in detail, drawing "sit spots" or small circle-shaped stickers. Rachel had placed these circles in her meeting area, and there was one for each student (although the spots were not assigned). Often, when the class was participating in a share or having a meeting Rachel would ask students to find a sit spot. They were positioned so that all students were part of the circle, and no one was excluded (see figure 5.9).

Figure 5.9.

Two Interpretations of "Sit Spots" in Rachel's classroom

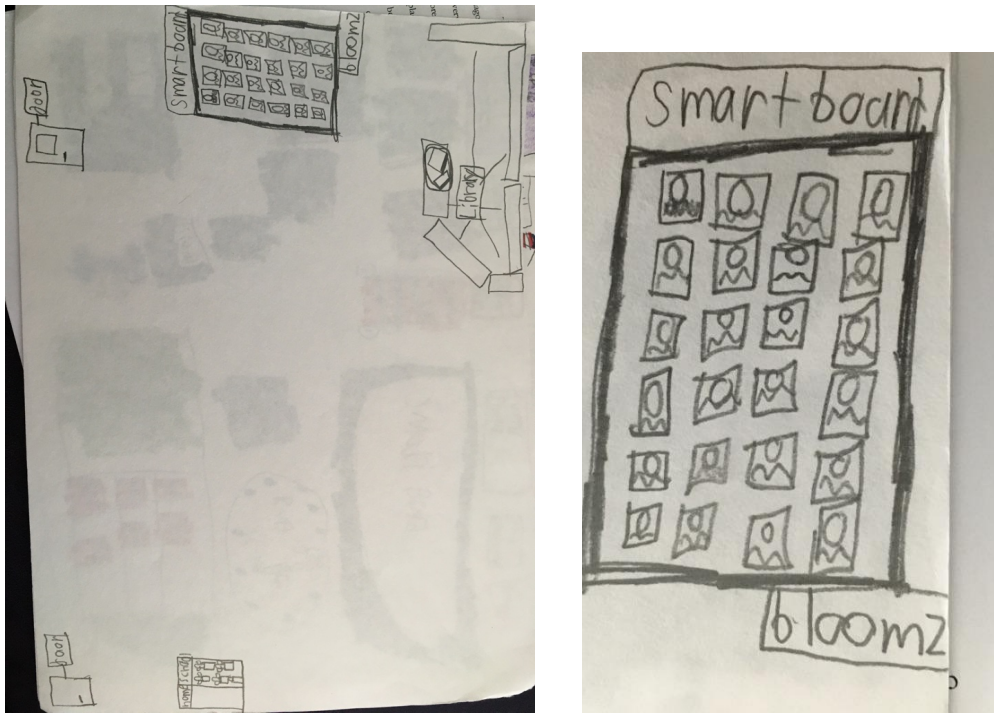


In both maps, the sit spots are drawn, along with Rachel's stool, where she often sat during class meetings and reflections. In the map on the left, the student has also chosen to draw the SmartBoard, as well as other features of the classroom, including table groups and an "island desk" that rotated among students who wanted the opportunity to sit by themselves. In the map on the right, the sit spots are central, and the focus of the classroom. Each of these suggests that the meeting area, and the sit spots specifically, are places that resonated with students.

The other feature that popped up was a graphic that Rachel often posted on the SmartBoard during independent work time. This graphic was a points system that Rachel used, and when she "caught kids being on task" she gave them points. The visual was of little eggs (see figure 5.10), each with a student name underneath. As students acquired more and more points the eggs began to hatch, eventually revealed little creatures inside. When this happened, students would stop what they were doing and cheer for the person. This was one of the areas in which Rachel said she noticed the most growth, was in the development of a supportive community (Rachel, interview, 4/1/19). One student depicted the hatchlings in detail as a key feature on their maps.

Figure 5.10.

Drawing of "Hatchlings" from Rachel's Class (on map and closeup)



Schoolwide images of Empowered Belonging

In closing this section, I think it is important to share images of the school environment students see as they walk the halls and traverse classroom boundaries at Riverview. The guidance counselor, assistant principal, special education teachers, and paraprofessionals have taken it upon themselves to offer messages of empowerment and belonging in common areas.

In figure 5.11, a wall in the west wing has been decorated with instructional posters and exercises students can try if they are out in the common area taking a break, and need ideas for calming down or refocusing. This poster shows breathing exercises, which appear in the east wing as well, and other displays posted by the occupational therapist offer exercises students can do to help them burn off some of their energy. Students are permitted to take breaks in the common areas and work through these exercises on their own or with an adult.

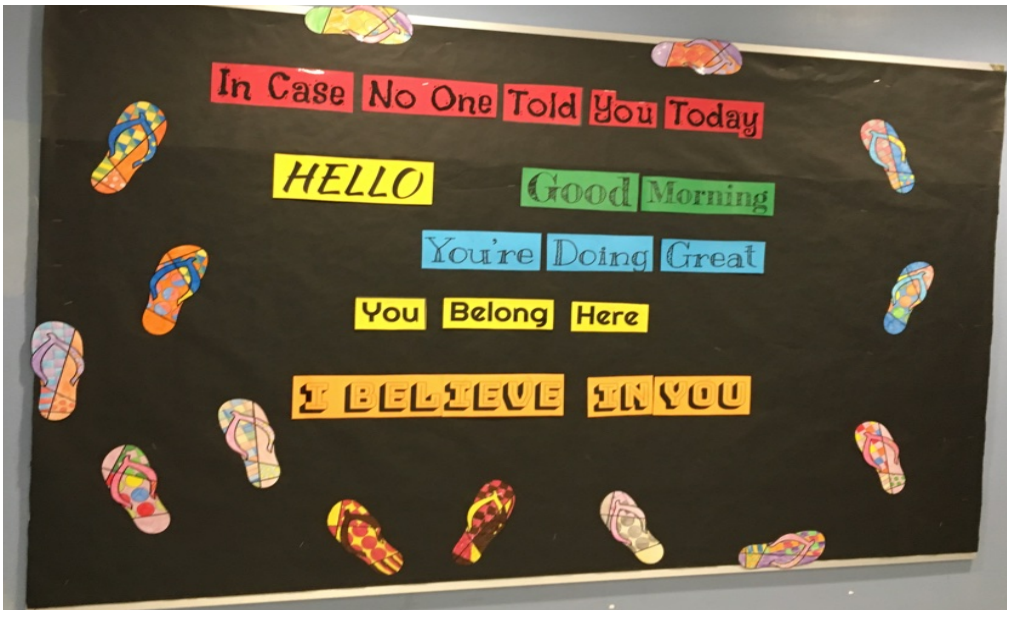
Figure 5.11.

Calming exercises posted in the west wing

In addition to "how to" posters, adults in the building also decorate bulletin boards with positive messages for students. The bulletin board below (figure 5.12) hangs in the front entryway, and clearly aims to send a message of welcome and belonging to students as they enter the building.

Figure 5.12.

Entryway bulletin board

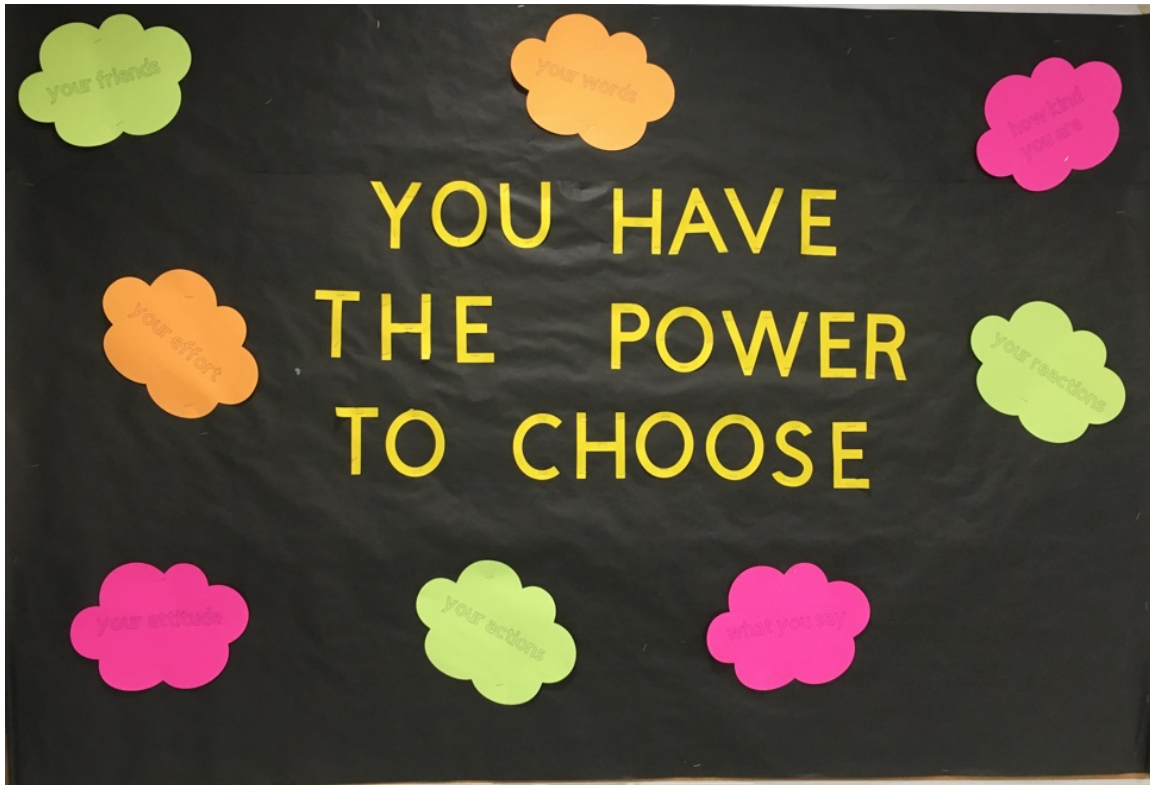


Finally, the bulletin board below (figure 5.13), located outside of the library, offers a message of empowerment to students. The central message is that educators at Riverview - in particular educators who put up these displays - want children are empowered to choose. The clouds around the perimeter say “your friends,” “your reactions,” and “how kind you are.”. As mentioned in the previous chapter, these do not seem to be empty messages; similar language was echoed by teachers in classrooms during lessons and conversations with students.

That said, it is unclear from the data collected how students responded to these messages. On several occasions I witnessed students reading bulletin boards or looking at the breathing exercises in the hallways (although I never saw students use them). Still, the message sent by educators that I observed was consistent with the narratives put forth in images across the school.

Figure 5.13.

Library bulletin board



Inclusivity at Riverview: Negotiating Incompatible Narratives

In this chapter, I have described how narratives of inclusivity were constructed at Riverview. In looking across texts from full and partial participants, I have illustrated how participants navigate competing Discourses of place, service provision, and rigidity within the system of special education, while trying to maintain and design inclusive pedagogy through their instruction and the organization of their space. Their negotiation of the tensions they face suggest that while the Discourse and practice of UDL (incorporating, belonging, variability, and empowerment) offer a promising framework for inclusivity, the bond between the Discourse of inclusion remains steadfastly linked to place and services. In other words, while UDL offers the promise of reimagining inclusivity, its uncritical stance is neither pervasive nor powerful enough to undo historical associations of inclusion as bound to a placed phenomenon of service provision (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016). Both teachers and students are facing mixed messages of inclusivity.

The narratives described in this chapter play out, as we have seen, in practices, Discourses, and spaces that seem incompatible with one another. Educators endorse inclusion as a feature of their school identity, but are troubled by the rigidity of services that positions students in stigmatized places, and minimizes the impact of the inclusive classrooms they have created. The conflation of inclusion as a dichotomous operationalizing of student services constrains educators' inclusive practices. In addition, it stabilizes the rigidity of special education as a system that is focused on service delivery in place, and fails to consider the consequences of this delivery. Furthermore, educators at Riverview struggled to define the role of special education personnel (teachers and paraprofessionals) in the classroom, and the justification for pulling students to a specific location. The act has the potential to both disempower and

disengage students (as evidenced in interviews with both Rachel and Sarah), and potentially teachers as well, and serves to maintain divisions in the classroom among students with and without labeled disabilities.

Still, amidst these constraints these data have illuminated Discourses of belonging and empowerment that have taken root at Riverview, despite a tumultuous year of transition and challenges. That educators remain resilient and committed to practicing inclusive pedagogy and designing permeable, inclusive spaces is promising. Further, the very fact that educators were willing to attempt to question the role of special education suggests a certain amount of resistance to the effects the system might have on students, as well as the narratives it perpetuated. Yet change is slow, and as Alex admitted during a UDL team meeting, the change Riverview is pursuing is a cultural shift in mindset.

In the following chapter, I situate these findings within the overlapping literatures of disability studies, critical geography, and UDL. I then discuss implications for inclusive education, and the considerations for developing a UDL Discourse that intentionally dismantles historically rigid links between inclusivity, service, and place.

Chapter 6: Discussion

This study's overarching research question asked how educators in an elementary school implementing Universal Design for Learning construct narratives of ability and inclusivity. As the findings presented in chapters 4 and 5 suggest, ability and inclusivity are complex and highly-contested concepts. As a result, narratives and counternarratives co-exist in tension with one another, and are reflexively shaped and informed by educators within the school.

In this final chapter I offer a discussion of the findings, addressing the ways in which educators articulate notions of ability and perform inclusive pedagogy in the context of a school implementing UDL. I begin by summarizing findings across chapters 4 and 5, and making connections with recent empirical literature. I then discuss implications of this research for theory and practice. Finally, I address some limitations of the current study, and make suggestions for future research.

Summary of Findings

Together, the findings from chapters 4 and 5 demonstrate how dominant narratives of ability and inclusivity work together and inform one another. Several of these "majoritarian" narratives (Delgado & Stefancic, 1993) assume the truth of naturalized systems that operate as sorting mechanisms in schools (e.g., special education, RTI), organize students accordingly by processes of determining ability (e.g., MAP scores, benchmarking), and assign students services that bind them to a particular place. Such narratives are replete with Discourses of placement – whether students are "in" or "out" of the "normal" environment that is the grade-level classroom – that enable the geographical marking of students as different.

Yet the findings also offered evidence of alternatives to majoritarian narratives of ability and disability that have traditionally been embedded within the confines of special education discourses (Broderick et al., 2012). Even while teachers participated in and informed

majoritarian narratives, they also resisted these discursively and pedagogically. For example, in Elyse's description of a student with a learning disability, she described how she altered her instructional materials and struggled to explain the student's disablement - as a truth of his diagnosis or as a result of inaccessible printed text. In addition, educators' construction of learning as a community process, empowerment of students to pursue their own ways of learning, and support of autonomous movement contributed to narratives that were at odds with traditional notions of ability and inclusivity that position learning as individualized and student activity as regulated by the teacher.

Narratives of Ability

Chapter 4 provided evidence that ability manifests itself in a number of ways, particularly in how it is determined, organized, and conceptualized by educators. The texts analyzed in the chapter indicated that a number of institutional systems and practices significantly influenced the ways that educators talk about student ability. Specifically, there was evidence that the provision of special education services, RTI interventions, and standardized assessments constrained and framed teachers' instruction and articulations of student ability. This is consistent with the work of Broderick and colleagues' (2012), whose findings suggested that teachers' work is disciplined by bureaucratic systems that compel them to act in accordance with larger organizational structures. For example, the prevalence of the RTI system, while intended to support student progress, served to label and divide students into tiers based on performance commensurate with their grade level. Often, this resulted in the removal of students from the classroom to be remediated. This and other concerns, such as students being labeled *as* tiers, have been raised by critics of RTI (e.g., Ferri, 2012), as they perpetuate the primacy of a subset of students who are able to learn -- or at least perform -- in a certain way. While the enactment of RTI at Riverview

attempted to blur the line between tiers by creating a flexible WIN block in which many students moved about the building, the Discourse of RTI maintained a hierarchy of ability, and the methods of tracking student growth rely primarily on "scientific" knowledge of performance on standardized assessments.

The prevalence of privileged knowledge, often associated with "scientific" or medical sources of expertise (e.g., physiological or genetic causes of AD/HD), worked in conjunction with sorting systems to influence teachers' Discourses on ability. This was evident in the ways some educators talked about students as "low," or drew on their own experience to compare students according to grade level expectations. Paugh and Dudley-Marling (2011) noted a similar finding in their CDA of teacher talk around deficits, noting that educators often drew on abstract professional language to legitimize claims around ability, or to define boundaries around whether students are teachable. Interestingly however, these researchers found a reluctance on the part of teachers to draw on their own observations as a source of evidence for student ability. In the current study, Sarah, a veteran teacher, was quite comfortable doing this; however, she drew on her observations to make a case for students' *lack* of ability, distinguishing them from "normal" groups of fifth graders with whom she had previously worked.

There was also evidence of educators drawing on scientific knowledge to define ability groups and differentiate instruction. This was driven, in Rachel's case in particular, by a desire to keep up with her grade-level colleagues in order to maintain the consistency in services provided by special education (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19). While Rachel felt that the system worked well for her students, and she was willing to deviate from schoolwide pedagogical norms, these were positioned as happy coincidences. The driver for the decision to use small group instruction was pressure to maintain the integrity of the pull-out system operating during phase one of the study.

Despite the constraints outlined here, the data also suggested a willingness on the part of educators to contest the process of assigning labels, and question fundamental aspects of how such systems operated. For example, Elyse openly questioned the special education identification of certain students (Elyse, interview, 4/17/19), while Rachel expressed ambivalence about the enactment of RTI interventions (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19). In each of these texts, participants distanced themselves from decision makers who either pulled students from their classrooms or tested students out of special education, suggesting a reluctance to participate in processes that re-name or exclude students on the basis of ability.

Texts from each of the participants indicated some adoption of language consistent with UDL. Students' access to and engagement with content were highlighted by each of the full participants. In several texts, teachers alluded to the ways that barriers in access and engagement prevented students from not only completing tasks, but also from being an involved member of the learning community. Further, underscoring UDL theory is an acceptance of flexibility in instructional methods, materials, and assessment across the learning environment (Rose et al., 2018). Several participants endorsed this flexibility, as demonstrated in their willingness to depart from the printed curriculum in order not only to engage students, but to provide opportunities for students with variable skills (Elyse, interview, 11/6/19). Both Meghan and Elyse, for example, pointed to exploratory activities in which students engaged with different ways of measuring different objects (length, capacity, volume, etc.), and in which all students could participate, regardless of where or with whom they traditionally received math instruction (Elyse, interview, 11/6/19; Meghan, interview, 11/6/19).

Negotiation of barriers in access and engagement through the use of technology, while consistent with practices of UDL, also shed light on some important tensions. First, the concept

of smartness surfaced in several texts, often in contrast to a disability label, or in reference to particular skills (e.g., reading/decoding). Smartness was presented as a desirable commodity – and indeed when teachers mentioned smartness it was presented as a positive internal characteristic of students that afforded them certain privileges (e.g., access to technology). The idea of smartness as something internal to students however, operated in contrast to the idea of *dis*ability as dynamic and contextual. This was evident particularly in Elyse's description of her "first grade reader" who she went on to describe as quite capable of learning but who had a true learning disability (Elyse, interview, 4/17/19). Her explanation of the student's learning tacks back and forth between attributions of disability and smartness, a tension Elyse never fully resolves.

Pushing the boundaries of how to conceptualize ability or where to draw the borders of disability are further evident in Meghan's texts. The Discourses of effort and progress that Meghan drew on did significant work in de-privileging academic performance, subordinating traditional notions of ability to her students' effort and willingness to try over their academic performance (Meghan, interview, 4/17/19). Further, Meghan's emphasis on students' learning in community with their peers suggested and openness within Riverview to reimagine ability as social and contextual

In summary, chapter 4 highlighted tensions within Discourses of ability, including those of disability and smartness. Further, tensions emerged among narratives of ability as deterministic and organizable on one hand, and re-imaginable and collaborative on the other. For example, a number of the texts shared in this chapter indicate how educators attempt to determine and organize ability, through both the use of a scientific or professional knowledge base, or adherence to sorting systems. Even as teachers attempted to minimize barriers and

promote students' competence, static notions of smartness as a desirable commodity worked to counter the idea that ability is contextual. Educators also are articulated a desire to have students feel involved and take risks within a supportive learning community. Yet this desire was often constrained by normalized ranking processes, such as benchmarking and sorting students into tiers.

UDL offered educators a language for challenging traditional notions of ability that educators took up to some degree, highlighting access and engagement specifically. Yet one of UDL's cornerstone concepts – that of the environment as disabling – while hinted at, was not clearly articulated by any of the participants. While the data suggests that the educators in the school are beginning to embrace more flexible and dynamic views of ability, a shift in its framing from individual characteristic to a social and cultural construction based on norms of performance (Dudley-Marling, 2004) has yet to occur.

Narratives of Inclusivity

In chapter 5, I highlighted the dominant narrative of inclusivity at Riverview, which tied the concept of inclusion to services and placement of students with disabilities. Specifically, this narrative focused on the geographical location of students during special education service provision. The context for this narrative was complicated by competing philosophies of inclusion between Riverview and Southside. While Riverview educators prided themselves as inclusive due to their "push-in" model of service provision, Southside operated under a different paradigm. Special education at Southside typically involved teachers pulling students out of class to provide special education services in a specialized (small group or individual) setting. Clashes in these philosophies played out during the first year of the school merger, and involved significant

changes to the way special education operated at Riverview, until IEPs could be rewritten to allow students with labeled disabilities to remain in the classroom.

The disruption to Riverview's enactment of inclusion as push-in services prompted several participants to speak (and question) the broader role of special education at the school. In several cases participants seemed to question the purposes of the system if the function was to help students complete assignments. Yet participants were reluctant to endorse a separate program or separate instruction for students – at least in a format where students might be pulled out of the room or singled out in some way. During phase two of the study pull-out special education services had been all but eradicated, with the exception of the WIN intervention block, during which the majority of students traveled to different classrooms for support or instruction.

Although students were no longer systematically pulled out from the classroom to receive special education instruction during phase two, the discourse of "pushing-in" continued to bind the idea of inclusion to both disability and services. This relationship is consistent with findings from Naraian's (2016) study of the link between students' learning differences and fixed environments. Naraian's analysis of teachers from across the United States indicated that regardless of where students were placed for instruction, or the degree of collaboration among general and special education teachers, the primacy of the general education classroom prevailed. In other words, the classroom is the unquestioned preferred place for learning, and as such, membership within the general classroom positions allows students a role in the learning community. At Riverview, where there is virtually no alternative placement, requirements for belonging in the classroom were flexible. The expectation was that students belonged in the classroom, not only physically and academically, but emotionally; when students felt the need to be somewhere else, they were generally empowered to move to a different place.

With difference marking through relocation (to a specialized setting) essentially off the table, students were still sometimes marked as different within the classroom. Physical positioning near a special educator or paraprofessional was not uncommon, nor was verbal acknowledgement that certain adults came to the room *for* certain students. These connections not only bound students to special education, but teachers as well (Ashston, 2016; Naraian, 2010; 2016). Naraian's research also noted the construction of such "places within places" (e.g., a work table in the back of the room), and the different ways these play out for students. In the current study, for example, Meghan emphasized places within places (specific marked locations in the room) to meet students' learning needs, while Sarah and Elyse tended to offer students autonomy in choosing their place as autonomous members of the community.

While some research (e.g., Broderick et al., 2012; Goodfellow, 2012) has suggested that students who are pulled to a different place (in or out of the classroom) are sometimes taught with inferior or unchallenging curricular materials that further serves to disengage, mark, and disable these students, this did not seem to be the norm at Riverview during phase two. For example, Meghan's students who used a different math program were included in whole group instructional lessons and activities. Sarah's student whom she described as on a completely separate program read with peers and played math games with others in his table group.

There were however, two notable differences during phase one. Elyse and Sarah both had students in their classes who spent the majority of their day in other locations. Sarah's student returned to the classroom, occasionally with a paraprofessional for science and social studies, and was often placed with a peer who would work with her and help her. Elyse's student spent the majority of the day in the Safe Place with a paraprofessional, but occasionally joined the class for morning meeting and specials (e.g., art, physical education). Elyse and I spoke about

this student during our second interview (Elyse, interview, 6/10/19), in which she expressed frustration at his not being in the room. At the same time, she also felt that the school needed an alternative to the Safe Place (which at the time functioned as a space for students exhibiting challenging behaviors). Specifically, she advocated for a self-contained program and or quiet workspace which students could access when they needed a space to work without being distracted by disruptive or dangerous behaviors.

In general, there was an effort on the part of Riverview educators to work toward inclusivity, mixed with a belief that "pushing-in" services was an obvious way to enact it. Over the course of the study however, educators indicated that marking places within the classroom for service provision was not only insufficient, but potentially harmful. Elements of Sarah's, Elyse's, and Meghan's instruction during phase two suggested a move toward more student empowerment and increased flexibility in enacting inclusive pedagogy.

This enactment and the subsequent interruption of the dominant narrative of inclusion as placement, was a growing counternarrative of inclusivity as empowered belonging. Although participants' actual discussions of inclusivity were almost exclusively linked with place, their pedagogical practices suggested a more flexible stance on inclusivity. Several participants broke with instructional norms in an effort to empower students to choose where, how, and with whom they engaged in learning. Furthermore, classroom boundaries were largely permeable for all students, with spaces across the building made available and accessible to students for a range of purposes. For example, in Alex's tour of the school, he expressed the commitment to this permeability, highlighting spaces across the building (e.g., the Safe Place, the common areas) where students could go any time they needed a quiet space to think, or a break from the

stimulus to the classroom (Alex, interview, 10/11/19). In this sense, inclusivity at Riverview was often about movement, as students traversed boundaries and spaces within the school.

The development and maintenance of learning communities was a persistent focus of participants. Meghan's pedagogy consistently drew on the idea that learning as a social and collaborative process. Rather than rely on the structure of the format (e.g., a 15 minute focus lesson followed by independent work time), she worked with students as a group until she felt that they had a strong understanding of the concepts. In addition, she established a climate where public mistakes (at the SmartBoard) resulted not in shame, but in peer support and collaboration. In doing so, she created the SmartBoard as a site of learning, rather than a site for students to demonstrate expertise. Similarly, Elyse and Sarah's emphasis on book groups based on interest rather than reading level suggested that their emphasis was on providing opportunities for all students to be involved and participate in the learning of the group – not only those who could access the text through traditional reading/decoding. Thus, while educators sorted students into learning groups the sorting was not reliant upon an ability or performance-based ranking process.

In addition, subtle acts of resistance (Broderick et al., 2012; Schlessinger, 2013) emerged in educators pedagogy in phases one and two. Elyse and Rachel showed a willingness to resist the whole-group/workshop paradigm as a preferred method of instruction, thus normalizing smaller working groups and blurring the line between children who received support from a different adult (e.g., special educator, paraprofessional), and those who worked with the classroom teacher. In addition, Sarah openly resisted a paraprofessional's insistence on pulling students with IEPs to a small group setting, recognizing that such public marking of difference in a particular place disempowered and stigmatized students.

As with ability in chapter 4, the findings presented in chapter 5 suggest the persistence of a dominant narrative of inclusivity as conceptually and practically bound to the placement and service provision of students with labeled disabilities. Yet despite the dichotomization of inclusion as a push-in or pull-out phenomenon and the challenges in transition, a powerful pedagogical counternarrative of inclusivity emerged. An emphasis on reimagining instructional methods to empower student learning, and opening up classroom boundaries to allow for autonomous freedom of movement propelled the practice of inclusion far beyond that of geography.

Significance

Taken together, these findings suggest that the Discourses and pedagogical performances taken up by educators applying UDL significantly shape and are shaped by schoolwide narratives of ability and inclusivity. Specifically, attempts to de-privilege the primacy of ability, particularly as an individual attribute, suggests that enactment of UDL taken up in community emphasizes collaborative learning processes that are consistent with goals of DSE to promote inclusivity (Baglieri, 2016; Ferguson & Nusbaum, 2012). In addition, the emphasis on student empowerment and establishing spaces of belonging across the school and classroom is reminiscent of UDL's foundations in UD: "Universal Design is not about buildings, it is about building - building community, building better pedagogy, building opportunities for agency. It is a way to move" (Dolmage, 2017, p. 118). Dolmage also emphasizes that UD should remind educators that disability is always present, and should be at the forefront of our planning and design. Thus, UDL's emphasis on avoiding "retrofits" and Riverview educators 'attempts to minimize environmental barriers are a step in the direction of creating practices consistent with both UDL and DSE.

Still, this work also highlights a significant inconsistency between UDL and DSE: the difference in criticality. This was perhaps most obvious in the Discourse of smartness that persisted among Riverview educators. Despite educators attempts to reimagine their pedagogy and remove instructional barriers, a pervasive emphasis on smartness as a desirable property (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011) that, for some educators, failed to disrupt the primacy of ability as an individual trait that could be determined and organized. Also troubling was the seemingly unbreakable bond between Discourses of inclusivity and placed service provision. That educators consistently linked inclusivity with disability (as framed in special education), and did not conceptualize their pedagogical performances is concerning. While DSE offers an interpretation of inclusivity that accounts for transformative pedagogy, educators in this study did not explicitly connect UDL with either inclusivity or transformative pedagogy. While their understanding of inclusivity was admirable and aimed at increasing belonging, it sheds light on the ways the language of UDL might more explicitly advance a transformative agenda for inclusivity.

This study has also illustrated the promise of CDA as a methodological tool for analyzing the mutually informing discourses of ability and inclusivity. While each of these concepts is informed by a significant amount of literature that addresses problematic discourses within schools, only a limited number have used CDA to investigate how teachers take up and challenge these discourses. As discussed in chapter 3, CDA allows researchers to examine how people use language to build and destroy things (e.g., relationships, systems, identities), as well as say things and do things (e.g., link students to teachers, mark students as different) in a particular social context (Gee, 2014). The use of CDA in this study allowed me to analyze how participants construct narratives of ability and inclusivity, while simultaneously being shaped by these narratives. In addition, participants' Discourse allowed me to identify ways that participants

pushed against dominant narratives and constructed counternarratives that highlighted tensions in their practice, and their attempts to enact UDL and inclusive pedagogy.

Additionally, this work was significant in its foregrounding of practitioner perspectives on implementing UDL. Unfortunately, these voices are often absent from literature on UDL practice, and researchers have called for more studies that highlight these perspectives (Lowrey et al., 2017). My interest in learning about inclusivity and ability from educators is deeply personal; as an elementary and special education teacher I was often expected to adopt "best practices" or new educational initiatives (e.g., Differentiated Instruction). Yet I cannot recall ever being asked how I felt about these programs, or about my experiences with them. UDL's increased momentum as an evolving pedagogical framework, combined with its links to education policy suggests that it is not going away; thus, it is crucial for those who study and implement UDL to learn from teachers who are implementing it in a variety of contexts.

Implications

The findings discussed in this dissertation have implications for the continued development of UDL in theory and practice, and its alignment with Disability Studies in Education. In terms of theory, this study suggests that there is work to be done in developing UDL as a critical framework for interrogating norms of ability, inclusivity, and the placement of students with labeled disabilities. This includes examining school structures that continue to sort and rank students, and spatially mark them as different. In addition, there is room for further analysis of the language of UDL, particularly its neuroscientific underpinnings, and how teachers' adopt and engage with this Discourse. In terms of practice, there was evidence that a culture of flexibility consistent with UDL offered teachers a chance to push against pedagogical norms and empower students in their learning. In addition, the freedom of movement afforded by

multiple sites of learning in classrooms and across the school emphasized the permeability of boundaries. Within classrooms, the privileging of learning in community disrupted the primacy of individual ability and achievement. These implications are discussed in more detail below.

Implications for Theory

The Language of UDL: Going Beyond Contesting Disability Labels

In recent years, scholars have argued that "a commitment to UDL is seen as part of the point of DSE-based education itself" (Mitchell et al., 2014, p. 310). Indeed, some educators in this study drew on the language of UDL, specifically the Discourses of access and engagement, as a starting point for questioning disability identification. Although UDL is not only about accessing content, this concept proved to be an important entry point for educators as they reconsidered student ability. This seemed particularly salient for Elyse and Rachel, who both raised the issue of smartness in discussions of students with labeled disabilities. Each of these educators referenced engaging students in tasks that were either perceived as difficult or disengaging through the use of technology. In each of these instances, these educators attributed smartness to their students who struggled in certain ways. Elyse elevated one boy's smartness in contrast to qualifying his label – "He's a smart boy. He just has a learning disability" (Elyse, interview, 4/17/19). Although Elyse subordinated the child's disability, she simultaneously reinforces smartness as a commodity that exists in relation to its opposite; after all, if someone is smart, a comparatively not-smart person must exist somewhere (Leonardo & Broderick, 2011). Similarly, Rachel acknowledged a student's struggles with literacy, but went on to quickly point out that he was "wicked smart at math" (Rachel, interview, 6/4/19). These utterances indicate that disability is still viewed as negative to the point where these teachers felt the need to compensate for connecting students with a label – even as they questioned that label. Yet DSE

scholars argue that UDL puts educators in position to not only consider disability from the outset, but to consider the ways in which a disabled perspective is beneficial to learning (Dolmage, 2017; Mitchell et al., 2014). While the concepts of UDL may have compelled educators in this study to think more flexibly about how ability and disability are constructed, and what it means to be smart, more explicit interrogation of norms of ability within UDL theory may urge educators to foreground the experience of disability as an important perspective in instructional and curricular design (Dolmage, 2017).

Variability: Incompatible with Tiered Systems

Another core component of UDL theory is the concept of variability (Meyer et al., 2014), not only across a group of students, but in terms of individual strengths and weaknesses within a particular content area[30] (Rose, 2017). The concept of the "myth" of the average brain (Meyer et al., 2014; Rose, 2017) can be somewhat aligned with what DSE scholars have called the "myth of the normal child" (Baglieri et al., 2011, p. 2122). While UDL's emphasis on neuro-variability highlights the fact that there is no such thing as an average brain around which to design a set of learning tasks or learning environment, DSE scholars push against the idea of a normal child around which to structure schools (Baglieri et al., 2011). In theory, these concepts together promote the design of a flexible learning environment in which variability can thrive (Meyer et al., 2014). Yet in reality, *ability* is determined scientifically and organized into efficient systems. In the current study, the primary example of such a system was evident in how Riverview operationalized RTI. Students were divided into tiers, became labeled as their tiers, and provided with instructional interventions in order to remediate them toward grade-level performance

[30] This refers to Todd Rose's work in which he points out the many dimensions of learning. For example, students are not simply good at math, but display different strengths and weaknesses related to math skills such as number sense, problem-solving, geometric reasoning, etc.

norms. Yet if we look to UDL theory these performance norms should hold little weight because they are determined through single modes of assessment, and are accompanied by a discourse that ranks students by numbers (e.g., tier 1, 2, 3) or letters (e.g., literacy benchmarks) in an ability hierarchy.

In addition, as has been suggested by other scholars (e.g., Dolmage, 2014; 2017), UDL's emphasis on variability has the potential to minimize the lived reality of disability, particularly within a school context that privileges ability and normalcy. Several educators in this study pointed to the fact that UDL was not about students with disabilities; it was about all kids (Alex, interview; 10/11/19; Elyse, interview, 4/17/19; Sarah, interview, 3/28/19). While the idea of a framework that advances the learning needs of all students is admirable, it also fails to critically recognize the ways that students with disabilities, as well as other minoritized identities (e.g., raced, gendered) have faced many forms educational injustice (Alim et al., 2017; Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016). On the one hand, an emphasis on all students may compel educators to consider the multiple ways students may succeed and struggle – even without demarcated boundaries of gifted or disabled labels; on the other hand, the experiences of those labeled as or who identify as disabled get lost in the shuffle. Universal Design, and UDL can and should remind educators that "disability is something that is always part of our worldview" and that empowers them to design flexible pedagogical environments (Dolmage, 2017, p. 118).

UDL, Neuroscience, and the Primacy of Medical Knowledge

The concept of neuro-variability that is so foundational to UDL theory also runs the risk of embracing a medicalized understanding of learning. In some sense, it is easy to understand the reliance of UDL theory on neuroscience: it is beholden to multiple masters. While its roots remain grounded in educational research and practice, UDL's endorsement in federal policy

(e.g., the Every Student Succeeds Act) virtually necessitates some language around scientific validity or evidence-based practice. Yet it is these types of language that speak back to special education's positivist paradigm of diagnosing deficiencies in individuals – their brains, the way they learn, the way they move (Baglieri et al., 2011; Baglieri, Valle, Connor, & Gallagher, 2011; Connor, Gallagher, and Ferri, 2011). UDL is often conflated with special education due to its emphasis on inclusivity, and several participants in this study (e.g., Alex, Elyse) admitted to initially thinking it was a special education initiative. The emphasis on neuroscience resonates with educators; in this study, Sarah in particular felt that the "brain science" background increased UDL's legitimacy, particularly in comparison with the wealth of other initiatives often passed down to teachers (Sarah, interview, 3/28/19). In an environment where scientific knowledge (e.g., test scores) are already often privileged in making educational and placement decisions, an emphasis on medicalized knowledge may work against, rather than with a move toward inclusive pedagogy.

Implications for practice

Pedagogical Flexibility Yields a Culture of Creative Design

At Riverview, instructional flexibility was expected and valued. Although the school used certain "boxed" curricula as decided by the school board (e.g., Engage New York Math), administrators at the school encouraged teachers – particularly veteran teachers – to use the curricula as a guide for consistency rather than a script (Meghan, interview, 11/6/19). While Alex expressed a hope that all students in Springdale Falls would have a similar learning experience in each grade, he emphasized that this meant the same opportunities to engage with materials and content; in other words, teachers were expected to exercise creative autonomy in designing lessons (Alex, interview, 12/8/19).

Thus, while there were certain cultural pedagogical norms in play at Riverview (e.g., the whole group and workshop instruction models), there was evidence that educators felt free to deviate from this. Further, even within this structure, educators took the opportunity to empower students to take ownership of their learning by opting in to extra learning sessions, as was the case in Sarah's class. The UDL guidelines represent this empowerment as part of expert learning, in which students are purposeful and motivated, resourceful and knowledgeable, and strategic and goal-directed (CAST, 2018). During the UDL team's instructional rounds process, team members observed one another's classrooms, noting multiple ways in which changes in instructional methods allowed students the opportunity to internalize their learning process and make decisions for themselves (UDL team meeting, 10/4/19). In addition, this flexibility was made possible by a culture of trust, in which teachers did not feel surveilled or threated by peer or administrator observation, but rather supported in becoming better (UDL team meeting, 9/26/19).

Flexible Geographies Can Normalize Movement

As discussed in chapter 5, classroom boundaries were permeable for students as well as adults. Students rarely acknowledged my entrance or exit from the classrooms I observed, and the travel of paraprofessionals, special education teachers, and other educational professionals (e.g., interns) in and out of the room was expected. In addition, students moved with ease in and out of the classroom. During phase one, there were some instances of students resisting being pulled out of the room, and in those cases special education teachers often tried to provide support in the classroom if it was not a violation of the student's IEP (Elyse, 6/10/19). Yet during this phase students' movement was marked, either by verbal reminders from the teacher to "go to services" or by being summoned by a teacher while in the classroom (Rachel, fieldnotes,

3/28/19). In phase two however, as pull-out instruction became increasingly rare, students' movement in and out of the classroom became normalized. Students were free to visit the Safe Place, to take motor breaks, or to work with a group in the common area. In one instance, a student in Sarah's class (who did not have a labeled disability) visited another 5th grade during a motor break, and ended up staying for and participating in a focus lesson (Sarah, interview, 11/6/19). Such flexibility offered opportunities for empowered movement not only for students who may have had an accommodation, but for many students who wanted the opportunity for this type of autonomy, but had not been given it in the past. This movement was supported by common areas in each wing for group work, and bulletin boards and posters on the wall to support students in calming or refocusing exercises. Further, this flexibility served to blur the boundaries of the classroom as a privileged, unilateral site of learning.

The concept of normalized movement occurred within the classroom as well. In each of the classrooms I visited there were options for flexible seating, though these were regulated in very different ways by each participant. Both Elyse and Sarah were extremely flexible in allowing students to work where they chose, and I rarely saw students remaining at their seats. At times, when this became a source of distraction or lack of productivity the teachers would step in. This type of movement, in classrooms and across the school, illustrates the potential of such flexibility for re-imagining inclusive education that transgresses traditional school borders and spaces (Oyler, 2011).

Conceptualizing Inclusivity as Community Reframes Ability as an Individual Attribute

Narratives of community and belonging emerged around both ability and inclusivity at Riverview. Several participants intentionally structured activities within the classroom to build on partnerships, learning groups, or cooperative exercises. These pedagogical decisions served to

both establish the classroom as a place of belonging, and to reframe ability as constructed within a community. To be clear, students were sometimes expected to work independently; however, during lessons and often during work time students were encouraged to turn and talk to a partner on an almost daily basis in all participant classrooms, or permitted to work with peers on class assignments. Additionally, as explained in chapter 5, in Meghan's class in particular the class collaborated to understand concepts being worked out on the SmartBoard. Intentional involvement of all students was a key motivation for teachers, and this involvement allowed students to meaningfully participate in lessons and conversations.

Belonging is a foundational attribute of Universal Design (Dolmage, 2017), inclusive education, and recent research suggests that it is central to enactment of UDL (Lowrey, Hollingshead, & Howery, 2017). The ways in which study participants designed their environments to create a belonging echoed schoolwide messages of welcoming and positivity that decorated the hallways, spaces for students to collaborate with peers or talk with adults, and were reinforced in the school's emphasis on inclusivity as a philosophy. Undergirding these messages of geographical and social belonging however, was an openness to the idea that ability is not a sole attribute of an individual. In several participants' classrooms, there was evidence that ability was constructed through collaboration and peer-supported struggle. In this sense, linking UDL with inclusive education offers an alternative to special education's more individualistic approach to student learning.

Implications for Teacher Education and Professional Learning

UDL in Practice

A persistent concern of teachers in this study, particularly during phase one, was what UDL should look like. Teachers wanted examples of UDL in practice, and craved feedback on

the steps that they took as they applied a UDL lens. The instructional rounds process resonated with participants, and has the potential to be a natural way to link UDL practice at the preservice level. Research has suggested that rounds are an innovative approach to supporting preservice teachers in their clinical (practicum) placements (Reagan, Roegman, & Goodwin, 2017). Bringing a model of UDL instructional rounds to preservice education offers a promising way for beginning teachers to practice designing with UDL at the beginning of their careers. In addition, engagement with rounds as a form of professional learning for in-service educators can provide a teachers with support from their colleagues to address problems of practice or focus on addressing specific UDL guidelines.

UDL as Content and Pedagogy

As discussed in the literature review, teacher educators have advocated for more UDL focused content in preservice curricula. This makes sense, not only to be consistent with federal policy, but also because many states are endorsing UDL in their public schools – as was the case in this study. But teacher education needs to not only incorporate UDL into its content; it must embed UDL in its pedagogy. Building on the recommendations of participants in this study, the more educators can see examples of UDL in practice, the more likely they are to adopt it as part of their own practice.

In terms of specific content, the results of this study suggest that some elements of UDL theory resonated more strongly than others. The concept of barriers within the environment, and provision of access were consistently endorsed by full and partial participants. Yet the situation of disability within the environment rather than the learner was not explicitly acknowledged. Rather, participants seemed willing to identify disability as "difference," which maintains a stigmatizing effect and fails to disrupt the notion of disability as an individual, pathological

deficiency (Connor & Gable, 2013). UDL professional learning would benefit from more extensively and intentionally unpacking definitions of ability and disability, and how these definitions inform the enactment of UDL.

Finally, a critical tenet of UDL is to avoid retrofitting of curricula, methods, and environments. Retrofits may have short-term benefits, but they do not support long term change (Dolmage, 2017). By introducing preservice teachers to UDL theory and practice early in their careers, teacher educators can support them in take risks a the design stage of lesson and curriculum planning.

Implications for Universal Design for Learning

In addition to offering implications *of* UDL for educational theory and practice at multiple levels, this study also sheds light on implications *for* UDL. Recent conceptual work has called for a more critical approach in UDL research, and the findings from this study underscore the need for a research agenda that moves beyond UDL interventions and engages with recent critiques (e.g., Alim et al., 2017; Baglieri, 2016; Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016).

As discussed previously, UDL offers a potentially transformative lens to educational research. UDL theory problematizes how structures and practices within the learning environment, such as instructional methods, materials, and assessments, actively disable learners (Meyer et al., 2014). While this is arguable a jumping off point for more targeted critiques of how disability constructs and defines ability within schools and society (Baglieri et al., 2011), UDL theory does not make the necessary leap of interrogating the location of disability in schools, attending in particular to how and why disability has been minoritized or silenced in the curriculum (Connor & Gable, 2013; Erevelles, 2005). Likewise, the findings of this study suggested that while participants were willing to alter their instruction and environments,

particularly in the interest of access. While participants were willing to question certain aspects of their methods (e.g., heavy reliance on reading and writing modalities), they used disability as an explanatory framework for understanding difference. In other words, their changes allowed access for students with disabilities or difficulties, but did not engage with what this meant in terms of more sweeping changes to curriculum and instruction.

Indeed, UDL theory seems to assume a neutrality of the curriculum itself. While a focus on developing expert learners, to some extent, de-privileges certain types of expertise (e.g., print-based skills, performance on standardized assessments), it falls short of questioning what it is students are being asked to learn. The predominantly white, male, able-bodied narrative that continues to serve a normalizing function in American curriculum (Erevelles, 2005) is neither acknowledged nor disrupted by UDL theory. Further, in calling for elimination of stereotypes and increased collaboration, the UDL guidelines also need to acknowledge that "schools are fraught with ableist, racist, and classist practices" (Waitoller & King Thorius, p. 376). UDL theory must go beyond trying to make existing curriculum relevant to students, as suggested in the guidelines, and compel educators to ask if the curriculum is reflective of students, and empower them to make changes if it is not. Educators like Elyse, who prioritizes engagement, or Sarah and Meghan who put a high value on belonging, while empowered to adjust their instructional methods, did not seem to connect UDL with making substantive curricular changes.

On a personal note, one of the primary aspects of UDL that first resonated with me was the willingness of researchers – specifically those from CAST – to revisit and revise the framework. UDL theory, as well as the UDL guidelines (CAST, 2018), continue to iterate and evolve with the changing times. My hope is that this dissertation might inform the next, more critical wave of UDL research, as well as further development of the UDL guidelines.

Limitations

There are some important limitations to recognize in this work. First, this case study offers a description of narratives of ability and inclusivity in a school that was, at the time, in the midst of a UDL professional learning program. While the Discourse and theory of UDL may have informed some aspects of educators' instruction, the evolution of educators' pedagogy over the course of the study is not causally linked with UDL professional learning. Second, the full participants in this study were all individuals who were highly invested in UDL practice; four of the five had expressed an explicit commitment to inclusive education. Although these participants often took on leadership roles within the school, their practices are not necessarily indicative of all of those happening at Riverview. Alex, Meghan, and Elyse's involvement with UDL Discourse and practice was more direct than other educators due to their membership on the UDL team and participation in professional learning events. Third, because I was not able to secure consent from several teachers at Riverview, I was not able to conduct CDAs of grade-level meetings, which would have allowed me to present a more nuanced portrait of the school's culture and identities of grades level teams. Finally, while this research raises some important questions about how UDL and narratives of ability and inclusivity interact, the limited number of participants and specific social, geographical, and demographical context of this study limit its generalizability to other schools, including those in the NUDLO program.

Future Research

The findings from this study raise a number of issues that would benefit from exploration in future research. First, as suggested in the previous sections, researchers must continue to seek out practitioner perspectives as they enact UDL. Rather than focusing on effectiveness or outcomes of UDL as an intervention for students with labeled disabilities (e.g., Dymond et al.,

2008), more research is needed on the experiences of teachers as they negotiate UDL as an inclusive pedagogical framework (e.g., Lowrey et al., 2017).

In addition, while UDL's connection with and reframing of ability is easily discernible in its emphasis on disabling curricula and environments, research has yet to address the ways in which disability (or disablement) is linked with race, particularly within the realm of special education (Annamma, Connor, & Ferri, 2016; Harry & Klingner, 2006; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011) and how this plays out in relation to UDL theory and practice (Waitoller and King Thorius, 2016). That UDL research has been virtually silent on this issue, save for positioning increasing student differences as a "problem" to solve (see Moore, Smith, Hollingshead, & Wojcik, 2018 for an assessment of UDL's use in higher education). The theory behind UDL, as I have mentioned previously, insists on reframing disability as situated within the learning environment, rather than the student. If we accept this argument, it is necessary to explore how UDL might address larger inequities that exist in schools, due to the fact that ability and disability are so deeply tied to the experiences of minoritized students on the basis race and socioeconomic status. An exploration of how Disability and Critical Race Studies, "DisCrit" might offer an analytical framework for investigated minoritized students and teachers experiences with UDL is warranted.

As noted in chapters 4 and 5, this study does not include perspectives of students. While maps created by students and my observations of the learning environment offer some indication of how students respond to pedagogy, further research that explicitly foregrounds the experiences of students would strengthen this work. I have presented narratives of ability and inclusivity put forth, shaped, and maintained by a variety of adults at Riverview, but it is not clear how students engage with these narratives. An understanding of how students experience

systems such as WIN, or the benchmarking process may shed light on how they perceive ability in schools. Further, understanding how students experience spaces within the school, through maps and tours of the environment would provide a clear picture of whether students feel a sense of empowerment or belonging that seems to be goals of the schools' educators. In addition, probing students' perspectives on specific aspects of UDL-inspired pedagogy would also be informative for educators and researchers as they continue to refine the framework.

Finally, as I have discussed previously in this chapter, specific aspects of UDL Discourse resonated with educators at Riverview. Specifically, concepts of access and engagement opened the door for teachers to question traditional definitions of ability. A CDA of the Discourse of UDL, including its medical roots and suggestions for practice, may shed light on what the kinds of systems the framework is constructing. In addition, a CDA may be helpful to UDL researchers as they continue to develop and refine the UDL guidelines.

Conclusion

This research aimed to explore the problem of how educators' attempts to enact inclusive pedagogy are influenced by dominant social, historical, and institutional narratives of ability and inclusivity - even within a context that espouses a philosophy of inclusion and is applying UDL as an inclusive pedagogical framework. These narratives encompass dominant (potentially exclusionary) instructional practices, the organization of social and pedagogical spaces, hierarchical systems of sorting students on the basis of ability, and discourses that reinforces prevailing norms of ability and belonging. This dissertation has highlighted how educators' process of taking up UDL begins to disrupt dominant narratives of ability as a static, individual attribute, as well as narratives that position inclusivity as a function of special education service provision. At the same time, these findings suggest that contesting these dominant historical

narratives is a messy process, and hierarchical systems embedded in schools significantly constrain attempts to enact more transformative interpretations of ability and take up a critical discourse of ability.

Powerful narratives of ability and inclusivity are constructed and countered by educators in an elementary school implementing Universal Design for Learning. While traditional notions of ability and the "normal" child (Baglieri et al., 2011) continue to define the contours of disability and difference, there is evidence that educators are willing to push against these boundaries, and are spurred by Discourses of access, engagement, and belonging. Further, although the privileged knowledge of test scores and medical definitions of ability remain powerful forces in determining and organizing student ability, the elevation of a Discourse around intangible skills such as effort, confidence, and decision-making were evident at Riverview. Further research on the language of UDL, and how it might intensify its support of teachers to situate "problems" outside of individual learners is warranted. Finally, despite inclusivity's persistent linkage to issues of placement and service provision in schools, this study has indicated that inclusivity can be reimagined as empowered belonging that educators enact through the design of the school environment, flexible pedagogy, and autonomous movement. In essence, UDL has the potential to signal a paradigmatic shift in how ability and inclusivity play out in schools, but more explicit engagement with these indefinable forces is essential to making this happen.

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APPENDIX A
Publications from the Literature Review (chapter 2)

Literature Strand	Title	Author(s) & Year
Disability Studies in Education (DSE)	"I Don't Think I'm the Right Person For That": Theoretical and Institutional Questions about a Combined Credential Program	Young, K.S. (2008).
DSE	Mind the gap: Destabilizing dominant discourses and beliefs about learning disabilities in a Bachelor of Education program	Iannacci, L., & Graham, B. (2010).
DSE	Awakening Teachers Strategies for Deconstructing Disability and Constructing Ability	Jones, M. M. (2011)
DSE	The Impact of Labelling and Segregation on Adolescent Literacy Learning	McCloskey, E. (2011)
DSE	Pedagogic Voicing: The Struggle for Participation in an Inclusive Classroom.	Naraian, S. (2011)
DSE	Seeking Transparency: The Production of an Inclusive Classroom Community.	Naraian, S. (2011)
DSE	'Speaking'deficit into (or out of) existence: how language constrains classroom teachers' knowledge about instructing diverse learners.	Paugh & Dudley-Marling (2011)
DSE	Teacher counter-narratives: Transgressing and 'restorying' disability in education.	Broderick, A. A., Hawkins, G., Henze, S., Mirasol-Spath, C., Pollack-Berkovits, R., Clune, H. P., &Steel, C. (2012)
DSE	Preservice teachers listen to families of students with disabilities and learn a disability studies stance.	Sauer, J. S., & Kasa, C. (2012).
DSE	How We Label Students with Disabilities: A Framework of Language Use in an Urban School District in the United States.	Back, L. T., Keys, C. B., McMahon, S. D., & O'Neill, K. (2016)
DSE	To the maximum extent appropriate: determining success and the least restrictive environment for a student with autism spectrum disorder	McCloskey, E. (2016)
DSE	Happy places, horrible times, and scary learners: affective performances and sticky objects in inclusive classrooms	Naraian, S., & Khoja-Moolji, S. (2016)
DSE	When Theory Meets the" Reality of Reality": Reviewing the Sufficiency of the Social Model of Disability as a Foundation for Teacher Preparation for Inclusive Education	Naraian, S., & Schlessinger, S. (2017)

DSE	Developing and Maintaining Inclusive Identities: Understanding Student Teaching through de Certeau's Framework of Tactics and Strategies.	Rood, C.E., & Ashby, C. (2017)
DSE	Teacher preparation as interruption or disruption? Understanding identity (re)constitution for critical inclusion	Siuty, M. B. (2019)
DSE	Prospective mathematics teachers' engagement with inclusive equity: An exploratory case study in anti-ableist sociopolitical grounding	Tan, P. & Padilla, A., (2019)
DSE	Losing hope for change: socially just and disability studies in education educators' choice to leave public schools.	Rood, C. E., & Ashby, C. (2020)
Universal Design for Learning (UDL)	Using a Participatory Action Research Approach to Create a Universally Designed Inclusive High School Science Course: A Case Study	Dymond, S. K., Renzaglia, A., Rosenstein, A., Chun, E. J., Banks, R. A., Niswander, V., & Gilson, C. L. (2006)
UDL	The Three Block Model of Universal Design for Learning (UDL): Engaging students in inclusive education	Katz, J. (2013)
UDL	An Exploratory Study of Universal Design for Teaching Chemistry to Students With and Without Disabilities	King-Sears, M. E., Johnson, T. M., Berkeley, S., Weiss, M.P., Peters-Burton, E.E., Evmenova, A.S. ., Menditto, A., & Hursh, J. C. . (2015)
UDL	Providing Access for Students with Moderate Disabilities: An Evaluation of a Professional Development Program at a Catholic Elementary School	Cunningham, M. P., Huchting, K. K. ., Fogarty, D., & Graf, V. (2017)
UDL	Creating Digital Science Texts: An Opportunity for Teacher Candidates to Understand and Implement Universal Design for Learning	Grande, M., & Whalen, J.Z. . (2017)
UDL	A Tale of Two Courses: Exploring Teacher Candidates' Translation of Science and Special Education Methods Instruction into Inclusive Science Practices	Kahn, S., Pigman, R., & Ottley, J. (2017)
UDL	A Closer Look: Examining Teachers' Language Around UDL, Inclusive Classrooms, and Intellectual Disability	Lowrey, K. A., Hollingshead, A., & Howery, K. (2017)
UDL	More Than One Way: Stories of UDL and Inclusive Classrooms	Lowrey, K. A., Hollingshead, A., Howery, K., & Bishop, J. B. (2017)

UDL	Going Deep: Leveraging Universal Design for Learning to Engage All Learners in Rich Disciplinary Thinking in ELA	Gravel, J. (2018)
UDL	Pre-service Teachers' Beliefs: Impact of Training in Universal Design for Learning	Lanterman, C. S., & Applequist, K.(2018)
UDL	Including Individuals With Disabilities in UDL Framework Implementation: Insights From Administrators: Administrator Insights on UDL	Lowrey, K. A., & Smith, S. J. (2018)
UDL	Barriers With Implementing a Universal Design for Learning Framework	Scott, L. A. (2018)
UDL	Engaging Preservice Teachers in Universal Design for Learning Lesson Planning	Owiny, R. L., Hollingshead, A., Barrio, B., & Stoneman, K. (2019)
UDL	Assessing teachers' knowledge, readiness, and needs to implement Universal Design for Learning in classrooms in Saudi Arabia	Alquraini, T. A., & Rao, S. M. (2020)
Social geography	Children's socio-spatial (re)production of disability within primary school playgrounds	Holt, L. (2007)
Social geography	Physical and Social Organization of Space in a Combined Credential Programme: Implications for Inclusion	Young, K. S. (2008)
Social geography	The geographies of inclusion of students with disabilities in an ordinary school	Ngcobo, J., & Muthukrishna, N. (2011)
Social geography	Institutional separation in schools of education: Understanding the functions of space in general and special education teacher preparation	Young, K. S. (2011)
Social geography	Looking through the learning disability lens: inclusive education and the learning disability embodiment	Goodfellow, A. (2012)
Social geography	Special units for young people on the autistic spectrum in mainstream schools: sites of normalisation, abnormalisation, inclusion, and exclusion	Holt, L., Lea, J., & Bowlby, S. (2012)
Social geography	Spatializing Student Learning to Reimagine the 'Place'of Inclusion	Naraian, S. (2016)
Social geography	"Everyone knows me …. I sort of like move about": The friendships and encounters of young people with Special Educational Needs in different school settings	Holt, L., Bowlby, S., & Lea, J. (2017)
Social geography	Inclusion Gatekeepers: The Social Production of Spatial Identities in Special Education	Siuty, M.B. (2019)
Social geography	Same As It Ever Was: The Nexus of Race, Ability, and Place in One Urban School District	White, J., Li, S., Ashby, C., Ferri, B., Wang, Q., Bern, P., & Cosier, M. (2019)

Appendix B

Letter of Approval from the University of New Hampshire IRB

University *of* New Hampshire

Research Integrity Services, Service Building
51 College Road, Durham, NH 03824-3585
Fax: 603-862-3564

18-Feb-2019

Fornauf, Beth
Education Dept, Morrill Hall
2 Nighthawk Dr
York, ME 03909

IRB #: 8023
Study: Indefinable Forces: How Teachers Negotiate Narratives of Ability While Applying Universal Design for Learning
Approval Date: 14-Feb-2019

The Institutional Review Board for the Protection of Human Subjects in Research (IRB) has reviewed and approved the protocol for your study as Exempt as described in Title 45, Code of Federal Regulations (CFR), Part 46, Subsection 104(d). Approval is granted to conduct your study as described in your protocol.

Researchers who conduct studies involving human subjects have responsibilities as outlined in the attached document, *Responsibilities of Directors of Research Studies Involving Human Subjects.* (This document is also available at http://unh.edu/research/irb-application-resources.) Please read this document carefully before commencing your work involving human subjects.

Note: IRB approval is separate from UNH Purchasing approval of any proposed methods of paying study participants. Before making any payments to study participants, researchers should consult with their BSC or UNH Purchasing to ensure they are complying with institutional requirements. If such institutional requirements are not consistent with the confidentiality or anonymity assurances in the IRB-approved protocol and consent documents, the researcher may need to request a modification from the IRB.

Upon completion of your study, please complete the enclosed Exempt Study Final Report form and return it to this office along with a report of your findings.

If you have questions or concerns about your study or this approval, please feel free to contact Melissa McGee at 603-862-2005 or melissa.mcgee@unh.edu. Please refer to the IRB # above in all correspondence related to this study. The IRB wishes you success with your research.

For the IRB,

Julie F. Simpson
Director

cc: File
Reagan, Emilie

APPENDIX C

Semi-Structured Interview Protocols

Initial interview

1. Can you show me around your classroom (interject questions during tour as necessary – paying particular attention to why and when certain features/centers were designed, not only their purpose. Also ask about particular patterns – if certain students gravitate toward a particular place).
2. How long have you taught in this classroom?
3. I've visited your class a couple of times but am still learning who the kids are.
    a. Can you think of an event or day that captures who these kids are?
4. How are things changing over the course of this year? Where are students headed? Anyone you're worried about? Anyone who's really made incredible progress?
5. When did you first learn about UDL (teacher ed, PD, etc.)?
6. What was your understanding of UDL at that time?
7. How was UDL framed here?
8. Tell me about why/how you became involved with NH UDL.
9. How would you define UDL?
10. What stands out about UDL (something from a PL event or something specific they've done)?
11. Can you give me an example of a time you've been successful with implementing UDL?
12. How about a time when you experienced a challenge with UDL?

13. How do you think your former students would describe you as a teacher? Your colleagues?

14. How long have you been teaching?

    a. Overall

    b. In this school

    c. At other school in town prior to this year?

15. What grades have you taught?

16. Do you have any other certifications (ECE, specialist, etc.)?

Second Interview (post-observation - ask teacher to bring student artifacts)

Thank you for letting me observe your classroom today.

1. Tell me about the lesson I just saw.

    a. If groups:

        i. How were groups created? How flexible are they?

    b. If a meeting:

        i. Why did you bring everyone to the meeting area?

    c. If independent work:

        i. I noticed you checked in with [student] first. Did he/she need something in particular?

2. Can you talk me through [student's] assignment?

3. Did all of the students get this assignment? (if no, probe as to who did not and why; who made changes and why).

4. What was the [special education teacher/paraprofessional] who came in during this morning's lesson working on?

   a. What is her role during the block?

5. How do you feel about the way special education works here? Has it always worked this way?

6. I noticed that some students left the room for the first half hour this morning. Where did they go?

   a. Which students left? Why? Where did they go? Do they always?

7. What are your thoughts on students leaving the room [for that reason/intervention block]?

Interview #3 (post-observation/stimulated recall)

Thank you for letting me observe your classroom today. I'm going to play a short audio recording of your instruction (play audio clip).

1. What are your thoughts on this?

2. Can you describe the structure of this lesson (e.g., share goal, guided practice, independent practice)?

3. How do you decide when to dismiss students from the rug area?

   i. (If students are grouped following the lesson) – how were the groups created? (Probe for info on flexible or static nature)

   ii. I noticed you checked in with [student] first. Did she/he need something in particular?

4. Can you talk me through how you planned/designed this lesson?

5. What is your take on how students responded to the lesson?

6. Did you make any modifications to this lesson?

7. Did you make any modifications to the assignment?

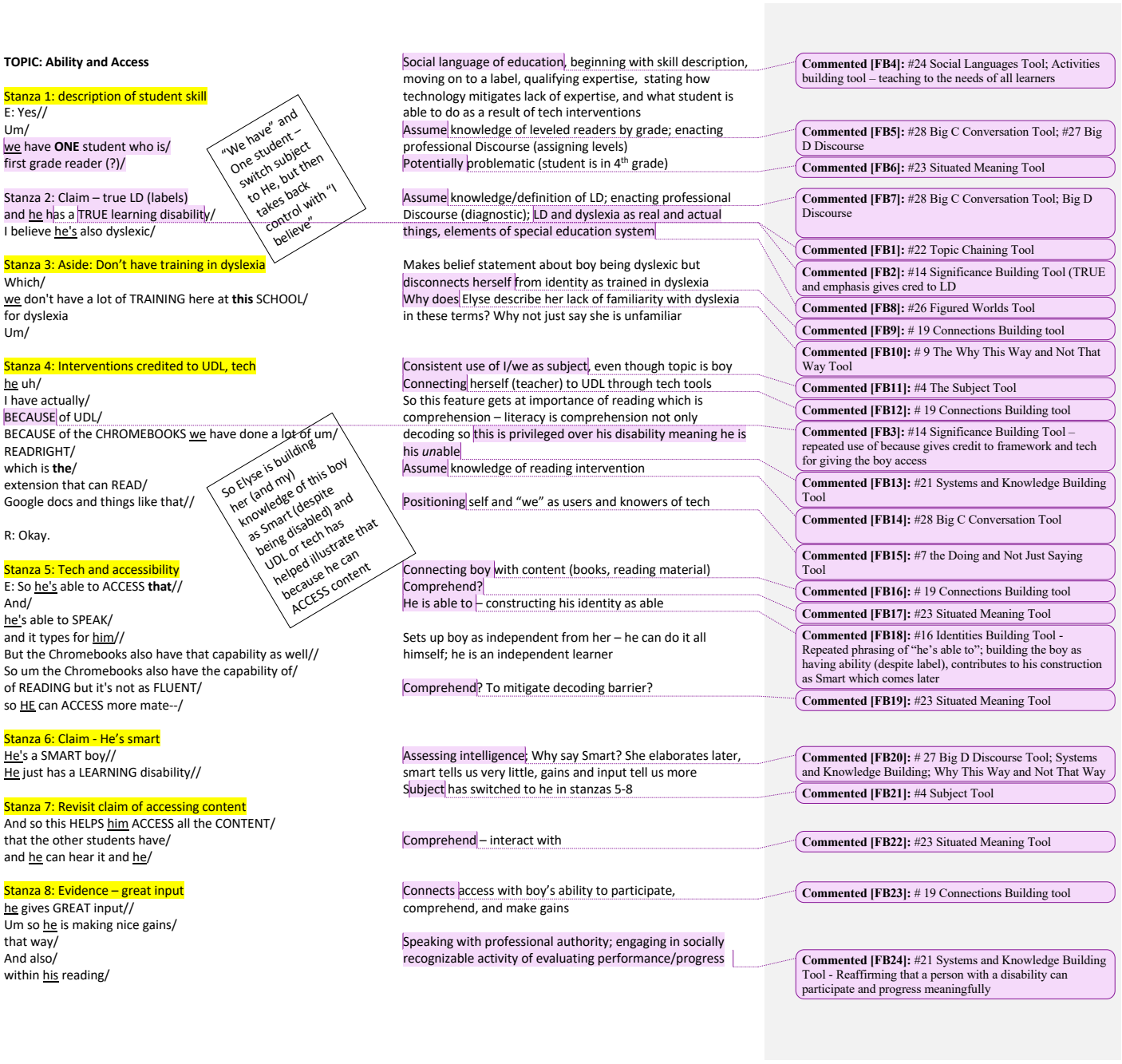
8. I noticed that some students received adult support (other than the teacher – special education teacher or paraprofessional). Are they working on something specific?

    i. Is this an everyday occurrence?

    ii. Is it always these students?

APPENDIX D

Sample Critical Discourse Analysis



APPENDIX E

Sample Table of Developed Themes for Analysis

In what ways do educators in an elementary school implementing Universal Design for Learning construct narratives of ability and inclusivity?

- How do educators in this school articulate notions of ability?
- How, if at all, do educators perform inclusive pedagogy through discourse, instruction, and the organization of the learning environment?

Narratives of ability

Theme	**Participants**	**Source**	**Example**	**Links to UDL**
Ability acquired through access – questioning disability **(Acquiring ability)**	Elyse	Interview 4/17		access – first row of guidelines **(Language of access plants seed of disability as socially constructed)**
	Elyse	Interview 6/10		
	Alex	Team meeting 9/26		
	Sarah	Fieldnotes fall		
Ability as a levels or hierarchy **(Organizing ability)**	Elyse			Anti-UDL?
	Rachel			
	Sarah	Interview 3/28		
Ability emerges? Exists in? intangible characteristics **(Reimagining ability)**	Meghan	Interview 4/17	Effort, confidence, progress	Engagement/affective/ emotive aspects, Dolmage **(Language of engage/belonging de-privileges performance)**
	Elyse	Interview 6/10	Book groups, loved being part of it, belonging	
Ability determined through privileged knowledge (test scores, experience, doctors) **(Determining ability)**	Sarah	Interview 3/28		Anti-UDL but drawing on brain research

Tensions – UDL offers language of access; features of school (hierarchies) too stable to undo? UDL offers "science" of brain research – does this detract from its mission? It is presented to highlight variability, but is it taken up to invoke professional authority? Do competing discourses on ability hinder progress toward inclusivity? So what – UDL has potential to shift discourse on ability and in doing so build inclusive systems. What are Riverview educators building with this Discourse – tension between ability as deterministic and organizable and ability as access and imagination; which narratives are more powerful? The ones backed up by bigger systems (RTI, special education)

Narratives of inclusivity

Theme	Participants	Source	Example	Links to UDL lit
Community building **(Inclusivity as belonging)**	Meghan	Interview 4/17		UD - Dolmage
	Elyse	Interview 6/10		
	Alex	Interview fall	Everyone on the same page	
In the room **(Inclusivity as place)**	Meghan		Push-in	
Pushing back against pulling out		Fieldnotes		
Whole group instruction	Sarah	Fieldnotes	Alayna	
			Whole-group, differentiation	
	Meghan	Maps	Where I go, where I learn examples	
	Sarah, Meghan	Interviews		
	Meghan, Sarah, Elyse	Interviews	Self-selection	
Room for Flexibility **(Inclusivity as meeting student needs)**	Elyse, Rachel	Interviews	Flexible or small groups	
	Meghan	Fieldnotes	Tiers	
	Rachel	Interviews	Tier system	Consistent and inconsistent – no average, but rank and sort
	4th/5th teams	Fieldnotes	CICO	
Permeable boundaries **(Inclusivity as movement)**		Fieldnotes		Flexibility
		Maps		
	Sarah	Interview (fall)	"D", "A" students	
	Alex	Tour	Safe place	

Tensions – inclusivity as place "in the room" defines sites of learning, marks students in a particular way; inclusivity as meeting needs perpetuates hierarchies (tier system); inclusivity as belonging – everyone belongs but not everyone is the same.