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Reflecting on and Embracing the Complexity of Literacy Theories in Practice

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Reflecting on and Embracing the Complexity of Literacy Theories in Practice

Cover Page Footnote/Acknowledgements

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NOTE: Throughout the paper, Pause and Ponder points will be utilized to help practicing teachers connect their own knowledge of theory, teaching practices, and literacy instruction with the article. These Pause and Ponder points of reflection are an asset-based approach to learning, aiming to help practicing teachers recognize what they are already doing well in their classrooms and establish a sense of empowerment and agency.

The purpose of this article is to discuss and demonstrate teaching practices embracing the complexities of literacy learning rooted in a multi-theoretical approach. We illustrate this by sharing one elementary teacher's literacy pedagogy as viewed through multiple theoretical lenses. We strive to empower teachers to rely on their agency, self-efficacy, and expertise and to feel capable in their knowledge and agency in an era where teachers are increasingly experiencing deprofessionalization through disempowering factors (e.g., test-and-punish culture, mandated use of scripted curriculum, narrowing of curricula, and substantial decreases in teacher autonomy; Haq, 2017). To contend with challenging, oftentimes disempowering working conditions, educators must cultivate their sense of agency and self-efficacy. This includes building a robust knowledge base about theories of learning, including how these can support their instructional decisions and provide confidence that they are meeting the individual literacy needs of their learners. We aim to help readers understand that their knowledge of theories and expertise can be used to augment their approach towards pedagogy, assessment, and learning in order to create empowered literacy learners.

First, we will focus on exploring a multi-theoretical approach to understanding and teaching literacy. Here, we will define literacy and its complexities, subsequently exploring multi-theoretical approaches to address those complexities in literacy instruction. Then, we will provide research-based teaching practices, embedding these with relevant supporting literature and grounding each in theory. We then highlight several teaching practices including using a growth mindset, implementing asset-based data collection, utilizing feedback, and integrating inquiry-based learning that ultimately supports the creation of empowered literacy learners. In the final section, we will discuss important considerations, notes, challenges, and tensions inherent to implementing a multi-theoretical approach. Here, we emphasize that one size does not fit all and that this paper is one illustration of what a multi-theoretical, asset-based, and student-centered approach to literacy instruction could look like.

Assumptions and Arguments

In this paper, we share that teachers are experiencing deprofessionalization (including teachers focused on literacy instruction). We contend that one way deprofessionalization can be combated is through implementing theory-based teaching practices, assume that this is supported by teaching from multiple theoretical standpoints, and foreground utilizing student-centered, asset-based approaches to pedagogy, assessment, and learning relating to literacy.

Teachers are Experiencing Deprofessionalization and Demoralization

We assume that teachers are currently experiencing a period of deprofessionalization. Curriculum and instruction are deemed the professional work of teachers, and so teacher deprofessionalization can be described as the subtraction of the teacher's influence or autonomy from curricular and pedagogical decision-making (Wronowski & Urick, 2021). Teacher deprofessionalization is linked with several factors, like perceptions of unsupportive administration, school factors (e.g., high-poverty schools in urban and rural locations), and the rise of the accountability movement in education starting with No Child Left Behind (Wronowski & Urick, 2021). The accountability movement of this time period brought with it more factors that stripped many teachers of their autonomy, including test-and-punish culture, mandated use of one-size-fits-all scripted curricula (Haq, 2017), increased time spent on high-stakes assessment, and "datafication" or a seeming obsession with data collection from high-stakes standardized assessments (Daliri-Ngametua & Hardy, 2022).

Deprofessionalization is also linked with teacher demoralization (Wronowski & Urick, 2021), or a disconnection between what motivates a teacher to teach (their "ethic of teaching" p. 685) and the actual work of teaching in schools today. In the demoralizing age of accountability and "datafication" in education, teachers who are "active, agentic position-takers in relation to their own work and their students' learning" are "disappearing from the educational landscape that should give their practice purpose and meaning" (Daliri-Ngametua & Hardy, 2022, p. 18). It is unsurprising then that teachers are leaving the field in droves due to the impacts of demoralization, including burnout and extreme levels of stress from an increasing workload relating to accountability, assessments, and data collection (Carroll et al., 2022; Daliri-Ngametua & Hardy, 2022).

We assert that in order for educational stakeholders (i.e., teachers, literacy professionals, administrators, policymakers) to combat deprofessionalization and demoralization of teachers, teachers need to be supported in retaining autonomy in curricular and pedagogical decisions. And for teachers, we argue that means having the confidence in their curricular and pedagogical knowledge from theory-based, research-based, and experiential standpoints. In essence, teachers need to not only

have autonomy over their practice but to have the confidence to enact those practices to best support their students.

Teachers Should Have Knowledge of Learning (and Literacy) Theories

First, we assume that knowledge of learning theories is important for teachers to know. This is an assumption held by educational researchers (e.g., Dressman, 2008) and literacy education scholars alike (Tracey & Morrow, 2017; Unrau et al., 2019). Unrau and colleagues (2019) share that a variety of educational stakeholders (e.g., classroom teachers, literacy specialists, teacher educators, researchers) both consciously and unconsciously hold theories of reading. Educators who are conscious about the theories they use can use those theories to explain, support, and defend their literacy teaching practices. Theories can be used to zoom in or "magnify" the components of a given teaching practice, sharing why it may (or may not) be beneficial in the given context (Silvestri, McVee & Barrett, 2021). For example, if we zoom in on the practices of cross-age partnered reading (see Morrow, 2002), we can use principles of Vygotsky's social constructivism (see Appendix A) to illuminate how learning is taking place. When the more knowledgeable student (usually the older one) reads, the younger student is listening to their fluent reading and then able to practice their own reading with the older child. The younger child is learning the working processes of reading through social interaction and supported practice from the older student. The theory (in this case, social constructivism) helps to magnify why an instructional practice works.

We argue for a conscious examination of literacy theories, as a thorough understanding of literacy theories will enhance an educator's instruction in the classroom, as it relates to literacy and with respect to education writ large (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). This assumption supports our writing, as we hope to help readers become conscious of their current knowledge of theories, and that theories already may be informing the teaching practices and decisions that they make before, during, and after instruction (Tracey & Morrow, 2017).

Literacy Instruction is Complex and Multi-Theoretical in Nature

Relatedly, our second assumption supporting this article is that approaching literacy instruction from multiple theoretical standpoints is essential to address the complexities of literacy. In short, we contend that multiple theories and their associated pedagogical practices are required to support growing the literacies of all learners across their literacy-learning journey. We know, like Unrau, Alvermann, and Sailors (2019), that theories, theoretical models, and theoretical frameworks can be imbued with power, insight, and an ability to "cast both light and shadow on our understanding of literacies;" however, they also argue that a single theory provides only a "narrow shaft of light" of insight into the complex

processes of literacy. (p. 3). As such, a consciously-held, multi-theoretical approach is required for robust literacy instruction.

As we will discuss in the next section, several literacy educators and scholars attempting to show the complexity of literacy through the creation of frameworks reveal the theoretical plurality required to support literacy learning (e.g., Duke & Cartwright, 2019; Freebody & Luke, 1990; Muhammad, 2020; Schleber & Punkosdy, 2021). We hope to help readers recognize that they are probably already using several teaching literacy instructional practices supported by multiple theoretical standpoints. We will illustrate this through Chrissy's reflection on her teaching practices and how they align with literacy theories through real-life examples.

Centering Asset-Based Approaches to Assessment, Teaching, and Learning

Our final assumption is that student-centered, asset-based approaches to assessment, pedagogy, and learning require teachers to be fully supportive and humanizing with respect to their students' literacy growth. Educators recognize and most likely regularly use several common points of data collection in their classrooms (i.e., benchmarking, progress monitoring, summative unit tests, and standardized tests). These data points typically use a deficit perspective to rank students into low, medium, or high proficiency levels related to literacy processes - especially reading. Framing students' abilities from a deficit-standpoint largely ignores students' passions, interests, and strengths (sometimes called "assets"). Minor (2019) writes that while this kind of data collection and measurement can be beneficial as a part of the greater landscape of a child's education, overemphasizing these kinds of assessments have created a "world where some kids know their scores and levels more intimately than they know their reading interests" (p. 119). Instead, instruction should begin with data informing teachers of the students' strengths as learners. With this, we urge our readers to recognize that their knowledge of students' assets, along with their knowledge of theories, can be leveraged to use and/or modify their approach to pedagogy, assessment, and learning in order to create an asset-based and student-centered learning environment.

PAUSE AND PONDER POINT: If we seek to empower our learners, it is important that we also feel empowered as educators. In what ways do you feel empowered as a teacher in your school community?

A Multi-Theoretical Approach to Literacy

As mentioned previously, one of our core assumptions as teachers of literacy is that approaches to literacy instruction must be rooted in multiple theoretical standpoints to support all learners flexibly and in consideration of their existing literacy assets. Here, we provide our working definition of literacy[1] and unpack the theoretical standpoints and literacy scholars that support them (superscript lettering corresponds with theoretical standpoints in Table 1 below):

> *Literacy is socially-contextualized meaning making[a]; specifically, this includes reading for comprehension, writing and composing, communicating, and (re)presenting information in digital and nondigital environments[b]. Literacy and its social practices are motivated by a variety of purposes rooted in the background knowledge, experiences, and identities of the learner[c,d]. When it comes to reading and composing print-based texts, this means learning to use the working systems of language and discrete skills that can support reading comprehension and cohesive writing (e.g., phonological awareness, word solving strategies, oral reading fluency, vocabularies)[e]. However, literacy does not stop at the ability to fluently decode and make meaning of print texts. Literacy takes an expanded view of "texts," assuming people make meaning across multiple modalities, including print-based texts, images, language and spoken word, videos, color as well as bodily modes such as facial expression, touch, gesture, and body positionings[f]. Literacy, then, is multimodal. Finally, literacy provides people with tools of being able to read the word so that one can come to read and critique their world, and then strive to recognize inequities in power and move to make change within that world toward transformative, socially just ends[g].*

First, we want to recognize that, to some extent, any definition of literacy that we could write in the confines of a single section of a journal article is going to be reductive. Several authors informing our definition of literacy have written full treatises (e.g., Frankel et al., 2016; Gee, 1998, Perry, 2012; Scribner, 1984) or constructed models (e.g., Cartwright & Duke, 2019) striving to answer the complex and evolving question, "What is literacy?" Second, we want to be clear that all of the literacy theorists and scholars we draw from in our working definition are situated within and/or beyond "the social turn" in literacy (Mills, 2015), making the assumption that literacy is a social practice rather than an autonomous practice to be developed outside of any social context. Finally, we situate our definition within

[1] All supported references have been removed from our definition to provide easier readability. These references are embedded within Table 1 as we break down our definition into its theoretical parts.

the ideological orientation of literacy, which means that the social practices of literacy are also necessarily linked to culture, power structures, and systemic pressures (Wiley, 2005).

Table 1 represents seven theoretical standpoints, their main assumptions, as well as associated theories and theorists supporting our definition of literacy. It also serves to activate the background knowledge of teachers by sharing how these theoretical standpoints support common literacy education terminology, to help teachers see that they may already be, in fact, using theoretically-supported practices in their literacy instruction (as is often the case; see Tracey & Morrow, 2017).

There is no one theoretical lens that can encapsulate the complexity of literacy in its entirety. As mentioned in the introduction, there are several multi-theoretical literacy frameworks that already exist, as authors have sought to conceptualize and illustrate how these theories and models work together in some configuration to explain the complex act of reading (e.g., Duke & Cartwright, 2019; Freebody & Luke, 1990) and/or literacy writ large (e.g., Muhammad, 2020).

For example, Freebody and Luke developed the *Four Resources Model* in 1990. This model demonstrates the different resources and corresponding learner roles that a reader draws on to support their meaning making of a text. Notably, each of these roles hail from different theoretical standpoints and all of these roles could occur within the digital realm:

- Codebreaker: resources relating to how to read code constituting the text (cognitive-processing)
- Text participant: resources relating to participating in/drawing meaning from text (constructivist)
- Text user: resources relating to how to use information from text (constructivist, multimodal), and
- Text analyst: resource relating to how texts position or influence the reader (social and critical).

More recently, Cartwright and Duke's (2019) model for Deploying Reading in Varied Environments or *DRIVE Model of Reading*[2] uses the metaphor of driving a car to show the different discrete skills and strategies of reading that work together to support a reader's meaning-making. For example, elements commonly associated with the cognitive processing models of reading like phonological awareness, decoding and word recognition, and fluency are the wheels and axle. However, if one zooms out to the dashboard of the car, you can see that constructivist-oriented comprehension monitoring and content knowledge are integrated. Zooming out even further, features constituting the social and affective "landscape" of reading, like reading purpose and reading context, become

[2] The DRIVE Model of Reading can be viewed within Cartwright & Duke's (2019) publication of their model in the Reading Teacher.

Table 1. Multiple Theoretical Standpoints, Assumptions, Theories, and Terminology associated with Literacy

Theoretical Standpoint	Summarized Main Assumptions	Example Theories (Theorists)	(Literacy) Education Terminology
Social[a]	Literacy is a social achievement (Scribner, 1984). Literacy is made up of "culture, activity, identity, power, and the sociocultural contexts" (Perry, 2012, p. 52). Literacy is "the process of using reading, writing, and oral language to extract, construct, integrate, and critique meaning through interaction and involvement with multimodal texts in the context of socially situated practices" (Frankel et al., 2016, p. 7).	● Social constructivism (Vygotsky) ● Social cognitive theory (Bandura) ● Sociocultural theory (Bronfenbrenner) ● Funds of knowledge (Moll et al.1992) *(Tracey & Morrow, 2017)*	● Zone of proximal development ● Observational learning ● Play-based learning ● Small group, center-based learning ● Guided reading ● Writing conferences
Digital[b]	Digital literacies involve "finding and consuming digital content, creating digital content, and communicating or sharing digital content" (Heitin, 2016, as cited by Coiro, 2020). Digital literacies consist of "interpretive and evaluative competencies needed for both navigating a fluid information landscape and developing a deep understanding of how information is produced, consumed, shared and used for self-learning and collaboration" (Gilchrist et al., 2019).	● Multilteracies (New London Group, 1996) ● Technological pedagogical content knowledge (TPACK) (Kohler & Mishra, 2009) ● Bloom's digital taxonomy (Sneed, 2016)	● Digital literacies ● 21st century learning ● "Digital natives" (Prensky, 2010) ● Multiliteracies ● Critical digital literacies

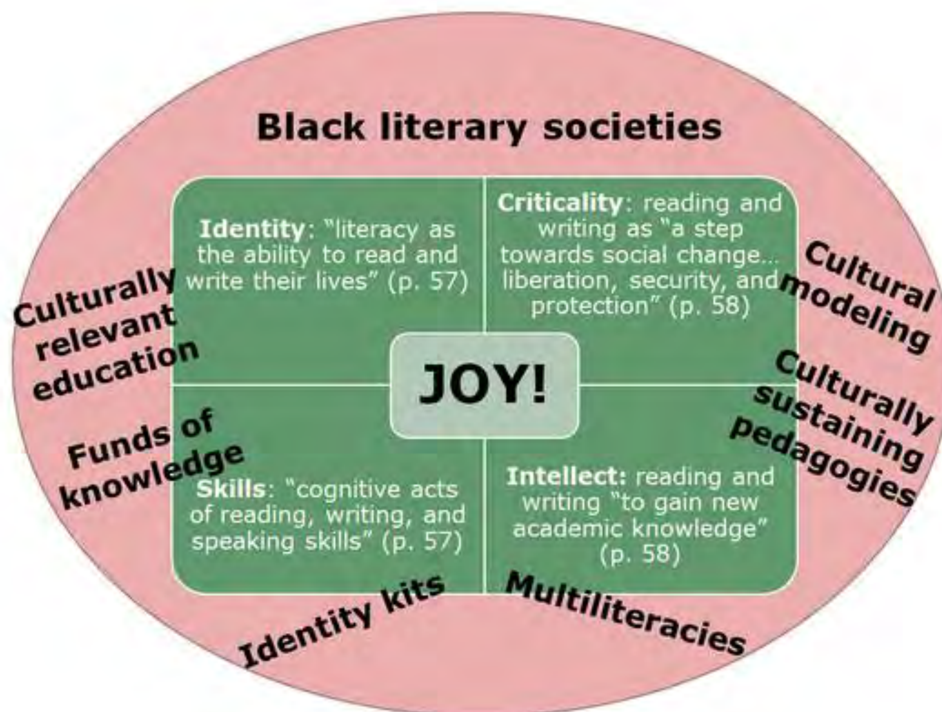
Constructivist[c]	Literacy is how we make meaning is contingent on our existing knowledge (i.e., schema) as a "constructive, integrative, and critical process situated in social practices" (Frankel et al., 2016, p. 8). Literacy is different for each student, as "each student has a unique history, identity, and literacy that makes them who they are" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 51).	● Schema theory (Anderson, 2019) ● Transactional/ Reader response theory (Rosenblatt, 2019) ● Inquiry learning principles (Dewey) ● Psycholinguistic theory (Goodman & Goodman, 2019) *(Tracey & Morrow, 2017)*	● Inquiry learning ● Problem-based learning ● Project-based learning ● Schema ● "Hands on learning" ● Metacognition
Affective[d]	Literacy (and any) learning is rooted in our emotions and emotional regulation (Immordino-Yang, 2016), and is especially impacted with respect to factors like attitude, interest, engagement, and motivation (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). When students are emotionally invested in their learning, "they learn more easily, acquire a deeper and richer understanding, and retain the knowledge longer than when they perceive the content as abstract, esoteric, or unrelated to their lives or personal identities" (Alexander, 2020, p. S93)	● Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs ● Importance of teacher-student relationships ● Engagement Theory (Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997) ● Motivational theories (see Barber et al., 2019) *(Tracey & Morrow, 2017)*	● Engagement ● Interest-based learning ● "Student-centered learning" ● Student choice and voice ● Socioemotional Learning
Cognitive Processing[e]	Cognitive processing models strive to explain the unobservable mental processes that support the act of reading (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 193). Cognitive processing models come to bear on practice within literacy instruction often when teaching discrete skills such as phonological awareness (including phonemic awareness), phonics, oral reading fluency, vocabulary, and spelling that lead to meaning-making of print texts.	● Simple View of Reading (Gough & Tunmer) ● Automatic Information Processing Model (Laberge & Samuels) ● Interactive-Compensatory Model (Stanovich, Rumelhart) ● Parallel Distributed Processing Model (Coltheart et al.) ● Dual-Route Cascaded Model (Rumelhart, McClelland) *(Tracey & Morrow, 2017)*	● "Simple view" ● Science of reading ● Scarborough's Rope ● Automaticity ● Repetition

Multimodal[f]	Literacy and communication writ large requires making meaning from signs and symbols beyond the written word (Kress, 2010) Multimodality is prominent in digital spaces, but "reading and writing have always been multimodal" since in addition to reading and writing print, one must attend to the "spatial layout of the text, images and other modes of representation" (Mills, 2015, p. 65).	● Multiliteracies (New London Group, 1996) ● Social semiotics (Kress, 2010) ● Translanguaging (Wei & Ho, 2018)	● Multiliteracies ● Multimodal composition ● Visual literacy ● Media literacy
Critical[g]	Literacy is used to understand, analyze, and push back on how power privileges or oppresses individuals or groups within a society and institutions (Mills, 2015). Literacy can be used to foster "critical consciousness through which a community can analyze its conditions of social existence and engage in effective action for a just society" (Scribner, 1984, p. 12). Literacy used for critical ends strives for praxis or making positive social change within communities by "putting intellect into action" (Muhammad, 2020, p. 117).	● Critical literacy theory (Luke, 2019) ● Intersectionality in literacy (Brooks, 2019) ● Critical race theories in education (Ladson-Billings & Tate, 1995; Love, 2019) ● Culturally responsive pedagogies (Gay, 2018) ● Culturally sustaining pedagogies (Alim & Paris, 2017) ● Translanguaging (Wei & Ho, 2018) ● Culturally and historically responsive literacy framework (Muhammad, 2020)	● Culturally responsive-sustaining education ● Culturally relevant texts ● Intersectionality ● "Mirrors, windows, sliding glass doors" (Sims Bishop, 1990) ● Critical literacy ● Critical race theory ● Anti-racist, anti-bias (ABAR) education

prominent. Both the DRIVE Model of Reading and the Four Resources Model show how different theories and aspects can be seen as discrete but are ultimately meant to work together toward meaning making.

Another multitheoretical literacy framework is Muhammad's (2020) equity framework for culturally and historically responsive literacy. Like the other two models described, the *Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy Framework* is one underpinned by several theories stemming from the social and critical theoretical lenses as well as multimodal perspectives in order to explain the four pursuits of literacy learning (see Figure 1). Importantly, Muhammad's model also brings in the voices, educational theories, and perspectives of Black scholars and people of color more broadly; these voices and perspectives historically are missing from educational spaces and literacy education scholarship.

Figure 1. Representation of Muhammad's (2020) Culturally and Historically Responsive Literacy Framework with Supporting Theories



We contend that these kinds of multitheoretical literacy frameworks reveal the complexity inherent in the teaching and learning of meaning-making in our world. The next section provides a series of theory-to-practice snapshots that share the teaching practices of fourth-grade special education teacher, Chrissy (author one). Here, Chrissy details how her literacy instructional practices are supported by

multiple theoretical perspectives. She begins by providing the context of her teaching as well as the curricula required by her school district and the theoretical perspectives that support these curricular choices. Then, she chooses several teaching practices to highlight, defining and discussing each practice as it relates to literacy learning, sharing how each practice is underpinned by supporting theoretical perspectives and scholarly literature. She also details how these teaching practices work together to support the growth of more empowered learners in her classroom through anecdotes found in each section. Finally, Chrissy concludes with important considerations regarding tensions and limitations of implementing these selected teaching practices.

PAUSE AND PONDER POINT: What theoretical perspectives do you gravitate towards in your own teaching? What theoretical perspectives does your school tend to support with respect to literacy instruction? Are there areas where you feel as though some theoretical perspectives are overemphasized or under-emphasized?

Chrissy's Literacy Education Context

Notes:

- *Chrissy will speak about herself and her classroom in the first person (i.e., I, me, we) throughout this section.*
- *Appendix A can be used as a resource to learn more about the several theories mentioned throughout this section.*

The anecdotes in this section of the paper are based on a special education classroom in which there is one special education teacher, two paraprofessionals, and, at most, 12 students. In my classroom, I use two district-provided programs to teach reading and writing instruction, respectively: Fountas and Pinnell (F&P) Leveled Literacy Intervention (LLI) (2017) and Lucy Calkins Units of Study (UoS) reading (2015) and Lucy Calkins Units of Study (UoS) writing (2016).

Reader's Workshop

For reading instruction, I use Calkins reading UoS, Fountas and Pinnell LLI, and Fountas and Pinnell Continuum of learning (2016) to inform all instruction. The lesson format follows a station-based model in which students actively participate in a mini-lesson, targeted LLI small group, and two additional literacy stations to supplement literacy learning (library and word work). Table 2 reflects my reading workshop block.

Table 2. Structure of Reader's Workshop Block

	Curricula / Resources Used	**Connection to Theory**
Whole Group Mini-Lesson 10-15 minutes	**Calkins UoS** mini-lesson teaching a reading strategy with a text on a given topic. The text is discussed, and strategy is modeled and practiced. ● Mini-lessons differentiated for learners' needs ● I do *not* use the scripted component of the reading UoS.	**Bandura's social cognitive theory-** students observe how to enact the reading strategy that is explicitly taught and modeled.
Stations: Timed stations including small-group LLI, Library, and Word Work.		
Small Group LLI 20-25 minutes per group	**Fountas & Pinnell Leveled Literacy Instruction** with a focus on phonological awareness, phonics, word work, fluency, vocabulary, comprehension, oral language skills, and writing. ● Use our assessment data (e.g., running records, comprehension conversations, etc.) to identify teaching points. The scripted curriculum is often not used during reading groups. ● F&P leveled texts are used to supplement lessons. We can use texts that exist outside of LLI kits to engage learners.	**Cognitive processing models (e.g., parallel distributed processing model):** students are both explicitly taught *and* get a chance to practice foundational skills (e.g., phonics, oral reading fluency) as they work together towards the goal of automaticity, which will facilitate comprehension.
Literacy Station- **Library** 20-25 minutes	Students can choose to read: independently, with a partner, on the Chromebook (i.e., Raz-Kids), and/or listen to audio books. ● Students ideally practice the strategies featured in the mini lesson.	**Cognitive processing models (e.g., parallel distributed processing model):** students get the chance to practice their skills with texts on their own, honing their skills through repeated, meaningful practice. **Affective theories (e.g., engagement theory)**: students choose what they enjoy doing while reading.

Literacy Station- **Word Work** 20-25 minutes	Students engage in word work skills (e.g., phonics, spelling, vocabulary) that align with the **F&P Continuum of Learning.** ● Students practice flash cards with sight words ● Practice skill of the week (e.g., rainbow writing, spiral writing, sentences, games, etc.). ● Instead of spelling tests, students are assessed on their ability to read and write words utilizing the skill that was explicitly taught and practiced throughout the week.	**Cognitive processing models (e.g., dual-route cascaded model):** students work on automatic word recognition and broadening vocabularies and word knowledge. **Affective theories (e.g., engagement theory):** Gamified word work and other high-interest activities engage learners in the word work skills they choose

Writer's Workshop

For writing, my school has adopted Lucy Calkins Writing Units of Study. As such, we are expected to use the lessons with fidelity to best teach the unit as a whole. The lesson format follows the Calkins' writing workshop model, starting with a mini lesson, moving to smaller strategy groups and 1-on-1 conferences, followed by sharing and celebrations. Table 3 reflects my writer's workshop block.

Table 3. Structure of Writer's Workshop Block

	Curricula / Resources Used	**Connection to Theory**
Whole Group Mini-Lesson 10-15 minutes	**Calkins UoS** mini-lesson teaching a writing strategy. ● Mini-lessons differentiated for learners' needs ● Use assessment data to determine objectives and move around mini-lessons as needed. ● I do use the scripted component of the writing UoS as a guide for my writing lessons.	**Social Theories (e.g., social cognitive theory):** students are observing how I enact the writing strategy that is being taught/modeled.

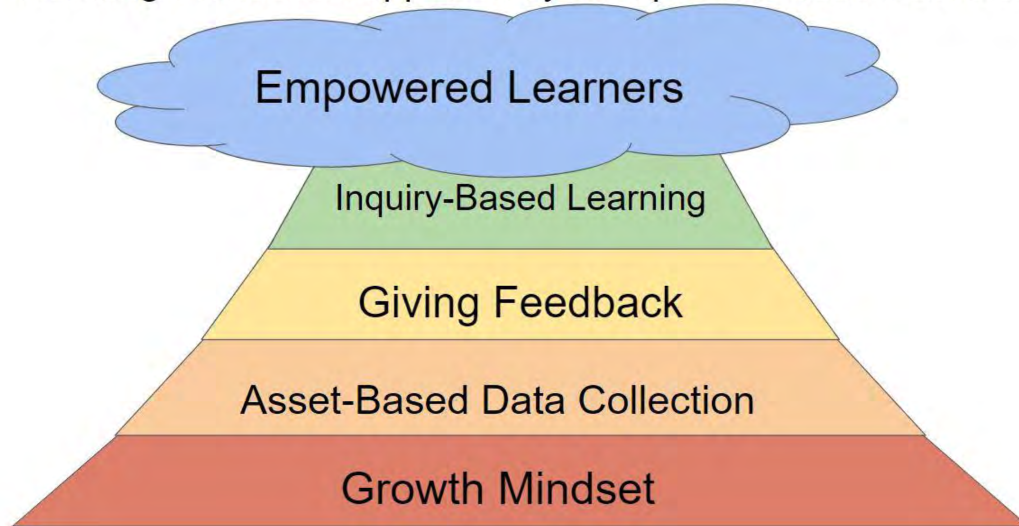
Strategy Groups and 1-1 conferences 35-40 minutes total 5-10 minutes per group/conference	Calkins UoS and Serravallo's (2017) *Writing Strategies* book are used to supplement strategy groups and 1-1 conferences. When students are not meeting with me, they are writing independently or with the support of classroom aide to achieve a writing goal that was established in a strategy group or 1-1 conference. ● Use assessment data to inform our objectives for students in strategy group or 1-1 conferences.	**Affective Theories (e.g., teacher-student relationships):** 1-1 conferences can develop and strengthen teacher-student relationships. **Social theories (e.g., social constructivism):** 1-1 conferences support students moving through their zones of proximal development by providing just-in-time instruction.
Sharing and Celebrations 5-10 minutes	Students share their goals and progress with peers. ● This is a quick way to gather assessment data to inform the next day's instruction.	**Social and Affective Theories (e.g., social cognitive theory, self-determination theory):** Students can learn through observation of their peers' celebrations as well as celebrate follow through of their own writing goals.

PAUSE AND PONDER POINT: What is your teaching context? How would you describe your current classroom? How would you describe your social positions in relation to your classroom? What curricula do you use to support your literacy teaching, including reading and writing instruction?

Chrissy's Instructional Mindsets and Moves

There are several teaching moves that I use to support and bolster my students' literacy learning both within and outside of these two curricular contexts of reading block and writer's workshop. This entails focusing on students' growth using a growth mindset, using asset-based data collection for assessment (including engaging in intentional processes of feedback), along with inquiry-based learning. It is my goal that using these teaching practices together help support children in becoming empowered learners (Figure 2).

Figure 2. Chrissy's Conceptualization of her Theory-Supported Mindset and Moves



Growth Mindset

Growth mindset is the idea that our current understanding of the world is not stagnant, in other words, it is constantly expanding. This means that learners understand that "their abilities [can] grow through their hard work" (Dweck, 2014, 1:16-1:18). When students embrace this, learning becomes engaging and accessible.

A growth mindset starts from the very first day of school with the mission of changing the way students speak about themselves and the way they speak about learning. With new mindsets and a new positive and growth-based vocabulary, students are able to become independent goal-setters and goal-achievers inside and outside of the classroom. Educators can use a growth mindset along with the "power of yet" and positive affirmations to help students set literacy-related goals and then to plan differentiated instruction that addresses those goals (Dweck, 2014).

Theoretical Lenses and Theories Supporting Growth Mindset

Growth mindset is linked to self-efficacy in learning environments, supported by Bandura's social cognitive theory which is both a motivational theory (Barber et al., 2019) and social learning theory (Tracey & Morrow, 2017) with respect to literacy learning. Self-efficacy is the belief a person holds that they can motivate

themselves to achieve goals that they set for themselves (Bandura, 1977). Growth mindset is also linked with the concept of agency. As Johnston (2004) explains, agency is "the belief that the environment can be affected, the belief that one has what it takes to affect it, and the understanding that that is what literacy is about" (p. 39). Growth mindset and associated concepts such as self-efficacy and agency are theoretically underpinned by motivational theories (e.g., social cognitive theory, expectancy-value theory) in the affective realm (Barber et al., 2019). Several studies have also theorized growth mindset with literacy concepts, such as self-regulated writing strategy use (Bai et al., 2021) and reading-specific mindsets as reflected on standardized testing performance (Petscher et al., 2017; Tock et al., 2021).

Chrissy's Classroom Conversations: Changing the Way Students Speak about Themselves and Literacy Learning

The language that students use directly impacts their mindset and their perspective toward learning, including supporting their sense of agency (or not). According to Skinner et al. (1998), children with agency are more deeply motivated in their learning and are less likely to give up in challenging situations (as cited by Johnston, 2004). In order to build a positive learning environment in which students have agency over their learning, it is crucial that student language is discussed on the first day of school and is represented within the classroom environment.

I start the school year by embedding language like "yet" in our classroom conversations (Dweck, 2014). For example, many of my students express that they feel nervous exploring chapter books because they are unable to read all of the words on the page. Whenever a student says that they cannot do something (i.e., read all of the words on a page), we reframe and rephrase the statement by saying, "I cannot read all of the words on this page yet."

In whole-group settings and in individual settings, I help students learn that using the word "yet" creates new opportunities for learning and relates to goal-setting. I explicitly teach and model that learning is a life-long process and that everyone must set goals for themselves in order to grow. In the example above, after students have identified their "yet" statement, I work one-on-one with them to help them understand how their "yet" statement is a part of learning process (Table 4).

Table 4. Process for using “Yet” Statements

Steps and Teacher Prompts for “Yet” Statements	**Development of Student “Yet” Statement**
1. Create a goal. ***Teacher Prompts:* “***What is your goal? What do you want to accomplish?”*	“I will be able to read all of the words on this page.”
2. Discuss how to achieve the goal. ***“****How can you achieve this goal?”*	“I will participate in reading stations by challenging myself to use the reading strategies that I learn to decode unknown words.”
3. Discuss how to assess and monitor the goal. ***“****How can you check to see if you are making progress towards your goal?”*	“I will practice reading this page and monitor how many words I can read on ____ date, ___ date, and ____ date.”
4. Discuss how feedback will be provided. ***“*** *will help you as you work towards your goal. I will give you feedback to help you reach your goal. Ask me questions to hear about what you have done well and what you can improve upon.”*	“What did you notice about my reading?”
5. Discuss how to celebrate when goal is met. ***“****How would you like to celebrate when you reach your goal? What goal would you like to work towards next?”*	“I will read this page out loud to my best friend.”

Setting small goals provides the foundation to show that even during times of struggle, their choices can lead to success (Johnston, 2004). However, goal setting and growth mindset language does not stop there. With repeated practice and encouragement, students use growth mindset language during instruction, guided practice, and independent practice of every lesson. Throughout the year, as students are exposed to new literacy skills and kinds of texts, they are able to recognize what their strengths and needs are and set goals around them. Instead of saying “I can’t do this,” they have a new mindset and skill set to approach the challenge, set goals for themselves, and begin working towards achieving that goal.

Chrissy's Classroom Environment toward a Growth Mindset

As Cleovoulou (2018) writes, "The learning environment, in many ways, guides student interactions and the flow of learning," (p. 315); as such, the classroom environment can actively position students as learners with a growth mindset. For example, anchor charts and posters with "yet" and growth mindset language are hung on the walls as quick reminders to students throughout the year. With students' permission, we also document student growth with pictures. As students achieve their goals, we take photos and add them to the wall. This environment allows students to focus on their goals and their accomplishments rather than their weaknesses. In return, students are having fun, engaged in lessons, and are independent goal-setters in the classroom.

PAUSE AND PONDER POINT: How do you set goals for yourself as an educator? How do you encourage your students to set goals for themselves in your classroom? How do you inspire your learners to actively work towards their goals? How do you celebrate when your students reach their goals?

Asset-Based Data Collection

Data collection plays a crucial role in the classroom as a driver for instruction. Educators collect data through informal and formal ways including *formative assessments* (e.g., direct observations of student learning, progress monitoring for day-to-day instructional decision making; Goatley et al., 2020) and *summative assessments* (e.g., end of year tests, benchmark assessments). Formative data can be collected from running records, observations from strategic questioning and conversations, checklists, think-pair-shares, turn-and-talks, and collections of student writing. This data is often quickly analyzed by the educator using minimal materials. Summative data can be collected from end-of-year tests, state tests, or benchmark assessments. This data is often analyzed in depth and uses standardized materials in order to score and compare student learning on a scale. We view asset-based data collection as assessments that defy deficit-styles of thinking by highlighting students' strengths, backgrounds, and schema in order to monitor progress and pinpoint instruction that is relevant to the learner's needs, goals, and interests.

Theoretical Lenses and Theories Supporting Asset-Based Data Collection

In the literacy classroom, data collection can be asset-based, drawn directly from student-created goals and self-assessment, and in return, help to create a more positive relationship between assessment and success (Johnston et al., 2020). Asset-based approaches toward assessment are rooted in sociocultural theories, tapping into students' "funds of knowledge" or "historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential for household or individual

functioning and well-being" (Moll et al.,1992, p. 133). In other words, asset-based approaches to assessment centers what the child brings to the learning context in terms of their unique capabilities, strengths, talents, practices, and experiences, in this case, as they relate to literacy learning. Asset-based assessment is often juxtaposed with high-stakes, standardized assessments common in schools today.

Chrissy's Classroom: Creating a Positive Relationship between Assessment and Success

Often, high-stakes, standardized assessments are positioned as the "go-to measure of student reading achievement" and that frequently, "a single standardized test score is often considered *the* indicator of student reading growth and achievement" (Afflerbach, 2017, p. 2). In school environments, this understanding of assessment can instigate fear and panic in students particularly around high-stakes standardized assessments and especially for students who are already experiencing hardship such as impoverishment (Heissel et al., 2021). For example, my students have shared that they feel assessments are full of trick questions and difficult tasks to complete that are setting them up for failure or what Howard (2018) calls the "gotcha" mentality. Afflerbach (2017) reminds us, however, that these kinds of standardized assessments are limited in scope and "their ability to describe students' reading needs and to inform reading instruction" (p. 2) and thus we must use other assessments to support our understanding of students' learning. However, not all assessments are harmful to students. Positive relationships with using multiple forms of assessment can start with a growth mindset.

A growth mindset directly impacts the data collection process in a classroom through the use of formative assessment (e.g., running records, observations from turn-and-talk, writing samples). As students use a growth mindset to set goals, they also should become increasingly comfortable with assessing their progress towards a goal. When assessment and data collection are clearly explained and taught to students as a form of self-assessment (Johnston et al., 2020), they can make the positive connection between purposeful data collection and achieving their goals. Data collection should not be harmful and deficit-based. We should be using our data to identify what our students' strengths are and to help them reach their own goals as readers and writers (Howard, 2018). While I use several formative assessments in my classroom, perhaps the most valuable formative assessment is making observations about my students' work and then providing them with relevant, strengths-based feedback as a way to develop their literacy learning.

PAUSE AND PONDER POINT: How do you collect data in your classroom? What data do you collect, and how many of these are mandatory? How do you help your students become comfortable with assessments and data collection?

Giving Feedback

Feedback can be considered one of the most important teaching strategies in the classroom, as it can both make learning explicit and promote the agency of learners within the classroom (Fletcher, 2018). In its most basic definition, feedback is "information about how we are doing in our efforts to reach a goal" (Wiggins, 2012, p. 10). Effective feedback is further characterized as "nonevaluative, specific, timely, related-to-learning goals and provide[s] opportunities for students to revise and improve work products and deepen understandings" (Meredith, 2015, para 1). In a positive and goal-oriented classroom, feedback is used by teachers and students as an opportunity to grow. I argue that feedback should be strength-based, and that there are safety and risk factors that can severely impact how a student responds to feedback and future tasks.

Theoretical Lenses and Theories Supporting Feedback

Providing feedback that is strengths-based is theoretically well-aligned with the affective, constructivist, and social learning lenses. First, strengths-based feedback can relate to motivation, self-efficacy, and goal-setting, supported by social cognitive theory and self-determination theory (Barber et al., 2019). Constructivist theoretical principles are also invoked when providing intentional, goal-oriented feedback since the feedback is rooted in the individual learning of the student (Tracey & Morrow, 2017). Finally, social theories like social constructivism underpin the giving of feedback since it supports students' literacy learning within their zone of proximal development with respect to the learner and task (Smagorinsky, 2013).

Chrissy's Classroom: Strength-Based Feedback

Much like assessment in general, feedback needs to be purposeful and asset-based. This means that the teacher is not using deficit-based language when providing feedback; instead, a teacher could take a strength-need-next step approach in their provision of feedback (Lalor, 2020, Table 5). The *strength* component requires an observation of the student's work that is clearly meeting expectations. The *need* component makes an observation of something that is not yet meeting expectations and prompts the student to think about what they could try differently. The *next step* component builds on the need and gives an actionable target for the student to work toward (Lalor, 2020) - a "process goal" (Barber et al., 2019, p. 238). In order for students to set goals and feel comfortable working to achieve their goals, the feedback must be clear, supportive, and provide direction for students as they work towards their goals.

Table 5. Strength-Need-Next Step Approach (adapted from Lalor, 2020)

Strength feedback example	"I noticed that you used capitalization at the beginning of your sentence and punctuation at the end of your sentence. This helped me to understand where your first sentence started and where your second sentence started."
Need feedback example	"When I was reading your paragraph, I began to wonder when your character was speaking. How can you use punctuation to show that your character is speaking?"
Next step feedback example	*Student was provided explicit instruction about using quotation marks for dialogue and an anchor chart to keep in their writing folder for future writing sessions.* Follow-up feedback: "You did an excellent job adding quotations to the dialogue in your first paragraph. As you continue to read and write your text, you should continue to use quotation marks whenever a character speaks. This will help your reader to better understand when a character is speaking."

Chrissy's Classroom: Safety and Risk in Feedback

As mentioned before, students often have anxiety around assessment situations in school settings, and the language used around scores and feedback can often be deficit-based. For example, some schools may use report card systems with criteria such as "exceeds grade-level expectations", "meets grade-level expectations," "below grade-level expectations," and "well below grade-level expectations." These criteria are also often seen on standardized assessments. These comments state nothing positive about the students' accomplishments; they instead focus on where the student falls on a scale. As a facilitator and resource to students, educators need to be intentional in their language around students' work, providing clear feedback that helps the student work towards achieving their goals. Importantly, this feedback should not only acknowledge where there is room for growth, but also share what is already being done well.

The benefits of receiving clear feedback are ample, especially when it comes to promoting student agency and help-seeking (Fletcher, 2018). For example, when students receive feedback from myself or a peer, they are encouraged to ask the question "why?" Students in my classroom understand that the intention of the feedback is solely meant to support their literacy skills and to help them grow as readers and writers. However, my students also recognize that learning can, and should, occur within both individuals engaging in the conversation about literacy. So, when the student asks the question "why," they are opening a dialogue in which they can listen to the feedback, learn from the feedback, and/or advocate for the choices that they made in their reading and writing. Engaging in these conversations, with the understanding that learning is

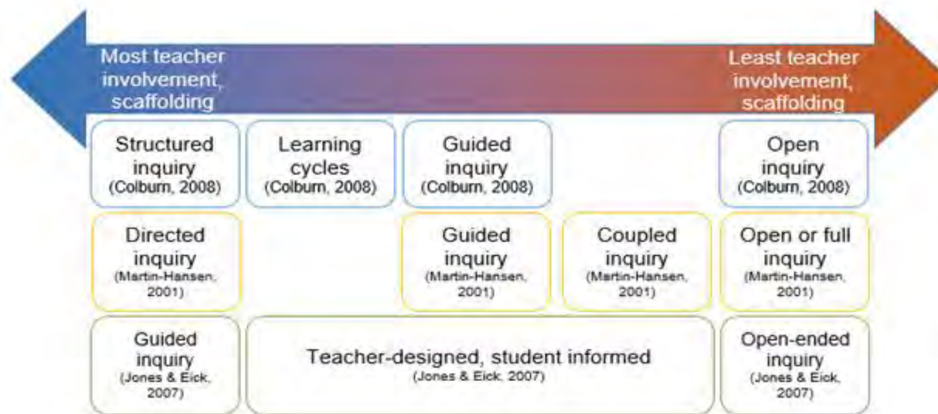
the ultimate goal, students feel safe taking risks in their learning and in the way they respond to feedback. This kind of risk-taking in learning supports students as they purposefully plot out their own learning endeavors through inquiry-based learning.

PAUSE AND PONDER POINT: How do you provide feedback to your learners? What modalities of feedback do you prefer to use? What modalities of feedback do your students prefer? How might you encourage your students to ask questions about their grades/scores?

Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based learning occurs when students focus "on certain key questions that lead to 'joy in immersion' through students working together as partners with teachers as opposed to simply responding to a barrage of teacher questions" (Buchanan, 2016, as cited by Beach, 2019, p. 9). In the classroom, inquiry learning often looks different from traditionally-styled teaching that is primarily teacher-led. There are several kinds of inquiry learning that have been defined and implemented in classroom settings (see Figure 3) based on the degree of teacher support and involvement.

Figure 3. Kinds of inquiry continuum based on teacher support and involvement (Silvestri, 2018).



Inquiry learning does not have a prescriptive path but rather processes and practices that indicate that inquiry learning is happening; furthermore, these inquiry processes correspond to purposeful, motivating opportunities to practice literacy skills and strategies (Table 6). When more guided or open inquiry-based learning is in progress, students actively set goals for themselves around these processes.

Table 6. Inquiry Skills/Practices with Corresponding Literacy Skills/Practices (Silvestri, 2018)

Inquiry Skills and Practices	**Literacy Skills and Practices**
Making observations and recording knowledge	(Using) evidence to support an argument; organizing information
Asking and developing questions	Questioning; predicting; making inferences
Constructing explanations	Using nonfiction text features; using evidence to support an argument; synthesizing information; citing sources
Exploring the topic/question	Using nonfiction text features; critiquing, evaluating, analyzing text; organizing information
Problem-solving	Questioning; synthesizing information; evaluating, critiquing, and analyzing data; metacognition
Creating artifacts to present findings	Composing; using nonfiction text features; organizing info
Drawing conclusions	Making inferences; synthesizing information
Reflecting on the process	Metacognition

One of the hallmarks of guided or open inquiry is the element of student choice. When considering how to increase the amount of student-directedness in an inquiry learning environment, it's important to get a sense of the choices provided to students. Table 7 reflects examples of student choice that can be provided to students in the course of their inquiry learning. In more structured or directed inquiry, teachers may only leave open one or two elements of choice (e.g., response modality/presentation medium and research process/notetaking) with the rest of the elements controlled (e.g., topic, question asked, texts/materials used, degree of collaboration, writing process and structure). In guided inquiry, teachers may elect to provide more choice overall.

Table 7. Kinds of Choice in Inquiry Learning

Choice in…	**Means...**
Questions asked During Inquiry	Students choose the questions they would like to ask, research, and otherwise learn more about.
Subject Areas/Topic	Students choose the topic subject area of study (e.g., science, social studies, music, math, literature, current events, etc.) and/or topic of study (e.g., reptiles, World War II, hip-hop, real world math applications, tall tales, climate change).
Texts and Materials Used	Students choose the texts (including print-based texts, videos, podcasts, etc.) and materials used while learning about their topic and striving to answer their question.
Degree of Collaboration	Students choose whether or not they would like to work alone, in pairs, in a small group, or perhaps this is a whole-class inquiry.
Research Process and Note-Taking	Students choose how they take notes as they proceed through research (e.g., in a notebook, in the margins of articles, on their mobile device, on the computer, through voice recordings, on a teacher-given note sheet, etc.).
Writing Process/Structure (if a written product is even required)	Students choose how they would like to plan for and proceed in their writing as well as how they would like to produce their writing (e.g., hand-written, typed on a computer, typed on a tablet, using speech-to-text applications, etc.)
Response Modality/Medium	Students choose how they will "show what they know" when they create artifacts share their findings with others (e.g., oral presentation, paper, digital visual presentation, poster, video, audio/podcast, poem, or song, etc.).

Theoretical Lenses and Theories Supporting Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry learning is very much situated within constructivist theoretical principles, especially following those of John Dewey and his tenets of experience and purpose in education (1938). Additionally, several affective theories support literacy practices required of inquiry-learning, especially when students' interests, choices, and goal setting in their learning are invoked (e.g., engagement theory, Wigfield & Guthrie, 1997; self-determination theory, Barber et al., 2019). Inquiry-learning also

very clearly aligns with the other teaching practices that I've discussed so far. What follows is my explanation about how I structure inquiry learning in my classroom, which are not only rooted in principles of guided inquiry but also in growth-mindset, asset-based assessment, and use of ongoing feedback.

Chrissy's Classroom: Growth Mindset in Inquiry-Based Learning

Inquiry-based projects in my classroom begin with students setting goals for themselves. They write their goals down, which serve as a reminder of what they are working towards. As they begin to conduct their research, I actively encourage them to use growth mindset language. When students use this language, they recognize their needs and are actively building on them to complete the inquiry project. Below, I provide examples of goals set by students and activities that we did in class supporting their inquiry projects (Table 8).

Table 8. Student-Created Inquiry Project Goals and Associated Activities

Example of Student-Created Goals	**Supporting Activities for Inquiry Projects (literacy activities are in bold print)**
I can teach others how to make applesauce.	○ As a class, we **followed directions** to make applesauce (peeled apples together, cut apples, cored apples, put in the crock pot, mashed, added cinnamon and sugar). ○ This student **used a graphic organizer to take notes** throughout the process of making applesauce. ○ This student **created a poster** using their graphic organizer notes and drawings.
I can learn about dogs and teach others about dogs.	○ This student independently **watched videos and read texts about dogs**. ○ They **took notes in a graphic organizer**. ○ They **created the sections in their book**. ○ They used Google docs to **paraphrase their notes and wrote a paragraph** for each section of the book. ○ They **used Book Creator to write a digital book** about dogs. ○ They **audio-recorded their reading (practicing oral reading fluency)** for their audience. ○ They **added text features to their book** (i.e., title, table of contents, headings, photographs, and captions).

Chrissy's Classroom: Assessment and Feedback in Inquiry-Based Learning

It is important that data is collected throughout the inquiry project in order for me to best know how to support my students as a facilitator. During inquiry projects, I like to foreground data that highlights students' strengths, and I collect data through observations, conversations with students, as well as their reading and writing throughout the project. This formative assessment data is then linked with the provision of feedback (Table 9). Low-risk and supportive response-based feedback has been effective during my students' inquiry-based learning projects. During inquiry-based projects, I like to check in with each student at least once a session to provide non-evaluative feedback.

Table 9. Observational Data and Related Feedback

Kind of Observational Data	**Related Provision of Feedback**
Listening and Taking Observational Notes: This allows me to gain a better understanding of where students are in their project and take notes on what I observe.	My observational notes are then evaluated outside of session times with the purpose of writing a response to the student or preparing for the next day's session meeting.
Asking Questions: Questions are used to encourage the student to define their project, goals, and pathway towards achieving goals.	This form of feedback enables students to think about the needs of their project. By identifying their current needs, they are also revisiting their goals. I often take notes during this form of feedback to better support the student in future sessions.
Identifying Strengths: This focuses on the strengths of the student and their success.	Having conversations about students' strengths enables them to build their confidence about what they have accomplished on along with their sense of agency in learning. During this meeting, I ask students to take brief notes in their notebooks to serve as a reminder of their hard work, determination, and self-agency.

I often remind my students that learning about reading and writing is never finished. This is because reading and writing are processes that are ongoing forever, and there is always more to know. Growth mindset teaches us that goals can be set and achieved through hard work and that once goals have been met, we can always set new goals for ourselves to grow as lifelong learners. In my classroom, depending on the time that is allotted for the project, the students create goals and

rubrics to help them recognize when their inquiry project is complete (for the purposes of our class). After students have completed their inquiry-projects, we celebrate by giving students the opportunity to teach their peers about their topic using their project. In my classroom, inquiry-based learning uses a variety of teaching strategies that ultimately serve to empower learners to take agency over their own learning in and out of the classroom.

PAUSE AND PONDER POINT: How comfortable are you with the idea of leading an inquiry project? What do you need to become more comfortable with leading inquiry learning? How can you use inquiry learning to connect reading and writing instruction? How can you use inquiry learning to inspire learners to take an interest in what they are reading and writing about?

The Goal: Cultivating Empowered Learners

In my classroom, empowered learners are students who see reading and writing as tools to support their own endeavors, from reading and writing to learn more about a topic to accomplish a larger goal (e.g., writing an article, blog, video essay, etc.) or using reading and writing for pleasure - to spark joy in their lives and others. Cultivating empowered learners is rooted in educators who have a strong sense of agency themselves - educators who take responsibility for their own learning and implement that learning within their classrooms through instructional decision-making (Calvert, 2016). In this case, we emphasize the decision-making toward implementing research-supported teaching practices in their literacy instruction that serves to empower their students as learners.

There are several ways that the concept of "empowerment" or "empowered learners" have been aligned with academic literature on K-12 literacy learning and instruction (Table 10). In this article, growth mindset, asset-based data collection, feedback, and inquiry learning co-construct a foundation in which students find learning valuable and interesting.

Learning is Valuable

According to Halliday (1975), "individuals learn to read and write as a means to accomplish goals related to basic life functioning" (as cited by Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 160). When learners view reading and writing as tools supporting them across their lives, they can operationalize these in pursuit of their goals, especially when such goal setting is explicitly modeled for students (Luther, 2022). This links with principles of growth mindset, as having a growth mindset allows educators and students to recognize the "power of yet" (Dweck, 2014) as they encounter challenges. Individuals who have a growth mindset recognize that learning and accomplishing one's goals are life-long processes.

Table 10. Ways Empowered Learning Relates to Learning and Instruction

Empowered Learners can Connect to Learning and Instruction by…	**References**
Promoting choice in independent reading	Allen-Lyall & Davis, 2020; Luther, 2022; McVeigh, 2019
Promoting choice during writing	Norris, 2015; Shapiro et al., 2016;
Critical literacy and advocacy aims	Cleovoulou, 2018; Heidorn & Rabine, 1998; Krishnan, 2021; Lawrence et al., 2017
Using strategic knowledge as readers	Allen-Lyall & Davis, 2020; Dawson, 2018; Graves et al., 2018; Wieck, 2020)
Opportunities for peer feedback	Bump, 2018; Fletcher, 2018; Mak & Wong, 2018
Supporting multilingual learners	Pang, 2016; Shapiro et al., 2016
Digital literacy skills and tools	Brandon, 2021; Kelly, 2018
Inquiry learning projects	Cleovoulou, 2018; Pang, 2016
Using diverse books toward aims of empowerment	Zapata et al., 2018

In my classroom, my students do not often get discouraged when they are challenged. Instead, challenges are opportunities to learn and grow. For example, when I facilitate reading groups, my students are quick to identify words that they do not know, utilizing their metacognition. My students know that they can use their tools and strategies to decode unfamiliar words. In decoding the word, the student will independently and flexibly use their tools and strategies (e.g., analogizing to known words, letter/sound knowledge, etc.) to read the word. When the student has correctly decoded the unfamiliar word, they will add this word to a word list in the back of their reader's notebook. By doing this, the student celebrates their new known word, and also sees and reflects on the growing list of words that they have successfully solved and learned during reading groups. This understanding of growth encourages students to become engaged and excited about what they are reading, aligning with principles of self-efficacy and motivation (Barber et al., 2019). Empowered learners recognize that learning is valuable because they can set achievable learning goals for themselves based on their personal endeavors and desires as members of society.

Empowered learners can recognize that their goals and course of learning are informed by assessments - ideally those that are asset-based and stem from student-created goals (Goatley et al., 2020). An aim of asset-based assessment practices is to show and celebrate progress toward meeting one's goals rather than perfection (Luther, 2022). When asset-based data collection is utilized in the learning environment in this way, it helps to create a positive relationship between assessment and success (Johnston et al, 2020). Therefore, we contend that empowered learners are better positioned to recognize the value of asset-based assessments because it serves as a positive, strength-based display of their learning; this, in turn, enables the educator to better facilitate learning and the student to frequently reflect and realign practices to support their goals.

In my classroom, one of my favorite student-led, asset-based data collection methods is to give students a choice. When I confer with students in writer's workshop, I usually ask them to select a portion of their writing they want to discuss on a deeper level during our brief meeting. By giving the student a choice in the writing that is discussed, they can independently determine if they want to discuss a portion of their writing that they deem already strong or if they want to discuss a portion of their writing that needs more work. Understanding that students benefit from positive reinforcement, encouragement, and recognition of strengths allows students to see the value in what they are creating through reading and writing as well as in their learning. Once the student has decided what to share during a conference, I follow through with detailed feedback.

Feedback from teachers and peers allows learners to recognize the value of learning by identifying what has already been mastered and what the next steps are for learning (Bump, 2018) sometimes known as "process goals" (Barber et al. 2019, p. 238). The purpose of feedback is to make learning explicit and to promote the agency of learners (Fletcher, 2018). Empowered learners are using and finding value in the feedback from their teacher(s) and peers in order to continue to reach their goals; their self-efficacy and motivation supports them in taking the potential emotional risks involved when receiving feedback from peers and teachers. When I provide feedback with the strength-need-next step approach, the process not only allows the student to see the value in feedback but also promotes the value of being interested and invested in what they are learning.

Learning is Interesting

Empowered learners are those who find enjoyment in learning and who actively seek new learning opportunities. Invoking constructivist theoretical principles, Tracey and Morrow (2017) state that "learning occurs when individuals integrate new knowledge with existing knowledge. . . [and] the integration of new knowledge with existing knowledge can only occur when the learner is actively engaged in the learning process" (p. 55). When an educator uses constructivist-based teaching

practices, learning is scaffolded in ways that make learning interesting and "captures students' commitment, energy, and enthusiasm" (Duncan, 2015, p. 2). When educators cultivate a classroom environment that is rooted in growth mindset, asset-based assessments, and feedback, empowered students can share the fruits of their learning through inquiry-based projects and practices.

Inquiry-based learning empowers students to take charge of their learning; additionally, it requires students to rely on and use multiple literacy strategies in order to create a product that will ideally be shared with others. Since inquiry-based learning is often student-led, it may be more interesting and valuable to the students compared to learning about topics and ideas that are disconnected from the student. In my classroom, students use goals to develop questions that they personally want to answer. These questions led to the student enacting several purposeful literacy practices, including reading and viewing texts and note-taking that resulted in the creation and editing of a text using digital tools. Empowered learners view learning as valuable, interesting, and purposeful for their own aims.

PAUSE AND PONDER POINT: What teaching practices do you use to empower learners in your classroom? How can you use literacy instruction and learning to empower your learners?

Important Considerations

We recognize that each classroom is going to look different to meet the needs and strengths of the learners in the room. Therefore, teaching strategies and multi-theoretical approaches will look different and may not be able to map onto other classrooms in precisely the same ways. The following section discusses some important considerations we share when it comes to interpreting this work relating to sociocultural factors, time and autonomy, resources and student needs, accessibility, and curriculum.

Considerations of Sociocultural Factors and Culturally Responsive-Sustaining Teaching

Factors that impact learning environments and the mindsets of learners include: class size; age of students; support staff in the room; language(s) used by the teacher; language(s) used by the students; school location; disabilities within the classroom; the unique cultures and social identities[3] of the students and their

[3] By "social identities," we mean identities that are sociohistorically linked to concepts of race, ethnicity, citizenship, class/socioeconomic status, disability, gender identity and expression, sexual and romantic orientation, religious affiliation, political affiliation, and other social locations, including the unique intersections of these social locations occurring at the same time (i.e., intersectionality).

families; the unique languages, cultures and social identities of the teacher(s) and support staff; resources available to all (i.e., students, families, teachers) as well as other sociocultural factors. Ideally, classrooms and educators would be able to situate these different factors into a culturally sustaining pedagogy embedded within a learner-centered curriculum (Paris, 2012). Paris (2012) states that "culturally sustaining pedagogy seeks to perpetuate and foster–to sustain–linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling" (p. 95). Our state education department strives to support similar approaches informed by culturally sustaining pedagogies named *Culturally Responsive-Sustaining* (CR-S) framework with respect to learning environments (New York State Education Department [NYSED], 2018). In brief, this framework strives to co-create learning environments *with* students that "affirm racial, linguistic and cultural identities; prepare students for rigor and independent learning, develop students' abilities to connect across lines of difference; elevate historically marginalized voices; and empower students as agents of social change" (NYSED, 2018, p. 64).

Educators who use a multi-theoretical approach inclusive of critical perspectives have the potential to enact culturally sustaining teaching practices within their classroom. However, we must point out that there are tensions between the tenets of culturally sustaining pedagogies and practices often enacted in K-12 schools today (e.g., the use of scripted curricula and one-size-fits-all approaches to assessment, etc.). Culturally sustaining pedagogies involve educators and students jointly building a curriculum around the different needs, strengths, backgrounds, languages, and cultures of the learners in the classroom. However, classrooms and schools with mandated scripted programs and standardized, deficit-based assessments will, by definition, not meet the different needs and cultures of every learner within the classroom (Paris, 2012; Alim & Paris, 2017). With that being said, we maintain that even educators in more scripted settings can strive to take up a culturally sustaining mindset, build trusting relationships with students and families, and bring their languages, literacies, cultures, interests, (dis)abilities, and social identities into conversation with pedagogy and curriculum.

Considerations of Time and Autonomy

We also recognize that time plays a significant role in the way that curriculum is implemented in the classroom. When educators are expected to adhere to scripted programs with students, time will be limited and potentially even monitored for fidelity of implementation (Haq, 2017). It may even feel like getting through the expected content is impossible. It would follow that knowledgeable, well-supported teachers who have more autonomy over content and pedagogy, rather than using a mandatory curriculum and one-size-fits-all approach, will better be able to meet the individual literacy needs of their learners. We argue that it is important for every

teacher to consider the time within their day where they have flexibility and autonomy over their literacy teaching and curriculum, even if it is brief.

For example, analyzing multiple and various reading and writing samples from students can be time-consuming. However, by permitting students to choose their data points (an asset-based data collection practice), the educator may spend less time collecting and evaluating data. For example, during scheduled small-group instruction, educators can give students a choice in which text they read for a running record. This may enable the student to better enjoy the assessment opportunity and also choose a text that better represents their schemas. Students may initially take more time to choose their data points as they learn the procedures; however, based on my experience, the student eventually learns to quickly choose which data points should be evaluated and will often volunteer their reading and/or writing to be evaluated before asked over time and practice.

The same can be said for the use of feedback. After collecting asset-based data, feedback should align with the student's preset goals. The educator can use shortened small-group instruction or conferencing to meet with students and provide feedback. Planning the feedback should be strategic and purposeful with a clear understanding of the students' goals as well as current knowledge-base. Keeping track of student goals and progress can be done by the student in their reader's and writer's notebooks. This not only saves the educator time, but also encourages students to take responsibility in tracking progress and working towards achieving their goals.

Considerations of Curriculum, Instructional Decision-Making, and Autonomy

Each learner and each classroom of students has unique learning strengths and needs. As educators who work with our students daily, collecting multiple points of formative and summative data, we have some of the clearest insights about our students' literacy strengths and needs. Sole reliance on scripted programs will ultimately be ineffective at meeting those learning needs of each and every student because it is unable to account for the individual differences and learning factors among our learners. However, when educators have autonomy and flexibility over the instructional decisions that they make based on the data they've collected, they are better poised to support their learners in multifaceted ways. Layering on top of that, if they take a multitheoretical approach to literacy instruction, they will be able to ask better questions of their students' data which will better support their instructional decision-making.

For example, a scripted program on comprehension that lacks a phonics component may not provide adequate help for students who need support in decoding and solving words while reading. On the other hand, a scripted curriculum that only teaches decoding and word solving skills may develop students into word callers with limited text comprehension abilities, and thus comprehension will not

be sufficiently developed to support increasingly complex texts. It is worthwhile to mention that neither scripted curriculum described in our fictitious example have taken into consideration affective and sociocultural factors of the learner. Autonomy and flexibility in instructional decision-making (directed from evidence-based strategies with a multitheoretical approach) enables educators to use their knowledge about literacy teaching, learning standards, and students together in order to pinpoint instruction that will ultimately lead to successful, purposeful, and empowered learners in the classroom.

Considerations of Ongoing Professional Learning

It is essential that literacy educators participate in professional learning opportunities in order to be able to effectively instruct all learners in the classroom. For many educators, district-led professional development may focus on standards-based instruction and/or scripted curriculum instruction. This professional development may help teachers to better support and instruct some learners in their classrooms, but there will inevitably be many students who do not fit in with the focus of standards-based and scripted curriculum instruction. As educators, we know what instruction our students need most. It is important that we are constantly searching for better ways to improve our instruction for our learners. I use social media groups and teacher-created resources as more informal modalities for professional learning, and also join and attend events of professional literacy organizations (e.g., International Literacy Association, state-level reading organizations like New York State Reading Association) for more formal opportunities to learn and grow. Teaching is a social practice, and as educators, it is important that we are collaborating with each other. Each teacher comes to the profession with unique skills, experiences, and backgrounds, and there can be great power when educators collaborate and begin to learn from each others' skills and experiences.

Concluding Thoughts

When writing this article, we set out to discuss and demonstrate teaching practices that embrace the complexities of literacy learning. We did this to purposefully prompt educators to reflect and rely on their senses of agency and self-efficacy to use multi-theoretical approaches to literacy instruction in their classrooms. We have drawn on reading research surrounding teaching practices along with Chrissy's pedagogy that are grounded within multiple theoretical lenses.

First, we argued that literacy instruction must be rooted in multiple theoretical standpoints to support all learners flexibly and in consideration of their existing literacy assets, breaking down multiple theoretical standpoints and how they support our working definition of literacy. Next, we used Chrissy's classroom

- a real-world context - to illustrate a multi-theoretical approach to literacy instruction in action. In this section, it is stated that the anecdotes are supported by the experiences and practices of Chrissy and her students in this special education classroom, including a flow of teaching practices used in her classroom to illustrate literacy instructional practices grounded in a multi-theoretical approach (i.e., growth mindset, asset-based data collection, feedback, inquiry learning). Finally, we support that these kinds of theory-supported, student-centered instructional practices are thoughtfully utilized in the classroom, learners begin to see reading and writing as opportunities to support their own life-long endeavors. Learners who are able to use literacy to set, build, and achieve their own goals are empowered.

It is here that we leave the reader - you, an educator - to continue to reflect on how you support your students as empowered readers and writers. Consider what you are already doing that is theoretically-supported by a range of theories in literacy education. Reflect on the moments in your day where you do have autonomy over the content and practices you teach your students. Let this spur you toward relying on your own knowledge and teacher agency to ensure that your students have rich literacy experiences that are rooted in their lived experiences. We hope that within your thinking, reflecting, and imagining that you find yourself feeling empowered.

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Appendix A

The purpose of this appendix is to provide an in-depth description of the multiple theories used within this article. We name each theory, define each theory, and connect each theory to teaching practices, activities, and instructional decisions mentioned in the article in order to support educators' reflection upon what underpins their instructional and pedagogical decisions.

Theories and Lens	**Definition**	**Instructional Practices and Settings Supported**
Social Cognitive Theory (and Self-Efficacy) Social Lens	This theory is both a motivational theory (Barber et al., 2019) and social learning theory (Tracey & Morrow, 2017) with respect to literacy; it combines aspects of behaviorism and social learning, mainly in the way that people learn by observing others (e.g., teacher/peer modeling). Social cognitive theory relates to self-efficacy, which is "the belief that [a person] possesses the ability to attain specific goals" (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 171). Students need to believe that they can achieve their goals.	● Growth Mindset ● Asset-Based Data Collection ● Strength-Based Feedback ● Empowered Learners ● Whole Group Mini-lesson ● Sharing and celebrations
Social Constructivism Social Lens	This theory explains that children need to interact with others to learn and grow in a social context, and that children's development is mediated (or brought about) using different methods, including social interaction and language as well as the use of tools, symbols, gesture, and more (Moll, 2014).	● Strength-Based Feedback ● Empowered Learners ● Partner reading ● Strategy groups / 1-1 conferences
Sociocultural Theory (and Funds	This theory states that a child's culture and social identities play a significant role in their ability to read and write. Three different layers of	● Asset-Based Data Collection

of Knowledge) Social Lens	influence impact a learner's development: ● Microsystem: a child's home environment ● Mesosystem: school learning environment ● Exosystem: local, national, and worldwide environments are not directly within the learner's reach (Fetsco & McClure, 2005, as cited by Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 163). Sociocultural theory is related to the concept of funds of knowledge or "the sources of knowledge that are central to [individuals'] homes and communities" (Moll et al., 1992) - knowledge of the microsystem.	● Strength-based feedback ● Empowered Learners
Parallel Distributed Processing Model Cognitive Processing	This model describes the process of the brain encoding text and outputting sounds of words, positing that "all cognitive information is stored as a series of connections between units" and that "these connections between units become stronger and faster with repeated pairings" (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 209). This represents the concept of connectionism. The primary processors are orthographic (or printed text) input, meaning input, context input, and phonological (or speech) input. The phonological processor has an alphabetic backup system just in case the reader has to sound out the word letter by letter.	● Inquiry-Based Learning ● Empowered Learners ● Small group reading (guided reading / LLI) ● Library station / independent reading
Dual-route Cascaded Model Cognitive Processing	This theory demonstrates there are "two routes for processing text input. The lexical route is for handling words that are already known to the reader and the sublexical (or nonlexical) path is meant to handle unknown words and nonwords" (Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 214). This model distinguishes kinds of processing for words the reader knows automatically (i.e., sight words, processed through the lexical route) versus words that the reader does not recognize on sight and must be decoded (i.e., processed through the sublexical/nonlexical route).	● Inquiry-Based Learning ● Empowered Learners ● Small group reading (guided reading/ LLI) ● Word Work Station

Engagement Theory Affective Lens	This theory "seeks to articulate the differences between 'engaged' and 'disengaged' readers and to provide direction to educators on how to help students become more engaged" (Guthrie, 2004, as cited by Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 146). Engaged learners tend to think about how they learn, and they also tend to talk about their learning with others. Proponents of engagement theory seek to put learning back into the hands of the learners, seeking to construct more student-centered learning environments.	● Inquiry-Based Learning ● Empowered Learners ● Library station / independent reading ● Word Work station
Teacher-Student Relationships Affective Lens	This theory claims that positive teacher-student relationships are what lead students to success. These relationships include: ● A student's sense that the teacher understands and cares about them as a person ● The student's perception that the teacher supports and respects them ● An overall positive feeling between teacher and student ● A student's sense of physical and emotional safety the teacher (Bernstein-Yamashiro & Noam, 2013, as cited by Tracey & Morrow, 2017, p. 144).	● Growth Mindset ● Asset-Based Data Collection ● Strength-Based Feedback ● Inquiry-Based Learning ● Empowered Learners