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Haley F. Kaplan April 14, 2015

Perceptions and experiences working with students with Learning Disabilities: How policies have shaped and are changing the Special Education system today

by

Haley F. Kaplan

Kristin Phillips, Ph.D.
Adviser

Department of Anthropology

Kristin Phillips, Ph.D.

Adviser

Debra Vidali, Ph.D.

Committee Member

Patricia Brennan, Ph.D.

Committee Member

2015

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Abstract

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By Haley F. Kaplan

In this thesis I examine how the implementation of the Common Core State Standards (CCSS) works on a localized level and impacts educators' perceptions and expectations of students with learning disabilities (LD). Currently 43 states and the District of Columbia have adopted and are now implementing these new standards. As schools and districts implement the Common Core State Standards, the standards for English and Math intensify the national standardization of what constitutes 'academic success.' These reforms place special education at a new crossroads, and provide a fresh opportunity to consider how learning disabilities are constructed, problematized, and addressed in the United States. Through my research I aim to answer three main questions: what social and historical changes do the production and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards index? How are the Common Core State Standards reconfiguring or reinforcing the current cultural construction of disability, particularly as it relates to notions of success and failure? And what are the implications for special education teachers and the construction of learning disabilities with the education changes that accompany Common Core? To answer these questions I employed the anthropological method of ethnographic research. Through participant observation and semi-structured interviews I examined the implementation of the Common Core State Standards as it relates to special education at three schools in one district in Northern California. Through my research I found that the cultural understanding and value of success, standardized tests, and education as a science and the role of technology, continue to be transforming and reproduced through the implementation of Common Core State Standards. Each cultural value uniquely interacts with special education and contributes to the evolving social construction of learning disabilities. Studying disability and education policy from an anthropological perspective provides insight into the cultural construction of disability and the societal values that are created and reproduced within today's transforming education system.

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Perceptions and experiences working with students with Learning Disabilities: How policies have shaped and are changing the Special Education system today

The implementation of the new Common Core State Standards (CCSS) [1] sparked debate amongst politicians, educators, and parents in many states across the country. Headlines from national newspapers testify to the controversy and importance of these standards: "Common Core divides GOP's potential 2016 field" (Moore, 2014, Dec 20 - USA Today), "Rage Against the Common Core" (Kirp, 2014, Dec 27 - New York Times), "School superintendents standing by Common Core State Standards" (Layton, 2014, Oct 8 -Washington Post) "The Common Core Is Tough on Kids With Special Needs" (Beals, 2014, Feb 21 - The Atlantic). Critique from the far left and far right and support from political leaders and various educators generated controversy, rage, and confusion about this new education policy. As these new education standards impact upon students and teachers around the country it is vital to understand how these changes affect some of the nation's most "at risk" students, the students in special education.

In 2011 8.4 percent or approximately 5.7 million students received special education services under the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Students with learning disabilities (LD)[2] constitute the largest proportion of special education students (Boser, 2009). Of the students in special education 42 percent or 2.4 million students were diagnosed with specific learning disabilities, comprising five percent of students in public

[1] Throughout this paper I will refer to the Common Core State Standards as: Common Core, the standards, and CCSS; The citation and use of information from the Common Core State Standards has been cited in accordance with the Common Core State Standards' Public License. © Copyright 2010. National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and Council of Chief State School Officers. All rights reserved.

[2] "A disorder in one or more of the basic psychological processes involved in understanding or in using language, spoken or written, which disorder may manifest itself in the imperfect ability to listen, think, speak, read, write, spell, or do mathematical calculations" (SEC. 602.30, IDEA 2004).

schools (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). More students with learning disabilities are not accounted for because many go undiagnosed. Moreover, the numbers do not include students in private or parochial schools. As of 2005 the federal government was spending $11 billion on special education following the re-passing of IDEA (Spellings, 2005).

Currently, the policy context for Special Education encounters a new crossroads as the Common Core State Standards for English and Math intensify the national standardization of what constitutes 'academic success.' At the start of this academic year in 2014, 43 states and Washington DC have adopted and are now implementing the new Common Core State Standards. "The standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live" ("About the Standards" Common Core State Standards [CCSS], 2015). These reforms provide a fresh opportunity to consider how learning disabilities are constructed, problematized, and addressed in the United States, as schools and districts integrate the new standards into special education programs. Due to the recent implementation of Common Core researchers have not had the opportunity to study the impact of the policy change on special education on such a localized level. In this thesis I examine the implementation of the Common Core State Standards at three schools in one district, Rolling Golden Hills School District[3] in Northern California. Using lenses and theories drawn from the anthropological literatures on education and disability, I analyze educators', administrators', and policymakers' initial experiences with and perceptions of the local implementation of Common Core in order to provide insight to the reform's impact on special education programs and agendas.

[3] To insure the confidentiality of the participants in the study, the name of the town and district as well as all of the district's staff members' names are pseudonyms

My interest in education and learning disabilities is rooted deeper than I care to remember. One of my earlier memories dates back to the first grade, it was the middle of winter and I was doing some schoolwork at my desk before recess. My teacher, whom I will refer to as Mrs. Smith[4] in this anecdote, came up to me and asked me why I did not have any snowflakes or leaves on the reading board when Mary-Ann already had two snowflakes and multiple leaves on the board. To clarify, each student placed a snowflake, leaf, or flower (depending on the season) on the reading board when they finished a book. I do not remember how I responded to Mrs. Smith but I do recall the overwhelming embarrassment and sense of failure that rushed over me. I did not know how to explain to Mrs. Smith that the reason I did not have any snowflakes on the board was because during reading time I just stared at the words on the page and admired the pictures. It was not until the middle of third grade that I would find out that the reason I never put a snowflake on the board, and still at age nine I could not read, is because I am dyslexic. This experience of being different within the context of school has driven my interest, passion and curiosity of how the label 'learning disabled' is produced within the American education system.

Although I experienced the humiliations of being pulled out of class to practice reading, taking tests separately from my classmates, studying with a tutor for countless hours, being grilled through IQ and achievement tests, and experiencing the stigma of being labeled learning disabled, I did not experience these within the context of the United States' public education system. I grew up in the middle of a large city in California and my parents had the foresight and the privilege to send me to a private school, where I remained in the mainstream (general) education classes. This is because private schools do not provide separate special education classes for students with learning disabilities, where public schools are mandated to have such

[4] To insure the confidentiality of my elementary teachers and classmates, pseudonyms are used for all names of individuals in my personal life

services. Generally private schools offer smaller class sizes than California public schools, allowing for more individualized attention in the mainstream classes. My experience of attending private school with a learning disability provides me a combination of insider and outsider perspective when studying the perceptions, expectations, and changes around learning disabilities and special education within public schools in California.

Studying learning disabilities 14 years after being diagnosed with dyslexia and just over 16 years after Mrs. Smith asked me why I did not have a snowflake on the board allowed me to gain distance from the struggles I faced as a young girl. Researching special education and learning disabilities from an anthropological perspective provided me with a different view on the cultural construction and creation of learning disabilities. Until my current research my understanding of learning disabilities has largely been the product of my personal experiences and struggles, but through my research and speaking with teachers and administrators I gained valuable insight to others involved in the process. Sitting on the other side of the education system and being treated as a peer felt odd at first, but I quickly realized the very human element of schools that I had failed to see as a child. The culture around learning disabilities and education is constantly evolving and much has changed in the way of understanding, diagnosing, accommodating, and talking about learning disabilities since I was diagnosed.

Studying learning disabilities from an Anthropological perspective provides insight into the cultural construction of disability and social values that are created and reproduced under a given policy. Understanding the role of success, standardized tests, and education as a science and the role of technology contributes to and builds on the anthropological literature on education and disability studies.

Literature Review

The relevant literature on learning disabilities lies at the cross section of several different subfields of anthropology. To fully grasp the complexities and interconnecting fields, I examined literature on the anthropology of education, education policy, disability, and the cross sections of the two subfields looking at learning disabilities. Focusing on the overlaps between subfields provides the most relevant information to my research on the implementation of Common Core, and how these standards are perceived to be changing, shaping, and impacting students with learning disabilities.

Educational researchers have used a variety of tools and disciplines to understand schooling and disability. These include policy, philosophy, sociology, medicine, psychology and anthropology. Anthropologists' unique contribution has been to look at education systems, education policy, disability, and learning disabilities through a unique lens to provide insight into the values, perspectives, and meanings of the larger society and culture. Employing an anthropological perspective while incorporating some additional information contributes insight into how educational policies are shaped and implemented, and how they impact individuals with disabilities.

A brief history of US education policy

Education policies constantly change, build upon one another, reform and transform to best reflect, match, and shape the societal values of the moment. The twentieth-century history of educational policy in the United States turns on three key policy moments: the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 (ESEA 1965); the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB 2001); and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards between 2011 and 2015. The Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965 was the first time the national

government became largely involved in education policy reform, creating a sense of national accountability and funding for public education (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003). The ESEA of 1965 passed under President Lyndon B. Johnson as part of the greater "war on poverty" that was going on at the time ("Archived Information: Using Federal Resources to Support Reform", 1996). In line with the plan to eradicate poverty was the goal to provide "full education opportunities" to all students (ESEA, 1965). The ESEA of 1965 led to the federal government's involvement and now continued involvement in public education. The passing of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 reauthorized ESEA and was the largest national education reform since the original act was passed in 1965. No Child Left Behind focused on national funding, standards, mandates, and accountability (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003). NCLB rose from complaints about the vast amount of money poured into education each year without yielding desired results. NCLB strove for 'accountability' in students' education ("Background & Analysis", 2014; "NCLB Overview", 2002). The original purpose of NCLB was to increase accountability of schools, provide increased choice to parents and students, and push for improved reading ability. States created accountability through annual testing that matched state developed standards, and schools and districts that would be subject to different rewards and consequences depending on whether they showed improvement or not ("Background & Analysis", 2014; "NCLB Overview", 2002).

In the subsequent years following the implementation of NCLB, many people critiqued and criticized the policy. Each state designed their own set of standards, and the level of rigor varied greatly between each state's standards making them incomparable. This left the United States unable to compare the nation's education system to other countries (CGCS Video Maker, 2013). Students left the 12th grade unprepared for college or the work force (CGCS Video Maker,

2013). After the backlash and critique that followed NCLB, emerged the development of the Common Core State Standards. This inconsistency of states' standards and students' lack of preparedness for life after high school drove the creation, adaptation, and implementation of CCSS ("About the Standards" CCSS, 2015; Gutierrez, 2014). The Council of Chief State School Officers (CCSSO) and National Governors Association Center for Best Practices (NGA Center) created the standards to set clear goals for grades Kindergarten – 12th grade (K-12), so students graduate high school ready for college and/or a career and are prepared to compete in an international world ("About the Standards" CCSS, 2015).

With changing education policies, students with disabilities have faced additional policy changes since the 1970s. Ginsburg and Rapp (2013b) outline the different laws and acts that impact students with learning disabilities. Some of the major policies include: the Children with Specific Learning Disabilities Act of 1970, the Education for all Handicapped Children Act in 1975, the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990, and the re-passing and modifying of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act in 2004 (IDEA 2004) (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013b). Currently the nation, states, and school districts operate under IDEA 2004, which outlines fourteen different categories of students who qualify for special education services (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013b). These key changes in education and disability policies beg the question of what was going on in American society that caused such change? Examining this question from an anthropological perspective can provide insight into American society and the nuances of everyday life. The anthropology of education, disability, and the interaction between the two presents a unique chance to better understand American values, societal constructs, and key moments of social change. Amy Stambach (2004, as cited by McDermott & Raley, 2011, p. 37-39) eloquently explains the role of schools in

creating and perpetuating societal norms, values, and structures: “schools are not drivers of change in themselves, but generative institutions that reflect and, in connection with other productive domains, create possibilities for social reproduction and change.” Looking at moments of change in education policy and schools, lends insight to the social development and discourse, and understanding how these changes interact with disability provides a clear understanding of societal values through both reproduction and change.

Anthropology of Education: Social systems and American values

The United States education system and schools provide a wide variety of insight into American values, society, and cultural practices. A range of literature that addresses education in the United States includes the role of education in American society, culturally constructed ideas of success and failure, and the complexity of school relationships and interactions (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Erickson, 1987; Hamann, 2003; McDermott & Hall, 2007). Living in the United States and being influenced by its values, it is sometimes challenging to recognize the culturally derived ideals. Schools provide insight to those values because of their given role in and the production of society.

American culture highly values education, and citizens view schools as the means to prepare people to participate in society (Dudley-Marling, 2004). This preparation for participation focuses on teaching, transferring, and instilling the cultural means of being a productive member of society. Schools have a major role in the production and construction of success in American society. Success and failure are culturally constructed concepts that have real life implications. American schools place a large value on individualism and individual success. Success in school corresponds to whether or not the student learns the information deemed important (Erickson, 1987). This learning or not learning connects to the individual, and

success and failure is therefore attributed to the student (Dudley-Marling, 2004). American society values individualism as an important attribute (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; Dudley-Marling, 2004) and the education system demonstrates and cultivates this characteristic. To maintain the integrity of the education system, individuals must fail so the institution or system does not (Dudley-Marling, 2004). Not learning the information taught in schools is tied to personal failure not the failure of the institution.

Erickson (1987) explores how humans are natural learners and that people consistently learn. Following this belief, failure in school is not the absence of learning but rather a lack of learning what is determined important. The school's ability to decide if a student is successful or a failure is based on if a student learns the predetermined information. The personal failure that accompanies the inability to learn the designated material has grave implications, because success in school ties to success later in life (Hamann, 2003). Denying or hindering a child's education equates with reducing the individual's potential for later success (Hamann, 2003). The education system and the reliance on standardized tests reproduce this model of individual success through creating competition (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; McDermott & Hall, 2007). In the past three decades cultural ideals shifted with an increased focus on large corporations, and the free market. Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, and Murillo (2002) explore the marketization of education.

Public schools reflect this historical shift of the 1980s and the changing economic and political values it introduced (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002). To solidify cultural shifts in society schooling systems must change (Erickson, 1987). Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, and Murillo (2002) exemplify this by exploring how the cultural changes shifted schools' purpose to be in the service of the economy as they adopted a business model. The shift

to a business model is evident through policies and increased standardized tests that promote competition between individuals. Schools and education policies focused on treating students and their families as consumers by providing perceptions of "choice" for public schools (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002, p. 6). The business and economic ideals are also evident within the schools themselves through the "commodification" of students' minds and social lives (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002, p. 7; McDermott & Hall, 2007, p. 10). The increase in standardized testing demonstrates the business model of education through the "commodification" of individuals (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002, p. 7; McDermott & Hall, 2007, p. 10). The commodification, business attitude, and individualism found in the school system all perpetuate and result from the cultural values of individualism and personal success.

Education is able to alter social and power distributions within the larger society (Erickson, 1987). Schools utilize this idea to obtain and maintain different power relations. Erickson (1987) analyzes the power relations in a given school. He explores how what is taught, enforced, and left alone in schools has consequences of success and failure beyond the classroom. People who have authority and assert dominance can normalize their corresponding values (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002). The underlying motivations and beliefs of those in power and the corresponding policies reflect this normalizing of values. Education policy is consistently changing and reflecting current ideals in society (Koyama, 2011).

Like other education policies NCLB reflects the cultural values and the beliefs of those in power at the time of its implementation. A major cultural value reflected in NCLB is the importance of science and research (Hamann, 2003; McDermott & Hall, 2007). Standardization,

ideas of best practice, and evidence-based policy demonstrate this value. McDermott and Hall (2007, p. 12) argue that this "scientifically based" policy worsened the culture of education, and demonstrates the discrepancy between theory and practice. The language used in the No Child Left Behind policy document clearly demonstrates the importance of the term "scientifically based", using the phrase no less than one hundred times (Traub, 2002 as cited by Hamann, 2003, p. 441). The shift to a scientific lens of education policy and practice contributed to treating education like a medicine (Hamann, 2003), reflecting the cultural significance of the medical model. Following the implementation of NCLB and the increase in standardized tests, the number of intervention programs grew (Koyama, 2011). The pathologizing of the individual within the education system became even clearer with the administering of standardized tests and prescribing different interventions. A main effect of this education model was the recording of those who were being left behind, creating a high stress and high stakes test taking environment (McDermott & Hall, 2007).

Science played a large role in forming NCLB and the corresponding changes in education. Drawing upon ideas of "scientifically based research" (McDermott & Hall, 2007, p. 12) and "best practice" (Hamann, 2003, p. 441) completely disregards the variety of local contexts and dynamics. Research is often based on generalizations of what works for the few and is prescribed as a solution for the many. This methodology is problematic because much of the research systematically excludes certain types of students (Hamann, 2003). By removing the diverse human component within a school, the formation of over-arching theoretical concepts and scientific based education theories of "best practice" contributes to the discrepancy between policies and practice (Hamann, 2003, p. 441). Nader (as cited by Hamann, 2003, p. 442) explores the power equated with "big science" in America. Hamann (2002) further explains that when this

type of science is implemented in policy, it has the social means of silencing other types of knowledge. This connects to the idea that the people in power have the ability to normalize a value until it is "common sense" (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002, p. 6-7). NCLB normalized the belief in best practice and the importance of scientific research. Hamann (2003) exemplifies this by describing the National Reading Panel (2000, as cited by Hamann, 2003, p. 440). The National Reading Panel (2000, as cited by Hamann, 2003, p. 440) narrowly focused on research demonstrating the importance of phonics when learning to read, but failed to include the role of comprehension, meaning making, and critiquing a text. This discourse of education policy and the process of only focusing on scientific research exclude the value of craft or local knowledge (Hamann, 2003). Conversely, Lyon and his colleagues (2001) argue that policies drive research instead of research driving policy, creating a gap between the two. The policy driven research could result from what people in power view as important within society and the politics of knowledge that direct education discourse (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; McDermott & Hall, 2007).

NCLB also stressed national accountability, contributing to the value placed on standardized test and test scores (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; Koyama, 2011; McDermott & Hall, 2007). Test scores are meaningless without the human interpretation, cultural context, and assigned value. People act on these test scores and prescribe them a role within education by using them as a means of providing information about what students learned (Koyama, 2011). NCLB created a result based accountability through standardized tests (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; McDermott & Hall, 2007). Additionally, tests are a means of creating control and record keeping (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003). Standardized tests reflect the ideal of individualism through producing personal test scores and connect to

individual success or failure. This testing process can be detrimental to children, because it is used to sort, categorize, and compare students (McDermott & Hall, 2007).

NCLB reflects the neoliberal ideals of business and privatization that began to appear in education in the 1980s (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002). Standardized tests and accountability contributed to the idea of privatizing aspects of public education (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003; Koyama, 2011). National testing companies contributed to the growing private sector following NCLB (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003). When schools failed to meet the established standards, they had to offer tutors and intervention programs to help students improve, and the private sector took on a large portion of the support services (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003). Koyama (2011, p. 20) explores the privatization of public education through the various intervention programs, "supplementary education services" (SES). NCLB is based on the idea that schools cannot close the achievement gap alone, but must rely on outside support services (Koyama, 2011). NCLB mandates that schools that fail to reach the "adequate yearly progress" marks for three years must offer SES programs from state approved organizations (Koyama, 2011, p. 20). Many of these organizations are private learning companies, leading to the integration of the private sector into public education (Koyama, 2011). NCLB reflects the values of the time in this case, individualism, neoliberal economics, and standardization. However, these policies rarely work as planned in theory, resulting in a discrepancy between policy and practice. Policy implementation involves many different actors, stakeholders, interests, and perspectives, contributing to a complexity of social interactions (Hamann, 2003; Koyama, 2011). With policy implementation, different powers emerge in the created space between policy and practice, and formal policies contribute to informal practices and realities, which in turn shape the policies (Koyama, 2011).

Current education reforms followed recent shifts in power, ideology, and globalization. The Common Core State Standards represent the most recent change in education policy and ideology, and many states are implementing the standards this academic year (2014-2015) or implemented them for the first time over the past few years (CCSS, 2015). The CCSSO and NGA Center created Common Core to have the same standards across states, so the US is comparable and competitive with countries around the world. Due to increased globalization, policymakers have placed increase importance on creating well-informed, competitive, global citizens who are able to compete in an international job market and economy. A major goal of CCSS is to prepare students to be college and career ready when they graduate from the 12th grade (CCSS, 2015). By outlining grade specific learning goals, the standards alter what is important and the type of thinking that students learn in each grade, and this shift corresponds to changes in tests and local curriculums (Gutierrez, 2014). States and districts are responsible for implementing the standards (Gutierrez, 2014). Due to the recent implementation researchers have had little time to study the impact of these standards from an anthropological perspective. Gutierrez (2014) examines the varying views of Common Core from the different perspectives of the stakeholders. She addresses the structural, political, human resource, and symbolic perspectives of the standards. Education reform involves many different parties and realities that are rarely implemented without conflict, complications, and setbacks. States and districts are responsible for the implementation of Common Core, which means that the implementation process varies from school to school, district to district, and state to state. People are the actors of the policy and structural changes (Gutierrez, 2014), which creates variability based on differing local realities.

Anthropology of Disability: Demonstrating values through difference and absence

The anthropology of disability is an established subfield within the discipline that covers a range of disabilities. Originally anthropology became involved in the field of disability studies through medical anthropology, and viewed disability through the medical lens (Reid-Cunningham, 2009). During the 1980s and 1990s the subfield of disability studies expanded into social-cultural anthropology and began focusing more on developing personal relations with disabled individuals to understand their lived experiences (Reid-Cunningham, 2009). Similar to the anthropological study of education, studying disability in social-cultural anthropology provides insight into American society, cultural values, and people's normalized views of the world.

Just as studying education demonstrates, studying disability in America stresses the significance of the individual (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; Dudley-Marling, 2004; Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013a). America was built on individual rights, personal liberties, autonomy, and independence (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Reid-Cunningham, 2009). This perspective of the world expands to crediting individuals with a given success or failure depending on personal effort and ability (Dudley-Marling, 2004). This directly translates to American cultural views of people who lack a given ability. With such intense focus on the individual, competition arises between people through relative comparisons (Dudley-Marling, 2004). This hyper competition and personal autonomy cultivates a culture that views individuals who lack a given ability or are different as the problem, instead of examining what is wrong with the institution (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006).

Singling out individuals because of a difference or an inability contributes to the formation of 'the other' (Reid-Cunningham, 2009). Cultures range in their reactions to difference

and depending on the response a difference can become a disability (Reid-Cunningham, 2009; McDermott & Varenne, 1995). This process of 'othering' individuals' plays an important role in creating disability identity. Americans view identity as part of a core personality that is intrinsic to the individual; however, in reality social interactions, relationships, and cultural context form one's identity (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Shuttleworth & Kasnitz, 2004). These socially constructed labels and identities have real life implications and shape people's perceptions and attitudes towards one another (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Shuttleworth & Kasnitz, 2004). People's perceptions of those who have a different identity or label contribute to the development of stigma.

Understanding stigma and its cultural significance is an important component of studying disability. The Merriam-Webster Dictionary (2014) defines stigma as a "set of negative and often unfair beliefs that a society or group of people have about something." Shuttleworth and Kasnitz (2004) elaborate on how stigma is culturally constructed by people's response to social information and its corresponding meaning. They explain that the more a particular trait, characteristic, or attribute is valued in a society and the more someone lacks or has a deficit in that given characteristic the more that individual is stigmatized (Shuttleworth & Kasnitz, 2004). Stigmas aversively impact the stigmatized or 'othered' individuals' self-esteem, emotional status, and views of themselves (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002; Shuttleworth & Kasnitz, 2004). Erickson (1987) explains stigma as the product of the negative perceptions of difference within a society. Difference can be viewed as deviance from a normative value or cultural characteristic. When placed in a social context where it becomes a "discrediting attribute" or "undesired" difference can lead to negative social responses, creating stigma (Ablon, 1981, 1984, 1988, 1992, 1995; Edgerton, 1967, 1993; Gleeson, 1997; Goffman, 1963;

Ingstad, 1995; Shuttleworth, 2004; Stiker, 1999, all as cited by Reid-Cunningham, 2009, p 105; Shuttleworth & Kasnitz, 2004, p. 146).

The themes of individualization, othering, and stigmatization are all evident in the medical model of disability. There are two primary models of disability, the medical and the social model (Carson, 2009). The medical model of disability largely reflects, integrates, and demonstrates American ideals, values, and perspectives. In receiving the diagnosis of learning disabled through the medical model, I am a beneficiary of many accommodations and services. I am not dismissing the value that the medical model has in diagnosing individuals with disabilities or the role it has in allowing individuals to access and claim their rights to services within the larger political and educational context. Rather, I wish to highlight the cultural discourse that contributed to the construction of this model of disability and the corresponding aversive side effects. Historically, this medical approach transforms an individual difference or impairment into a disability and can cause discrimination (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013a). This view of disability highlights binary oppositions and constructs abnormality as the opposite of normality and disability as the lack of ability (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013a; Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013b; Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002; Peters, 2000). This perspective focuses on establishing what is abnormal or wrong with a person, or what causes them to deviate from the norm, pathologizing the individual (Dudley-Marling, 2004). Pathologization drives the 'treating' of the disabled (Reid-Cunningham, 2009). 'Treating' disability reflects the importance of science, technology, and experts in American culture (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002). With the shift from medical to social anthropology, anthropologists' understanding of disability changed to encapsulate the role of culture in the social construction of disability.

The social or cultural model of disability studies the institution or society that creates the disability (Dudley-Marling, 2004; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Reid-Cunningham, 2009). This perspective of disability examines the aversive cultural implications for an individual with an impairment, difference, or deficit when interacting with society (Carson, 2009; Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013a; McDermott & Varenne, 1995). The shift from examining what is wrong with the individual to what is wrong with the institution (Dudley-Marling, 2004) provides an alternative view to disability and its construction. This paradigm shift is connected to activism, social change, rights movements and empowerment (Carson, 2009; Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013a; Shuttleworth & Kasnitz, 2004). Cultural anthropologists frequently explore this view of disability as a social construct.

McDermott and Varenne (1995) further dive into the different components of culture and disability and how society constructs disability. They explore three approaches to disability based on three different social constructions. Each model provides insight into how culture contrives interpersonal variability as disability. McDermott and Varenne (1995, p. 333) first describe the "deprivation approach", which is the idea that groups of people have a culture and another person lacks that culture completely; McDermott and Varenne (1995, p. 333) simplify it to "we have culture, and you don't." This perspective allows for individuals to participate in society in one prescribed manner and inhibits the 'disabled' individuals from participating. Consistent with American ideology of individualism this approach blames the individual for their personal failure (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Reid-Cunningham, 2009). The next perspective that McDermott and Varenne (1995, p. 334) explore is the "difference approach" to disability. This model of disability focuses on differences within and between individuals and variations in people's ability and the inability to perform culturally prescribed tasks, contributing to the

formation of disability. This follows the notion that there is a correct way to perform the given task, which is associated with mainstream society. The final perspective that McDermott and Varenne (1995, p. 336) address is "culture-as-disability." This approach completely shifts societal views of disability by exploring the notion that disability cannot exist without culture. Culture provides a context where individuals can lack a trait or deviate from the norm, and without the culturally prescribed context no one would be disabled (McDermott & Varenne, 1995).

Within anthropology researchers have explored the role of culture in the construction of disability. One highly referenced ethnographic study (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013a; McDermott & Varenne, 1995; Reid-Cunningham, 2009) is Nora Groce's (1952) book *Everyone Here Spoke Sign*. In her research Groce (1952) studied a community with a large deaf population in Martha's Vineyard. In the book Groce (1952) explores the role culture plays in constructing disability, because deafness used to not be considered a disability in Martha's Vineyard. Groce (1952) argues that deafness was not considered a disability because individuals were not separated from society based on that characteristic. Not treating deafness as an individual trait, but rather a physical characteristic of a group of people led to the culture changing and adopting instead of individuals making all the changes. This study demonstrates that depending on the surrounding culture a difference can either be enabled or disabled (McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Understanding the role that culture plays in creating disabilities is important, because disabilities are often accompanied by negative perceptions and attitudes. American society disables people based on a physical or psychological difference (McDermott & Varenne, 1995) and individuals and their families make meanings of these lived experiences (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002; Rapp & Ginsburg, 2001). These different approaches and interpretations of

disability can all be applied to the process of creating, labeling, and the lived experiences of people with learning disabilities.

Understanding learning disabilities: The cross section between education and disability

Explaining learning disabilities from a social cultural perspective builds upon the social cultural analysis of schools and disability. Learning disabilities fall at the intersection between disabilities and education in American society. To fully understand the cultural production and role that learning disabilities have in the wider society, it is important to understand how it is connected to both the anthropological study of education and disability. The American education system culturally fabricated disability through a discourse of 'othering', stigmatizing, highlighting differences, and taking a technical, scientific, medical approach to both education and disability. Similar to the study of other disabilities, understanding learning disabilities focuses on what is wrong with the individual instead of examining what is wrong with schools (Dudley-Marling, 2004; McDermott, Goldman & Varenne, 2006; McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Throughout educational discourse schools rely on the medical model of disability, which impacts children with learning disabilities (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Lyon et al., 2001).

Implementing policies that frame learning disabilities within an individualized, medical approach impacts children, their daily lives, and their futures. This model promotes the understanding of learning disabilities as "unexpected underachievement" (Lyon et al., 2001, p. 261). To better understand how learning disabilities are viewed in society McDermott and Varenne's (1995) approaches to disability can be applied to learning disabilities. Viewing learning disabilities through a deprivation model is the idea that some students cannot perform as quickly or as well as others. The "difference approach" to learning disabilities is explained through the arbitrary tasks at school that are deemed important and highlight some individual's

weakness, but the model addresses how students can have strengths in different areas (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 334). This model demonstrates that individuals with learning disabilities learn differently than the mainstream. The idea that some students learn differently than the 'normal' way (McDermott & Varenne, 1995) contributes to the idea of special education as a separate culture of learning. This reinforces the institutional idea that something is intrinsically different or wrong with these students (Dudley-Marling, 2004). Looking at learning disabilities through the culture as a disability model makes the school the disability and learning disabilities the product of schools. This rests on the notion that without the cultural construct of ability --being good at something-- there could be no concept of disability, and thus "without schools" there could be "no learning disabilities" (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 338). The definition of disability relies on the existence of the binary opposite, ability. The "culture-as-disability" model (McDermott & Varenne, 1995, p. 336) demonstrates that schools and classrooms are arranged in a way that learning disability is a relevant and meaningful term (McDermott, Goldman, & Varenne, 2006). One ethnographic study that examined adults who have learning disabilities described one individual who noted how his perception of his disability had improved after leaving school and he has even "gotten over it" (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002, p. 11). This attests to McDermott and Varenne's (1995, p. 338) idea that "without schools" there can be "no learning disabilities". Schools, where specific skills are taught in a particular manner, are necessary for identifying students who learn differently than the prescribed model. The United States education system primarily utilizes the difference and deprivation approach to understanding, assessing, and treating learning disabilities (McDermott & Varenne, 1995).

Understanding learning disabilities through this lens is of great political significance. Prior to the passing of the Education for All Handicapped Children Act in 1975, students with learning disabilities were systematically left out of the American public education system. In this time before the act passed:

> "The educational needs of millions of children with disabilities were not being fully met because (A) the children did not receive appropriate educational services; (B) the children were excluded entirely from the public school system and from being educated with their peers; (C) undiagnosed disabilities prevented the children from having a successful educational experience; or (D) a lack of adequate resources within the public school system forced families to find services outside the public school system" (Sec.601(c)(2), IDEA 2004).

With the passing of the Education for all Handicapped Children Act, the culture and policies switched from McDermott and Varenne's (1995, p. 333-334) "deprivation approach" to a "difference approach" to disability. In this difference model of disability individual students are included in education but separated because of a difference. This separation of students with learning disabilities is due to the fact that in order to have a successful institution those individuals who do not fit the prescribed model must fail (Dudley-Marling, 2004). The political implications of individual failure are much less than the implications that would follow the attributing failure to the American school system. This has contributed to the current model of special education. To prevent the schools from failing, students who are unable to learn in a 'normal' or general education environment are physically removed from mainstream education and placed in separate classes known as special education classrooms. IDEA 2004 defines who is included in special education and what services are provided to children with disabilities. The policy demonstrates the difference model of disability by separating students because of a difference and placing them into special education classes, contributing to the cultural construction of disability today. This difference model of disability and separating students who

are labeled as learning disabled corresponds to the medical model and the internalization of disability.

Components of the definition of learning disabilities correspond to the individualized medical model of disability. The explanation given by Kirk (1962 as cited by Lyon et al., 2001, p. 261) removes blame of academic failure from schools, and the *Diagnostic and Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders, Fifth Edition* (DSM5) (Weis, 2013) attributes the problem as internal to the individual student.[5] This perspective impacts how learning disabilities are stigmatized and 'treated' in schools. The method of diagnosing learning disabilities takes a medical approach. This psychological view and means of identifying individuals in and of itself produces and re-confirms the medical model of learning disabilities. This process of diagnosing, separating, and treating, pathologizes the individual (Dudley-Marling, 2004). It creates the idea that something is wrong with the student because they cannot learn the information in the mainstream fashion while ignoring the larger cultural, social, and political context (Dudley-Marling, 2004; McDermott & Varenne, 1995). Trying to find something wrong with an individual internalizes a given disability and contributes to the associated stigma (McDermott & Hall, 2007). Drawing upon Shuttleworth and Kasnitz's (2004) idea that the more something is valued in society and the more someone lacks or has a deficit in that area increases the amount of stigma, directly applies to learning disabilities. American society values reading, writing, and arithmetic. These skills are so valued, that institutions, known as schools are dedicated to teaching these skills. Lacking the ability, or struggling to learn or perform these culturally

[5] In the switch from DSM IV to DSM 5 there has been a shift in diagnostic criterion from a standard deviation of 1.5 between academic achievement score and intelligence quotient (IQ). In the DSM 5 specific learning disorders (learning disabilities) are now diagnosed through Response to Intervention (Weis, 2013). However, multiple staff members, in the school district in California that I am studying, informed me that California public schools are abled to use either criterion to diagnose learning disabilities.

important tasks contributes directly to the stigmatizing, diagnosing, labeling, and disabling of those who struggle in these areas.

This stigmatizing and disabling connects to notions of success and failure. The intrinsic model of success and failure based on individual effort and ability applies directly to schools and learning disabilities (Dudley-Marling, 2004). When students do not perform or learn at school, the individual fails instead of the school. The education system created special education as a response to schools not being prepared to teach to all types of students (Lyon et al., 2001). This separation of students and labeling them as different or 'special' acts as a social function and transfers the blame or failure from the school to the individual (Dudley-Marling, 2004; Lyon et al., 2001). Instead of changing the education method or system, schools remove the students who do not learn in a mainstream fashion (Lyon et al., 2001). This supports McDermott and Varenne's (1995, p. 333-334) "difference approach" and "deprivation approach" to disability and makes learning disability a relevant term in schools (McDermott, Goldman & Varenne, 2006).

This separation of students who the school is unprepared to teach contributes to the failure of the individual while protecting the legitimacy of the schooling institution (Dudley-Marling, 2004). This contributed to specific learning disabilities constituting the larger proportion of special education (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014; Shifrer, 2013). A problem with this method and the medical model of diagnosing and 'treating' learning disabilities is that most students are not diagnosed until age nine when they show clear signs of struggling in school, creating a "wait to fail model" (Lyon et al., 2001, p. 269). This has devastating implications for individuals in American society because of the culturally prescribed importance of success in school impacting success later in life (Erickson, 1987; Hamann, 2003; McDermott & Varenne, 1995).

Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, and Herman (2002) explore what it means to be successful in an ethnographic study looking at adults with learning disabilities. For a learning disabled individual to be successful in American society they stress the importance of going through the "stages of acceptance of a learning disabilities" which are: "awareness of difference, labeling event, understanding/negotiating label, compartmentalization, and transformation" (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002, p. 3). Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, and Herman (2002) found that personal awareness and self-acceptance were important for successful individuals with learning disabilities. The definition they used for success was evidence of the American values and they operationalized success based upon "employment, educational, familial, social, and psychological adjustment criteria" (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002, p. 5). This study provides insight into the experiences of individuals who struggled in school, faced stigmatization, and experienced aversive social emotional impacts (Higgins, Raskind, Goldberg, & Herman, 2002).

Due to the separation, labeling, and stigmatization, some researchers have studied different forms of traditional programs and additional support beyond tutoring for students with learning disabilities. Faye Ginsburg and Rayna Rapp (2013b) are both well-known anthropologists and also parents of students with learning disabilities. In their research they explore different transition programs that prepare students for a successful future instead of "transitioning to nowhere" (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013b, p. 189). Ginsburg and Rapp (2013b) explore success in American society and the idea that college is necessary to be accomplished (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013b). America's focus on college is important because a lower percentage of students with specific learning disabilities attend and complete college than the general population (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Ginsburg and Rapp (2013b) explore what happens

when students are not on a culturally traditional trajectory and study a transition program that works on developing skills to function in the real world, as well as developing empowerment and independence. In another case they conduct an ethnographic study looking at a local chapter of the mentoring program 'Eye-to-Eye.' This program focuses on college and high school students with learning disabilities mentoring grade school students with learning disabilities. The program focuses on cultivating communities of LD/ADHD individuals, advocacy, de-stigmatizing learning disabilities, building self-confidence, and transitioning away from the medical model of disability (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013b).

Programs like this help reshape the model of disability and contribute to the education systems possible future transition from a medical to social model of disability. Learning disabilities within the culturally contrived school environments come into contact with disability and special education policy. Students with learning disabilities encounter a number of different education and disability policies that have changed and shaped their experiences. A major focus in schools has been compliance with federal laws and mandates instead of working on positive outcomes for students impacted by the policies (Lyon et al., 2001). Lyon and his colleagues (2001, p. 269) called for a shift from a "wait to fail model" of identification to a prevention model with early intervention. A recent shift in the DSM for diagnosing specific learning disabilities through Response to Intervention (Weis, 2013) helps create this shift, however it does not mandate or require early intervention programs. A fear with this new diagnosis method is that it will turn into a "watch them fail model" (Reynolds & Shaywitz, 2009 as cited by Weis, 2013, p. 213).

Other policy changes, such as the ADA, helped secure and establish rights for individuals with disabilities in and out of the education system (Rapp & Ginsburg, 2001). However, learning

disabilities often still fall under the medical gaze in the United States (Ginsburg & Rapp, 2013a). Ginsburg and Rapp (2013a) argue that shifting to a social model of disability is not enough, but rather more needs to be accomplished in the way of advocacy. Merely shifting to a social-cultural understanding of disability does not prompt change but may rather encourage complacency, knowing that the system in place is a cultural construction. *Advocacy* is critical in making the cultural change from a medical to social understanding of disability, obtaining equality opportunity not only in legal framework, but also in society. The cultural expectations and norms themselves must be altered, thus creating new ways of understanding and intervening in disability in both schools and the American culture at large.

Examining the interaction of a new education policy, Common Core, and its interaction with special education and learning disabilities provides insight to how advocacy and social change can occur. The limited previous research on Common Core and the focus on local implementation (Gutierrez, 2014) creates a space for my ethnographic based research to examine perceptions of the implementation process and impact on learning disabilities as it is implemented this school year in California. Taking an anthropological and specifically ethnographic approach allows me to examine the changes on a localized level by only looking at three schools within one district. The past research in the anthropology of disability and education provides insight into education and disability policies. This allows for a better understanding of how change in education impacts perceptions and expectations of learning disabilities.

The research on education and learning disabilities provides valuable insight into American values of success, individualism, and cultural shifts. With the current policy change the education system is undergoing a revamping, providing a unique opportunity to reexamine

the changing American values and how this is shaping, perpetuating and redefining perceptions of disabilities and learning disabilities. By studying the impact of Common Core on special education I can try to answer questions such as: What social and historical changes do the production and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards index? How are the Common Core State Standards reconfiguring or reinforcing the current cultural construction of disability, particularly as it relates to notions of success and failure? And what are the implications for special education teachers and the construction of learning disabilities with the education changes that accompany Common Core?

Methods

To answer these questions I employed the ethnographic methods of participant observation, semi-structured and informal interviews, and focus groups in Rolling Golden Hills School District, a local school district in Northern California. Over the course of a semester I spent over 30 hours across five days immersed in three schools in the school district. Growing up in Northern California, I spent a great deal of time in the county and met members of the district prior to my research. These previous connections allowed me to quickly establish rapport and relationships with the district's different staff members and administrators. A major limitation I faced was the amount of time I spent in the district, but these relationships and connections helped the quality of my research with my given time restraints. To better understand the impact of policy change and practice I divided my time between the district's two middle schools and one high school. I decided to first focus on the two middle schools to examine the impact of Common Core on special education and the implementation process. I then expanded my research to the high school to better understand how Common Core impacts expectations and notions of future success for students in special education. This qualitative research provides a

glimpse into the lives of teachers, faculty, and administrators who are impacted by Common Core policy changes and its ramifications on the special education department. Although my research looks at educator's experience of implementing Common Core and its impact on special education within only one district, the cultural shifts experienced here happen across schools, districts, and states in America.

My visits to the district led to both formal and informal conversations about the complex social realities and implications that Common Core has on educators' lives and how it impacts students with learning disabilities. Throughout the course of my research I conducted a total of 19 interviews (a combination of formal semi-structured interviews and informal interviews) with a total of 14 different staff members in the district (See Appendix A for semi-structured interview guide). Of these interviews 11 were formal, five of which were recorded. The remaining eight interviews developed from conversations that happened throughout my participant observations. The educators I spoke with included a mix of administrators, staff members, and general and special education teachers.[6] Throughout my fieldwork, I spoke with both male and female staff members. Additionally, I led two focus groups, one with four special education teachers and the other with five general education teachers. In both focus groups teachers provided insight into their experiences with Common Core. After completing my Institutional Review Board (IRB) Social and Behavioral Research training, I opted against working with students because of the risks associated working with a 'vulnerable' population, especially because disability can be a very sensitive topic. I also decided to omit studying the experiences of students and parents, because I wanted to narrow my research to the perceptions and experiences of staff members. This allowed me to focus on the lives of educators who are

[6] Throughout this paper, I will also refer to special education classes and teachers as RSP (Resource Specialist Program) or resource classes and teachers

most directly working with the changes accompanying Common Core. In addition to interviews, my participant observation provided me invaluable insight into the lives of staff members in the Rolling Golden Hills School District. For my participant observation I attended two professional development days, sat in on classrooms, and spoke to teachers between classes and during their breaks, all of which helped shape my questions and understanding of the effects of implementing Common Core on special education. Examining the impact of policy change on the social realities and everyday lives of a school district from an ethnographic lens provides unparalleled insights into the lives of individuals and the ongoing social construction of disability.

To better organize and understand the experiences of the district's staff members I kept a binder (see Appendix B) comprised of all my jottings, field-notes, interviews, conversations, and a research log (see Appendix C). Following my fieldwork I sifted through my research binder, coded my findings, and categorized my notes into different themes and concepts. Through this interactive process I analyzed and interpreted my findings, and reflected on the insight they provided into the larger cultural values. Through my research three major themes continued to appear and reappear: success, standardized testing, and education as a science and the role of technology in the classroom. Each of these themes connects to my findings about the cultural shifts that contributed to and are reproduced under the Common Core State Standards, and all directly impact students in special education.

My experience of being labeled as dyslexic allowed me to connect and establish rapport with many of the special education teachers and staff members. Throughout my observations and conversations with teachers, administrators, and faculty I consistently found myself recalling different experiences I had as a young girl going through school being diagnosed as dyslexic. Stepping into and spending time within three schools in one district provided me insight into

how the implementation of Common Core is impacting the education systems, how teachers work with students with learning disabilities, and how the policy reflects changes in cultural values and ideals. To best share my findings I employed the ethnographic writing technique of integrating my field notes and excerpts from interviews into my analysis to provide a better glimpse into the lives of educators in the Rolling Golden Hills School District.

Ethnography

Transitioning to Common Core: The implementation process in the Rolling Golden Hills District

Driving down the main road into town my heart raced. Rolling hills circle the town, protecting it from the outside world, which creates a unique bubble. The hills were golden brown and all dried out from the ongoing drought that California has been experiencing. It is a relatively small town with just over 10,000 residents ("State & County Quick Facts", 2015) that centers around a city hall and the town square. Within the town and the district there are only two public middle schools and one public high school. This creates a unique sense of concurrency and community within and between the schools. The high school and one of the middle schools are located on a long road into the center of town, while the other middle school is located across town on the other main road. Driving up for my first day of participant observation I was not really sure what to expect. I was curious to meet the different administrators and staff members and hear their thoughts on Common Core and the new changes that are impacting California public schools this year.

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California adopted the Common Core State Standards in 2010, but this 2014/2015 school year was the first official year of their implementation ("Standards in your State" CCSS, 2014). Despite the official switch to the new standards this past fall the district began taking steps for

the transition about three years ago.[7] I found that this proactive approach helped the transition to Common Core, and the implementation has been well received by many administrators, teachers, and staff members within the district. When speaking with Mary[8], an administrator, she explained that, "the district has done a really good job with Common Core."[9] The district's collective reaction to Common Core has been positive and this public perception is evident in a number of different articles in the local newspaper. Several articles express the district's reaction to Common Core and described the implementation process.

> "In the Rolling Golden Hills District, Common Core curriculum and instruction strategies were refined with the intense involvement of area teachers and administrators, and enthusiasm for the program is running high, although not without some teacher trepidation about being adequately prepared to teach it by next year" (Local paper[10], April 2014).

In an article welcoming families to the new school year the paper described how "our educators are leaders across the state in successfully implementing Common Core State Standards in all classrooms and subject areas" (Local Paper, Aug 2014). This public welcome of Common Core directly impacted the community and teachers' perception of the new standards that is not mimicked across the country. Each district is responsible for the implementation process and the district's positive reaction to Common Core directly relates to the overall smooth transition and implementation of the standards.

The support and enthusiasm for the Common Core State Standards was not limited to the local paper, but teachers and staff members reiterated their excitement about the changes. Throughout my fieldwork I heard a number of positive remarks regarding the new standards and

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[7] Interview with "Mary"
[8] To insure the confidentiality of the participants all of the district's staff members' names within the school district and town are pseudonyms
[9] Interview with "Mary"
[10] I have omitted the formal citations for articles from the local paper to protect the confidentiality and anonymity of the staff members in the district

the implementation process. One general education teacher, Stella, explained how she believes that Common Core is more in line with the nature of teaching than past education models. She expressed how the implementation within the district has been very good, which has made a huge difference in how the policy works and its effectiveness.[11] Rachel, a special education teacher, explained how the changes that have accompanied Common Core are the first positive changes in education that she had seen in a long time.[12] Charlotte, another general education teacher, explained that she liked Common Core because she felt it reflects how she has been teaching for a long time.[13] These positive perceptions expanded across both middle schools and the high school as well as across special and general education. Part of this acceptance of Common Core could stem from the smooth implementation process.

When speaking with Mary about the implementation of CCSS she explained what they have done over the past few years to create an easier transition for the district:

> "So we started working with Isabella and we identified some teacher leads who we wanted to work with her three years ago and then last year the effort was augmented even more so. We have teacher leads who miss a day of class this year I think its six days a year, last year it might have been more…and then there is also an after school meeting where…they go and meet and they get information about what Smarter Balanced[14] is all about and the new standards and what the Smarter Balanced exams might look like, strategies that are appropriate, and then they do lesson planning. They [the Common Core Leads] actually work together to plan our professional development days that we have for the district and they're strategically planted in each department."[15]

As evident from Mary's description the Common Core Leads play an important role in the implementation process. When speaking with Sabrina, a middle school Common Core Lead, she further elaborated what her exact role was in the implementation process. A Common Core Lead

[11] Focus group
[12] Interview with "Rachel"
[13] Interview with "Charlotte"
[14] Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC), the new standardized test
[15] Interview with "Mary"

is a teacher who attends subject specific, district wide meetings about the implementation of Common Core. At these meetings the leads will share and discuss strategies, lesson plans, and their experiences with Common Core. Then the leads will return to their school and share what they learned with other teachers in their department.[16] Relying on teachers to implement Common Core is a bottom-up approach and provides teachers a chance to have an important role in the implementation process and helps make for a smoother transition.

Despite the immense effort by the district, I found that the transition to Common Core has not been entirely smooth and like any change is not without its challenges. With change some people are going to be hesitant or slow to adjust, and a change in education policy is no exception. Several teachers explained how there have been numerous changes in education policy over the past 30 years and every five to ten years there seems to be a new policy. This proposed a challenge for some of the older teachers who experienced this 'pendulum within education.' One teacher, who is close to retiring, expressed how she just does what she wants and what she thinks is best at this point, "I don't give a damn because I am not going to change everything for just a few years."[17] Another teacher reaffirmed this exact same point when she expressed how she does not "always see the point of changing everything because I want to retire soon."[18] This pushback and lack of compliance with the changes in Common Core presented a challenge for the Common Core Leads. Sabrina explained how "some teachers are not as compliant or into implementing the standards into their classes, and as an individual there is really nothing I can do about that."[19]

[16] Interview with "Sabrina"
[17] Focus group
[18] Focus group
[19] Interview with "Sabrina"

As I learned more about teachers' worries and critiques about Common Core and its implementation, I discovered how these changes related to special education teachers. I was shocked to learn that there are no special education teachers who are Common Core Leads in the middle schools or the high school. I wondered how this was possible and how it impacted the implementation of Common Core in special education classes. The lack of an RSP (Resource Specialist Program)[20] Common Core Lead could account for the 'lack of direction' that special education teachers felt and administrators expressed regarding the implementation of Common Core. Still perplexed by this I sought to further understand why there was not a special education Common Core Lead. An administrator, Mary, provided me her thoughts on the topic:

> "We don't have a literacy lead or a math lead who is from the special education department. I think if we did have a special education teacher or teachers who were in those groups… it could benefit them… I think that going back to if our special education teachers were participating with the lead groups, [I think] that they would have more information about the standards and strategies and what it might look like, then they have had time to [by just] really exploring on their own. As you know special education teachers have so much to do, and loads of paper work and meetings with students and progress reporting for grades and goals and what not. So definitely they don't have a lot of extra time on their hands to explore a lot of those things on their own. I should say that there *are* special education teachers who had the opportunity… to participate in those groups. But they just *didn't* have any takers I guess."[21]

Her explanation speaks to the different time and workload challenges that special education teachers face, which could limit the likelihood that they will substantially engage in the implementation process of new reforms. Amanda, a special education teacher, describes how "Common Core works better for some subjects than others."[22] Within special education there have been a number of different challenges and benefits that teachers have found with implementing Common Core into their classes. With its implementation, Common Core has

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[20] Throughout this paper, I will also refer to special education classes and teachers as RSP (Resource Specialist Program) or resource classes and teachers

[21] Interview with "Mary"

[22] Interview with "Amanda"

started to have and will continue to have a profound impact on learning disabilities and the culture of disabilities within schools and American society.

Success

Defining Success (noun) \sək-ˈses\: What success means in education today

I was so nervous walking into the district office that I did not remember what Jenny, an administrator, looked like, and I was supposed to meet her so she could instruct me where to go. After about ten minutes of looking lost and chatting with some people in the human resources office, I finally found Jenny pushing chairs into a big conference room. The room looked like a mini mess hall, with three long tables lined up with teachers sitting on both sides. A small table was pushed against the wall and filled with various pastries, muffins, fruit, and coffee. At the front of the room there was both the American and the California state flags on either side of a large projector screen with a power point on it.

I was introduced to Christina; she explained that she is a RSP teacher at one of the middle schools. She was welcoming and I pulled up a chair. Exhausted from the long drive into town, I grabbed a much-needed cup of coffee. After small talk and explaining that I was actually not a teacher but a college student, the presentation began. As the day started we all introduced ourselves, everyone gave a brief introduction including their name, what school they work at, their position, and how long they had been teaching or in the district for. I was fascinated by the full range of ages and experience that people had. The newer teachers were wide eyed and dressed in heels and slacks where some of the older teachers were dressed in jeans and a t-shirt. From Christina's conversation with her friends it was clear that she could not believe it was already time for school, and she even admitted she thought the meeting was the following Monday.

After introductions Holly, an administrator, explained the first activity as she pointed out the large sheets of paper spaced around the room. Holly elaborated how we would be writing down aspects of success for that academic year. She explained how the sentence began with "I will feel successful at the end of the year when…" and that each sentence was followed by what was written on the sheets of paper around the room. Each paper said something different: "I…" "My students…" "My coworkers…" "My administrators…" "The district office…" She broke us up into five groups and gave each group a marker and instructed us to complete the sentences on each sheet of paper.[23]

As this first activity unfolded groups of teachers and faculty walked around discussing what would make them feel successful. I found that the teachers were engaged and enthusiastic about this activity, all of them actively contributing answers. The responses differed for each sheet of paper. As I walked around the room I took note of what the teachers wrote down on the different pieces of paper. Some of the responses included: "I will feel successful when my administrators… support me, visit my class, and attend IEPs."[24] "I will feel successful when I… am supported and understood."[25] "I will feel successful when the District Office… listens and helps solve problems."[26]

However, of all the sheets of paper I was most interested in the one where teachers listed "I will feel successful when my students…" What caught my interest about this understanding of success was its connection to their expectations of the students in special education. I was interested by what the teachers had written down on this paper, which included "when my

[23] Field notes
[24] Field notes
[25] Field notes
[26] Field notes

students…feel successful, are engaged, improve at school, and when… expectations are high."[27] This sheet of paper interested me for a number of different reasons, the first being it shed light into expectations and goals for students with learning disabilities and how both of these are directly connected to perceptions of success.

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Through this activity a clear link developed between expectations, goals, and support when thinking of different things that they wanted to happen so they would feel successful at the end of this academic year. I found that the goals and expectations were not just for themselves, but also for their students, administrators, and the district office, highlighting the complex interactions between people in order for one person to feel successful. After the professional development day and this activity in particular, the importance of success within the education system resonated with me. How could there be so many different definitions of success? Why was success different for different groups of people? And how was success defined for special education students within public schools?

I felt like this activity opened a can of worms and I was determined to understand these different and evolving meanings. Success is a term frequently used in schools and in day-to-day life, but I realized I could not define what it means. Unsure of how to proceed I decided to Google success and found a definition on *Dictonary.com* (n.d.), which defines success as "1. The favorable or prosperous termination of attempts or endeavors; the accomplishment of one's goals. 2. the attainment of wealth, position, honors, or the like." However, I do not think this definition accurately encompassed the cultural importance and value that the term success carries, and the meaning of success has such individual variation that simplifying it to a few words seems unfair.

[27] Field notes

Weighted in the cultural nuances and American ideology of valuing wealth and status it does not correspond to the immediate world of education.

As I sought to understand what success actually means within the education system I learned that there are many different components. One definition of success that I heard during an interview with Eli, a staff member, really stood out to me. When speaking with Eli about how special education students' transition into more general education classes in high school, he frequently used the term 'success', and I asked if he could elaborate what exactly he meant by it. Within the school district and in the classroom it appears that the term success is directly correlated with the future of an individual and what he or she planned to do after high school. Eli explained what he viewed to be academic and general success.

> "So I guess for success academically its more focused on class and afterwards its more do you have at least a focus or a plan or something that you're interested in that you are kind of planning to do down the road…. you know a lot of these kids do know they can be good at certain things and can be frustrated during a lot of the academic stuff but they know that they are very good at other things…. So for me that's more success. I think when we are looking at the long term, this is something that you could really be successful at. Maybe school is frustrating and you are not doing really well at that and you know you are not happy here, but you [the students] do have some good things to offer and some good skills and some strong interests and you [the students] can focus on that."[28]

The idea that people are expected to have a set of skills that they can offer society is an interesting concept. This belief that individuals should have something they are good at sheds light on the American ideology of individualism in the role of personal achievement. School seems to play a vital role in finding and developing one's individual skills. When the traditional methods of finding and developing skills are challenging, alternative avenues to success are created. Dividing success into academic and non-academic contributes to a discourse where students can be successful after high school. This distinction provides an opportunity for students

[28] Interview with "Eli"

who struggle in school to discover and develop a set of skills that will allow them to be successful and participate in American society. A special education teacher, Natalie, provided an example that confirmed this idea of alternative paths to success, when she spoke about one of her students. She explained how one of her students was highly talented at landscaping and designed the school garden. Natalie continued that although he might not attend a four-year college, she hoped that he would "find his niche" in the landscaping business and end up being successful.[29]

This idea of finding a niche through a non-traditional route speaks to Eli's idea that all students have a strong set of skills and interests that they can focus on.[30] Increased acknowledgment of students finding different areas outside of school to be successful in raises the importance of education in shaping societies' ideas of success. These ideas of success are internalized within the policies themselves, contributing to the reproduction of the same value and definition of success relating to plans after high school. Similar to how NCLB reflected the societal values of privatization and science (Bloomfield & Cooper, 2003), I found that Common Core reflects the current cultural ideal of being successful in the future.

"Preparing America's Students for Success"[31]: How success is changing, understood, and promoted under Common Core and its relation to student's future

Through my research I discovered that ideas of success are changing and Common Core reflects the evolving meaning of success. Common Core shifts how academic success is understood and measured, which is reflective of the cultural changes. No longer will simple memorization or regurgitating information be enough. In the past, academic success has been defined as "a teacher talks, students listen and read, their success measured by what they've absorbed" (Noguchi, 2013, Nov 9 – San Jose Mercury News). This demonstrates how success

[29] Interview with "Natalie"
[30] Interview with "Eli"
[31] (CCSS, 2015)

was viewed and understood under past policies such as NCLB, where the term 'success' appears no less than 60 times in the policy (NCLB, 2001). This older understanding of success contributed to some of the critique of NCLB and the idea of having to teach to the test. With the recent shift to Common Core there is continued value placed on success in American Society, but the definition and meaning of success appears to have shifted. The idea of success is vital in the adoption and implementation of the Common Core State Standards, evident from the home webpage stating: "Preparing America's Students for Success" (CCSS, 2015). This value is clearly expressed in the standards and alludes to the idea that students were not successful under past policies. With this change increased value is placed on the future. Under the explanation of why the Common Core State Standards are important, it explains:

> "High standards that are consistent across states provide teachers, parents, and students with a set of clear expectations to ensure that all students have the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life upon graduation from high school, regardless of where they live. These standards are aligned to the expectations of colleges, workforce training programs, and employers." ("FAQ" CCSS, 2015)

These concepts of success highlight the value of being successful later in life. This confirms the cultural beliefs I found in my fieldwork, that success is largely connected to plans following graduation.

Similar to the Common Core explanation of why the standards are important, the "About the Standards" section of the website reiterates that "the standards were created to ensure that all students graduate from high school with the skills and knowledge necessary to succeed in college, career, and life, regardless of where they live" ("About the Standards" CCSS, 2015). This exemplifies how ideas of success have transformed, and education policy has followed these changes while simultaneously producing the change in and of its self. It is no longer acceptable to simply memorize and recall information learned in the classroom, but rather a huge

focus is now placed on applicability of skills and knowledge learned to life outside of education. This is reflected in both the classroom and in the standards themselves.

The hope of the standards is that students "graduate high school prepared to succeed in entry-level careers, introductory academic college courses, and workforce training programs" ("About the Standards" CCSS, 2015). The goal of the standards reiterates the value of the future that I found when speaking with administrators and teachers. A number of different teachers, administrators, and staff brought up the future and what students planned to do following graduation from high school and how early they encourage students to begin to think about this. When sitting in a middle school classroom, I took note of the college flags that bordered the walls of the room, providing students with something to strive for and a future to work towards.[32] When speaking with Natalie, she told me how she talks with her students about what they want to do after high school graduation. She explained how she tries to incorporate the skills needed for them to meet their goals into the classroom.[33]

Beyond the integration of students' future plans into the classroom, the standards themselves demonstrate the shift in meaning of success from NCLB. In the NCLB 2001 policy document there is a large focus on Title I: "Improving the Academic Achievement of the disadvantaged" (NCLB, 2001). The change in focus from academic achievement to preparing students to be successful following graduation demonstrates the shift in societal values and ideologies. The transformation and development of education reform from assessment and accountability under NCLB to success and preparing students for college and/or careers verifies the increased value of success in relation to student's future. The core standards for CCSS ("About the Standards" CCSS, 2015) are:

[32] Field Notes
[33] Interview with "Natalie"

1. "Research- and evidence-based
2. Clear, understandable, and consistent
3. Aligned with college and career expectations
4. Based on rigorous content and application of knowledge through higher-order thinking skills
5. Built upon the strengths and lessons of current state standards
6. Informed by other top performing countries in order to prepare all students for success in our global economy and society"

These standards move beyond academic achievement and focus on critical "higher order thinking" abilities and prepare students to contribute to the ever growing global society. Globalization has impacted the definition of success. Schools now try to prepare students to be accomplished in an international world following high school instead of just within the United States. I found these national ideologies on a local level and the importance and evolving understanding of success is evident in the school district's mission statement: "Together, with the support of parents, teachers, and the community, students will graduate from the 'Rolling Golden Hills School District' prepared for success in college, career, and life." Their mission statement parallels the goals of Common Core, and highlights how ideas of success have become internalized and are manifested on the local level. This demonstrates how policies integrate into the education system and create and perpetuate new societal norms as addressed by Erickson (1987).

With the standards' increased level of rigor that accompanies the goal of preparing students to be successful in college or their careers, the media highlights the pushback that has occurred with the changes. The resistance stems from the fear that some students might not succeed on the tests or in the classroom because of the changes following CCSS. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan clearly expressed how this changing definition and standard of success is impacting parents and educators, explaining how parents realize that "all of a sudden — their child isn't as brilliant as they thought they were and their school isn't quite as good as they

thought they were, and that's pretty scary" (Arne Duncan as cited by Strauss, 2013, Nov 16 - Washington Post). Grant (2013, Dec 5 - Washington Post) explains how "the way students are assessed (or graded) has changed and those changes haven't always been clearly communicated to parents." This fear, change, and unknowing about new ideas of success and how to achieve it, created critique, backlash, and conflict around the implementation of Common Core. This controversy around the standards occupied a large portion of the media, with much of the critique arising from misunderstandings regarding the Common Core and parents and schools' fear of failure.

One major concern is the challenging math curriculum. A portion of the media blamed the standards for the new math curriculum when students began to struggle in their math classes. This backlash is derived from a misinterpretation of the standards and people confusing the standards for a curriculum. Lahey (2014, April 3 - The Atlantic) clarifies that "Until media outlets stop conflating issues of Common Core and curriculum, the public will continue to blame Common Core for the harm that flawed, but locally selected, curriculums are doing to math education." While there is a large body of critique out there, other media sources expressed the need for these standards to help students become more successful following graduation. As some states reject Common Core in favor of creating their own standards, Petrilli and Brickman (2014, Dec 24) of the *Washington Post* explain how "The basic problem is that it's impossible to draft standards that prepare students for college and career readiness and that look nothing like Common Core."

Despite the resistance to switching to Common Core there is still the value of preparing students to be successful following high school. Regardless of what standards are set, success after high school graduation is a critical American ideology that is reflected in current policies

and legislation. An English professor at a university wrote an article for *The Atlantic* about why she supported the standards, she explained how "the Common Core's 'deep reading' approach to literacy and language arts is desperately needed, and will give students… the tools to be prepared for college, career, and life--tools they currently lack" (Prior, 2013, April 24 - The Atlantic). This demonstrates how students have entered college and the work force significantly unprepared and are unable to succeed. This drove the transforming ideas about being successful in primary and secondary education and is evident in policy changes and the development of the standards. I discovered that the acceptance of the changing learning goals reflects the evolving meaning of success taking on a new definition of preparing for college and careers, and its implications have matriculated into the classroom. During an interview with Mary, she explained how teachers have embraced and incorporated the changes in meaning of success into the classroom through teaching different skills.

> "Critical thinking and analysis, analytical skills, and then really developing writing skills… are really valuable. We want our students graduating with those skills to be college and or career ready so if its not deep and its more shallow that's not where we wanna see our students go, so I think the [Common Core] changes are welcomed in that sense, and that we are allowed to go back to and spend more time on these skills that we believe are really important."[34]

The Common Core State Standards reflects American society's changing understanding of success. I found that this evolving view of success reflects the significance of life after high school and impacts the realities and daily lives of the members of the Rolling Golden Hills School District. As I learned more about the local incorporation and reproduction of this cultural shift, I wondered how the new construct of success and potential applied to special education and students with learning disabilities.

[34] Interview with "Mary"

Is there a different type of success for students who learn differently: Understanding the disadvantages and advantages that the new meaning of success has for students in special education

The evolving meaning of success under the Common Core State Standards impacts all students, but I was curious how changing ideas of success would affect students in special education. When speaking with Eli he explained how "teachers are finding kids aren't being real successful so they are getting referred to special ed and then they don't succeed."[35] Moving kids from general to special education when they struggle in mainstream curriculum hinges on the cultural belief that the schools cannot fail, but rather the students can (Dudley-Marling, 2004). This highlights McDermott and Varenne's (1995, p. 336) idea of "culture-as-disability", how the American education system separates those individuals who are 'different' or 'deprived' in their ability to learn from the rest of the education system. How does moving failing students from general education to special education impact potential success or change the definitions of success? Is this evolving with the changing definition of success that is accompanying Common Core?

These questions both frightened and interested me. Had I attended public school, I know for certain I would have been placed in RSP classes and I wonder if I would be considered a successful student at a top university today? What would the expectations have been for me and would this have shifted what was considered being successful? Throughout my research I struggled with ideas about where I would have fit in within the education system in the town. On any given site visit, something would cause me to have flashbacks to my own education experience and often these memories were not pleasant. Sitting in one RSP class in particular triggered memories of me failing at school time and time again.

[35] Interview with "Eli"

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I was sitting in the back of an RSP class and the teacher, Claire, had just finished going through examples of words that make a variety of different sounds. Then Claire went through a series of sounds including oo, ou, ai, ay, er, ow, and she asked the students to read a row of words out loud. This focus on phonics and vowels is crucial in the learning how to read process. Just sitting in the back of the class, watching the teacher lead this activity began to give me PTSD, remembering when I had to do this in school. Silly as it sounds, I dreaded that Claire would call on me. I thought that if she called on me right then I would probably give the wrong answer. I was still scared of failing at school and I knew I had never successfully learned phonetics. She explained how vowels were the trickiest letters in the alphabet and then reviewed the long and the short sound that each vowel makes, writing down the phonetic breakdown for each letter. I must admit that to this day I still cannot differentiate all of the different sounds, let a lone read the phonetic breakdown of a word. Next, as Claire switched to having her students read the full words as she underlined the vowel sounds within each of the words, I felt the anxiety continue to creep over me as I thought back to my early school years.[36]

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After I left the school that day I was rather shaken up. I had not expected the surge of emotions, anxiety, and memories of failure to come rushing back with such intensity. I remembered being pulled out of classes during silent reading time so I could practice phonetics and learn to read. I remembered the traumatic feeling of being called on and having no idea how to pronounce the word in front of me. I remembered thinking I was stupid and a failure. Later that week I spoke with my mother about her experience of me being dyslexic and struggling in

[36] Field notes

school for so long. As we talked we recounted a number of different memories from my childhood touching on expectations, success, and failure. She recounted one conversation she had with my school's principal when I was in the 6th grade. My principal had wanted me to take Study Skills instead of Spanish the following year. Study Skills was a course available for 7th and 8th graders who were struggling in school and required extra help with academics. My parents disagreed with my principal and explained they were fine with me receiving a lower grade in Spanish. Back then I did not consider how this was in line with altering expectations and definitions of success for students with learning disabilities. Through my fieldwork I noted the automatic need to separate students who are struggling and I learned it derives from a cultural construction about what it means to have a learning disability.

Limitations of special education and preparing for future success

As I continued to try to understand the connection between success, expectations, goals and the future I spoke with different teachers and administrators about their ideas of success for students in special education. The focus on success as a product of goals and ambitions for after graduation is most evident at the high school level, although it is not absent in middle school. From the moment students with IEPs (Individualized Education Plans) or 504 plans, both are legal documents that state the student's disability and services that the student will receive, enter high school discussions begin about their post graduation plans, goals, and how to best reach those goals. Within the district this takes place in both informal and formal conversations. The state requires that all students with an IEP have an Individual Transition Plan (ITP) by age 16 to help decide and indicate what the student plans to do following graduation. Holly explained to me how although the state does not require the ITP until age 16, she and other administrators try

to work with the students and make plans from the moment they enter high school at age 14, in order to provide students with ample time to reach their goals.[37]

Beyond the formal ITPs that staff members have with students, other informal conversations take place between staff members and high school students about their goals, future, and success. This is important as it relates to selecting classes, which directly impacts students' future success. In a conversation with Eli, he addressed the struggle that the cultural structure of having special education classes creates within the transforming ideas of success and preparing students for life following graduation. Eli explained that A-G[38] requirements are the classes that students need to complete to be accepted into a California State University (CSU) or University of California (UC). A major struggle for students with learning disabilities in resource classes is that RSP classes do not count towards the A-G requirements, which limits their opportunities for after graduation. Eli addressed the deeper conflict, and explained that special education students who want to go on to a four-year college or university must take the general education A-G classes, but risk not being successful in these classes because they are used to the additional support provided in RSP classes.[39] This creates the paradox between special education and success potential found in today's school systems. Learning differently than mainstream

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[37] Interview with "Holly"

[38] "History/social science ("a") – Two years, including one year of world history, cultures and historical geography and one year of U.S. history, or one-half year of U.S. history and one-half year of American government or civics.
English ("b") – Four years of college preparatory English that integrates reading of classic and modern literature, frequent and regular writing, and practice listening and speaking.
Mathematics ("c") – Three years of college-preparatory mathematics that include or integrate the topics covered in elementary and advanced algebra and two- and three-dimensional geometry.
Laboratory science ("d") – Two years of laboratory science providing fundamental knowledge in at least two of the three disciplines of biology, chemistry and physics.
Language other than English ("e") – Two years of the same language other than English or equivalent to the second-level of high school instruction.
Visual and performing arts ("f") – One year chosen from dance, drama/theater, music or visual art.
College-preparatory elective ("g") – One year chosen from the "a-f" courses beyond those used to satisfy the requirements above, or courses that have been approved solely in the elective area" ("A-G Subject Requirements", 2015).

[39] Interview with "Eli"

education has the ability to limit potential avenues towards success, as defined by policy, teachers, and schools as contributing to society following high school. This paradox is embedded into the school system and the historical development of education, and is a key part of the culture of disability. Eli explained how "it's hard when you get to high school and you don't want to set them up to fail when they have had those supports all along but you also don't want to enable or perpetuate that special ed when it doesn't need to be there."[40] When chatting with Emma, a staff member, about learning disabilities she described to me how "you can have an intelligent student with a high IQ failing a class."[41] This addresses the complexity of students with LD and creates confusion and misunderstanding about their ability to succeed.

This conflict between success in special education versus general education is also apparent in the middle schools. Natalie explained to me how her students are so smart, but one little piece is so difficult for them. She believes that many of them would not be successful in the general education classes because they need the additional support and accommodations.[42] It is this separation of students and then providing them with the extra support instead of the integration of support that stems from and breeds the culture of disability. As a student who still receives a handful of accommodations including double time on exams, testing in a separate – distraction free room, having a note taker for lecture classes, and using a computer in class and for exams, I am fully in favor of providing students with extra help, services, support, and accommodations. However, what I wish to challenge is the cultural structure of the classroom that has a tendency to separate students before they can initially receive these supports and services, which in turn contributes to McDermott and Varenne's (1995) idea of culture as a disability, specifically within the context of education.

[40] Interview with "Eli"
[41] Interview with "Emma"
[42] Interview with "Natalie"

The created paradox of being successful in special education resource classes, but limiting future success by preventing students from completing the A-G requirements for CSU and UCs could account for the large number of special education students who attend a junior college following high school. Although a number of students attend a four-year college or university, I found that the staff emphasized the junior college within the special education department. Mary explained to me what she saw students doing following graduation, and the different career or continued education paths they took. She told me how the district is above the state average in sending high school graduates to a four-year university, including CSUs, UCs, out of states schools, and private schools. Mary continued how some students also pursue a career directly after graduation. She then described how some of the students from the special education department or those students with IEPs go on to attend the local Junior College (JC), while others attend a trade school to become a dental assistant or a cosmetologist, and some go straight to a four year college. Mary explained how she thinks that the district has "representation for all paths with in the special education [department] which mirrors outside of the special education department and [I] think that's a good thing."[43] Her perspective of where students end up, demonstrates the value of plans following graduation, but neglects to acknowledge the limitations of the paradox of success that connects to general and special education classes.

Common Core and new ideas of success create opportunities and benefits in the classroom for students who learn differently

Beyond creating a paradox, the changing definition of success opened up new opportunities and avenues for students with learning disabilities to express themselves in the classroom and in turn be successful in school. With Common Core's focus on depth of knowledge there has been a switch from memorizing facts to a deeper understanding of the

[43] Interview with "Mary"

material. This change is especially evident in math where there is no longer one correct answer or way to solve a math problem. This opens up opportunities for students who think differently to excel within the general education or 'mainstream' curriculum. This expansion of what is deemed as the correct answer in math and its impact on viewing students as successful is made highly apparent in an antidote from a conversation with Emma.

> "I was in a math class yesterday and they were discussing the way to solve a problem and there were two obvious ways, but I'll tell you they were trying to get the probability to half and half using bears and stuffed animals, so it was between bears and other types of stuffed animals, and there were four of one and eight of another, how would you make that an even probability? You would either add or take away, so the obvious answer is to either add four bears or take away four of the one that is eight. So there was one student who said at the end 'what I did is I added six bears and two of whatever it was.' So it was an easier number, it was ten and ten, it's a totally appropriate answer, but if the teacher had not been teaching to more of the Common Core way, I don't think that explanation would have come out and it was really neat to see the kid who was thinking outside of the box. And maybe as someone who was educated a few years before Common Core I'm always looking for those right answers and that's an example of when math isn't always black and white…. Back to the observation last week where the student was not engaging with the teacher…actually he had his head down but when he started working with a partner group he was actually volunteering and the teacher… was like wow, he has so much more to offer when he is engaged and engaged because of the process… So I think if they could find a way to tap into those kids, and learning disabilities doesn't mean a kid isn't smart… you just have to tap into their strengths and that is my experience. We will often identify the disability, but I think it's really important that we focus on the strengths and allow the child to shine in some ways."[44]

Common Core provides the potential for students who previously would have incorrectly completed the math problem to be successful at it, because it reflects the cultural normalization of different methods of problem solving and thinking. The focus on depth of knowledge in math and the multitude of answers and solutions to a problem no longer pigeonholes students into solving a problem in a prescribed manner. This change in Common Core presents the opportunity to further expand definitions of success in the daily lives of students in the

[44] Interview with "Emma"

classroom, which directly impacts students with learning disabilities. The story that Emma recounts highlights how this differs from past ideas of daily successes and failures and how society no longer views math and learning as black or white. Another key point that she made was the idea that kids with learning disabilities are smart and it is just a matter of finding a way to access that. This demonstrates both the historical misconceptions that developed around students with learning disabilities and also addresses the limitations of traditional curriculum and teaching methods. To keep up with the developing ideas of success and accepting that learning is no longer black or white, the standardized tests and assessments have shifted to match the corresponding curriculum, teaching methods, and notions of success.

Standardized Tests

A culture of testing: Creating a society that centers around test taking

Testing under NCLB and changes in testing with the new SBAC test

I had just finished taking my PSSAT, which was the practice version of the standardized test I needed to take before entering high school. I remembered being anxious when I received the envelope in the mail but excited to open it to learn how I did. I had taken the test with several other students who also received extended time; we took the test in a separate room in the basement of one of the buildings. Nervously I opened the envelope in front of my mom, and my face dropped as I saw my score. I handed the sheet of paper to my mother and told her I did exactly what my tutor had told me to do: 'skip the questions I wasn't sure about.' This however left me with a 22 percent in verbal and a 46 percent in reading comprehension, and after years of standardized testing I knew this was not good. Standardized testing causes such controversy amongst education policy, educators, parents, teachers, and administrators, yet in recent years it has been engraved into the education system and is now viewed as the norm.

No Child Left Behind mandated annual standardized testing as a means of accountability (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002; Koyama, 2011; McDermott & Hall, 2007). NCLB 2001 focused on national, state, district, and school accountability with standards established by each state. NCLB required each state to annually test students in math and reading in 3rd through 8th grade and once in high school and additionally test students in science once during the following time periods 3rd through 5th grade, 6th through 8th grade, and 10th through 12th grade. This made standardized testing the norm within public schools. California used the STAR (Standardized Testing and Reporting) tests, which consisted of multiple choice bubble tests (Standardized Testing and Reporting [STAR], 2009). With the switch to Common Core and the new learning goals the test changed to match the new standards. Under NCLB the test will still be administered annually in grades 3rd through 8th and in the 11th grade; however, with the change to CCSS many states, including California, are switching this year to the Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium (SBAC) test. The SBAC is an online test that uses adaptive technology which means the tests cater to the student; if a student answers a question correctly the questions become more challenging, and if a student answers the question incorrectly the test adjusts to become easier. This allows for better and more accurate assessment of the student's ability. The SBAC moves beyond traditional bubble (multiple choice tests) and includes short answers and a longer performance task with the purpose of evaluating student's critical thinking and depth of knowledge skills (Smarter Balanced Assessment Consortium [SBAC], n.d.; local paper, 2014). Similar to other changes that have accompanied Common Core, the implementation and preparation of the SBAC caused much controversy and elicited a range of responses both in the national media and within the district itself. A California newspaper highlights the key changes in standardized tests that have followed Common Core.

> "Multiple-choice assessments were never designed to measure the deeper learning called for by the Common Core, so we must transition to ones that measure learning in new ways. The new, computer-adaptive tests will include performance tasks and questions that require extended responses. No doubt it will take our students time to learn these new skills, so it's important to remember that test results are meant to provide information about student progress, not a measure of their potential" (Kirst, 2013, Aug 16 – San Francisco Chronicle).

It was rare that I made it through a single conversation about Common Core without the topic of testing coming up. The switch to the SBAC was on the forefront of many of the teachers' minds, having administered a trial run last spring and the official test in the Spring of 2015. Testing is a hot button topic amongst educators, and everyone seemed to have an opinion. Expanding to the national level the new test has been a controversy in a number of media articles, where each political party expressed their opinion. Critics of Common Core have gained support from the far left because of the "high stakes tests" that are still being used (Rich, 2014, May 29 – New York Times). However there is also a range of support from people regarding the switch to this test, highlighting the variety of responses. As California prepares for the first round of the SBAC testing in the Spring of 2015, Lambert (Jan 15, 2015 – Sacramento Bee) explains how Michael Kirst, the president of the California State Board of Education "expects an immediate dip in test scores as students take Common Core tests for this first time this spring." This anticipated drop in test scores caused anxiety within different communities and contributed to the controversy surrounding standardized tests.

Despite the national 'upheaval' that the media seems to be perpetuating, the district as a whole has welcome the new SBAC test with headlines in the local paper of: "Testing: STAR out, Smarter Balanced in" followed by an article explaining how they "happily waved goodbye to the annual STAR testing and this month ushered in an entirely new world of standardized testing" (local paper, May 2014). This article was released before the district ran a trial run of the new

test as a chance to work out the kinks before the actual test is administered in the Spring of 2015. Mary explained the challenges and problems that the new method of testing presented for the district and what they learned from the experience. Last year in addition to the practice SBAC test, Mary explained how many of the students were taking additional standardized test including the state's graduation exit exams, the Early Assessment Program (EAP) a California standardized test, the NCLB science test, as well as Advance Placement (AP) tests. All of these various standardized tests "chip away at instructional time." Mary explained that another problem was the coordinating of when students could take these various exams. "So the kids [who] are testing first period in the morning are fresh, but the kids who are testing fifth or sixth period after lunch are not. They have been through at least two classes and lunch and whatever else is going on in their day socially or emotionally." She elaborated how all of these different logistical factors need to be taken into consideration when planning the SBACs for later this year. Mary explained that for this up coming round of SBAC testing, to avoid the distractions of bells going off, they plan on "having juniors testing in the morning and other students start school later, so a delayed start for everybody else so there would probably be a two hour block of time for about two weeks where they would do that."[45] As Mary and other district staff members addressed, the national focus on standardized testing impacts a small district in a variety of different ways. I found that America's continued dependency on standardized tests with Common Core manifested its self on a local level through the push for teachers to accept and integrate assessment into the classroom.

Assessment integrated into learning: cultivating a cultural dependency on tests and standardized scores

Standardized tests create serious challenges in terms of missed instruction time because

[45] Interview with "Mary"

of the large number of standardized tests that students take in a given year. Numerous teachers expressed the struggle of having so many days of the year dedicated to standardized testing both at the middle and high school level. To compensate for this there was a push during one of the professional development days for teachers to find ways to minimize this lost instruction time by "linking assessment to learning."[46] When I sat in on the Common Core development day, an hour was set aside to this topic of assessment, proposing different methods of how to integrate assessment into the classroom and view it as a vital component of instruction.

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For this activity we, all of the teachers at the training and I, were provided a handout with six different quotations relating to views on assessment. Some of the quotes included, "If assessment is also a learning event, then it does not take unnecessary time away from instruction…"(Linn & Baker, 1996, as cited by Last Word handout[47]), "Once assessment is designed to be educative, it is no longer separate from instruction; it is a major, essential, and integrated part of teaching and learning" (Wiggins, 1998, as cited by Last Word handout[48]). We were placed in groups of six and instructed to each read a quote and then go around in a circle and provide our opinion on that quote. I sat there listening to the five teachers in my group's opinions and nodded along as I waited for my turn to speak.[49]

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This focus on creating alternative views towards assessment exemplifies the value assigned to these tests and how the local reality and opinions might differ from the states objectives and perspectives. This continued push for standardized tests demonstrates the

[46] Primary documents
[47] Primary documents
[48] Primary documents
[49] Field notes

American education system's dependency on testing. Tests are used as a means to see if the students are at grade level, if the teachers are teaching what they are supposed to, if students have mastered the material enough to receive college credit, and so on. The amount of testing that occurs in a given year makes it seem like it is either a crutch or the solution to the problems in education. Testing reduces students' abilities and learning capabilities to a single score, number, or percentile. This creates a means to measure and account for individual experiences and learning, and in turn exemplifies Scott's (1998) idea of rendering development, in this case the development of students and education, legible.

Making information and experiences legible is a trend in American society that starts at birth. For babies born in hospitals the infant's height and weight is taken soon after birth, then these measurements are placed on a normal distribution scale and the child is given a ranking of x^{th} percentile. This process of measuring and normalizing or standardizing the scores is ongoing. For each subsequent annual check up, the doctor takes the child's height and weight and places the measurements on a graph or gives it a percentile. Amongst all the seemingly meaningless numbers and percentages the doctor is there to provide meaning and explain the importance of these various numbers. I found that these same concepts and methods of standardization hold true of students taking standardized tests.

Starting in the third grade students are required to take standardized tests and through this students, schools, and districts are assigned some numerical value. These different test scores are used as a means of measuring, ranking, and accounting for schools. This process through which schools are held accountable is made legible through this testing experience. This process of rendering schools legible simplifies subjective and personal experiences to a single form of measurement, a test score. This minimizes the complex local realities and experiences that have

gone into producing this standardized measurement. Scott (1998) explores how these systems of measurement are beneficial for the state. With the passing of NCLB standardized tests became a method of accountability on a state level. Although CCSS is not a national mandate, the push for having the same learning goals, standards, and tests across all states and making them comparable is a means of creating more national accountability and uniformity. Through the CCSS learning goals there is an increase in accountability, which is rendered legible through creating consistent measurements between the different states. Using the same standardized test across states places students, schools, and districts on a nationalized scale.

Similar to how doctors provide meaning to weight and height measurements, the state and boards of education assign value to the standardized test scores. Test scores are meaningless on their own, but are provided value when people act upon the measurements (Koyama, 2011). With NCLB and in education these test scores are highly valued and given immense weight, because states allocate rewards and consequences based on the test scores to create accountability. With the increased standardization and unification between the different states through the SBAC this year it will be interesting to learn how people assign value to these scores and how it impacts and changes the local implementation of the test and standards. Following the trial run of the SBAC the schools did not receive the test scores so the state or national impact of this legibility on a local level is still unknown. Creating accountability through simplified measurements discredits the impact it has on local communities and classrooms. Beyond creating legibility and reducing students to test scores and the issue of missed instruction time, I found that standardized tests cause a range of responses for staff and administrators when it is in regards to working with students with learning disabilities. Within the district I discovered a divide on the views of standardized testing between the administrators and the special education

staff.[50]

Standardized testing for special education: Administrators acknowledge the benefits and special education teachers express distaste

Standardized tests as a topic within public education already brings up a number of different strong opinions, and this is amplified within the context of special education and learning disabilities. I remember spending hours taking tests with extended time in a special room with the other students with learning disabilities. Someone always brought dark chocolate, justifying that it would make us 'smarter' or 'help us focus,' but this did not change the fact that I was struggling through these challenging standardized tests where I rarely finished, where if I didn't know the answer I bubbled in 'c,' and where I was not even expected to take all of the sections of the test. The controversy around standardized tests that existed when I was a child has evolved, but in public schools it seems to be even more at the center of conversations.

From my fieldwork I found that there is often a negative connotation around standardized testing in public schools because of the high stakes environment they create, but I learned that administrators were able to see some value. When chatting with Holly she explained to me the importance she saw in standardized testing as a whole. She described that one of the purposes of NCLB was to use standardized tests as a chance to provide feedback to educators. However, the tests were not used the way that they were originally intended. She explained how she believed that each student, with or without a learning disability, should be receiving at least a 70 percent, a C-, in reading in math and that it was not an outrageous expectation. "Kids should be passing school."[51] However, Holly noted that she feels that there is a need for more formative assessments instead of relying on one test at the end of the year where teachers and

[50] Field notes
[51] Interview with "Holly"

administrators could only say "oooops" if a student did not do well.[52]

The passing of NCLB and mandated standardized testing exemplifies the disconnect between policy and practice. Policy in theory and policy in reality rarely match up. This is not just seen in education policy but also international policy, economic policy, and almost any national policy because of the over simplification that goes into creating laws and the differing complex local realities they are applied to. One teacher, Logan, put it perfectly when talking about Common Core, he said, "Common Core, the test, the learning goals, and the text book all look good in theory, but then you add the students."[53] After he said this the other teachers in the room laughed in agreement. This demonstrates the difference between policy and practice, and how complicated education is in reality. In theory the standardized test should encapsulate the different learning goals and how much the students have learned in a given year, but in reality learning cannot be simplified to a test. This is because students and people are messy and complicated and do not learn or work in one standardized, cookie cutter way. I have found that teachers recognize this to be especially true of students with learning disabilities in and outside of special education.

Holly made an excellent point that in theory every student should be able to receive a 70 percent on these standardized test, but Logan really hit the nail on the head when he explained how this does not always work in reality. This standardized model of assessment simplifies learning to either a bubble or now a computerized open answer solution. This can be extremely difficult for students who think and learn outside the prescribed 'normalized' method. As highlighted by several special education teachers these tests can have an aversive impact on their students' views of themselves and their capabilities, because the way the material is presented is

[52] Interview with "Holly"
[53] Focus group

challenging for them. The distaste for standardized tests was evident when speaking with Eli about their impact on students in special education.

> "Are students that are taking some of these CAT [California Achievement Test] test or the Smarter Balanced tests that they look at it and its very frustrating, so it just sort of reinforces this feeling that I am not really good at school, I can't do this stuff. I think with some special ed students I don't know what we end up gaining from doing that…There are a lot of students who told me that they will just mark answers or 'when I get tired I'll just close my eyes or ignore answers.' I think there are a lot who probably take it very seriously, though in that test settings, generally students typically want to do well but I do think that there are some that know that they probably aren't going to do well and there are others that get very anxious when they come to tests… I don't think it gives us a lot of information about individual students but just a giant picture about how students might be doing in school just compared to other schools or compared to other places."[54]

Although the test is no longer a series of multiple-choice single answer questions, the SBAC also brings up many issues demonstrating the continued discrepancy between policy and practice. During my fieldwork the challenges with the SBAC were evident in the special education classes. On one of my visits to the middle schools, teachers administered a practice SBAC language arts test. While her students took the test, Natalie expressed her concerns about the SBAC. She was worried about the test's level of difficulty. With the first year of Common Core the learning goals have changed and the tests switched to match those goals, but students have not been exposed to this caliber of material with the focus on depth of knowledge until this year. The limited exposure of depth and understanding, combined with her students learning the material at a different rate than the general education students, contributed to Natalie's apprehension. The SBAC, Common Core practice test that was administered that day was comprised of three different primary documents that the students had to pull evidence from. Each grade had a different topic, 6th graders wrote about robots and 7th graders about sleep. Natalie

[54] Interview with "Eli"

explained that there was a mix of 6th, 7th, and 8th graders testing in the same room and they could take extra time if they needed. She explained to me that many of the students had the accommodation of having the directions and documents read to them.[55]

After the visit I followed up with Natalie to see how the test went. She explained that she really dislikes standardized tests, because they are so hard for her students who are not at grade level. She explained how it is a really challenging test and that her students are rarely successful. Many of her students are guessing at the answers and she believes that standardized test are "not effective and not a good use of the time" because it creates a very stressful environment for the students. She does not know what the school district does with the information or if they take into account that her students are learning disabled. She elaborated how this testing model is very "one size fits all." For the test the students had to read four to five pages before they could answer the essay question. She continued that beyond reading the documents to them, she could not really help them or explain the material, creating a taxing testing experience for her students. She told me how her 6th graders had to read a story about robots and then write a narrative and site something from one of the original articles. Many of the students ended up not using that information or copied from the articles or had no idea that they needed to cite it. Only one student received a high score of 50 percent out of all six of her classes.[56]

None of her students reached the proficiency level that Holly had hoped for, exemplifying Logan's point about how everything looks good until you add the students. Natalie argued that having students take a test they are not prepared to take makes no sense. Beyond the discrepancy between policy and practice, this testing experience brings up the critical point of the culture of disability and expectations of students. Standardized testing raises issues around

[55] Field notes
[56] Interview with "Natalie"

creating a culture that has a limited number of ways to be successful. Some students are not good at testing environments and others are better at expressing their knowledge in alternative methods. When a student fails to receive above a 70 percent on a test, it does not mean he/she has not mastered the material. Although staff, educators and administrators acknowledge that just because a student has a "learning disabilities doesn't mean a kid isn't smart"[57] they also highlight how they have different strengths and weaknesses.

The focus on strengths and weaknesses demonstrates McDermott and Varenne's (1995, p. 334) "difference approach" to disability. In this model of disability they describe how cultures, in this case schools, will label students who learn differently. It addresses how students might struggle with math or reading, but can be good at other things and in turn creates a difference model of strengths and weaknesses. Standardized test perpetuate this difference model of disability because it limits the ways that students can express the information they know. Although this will change slightly with the SBAC, which uses short answer and performance tasks as the assessment, it still can limit students who struggle in these areas. The shift to allowing different methods of completing a problem on a test was not as widely accepted as I had expected. When speaking with Nathan, a high school teacher, he explained how for math this might make less sense. One thing that Nathan brought up was that the math was harder to test. Common Core requires students to explain three different reasons for why 4x16 = 64, instead of just writing 64 as the answer. He did not find this necessary for the tests, and in his opinion the tests should accept 64 as an answer and if students want to explain the different ways that they arrived at the answer then they can. Through this example Nathan highlighted the difference between tests and instruction.[58]

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[57] Interview with "Emma"
[58] Interview with "Nathan"

Nathan made an interesting point regarding the math test. Having students explain the reasons instead of just asking for the answer tests a different skill set, which he did not believe was necessary to assess on standardized exams. This example also demonstrates the switch to focusing on depth of knowledge and full mastery of skills, but several special education teachers expressed concerns that it will compromise students learning basic skills. Having a student explain three different reasons why 4x16 = 64 is more challenging and assesses the level of mastery that is pushed by Common Core. This contrasts the previous one answer type of problem that limits students who think differently from demonstrating or sharing what they know. This difference in opinions creates a double edge sword that comes with standardized tests.

The reality is that students have to take the standardized test, regardless if teachers want them to our not. Mary points this out when we were discussing how the practice SBAC was for the students in special education.

> "Comments I heard from teachers last year are things like this test is so hard its really hard for our students, and teachers were inquiring the ways to possibly have their students not take the test, because they didn't want their students to be frustrated or disappointed if they were to have an experience that made them feel not intelligent or less than or different than other kids. So all though I appreciate those concerns we still need to have our students take the test."[59]

This demonstrates how education policy and mandates impact the daily lives of students and teachers and can transform the energy of the classroom. Standardized tests highlights how students with learning disabilities are different from their peers, and the associated feelings and struggles contributed to the contrived culture of disability. In recent years America has demonstrated the value it places on test scores, normalizing individuals into numbers. The standardized tests reduce students, teachers, schools, and districts to numbers. This value of transforming lived experiences into, test scores and statistics happens time and time again in

[59] Interview with "Mary"

American society and continues to be produced and reproduced within the education system. This idea that science, data, and technology are the solution to many of the problems expands to larger political ideologies of rendering society technical and legible (Ferguson, 1990; Li, 2006; Scott, 1998).

Education as science and the role of technology in schools

Integrating scientific methods and introducing technology into the classroom

Across a number of different fields of anthropology and development, influential researchers examined the role western science and technology have in creating solutions to some of the worlds most complex social and economic issues (Ferguson, 1990; Li, 2006; Scott, 1998). However, the origins of these issues are rarely addressed or discussed. If schools produce, change, and reproduce societal values and ideals as Amy Stambach (2004, as cited by McDermott & Raley, 2011, p. 37-39) argues when she explains the role of schools in creating and perpetuating societal norms, values, and structures. The importance of technology, scientific models, evidence based practice, numbers, and data collection are embedded into the education system and structure, allowing for the replication and development of these values.

With the continuous development of technology, schools are constantly trying to keep up with implementing the newest equipment. New technologies have revolutionized education. Take the computer for example, it provides spell check, instant access too information through the Internet, and alternative mediums to sharing, connecting, and presenting information. With the implementation of Common Core and the computer based SBAC test, technology is increasingly integrated into the classroom and becoming more a part of the normalized reality. As seen with the implementation of NCLB there was a focus on and normalization of the value of scientific research (Hamann, 2003). This focus and value is still apparent in the education

system today, with the use of evidence based practices and the reliance on data. In addition to continuing to perpetuate the American ideology of scientific practice, with the passing of CCSS states increased focus on implementing and integrating new technologies into schools and society.

Although normalized with the passing of NCLB (Hamann, 2003) the value of scientific research and use of evidence-based practices continues to appear and be reproduced under Common Core. On the "About the Standards" page of the CCSS website it lists six things that the standards are, the first being "research- and evidence-based" ("About the Standards" CCSS, 2015). Evident by its inclusion and placement in the description of the standards, the explicit statement on the scientific research that has gone into creating the standards carries significant weight within American culture. The terms "research- and evidence-based" are not only used in legislation, but I also found it is common vernacular used amongst educators.

I first took note of the phrase "evidence-based practice" on a professional development day. The day's focus was the new Common Core State Standards, as I listen to the speaker she referenced this term "evidence-based" when talking about different teaching methods and strategies that worked.[60] I did not think much about it then, but as I spoke with more teachers and administrators I started to understand the gravity of this phrase. From studying psychology I was familiar with the term but decided to look it up anyway. The first thing that appeared on Google was an excerpt from a Wikipedia (n.d.) article explaining that evidence based practice "is an interdisciplinary approach to clinical practice that has been gaining ground following its formal introduction in 1992." This focus on a clinically driven or medical approach to education is

[60] Field notes

evident in both the study of education and the study of disability, influencing how teachers teach students and how learning disabilities are discussed, assessed, and defined.

To better understand how schools perpetuate the value of scientific research, the medical model, and evidence based practice I spoke with a number of different teachers and administrators about learning disabilities. In the school district, and more broadly America, evidence based practice and scientific research are critical in creating different education practices and even more vital in the education of students with learning disabilities.

Evidence based practice: Quantifying lived experiences of learning disabilities using scientific research and data collection

The cultural value of science seen in NCLB and the transforming and increasing value on evidence-based practiced expands beyond education policy and Common Core. This societal ideal also manifests its self in the methods used to assess and diagnose individuals' with learning disabilities. To better understand the role scientific method and the medical model play in constructing learning disabilities, I asked my parents to send me a copy of my own Psycho-education evaluations. I was fascinated reading through my evaluations. Each report listed the different tests I took, used terms such as "average" "below average" "above average," standardized my test scores and compared them to a "norm" through percentiles, and listed recommendations. This use of numbers and test scores to find the discrepancy between achievement and Intelligence Quotient (IQ), contributed to the ideas that I heard my whole life as a student with a learning disability. 'You are very smart or bright, but reading is just really hard for you' or 'you can do this, but it just takes you longer than other students.' In my mind this translated into you are smart, but you just are not good at this. I found and still find that *'but'* to be a very discouraging term because it signifies the culturally created difference or lack in ability that separated myself and other students with learning disabilities from our peers. This approach

to assessing and treating students with learning disabilities reduced the struggles I faced as a child to a series of tests in order to produce a clinical report.

My evaluations reflect the cultural construction of disability through the prominent medical model that Dudley-Marling (2004), Lyon and his colleagues (2001), and Reid-Cunningham (2009) all addressed. These ideas and concepts of individualization, treatment, and separating people based on a difference are highly evident in the American education system. The development of special education classrooms as a place to send students who learn differently from the mainstream, general education courses highlights the medical model of education and disability. This system is not specific to California but occurs throughout the United States. Special education relies on psychologists to assess and diagnose learning disabilities, reflecting how scientific research is integrated into the education system. With developments in psychological research, the means of diagnosing a student with a learning disability has changed since I was diagnosed. The scientific method of assessment switched from finding a discrepancy of at least 1.5 standard deviations between achievement and IQ to diagnosing through Response to Intervention (RTI). In the DSM-5 the current method of diagnosing Specific Learning Disorders (learning disabilities) is through Response to Intervention. However, California policy does not require schools to use this model, but rather allows them to diagnose specific learning disabilities either with the old 1.5 standard deviation discrepancy method or the newer RTI model.[61] The medical approach and influence of scientific method and research is still pervasive in the new psychological assessment. An RTI model requires much data to be taken early, measuring the student's ability, and requires the

[61] Interview with "Holly"

implementation of interventions and the subsequent observation and continued data collection to see if the student responds.

This scientific approach to diagnosing learning disabilities within the education system has transformed with the RTI model and is largely dependent on the collection of data and quantifying lived experiences. When first learning about RTI, I was unsure how different learning goals or lived experiences could be collected as data or quantified. When speaking with Holly, I asked her to clarify the data taking process for Response to Intervention and how it would be implemented. She explained that RTI "is taking data on what ever it is you want and looking at it. [And asking] are they making progress or not? And modifying your intervention accordingly." Holly continued to explain how her "data collection systems literally can take seconds" and provided the example of testing a students ability to read and recognize sight words, words that students should be able to recognize without sounding out. She explained that a teacher would record how many the student answered correctly out of the total number and then convert that score into a percentage.[62] Measuring a child's ability to read a certain number of words correctly is easy to quantify and record. This quantifies a child's reading experience and ability, transforming it into a number or percentage that is prescribed a cultural value. This exemplifies the idea that education has evolved into a science. Holly continued to explain how this method of collecting and recording data works for measuring specific behaviors and not just academic skills. She gave the example of when a child is speaking out of turn in class and how a teacher can provide the child with a replacement behavior such as raising a hand. The teacher can then record how many times the child raises his/her hand and how many times he/she speaks out of turn.[63] Not only does this exemplify how scientific models and methods of collection can

[62] Interview with "Holly"
[63] Interview with "Holly"

be applied to behavior, but it also demonstrates behaviors taught in the classroom are values that translate to adult life.

Even in the example Holly provided of reading sight words, the child's experience of reading those site words was reduced to a percentage and given a numerical value. Still a little weary on the concept of the value of data within the education system, I thought back to Holly's previous explanation on the value of frequent data collection. She had kindly explained to me the importance of taking frequent and consistent data.

> "We also know we want to have like six data points before we make a decision of its not working before we change to something else. If you only take data once a month, well that's six months – that's a long time to go ooo dang, that didn't work. They totally flat lined and we did nothing."[64]

This model of data collection and RTI not only includes the special education teachers, but it expands into general education, primarily at the elementary level. Integrating early data collection allows teachers and administrators to see if students are responding to evidence based models of intervention that are built into general education classrooms. Holly explained how she hopes to see more people who are trained in data collection and early reading programs.[65] This focus on integrating different trainings and interventions into the general education or mainstream classrooms has the ability to change the culture of disability by limiting the separation of students who learn differently. Normalizing different learning techniques and reading interventions at a young age can have a lasting impact on the older middle school and high school students, and could reduce the stigma that is associated with learning differently and the corresponding culture of disability that is created within the education system.

The shift to the RTI model expands to the changes that must occur within mainstream education and not just within special education and reflect the continued cultural importance of

[64] Interview with "Holly"
[65] Interview with "Holly"

scientific method and data collection. Special education and general education are highly interconnected and what happens in one directly impacts what happens in the other. This is evident with the changing uses of technology that have accompanied Common Core and their impact on different classrooms.

Common Core's focus on using technology in the classroom: How technology implementation works on a local level

Technology is a critical part of Common Core's integration into the district. When speaking with a Common Core Lead he explained what each Common Core lesson should include. He then handed me a list that had the criterion of what each class should "HIT":

- "technology
- non fiction works
- primary and secondary sources used
- reading strategy for primary / secondary sources
- vocab activities to highlight key contents
- scaffold lessons for students
- activities to deconstruct / analyze text
- group discussion, small and larger
- focus on writing
- common rubrics really help in school wide writing programs"[66]

"Technology" was the first item listed. Similar to the Common Core learning goals found on the website, the inclusion and location of technology demonstrates the importance of technology within the education system. Teachers are encouraged to incorporate technology into their Common Core lessons. As I sat in on different classes I noted that technology was incorporated in a number of different ways. I found that technology is a broad term that encapsulates many different learning tools and each time I walked into a classroom I took note of the different 'technologies' that I saw. This included but was not limited to computers, projector screens, televisions, alpha smarts, and iPads. As society becomes more reliant on technology and it

[66] Field notes

becomes increasingly integrated into the personal lives of individuals, the academic environment continues to replicate and reproduce this dependency.

Engaging students through technology: Helping students with learning disabilities access academic information

In a vast majority of the classes I visited throughout my fieldwork I found that teachers utilized at least one piece of technology in one way or another. I found that each teacher had a different opinion and interpretation of what using technology meant. In both special and general education classes several of the teachers used different video clips to help engage their students or introduce a new topic. When sitting in on one of Natalie's RSP classes and speaking with her after, she explained how she used Pixar shorts to demonstrate the different components of writing a story. She continued how she used this to teach her students about motifs and the different elements of a story, and that multimedia helps her better demonstrate concepts.[67] This exemplifies how different technology mediums can be used as a means of improving student's knowledge. It also allows for students who learn differently to access information and material that they might not have been able to in a more traditional teaching method. Using technology as a means to teach different concepts and address different learning styles also holds true for general education classes.

When speaking with Sabrina, a general education teacher, she explained how she has integrated more technology into her classes to increase students' access to information. She elaborated how Common Core and technology allows for a more interactive environment and found that her students are more engaged because they are no longer just reading a textbook. To demonstrate this engagement she provided an example of how her students were working on a project around Mesopotamia pottery. She projected the image of a pottery piece onto the screen

[67] Interview with "Natalie"

and the students had to find its uses and what the piece of pottery said about the culture. During this time she allowed students with smart phones to look up the answers. Sabrina explained that some days she tries to bring the iPad or laptop cart into the classroom so students could find the information themselves instead of just reading about a topic in a book.[68] The use of technology as a means to access information and engage students incorporates different learning strengths than the traditional method of learning through textbooks and lectures. Technology provides a means of engaging students and allowing them to interact with the material instead of passively receiving the information. This engagement creates an environment where students who might be labeled as disengaged, lazy, LD, or ADHD, will all of the sudden start participating and be interested in the class. This transformation in students' behavior highlights how changing the classroom culture, directly alters the construct of disability. Sabrina spoke to this increased classroom participation that she has seen in her students with IEPs. She explained how she thinks,

> "That Common Core has been particularly good for students with special needs or learning disabilities because it engages them more than previous curriculums of just listening to a teacher talk or reading a text book, but instead they are engaged with their peers and the information, which I think has led to a decrease in behavior problems then in years past." [69]

Finding ways for students to actively engage with information is an important part of the learning and teaching process. The positive impact technology has as an alternative method of teaching and evaluating students with learning disabilities was further clarified when speaking with Rachel, a middle school special education teacher. She explained how she believes "it is helpful for the students with both social and academic inclusion, because it really helps those students who learn differently through using video tapes and technology and for the students who

[68] Interview with "Sabrina"
[69] Interview with "Sabrina"

might understand something better if they see it instead of just reading it."[70] Based on these examples of how technology is integrated into the classroom it has the potential to really transform the culture of learning disabilities. As education continues to evolve and develop, and incorporate more technologies and normalize its use as a teaching strategy, the types of learning disabilities that individuals have will begin to transform and change.

Additionally, the fact that these alternative forms of engaging students are being incorporated and integrated into general education classrooms reflects the normalization of these values. The increased normalization has the ability to reduce the need for the separation of those who learn differently and in turn the culture of disability and special education. I found that technology is not just used as a means to engage students but also helps prepare students for accessing information following high school. The ability to find material on ones own is an important skill to be successful in life, and it is now being integrated into schools and is apparent in the Common Core State Standards. Learning how to navigate the different technologies, learn new skills, and access information on ones own is reflective of the skills that are valued in society.

The role of technology and the importance of cultivating digital literacy: the national promotion of technology and the corresponding local challenges and benefits

To better understand the connection between Common Core and technology and the political and social ideologies that went into creating and normalizing the standards it is important to look at the standards major supporters. One of the biggest donors and supporters of CCSS is The Bill and Malinda Gates Foundation. Looking at the role The Gates Foundation has had in the successful passing and implementing of the Common Core State Standards highlights

[70] Interview with "Rachel"

the role of politics and those in power. Similar to the normalizing of privatization of education through education policy in the late 1980s through early 2000s (Bartlett, Frederick, Gulbrandsen, & Murillo, 2002), the ideal of technology continues to be normalized through policies that represent the values of those in power. The influence and role that The Gates Foundation has had in the passing of Common Core through the political and financial support is substantial.

> "The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation didn't just bankroll the development of what became known as the Common Core State Standards. With more than $200 million, the foundation also built political support across the country, persuading state governments to make systemic and costly changes" (Layton, 2014, June 7 – Washington Post).

This quote from the *Washington Post* highlights how policies and the corresponding ideologies are directly impacted from those in both political and financial power. The large role that The Gates Foundation had in supporting and funding the standards was not met without criticism. "Critics say Microsoft stands to benefit from the Common Core's embrace of technology and data" (Layton, 2014, June 7 – Washington Post). Whether or not this is true, technology is highly valued at both Microsoft and at The Gates Foundation and these values have been transferred into legislation and policy.

Similar to the normalization of evidence-based practice and scientific research, the use and value of technology has been simultaneously created and reproduced within the education system. Despite the many benefits that have followed the integration of more technology into the classroom some challenges have arisen. I found that local challenges manifested in a number of different ways demonstrating the limitations of technology and the difference between policy in theory and policy in practice. When speaking with a number of different administrators and staff members within the district many brought up both the benefits and the challenges they encountered with the trial run SBAC test.

The new SBAC test is computerized and with the switch the test has become adaptive; in theory this allows for more accurate assessments of students' abilities. Another benefit of the online test is the ability to incorporate individualized accommodations into the computer for students with IEPs.[71] Personalizing different testing environments through technology can be revolutionary for students with learning disabilities, because of the anonymity it has when providing individualized accommodations. This has the potential to transform the testing environment where students with extended time or a test reader would not necessarily have to be isolated or placed in a separate testing room away from their peers.

In addition to the benefits of online testing the switch to using computers for testing has created several new challenges. Mary explained some of the troubles they encountered with the transition to computerized testing. She highlighted the limitation of not having enough computers to test an entire grade at once.[72] Switching to computerized testing is not as simple as it appears in theory. As Mary described there are many logistical and economic limitations and challenges that arise when trying to plan the tests. The logistical aspect of coordinating the testing times of students and computer use without over infringing on instruction time or extracurricular events, demonstrates the complexity of policy implementation and the difference between policy and practice.

When speaking with Mary I learned that the challenges that teachers and the staff faced with the switch to more technology driven standards and curriculum expanded well beyond the testing environment. She explained how the increased demand for technology use in the classroom creates limitations.[73] Teachers have developed different solutions and methods of integrating technology into the classroom through creating other ways to access technology.

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[71] Interview with "Emma"; Interview with "Natalie"
[72] Interview with "Mary"
[73] Interview with "Mary"

Mary continued to explain the importance of technology integration for fostering and creating "digital literacy."[74] This was of great interest to me because it's a novel type of literacy that has arisen from the increased use and dependency on different technological products. Mary described how the different teachers are integrating technology into their classes to create students who are digitally literate. To develop this digital literacy teachers allow students to look information up on their cell phones or they are bringing the students into the computer lab. Mary elaborated how technology has become a prominent part of the classroom environment. "There is so much they are using on the web now with articles or even annotating on the computer or on their cell phone… or different ways of publishing whether it be with Instagram or sometimes teachers do things with Facebook."[75] Digital literacy and technology have made its way into American Society and this is now being reflected and reinforced in the classroom. No longer is information provided solely in textbooks and lectures, and teachers are no longer evaluating students only through essays and tests. The growing role of technology has increased the reliance on students and teachers ability to share information across digital mediums. With the increased importance of digital literacy, policies try to match these new society driven skills and demands. Common Core and the SBAC are dependent on technology, contributing to the growing importance of digital literacy. However, because of different IT and budgetary constraints it has created a discrepancy between how material is taught in the classroom and evaluated on the test. Mary elaborated on the challenging aspects of this discrepancy:

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[74] Digital Literacy: "1. The ability to use digital technology, communication tools or networks to locate, evaluate, use and create information. 2. The ability to understand and use information in multiple formats from a wide range of sources when it is presented via computers. 3. A person's ability to perform tasks effectively in a digital environment… Literacy includes the ability to read and interpret media, to reproduce data and images through digital manipulation, and to evaluate and apply new knowledge gained from digital environments" (US Digital Literacy, 2015).

[75] Interview with "Mary"

> "So what that means is that even though are kids might be really good at close reading or they have been exposed to that a lot, in a lot of different classes their not necessarily, or haven't necessarily had experience doing close reading on a computer. Highlighting on the computer is different than the kinetics of having the highlighter in your hand and making notes in the margin…. There has been less technology use in the area of math and students are asked to do things on the math test like draw an arrow from one point to another and that's just not something they have the experience with yet in their math classes."[76]

Integrating technology and creating the infrastructure is a prerequisite to help create the digital literacy that is needed for the SBAC standardized test. The rapid changes in policy and Common Core and SBAC implementation does not account for the time needed to fund raise, purchase, expand and develop the technology systems, support staff, training, and increase bandwidth needed to accommodate such technology and computer demands. Logistical and practical constraints of a small district are not always considered when creating or writing a policy. I found that the discrepancy between policy and practice that local schools encounter makes way for the immergence of new cultural practices, such as students using their cell phones in class. Local level implementation of Common Core has such individual variation especially when it comes to technology. The amount of technology exposure that different states, districts, and schools have varies greatly based on previous and present access. Despite the many benefits associated with the changes following Common Core, the district is facing real life challenges when it comes to the realistic practice of the new standards and standardized tests.

Conclusion and Implications

Common Core is changing education; that fact is indisputable. By immersing myself in three schools within one school district in California, I sought to understand how the changes with Common Core impact special education teachers and departments, and the evolving societal construction of learning disabilities. Specifically, I asked: what social and historical changes do

[76] Interview with "Mary"

the production and the implementation of the Common Core State Standards index? How are the Common Core State Standards reconfiguring or reinforcing the current cultural construction of disability, particularly as it relates to notions of success and failure? And what are the implications for special education teachers and the construction of learning disabilities with the education changes that accompany Common Core? Understanding how Common Core impacts individuals with learning disabilities is important, because learning disabilities constitute a large portion of students in public schools, accounting for about five percent of all students (Cortiella & Horowitz, 2014). Studying education and disability, specifically special education and learning disabilities, through an anthropological lens also provides insight into American values and ideals.

Education policy is evolving to reflect the national and global expectations of school systems, and in turn education is changing and altering how and what teachers teach and their expectations for students. Understanding who is labeled as learning disabled and systematically separated within schools provides insight into what is important within American culture. Looking at education during a moment of change provides a unique chance to examine a turning point in American values and ideologies.

I learned that teachers have a range of responses to Common Core and have implemented the learning goals into their classrooms in a variety of ways. This demonstrates how teachers are agents of social change by creating new cultural practices, such as allowing students to use phones in class to better access information and cultivate digital literacy. These variations in local implementation exemplify how teachers, educators, and administrators are not passive recipients of policy change, but are effective agents in cultivating the lived realities that accompany Common Core. Despite the flexibility within the classroom, my research

demonstrates how teachers and administrators are still largely bound by the policies, mandates, and larger structural constraints of the education system. The lived experience of educators being part of the school structure and simultaneously agents in the implementation process was very evident through my research, and specifically in relation to the themes of the definition of success, standardized testing, and education as a science and the role of technology in the classroom.

Focusing on the theme of success I found that the definition of success is changing within both American society and the school system. Under No Child Left Behind success in schools was closely tied to academic achievement. Based on critiques of the NCLB policy, the concept of success is now more closely tied to students' plans following high school graduation and preparing students for future success. In speaking with various educators I learned how this is revolutionary for students with learning disabilities. This new understanding of success creates opportunities for students who have previously encountered obstacles due to narrow definitions of success, to be assessed on a broader range of skills, abilities, and knowledge sets. These broader ideas of success are evident in the Common Core State Standards themselves, the learning goals, and how teachers are implementing the standards into the classroom. Teachers focus more on critical thinking and depth of knowledge, to better prepare their students for life following high school whether they pursue a career or post-secondary education. This change directly impacts students in special education.

But the paradox of special education remains, because although students who do not perform well on assessments are given the opportunity for special services and different learning environments, such moves ultimately limit their post-graduation opportunities. So while the structures are transforming, the cultural construction of disability as an individual failure, not an

institutional failure, remains. As Dudley-Marling (2004) has argued, the school cannot fail so the individual must fail. Students with learning disabilities either struggle or fail in general education classes or are referred to special education classes, which do not count towards the A-G requirements that students need to complete in order to attend a California public university. The changing understanding of success creates new opportunities for students with learning disabilities but simultaneously reduces their paths to success. Although I did not focus on students' understandings of success, future research should examine special education students' concepts of success under Common Core's shifting expectations and learning goals.

Beyond the value of success, I found that within the education system standardized testing continues to be important. The culture of test taking and standardization that developed under No Child Left Behind persists under Common Core. Although the types of tests that students are taking have altered with Common Core, the American education system continues to depend on standardized tests. I found that the district made a concerted effort to further normalize the practice of standardized testing by highlighting its educative value. With the continued focus on standardization and standardized testing, I found that administrators acknowledged the benefits while special education teachers expressed their distaste. Talking with a range of staff members highlighted a wide array of opinions towards standardized testing, which was associated with individuals' roles within the system. One administrator noted that in her view, all students should be able to receive at least a 70 percent on standardized exams, regardless if they have a learning disability or not.[77] However, I found that all though this goal is great in theory, it does not always work in practice because standardization does not take into account the institutional context like variations in school resources, parent involvement, and

[77] Interview with "Holly"

support. Logan, a general education teacher, clarified this when explaining how the test appears great in theory, but is much more complicated in practice once the students are added.[78] This is especially true when the students have learning disabilities. As Eli and several special education teachers pointed out, the standardized tests are very challenging for many of the students in special education, highlighting a difference and in turn reinforcing the cultural construction and stigma associated with disability. With the official switch to the SBAC in the Spring of 2015, it will be important for future research to dive into the cultural implications that the different testing methods and scores have on local communities and the reactions these changes invoke from parents.

The continued reliance on standardized tests directly relates to treating education as a science. This idea of integrating scientific method and evidence-based practice into the education system took hold during NCLB, but has been strengthened, reproduced, and made explicit under the Common Core State Standards. This cultural idea of viewing education as a science is not limited to education policy but also expands to how learning disabilities are diagnosed and 'treated' within the school system. Both methods of diagnosing learning disabilities (1.5 standard deviation model and the Response to Intervention model) quantify lived experiences through measurements and with these educators rely on evidence-based interventions as solutions. This practice further reinforces the medical and scientific model to education and disability.

In addition to treating education as a science, I found that the standards and the new SBAC test increased the integration of technology into the classroom. This increased integration of technology that accompanies Common Core is changing the classroom culture. As Sabrina noted in an interview, with the shift to Common Core and the increased use of technology,

[78] Focus group

students with learning disabilities become more engaged with the information.[79] Although technology might not be necessary to cultivate the increased engagement, Common Core's reliance on technology reflects the growing cultural importance and use of technology both in and outside of education. This changing classroom environment directly impacts what is viewed and categorized as a learning disability, because the skills needed to effectively use and engage with technology in the classroom are different. These new skills decenter old ones that previously characterized successful students. Students with learning disabilities therefore may encounter new opportunities to show their strengths. Despite the benefits that accompany the increased use of technology I found that the district faced challenges with the need to rapidly implement increased levels of technologies. These challenges highlight how policies do not always account for varying local realities, such as funding or increased IT demands. Teachers responded to these variations in resources by working with those tools to which they had access, incorporating their own laptops, allowing students to use cell phones, or integrating social media into their classroom practice and assignments.

I discovered that the concepts of success, standardized tests, and education as a science and technology in the classroom, are central to the current American zeitgeist and that these values are reflected in the education system. All three of these cultural themes directly impact the developing discourse and creation of learning disabilities and special education's role in schools. Evaluating how each of these societal themes are directly associated with Common Core and impact the culture of disability is a novel topic of research and contributes valuable information to the body of the anthropological literature of education and disability studies.

[79] Interview with "Sabrina"

Understanding how policies work on a local level provides vital information that policy makers can use to improve current and create future policies. My research provides a starting point for understanding the implications of Common Core, insights into the lived local realities, and new cultural practices that emerge in the space between policy and practice. My research can be used to highlight the ongoing and cultural construction of disability and to shed light on how schools create, reproduce, and perpetuate certain cultural values and ideals. This knowledge and understanding builds on the current anthropological literature on education and disabilities. Similar to the claim made by Ginsburg and Rapp (2013a), I argue that merely understanding the social construction of learning disabilities is not enough. Rather policy makers and those in power should do more to use this information to question this cultural construction of disability and the way it marginalizes certain individuals. They should also revisit policies that produce and perpetuate stigma. My work demonstrates that in addition to the legal rights provided for individuals with disabilities, policies can work to alter the culture instead of relying on students and parents to adapt to existing structures. My research provides invaluable insight into how the larger changes in education are impacting those who work closely with a significant sub-portion of the population. Understanding the implementation of Common Core within three schools demonstrates how education and the construction of disabilities are at a crossroads. Similar to past literature, my research demonstrates several of the challenges that accompany the medical model of disability and how it interacts with the changing culture of education and corresponding societal values.

While the medical model has allowed disadvantaged individuals to access resources, a major challenge associated with it is the corresponding stigma it produces. As the social construction of disability is increasingly acknowledged, it is my hope that the stigma surrounding

learning disabilities will continue to decrease. However, even with the societal changes, I do not foresee stigma as a cultural construct disappearing all together, because as long as certain characteristics or skills are more valued than others and individuals vary in their ability or personal characteristics, stigma will persist, but what is stigmatized will change. This has already begun to happen since I was first diagnosed with dyslexia. With any change in education policy, understanding how the policy directly impacts and alters the lives of individuals with disabilities is important.

Education is not at a point where it can dismiss the medical model, because of the rights and services it provides for students and individuals with disabilities. However, I argue it is critical to challenge and bring to light the social structures that led to and continue to perpetuate the medical model of disability and the stigma that is associated with disability and special education. With schools acting as means of social reproduction and change, my study highlights how the greater societal construction of disability could evolve with the changing education culture. Schools are a critical aspect of American society, and their role expands beyond being institutions that teach the culturally important skills of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Schools also act as a means to rank and sort people into an unequal and differentiated political economy, where different skills and attributes will have varying value.

The implementation of Common Core provides an opportunity to understand how the Common Core State Standards both reflect and change education, American values, and in turn the culture of disability. Making the familiar unfamiliar and viewing disability as the product of a culture challenges the societal norms that initially created learning disabilities. Understanding how the construct of learning disabilities and special education are changing with Common Core and the corresponding cultural shifts, allows for the function and construction of special

education to be challenged and better understood. My research and this perspective and understanding of education and disabilities provide insight into moments of change and can be used to challenge societal concepts as cultural values evolve and are reproduced under future policies.

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Appendix A

Semi-Structured Interview Guide

Attitudes, perceptions and expectations for students with learning disabilities

- Could you define what a learning disability means to you?
- How many students in your classes have a learning disability?
- Tell me about your experiences and interactions working with students with learning disabilities?
- Since you have begun teaching have your thoughts towards learning disabilities changed? across your lifetime?
    - If so how?
- When you hear the term learning disability what thoughts or words come to mind?
- How do you define success?
    - For all students?
    - For learning disabled students?
- Does this definition vary across student populations?
    - If so how?
- What do you see the LD students doing after graduation from high school?
- In a hypothetical world, how would you change education so would not have to label students as learning disabled, what would that school environment look like?

Preparation of teachers/staff

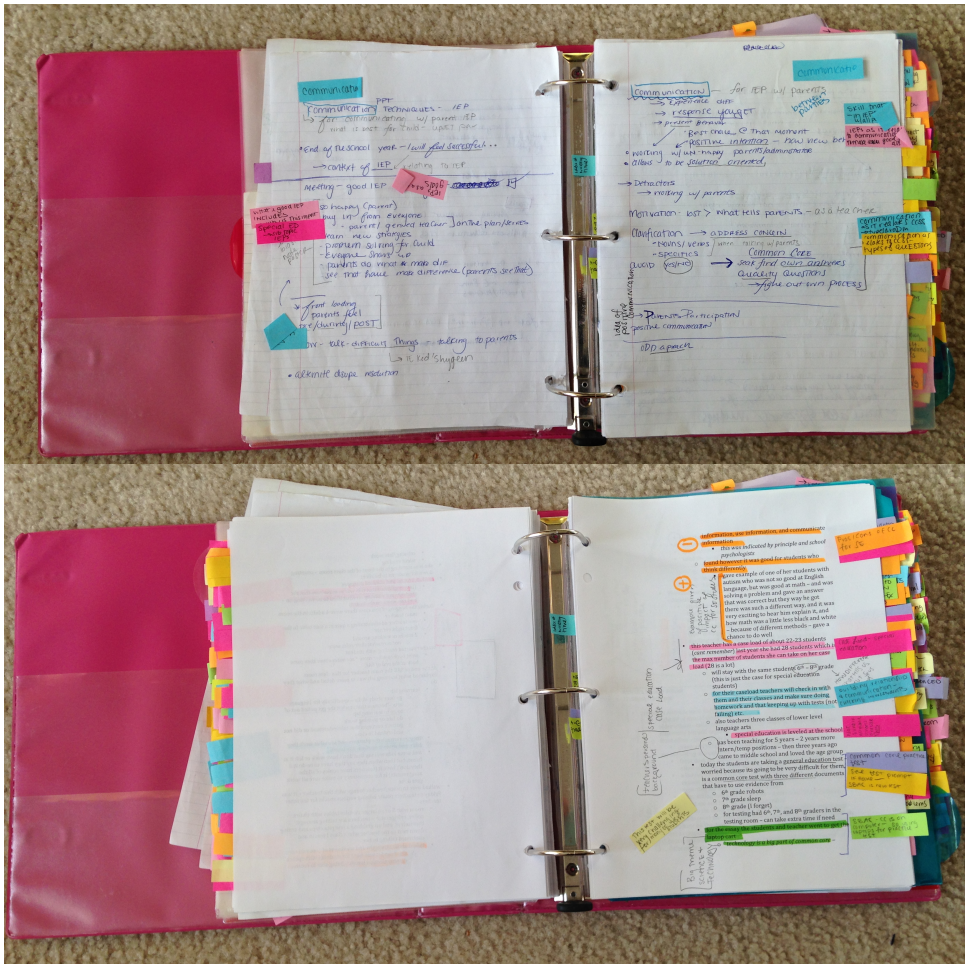
- What preparation have you had to work with students with learning disabilities
    - How do you feel this preparation has prepared you or not?
- What do you think would have been helpful to learn before working with students with learning disabilities?
- Did you feel prepared to work with students with learning disabilities when you first started working? Do you feel prepared to work with students with learning disabilities now?
    - What if anything changed?
- For general education teachers
    - Have you been trained to identify early warning signs for learning disabilities? If so, could you describe what they are and how you would proceed?
    - How has it been working with special education teachers – when a student is in both special and general education classes?
- For special education teachers
    - Could you describe the range of disabilities you work with?
    - Could you describe your experience working with students with learning disabilities?
    - How is working with general education teachers - in general, day to day, IEPs?

CCCSS Academic support systems

- Could you describe your experience with the implementation of CCSS?
- What has been your experience in the classroom as a teacher or an administrator since the implementation of the CCSS? Have you noticed any changes? If so could you describe the changes
- What support is offered for students with learning disabilities? Could you describe it?
- Could you describe that academic support system in general in the district?
    - Has this changed across time? If so, how?
- In the classroom how do you accommodate students with learning disabilities? Specific accommodations (i.e. extended time) or informal accommodations such as where sit in classroom?
- What has been your experience around standardized testing?
    - Could you describe it?
- Can you explain how students with learning disabilities have been integrated within general education and/or other programs with in the school?

Appendix B


Honors
Thesis Research
-Haley Kaplan
-Anthropology Dept
hfkapla@emory.edu
(415)350-7830



Appendix C

Research Log

Date	**Type of research**	**Brief details**
8/11/14	Participation Observation – Field work	Expanded field notes – professional development day (jottings in section 1; write up in section 2) 8:30am – 3:15pm
8/12/14	Participation Observation – Field work	Expanded field notes –professional development day (jottings in section 1; write up in section 2) 8:00am – 1:30pm
9/19	Participant Observation – Field work	Expanded field notes – split the day between the two middle schools (jottings in section 1; write up in section 2) 9:00am -12:30pm and 12:50pm – 3:15pm
9/19	Formal Interview (recorded)	10 min interview with staff member in office (transcription in section 3)
9/19	Formal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) With an administrator – at the school in the administrator's office
9/19	Informal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation with teacher that turned into a informal interview – conversation took place in classroom
9/19	Informal Interview (Not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation with teacher that turned into a informal interview – conversation took place in classroom
9/19	Formal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) With an administrator – at the school in administrator's office
10/9	Formal Interview (not recorded – over the phone)	Phone interview with staff member (Interview notes in section 3)
10/14	Formal Interview (not recorded – over the phone)	Phone interview with staff member (Interview notes in section 3)
10/17	Formal Interview	Phone interview with staff member

	(not recorded – over the phone)	(Interview notes in section 3)
10/24	Participant-observation fieldwork	Expanded field notes – split the day between the two middle schools (jottings in section 1; write up in section 2) 8:30am -12:30pm and 12:30pm – 3:30pm
10/24	Informal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation that turned into a informal interview with teacher – conversation took place in classroom
10/24	Informal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation that turned into a informal interview with teacher – conversation took place in classroom
10/24	Informal Interview (non- recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation that turned into a informal interview with teacher – conversation took place in classroom and cafeteria
10/24	Informal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation that turned into a informal interview with teacher – conversation took place in classroom
10/24	Informal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation that turned into a informal interview with teacher – conversation took place in classroom
11/7	Participant-observation fieldwork	High school all day 8:00am-3:15pm
11/17	Focus group	With five general education teachers – focus group notes in jottings and field notes (section 1 and 2)
11/7	Formal Interview (recorded)	45 min interview with staff member (transcription in section 3) in office
11/7	Focus group	With four special education teachers– focus group notes in jottings and field notes (section 1 and 2)
11/7	Informal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation that turned into a informal interview with teacher – conversation took place in classroom
11/7	Informal Interview (not recorded)	In expanded field notes and jottings (section 1 and 2) Conversation that turned into a informal interview with teacher

		– conversation took place in classroom(s)
11/7	Interview (recorded)	Formal interview with administrator in office Transcription and notes from the interview (section 3)
12/17	Interview (recorded)	Formal interview with administrator in office Transcription from the interview (section 3)
12/17	Interview (recorded)	Formal interview with administrator in office Transcription from the interview (section 3)