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"If You Want to Go Far": A Case Study of Culturally Sustaining Co-teaching

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Abstract
Researchers have often focused on weaknesses in the instruction offered to Black and Latinx students with dis/abilities, and not on what it looks like when teachers seem to get it right. The purpose of this case study was to understand the instruction and co-teaching partnership in one inclusive, urban high school classroom where the teachers sought to deliver responsive, empowering instruction. Working together, the teachers supported students' academic success, demonstrated cultural competence, and infused sociopolitical consciousness into lessons while being responsive to students' dis/abilities. They balanced teaching practices known to be culturally sustaining with those that were responsive to students' dis/abilities. The findings have implications for how we prepare and support teachers of Black and Latinx students with dis/abilities.

Keywords Co-teaching · Culturally sustaining pedagogy · Special education · Critical disability studies

Introduction

Students with dis/abilities and students who are Black and Latinx are too often offered a second-class education in American schools (Gay, 2002, 2018; Skiba et al., 2014). Students who are multiply-marginalized (Annamma et al., 2013), including those who are both Black and/or Latinx and have dis/abilities, face compounded challenges in access to general education courses, opportunities to earn course credits, school discipline, and graduation rates (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2018; Newman et al., 2011; Office of Special Education and Rehabilitative Services [OSERS], 2020; Skiba et al., 2014). Because of these challenges, researchers have called for culturally

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sustaining pedagogy (CSP) in special education settings (Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016; Harkins Monaco et al., 2022).

CSP builds on culturally relevant pedagogy (Ladson-Billings, 1995) to focus on educational practices that sustain students' cultural and linguistic heritages while supporting their sociopolitical consciousness and academic success (Ladson-Billings, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). Like culturally relevant pedagogy and culturally responsive teaching, CSP is an asset-focused pedagogy, one that positions the languages, literacies, and cultures of students as educational assets that teachers can draw on and honor through their teaching (Paris & Alim, 2014). While researchers studying special education have drawn on asset-based pedagogies, they have often focused on challenges and beliefs, not on classroom enactment (e.g., Annamma et al., 2013; Chu & Garcia, 2018; Cruz et al., 2020; Friedman et al., 2020; Fisher et al., 2021).

Over 250,000 Black and Latinx students receive special education services, with most spending part to all of their days in general education classrooms (OSERS, 2020). As students with dis/abilities have become more included in general education classrooms, co-teaching has become an increasingly popular way to support students (Cook et al., 2017; King-Sears et al., 2021). Co-teaching is an instructional model where a general education and special education teacher partner to deliver instruction in the general education setting (Friend et al., 2010; Cook et al., 2017). In theory, co-taught classrooms provide students with more individualized supports and a greater range of instructional approaches (Shamberger et al., 2014; Cook et al., 2017). In practice, researchers find that co-taught classrooms generally look similar to single teacher classrooms and that co-teaching often has small effects on student outcomes (Murawski & Swanson, 2001; Cook et al., 2017; King-Sears et al., 2021). The exceptions illuminate the possibilities of co-teaching. In classrooms with strong, collaborative co-teaching partnerships, the teachers' instruction is often more differentiated, and teachers bring their different expertise and techniques into their shared instruction (Pratt, 2014; Oh et al., 2017; Rytivaara et al., 2019).

We need more examples of asset-focused instruction for multiply-marginalized youth, including in co-taught settings, so that we can broaden our understanding of what is possible. Lightfoot (2004) wrote, "I think we—parents and teachers—can learn a lot more from examining examples of 'goodness' than we can from dissecting weakness and pathology" (p. xxvii). Ladson-Billings (2009) wrote that she "wanted to know what was right with African American students' education and what happens in classrooms where teachers… seem to get it right" (p. vii). This case study focuses on two urban high school co-teachers who seem to "get it right" in teaching multiply-marginalized youth, with implications for teacher education and findings on the teaching practices they leveraged to respond to both students' dis/abilities and their cultural and linguistic heritages.

Theoretical Framework

In order to understand the complexity of teaching that tries to "get it right"(Ladson-Billings, 2009, p. xxvii) for Black and Latinx students with dis/abilities, this study draws on a DisCrit framework. DisCrit brings together critical race theory and

disability studies to understand the experiences of multiply-marginalized youth (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma, 2015). DisCrit recognizes, among other things, the interconnections of ableism and racism, the multidimensional nature of many students' identities, the impacts of being raced or dis/abled, the importance of attending to the voices of multiply-marginalized students, and the need for resistance to inequities (Annamma et al., 2013). In co-taught classrooms, DisCrit has been used to understand how teachers draw on deficit and intersectional perspectives of their students and how these perspectives shift when the teachers face challenges (Friedman et al., 2020). DisCrit has also been used to delve deeper into the discipline process for multiply-marginalized youth (Fisher et al., 2021), and the ecology of classrooms that disrupt racism and ableism (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Hancock et al., 2021). The ecology includes the pedagogy in the classroom, the curriculum, the relationships within the classroom (solidarity), and resistance, how teachers and students reject deficit narratives and inequities (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). A DisCrit framework allows for an intersectional approach to special education, one that attends to the complexities of students' identities and the particular forces at work in their classrooms. In this study, I drew on DisCrit to maintain a focus during observations and data analysis on the multidimensional natures of students' identities, on the teachers' resistance to inequities, and on the classroom ecology.

Related Literature

Providing Culturally Sustaining Instruction

Culturally relevant pedagogy, the foundation of CSP, rests on three pillars (Ladson-Billings, 1995, 2014). Culturally relevant educators are culturally competent, using students' culture as a bridge to the curriculum. They support students' academic success by building their skills, maintaining high expectations, and building positive relationships with students. Finally, culturally relevant educators build students' sociopolitical consciousness so they can critique and change social inequities. CSP builds on this foundation by emphasizing the social justice focus of culturally relevant teaching, which has often been watered down in classroom practice (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Powell et al., 2016; Thomas & Berry, 2019), and by focusing on supporting students' multicultural and multilingual identities in ways that acknowledge culture as something evolving, not fixed in history (Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014).

In practice, teachers of English, social studies, and English for Speakers of Other Languages (ESOL), the subjects focused on in the co-taught classroom in this study, have operationalized CSP and culturally relevant pedagogy in many different ways. Teachers have worked to demonstrate cultural competence by learning about students' cultures, and validating students' heritages within lessons (Powell et al., 2016; Thomas & Berry, 2019). In diverse social studies classrooms, teachers have emphasized cultural competence by showing students multiple perspectives on key events in American history, connecting to students' lived experiences, providing students with choice in the classroom, and seeking out students' advice on content to cover

(Martell, 2018; Martell & Stevens, 2019). In ESOL classes, teachers have encouraged multilingualism (Choi, 2013; Aronson & Laughter, 2016). In English, teachers have incorporated hip hop into lessons, assigned books with themes that resonate in students' lives, utilized student conferencing, and built peer support through small group work (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Smith, 2020; Walker & Hutchinson, 2021). In each of these classrooms, teachers have found their own way to be culturally competent and sustain students' identities.

Teachers have worked to support students' academic success by focusing on academic excellence and being warm demanders (Ladson-Billings, 1995). Teachers have provided individualized scaffolding for lessons, set and maintained high expectations for student learning, and incorporated hands-on work into lessons (Morrison et al., 2008; Thomas & Berry, 2019). They have built relationships and trust with their students and their families (Bonner, 2014; Thomas & Berry, 2019). In social studies, teachers have engaged students in simulations, debates, and discussions and incorporated videos and other materials into their lessons to support students' learning (Martell, 2018; Martell & Stevens, 2019). In ESOL classes, teachers have provided rich visual supports for students (Choi, 2013; Aronson & Laughter, 2016). In English, teachers have provided small group instruction, and differentiated learning activities to meet students' learning needs (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Walker & Hutchinson, 2021). The high expectations, caring for students, and focus on building each student's skills are part of how these teachers have supported the academic success of their students.

More rarely than either academic success or cultural competence, researchers have documented teachers building students' sociopolitical consciousness through explicitly teaching about inequities, political movements, and political change (Aronson & Laughter, 2016; Powell et al., 2016; Martell & Stevens, 2019; Thomas & Berry, 2019). These teachers show what it can look like for students from historically marginalized groups to receive an education that begins to sustain, not overwrite, their identities.

Co-teaching to Support Students with Dis/abilities

For students who are multiply-marginalized, instruction, ideally, should be responsive to their dis/abilities as well as their racial, ethnic, and linguistic backgrounds (Kourea et al., 2018; Freeman-Green et al., 2021). In addition to individual accommodations and modifications, many students with dis/abilities benefit from small, flexible learning groups, scaffolded supports, frequent feedback, positive relationships with their teachers, and relevant lessons that engage them (McLeskey et al., 2017). Students with dis/abilities also often benefit from instruction that supports their self-determination, an instruction with features such as providing students choice and control within the classroom (Shogren et al., 2012, 2015; Chang et al., 2017).

Co-teaching is an instructional model that could provide students with dis/abilities with instruction that meets their needs in inclusive classrooms (Friend et al., 2010; Cook et al., 2017). In inclusive classrooms where the special education

teacher directly supports students, students with dis/abilities improve their skills more and feel more confident in their learning (Bottge et al., 2018; Burks-Keeley & Brown, 2014). Unfortunately, in many co-taught classrooms, the general education teacher instructs, often through whole group instruction, and the special education teacher serves as an assistant (Scruggs et al., 2007; Wexler et al., 2018). In these "business as usual" classrooms, students with dis/abilities often struggle (Cook et al., 2011, 2017). In other co-taught classrooms, however, the teachers engage in team teaching, where the teachers share instruction and responsibilities (Pratt, 2014; Rytivaara et al., 2019). While each co-teaching pair finds a different balance that works for them, the teachers might divide up responsibilities for lessons, flexibly shift roles during a lesson, and build on their individual strengths so that the general education teacher might present the content and the special education teacher makes the content accessible for students or connect it back to prior learning (Pratt, 2014; Rytivaara et al., 2019).

Stronger co-teaching partnerships tend to share certain characteristics (Shamberger et al., 2014). In strong partnerships, teachers are likely to engage in co-planning and have administrative support for their co-teaching, including common planning time (Shamberger et al., 2014; Cook et al., 2017). The teachers are likely to both be interested in co-teaching, know the content, and show willingness to share power in the classroom (Shamberger et al., 2014; Oh et al., 2017; Pesonen et al., 2021). Many strong co-teachers hold similar teaching philosophies (Pratt, 2014; Fluijt et al., 2016). Many also take direct actions to support their partnership, including positively reinforcing each other's successes and communicating frequently about students, upcoming lessons, and their lives (Brinkmann & Twiford, 2012; Pratt, 2014). Strong co-teachers tend to engage in open, direct communication about differences and challenges in their partnerships as well (Oh et al., 2017; Rytivaara et al., 2019; Hackett et al., 2020). Strong partnerships often build over time, with increased role flexibility and sharing of instructional duties (Pratt, 2014; Fluijt et al., 2016). The instruction provided in classrooms with strong co-teaching partnerships is likely to be individualized and supportive of students' dis/abilities, but it is less clear how responsive that instruction would be to other aspects of students' identities.

Research Purpose

Multiply-marginalized youth deserve instruction that is responsive to their racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities, and to their dis/abilities. We have examples of what instruction that is responsive to students' racial, ethnic, and linguistic identities can look like and examples of what instruction responsive to students' dis/abilities can look like, but fewer examples of instruction that is responsive to students' intersectional identities, and draws on the affordances of co-teaching. We need those examples to show future and current teachers what is possible and to build a wider repertoire of strategies that are supportive of multiply-marginalized youth. Therefore, this study focuses on:

What elements of culturally sustaining pedagogy are visible in a racially, ethnically, and linguistically diverse, general education classroom serving multiply-marginalized students?
How does co-teaching shape the culturally sustaining pedagogy visible in the classroom?

Methods

Research Context and Participants

This single case study focuses on the actions and beliefs of one pair of co-teachers at Washington High School (WHS; pseudonym) in the Southeast. Washington High School enrolls close to 2000 students, 57% of whom identify as white, 15% of whom identify as Black, and 14% of whom identify as Latinx. In addition to being ethnically diverse, the urban high school is economically diverse, with 28% of students classified by the state as low-income, and linguistically diverse, with 10% of students classified as ESOL. According to district and state records, Black and Latinx students at WHS graduate and enroll in advanced classes at lower rates and are disciplined at higher rates than their white peers. In Washington School District, white students are more likely to be identified as Autistic, and Black students are more likely to be identified as Emotionally Disturbed than is true either at the state level or nationally.

The 11th grade Synthesis course at WHS taught by Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner (pseudonyms) was chosen for the case study based on the recommendation of a district administrator and an initial meeting with Dr. Sumner. The district administrator described the Synthesis program as an example of an equity reform, although neither the administrator nor the teachers used the terms responsive, relevant, or sustaining to describe the program. The administrator recommended that I meet with Dr. Sumner, who had recently won a prestigious teaching award. Dr. Sumner spoke in our preliminary meeting of his co-teaching partnership with Coach Wilson and their shared drive to prepare students to pursue their goals during and after high school. During that meeting, Coach Wilson came into the classroom, as did multiple students, and I was able to observe the teachers' and teacher-student interactions, which led me to focus on their classroom for the case study.

Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner were in their third year of co-teaching and in their first year of teaching both English and History, as the two classes had previously been separated. Both teachers were comfortable teaching the history content, but Coach Wilson had not previously taught English before and viewed 2018 as a learning year. Coach Wilson is a Black man in his late thirties. He had been a special education teacher and head football coach at WHS for five years and was called either "Coach" or "Coach Wilson" by the students, one of whom was on his football team. He was a coach before he became a classroom teacher and still described himself first and foremost as a coach. Of the eleven students on his special education case load, only three were in Synthesis. Dr. Sumner is a bilingual white man in his early

40 s who taught Synthesis and ESOL classes, served as chair of the ESOL department, and was called "Doctor" or "Doctor Sumner" by the students.

Synthesis, their co-taught class, meets for a double period and combines United States History and 11th grade English, with the students taking state exams for both subjects at the end of the school year. The course was designed by Dr. Sumner as a way to address concerns by ESOL students about segregated classes and has become progressively more linguistically and ethnically diverse over time. In 2018, the course enrolled close to even percentages of white, Black, and Latinx identifying students and slightly more male students than female in each class. Approximately one-third of the students in Synthesis were classified as ESOL students, all but one of whom spoke Spanish at home. About one-third of the students received special education services, almost all of whom were served under the learning disabilities category, although there were also students served under Emotional Disturbance, Autism, and Other Health Impaired labels. Across the two periods, three students had dedicated aides. Students in Synthesis could take the course for honors or standard credit, and about 20% of the students were pursuing honors credit. The course, at 20 and 21 students in the two sections, had class sizes slightly smaller than the WHS average.

Data Collection and Analysis

This study draws on observational and interview data of the two teachers, supported by classroom artifacts and archival information. Following Institutional Review Board approval, I observed the teachers' co-taught classes for 33, 75-min periods over the course of five weeks. To learn about Dr. Sumner's instruction outside of Synthesis and the connections between Synthesis and the broader community, I observed five periods of his ESOL class, attended an in-school event organized by Dr. Sumner, and went to a community outreach event. I typed detailed field notes during each observation, guided by an observation protocol, which were edited for clarity each night. The observation protocol focused on (1) the teachers' partnership; (2) academic content and skills; (3) teacher-student interactions; (4) sociopolitical content and foci; (5) experiences of multiply-marginalized students. In addition to observing the teachers, I interviewed each separately for 30–50 min at the beginning, midpoint, and endpoint of the observation window for a total of approximately two hours of interview time per teacher. The semi-structured interview protocol derived from the research questions and from phenomenon that I observed in the classroom and in prior interviews. Questions included, "What is your approach to building community in the classroom," "How has your co-teaching partnership evolved over time," and "You spoke last time about your goal for the class being for students to see what they are capable of. Can you tell me more about that?" I supplemented the observations and interviews with classroom artifacts, including handouts and resources provided to students and links to websites used during instruction, and archival information, including media articles on the teachers and public information on the school and program from the district and the state.

I engaged in three phases of data analysis. The first phase, which occurred concurrently with data collection, included detailed daily and weekly memos and my field notes (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Miles et al., 2014). The second phase of analysis, completed immediately after data collection, consisted of coding the interviews, documentary evidence, and field notes in Nvivo, a qualitative data analysis program, and using analytic memos to synthesize the codes and identify patterns in the data (Miles et al., 2014). All materials were separately line by line coded using a combination of a priori codes, generated from work on asset-focused pedagogy and the research questions, and emergent codes that came from the observations, documentary evidence, and the interviews (Miles et al., 2014). Colleagues with expertise in culturally sustaining pedagogy reviewed excerpts from the field notes and provided feedback on the initial codes.

Through pattern analysis and further discussion with colleagues, five conceptual themes emerged across the data of socio-political consciousness, academic success, cultural competence, co-teaching partnership and school context. Based on the codes from the second round of data analysis and themes identified in analytic memos, each of these larger codes was divided into two to five sub-codes. For example, the code of co-teaching partnership was subdivided into codes for roles, relationship, communication, and beliefs and characteristics. Each sub-code was then operationalized for coding, as can be seen in the codebook in the "Appendix".

All observations and interviews were coded two times using the codebook to increase reliability in coding. Coding was at the phrase level, and one section from an observation or interview could be coded multiple time. An example of a phrase from the field notes that was coded multiple times is, “9:10 Dr. Sumner pulls up a video and thanks students for giving them feedback.” This phrase was coded both under the academic success sub-code of “instructional formats” because of the reference to a video and under the cultural competence sub-code of “student power” because of the reference to students’ feedback on instruction.

Throughout the coding process, I met with colleagues to discuss the emerging codes, other ways to code the data, and the reliability and validity of my analyses (Yin, 2018). I asked colleagues to read segments of field notes and interviews to see how they would code them and what aspects of culturally sustaining pedagogy they saw, or did not see, in those segments. As I moved from codes to themes, I searched for disconfirming evidence and used the three sources of data to triangulate my findings (Yin, 2018). I shared initial drafts of the paper both with Dr. Sumner for member checking and with colleagues with expertise in qualitative data analysis for critical feedback, and made changes based on their feedback (Yin, 2018). To increase the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, I also developed a research database and established an audit trail through analytic memos, backups of the Nvivo coding from each data analysis phase, and methodological journals (Yin, 2018).

Researcher Reflexivity

As a qualitative researcher, I cannot be written out of the research process. Who I am shapes what questions I ask, my interactions with participants, (Lecompte &

Preissle, 1993), and what I see when I look at the data. I am a white, monolingual woman who worked for over a decade with multiply-marginalized youth, including in co-taught settings. I have a strong commitment to understanding how schools can support students' empowerment. My personal beliefs shaped both my selection of the case study and what I was predisposed to notice during my observations and interviews. To address the impact of my own biases and experiences on my understanding of what I saw and heard, I maintained a reflective journal throughout the research process. During data analysis, I reviewed the journal and shared my insights with colleagues. While care was taken to seek member input, to attend to my own biases, and to confer with experienced colleagues, my own "assumptions, interest, and theoretical commitments" (Emerson et al., 1995, p. 167), inevitably shaped what I saw and the themes I identified.

Limitations

Despite the measures taken to heighten the credibility and trustworthiness of the findings, the study has several limitations. No student interviews or academic information was collected as part of the study, meaning that students' views of the classroom instruction is missing from the study, as is data on student outcomes. The study is also cross-sectional and so changes over time in the program are not visible. Despite these limitations, the findings from this study offer new insights into culturally sustaining co-teaching.

Findings

Despite never describing their instruction as culturally sustaining, Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner delivered instruction that focused on supporting all students' academic success, sustaining students' cultures, and building students' sociopolitical consciousness while being supportive of students' dis/abilities. Each of these elements was supported by the teachers' co-teaching, shared commitment to equity, and willingness to put in the time to create a strong, student focused partnership. Their instruction provides an example of what culturally sustaining, co-taught instruction can look like in inclusive classrooms.

Supporting Students' Academic Success

In Synthesis, Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner worked together to build students' academic skills, to hold students to high expectations, and to provide students with socioemotional and academic supports. During most classes, students worked with partners or in flexible, cooperative groups, as well as individually and as a whole class. The whole group instruction combined primary source images, video clips, music, lecture, and interactive questioning. The teachers also provided scaffolding for assignments, including examples of strong student work and sentence starters. In addition to these class level supports, during check ins with students, the teachers

provided supports calibrated to students' needs, so that one student received support with paragraph structures while another was pushed to add descriptive language to his essay.

In 11th grade, students at WHS took a high-stakes exam in both English and History and the ESOL students took an additional, high-stakes exam. Both teachers felt a duty to help students succeed on the exams. The students with identified dis/abilities had Individual Education Program goals as well that needed to be met. The teachers taught to all three sets of these needs, individualizing instruction as needed. They folded ESOL supports, such as sentence frames for oral discussions and for writing, and special education supports, such as teaching metacognitive reading and note taking strategies and explicit instruction on formal English, into the main content of the course. Synthesis students received individualized supports and learned in small groups and through innovative pedagogies—all of which were supported by the team teaching in the classroom.

The teachers also challenged students to excel. They constantly gave the students growth oriented feedback. Coach described their goal as to "push [students] to their limits… [and] help them to be successful." In class, Dr. Sumner told students, "There is always a way to make it better," and Coach Wilson said, "We want you to challenge yourselves, to take it to another level." They also held students accountable. When Coach saw a student slacking off in class one day he said, "Stop doing the minimum." When a student told Dr. Sumner that she was okay with a C- grade, he told her that her grades needed to be higher and that, "It's hard to have a college career as a C student." They also partnered with students' families to encourage more growth, referring to students' families in conversations both positively and for discipline, as when Coach Wilson told one student, "When you get home, Mrs. B is gonna crack down too."

The high expectations were paired with support. Dr. Sumner worked with students before and after school and offered them rides to and from events. Coach Wilson worked with his athletes almost daily after school and was involved in their lives, on and off the football field. The teachers listened to their students and knew them as individuals. After school one day, a student shared about her brother's eviction, his challenges, and her own struggles as Dr. Sumner listened and expressed empathy. Coach Wilson spoke with students about their individual challenges in class while still refocusing them on their work, telling one student, "Man dog, I am feeling for you," and then pointing to his assignment. The teachers individualized their management strategies based on their knowledge of students. One student was shy, always choosing to sit alone and hunching up when he was approached. When he was off task, rather than speaking about it directly like they did with his peers, the teachers would use proximity or ask him a friendly question about his work. When it was time to work in groups, one teacher would go to him, walk with him to his group, and sit in the group with him for a while.

Coach Wilson described his desire to create a classroom where students "are comfortable learning," and "feel comfortable being themselves." The classroom was full of couches and round tables with multicultural art on the walls. The teachers built on the warm physical environment by making students feel welcome. Almost all students were personally greeted as they came into the classroom. When a

student came in late, the teacher who was not instructing would quietly pull that student aside, explain what was going on, and welcome them. The teachers further built a warm environment by praising students. They frequently high-fived students and complimented their work, as when Dr. Sumner told Deandre, a Black student with dis/abilities, that his writing was "blow[ing Dr. Sumner's] brain." Coach built on the warmth by adding in fun. During class one day, music came on briefly and Coach started dancing. When a student looked at him, he laughed and said, "You got to have fun sometime!" He routinely cracked jokes and made students laugh during lessons. The combined effect of the space, the welcoming, the praise, and the jokes was an environment that students chose to be in during their lunches, and before and after school. The teachers encouraged students' academic success through multi-faceted instruction, socioemotional and academic supports, and the creation of a warm and welcoming environment.

Demonstrating Cultural Competence

Dr. Sumner and Coach Wilson included multiple perspectives on history, connected the content to students' lives, folded in bilingual supports, provided students with choice, and gave the students' leadership within the classroom. Each of these is part of cultural competence. Rather than relying on textbooks for information, the teachers often wrote their own handouts, or paired written content with documentary clips and photos that emphasized varied perspectives on history. In a lesson on Westward Expansion, the teachers highlighted its impact on Indigenous communities through primary source photos of dead buffalo and boarding schools and lyrics from "Home on the Range." During that same lesson, the teachers also discussed the exclusion of Black Americans from homesteading opportunities. In a lesson on cowboys, Dr. Sumner shared that over ten percent of cowboys in the West were Black. Rather than just presenting a dominant narrative of US history, the teachers wove in multiple narratives and perspectives. In the same lesson on Westward expansion, the teachers traced the origins of the words lasso and rodeo back to Spanish. Dr. Sumner, who was bilingual, often used language as an access point to the curriculum, supporting students use of Spanish, providing cognates, and more broadly affirming students use of dialects and their home languages in class, while still teaching the formal English students needed for their high-stakes tests.

The teachers worked to connect course content to the lives of students. When the students were confused about why the Great Migration occurred, Dr. Sumner invited a student to share his immigration story. The student responded by describing the violence and fear his family felt in El Salvador and their desire for safety. Dr. Sumner then connected those reasons for migration to the reasons Black Americans left the South. Deandre made connections between the content and his own life on his own, as when he compared pay for child workers during the Gilded Age to his peers' complaints about their after school jobs by saying, "They paid [the child workers] so low wages they couldn't even get by… and you complain about your pay like, 'Why's he getting five an hour?'" Both teachers felt it was important to include a

wide variety of examples and content so that students could find their own access points into the curriculum, while still learning the prescribed content.

The teachers also gave students power within the classroom. Dr. Sumner believed that people with power had a responsibility "to step back to let others have power as well." He and Coach Wilson acted on that by listening to their students, giving them some control in the classroom, and treating them as experts. The teachers encouraged student presentations, telling students to listen to each other because, "You can learn from them." Dr. Sumner and Coach Wilson sought the students' input on how the class was going. When students wrote on surveys that homework was disconnected from classwork, the teachers changed how homework was done for the class. When the students wanted to see more connections to contemporary life, the teachers began bringing in more content that showed parallels in today's society, including a video about the first women Rangers as part of a unit on suffrage. The teachers also gave students some autonomy in lessons, letting them choose the level of text to read, how to complete an assignment, and giving them freedom of movement within the classroom.

Building Sociopolitical Consciousness

Power, along with exposing and resisting inequities, were key themes in Synthesis. Students learned about the Indian boarding schools and the low wages paid to Chinese-American railroad workers during lessons on Westward Expansion and about the "inequality of money" in the Gilded Age. In a classroom discussion on suffrage and gender imbalances in public monuments, Coach said, "We have talked in this class about being excluded, about being marginalized, about telling the untold story… Is it possible that women are being excluded from the story?" Beyond exposing inequities, the teachers lifted up historical figures who resisted oppression from Ida B. Wells to Susan Anthony to Sitting Bull. In the lesson on Westward expansion, Dr. Sumner focused on Indigenous resistance saying, "Do you think some fought back?… Native Americans had been fighting a war with the American government for 250 years." In a lesson on the late 1800s, he said, "Today, we will be discussing fighting Jim Crow. We don't want you to think that nobody was doing anything about it." In addition, as a white man and a Black man discussing racial inequities and resistance, and as two men discussing misogyny and women's rights, the teachers themselves served as role models for examining and resisting inequities in society.

The teachers gave students opportunities to be change makers in their communities. Dr. Sumner described their instructional goal as "trying to connect the skills and the [state-tested] content they need to know to projects that have some kind of an impact in the world." In the past, students had worked with the town council to create a mural along a local road and created their own podcasts on the historical roots of a contemporary problem. During my observations, students emailed politicians advocating for a holiday or a school named after a woman from history with the goal, as Dr. Sumner told them, of "hav[ing] an impact." One student advocated for renaming a school after a local figure who resisted slavery and another

for a holiday named after Sacagawea. As they polished their emails and received responses from politicians, a student who had discussed dropping out of high school commented on his work, saying, "It is only this good because I have to send it to a policy-maker… It matters," while a peer described the project as, "something I care about." Charlize, a student who was juggling 40 hours of work and exhaustion along with her schoolwork, excitedly yelled, "I did it!" when she sent off her email. The teachers found ways to teach the tested content while elevating stories of resistance and providing students with opportunities to have an impact.

In Synthesis, the focus on creating change extended to students' academic futures. Many of the students in Synthesis were not enrolled in college credit bearing classes, or on track for college. The teachers wanted to change students' trajectories. Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner spoke frequently about college and about college credit courses in class, with Coach saying, "If we didn't think you could do it, we wouldn't talk to you about it… Don't limit yourselves." Dr. Sumner organized a recruitment session for advanced courses during lunch that 18 Synthesis students attended. Advanced course teachers discussed expectations and supports, including financial supports, with small groups of students. Dr. Sumner also organized a series of after school events on college. The bilingual sessions featured panels of first-generation college students and parents answering community members' questions. Coach described the teachers as wanting to help students "achiev[e] their sense of greatness in whatever avenue they choose," and supporting students in accessing advanced opportunities was part of that.

Changing Students' Trajectories

Both teachers saw an impact of their work in Synthesis. Coach Wilson described "seeing …progress in the kids and [their] writing and the confidence they have in talking." Dr. Sumner felt they had helped changed some students' trajectories; "I feel like there are certainly kids who have gone through the program who are in college now who… may not have been [on that] trajectory… and now they are." The impact of their caring and responsive teaching was visible in how students responded. Deandre had struggled academically and behaviorally in other contexts. One day, he came to class angry and upset because he thought he was in trouble. Coach Wilson stayed with him, reassured him, and helped him rejoin the class. A few days later, Deandre told Dr. Sumner that it was frustrating to work on a writing assignment at home because he did not know what to change. Dr. Sumner offered to stay with Deandre after school so his writing could be "exceptional." Deandre responded with strong engagement. He made connections continuously. He responded to a lesson on wealth inequality in the Gilded Age by saying, "It still feels like that, really rich and poor people," and connected monopolies to Jeff Bezos. One day, he looked at a classmate and said, "I don't know. I like learning about this content." Deandre sought out feedback on his writing from the teachers and responded to constructive feedback with comments such as, "Okay, I can do that." When Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner spoke after school about who was struggling and who was excelling, Deandre was at the top of the list of excelling students.

Edwin, another multiply-marginalized student, was very different. Edwin missed school frequently and, during the first week of observations, tried to sleep in class every day that he was there. The teachers took turns engaging him and trying to keep him awake. During the second week of observations, Edwin lashed out at Coach, saying "Man, f@# this." Coach Wilson got another teacher to check in with him. The next few days, Edwin did little work. The teachers each reached out to him, with Dr. Sumner discussing cars and Coach Wilson loaning him his own computer. The teachers took turns praising him in front of the class as well, with Coach saying one day, "Edwin is probably the best in the class at making connections." Day by day, Edwin began to do more work and to be more on task. By the last week of observations Edwin was consistently on task and positively contributing to the class. While Edwin's behaviors might reappear and Deandre experience challenges in other contexts, in Synthesis both were growing.

Creating a Co-teaching Partnership

The instruction in Synthesis was underpinned by the teachers' partnership. Dr. Sumner had co-taught multiple times before and had one negative experience. In that partnership, the teachers had no common planning period, had limited time to teach together, and were poorly matched with "very different" philosophies about "education and the class we were teaching." Coach Wilson also had struggled in a previous partnership where he was asked to coteach in algebra, a content area where he himself had a learning disability and where he felt "helpless" with the students because he "worried about giving bad information."

Both teachers saw their current partnership as very different. The teachers had administrative support in the form of common planning time, which they had extensively used during their first years for planning and relationship building, and in the form of the longevity of their partnership, which was in its third year. The teachers also, according to Coach Wilson, had "the same attitude and mentality" when it came to teaching, and the "same vision" according to Dr. Sumner. Dr. Sumner described them as both feeling "strongly about… trying to make a difference for kids who may have been left out in the past." Dr. Sumner wanted his students to leave feeling ready to address "contemporary problems in their communities." Coach Wilson wanted to help students "reach their potential," and "maybe trigger a kid who wants to work to change [persistent social problems]." The teachers also shared an awareness of societal inequities, which Dr. Sumner explicitly addressed in interviews and Coach Wilson addressed through discussions of "who's allowed opportunities." They also shared a love for history and traded trivia during breaks.

The teachers were able to share responsibilities in the classroom because, according to Coach Wilson, there were not "ego guy[s]" and instead were focused on "the kids." Both teachers led whole group discussions, addressed behavioral challenges, worked with individual students, and supported small groups. Dr. Sumner did all grading and most of the prep work for classes, as Coach focused on football and his special education caseload outside of class. In class, however, they strove to balance their roles. Dr. Sumner tended to do more of the instruction in the first period

class and Coach Wilson tended to step in more with the afternoon class, when he felt more comfortable with the English content. When one teacher was absent, the broad patterns of instruction were the same, but the jokes were missing, students received less individualized support, and students engaged in more off task behaviors, like checking their phones. In general, Coach Wilson led more reviews and checked more on students' understanding and Dr. Sumner introduced more lessons and answered more of students' content questions. After a day when Dr. Sumner was visibly tired and stressed due to ESOL testing, Coach Wilson described Dr. Sumner as staying focused "on the kids" "even when he seems overworked and tired and stressed." During classes earlier that day, Dr. Sumner had begun the lesson by giving Coach Wilson directions on who to support before visibly stepping back and asking Coach Wilson to take over part of the lesson. Maintaining the power balance in the classroom was an ongoing effort.

The teachers shared that, in general, their partnership took work to maintain and build. In co-teaching, according to Dr. Sumner, "there's more investment needed into the relationship" between the co-teachers; "You have to think about your relationship with these other people and not just your relationship with the students." He acknowledged the work of maintaining the relationships, but also saw the value, saying it was "like the saying… if you want to go fast, go alone, but if you want to go far, go with a group of people." To make it work, the teachers checked in constantly. They touched based before school, during breaks between classes, during downtime in instruction, and, based on their conversations, over text messages. They touched base about students, about lessons, and about life. If one of them was unsure about something the other had done with a student, Coach Wilson described them as willing to reach out and hear each other's "perspective." He felt this helped them stay "on the same page" and let them "be ourselves, but also be linked together." Coach Wilson acknowledged that this took "some time," but saw the investment as worth it. They began each year by laying the "groundwork" and "getting on the same page [about] kids." They also talked about the bigger issues, according to Dr. Sumner, such as "classroom management, our perspectives are on why we're teachers, why we're here." The teachers saw the work they were willing to put into maintaining their partnership as underpinning their instruction and the classroom environment.

Discussion

Students deserve an education that meets their needs, sustains their identities, and empowers them. For students who are multiply marginalized, their educational experiences are too often characterized by compounded challenges, not by empowerment (Skiba et al., 2014; Waitoller & King Thorius, 2016; Harkins Monaco et al., 2022). DisCrit calls attention to our need to disrupt the inequities that students face while attending to all aspects of students' identities, (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma, 2015), tenets that Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner enacted in their instruction. To support future and current teachers in being inequity disruptors in their work with multiply-marginalized youth, we need to learn from teachers who are already engaging in this work. This study focused on understanding how two urban teachers

supported academic success, demonstrated cultural competence, and built sociopolitical consciousness in their inclusive classroom and how co-teaching shaped their pedagogy. While their practices are individual to who they are as teachers and the context they teach in, what these teachers did in their classroom has implications for school leaders, policy-makers, and teachers supporting, or preparing to support, multiply-marginalized youth.

Looking to What Seems to Be Working for Multiply-Marginalized Youth

We can learn from the actions of teachers who seem to get it right for multiply-marginalized youth. In Synthesis, Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner's co-taught English and social studies course, the teachers seemed to get it right by modifying asset-based pedagogies in ways that were supportive of their students' dis/abilities. They, like other asset-focused teachers, supported students' academic success by, for example, maintaining high expectations for students, providing scaffolding, differentiating instruction, and building relationships with students and families (Bonner, 2014; Morrison et al., 2008; Martell & Stevens, 2019; Walker & Hutchinson, 2021). At the same time, while asset pedagogy literature often emphasizes the importance of warm demanders (Ladson-Billings, 1995), Dr. Sumner and Coach Wilson prioritized creating a warm and caring environment and individualized socioemotional support. In DisCrit classroom ecology, authentic relationships, are a way that teachers can help disrupt the marginalization of culturally and linguistically diverse students with dis/abilities (Annamma & Morrison, 2018), indicating that the teachers' approach was likely supportive of students' dis/abilities.

Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner's approach to cultural competence also reflected a mixture of practices emphasized in CSP and asset pedagogy literature, and practices responsive to students' dis/abilities. Asset-focused teachers, including those in this study, have connected the content to students' lived experiences, incorporated their languages, and presented students with multiple perspectives on content (Choi, 2013; Powell et al., 2016; Martell, 2018). In social studies, teachers have sought students' input on lesson content and provided them with choices, as happened in Synthesis (Martell, 2018; Martell & Stevens, 2019). In Synthesis, however, the teachers' focus on seeking students' input on lessons was part of a broader push to build students' power. Students were positioned as authorities in the classroom, giving presentations and instructed to learn from each other. Building students' power in the classroom, including by giving them some control and choices, also supports students' self-determination (Chang et al., 2017). For students with dis/abilities, self-determination is associated with a wide variety of positive life outcomes (Shogren et al., 2012, 2015), making the teachers' focus on student power responsive to students' dis/abilities.

Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner also focused on building students' sociopolitical consciousness, which is the component of asset-focused pedagogies most likely to be missing in classroom practice (Martell & Stevens, 2019; Powell et al., 2016; Thomas & Berry, 2019). They talked about power, oppression, and resistance in American history, and designed assignments that allowed students to advocate for

change. The teachers also supported students in addressing inequities within their own educations. Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner encouraged students to enroll in advanced academic opportunities and informed them about college credit courses and college opportunities; instruction and encouragement designed to change the trajectory of students' educations. While asset-focused pedagogies include a broad focus on sociopolitical consciousness, DisCrit emphasizes the need for school staff to support students in disrupting the inequities that too many multiply-marginalized youth face in their lives (Annamma et al., 2013; Ladson-Billings, 2014; Powell et al., 2016). By both focusing on broader societal inequities and challenging the inequities students faced in course access, Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner continued to combine practices from asset-focused pedagogies with practices that were responsive to students' dis/abilities.

Students deserve educational opportunities that are attentive to all aspects of their identities (Annamma et al., 2013; Annamma, 2015). Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner's instruction shows one way that instruction can be culturally, linguistically, and ethnically sustaining while also being supportive of students' dis/abilities. The nuances in their instruction, such as their focus on individual behavioral interventions rather than warm demanding, and their focus on disrupting daily inequities for students as well as on broader sociopolitical consciousness, also has implications for how we think about asset-focused pedagogies. We need more research on asset-focused and sustaining classrooms serving multiply-marginalized to understand what instruction looks like when it attends to students' racial, linguistic, ethnic, and dis/ability identities. As we support future and current teachers in attending to all aspects of students' identities, however, we can point to examples of strong, asset-focused and dis/ability responsive instruction, like the ones from this study. Rather than thinking of practices that are supportive of students' linguistic and cultural heritage, and those that are supportive of their dis/abilities as separate, these findings highlight for policy-makers and leaders the overlap between the practices and the need for teachers to adapt any pedagogy to their individual students.

Leveraging Coteaching to Strengthen Instruction for Multiply-Marginalized Students

What makes Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner's class unique is the ways in which co-teaching enhanced their pedagogy. The two teachers both worked individually and with small groups of students, increasing the amount of attention students received. They brought their differing styles and personalities to supporting students and creating connections between life and the curriculum. Inclusive classrooms where the special education teacher has a role as an instructor, not just an aide, are ones where students with disabilities are likely to thrive (Burks-Keeley & Brown, 2014; Cook et al., 2017; Bottge et al., 2018). These teachers traded instructional roles within lessons, built on their individual strengths, and divided up responsibilities, as other strong co-teaching partners have done (Pratt, 2014; Rytivaara et al., 2019). Like other co-teaching teams, Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner also found their own balance of what works, with Dr. Sumner

taking the lead on English content, grading assignments, and designing much of the day-to-day materials (Rytivaara et al., 2019).

The teachers' partnership relied, as other co-teaching partnership have, on their willingness to share power and communicate frequently, and on their similar teaching philosophies (Pratt, 2014; Fluijt et al., 2016; Oh et al., 2017; Pesonen et al., 2021). Dr. Sumner and Coach Wilson shared a commitment to equity and an awareness of inequities that shaped their instruction and enhanced their partnership, a finding that reinforces previous work on the importance of school leaders carefully pairing co-teachers (Fluijt et al., 2016; Oh et al., 2017). The teachers also took direct actions to maintain their partnership and to stay on the same page. They engaged in open, direct communication about what was happening in the classroom (Oh et al., 2017; Rytivaara et al., 2019; Hackett et al., 2020). The frequent conversations, the willingness to engage in challenging conversations, and the time it took to talk through issues was something both teachers noted and neither saw co-teaching as "fast." As school leaders and teacher educators look to support strong co-teaching partnership, stories like these on the time and effort behind strong partnerships, and the need for teams to find their own balance in duties and responsibilities, can inform both trainings and the supports provided to co-teaching partners. It also took effort to maintain the power balance in Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner's partnership. Dr. Sumner at times had to check himself to keep from relegating Coach Wilson to an assistant role. The outcome of the teachers' effort was a partnership that supported the culturally sustaining pedagogy in the classroom. We need more research on other co-teaching teams who share a focus on equity to understand how their co-teaching shapes their pedagogy. The instruction in Synthesis is unique to that classroom and to those teachers, but it illustrates the possibilities of co-teaching for both meeting students' dis/ability related needs and for delivering culturally sustaining, empowering instruction.

Conclusion

The goal of this study was to "learn…from examining examples of 'goodness'" (Lightfoot, 2004, p. xxvii) what culturally sustaining pedagogy that attends to students' dis/abilities as well as other aspects of their identities can look like. For Coach Wilson and Dr. Sumner, co-teaching was a tool that helped them "go far" in their instruction and meet the multifaceted needs of their students. They engaged in open communication and put in the effort to make their partnership work because for them, the students came first. As we support future and current teachers in working with multiply-marginalized youth, their classroom shows both how culturally sustaining and dis/ability supportive instruction can be woven together and the power of co-teaching to enhance empowering instruction.

Appendix

Codebook

Code	Definition
Socio-political consciousness	
Creating change	Observations and interview comments that focus on impacting students' lives outside of the classroom or giving them opportunities to have an impact outside of the classroom, including discussion of college, empowerment in personal lives, and academic projects with a community focus or impact
Identifying inequity and resistance	Observations and interview comments relating to teachers' discussion of misogyny, racism, or structural inequalities and any discussion of historical figures who resisted misogyny, racism, or other structural inequalities or who broke barries/created change
Academic success	
Caring	Observations and interview comments pertaining to emotional support for individual students including mentoring, providing counselling, out of class supports for students, building relationships with and knowledge of individual students, and positive reinforcement offered to students
Classroom environment	Observations and interview comments pertaining to the classroom environment including the physical space, how students are greeted, the establishment and maintenance of classroom norms, student participation, and peer to peer relationships in the classroom
Expectations for students	Observations and interview comments about being a warm demander, including expectations for students, feedback given to students, or partnerships built with home and community, including references made during class to students' families
Academic skills	Observations and interview comments on the explicit teaching of academic skills including academic language, metacognitive skills, writing skills, and reading strategies
Instructional formats	Observations and interview comments on the format of the instruction including instructional modality, activities, and structure. Includes strategies to build comprehension of content such as spiral review, connections to earlier content, and first language supports
Cultural competence	
Relevance	Observations and interview comments about the relevance of the academic content to students' lived experiences and to current events, including the use of students in examples, connections made by students, students' comments on relevance, and attempts by the instructors to highlight the importance of the content
Student leadership and voice	Observations and interview comments about ways in which students' voices and power are elevated or suppressed in the classroom, including freedoms offered/not offered to students, extent of student choice in activities, ways in which power is shared or maintained by the instructor, and instructional activities that offer students' leadership

Code	Definition
Co-teaching partnership	
Roles	Observations and interview comments about the roles each co-teacher takes in instruction, planning, assessing students, and interacting with students. Includes discussion and observation of challenges with co-teaching and in their partnership
Relationship	Observations and interview comments about the relationship between the two teachers including time spent together outside of co-teaching times, personal conversations between the teachers, non-verbal interactions like smiles/frowns/high-fives, and references to the other co-teacher made during interviews
Communication	Observations and interview comments about communication between the two co-teachers including the value of communication, non-verbal communication between the teachers, and conversations between the teachers about students or the course
Beliefs and characteristics	Observations and interview comments about the individual teachers' own backgrounds, beliefs about education, students, classroom management, and society, and experiences with co-teaching
School environment	Observations, document analysis, and interview comments about the school context including state records on student achievement at the school, observation of the school structure and schedule, and comments made by the teachers or students during class about the school or district. Includes the history of the program and constraints or supports perceived by the teachers

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