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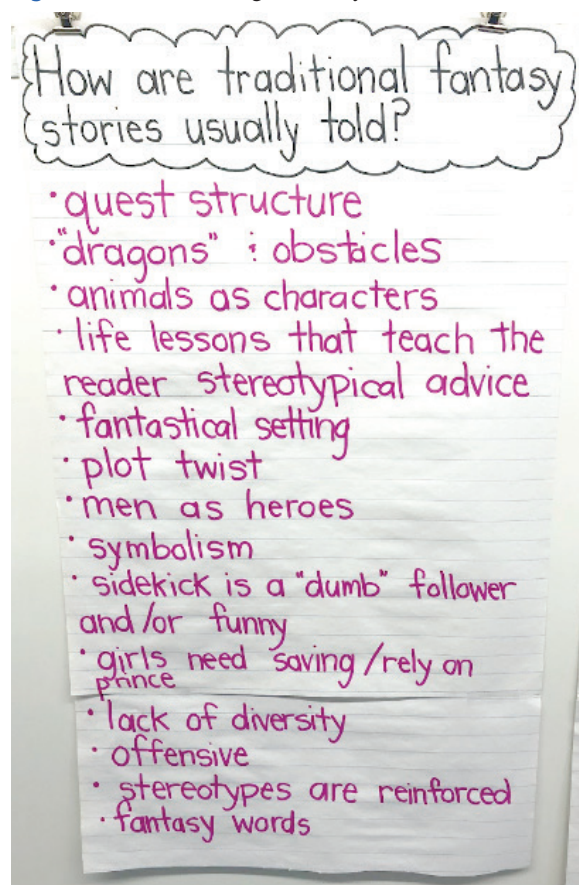
Disability Sustaining Pedagogy: Literacy Instruction Informed by the Knowledge and Lived Experiences of Teachers with Disabilities

Centering the narratives of teachers with disabilities, this piece offers Disability Sustaining Pedagogy as a stance and practice for honoring disability identities in literacy classrooms.

In early May 2022, Kate had her fifth graders gathered on the rug. Her co-researcher Laurie sat crisscrossed, taking notes on a laptop and chiming in on the students' discussion. The class was studying an anchor chart they had co-constructed, entitled "How Traditional Fantasy Stories are Usually Told" (see Figure 1), and working to co-create a new one that asked: "How will our fantasy stories disrupt the genre?" (see Figure 4). An animated discussion of alternative approaches ensued as students drew on examples from fantasy stories they read independently (e.g. *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*, which has a white hero), the mentor text for the unit (*The Gauntlet*, which has a Bangladeshi American heroine), and the fantasy stories they were writing themselves.

"You are the author. It's your story," Kate explained, asking them to consider what they wanted to teach audiences through their fantasy stories. While Kate's intent was to use Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) to surface how race and gender are typically represented in children's fantasy writing, students interwove ableism, or discrimination against disabled people, into their critical reading of the fantasy genre. The class homed in

Figure 1. Critical reading of fantasy chart.



on *Charlie and the Chocolate Factory*'s representation of the Oompa Loompas, characters with dwarfism that Willy Wonka has taken from their home in the jungle to work for him in the candy factory.

Willy Wonka "is like Columbus forcing the Native Americans to convert," Harry (all student names are pseudonyms) hypothesized. The class began to analyze the forced labor of these disabled characters. Students soon identified the Oompa Loompas as Willy Wonka's "sidekicks." They referred back to the first anchor chart, which noted that sidekicks were typically minoritized individuals characterized as "dumb" or "funny." Then, an idea sparked.

Brooklyn said, "In our stories, we could make the sidekick *not dumb*." Kate recorded this on the anchor chart, "Sidekick is smart and helpful," then replaced "sidekick" with "partner." Students realized that one way they could disrupt the fantasy genre was by challenging white male heroes' intellectual superiority.

After the lesson, Laurie and Kate discussed that teaching literacy using a CSP-informed approach without incorporating a rich discussion of disability representation was incomplete. Drawing on previous instruction about ableism—which Kate was passionate about as an educator with disabilities—students had identified how race and disability were intersecting in fantasy stories. In this article, we explore the experiences of Kate and three other educators with disabilities to flesh out a stance and terminology parallel to CSP that explicitly addresses disability identity in literacy instruction.

Disability Sustaining Pedagogy

In 2012, Django Paris argued for a new "stance, terminology, and practice" that built on and extended Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) (Ladson-Billings, 1995). He offered up the term "Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy" (CSP) to encapsulate a body of research and teaching practice that "supports the value of our multiethnic and multilingual present and future" (p. 93). CSP reinforced tenets of CRP but also lovingly critiqued the need for more descriptive terminology that emphatically affirmed

the languages, literacies, and cultural practices of students as not only connected to curriculum but also cultivated through curriculum.

CSP has been cross-pollinated with Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016), which is a framework grounded in neuroscience research and aims to support teachers in designing instruction that is both appropriately challenging and accessible for all learners. UDL offers teachers practical suggestions to design meaningful and challenging learning opportunities across content areas. Unlike traditional curriculum, which considers "typical" students first and then retrofits adaptations for students with varied needs, UDL is used to design curriculum for diverse learners at the onset. UDL assumes that access points enhance learning for all students, not just specific students.

The UDL Guidelines (available at <https://udl-guidelines.cast.org/>) are organized by principles of multiple means of engagement, representation, and action and expression, which map onto the networks of the brain that are essential to learning (CAST, 2018). In the cross-pollination of CSP/UDL, the emphasis has been on the access of students with disabilities to CSP. Our work builds on and extends the work of cross-pollination to address critiques of UDL's approach. As UDL conceptualizes a spectrum of neurodiversity that can be equated to "learning styles," it has the potential to erase the specific experiences of students with disabilities and the opportunity for disability identities to be acknowledged as valued and agentic (Dolmage, 2015). In cross-pollinating CSP and UDL, disability has not yet been given equitable attention as a culture worthy of being sustained.

The theory of inclusive schooling does aim to encapsulate both cultural and disability identities as worthy of centering in classroom curriculum (e.g., Ashby & Cosier, 2016). However, similar to Paris's (2012) critique of CRP, inclusion is not a descriptive enough term to emphasize that disability is an identity worthy of sustaining in classrooms. Inclusion is a muddled term due to discrepancies between its theoretical conception and its enactment in schools (Artiles & Kozeleski, 2016).

We offer up a new stance, terminology, and practice for thinking about the meaningful education of students with disabilities and their nondisabled peers, Disability Sustaining Pedagogies (DSP) (first named by one of our coauthors, Veronica). Building on a rich history of scholarship in inclusive education informed by Disability Studies in Education (DSE), we offer up DSP as a counterpart to CSP. DSP calls for thinking beyond teaching practices that provide students with access to general education curriculum and classroom spaces to honoring disability identities as cultural and a form of diversity that is worthy of sustaining. Because some disabled students may not share their disability identity with those in their families or classrooms, DSP involves supporting these students in making connections, identifying role models, and building communities with other disabled individuals—including teachers with disabilities. Similar to other asset pedagogies, DSP attends to gaining access to dominant ways of knowing and being, while simultaneously supporting nondisabled students with access to disabled ways of knowing and being; in other words, gaining disability cultural competence. Inherent in this orientation is the practice of challenging deficit notions of disabled individuals and disability cultures without essentializing disability identities associated with a classification or label. DSP also explicitly draws on and values the intuition, knowledge, and lived experiences of disabled individuals.

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We focus on literacy educators with disabilities, who have unique expertise cultivated through their experiences in successfully and strategically maneuvering literacy classrooms and curricula. They leverage their experiences—with both supports and barriers—as a tool to imagine instruction differently. We consider how their work draws attention to actively anti-ableist teaching practices that must be infused into a disability sustaining approach. In the following sections, we situate DSP

within theories of inclusive schooling and our own ongoing research with teachers with disabilities. The ideas for this work emerged through collaborative storytelling that we have done together so the literature we review and the teacher perspectives we share center narratives. We conclude with the principles of DSP that surfaced through our storytelling and share ideas for teachers to utilize elements of this process and stance in their own practice.

Experiences of Teachers with Disabilities

Research into the experiences of teachers with disabilities highlights the complexity of their careers. Teachers with disabilities draw on their own experiences to inform their teaching while they simultaneously navigate settings permeated by ableism. The literature illuminates the (predominantly negative) experiences teachers with disabilities had in school, including segregation and isolation, and the impact those experiences had on their identities (Ferri, 2001). Valle et al. (2004) shared narratives of teachers navigating the decision of disclosing their learning disabilities as an “ongoing struggle” with social and political ramifications akin to LGBTQIA+ individuals coming out (p. 12). Disability identities also shape the way that teachers perceive themselves professionally (Vogel & Sharoni, 2011). Participants’ primary motivation for becoming teachers was a desire for their own students with disabilities to have more positive experiences in school than they had themselves. They viewed themselves as effective teachers because of their empathy for the challenges their students faced, commitment to disrupting shame and lowered expectations, and desire to foster agency and autonomy (Ferri, 2001). Importantly, teachers with disabilities viewed their own disabilities *as a tool* for meeting student needs. Their insights into how to support students with disabilities should be valued as professional knowledge to be leveraged by all literacy educators.

Methodology

In what follows we share context regarding the reciprocal engagements of the coresearchers whose

work together informed this conceptualization of DSP, our collaborative storying process, and data analysis.

Researchers

Researchers in this study were classroom teachers and teacher educators who had pre-established relationships. We connected through the classroom teachers' graduate coursework and supervision, as well as other writing and research projects. During these prior experiences, classroom teachers had personally identified as someone with a disability and drew on that identity as a part of their pedagogy. Participants came together in a collaborative story-telling process in which the iterative and reflexive cycles of writing and response would enable us to flesh out an understanding of DSP. Four classroom teachers and two teacher educators participated as coresearchers. Laurie and Amy, the teacher educators, have collaborated on writing projects for seven years, while the classroom teachers shared a graduate school context. Table 1 shows how each researcher self-identified. While this reflects a variety of experiences, we acknowledge that one way in which our group is not diverse is that we all identify as white. We recognize how this racial identity affords even those of us who are multiply

marginalized in other ways with privileges, including an alignment with some of the norms of the school curriculum. Simultaneously, we acknowledge that whiteness is not monolithic and intersectional identities like religion, ethnicity, gender, and class complicate each individual's racial identity.

Storying and Analysis

We implemented narrative inquiry methods (Chase, 2011), which take an interest in life experiences as narrated by those who live them. Valuing and amplifying narratives is an intentional choice, rooted in a DSE framework that acknowledges the long history of research *about* individuals with disabilities that did not include the perspectives of disabled individuals themselves (Valente & Danforth, 2016). All coresearchers shared experiences with and beliefs aligned to DSE prior to their participation; social justice and disability rights are central to our teaching philosophies, which we are constantly reflecting upon and revising.

This project began when Veronica used the term "disability sustaining pedagogy" in her writing and Laurie and Amy began to consider an approach to literacy instruction informed by the insider knowledge of teachers with disabilities as experts on strategically maneuvering within the

Table 1. Researcher Identities

Researcher	Context	Years Teaching	Gender	Race/Ethnicity	Disability Identity
Laurie	Teacher educator Liberal arts college	15	Female	White, Jewish	Able-bodied
Amy	Teacher educator Public university	17	Female	White	Anxiety, depression, chronic pain
Veronica	Second grade Religious school	4	Female	White, Middle Eastern	ADHD, sensory processing disorder, generalized anxiety
Charlotte	Fourth grade Private school	2	Female	White, Jewish	ADHD
Kate	Fifth grade Independent school	10	Female	White, Italian	Dyslexia, ADD, auditory processing disorder
Todd	Second grade Special education Public school	5	Male	White	Dysgraphia

ableist norms of schooling. We shared our thinking about DSP with the individual teachers in informal conversations, explaining the goal of centering the identities of educators with disabilities who work with students with disabilities and listening to their perspectives. These informal discussions continued across approximately six months (throughout a different project), with Laurie and Amy maintaining field notes and reflective memos to capture the group's evolving thinking. Once the previous project concluded, Laurie and Amy began to flesh out DSP, drawing on field notes and memos as well as extant scholarship. They invited the teachers to continue the already-in-process practice of "storying," in which both researchers and participants give and receive stories, which are contextualized as research and knowledge production that allows us to effect change (San Pedro & Kinloch, 2017). Positioning writing as a method of inquiry and a way of knowing (Richardson, 2000), Laurie and Amy developed the following prompts that classroom teachers wrote in response to:

- How does your disability identity influence your teaching practice?
 - Your thinking about your students' identities
 - The pedagogical and curricular choices you make
 - The way you interact with students with and without disabilities
 - Your goals and hopes for your students
- Give an example of how these ideas play out in your classroom.

Teachers were invited to a co-brainstorming session to develop ideas. Using a DSP-informed approach meant that we offered choices for how coresearchers engaged in the research process. Sessions focused on different content (e.g., Amy sharing personal examples as "mentor texts" or answering logistical questions about audience, tone, and length) and took different formats for each writer (e.g., texting, emailing, or Zoom meetings). As they independently crafted their narratives in Google Docs shared with Laurie and Amy, teachers were

encouraged to draw on their own previous writing (e.g., assignments from Laurie's class, journals) and artifacts from their teaching as a source of inspiration. Kate also used data from an institutional review board (IRB)-approved study that she and Laurie conducted in her classroom in the spring of 2022.

Once the teachers had drafts, Laurie and Amy collaboratively read and commented on each teacher's writing, posing questions and sharing ideas grounded in our relationships. Teachers were given the opportunity to revise, then the second drafts were analyzed using descriptive codes based on the literature of our theoretical framework (e.g., cultural competence, academic growth). The ideas surfaced in the narratives were used to iteratively revise the DSP framework; teachers were also invited to member-check their narratives and to give feedback on the framework itself. Both the narratives and the framework were revised to take the teachers' perspectives into account.

Reviewing both their narratives and the framework highlighted for teachers how their strengths as educators are connected to their strengths as individuals with disabilities. This restorying is an act of agency to reshape one's narrative, particularly in response to marginalization or silencing (Thomas & Stornaiuolo, 2016). These pieces serve as counter-narratives (Burns et al., 2013), resisting the shame and stigma that are often associated with disability identities, especially disabled teachers (Valle et al., 2004). Instead, these pieces offer examples of pride and expertise. Rather than creating portraits or developing themes, we present the narratives that each coresearcher wrote themselves; in the language of the disability rights movement, "nothing about us, without us" (Charlton, 2000).

Charlotte's Story: Cultivating Inclusivity by Honoring Difference and Dis/ability

I'm a fourth-grade teacher with attention-deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) and, honestly, I've never considered it a disability. In fact, I consider ADHD to be my superpower; it makes me creative,

curious, passionate, quick-thinking, and able to see things from a variety of perspectives.

ADHD is diagnosed three times more often in boys than in girls. However, I was fortunate to receive my diagnosis at a young age. My older brother also has ADHD, and my middle-class, white family was able to afford a private evaluation because they were curious if I had it too. Because I grew up knowing my brain was wired differently and spent my formative years working hard to understand myself and how I learn best, I can now harness my brain's unique wiring to serve me as a lifelong learner and educator.

How I like to work looks different from what others may expect because I often plan lessons out of order. Recently, I was developing a unit on Matt de la Peña's *Milo Imagines the World*. As I began developing my first lesson, I got excited by how I could build on this and jumped ahead to my second one. With this new idea, I had greater clarity on my intended learning goal and went back to revise my original one. I then knew exactly how I wanted this unit to conclude and started sketching out my final lesson. At the end of this single work session I had three half-finished lesson plans, my book was covered in Post-its, and nothing was finished. But I knew exactly what this unit was ultimately about.

When I was younger, I used to try and combat this urge to jump around, fighting to stay focused on one task at a time. But the thing is, task switching is where the magic happens for me. I get excited by ideas, and these sparks take me down what I call "hyper-fixated dives." When I allow myself to lean into these seemingly random, impulsive digressions, I get to lean into curiosities, make connections between what I know and what I'd like to know, and come out with a deeper understanding of what I'm working on. Because I understand how my unique brain likes to work, I don't care that my process looks different or illogical to someone else. It's *my* superpower, and working in this way is why I'm as smart as I am and why I still genuinely enjoy learning as an adult.

I also know that my work habits can look a bit inconsistent at times. Some days I can be "in the

zone" for several hours, laser-focused on my work with the rest of the world fading away. I call this my "online" brain, and my gosh, it feels electric. Other times, my "offline" times, working through tasks feels impossible. Pushing through on these "offline" times feels like fighting a war with my brain, and I'm often left mentally exhausted. When I was younger, I thought that I was sometimes smart and sometimes dumb. But I now know that these "offline" times are called ADHD burnout and allow myself opportunities to scroll on my phone, doodle, play a game, stare blankly at a wall, or any other brain break that feels good at that moment. I often think about how different my self-esteem would have been if I'd allowed myself these breaks as a student. If I had trained my inner voice to say, "You're not dumb, you just need a break. Set a five-minute timer and give yourself what you need."

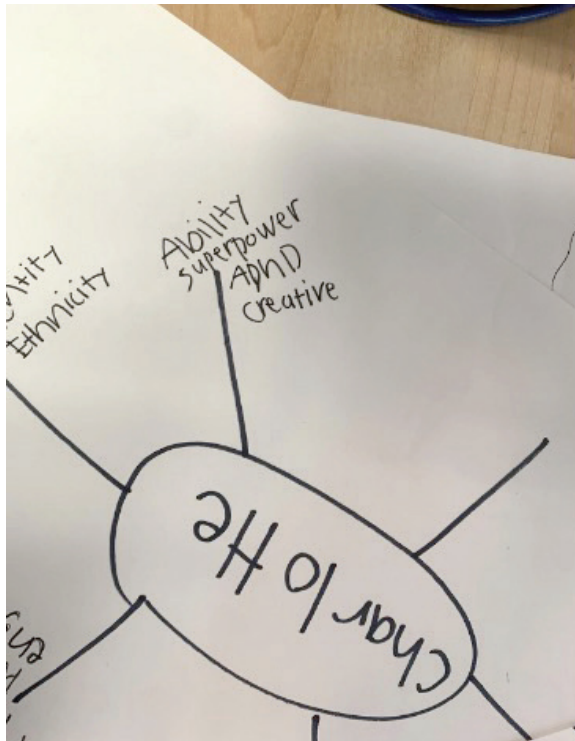
Now, I don't believe that I have any problems as a learner, but as you can imagine, my erratic work style does not align with the highly structured school day schedule. I know how hard it is to stop a task and immediately transition to a new subject. I know how painful it is to be asked to work when my brain is "offline." While I can't control our class times, lengths, or schedule, I can structure my classes in a way that allows students to work in their own way and at their own pace. I prefer the workshop model, a framework that encourages self-reliance on long-term projects. I start periods with a mini-lesson, modeling a relevant skill or strategy, but preserve the majority of the class time for conferencing with students as they work independently or in small groups. Students are often working at different stages in my classroom, whether in their writing process or at different parts of a book.

I believe the most important lesson a student can learn during their time in school is discovering how they learn best. Not all students process information in the same way, regardless of whether they have a classified learning variation or not. I am very open with my students about my having ADHD and love to share my journey of unlocking my learning process. Each year, I read aloud *Just Ask!* by Sonia Sotomayor, a wonderful book celebrating different

abilities and their respective superpowers. I pause at the page discussing ADHD and share a bit about my experiences. I try to model pride in my identity as a person with ADHD and to emphasize the gifts it gives to me (see Figure 2 for an identity web I created to model this pride). My hope is that I'm inspiring students to be inquisitive about how *they* learn best.

When we view learning variations from a deficit perspective, it is easy to consider our students with ADHD as merely impulsive, inattentive, and hyperactive. When we send students the message that, due to their variation, things will always be hard for them, we're depriving them of the opportunity to understand how they can use their brain's unique wiring as an asset. When I think about my students and their identities, I find it imperative to identify what a student *can* do. What gifts do you have as a result of your variations? What unique perspectives can you provide based on the unique way that you experience the world? How can I support you in discovering who you are as a learner?

Figure 2. Charlotte's identity web.



Kate's Story: Sustaining Disability Identity in Fantasy Writing

I know what it's like to struggle in school. I also know how it feels to overcome what seems impossible. From the time I could babble, my extrovert personality drove me to quickly learn how to talk and communicate with my large Italian family. However, I soon learned that reading and writing were not going to be as easy. Growing up with a learning disability was taxing, but I am grateful for my struggles and experiences as a Dyslexic person. They shaped me as an inclusive, culturally responsive, and empathetic educator who advocates for all learning styles, needs, and abilities.

While I was able to hide my struggles with reading in younger grades, by third grade, the literacy teaching practices of choral and round-robin reading exposed my challenges. I quickly went from loving school to crying every day and begging my mom to let me stay home. Reading seemed impossible when it felt like the words danced on the page. Simple tasks like following the directions were difficult to complete as my thoughts drifted beyond the classroom. The one-size-fits-all model that my elementary teachers used hindered my ability to grow as a literacy learner. Luckily, my mom partnered with my school and got me tested for a learning disability. A few weeks later, I was diagnosed with dyslexia, auditory processing disorder, and mild attention-deficit disorder. While the labels didn't define me, the experiences that followed had a great impact on my life and eventually my career path.

Getting tested and diagnosed was the easy part. The road ahead was challenging. At first, my third-grade teacher told my mom that it wasn't fair to give me "special treatment." The private school I attended was not used to making accommodations because they usually turned away kids who had disabilities. But my mother advocated for me and attended multiple meetings with the principal to put a plan in place. Luckily, the principal was responsive, likely in part because my mom is a white, middle-class woman with an advanced degree who could hire a psychologist to support me.

When I was diagnosed with my learning disability, I felt understood. A reading specialist was able to teach me in a way that my brain could comprehend. I began taping lessons, audio recording my writing, and listening to books on tape at my own pace. I thrived because I had all the tools I needed to succeed. I also realized my struggles with reading weren't solely internal. While my neurological variation exists, the literacy instruction I had received led to barriers to my reading success.

In my own teaching, I pull from this experience in showing my students that labels do not define who we are; rather, we hold the power to define ourselves. I draw on students' racial identifications, ethnicities, languages, and (dis)ability identities to design instruction that is meaningful. I also engage students in critically reading texts and rewriting narratives that do not accurately portray their identities.

For example, in a fantasy writing unit, I asked fifth graders to identify strengths and weaknesses in the genre using a critical lens. They assessed how well authors explore issues of race, power, access, and equity. They pay attention to character diversity, language, and dialect to see if multiple identities are authentically represented. In my most recent teaching of this unit, students were encouraged to use literal glasses to remind them to read with different critical lenses (see Figure 3).

Students apply this thinking as they craft their own fantasy stories aimed at disrupting the oversimplified, didactic version of fantasy presented to elementary readers (see Figure 4). One student, Eric, took up disability representation in his writing. In

the opening scene, a character named Alex ridicules Cedric, a man who uses a wheelchair. Cedric then uses magic to insert Alex and his friend Ethan into a video game. Cedric provides Ethan with scaffolds and accommodations as a reward for his kindness (see Figure 5). Alex, on the other hand, faces many

Figure 4. Disrupting the fantasy genre anchor chart.

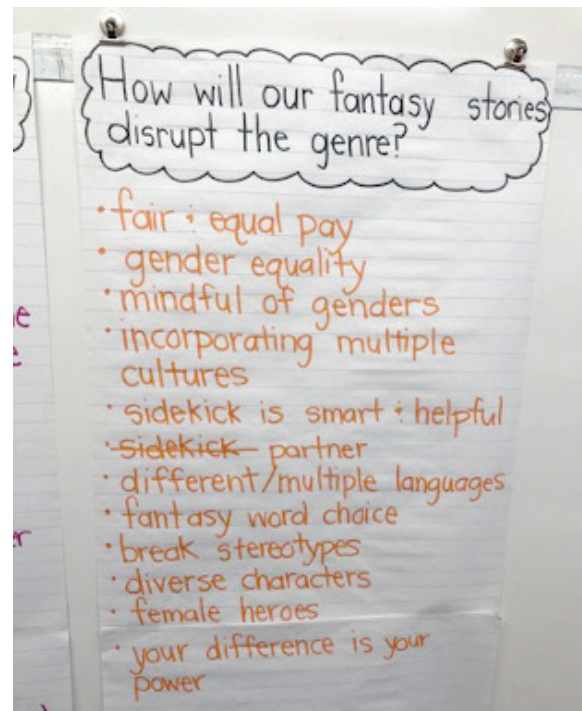


Figure 5. Excerpt from Eric's fantasy story.

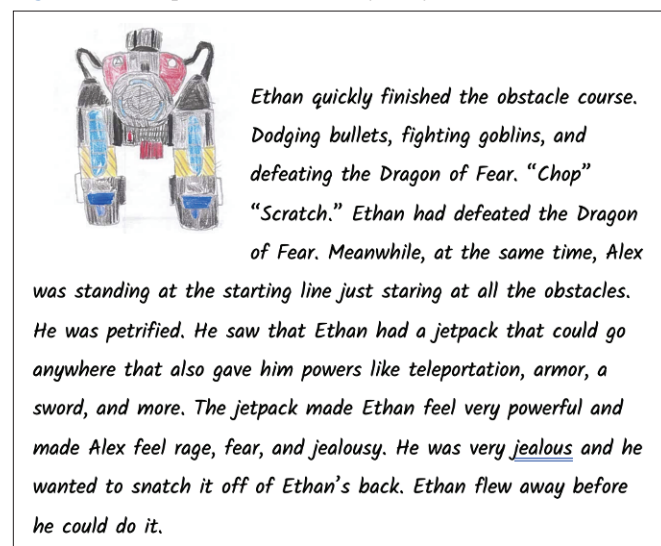


Figure 3. Critical reading lenses.



obstacles without any of the necessary supports—a punishment for his ableism. While the story relies on some tropes about disability, such as a disabled person as superpowered, Eric shows a critical stance as Alex learns that what disables Cedric is environmental barriers, not his disability.

I designed this unit in 2020, as my outlook on education was rapidly shifting due to the global pandemic and ongoing racial violence. I knew that there was a lack of diversity in the fantasy genre that needed to be addressed. What I later realized is that I could draw on my own identity as a dyslexic and use teaching methods grounded in culturally sustaining curriculum design to treat disability as an identity worthy of sustaining. Instead of just adding to the fantasy genre, I could help my students transform the world through it.

Todd's Story: Using My Experiences with Dysgraphia to Develop Joyful Readers

Describing myself as dysgraphic is an efficient means to communicate that conveying information through written text is challenging. However, I identify myself as dysgraphic not to qualify my product, but to enable me to self-advocate. Leading with the label creates space for me to illuminate my process, to explain that it takes me a while to get the words out.

This self-knowledge stems from the instruction and support that I have received. Throughout my schooling, I had access to experienced educators who both guided me through the writing process and taught me how to be my own guide. Hence, my independence and identity as a writer were fostered.

Based on my experiences, I am passionate about fostering the independence and identities of my students with disabilities. I wholeheartedly believe that “kids do well if they can” (Green, 2008, p. 10) because I recognize that the conditions under which students succeed vary widely. As the special educator in a second-grade classroom that integrates general and special education students, I take responsibility for creating a learning context within which my students with disabilities can thrive. I take an inquiry stance: constantly oscillating between assessing and instructing.

I always begin with assessment. On one hand, I assess to understand my students' subskills in reading, including comprehension and decoding. This helps me determine what my students specifically are ready to learn next. On the other hand, I inquire about the books that they read with family members, enjoy repeatedly revisiting, and wish were in our classroom library. This enables me to holistically understand my students as readers and provides me with guidance on how to make learning to read a meaningful experience.

My instruction takes place in groups of three to five students who have overlapping needs. Cultivating my students' reading identities is at the core of our work. Before starting our work together, many of my students claimed that they could not read. My instructional decisions alter this narrative by providing them with experiences of competence. I identify and teach one learning objective at a time and assess for mastery before we progress. I also emphasize and celebrate each moment of measurable growth, which helps my students recognize that they are developing as readers. My approach is a response to the fact that no one acknowledged my growth as a writer; it was not until well into my twenties that I started feeling proud of my writing.

I see small groups as a site where I can cultivate students' sense of belonging as part of a community of readers. I offer students the chance to pick their own “alias.” In this way, students are not naming themselves as struggling readers; they are seeing themselves as favorite characters such as “Princess Peach” and “Bruce Wayne.” This also activates our group as a space for joy rather than for remediation. I sustain this feeling of joy through games, multimodal activities, and student choices. My students have shared that they treasure our small-group work because it is fun. I was motivated to create this learning environment, in part, by my enjoyment during the sessions where I received writing intervention.

My experiences discussing my dysgraphia have illuminated the importance of teaching my students to know themselves as readers and advocate for what they need to be successful. I highlight everyone's strengths and areas of growth as readers because self-knowledge is a prerequisite

for self-advocacy. In the beginning of the year, my students with disabilities are prone to saying “I’m tired” as a way of indicating “this is hard.” As they come to better understand themselves as readers, they are willing to ask for help. Ultimately, they become deft at asking for support in utilizing new strategies. Their willingness to ask also results from my insistence that asking for support is an essential skill. Their needs—like those of many individuals with disabilities, myself included—are not readily apparent, so it is imperative that they learn from an early age how to demand that their needs are met.

Veronica’s Story: Disability Sustaining Pedagogy through Empathy, Access, and Criticality

I am a neurodivergent literacy teacher. It still takes bravery for me to say that. Not many people understand neurodiversity, and disability in general, as a multidimensional, constantly-in-flux color wheel of identity, describing a plethora of experiences, and not as a shameful label. Therefore, it is difficult to convey the message that I want to communicate to students when I call myself neurodivergent: that you can be successful and disabled, happy and disabled, complex and disabled, human and disabled.

However, I find that thinking about my own disabilities helps me think about my students (both disabled and nondisabled) more deeply, as my perspective and experiences help me to appreciate the unique strengths and needs of different students. We can empathize more easily with some experiences than others because we ourselves have shared them. I approach my practice at the tension between already-understanding, beginning-to-understand, and wanting-to-understand. This is a pillar of DSP: a practice that responds to students’ strengths and needs in a multifaceted way. We must not view students as successful *despite* their disabilities, but as simultaneously *shaped by and living beyond* their labels; they, and all of us, are made human by this tension. Do we value students *alongside* their assets, achievements, difficulties, traits, and all? Do we attach their self-worth and identities to normative measures of academic success or something more: critical thinking, compassion, curiosity, creativity? DSP grants

as much autonomy as possible to students and treats them as coinvestors in their learning.

A pedagogical companion to DSP is UDL (CAST, 2018), which I have enacted by providing students with options such as cool-down periods, working on the rug, and wobble cushions and working closely with the school psychologist and learning specialist to ensure that all students are being cared for academically, socially, and emotionally. I think of UDL and DSP as pathways to accessible rigor, a phrase that has resonated with me in its challenging of neurotypical, able-bodied, and otherwise hegemonic notions of achievement and intelligence. Accessible rigor is the belief that all students are capable of critical thought, conscious citizenship, and access to individualization and community.

My daily interactions with students hinge on empathy, intention, and patience, as well as a concrete understanding of their individual learning profiles. In my second-grade classroom at a private school, I’ve prioritized read-alouds that celebrate and unpack differences (e.g., *What’s the Difference?: Being Different Is Amazing* by Doyin Richards). In my interactive read-alouds, students make connections to the differing abilities represented among classmates and family members; share what makes them special; and explore what it means to be respectful to and open with others, to not be ashamed of asking for what one needs.

The message that I want to communicate to students when I call myself neurodivergent: that you can be successful and disabled, happy and disabled, complex and disabled, human and disabled.

As educators, we must fight stigma in our schools; children should learn to honor similarities *and* differences. We should emphasize honesty, nuance, and deep inner work around assumptions and biases by asking, “What *else* could be true?” When teaching about disability as a social justice topic, teachers need to provide students with the purpose: every human is worthy of love and understanding. Good literature, as well as good teaching, helps us get there.

Interweaving Stories to Conceptualize DSP

As we read and discussed our narratives together, we began to distill principles that comprised DSP-infused literacy instruction. Those ideas are presented in Table 2. You'll note elements that echo the teacher narratives provided earlier, as well as related ideas that reflect both Laurie's and Amy's

narratives (not included in the scope of this piece) and our vision for the possibilities of this orientation. The chart is organized into five categories. Identity involves the lived experiences that make each individual unique. Relationships involve the collaboration and community of those working for disability justice. Criticality refers to the ability to read the world for power and perspective. Cultural competence necessitates learning about your own

Table 2. Principles of DSP

	Mindset	Practice
Identity	<p>Understanding disability as a multidimensional identity and culture deserving of celebration and sustaining, not something worthy of shame or in need of a "cure"</p> <p>Exploring the beliefs and biases that shape your understanding of disability</p> <p>Considering the role of privilege and marginalization both within different disability identities and at the intersection of disability with other identity categories (e.g., whiteness, middle-classness)</p>	<p>Sharing your own identity and your experiences with disability openly in the classroom</p> <p>Inviting students to share their disability identities and experience with people with disabilities</p> <p>Reading and discussing children's literature that centers complex characters with disabilities</p> <p>Engaging students in the exploration of the beliefs and biases that shape their understanding of disability</p>
Relationships	<p>Partnering with families to create collective expertise on children</p> <p>Recognizing that curriculum writing and pedagogy are collaborative processes that can and should involve both other educators and all students</p> <p>Viewing yourself as a member of an advocacy team working in the interest of sustaining the identities and cultures of students with disabilities</p>	<p>Incorporating the expertise and disability culture of family and community members into the classroom</p> <p>Inviting related service providers and other special educators into the classroom to meaningfully engage with all learners regardless of their classifications</p> <p>Offering opportunities for social-emotional lessons about acceptance, inclusion, and power dynamics between disabled and nondisabled people</p>
Criticality	<p>Challenging deficit notions of individuals with disabilities and disability cultures</p> <p>Querying how pullout services, self-contained classes, and tracking limit student access to curriculum and learning (Baglieri et al., 2011)</p> <p>Critiquing the curriculum—including the use of medicalized language—to make choices about what and how to teach</p> <p>Critiquing institutions that inform teaching practices of students with disabilities, including school, district, state, and federal policy</p> <p>Critiquing elements of disability culture that are raced, gendered, classed, and associated with White Mainstream English, which can benefit students with privileged identities but may not serve all students with disabilities</p> <p>Reflexively critiquing your perspective as a raced, gendered, classed, and linguistic individual and your decisions about identification and classification of students</p>	<p>Engaging students in challenging deficit notions of disability that might impact how they perceive themselves, one another, or members of their family and community</p> <p>Engaging students in critical reading of curricular materials, school policies, and instructional practices that address, segregate, or ignore/silence disabled people</p> <p>Critically reading children's literature to identify problematic representations of individuals with disabilities, meta-narratives or tropes, and ableism</p> <p>Offering curricular resources that provide first-person narratives from people with disabilities</p> <p>Critically reading special education documents to identify where power and perspective lie and where a holistic understanding of a child is absent or missing</p> <p>Applying knowledge of disproportionality in classification and access to services based on identity categories, including race, to advocate for needs in your context</p>

Table 2. Principles of DSP (*continued*)

	Mindset	Practice
Cultural Competence	<p>Believing that teaching students with disabilities is the work of all educators, not just those with a specialization</p> <p>Building knowledge about the language preferences of different disabled communities</p> <p>Becoming knowledgeable about disability justice, history, and ableism, as well as acts/examples of pride, resistance, and joy</p> <p>Appreciating the strategic maneuvering and compensatory methods of disabled individuals as a sophisticated form of knowledge</p>	<p>Differentiating behaviors and needs from identities, approaching behavior from an inquiry perspective</p> <p>Coaching students in both advocacy of self (e.g., “What do I need?”) and empathy for others (e.g., “What might my peer’s behavior be trying to tell me?”)</p> <p>Explicitly teaching about disability justice, history, and ableism, as well as acts/examples of pride and resistance and joy</p>
Academic Growth	<p>Viewing disability as a natural variation, rather than as a static label</p> <p>Questioning concepts of help and learned helplessness, understanding that help is not problematic while also supporting independence</p> <p>Presuming the competence of all students (Biklen & Burke, 2006)</p>	<p>Using high-quality, consistent formative assessment to determine students’ strengths and needs and teaching responsively without placing value judgments</p> <p>Supporting students’ awareness of their own strengths and needs, as well as their ability to self-advocate</p> <p>Delivering responsive instruction in high-interest, high-engagement ways that foster student investment and agency</p> <p>Crafting actively antiablest special education documents and instructional plans</p>

culture(s) and the cultures of others. Academic growth is about the development of skills, strategies, and content knowledge. These categories draw on the tenets of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 1995), with the additional consideration of relationships as a separate category, rather than embedded within the other categories. Echoing Aronson and Laughter’s (2016) synthesis of research on CRP, we have categorized these principles into two threads, seen here as vertical rows: teacher dispositions, or qualities of mind, and teacher practices, or the actions taken.

Literacy teachers might reflect on the mindset column to assess the unconscious biases that shape their instruction of and interactions with students with disabilities. Storying can be a method to enable this process. In engaging in storying, teachers are adding to a burgeoning body of research that has explored the cross-pollination of CSP and UDL in literacy instruction. While teaching using a CSP/UDL approach has drawn on CSP to support students in “making their identities more visible in the classroom” and used UDL to eliminate barriers for participation (Coppola et al., 2019, p. 226),

DSP-informed storying ensures that disability and ability are cultural identities explored in curricular practices and positioned as valuable pedagogical knowledge. DSP stands in contrast to UDL because the data that informs DSP comes from the narratives of people with disabilities rather than the neurological research that informs UDL. DSP makes clear that both people with disabilities and people without disabilities can teach based on the knowledge built from experiences of people with disabilities. We see examples of this as coresearchers discuss teaching about disability alongside other identities, rather than in isolation. They use texts that represent intersectional identities, encourage students to read critically with multiple lenses, and integrate intersectional aspects of students’ identities to foster joy.

DSP-informed storying ensures that disability and ability are cultural identities explored in curricular practices and positioned as valuable pedagogical knowledge.

Teachers can take up a few practices from the chart in Table 2 at a time, setting reasonable goals to build the DSP-informed culture of their classrooms. Reading and discussing these stories or adding their own makes community and coalitions possible. We invite you to revisit the prompt shared earlier and tell your own story; if you do not have a disability, you might reflect on the way your able-bodiedness shapes your teaching.

For us, the storying process revealed how disability identity informs our teaching. After revising her narrative, Charlotte remarked that she had much more to say about ADHD and teaching than she realized, and Todd shared that writing his story reframed his thinking about how dysgraphia has and could shape his teaching. These examples illustrate the potential of storying as a humanizing practice for teachers and students with disabilities.

For more about DSP, see the forthcoming *Cross-Pollinating Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy and Disability Sustaining Pedagogy in the Elementary School Balanced Literacy Classroom*, set to be published by Routledge in 2024.

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INTO THE CLASSROOM

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