

SPECIAL EDUCATION: AN EXCAVATION OF IDEALS

by

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ABSTRACT

This research considers how the transformation of perceptions about disabilities and people with disabilities have affected the fulfillment of IDEA's intended purpose for special education. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) was developed in response to students with exceptional needs. The foundation of special education programs was built on IDEA's intention to provide education to enhance the dignity, independence, and self-reliant nature of students with disabilities. This study chronicles the evolutions of perceptions about people with disabilities, examining how these perceptions can influence the way we educate students with disabilities. It acknowledges that professional educators cannot escape exposure to these perceptions, and this can influence them to engage in practices that inadvertently perpetuate the stigmas and labels faced by students with disabilities. The focal point of the conclusion reached focuses on the significance of high expectations and their role in the advancement of competent, independent, able-minded students with special education needs. If practices that enable dependence and shirk accountability are not discontinued, the ideals special education makes great efforts to uphold will remain buried.

Keywords: Special Education, Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA), High Expectations

Introduction

Our education system was designed to assist students' development into productive, self-sufficient members of society. Special education was established with this same goal in mind but fixates on the assistance given to students with atypical needs. The response for how to educate students with atypical needs has changed with society's views on disabilities and the people who have them. The institution of monumental laws such as IDEA along with the rise and fall of civil rights movements have clarified that our goal for students without disabilities, to produce capable individuals ready to move into society, should match the goal we have for our students with disabilities. The answers to the question of *how* we go about reaching this goal are forever in motion.

These evolving views on teaching students with disabilities impresses upon society how we should see people with disabilities and how they should see themselves. When these perceptions bleed into how we assist students with special education needs today, there is an inconsistency between how we provide services and the initial purpose behind their provision. "Special Education: An Excavation of Ideals" serves to explore how the transformation of perceptions people with disabilities has affected the fulfillment of IDEA's intended purpose for special education.

This study will explore the foundations of best practices in special education. The foundations will be investigated chronologically to emulate the transformation of perceptions about disabilities and people with disabilities. It will observe dispositions toward students with disabilities through a legal scope. There will be scrutiny of how laws furthered the views held by society, and what that meant for students with disabilities. There will be an examination of the Individuals with Disabilities Education

Act (IDEA) to ascertain the intended purpose for special education. An appraisal of the outcomes from the disability rights movement will be used to frame present perceptions of disabilities and people with disabilities. Accountability practices in special education and how special education practices have reflected the intentions behind IDEA will be deliberated. This exploration will also focus on high expectations. Educators' identities direct how they create and communicate expectations with students. An emphasis will be put on the importance of critical reflective practices. Suggestions will be made on how to evaluate self-identity and the part it plays in the development of expectations in the learning environment. This study encourages engagement in these critically reflective practices to increase the likelihood that teachers will create and communicate high expectations that further the advancement of the dignity, competence, and independence of all students, especially students with disabilities.

Educators proclaim that special education programs cultivate independent, self-sufficient, able-minded beings, yet the significance of this research exists in its cross-examination of how educators' predispositions effect special education practices and how these practices can contradict this proclamation. Students with disabilities already face enough adversity from the labels and stigmas that surround disabilities and the people who live with them (Akin & Huang, 2019; Bejoian & Reid, 2005;). This study aims to track the evolution of society's perceptions of disabilities and people with disabilities to call attention to the imprint these deep-seated sentiments can have on how professionals educate students with disabilities. Professionals who work with students with disabilities need to appreciate how these views and their own biases can affect how they educate the students. This study aspires to show how educators may unknowingly or unintentionally

promote stigmas and demonstrate how expectations facilitate either positive or negative effects on students with disabilities.

This exploration is divided into subsections. The transformation of dispositions about disabilities and people with disabilities will address the history of special education before IDEA and the instatement of IDEA and its principles. A review of the progression of state testing accountability in special education will be included to depict the large expectation gap between students with and without disabilities. Moreover, it exemplifies the discrepancy between the proclamation that special education programs cultivate independent, self-sufficient, able-minded beings and the execution of practices in special education. The transformation will also address several present views that pose challenges to special education today. An analysis of these challenges will inspect how they produce obstacles to the promotion of self-sufficiency, accountability, and independence in students with disabilities. Next, this study will deeply explore the creation, communication, and significance of high expectations. Finally, this exploration will close with a summation of the transformation of perceptions, the implications of high expectations, and suggestions about the assessment of educators' self-identity to solidify how teachers play an active role in the successful implementation of high expectations.

Though the position that the education system is broken warrants a much more extensive investigation and conversation, this study captures a small piece of the problem that needs to be recognized before it can begin to be solved. If we do not critically reflect on the natural biases of educators who work with students with disabilities, then we will continue to engage in practices that are counterproductive to the objectives we claim special education programs work to reach.

I. Foundations of Best Practice

History

The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 and the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (1973) are two reformative pieces of legislature that have contributed to the foundation of what is known as best practice in the special education community. The Rehabilitation Act of 1973 guaranteed all students the right to a free appropriate public education (FAPE). In 1975, the Education for All Handicapped Children Act (EAHCA) further specified that students with a disability are guaranteed a free and appropriate public education that fits their individual needs. The EAHCA was later changed in 1990 to what is now referred to as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Before IDEA, students with disabilities were neglected because schools were not required to teach students with disabilities the same curriculum as their peers without disabilities. Before the 1970s, students were frequently banned from school settings despite their ability to learn within the educational system. In *Watson v. City of Cambridge* 1893, the earliest reported case of a child with a disability, the Massachusetts' Supreme Judicial Court ruled to exclude a student from the classroom on the basis that the student was 'weak minded' (Russo, 2019, p. 547). The Supreme Court of Wisconsin made a similar ruling in *State v. Board of Education of City of Antigo* 1919 when they maintained the verdict that excluded a student from school because 'his physical condition and ailment produce[d] a depressing and nauseating effect upon the teachers and school children' (Russo, 2019, p. 547). In the years to follow, *Brown v. the Board of Education* (1957) became what will later be known as one of the most monumental cases brought to the supreme court. This landmark case earned its notoriety for its pursuit of

equal education opportunities for all students no matter their race. *Brown v. the Board of Education* changed the legal definition of equality by overturning the precedent set by *Plessy v. Ferguson* which recognized the constitutionality of racial segregation under the ‘separate but equal’ doctrine (Cook, 2005).

Although *Brown v. the Board of Education* dissolved the legal barrier discrimination presented to the equalization of educational opportunities, this concept of ‘equal opportunity’ remained incomplete. The color of a student’s skin could no longer be used as a legitimate reason to justify educational advantages given to some students but not others; however, students with disabilities remained at a disadvantage because schools still had no legal obligation to afford students with disabilities the same educational opportunities given to students without disabilities. It was not until 1971 that a federal trial court, *Pennsylvania Association for Retarded Children v. Pennsylvania (PARC)*, began to articulate notions that would shape the principles of IDEA (Russo, 2019). Both sides came to the agreement that students, who were intellectually or developmentally impaired or thought to be, could “neither be denied admission to public schools nor subjected to changes in their educational placements unless their parents received procedural due process and that placements in regular school classrooms were preferable to those in more restrictive settings” (Russo, 2019, p. 548).

Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA)

A short time later, IDEA became a full-blown law initiated as a response to the growing demand to educate students with atypical needs. Since the instatement of IDEA and its revisions in 1997 and 2004, six principles have helped to shape best practice in special education as we know it today. First, IDEA requires states to provide all students with a free appropriate public education. This means school boards and local agencies must identify, assess, and serve all students with disabilities no matter their disability or its severity (Russo, p. 549).

Second, IDEA requires schools to conduct an ‘appropriate evaluation’ of any student suspected of having a disability. Student evaluations must be done in a timely manner. A pre-referral process must be undergone before diagnostic evaluations (Nelson & Benz, 1996). The pre-referral process employs a team to determine instructional strategies for students struggling in their general education classroom. This process is used to improve the performance of struggling students and decrease the number of misguided referrals to special education (Bateman & Cline, 2016). Schools must also ensure evaluations are done by trained professionals, conducted with instruments and procedures free of cultural bias, and given in the students’ native language (Nelson & Benz, 1996).

Third, IDEA requires schools to prepare an individualized education program (IEP) for all students receiving special education services. An IEP lists services the child will receive, where, how often, and with measurable annual goals (Yell et al., 2020). The IEP, developed by a multidisciplinary IEP team, requires documentation of a student’s recent evaluation data, present levels of academic achievement and functional

performance (PLAAFP), and measurable annual goals. The team must provide descriptions of progress monitoring procedures, the student's least restrictive environment (LRE), and the extent of a student's participation in state assessments. The IEP must also include an explanation of the student's special education and related services with details such as the date of initiation, duration, and frequency of services rendered (Yell et al., 2020; Gartin & Murdick, 2005).

Students are eligible for special education services until they are 22 years of age or until they graduate with a high school diploma (Russo, 2019). In the years preceding graduation, the IEP team must include the student in the development of an individualized transition plan (ITP) which conveys postsecondary goals related to training, education, employment, and independent living skills.

Fourth, IDEA stresses that students be placed in the least restrictive environment (LRE) based on their unique needs. The purpose of acknowledging a student's LRE is to facilitate a FAPE that enables a student to associate with students without disabilities to the maximum extent suitable to his or her educational needs (Nelson & Benz, 1996). If a student is to be removed from the general education setting and consequently not given the opportunity to share educational experiences with his or her non-disabled peers, IDEA requires validation for this decision (Gartin & Murdick, 2005). IDEA recognizes that a FAPE is an education that prepares students to function in society and live independently to the best of their ability. The LRE mandate accepts that the ability to learn and grow alongside one's peers is an important part of a student's development where he or she learns skills that they will need to apply after they leave school.

Fifth, IDEA has a special stipulation about parent involvement in placement decisions. Schools must make sure parents or guardians of a student with a disability are a part of any group that makes decisions regarding the educational evaluations and placement of their child. Parents must consent to the initial evaluation and are entitled to the right to refuse further evaluation (Russo, 2019). Guardians must also sign consent for special education services and be invited to equally participate in all IEP meetings as part of the team making decisions about the child's education.

Finally, the sixth principle concerns the establishment of procedural safeguards to protect the rights of the parents and the students. Procedural safeguards are in place in case there is a disagreement between the parents/ guardians and the school concerning a child with a disability. These safeguards grant parents/guardians access to all of their student's educational records. A copy of procedural safeguards must be provided to parents/guardians at every IEP meeting.

These 6 principles of IDEA have shaped the foundation of best practices as we know them today. Though most special educators are familiar with these principles, many professionals within education have not been introduced to this material in quite so much detail. This is unfortunate since all teachers are expected to provide a FAPE to every student in their classroom, including those with disabilities. As previously mentioned, a student's IEP plays a large role in providing a FAPE, with the IEP team collaboratively developing an individualized educational program to best fit the student's needs. The IEP team consists of the student's parents/guardians, the special education teacher, the student's general education teacher(s), an individual qualified to interpret evaluation results, a representative of the local education agency, related service providers, and

guests invited by the parents or the school. The student should be included as appropriate (Yell et al., 2020). The first 5 members listed in the latter are required to be at all IEP meetings. Note the inclusion of a general education teacher. The general education teacher is the expert when it comes to the general education curriculum and content standards. He or she plays an imperative role as a member of a student's IEP team because he or she is responsible for insight into the student's current performance in the general education classroom, input about decisions regarding the student's predicted performance and ability to reach grade level benchmarks with the appropriate supports, and contributions concerning program accommodations and supports needed by teachers in the general education setting to best serve the student.

Without an understanding of the 6 principals outlined in IDEA, it would be difficult for any IEP team member including the general educator to make decisions about a student's IEP or interpret the best way to provide a FAPE to a student receiving special education services. Furthermore, the intended audience for this thesis is all educators, not just special educators. This introduction to IDEA is comprised of references for terminology that will be used for the duration of this thesis. This introduction served to show that IDEA started as a way to provide an education to students with disabilities. Soon, the purpose of IDEA was to ensure that children with disabilities received a free appropriate public education (FAPE) to meet their unique needs and prepare them for further education, employment, and independent living.

Accountability Factors into FAPE: Progression of State Testing in Special Education

When the state board of education ruled that students with IEPs did not have to take state required tests, Jack insisted that he be allowed to take the test along with everyone else. He wrote a letter to the board stating that although he was a student with an IEP, it was his right to take the required grade-level standardized test. (Schwarz, 2006, p. 41)

This quotation was taken from Patrick Schwarz's *From Disability to Possibility* where he describes his experience with a student named Jack. Schwartz describes Jack as extremely intelligent and a fierce advocate. Jack is also described as a fifth grader with cerebral palsy. The possible consequences of the board's decision to allow students such as Jack to forgo state testing was further analyzed by a report entitled "Revisiting Expectations for Students with Disabilities" (Thurlow et al., 2019). This report starts by addressing a common misconception that alludes to why many impose low expectations on students with disabilities. In the section titled 'History of Low Expectations', the brief defines this misconception as, "...the belief that a student who has been identified as needing special education services by definition is not able to achieve to the same level [of accomplishment] as that student's peers" (Thurlow et al., 2019, p. 2). It is important to be aware that disabilities do not mean inability.

This misconception of 'inability' may have led to the high prevalence of exclusion of students from state testing as recently as the 1990s. According to "Revisiting Expectations for Students with Disabilities", many special educators reported that they were asked to take students with disabilities on field trips the day of state testing, and

parents of students with disabilities were advised to keep their students at home due to the perceived stress state testing might have on them (Thurlow et al., 2019). It became apparent that the exclusion of students with disabilities from state testing resulted in those students not receiving appropriately rigorous academic instruction. In response, a federal policy mandated that state receiving IDEA Part B funding must proctor state assessments to all students with disabilities. These students would also receive accommodations as needed on an individual basis. By 2000, modified assessments were created for students who were unable to take the regular state assessment.

Despite the development of participation guidelines, accommodations policies, and alternate assessments, the previously held assumption that students with disabilities could not perform as well as their peers appeared to be true. Their poor performance was not a reflection of the students' abilities but rather a reflection of the adjustment many students with disabilities had to make because they had not been given standards-based academic instruction prior to the new policy and were not required to be assessed on those standards before. It would be reasonable to assume that it would take time for teachers of students with disabilities to adjust to the same academic demands held for typical grade level students. However, poor performance scores spurred various states, schools, and districts to suggest out of level testing for students with disabilities. Out of level testing refers to a practice where the content and performance standards are lowered across the board until they match the standards for students at a lower grade level. The report found that many educators presumed that participation in a lower grade level test could allow students with disabilities to be counted as proficient at their own grade level for accountability purposes, provide useful intel needed to make instructional decisions,

and make the students feel more at ease with the testing experience because the objectives would be easier for them.

It turned out that studies showed the test scores of students who participated in out of level testing were not included in the accountability system, and teachers did not receive scores in a way that could guide instructional decisions. Also, student reports found that many students noticed the difference between what they were taught and what they were tested on. This set them apart from their peers and made their testing experiences very different. Consequently, many students who participated in the out of level state assessments did not take them seriously (Thurlow et al., 2019).

Although the development of modified state assessments was required by law, it was still unclear about who this test was designed for and what it should measure. Over time, it was decided that modified assessments, also known as alternate assessments, would be fashioned to measure alternate achievement standards. Up to 1% of student population could take this alternate test, and students permitted to take the test would be tested on the same content standards as their peers but have different expectations of achievement. This is the practice we adhere to today (Thurlow et al., 2019).

The objectives and standards tested on state exams detail curriculum requirements for every course across a state. These standards and objectives serve to make the requirements consistent across the state and guide instructors on what skills and specific knowledge students need to know to reach learning goals applicable to the real world. The establishment of these standards and objectives result in the creation of criteria that can be measured. This creation is only useful if we can measure whether certain criteria are being reached. Though state testing has been fraught with controversy, state testing,

for the purpose of progress monitoring, has many uses (Thurlow et al., 2019; Jones, 1973). State testing is meant to hold both students and instructors accountable (Bejoian & Reid, 2005). This measurement of accountability speaks to whether the education system has provided each student with a FAPE. The special education system has come a long way in its advancements concerning the rights of students with disabilities and state testing accountability. Schwarz's excerpt about Jack and "Revisiting Expectations for Students with Disabilities" supports the argument that accountability serves as a determinant of whether a student has received a FAPE. To be more specific, if we do not hold students with disabilities to a measure of accountability that is as close as possible to the measurement expected of their peers, there is reason to argue that we have not provided them with a free and appropriate public education.

II. State of Special Education Today

Changes in Disability Perceptions Inspire New Challenges for Special Education

Kauffman, McGee, and Brigham (2004) examine how changes in attitudes toward disabilities, special education, placement, and accommodations can result in the perpetuation of a disability in special education programs today. Though the road to a positive and accepting environment for students with disabilities was paved with good intentions and led to many beneficial advances, these authors discuss the fine line where arguments to “normalize” disabilities, embrace disabilities, and advocate for full inclusion have resulted in practices that inspire a lack of student accountability and present several obstacles to student progression toward independence and self-reliance (Kauffman et al., 2004).

Their article, “Enabling or Disabling? Observations on Changes in Special Education” (Kauffman et al., 2004), describes a shift in ideals which has obscured the original purpose and goals of special education. Special education was developed to respond to students with atypical needs. It aimed to decrease or close the performance gap between students with disabilities and students without disabilities in the general education classroom. The movement of as many students with possible to the mainstream classroom with the proper supports was a major goal. The goal for students with needs that could not be met in the regular classroom was still to move to a more typical setting within the plethora of placement options. There was a clear intention to increase students’ abilities to function independently and proficiently in society. Special education aspired to help students with disabilities attain as much normalization as

possible. observed that the focus of special education has migrated away from normalization, independence, and competence. Instead, the objective has changed to “the appearance of normalization without the expectation of competence” (Kauffman et al., 2004, p.614).

One negative impact that arose out of the disabilities rights movement was an increase in subscribers to the belief that disabilities are social constructions. The belief is often verbalized through the sentiment that “normal” does not exist. Abilities across our population vary, and the line between what is normal and abnormal is arbitrary. Therefore, no one has a disability and likewise, everyone has a disability (Kauffman et al., 2004). Though the argument that “normal” is discretionary has its merit, the significance with which it pertains to the need for special education services lies in the question of whether disability as a social construct can help people obtain dignity or if it would be more advantageous to assume disabilities do not exist (Kauffman et al., 2004). If we recognize disabilities as social constructs, does that mean we should dismiss disabilities as imaginary or unimportant? Kauffman, McGee, and Brigham ask the audience to consider the consequences if this one of thinking is applied to other social constructs such as dignity, civil rights, childhood, and social justice (615). The labels and stigmas that follow a person is a commonly voiced drawback of the recognition of disabilities. Denial of disabilities may change how society conversates about them, but it will not change the needs of the people who have them. Rejection of disabilities leads to society tiptoeing around the subject. Vague whispers and euphemistic mummers used to address the unfavorable

conceptions that are disabilities may unintentionally add to the stigma, and this kind of unclear communication will hinder progression efforts. If we sacrifice the acknowledgement of disabilities to compensate for the labels and stigmas attached, we also sacrifice programs in which these arbitrary decisions were necessary to provide special services to those who need them (Kauffman et al., 2004; Evans et al., 2005).

Another unintended drawback of the disability rights movement was more people began to view disabilities as insignificant or something to cherish, flaunt, or take pride in (Evans et al., 2005; Bejoian & Reid, 2005; Kauffman et al., 2004). While loving oneself has become a popular contemporary phenomenon, these outlooks about disabilities can present significant issues when applied to special education. If educators and special education programs approach disabilities as if they make no difference or should be seen as something desirable, they are far less likely to work towards improvement. If special education programs operate under the assumption that disabilities are to be embraced, prevention efforts are degraded, and possible crippling ramifications from the disability can become more pronounced.

Full-inclusion is one of the most substantial developments to come out of this shift in attitudes towards disabilities. Full -inclusion is a movement that no longer places the responsibilities of educating students with special education needs predominantly on special educators and their affiliates. This modern-day movement requires general educators to share in the responsibility of educating students with disabilities. This means general educators are directly responsible

for planning to provide suitable instruction, monitor student progress on individual goals and objectives, evaluate curriculum instructional outcomes, and supply necessary accommodations and supports that meet the needs of the students receiving special education or 504 services.

A decrease in the superfluous removal of students with disabilities from the general education classroom, is one benefit to come out of the Full- Inclusion movement. Some other advantageous outcomes attributed to full inclusion are a heightened accountability for general educators and greater priority placed on the importance of educating students with disabilities with their peers without disabilities.

The full inclusion movement has also incurred some negative consequences. As more students are pushed towards the general education classroom, special education has come to have a very unpleasant connotation (McLaughlin et al., 2006). Many have come to view special education programs as institutions that do more harm than good (Kauffman et al., 2004). Full inclusion has also led to the treatment of special educators as secondary supplemental instructors rather than professionals who play a fundamental and equally important role in the success of a full inclusion classroom (Kauffman et al., 2004). This movement has also fueled the misconception that the general education classroom is the only placement where fair and equitable treatment as well as an equal opportunity to learn is given to all students. This misconception downplays the necessity and usefulness of the services delivered by special education programs. If special education is only seen as benignant when it blends

into the background, it disregards the needs of students who cannot yet perform in a general education setting. Its position as a useful and helpful system is diminished (Kauffman et al., 2004).

Through the disability rights movement and into the full inclusion era, we have witnessed the stance on disabilities change from undesirable to nugatory or proud and interpretations of special education move from constructive to harmful. While large strides were made, the evolution of attitudes towards disabilities and special education has also blurred the purpose of special education and its intended goals to help students with disabilities.

III. High Expectations Theory and Description

The Pygmalion Effect

Psychologist Robert Rosenthal researched the sociological phenomena that theorizes that others' expectations of a person affect how that person performs. The specific situation where someone's high expectations for another person results in the high performance of that person is known as the Pygmalion effect or the Rosenthal Effect. Rosenthal partnered with Lenore Jacobson, a school principal, to study the Pygmalion Effect in 1968. They concluded that if teachers were persuaded to expect better-quality performance from students, then the students' performance would be enhanced (Jussim & Harber, 2005; Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018; Akin & Huang, 2019; Milner et al., 2019). This concept has since been applied and studied in business and education contexts, but its application to special education has not been studied as heavily as its application in the general education classroom.

Jussim and Harber (2005) did an extensive 35-year study on teacher expectations in the general education classroom. Jussim and Harber use the term "self-fulfilling prophecies" to describe the occurrence where teachers' expectations influence student outcomes. For this paper, we will keep to Murdock-Perriera & Sedlacek's (2018) definition of self-fulfilling prophecies which makes the distinction that "self-fulfilling prophecies are mediated by students' own behaviors and beliefs" (p.704). Jussim and Harber's definition of self-fulfilling prophecies encompasses a broader expanse of effects, "which are the effects of teacher expectancies on student outcomes regardless of mediators" (Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018, p. 704). Jussim and Harber's definition of self-fulfilling prophecies will be referred to as 'expectancy effects'

Jussim and Harber's (2005) study concluded it remained unclear whether these expectancy effects affect intelligence or do more harm or good in general. Teachers' expectations were not as large of a factor when it came to student outcomes as the intellectual public and social scientists were led to believe, and the weight of these expectations did not accumulate over time in the general education population. These conclusions hint that teachers' high expectations play a trivial part in student success; however, other literature sources contradict this finding (Akin & Huang, 2019; Johnson, 2004; Milner et al., 2019; Tompkins, 2019).

Jussim and Harber's study observed the effect of teacher expectations on student outcomes through a very restricted lens and should not be used to imply that high expectations play such a small role in student success. Jussim and Harber insist that their study did not review all interpersonal expectations, and the scope of their study strictly includes empirical studies that address whether teachers' expectations influence student outcomes (2005). Empirical studies rely on data observed about measurable phenomena and draw conclusions based on experience rather than theory or belief. The observation and measurement of phenomena that affect how teacher expectations influence student outcomes is not always straight forward. The effects of students' beliefs and behaviors and their part in self-fulfilling prophecies as well as the creation and limitations of self-fulfilling prophecies were beyond the scope of this study (Jussim and Harber, 2005). Nevertheless, the creation, limitations, students' own behaviors and beliefs, and other mediators of teacher expectations create a complexity of factors that can determine how student outcomes are affected (Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018, Johnson, 2004; Milner et al., 2019, Shogren et al., 2015). These factors are complex individually, and this intricacy is

increased with the consideration that combinations of these factors can alter student outcomes. The complexity of individual factors and combinations of these factors can make them difficult to observe and measure. This can make correlations between teachers' expectations and student outcomes difficult to precisely define within an empirical study. It is understood that all extraneous variables cannot be investigated completely, but the variables outside the scope of Jussim and Harber's study play such a large part in how student outcomes are affected by teacher expectations that it changes the narrative of how important high expectations are in the classroom.

How low teacher expectations affect student outcomes is as important to study as how high teacher expectations effect student outcomes. Something else to consider is empirical studies usually look at distinctive teacher expectations and student outcomes. It would be more difficult to observe and measure low teacher expectations if teachers do not acknowledge that they have low expectations for their students. Also, Jussim and Harber reviewed Rosenthal and Jacobson's experiments on the Pygmalion Theory and determined that Rosenthal and Jacobson's experiments could not speak to whether negative expectations undermined student achievement because the purposeful instillation of negative expectations would have been unethical (2005). It can also be said that Jussim and Harber's study could not study whether negative expectations undermined student achievement for the same reason. Without more information about how negative expectations can affect student outcomes, it would be tougher to analyze the magnitude of the effect high expectations have on student outcomes.

The parameters of Jussim and Harber's study narrowed the extent of the conclusions that could be drawn about the effect of teachers' expectations on student outcomes, and conclusions from their study should not be used to generalize the significance of high expectations. Jussim and Harber (2005) did find that expectancy effects do occur in the classroom, and there was evidence to support that teacher expectations could have a more powerful effect on stigmatized social groups. This finding has been further authenticated by other sources. Education literature has documented many studies that recognize the disparaging effects, negative impacts, and powerful consequences teachers' expectations can have on students labeled as "disadvantaged" or "different" (Bejoian & Reid, 2005; Fine & Weis, 2003; Rist, 1970; Shogren et al., 2015). Though Jussim and Harber's study of the Pygmalion Effect could not say with certainty whether these expectancy effects do more harm or good in general, high expectations for all students is prevalent in many classroom-management plans and strategies because of their positive correlations to student success (Akin & Huang, 2019; Johnson, 2004; Milner et al., 2019; Tompkins, 2019). Contrary to the conclusions that could be drawn from Jussim and Harber's study, high expectations are shown to be important for students with and without disabilities.

Researchers have found compelling evidence to support repetitive processes of teacher-student interaction stimulate the sociological phenomena in which teacher beliefs about students influence student outcomes (Murdock-Perriera & Sedlacek, 2018). Murdock-Perriera and Sedlacek's exploration of the Pygmalion Effect in educational domains investigates the existence and implications of teacher expectancy effects. Their research is unique in that it concentrates more on the formation and

transmission of expectancies rather than on the effects of these expectancies. Murdock-Perriera and Sedlacek's research is important to consider in the attempt to utilize the Pygmalion Effect to inform educational interventions.

High Expectations, Belief, and Rigor

The effective implementation of high expectations is deeply rooted in the interpersonal relationships between teachers and students (Milner et al., 2019). The exuberant variations in students' educational experience lend to difficulties in the study of high expectations and their effect on students. The role the teacher plays in shaping the educational experience has become the center of numerous studies (Rist, 1970). The demand that classroom culture must be responsive to students' unique learning needs has grown beyond the special education classroom. A healthy classroom culture is driven by effective instruction, persistent student-centered practices, family and community partnerships, and high expectations (Milner et al., 2019). Milner's book suggests some ways to implement high expectations in any classroom to integrate a caring and productive learning environment for all students. The book affirms the importance of student-teacher relationships, belief in students' abilities, and rigor in the successful implementation of high expectations. Milner maintains this means the whole class knows a lot is expected of them both academically and behaviorally, their lessons will be challenging, and teacher and students all hold the belief that they can learn and achieve at elevated levels. High expectations in the classroom centers on a teacher's belief in what he or she is doing and their students' ability to learn.

Like Milner and his co-authors, Pamela Seda's 7 principles of equity pedagogy also focuses a great deal on how rigor plays a role in the successful

implementation of high expectations (2020). Pamela describes rigor as not difficulty, but the depth of thinking and the robust quality of understanding. Rigor challenges students to find harmony between concepts of knowledge, skills, and application (Seda, 2020; Milner et al. 2019). Milner explains that low expectations can manifest in different ways. Low level worksheets may take the place of rigorous lessons, or students may not have the expectation of working from the start of class to the end. Milner (2019) shares low expectations coupled with low rigor can leave students feeling that teachers do not believe in their ability, pity them, or let them off easy because of economic or social circumstances. Tompkins (2019) agrees that a successful classroom community must have high expectations that emphasize that all students can be successful. These high expectations cultivate a positive classroom environment where students behave properly and develop self-confidence. A healthy classroom culture blends components conducive to learning such as high expectations with risk taking. The risk-taking component asserts teacher's responsibility to challenge students to explore new topics and try unfamiliar activities (Tompkins 2019).

This paper focuses on high expectations because of their potential to fight negative stigmas students with disabilities encounter. The confidence and self-perceptions of students with disabilities have been found to be influenced by others (Akin & Huang, 2019; Rodis, Andrew, Boscardin, 2001). . Students who experience negative disability stigma over extended periods of time can suffer from low self-esteem, depression, isolation, and avoid new or challenging activities (Akin & Huang, 2019). The belief in students' abilities is paramount to the implementation of high expectations in the classroom. The section serves to show how interpersonal relationships, behaviors and

attitudes toward students, and communication are profoundly rooted in the successful implementation of high expectations in the classroom.

IV. Construction of High Expectations : The Balancing Act

Match Student Expectations to Student Capabilities with Caution

Expectations should correspond with student abilities, and to an extent, high expectations need to stress the individual. This is where it becomes tricky, particularly when working with students with disabilities. When we construct high expectations for students with disabilities, teachers need to be aware of the pitfalls they may face. Students with disabilities are profiled based on their disability, and this information can be used to shape the expectations we have for students with disabilities. Teachers need to avoid the assumption that students with similar instructional needs and characteristics have similar abilities. While this may be true in some cases, making assumptions about students' abilities based on their disability label can cause students and teachers to not fully attempt to nurture developing abilities because restrictions have already been placed on the potential of these abilities to grow. Another issue educators face when matching students' abilities to their expectations is the misconception low expectations for students with disabilities is acceptable. Teacher should keep in mind how students can suffer in the long run when their expectations do not align with the expectations of their peers without disabilities. This section of the paper discusses issues teachers should consider in the construction of expectations for students with disabilities and how to balance between an individual needs and the need to achieve a common goal for all students.

Remnants of the disability-deficit paradigm can lead educational professionals to assume students of a specific disability classification share the same characteristics and educational needs (McLaughlin et al., 2006). The belief that students within the same disability category have similar needs and characteristics can be easily misconstrued as

these students also have similar abilities. While these assumptions can turn out to be helpful in supporting students, it becomes a precarious slope when teachers assumptions about students' abilities influence their beliefs about their own abilities. Lynn Pelkey (Rodis, Andrew, Boscardin, 2001), a student who grew up with a learning disability, shared how others beliefs and behaviors in school ultimately began to shape her beliefs about herself and her abilities.

My self-efficacy, my belief about my competence, fell into the category of failure-accepting. I expected to fail, so I set no goals. I learned helplessness. I started to believe the negative stereotypes associated with my academic abilities (p.25).

Intellect builds on our social, relational, and emotional experience, and teachers must be purposeful about how they shape these experiences in the classroom (Milner et al., 2019). Pelkey's overall educational experience contributed to her identity. New school years bring about the process where a group of new students meet a new teacher, and their journey throughout the rest of the year leads to the emergence of patterns of behavior, expectations of performance, and a mutually accepted system which stratifies the strong students from the poor performing students (Rist, 1970). Rist also found that these yearly experiences compound over time and often influence one another (1970). Teachers talk to other teachers, and students' records follow them from classroom to classroom. This is why it is important to keep in mind that the population of students with disabilities is very heterogenous, and the spectrum of their abilities is wide in its variety (McLaughlin et al., 2006). We must foster the growth of students' abilities, not impose

our assumptions about what students can and cannot do. Educational experiences are framed by interpersonal relationships between students and teachers. Though each experience will remain different, teachers can increase the number of positive experiences by creating a classroom culture with shared components that encourage the growth of constructive students. The inclusion of high expectations in a classroom culture serve to help all students begin to hold a deep belief in themselves and their capabilities.

Alignment of Expectations Advances Attainment of Shared Goals

High expectations should be suited to students' individual abilities. During the individualization of these expectations' educators should remember same needs do not always equate to same abilities. They should also reflect on whether their expectations are conducive toward the formation of self-reliant and compassionate adults. It is common for us to condone lower expectations for students with disabilities, particularly when it comes to behavior and accountability (Kauffman, 2004; Rodis, Andrew, Boscardin, 2001). Students with disabilities may be held to lower expectations than their peers without disabilities, but we maintain these lower expectations because of the belief that they are "high" for those individual students. Kauffman and his co-authors described how changing attitudes toward students with disabilities led to the unfortunate assumption that special education is sometimes seen as a free pass for students with disabilities to not be held accountable to high expectations of performance (2004).

Though our expectations should reflect students' capabilities, this line also becomes slippery when we lower expectations for students with disabilities and believe we will raise them when students begin to make progress. Patterns emerge where students

can see that their disability effects the expectations teachers hold them to, and they start to accept and expect that they will be held to different standards than their peers without disabilities (Kauffman et al., 2004; Rodis, Andrew, Boscardin, 2001).

When students with disabilities leave school, it can be a shock when society holds them accountable for the same expectations as their peers more often than they were used to in school. Recall Kaufman stated that the inclusion movement often affords students with disabilities the “ appearance of normalization without the expectation of competence” (2004, p. 614). The shock some students experience is understandable because they have been sent the message that they have not been held to certain expectations in the past because they cannot reach them. This is problematic since society imposes certain expectations, and one must reach them in order to lead a fuller, more independent life. Therefore, educators should be weary of certain performance accommodations that undermine the achievement of students with disabilities. Expectations are in place to promote specific goals of self-sustainability and independence. It is very important that the level of accountability and expectations of students with disabilities be as close as possible to the extent we hold their peers. Otherwise, they will not be ready to integrate into society when the time comes. The more aligned our expectations for students with disabilities are to the expectations of their peers without disabilities, the stronger the possibility that students with disabilities will reach the shared goal we have for all students.

Different Forms of Success Share the Same Minimum Threshold

Recall from [“Revisiting Expectations for Students with Disabilities”](#) (Thurlow et al., 2019), many educators assumed that students with disabilities who participated in out

of level state testing could count as proficient in their own grade level for accountability purposes even though they were held accountable for lower grade level standards. This way educators could say we hold *all* our students accountable. The unspoken part of such a statement was “just not in the same way.” This is reminiscent of a concept in James Orwell’s *Animal Farm* expressed by the statement, “All animals are equal, but some animals are more equal than others,” (1945, p. 124). Even though in the context of *Animal Farm*, Orwell was referring to the hypocrisy governments exhibit when they deem all their citizens equal yet bestow power and privileges on a select elite, the concept that something is given to all, but there is something not quite the same about what everyone is given, applies to accountability standards often found in special education.

Now, it is common knowledge among special educators that equality does not always equate to equity. We strive for equity because it means that a student is given what he or she needs to succeed, and this does not necessarily mean that he or she is given the same as everyone else. However, Orwell’s concept, as applied to accountability, is meant to underscore the idea that the extent to which we hold students with disabilities accountable should be as close as possible to the extent we hold their peers. The same goes for the expectations we have for students with disabilities. The expectations of a student with disabilities may not match the expectations of his or her peers, but the expectations will mirror what is best for him or her to succeed. In particular, the expectations needed for a student with disabilities to succeed should be as close as possible to what is expected of his or her peers. These expectations serve to

promote the success of all students, and though success may look different, there should be baseline criteria that characterizes the success we want all students to reach.

Archaeology of Self

The concept of Archaeology of Self was coined by Dr. Yolanda Sealey- Ruiz a professor at Columbia University. Her research was directed at racial inequality and discrimination in schools. She uses the concept to help teachers in urban schools become more racially literate (Teachers College, Columbia University, 2019). Similar themes of hardship can be found when we look at race, class, and disability within the education system. The inclusion of the archaeology of self in this study is meant to communicate the importance of critical reflective practices in the classroom. The expectations we have for students go beyond the day-to-day occurrences in the classroom. The Cradle-to Prison-Pipeline (CTPP) is an example of how teachers' expectations and students' educational experiences can have a compounding effect on students beyond the classroom setting. CTPP is concept used to describe how structural, institutional, and societal challenges have caused an increase in outcomes where particular students are pushed toward the path to prison (Milner et al., 2019).

The CTPP results from a combination of societal and structural factors that affect populations such as students of color, students living below the poverty line, students whose first language is not English, and students who may require special education services. Though education systems and structures are likely not intentionally directing these particular students toward juvenile and criminal justice systems, disparities in funding, cultural and economic awareness, and access to opportunities and services severely hinder students' ability to succeed. Oftentimes, sizable percentages of

populations such as students of color, students living below the poverty line, students whose first language is not English, and students who require special education services are associated with academic failure and increased dropout rates, and there becomes a domino effect where academic failure is linked to increased drop-out rates which is linked to future incarceration (Milner et al., 2019).

For the sake of all these underserved populations, we push the realization that the culture and expectations created in the classroom goes beyond daily occurrences. Classroom management is a part of the bigger picture and by extension, has broader consequences. The inspection of implicit biases and critical reflection are practices that merge the spheres of race, class, and disability together in the effort to bring out changes in educational professionals. Professionals who dig deeply into their ‘Archaeology of Self’ will reflect a deeper respect for people who do not share aspects of their background, culture, and identity. Though this is valuable to all teachers, it is especially valuable for educators working with disabilities because they do not share the background, culture, and identity of the students they work with. Many educators do not know what it is to live with a disability, and even if they do, their background and culture make the experiences they have vastly different from those of their students. Engagement in such reflective practices acknowledge the significance of how each student’s identity and teachers’ identities play a large role in shaping a students’ educational experience, expectations, and success in the classroom.

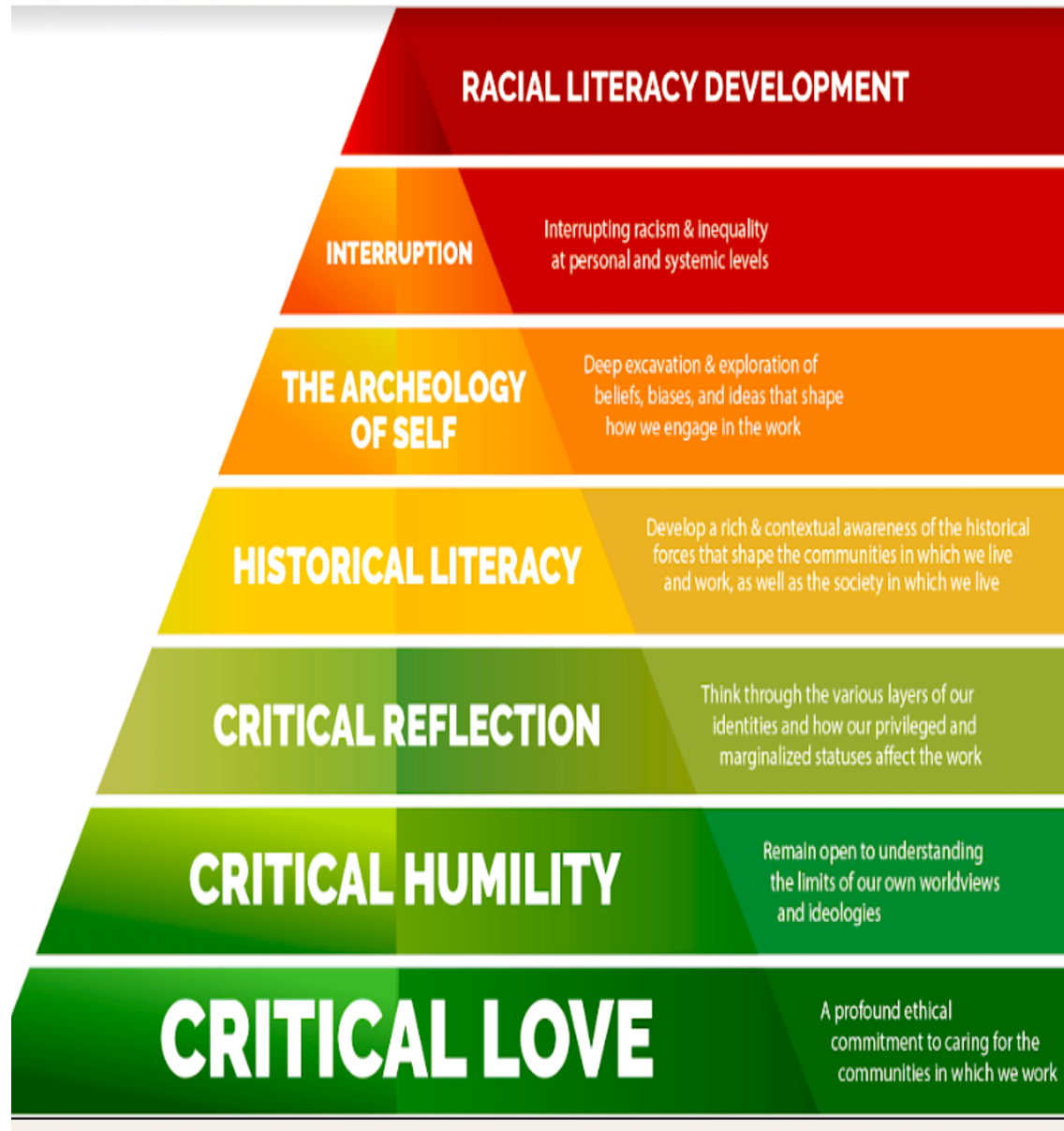
Inspection of bias and critical reflection requires honesty and effort over time, but it gives the capacity and propensity to take initiative. Sealey-Ruiz offers a model to involve teachers in thinking about themselves and their responsibilities in the classroom.

When students are not achieving at high levels, it is an opportunity for educators to undergo this reflection process to contemplate their expectations for their students and how their expectations manifest themselves in their classroom.

Despite the name, the Racial Literacy Development Model can be used to work against more than just racial injustice. Sealey-Ruiz's model provides a way for teachers to consider their identities and the identities of their students in a way that actively shows respect for their students' individuality in the classroom. There are often complaints about how students with disabilities are often lumped together in schools, this model would guide teachers to show more respect and acknowledgement of the individuality of students with disabilities (Kauffman, 2004; Rodis, Andrew, Boscardin, 2001; McLaughlin et al., 2006). Sealey-Ruiz outlines a reflective process that benefits all students in the classroom, and this paper supports that her practice and model would be especially beneficial for teachers working with students with disabilities because it forces educators who work with students with disabilities to acknowledge their own biases and perceptions about the students they work with, compels educators to contemplate how their actions, behaviors language, and expectations are affected by these perceptions, promotes the respect of individuality, and centers on how teachers' identities and student identities work hand and hand to shape students' path to success.

Illustration 1

The Racial Literacy Development Model



Similar themes of hardship can be found when investigating race, class, and disability within the education system. The racial literacy and development model, theorized by Dr. Yolanda Sealey-Ruiz and illustrated by Dr. Angel Acosta, can help educators critically reflect on how their biases and attitudes shaped their classroom. When educators examine how these layers relate to themselves and their classroom, they are more equipped to work against the stigmatization of students whether it is due to race, class, or disability.

V. Implications: High Expectations Pave the Road to Improvement

Evolution Recap and Significance of Communication

To review, the evolution of perceptions about disabilities and people with disabilities present a perception pendulum so to speak. Before IDEA, perceptions of limited ability and negative perceptions were believed, resulting in students with disabilities having little to no assistance. It was socially acceptable to exclude them, segregate them, and openly demean their dignity. Overtime, instead of pariahs, society has begun to advocate a more embracing and normalized view of individuals with disabilities. This has led to the demand that all students with disabilities be given the instruction they need to succeed on an individual basis. In an effort to give students what they need, we see the perception pendulum has swung from one extreme to another. To find a balance, this study has investigated the importance of high expectations.

High expectations and their successful implementation have been taxing to study because of their strong ties to enigmatic factors like behavior and attitudes. Behavior and attitudes are strongly tied to expectations and consequences students with disabilities can encounter throughout their life. (Evans et al., 2005). It is extremely likely that educators do not intend to perpetuate disabilities or negative stigmas, but their statements and actions can act as indirect and subtle means of degradation of dignity and competence (Thurlow et al., 2019; Evans et al., 2005; Kauffman, 2004; Rodis, Andrew, Boscardin, 2001; McLaughlin et al., 2006; Akin & Huang, 2019; Johnson, 2004). These microaggressions have macro affects, and one of the first steps we must take to remedy this is to recognize the power of communication.

Students' educational experience fashions large parts of their identity. Therefore, what teachers communicate to their students is important. Teacher communication can unintentionally and unknowingly supply students with the ammo to destroy their own arsenal (Johnson, 2004). The way we communicate with others often gives clues to who we think they are. This is one reason why Milner, Tompkins, and Seda (2019, 2019, 2020) emphasize that educators must believe in the high expectations they give their students. High expectations communicate to students that they can grow to embrace their assets, be driven by their beliefs, and create positive narratives about themselves (Milner et al., 2019). My motivation to pursue this thesis topic came from my own experience with special education. I was often more focused on how others' communication relayed who they thought I was. I became especially conscious when who they believed me to be, conflicted with who I believed I was and what I believed I could be.

High Expectations Prompt Educators to Work Harder for Student Success

Student expectations should be proportional to the capabilities of their grade level peers. The challenge many educators who work with students with disabilities face is discovering what those capabilities are. As previously mentioned, disability does not mean inability, yet we do not want to set expectations that ask too much of the student or put him or her in danger (Thurlow et al., 2019). Evidence -based decisions are made from observations, student work, and other data (Gartin & Murdick, 2004). Educators' expectations for students with disabilities can be fueled by this collection of data. It is worthy to note that predictions of a person's capabilities, based on observations of what he or she has done, can be a slippery slope, especially when it concerns the pursuit of something new.

Imagine the first time a child learns to ride a bike. The child may be worried about sustaining an injury, and the child may become discouraged if he or she continuously falls. If he or she continuously falls, we may predict he or she cannot ride a bike based off what is observed. If the child feels nervous about his or her first time on the bike, what provokes the child to try it anyway? If he or she continuously falls, what inspires that child to get up and try again? The child's inspiration could come from encouragement and adult communication of the belief that the child can ride the bike as all other children do. Both nurture the development of courage and confidence within the child. Motivation is as complicated as it is dynamic, but we are less motivated if we are sure something is not worth the effort. Teachers have been observed to be less attentive toward students with disabilities when they believe the students are less academically capable than their peers without disabilities (Akin & Huang, 2019). Rist (1970) found students designated as 'fast learners' received majority of the teaching time, positive-reinforcement behavior, and teacher attention.

Some children take longer to master a skill than other children; and in the time it takes to achieve mastery, the child may experience what feels like an excessive amount of failure. Yet children continue to try new things and continue to grow as people. The pursuit of the advancement of oneself is typically worth the effort, so how do educators promote this idea of self-worth? Can it be said that educators are likely to work harder to help students achieve success if we believe them capable of great things?

Conclusions

The first-time teachers meet students, they begin to subjectively evaluate them on whether they possess the desired traits necessary for 'success' (Rist 1970). It is human

nature to have implicit bias, and our actions and reactions to others can be by-products of these biases. Implicit bias refers to ‘the automatic and unconscious stereotypes that drive people to behave and make decisions in certain ways’ (Milner, 2019, p. 105). Teachers need to be aware of the adjectives that come to mind and other social labels when they consider the multiple facets of their students’ identities. If educators leave their implicit biases uninspected, we will continue to be incapable of thoroughly comprehending or being mindful of our responses. This is why it is important for teachers to inspect their thoughts and associations about children and engage in critical reflective practices (Milner, 2019; Teachers College, Columbia University, 2019).

This study acknowledges that professional educators who work with students with disabilities cannot escape exposure to negative perceptions, and in an effort to help, they may be influenced to engage in practices that inadvertently perpetuate the stigmas and labels faced by students with disabilities. If practices that shirk accountability are not discontinued, the ideals of special education will remain buried. While high expectations do not directly predict success, there is much evidence that they directly influence success. Expectations in the classroom are influenced by aspects of educators’ identity such as personal biases, attitudes, and experiences. Educators can communicate expectations through their behaviors, actions, and language. Hence, the importance that educators critically reflect on how their own self-identity impacts how they communicate expectations in their classroom and whether these expectations foster the development of independent and productive members of society. Every student deserves to have teachers value their strengths, believe in their ability to overcome disability challenges, and insist they are capable.

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