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The Perceptions of Scaffolding on Literacy Instruction for Middle School Students with Learning Disabilities during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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THE PERCEPTIONS OF SCAFFOLDING ON LITERACY INSTRUCTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

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ABSTRACT

THE PERCEPTIONS OF SCAFFOLDING ON LITERACY INSTRUCTION FOR MIDDLE SCHOOL STUDENTS WITH LEARNING DISABILITIES DURING THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC

Elizabeth De Fantis

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused uncertainty in major aspects of national and global society. This pandemic has had an extreme impact on education. Since March, 2020, the education system has changed drastically. Schools, educators, families, and students are experiencing unprecedented times and are finding a way to navigate and determine the best way to educate students. Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, middle school students, particularly middle school students with learning disabilities have had a difficult time obtaining support for reading/literacy instruction. According to Allington (2011), much of the literacy instruction support is given to elementary school students and middle school students. In addition, middle school students are expected to come to middle school with that knowledge (Vaughn, et al., 2012; Wanzek et al., 2011). Students with learning disabilities benefit from explicit and sequenced instruction. Educators can help students with learning disabilities learn how to use scaffolding materials for managing their assignments. Although there are many challenges for students with learning disabilities in secondary schools; classroom strategies, such as scaffolding, may help students achieve in various locations, including inclusion and self contained classrooms. The following study explored the perceptions of these scaffolding materials, including chunking texts, color coding, graphic organizers, and sentence structures/starters on middle school students with learning disabilities in inclusion and self-contained classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study utilized Deci and

Ryan's self-determination theory as it relates to intrinsic motivation. This qualitative study used case study research and incorporated middle school students' perspectives on scaffolding material used within the content area classrooms. The data collection encompassed an understanding of reasons and opinions about the scaffolding materials by interviewing students with learning disabilities in content area classrooms.

Keywords: Scaffolding, Perceptions, COVID-19

DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to the many individuals that have helped me arrive at this point in my educational journey.

First, I would like to thank my fiancé for giving me the time to complete this dissertation and for being extremely supportive of my journey. Without your support and love, I would not have been able to reach this success.

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CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Problem

Throughout the field of education, special education and general education teachers are providing their diverse students with scaffolding instruction. Scaffolding is additional support given to a student by an instructor in order to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of skills. Teachers choose to scaffold based on students' needs and teachers build upon students' experiences and knowledge as they are learning new skills. This approach allows students to learn content and material through additional support and/or assistance.

In the ever-growing field of reading research, studies focusing on the enhancement of a middle school student's reading achievement are lacking. These studies are lacking because teachers in secondary level schools are forced to focus on content and less on reading instruction (Dulaney, Vaughn, Wexler, Roberts, Barth, Cirino, Romain, Francis, Fletcher, & Denton, 2012; Wanzek, Vaughn, Roberts, & Fletcher, 2011). According to Wanzek et al. (2011), there is a strong need for a more comprehensive investigation into the efficacy of interventions, such as scaffolding, for older students with reading difficulties. The interventions for reading instruction are much more common for elementary school students than for middle school students (Vaughn, et al., 2012; Wanzek et al., 2011). Within these elementary schools, reading instruction is built into the day; however during secondary school instruction, the content that needs to be taught does not allow time for reading instruction.

Additionally, many teachers in the secondary level expect their students to come to them with an appropriate reading level for their grade. Beyond inclusion, resource

rooms, and other special education practices, there is relatively little research on reading interventions, specifically scaffolding, for middle school students with learning disabilities. Therefore, there remains a gap in the current literature regarding appropriate and efficient reading strategies, such as scaffolding, for middle school students.

As students and the curriculum move from Kindergarten to senior year of high school, the emphasis in literacy education shifts from one focus to another. In the younger grades, literacy education is focused on foundations and comprehension while in the older grades literacy education is focused on analysis and evaluation. Some attention is devoted to reading the text in the earlier grades. Making meaning with texts is always the focus, but young children especially need to develop the ability to hear sounds in words, develop sight words, and acquire word recognition strategies (Fitzgerald & Shanahan, 2000). Word repetition in texts reinforces sight word learning. Repeated refrains or phrases also reinforce sight word development, as well as, scaffolding development of a variety of word recognition strategies (Ehri & McCormick, 1998).

Scaffolding material allows students with special needs access to the general education material through various modifications. This access also allows for opportunities that are more equitable for students with special needs. In addition, there is a major emphasis on decoding and general vocabulary in the earlier elementary years. Students in high school move on to a greater emphasis on critical comprehension and spend little time on decoding (Chall, 2014). Although the focus changes from year to year and as the students get older, one constant is that many students with special needs continue to need additional support throughout their educational career. This additional support needs to come from scaffolding instruction.

However, scaffolding instruction should be taken with a degree of flexibility as schools differ when these elements are addressed. In addition, when addressing these stages of reading development, from Kindergarten to high school, the individuality of learners, as well as, the needs of students with disabilities are important to consider. Since some students with disabilities may struggle throughout some of these stages, it is essential for educators and other professionals within the educational field to provide scaffolding support within these important stages.

COVID-19 Pandemic, School Closures, and Impact on Learning

The COVID-19 epidemic has required all K-12 students in the United States into online learning and forced them to miss valuable full-time face-to-face instruction and important social interactions. There is a challenge for educators to figure out how successfully educate their students during this pandemic. While many teachers are struggling, the obstacles experienced by those who teach children and young adults with disabilities are even more difficult. Many of these students with learning disabilities are falling even more behind than their general education peers. Therefore, the exploration of how these changes have impacted the scaffolding instruction will provide an understanding of the perceptions of middle school students with learning disabilities and their educators during these unpredictable times.

The global COVID-19 pandemic has infected more than 128 million people worldwide, killing more than 2,800,000 with more than 12 months into the pandemic (New York Times, 2021). Of those 128 million people, over 30,000,000 have been affected in New York State with more than 551,000 deaths 12 months into the pandemic (New York Times, 2021). At the height of the worldwide pandemic, during the spring of

2020, as the corona virus began to spread across the world, many countries decided to close the schools. The closing of the schools would hopefully slow the transmission and ease the burden on the health officials. These closings led to an entire generation of students having their typical education impacted, which could have several negative consequences, specifically on those students with learning disabilities.

With 55 million students in the United States out of school due to the COVID-19 pandemic, education systems were moving quickly to meet the needs of schools, students and families (Kuhfeld, Soland, Tarasawa, Johnson, Ruzek, & Liu, 2020). These various needs included planning how best to approach instruction in the fall of 2020, given students may be farther behind than in a typical year due to these uncertain times. Yet, education leaders have little data on how much learning has been impacted by school closures.

As schools have been closed to deal with the global pandemic, students, parents and educators around the globe have felt the unexpected effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. While government officials, frontline workers and health officials, including nurses and doctors, are doing their best trying to minimize the outbreak and death totals, education systems are trying to continue to provide quality education for all during these difficult times. Throughout these daunting times, many students with learning disabilities and other disabilities have been struggling to achieve success within this virtual environment. In addition, many students at home have undergone psychological and emotional distress and have been unable to engage in the virtual learning process productively.

Schools are a sense of mental health system for many children and adolescents, providing mental health services to 57 percent of adolescents who need care (Golberstein, Wen, & Miller, 2020). The COVID-19 pandemic and the school closures have had an impact on the well-being of many students which may have been magnified by the effect of the school closures. The COVID-19 pandemic may worsen existing mental health problems and lead to more cases among children and adolescents because of the unique combination of the public health crisis, social isolation, and economic recession (Golberstein, Wen, & Miller, 2020).

Due to the fact that some students' parents are losing their jobs at an all time high, students may feel the impact of that loss. In addition, since students are not able to see their friends and loved ones, they may feel socially isolated and alone. Finally, unfortunately, some students may have a loss of a loved one during this pandemic. It is important for teachers and other staff members to be aware of these difficulties that some students may be facing, in addition to other social and emotional issues that were already on display.

The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in human history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 200 countries (Pokhrel & Chhetri R, 2021). Closures of schools, institutions and other learning spaces have impacted more than 94% of the world's student population (Pokhrel & Chhetri R, 2021). This has brought extensive changes in all aspects of our lives. Social distancing and restrictive movement policies have significantly disturbed traditional educational practices.

Due to the COVID-19 pandemic, lockdown and social distancing measures have led to closures of schools and higher education institutions in most countries. There was a drastic shift in the way educators deliver quality education- once the traditional face-to-face instruction has shifted to various online platforms. The online learning and distance learning have become a quick answer for this unprecedented global pandemic, despite the many challenges posed to both educators and the learners. These challenges are exacerbated for students with learning disabilities who may struggle with change. Being able to transition from the traditional face-to-face learning to online learning can be an extremely different experience for the learners and the educators. However, due to the quick change, many learners and educators adapted with little or no other alternatives available during these unprecedented times.

The COVID-19 pandemic will undo months and years of academic gains and may leave many students behind. The start of the 2020-2021 school year projected that students will have an average of 66 percent of learning gains in reading and 44 percent of the learning gains in math relative to the typical gains for a new school year, which are much higher (Kuhfeld, et. al., 2020). During the pandemic, the gains in reading would be worse, as the top third of students will make gains, due to continuation of reading with their families while the schools are closed (Kuhfeld, et. al., 2020). On average, students will experience substantial drops in reading and math, losing roughly three months' worth of gains in reading and five months' worth of gains in math (Kuhfeld, et. al., 2020). This would widen the already huge achievement gap. In addition, few schools provide plans to support students who need accommodations or other special populations, such as students with learning disabilities.

As schools reopen, many students may be behind academically, socially, and mentally compared to a typical school year. As a result, teachers need to be very methodical about checking on their students, not just academically, but socially and mentally, as well. In addition, some teachers may be dealing with social and academic issues themselves, too. Teachers, staff members, and students may be dealing with issues and trying to recover from the pandemic as best as they can while they may be dealing with trauma, grief, and anxiety.

Because many students, particularly students with reading learning disabilities, may fall behind academically, it is essential for educators to differentiate and modify their instruction. The abrupt transition to online learning left minimal time to plan a strategy that could adequately meet every student's needs. Unfortunately, due to this quick transition, many teachers were not given appropriate training on how to meet the needs of the most vulnerable students. Since this occurred, many parents/guardians may not believe that their child's school was providing materials and other resources to support students with disabilities. However, teachers and other educational professionals can work to ensure that their students get the support they need by differentiating instruction and giving them choices within their learning, such as asking them their perspectives on how they learn various material within the classroom environment.

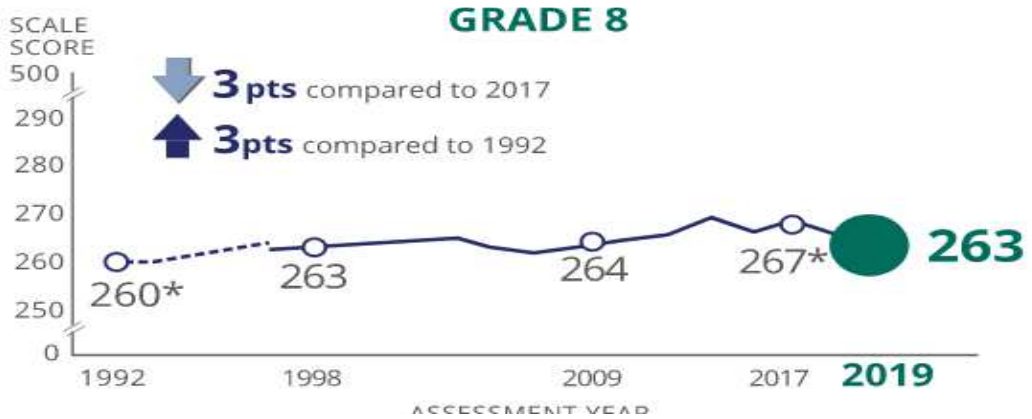
Statement of the Problem

Although the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB; 2001) has prompted schools to improve reading instruction for all students due to low assessment scores on state examinations, many middle school students continue to demonstrate difficulties with reading (Dulaney, 2012). Many middle school students continue to be significantly

below grade level in reading. The National Assessment of Educational Progress (NAEP; 2013), provides data that reflects the results of reading tests administered to a sample of students across the country. Average scores are reported on the NAEP reading scale that ranges from 0 to 500. According to the Nation's Report Card (2019), in 2019, the average reading score for eighth-grade students was 263, 3 points lower compared to 2017, the previous assessment year, but 3 points higher in comparison to 1992, the first assessment year (see figure 1.1). During the 2019 school year, students in the eighth grade across the nation scored an average of 263 points out of 500 on their reading assessments.

Figure 1.1

The National Assessment of Educational Progress- Nation's Report Card (2019)



It has been shown that these struggling readers can improve in their reading comprehension when taught reading comprehension practices, such as scaffolding (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009). However, Fagella-Luby and Deshler (2008) note that some educators do not have the knowledge of best practices for scaffolding and continue to seek information on best practices for reading instruction for their students. If these teachers are given the appropriate tools and scaffolding strategies that are

necessary to teach a diverse population, then more and more middle school students with learning disabilities may improve in their reading comprehension and their overall reading achievement (Fagella-Luby & Deshler, 2008).

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 provided students with a goal to obtain grade level proficiency; however, many of the students in the United States have not reached grade level ability in reading. Many students in middle schools around the country continue to be below grade level in reading. According to the National Assessment of Education Progress (2013), 64 percent of eighth graders are reading below grade level, whereas 36 percent are reading at or above grade level. Due to students being below grade level in reading and due to the advanced Common Core state standards, studies show that students with learning disabilities progress when utilizing scaffolded material (Reed, 2009; Roberts, Torgesen, Boardman, & Scammacca, 2008).

Educators can teach students to become proficient readers in today's schools. These professionals can design and implement strategies that are practical. However, the designing and implementing of these strategies is a great challenge (Deshler, Hock, Ihle, & Mark, 2011). According to Deshler, et al, (2011), these challenges are especially evident when working with students with reading learning disabilities because these students have difficulties in mastering skills in reading, spelling, writing or math at or near expected age and grade levels. In addition, this challenge is magnified when working with these students in secondary schools since reading instruction is limited due to time constraints (Deshler et al., 2011). Transitioning from the smaller, more personalized environment of elementary school to the larger middle school setting is contradictory to the psychological needs of students during times of adolescence. During

this time, students have a need for greater psychological autonomy and positive relationships with adults and peers. The middle school setting of six to seven teachers per day with a possible new group of peers in each individual class is not structurally effective for easy development and navigation of meaningful, authentic adult and peer relationships.

Even though there are many challenges for students with reading learning disabilities in secondary schools, various effective classroom strategies, such as scaffolding, can help these students achieve in various locations, including the general education setting. According to a study conducted by Lee and Yoon (2017), students were given scaffolding for text complexity. Since the students had difficulty with the complete texts, they used scaffolding materials to help them. They found that students were able to better comprehend the material that was on their level when they received various scaffolding materials.

In addition to scaffolding materials helping students achieve in their subjects, scaffolding materials also provide students with equity. Since some students may need the extra support, scaffolding materials provide them with that extra help and more access to the curriculum. Because of these materials, students with learning disabilities are able to access the general education curriculum, just as their general education peers.

Perceptions of Scaffolding Materials

In the classroom setting, educators can conduct short questioning sessions following each scaffolding material used. They may be able to determine the student perception related to the material covered in the class. Being able to assess student learning can help teachers to pace classroom instruction and determine the effectiveness

of each scaffolding material. In addition, students can provide teachers with immediate feedback related to how well they comprehend the material and how effective they believe the scaffolding materials are helping with their education.

Challenges Facing Students during Reading Development

According to Chall (1983; 2014), there are six stages of reading development. Stage 0: the pre-reading stage occurs when children are 6 months- 6 years in age. During this stage, the child "pretends" to read, retells stories when looking at pages previously read, names letters, and recognizes some signs (Chall, 1983). The child is being read to by an adult and is engaged in dialogic reading when an adult and child are engaged in a discussion about the story. Within this stage, most children can understand the children's picture books and stories read to them.

Stage 1: the initial reading and decoding stage occurs from 6-7 years of age and the beginning of 1st grade to the beginning of 2nd grade. During this stage, the child learns relation between letters and sounds and between printed and spoken words. Also, the child learns through direct instruction in letter-sound relations and practice in their use. According to Chall (1983), the level of difficulty of language read by the child is much below the language understood when heard.

Stage 2: the confirmation and fluency stage occurs at ages 7-8 years old and in 2nd and 3rd grades. During this stage, the child reads simple, familiar stories and selections with increasing fluency. Within this stage, educators use direct instruction in order to advanced decoding skills and provide interesting materials to promote fluency. At this stage, listening is still more effective than reading.

Stage 3: the reading for learning the new stage occurs at ages 9-13 and in 4th through 8th grades. This stage is where children begin to learn new knowledge, information, thoughts, and experiences by reading. Reading is used to learn new ideas, to gain new knowledge, to experience new feelings, to learn new attitudes, usually from one viewpoint (Chall, 1983). Growth in word meanings (vocabulary) and background knowledge are primary goals. Most reading is for obtaining facts, concepts, or learning how to accomplish tasks. The focus is on disciplinary literacy, independence, technical vocabulary, and nonfiction genres.

Stage 4: the multiple viewpoints stage occurs at ages 15-17 and in 9th through 12 grades. This stage is where students deal with more than one viewpoint. Reading is from a broad range of complex materials with a variety of viewpoints. During this stage, reading comprehension is better than listening comprehension of materials of difficult content and readability (Chall, 1983). The focus is on analysis and synthesis, multiple viewpoints, and complex structures.

Stage 5: the construction and reconstruction stage occurs at ages 18 and beyond and from college to adulthood. This stage is where readers can read materials in the degree of detail and completeness needed to serve their purposes. Reading serves to integrate one's knowledge with that of others and to synthesize it and to create new knowledge (Chall, 1983). The readers analyze, synthesize, and make judgments about what they read.

Chall (1983; 2014) mentioned that the ages and grades at which the stages occur are approximate. Whether reading develops as described at any given stage depends, to a considerable extent, upon the instruction that is provided in the classroom and/or at

home. This shows the importance of scaffolding materials to be implemented as soon as a developmental stage is not reached. Also, development at each stage is dependent upon the adequate development at the prior stages. For example, the critical reading skills in stage 4 are dependent upon the information and vocabulary in stage 3.

These stages demonstrate the steps that students will take to become fully developed readers. However, as these elements are used, they should be with a degree of flexibility as schools and students differ. A stage model has important implications for individualization of instruction.

Because development at each stage is dependent upon adequate development at the prior stages, it is necessary that educators conduct assessments to determine students' level of development. Also, the individuality of learners and students with disabilities should be taken into consideration when addressing these stages of reading development. Since some students with disabilities may struggle throughout some of these stages, it is essential for educators and other professionals within the educational field to provide scaffolding support within these important stages.

Reading for Learning the New: A First Step

High quality instruction is critical for the development of comprehension skills that students need for academic success and quality of life after schooling. The teacher's choice of tasks, ways of fostering language use in talking about texts, and the ability to scaffold children's understanding of texts are important determinants of children's literacy development (Chall, 2014). This is essential so that teachers can understand both the commonalities and the individual differences in their students' development of comprehension, and have a sound basis for selecting instructional goals, materials, and

approaches that foster students' language and literacy development. After all, if comprehension is dynamic and flexible, then instruction needs to be more dynamic and flexible.

Significance of the Study

According to the Centers for Disease Control (2020), one in five people have a disability in the United States. Due to this high statistic, teachers in both general and special education classrooms continue to need insight into instructional strategies, such as scaffolding, aimed at increasing reading skills and preparing students for the unique challenges that living with a learning disability entails. Therefore, this study is relevant and necessary to the field of literacy research and education.

Learning disabilities or learning disorders are umbrella terms for a wide variety of learning problems. Learning disabilities look very different from one child to another. One child may struggle with reading and spelling, while another loves books but can't understand math. Still another child may have difficulty understanding what others are saying or communicating aloud. The problems are very different, but they are all learning disorders. Basic reading problems occur when there is difficulty understanding the relationship between sounds, letters and words. Reading comprehension problems occur when there is an inability to grasp the meaning of words, phrases, and paragraphs.

Student Impact

Students are powerful determiners of the learning that occurs in their classrooms. Understanding why they learn well or poorly is determined by understanding their perspectives on learning. However, knowing how these perspectives influence students'

academic performance is limited. There is minimal amount of research that has shown what students think and feel about learning and why they relate to it the way they do.

There are limited studies that show a direct connection between student engagement and students valuing their education and opportunities to make their voices heard. Many advocates and researchers encourage schools to create opportunities for students to participate in decisions about their education as a means of increasing engagement and investing students in their education. Teachers and schools can use different strategies to incorporate student perspectives and empower students to engage more within their learning, particularly how they learn their material.

Teacher Impact

Educators should personalize learning and customize curriculum to meet the interests and needs of each student. Teachers and schools can help students to critically consider their environment and effectively articulate challenges and solutions by adopting democratic classroom practices. Ensuring that all students are engaged by increasing access to rigorous coursework and providing the necessary supports for success is paramount.

Also, equally important is the need to ensure students have a voice in their education. Schools should empower students to influence instruction, both in how and what they are taught. In addition, teachers and school administrators should adopt practices or structures that allow students to share their perspectives, and make their voices heard.

The contribution of a study of this nature was to augment understanding of the scaffolding materials on which children with learning disabilities use to help guide them through their reading/literacy instruction throughout their content area classrooms.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to bring awareness to the importance of the perceptions of scaffolding material within the content area classrooms. This study explored the perceptions of these scaffolding materials, including chunking texts, color coding, graphic organizers, and sentence structures/starters on middle school students with learning disabilities during the COVID-19 pandemic. The study used Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) as it relates to intrinsic motivation, which would result in quality learning and feelings of competence, autonomy and relatedness. This qualitative study used case study research and incorporated participant perspectives to encompass the data collection in an understanding of reasons and opinions by interviewing students.

Case Study Research Approach

Case studies use a variety of qualitative research methods, such as observations and interviews, to provide rich detail. This rich detail makes case studies a useful tool for instruction and discussion in education. The case study approach is particularly useful to employ when there is a need to obtain an in-depth appreciation of an issue, event or phenomenon of interest, in its natural real-life context. Complexities of a phenomenon, such as scaffolding, within one real-life context, such as middle school classrooms, should be analyzed in depth.

Throughout case studies, a cross-case analysis may be used. A cross-case analysis generally takes on a larger scope, such as multiple classrooms or multiple schools. Within this study, a cross-case analysis was used by utilizing multiple classrooms, such as different content area classrooms and different grade levels within the middle school environment. An efficient cross-case analysis includes more cases and greater variety between the cases. Therefore, this study included five middle school students with learning disabilities.

The COVID-19 pandemic also brought about this research theory. Due to the fact that COVID-19 provided multiple restrictions of having in person access to students and teachers, case study research provided the best form of data through interviews, both in person and virtually. Since educators are constantly reflective in their practice, this research allowed them to continue to be reflective in their field. However, students are usually not asked to be reflective in their education. Therefore, this research allowed students to be reflective in the environment within the COVID-19 pandemic. The COVID-19 pandemic fueled this research theory to be used within this study.

Researcher's Positionality

In this study, it is important to acknowledge the role that positionality played. Savin-Baden & Major (2013) identify three primary ways that a researcher may identify and develop his/her positionality. First, a researcher may locate themselves around the subject, such as acknowledging personal positions that have the potential to influence the research. Second, a researcher may locate himself/herself around the participants, such as acknowledging that researchers individually consider how they view themselves, as well as how others view them. Third, a researcher may locate himself/herself around the

research context and process, such as acknowledging that research will necessarily be influenced by them and by the research context.

As a researcher, my former disability identity and career path identity shaped the positionality I took throughout each step of the study. From the onset, this study sought to build equity and access to middle school students with learning disabilities, whom I can provide a voice for as I consider myself a former student with a disability, a teacher of students with disabilities who uses scaffolding every day in her classroom, and a disability advocate.

My Identity as a Student with a Disability

During my elementary and middle school years, I received speech and language services and I was determined to have a classification of "Speech and Language Impaired." At first, I received speech and language services because I developed a lisp and needed to correct that issue. However, when my speech and language teacher began to speak with me in a smaller environment, she noticed that I could use speech services for my lack of vocabulary. Due to this lack of vocabulary, it was recommended that I repeat the first grade. My parents agreed with the teachers; I repeated the first grade and I was in the related service, Speech and Language. This related service was required for me to obtain success in the first grade general education setting.

In addition to struggling with vocabulary, I also struggled with reading. I found it difficult to learn a new reading strategy or to comprehend advanced vocabulary. Therefore, I understand student frustration on learning a new strategy, particularly with literacy instruction. Because I was "labeled" as having a disability and received various

services and supports within the classroom, I can relate to my proposed study's student participants.

After reviewing this experience, I began to question whether I should have been "left behind" and repeat the grade. Since I became a special education teacher, I was questioning how different life would be for me if I were a student in current times. Most likely, I would have received Response to Intervention and/or scaffolding material in the classroom to have better address my academic needs.

My various academic needs dealt with vocabulary shortfalls. Because of this experience, I wanted to learn more about how to use scaffolding materials within the classroom to ensure that students receive the appropriate support they need so that they do not have to repeat a grade.

As a lifelong learner, I feel that it is imperative for teachers in the United States and all over the world to continue to want to learn more about education. Since the field of education is constantly changing and evolving, it is vital for educators to learn the new and innovative techniques and methods to teaching. This constant knowledge will ensure that all students learn the best way they can.

My Identity as an Educator of Students with Disabilities

During my career, I have had a plethora of experiences working with students with and without disabilities. All of these experiences, ranging from co-teaching sixth, seventh and eighth graders to teaching a self-contained middle school class to serving as a teaching assistant in a middle school Life Skills class for students with autism, learning disabilities, and developmental disabilities, have taught me a tremendous amount about myself and about the teacher I want to continue to strive to be each and every day. Not

only have these experiences taught me about the educator that I would want to be each and every day, they also taught me about the type of advocate I would like to become for students with special needs.

As a special education teacher who not only had a disability herself, but also views herself as a disability advocate, I believe people need to be more cognizant of their everyday language. They need to be aware that it can have a negative connotation for individuals with disabilities. Throughout my time as a special education teacher in a variety of settings, I have heard and corrected negative language towards individuals with special needs.

During my time in these settings, I have heard adults talking about students and saying, "There's no way *those* kids can do that" or one of my biggest pet peeves, "They're retarded." One of the phrases or words that makes me cringe is "That's retarded." I have heard this used by my students, colleagues and even some administrators. I am aware that what they really mean is "That's stupid" or "That's absurd," but they do not realize the negativity of their language.

I have corrected many people who use this term and try to enlighten them of their choice of words and even mentioned the reason for the change of disability from mental retardation to intellectual disability. Even after explaining this, some of my colleagues still use the term and after they do, they look at me and say, "Sorry." Although it isn't me that they should be apologizing to, I still hope that they will understand my concern for their language and hope they will correct it and even educate other people. As a disability advocate, a person who had a disability growing up, and an individual who works with students with disabilities, I always try to address the prejudice and stigma of

the disability. I hope that people without disabilities will become more aware of their language and want to change their words to become more inclusive and more respectful.

My Identity as an Advocate for Individuals with Disabilities

While other groups continue their struggle, individuals with disabilities have joined forces to end discrimination in their lives and claim a life of equality in the United States. Throughout the country and world, there are many walks for specific disabilities and other functions to help those impacted with disabilities. These walks and functions allow people to understand and help those with disabilities.

Special education was born out of the civil rights movement. The concerns about racial inequity were central to many court cases, such as Brown versus Board of Education (1954), which led to the spread of the first special education legislation, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990). However, even with these laws, there are still racial disparities in special education services which remain one of the key indicators of inequity in our nation's educational system.

Many people with disabilities view themselves as oppressed minorities. They have fought for their constitutional rights for many decades. The fact that the Disabilities Rights Movement (1960's and 1970's) has been comparable to the Civil Rights Movement (1960's and 1970's) is extremely influential. Still to this day, individuals with disabilities are fighting for their rights.

The American with Disabilities Act of 1990 prohibits discrimination of employment and public services and accommodations. It was a major step towards improving the development of independent living for disabled Americans. Not only has

this law helped improve their independence, it has helped to open doors with opportunities for employment.

Many individuals with disabilities were once considered members of another class, segregated by society, leaving them to stand alone. They were left in institutions to live out their lives in horrific conditions. Their conditions have left them deprived of basic human rights that many of non-disabled individuals take for granted today.

Since one of my first experiences of working with individuals with special needs, I have considered myself an advocate for individuals with disabilities. During my time as a teaching assistant in a life skills middle school classroom for students with severe disabilities, ranging from autism to intellectual disabilities to brain trauma, I learned an abundance amount about the students and about myself, both as an individual and as an educator. After this experience, I knew I wanted to fight for individuals with disabilities.

Throughout my educational and professional career, I have attended Autism Speaks walks and National Buddy Walks for individuals with Down syndrome. As I was attending these walks, I wanted to ensure that I not only showed my support for individuals with disabilities; but to also see how I could volunteer my time and to help these individuals to succeed within a classroom or another environment. As an advocate, I want to continue to learn more about individuals with disabilities to ensure they are getting all the necessary materials and supports they need for educational success as well as success after education.

My Trajectory and Passion for This Work

As captured in my identities as a student with a disability and as an educator of students with disabilities, one consistent factor is my passion for helping individuals with

disabilities, my passion for the teaching and learning of literacy, and my goal to increase the learning materials for those who need this type of learning to enhance their skills. My pursuit of this study was to increase my own capacity as a scholar practitioner in order to lead school districts through the teaching and learning of scaffolding and literacy within these communities. I seek to develop relationships with leaders in the field of special education and literacy, be acknowledged as an expert in the field of scaffolding and literacy, and eventually transition into higher education to prepare the next generation of educators and educational leaders on how to effectively teach students with disabilities.

Research Question

What are the perceptions of scaffolding on literacy instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities during the COVID-19 school re-entry in the fall of 2020?

Definition of Terms

Scaffolding: additional support given to a student by an instructor in order to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of skills.

Modifications: a change in the instructional level, content, or performance criteria; a change in what students are expected to learn, based on their individual abilities.

Self-Determination Theory within This Study

Self-determined individuals are more likely to feel motivated to achieve their goals. Also, these individuals are more likely to want success and will have success due to this innate motivation. Within this qualitative study, competence, autonomy and relatedness were the subsets of the theory used to identify the self-determination for the middle school students with learning disabilities.

This study used Self-Determination Theory (SDT) (Ryan & Deci, 1985) and its subsequent revisions and additions to address the research question. By using SDT, this study investigated students' experiences and perceptions of scaffolding materials after they used them in their content area classrooms. This theory aimed to help understand how students perceived themselves and the scaffolding materials after they used them for a 12-week period within a New York City public school.

New York City Public Schools

During the height of the COVID-19 pandemic, in March 2020, Mayor Bill De Blasio and Chancellor Richard Carranza ordered a system-wide shutdown of the New York City schools, including its 1,800 public schools amid a state of emergency. At that time, De Blasio mentioned that he was concerned that if the schools closed, they would remain closed and not reopen until the following school year, if he had them completely shut down. Initially, Mr. De Blasio order schools closed and all instruction shifted to online learning throughout late April, but he had to change his original plan due to the continuation of the rise of cases. The schools did not reopen their buildings for the remainder of the 2019-2020 school year.

The shifting of all New York City public schools to remote learning was a colossal challenge for the city in addition to the COVID-19 health crisis. Many students struggled with this transition to remote learning. In addition to this change, many students also had difficulty accessing their devices, such as laptops or iPads, as well as, difficulty obtaining stable WiFi to engage in their online classes.

Due to the difficulty accessing technology and stable WiFi, many students had difficulty completing their assignments and attending various virtual classes. The city's

over 100,000 homeless students bore the brunt of this crisis by not being able to attend their classes and/or complete valuable coursework. Many of these students were unable to log into their classes or have a strong enough signal to view any coursework or classes.

Luckily, the Department of Education ordered hundreds of thousands of iPads to ensure that all students could log onto their online classes. In the spring of 2020, the department distributed over 320,000 iPads to students and would later order another 100,000 in the fall. These technological devices would ensure that every student could connect to their virtual classrooms.

After the 2019-2020 school year, city officials announced plans for a hybrid-learning model in the fall. This model would allow students to continue to take their classes either fully remote or return to school for some days during the week. In addition to allowing students to learn from home, the teacher's union, United Federation of Teachers (UFT) allowed teachers to file an accommodation if they had a health issue and did not feel safe coming into the building during this pandemic.

Since there were numerous concerns and requirements placed on Mayor De Blasio by the city's teacher union, the UFT, De Blasio needed to rethink his fall school year opening. Originally, Mr. De Blasio wanted to open the NYC public schools on September 8, 2020, but he needed to rethink this date due to the union. However, the city's youngest students and those with severe disabilities (students in District 75) went back to their face-to-face classrooms before the general education population. Then, the mayor used phases to allow other students that enrolled in a blended program to return to their schools. Due to the mayor flip-flopping on dates, this lowered his expected enrollment numbers in the hybrid model. Data from the NYC Department of Education

revealed that roughly 280,000 students attended in-person classes since schools reopened. This is far below the expected numbers from the mayor, which were at 700,000 students.

As school and city officials were dealing with the difficulties of a hybrid learning system, the number of COVID-19 cases began to increase across the five boroughs. This was due to the pandemic's second wave. As part of Mayor De Blasio's state-approved reopening plan, if the overall COVID-19 positivity rate reached 3%, all public schools would again shut down. This statistic was on a seven-day rolling average.

Unfortunately, the numbers began to increase, and in the middle of November 2020, the positivity rate reached 3%. This interrupted the education of about 300,000 blended learning students and forced them into a remote learning program. Although the school officials have already closed and reopened schools before, officials did not have a concrete plan in place for a second reopening. However, De Blasio mentioned that when the schools were to reopen again, testing would play a much bigger role in ensuring the students are able to come back into the school buildings.

During the first week of December 2020, some students were able to return to their classrooms. These students included students in 3K, Pre-K, District 75 students, and students in grades one through five. However, the status of middle and high school students remained unclear until after the students returned after the winter break. Before the second system-wide closure, schools were required to test 20% of random students and adults in the school building. As students returned, they were required to submit a COVID-19 testing parental consent form. The staff members in the building were also required to submit a consent form each day.

Mayor De Blasio and Richard Carranza, the NYC schools chancellor mentioned that they strived to have middle school students back after the winter holiday break. However, officials did not announce plans to bring back over 60,000 middle school students enrolled in blended learning until early February. Middle school students enrolled in blended learning returned to the school buildings on February 25, 2021.

Although many school buildings have reopened, there have been issues with the schools remaining opened for their blended learners. Because there is mandated testing, sometimes staff members and/or students will come up positive for COVID-19. Unfortunately, when this occurs, as per the Department of Education and the United Federation of Teachers, the school must close and students and staff members must quarantine for ten days. This disrupts the education of students and disrupts the planning for teachers and other staff members.

With the Moderna and Pfizer vaccines in place and distributed throughout New York City, the Department of Education and the mayor, along with the UFT are now developing a plan for next school year in September 2021. The plan is for a more "normal" school year like the ones that students have experiences before the pandemic. Mayor De Blasio hopes that students and teachers will be back in the classroom full-time learning from and with one another.

Limitations

The study was completed during the fall 2020 semester during the months of October through December, which consisted of the first marking period. During the course of that time, the student participants engaged in limited scaffolding materials for science and social studies since those classes were on their schedule less than English

Language Arts and math. It is recommended that a yearlong study would capture multiple times the students were engaged in the scaffolding materials for all of their classes.

Summary

This chapter focused on issues related to students with learning disabilities' achievement as it relates to scaffolding materials during the COVID-19 crisis (school closures and remote learning). In particular, the chapter focused on the academic needs of students with learning disabilities and the central qualitative research question that guided the study. The researcher's positionality and theoretical stance described how scaffolding materials were within this study.

CHAPTER 2

REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Learning disabilities arise from neurological differences in brain structure and function and affect a person's ability to receive, store, process, retrieve or communicate information (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014). The most common types of learning disabilities are those that impact the areas of reading, math and written expression. They may occur with other disorders of attention, language and behavior, but are distinct in how they impact learning (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

The United States education system is facing a challenge that is moving too quickly for educators to keep up with the demand. Students with learning disabilities (LD) are a rapidly growing population in the United States (National Center for Learning Disabilities, 2014). LD is the largest category of students receiving special education services. There are 2.4 million American public school students (approximately 5 percent of the total public school enrollment) identified with learning disabilities under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Forty-two percent of the 5.7 million school-age children with all kinds of disabilities who receive special education services are served in this category (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014).

Due to the No Child Left Behind Act (2001) and the many laws and acts, such as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (1990), that fight for individuals with disabilities, more and more students with learning disabilities are being placed in the general education setting. Seven out of 10 students with IEP's for learning disabilities spend 80 percent or more of their school day in the general education classrooms (The Understood Team, 2021). The trend towards inclusion is a steady one, which is

appropriate for all students. However, many students do not receive enough support in the general education setting.

According to The Understood Team (2021), only 30 percent of general educators feel strongly that they can successfully teach students with learning disabilities. More training and resources are needed to help diverse learners thrive in the general education classrooms. Such modifications as scaffolding can allow these teachers to help their students to achieve success in the general education classrooms. These materials will also help these students during the COVID-19 pandemic with their face-to-face and online learning.

Since March 2020, schools across the country and world have been closed due to the COVID-19 pandemic. This pandemic has caused school leaders to shift from the traditional instruction of face-to-face learning to an online learning environment. Although online learning is not a new concept in the field of education, the quick change of moving from face-to-face learning to the virtual setting was a daunting task to accomplish in a short period of time.

Being able to transition to a virtual setting forced many educators to learn new technologies and skills to teach a variety of students. These new concepts caused stress among both educators and students. In addition to moving to an online learning environment during the pandemic, educators of students with special needs were faced with even more challenges of ensuring equity for all of their students with special needs. Special educators needed to ensure appropriate instruction in the virtual environment, as well as ensuring special education services and related services provided, as per the

Individualized Education Programs, which would provide the students with more equitable opportunities.

This literature review aims to provide an understanding of the struggles that students with learning disabilities face daily in regards to the dearth of research that shows success in literacy instruction in secondary school. It begins with an outline of literacy instruction. This instruction pertains to reading instruction for middle school students and particularly mentions students with learning disabilities. The literature review proceeds to explain one form of reading assessment for students, the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarking assessment.

Next, this literature review explains the history of students with learning disabilities along with the pertinent laws that protects these individuals. In addition, the literature review clarifies the stigma of the label and mentions negative attitudes from parents, teachers and students without disabilities. Also, the literature review outlines the two types of settings for students with disabilities, Integrated Co-Teaching classrooms and self contained classrooms. These two classrooms are beneficial in many ways. However, they both serve a purpose for particular students.

Finally, this literature review outlines the four types of scaffolding materials that will be used within this study. The four materials are graphic organizers, color coding, chunking texts, and sentence structures/starters.

Literacy Instruction

Throughout the field of education, literacy can be viewed as a process to expand one's knowledge of reading and writing in order to develop thinking and learning. At times, in order for one to expand in his/her knowledge of reading and writing, a change

needs to occur in learning to develop thinking and learning. Within education, literacy has always been changing (Leu, Kinzer, Coiro, Castek, & Henry, 2013). It has continuously been redefined by a changing context. This redefined change can be in the form of scaffolding. Scaffolding may be viewed as activities by a more knowledgeable person to provide temporary support to develop thinking and learning for an individual.

Literacy instruction is more prevalent in elementary schools than in middle schools (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009 & Allington, 2011). Since elementary school teachers have their class all day, it is easier for them to teach literacy instruction than middle school teachers who only have their students for a period (Hock, Brasseur-Hock, Hock, & Duvel, 2017 & Ivey & Broaddus, 2000). Many secondary leveled teachers have important content to teach and to prepare the students for assessments. Some of these teachers may even say that they do not have the time to teach students how to read. However, more and more secondary leveled teachers are implementing literacy instruction into the content-area classrooms.

If reading instruction in the middle school is provided by anyone, it is often the English language arts teacher (Allington, 2011). The struggling readers in middle school can improve in their reading comprehension when taught reading comprehension practices. However, most middle school English language arts teachers do not have the course preparation in reading and most states do not require middle school teachers to take reading classes. Therefore, the educators do not employ the pertinent reading practices within their classrooms and must continue to seek information on best practices for reading instruction for their students. If these teachers are given the appropriate tools, strategies and interventions that are necessary to teach a diverse population, then more

middle school students will improve in their reading comprehension and their overall reading achievement.

Ehri and McCormick (1998) wrote about the implications for instruction with delayed and disabled readers. They mention how information on word-learning processes can assist teachers of problem readers. It can help them understand and interpret the word-reading behaviors they see in delayed and disabled readers. Information about word-learning processes can clarify the locus of difficulties that students have in learning to read words. Delayed readers take longer to learn to read because of possible absences and/or lack of adequate instruction. Also, disabled readers are thought to possess a processing deficiency that makes it harder to learn to read. In addition, information about phases of development can help teachers determine how to support, scaffold, and guide their students to the next phase. As teachers gain experience relating their methods of instruction to students' phases of development, they will become more skilled at this trouble shooting, problem-solving approach to reading instruction.

Literacy Instruction for Middle School Students

There are many laws that require students with disabilities to receive the best appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment. The federal law known as IDEA (1990) ensures that all children and youths with disabilities have the right to a free, appropriate public education in the least restrictive environment (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2019). The second federal law, ADA, ensures the right of individuals with disabilities to nondiscriminatory treatment in other aspects of their lives. This law provides protections of civil rights in the specific areas of employment,

transportation, public accommodations, state and local government, and telecommunications (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2019). Although these pertinent federal laws ensure that students with disabilities receive a public education, as well as their, modifications, research has not addressed the student self-perception of these modifications that are needed for them to access the general education curriculum.

Although the No Child Left Behind (NCLB, 2001) Act has prompted schools to improve reading instruction for all students (including those in middle and high school), many secondary students continue to demonstrate difficulties with reading (Dulaney, 2012). In the 2009 NAEP reading assessment reports, one-quarter of eighth-grade students performed below the Basic level of reading proficiency (Allington, 2011). Many of these students would find it difficult to read grade-level materials with comprehension.

Throughout their time in school, middle school students with learning disabilities receive modifications to assist them in order to best access the curriculum. These modifications give students extra assistance, which allows equitable opportunities to access the general education curriculum. A modification is a change in what an educator teaches to a particular student. It is also a change in what a student is required to do. Making an assignment easier so the student is not completing the same level of work as their general education peers is an example of a modification. These modifications can include scaffolding materials, such as graphic organizers, chunking texts, and sentence structures/starters. Modifications are entailed and described in a student's Individualized Education Program (IEP). Since an IEP is a legal document, it is required that educators, related service providers, and other personnel offer these modifications to their students. These scaffolds provide additional support for the students.

When students are using these scaffolding materials, it is important to analyze how middle school students with learning disabilities are able to use the skill sets gained using these materials. Also, it is imperative to analyze how they are applying new proficiency in order to achieve greater levels of independence. This is essential to the success of their academic achievements.

As students move up the grade levels, their texts become more difficult and the educational environment tends to no longer put emphasis on to their motivation to read (Roberts et al, 2008). It is essential for teachers to provide texts that students want to read in order to improve reading motivation. According to Faggella-Luby and Deshler, 2008, research shows the gains readers with learning disabilities can make when engaging texts are at the center of a lesson. When students are interested and in control of their learning and when they take an active role in their learning, achievement will improve.

According to Reed (2009), an increasing concern about the literacy needs of adolescents and the instructional practices of secondary teachers in support of reading across curriculum is well documented. Nationally, only 31% of eighth graders without disabilities and a mere 7% of students with disabilities scores are at the proficient or advanced levels (Reed, 2009). Ongoing school wide initiatives that are responsive to teachers' perceived needs hold promise for increasing literacy instruction across curriculum and improving some student reading skills.

In their research study, Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway (2009) discussed teachers' resistance to content literacy instruction. Teachers' resistance to content literacy instruction is relevant in light of recent assessment results indicating that more than one

in four adolescents is achieving below basic levels in reading. Middle and secondary schools are characterized by distinct subject area divisions and content area subcultures that value different forms of knowledge and pedagogy. Their findings indicated that most content area teachers believed that literacy was integral to their content area and they reported viewing themselves as literacy teachers as well as content teachers.

Ivey & Broaddus (2000) determined the need for middle school students to have reading instruction throughout their day. Students in middle schools need good reading instruction (Roberts et al, 2008; Reed, 2009). But, many middle school teachers may be unprepared or unable to provide it. It is imperative for these teachers to be given materials needed for scaffolding instruction and knowledge in order to better prepare their students.

Reading Levels and Assessment

The Fountas & Pinnell Benchmark Assessment (1996) determines students' independent and instructional reading levels. This assessment is important to document students' progress through one-on-one formative and/or summative assessments. While using this assessment, teachers are able to observe student reading behaviors one-on-one, engage in comprehension conversations that go beyond recalling, and make informed decisions that connect assessment to instruction. Also, it helps teachers to successfully recommend a placement level for instruction and to form initial groups for reading instruction based on the data. Finally, it guides teachers to plan for effective instruction and to identify students who need intervention or extra help.

In addition, this assessment is conducted in a one-on-one manner. During the first part of the assessment, the student reads aloud and discusses the text while the teacher

observes and annotates the reader's answers on forms. In the second part, the teacher conducts a comprehension conversation. There is an optional third part where the student writes using a prompt. However, during this study, the third section was not used.

Readers must build a system of strategic actions for processing texts A-Z that begins with early reading behaviors and becomes a network of strategic actions for reading increasingly difficult texts (Fountas and Pinnell Literacy). Reading levels should be seen as a continuum of progress for readers, meaning as they gradually increase in knowledge and age, they should also increase their reading levels. The Fountas and Pinnell Literacy provides text level gradient and levels where students in elementary and middle school should strive for based on their grade and/or age (see Appendix A).

History of Students with Learning Disabilities

A learning disability is a neurological disorder that affects the brain's ability to receive, process, store, and respond to information (National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2019). A learning disability can cause a person to have trouble learning and using certain skills. The skills most often affected are reading, writing, listening, speaking, reasoning, and doing math (National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2019). These limitations can show up in many ways: as specific difficulties with spoken and written language, coordination, self-control, or attention (National Association of Special Education Teachers, 2019).

Over the last decade, there has been a significant increase of students with disabilities in the United States. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (2017) from the U.S. Department of Education, in the 2014-2015 school year, the number of children and youth ages 3-21 receiving special education services was 6.6

million, or 13 percent of all public school students up from 4.7 million, or 11 percent of total public school enrollment in 2004-2005. In the 2014–15 school year, a higher percentage of children and youth ages 3–21 received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) for specific learning disabilities rather than for any other type of disability (National Center for Education Statistics, 2017).

The Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) of 1965 was the nation's educational law that showed a commitment to equal opportunity for all students, despite differences or circumstances. ESEA authorizes state-run programs for eligible schools and districts to raise the academic achievement of struggling learners and address the challenges for those students who have disabilities and other difficulties, such as poverty or limited English. ESEA requires schools to meet specific standards for educational content and student achievement. It also requires schools to measure student achievement and progress in reading and math annually. Under ESEA, schools must provide data on overall student performance as well as on progress made by discrete student groups, including students with learning disabilities.

The Education for All Handicapped Children Act, passed by Congress in 1975 was the first special education law for students with physical and mental disabilities. The law stated that public schools must provide children with special needs with the same opportunities for education as general education children. Within this act, students were able to access special education services. In addition, students with physical and mental disabilities were able to maintain fair and appropriate services. In addition, these students received with federal resources, which were distributed to their schools.

Although these services were supposed to be implemented fairly, they were met with lawsuits. Therefore, these laws needed to be changed.

The No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 was in effect from 2002-2015. It was a version of the ESEA and replaced by the Every Student Succeeds Act in 2015. When the NCLB act was in place, it affected public schools throughout the United States. Its main goal was to aid those that were considered "disadvantaged," such as students in poverty, English Language Learners, and students with disabilities, by providing equal educational opportunities for these students. In order to ensure that schools were succeeding in educating their students, annual tests were given in reading and math to students in grades 3-8 and grades 10-12. The states had to bring all students, including those "disadvantaged" in special education up to the "proficient" level on tests. The schools received an adequate yearly progress on how they were performing.

The Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) of 2015 is the reauthorization of ESEA (1965). This new law builds on key areas of progress in previous years which is made possible by the effort of educators, parents and students throughout the country. Also, this law advances equity by upholding critical protections for America's disadvantaged and high-need students. In addition, it requires that all students in America be taught to high academic standards that will allow them to be college and career ready. Moreover, it ensures that pertinent information is provided to educators, families, students and communities through annual state assessments that measure student progress.

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), created in 1990, was the modification of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1975). This law ensures that students with special needs receive a free appropriate public education in the

least restrictive environment. This act helps students receive the extra support they need; but allows them to participate in the same activities to the maximum extent possible as general education students.

IDEA also guarantees the right of children and their parents or guardians to timely evaluation, access to all meetings and paperwork and transition planning. IDEA specifies that children with any of 13 possible disabilities (including learning disabilities) are eligible for these services. IDEA also provides federal funds to states and local school districts to help support the additional costs of special education.

One major principle of IDEA is that every state and locality must have a plan to ensure that a written Individualized Education Program (IEP) is prepared for each student with a disability. The IEP is a document that is developed for each public school child who needs special education. It is created through a team effort, including regular education teachers, special education teachers/providers, school system representatives, transition services agency representatives when the student is of age, translators, if needed, parents, and the student, when appropriate, and is reviewed periodically. This IEP includes present levels of functioning, measurable annual goals, recommended special education programs/services, testing accommodations, extent to which the student will not participate in the general education classroom and curriculum, plans for initiating and evaluating the services, and needed transition services. A team of knowledgeable people is included in the process to ensure that the student receives the best education available to him/her. The inclusion of all of these pertinent people, such as special education teachers, general education teachers, school psychologists, related service

providers, the parent(s), and whenever appropriate, the student him/herself, allows the student to involve people that have the best interest of the student.

Another major principle of IDEA is that every state and locality must have a plan to ensure that all children and youths with disabilities have the right to a free and appropriate public education. Every child and/or young adult between the ages of 3 and 21, regardless or the nature or severity of the disability has the right to an appropriate and just education. Each student with a disability is entitled to an appropriate public education at no cost to the parents or guardians. This means that the student is able to receive a suitable education for him/her in the best possible environment. The best possible environment would be the one that is least restrictive for the individual student.

Special education entails instruction and interventions designed to meet the individual needs of each child with a disability (U.S. Department of Education, 2010). Due to special education and the services, instructional curriculum and programs are used to teach core competencies to children with various disabilities. Two of the most pivotal acts in the field of special education are the Individuals with Disabilities Act (IDEA) and the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA).

The federal law known as IDEA "ensures that all children and youths with disabilities have the right to a free, appropriate public education" in the least restrictive environment (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2019, p. 13). The second federal law, ADA, "ensures the right of individuals with disabilities to nondiscriminatory treatment in other aspects of their lives; it provides protections of civil rights in the specific areas of employment, transportation, public accommodations, state and local government, and telecommunications" (Hallahan, Kauffman, & Pullen, 2019, p. 14). The ADA protects

people who have a physical or mental impairment that substantially restricts one or more major life activities. In addition, people with disabilities are protected from discrimination in employment settings by the ADA. The law prohibits employers from using unnecessary qualification standards to weed out applicants with disabilities. Since the authorization of IDEA in 1975 and the enacting of the ADA in 1990, our nation has tried to ensure access to quality special education and related services; but it is still an ongoing work in progress.

The field of special education provides additional services, supports and placements to qualifying students who have a disability and educational needs that provide support that goes beyond the normally offered general education setting. Special education must involve individually planned and systematically monitored arrangements of teaching procedures, adapted materials, accessible settings, and other interventions designed to help learners with disabilities achieve a level of self-sufficiency and success in school and the community (Bean & Swan, 2012). Usually, special educators at the elementary level provide early learning skills, behavioral strategies, reading instruction, and content knowledge. On the other hand, special educators at the secondary level focus on subject-specific information, practical life skills, and the transition from school to the workforce. Special educators have much to offer all the teachers and students in their schools, but their first commitment and concern must be for the students who qualify for special education services.

Stigma of the Label

Stigma describes prejudicial attitudes toward and negative treatment of people with characteristics deemed dangerous, undesirable, or unworthy (Shifrer, 2013).

Unfortunately, in the 21st century, there is still a stigma for special education students. Sadly, when some students are labeled, they are taken out of a general education classroom and put into a special education classroom that is sometimes segregated away from the rest of the school. Any student placed in a separate special education class may be at risk of being made fun of by their peers, because they are seen as "different." Also, any student placed in their inclusion class may be at risk of being bullied by their general education peers. Many of the students that are seen as "different" tend to become the target of bullying.

Some children that are classified with a disability learn at a different rate or have a different set of strengths than their general education peers. Other students were possibly not exposed to the same vocabulary and learning opportunities as their peers. The more we, as educators and other professionals, only focus on the weakness, the more the students will only focus on their weakness and never see that they have strengths. In addition, the more that we include a weak-based educational program instead of a strengths-based approach, the more we run the risk of having more parents think that the school system is out of touch and outdated.

There are many outcomes that come from labeling a student with a disability. The negative outcomes of labeling are that professionals label for its own sake, without suggesting any form of treatment or support, as a way of maintaining the status quo by keeping minority groups at the bottom of the social hierarchy and to maintain focus on within child problems and not address the environmental factors which have produced or exacerbated the problem (Riddick, 2000, p. 653). Labeling can lead to a stigma and give

the child and adults, such as teachers, providers and parents, involved negative expectations.

The stigma associated with identification as needing special education could be reduced by talking in readily understood language about differences, accepting the reality of differences and what they mean for students' education, and emphasizing the benefits of special education and the special skills needed to provide it (Kauffman & Badar, 2013). Changing the stigma attached to special education is the key to success for the students with special needs to ensure equity. This change will require altering from the top down.

Administrators must make sure that their schools have zero tolerance for teasing and discrimination based on ability and differences. These administrators need to ensure that they are setting a tone where there is a zero tolerance for students who make fun of one another because of an academic disability. Also, teachers must have the skills to address the academic needs of students mainstreamed into their classes, and model treating all students with respect. Students must then understand that being different is "okay," and that their peers are more like them than they are different from them. Once these changes are met, then the attitudes from parents, teachers and students without disabilities might transform.

Negative Attitudes from Parents, Teachers and Students without Disabilities

Labeling can lead to stigmatization and give the child and adults involved negative expectations (Riddick, 2000). Many parents have a hard time admitting that their child needs special education services. Other parents may refuse to put their child in special education, even when they know their child would benefit from the services.

Many parents hide the fact that their child is in special education because they know that once a child is labeled, that label will stay with them throughout their school years.

According to the West Virginia Department of Education (2012), early evidence showed that knowing a child's label, especially the labels of learning disability, affected teacher perceptions and expectations for success. Other research showed that only certain labels (i.e., emotionally disturbed) influenced teachers' expectations for student success, and that teachers are more influenced by student behavior, such as a sample of student work (West Virginia Department of Education, 2012). It is clear that teachers displayed a negative outlook on students with disabilities and students with disabilities felt the stigma attached to them.

Unfortunately, there is a lowered expectation of achievement from parents and teachers for students with disabilities. Teachers and parents are more likely to perceive disabilities as a deficit and hold lower expectations for labeled students than for similarly achieving and behaving adolescents not labeled with disabilities (Shifrer, 2013). The negative effect of being labeled is partially mechanized through parents' and particularly teachers' lower expectations (Shifrer, 2013). However, "the negative effects of the school label seem to be mechanized to a greater degree through teachers' rather than parents' perceptions and expectations" (Shifrer, 2013, p. 476). Although inconclusive evidence that the power of the label to stigmatize is evident in teachers more than parents, the very possibility of the stigma might be sufficient motivation for additional research into the special education processes in schools all around the United States.

Settings

In order to access the least restrictive environment, schools offer two main settings for students with disabilities. An Integrated Co-Teaching class includes two teachers, a general education teacher and a special education teacher. These two teachers work together to ensure students receive their services. A self-contained classroom includes a special education teacher and paraprofessionals or aides to help support the students. Although these two settings provide different environments and different atmospheres, they both employ strategies and methods to ensure the students achieve success.

A powerful source for students with disabilities' success is the quality of their teachers and their instructional practices. Many schools are implementing the co-teaching model, where one general education teacher and one special education teacher share the roles and responsibilities of ensuring that all students, despite certain circumstances, learn the best way they can. The students with special needs attend class with their general education population peers. The teachers employ various strategies and methods to teach students with and without disabilities to guarantee that all students have equal access to the general education curriculum.

Within the Integrated Co-Teaching classrooms, students are exposed to more academic diversity, meaning some of the students have disabilities and some do not have disabilities. Co-Teaching classrooms allow special needs students to have greater access to the school's general education curriculum. Finally, special education students are not labeled in a way that could decrease their self-worth.

On the other hand, self-contained special education classrooms are smaller than the Integrated Co-Teaching classrooms. They are led by a special education teacher and many have the assistance of paraprofessionals or aides. The students in self-contained classrooms also receive special support and intervention, as mentioned in their Individualized Education Programs.

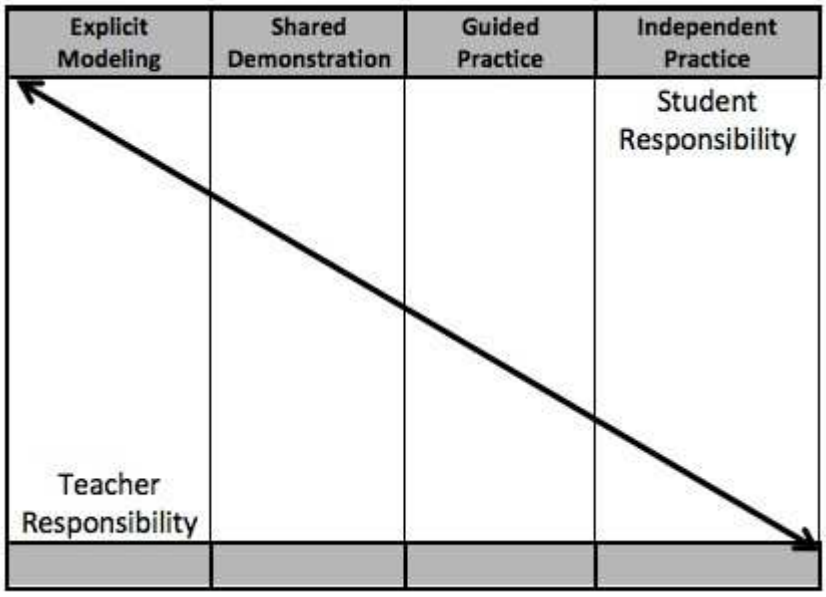
Within the self-contained classrooms, students are given more intensive intervention, as opposed to the Integrated Co-Teaching classrooms. Also, self-contained classrooms foster individualized attention. In addition, these classrooms provide students with individualized learning styles.

Scaffolding Instruction

In education, the term, *scaffolding*, refers to a process through which a teacher gives support for students in order to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of skills. The teacher chooses to scaffold based on students' needs and the teacher builds on students' experiences and knowledge as they are learning new skills. Some of the scaffolding materials may include sentence structures/starters, color coding, graphic organizers, and chunking or breaking down material into smaller sections. Since teacher support is needed at the beginning of scaffolding, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide explicit modeling. However, the end goal of scaffolding is for students to have more responsibility and complete assignments independently (see figure 2.1).

Figure 2.1

Share of Responsibility for Task Completion in the 'I Do, We Do, You Do' Framework, Adapted from Pearson, P.D., & Gallagher, M. (1983)



Although there is limited research on scaffolding instruction for secondary students, some of the research from elementary students can be beneficial for students in middle and high school. According to Lee and Yoon (2017), altering text difficulty of passages is an important component to facilitate performance in repeated reading studies, even though type of difficulty manipulation in repeated reading varies in outcome. This indicates that as teachers give scaffolding support for their students; they are able to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of skills. In addition, the greatest gains in reading fluency occur when a shift of instructional-level to independent-level passages were used (Lee & Yoon, 2017). As students receive scaffolding materials, they are able to comprehend the material that is on their level, which will enhance their ability to read independently, without the scaffolding materials.

Hock, Brasseur-Hock, Hock, and Duvel (2017) and White and Kim (2008) looked at scaffolding as an intervention, yet they used different scaffolding facilitators. Hock et al. (2017) had teachers provide scaffolding support as students had multiple opportunities to apply and generalize reading skills and strategies to core class material. They found that the interventions that combined direct instruction and reading strategy instruction were the most effective for teaching reading comprehension. White and Kim (2008) found that if the books closely match students' reading levels and interests, and if teachers and parents provide scaffolding support in the form of oral practice and comprehension strategies instruction, voluntary reading of books over the summer can enhance the reading achievement of ethnic minority students and reduce summer reading loss for students with and without disabilities. Since these two studies provided a different viewpoint of scaffolding materials, their findings warrant further exploration of the association between scaffolding and students with learning disabilities.

Graphic Organizers

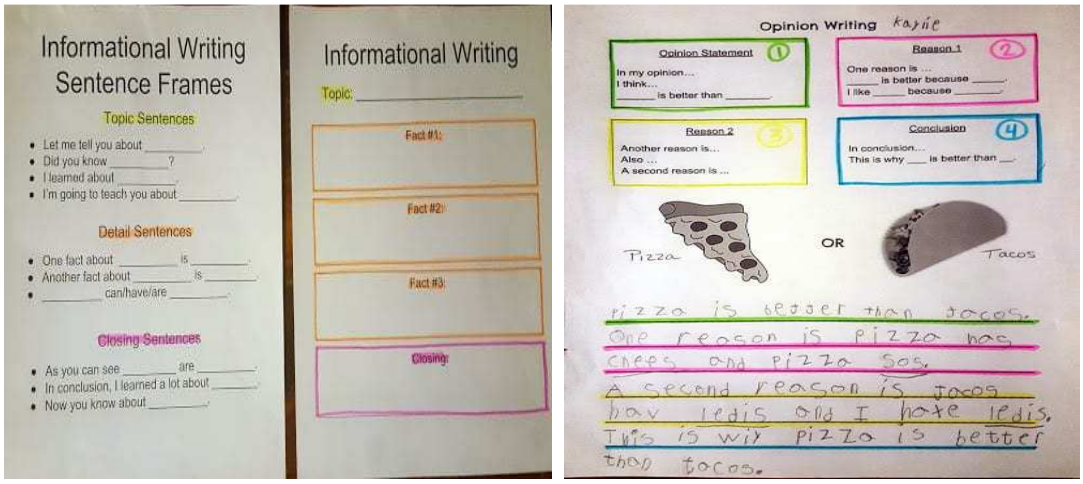
The Common Core State Standards present challenges for all students, but particularly those students with disabilities. These standards have increased the expectations for rigorous reading and writing across all content areas. A common method for supporting the writing of students with disabilities is the use of graphic organizers.

Ewoldt and Morgan (2017) mention that students with learning disabilities often struggle with the process of developing their ideas into organized sentences. The integration of graphic organizers as a support tool has been found to be effective. Ewoldt and Morgan (2017) mention that adding color to graphic organizers provides organization

that displays relationships between undeveloped ideas and complete sentences in the paragraph and provide additional scaffold for students with learning disabilities. These color coded organizers allow students to differentiate between various sections of either a writing piece or another type of assignment (see figure 2.2).

Figure 2.2

Color Coding Graphic Organizers (Caudill, K, 2018)



According to Singleton and Filce (2015), graphic organizers can reduce cognitive demands by providing a framework for students to create a visual representation of the most significant information in the text. Graphic organizers are visual tools that can alleviate the anxiety often experienced by students with learning disabilities when reading. These tools can be used to present information needed prior to reading or to help students remember important information during reading in order to improve comprehension. In addition, graphic organizers enhance reading comprehension for older students with learning disabilities when the appropriate organizer is selected.

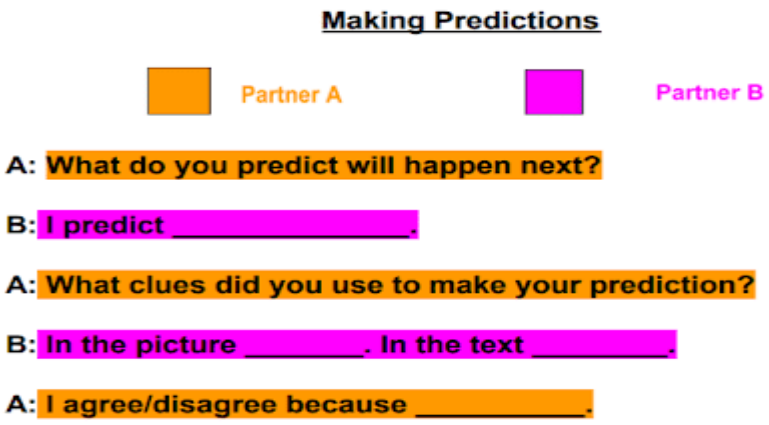
Color Coding

The usage of color can be very effective in learning and educational settings. There is a higher demand put on excellent academic achievement for students of all levels

in the educational setting. The extent to which students utilize their cognitive abilities is important and may contribute to better academic achievement. The cognitive abilities of the students refer to the way the students perceive, pay attention, remember, think, and understand the lessons (Dzulkifli & Mustafar, 2013). There needs to be specific strategies, such as scaffolding materials to use within the classroom that could emphasize the use of colors. These materials can be used to facilitate the learning process and colors can play a role in motivating students to learn and profit from their educational experiences.

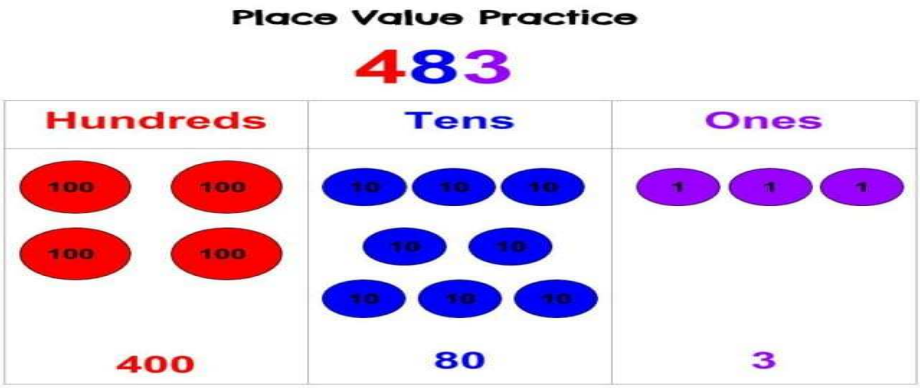
In New York State, the Common Core and Next Generation learning standards have become increasingly more difficult for students, particularly those with learning disabilities. This is exacerbated when students are in middle school and dealing with social and emotional issues, as well as various other changes. These new standards include speaking and listening where students must learn to academically speak with one another. Students with learning disabilities should be provided with sentence starters/frames to help guide them throughout their speaking. The use of color coding sentence starters to allow the students to view their individual speaking section would help the conversations flow in a more meaning way (see figure 2.3).

Figure 2.3
Sentence Stems, Using Color Coding (Caudill, K, 2018)



Although many content area teachers use color coding for English Language Arts, color coding can be effective in all subjects. Color coding allows students to focus on specific sections of a text or determine the differences between place value in math (see figure 2.4). Also, color coding can allow students to determine the importance of information within a variety of subjects.

Figure 2.4
Using Color Coding in Math (Caudill, K, 2018)



Within the educational setting, color helps students in memorizing certain information by increasing their attention level. Color enhances attention level in

individuals and is extremely beneficial within the classroom setting. The more attention focused on certain stimuli, the more chances of the stimuli to be transferred to more of permanent memory storage (Sternberg, 2009). Using color has the potential to increase chances of environmental stimuli to be encoded, stored, and retrieved successfully (Dzulkifli & Mustafar, 2013).

Chunking Texts

An important skill for students to practice is the ability to comprehend challenging texts. One way students can better comprehend challenging texts is through chunking. Chunking occurs when a difficult text is broken down into more manageable pieces. When students are given content that is divided into smaller parts, they can better identify key words and ideas. Also, the students can develop their ability to paraphrase. This makes it easier for students to organize and synthesize information.

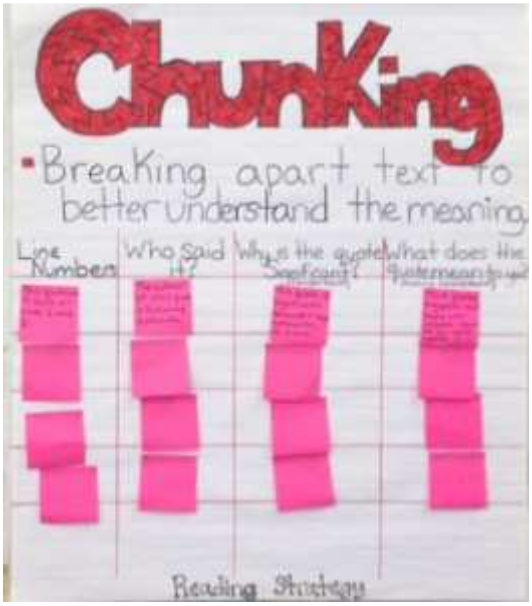
Chunking breaks longer strings of information down into smaller pieces of information. This allows individuals that use chunking to enhance their learning. As information is chunked, there is more of an understanding of information. Educators can ask students various questions about specific sections of the text. Also, as information is chunked, the application of information is facilitated. Finally, with chunking, information is retained in working memory.

The use of chunking allows students to re-read text by breaking the text into parts to better understand the meaning of the text. Chunking can be done by breaking a larger text into smaller paragraphs or can be done by breaking the text apart sentence by sentence (see figure 2.5). Students can choose various sections of a text to analyze and

interpret for themselves. The reading strategy of breaking apart the text into smaller pieces will help students to master a difficult text or assignment.

Figure 2.5

Using Chunking to Break Apart Text (Pierson, 2013)



In order to obtain success in middle and high schools, students must effectively use reading as a study skill. According to Kozen, Murray, and Windell (2006) some students may have difficulty with larger passages. For some students, the passage to be read is too long, and they are unable to process all the material at one time. They mention the effective strategy, chunking. Chunking involves dividing the text into smaller sections that are more easily read and understood. The use of chunking makes the text more manageable and result in better comprehension of the text as well as participation in class.

According to Nishida (2013) chunking has been demonstrated to improve reading comprehension. Nishida conducted a quantitative study where she evaluated the effectiveness of chunking. This study assessed whether the ability to practice chunking

accurately could improve reading comprehension skills. The findings showed that chunking errors decreased when participants received continued instruction on chunking methods and syntactic structures. Therefore, chunking is an effective and valuable tool for middle school students, particularly those middle school students with learning disabilities.

Sentence Structures/Starters

In order to assist students, particularly those with learning disabilities, incorporate higher levels of academic language into their writing, teachers incorporate the use of sentence structures and sentence starters. Sentence starters are starter words for students who must complete the sentence. These are especially beneficial for those students who have writing difficulties. The sentence starters can help these students to learn to enhance their writing skills.

When students are in elementary school, they are engaged in reading and writing workshops. The reading workshop method has a goal to teach students strategies for reading and comprehension. This workshop model allows teachers to differentiate and meet the needs of all of their students. In the writing workshop method, each student in the class is seen as a working author. The teacher allows to students to act as the writing professional and the teacher acts as a guide to allow students to explore their writing.

Throughout these early models of reading and writing, teachers use sentence structures/starters to help guide their students throughout this process. Some of these starters may include orderly transitions, such as "First," "Next," "Then," and "Last" or starters in making connections, such as "I can relate to…" or "This reminds me of…" As students move throughout the educational career and into middle and high school, it is

important for educators to continue to provide these sentence structures/starters as they are needed, depending upon the individual student and his/her individual needs.

Ustunel and Tokel (2017) conducted a study with middle school students in Turkey. Forty-one middle school students attending an international school in Turkey were scaffolding with technology-based scaffolding treatments in two groups supervised by two teachers. The results showed that the students benefited from the use of sentence starters and question prompts, which led to the students to develop the ability to construct arguments with a claim, ground, backing, warrants, and in some cases, more sophisticated arguments using rebuttals. These two researchers were able to conclude that sentence and question prompts promote student learning and improve the student's ability to construct arguments.

Subramaniam (2010) mentioned the benefits of using writing frames in the classroom. Jones (2000) and Wellington and Osborne (2001) described a writing frame as a template that contains starters/sentence beginners, key language information, connectives/cohesive links, and sentence modifiers (as cited in Subramaniam, 2010). These elements collectively work together to provide an outline to scaffold writing and provide a view of the overall writing tasks. Overall, Subramaniam concluded that sentence starters activate prior knowledge about the topic of study and help teachers introduce students to the language in that topic of study.

Self-Determination Theory

There are varieties of theoretical perspectives that aim to explain motivation. Self-determination theory helps people to think about teaching, student motivation, and course preparation. The applied skills based on the scaffolding materials are the

development of students' self-concept and self-determination. Self-concept is a collection of beliefs about oneself from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the responses of others. Self-determination is an important concept that refers to each person's ability to make choices and manage aspects of their own life. It allows people to feel that they have control over their choices.

Throughout this study, I asked students their perceptions on each scaffolding material and the students were able to feel in control over their educational choices. This had an impact on their motivation. People feel more motivated to take action when they feel that what they do will have an effect on the outcome. Self-determination theory (SDT) as expressed by Deci and Ryan (1985) was the framework theoretically informing the research.

Self-determination theory grew out of the work of psychologists Edward Deci and Richard Ryan (Cherry, 2019). Self-determination theory suggests that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The concept of intrinsic motivation, or engaging in activities for the inherent rewards of the behavior itself, plays an important role in self-determination theory. Deci and Ryan (1985) mentioned that people have a need to grow and gain fulfillment.

Much of the research guided by SDT has also examined environmental factors that hinder or undermine self-motivation, social functioning, and personal well-being (Ryan, & Deci, 2000). Although many environmental effects were in previous research, the research suggests that these detriments described in terms of the three basic psychological needs, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. As a result, SDT is

concerned not only with the specific nature of positive developmental tendencies, but also examines social environments that are opposed to these tendencies.

Subsets of Self-Determination Theory

In self-determination theory, a student's level of self-determination is decided by the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Autonomy refers to being the source of one's own behavior and achieving correspondence between the activity and one's sense of self. Competence refers to the need to have an effect on the environment and to achieve desired outcomes. Relatedness is the desire to feel connected to others.

Promoting autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the classroom is essential for satisfaction of these needs. The more SDT needs are satisfied, the greater the level of one's own self-determination and motivation (Bachman & Stewart, 2011). In addition, self-determined students are more motivated to engage in and complete tasks (Bachman & Stewart, 2011).

Autonomy

Autonomous behaviors are behaviors that are self-initiated and regulated by one's own choice (Deci & Ryan, 1985). The need for autonomy includes one's inherent need to feel free and access choices when considering or performing an activity. Individuals may experience the self as the agent of the behavior or perceive external factors, such as parental expectations or internal factors, such as the student wanting to do well him/her, as controlling their behavior (Bachman & Stewart, 2011). These needs, thoughts, and feelings can be either internalized or externalized.

In order for educators to support autonomy within the classroom, students engage in self-governed behaviors. Being able to provide students with choice will allow them to increase in their performance (Bachman & Stewart, 2011). Within the classroom to support autonomy, educators may provide students with multiple ways to complete an assignment or solve a problem and allow them to select their preferred method.

Another way to promote students' sense of autonomy is to provide them with autonomy support in the educational setting. According to Bachman and Stewart (2011), students with autonomy-supportive teachers compared to students with relatively controlling teachers, "show greater mastery motivation, perceived competence and intrinsic motivation, greater conceptual understanding, higher academic performance, and greater persistence in school" (p. 182). When students feel like they have a choice, particularly in their scaffolding support material, they will feel more motivated and want to do well.

According to Cherry (2019), people need to feel in control of their own behaviors and goals. Being able to take action will result in real change and has shown to play a crucial role in helping people feel self-determined. In addition, being able to provide students with autonomy support within the classroom allows students to make choices and decisions about their learning experience.

Competence

Competence focuses on the need for an individual to interact proficiently or effectively with the environment. The need for competence refers to students' need to feel capable of mastering challenges and to interact with the environment. Perceptions of competence are critical because they facilitate goal accomplishment and provide

individuals with a sense of satisfaction when engaging in an activity at which they feel successful (Bachman & Stewart, 2011). In addition, being able to master difficult concepts and tasks allows individuals to feel efficient and to experience greater levels of intrinsic motivation (Deci & Ryan, 1985).

According to Cherry (2019), people need to gain mastery of tasks and learn different skills. When people feel that they have the skills needed for success, they are more likely to take actions that will help them achieve their goals. In order for students to achieve their goals and achieve success, their teachers must create an appropriate learning environment. Creating a learning environment that builds student self-efficacy will help them develop a sense of competence and increase their motivation.

In order for educators to support competence within the classroom, students must feel effective in the content of their social environment. Once students feel competent, they will be willing to take on challenges. Therefore, in this technological era, due to COVID-19, educators can provide students with video and other technological resources that encompass evidence-based study strategies tailored to the content area course.

Since many students with learning disabilities may not have appropriate prior knowledge to be competent in various subjects, it is important for educators and educational professionals to be aware of issues that may seem to lack motivation. The difficulty in tasks, perceived importance, and value of engaging in the task has identified as important variables affecting student motivation. Previous learning experiences shape a student's sense of competence. These experiences will determine how a learner perceives a given task and the amount of effort required to perform the task successfully

(Bachman & Stewart, 2011). Therefore, it is essential for educators to provide students with scaffolding material to allow students to feel competent and effective.

Relatedness

Relatedness is concerned with the interpersonal relationships, meaning the extent to which a person feels connected to other individuals, and the thoughtful relationships with those individuals, and has a sense of community. Relatedness refers to one's need to feel close to people who are important to them. Perceptions of relatedness are "viewed as the vehicle between value transmission and social relationships" (Bachman & Stewart, 2011, p. 182). Therefore, individuals are more likely to adopt the beliefs and values held by certain individuals and groups that they respect.

In order for educators to support relatedness within the classroom, students need to feel connected to others and/or a sense of belonging. Educators can do this by facilitating collaborative and active learning assignments, which may build students' confidence and a sense of community. In addition, teachers can foster relatedness within the classroom by asking their students how they personally relate to the topics within the classroom environment. Being able to value their feedback will build a sense of community and belongingness.

People need to experience a sense of belonging and attachment to other people (Cherry, 2019). The students with learning disabilities need to have supports, such as scaffolding materials, to feel closer to their general education peers. Being able to access the same curriculum through a different lens will help them feel a sense of relatedness and provide more equity and equitable opportunities. There are numerous supports for

students, such as scaffolding materials, to have a sense of relatedness to their general education classmates and/or peers and the staff.

Within the diverse classrooms, it is important to promote autonomy, competence, and relatedness for satisfaction of these needs. Self-determination theory suggests that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness (see Figure 2.6). The concept of intrinsic motivation, or engaging in activities for the inherent rewards of the behavior itself, plays an important role in self-determination theory.

Figure 2.6

The Areas of Psychological Needs for Self-Determination

Gaps in the Research

Deci and Ryan (1985) propose that students act intentionally to address needs within the three dimensions, autonomy, competence, and relatedness. These three dimensions have implications for student motivation. Deci and Ryan (1985) point out that there is a direct link between autonomy and intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation requires autonomy in the form of free choice to participate in an activity, without requiring or desiring an external reward. However, many students in middle school do not have the choice to access materials of their choosing. Therefore, a study is vital to

show how middle school students perceive their support that they have within their content area classrooms.

Unfortunately, literacy instruction is more prevalent in elementary schools than in middle schools (Cantrell, Burns, & Callaway, 2009 & Allington, 2011). Many middle school classrooms are on a time constraint and must teach important content within that short period of time. Since elementary school teachers have their class for most of the school day, it is easier for them to teach literacy instruction to their students than for middle school teachers to teach literacy to their students because they only have their students for a shorter period (Hock, Brasseur-Hock, Hock, & Duvel, 2017 & Ivey & Broaddus, 2000). Many secondary leveled teachers have important content to teach and to prepare the students for assessments. Some of these teachers may even say that they do not have the time to teach students how to read. However, more and more secondary leveled teachers must begin implementing literacy instruction into the content-area classrooms.

Research on scaffolding instruction for secondary students is very limited. However, some of the research from elementary students can be beneficial for students in middle and high school. Being able to alter text difficulty of passages is an important component to facilitate performance, even though type of difficulty manipulation varies in outcome (Lee & Yoon, 2017). This indicates that as teachers give scaffolding support for their elementary leveled students; they are able to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of skills. As students are provided with scaffolding materials, they are able to comprehend the material that is on their level, which will enhance their ability to read independently, without the scaffolding materials. Since this is true for elementary school

students, the studies with middle school students should replicate the elementary leveled students. But, there are limited studies that can prove this theory.

Although there is evidence that scaffolding materials are effective with elementary school students, there is limited research on the effectiveness of scaffolding materials on middle school students. In addition, the research studies on the effect of scaffolding on elementary school students do not include students with special needs. Also, these studies do not elicit the perspectives of these students on the materials that are used to help them learn a new concept or material within the classroom. Therefore, further research should include the thoughts and interpretations of scaffolding materials on educators, as well as, middle school students with special needs.

Research Implications

As mentioned above, the amount of research on scaffolding materials for middle school students is limited. Due to the fact that scaffolding materials have had success within elementary school classrooms, the results should concur with middle school students. In addition, there is a need for more qualitative studies on scaffolding materials that consider the contextual and individual factors that impact perspectives on these important materials within the classroom.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Research Design

This qualitative study employed a case study of five middle school students with reading learning disabilities in order to understand the participants' perspectives while using scaffolding material. There was an individual case study for each student. The study used the data collection in an understanding of perspectives by meeting with students face-to-face and virtually. The collection of student perspectives occurred on multiple occasions using semi structured interviewing techniques. After I collected and transcribed the data, I used qualitative coding to analyze the data. The coding determined patterns and themes. Finally, in order to ensure triangulation, I conducted observations of the students and their teachers using the scaffolding materials in the classroom environment or via a virtual communication platform.

Case studies analyze a particular set of issues within the educational context and may be in narrative form to serve as the basis of a pedagogical tool. Case study as research is most appropriate when the phenomenon studied is in a real-life context, such as within a middle school classroom setting. Case study research excels at bringing us to an understanding of a complex issue or subject and can extend experience or add strength to information known through previous research (Grauer, 2012).

Paradigm

This study took a qualitative method approach, specifically a case study approach because I sought to determine the outlook on scaffolding materials for middle school students with learning disabilities within the content area classrooms. I invested in understanding which scaffolding materials the participants enjoyed using, as well as, their

individual perspectives of the effectiveness of such materials. The social interactions between each participant and me were important to determine the meaning and knowledge of these scaffolding materials.

For these reasons, this study adopted a constructivist-interpretative paradigm which states that reality is constructed through interactions between a researcher and the research subject. The constructivist paradigm "constructs meaning and knowledge through interactions with others and the environment" (Unrau & Alvermann, as cited in Alvermann, Unrau, & Ruddell, 2013). The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. Therefore, I was interested in the experiences of the individual students as it relates to the issue of using scaffolding materials within the content area classrooms.

Theoretical Framework

In addition to using a constructivist-interpretative paradigm to understand the subjective experiences of the student participants, I employed self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to understand the motivation and determination behind the perspectives of the subjects. This theory suggests that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The concept of intrinsic motivation plays an important role in self-determination theory due to the fact that intrinsic motivation comes from within and the need for personal satisfaction.

In self-determination theory, a student's level of self-determination is discovered by the satisfaction of three innate psychological needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. All of these needs can work together or stand alone; but having more than one needs being met can help self-determination. Within this study, autonomy,

competence, and relatedness were utilized. Autonomy refers to being the source of one's own behavior and achieving correspondence between the activity and one's sense of self. The participants need to feel like they are in charge or their own learning or their own teaching. Competence refers to the need to have an effect on the environment and to achieve desired outcomes. The participants need to feel like they are knowledgeable in the topic/material and have an effect on their learning and/or teaching environment. Relatedness refers to the need for the participants to experience a sense of belonging or attachment to other people. The participants need to feel like they belong in their environment and/or have an attachment to other people, including their peers. Therefore, the self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) that considers motivation and determination and the constructivist-interpretative paradigm that considers the interactions of others and their environment were within this qualitative study.

Methodology

The research questions below formulated in taking a qualitative approach to the study of scaffolding on middle school students with learning disabilities within a middle school inclusion or self-contained setting. This study took into account the impact of COVID-19 school closures that began during the spring 2020 and the hybrid and remote learning instructional contexts during the fall 2020. Now more than ever, an understanding of how individual and contextual factors that affect students with learning disabilities is necessary within this unprecedented time. This study utilized a case study perspective to answer the following questions:

- What are the perceptions of scaffolding on literacy instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities during the COVID-19 school re-entry in the fall of 2020?
- What individual and contextual factors shape the perceptions of scaffolding materials for students?

The first question was the central research question, one that reflects a broader question that asks for an exploration of the central phenomenon (Creswell and Creswell, 2018), such as scaffolding on literacy instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic. Question 2 represents the sub-question, which relates to the general central question but narrows the focus of the study to various factors that would affect the perceptions.

Research Site

The study site chosen was a 3K-8 public school located in Queens, NY. This school is described as a "school of Core Knowledge." The Core Knowledge curriculum sets apart from the curriculum in a traditional school by the specificity of the standards. The curriculum is intensely rigorous. Another difference between a Core Knowledge school and what children might experience in another school is that art and music are essential. As of the 2019-2020 school year, 941 students attend this school.

According to the website, greatschools.org, this school received an overall rating of 8/10. These ratings follow a 1-10 scale, where 10 is the highest and 1 is the lowest. Ratings at the lower end of the scale (1-4) signal that the school is "below average," 5-6 indicate "average," and 7-10 are "above average."

The population of the school consists of 41% of the population being Hispanic, 37% being white, 11% being Asian or Asian/Pacific Islander, 9% being black, 1% being

two or more races, and 1% being American Indian/Alaska Native. Students from low income families are represented in 56% of the population, 4% of the population are learning English, and 51% of the population is males and 49% of the population is females. There is a 16:1 ratio of students to teacher and 98% of teachers have 3 or more years of teaching experience.

To protect the privacy of the participants and the school, the pseudonym "P.S. 1000" was used throughout the study. This school was chosen due to the teacher participants being tenured and having worked there for more than three years and due to the Integrated Co-Teaching programs in all content areas and providing a self-contained classroom for middle school students. In addition, being able to choose this site allowed the participants and the researcher to schedule meetings and interviews on campus at a convenient time.

Participants

Within this study, five middle school students with learning disabilities (grades 6-8) participated in the interview process. The selected participants were on the following criteria: (a) students had to be registered for middle school at P.S. 1000 for the 2020-2021 school year, (b) students must have a classification of learning disability, specifically a reading learning disability, (c) students must be in either an Integrated Co-Teaching classroom or a self-contained classroom for the 2020-2021 school year.

The participants in this study include five middle school students with learning disabilities who attended either Integrated Co-Teaching classes or self-contained classes participated in this study. These students allowed cross-case comparisons among their prospected teachers. The students with learning disabilities, Kayla, Francesca, Adrianna,

Shyla, and Luis have attended P.S. 1000 for at least four years. Table 3.1 provides the summary of the biographical data for the student participants.

Table 3.1

Summary of the Student Participants' Biographical Data

Student Participants	Grade	Age	Setting (Self-Contained or Integrated Co-Teaching (ICT))
Kayla	6	11	Self Contained
Francesca	7	13	ICT
Adrianna	7	13	ICT
Shyla	8	13	ICT
Luis	8	13	ICT

Participant Privacy and Confidentiality

Due to the fact that this is a qualitative study that incorporates a case study approach, personal identifying indicators surfaced during the data collection and analysis. The data was filed with pseudonyms and codes for the cases developed for the student participants. Since learning was done on technological devices, there was limited amount of paper during the learning process. The digital files for the recorded interviews, files of the scaffolding materials, and the transcriptions were saved on an external drive (USB) that was kept in a locked filing cabinet in the researcher's home. These digital files were stored on a personal computer to ensure online access to the researcher.

Data was collected through student interviews and using student scaffolding materials. The scaffolding material data, including graphic organizers, color coding activities and sentence starters, had identifying indicators, such as student names. These names were erased and replaced with a code number to ensure confidentiality.

In addition, student interviews were either video recorded or audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The recorded student interviews were via Google Meet. The research site preferred the students to use once consistent telecommunication mode during school, which was Google Meet.

The transcriptions for the student participants included code names to protect their anonymity. There was no reference to the school's name or address to continue to protect the identity of the participants within this study. Throughout this study, the data that was collected was compiled into separate case files and stored in a private area. I was the only individual to obtain access to these files.

Procedures

COVID-19 Additional NYC Information

After St. John's University and the New York City Department of Education approved the study proposal, data collection began. However, this study was in effect during the COVID19 pandemic. According to Mayor Bill De Blasio (NYC), New York City public schools were set to open on September 29, 2020 for the 2020-2021 school year. The mayor and the school chancellor, Richard Carranza, laid out the fall framework for the reopening of NYC public schools. The fall framework that was sent out by the schools chancellor to parents, students, teachers and staff in the beginning of June includes enhanced health measures to ensure students, teachers and staff are safe. According to the former chancellor, there was a need to ensure that schools and other office buildings are well-equipped to manage the enhanced health requirements that are necessary to protect against COVID-19 infection. This includes proper protective equipment (PPE) and other equipment, supplies, social distancing protocols, and

monitoring of health indicators required to protect our children, teachers, and staff. Temperature checks may also be a component of the multi-faceted strategy that will be in place when kids return to class.

In addition to health measures and proper protective equipment, the fall framework also includes a trauma-informed transition back to school to help students with their social-emotional needs. According to the mayor and the school chancellor, there must be a thoughtful process to re-acclimate children, parents, and staff to being back in school buildings. This means a focus must on the social-emotional needs of school communities while implementing trauma-informed approaches to teaching and learning. Also, the transition should include blended learning, which would be a combination of remote and in-person instruction.

The first step in the recruitment process was to send an email to the middle school content area teachers (see Appendix B). Then, the participating middle school teachers received the teacher consent form (see Appendix C) which contains further details about the research study and contact information for the researcher and mentor faculty overseeing the research. After the teachers provided the consent form and received a copy, a brief presentation was given to the teachers' students in their face-to-face and/or virtual classroom. The students that were interested in participating in the study received the parent (see Appendix D) and student (see Appendix E) consent form, which reviews the details of the research and the information about their participation. Once the participating students' parental and student consent forms were signed, submitted and copies were given, based on the number of students willing to participate, students were randomly selected. A total of five students were selected for the participant perspective

research. I used face-to-face and virtual interviews for data collection, allowing full participation. Then, I used coding to determine themes using field notes.

Data Collection

During the fall, 2020, there were specific guidelines put in place for re-entry into the school buildings. Based on the COVID-19 progression, the guidelines from the Center for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC), the guidelines from the World Health Organization (WHO), and executive order from Governor Cuomo and Mayor De Blasio, the research of this study was developed in alignment with the New York State guidelines. These guidelines consisted of a hybrid and remote learning model which were used to collect data from the participants.

Within this study, data was collected based on the restrictive social distancing mandates which forced schools to create staggered student schedules in order to reduce class size population. In addition to reducing class size for in person students, the students needed to be engaged in learning remotely. There was a percentage of instruction for in person students and a percentage of instruction for remote students using a digital platform. This type of blended learning consisted of in person classes and classes that use telecommunication software, such as Google Meet.

In addition, there were a plethora of students and families that opted for full remote instruction, using telecommunication software, such as Google Meet, for instruction. Due to the fact that scaffolding materials are predominately rendered by teachers using small group instruction within the classroom, the COVID-19 pandemic positioned teachers to utilize "break out rooms" to provide small group instruction. However, since some students did not turn on their cameras and/or unmute their

microphones to discuss their topics and/or assignments, teachers displayed difficulty in determining whether students comprehended the material being taught. Regardless of the instructional scenario, instruction occurred on-site and remotely. As has occurred in the New York City Department of Education, instructional settings may change at any given moment due to the progress of COVID-19 and the numbers. Hybrid learning can quickly switch to complete remote and vice versa.

Data was collected over a 12-week period from multiple sources, including student semi-structured interviews, classroom observations either the classroom or virtually, class activities, and class documents. This data compiled to form individual case profiles for the five middle school students with learning disabilities. The first cycle of coding involved the scaffolding material within the content area classrooms either within the physical classroom and/or virtually. During this time, I determined the perspectives of students on these scaffolding materials and labeled data that informed learner responses to the scaffolding material. The second cycle of coding provided cross-case comparisons of the five students to identify common patterns regarding the relationship between scaffolding material and literacy instruction.

Triangulation conducted in order to maximize the accuracy of the data analysis through identifying cross-referencing evidence collected from the different sources discussed below in support of each theme that emerges. Table 3.2 reflects the data collection timeline for this study. The timeline begins with week 1, which began on September 29, 2020. The last week of the study, week 12, concluded the study during the week of December 14, 2020.

Table 3.2

Timeline of the Data Collection

Timeline	Data collection procedures
Week 1-3	The first round of interviews for teachers and students
Weeks 4-10	Scaffolding materials is assigned and given to student participants
Weeks 11-12	The second round of interviews for teachers and students
Throughout the 12-week study	Classroom observations, both in person and virtually

Student Interviews. The student interviews were collected regardless of whether learning took place in the classroom or virtually. In order to protect the security of the participants and me, all interviews were held using the same telecommunication platform, Google Meet, and were recorded so that exact transcriptions were created for data and analysis purposes. The interviews were conducted at the beginning and at the end of the first marking period using an interview guide (see Appendix F). The interviews aimed to elicit the students' attitudes and beliefs of using scaffolding within the classroom. The analysis of the feedback students provide on scaffolding gave a valuable means to triangulate the interview data. This was used to understand the perceptions of scaffolding materials within the classroom.

Classroom Observations. Interview data was supplemented with observation data. Since the NYC DOE used a hybrid model for the fall where instruction was both face-to-face and remotely, the observations occurred in both the classroom and virtually. When instruction was face-to-face, the observations were physically present in the classroom. In addition, the observations followed the social distancing guidelines of remaining six feet away, wearing a protective facemask, and sanitizing practices in order

to protect the participants and me. When instruction was virtually, the observations occurred by being logged onto the class telecommunication program (i.e. Google Meet). This data was used to triangulate the data during the interview collection and analysis.

The analysis of in-person and remote classroom observation data assisted to establish the types of information communicated from the students about scaffolding as well as the kinds of relationships the teachers build with their students during both in-person and via remote learning. These data were also utilized to triangulate the data captured during the interview collection and analysis.

For this study, data was collected from the five middle school students with learning disabilities. Interviews guides were used for the students. The collection of student perspectives occurred on multiple occasions and qualitative coding was used to analyze the data. The coding determined patterns and themes.

Data Analysis

Throughout this qualitative data, I immersed myself in the data and consolidated the data by focusing on the segments that may provide insight into the research question. Then, I compared segments looking for patterns and themes within the data. I manually interpreted the interviews and what was said, and made meaning from the patterns and themes. These meanings or understandings became the findings within the study.

Data analysis involved the analysis of middle school student perspectives to investigate their interpretations on scaffolding materials that was reviewed in the Literature Review, Chapter 2. The scaffolding materials that were used the most within the research site were graphic organizers, color coding, sentence starters/stems, and chunking texts. At times, more than two scaffolding materials were used simultaneously.

The quality of student work using these scaffolding materials was also viewed to determine the efficacy of the materials provided. The quality was determined by the completion of the students' assignment.

Data analysis was performed continuously throughout this study. In order to effectively analyze the data, I began by reading the transcripts to look for events, experiences, accounts of things that happened, as well as the details of the actual narrative that was analyzed. While transcribing the tapes from the interviews, any patterns or themes were noted in the transcript margins. Then, I created a written summary showing the beginning and end of the events within the interviews. Next, I identified themes within the interviews.

Within the data analysis, there were several rounds of coding. The coding process was coded manually. Although there are qualitative analysis software programs available, I elected to complete the data analysis manually. The data was separated into major activities involving use of scaffolding materials in the four content areas, English Language Arts, Mathematics, Social Studies and Science, and then reduced common classroom activities and routines into one theme at every beginning stage of the analysis process.

The scaffolding activities within the content area classrooms were further coded and grouped. In the second round of coding, I reflected on the already categorized data and continued to link these codes to the literacy instruction of the classrooms in order to address the research questions. For instance, in the second round of analysis, when analyzing middle school students' interaction with scaffolding materials, the focus was

on the knowledge process of literacy and the content area. Then, I identified several sub-themes from this interaction.

During the transcription and coding process, I re-read the interviews and highlighted, within each interview, prominent ideas and any recurring words or messages. Then, I developed a corresponding code for that passage and placed it in the margin of the transcripts. After completion of coding in the first transcript, a code list was constructed. As I proceeded with the second round of interviews and coding, codes were pulled from the previous code list or new codes were created and added.

The students' interview data was coded into several different categories. The categories included: "students' skills with scaffolding materials," "student' skills with the content area," "students' skills with literacy," "students' attitudes towards use of scaffolding materials," and "challenges and concerns" based on the main themes that had developed in interview questions. I used photos of the students' physical and digital work to visualize the scaffolding materials and to make text interview and/or field notes more descriptive.

Prior to determining these categories and rounds of coding, the interviews were recorded using telecommunication platforms and then transcribed verbatim. Drafts with completed and uncompleted scaffolding material, transcripts and field notes and documents related to each student were compiled into an individual case profile. As mentioned above, there were two rounds of coding. First, the data was separated into major activities involving use of scaffolding materials in the four content areas. Then, the data reduced the common classroom activities and routines into one theme at every beginning stage of the analysis process. Next, the scaffolding activities within the

content area classrooms were further coded and grouped using an open coding approach. During the second round of coding, I reflected on the categorized data from the first round of coding and linked these codes to the literacy instruction of the classrooms in order to address the research questions. This round of coding involved cross-comparisons of the five students to identify common patterns regarding the relationship between individual factors, including learner factors, and contextual factors in mediating responses to scaffolding materials.

Instruments

Scaffolding Materials

Student scaffolding materials were collected through telecommunication devices. These materials were specific for the hybrid and remote contexts. The scaffolding materials were created by each individual educator based on their individual content area. These materials included graphic organizers, color coding, sentence starters/structures, and chunking. The teachers chose the materials to use throughout their lessons and/or units. Each content area educator used all four scaffolds in their lessons and/or units.

Each of the content area lessons and/or units was aligned with the New York State learning standards. These lessons and/or units include the pertinent scaffolding materials. Also, these lessons and/or units incorporate a variety of genres and multimodal texts and learning experiences to engage students in critical thinking.

Interview Questions

An effective way researchers can collect qualitative data is through interviews, where researchers use predetermined questions and conduct either structured, semi-structured, or unstructured interviews. During this type of research, information is

gathered from the participant(s) about the topic or material that is being studied. Throughout this qualitative research study, data was collected about the perceptions of scaffolding materials through interviews from student participants.

Interview questions were used for student participants. These interviews include questions about the perceptions of scaffolding materials. In addition, the questions include contextual and individual factors that contribute to the perceptions of these materials. Some of these factors may include perceptions on learning through scaffolding materials and perceptions of individuals within the classroom environment. Due to the fact that this research study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic, the perceptions about learning during this time and the abrupt use of technological tools for remote learning were also discussed.

Throughout this qualitative study, there were two rounds of interviews for student participants. The first round of interviews occurred in the beginning of the school year when staff and students returned to school, either in person or virtually. The second round of interviews occurred at the end of the 12-week study in which scaffolding materials were implemented. The interview guide contains the interview questions, which serve as guidance to me.

Presentation of Findings

The results of the case study research were reported in Chapter 4 of this study. These results include presentation of the findings using samples, tables and charts and scaffolding materials. In addition, it also reflects the comparisons of the five students to reflect the common patterns regarding the relationship between individual and contextual factors.

For this study, I presented the findings using a case study approach. I used interviews and observations for each individual case study. The observations were conducted in the content area classrooms, either in person, using the NYS regulations during COVID-19 or conducted virtually, using a telecommunication system. I included common themes among the participants by using visual representations of the themes that were observed throughout the data. In addition, I used the participants' dialogue, language and dialect, as well as, quotations from them. The study concluded with a summary of the findings, conclusions and implications for future research that were drawn from this current study.

Ethical Considerations/Potential Research Bias

Due to the qualitative nature of this study, personal identifying factors may arise during the data collection. Data was collected through student scaffolding material samples with their names and/or student ID. However, the names and/or student ID's were erased and students were given a code number or code name to ensure confidentiality.

The participant interviews were either audio or video recorded and transcribed verbatim by me. The interviews were conducted either face-to-face or virtually using Google Meet. The transcriptions had the code names for the participants to protect their anonymity. There was no mention of the school's name and/or address to protect the identities of the participants. All data was collected and compiled into separate files and locked in a filing cabinet. The only individuals that would have access to the files were the researcher and the mentor faculty member.

In order to minimize any harmful effects or reactions that could occur during the study, I ensured that I remain at a safe distance in the event of classroom observations. I guaranteed that I have the proper protective equipment, including facemasks and gloves. In addition, I made certain that the teachers and students felt comfortable during the interviews. If participants did not want to answer a specific question, I did not ask them to answer it (see Appendix G for assent statement). These participants did not have any harmful effects or reactions that may occur during this study.

Summary

This research investigation sought to develop a coherent understanding of scaffolding materials from a self-determination perspective. The research was concerned with determining the motivation of students in how they want to learn using various scaffolding materials. In addition, this study sought to discuss the impact the COVID-19 pandemic had on the interactions between students and their teachers. During the COVID-19 pandemic, students, teachers, families and schools experienced difficult times and were navigating through uncharted territory together in order to determine how to best educate students. This case study designed to determine the perspectives on scaffolding materials from middle school students with learning disabilities. It also determined the interactions between contextual and individual factors that shape those perspectives provided.

Data collection occurred during a 12-week timeline with middle school students with learning disabilities and their educators. There were two rounds of interviews, as well as, classroom observations. The two rounds of interviews occurred after school hours with middle school students with learning disabilities. Information from the

interviews and observations were analyzed and presented. These interviews and observations demonstrated the interaction or relationships between individual and contextual factors that surround or influence their perspectives on scaffolding materials. The results are discussed in the next chapter, Chapter 4- Findings and Themes.

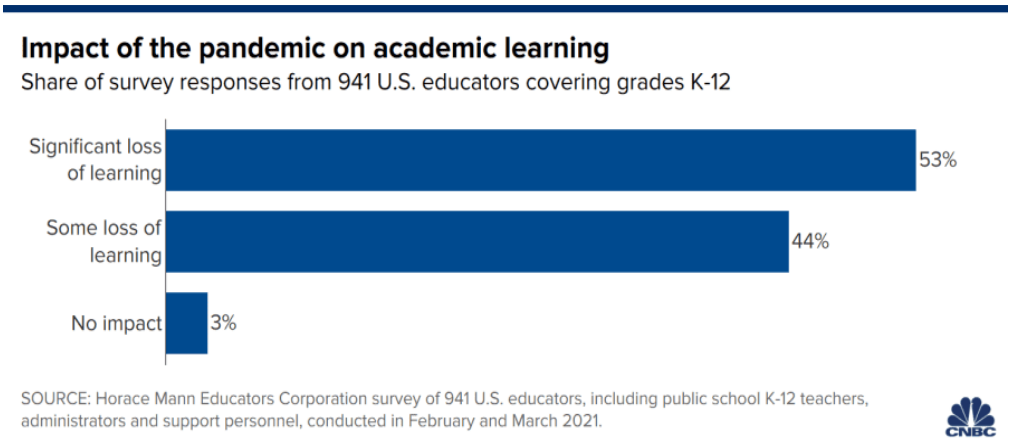
CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS AND THEMES

The central research question that guided the data collection and analysis was: "What are the perceptions of scaffolding on literacy instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities during the COVID-19 school re-entry in the fall of 2020?" This question surfaced as a result of multiple factors, including the need to improve the educational outcomes of students with learning disabilities, specifically reading disabilities, as well as the tremendous concern of learning loss during the K-12 school closures during the spring 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. As schools have been closed to deal with the global pandemic, students, parents and educators around the globe have felt the unexpected effect of the COVID-19 pandemic. Many educators have felt the negative impact of the pandemic on academic learning (see Figure 4.1). Throughout these daunting times, many students with learning disabilities and other disabilities have been struggling to achieve success within this virtual environment.

Figure 4.1

Impact of the Pandemic on Academic Learning



The COVID-19 pandemic has created the largest disruption of education systems in human history, affecting nearly 1.6 billion learners in more than 200 countries (Pokhrel & Chhetri R, 2021). Closures of schools, institutions and other learning spaces have impacted more than 94% of the world's student population (Pokhrel & Chhetri R, 2021). This has brought extensive changes in all aspects of our lives. Social distancing and restrictive movement policies have significantly disturbed traditional educational practices.

The central question of this study focuses on the field of special education during unprecedented times. Within the field of special education and general education, scaffolding material is being used to help students with various assignments. Scaffolding material is helpful because it breaks down various assignments for students into simpler forms and/or tasks. During this study, the scaffolding material was discussed with students and implemented in both in-person and virtual classrooms.

This research stems from my desire to bring awareness to the beliefs or perceptions of students with special needs in the content area classrooms. These students with special needs, specifically students with reading learning disabilities, have viewpoints on how they are taught various materials. These viewpoints should be valued and these students should be permitted to express their interpretations on the materials that are given to them to help guide them through their education.

During my teaching career, I have preferred to use color-coding materials to help my students determine important aspects of the information they learn. One of the assistant principal's within my school even refers to me as, "The Highlighting Queen." In addition, I have preferred to use color-coding within my own learning within my

educational career. Since I am intrinsically motivated to use color-coding, I believed that students would also be motivated by their preferred method of scaffolding materials.

In addition, this research stems from the gaps in previous research on the perceptions of middle school students with reading learning disabilities. In addition, it stems from the lack of research for middle school students and using the theoretical framework, self-determination theory (1985). Finally, this research stems from the gap of research on scaffolding materials and how they can possibly close the inequity gap by providing students with special needs the support that is needed for them to get a fair and just education.

The use of scaffolding materials presents an opportunity, as well as a challenge during hybrid and remote learning when students are either in the school buildings part-time or not at all. As a result, sub-question 2 was incorporated to the general question above and narrow the focus of the study. It includes:

- What individual and contextual factors shape the perceptions of scaffolding materials for students?

The central question and sub-question are formulated with the constructivist-interpretative paradigm, which states that reality is constructed through interactions between a researcher and the research subject. The constructivist paradigm builds meaning and knowledge through interactions with others and the environment.
The interpretive paradigm is concerned with understanding the world as it is from subjective experiences of individuals. Therefore, I wanted to know the experiences of the individual student as it related to the issue of using scaffolding materials within the content area classrooms.

In addition to using a constructivist-interpretative paradigm to understand the subjective experiences of the student participants, I employed self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 1985) to discover the motivation and determination behind the perspectives of the subjects. This theory suggests that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. Throughout this study, autonomy, competence and relatedness were used. The concept of intrinsic motivation plays an important role in self-determination theory.

Data was collected while schools were putting restrictive social distancing measures into place. This forced schools to create staggered student schedules in order to reduce class size population. In addition to reducing class size for in person students, the students needed to be engaged in learning remotely. There was a percentage of instruction for in person students and a percentage of instruction for remote students using a digital platform. This type of blended learning consisted of in person classes and classes that use telecommunication software, such as Google Meet.

Data was collected over a 12-week period from multiple sources. These sources included student semi-structured interviews, classroom observations either in the classroom or virtually, class activities, and class documents. This data was compiled to form individual case profiles for the five students with learning disabilities.

The first cycle of coding involved the scaffolding material within the content area classrooms either within the physical classroom and/or virtually. During this time, I determined the perspectives of students on these scaffolding materials and labeled data that informed learner responses to the scaffolding material. The second cycle of coding provided cross-case comparisons of the five students to identify common patterns

regarding the relationship between scaffolding material and literacy instruction. Triangulation was conducted in order to maximize the accuracy of the data analysis through identifying cross-referencing evidence collected from the different sources discussed below in support of each theme that emerges.

Participant Profiles and Perspectives on Scaffolding Materials

The participants in this study included the five middle school students with learning disabilities who attended either Integrated Co-Teaching classes or self-contained classrooms. The students with learning disabilities, Kayla, Francesca, Adrianna, Shyla, and Luis have attended P.S. 1000 for at least four years. All of the students, except Louis were fully remote students. Luis remained a blended student and the remote students remained remote students throughout this entire study.

Kayla, 6th Grader

Kayla is an 11-year-old special education student at P.S. 1000. She is classified as a student with a Learning Disability and is currently placed in a 6th grade Special Class (12:1:1). Kayla is currently enrolled in a 100% remote learning program due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In class, Kayla benefits from online graphic organizers and writing frames, visual aids and supports, and use of highlighter to highlight important information in a text or in a math problem.

Kayla has adjusted well to her fully remote learning situation. She attends all the virtual meets and completes most of the assignments on the virtual classroom platform. According to her self-contained teacher, she is always prepared for class. She can transition remotely from one subject to another.

According to her self-contained teacher, Kayla learns at a slower pace than her

general education peers. She requires many trials for mastery as well as constant repetition and reinforcement, especially when new material is presented. She will ask for clarification of something if she doesn't understand the concept.

Kayla has made some progress on her goals from last year. Kayla has begun to participate more effectively in class discussions. Using different writing strategies she has begun to include more text evidence in her writing. She still needs to continue to improve her writing and math problem solving skills. She also still needs to expand her reading comprehension skills to include more inferential thinking. She needs to continue to build upon her knowledge of math concepts and to be able to apply this knowledge to new concepts.

According to her self-contained teacher and researcher observation and evaluation of student work, Kayla is able to locate and highlight some important information in a given passage. She can answer simple, literal comprehension questions about a passage she has read on her reading level. She has some difficulty recalling details when a text is read aloud to her. Kayla is able to highlight important information in a text that helps her answer questions. She has difficulty answering critical thinking and inferential questions about a text she has read or heard. She has difficulty answering "how" and "why" questions about texts she has read or heard. Kayla also has trouble identifying central ideas of texts on a 6th grade level. When answering a question she does not include text evidence to support her answers. Kayla has begun to participate more in ELA discussions.

According to her teacher and a review of student portfolio and evaluation of writing assignments, Kayla is able to answer some short response questions. She can

answer questions that require 1 or 2 sentences about literal information about a text. She has a difficult time answering short response and extended response questions including details and text evidence to support her answers and ideas. Kayla does well when given scaffolding materials, such as graphic organizers, checklists, anchor charts and peer/teacher assistance to help guide her writing. Kayla has begun to go back into a text to locate and highlight answers or details to answer multiple choice questions about the text. She has difficulty including text evidence to support her ideas in her writing. She still struggles with answering inferential questions and using story evidence to support her answers. However, scaffolding materials will help guide her though this difficulty.

As per her teacher, Kayla is functioning on a fifth grade level in mathematics. Kayla can add, subtract, multiply and divide fractions. She is also able to add, subtract, multiply and divide decimals. Kayla has some difficulty with: adding, subtracting, multiplying, and dividing integers; prime factorization of numbers and using the order of operations to solve problems. She still needs repeated practice when solving percentage problems - finding the percent of a number, finding a percent when given a part and a whole, and finding a whole when given a part and a percent. She struggles to interpret and solve multi-step word problems.

During our first interview, Kayla said that her favorite subjects are Math and Social Studies. Her least favorite subject is Science. She declared that her goal for using scaffolding material was to "improve in her writing" and "add more details." Kayla discussed that she did not like online learning in the beginning because she did not know how to use Google Classroom, but mentioned that she likes it "now that she has gotten

used to it." Although she has gotten used to online learning, she revealed that she would prefer to be in the school building and learning "the normal way."

Throughout her educational career, Kayla has been in self-contained classrooms. During her fifth grade experience, she was integrated into a fifth grade math classroom since her strength is in that subject. She mentioned that she has used scaffolding materials in her education, specifically graphic organizers, chunking texts, color coding, and sentence starters. When asked about chunking, she originally did not know what that was, but when it was explained to her she mentioned that she "did not know that was what it is called." Her previous teachers have helped her with her difficulties in literacy by having her "sound out words when reading." She explained that her content area teacher(s) was usually one teacher that she had all day since she has been in self-contained classrooms. Kayla said that she thinks scaffolding materials "will help in the future" when she does not understand an assignment.

Kayla stated that scaffolding materials are helpful for her in the classroom. She said that they help her to organize her thoughts, specifically color coding and graphic organizers. Kayla believes that some scaffolding materials, such as organizers, may have too many boxes or "too many things to fill out." In addition, she declared that sometimes, teachers use many sentence starters and sometimes they "want us to use response stems a lot" to help guide their discussions in the classroom. Kayla thought that scaffolding material is mostly in the English Language Arts classroom and sometimes in other classes when "the teachers want us to write an essay." She mentioned that scaffolding materials are helpful to her, but she would like the option to choose how to complete the materials.

During the final interview, Kayla believed that she enjoyed using the graphic organizers and color-coding the best. As per her interview, she said that teachers usually read a text aloud to her class and they go over each paragraph to ensure the students comprehend the material. In addition, she declared that discussion stems are "always used" throughout her day because they are posted on the walls in the "regular classroom." However, during remote learning, she has "forgotten some of the responses to use" and her teacher(s) reminded her of the stems to use during class discussions. Some of the discussion stems can include science stems, such as:

- I wonder…
- I expect to see…
- I observed…
- I was really surprised when…
- I see patterns in…
- My data shows that…
- My results show…
- What if…
- Would the outcome be different if…?
- This related to…
- This reminds me of…
- I predict…

In addition, on her reading logs each week, Kayla is required to use response stems, which include sentence starters (see Appendix H). She uses these materials every time she completes a reading log.

Kayla mentioned that she enjoys graphic organizers and color coding the most out of the four scaffolding materials. She cited that graphic organizers "help to organize my thoughts before I write an essay." When a teacher or paraprofessional sat next to her in the classroom before COVID-19, she felt more confident because she had someone next to her to help organize her thoughts and ideas. However, now that she is 100% remote, she does not have that help next to her. Due to this, she feels that she can be doing better

with the assistance. In addition, Kayla enjoys using color coding because "I like to see the color on my assignments. It helps me see what is important." She believes that colors help to determine the importance of material within an assignment.

Due to the fact that Kayla is a remote student, some of her assignments have been incomplete or "difficult for her to complete" without the assistance of a teacher or paraprofessional next to her. She was used to always being able to call upon an adult in the classroom for assistance, but now with COVID-19 and her being a remote student, she no longer has that assistance. Also, since Kayla is a relatively "shy" student, she does not usually ask for her from her teacher(s). Because of this, it was difficult for her teacher(s) to determine whether or not she understood the topic/material at hand.

Although Kayla is shy and does not ask for help in class, when asked how much she understood the scaffolding materials that was given to her, she said that she did understand the material and that it did help her within her studies in the content area virtual classrooms. She mentioned that if the assignment was too difficult for her, she would ask her mother for help. She felt that the scaffolding material was helpful within all of her classes, but at times it could be overwhelming if there was "too many boxes" for an organizer or "too many words" in a reading. Kayla declared that she did better last year when she was in the school building. She would like to return to school to be able to "see my friends and teachers again."

Francesca, 7th Grader

Francesca is a 13-year-old special education student at P.S. 1000. She is classified as a student with a Learning Disability and is placed in an Integrated Co-Teaching Service classroom with counseling as a related service. Francesca is currently

enrolled in a 100% remote learning program due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During class, Francesca benefits from visual prompts/anchor charts for reference, small group or teacher assistance whenever possible to reinforce concepts as well as graphic organizers to organize her thoughts and increase her ability to express her ideas in writing. She also benefits from color coding and highlighting of important information and frequent monitoring when completing an independent assignment to ensure mastery of the concept.

According to teacher reports, Francesca's adaptive behavior, including safety awareness and her ability to follow classroom rules and routines, is age-appropriate. Francesca is able to keep her personal and school belongings organized. She communicates effectively with her peers and teachers and understands the consequences of her behavior.

According to her English Language Arts teacher, Francesca is functioning on a sixth grade level in ELA. Francesca is reading on a level S, according to the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarking system, which is a 5th grade level. Francesca is able to use reading strategies and skills that are taught in class independently. She is able to comprehend grade level texts. Francesca is an active participant in the classroom during ELA discussions. As per her ELA teacher, Francesca should continue to improve upon her ability to cite evidence and explain her thinking in order to support her answers.

In addition, Francesca is able to write using proper format and organization. Her writing contains grade appropriate capitalization, punctuation and spelling. Francesca is able to use details in her writing that support her thesis.

According to her mathematics teacher, Francesca is functioning on a sixth grade

level. Francesca participates during full class and small group instruction. She is able to add and subtract multi-digit numbers with and without regrouping. Francesca struggles with multi-step word problems. She has difficulty identifying the operations and information needed to solve the problem. Francesca is beginning to work on finding proportional relationships with the rest of her class. Francesca struggles with subtracting integers. She forgets to use the strategy "Keep Change Change". Francesca confuses the rules for adding and subtracting integers. However, she continues to ask for help during class if she does not comprehend specific topics or lessons.

During class, Francesca is prepared with her supplies. She always completes her class work and homework on time or earlier. Francesca is focused and attentive throughout the school day. She benefits from small groups, although this is not required in order for her to stay focused. Francesca transitions well between classes and activities.

According to her parent, she would like to see Francesca attend college after high school graduation. Her mother states that Francesca would like to be a guidance counselor in the future. Francesca enjoys helping others. At home, Francesca makes her bed and organizes her personal and school belongings. In her free time, Francesca enjoys doing her nails.

According to teacher reports, Francesca is aware of the world of work and that she has to work hard to achieve her goals. Francesca's goal last year was to be placed in an ICT classroom instead of a Special Class and she achieved that goal by working hard. After graduating from high school, Francesca would like to attend college in order to pursue a degree in Criminal Justice or school counseling.

Francesca is described by her teachers as a student who has a good memory for details and follows instructions easily. She does her assignments promptly and neatly. Francesca is an attentive and cooperative student in the classroom. She shows initiative and is responsible as well as resourceful.

During our first interview, Francesca stated that she enjoys ELA, math and science while the class that she likes the least is social studies. She is not currently involved in any activities in school but does enjoy spending time with her friends. Francesca enjoys working both by herself and with a group, but overall prefers to work alone. She would like to become a guidance counselor in the future. In order to prepare for this kind of work she needs to go "go to college and get good grades."

Francesca mentioned that her main goal for using any scaffolding materials is to "improve my grades" (first interview). Although Francesca already achieved honor roll for the first marking period and achieved honor roll status last year, she believes that she can "always improve my grades" (first interview). She is internally motivated to achieve success in her middle school education. During the COVID-19 pandemic, Francesca has done extremely well. She stated that she enjoys learning online and completes all of her assignments for all of her classes. Francesca enjoys distance learning, although she misses seeing her friends at school every day. She revealed that there are fewer distractions when she is learning virtually.

When Francesca was in a self-contained classroom last school year and when she was integrated into a sixth grade co-teaching classroom, she used the four scaffolding materials, graphic organizers, color coding, chunking, and sentence starters/frames. She stated that she used to sit in a small group with the special education teacher when she

was in the integrated co-teaching classroom. The teacher would discuss how to use the graphic organizers and determine the information that would go in each section. She mentioned that she knew some students were getting different organizers and that was "okay" with her (first interview).

In addition, Francesca revealed that she enjoyed using the color coding materials in the content area classrooms, particularly in ELA and science when she was reading a text. She said that sometimes she would use color-coding to highlight specific sections of an essay to determine whether she had all of the parts of the essay, such as details and quotes to support her claim (see Appendix I for sample). For example, during the classroom observation, I observed Francesca using the following color coding activity:

INTRODUCTION
Blue- Hook
Purple- Thesis
Pink- Preview

BODY PARAGRAPHS
Orange- Transitions
Red-Topic Sentence/Context
Yellow-Quote/Evidence
Green-Explanation

CONCLUSION
Orange- Transition
Peach- Summary of Main Points
Tan- Final Point

Francesca mentioned that her teachers have helped her a lot with literacy. When she was younger, she had difficulty reading and sometimes, now, she feels that she does have a difficult time sounding out specific words. She revealed that her teachers have sat with her and helped her use specific strategies. Francesca said that some of the

scaffolding materials have also helped her with literacy, such as chunking the text and being able to summarize each paragraph in her own words.

According to Francesca, she believes scaffolding materials have helped her in the middle school classroom. She added that graphic organizers help her to organize her ideas before writing, chunking has helped her to paraphrase, color-coding has helped her to identify the important parts, and sentence starters have helped guide her discussions. She articulated that sometimes, teachers might overuse some of these materials.

For example, for a lesson dealing with the core knowledge phrase, some teachers allow students to choose between using an organizer or allow the students to use sentence starters (see Appendix J). She felt this choice worked best for her. At times, Francesca feels that she would like to write without using these scaffolding materials. She would like to be able to try to do things on her own, without the organizers and other materials. However, she does feel that scaffolding materials have helped her in the past and still do now.

During our final interview, Francesca expressed that her content area teachers have been using all four scaffolding materials within their classrooms. She mentioned that she has seen the scaffolding materials in English Language Arts a lot, but said that she has seen them in her other subjects, as well. Francesca revealed that the graphic organizers were in ELA when she had to complete an essay, in Social Studies when she was working on a "longer assignment" that "dealt with writing" and in Science when her teacher asked the students to explain the steps, they took to complete a lab (second interview).

In addition, she declared that anytime a teacher conducted a read aloud to the class, they used chunking, which meant the teacher "stopped at various points in the text and asked comprehension questions" (second interview). Also, Francesca revealed that she used color coding when her Science teacher asked the students to highlight the important parts in a text. She mentioned that her ELA teacher asked her class to highlight specific parts of an essay that she completed. Francesca said that this was like a list to make sure she had all of the parts of an essay. She enjoyed that lesson because she was able to see where she made an error and could fix it automatically.

Francesca shared that she enjoys being in her seventh grade ELA class. She said that her ELA teacher "makes her lessons fun" and "she is always nice to talk to" (second interview). Since her ELA teacher is teaching from home and Francesca is a remote student, they are able to share in their home experiences. Francesca mentioned that she believes her science teacher is "very strict, but sometimes nice" and her Social Studies teacher is "nice, but not like my ELA teacher" (second interview). She noted that she has a very good relationship with her ELA teacher and enjoys speaking with her.

Francesca believes that her remote learning experience has been very successful. She revealed that there are less distractions at home than in school. She has enjoyed using the scaffolding materials, but would like to see how she does without the materials.

After speaking with the assistant principal at P.S. 1000, it is being recommended that Francesca be decertified from special education services for the 2021-2022 school year. The teachers, administrators, and Francesca, herself have seen the astonishing progression that she has made from the 2019-2020 school year when she was in a 12:1:1 setting until now. She has achieved honor roll while being integrated into a co-teaching

classroom. During her final year at P.S. 1000, she will be in a general education classroom.

Adrianna, 7th Grader

Adrianna is a 13-year-old seventh grade special education student at P.S. 1000. She is classified as a student with a Learning Disability and is currently placed in a seventh grade Integrated Co-Teaching class. She is currently enrolled in a remote learning program due to COVID-19. Adrianna does not receive any related services. In class, Adrianna benefits from preferential seating, labeling, highlighting and underlining important parts of tasks, opportunities for review and practice, small group instruction, use of a highlighter or underlining to identify important information in a text, using graphic organizers, outlines, checklists and anchor charts, and using manipulatives or a calculator to solve math problems.

According to multiple teachers, during this school year, Adrianna has not turned in all of her assignments for all of her classes. She needs to work on her organization skills to ensure she turns in all assignments and prepares for all exams or other assessments, particularly those assignments in her mathematics class.

According to her English Language Arts teacher, Adrianna is reading on a fifth grade level (based on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarking assessment). After reading a text on her reading level and/or listening to a read aloud, Adrianna is able to orally summarize the important parts of the text. She is able to include key details when discussing the text with a teacher. Adrianna reads in three- or four word phrase groups and pauses for some punctuation. She makes some mistakes while reading by not slowing down or ignoring some punctuation, which may affect the meaning of passages.

In addition, Adrianna demonstrates proficiency in understanding the text however; she has some difficulty going beyond the literal meaning of a text to develop a deeper understanding. Due to Adrianna's difficulty to focus, she struggles to decode words and apply fluency strategies. Adrianna does not usually participate in class, particularly during virtual meetings.

Adrianna's learning disability impacts her progress in writing. She frequently struggles in the area of writing, particularly if it is not of interest to her. When creating a writing piece, Adrianna does not always add details to her writing and struggles to make inferences based on the prompt given. Adrianna has improved in picking appropriate evidence when trying to support her thesis, although she still struggles to explain how her evidence supports her ideas. Adrianna benefits from the use of graphic organizers to help her organize her writing. These graphic organizers help Adrianna remember the components needed in her writing piece.

According to her mathematics teacher, Adrianna is functioning on a sixth grade level. Adrianna is able to correctly identify integers and their opposites. Adrianna does not turn on her camera and keeps her microphone muted throughout the lessons. She also does not participate during the instruction. Adrianna struggles with comprehension of multi-step problems, and how to determine which step or operation to follow.

During our interviews, Adrianna revealed that she enjoys reading and art. Her favorite subject is ELA. Her least favorite subject is Spanish. During her spare time, she enjoys playing with her brother. Adrianna prefers to work by herself instead of within a group. Currently, Adrianna is uncertain of the career path she would like to pursue after graduating from college. She considers herself a good listener, however, at times; she

has difficulty understanding what is required of her by her teachers. At home, Adrianna is responsible for walking the dog and washing the dishes.

During her remote learning lessons, Adrianna may have a "mental shut down" if she does not understand an assignment. Adrianna will mention to her teachers or parents that she does not need help or does not want help. Since she has been fully remote, Adrianna does not take her assignments so serious and will not turn in some and/or all of her assignments.

Throughout our first and final interviews, Adrianna was very limited with her answers to the questions. During the first interview, she stated that her goal for using scaffolding materials was to complete the assignments. She said that she does not like to do the "extra work" of completing the scaffolding material, such as an organizer before an essay. Therefore, her motivation for using the scaffolding materials was to only complete the assignments.

Adrianna declared that she had difficulty when remote learning was first implemented in March 2020. She said that she did not understand how to use Google Classroom at first and needed a lot of time to get used to it. Adrianna revealed that she prefers to learn by coming to school, although she likes "being home" (first interview).

During her last school year, Adrianna mentioned that she used a lot of graphic organizers and sentence starters. She said that she does not remember using chunking or color-coding, but remembers "buying highlighters for school" (first interview). During her ELA class and "sometimes in Science and Social Studies," she would use graphic organizers to help with her writing (first interview). She revealed that the organizers mostly had "boxes to fill in information" (first interview). Adrianna said that sometimes

they would help. In addition, she expressed that "teachers have us use sentence starters when we talk to each other" (first interview). Throughout the school, teachers use discussion stems/starters to help the students have "accountable talk" with one another. She mentioned that some teachers would have them taped to student's desks when she was younger.

Adrianna revealed that she believes scaffolding materials can help students in middle school. She said, "Organizers can help to write down what you think before an essay" (first interview). She noted that they are important if you have issues with organization. She revealed that she does not want to complete the organizers or other scaffolding materials because "it seems like extra work" sometimes (first interview). Adrianna mentioned that teachers usually do not grade the graphic organizers. Therefore, she felt she doesn't want to complete them.

During our final interview, Adrianna articulated that she has used all four scaffolding materials throughout the 12-week period. She said that she has seen graphic organizers in her ELA, Social Studies and Science classroom. During ELA, she stated that she used them before writing an essay. Adrianna announced that she used "Essay Math" which helped organize her thoughts and had sentence starters, too. During the class observation, I saw Adrianna using Essay Math, which consisted of sentence starters and an interdisciplinary approach, using an equation and explanation:

> "Hook + Thesis Statement + Preview of Supporting Examples = Introduction"
> Then, she provides a graphic organizer that has each component, such as:
> *Hook*: _____
> *Thesis Statement*: (This is your answer to the question, including the word, "because"
> *Supporting Example 1*: Body Paragraph 1 main idea
> *Supporting Example 2*: Body Paragraph 2 main idea
> *Supporting Example 3*: Body Paragraph 3 main idea

The body paragraphs include the equation and explanation:

"Transition + Context + Quote + Explanation = Body"
Transition: Depends on body paragraph (see explanation below)
Context: This is background information from the text that will help the reader understand from where the quote is coming.
Quote: A line taken directly from the text and placed in quotation marks ("")
Explanation: This quote shows... demonstrates… illustrates… emphasizes… clarifies

The transitions for the body paragraphs depend on the specific body paragraph. For example, for the first body paragraph, students can use, "To begin with, to start, or from the beginning" to show that they are starting their evidence. For the second body paragraph, students can use, "Another example, additionally, or building on that idea" to show that they are continuing with their evidence. Finally, for the third body paragraph, students can use, "Furthermore, a final example, or above all" to show the last example.

The conclusion includes the equation and explanation:

"Transition + Thesis + Summary + Final Thought = Conclusion"
Transition: Following this, in summary, all things considered, ultimately
Thesis: Restate your thesis
Summary: Summarize your key points of evidence
Final Thought: This all points to… this all proves…

According to Adrianna's ELA teacher, being able to use these writing devices has allowed students to organize their writing pieces and have success. In addition, it allows them to see their learning through an inter-disciplinary way. Also, Adrianna mentioned she used the graphic organizers for Social Studies and Science, but was unclear of the specific assignments.

Adrianna stated that she also used chunking when "the teachers would read out loud to us and ask us questions after" (second interview). Also, she mentioned that color

coding was used to "highlight important stuff" in a text (second interview). Adrianna also said that she used sentence starters during Junior Great Books.

Junior Great Books is an engaging program that includes fiction, nonfiction, and poetry selections. Junior Great Books is a weeklong program that creates reading and discussion programs for students. This discussion of enduring literature advances social and civic engagement and helps students to think critically about their own lives and the world we share. Junior Great Books supports differentiated instruction through literature and activities that resonate with middle school students. It allows for many reading interventions, such as teacher modeling in the beginning of the week, small group instruction in the middle of the week, and scaffolding materials at the end of the week.

During the final interview, Adrianna commented that she understood the scaffolding materials in her content area classrooms, but sometimes believed that they were not needed or that she should not be forced to complete it all. At times, she would turn in an incomplete graphic organizer or an incomplete assignment. Adrianna said that teachers should allow students to pick and choose how much of an organizer to complete. She mentioned that it was easier to complete all of her assignments when she was in school.

Shyla, 8th Grader

Shyla is currently a 13-year-old special education student at P.S. 1000. She is classified as a student with a Learning Disability and is placed in an Integrated Co-Teaching Service classroom. Shyla is currently enrolled in a 100% remote learning program due to the COVID-19 pandemic. In class, Shyla benefits from preferential seating next to the teacher so she can ask questions on new material. She requires

graphic organizers, anchor charts, and sentence starters in ELA when creating a writing piece to help her organize her writing. In math, Shyla benefits from step-by-step guides, anchor charts, and small group guided instruction to help her with new concepts. She also benefits from a separate location when taking assessments to minimize distractions and stay on task. Shyla benefits from minimal distractions.

According to her English Language Arts teacher, Shyla is functioning on a sixth grade level in ELA (based on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarking assessment). Shyla is able to recognize and pronounce sight words but struggles with decoding, fluency, and comprehension. Her reading and fluency are slow and the pace interferes with her understanding of the material. Shyla does not like to read out loud during class and has to be invited to take part in classroom discussions. Her understanding of text is literal; she can answer basic questions about the text such as main idea. Shyla struggles to answer inferential questions, when asked she will often remain quiet or ask a teacher first to make sure her answer is correct before responding. With assistance, she is able to cite evidence and explain her thinking in order to support her answers. Shyla needs to practice reading aloud at home to practice fluency. Shyla does not always participate in class discussions during ELA.

In writing, Shyla is able to write using proper format and organization. However, she does need to work on paragraph organization. Shyla's writing contains grade-appropriate capitalization, punctuation and spelling. She needs to continue to work on using details in her writing that will support her thesis.

According to her mathematics teacher, Shyla is functioning on a seventh grade level. Shyla is able to work with fractions when adding, subtracting, multiplying and

dividing. She can solve grade level multiplication problems with and without the use of a calculator. Shyla can add and subtract multi-digit numbers with and without regrouping. She does struggle when solving multi-step word problems and has difficulty identifying the correct operation to use. Shyla is able to find greatest common factor and least common multiple. She is able to find proportional relationships. Shyla is able to add, subtract, multiply and divide integers. She can calculate mean, mode, median and range. Shyla can solve one and two-step equations. She is an active participant during her math classes.

During class, Shyla is prepared with her supplies organized. Shyla is responsible for completing all of her homework and class work on time. She is usually focused in class but does benefit from small group instruction or break out rooms remotely when challenging new material is presented. Shyla is able to transition between activities and classes well, both when she is in school and during remote learning. She can navigate the virtual classroom independently and attends all of her live virtual meetings on time. Shyla benefits from preferential seating next to the teacher so she can ask questions on new material.

According to her teachers, Shyla is described as a student who acquires new information at a slower pace when compared to her peers, requiring many trials for mastery. Shyla benefits from constant repetition and reinforcement but is able to generalize information that she has learned in one setting to another. However, Shyla is able to apply skills that she has learned in the school setting across the curriculum. For example, she can use skills learned in math and apply them to computation work in science. Shyla needs to continue to work on her written communication skills so that she

can be successful with school work.

Shyla mentioned that she enjoys social studies and science while the class that she likes the least is ELA. Shyla is involved in extracurricular activities such as dance and volleyball. Shyla enjoys working independently but also likes to work with her peers in virtual classroom breakout rooms. Shyla feels that she has difficulty focusing at times, but thinks that she is good at helping and supporting others.

During our first interview, Shyla revealed that she believes the goal for using scaffolding materials is to "get better at writing and reading." She cited that she has seen her teachers using these materials in the past and have used them effectively herself. However, due to COVID-19, she said that she doesn't want to "do the extra work" anymore.

Since Shyla is a social student with many friends, she would prefer to come to school to be with her friends. She misses being able to socialize and spend time with her friends. However, she declared that she has seen her grades improve since she has been learning remotely without "all the distractions" of being in school.

During her previous years, Shyla mentioned that she has used all four scaffolding materials. She commented that last year in ELA, she did a lot of color-coding. Shyla said she remembered that her last year's ELA teacher used to color code essays and color code texts. In addition, she expressed that her Science and Social Studies teachers used to also color-code. Shyla said that her Math teacher did not use color coding that much; but she remembers that he color coded some tests for her to show important words or numbers. In addition, she revealed that she used to use graphic organizers in ELA mostly but she believes that she also used then for Science and Social Studies, too. When asked

the topics for the graphic organizers, she said, “I’m not sure, but I know we used organizers for JGB [Junior Great Books].”

Since Shyla has been in integrated co-teaching classrooms for her entire middle school education, she has been able to have two teachers in her content area classrooms. She mentioned that if she had difficulties with literacy, she would ask one of the two teachers in the classroom. Shyla noted that she enjoyed having those two teachers for the “extra help.” She said that she is not sure that she will have that extra support or help next year when she is in high school.

Due to the fact that Shyla is in the eighth grade and attending high school next year, her content area teachers have tried to limit the amount of scaffolding materials, especially by the end of the school year. Shyla remarked that she does believe that scaffolding materials can help her; but she has seen throughout the years that some students do not have to complete the organizers or color coding assignment. Therefore, she believes that scaffolding materials can cause more work for her.

According to Shyla, she believes that the strengths of scaffolding materials are to “help those who need help with organization” (first interview). She mentioned that during her sixth and seventh grades, she used them a lot and saw that they did help with her organization and paragraphs. Shyla believes that scaffolding materials are more helpful in the ELA classroom than any other classroom. She said that she would like to choose which sections to complete on an organizer or another scaffolding material. Shyla revealed that she believes scaffolding materials are easy to understand but they “take a lot of time” (first interview).

During our final interview, Shyla revealed that she has used all four scaffolding materials throughout the 12-week period. She said that she has seen graphic organizers and sentence starters in her ELA and Social Studies classrooms. During ELA, she stated that she used graphic organizers that have sentence starters before writing an essay. Shyla mentioned that this helped her to organize her thoughts.

In addition, Shyla communicated that she understood the scaffolding materials in her content area classrooms, but sometimes believed that they were not. Shyla said that teachers should allow students to choose how much of an organizer to complete. Since she is attending high school next year, she would like to be able to have more independence.

Luis, 8th Grader

Luis is a 13-year-old special education student at P.S. 1000. He is classified as a student with a Learning Disability and receives Integrated Co-Teaching services. He is currently enrolled in a blended learning program due to COVID-19. He attends in-person classes two or three times a week. When he is not in-person, he is learning remotely. Luis benefits from the modeling of appropriate social interactions as well as consistent reinforcement for positive behaviors. Luis benefits from using graphic organizers to help summarize information. Also, Luis benefits from labeling, highlighting and underlining important parts of tasks. In addition, Luis uses checklists to help organize tasks and hand in work on time.

According to his teachers, Luis comes to school prepared with his supplies but struggles to keep his personal and school belongings organized. Luis will work on assignments at home and then not turn them in to his teachers. Luis is able to focus and

attend when he is interested in a topic. He requires prompting in order to initiate tasks in the classroom.

According to his English Language Arts teacher, Luis is reading on a fifth grade level (based on the Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarking assessment). Luis is making an effort in ELA however, due to his learning disability; he struggles to apply reading strategies and skills independently. He has difficulty identifying the main idea, inferring meaning and questioning while reading. Luis is able to sequence events. With scaffolding support and texts read aloud or use of audio-books, Luis is able to comprehend grade-level texts. He will sometimes participate during class discussions and will comply when he is called on to answer. Luis feels more comfortable in student/teacher lead small groups; he more readily participates in the discussions and is more likely to express his ideas.

In addition, Luis is sometimes able to cite evidence and explain his thinking, but has to be reminded to use text-based references. This extends to Luis' writing. When creating a writing piece, Luis struggles to use proper structure, grammar, and cite evidence to support his thesis. His essays are often all one paragraph and hard to understand due to lack of proper punctuation. When citing evidence, Luis struggles find evidence from the text to support his ideas. Due to Luis' learning disability, he requires structure and explicit instructions for mechanics (paragraphs, capitalization, punctuation, and spelling) and content (conveying his ideas coherently). Luis benefits from the use of graphic organizers which allow him to write down the appropriate information where prompted and accurately explain his ideas.

According to Luis' mathematics teacher, Luis is on a sixth grade level. Luis

enjoys math so he puts in a lot of effort to complete his work. He is able to multiply and divide, add and subtract multi-digit numbers with and without regrouping. Luis can work with integer rules relating to all four basic operations. He can find the unit rate and can work with percents. Luis struggles when attempting to solve word problems. He has trouble identifying the key terms needed to determine the operations to solve the problem. He also struggles to select the right information need to solve the problem. Luis benefits from working with step-by-step guides and flip books to assist him in solving problems independently.

When working with new material, Luis benefits from direct teacher instruction, but will then work independently to finish the task. He works well in small groups with students who will help keep him focused the assignment. Luis works well with teachers during small group instruction and will advocate for himself when he needs help.

Luis benefits from sitting in front of the classroom for frequent prompting, redirection and refocusing. Luis benefits from small group instruction. In ELA, Luis benefits from the use of graphic organizers, checklists, and sentence starters to help construct well organized essays. He also benefits from having passages read aloud so that he can gain a deeper understanding of the material. In Math, Luis benefits from working with step-by-step guides to help his solve problems when working independently. Small group instruction helps when introducing new concepts so that he can get a deeper understanding of new material. When working on a new topic, Luis likes to sit alone so that he can focus on the new task. He benefits from being close to a teacher so he can ask questions when needed.

According to our first interview, Luis' favorite subject is Social Studies. His least favorite subject is Science. When asked if he prefers to work by himself or in a group, Luis stated that he didn't have a preference. During his spare time, he likes playing basketball and video games. After graduating from a four year college, Luis would like to pursue a career as a race car driver. Luis feels that he's best at riding dirt bikes and finds science to be difficult.

During his previous years, Luis declared that he has used all four scaffolding materials within the classroom. He acknowledged that last year in ELA, there were "a lot of color coding and graphic organizers" (first interview). Luis revealed that his ELA teacher provided the class with many types of materials to use and gave "a lot of choice in how to fill it out" (first interview). He felt that this was good and that more teachers should provide students with choices.

Due to the fact that Luis is in the eighth grade and attending high school next year, his content area teachers have tried to limit the amount of scaffolding materials, especially by the end of the school year. Luis mentioned that he does not believe that scaffolding materials can help him since "it feels like it is extra work" and sometimes "the other students don't get them" (first interview). He revealed that if everyone had to complete the same assignment with the "extra work" he would "not care" (first interview).

Luis believes that the strengths of scaffolding materials are to "be able to complete the assignment better" (first interview). He exclaimed that during his sixth and seventh grade years, he used them a lot and saw that they did help with writing essays. Luis believes that scaffolding materials are more helpful in the ELA classroom than any

other classroom. He mentioned that highlighting and reading a lot is not needed in mathematics class.

During our final interview, Luis declared that he has used all four scaffolding materials throughout the 12-week period mostly in ELA. He stated that he has seen graphic organizers and sentence starters in the ELA classroom. During ELA, he stated that he used graphic organizers that have sentence starters. Luis mentioned that he liked this because "everyone had to do it" (second interview).

In addition, Luis stated that he understood how to complete all of the scaffolding materials in his content area classrooms, but sometimes believed that they were not needed or that he should not be forced to complete it all. Luis said that teachers should allow students to choose how much of an organizer to complete. Since he is attending high school next year, he would like to be able to choose which assignments to complete and how to complete them.

Case Study Themes

Individual Factors Affecting Responses to Scaffolding

Perceptions are driven by internal and external factors. Personal characteristics that affect perception include as person's attitude, personality, motives, interests, past experiences and expectations. Throughout this study, these individual factors have affected the perceptions of the students.

Every learner or thinker reflects on a set of factors that are unique to him or her. As learners, we leave our individual mark and our identity through our voices and writing informed by our experiences and interactions. Our voices and identity are constantly changing and the impression we leave is shaped through a combination of factors. These

factors reflect the individual experiences that students have that affect the rendering of and response to materials that they use in their everyday school life, including scaffolding material within the classroom. The individual factors include student beliefs. These factors were identified within the data including the first interviews, second interviews, classroom observations, and classroom artifacts collected.

Student Beliefs on Scaffolding

The decisions on which type of scaffolding material to use and the interaction between students and scaffolding is also impacted by the factors of student beliefs on the practice. For the student participants, they were consistent in their beliefs that scaffolding material is helpful and a part of the teacher's responsibility. Also, some students mentioned that it helps them to write better (Kayla, Francesca, and Shyla, second interviews). In addition, some students said that since their favorite subject was ELA, they did better in that class or since their favorite teacher was their ELA teacher, they had a good relationship with her and wanted to do well in her class (Francesca and Adrianna, second interviews).

Francesca, the seventh grade remote student, mentioned that her favorite subject was ELA and that she has seen the scaffolding materials mostly in English Language Arts. She mentioned that her ELA teacher asked her class to highlight specific parts of an essay that she completed. Francesca said that this was like a list to make sure she had all of the parts of an essay. She enjoyed that lesson because she was able to see where she made an error and could fix it automatically.

In addition, Francesca declared that she enjoys being in her ELA teacher's seventh grade ELA class. She said that her teacher "makes her lessons fun" and "she is

always nice to talk to" (second interview). She revealed that she has a very good relationship with her ELA teacher and enjoys speaking with her. Due to this positive relationship, she may enjoy these scaffolding materials more in her ELA teacher's class rather than in another class.

Adrianna, the other seventh grade remote student, stated that ELA is also her favorite subject. She indicated that during ELA class, she would use graphic organizers to help with her writing. She said that she has not seen the other subjects using scaffolding materials as much as the ELA class. Adrianna revealed that she believes scaffolding materials can help students in middle school. She said, "Organizers can help to write down what you think before an essay" (first interview). She mentioned that they are important if you have issues with organization. Since her favorite subject is ELA, she may have focused on that subject and seen the most scaffolding materials in that subject.

Impact of COVID-19

Although educators can provide their students with scaffolding materials within the in-person and virtual classrooms, sometimes the students are not completing their various assignments. As many teachers have revealed throughout the pandemic, it is difficult for them to determine whether a student comprehends the material or assignment during this difficult time. Due to the fact that students are submitting all assignments virtually, students can submit a blank document, an incomplete document or mention that they are having technological issues and cannot submit an assignment.

In addition, some students do not turn on their cameras and/or un-mute their microphones to participate during remote learning. Many parents have mentioned that they have tried to ask their children to turn on their cameras and microphones, but they,

too are having difficulty. According to Adrianna, the seventh grade remote student, she does not want to turn her camera on because she does not want to be seen by her peers. She also revealed that other students do not have their cameras on do it is "not fair" that she should turn her camera on (second interview). Some other students may feel uncomfortable turning on their cameras because they do not want to display their homes. During these emotional times, some of these extenuating circumstances have to be taken into consideration. However, at times the assistant principal of the building has entered Google Meets and have told the students that they should have their cameras on; but even when he asked them to turn their cameras on, some of the students still do not.

Blended students that have a blended schedule may also have difficulty with participation. Since the students must remain six feet apart, they cannot have group assignments. They must remain in their seats for an extended period of time and complete their assignments on their technological device. In addition, the teachers cannot sit with them one-on-one as they have in previous years because of the social distance that is required. Some of these blended students may not participate frequently because they may not feel comfortable speaking in their mask or are just uncomfortable being in the classroom without their friends that may be at home.

Choices

Through offering choice in scaffolding materials and in their education, students can self-differentiate their learning. Offering choice will allow students to choose appropriate challenging tasks and can allow them to connect with their strengths and interests. In addition, this can boost their intrinsic motivation.

Motivation is a subject that is constantly discussed in the field of education. Educators around the world are taught not only to teach their students, but to also motivate them. Administrators are evaluating teachers based on how well they motivate their students. They are evaluating them based on the activities and assignments, student grouping, instructional materials and resources, and the structure and pacing of each lesson to determine whether it is engaging enough for the students.

As students get older, their intrinsic motivation tends to decrease. This makes it more difficult for teachers to motivate their students. According to self-determination theory, students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met in order to experience positive social development and growth. When these needs are met, students experience high levels of self-motivation.

Many of the students above revealed that they should also be provided with choice (Shyla and Luis, second interviews). They stated that they understood how to complete all of the scaffolding materials in their content area classrooms, but sometimes believed that they were not needed or that they should not be forced to complete it all. The students said that teachers should allow students to choose how much of an organizer or how much of an assignment to complete. Since Shyla and Luis are attending high school next year, they both mentioned that they would like to be able to choose which assignments to complete and how to complete them.

In addition to choice, many students felt that scaffolding materials were causing them to have "extra work." Adrianna, Shyla, and Luis all mentioned that they felt the use of graphic organizers and color coding was adding to their assignments. Also, Shyla and Luis felt that it was not fair that the other students were not asked to use some of these

materials. The use of choice would help these students to not feel like they have an extra work load. They can choose which material or the amount in which to complete.

Scaffolding Should Lead to Independence

Although the five middle school students have seen the positive effects of scaffolding on education, they stated that the overall goal of scaffolding should be to lead to independence. The four scaffolding materials within this study, graphic organizers, color-coding, chunking and sentence starters/frames were used in some fashion by all of the content area teachers and taught to the students in some fashion throughout the 12-week study. The students believe the effects of scaffolding are positive in the field of education.

Since the students are in middle school and two are going to high school in September 2021, the scaffolding materials should be used for a short period of time and not last for the entire school year. The students' content area educators mentioned that they would like to use the scaffolding materials during the beginning and middle of the school year with their middle school students. By the end of the school year, the students should no longer need their teachers to provide them with scaffolding materials and should have enough knowledge of these materials to no longer either need these materials or be able to create their own type of scaffolding material that would be beneficial for them.

Due to the fact that the Shyla and Luis are graduating in June, 2021, their eighth grade teachers determined that their scaffolding materials should end before the sixth and seven grade students. These materials should end sooner because they may not be able to get these scaffolding materials within their high schools. Therefore, their educators want

them to be able to have that knowledge to create their own scaffolding materials by the end of their eighth grade.

A Synthesis of Themes

As one may notice, the learning environment is complex and dynamic. Those individuals within the learning environment, such as educators and students, are also complex and dynamic and provide different responses to the learning environment. As individuals are in the learning environment, they interact and build on their relationships within the environment. The individual factors, such as beliefs and abilities, will perceive the environment differently which will form their perceptions.

The learning environment is constantly changing from year to year. Now, more than ever, the learning environment has been shifted due to the COVID-19 pandemic. These changes within one factor, either individual or contextual, can cause an effect on the other factor. The COVID-19 pandemic has caused disruptions across both individual and contextual factors, causing the learning environment to change and have to adapt to the new times. These changes were implemented rapidly in order to protect the well-being of educators and students. This included the changes needed in addressing the literacy needs of students with learning disabilities.

Throughout this study, scaffolding materials were used without any physical changes. These materials were used without any prior training for both students and teachers and these individuals were engaged throughout the first marking period. However, the perseverance of the five content area teachers, particularly the ELA teachers, to ensure these scaffolding materials were used is possible during blended and remote teaching.

Findings Based on Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory was used to discover the motivation and determination behind the perspectives of the participants. This theory suggests that people are motivated to grow and change by three innate needs: autonomy, competence, and relatedness. The concept of intrinsic motivation plays an important role in self-determination theory. It is concerned with the motivation behind choices people make without external influences or interferences. Throughout this study, competence, autonomy and relatedness were studied. The students discussed their views on the four scaffolding materials.

Student Views on Using Graphic Organizers

Typically, in middle and high school educational settings, students are expected to acquire a large volume of academic knowledge and skills in a relatively short period through reading texts and from listening to lectures. Additionally, high-stakes state exams are the primary means for students to demonstrate their knowledge and skills. Students' experience using graphic organizers to facilitate reading and listening comprehension and to study for exams can be crucial to their success.

According to Francesca and Kayla, graphic organizers are very effective and have helped them to achieve success in their setting. Francesca revealed that she uses "all of my teachers' materials that they give me" in order for her to achieve success (second interview). Francesca said that she "feels happy" and "proud of myself" when her teachers post positive comments on her graphic organizers (second interview). Kayla mentioned that she wants to do well and because of that she "tries her best" and

"completes all of her organizers" (second interview). Both Francesca and Kayla are intrinsically motivated to do well and feel proud of their success for themselves.

On the other hand, Adrianna, Shyla and Luis stated that they do not find the graphic organizers to be helpful. They mention that it is "extra work" and that it is not needed (second interview). They believe that they can have success and become competent without having to complete an organizer prior to an essay.

Student Views on Using Color Coding

The use of colors in instructional materials has proven to play an important role in creating different emotional reactions and capturing learners' attention. Color helps learners increase their attention levels on certain information. In addition, color can help learners improve their earning efficiency since learners can process color automatically. In addition, color is a clue for importance, which helps learners also to retrieve vital information.

According to all five students, color-coding helps them to "find important information" in a text (first interviews). Kayla and Francesca responded that during Science class, their teacher reads a text aloud to them and she "highlights important information." The students mentioned that sometimes the highlighted texts can help them find information for a test. However, besides that, it does not help them to become more competent within their subject area.

In agreement with Kayla and Francesca, Adrianna said that color-coding can be helpful. She recalled how her last year's ELA teacher used color-coding to help identify parts of an essay. Adrianna said that she uses the color-coding to "check if I have all of

the parts" of the essay (second interview). She believes that this type of assignment would help her to see what she may be missing from an essay or another assignment.

Shyla and Luis, the two eighth graders, felt that color-coding was not needed. Shyla declared that if she wanted to study for a test, she would use "flash cards" and said that color-coding was not needed for her to be successful within the content area classrooms (second interview). Luis mentioned that sometimes if he was "bored," he would use the highlighter or another form of color-coding to color in a picture if it was on the same page that he was supposed to be highlighting (second interview and classroom observations).

Student Views on Using Chunking Texts

Students can better comprehend challenging texts through chunking. Chunking occurs when a difficult text is broken down into more manageable pieces. As information is chunked, there is more of an understanding of information. Educators can ask students various questions about specific sections of the text. Sometimes, teachers chunk the text in advance for students, especially if this is the first time students have used this strategy. Other times, teachers ask students to chunk the text. As information is chunked, the application of information is facilitated.

Although most of the students did not know what the word "chunking" was, they were aware of how it was used within the classroom. Kayla, the sixth grade student in the self-contained classroom revealed that her teacher reads most of her books aloud to her. She mentioned that they are reading the novel, "Freak the Mighty" in class now and that her self-contained teacher reads the chapter to her and "stops to ask questions"

(second interview). She said that chunking is helpful to her because her teacher reads it aloud to her and that helps her to understand the text better.

Francesca and Adrianna mentioned that chunking helps them, also. They commented that their Social Studies teacher reads various textbook pages aloud to them and that helps them to understand the material. They both pointed out that some of the concepts in Social Studies are "difficult to understand" and that being able to hear the textbook being read aloud and explained helps them to comprehend the material better (second interviews).

Shyla and Luis described the effectiveness of chunking, as well. They said that their English teacher reads the novel, "The Outsiders" aloud to them and this helps them to "understand the book better" (second interviews). Shyla stated that she benefits from hearing new material, and according to her learning style, she is an auditory learner. Luis said that he likes when teachers read aloud to him because "sometimes, I zone out if I'm asked to read something myself" (second interview). These students determined that chunking helps them to comprehend the material better; therefore, increasing their competence within the content area classrooms.

Student Views on Using Sentence Structures/Starters

Sentence structures/starters provide students with a structure to practice literacy-writing skills. Sentence structures/starters are a structured language practice used to scaffold and provide students with opportunities to write, think, and talk about concept terms and academic language. Sentence structures/starters can be used in the classroom to help students communicate their ideas and express their thoughts.

In order to assist students, particularly those with reading learning disabilities, incorporate higher levels of academic language into their writing, teachers incorporate the use of sentence structures and sentence starters. Sentence starters are starter words for students who must complete the sentence. These are especially beneficial for those students who have writing difficulties. The sentence starters can help these students to learn to enhance their writing skills.

Although sentence starters have proven to be effective based on the literature review, many students within this study did not like to use them in their content area classrooms. Kayla mentioned that she would like the opportunity to choose either to use the sentence starters or be given an option to choose between a variety of sentence starters. She said that some of the sentence starters that she was given, she did not want to use in her writing. Kayla also cited that when she was in school, she did not like to have the sentence starters taped to her desk. She said that she would rather speak during a debate or discussion and not "be forced" to use discussion stems (second interview).

In addition, Francesca declared that she does see the benefit of using sentence starters, but she would also like to be given the option of choosing. Francesca said that in her ELA teacher's class, she enjoys using the "Essay Math" because it allows her to choose between varieties of sentence starters. She mentioned that she does better when she uses the sentence starters that are available to her in the "Essay Math."

The two eighth graders, Shyla and Luis revealed that they do not like using sentence starters. Shyla mentioned that she used sentence starters during Reading and Writing Workshops when she was younger. Although she can see the positive effects on the younger elementary leveled students, she would like to not be given sentence starters.

Luis stated that he does not think he will be given sentence starters in high school; so he does not want to use them now. Since scaffolding materials should lead to independence, it is pertinent that these materials be slowly removed from instruction to ensure this independence for all of the students, not just the students attending high school next year.

Student Views on Autonomy

Throughout the study, the students wanted to be in control of their scaffolding materials. According to the five students, they wanted to be given a choice in which scaffolding materials to use in their content area classrooms. They mentioned that sometimes, their teachers would give them a scaffolding material and not ask them whether they want it for the assignment. These students would like their educators to ask them whether they wanted to use that scaffolding material.

In addition, the students wanted to have a choice in how much of the scaffolding material to complete. Many of the students mentioned that some materials, specifically a graphic organizer might have "too many boxes" or "too much information" to complete. If the students were given a choice of how much to complete, they may feel more confidence in their ability to complete the task.

Student Views on Competence

During this study, the middle school students wanted to use the scaffolding materials to gain mastery of the task that was given to them. The students wanted the scaffolding materials to benefit them; but at times, they felt they did not help them to better understand the material. Sometimes, they felt that the scaffolding materials were a waste of time and possibly, not important to their teachers because they did not grade them.

Student Views on Relatedness

Within this study, the students wanted to have a sense of belonging, both in their classroom environment and in feeling similar to their peers. At times, being given the scaffolding materials made them feel "different" and "not like the other students." The eighth grade student, Luis specifically mentioned that he did not want the scaffolding materials because "the other students did not get them" (second interview). If the other students were given the same materials or if these students were given the option of whether or not they want to complete the scaffolding materials or how much of it they wanted to complete, then the students could have more of a sense of relatedness.

Reflexivity

Throughout this study, my positionality has allowed me to see myself in the student participant's shoes, as a student with a disability myself. In addition, my positionality has allowed me to see myself in the teacher participant's shoes, as an educator of students with disabilities. Also, my positionality has allowed me to see myself as an advocate for the students with learning disabilities in the future. After this research, my positionality can shift to a new role, a researcher.

During the case study research study, I was able to determine the perceptions of the five students. Each student was filled with an individual perspective of the scaffolding materials. The educators used their own motivation and allowed me to investigate how they feel about each scaffolding material and the ways they are or are not motivated to use each one.

In addition, I experienced a shift in my understanding because of the study. Since the participants experienced different responses to the scaffolding materials rendered, this

also applied to me as the researcher. My individual factors and responses to the scaffolding materials discussed within this study were important, as well. Because I use these scaffolding materials within my special education classroom, individual factors affect me. Other researchers may have different interactions and perceptions on the data collected.

As a special education teacher with over ten years of teaching experience, I was surprised at some of the perspectives of scaffolding materials. Usually, I have seen the effectiveness of these materials within the general and special education classrooms. There has even been research that has been conducted that proves the positive effects of scaffolding materials on students (see literature review). However, during this study, some of the students mentioned that they believe that sometimes, scaffolding materials are not effective. Many students revealed that they do not want to do the "extra work" and some of the students are not completing their assignments. This can be due to the extenuating circumstances surrounding the COVID-19 pandemic.

As a result of this study, implications from the data have prompted further empirical questions for subsequent research. In addition, the research questions and themes have reinforced the belief that scaffolding materials can contribute to success for students with reading learning disabilities. However, not all perspectives of scaffolding materials have been positive during this study. This will be elaborated in the subsequent chapter.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSION AND IMPLICATIONS

Research Questions, Themes, and Discoveries

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused uncertainty in major aspects of national and global society. This pandemic has had an extreme impact on education. Since March, 2020, the education system has changed drastically. Schools, educators, families, and students are experiencing unprecedented times and are finding a way to navigate and determine the best way to educate students. During the fall of 2020 when school buildings were set to reopen for the new school year, there were still uncertainties of whether or not the schools would remain open.

Even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, middle school students, particularly middle school students with reading learning disabilities, have a difficult time obtaining support for reading/literacy instruction. Most of the literacy instruction support is given to elementary school students and middle school students are expected to come to middle school with that knowledge (Vaughn, et al., 2012; Wanzek et al., 2011). Although there are many challenges for students with learning disabilities in secondary schools, classroom strategies, such as scaffolding, can help these students achieve in various locations, including inclusion and self contained classrooms.

Within this study, different types of scaffolding were examined and determined which one(s) have proven to be effective within the literature review. This study explored the perceptions of these scaffolding materials, including chunking texts, color coding, graphic organizers, and sentence structures/starters on students with learning disabilities in inclusion and self-contained classrooms during the COVID-19 pandemic.

The study utilized Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) as it relates to intrinsic motivation. Due to the fact that each individual represents a unique set of characteristics and interactions with the learning environment, a case study approach was utilized to capture each participant as a case for analysis. The analysis emerged themes that provide a coherent understanding of what happened and implications for what is to come as it relates to scaffolding material within the middle school content area classrooms.

Instructional Scaffolding

Instructional scaffolding refers to a process through which a teacher gives support for students in order to enhance learning and aid in the mastery of skills. The teacher chooses to scaffold based on students' experiences and knowledge as they are learning new skills. Within this study, some of the scaffolding materials included sentence structures/starters, color coding, graphic organizers, and chunking or breaking down material into smaller sections.

Since teacher support is needed at the beginning of scaffolding, it is the teacher's responsibility to provide explicit modeling. The purpose of explicit modeling is to provide students with a clear model of a skill or concept. However, the end goal of scaffolding is for students to have more responsibility and complete assignments independently. Throughout this qualitative study, scaffolding does lead to independence.

Graphic Organizers

According to Francesca and Kayla, graphic organizers are very effective and have helped them to achieve success in their setting. Francesca declared that she uses "all of my teachers' materials that they give me" in order for her to achieve success (second

interview). Francesca said that she "feels happy" and "proud of myself" when her teachers post positive comments on her graphic organizers (second interview). Kayla mentioned that she wants to do well and because of that she "tries her best" and "completes all of her organizers" (second interview). Both Francesca and Kayla are intrinsically motivated to do well and feel proud of their success for themselves.

Color Coding

According to the five middle school students, color-coding helps them to "find important information" in a text (first interviews). In agreement with Kayla and Francesca, Adrianna mentioned that color-coding can be helpful. She recalled how their ELA teacher uses color-coding to help identify parts of an essay. Adrianna said that she uses the color coding to "check if I have all of the parts" of the essay (second interview). She believes that this type of assignment would help her to see what she may be missing from an essay or another assignment.

Chunking Texts

Kayla, the sixth grade student in the self-contained classroom revealed that her teacher reads most of her books aloud to her. She cited that they are reading the novel, "Freak the Mighty" in class now and that her self-contained teacher reads the chapter to her and "stops to ask questions" (second interview). She said that chunking is helpful to her because her teacher reads it out loud to her and that helps her to understand the text better.

Francesca and Adrianna said that chunking helps them, also. They mentioned that their Social Studies teacher reads various textbook pages aloud to them and that helps them to understand the material. They both commented that some of the concepts in

Social Studies are "difficult to understand" and that being able to hear the textbook being read aloud and explained helps them to comprehend the material better (second interviews).

Sentence Structures/Starters

Many students within this study did not like to use sentence starters in their content area classrooms. Kayla mentioned that she would like the opportunity to choose either to use the sentence starters or be given an option to choose between a variety of sentence starters. Kayla also declared that when she was in school, she did not like to have the sentence starters taped to her desk. She said that she would rather speak during a debate or discussion and not "be forced" to use discussion stems (second interview).

The two eighth graders, Shyla and Luis revealed that they do not like using sentence starters. Shyla mentioned that she used sentence starters during Reading and Writing Workshops when she was younger. Although she can see the positive effects on the younger elementary leveled students, she would like to not be given sentence starters. Luis revealed that he does not think he will be given sentence starters in high school; so he does not want to use them now. Since scaffolding materials should lead to independence, it is pertinent that these materials be slowly removed from instruction to ensure this independence for all of the students, not just the students attending high school next year.

Impact of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a detrimental disruption to the education system. Since many students, particularly students with learning disabilities may fall behind academically, it is essential for educators to differentiate and modify their

instruction. Many educators are integrating scaffolding materials to ensure their students are able to comprehend the material being assigned.

Although educators can provide their students with scaffolding materials within the in-person and virtual classrooms, sometimes the students are not completing their various assignments. It may be difficult for them to determine whether a student comprehends the material or assignment during this difficult time. Due to the fact that students are submitting all assignments virtually, students can submit a blank document, an incomplete document or mention that they are having technological issues and cannot submit an assignment.

In addition, some students do not participate in their in-person and/or virtual classes. Some students do not turn on their cameras and/or un-mute their microphones to participate during remote learning. Also, some in-person students do not participate in their live classes. This is an additional stress to the educators and students with learning disabilities.

There has been a tremendous decline in student work. It is extremely difficult to know whether the students comprehend the material when they are not participating in class. Also, the students are doing a minimal amount of work and they do not want to complete scaffolding materials or any part of an assignment. Some of the students within this study even revealed that they do not want to complete any "extra work" and they believe that scaffolding materials would be that additional assignments.

Choices

Through offering choice in scaffolding materials and in their education, students can self-differentiate their learning. Offering choice will allow students to choose

appropriate challenging tasks and can allow them to connect with their strengths and interests. In addition, this can boost their intrinsic motivation.

Motivation is a subject that is constantly discussed in the field of education. Educators around the world are taught not only to teach their students, but to also motivate them. Administrators are evaluating teachers based on how well they motivate their students. They are evaluating them based on the activities and assignments, student grouping, instructional materials and resources, and the structure and pacing of each lesson to determine whether it is engaging enough for the students.

As students get older, their intrinsic motivation tends to decrease. This makes it more difficult for teachers to motivate their students. According to self-determination theory, students' needs for autonomy, competence, and relatedness must be met in order to experience positive social development and growth. When these needs are met, students experience high levels of self-motivation.

Scaffolding Should Lead to Independence

Although the five students have seen the positive effects of scaffolding on education, they mentioned that the overall goal of scaffolding should be to lead to independence. The four scaffolding materials within this study, graphic organizers, color-coding, chunking and sentence starters/frames were used in some fashion by all of the teachers and taught to the students in some fashion throughout the 12-week study. The students believe the effects of scaffolding are positive in the field of education.

Since the students are in middle school and two are going to high school in September 2021, the scaffolding materials should be used for a short period of time. Scaffolding materials should predominately be used during the beginning and middle of

the school year with middle school students. By the end of the school year, the students should no longer need their teachers to provide them with scaffolding materials and should have enough knowledge of these materials to no longer either need these materials or be able to create their own type of scaffolding material that would be beneficial for them.

Application of SDT to Research Study

According to Self-Determination Theory, intrinsic motivation occurs when a student or individual does something because the behavior is inherently interesting or enjoyable (Deci & Ryan, 1985). Therefore, it is valuable to design a classroom environment that enhances intrinsic motivation, which would result in quality learning and feelings of competence and relatedness. Throughout this study, the students were able to explore the variety of scaffolding materials. The students were able to apply those materials into the instruction and possibly use the materials elsewhere. Students feel competent when they receive instructional feedback they can use to improve their performance. During the school day, students were given feedback from their teachers. The teachers used the scaffolding material to assess the students and then to eventually provided necessary feedback. Students feel related when they perceive that others care about them and listen and respond to them, which can be easily achieved using scaffolding materials to increase instruction and overall comprehension.

All students should have motivation and self-determination in school and throughout their lives. Providing support for student self-determination in school settings is one way to enhance student learning. This support can improve outcomes for students with learning disabilities. Many schools throughout the country have emphasized the use

of self-determination with students with disabilities to meet federal mandates. The use of self-determination has allowed students with disabilities to become actively involved in the Individualized Education Planning process.

This study used SDT to address the research questions. By utilizing SDT, this study investigated students' experiences and perceptions of scaffolding materials available to them in their content area classrooms. This theory helped understand how students perceive the scaffolding materials and themselves after they use the materials in their classrooms.

Limitations

There are several limitations associated within this qualitative study. I could not control some of these limitations. These limitations confirm that further investigation of scaffolding materials data in the content area middle school classrooms is needed.

The first limitation is that this study took place during the COVID-19 pandemic. Due to the fact that instruction was taken place virtually and/or in person, learning was constantly changing. Although none of the students with learning disabilities in the study dealt with losing a loved one or was negatively impacted by the virus themselves, this pandemic had an emotional toll on all of them. In addition, the educators within this study had a difficult time ensuring that all of their students comprehended the materials being taught and/or submitted their assignments. However, even prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, middle school students, particularly middle school students with learning disabilities, have a difficult time obtaining support for reading/literacy instruction.

Although COVID-19 was a limitation for this study, it has changed the way teachers, parents and students view education. Many students did not have access to a

computer and others did not have access to appropriate WiFi to access their classes. Not only has this virus shown the inequities in access to education, it has also shown the inequities in materials that are given to students to help them.

The second limitation is that this study focused on middle school students with reading learning disabilities only. This study aimed to determine the perspectives of middle school students and their content area teachers. Middle school students are sometimes expected to come to middle school with literacy knowledge, but sometimes that is not always the case. Therefore, scaffolding materials are needed to help guide them through their literacy instruction within the content area classrooms.

Reciprocity with Participants in this Study

The benefits that were observed for the participants themselves during the course of the study are that the students engaged in systematic reflection. Usually, educators engage in reflective pedagogy to better understand the practices they are engaged in, particularly the types of scaffolding materials used and preferred. In addition, teachers usually engage in self-questioning of why they choose to use a particular type of scaffolding material over another.

However, students are usually not reflective on how they are educated. For the five middle school students with learning disabilities, they engaged in tasks to better understand their responses to the scaffolding materials they receive from their teachers. The students discussed what they found confusing, what was clear, what was unnecessary, and created recommendations for their content area teachers to better address their learning needs as it relates to using scaffolding materials. For example, during their second interviews, both Shyla and Luis mentioned that some scaffolding

materials were not needed, especially since they will be entering high school in September, 2021.

Implications for Future Research and Informing Practice

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused a sense of uneasiness in major aspects of our society. This pandemic has had an extreme impact on education. Since March, 2020, the education system has changed drastically. Due to the fact that this study was conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic when education was completely changed, future research should be conducted on middle school students with learning disabilities within the typical classroom environment.

Although this study revealed that students perceive scaffolding through a positive lens, it did not show it from a quantitative method. Throughout this qualitative study, students mentioned the positive effect of scaffolding materials within the typical class setting. They also revealed that they would like to have choice in their materials that are used within the classroom. The students mentioned the negative effect that COVID-19 has had on education, including their own lack of completing assignments. There is no doubt that scaffolding does lead to independence. However, this would be proven further with a quantitative study that could measure test scores on scaffolding materials.

Since perspectives of students are often overlooked in educational practices, the immediate beneficial factor of this study is that the students engaged in reflection on scaffolding materials used within the classroom. Usually, teachers engage in reflective practices based on their teaching; but, students often are not asked about their classroom materials. This understanding will inform subsequent practices with the ultimate goal of

increasing student skills in literacy instruction in the middle school content area classrooms.

In addition, this study further enhanced the research on scaffolding by helping students with learning disabilities in inclusion and self contained classrooms identify their strengths within the literacy process. In addition, it allowed educators to continue to reflect on their individual teaching strategies. This study investigated the perceptions of scaffolding on literacy instruction for middle school students with learning disabilities.

Research addressing the effects of scaffolding materials among middle school and high school learners with learning disabilities remains a gap to be filled. Although this study concluded the perceived usefulness in utilizing scaffolding materials within the middle school content area classrooms, it did not address the measureable outcomes for such a modification with this population of learners. Therefore, there should be further research into identifying the effects of these materials.

After this research, it is hoped that all middle school teachers that service students with reading learning disabilities would use scaffolding materials within their classroom to ensure that these students are given the assistance and help that is needed. Since all teachers are literacy teachers, whether they teach science, math, social studies, English language arts, or any of the special subject areas, such as art, physical education or music, it is vital for teachers to provide students with reading learning disabilities with various materials that would help guide them throughout their instruction. As educators, if we pay better attention to this age group and provide them with the materials they would prefer to use, they will have equitable access to their education and may be intrinsically motivated to have success.

Praxis

The implications from the results discussed above inform the direct applications that should be considered immediately in order to close the gap given to students with reading learning disabilities. This gap includes direct applications within K-12 school and classroom settings and school districts. The case studies will be used to reference examples of the types of scaffolding materials used within the classrooms and the perceptions of these materials from students within the classroom environment.

For Content Area Teachers and Their Students

For the content area teachers and their classrooms, providing valuable class time for students to complete their scaffolding materials and complete their writing tasks and any necessary revisions is necessary for students to interact with the materials. When given these additional materials, it is pertinent for educators to provide students with time to complete these tasks. Through the participation in this study, the content area teachers mentioned that the main goal of scaffolding is to ensure independence. It is vital for teachers to give their students the materials and knowledge to provide them with that independence to create their own device that can help them with a writing task. The student participants also shared suggestions during the interviews for their content area teacher to consider when rendering scaffolding materials within the classroom. These suggestions will be shared with the teachers to inform their practice.

For Middle School Classrooms with Students with Reading Learning Disabilities

For middle school classrooms, teachers would benefit from learning more about the different types of scaffolding that they may be already employing and learning about others that may benefit their students. This information may be shared through

professional development workshops to increase the awareness of scaffolding materials, as well as, increase teacher knowledge in using scaffolding materials within their content area classrooms. There will be various documents and other sources to provide an inventory of scaffolding materials that can be used within the classrooms.

For School Districts

Within the field of special education, one consideration for school districts is determining the amount of scaffolding material that is given within the content area classrooms and determining the amount of time given to this material. School districts and classrooms specifically, depending on the needs of the students and class sizes, should measure and determine the sufficient amount of time given to these modifications. After this is decided, guidance should be provided to schools on the expectation in engaging students with instruction regarding this process. It is essential for students with reading learning disabilities to write about the content within their classrooms, but also, to be given opportunities to engage in English language within the content areas besides English Language Arts classrooms.

Conclusion

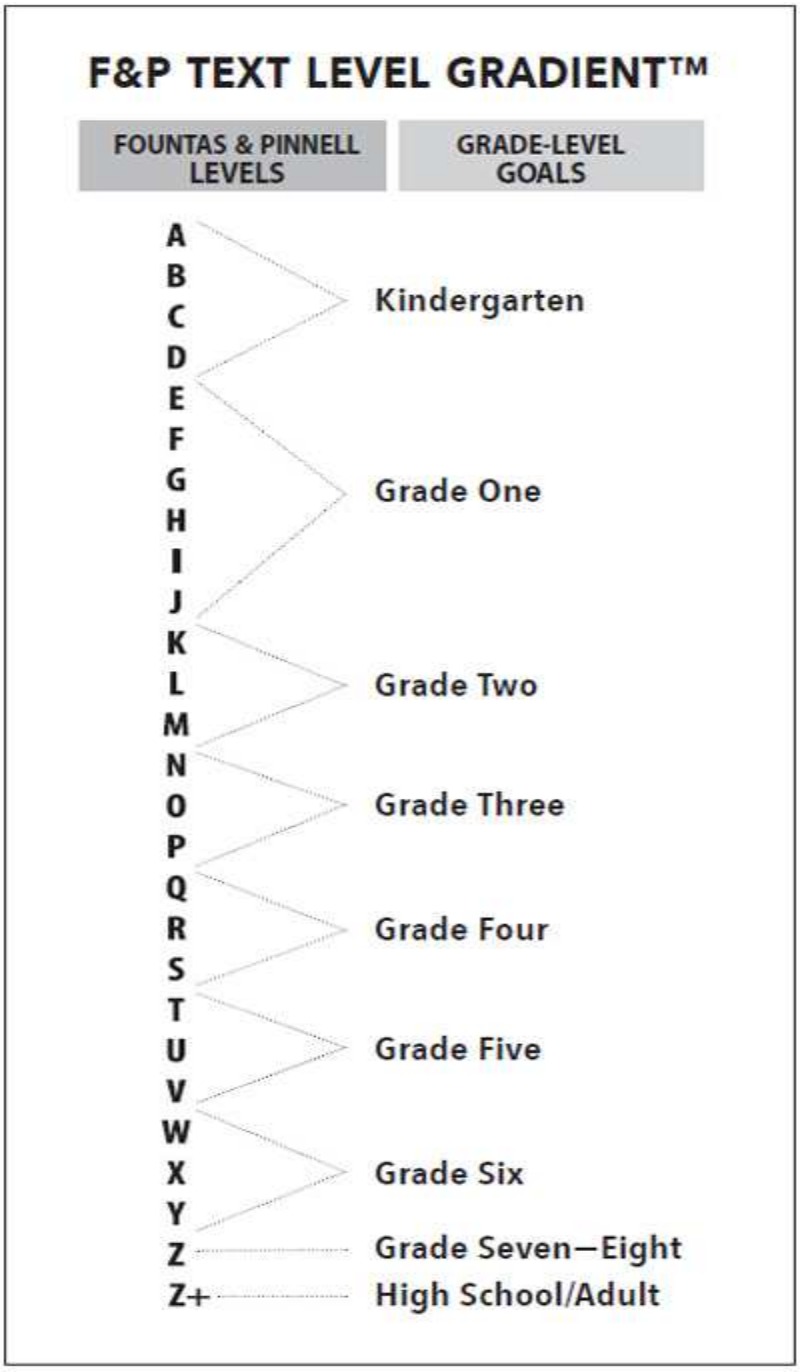
The COVID19 epidemic has forced virtually all K-12 students in the United States into online learning and forced them to lose out on valuable full-time face-to-face instruction and important social interactions. There is a challenge for educators to figure out how to best educate their students during this pandemic. While many teachers are struggling, the obstacles experienced by those who teach children and young adults with disabilities are even more difficult. Many of these students with learning disabilities are falling even more behind than their general education peers. Therefore, the exploration

of how these changes have impacted the scaffolding instruction provided an understanding of the perceptions of middle school students with learning disabilities during these unpredictable times.

The qualitative study explored the perceptions of these scaffolding materials, including chunking texts, color coding, graphic organizers, and sentence structures/starters on students with learning disabilities during the COVID19 pandemic. The study utilized Deci and Ryan's self-determination theory (1985) as it relates to intrinsic motivation, which would result in quality learning and feelings of competence. It used case study research and incorporated participant perspectives by interviewing middle school students with learning disabilities.

APPENDIX A

Fountas and Pinnell Benchmarking System



APPENDIX B

Teacher Recruitment Script Email

September 2020

Dear Middle School Content Area Teachers,

Welcome back! I hope you had a restful and relaxing summer break and are excited for the new school year. I am writing to solicit your assistance to engage in a study to learn more about the perspectives of middle school students with learning disabilities on scaffolding instruction. I am conducting this study along with Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, professor and researcher from the School of Education at St. John's University. The study will also serve as part of my doctoral dissertation.

If you would like to participate, the following are the study activities I will engage with you:

1. Be observed during classroom instruction at school or online during distance learning.
2. Have your students' scaffolding materials collected and analyzed.

In addition, your middle school students with learning disabilities who want to participate and have parental consent will also engage in the following activities:

1. Participate in 2 interviews concerning their perspective and beliefs on the scaffolding material they receive in your content area classrooms.
2. Be observed during classroom instruction at school or online during distance learning.
3. Have their scaffolding materials collected and analyzed.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please email me at [redacted]. I will send the "Teacher Consent Form" which contains additional details, information, and participants rights.

Thank you for your time, consideration, and commitment to our students with learning disabilities.

Sincerely,

Elizabeth De Fantis
Special Education Teacher
[redacted]

APPENDIX C

Teacher Permission Form

September 2020

Dear Middle School Content Area Teacher,

You have been invited to take part in a research study to explore and build a better understanding on how to effectively use scaffolding material within the classroom. This study will be conducted by Ms. Elizabeth De Fantis, Special Education Teacher from P.S. 1000 and Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, professor and researcher from the School of Education, St. John's University. This study will also serve as part of Ms. De Fantis' doctoral dissertation.

If you give consent to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Be observed during classroom instruction at school or online during distance learning.
2. Have your students' scaffolding materials collected and analyzed.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. If there are any physical classroom observations, they will maintain the Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines of social distancing.

Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help us better understand the importance of the perspectives and beliefs of students on the scaffolding material they receive in their content area classrooms. There will be confidentiality of your name and records.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect your professional evaluations or standing.

If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Ms. Elizabeth De Fantis at [redacted]. You can also contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, at blakeb@stjohns.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chairperson, digiuser@stjohns.edu, 718-990-1955 or 718-990-1440. You will be given a copy of this teacher permission form to keep.

Permission to Participate

I have read and understood the information described above and give consent to participate in this study.

_____

Name of Teacher

_____ _____

Teacher Signature Date

APPENDIX D

Parental Permission Form

September 2020

Dear Parent or Guardian,

Your child has been invited to take part in a research study to explore and build a better understanding on how to effectively use scaffolding material within the classroom. This study will be conducted by Ms. Elizabeth De Fantis, Special Education Teacher from P.S. 1000, and Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, professor and researcher from the School of Education, St. John's University. This study will also serve as part of Ms. De Fantis' doctoral dissertation.

If you give permission for your child's participation in this study, your child will be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in 2 interviews concerning their perspective and beliefs on the scaffolding material they receive in their content area classrooms.
2. Be observed during classroom instruction at school or online during distance learning.
3. Have their scaffolding materials collected and analyzed.

Your child's interviews will be audio or video taped. As the parent or guardian, you may review these tapes and request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve approximately two hours of time: 1 hour for each of the two interviews. The interviews will occur at the beginning and the end of the first school semester.

There are no known risks associated with your child's participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. All interviews will be held using computer video conferencing programs to ensure the safety and wellness of your child during the COVID19 pandemic. If there are any physical classroom observations, they will maintain the Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines of social distancing.

Although your child will receive no direct benefits, this research may help us better understand the importance of the perspectives and beliefs of students on the scaffolding material they receive in their content area classrooms. There will be confidentiality of your child's name and records. Your child's responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others.

Participation in this study is voluntary. Your child may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. Your child also has the right to skip or not answer any questions he/she prefers not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect

your child's grades or academic standing, nor would it affect the services your child receives at school.
If there is anything about the study or your child's participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may contact Ms. Elizabeth De Fantis at [redacted]. You can also contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, at blakeb@stjohns.edu.

For questions about your child's rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chairperson, digiuser@stjohns.edu, 718-990-1955 or 718-990-1440. You will be given a copy of this parental permission form to keep.

Permission to Participate

I have read and understood the information described above and give consent to my child to participate in this study.

_____

Name of Child

_____ _____

Parent Signature Date

APPENDIX E

Student Permission Form

September 2020

Dear Student,

You have been invited to take part in a research study to explore and build a better understanding on how to effectively use scaffolding material within the classroom. This study will be conducted by Ms. Elizabeth De Fantis, Special Education Teacher from P.S. 1000, and Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, professor and researcher from the School of Education, St. John's University. This study will also serve as part of Ms. De Fantis' doctoral dissertation.

If you give permission to participate in this study, you will be asked to do the following:

1. Participate in 2 interviews concerning your perspective and beliefs on the scaffolding material you receive in your content area classrooms.
2. Be observed during classroom instruction at school or online during distance learning.
3. Have your scaffolding materials collected and analyzed.

Your interviews will be audio or video taped. You may review these tapes and request that all or any portion of the tapes be destroyed. Participation in this study will involve approximately two hours of time: 1 hour for each of the two interviews. The interviews will occur at the beginning and the end of the first school semester.

There are no known risks associated with your participation in this research beyond those of everyday life. All interviews will be held using computer video conferencing programs to ensure the safety and wellness of you during the COVID19 pandemic. If there are any physical classroom observations, they will maintain the Center for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines of social distancing.

Although you will receive no direct benefits, this research may help us better understand the importance of the perspectives and beliefs of students on the scaffolding material they receive in their content area classrooms. There will be confidentiality of your name and records. Your responses will be kept confidential with the following exception: the researcher is required by law to report to the appropriate authorities, suspicion of harm to yourself, to children, or to others.

Participation in this study is voluntary. You may refuse to participate or withdraw at any time without penalty. You also have the right to skip or not answer any questions you prefer not to answer. Nonparticipation or withdrawal will not affect your grades or academic standing, nor would it affect the services you receive at school.
If there is anything about the study or your participation that is unclear or that you do not understand, if you have questions or wish to report a research-related problem, you may

contact Ms. Elizabeth De Fantis at [redacted]. You can also contact the faculty sponsor, Dr. Brett Elizabeth Blake, at blakeb@stjohns.edu.

For questions about your rights as a research participant, you may contact the Institutional Review Board, St. John's University, Dr. Raymond DiGiuseppe, Chairperson, digiuser@stjohns.edu, 718-990-1955 or 718-990-1440. You will be given a copy of this student permission form to keep.

Permission to Participate

I have read and understood the information described above and give consent to participate in this study.

_____

Name of Student

_____ _____

Student Signature Date

APPENDIX F

Interview Guide for Students

There will be two student interviews. One interview will occur at the beginning of the study and the other interview will occur at the end of the study.

First Student Interview

Personal Experience and Goals for Scaffolding Material Use

1. What is your goal for using scaffolding material, such as graphic organizers, chunking texts, color coding, and sentence starters/frames in middle school?
2. Tell me about your experiences during the COVID19 pandemic?
3. How have COVID19 and the school closures impacted your learning and impacted your ability to use these scaffolding materials?
4. Do you prefer learning by coming to school or engage in distance learning using the computer and all the available resources?
5. Tell me about your learning experiences of scaffolding material, such a graphic organizers, color coding, chunking texts, and sentence starters/frames thus far.
6. How did you previous teachers help with difficulties that you were having in literacy?
7. How do your content area teachers in the school help with problems you may be having in literacy?
8. What role do you think scaffolding material plays in your near future? For those of you in eighth grade, what impact do you think these materials will have on you in high school?

Learner Beliefs and Attitudes towards Scaffolding in the Classroom

1. In your opinion, how important is scaffolding material in the middle school classroom?
2. In your opinion, what should you use to guide you through difficulties in literacy instruction?
3. What are strengths and weaknesses of using scaffolding material in the classroom?
4. How important do you think scaffolding material is in the ELA classroom? How important do you think scaffolding material is in other content area classrooms?
5. To what extent do you usually use the scaffolding material? Do you use sections of it? For example, if you have a graphic organizer with multiple sections to complete, do you feel it is better for you to complete a few sections as opposed to the entire organizer?
6. Have you ever found scaffolding material confusing or unclear to you? Can you give me an example?
7. What are the reasons why some scaffolding material may be difficult to understand or difficult to complete?
8. Do you think scaffolding material is helpful for you? Why/why not?

9. Your teacher wants to improve the way he/she uses scaffolding material within the classroom. What suggestions would you give him/her? What suggestions would you provide when feedback is given via distance learning?

Final Student Interview

1. Tell me about your experiences of using graphic organizers in content area classrooms over the past 12 weeks.
2. Tell me about your experiences of using chunking in content area classrooms over the past 12 weeks.
3. Tell me about your experiences of using color coding in content area classrooms over the past 12 weeks.
4. Tell me about your experiences of using sentence starters/sentence frames in content area classrooms over the past 12 weeks.
5. How has hybrid learning or distance learning impacted your learning experiences?
6. Do you enjoy being in your ELA/Social Studies/Science/Mathematics teacher's class? What do you think about this teacher?
7. Tell me about your experiences of using scaffolding material over the last 12 weeks, both in school and digitally.
8. How much did you understand the scaffolding material that was given to you? Was there a difference in understanding the material while being in a physical school building or at home?
9. How did you use the scaffolding material to benefit you?
10. What did you usually do if the assignment was difficult for you?
11. What resources did you usually use to complete the scaffolding material assignment?
12. What did you feel about using the scaffolding materials in your content area classes to improve literacy?
13. What aspect of scaffolding material do you think was the most helpful?
14. What aspect of scaffolding material do you think was the least helpful?
15. Which do you believe was the most helpful for scaffolding material, written or digital? Why?
16. What do you think your teacher should have done differently when he/she provided you with these resources?
17. Do you have any further reflections or comments on scaffolding material or literacy instruction, in general?

APPENDIX G

Student Assent Statement

The following assent statement will be read aloud to each student who has volunteered to participate in the study via Parental Consent Form and Student Consent Form.

I have spoken to my parent(s) about the study Ms. De Fantis from P.S.1000 and St. John's University wants to complete. Today, I will answer some questions out loud that will be recorded and/or video tapped. Even if my parent(s) said that I may participate, I understand that I may stop the questions at any time that I do not feel comfortable and Ms. De Fantis will throw away any answers that I do not want to share with her.

APPENDIX H
Reading Response Stems

Making Connections	**Asking Questions**
• This reminds me of… • I have a connection… • An experience I have had like that… • This reminds me of the book _____ because… • I can live differently because this book has been a part of my life.	• I wonder… • How come… • Why… • I'm confused… • What if… • I don't understand…
Visualizing/Sensory Images	**Inferring/Predicting**
• In my mind, I picture… • I visualized… • I can see… • I can taste/hear/smell/feel…	• I think… • Maybe this means… • I'm guessing… • This allows me to assume… • I predict… because…
Synthesizing	**Evaluating**
• I'm thinking that… • At first I thought..., but now… • I'm thinking _____ because… • I'm changing my thinking again… • I think the lesson or theme is… • These events have caused me to believe…	• I agree with… because… • I disagree with… because…
Setting (Time and Place)	**Characters**
• I would/would not like to live during this time period/in this place because… • Something I noticed about the setting that I liked was…	• If I were (character's name) I would… • The character that interests me most is _____ because… • A character that really changed in the story was… I think this is true because… • I like/don't like (character's name) because…

APPENDIX I
Color Coded Essay

KEY- INTRODUCTION

Blue- Hook
Purple- Thesis
Pink- Preview

It's only natural to keep vivid memories of certain monumental moments in life, such as the first day of school, for a long time. In the story, "The First Day", the narrator said that she can hear her mother's footsteps above it all because of how significant her mother is. The girl thinks her mother is significant because she sacrifices herself for her daughter to be safe and successful, the bravery and commitment she had to take for her daughter to be in a better school, and the worries she has for her.

KEY- BODY PARAGRAPHS

Orange- Transitions
Red-Topic Sentence/Context
Yellow-Quote/Evidence
Green-Explanation

To begin with, the narrator said that she can hear her mother's footsteps above it all because her mother makes many sacrifices for her to be safe and successful. On page 27, it states,"This form. Would you mind helpin me fill it out?"The woman still seems not to understand. I can't read it. I don't know how to read or write, and I'm askin you to help me." My mother looks at me, then looks away. I know almost all of her looks, but this one is brand new to me. "Would you help me, then?". This quote shows that the mother would still do anything for her daughter to be in a safe and good school, even if she had no sense of vision.

Consequently, the narrator said that she can hear her mother's footsteps above it all because of the life lessons her mother has taught her. On page 25 it states,"Then she shakes her head and says that we are at the wrong school, that we should be at Walker-Jones. My mother shakes her head vigorously. "I want her to go here," 5 my mother says. "If I'da wanted her someplace else, I'da took her there.". This quote demonstrates that her mom never thought of giving up, just to ensure that her daughter got what she wanted.

Above all, the narrator said that she can hear her mother's footsteps above it all because of the worries her mother has for her. On page 27, it states," Indeed, she takes out more papers than I have ever seen her do in other places: my birth certificate, my baptismal record, a doctor's letter concerning my bout with chicken pox, rent receipts, records of immunization, a letter about our public assistance payments, even her marriage license—every single paper that has anything even remotely to do with my five-year-old life.". This quote illustrates that the girl's mother is worried that she doesn't have the document for the school. Nonetheless, she keeps trying but is still worried. This is a

significant part because the mom is not only worried about the papers but her daughter's future as well.

KEY- CONCLUSION

Orange- Transition
Peach- Summary of Main Points
Tan- Final Point

All things considered, the narrator said that she can hear her mother's footsteps above it all because of how significant her mother is. The girl shows appreciation to her mother because she makes many sacrifices for her to be safe and successful, the bravery and commitment she had to take to put her daughter into a better school, and the worries her mother has for her. This all points to the fact that the girl looks up to her mother as an important figure. The girl is grateful for everything her mother does.

APPENDIX J

Core Knowledge Phrase for October

Directions: Read the phrase and begin to think about an answer *before* you begin to write. Think about a time when you *have or will live* by this phrase. Describe what the phrase *means to you*. If you have never had an experience thinking about or using this phrase, then think about a time that this will *become relevant* in your *life*. What are some ways that you can *help others* to live by this phrase?

Extra Credit: As an extension, create a connection with an ongoing news event and compare this phrase to that event. Be sure to tell how this phrase can be applied to the news event and why it would help the world or community.

Brainstorm

What does this phrase mean to you?	
Describe a time when you have *or* will live by this phrase.	
Answer this question *only* if you have never had an experience thinking about or using this phrase: How will this phrase become relevant in your life?	
What are some ways that you can help others live by this phrase?	

During the month of October, the Core Knowledge Phrase is _____

_____

Many people have different interpretations of this phrase. To me, this phrase means

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

There are many examples of where I (have/will live by) this phrase. One example is

_____

_____

_____

_____

This is an example of how I (have/will live by) this phrase because

_____

_____

As a child, I can help others live by the phrase, "where there's a will, there's a way." I can do this by

_____

_____

_____

_____

Therefore,

_____

_____

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VITA

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Baccalaureate Degree	Bachelor of Science, Molloy College Rockville Centre, NY Major: Childhood Education, 1-6
Date Graduated	May, 2009
Master's Degree	Master of Science, Molloy College Rockville Centre, NY Major: Childhood/Special Education, 1-6
Date Graduated	May, 2011
Other Certifications:	NYS Professional Certificate in Early Childhood Education: Birth-2 (2016) NYS Professional Certificate in Students with Disabilities: Birth-2 (2016) NYS Professional Certificate in Childhood Education: Grades 1-6 (2016) NYS Professional Certificate in Students with Disabilities Grades 1-6 (2016) NYS Professional Certificate in English Language Arts: Grades 7-12 (2016) NYS Professional Certificate in Students with Disabilities: Generalist: Grades 7-12 (2016) Certified Autism Specialist (2021)