STORIES WE CARRY INTO CLASSROOMS: THE LITERACY NARRATIVES OF TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH COMPLEX SUPPORT NEEDS

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STORIES WE CARRY INTO CLASSROOMS: THE LITERACY NARRATIVES OF
TEACHERS OF STUDENTS WITH COMPLEX SUPPORT NEEDS

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DISSERTATION

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Requirements for the Degree of

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Special Education

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Dedication

This is for Kathy Joy La Plante who, thankfully, carries the whole story of me.

AMLA
Acknowledgements

At the end of this project about literacy, I am struck by the inadequacy of words to describe the many ways that Dr. Susan Copeland has not only supported this work but helped me to stay true to myself and my vision in the process. Advisor, mentor, dissertation chair, story-sharer, co-inquirer, careful listener, critical questioner, colleague, friend. Somewhere within, among, and/or beyond those words lies the truth of her impact on my thinking and my work over the past fifteen years. For this, I am truly grateful.

I also want to acknowledge my committee members Professor Ruth Luckasson, Dr. Julia Scherba de Valenzuela, and Dr. Jan Armstrong and thank them for their expert teaching and their modeling of what life and work in the academy can and should be. I am especially grateful for Professor Luckasson whose leadership of the Special Education Department at UNM made possible the research and teaching of a group of talented and justice-focused faculty whose influence continues to inspire my work with students and teachers.

Additionally, I acknowledge all who have been my teachers, formally and informally, across a lifetime of learning. I begin with the four teachers who participated in this study and who have taught me more than they will ever know. I will continue to carry their stories with gratitude and humility. I also include here my students, families, and co-educators in K-12 settings; my students, colleagues and professors at UNM; my parents Carol and Jim; my sisters Karen, Diane, and Sue; my nieces and nephews Brad, Brittany, Brett, Bethany, Rachel, Joey, Jake, and Emily; and my aunt Dolores and all of my extended family.

Finally, I recognize Dr. Ira Zepp, now departed, who is the model for the teacher that I hope to be every single time I enter the sacred space of the classroom.
In this study, I used a case-based narrative inquiry to investigate the literacy narratives and the thinking about instructional practices of four teachers of students with complex support needs (CSN) from a small, rural school district in the Southwestern United States. I conducted initial and follow-up interviews and facilitated two focus groups across an eight-week period using a process designed to look at teacher narratives across time and after interactions with peers. My data were in the form of transcripts of all interviews and focus groups that I analyzed using two analytic processes: thematic and narrative (Polkinghorne, 1995). I described three themes that emerged from the thematic analysis: Writing instruction is inherently different for students with CSN; Relating to literate others; and Learning to teach. I also used an exploratory narrative analysis process to make meaning of the literacy narratives of one of this study’s participants. Results pointed toward the ways that teacher literacy narratives reveal their underlying assumptions about literacy for students with and without CSN and their thinking about instructional practices for students with CSN. I discussed the limitations of this study, possibilities for future research, and implications including the potential use of a process of sharing literacy narratives in pre- and in-service
training to shift practice toward more inclusive and comprehensive literacy instruction for students with CSN.

*Keywords:* literacy, literacy instruction, narrative inquiry, teachers, decision-making, students with complex support needs
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CHAPTER 1

Literacy Instruction for Students with Complex Support Needs

Literacy is more than letters and words presented and accessed in conventional ways. Literacy is the connection, or path, between minds and hearts, between words and meaning, between generations, and between multiple, individually- and communally-significant stories (Keefe & Copeland, 2011). Every human being seeks and has the right to the transformative connections that this path allows (Erickson et al., 1997; Forts & Luckasson, 2011). When students have complex support needs (CSN) that limit traditional access points to symbol systems (Kliwer, 2008), teachers must be prepared for and have a deep and abiding curiosity about how to see and listen for all the ways that students might enter into the literate community. (Students with CSN refers, in this context, to individuals with intellectual disability, moderate to severe disabilities, or multiple disabilities. See further explication below.) Literacy is not a fixed attribute and is never only situated in the individual (Gee, 2001; Kliwer et al., 2006). In classrooms that serve students with severe cognitive and/or behavioral differences, most often teachers share their knowledge of the parts of things (think of common instructional phrases like “phonemic awareness,” “functional skills,” “writing conventions,” “mathematical operations,” and even “reading comprehension”) without the structure that makes story and connection possible. For students without CSN, learning literacy skills requires the intricate and speedy use of a set of neurological “tools” in a human brain that was not built for reading and writing (Wolf, 2018). Gaining a necessary and potentially life-changing facility with language and text is possible for all students and cannot be taken for granted for any student. Therefore, all teachers must be deeply curious
about the many ways of listening and of building structures that are conducive to the growth of literate lives, especially teachers who work with students with CSN.

Gee (2001) argued that all children gain school-based literacy skills through “their access to family, community, and school language environments in which children interact intensively with adults and more advanced peers and experience cognitively challenging talk and texts on sustained topics and in different genres of oral and written language” (p. 724). Generally, students with complex support needs have received limited access to the types of inclusive (general education) classrooms that Gee described as necessary to emergence as fully literate learners (Kleinert et al., 2015, p. 322). Students with intellectual disability have demonstrated the ability to acquire reading skills when given access to a comprehensive literacy intervention program (Allor et al., 2014) and students with Down syndrome have made gains in reading skills through the use of “personalized” instruction (Lemons et al., 2018). However, for most students with CSN, literacy instruction has been most often provided by a special education teacher or instructional assistant in segregated settings and has tended to focus on narrow, discrete tasks (Ruppar, Fisher, et al., 2018). Also, reviews of research of curricular approaches and materials for students with CSN showed a focus, primarily, on non-academic functional/life skills (Nietupski et al., 1997; Shurr & Bouck, 2013) and studies highlighting instructional practices for these students frequently have not met methodological and/or reporting guidelines that allow designation of these practices as evidence-based (Spooner et al., 2017).

Despite studies that have shown that students with complex support needs benefit from full inclusion in the broad range of literacy activities that are included in a typical classroom community (Hudson et al., 2013; Kliwer et al., 2004), students with more
significant disabilities and needs continued to be placed in primarily segregated school settings (Kurth et al., 2014). Using an assessment of student and teacher academic behavior, Kurth et al. (2016) found that students with CSN served in self-contained classroom settings were disconnected from meaningful interaction with peers and did not receive high quality research-based instruction in their self-contained settings (p. 237). Additionally, in their interview study, Ruppar, Roberts, and Olson (2018) discovered that school leaders and general education teachers showed misunderstanding about and/or lower expectations for teachers of students with CSN. Special educators serving students with CSN were often seen primarily as “caregivers” rather than instructors (p. 324) and were viewed as being separate from the overall (instructional) mission of the school.

**Lack of Access to Literacy Instruction in Inclusive Settings**

Given the importance of literacy in the lives of all students and the growing body of research demonstrating the literate abilities of students with CSN when given access to a comprehensive instructional program, there has been interest in understanding the continued lack of access to meaningful literacy instruction in inclusive settings for many students with CSN (Kleinert et al., 2015; Ruppar, 2015). What were the factors at the local level leading to decisions about implementation of literacy instruction, generally, for students who qualify for special education services (Siuty et al., 2018), and specifically for students with CSN? How have districts, schools, and, most importantly, teachers decided what literacy instruction will look like for their students with CSN? In their work to better understand this process of teacher decision-making about literacy instruction for their students with CSN, Ruppar et al. (2015) used teacher interviews and classroom observations to develop a possible theoretical model. They found a range of factors that impact teachers’ instructional decision-making
including teachers’ sense of self-efficacy and their early personal and professional experiences. The authors asserted that “teachers’ voices provide the essential link between theory, research, and implementation” as (general and special) education researchers and practitioners at all levels work towards a common understanding of where, when, and how students with complex support needs access literacy instruction and literate community (p. 223). Ruppar (2017) conducted an instrumental case study that included semi-structured interviews with instructional staff (one teacher and eight assistants) and 34 hours of observation in a self-contained instructional setting. The researcher focused on the ways that teachers’ beliefs are situated in past and present experiences and understandings of literacy and in contexts of attempted institutional change and accepted (effective or ineffective) classroom practices. These beliefs held by instructional staff impacted choices about and implementation of literacy instructional practices for students with CSN.

Literacy is much more than a discrete set of skills. Literacy is enacted and nourished in social interactions (Gee, 2001) and it “requires and creates a relationship (connection) with others” (Keefe & Copeland, 2011, p. 97). Research about literacy for students with and without CSN must, then, include focus not only on specific skill sets and instructional practices but on the multiple relationships in school settings within which those literacy practices occur. Keefe and Copeland included an emphasis on literacy as that which is the “collective responsibility” of everyone in literate communities, large or small (2011, p. 97).

**Teacher Decision-Making**

In her work as a teacher-researcher, Paley (1990) documented her re-education in the ways that learning and story were inextricably connected in the classroom lives of her preschool students. She described herself as “neither a good listener nor an able storyteller”
and as a “stranger in the classroom” (p. 15). In her day-to-day practice, Paley wanted to understand the meaning that children make of the classroom and what they “think about” when they are at school, but she realized that she had “grown distant from the thinking of children” (p. 15). Paley’s attempt to learn about learning by listening to the stories of the children and adults who were taking part in the learning process has been inspiration for my research study. Built upon the work that Ruppar and others have done to better understand the thinking and resulting instructional decision-making of teachers of students with CSN, my study examined, in depth, the stories of a group of these teachers whose voices may be the “essential” and missing link between research and classroom practice (Ruppar et al., 2015). This research study was designed to provide greater balance to an approach to research about best instructional practices for students with CSN that has grown distant from the thinking of the teachers of these students. My study focused on listening for teachers’ narratives about literacy in their lives and the lives of their students.

This research study was based upon a view of teachers (and human beings) as carriers of stories about students, instructional practices, classrooms, and schools that have impact on their day-to-day work with students. The goals of this study were to provide space for teachers of students with CSN to share their personal and professional stories about literacy and to analyze and “author” those narratives “in such a way that lives” of those in the entire school community are “changed for the better” (Carter, 1993, p. 11). This dissertation was conceived of as a first step in a longer-term research program that investigates the connections between the literacy narratives that special and general education teachers “live and tell” (Clandinin & Rosiek, 2007, p. 71) and the enactment of literacy, in the classroom,
with students who have complex support needs (Frank, 2013; Gubrium & Holstein, 2009; Kliwer, 2008).

**Methodological and Theoretical Approaches**

My research study suggested a methodological approach that is qualitative in nature because of the need to focus on insider (“emic”) understanding and multiple perspectives (Schwandt, 2015, p. 83). In the following section, I have expanded upon my reasoning for this approach and have outlined the theoretical lenses through which my study has been conceived and by which my data was constituted and perceived.

**Historic-Methodological**

Historically, research into approaches to literacy instruction for individuals with complex support needs have shown a strong tendency toward isolated skills instruction and quantitative approaches reflective of a positivist paradigm (Katims, 2000). This quantitative methodological approach has been at the center of the analysis of intervention effectiveness done by the National Reading Panel (2000), the What Works Clearinghouse, and by researchers whose focus was on literacy instruction for students with CSN (Ainsworth et al., 2016; Mims et al., 2012; Reichenberg, 2014). Insistence on “evidence-based practices” that are necessarily limited and limiting because of the definitional need to be “specific, narrow, measurable, and observable” (Creswell, 2015, p. 13) has constricted the perspective of the broader research program related to literacy instruction and outcomes for students with CSN. The highly valuable, yet narrowly focused, work done in quantitative studies has been incomplete without qualitative work that tells the rest of the story for teachers of students with CSN and, ultimately, for these students who continue to be denied access to “full literate community” (Kliwer et al., 2004).
Qualitative research, broadly, has focused on the messy, often contradictory, seemingly non-causal, non-predictive, and beautifully complex aspects of the human experience. This has been research that is less a reaction to the traditional hypothetico-deductive (positivist) approaches to research in psychology and education and more of a long-lost (harder to understand and to fit neatly into the family tree) relative birthed by Wilhelm Wundt in the early 20th Century (Marecek, 2003, p. 49). Wundt proposed an approach to psychological research that embraced methodologies both quantitative and qualitative in approach and design, depending on the question(s) at hand (p. 50). However, the qualitative “side” of Wundt’s formulation was largely ignored initially, and the focus of research in psychology and social sciences in America and Western Europe focused on “publicly replicable procedures” that allowed “little or no space for the exercise of personal judgment” (Eisner, 2003, p. 18). Willig (2013) defined qualitative inquiry as that which is focused on “meaning” and on the “quality and texture of experience, rather than with the identification of cause-effect relationships” (p. 8).

**Narrative Inquiry**

My proposed qualitative research study was conceived of as a narrative inquiry because of my strong sense, after 15 years as a special education teacher, that the stories that teachers carry into classrooms shape their work with students. Story-making, narrative, is a “primitive,” yet un-naïve human endeavor (Crites, 1971, p. 306). The teller makes conscious decisions about a story’s beginning and ending points and about the people and events included. The resulting story told and re-told inwardly and outwardly not only shapes subsequent actions but the way that the world is experienced (Crites, 1971, p. 304). Stories are not inherently good or bad, right or wrong. They are, however, reflective of the teller’s
personal and professional experiences and of the cultural and historical milieu in which they live and act. Frank (2013) said that “storytelling is less a way of reporting and more a process of discovery” (p. xvi) and that “in stories, the teller not only recovers her voice, she becomes a witness to the conditions that rob others of their voices” (pp. xx-xxi). Perhaps, in this study, the teacher-participant as the “teller not only recovers her voice,” she could become a stronger listener to voices too long unheard.

Because narrative inquiry requires an awareness on the part of the researcher that she is entering the stories of teacher-participants “in the midst of living and telling, reliving and retelling,” the literacy narratives recorded and analyzed as a part of this study were from the near or distant past (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20). In other studies of the literacy narratives of pre-service and in-service teachers, participants have been asked to recall and write and share letters about their early literacy learning in light of their learning about theories of teaching and learning (e.g., Ciuffetelli Parker, 2010), to write a literacy autobiography (e.g., Bokhorst-Heng et al., 2014; Campbell & Parr, 2012), to share their identities as readers as a way of elucidating decisions about reading instruction (e.g., Bernstein, 2014), and to recall home and school literacy experiences (e.g., MacPhee & Sanden, 2016). While there have been studies that have looked at a broader range of factors related to teacher decision-making about literacy instruction for students with complex support needs (e.g., Naraian, 2011; Ruppar et al., 2015), there has been an absence of studies looking at the literacy narratives of teachers who work with this student population.

**Theoretical**

For this study, I proposed several “lenses” in addressing the research questions. These were the theories (or structures) that have shaped my understanding of the phenomena to be
explored and the ways that I intended to move forward with that exploration (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993, p. 121). The following theoretical lenses provided the most comprehensive, yet focused, view of my approach to this study at this point in time: Narrative theory via a sociocultural lens; Teachers as Curriculum Makers (Craig, 2011); Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscapes (TPKL, Clandinin & Connelly, 1995); and Feminist Ethic of Care/Borderlands Theory (Gilligan, 1995, 2011; Noddings, 2013; Anzaldúa, 2012).

**Narrative/Sociocultural Lens.** Most attempts at conceptualizing sociocultural theory begin with Lev Vygotsky whose work focused on child development and learning within social and historical contexts (de Valenzuela, 2014, p. 299). For the purposes of this research study, my interest has been in the ways that learning is “mediated by language and other symbol systems” (John-Steiner & Mahn, 1996, p. 191). Vygotsky and Luria (1994) asserted that the “the child’s psychological development” and the child’s “adaption to the environment is achieved by social means” (p. 116). These social means are internalized or “turned to” the individual child when the child begins to look within (for an internal mediator; i.e., a memory of a word, a sequence that can help with the task) instead of looking to an adult in the room (the external mediator) (p. 119). “The word intrudes into the child’s perception” in a way that focuses (and limits) aspects of that which is experienced by sense organs and that creates “new (artificially introduced and mobile) structural” cognition (p. 125).

One of these primary cognitive structures in humans is story. There seems to be a fundamental drive, in humans, to make meaning with story. We embody an inescapable narrator who wants to birth “a sense of order and meaning to the myriad details” in human experience (Murray, 2003, p. 98). A narrative approach to research assumes that “we live in a
storiied world” and that we are “shaped,” individually and collectively, by narratives that we hold and that are held about us (Murray, 2003, p. 95). Ricoeur (1991) described the inner drive or proclivity to create a story (or stories) out of our lives as the “pre-narrative quality of human existence” (p. 434). He characterized human life “as an activity and a desire in search of a narrative” (p. 434) and argued that “life is no more than a biological phenomenon as long as it is not interpreted” (p. 432). Narratives may or may not be factual but express a truth or “logic” that is meaningful to the individual teller. They also, generally, have the dual quality of being situated in time and of being “causal.” Narratives are descriptive of a string of events that lead, relatively logically, from beginning to end (Murray, 2003, p. 98).

Building on the work of Vygotsky and disciples, Bruner described the “cultural tool kits” or the “cultural products, like language and other symbolic systems” that “mediate thought and place their stamp on our representations of reality” (Bruner, 1991, p. 3). He described the narrative tool kit as that which helps human beings to build relative cohesion out of “the rich and messy domain of human interaction” (p. 4). Bruner saw narrative as a means for the transmission of “folk psychology,” those stories that share what it is to be human within a given cultural context (Bruner, 1994, p. 57) and asserted that “we learn our culture’s folk psychology early, learn it as we learn to use the very language we acquire and to conduct the interpersonal transactions required in communal life” (p. 35). In other words, cultural narratives shape who we are and how we act and are concretized within “historically rooted institutions” that are meant to “enforce” those cultural stories and practices (p. 57).

**Curriculum Research and Teacher Experience/Knowledge (Clandinin & Connelly).** The work of Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly, rooted in Deweyan philosophy, took an approach to curriculum studies and educational research that focused on
the personal experiences of teachers and on ways of listening to the voices of teachers. For
the purposes of this research study, their work provided a lens for understanding the
connection between teachers’ telling of the literacy narratives from their personal
experiences and those of their students with (or without) CSN and their thinking about
literacy instructional practices for students with CSN.

*Teachers as “curriculum makers”*. In the 1980s, Clandinin and Connelly, in their
work as educators of pre-service teachers and researchers, began to question the then (and
still) dominant view of curriculum as that which is “injected” into the typical school
classroom via the “conduit” of the teacher (Craig, 2011, p. 21). They argued against the idea
of curriculum as simply a “course of study” that is essentially the same regardless of the
classroom into which it is placed and saw curriculum, instead, as a “course of life” shaped
and enacted within the intersecting lives of teacher and children in a specific place and time
(Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 392). Curriculum was “an account of teachers’ and students’
lives together in schools and classrooms” and teachers were at the center of “the curriculum
process” (p. 392). This early work by Connelly and Clandinin led them to questions about
teacher knowledge. In other words, if teachers are at the center of the process of curriculum
making, what are the forms and bases of knowledge that teachers were, day-by-day, using to
create curriculum within their classrooms?

*Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscapes (TPKL)*. TPKL emerged from
Clandinin and Connelly’s (1995) deep questioning of the ways that teachers’ knowledge was
shaped by their work in classrooms and schools. They formulated a “landscape” defined by
sacred, secret, and cover stories. Sacred stories are developed by researchers, policy makers,
and school leadership and are “funneled” into the professional landscape with the expectation
that teachers will enact or implement those stories, altering their own and children’s lives (p. 11). Clandinin and Connelly conceptualized classrooms as “safe places” where the secret (or hidden) stories of the individual teacher’s practical knowledge is enacted (1996, p. 25). When teachers crossed the boundary from classroom to common professional spaces, they told “cover stories” that “fit within the acceptable range of the story of school” within their work community (p. 25).

Because of the enactment of accountability legislation beginning in 2001, general education classrooms in the United States have been less “secret” than in the 1980s and 1990s when Clandinin and Connelly were working in the Canadian classrooms documented in their work. However, the classrooms where the participants in my research study enacted literacy were still “free from scrutiny, where,” for better or worse, “teachers are free to live stories of practice” (1995, p. 13). This research study began to update and extend Clandinin and Connelly’s (1996) model of TPKL. This model provided a rich metaphor for “placing” the stories of special education teachers whose work has been often undervalued and misunderstood by teacher-peers, administrators, and, occasionally, by themselves (Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2018). This research study addressed a gap in the TPKL model by looking at what I tentatively call the “holy” (i.e., that which makes whole) stories of teachers’ own literacy experiences that are, consciously or unconsciously, carried into relationships with students, colleagues, and supervisors. Akin to but pre-dating narratively the “secret stories” of that which happens in the “safe place” of the classroom (Clandinin & Connelly, 1996, p. 25), this research study sought to understand the stories of teachers’ own development into literate beings and their work as gatekeepers to literate community and enactors of the story that is school.
Feminist Ethic of Care (Noddings/Gilligan) in the Borderlands (Anzaldúa). Carol Gilligan worked with Lawrence Kohlberg at Harvard on Kohlberg’s theoretical work on the stages of moral reasoning (Sigelman & Rider, 2018, p. 408). Her emerging dis-ease, in the context of that work, with a theoretical framework that made the “rights-based” moral reasoning of boys normative and the “responsibility-based” moral reasoning of girls problematic led to her work on women’s development and “voice” (Gilligan, 1982, p. 21). Gilligan differentiated between a feminine ethic of care and a feminist ethic of care. A feminine ethic of care, as described by Gilligan, was defined by “special obligations and interpersonal relationships” and traditional patriarchal values of “selflessness or self-sacrifice” (1995, p. 122). This traditional ethic was “premised on an opposition between relationships and self-development” (p. 122). Gilligan centered a feminist ethic of care in “connection” with others and “as primary and seen as fundamental in human life” (p. 122). A feminist ethic of care is grounded in the recognition of the ways that “human lives are interwoven in a myriad of subtle and not-so-subtle ways” (p. 122). Gilligan emphasized the importance of “hearing a relational voice as a new key for psychology and politics” (p. 125). This listening for voice within the context of relationships in schools and other research settings has been vital to individuals with complex support needs and to those committed to hearing. Without this stringent or “severer listening” (Rich, 1978, p. 75), students with CSN have continued to be denied access to meaningful communication with non-disabled peers (Ruppar et al., 2011) and their teachers have continued to be seen as caretakers who are outside of the educational vision of what school has been for students without CSN and should be for all students (Ruppar, Roberts, & Olson, 2018).
Nel Noddings, philosopher of education and professor at Stanford University, started her career as a secondary mathematics teacher and a school administrator (Stone, 2018, n.p.). Her work included significant theoretical focus on the relational ethic of care. Noddings (2013) held that caring “requires some action in behalf of the cared-for” (p. 10) and that, although the caring can be seen by outside observers, “the essential elements of caring are located in the relation between the one-caring and the cared-for” (p. 9). Also, the caring relationship cannot be completed if, for some reason, the one cared-for cannot or will not receive the caring offered. Noddings maintained that the “fundamental truth” of “all caring involves engrossment” (p. 17). This engrossment, as described by the author, requires an attentional shift away from self and toward the one cared for. Engrossment is not a long-term selflessness or martyrdom (p. 17). It is a turning toward the other for the (short or long) time that the caring act requires. According to Noddings (2013), “to the cared-for, no act in his behalf is quite as important or influential as the attitude of the one-caring” (pp. 19-20).

While Gilligan provided a focus on listening within relationship as central to human connection and Noddings gave a model for the relationship between the one in the caregiver role and the one receiving care, Gloria Anzaldúa (2012) created a poetic and powerful relational metaphor out her experience as a Mestiza (a woman living in-between), growing up as one “straddling that tejas-Mexican border, and others,” psychological and spiritual (p. 19). She wrote out of her own experiences of the physical, linguistic, and psycho-sexual borders that existed in her own life but specified her understanding that “the Borderlands are present wherever two or more cultures edge each other” and “where the space between two individuals shrinks with intimacy” (p. 19). For Anzaldúa this Borderlands was a “third country,” a “narrow strip along a steep edge” and a place “in a constant state of transition”
This third country, this new place, was described as a place of hope and opportunity where “languages cross-pollinate and are revitalized; they die and are born” (p. 19). I see schools and classrooms as Borderland spaces where a predominantly white teacher-culture meets cultures of a vast multitude of languages, places, and abilities. It is a place of profound danger and opportunity, especially for students with CSN. Because this research study focused on the stories of teachers, I needed Anzaldúa’s voice to remind me of my embodiment of one particular cultural and linguistic space coming into conversation with participants embodying a generally similar space. I also embraced her voice as a corrective or a crying-out for the unique and beautiful linguistic abilities of students with CSN many of whom are still waiting for some teacher to meet them in that third country. A Feminist Ethic of Care in the Borderlands has been foundational not only for this research study that proposes a closer listening to the literacy narratives of teachers but as a means for thinking and talking about teaching students with CSN.

**Positionality**

As researcher, my work with teachers could have changed the curriculum, the “course of life” in classrooms, because of my presence. The enacted curriculum in its broadest sense was “not the same curriculum as it would be without the researcher” (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992, p. 393). For this reason, my narrative, my positionality, must not only be identified but seen as a part of the warp and weft of the co-constructed teacher literacy narratives that were at the center of this research study. My drive to listen to and better understand the literacy narratives of teachers of students with CSN was undergirded by multiple personal, practical, and intellectual (Maxwell, 2013, p. 24) stories.
Personal Story

I have been a school “insider” for a large part of my life. Both of my parents worked in public schools for their entire careers and I have been a special education teacher since 2006. I was also educated in public schools from first grade through twelfth grade. I have an emic view of the language, structures, and practices used in the schools and districts in which I have lived and worked in the states of Maryland, New Mexico, and Washington.

I was a second-career special education teacher. I still quite often find it profoundly surprising that I ever made the choice to spend more time than I already had (as a student) in public schools. In my work in multiple schools and programs, I have had many experiences of feeling that I was not seeing things in the ways that most others were seeing them. At this point, I have gained enough experience and trust in my work with students to realize that not only was this true, but that this experience of feeling like an outsider (with insider status) led me to try things that are beneficial to students and families. I was an insider whose “outsider” views led to positive outcomes for students with CSN.

Additionally, as a teacher, my primary focus on the needs of students and families has, at times, caused me to be judgmental of teachers who do not have, by my perception, that same focus. In this research study, I was aware of this tendency to want to blame teachers and to be excessively critical of what I have called “teacherliness.” I described teacherliness as that which comes from individuals who want to uphold the structures and outward trappings of school as it was for them because they happened to love school and knew how to “play school” well. I was acutely aware of this tendency toward critical judgment and blame of teachers.
Interest in Various Forms of Literate Community

My maternal grandmother showed a deep commitment to and love for the ritual narrative that was the weekly church service. She held the hymnal with care and thumbed through to find the pages that bound her to this communal activity. The hymnal told her when to sing or speak and the words to which she gave voice. Before I had awareness of the narrative at the foundation of Christian churches everywhere, I knew that the process of going to, participating in, and using the primary text therein (the hymnal) had profound meaning to this primary figure in my life. The hymnal was my first visual-tactile representation of the narrative of what a community might be and, more importantly, helped me to feel connected to people and meaning at times when both were less tangible. I still have and frequently refer to a copy of the hymnal as a comfort and as a point of reference for moments of confusion or questioning. I have believed that my longing for connection with others is possible, in large part, because I had this early center or place of storied community as a reference point. I have wanted students who have not had the experience of this type of center and grounding place to have at least some aspects of both in the school setting.

Practical Story

In 14 years of working as a teacher and as an IEP case manager, I have worked in a variety of self-contained (segregated) and inclusive classroom settings. Although my initial training provided me with skills and strategies to work with students with CSN, the “real world” of special education brought me, increasingly, into contact with students (mostly boys, often of African American or Hispanic descent) who were excluded from general education classrooms because of behaviors seen as non-conforming or threatening to the classroom teacher and/or peers. I have also often worked with students with autism who have
had behaviors equally puzzling and frightening, especially to teacherly teachers. Often, these students have had significant difficulties with reading and writing skills that pre-date and/or coincide with the onset of behavior issues. Among teachers and other school staff, it has been easy to look at these academic and behavioral difficulties as being situated within the student and to shape narratives and classroom/school structures around that assumption. I have disputed the fact of this essentialist view of disability and resist the ease of taking such a perspective.

Another aspect of my practical interest in this research study has had to do with really seeing and hearing students. I have believed that it does not matter that we (teachers) may or may not always have perfect intention or ability to see or hear or experience students in the way they want to be seen, heard, or experienced. The importance has been in the presence and the return, every single day, to a willingness to attempt to connect with students in some way. How could opportunities for ongoing, intentional conversations among teachers mitigate the disconnections and misunderstandings that can easily lead to exclusionary and limiting instructional practices for students with CSN?

**Intellectual Story**

Because of my social anxiety and because I was very fortunate to have access to texts and to positive literacy experiences at a young age, I was text-obsessed from an early age. I turned to books for solace and to try to figure out what was happening in the world around me. My first career was in public libraries. I loved the feeling of being surrounded by books and ideas (and working with colleagues who shared that love). I have an abiding intellectual interest in stories and myths and the ways that they shape our thinking and our lives. My work in public schools has had this one consistent thread and/or question: How could I
engage students, meaningfully, in stories and story structures and how could I provide the tools (conventional or unconventional) that they need to find and share their stories?

This interest in stories and in conventional and unconventional ways of “getting them out” has led to an abiding intellectual curiosity about memory and the ways that human beings structure and tell stories about where they come from, who they are, and how they see themselves in the world. I have been curious about the narrative qualities or structures that may be seen in the stories of school told by the teachers who took part in this research study.

**Purpose/Research Questions**

The purpose of this research study was to examine the literacy narratives of a group of teachers from separate classrooms who work with students with CSN in a small school district in the Southwestern United States. This inquiry into and analysis of these narratives provided clues to teacher decision-making about inclusion in/exclusion from literate community and literacy instruction for their students with CSN. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that “enhancing personal and social growth is one of the purposes of narrative inquiry” (p. 85). By taking a stance as researcher that was intentionally relational and that provided active attention to and “engrossment” (Noddings, 2013, p. 17) with individual and corporate literacy narratives, this study intended to “hold a place” for professional connection (and, possibly, growth) for one group of teachers that had the potential to positively impact their thinking about literacy instruction for students with CSN.

Through this research study I listened to the “stories lived and told” (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000, p. 20) of teachers of students with complex support needs by asking the following research questions:

What are the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs?
What do teachers’ literacy narratives reveal about their thinking about instructional practices?

**Definition of Terms**

For the purposes of my research study, I defined the key terms/phrases in the following way.

**Complex Support Needs**

The phrase “individuals with complex support needs” is a relatively recent term used to describe individuals who, in previous time periods may have been referred to as individuals with intellectual disability, moderate to severe disabilities, mental retardation, developmental disabilities, cognitive impairment, or any of many other past or present iterations that are not expressed in “people first language” (American Psychological Association, 2010, p. 76) and that are now accepted as deeply disabling if not offensive.

In the EBSCO PsychINFO database, the first cited use of the phrase “complex support needs” was from 2009. This nomenclature seems to have first been used in community agencies in Australia and the United States. Given the central place of supports in the American Association on Intellectual and Developmental Disabilities’ conceptual framework (Schalock et al., 2010) and the supports required across the lifespan regardless of physical and/or intellectual abilities, this is a phrase that seems deeply respectful of individual dignity and potentially helpful as a reset of mindset for educational professionals.

**Literacy**

In the context of my research study, literacy was defined as a set of text-based skills situated in a variety of possible technologies and meaningless when isolated from a specific
personal, communal, and/or historical context. This definition was based on the work of Graff (1987) and Keefe and Copeland (2011) as highlighted below.

Graff (1987) described literacy as “profoundly misunderstood” across human history and into the present time (p. 3). In his attempt to provide a historical review of literacy in Western culture, he outlined three definitional “tasks” that he saw as preliminary to any study of this topic (p. 3). The first task was to have a “flexible and reasonable” basic definition and for Graff this was “basic or primary levels of reading and writing” (p. 3). The second definitional task was to understand that literacy is a “technology or set of techniques for communication and for decoding and reproducing written or printed materials” (p. 4) and that these technologies are never stable. In other words, it is never appropriate to define the “what” (i.e., reading and writing) without an understanding of the “how” (e.g., interplay with shifting technologies). Finally, Graff’s third definitional piece was related to “where” and “with whom.” (p. 4). In other words, literacy involves “a complicated and sophisticated sociocultural process of interchange and interaction” (p. 5). Graff argued that any approach to studying literacy that does not include all three of these definitional aspects is limited and limiting to individuals outside of the norm (p. 5).

Keefe and Copeland’s (2011) definitional work extended, to the relational level, the importance of the framework within which access to literate activities and literacy instruction is provided. Not only are “all people capable of acquiring literacy” but that capability is based on a view of literacy as that which “requires and creates a relationship (connection) with others” and that is the “collective responsibility” of everyone in literate communities, large or small (p. 97).
**Comprehensive Literacy Instruction**

For the purposes of my research study, comprehensive literacy instruction referred to an approach to teaching literacy built upon the presumption that all students are readers and writers given appropriate, individualized instruction and supports (Copeland et al., 2018). Comprehensive literacy instruction for students with CSN includes all components of reading instruction indicated for typically developing learners (National Reading Panel, 2000) and adds a focus on assessment and instruction that places a vision of the student with CSN as a vital and contributing member of their literate communities at the center (Copeland et al., 2018, p. 14).

**Literacy Narratives**

For purposes of this research study, the literacy narratives are defined as any story told by teachers about their personal experience of literacy learning, literacy content/materials, or literate community. This included the teacher’s experiences as a literacy learner (at any age) or their experiences as a teacher of literacy for their students with or without CSN.
CHAPTER 2

Literature Review

The purpose of my research study was to examine the literacy narratives of a group of teachers from separate classrooms who work with students with CSN in a small school district in the Southwestern United States. This inquiry into and analysis of these narratives provided clues to teacher decision-making about inclusion in/exclusion from literate community and literacy instruction for their students with CSN. In this chapter, I provided a review of research studies that framed (and deepened) the rationale for my research study in the following areas: literacy instruction for students with CSN including factors that limit their access to that instruction and the importance of social/inclusive aspects of literacy; teachers as decision makers or “makers of curriculum” in their everyday work in classrooms and a model (TPKL, Clandinin & Connelly, 1995) that was developed to help explicate the contrast between efforts at systemic change and stagnancy in day-to-day practice in classrooms; and a Feminist Ethic of Care (Noddings, 2013; Rogers, 2016) as a relational tool for work with students with CSN and the teachers who work with them.

Literacy Instruction for Students with CSN

Students with CSN can make significant gains in literacy skills and are able to access the general curriculum when provided with comprehensive literacy instruction in ways that build connections with the larger literate community that is school. This section of my research review began with evidence of students’ success with literacy instruction, continued with studies describing the importance of access to literacy in socially inclusive settings, and concluded with a discussion of barriers to comprehensive literacy instruction and access to
the general curriculum. In this section, I provided a context for teachers’ thinking about literacy which is at the heart of my proposed research study.

**Effectiveness of Literacy Instruction (or Approaches to Literacy Instruction)**

There is a significant and growing research base demonstrating a positive impact of inclusive education and/or access to a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction on the ability of students with CSN to learn literacy skills (e.g., Allor et al., 2014; Browder et al., 2006; Hudson et al., 2013). In a search of the EBSCO Education Research Complete database for research studies focused on literacy instruction for students with CSN published within the past decade, I found 18 studies that included participants of a variety of grade levels (from Kindergarten through high school and post-secondary programs), that utilized an intervention (or interventions) seen as part of a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction, and that described interventions provided in general and special education settings. For the purposes of this review, I included studies that demonstrate either the effectiveness of implementing a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction and/or success in that implementation within the context of the general curriculum. I chose to highlight studies that focused on an aspect of literacy instruction often denied students with CSN (Ainsworth et al., 2016; Allor et al., 2018; Mims et al., 2012; Pennington et al., 2018), studies that embedded interventions within the general education curriculum (Roberts & Leko, 2013; Wood et al., 2015), studies that employed a shared story intervention (Mucchetti, 2013; Ruppar et al., 2017; Spooner et al., 2015), and one study that included adults learners with CSN as co-researchers within an inquiry about their own literacy practices (Morgan et al., 2015).
Beyond Sight Words

The studies presented in this section reflected an approach to literacy instruction for students with CSN that moved beyond limited and limiting teaching strategies that focus on discrete sets of skills such as sight word vocabulary or strictly functional (non-academic) content (Katims, 2000; Ruppar, 2015). Ainsworth et al. (2016) used a single-subject, multiple baseline design with a group of eight students to assess the effectiveness of a scripted literacy program to teach letter-sound correspondence. The researchers sought to add to evidence that supports the use of comprehensive literacy programs for individuals with ID instead of focusing on a sight-word approach. They found that students of middle school age with intellectual and complex communication needs made gains in learning letter-sound correspondence using an approach that accommodated for their specific communication needs. Additionally, the participants in this study (students aged 11 to 16) received their instruction in a small group setting, a type of setting generally used by teachers of literacy skills with students of all ages and abilities.

Ainsworth et al. (2016) showed the importance of including skills taught as a part of comprehensive approaches to literacy instruction despite the age, IQ level, and/or communication needs of the student (p. 174). In another study designed to use a more comprehensive, “text-centered” approach to literacy instruction, Allor et al. (2018, p. 474) used a single case, multiple baseline across levels design with 8 students with IQs between 40 and 63 and their teachers in two special schools in the American Southwest. Their purpose of this year-long study was to see if the researcher-designed comprehensive curriculum was effective for students with CSN and, significantly, to determine the feasibility of longer-term implementation as indicated by teachers and parents who took part in focus groups as a part
of this study. This team of researchers found that students showed growth in measures of word reading and decoding and growth in common, general curriculum-based measures of foundational literacy skills such as the Dynamic Indicators of Basic Early Literacy Skills (DIBELS). In their qualitative analysis, Allor et al. (2018) observed that teachers found implementation of the curriculum highly feasible and parents reported that their students showed greater interest in text-based activities at home after implementation of the curriculum.

In a study by Mims et al. (2012), 15 students with CSN were instructed by their special education teachers who were taught how to use scripted reading and writing lessons designed by researchers, adapted from the general curriculum, and vetted by a content area specialist. Teachers were also provided with instruction in use of appropriate response prompts (p. 416). Students were given pre- and post-intervention measures in acquisition of vocabulary, text comprehension, understanding of poetry (figurative language), and writing. Mims et al. (2012) found this intervention to be highly effective (effect size of 1.31 and 0.93 respectively) in areas of vocabulary and comprehension of familiar texts and moderately effective (effect size of at least 0.45) in comprehension of unfamiliar texts, understanding of poetry, and writing (p. 422).

Finally, Wood et al. (2015) established a positive relationship between interventions and increases in student ability to generate and answer questions about grade-level text. The researchers used a system of least prompts for question generation and asking questions, a graphic organizer for question generation and for understanding whether information was or was not in grade-level US History text, and a graphical cue to indicate when an answer to a question had already been read in text. Participants included two students who spent most of
their day in a self-contained classroom and one student who was in general education classes for most of the school day. Interventions were implemented in special education settings with a generalization assessment which took place in the general education setting with grade level peers (Wood et al., 2015).

**Embedded Interventions**

Through their multiple baseline design, Roberts and Leko (2013) assessed student-teacher dyads on use of an intervention to embed students’ work on functional goals with grade-level academic content. After researchers worked with instructional teams to identify academic/functional goals for each student that could be embedded in a grade-level adapted text, teachers were guided in their use of a task-analytic lesson plan that they used to help students meet those goals. The classroom teachers recruited to take part in this research study were also trained to be the primary interventionists. Data were collected on teacher fidelity to the lesson plan and student progress toward the goals that had been created. As a result, students showed at least some growth toward functional goals and teachers showed significant growth.

In a study addressing a generally overlooked component of a comprehensive approach to literacy instruction, Pennington et al. (2018) introduced a sentence writing intervention with three middle school students with moderate or severe disabilities. They investigated whether participants receiving explicit instruction in sentence writing could generalize those skills to journal writing activities. All three students made significant gains in sentence writing during the intervention phase of the study and all three were able to generalize their new skill (writing complete sentences) to journal writing with at least moderate success.
**Shared Story Reading**

Shared story reading describes a variety of interactive approaches used with emerging readers with and without CSN. This generally includes the reading aloud of an age-appropriate story with the provision of adaptations to the text and/or objects related to the text that allow the learner to interact with the reader (who may be an adult or a peer) (Hudson & Test, 2011, p. 34). Spooner et al. (2015) used a shared story intervention in conjunction with interactive technology (iPad®) to attempt to provide meaningful access to grade-level texts for elementary students with severe disabilities. They demonstrated the effectiveness of this technology-based intervention in helping students to build text-navigation and comprehension skills. Additionally, participants demonstrated the ability to generalize their learning of concepts of print such as understanding how to find author and title and that text is read or “tracked” from left to right.

Mucchetti (2013) looked at the effectiveness of shared reading strategies implemented by their teachers with four students (ages 5-6) with autism who had minimal verbal output. These students were enrolled in a nonpublic special education school created to meet the needs of students with autism. Interventions included the use of a structured approach to sharing stories and adapted books (e.g., books using simplified text, three-dimensional objects, and/or additional graphics). Students showed a significant increase in both engagement with texts and teachers during story sharing sessions (41-52% pre-intervention engagement versus 87-100% engagement post-intervention, p. 368) and in ability to accurately answer comprehension questions.

Ruppar et al.’s (2017) single-case design study used shared story reading of modified grade-level content in conjunction with constant time delay (prompting) that was embedded
within the general education setting. Before the implementation of this intervention, the student-participant was physically included in a high school general education classroom but was working on learning sight words and was not engaging with the curriculum to which the rest of the class had access. Their study was focused on finding an avenue to greater access to grade-level content and to meaningful interaction with peers for this student. The intervention used an adapted version of a grade level text, *The Odyssey*, that addressed the student’s communication needs and that was reviewed by the general education (classroom) teacher to ensure that key content was included. Instruction in use of the adapted text was delivered by a special education teacher with whom the students had developed a good rapport and during “natural opportunities” in the course of the regular English Language Arts class, typically during times when all students were doing independent work (p. 56). The combined use of shared reading, embedded instruction, and time delay allowed this high school student with CSN to make gains in vocabulary building, comprehension, and, most significantly, in engagement with a highly complex grade level text in her classroom community.

**Co-researchers**

In Morgan et al.’s (2015) study, three young adults with intellectual disability were provided with instruction in research skills that they could then use to investigate their own uses of literacy across their everyday lives. The first author trained one young adult who then trained the second “research-partner” (p. 440). The second participant trained the third and the first young adult to receive the training took on the role of lead researcher. The cyclical nature of this project required participants to be trainers as well as learners (p. 454). The
authors credited this approach as a large part of the growth shown, by all three young adults, in conceptual knowledge and research-related skills.

**Importance of Inclusion in Literate Community**

For all students, learning occurs at the intersection of a place (the classroom or context) and the instructional content or curriculum (Jackson et al., 2008). For students with CSN, learning (especially learning that provides access to literate community) is positively impacted by access to appropriate tools and instruction within an inclusive classroom setting (Kliewer, 2008). In this section, I described several studies that highlight the gains in literacy skills made by individuals with CSN as a result of their access to the general curriculum in inclusive settings. These studies took the form of individual case studies (Erickson et al., 1997; Ryndak et al., 1999), a year-long exploratory study of the impact of providing a literacy-rich environment to preschoolers with significant disabilities (Katims, 1991), an ethnographic study of kindergarten and preschool children in inclusive classrooms (Kliewer et al., 2004), and autobiographical accounts of access to literacy instruction and interaction across the lifespan (Forts & Luckasson, 2011).

For two students with CSN, family advocacy and staff buy-in led to inclusion in general education settings and to outcomes unseen in self-contained settings (Ryndak et al., 1999; Erickson et al., 1997). Ryndak et al. (1999) sought to understand the impact of inclusion on one young woman with significant disabilities and to document instructional and social/emotional differences as this student moved from a segregated school setting to a fully inclusive one. “Melinda” was included in a fully inclusive program during her time in high school (after 10 years of special education services in self-contained settings). She showed a marked decrease in the inappropriate behaviors that had been a primary concern for her
instructional team (including her parents) and an increase in literacy (especially writing) and other skills that, in the words of her father, were “a thousand times better” that when she was in a self-contained setting (p. 18). Erickson et al. (1997) conducted a two-year qualitative case study involving “Jordan” (a student with severe speech and physical impairments) that included 200 observation hours, unstructured interviews, and document review in the first year and classroom visits, document review, and interviews in the second year. The authors justified their choice of a qualitative design as a way to gain a more complete picture of the student’s progress in literacy and communication skills. They identified Participatory Action Research and Collaborative Research as the theoretical bases for their work with school staff (p. 143). Jordan showed improvement in literacy and communication skills across the two-year period and researchers and teaching staff worked together on a number of interventions to improve Jordan’s access to text and to writing activities (p. 149).

Katims (1991) investigated the impact on preschool students with significant disabilities of having access to a literacy-rich classroom environment. Katims worked with a treatment group of 14 students who were in a classroom with a highly accessible and engaging classroom library, daily storybook readings, and a developmentally appropriate writing center staffed with a supportive (trained) adult. The control group received none of these literacy “extras.” Both groups continued to follow the school-wide curriculum. Katims gave a pre- and post-test of concepts of print assessment and found a statistically significant increase in scores for the experimental group. Also, he noted positive changes in writing behaviors within the experimental group. Kliewer et al. (2004) asked how preschoolers and kindergarten students with moderate to significant disabilities were “supported as full, competent citizens” in a “dynamic literate community” (p. 377) and what were the potential
barriers to acceptance? The research team observed nine classrooms in five different schools over the course of two years. Kliewer et al. (2004) found that teachers need to “assume the competence of children with disabilities” (p. 382), believe in the narrative abilities of all children (p. 384), make multiple literacies available (p. 387), and transform children’s strengths into “literate opportunities” and texts (p. 393).

Ann Forts (Forts & Luckasson, 2011) had access to an inclusive setting relatively late in her K-12 educational career. She attended an inclusive high school when her family moved from New Jersey to New Hampshire and Forts benefitted from more extensive access to the curricular and extracurricular activities of a typical high school student (p. 123). For Forts, reading and writing were not purely academic pursuits. As a student, she was motivated to learn how to read and write so that she could “build and enhance relationships” with family and friends (Forts & Luckasson, 2011, p. 123). In fact, Forts initiated a long-standing friendship with her co-author by writing and passing a note during a meeting that both were attending (p. 121). Forts described the long process and struggle required for her, an individual with intellectual disability, to become literate. But she seemed to have never doubted that she would gain the skills needed to connect with others and maintain the friendships that were so important and motivating to her. Like the account shared by Forts in Forts and Luckasson (2011), other first-person accounts of individuals with intellectual disability or with CSN who were highly successful when given access to comprehensive literacy instruction in the midst of an inclusive school or community setting began with a presumption of the importance of that instruction regardless of “label” (e.g., Savarese & Savarese, 2012; White & Morgan, 2012).
Barriers to Access to Comprehensive Literacy Instruction

Advances in legislation and educational policy and legal definitions of frameworks such as least restrictive environment (LRE) have generally benefitted students identified as requiring special education services. However, school implementation of LRE and other policies continue to allow students with CSN to be denied access to instruction in reading and writing in classroom settings with high expectations for communication and with sharing of broader cultural texts and conversations (Ryndak et al., 2014). Because the LRE for any given student with CSN is determined by members of an individualized education plan (IEP) team with varying degrees of power and voice (Ruppar & Gaffney, 2011) and because general and special education teachers often show discrepancy in their understanding of LRE (Dymond et al., 2007), decisions about student access to general curriculum and/or to inclusive educational settings seemed to rely more on factors other than student strengths and needs. The LRE is widely interpreted as allowing for a continuum of general education and alternative settings and, as a result, it “codifies and sanctions segregated educational placements” that have been “institutionalized by states and districts” (Ryndak et al., 2014, p. 66). The studies described below demonstrate the ways that district, school, and teacher enactment of policies such as LRE and alternative assessment have resulted in limited access to meaningful and comprehensive literacy instruction and access to literate community for students with CSN.

The majority of students with CSN are placed in classrooms where they spend significant amounts of their time separate from their typically developing peers. Kleinert et al. (2015) found that students who are eligible to take an alternative statewide assessment are overwhelmingly more likely to be placed in segregated school settings. The researchers
surveyed 15 states and almost 40,000 students to determine the extent to which students taking an alternative assessment based on alternative achievement (AA-AAS) were taught, primarily, in inclusive classroom settings. They also looked for correlation in the data between student placement and one or more of the following factors: “communicative competence,” use of an alternative or augmentative communication (AAC) system, reading skill level, and math skill level (p. 316). The authors found that 93% of students who took an AA-AAS were placed in self-contained setting with 7% served in general education or resource room classrooms. Additionally, the authors found an overall positive correlation between student reading and math skills and likelihood that they would be placed in a more inclusive setting. Students who used an AAC system were more likely to be excluded from inclusive school settings.

Despite research studies demonstrating (including those cited above) students with CSN showed growth in literacy skills when given access to a range of instructional opportunities, researchers have documented a continued lack of meaningful access to comprehensive literacy instruction and inclusive literate community for students with CSN. Roberts et al. (2018) found that “administrators were not able to articulate specific instructional practices demonstrated by teachers of students with severe disabilities, even when asked specifically about instructional practices” (p. 14). In another study focusing on practices within classrooms serving students with CSN, Ruppar (2015) found that most literacy instruction took place in self-contained classrooms with teachers working one-to-one with students and the most frequent literacy topic was the challenging behavior of students (in the form of social stories). Ruppar (2015) also observed that the most common
instructional materials were picture symbols and worksheets/workbooks and the most frequent literacy task was vocabulary development (pp. 239-240).

Ruppar, Fisher, et al. (2018) extended the research described above by developing and piloting a measure to evaluate literacy contexts, materials, and instructional content for students with severe disabilities. Their findings were similar to some of the trends suggested in this analysis of research studies. First, in Ruppar, Fisher, et al.’s observations, the most frequent instructional configuration was one-to-one instruction (50% of time) (2018, p. 201). Additionally, they found that regardless of setting, the “activity leader” for literacy instruction was a “specialized” or independent (not general education) teacher over 60% of the time (p. 201). Ruppar, Fisher, et al. (2018) discovered that when students received instruction in general education settings, they were exposed to a wider array of “literacy forms” (or media formats) and that “the presence of peers without disabilities” increased the probability of gaining access to grade-level appropriate literacy content (p. 204).

**Teachers as Decision Makers**

Clandinin and Connelly (1992) described their work of listening to teachers’ stories as a way “to demonstrate the embeddedness of teachers’, students’, and researchers’ knowledge in the classroom making of curriculum” (p. 391). Their emerging research program in the 1980s and 1990s moved their work in curriculum studies from the predominant view in the field of seeing teachers as “conduits” of curriculum (p. 369) to “seeing teachers as knowers and doers in the educational enterprise” (Craig, 2011, p. 21). Clandinin and Connelly (1992) moved from a more traditional view of curriculum studies as that which is developed outside of the context of the classroom and delivered into the classroom through the teacher to an approach that insisted on the primacy of teachers’
experiences (inside and outside of the classroom) and decision making as the interact with
students and academic content. I acknowledged that the topic of teacher decision making has
been examined through many different theoretical lenses (Borko & Shavelson, 1990; Fang,
1996; Ruppar et al., 2015; Siuty et al., 2018). However, for the purposes of this research
study, teacher decision making will be described through this lens of curriculum making as
described by Connelly and Clandinin (1988; see also Clandinin & Connelly, 1992), and
Craig (2012). This was a view of decision making that placed teachers’ personal experiences
in classrooms (including their experiences with and perceptions about students) at the center
their work with students (Connelly & Clandinin, 1988).

In a study with two teachers of students with CSN who were using the same
comprehensive literacy instructional program (*From MeVille to WeVille*) in separate
classrooms, Bock and Erickson (2015) discovered that engagement and outcomes for
students were different because of the teachers’ enacted beliefs about teaching practice. The
authors found that a teaching approach that was primarily teacher-directed and that focused
on discrete sets of literacy-related skills resulted in less student engagement than an approach
that included “student-centered, interactive methods” and a focus on “intrinsic motivation” of
students (p. 139). Teachers’ beliefs about teaching literacy and about their students’ abilities
and/or needs was reflected in their instructional approach even when using the same
curriculum materials. Similarly, Hintz (2017) found that teacher beliefs about students’
reading ability, student responsibility, and students’ learning differences could be seen in
teachers’ approach to teaching the social studies content to students with and without
disabilities. Through the use of classroom observations and individual interviews, the author
found that teachers’ beliefs about students, literacy, and the social studies content impacted
their decision making in the classroom. For example, one teacher who participated in the study intentionally planned for her students with significant reading deficits to use primarily visual supports and to not engage with small or large parts of the text in a meaningful way. This teacher “assumed that students with low reading levels could not be expected to do the same work or learn the same content as other students” and she planned her instructional time accordingly (p. 283).

Ruppar et al. (2015) sought to understand how teacher beliefs and the instructional setting in which they teach shape decision-making about literacy instruction for their students with severe disabilities. The researchers recruited four special education teachers with at least three years of teaching experience. They then asked each teacher to identify two students, one who was seen as being able to successfully access literacy instruction and one who was seen as limited in ability to access content. The authors used a variety of qualitative data collection methods to study these teacher-student triads. Using a grounded theory analytical approach, Ruppar et al. (2015) posited a “preliminary theoretical framework of teacher decision making” (p. 217). Ruppar et al. (2015) described a veteran special education teacher who “did not anticipate that students with severe disabilities would benefit from learning literacy skills” (p. 218). Also, all of the teachers in their study reported the importance of communication “as a focus of their literacy teaching,” but “few authentic opportunities” for student communication were observed in two classrooms (p. 219).

In eight months as a participant observer in an inclusive first grade classroom, Naraian (2011) found that the teacher’s (likely unintentional) decision making about classroom structures resulted in a silencing of students who were expressing voice through silences and behavior (p. 259). The teacher’s emphasis in her classroom of “helpers” (with
most helping performed by non-disabled students and adults) inadvertently silenced the voices of some students. “Stephanie,” the lead teacher in the classroom in which Naraian conducted her ethnographic study attempted a “speaking for” her students with complex communication needs that facilitated “voice” in structured, teacher-led activities but that limited peer-to-peer interaction and meaningful inclusion in the classroom community at large (p. 257). In another study looking at the ways that teachers’ understanding or “stories” of key concepts such as access to the general curriculum, Timberlake (2014) found that teachers regularly made decisions about curriculum and instructional setting based on their perception and/or assessment of student skills and abilities, their beliefs about school and the teaching profession, and conflicts about what it means, practically, to provide access to the general curriculum inside or outside of the general education setting. Through her application of a “street level bureaucracy” theoretical lens, the author highlighted the need to see access to the general education curriculum as more than a set of practices to be implemented but as a “decision-making process that requires teachers to continually make complex value-laden decisions about children and youth” (p. 94).

Teachers of students with CSN have also shown resistance to and misunderstanding about providing their students with instruction based “essential elements” of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) (Petersen, 2016, p. 23). Petersen (2016) found that teachers expressed deep ambivalence about this requirement to teach from the academic standards required for all students. They shared concerns about feeling that they had to make either/or instructional choices between academic content and functional skills (p. 26). More significantly, the researcher found that teachers had a limited understanding of what curriculum access for their students could or should be (e.g., one participant expressed an
opinion that teaching focused on items from the alternative assessment constituted access to
the CCSS, p. 24) and they cited lack of access to resources (including time to collaborate
with general education teachers) as limiting their ability to expand their understanding. In her
discussions with teachers of students with CSN, Petersen (2016) uncovered an ambiguity
about access to standards-based instruction and a suggested pattern of teacher decision-
making biased toward teaching life skills as opposed to “those core things” (p. 26).

McGlynn-Stewart (2014) followed six early career teachers over three years through
a process of multiple semi-structured interviews, classroom observations, and review of
literacy-related documents being used in the participants’ classrooms. The researcher asked
how the early literacy experiences of beginning teachers impacted their work with students
and how these teachers modeled themselves after teachers from their pasts. McGlynn-Stewart
(2014) found that all six participants named and described one or two teachers from their
early school experiences who were models for their own approach to being with students in
the classroom. Three participants identified themselves as having struggles with literacy
skills in their early academic careers and the teachers they chose as models were those who
supported them in ways that made them more successful in the classroom. The other three
participants identified themselves as very successful early literacy learners and chose as
models those teachers who provided them with enriched and engaging literacy experiences.
There were two key findings from this study by McGlynn-Stewart. First, teacher practice in
the area of literacy instruction and intervention was more closely linked to the teachers’ early
classroom experiences and the approaches of their teacher-role models than to instruction
provided in their teacher preparation program. Second, those participants who described
themselves as struggling literacy learners as young children were “more focused on
understanding and meeting the needs of diverse learners in their classrooms and on
developing as literacy teachers” than the participants who were more easily successful as
early literacy learners (p. 87).

**Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscape (TPKL)**

Researcher Cheryl Craig described her use of narrative inquiry to understand how
“teachers’ personal practices shape and are shaped in context” (Craig, 2012, p. 91). As a
student at the University of Alberta, Craig’s doctoral work was supervised by Jean Clandinin.
She also completed postdoctoral work with Michael Connelly at the University of Toronto
(Craig, 2019). Craig described the emergence of ideas about “teacher-as-curriculum maker,”
TPKL, and use of a narrative inquiry approach as “fruits of the same research program”
developed by Connelly and Clandinin (1990). Their narrative approach to teachers’
experiences in classrooms and schools was always intended as a means to better understand
the landscape in which teachers exist as both active and passive players within a given school
culture. I will highlight two studies by Craig (2012, 2014) that provide examples of teacher
decision making within a complex landscape of school reform, district and school leadership,
and teachers’ classroom experiences.

Craig (2012) conducted a narrative inquiry of teachers’ experiences at a school
undergoing curriculum reform in the area of literacy. She focused on one teacher’s story in
the midst of a cohort of general education literacy instructors who were asked to implement
in their classrooms a new workshop model that was to be supported by an instructional
consultant and the school principal. The teacher and her colleagues saw themselves as having
a “deficit” (p. 99) in their instructional practice as a result of the way that the “sacred story”
(Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 11) of instructional reform was shared and implemented by
school leadership. The teacher at the center of Craig’s (2012) study felt a loss of community and “camaraderie” (p. 99). More importantly, this teacher described “an oppressive mindset” within her instructional cohort that had “significantly shaped what they knew and could do in discretionary classroom spaces where they met face-to-face with” their students (p. 100).

Another study by Craig (2014) focused on the six-year experience of a beginning teacher in the same school setting described above (Craig, 2012). This teacher entered, as a first-year teacher, a school setting embroiled in conflict around literacy curriculum and leadership styles. She exited the school six years later as an emerging expert in literacy instruction and mentor teacher because of continued turmoil around curriculum, high-stakes testing, and constant (almost yearly) changes in school leadership p. 110). In the stories shared by Craig’s (2014) teacher-participant, the common theme was “productive human relationships and interactions” (p. 108). However, the “sacred stories” of curriculum reform, accountability testing, and effective leadership undermined these relationships and led “Anna,” the teacher at the core of this study, to develop a “cover story” by which she could leave her position (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 11).

In their study of schools as places of teacher induction, lisahunter et al. (2011) conducted multiple semi-structured interviews with 12 teachers who had recently completed teacher training and who were beginning their careers. Participants were asked about their experiences in relationship to the places in schools in which they worked. Also, they were asked to photograph those places in their assigned schools to elicit responses to interview questions. The authors highlighted the workplace narratives of two first-year teachers and the ways that their emerging identities as teachers were “constructed in workplace relations and in the place of the staffroom” (p. 36). This study underscored the building of the knowledge
landscapes for these two teachers through their interactions with more experienced colleagues in the specific spaces of which a school consists. lisahunter et al. (2011) argued for a revision of the theoretical framework of TPKL that includes attention to not just the stories through which professional knowledge is built (i.e., sacred, cover, and secret) but that includes attention to the ways that physical spaces “tell” beginning teachers what is valued in a particular classroom or school.

**Feminist Ethic of Care**

Noddings’s (2013) conceptualization of an Ethic of Care as a potential foundation for student engagement and school reform included the following four elements: dialogue, practice of the skills of caring, confirmation of students and staff as persons capable of positive change, and the creation of school structures that facilitate caring. Rogers (2016) highlighted this approach to care as that which is “learnt and, importantly, as improvable” (p. 35). For example, confirmation of all students as literate beings (regardless of present skill level and/or label) requires a more inclusive vision of literacy instruction. Additionally, if, as feminist ethicists assert, we all share “the commonality of human vulnerability, not just at the beginning and end of life, but as a constant and fundamental condition” (p. 35), there are other forms of this commonality such as literate-ness that require interdependence. For my research study, I saw a Feminist Ethic of Care as a potentially powerful framework for understanding teachers’ literacy narratives and, further, for emphasizing interdependence and the relational nature of literacy and literacy instruction. In this section, I highlighted three studies that place aspects of an ethic of care at the center of their work with students.

Worthy et al. (2012) conducted a year-long ethnographic study of one teacher in a school in the Southwest United States. The focus of their study was the “restorying” of the
reputations of two students who had entered the second grade with significant behavioral and/or academic difficulties (p. 568). The researchers used participant observation during the literacy instructional period of one classroom teacher who was chosen for this study because of her own reputation as a master teacher who was willing to find ways to reach students who had not been successful in other classrooms. Thirty-eight observational opportunities were videotaped, and the researchers also conducted multiple semi-structured interviews and made notes about many informal conversations with the classroom teacher. Worthy et al. (2012) framed their work in part on Noddings’ formulation of an ethic of care. In their teacher-participant, the authors found an expert in Noddings’ notion of “confirmation” or the ability to “attribute the best possible motive consonant with reality to the cared-for” and to “reveal” to that individual “an attainable image that is lovelier than that manifested” in the individual’s “present acts” (Noddings, 2013, p. 193). Worthy et al. (2012) highlighted an approach to listening (and teaching) with previously unsuccessful readers and writers that helped them to see themselves (and to be seen in the classroom community) as engaged with and deeply important to the learning of the whole class.

Cassidy and Bates (2005) sought to understand what a school environment built around an ethic of care would look like in function and in student outcomes. They focused their work on a school in British Columbia that was built around the needs of high school students who were involved in the juvenile justice system (for offenses ranging from attempted murder to possession of illegal drugs). Some of the students served by this small alternative school were required to be at the school because of court-ordered attendance and others had been referred because of the school’s reputation for success with students who had not had success in any other setting. Additionally, the authors reported that most of the
students had diagnosed learning disabilities, mental health diagnoses, and/or substance abuse issues (p. 71). Prior to this study, the lead author had been involved with the school and wanted to know what accounted for her experience of a school environment that “exuded peacefulness and warmth” (p. 72) especially given the backgrounds of the students served there. She gathered a team of researchers to conduct an ethnographic case study that included extended periods of participant observation, interviews with students, administrators, and staff, and a review of documents and other material culture found in the school setting. Cassidy and Bates (2012) described a small, cohesive teaching staff who saw their role not just as teachers but as “carers” who defined caring as developing a supportive learning environment, building positive relationships with students, being respectful, making the curriculum work for all students, “being empathetic and nonreactive,” and working in support of the students’ short- and long-term well-being (p. 82).

Sosa-Provencio’s (2017) work in recording and understanding the testimonios of two Mexican/Mexican-American teachers of primarily Mexican/Mexican-American students was done to develop a Mexicana/Mestiza Ethic of Care that is overtly political and that situates education “as an ethical calling toward recovering dignity and equity” for students of color (p. 651). The author used a methodology described as Critical Feminist Testimonio that included “participants as co-researchers and theorists making meaning out of individual and collective” experiences (p. 654). This approach to research involved multiple individual interview and focus group sessions that included opportunities for participants to review transcripts and other data as meaning-making and analysis unfolded. Sosa-Provencio and her teacher/co-researcher, “Rosa,” constructed a model that shares Rosa’s sense of being La Encargada (the one responsible) for “constructing curriculum and pedagogy rooted” in the
“collective history and continued struggles of her students” (p. 661). For the purposes of my research study, Sosa-Provencio (2017) provided a necessary critique of an ethic of care, situated in the dominant (White) culture, that is unwittingly (or otherwise) “colorblind” and/or “apolitical” (p. 652). Through her work, Sosa-Provencio found in her co-researcher Rosa, an embodiment of a Critical Feminist Ethic of Care which holds “teaching as the responsibility to carry education as a reclamation site of dignity” where students are “challenged and cherished into loving” themselves, finally (p. 661).

**Conclusion**

The literature reviewed in this chapter focused on concerns about (and lack of understanding of) teacher decision making about literacy instruction for their students with CSN by placing these concerns in the context of literacy instruction for students with CSN (e.g., Mims et al., 2012; Roberts & Leko, 2013; Ruppar et al., 2017) including factors that limited their access to that instruction (e.g., Kleinert et al., 2015; Ruppar, Fisher, et al., 2018) and the importance of inclusion in literate community for individuals with CSN (e.g., Forts & Luckasson, 2011; Katims, 1991; Kliewer et al., 2004; Ryndak et al., 1999). Next, I included literature about teachers as decision makers or “makers of curriculum” in their everyday work in classrooms (e.g., Naraian, 2011; Ruppar et al., 2015; Timberlake, 2014) and a model (TPKL) that was developed to help explicate the contrast between efforts at systemic change and stagnancy in day-to-day practice in classrooms (e.g., Craig, 2012; lisahunter et al., 2011). Finally, I discussed studies that used a Feminist Ethic of Care as a theoretical lens for teachers’ work with students (e.g., Cassidy & Bates, 2012; Sosa-Provencio, 2017; Worthy et al., 2012).
My research study, as described in Chapter 3, gathered the personal and professional literacy narratives of teachers of students with CSN to better understand teachers’ thinking about literacy instructional practices and teacher decision-making about inclusion in/exclusion from literate community and literacy instruction for their students with CSN.
CHAPTER 3

Method

In Chapter One, I looked at the importance of comprehensive literacy instruction in inclusive school settings for students with complex support needs (CSN) and the ways that teacher decision-making impacted provision (or not) of access to this type of instructional opportunity. Ruppar et al. (2015) highlighted the need to listen to “teachers’ voices” as the “essential link between theory, research, and implementation” (p. 223). This “essential link” was at the heart of my research study in the form of teachers’ telling about literacy and literacy instruction through narratives of their personal experiences and their experiences as instructors of students with CSN.

Purpose

The purpose of this research study was to examine the literacy narratives of teachers of students with CSN who work, individually, in primarily self-contained settings across a small school district in the Southwestern United States. This research study into and analysis of these narratives was intended to provide clues to teacher decision-making about literacy instruction for their students with CSN. Clandinin and Connelly (2000) asserted that “enhancing personal and social growth is one of the purposes of narrative inquiry” (p. 85). By taking a stance as researcher that was intentionally relational and that provided active attention to and “engrossment” (Noddings, 2013, p. 17) with individual and corporate literacy narratives, this study intended to “hold a place” for professional connection (and, possibly, growth) for one group of teachers that had the potential to positively impact their thinking about literacy instruction for students with CSN.
**Research Questions**

The research questions for this study are as follows:

What are the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs?

What do teachers’ literacy narratives reveal about their thinking about instructional practices for students with CSN?

Table 1 lists each question and the types of data collection used to address each question.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Research questions</th>
<th>How answered?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>What are the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs?</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews (pre- and post-focus group); focus groups; post-interview and post-focus group written input from participants via email (optional); narratively structured member checks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>What do teachers’ literacy narratives reveal about their thinking about instructional practices?</td>
<td>Semi-structured interviews (pre- and post-focus group); focus groups; post-interview and post-focus group written input from participants via email (optional); narratively structured member checks</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theoretical Framework**

In Chapter One, I described a possible theoretical framework for this research study that included narrative theory (via Bruner’s narrative theory and a broader sociocultural lens), Clandinin and Connelly’s (1995) Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscapes
(TPKL), and a Feminist Ethic of Care in the Borderlands conceptualized through my readings of theoretical work by Noddings (2013), Gilligan (1995), and Anzaldúa (2012).

I addressed my research questions through Bruner’s (1994) formulation of narrative as that which is not only at the center of human meaning-making but as that which encodes and shares who we are and how we act within culturally and “historically rooted institutions” such as schools (p. 57). Narratives are not static objects but are constantly shaping and shaped by experience, affect, and memory. Through this theoretical lens, I approached teachers’ literacy narratives as mediators through which their decisions about literacy instruction for students with CSN are made and enacted.

Another lens for my approach to the research questions presented here was the work of Jean Clandinin and Michael Connelly who took an approach to curriculum studies and educational research that focused on the personal experiences of teachers and on ways of listening to the voices of teachers. For the purposes of this research study, their work offered a lens for understanding the connection between teachers’ telling of the literacy narratives from their personal experiences and those of their students with (or without) CSN and their thinking about literacy instructional practices for students with CSN. Additionally, Clandinin and Connelly’s (1995) model (TPKL) for the ways that teachers acquire and implement professional knowledge in school settings provided a potentially powerful tool for framing the narratives of teachers of students with CSN who participated in my research study.

Finally, I used a Feminist Ethic of Care in the Borderlands theoretical stance (a re-imagining of work by Nel Noddings, Carol Gilligan, and Gloria Anzaldúa) not only as a lens through which to think about and analyze the literacy narratives of the teachers participating in this research study but as the approach to be taken by the researcher. Gilligan (1995)
centered a feminist ethic of care in “connection” with others and “as fundamental in human life” (p. 122). A feminist ethic of care, in the context of this research study, kept me focused on the ways that our voices (including my own) “are interwoven in a myriad of subtle and not-so-subtle ways” (p. 122). Noddings (2013) argued that the “fundamental truth” of “all caring involves engrossment” (p. 17). This research study required an engrossment and an attentional shift away from self and toward the participants, the ones listened to.

Engrossment is not a long-term selflessness. It is a turning toward the other for the (short or long) time that the listening-caring act requires. Anzaldúa (2012) provided a necessary reminder that the coming together of researcher and participant (and of teacher and student for that matter) is always a form of border-crossing between psychological, cultural, and linguistic contexts (or “countries”) within which we are each situated. According to Anzaldúa, these Borderlands are places where there is opportunity for profound learning, creative cross-pollination (p. 19), and/or danger of silencing of self and other. By attempting to enact a Feminist Ethic of Care in the Borderlands, in the context of this research study, I was constantly mindful of the short- and long-term impact of the relationship between listener to and teller of personal and professional literacy narratives and the inevitable blurring of that line within research-participant relationships.

**Guiding Studies**

There were two research studies that provided inspiration and focus to my thinking as I worked through my decision-making regarding the design and method for this research study. Ruppar et al. (2015) pointed to the importance of finding ways to listen to teachers of students with CSN to better understand their decision-making regarding literacy instruction for their students. Ciuffetelli Parker’s (2010) work with the literacy narratives of pre-service
teachers was central to development of my design for data collection. This researcher’s three-year study provided time reflection on early learning experiences for her participants both individually and in peer-group triads. While the timeframe for my research study was significantly shorter, I was able to allow for time for participants to discuss their literacy narratives in both one-on-one interviews with me and in peer-group settings.

Ruppar et al. (2015) studied triads of teachers and students with significant disabilities (one teacher and two students per each of four cases in their study) to attempt to answer questions about teacher decision-making about literacy instruction for their students. Their data collection involved teacher interviews and classroom observations in the secondary-level settings where these students were being taught. The researchers found four “core concepts” that impacted teacher decision-making: context (including personal and professional experiences); beliefs about students, teaching, and learning; expectations (including assumptions about student outcomes and capacities for learning); and self-efficacy (pp. 216-221).

The findings from this study were a direct influence in my desire to dive deeper into some of the influences on teacher decision-making that Ruppar et al. uncovered. They found that their participants described “early, pivotal experiences that influenced” their “teaching decisions” (p. 218) and they also found that their participants’ “beliefs about the causes for student learning led teachers to take more or less responsibility for their students’ literacy learning” (p. 220). In my research study, I specifically wanted to find a way to delve into the stories of teachers’ early experiences as learners and as teachers of literacy to highlight their thinking about their students as learners and the instructional practices that they employed with those students. The authors assertion that “teachers’ voices provide the essential link
between theory, research, and implementation” (p. 223) fueled my desire to listen to more of those teacher voices as one way to begin to address gaps (or chasms) between, especially, what is known about what works instructionally for students with and what is being provided in their classrooms.

Another early and significant inspiration for this research study was Ciuffetelli Parker’s (2010) longitudinal study of the literacy narratives of undergraduate students who agreed to participate in this study across four of the five years of their cohort’s movement across a teacher preparation program. The researcher was a professor in this program for pre-service teachers and she enacted a process of having her students engage in written dialogue with one another via letters written weekly and shared within triads across the first year and at least two times a year in the second through fourth years of the study. Ciuffetelli Parker’s results indicated that student teachers engaged in deep, reflection conversations via their letter writing that provided safety and opportunity to challenge their own thinking in light of both their own early learning experiences and the theoretical and practical information that they were encountering in their teacher prep classes. This work by Ciuffetelli Parker pointed toward a potential for “revolutionary transformation” (p. 1259) situated in intentional story-sharing by pre- and in-service teachers within intentional communities of care and trust that inspired the design and data collection process for my research study.

**Research Design**

The design of my research study was a case-based narrative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Riessman, 2008; see also, Brockenbrough, 2012; Brooks et al., 2013; Kear, 2012; and Posmontier & Fisher, 2014). I sought out the individual lived and “told” literacy narratives of teachers of students with CSN through interviews and opportunities for shared
storytelling (focus groups). This seeking after unique, individual narratives (Polkinghorne, 1995) is at the center of this research study. This study was enacted as a case-based narrative inquiry because of its inclusion of participants who share a specific aspect of professional experience (i.e., the teaching of students with CSN). “Case-based” as a modifier (adjective) used to describe this narrative inquiry shaped my approach to recruitment of participants for this research study. Additionally, because of my experience as a teacher of students with CSN who met the inclusion criteria (see below) for this research study, my data collection included my reflection upon and writing of personal/professional literacy narratives. This is described in detail below.

**Method**

**Participants**

Given the stated research questions, participants included in this research study were teachers who work with students with CSN. For the purposes of this study, teachers of students with CSN was defined as teachers who, at the time of data collection (Summer 2019), had at least two years of experience teaching students with intellectual disability, moderate or severe disabilities, or multiple disabilities. Teachers with less than two years of experience were excluded from this study. My decision to exclude teachers with less than two years of experience was based on my own experience as an early-career teacher. Teachers with less than two years of experience are typically “learning the ropes” and have not had time to reflect upon and develop a vision (or story) of what literacy instruction can and should be for students with CSN. Also, although the majority of teachers of students with CSN teach in self-contained classrooms (Kleinert et al., 2015), the setting in which teachers in this study teach was not an inclusionary or exclusionary factor. In other words, the
teachers who participated in this study had experience teaching students with CSN in a self-contained setting and/or in an inclusive setting. I recruited four participants who met these inclusion criteria. My participating teachers (Carol, Darcy, Fran, and Beth) all met the inclusion criteria of having at least two years of experience as a teacher of students with CSN. All participants were white females as was the researcher. On average, my participants had nine years of experience as teachers of students with CSN at the time of data collection. Because of the small sample size and because my participants all taught in the same small school district, I deliberately did not include information about their specific, respective years of experience as that may have provided detail that could reveal their identities. My justification for including this number of participants was two-fold. My attention to the individual (and communal) narratives necessitated a relatively small sample size. Additionally, the focus groups that were a part of data collection needed to be of a size that did not inhibit conversation either because the group was too large or too small.

My Relationship to Participants/District

At the time of recruitment and data collection for this research study, I was a part-time employee of the school district in which my participants worked. For the 2018-2019 school year, I worked three days a week as a specialist providing special and general education teachers with recommendations of behavioral and instructional supports that might better meet the needs of the students in their classrooms. For the Fall 2019 semester, I continued to work in this same position for two days a week. I resigned this position in December 2019. At the time of recruitment, I held a Level 3 Instructional Leader license in Special Education from the New Mexico Public Education Department, and I had fourteen years of experience in K-12 classrooms. I was not (nor never have been) licensed as a school
administrator and I had no official role as supervisor or evaluator of the teachers who participated in this study. However, in my role within this school district, I was frequently asked to provide feedback to principals and administrators at the district level about what I see in classrooms and I often made recommendations about additional supports that may be needed in support of students in classrooms. I was also, at times, in the position of recommending classroom strategies that the classroom teacher did not agree with and/or understand. In these situations, I worked through a process of discussion and negotiation with the teacher to uncover together what will work for the student in that specific classroom. And, if part of the resistance on the part of the teacher was related to a lack of understanding or a training need, it was part of my job to find ways to support that teacher with my time or other instructional opportunities to meet that teacher’s learning needs.

Although I have no direct role as a supervisor or administrator with the teachers in my school district, I would be naïve to say that there was not a perceived or potential power differential in my relationships with them. Because the teachers with whom I worked knew that I had been called into their classroom based on a request from their principal or from the special education administrator and that my recommendations would be shared with those administrators, there was a natural (I believe) tendency for teachers to feel some initial hesitancy in my presence and/or to feel judged or evaluated by me. My post-observation reports, usually sent by email, were intentionally focused on the student in need but necessarily included recommendations that addressed changes to the classroom environment and teacher practices. I laboriously worked on the writing of these reports so that they reflected the strengths of the teacher, the classroom environment, and of the individual students observed as well as recommendations for changes. I also worked diligently to
provide a clear schedule of ways to address these changes in the short- and long-term including the ways that I proposed to share my time and other resources in support of those changes. That said, I did still think that there were times when teachers (especially general education teachers) received these reports as criticisms.

Generally, the special education teachers with whom I have worked were less likely to react negatively to recommendations that I included in my observation reports. Of the four participants in my study, I had observed in the classrooms of three of them for a relatively limited amount of time before they were recruited to participate in this study. Those observations and consultations were perceived, by me, to be very positive and when in the course of the interviews and focus groups, a student was discussed with whom we had worked together, any discussion about our shared work was generally positive. Of course, in my listening to and reading of these discussions, I allowed for the fact that this positivity about our shared work could have been presented in that way by the participant because of the potential/perceived power differential discussed above.

Prior to working as a part-time specialist in the school district, I worked there as a full-time special education teacher and instructional support specialist for three years. In these previous positions, I was based in one middle school in the district and had infrequent, collegial contacts with other special education teachers in the district including some of those individuals who were participants in this research study. Because of perceived/actual differentials in power in my relationships with the teachers who were recruited for this research study, I communicated about and enacted a clear boundary between my position with the district and my position as student investigator throughout the process of recruitment, gaining informed consent, and data collection. I did this in large part through
clear discussion with participants about my two roles and the intentional setting of boundaries between those roles and through multiple reassurances about the fact that data collected in course of this study would be deidentified and would not be shared with the school district. I provided potential participants with clear guidance about the fact that their participation was strictly voluntary and that there was no penalty or negative consequence as a result of a decision not to participate in this research study.

**Recruitment of Participants**

Before contacting potential participants for this research study, I sought and received approval for this recruitment from the leadership of the Rural School District (pseudonym). This district required that the following items be submitted to the Superintendent for clearance/approval by their Executive Committee: proof of Human Rights Clearance from the University of New Mexico, a prospectus (Appendix A) describing the research study, and cover letter addressed to the Superintendent (Appendix A). Once this approval from the district was received, I contacted potential participants either in person (using a script, see Appendix B) or by email (using an email format, see Appendix C). When I received indication of a potential participant’s interest in taking part in this research study, I emailed an electronic version of the consent form (Appendix D) to give them the opportunity to review the form. I then arranged for a time and place to meet and review the consent form, have the participant sign the consent form, and, given their consent, to conduct the initial interview.

Finally, because I was currently a part-time employee of this school district in which my proposed participants work and because I had worked with all of these potential participants on an occasional basis, I made all contacts related to recruitment for this study
outside of my regular, contracted hours for the school district and, if at all possible, outside of the work schedule of any of the teachers with whom I sought to discuss their possible participation. I documented all contacts in my research notebook by recording the specifics of contacts made, during the school year, with potential participants including face-to-face meetings, telephone calls and conversations, and email correspondence. Also, I assured those individuals being contacted for recruitment for this research study that their decision to consent to or to decline participation would have absolutely no impact on their employment with the school district. In my initial discussions with participants, I provided assurance that none of the information that they shared in interviews and focus groups would be shared with the school district with whom they are employed. Through this intentional boundary-keeping in contacts and conversations with potential participants, I remained accountable and clear about those necessary boundaries between my professional work with the school district and my academic work with The University of New Mexico.

**Context**

The teachers who were participants in this research study were recruited from the Rural School District located within a 60-mile radius of a major metropolitan area in the Southwestern United States. The Rural School District consisted of three elementary schools, two middle schools, a central office that housed a Pre-K program, and a single high school. Schools in the district had a strong community presence and a reputation of having good programs in arts, athletics, and agriculture. Between 2014 and 2017, high school graduation rates for all students were between 65% and 80%. The graduation rates for students with disabilities, for that same period, were as low as 38% (https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/bureaus/accountability/graduation/). For the 2017-2018 school year, Rural School District
had an overall enrollment of 50% students identified as Caucasian, 46.5% identified as Hispanic, 1.5% identified as African American, and 1.4% identified as American Indian. The overall state demographics for the same period of time showed 61.6% of students identified as Hispanic, 24% of students identified as Caucasian, 10.6% identified as American Indian, 2.3% identified as African American, 1.3% identified as Asian, and 0.2% identified as Pacific Islander (http://webed.ped.state.nm.us/sites/conference/2018%20District%20Report%20Cards/).

At the time of this writing, there was no specific district-wide data on placement of students with CSN. However, for the 2016-2017 school year, 9% of students in the Rural School District with any special education eligibility were in a regular class for less than 40% of their instructional time (https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2019/01/DPR1617-FINAL-REVISED-201901221031.pdf). Data from the state where the Rural School District is located showed that, for the 2015-2016 school year, 70% of students with intellectual disability (ID) and 84% of students with multiple disabilities (MD) were in a regular class for less than 40% of their instructional time (https://webnew.ped.state.nm.us/wp-content/uploads/2018/01/SY15-16_IDEA_Environment.pdf). This showed that, for that given period of time, an overwhelming majority of students with ID and MD (i.e., student who would fall under the definition of CSN as defined in Chapter 1) were learning in settings without their peers without CSN for the majority of their school days.

Reciprocity

Because data collection took place during my participants’ summer break (a time of precious re-connection with self and family for most teachers), I felt heightened sense of wanting to have a way to show my appreciation for the time that my participants gave to this
research study. First, I held focus groups in locations where I provided drinks (e.g., coffee, tea, soft drinks, or water) and light snacks. The combined cost of providing drinks and snacks for the two focus groups was approximately $30. The provision of snacks and drinks was intended to signal a hospitable welcome, an opening to the building of rapport, and my attempt to help participants feel more at ease. Additionally, I offered and provided childcare for both focus groups in recognition of the needs of my participants as the primary caregivers for children during the summer break from school. Through one of my participants, I arranged for an individual who worked as an educational assistant during the school year to be present during the focus groups for a rate of $20 per hour for a total cost of $80. Finally, once data collection was over, I provided participants with a gift card from a brick-and-mortar or online store where classroom supplies could be purchased in the amount of $60 total per participant. I gave my participants the choice of a gift card from Amazon, Target, or Wal-Mart and hand-delivered their chosen gift card along with a hand-written thank you note at the end of the data collection process. This amount of $60 is well under the recommended limit of $100 per participant outlined in UNM’s Institutional Review Board’s Standard Operating Procedure 503.3 (Office of the Institutional Review Board, 2017) on the topic of compensating participants. Because each participant was asked to attend two interviews and two focus groups, the amount of compensation per meeting with me was approximately $15 per interview/focus group session. Also, this individual compensation provided an amount that will allow the teacher-participants to purchase relatively significant amount of the types of supplies regularly used in classrooms that are paid for out-of-pocket by teachers and are generally uncompensated. Given that participants in my research study had relative security of income as full-time teachers in a local school district, the amount of compensation did not
represent “undue influence or coercion” as stated in the UNM IRB Researcher Handbook (Office of the Institutional Review Board, 2019, p. 23). The type and amount of participant compensation was included in recruitment materials and/or conversations with participants.

The last (but not least, I think) form of reciprocity included in the design of this research study was the opportunity for my participants to be seen, heard, and valued in a deeply intentional and wholehearted way. This form of reciprocity was not based on guesswork but on input that I received from three teacher-friends (not a part of this research study) who helped me to refine my interview questions. I received positive feedback about their perceived benefit of being listening to in this way. Also, in the follow-up interviews, all four participants expressed gratitude for the opportunity to connect with their peers and indicated that they had found the opportunity to reflect on their student/teacher literacy narratives as beneficial to them in some way.

**Setting (Time and Place for Data Collection)**

I conducted interviews and focus groups during the summer of 2019 when the teachers who were participating in this research study were on their summer break. The individual interviews took place in a variety of locations that were convenient to the participants. The two focus groups took place at a central location that was convenient to and agreed upon by the whole group. The meeting places were as follows: private meetings rooms at a branch of a large city-wide public library system, in private meetings rooms at two smaller community libraries, and in a meeting room at a church from a mainline denomination. I intended not to conduct interviews or focus groups on school grounds for purposes of clarity about my boundary between roles of researcher and district employee and I was able to fulfill this intention with one exception. For my very last interview (and last
instance of data collection overall), I arranged to meet with one of my participants at the local church described above. I had been given a key to the church building so that I could access the building at an early hour (a time that worked best for this participant who had significant family commitments). When I arrived at the church, I was first in the building that day and quickly realized that church building had been burglarized. I left the building, called the church pastor and the police, and waited for my participant to arrive. When the local police arrived, they indicated that I would not be able to have access to the building for at least several hours. Because this was the last available meeting time before the beginning of the school district’s contract year for teachers and because my participant’s time was at a premium, I conferred with my participant and we agreed that we would go to a meeting room in the local school/administrative building, a building to which my participant had access. I conducted the interview in that location.

My attempt to geographically separate these my roles as researcher and as school district employee probably did not address all potential instances of intentional or unintentional “boundary-crossing.” However, I do think that it was one way of building trust with participants and of having them see me in a role other than that which was bound within schools and within the district hierarchy. I have provided more information about the timing and interspersion of interviews and focus groups in the sections below and in the timeline provided in Appendix E.

**Data Collection**

My participants were heard through a preliminary individual semi-structured interview, followed by two focus group (shared storytelling) meetings, and finally a follow-up semi-structured individual interview. The individual interviews ranged from 54 to 63
minutes in length with a mean length of 59.9 minutes. The first and second focus groups were 81 and 78 minutes in length, respectively. Interview and focus group questions entailed an opened-ended “invitation to conversation” (Armstrong, 2017) and, as researcher, I intentionally traversed the continuum between participant and observer through my willingness to share my personal experiences and by approaching interaction with participants as a “skilled listener” (Denzin, 2001, p. 66). These interviews and focus groups were recorded and transcribed resulting in the primary form of data collected (see Appendices H through K for specific interview and focus group questions).

Also, participants had the choice to share with me any additional thoughts about questions and/or discussion in interview/focus group sessions in writing via email after each interview and focus group meeting. This opportunity was offered as a support to those participants who felt as if they were unable to respond during the scheduled amount of time. At the end of each interview and focus group, I provided participants with a reminder that I would welcome an email from them with any additional responses to questions or additions to discussion that they did not have time to share. I also initiated the opportunity for further input from participants by sending a follow-up email after each interview and focus group (see sample follow-up email in Appendix F). These opportunities for post-interview or post-focus group responses via email were intended only as a support to participants and were in no way required. None of the participants responded to these post-interview or post-focus group emails.

I also kept a paper field journal with me during the data collection process to take notes and to be mindful of my “personal views, perspectives, and emotions” as I worked with my participants and with the data generated through our interactions (Glesne, 2016, p. 148).
My work on this research study required a constant vigilance in maintaining a “highly disciplined subjectivity” (p. 148) because of my history of insider positioning within the schools and the district within which my participants worked. (Please see section below for specific information regarding handling and analysis of all forms of data).

**Approach to Interviews**

My research study reflected an approach to interviewing that was of a “particular kind of discursive, narrative, or linguistic event or practice” taking place in a clearly delineated place and time (Schwandt, 2015, p. 170). In this type of approach, the researcher and participant “are regarded as agents active in the coconstruction of the content of the interview” and the interaction between them is described as the “active interview” (p. 170). Additionally, my positionality within the working lives of my participants and my own experiences as teacher and literate being were “not considered in terms of contamination or bias” (p. 170). These were, instead, seen as “unavoidably part of the communicative event in which the interviewer’s meaning is assembled in its narration” (p. 170).

My research study included multiple opportunities for participants to discuss their personal and professional literacy narratives so that rapport and trust could be built with me (Murray, 2003). I used a type of open-ended interviewing that sought an “elicitation of stories of experience” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 172). This brought about responses that were as free as possible of shaping or artificial coherence based on questions asked (Murray, 2003). All four participants participated in the initial interviews, both focus groups, and the follow-up interviews.

**Protocol for Interviews.** A detailed protocol for focus groups and interviews (Appendix G) and questions for both of the semi-structured interviews can be found in
Appendices H and I. I asked questions in the initial semi-structured interview that focused, broadly, on my participants’ experiences as literacy learners and as teachers of literacy learners who have CSN. I started with “grand tour” questions (Armstrong, 2017) and followed up with more specific probes (indicated in Appendix H) only if the participant asked for clarification or if the conversation waned.

For the follow-up (semi-structured) interviews, I asked questions (Appendix I) that focused on the social/relational nature of literacy learning both for the participants as learners and as teachers of students with CSN. For this final semi-structured interview, I also included a broad question on the participants’ understanding or definition of literacy. I developed used a set of probes (questions) for each of these areas (relationships and definitions) that I used if participants needed clarification or if I had the sense in the course of the interview that these probes were useful to put the participant at ease or to go deeper into the questioning.

My rationale for focusing very broadly on participant experiences (both as student and as teacher) in the first semi-structured interview was to elicit as many short literacy-focused vignettes or stories as possible in this initial interaction. By starting with initial questions that do not specifically use the word “literacy,” I hoped to keep the stories shared by participants as inclusive as possible of all of the ways that literacy is enacted, remembered, and re-storied (Clandinin & Connelly, 2000) in participants’ personal and professional lives.

I focused the second set of semi-structured interviews (after the focus groups) on relationship in the context of literacy and literacy learning. In this second interview, I also asked question(s) that sought to uncover participants’ understanding or definition of literacy (without asking specifically for a definition). As I conducted practice interviews with
teacher-colleagues, I found myself making notes about the strong feelings that emerged when these friends discussed relationships with their teachers and students in the context of their told stories about literacy instruction or literate objects (e.g., stories, books, writing materials). It is for this reason that I decided that I would focus on relationships in my questions for the second round of semi-structured interviews. I wanted to know if the process of thinking and talking about and sharing their literacy narratives shaped (or re-shaped) their thinking about literacy instructional practices for their students with CSN. This approach to the second semi-structured interview provided the opportunity to hear about these practices through the lens of relationship and in a way that did not require repetition of questions from the first semi-structured interview. I wanted to avoid this repetition because of potential confusion on the part of participants and because of the seeming artificiality of this approach for me as interviewer.

*Approach to Focus Groups*

Schwandt (2015) described focus groups as “conversations” with a group of individuals around a “particular topic or range of issues” (p. 122). My research study included two focus groups that were situated chronologically between the two individual interviews as a way for participants to “explore collectively” their personal and professional literacy narratives (Brockenbrough, 2012, p. 747). The focus groups were less potentially confrontational than individual interviews and provided participants with opportunity to “use their ‘indexed knowledge’ without any need to explain themselves to one another” or to the researcher (Morgan, 2001, p. 16). In other words, the focus groups were intended to give me a more naturalistic view of participants’ thinking than in interview settings where
interviewees were more likely to be asked to take on a meta-analytic role in explaining their own thinking.

Conversely, another reason for my inclusion of a focus group component to this research study was because of Morgan’s (2001) assertion that participants in focus groups who share a context (whether experiential, professional, or geographical) may demonstrate culturally-held stories in the broadest possible sense. For my research study, I was interested in both individual interviews and focus group discussions as a possible way to listen for and understand personal and group narratives and the impact on those narratives on teachers’ and students’ literate lives. Finally, because of the necessity of “skillful moderation of the discussion” (Schwandt, 2015, p. 122) in the focus groups that will be part of my research study, I used the protocol described below.

**Protocol for Focus Groups.** A detailed protocol for focus groups and interviews (Appendix G) and scripts for both focus groups (Appendices J and K) can be found below. I initiated the conversation within the first focus group by introducing the broad topic of literate connection and literate “joy” (Kliwer, 2008, p. 117). I began the second focus group by introducing the topic of challenges facing teachers of literacy for students with CSN (Appendices J and K contain the scripts for both focus groups).

**Member Checking**

Given the design of this research study, there was opportunity for member checking after the data collection process that involved a narrativized summary of experiences shared by participants. This form of member checking consisted of highlighting two or more transcribed narratives that were shared by the participant and chosen and “narrativized” or “storied” by me. I sent these narratives in print and audio formats to individual participants.
via email and asked for clarification of any questions that I had, elucidation (more details), and/or further comment (see Appendix L). I included an audio version of these narratives out of consideration for participant struggles with reading text that had been revealed during data collection. All participants were given the opportunity to take part in this member checking process and all participants shared at least some feedback or further reflection about their stories that had been re-articulated by me. I included this feedback/reflection as a part of the thematic analysis in Chapter 4.

**Data Analysis**

Narrative inquirers focus on “the whole account” of an experience or practice (Josselson, 2011, p. 226). Denzin (2001) suggested a “writing” of participants’ “personal experience” that is inclusive of three ways of looking at data. First, the account should respect the integrity of the individual’s life or story. Also, if there are groups of stories from multiple participants, thematic analysis of that collection is recommended. Finally, a “cross-case analysis” could help to provide a focus on process (p. 62). More importantly for the purposes of my approach to analysis, Polkinghorne (1995) described two approaches to a narrative approach to research: analysis of narratives and narrative analysis. The first of these approaches, analysis of narratives, is that which “functions to generate general knowledge from a set of particular instances” (p. 14). Polkinghorne described this as the type of analysis that can be “one in which the concepts are derived from previous theory or logical possibilities” or “one in which concepts are inductively derived from the data” (p. 13). The latter is the approach used in grounded theory and, generally, in other types of qualitative research. This is a nomothetic process that seeks to find the generalizations (themes) or “laws” across sources or participants (Schwandt, 2015, p. 216). The second approach,
narrative analysis, is that which creates “stories as the outcome of the research” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). This is idiographic, “emplotted” analysis that is true to one participant’s data “while at the same time bringing an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves” (p. 16).

My process of data analysis for this research study included the following steps: transcription of interview and focus group recordings based on a pre-determined formatting protocol/key; organization, deidentification, and storage of all data; a thematic analysis (“analysis of narratives,” Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 13) that involved primary and secondary cycles of coding; an in-depth “narrative analysis” (p. 15) of one of my participants; and an ongoing engagement with the audio recordings from this research study so that I could listen for those meaning-filled elements of conversation that cannot always be “heard” when reading a transcript. More detail on these steps is provided in the following sections.

**Transcription**

I transcribed recordings from the initial interviews for two of my four participants (P1, pseudonym Carol and P2, pseudonym Darcy). For this transcription I followed a process of listening, re-listening, and typing/formatting according to the transcription key in Appendix M. Initially, I intended to complete all transcription of recordings for this research study in this way. However, due to a number of factors including but not limited to my own health issues and subsequent surgery in the fall of 2019, I decided to use a transcription service for the remaining two initial interviews, both focus groups, all follow-up interviews, and my self-interviews. I made this decision because I realized that I was not going to be able to complete the transcription on my own within a reasonable timeline. Before giving these recordings to the transcription service, I submitted an amendment application to the
Institutional Review Board (IRB) on 9/24/2019 and received approval for this change to my handling of data on 10/9/2019. I then began a process of sending recordings to the online transcription service (Rev.com) and thoroughly editing those transcripts, once complete, according to the transcription key given below (Appendix M). The recordings associated with my research study contained identifiable information in the form of the first names of participants and, in some cases, the names of schools where they have been a student and/or teacher. I removed the identifiable information in the process of transcribing/editing these transcripts. Once I downloaded the transcripts from the secure platform at rev.com, I deleted the audio files and the resulting transcripts from my account on that website. The transcription that I completed on my own and the editing process that I used for all transcripts required the type of careful listening that began with my immersion in the recorded voices of my participants and that required my personal engagement in the transcription process. I was able to immerse myself in the voices and stories of my participants regardless of the source of transcription.

Organization, Deidentification, and Storage

Interview and focus group recordings, emails sent by participants between meeting times or after the final focus group, a Word document that connected the actual names of participants with their pseudonyms (participant codebook), and any other data containing personal information from participants were and will continue to be kept in a password-protected electronic file folder that is separate from all other data on my personal device (a Surface Go with password-protected login process) and have been backed up on an external hard drive and on a password-protected cloud-based storage account via Microsoft 365. This folder was and will continue to be separate from all other data for this research study.
including transcripts of interviews and focus groups that were deidentified (through the use
of pseudonyms) at the time of transcription and/or editing. Additionally, some of these
electronic recordings were uploaded to the secure platform at rev.com, an online transcription
service. This service provided a verbatim transcription on their platform for download
(https://www.rev.com/transcription/faq). Once the verbatim transcriptions were downloaded,
I deleted those audio files and resulting transcripts from my account at rev.com.

All written responses/reflections from participants were submitted to me via email,
and I processed them by copying all parts of the email exchange into a Word document,
deidentifying the content by changing participant names to pseudonyms and removing and
other specific personal and/or geographic information that might reveal identity. The
electronic versions (emails sent to me by participants) were deleted from my email account
after the deidentified versions were created.

All deidentified data were given an alphabetic code based on type of data (see Table
2) and a numeric code based on order received and/or processed. It was then uploaded into an
online, password-protected, subscription-based data analysis platform (Dedoose) that allowed
for the application of descriptors and codes to all data as it was read and re-read. Dedoose
also allowed me to upload analytic memos as I created them so that I could consult them
when coding my data and/or they could be accessed by the Principal Investigator.
Additionally, I uploaded recordings of all interviews and focus groups associated with this
research study so that I could easily perform the listening and re-listening to participants that
was necessary to my analytic process.
Table 2.

*Organizational Codes for Data*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Code</th>
<th>Type of data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>AUI</td>
<td>Audio file, interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AUF</td>
<td>Audio file, focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ITR</td>
<td>Interview, transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FTR</td>
<td>Focus group, transcribed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>FNO</td>
<td>Field notes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PIB</td>
<td>Participant input (between sessions)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ANM</td>
<td>Analytic memos</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCA</td>
<td>Member check audio narratives</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>MCI</td>
<td>Member check input</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*Coding Cycles (Analysis of Narratives)*

As stated above, my process of analyzing data for this research study included both a thematic analysis of narratives and a narrative analysis, as suggested by Polkinghorne (1995). For my thematic analysis (analysis of narratives), I used an approach to first-cycle coding that combined “process coding” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 78) and “emotion coding” (p. 125). I chose a focus on process elements in the data because it provided a specific lens on the ways that participants labeled the “actual or conceptual actions” from their experiences as literacy learners and teachers of literacy (p. 78). I included “emotion coding” as a part of the first-cycle coding process because of my interest in the deeply relational nature of the stories shared with me during data collection and because of my interest in getting at issues of “decision-making, judgment, and risk-taking” (p. 125) as it related to my participants’
thinking about instructional practices in their respective experiences as teachers of students with CSN. Also, a combined look at elements of process and emotion in the data helped to uncover experiences that left “indelible marks” and that could be described as “epiphanies” of insight or learning (Denzin, 2001, p. 62).

My data consisted of three groups of transcripts, all uploaded and coded using an online platform (Dedoose). The first set of transcripts were initial individual interviews with each of my four participants. The second set included transcripts from the two focus groups of which all four participants were a part. The last set of transcripts were from the four follow-up individual interviews which took place after the two focus groups. Because data collection was conducted with a sense of temporality (or situation in time), I stopped the initial coding as I finished with each group so that I could create/revise the resulting codebook and perform a “clean-up” of codes. For example, after finishing my initial coding of the four initial individual interviews, I downloaded all codes from Dedoose into an Excel spreadsheet. On the spreadsheet, I used a color-coding system to be able to easily see parent, child, and, in some cases, grandparent and great-grandparent codes. I also added frequency data for each code. This visual array (on the spreadsheet) helped me to see issues such as redundancy of codes and forced me to write and/or clarify the code definitions. I completed this clean-up process after initial coding of each set of transcripts.

After first-cycle coding of the transcripts for initial interviews, focus groups, and follow-up interviews, I completed an overall review of all excerpts and their related codes and, in some cases, re-parented or merged codes that were redundant or unclear in some way. During this review, I also made extensive edits to the definitions for all codes for clarity and for justification of what was or was not included under each code. I then created another
color-coded spreadsheet with code frequency counts. I used this spreadsheet to create a visual display of my understanding, at that moment, of emerging categories and/or themes (Miles et al., 2014). In an analytic memo dated December 27, 2019, I proposed the following broad organization:

In the coding thus far, there seems to be a pretty clear delineation between codes related to participants’ experiences as a learner (i.e., as an early childhood or school-age learner) and their experiences as teachers in school settings with students with CSN. At this point, I do not want to collapse or “lump” codes so much as more clearly define codes as representing experience from either the participants’ telling about time as a learner or their time as a teacher of students with CSN. This seems like a logical way to move forward given the research questions. (ANM12, 12/27/19)

After this initial grouping of codes into the broader groups of participants’ “experiences as students” and “experiences as teachers,” I created a second visual display (on poster paper) of the predominant (most frequent) codes. This visual display began as a linear organization of codes following the two broad areas or categories described above but resulted in an arrangement, using less linear shapes (circles and flowing lines), that reflected my growing understanding of the relationships within and among the codes with which I was working (Miles et al., 2014).

Themes

This second visual display led me to my preliminary identification of themes that included the following: Deciding about curriculum; Relating to literate others; Writing as a reflection of beliefs about literacy; Learning to teach; Defining literacy; and Experiencing literacy. After identifying these preliminary themes I reviewed all excerpts associated with
those themes and, based on that review, condensed those into the following three themes:

Writing as a lens on literacy; Relating to literate others (including excerpts from Experiencing literacy); and Learning to teach (including Deciding about curriculum).

I then downloaded the excerpts associated with these themes into separate Word documents and printed these out. I assigned a different color marker to each of the participants (P1=green; P2=red; P3=yellow; and P4=blue) and to each of the “places” on the data collection timeline (initial interview=gray; first focus group=purple; second focus group=orange; and follow-up interview=brown). As a result of this color-coding, I was able to locate each excerpt not only in its relationship to my proposed theme but to participant and the data collection activity from which it had come. After completing this color-coding of excerpts, I began a process of sorting and re-sorting these excerpts so that I could work with a variety of schemes of organization as I wrote and edited the thematic analysis. Finally, as I worked on this printing out, color coding, and physical manipulation of excerpts, I listened, again, to all recordings of interviews and focus groups. In some cases, I targeted a specific place in the interview or focus group so that I could listen and re-listen to the part of a conversation connected to an excerpt that was in front of me. I did this so that I could widen the context or listen to the cadence, volume, or other non-verbal aspects of the excerpt to make sure that I had as full as possible an understanding of the excerpt at that moment in time.

As a result of this process of reviewing excerpts, listening/re-listening to the excerpts in the voices of my participants, and writing about this “analysis of narratives” (Polkinghorne, 1995) in light of my research questions, I finalized my thinking about the themes that emerged from the data that are outlined and explicated in Chapter 4. These
themes were as follows: Writing Instruction is Inherently Different for Students with CSN; Relating to Literate Others; and Learning to Teach.

**Narrative Analysis**

For my narrative analysis (see above; Polkinghorne, 1995), I chose one study participant whose story I engaged with on a much more in-depth level. The participant at the center of this narrative analysis was Beth whose stories I chose to focus upon for a variety of reasons, some initially unclear to me. In a memo written in December 2019 (ANM12), I expressed some of my process of making this choice by describing the “self-reflection on the part of this participant.” By this point, I had narrowed my choice down to two of the participants and described both (Fran and Beth) as having “rich experiences as literacy learners and deep experience as teachers of students with CSN.” I was also profoundly aware of “my working relationship with these participants and which would be less problematic in terms of thinking about them reading this analysis” once it was complete. I saw an analysis of Beth’s stories as potentially “more problematic in terms of what might be revealed and how the analysis might be perceived.” In the end, however, I was most “intrigued” by Beth’s stories in my position “as a researcher and teacher and human being.” Frank (2012) used the term “phronesis” to describe his experience as a seasoned analyst of narratives of having the “capacity to hear, from the total collection of stories, those that call out as needing to be written about” (p. 10). I did not in any way claim to have the level of phronesis or practically gained wisdom as a professional narrative analyst that Arthur Frank had. I did, however, feel that Beth’s stories were calling out to me.

I began the process of working with the data (or Beth’s stories) by copying this data into one Word document. This included the transcribed conversations from the initial and
follow-up interviews with this participant and from the two focus groups, a total of over 140 pages. I also referred to the narrativized member check that I had created for Beth. With these pages of conversations with me and with the other participants, I started to create short paraphrased narratives based on Beth’s words. I forced myself toward a paraphrase of these stories in order to make clear my active role as analyst of these data. During this time, I continued the same practice of listening and re-listening to the recordings of these data collection sessions in the same way that I had done during my thematic analysis process. This helped me to capture nuances not always available in a transcribed version of a conversations. In those cases where Beth had related the same story in more than one setting, I grouped those stories together to look for any interesting differences based on the temporality (i.e., timing of data collection) or sociality (i.e., those persons present during data collection) of the telling and re-telling.

The result of this process of narrativizing engagement with the data was a collection of short snippets of paraphrased stories that I then printed out as a hard copy. With this printed copy, I started re-reading, making notes, crossing out pieces that I decided not to include, and looking for a way for me to make meaning within a storied form.

**Emplotment: Creating a “Storied Product”** (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 18). My next steps in this process of narrative were to find the structure through which I could share the stories that Beth had shared with me. Following Labov (as elucidated in Riessman, 2008, p. 84), I looked for ways to incorporate these story elements: abstract, orientation, complicating action, evaluation, resolution, and coda. In my work to create stories out of the data that focused on Beth, I especially looked for ways to include the elements of orientation (i.e., time, place, characters, and situation), complicating action (i.e., the arc of the plot that
highlights the problem that is at the center of any engaging story), and evaluation (i.e., a point in the story where “the narrator steps back from the action to comment” on actions or emotions, the heart of the story). According to Riessman, not all stories need to contain all of these Labovian elements and neither do they always occur in the same order (p. 84). Frank (2012) also cited Labov but maintained that what a story is should remain fuzzy at the boundaries. Horizontally, a story is a segment of talk, writing, or other communicative symbolism that has at least a complicating event and a resolution. Vertically, stories have enough of the aspects that include characters, suspense, and imagination. What is enough can be determined by the bedtime test (p. 9).

The value of any given story, according to Frank, rested with the listener who could not let it go and who wanted to hear it again and again.

In Chapter 5, the final story or result included is not a fictionalized account but a re-telling or reshaping of the stories shared with me by one of the participants in my study. These stories have been re-framed (re-articulated) by me. This was my attempt at a “synthesizing of the data” and a “configuration into a coherent whole” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). With Clandinin (2013), I see my work as a narrative inquirer as “as relational research” (p. 81) and this narrative analysis of Beth’s stories was my attempt to honor our relationship as researcher and participant and, more importantly, to provide space for a telling of the many relationships that have shaped Beth as a learner and as a teacher who makes decisions about instructional practices for her students with CSN. Because I could not let go of Beth’s voice as I read and listened to our exchanges across the data collection
period, I moved forward with this narrative analysis as a way to understand that nagging attachment and to engage others in her story.

Below, I began with my story of Beth as a literacy learner and as a teacher based on content from interviews and focus groups. I then shared another version of Beth’s story that placed a student at the center of the story. My reasoning and approach to this second telling of details from Beth’s data were given in the introduction to this second storied account.

**Listening and Interpretation**

My listening to and interpretation of data collected from my participants was filtered through my experiences and personal/professional subjectivities (Glesne, 2016). I came to this process with a perspective on “analysis as a mode of conversation” (Mahmood, 2005, p. 199) with my participants (and colleagues in the literate worlds of school) in a particular place at a particular moment in time. In this role as initiator and implementer of this research study, I entered conversation with participants not just as the writer and “asker” of a set of questions related to literacy narratives but as one who has reflected upon and answered these questions, over and over, as a teacher and a student. For this reason, I performed a self-interview through which I answered to the questions that I asked of my participants. My reflection upon these questions was written in the form of an informal autoethnography that was included in my reflection upon the data analysis process and that allowed me to be as clear as possible about my own subjectivities (the “I” at the center of this research study).

By using the term autoethnography, I made explicit my use of a “retrospectively and selectively” focused research and writing process to reflect upon and better understand teachers’ thinking about literacy within their school culture or “particular cultural identity” as teachers in a specific place and time, working with a specific group of students (Ellis et al.,
2011, p. 276). My intention was to make “familiar for insiders and outsiders” the experiences and literacy narratives of teachers of students with CSN (p. 276). By using an intentionally autoethnographic approach to this personal reflection and to my overall analysis of data, this research study provided greater understanding of the sub-culture inhabited by teachers of students with CSN. By taking an autoethnographic approach, I sought to understand the culture of learning within which each teacher emerged as a literate being. My autoethnographic piece was provided in Chapter 4 below and was shared through the following two highlighted themes: Expansion of ideas about literacy and Maps and meaning.

**Quality and Rigor**

Willig (2013) argued that an approach to evaluating qualitative research could, and maybe should, be grounded in that study’s epistemological undergirding (p. 174). Studies grounded in an approach on the realist end of the epistemological spectrum could, possibly, show an objectivity or reliability via a triangulation with other data sources (p. 174). Research approaches taking a more relativist approach require an evaluative view that looks at “the quality of the research rather than its validity (p. 174). In other words, does the researcher clearly express the forms of knowledge to be created, provide a detailed road map for arrival at that sought-after knowledge, and demonstrate a reflexivity that unabashedly places the “I” of the researcher into all phases of the project.

Despite deliberate or unintentional obfuscation of terminology and approaches to evaluating qualitative research, Mayan (2009) asserted “that rigor works for qualitative inquiry” (p. 107). Morse et al. (2002) described possible verification strategies such as attention to “researcher responsiveness, methodological coherence, appropriate and adequate sampling, collecting and analyzing data concurrently, and thinking theoretically” (p. 18). I
attended to these strategies as I entered into and worked through the process of this research study.
CHAPTER 4

Results of Thematic Analysis

For this research study, I used a case-based narrative inquiry framework to explore:
(a) the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs (CSN) and (b)
what those literacy narratives reveal about their thinking about instructional practices for
students with CSN. The study included data in the form of recordings and transcripts from
initial interviews, two focus groups, and follow-up interviews. All four participants
completed both interviews and participated in both focus groups. Additionally, I completed a
self-interview with the questions from the initial and follow-up interviews prior to asking
these questions of my participants. This self-interview was recorded and transcribed. Below,
I describe the results of my study in the following order:

- Researcher autoethnography based on responses to interview questions answered by
  all study participants.
- Thematic analysis of narratives from participant engagement in individual initial and
  follow-up interviews and in focus groups.
- A narrative analysis (in-depth re-articulation) of one participant’s sharing of stories
  about her experiences as a literacy learner and teacher of literacy for students with
  CSN. This part of the results for this study will be included below as Chapter 5.

For a timeline of these data collection activities and dates, see Appendix E.

My participating teachers (Carol, Darcy, Fran, and Beth) all met the inclusion criteria
of having at least two years of experience as a teacher of students with CSN. All participants
were white females as was the researcher. On average, my participants have nine years of
experience as teachers of students with CSN. Because of the small sample size and because
my participants all taught in the same small school district, I decided to not include
information about their specific, respective years of experience as that may have provided
detail that could reveal identity.

Carol, Darcy, Fran, and Beth were quick to respond to my initial recruitment email
(one response came within fifteen minutes of sending the email) and the process of deciding
upon initial and subsequent meeting dates, consenting, and data collection was easy and
problem-free. In fact, the only change to any of the scheduled meeting dates was initiated by
me. The initial interviews all started with some obvious nervousness on the part of
participant and researcher (as experienced by me and as perceived by me in my listening/re-
listening to recordings) but rapport and trust seemed to grow across the data collection
process. The one-on-one conversations about literacy/teaching experiences, especially,
provided entry into a deeply emotional and intimate space of remembered/shared story that
left me with a sense of “inherited responsibility” (Oliver, 2016) for those stories and for the
individuals who shared them with me. This responsibility, as I intend it, is not so much about
protection as it is about integrity in my careful listening to participants’ stories and in
reporting of my process of analyzing, sharing this analysis, and in my discussion of these
results.

Researcher Autoethnography

On the morning of June 4, 2019, I sat at my dining room table and recorded answers
to the interview questions that I had written for my initial and follow-up interviews with
participants (see Appendices H and I). My recorded answers to these questions were
transcribed and edited in the same manner as the recordings of the individual participant
interviews and the focus groups. I then commenced a process of reading (and re-reading)
these transcripts of my self-interview while listening (and re-listening) to the recordings. Because I had, prior to this research study, written extensively about my own experiences as a literacy learner and as a teacher of literacy, I looked and listened for ideas that seemed new or surprising to me in some way. This use of a “retrospectively and selectively” focused questioning and writing process helped me to clarify and record my thinking about literacy as a student and as a teacher in the time just prior to data collection (Ellis et al., 2011, p. 276). My intention was to make “familiar” for myself and for my readers my own thinking about the questions at the center of the data collection process (p. 276). This familiarity was necessary to show my thinking about instructional practices for students with CSN and about ways of defining literacy as I entered the process of analyzing my participants’ thinking about these topics. As the analyzer, I was informed by my own experiences as literacy learner and as teacher of literacy. Below, I discussed, briefly, two narratives that sprung from this self-interview process entitled as follows: Expansion of ideas about literacy: Middle Schoolers and Maryann Wolf and Maps and Meaning.

**Expansion of Ideas about Literacy: Middle Schoolers and Maryann Wolf**

In my self-interview, I discussed my work with middle school students with and without CSN. I reflected upon students at the middle school level who have been on my caseload and my focus on building a foundation of trust so that students who have not had much success as learners could connect with their teachers and connect with the content. I also described my work with general education teachers to try to help them see how to better support students with CSN in their classrooms. In the middle schools in which I have worked, I always had the feeling that there were pre-formed and hardened ideas about what students should do and be. It seemed that there were assumptions about what teaching in a
content area should look like without much willingness to provide the accommodations and/or modifications that were part of individualized education programs (IEPs) and that would likely help all students. I shared my experience in one middle school history classroom where I felt “repelled” by the way the content was being shared and that the seeming objective was to “make history as boring as possible for our students.”

As a part of my reflection on my work with middle school students with and without CSN, I discussed my growing awareness of teachers, classrooms, and other school spaces as persons and places that students needed to learn to read. In other words, if teachers were not going to make accommodations and/or modifications to content and to instructional spaces, what skills could I teach to students that would help them to understand how to watch for moments of possible connection with their teachers and to self-advocate. In my discussion of my experience as a teacher of literacy, I moved to thoughts about how I have taught teachers to help students with literacy and how to teach the teacher “along with the student…about how to connect with what's going on” in the spaces “around them” and how teachers can listen for all of the ways that students are expressing needs and wants.

Maryann Wolf’s (2018) discussion of deep reading (p. 5) was very much on my mind at the time of this self-interview. Via current research in neuroscience, Wolf described a process of change occurring in human brains as transition was made from processes that require a significant investment of time and focused attention to make meaning of long passages of text on a printed page to the shorter attentional need and choppier time increments required for reading in a “digital milieu” on a device (p. 8). While I shared Wolf’s concerns (and related my own experiences as a deep reader who actively sought “the fattest book” for summer reading), I wondered about the “privilege” of deep reading in our distant
and more recent history. I saw the ways that persons from particular ethnic and/or socioeconomic backgrounds, of a particular gender, or having a particular set of cognitive skills or abilities that happen to be defined as “typical” for a particular moment in time were privileged in ways that allowed for access to potentially liberating educational/economic resources. While not devaluing this set of skills Wolf called “deep reading,” I wondered if we need to understand it “within the context of a whole set of skills” or “abilities related to literacy” within a much larger definitional framework. In other words, if deep reading was a way to connect with another human being (the author), with the ideas within the text, or with others who have engaged with that same text, were and are there no other ways to get to that connection? Why was deep reading seen as a more valuable way to get to that connection? I maintained that a broader understanding of the multiple ways of literate connection would necessitate more inclusive learning environments (classrooms) especially at the middle and high school levels where supporters of the exclusion of students with CSN become particularly vociferous in asserting that engagement with grade level content was impossible.

Maps and Meaning

My self-interviews also produced memory of a writing experience with which I concluded this autoethnography. When considering an interview question about an unforgettable time or moment as a student, I spoke about an experience from middle school that involved a different and memorable literate form as recalled in interactions with a fifth-grade teacher, Mrs. Mann. I recalled this literacy-based experience because of the structure or form of making meaning and its significance for me.

Mrs. Mann, my social studies teacher, gave road maps of the eastern United States to me and my classmates. She gave us time and space to map a trip from our location in central
Maryland to any location within the confines of the map. We had been given some instructions. But, basically, we were asked to choose any location on the map and to write on a sheet of paper the directions that would take us there. At that time, I loved summer weekend trips to Ocean City, Maryland, so I mapped my journey to that location. I recalled lying on my stomach in the hallway outside of that classroom with the road map opened out in front of me. It was a way of reading and writing about that reading that I had not encountered before in such a specific and concrete way, and, as I recalled this incident, I could still feel the thrill (and, I think, power) of the knowledge that getting to that favorite place by the Atlantic Ocean away from those much less-favored places (middle school classrooms, locker rooms, and hallways) was somehow within my knowing, within my hands. It was at that moment that I “fell in love with place names” and maps. The world seemed wider and more accessible to me on that one day.

These two narratives were emblematic of my thinking about literacy and about instructional practices as I entered the process of data collection with this research study’s participants. In one sense, these short narratives are maps that locate my thoughts in a specific time and place and in relationship with other individuals and/or ideas. In the case of these two maps, they located me in a time of transition, anxiety, and excitement as I entered my own uncharted territory as a student-researcher; in a place that gave me the opportunity to connect with four teachers of students with CSN; and in relationship with ideas about reading with which I wrestled and argued. As I entered the data collection phase of this study in June 2019, I was mindful of how my work with students with CSN had forced me to broaden my approach to defining literacy and to instructing students. I was also thinking about how to
map a way forward, for myself, that would allow me to make some meaning of the stories for which I was about to listen.

**Thematic Analysis**

I conducted initial interviews, two focus groups, and follow up interviews that included all four of the participants in my study. The resulting recordings were transcribed via a process described in Chapter 3. All recordings and transcripts were uploaded into an online platform (Dedoose). This platform allowed for the excerpting and coding of the data (transcripts) using an approach that combined “process coding” (Saldaña, 2016, p. 78) and “emotion coding” (p. 125). After this first cycle of coding, I used a process of visual mapping that allowed me to see overarching themes and more subtle connections between categories of codes that emerged through the analysis process.

Data collection was conducted with attention to time (e.g., all initial interviews were completed before starting the focus groups and follow-up interviews were not begun until after both focus groups had been completed). Because of this intentionality related to timing, I included temporality (or placement in time) as part of the analysis process. I also looked at stories shared by participants in terms of sociality (i.e., was the story told in an individual interview, in a focus group, or in both). This attention to temporality and sociality was suggested in Clandinin’s (2013) theorizing about the “commonplaces” of narrative inquiry (pp. 39-40).

The research questions at the center of this study provided both a gift and a challenge as I worked through this process of thematic analysis. The first question about teachers’ literacy narratives opened a metaphorical window through which flew remarkably rich and poignant gusts of stories that left me feeling dizzy and edgy and having to make semantic
leaps so that I could attempt to answer the second question about how those teachers’ literacy narratives revealed their thinking about instructional practices for their students with CSN. I was awash in this vertiginous-ness at the beginning, amid, and at the precious, bittersweet end of thinking about and writing up the process described below. Also, because I emerged from this process laden not just with data in the form of stories but with the experience of sitting with the tellers of those stories, I struggled to leave these voices out of this thematic analysis. As a result, I have provided analytic frames around my reframing of parts of the literacy narratives of the four participants.

The result of this process of “analysis of narratives” (Polkinghorne, 1995) is the identification of three themes: Writing instruction is inherently different for students with CSN; Relating to literate others; and Learning to teach. I have provided definitions and descriptions of these themes in the sections below (Table 3).

Table 3.

*Themes and Definitions*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/sub-theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme One: Writing instruction is inherently different for students with CSN</strong></td>
<td>Explication of writing instruction as provided to participants who were students without CSN and of participants’ writing instruction for their students with CSN.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme: Learning to write (without CSN)</strong></td>
<td>Descriptions of multimodal and comprehensive approaches to writing instruction for students without CSN. Includes examples of school-based instruction and participants’ views of the importance of writing outside of school.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

- School-based
- Writing as connector to self and others
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Theme/sub-theme</th>
<th>Definition</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme</strong>: Writing instruction for students with CSN looks different (the majority view)</td>
<td>Writing instruction described as either a set of discrete skills without connection to stories, informational texts, semantic tools for navigating the classroom/school and/or described as something that participants struggled to teach to their students with CSN. Included outlier view of one participant who used a more wholistic instructional approach with her students with CSN.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme</strong>: Inclusive, comprehensive writing instruction for all students (Fran’s outlier view)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Two: Relating to literate others</strong></td>
<td>Stories of significant literate others who taught them to read, modelled how to take part in literate communities, provided access to books and other literate objects, and/or told stories of the participants’ place within familial/historical contexts.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme</strong>: Literate Matriarchies</td>
<td>Description of mothers and grandmothers who were the primary relational force described by participants, when asked about individuals who had impacted their literacy learning.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• First Teachers</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>• Safety and Connection</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme</strong>: Impactful Teaching</td>
<td>Teachers’ actions and instructional decisions profoundly affect students’ interest, motivation, and view of themselves as a reader and writer.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme</strong>: Teaching with Relationship at the Center</td>
<td>Effective literacy instruction for students with CSN requires a willingness on the part of the teacher to build rapport/relationship with students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Theme/sub-theme</td>
<td>Definition</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Theme Three: Learning to teach</strong></td>
<td>Learning to teach students with CSN is complex and requires on-going effort.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme: Feeling Unprepared to Teach and Turning Points</strong></td>
<td>Descriptions of initial teaching experiences when participants felt unprepared and/or did not know what to do; moments when they realized they were at a crisis or turning point.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme: Training and Getting Help</strong></td>
<td>Descriptions of the ways that participants sought help or actively looked for ways to learn more about how to better support their students.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Sub-theme: Curriculum-making</strong></td>
<td>Decision making about what/how to teach in their classrooms based on the interplay of student needs/interests, formal curricular expectations and/or materials, and teacher experience.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Theme One: Writing Instruction is Inherently Different for Students with CSN**

This theme emerged from participants’ stories and discussions about literacy and literacy instruction in their experiences as students and as teachers of students with CSN. My analysis revealed a clear distinction for all but one participant (Fran) between thinking about literacy instruction for students like themselves who generally were typically developing learners and for their students with CSN. This analysis and the examples from participant narratives focused specifically on writing and writing instruction as a result of the frequency of codes related to this topic. Because writing and writing instruction were discussed in interviews and focus groups more frequently than any other aspect of literacy and literacy
learning, I specifically chose this focus on writing as a lens on participants’ thinking about instructional practices (their own and those of teachers and others who had taught them), a foundational question of this research study. Through the process of data analysis, I used a definition of writing based on the work of Christopher Kliwer (2008). Kliwer defined writing as “making and expressing one’s own meaning through narratives crafted from visual-tactile, pictorial, and textual symbol systems” (p. 113). Kliwer’s definition was developed through his work in inclusive classrooms supporting students with CSN and presumed “a deep sense of the individual as rightfully belonging, intelligent, and imaginative” (p. 114). My focus on writing instruction had a two-fold basis. First, I chose this focus because of the frequency of participants’ descriptions of their learning/teaching experiences with writing and the richness and depth of those descriptions. Second, I had previous direct experiences with students with CSN and their teachers where writing instruction was perceived as too difficult or as a skill to be addressed once other skills, seen as more functionally or instructionally important, were in place. For these reasons, I found that a focus on writing instruction was compelling and justified.

All four of the participants in my study shared stories of their experiences of learning to write that gave them ample opportunity to make and express meaning through a variety of modalities that helped them to build skills as writers using a standardized symbol system. In other words, they were all presumed to be capable of gaining writing skills and they all were successful in acquiring these skills (Sub-theme of Learning to Write as Students Without CSN via Participant Experiences). Under this sub-theme, I distinguished between participant stories about school-based experiences (School-based Writing Experiences) and stories of writing outside of school (Writing a Connector to Self and Others). Through the data
collection process, participants shared stories about how they taught writing to their students with CSN, and I saw their stories as a way to understand their thinking about instructional practices for their students with CSN that were, generally, inherently different from their own experiences (Sub-theme of Teaching Writing to Students with CSN).

Learning to Write as Students without CSN (via Participant Experiences). All four of the participants in this study shared stories of their experiences of learning to write that gave them many occasions to make and express meaning through a variety of modalities that helped them to build skills as writers using a standardized symbol system. Re-stated and emphasized, they were all presumed to be capable of gaining writing skills and they all were successful in acquiring these skills. I highlighted these stories about participant experiences as young writers because of the generally stark contrast between these learning opportunities and the learning opportunities provided to their students with CSN.

Within these stories of participant experiences of learning to write and as writers, I felt it necessary to split out narratives of school-based experiences and those experiences described by participants of writing as something that was key to not just their functioning but their sense of self outside of school. These two approaches are described below as follows: School-based writing experiences and Writing as a connector to self and others.

School-based Writing Experiences. The participants in this research study all shared stories that revealed their early position within classrooms and schools as students presumed to be able to gain skills and to make meaning with a traditional symbol system (i.e., text in the dominant language). Even the one participant (Darcy) who self-identified as having a disability that challenged her successful engagement with text described the ways that the adults in her early life helped her to develop traditional writing skills and held a presumption
of her ability to find success as a writer. Both Fran and Beth described writing as central to
their identities as literacy learners both in and outside of school. The other two participants
(Carol and Darcy) related more isolated instances of positive experiences of writing as
students that helped them to describe themselves as enjoying the process of writing given the
right emotional support and/or modifications to the writing process. In this section, I will
focus on the school-based writing experiences of all four participants.

Beth, Fran, and Darcy shared stories of elementary school teachers and, in one case, a
Speech/Language Pathologist (S/LP), who provided opportunity for them to work as creative
writers in their elementary school classrooms. Fran described her third-grade teacher who
taught writing via a “writer’s workshop” model and who invited her students and their
parents to that teacher’s home to “present and share our books we wrote.” She said she
especially liked creative writing or “making up kind of random stories” later in elementary
school. Fran qualified her in-school experiences with writing by indicating that she “didn’t
like writing as much as I like reading.” As students, Fran, Beth, and Darcy all experienced, at
some point in their school years, a writer’s workshop type of approach to writing instruction
that was centered on students writing regularly, receiving support with skills such as learning
writing conventions, and publishing/sharing stories in a formal way.

Beth enthusiastically described a S/LP who provided opportunities for shared and
individual writing in her elementary school classroom. In our initial interview, Beth recalled,
in minute detail, this writing experience and the characters that she created alongside her
classmates. For example, she shared the name of one of the characters that she and her
classmates created and that she still recalled. Beth related a whole group process of
brainstorming about what this character needed and was feeling in the story that they were
creating together. According to Beth, this writing instructor “kind of got us through emotion and like storytelling and setting and all that stuff” and helped her students to build vocabulary by thinking about everyday objects like umbrellas and other ways to describe them or variations of them such as parasols. This important early writing experience was so significant to Beth that she recalled it again during our follow-up interview and she brought to the that second interview the physical hand-written and illustrated books that her parent had kept, initially, and that Beth continued to hold onto and to value.

Darcy self-identified as someone who struggled as a learner and who needed supports to be successful with any literacy-based skill. However, she had a supportive teacher for most of her elementary school years who valued Darcy’s ability to “make up stories” and to “memorize them in my head.” Darcy described her teacher’s process of writing down Darcy’s stories “so the whole class kind of had the books that I had written.” This teacher also helped Darcy to see herself as an active part of that literate community by telling her “see you can write you can read” at a time when Darcy was increasingly aware of her learning differences. Even though Darcy described herself as someone who found a path to academic success eventually earning Bachelor’s and Master’s degrees, she felt the need to describe this early writing experience as “technically writing” because it was not done in a traditional pencil-and-paper fashion.

Carol related her experiences with a Language Arts teacher in high school who was “really really energetic” and “really fun.” She said that this was a “favorite class” because she and the other students “could write whatever you wanted” and “unless you misspelled words or you got the punctuation wrong you pretty much would get a good grade.” Carol said that this teacher always seemed interested in all students and she found ways to learn
about and connect with everyone in the class. This last piece was a significant factor in Carol’s memory of this writing class as a positive one. All four participants described scenarios where they saw themselves as having success as learners of the writing process through relatively typical classroom experiences.

**Writing as a Connector to Self and Others.** Skills gained in the process of becoming a writer are always intended as tools to build connection with a larger literate community (Forts & Luckasson, 2011; Keefe & Copeland, 2011; Kliewer, 2008). In addition to the school-based writing experiences described above, most of this study’s participants described uses of writing for a variety of “connecting” purposes outside of their experiences in school. Through their literacy narratives, Darcy, Fran, and Beth saw writing as a skill that was supported by literate others outside of school and allowed them to make sense of themselves and to connect with others. Fran remembered “having like journals” in which she would draw pictures and write stories. Her mother still has these early journals. Fran also described her written correspondence with her grandmother before her grandmother “got really sick” and passed away. Fran said that “even in the day of you know we had email and phones and stuff we still we’d do the handwritten notes” and this seemed significant to Fran because of the permanence of these physical (paper) objects. Fran shared that she still “has a whole box of” these letters that her grandmother had written to her and that these physical objects with her grandmother’s “handwriting” gave her “something to hold onto” that “just the phone calls and stuff” did not provide.

Beth described her early writing as “one of my favorite things to do” and that, as she got older, she “just loved writing…making up my own stories.” She remembered writing illustrated stories in notebooks over her summer breaks and she shared that she loved writing
essays once she was introduced to that written form. Beth described herself as a “very shy person” and as “not a very outgoing or confident person in front of a lot of people” and that she “can write it better than I can tell you a lot of times.” As a result, Beth continued to use writing, beyond her time as a student, as “a medium to express myself” and to “not worry what other people thought.” Beth said that she still uses handwritten cards or letters as a way to communicate her feelings to those that she cares about because it gives her to opportunity to “practice everything in my head” before sharing her thoughts or feelings. Additionally, Beth described a particularly difficult school year that she had working with the educational assistants assigned to her classroom. In the second focus group, she shared her experience of taking time during the summer after that school year to write an “EA manual” that communicated her vision for her classroom and the ways that she wanted her education assistants to work with students. There was a staffing change in her classroom at the beginning of the next school year so she never used the manual. However, based on my conversations with her during the entire data collection process, it seemed to me that this act of writing the manual was, at least in part, a way for Beth to process her feelings and frustrations about this situation.

For three of four participants, the writing instruction that they received through their years as literacy learners as described by them shared little in comparison to their depictions of the writing instruction that they provided to their students with CSN. This differing approach to instruction in writing skills, as described by three of the four participants, was included in the next section and is labeled a “majority view.”

**Writing for Students with CSN Looks Different Than for Students without CSN (The Majority View).** All four participants related experiences as teachers of writing for
their students with CSN. For three of these participants, writing instruction was described as either a set of discrete skills without connection to stories, informational texts, semantic tools for navigating the classroom/school and/or was described as something that they struggled to teach to their students with CSN. As described by these three participants, writing instruction was inherently different from their experiences as learners without CSN.

In discussions with Carol, Darcy, Beth, writing instruction was generally described in terms of a discrete skill or set of skills such as writing/tracing letters, matching letters or words, compiling lists of frequently used words (e.g., for grocery shopping), or using a sentence strip with the words “I want” and picture cards with food and other items in the classroom to make requests as a part of communication exchange system. Another generality that emerged in interviews with Beth and Carol was the divide between students in their classrooms who had some of the skills of a typical literacy learner (e.g., being able to hold a pencil without support or showing signs of emerging literacy skills such as showing interests in texts or reading short, easily decodable words) and students who needed more significant supports.

Carol, Beth, and Darcy shared their desires to broaden approaches to writing instruction for their students with CSN. However, they described specific practices, especially for students with the most significant support needs, that evinced more limited views of what was possible for these students. They struggled to see writing as more than just the physical act of pencil/pen on paper and to broaden their thinking about how to make writing more accessible and meaningful for their students. Also, during one of the focus groups, Beth reiterated a statement shared in her initial interview that she did not teach reading and writing to her students with the most significant communication needs. Her
instruction for these students focused on providing many opportunities across their day for communication exchanges using requests made verbally or via a picture exchange system. In Beth’s self-contained classroom, writing instruction was described primarily within the framework of communication opportunities for her students. Beth described writing activities for her students that included the writing of letters and words for students who have the “hand strength” to hold a writing implement and to make marks on paper. For her students who cannot hold a pencil or marker, Beth provided opportunities to work with text via matching of letters and words and by using sentence strips with stem phrases such as “I want” that can be completed by choosing a word that describes an object or activity. Beth shared a strong adherence to what could be described as a philosophy of communication-centered (or communication-only) literacy.

Beth shared her recent experience of reflecting in writing (on her professional dossier) about “differentiation” for a “high student and a low student” and what writing looks like for each. She described one of her “high” students as being able to “do a lot of academic work” and a lot of writing that “may not be logical” but who could eventually make himself understood by writing. For one of her “low students,” writing “is a lot of matching” and “recognizing prints or recognizing your name recognizing your phone number like functional type life skills” (Beth, follow-up). Beth said that “personally literacy means to me just loving to read and loving to write” and she expressed her understanding of the important of reading with and in front of her own child so that she can “model that for them.”

Darcy described her approach to literacy as focusing primarily on communication and the ways that “we miss that sometimes maybe kids saying something and understanding something and we just automatically assume they don’t know it.” After probing for more
details, Darcy struggled to describe writing instruction in her self-contained classroom. She admitted that “because it is a struggle for me that is not my favorite thing to teach.” However, she did continue with a description of her use of a text from some of the curricular materials made available to her by the school district to initiate a writing activity for her students with CSN. Darcy took the basic story provided in her curriculum and expanded it into a whole group storytelling activity with her students providing parts of the story. For example, she had them imagine what could happen while walking to their local store and added their ideas to the story as she told it. Then, Darcy had her students use a word processing program to write a list of items that they wanted to buy at the store. Darcy said that, initially, she had started this storytelling/writing activity as an unplanned extension of the basic story in the curriculum but continued the activity over the next week giving her students a chance to stand up at the front of the room to help to lead the storytelling part of the activity. Beyond this isolated story, Darcy could not describe any systematic approach to writing instruction for her students with CSN.

Carol, who also worked in a self-contained classroom, described her creation of “journals” for her students to increase fluency with and comprehension of “sight words” and “functional words.” Initially, Carol’s students were provided with a sentence that had been typed and printed out by Carol and she asked her students to draw a picture based on that sentence. This activity also included the tracing of a word in the sentence, if the student could hold and manipulate a pencil or marker. For her students who could not hold a writing implement, Carol provided a piece of paper with the word on it that the student could glue onto the journal with hand-over-hand support. Carol’s students were also given the opportunity to practice writing or tracing of individual letters in their journals, again some
with hand-over-hand support. Additionally, some of her students showed interest in attempting to approximate the writing of letters, words, and short phrases and she provided them with time to do this. This type of journaling activity was not something that Carol tried in her classroom until recently but she did this as a way to bring her students “together as a group” with the opportunity to “still individually work” at a level that made sense for each student. In reflection, Carol said that she “kind of wanted to make it a book so that they could go through and read it and you know it would kind of make sense” but that result did not occur because “we kind of skipped all over the place.” She expressed her desire to continue this “journaling” practice in the year ahead and going “in a different direction with that” so that it could be more meaningful for her students.

Inclusive, Comprehensive Writing Instruction for All Students (Fran’s Outlier Perspective). In contrast to the view of the majority of participants, my discussions with Fran revealed a comprehensive approach to teaching writing using whole and small group instruction, play-based opportunities to discuss and create texts, and intentional one-on-one interactions with adults and peers that involved communication with and about written products. Fran’s description of writing instruction in her inclusive classroom was relatively close to those descriptions provided by all participants when they described their own early engagement with writing instruction.

Fran was the only one of the four teachers who participated in this study who taught in an inclusive classroom setting. (In a classroom of approximately 20 students, she worked with three students with CSN.) I chose to name Fran’s description of writing instruction with her students as that of the “outlier” not only because of the inclusive setting (unique among the four participants) but because of her emphasis on finding ways for all of her students to
engage meaningfully in her writing instruction. Another aspect unique to Fran and her
experience as a teacher was her work as an instructor in a local community college teaching
classes on literacy to students working in a teaching licensure program. She described her
career as a teacher as continual process of learning how to better support her students.

In the initial interview, Fran showed great excitement about an approach to writing
instruction that she had recently learned and implemented in her classroom. Through this
writing program, Fran provided direct instruction and intentional, experientially based
practice in a series of approaches to making meaning with written marks on paper. For
example, Fran described a process of drawing or showing a picture of a butterfly “then you
model” for her students “how you would write the sentence so ‘I see a butterfly’ you know
but then I'd model all the stages below.” She told her students that she had been a writer for a
long time but if she did not know “how to write all these words” that she could try to “sound
it out phonetically” and write down the letters associated with the sounds. Then, she would
tell her students that if she did not know the sound-letter combinations, she could write out
some random letters with an associated picture. Fran described this process as putting the
writing process into the hands of her young students of all abilities without having them wait
for an adult to intervene and create text for them. She then tied this writing process to literacy
centers where students could create and describe their own play spaces. One example of this
that Fran provided was her students’ choice of a local pizza restaurant and their favorite
menu items that they chose as the focus of play kitchen area of the classroom. Fran said that
it was “really empowering” (for her and her students) “to see them get stuff on a piece of
paper and that was their writing” and to be able to share that meaning making with other
students and adults in the classroom. In her experience, Fran has seen that, for her learners
with CSN, that “a lotta times their writing leads their reading” given the right circumstance or instructional methods because students learn that writing can help them to communicate or “get out their stuff.” This process of helping a student to use writing as a tool for communication, as Fran has experienced it, “leads them to become a better reader.”

In my final conversation with Fran, she discussed writing as a way that one of her students with CSN may be able to move past his current struggle to understand the placement of his experiences in time. As described, this student seemed to have “no past tense or present tense in the way he would talk” and this caused anxiety to the student, his parents, and his instructional staff because he would recount and seem to relive (potentially unsafe) experiences that happened five months previously as though they had happened five seconds ago. This limited ability to distinguish between events, in a temporal sense, made it hard for this student, by Fran’s recounting, to connect with peers, with staff, and with the stories shared in the classroom. However, Fran expressed her belief that his continued work with rich and engaging writing opportunities could help him “to see in writing how you can talk about things in the past” and not only in the present moment.

Additionally, during my follow-up interview with Fran which occurred on the very last day of data collection and just prior to the start date for the ensuing school year, I felt a sense of my own urgency to complete the data collection process and I sensed some urgency from Fran to reflect upon her experience of taking part in the focus groups with her colleagues from around the school district. Fran defined literacy, for herself and her students, as “being able to connect” and to “express yourself orally and then through pen and paper.” She also discussed the ways that literacy connects us “with people past through reading and what they’ve written” and with “people in the future” through our own written expression.
More broadly, Fran expressed her belief that “reading and writing really helps us eventually come out of ourselves” to “experience things that you can't physically experience yourself in your situation” and “to connect with people that you're never going to meet face to face,” with other “worlds” and times “past present future” that we cannot experience directly ourselves.

In this interview, Fran addressed “comments I had heard in one of our groups” when participants were “talking about that you know about like whoa with some of the students I don't we don't teach reading and writing we only teach oral language.” She described herself as having “replayed” this conversation “in my head a little bit” as way to reflect upon her work with “new teachers” in her role as an instructor in local community colleges. Fran took her discomfort with that earlier conversation and kind of played around with this idea of how do I get teachers to understand that you're teaching oral language but you're also teaching reading and writing at the same time and how those are more interconnected…than than sometimes they appear.

In Theme One, I found that all four participants in this research study described writing instruction that helped them to gain not only the skills that allowed them to communicate or make meaning with traditional symbol systems. However, in their descriptions of writing instruction for their students with CSN, I found a view expressed by three out of four participants that they saw that instruction as inherently different from the types of instruction provided to students without CSN. Only one participant, Fran, described a comprehensive and inclusive instructional basis for her work with her young writers with and without CSN. In the following section, I shared my second theme that focused on participants descriptions of their relationships to important literate others in their lives.
Theme Two: Relating to Literate Others

For the purposes of this study, the phrase literate other was defined as any individual in a participant’s early life who engaged in literacy activities directly with the participant and/or who provided access to literacy materials or literacy-based events. Participants described multiple narratives of significant literate others who taught them to read, modeled how to take part in literate communities, provided access to books and other literate objects, and/or told stories of the participants’ place within familial/historical contexts. A commonality for all participants in this study was that they each had at least one adult caregiver (usually a female) in their early lives who had an established reading, writing, and/or storytelling routine, who saw them as having the potential to engage with literacy materials and activities, and with whom the participant felt a close emotional bond.

Additionally, one of the constants that emerged was participants’ willingness to discuss and to revisit (with and without prompting) their experiences of literacy within this type of relational context. These included descriptions of experiences that participants had with, primarily, mothers and grandmothers (under the heading, below, of Literate Matriarchies) and with teachers (under the heading of Impactful Teaching). Under Literate Matriarchies, I highlighted examples of the ways that participants’ mothers provided their daughters’ first literacy learning experiences (First teachers) and examples of literate others who provided models for perseverance and work in the classroom (Safety and Connection). The sub-theme of Impactful Teaching included, generally, narratives of teachers as influencers, in a positive sense, on all four participants’ emergence as literacy learners. However, one participant (Darcy) described experiences with literate others (teachers and peers) who discouraged or “devastated” her. This was related under the sub-theme of
Impactful Teaching. Participants also placed specific emphasis on building strong relationships/rapport with their literacy learners with CSN as vital to their work in getting these students to engage with instruction in literacy. This sub-theme was described as Teaching with Relationship at the Center below. In their sharing about their literacy instruction with students with CSN, participants emphasized the importance of listening as a teacher or watching for ways to motivate their students to engage with learning opportunities. As described, this was not only about motivation and engagement but also about finding ways to differentiate or to modify literacy materials so that their students could actively participate.

The through line for this set of narratives is a thread woven of literate acts/objects and relationships with, generally, female family members and teachers who provided space for connection and meaning making with those literate objects. Furthermore, participants saw their important literate others as role models, in various ways, for ways of being personally and professionally. Finally, participants identified the importance of building rapport and relationship to facilitate the learning of their students with CSN.

**Literate Matriarchies.** All four participants identified at least one female family member who was their primary role model for literate behavior in their early years. These mothers and grandmothers were the primary relational force described by participants, when asked about individuals who had impacted their literacy learning. Also, although not discussed explicitly, all the participants in this study described backgrounds that were solidly working and/or middle class and that provided the time and the environments in which these relationships could flourish. There were resources for basics (food, clothing, shelter) and for the beyond-basics like books/other literacy materials, trips to libraries/bookstores, vacations
to visit important literate others such as grandparents, etc. Two participants (Fran and Beth) were daughters of teachers or other educational professionals. Another participant (Darcy) was supported by her stay-at-home mother who, as described by her daughter, probably should have been a professional educator. Carol’s early learning was shaped by her grandmother who was a storyteller and a stubbornly self-sufficient rancher and businesswomen. These early literacy narratives were grouped below under the headings of First Teachers and Connection.

**First Teachers.** When asked about individuals who had been important to their early literacy learning three of four participants described their mothers as their first teachers. Both Beth and Fran were systematically taught to read by their mothers as preschoolers. Darcy’s mother was Darcy’s primary support with literacy learning when it became apparent that Darcy would need support with her literacy learning. The fourth participant (Carol) spent significant amounts of time during her early years with her grandmother who was Carol’s teacher by example (oral storytelling, reading the Bible, etc.).

Fran described her mother as the first person to come to mind when asked about an individual who had impacted her learning of literacy skills. She said that her mother worked as a “speech therapist and so she did a lot of stuff with us at home.” Fran remembered both her mother and grandmother as avid readers who were always reading and discussing books and she reported that that modeling of reading by these two important adults in her life helped her to develop her own love of reading. She also recalled her mother teaching a phonics-based program to her and her sister and her mother “constantly complaining about the schools not teaching phonics.” Fran had to “do all these workbooks and stuff during the summer time” at her mother’s insistence. Beth, too, was raised by educators and remembers
both parents as positively impacting her development as someone who still actively reads and
writes across settings and purposes in her adult life. Beth’s mother taught her and her sisters
to read before they started school. She told a story of taking the “Sally, Dick, and Jane”
books to her preschool classroom to prove to her teacher that she could read. Beth expressed
deep affection for these books that her mother used to teach her to read and related that these
were the actual copies of the books that her mother had used when she was learning to read.
Beth also recalled her mother’s use of flash cards to teach sight words, a set of tools that
likely came from her mother’s elementary school classroom. Beth could not remember a time
when reading was not a part of her life.

Darcy, too, shared stories of her mother’s impact on her literacy learning. Her mother
had an awareness of Darcy’s father’s struggle with reading and could see that same difficulty
with reading and writing in her daughter and her son (Darcy’s brother). Darcy described her
mother’s insistence that Darcy not give up or to give in to the often-negative things that she
would hear about herself from teachers and peers. Darcy said that homework took hours but
her mother “would sit with us” and “she’d struggle with us ‘cause she knew my dad
struggled and she understood it.” According to Darcy, her mother was a gifted and
“theatrical” storyteller who would use a flashlight, a sheet, and hand puppets to help her
daughter to “write” stories and memorize them. Darcy described her mother as working “all
the time” to find ways to make “learning fun” for her and her brother. She expressed her
belief that teachers “need to listen” because “kids know how they want to learn they may not
know what they want to learn…but they want to read they want to write.”

Carol was the youngest child in her family and, by the time she started school, both of
her parents had to work full-time jobs in support of their family. As a result, she spent large
amounts of time with her grandmother who was a rancher and independent businesswoman. Carol recalled riding along in her grandmother’s truck when her grandmother had chores to do around the ranch. On one occasion, her grandmother bought a small property that had an old, dilapidated schoolhouse on it. Carol watched her grandmother “knock” down the “boards” and then saw her “stacking them up loading them in her truck” and “taking them to her house” to use for the building and repair of fences. Carol said that her grandfather died when she was very young and, beyond that, her grandmother took on the running of their cattle ranch by herself. Carol did not recall having a lot of books in her home; neither her parents nor her grandmother were regular readers although she did remember her grandmother reading from a Bible. But, Carol’s grandmother “was really good at telling stories” like Rip Van Winkle.

**Safety and Connection.** More significant than the active and specific teaching or modeling of literacy-based skills, participants described the importance of the connection that they had with these women who were central to their early lives. Although I saw these connections as inextricably linked with the specific literacy activities described, I provided below examples of stories from participants that highlighted the importance of emotional safety and connection at the center of their early lives. In some of these examples, the participant did not make a direct connection to a literacy-specific activity with the individual identified as having a significant impact on their experiences as a learner or teacher. However, they did all make a direct connection between the influence exerted by these significant individuals and the participant’s experience as a literacy learner and/or teacher of literacy.
Carol recalled a connection to a singular caregiver, her grandmother, whose story was, in part, shared above. Carol remembered her grandmother as a “very hard worker” who “worked uh you know her fingers to the bone until the day she died” and whose work ethic and “stubbornness” was a “challenge” to Carol “every day” to persist in her work with children. This inimitable woman at the center Carol’s early life had enviable talents and she was described as a source of inspiration for Carol. Carol recalled that she (Carol) had “done a lot of things” in her life that she either never planned to or thought she could do. However, her reflection on her “very independent and very headstrong” grandmother who had done “lots of things most men would maybe not do either” helped Carol to say to herself, “I guess I could do it.”

Fran provided descriptions of powerful connections that she had with her mother and grandmother that were literacy-based. She recalled “reading every night” before bed with her mother even after Fran had learned to read and was an avid independent reader. Fran described this as “such a good like time to connect with her and to be able to talk about things” as they would take turns reading from chapter books. One of these shared books in particular, *The Education of Little Tree* (1976), was memorable because it was the first time that Fran had read from a book with “bad words” in it. Fran remembered her mother’s direction to say “beep” when either one of them encountered a “bad word.” More significantly, Fran recalled having a conversation with her mother about “bad words and what you do and how other people talk different than you do.” Fran also described her overhearing of enthusiastic conversations between her mother and grandmother about books that they had read or were planning to read and how this “really inspired” Fran to want to read. Fran was the oldest of her grandmother’s grandchildren and, as a result, spent a lot of
time with this significant adult. Her grandmother shared family stories about family who “came over in covered wagons” to a state in the Southwestern U.S. and Fran learned to value this “connection with older generations.”

Darcy described her mother’s illness that in recent years made it impossible for her mother to write, an activity that “she loved.” This illness also made it “a struggle” for her mother to read. Darcy said that “watching her” mother, who was an early and energetically persistent teacher for her daughter, face a progressive illness “gave me the power to keep going to you know she can face this I can face this” or any specific challenge inside or outside of her work as a teacher.

**Impactful Teaching.** Mothers and grandmothers were the most frequently mentioned literate others in the learning lives of the participants in this study. However, all four participants shared stories of teachers who had provided impactful literacy learning experiences for them. These were individuals who had provided welcome or a sense of belonging within the classroom; who gave the participant access to previously unknown content, books, or ideas; and/or who demonstrated the ability to focus attention on their students in a way that helped them to feel truly understood or valued. Finally, while Darcy described teachers who met the criteria mentioned above, she also shared experiences of inappropriate or hurtful behavior by teachers as a result of her learning difference which are also shared below.

Carol’s description of an impactful teacher came in the context of her expressed introversion as a student and her general dislike of school. She shared her story of one teacher from her secondary years who was “animated and very positive and upbeat” and “she just made the class fun.” This language arts teacher made “a connection with everyone in the
classroom you know I mean she would you know…talk to everybody…not just one or two people.” Carol also remembered this teacher’s sharing of different kinds of literature in a way that “made it a little bit more fun and less dull.” This teacher “influenced my learning more than anyone,” according to Carol. Fran recalled “always liking” her first grade teacher not because of any specific literate activity or specific event but because of their warm connection. Darcy described her “absolute favorite teacher” from high school who provided her with learning opportunities that did not require her to “sit and read all day.” She said that it was in this teacher’s classroom that she “developed the ability to have conversations” and to begin to overcome her shyness and insecurity. Darcy recalled that this teacher “saw something that” she “didn’t see” in herself and that he “really opened up” her “world.”

Beth’s “favorite part” of “going through elementary school was reading aloud time” which happened after recess every day. Her teachers would turn “off the lights” and “would just read a book” for this period of time. She said that this activity “may have been 15 minutes” but that it seemed much longer and that her teachers’ choice of books to read aloud introduced her to literature that she likely would not have otherwise encountered. Beth “just sat there” and “hated when they were like okay and we’ll pick up tomorrow.” Beth described her reaction to the end of this read aloud time as “NO keep going.”

While Darcy was able to provide examples of a couple of teachers who helped her to connect with school and with herself as a literacy learner, she also had experiences with teachers and peers that were very negative. She described the act of having to read “out loud” in class as “devastating” and as causing stress that made reading even harder. In middle school, Darcy encountered teachers who would force her to read aloud even though she had been receiving special education services for her dyslexia since elementary school. After
being forced to read aloud in front of her peers, Darcy would encounter classmates on the playground who would say “rough” things like “you can’t even say ‘the.’”. She described these experiences as being central, at least in part, to her development of a profound “lack of confidence” that was occasionally mitigated but that still haunted her at times. Darcy described “teachers that made it hard in a lot of ways because they would become frustrated and they would try not to show it but I knew as a kid I knew they were frustrated.”

Teaching with Relationship at the Center (Experiences as Teachers). While the previous section addressed participants’ relationships with key literate others in their experiences as literacy learners, another significant sub-theme that emerged within the larger Relating to Literate Others theme was the emphasis placed on building relationship and rapport as foundational to the literacy learning of participants’ students with CSN. Literacy instruction for students with CSN, according to the teachers interviewed for this study, required a willingness to listen as a teacher (i.e., to watch and wait for opportunities to connect with students around a particular interest, activity, or as a result of giving the student time to build and feel trust).

Beth described a situation where her willingness to build relationship/rapport with a student helped to minimize disruptive behavior and to build opportunities for learning. She worked with a student who, prior to arrival in her classroom, had spent several hours a day in front of a computer watching short animated clips and copying/creating logos from his favorite movies. She said that she was able to build rapport with this student and to get “the computer problem eliminated” by watching and learning from the student. Beth was able to disrupt this student’s escalation to potentially destructive behavior in her classroom by quoting lines from the student’s favorite movies. Beth worked with this student for several
years and was able to help them to minimize behaviors that were interfering with their learning. Additionally, in our final conversation together, Beth stressed the importance of proactively “creating relationships” with families as well as students and of making sure that parents see that their teacher views them as “valued people” and not just students with a particular label and/or set of behaviors.

Another example of how taking time to watch and understand students can help to facilitate learning was given by Fran who described her experience with a student who was fascinated by and would only engage with content focused on a specific subset of prehistoric reptiles. Initially, this student refused to participate in literacy-based activities and assessments, but Fran’s curiosity, persistence, and patience allowed her to get to a point of understanding that she needed to modify activities, at least initially, to include this student’s special interest. For example, this student would not respond to a prompt to “clap out the syllables in zebra” but could successfully “clap out” the “syllables in stegosaurus.” In her experience as a teacher of students with CSN, Fran described her wariness of accepting wholeheartedly the information about what students can and cannot do as reported in IEPs (and other paperwork) when a student first comes to her classroom. She said that “half the time I feel like I don’t even wanna look at the IEP for a couple of weeks.” Conversely, Fran said that when students transition out of her classroom, she wants to be able to share what has been successful for those students along with specific areas of support.

**Theme Three: Learning to Teach**

In this discussion of the theme Learning to Teach, all participants described the ways that they continue to work to learn how to teach literacy skills to their students with CSN and continue to be deeply reflective about successes and failures after, on average, nine years of
experience as teachers. Fran’s plea that “someone’s gotta know how to do this” expressed the sentiment shared by all four participants that they were woefully unprepared to meet the needs of their students with CSN when they first entered the classroom. Also, participants described turning points in their learning as teachers that helped them to move toward a shift in instructional approach and/or mindset that helped them to better serve their students. Participants shared stories about students who helped them to see how they had to be open to change in their approaches to working with students’ behavior and to teaching literacy skills.

It was the set of follow-up interviews that was most interesting in terms of seeing either more authentic sharing and/or shifts in thinking about instructional practices for students with CSN. It was also during the follow-up interviews that participants most clearly expressed their need to be more supported with the work that they are doing. They shared their need for support for building strong, collaborative classroom teams (teachers, educational assistants, and related services providers) and for training that is effective and targeted to their specific needs. Finally, within the narratives shared during the follow-up interviews, there was expressed a frustration with feeling alone in having to figure out how to teach their students with CSN.

All four participants provided examples of ways that they had acted as curriculum makers in their work with students with CSN. Two of the four participants (Carol and Darcy) shared the ways that they had either adapted existing curricular materials or had gone completely “off script” by disposing of the curriculum provided by the school and creating their own materials in order to better meet their students’ needs as literacy learners. One participant (Fran) shared her belief that teachers, especially those new to the classroom, need to use some type of curriculum that provides a well-rounded approach to literacy instruction.
However, her curriculum making took of the form of helping her team members to see the importance of following her instructional plan regardless of the seeming unconventionality of the approach for students with and without CSN. The other participant (Beth) shared her apprehension, in the follow-up interview, that her particular approach to curriculum making was perhaps doing a “disservice” to her students.

The teachers of students with CSN in this study described a years-long process of learning to teach literacy to their students that began when they entered the classroom. This theme included narratives about learning to teach students with CSN under the following sub-themes: Feeling Unprepared to Teach and Turning Points (descriptions of initial teaching experiences when participants felt unprepared and/or did not know what to do and of moments when they realized they were at a crisis or turning point); and Training and Getting Help (descriptions of the ways that participants sought help). I also looked at the ways that my participants described their decision-making about how to provide writing/literacy instruction in their classrooms through the interaction of instructional staff, students, prior experiences of both, materials, etc. through the lens of teachers as curriculum makers (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992). Under this sub-theme (Curriculum-making), I found not only evidence of curriculum making in the stories of these teachers of students with CSN but also found both fixity (in the case of three participants) and change (in the case of one participant) in their thinking about instruction for their students from the beginning to the end of the data collection period.

**Feeling Unprepared to Teach and Turning Points.** While no interview questions were asked specifically about participants’ training or their process of learning to teach, this theme emerged through stories shared across the data collection process. This included
descriptions of feeling a lack of preparation to be able to meet the needs of students with CSN once participants were working in classrooms. They also described moments when they realized they were at a crisis or turning point in their work with students with CSN. This sharing typically came in relationship to a particular student with CSN who, in hindsight, helped the participant to make changes that would help not just that student but other students as well. Fran described her teaching as a continual process of questioning past practices and opening her mind to new interventions or strategies. Her initial training/licensure was focused on her chosen work of teaching deaf students. When she was in her first teaching position, she realized how little she really knew about how to support and teach her students. With an attitude of “somebody’s gotta know how to do this,” Fran began a career-long process of seeking professional development, attending training courses during summer breaks, and learning about new interventions. When she began to teach community college courses, Fran said that she became even more reflective as she encountered her students’ experiences and questions. She said that when she teaches “literacy courses…we’re constantly talking about remember how you learned to read or write growing up.”

Carol felt ill-prepared to teach literacy when she emerged from her teacher preparation program. She said that her supervisor and cooperating teacher for her student teaching “pretty much just let me do my own thing” and that her supervisor “came out maybe once or twice” to observe. Darcy described the “elaborate lesson plans” that she created in her first month of teaching but that “the kids didn’t buy into them.” She desperately wanted the preschool children with CSN in her first classroom to “love” literacy and school, in general. In the midst of those first months in the classroom, Darcy’s mother advised her that
if “they’re not loving it they’re not learning it so just throw it out have some fun with them and start over.” Darcy took that advice and chose a book, *Pete the Cat*, as the centerpiece of her instruction over the next two to three weeks. She used a variety of storytelling strategies including song, visual props for sequencing, and play-acting. Darcy described this as a “turning moment” in her teaching.

Beth described a similar type of turning point when she was convinced by the Occupational Therapist (OT) who was working with her students with CSN to sign up her class for the school-wide talent show. Initially, Beth thought that the whole school setting would be “too much…too many people” for her students. The talent show activity was based on the story/song *We’re Going on a Bear Hunt* (1989) and contained elements that supported Beth’s students with literacy and sensory processing goals. Students from general education classrooms participated with the students from Beth’s self-contained classroom and Beth said that “everyone was just so receptive and helpful.” This experience forced Beth to put aside assumptions about what her students could and could not do.

Darcy shared her feeling of “flopping all over you’re like a fish out of water and you don’t know what’s sticking but you’re throwing everything.” This honest sharing by Darcy reflected her feelings of overwhelm and her description of relatively abrupt changes of course in instructional practice when students seemed unengaged or unable to access the content. Carol recalled her experience of days at school that “could have gone so much better” and her sense that she had to be willing to ask “how could we do this a little a little bit different?” Carol also admitted her struggle with disruptive student behavior and her realization that “until you get that behavior a little bit under control reading and writing is not going to happen.” More significantly, Carol concluded her reflection with the admission that
“I really had to come to the terms with the fact that I HAD to change a lot of what I was doing in the classroom” to help her students to be successful and to access academic content.

The first time that Carol realized that she had to “find where those interests are” for students and build on those strengths was when she worked with a “very very difficult student” who had “very VERY aggressive behaviors.” She had minimal experience working with students who needed significant support with behavior and she said, “there was no one in the district who could help me.” Carol’s school district eventually hired a consultant from a local agency who provided Carol with support in classroom strategies, instructional planning, and in better understanding her student. Carol said that this student “started me on the road to knowing that I really needed to learn a lot more and look at a lot of different things a lot of different ways to teach students.” Also, Carol was deeply reflective about how she has had to continue to learn from students that she has had more recently, “to kind of” try “to put myself in their shoes…and step back a little bit and not be as judgmental and reactive.”

Training and Getting Help. Participants shared many descriptions of the ways that they sought help or actively looked for ways to learn more about how to better support their students. Beth described her reliance on social media for ideas and support when she was struggling in her classroom. She looked to online sharing apps for models for visual behavior supports and other tools such as social stories. Beth also looked to these sources for moral support and, it seemed, for a feeling being less alone in work that she was doing. Darcy shared that her day-to-day learning with her own children, who have a variety of support/communication needs, has motivated her to continue to learn and has helped her to be a stronger teacher for her students with CSN. She described her constant questioning of
related service providers and others who provide support to her children at home and the students in her classroom. Darcy remained enthusiastic about her work as a teacher of students with CSN because, in part, of this sense of how she could continue to learn and improve in this role.

In terms of learning as she moves forward in her career, Carol expressed a desire for more opportunities for face-to-face training and collaboration with peers across the district who are facing similar situations in their classrooms. An example of this was a recent book study of which Carol was a part that focused on how students’ experiences outside of school, including the experience of trauma, can have major impact on their learning and experiences in school. Carol expressed her eagerness to take part in other opportunities for this type of collaboration but she has also felt that there has not always been buy-in from her colleagues to better understand the whole range of factors that she has learned can impact student learning and behavior.

Fran described her constant seeking out of research and training that will help her to better understand and teach her students. She recalled the feeling of reaching plateaus in her career where she felt like “okay I have some idea of what I’m doing” and then “another student” shows up who “totally doesn’t match that.” When she has found herself with a student who has challenged her in this way, Fran searched online and looked “for some professional resources” about “some ideas to draw students out” into greater engagement in the learning environment. She also shared that she has attended “trainings after trainings” “and as many different workshops and stuff as I could ever find.”

Additionally, Fran found the experience of participating in the focus groups for this research study to be, in one sense, a way of reflecting upon and training to be a better teacher
of pre-service and in-service teachers in her role as an adjunct college instructor. She wondered about “how different past experiences impact your current teaching.” She said that it may seem like a process of having students move out of your classroom at the end of a school year and “you kind of just push that away” but the reality is that “it it really is all all connected there that the things you’ve done in the past…really impact the current.” It was also at this point in the interview that Fran commented on something that she “had heard in one of our” focus groups that “with some of the students I don’t we don’t teach reading and writing we only teach oral language.” Fran described her process of how she “kind of replayed in my head a little bit and knowing that I work with new teachers you know at the college level” and wondered aloud “how do I get teachers to understand that you’re teaching oral language but you’re also teaching reading and writing at the same time and how those are more interconnected…than sometimes they appear.” She said that she is “always kind of playing around with what I hear overhear teachers saying and how I can help new teachers in seeing things you know maybe a little bit differently.”

**Curriculum-Making.** I used the phrase curriculum-making (Clandinin & Connelly, 1992) to describe stories shared by participants that revealed their process of decision making about what/how to teach in their classrooms based on the interplay of student needs/interests, formal curricular expectations and/or materials, and teacher experience. I found that there were a number of instances shared by participants where there were intentional and planned examples of curriculum-making and others that related more of an “in the moment” shifting away from plans as a reaction to what was happening in the classroom. It was in the context of this sub-theme of curriculum-making that it was most fruitful for me to look at the any changes in participant thinking about literacy instruction for their students with CSN across
the process of data collection. Three of the four participants showed a fixity of thinking about instructional practices while one (Beth) revealed a glimpse of a possible change in her thinking during our final conversation. My analysis of these changes in thinking about instructional practices for their students with CSN was addressed as a part of the description of each participant’s curriculum-making below.

Darcy’s approach to curriculum-making was manifested in her ready and quick willingness to move away from a planned instructional approach to an on-the-spot change intended to increase student engagement. On a couple of occasions, Darcy described her experience of being provided with a pre-packaged curriculum or of starting with more formal instructional plans based on actual or perceived directives from an administrator or consulting teacher then moving away from strictly following that structure for the purpose of finding something “that the kids were really into.” Darcy described her use of a district-provided online curriculum that had “scaled back” language or what might be described as a high-interest, low-level content that was still considered to be age-appropriate. She seemed to appreciate this curricular tool but said that the stories and other content was often less than engaging and that she would have to build “bridges” to activities that would hold her students’ interest.

Also, Darcy shared some personal and staffing issues that impacted her curriculum-making in the classroom. She asserted her belief that “if the teacher’s bored the students are bored” but admitted her tendency to jump from activity to activity or to try activities that were not planned for if it seemed that her students were not immediately understanding what she wanted them to do. Darcy shared that this approach often caused conflict with her educational assistants and detracted from having a positive classroom environment. Although
she taught in a self-contained classroom, Darcy described her class as being too large and
opined that her ideal setting for students with CSN would be in a self-contained classroom
with fewer students who have a more homogeneous set of skills so that she could hone in on
what and how to teach her students. Darcy’s fixity in her thinking about instructional
practices for her students with CSN was primarily seen in her consistently inconsistent
approach to her work with students. She was much more comfortable describing her own
(unique and engaging) stories about her literacy learning than she was in being specific about
teaching literacy to her students with CSN. It seemed that Darcy could speak in wonderful
generalities about what literacy could and should be for her students, but she struggled to
provide specific examples and admitted her own discomfort with teaching writing because it
was something that she struggled with in her own life as a literacy learner and as a writer.

Carol said that “it’s kind of been up to me to design” her own curriculum because of
the individual and very different needs of the students that she has had in her classroom over
the years. She described some support from her school district in the form of materials for a
highly structured, discrete skill-based program that focuses on academic and functional skills
for students with CSN. However, she recalled that “we didn’t get a lot of training” in the use
of that curriculum. She saw this material as a “good starting point” but not comprehensive
enough. Carol expressed frustration in not having enough “reading material for kiddos that
aren’t in the general ed classroom” and admitted her feeling of not always understanding how
to connect grade-level standards to the work that she does with her students whose
communication differences were significant and “whose reading skills were non-existent.”
One idea that was central to Carol’s curriculum-making process was “to make sure that every
activity that we do can involve everybody in some respect.” She said that she regularly
develops “whole group literacy” activities that are differentiated to meet all of her students’ needs. However, Carol wondered aloud “am I doing it like I should be doing it? Is there something that I’m missing? Or you know should I be adding something else into it?”

In an exchange during one of the focus groups, Carol shared her view that her students with the most significant CSN are “lost” in inclusive (general education) settings and that they have “no idea what’s going on in there.” She provided these thoughts in the context of the expressed doubt (by Darcy, Beth, and Carol) about district mandates about providing more inclusive learning experiences for students who were primarily being served in self-contained classrooms. In this focus group context, Carol’s views were expressed relatively tentatively. However, during our final conversation, Carol very clearly and directly expressed her opinion that her students with the most significant CSN are better served by receiving writing instruction in her “separate classroom” because she could not see how that instruction could be “as effective if they were in the general ed classroom.” For Carol, it seemed that her thinking about instructional practices for students with CSN and, especially, her thinking about instructional settings were confirmed, not changed in anyway.

Fran’s approach to curriculum-making was less focused on changing or adapting content or materials and had more to do with convincing her educational assistant to follow the procedures for a structured approach to writing instruction that she was implementing in her current classroom. She had to model for her assistant how “to let a couple of my kids just scribble on a paper and then” have those students tell what they had written. When Fran had to ask her educational assistant to “put away” the highlighter that she had been using to write words for students to trace, Fran sympathized with her assistant and said to her “I know it
feels really weird and it feels really weird for me too but this is what we're going to try doing something a little bit different than the way you and I learned to write.”

Of the four participants in this study, Fran was the one who most clearly advocated for adhering as closely as possible to research-based and comprehensive curricular materials in reading and writing as a way to make sure that her students’ needs are being met. This may have been the effect of Fran being the only one who was teaching in an inclusive classroom setting and/or of her work as a college instructor of pre- and in-service teachers.

Fran also described her work with “new teachers” who complain about teaching from highly structured phonics curricula, but she said she reminds these students that they do not have the “understanding to know how to create a phonics curriculum or how to make sure that” their “students are actually decoding words.” Fran said that new teachers need to “follow something” as they learn to meet the needs of their students. Additionally, Fran showed consistency in her thinking about instructional practices for her students with CSN. She was firm and fixed in her belief that there were ways for her students with and without CSN to become highly competent meaning makers within inclusive literate communities/classrooms. Fran’s fixity was connected to her expressed conviction that she could continue her own reading, writing, and work as a lifelong learner in support of her beliefs. It had less to do with knowing exactly what to do with and for her students and more to do with being open to student needs and working through the “not-knowing” in a productive and collaborative way.

Beth’s approach to curriculum-making was grounded not only in her students’ complexity of need but within issues related to struggles with student behavior, issues with classroom staff, and school culture. Beth described her struggle to find a reading curriculum
that worked for her students. She said that she “really just dropped a reading time because to me…language is so much more important for these kids.” However, despite this seemingly adamant and troubling statement, Beth also described her use of the same highly structured, discrete-skills based curriculum that Carol used in her classroom and that included academic activities that could help students to become readers in a traditional sense. She described her conversations with parents of students with CSN in the following way:

I tell parents that I don't care if he can ever read or write if he cannot tell me like I need a drink I need to go to the bathroom like that does not matter to me and I think for a lot of parents that when they think of school they think of the alphabet and numbers and I think it's hard for them to hear on the first time um but then when they hear what I'm saying like oh like she cares more about him telling me what he needs.

Beth went on to provide descriptions of her classroom that illustrated this communication-focused approach including but not limited to the intentional provision of the maximum number of meaningful communication exchanges (e.g., using words, picture cards) across activities such as morning meeting, snack time, and transitions to and from various locations in the school.

However, even in the midst of hearing Beth’s statements about not providing reading or writing instruction for her students with the most significant CSN, my sense was that this seemingly extreme statement was, at least in part, hyperbolic in light of Beth’s description of a school culture not always welcoming to her students with CSN and her own admission of doubts about the effectiveness of her approach to teaching. In our last meeting together, Beth revealed her “struggle with introducing reading in my class because” of her doubts about both the ability of her students with the most significant support needs to gain literacy skills
and about her own ability to teach them. She wondered aloud if she was “doing them a
disservice not teaching them some form of reading and writing.” Beth was the one participant
whose thinking about instructional practices for her students with CSN seemed to begin to
shift or change by the end of the data collection period of this research study.

Conclusion

In this chapter, I discussed themes that became apparent through a thematic analysis
of data from interviews and focus groups with the four teachers of students with CSN who
participated in this research study. These themes, Writing Instruction Is Inherently Different
for students with CSN, Relating to Literate others, and Learning to Teach were explicated, as
much as possible, through the voices of participants. Additionally, because there was an
intentional temporality to the process of data collection, I was able to discuss participants’
fixity or change in thinking about instructional practices for their students with CSN in the
Curriculum-Making sub-theme under the broader theme of Learning to Teach. I also
provided at the beginning of this chapter a researcher autoethnography based on my
interactions with the interview questions prior to the start of data collection with participants.
This was done to share and be as clear as possible about my own thinking about the questions
at the center of this research study prior to the commencement of conversations with
participants.

In chapter 5, I continued with a narrative analysis (in-depth re-articulation) of one
participant’s sharing of stories about her experiences as a literacy learner and teacher of
literacy for students with CSN as a way to delve into that participant’s experiences across
time. More importantly, I used this narrative analysis to answer the following questions at the
center of this research study: What were the literacy narratives of teachers of students with
CSN and what did those narratives reveal about teachers’ thinking about instructional practices for their students?
CHAPTER 5
Results of Narrative Analysis

As discussed in the previous chapter, I used a case-based narrative inquiry framework to explore: (a) the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs (CSN) and (b) what those literacy narratives reveal about their thinking about instructional practices for students with CSN. In the previous chapter, these questions were addressed through an “analysis of narratives” that was intended to “generate general knowledge from a set of particular instances” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 14). This nomothetic process yielded the themes discussed in Chapter 4.

In this chapter, I used an approach to narrative analysis that sought to create a story as “the outcome of research” (Polkinghorne, 1995, p. 15). I created idiographic (i.e., focused on the unique or the individual), emplotted (i.e., shaped into a cohesive whole within a given timeframe) data as I worked to make meaning from all of the stories shared by one of the participants in this research study. It was idiographic in that I focused on the unique, individual stories of one participant and was placed within a plot in my attempt to create a cohesive whole with story elements such as characters, setting, and a clear beginning and end. I followed Polkinghorne’s directive that the narrative analyst “cannot impose just any emplotted order on the data” but must find and bring “an order and meaningfulness that is not apparent in the data themselves” (p. 16). Below, I began with my story of Beth as a literacy learner and as a teacher. I then shared another version of Beth’s story that placed a student (i.e., a composite student based on multiple stories that Beth told about students) at the center of the story. My reasoning and approach to this second telling of details from Beth’s data were given in the introduction to this second storied account.
**Beth: One Unresolved Story of Being Found and Lost**

This story of one of the participants in my research study was based on my perception of the clear difference in the ways that Beth described her early experiences as a typically developing literacy learner and her approach to teaching her students with CSN. I presented this story as lacking in resolution for Beth and her students for reasons described below.

**Found in a Literacy-Rich World**

Reader, I ask you this. What do you do if you start out in a place where you were safe; where you were found? But, one day, you find that you are lost. You might ask, how does that happen? Isn’t the lost supposed to come first? Don’t the signs at the airport or the train station or the front office of the school say, “Lost and Found” and not “Found and Lost.” True enough. But what do you do when being found comes first then you find yourself lost?

I want to share with you the story of Beth, one of the found then lost ones. She was first found by two teachers: one was her mother and one was her father. Now, another way to say this would be to say that Beth was born to two teachers as the middle child among her siblings. I use the word “found,” though, not because Beth was the daughter of a great mom. She could not imagine a mother who was a kinder, sweeter lady, not just to Beth but to everyone. Her mother could start a conversation with anyone anywhere about anything! Her father was quieter, but kind and a teller of funny stories and perfect for Beth. Okay, so she had really great parents. That’s an amazing thing, of course. But, that was not as important to this story as was the fact that Beth’s mother taught her to read before she ever started school. When she was four years old, Beth remembered her mother teaching her to read words from flash cards that had blue decorations on the back. Even before that, her mother used an old
book from which she had learned to read to teach Beth to read. Beth never forgot the names
of the children, Sally, Dick, and Jane and the beautiful pictures of their pets, their friends,
and the places where they lived inside of that book.

You see, Beth’s parents found her so that she could find herself in the books that
became central to her life. She lived in pages, nestled between lines of text, wandered
through illustrations with her character-friends, and held books close so that she could enter
them through their smell and feel and weight and the text contained therein. She could not
get enough of stories and books and reading.

Beth’s found-ness was located in two communities essential to her early life: church
and school. Beth loved both communities. At church where her parents were both Sunday
School teachers, Beth used felt cut-outs of characters from the Bible to help tell stories in her
Sunday morning classroom. She can still recall the deeply connecting feeling of accessing the
story of her faith community through the singing of hymns. Beth’s early school experiences
were affirming and exciting to Beth. Her favorite part of elementary school was read aloud
time. This was a time when her class would come in from recess, the lights in their classroom
would be turned down, and their teacher would read from a chapter book. As Beth recalled,
that read aloud time was likely only about a 15-minute period of time, but it felt so much
longer and more important than anything else. She never wanted it to end. It was a time when
she could relax and nestle within the sentences spoken into that darkened room.

Her teachers chose books that Beth probably would not have chosen for herself,
tell you how grateful she is that these teachers shared such well-written, engaging stories
with her at a time when she was reading mostly serial fiction like the *Full House* books based
on a television series. Her elementary school teachers also found her and helped her to find her favorite books, *To Kill a Mockingbird* (1960) by Harper Lee and *Night* (1956) by Elie Wiesel. She realizes that she probably would not have fallen in love with these books if not for her sixth-grade teacher. She still has copies of both books on her bookshelf at home and she re-reads them on a regular basis.

Allow me a moment to say more about Beth’s sixth-grade teacher. Beth had many good teachers but Ms. [Last name of teacher] was exceptional. It felt to Beth that everything about school was fun that year. In this sixth-grade year, Beth’s class had a time devoted to Social Studies that included learning about history, specifically ancient history. They learned about Egypt and Mesopotamia. They had a bartering day during the time when their class was learning about ancient economic systems and about what life was like for people who lived then. Ms. [Last name of teacher] was also the sponsor for the afterschool Bible club, so Beth would volunteer to stay inside at lunchtime so that she could help to get snacks ready for this club. It gave her more time to spend with this teacher who would listen to her and who seemed to value her for just being who she was. Beth decided to become a teacher, in part, because of this teacher.

This was also a time when Beth became really interested in reading about the Civil Rights Movement of the 1950s and 1960s. She would check out a biography of Martin Luther King, Jr. over and over. She could not get enough of reading it. Then, when her teacher read *To Kill a Mockingbird* to Beth’s class and Beth met the character of Tom Robinson, she could see the connection between King’s struggle and this character’s deadly encounter with racism.
Beth could always find herself in books and in the characters who lived in the stories that she loved. Scout in *To Kill a Mockingbird* was someone very real to Beth. She related to Scout because she was a tomboy, too, and when her mother wanted to give her a consequence for inappropriate behavior she would make Beth wear a dress to school. Most of Beth’s friends at school were boys and they all loved to play basketball at recess. When she wore a dress to school, Beth’s friends would ask her why and she would have to tell them to be quiet and leave her alone. Beth was Scout. She did not fit into the groups or the activities that girls at that time were usually interested in. Beth did not like girly things. She wanted to play basketball. Scout helped Beth to feel like she was okay.

Beth read and re-read her favorite books because she loved them. Reading and re-reading those books took her back to her years as a student and to memories of her favorite teachers. Every time she re-read a book, she found or experienced something that she had missed in her previous readings. Beth felt like she was back in touch with old friends who she loved and had missed since the previous reading. Another example of this was the Harry Potter books. Beth loved them and continued to go back for re-readings at least once a year. She related to all of the characters. Harry Potter was kind of shy in the same way that Beth saw herself. Hermione was intelligent, loved school, and was a reader. Ron Weasley was picked on by his brothers and Beth was sometimes picked on by her sisters because she was quiet and shy. She also really connected with the Ramona character in the Beverly Clearly books. Beth was the pesky little sister type and her older sister was like Beezus.

Beth was a born writer and she remembered filling up notebook after notebook during her summer vacations. She relied on the written word to share her thoughts and deepest feelings with those who were closest to her. In the same way that Beth was found in and
through the lines of text that allowed her to connect with her character-friends, writing gave her a way to connect with others through the marks made by a pen or keystrokes on paper.

Allow me to pause here. You have heard about many of the ways that Beth found meaning and deep literate joy through her access to and use of well-practiced and expert skills with the reading and writing of text. In large part due to her found-ness within ideas and stories and her positive experiences throughout her school career, Beth decided to become a teacher. She initially worked as a reading teacher and helped students who were struggling readers and writers to catch up to their peers. In this work, Beth could draw upon her lifetime of excitement about reading and writing to get her students more engaged with what they were learning. However, after two years in the position, Beth was asked to start a self-contained program for students with CSN.

Hic sunt dracones (Here be dragons). Reader, I share this old legendary warning used to let globe-reading travelers know that they were entering territory previously unexplored. It is an apt warning for Beth at this point in her story because she was about to enter/create a place seemingly devoid of the literacy-rich experiences that had been so important to her own learning.

Lost and Stranded on an Island Without Reading and Writing

Beth was asked to assume responsibility for a self-contained classroom for students with CSN and agreed to do it out of a sense of wanting to be of service to students who she felt needed her. She did not, however, have a great deal of experience working with students with CSN. When she started working in this classroom, Beth felt entirely alone. She did not know what to do and felt overwhelmed and isolated in her room. The teachers in the school in which she was working did not understand Beth’s students, and Beth felt like neither she
nor her students were welcomed as members of the school community. She was given some training in a curriculum that she was told would be good for her students with CSN. Beth was also provided with the opportunity to visit some programs like hers in a neighboring school district. But Beth struggled to find the time and support to implement what she had seen there. She became a teacher stranded on her own little island where she had to figure out what to do and how to be for her students all by herself.

With Beth and her students on her classroom island there had been multiple educational assistants, related services providers, and consultants called in by her school district. The support provided by these members of her instructional team, however, had been hit-or-miss. She had different assistants each year for her first three years in the program and the quality and experience of the related services providers supporting her students had been spotty. Beth had one assistant who refused to work with one of her students and she had a related services provider who openly antagonized a student over the course of a school year. There were also times when related services providers, especially the communication experts essential in support of Beth’s work with her students, did not have experience working with students with CSN. This was just one more instance of Beth’s aloneness in trying to find solutions for her students. Also, some of the support that Beth had received from her school district was helpful. But she felt as though she had to get to a point of desperate concern about a student’s behavior before that help was provided.

For these reasons and because Beth struggled to find materials for literacy instruction that work for her students, she stopped focusing on teaching reading and writing to her students with CSN. Beth told her students’ parents that practicing basic communication skills was a priority over learning how to read, write, and use basic math skills. Beth saw that her
students’ behavior was a form of communication and was able to show calmness with them even when other adults in the classroom could not. For this reason, Beth always felt alone in having to understand and handle the most extreme behaviors exhibited by her students. She desperately wanted for her students to be seen as typical students, as being more than their specific disability label. She wanted her students to be more widely accepted in their school. Beth’s work to stabilize behaviors in her classroom and to fight against the ways that her students had been isolated and seen as separate and different by the wider school community consistently left her with little energy to create and negotiate the ways that reading and writing might be made accessible and empowering for her students with the most significant support needs.

Here is another point in this story where I insert myself to comment. There was an obvious split in Beth’s approach to working with students with CSN. Beth seemed to divide her students into two camps. She described students with whom she has worked who had a set of skills that allow them to access traditional literacy instruction. These students may or may not have had strong verbal communication ability, but they were provided with more significant amounts of time among their grade-level peers in classrooms where they can engage with the general curriculum because of their ability to demonstrate traditional literate functionality. In other words, these students showed ability to decode and read basic sight words. They could hold a pencil independently and make marks on paper that at least approximated letters and words. Beth described some instances where these higher-level students eventually spent most of their time in general education classrooms with occasional support from Beth and/or her educational assistants. One of Beth’s higher-level students found seeming literate joy when his classmates in his general education setting showered him
with written notes during a classroom celebration. Beth could see this student’s joy in his affect as he told her about this experience. Beth shared this story with the suggestion that her students with the most significant CSN, those who were not given a large amount of access to their general education peers, would not have been capable of accessing this same kind of literate joy or would not have been able to understand or to feel the connections that this other student was able to make.

So, the students who remained in Beth’s self-contained classroom for the majority of their day were students who demonstrated minimal interest in or ability to engage with traditional forms of either understanding or making meaning with text-based symbol systems. Beth saw her students with the most significant CSN as not naturally being able to see outside of themselves which was why sharing in stories or comprehending texts was very difficult for them. Or, as described above, she saw them as not benefiting from social interactions in ways that her students who have more potential for or ability to access typical literacy activities have. In other words, Beth placed at least some of her struggle with providing literacy instruction for her students with the most significant CSN with the students themselves.

This telling of this part of Beth’s story ends here with her decision to leave her self-contained classroom. She left at the end of several years of struggle on this island with students who attended school without the meaningful access to literacy instruction and to the types of literate others that Beth had in her early life. I want to state more actively Beth’s role and active decision-making about this landscape barren of anything but minimal access to literate community. I choose to be clear about this role and, at the same time, want to
recognize that Beth’s decision-making about instruction for her students was situated in a complex of factors faced by many teachers of students with CSN.

The end of this part of Beth’s story is not a true ending. Beth left her classroom where she struggled to teach and to advocate for students with whom she had worked. At the time of this leaving, Beth admitted some doubts about her decisions not to provide more comprehensive literacy instruction for her students with the most significant CSN. She wondered if focus on only the behavioral and communication needs of her students was the right decision for the students who spent the majority of their time at school in her self-contained classroom. Where was the resolution, the “happily ever after” or at least the turning toward a new or renewed vision emerging from this story’s conflict?

The Narrator Between the Lines

As stated in Chapter 3, I worked for Beth’s school district before and during the time of data collection for this research study. This relationship with the school district and my occasional work with Beth and with students with whom she had worked placed me in wary juxtaposition to the process of analyzing data and sharing my analysis, my voice as researcher. In the story above, I referred to the ways that Beth felt that she had to make repeated and ever more urgent requests to her school district to get additional help with student behavior. In at least one instance, I was the person sent to Beth’s classroom by district leadership once those pleas by Beth were heard. I had direct experience with the students Beth discussed during data collection. I have felt deeply connected to and even protective of the teachers whose stories were at the center of this study.

However, I pushed past this paternalistic view of my participants so that I could share the findings of this study in a way that honored their voices by allowing them to speak to
their (and my) own knowing about working with students with CSN. It was for this reason that I included below another short story inspired by stories of several students shared by Beth and made into a coherent whole by me. In this one story, I shared aspects of stories about multiple students including the instructional strategies used with them, in order to protect student identities. I placed this composite student at the center of this story. I attempted to share this story in a way that illustrated both Beth’s struggles and the ways that those difficulties played out for her students with CSN.

**Stumbling Toward Silencing**

Liam, a student with CSN, was a student in Beth’s self-contained classroom. At the time that he worked with Beth, Liam had no generally understandable verbal output and he had no systematic and consistent means to communicate with others in his classroom and school. In Liam’s classroom, there were multiple changes in the educational assistants who were assigned to work with Liam and his classmates over the course of his time there. There were also changes, from year to year, in the related services providers who were supposed to be helping Liam with his communication skills and with his learning of day-to-day skills in his classroom and around the school.

Despite the lack of consistency in staffing in Beth’s room and in supports for Liam, Liam loved working with Ms. Beth. They had an easy rapport. Liam spent a lot of time with Ms. Beth and he ate his lunch in his classroom every day, assisted by his teacher. In their time together, Ms. Beth realized that Liam was able to quickly learn a variety of short utterances to request different types of food or other preferred items in the classroom. She gave him opportunity to use this means of communication and helped other staff to
understand what Liam was requesting. Liam was a student in Ms. Beth’s classroom until he transitioned to middle school.

The remainder of the story about Liam, the composite student, was shared by me. When Liam left his elementary school classroom, he still had no consistent way of communicating his needs and wants outside of the short verbal utterances that were limited to a small variety of items and that were not understandable to those who did not have a significant amount of experience in working with Liam. He was assigned new related services providers who changed, yet again, their approach to helping Liam to communicate and to navigate his new school setting. Liam’s frustration (and perhaps anxiety) in his middle school classroom led to an increase in behavior that his new instructional team was unprepared to address in ways that provided Liam with opportunities to change disruptive behavior and to learn positive replacement behaviors. It was at this point that I first met Liam and began to work with him, with other students in his self-contained classroom, and with the staff working there.

I inserted myself in this story not to share any action that I took with Liam that may or may not have been helpful to him and to his teachers at that moment in time. As described above, Liam was a composite student based on multiple students that Beth and I worked with and that Beth discussed as a part of this research study. I brought this story to the surface here to see Beth, as Liam’s classroom teacher, engaged with and entangled in a system that I would describe as stumbling toward the silencing of students with CSN. In this last sentence, I used the word stumbling to depict the active inconsistency and incompetency of a system that should have supported Beth in her attempts to find stronger supports and research-based interventions for her students. Liam was silenced.
In her narratives of her experiences as a literacy learner and as a teacher of literacy, Beth clearly revealed her divergence in thinking about instructional practices for students with and without CSN. Polkinghorne described “the result of a narrative analysis” as “an explanation that is retrospective, having linked past events together to account for how a final outcome might have come about” (1995, p. 16). While the final outcome of Beth’s narrative was the significant difference both in her definition and practice of literacy instruction for students with CSN, I saw threads in Beth’s stories that led to a sense of duality and my wondering about possible other outcomes given the right opportunities, supports, and/or discussions along the way. For example, Beth’s sharing of her deep connection to reading and to books revealed a strong interest in the life and times of Martin Luther King, Jr. Beth not only discussed a biography of King that she read repeatedly as an elementary school student but she reflected upon the injustices at the center of the plot of her favorite book *To Kill A Mockingbird*. These early interests led Beth to sign up for a course on African American history as an undergraduate.

Beth’s strong interest in learning about (in)justice related to race and her obvious view that this was an issue that was still unresolved in our communities and our country struck me as puzzling as I reflected on what were the inequities in her students’ access to tools for understanding the meaning making of others and to make their own meaning. Beth shared her definition of literacy as that which “kind of opens your world and your imagination” but used this definition when describing her own experiences and her work with students with (less severe) learning disabilities.
However, after my final interview with Beth, I had the strong sense that her ideas about literacy instruction for her students may have been shifting and I could imagine no better outcome than the opportunity to continue to discuss these issues together. Beth’s openness to questions was an “emotional gift” and gave me “access” to the “soul” of one teacher (phrases from Jan Armstrong, ANM14). I was also faced with my own memories and stories of the students that Beth and I had shared and was forced to see my own experience of feeling ineffective in my own practice and of seeing myself as contributing to the silencing of students because of my situation within an unjust system and my own failure to effect change within that system.

Beth epitomized the early career teacher who is so open, so eager for good guidance and support in her work with students with CSN. She even came to her teacher career already understanding issues of racial injustice, a clear framework upon which to build an understanding of the biases about students with CSN in educational systems. Beth’s stories pointed out the many ways that she was failed by teacher-preparers, administrators, and other experts. More poignantly, as I compiled this narrative analysis of Beth’s experiences as a literacy learner and as a teacher of students with CSN, I felt sadness about a teacher and her students who were so clearly not given the opportunity to reach a greater potential.
CHAPTER 6

Discussion

This research study, a case-based narrative inquiry (Merriam & Tisdell, 2016; Riessman, 2008), cracked open a set of stories from a small group of teachers of students with CSN. From this set of stories shared by my four participants, I attempted to shape narratives about what literacy learning looked like for these teachers and for their students. These narratives revealed teachers’ thinking about instructional practices for their students and thus offer some possible insights into how teachers of students with CSN may experience and approach their role as literacy teachers.

Of course, there are as many definitions of the term narrative as there are scholars or philosophers or storytellers who have tried to either define it or make use of it. For the purposes of this discussion, I sought a simple definition, a simple (but not easy) way to begin to make meaning out my participant’s stories to convince my reader that these stories were worth listening to and that these voices provided an “essential link” between the research on best instructional practices for students with CSN and implementation in their classrooms (Ruppar et al., 2015, p. 223). My definition of narrative was this: Narrative begins with a person who shares a set of events that are chosen and sequenced to make sense of subsequent actions and to guide a listener to the truth(s) that s/he wants the listener to gather from that set of events (Riessman, 2008). This definition presumed a teller and a listener and a process of meaning making all along the way. My analysis and meaning making (i.e., interpretation) of the stories of these teachers of students with CSN came down to this. Looking across the participants’ stories about their own literacy learning and that of their students, I found narratives of coherence, narratives of incoherence, and narratives of the spaces in-between
that shape the work of teachers with their students with CSN. These were not either-or categories of narrative; the same participant could have both narratives of coherence and narratives of incoherence, for example. However, it was apparent that these narratives had power on the instructional decisions these teachers made and thus shaped the literate lives of their students in profound ways.

**Narratives of Coherence**

For this synthesis across the data collected, I understood narrative coherence as a series of events having some type of “logical connection or relation” to one another (Oxford University Press, n.d.). More significantly, I looked for consistencies or inconsistencies between various parts of a set of given stories participants told about their own and their students’ literacy out of which I was trying to make sense and forge a larger narrative. This resulted in seeing ways in which participants’ stories, comments, and memories communicated a consistent view of what literacy learning is for people with and without CSN. Their narratives showed an inner coherence across time (i.e., across the interviews and focus groups), and the participants seemed to have a conscious awareness of their beliefs and the impact of those beliefs on their instructional decision-making.

Fran is an example of someone with a coherent narrative about literacy learning. It was relatively easy for me to see the coherence between Fran’s early literacy experiences, her stated vision of what she wanted literacy to be and to do for her students with CSN, and her detailed descriptions of writing instruction in her classroom. The only participant who taught in an inclusive classroom setting, she described with deep certainty the importance of access to research-based literacy instruction for all of her students. Fran gave rich descriptions of the importance of reading and writing in her own early life and clearly wanted to provide these
same types of experiences to her students with and without CSN. She described an approach to reading and writing instruction that presumed that all of the students in her inclusive classroom would become fluent meaning makers with a textual symbol system. In her preschool classroom, Fran modeled multiple ways that her students could begin to create their own narratives using symbols and provided small- and large-group instruction using a process of “thinking aloud” the choices that students could make when they did not yet know a specific letter or letter sound. She modeled included examples of writing in picture form so that her students who had not yet acquired facility with text symbols could still “write” and gave students multiple opportunities every day to engage with play-based opportunities to practice their writing skills.

Fran’s coherent narrative about literacy, illustrated in her approach to writing instruction, as described, was rich in examples of Vygotsky and Luria’s (1994) conceptualization of learning as that which happens within a social structure, a shared story, or in interaction with a community. In the case of Fran’s classroom, the “word intrudes” into heretofore un-worded interaction involving a favorite item or activity (and the favorable sense experiences/memories associated with these) and that word took on a power that was highly motivating to her students. Her students learned to move from inward to outward representations that could be communicated to others in the classroom setting. Fran’s preschoolers with and without CSN were invited into multiple, meaningful interactions within the literate community in her classroom.

Another aspect of the coherence of Fran’s literacy narrative were descriptions of the struggles that she faced as she worked to support her students over the course of her career. She shared her process of constantly seeking out training and support that would help her to
teach reading and writing to her students with hearing loss and with a variety of other complex communication needs. Hers was not an easy coherence, past or present, but coherence, nonetheless. In fact, these descriptions of struggle authenticated or confirmed my view of Fran as having a coherent narrative.

I found another narrative of coherence in Carol, a teacher of students in a self-contained classroom. Carol’s narrative was centered on a different core belief than Fran’s but still demonstrated an inner coherence. Like Fran, Carol described her struggle with learning how to be a better teacher for her students with CSN both in the areas of literacy instruction and behavior support. She arrived at a different conclusion, however, and came to believe that her students with the most significant CSN were “lost” in inclusive (general education) settings and that they have “no idea what’s going on in there.” Her narrative of instructing students with CSN was coherent and increasingly self-assured as she reflected in individual interviews and in focus groups where other participants expressed doubt and questions about their district’s policy on increasing access to the general curriculum for students with CSN. She expressed her belief that all students are capable of learning academic skills and she has worked in her classroom to make sure that her students have access to literacy instruction that is individualized and relevant to them. The consistency in my reading of Carol’s teaching narrative was her central core belief that her students with the most significant CSN are “lost” in inclusive (general education) settings and that it is best if these students are provided with literacy instruction in a “separate classroom” because she could not see how that instruction could be “as effective if they were in the general ed classroom.”

In our final conversation, for example, Carol very clearly and directly expressed her opinion that her students with the most significant CSN are better served by receiving
literacy instruction in a self-contained classroom. This consistent narrative influenced the instructional decisions she made and the opportunities for access to the general curriculum she provided to students in her classroom. She remained clear in her sense that she must continuously seek to find ways to meet her individual students’ needs in a segregated setting that provided protection from the challenge and potential judgment to which those students might be exposed in an inclusive classroom.

Three of the four participants in this study held some version of Carol’s narrative described above. Because of this shared narrative about students with CSN within this small group of teachers, I saw that narrative as a “cultural product” that shaped thoughts about and actions taken with students with CSN in the classrooms and schools where Carol, Beth, and Darcy taught (Bruner, 1991, p. 3). These teacher narratives about students as learners and as members (or not) of a community was a means for the transmission of “folk psychology,” those stories that are told in schools about what it is to be learner within that cultural context (Bruner, 1994, p. 57). This transmission of stories by teachers about what students can and cannot do intentionally or unintentionally concretize assumptions about students with CSN and limit access to the literacy instruction required to “acquire and to conduct the interpersonal transactions required in communal life” (p. 35). In fairness to Carol, Beth, and Darcy, all three shared directly or hinted at conflicts or struggles that they had within school cultures that were not welcoming, in a variety of ways, to “those students,” as Beth put it. It was beyond the scope of this study to conjecture about the ways that negative or unwelcoming school culture shaped these teachers’ stories, but this is a question worth further study.
Narratives of Incoherence

I found multiple narratives of incoherence in my process of listening to and reading the stories of my four participants that also may provide understanding into the ways in which teachers of students with CSN design literacy instruction for students. These are instances when their literacy narratives did not hold together or have a consistency between parts of the narrative. Specifically, while all four participants described their early literacy experiences as rich and generally supportive of their needs as learners without CSN, they went on to describe a different view of literacy for their students with CSN. They all describe rich early literacy experiences and had the support of adults who demonstrated a presumption that the participants would all be able to learn to be readers and writers and to participate in the literate communities around them.

Three of the four participants, however, described approaches to or thinking about literacy instruction for their students with CSN that differed significantly (did not have inner coherence) from what they had said about what literacy learning should be. Their literacy instruction narrative for students with CSN focused on teaching a discrete set of skills without connection to stories, informational texts, semantic tools for navigating the classroom, and/or was described as something that they struggled to teach to their students with CSN. One of these three participants, Darcy, for example, shared her stories of her mother’s use of puppets and other props to help Darcy to see herself as a storyteller and writer at a time when Darcy was struggling to access text in the same ways that her peers were. In her descriptions of writing instruction for her students with CSN, though, Darcy was able to provide little specific detail and described that “because it is a struggle for me that is
not my favorite thing to teach.” This seemed to be an admission of little focus on writing skills, in a comprehensive and integrated way, for her students with CSN.

Narratives of incoherence also surfaced in moments, especially during the final set interviews, when I had a strong sense that some rapport had been built between participants and myself and that participants were less guarded and more honest about their views, their unease, and ongoing struggles. I wondered whether this unease was a result of the “split existence” between what these teachers thought they should be doing in their classrooms (or what they thought I wanted to hear) and their practice (Clandinin & Connelly, 1995, p. 5). In their work to better understand how teachers gain and enact professional knowledge, Clandinin and Connelly (1995) looked at “the relationship between how teachers live in their classrooms and how teachers live in those other professional, communal places” (p. 5). The model that emerged, Teachers’ Professional Knowledge Landscapes (TPKL), posited a “landscape” defined by sacred, secret, and cover stories. Clandinin and Connelly suggested that classrooms were “safe places” where the secret (or hidden) stories of the individual teacher’s practical knowledge are enacted (1996, p. 25). When teachers crossed the boundary from classroom to common professional spaces, they told “cover stories” that “fit within the acceptable range of the story of school” within their work community (p. 25).

While I saw evidence of the “split” described by Clandinin and Connelly, I resisted the naming of the stories of the teachers in my study as secret stories and it was a resistance that went beyond the value-laden connotations of words like sacred and secret in this context. The inclusive or self-contained classrooms for students with CSN of which I have been a part were never places where one teacher enacted school with a group of students. There were always groups of adults including educational assistants, related services providers,
consultants, parents, etc. who were a regular part of the classroom community. I know this to be true of the classrooms where my participants interacted with their students with CSN, according to their descriptions. These narratives of incoherence that came out of the sharing of stories by my participants were better described as a collection of threads where each thread represents an adult within the classroom community. Each individual thread has multiple strands with a variety of color, texture, strength, and pliancy. It is the weave of these threads that does or does not provide the instructional and other supports that students need. The teacher’s split or disturbance comes not from stories within the classroom that do not match official or sacred stories. The disturbance comes from those places in the weave of multiple threads where there was a weakness (or support need) in the teacher and/or one of the adults in the classroom setting.

**When Narratives Fall Apart**

The last type of narrative described here is one in which there seemed to be a moment of deep honesty or an epiphany (Denzin, 2001) about a previous practice or experience. This perhaps could be better described as a narrative moment that splits open the participant’s story up to that moment and allows for multiple different “endings” moving forward from that moment. Beth was the only participant who seemed to show some change in her thinking about teaching literacy to her students with CSN. Through the initial interview and both focus groups, Beth shared her vision of focusing on communication and behavior supports for her students with the most significant CSN and of not providing instruction in reading and writing. However, by the end of the data collection process, she indicated reservations about not providing her students with a more comprehensive approach to literacy instruction. At the end of the data collection process, Beth seemed to be at the point of seeing the
incoherence in her own story of who she had been as a teacher of literacy for her students with CSN. She openly and courageously wondered whether she was doing a “disservice” to her students.

Beth’s story suggests that teachers’ narratives of what and how they teach students with CSN “hang together reasonably well, but they occasionally tend to fall apart” or, I would argue, need to fall apart (Carr, 1986, p. 97). It is sobering to juxtapose the stories that Beth shared about her own early literacy experiences and her stories of literacy instruction with her students with significant CSN. Beth described her life-changing interactions with teachers who shared books that have worked deep furrows in her mind and heart. She told about the ways that writing helped her to better understand herself and others and to express that which she could not always share verbally. When Beth began school, there was never a doubt on the part of the adults around her about whether she would receive instruction in reading and writing. How might Beth’s experiences as a teacher of students with CSN been infinitely more positive and productive had she been supported within a community of educational assistants, related service providers, and administrators who saw access to research-based literacy instruction as a human right for all students? More significantly, how might Beth’s students with CSN have benefited from the same presumption and the same access to rich and comprehensive literacy given the opportunity?

In his study of illness narratives, Arthur Frank (2013) shared his experience of listening to other’s stories of their illnesses at a time when he was facing his own serious illness. He said that “the voices that speak to us at particular moments of our lives, especially during transitions or crises, imprint themselves with a force that later voices never quite displace” (p. xii). While not facing the life-threatening illnesses studied (and experienced) by
Frank, I sensed that my participants were all in the midst of some type of big or small transition even if only the every-year transition between school years when we have to let go of students we had struggled to learn from and to serve and to welcome the students soon to enter our classrooms. Although I am a deeply sentimental person, it was not for sentimental reasons that I cited here Frank’s deep affection for “the voices of those whose stories I retell” (p. xii) although I do feel that deep affection as I listen and re-listen to the voices of my participants. In my final interviews with them, I experienced confirmation, both through my felt sense and through the sharing by my participants, of what I had hoped might be possible, however artificially and briefly enacted across the data collection process for this research study, in terms of providing a process that allowed participants to reveal their thinking, including their doubts and hopes, about instructional practices for their students with CSN.

If there is a better-known poem about coherence and incoherence than Yeats’ *Second Coming*, I cannot name it. Of course, “things fall apart” and “the center” which represents only the best of our limited human ways of thinking and being in the world at one moment in time “cannot hold” (1970, pp. 10-11). The center should not hold sometimes; sometimes it all falls apart and we put it back together again. Not only do we wait passively to witness this falling apart, sometimes we have to actively unhinge, tear apart, grab the thread that undoes swaths of fabric and whole garments, whole narratives of what was and what needs to be different, better, and more inclusive.

**Implications**

There are several implications that arose from this case-based narrative inquiry focused on the literacy narratives of teachers of student with CSN. The most significant implications are related to teacher preparation and the ongoing development of teachers in
their first years of service. Within this discussion of teacher preparation and development of in-service teachers, I shared thoughts about the importance of teachers having a definition of literacy for students with CSN that includes but also gets beyond the “how” of teaching evidence-based practices to the “why” of literacy as a key relational activity and a basic human right. I have also placed border-crossing within this context of thinking about how to work with stories as data and, finally, have addressed the implications of my position in relationship to participants and the impact on data collection through an interpretive framework.

**Teacher Preparation and In-Service Development**

This research study provided participants with multiple opportunities across a two-month period to discuss their experiences of literacy learning and their teaching practice with students with CSN. It pointed to the potential value of providing this type of opportunity to pre-service teachers, ideally, across a longer time period. A previous study investigating the literacy narratives of pre-service teachers (e.g., Ciuffetelli Parker, 2010) demonstrated the positive impact of the writing of letters reflecting upon experiences as literacy learners and as pre-service teachers shared with a small group of peers across a three-year period. For the purposes of this study, I was the primary interpreter of the stories of participants. The use of this model for narrative inquiry in settings with pre- or in-service teachers, these individuals could and should be co-interpreters of their own and others’ narratives in an ongoing process of speaking (or writing), sharing, and meaning making. This process, combined with data sources that have been used in other studies (e.g., Craig, 2012; Ruppar et al., 2015) and that help teachers to better understand their decision-making, could help to deepen self-reflection
and de-mystify choices made related to evidence-based practices and to assessment that shapes practice with students with CSN.

Across the stories shared in one-on-one conversations with me and in focus groups, there was a general feeling that participants were unprepared to effectively teach and support their students with CSN. I saw these stories as resulting in three possible narratives described below in one sentence each. First, here I was, a new teacher with a special education license and coursework in methods for teaching literacy to students without CSN from a teacher preparation program, who was feeling like I had no clear instructional plan (including research-based strategies) for how to teach my students with CSN. Second, here I was, a new teacher with a special education license and coursework in methods for teaching literacy to students without CSN from a teacher preparation program, who was unprepared for and/or overwhelmed by the day-to-day management of the collaborative relationships within my classroom and this impacted my ability to provide comprehensive literacy instruction to my students with CSN. Finally, here I was, a new teacher with a general or special education license and coursework in methods for teaching literacy to students with or without CSN from a teacher preparation program, who needed to understand that it was okay not to know everything and that teaching was, by its very nature, a day-by-day and career-long learning about how to teach my students regardless of their level of need.

The four participants in this research study were all teachers of student with CSN in a small rural school district. However, the focus groups that were a part of the data collection process was the first time that they sat down together to discuss what instruction looked like for their students with CSN. Additionally, all four participants described the value to them of regular collaboration and the many barriers to being able to schedule regular opportunities to
meet as a team with educational assistants, related service providers, general education teachers, and/or other special educators. Three of the four participants described the profound isolation and sense of having to figure out things on their own that they have experienced over the course of their professional careers.

How, then, could we support in-service teachers of students with CSN in taking a more confident, theory-making, teacher-researcher stance in their work with students? This research study pointed to the need to keep teachers of students with CSN engaged with research about best practices and to provide consistent, high quality support from consultants or trainers who can demonstrate what comprehensive literacy instruction should look like for students with CSN. There was no evidence or support for the possibility that the teachers in this study who were struggling to provide effective literacy instruction for their students were doing so out of neglect or lack of caring. So, this suggested to me that I was in conversation with teachers who needed to be encouraged to see themselves as teacher-leaders in their classrooms and school. I based this not only on the interviews and focus groups at the center of this research study but also on my work as a special educator and behavior/instructional specialist. Teachers who are working with students with CSN need to be coached into their necessary roles as leaders of instructional teams, as advocates for students and families, and as classroom researchers fascinated by the unique ways that their students are able to make meaning in the school community. Finally, there was enough positive feedback from participants about the value of the time they spent talking together in focus groups that I saw potential in this process of openly sharing narratives of our work with students as one means to address the issues discussed above.
Preparing Teachers with Instructional Coherence: Definitions and Practice. As described above, this case-based narrative inquiry pointed to the ways that the teachers of students with CSN who participated in this study did not always show consistency between their stories about and definitions of literacy and their thinking about literacy instruction practice for their students with CSN. This provided entry to a necessary, ongoing conversation about the importance of teachers having preparation in not only a set of evidence-based practices that are shown to be effective with students with CSN, but a coherent framework or story about why those practices are vital and where they are best enacted.

Where Stories Meet

Schools and classrooms are Borderland (Anzaldúa, 2012) spaces where a predominantly white teacher-culture meets cultures of a vast multitude of languages, places, and abilities. I maintained, throughout this process, my belief that these classroom “third” spaces (or “third countries,” Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 25) are places of profound danger and opportunity, especially for students with CSN and this belief was confirmed by my findings. In Beth’s literacy narratives, I found a borderland yet to be entered in terms of her thinking about literacy instruction for her students who have CSN and significant communication differences. For example, her students who showed promise of gaining more typical literacy skills because of their ability to hold a writing implement and to make marks that at least approximated letters and/or who could make letter sounds or learn to read some sight words were given access to more comprehensive literacy instruction in a general education classroom than those who did not have these skills. Beth’s students who could not demonstrate these early literacy skills were seen as needing to focus on communication only
without access to instruction in reading and writing. As described by Beth, her classroom and school were fraught with boundaries both internal and external. Anzaldúa described a borderland as a place where two cultures “grate” against each other creating a place where the “lifeblood” of each merges and “scabs” to form a new country, a place that inextricably links the two previously separate and demarcated places (p. 25). By the end of the data collection process, I could tell that Beth had spent time in the spaces in between the focus groups and the follow-up interviews thinking about and questioning her approach to literacy instruction for her students with CSN. I found great courage in her admission that perhaps she had done a “disservice,” instructionally, to her student. Was this the beginning of a cognitive third space between two previously distinctly different, parallel ways of thinking about her students?

Another place of border-crossing was in the meetings with participants where distances shrank with the development of trust and intimacy (Anzaldúa, 2012, p. 19). This intimacy was at least in part the effect of my questioning about participant experiences that laid at the heart of how they saw themselves not only as learners but as young human beings in relationship to the most significant adult human beings in their early lives. It seemed that my questions about literacy opened avenues to stories of self that sat at the center of how participants’ saw themselves not just as teachers but as individuals in relationship to their children, mothers, grandmothers, etc. As I left the data collection process, I carried with me many indelible images from the stories that had been shared with me. I could see Fran and her mother at bedtime taking turns reading from a chapter book and verbally “beeping out” the “bad words.” I could easily bring to memory an image of Darcy and her mother crouched behind a bedsheets with a flashlight making meaning with shadow puppets. Carol was riding
shotgun in her storytelling grandmother’s truck as they moved from chore to chore on land that her grandmother singlehandedly ranched and Beth, of course, was happily cradling a new book bought by her mother as the family set out on a summer road trip.

**Ethics of Positionality**

As I worked through my analysis of the data from this study, I had questions about how I had addressed my positionality with the participants in this study and how my relationship with some of the participants prior to this study was impacting my analysis. I addressed this issue extensively in Chapter Three and in the proposal submitted and approved by my University’s Internal Review Board (IRB). I also had multiple discussions on this topic with my dissertation chair through the analysis process.

I started the planning of this research study with a point of view that all students with CSN can benefit from comprehensive literacy instruction in inclusive classroom settings and that these students should be given access this type of instruction for ethical, moral, and legal reasons. I have held this belief for a number of years and that perspective definitely did not change over the course of the research study. However, I did not make this researcher point of view clear to my participants and the consent form that they signed and other spoken or written information provided about the study did not explicitly state this perspective. Because I did previously work with three of the four participants on an intermittent basis, those individuals may have been able to assume this perspective either through my previous words or actions.

What was my responsibility to participants in terms of sharing this type of information that was foundational to the rationale for and the knowledge to be created from the narratives that I was asking them to share with me? Josselson (2004) said that researchers
should be clear about their interpretative stance at the outset of any research study. Josselson reframed Ricoeur’s hermeneutical continuum of faith or suspicion as a hermeneutic of restoration or demystification and asserted that researchers, as a rule, tended to fall somewhere on a continuum between these two poles. A researcher with an approach informed by a hermeneutic of restoration was one who seeks to produce “a genuine personal encounter between interviewer and interviewee so that the possibilities are maximized that the interviewee will reveal meaning that are central, important and authentic” (p. 7). The purpose of this type of approach to narrative inquiry is “to create an ‘I-Thou’ relationship where the self can be fully expressed and heard by the other” (p. 7). A researcher with more of a focus on a hermeneutic of demystification tended to look for the meaning underlying the stories of an individual.

Josselson (2004) said that a researcher coming from a hermeneutic of demystification apprehends “the relativity of all accounts” and recognizes that “the goal is not to challenge or disprove the participants’ meanings – in fact, we may well believe that the person believes what he or she says – but to turn our attention elsewhere” (p. 15). A researcher working from this frame of reference assumed “that any given told story refers to an untold one as well” (p. 18). Especially if working from this type of interpretative stance, Josselson hinted at an ethical obligation on the part of the researcher to let the participant know that the researcher would be taking “interpretative authority” (p. 20) even if that is not necessarily required in the consenting process. The nature of this narrative inquiry as that which placed such careful attention to the stories of others at the center of the data collection and analytic processes warranted this continued focus on my interpretive lens and the way that that was used to make meaning of these stories.
Limitations

In this section, I addressed limitations related to sample size and amount of data generated, types of data collected, and challenges related to the broadness of the research questions especially within the nomothetic and idiographic analytic process. I also gave recognition to the limits of the specific theoretical lenses through which I analyzed and discussed the data and other lenses, not used, that could have been potentially as fruitful in making meaning from this study. Finally, I shared limitations in terms of what this study could not answer especially in regards to the racial makeup of the participants within the school district where they were teaching and to farther reaching questions about the impacts of school leadership and school culture on teacher decision-making about instructional practices for their students with CSN.

Given the in-depth nature of narrative inquiry in general and the multiple opportunities for participants to share their narratives over the data collection process, a small sample size of four participants was a necessity. The large amount of data collected across multiple interviews and focus groups resulted in a process of having to make choices about what to include and what to leave out. Additionally, because I wanted to include not just a thematic analysis but a narrative analysis, I had to limit that narrative analysis to one participant due to restrictions of time and space.

Another limitation of this study was connected to the types of data collected. I relied on individual interviews and focus groups to answer the questions about literacy narratives and how they might show teacher thinking about instructional practices for their students with CSN. I could see that this research study was a positive first step in getting at answers to these questions. However, it would have been ideal to be able to include other data sources
such as notes or videos from classroom observations, notes from instructional team meetings and/or focus groups with teams, written and/or recorded feedback from teachers at more than one point across the data collection process, etc. (Clandinin, 2013; Craig, 2012).

The broadness of the research questions provided a challenge and opportunity in my work to make sense of my data during the process of analysis. At the time of proposing this research study, I felt a great deal of curiosity about what might emerge from such open-ended questions. I continued to maintain that curiosity across the process of completing this project and, moving forward, would likely find ways to narrow my focus based on these results. I chose to look at my data in a means suggested in multiple readings that I had done about narrative inquiry and of actual studies. I landed on Polkinghorne (1995) who was a very helpful in my thinking about how to analyze the quantity of data with which I was working. As a result, I chose to complete a thematic analysis and to experiment with the writing of a narrative analysis focused on one of the participants. The limitation that I saw in this approach was only that I could find very little guidance about how to “do” the latter type of analysis. Polkinghorne (1995) provided some guidance and I also looked to Craig (2012; 2014) and Riessman (2008) for guidance about how to organize this piece as presented here.

There were also limitations in connection with the theoretical lenses through which I chose to look at the literacy narratives of my teacher-participants that shaped the results and this subsequent discussion. For example, I situated this study within a broad sociocultural context (Vygotsky & Luria, 1994; Bruner, 1994) to emphasize the deeply social, relational nature of literacy learning and how teachers’ understanding (or not) of this view of learning shaped their thinking about literacy instructional practices for their students with CSN. I also used Clandinin and Connelly’s (1996) framework to try to understand my participants’
understanding of their professional knowledge and their telling about that knowledge. There were many other lenses through which I could have looked at this data to produce knowledge of equal if not greater value.

For example, Festinger’s theory of cognitive dissonance (1957; McGrath, 2020) would have likely been useful in looking at participants’ thinking about the limits that they seemed to place on instruction for their students with CSN in light of their telling about their own rich and comprehensive access to literacy learning as children. Another avenue for rich reflection would have been in the use of a justice lens based on definitions of legal rights and judicial decision-making (Schalock et al., 2018, p. 81) such as the capabilities approach to a theory of justice as articulated by Nussbaum (2006) and re-envisioned by Lim (2020). Also, another profoundly fruitful analysis, given a slightly different approach to data collection, would have been through the use a Foucauldian lens (Foucault, 1977; Gutting, 2005) on the enactment of power among adults in the school setting and its impact on teacher decision-making regarding literacy instruction for their students with CSN.

A final and perhaps most significant limitation to this study was in the racial makeup of the participants and the researcher (all white) in contrast to only 50% of students in their school district identified as Caucasian and 24% of all students in their state identified as Caucasian (see Chapter 3). This discrepancy in the racial backgrounds of teachers and their students is not isolated to this district, to teachers who work with students with CSN, or special educators in a specific state (Bettini et al., 2018). However, it pointed to questions that could not be answered by this research study such as how differences in a teacher’s racial or cultural background may have been revealed in their literacy narratives or have impacted their thinking about instructional practices for students with CSN from a similar or
different cultural, racial, and/or linguistic background. Also, this study did not directly address the impact of school, district, and/or state educational culture on teachers’ views of literacy or on their thinking about literacy instructional approaches for students with CSN. There were moments within interviews (especially with Beth and Carol) that hinted at struggles within a negative school culture. However, in this study, this was not investigated nor addressed in a systematic way.

**Future Research**

This research study of the literacy narratives of teachers of students with CSN demonstrated the ways that the sharing of stories in one-on-one and group settings revealed teachers’ thinking about instructional practices for their students. It points toward several possible areas for future research. While this study allowed for a relatively short time to build rapport and to gather data in the deeply relational way that is typically at the center of a narrative inquiry, there was still evidence of effectiveness at getting answers to the research questions posed. Future studies that allow for the process to unfold across a longer time period would be optimal. Also, a study that was developed to take place across a school year would provide opportunity to collect multiple forms of data including individual interviews with the wider instructional team (e.g., teachers, educational assistants, related services providers), focus groups, classroom observations, and, possible teacher and student artifacts. The narratives of how literacy instruction is discussed could be juxtaposed with how that literacy instruction is enacted in the classroom.

Another area of research that could be initiated moving forward is the use of narrative inquiry to investigate the literacy narratives of pre-service special educators across parts of their teacher preparation programs including, potentially, their clinical (student teaching)
experiences. This would be one way to look at issues of defining literacy for students with CSN and at thinking about instructional practices for students with CSN across a program where pre-service teachers are, ideally, engaging with issues related to legal, theoretical, and practical implications of literacy instruction for all students.

**Conclusion: Maps and Mirrors**

Stories are maps and mirrors. The stories shared with self and others across the course of any given day place us within specific times, places, and relationships to others. For example, a story that we share about an event that happened twenty years ago provides not only the specific, time-dimmed details that can still be recalled but the set of knowledge and beliefs that we have today and that we cannot help but use to shape that memory into a sequence of events that makes sense in the present moment and that is of interest to our audience (Josselson, 2004). A story maps our location along a continuum of times, places, and relationships to others (Clandinin, 2013). Story is also a mirror. It shows us who we are in the moment of the telling. Why did we choose that specific set of events out of thousands of discrete moments and experiences? If this is a new story, why did we make that creation today? If it is a story we have told before, why re-tell it and how did we change it to make it fit better into the present moment and audience?

Over the course of one summer, I was given the opportunity to listen to and to try to make sense of the stories of teachers of students with CSN. These teachers shared stories of their experiences as literacy learners and as teachers of literacy. In the same way that these stories shared with me are maps and mirrors of these four individuals from a short period of time in the summer of 2019, so this analysis and discussion of these stories is a map of my research journey across terrain new, to me, and necessary. It is a mirror that requires a deep
look at who and how I want to be as a researcher and as a teacher of future teachers. More importantly, this mirror forces me to see the cascade of injustice that occurs when teachers of students with CSN are not well-prepared, are not adequately supported by administrators and related service providers, are isolated in school cultures that see students with CSN as not able to be fully literate beings, and, as a result, are not providing their students with the opportunities to develop literacy skills that allow true belonging.

I maintain that the stories that teachers carry into classrooms matter and, significantly, teachers of students with CSN want to have time and space to share those stories, to reflect upon them, and to possibly even change them. Science writer Erik Vance said that to be human is to have a brain that makes predictions that “create this tapestry of reality and expectations and the way we see everything fitting together” and that my tapestry, my map, like yours, “is just as flawed and amazing as” (Tippett, 2019) the ones created and constantly re-created by my teacher-participants and our students with CSN. This study pointed to the value of and a possible process for educators coming together to discuss “this tapestry of the map that we’ve created about” what school and literacy instruction has been for students with CSN, to admit that it is “flawed” and “not accurate” (Tippett, 2019), and to become cartographers of a passage to literacy and belonging that works for all students and their teachers.
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Appendix A

Letter/Prospectus Requesting Approval by District

Superintendent
Name of school district
Mailing address
City, State

Dear Superintendent:

I am writing to request approval to recruit participants for my dissertation research study entitled “Stories we carry into classrooms: The literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs.” The purpose of this study is to investigate the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs (CSN).

Please find attached a prospectus with more detailed information about this project and about the recruitment process. As a point of emphasis, I want to let you know that while my timeframe for recruitment of participants in this study is within the current school year, recruitment activities will take place outside of contracted hours for myself and any potential participants. Data collection (interviews and focus groups) will be scheduled for June and July 2019, outside of the regular school year for teachers.

The district’s initial approval of recruitment for this study will be submitted with my application for “human rights clearance” through the university’s Institutional Review Board (IRB). Once I have that clearance (or approval) from the IRB, I will provide documentation of that approval before moving forward with recruitment of participants for my study.

Please feel free to contact Dr. Susan Copeland (505-277-0628 or susanrc@unm.edu), principal investigator for this study, or me (505-288-7802 or shead2018@unm.edu) with any questions or concerns related to this request.

Thank you for your time and consideration of this request.

Sincerely,

Sharon L. Head
Doctoral Candidate, Special Education Department
The University of New Mexico
PROSPECTUS
Stories we carry into classrooms: The literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs

Purpose of this request: This is a request to recruit teacher-participants in a research project that is being done by Sharon Head (doctoral candidate) and Dr. Susan Copeland (faculty sponsor), from the Special Education Department at The University of New Mexico.

Purpose of research: The purpose of the research is to investigate the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs (CSN). The teachers that I recruit will be asked to participate because they have at least two years of teaching experience with students with CSN.

What teacher-participants will do in this project: The teachers who volunteer and give consent will participate in two individual interviews and two focus groups. The interviews should take about 60 minutes each to complete and the focus groups should take approximately 90 minutes each. The interviews include questions such as the following: “Tell me what literacy means to you. Tell me a story about that.” OR “Tell me about reading and writing in your classroom.” Teacher involvement in the research is voluntary, and they may choose not to participate. They can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time.

Recruitment of teacher-participants: Participants for this research study will be recruited from teaching staff in the Moriarty Edgewood School District. Teachers with at least 2 years of experience working with students with CSN (students with significant disabilities) are needed for this research study. Potential participants will be contacted by phone, email, or in person at a time outside of the contracted workday. Consent will be obtained in-person prior to participation in this study.

Confidentiality of teacher-participant information: The information that is shared as a part of this research study will not be shared with the school district. There will be no names or identifying information associated with responses. All identifiable information (e.g., name, school) will be removed from the information collected in this project. Recordings from interviews and focus groups will be saved in a password-secured electronic file that is separate from transcriptions or any other documents containing participants’ deidentified response.

While significant measures will be taken to protect the security of all personal information of participants, we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all research data. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human research may be permitted to access records from this study. Participants’ names and schools will not be used in any published reports about this project.

Use of information for future research: Information collected for this project will not be used or shared for future research.
**Right to withdraw from the research:** Participation in this research is completely voluntary. Teacher-participants have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw from participation at any time without penalty.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact:

Dr. Susan Copeland, Special Education Department, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131. (505) 277-0628. susanrc@unm.edu

Sharon Head, 37 Blue Mule Drive, Edgewood, New Mexico 87015. (505) 288-7802. shead2018@unm.edu

If you have questions regarding this research study, or if you want to obtain information or offer input, please contact the Institutional Review Board (IRB). The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving people. Contact information: (505) 277-2644, irbmaincampus@unm.edu.
Appendix B

Phone Script for Recruitment of Participants

WHEN REACHING AN ANSWERING MACHINE OR VOICE MAIL

I will not leave a telephone or voicemail message regarding research recruitment.

IF SOMEONE OTHER THAN PARTICIPANT ANSWERS THE PHONE

Hello,

Am I speaking to (potential participant)?

• If NO, ask if the desired person is available. If not available, then indicate you will call back, say Thank You and hang up. Do not provide any information that might violate the potential subject’s privacy.

ONCE THE POTENTIAL PARTICIPANT IS ON THE LINE

Hello,

Am I speaking to (potential participant)?

If YES, then continue:

My name is Sharon Head. I am a doctoral candidate and researcher at the University of New Mexico. The Special Education Department is doing a study about the literacy narratives (or stories) of teachers who work with students with complex support needs (or significant disabilities). I am contacting you because of your work in this field.

May I have your permission to talk to you about this new study?

• If no, say Thank you for your time and end the call.
• If yes, continue as below.

The purpose of this research study is to gather the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs.

If you agree to participate, this study will involve your participation in two 60-minute individual interviews and two 90-minute focus groups.

There are no known risks in this research, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering questions. While there are no overt or immediate benefits
to you, you may find the experience of sharing your personal and professional literacy narratives to be a positive, “connecting” one.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will receive a $60 gift card at the end of our work together.

You do not have to be in this study, your decision to be in any study is totally voluntary.

Do you have any questions? (Answer any questions)

“OK very good. Are you interested in being part of this study?

- If no, say Thank you for your time and end the call.
- If yes, then set up a time and location to review consent form in-person and to conduct initial interview.
Appendix C

Sample Email for Recruitment of Participants

Subject Line: Opportunity to Participate in Research

Dear [name],

I am conducting a research study about the literacy narratives (or stories) of teachers of students with complex support needs (CSN) or significant disabilities.

You are receiving this email because you have 2 or more years of experience teaching students with complex support needs.

The purpose of this research study is to gather the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs.

If you agree to participate, this study will involve your participation in two 60-minute individual interviews and two 90-minute focus groups.

Insert risks and benefits. There are no known risks in this research, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering questions. While there are no overt or immediate benefits to you, you may find the experience of sharing your personal and professional literacy narratives to be a positive, “connecting” one.

If you choose to participate in this study, you will receive a $60 gift card at the end of our work together.

You do not have to be in this study, your decision to be in any study is totally voluntary.

If you feel you understand the study and would like to participate, please contact me at 505-288-7802 or shead2018@unm.edu so that we can arrange for a time to review the consent form in-person.

If you have questions prior to participating, please contact:

- Sharon Head by phone (505-288-7802) or email (shead2018@unm.edu)
- Dr. Susan Copeland by email (susanrc@unm.edu)
- UNM Office of the Institutional Review Board (OIRB) by phone (505-277-2644) or through their website (irb.unm.edu).
Thank you for your time,

*Sharon Head*
*Doctoral Candidate*
*Special Education Department*
*The University of New Mexico*

Principal Investigator: *Dr. Susan Copeland*
Study Title: *Stories we carry into classrooms: The literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs*
IRB #07819
Appendix D

Text of Consent Form to be Provided to Participants on UNM Letterhead

Stories we carry into classrooms: The personal and professional literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs (working title)
Consent to Participate in Research

03/30/2019

Purpose of the research: You are being asked to participate in a research project that is being done by Sharon Head (doctoral candidate) and Dr. Susan Copeland (faculty sponsor), from the Special Education Department. The purpose of the research is to investigate the literacy narratives of teachers of students with complex support needs (CSN). You are being asked to participate because of you have at least two years of teaching experience with students with CSN.

This consent form contains important information about this project and what to expect if you decide to participate. Please consider the information carefully. Feel free to ask questions before making your decision whether to participate. Your participation in this research is voluntary.

What you will do in the project: Your participation will involve participation in two interviews and two focus groups. The interviews should take about 60 minutes each to complete and the focus groups should take approximately 90 minutes each. The interviews include questions such as the following: “Tell me what literacy means to you. Tell me a story about that.” OR “Tell me about reading and writing in your classroom.” Your involvement in the research is voluntary, and you may choose not to participate. You can refuse to answer any of the questions at any time. Also, after you have participated in the first interview and the two focus groups, I will send you some whole or partial stories (or narratives) that you have shared as a way for me to check with you about my understanding of what you have shared up to that point.

Risks: There are no known risks in this research, but some individuals may experience discomfort or loss of privacy when answering questions. There are risks of stress, emotional distress, inconvenience and possible loss of privacy and confidentiality associated with participating in a research project.

Benefits: There will be no overt or immediate benefit to you from participating in this research. However, it is hoped that information gained will help in better understanding teacher decision-making about literacy instruction for students with complex support needs. Additionally, you may find the experience of sharing your personal and professional literacy narratives to be a positive, “connecting” one.

Confidentiality of your information: The information that you share as a part of this research study will NOT be shared with your school district. There will be no names or
identifying information associated with your responses. All identifiable information (e.g., your name, school, etc.) will be removed from the information collected in this project. Recordings from interviews and focus groups will be saved in a password-secured electronic file that is separate from transcriptions or any other documents containing your deidentified response.

We will take measures to protect the security of all your personal information, but we cannot guarantee confidentiality of all research data. The University of New Mexico Institutional Review Board (IRB) that oversees human research may be permitted to access your records. Your name will not be used in any published reports about this project.

You should understand that the researcher is not prevented from taking steps, including reporting to authorities, to prevent serious harm of yourself or others.

**Use of your information for future research:** Your information collected for this project will not be used or shared for future research, even if we remove the identifiable information like your name or date of birth.

**Payment:** In return for your time and the inconvenience of participating in this project, you will receive, in total, a $60 gift card. Compensation is considered taxable income.

**Right to withdraw from the research:** Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. You have the right to choose not to participate or to withdraw your participation at any time without penalty. If you decide to withdraw at any point in the course of this study, you will contact the investigator, Sharon Head, by phone at 505-288-7802 or by email at shead2018@unm.edu. Once withdrawn from the study, audio recordings of individual interviews will be deleted from any electronic storage and any paper and/or electronic copies of transcribed interviews will be destroyed. Recorded participation in focus groups will be retained in a secure location and used only for the purpose of input of participants who have not withdrawn from the study. Any transcriptions from these focus groups will be expunged of any content provided by you, should you withdraw from the study.

If you have any questions, concerns, or complaints about the research, please contact:

Dr. Susan Copeland, Special Education Department, 1 University of New Mexico, Albuquerque, NM 87131. (505) 277-0628. susanrc@unm.edu

Sharon Head, 37 Blue Mule Drive, Edgewood, New Mexico 87015. (505) 288-7802. shead2018@unm.edu

If you have questions regarding your rights as a research participant, or about what you should do in case of any research-related harm to you, or if you want to obtain information or offer input, please contact the IRB. The IRB is a group of people from UNM and the
community who provide independent oversight of safety and ethical issues related to research involving people:

UNM Office of the IRB, (505) 277-2644, irbmaincampus@unm.edu. Website: http://irb.unm.edu/

CONSENT

You are making a decision whether to participate in this research. Your signature below indicates that you have read this form (or the form was read to you) and that all questions have been answered to your satisfaction. By signing this consent form, you are not waiving any of your legal rights as a research participant. A copy of this consent form will be provided to you.

I agree to participate in this research.

Name of Adult Participant  Signature of Adult Participant     Date

Researcher Signature (to be completed at time of informed consent)

I have explained the research to the participant and answered all of their questions. I believe that they understand the information described in this consent form and freely consents to participate.

Name of Research Team Member  Signature of Research Team Member     Date
### Appendix E

#### Timeline

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Date</th>
<th>Activity</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2019-03-27</td>
<td>Proposal defended</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-04-30</td>
<td>Received IRB approval</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-05-10</td>
<td>Received consent from district to contact potential participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-05-14</td>
<td>Contacted potential participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-05-21</td>
<td>Consent process completed</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-05-21</td>
<td>Identified locations for interviews and focus groups</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-06-01</td>
<td>Notified participants of all meeting times and locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-06-16</td>
<td>First round of interviews completed; via email, provided participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>with way to record any thoughts related to content/process of interview</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uploaded recordings into Dedoose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-06-30</td>
<td>First focus group completed; via email, provided participants with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>way to record any thoughts related to content/process of focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uploaded recording of first focus group into Dedoose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-07-10</td>
<td>Began process of transcribing initial interviews</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-07-14</td>
<td>Second focus group completed; via email, provided participants with</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>way to record any thoughts related to content/process of focus group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Uploaded recording of second focus group into Dedoose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-08-01</td>
<td>Second round of interviews completed; provided participants with way to record any thoughts related to content/process of interview including details about how to return to researcher Uploaded recordings from follow-up interviews to Dedoose</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-08-02</td>
<td>Contacted participants about their preference for gift cards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-08-06</td>
<td>Delivered thank you notes and gift cards to participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-09-01</td>
<td>With dissertation chair, began discussion of using transcription service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-09-24</td>
<td>Submitted amendment application to IRB to address use of transcription service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-09-30</td>
<td>Created narrative-based member checks and emailed to participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-10-09</td>
<td>Received approval letter for amendment from IRB</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-10-11</td>
<td>Submitted first recordings to online transcription service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-10-12</td>
<td>Received first draft of transcripts from transcription service and began editing process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-10-15</td>
<td>Completion of transcription and editing of initial interviews with P1 and P2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-10-30</td>
<td>Followed up with participants about any member checks still not returned to me</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-10-31</td>
<td>Received last responses to member checks</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-11-09</td>
<td>Submitted last set of recordings to transcription service</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Date</td>
<td>Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>------------</td>
<td>--------------------------------------------------------------------------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-11-26</td>
<td>Completed editing of all transcripts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-12-26</td>
<td>Completed first-cycle coding</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2019-12-29</td>
<td>Deleted all recordings and transcripts from Rev.com (online transcription service)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-01-17</td>
<td>Met with Dr. Armstrong to discuss choice of participant for narrative analysis; Began process of narrative analysis for P4, Beth</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-01-20</td>
<td>Completed visual mapping of thematic analysis and identified initial themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-01-27</td>
<td>Identified final themes for thematic analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-02-06</td>
<td>Completed initial drafts of thematic analysis and narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2020-02-20</td>
<td>Completed final write up of thematic analysis and narrative analysis</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix F

Sample Email for Follow-up After Interviews and Focus Groups

[Date]

Dear [Participant Name]

Thanks so much for taking the time to participate in the [interview OR focus group] on [day of the week]. Because our time together for these sessions is so limited and because it is natural to continue to process, internally, questions that we have been asked or thoughts we wish we had shared in the moment, I want to give you this opportunity to share any thoughts that you have had since meeting.

Please do not pre-judge the importance of your reflections or questions about our conversation. I would welcome any answers, questions, thoughts, etc., related to our [interview OR focus group] or, generally, about the topic of literacy for you or your students. Please share any additional input you have by replying to this email.

I look forward to hearing your insights and to our ongoing conversation.

Thanks,

Sharon Head
Appendix G

Protocol for Interviews and Focus Groups

1. Contact local or university libraries for information about how to schedule private meeting rooms for interviews or focus groups.

2. After notification of interest in participation in study is received from teachers, schedule initial interviews. Signed consent will be obtained at time of meeting for first interview prior to any data collection. Make sure to ask participants about the following items:
   a. Preferred method of contact (phone, text, and/or email) for scheduling of meetings and for any other contacts related to the research study;
   b. Information about preferred/available meeting dates and times for focus groups and for follow-up interviews.

3. Based on input from participants, decide on dates/times and locations for initial interviews and first focus group.

4. Contact local or university libraries to schedule meeting rooms for the dates and times needed. Ask to be added to library meeting room schedule (or use the process available to make the reservation). For example, the University Libraries at UNM have an online booking system for meeting rooms. Schedule meeting rooms for an amount of time that allows at least 30 minutes for my arrival and preparation of site and at least 30 minutes for lingering conversations with participants and for re-organization of materials in bag and for clean-up. Make sure to ask about available furniture, seating, access to outlets for power cords for recording devices and for
recharging other devices, if necessary. Also, inquire about access to wireless connection.

5. Send an invitation via email, phone, or text (using preferred method for each participant) with meeting dates, times, and locations. Also, let participants know that I will be contacting them to confirm meeting dates, times, and locations within 24 hours of scheduled time.

6. For focus groups, contact participants to see if they will require childcare. If childcare is required, arrange for childcare provider to be present during time scheduled for focus groups and add crayons, markers, paper, and picture books from home library to checklist.

7. Create checklist of materials needed for interviews and focus groups (see Appendix N).

8. Gather all materials needed for interviews and focus groups in purple carry-on bag. Use checklist to make sure that all items are included.

9. Within 24 hours of meeting time, confirm dates, times, and locations for initial interviews and focus groups with participants. Provide directions to meeting location (including location within the building) and give guidance about parking, if needed. Express gratitude for their participation and enthusiasm for the conversations to be shared with them.

10. Confirm scheduling of meeting room with library system where meeting room is scheduled.
11. On day before scheduled meeting, use checklist to double-check that all items are in
   bag to be taken to interview or focus group. Especially, make sure that electronic
deVICES are charged and that battery-operated devices have working batteries (and
backup batteries).

12. Arrive at meeting location at least 15 minutes prior to scheduled time. Check-in with
   library staff, if required, and enter meeting room. On initial visit to the library, do a
   quick reconnaissance of key locations such as restrooms, locations for a smoking
   break (if allowed on the site), etc.

13. Move tables and chairs in the room to allow for the follow configurations:

   a. For interviews, use one table for set up of recording equipment (bi-directional
      microphone attached to Surface Go tablet or back-recording device, Sony
digital recorder), list of questions, field notebook, water/drink bottles. Other
miscellaneous items (for example, interviewee’s bag or other personal items)
could be placed on floor under table or on an extra table. Depending on size
and shape of table, interviewer and interviewee will sit either across table
from each other, adjacent to one another, or next to each other with
appropriate proximity, if using a round table. Ultimately, the seating
arrangement will be determined once the participant arrives, gets to see the
seating options, and is asked by interviewer what the most comfortable
position will be for her. Recording equipment will already be out on the table
and ready for minor adjustments once the interviewer and participant
coordinate seating arrangement. Make sure that table is placed so that recording equipment can be connected to power supply via an extension cord and/or multi-outlet adapter.

b. For focus groups, if more than one table in the meeting, choose table around which all participants and interviewer (five to six adults total) can comfortably be seated. Before arrival of participants, place recording equipment (MOVO conferencing microphone attached to Surface Go tablet or back-up recording device, Sony digital recorder) in a central location on table along with interviewer’s supplies (list of questions, field notebook, pens) and water/drink bottles. Make sure that table is placed so that recording equipment can be connected to power supply via an extension cord and/or multi-outlet adapter. Snacks and extra drinks will be placed on the table (if there is sufficient room) or in another easily accessible location in the room. Other miscellaneous items (for example, participants’ bags or other personal items) could be placed on floor under table or on an extra table. Chairs for participants and interviewer will be placed around table so that there is a relatively equal distance between microphone and all individuals around the table. Recording equipment will already be out on the table and ready for minor adjustments once the interviewer and participant coordinate seating arrangement.

14. Offer snacks and drinks. Give participants a couple of minutes to make a choice and then to get resettled in chair at table.
15. Check that recording equipment is working by doing sound check. Before starting sound check, give participants directions about the following procedures. For interviews, researcher will start recording device and say, “This is a sound check,” then will look at participant and say, “please say hello.” After the participant replies, researcher will turn off recording device and play recording to make sure that audibility, including volume, is optimal before starting interview. For focus groups, researcher will start recording device and say, “This is Sharon. We’re doing a sound check. When I look at you, please give a greeting and share your name.” Researcher will give each participant a chance to speak. After each focus group member replies, the researcher will turn off recording device and play recording to make sure that all members can be heard clearly before starting the focus group questions.

16. Once sound check is completed but before starting the recording device, I will remind participants of the length of the interview (approximately 60 minutes) or focus group (approximately 90 minutes). I will start timer.

17. Next, I will tell participants that we are going to start the formal interview or focus group process. I will turn on the recording device and say, “Today is [date] and this is a recording of a/n [interview OR focus group] with [first name of each participant]. Let’s start by introducing ourselves for the purpose of accurate identifying voices when I am transcribing and reviewing this recording.” I will start with “This is Sharon, recorder and asker of questions.” Then, I will gesture/nod to and ask each
participant to say some version of an introductory statement (such as “This is [first
name]”) as a way to begin the formal recorded interview or focus group.

18. I will conduct interviews and focus groups with the questions (for interviews) or
scripts (see Appendix H for the preliminary interview questions, Appendix I for the
follow-up interview questions, Appendix J for the script/questions for first focus
group, and Appendix K for the script/questions for second focus group).

19. Complete interview/focus group at end of scheduled time.

20. Turn off recording device.

21. Before participants leave, provide them with paper reminder of next scheduled
meeting (except for last interview). Also, provide them with reminder of how to
contact researcher (via email) if they have additional information that they would like
to share.

22. After 2nd focus group, discuss member checks and/or have them ready to go out prior
to beginning of follow-up interviews.

23. Thank profusely and dismiss.

24. Clean up all recording equipment, tools, and drink/snack leftovers or trash; use
checklist to make sure that all equipment gets back into carry-on bag.

25. Move tables and chairs back to original positions, if necessary.

26. Check out with library staff (if required) and leave.

27. Send follow-up email within 24 hours (or same day, if possible).
28. Check access to and sound quality of recordings and back-up to all of the following locations within 24 hours: external hard drive; UNM Microsoft online account; personal Microsoft 365 account; Surface tablet.
Appendix H

Script/Questions for Initial Interviews

1. Tell me about your experiences as a literacy learner.
   a. *Tell me about learning how to read and/or write.*
   b. *Tell me a story about reading, writing, or being part of storytelling as a child or adolescent. This could be a story about an experience at home, in your community, or at school.*
   c. *Tell me about any stories you remember someone sharing with you.*
   d. *Tell me about a time when an adult in your life brought a story to life.*
   e. *Tell me about an unforgettable moment or story from your time as a student.*

2. Tell me about your experience as a teacher of literacy.
   a. *Tell me about a typical day for you and your students in your classroom.*
   b. *Tell me about reading and writing in your classroom.*
   c. *Tell me about how your students read, write, or communicate.*
   d. *Tell me about an unforgettable moment or story from your time as a teacher.*

Generic probes:

*Please tell me more about that.*

*What do you mean? What does that mean?*

*Please explain that.*

*What were you thinking/feeling at the time?*

*Please give me an example of that.*

*Take me through/tell me about the experience.*

*What did that look (sound, feel) like?*
Appendix I

Script/Questions for Follow-up Interviews

1. Tell me about a person who impacted your learning.
   a. Tell me about a teacher or another adult who influenced you as a learner.
   b. When you think about learning how to read or write, is there a specific person you recall? Tell me about her/him.

2. Tell me about a student who has impacted your teaching.
   a. Tell me about a student who had a literacy success story.
   b. Tell me about a student who really challenged you.
   c. Tell me about a student who caused you to reconsider your ideas about literacy or about how to teach literacy skills.

3. Tell me what literacy means to you. Tell me a story about that.
   a. Tell me about a book or story that was important to you in your time as a student.
   b. Tell me about a book or story that has been important to you in your work with students.

4. Tell me about your experience of participating in this research study.
   a. You have shared stories of your literacy learning and the literacy learning of your students on several occasions. Tell me about any story (or stories) that “stand out” for you.
   b. Tell me about any story (or stories) that come to mind now that perhaps you have not discussed in our earlier meetings.
Generic probes:

*Please tell me more about that.*

*What do you mean? What does that mean?*

*Please explain that.*

*What were you thinking/feeling at the time?*

*Please give me an example of that.*

*Take me through/tell me about the experience.*

*What did that look (sound, feel) like?*
Appendix J

Script/Questions for First Focus Group

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Topic: Literate connection/Literate “joy” (Kliwer, 2008)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Opening: Thank you for being here today to take part in my research study. Let’s go around the table and introduce ourselves. This is also for the purpose of helping me to connect names with voices when I transcribe this group conversation. Please give first name only. [Give each participant time to introduce themselves.] Our time together today is scheduled to last for 90 minutes. I have already set my timer for that amount of time.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Introduction of topic: Given my interest (in this research study) in your stories about literacy in your lives and in the lives of your students, the suggested topic of today’s conversation is literate connection and literate joy. QUESTION: What are the ways that literacy has been a bridge to greater connection with others and/or the ways that you have experienced joy through any literate experience? Who would like to start?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Possible follow-up, if needed: Provide expansion of definition of literate experience. For example, describe literate experience as that which involves reading, writing, storytelling, watching/performing theater, creating video/audio content, etc.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Allow for long pauses in between comments/questions. Sit with discomfort and provide focus group members with maximum “space” for expression of their stories.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Share excerpt of poem “First Teacher” (see Appendix O), a reflection on my early literate joy and connection with my grandmother.

Closing: If timer goes off in midst of conversation, allow for natural break in conversation. Say this, “The timer tells me that our time is up. Out of respect for your time, we will end here. Please feel free to take a snack or drink with you. I will be here for at least a few minutes to clean up. If you have any pressing comments, questions, or concerns, please know that you are welcome to stay and discuss with me.”

Reminders: Say this, “Finally, remember that our next focus group is scheduled for [date/time] at [meeting place]. Here is a paper reminder to take with you. I will also be sending you an email within the next 24 hours to offer you the opportunity to contact me by email with any stories or thoughts that ‘come to mind’ after this meeting is over. Your willingness to participate in our conversation today is more appreciated than I could ever express. I will look forward to seeing you soon!”
Appendix K

Script/Questions for Second Focus Group

**Topic:** Challenges as a teacher of literacy for students with CSN

**Opening:** Thank you for being here today to take part in my research study. Let’s go around the table and introduce ourselves. This is primarily so that I can connect names with voices when I transcribe this group conversation. Please give first name only. [Give each participant time to introduce themselves.] Our time together today is scheduled to last for 90 minutes. I have already set my timer for that amount of time.

**Introduction of topic:** Given my interest (in this research study) in your stories about literacy in your lives and in the lives of your students, the suggested topic of today’s conversation is challenges as a teacher of literacy for students with CSN.

**QUESTION:** What are the challenges that you have faced as you provide literacy instruction to your students who have CSN? Who would like to start?

**Possible follow-up, if needed:** Provide expansion of definition of literacy instruction. Include discussion about communication challenges/opportunities.

**if needed:** Allow for long pauses in between comments/questions. Sit with discomfort and provide focus group members with maximum “space” for expression of their stories.

Share examples of challenges that I have faced as teacher of literacy for students with CSN (e.g., teaching writing to and building literate community
for students with autism).

Closing: If timer goes off in midst of conversation, allow for natural break in conversation. Say this, “The timer tells me that our time is up. Out of respect for your time, we will end here. Please feel free to take a snack or drink with you. I will be here for at least a few minutes to clean up. If you have any pressing comments, questions, or concerns, please know that you are welcome to stay and discuss with me.”

Reminders: Say this, “Finally, remember that follow-up interviews are scheduled over the next couple of weeks. Here is a paper reminder to take with you. I will also be sending you an email within the next 24 hours to offer you the opportunity to contact me by email with any stories or thoughts that ‘come to mind’ after this meeting is over. I am deeply grateful for your willingness to participate in our conversation today. I will look forward to seeing you soon!”
Appendix L

Sample Email Communication for Member Checks

[Date]

Dear [Name of Participant],

Thanks so much for participating in my dissertation research project. I have transcribed our initial interview and have also listened to recordings of both focus groups and our follow-up interview.

I am sharing below just a small representation of the stories about literacy that you shared with me. (There is also an audio version of these stories attached to this email.) Please read (and/or listen) and share any comments, suggestions, and/or additions to what I have given here. Also, most importantly, please let me know if these short narratives in any way misrepresent your experiences as a literacy learner and/or teacher of literacy.

There is no deadline for this. Please take as much time as you need.

Finally, as you will see, I have chosen the pseudonym of [Pseudonym] to protect your identity as I write about your stories. Please let me know if you would prefer that I use a different pseudonym.

Thanks, again, for your help with my research study. I have thoroughly enjoyed our conversations about literacy. I look forward to hearing back from you.

Sharon
Appendix M

Transcription Key (Scherba deValenzuela, 2018)

- Type in the real names of the participants for the first draft. We will change them to pseudonyms after you transcribe the whole tape.
- Type EXACTLY what you hear. For example, if someone says “gonna” (not going to), type gonna. Same with talkin’, doin’, y’know, etc. Don’t clean up the grammar or pronunciation. Spell and type everything exactly as you hear it.
- If you don’t understand what someone says, listen to it a couple of times, the back up a bit and play it through (sometimes that helps) and then, if you still can’t understand it, put XX, to indicate an unintelligible utterance.
- When one person talks, keep typing in the same paragraph. Don’t hit the paragraph return until a new person starts talking.
- Don’t use punctuation like you would when you write. When transcribing, punctuation has very specific meanings. For example:
  - Put a period at the end of a phrase that sounds like someone is ending a sentence, when their voice goes down at the end of a sentence.
  - Put a question mark at the end of a sentence which sounds like a question, when their voice goes up at the end of the sentence. It doesn’t matter whether it is a question, grammatically. And, if a question doesn’t sound like one, where someone’s voice doesn’t go up at the end of the sentence, don’t put a question mark.
  - Use a comma to indicate a pause. Don’t use it just because it is grammatically a phrase. There has to be a real pause there.
  - Use a dash to indicate when a word is broken off. For example, “w- what” would indicate that someone started to say what but only started it, but then said it again.
  - Don’t use dots (...) to indicate that someone trailed off. I will need to use that later to indicate that I deleted part of a quote. Instead, if there is a pause, use a comma.
  - If two people talked on top of each other, put a square bracket ([) at the beginning of when the overlap occurs for the person who is talking and then, put the end bracket (]) at where the overlap starts. You will then do a paragraph return and type in what the second person said who was talking over the first person. That will also be in square brackets. Look at the example below to see how that works.
  - If someone is talking along and doesn’t stop their flow of conversation but someone else interjects, then you use the = sign to link two parts of the transcript. This tells us that the first person didn’t have a break in the conversation, but lets you also indicate where the second person was talking interjecting without overlapping.
• Use double parentheses to indicate a description that you are including. For example, is someone laughs or pounds the table, or snaps their fingers, you would include it as ((laughing)) ((pounds table)) ((snaps fingers)) ((claps hands))

• Use a colon to indicate where a sound is prolonged more than usual.

• Use all caps when someone uses a HUGE emphasis on a word.

• If there’s a break in the recording, like when the tape is turned over, use double slashes to indicate that. (see below)

Example One
Barb:  ((laughing)) XX
Julia:  Yeah people used to say that they a::, thought I was a::, talkative, ’till they met my family
Barb:  Oh really. XX
Julia:  Okay well hopefully this will re- yeah I think its recording, yeah
Barb:  We can play it back in a second and see if it’s
Julia:  Yeah, well, it’s pickin’ up. The little monitor’s going
Barb:  Okay [XX]
Julia:  [Okay, thanks] this: makes it a lot easier for me to transcribe if I’m not taping questions, uhm do you want to see a copy of the questions I’m gonna ask?
Barb:  Yeah yeah
Julia:  It makes it easier to follow along.
Barb:  [okay]
Julia:  [This is] very open ended and we’ll just, go though ‘em, and, ((chuckles)) and, if it’s okay with you I’d like to interview you:, two more times and then come back to you at the end. for some. member check.
Barb:  M’kay
Julia:  So, to see if any of your, ideas about this change, through the whole process like the thirs time-, the third time I’ll interview you would be a:fter, the external reviewers co:me
Barb:  Oh okay
Julia:  So.
Barb:  And- the purpose to interview us? Why are you interviewing us?
Example Two
Julia:  ((microphone noise)) I’m gonna move this closer to you so XX don’t get a lot of uhm, fan ((noise in background))
Beth:  Okay. That’s not gonna hurt the, computer. Bill dropped something on it yesterday. ((laughing))
Julia:  Okay, and you said were, both enlightened and confused. Can you tell me a little more about that?
Beth:  Uhm, it seemed to me that THIS particular OGS review

Example Three
Julia:  Okay. Today is, September 19th I believe? Is that right?
Chris:  Uh huh.
Julia:  September 19th and I’m interviewing Christine Mitchell for the second round of questions,
Chris:  M’kay.
Julia:  =uhm, prior to the OGS visit. Which will happen next week. WELL, [Dr. Mitchell=]
Chris:  [((laugh))]
Julia:  =what do you see as the purpose of this OGS review.

Example Four
Julia:  Yeah. So you know a part of me- you know today ((inaudible sentences for about 45 seconds)
//
((end of side 1 of tape))
//
Julia:  So- so it’s just kind of uhm, to bring out uhm, what kind of data do we want to
Appendix N

Checklist of Materials Needed for Interviews and Focus Groups

☐ Microsoft Surface Go tablet
☐ Microsoft Surface pen
☐ Samson Go Mic (N382) and USB cord/adapter
☐ MOVO Portable USB Conferencing (multi-directional) microphone (MC 1000) and USB cord/adapter
☐ MicroUSB adapter for Surface Go
☐ Seagate expansion portable drive (for manual backup of data) and USB cord
☐ Extension power cord with multi-outlet adapter
☐ Bic Atlantis pens (2 blue ink, 2 black ink)
☐ Box of assorted snacks such as fruit/granola bars, nuts (almonds, walnuts, etc.) in pre-packaged, portioned bags, mints, gum, chocolates (individually wrapped).
☐ Bottled water (at least 2 bottles per participant)
☐ Crayons, markers, paper, and collection of picture books for focus groups, if childcare is to be provided
Appendix O

Sample of Literacy Narrative (First Teacher by S. Head)

I was three or so
and could barely see over the back of the wooden pew.
But she insisted that I help to hold the
hymnal and I trusted the
power of the squiggles and lines
because I was in the warm space beside her.
Before I could read letters or words,
she held a place in the story for me.

I was five or so
and she led my Sunday School class.
She taught me cryptic passages and
prayers that I would recite, from memory,
in front of a smiling congregation at Easter.
Before I could unlock meanings,
she held a place in the story for me.

I was twelve or so
and she gave me a confirmation Bible with a
white leather cover and a zipper that
secured the pages. The greater gift was her expectation that
I could wrestle with the words and worlds within.
Before I could enter mystery,
she held a place in the story for me.

I am fifty or so
and know that I would never have
loved sentences, puzzled over poems and prayers, or
embraced rough and necessary questions without
my first teacher (and all teachers)
who held a place in the story for me.

When I walk into a school, before anything else
I wonder:
Which child is still waiting for some
stubborn and kind teacher to hold a place in the story for her?