Self-Advocacy, Autonomy, and Special Education

Praxis Project Thesis: Submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Bachelor of Arts — as part of the Community, Youth, and Education Studies Major at Clark University

Lily A. ten Berge

Committee Signatures:

Eric DeMeulenaere

Katerine Bielaczyc

Lora Barish

Abstract

This project stemmed from my desire to help disabled students become effective self-advocates so they can better work toward personal and educational goals. My project aimed to examine if and how disabled students advocate for themselves by observing their behavior while participating in inclusion ELA and math classes and pull-out reading services. I implemented three short lessons across two grade levels to help make students aware of their autonomy and capacity for self-determination and continued observing to determine if those lessons impacted student behavior. The data collected reveals that before any intervention, only certain types of student self-advocacy were recognized by their teachers and peers. When students could advocate for a specific need verbally, they generally had that need met. Acts of non-verbal self-advocacy, however, were often unrecognized or deemed disruptive. The interventions did not result in a drastic amount of change in student behavior, but they introduced students to some helpful vocabulary. These findings demonstrate the importance of recognizing students' capacity to know what they need and to ask for it. The data further implied that autonomy-supportive classroom structures and actions benefit students and teachers alike.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgments **5**
A Note on Identity-First Language **6**
1. Introduction **7**
1.1 Unpacking and Addressing the Problem 9
1.2 Research Questions 12
2. Literature Review **14**
2.1 Self-Advocacy Strategy 14
2.1.1 Self-Advocacy Strategy Instruction for High Schoolers 15
2.1.2 Self-Advocacy Strategy Instruction for Middle Schoolers 16
2.2 Self-Advocacy for Elementary Schoolers 17
2.3 Gaps in Self-Advocacy Literature 18
2.4 Broadening the Search: Autonomy-Supportive Teaching 19
2.4.1 The Outlier 23
3. Conceptual Framework **25**
3.1 Disability Justice 25
3.2 Self-Determination Theory 28
3.3 The Inherent Value of Children's Autonomy 30
3.4 Tying It All Together: Autonomy in the Special Education Context 32
4. Key Terms **36**
5. Methods **38**
5.1 Methodology 38
5.2 Epistemological Stance 39
5.3 Site Description 40
5.4 Positionality 41
5.5 Participants 43
5.6 Data Collection 44
5.7 Data Analysis 47
6. Findings **50**
6.1 General Observations 50
6.2. "Why Does Everybody Hate Me?" 3rd Grade Initial Observations 50
6.3 6th Grade Initial Observations 54
6.3.1 Overtly "Disruptive" Self-Advocates 55
6.3.2 Silently "Disruptive" Self-Advocates 57
6.3.3 Struggles with "School-Accepted" Self-Advocacy 58
6.4 6th Grade Lesson #1: What Is Self-Advocacy? 60
6.5 3rd Grade Lesson #1: What Does Your Brain Need? 64
6.6 6th Grade Lesson #2: Accommodations 67
6.7 3rd Grade Lesson #2: Strengths, Struggles, and Asking for Help 70
6.8 Lesson #3: Setting Goals 73

6.9 3rd Grade Lesson Impacts..... 78
6.10 6th Grade Lesson Impacts..... 79
7. Conclusions..... 82
7.1.1 How do Special Education Students Advocate for Themselves?..... 82
7.1.2 “School-Accepted” vs. “Disruptive” Behaviors..... 82
7.1.3 Impacts of Explicit Self-Advocacy Instruction..... 83
7.2 Collective Analysis..... 84
7.3 Theoretical Implications..... 85
7.4 Implications for Practice..... 87
7.5 Limitations..... 88
7.6 Final Thoughts..... 89
8. References..... 92

Acknowledgments

To Lora, for graciously allowing me into her classroom, making space for my research, and trusting me with her students–

To Eric, for remaining calm each time I almost cried in his office over this project for a year and a half–

To Kate, for showing interest in my research and generously agreeing to read all 90-something pages of it–

To Xea and Ezra, for being my sounding boards, accountability partners, and frequent recipients of my dramatic complaining–

To anyone in my life that heard the word “praxis” far too many times despite being uninvolved in the CYES major–

To every single student who’s ever allowed me to learn from them–

Thank you!

This work would not exist without your support, kindness, and care.

A Note on Identity-First Language

Throughout this paper, I use identity-first terminology, like "disabled students," instead of person-first terminology, like "students with disabilities." I want to acknowledge that this was a conscious choice on my part. While I recognize that special education professionals typically use person-first language, several communities of disabled people prefer identity-first language. Many Deaf people, for example, reject person-first language to celebrate the Deaf community and its cultural values (Wooldridge, 2023). Members of the autistic community also often opt for identity-first language. According to the Autistic Self Advocacy Network, many autistic people prefer identity-first language:

> "Autism, however, is not a disease. It is a neurological, developmental condition; it is considered a disorder, and it is disabling in many and varied ways. It is lifelong. It does not harm or kill of its own accord. It is an edifying and meaningful component of a person's identity, and it defines the ways in which an individual experiences and understands the world around him or her. It is all-pervasive" (Brown, 2011).

I am not here to make an exhaustive judgment call regarding whether identity-first language is better than person-first. Plenty of people prefer person-first language; identity-first language can feel dehumanizing if it is not used with care. However, I use identity-first language in this paper to honor disability as an identity that has given rise to a cultural community. While there are struggles associated with disability, those struggles should not eclipse the pride disabled people have for themselves and their communities. Those struggles are not the fault of the person's disability; they are what result from living under societal structures that are not inherently accommodating or accepting. To put it simply: disability is not a bad thing. It does not detract from a person's humanity. Disability is a component of identity that should be celebrated.

1. Introduction

Looking for a summer job as a college student is needlessly stressful. No one is interested in hiring when they know you can't stick around for more than a few months. The summer of 2021 was especially difficult. The pandemic had obliterated my relationship with the fast-food job I'd worked since my sophomore year of high school, but I needed a job. Desperately. When my mom offered to put in a good word with the Director of Special Education in her school district, I doubted that anything would come of it. I prepared a script for what I was sure would be an awkward phone call to my local Wendy's manager to ask for my job back. Miraculously, I never needed to make that phone call to Wendy's. Instead, I landed a job as an Educational Support Professional in the same classroom as my mom for a 6-week summer program for students with moderate to severe special needs. Public school special education had not been a field I'd considered, but I did enjoy working with youth. I'd served as a volunteer teaching assistant at my dance studio to help my autistic sister, Ivy. I'd also babysat neurodivergent kids and felt comfortable with them. The position also boasted a set schedule, air-conditioning, and an hourly rate above minimum wage. I jumped at the opportunity.

My mom opted to give me pointers about specific students. I hadn't asked for them, but since I was her nepotism hire, she wanted me to be prepared. For the most part, they were innocuous. One student would take a while to warm up to me, but providing pictures of cats would improve our relationship exponentially. Another would attempt to sweet-talk me into bending the rules for him. She only provided one warning: one student, [1]Grace, would scratch

[1] Grace is a pseudonym chosen to protect the student's identity.

me if she felt ignored. I was to either let the experienced staff handle her or wear denim arm guards. It was too hot for long sleeves, so I planned to step back.

I understood why I had been warned on the first day. The school was under construction to make the water potable, so summer school was held in an office building. Not only did the students have to adjust to coming back to school, but they had to adjust to being in an entirely unfamiliar space. Grace had the hardest time adjusting. She cried and screamed and scratched for almost the entirety of the 5-hour day. The other adults in the room seemed annoyed with her. I was particularly off-put by the tactics used by the school's behaviorist; while the others had at least attempted to calm Grace down, she opted for old-fashioned disciplining. The behaviorist yelled at Grace and refused to allow her to watch the ASMR videos she enjoyed. I did not need behavioral training to see that this method would only result in more scratching.

As the summer went on, Grace adjusted to the new space. She also adjusted to me. I went from hovering on the sidelines to working with her directly. She enjoyed math far more than reading, so we practiced adding and subtracting. While she didn't verbally communicate very often, counting was an exception to the rule. We giggled together and counted emphatically to ten, then fifteen, then twenty. The more experienced staff would still step in when she had a tough moment, but I knew I could hold my own. I figured out that if I counted too fast or didn't praise her enough after she solved a problem, she'd get upset. I could empathize with that; I also wanted praise when I completed assignments. It wasn't her fault that she communicated differently– she hadn't been effectively shown any other method. Her teachers had been working on her use of nonverbal communication devices, but her family hadn't helped, so the lessons hadn't stuck. She needed a surefire way to get the adults in her life to notice her, and scratching them did the trick.

Eventually, she found some other methods, most of which she'd come up with on her own. She'd gently squeeze my hands or shoulders to ground herself. She'd lean close to my face and look me directly in the eye, giggling hysterically, when she wanted attention. She'd stomp or bang her fists on tables instead of reaching for me when she was frustrated. Finally, while we were watching a movie, she plopped herself into my lap so I could give her a sustained hug.

Grace was far from the only student I've had who advocated for herself in unpredictable ways. In the summer of 2023, I met [2]Brian, who expressed frustration by threatening to kill people. He was a skinny 7th-grader with a high, nasally voice, so the threat wasn't all that intimidating, but I still needed to learn to recognize it as an unconventional request for help. Another student, [3]Patrick, was nonverbal by choice. He communicated by humming, writing on whiteboards, or pointing. The other teachers in the room responded with varying levels of empathy and patience. While some behaviors needed to be corrected for safety purposes, I noticed some things being corrected that I considered perfectly acceptable. Patrick was constantly told to use his voice, even though he clearly did not want to. I realized that other teachers were not respecting student attempts at self-advocacy that were not traditionally accepted. I wanted to understand the ways my disabled students communicated regardless of whether that communication conforms to traditional school communication protocols.

1.1 Unpacking and Addressing the Problem

I've been involved in special education since elementary school, initially as a "peer model." I was asked to teach my friends to use their words, even when I knew said friends did not like communicating verbally. While this confused me, I took my job seriously and tried to

[2] Brian is a pseudonym chosen to protect the student's identity.
[3] Patrick is a pseudonym chosen to protect the student's identity.

ensure my friends got what they needed. As I got older, I began questioning why the teachers hadn't spent time helping my friends learn to advocate for themselves. My sister's experiences with the special education system further illuminated this problem. She is diagnosed with autism and ADHD and has been in special education since preschool. Very few of her teachers gave her any self-advocacy skills. Her attempts to advocate for herself became considered "behaviors" to be fixed instead of communication tools. She was punished for her tone and reprimanded for supposed impulsivity when she grew annoyed with waiting for adults to listen to her and took matters into her own hands. My parents complained as she received fewer and fewer of the services she was supposed to because of her "behaviors." We knew that any outbursts she had at school had to do with how school staff treated her; she did not have nearly as many behavioral issues at home. At home, we let her advocate for herself. I was left wondering why her teachers would not do the same.

As I transitioned into adulthood, disability education work remained a constant in my life. When I began working as an ESP in the summer program, I was introduced to complexities that I had not noticed when I was a student. I had been lucky enough to have teachers who cared about me personally. They noticed when I was having an off day and cut me slack when I needed it. The disabled students I worked with did not always have this kindness extended to them. While the staff members I worked with did their best, they were encouraged to hold students to behavioral standards that would never be achievable. We were not told to ask the kids how they felt about particular rules, so they did not know how to self-advocate. The students I worked with relied heavily on parental advocacy to ensure they got the services they needed. Unfortunately, not every parent prioritized this, leaving many students, like Grace, to fend for themselves.

Opportunities for students to advocate for themselves are severely limited in schools, particularly if your modes of communication do not conform to the expectations of the educators. Children are not provided the same access to their fundamental human rights as adults. Kids legitimately have to ask to use the bathroom, and are sometimes told "no!" That's considered a normal thing to do, even though if an adult were told they could not use the bathroom, they would be horrified. Students are expected to conform to countless behavioral and social norms without questioning them. This limits student autonomy and makes it more difficult for them to become self-sustaining adults. Special education students are held to especially high standards. Ableism has permeated throughout American culture, including American public schools. Disabled students are taught to behave "normally," leading to interactions like the ones Grace had with her behaviorist. The behaviorist saw Grace's disability as a hindrance and thus blamed Grace entirely for her communication struggles. She was rarely asked why she was upset or what she needed; instead, she was scolded for her method of communication. Grace was robbed of her autonomy. Had she been able to advocate for herself more effectively, she would have been able to access more academic content and participate more socially.

I believe that self-advocacy should be more actively incorporated into the public school curriculum. Students need to be able to ask for what they need. Children are autonomous beings who deserve to have their needs respected. Unfortunately, those needs are often pushed to the side by adults, especially in educational spaces. Special education can be especially harmful, as disabled students are held to ableist standards of behavior that limit their autonomy. I believe it is important to learn what different modes of self-advocacy look like to more effectively address student needs. Self-advocacy is not as simple as raising one's hand or sending an email. Children are advocating for themselves constantly; it is our responsibility as the adults in the room to

recognize and respond to their requests. Additionally, we should work to help our students identify and advocate for their individual needs and goals.

1.2 Research Questions

Three questions guided my exploration of self-advocacy in special education classrooms. They are as follows:

1) How do special education students advocate for themselves?
2) What kinds of student self-advocacy are considered "school-accepted" versus "disruptive" by teachers?
3) Does explicit instruction about self-advocacy change how students advocate for themselves? What do these findings teach us about explicit self-advocacy instruction?

I explored these research questions by observing special education students as they participated in general education classes and pull-out lessons. I spent six weeks observing if and how a group of special education students advocated for themselves in the classroom. I observed one third-grade student during her inclusion English Language Arts period and pull-out reading lessons. I also observed five sixth-graders in their inclusion math class and pull-out lessons. I paid attention to the various ways students chose to advocate for themselves. Some students were more prone to verbal self-advocacy, while others advocated non-verbally. I coded field notes for both types of self-advocacy. I also coded for whether or not a student's attempt at self-advocacy was considered "school-accepted" or "disruptive." After this initial assessment, I facilitated three simple mini-lessons focused on introducing students to self-advocacy and guiding them toward effective methods. After each lesson, I observed student behavior to see whether their

self-advocacy skills had changed or improved. I paid specific attention to whether or not information from the lessons affected student behavior.

2. Literature Review

To conduct effective research, I needed to determine how self-advocacy looks in both general educational settings and special education settings. I define “self-advocacy” as one’s ability to effectively ask for something they want or need. In educational research, however, the term tends to be defined differently. Most authors equated self-advocacy to representing one's interests. In educational spaces, one's interests are centered on accessing curriculum content. Discussions about educational self-advocacy focused on student use of institutional or federal resources.

2.1 Self-Advocacy Strategy

When searching for literature about self-advocacy in educational spaces, most studies focused on Anthony K. Van Reusen’s Self-Advocacy Strategy for Education and Transition Planning. Van Reusen defines self-advocacy as, “an individual's ability to effectively communicate, convey, negotiate, or assert his or her interests, desires, needs, and rights” (Van Reusen 1996, p. 1). Van Reusen’s article “The Self-Advocacy Strategy for Education and Transition Planning” outlines a series of techniques teachers could use to improve their students’ self-advocacy skills. Van Reusen recommended beginning with his “I PLAN” behavioral strategy. “I PLAN” is an acronym delineating the following steps: “Inventory,” “Providing Your Inventory Information,” “Listen and Respond,” “Ask Questions,” and “Name Your Goals” (Van Reusen, 1996). Each step is intended to help students learn to advocate for their educational needs in formal settings, like Individual Education Plan meetings. Students are also taught “SHARE” behaviors, which Van Reusen describes as techniques for effective communication. “SHARE” is another acronym: “Sit up straight,” “Have a pleasant tone of voice,” “Activate your

thinking," "Relax," and "Engage in eye communication" (Van Reuse, 1996). Much of the body of research focused on educational self-advocacy examined whether Van Reusen's strategies could transcend across age groups, instructional methods, and settings.

2.1.1 Self-Advocacy Strategy Instruction for High Schoolers

Several studies aimed to determine whether Van Reusen's Self-Advocacy Strategies could be effectively taught to disabled subgroups of the high school population. Several concluded that this was the case (Cease-Cook, Test, & Scroggins, 2013; Van Reusen, Deshler, & Schumacher, 1989; Lancaster et al., 2002; Schelling & Rao, 2013) These studies concluded that high schoolers could be taught to use the Self-Advocacy Strategy steps. High schoolers were introduced to the strategies in various formats, including conferences (Van Reusen, Deshler, & Schumacher, 1989), digital media (Cease-Cook, Test, & Scroggins, 2013), or a combination of the two (Lancaster, 2002; Schelling & Rao, 2013). High schoolers generally found the Self-Advocacy Strategies comprehensible and useful.

In all major studies I found, students were introduced to Self-Advocacy Strategies for the explicit purpose of improving their ability to participate in Individualized Education Plan (IEP) meetings. IEP meetings are typically conferences between educational staff, parents, and students. While this is beneficial for students, this should not be the only time self-advocacy skills are mentioned in the classroom. Students should also be taught to advocate for themselves in lower-stakes settings. These instances of self-advocacy are just as important as the higher-stakes IEP meetings the research discussed. One study concluded that the Self-Advocacy Strategy could be used across settings (Schelling & Rao, 2013). More studies of this nature should be done to build a true understanding of the Self-Advocacy Strategy's usefulness. This study will contribute to this deficiency in the literature.

It is also worth noting that some researchers privileged verbal communication by only deeming speaking students eligible for participation. Verbal communication skills were then assessed before and after receiving Self-Advocacy Strategy instruction (Cease-Cook, Test, & Scroggins, 2013; Van Reusen, Deshler, & Schumacher, 1989). Generally, being introduced to Self-Advocacy Strategies improved the quantity and quality of student contributions to IEP meetings (Cease-Cook, Test, & Scroggins, 2013; Van Reusen, Deshler, & Schumacher, 1989). While the students I am working with can communicate verbally, I do not think that self-advocacy skills should be reserved for the verbally communicative. More work should be done with non-verbal or non-speaking student populations.

2.1.2 Self-Advocacy Strategy Instruction for Middle Schoolers

Middle schoolers were also frequently introduced to Van Reusen's Self-Advocacy Strategy. Several studies aimed to determine whether this age group could effectively use the Self-Advocacy Strategy's steps (Balint-Langel & Ridden, 2022; Balint-Langel et al., 2020; Hammer, 2004; Test & Neale, 2004). These studies also tested various instructional methods. Some studies focused on the effectiveness of verbal and interactive instructional practices (Test & Neale, 2004; Balint-Langel & Ridden, 2022; Hammer, 2004). One study aimed to determine if computer-based instructional methods were effective (Balint-Langel et al., 2020). Regardless of the type of instructional strategy, these studies noted that students' self-advocacy skills improved after receiving explicit instruction. Once again, though, these studies focused on building self-advocacy skills to participate in IEP meetings.

2.2 Self-Advocacy for Elementary Schoolers

Van Reusen's self-advocacy strategy does not seem to be used with elementary schoolers, presumably because they were not going to be attending IEP meetings. However, some researchers have explored how to increase elementary schoolers' self-advocacy skills.

One relevant study found that disabled second-graders could develop their self-advocacy skills with explicit instruction (Massengale, 2016). Massengale interviewed and observed student participants to assess their self-knowledge regarding their disabilities, their knowledge of their human rights, their communication skills, and their leadership skills. It is important to note that this study only observed two student participants, both of whom utilized verbal and written communication skills. Further research with a larger sample size ought to be done. That being said, the implications of this study are worth considering. Massengale (2016) found that participants did not know what specific disability they had been diagnosed with, but could identify how their needs differed from their peers. They also had limited knowledge of their rights as disabled people, but they understood the rules and expectations they were held to both at home and in school. Both participants had basic communication skills but struggled to advocate for their needs in specific circumstances. Each student had individual strategies for self-advocacy, but neither could move beyond those strategies. Their strategies were also not consistently situationally appropriate or effective– one participant responded to any upsetting situation by "screaming and crying," for example (Massengale, 2016). He had formed a habitual self-advocacy strategy that was not particularly useful by second grade. Massengale argues that exposing this student to alternative methods of communication from a younger age would have set him up for increased success.

Another study recognized the importance of teaching students specific self-determination skills to increase their self-advocacy (Coyne, 2016). A group of disabled fourth-graders participated in a curriculum unit designed to increase their self-awareness, self-advocacy, choice-making, and goal-setting skills. Implementing this curriculum resulted in a perceived increase in student self-determination skills (Coyne, 2016). Growth was determined to have occurred because students demonstrated skills taught in the curriculum. Post-lesson observations quoted many students articulating self-determination vocabulary discussed in the curriculum unit (Coyne, 2016). Coyne also surveyed parents and teachers to determine whether they felt their students' self-determination skills had increased. For the majority of participants, results indicated a perceived increase in student self-determination between the pre-intervention and post-intervention surveys (Coyne, 2016).

I do want to draw attention to the strategy of using parent and teacher perceptions of student growth in these studies. Coyne was not the only researcher who used this strategy; other studies advocate for increased familial and teacher education to ensure that young students' needs are met (Alper et al., 1995; Massengale, 2016). While I am cognizant of the fact that an elementary schooler's self-reflection skills may not be highly developed, I still believe studies centering self-advocacy should allow students to self-reflect.

2.3 Gaps in Self-Advocacy Literature

Educational researchers are interested in self-advocacy. However, I believe researchers generally minimize self-advocacy's role in fostering autonomous thought. Most of the literature focused on developing self-advocacy skills to increase student participation in IEP meetings. Of course, students do need to be able to appropriately participate in these meetings. However, there

is little discussion about developing self-advocacy skills early in a student's life. In the United States, schools do not have to invite students to their IEP meetings until they are 14[4]. Students should not have to wait that long before being taught to self-advocate. I believe that people can self-advocate from birth. Newborn babies cry when they need something. Humans naturally want to advocate for themselves, but many adults strip children of their ability to do so. Disabled children need self-advocacy skills the most, as they will be combating systemic ableism by existing. They should not have to wait until middle or high school to develop these skills. I want to help disabled students learn to advocate for themselves so they can go on to become autonomous adults. Students will lose themselves and their hope for the future if they cannot act autonomously.

2.4 Broadening the Search: Autonomy-Supportive Teaching

While self-advocacy is an underutilized term in educational research, there are related topics that have garnered interest. I chose to focus on autonomy-supportive teaching, a related concept that has been studied in various educational settings. Autonomy-supportive teaching refers to a style of teaching that centers on student autonomy, competence, and relatedness in the learning process (Reeve, 2016; Vich, 2023). Autonomy refers to, “a capacity for self-governance in the light of personally meaningful goals and commitments, which could be values, people, relationships, experiences, or things” (Mullin, 2022, p. 23). It is also a basic psychological need; people need to be able to exercise free will and make decisions for themselves (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Guay, 2021; Mullin, 2022; Vich, 2023). “Competence” and “relatedness” are also basic

[4] It is relevant to note that Massachusetts is implementing a new system that requires all students to attend their IEP meetings, not just those over 14. However, at the time this paper was written, this fact was accurate and students under 14 only attended their IEP meetings if they specifically requested to.

psychological needs. When one feels competent, they perceive themselves as capable of successfully completing tasks or rising to new challenges (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Wang et al., 2019; Vich, 2023). “Relatedness” refers to a student’s capacity for connection; students must feel tied to those they share an educational environment with (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Wang et. al, 2019; Vich, 2023). Many researchers argue that when all of these basic psychological needs are met, students will feel supported by their teachers (Deci and Ryan, 1985; Vich, 2023).

Autonomy-supportive teaching is also intended to support intrinsic motivation. When a student aims to complete a task for their own personal enjoyment, not because of an external reward, they are intrinsically motivated (Ryan and Deci, 2000b; Vich, 2023). Allowing students to feel empowered in their autonomy can heighten their intrinsic motivation. In 2004, a McGill University study (Joussemet, Koestner, Lekes, and Houlfort) found that children receiving autonomy-supportive instruction felt happier performing tasks than those who received rewards for completing said tasks. Participants were divided into classrooms that either used autonomy-supportive methods or did not. Those groups were then sub-divided into groups that either used reward-based systems or did not. All groups were asked to complete the same tasks, some of which were intentionally tedious, some of which were meant to be fun. The children then self-reported whether they were happy completing each task and whether they found each task valuable. The students in autonomy-supportive conditions rated both their levels of happiness and perception of task value more highly than those in control conditions, regardless of whether or not a reward was offered. Children in autonomy-supportive conditions were also found to have stronger self-regulation skills, meaning that they possessed more intrinsic motivation skills than their peers in reward-based systems (Joussemet, Koestner, Lekes, and Houlfort, 2004). Autonomy has thus become a resource that teachers can use to increase student

participation. Teachers cannot work effectively with students who are not motivated to complete the tasks assigned. Many educators have noticed that allowing their students some freedom makes them more likely to want to complete assignments, even the most boring ones.

The importance of a supportive environment cannot be understated. Several studies found that autonomy-supportive classroom environments fostered higher levels of academic engagement and achievement. A 2010 study found that teachers who incorporated both autonomy support and structure into their classrooms saw increased student engagement (Jang, Reeve, and Deci, 2010). Trained observers went to 133 public high schools in the American Midwest to rate teacher instructional style and student behavioral engagement. Students were also asked to assess their own subjective engagement. The study found positive correlations between autonomy support and structure; teachers who used both strategies saw higher levels of student engagement in their classrooms (Jang, Reeve, and Deci, 2010). Autonomy support was unique in that it indicated whether students would self-report higher levels of engagement; students with autonomy-supportive teachers reported higher levels of engagement. Many implications for practice can be drawn from this study. Students will be more engaged and more cognizant of their engagement when in autonomy-supportive environments. However, this does not mean we need to abandon structured classrooms entirely. Structure is beneficial to student engagement, so long as it is paired with autonomy-supportive interventions.

Another study corroborated the idea that students need to feel that their autonomy is being supported. A 2002 study (Assor, Kaplan, and Roth) found that students noticed when their teachers gave them opportunities to act autonomously and when they did not. Over 800 students filled out questionnaires assessing whether their teachers fostered autonomy-supportive conditions. Students noticed when their teachers fostered relevance, allowed for criticism, and

provided choice in their classrooms (Assor, Kaplan, and Roth, 2002). They also noticed when teachers did not allow for criticism, intruded, and forced unmeaningful acts (Assor, Kaplan, and Roth, 2002). The students who believed their autonomy was supported reported more positive feelings and higher levels of engagement. Teachers must therefore be actively empathetic. A 2012 study (Diseth, Danielsen, and Samdal) corroborated those findings while adding the importance of intentional autonomy-supportive classroom structures. Researchers anonymously surveyed 240 middle- and high-school students about their perception of how well their teachers helped them meet various personal needs (Diseth, Danielsen, and Samdal, 2012). Students rated their levels of basic need support from teachers, ability to complete achievement goals, academic self-efficacy abilities, and life satisfaction. Students also provided information about their level of academic achievement. The survey found that students who perceived their needs as being met also rated their ability to complete their goals and academic self-efficacy skills more highly (Diseth, Danielsen, and Samdal, 2012). The data from this study can be extrapolated to imply that students feel empowered academically when their basic psychological needs associated with autonomy are met. Additionally, students subconsciously recognized when their teachers wanted to support their autonomy. Those who felt supported also felt competent.

The 2010 claim that targeted autonomy-supportive measures positively impact students is also corroborated by additional studies. A 2016 study (Wang, et. al.) found that when teachers administered autonomy-supportive interventions in their classrooms, their students felt more supported. Teachers were trained to implement five-week autonomy-supportive interventions in their classrooms. Their students were given questionnaires before and after the interventions to assess their perceptions of autonomy support, basic needs, motivation orientation, and use of learning strategies (Wang, et. al., 2016). A control group of students received the same

questionnaires but did not receive targeted autonomy-supportive interventions from their teachers. The students with autonomy-supportive teachers perceived positive changes in their autonomy support, needs, self-efficacy and self-regulation skills, and grades. Students in autonomy-supportive conditions were also observed to be more self-efficacious and autonomous than those in the control group (Wang, et. al., 2016). Once again, autonomy-supportive classroom structures were found to benefit the students.

2.4.1 The Outlier

In one study, students were granted varying levels of cognitive autonomy and procedural autonomy (Furtak and Kunter, 2012). Procedural autonomy allows students to make tangible choices about the use of various classroom materials and equipment; cognitive autonomy describes the degree to which teachers allow students to initiate their own learning (Stefanou et al, 2004; Furtak and Kunter, 2012). Furtak and Kunter (2012) recognized two levels of procedural autonomy– hands-off activities vs. hands-on activities– and cognitive autonomy– controlling vs. supportive. Students in hands-off, controlling academic environments were granted the least access to their autonomy while students in hands-on, supportive environments had the most. Their study found no significant statistical differences between academic results based on levels of procedural autonomy. However, students who received lower levels of cognitive autonomy support learned more than their peers. They also found lower levels of student motivation when they received high levels of procedural and cognitive autonomy support. Furtak and Kunter (2012) believe that their conceptions of autonomy support were perceived negatively by the students, resulting in lower levels of learning and motivation. Additionally, they noted that the students who believed their autonomy had been supported also

found the lesson content more interesting, enjoyable, and useful. The intended level of autonomy granted did not affect these findings; if students in the least autonomy-supportive environments perceived support, they enjoyed and valued their lessons more.

In general, autonomy-supportive classrooms benefit students and teachers alike. However, teachers must actively incorporate structures that support autonomous behavior in their classrooms. These structures must also align with what students perceive as autonomy-supportive. Furtak and Kunter's study is relevant because it proves that teacher intent is not enough on its own. I wanted my research to give students some tools to recognize their own autonomy and begin advocating for it.

3. Conceptual Framework

I believe that being able to advocate for oneself is a valuable skill. If people cannot identify and/or ask for what they need, they will be helpless in the ongoing fight against oppression. Schools could become sites of resistance, but they were created to be tools for the oppressor. American public schools teach children to ignore their physical and emotional needs. People of all ages deserve to be the arbiters of their own fates. Self-advocacy makes this possible. However, most definitions of self-advocacy center on verbal forms of advocacy. Alternative forms of communication, especially body language, are dismissed as merely behavioral outbursts. This is unjust. Autonomy should be respected, even if a person uses a non-normative method of communication. The idea that there is one "normal" style of communication comes from systemic ableism. In the following sub-sections, I explore how disability justice, self-determination theory, and the inherent value of children's autonomy should build upon each other to create change. I believe that educators should value student autonomy and engage in autonomy-supportive teaching. Self-determination theory should inform the autonomy-supportive actions teachers take. Disability justice should be a central tenet of autonomy-supportive special education teaching.

3.1 Disability Justice

For centuries, discrimination against disabled people went unquestioned by society writ large (Baynton, 2013). Since disabled bodies were seen as "abnormal," disabled people were viewed as "less than" their non-disabled counterparts (Baynton, 2013). The concept of disability was additionally ascribed to other marginalized groups to justify discrimination. For example, women's suffrage movements were dismissed because of their, "supposed physical, intellectual,

and psychological flaws, deficits, and deviations from the male norm" (Baynton, 2013, p. 17). Deeming women "disabled" allowed sex-based discriminatory practices to thrive because discriminating against disability was considered "normal." Suffragettes then argued for their rights by denying that they were disabled, not by countering ableist discrimination (Baynton, 2013). Ableism thus continued to thrive even after women gained the right to vote in 1920. Sexism was not the only system of oppression justified through ableism. The institution of slavery and subsequent centuries of anti-Black racism were also attributed to the supposed "intellectual inferiority" of African and Black Americans (Baynton, 2013). By insisting that Blackness was a disability, America institutionalized racism. This implies that ableism was already built into the fabric of the American institution.

Centuries of systemic ableism cannot be undone overnight. The standards of communication, behavior, and self-expression American people adhere to today are rooted in ableism. Disabled people, especially children, thus frequently have the validity of their decisions questioned. If we are ever going to build a society that is not entrenched in ableism, I believe that we need to actively engage in disability justice. "Disability justice" can mean a variety of things to different people. However, all forms of true disability justice, "[push] past solely access, assimilation, inclusion and equality, to justice and liberation" (Mingus, 2014, p. 2). All types of bodies are unique and essential; all people have individual strengths and individual needs (Berne, 2015). Disabled people should not be forced to continue to watch as their needs– and subsequently their existences– are outright ignored by their society. Disability justice acknowledges that the historically oppressed must be granted liberation. Ableism is mutually dependent upon other systems of oppression (Mingus, 2014). If disability justice is to be achieved, every other oppressed group must also be liberated. Those engaged in disability justice

give the historically oppressed seats at the table where their voices are heard and valued. Prioritizing the autonomy of the oppressed is essential to engage in disability justice.

To engage in appropriate disability justice, I believe that we must come to terms with the idea that there is nothing inherently wrong with being disabled. The social model of disability states that societal expectations disable people with impairments (Shakespeare, 2013). "Impairment" in this context refers to the individual, private aspects of one's body that may cause society to deem them "disabled" (Shakespeare, 2013). "Disability" thus refers to the structural and public ways that society constructs reality that results in some people being deemed "impaired" and unable to equitably access the public and social world. Society is the causal agent in this relationship; we actively (and often literally) build the structures and social realities that cause disability. In my view, American society continuously punishes disabled people for their existence by refusing to make basic changes that would improve the quality of life for millions of people. Adhering to the social model takes the burdens of ableism off of the shoulders of disabled people and, "places the moral responsibility on society to remove the burdens which have been imposed, and to enable disabled people to participate" (Shakespeare, 2013, p. 217).

Disability justice and autonomy can seem diametrically opposed. Autonomy centers on our individual right to pursue our goals. Disability justice calls for collective liberation; it requires collective recognition and commitment. However, I feel that the two concepts are inherently linked. We cannot work for the good of the collective if we cannot identify what benefits the individual. Disability additionally requires a unique level of nuance. We are taught to fear disability. We worry about what would happen if we lost a limb or one of our senses. However, the vast majority of us will become disabled at some point in our lives. Old age is

nearly universally disabling; accidents and illness can befall us at any time. Any individual can become disabled in the blink of an eye. The disability justice movement reframes “able-bodied” individuals as “non-disabled” or “not disabled yet” for that reason. In our current system, disabled people are not afforded autonomy. When people become disabled, they are stripped of their physical, social, and even legal abilities to make their own choices. Our treatment of the most vulnerable members of society sets a precedent; oppressors will use the disenfranchisement of one group to justify their oppression of others. If we ignore the collective disenfranchisement of disabled people, it will lead to the restriction of our individual rights. Accepting these truths can bring us one step closer to achieving justice. Ableism is a system of oppression that can and will affect all of us. We must choose to do something about it, but we can only make that choice if we are afforded access to our autonomy. More importantly, the individual rights of disabled people matter. We cannot allow our society to justify stripping disabled people of their autonomy.

3.2 Self-Determination Theory

Self-determination theory is directly related to autonomy. Self-determination theory is a subset of human motivation theory. People are proactive; they want to act for themselves (Ryan and Deci, 2000). We crave challenges that we can master and new experiences that we can learn from (Guay, 2022). These tendencies toward positive personal growth are intrinsic to human nature (Guay, 2022). Self-determination theory describes the processes by which people control their own lives. People thrive when they can work toward their personal goals on their own terms. We need to feel competent in our journeys toward self-actualization (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Our goals are also relational. We look to our communities for inspiration as we strive

toward growth (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Being allowed to make decisions for ourselves and our futures is psychologically beneficial (Ryan and Deci, 2000). However, we are not born knowing exactly what to do to find meaning. The relational aspect of self-determination theory is especially relevant for teachers. Children need to learn how to decide what is meaningful to them. They cannot hope to become self-determined individuals if they cannot decide what they want. Of course, all children gradually develop into autonomous adults. Some children, though, especially marginalized children, have opportunities to learn self-determination skills in their youth stripped from them. Disabled children are frequent victims of this maltreatment, sometimes to the point of stunting personal growth. Teachers can help their students grow by encouraging them to make autonomous decisions. Denying people choice causes listlessness and detachment from themselves and their world (Ryan and Deci, 2000). Teachers can prevent students from becoming detached from their learning by building choice into lessons.

Self-advocacy is an essential skill for those hoping to self-determine. My definition of self-advocacy is simple: self-advocacy is asking for something you need or want. When people can effectively self-advocate, they can work toward their individual goals. Self-advocacy requires people to be able to recognize situations where their goals could be realized (Mullin, 2022). They also need to exercise self-control to ignore impulses that conflict with their goals (Mullin, 2022). Most importantly, they must persist, even when setbacks arise (Mullin, 2022). Without these strategies, people are unable to work toward fulfilling their goals.

Once people learn how to recognize their needs, they must learn to communicate them. People are constantly subconsciously self-advocating. We use our friend’s body language to determine if they're enjoying an activity and adjust the plan if they seem disinterested. However, if our friends do not tell us what they need, we might not make the best adjustments. People can

only act autonomously if they can articulate what it is they need to pursue their goals. People also have to learn to see one another's requests for self-determination. Teachers can model this skill for their students by recognizing their requests and providing an explanation in moments where a request cannot be met.

3.3 The Inherent Value of Children's Autonomy

Fostering autonomy in educational spaces is a more recent focus in the education research community. Student choice has become an especially popular research topic. As the literature examined above implies, researchers have become very interested in student choice as it pertains to autonomy-supportive teaching. Autonomy-supportive teaching is a student-focused strategy that recognizes the importance of autonomy, competence, and relatedness (Reeve, 2016; Vich, 2023). Autonomy-supportive teachers provide their students with opportunities for self-direction. They also acknowledge student perspectives, emotions, and desires in their teaching. The central goal of autonomy-supportive teaching is student empowerment. When we feel that our perspectives are valued, we are more likely to express ourselves. Autonomy-supportive teaching has also been found to increase intrinsic motivation, improve self-regulation and critical thinking skills, and bolster student creativity.

It is easy to balk at the idea of giving children too much autonomy. We've all known impulsive children who make decisions that are inconvenient at best and dangerous at worst. We all have memories of our worst childhood decisions; I distinctly remember burning myself after being explicitly told not to touch a piece of metal I'd found outside on a summer day. However, children are often denied access to their autonomy even when making safe decisions. Children have become increasingly surveilled by their parents since the 1990s (Ramey, 2010; Cooper and

Pugh, 2020; Dinsmore and Pugh, 2021). In many cases, this is a good thing. Parents ought to be involved in their children's lives. However, increasingly intensive parenting has also reshaped childhood. We want to protect or children from the risks, both real and perceived, of living in this world (Beck et al., 1992; Katz, 2005; Dinsmore and Pugh, 2021). Our media disproportionately discusses the things we fear most for our children: kidnapping, death, and exploitation (Moscowitz and Duvall, 2011; Dinsmore and Pugh, 2021). White children are the most frequently discussed victims (Moscowitz and Duvall, 2011), causing any inherent bias resulting from living in a white supremacist society to rear its head and terrify parents further. This environment of inflated risks has caused increased levels of parental monitoring (Nelson, 2010; Dinsmore and Pugh, 2021). This has reduced children's spatial autonomy; fewer children travel alone, obtain driver's licenses, or leave their homes without their parents (Doxey et al, 2003; Villanueva et al., 2012; Shaw et. al, 2013; Twenge and Park, 2019). In many cases, this does increase children's safety; however, it decreases their autonomy simultaneously.

The heightened level of surveillance affects children at school, too. Schools are now laden with security cameras, metal detectors, and police presence (National Center for Education Statistics, 2019; Dinsmore and Pugh, 2021). In some cases, these measures improve student safety. In the United States, there is a very real fear of encountering gun violence while at school. However, these forms of surveillance also disproportionately impact Black and Hispanic students (Steinka-Fry et al, 2016; Dinsmore and Pugh, 2021). Surveillance efforts tend to be more intrusive in schools serving communities of color– metal detectors or police officers are far more noticeable in one's day-to-day life than an extra security camera. Schools serving more students of color are also more likely to charge their students with crimes (Welch and Payne, 2018). There are also an increasing number of apps used by educators and parents alike to surveil children

while in school. These apps allow adults to communicate about children's grades or behavior instantaneously (Lupton and Williams, 2017; Dinsmore and Pugh, 2021).

There is nothing wrong with prioritizing children's safety. As an aspiring educator, I believe wholeheartedly in doing what is best for our children. That being said, we must be discerning when determining how to exercise our authority. Adults are implicitly encouraged to exert total control over children, regardless of whether or not that control is necessary. Dinsmore and Pugh encapsulate how American society generally views children's autonomy: we characterize children's rights as, "a zero-sum game, with adults suffering losses if young people were to gain autonomy" (2021, p. 451). Rather than nurturing the capacity for collaborative autonomy in our children, we grant adults unilateral power. This approach deprives children of the opportunity to engage in meaningful decision-making processes, perpetuating a cycle of adult dominance at the expense of authentic empowerment and learning. Instead of being provided full access to themselves, children learn to hand their autonomy freely over to adults.

3.4 Tying It All Together: Autonomy in the Special Education Context

Schooling has historically stripped children of their autonomy. However, schools are slowly becoming potential sites of change. Most American children spend the majority of their day at school. Teachers thus have tons of opportunities to encourage autonomous thinking (Guay, 2021; Dinsmore and Pugh, 2021). When teachers center autonomy in their classrooms, they are autonomy-supportive. Autonomy-supportive teachers, "view students as capable of mastering their own learning" (Zachariou and Bonneville-Roussy, 2023). Autonomy-supportive teachers engage in autonomy-supportive behaviors. These behaviors include centering student perspectives, displaying patience, nurturing self-motivation, providing rationales, using

non-controlling language, and accepting negative student opinions (Zachariou and Bonneville-Roussy, 2023; Guay, 2021). Teachers should also provide activities that allow students to make their own choices. Students become more self-motivated when they're able to make their own choices. This gives them the confidence they need to pursue their goals (Guay, 2021). They also become more hopeful, as they believe their perspectives and preferences matter (Mullin, 2022). In my view, they will only be able to make their own choices if they are taught to advocate for themselves. Teachers cannot know what their students want or need if they do not know how to ask for them.

Research done in a special education context is particularly focused on the freeing capabilities of autonomous thought. Disabled children are characterized as struggling for independence (Mullin, 2022; Alexander and Hunter, 2004; McKittrick, 2022). Certain disabilities, particularly those that cause communication delays or challenges, are thought to make acting autonomously more difficult (Mullin, 2022). While this is not necessarily wrong, it is unfair to blame students for the failings of the education system. Curriculum infrastructure does not generally account for the needs of disabled students, so lessons that could grant students access to their autonomy are often inaccessible. This often discourages teachers from focusing on autonomy with their disabled students.

Many researchers advocate for education as something that can provide disabled students access to their autonomy (Alexander and Hunter, 2004; McKittrick, 2022; Guay, 2021). There are a variety of roles that educators can play in fostering student autonomy. Teachers can support their students as they build independent skills, help students become more self-aware, facilitate opportunities for self-determination, and collaborate with parents to encourage building skills beyond the classroom (McKittrick, 2022). Building these skills helps disabled children avoid

“Fairy Godmother Syndrome;” when children have all of their decisions made for them by forces they may not understand. This can lead to learned helplessness and self-alienation (Ferrell et al., 2014; McKittrick, 2022). When teachers offer students simple choices, they are allowed to practice self-sufficiency in a safe environment. Teachers can also help students become more self-aware, increasing their ability to determine what they want or need (McKittrick, 2022). Most students, especially those who are disabled, are not taught how to understand themselves. Disabled students must cope with the pressures associated with childhood and the struggles that come with being othered by those around them. Allowing students to discover who they are for themselves allows them to regain a sense of power over their lives. They are also better prepared for the future, as they will know what they need and how to ask for it (McKittrick, 2022).

There are, of course, notable barriers that make fostering autonomous students difficult. Many teachers do not have access to resources that would help them teach students to be autonomous (McKittrick, 2022). Teachers must frequently ignore student desires to adhere to school-wide behavioral or curriculum standards. When inundated with messaging prioritizing standardized testing, teachers find themselves unable to center their students’ emotional well-being. In most disability education spaces, self-advocacy skills are built for hyper-specific purposes. Students are taught how to attend IEP meetings, set academic goals, or plan for future careers. True self-advocacy requires fostering autonomy, which is not something most teachers are socioculturally encouraged to focus on in the classroom. Students may also find the content difficult if their disabilities affect their communication or comprehension skills, though many of these challenges can be overcome (McKittrick, 2022). While these barriers are not to be ignored, I think they must be overcome to appropriately prepare students for their futures. Disabled people are frequently placed in scenarios where they will need to advocate for themselves.

American society is not yet built to accommodate those with disabilities intrinsically. Disabled students need to believe they can advocate for themselves and thereby be encouraged to develop the will to change the system to work for them.

4. Key Terms

My perspective regarding student self-advocacy was informed by a combination of my personal experiences, information from the literature reviewed, and concepts from the framework outlined for this study. I have delineated my key terms associated with this study:

- **Behavior:** an action taken by a person that is meant to communicate something to the world around them.
- **Self-Advocacy:** a behavior that communicates a specific social, emotional, or physical need.
- **Effective Self-Advocacy:** a behavior that is recognized as an expression of student need by teachers and/or other educational staff and results in that need being met.
- **Appropriate Self-Advocacy:** a behavior that exhibits a normative attempt at self-advocacy and is recognized as an expression of need by teachers and/or other educational staff, e.g. raising one's hand or politely asking a question.
- **Ineffective Self-Advocacy:** a behavior that is recognized as an expression of student need that does not result in that need being met by a teacher and/or other educational staff.
- **Inappropriate Self-Advocacy:** a behavior that is communicative, but is not recognized as an attempt to self-advocate because of its nature, e.g. moving noisily around the room while a teacher is giving instruction.
- **"School-Accepted" Self-Advocacy:** appropriate self-advocacy that may be effective or ineffective.

- **“Disruptive” Self-Advocacy:** inappropriate behaviors that are not recognized as attempted self-advocacy and are therefore ineffective.

5. Methods

To explore my research questions, I designed a project intended to observe students in their day-to-day lives at school. I engaged in interactive observations so I could get to know each student participant and center their perspectives. I also made sure to pay attention to how their self-advocacy attempts were viewed by their teachers. If their attempts were recognized as self-advocacy, I coded them as "school-accepted." In contrast, behaviors that were seen as "disruptive" were coded as such. I then created three mini-lessons to explore my ideas surrounding teaching students explicit self-advocacy skills. While these lessons were far from extensive, they provided some insight into how students respond to being shown the ways they could effectively ask for what they need.

5.1 Methodology

I engaged in Practitioner Inquiry Research (PIR) to complete my study. In order to engage in PIR, a researcher must be engaged in a practice that they would like to improve upon. In my case, I worked to develop autonomy-supportive teaching practices. I would like to improve autonomy-supportive practices by recognizing student self-advocacy to increase learning and trust in the classroom. PIR additionally allows educational researchers to, "gather, analyze, and use pertinent data for advocating on behalf of *all* students' educational equity" (Brooks-McNamara and Pedersen, 2006). I can expand the impact of my own work to improve my practice in my own classroom with a small group of students by sharing what I learn in the process and thereby convey the lessons to other educators working with children elsewhere. I chose to use PIR because I am an educator interested in improving educational equity. My Praxis Project hinges upon my ability to teach students specific skills. These students are humans. They

had opinions about whether my methods are effective. In order to conduct my research, I must view my actions from the student's perspective. While I hope my research is beneficial for educators, I believe that our work relies on understanding our students. Student self-advocacy will always be underpinned by the power dynamics inherent in child-adult interactions. It can be intimidating for students to ask adults for things they need, especially when the adults are in explicit positions of power. By centralizing the student viewpoint, I hoped to address those inherent power dynamics. Educational equity is best addressed by centering marginalized student voices.

I lived in a near-constant state of inquiry to determine whether my Praxis Project was useful. I analyzed my methods for effectiveness and inquiry. I gathered ethnographic qualitative data. I observed if and how student participants advocate for themselves in the classroom. I am interested in what choices students make and why they make them. Qualitative data is the most effective way to glean this insight. I also wanted to center the humanity of my participants, so I focused on their experiences. I tried not to let taking field notes prevent me from connecting with students. Forming connections also allowed me to create more effective lessons.

5.2 Epistemological Stance

I believe in the inherent value of human experience. My emphasis on qualitative data comes from this belief. Experiential knowledge is the only form that consistently centers humanity. Systems of oppression thrive when people lose sight of the humanity of those around them. I worked toward dismantling these systems by centering humanity. My epistemological stance thus centers on qualitative, experiential knowledge. I am especially interested in the

knowledge children hold. Children are full human beings with the capacity to hold knowledge. I centered that knowledge as I conduct my research.

I am specifically working with disabled children because their perspectives are constantly ignored. The ableist system we live in undermines the experiential knowledge generated by disabled people. My epistemological stance sees the knowledge held by children, disabled people, and disabled children in particular, as inherently valuable. I also value alternative forms of communication and learning. People can gain knowledge in various ways. Each way is inherently and equally valuable. Disabled students may communicate in ways that are outside of typical mainstream classroom practices. Their communication may be primarily non-verbal or generally unaccepted. I believe all forms of communication are valuable and aim to recognize them. Knowledge can be created and disseminated in various ways, not just through verbal speech or writing. I want to put disabled perspectives first. I will do so by centering their experiences.

5.3 Site Description

My research took place in an elementary school in Worcester, Massachusetts. For simplicity's sake, I refer to this school as W Elementary. W Elementary is a public school that currently serves about 500 students from pre-kindergarten through sixth grade. About three-quarters of the student population is Latinx or Hispanic. The last quarter of the student population is 10% African American, 8% white, 5% Asian, and 2% multiracial students (DESE, 2023). Almost the entirety of the student population is classified as High Needs and low-income. Over three-quarters of the students students speak a first language that is not English (DESE, 2023). The majority of the bi- or multilingual student population are English Language Learners.

To put it simply, the majority of the W Elementary student population holds at least one marginalized identity.

I focused my project on special education students, who made up about 16% of W Elementary's population. I worked with one third-grade student and six sixth-grade students. All of these students receive special education services from W Elementary's Teacher of Moderate Special Needs, henceforth referred to as Ms. T. The students receive full inclusion services, meaning that they spend the majority of their day in a general education classroom. Students had regularly scheduled pull-out lessons with Ms. T to work on specific skills. I was able to observe student behavior in both settings.

5.4 Positionality

I am undeniably an outsider in W Elementary. I do not work there, nor do I spend much time there outside of when I'm researching. My experience with the Worcester Public Schools is also quite limited. I'd spent some time in various Worcester Public Schools doing work for Clark University classes, but I had a limited amount of engagement with the students. I am also visibly an outsider to the Worcester community. I am a white, upper-middle-class, feminine-presenting college student. I only speak English. I attend a private university that is comprised of mainly white, affluent students. Simply put, I am very different from the majority of the students in Worcester. This had the potential to limit my ability to work with the students. Their identities are not the same as mine. I hoped to build trust with the students, but that takes time. I was able to establish connections with Worcester teachers fairly easily. I look like the average member of Worcester's teaching force. The majority of teachers, both in Worcester and across the nation, are white women. Ms. T and I both fall into this category. However, she had established a trusting

relationship with her students throughout the year because she spent a significant amount of time working with them in small groups. Ms. T is the only Special Education teacher for W Elementary's third and sixth graders, so she knows her students well. My connection to Ms. T may have helped warm the students up to me faster. I also tried to be a resource for students when I could be– if they were struggling with an activity and I could help, I did. Regardless of my intentions, I knew I wanted to prioritize student comfort over my research. I remained acutely aware of my outsider status and the privileged positions I held as I interacted with the students.

I do feel that my approach to understanding the world helped me make connections at W Elementary. The work I have done and want to continue to do is work that dismantles ableism. I want to do that by working in American public schools with disabled students. I want to give them the space to claim their identities and help make their education more accessible. In all honesty, I am not sure that I am the best person to accomplish the kinds of change I would like to see. I got through the American education system relatively unscathed; in many ways, the system worked in my favor. I was (and still am) an anxious student who aimed to please. I did not misbehave or push boundaries; my teachers and the system writ large rewarded that. I am also a white, feminine-presenting person, which gave me privileges many of my peers did not have. I want to spend my adult life misbehaving. I want to work toward building a site of resistance within schools where students can participate in restorative justice through collective action (Giroux, 1983). I want to foster spaces where disabled students can address and combat the underlying problems with the public school system. I want to use the privileges I possess to disrupt the dominant culture in relative safety. Privilege is a form of power in American society. I can use my power to grant others access to that which is kept from them.

I have some insider knowledge of disability education that will help me foster disruption. I spent the past three summers working as an Educational Support Professional in special education classrooms. Teachers assumed that students would not be able to articulate their desires or make the "right" choices. Ignoring student autonomy was the default. I tried to give the students more chances to think for themselves, but I was beholden to bosses with different perspectives. My youngest sister is also disabled. She has been enrolled in special education programs since preschool. Her autonomy was repeatedly disrespected, causing her to leave the public school system.

At W Elementary, I was lucky to have the freedom to give students space and allow them to lead conversations during my mini-lessons. Ms. T trusted me to create the lessons I saw fit and provided me with resources. I wanted to allow students to think about self-advocacy in a safe space, and I think I was somewhat able to accomplish that. I still had to follow the school's schedule and work within various time constraints, so I did not have total control. However, I was able to embrace the control I did have to work toward my goals.

5.5 Participants

I am working with two different participant groups for this project. The first participant, [5]Isla, is a third-grade student. She was the only third-grader involved with my project. W Elementary's Teacher of Moderate Special Needs informed me that Isla is autistic, but I do not know of any other specific diagnoses. She spends most of her day in a class with both general education and special education students. Isla is chatty, funny, and high-energy. She struggles to self-regulate and self-motivate, so she often needs one-on-one assistance with academic tasks.

[5] All participant names are pseudonyms chosen to protect their identities.

The other participants are sixth-graders. I observed four female students– Allie, Carmen, Havana, and Jimena– and one male student– Adrian. These students have a variety of needs that make it more difficult for them to exist in general education classes than their non-disabled peers. Some are diagnosed with Autism Spectrum Disorder or Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder; some have social or emotional disorders; some have learning disabilities. They also participate primarily in general education classes, though some of them are pulled out of class for specific interventions regularly.

I chose to conduct my research in a special education setting because I believe a particular focus should be taken to foster self-advocacy in disabled students. Disabled students need to be able to advocate for themselves, as they will be forced to navigate systems that are not built for them. The nature of my project also makes a smaller group more manageable. I am only one person, and I took physical field notes. Observing a smaller number of students allowed me to take more detailed notes about each participant. I was also able to form stronger connections with the participating students because there were only six of them. I could focus my energy on getting to know specific kids instead of attempting to bond with and research an entire class. By the time I incorporated mini-lessons, I had become a familiar face to my research participants. I believe that their willingness to participate in my lessons was because they had already formed a connection with me. While that connection was not particularly deep, it was enough to ensure the students that I was safe to speak with.

5.6 Data Collection

I collected data by taking written field notes each time I observed the students at W Elementary. I used a small purple notebook with a sparkly “Worcester” sticker on the front. I

wanted the students to feel comfortable asking questions about what I was writing, so I chose an inviting vessel. During my initial observations, I typically wrote about interesting moments as they happened. I was able to transcribe some direct quotes from participating students using this method. However, it also meant that I was relatively disconnected from the students initially. I wanted to be more of an active participant in the classroom, so I started alternating between working with the students and writing notes. I got to observe the participating students in various academic environments. I observed Isla in her inclusion English Language Arts class and reading pull-out block. I also observed the sixth-graders by attending their inclusion math class and their reading pull-out block.

My initial observations began on November 21st, 2023, and ended on January 30th, 2024. I observed the third-grader during her inclusion ELA class and her reading pull-out lessons with Ms. T. I observed the sixth graders during their inclusion math class and their reading pull-out lessons with Ms. T. All of my observations occurred before lunch, between 8:00 AM and 11:30 AM. The actual schedule I followed varied depending on the day. I took note of any instances where students attempted to advocate for themselves. Some of these attempts were expected, like asking for water or raising a hand to receive help from a teacher. Other instances of self-advocacy were less obvious. I paid attention to instances where students expressed discontent, stimmed, or snapped at their teachers. While not all of these actions are generally recognized as self-advocacy, I do not believe that self-advocacy has to be effective to be present. Children use a variety of methods to make their needs known, some of which are more obvious than others. I believe that all attempts at communication are valuable, even those that typically go unnoticed. However, some of those attempts are also effective, appropriate attempts at self-advocacy; others are not. I chose to qualify student behaviors that expressed a need as

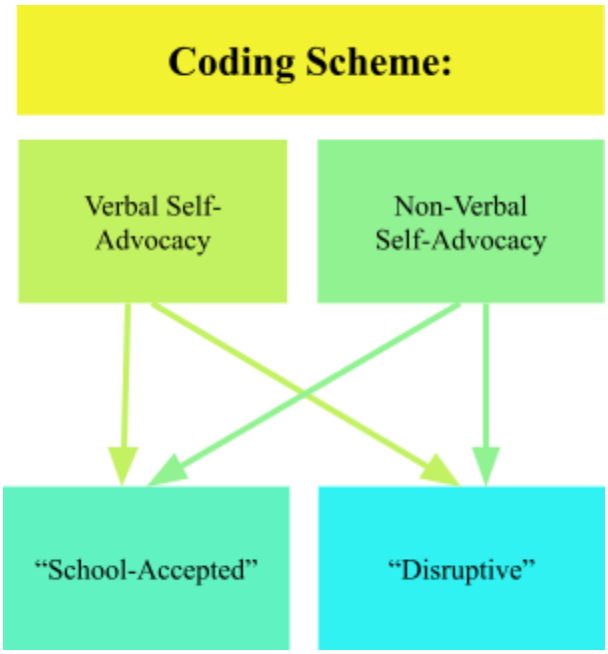
"self-advocacy" regardless of whether they were effective and appropriate. I then coded each instance of self-advocacy based on whether it was verbal or non-verbal. I additionally sub-coded each instance as either "school-accepted" or "disruptive." These sub-codes allowed me to differentiate effective and/or appropriate self-advocacy versus inappropriate and/or ineffective self-advocacy. Behaviors that were clearly noticeable as self-advocacy were appropriate and thus coded as "school-accepted." Not all of these attempts were effective, though. My field notes specified whether a self-advocacy attempt was honored by teachers (effective) or not (ineffective). "Disruptive" self-advocacy attempts were behaviors that expressed a need, but were not appropriate for a school setting.

The lessons I incorporated addressed the types of self-advocacy that students struggled with. After my initial observations, I concluded that the sixth-grade students were all familiar with school-accepted forms of self-advocacy. They raised their hands or followed specific classroom procedures to ask for help, raise questions, or meet specific bodily needs. A few students also received and used specific educational accommodations. However, I noticed a lot of their non-verbal self-advocacy happening that went unaddressed. The third-grade student struggled with self-regulation. She did not tend to follow classroom procedures when she needed something, instead opting to make declarative statements to the room and hope that adults noticed her frustration. She also rarely asked for breaks, even though her general education classroom had a break station set up. I aimed to help both groups of students internally recognize their needs in order to communicate more effectively with their teachers.

All of the lessons were autonomy-supportive and rooted in self-determination theory. Student autonomy was respected, even if it meant that they did not participate in a lesson as I planned. I did not want self-advocacy to feel like a requirement; I simply wanted to provide them

with options should they want to change how they address their needs. At the end of each lesson, I wrote up a description of how it went. I did my best to remember each student's contributions and take note of common themes and confusions. I also took note of whether students responded positively to each lesson by asking for feedback directly and observing their reactions to the content as I taught it.

5.7 Data Analysis



All field notes were coded to make the information usable. Since I chose a qualitative form of data collection, I needed to find a way to draw connections between my findings. I decided to create a coding system that classifies different forms of self-advocacy. My primary codes identify "Verbal Self-Advocacy" and "Non-Verbal Self Advocacy." These categories are self-explanatory. When a student used their words to communicate a need, it was coded as "Verbal Self-Advocacy." When a student used body language or gestures to communicate a need, it was coded as "Non-Verbal Self Advocacy." Acts of "Verbal Self-Advocacy" do not have to occur in a particular language; students could speak English, Spanish, or any other language they happen to know. These categories are intentionally broad. People express needs in infinite ways, some of which are easier to define than others. I coded many behaviors as self-advocacy that went entirely unrecognized by other adults in the room.

I then sub-coded each instance of self-advocacy as either “School-Accepted” or “Disruptive.” “School-Accepted” forms of self-advocacy included raising one’s hand, asking a teacher for help in a respectful tone, or asking a peer a question at an appropriate time. This category is intentionally subjective. Different teachers, schools, and communities have different conceptions of acceptable school behavior. The Worcester Public School district serves students from dozens of cultural communities, many of which are unfamiliar to me, an American white person. I did not want to place strict limitations on what could be school-appropriate. I landed on the term “School-Accepted” to describe student behavior based on the responses they received from their teachers and peers. This category was largely defined by the response students’ actions received. When a student’s request was granted begrudgingly, as indicated by a teacher’s tone or expression, I made note of it. My goal with this project was to give students some tools that would help them communicate their needs to teachers and other educational staff. In order to do this, I needed to know what kinds of behavior could be added to their toolkit.

“Disruptive” forms of self-advocacy include behaviors that result in redirection or punishment. Some examples included talking while the teacher gave directions or walking around the classroom during instruction. The student population I worked with also exhibited some less common behaviors, like inappropriate stimming or hitting their desk with their fists. I believe that unexpected behaviors are some of the clearest acts of self-advocacy. However, in the chaos of the classroom, they often go unnoticed. I aim to make them noticeable.

After making and coding initial observations, I created three mini-lessons for each age group. These lessons focused on introducing students to language they could use when self-advocating. I also wanted to give the students opportunities for self-reflection. I wanted the sixth-grade participants to become familiar with the concept of autonomy through self-advocacy.

Sixth graders are beginning to truly consider what they want from their schooling. I wanted to give them some tools to share their desires with their teachers. We discussed defining needs, accommodations, and setting goals across the three lessons. My lessons with the third grader focused on helping her identify her own needs, strengths, struggles, and goals. I did not want to focus on complicated vocabulary; instead, I wanted the third-grader to feel empowered toward autonomy intrinsically. I took field notes directly after each lesson to make note of how students responded to them. I am extremely grateful for their willingness to listen and learn with me.

After each mini-lesson, I continued observing the students to see if their self-advocacy habits changed. Due to the timeline I had to follow, most of my post-lesson observations occurred directly after the lessons themselves. I continued to make note of moments where students advocated for themselves in various forms. I paid additional attention to moments where students could have chosen to self-advocate but did not. I felt that those instances were relevant after my mini-lessons because the lessons were intended to help students improve their self-advocacy skills. While I do not believe my lessons were capable of inciting drastic behavioral changes, I was curious to see whether short-term changes occurred.

6. Findings

6.1 General Observations

My research began in November 2023. I observed one third-grade ELA class and one sixth-grade math class weekly over six weeks. I used these initial observations to determine how W Elementary's culture affected disabled students. Fostering a productive disability culture requires making space for varying types of self-advocacy. I noticed students engage in both verbal and non-verbal forms of self-advocacy. I also paid attention to how teachers and peers perceived each act of self-advocacy.

In February 2024, I used the insights gleaned from my observations to create mini-lessons. My lessons aimed to help students build their self-advocacy skills. I wanted to address the gaps I perceived in student knowledge. My lessons prioritized granting students their autonomy. I wanted them to see themselves as the arbiters of their own fates. I worked with Ms. T to implement my lessons effectively. After administering each mini-lesson, I continued to observe the students' self-advocacy behaviors. I wanted to know whether their approaches to self-advocacy evolved.

6.2. “Why Does Everybody Hate Me?” 3rd Grade Initial Observations

My observations at W Elementary began on Tuesday, November 21st, 2023 at 9:00 in the morning. The third graders had already been at school for an hour, so an ELA lesson was in full swing when I entered the room. The students had been instructed to write down three words describing their goals for the rest of the school year. Isla immediately declared that she did not have a paper. She then jokingly complained that her seat was “so obvious” as she approached the

classroom teacher to remedy her problem. Once she had the supplies she needed, Isla came up with her goals independently. She was then tasked with choosing one goal to make into a necklace; she chose the word “ready.” She strung her beaded necklace together with some requested assistance from myself and the other teachers in the room. Throughout the process, she praised her color choices and excitedly offered to help her peers. After I tied her creation around her neck, she handed me a sparkly purple bead in thanks.

My initial interactions with Isla exemplified her personality perfectly. She is enthusiastic, funny, and kind. Humorous complaining is a staple of her conversational style. She is prone to dramatic declarations of mistreatment when teachers neglect to pay her immediate attention. I noted dozens of instances of humorous complaining over the six-week period of initial observations. She also frequently narrates her actions and the thought processes behind them. Since she was the only third-grader involved in my project, I was able to connect with her on an individual level. She quickly began to anticipate my presence and wave hello when I entered the classroom. She also began looking to me for help, which I happily gave.

Isla advocated for herself in a huge variety of ways. Her tendency towards the dramatic meant that she frequently engaged in verbal forms of self-advocacy. However, her verbalizations often toed the line between school-accepted and disruptive. She was far more likely to groan and say, “I don’t get this!” instead of asking for help directly. She rarely raised her hand, opting instead to voice her thoughts as soon as they occurred. She also rarely sat still. I watched her roam around the classroom, bounce in her seat, and stand while completing her assignments. Most of her movement went unrestricted by her teachers, even when I classified it as disruptive. When she was told to change her behavior, it was a reminder, not a punishment. Overall, I determined that Isla had a clear sense of her own needs. However, she struggled to communicate

those needs to others. This resulted in power struggles with her teachers when they could not identify what she needed.

One particular day's worth of observations was particularly illuminating. On December 12th, 2023, I entered Isla's third-grade classroom and found her drawing and playing with pictures of cats while the class listened to a presentation about culture. I immediately noticed that the whole class was not tuned into the presentation. Some students were having discussions with their peers while their teacher was talking. Others were doodling, laying down, or walking aimlessly around the room. Isla's lack of engagement was most visible. She sat in various unconventional ways in her chair and stood up several times. A teacher directed her to pay more attention, but she continued drawing instead. The students were then instructed to complete an assignment related to the presentation. Isla did not follow this instruction, but eventually noticed her peers working and asked, "What are you trying to do?" A teacher then asked Isla what she was up to. She responded, "We're done with the work," and began cutting out the characters she had drawn. She also began singing a song with a peer. A teacher then attempted to get her back on task.

In a handful of minutes, I had a clear image of where Isla struggled to self-advocate. I coded her choice to draw instead of engage with the lesson as an act of disruptive, non-verbal self-advocacy. Her classroom has a break station set up in the back corner, which she could have requested to use. However, she did not do so. All of the break station activities required students to be solitary and seated. I wondered if Isla needed a physical movement break. I also wondered if she was confused as to the purpose of the activity. When she noticed a peer working, she did ask what they were doing. However, the vast majority of her peers were not engaged by the assignment. These mixed messages may have confused Isla, causing bodily dysregulation. She

struggled with inattention, and in this environment, became completely removed from the room around her.

The reminders from teachers to pay attention did not address Isla's potential bodily or instructional needs. As a result, Isla did not change her behavior. Her choice to verbally ask her peers about the assigned work was an act of verbal, school-accepted self-advocacy. She had the skills necessary to recognize that they were completing a task that she was not. However, she had already checked out of the lesson and did not know how to check back in. The wording of her question, "What are you trying to do?," implied that she did not realize that she also had work to do. This is further shown by her assertion that she had completed the work.

Isla was far from the only student off-task. The entire classroom was not particularly focused. This prompted a teacher to enforce a five-minute "teacher break." She turned the lights off and requested five minutes of silence from the room. The teacher explained that once her break was over, the class would be doing an assessment. Isla responded to this by kicking her desk and stating, "I don't wanna take a test, I wanna take a nap!" After a moment of frustration, she started cleaning up her desk, as directed. She was then told to go grab some paperwork from the nurse, which she responded to with, "Why does everybody hate me?" She then went to the nurse's office on her own. Isla's assertion did not seem to be aimed at anyone in particular, nor was it a direct response to the task she had been given. It was a general reaction to the combined stressors of the past ten minutes. She had repeatedly found herself unable to connect with the room around her, even when everyone was equally dysregulated. She and her peers then found themselves feeling punished by the "teacher break," even though I do not believe it was intended to be punishing. The mention of an assessment then pushed Isla fully into discomfort. Her

moments of self-advocacy shifted fully into being “disruptive.” Being asked to leave the room added to this discomfort, resulting in an outburst that did not seem to match the situation.

For Isla, self-advocacy was highly relational. The types of self-advocacy she engaged in matched the energy of the room. Her interactions with her peers and teachers cemented this; she tried to align her actions with their desires, even when the two group’s goals fundamentally did not align. When the group was “punished,” she took it personally, as she had intended for her actions to match the group’s. Her expressions of autonomy were not for individual empowerment, but for contextual empowerment. When her attempts to contextually relate fell flat, her distress overpowered her ability to effectively self-advocate. When she was asked to leave the room, or the context she had been attempting to fit into, she panicked. While I believe the phrase “Why does everybody hate me?” was likely repeated from a show or movie, the sentiment behind it was true to Isla. She created a dramatic sense of control over the situation by assuming that everyone else within it had something against her.

6.3 6th Grade Initial Observations

Observing the sixth graders was an entirely different process from observing the third-grader. Five sixth-graders agreed to participate, meaning that my field notes needed to encapsulate all of their individual relationships with their school, teachers, and peers. I also had different expectations for their behavior. Ms. T informed me that they had already learned some self-advocacy skills. Their teachers expected them to be able to ask for help. Most of the sixth-grade participants defaulted to school-accepted ways of asking for what they needed when in class with all of their peers. When they participated in small-group pull-out lessons, however,

they acted more freely. These lessons were typically conducted in a separate space with only Ms. T and myself present.

Despite the small size of the group, I noticed a wide variety of behaviors from the sixth-grade participants. Some of the students' self-advocacy attempts were more likely to be considered "disruptive." Adrian, Havana, and Jimena were more likely to be scolded than Allie or Carmen, largely because their styles of self-advocacy were more often considered "disruptive." However, Allie and Carmen sometimes struggled to have their needs met because of their quieter self-advocacy strategies.

6.3.1 Overtly "Disruptive" Self-Advocates

On December 12th, 2023, I walked in to find Adrian was lying on a table and stretching. He then asked to take a lap, and sat back down when denied. In this instance, Adrian's "disruptive," non-verbal self-advocacy caused his verbal, "school-accepted" request to be denied. Obviously, Adrian should not have been laying on a table. He was taking workspace away from his peers and risking potential injury, as the table may not have been strong enough to hold him. After being told to get off the table, he asked for an acceptable solution to his bodily dysregulation: taking a lap. However, the teacher did not grant his request, nor did they provide a justification as to why. Adrian continued engaging in "disruptive" behaviors after being told he could not take a lap. He began talking to his peers. When a teacher scolded him for that behavior, he responded, "What did I do?" He also continued wiggling and spinning around. Eventually, he was given permission to leave the room. Adrian's repeated acts of "disruptive" self-advocacy were eventually recognized and honored by his teacher. Though he was not taken seriously at

first, he needed a movement break. It took a few instances of disruption before he was listened to, but eventually, he got the break he needed in that moment.

On the same day, Havana engaged in a few “disruptive” self-advocacy behaviors. She had a tendency to stim, or perform specific, repeated movements of vocalizations, to self-regulate while in the classroom. She often wiggled, laughed, or knocked her hands against the table. On December 12th, Havana spent almost the whole math lesson stimming. She was not the only student moving around or making noise, so at first, this was not an issue. She was also engaged in the lesson, often responding to her peers with the nonverbal signal for “I agree” the class used. However, she then began whispering something to her peer. This prompted a teacher to ask her to pay attention, which prompted her to argue that she had been. The group then began a quiz on Google Classroom. This was an independent activity, but Havana began whispering quietly and angrily to her peer again. Once again, she was reminded to stay on-task. Once she had gotten to work, she switched between standing and sitting. However, she also continued talking to peers and defending herself by stating, “I'm telling them to pay attention.” At one point, I heard her quietly ask a peer a question, refuting her own assertion. After a few more minutes she grabbed a whiteboard and markers. Several other students were also using these materials, but Havana was not initially able to use them effectively. She even got some whiteboard marker on her Chromebook. After another minute, she received some help organizing her materials from a teacher.

Both Adrian and Havana’s self-advocacy attempts were expressions of their individual needs. They also tended to advocate non-verbally, largely because they both needed more opportunities to take movement breaks than their peers. The disruptive nature of their behaviors caused their teachers to discipline them initially. I suspect this is related to their unique

positionalities as participants. Adrian was the only male student I worked with; while he was not the only male student in his class, he was the only one who regularly got pulled out to work with Ms. T. However, I believe his gender presentation affected how teachers responded to his attempts at self-advocacy. Several of Adrian's male peers engaged in "disruptive" behaviors. They were typically scolded and thought to be intentionally distracting the teacher or their peers from the lesson. Adrian's non-verbal attempts at self-advocacy were likely perceived in the same manner. However, he has a disability that makes bodily regulation and impulse control difficult for him. He also has a sense of when he needs to take action to self-regulate, as shown by his request to take a lap. Havana was in a similarly unique position. She had the most social and educational needs of the students I observed. Her frequent stimming also made her disability visible to her teachers and peers. While her non-verbal behaviors were often found "disruptive," they were also inherently excused. Her teachers would scold her, but they would also help her. In some cases, she even got away with more than her peers did.

Adrian and Havana are both examples of how presentational identity overlaps with autonomy. Adrian's self-advocacy attempts caused him to be grouped as one of the "boys being boys" in his classroom. Havana stood out because of her additional needs. Both students received different responses to their requests for autonomy because of their visible identities. It took longer for teachers to acknowledge both of their needs because, stereotypically, their identities meant that they would be more "disruptive."

6.3.2 Silently "Disruptive" Self-Advocates

Jimena was the other student who engaged in "disruptive" forms of self-advocacy. However, she preferred quietly "disruptive" behaviors alongside her peers. She often engaged in

whispered conversations or rolled her eyes when teachers re-directed the group. Her behaviors were so subtle that I did not take many field notes about specific instances. I often wrote about her chatting with her seatmates, zoning out, or seeming tired. My own bias played into my perceptions of Jimena's style of self-advocacy. She followed a similarly relational model to Isla; she matched the energy of those around her. When her peers were goofing off, she would join them. When they all looked like they were about to fall asleep, so did she. She differed from Isla in that she did not attempt to match her teacher's energy. Given her age, this makes sense. A 6th grader is more likely to be considered "cool" by their peers if they are not invested in their teacher's opinion in an obvious manner. Jimena was rarely overtly disrespectful, and I got the impression that she genuinely liked most of her teachers. However, she prioritized her relationships with her peers through her acts of self-advocacy.

6.3.3 Struggles with "School-Accepted" Self-Advocacy

Another student typically advocated for herself in a school-accepted manner, but struggled to be taken seriously. Allie made her desire to go by a nickname known to me when I first asked if she wanted to participate in my research project on November 21st. She had been introduced as Paloma, but signed her assent form with the name Allie. She clarified that Allie was her preferred nickname when I asked about it. However, she was always referred to by her given name in the classroom. I noticed this phenomenon for the first time on December 12th, when she raised her hand to answer a question and was called Paloma by her classroom teacher. I was one of the only adults who consistently used her preferred nickname, even though she did not hide her preference. Her other acts of "school-accepted" self advocacy were easily recognized by her teachers. When she raised her hand to ask questions, tilted her head in

confusion, or expressed frustration with her peers, she was understood. However, her desire to go by a nickname was not recognized as an acceptable mode of self-advocacy.

There are several reasons why Allie's request went unmet. Simple forgetfulness is an obvious possibility. Allie had gone by Paloma for most of her time at W Elementary, so anyone that already knew her associated that name with her. Mistakes are reasonable. Allie also did not vehemently correct anyone who used Paloma to refer to her. However, she did introduce herself as Allie and write "Allie" at the top of her papers. These subtler forms of self-advocacy were not enough to remind everyone of her preference.

Allie's difficulties related to her nickname may have also been the result of good intentions. "Paloma" is a noticeably Latina name, while "Allie" is a whiter-sounding nickname.[6] Some of the adults in her life may have wanted to encourage Allie to take pride in her cultural community by embracing her given name. Many of us believe firmly in culturally-sustaining teaching practices, myself included. I do not think teachers should ever forcibly nickname their students to avoid learning to pronounce their names. However, Allie's request was purely her own. I cannot say whether Allie's desire for a nickname is rooted in internalized racism; I did not ask her to discuss her relationship with her cultural background with me. It is not my place to make any kind of assumption. At the end of the day, Allie made a perfectly acceptable request to use a nickname, so I complied.

Carmen was the quietest student in the group I observed. Due to this, she was another student I took fewer field notes about than I should have. She seemed to have the most independent academic skills, so during class, she would diligently complete assignments. The social dynamics of the classroom also seemed to stress her out. She did not react positively when

[6] This is true of Allie's real names, but "Allie" and "Paloma" are pseudonyms, as mentioned previously.

her peers joked around or deliberately distracted the teacher. A couple of times, she chose to sit separately from her classmates to complete an assignment even though she could have worked with her peers to lighten the load. Most of her self-advocacy attempts were "school-acceptable" and verbal. She raised her hand to ask questions or approached teachers directly. She also often waited to be prompted before asking questions. The normalized nature of her self-advocacy meant that I missed a lot of potential moments from Carmen. While this is not the world's strongest finding, I think it speaks to the bias caused by living through and working in the American public education system. As children, we are taught to conform to rigid behavioral standards that do not come naturally to the majority of us. By the time we graduate high school, those systems have become ingrained into our bodies. Carmen likely needed things she did not get because she did not know how to ask for them "appropriately." I also paid less attention to her self-advocacy because it followed the standardized model.

6.4 6th Grade Lesson #1: What Is Self-Advocacy?

I began my mini-lessons with the sixth-grade participants on February 27th. Only two students, Allie and Jimena, were present. Although this was a smaller group than I had expected, I stuck to the lesson plan I had outlined, which is below.

6th Grade Lesson #1: What Is Self-Advocacy?	
2 Minutes	What's the Plan? ● Re-introduce yourself and your project ○ Make sure students know that they can participate as much or as little as they'd like ● Students Will Be Able To: Recognize vocab associated with self-advocacy ○ Become re-familiarized with my project and my note-taking
4 Minutes	Opening Activity: 1 to 5 Using your fingers, rate whether you agree or disagree with the following ideas.

	Put up 1 finger if you strongly disagree and 5 if you strongly agree. ● "When my body needs something, I immediately know what it is." ● "When my brain needs something, I immediately know what it is." ● "I ask my teachers for things my body needs." ● "I ask my teachers for things my brain needs." ● "I know what accommodations I can ask for at school."
6 Minutes:	Vocabulary: ● Needs ○ Have students provide examples of their needs. ○ Get beyond the basics- everyone has different needs! ● Accommodations ○ Have students provide possible examples. ■ If they receive accommodations they can share, but they don't have to. ● Self-Advocate ○ Share some examples of self-advocacy: ■ Asking to use the bathroom ■ Having a private convo about accommodations ○ Ask for student examples ● Autonomy ○ Stress that students have autonomy regardless of environment– that's why I asked if they wanted to participate in my project!
6 Minutes	Kahoot!
2 Minutes	Debrief: What did you already know? What did you learn? ● Can be self-reflection or conversational depending on the vibe. What do you still want to know? Did you have fun? Give students the option to write it down or email me later

I began by re-introducing myself and my project. It had been several months since Allie and Jimena had agreed to participate in my research, so I wanted to be certain that they still wanted to participate. I also reassured Allie and Jimena that they were not obligated to participate in my lesson. I did suspect that the girls felt some subconscious pressure to participate; their teacher was in the room, and my project relied on some student participation. That being said, I did not want the girls to feel pressured to share fully-formed "academic" thoughts. They could have simply listened to me talk, and that would have been okay.

I started the mini-lesson with a self-reflection exercise where students rated their abilities to recognize and ask for things they need from zero to five. A zero was a "completely disagree;" a five was "completely agree." Both girls answered the following questions:

- When my body needs something, I immediately know what it is.
- When my brain needs something, I immediately know what it is.
- I ask my teachers for things my body needs.
- I ask my teachers for things my brain needs.
- I know how to ask for accommodations at school.

Jimena rated her ability to recognize her bodily needs higher than her ability to recognize her brain's needs. Allie reported the opposite; she recognized her brain's needs more easily than bodily needs. Both girls responded that they did not ask their teachers for things their bodies needed; they held up zero fingers. They rated the likelihood of asking for things their brain needed much more highly; Allie held up five fingers, Jimena held up four. Neither student recognized the word "accommodations," so they did not provide reflection ratings. I was surprised by this, as I had heard Ms. T use the word in conversation. Allie had an accommodation that allowed her to use a calculator in her math class, even on assignments where calculators were specifically prohibited. Jimena also wore glasses and had some mild motor skill impairments, meaning that she likely needed accommodations at some point in her educational career.

After both girls had completed the initial reflection activity, I went over four specifically vocabulary terms. I chose to discuss "needs," "accommodations," "self-advocacy," and "autonomy." I began by defining "needs" as "something you must have to stay healthy and happy." I then explained that when people do not know what they need, they are unable to ask

for help appropriately. I then defined “accommodations” as “specific tools that make it easier for you to learn by helping you meet your needs.” I also explained that to get accommodations, you must be able to self-advocate. I defined “self-advocacy” as “when you speak up for yourself to get what you need.” While all of these definitions are relatively simplistic, I wanted to ensure they were understood. I was also able to provide some verbal elaboration on certain terms as I went though the lesson. Both Allie and Jimena asked some questions and provided some examples for terms when I prompted them to. Allie was particularly enthusiastic, which I appreciated. She was happy to engage and attempt to answer questions even when she did not know the answer. Jimena also participated, but not as freely as Allie. After defining the first three terms, I defined autonomy as “the ability to make your own choices and set your own goals.” I then characterized autonomy as the umbrella over all of the other concepts. In order to set your own goals, you need to be able to identify and ask for the things you will need to meet those goals effectively. None of the concepts seemed foreign to Allie or Jimena, they just had not specifically discussed them.

I wrapped up the lesson with a game of Kahoot to review the vocabulary I had shared. Kahoot is a competitive game that allows students to race to answer multiple-choice questions correctly. I had been anticipating a bigger crowd, so there was not much competition. I ended up running the game for Allie, Jimena, and Ms. T. Both students did well, though some of the intentionally tricky questions tripped them up. There was not much discrepancy between the amount of points earned, though Ms. T did pull ahead and win the game. Finally, I asked the girls some closing questions about my lesson. They were as follows:

- What did I already know?
- What did I learn?

- What do I still want to know?
- Did I have fun?

Allie said she had heard of self-advocacy, and Jimena said she knew the word "autonomy." They also both provided some examples of things they'd learned from the lesson. Allie asked for more information about accommodations. She wanted to know more about what kinds of things count as accommodations. Jimena agreed that she had lingering questions, too. I chose to focus my second lesson on accommodations based on their feedback. Allie also said she'd had fun, but I believed this may have been more for my benefit.

This lesson showed me that at least two of my sixth-grade participants had little understanding of the vocabulary associated with self-advocacy. I intentionally chose four terms that I feel are integral to reclaiming autonomy. If we do not know how to identify our needs, we cannot hope to even begin the process of having them met. Accommodations help even out the playing field and ensure that people can have their needs met regardless of their perceived level of ability. Self-advocacy is the skill that allows us to work toward getting the accommodations that will allow us to meet our needs. Autonomy manifests once we are able to harness our needs into goals. We can then self-advocate and use any necessary accommodations to meet our goals.

6.5 3rd Grade Lesson #1: What Does Your Brain Need?

On February 27th, Isla participated in my first mini-lesson. She had just returned from a cruise, so her teachers were not sure how receptive she would be. I also did not want to introduce her to any new academic skills. My focus was on providing her with some vocabulary she could use when advocating for herself. I chose to design a lesson around an activity I knew she enjoyed: drawing. Isla was constantly doodling during lessons, so I was confident that she would

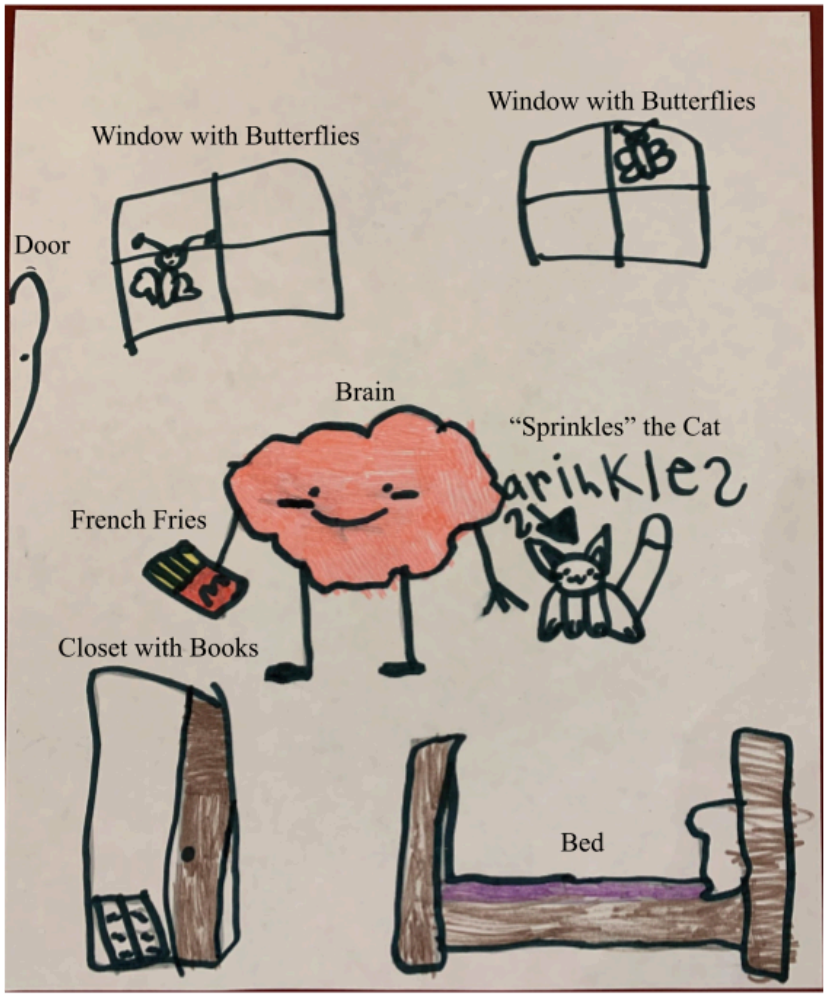
enjoy being asked to draw something. I came armed with a myriad of erasable markers and a plan:

3rd Grade Lesson #1: What Does Your Brain Need?	
2 Minutes	What's the Plan? ● Re-introduce yourself and your project ○ Make sure students know that they can participate as much or as little as they'd like ● SWBAT: Talk about the things their brains and bodies need
3 Minutes	What is a Need? ● Have a conversation with the student about needs. Ask what they think a "need" is. ○ Differentiate between "brain needs" and "body needs."
10 Minutes	Self-Portraits 1) Draw your brain. 2) Put your brain needs inside of your brain. ● Things like "breaks," "quiet space," "music," etc 3) Draw your body. 4) Put your body's needs inside of or around your body. ● Things like "food," "water," "movement," "bathroom breaks:
5 Minutes	Debrief: What Did You Draw?

Isla and I sat at a small table in the hallway across from her third-grade classroom. She responded enthusiastically when I asked if she wanted to draw something with me, so I felt confident that she would engage with at least part of my planned lesson. I began by asking her about the cruise she had gone on. It had been about two weeks since I had seen Isla, so I did not want to jump right into learning without catching up. I was amused by her declaration that while the cruise had been fun, she had "missed [her] cat more than anything!" She also stated that she preferred being home to going on vacations.

We then transitioned into talking about needs. I began by asking her to think about some things her brain needs to feel good. She thought of studying, reading, and doing homework. I got

the feeling that she had been told that her brain needed certain things to get smarter. I then gave her some examples of things my brain needs: breaks and music. She agreed that her brain needed those things, too. I then asked her what kind of things her body needed. She listed some different physical needs– food, exercise, and sleep. We then talked about whether our brains and bodies had the same needs and came to the conclusion that they did.



We then got into the main part of the lesson: drawing our brain and its needs. I asked Isla to draw her brain, which she chose to personify without prompting. I then asked her to give her brain some of the things it needs. The first thing she decided to draw was a carton of French Fries in her brain's left hand. She also drew her brain a bed, a closet with books in it, and a pet cat. She asked me how to spell "Sprinkles" so she could label the cat with their name. As she drew, we chatted about how you know if you have met your brain's needs. She stated that when your brain gets bigger, you have met its needs. She also talked about making things out of

cardboard and selling them to become the first person to have a million dollars. It was at this point that I realized we would not have time to draw a second picture, so I decided this lesson would be solely about brain needs. Isla finished her drawing by adding windows, “so you don’t get bored looking at the TV all day,” and a door, “so he can escape.” I wrapped up the lesson by asking her to share her thoughts about the lesson. She stated that she thought some parts were “easy,” like our discussion about whether our brains need food and sleep. She said thinking about all of the kinds of things her brain might need was helpful, though.

Isla’s first mini-lesson showed me just how important appealing to student interests is. I highly doubt this lesson would have been successful if I had not allowed Isla to draw out her thoughts. She struggled to clearly express herself verbally, even though she was almost always making noise. Drawing allowed her to organize her thoughts in a manner that made sense to the both of us. She was also able to communicate some complex ideas through drawing. The windows and door in her drawing were particularly fascinating to me. When thinking about her brain, she recognized her own need to “escape” from the context surrounding her, even though being removed from a shared context had stressed her out. I believe that Isla prefers to have control over whether or not she is invited to remain in a space. She drew windows and a door, not a portal or hole. Having the choice to open windows or doors is an intrinsic need in Isla’s brain.

6.6 6th Grade Lesson #2: Accommodations

Allie, Jimena, Carmen, and Havana were present for my second mini-lesson on March 8th. I focused on accommodations because Allie and Jimena had expressed interest in learning more about them after the previous lesson.

6th Grade Lesson #2: Accommodations	
3 Minutes	Opening Activity: How High? ● Give each student a sticky note. ● Line students up against a wall/board. ● Explain that this is a super simple game: whoever gets their sticky note highest wins! ○ Students can jump/stand on tiptoes/etc, but they can't use anything to get higher. ○ Presumably, the shorter students will not be able to get theirs as high as the taller ones. ● Was this game fair? Why or why not? ○ What could have made it fair? ■ If students provide an option they could safely test, let them!
1 Minute	SWBAT: Identify when they should ask for help/accommodations at school.
6 Minutes	What's An Accommodation? ● Does anyone know/remember what an accommodation is? ○ "Specific tools that make it easier for you to learn by helping you meet your needs" ■ The things we could have used to make our game more fair (or **equitable**) are simple accommodations! ● What are examples of accommodations? ○ Take student ideas, then show examples
8 Minutes	Scenario Exercise ● "I have a few made-up students who need help figuring out if they need accommodations at school. Wanna help me come up with some ideas for them?" ● Read scenarios aloud. Allow students to talk through options in pairs/small groups (if attendance allows). Ask them to share their thoughts after they've talked it through with a peer. ● Conclude by highlighting that asking for help = getting accommodations.
2 Minutes	Debrief: What did you already know? What did you learn? ● Can be self-reflection or conversational depending on the vibe. What do you still want to know? Was this helpful/fun? ● Give students the option to write it down or email me later

I began with the "How High" activity, which the group enjoyed a lot. Allie immediately joked about her imminent loss, as she was the shortest member of the group. Carmen, the tallest

member, won the game as predicted. When I asked the students if they felt that the game was fair, they initially said that they did. However, they simultaneously acknowledged that Carmen had an advantage over Allie because of their height difference.

While this game was simplistic, it allowed the group to begin thinking about equality and equity. There initial reaction speaks to their conception of equality; since they had all been given the same tools and goal, they felt the game was fair. However, they also realized that their bodies were tools that impacted the outcome of the game. This led them to conclude that the game could have been fairer, or more equitable. I felt that it was important to think about equity because accommodations can sometimes seem like "cheating." For example, when one student has a calculator accommodation, it can seem like they're cheating on a test that prohibits calculator use. I wanted to begin my lesson by challenging the idea that an accommodation is "cheating." If Allie had been allowed to stand on a chair or had to reach a lower point, she would have had an actual chance at winning. Since I did not offer anyone an accommodation, the tallest student, Carmen, won easily.

After completing the game, I defined "accommodations" using the same definition from my previous lesson. I then asked the students to think of some examples of accommodations. They came up with several of the more obvious academic ones, like using a calculator, having texts read aloud, or getting extra time on tests. I also mentioned physical accommodations, like using a wheelchair. They were then able to provide a few more examples of common physical accommodations. I also introduced the group to accommodations made for social and emotional reasons. None of them had considered that emotional distress is a reason to ask for specific help. I felt that this spoke to our tendency to ignore our students' emotional needs. None of the four girls considered emotional distress enough of a reason to need an accommodation.

Next, I led the group through some scenarios where different students needed different things and asked them what kinds of accommodations might be beneficial. They identified the accommodations I expected them to for each scenario. However, when I was explaining what different types of accommodations could look like, I unintentionally spoiled many of my own scenarios. One of my scenarios centered a student struggling to attend gym class because of the social pressures associated with not knowing anyone in the class. However, earlier in the lesson, I had used the gym class example to introduce students to the concept of social accommodations. This meant that the scenario section of the mini-lesson was not as beneficial as I'd hoped. The students were able to echo my prior examples of accommodations, which was good, but I had intended for them to brainstorm their own.

I wrapped up the lesson by prompting them to think about what the solutions to each scenario had in common. They recognized that the fake students all had to ask for help, which was what I had intended them to notice. I wanted the group to recognize that self-advocacy is a necessary skill if they want to receive accommodations.

6.7 3rd Grade Lesson #2: Strengths, Struggles, and Asking for Help

My second lesson with Isla also occurred on March 8th. I chose to focus on how knowing our strengths and struggles helps us identify when to ask for help.

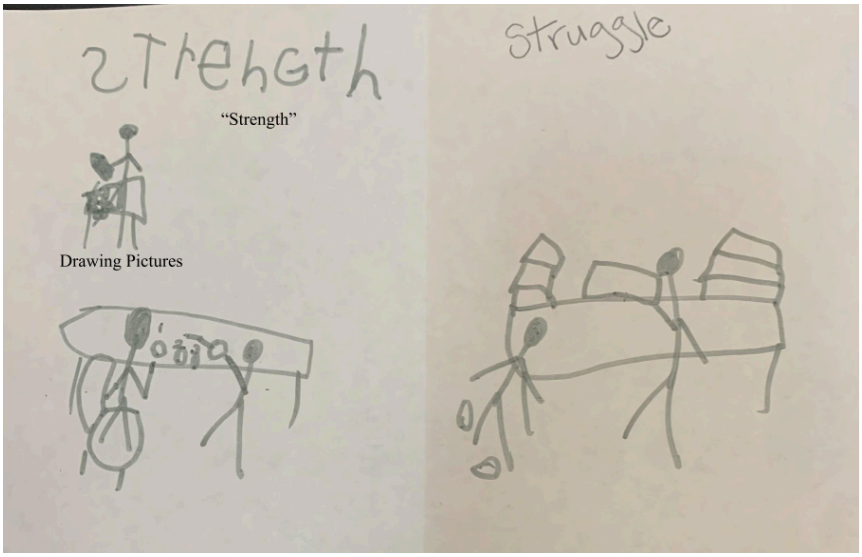
3rd Grade Lesson #2: Strengths, Struggles, and Asking for Help	
2 Minutes	What's The Plan? ● SWBAT: Identify when they should ask for help and when they can be the helper!
15 Minutes	Strengths, Struggles, and Asking for Help (Adapted from: Learning for Justice: Everyone's a Helper) ● What's a strength?

	○ "something you are really good at and might be able to use to help someone else" ● What are your strengths? ○ Fold a piece of paper in half ○ Label one side "strengths" ○ Draw or list your strengths! ● What's a struggle? ○ "something you sometimes have a hard time with and might need help from someone else for" ● What are your struggles? ○ Label the unused half of your paper "struggles" ○ Draw or list a few struggles! ■ Allow students to be as self-reflective as they're able. ● What does "help" mean? Why are we talking about it? ○ "to use your strengths to support someone else who is struggling with something" ● Re-label our lists! ○ The "strength" side should become "what I can help with," and the "struggle" side should become "what I need help with"
3 Minutes	Debrief: Asking for help is a strength! ● Why might it be good to know what we need help with? ● We now know what things we need help with, so we can add "asking for help" to our list of strengths!

We had a shorter amount of time than I had initially planned for, so the conversations we had were on the shorter side. We were in the same room as Isla's peers, who were playing a word game using Candy Land. She asked me if she could play the game, and I felt it would be antithetical to my project's goals if I denied her request. We still made it through the lesson I had planned, though.

I began by asking Isla whether she had ever asked for help; she stated she had. I then asked if she had ever been the helper, which she also said she had. I then explained that I wanted to talk about how we know when to ask for help and when to be a helper. I asked her if she could define "strength." This initially made her think of being physically strong, but when I prompted her to think of a second definition, she revealed that she understood "strengths" as "something

you're good at." I asked her to draw a picture of some of her strengths. She drew herself drawing and being nice to a peer. I then asked if she knew what a "struggle" was. She knew struggles were things you found hard to do. I then asked her to draw a picture of something she struggled with. She recounted a specific instance when she struggled to play a game and drew it. However, by this point she was rushing because she wanted to play with her peers. I wrapped up the lesson by quickly explaining that we can be helpers when we know our strengths, and we should ask for help when we struggle. She affirmed that she understood, and headed off to play Candy Land.



While the condensed timeline for this lesson impacted its efficacy, I still feel it provided some valuable insight into Isla's self-advocacy style. She was familiar with helping and being helped, and valued those skills. She went so far as to list being a helper as a strength alongside drawing, a more individual skill. Isla's response to this lesson proved that she understood the value of self-advocacy in understanding the value in asking for help. It also showed me that I had built a trusting relationship with her, as she was willing to ask to end my lesson early to engage in a preferred activity. I valued that interaction even more than her participation in my lesson.

6.8 Lesson #3: Setting Goals

For my final lesson, I chose to create a plan that both the sixth graders and third-graders could follow. I was interested in comparing how each age group reacted to similar content. I remember discussing my goals throughout my schooling, so I was relatively confident that the vocabulary was familiar. I also noticed the language of academic goal-setting being used with both the sixth-grade and third-grade participants. I wanted to give the students the opportunity to think about the non-academic goals they have. I felt that there was a strong connection between autonomy and goal-setting that I wanted to explore.

<table>
<tr><td colspan="3">Lesson #3: Setting Goals</td></tr>
<tr><td>4 Minutes</td><td colspan="2">What's a Goal?
● Take student suggestions
● Something you want to do that you will work hard to achieve.
How do we achieve our goals?
● Turn and talk to a partner
● Share some ideas</td></tr>
<tr><td>10 Minutes</td><td colspan="2">Vision Board Padlet
● What's a vision board?
○ A collage of pictures and words related to our goals
● Open up the Padlet using the link or QR code on the slide
○ Quick demonstration (if needed)
■ Encouraged to use both pictures and words, could pick one or the other if preferred
● Prompt 1: Think of a goal you have for this week. How could you work to meet that goal?
○ What would make it easier to meet that goal?
● Prompt 2: Think of a goal for the rest of the school year. How could you work to meet that goal?
○ What would make it easier to meet that goal?
● Prompt 3: Think of a goal you have for the future. How could you work to meet that goal?
○ What would make it easier to meet that goal?</td></tr>
<tr><td>6 Minutes</td><td>Why Are We Talking About This? (6th Grade)
● Take student suggestions</td><td>Why Are We Talking About This? (3rd Grade)</td></tr>
</table>

	● Prompt: Accommodations ○ Sometimes, we need certain accommodations to be able to meet our goals ● Prompt: Self-Advocacy ○ We use our self-advocacy skills to get closer to meeting our goals ● Prompt: Autonomy ○ Setting and meeting goals helps us find our sense of autonomy Debrief ● What have you learned from me? ● What are you still wondering about? ● Did you like these lessons? Did you have a favorite? ● What is one thing (about the lessons) you would've changed? ○ They can answer IRL or on the Padlet	● Take student suggestions ● Prompt: Accommodations ○ We have tools that make it easier for us to meet our needs! ● Prompt: Asking for Help ○ When we know what our struggles are, we know what help we need! ● Prompt: Self-Advocacy ○ We speak up for ourselves to get what we need!

I taught the sixth graders first. Allie, Jimena, Carmen, Havana, and Aiden were all present. I explained that I wanted to spend the day talking about setting goals. I then had the students join a Padlet[7] to make a collective vision board. Students could anonymously post pictures or blurbs about their goals. I had them start by thinking about short-term goals they could meet within the week. The sixth graders primarily associated short-term goals with academics. I chose an academic goal to use as an example of a short-term goal, so I may have set them up to make that association. I had also heard Ms. T discuss goal-setting in relation to academics. One student's short-term goal was personal: they posted a picture of a mom hugging a little girl and captioned it "Finally saying she's proud of me." While this goal pulled at my heartstrings for obvious reasons, I appreciated the student's willingness to share something so personal. I also felt that this goal showed that this student understood a broader conception of

[7] See page 77 for a screenshot of the Padlet and the student's contributions to it.

self-advocacy. This anonymous poster recognized that they could advocate for their emotional needs as well as their academic ones. I was proud that they had made that connection, even though I wish the student's emotional needs were being met.

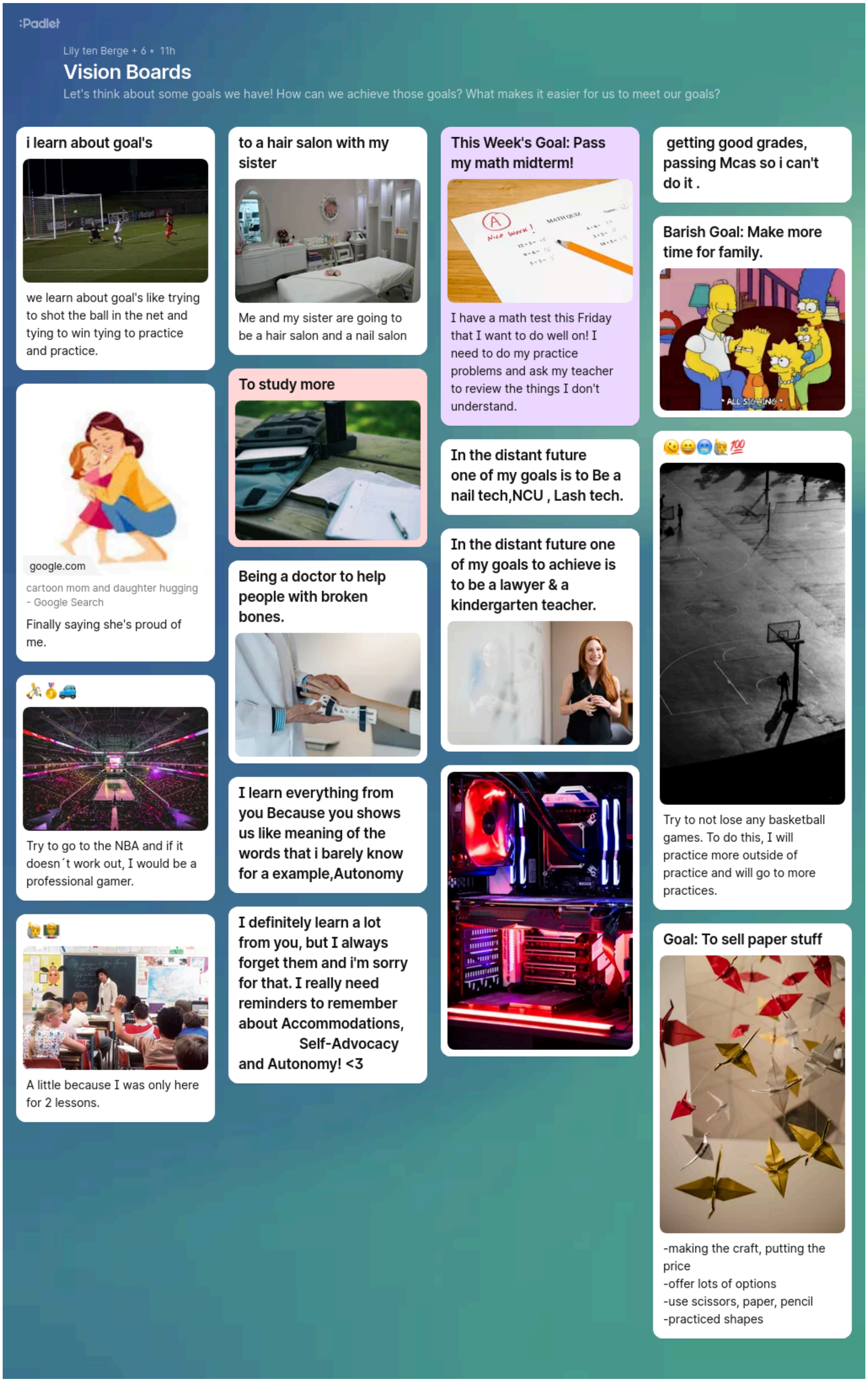
The sixth grader's long-term goals were focused on careers. There was a lot of variation in what kinds of careers they were interested in. Several students even came up with multiple options. I appreciated their willingness to share their aspirations with me. However, I was surprised to see that we ingrained the idea of desiring a career into our students. I did not tell them explicitly to choose a career-related goal, but they all went that route. On the one hand, career goals are easy to wrap one's head around. Adults started asking me what I wanted to be when I grew up as a kindergartener– I'm sure these students had the same experience. I do wonder what other long-term goals they might have come up with if they had not been in a classroom. I was still able to discuss using accommodations and self-advocacy skills to work toward the career you want, which aligned with my lesson's goals.

I ended the lesson by asking the group for cumulative feedback about my mini-lessons. They ended up putting their feedback directly into the Padlet. It was very positive overall; the one that stood out to me read, "I definitely learn a lot from you, but I always forget them and I'm sorry for that." Their positivity shows that my lessons resonated with at least one of the sixth graders. While I wish the content had stuck in this student's brain more, I believe that is my responsibility, not theirs. This feedback request showed that students value being granted access to language and concepts related to autonomy.

Isla had a shorter time frame to complete this lesson than the sixth graders did. I decided to condense the lesson by having her choose one goal. She decided that her goal was, "To sell paper stuff." We'd discussed her interest in selling crafts before, so I was not surprised by this

assertion. She was also extremely confident in her abilities. When I asked her about practicing her craft, she asserted that she was already very good, so she would not need extra practice. I typed her thoughts into the Padlet as we conversed. She also chose the picture associated with her goal.

While my conversation with Isla did not go as planned, I felt that it provided some insight into how a younger student views goals. She chose to focus on a goal she found highly achievable because of her pre-existing abilities. I had seen some of Isla's paper creations; they were quite well-made. I understood why she thought she would not need much more practice to hone her craft. I also found this lesson proof of Isla's desire for self-determination. "Selling paper stuff" is not a typical career goal, but Isla stayed strong in her convictions. She knew what she was good at and how she wanted to use it. If she can maintain that confidence, I am sure she will have an easier time self-advocating than some of her shy peers. She did not worry about how I might respond to her goal, nor did she question whether the kind of goal she wanted to discuss was "correct." She simply thought about what she wanted out of her life, and told me about it. It was refreshing to see a highly confident student, especially given Isla's tendency toward relational self-advocacy.


:Padlet
Lily ten Berge + 6 • 11h
Vision Boards
Let's think about some goals we have! How can we achieve those goals? What makes it easier for us to meet our goals?
i learn about goal's
we learn about goal's like trying to shot the ball in the net and tying to win tying to practice and practice.
google.com
cartoon mom and daughter hugging - Google Search
Finally saying she's proud of me.
Try to go to the NBA and if it doesn´t work out, I would be a professional gamer.
A little because I was only here for 2 lessons.
to a hair salon with my sister
Me and my sister are going to be a hair salon and a nail salon
To study more
Being a doctor to help people with broken bones.
I learn everything from you Because you shows us like meaning of the words that i barely know for a example,Autonomy
I definitely learn a lot from you, but I always forget them and i'm sorry for that. I really need reminders to remember about Accommodations, Self-Advocacy and Autonomy! <3
This Week's Goal: Pass my math midterm!
I have a math test this Friday that I want to do well on! I need to do my practice problems and ask my teacher to review the things I don't understand.
In the distant future one of my goals is to Be a nail tech,NCU , Lash tech.
In the distant future one of my goals to achieve is to be a lawyer & a kindergarten teacher.
getting good grades, passing Mcas so i can't do it .
Barish Goal: Make more time for family.
ALL SIGHING
Try to not lose any basketball games. To do this, I will practice more outside of practice and will go to more practices.
Goal: To sell paper stuff
-making the craft, putting the price
-offer lots of options
-use scissors, paper, pencil
-practiced shapes

6.9 3rd Grade Lesson Impacts

I found working with Isla extremely enjoyable. Her sense of humor made it easy to connect with her. She was also willing to try everything I put in front of her, even though not every lesson I did followed a familiar format. To put it simply, working with Isla was fun. I've also had some practice working one-on-one with students, so I felt more prepared to tailor my lessons to her preferences.

The impacts of each mini-lesson were rather varied. I felt that Lesson #1 was the most successful. Isla's drawing of her brain impressed me, as did her ability to recognize the variety of things her brain might need. I felt that by the end of the lesson, she recognized that she needed a wide variety of things to be a healthy and happy person. I was especially impressed with the implications of the windows and door she drew for her brain. Isla struck me as a student with a million thoughts in her head all of the time. I also observed her become stressed in situations that were overly stimulating for her. I believe she acknowledged her own capacity to become overwhelmed by giving her anthropomorphized brain some escape routes. The discussion we had as she drew additionally highlighted how well she knows herself. She knew to add things like cats and French fries to her drawing, indicating that she understands that specific, personal needs are still needs. I would do a similar lesson to this one again with future students to both explore their psyches and get to know them.

The second lesson was not as successful, in my opinion. While Isla took away the general ideas, the condensed time frame meant that I did not get to build upon her prior knowledge of strengths and struggles as much as I would have liked. That being said, I do not regret cutting the

lesson short. Isla advocated for herself by asking to join her peers instead of sticking through the solo lesson; honoring her request felt like the correct thing to do.

The third lesson was also impacted by time constraints. I had a hard time helping Isla understand how working towards a goal might look. Since her goal was to do more of an activity she already enjoyed, she did not believe she would have to put in effort or ask for help to achieve it. Her self-confidence was refreshing, but I was not able to push her to reflect more on goals that would be harder for her to meet. I believe that this lesson went more smoothly with the 6th graders, which I will discuss further in a moment. That being said, I do not think I would take this approach with a student as young as Isla again.

Due to the timeline I had to follow to complete this project, I was unable to observe whether my lessons had long-term impacts on Isla's self-advocacy skills. Lengthening the study would have allowed me to reinforce applying self-advocacy skills with Isla, which may have allowed me to glean more insight into long-term impacts. That being said, I feel confident that Isla picked up on the basic vocabulary she will need to continue her self-advocacy education.

6.10 6th Grade Lesson Impacts

Working with the sixth-graders was also a very enjoyable experience. I was thankful for their attention and willingness to participate in my mini-lessons. The students all seemed engaged as I taught and trusted me enough to listen to what I had to say.

The first mini-lesson was probably the least impactful of the three. Only Allie and Jimena participated in this lesson, as they were the only two participants present. They provided thoughtful responses to the various questions I asked them about identifying and asking for things they needed. They also seemed to understand the vocabulary terms I went over, and asked

clarifying questions when needed. Both girls also participated in the Kahoot I prepared and answered most of the questions correctly. In the future, though, I would create a different style of review game for this lesson. The Kahoot questions required simplistic recall. While that is beneficial, I wish I had asked the students to expand their thought processes about self-advocacy and autonomy after introducing them to the concepts. I do believe introducing them to specific self-advocacy vocabulary terms was beneficial, though. Both Allie and Jimena requested more information about accommodations at the end of this lesson, surprising both myself and Ms. T. We had both assumed the students were familiar with accommodations, as they received several. I was glad for the opportunity to help them better understand things that impact their lives.

The second mini-lesson was relatively successful. Allie, Jimena, Havana, and Carmen were all in attendance, which allowed for more group discussion about accommodations. I think starting with the "How High?" game set the students up for productive conversations about equity and the role of accommodations in fostering equity. While the nature of the game had its drawbacks, I find sixth graders to be quite competitive, so that aspect fostered engagement. In the future, I would allow students to work as a group toward a shared goal after a competitive round of "How High?" to foster further conversations about equity and community care. I also wish I had not spoiled my scenarios by using them as examples. I think the end of the lesson would have been stronger if the students had more opportunities to think through unique accommodations they could offer each of my imaginary students. By the end of the lesson, though, I felt all of the students understood that accommodations are tools used to make things fair for everyone in a school, not just special privileges some students get and others do not. I also felt confident that they understood they could and should ask for accommodations if they were struggling.

The third mini-lesson was the only one where all five students were in attendance. I knew the sixth graders would be familiar with academic goal-setting, so I wanted to push them to think beyond that. I was impressed with the student whose goal was, “Finally saying she’s proud of me.” This student understood that social and emotional goals are valid goals to strive for. While the implications of this goal make me a bit sad, I hope that our conversations gave this student permission to express their needs to the adults in their lives. I was also excited to hear about the different career goals each student had for themselves. I appreciated the variety of aspirations students shared. Many students also provided examples of things they could do to meet those goals as we conversed during the lesson. Adrian especially impressed me, as he had missed the first two mini-lessons. His goals, which he indicated were both about basketball, mentioned the necessity to practice regularly to improve his skills. When I asked him what he would do if he was struggling to find time to practice, he knew that he could ask the adults in his life to help him make time for basketball.

Due to the schedule I had to follow to complete this project, I was also unable to observe whether my lessons had long-term impacts on the sixth-graders self-advocacy skills. Lengthening the study would have allowed me to reinforce applying self-advocacy skills, which may have allowed me to glean more insight into long-term impacts. However, the reflections students provided left me confident that they understood the importance of the basic vocabulary associated with self-advocacy. I also appreciated the honesty of the student who said, “I definitely learn a lot from you, but I always forget them and i’m [*sic*] sorry for that. I really need reminders to remember about Accommodations, Self-Advocacy and Autonomy.” I felt that this reflection proved that the students valued what I had shown them, but knew that I would not be able to reinforce those skills since I only had time for three short lessons.

7. Conclusions

7.1.1 How do Special Education Students Advocate for Themselves?

During initial observations, common themes emerged regarding students' self-advocacy methods. I noticed that students employed both verbal and non-verbal means of expressing their needs while at school. Their needs were most likely to be adequately addressed when they used conventional methods such as raising hands, using hand signals, and maintaining a respectful tone. However, when students used "disruptive" forms of self-advocacy, primarily through non-verbal restlessness, they were punished. The students themselves also appeared to be unaware of their unmet needs after self-advocating in non-verbal, "disruptive" ways. Their frustration was evident, but they did not typically articulate a desire to have a need met.

7.1.2 "School-Accepted" vs. "Disruptive" Behaviors

Throughout my observations, I noticed a few distinct patterns emerge regarding how teachers responded to student behaviors. The first thing I noticed was a distinction between non-verbal and verbal inappropriate behaviors. Non-verbal inappropriate behaviors were often considered more disruptive than their verbal counterparts. For instance, Adrian's choice to lounge on a table garnered more attention than Jimena's whispered conversations with friends, though both behaviors were "disruptive." Verbal, appropriate behaviors proved to be the most effective means of communication. When students advocated for themselves verbally and appropriately, their attempts were more easily recognized by their teachers. Teachers were also more likely to effectively meet needs expressed in this manner.

Additionally, I noticed that instances where verbal, appropriate behaviors were ineffective often stemmed from prior engagement in disruptive actions. I observed this pattern most frequently in my observations of Isla, Adrian, and Havana. They tended to make "disruptive" behavioral choices first, then switch to appropriate modes of self-advocating after being scolded. However, since their "disruptive" behaviors were not recognized as expressions of need, their appropriate requests were assumed to be unnecessary.

Finally, I noticed that even when students utilized appropriate, non-verbal behaviors to advocate for themselves, their needs sometimes went unnoticed. Allie and Carmen had the most difficulties getting their needs met despite displaying appropriate self-advocacy behaviors. In my opinion, this highlights a potential oversight in how we manage classrooms. I found myself less likely to take field notes when students used appropriate non-verbal methods to self-advocate, showing that these methods can easily go unnoticed.

7.1.3 Impacts of Explicit Self-Advocacy Instruction

The mini-lessons I implemented allowed me to draw some conclusions about how students viewed their own self-advocacy skills. All of the student participants had some understanding of concepts related to self-advocacy, like needs, goals, and asking for help. Even without using formal vocabulary, students were able to reflect on their self-advocacy skills. However, most of their reflections showed a lack of confidence in their self-awareness. Allie and Jimena both reported struggling with identifying things their bodies and brains needed during their first lessons, and Isla exhibited traits that implied she struggled to self-reflect during the initial observation period. Several of the students also struggled to make their needs known to their teachers. I noticed Havana, Allie, Carmen, and Isla all struggled with communication

throughout the initial observation period. I thus chose to try and address both the self-reflection and communication skills necessary to become a strong self-advocate.

As mentioned previously, I was not able to determine whether my mini-lessons had long-term impacts. The timeline of my project meant that all of my lessons occurred toward the end of my time spent at W Elementary. As such, I was not able to help the students practice their self-advocacy skills or observe them to see whether they used the information covered by the lessons in their daily lives. However, I did feel that each lesson provided each student with some new knowledge about self-advocacy. This was especially true of the sixth graders, who discussed the new vocabulary they had been exposed to on the Lesson #3 Padlet. The group seemed to appreciate gaining a clearer understanding of how accommodations work, especially because they all already received some accommodations. Isla was also able to practice using vocabulary related to her needs through these mini-lessons. Lesson #1 also helped her work to grow her self-reflection skills. I believe that if the circumstances had been different, Lessons #2 and #3 could have also allowed Isla to self-reflect.

7.2 Collective Analysis

I found that students struggled with two distinct tasks: identifying their needs and/or communicating effectively. Some students, like Allie and Adrian, knew what they needed, but could not express that need in a manner that their teachers recognized. Others, like Isla, had trouble identifying what they needed at all. Havana struggled with both aspects of self-advocacy. It took her some time to identify her needs and she had a hard time explaining them to her teachers. Carmen and Jimena both flew under the radar, meaning any potential struggles with communication and need identification went unnoticed. I also noticed that all students engaged

in a mixture of verbal and non-verbal behaviors when expressing their needs. All students also engaged in a combination of appropriate and inappropriate behaviors. The students who most frequently used verbal, appropriate behaviors when expressing needs exhibited the most effective self-advocacy skills. Those who lean toward non-verbal and/or inappropriate behaviors experience more ineffective responses to their self-advocacy.

7.3 Theoretical Implications

I initially framed my project by centering the importance of possessing self-advocacy skills. I believe the resulting data supports that assertion. When students effectively self-advocated, they had their needs met, even when those needs were not obvious. Adrian and Havana are the clearest proof of this phenomenon. Adrian knew how and when to ask for movement breaks, and those needs were eventually met. Havana's self-advocacy skills were less traditional, but her non-verbal moments of struggle were enough to draw the attention of teachers who could help her. However, I also observed cases where student's needs went unmet even though they expressed themselves adequately. Allie was the clearest example of this phenomenon; her desire to go by "Allie" was expressed clearly, but many people continued calling her "Paloma." While I am sure those people meant no harm, they ignored Allie's request. Jimena and Carmen also struggled to self-advocate, largely because their behaviors were so unobtrusive that they went unnoticed.

The varying responses to sixth-grade self-advocacy highlight the importance of recognizing children's autonomy regardless of the form it takes. Every student in the group had needs, some of which were more clearly expressed. However, all of the students responded positively when their needs were met. They also appreciated the content of my mini-lessons,

which were designed to give them tools to better get their needs met. While I was not able to see much of the impact these lessons had after their administration, I believe their engagement during the lessons proves that they understood the relevance of the concepts to their lives.

I feel that Isla most obviously demonstrated the importance of recognizing alternative forms of communication. She was the youngest student I observed, so she was still working to figure out her preferred style of self-advocacy. She also had less experience identifying her needs. That being said, she still showed that she could recognize when she needed *something*. Her body language and dramatic moments served as her requests. However, these requests were harder for those around her to recognize. As a result, she struggled to access her autonomy, even when her goal was simply to fit into her social context.

The entirety of this project highlighted the ongoing need for disability justice. All of the students I observed had unique needs as compared to their neurotypical peers. They also had a wide variety of strengths. The empathy each student possessed was palpable, even though I only saw them about once a week. Allie went out of her way to include me in the classroom ecosystem by silently welcoming me into the space. Adrian always thanked me for helping him with math. Havana showed me the work she was proud of to invite me into her accomplishments. Carmen pushed herself to participate in my lessons in spite of her reserved nature. Jimena laughed at my jokes, even though she typically resisted aligning herself with adults. Isla allowed me into her space even though she was the only student in her class I formally observed. She was ready and willing to participate in my lessons, even when they delayed her ability to join a game. She also frequently jumped to help her peers when they were struggling. Clearly, their status as special education students did not lead them to ignore the needs of those around them. They deserve reciprocal care extended in their direction. We owe it to disabled children across the

country to invest effort into pursuing disability justice. Disability justice is, at its core, about empathy. If disabled students can extend their empathy to us, we should extend it to them.

7.4 Implications for Practice

I based the entire design of this project on my belief in the importance of student autonomy. I firmly believe that a good teacher centers their students' needs as much as they feasibly can. Since I have been able to practice observing solely self-advocacy, I now know what to look for from my future students. I discovered that the behaviors that seemed disruptive were simply students expressing needs in an unintentionally ineffective manner. When I begin teaching, I will view disruptive behaviors through this lens. My empathy for my students will increase if I meet them where they are. If I have another student like Grace, I will no longer view their aggressive behaviors as expressions of violence. Even the most dangerous behaviors are ways of seeking attention and asking for what one needs. That being said, I will also work to create classroom expectations that hold space for uniqueness without fostering chaos. While the contrarian in me wishes I could manage a classroom with no rules, the teacher in me knows that is simply not possible. Instead, I have created a list of goal practices I will follow as a teacher that will allow my students to access their autonomy without sacrificing classroom control completely.

As a teacher, I will:

- View all behaviors, including the "disruptive" ones, as communication.
- Explicitly teach my students how to self-advocate effectively and appropriately in my classroom at the beginning of each school year.
- Create a list of classroom expectations with my students addressing both

- a) what forms of self-advocacy are effective and appropriate and
- b) what we will do as a classroom community if someone self-advocates in an ineffective or inappropriate manner.

I believe my research highlights the importance of truly knowing and seeing your students. Children constantly express their needs. I need to be able to discern and address their requests effectively. To do so, I must have a sense of what kinds of things my students need. Students like Isla, who are still learning to self-reflect, may need extra help from their teachers to get their needs met. If we do not know our students, we could misidentify their needs and cause more confusion or distress. However, we must also be willing to set our egos aside if a student expresses a need we do not understand. It is more important to respect our students than teach them (though teaching is a close second). Allowing students to take a lap may seem antithetical to their learning, but we cannot learn when distracted. Honoring student needs will put them in a better place for learning. Students receiving special education services also deserve thorough explanations of their accommodations to ensure they understand how and when to use them. We have to be highly tuned in when working with kids. Otherwise, we will mistake their signals for radio static.

7.5 Limitations

The main challenge I encountered in completing this project was the timing. The Institutional Review Board's approval process took a lot longer than I had anticipated. I had trouble designing a project that met their guidelines while still accomplishing my personal goals in a meaningful way. The IRB revision process also caused me to experience a high level of burnout, which counterintuitively meant that it took me longer to turn in revisions. The high-stress nature of the process meant that I avoided it instead of powering through. I had also

originally intended for this project to occur at a different research site. While I am very grateful to have completed this project at W Elementary, switching sites pushed back my timeline significantly. I also encountered many of the challenges inherent to researching at a public school. There were unexpected snow days, absences, and holidays that I could not schedule around as effectively as I would have liked. I believe a better-executed version of this study would take place over the course of a full school year with alternating observation and lesson periods. I, unfortunately, did not have that luxury. By the end of the project, I had run out of time to make extensive post-lesson observations. Continuing those observations would have helped me draw further conclusions about the efficacy of the lessons.

Generally speaking, this analysis is missing a lot. I am only one person, and I have very little research experience. I was not able to dig deeply into every angle presented by the interactions I observed. My lessons were also underdeveloped, as I implemented them for the first time with my research participants. I did not have the ability to test each lesson to see how effective they would be. My inexperience means that this study is far from comprehensive. That being said, I hope it is an okay start. I hope that the insights from this work can provide a foundation for future research.

7.6 Final Thoughts

Observing these students and their attempts at self-advocacy re-centered disability justice in my educational pedagogy. Specifically, I found myself thinking a lot about the merits of inclusion versus sub-separate educational spaces. Most special education programs focus on integrating students into general education classrooms. We want students to learn alongside their peers as much as possible, so this goal has its merits. However, teachers must be reflexively

aware of any subconscious biases they hold towards disability. Otherwise, our attempts at inclusion may unintentionally reflect those implicit biases. When we include disabled students in our classrooms, we must be sure that we are allowing them to exist as themselves. The American school system holds children to ableist standards of behavior and communication. Teachers inherit bias from the system they function within; students inherit bias from the adults they learn from. When biases go unchecked, disabled students are unduly separated from their peers, both figuratively and literally. To challenge systemic ableism, we must empower disabled students to advocate for themselves. As an aspiring professional educator, it is my job to provide students with the space to make their own choices. This requires accommodating diverse communication needs, so long as those needs do not infringe upon others' right to learn.

I also believe in teaching students about the importance of self-advocacy within an ableist educational system. My research project, though small in scale, serves as an example of promoting change from the ground up. Students deserve to work with educators to diagnose and address systemic problems. Teachers deserve to have autonomy over how they educate their students. Basic mini-lessons can be powerful tools in creating inclusive spaces where disabled students feel empowered to tackle systemic challenges. We lay the foundation for meaningful change when we show marginalized students that their voices matter.

The most important things I learned through this process were related to trust-building. I was honored to find that after I taught the first mini-lessons, all of the participants were more likely to ask me for help while I observed.

I am interested in continuing to develop spaces for increased student autonomy. I believe this will help students find themselves. Once students learn that their opinions have value, I believe will reveal that they will become more confident. I also believe my project will increase

teachers' confidence in their students' abilities. Classrooms can become autonomy-supportive spaces if students and teachers believe self-determination is possible. As educators, it is our job to advocate for our classroom's collective needs. If we cannot recognize our students' individual needs, we will not be able to effectively advocate for their collective needs. There will also be instances where we cannot honor a student's request. We owe it to our students to explain why we cannot meet their needs. By recognizing the "disruptive" ways students advocate for themselves, we can ensure that we are giving all of our students the access to autonomy they deserve.

8. References

Alexander, Kern & Hunter, Richard C. (2004). *Administering Special Education: In Pursuit of Dignity and Autonomy*. 1st ed. Amsterdam: Elsevier JAI. Retrieved May 14, 2023, https://web-s-ebscohost-com.goddard40.clarku.edu/ehost/ebookviewer/ebook?sid=25aa10f-a38a-40ad-96a9-cf363e25005d%40redis&vid=0&format=EB.

Alper, S., Schloss, P. J., & Schloss, C. N. (1995). Families of Children with Disabilities in Elementary and Middle School: Advocacy Models and Strategies. Exceptional Children, 62(3), 261-270. https://doi.org/10.1177/001440299606200307.

Assor, A., Kaplan, H. and Roth, G. (2002), Choice is good, but relevance is excellent: Autonomy-enhancing and suppressing teacher behaviours predicting students' engagement in schoolwork. British Journal of Educational Psychology, 72: 261-278. https://doi.org/10.1348/000709902158883

Balint-Langel, K., & Riden, B. S. (2022). Using the Self-Advocacy Strategy to Support Middle School Students With EBD. Beyond Behavior, 31(2), 103–114. https://doi.org/10.1177/10742956211023777.

Balint-Langel, K., Woods-Groves, S., Rodgers, D. B., Rila, A., & Riden, B. S. (2020). Using a Computer-Based Strategy to Teach Self-Advocacy Skills to Middle School Students With Disabilities. Journal of Special Education Technology, 35(4), 249-261. https://doi.org/10.1177/0162643419864847.

Baynton, Douglas C. (2013). Disability and the Justification of Inequality in American History. In L. J. Davis (Ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited (Fourth Edition), Routledge, 17-33.

Beck, Ulrich, Scott Lash and Brian Wynne. (1992.) *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity*.

Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications.

Berne, Patty. (2015). Disability Justice - a working draft by Patty Berne. *Sins Invalid.* https://www.sinsinvalid.org/blog/disability-justice-a-working-draft-by-patty-berne.

Brooks-McNamara, V., & Pedersen, L. (2006). Practitioner Inquiry: A Method to Advocate for Systemic Change. *Professional School Counseling*, *9*(3), 257–260. http://www.jstor.org/stable/42732680.

Brown, Lydia. (2011, August 4). *Identity-First Language*. Autistic Self Advocacy Network. https://autisticadvocacy.org/about-asan/identity-first-language/.

Cease-Cook, J., Test, D. W., & Scroggins, L. S. (2013). Effects of the CD-Rom Version of the Self-Advocacy Strategy on Quality of Contributions in IEP Meetings of High School Students with Intellectual Disability. *Education and Training in Autism and Developmental Disabilities*, *48*(2), 258–268. http://www.jstor.org/stable/23880644.

Cooper, Marianne and Allison J. Pugh. 2020. "Families Across the Income Spectrum: A Decade in Review." *Journal of Marriage and Family* 82: 1: 272–299.

Coyne, Kaitlyn. (2016). Self-determination in elementary school: learning self-awareness, self-advocacy, choice making, and goal setting. California State University, Sacramento. https://hdl.handle.net/10211.3/171237.

Deci, E. L., & Ryan, R. M. (1985). *Intrinsic motivation and self-determination in human behavior*. Plenum Press.

DESE. (2023). "W Elementary." Massachusetts Department of Education. https://profiles.doe.mass.edu/general/general.aspx?topNavID=1&leftNavId=100&orgcode=03480000&orgtypecode=5.[8]

[8] I have replaced the name of the school I did my research in with my pseudonym to maintain anonymity. I have also linked to the general district information instead of information about the specific school I spent time in.

Diseth, Åge, Danielsen, Anne G., & Samdal, Oddrun (2012) A path analysis of basic need support, self-efficacy, achievement goals, life satisfaction and academic achievement level among secondary school students, Educational Psychology, 32:3, 335-354, DOI: 10.1080/01443410.2012.657159.

Dismore, Brooke, & Pugh, Allison J. (2021). The Paradox of Constrained Well-being: Childhood Autonomy, Surveillance and Inequality. *Sociological Forum*, *36*(2), 448-470. https://doi-org.goddard40.clarku.edu/10.1111/socf.12687.

Doxey, John, Tam Tran, Kristi Kimball, James Corless and Miles Mercer. 2003. "Can't Get There From Here: The Declining Independent Mobility of California's Children and Youth". *Surface Transportation Policy Project and Transportation and Land Use Coalition and Latino Issues Forum*. Sacramento, CA: California Department of Transportation.

Ferrell, K. A., Bruce, S., & Luckner, J. L. (2014). Evidence-based practices for students with sensory impairments. CEEDAR Centre, ceedar.education.ufl.edu.

Furtak, Erin Marie and Kunter, Mareike (2012). Effects of Autonomy-Supportive Teaching on Student Learning and Motivation, The Journal of Experimental Education, 80:3, 284-316, DOI: 10.1080/00220973.2011.573019.

Giroux, Henry A. (1983). Theories of Reproduction and Resistance in the New Sociology of Education: A Critical Analysis. *Harvard Educational Review*, 53(3), 257-293.

Guay, Frédéric. (2022). Applying Self-Determination Theory to Education: Regulations Types, Psychological Needs, and Autonomy Supporting Behaviors. *Canadian Journal of School Psychology*, *37*(1), 75-92. https://doi.org/10.1177/08295735211055355.

Hammer, M. R. (2004). Using the Self-Advocacy Strategy to Increase Student Participation in

IEP Conferences. *Intervention in School & Clinic*, *39*(5), 295–380. https://doi.org/10.1177/10534512040390050601.

Jang, H., Reeve, J., & Deci, E. L. (2010). Engaging students in learning activities: It is not autonomy support or structure but autonomy support and structure. *Journal of Educational Psychology, 102*(3), 588–600. https://doi.org/10.1037/a0019682.

Joussemet, M., Koestner, R., Lekes, N. and Houlfort, N. (2004), Introducing Uninteresting Tasks to Children: A Comparison of the Effects of Rewards and Autonomy Support. Journal of Personality, 72: 139-166. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.0022-3506.2004.00259.x

Katz, Cindi. (2005.) "The Terrors of Hypervigilance: Security and the Compromised Spaces of Contemporary Childhood." *Studies in Modern Childhood* 99–114.

Lancaster, P. E., Schumaker, J. B., & Deshler, D. D. (2002). The Development and Validation of an Interactive Hypermedia Program for Teaching a Self-Advocacy Strategy to Students with Disabilities. *Learning Disability Quarterly*, *25*(4), 277–302. https://doi.org/10.2307/1511358.

Massengale, Lindsey. (2016). The Lived Experiences of Elementary Students with Disabilities Self-Advocating Through Speaking and Writing. *Electronic Theses and Dissertations*. 5079. https://stars.library.ucf.edu/etd/5079

McKittrick, Lanya Lynn. (2022). The Benefits of Teaching Self-Determination Skills to Very Young Students with Sensory Loss. *Lane of Inquiry: Deafblind Education Research & Family Support*. https://eric.ed.gov/?id=ED619743.

Mingus, Mia. (2014). Reflection Toward Practice: Some Questions on Disability Justice. In Caitlin Wood (Ed.), *Criptiques*.

Moscowitz, Leigh and Spring-Serenity Duvall. (2011.) "'Every Parent's Worst Nightmare'

Myths of Child Abductions in US News." *Journal of Children and Media* 5: 2: 147–163.

Mullin, Amy. (2023). Children, Social Inclusion in Education, Autonomy and Hope. *Ethics and Social Welfare*, 17:1, 20-34. https://doi.org/10.1080/17496535.2022.2112409.

Nelson, Margaret K. 2010. *Parenting out of Control*. New York, NY: NYU Press.

Ramey, Garey Ramey and A. Valerie. (2010). *The Rug Rat Race.* Washington, DC: Brookings Institute.

Reeve, J. (2016). Autonomy-supportive teaching: What it is, how to do it. *Building Autonomous Learners*, 129-152. Springer.

Ryan, Richard M., & Deci, Edward L. (2000b). Self-Determination Theory and the Facilitation of Intrinsic Motivation, Social Development, and Well-Being. *American Psychologist*, *55*(1), 68-78. https://doi.org/10.1037/0003-066X.55.1.68.

Ryan, R., & Deci, E. (2000). Intrinsic and extrinsic motivations: Classic definitions and new directions. Contemporary Educational Psychology, 25(1), 54–67. https://doi.org/10.1006/ceps.1999.1020

Schelling, A. L., & Rao, S. (2013). Evaluating self-advocacy strategy instruction for students with an intellectual disability using an interactive hypermedia program. International Journal of Business and Social Science, 4, 1–10.

Shakespeare, Tom. (2013). The Social Model of Disability. In L. J. Davis (Ed.), *The Disability Studies Reader*, edited (Fourth Edition), Routledge, 214-221.

Shaw, Ben, Ben Watson, Bjorn Frauendienst, Andreas Redecker, Tim Jones and Mayer Hillman 2013. *Children's Independent Mobility.* London, UK: Policy Studies Institute.

Test, D. W., & Neale, M. (2004). Using The "Self-Advocacy Strategy" to Increase Middle Graders' IEP Participation. *Journal of Behavioral Education*, *13*(2), 135–145.

Twenge, Jean M. and Heejung Park. 2019. "The Decline in Adult Activities Among U.S. Adolescents, 1976–2016". *Child Development* 90: 2: 638–654.

Van Reusen, A. K., Deshler, D. D., & Schumaker, J. B. (1989). Effects of a student participation strategy in facilitating the involvement of adolescents with learning disabilities in the Individualized Educational Program planning process. Learning Disabilities, 1, 23–34.

Van Reusen, A. K. (1996). The self-advocacy strategy for education and transition planning. *Intervention in School & Clinic*, *32*(1), 49. https://doi.org/10.1177/105345129603200110.

Wang, J.C.K., Ng, B.L.L., Liu, W.C., Ryan, R.M. (2016). Can Being Autonomy-Supportive in Teaching Improve Students' Self-Regulation and Performance?. In: Liu, W., Wang, J., Ryan, R. (eds) Building Autonomous Learners. Springer, Singapore. https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-287-630-0_12

Wang, C. K. J., Liu, W. C., Kee, Y. H., & Chian, L. K. (2019). Competence, autonomy, and relatedness in the classroom: understanding students' motivational processes using the self-determination theory. *Heliyon*, 5(7). 1-6 https://doi.org/10.1016/j.heliyon.2019.e01983

Wooldridge, Shannon. (2023, April 12). *Writing respectfully: Person-First and Identity-First Language*. National Institutes of Health. https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/what-we-do/science-health-public-trust/perspectives/writing-respectfully-person-first-identity-first-language.

Zachariou, Antonia, & Bonneville-Roussy, Arielle. (2023). The role of autonomy support from teachers in young learners' self-regulation in dyadic contexts: An examination through three-level multilevel analysis. *Learning and Instruction*, 89. https://doi.org/10.1016/j.learninstruc.2023.101843.