Educational experiences of first generation Black African students with and without dis/abilities

Shehreen Iqtadar
University of Northern Iowa

Recommended Citation
Iqtadar, Shehreen, "Educational experiences of first generation Black African students with and without dis/abilities" (2022). Dissertations and Theses @ UNI. 1236.
https://scholarworks.uni.edu/etd/1236

This Open Access Dissertation is brought to you for free and open access by the Student Work at UNI ScholarWorks. It has been accepted for inclusion in Dissertations and Theses @ UNI by an authorized administrator of UNI ScholarWorks. For more information, please contact scholarworks@uni.edu.

Offensive Materials Statement: Materials located in UNI ScholarWorks come from a broad range of sources and time periods. Some of these materials may contain offensive stereotypes, ideas, visuals, or language.
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FIRST GENERATION BLACK AFRICAN STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DIS/ABILITIES

An Abstract of a Dissertation

Submitted

in Partial Fulfillment

of the Requirements for the Degree

Doctor of Education

Approved:

________________________________________

Dr. Susan L. Etscheidt, Chair

________________________________________

Dr. David I. Hernández-Saca, Co-Chair

________________________________________

Dr. Jennifer Waldron
Dean of the Graduate College

Shehreen Iqtadar
University of Northern Iowa

May, 2022
ABSTRACT

Several studies have focused on the disproportionate representation of students from historically multiply marginalized communities in special education (Artiles, 2011, 2013; Artiles et al., 2005; Brayboy et al., 2007; Cavendish et al., 2018; Cooc & Kiru, 2018; Dunn, 1968; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Voulgarides et al., 2017). Only recently, researchers have begun to explore the connections between immigrant and refugee students and special education (Migliarini, 2017; Song, 2018; Qing, 2018). Missing in this literature are the critical accounts of students and (a) their perspectives about the nature of dis/ability and their placement within special education and English as a Second Language (ESL) Classrooms and (b) the internal processes of how they respond, feel, resist (if needed), and navigate these spaces, and (c) their intersectional identity formation in their new schools in the U.S., and their navigation of intersectional identities in inclusive education systems. The purpose of this study was to fill this gap in the literature by exploring participants’ meaning making of their Special Education and English Language Learner (ELL) experiences, their intersectional identity formation in their new schools in the U.S., and their navigation of intersectional identities in inclusive education systems. This dissertation research study used qualitative methods, specifically adopting a hermeneutics phenomenology perspective, and employed a pluralistic theoretical framework approach to explore the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee students in K-12 education. Specifically, I asked: 1) How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, make meaning of English as a Second Language and/or Special Education experiences?
2) How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, engage in identity formation in a new school and culture? 3) How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities experience schooling/inclusion and navigate their intersectional identities on a daily basis? The analysis of participants’ identity formation and educational experiences revealed six themes: 1) understanding intersectional identities in new social and educational life, 2) privileging the self-selected voice, 3) identifying salience within multidimensional identities, 4) establishing a collective multidimensional sense of belonging, 5) experiencing intersectional disablism, and 6) neutralizing assimilation and visible resistance. The participants of this study made meanings of English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or special education services as segregated and exclusive practices in schools. Their intersectional navigation included acts of assimilation to ‘fit in’ the system, and resistance to the *deficit views* about their ethnic-cultural identities.
EDUCATIONAL EXPERIENCES OF FIRST GENERATION BLACK AFRICAN
STUDENTS WITH AND WITHOUT DIS/ABILITIES

A Dissertation
Submitted
in Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education

Approved:

______________________________
Dr. Susan L. Etscheidt, Chair

______________________________
Dr. David I. Hernández-Saca, Co-Chair

______________________________
Dr. Shuaib Meacham, Committee Member

______________________________
Dr. Bradley S. Ellison, Committee Member

______________________________
Dr. Danielle M. Cowley, Committee Member

Shehreen Iqtedar
University of Northern Iowa
May, 2022
DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my parents, my sisters, Aadrish and Sundas, and nephew, Sami. Ami, you have always been a source of inspiration for me. I am forever grateful for your sacrifices for our family. Growing up in a small town in Punjab, I would not have believed in my dreams if you did not believe in them. Your kindness, selfless sacrifices, love, and compassion will always stay with me, as I believe that no degree can teach one to be a kind human being. Papa, I am beyond grateful that you showed us, your three daughters, that our dreams mattered as much as our brother’s, and providing the same (and beyond) resources to help us achieve our dreams against all norms in a world that inherently discriminates against women for their “gender”. As a first-generation immigrant yourself, I have witnessed you work so hard day and night for us. A man like you exemplifies the hardships that many newcomers to this country endure. I love you both with all my heart and soul, and you mean the world to us.

Adi and Sundas, I could not have asked for better sisters. Thank you for being the elder sisters who have always been there like a mother. I would not have been able to start and end my education journey in a new country without your continuous support, love, and guidance. I also want to dedicate this work to my participants, Kabaka, Mandla, Lema, and Eli, my nephew Sami, and all the first-generation immigrant and refugee students who endure racism and ableism upon their arrival to their new country. Thank you to the five of you for allowing me to enter in your life and learn about your educational experiences in this new country, and for your precious time and support for this research study.
Finally, I want to dedicate this dissertation to Danielle Cowley, Dr. Susan Etscheidt, and Scott Ellison. Danielle and Dr. Etscheidt, thank you for truly living up to respecting and valuing diversity around you. It is said that an educator who reaches students’ hearts and souls is unmatchable to thousands of content knowledge experts. Your legacy of kindness, support, and care towards me and your other students sets an example as I continue my own professional career. I also want to thank the two of you for the times I felt alone and directionless. You were truly there as my Chairs in different phases of this dissertation study and supported me throughout. I am beyond grateful for such a dedicated support and respect towards my research study. Scott, thank you for helping me see the world through a critical stance and questioning the systems of power that are set up to uphold white supremacy against all people of Color. Thank you for your mentoring, for being a critical friend throughout the dissertation process and beyond, and for being patient and kind as I progressed. This was and continues to be as much a personal identity navigation as a first-generation immigrant as it was to understand my first-generation participants’ identity formation experiences. I can never express in words the respect and honor I feel of being your student.
# TABLE OF CONTENTS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF TABLES</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>LIST OF FIGURES</th>
<th>PAGE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>xi</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

## CHAPTER ONE INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS 1

- **Introduction and Significance of the Research Study** .............................................................. 1
- **Background and Significance** ........................................................................................................ 4
  - **Background** ................................................................................................................................. 5
  - **Significance** ............................................................................................................................... 7
- **Research Problem and Questions** .................................................................................................. 10
- **Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations** ..................................................................................... 13
  - **Researcher’s on-going Theoretical, Intellectual and Philosophical Commitments** ...... 17
    - **Critical Disability Studies** ....................................................................................................... 17
    - **Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit)** .............................................................................. 21
    - **Global South Informed Disability Critical Race Studies (GSI-DisCrit)** ................................ 24
    - **A Sociocultural Perspective of Identity Formation** ............................................................... 30
    - **Cultural Hegemony, Structure, and Agency** ............................................................................ 32
    - **Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation** ...................................................... 44
    - **Pluralistic and Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation** ......................... 48

## CHAPTER TWO LITERATURE REVIEW 61

- **Providing the Historical and Experiential Context** .................................................................... 62
  - **Similarities and Differences Between Immigrants and Refugees** ....................................... 64
Recent Influx of Immigrants and/or Refugees in the U.S. and the Midwest ........ 67
Critical Systematic Literature Review ........................................................................ 69
Method ......................................................................................................................... 70
First Generation Immigrant and/or Refugee Students in the U.S. Schools ............ 73
Deficit Thinking and Language Understanding of Multiple, Intersecting Student Identities .......................................................... 82
Immigrant and/or refugee students with disabilities or those receiving special education services ........................................................................ 92
Conclusion .................................................................................................................. 102
Gaps in the Literature ................................................................................................ 104
CHAPTER THREE QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH ............................ 108
Hermeneutics Phenomenology and Methods ............................................................. 109
Research Methodology ............................................................................................... 110
Phenomenology Research ......................................................................................... 112
Double Hermeneutics ............................................................................................... 117
Personal Positioning: Voice of the Researcher ......................................................... 119
Qualitative Research Methods .................................................................................... 126
Challenges in Accessing the Study Setting ............................................................... 126
Recruitment Procedures and Participant Selection .................................................. 127
Data Collection Procedures ....................................................................................... 135
Interview Protocol and Guidelines ............................................................................. 138
Data Analysis Procedures .......................................................................................... 148
Ethics in Qualitative Research ................................................................. 159

CHAPTER FOUR FINDINGS ...................................................................... 163

KABAKA’S NARRATIVE .......................................................................... 165

“coz they were born here”: Kabaka’s Lived and Educational Experiences .......... 166

Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life ...... 166

Privileging the Self-Selected Voice: Salience within Multidimensional Identities 171

Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging ......................................... 178

Intersectional Disablism ........................................................................ 181

Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance ........................................ 186

Summary .................................................................................................. 193

MANDLA’S NARRATIVE ......................................................................... 194

“Who Created These Rules?”: Mandla’s Special Education Journey ............ 195

Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life ...... 195

Privileging the Self-Selected Voice: Salience within Multidimensional Identities 199

Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging ........................................ 201

Intersectional Disablism ........................................................................ 204

Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance ........................................ 206

Summary .................................................................................................. 211

LEMA’S NARRATIVE ............................................................................. 213

“My Africanness was not a Disability”: Lema’s Intersectional Navigation .......... 214

Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life ...... 214

Salience within Multidimensional Identities .............................................. 225
Privileging the Self-Selected Voice ................................................................. 228
Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging ........................................ 230
Intersectional Disablism .............................................................................. 238
Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance ......................................... 248
Summary ........................................................................................................ 260
ELI’S NARRATIVE ............................................................................................ 262
Masked and Muted: Eli’s Cultural and Educational Resettlement ............... 263
Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life .... 263
Privileging the Self-Selected Voice: Salience within Multidimensional Identities 272
Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging ........................................ 273
Intersectional Disablism .............................................................................. 274
Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance ......................................... 282
Summary ........................................................................................................ 298
Chapter Summary .......................................................................................... 299
CHAPTER FIVE DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS ...................... 301
Question 1: How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, make meaning of English as a Second Language and/or Special Education experiences? ................................................................. 303
Situating the Findings in Theory and Literature ........................................... 305
Question 2: How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, engage in identity formation in a new school and culture? ........................................................................................................ 314
Question 3: How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, experience schooling and navigate their intersectional identities on a daily basis? ................................................................. 324

Situating the Findings in Theory and Literature ................................................................. 326

Macro, Meso, and Micro Implications ............................................................................. 331

Implications at the Macro Level ..................................................................................... 332


DisCrit Meso Pedagogy: Blending Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) ................................................................. 337

DisCrit Curriculum at the Meso Level: Blending Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) ................................................................. 341

Individual Educational Experiences at the Micro Level: A Call for Solidarity ........ 347

DisCrit Solidarity: An Ethic of Care and Advocacy ....................................................... 347

Limitations of the Study ................................................................................................. 350

Directions for Future Research ..................................................................................... 351

Conclusion ................................................................................................................... 352

REFERENCES ............................................................................................................. 355

APPENDIX A ORAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – PARENTS/GUARDIANS ........... 389

APPENDIX B ORAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – STUDENTS/PARTICIPANTS ... 390

APPENDIX C TEMPLATE ASSENT FORM .................................................................. 391
APPENDIX D PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM ................................................................. 394
APPENDIX E PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM .............................................................. 396
APPENDIX F INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS ........................................... 398
LIST OF TABLES

PAGE

Table 1 *Demographics* ........................................................................................................... 133

Table 2 *Hermeneutics Data Collection Procedures* ............................................................... 144

Table 3 *Data Analysis* ............................................................................................................ 152

Table 4 *Hermeneutic circle process for data analysis* ......................................................... 153

Table 5 *Thematic integration* ............................................................................................... 154
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Figure</th>
<th>Title</th>
<th>Page</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Figure 1</td>
<td>Theoretical, Conceptual, Methodological, and Praxical Foundations</td>
<td>32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 2</td>
<td>A Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 3</td>
<td>Research Methodology and Methods</td>
<td>110</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 4</td>
<td>Hermeneutics Circle between Data Collection and Data Analysis</td>
<td>150</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 5</td>
<td>Thematic Formation</td>
<td>164</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Figure 6</td>
<td>Grounding Curriculum</td>
<td>346</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
CHAPTER ONE
INTRODUCTION AND CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS

This research study is centered on the first-generation immigrant and refugee students with multidimensional and intersectional experiences at the nexus of dis/ability, language, and immigrant and refugee status. I begin the first section of chapter one with the introduction, background and significance of this research study. The second section of this study details my on-going conceptual, theoretical, and intellectual commitments in the field of Critical Disability Studies in Education, followed by explaining the interdisciplinary theoretical plurality, including Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation, Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit), Global South informed DisCrit, and Intersectional Disablism, employed in this study. This interdisciplinary theoretical plurality helped me, the researcher, answer the research questions and analyze the complexity of processes such as cultural and linguistic racism, ableism as well as discrimination and bullying that participant of this study experienced in school settings and their host U.S. culture and society. I now turn to the introduction and significance of the research study.

Introduction and Significance of the Research Study

One day in the fall of 2013, a special education teacher hand-tied Ali, a disabled student, for “disruptive behavior.” Ali, who belonged to a lower social class, was 11-years-old and was labeled with mild hemiplegia (a type of cerebral palsy in which one side of the body is affected). When I entered the center, I could hear Ali crying from one
of the classrooms saying: “Forgive me teacher, I wouldn’t do it again” مجبور معاوض کردن

My transnational cultural perspectives, of living at the intersections of Global South and Global North, inform my interest to understand the identity formation of immigrants and refugee students at the intersections of their multiple identities including race, culture and ethnicity, dis/ability\(^1\), social class in a global context. I first became interested in students’ experiences with dis/ability labels at the intersections while teaching as a special education teacher overseas. During this time, I worked with PreK-12 grade children with moderate to significant support needs (including autism, Down syndrome, hearing impairment, and intellectual disabilities) in a child development center of a Private University in Pakistan. The Center followed Montessori Curriculum with a multidisciplinary approach including literacy, mathematics, speech therapy, occupational therapy and Physiotherapy. I worked with children between the ages of 3 to 14 years old in the areas of literacy and numeracy.

Throughout my multiple and varied teaching experiences in Pakistan and the United States, I have seen similar patterns play out repeatedly, regardless of setting:

\(^1\) Following the work of Dr. Subini Annamma, Dr. David Connor and Dr. Beth Ferri (2013), I use dis/ability to represent that both disability and ability are socially, politically, emotionally, culturally and historically constructed categories. I also use slash to disrupt how disability is constructed, identified, controlled, intervened, fixed and maintained globally (Taylor, Ferguson, & Ferguson, 1992) through national and international laws and policies (Iqtadar et al., 2021; Ribet, 2011; Walker, 2014). I also acknowledge that the term is often used in academia and by non-disabled people, and may not be supported by disabled people themselves, who would rather “say the word” for disability pride, identity, and culture (Iqtadar et al., 2021). For this reason, I also use the term “disabilities” or “disability” throughout, whenever appropriate.
students in special education classrooms (or repurposed, segregated settings, as it were) and in classrooms of my pre-service and in-service general and special education teachers have mostly been students of Color and/or students from working class families. From a Globally Informed Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) (GSI-DisCrit) perspective, I began to question our constant need to correct students’ behavior and use harsh punishments when they do not “comply” with the K-12 education system (Annamma et al., 2013; Iqtadar et al., 2021). In the incident shared at the beginning of this chapter, Ali was so terrified for the next few days that he did not show up to the center. The children who attended this center were mostly from working-class families. Their parents already felt in-debt to the Department for providing services at an affordable cost. In fact, oftentimes parents felt ashamed of their children’s “dis/ability” and blamed them for their “disruptive behavior.”

When working with Ali, I found that he was very fond of telling and listening to group-time stories. He had dreams and was an independent child who did not like taking commands. I soon learned that Ali and my other students had unique ways of learning and expressing themselves. They were so much more than what a disability label would define for them. I realized that our attempt to constantly explain students’ abilities in “functional terms” while using intelligence scores to explain and define their actions, day-to-day behavior, and achievements was misleading, inaccurate and dehumanizing. This incident and memory of it was and is traumatic, for both Ali and I, and sets the stage for my study of schooling at the intersections of dis/ability, race, and immigrant and refugee status in the United States. As shared above, my personal and family experiences
of living in the U.S. as a recent immigrant also shapes my interest to explore this populations’ educational navigation and identity formation.

This study is grounded in hermeneutics phenomenology about students’ voice and how they experience and navigate schooling in a culturally different setting. I understand student voices as students’ perspectives about their education and educational decisions in schools (Gonzalez et al., 2017). Researchers argue that including student voice is imperative (a) for recognizing their right to education, (b) to value their engagement in school reform and equity efforts, and (c) for political and programmatic changes (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Kirshner & Pozzoboni, 2011). Within the context of intersectional identities, such as race, dis/ability, language difference, and immigrant and refugee status, this study explored student voice about the structural processes such as racism and ableism and their powerful impact on students’ educational and personal identity work (Bal, 2009; Migliarini, 2017b). The goal was to unmask these normalizing processes in society and education to understand how these processes collectively marginalize students migrating from Global South countries, who also receive special education or English Language Learning (ELL) services (Artiles, 2011, 2013).

Background and Significance

The praxical, methodological, theoretical conceptual foundations for this study are grounded within my Global South informed epistemological and ontological stance as a researcher, academic and a Global South woman of Color. My commitment to (a) social justice, resistance and liberatory perspectives, (b) understanding of disability studies’ and disability studies in education strands of interdisciplinarity and intersectionality, (c)
understand and explore the how humans practice agency and engage with structures to perform political work necessary to change those structures, and (d) phenomenological inquiry of students’ experiences and identity formation in their new schools’ culture and society informed this study. My identity and positionality—which is one of the important components of my overall conceptual framework for this study—served as a major reason why I became interested in the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students. Given that this study is about the emerging identity formation of immigrant and/or refugee students who receive special education and/or ELL services, I find it necessary to include my personal educational experiences as a first-generation female and recent immigrant student of Color who has a multigenerational history of immigration in my family—from India to Pakistan and then from Pakistan to the United States.

**Background**

Since a young age, I grew up listening to the stories of my grandparents’ immigration from India to Pakistan. Within these narratives, there are themes ranging from the Hindu-Muslim Bhai-Bhai (brotherhood) before partition, to escaping India for a better life and a constant starvation and fear of life while crossing the border, to the challenges presented during resettlement in Pakistan. From an early age, I myself have been looking for intrinsic meanings in such resettlement stories within my community. These childhood memories ground my passion for learning about the lived and social experiences of immigrant and refugee students who experience life at the intersections of multiple emerging identities in a new culture.
I started my Masters in Special Education at the University of Northern Iowa (UNI) in 2014. As a new international student, I volunteered in the International Student Organization on campus where I was able to make friends from many different countries, ethnicities, and backgrounds. Coming from an intersectional background—a South Asian female and recent immigrant of Color—I soon became interested in the educational experiences of students who are historically multiply marginalized within the education system. This quest led me to co-author a qualitative research synthesis (QRS) about the educational experiences of students of Color labeled disabled (Iqtadar et al., 2020). This synthesis represents data from thirteen qualitative studies (2006-2018) that explored how K-16 students of Color experienced, negotiated, and sometimes challenged the prevailing dominant ideologies surrounding dis/ability labels, race, gender, and other forms of identity.

The goal was to synthesize the literature about students’ counter-narratives to the prevailing, false master-narratives surrounding race, dis/ability, social class, and other markers of difference in contemporary U.S. society and education. By master-narratives I mean the dominant false assumptions about people from different social groups and social identities that allow and constrain their collective agency (Bamberg, 2004). Findings from this synthesis suggested that students in the sampled studies understood disability as an identity assigned within the school system; perceived dis/ability labels to be related to their racial, gender and social class identities; and resisted these labels in complex ways. Findings from the synthesis further suggested that these labels often leave an impact on students’ psychological and emotional well-being further marginalizing
their identity work (Iqtadar et al., 2020; Thomas, 1999) who they can be and how they understand themselves.

**Significance**

This study was carried out to acknowledge student voice (Gonzalez et al., 2017) within the larger body of literature exploring the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee students who also receive special education and English Language Learners (ELL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) instruction in U.S. public schools. I used ELL and ESL interchangeably throughout to value the language my participants used interchangeably with the change in space, time and location. In this study, the researcher explored first generation African students’ identity formation and how they navigated U.S. education. Scholars have identified that more research needs to be conducted that accounts for the educational experiences and identity formation of newly arrived immigrants and refugee students in U.S. schools (Artiles, 2015). This is especially significant in today’s growing immigration situation and the demographic imperative. In the current U.S. education system, the demographic imperative is understood as a system wide problem to three interrelated issues of equity and diversity: (a) increasing immigrant and refugee student population in U.S. public schools (with growing populations in the previously considered preserving “white” American2 Midwestern States), (b) the differences between these students and their white middle class teachers’ backgrounds

---

2 Within this dissertation research, my use of the term “American” is to honor my participants’ use of the term in their narratives. However, I acknowledge that the colonial history of saying U.S. citizens as being "American" is colonial, since the Americas is not only the U.S., but includes the entire continent of the Americas, including North, Central and South America.
and lived experiences, and (c) the education debt between these linguistically and culturally diverse students’ and their peers’ educational outcomes (García et al., 2009; Ladson-Billings, 2006; McDonald, 2007).

Several studies have focused on the disproportionate representation of students from historically multiply marginalized communities in special education (Artiles, 2011, 2013; Artiles et al., 2005; Brayboy et al., 2007; Cavendish et al., 2018; Cooc & Kiru, 2018; Dunn, 1968; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Voulgarides et al., 2017). Despite the overrepresentation, little is known about the educational experiences of students who are multiply situated within different racial and ethnic backgrounds and dis/ability labels (Annamma et al., 2013). Some researchers also discuss the educational trajectories and risks of English Language Learners (ELL) or English as Second Language (ESL) or English Language Learners (ELL) students being tracked to special education (Bal, 2009). However, more research is needed to explore students’ emerging identity work in their host culture, and how they navigate their intersectional identities within the figured world of schooling. This gap in the literature is further expanded and explored within the systematic literature review section of this study.

Further, while some studies have focused on the engagement and experiences of immigrant parents with special education programs (Carreón et al., 2005; Hess et al., 2006; Kim & Kim, 2017), their perceptions, roles, and attitudes towards their children’s disabilities (Rizvi, 2017), and the barriers families encountered in their children’s education and transition to adulthood (Geenen et al., 2003), little is known about how immigrant and refugee students with intersectional identities experience schooling and
cultural artifacts including ELL and special education classrooms (Bal, 2009; Holland et al., 1998).

There is also a growing body of empirical international literature regarding the resettlement experiences of refugees with disabilities (Elder, 2015) as well as the educational resettlement experiences of immigrant and refugee students (Bal, 2014; Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Matthews, 2008; Taylor & Sidhu, 2012; Trueba et al., 1990). In his study with Ahiska refugees, Bal (2014) explored the educational experiences of a group of newly arrived Muslim Turk refugee students in an urban charter school. The author interviewed educators and students to explore and understand the academic identity formation of these newly arrived refugees. Findings from his study suggest that students were often identified into the category of generic institutional identities such as ELL or racialized learners. Over time, this identification led to students’ exclusion from the general education classrooms and provided reason for their entry into special education.

While the major focus of these studies was the resettlement experiences of refugee populations, I argue that more space must be made in the current literature to explore and understand the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students who experience marginalization and discrimination in multiple intersecting ways. This is specifically needed to represent immigrant and refugee students’ voice (Bal, 2014; Migliarini, 2017b; Migliarini, et al., 2019) in the current literature and understand how they navigate schooling that often represent these students as ahistorical and autonomous subjects outside their cultural-historical contexts (Artiles, 2009; Klingner et al., 2006; McBrien, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, 2000). Further, while much of the studies are focused on
war-fled refugee populations and their resettlement experiences in society in general, it is important to also understand how students make meaning of their special education and ELL experiences, and how they navigate and negotiate the assigned labels in school settings (such as ability labels, racialized labels, cultural and ethnic labels to name a few). It is specifically important to account for the educational experiences of increasing immigrant and refugee students in the U.S. schools (Artiles, 2011).

Research Problem and Questions

The growing immigrant and refugee student population in the U.S. schools is subjected to racist nativism\(^3\), white supremacy, and cultural hegemony within educational spaces and the larger U.S. and global society (Artiles, 2015). The deficit thinking, language, and assumptions (Patton Davis & Museüs, 2019; Valencia, 2010) about immigrants’ multiple identities in the political and social climate calls for re-exploring the educational experiences of those at the intersections of experiencing deficit policies and practices. Patton Davis and Museüs’s (2019) conceptualization of deficit thinking and language identify that such deficit based ideas and thinking are rooted in four essential elements: 1) it represents a blame the victim orientation (e.g., students’ “academic failure” is the result of their environment and family background), 2) it is a symptom of larger systemic oppression which frames multiply oppressed people as inherently “deficient”, 3) manifests pervasively and implicitly throughout the system and

---

\(^3\) “the assigning of values to real or imagined differences, in order to justify the superiority of the native, who is to be perceived white, over that of the non-native, who is perceived to be People and Immigrants of Color, and thereby defend the right of whites, or the natives, to dominance” (Huber et al., 2008, p. 43).
structures (i.e., through the education system, ELL and special education placement of students of Color), and 4) it reinforces oppressive and hegemonic systems such as lower expectations of educators towards students of Color. I use all these four essential elements of deficit thinking and language which I understand maintains and reproduces hegemony, though different qualitatively and intersectionally and at times independent of consciousness, when working through people, policies, practices and systems (relationships). By deficit policies, practices and systems here I mean the historical hyper-surveillance of students of Color including immigrants and refugees within special education and ELL classrooms, and the standardized assessments and educational disparities rooted in the education debt for racial and ethnic historically multiply marginalized in schools (Artiles et al., 2005; Bal, 2009, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Migliarini et al., 2019). Educational debt encompasses the historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral debt for students of color in U.S. schools and society.

I foregrounded this study in the interdisciplinary and intersectional field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) (Annamma et al., 2013; Connor et al., 2008) and incorporated a plurality of theoretical frameworks (Baglieri et al., 2011a). Specifically, I drew upon the interdisciplinary fields of inquiry including Critical Disability Studies (CDS), DisCrit, GSI-DisCrit, and the Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic Racial Identity (ERI) formation, which seek to (re)evaluate and problematize the historical, material, social, emotional, and political understandings of students’ multiple intersecting identity formation—their emerging sense of self in new culture (Annamma et al., 2013; Erevelles, 2011; Hall, 2019; Holland et al., 1998; Iqtadar et al., 2021; Meekosha, 2006; Meekosha
& Shuttleworth, 2009; Minich, 2016; Roets & Goodley, 2008; Thomas, 1999; Tremain, 2005).

DisCrit, in specific, aims to understand the ways in which people with multiple marginalized identities experience intersecting oppression. The Global South informed DisCrit helped the researcher make sense of the participants’ multicultural sense making of their personal, relational, and collective selves (Sedikides & Brewer, 2001) and how they navigated their intersectional identities within the U.S. society and education system. This study also situates Gramsci’s perspective of hegemony within CDS to (a) understand the power dynamics within students’ accounts of their situatedness in contemporary society and education, and (b) to problematize their cultural, emotional, social, and educational processes and how they impact students in their day-to-day life. I interpret power as a force that “mediate(s) and legitim(izes) the relations” within the social, cultural, historical and other spheres of life (Giroux, 1983, p. 262). My understanding of power (Bourdieu, 1989; Foucault, 1980) guides this study that power is always prevalent within the classroom and school spaces, (between and among different agents), independent of their consciousness and will, and guides the social interactions among themselves (Bourdieu, 1989). Global South informed DisCrit along with a Dis/ability-Integrated ERI framework was useful in understanding students’ identity formation at the intersections of multiple cultures, their stories and experiences, asking questions, collecting and analyzing the data, and making meaning of the emergent themes.

This study contributes to the growing body of literature that critically explores the intersectional identity formation and schooling navigation of immigrant and/or refugee
students receiving special education and ELL services. Specifically, the following research questions were asked:

1. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, make meaning of English as a Second Language and/or Special Education experiences?

2. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without disabilities, engage in identity formation in a new school and culture?

3. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, experience schooling and navigate their intersectional identities on a daily basis?

**Theoretical and Conceptual Foundations**

Within U.S. culture, I am specifically interested in immigrant and refugee students’ identity formation for two major reasons: first, because of my own epistemological and ontological standing and my emerging sense of self as an immigrant student, researcher, and teacher educator of Color, and second because of the predominantly deficit views about culturally and linguistically diverse learners in the U.S. school culture (Artiles, 2015; Bañales et al., 2020). This study intended to understand first-generation immigrants and refugee students’ identity formation and its implications for transforming society and engaging social change. As described later in this chapter, this study explored identity formation of the first-generation African students as emerging and in conversation with the structures of U.S. schools and society. This means that a *stable* identity may be observed in relation to specific cultural artifacts
and practices. However, I understand that identities are *fragmented* and *fractured* selves and are practiced in relation to “others” and the hegemonic power structures that they live, work, and experience life in (Hall, 1986). The interplay of socially ascribed positions, agency, and structure influence identity formation.

For this purpose, this chapter is divided into two sections: the first section underscores my on-going theoretical, intellectual and philosophical commitments within the field of Disability Studies in Education through an interdisciplinary discussion of cultural hegemony, and role of structure and agency to foreground Global South informed DisCrit. This conceptual foregrounding helped the researcher understand first generation immigrant and refugees’ identity formation in the U.S. society. The second section of this chapter specifically draws upon their identity formation through a Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity formation framework that helped understand their educational and cultural navigation in the figured worlds of schooling and culture of the U.S.

The theoretical, conceptual, methodological, and praxical foundations for this study are situated within the: (a) researcher's Global South informed epistemological and ontological stance, (b) pluralistic commitments to social justice and theories of resistance and liberation, (c) understanding and exploration of human agency and engagement with structures to perform political work necessary to change those structures, (d) disability studies’ strands of interdisciplinarity and intersectionality, and (e) phenomenological inquiry of participants’ experiences and identity formation in new schools and society. For the purpose of this study, I define praxical as collective and dialogic self-reflection
and action between participants and the researcher about participants’ socially, culturally, politically and economically constructed realities in the figured worlds of schooling and society (Kamberelis et al., 2018). The goal here was to motivate social change by disrupting the dialogic hindrance between participants’ epistemological and ontological stance and the social processes such as disablism, racism, sexism and classism that shaped and formed their social worlds. To engage such a praxis, the researcher engaged a heuristic approach of (a) pluralistic and reciprocal theories embedded in interdisciplinary approaches, (b) asking specific questions that highlighted instances and conditions of dominations as contextualized by researcher and inviting participants to adapt these questions based on their knowledge and experiences in their social worlds, (c) qualitative methodologies of hermeneutics phenomenology by valuing student voice (Cohen, 2000; Kafle, 2011; Laverty, 2003) as represented in the findings of this research project. The goal for such praxis was to motivate social action that “liberates people from the constraints of extant ideologies about how they (“should”) think, feel and act” (Kamberelis et al., 2018, p. 700) as “emancipatory rationality” (Habermas, 1971, as cited in Kamberelis et al., 2018).

From an interdisciplinary perspective, I understand culture as fluid and in a multifaceted way. First, as a group(s) of people sharing similar values, beliefs, practices, customs, norms, and language(s) (Milner, 2007). From the disability studies perspective, I also understand culture as institutional and social practices that create differences by compartmentalizing people through learning and ability supremacy into different “identity” categories including race, gender, ethnicity, social class, dis/ability,
immigration and refugees (Artiles, 2015; Nasir & Hand, 2006). From this definition of culture, participants’ navigation of their cultural experiences—in U.S. schools and society—were explored to understand their counter-hegemonic narratives and actions represented in day-to-day conduct with others (Giddens, 2005). I understand counter-hegemonic narratives as subjective voices, stories, and ideas of the study participants positioned as multiply marginalized in the U.S. speaking back to the structures of power and white and ability supremacy (De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005).

Within U.S. culture, those who are historically marginalized—including immigrant and refugee students—are disproportionately sorted into ability categories—both physically within the special education classrooms, English Language Learners (ELL) classrooms, and other segregated settings, and ideologically being understood as intellectually inferior (Anyon, 2014; Artiles, 2011, 2013; Artiles et al., 2005; Brayboy et al., 2007; Cavendish et al., 2018; Cooc & Kiru, 2018; Dolmage, 2018; Dunn, 1968; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; O’Connor & Fernandez, 2006; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Voulgarides et al., 2017). However, little is known about how (a) learning and culture interact within classrooms for those migrating from other countries (Arzubiaga et al., 2008; Nasir & Hand, 2006), (b) they engage in identity formation, and (c) how they navigate schooling on a day-to-day basis (Bal, 2009, 2014; Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Connor, 2006, 2008, 2009; Dávila, 2015; Ferri & Connor, 2010; Hernández-Saca, 2016; Petersen, 2006a, 2006b, 2009; Washington, 2011; Whitener, 2014; Wright, 2012). By identity formation, I mean how people understand their diverse intersectional selves and their personhood in relation to the historical, public, personal, interpersonal, structural and political social
arenas and institutions that create such differences in the culture (Crenshaw, 1991; Holland et al., 1998). I understand identity formation as an important condition to unpack the “reciprocity between individuals as well as the development of a political philosophy that commits actors to social change . . . express[ing] the transformative possibilities of a dialogic community” (Kamberelis et al., 2018, p. 702). This study is an attempt to explore immigrant and refugees’ identity formation within the sociocultural context of U.S. schools and society.

An interdisciplinary Global-South informed Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) (Iqtadar et al., 2021) foundation shaped the researcher’s inquiry and defined the approach to this research study. Plurality and reciprocity of theoretical frameworks (Baglieri et al., 2011a; Connor et al., 2011) and the interdisciplinary nature of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) (Connor et al., 2008) provided the lens through which the researcher explored the participants’ intersectional identity formation and their counter-hegemonic navigation of these identities within the social milieu of U.S. schools and society. Multiple theoretical constructs guided the development of the research questions, the collection and analysis of the data, and the construction of thematic interpretations to answer the research questions.

Researcher’s on-going Theoretical, Intellectual and Philosophical Commitments

**Critical Disability Studies**

Critical Disability Studies (CDS) is an interdisciplinary paradigm which seeks to re-evaluate and problematize the historical, material, social, and political understandings of dis/ability in various analyses and fields of inquiry (Erevelles, 2000; Hall, 2019;
Meekosha, 2006; Minich, 2016; Roets & Goodley, 2008; Tremain, 2005). As stated in the introduction, the use of slash within the disability and ability is not to represent binaries. Instead, it disrupts the ideological binaries created between the two terms. Situated within the DSE and CDS frameworks, disability is constructed, identified, controlled, intervened, fixed and maintained globally through the medical model of disability, and the lens of productivity in the economic world (Baglieri et al., 2011b; Taylor et al., 1992; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). My use of slash further questions how disability is created socially, politically, and culturally by systems such as special education—grounded within Global North ideologies (Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018), and national and international laws and policies, including the United Nations Convention for the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) (Amin, 2006; Iqtadar et al., 2021; Jenks, 2017; Ribet, 2011). I understand that such social and political creation of disability has material and psychological realities for people with dis/abilities and follows a lineage of resistance in political discourses (Annamma et al., 2013). Scholars, using a CDS lens, argue that the discrimination and oppression against disabled people cannot be resolved or changed simply through liberal or western European neoliberal policies and legislations in health care and higher education (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009; Minich, 2016). Instead, an emancipatory stance is needed by critically re-evaluating the paradigm of traditional disability studies and engaging in transnational intersectional analyses of disability in global contexts (Hall, 2019; Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

Critical Disability Studies as a field draws upon critical theory for being self-aware of its historicity and its own situatedness within time and place. This means that
theories that were once identified as adequate need a critical re-examination in a new historical bloc—a moment during the process of change within a contemporary society (Forgacs, 1988), due to society’s ever-changing social relations, cultural meanings, and oppressive dynamics which can never be acted upon definitively. This nature of “critical” self-reflexivity at its very core has “sustained critical theory throughout the waxing and waning of many other theoretical perspectives” (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009, p. 54).

Drawing on critical theory’s self-reflexivity, CDS critically evaluates the disability studies’ underlying social model and philosophical assumptions of disability, as well as the presence of white hegemony in Disability Studies (Bell, 2006). Critical theory provides CDS with the tools for critically evaluating the philosophical assumptions within traditional disability studies and its own situatedness in each historical moment. Within the fields of special education and Disability Studies in Education (DSE), it is significant for the demographic imperative, meaning the ground realities, and under theorized and under researched educational and emotional experiences that the growing immigrant and refugee student population navigate in the U.S. public schools (García et al., 2009; McDonald, 2007). This study employed this “self-reflexivity” of critical theory to examine the field of disability studies in education and special education, the institutions of power—making decisions for immigrant and refugee students’ needs—and the dominant white middle class culture from an epistemological and ontological stance of the students who experience these systems and structures as Global South “Others” in Global North countries.
Finally, Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) argue for a global theoretical framework for disability studies. Traditionally, critical theory has its origins in Western and European ideals which makes it difficult to engage with non-western cultures. However, due to changing geopolitics and the increasing role of international organizations such as United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) and United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (UNCRPD) within the Global South, as well as increasing immigrant population from Global South to Global North countries, scholars within CDS find it necessary to engage disability studies in dialogue among cultures (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009).

Specifically, Meekosha and Shuttleworth (2009) state:

Yet, despite the use of post-colonial approaches in disability literary, art and film, we have not witnessed an extension, beyond the deconstruction of the text, to an investigation of the production of disability by the colonial enterprise and the exploitative and damaging effects embedded in the economic and material relations between the metropolis and the periphery. Although living in a world where race, racism, nationalism and globalisation are dominant forces, disability studies largely avoids these issues (see, however, McRuer 2006). Disability theory remains ethnocentric, with the global north dominating the agenda. CDS, on the other hand, can be self-conscious about its historicity by revealing the impact of colonialism and post-colonialism on those outside the metropolis who become disabled through invasion, dispossession, war and the hegemonic processes of normalcy (Sherry 2007; Meekosha 2008) (pp. 63-64)

Global South informed DisCrit continues to engage this contention within the field of critical disability studies, DSE, and DisCrit. Other scholars from Global South have called upon disability studies scholars and emancipatory thinkers to engage the diversity among cultures in the Global South and Global North to unpack the disability experience, in schools and society, by the colonized people of the Global South (Ariotti, 1999; Ghai,
2002; Grech, 2015; Meekosha & Soldatic, 2011; Mundy, 1999; Soldatic & Biyanwila, 2006). For example, in their study conducted about the self-perceptions and lived realities of children with disabilities in Indian context, Singh and Ghai (2009) discussed how children identified disabilities to the existential–God, fate/destiny–and material causes. Following the CDS tradition, Global South informed DisCrit is a space to explore the dis/ability understanding, narration, experiences of people of Global South, living in Global North or Global South, through the major points of Global South informed DisCrit, which I outline later within this chapter below (Annamma et al., 2013; Iqtadar et al., 2021).

Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit)

Over time, CDS scholars engaged Disability Studies (DS) with Critical Race Theory (CRT) in education (Erevelles et al., 2006; Petersen, 2006a, 2006b, 2009; Connor, 2008; Ferri & Connor, 2010). Only recently, Annamma et al., (2013) coined the term DisCrit while simultaneously engaging the fields of DS and CRT together. DisCrit is an emerging and dynamic interdisciplinary framework within Disability Studies in Education (DSE). The two frameworks, Disability Studies, and Critical Race Theory, vary in their explanation of disability as a social versus medical or biological identity. For scholars in Disability Studies, disability is a social and political identity that “derives meaning and social (in)significance from the historical, cultural, political, and economic structures that frame social life” (Erevelles & Minear, 2010, p. 132; Ghai, 2019). However, Critical Race Theory scholarship conceives “disability as a biological category . . . an immutable and pathological abnormality . . .” (Erevelles & Minear, 2010, p. 132).
Similarly, scholarship in *Disability Studies*, for a long time, painted the field as what Bell (2006) termed a white disability studies. Bell (2006) pointed to the overrepresentation of white scholars with/without disabilities within *Disability Studies* conferences and scholarship, overrepresentation of white people with disabilities in DS documentaries and films, and the problematic dearth of people of Color in texts. Thus, Annamma et al., (2013) developed a framework of DisCrit to critique both CRT scholars’ failure to focus disability and ableism within their framework and to address race and racism within the fields of DS and DSE.

DisCrit is an interdisciplinary theoretical framework in the field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE) in which race and disability are socially constructed categories in society which are (re)produced by hegemonic power structures working in tandem (Annamma et al., 2013). I interpret hegemonic power structures in the U.S. as the dominant White middle-class able-bodied ways of thinking, acting, and speaking that favors some people by allowing them to exercise domination over those not favored through these social categories. This has implications for the experiences of people of color, who are multiply and intersectionally marginalized at personal, interpersonal, structural, and political levels of society (Crenshaw, 1991).

Intersectionality, a term coined by critical legal studies and critical race theorist Kimberlé Williams Crenshaw (1989) provides a lens to explore the interlocking discrimination and subordination that people of Color experience in their everyday life. It is central to the study of inequality, social justice, power and identity formation (Cho,
Following the lineage of Black and critical race feminist scholars and activists, including but not limited to Anna Julia Cooper, Audre Lorde, Sojourner Truth, Zora Neale Hurston, intersectionality—as a critical social theory—seeks to understand how such interlocking oppressions intersect and define people’s personal, interpersonal, structural, and political realities in society (Crenshaw, 1991). Following this lineage, DisCrit values experiential voice and examines how race and dis/ability intersect and influence the life of people at the intersection of different identity markers (Annamma et al., 2018). The seven tenets of DisCrit include:

- DisCrit focuses on ways that the forces of racism and ableism circulate interdependently, often in neutralized and invisible ways, to uphold notions of normalcy.
- DisCrit values multidimensional identities and troubles singular notions of identity such as race or dis/ability or class or gender or sexuality and so on.
- DisCrit emphasizes the social construction of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impacts of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the Western cultural norms.
- DisCrit privileges voices of marginalized populations, traditionally not acknowledged within research.
- DisCrit considers legal and historical aspects of dis/ability and race and how both have been used separately and together to deny the rights of some citizens.
DisCrit recognizes Whiteness and Ability as property and that gains for people labeled with dis/abilities have largely been made as the result of interest convergence of White, middle-class citizens.

DisCrit requires activism and supports all forms of resistance (p. 19)

Within the context of this study, I used the seven tenets of DisCrit to understand how first-generation immigrants and refugee students navigated their day-to-day schooling at the intersections of culture and multiple identities. This helped me answer the second and third research questions for the study to explore their intersectional identity formation in new schools and society.

Global South Informed Disability Critical Race Studies (GSI-DisCrit)

Within his book, Disabled upon Arrival: Eugenics, Immigration, and the Construction of Race and Disability, Dolmage (2018) drew upon the earlier 20th century anti-immigration rhetoric of immigrants as dangerous and undesirable to describe the arrival of immigrants to North America. He explained that the immigrants traveling through New York’s Ellis Island were subjected to medical scrutiny and viewed unfavorably through the lenses of race, dis/ability, nationality, and immigration politics. People’s behavior, their body language as well as their limited English language skills led to either (a) immediately sending them back to their countries of origin, or (b) excluding, marginalizing and monitoring them as soon as they arrived to the U.S. Dolmage (2018) further posited that artifacts of the Eugenics movement involving the control of the human population through Eurocentric ableist and racist bodily values contributed to those 20th century practices and are still prevalent in today’s immigration restrictions for
people arriving from the Global South. The construction of xenophobic and nationalist ideologies is evident in political dialogues and immigration practices in the United States. Within the U.S. education system, such segregation is seen through the separate English Language Learner (ELL) classroom practices, and sorting of students based on their linguistic and behavioral “ability” to align with the white middle class structures of conduct (Artiles, 2015; Bal, 2014; Giddens, 2005).

Global South informed DisCrit is then an exploratory journey which engages the contention of experience—within schools and culture—at the intersections of race, culture and ethnicity, social class, immigrant and refugee status, language, and ability supremacy as a cultural and social process (Nasir & Hand, 2006). The anti-immigrant rhetoric in U.S. politics has portrayed migrants as a “threat” to the White working class. These expressions reveal that the relocation experiences of this dissertation’s participants and students involved not only material and structural challenges—such as financial and educational issues—as reflected in their day-to-day conduct, but also challenges of material and emotional realities of relegation to the “other” due to race, skin color, country and continent of origin, culture, language, dis/ability and other markers of identity in schools and broader society (Giddens, 2005; Hall, 1997; Ingstad & Whyte, 2007). The most current example of such understanding became explicit during COVID-19 pandemic. While there is an increase in the racist comments against Asian-American population across the U.S., Trump’s following tweet on March 16, 2020 highlighted the prevalence of such deficit views in contemporary society:
The United States will be powerfully supporting those industries, like airlines and others, that are particularly affected by the “Chinese virus”. We will be stronger than ever before! (Aratani, March 24, 2020)

Historically, leaders have used such language against immigrant groups—such as anti-Asian and/or anti-Chinese language—to paint them as a “threat” to the white American working class. Dr. Claire Jean Kim, a professor of political science and Asian American studies at the University of California argued that such language is used to mislead people about the actual causes and reasons of pandemics by finding the source within a specific group of people (Aratani, 2020). This presents that the experiences of relocation present deeper inequalities and challenges at the levels of ideas, common sense assumptions, and practices impacting identity formation in host countries (Giddens, 2005; Hall, 1986; Ingstad & Whyte, 2007).

Further the meaning associated with disability labels often differ between Global North and Global South (Ghai, 2002), with Global North dominating the disability conceptions under the medical model and special education paradigm (Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018). However, the impact of fluid medicalized concepts and the labeling system borrowed by the scientific research community conducted in the Global North and/or embodied by international organizations working in the countries of Global South has impacted how dis/ability is started to be understood in political and educational discourses of the Global South (Iqtadar et al., 2021). However, much of these discourses
do not include voices of those populations with intersectional identities who are directly impacted by these international legislations and conventions (Ribet, 2011).

As Dolmage (2018) argued that the Eurocentric ideologies\(^4\) and the imperial gaze of seeing immigrants from the Global South as “uncivilized,” “backward,” “incompetent,” and “disabled” has implications on their resettlement experiences in the West. The postcolonial theorist, Edward Wadie Said (1978), called this phenomenon *orientalism*\(^5\) where Western society romanticizes people from the orient (East), yet also views these very people as “uncivilized,” “inherently defective,” and “backward.” In Trump’s earlier tweet, one sees such existing binary between “us” and “they” to centralize “us” as successful and advanced and “they” as someone inherently “unhygienic” and not from an “advanced culture” and/or race.

A Global-South informed DisCrit (Iqtadar et al., 2021) centers such cross-cultural experiences of the multiply oppressed population and proposes that the seven tenets of DisCrit must account for *global intersectional dis/ability politics*. By a *global intersectional dis/ability politics* I mean that DisCrit conversations open to the realities of how dis/ability is “created and experienced by [Global South subaltern populations with dis/abilities] through war conditions, mass destruction, globalization, as well as Global North interference and invasions in countries of the Global South for economic and

\(^4\) Eurocentric ideologies place European culture as the center and standard to which all other cultures must be contrasted and explained from (Amin, 1989).

\(^5\) Since the 18th century, orientalism refers to the study of cultures, languages, and histories of Asia, while the first Asian language—Hebrew—studied in the West dates back to the Middle Ages (Hübinette, 2003).
political purposes” (Iqtadar et al., 2021, p. 732). Through the Global South informed DisCrit framework I engage the systems of oppression in the Global North and Global South as experienced by people who are most directly affected by the historical oppressive policies and practices of ableist Eurocentric ideologies (Iqtadar et al., 2021).

Within the context of this study, such a framework is essential for unpacking immigrant and refugee students’ identity formation by accounting student voice, their transnational understanding and experiences of dis/ability and other identity markers embedded in Global South and Global North cultures, and navigation of their intersectional experiences within structures—virtual and ideological—in the U.S. society (Giddens, 2005; Hall, 1986; Iqtadar et al., 2021; Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010).

Within the U.S. schooling, this means accounting for the navigation of cultural ableism and racism and its impact on the identity formation and life of students migrating from Global South countries (Artiles, 2015; French, 2012). The overwhelming refugee and immigrants’ flow across the national borders, the deepening inequalities—in education and society, and the unparalleled comparison and realities of living in two or more countries (at times in Global South and Global North) is the demographic imperative that needs immediate attention (Artiles, 2015; Artiles & Dyson, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This study emerged as a response to this call of the DSE scholars and examined how racism and ableism intersect for first-generation African immigrants and refugees with and without disabilities who have lived at the intersections of multiple cultures (Bal, 2009; Migliarini, 2017b). This study explored how they are engaged in a continuing identity formation and how their identities are (re)shaped by living in multiple
cultures, and the ways whiteness and intersectional disablism (Iqtadar et al., 2020) silently yet fluidly travels across the globe (Said, 1993). By intersectional disablism I mean a form of social oppression enacted by the social, emotional and psychological impact of intersectional racism, ableism, and linguicism, which impacts individuals’ life trajectories and future goals.

Participants’ disability experiences and intersectional identity formation at the borders of multiple Global North and Global South cultures is the agenda that drove this study. In a recent publication in *Race, Ethnicity, and Education*, co-authors and the researcher, I, proposed five points that the future work within DisCrit theory and praxis account for an emancipatory struggle of global intersectional dis/ability politics:

- Emphasize the social, global cultural, psychological, emotional, and material constructions of race and ability, which sets one outside of global ability supremacy and racial ‘norms;’ [of white middle class abled-bodies]
- Engage the global intersectional onset of dis/ability through war conditions, mass destruction, globalization, Global North interference, and invasions in countries of the Global South for economic and political purposes
- Center the voices of globally dis/abled multiply marginalized people, both in the Global South and those migrating from the Global South to the Global North
- Call out the Global North interest convergence and resist its’ neoliberal concepts which create a mythical divide of ‘Global North/South’ to understand human beings (through racial, dis/ability, tribal, social class, caste identities to name a
few) that values the economization of human bodies and their productivity through local and global institutions and structures; and,

- Acknowledge, support, and align with all forms of global activism, resistance and justice movements in order to counter-narrate the silence, lack of representation and power within and between multiple levels of global and local civic society and institutions for critical revolutionary praxis (p. 731).

The purpose of this dissertation study was to explore participants’ meaning making of their English Language Learner (ELL) and/or Special Education experiences, their navigation of intersectional identities in inclusive education systems, and intersectional identity formation in their new schools in the U.S. The researcher specifically drew upon the first, third, and fifth points of Global South informed DisCrit to guide this research study to understand participants’ intersectional identity formation in their host culture of the United States. It was specifically helpful in answering the third research question for the study, and honoring my participants as transnational individuals with lived histories in both Global South and Global North contexts.

A Sociocultural Perspective of Identity Formation

From a sociocultural perspective, identity may be conceptualized as an individual’s complex and emerging sense of self, mediated by the social, cultural, and historical processes, and is continually produced in and by the dialectical social relationship and interaction with the world (Holland et al., 1998). I understand self as a “complex emergent phenomenon continually produced in and by individuals in their interchanges with others and with the culturally transformed material world” (Holland et
al., 1998, p. 2). The social interaction between the self and the “other” is mediated by power relations in the discourses, which ascribe social positions and practices, and categorize individuals (learning disabled, emotionally disturbed, etc.) in the social milieu (Bourdieu, 1977). This leads to a sense of self-making which is always emerging, instead of an ever achieved or completely formed identity (De Certeau, 2005). In this study, I drew upon this conception of identity formation, which is always emerging and never fully achieved, yet is in dialectical relationship with the hegemonic power structure that my participants found themselves in. The immigrant and refugee participants in this study engaged in a self-reflexive endeavor to understand their socially constructed identities (such as race, dis/ability, social class, immigrant and refugee) and gave meaning to their experiences in school and society impacting identity formation.

To explore students’ identity formation, I used a Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity (DERI) framework (which I will expand on in the second half of this chapter), along with pluralistic and reciprocal theoretical frameworks (see Figure 1) to understand how intersectional identity formation was operationalized by the participants. At this point, I situate the conversation in an emerging need for the study of culture and its mediating role in newly arrived immigrant and refugee students’ learning and ability differences. The scholars within DSE community have argued for interdisciplinary theoretically and analytically engaging discourses in exploring students’ identity formation at the intersections of multiple intersecting identities, and how students adopt and perform strategies and practices in the new culture; i.e., engage in praxis (Artiles, 2015; Bal, 2009, 2014; Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Giddens, 2005; De Certeau, 2005). To
this study, the integration of multiple interdisciplinary frameworks provided theoretical constructs to understand Black immigrant and refugees’ identity formation experiences in the new culture. For this purpose, I now turn to an interdisciplinary discussion of cultural hegemony, role of structure and agency to foreground Global South informed DisCrit in understanding first generation immigrant and refugee students’ experiences.

Figure 1

*Theoretical, Conceptual, Methodological, and Praxical Foundations*

**Cultural Hegemony, Structure, and Agency**

Drawing upon an interdisciplinary perspective of cultural hegemony, DisCrit tenets and Global South informed DisCrit was employed to understand how the study participants ‘*consumed*’ cultural strategies and tactics to negotiate social norms and
ideologies that govern U.S. schooling and cultural practices (De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005). Gramsci identified hegemony as a process of achieving power within a society through both coercive means and the dominance obtained by the “willing consent” of those dominated (Forgacs, 1988). The study of society, politics, and human practice cannot be understood without the cultural, social, and historical processes (Coutinho, 2012; Giroux, 2002). For Gramsci, “it is not true that the philosophy of praxis—people’s actions towards changing society—‘detaches’ the structure [or base] from the superstructure when, rather, it conceives their development as intimately connected and necessarily interrelated and reciprocal” (Forgacs, 1988, p. 193). Gramsci understood that the nature of power in a contemporary society works in a dialectical relationship between structure and superstructure—between political, ideological, economic, sexual questions (Hall, 1987). Within the context of this study, participants' schooling and day-to-day experiences, as well as their actions informing the practice were in a dialectic relationship with the broader hegemonic structure of society and how they were positioned and understood within the U.S. society.

One of Gramsci’s major contributions was to outline and explain the concept of hegemony—a Greek term meaning domination—in a society. He understood hegemony as generative and not totalizing and fixed notion. Within his prison notebooks (1929-1935)—a series of pamphlets that he wrote while in the prison—Gramsci contended that

---

6 By superstructure Gramsci meant both civil society and the political society within a society (Forgacs, 1988). Civil society is composed of organizations in a society that are associated with the State such as political parties, religious institutions, education sector, media, trade unions, NGOs. The political society is the State itself.
the ruling class always exercises hegemony through the use of civil society. This is done by gaining general consent of those dominated by out spreading the ideas and beliefs of the ruling class as the only sensible way of seeing the world. Hall states that Gramsci identified three main points underlying the concept of hegemony:

- ‘hegemony’ is a very particular, historically specific, and temporary ‘moment’ in the life of a society. It is rare for this degree of unity to be achieved, enabling a society to set itself a quite new historical agenda, under the leadership of a specific formation or constellation of social forces. Second, we must take note of the multi-dimensional, multi-arena character of hegemony. It cannot be constructed or sustained on one front of struggle alone (for example, the economic). It represents a degree of mastery over a whole series of different ‘positions’ at once. Mastery is not simply imposed or dominative in character. Effectively, it results from winning a substantial degree of popular consent. It represents the installation of a profound measure of social and moral authority, not simply over its immediate supporters but across society as a whole. Third, what ‘leads’ in a period of hegemony is no longer described as a ‘ruling class’ in the traditional language, but a historic bloc… The ‘leading elements’ in a historic bloc may be only one fraction of the dominant economic class—for example, finance rather than industrial capital; national rather than international capital. (Hall, 1986, p. 224)

This study employed the construct of hegemony—as a generative force—to understand and explore ways in which study participants experienced the multi-dimensional character of domination, and used strategies and tactics, and their unique constellation of difference from white and ability supremacy to “reclaim autonomy from the all-pervasive forces of economics, politics, and culture” (De Certeau, 2005, p. 213).

The current historic bloc in the U.S.—structured in dominance—producing and reproducing the hegemonic order through spreading out ableist and racist ideologies about immigrant and refugee bodies and minds shaped the day-to-day experiences of this study participants in education, career, daily life activities, and relationships. They engaged with this cultural politics in U.S. schools and society through contesting counter-
hegemonic ideologies and perspectives, i.e., war of position, through an engaging day to day conduct with others (Coutinho, 2012; Giddens, 2005). By war of position I mean a struggle for civil hegemony by political leadership and/or mass consent. This means that these immigrant and refugee students were acutely aware and reflexive about the deficit meanings attached to their (a) special education and/or/both ELL placement, (b) racial, cultural and ethnic identities, and (c) their immigrant and refugee experiences. They contested these meanings and made career and life choices to disrupt and counter this cultural hegemony through operationalizing agency.

I understand agency—a constituent of structure—as a person’s ability which is an ongoing activity to purposefully and reflectively (intentional or otherwise) (re)act, reiterate and reshape social conditions and perspectives within a sociocultural environment (Giddens, 2005; Giroux, 1983; Ermarth, 2005). According to Giddens (2005), “structure teaches agents who help to form the structure, in a circular process that [he] term[ed] structuration” (p. 119). Within the context of this study, this heuristic approach of purposefully reflecting, reiterating, and reshaping their views and understandings about themselves, and an effort to reshape their social conditions in a circular process within the structures was depicted in how participants purposefully and reflectively interacted with their sociocultural environments. This informed their continuing identity formation by countering the dominant ideologies and existing hegemonic structure.

From a Global South informed DisCrit perspective, this does not mean that all immigrants and refugees have a collective set of experiences and practices that they must
experience and use to relate to the *identity politics*—emphasis added for defining loosely. Instead, I understand that they practiced agency within the bounds of structure that they live and work in to necessarily change those structures from within with a collective effort in their communities. As Michel De Certeau (2005) argued:

> The examination of practices does not imply a return to individuality. The social atomism which over the past three centuries has served as the historical axiom of social analysis posits an elementary unit—the individual—on the basis of which groups are supposed to be formed and to which they are supposed to be always reducible. This axiom...plays no part in this study. Analysis shows that a relation (always social) determines its terms, and not the reverse, and that each individual is a locus in which an incoherent (and often contradictory) plurality of such relational determinations interact (p. 213-214).

In this study, the social relations are depicted in the similarities in students’ lives and educational experiences which positioned them in an ongoing praxis (such as reflected in their dress codes, career choices, and resistance to ELL and special education placement). The differences between them identified their unique and at times different experiences based on their within groups position differences, such as gender, dis/ability, linguistic “assimilation” etc. They employed agency to “use” and “consume”—adopting strategies and tactics to reclaim autonomy—culture and cultural artifacts for making informed and liberatory choices in day to day life with others (De Certeau, 2005). This supported them to navigate their intersectional experiences and emerging identity formation.

> From a DisCrit perspective, the hegemonic power structures of ableism\(^7\) and whiteness—a position of White race privilege and structural advantage (Frankenberg, 2019).

---

\(^7\) “A system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, productivity, desirability, intelligence, excellence and fitness. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in eugenics, anti-Blackness, misogyny,
flow within U.S. society and educational settings to maintain unequal power relations and intersectional oppression for people of Color with dis/abilities (Crenshaw, 1991; Foucault, 1980). However, identity work is complex (Holland et al., 1998). In the context of this study, the participants shared narratives when they actively exercised agency, recognized the power dynamics in their day-to-day experiences, and (re)shaped their personal experiences in a dialectical relationship between self-identity and power relations (Bal, 2009). I understand that to study identity formation, one must account for this dialectical relationship to understand the grassroot political work that those with intersectionally marginalized experiences—first-generation immigrants and refugees in the context of this study—perform in daily conduct. My use of grassroot political work here is relatively the one depicted in everyday common life of people, especially in contrast to the leadership or elite of a political party. Such actions at the subjective experiential level are necessary to identify and counter the multi-dimensional character of domination as it is experienced in day-to-day life. Within the intersectional literature related with students of Color with dis/abilities, this foregrounds student voice—valuing the standpoint and experiences of students about their experiential knowledge in contrast to the systems as they understand students’ experiences (Gonzalez et al., 2017).

Cultural Hegemony and Intersectional Disablism. Specifically, the first point of Global South informed DisCrit recognized that the participants of this study are global colonialism, and imperialism. This systemic oppression leads to people and society determining people’s value based on their culture, age, language, appearance, religion, birth or living place, “health/wellness”, and/or their ability to satisfactorily re/produce, “excel” and “behave.” You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism” (Lewis, 2022).
cultural citizens, who have lived within two and sometimes three different cultures—specifically refugees. The way the participants understood and navigated their cultural identities within and across the U.S., and white and ability supremacy impacted their social, educational, local and global cultural, psychological, emotional, and material constructions of their multiple and intersecting identities in U.S. schools and culture (Iqtadar et al., 2021). However, they also understood themselves beyond the U.S. “racial” and “ability” paradigm, and along their cultural and ethnic selves. This study attempted to explore these intersectional experiences between cultures, meaning of being Black in the U.S., living in the “neighborhoods”, being assigned dis/ability and ELL labels, placement in segregated special education and/or ELL classrooms, and beyond.

Additionally, I understand that for newly arrived immigrants and refugees this intersectional navigation is complex and may sometimes leave psychological and emotional impact on their wellbeing, termed intersectional disablism, which can impact their identity formation (Iqtadar et al., 2020; Thomas, 1999, 2007). I understand intersectional disablism as:

a form of social oppression enacted by the social processes such as disablism, racism, sexism and classism that works to restrict the social activity of people from marginalized identities and influence whom they can become by undermining their psychological and emotional well-being. (Iqtadar et al., 2020, p. 21)

The findings from this co-authored qualitative research synthesis (QRS) publication suggested that students of Color may internalize the negative beliefs about themselves and their multidimensional identities when viewed from a White middle-class lens. This can lead to affecting their participation in classroom learning and/or activities in day-to-
day life. Such as, in one of the sample studies, Ferri and Connor (2010) argued that being the only girl in the special education classroom often overburdened girls due to the dual stigmas attached with gender and disability labels. This emotionally threatened the girls while they also internalized that they were “less desirable, even as friends” (Ferri & Connor, 2010, p. 109). Yet, in another study (Wright, 2012) a participant shared:

People think you are dumb because you have an [Individualized Education Program] [IEP] but that is not always true. Yet the school doesn’t do anything to help you because they are too busy tryna to keep us down. And none of them care about how that makes us feel or how that hurts our ability to focus in class and learn (p. 167).

The findings from this qualitative research synthesis suggested that although students often resisted the prevailing deficit thinking, views, and language (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) about their multiple identities, other times they also internalized these views about their intersecting identities (Iqtadar et al., 2020).

Further, the first point of Global South informed DisCrit engaged with the third tenet of DisCrit which states that “DisCrit emphasizes the social construction of race and ability and yet recognizes the material and psychological impact of being labeled as raced or dis/abled, which sets one outside of the western cultural norms” (Annamma et al., 2013; p. 19, added emphasis). Within the context of ability supremacy of White middle class and Eurocentric Global North values, people residing in the Global South or those migrating from Global South to Global North countries historically experience isms qualitatively differently because of the historical legacy of colonialism (Grech, 2015).
While the phrase *which sets one outside of the western cultural norms* communicates the fact that Black, Indigenous Youth of Color (BIYOC) within western culture experience racial and ability supremacy differently from the White majority “able bodied” people, this study lends itself to explore that the phrase necessitates further consideration in relation to Global South bodyminds. Such as, western culture norms often view people from the Global South through the lens of *pity* and *deficit* ideologies by creating a false dichotomy between western cultural norms as advanced and non-western cultural norms as “backward” (Grech, 2015). Hence, the analyses are often constructed through a western eye and colonial gaze, even if unintentional, and when at times critiquing that gaze. The researcher understands that DisCrit has much potential to problematize and engage such contention. It is important that DisCrit and disability studies as a field open the dialogic space to engage Global South cultures as valued members, especially considering the ever increasing disability and impairment creation politics in the countries of Global South (Meekosha & Shuttleworth, 2009). This is important to recognize the existing binary between Global North and Global South as well as the global hegemony of western cultural norms (Amin, 2006; Hall, 1986; Mutua, 2002).

Global hegemony of western cultural norms means the material and psychological supremacy of European white middle class practices and policies in global culture (Amin, 1989; Said, 1978). The researcher understands global culture as the prevalent values and “rules” governed under medical and scientific models of ability supremacy. It is practiced through coloniality of thought processes as a prevalence of historical practices of European colonization (Iqtadar et al., 2021). For example, different fields of inquiry such
as the medical field intersect with cultural practices of identifying, “sorting” and categorizing individuals into ability and racial categories (Dolmage, 2018; Hyter, 2014; McDermott et al., 2011). Within the U.S. culture and education system, the immigrants and refugees from the Global South further experience racial, ethnic, cultural and linguistic hegemony with the White majority and navigate their identity formation within different layers of being Black. Global South informed DisCrit calls out the hegemony of sociocultural norms and practices of being American and speaking American English and accent that forms lived and educational experiences of immigrants and refugees experiences uniquely (Giddens, 2005; Gutiérrez et al., 2002).

This will have implications for future researchers and practitioners using DisCrit and engaging activism in different structures including classroom spaces, where the real work happens (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). I agree with Annamma and Morrison (2018) that simple statements in the field of education such as “diversity matters” do not suffice. Instead, such a step will open space for scholars and practitioners to reimagining cultural hegemony as a construct explored within DisCrit as beyond ability and racial intersection, including but not limited to “language supremacy,” “cultural supremacy,” and/or “within and across racial supremacy,” at the intersections, that Global South migrants and refugees experience on a day-to-day basis personally, interpersonally, structurally and politically (Crenshaw, 1991).

Global South informed DisCrit does not propose to decolonize the colonized. It does not propose “doing” the work for people. As someone from the Global South, I understand that such a narrative runs the risk of erasing the history of colonial oppression
that still presents itself at times through globalization, creating war situations, and Global North interest convergence in Global South countries. Introduced by the Law Professor, Late Derrick Bell, interest convergence means that African Americans in U.S. society achieve civil rights only when their rights converge with White Americans (Bell, 1980). Within the GSI-DisCrit this means the strategic mobilization of Global North interest which provides a buffer zone in times of social and economic crisis in Global South, securing White and Global North supremacy in the countries of Global South (Gillborn, 2010). Global South informed DisCrit acknowledges that the existing power structure between Global North and Global South shapes the very material, ideological and emotional realities of many of the subaltern populations of Global South countries. It proposes that Global Disability Studies politics welcomes a space to understand and [re]imagine life from the lens of “Other”—in this situation Global South subaltern populations with and without dis/abilities who experience multiple forms of oppression, by privileging their voice, bodyminds, and culture. This is necessary to counter the deepening inequalities that they face both in Global South and Global North—especially when migrating as a refugee.

This will also have implications for cultural pedagogies in classrooms and would provide space for scholars to reimagine how they interact and engage in discussions from a phenomenological perspective—that is, understanding and exploring students’ lived and educational experiences, identity formation, as well as their cultural navigation (Annamma & Morrison, 2018). In alignment with DisCrit tenet four, Global South informed DisCrit would shift the lens from highlighting how immigrants and refugee
students are perceived in the broader dominant U.S. culture to the diversity and richness they bring to the culture. By dominant U.S. culture I mean the white middle class culture and its values, beliefs, practices, customs, norms, and language(s) (Harry & Klingner, 2014). In that spirit then, Global South informed DisCrit values and privileges the voices of those migrating from Global South because of war based atrocities, globalization, Global North invasions and interference in Global South countries who are viewed through the binary of “Western created non-western norms” that view people from the countries of Global South as “deviant” (Amin, 2006; Iqtadar et al., 2021).

Much of the current literature on identity formation of newly arrived immigrants and specifically refugees is focused on two factors influencing identity formation (Bash & Zezlina-Phillips, 2006; Jungbluth & Meierkord, 2007; Lustig et al., 2004; McBrien, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Bal (2009) termed the first set of factors as: individual factors meaning what refugees bring to the U.S. (for example, the trauma they experienced because of war based atrocities, psychological and emotional or behavioral disorders, school related challenges, cultural artifacts and repertories, problem solving skills, etc). The second set of factors include what participants find in their host culture. Some examples of this second set of factors include limited educational and economic opportunities, as well as experiencing xenophobia, racism, discrimination and prejudices to name a few (Rumbaut & Portes, 2001; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Bal (2009) recognized that such unidirectional and cause and effect relationship about immigrant and refugees’ identity development is problematic. This study intended to explore and highlight such identity formation navigation of participants’
multidimensional and intersecting identities which is messy and intersectional yet important. I agree with Bal (2009) that “by using the concept of identity as an analytic tool educational researchers can develop a more dynamic and complex understanding of students' academic and social experiences in the U.S. schools” (p. 3). For this purpose, I now turn to the second part of this chapter to explain the Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity formation framework employed to understand the experiences of newly arrived first-generation Black immigrants and refugees.

Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation

This study used a Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial (DERI) identity framework to understand the operationalization of participants’ identity formation. Umaña-Taylor et al. (2014) defined ethnic-racial identity as “a multidimensional, psychological construct that reflects the beliefs and attitudes that individuals have about their ethnic–racial group memberships, as well as the processes by which these beliefs and attitudes develop over time” (p. 23). The plurality and reciprocity of these frameworks and constructs helped the researcher unpack the tension and multiplicity of these Global South migrant and refugee students’ identity experiences and navigation about experiences related with dis/ability and other identity markers. ERI refers to the beliefs and attitudes of a person as their sense of group belonging, membership, pride, affirmations, and their perceptions about how others feel about their group (Rivas-Drake et al., 2014). ERI processes reflect the actions people take to learn more about their ethnic and racial identities and groups (Phinney & Ong, 2007; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). As stated above, the DERI framework provided a lens to understand the tension and multiplicity of students’ identity
formation as they navigated their on-going ethnic, racial, dis/ability and other multidimensional identity experiences in a dialogic relationship with the figured worlds of school (including relationships, schooling practices and activities, cultural artifacts etc) and society in which they lived. In addition to accounting for students’ intersectional racial, ethnic and cultural experiences, the Dis/ability-Integrated ERI incorporates dis/ability experience of the two participants who received special education services, as well as their immigrant, refugee, social class and gendered experiences at the intersections of multiple identities and cultures.

This study approached cultural identity formation as intersectional in nature. Within the domain of racial-ethnic identity formation, race and ethnicity are socially constructed and fluid constructs that are embedded in context (Echols et al., 2018; Gaither et al., 2013; Nishina et al., 2010). Taking a disability studies approach, the researcher understands that dis/ability is also a socially constructed identity within the figured worlds of education, home, and society. From this perspective, the introduced Dis/ability-Integrated ERI framework accounts for participants’ intersectional experiences along race, culture and ethnicity, dis/ability, social class, gender, refugee and immigrant status across all six categories of identity formation.

To understand participants’ Dis/ability-Integrated ethnic-racial identity formation, the researcher used a pluralistic theoretical framework approach (Baglieri et al., 2011a; Connor et al., 2011). This plurality of theoretical frameworks (see Figure 1) contributed to an intersectional analysis of participants’ identity formation and navigation of their multidimensional and intersectional experiences, understanding and meaning making of
multiple labels they received, school practices, and their relationships within the school and sociocultural milieu. The data analysis for this study captured the combination and contribution of multiple constructs from these theoretical frameworks and represents an analytic approach fully informed by all theoretical frameworks that helped the researcher make meaning of participants’ experiences. This approach helped to capture the diversity and richness in participants’ intersectional experiences at personal, relational, and collective identity formation. Additionally, the researcher agrees with Bal (2014) that studying students’ educational experiences inform us about the current organization of U.S. schools by centering student voice in academia.

**Figured Worlds.** Sociocultural theorists Holland et al. (1998) defined figured worlds as a “socially and culturally constructed realm of interpretation in which particular characters and actors are recognized, significance is assigned to certain acts, and particular outcomes are valued over others” (p. 52). Within the figured world of U.S. schooling in general, and general education, special education and ELL classrooms in specific, the immigrant and refugee participants of this study engaged in meaningful acts of learning, unlearning and relearning of their multiple and intersecting identities. They consumed and engaged with the assigned cultural positions (immigrants, refugees, teacher’s pet, smart) and racial, cultural, ethnic, and dis/ability, special education and/or ELL labels (Learning Disabled, smart, good, bad, limited English Proficient) across these figured worlds that they traveled (De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005).

The study further employed the construct of cultural artifacts and how those artifacts were represented in the participants’ schooling experiences (Holland et al.,
By cultural artifacts I mean the artifacts and nomenclature produced and promoted in school culture and larger society, to support individual and societal growth, that categorize and sort students into different identity categories (Artiles et al., 2016; Bal, 2009; Holland et al., 1998; McDermott et al., 2011). Such as standardized tests and exams, models of disability, cultural labels, and different learning placement or locations embedded. I was specifically interested in how students experienced and negotiated these cultural artifacts in schools, while also at times using them to their benefit (De Certeau, 2005). For example, how were models of disability experienced by the study participants? Did the school environment reveal elements of a social, medical, psycho-emotional, intersectional disablism model of disability? Were political or legal dimensions of disability evident to the participants? Were disability or cultural labels used in school settings, and what perspectives did those labels reveal for participants' culturally diverse selves? (Global South informed DisCrit, Point 3). What locations or learning structures suggested ability or cultural privilege and/or hegemony? (Artiles, 2015; Bal, 2009). For example, the location of general and special education classrooms, the ELL classrooms, or how within the general education classroom student grouping reveal an ability-centric orientation or cultural divisions? How teachers interact with students for instruction or management may similarly suggest certain racial or ethnic distinctions.

Participants’ experiences in relation to the cultural artifacts and how they were positioned in relation to these artifacts was operationalized through power and privilege within schools at the personal, interpersonal, structural and political dimensions of
intersectionality in society and education (Annamma et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1991) and was of great interest in this study. Holland et al. (1998) identified that “the relationship of the practices and activities that instance figured worlds with larger, institutionalized “structures” of power confer a depth to figured landscape that extends beyond the immediate order of interaction” (p. 57). This study then attempted to understand the multidirectional view of power that was resisted against by employing agency, internalized, taken as passively, within one-on-one interaction with peers, teachers, administrators, but also taken up to the context of culture beyond schooling by participants along personal, interpersonal, structural and political dimensions of intersectionality (Crenshaw, 1991; Giddens, 2005).

Pluralistic and Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial Identity Formation

Different identity theorists have used unique but related approaches to understand identity development of students’ ethnic-racial identity formation (Myers et al., 1991; Rogers et al., 2020). Bernal and colleagues (1990) conceived that the overall construct of children’s ethnic-racial identification includes six unique but related components: ethnic self-labeling (i.e., categorizing oneself correctly as a member of a group), ethnic constancy (i.e., knowledge that ethnicity is unchanging), use of ethnic role behaviors (i.e., engaging in behaviors involving one’s culture), ethnic knowledge (i.e., knowledge of culturally-relevant behaviors, customs, and values), and ethnic preferences (i.e., feelings and preferences about being a member of one’s ethnic group). From the Dis/ability-Integrated ERI theoretical framework, this study used multiple, relevant conceptualizations to guide the analysis of participants' response. In specific, six
dimensions of the Dis/ability-Integrated ethnic-racial identity formation process were categorically constructed in the analysis of the first generation immigrants’ and refugees’ experiences in their new schools and culture. These dimensions include: centrality, self-reference or self-labeling, knowledge and understanding of multiple intersecting identities, communal attachment and/or detachment, social, psychosocial, and emotional construction of identity via integration vs. exclusion, marginalization, and oppression, and accommodation, adaptation, or resistance in either an active or passive form (see figure 2). In the next few pages, each of these theoretical constructs are explained, in relation to the researcher’s interdisciplinary conceptual and theoretical commitments (see figure 1), to help understand the pluralistic approach of multiple theoretical orientations of this study.
Centrality. Centrality refers to the importance or regard participants gave to each of their multiple intersectional identities. The salience or centrality of an intersectional attribute for a participant represents how that particular aspect of identity contributed to the participant’s sense of self (Doosje & Ellemers, 1997). For example, what is the relative importance of dis/ability, race, gender, social class, ethnicity or cultural hegemony to the participant’s identity? The centrality of an intersectional domain may shift depending on factors such as age or social context. From a Disability Critical Race Studies perspective, both disability and race are central to identity formation simultaneously. DisCrit theory further emphasizes that within the western culture, people of Color at the intersection of race and dis/ability experience psychological and emotional
impact of being categorized as raced or dis/abled (DisCrit Tenet 3). The Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) provides a phenomenological lens of the status of racial centrality, racial salience, racial regard, and racial ideology (Sellers et al., 1998). Employing the construct of centrality across participants’ multiple identities helped the researcher identify the intersections and identities central to participants’ experiences and those which were not salient. Further, a Global South informed DisCrit analysis helped the researcher understand how participants with and without dis/ability labels gave meanings to and maintained their global and multicultural selves (Iqtadar et al., 2021). This was represented when participants narrated how they still at times understand their dis/ability, racial, gendered, linguistic and other intersectional identities from the culture of their country of origin. The construct of belonging was multicultural for them. They acknowledged certain opportunities they received based on some of their newly formed identities in the U.S. culture, for example refugee identity and citizenship status. However, their cultural selves also belonged to the African tribal culture of their country of birth. At times they also employed tactics and strategies to counter narrate the existing schooling and cultural practices (De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005). Important to this research, this categorial construction examined how immigration was influenced but also influenced the salience of various newly formed intersectional identities such as the intersection of assigned dis/ability labels and Black status in the U.S. culture (Iqtadar et al., 2021).

8 This is not an “anti-Blackness” argument. However, for the first generation immigrant and refugees from African countries, this study presents findings about their navigation of identifying and/or not identifying themselves with the deficit racial paradigm in U.S.
Self-Reference or Self-Labeling. Intersectional and identity domains may be emphasized by individuals through self-referencing or self-labeling (Bernal et al., 1990). The self-references provided by participants reveal their beliefs and attitudes about multiple intersections and reflect identities associated with their current self and future goals. This self-declaration of an identity domain revealed how individuals perceived their membership in various identities and intersections. For example, what was participants' self-reference in regard to dis/ability, race, gender, social class, ethnicity or cultural hegemony, and existing structures and agency as a contributor to the participant’s identity? (Giddens, 2005). Sedikides and Brewer (2001) developed a hierarchy composed of three domains of identity including personal, relational, and collective. Personal identity includes domains that refer to one’s goals, values, beliefs, and life story. Relational identity encompasses domains involving a person’s sense of self in relation to other people. Collective identity refers to domains associated with group and social category identification, such as dis/ability, culture, race, ethnicity, and religion. This categorical construction was used to identify participants’ own perceptions, ideas, beliefs systems, labels that they identified for themselves, and made sense of their life stories, in relation to others, across their multiple and intersecting identities. The collective identity formation domain was used to understand if participants shared a collective sense of being and belonging in relation to any of their multiple identities. From a Global South which conveniently views all people of Color from a binary of Black and White (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). In the context of this study, the participants’ navigation of cultural and linguistic racism, as well as how they navigate the U.S. racial paradigm of Black and White is discussed as their identity navigation.
Informed DisCrit perspective—embedded in the cultural hegemony—capturing the voices and self-declarations of identity across multiple intersections was essential to understand the influence of migration and refugee experiences on the development of participants’ sense of self. Did participants feel a sense of belonging to a specific culture or cultures, including the U.S. and their African tribal culture and ethnicity? How did they navigate the existing intersecting racial and dis/ability cultures within the U.S. and self-identified in reference to those cultures? In what ways, if so, did they employ the agency to (re)claim their intersecting identities growing up in the U.S.? Global South informed DisCrit was employed to understand such navigation of immigrant and refugees’ intersectional cultural identity formation at the intersection of multiple identities they carried or were ascribed to them in the U.S. schools and society.

**Knowledge and Understanding.** This study used the construct of knowledge and understanding to explore participants' understanding of dis/ability, race, gender, social class, ethnicity, and cultural hegemony and how that knowledge contributed to the participant’s intersectional identity experiences. From the perspective of Global South informed DisCrit, participants’ knowledge and understanding of their multicultural relevant behaviors, customs, and values, and their ethnic preferences (i.e., feelings and preferences about being a member of one’s ethnic group) were explored (GSI-DisCrit, Point 4). This study paid attention to their understanding of cultural artifacts in schools as influenced by the ideologies about immigrant and refugee body minds in larger society, and the cultural strategies and tactics they consumed to negotiate these ideologies that govern U.S. schooling and cultural practices (De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005). For
example, what meanings they associated with ‘dis/ability’ politics as intersectional with race, gender, immigrant and refugee status and other identity markers in contrast to the Global North understanding of their multicultural selves? Did they truly see themselves from these identity markers or counter the widely prevalent deficit ideologies about their intersectional selves in U.S. society? (GSI-DisCrit, Point 4) How did they compare and contrast the two education systems they have experienced in different parts of the world? In their perspective, how did the economic and political system, and social class impact the education system in each country when it came to their intersectional experiences?

Communal Attachment and Detachment. The fourth categorical construction of Dis/ability-Integrated ethnic-racial identity formation explored in this study was the participants’ communal attachment or detachment within and across their multiple intersectional communities, including dis/ability, race, gender, social class, ethnicity or cultural hegemony. Sedikides and Brewer’s (2001) construct of collective identity was used to understand participants’ depersonalized membership in a cultural collective or dissonance to that identity. Furthermore, this research study used cultural identity negotiation of first generation Black immigrants and refugees (Asante et al., 2016). By cultural identity negotiation, Asante et al. (2016) mean “uncovering structures of domination and especially how hierarchy among individuals is constructed, maintained, and resisted in groups who are placed in similar racial categories” (p. 371). In alignment with scholars using critical perspectives to explore group identity formation and subject positioning, this study explored how the first generation Black students not only navigated whiteness as a ‘colored and racial privilege’ but also navigated “dis/ability”
and “ableism” embedded within cultural contexts of U.S. schooling and society (GSI-DisCrit, Points 1 & 3). By whiteness I mean a position of White race privilege and structural advantage (Frankenberg, 1993). For the study participants, navigating African American culture at the intersection of social class in U.S. society and culture was also part and parcel of identity formation in the host culture. This study also identified cultural identity negotiation as contextually intersectional for Black African participants (Asante et al., 2016).

The cultural identity negotiation perspective was purposefully employed to uncover participants’ navigation in “becoming” Black within the U.S. racial system (De Certeau, 2005; Iqtadar et al., 2021; Lears, 1985). Participants’ ascribed social and cultural identities helped the researcher explore their ongoing learning and navigation by living at the what I termed “ideological borders” of two cultures emerging in the Global South and Global North ideas of being (Collier, 1998 & 2005). Simply put, the study aimed to explore how participants navigated and negotiated the core values and norms of family and community cultural expectations along with negotiating U.S. culture. In other words, how “students negotiated their ascribed identity as Black in relation to their avowed identity as African” at the intersections of other identity markers (Asante et al., 2016, p. 371). Furthermore, by ideological I mean the “common sense” deficit assumptions about participants’ multiple intersecting cultural identities that they navigated not only in the school spaces and society, but also at the point of ideas by accepting, rejecting or showing passivity towards them (Coutinho, 2012).
Social, Psychosocial, and Emotional Construction of Identity. This categorical construction enabled exploration of the socially-emotionally-lived experiences of the participants. By socially-emotionally-lived experiences I mean how participants emotionally and psychologically experienced the ‘ability’, ‘racial’, and ‘cultural’ supremacy—as intersectional—embedded within their day-to-day contexts. From the perspective of intersectional disablism this emotional navigation of their social experiences at times impacted their sense of self within the U.S. culture and their ability to act (Iqtadar et al., 2020). Through an analysis of the data, patterns of social and emotional inclusion, exclusion, marginalization, oppression, and/or discrimination were examined. The social and emotional construction of identities is anchored in DSE and intersectional disablism (Iqtadar et al., 2020), with dis/ability, race, gender, social class, ethnicity or cultural hegemony social experiences. Importantly, the social and emotional experiences of immigrants confirm their identity formation as intersectional at the borders of living at two different continents in time and space.

From a Global South informed DisCrit their navigation of personal, relational, and collective sensemaking is in conjunction to their sense of belonging, attachment and detachment with their life experiences in two unique cultures and societies (Point 1). At times this may represent not feeling associated with their country of birth or their country of resettlement. Other times, it may represent itself in the form of feeling overburdened to do something for their country of resettlement. The consistent bullying and othering of their refugee and immigrant identity may create a sense of double consciousness where they don't feel belonged to either or. Du Bois (1903) coined and defined double
consciousness as it related to African Americans in the early 20th century in his sociological book, The Souls of Black Folk, as “a peculiar sensation, …[a] sense of always looking at one's self through the eyes of others, of measuring one's soul by the tape of a world that looks on in amused contempt and pity” (p. 9).

Sedikides’ et al. (2011) concept of relational self was used to understand participants’ social and emotional integration within the school culture. As indicated above, this view asserts the primacy of the relational self. People manifest a paramount desire for formation of stable interpersonal attachments, enhance and protect their relationships, resist the termination of existing relationships, and feel psychological and physical pain when socially and emotionally excluded (Baumeister & Leary, 1995; Eisenberger et al., 2003; Murray et al., 1996; Sedikides et al., 2011). In addition, close relationships influence perceptions, affective reactions, and behaviors toward new acquaintances, as well as goal pursuit (Andersen & Chen, 2002; Sedikides et al., 2011; Tice & Baumeister, 2001). This study used the relational construct to understand participants’ navigation when and if they felt discriminated against, ascribed certain social positions and characteristics in school and classrooms (such as teacher’s pet), excluded, marginalized or oppressed (Coutinho, 2012). It further helped unpack how the emotions they felt and demonstrated during times of contention with their peers and those in authority, including teachers and administrators.

Identity Assimilation involving Accommodation, Adaptation, and/or Resistance in either an Active or Passive Form. In the figured worlds (Holland et al., 1998), this categorial construction assisted in examining how participants constructed identities of
who they are, how they relate to one another through their participation in figured worlds mediated by cultural artifacts, and what cultural strategies and tactics they consume and use to negotiate their positions in the hegemonic order of schooling and society (De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005). For example, the differences and similarities between immigrants and refugees across social class and resettlement experiences, and between African Americans and Africans. The models of disability, elements of the school environment revealing a social, medical, psycho-emotional or intersectional disablism model of disability were also explored. The use of disability or cultural labels (about their intersectional identities) in school settings, various disability models, school locations or learning structures described by participants were analyzed for ability or cultural privilege or hegemony. Teacher instruction and management practices were explored as revealing possible intersections of ability-centric orientation, racial, ethnic, gendered, social class, or cultural divisions. Students’ reported acts of assimilation, internalization, resistance or passivity of cultural artifacts were analyzed in the figured worlds. Their experiences were explored in relation to the figured world of schooling, and how these experiences shaped their perception of self (De Certeau, 2005). By the figured world of schooling I mean a space where the educational experiences of first generation African students are institutionally and socially constructed through cultural and linguistic differences.

The Dis/ability-Integrated ERI framework explored specific areas of multiplicity embedded in the identity development of first generation immigrant and refugee Black students, with and without dis/ability labels in a new school and social culture (Rogers et
al., 2020). The intersectional approach to students’ ethnic and racial identity formation shaped this study to understand how each participant engaged with different aspects and identities during their Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial identity development. Rogers et al., (2020) argued that different elements of identity (such as gender, sexuality, religion) might be more or less salient, during different phases of life, which affect how people engage with their ERI. For example, the findings of Carter’s (2006) study revealed that the notion of “acting white” represents different gendered and sexualized experiences for young Black girls and boys. Black boys when accused of “acting white” were simultaneously considered gay, and their sexuality was assumed and questioned in a way that Black girls’ sexuality was not. Colorism, “a system that privileges phenotypically “white” skin (and more Eurocentric features)” (Rogers et al., 2020, p. 11) also has varying implications for the life experiences of first generation Black and Brown immigrants and refugees (Bonilla-Silva, 2009; Burton et al., 2010).

Within the ERI framework, whiteness–white privilege and supremacy–assumes that the ethnic and racial experiences of BIYOC does not happen in a vacuum. Instead, their experiences are directly linked with society’s ethnic majority, which in the U.S. context are members of the White racial group (Global South informed DisCrit, Points 1 & 3). In other words, the “social construction of race is inextricable from whiteness” (Rogers et al., p. 12). The racial hierarchy and power embedded within whiteness is everyday experience for ethnic and racial minorities in the U.S. (Annamma et al., 2013). This means that one’s understanding of what it means to be from a particular ethnic and racial group is in direct contrast to what it means to be White. This study used the
construct of Whiteness to understand how the first generation Black immigrants and refugees navigated whiteness and experienced being Black in contrast to White.

**Conclusion.** This research centered on the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee students with multidimensional and intersectional identities at the nexus of dis/ability, language, and immigration status. Theoretical plurality employed in this study enabled the researcher to decouple and analyze the processes of racism, ableism, classism, as well as the discrimination—such as language based, gendered based, socio-economic, Color based, culture based—against four participants’ multiple intersecting identities. The Global South informed DisCrit and Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial identity formation frameworks helped the researcher analyze the schooling as well as the sociopolitical practices in participants’ accounts that produce, regulate, oppress, and neglect students’ multiple identities and subjectivities. Their experiences were recorded as it pertained to using agency to inform their counter-hegemonic navigation of their educational and social experiences in the social milieu of U.S. schools and society.

The next chapter detailed the systematic literature review that explored immigrant and refugee students’ educational experiences with and without dis/ability labels within the U.S. public schools.
CHAPTER TWO
LITERATURE REVIEW

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a critical systematic review of the literature about the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students with/without dis/abilities9 (Mills, 1998; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). This section begins by presenting a brief historical account of world immigration due to religious, economic, political, war-related reasons, as well as the resettlement experiences of immigrant and refugee populations. Within this first part of the chapter, I also discussed the general psychological and social experiences of immigration. Next, I explored the similarities as well as differences between regular immigration and refugee-seeking immigration. Finally, the section concludes by presenting the recent influx of immigrant populations in the United States including the Midwest. The intent is to provide a historical and experiential context with which to understand the current body of literature regarding the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students with/without disabilities in U.S. schools.

9Much of the literature suggests that the deficit views about students’ language abilities as well as their racial backgrounds and country of origin have underlying deficit ideologies and places students in ELL and special education trajectories. For this reason, I found it important to systematically review students’ educational experiences with and without dis/abilities. This is followed by the review of the relationship between immigrant and/or refugee students and special education. Further, some States including Iowa do not assign disability labels to immigrant and/or refugee students, however students might receive individualized instruction for their needs. I, then, found it important to review the literature about immigrant and/or refugee students’ educational experiences and how students navigate the system.
In the second part, I present a systematic review of the current literature regarding the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students. While this literature review presents findings from recent qualitative studies, I intended to take an iterative critical literature review approach (Mills, 1998) which continues throughout the research process as new questions and concepts emerge. The themes that emerged from this section are based on the research addressing first generation immigrant and/or refugee students’ educational experiences including language use and the experiences of English Language Learners or emergent bilinguals, as well as socialization experiences, such as making U.S. friends within school spaces. Literature further suggests that students experience stereotypes, racism and bullying while they resist the deficit thinking and language which are wrongly associated with their multiple identities (such as race, immigrant status and country of origin) in their new school spaces. By deficit thinking I mean the thought process and widely accepted deficit ideas that students from marginalized communities are responsible for the inequalities and challenges they encounter (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Solórzano & Yosso, 2001; Valencia, 1997, 2010; Weiner, 2003). I then present the limited and recent literature which explores the relationship between immigrant and/or refugee students and special education. Finally, I concluded this section with a general summary of the systematic literature review for the study and the gaps identified within the literature that have informed not only the research questions for this study, but its research design as well.

Providing the Historical and Experiential Context

A migrant is “any person who is moving or has moved across an international border or within a State away from [their] habitual place of residence, regardless
of (1) the person’s legal status; (2) whether the movement is voluntary or involuntary; (3) what the causes for the movement are; or (4) what the length of the stay is” (United Nations, para. 4)

World history is full of migration stories of people fleeing their homeland for religious, economic, political, and war-related reasons, among others. Two early accounts of migration are found in the stories of Jesus and Muhammad (Peace be Upon Them) seeking refuge because of their religious beliefs (Martin, 2017; Naqvi, 2013; Saritoprak, 2011). Some other historical events include the migration period of Europe from A.D. 400-800, Great migration of the Serbs from the Ottoman empire to Habsburg empire in 1690 and 1737, historical events of Canadian immigration from 1815-1850, the 1947 partition of British-occupied India, and mass migration between the two newly separated countries India and Pakistan (Hasan, 1997; Kleinschmidt, 2003; Pappas, 1994; Riendeau, 2007). Today, according to the International Organization for Migration’s (IOM) Global Migration Data Portal (2022), approximately 271.6 million people live as immigrants in places they were not born, while re-establishing their lives in culturally, socially, emotionally, historically, politically, and sometimes religiously different parts of the world.

Within the Global North context, refugees and immigrants traveling from Global South to Global North are often victims of existential insecurity of the Global North in the face of job insecurity, terrorism, and islamophobia (Hyndman & Giles, 2016). Despite the dramatic trends in changing world order and population, little is known about their lived experiences in the resettled countries (Bal, 2009). Yet little is known about the identity formation and educational experiences of children and youth with immigrant and
refugee status (Artiles, 2015; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). This study fills this gap by exploring first generation Black immigrant and refugee students’ educational experiences and identity formation. However, before their educational experiences are explored, the researcher first contextualizes this study by highlighting some of the similarities and differences as understood between immigrants and the refugee population.

Similarities and Differences Between Immigrants and Refugees

There are many similarities and differences between the refugee and non-refugee immigrants (Dolmage, 2018; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). After World War I, people fleeing war and violence were given, for the first time, refugee status and the right to re-settle in another country by the League of Nations (History.com Editors, 2020). Being a refugee is a legal status which differs from typical immigration in some ways. According to the UN Refugee Convention of 1951 (UNHCR, 2020), refugees—unlike non-refugee immigrants—are not allowed to return to their country of origin from which they fled. However, the larger legal discourse of immigration has intersecting legalities. All immigrants, irrespective of their status, experience medical inspections before and after their arrival to the new country (Dolmage, 2018), and are faced with years-long waitlists before entering their new country of resettlement.

Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) identify three common characteristics that immigrants and refugees share: (a) both immigrants and asylum seekers can be ascribed a documented (legal) or undocumented (illegal) status in their new country, (b) both may seek to bring families to their new country, and (c) both groups can have
multiple reasons fleeing their origin of country which makes them non-homogenous groups. For example, immigrants can have personal, economic, and/or social reasons and motivations to resettle in a new country. Likewise, refugees/asylum seekers may be elite-class political asylum seekers, fleeing religious and social oppression, and/or escaping state terrorism (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Despite the status of a migrant, resettling in a new country is always a stressful event in the life of people. This makes the resettlement experiences of immigrant and/or refugee families and children diverse and intersectional in complex ways.

**Psychological and Social Experiences of Immigration.** Immigration, despite the reason to migrate, can be one of the most stressful events in a family’s life. Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) argue that a typical process of family reunification can be “a long, painful, and disorienting ordeal” especially for children (p. 66). In some cases, people leave their children behind in the care of relatives, so that they can come back and take their children once they receive proper documentation. Those who migrate for economic purposes also suffer long-distance family separation impacting psychological and emotional well-being of families, especially children. Further, people who cross the border as undocumented migrants additionally face multitude of varied forms of violence as they cross the border (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

At times, there may be history of slavery, illness, rape, threats to life and freedom, as well as religious, ethnic, political, and/or gender-based discrimination and terror (Bal, 2009). All these experiences lead to stress when added with the stress of immigration or seeking refuge through legal or illegal ways in a new country. Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-
Orozco identify that the families may experience a range of stressors including loss of relationships and community, emotional disorientation in new surroundings, language barriers, feelings of marginalization, downward socioeconomic movement in country of resettlement, acculturation stress—“a process of learning new cultural rules and interpersonal expectations” (p. 73), and violence in new neighborhoods which can have long-term effects on children’s psychological and emotional well-being (Bal, 2009; Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Border crossing is often a traumatic experience, especially for children. In their empirical study, Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001) interviewed refugee children regarding the traumatic experiences of border crossing. Many of these children discussed the fear and trauma of being “detained, deported, beaten, or humiliated” while crossing the border (p. 71). Some of them even sensed danger for their life. One nine-year old Mexican boy shared that “I had to be careful of where I put my feet. My parents told me that the migra [slang term for the Immigration and Naturalization Service INS] had put piranhas in the river to keep us away” (p. 71). The authors further shared that once resettled in the U.S., these families often face new challenges and violence in their American neighborhood placement.

Especially those migrating from Latin America and/or the Caribbean shared that they experienced high levels of violence (such as gang activities and killings) in their highly segregated neighborhoods of resettlement and school settings. However, not all immigrants experience violence or trauma in their countries of origin or resettlement, especially for those who take planes to arrive in the U.S. and are received politely by the
INS and resettled in middle class neighborhoods. However, for a significant number of immigrant and refugee families violence remains a stressor in their birth and host countries. Further, their interaction with the authorities and the law enforcement agencies and maltreatment of families by the police officers made the resettlement even more difficult (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001).

Recent Influx of Immigrants and/or Refugees in the U.S. and the Midwest

At the turn of the millennium, the United States had seen a shift in immigration patterns. Before 1965, the majority of immigrants to the U.S. were from Europe or Canada. Since 1975, more than three million immigrants (including refugees) have resettled in the U.S. from nearly 125 countries. The vast majority of them are from non-European, non-English speaking countries, and are highly heterogeneous in nature (Mirza et al., 2014; Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Specifically, the majority of foreign-born children (immigrants and/or refugees) are either from Africa, Asia, or Latin America (Hyndman & Giles, 2016; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). Since most of these recent immigrants are from non-European, non-English-speaking countries, within the American multicultural society they are perceived as “people of Color” such as those referred to as Brown, Black and/or White, based on their skin Color and continent of origin (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). While this racialized identity is mirrored at them, many of these new immigrants do not self-identify with these categories.

In recent years, there has been a rapid increase in racial and ethnic diversity in the U.S. suburbs as well as in the States previously considered non-traditional immigrant states such as Minnesota (Fennelly & Orfield, 2008). The Midwest, which was
historically celebrated as “preserving authentic America” in terms of White, middle-class, heteronormative norms has seen increasing international and secondary migration (Fennelly, 2008). The expansion of meat and poultry processing plants and manufacturing has had a direct impact on the increasing immigration in the Midwest (Fennelly & Leitner, 2002). With these increased employment opportunities, although relatively low wages, the Midwest has seen rapidly increasing immigration (Fennelly & Orfield, 2008; Kandel & Parrado, 2004). One Midwestern state, Minnesota, has historically been home to one of the largest refugee populations in the U.S. Many refugees in Minnesota have migrated from Africa, Asia, countries of the former Soviet Union, and Bosnia (Fennelly & Orfield, 2008). They either entered the U.S. as refugees or through family reunification sponsorship of already accepted refugees in the U.S. With this increasing immigrant population, the immigrant and/or refugee student population has also increased in the Midwest schools. According to the latest Iowa Condition of Education Report, 23,820 students were enrolled as ELL classrooms in the year of 2012-2013 (Iowa Department of Education, 2013). While this was reported to be the doubling of the ELL students in the last ten years, the report further suggested a steady increase on an annual basis. This rapid increase of linguistically diverse student population—many of whom are either first- or second-generation immigrants and/or refugees—creates a need to explore and understand the schooling experiences of these students within U.S. public schools to better understand their emerging identities in the new culture and education system.
Critical Systematic Literature Review

In what follows, I draw upon recent research within the field of education that explores the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students with/without disabilities. This is to acknowledge the individual voices of immigrant/refugee students within the larger body of literature exploring disproportionate representation of historically multiply marginalized students in education. It is also important to understand students’ identity work in their new host countries and how they are different from the experiences of students of Color born and raised in the U.S.

I begin by outlining the methods section. In this section, I explain the method I used to conduct this critical systematic literature review. After explaining the methods, I then present the findings under four themes and five sub-themes. Overall, the first two themes discussed the educational experiences of all immigrant and/or refugee students. Whereas the third theme specifically explored the recent studies conducted with and/or about immigrant/refugee students with disabilities. While researchers have recently begun to explore the connection between students’ immigrant and/or refugee status and special education, the review suggests that more research needs to be conducted with this student population specifically in today’s growing immigration situation.

The first theme “first generation immigrant and/or refugee students in U.S. schools” further included two subthemes surrounding students’ race-based experiences and assimilation into their new school culture. The second theme deficit understanding of multiple, intersecting student identities explored students’ educational experiences in ELL/ESL classrooms, their experiences with racial and linguistic discrimination
including stereotypes, bulling, language abilities and foreign-born status in U.S. school), as well as how students resist deficit understandings about their multiple identities within school spaces. Finally, studies engaging students’ experiences at the nexus of immigration/refugee status and special education are discussed. This section draws upon international literature that has recently begun to explore the relationship between school-aged immigrant and/or refugee populations and their special education experiences. The section is concluded by identifying gaps in the current literature: research conducted with immigrant and/or refugee students is understudied within the literature. It is specifically limited in terms of identity formation of first generation immigrants and/or refugee students both in general and special education and/or those receiving individualized ELL instructions. As mentioned earlier that the immigrant student population is the fastest growing student population in the U.S., it is important to listen to student voice (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) to better understand their educational and emotional experiences within new cultural and educational settings.

**Method**

I conducted a critical systematic literature search for research studies (including peer reviewed articles and dissertations) centering the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students in K-16 education. Using library research services at a Midwestern University, I created a list of 56 keyword combinations and descriptive terms (related to the research questions of my study) to search the literature exploring identity formation and educational experiences of students with and without disabilities. I used these keywords and descriptive terms with various combinations using connectors such
as “*”, “and” “OR” “intitle” and “N3” to find potential studies. Some of the keyword combinations include: *immigra* OR *refugee*, *student* N3 *experience*, *ethnograph* OR “case stud*” OR “focus group*” OR *interview*, Disabilities intitle:*immigrant intitle:*students experience, Disabilities intitle:*immigrant intitle:*student labels, Disabilities intitle:*immigrant intitle:*student meaning, Disabilities intitle:*immigrant intitle:*student resistance, Disabilities intitle:*immigrant intitle:*student resilience, Disabilities intitle:*refugee intitle:*students experience, Disabilities intitle:*refugee intitle:*student labels, Disabilities intitle:*refugee intitle:*student meaning, Disabilities intitle:*refugee intitle:*student resistance, Disabilities intitle:*refugee intitle:*student resilience, immigrants or immigration or immigrant or refugee or refugees, student with disabilities or special education or special needs, identity formation or identity work. I used the following search engines: ERIC, psycINFO, Education fulltext, Google Scholar, ProQuest Dissertations & Theses A&I, and Open Access thesis & dissertations. Most importantly, I focused on peer-reviewed articles as well as doctoral-level dissertations and masters-level theses to ensure the quality of the research studies. I restricted my sample to qualitative studies, and excluded all the mixed method and quantitative studies from this review. The purpose for doing this was to gain access to in-depth and rich participants’ quotes in the qualitative studies to understand students’ experiences. I did not restrict the timeframe for this review as I was interested in learning any changing patterns in students’ experiences over time, however, to my surprise much of the literature is recent, beginning from the 2000s.
The literature inclusionary criteria were guided by the research questions as well as the participant inclusionary criteria of this study. The specific literature inclusionary criteria included: studies exploring 1) the educational experiences of first-generation immigrant and/or refugee students, 2) exploring the identity formation of this student population, 3) in K-16 education, 3) students’ ELL experiences, and 3) students with and without dis/abilities. In the first search pool, approximately 650 studies resulted using the different combinations across databases. I skimmed the titles and abstracts of all studies to determine whether or not the study was relevant to my research questions. I excluded the quantitative and mixed method studies to gain access to rich data in participants’ narratives. Many of the studies were repeated across the databases. The second pool included 130 studies.

I then created an excel spreadsheet to secure the data from the studies relevant to the emerging themes in the literature. For this purpose, I created columns indicating the study’s topic, title, author(s), study population, research questions, research design, data analysis, and findings. I read the findings of each study in detail to identify if the study was relevant to my critical systematic literature review. I then performed forward and backward snowballing techniques (Wohlin, 2014) by reviewing the articles that cited these studies and skimming through the reference list of each article and study to identify further studies. I also searched through the names of scholars in the field of Disability Studies in Education who have directly conducted studies with immigrant and refugee students. Some of these names include: Aydin Bal, Chelasea Stinson, Kimiya Sohrab
Maghzi, Maria Cioè-Peña, Valentina Migliarini, and Yosung Song. The final pool included 45 studies across themes.

Educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students who are also labeled disabled and/or receive special education services is an understudied area. However, much of the research is conducted either with the families (such as parents) and/or teachers of immigrant and/or refugee students, and not directly with students themselves. The studies that are conducted with students are mostly conducted with an older student population. Research representing the voices of younger and/or teenage student populations appear more limited, likely due to (a) crucial phase of life and specifically for being immigrant/refugee populations as more “vulnerable”, and (b) researchers’ limited access to this population. I will discuss later in the methods section of this study how these prevalent yet deficit perspectives, such as “vulnerable population” also limited the access to participants for this study.

**First Generation Immigrant and/or Refugee Students in the U.S. Schools**

In 1990, the International Convention on the Protection of the Rights of all Migrant Workers and their Family Members assigned legal rights to new migrants and their families. Specifically, the law stated that migrant children have a basic right to education despite parents’ legal status. Article 30 of the convention states:

> Each child of a migrant worker shall have the basic right of access to education on the basis of equality of treatment with nationals of the State concerned. Access to public pre-school educational institutions or schools shall not be refused or limited by reason of the irregular situation with respect to stay or employment of either parent or by reason of the irregularity of the child's stay in the State of employment (United Nations Human Rights Office of the High Commissioner, 1990)
Today, immigrant and/or refugee students are one of the fastest growing populations in U.S. schools (Peguero, 2009). Approximately, one in every five children under 18 is living in an immigrant-headed household (Mirza et al., 2014; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; U.S. Census Bureau, 2011). The highest percentage (20%) of school-aged immigrant students reside in California.

However, immigrant students are now present in considerable numbers across U.S. school districts. In New York State alone, more than one hundred languages are spoken within schools representing the rich linguistic diversity within this population (Suárez-Orozco, 2001). Few languages, however, including Spanish, Chinese, and Tagalog account for 70% of the overall bilingual/multilingual population speaking languages other than English at home (Batalova & Zong, 2016). Only 15% of U.S. immigrants spoke only English at home (US Census Bureau, 2011). Today, the number of English language learners (ELLs) in U.S. schools has increased from 3.8 million students in 2000 to approximately 4.9 million students in 2016 (National Center for Educational Statistics, 2019).

Not all immigrants experience trauma and violence in their country of origin or in the new setting. However, research revealed that the majority of immigrant children experience cultural and social challenges in their new country (Jhagroo, 2011). According to Suárez-Orozco and Suárez-Orozco (2001), resettlement is the most crucial time for children if they (a) are reuniting with family after a long time, (b) fled war or similar circumstances, and/or (c) left loved ones and/or friends behind. Scholars argue that for children, this is the time when they are caught up in the margins of two different
cultures and trying to “assimilate” in their new culture (Smith-Davis, 2000; Lahti, 2007). These social and cultural challenges may cause barriers to learning experiences. Schools, in the country of immigration, serve as the basic institution for children to learn new cultural values and norms. They meet teachers (from the dominant culture) and peers—often from similar or different racial historically multiply marginalized groups—in school spaces and learn to adjust to the demands of the new culture. In doing so, students may experience many barriers in their learning.

The literature suggests that immigrant students’ educational challenges include: language use, cultural assimilation, adaptation, and/or resistance, identity formation, and economic barriers (Bal, 2014; Bal & Arzubiaga, 2014; Braye, 2018; Brinegar, 2010; Dávila, 2015; Kiramba & Oloo, 2019; McBrien, 2005; Portes & Zhou, 1993; Verma et al., 2017). Students may further experience challenges with socialization such as making U.S. friends, becoming familiarized with new school culture and acquiring new language skills (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Braye, 2018; Coll & Marks, 2009; Mthethwa-Sommers & Kisiara, 2015).

Racializing first generation immigrant and/or refugee students. Racialization is the recursive process and the most obvious lens by which the newly arrived immigrant and/or refugee students are viewed in the schools (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Coll & Marks, 2009; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Shankar et al., 2017; Verma et al., 2017). Critiquing the deficit and convenient racial paradigm in the U.S. (Black/White), Delgado and Stefancic (2001) state:

Long preoccupied with issues of identity, American society prefers to place its citizens into boxes based on physical attributes and culture. No science supports
this practice; it is simply a matter of habit and convenience. Like other paradigms, the black-white one allows people to simplify and make sense of a complex reality. And, of course, it is helpful in looking at the historical and ongoing relationship between black and white Americans. The risk is that nonblack minority groups, not fitting into the dominant society’s idea of race in America, become marginalized, invisible, foreign, unAmerican. The black-white—or any other—binary paradigm of race not only simplifies analysis dangerously, presenting racial progress as a linear progression; it can end up injuring the very group, for example, blacks, that one places at the center of discussion. It weakens solidarity, reduces opportunities for coalition, deprives the group of the benefits of the others’ experiences, makes it excessively dependent on the approval of the white establishment, and sets it up for ultimate disappointment . . . Binary thinking, which focuses on just two groups, usually whites and one other, can thus conceal the checkerboard of racial progress and retrenchment and hide the way dominant society often casts minority groups against one another to the detriment of both. (pp. 70-71)

Aligned with Delgado and Stefancic (2001) line of argumentation, I argue that while this deficit paradigm is prevalent, it is problematic and needs further analyses. Such as it over simplifies racial experiences of people of Color, and pins them against each other in many ways to uphold notions of White supremacy, and “normalcy”. Within the findings of this study, readers will identify how these first generation Black African students learned and unlearned racism against their African American peers as a species of White hegemony. This is important from a critical theory perspective to highlight that while my first generation Black participants endured cultural and linguistic racism themselves, they were also systematically taught racism, further creating divisions among Black students.

From the perspective of Patton Davis and Museus’ (2019) conceptualization of deficit thinking and language, it places the blame on one group of people, such as African Americans, to further the deficit ideas such as culture of poverty, and environment and family background as the cause of “academic failure” that my participants did not want to associate with (Gorski, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2006; Lee, 2009). Within the larger body
of literature it is important to discuss their identity navigation of being newcomers in the system.

Additionally, Delgado and Stefancic (2001) define whiteness as a “quality pertaining to Euro-American or Caucasian people or traditions” (p. 156). According to this notion, the categories of “middle classness”, “maleness”, “intelligence”, and “school achievement” are often considered defining characteristics of whiteness (Ladson-Billings, 1998, p. 9). Further, deficit thinking and language views (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) about immigrants and/or refugee students’ country of origin affect students’ educational experiences in the school settings. In 2005, McBrien reviewed the literature regarding the educational needs and obstacles the newly arrived immigrant and/or refugee students experience in U.S. schools. In her extensive literature review, she found that the concept of racial identity appeared as a significant factor in understanding students’ social and academic adaptations in the new school culture. Oftentimes, students’ identities were viewed from the deficit thinking and language approach (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) portrayed in the wider society in relation to their race and country of origin.

Findings from McBrien’s (2005) review suggest that students were often stereotyped and discriminated against for their culture and ethnicity, and their race in new school settings. For example, one study included in this review, identified that in a western U.S. middle school Latino, Bosnians, Somali and Sudanese students were both welcomed and marginalized at the same time by broader school structures and policies (Gitlin et al., 2003 as cited in McBrien, 2005). The school staff and administration
demonstrated deficit thinking and language (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) views towards the language and cultural practices of these students. In this qualitative study, authors interviewed English as a Second Language (ESL) teachers, administrators and community members, as well as conducted observations in and outside of the school settings. Their findings suggest that Asian students were often stereotyped as “model minority.” The “model minority” is a deficit approach used to convey “implicit and explicit message that the political structures of American society allow for success and the achievement of the American Dream” (Ngo & Lee, 2007, p. 415). The ESL classes were originally placed in a farther wing of the school, to minimize interaction between immigrant and/or refugee students and their U.S. born peers. Further, the authors reported that students were marginalized in subtle exclusionary ways such as “lack of late transportation that would allow immigrant and refugee children to participate in after-school activities, school assemblies dominated by White students, segregated lunchroom practices facilitated by lunchroom monitors, and disciplinary practices guided by cultural stereotypes.” (p. 349 as cited in McBrien, 2005). McBrien (2005) argued that such stereotypical behavior and attitudes of school personnel can impact refugee students’ sense of self and well-being in new schools.

Verma et al. (2017) argue that first generation immigrant students’ identity formation within the U.S. schools includes the process of racialization—a mechanism by which “hierarchical racial categories are created and institutionalized” (p. 203). In this qualitative study, the authors interviewed recent high school immigrant students and their teachers from seven U.S. cities. Their findings helped them introduce a model of
racialization which uncovers the mechanism and factors that affect the racial identity formation among recent high school immigrant students. At the core of students’ identity formation are the messages of “normative” behaviors that are associated with the existing racial categories, such as White, Black and other people of Color, in the U.S. racial hierarchies. The model suggests that the criminal justice system and the education system serve as the immigrant surveillance apparatus where students are constantly watched for any deviant behavior (stereotypes attached with different races) by the authority figures in either system. Their findings further suggest that school authority figures including teachers play a significant role in enforcing the U.S. racialization process for these newly immigrant students. Although many immigrant children do not ascribe to the U.S. racial hierarchies before migrating to the U.S., immigrant and/or refugee students often learn and self-identify with institutionalized racial categories in their interactions with school personnel and peers. However, the process of racialization in school spaces further marginalize these students within the institutions and categorize them for racially ascribed life-styles in the U.S.

Assimilating, Adapting, Accommodation into the new school culture. Scholars further argue that “assimilation”, adaptation, and accommodation practices within school spaces are often associated with structures of whiteness (Heng, 2011; Shankar et al., 2017). The first generation students often find themselves in a state where school practices and cultural artifacts required them to assimilate into American school culture. These practices privilege different life opportunities for those migrating from European countries compared to non-European countries (Portes & Zhou, 1993; Priest et al., 2016;
Verma et al., 2017). Portes and Zhou (1993) conducted a longitudinal study with immigrant and refugee children. On the basis of this study, they proposed “segmented assimilation theory” noting that immigrant children are assimilated within U.S. culture (such as learning new language, celebrating national holidays, subscribing to the values of majority) through a segmented process. By segmented process they mean that students from European and non-European countries assimilate into different segments of society. Previously, it was assumed that all immigrants assimilate in the U.S. society through a homogenous process. However, Portes and Zhou (1993) argue that different immigrant groups assimilate into different segments of society which prepare them for different life opportunities and social classes within the mainstream. They further identified that the assimilation process prepares the European immigrant students for an upward assimilation (upward mobility) and non-European students for a downward assimilation (downward mobility) in U.S. society. Upward assimilation refers to adapting and becoming similar to the native-born U.S. citizens. This has an underlying problematic assumption that all immigrants must assimilate within the white middle-class society. The downward assimilation is often associated with assimilating into the culture of those living in poor neighborhoods.

Scholars have argued that the assimilation model offered by Portes and Zhou (1993) did not problematize the concept of “whiteness” within the process of assimilation (Jung, 2009; Verma et al., 2017). Jung (2009) specifically argued that the segmented model of assimilation reproduced racialized assumptions without openly discussing race and failed to identify how some races—associated with whiteness—are set for the
upward mobility and others—associated with Blackness—for downward mobility upon their arrival in U.S. He further critiqued the model for omitting racial privilege in the process of immigration. In his critical analysis of the central assumptions of the segmented assimilation theory, Jung argued that Portes and Zhou (1993) (a) constantly engaged in comparing current non-European migrants to the past migrants from Europe, (b) excluded Black Americans from their analysis, (c) used the concept of “underclass” to represent black urban people, and (d) advocated the assimilation of migrants into the white middle-class American culture. He further pointed that the authors largely left whiteness and its role in reproducing the educational inequalities unquestioned for the next generation of immigrants (Jung, 2009).

In his empirical study, Barillas-Chón (2010) explored the high school experiences of 4 Oaxaqueno students in northern California. Findings from his study suggested that new immigrant students often found themselves under the challenge of becoming “Americanized” while also experiencing being “unwelcomed” within the school spaces. He argued that immigrant students are often encouraged to leave their ethnic and racial identities at home and supplement them with the “right” and acceptable identity when in school. Participants from his study shared that their school engaged in many welcoming practices to promote inclusion for all immigrant students. However, these “[well] intended practices of welcomeness and inclusion paradoxically resulted in unwelcomeness and exclusion” (p. 311). This means that the very spaces of inclusion—such as their placement in language classes—physically separated these new immigrant students from the mainstream school culture.
Findings from this theme suggested that immigrant and/or refugee students experience stereotypes and discrimination against their cultural and linguistically diverse selves within their new school settings. Students further experienced white supremacy in classrooms while they constantly navigated the challenge of becoming "Americanized". Their multiple identities—such as their ethnic and racial identities—were often discouraged when in school spaces. Finally, students were encouraged to supplement and embody the “correct” identity—aligned with white able-bodied and English only middle class norms and values—within the school spaces.

**Deficit Thinking and Language Understanding of Multiple, Intersecting Student Identities.**

Students in several studies shared that their foreign-born status, race, and limited English proficiency was often viewed as deficient for their academic success. They further felt that school personnel held lowered expectations towards them (Barajas-López, 2014; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Kiramba & Oloo, 2019; Heng, 2011; Dávila, 2015). Barajas-López (2014) documented one students’ recollection of his experience in the following manner:

Lazaro’s recollection of being in fifth grade with a White monolingual English-speaking teacher highlights these two points succinctly. He believed that his teacher was prejudiced toward him because of the language he spoke and because he was foreign born. By his recollection, these two factors kept his teacher from helping him and making him feel a part of the class. Examination of Lazaro’s report card revealed that his fifth-grade teacher commented that he was “not at grade level in Math and in Reading” (report card/cumulative record) and that he had a “hard time focusing on his work” (report card/cumulative record). Although Lazaro’s narrative confirmed that he was not successful in that class, Lazaro challenged what he perceived to be his teacher’s assumptions (Barajas-López, 2014, p. 26).
Among the many challenges that immigrant students experience within schools, the assumptions related with their multiple identities—such as race and foreign-born status—often create barriers for student academic success. Students constantly negotiate their multiple identities while also navigating the new cultural, social, emotional, linguistic and educational settings.

**Educational experiences in ELL/ESL classrooms.** One of the challenges that immigrant students face in their new educational settings is to learn the language of the host culture which also appears to be the biggest barrier to academic achievement (Tanners, 1997). Within English-speaking countries such as Europe, Australia, and the U.S., immigrant students are often placed in the English Language Learner (ELL) or English as a Second Language (ESL) classrooms (Barajas-López, 2014; Brinegar, 2010; Dávila, 2015; Kim & Duff, 2012; Kiramba & Oloo, 2019). Several authors identified the importance of ELL/ESL classrooms for students’ linguistic, social, emotional and academic learning success (Brinegar, 2010; Dávila, 2015;). For example, Kiramba and Oloo (2019) stated that the benefits of ELL classrooms are far reaching for recent immigrant students. In addition to learning the language of the new country, ELL classes provide a place to help students make friends, find their voice, and listen to similar stories of “hope[s] and dreams” from other immigrant students (p. 17).

While the benefits of ELL classes are well documented, several authors also shared challenges in regards to students’ ELL experiences. Barajas-López (2014) conducted an ethnographic study with four Mexican immigrant high school students and explored their pursuit to learn mathematics and receive access to quality and equal
education. The students shared that much of their elementary education was in the ELL context and while they experienced some success in the elementary school years, they did not feel that they were prepared for success in high school. Spending most of their day in ELL classrooms, they were denied access to other academic and instructional opportunities that might have been beneficial for their academic growth. Further, while Antonio—one of the study participants—was identified in elementary school as eligible for gifted services in second grade, he was never placed in a gifted and/or honors courses throughout schooling. Participants further shared that their placement in academic programs such as advanced mathematics was based mostly on their language proficiency.

One of the participants’ mother, who volunteered her time at her son’s elementary school, shared:

(Children who speak Spanish are not seen in the same way [as English speakers]. They [teachers and school staff] don’t know if they excel in other subject areas because they ask them [evaluate them] in English. There are some children who come from Mexico who are much more advanced [in mathematics], but they don’t place them in the classes where they teach students advanced mathematics. They probably think that they are not capable of learning the material that they teach to English-speaking students because they don’t speak English too well . . . I observe that predominantly English-speaking students are given more attention because the teachers are more attentive to them. There are also classes with only English-speaking children. They are the gifted students and there they teach them everything. Those children have always been together. From kindergarten to high school.) (Interview, April 3, 2007)

Barillas-Chón (2010) in the previously quoted study also shared similar concerns. He argued that while ELL classes provide the platform of learning the majority language, they “do not guarantee the students’ social integration, academic achievement, comfort, safety and overall well-being” (Barillas-Chón, 2010, p. 309). This is, then, significant as
the very spaces meant to prepare students to “integrate” or “assimilate” further segregate them from academic achievement and mainstream school culture.

**Experiencing racial and linguistic discrimination.** Kiramba and Oloo (2019) conducted a narrative study with two first-generation and refugee background West African females. The purpose of their study was to explore the educational experiences of the two students within U.S. classrooms. While both participants shared that they were proud of their African background, their findings suggested that they often were stereotyped in relation to their racial and linguistic abilities. Some of the stereotypes participants discussed that they experienced include (a) lowered academic expectations by teachers and peers, (b) perceived lack of intelligence because of their race, (c) low behavioral expectations, and (d) their West African background as backward (Kiramba & Oloo, 2019, p. 20). Dávila (2015) affirms that students are often perceived intellectually inferior because of their limited English proficiency. An Assistant Principal in his study shared that “students are simultaneously positioned as ‘model minorities’ [by the teachers] because they are quiet and obedient, and intellectually deficient because of their lack of English language proficiency” (p. 143). Dávila (2015) further argued that this sends contradicting messages to students while they face the dual task of learning both the language and the academic content.

Several other authors discussed that immigrant and/or refugee students regularly experienced racism and discrimination within school spaces (Barillas-Chón, 2010; Gallo, 2014; Gold, 2017; Harris & Marlowe, 2011; Mthethwa-Sommers & Kisiara, 2015; Priest et al., 2016; Shankar et al., 2017). For example, Harris and Marlowe’s (2011) study
identified racist and hidden assumptions about students’ multiple identities. Their study consisted of 20 young, African-born adults studying in South Australian University. The students in this study shared that the staff did not expect them to contribute to classroom discussion and when they did contribute, it appeared shocking to the professors. One student specifically shared that "I feel so insulted by such an assumption that I should be stupid . . . I didn't get here because I'm stupid" (p. 190). Students often felt that these racist practices are based on the deficit thinking and language ideologies about their race and language use (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010).

In another study, Priest et al. (2016) interviewed parents, children (8-12 years) and their teachers to identify how historically marginalized children and youth from different ethnicities and countries of origin negotiate racial, ethnic and cultural diversity within four Australian public schools. While students from East African countries (including Ethiopia, Somalia and Eritrea) shared instances of experiencing blatant racism based on their skin Color, students from Middle Easterners and Asian background shared experiencing racist statements in relation to their cultural and religious identities (Priest et al., 2016). Further, while all students shared instances where they experienced racism in their interactions with white people, East African students also experienced racism in their interaction with other historically multiply marginalized students. Washington (1990) explains this phenomenon as “brown racism” when people from other historically multiply marginalized groups (such as Asian and Middle Eastern backgrounds) associate themselves with the white skin Color instead of the darker skin Color within the Black-
White dichotomy. Many East African students experienced brown racism in their interactions with other historically multiply marginalized students.

Racism and bullying is an on-going experience for all minority students, including immigrant and/or refugee students (Iqtadar et al., 2020; Mthethwa-Sommers & Kisiara, 2015; Shankar et al., 2017). However, the experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students are often different from native-born historically multiply marginalized students. For example, Mthethwa-Sommers and Kisiara (2015) conducted a study with 12 high school (between the ages 15 to 19) refugee students in upstate New York to explore students’ educational experiences. Participants were originally from four countries including: Bhutan, Somalia, Thailand, and Myanmar and had been residing in the U.S. between two to five years. The findings from this study suggested that immigrant students experienced three types of bullying in the schools: race-based bullying, language and accent-based bullying, and clothing and religion-based bullying. The participants compared their racialized experiences between their country of origin and the country of resettlement. They identified that race-based bullying was not an issue in their country of origin considering countries of origin were largely monoracial. However, in the country of resettlement, new immigrant students overwhelmingly shared being bullied because they looked different or because of their language differences.

Similarly, Mendez et al. (2012) identified the pattern of language-based and superiority-based bullying between high school (Grade 9th through 12th) Mexican American and Mexican immigrant students. Their findings suggest that the Mexican immigrant students were often bullied by their Mexican-American peers for not speaking
English well or for attending ELL classes. One student—Isabel—specifically recalled her experience of feeling inferior due to limited English language in the following way:

Actually yes. Me personally I have. I attended ESL when I was like in kindergarten to like 1st grade . . . and like they would always like make fun of me because, well they would always just be like “Oh, you attended ESL” and they would always like, call me like names about it and stuff.

Students further felt that they were bullied because they did not have friends or allies from the White majority population. The authors connected bullying events to the socially isolated and segregated nature of ESL classrooms.

Resisting deficit thinking and language understandings. Scholars identify that students of Color often resist the deficit thinking and language understandings about their multiple identities—such as race, disability, gender, social class, migration and/or refugee status, country of origin—in complex ways. In their qualitative research synthesis, Iqtadar et al. (2020) found that students of Color often used strategies to resist and cope with microaggressions experienced in school settings. The historically multiply marginalized students, including immigrant and/or refugee students, experience racial- and disability-related macroaggressions (Shankar et al., 2017). Iqtadar et al. (2020) suggested that oftentimes students resisted these microaggressions through overt acts of resistance such as kicking the door and throwing the school furniture. While other times students used “covert acts of resistance—such as demonstration [of] their dislike through (a) facial expressions and body language, (b) hiding the label, or (c) simply by not engaging in the aggressive behaviors” (p. 25).

While most students of Color experience racial microaggressions, immigrant and/or refugee students further experience language–based racism—linguicism—in their
new schools. Kiramba and Oloo (2019) noted that immigrant students often resisted these racialized or language-based deficit assumptions by employing what they called “resistant capital” against the stereotypical assumptions about their race and linguistic identity (p. 21). Resistant capital includes “skills and cultural practices that challenge inequality and promote social justice” (p. 21). Participants used multiple strategies to resist the microaggressions and misperceptions about their many identities. For example, one student in particular used her multilingual resources as resistant capital against the microaggression she experienced in relation to her ELL status and African background. She shared:

I would get irritated when asked, “Where do you come from?” or “How many languages do you speak?” But still I’m happy to be asked that because I’m able to share my culture and languages (p. 20)

Their findings further highlighted that students countered deficit thinking and language assumptions—such as low academic performance, perceived lack of intelligence due to limited English proficiency, and perceptions about their country of origin—by performing better in schools. They constantly felt a need to prove their abilities to the teachers and other staff members. One student shared that:

“You have to prove yourself. You have to work really hard, you have to keep your grades up. I feel like Black girls sometimes have to prove themselves more. Maybe girls of other races do too” (p.16).

Immigrant and/or refugee students often feel they need to work even harder and perform better in school to prove that they are intelligent and dismantle the stereotypical assumptions about their non-white, non-English speaking identities and selves.
Mthethwa-Sommers and Kisiara (2015) identified four models of resistance and coping strategies used by immigrant students against bullying in school settings. These models include: (a) push-back, (b) dignity preservation, (c) self-punishment, and (d) external validation. In the push-back model, the bullied students engaged with the bully and fought back in the same way. Most of the time students engaged in verbal arguments or responded back verbally. However, sometimes, they also engaged in physical confrontation. The second type of model students used was dignity preservation model. While preserving the dignity of the victim is the reason behind all forms of resistance, students specifically employed the dignity preservation model to hide their true emotions in front of their bully. Sharing an incident when one student was bullied, the authors noted that “she went to the bathroom to cry, but remained stoic and unresponsive while being bullied” (p. 5). Through this model, students made sure to hide their emotions and not appear “weak” in front of the bully.

The third model was related to self-harm “with hopes that physical pain will dwarf [the] emotional pain” (p. 5). Some students shared that they engaged in self-harm because there was no escape from the bullying in their school. One girl shared that “It was really a bad time. I cried a lot and stopped eating. I drank pills, sleeping pills. I was also so mad so I cut myself. I still have the scars.” (p. 5) In extreme situations, victims may commit suicide due to lack of support or finding no way to stop the bullying. Finally, students also used the external validation model by reaching out to the school staff and administration or their U.S. born peers for help. One student reported that she
saw the bullying decrease from the previous year because this year she had made many
“American” friends who support her in bullying situations. For example, she shared:

They yell at the bullies, and the bullies seem to listen to them. If I say leave me alone, they don’t leave me alone. But if an American student says leave her alone, they leave me alone. So it works (p. 6).

In different situations, students used different models of resistance to decrease the
bullying they experienced in their new schools.

In her dissertation study, Braye (2018) identified the resiliency factors that
refugee students used to overcome higher education barriers. She identified that refugee
students’ strong motivation—along with adequate support systems—can help students
achieve academic success in college. Findings from this study indicated that students
acquired a resiliency model and self-advocacy skills in order to achieve their academic
goals. This way they ensured their professors and counselors that they deserved quality
education. And even though they constantly felt motivated to “prove themselves to be as
intellectually capable as their peers” (p. 37), Braye (2018) noted that students had goals
to disrupt the negative assumptions about refugee students as intellectually inferior to
their white U.S. peers.

Findings from this theme suggested that when in school students regularly
experience deficit thinking and language views about their multiple identities—such as
their foreign-born status, race, and limited English proficiency—as well as the lowered
expectations from school personnel. While some studies indicate the benefits of ELL
classrooms, others identify challenges of receiving education in ELL settings. Students
further experienced racial and linguistic discrimination. They faced stereotypes including
(a) perceived lack of intelligence because of their race, (b) lowered behavioral expectations, and (c) their African and Asian backgrounds as backward. Finally, the third sub-theme suggested that the counter-narrating and resisting of these negative assumptions was part of students’ emergent identity formation in their host school cultures.

Immigrant and/or refugee students with disabilities or those receiving special education services

Researchers have recently begun to explore the relationship between immigrant students and U.S. special education—a general term referring to various educational services and models used for students deemed eligible. Due to the tendency to view immigrant and/or refugee students’ characteristics and identities as “deficit” and “different”—where “difference” is negative and needs remediation—they are over-identified for special education services (Artiles & Klingner, 2006; Iowa Department of Education, 2020). Over-identification represents that immigrant and/or refugee students are referred more and are identified more for special education (Harry & Klingner, 2014). Further, preliminary evidence suggests that cultural and racial historically multiply marginalized students, receiving ELL services, are over-identified for subjective disability labels such as learning disability, emotional disorder, and intellectual disabilities (Bal, 2009, 2014; Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Gabel et al., 2009; King et al., 2016; McBrien, 2005; Song, 2018).

Many scholars have identified that the implicit bias has been a contributing factor to such disproportionality when educators believe that students lack first or second
language proficiency (Artilés & Klingner, 2006), or when educators look for cognitive
deficits within children to explain learning difficulties, instead of accounting for systemic
inequality and the ‘dilemma of difference’ among students (Artilés, 1998; Artilés et al.,
2005; Minow, 1990). The basic dilemma of difference suggests the need of whether to
recognize or not to recognize the difference from the “norm”. Minow (1990) identified
that both approaches that we take to “treat” the difference—such as treating different
groups of students the same, or treating them differently—are problematic. It affirms the
difference.

Historically, multiply marginalized students experience overall higher drop-out
rates, lower academic achievement, lower college acceptance rates, more school
suspensions, and are labeled with specific disability labels at rates higher than their white
peers (Artilés et al., 2004; Donovan & Cross, 2002; Iqtadar et al., 2020; Kozol, 2005).
Iqtadar et al. (2020) conducted a qualitative research synthesis for twelve years of
qualitative data (2006-2018). The purpose of this synthesis was to explore (a) how do
students of Color, labeled disabled, make sense of disability labels, and (b) how do they
navigate their multiple identities (such as disability label, race and gender) within the
education system. The findings from this second-order thematic analysis suggested that
students of Color who are placed in special education classrooms experience systemic
inequality and marginalization through their multiple identities within the education
system. This impacts students' identity work in the school spaces.

Many participants in this synthesis noted the disproportionate representation of
students of Color in the special education classes as well as their differential treatment by
school personnel. They were acutely aware that their educational experiences were rooted in the social construction of their other identities such as their race and gender. Students further identified that the dis/ability labels that were assigned to them within school spaces were informed by these identity markers (Iqtadar et al., 2020). One student in Washington’s (2011) study shared that “there were not that many African Americans that went to my high school . . . [however,] it was almost like most of them were in special education” (Interview #2; p. 106). Further, the synthesis findings suggested that students were often aware of their differential treatment by school staff. One of the studies included in this synthesis—Banks (2017)—remarked that teachers’ responses to race and disability demonstrate how confounding identities uniquely intersect to contribute to cyclic experiences of labeling that resulted in pejorative stereotypes and lowered expectations (p. 103). This means that many of the teachers held lowered expectations towards students of Color with disabilities and interacted with them in ways that further marginalized them in the school spaces.

Recently, researchers have begun to identify similar patterns in the educational opportunities and placement decisions of first generation immigrant and/or refugee students (Bal, 2009, 2014; McBrien, 2015). In the context of Italy and United States, Migliarini, Stinson and D’Alessio (2019) identified that the educational policies that serve both students with disabilities and those receiving ELL services are categorized “by an individualized service delivery [model which is] driven by neoliberal principles such as standardized assessment, compliance, and student performance” (p. 10). They argued that the national policies of Italy and the U.S. —which are based on the international
declaration of inclusive education (UNESCO, 1994)—are overwhelmingly focused on the pathological construction of student differences—including their linguistic and ethnic differences.

Within their co-led research article in the international context of Italy and the U.S., they noted that students’ classification of both disability and ELL labels is the primary signifier for the instructional opportunities they receive within their new schools. For example, Stinson interviewed general and special education teachers in an urban school district in Upstate New York. Many of the participant teachers discussed the micro-exclusion of students based on the educational labels they receive. One third grade special education teacher shared:

[I]f you’re the special ed teacher in the room, the special ed (sic) kids are your kids, and, like, the gen ed (sic) kids are the gen ed teacher’s kid. [. . . ] I feel like even administration like even forgets about the kids or students with disabilities . . . and it’s just like okay well [. . . ] that’s their plan. They have a label. Like when we even go through and look at data, they’ll immediately go, like, ‘Oh, are they ENL? Oh, do they have an IEP?’ and [. . . ] it’s like, ‘Nevermind interventions for them—they have ENL or they have an IEP . . . ’ and it’s like, okay, they are getting something, but does that mean they should be forgotten about? (Migliarini et al., 2019, p. 9)

Migliarini, Stinson and D’Alessio (2019) argued that classifying students through ELL and disability labels signifies who will teach them—such as ELL teachers and/or special education teachers—most of the school day. They are further limited to interactions with teachers and peers in these classrooms. Consequently, their social and educational experiences within the school spaces are reified by these labels. They argue that the educational structures established to support inclusion—such as Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA)—in reality disable students’ educational and social opportunities in the
general education setting. This way students are further segregated within the education system.

In his recent work, Bal (2009, 2014) critically explored the student identity formation, educational experiences and challenges faced by Muslim Turk refugee students (between the ages of 9 and 13) of Ahiska ethnicity at a U.S. public-charter school. The findings from his study suggested that Ahiska students were often positioned within the education system either via prototypical or generic characters such as ELL or racialized learners. The underlying assumptions were often based on deficit thinking and language (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) views about students’ non-white and non-English speaking identities. Bal (2014) noted that segregated ELL classes served as “heterotopia—a space of otherness” to exclude students from the mainstream due to their non-white behavioral and linguistic characteristics (p. 281). He further argued that this deficit thinking and language (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) justified students’ exclusion from general education settings, and over time, led some of them to special education placements. In effect, creating a pipeline to greater and greater segregation.

Bal (2009, 2014) used the construct of figured worlds—socially and culturally created worlds of interpretation where people are assigned positions, and certains acts and outcomes are valued over others—of school and families. The rich cultural narratives in family’s figured worlds identified that family and students expected accountable and challenging academic practices and environment from the school. However, their important cultural practices, including working as a group, adapting but not assimilating,
and engaging in different literacies, were not welcomed and utilized by the teachers. Bal (2009) argued that educators did not align the academic practices to students’ cultural practices.

Further exploring the educational experiences of immigrant students with disabilities, Qing (2018) found that students often developed a negative self-image with regards to their education. He conducted a study with four Chinese immigrant students with intellectual disabilities to explore the challenges and opportunities in special education transition services. The findings from this study pointed to the impact of students’ schooling experiences on their sense of self. In general, students experienced more positive aspects regarding quality of life living in the U.S. —such as better living conditions and greater acceptance from the community and society— as compared to their experiences in China. However, they also formed negative perceptions about themselves living in the US. According to Qing (2018),

[students] always blame themselves for not being good enough, [and] saying “I need to work harder” or “I need to push myself more.” This creates a “double harm for students with disabilities”. Because of this, their negative senses of self-made them reduce contact with the outside world. (p. 92)

These negative self-perceptions made them feel “lonely, helpless, stressed out, being different, wanting to hide, feeling anxiety and pain, unhappy, as well as being scared” (p. 96). In addition, they often did not know anyone to ask for disability related information, and had no transition plan, or role models to guide students in need.

In her dissertation study, Song (2018) explored the educational experiences of North Korean refugee students at the intersection of their refugee identity and dis/ability. The findings from her ethnographic study suggested that refugee students migrating from
North Korea to South Korea were interpreted as “violent” or “deficient” by teachers, which leads to greater drop-out rates of refugee students educated in South Korean schools (Song, 2018). The findings also indicated that disability can become an embodied identity for refugee students in their new setting. In addition to their traumatizing refugee experiences, the stigmatization and discrimination they experienced in their new South Korean schools and society made students embody mental health difficulties. She noted that:

> Without receiving appropriate educational support, several students told me that they attended a classroom for years, while not understanding the content being taught. In so doing, students developed a negative perception about their academic identity, viewing themselves as underachievers or slow learners (p. 120).

The findings from her study further suggested that South Korean teachers often used culturally relevant approaches to help and support students for developing a positive self-identity. While receiving mental health support was essential in this situation, the limited number of mental health professionals who could relate to students’ experiences was another barrier for these students.

Considering the experiences of asylum-seeking children in Europe, scholars such as D’Alessio (2018) and Migliarini (2017b) explored the impact of European inclusive education policy. In 2013, Italian educational policy makers created a new policy which proposed that the students from “cultural, linguistic and socio-economic disadvantages” are eligible for special educational needs (SEN) along with students with disabilities (D’Alessio, 2018, para. 6). D’Alessio (2018) argued that Italy’s SEN category was a step towards justice for all students experiencing school failure, however, it also emphasized
that students must be assessed against a predetermined “norm”. She further argued that instead of identifying the barriers and focusing on the systematic deficit thinking, language and attitudes within the education system, the policy fundamentally encapsulates the hegemony of Anglo-Saxon classification of the SEN category. In other words, the policy provides a space to reinforce that some students—including those with disabilities and those from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds—are inherently “deficit” and “in need” to be corrected. The discriminatory discourses of “ableism (the disabled/SEN versus the idea/ordinary student) and disablism [difference perceived as pathological]” are further producing and reproducing educational inequalities for historically multiply marginalized students—including immigrant and refugee students. (D’Alessio, 2018, para. 13).

In the similar vein, Migliarini (2017a) conducted her doctoral dissertation research with nine refugee service organizations in the city of Rome. She explored the intersections of race, students’ migratory status, and disability labels in relation to the educational experiences of asylum-seeking students in Italy. Her data included 27 participants: 17 professionals in the fields of education, health care and social assistance, and 10 refugee and asylum-seeking children. The findings from her study suggested that the bodies of migrant children coming from sub-Saharan West African countries to Southern Italy are considered “risky bodies,” who’s presence must be controlled, monitored and prevented (if possible) in the national territory. Professionals working with these children often viewed them from deficit thinking, language and ideologies about their religion and racial identities. Similar to the educational practices identified in
Song’s (2018) study, the educational processes and discourses of Italy position these children as “less ‘able’ from a predetermined standardized ‘norm’” (Migliarini, 2017b). Migliarini (2017a, 2017b) argued that the deficit thinking and language views about students’ abilities—which are rooted in Eurocentric cultural and medical perspectives—subjectify asylum-seeking children as illiterate and those from disruptive schooling backgrounds in sub-Saharan West Africa. Her findings further suggested that this presumed illiteracy is measured by children’s “inability to speak European languages, such as French” (2017b, p. 15) and the professionals’ refusal to acknowledge how existing racism and ableism further reproduces white supremacy in the Italian context—prioritizing European languages and diminishing languages native to West Africa.

In 2013, Annamma conducted her doctoral research with ten (10) young incarcerated women of Color with disabilities. The purpose of this study was to explore and understand the educational experiences of young women of Color with disabilities through the School to Prison Pipeline. The School to Prison Pipeline or prison track refers to a punitive discipline approach used in the education system in the U.S. which allows detaining students to the youth prisons and mirrors the treatment of youth in the criminal justice system. (Wald & Losen, 2003). One of the students in Annamma’s study (2013), Veronica, was an undocumented Latina labeled with an emotional disability. Her undocumented status was an additional identity that she carried which impacted her education in the juvenile justice in complex ways. Annamma reported that Veronica’s undocumented status was first discovered when she got arrested by the city Police. During investigation, the police inquired if she was undocumented. While Veronica said
yes, Annamma questioned the practice of questioning a juvenile with a disability without a legal lawyer or an adult to advise her. Veronica was later informed that the staff (including teachers) in the prison knew about her legal status. This put Veronica under tremendous shame and stress to (a) demonstrate “good” behavior all the time, and (b) constantly worry about her possible deportation after incarceration.

The findings from this study suggested that Veronica’s behavior was often interpreted by the staff members without considering her sociocultural background. The curriculum taught inside the juvenile justice—“Thinking for Change” (T4C)—was inherently incompetent for the multiple social identities of students. Annamma argued that the curriculum “had [no] special instructions to work with students with disabilities or English Language Learners” (Annamma, 2013, p. 37). In addition, the staff often regulated and controlled students’ bodies and thoughts to meet the standardized “behavior” and “socializing practices” deemed appropriate. Annamma (2013) quoted:

For instance, in one 45-minutes class I observed, implementing these routines took 26 minutes. One major socializing practice for a new female inmate was to keep feet together at all times when sitting. When I asked why this practice was necessary, a security staff responded, “They need to learn to behave like young ladies”. This comment reflected an attempt to enforce normative femininity on criminal female bodies, a common effort in female juvenile incarceration (p. 38)

Students’ bodies and behavior were constantly surveilled while the curriculum used for educating these young women was based on the deficit thinking and language approach—teaching skills to those who have inherent “deficits.” Overall, this curriculum did not account for students’ rich multiple identities and backgrounds while allowing them to view their actions without context.
Findings from this theme suggest that the educational experiences and identity formation of immigrant and/or refugee students who are also labeled disabled are underrepresented within the research literature. The recent engagement of researchers with this topic indicate that immigrant and/or refugee students receiving ELL services are over-identified for subjective disability labels—including learning disability, emotional disorder, and intellectual disability (Bal, 2009, 2014; Dyson & Gallannaugh, 2008; Gabel et al., 2009; King et al., 2016; McBrien, 2005; Song, 2018). Implicit bias is identified to be one of the contributing factors to such disproportionality (Artiles & Klingner, 2006). Further, while some studies included students’ perspective and experiences while also indicating the deficit structures that put immigrant and/or refugee students at the trajectory of special education (Bal, 2009, 2014), more research needs to be conducted to account for the experiences of those already labeled disabled. With a growing immigrant and refugee student population, it is important to include student voice in understanding their experiences, emerging sense of self, and for equitable educational opportunities for these first generation students.

Conclusion

In this section, I have provided many examples from the international literature of immigrant and/or refugee students’ educational and socialization experiences in educational spaces. In the U.S., the historically multiply marginalized students including first generation immigrants or those seeking refuge have historically been denied an equitable education in comparison to their white peers. Researchers have now begun to explore the critical connections and relationship between students’ immigration status,
their special education and ELL placements, as well as their emerging sense of identity in the host cultures and schools. Preliminary evidence suggests that students receiving ELL services are often over-represented in special education classrooms. Researchers argue that much of this has underlying deficit thinking and language (views about students’ identities including their race, country of origin, and language use which are considered deficient). Students’ labeling of both ELL and disability can further limit immigrant and refugee students in specific school spaces and limit their educational opportunities in the general education settings.

Given the narrow focus of assimilation practices such as the “segmented assimilation” (often associated with whiteness) which prepare different groups of students for different life opportunities, more research is needed to be conducted with immigrant and refugee students to understand their identity formation, their navigation of multiple intersecting identities in schools, and their educational experiences and opportunities. There is limited literature that critically explores why students struggle, what meanings they associate with ELL and special education services or simply being placed in segregated classrooms from their general education peers. The researcher holds a critical perspective towards these segregated settings as well as has a drive to understand what additional support and services are used to meet the needs of such a diverse student group. There is an immense need to explore students’ perspectives, to identify their struggles, and to identify strategies they use to navigate the stigmas and stereotypes associated with the multiple labels they receive such as ELL and/or dis/ability labels or those receiving special education services under an IEP. As described earlier,
only recently researchers have begun to explore these connections. Additional research is also needed to explore how students resist such labels and/or navigate their intersectional identities in day-to-day schooling.

Gaps in the Literature

The current research about the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students provides much insights into the discrimination and the stereotypes against their cultural and linguistically diverse selves in new school spaces. Missing in the educational experience literature are the critical accounts of students for the internal and external processes of how they respond, feel, resist (if needed), and navigate these spaces. Further and as said earlier, there is limited research conducted with immigrant and/or refugee students who also receive disability labels in their country of immigration. More research is needed to account how do students navigate (if needed) the disability microaggressions, stereotypes and bullying as an intersectional experience within school spaces.

Further, some research alludes to the fact that ELL classrooms might set students for a special education trajectory (Bal, 2009, 2014). More research is needed to be conducted with students themselves to understand and explore (a) their perspectives about the nature of dis/ability and the over-representation of students of Color including immigrants/refugees within special education classrooms, (b) their emerging sense of self in their host culture, which includes their understanding and experiences at the intersections of multiply marginalized identities, (c) their views about the normalizing practices – such as English language and ability superiority in schools, (d) their account
for the dialectical relationship between social, political, educational, emotional, as well as cultural (living at the borders of two cultures) factors affecting students’ educational opportunities, and (e) to identify students’ struggles, and the strategies they use to navigate the stigmas and stereotypes associated with the multiple labels they receive such as ELL and/or disability label or those receiving special education services under an IEP.

As described earlier, only recently researchers have begun to explore some of these connections (Migliarini, 2017b; Song, 2018; Qing, 2018).

The literature about the educational experiences of all immigrant and/or refugee students further suggest that students regularly navigate and resist the deficit ideologies in relation to their race, language and culture. Recent literature conducted with immigrant and/or refugee students who also received disability labels suggest that students’ schooling experiences within their new culture have both positive and negative impact on their sense of self—such as embodying the disability identity and identifying disability as something residing inside the individual (Song, 2018; Qing, 2018). However, there is limited research which explores how students navigate and/or resist such labels along with their other intersectional identities in day-to-day schooling (Annamma, 2013). This study intended to explore this connection and what strategies students employ to navigate their experiences.

Finally, much of the limited emancipatory research conducted with students does not account for the internal and emotional processes that students experience and how disability labels and/or other labels—including cultural and ethnic stereotypes, linguistic stigmas, racial deficit views, could also be a dialectical process between the internal and
external struggles and navigation. This study employed conceptual and theoretical frameworks to understand such dynamic navigation of students which is as internal as it is external. This study employed an interdisciplinary and pluralistic approach from the fields of disability studies in education and cultural studies to understand students' narratives at multiple discursive intersections including social, cultural, political, global (as participants lived in Global South and Global North countries), emotional, and historical. While literature suggests the existing power relations between educational actors and students and their families, there is a need to understand students’ perspectives and understanding about the cultural-linguistic artifacts and informational structures about the broader societal deficit thinking and language ideologies around immigration and disability narratives. For this reason, this study accounted for students’ educational experiences in a holistic manner—including their lived realities at the intersections of social, educational, cultural, linguistic processes and how the discursive educational and political practices — such as their day-to-day decisions and how they are impacted by the broader political agenda—impact their identity formation at the intersections. I further intended to explore how students navigate and negotiate their multiple intersecting identities within educational spaces.

The conceptual underpinnings of this study were rooted in researcher’s Global South ontological and phenomenological stance, plurality and reciprocal nature of interdisciplinary theoretical frameworks endowed in resistance and agency, empirical literature, and hermeneutics phenomenology. The next chapter discusses the
hermeneutics phenomenological inquiry and the methods employed for this qualitative study.
CHAPTER THREE

QUALITATIVE RESEARCH APPROACH

Qualitative methods approach was selected for this study because of its epistemological, theoretical, and methodological underpinnings in socially constructed reality (Jones, 1995; Sofaer, 1999). Unlike quantitative research, which seeks positivism, qualitative research explores the phenomenon at hand through the framework that is value-laden, holistic and descriptive, and prefers in-depth accounts of individual voices of people affected and/or involved (Yilmaz, 2013). As Yilmaz (2013) suggests that the underlying epistemological stance of a qualitative research is that reality is “socially and psychologically constructed” (p. 311). My decision to design a qualitative study began with this belief in the social and psychosocial meaning-making of my study participants about their identity formation experiences in relation to their multiple and intersectional identities in the U.S. schools and society.

Additionally, my decision to design a qualitative study stemmed from an interpretivist view of immigrant and refugee students within a new culture and society (Finlay, 2012). This is because my intent, as an inquirer, was to explore and understand one of the many interpretations of students’ experiences. For this purpose I specifically drew upon hermeneutics phenomenological research methodology. Throughout this research process, my role was one of an interpretivist inquirer. Eisner (2017) identifies that an interpretivist inquirer essentially assumes two roles: first as to account for what is given and explain the reason behind an event, and the second as to understand the
meanings people associate with these events. I intend to draw my interpretations of students’ experiences both from their spoken words and silences (Psathas, 1979). I now discuss the hermeneutics phenomenology and methods used for this study.

Hermeneutics Phenomenology and Methods

In this chapter, I discuss my research methodology and my research methods. My research methodology is centered with qualitative research and hermeneutic phenomenology, which involves my personal interpretation of the lived experiences of my participants and the meanings they associate with these experiences. My interpretations of my participants’ experiences are a combination of what they shared and re-shared with me and how I made sense of those experiences from my ethnic, racial, cultural, and social class backgrounds. I share my personal and family experiences at the nexus of immigration and my multiple intersectional experiences in the U.S. society and education system as the positionality intersection of my interpretations.

This chapter also introduces my research methods centered in qualitative data collection, data analysis, and thematic interpretation. I discuss challenges related with access to the study setting, leading to modifications to the original research proposal. I present the recruitment and selection of participants, including inclusion and exclusion criteria. I describe the data collection procedures, involving three interview sessions with each participant, and discuss strategies for building rapport. I also discuss the data analysis process, involving initial coding, categorical construction, and thematic integration within a hermeneutic circle. I conclude by presenting measures to establish
credibility and trustworthiness of the research process. The following graphic (figure 3) illustrates the research methodology and methods of this research endeavor.

**Figure 3**

*Research Methodology and Methods*

!!![](image_url)

**Research Methodology**

In this chapter, I discussed qualitative research and hermeneutic phenomenology (Eatough & Smith, 2017) as an approach to examine the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee students receiving special education and/or English Language Learner (ELL) services. My decision to employ and design a hermeneutic phenomenology stemmed from an interpretivist view of qualitative inquiry and by privileging student voice at the intersection of dis/ability, race, ethnicity and culture, and
other markers of identity (Finlay, 2012; Van Manen, 1990). From the DisCrit perspective, privileging the student voice is at the heart of education practice and policy (DisCrit Tenet 4). In learning about the educational experiences of four Black immigrant and refugee first-generation students, my aim was to understand each participant’s unique identity formation, and their intersectional educational and cultural resettlement experiences through dialogue, conversations, and their stories. The specific research questions I asked include:

1. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, make meaning of English as a Second Language and/or Special Education experiences?

2. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, engage in identity formation in a new school and culture?

3. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, experience schooling and navigate their intersectional identities on a daily basis?

I begin this section by situating my study in qualitative research and the concepts of hermeneutic phenomenology which provided the foundations for my research design. Since the beginning of this study, I understood that within the tradition of phenomenological and qualitative inquiry, disclosing and underscoring researcher’s positionality is valued (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Moss, 2004). Hence, after discussing my methodological choices, I describe my positionality in detail as a researcher for my readers. I then present my qualitative approach to data collection, analysis, and
interpretation. I end this chapter with providing details about measures to establish credibility and trustworthiness, as well as the ethical considerations involved in this research endeavor.

**Phenomenology Research**

Phenomenology is a philosophy and a research method which aims to explore the lived experiences of people, their perceptions and interaction with the world through specific events and interactions, and the meanings they associate with these interactions (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982; Langdridge, 2007; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994). Finding its origins in Husserl’s phenomenological movement (1859-1938), phenomenology can be described under three major traditions: 1) transcendental phenomenology, 2) existential phenomenology, and 3) hermeneutic phenomenology.

**Transcendental and Existential Phenomenology.** Husserl’s *transcendental phenomenology* is built upon the idea of *reduction* and *bracketing*. Reduction refers to the suspension of researchers’ personal prejudices, presuppositions, and biases from research. For Husserl, “consciousness is always consciousness of something” (Sherman, 2014, p. 142), meaning that the world or a phenomenon could only be known through individuals’ thoughts (Porter, 2000). The reduction view is rooted in the psychological phenomenological approaches which identify phenomenology as rooted in three interlocking steps of (a) reduction, (b) description, and (c) search for essence (Giorgi, 1997). According to this view, researchers can reach to the core or essence of a phenomenon under study by discovering and describing the ‘life world’ or ‘lived experience’ of the participants in the figured worlds of schooling and culture (Dowling &
Cooney, 2012; Finlay, 2012; Holland et al., 1998; Kafle, 2011; Smith et al., 2009; Van Manen, 1990). Similarly, *existential phenomenology*, as proposed by Moustakas, involves the concept of *epoche*—refraining from making judgements—and approaching research from the lens of interviewee instead of the interviewer (Heppner & Heppner, 2004; Miller & Salkind, 2002; Moustakas, 1994).

**Hermeneutic Phenomenology.** I approached this research with an underlying assumption that *bracketing or reduction* is impossible because the researcher can not be separated from the cultural phenomenon they research (Merleau-Ponty, 1964). From the GSI-DisCrit perspective, this means that people migrating from Global South to Global North or vice versa are intertwined with the phenomenon under exploration due to their rich experiences. Therefore my interactions with my participants, their narratives, and experiences are influenced by my own experiences with the phenomenon under investigation, such as the U.S. education system. As I explain later in the positionality section of this chapter, my intersectional positionalities and my on-going scholarly and teacher-educator engagement rendered me a position where I entered the field with specific understandings of the studied phenomenon. Hence, I used the third category of phenomenology—*hermeneutics phenomenology*—to gain a holistic understanding of Kabaka, Mandla, Lema, and Eli’s (pseudonyms) identity formation and meaning-making of their intersectional experiences in the schools and larger society—as interpreted through my own experiences and understandings of the research phenomena (Crenshaw, 1991; Finlay, 2012). First introduced in the writings of Martin Heidegger (1889-1976), hermeneutic or interpretive phenomenology contested the idea that describing the
experiences of people is enough. Rather, an Interpretivist Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) allowed the researchers to critically think and explore one of the many interpretations of the study participants’ experiences by moving away from simple descriptions of events to interpreting their lived experiences through the researcher’s personal experiential lens (Cohen, 2000; Eatough & Smith, 2017; Finlay, 2012; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). I approached this study with presuppositions and biases which cannot be suspended from the research process (Crane, 2004; Heshusius, 1994; Kafle, 2011; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009; Ray, 1994). Hence I employed Eatough and Smith (2017) and Van Manen’s (1990) approaches of hermeneutics or interpretative phenomenological analysis using three major concepts: 1) lifeworld, 2) idiography, and 3) double hermeneutics.

Lifeworld. Within the tradition of phenomenology, lifeworld, or as Husserl described it Labenswelt, means studying someone’s everyday life experiences and reflection of that experience. In other words, experience is subjective in a sense (1) what is given—connecting events, people and objects in a given situation, and (2) how it makes sense to them through subjective experience and its manifestation in action and behavior (Eatough & Smith, 2017). Within the tradition of lifeworld, this reflection is a pre-reflective phase, which means, the focus is on what is being perceived rather than how it is perceived. Additionally, lifeworlds include studying the social, contextual, historical and cultural contexts of one’s life in specific time, space, body, and human relationships (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Ladkin, 2014; Van Manen, 1990). In the figured worlds of schooling, participants’ reflections and understanding of their ELL and special
education placement, as well as their navigation of intersectional experiences, are documented as lifeworld. I understood my participants as the experiential experts within the context of their life and educational experiences, and let them take me where they might through sharing their life stories.

Phenomenological research also requires humans to be meaningful participants and change agents of their worldly experiences (Eberle, 2014; Van Manen, 1990). Yancher (2015) suggests such concernful involvement of participants in the following manner:

As agents who participate meaningfully in a meaningful world, humans encounter the events of their experience as mattering; that is, participational agency is characterized by a kind of care or existential concern with the affairs of living that provides a basis for action such as making judgment, taking positions, and engaging in cultural practices (Yancher, 2015, p. 109).

By attending the events and things that mattered to my participants helped me distinguish between different parts of their experiences and identify the most and least relevant aspects of these experiences. Hence, I used participants’ lifeworlds, which are significant and meaningful to them, for a complete understanding of their positionality and experiences (Eatough & Smith, 2017). In the next section, I will explain how an idiographic method helped me focus on my participants’ identity formation and their experiences and stories of particular life experiences.

Idiography. Derived from the Greek word idios meaning “own” or “private”, idiography deals with the unique, particular, and concrete aspects of an individual’s experiences, while also maintaining their integrity (Eatough & Smith, 2017; Smith et al., 2009). This method emerged from the interpretive phenomenology method in psychology.
to focus on an individual’s unique experiences in comparison to objective and scientific analysis of the collective experiences of a group of individuals. This means that idiography is least concerned with making blanket statements about larger groups, and focus on case studies unique to the lived experiences or *lifeworld* of individuals (Mischler, 1984; Smith et al., 2009). In this research study, I was interested in the lifeworld of my four first generation African participants, and while there were similarities in their experiences, I also paid attention to and reported the unique ways they made sense of their individual experiences.

Researchers employing idiography use small sample sizes to make sense of individuals’ unique connection to certain general themes in the lives of all individuals (Evans, 1993). In this sense, although idiography does not concern with generalizations, it helped me get “closer to noteworthy aspects of the general by connecting the individual[’s] unique life with a common humanity” of collective understandings (Eatough & Smith, 2017, p. 12). My aim was to understand the subjective and interpersonal experiences of my study participants in relation to their thought processes, actions, and emotions. This helped me better understand the ways immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities involved in ELL programs labels make sense of their educational experiences in special education and ELL classes. Additionally, this thorough approach allowed for an evolving understanding of students’ experiences and sense making, while also acknowledging their experiences, emotions, thinking, and how they navigated the education and larger systems of power on a day-to-day basis. I also used this approach to ensure that each participant’s life experiences were valued and
explored in depth to contribute to the paucity of literature regarding the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities (Elder, 2015; Migliarini, 2017a; Song, 2018). I accomplished this through the process of double hermeneutics.

Double Hermeneutics

*Double hermeneutics* refer to the process of a “researcher trying to make sense of the participant(s) trying to make sense of what is happening to them” (Smith et al., 2009, p. 3). Within the Interpretivist Phenomenological Analysis (IPA) tradition, double hermeneutics involves a two-step process of synthesizing participant’s narratives and experiences through:

1. participant sense making of their experience during the interview, and
2. researcher’s sense making of participant’s experiences during an iterative process of data analysis.

IPA allows the researcher to critically think and explore one of the many interpretations of study participants’ experiences by moving away from simple descriptions of events to interpreting their lived experiences (Cohen, 2000; Eatough & Smith, 2017; Finlay, 2012; McConnell-Henry et al., 2009). This process of double hermeneutics helped me gain a deeper understanding of participants’ meaning making and their identity navigation in U.S. schools. I approached multiple layers of interpretation through: (1) hermeneutics of empathy, and (2) hermeneutics of suspicion (Ricoeur, 1970). As Eatough and Smith (2017) indicate:

For IPA, these two hermeneutics are employed to encourage researchers to adopt a both/and approach; on the one hand to assume an empathic stance and imagine
what-it-is-like to be the participant, whilst on the other hand, to be critical of what appears to be the case and probing for meaning in ways which participants might be unwilling or unable to do themselves. The former aims to produce rich experiential understandings of the phenomenon under investigation and remain close to the participant’s sense-making. The latter involves the researcher putting aside what they have previously accepted at face value in order to develop a textured multilayered narrative of possible meanings (Eatough & Smith, 2017, pp. 13-14)

I also approached this study with the underlying assumption that every interpretation of a phenomenon experienced is a single interpretation, “and no single interpretation of human experience will ever exhaust the possibility of yet another complementary, or even potentially richer or deeper description” (Van Manen, 1990). Hence, I acknowledge that my interpretations of my participants’ experiences are a combination of what they shared and re-shared with me and how I made sense of those experiences from my ethnic, racial, cultural, and social class backgrounds (Lapan et al., 2012). Equally important is the influence of my scholarly commitments rooted in the field of Disability Studies in Education, and the theoretical and conceptual underpinnings of DisCrit and GSI-DisCrit. As a researcher, it was impossible for me to shed myself of my intersectional identities and my personal and professional backgrounds (Denzin & Lincoln, 1998). Given that and to help my readers know and understand my background, I now turn to share who I am and how my multiple positionalities might privilege and constrain my understanding of my four participants’ experiences about their educational and social experiences with the U.S. (Adler, 2004; Asher, 2003; Kafle, 2011; Maykut & Morehouse, 1994).
Personal Positioning: Voice of the Researcher

My interest in the educational experiences of specifically immigrant and/or refugee students receiving special education and/or English Language Learners (ELLs) services initially stemmed from my personal and family experiences at the nexus of immigration and my multiple intersectional experiences in the U.S. society and education system. Whenever I talk about my multiple identities, I struggle as I understand that I am a Muslim, a South Asian multilingual Female, and a recent Immigrant to a country where all these identities are politically and culturally viewed from deficit and ableist thinking and language (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019). While I have often felt privileged due to my certain identities such as being an international student, I have also felt “othered” in many of my on-campus classes. My first recollection of feeling “othered” is as a master’s student in 2014 when I worked on a group project with four other white female students. Contrary to my repeated requests to discuss the project and collaborate, my group decided to not respond to my emails while still collaborating with each other. In the end, I requested the professor to change my group. I have experienced that moment multiple times ever since, and while I could not fully comprehend why these students were reluctant to work with me then, looking back, I am certain that racism, linguicism and xenophobia were often at play in these instances, even if unintentional. I now understand that their actions are related to the system that privileges the U.S.-centered white-middle class ways of being and doing which often “Others” the dispositions that do not align with the mainstream white culture and values.
Additionally, my Global South informed cultural understanding of learning in collaboration often intersected with the American cultural “norms” of individualism. This means that I often completed the class projects for my entire group because I thought I was “learning” and needed this opportunity. The psycho-emotional disablism that I experienced in these interactions made me feel that my Global South bodymind was not competent enough. Similar experiences when I felt pressured to assimilate or discriminate based on my Colored identity, language, being a SouthAsian female, and my religious identity have shaped my educational experiences living in the U.S. I am sensitive to the fact that my participants were also stereotyped and bullied based on their historically multiply marginalized identities on a daily basis.

I also became interested in the experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students because of the within school bullying and discrimination that the first-generation children in my family have endured. Quite often, these experiences are blatant acts of racism, xenophobia, and islamophobia by either educational professionals or their peers. Their schooling experiences have made me think about how often immigrant and refugee students may feel “Othered” within k-12 school spaces. Often students are not aware of the prevailing deficit narratives surrounding their multiple identities until months or years after they first arrive in the U.S. This lack of awareness can lead them to internalizing deficit narratives while they may begin to believe that their multiple identities are not inherently good and sufficient (Valencia, 2012). As much as these views are inherently deficit, they remind me to question the existing educational paradigm—with white supremacy at its very core—that affects these students everyday (Ladson-Billings & Tate,
As someone who has lived across and experienced global cultures, both in Global South and Global North, I understand that these experiences are global realities for people with historically multiply marginalized identities in a society.

My interest in studying disability is primarily influenced by my experiences of teaching children with disabilities as well as providing them “speech therapy” at a Private University’s child development center in Pakistan. I worked at this center from 2012-2014 before coming to the U.S. Some of the families of my students could not economically afford an education for their children, for which the center provided both “speech” as well as small-scale educational services. These families were grateful that the center was providing and supporting their children. However, parents often had little to no say in their student’s quality education. The deficit views (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) underlying their many identities in Pakistani culture and context—some of which are also global such as medical perceptions of dis/ability labels—limited their educational opportunities. Students were often grouped together to play rhymes and poems for time-saving purposes. Individualized instruction mostly included teaching and practicing speech sounds for months until students mastered it. Despite this, families often felt grateful for receiving education services to their children.

At this point, I must make it explicit that I am “able-bodied” and even though I approached my research from a critical dis/ability studies lens, I was mindful of the power dynamics and privilege inherent within my research (Armour et al., 2009). Additionally, I acknowledge that while I self-identify as a person of Color in the U.S. because of my day-to-day experiences, my lighter skin tone has rendered me a privileged
position in many educational and social situations (Dumas, 2016). This is critical because my participants are first generation Black African immigrants and refugees with unique intersectional experiences. Along the similar line of thought and reflexivity, I want to acknowledge that my participants’ experiences and identity navigation within the U.S. education system and structures is a complex phenomenon, which at times constrained and afforded them agency, while other times represented as navigating their Black identities in the U.S. society. This means that their narratives highlighted ways in which they endured racism, while other times also learned and unlearned anti-Black racism against their U.S. born Black peers. By anti-Blackness I mean how Black bodies, especially African Americans, have historically been marginalized and attacked in schools and society through policies and practices that (re)produce and maintain Black suffering (Tulino et al., 2019). In theorizing anti-Blackness, Michael J. Dumas (2016) states:

Antiblackness scholarship, so necessarily motivated by the question of Black suffering, interrogates the psychic and material assault on Black flesh, the constant surveillance and mutilation and murder of Black people (Alexander, 1994; Tillet, 2012). It also grapples with the position of the Black person as socially dead—that is denied humanity and thus ineligible for full citizenship and regard within the polity (Patterson, 1982). And in all the theorizing on antiblackness, there is a concern with what it means to have one’s very existence as Black constructed as problem—for white people, for the public (good), for the nation-state, and even as a problem for (the celebration of) racial difference (Gordon, 1997, 2000; Melamed, 2011).

From the critical disability studies perspective, I understand that anti-Black racism was a learned and unlearned experience. Even when my participants were not aware of the deficit and racist language they employed at times, it was very much prevalent in their
narratives. In other words, identity formation of “Becoming Black in the U.S.” was an ongoing process for these first generation Black African students. I find it paramount to discuss here considering the a) historical anti-Black racism and culture of poverty\textsuperscript{10} rhetoric (McDermott & Vossoughi, 2020) in the U.S., b) due to my commitment to social justice and equity, c) my adherence to the tenets of DisCrit and disability justice, and d) my resistance against white supremacist systems of power that pin people of Color against each other, by identifying “Black as problem” to further the agendas of White supremacy and maintaining power in the system. I would also put myself in this category and self-reflect that being first-generation immigrant I’m often not aware of how racism and ableism works through me in intricate ways. Since my arrival to the U.S. I have studied in White majority institutions of power, and have learned and continue to unlearn many deficit orientations of the teaching of racism that is often taught to newly arrived immigrants and refugees. In this sense then, my own identity formation in new society and culture is closely knitted within the fabric of structures that produce, reproduce, and maintain hegemony and hegemonic ideologies. Throughout this study, my continuous and critical self-reflection is an ongoing journey of learning and unlearning of such deficit orientations.

\textsuperscript{10} Finding its origin in 1959, prominence in 1960s and research-led crash between 1968-1980s, the culture of poverty rhetoric has reemerged in the last decade (McDermott & Vossoughi, 2020). This deficit-oriented master narrative puts the blame of poor people’s life conditions and circumstances on them, instead of identifying how the racist systems maintain structural hegemony. McDermott and Vossoughi (2020) argue that the less obvious problem in such deficit rhetoric is that “poor people have to put up with being disparaged, distrusted, rejected, and theorized by those who are not poor” (p. 60).
Within the qualitative tradition, researcher’s turning back and reflexivity is vital as it makes them aware of their power, biases, and privileges as they intend to unpack and explore the power dynamics of individuals’ experiences within a system (Colaizzi, 1973). Throughout this study, I was careful not to ‘over-privilege’ my voice over my participants’ voices and experiences. Thus, throughout this chapter I inform the reader about the decisions I made with regards to how I collected, analyzed, and presented the data. Additionally, my participants were from different cultural backgrounds than mine and while I shared the immigrant identity with them, my university degree, the scholarship I received to complete my education, and my “able-bodied” status, both afforded and constrained the way I made sense of participants’ experiences. All of my participants were from African tribal backgrounds, and while I am also a recent immigrant to the U.S., their refugee camp experiences or entering the U.S. from a lottery system as immigrants rendered them a different experience from mine. Also, since they all came to the U.S. as children or teenagers, they experienced the K-12 education system whereas I entered the higher education system in the U.S. as a 24 years old adult. Further, my researcher positionality rendered me a privileged position over my participants. Within the tradition of hermeneutics phenomenology, researcher reflexivity and explicitly writing about their privileges and biases is crucial beyond simply stating their positionality (Colaizzi, 1973; Finlay, 2012). In the context of this study, I was aware from the beginning that my higher education experiences and my international student status are privileged within the higher education spaces. I recognize that my positionality is complicated and messy.
Finally, while I was an insider based on my immigrant identity, it is worth noting that I completed this research study through multiple phases of my professional career. In the beginning of this study, I had little experience of being in the U.S. K-12 educational settings. However, I accepted a Visiting Clinical Assistant Professor position at the beginning of the data analysis phase of my study. During this time, my teaching role rendered me a position to weekly teach my senior year pre-service teacher educators across multiple elementary schools in the city. While I did not supervise students for their field observations, my physical placement inside the schools helped me unpack my participants’ structural experiences from a different level of interpretation in contrast to the early phase of this study. This means that the physical setup of the school system became alive for me and as I was reading and (re)reading my participants’ interviews for data analysis, their conversations about the cafeteria (Tatum, 2017), special education, ELL, and general education classrooms presented differently from not spending one-on-one time in such a physical setting before. I acknowledge that my visual association with the school systems in my new position rendered me a location different from when I began this study. As I entered the K-12 field as a teacher-educator, I recognized that there is much that I did not know and might never know. Therefore, I acknowledge that my documentation of school practices, culture, and structures, as well as student-teacher interactions is subjective to my own experiences in schools. My transformation from student to faculty, my professional and personal experiences, and my reading of the K-12 literature about the educational experiences of immigrants and refugees with and without dis/abilities, influenced my interpretation of my participants’ experiences. With this
presentation of research methodology and researcher positionality, I now explain the qualitative research methods employed for this study.

**Qualitative Research Methods**

In qualitative studies, *gaining access* and *entering* the field are two of the most challenging tasks (Creswell, 2013; Madison, 2005). Both of these tasks proved difficult to achieve within the school system of interest. I begin with a discussion of the barriers to entering and access.

**Challenges in Accessing the Study Setting**

My original intent was to gain access to immigrant students in two urban public school settings through contact with non-governmental organizations (NGOs) who worked with the school districts. The executive director for one NGO working with Syrian refugees seemed interested in the research project, but informed me that I would have to contribute to the costs involved in recruitment, and that any interaction with the students would be monitored by an agency staff member, and that following a one hour interaction with a student, I would not be permitted additional time or access. While I was able to negotiate additional time with the students, the funding expectation was beyond what University-sponsored research permitted. A second contact to another NGO was also unsuccessful.

I next attempted to gain access by directly contacting administrators of the public schools in the two urban cities of interest. Here I faced challenges that were related to the deficit belief and assumptions about immigrants and refugees (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 2010) and the school district’s reliance on the “vulnerability” status of
the students according to federal regulations regarding research with human subjects. I strongly believe that student voice (Gonzalez et al., 2017) should be centered to understand their systemic experiences in the education system. Again, by student voice I mean valuing the standpoint and experiences of students about their experiential knowledge in contrast to the researchers or the systems as they understand students’ experiences (Gonzalez, et al., 2017). However, despite initial interest by the administrators in those urban school districts, I was unable to secure permission to conduct my research. At this point, I revised my research proposal to gain access to current and former immigrant and refugee students available within the communities. These access efforts had taken over six months. I detail the challenges I faced in gaining access to the participants for two main reasons: (1) to provide an understanding of the difficulty of access for future researchers and doctoral students interested in interviewing immigrants and refugee students, and (2) to highlight the structural complications and how the deficit assumptions of professionals about this student population makes it even harder to center their voice in social science research and understand their educational experiences.

**Recruitment Procedures and Participant Selection**

The participants for this study were residents of two small Midwestern urban cities, Sugar Valley and Lake View. My understanding of small urban cities is based on Milner’s (2012) categorization of urban emergent cities (fewer than 1 million people) that share many of the same characteristics of the larger urban cities. Both cities are growing from their once white, northern European population into a more ethnically diverse
population. Currently, immigrants and refugees from Liberia, Burundi and Congo are the largest growing population after the Burmese and Bosnians. The participants for this study were members of Liberian and Burundi communities. I approached them through the support of a local community church, that I named Pentecostals of the Sugar Valley (PSV) for this study.

I contacted the local religious groups such as the Pentecostals of the Sugar Valley (PSV) church and the Al-Madina Mosque (pseudonym) and used a purposive yet convenient sampling technique (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Creswell, 2013; Glesne, 2016) to directly recruit participants in the local community. Purposive sampling means purposefully identifying and selecting individuals, groups, and/or settings for the study to make sense of the researched questions and phenomenon (Onwuegbuzie & Leech, 2007). The convenience aspect of the sampling was necessary due to my student-related responsibilities at the nearby University. My initial selection criteria consisted of students who were:

1) first-generation immigrant and/or refugees,
2) receiving special education services and have a current Individualized Education Program (IEP),
3) studying in K-12 school district,
4) between the ages of 8-21 years old, and
5) with at least one year of residing in the U.S.

After the Pentecostals of the Sugar Valley (PSV) church agreed to help with my recruitment procedures, I shared the university approved Institutional Review Board (IRB) oral recruitment script with my contact, Pastor King and Catherine.
Pastor King and Catherine connected me with Kabaka’s family. Once the family agreed to meet, I visited the church to discuss details about the study. In this initial meeting, Kabaka’s parents and I sat down in the commons room after the Sunday service so that I could provide details about the study and answer any questions that they had. As a qualitative researcher, and to enhance trustworthiness in the study, it is critical that you share with your participants about 1) who you are, 2) how you are connected and situated within your study, and 3) why you are interested in interviewing the participants. Kabaka’s parents asked similar questions, in addition to wanting to know my intentions about what I will do once I finish data collection. As someone in family immigration myself at the time, I expected these questions and understood parent’s concerns. I shared with them about my family’s recent immigration history, as well as my student and teacher identity of preparing preservice special education teachers at the local university. I further discussed my belief that it is important for our school districts and teachers to center student voice (Gonzalez, et al., 2017) in learning about their educational experiences in the new culture of schools and society, while they also navigate the special education system.

This meeting lasted for forty-five minutes, and I was able to answer many of the questions that the family had. I shared my contact information with the parents that they may contact me if they have further questions. At the end, I left this meeting feeling that my multiple identities, especially my immigrant and special educator identity, helped with developing initial trust with the family. For example, as soon as I shared my immigration status, even though it was different from Kabaka’s family’s immigration
history, Kabaka’s father stated: “oh so you are also immigrant… you know how it is for students when they first come here… Yes, I think you can come our place some Saturday and talk to him…” (March, 21, 2020).

However, I understood that trust building is a process. For example, his father sat down with us throughout the first interview with Kabaka. Culturally, I respected and welcomed him to sit with us as I understand that parents from many cultures feel more comfortable to sit with their children at least in the beginning phase of an interview. It was equally important that I approached interviews in open-ended conversational styles (Gallagher, 1995). Anyone who Kabaka introduced me during his interview and who shared similar interests in relation to the study was welcomed to join the conversation. For example, during one of our conversations, the differences between Liberian and American English became a topic of discussion. Kabaka instantly requested if he could invite his next-door neighbor who is also Liberian and can help with unpacking the differences. He then invited Mandla—who I later became my second participant for this study. Mandla and Kabaka then helped me understand a few major differences between Liberian and American English such as shorter vs. longer sentence structures. This particular conversation helped me understand how happy Kabaka was to talk and share more about his cultural and tribal identities from both his father and mother side.

Kabaka’s family introduced me to my second participant, Mandla who at the time of this study was seventeen years old first-generation Liberian High School student. Mandla and his family lived next door to Kabaka in the same apartment building. Like Kabaka, Mandla also received special education services and had a written IEP. I met
with my final two participants from Lake View city through another contact, Mrs. Hannah, in the Pentecostal Church. Mrs. Hannah, who is in her sixties visited the church from Lake View city with her Pastor husband for a Sunday service. The two participants in Lake View City are in their thirties and reflected on their K-16 educational experiences. They never received special education services nor a disability label in K-12. However, both pushed my thinking about the concept of ableism in many ways and shared personal experiences of how linguicism and ableism are interconnected and intertwined. Talila Lewis (January, 2020) define ableism as:

A system that places value on people’s bodies and minds based on societally constructed ideas of normalcy, intelligence, excellence, and productivity. These constructed ideas are deeply rooted in anti-Blackness, eugenics, colonialism, and capitalism. This form of systemic oppression leads to people and society determining who is valuable and worthy based on a person’s appearance and/or their ability to satisfactorily [re]produce, excel and “behave”. You do not have to be disabled to experience ableism.

At this point, I expanded my study’s inclusion criteria to include voices of students who (1) received English Language (ELL) Services in addition to special education services in K-12 education, and (2) were current students and/or adults reflecting on their educational experiences (beyond 21 years of age). This helped the study to gain a broader perspective of ableism through experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students with and without dis/abilities in their new school culture. I then expanded my study to include the educational experiences of immigrant and/or refugee students with and without dis/ability labels. My refined research questions for the study include:
1. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, make meaning of English as a Second Language and/or Special Education experiences?

2. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without disabilities, engage in identity formation in a new school and culture?

3. How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, experience schooling and navigate their intersectional identities on a daily basis?

As Table 1 indicates, Kabaka was an eighth grade student receiving both English as second language and special education services. He moved to the U.S. six years prior to the beginning of this study. Mandla, who also received ELL and special education services, was about to graduate highschool in a few weeks time and recently started his first job at a local Sportsplex. Mandla’s family recently moved to the U.S. two years ago and Mandla was still in the initial phases of understanding the system. Both Mandla and Kabaka’s families came to the U.S. from Liberia via lottery system, and lived in the neighborhoods. The other two participants, Lema and Eli, are siblings and migrated to the U.S. as refugee kids. Lema was seven years old while Eli was nine at the time of resettlement to the U.S. They both attended College and received their Bachelor's degrees. At the time of this study Lema was working at a refugee organization named Christian Compound (pseudonym), while Eli worked in a leadership role in a local factory in the Midwest.
Table 1

**Demographics**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Name</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>Country of birth and First Language</th>
<th>Race and Ethnicity</th>
<th>Age when migrated</th>
<th>SPED and/or ELL status</th>
<th>Education</th>
<th>Current Status</th>
<th>No. of interviews</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Kabaka</td>
<td>15</td>
<td>Liberia and Liberian English</td>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Received special education and ELL services</td>
<td>8&lt;sup&gt;th&lt;/sup&gt; grade</td>
<td>Student</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lema</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>Burundi and Kirundi Language</td>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>7 years</td>
<td>Received ELL services</td>
<td>Bachelor’s in psychology</td>
<td>Christian Compound</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eli</td>
<td>31</td>
<td>Burundi and Kirundi Language</td>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>9 years</td>
<td>Received ELL services</td>
<td>Bachelor’s in education</td>
<td>Local factory</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mandla</td>
<td>17</td>
<td>Liberia and Liberian English</td>
<td>Black African</td>
<td>15 years</td>
<td>Received special education and ELL services</td>
<td>High school</td>
<td>Sportsplex and student</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Kabaka and Mandla’s interviews helped me unpack first generation immigrants’ educational experiences in the special education system. While all four participants helped me understand what meaning immigrants and refugee students assign to their ELL placements. Additionally, their narratives also helped me explore and understand their identity formation and intersectional navigation in day-to-day schooling.

**Rapport Building with Participants.** I entered the field with an intent to develop rapport with my participants right from the beginning. Madison (2005) notes that “it is important to keep in mind that [developing] rapport is the feeling of comfort, accord, and trust between the [researcher and the participants]” (p. 31). Further, rapport building includes a continuing awareness of our status as researchers and our interest, care and empathy in our participants' sense-making and lived experiences (Noblit, 2004; Saldaña, 2011; Tammivaara & Enright, 1986). When in the field, I consciously attempted to be aware of my status as a researcher while also trying to develop and maintain a trustworthy relationship with my participants. For this reason, I met with each participant at least once prior to conducting the first interview. We discussed who I am and why I wanted to interview them and the importance of this study for students and families, educators, and the school districts. This included traveling two hours to Lake View city to meet Lema and Eli. These visits helped me unpack many of the questions they had prior to conducting interviews. In the next section, I explain the step-by-step data collection and data analysis procedures employed for this study.
Data Collection Procedures

The data collection procedures for the study involved interviews with each of the participants. In addition to recording and transcribing their responses, I also collected expansive field notes of my interview interactions. The semi-structured interview protocol permitted a flexible structure to guide the interactions and to permit further probing for additional data (Carruthers, 1990). The settings for the interviews were determined by the participants and/or their parents. The majority of the interviews were conducted face-to-face, with the final three conducted via Zoom due to the COVID context. The interview protocol and guidelines were developed to correspond with the research questions. Importantly, consistent with the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, I engaged the data collection procedures as conversational, and “co-constructed” the dialogue with my participants through the use of expanded questions and reflections based on my own experiences and understanding of the immigration journey. I included specific efforts to ensure trustworthiness and credibility of the data collection process, including confirmation checks and maintaining reflective journal entries.

Interviews. I used interview designs from Creswell (2013) and Turner III (2010) to obtain thick and rich data of participants’ experiences. I specifically conducted three interviews with each participant. Each interview with the participant lasted between one and a half hour to two hours. All interviews were audio recorded on Zoom and transcribed before the next interview with the participant. I went back to the Zoom transcription and hand typed the missing information while listening to the interview
recording. The transcriptions of the interviews were nearly 500 pages long. I read through each transcription, highlighted the missing information and wrote clarifying questions in addition to the questions that originated from the previous interview. I also kept a reflective journal that helped me keep track of my questions, missing information, and sense making of their experiences. This strategy helped me prepare for the next interview and although I asked clarifying questions in the beginning of the next interview, I did not ask all the questions in a fixed pattern. Rather I let the participants lead the interview with general topics that I wanted to discuss. This open-ended strategy Turner III (2010) helped with participants sharing more stories in relation to the topics at hand. Nancy Mellon (1998), in her book *The Art of Storytelling*, suggests that “because there is a natural storytelling urge and ability in all human beings, even just a little nurturing of this impulse can bring about astonishing and delightful results” (p. 174). I was interested in interviewing participants to understand their rich and in-depth meaning-making and understandings of their social experiences in relation to their multiple intersecting identities in order to answer my research question(s). For certain topics, our conversations made me think of certain literature in the field of DSE and we read excerpts of specific articles that correlated with what my participants shared with me during the interview. That exchange further helped create a respectful relationship with my participants as it generated more thoughtful insights in their own life experiences. However, I was particularly aware of not introducing any excerpt before them sharing similar experiences to avoid guiding them to sharing specific stories and experiences. Rather, I used them as moments of sharing and authenticity while they reflected, dived-in
deeper, and made-meaning of their experiences. For example, during the second interview with Kabaka, he shared the following:

but for me… sometimes it gets frustrating because im trying to be like everybody else… just trying to fit in with the other kids in the class and do the same work as them but its like i cant… im just like . . . mostly i really don’t do that much of study because sometimes i just get mad like I am not going to get this… so why study… and its hard for me to study on my own… and sometimes in the class… i mean i have another teacher in the class… like the small group [in another class] … sometimes… and i don't wanna go with the teacher… i just tell her i wanna stay in the class… but she just says that you have to go… sometimes i don't want to but i just have to… so… yeah… we are doing the same thing but like the one we are doing in the small group[in special ed. class] is not as hard as rest of the class doing… so I tell them i really wanna work like everybody else… like just like the hard one… but its like i have to do the easy one… it sometimes make me mad.

While sharing this, I noticed a change in Kabaka’s body language. His voice was a little quiet as if he was reliving multiple emotions including shame and frustration all at once. For this reason, I asked him if he would like to read something together, and if yes would he like to read from his class reading or something outside of books. When he showed interest in reading something outside of his course texts, I decided to read David Connor’s article “Michael’s story” (2006) together with Kabaka. In this article, Michael, shared his lived and educational experience as being a young Black male with learning disability (LD). We read a few excerpts of the article and then discussed how it made Kabaka feel reading someone else’s experiences. Such nuances helped Kabaka reflect more on his educational experiences about where they differed and related with Michael. It is worth mentioning that Kabaka was very upfront in sharing where his experiences differed. However, reading the article reassured that the struggles that he was going through were authentic and meaningful.
Interview Setting. I interviewed all participants at the location of their and/or their parent’s choosing and their availability. As this study was conducted during the COVID-19 circumstances, I had to change the format of my interviews from face-to-face to zoom interviews. I conducted 14 interviews in total; 11 face to face interviews and 3 interviews via Zoom. The three interviews were third and fourth interviews with Lema and Eli. However, I could not contact Mandla until the COVID-19 situation was resolved and we could resume the interviews. Mandla’s father gave verbal consent in August of 2020. However, as COVID-19 continued, the university restricted conducting interviews one-on-one, and church service closed for certain months in addition to Mandla’s limited internet access. I had to wait until January of the year 2021 so that I could conduct interviews with him. I was finally able to interview him in the Spring 2021. This also pushed the time frame for which the study was originally planned to be completed. For example, I intended to finish all the interviews in the fall of 2020. However, due to COVID-19 restrictions and University policies for re-writing and getting the updated IRB approved, data collection took longer than expected. I finished all the interviews in the Spring of 2021.

Interview Protocol and Guidelines

I adapted the interview guidelines for students (Appendix F) from the dissertation study of Hernández-Saca (2016). The attached interview protocol (Appendix F) is the first draft of interview questions with questions added due to the conversational style of interviews. Hernández-Saca conducted his study with Latino/a middle school students to understand their meaning-making and feelings about being labeled with LD. His study
also explored the idea of LD for students at the nexus of emotion-laden talk and sociocultural and identity intersections. As I was also interested in students’ meaning-making experiences of special education, the questions from Hernández-Saca’s study helped me with the initial set of questions to ask in the first interview. Additionally, in relation to my first and third research question I was also interested in students’ identity formation, cultural meaning attached with dis/ability labels and ELL experiences, I added questions about the perceptions of disability and ELL in cultural contexts (country of origin).

Within my student interview guide, I added questions in relation to students’ immigrant and/or refugee identity at the intersectional of dis/ability and ELL labels. Some examples includes:

- In your opinion, is getting help from the ELL classroom a good thing? If yes, what are the good parts about it? If not, what are the bad parts about it?
- How do you think kids feel about getting ELL help? Or How come? Or Why not?
- How do you think that it [your disability label experiences] differs from another student who is not an immigrant and/or refugee?
- What do you think their experiences are and how do they differ from your experiences of being an immigrant and/or refugee with a disability label?

I also shared my nephew—Esa’s—story and a narrative that he wrote for my study participants (see Appendix F) to share regarding a few of his historically minoritized identities within the U.S. school system. Esa’s narrative helped participants think about their multiple identities and to share a story in relation to their race, gender, and/or
immigrant status and placement within special education and ELL settings. These sets of questions were particularly useful in answering my third research question about students’ intersectional identity navigation in the education system. Both Kabaka and Mandla were receiving ELL services in addition to the special education services, while Lema and Eli also received ELL services at certain times in their K-12 education. I also used various probing questions [e.g., attention, steering, clarification, credibility, evidence] for rich descriptions (see Appendix F for the probing question examples) (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007; Rubin & Rubin, 2011).

Additionally, I used the interview guidelines provided by Patton (1990) and Spradley (1979) when formulating interview questions (Madison, 2005). Specifically, I drew upon Patton’s model for developing:

(a) background demographic questions,
(b) behavior or experience questions,
(c) knowledge questions, and
(d) opinion or value questions.

Knowledge and opinion questions addressed participants’ information and opinions based on their experiences, while behavior and experience questions allowed me to ask questions about participants’ behaviors and their actions based on their previous responses. The student interview protocol had three main sections:

(1) background information (including questions about their country of origin, life in the refugee camps, languages they speak, and early resettlement experiences in the U.S.),
(2) students’ meaning-making of disability and/or ELL services, and
(3) students’ experiences of their multiple and intersectional identities in school

(See Appendix F for the entire interview protocol).

The background questions intended to develop trust, as well as to identify their emerging identity formation across time and space to answer the second research question (Jacob & Ferguson, 2012). Two examples include:

- How many languages do you speak?
- Can you share why your family migrated to the U.S.?

The experience question intended to ask participants’ intersectional experience within schools. This was specifically useful for answering the third research question for the study. The sample questions included:

- When at school can you tell me what it means to be a Black African student who receives English language help in the ELL classroom? and how does it feel?

Similarly, the “why” in the following question is intended to seek the participant’s opinion regarding their favorite and/or least favorite class:

- Which classroom do you like more? Why? Why not?

This inductive approach to developing and asking questions based on the background and experiential data helped me understand my participants’ figured worlds, their idiosyncratic meanings, and the various ways they actively engaged and responded in shaping their worlds (Bogdan & Biklen, 2006; Gerson & Horowitz, 2002).

True to critical form, I also intended to approach my dissertation from the critical disability studies perspective and acknowledge that immigrant/refugee status, English
language superiority, and disability labels are socially constructed within societies that marginalize students within school spaces in many forms and shapes. I intended to excavate the stories of my immigrant and refugee participants to uncover potential marginalization based on students’ multiply situated identities. This is important as first-generation students may experience barriers to education not common to their peers. Therefore, I did not approach this dissertation entirely inductively. Rather, I began with an understanding that many immigrants and refugee students with and without disabilities experience educational inequity in school settings. Special education trajectories, ELL labels, and immigration and/or refugee status are all at play together in shaping their educational and daily life experiences which silences and relegates students to the margins of school settings. Asking questions from this perspective helped me invest in the figured world of participants in learning their views and experiences relative to their personal narratives.

Consistent with the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, I engaged the data collection procedures as conversational, and “co-constructed” the dialogue with my participants. The student interview guidelines were adapted, which I explain later in this chapter, from the dissertation study of Hernández-Saca (2016). I began the interviews by asking these initial sets of questions. During the interview, I expanded these initial questions with comments and/or follow-up questions to let my participants share their experiences and take the lead in the conversation. The reason for these dialogic follow-up exchanges was to help my participants talk about what they wanted to share, and to build on their narratives. I, at times, repeated their sentences verbatim to reinforce what they
said and to probe the meaning further. This was important for two reasons; (1) to center their voice and value their experience, and (2) assume an empathic stance and view the experiences from their lens.

Within hermeneutic phenomenology, the role of researcher is both data collector and an “empathetic traveler” –an “insider status” that enables one to facilitate trust and confidence and allows the researcher to establish rapport early and throughout data collection (Eatough & Smith, 2017). I asked follow-up questions with probing to gain rich experiential understanding. I also asked member checking questions in the follow-up interviews (Sandelowski, 1993). This was not done only in the beginning of the next interview. I, instead, also asked member checking questions throughout next sets of interviews as the topic repeated in conversation. This helped with the flow of conversation in a natural way and facilitated trust and confidence between my participants and myself. In the Table below, I share two examples of how the dialogic interviews were conducted. The first column represents the planned interview question with the follow-up question and/or comment that expanded the dialogue. Third column illustrates examples of member checking questions to develop rigor and trustworthiness, while the last column represents excerpts from my reflective journaling as appeared in my fieldnotes in relation to the specific dialogue.
Table 2

Hermeneutics Data Collection Procedures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Planned Interview Protocol</th>
<th>Follow-up Question or Comment to Expand Dialogue*</th>
<th>Confirmation: Example of Member Checking Question or Comment (rigor, trustworthiness) **</th>
<th>Excerpt from Reflective Journal Entry OR field notes of Dialogue</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Example 1:</strong></td>
<td>Now that you have told me your experiences when you need more help, can you tell me what you think or feel is the reason that students receive IEP services or extra help?</td>
<td>So last time we talked about your school experiences, and your feelings about school and receiving IEP services. You shared that your dad told you that “it’s the way you got to think about yourself. If you think negative about yourself then it would turn out to be negative and if you think positive and think you do not have a “disability”, things will be positive” (verbatim from first interview). Would you like to expand on that or share more about it?</td>
<td>What Kabaka shared in today’s interview is the complexity and multiple layers of interpretation of his experiences with special ed. While he likes receiving extra time and support within the special ed. classroom or with counselor, he also struggles with not internalizing the deficit and medical version of explaining disability at the intersections. Such as at times explaining disability as something inside himself or his “brain”, while other times externalizing it by statements such as “sometimes I do need help and sometimes I don’t … because most of the stuff they give me is really easy for me”. Talking about his intersectional experiences with race and disability, Kabaka also highlighted what scholars in the field call interconnectedness of race and ability (Annamma et al., 2013). Such as he often associated whiteness with “smartness”. For example, in one of our exchanges he stated “because like when in school … in class</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
mostly … white kids like, they like know more, most of the stuff like a lot more than black kids … in like my classes like science or math or yeah literacy…” Such complexity is a common theme found in literature concerning students’ identity work and development of sense of self (Gonzalez et al., 2017; Iqtadar et al., 2020). When probed why he thinks that they are better in literacy and other classes, Kabaka shared: “coz they were born here… They went to the elementary schools or kindergarten here… I came here in 5th grade so yeah I just got from Africa to the Midwest…” (February 21, 2020)

Example 2:

Growing up, what did you like most and least about living as a refugee in the U.S. and why?

So, you said you did not like seeing yourself through a color line, what is the reason for that? And why would you say that “Black people in America are not the same as Africans?”

So, you mean you were taught that back in the camps that Black people in America are not the same as Africans? Who taught you that? Do you find that to be true now living in the U.S.?

Lema and her family were taught systemic racism against African Americans by U.S. officials in the camps, before they moved to the U.S. This is extremely problematic, especially learning, and internalizing racism against a group of people. Not to mention that even as a kid. She later connected it with her fear of African Americans that she grew up with and never really felt or liked calling herself an African American in school. She was fortunate to receive college education, and had exposure to working with African American students in college. I think this helped her investigate her implicit biases about African Americans. However, now calling herself an African American since she received citizenship often makes her question her female African American identity in the U.S. For her, it is more complex than it appears…
In Table 2, the first example represents one of the questions I asked Kabaka about the IEP assistance in school. The question was then expanded to confirm his experiences and feelings, and to invite more description about the school services. As I added comments from the reflective journal, I recognized the complex nature of intersectionality and his struggle with understanding dis/ability with other markers of difference. In the second example, the question about living as a Black refugee was expanded to inquire about Lema’s fear of being called an African American growing up. My notes from the reflective journal indicated her college experiences of attending a class with other African American students which helped her unpack and unlearn the hidden biases and racism she learned growing up. Such experiences also impacted her understanding of her multiple identities in U.S. society.

In both examples, this co-construction of the data revealed the first stage of double hermeneutic strategy where I tried to make sense of participants’ experiences by trying to make sense of their experiences. Stated simply, the follow-up questions or comments, member checking, conversational style was an attempt to help the participants think through their educational experiences and share in length. My reflective journal entries also served as one of the components of this phase where I bring my own interpretation of the situations (Foster, 2009).

Maintaining fieldnotes. I kept a journal where I maintained detailed notes about the time I spent in participants home, the dialogues and interaction that occurred between family members and themselves, overall home setting and the neighborhood where they
lived, as well as my observations in the field such as the church (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). In this journal, I also kept my reflective journal entries of the interviews as I kept going back to it after transcribing, reading, and re-reading each interview. In this journal I also made notes about those in the surrounding or those who volunteered to participate in interview(s), added clarifying questions, recorded additional thoughts and questions, as well as added my analytic reflections of the analytic decisions I made during this study (Glaser & Strauss, 1967). This process was useful in reading the transcripts in a dialogic and cyclic manner to sort and group (Corbin & Strauss, 2008) participants’ direct quotes, my observer comments and reflective notes, as well as analytic memos (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007) into finding commonalities and differences in their experiences. Following is one example of how I grouped an excerpt of Kabaka’s experience and my reflection of the quote from my journal entry under an emerging pattern of racist jokes.

**Kabaka:** “like some of my friends are from Marshal Island so they normally make Black jokes and say something like the reason because I am so dark is I have been in sun… its funny… stuff like that… stuff like when am I gonna take water back to Africa? They think its funny… but i dont know its not really funny… sometimes it really get on my nerves… make me mad… that’s why I just hate telling people where i am from…so I hide it” (Interview: feb 21, 2020)

**Reflective Note:** Erasure of identity occurs in many ways. The deficit ideologies that are wrongfully associated with Kabaka’s identities made him change/not wanting to share or talk freely about his background and identity because he is aware of these deficit views about his different identities. It is also a strategy that Kabaka employs to live his day-to-day schooling. But the psychological and emotional impact of these deficit views (for example “sometimes it really gets on my nerves . . . make me mad” coercively impact students’ identity work and force them to hide their multidimensional identities in an attempt to become American (both in language and behavior).
This process of sorting and grouping helped me move fluidly between the overall phenomenon of participants’ experiences, and the initial codes that I observed, hence supporting my understanding of their experiences.

Data Analysis Procedures

Data analysis began simultaneously with the data collection procedures, which I termed hermeneutic circle (see Figure 4). Bogdan and Biklen (1982) termed this as in-field analysis. My in-field analysis included immersing myself into transcripts with iterative reading as preliminary interpretations to facilitate coding and my reflection in the form of reflective journal and fieldnotes entries and emerging thoughts as documented in the form of analytical memos (Ajjawi & Higgs, 2007). I revisited the data after every interview to identify the emerging questions and/or point of discussions for the next meeting. At the beginning of the next interview, I revisited these points with the participants for additional questions and queries by moving between this emerging data, and narrative (Bogdan & Biklen, 1982). Following the tradition of hermeneutic phenomenology, my initial codes emerged from this interactive process of in-field analysis, including an interpretation based on the a priori codes emerged from the qualitative research synthesis (QRS), the theoretical and conceptual frameworks, and the empirical literature I was immersed in and my personal positionality—which I termed researcher constructs (Suddick et al., 2020; Table 3). The analytic codes (see Table 4) represent the hermeneutic circle of this immersion into the transcript data, theoretical and empirical literature, and the participant and researcher constructs (Koch, 1995; Suddick et al., 2020). From an analysis of the initial coding, categorical construction was developed
based on concepts from the Racial-Ethnic Identity formation model (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) From a constant-comparative analysis across the constructed categories for all participants, themes emerged and were described. The circle also depicts measures undertaken to establish the credibility and trustworthiness of the data analysis, including analytic memos and peer debriefing.
Hermeneutic circle and data analysis. Table 3 and Table 4—adapted from Ajjawi and Higgs (2007), and Suddick et al. (2020)—show the research hermeneutic praxis for this study. The tables represent meanings within the researcher's horizon of understanding, hermeneutic circle and attitude, as well as researcher’s dialogue with the text/description. As qualitative analysis is never about “getting it right” (Foley, 2002; Radigan et al., 2002), the codes established demonstrate how social life is plural, fluid, socially constructed, and includes the reflexive interpretation of the researcher (myself). Once analytic codes were generated, I then organized these codes into integrated categories. This was done by organizing and grouping the initial analytic codes into
similar categories (buckets & baskets) that shared similar characteristics (Corbin & Strauss, 2008; Saldaña, 2013). Credibility, faithfulness, authenticity and trustworthiness were maintained in the data analysis phase of this study by peer debriefing with my Co-Chairs, Dr. Susan Etscheidt and Dr. David Hernández-Saca, in addition to examining the analytic memos (Creswell, 1998; Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). The final tier of the analysis involved the formation of themes through the construction of a plausible explanatory framework in response to the research questions asked in the study. I used constant-comparative methods to compare and contrast data among and between the final categories (Charmaz, 2005, 2006). This final phase of the analysis helped bring meaning and coherence to the categories by generating themes (see Table 5). These themes are embedded in constructs employed from the theories of DREI framework, DisCrit, CDS and intersectional dis/ablism. The employment of CDS and DisCrit frameworks revealed problematic structural constructions associated with these first-generation participants’ identity formation, including anti-Blackness, White supremacy, deficit thinking, ability supremacy, linguistic hegemony, and \textit{racism without racist} rhetoric. These themes presented and arranged as findings to answer the three research questions asked in this study.
Table 3

Data Analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Participant Constructs: Reading Initial Coding and Categorization</th>
<th>Researcher Personal Constructs: Reflecting on participant experiences with researcher’s personal knowledge/experiences</th>
<th>Integrated Participant and Researcher Constructs: Establishing Categories and Themes</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Immersion into transcripts/text with iterative reading as preliminary interpretations to facilitate coding</td>
<td>Rereading transcripts through personal experiential lens</td>
<td>Described as “hermeneutic circle” representing movement between the transcript data, the participant and researcher constructs, integrated categories, and the evolving themes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I transcribed and read each interview transcript after each interview</td>
<td>I re-read each transcript from personal experiences lens</td>
<td>Represented in Table 4</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Coding* of Transcripts – across all interviews with participant

I then began the coding of the transcripts. My initial codes of participants’ experiences included an interpretation based on the a priori codes emerged from the qualitative research synthesis (QRS) I conducted, theoretical and empirical literature related with first generation immigrants and refugees that I was immersed in and my personal positionality. Examples of these codes are represented in Table four.

| Expanding or adapting participant codes to reflect personal knowledge/experience first day of school, individualistic, racial identity, who am I? learning from others, teaching styles, different ways of learning, internalizing linguicism. | Emerging themes from the categorical constructions which represent the structure of the experience with rich, thick descriptions. | Represented in Table 5 |
# Table 4

Hermeneutic circle process for data analysis

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>a priori codes</th>
<th>Researcher constructs</th>
<th>Codes from the transcripts</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>QRS Project and Systematic Literature Review</td>
<td>Personal experiences, theoretical and empirical literature</td>
<td>Initial Codes</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>It’s all racism, white supremacy, mental illness, he is a criminal, Black kid driving, education will take me out, problematic label Rejecting ableism, Fix Deficit ideologies, only appears in school context not inherent, Testing &amp; competition, Lowered expectations, Normal like others, it’s not disability, it’s the system, Misleading label, Prejudice, Disability is a social construct, created category, code switching</td>
<td>first day of school, individualistic, racial identity, who am I? learning from others, teaching styles, different ways of learning, internalizing linguicism, learning and unlearning anti-Black racism, White supremacy, divorcing oneself from the neighborhoods, deficit thinking about other people of Color, social class hierarchies, studying in White majority institutions of power</td>
<td>school means learning, small class, helps with reading, small group don't wanna go there, makes me mad, not as hard, easy stuff, let’s me stay, feeling othered stay with them, “normal” English, becoming American, retaliate, racist language</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Table 5

*Thematic integration*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>DERI Categorical Construction</th>
<th>Thematic Integration (embedded in CDS, DisCrit, intersectional dis/ablism, and cultural hegemony through linguistic, racial, and social class (re)production and maintenance)</th>
<th>Sub Themes Within &amp; Across Data</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>critical analysis expansions</strong></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Knowledge and understanding about race, dis/ability, culture and ethnicity</td>
<td>Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life</td>
<td>deficit medical model of dis/ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>(un)learning anti-Black racism, culture of poverty rhetoric,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>racism without racist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>deficit oriented blame the victim approach,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>American exceptionalism, myth of American dream,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>political, structural, educational and social class differences between immigrants and refugees,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>becoming the “Other” coming to the U.S.,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>redlining,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Educational Opportunities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>limited resources and teachers in neighborhood schools,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ELL placement,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>ELL and special ed. classes as rooted in deficit orientation, marginalization, and seclusion,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>“dis/ability” and difference-based segregation,</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Dis/ability Construction and Special Education as a Formalized Service.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Hegemony and Opportunities Relative to Race and Cultural Status</td>
<td>Privileging the Self-Selected Voice</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Self-reference or self-labeling for race, dis/ability, culture and ethnicity</td>
<td>racism without racist</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Centrality and Salience of race, dis/ability, culture and ethnic identity</td>
<td>racial solidarity with other Black students</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>systemic teaching of anti-Black racism and deficit thinking, culture of poverty</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Centrality and Salience of race, dis/ability, culture and ethnic identity</th>
<th>Salience within Multidimensional Identities</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>internalization of racism and ableism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Communal Attachment and Detachment with race, dis/ability, culture and ethnicity</th>
<th>Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Ability” Referencing.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Dis/ability Detachment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>racism without racist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>learning and unlearning racism and ableism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School’s Unwelcoming Practices.</th>
<th>Global White ability supremacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Dis/ability Identity and Special Education Services.</td>
<td>deficit medical model approach of dis/ability</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>“Othering” students with dis/abilities</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>racism without racist</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>anti-Black racism</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>multiply marginalized</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>racialized environment and territories in classrooms, agency to unlearn racism, myth of American dream and American exceptionalism</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Impact of Social Class on Attachments and Friendships.  

social and economic capital
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social and psycho-emotional integration (exclusion, marginalization, oppression)</th>
<th>Intersectional Disablism</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>social class differences</strong></td>
<td><strong>redlining</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>intersection of race, class, and refugee status, White hegemony, education debt, Dis/ability Identity and Special Education Services.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Experiencing racism</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting deficit views about accent teaching of racism by UNHCR</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Color-evasiveness</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Boundaries between General Education and Special Education Services: Who Creates the Rules?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Teacher-Student Interactions and Relationships in Identity Development.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying and Racism and the Psychosocial/Emotional Construction of Identity.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identity Construction in the Post-School Context.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Resisting the deficit perceptions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>model minority</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Bullying and Racism and the Psychosocial/Emotional Construction of Identity</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Identity accommodation, adaptation, conformity, assimilation, internalization, Resistance, activism, or passivity (race, dis/ability, culture and ethnicity)</th>
<th>Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Whiteness as Smartness.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Linguistic Assimilation and Multicultural Events.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Navigating Friendships and Cultural Hegemony among Peers.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Resisting Hegemony in the Classroom.

Multi Assimilation

culture of poverty, anti-Black racism, myth of American dream and American Exceptionalism, manifest destiny, cultural hegemony, dominance through teaching history a certain way, ideologies, agency, deficit thinking about race and social class, American dream

Personal Assimilation in the School Culture.

ideals of individualism and ability centrism - rooted in “productivity”

linguistic difference-deficit-dis/ability

Resisting dis/ability Identity and Special Education Services.

resisting dis/ability identity

ESL/ELL as Formalized Assimilation.

segregation based on race, culture and linguistic backgrounds

The Difference-Deficit-Dis/ability Construction.

Personalized Assimilation: The Accent Journey.

forced assimilation
tracking bilingual students through ability grouping

Tensions within the Formalized Assimilation of the ELL Program.

segregation based on social class, racial hierarchies and cultural and linguistic differences

power dynamics
Ethics in Qualitative Research

I began this study as an “ethical and moral task” that required notable ethical considerations (Smith, 1993). While I outlined some of the formal ethical considerations here, I shared examples for readers about how I approached ethics as a process throughout the data collection and analysis process. According to the University of Northern Iowa’s Institutional Review Board (IRB), people with cognitive impairments and those with limited ability to understand English language are considered a vulnerable population. While I do not agree with the use of terminology here, I understand that both groups have historically been subject to certain atrocities in the name of “research.” This understanding is specifically rooted in my commitment to Disability Studies in Education (DSE). Describing immigrants’ arrival at Ellis Island in the early 20th century, Dolmage (2018) explained that immigrant populations have historically been subject to scientific scrutiny and scientific racism. This scientific scrutiny of people’s behavior, their body language and limited English language abilities have historically led to marginalizing this group in the United States.

Throughout this study, I was sensitive to this history and the political circumstance. I made efforts to limit the risks (including physical, emotional and psychological) to students and their parents. This included conducting interviews as per their availability, and informing them that they may withdraw from the study or take breaks during the interviews without repercussion. I sought a parental permission form (Appendix E) in addition to participant consent form from both Kabaka and Mandla’s parents, considering they were under 18 years at the time of this study. I also invited the
parents to be present during the student interviews if they choose to be a part of the interview conversations.

Confidentiality was also a very important aspect of this study. To maintain participants’ privacy, I conducted interviews at locations that were considered private and secure from participants’ perspective (Thomas & Magilvy, 2011). I conducted all interviews with Kabaka and interviews with Mandla at their home and one interview with Mandla was conducted at his church’s conference room. All interviews with Lema and Eli were conducted at Christian Compound (Lema’s workplace). To avoid interruptions in her shared office space, Lema suggested interviewing in one of the rooms specified for tutoring the refugee students and adults. Throughout this study, I used pseudonyms for all participants, cities, as well as locations where my participants worked. I also kept participant data (including signed consent forms), and the electronic deidentified data files in a secure location for analysis in my department office.

For the purpose of this study, I maintained trustworthiness and credibility during the data collection phase as member checks and reflective journal entries. Additionally, due to time constraints, location accessibility, and new job responsibilities I could not achieve the exit checks with my study participants. However, another way I achieved trustworthiness and credibility is through extensive peer-debriefing with my co-chairs and constant comparative analysis of the data analytic memos.

Prior to conducting this study, I was under the assumption that some questions might appear uncomfortable for my participants to respond to such as those related with a) immigration and/or refugee status, b) resettlement experiences as well as their c)
negative schooling experiences. This was specifically because of the available literature about the trauma associated with refugee resettlement experiences (Suárez-Orozco & Suárez-Orozco, 2001). I shared with my participants that they could take breaks if needed. To my surprise none of my participants wanted to hold back on their cultural experiences or experiences as immigrants and refugees. As a matter of fact, they shared in detail about their process of resettlement and felt proud of sharing their culturally rich and diverse experiences. I understand, there have been few studies that are conducted with immigrant and/or refugee students receiving special education services (e.g., Elder, 2015; Migliarini, 2017a). There also may not be many opportunities for immigrant/refugee students receiving these services to share their day-to-day schooling and experiences.

In contrary, I did observe paralinguistic changes (such as lowering of volume, pitch, or intonation) when they shared individual experiences in relation with white supremacy, racism, and ableism in their day-to-day life in the U.S. Since these were related with sensitive topics and areas of discussion, I approached their responses with utmost respect. These sudden signs alerted me about participants’ discomfort with the topic of discussion and I made decisions accordingly about next sets of questions or to end the interview as appropriate. Since the interview protocol was more conversational, at times I asked my participants if they would like to continue with the interview or needed to take a break. By including these humane and ethical dimensions in the data collection phase, I centered the voices of my participants in this study (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 1997).
In the next chapter, I discuss the findings of this study as emerged from the data analysis. I discuss these findings under six themes across participants adopted from the Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic Racial Identity Formation framework, CDS, DisCrit, and cultural hegemony (Anamma et al., 2013; De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005; Forgacs, 1988; Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), and participants’ narratives.
CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

Chapter four discusses the findings of this study. The results of the data analysis emerged into six themes (see Figure 5) across participants adopted from the Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic Racial Identity Formation framework (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). Data for each theme is discussed for each participant individually. First two participants, Kabaka and Mandla, received special education services, while all four participants received English as a second language services in U.S. schools. At the time of this study, Kabaka was an eighth grader and Mandla was about to graduate high school in a few weeks. Both Lema and Eli were in their thirties and reflected on their K-14 education in the Midwest.

The first theme described participants’ understanding of their intersectional identities in U.S. schools and society and discussed their early resettlement experiences in U.S. Participants described their understanding of the U.S. formalized ELL and special education systems, and the ways in which language differences influence their placement decisions by the school systems. The second and third theme discussed the salience of participants’ multidimensional identities by privileging the self-selected voice. These themes, merged as one theme in Kabaka, Mandla and Eli’s narratives, and discussed how the four participants self-identified with their ethnic-cultural selves in relation to the racial identities in the U.S. society. The fourth theme discussed participants' multidimensional sense of belonging and navigation of their intersectional experiences in the U.S. Within theme five, their psychological, emotional, and social experiences,
including the cultural racism and bullying they experienced in U.S. schools and society, are documented. Finally, theme six elaborated their neutralized assimilation and visible resistance to the bullying, racism, ELL and special education placement and the deficit ideologies associated with their multiply marginalized identities in the U.S.

Figure 5

Thematic Formation

The first section for the findings chapter begins with Kabaka’s narrative, and is followed by Mandla, Lema and Eli. The reason I begin with Kabaka and Mandla is their K-12 placement during the time of this study, and their discussion of the construction of dis/ability identity and special education placement in addition to receiving ELL services in schools.
KABAKA’S NARRATIVE
“coz they were born here”: Kabaka’s Lived and Educational Experiences

Kabaka’s educational journey in the U.S. was in comparison to his understanding of the Liberian education system and the impact of the economy on the educational opportunities for students in the two countries. He discussed his education trajectory in the U.S. as compared to his U.S. born peers and discussed that “smartness” is interchangeably used with “whiteness” in U.S. schools. To him, his white peers appeared to be “smarter” in academics because they received elementary education in the U.S. and already knew the system. He shared a sense of belonging to his cultural and ethnic, and racial identity, however, he did not feel a communal attachment with the school system. The reason for this lack of attachment was associated with the consistent bullying he received in the school, by educators and peers alike, and how he was made to feel less intelligent in the school spaces. Kabaka shared his lack of contentment with his special education placement, and shared that he only needed these services when in school. Outside of school he often figured things out himself. From a DSE and DisCrit perspective, Kabaka, at times also represented deficit thinking and language, such as “smart”, and “mentally and physically” “fit”. Finally, he discussed the benefits of receiving extra help and support by the special education teacher, but discussed the detriment of not receiving such support in the general education classroom.

Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life

Kabaka’s understanding of his cultural and ethnic identity in U.S. society presented itself in economic, cultural, racial and educational experiences. He compared the educational experiences and opportunities between the two cultures of Liberia and the
U.S. and expressed its overall relevance to the U.S. economic stability. Some of Kabaka’s accounts represented ableist language such as “being smart”. He also expressed learning better when he worked with his peers from other cultures, and did not think he needed teacher’s help all the time. He paid much attention to the role of education in one’s life, and stressed that U.S. citizens are more “smart” because they received primary education in this society. Kabaka discussed the relevance of special education as a formalized service in the U.S. education system. Finally, he discussed the widely prevalent racism against Black people in the U.S. society and schools.

Kabaka understood that the economic standing of Liberia and the U.S. is different. For example, he shared that “like comparing the U.S. with Liberia just to get here [U.S.] is hard. You have to spend a lot of money, go through a lot of processes” He compared the education system in the two countries and discussed the impact of the economy on education and how it presents different educational opportunities for students:

to get the scholarship here is, I mean it's not easy but it's a lot easier than to get a scholarship in Liberia . . . because to get a scholarship in Liberia it costs you money . . . and you have to be “smart” to get everything you got . . . so it's hard to get a scholarship there . . . And for sports you can get a scholarship for sports here . . . in Liberia . . . the only sport that you can get a scholarship for is soccer . . . and you have to be really really good to get a scholarship coz not everybody’s dreams come true in there . . . so you have to be as good . . . like the best in the town or the best in the city you are living in to get a scholarship there . . .

Kabaka understood that within U.S. culture his racial, cultural and ethnic identity was never going to change and shared that the stigmas attached with his identities are widespread in society as well as the school system. He shared an interaction with police in the following way:
The police suspect almost all black kids like to be bad, to be criminals and stuff like that. For example, one time we're playing soccer up in the front like right here and then a cop came. He said I just came to say hi. Then my friend just picked up and started to run. For some reason I stayed there until the cop came in. He jumped out of the car. Why are they running? Did they do anything or steal anything? That's the first thing he said. I was like I don't know, they're just running because they are afraid of you or something . . . Yeah because we are black . . . there were other white people there but he told this to only us . . .

He understood that since the bias and racist assumptions about his multiple intersecting identity markers are not going to change, he needs to be a more involved member of society when it comes to knowing his rights and laws. He stated:

Yeah, I don't really focus much attention on all the stuff. And I'm not into anything, I didn't do nothing and that's one of the reasons why, when I am in High School, I wanna take the law class. Coz I see videos of the cops trying to do a legal search on Black people when they're not allowed to. they try to do it . . . and if the person doesn't know anything about our law, they don’t know their rights.

Educational Opportunities. Kabaka’s understanding of the cultural differences of Liberia and the U.S. also presented in the education systems. He differentiated himself culturally from his U.S. peers and shared that he thinks that people are more educated here. He shared: “but yeah here . . . people get more education here than where I am from . . . it's like . . . they expect you to be smart . . . so for some reason everybody expected me to be like them.”

In terms of education support, Kabaka shared that he did not feel a need for teacher’s help all the time. Based on his experiences in the classroom he felt comfortable working by himself:
Sometimes, I don't. I don't ask nobody but just myself. Sometimes, I say, I probably don't really need teacher’s help. Damn, I just plan to do my work by myself and keep myself in my own control, and then I'll be fine.

He further stressed the importance of education in the families where parents have been to college: “so we're like since the family has been going to college, they start at a really young age for reading, writing and that really helps them in the future…” Comparing the two cultures, Kabaka shared:

But for us . . . I mean I started going to school at a young age . . . but . . . I still didn’t understand nothing . . . because the only thing I can remember right now is the school we were going to, there were a lot of other little kids in it. Yeah.

In one of our sittings together, both Kabaka and Mandla explained a few major differences between U.S. and Liberian English to the researcher. The interaction went like this:

Kabaka: how you say like, I mean, I just say like, for us, we cut most of the words short . . . So instead of like what language do you speak you would say “what language you speak”? making it short.

Mandla: some of the words are like there is no like “the” sound

Kabaka: Yeah, like Americans use that . . .
Let me say the things that we say things like la thing [lighting].
Yeah, la thing. So see how like he said lighting we just say “la” thing.

Within the U.S. schools, Kabaka understood that his educational trajectory was also influenced by the special education system.

Dis/ability Construction and Special Education as a Formalized Service. Kabaka shared his knowledge and understanding about dis/ability construction and the need for
special education services. He understood that special education services are for students who need extra help in academics (including reading, writing, and Math):

Kids who need help . . . extra help . . . and normally other kids who are in class are the ones who really need help . . . special education is for the kids who normally need teacher help . . . like if they don't really understand stuff, the teacher helps them understand.

He shared how receiving special education services has helped him “go slow”:

So it's the class that I go to . . . the class with a small number . . . for reading . . . it helps me go slow . . . coz most of the time when I am reading I make mistakes and get lost where I am at so it helps me a lot . . . for reading and spelling . . .

When asked about the first individualized education program (IEP) meeting and how he was introduced to special education services, Kabaka shared that he and his family were informed by the teacher that he will begin receiving special education services. He shared:

I mean we went together and so the teacher was telling Pastor King and my dad how I was doing and she said I was doing good in this class, and she said that I might need help in the other class. Then after that she said my reading level is like a 4th grader level. I mean, I am not pretty sure about that. I don’t really believe that. I would say my reading is getting better.

Kabaka was not provided an explanation of special education services:

I don't think they really explained it. I mean they just told me that and to the teacher. They just introduced me to the teacher and said that you will work with this teacher for a year. I said okay . . . They just said it will help me get better in everything. They said in every class.

Kabaka understood that his racial, cultural and ethnic identity represents within all walks of life: educational, economic, and/or social experiences. He compared the educational opportunities between Liberia and the U.S. and discussed how these were
related to the country’s overall economic situation. He also compared himself with his U.S. born peers when discussing education, however, he shared that U.S. citizens are “smart” in academics because they received primary education in this country. Finally, he discussed the relevance of special education services for providing extra support and assistance with academics. He was not aware of how special education services were determined or provided. He was aware that the services helped him “go slow” however he also discussed that he is improving in academics. The next theme discusses Kabaka’s self-identification as an African and his lack of attachment to the special education placement and dis/ability identity.

Privileging the Self-Selected Voice: Salience within Multidimensional Identities

Kabaka self-identified as African, and gave importance to his racial, cultural and ethnic identity and his physical strength. For Kabaka, everyone is good at something, and his strength and skills are represented in physical strength as compared to his U.S. peers who Kabaka understood as more knowledgeable in academics. He further discussed differences in U.S. and Liberian English. Kabaka centralized his cultural-racial identity. He did not self-identify with dis/ability or with special education placement.

Kabaka shared that previously he did not like discussing his culture because of the cultural racism and bullying he experienced at school. However, he learned over time that he should be proud of his cultural and racial identity.

so they normally make Black jokes and say something like the reason I am so dark is I have been in the sun, stuff like when am I gonna take water back to Africa? Sometimes it really gets on my nerves, makes me mad. That’s why I would just hate telling people where I am from. So I would just keep that to myself . . . Well, now I gotta love who I am. I mean even if people make fun I tell them where I am from . . . I mean the system is for them [U.S. born citizens]
Kabaka also centralized his physical strength:

I mean I might not be as good as them, or as smart as them at this stuff [academics] but there's something else I’m better at than them. For example, when it comes to sports, no one likes to compare, challenge me, especially sports like track, football, and wrestling, especially wrestling. Nope. Nobody compares me, not even the coach.

Kabaka had goals and future plans to join the Marine Corps. As indicated above, he believed that people are good at different things and he is good at sports. He also shared his future aspiration to join the Marine Corps because he was “mentally” and “physically” strong. In his words: “I mean, it's really about strength. You got to be mentally strong and physically strong. I want to join the Marines.” Kabaka did not identify with dis/ability and shared a communal detachment with special education students.

Non-Salience of Dis/ability Identity. Kabaka did not see himself as a student with dis/ability. While he did express the need for receiving extra help and services, he shared that not many general education peers know that he is in a special education classroom. He said that “Nobody knows that I’m in that class. So the teacher has really helped us compare with other classes.”

Kabaka self identified as a “slow reader”. In the following quote, he shared the struggle when he tried to read fast, and the fact that reading at a slower pace helps:

I would say right now I am at like 50 percent [at reading] because like the thing that really holds me back when I am reading, most of the words I am going to know but then I am like a slow reader. I have to think about what the word says before I read it. I can’t think about it and just start to read it at the same time, and
if I make a mistake on it I have to like to read and think what the word says then I try to read fast

When probed what helped Kabaka in classes with reading or writing he shared that it is easier when people read:

like when people are reading it gets easier. When I get stuck on the stuff it's like, I'm like am I overthinking this or is it just the answer is right there but I just can’t see it, it just gets hard for me. I just want to give up and leave

“Ability” Referencing. In the beginning of his cultural transition, Kabaka discussed his dis/ability as:

At first I was thinking it was too late. It was because I was born with something or it was just something wrong with my brain. Sometimes when people talk like, sometimes you know you are not understanding them well

While Kabaka shared that being “slow” at reading sometimes made him question if there is something “wrong” with his brain or his abilities, he also countered these thoughts by not identifying as someone with a disability:

but my dad was explaining to me this morning that it's the way I gotta think of myself. Like if I keep thinking negative about myself, that’s what gonna happen. If i think positive, that's what gonna happen, if i keep trying and take time to study

Kabaka also viewed himself in relation to others. He stated that “Yeah (extremely low voice) since like, when I first got here in 5th grade, everybody in my class was “smarter” than me so everybody was “smarter” than me. I didn't understand nothing.”
His understanding of the self gradually shifted from viewing himself from a special education or dis/ability lens to identifying his goals in life. He self-referred in relation to others, by identifying his strengths and goals in life. Such as he shared:

I am thinking of being in the military, the marines. I mean one of my teachers in 7th grade said her son joined the marine . . . Like they say when you are done with high school, you can join if you want, or like in high school 10th grade. I think my dad said maybe when I am in the 10th grade he is gonna put me in the marine . . . then right after school I'm going to go to marine. I can go to a school for a military degree so when I am done with the military college I can join the marine. It will just be like I can be a captain, be a soldier

Kabaka discussed a lack of salience of his disability identity and a communal detachment with other special education students.

Dis/ability Detachment. Kabaka differentiated himself from his special education peers. He shared being marginalized and excluded from the general education classroom and curriculum, which he found problematic and resisted. While on the one hand, his narratives depicted countering the deficit oriented special education placement, while on the other hand he also distanced himself from his special education peers and demonstrated a deficit orientation towards his peers with dis/abilities.

Kabaka differentiated himself from other kids in the special education classroom. He shared:

for the other kids, they're fine with that but for like me. Because like for them, they have teachers following them. So they're like, they don't really get a lot of stuff. They don't understand a lot of stuff. I don't understand a lot of stuff too. But I'm like, I can do it on my own
In another instance he shared:

I mean sometimes for other people, I don't really like it. But they're probably different from the other kids in there cuz like, like for other students like they're probably gonna be like looking around everybody's doing the work but they don't know what to do and they're stuck on something.

In yet another instance, Kabaka shared his view of how other kids have more needs and his needs are different from these “other” students in the special education classroom. For example in the following two quotes he shared:

Benjamin and Thomas are assigned to Miss. Lang and Miss Becky, actually they take them to their classes, but sometimes she helps them out, they have more needs. Coz like for example, like one of them needs help with writing some time… [for me] well if I get stuck at that word then yeah [I need help], but sometimes my teachers just tell me to sign out the word, to help to say it out

Well it's [special education class] like kids who really need help, like with learning and understanding stuff but umm, because they can't do that on their own. And sometimes more than learning it's more than reading or writing, it's like, sometimes worse. They don’t sometimes, they use stuff like, to tell the teacher what they want

For Kabaka, his exclusion from the general education classroom without his consent was problematic. He shared:

I mean I have another teacher in the class, like in the small group. Sometimes, coz some of my friends don't really have teachers helping them, they do it on their own. Sometimes I get mad and don't wanna go with the teacher. I just tell her I wanna stay in the class, but she just says that you have to go, sometimes I don't want to but I just have to

Yet Kabaka shared how he felt being excluded and marginalized within general education classes, when his needs were not met:
Especially for some classes if you are reading too slow [and] everybody else is reading too fast and they are done with it . . . the teacher goes to the next slide, and if you are still reading you don’t get to finish and then start reading from the next slide. You just can do nothing about it sitting there.

He added that work in the special education classroom is not as “hard” as the general education classes:

I mean it's like we are doing the same thing but like the one we are doing in the group is not as hard as the rest of the class. So I tell them I really wanna work like everybody else, just like the hard one, but it's like I have to do the easy one, it sometimes makes me mad.

In another way, he shared the contention of not being given a chance of being in the general education setting for most of the time. He said:

but in general education learn more like, you know, they're like way over that they're just learning more. Yeah. And I mean I can keep up with the general education but it's just I am not given a chance. Teachers don't let me. They don't give me a chance to learn and they won’t give me a chance. like let me just go there and see what I wanna do.

Kabaka further expanded that the need for special education services mostly arises in school spaces. He often figured things out himself outside of the school. Such as:

Mostly in school like I mean most of the time I know most of the stuff but mostly it's in the school. Sometimes it's outside the school as well, but outside the school I normally figure it out but in school I struggle on it. Like at Sunday school there is this one test where we were talking about the bible and then they got the answers on a paper. It was me, Zack, Mandla and Jackson. So Mandla got stuck on most of the things, he ain’t know most of the things. I got stuck on a few things but I mostly figured out the answers.
Spending most of his time in a special education classroom in school and not being able to receive quality education made Kabaka insist that he would not want to be in special education for long. He resisted the idea that if receiving special education “help” meant being separated from other kids [in general education], he would not want to be in a special education classroom in high school. He shared:

but one of my teacher told me that, the special needs one, she told me that it will help me up to high school and possibly college and I heard that I mean okay all right but I didn’t know what she meant by help. If she means by separating from the other kids, if it’s like that I probably won’t do it

However, Kabaka discussed placement in general education in comparison to peers:

like when people are reading it gets easier. When I get stuck on the stuff it’s like I'm like am I overthinking this or is it just the answer is right there but I just can’t see it. It just gets hard for me. I just want to give up and leave

He also shared his disapproval when he did not receive help in general education. Kabaka stated:

I would say like being a part, you’re just sitting there stuck on something and watching everybody else doing their work. Some people are done. Teacher gave them free time to tell everybody hasn’t done. I mean you have to do it yourself. So yeah that’s the part I don’t really like

Kabaka’s self-identification was prominent as a Black African in his classes. He did not self-identify with dis/ability or with special education placement, but discussed how special education impacted his educational opportunities. From the DSE and DisCrit perspectives, his narratives also suggested a sense of “Othering” and “distancing” from
his special education peers because “they don't really get a lot of stuff”. For him, his racial and cultural identities were central throughout his educational experiences.

**Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging**

During our interviews, Kabaka did not express a strong sense of belonging with the U.S. society or the school in general, and with his White peers or kids from other countries, including French African and Asian classmates. The lack of “belonging” feeling was because of the persistent racialized territories in class, and the mistreatment he experienced from teachers and peers alike. Although Kabaka shared a strong sense of belonging to his African and racial identity, he often hid his cultural identity in school spaces, such as not speaking in Liberian English to his Liberian classfellow because of the fear of being judged by others.

Kabaka did not feel he belonged in the larger U.S. society. Discussing his earliest friendships, while simultaneously perpetuating an anti-Black and culture of poverty narrative, he said:

I used to hang out with a few friends, most of them got me in trouble. Like when I first got here there were few African American kids who used to live in the next door apartment. They moved back to Chicago but they had 2 kids that I was hanging out with they were into bad stuff but i didn't really see it at that time, but now I am seeing it because they used to get involved in fights. I normally don't wanna get involved and I would leave but they would be saying all types of stuff, like you are weak and stuff because I didn’t wanna get involved in it

Expanding on a particular incident he shared:

they are going to steal stuff. I normally didn’t get involved and I didnt wanna go. I'm normally gonna stay far, at a distance, and just leave them there and walk home, like sometimes they even get involved in gun stuff, and 1 time 1 of them
got us in trouble. The police were after them, I was also on the property, yeah, they were pretty much after us. One of them shot somebody window with the gun, so and when the man came out he didn't see the guy who shot, he only saw the mess that all happened. He knew I didn't do nothing but the thing was I was on his property, so he said since I was on his property that's why he called the cops. So I saw the man the man saw me at another time in the park he didn't really do nothing. He just said he wasn't after me. It was the other kid with the gun. Earlier I was not on his property but when the kid shot his window I tried to go tell the kid to stop, we should leave. So he saw me at the wrong time

School’s Unwelcoming Practices. Kabaka often hid his African racial identity in school. He shared the reason for this was experiencing cultural and linguistic racism. He shared the racial, and cultural and ethnic bullying he experienced in school in the following ways:

Coz they think that it's funny or something coz they normally tell people tease people if they are African. I normally don't tell people that I am African, because every time they are making I guess jokes that are not even funny, most of it is kind of racist. I gotta deal with that. That’s why I really dont tell people that I am African or that they are asking more questions I dont wanna answer

Kabaka shared a sense of communal attachment with his African racial identity. However when alone with his only other Liberian fellow, Kabaka would not speak Liberian English because of the fear of being judged in school. He expressed it as “so one of my friends is Issac. He is from Liberia too so we normally talk together in the hallway but in normal English because there are so many people in the hallway”

When asked for the reason to not speak his native language, Liberian English, in school Kabaka shared:

I guess because the more I speak American English the better I learn. I normally only speak it [Liberian English] when I come home and next door with the Kimathi family. I normally speak with them, besides I don't really speak it there
[at school] because of the other people around me, because they like to tease people like me and I don't like this very much

Kabaka discussed hanging out with his other international friends because they made him feel that he was not the only one from another country. However, he often shared that they were not the best group of friends for him because of the consistent bullying. He shared:

so I just like to stay with them [French and Asian kids] because they are a good crowd. They remind me that I am not the only one who’s from another country, but sometimes the way they act makes me think they are not the right friends for me. I should just sit somewhere else…

He further shared the racialized classroom territories as one of the reasons he never felt he belonged. Kabaka said “I hate sitting around there. And like most of this all white, like white kids. I'm not trying to sit at that table because it will be somebody else’s seat”.

Kabaka also perceived that teachers privileged his White peers and that the classrooms' environment was embedded in global White and ability supremacy, and was entirely racialized and ableist at the intersection:

cuz sometimes I feel like the teachers don’t really focus more on me than other kids because as a teacher one time I needed help in the classroom, a white kid was asking for help also but the teacher, like White kid was already helped, but the teacher skipped me and went to the white kid again

Kabaka’s schooling experiences contributed to his future plans, looking for a sense of community:

I am thinking of being in the military, the marine. Right after school I'm going to go to the marine to go to a college. I can go to a school for a military degree so
when I am done with the military college I can join the marine. It will just be like I can be a captain, be a soldier

but also, like, that’s where you know, you can trust mostly people in there in the outside world. Like at school, you can’t really trust most of your friends. But there, because at school you’re like you know you are working by yourself. Yeah but in there you're working as a team.

Kabaka shared a strong sense of belonging to his cultural and racial identities. However, he did not share a communal attachment with the school system because of bullying and cultural and linguistic racism. However, he demonstrated awareness of how the school system and his classroom environment was embedded in global White and ability supremacy, and was entirely racialized and ableist at the intersection. Kabaka did not feel attached or related to the special education classroom, and discussed the prevalence of racial territories in his general education classroom. Within school, he often used strategies and tactics when he avoided being bullied for his cultural and racial identities, for example not speaking in Liberian English for fear of bullying. Kabaka experienced being marginalized for his racial, cultural and ethnic identity in intersectional ways.

Intersectional Disablism

For Kabaka, exclusion, marginalization and oppression occurred in intersectional ways in school, due to both the color of his skin, his culture, and his language. This often impacted his emotional and psychological sense of self and left him second-guessing his abilities. Kabaka experienced discrimination for his multiple identities, including his racial and cultural identities as well as his academic abilities. He experienced xenophobic and stereotypical labels which impacted him emotionally, feeling “mad”, “hurt” and “sad”. The lack of connection within the different racial territories in the classroom made
him feel not “welcomed” within any particular group. While he often stayed with his
French Africans, Asians, and Marshallese peers, he experienced being made fun of for his
linguistic and cultural identities of being the only Liberian in those groups. He also
shared about feeling pitied in the classroom from the ability supremacy lens—meaning
psychological supremacy of European English speaking white middle class “able bodied”
individuals. Finally, he did not see himself from the medical model of dis/ability—
meaning that there is something wrong within him.

Kabaka shared how he was marginalized in classroom spaces due to the color of
his skin and his language:

like some of my friends are from Marshall Island so they normally make Black
jokes and say something like the reason I am so dark is I have been in the sun,
stuff like that or when am I gonna take water back to Africa? They think it's funny
but I dont know its not really funny sometimes it really gets on my nerves [and]
makes me mad

Kabaka further experienced marginalization for his accent and linguistic differences. He
stated:

Well they were making funny jokes about, I don't know, because when I was in
6th grade my language wasn’t really that good. I had more of an accent so when I
talk they don’t really understand me, so they were making jokes about it

He further expressed his emotions for being labeled with xenophobic and stereotypical
cultural labels in the following way:

Especially that one Asian kid. He is the one who always keeps bringing up stuff,
like always, and one time he made me almost fight him for bringing something
up. Sometimes they call me and the French kids gorillaz. So that has started in 8th
grade and it has been going on. It hurts me, it's just, but I just deal with it.
For Kabaka, the exclusion and marginalization also occurred in many ways by the professionals, including teachers, in the school system. For example in the following example Kabaka was sent for detention by the classroom teacher without much nuanced understanding of the situation. He stated:

there was this one kid in class, and we were into like, we're in class and we had a sub and then a teacher told me to bring his Chromebook and went to the office. I asked for his chromebook but he won't give it because he's trying to play. So I wanted to grab it and he snatched the jacket from my hand and I was like why did he do that to me? I said teacher you see it right? and then the kid said shut up. He told me to shut the f*** up. I told him that you keep doing that you are really on my nerves. Then he said what the f*** you gonna do? I said you want to know what I can do? then went up to him and like I said keep saying stuff you really will see what I'm gonna do. Then the teacher kept telling me to sit down and then I went to my chair to sit on it [and] he told me to go. He [the student] stole my chair from me and I said why did you take my chair? I tried to snatch my chair back and then the teacher started to say stuff. He [the teacher] said he just told me you Black get down now. I told him you are being racist. And the teacher wanna call the counselor on me. He called the counselor to come and then he told the counselor that I was being disrespectful. He said I wasn't doing my work.

Recalling the incident Kabaka shared feeling discriminated against by his teacher and being referred for suspension without a reason. He shared his sentiments that the teacher saved the white boy because they have the same race. He stated:

I mean, it doesn't really affect me much. But it makes me feel sad… Because sometimes what I think is, it's fine because they're both the same race. They're both white so there's nothing wrong with them liking each other…

He shared that teachers and counselors were not aware of the intersectional racism he experienced in class. He said:

Cuz those kids are calling me something and then I get pretty mad, and then I fight the other one. Then the teacher comes in and tells me to go to the office so that one of the counselors can talk to me and then I tell them that they're making
fun of my language and my race and calling me gorillas and stuff and the counselor told me why don't you just move seats

Another form of marginalization appeared in physical form for Kabaka. He shared that there were racial territories in his classroom. White students and other students of Color sat separately. While there were no explicit rules, this was the hidden structure of the class. He shared:

I mean you can sit anywhere you want but I will say mostly there is a territory type of place cuz. because we don't sit anywhere we want like half a bunch of groups sit in one area and another bunch sit in another area. It's all territory places

Kabaka further showed awareness of the hegemony he saw within such classroom practice. He shared that White kids could always sit anywhere in the class, but Black and other students of Color were not allowed to sit anywhere by choice.

but I see other kids come over from all the white kids' area to sit at my table but then when we try to sit at their table they get mad and then try to talk stuff. It's just they can sit anywhere but I try to sit there for some reason they don't like that…

For Kabaka, this marginalization was across racial and cultural identities:

Because the French people used to sit just with each other. But when I try to sit with them, they tell me to move. And then the other White boy on the other side, he always has something to say to me, something that is not appropriate. They don’t like it when I try to sit there.

The racial, and cultural and ethnic exclusion and discrimination that Kabaka experienced was also represented when he was asked xenophobic questions by his peers in the following way:
Like, they ask questions. Especially at lunch they ask me questions like, how’s Africa? What is Africa like? Did you wear shoes? Did you wear clothes? I’m like of course we all do and then like because some parts of Africa is really hot because like Africa is like a desert area. The people who live in the desert area need water coz of course, coz that area is so hot and then they need water and then they [kids] normally come up to me like and be like, make funny jokes and stuff like, hey here is some water take it back to Africa, give it to your people

When Kabaka tried to move his table because of consistent xenophobic questions, he shared that he was not “welcomed” to other tables because of the visible classroom territories. He stated:

He says, Are you the king of Wakanda... or the caveman? Or gorilla. Something like that. Yeah. So it happened at the table I sat at. But the thing is, I mean I can move to other tables. But most of the tables are not really welcoming.

**Dis/ability Identity and Special Education Services.** Kabaka also felt marginalized as a special education student. While not salient in his identity, the special education placement created psychosocial and emotional impacts on his identity development. He shared the feeling of being pitied within classrooms for the assigned dis/ability in school. He said that “you can't ask nobody for help. people act if they pity me, they will say that believe in yourself.”

Kabaka further shared being viewed through the “ability” lens in classes. Going to the special education classroom to receive services made few peers automatically assign certain labels with Kabaka’s ability and identity. He shared that “a few people would say stuff… but they won't really say it to my face… i dont know… [they would say] he’s stupid… he’s dumb…”
The racial, linguistic, cultural and ethnic marginalization that Kabaka experienced in school often impacted his emotional well being and socialization. He further experienced marginalization through his racial and cultural positions in the classroom. Furthermore, he discussed feeling being pitied by his classmates for his imposed dis/ability label in school.

Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance

The educational rules of U.S. schooling impacted Kabaka’s learning identity in many ways. The ability–dis/ability groupings and/or academic “smartness”, racialized labels, linguistic bullying, and racial and cultural privilege embedded in schooling practices impacted how Kabaka navigated his education. Sometimes he adapted, accommodated, conformed, assimilated, internalized the labels and deficit views about his “abilities”, racial, cultural and ethnic identities and that of his peers, such as his African Americans peers. Other times Kabaka resisted those false assumptions about his multiple identities. He discussed the prevalent ideology of “smartness as whiteness” in the U.S. education system. His resistance to such ideology was reflected in his acknowledgement that his white American peers know the system and have received elementary education in the U.S. He also discussed the need to learn American English to avoid bullying and ‘fit in’ the system. He discussed the existing challenges between his friends and himself. However, he shared that he continued his friendships with other international friends because it reminded him that he was not the only one from another country. He also discussed experiencing cultural and linguistic racism during his interactions with his peers and teachers alike.
**Whiteness as Smartness.** Kabaka shared that the U.S. schools expected him to be “smart” which is correlated with being and acting like “whites”. He said “but yeah here, people get more education here than where I am from. It's like they expect you to be “smart”, so for some reason everybody expected you to be like them [White students].” Elaborating on his understanding, he shared: “coz like when in school, in class mostly white kids like, they know most of the stuff like a lot more than black kids, in my classes like science or math or Yeah, literacy”

He elaborated that one of the reasons they are “smart” is that they were born here and went to elementary school in the U.S. “coz they were born here. They went to the elementary schools or kindergarten here. I came here in 5th grade so yeah I just got from Africa to the Midwest.”

Despite the overarching ideology of “smartness” in U.S. schools, Kabaka resisted that “smartness” is only associated with academics:

For example sports because I mean a lot of people who are really good in learning classes like math… they are really good at that high level but in my school when it comes to sports I'm pretty much the best. Like when it comes to track i’m the fastest, in basketball, I'm the fastest, when it comes to strength i’m the strongest

**Linguistic Assimilation and Multicultural Events.** Kabaka’s act of assimilation presented itself in his linguistic acquisition of U.S. English. For him, learning U.S. English was important. He shared how he communicated only in American English outside of home so that he could learn better. However, he also shared that this intrinsic
motivation was not the only reason for him to learn U.S. English. He discussed linguistic bullying as another reason that he wanted to learn U.S. English. He stated:

There is this one girl in my Math class, my 3rd period class, who is from Liberia. She sits at the next table across from my table, but we normally don’t really speak Liberian. We only talk in the U.S. English…

I guess because the more I speak U.S. English the better I learn… I normally only speak it [Liberian English] when I come home, and next door with the Kimathi family, I normally speak with them. Besides I don't really speak it there [at school] because of the other people around me, because they like to tease people like me and I don't like this very much.

Learning to speak U.S. English was an important feature of Kabaka’s assimilation. He discussed that there were only a few students from Liberia in his school. While other students from different ethnic backgrounds might speak in their native language at times, they all spoke U.S. English together.

We have more kids who are French in the school than Liberians, so I normally hear fewer kids speaking French than American English… I have few friends who speak French but we all speak English together so… yeah…

Kabaka discussed the “need” to assimilate by trying to learn how to speak American English to avoid being misunderstood by teachers and peers who only spoke English:

Sometimes I don’t really understand the teachers… I have to ask questions. And when I speak sometimes the teacher or the students don't understand me. And they just say can you repeat again, can you re-say that one line. When they say stuff like that or when they keep telling me to repeat that I just stop… I just say nevermind.
Sharing about schooling practices and activities about multiculturalism, Kabaka discussed that two of his teachers asked students to bring food from their home country. This happened twice in his five years of education at the school. He stated:

well… only once in 7th grade… the social studies teacher… she let us… actually it was twice… it was in my 7th grade class (general ed) and then in my ELL class… so it was in the S.S. and ELL classes that the teacher said that we should bring food from the countries we are from… so a lot of people… some of the kids from Congo brought food from Congo… and then some people from Germany brought German cake and other food…

Despite these multicultural activities, Kabaka experienced a cultural hegemony that influenced his identity development.

Navigating Friendships and Cultural Hegemony among Peers. Kabaka also discussed maintaining friendships in school. While he experienced bullying in school, his narratives also represented learning a deficit and racist understanding towards other students of Color, especially his African American peers. This is important to call out as a species of White supremacy as running through the structure of his classroom and himself through ideologies.

As discussed earlier, he discussed being bullied for being African. However, he shared that he continued sitting with his group because it reminded him that he was not the only one from another country. Kabaka said “so I just like to stay with them because they remind me that I am not the only one who’s from another country…”

Kabaka further discussed learning that his African Americans peers were more American and that there was a disconnect between them and students from Africa “and then the Black… like African Americans, they are in a different way Americans, more
Americans and different from Africans…” Adding to this, Kabaka discussed that much of the bullying he received was from other international and Black students in class. He stated:

Yeah like other kids don’t say nothing… it’s mostly the Asian kids… that put jokes on… and then the Marshallese are the ones who bring… I don’t think it's funny, they make fun of me… other kids don’t say nothing… They just laugh at it. Yeah.

He added that if he tried to engage when bullied, his teacher encouraged him to show “good behavior” by not fighting with other students. In his words:

The only part the teacher sees is when it made me so mad and I tried to fight them. That’s the only part that the teacher sees but I just hold back. I don't wanna fight nobody so I am normally not the one who gets in trouble because like the teacher says oh that’s a good thing because i didn't fight no body

However, if he did not engage there was always a risk of being further bullied for not responding. He stated:

I normally back up and don't do nothing and the other [White] kid said the reason he keeps picking on me is because I don't do nothing about it. He said normally other people would try to fight him but I just hold back and I don’t do nothing so I said alright. that’s why I don't sit there anymore

Kabaka further shared that since he was a minority within a minority in his classroom, he was the only student who was picked up for bullying often.

I mean it's pretty bad because right now I am the only one they do that (bullying) to. like all the other kids around like the other African kids they don’t do that to them. Maybe because most of the other French kids they sit together. I am normally the only one they say that to. So it gets me sometimes really mad

When probed about changing his seat, Kabaka shared that he was not welcomed by other groups to sit with them. He shared:
He says, Are you the king of Wakanda... or the caveman? Or gorilla. Something like that. Yeah. So it happened at the table I sat at. But the thing is, I mean I can move to other tables. But most of the tables are not really welcoming.

**Resisting Hegemony in the Classroom.** Kabaka shared that when the counselor told him he should sit somewhere else he stood up for himself and told the counselor that this was the only area in class where he was welcomed. He stated:

and then I tell them that they're making fun of my language and my race and calling me gorillas and stuff then she just told me why don't you just move seats but that’s my seat and I like sitting in that area that’s like my sound area. The only area I’m welcomed at

Kabaka further demonstrated acts of activism when he stood up for his friends who experienced racism. As previously shared, Kabaka’s classroom had racial territories. In the following quote, he shared how he stood up for David, his friend, when he was not welcomed to sit on the “white” territory in class. Kabaka stated:

and then David came and told me all about it like who did it. So I went there and so because like for some reason, one of the kids said they're all afraid of me for something. And so one day I saw an open seat there, and so I went over there to sit there and then the other guy said do you know that’s so’s spot. When he comes and you don’t move he's going to push you off or he's going to punch you in the face. I said I would like to watch that happen. So he came over and he saw me sitting there like. He said dude who’s sitting in my spot, and then he said it’s Kabaka. Oh Kabaka. He came to me and I said it’s not an assigned seat. I can sit anywhere I want. Then he said but that’s my spot, move on mad, and I said make me move like you moved David

In the following quote, Kabaka shared how standing up for oneself or for others helped stop bullying. He also highlighted the teaching practices, as embedded in White supremacy, that fed into the existing racial territories within classrooms:
and then he said you know what? Forget it. You can sit there. So he found another spot to sit and I was like wow. So they're really tough with certain people and so he went to the teacher. Teacher came over and said that's this guy's spot you can move here. Like, why, it's not an assigned seat? Yes, I can sit wherever I want. And I mean, the teachers, they know that. So that's why, like, when I said that she is like, you know what, you can just go sit over there sit there. so Yeah.

As indicated above, Kabaka did not see special education and dis/ability as an identity that represented him. He understood that he had certain needs, and his education should be individualized within the general education setting. However, Kabaka constantly resisted the idea that he does not deserve quality education. To him, he deserved quality education with his general education peers, and that education should be differentiated for his needs. Further, and as indicated above, he did not perceive himself and his identity as a singular dimension of ability represented in education. According to him, people are good at different things, and he is good at sports:

For example sports because of, I mean a lot of people who are really good in learning classes like math they are really good at that high level but in my school when it comes to sports I'm pretty much the best like when it comes to track i'm the fastest in basketball, I'm the fastest when it comes to strength i'm the strongest

Kabaka’s education and learning identity was impacted by many in-school experiences in relation to his language ability, dis/ability grouping and special education placement, placement in the ELL classroom, his racial, ethnic and cultural identities. He discussed the overarching ideology of whiteness as “smartness” in the U.S. school system. To him, his “white” classmates were smart in “academics” because they knew the system and gained elementary education in the U.S. education system. He further discussed the presence of “whiteness” as “goodness” narrative within his racialized and ableist classroom environment. He felt that he needed to learn American English to adjust in
society, and to avoid bullying. He navigated the bullying and racial-cultural hegemony within the classroom in multiple ways, such as by speaking up for himself and his other friends of Color.

**Summary**

Kabaka’s understanding of a country’s education system is related to its economic conditions. He compared the education system of Liberia and the U.S. to discuss the educational opportunities for students in the two countries. He often discussed his educational journey in comparison to his White peers’ educational experiences and background. To him, “smartness” in the U.S. is interchangeably used with being “White” and there is an inbuilt expectation in the schools to be like “white” students. However, to him his white peers appear to be “smarter” because they already know the system and received elementary education in U.S. schools. He also shared communal attachment with his racial and cultural identity. However, he did not share a sense of belonging with the school system and discussed the prevalence of global White ability supremacy.

Kabaka further shared his discontent with special education placement. Kabaka self-referred as a “slow reader” however, he did not perceive that special education is the “best” placement for him. From a DSE and DisCrit perspective, Kabaka, at times also represented deficit thinking and language, such as “smart”, and “mentally and physically” “fit” and represented deficit and ableist approach towards his special education peers.
MANDLA’S NARRATIVE
“Who Created These Rules?”: Mandla’s Special Education Journey

Mandla migrated to the U.S. from Liberia two years prior to conducting this study. His racial, and cultural and ethnic identities were important to him, and he understood his cultural navigation in a contrasting manner between the Liberian and U.S. society and education system. Economic stability was important to Mandla, and he discussed the financial differences and its impact on life opportunities in the two cultures. In terms of education, Mandla found learning; reading and writing, an important skill, however, he also questioned his English Language Learner (ELL) and special education placement in the U.S. school system. Mandla was especially concerned about his special education placement, and questioned how that placement decision was made. One important finding was the deficit understanding of dis/ability, as something that should present itself physically, represented in his narrative. He questioned who created the rules for the segregated education system for students, and missed being in the general education classroom.

Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life

Mandla’s understanding of his cultural and racial self was in contrast to his experiential knowledge and understanding of U.S. culture. He often saw his Liberian culture in contrast to American culture by comparing the education systems, life struggles and opportunities, basic differences in U.S. and Liberian English, and job security and work opportunities between the two countries. He was aware of the importance of learning to read and write for job security in U.S. society. His knowledge of dis/ability
was situated in the deficit medical model of dis/ability that it is for students who have some “mind” problem, while his needs were related with reading and writing.

Mandla understood his cultural and racial background and identity in contrast to the broader U.S. economic, cultural, and education system. While he shared about his struggles of living in Liberia in a contrasting manner to life in the U.S., Mandla's narrative also demonstrates an anti-Black and culture of poverty (McDermott & Vossoughi, 2020) rhetoric. As described in the quote below, his understanding of the Black neighborhood that he lived in demonstrated an inherent deficit approach towards people of Color, especially African American neighborhoods:

you know down there life is a little bit hard [and] there is no work. We came here for work and money. You know when I was there I thought here [in the U.S.] it's more fun but now that I’m here like you know it is not like what I thought, because people are into the game stuff. People are in bad sort of stuff you know

Mandla continued by comparing his life in Liberia to his life in the U.S.

You know [in Liberia] you got to wake up in the morning… you gotta walk to school… because down there it is all about walking… you don’t have much money, so you have to walk to school… and then come back home… while here [in the U.S.]… you have everything here… you don’t walk to school… I mean some people will walk to school… but not all.

While he discussed that life is financially hard in Liberia, he also recognized and discussed that life is difficult and different in many ways living in the U.S. His comment below further alludes a racism without racists approach - an understanding that racism exists but in a distant place (Bonilla-Silva, 2017). Such a narrative allows one to distance themselves from the system of racism.

oh down there is good… because like over here is kind of different, I mean you know… The way other kids are like… they be doing other things like you know
drugs and stuff… like I’m not used to… like you know… but I dont know its not like this over there you know.

Commenting on his early resettlement experiences and yet continuing to be seen as divorced from the system of racism Mandla said:

we moved more than three times… We lived on Roosevelt then we moved to E12th street… and now we live at Servicewood circle… here it's not bad. I mean you can’t really hear a lot of noise, people mind their own business… you know yeah it's not a lot of noise on this side… I like it here...

**Educational Opportunities.** Mandla shared that the education system in the U.S. is better than back in Africa. He did not appreciate that he had to wear a uniform to go to school in Liberia. In contrast, he said that you can wear anything you want to the school here. He stated:

Going to school here is better, and you know education is good here. Because like back in Africa our school, it kind of looked different than this one. That is cool you know you have to. You know [there] you had to wait for a uniform and go to school, I mean they had a dress code like a shirt and brown pants. So I needed to have a uniform and shoes. Here you can wear anything you can wear a hoodie and go to school, no one would say nothing. So the school here is better than over there where I’m from

He further commented on the teaching practices of educators by adding that “school is different here, I get a lot of help here from teachers…”

Mandla struggled with Math, reading and writing. He discussed the importance of education, especially learning to read and write:

English. yeah. English is hard [and] Reading is hard, because I know some people may not like to read. It is kind of hard… I’m pretty sure I’m doing good in Math and writing. What helps is reading to the teacher only or myself. Reading is good because if we go somewhere and we know nothing or especially you know in America you gotta learn how to read, because everything is about reading. You
know if you want to work, if you need to do a job application [for everything] you need to know how to read

Mandla also discussed his understanding of dis/ability and special education services in the context of U.S. education.

Dis/ability Construction and Special Education as a Formalized Service.

Embedded in the globally hegemonic and deficit medical model of dis/ability, Mandla shared his understanding of special education classes by stating: “the special class, it's like, it's kind of the class for the kids who are like, they got a mind problem, they support those kids.”

He discussed how he was first placed into the special education classroom:

I have been in a lot of meetings when I’m at school. I have been in meetings where they had to call my dad and me to school. They had me in a special class, you know, for me to learn how to read and write.

Additionally, and continuing with the medical model of dis/ability approach, Mandla said:

I mean special education word… like the word itself seems like people who… people who are not like… people who are crazy… people who really don’t have sense… that’s how it makes you feel… the brain is different…

Mandla understood that his needs were only related with reading and writing, for which he had been placed in the special class. However, he was made to spend most of his day in this class and not in general education classes. He said “they had me in a special class for me to learn how to read and write. I just spent the whole time there for the rest of the day.”
Mandla was often asked by his peers why he needed to spend most of his day in the special education class. In his explanation, he relied back on the deficit and ableist approach that special education is for kids who have some “mental” problem and he didn’t understand why he would spend most of his day in a special education classroom. To him “people be like why are you in that class? I would be like I don’t know like nothing happened to me… everything is good…”

Mandla understood his racial, cultural and ethnic self in contrast to U.S. culture. He was aware of the differences between the two cultures as represented in the education system, work opportunities, general life struggles and the linguistic differences between American and Liberian English. He gave importance to education as he recognized its importance for job security in the U.S. Rooted in the widely prevalent deficit medical model understanding of dis/ability, Mandla did not believe he needed to be placed in a special education classroom, and differentiated himself from his special education peers. Importantly, he gave a central position to his racial, and cultural and ethnic identity but did not centralize special education or dis/ability as his defining identity.

Privileging the Self-Selected Voice: Salience within Multidimensional Identities

Mandla centralized his racial, cultural and ethnic identity by comparing the two cultures, such as in comparison to his U.S. peers. His sense of cultural self was also represented in telling others about his culture and where he is from. This sharing was in contrast to hiding about his cultural identity previously. Mandla also gave importance to job opportunities living in the U.S. Finally, dis/ability identity or special education placement was not a defining identity for Mandla. Mandla’s cultural and ethnic identity
was central to his sense of self. He shared that although he would hide his cultural identity in the beginning, he now tells everyone where he is from. This is represented in the following quote:

I mean I don't care now and I just tell them that I’m from Africa… You know where I’m from I tell everybody… I like my place… I will tell them where I was from… I tell them I was not from right here.

Within the education system, Mandla identified himself in relation to his peers and discussed racial solidarity with his African American peers. Mandla stated:

like even the white Americans when they say I would be like what they say is not me or you [African American peer]… you know we got the same color… the only difference is that you were born here and I was not born here.

Since the beginning of moving to the U.S. Mandla shared he was much aware of the financial constraints that his family experienced both in Liberia and the U.S. During the interview, Mandla shared that his personal goal was to get a job:

We came here for work and money. I was working over there, it's kind of like I will go to somebody. I was working for someone, he will pay me sometimes and not always. But here you work for someone you get paid, when I say I was working I mean working for a neighbor so they will give me money

Non-Salience of dis/ability and Special Education Services. Mandla did not see dis/ability or special education services as his defining identity. Due to the deficit understanding of dis/ability as something within the “brain”, he shared that he didn’t do “nothing crazy” to be in the special education classroom. Equally important is to discuss the intersection of racism and ableism present in the structures that allows placing
students of Color into special education classrooms, in this case a multicultural and
multilingual recent migrant due to linguistic differences and “low levels in reading”:

I don't do nothing “crazy”. I don’t know why I'm there. I wanna know but they
don’t tell me. All I hear is your reading is not high, your reading is low, they say they
put me in there because my reading is low, so I don’t understand why and they don’t tell me

Additionally, he said that being in the special education classroom made him feel “crazy”
or that he is not good. He said “see being in that class I feel like I’m kind of crazy… like
I’m you know I’m not good…”

Mandla’s racial, cultural and ethnic sense of self was central to him. It was
represented in comparing himself with his American peers and in relation to his personal
financial goals. He self-referred his cultural and racial identities, and stated that just being
born in the U.S. did not mean that his African Americans peers are not Africans.
Additionally, dis/ability was not something that Mandla self-identified with. Finally, his
responses also show how he experienced racism and ableism, and how racism and
ableism also worked through him for other students of Color when distancing himself
from his African American neighborhoods.

Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging

Mandla felt a strong sense of belonging with his cultural and racial identity. He
felt more attached to his friends back in Africa than his peers in the U.S. The reason for
that was the cultural racism he experienced in U.S. schools. He did not share a communal
attachment with his school environment and with his special education classroom.
Finally, he distanced himself from his special education peers and discussed a deficit
medical model approach towards dis/ability as something which needs to represent itself physically.

Mandla shared a strong sense of belonging with his African racial and cultural roots and background. As previously discussed he shared about his African background and roots with his classmates. He further shared that he has more friends in Africa than in the U.S. The *racism without racist* approach also presented itself when he said “I have got more friends down there you know. I have too many friends here but they are not “friends friends”.

Mandla discussed his lack of willingness to attend school because he did not feel any sense of belonging with the school environment. He shared that when at school he often did not want to talk to people and just wants to leave as soon as he finishes work. Mandla said:

> and people be asking me, like I appreciate them saying oh how are you doing? how was your day? you know like some people are not in the mood sometimes. So I don’t like talking then.

Mandla experienced cultural racism and bullying in classes, and expressed a lack of feeling belonging to his classroom community. He said “and that’s the thing… yeah they [peers] say the same thing saying oh you African booty scratchers… so you know it's not nice…” However, in specific context to his African American classmates the following quote expresses a form of solidarity where he stated:

> So I know where I am from… They don’t know where they are from… they were born here… somehow it sounds “crazy” but they are Americans… they are not Africans… but my point is only because you are born here… doesn’t mean you are not African…
Finally, Mandla did not express any communal attachment with his special education classroom. He shared “and like I had a special education class I didn't like.”

**Dis/ability Identity and Special Education Services.** Mandla did not feel belonged within his special education classroom or identify with dis/ability categorization. This also represented how he understood dis/ability from a deficit medical model approach as something that needs to be represented “physically”, and differentiated himself from other students in his special education class. The following quotes illustrate how Mandla perpetuated the rhetoric of “Othering” his special education peers, and did not want to be placed in special education classroom:

> They [his peers in special education class] are smart but like the thing is when I want to go to lunch, I know what I am going to do there… but they have to walk down there, they need help with eating, and they need help to walk down to class. I can walk myself and do whatever, when I’m doing something I know what I’m doing. That’s the difference… We're different… the special class… it's like… it's kind of the class for the kids who are like… they got a mind problem… they support those kids… and so I don’t need to be there…

> Sometimes when I'm in class, like when it's settling down quiet, someone will start crying. I’m like what? That’s not what I go to school for. So I’m like no that’s not why I came to school. So that type of thing. I’m like why are they crying? What’s the reason? Someone just please stop making noise running around the classroom…

From an intersectional deficit lens, he shared about a Black classmate in special education class as “He [the other Black kid] doesn't come to the school that much the way I do. He sits close to the teacher, his head is kind of big, he got a “problem”” This was also represented in his unwillingness to attend special education class as “I just go
straight to the class and you know, like I don’t even want to talk to nobody like even to the teacher you know sometimes because I hate going to [special education] class”

Mandla shared a strong sense of belonging with his cultural and ethnic community. He maintained connections with his friends back in Africa. While at times he represented a *racism without racist* approach towards other students of Color, especially his African American peers, other times he discussed a solidarity approach with his African American peers. One major reason for his lack of feeling associated was the cultural racism and bullying he experienced in classes. He did not feel or experienced a sense of belonging within the special education classroom and differentiated himself from his special education peers through a medical model approach.

**Intersectional Disablism**

Mandla felt excluded from the school culture in many ways. He experienced cultural racism and shared how often this marginalization impacted his emotional sense of self. He realized that he was often marginalized not only because of his Black skin color, but also for his African accent. He felt compelled to speak like U.S. citizens. Mandla felt being excluded from the general education classroom and discussed that he wanted to change all his classes to general education classes. He questioned the existing binary between general and special education systems and asked who created these rules for separate education systems.

Mandla experienced racism based on both his darker skin color and his African accent. He shared the following quote:
You know sometimes the way I speak, sometimes they are like you know you are from Africa and don’t sound like us Americans. People are like oh where are you from? because you don’t sound like you are from here. Yeah it makes me feel like, hey I’m not the only one who’s different. Also, your accent and also your skin color, you know they are always looking at skin color, your accent and where you are from, making fun of you.

Such deficit views about his African accent restricted him from wanting to read in front of the class, as he shared feeling “sad” and “ashamed”:

it becomes hard when I’m reading in front of the class. When I’m reading to the class, I will be shy, like a lot of people don’t really like reading in class. It makes me feel sad, like it makes me feel why I can’t really read well like them? like how some people read well and they know how to read fast, or how to read so quick. So, you know it makes me feel sad

Mandla preferred the general education setting and felt ashamed of being identified with the special education setting. He said:

If I had the choice, and I mean, I would not be in that class. I would tell them to turn all my classes to general ed. because I mean. yeah I just like I say. It feels like I'm different. I feel ashamed.

Boundaries between General Education and Special Education Services: Who Creates the Rules? Mandla questioned his placement in special education:

but I don’t know, I feel like I don’t have a choice. Like who created these rules? Who’s doing all of this? I don’t know. You know saying I don’t have a choice, my brother told me he said the school is controlling you. They don’t want you to be doing something by yourself. So you know that’s a question I want to ask somebody. I don't know but I want to ask, and I don’t have a choice. They tell me I don’t have a choice. And I am like what? Why don’t I have a choice?

Mandla shared that students feel marginalized in the special education settings in many ways. One way he expressed this was when he felt being made fun of by his general education peers. He said “and other kids often make fun of me. Why are you in that class? like I don’t like just being there and made fun of”
Mandla added that he hid himself from his peers when going to the special education classroom:

I feel when I have to go to that class, I hide myself. Sometimes my friends see me going in there, but I try to hide myself. So I have a way to get into the class if I have to go to the class because I don’t want them to see me.

When asked what he thinks the reason is that school placed him in a special education classroom, Mandla said that he only needs help with academics:

I mean yeah but only Help. I would need help but not everyday. First of all like not everybody knows everything. I know I don’t know everything, but everybody doesn't know everything. So yeah I need help, that’s why I am in the school... for somebody to show me.

The school culture made Mandla feel excluded and marginalized. Mandla missed being in the general education classroom and questioned who created these rules for separate education systems and placement decisions for students. Mandla also shared that he was not included in his educational decisions. Despite these perceptions, Mandla tried to ‘fit in’ U.S. society and the education system.

Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance

Mandla did not feel associated with his neighborhood culture. While he willingly assimilated through certain educational opportunities that helped him ‘fit in’ the economic aspect of society, such as attending the “work experience class” to learn job related skills, Mandla did not like assimilating or adapting to every aspect of society or the education system. He questioned that his racially and culturally diverse self was required to ‘assimilate’ into the society by learning to speak in the American accent. For Mandla, this was hard at many fronts, such as due to the cultural racism he experienced in
school and society. This led him not feeling associated with the education system in the U.S. at large. Mandla shared that he was not given a choice in his education and resisted the idea of ELL placement and desired to be out of the class. He also consistently resisted his special education placement. Sometimes this resistance was prominent when he skipped the school or class period, or hid himself from peers when going to the class. The shame that came with special education placement was tremendous for Mandla. Mandla further differentiated himself from his special education peers because of his deficit medical model understanding that disability needs to present itself physically. This was not true in Mandla’s case as he only needed support with academics.

Multi Assimilation. Mandla discussed assimilating both into the U.S. society and the education system. As discussed earlier, the assimilation into the culture and society was often in relation to the work opportunities and the socioeconomic status. While he was willing to assimilate into the economic system of the society, his narratives depict passivity—as rooted in culture of poverty and anti-Black racism—to assimilate into his neighborhood culture. He stated:

like there is a lot of stuff going on here [in the neighborhood]. So I mean where I’m from all these shootings, people having guns, you have to be 18 or more but when I first came here . . . oh no we don’t do that stuff there . . . People here holding guns or drugs and stuff . . . we don’t do it over there. I don’t do it here. Anyone doing it, it's too bad

Personal Assimilation in the School Culture. Mandla’s struggles within the realm of schooling were indicated within the requirement to assimilate at multiple levels. He shared that there was an implicit ableist understanding in the school culture that he should
learn to speak English with an American accent. Mandla said “they speak fast. So everyone would say this to me but now I know they always try to say you should speak in the way we speak or say… it’s hard for me…”

The constant bullying and cultural racism Mandla experienced was another reason he did not feel associated with the school culture. He also shared that he experienced such bullying and the cultural stereotypes from the first day of schooling. Mandla said:

You know, the first day when I came here and went to school… first day… People are like, they bullied me, like in school Oh you from Africa and stuff like that. I don’t say it no more because they would say stuff

Most of Mandla’s friends were immigrant students who migrated from different countries. He said he felt comfortable with them since there is no requirement for speaking in an “American accent”:

I am friends with people from other countries like Asian, Haitian, Puerto Rican people. I’m friends with a lot of people because they are cool and I would be more friends with them. So I have more friends from different countries, you know it's just I'm not trying to be a racist but I make more friends from other countries. We don’t have issues with accents you know…

The class that Mandla enjoyed and felt was important for him to prepare him for the job market was the “work experience” class. Perpetuating a “good worker” narrative of the ideals of individualism and “ability-centrism” rooted in “productivity”, Mandla said:

I’m taking English, writing, Math and ELL. Oh and I’m also in work experience. I’m in this class where you learn about work experience. It's like to learn how to work . . . you know I was doing work experience, and so you know I was doing what is right so you know they hired me because I'm a “good” worker so yeah that's also, now I’m working at sportsplex. I started work experience last year. So
in work experience they are teaching me how to work. It teaches me when I go somewhere, you know how I can do something for myself

He shared how he managed between his school and job as “you know I do my homework but like I don’t bring it at home. I do it there and when home I just put my bag down and go to sleep and then go to work”

Mandla further discussed his desire to assimilate into the school via sports. He shared “I’m fond of playing basketball, that's my favorite sport. I wanted to play for my school but they say no. The sport I’m playing is soccer. I'm on the team, [the] soccer team

Mandla also shared about his placement in the ELL classroom “why (I’m) in ELL class is because of my writing and reading. Also when they give me work I just do it at school… you know instead of bringing it at home I just do it there” He added that placement in a separate classroom should not be about learning the language “I mean you don’t have to, yeah something to be in a special [language] class should not be about how to speak English. I mean you gotta take your own time”. This led Mandla to share his desire to be out of ELL classroom:

Only thing I was in ELL for was to speak English, for people who don't speak English, the goal is to help them learn English… but now I mean I’m speaking English its fine… I should be out of it…

Mandla’s narrative depicts what Artiles (2003) referred to, that the linguistic difference-deficit-dis/ability overlap pointing to the sizable overrepresentation of students from cultural, ethnic, racial and linguistically diverse backgrounds into special education and other segregated settings.
Resisting dis/ability Identity and Special Education Services. Mandla consistently shared his lack of willingness to sit in special education classes. In the following quote, he shared how much he disapproved of going to the special education classroom “it's a class I don't want to be in but they just put me there. I don’t like being in that class.

That’s what I would say”

Mandla actively resisted his special education placement in the school:

I even told my Principal that you know I don’t like the class and she said you know it's fine, but then she said she cannot change my class. She said you are already going to graduate so let’s just finish. I miss being in general class, not in the special education class

that’s why I don’t like going to school because of the class I’m in. I will miss my first period class, second period, third, fourth because, no first period I will attend because I have a seminar, but like 2nd, 3rd, 4th, 5th no, because I don’t want to be there [in special education class]. They all keep asking why you are missing class, because I don’t want to be in that class. That’s why I would be skipping the class . . . I get mad and I don’t want to sit there, and so I skip class . . . I don’t want to be there I tell them but they don’t listen.

Mandla’s resistance also involved questioning the structure of the education system and the power of those involved:

they already… most of them already know… but I don’t know I feel like remember when I said I don’t have a choice. Who create these rules? Who’s doing all of this? I don’t know… like you know saying I don’t have a choice…

His resistance also appeared as:

You want to come out of that class. They get teachers spying on me, like they get someone to follow me and see if I’m going to the class or not. So I’m like why are you spying on me. They will spy as if I’m going to skip the class or go do something else. So sometimes I’m mad. Why are you following me? so I got mad and walked out of school
Mandla found ways to “fit in” the different components of the education system and society, such as “work experience class” and he desired to take part in sports in school and find a job as early as possible. However, this did not mean that Mandla wanted to assimilate into every aspect of society. He found it problematic and deficit oriented to learn to speak the American accent. For this reason, Mandla made more friends from other countries, as he felt they were more accepting of the accent differences among themselves. While at times his narratives also depicted a *racism without racist* approach towards his African American peers, other times he discussed solidarity with them. In terms of his linguistic identity, Mandla's experiences dictated that ELL placement was only to teach American accent and English language and represented a difference-deficit-dis/ability approach. He wanted to be out of that classroom as soon as possible. Mandla also consistently resisted the idea of being placed in the special education classroom. He often skipped the classes and felt that he did not have a choice in his education.

**Summary**

Mandla’s racial, ethnic and cultural sense of self was important to him. He understood the cultural differences between Liberia and the U.S. as represented in the U.S. society and education system. He gave importance to economic stability and discussed the relevance of financial independence in the two systems. Mandla also discussed the importance of education; reading and writing, and shared his discontent with his education. He did not think that his special education placement defined his abilities, and discussed the bullying he received because of his linguistic differences. One important finding was about Mandla’s medical model understanding of dis/ability as
something that represents itself “physically”. He missed being in the general education classroom and questioned who created such rules to create a segregated special education system for students.
LEMA’S NARRATIVE
“My Africanness was not a Disability”: Lema’s Intersectional Navigation

Lema’s resettlement journey was rooted in her cultural, racial, refugee, social class, and gendered experiences. She discussed the impact of social interaction and educational experiences on her identity development. The intersectional salience of her racial, African and refugee identity were captured through her self-labeling, as she described feeling connected with her African and refugee identity groupings. She also experienced the psychosocial and emotional impact of navigating family’s cultural expectations, positive and negative schooling experiences, and post-school interactions. These experiences presented challenges for Lema to “figure out” her identity. In an attempt to navigate these challenges, Lema tried to “fit in” the U.S. society and education system, specifically through linguistic “assimilation”. She discussed the relevance of forced assimilation as practiced through the education system; such as the ELL practice. She discussed the deficit perceptions about linguistic abilities, that identify language differences as disability or “deficit” which needs “remediation.”

Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life

Lema’s resettlement experiences reflected an intersectional knowledge and understanding of her race, gender, culture and ethnicity, social class, refugee status and national identity in U.S. society. Through the interviews, she described factors influencing her family’s relocation decision and how the structure of the new location impacted her social interactions, social class, and life opportunities. She discussed her understanding of distinctions between relocation experiences of immigrants and refugees, and how differences in language are viewed as deficits and as dis/abilities.
Lema described the structural and infrastructural differences between her camp life in Tanzania and resettlement in the U.S:

I mean it was really different coming to the US. These apartments were like facing away from the street. They were more like the rectangle kind of apartments, [and] swimming pool somewhere in the center. We were on the second level. The buildings and roads were different, [with] lots of cars driving around. That's something that we weren't used to

Comparing the two lifestyles in the refugee camp and complexes in the U.S., Lema discussed how these structural differences influenced social interactions with neighbors due to the facilities design. She discussed difference in life in the apartment facility and camp facility:

Like our neighbors [in Arizona] who were across the street, were still, umm technically far [laughs], and then like not everyone knew each other or had any sort of relationship. Like we had neighbors, but we weren't connected with them. And that was different from like the camps that we were in because everybody knew each other and we're all friends with each other.

She further discussed how placement in the complexes structurally split former neighbors and how that placement influenced social interactions by saying “then like we were all put into different complexes or different areas of a complex so we weren't as close to each other as we used to” Adding about this split during the resettlement experiences she stated:

There are records. There were 30 families in that big push to start resettling. But they didn't all go to the same place. We had like six seven families that we were really closely connected to, but we weren't all put in the same area. And they didn't all arrive at the same time, some people who came in a few months later or a few years later, I don't count. But we were closer to my uncle, we were close enough that we could walk to each other's houses.
Sharing about the socioeconomic status of the neighborhood placement, Lema said it was at the “low end” of social class but that the neighborhood was safe and that the aim of United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) officials was to resettle them at a location that is affordable for the families. She reflected that although now she thinks it was a “poor” neighborhood, at the time they were excited to find a place with basic life facilities:

their aim was to try to find us something that's affordable so something we could afford. They weren't dangerous. It wasn't like there was fear for our lives. They were an upgrade from where we had come from… So, I mean thinking back it was like oh that was like a lower, lower end of the social economics but like when we got there it was like Wow, this is great, there's running water.

It is important to identify that the deficit language embedded in the rhetoric of culture of poverty, such as “dangerous” and “fear for our lives” perpetuates the ‘blame the victim’ orientation to classify Black neighborhoods as inherently “bad” and “dangerous” (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019).

Continued with such deficit approach, Lema further elaborated how her Black neighborhood was structurally “policed”:

But, yeah, there were maybe a couple of times when we encountered law enforcement, not like not necessarily because we did something “wrong” but just because there was “stuff going on in the neighborhood”. Because one time when my brother and I went to my uncle's house and something had gone on, I think they were, the police were looking for a “fugitive”. And, like it was all over the news, and that was like helicopters and police officers and I, we didn't know what was going on so my uncle was like hey you guys should just go home. So we went and we stood and waited to see if someone was going to acknowledge us and like allow us to cross the street, cuz there was like a block. And I was like, there's no cars coming so I ran across the street and I ran into the police, and they drew their guns and said freeze. They call it a shoot. And I didn't know what they're saying because we were really new, so I just kept running like the police chased me all the way up the stairs to my house and then eventually like that they
just like trying to explain to my mom like you need to keep your kids inside it's not “safe” there's a “fugitive” that's loose. And so, you know, that happened.

This incident further shows how anti-Black racism and culture of poverty is taught to the new immigrants and refugees through statements and ideologies that the Black neighborhood was not “safe”.

Lema further shared how the act of resettling refugees in the U.S. introduced a cultural hegemony and described her awareness of how the deficit ideology of American exceptionalism is taught and prevails in the system. By American exceptionalism I mean that deficit approach that the U.S., it’s values, political system and historical development is inherently virtuous and destined to play a unique and positive role in the world stage:

Kind of a myth that is. I think it gives the perception to other countries and other people that it's okay. Maybe they're doing a lot of good things, they resettled us so I think that's, I think that's what it is, like, they as “Americans” they might know what their flaws are but they don't like to talk about what their flaws are. They hide it, and then they say like we're great, we're the best at this, at that. Even if they are not, but if that's what you're hearing, and you're hearing it constantly, then people will begin to perceive you as that and I think that that's the reason why, you know, Americans are like, oh I'm proud to be an American and this and that and so then people are like oh yeah you guys are great.

Lema discussed her family’s decision to move from the camps:

We were the first to establish those camps that we were in, our family. When we got there I was two years old so that's like the life that I knew. No running water, mud houses like that's what it was like, that's what I thought was normal, but. So my parents had been in the camp for five years when they decided that they were going to start resettling and it was like a big deal.

She described how other families were reluctant to consider relocating to the U.S. because of fears and uncertainties grounded in their understanding of U.S. history of
slavery. Lema shared that the information about U.S. history that people had back in the camps made many families decide not to come to the U.S:

and we were like, the families that did agree to resettle they were like hey take us anywhere, anywhere but here. But there was this fear of coming to America. And it's not like it was. They didn't know what to expect. So it was really hard, because there are some people who like were granted the opportunity to come and they like didn't come because they were like what are they going to do to us, that they're going to turn us into slaves. They're gonna put us in some factory and, like, you know, so there was that.

Lema shared how her family and few other families reached the decision to come to the U.S. in hopes of better life opportunities. Such narratives are embedded in the myth of the American dream, meaning that all Americans have equal access to opportunities which allows highest aspirations, and goals and dreams to be achieved (Mayfield, 2020):

if they send us to America, is it really going to be any worse through this? And so that's why you know there was like a little bit of glimpse of hope, you know, hearing about America. America is great, like this. The roads are clean, there's running water, there's all this stuff. And a lot of our parents got really excited.

Lema described how that glimpse of hope, embedded in the myth of American dream, included opportunities for women to “dream big” but that achieving those dreams would require considerable support due to the cultural differences:

I think about opportunities. Like being in this new culture that allows women or young girls to dream big, and also have a pathway to achieving those dreams is a positive thing, a really great thing. So not being limited to how big I can dream. I think the downside to that, is that because I am from a culture that doesn't necessarily support that, or, yeah, I would say support, then I find myself having to do it on my own, and not having like support systems, or the, like, their form of support being different than what I would have wanted or expected.
She further shared her awareness of the cultural differences between her native culture and the U.S. society. She discussed how at times her family’s cultural orientation contradicts with American ways of being and living, creating a lot of stress and struggle for the young refugee generation navigating the two. She shared:

Like I remember using an example with my mother where I was like, like, Mom. Imagine me growing up in a city and like I wear skirts, you know, knee length skirts and high heels, all the time. And then I have a child and she's growing up and I'm teaching her that she's gonna have to wear skirts and high heels all the time. And then we end up moving back to like a camp where there's no sidewalks, there's no paved roads. It's muddy, it's dusty and like everyday I'm forcing her to wear a short, you know, knee length skirt and high heels. Eventually, it's gonna be dangerous for her because she could trip on something and break her ankle because that's not the right environment for a skirt and high heels.

And so, and I'm like, and I know that this is not like completely the same thing, but like having like they would want us to wear wrappers and like in traditional clothing. Like, I will sometimes but I can't wear it all the time because it just doesn't make sense to the place.

Lema was also aware and knowledgeable of her refugee identity in the U.S. and the structural differences between refugees and immigrants in relocation:

But as far as being a refugee or immigrant, we were all like, like still today people mix being a refugee or an immigrant as being the same thing. We all just categorize them as the same thing. So the biggest difference is that an immigrant comes here by choice. And say like they choose to leave their home country to come to the U.S. or to any other country for means to benefit them in some way. Whether it be for education, close to family, or employment. But a refugee cannot leave their home country to come to the U.S. A refugee must first flee their home country to a different second location, and then the United States would be at least their third destination. And then refugees don’t have the liberty to always choose where they wanna go. You are just randomly gonna be placed in a city in the Midwest [laughs]. Like you don’t know anyone in the Midwest. You know being resettled in the rural Midwest, or being resettled in NYC, NY [is] definitely going to be a different experience. So the biggest difference is choice with refugees. But then with immigrants, on the more technical side of it refugees come here with the same benefits as a natural born citizen. So accessing public assistance isn’t going to negatively impact.
Lema’s understanding about differences between refugees and some immigrants included political, structural, educational, and social class distinctions, as well as the differential treatment towards families and students upon their arrival:

Now Christian Lane has a lot of immigrants whose parents were engineers for aerospace, so like a lot of kids that went there their parents were like engineers. So there was probably an ELL class but it was different because all of them were at a higher level like pretty “smart” kids with pretty “smart” parents and that’s when we started to see oh there is a difference. There was an immigrant kid whose dad was pretty famous in the Midwest, a doctor. The way he got treated, even though he was a foreigner, he was from India, was definitely not how we got treated.

While Lema provides a very insightful information about the political, structural and educational differences as represented in students’ treatments, such as a higher level ELL classes, she also alluded to deficit thinking embedded in culture of poverty as represented in her comment about “smart kids” and “smart parents”. This is important because in comparison, Lema shared her parent’s economic struggles when they moved to the U.S. in the following way:

Like when our parents arrived, they were made to think or maybe their own perception was like that I am old I am no longer capable of learning, so I am gonna take whatever job I can take and so that’s our standard. Like if we do, if we succeed its doing anything better than what my parents are doing. And anything better might be working at McDonald’s, or doing a factory job or like, so by that standard if I am working at a factory but working at like a lead position or I have a different position from what my mom and dad are working, then I guess I consider myself successful. If that makes sense. So yeah I think that where you start influences how far you go.

Lema further discussed her awareness of structural differences and discussed how the hegemonic ideologies, such as culture of poverty was often used to put her against her
African American peers, further perpetuating a deficit thinking about specific groups of people, in this case African Americans in the U.S.

in one of my psychology classes we had a discussion about it. You know I was saying because we come and are already put up to a higher level than someone who was born here. So like we come here and we come with no credit problems, we are able to build this credit history with scratch and no debt and the only debt that we do have is for our benefit. Because it's like the loan that they give us for plane tickets, we pay it back and that’s the credit. And everybody wants to help us… There's so much support.

And like as a refugee I was telling one of my friends, imagine two same persons, one of them is a refugee or has a title of refugee and the other doesn’t. if I, as a refugee, go and apply for public assistance, it's because I am poor and I had a hard life, and I really need this extra help, and I am expected to get on my feet as soon as I get that, and then I am gonna get a job and I am gonna be on my feet as soon as I can, and so everybody is going to help me. And even though I have this cash and food assistance, there’s volunteers who want to help me with transportation, to help me with child care, to donate stuff. There is so much help and support for refugees and then imagine me, the same exact person, as the other person, and then going to apply for the same assistance, they are going to think of me as like lazy, like why are you in need of this assistance, it was not that hard that you could have done that on your own. You are getting on this public assistance. You are probably gonna stay on this. Nobody wants to help me, everybody is afraid of me. And so if I look at me, the American me looks at the refugee me, I am angry at me because I have been through similar things, but the perception that people have of me is completely opposite.

Educational Opportunities. Lema’s knowledge of her racial, refugee, cultural and ethnic identities at the intersections was also evident in her descriptions of school spaces.

One significant aspect of that identity was her placement in the ESL programs. She shared that ESL was a new system that was introduced when she was in elementary, so not all schools offered ESL education and kids had to be bussed to the schools that offered ESL services:

Yeah, and all of the schools, it was a regular school but there were some schools that had that program so they had teachers that were specific to ESL. And so, and
it wasn't that many of them, like when we first started there were three [ESL schools]. One elementary [and] one middle school, and so everybody in the whole city wherever you were living, if you were in ESL you got bused to that specific school. And so by the time I was in high school. You know, it was pretty similar, where like there weren't that many schools that provided ESL. And so everybody from all over the city, who were in “need” of ESL were bused there so that was a thing like JFK is on the southeast side of town, and we were living on the southwest side of town and there was a school that was walking distance but they didn't have any teachers. They didn't have a program so everybody went there...

As Lema shared the placement and commute, her narrative also highlighted the structural issue of lack of inclusive schools and resources, and educators’ training and availability in the schools in her neighborhood to teach ALL students. She further alluded to another structural issue, educators’ referral in making placement decisions, related with the subjective categorization for ELL placement. She said that since it was a new system, she does not recall taking any “test” to be out of ESL. She shared the exchange between her teacher and herself in the following quote:

I don't think they had the levels or the system back then. It was a pretty new system that they were starting, which is why it was like, when it was time for me to be out of it so they kind of just talked to me and asked like. Do you think you need this? And so, like, I don't, I don't think so. No, there wasn't that “test” for me. Not that I remember and if I did do it, they didn't explain like this is why I'm here testing and I know now they do and they explain like you're going to take a test and that will determine whether you're in ESL the next year. It wasn't that then.

When asked how did she exit the ESL program, Lema said it was mostly when the teacher “felt” comfortable taking kids out:

Previously it was, if the teachers felt comfortable with that, coz I honestly don't remember taking a test to come out of ESL. It was the matter of just talking to me and talking to my parents and saying, like, the teacher saying like, you're doing great. You're doing great in ESL. So, would you be okay, not being in ESL? Do you want to continue to be in ESL?
Lema further stated that although she appreciated the one on one interaction with the paraeducator, she worried that the kids in ESL classrooms are often viewed in terms of a single score on their report and viewed as “less intelligent” because of the cultural differences—where difference is considered deficit and dis/ability. She stressed that:

I mean, I think I would want them to know that well, to try to get to know me. I'm past my ESL score. Um, and kind of and then gear the lessons towards me and I'm realizing that some things I might not know because of exposure and not because of lack of intelligence.

She further added that the ESL classes and special education classes are categorized as the same, through a deficit-oriented approach—which are rooted in blaming the students to further marginalize and seclude them in schools. Talking about how special education and ESL students are segregated in schools she said:

Sometimes the students when they find out like, Oh, this person is either in ELL or a special type of class, then you're just automatically categorized as being like, the special ed. class… and that was like the similarity I was talking about with ESL and special ed it is like… being in your own side of the school does keep you segregated…

so sometimes it was hard for them to distinguish whether someone was going to ESL or going to a special ed. class. And then because special ed is what everybody was used to, everybody just assumed that developmentally you are a little bit slower.

She further discussed the prevalence of the deficit medical model of dis/ability in schools, and how special education kids were segregated based on “ability”, in the separate part of the school. Lema said:

they were all in their own wings. Like if you are “slow”, that was the language that was used [in school], that if you are “slow” or have a “developmental issue” then you go to special ed. And we all knew where the special ed. classes were so
if anyone was in that area as opposed to the ESL area then people would start asking questions like hey why did you go there?

She didn’t recall if they learned anything about special education students in school. She said:

But there wasn't any class where they talked about the differences or why one would be in one and not the other. That was just the “status quo”, that's just the way it was and like if you were in it you knew why and if you weren’t then it's not your business.

Lema also shared how the deficit views about special education students prevailed across the board. She added:

like when people were in that wing, like in special ed. and not ESL, people would just be like dude you are slow because like we all have English problems that’s why we are here, but there’s something extra wrong with you. So there was something wrong with you being in ESL because you don’t speak English, so you are slower than everybody but then there was an extra layer of slowness if you were in a special ed. class.

Lema further discussed that comparing the ESL classroom today from the past, they have now created different levels, meaning that students take regular classes in addition to their ESL class. She said:

They're more structured and I mean, now they have like a test or a standard on how like when someone moves up to the next level. They are different in that not all classes are like being an ESL does not necessarily mean that you’re going to like in your own wing or like your own side of the school like you can have an ESL class and then have other classes like math or science that is regular like regular ed. classes and, you know, um, so that's different.

Lema’s knowledge and understanding of her multiple and intersecting experiences including race, gender, culture and ethnicity, social class, refugee status and national identity were evident in her reflections of the resettlement process. She described how the setting, social interactions, educational and social structures, and schooling experiences
influenced her identity development and introduced her to the cultural hegemony of the
U.S. Lema’s descriptions of how language differences evolve into perceived deficits,
which are then associated with perceived disabilities, reflect an understanding of
linguistic hegemony and bias. She emphasized how distinctions between immigrant and
refugee status influenced social perceptions, differential treatment between students, and
support services provided. The intersection of her racial, refugee, and African identities
were evident throughout the interviews. While Lema often called out the deficit
orientation within the school systems towards students of Color with and/or without
disabilities, her narratives also depicted internalizing of the anti-Black racism and culture
of poverty rhetoric which wrongfully places the blame on Black people for their living
conditions and realities. The next category describes the interlocking centrality of Lema’s
racial, cultural and refugee identity to her understanding of identity formation.

**Salience within Multidimensional Identities**

Lema gave central importance to her African racial identity. In the following
quote she stated:

because like when I first started, middle school people thought I was making an
ethics claim I'm African American. But they were like, there was a lot of
generalizing. So, like in my history class if we were talking about like slavery and
African American history they would look at me like, I'd have to explain like I
wasn't there. I don't know if I can answer all these questions… I'm African.

While she discussed an important point above where society and systems make
generalizations about all students of Color in relation to “White” students as the “norm”,
she also portrays what Bonilla-Silva (2017) called *racism without racist*. This means that
in her attempt to “Other” herself from her African American peers she distanced and
divorced from the system of racism and ableism, and portrayed an anti-Black and culture
of poverty rhetoric.
In relation to her native tribal language, Lema shared that she speaks it everyday at home
with parents and also uses it at work for “interpretation” because “a lot of [her] clients
also speak Kirundi.”

Sharing about her school experiences and speaking her native language in school
Lema discussed that in her earlier elementary school years she would speak Kirundi with
her African friends. However, Lema’s school was changed and she was separated from
her African peers and placed in a White majority middle school. This shift made an
impact on Lema’s use of her native language in the school. She shared:

When I first started school there were some other Burundians in my class. So
sometimes we would speak Kirundi together and then after school hanging out
with friends we would speak Kirundi but then eventually they moved my school
and then I didn’t speak it much… In elementary, when we were all together we
would talk in our language
Lema’s discussion about losing her native language should not be seen without her
distancing herself from the prevalent U.S. structures where systems including racism,
ableism and other ism are present in day-to-day reality. Simply put, absent from her
narratives are discussions of structures of the schools she was placed in as she continued
making comparisons between her native and white middle class cultures and schooling.
In her new all White Middle school, Lema discussed that the stereotypes about her
cultural identity, specifically about her intersectional racial, ethnic and linguistic
identities, involved perceptions of “inability” and a lack of “intelligence”. She said “so,
yeah, like in schools you get that where like, where because you don't speak the
language, then that equates to not being intelligible and so, yeah.” Lema added to this by
stating that a lot of times there was a misconception in schools that what is “common
sense” in the American system—as White middle-class ways of being and doing—is
“common sense” to everyone. Such ideology often led to limited understandings about
refugees’ whole selves and experiences. She shared:

> I think that a lot of things we just assume that people know like common sense
> isn't common and so, there are some things that, because I have not been, because
> I'm so new to the country and because I haven't been exposed to it a lot, I don't
> know it, but it's not because I lack “intelligence”, it's just because I haven't been
> exposed to it

For Lema this was personal, and she wanted to show her peers and teachers—and in a
sense responding to the systems and structures at large—that her Africanness was not a
“dis/ability”. She said “… and wanting to show that my Africanness was not like a
disability. And it was not like a step back. For me. It is just another layer of my, like vast
identities.” Her middle school experiences in an all White school resulted in the loss of
her native language over time. However, it was important for Lema to (re)center her
cultural linguistic identity. She stated:

> this is kind of embarrassing… And so, you know, just hanging out more with
> people from our culture then I, you know, I decided to just to learn it again. So I
> would speak to my friends like in the hallway or at lunch, like we would speak
> our language, because it was like the group. But that's the only time that I used it.
> When I was hanging out in school.

The centrality of Lema’s African racial identity, both culturally and linguistically, were
clearly evident. This theme also represents that while she valued her cultural and racial
identities, her narratives also depict an ongoing *racism without racist* approach at play.
The salience of that African identity and her refugee identity was also captured through her self-labeling and self-identifying.

**Privileging the Self-Selected Voice**

Lema referred to herself in terms of her racial, cultural and ethnic identities as interlocked with her refugee identity. Her experiences were wrapped in her refugee self-identity which was presented as tribal and African:

> Ummm.. my parents are from mixed tribes… hutu and tutsi… one of my parents is from hutu and the other is tutsi so I am a mixed child… and in 1993 and 1994 there was hutu and tutsi genocide in Ruwanda and Burundi… and that is why we fled from our country to Tanzania. and then eventually we resettled to the US coz we were a “vulnerable” population

Throughout her childhood, Lema was reluctant to be known as an African American, due to the systemic teaching of anti-Black racism and deficit thinking. She shared the systemic ways in which racism against African Americans was introduced to her family during the cultural orientation in camps and reinforced in the U.S. schools and society:

> So, um, a lot of the things that were being taught were like be careful, Black people in America are not the same as Africans. So actually growing up and then coming here to the Midwest kind of reinforced. You know cuz there was a lot of teaching of racism. And so there was this sort of fear of, there wasn't as much of a fear for white folks, because they're doing a lot of the teaching but like for African Americans, because in camps there was a cultural orientation that was given to our parents, and then our parents would inform us… and then like movies and stuff kind of reinforced that because a lot of movies… especially where they're depicting African Americans that get really violent and not the best picture so…

Further embedded within the structurally taught anti-Black racism—which put students of Color against each other—as processed through them she shared:
I will say that black, black kids were meaner to us than like the white kids, white kids kind of kept it to themselves. Blacks wanted to differentiate us like we're African Americans and they are African like there's a difference. There's a difference and so like, all, all throughout high school. Well, up until my senior year. when anyone called me African American I was like African… or American, African or black, like, that's it. I don't want you calling me African American because I know I'm not even a citizen.

Elaborating on this deficit and *racism without racist* approach, she discussed that growing up going to the school there was always this assumption and a responsibility placed on her that she should share the Black history and Black pride in the U.S. context:

it wasn't just the middle school, but even in like, high school, and even in college actually, like, being in classes that we were studying, like, civil rights, or, like, you know, just black history, and like, feeling like this burden of having to carry some sort of responsibility in people understanding the black history, even though that technically isn't my history. I came here as a refugee

However, once Lema received her U.S. citizenship, her identity of being recognized as an African American shifted. She discussed:

And so, like after I got my citizenship, and I was like okay fine you can call me African American because I literally am African and now American. But yeah, and it was, I think it was just because African Americans had been so mean at the beginning. I was like no I'm not one of you guys like I'm different.

Lema’s self-identification throughout the interviews confirmed the salience of her cultural, racial, and refugee affiliations in unique intersecting ways. Her attachment to the intersections of her cultural, racial and refugee communities was captured in several narratives. Importantly, her earlier middle school detachment from the African-American identity because of systematic teaching of anti-Black and culture of poverty rhetoric lessened as an adult.
Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging

As previously mentioned, Lema shared a strong sense of belonging with her racial, cultural and ethnic identity as she grew up. She did not share a strong connection with her country of birth, Burundi, however, she also saw herself as someone multiply marginalized in the U.S. school and culture through her refugee, racial, cultural and gendered experiences:

Being a refugee brought, in America, like, K through 12 school systems, I feel that every class I was in, I felt like a minority of minorities. so, sometimes, in middle school, I will sit in class and I will say, Gosh, I'm not only a minority, because I'm Black. And I'm a minority because I'm a woman. I'm also a minority, because I am African. And I felt like that triple barrier.

She elaborated, from a deficit and anti-Black approach, that she was often expected to embody Black pride being a Black person. However, her status as first generation refugee in the U.S. and not knowing Black history often put her in a situation where she navigated these multiple layers of her identity in school. She said:

So like, people just expect me to, like, know, and to, like, have black pride and stuff and like, but then like having to figure that out, like, what is black pride? And why should? Why should I share that? So that was always a big thing where I'm like, okay, so should I be proud to be an African, should I be proud to be black, should be proud to be in America, you know, like, not knowing exactly what my identity was.

As stated above, Lema did not share a strong sense of belonging as being an American. Much of this was associated with her multiply marginalized experiences throughout her childhood and adult life that did not make her feel that she belonged. This detachment is represented in the following quote when Lema discussed her family’s early resettlement experiences:
But it was random. It wasn't like we chose America that we wanted to go there. Just, you know, Phoenix, like we didn't know anyone, it was pretty much like okay if you resettle us, send us for wherever you feel.

The contention of carrying multiple identities—due to how the system perceived and portrayed her identities—and representing her culture while also fitting in the new culture made Lema experience communal attachment and detachment at multiple levels and in many layers. There was a time in middle school when she tried to distance herself from her African cultural and ethnic identity in public and school spheres. However, in high school she regained that sense of belonging with her culture. While she was very proud of her African heritage and identity, she shared the struggles of leaving her African identity at home in hopes to fit in the American school culture. Lema shared the reason for this in the following quote:

because a lot of times they have to completely shift. Like when I'm at school, I almost have to put my Africanness away and try to be as American as I can be. Because some of the things that I might do and it might seem deviant or just, you know, not proper for the place that I'm at, and then when I go home it's the same thing. Like, I gotta take that part of me off and be this, try at least to be this African

Recalling the racialized environment and territories within her elementary school classes, she shared:

No, I mean we tended to stick together but then like all the Asians were by themselves, like in one group all of the Africans were in one group and then there were subgroups within that too but when it came to like, in general, we were pretty much like, there's the Africans there's the Mexicans there's the Asians.
She further shared about learning early on that there were different “layers of being Black”—due to the systemic orientation that ideologically keeps people of Color against each other—in American culture. Lema stated:

One thing I learned pretty quickly was that Black was not Black, like Black wasn’t just simply Black. There’s so many layers to being Black, or different types of Blacks. There’s Blacks from Latin countries, from Africa, there’s so much of a difference.

Lema also recognized the “layers” within the identity of being an African, based on your country of origin. She shared:

So that’s one of the things I learned was that it wasn’t just one thing. Like even with being African, like not all the Africans are the same either. There are people from Congo, people from West Africa, people from East and South Africa, and Northern parts, like we are all so different people, and like our cultures are so different. So like if we are hanging out we will realize oh that is a similarity that we share. So like great moments like that. My best friend is Liberian and it’s kind of going through things that are culturally similar and things that are culturally completely different. So it's really cool.

In lieu to Lema’s identity formation and employing of her agency to understand her peers, Lema’s perceptions about her African American peers changed when she took a high school class with all African American students and staff:

So in high school, there was this literature teacher, who also had an African American program to help African Americans to one know the history, but two to get ready for college. When I went there it was all African American teachers, all African American students and so like Black teachers and Black students that’s when like, because that was the first class that I went to that was full of Black people, teachers and students, Black administration, that’s when I started to have personal experiences with them, when it wasn’t like oh like I have this one class, so and so sits two rows down from me. Or like we go to this school that has Black people and has a full program, like this was like really close interaction. That’s when I started feeling more comfortable, I was in High School and that took me
longer than others mainly because like I went to a completely White middle school

In an attempt to understand her multiple and intersectional identities, including gender, culture, and race, Lema shared that it is tough to belong to one identity and not the other. It is hard to figure out who you are and to which communities/identities you associate more with. She shared this contention in the following quotes:

yeah. I mean, it's hard knowing, like figuring out who you are. In general… like just being a girl growing up in a society where you're a kid and you know you're growing up with people who experienced the same culture as you and, and stuff like that. So it's hard enough just trying to figure out who you are. But when you add in, oh the expectation of this new culture the expectation of your parents and the culture that they lived in, it makes it really difficult because at the end of the day, you're gonna let somebody down… if it's not my parents then it's going to be like my school friends or just the expectation culturally of like what a young lady is supposed to be like, there was like a lot of friction on like physical appearance, how should one dress What should I wear.

She further shared the struggle to balance the expectations of her cultural and ethnic self that her family had and still trying to ‘fit in’ the U.S. culture:

So, it was a lot of, there was a lot of struggle, there were some relationships with parents that were broken. Because, you know, no one wanted to kind of like, meet each other halfway. I was lucky enough that I came around, and then my parents came around as well. There was a lot of give and take, but it just made it really difficult because it was like I'm trying to figure out who I am as a person. I want to be a person that, you know, respects my parents, is a person that my parents honor and respect and are proud of, but I also want to fit in with my friends and have friends. It was really difficult.

She also shared that her attachment to her African identity presented challenges when she pursued a career over marriage. Lema stated:

And at that time the Burundian girls that were older than me… a lot of African girls that I knew that were older than me were just like finishing high school and
then getting married and that was the trend. So I kind of broke the expectation so
like young ladies from Burundi and Congo they finish high school 17, 18 and just
get married and that was the expectation and so I think I was one of the first to
like not do that.

And to like going to college, and that was like a big change I think …
when I was 25… at like 24, 25, people started to lose all hope. Yeah. Oh my
goodness. She is mid 20s and she's not married. She's not even like dating anyone.
This girl's gonna die alone. And some people were really nervous for me. They
question every other day, every week at church like When are you getting married
like when are you gonna start a family. How long are you going to do this school
thing?

Embedded in the myth of American dream and American exceptionalism, Lema
discussed the opportunities and freedom available in American culture, particularly for
women:

Oh the opportunities… like just being able to make a goal, and know that if I
work, if I work hard enough, meet enough people and make enough connections I
can definitely like eventually get there… I like that… I like some of the liberties
that you know the freedoms that we have. Being able to speak and you know not
feel like, just because I'm a female that you know I can't make a decision or I can't
do something that I hadn't planned on doing.

In addition to her communal attachment with her African racial, cultural and ethnic
identities, Lema also discussed other affiliations with communities in her social
environment. These connections contributed to her sense of self.

Impact of Social Class on Attachments and Friendships. Lema discussed the
impact of social capital on making friendships and gaining economic capital in society.
According to Bourdieu (1985), social capital is one’s association with different groups
and friends, while economic capital refers to the material assets that can be converted to
money and/or institutionalized as property rights. Lema stated:
I have come to realize that you know it’s not always about what you know, it’s about who you know. So some of my friends ended up making more. Remember my friends used to be like some of the kids that came to America with me were like, oh man I am gonna be friends with this and this because he’s rich. His dad owns a company, or his mom is so and so, you know, stuff like that and like those were, like that was the base of their friendship

She further added that when they resettled, certain families volunteered to help them adjust in the society socially. She said that the kids from families who got connected with financially well-off people ended up seeing good role models. This helped them with social mobility in the economic structure of U.S. society. Lema said:

Also, when we resettled, volunteers would connect with us. And like depending on which volunteer would connect with you, and how close of a friendship you guys ended up having will also affect the level of education children get. So like doctors or lawyers who would volunteer and connect with the family and then the kids would like to get to know their kids and eventually start finding out what the adults do and end up seeing oh this person lives in a pretty big house and nice cars and so be thinking I wanna do something similar. And then because they are so well connected with you, it’s easier to say, how do I get into that. And then since they know people so they would be like oh well this college, let me help you apply to that, let me help you get into this program.

School also played an important role in developing those friendships and social capital. Lema shared how some students who were good athletes ended up being popular in school and gaining those friendships. She said:

Like I am going, maybe like the athletes, the ones that are good athletically, would like be popular in that way and then they would use that popularity to try to be friends with someone who they knew their parents were well off or like you know… I went to their house and it was huge, I am gonna be friends with them. And going into HS then, as we were finishing HS, these kids, their parents were already setting them up to do as good, if not better than the parents have been doing. And so if my friend that had friendship with someone who were majoring in like engineering or some science degree, and so then the friends or the Africans would say oh I am majoring the same thing, so because they are friends now with this person, this person is able to support them and this person is gonna help them
with like classes. So I have a lot of friends who ended up getting business degrees or engineering degrees, or like because they got so close to someone whose parents were that so then they saw they could picture themselves making it there.

She further added that some other students who didn’t have those connections probably received the academic degree but did not make it that higher of social mobility in society. She shared:

Whereas like some of the other ones who didn’t have that sort of a connection maybe could have gone to the school and gotten a degree or something that could have earned them a good wage but never themselves succeeding because they never saw someone that had already done it, that could show them the way to getting there.

For Lema, her “biggest struggle” was making those social connections. She said:

And so, and I think that was my biggest struggle that I was never, like it’s hard for me to like to get out there and hang out with people and start a conversation and be super close friends with someone who needs someone to be with them all the time. I think I can’t do that. That’s just not me.

Most of Lema’s friends were Africans. She said “a lot of my friends are African. They're not all like Burundians. But they're mostly African.”

Lema did make American friends in middle school. However, these friendships only lasted within school premises due to the social class differences in society. Lema discussed the social class difference between her white peers and herself and shared how she compartmentalized her friendships between school and neighborhood categories. She shared:

so in middle school I did have some friends who were white as well. I did in middle school like I had, I was very compartmentalized of friends. So like when I was at school, I had a crew. We were all friends but like we didn't really
communicate outside of school like we weren’t like best friends that we were like, that ever like overflowed out of school. But I never felt like, Oh, I can't go to school because I don't have any friends. So, when I was at school I had my school friends and then after school I had my African friends that I was neighbors with, I lived with them. My friends from middle school lived far away, they lived in houses. And like, you know, they didn't take the bus their parents drove to school every day… I walked to school in middle school, it was close enough that I could walk but it was far enough that like, it would have been better if I had a transport. And in the winter maybe my dad would take me. But I lived in an apartment complex so like my neighbors were my friends and a lot of my neighbors, so “happened to be Africans” because in middle school we were living in like government housing and so just so happened that a lot of the people that we came to America with needed a government housing and we were all staying in the same complex, or the same like housing units. So, I was separated that way.

Lema discussed her awareness of the social class differences between her school friends and herself. However, her reference to “happened to be African” because they “needed government housing” depicts her limited awareness of how the structures of U.S. society have historically and systematically (re)produced and maintained the practices of redlining to discriminate against people of Color, especially African Americans, in segregated neighborhoods and project housing (D’Rozario & Williams, 2005). Lema’s comments revealed a strong sense of attachment to her refugee and African racial communities/identities, which was central and salient to her sense of self. She discussed the “layers” within both the Black and African communities with cultural similarities and differences and discussed the explicit and implicit ways anti-Black racism was taught across the system. She further discussed her awareness of social and economic capital, as well as how friendships are developed and impacted through one’s social class. Her attachment to the African-American identity was gradual. Additionally, balancing the
expectations from those in the multiple communities was challenging for Lema, which complicated the construction of her ongoing and multidimensional identity formation.

**Intersectional Disablism**

The cultural, racial, social and gendered expectations from family and school impacted Lema’s identity development in many ways. Family pressures and expectations, coupled with cultural bias within the schools’ curriculum, and the stereotypes and bullying experienced in school influenced Lema’s sense of self. Relationships with peers and teachers similarly contributed to identity development, including both positive encounters as well as bullying and racist interactions. These social, psychosocial, and emotional experiences made it difficult for Lema to “figure out” her multiple intersectional sense of self.

Lema shared the family pressure of succeeding in her classes and making a good career for herself so that she can gain a good social and economic status in society. She shared how such exchanges with her mother made Lema worry about her future:

She would be like, and it was her way of trying to encourage us but like you know she'd say, if you don't do good in school you're going to end up like me and so [thinking to self] if I can’t succeed in these classes then will I ever amount to anything… in the bigger picture.

Parental understanding of education was tied up to the African teaching styles, and Lema shared that her mother showed concern about their education:

like I remember coming home from school, me and my brother and telling my mom that school this grade year… like the teachers don’t have like, no kids are beaten at school and then my mom was like if they don’t hit kids at school how would they learn? [laughs]
The pressure from Lema’s parents to do well in school or “end up like me” influenced her self-perception. Yet the school context itself presented challenges to both Lema’s academic success and sense of self. One poignant incident that lingered through Lema’s childhood was when United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) shaved the heads of all the refugee kids before they stepped in the plane to come to the U.S. and the resulting bias in school:

Yeah. When we came to America like before we could get on the plane they shaved our heads like we didn't have hair… would have been like UNHCR. They didn't want us to come here and bring like lice or whatever. And then when we got here it was kind of like the expectation, like what our parents thought was the expectation. And so, and then not knowing what product to use and while we could use it was just easier to cut our hair… shaved heads, and sometimes like there were some kids that you know ended up getting lice or something and so like the teachers didn't know what to do. So then the recommendation was to shave our heads.

The deficit ideology presented by the UNHCR official over time became a ritual for the African families:

like it started to become like a cultural thing amongst our parents. And so some of them started to infuse that with religion. Oh, like we don't want our kids doing their hair, we don't want them to put fake stuff in their hair like extensions or anything so with that then it made it really difficult.

Lema discussed how the kids, especially girls, had to fight their families to keep their hair and questioned why UNHCR did not provide products to the families to be used for lice:

like, how am I gonna manage my hair, if you're not allowing me to braid it, if I can't braid it then my hair is gonna get really tough and it's gonna get difficult to comb, then it's going to be messy and then I'm not looking presentable so then what's the option, what's the option than to cut it. And so, yeah, that was something that we had to battle with our parents and like our churches, like, we need to look presentable at school, and we don't want to be disrespectful so I'm going to do my hair… So eventually it got to a place where I'm just going to do it because I don't want to continue to look like a little boy… and just thinking in my head why didn't UNHCR give some products to be used for lice?
The social, psychological, and emotional effects of rituals like head shaving were intensified by other school experiences. Recalling her elementary school experiences, Lema shared that she and other students were often pulled out of the classroom for one-on-one instruction. While Lema enjoyed and benefited from this academic experience, she also questioned the social and academic isolation:

I mean I did enjoy it. I did enjoy, like, being one on one and taking my own time and being at my own pace. Not feeling like I'm causing other people to be behind or feeling like I'm looking too far ahead. It was nice being able to be one on one with the teacher. There was [also] a paraeducator that would come in and just meet with me one on one to help me learn how to write… like letters and then eventually we get into like sentences and stuff, and before, before they allowed me to go into like a general ed. So I really enjoyed my time with her.

Lema also questioned this isolation:

Because like, sometimes you would, I would ask myself, like, how can I be the only one leaving class? Or we are the only ones leaving class. Or do these people leave class or go somewhere when I'm gone?

And I kind of didn't really understand all that was happening. Partly because I was a little kid. And also, because I don't feel like there was a lot of explaining done to, to kind of walk me through, okay, this is what's going on. This is how you're different from the rest of the classes. I was confused. Because once you start noticing that you're always being taken out of class, and you don't understand why you start creating your own reason. Or having your own understanding of what the process is. So although I enjoyed getting pulled out of class, there were times when I questioned myself like am I the only one being pulled out. Why do I have to meet with a teacher by myself?

Lema’s confusion about the academic isolation contributed to her identity development from a social, emotional, and psychosocial dimension. Even her early educational experiences raised similar questions about her academic needs and cultural disparities:

I think I remember when it was my very first day of school, it was in Phoenix, Arizona, and I think it was like first grade. Yeah, I started off in first grade. So it's
my first day in American school and they started off by showing me animals. Like what are these animals? And I remember crying because they were showing me animals that aren't familiar to me in my country, and it's my first day of class. And I'm like, this should be easy. I've never seen a horse before, but I don't think they took the time to think, okay, where she from, what animals are common. So I got a really low score. I don't think I got any of them right, or if I did, I got like one. And I remember going home and like taking the sheets and I'm like, Mom dad do you know what these animals are? [laughs] Am I just stupid? like I don't know. Like it just made me like feel a little dumb because none of the things that they were showing me were familiar to me.

She reflected on the cultural bias of school testing and instruction which impacted her educational sense of self:

So I think that's something to think about. Even when giving an exam or testing kids on their level of understanding, also thinking about where's this person from. Is this something that's familiar to them that they just don't understand or is it something that they don't understand because it is completely a foreign object to them.

Lema further commented on the purpose of standardized tests and the oppressive effects on students’ identity development:

I think they should only be tested to test the level of growth. I always liked when teachers would give a pretest, and then like give the same pretest post learning something just to see like, what did you learn, what did you gather and so that was, that was testing my level of growth and so that made me feel more comfortable when taking that test like I'm not like a complete “idiot.” Even if I get just one like one right at the end. At least I learned something. Yeah, but I think that, you know, being able to test whether someone is learning in the classroom is also valuable.

The pressures from family to do well in school, complicated by the cultural bias inherent in school practices, and the bullying and cultural stereotypes Lema experienced influenced her psychosocial and emotional construction of identity. For Lema, the
struggle was to figure out who you are as a person in relation to the two cultural identities she carried. Lema stated:

so kind of understanding that one these students are coming into this new culture, into this school system at a time where they were starting to like actually learn about their culture and learn about themselves. They are starting to develop who they are and maybe they were just starting to understand who they are in the country that they were in or the society that they were in, and then all of a sudden things are completely changed and here they are in this new place and parents want them to be one way and society wants them to be a different way, [and] the school district wants them to be another way and so it becomes really difficult for them to figure out which identity is them … so like, you know, a lot of times when like kids or even adults would associate like weird... like generalize all African Americans are like this… you know, I started to get put in that box as well like you're, you're black you're African so you're African American, and it was, I mean it's a struggle, kind of trying to figure out what your identity is.

She further shared how the additional layer of her gendered identity received biases and additional pressures:

yeah. I mean, it's hard knowing, like figuring out who you are. In general… like just being a girl growing up in a society where you're a kid and you know you're growing up with people who experienced the same culture as you and, and stuff like that. So it's hard enough to figure out who you are. But when you add in. oh the expectation of this new culture the expectation of your parents and the culture that they lived in, it makes it really difficult

She further added that since kids have to change their cultural identities so often within school and at home, that it becomes really hard:

So it's hard because I think both ends need to be accepting and to understand that as a kid there’s going to be a struggle in finding out who they are because their identities have to shift so often.

During her crucial middle school years, Lema was switched to an all white middle school because the school district did not feel that she needed to attend an ESL school anymore.

She shared the struggle of how it affected her psycho-emotionally by both the sudden
transition from the ESL program and the lack of opportunity to interact with African peers. She said “and so, you know, just switching my school. like that messed with me a little bit because I wasn't around Africans anymore.” It was difficult, she added, not to see any other Africans in her class or school. Lema often felt like a “minority of minorities” and her “quadruple minority” status influenced her identity development:

I remember observing in my social studies class that I was like a triple minority… Umm not only I am a Black female, but I'm also African and in my class and usually I was the only you know the triple minority. If there was another like Black person in our class it usually was an African American male. So those things I remember observing in my classes in my school. So like, I was at a stage where this whole feeling of like, being a triple or quadruple minority, all at the same time felt like it would ease a little bit if I at least talked and acted like them.

These experiences and changes were “sad” and difficult for Lema, creating a sense of self that was not “standard” “it's sad that I noticed that I could sit in class and like, actively notice that I am, I'm not the standard. I am like the “weird kid.””

When asked what would Lema want her peers and teachers to understand about immigrant and refugee students, Lema demonstrated an ideology of color-evasiveness. She stated:

I'm trying… Some things are new to me and not every joke is going to be funny, because I don't understand the context… I’m just a kid like you. My home experience might be different from yours, but generally, things are very similar. I think we're all the same, just in different ways.

11 “Color-evasiveness, as an expansive racial ideology of Color-blindness[—that one doesn’t see race], resists positioning people with disabilities as problematic as it does not partake in dis/ability as a metaphor for undesired” (Annama et al., 2017, p. 153).
Lema’s interest in that others know and understand her racial, cultural and refugee identity was highlighted in her discussions about the need for teacher-family communication and collaboration.

Teacher-Student Interactions and Relationships in Identity Development, Lema discussed how her interactions with teachers also influenced her identity development. She discussed the value of “connectedness” with teachers and the importance of teachers knowing both students and their families:

At least with the ELL teacher there is this connectedness… a lot of special ed. and ELL teachers are really focused on the students so they actually develop relationships with students so that was really nice… that there is this adult in the school that I feel comfortable with and someone I could go and talk to, even with my messed-up English. They would still be willing to be helpful.

in middle school there was my history teacher and my social studies teacher, she was pretty cool. And so, I wouldn't say we were like super close but like compared to other teachers I felt like she was one that I could talk to, but then like thinking back I think the reason why I could talk to her or I felt comfortable with her was because I was doing well in her class.

Lema advised that teachers should work on building this relationship with students and parents through building a familiarity with their culture and community. By enhancing positive relationships, a student’s sense of identity is also enhanced:

I think what I would tell the teachers is talk to your students, you know, get to know them, but also get to know their parents. Find out what their culture was like, what education was like where they came from. Um, I think understanding that will help teachers to understand students as a starting point and also the direction that they need to take and help their students to grow. So I think communication like open dialogue back and forth is going to be helpful, not just orienting the students and the parents, but also being oriented on their culture and their language, their ways of thought.
Lema’s social, psychosocial, and emotional construction of identity was significantly influenced by experiences with bullying and racism within her social world of schooling.

**Bullying and Racism and the Psychosocial/Emotional Construction of Identity.**

Lema experienced consistent bullying and racism with regards to her racial and cultural identities in middle school. The bullying and racism she experienced often targeted her race and culture and impacted Lema’s social, psychosocial and emotional wellbeing “kids can be mean sometimes. And so kids would make fun of me and you know, my friends…” She added:

In my gym class, there was always this boy who was actually Black. He will start stuff all the time like Lema like how does it feel actually wearing clothes, because in Africa people don't wear clothes? and like talking about hygiene and stuff like oh you guys don't bathe.

you know and just kids being mean about, like, you know, their expectation of what my hygiene is going to be like… based on where I’m from. And that, oh, are you African, or Are you Jamaican I get that, too. And, and it was like they weren't asking me as if like, oh, that's cool. Or like, that's exciting. It was kind of like, you know, like Africans they're dirty, they're not civilized. They don't know what clothes to wear… like kids were mean back then

But, um, yeah there was a lot of teasing about being like an African booty scratcher or like, you know, that we didn't know how to dress, like this is a new concept for us. So yeah, there's a lot of stereotyping… you know, kids being mean like stereotyping you know, all of the Congolese women are gonna bleach or something like just there were some stereotypes of like, if so so and so is bleaching then like they'll say, Oh my gosh, are you like Congolese or something, you know

She adamantly stated that those understandings of her cultural and ethnic identity was not something that she or her family introduced her to. Instead it was the school system where she learned those stereotypes about her race, culture and ethnic identity. Lema said:
A lot of the stereotypes. Like you know being called like African booty scratchers… a lot that came in school. And it was, it was towards me being African more than black… That’s something that we experienced in schools and then like you know brought home or something. it wasn’t that we came from Africa with having these perceptions about ourselves or our ancestors..

The emotional impact of receiving consistent bullying and racist jokes impacted Lema’s identity formation. She became a “bully” herself. Lema understood the power dynamics in controlling the fight as she figured it out that the one who starts the fight can control it:

In middle school, you know, there was a lot of bullying. But then I feel like at the end of it I almost ended up becoming more of the bully. Yeah, I was more of the bully at the end of it all because I figured if I start the fight, then I can control it.

As Lema moved from the world of school into adulthood, various experiences and perceptions continued to influence her sense of self.

Identity Construction in the Post-School Context. The social and psychosocial dimensions of identity development continued into Lema’s adult life. While her interactions with others as a service provider in a refugee resettlement organization brought her a sense of purpose, honor and respect, she also resented and resisted the deficit perceptions that she should be grateful for these opportunities. Lema said that she wants people to understand that moving here as a refugee was not her choice. She said:

And I think that that's what I liked the least about it is that a lot of people here think that oh you're a refugee or an immigrant and they feel like we owe them something like we should be grateful and like show gratitude. Just because, like there's a lot of different things that had to happen, that were caused by different places and different countries that I needed to flee. I don't like the fact that this isn't where my parents were born and this wasn't a choice. Like it's great that I'm here but like this wasn't my choice. So, like you want to stop and think about that. I mean, it's like, yes I am grateful that I'm here. But I don't want to be forced to feel like I have to show gratitude every time to someone. Yeah, so I think it's just that feeling.
I still get it. I think even people who like their main purpose is to help… still make it seem… like they have a good intention at heart… they are like… Oh, well thank God you got here, but we are here so I feel like people have good hearts and good intentions, but sometimes they can come off as, you know, I don't know. I owe them something…

In the following quote Lema shared how she has often been considered a “model minority” in social and work structures, while simultaneously being marginalized and limited due to her linguistic ability to speak Kirundi language. She stated in the following quotes how she navigated that situation. She said:

You know, I think there's times when I've gotten a job because I'm a different type of African or because I'm like a mile quite African. If you can say that, at least like in terms of thought and in terms of like the way that I sound. So yeah, I think it would be acceptance and like, wanting to feel like an equal. Like, I went to college, and I am still interpreting, but they like making it seem like… like that's all that I can do is the interpretation. So like, that's actually one of the things that got me out of being an interpreter, and more of being a provider, because then it's like okay listen, I provide this skill or I provide this service in the language. it's not that I'm incapable of providing the service. I am not an interpreter, I am a provider, and I do it in the language. I think that was my way of thinking that's the main or something like just not feeling like you know because I’m less than… yeah.

When asked how would Lema describe herself, she shared how her multiple identities at the intersection of the two cultures intersect:

I am Burundian, I had to flee. So I guess I was once a refugee, I don't like to consider myself still as one. I am a woman, I am curious, like, I am career oriented. But I also want to have the American experience, but also keep, like, the humility and the humble. The humility of like an African woman, you know, I like to be able to be seen and viewed as like a soft female or woman, but also be respected and honored as someone who has the honorary respect, I guess, as an individual, and as in my career just as a human being, and don't want to be identified as like, a great like, you're good for an African in anything.
The social, psychological, and emotional construction of Lema’s identity was influenced by family expectations, positive and negative school experiences, and post-school interactions. Structural experiences such as shaving the hair of refugee students discriminated against and marginalized them, including Lema. Her educational isolation for one-on-one assistance and her transition into an all-white school created complexities in the development of her sense of self as an African and as a linguistic minority. Bullying and cultural racism in the school environment contributed to the difficulties Lema experienced in “figuring out” her identity. In response to these difficulties and challenges, Lema explored both assimilation and resistance to cultural hegemony.

**Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance**

The final theme emerging from the data analysis involved Lema’s construction of identity associated with multi-assimilation, accommodation and adaptation to the cultural hegemony of the U.S., particularly linguistic hegemony. She described an imposed pressure to assimilate and she shared her resistance to accommodation. Her experiences with ELL as a formalized assimilation revealed the perception of language difference as a deficit or disability to be remediated or overcome. Lema also discussed a personalized assimilation through her journey to modify her accent to adapt to the hegemonic language—U.S. English—of her social setting.

**Multi-Assimilation.** Lema shared her perspective about the multi-assimilation to American language and culture when refugees first move to the U.S. According to her, U.S. has created a global image of itself as a great nation and country, connecting back to
the myth of the American dream and American exceptionalism. She elaborated on this in
the following quote:

I think Americans and America have created this perception of themselves as
being great. And I think that the fact that they're not lenient or willing to learn
other languages and the fact that they expect others to speak their language and
not find a happy medium. So it's fair for them to ask for it. I think them doing lots
of business with other countries and being in the front line of world relief. I think
it plays a role in that perception. America is really good at painting itself as holy,
pure, like a great nation. And so then who wouldn't want to be a part of this holy
pure nation

Commenting on the nationalist and manifest destiny\(^\text{12}\) ideology of being proud to be an
American, Lema added that “as Americans… they might know what their flaws are but
they don't like to talk about what their flaws are… they hide it, and then they say we're
great.” She further added that when you hear this constantly you begin to believe that and
strive to achieve a similar perception “but if that's what you're hearing, and you're hearing
it constantly… Then people will begin to perceive you as that. And so then who wouldn't
want to be a part of this holy pure nation…”

This perceived need to assimilate and adapt was grounded in the deficit view of
language difference as something was inherently “incomplete” in herself. The language
differences were a barrier and created a perception of “incompetent” for refugees. Lema
elaborated on these deficit views, which she challenged and resisted:

---

\(^{12}\) the widely prevalent 19th-century colonial and imperialist belief that the American settlers
were designated the right to spread and rule over the whole American continent (Pratt, 1927). The
two components of this belief included: 1) Special morality of the American people and
American institutions, 2) the mission and duty of the United States to remake the west in the
image of the agrarian East.
People like explaining things differently to us, like slowing down. Because they just don't feel like we are smart enough, and because of a language barrier, not understanding that we do understand concepts. We just don't understand the language you know…

Lema’s perception that linguistic accommodation and adaptation were necessary to avoid a view of incompetence by others was amplified through her experiences in the ESL programs. The national establishment of the ESL programs represents a formalized assimilation effort and intent.

**ESL/ELL as Formalized Assimilation.** Lema shared both formalized and personalized accounts of cultural assimilation. From the GSI-DisCrit perspective, the structure and operation of the ESL programs was intended to create a pathway to linguistic accommodation and to preserve cultural hegemony of the U.S. Lema shared:

and just there were a lot of people looking down on us, because of our language barrier. And like making that barrier, the language barrier seem as though we are incompetent. And we are not intelligent, because we don't speak the language. She discussed that the bilingual students are placed in ESL classes just for being born to a bilingual family:

like yes an ESL program will enroll a child in ESL just for being born into a family or living in a family where English is not their native language. It doesn’t necessarily mean that the kid can’t speak English… or if the child is fluent in the language they will still be offered ELL

She added how the school practice of ESL service is rooted in lowered expectations for bilingual students. In Lema’s words:

But at first there were classes that were like, Okay, everybody just goes there… like everybody's just slow. I just don't understand, like you know the thing is that language is what's a barrier. So, yeah, like in schools you get that a lot, where because you don't speak the language, then that equates to not being intelligible.
She further added that the pull-out and isolated nature of ESL services created a sense of difference and deficit for her:

And so even with ESL classes, and just being pulled out of class… you know, not everyone is going to learn better by being pulled out of class. There are some people who would benefit… But there are some who would have potentially done better, faster or, yeah, had a better understanding if they would have just stayed in that [regular ed.] class and just had a teacher or a TA just focus on them a little bit to make sure that they are following along, if that makes sense. Like being pulled out of class made it just seem like, you know, we just didn't understand.

Lema did not appreciate such stereotypical generalization of kids from bilingual families and their placement in ELL classrooms. She acknowledged the intention, however, she said there is a need for individualizing education when it comes to educating children. In her words:

I mean I don’t think either the stereotypes or the generalization is necessarily appropriate or accurate… placing children in ELL, I can see how the intention is good. Like you know trying to streamline things but I feel like there is a need for individuality in schools… and that the students are not all the same… people learn but don’t learn at the same pace though.

Lema questioned the negative consequences of this practice on students’ sense of self. In her words:

I mean, they are treated differently. And then there's a generalization, there's the window, or the door for generalizing. So if you have an issue with one person who's being pulled out of class, all bilingual students will be pulled out of class, it's sort of like what ends up happening. When some, you know, a group of children have to be pulled out of class or a group of people have to be separated. And I mean, it's with good intention but can have some negative consequences.

Lema further added that this deficit ideology prevails in high school ESL classrooms as well. She shared about her high school ESL class as not appropriate for the grade level. Lema said:
because like, being in [high school] ELL [class], maybe this is generalizing, but like, ELL that I was being in. It was a really easy class. And it was definitely I don't think grade appropriate load I feel like it would have been like a good Middle School class level. But I took it because I was like, Oh, this is gonna be really easy and it was easy.

So I remember having conversations with my friends that were actually ELL and I would say like why is this a class? We would discuss that history itself is something that anybody can struggle with. like you either know it or you don't, and you're learning it... it's just the language. And I felt like the material that was being used was so elementary. It was very, very simple and not in the language form, but just like in the content and so...

Lema wanted her peers and teachers to know that refugees and immigrants are just regular kids. Preserving her linguistic identity of native language, Lema said that bilingual students take foreign languages just as Americans would take any foreign language. The difference is that we take English as a foreign language. She said:

To me, when I think about it, that's all that it is like we're regular kids, but we're taking a foreign language and that foreign language just so happens to be English. Of us are going to excel like some American kids excel and some of us are going to fall behind, just like some American kids fall behind. The only difference is the foreign language that we are learning just so happens to be the main language for the majority.

Rather than a perception of learning a different language, Lema shared that a difference in language was perceived as a deficit, which in turn was perceived as a disability.

The Difference-Deficit-Dis/ability Construction. Within the school spaces, Lema also discussed how differences in language were viewed as deficits, and then those deficits were viewed as disabilities. She shared that within the larger school system there are many common beliefs spread about the special education system and ESL system. She said:
I think, because like the special ed. classes at least in the schools that I went to had their own wing… they had, you know, different teachers that would either follow a student into their regular class and then escort them to their special ed. class. And so that was similar to the ELL classes… so when a student was staying in their own classroom like the general class, sometimes they would send a teacher, an ELL teacher to escort them or be with them, and to help them out. There were… all of the ELL classes were kind of in the same area. So there's the ELL wing and then there is the special ed. wing. So that's similar as well. Yeah, so I think the way that the system or the programming was very similar. It was just the subjects or the product being taught that was different.

Lema shared that teachers often saw students taking ELL classes from the deficit mindset. Lema said:

I mean, like a lot of the classes were the same, except that they had to be slowed down because of the language barrier. And so I feel like the general ed. teachers didn't feel like we were going to be able to understand other concepts… like there was no need to have ESL math. Because the numbers are still the numbers like math is math.

However, Lema resisted the perception of language difference as a deficit and disability:

So the thing I would want people to know and to recognize is that our lack of English or the ability to speak English is not a disability, but a lot of times it's not viewed in that way if you're an ELL or, you know, you're taking language classes, instead of it being viewed as like oh this is a great skill that you have and that you're able to pick up on language so quickly, it's more of like considered a “disability” because you don't know the language yet, so that's what I would say, I would say we're just normal kids we move at different paces, just like “normal” kids. We just have a language barrier that we're working through.

Lema said that if one keeps experiencing the difference-deficit-dis/ability perception, students may begin to internalize that deficit view of themself which influences identity construction: “I think, um, you know, like if you say, or if you feel something long enough, I guess you'll internalize it, or if you hear it long enough time.”
Lema also shared the challenges to maintaining the two languages, and the difficulty in retaining the native language when one spends eight hours a day at school learning another language. She said:

So I'm learning a new language. I'm trying to keep the language that my parents speak so that I can at least communicate with them, which is very difficult when you're spending eight or more hours and then coming back and then trying to continue to communicate with your parents who aren't catching on to the new language as fast.

Lema shared that the deficit perspective might be addressed by schools inviting native language guest speakers who could help students learn the language from a native speaker and learn about different dialects. She said:

I think… So like I've seen where schools do a career day and have parents come and share their careers in order to help kids learn about different careers that exist. I think there is room to expand that and incorporate it in some of the classrooms. Having people come in who are from different countries I think that would be so helpful. I remember taking French class and thinking, you know what would be really cool is if like an actual native French speaker came in and just like talk to us and you know, experiencing the language isn't just taking a trip to that country, there are people here in the community that speak the language or are from French speaking countries and, like, inviting people from like France versus Congo, you know, because they both speak French, but it's not the same French.

However, Lema shared that the deficit views about her linguistic identity still prevail and linger on. Embedded in the deficit language taught ideologically in schools, she said she still feels “dumb” at times for not knowing the vocabulary that people use when talking. In such situations, Lema second guesses herself. She said:

Cuz sometimes, I mean there are times when I feel like I'm “dumb.” like, you know, not as smart maybe because I don't understand a word or someone uses a different word than I'm used to.
She counters that mindset with reminding herself that it is just vocabulary that she is not aware of. Lema shared this navigation in the following comment:

but that doesn't necessarily mean that I am “dumb.” It just means that that's a vocabulary that I haven't experienced. like, you know, like being in school and like someone's saying something, you're just like, what? I don't understand what that means. Not because I'm “dumb”, but because I've never heard of that word. This is a new word to me. And I don't understand the meaning.

However, for kids she said it is hard to not fall into this deficit thinking. She shared her own experiences “but then as kids, you know, your friends or just people who are from Europe are like, you don’t know what that means? That's “dumb”, you know. So they start thinking, like, maybe I am.”

Personalized Assimilation: The Accent Journey. Lema’s reflections and discussion of her “accent” journey revealed the tensions in assimilating to the linguistic hegemony: “so I kind of got to a place where like, I had a little bit of an accent so people, when I started talking to them they like they knew like oh you're not from here.” As said earlier, her goal in middle school was to change her accent to a Midwestern white accent—which represents how forced assimilation works through children. During another conversation she shared:

So I did work on changing my accent and on purpose, like I said last time that my goal was that if I was on the phone, and I was like, Hello, this is Lema speaking… I wanted people to be like oh I was looking for an African. And so people would call me and they'd say, Is this Lema? For people who hadn't spoken to me in a while, they'd be like, wow, you sound so different.

When further probed why Lema wanted to change her accent, She said “because I couldn’t change my skin color. I couldn’t be white like the majority of the school. And
so, the least I could do was at least sound like them. So that I wasn't as much of an outcast.”

She added:

… I don’t think that I was trying to change my accent because white as in color was better… so I feel if that was whiteness [as in skin color] then I would have maybe leaned towards changing my appearance more so than my accent. I think it was acceptance. It was acceptance for me, I wanted to feel like I was a part of, that I was an equal.

She shared that another reason to change her accent was the judgments people held towards her as soon as she interacted with them. She did not want to be judged in multiple ways. She said:

The very first thing people would say when they saw me or heard me speak is that they would just try to assume where I was from… I intentionally tried to fit in, and I mean it was the school that I was going to. I just wanted, if I'm going to stand out in the fact that I look different, I can at least sound like them, so that I'm not being judged in so many ways.

Before moving to an all white school, Lema was first moved to a majority Black school. She shared that with changing the schools her accent changed from sounding Black to sounding White.

… because like I said, like when I started in middle school, well, so my first trimester middle school, I was at my county school down here, which was like majority black, African Americans. It wasn't an ESL school, but it was very, very diverse. And then so the way that I spoke was different, like I had kind of like, like a, what they would like, quote unquote, call, like a black accent, and then like, I went to after that trimester, I moved to, so after thanksgiving, I moved to a different school. And it was like, the complete opposite. So I went from sounding black to sounding like a preppy white girl.
The cultural artifact of the superiority of the English language was also observed outside of school in her interaction with people. This encouraged Lema to completely change her accent. She shared:

my pastor, Pastor Schmitz, actually, like pointed out when he was picking us up for Wednesday Bible study, and he was like, Lema, your English has changed dramatically. Your accent has changed dramatically since you've started going to this new school. You speak very proper now. And I'm like, oh, but it was sort of intentional, because like, at first when I started at that school people were like, Wait, you're African. And you sound Jamaican, and like, people would like, try to figure out who I am. And I didn't like that for some reason.

In addition to the forced assimilation aspect in her linguistic assimilation journey, Lema also discussed experiencing being placed in “identity boxes” for her race and ethnicity. She said “… like that’s a box that everybody's putting me into. And then like where do I stand as an African. I got a lot of that… where everybody just, they see the color of my skin”. She further added by sharing about the culture of poverty and anti-Black racism that she received growing up by saying “so they think you're black or ghetto… And so it was really difficult actually growing up.”

Lema also discussed how often kids who develop language skills and American accents are considered a “token African”. She shared that this is a cultural artifact which is prevalent inside and outside of schools. Sharing about her struggles she said:

Like one thing that I hate is being like that token, the token African. And I think a lot of times, a lot of times, that's what I end up becoming. I don't know from my past experiences, it's like oh you are like, you're a refugee kid who speaks so well. You don't sound like you came from anywhere else. So, we want you to be the example for others. I mean, like, maybe not saying it exactly, but like, making you feel
She resisted to be known as a “token African” or “model minority” for her language ability. Lema said:

I am valued because I'm Refugee and Immigrant [and] because I have this language skill that someone else doesn't, then like not being valued outside of that. Yeah. And so I want to be given value just as a person as opposed to like, my only value lies in my language ability or my past experiences that might help someone understand other people better.

Lema added that her formalized assimilation through ESL resulted in missed opportunities and experiences in school. For example, ESL students were not offered guidance about taking part in extracurricular activities in school. She added that the ESL orientation occurred at the same time when the school had general orientation. That put her in a disadvantaged position. Lema said:

Like I didn’t know until in my senior year anything about that you could run for school office. That you could run for an elected position and help influence your school. That information they didn’t tell us. Like during orientation, they had general orientation and then had an ESL orientation and they both happened at the same time. So you don’t get to go to the other one. So it really sucked because it's all at the same time and so there were really cool groups that you could join, even if your language level isn’t the highest, but I couldn’t.

She also commented on the advanced practicum (AP) classes in high school. She shared that the ESL students were often not encouraged to take the AP classes. Lema shared:

So in high school I took an AP class. But I also took that one class, that was an ESL class and so, like, okay, so there are certain students that were encouraged to take AP classes. You should take the AP, and this is going to help you. But when they would do those meetings, they wouldn't include ESL students.

In fact she shared that ESL students were often provided information about community colleges because of the deficit underlying ideology and tracking bilingual students through ability grouping in ESL classrooms (Callahan, 2005; Harklau, 1994). She said:
so like if it's an AP math course, or science… why weren't they [ESL students] included in meetings where you're advertising college readiness classes… and it was more like okay so we will advertise for these people… like trade school kind of classes, [and] tell them about Community College that's going to teach them a skill and then they can start working because they're not going to go to college.

She attributed the unavailability of AP classes to confusing language difference with intellectual deficit:

And so AP classes are, they range from, you know, math, science, reading, writing all of that. So, um, but we weren't offered that. But being an ESL doesn't necessarily mean that I couldn't take an AP course in math or science. And so yeah, there is this sort of thought that if you're an ESL then you are low level in all of your topics and all of your subjects like you're just behind period. As opposed to saying that these students… that barrier is language, not intellectual. And I feel like language and intelligence get kind of mixed at times.

Lema stated that those limited opportunities to take AP classes impacted her preparation for post-school success:

And so I think that that can affect people wanting to go into AP classes. AP classes aren't difficult because the English is different. AP classes are difficult because of the pace. And so like the quantity of assignments, and when the things need to be turned in. and so I guess that's what's disappointing is that they're not really setting you up to prepare you for college or prepare you for higher education… and there wasn't a lot of preparation for what's next…

Access to the AP classes also revealed racial inequities. Lema shared her difficulties in enrolling in these advanced placement classes:

So I remember signing up for an AP class but it was not normal for someone like me to be in one… I think I was the only African in any of my AP classes and like, as far as I know, in any AP class. At that time, at least, because it was just like they weren't encouraged to take them. It was just like that thought that was that, because you're still developing the language, you're still developing these skills as well.
Lema’s identity formation included multi-assimilation into the U.S. society and education system, specifically through linguistic hegemony. She discussed the ways in which prevalent forced assimilation is practiced through the education system; such as the deficit based ELL system. However, she also discussed her resistance to this forced assimilation, while also discussing different tactics that she used to survive the system; such as learning the American accent. Lema also discussed the deficit perceptions that identify language differences as deficit or disability which needs to be remediated or overcome.

**Summary**

Lema’s resettlement journey was shaped by her intersectional experiences. She discussed how often her multiple identities, including cultural, racial, refugee, social class, and gender were discriminated against in the U.S. schools and larger society. She gave importance to her racial and African cultural identity, and discussed feeling connected with her racial, cultural and ethnic identity grouping. Lema also experienced bullying and cultural racism in the schools, and discussed how it impacted her psychosocial and emotional well being, further limiting her future trajectories. While Lema discussed receiving anti-Black racism, her narratives also demonstrated a learned anti-Black racism, culture of poverty rhetoric and *racism without racist* approach towards her African American peers. She further discussed unlearning such racist and ableist ideologies when she joined college and spent more time with her African American peers. Lema also discussed the multiple ways she tried to “fit in” the society and culture. However, she discussed that the stereotypes surrounding her once refugee identity still
prevail after citizenship. Finally, she discussed the relevance of forced assimilation through the education system, such as ELL practice, and discussed how often linguistic differences are perceived as deficit or disability.
ELI’S NARRATIVE
Masked and Muted: Eli’s Cultural and Educational Resettlement

Eli’s intersectional identity navigation, along his racial, African, refugee, and linguistic experiences, was situated in his cultural and schooling resettlement experiences. His resettlement experiences included living in a refugee camp in Tanzania before resettling in the U.S. Eli discussed the differences in the resettlement experiences of people moving from different parts of the world, specifically Europe and Africa, and how their background makes it easier or difficult for them to adjust in the new society. He also shared educational experiences and described being marginalized in the education system because of his intersectional identities in the U.S. Finally, he discussed the inclusive and exclusive educational practices that shaped and informed his education trajectory in U.S. public schools.

Understanding Intersectional Identities in New Social and Educational Life

Eli’s cultural understanding and experiences of his earlier years of life were situated in his refugee, African, and racial identities at the intersection. He reflected on his family’s reasons to flee his birth country, Burundi, to the refugee camp in Tanzania and finally resettling in the U.S. Through the interviews, he reflected on the importance of linguistic support for the decisions his family made to move between States in the U.S. as well as its impact on his educational experiences. He discussed the structural differences in life opportunities of people resettling from different parts of the world, specifically Europe and Africa, and how their background makes it easier or difficult to adjust in the U.S. Eli also discussed his lack of awareness about the White U.S. culture, and how often he was made fun of for his linguistic differences in school. He also
discussed how often people failed to see their privileged circumstances as compared to those not so privileged.

Eli shared that he was born in Burundi and his family fled to Tanzania—a neighboring country—when he was only four years old. His family lived in the refugee camp for five years before they were resettled in the U.S. Eli discussed that he only recently considered the reason his family fled Burundi, understanding now that a war between the two tribes, Hutu and Tutsi, to which his parents belonged was the cause. The civil war causing genocide became the reason his family fled to Tanzania to seek shelter.

So from what I heard there was a war that ended up becoming a genocide, and my parents fled because of fear, so they ended up finding shelter in the neighboring country which is Tanzania … between a group called Tutsi and a group called Hutu. And it was, I believe, a civil war. And from what I hear is my mom was in… they were seeking for my mom so she had to get to safety.

Eli elaborated on his family’s struggles and fear of life back in Burundi:

Back home, we were living in fear every day, because anytime something could happen to you, and nobody would really rescue you. The police department was not as stable as the one that we have here. So it's basically fear. Here I can go to sleep, and know that I'm gonna wake up without fear.

Eli recalled his family’s life in the camp as isolated outside of the city. He said that refugee families waited for years to either move back to their birth country or be resettled somewhere else:

when you are a refugee they find a piece of land outside the city with nothing and then they'll provide what they call tents. For each family there is a tent and you just start a life in that camp. So it wasn't really like the Tanzanian city. it's just an isolated place for all the refugee people to just live while they're waiting for the birth country to either get things better or see if they can get settled somewhere else.
Elaborating on his lived experiences, he discussed the limited resources and schooling provided in the camps:

They had temporary things so we will line up for food, will line up to get [medically] treated, and then eventually they kind of developed a school… I did go to school. It was kinda like a startup school in the camp … but I wouldn't call it school because a lot of the teachers and people filling in the positions were not very qualified… they were actually among the refugees.

While Eli described some enjoyable memories in the camps, he also was aware of “terrible” events around him:

Um, I was a kid in the refugee camp. It was fun, because we got to go and play, explore, no one to worry like parents worry about things. We just went out and played. We didn't have to worry about whether we had clothes or had things. As long as we were out there being with each other, it was just fun. So a lot of the memories I have are memories of the fun things I did with my friends. But there were some terrible things happening… but as kids we just focused on playing and having fun.

Eli’s family was resettled in Arizona, before they moved to the Midwest. He was 10 when they moved to the Midwest. Eli’s early resettlement experiences in Arizona included stories about family’s experiences of learning the new lifestyle. He compared his life in the camps with living in the apartments.

And some of us had probably worn a pair of shoes one time or maybe never, never seen a car. Never. A lot of the things we got to see were new, like electricity, water coming from a sink. Now we enjoy it, but it was completely new. When parents first came they didn't know how to use anything … They have a lot of funny stories, trying to cook for the first time, or eating food. It was just an experience. Except for my siblings, there were no other African families in Arizona… When we got here we had an apartment already prepared for us, we had my mom's brother we lived with, we came together…
He further added that the neighborhood in Arizona was more diverse than the Midwest,
and fewer refugees in Midwest:

The neighborhood that I grew up in Arizona was somewhat diverse from my
memory now because I know there were some Asian families, and some Hispanic,
and African American families. But here [in the Midwest] it was a little different … As I grew up, and say in middle school, we lived in a big huge apartment and it
had all people from different countries and a lot of the African Americans lived in
those buildings.

Perpetuating an anti-Black and culture of poverty narrative, Eli discussed his
neighborhood in the Midwest as the following:

So a lot of our parents did worry about their kids, hanging out with the wrong kids
and doing the wrong things. It was that sort of neighborhood… It was mixed. I
would say it was the first generation and mixed with African Americans. There weren’t a lot of African Americans, but there were a few, it was what you
consider in Cedar Hills the worst neighborhood. That’s why we were safe inside
our apartment where we lived… I'll say it's coz you know you hang out with who
you're close to. So if I'm in a neighborhood that produces a sort of behavior I'm
likely to participate in them, and a lot of us didn't have the money or the
opportunity to live in neighborhoods that were the ones that were not, I guess
making different choices.

Linguistic and cultural support played a huge role in making the resettlement
decision to the Midwest. Eli’s family and the other refugee families that moved to the
Midwest made this decision so that they could be closer to someone who speaks their
language and could help them with resettlement. He shared:

She [a Midwestern lady] was an American lady who grew up in Burundi, actually
learned the language and for some reason, she was located in the Midwest. So a
lot of the families wanted to come here because she knew the country and she
spoke the language. So everybody felt like coming here will help a lot more. I
didn't know that until I grew older… She is American… She's not even our color
[laughs].
While Eli discussed an important point about the support one needs during the early resettlement phase, the statement that “she’s not even our color” shows his deeper understanding of how people are seen through Color in the system and how structures impact life because of someone’s darker pigmentation. In one of our other conversations Eli discussed that he never saw himself as a Colored person back in Africa. This does not suggest negating colonization. More so elaborating on another incident in an interview, he shared how as a kid in the refugee camp he rushed with his friends to see a White person and thought he was “different”. Adding to that Eli said that it wasn’t until he came to the U.S. that he realized that he was “different”.

When probed about Eli’s current neighborhood in the Midwest, Eli alluded to his awareness of the historic and systemic discriminatory practice of redlining that discriminates against African Americans and maintains the societal segregation on the basis of housing (D’Rozario & Williams, 2005). He shared that currently he lives in an all white neighborhood and said “I live in a neighborhood called the southwest side. I'm the only, besides my parents, we are the only Burundians [in this new neighborhood].” He stated he liked the diverse neighborhood better, because he felt he could relate to people and life there. Eli said:

To be honest I like the diverse neighborhood. Because we could relate. Where I'm living now is a nice neighborhood, it’s safe for my kids. But there's really nothing I can relate to any of my neighbors and they're very stuck to themselves.

Recalling his early schooling experiences in Arizona, Eli stated that he was probably the first student in school who spoke a language from Africa. He shared that it was hard for the school to figure out what to do in this situation. He elaborated “Yeah, it was complex
for me because I didn't know what was going on. Everything was new. Clothes, food, everything [laughs].”

Eli shared his understanding of how the U. S. resettlement afforded educational opportunities unavailable in his home country. Those opportunities were defined by language, race, and culture.

Educational Opportunities. Eli compared himself with his peers growing up, sharing how the lack of educational opportunities impacted his self-esteem:

Personally, I'll say it is life circumstances, it is low self-esteem when you grow up in a life where you have nothing. And a lot of times we base it on somebody's having everything, you see somebody who has things you don't have, you feel like they're better than you… and lack of education for me. So that lack of education was the biggest because my brain wasn't as open to things and I wasn’t able to understand things as I understand it now. You know, sometimes you are like, life is not fair and then you go on like I didn't choose this life… You know, sometimes you are like, life is not fair and then you go on like I didn't choose this life.

For Eli, role of education was empowering for identity formation:

it [education] empowers you, it empowers kids to think differently. You know. I've seen a lot of positive things in education. And that's where you get that empowerment and embracing others and motivating others to do better. You see that in education

However, his family was not systemically accustomed to the “formal education” before coming to the U.S.

I would say it's the lifestyle that I was raised in, you know, reading and writing was not, you know, something we were accustomed to, then coming here, finding a kid who is in elementary school can read at a level that maybe even your parents can not read.
He elaborated that this feeling made him think deeper about the differences in the education systems of the countries he has lived in. He said “there's a lot of things running through your mind when you lived in a completely different world that didn't focus as much on education as the system does here…”

Linguistic Hegemony and Opportunities Relative to Race and Cultural Status.

While Eli discussed the importance of education and reading and writing as empowering, he also shared how often he was made fun of for his linguistic differences in school:

Some of the kids just didn't understand culture. They will laugh. Other kids would say how come you guys can’t speak English? Why? Why is it so hard for you to read, you know, they didn’t understand how a kid can be a certain age and not be able to read or write.

He further elaborated that people often don’t understand the privilege they have over others because of their privileged circumstances. He shared that “because of the privilege that comes with knowing the language. There's a lot of ignorance in this country, but not by fault it’s just the way certain people are raised.” He stated that Eli and his other African friends were often made fun of for their culture and language abilities “So, I mean, we were also, I was made fun of a lot whether in the community or school for being African or for not being able to speak English properly.” While Eli discussed the linguistic racism he received, from a critical perspective he also alluded to his understanding that ideologies are fed and they run through people in the ways “people are raised”.
He further shared that within his general education classes, he was often quiet and kept to himself:

So I was always quiet, you know in my [general ed.] classes, just kept to myself… Not really [smiles] had American friends… We didn't really relate or connect at all. It was always a weird exchange.

Eli elaborated that he could not relate with his White peers because of the cultural, structural—due to living in different neighborhoods—and social disconnect. He shared an example of this in the following quote:

Even when I was in college. I don’t remember what class it was but the teacher was talking about childhood experiences, and all the students… They're all joking around about childhood songs they used to listen to, things they did, they could all relate and I am like I don’t remember none of that. So it was always tough because I couldn't relate to any of the students or culture.

He also discussed feeling different and “going with the flow” to fit in with “white folks”:

I mean you felt different from the other kids. But we didn’t know what to do about this. So we went with the flow. You know living in this country at all was a privilege for all of us so whatever little that we got we were just appreciative of it and it’s not until we grew up that we wanted more, we wanted to fit in, but at that time there was a lot of fear, even of white folks, you know, if they say something they must be right. So we just went with it.

Eli’s awareness of the type of opportunities people get in the U.S. was directly related to people’s racial and cultural backgrounds. Sharing about his life experiences in the U.S. Eli stated that it is hard to advance in many fields depending on your family’s past, race, and if you did not get a head start. He said “It's not a perfect place to live. It's hard to advance in a lot of things. If you didn't get a head start. Your family didn't come here back in the day, it's really hard to advance.” Eli added that some people adjust easier
to their resettlement in the U.S. than others, based on their cultural and racial backgrounds. He said:

Yeah. depending on where you are coming from and your past. Some people adjust easier in the United States than others. I've gone to school with the international kids coming from Europe, they adjust more easily here than a student coming from Africa or Asia.

Eli’s understanding of his different “Colored” and cultural identity from his European international and American peers made it difficult for him to adjust:

and then when we came here I was the one who was Colored or different. It was in Arizona, there were Hispanics as well in the school. But I didn't really understand that either … It was very confusing, I didn't know what was going on.

While different cultural backgrounds created different life opportunities for people, Eli also recognized the importance of getting an education. I say this with caution and not to understand that he was perpetuating an American dream concept. In another interview, Eli alluded that even if one gets a degree, social class and race play a huge role in where you end up in this country. However, in this specific quote Eli described education as empowering “You know. I've seen a lot of positive things in education. And that's where you get that empowerment and embracing others and motivating others to do better.”

Reflecting on the importance of education, he further stated:

I got to actually learn from my teachers. There were times you know some embarrassing moments where you know I had to stand in front of the class or you know being in projects with other students, regular students. But overall, it was a good experience for me because it was an education and I didn't have that back home. I got to learn and expand my knowledge.
Eli’s understanding of his resettlement experiences were rooted in his cultural, racial, and refugee identities at the intersections. He discussed how his community and schooling experiences further influenced his identity development, and introduced him to the different life experiences and opportunities based on his darker Color and country of birth. Eli also discussed how language factors influenced his family’s decisions to move to another state for linguistic support. The importance or salience of Eli’s racial and linguistic identity and cultural relativity are represented in his cultural and refugee experiences in the U.S.

Privileging the Self-Selected Voice: Salience within Multidimensional Identities

Language played a central role for Eli growing up. He learned his native language, kirundi, and the official language of Tanzania, Swahili, growing up in the camps. He also learned Kinyarwanda, a language in Rwanda, in the camps, and learned English growing up in the U.S. The centrality of his linguistic experiences is shared in the following quote about speaking Kirundi everyday with his family and in church, and speaking it with his Burundian friends in school.

I have learned Kirundi which is my native language, and I picked up Swahili, as we lived in Tanzania, and also, I was able to learn from our neighboring country, Rwanda, Kinyarwanda, which is a little similar to Kirundi… in Rwanda, they speak a country language called Kinyarwanda, and then English… I learned [Kirundi] from my parents and neighbors and going to events and church, just stuff like that in the U.S. A little bit in the camp, because there were some families and other folks who spoke the language. And then, mostly here at home, in America. I speak my language at home, every day, and at church … I did have students who I went to school with who spoke the language… I was in middle school then.
He further discussed the importance of speaking native language in schools. Eli stated that he and his friends used Kirundi to explain stuff to each other. He said “Yes, and sometimes one of the students will understand something a lot better than the other one. So we will explain it to each other in our native language, you can make a lot more sense.”

When probed how it impacted his sense of self, he shared:

It was actually a relief for me to have somebody else speak too. It’s probably embarrassing now but when we came, we were some of the first you know, especially here in Midwest. So having somebody else who we could relate to and speak Kirundi with was a relief. We embraced it.

Linguistic identity played a great role in Eli’s sense of cultural, racial, and African identity formation. This also reflected in his sense of communal attachment with his African friends in school.

**Collective Multidimensional Sense of Belonging**

Eli shared a strong sense of communal attachment with his racial, cultural, and refugee identity group. Eli shared how his family and other refugee families who were resettled from the camps ended up finding each other in the U.S. He stated:

Yeah, we all came from Africa, and they split us up, and then we ended up moving in one State, finding each other… It was like a lottery, they did like a lottery where you get selected to come to the U.S. So, there were a few families in camp with us, some [of them] went to Kentucky, others came here to the Midwest and others to Arizona, Georgia. So, we all came to the U.S. we found each other and ended up all together…

Sharing about the struggles in Arizona, he stated that it was comparatively easier in the Midwest because he had African friends to lean on: “It was difficult in Arizona. It was difficult over there, but here it was okay because you could lean on your other friends
because they would understand what you are going through, but in Arizona I was by myself.”

Eli spoke Kirundi with his African friends at school. He shared that he often spoke his native language during ESL class and lunch. He said:

My native language I used when I was with my friends. So, for ESL class, and during lunch. That’s when I will use the language to communicate with them… She [the ELL teacher] wasn't too up about it. Because you will have some folks speaking Kirundi, some speaking Korean language, Spanish. It was amazing. It was cool. Sometimes I did want to learn what other people were saying but it must have been very confusing for the teacher, because she only spoke one language.

The intersection of racial, cultural, and linguistic identities in school were evident in Eli’s schooling reflections. Eli shared that: “I also fall in the category because I look like my [African American] friend, but I didn't speak [English] like my friends who lived the same life.”

The intersection of racial, cultural, and linguistic identities influenced Eli’s social and emotional construction of self. His educational experiences helped to shape his identity.

Intersectional Disablism

Eli’s educational journey was filled with experiencing marginalization through his African racial identity, and was depicted in school rules and practices. His linguistic identity, rooted in his cultural, racial, and ethnic background was often stereotyped and used to make him feel “less intelligent” in school spaces. Eli believed in the power of education and consistent encouragement for students, and discussed the role of teachers and parents in his identity formation. However, he also discussed the impact of certain
school and societal practices on his sense of self and emotions and shared how they
benefit some students over others.

Eli’s discussed how systemically race and class intersect with an added
treatment further feeds into
anti-Black and culture of poverty rhetoric in the U.S. (Bledsoe, 2020). Eli stated:

And then you also have tension between Africans and African Americans. I dealt
with that in my neighborhood, because they felt like we were getting treated better
than them… So some of us were not welcome because of the tension that was
happening in this country…

Talking about his education journey in U.S. schools, he shared that his peers’ comments
about his reading and writing often made him feel “less intelligent”. Eli further expressed
that when in school he never liked working on group projects and presentations because
of how he was perceived by his peers in those situations. He said:

Because then it will be embarrassing because a lot of the other kids were like,
wow you are in this grade and you don't know how to read or write. That was
tough… It makes you feel like you're not the same as everybody else. Like less
intelligent. You want to be alone. You don't want to be in group projects, a lot of
times I hated group projects. I hated presentations, anything that would stand you
out, I didn't like it because the students would always perceive you in a different
way and some of the kids didn't even understand. So when we did group projects I
didn't want to be picked on to read or to write.

Eli shared the embarrassment he experienced:

Yeah, high school, middle school, anytime I was in a group project, I just never
really wanted to be a part of it because they always gotta choose who's gonna
write, who's gonna speak, and who was gonna go up and present that. And they
always pick on the quiet person. You're gonna go up there right. No, I mean I
wanted to do it, it’s just I didn’t want to embarrass myself, and it was always
because I was so behind in age. Like we're the same age and I'm like, on this
level. So if I go up there everybody's gonna laugh at me so always choose not to
go.
Such treatment was not something new to Eli. Recalling his first day of school in the U.S. he shared how embarrassed he felt when the teacher asked him to write his name on the whiteboard. He stated:

Another embarrassing moment was my first day of school in America, and going up in front of the class, the teacher wanted me to write my name for the students. So I stood there and the teacher was confused because she thought it was a language barrier, which it was, but she also didn't know that I didn’t know how to write my name.

Eli called that moment a “moment of being mute”. Although he had words in his native language, he did not know how to express his frustration in a language he didn’t speak. Elaborating on the incident he said:

So I was just standing there because I wanted to tell them, but I didn't know how. Because they would show me to do this, and I didn't know what to say. So I just stood there and it was just a frustrating moment for me, and all the kids were just looking at me, and I was looking at them. It was just an embarrassing moment. It's like you, you have words. It was basically a moment of being just mute… Yeah, having that ability to but can't because of the situation and not knowing the language. It was a very embarrassing moment.

Eli suggested that such shame and embarrassment could be minimized if teachers know their students well.

I advise teachers to know the kids background and their history [because] knowing them would help the teacher teach the kid better. Because if you're going to have a kid stand in front of the classroom to write their name, if they are new, they have no schooling, you are not gonna embarrass them standing in front of the classroom. So having a little background of where they come from, their culture, could help. It lessens the stress on the kid, and also on the teacher.

Eli further shared that he also received cultural bias for his last name:

When I graduated high school, I took the ACTs that everybody else takes, and the SATs like everybody else. I got the grades, but [I was told] if you are from
another country, you have to retake the test. I was like why? Does everybody in this school have to, they said no we are only having folks from foreign countries. I was like but I am not from a foreign country. So they based it on my last name.

In addition to in-school experiences with educators and administration, he equally felt that there was no encouragement and empowerment at home. While Eli was struggling academically in school, he shared that there was a lack of encouragement at home as well. Sharing about this, Eli stated:

You do it or if you don't do it, there is a punishment. That's how we grew up. There was never a good job kid moment. Awesome, you're intelligent, you are smart, none of that. We didn’t hear none of that as kids. So, there was no empowerment at all…

While Eli discussed the importance of encouragement in the life of students, families of Color are often viewed through a deficit lens about parental participation and engagement in their students’ education. In turn this represents a species of White hegemony that places the blame on families of Color for students’ “academic failure” (Ladson-Billings, 2006; Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 1997).

Eli contrasted the difference in encouragement between home and school:

Just in the development of society like when you go to school they will tell you, good job you did a good job. You’re important, people telling you things like that. The communities we're living in back home there was none of that. So the kids who grew up not knowing that they were good at anything, and even like now my kid does anything good at home I'll give them a high five and say Good job. You know, we didn’t have none of that. Yeah, I don’t remember my parents ever telling me any of them, so encouraging… and for a lot of times kids would receive that encouragement from school and from teachers, or sports… sports really helped me because if you do something they'll tell you, good job.
Additionally, being in sports helped with learning the language. Eli said “yeah, I mean, one of the things that helped me was joining sports… you know when they keep us in one group and we're all struggling the same way, we can’t learn from each other, so sports helped.” He added that being in sports helped with English language development by stating:

But I learned that when I was in sports. I was forced to learn to speak the language… So being within different groups helped me grow when it came to listening to the language and also being able to speak the language. It was also hard to make friends with kids outside of the ESL program because those are who we were with. When I joined sports, that’s when I kind of connected with other kids

Bullying and Racism and the Psychosocial/Emotional Construction of Identity.

Eli experienced marginalization through name calling and being stereotyped for his racial, African cultural and ethnic identity. He shared that he did not realize at the time how much it impacted his sense of self. However, reflecting on his educational experiences he realized that students internalize the deficit views and language, such as “dumb” and “you don’t belong” about themselves and their backgrounds:

you know, these name calling or stereotyping students based on where they're from… At the time I didn't really realize how much it impacts us. But as you grow you find out that it really does, because when you're younger, you tend to believe whatever somebody tells you. So if somebody's saying that you are dumb or you don't belong, you start to believe in, and especially when you live in a country that has a lot of segregation, like different people from different places and, who are not treated the same as other people, you start seeing that. And then you start believing or [thinking that] what they're saying it's true, and start living life in fear.

Elaborating on his struggles, he discussed the emotional impact of being mistreated in school:
The biggest struggle was when they would say things like that, we start believing it. I'll think about it as my fault because some of the kids didn't really know what we went through and why we were in this country and they didn't want to know. So it was really hard. They just felt like why are you in our country? Why this and that. On my side I'm like I didn't choose to be here or wished. If everything was good in my country I could have stayed there. So anytime they said something like that. I'll just get into the thought that why did this happen to us? and Why are we in a country where people don't want us to be here? And stuff like that. So low self esteem was a big factor when it came to the name calling and the mistreatment in school.

Eli shared about an incident when he retaliated to being mistreated by a class fellow during the basketball practice. He recalled that none of his coaches or the principal understood the pain he went through:

there was an incident where there was a school basketball practice in middle school, where a white kid was making fun of me. and I tried to avoid it, but it got to a point where I couldn't. And I retaliated, I think I pushed him, and it became a big deal. When I tried to explain myself to the coach he kind of didn't listen to what I was saying. Then when I went to the principal's office I thought that they would at least listen. I know I shouldn't have reacted the way I did, but I also felt like they didn't understand the pain I was going through.

Eli’s suspension following the incident made him question the existing school practices. He described that the rules in the school system are designed for some of the kids, and not for others. He shared:

I think they went by the book, that you know you shouldn't behave that way. The other kid didn't really get into as much as I got to. I got suspended and I felt like I shouldn’t have been suspended, especially with the way I was treated and so on. So things like that happened. And I felt like a lot of the school system, a lot of the leaders didn't look like us. So there's a lot of things they didn't really understand …and growing up, I feel like the book, the rules and everything was designed for us, some of the kids, not all of us. It was complicated because you made a mistake, you are automatically in trouble, and there was no explaining yourself.
Eli attributed the response to this behavioral incident as influenced by his race:

but I thought the coaches and the principal would understand, because I've never done anything like that. I was a good kid. But yeah the black color really is something when you do something, you are automatically the target. So that was a learning experience for me. So I tried to avoid any interaction or anything with kids going forward in high school because I wasn't trying to get in trouble.

He also shared another dimension of his experiences of living in the neighborhood where he stated that he experienced name calling and cultural stereotypes. He stated:

Just like the name calls… for me, or have to say like the name calling thing I'll say would have to be in the neighborhood that I lived in. It wasn't really in the school. It will be one where I'll be at a park playing with the other kids. Sometimes, you know, they'll call us African booty scratchers or they will say other stuff… sometimes they will say go back to your home where you came from.

However, the situation was different in school. The jokes about his cultural background were often made in the following way:

But for school. Some of it wasn't really name calling it was just like, to them it was making jokes, but to me it wasn't really jokes. You know, like to ask, you know, did you play with monkeys when you were in Africa? Did you know certain things? Just, you know, and then they will laugh about it. You know, like a joke, but to me it wasn't really funny.

Elis stated that he never really retaliated to this because he did not want to make it a big deal. He shared:

But I was always a quiet person. I never really spoke up about it because I didn't want to make it a big deal. Those are the things that I experienced, but I know there's a lot of kids who experienced worse than me because they weren’t as lucky as I was, like being good at a sport was easier. You're good at something, they don't really mess with you as much.
The only time he retaliated, as described above, was for the following name calling incident:

For me it was calling me names, you know, making fun of me being African and he [the other student] kept joking about it. I tried to avoid it, told him you know he shouldn't be saying stuff, but he got really aggressive and kept doing it. And I just got really angry, I think, it was the angriest I ever got in my life at school. It just went overboard and I kind of pushed him but it wasn't too hard.

Teacher-Student Interactions and Relationships in Identity Development, Eli’s identity development was also influenced by interactions with teacher and peers in school:

My favorite subject in middle school was actually the ESL class. I liked it because of the teacher. It was the teacher who caused me to like it. She just believed in us and she made us believe that we were smart. She made us believe that we could make a difference; we could read, write, and spell. I don't know how she did it but she made all of us believe. To this day, all the students that she taught remember her. We stayed in touch, anytime there is an event or something going on, we invite her because she was impactful in our lives.

Elaborating on this student-teacher relationship he stated:

because when we came to this country, I'll speak on my behalf because I don't know about the other kids, when I came here I was so behind in education that every grade that I went to they could read I couldn’t, they could write I couldn’t. She knew that I couldn't do that but she chose to believe that I was smart and I could do it.

Although Eli’s relationship with his ESL teacher helped his sense of education identity, overtime he started feeling disconnected from his ESL classroom. Sharing about his later sense of detachment with the ELL classroom he stated “once I started getting to the eighth ninth 10th, I no longer wanted to be affiliated with those classes because I wanted to feel normal…” Eli’s racial, cultural and ethnic status were often used to marginalize
him in school. He was often mistreated because of his race, linguistic differences and cultural identity and made to feel “less intelligent”. This impacted Eli’s emotional sense of self. Eli provided important descriptions of how he navigated his racial, cultural and ethnic status through multi-assimilation.

Neutralized Assimilation and Visible Resistance

Multi-Assimilation. Eli discussed the challenges of cultural assimilation due to social class differences and cultural competition. Navigating the social context and building friendships was related to social class, and cultural and racial identity. Eli discussed assimilation within the school context, and both inclusive and exclusive school practices. He discussed at length the benefits and detriments of his participation in the ELL programs.

Eli emphasized the challenges of adaptation due to social class differences through his interviews: “I like the freedom the country has and the resources that we are able to get here. The advancement of the country makes life a little easier” He added:

Depending on the social class you are in, it's harder, it's like climbing a ladder, and if you are on the bottom, it's gonna take you a long time to reach the top. And sometimes you can't even reach the top because of all the gaps and all the obstacles in your way. So social class plays a big role in this country. Even if you get a degree, depending on where you are from, you might not even get a job. Because this place is so competitive, and it's who you know, who can get you in the door. It’s complex. I know a lot of folks who have degrees who have gone to school, but they still can’t get a job.

He described a cultural competition:

Being that this is a foreign country where people from all over the world come in, they’re all trying to make a home for themselves, it has created so many different cultures, and all those cultures are competing and they all want to dominate over the other and this really becomes hard. Some say this is our place, others are
saying this is not your place. Somebody is arguing about who belongs here, and we are just missing the point. Because there's beauty in all the cultures, we just all need to learn to just appreciate each other and learn from each other. Instead of trying to find who's on top.

Eli described this cultural competition as a social class “power dynamic”. His understanding reflects hegemony as a process of achieving power in a society through a) coercive means such as through maintaining housing segregation, b) dominance obtained through teaching history in a certain way and c) by obtaining the “willing consent” of general masses through these ideologies (Forgacs, 1988):

In my opinion, it’s in a power sense that somebody wants to, like one social class would like to maintain power and the only way to do that is to accumulate everybody to learn a certain way, everyone to understand history a certain way.

He discussed the role of agency—a constituent of structure—by adding that it is not until one takes their learning in their own hands that they figure out the true situation. He shared:

It is not until a person says no. I wanna take learning in my own hands and try to figure this out, because it’s not making sense. And we can see it, even to this day, that a lot of people are confused. They’re very confused about the history of this country, confused about the rights, how it came about. Some kids are surprised when they find out who invented this and who came up with this idea. They are like, wow, I used to think it was this person? we don't learn the truth.

He shared that he first became aware of this discrepancy about the actual history of the country and how it is taught during his four years of college in another state in the Midwest. He stated:

And I was like, when I was learning about the Native Americans, I was like I never learned anything like this. And the teacher was like, they won't teach you this stuff in your classroom. I’m like, something is wrong with the history books.
I was confused. The teacher was like, I'm not going to beat around the bush. I'll tell you the truth. I have ancestors. I have grandfathers who have passed on these stories. I was like, wow.

Learning about such power dynamics made Eli change his decision to go into the education profession. He stated that there is so much control in the education system that you can not teach a certain way and your opinion doesn't really matter. He stated:

Yeah. And I went to school, I went to school to be an educator, as I was really touched by my teacher, how she just believed in me, then I went to school, I got into the education program. And I found out how much control is in the school program, how much they really would like you to teach a certain way and how your opinion really doesn't matter. I was like, if I would have known all of this before I wouldn't choose this career, I would have never become an educator. So that's why I ended up finishing but I just didn't want to pursue it because I don't want I don't want to go into a system where I have to teach certain things or do things I don't believe in. I just chose not to.

Social class also influenced assimilation into the social context, as did racial identity, in building friendships with his African American peers:

it was through color. I think color was a funny thing that helped us feel the same struggle. But when it came to culture. I had to learn their culture, unfortunately it was hard for them to learn my culture because it's not as popular

He discussed the complexities of navigating both race and social class:

There was always a fear of being called out … I mean the thing with like, being friends with African American kids, was the way people portray you, when you hang out with the group it's about being tough. Not necessarily bullying people. But people have the notion that if I was in that group, you wouldn't want to mess with me. So me being with the group, there are always some kids who fear like since he's hanging out with them, I don't know if I should talk to them like this, you know. So there's always some sort of either respect or fear that comes with whatever group you're hanging out with…
And me being the social class I was in, it was a lot easier for me to hang out with African American than to hang out with the white kids, because of money, because those kids could come to my house, I could go to their house… So the relationship [with White kids] was always just school. But for the African American, some of them, we were living in the same apartment complex so it became easier.

He shared how cultural differences also complicated his attempts to “fit in”:

Especially if you move to a neighborhood where you don't have so many people from your background, then you have to pick and choose and it's a lot more comfortable to just be with a group that I look like. But the culture was just, it was hard, because I didn't understand the culture … It was complicated, because they had a culture and it wasn't my culture. When I was in their group, I was basically putting on a mask for them just to be, you know, to fit in.”

He discussed how his refugee identity also influenced efforts to “fit in”:

Being from another country was really tough because I did not fit in with any culture. I was in a culture that I am not familiar with in this country. So it was really hard to fit in, even if I was attempting to fit in with the African Americans, their culture was a little different than mine … And it's not the culture that they teach in school. They don't teach in school. So you're just out there, just copying basically. And you don't really know why they do what they do…

Yeah. depending on where you are coming from and your past. Some people adjust easier in the United States than others. I've seen that I've gone to school with kids, international kids coming from Europe, they adjust easily here than if a student’s come from Africa or Asia.

It was constantly exhausting for Eli to try to fit in due to negative stigma and the white middle class hegemony:

So it was exhausting. I was intrigued by their culture. I made friends, I got to understand them by talking to them and just being friends with them. But some people don't give them a chance because of all the negativity that’s there. It's just that white middle class culture that we are trying everyone to assimilate into.
While it was exhausting, Eli managed to make friends and enjoy multicultural events:

I could make friends with anyone. I had friends from all over. I actually enjoyed learning about other cultures and I did also have African American friends. And also, I think, I had leadership in me. So it was always when I was around kids I tended to like to be a leader among them…

We did have multicultural events in my high school. It helped a lot of the students to appreciate, get to taste our food that is different, like Oh, I didn’t know you eat food like this, dress like this, speak languages like this, many languages. I am like Yes, we do. So multiculturalism is crucial. It helps the country to advance … I believe that it is important. It would also help kids who are born here, expand their knowledge, because they don't know a lot about what's going on outside of whatever state they're in. And that's how terrible it is. Like I've got to sit down with kids from all over. Kids who were born here and kids who weren’t born here… and you find the kids who were born outside the country, they know a lot more. They know a lot more than the kids who were born here… they just know about this state, whatever football team or basketball team, but that's it. Some kids don't even know whether Africa is a country or continent. So it's just, it helps…

Reflecting on his early resettlement to the U.S., Eli’s following narration reflects the process of learning the deficit thinking and language at the nexus of race and social class:

It (the neighborhood) was the lowest of the low… Yeah. So as you grow up they give you titles, it would be like they called it the ghetto, things like that. A lot of the kids we lived with will be considered living in the ghetto. It was that side of the city. cuz when you start getting into like the southeast side, certain parts of the southeast side, they call it the ghetto.

He added:

the neighborhood I am in now… I'll call it a nice neighborhood… Like I said I'm, besides my parents we are the only Africans [in this neighborhood]… Yeah mostly white I think there's like one other African American family, but they're moving.

He further shared how privileges come with social class:

When you are in a different social class, you have more privileges to do things that other kids don't get to do. You have exposure to things other kids don't have
exposure to. So, when I was in middle school ESL, I didn't know anything about sports programs outside of school. When I went to high school, I was like oh in order for you to play football, you had to play some football [in middle school]. Yeah. I didn't know that, none of the kids I grew up with knew … there’s a lot of information they might not get. Also, the social connections you get being with other kids, being in the general education classroom with kids, those interactions, those all matter. Because once you develop these connections, it can help you in high school years.

He further shared how certain opportunities reflect social class differences:

But yeah, when it came to music. I never got the chance because I was afraid. And I didn't have the instruments, I didn't have the money to be able to afford the instruments. And also after I believe, a lot of the kids had their own personal teachers, and I didn’t have that also so…

At another occasion he shared:

So I was always interested in music. I just didn't know, I'll see other kids bring instruments to school. I didn't know what was going on. But one day, I just asked somebody like hey, I would like to join and play an instrument, how do I go about it? And the only answer I got was you have to have some sort of experience in order to be a part of the band. So because I didn't have that experience [I couldn’t join]. I just had a desire I was like huh so I am not going to get accepted.

He further added that race and cultural background always played a role when making decisions who will get a place in different groups. He said “and a lot of the kids who are in those groups were not of my color or my background, so I just didn't bother pushing forward, you know, trying to get into it. So that became a closed door for me.” Because of this Eli never really asked to join music in high school. He shared how students were recruited for specific sports and groups based on race and culture. He said:

… So a lot of the sports that I played were the sports they didn’t expect of me. So I will go join basketball and they wonder why you joined basketball, and not soccer. Why can’t I join basketball? I have to have questions of why, you know, so that's the way I approach things.
Eli was very much aware of the social class differences and discussed strategies to mitigate those differences:

I think High School was even more extreme I would say, because a lot of the kids I went to school with I didn't even know until then, some of the kids were the Governor's kids, or a senator's kids because I was going to high school, it was split into two, like poor and real rich kids. We didn't even know that until I went there. I was like did you even know this person is the Senator's son? I did not know that. The only reason why I gotta know that is because I joined the sport and the person happened to be in. I'm like wow really?

Observing this social class difference added to the reasons that Eli stayed with his “own group” of students with the same social class:

So I tended to just stick with my own group, which is other kids from different countries. So even during lunch, we'll all sit together. I think sports helped me be able to like even getting closer to some bigger social class, because then that changes that dynamic, it's no longer about you know where you are from? It’s more about sports.

Eli described the “struggle” to try to find your place in the new country. In a sense Eli’s description below gets to the core of identifying the myth of American dream (Mayfield, 2020):

As you grow when you are given the opportunity coming from a place you have nothing, it is a dream and makes you feel it is a land of opportunities. But once you come here and you grow. You see the struggle of trying to find your place. Of course you get food, because you have nothing but then after you settle, you want to find your place and then you find that it's not easy to find your place in this country because there's so many groups and classes that have been developed. You can work hard, you can study, you can do all the right things and still hit a wall.

In addition to navigating the social class complexities of assimilation, Eli also described how the school environment presented additional challenges.
Personal Assimilation in the School Culture. Eli also discussed assimilation experiences in the school context:

And I do remember that even when I started school, that the school tried to have somebody, even though they didn't speak my language, just be my shadow. So I'll just follow them wherever and do whatever.

Peers were enlisted to support adaptation to the school setting:

Yeah, in Arizona there was a kid that came to pick me up in the office, he didn’t speak the language. He didn't know me. I don't know how they selected who would come pick me up but he came and I was amazed that he actually was really nice. I followed him to every class. I think we were supposed to have the same schedule … and the amazing thing is, when I got home, a few minutes later, he knocked on my door with his whole family. So they came to visit us, even though we had a language barrier they just came and we just developed a friendship. I would go to his house, and sleep over and he'll come to my house. It was really nice that's how I got to learn English fast, because I was forced to learn it, because in his house there was no Kirundi. It was only English. He was a really good welcoming person. It was new to him too but I was so surprised how he just developed a real friendship with me … We were in the same grade, and he probably would have just told his family and the way the family received it was amazing, because I went to their home, slept in their house, ate their food, and they never had a problem. Anytime they had an event that was a family event for them, they would make sure to invite me, make sure I was there. It was the best experience for me. I don't know if all the kids got that experience, but I really got a good experience.

Despite peer support, an additional challenge in assimilating to the school environment was the curriculum. The planned accommodation for that challenge was placement in the ELL classes.

ELL as a Formalized Assimilation. Eli described his introduction into the ELL program:

Oh, and it was on the top floor. It was either the top or the second floor. It was upstairs for sure. I just don’t remember exactly which floor… I didn’t really know
how all this worked. I just know the class that we were learning at a slower pace… it was a different curriculum for us

Eli described the benefits of the ELL program:

Being in the ESL classes helped. Because I was free to ask questions. When I was in all regular classes I was always quiet and I kept to myself. I didn't really participate because a lot of times when you spoke [people asked] what did you say? Can you repeat that? So we just kept quiet. Yeah. Because being around students you can relate to, you're not afraid to make mistakes … So what I understood that class was doing was trying to help me catch up. So I could be on the same reading level, math level, science level as the other kids. That's how I understood it.

Eli’s education experiences encompassed trying to learn and adapt to the English language which impacted his learning of subjects, such as science, and made it difficult to learn: “I didn't really understand (science). I was so busy trying to figure out the language and everything else. Science was just another subject confusing me.” He added about the extra burden and struggles he experienced with his classes and learning the language in the following way:

The basics, reading, writing, and Math. All of those subjects were a struggle, because you focus so much energy on trying to learn English that those subjects become complex. I struggled with all of that, trying to understand, because English is complex and complicated. Even in reading you have the alphabet sound this way and then when you read the word, it sounds another, or it sounds the same. It's always confusing.

Eli described this confusion in the following way:
Elementary is really blurry for me, because it was the time where I just came, I was confused. And I didn't really understand the system that well. And now I was bounced around in classes, or being in a class where they had everybody read. And I couldn't read and they would just say try, just try to read. When I would read the word everybody would laugh in the class. That's all I can remember. Yeah, so that stuck with me…
Elaborating on the second language complexity and the embarrassment he experienced at times during his effort to learn the language Eli shared the following:

When I was in middle school, we did spelling and the teacher wanted me to spell “I”. It was so hard [and] it was embarrassing to spell. I am thinking hard and I ended up saying E, Y, E… to this day she reminds me of that. She said it’s just “I” just write “I”, that’s it. I was like oh…

He further shared that adapting to the English language required rote memorization:

So a lot of my writing and reading was based on memorization. Because some of the things were hard to understand. I am a person who wants to understand why, and in English I could never understand why is this silent? Why is it pronounced this way, and they didn’t have enough time to teach us all that. I struggled in all the regular classes. Because a lot of times I would be the only student that was struggling with English and the subject.

Despite offering assistance, Eli further discussed his lack of willingness to be affiliated with the ELL class in high school. His wish to be out of ELL was directly related with his sense of self and how he wanted to feel “normal”. He stated: “once I started getting to the eighth ninth 10th, I no longer wanted to be affiliated with those classes because I wanted to feel normal.”

Eli also shared that the ELL focus of learning the language did not prepare him for the future:

Yeah… I think the best way to help a kid is to pave a way towards their future, but we were being taught English only and knowing English only doesn’t help you in this country. It is the skills that you learn with the language. We didn’t learn the skills, we were just learning if we could speak English and it's good. So it did limit us.
Eli also discussed the structural segregation under the cover of ELL classes:

and not being able to, you know, be I guess normal, Because you always pass a class [ELL class] and then they will create another class for you when you take a test… when we were taking tests they had to create a version for us. and then in the classroom, the same kids that I participated in sports with I'll never see even though [we were] in the same grade. They always asked me, do you go to the same school or do you have a private school? Because I know in my high school, there are some kids who went to private schools or were homeschooled but would play sports. So they kind of thought I was not in the same school. So I told them I go to the same school. But how come we don't see you in our classes, it was hard to explain to them.

He shared that other students, especially his White peers, were clueless about the ELL situation:

Yeah, some of the kids like American born students didn't really know. Especially if we go with color like the white kid didn't know what was going on. But it was a black kid or an international kid, and then an immigrant, they understood. Because at the end of the day, you find them in the same location as you.

Eli also shared that having access to ELL classrooms only can limit students’ exposure to multiple ways and methods of teaching from different teachers. He stated:

The level of teaching, the tools and skills that teachers use to teach can also help you move forward. And if you are only in one classroom and only learning with one teacher, you are not exposed to different methods that different teachers can use.

He added that ESL placement can also limit extracurricular activities of students. Eli stated:

Yeah, so one of the things is, unless it's ESL related you don't really get as much information on things outside of school or things that could benefit you personally. I never knew about the band, choir and all of that stuff.
Discussing about his middle school ESL placement, Eli shared how his teacher assisted him in adjusting to the school culture:

Actually she would help all of us, I was behind in many subjects, so a lot of the subjects I just took with her. I think though there were times I don't know what year it was but there were times that I will be pulled from the ESL class in a normal class, they will just mix it up. A lot of times she was teaching math, science, and English. There was even a time where I joined sports and I didn't understand the rules. She had to teach me the rules. She was a coach to me…

He added:

A lot of my [middle school] schedule was one classroom but with different subjects. So I spend time reading books, then we'll talk about the book that we read. And then we will spend time with spelling, math. I remember the teacher was very creative, she would help us study for spelling. And if we did well on the spelling, we'll get a Pepsi, and $5. So everybody was excited to study for the test, just so they can get a Pepsi…

He discussed the impact that ELL teacher had in his adaptation journey:

As far as I know, I know some kids had other teachers. It depends on the grade you're in. But most of my memories are with that teacher because she was so impactful. But I know there were other ESL teachers for different grades. And there were some students depending on your level of English who would either have just math with the teacher and then have other regular classes with other teachers. So they would give you a test to figure out where you belong.

Commenting on his relationship with the ESL teacher he stated:

Actually, to this day, she has videos and pictures of us from when we were younger, we didn't even know she took pictures. It was a great memory. But a lot of our classes were in one classroom, at different periods of time. And that's how we learned. A lot of times, we will get out to go to PE [physical education]. I remember that I was in middle school… That was the only class that we left to go to.
Eli shared that he was gradually moved to general education classes:

> I'll say in sixth grade I spent probably like 90% of my time in the [ESL] program. And as I went from seventh to eight they started lowering my time there… in eighth grade I wasn't in the class as much. I was probably just taking grammar classes and then all the other subjects were in my regular classes with everybody else. So I did improve a lot.

However, he was never really out of the ESL program. While his language improved tremendously, he shared his struggle of trying to get out of ESL program in the high school in following ways:

> In high school they have levels. Like, first level, second, third and fourth, and you had to test out... I did well as I went from eight to nine, I was improving a lot. I didn't really need a lot of ESL when I went to high school. But for some reason, I,... [pause] yeah they had three levels, and I tested out. So then they said there is this new fourth level for some reason. I was like I just tested out. Why did you create another level? Just wanted to keep me there and I ended up helping out the teacher, she just had me be a teacher's assistant, just helping off because I don't know why they did that... They just gave me a test, and once I passed that test, they were like. Oh, guess what? We developed a level 4 ESL and I am like what? When I took the test, there was no level 4. Like in level 4 there were like 3 kids which made no sense. But I kept bugging them. I think maybe it was the way I was always challenging my teachers. I didn't know I had a say in my own education. So once, I kind of did it by accident. I was always bugging the teacher

He added: “If it wasn't for me pushing to not take the [ESL] class, I could have spent a year or two years retaking ESL classes while the other kids were advancing, getting their AA degrees.”

Eli shared that he wanted to be treated the same in high school. For this reason he tried hard to get out of the ESL program. He shared:

> For me, once I got to the HS, I just wanted to be treated the same. I tried hard to get out of the ESL program, but for some reason they would give me a test, I did well on the test, and then they would try to create a different level to keep me in, and I just remember I shared that the teacher ended up giving in. So we made a
deal to just be a TA. I didn’t want to be treated differently because I knew that the best way to advance is to struggle with everybody else rather than struggle when it’s too late…When I started bugging them so often they are like okay you can take regular classes. I was like it shouldn’t have to be this way.

Eli elaborated:

I mean, at some point ESL was necessary for me, but then it wasn't created to, like, help me succeed, to the fullest potential, with a system that was there to basically babysit me. But with that, like graduating me to another stage. That's why I thought,, at a certain stage I'll be out of it. But then you continue on and on and they'll continue creating new levels and that was the most frustrating part because all the kids want to be normal. They want to be in all the normal classes and nobody wants to be identified as you know in a special class.

He further shared that another reason he wanted to be out of ESL in high school was a concern that he might not graduate:

In Middle School I just went with the flow, but once I got to the HS I just wanted [to graduate], because once you get to the HS there’s a pressure of graduating, I was the oldest and no one in my family ever graduated from the HS so I had that pressure if I stay in the ESL program for so long, I always had the fear [that] I might not graduate.

The transition to non-ELL courses did present challenges to Eli:

Once you go to that [high school] classroom, you are confused. You are going to the English class and you are being taught to write an essay in a way that you never did in an ESL class, you become confused.

Eli further shared that the ESL automatic placement decisions based on students’ linguistic backgrounds is still prevalent today. He shared that his son was automatically placed in ESL by him being born to a bilingual family. This must be underscored as how the system maintains power and segregates students based on their racial, cultural and linguistic backgrounds (Artiles et al., 2010). Eli shared:
Yeah it even happens today… It's still happening because my son, by him being born to us, automatically they want to put him into the ESL program. Even though he was born here. It’s always been like that I had to go to the school and say no I don’t want my son in the program. I want him to have regular classes like everybody else.

Tensions within the Formalized Assimilation of the ELL Program. Eli discussed both the benefits and the detriments of involvement in the ELL classrooms. These spaces can be a resource for making friendships or limit developing new friendships in the new school and culture: “I got a chance to make friends basically with kids from all over because of the class, and then being involved in sports helped me to be friends with a lot of African American kids.”

Eli also discussed the importance of making American friends. He encouraged other students to also make friends with American students. According to Eli, it also helps with developing language skills “and for the students trying to make friends, even though it's not easy. Because those friends can help develop your language… and also can help you overcome some of the fears.” He added: “not being able to interact with American kids really jeopardized my language growth”. This quote must be taken with caution because of Eli’s continuous sharing of how systems structurally maintain power and keep students segregated and marginalized through social class, racial hierarchies and cultural and linguistic differences. In this way one’s identity formation is never really out of the circle of hegemony where individuals are influenced by the structural factors including economic, social, and educational factors (See Allen & Liou, 2019).

The ELL practice, while helpful in the initial stages of resettlement, was discussed as an exclusion practice that segregate students from the rest of the school:
Oh it impacts a great deal. What I learned is that it comes from when you are with people who you can relate to. But the real world is not like that. Real world exposes you to many different people and if the kids are not exposed to that in the classrooms or their school, once they are thrown into it, it becomes emotional, and stressful and some of the kids don’t know how to handle it. So it's better that they deal with it at an earlier age, so that when they go to high school or college, they can handle it. Because college is stressful. You are on your own. I remember college days when I was stressed and by myself, I didn't have anybody that looked like me. I wasn’t exposed to that. How do I handle that? So it’s crucial that ESL becomes a source that kids can use for wisdom but not a place for them to be stuck and then thrown into the real world after they no longer need it.

Eli proposed that the detrimental and exclusionary aspects of the ELL program might be addressed if the classes were offered as additional resources students could seek:

I wish the ESL class was set to help. If I need extra help I could come to the teachers, but not for that to be my main class. That should be a resource, just like other kids that could get extra help, ESL should be a resource for extra help not the main source. That's what it was for me in school, the main source.

In this category, Eli discussed the challenges he experienced trying to ‘fit in’ the American culture and schooling. He discussed that social class, race, and his cultural differences impacted the cultural navigation, educational opportunities and building friendships. His identity formation journey also reflects how one social class maintains hegemony by circulating deficit ideas about history, maintaining structural segregation, and obtaining the “willing consent” of general masses through these ideologies. He further discussed his efforts to adjust in the school culture, and elaborated on both inclusive and exclusive schooling practices. Eli discussed at length the ELL placement practice as a planned and formalized accommodation which became an exclusionary practice for his educational career. He shared how the ‘well intentioned’ practice can become detrimental for students’ curricular and extracurricular growth.
**Summary**

Eli’s cultural and schooling resettlement experiences were situated in his intersectional identity navigation along his racial, refugee, African, and linguistic identity vectors. He employed these vectors of identity to ‘fit in’ the American schooling and society. However, he also experienced being marginalized through these vectors in the educational spaces and society. He shared a strong communal attachment with his cultural and ethnic identity groups. Another important intersection of his cultural navigation was described as the social class, race and cultural navigation. He finally discussed inclusive and exclusive schooling practices that impacted his educational journey in U.S. public schools.
Chapter Summary

Chapter four discussed the complicated educational, racial, cultural and ethnic, and social journeys of identity development for the four first-generation African immigrant and refugee participants. It explored their intersectional experiences using the six themes embedded in Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic Racial Identity Formation framework (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014), DisCrit (Annamma et al., 2013), GSI-DisCrit (Iqtadar et al., 2021); intersectional disabling (Iqtadar et al., 2020; Thomas, 1999; 2007), and cultural hegemony through social class formation and agency (De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005; Forgacs, 1988). Participants’ experiences revealed their understanding and salience of intersectional identity experiences in U.S. schools and society, as well as ways in which they self-referred to their racial and cultural identities in the U.S. They discussed their complicated and unique resettlement experiences, and their communal attachment and/or detachment to the various identity groupings. Participants’ narratives also demonstrated structural learning and unlearning of deficit thinking, anti-Black racism, culture of poverty rhetoric and efforts related to racism without racist approach (Bonilla-Silva, 2017; Dumas, 2016; McDermott & Vossoughi, 2020; Tuck, 2009; Tulino et al., 2019).

They further discussed the psychological and emotional impact of the racism, ableism, bullying and other ism they experienced through their unique intersectional identity. Finally, participants discussed various schooling practices that marginalize them, and different acts of neutralized assimilation and resistance they employed to navigate the hegemony of smartness employed in the systems. Hegemony of smartness permeates the
hierarchies and hegemony of individuals “who are smarter” than those “who are not smart” under the medical model of dis/ability and individualistic and meritocratic narratives (Hernández-Saca, 2019). In the next chapter I discuss these findings under the study’s research questions in relation to DisCrit and Global South informed DisCrit framework embedded in a discussion of agency and structure. The discussion also engaged the empirical literature on the experiences of immigrant and refugee student voice and identity formation. The chapter ends with praxical recommendations and implications for the classrooms.
CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The purpose of this study was to explore the intersectional identity navigation of first-generation Black African immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities in the U.S. schools and society. The goal was to acknowledge and facilitate student voice and agency, and explore how they navigate and make sense of the ELL and special education services upon their resettlement in the U.S. I agree with Ashby (2011) that facilitating voice and agency is an attempt to further level the researcher-researched hierarchy. This study was an attempt to facilitate student voice and agency in order to understand their identity formation in new U.S. schools and society. I understand that agency is a constituent of structure, which means that people purposefully and reflectively (intentional or otherwise) (re)act, reiterate and reshape their social conditions and perspectives within a sociocultural environment (Ermarth, 2005; Giddens, 2005; Giroux, 1983). According to Giddens (2005), “structure teaches agents who help to form the structure, in a circular process that [he] term[ed] structuration” (p. 119). From this perspective I understand that my participants, who experienced racism, linguicism, and ableism, also learned, unlearned and enacted deficit ideologies such as ableism, anti-Black racism, culture of poverty, racism with racist rhetoric within the system. Simply put, they were never divorced from the system of White and ability supremacy which
intersectionally place people of Color with and/or without dis/abilities at a disadvantage, view them from the “normed” “white middle-class” “behavior” and ways of thinking\textsuperscript{13}.

The first chapter introduced the study and my conceptual, intellectual and theoretical commitments in the interdisciplinary and intersectional field of Disability Studies in Education (DSE), DisCrit, Global South-Informed DisCrit, and Disability-Integrated Racial-Ethnic Identity development model.

The second chapter provided a review of relevant literature, including first generation students’ “assimilation”, adapting, accommodation into the new school culture, the deficit thinking and language about multiple, intersecting student identities, their educational experiences in ELL and special education classrooms (including experiencing racial and linguistic discrimination), as well as their resistance to the deficit thinking and language (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Valencia, 1997) view about their intersecting identities. My third chapter described the hermeneutic phenomenology methodology which guided the study, as well as the qualitative method employed in data collection, analysis, and interpretation. Chapter four discussed the findings as individual students’ narratives under six themes which emerged from the data. The themes were adopted from the five constructs employed from Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic Racial Identity formation framework (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014).

\textsuperscript{13} Situating an analysis within a social framework defined by white supremacy and cultural and physical violence targeting Black and Brown bodies is paramount. The researcher acknowledges and calls attention to the relevance of recent racial violence to the present study. In the current climate, I especially call out the recent national atrocities, such as the murdering of Patrick Lyoya, the Buffalo Supermarket shooting, as well as the anti-immigrant education legislation advanced by Texas Governor Greg Abbott.
This chapter has two sections: I first discuss findings of this dissertation study. The second section of the chapter discusses implications at the macro, messo, and micro levels of educational law and policy, schooling practices, and individual educational experiences. I begin with discussing my findings in relation to each research question and in relation to the conceptual and theoretical frameworks. I also discussed relevant empirical research on immigrant and refugee student voices and their identity formation associated with the research questions and thematic findings. I begin with my first research question.

Question 1: How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, make meaning of English as a Second Language and/or Special Education experiences?

The participants of this study made meanings of English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or special education services as segregated and exclusive practices in schools. They understood ESL practice as a formalized system intended to create a pathway to (a) linguistic accommodation for multilingual students, (b) preserve cultural hegemony of the American English and accent, and (c) maintain structural segregation of their racial, cultural and ethnic selves in U.S. schools. Participants discussed experiencing the imposed pressure of ESL classrooms to multi-assimilate into American English and culture. They worried that the focus of ESL classrooms on teaching the language and acquiring the expected accent created challenges for their education. The participants shared that the assigned ELL courses limited their access to the general education curriculum and high school AP classes, as well as limited their exposure to multiple
teaching methods and work opportunities after graduation. Their general education pull-outs and isolated nature of ESL classrooms created a sense of difference or deficit, against which the participants regularly resisted through speaking in native language, repeatedly requesting to exit the ESL classroom and program, and requesting to be placed with their general education peers to receive quality education. Finally, they discussed the social aspect of the ESL classroom as a space that limited their interaction with general education peers.

Similar to ESL placement, Kabaka and Mandla, who attended the special education services, shared that special education was a system which limited their access to general education placement and curriculum in schools. Their meaning-making of special education was in accordance with a deficit medical model of dis/ability which is prevalent globally. Both participants did not identify as someone with a dis/ability and consistently resisted their special education placement. Their resistance to special education placement was represented in their efforts to skip school and to hide in school spaces to skip the classes. While they resisted their special education placement, Mandla’s narrative specifically represents “Othering” his peers in the special education classroom because of his deficit medical model approach. They also questioned the “rules” to segregate students and forcefully rejected the possibility of attending the special education class in high school. They understood that while they had certain academic needs, those needs should be met within the general education classroom. Finally, participants discussed the need for such assistance within school spaces only, and
that they could figure things out themselves outside of the school system, such as taking
the bible study test at Pentecostals of the Sugar Valley church.

**Situating the Findings in Theory and Literature**

**Special Education and ESL:** The participants of this study identified that special
education and ESL classrooms are segregated and exclusionary practices in the school
system, which share many commonalities with each other. Artiles and colleagues (2010)
identified that historically ELL students have been less likely to be identified for
aggregated special education placement. However, ELL students’ identification within
the learning disability (LD) category under Individuals with Disabilities Education Act
(IDEA) has gradually increased to overrepresentation since 2006 (Artiles et al., 2010).
This means that students from racial, social class and linguistic backgrounds are a sizable
segment of the special education population (Artiles, 2003). Within the context of this
study, both Kabaka and Mandla were residents of a Midwestern State where dis/ability
labels are not officially “assigned”. However, both received Individualized Education
Program (IEPs), in addition to the ELL services. Their academic IEP goals were
identified in reading, writing, and Math. Mandla’s IEP stated:

**Reading:** Mandla is an *Emergent reader*. When given familiar reading materials,
he is able to answer multiple choice comprehension questions over the most
recent chapter read with 40% accuracy. When he was tested over the same
familiar reading material, but over previous chapters read, his comprehension was
20% accuracy. He identifies/states the name of all letters in the alphabet. He states
the most sound of all letters. He reads almost all 100 sight words on list 1. The
focus for Mandla this year is to read and comprehend words from applications
and forms.
When provided with 50 survival/work/personal information related words,
Mandla read 28 of those words independently.
While Mandla was in his second year of moving to the U.S. when the study was conducted, he started receiving both ELL and special education services at the end of first year of being in U.S. schools. This is an important finding because researchers suggest that bilingual students take approximately two years to achieve a socially “functional” language, while academic language proficiency may take between five to seven years compared to monolingual English speaking students (Baker, 2011; Cummins, 1981).

The excerpt from Mandla’s IEP above represents that he was placed in the special education classroom because he was an “emergent reader” which is troubling for the above mentioned reason of academic language acquisition of bilingual and/or multilingual students. Mandla’s discontent with his special education placement was rooted in his understanding that the academic support he needed for reading, writing, and Math should be provided in the general education setting. The above mentioned excerpt also provides an example of how often students from ethnic, racial, and linguistically diverse groups are represented within special education classrooms; meaning their movement and placement in ELL and special education classrooms is more fluid and goes unchecked within the school systems (Artiles, 2003; Artiles et al., 2010).

In other words, this difference-to-deficit-to-disability “web” (Barrera, 1995; Brown, 2004; Gonzalez, 2001) fails to account for cultural or linguistic diversity prior to referral for special education “assessment” and eligibility for services. The challenge of distinguishing dis/abilities from English language proficiency, in current practice, (Klingner et al., 2014; Park, 2019; Guiberson & Atkins, 2012; Shenoy, 2014) contributes to the overidentification of bilingual and or multilingual students into special education
(DeMatthews et al., 2014; Sanatullova-Allison & Robison-Young, 2016). While the label “emergent bilingual” is intended to replace deficit framing labels such as “limited English proficient (LEP)” (Przymus & Alvarado, 2019), that description in Mandla’s IEP confirms the different-to-deficit-to-disability web, particularly given the timeline of his special education eligibility determination.

From the student voice perspective (Annamma et al., 2013; Gonzalez et al., 2017), this was even confirmed when Mandla and Kabaka discussed that their racially, culturally and linguistically diverse selves were often viewed from a deficit approach, and that those deficits were mechanically viewed as dis/abilities (Connor, 2019; Skrtic, 1991); meaning difference-deficit-dis/ability construction (Artiles, 2003). This means that even when they were not “categorically assigned” dis/ability labels, they experienced ableism through their multicultural and multilingual selves. Within the field of Disability Studies in Education, scholars have identified and critiqued the existence of this deficit approach against culturally and linguistically diverse student populations as widely prevalent within the U.S. education system (Artiles, 2015; Waitoller & Artiles, 2013). They argue that within the school spaces special education and ESL placement practices are used as ability tools to segregate multilingual and multicultural students with and without disabilities in separate settings, and to maintain and preserve hegemonic systems of practice which relies on conceptions of able-bodiedness, ability supremacy and ability-centric narratives which is connected with White supremacy in the education system.

Valencia (2010) argues that within our age of globalization such deficit thinking, founded on ability-centric narratives of white middle class able-bodied individuals is a
pseudoscience which is rooted in racial and class bias and thus discriminates against, pathologizes, and marginalizes students of Color living in the neighborhoods. The difference is indexed in cultural “others”, thus assuming that these first generation students differ in their ways of thinking, learning and ability level (Artiles, 2015; Leonardo & Broderick, 2011; Valencia, 2010).

Practices based on “White Middle-Class Ability-Centrism”: My study participants explained that in school spaces this hegemonic system of ability centrism and deficit views was maintained by pulling them out from general education instruction which limited their access to quality education. Through language acquisition and accent assimilation, they were required to assimilate and ‘fit into’ this hegemonic system of ability-centric practices which maintains racial and linguistic hegemony of White American middle class in the education system (Baglieri et al., 2011b). According to Patton Davis and Museus (2019) these hegemonic practices that blame first generation students and their families for their lack of English speaking skills are problematic. It maintains, reproduces, and reinforces the hegemony of the English language (Macedo et al., 2015) and equates language difference with ability to put the blame on these first generation students.

This ability-centric orientation of their linguistic abilities and capabilities resulted in participants’ ESL placement. Similar to Bal (2009), my study participants were supposed to “catch up” with their English speaking peers and “catch on” using “correct” or American English” (p. 104). In addition to Bal’s (2009) argument, this study participants discussed the hegemony of the American accent that they were forced to
enunciate and ‘fit in’ to become more “American” which at times led to losing their native language. Their linguistic journeys revealed the tension in assimilating to the hegemony of “American English” (Gutiérrez et al., 2002). Within the figured worlds of schooling, participants understood that ELL classrooms were used to teach English language only, which limited their socialization with general education peers. This finding differs from Kiramba and Oloo’s (2019) finding that stated that the benefits of ELL classroom include access to making friends, find their voice, and listen to similar stories of “hopes and dreams” from their immigrant and refugee peers in the ELL classroom (p. 17). Within my study, participants discussed that ESL placement indeed created challenges for developing new friendships with peers.

My study findings also aligned with the study conducted by Gitlin and colleagues (2003), which discussed the structural segregation of linguistically diverse students from general education classrooms. Although Lema and Eli’s reflection on their ESL classrooms was from the time when ESL was relatively a new program in the Midwest, Kabaka and Mandla’s narratives depicted that the basic structure and deficit ideology of the ESL system remains the same today. Patton Davis and Museus (2019) would argue that by doing so our education system maintains and further lets educators and other school personnel hold lower expectations towards students of Color, including first generation students of Color. Gitlin et al. (2003) discussed how students are housed in ESL classrooms for a specific amount of school days to learn the English language only, which limits their interaction with the general education curriculum. In addition to their study findings, my participants also discussed not being aware of the process of exiting
the ESL or special education classrooms when they wanted. In the context of special education, this contradicts the DSE’s major tenet of privileging the interest, agendas, and voices of people assigned special education placements (Connor et al., 2008).

Participants of my study further demonstrated the interconnectedness of their racial, and cultural identities along with the presumed deficit narratives embedded within ESL and special education placement. Disability Critical Race Studies (DisCrit) authors argue that within the U.S. education system both race and ability are socially created and interconnected categories, and that the interconnection of whiteness and ability is used as properties to marginalize students of Color in the U.S. The participants of this study discussed such social construction of whiteness and ability as inextricable and interdependent in their educational experiences. They discussed the construction of their racial identities through their skin color in the education system, which identified them as “Other” in relation to their white peers. This racial and dis/ability identity formation set them up for neutralized assimilation via the special education and ELL classrooms.

Within the figured world of ESL classrooms, they also discussed another intersection of ability-centric deficits about their racial and cultural identities. They discussed that a dominant cultural narrative about their African racial identities as “less able” was prevalent among teachers and peers alike. This additional layer of ethnic-cultural racial identity formation was rooted in what I term Global-South-identities-as-Less-than paradigm rooted in Iqtadar et al’s., (2021) “… economization of human bodies [language, thought process] and their productivity through local and global institutions and structures” (p. 731). My analyses of the data identified that this intersection of race,
culture, and ability orientation enforced their ESL placements in the U.S. public schools (Artiles, 2015).

**Special Education Placement:** Additionally, like their ELL placement the special education placement was also rooted in deficit understanding about their diverse racial and ethnic selves and linguistic abilities (Artiles & Klingner, 2006; Kalyanpur, 2020). In the context of special education placement, Song (2018) dissertation study explored the educational experiences of South Korean refugees in North Korean schools. Her findings represented that disability can become an embodied identity for refugee students in their new school setting. She noted:

> Without receiving appropriate educational support, several students told me that they attended a classroom for years, while not understanding the content being taught. In so doing, students developed a negative perception about their academic identity, viewing themselves as underachievers or slow learners (p. 120).

Similar to Song’s (2018) findings, my participants attended special education classrooms for years. When I asked them if they had an option to get out of the special education classroom once they achieved their individualized education program (IEP) goals they discussed not being aware of such an option (Connor, 2008). My study findings aligned with Song’s (2018) findings about students’ lack of awareness in their placement decisions. However this study findings differed from her findings about participants’ understanding of dis/ability identity for their sense of self and identity formation. My analyses of the data revealed that both participants did not see disability as their defining identity, and differentiated themselves from their special education peers. At this point, and from a critical dis/ability studies lens, I find this problematic. Petersen’s identified
that students’ anxieties as “rooted in a fear of becoming the other” often make them distance themselves from their peers in the special education classroom (Petersen, 2006b, p. 728). In addition, my analysis from a CDS perspective also revealed that the learning and internalization of medical model of dis/ability, systematically reproduces racial and ability hegemony which creates an urge to differentiate oneself from those not identified or related with the “norm”, in this situation “White normed bodies”. This is especially important considering Mandla’s explanation of the other Black kid in his special education classroom who Mandla described as “his head is kind of big, he got a “problem””.

Additionally, and from the DisCrit perspective, they consistently resisted their special education placement in multiple ways. This finding aligns with tenet seven of DisCrit which addresses the need for activism and resistance based on the lived realities of people who continuously experience intersectional subordination and marginalization. This goes beyond the traditional activities of activism (such as sit-ins, and marches), and includes types of activism and resistance in day to day experiences against daily forms of domination. From this understanding of resistance, my participants’ resistance manifested itself materially by skipping school, hiding in school spaces to avoid teachers and special education classes, and other times it appeared at the ideological level by questioning who created the rules to segregate students into special education classes from their general education peers.

Additionally, while a discussion of language acquisition is beyond the scope of this study, my study participants often felt their funds of knowledge (Moll et al., 1992)
were recognized through deficit orientation by their teacher (Artiles, 1998; Artiles et al., 2005; Minow, 1990). Funds of knowledge refer to “historically accumulated and culturally developed bodies of knowledge and skills essential [for day to day activities and life] . . . pertaining to people’s social, economic, and productive activities” (Moll et al., 1992, pp. 133-139). This finding aligns with Cho et al. (2019) that despite educators’ use of culturally sustaining pedagogies and their own power to promote social justice and equity in classrooms, teachers use of self-reported pedagogies heavily relied on deficit views about students’ socioemotional learning (SEL). While my study participants discussed the social, emotional, and psychological impact of these deficit views on their sense of self (Thomas, 2007), their resistance to language assimilation has been thoroughly discussed in their narratives. This aligns with Ishihara’s (2010) pragmatic resistance of the target language:

> learners do not simply acculturate to community practices entirely and unidirectionally. Rather, norms of communication and learners’ subjectivities are viewed as being socially constructed and shaped in interactive discourse. That is, learners not only preserve and reproduce community practices but also selectively emulate and actively approximate existing practices at times … which leads to both accommodation and resistance to perceived community norms (p. 941).

Within the figured world of schooling, my participants’ resisted the dominant deficit narratives about their native language. While they often ‘used’ and ‘consumed’ tools to learn the language, they were agents of speaking native language when needed, such as speaking native language in the ESL classroom to explain content to each other.

In response to the first research question, I conclude that my participants experienced a sense of segregation in the ELL and special education placements. The difference-to-deficit-to-disability perspectives of teachers and peers aligned with the
able-bodiedness, ability supremacy and ability-centric constructs from Disability Studies in Education. These experiences in ELL and special education influenced the participants, as did their navigation with other identity-impacting contexts. While they resisted these deficit orientations, at times they also learned the deficit views that are widely prevalent at the intersections of race and dis/ability.

**Question 2: How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, engage in identity formation in a new school and culture?**

Participants of this study self-identified with their racial and cultural identities. Their racial, linguistic, gendered, social class and other intersectional experiences informed and shaped their identities. Despite their age differences and differences in their age of migration to the U.S., they discussed the relevance of African culture in their relocation, economic, cultural, racial, and educational experiences. Their comments about cultural-racial grouping and territories in classrooms illustrate the systemic racialized territories present within the classrooms. These discussions were wrapped in comparing their experiences of multidimensional selves to their White American peers’ educational and lived experiences, with social class differences as represented in living conditions, social and economic capital, and educational backgrounds of the family members.

Additionally, my analyses of the study participants’ experiences further indicated that identity formation is a messy and multidimensional process. My participants shared their attachment and detachment to their social worlds of schooling and society and friendships which contributed to their sense of self and identity. In the figured world of schooling, their narratives elaborated the challenges they experienced reaching this sense
of ethnic and racial self. Some of these challenges included the schools’ unwelcoming practices, persistent racialized territories in classrooms, and the cultural racism and mistreatment they experienced from teachers and peers. This was specifically evident in their learning, unlearning and navigation of the deficit-oriented U.S. racial paradigm—which sees race in America through a binary of Black and White and creates divisions among multiply marginalized groups of people (Delgado & Stefancic, 2001). While the U.S. racial paradigm consistently impacted their sense of racial and cultural identity and who they thought and felt they were in the U.S., my participants at times internalized the racist assumptions against other people of Color, particularly African Americans. Such as learning the anti-Black racism, ableism, culture of poverty, racism without racist rhetoric in attempts to “Other” themselves from their African American peers and neighborhoods. 

Finally, their multidimensional sense of belonging to this cultural identity throughout their school experiences was consistently evident in comparisons between the cultures of their country of birth and the host U.S. While proud of their African heritage and identity, the participants also recognized the importance of learning American culture to ‘fit in’ the social and economic life of the broader U.S. society. This also meant identity navigation between the cultural expectations of family and society which complicated the construction of their ongoing and multidimensional identity formation.

Situating the Findings in Theory and Literature

My participants engaged in identity formation as Black Africans. This finding is aligned with the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI) which provides a phenomenological lens of the status of racial centrality, racial salience, racial regard, and
racial ideology (Sellers et al., 1998). Additionally, I used theories of Dis/ability-Integrated Ethnic-Racial identity formation to identify how participants understood their multidimensional selves, the salience within their multidimensional selves and their collective sense of belonging to the various identity groups they identified with (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014). The participants of this study discussed their navigation of their racial, and culturally diverse selves as presented in their experiences of relocation, economic differences between their American and other international and immigrant peers from different social class, cultural expectations, and racial and cultural differences in educational experiences. The salience of the intersectional experiences of participants due to their race, culture, linguistic abilities, gender, and dis/ability is consistent with DisCrit tenets which address the value and privilege of their multidimensional selves and experiences, as well as identifying ways in which racism and ableism work interdependently for first generation students. From DisCrit and CDS perspective, it is equally important to narrate that racism and ableism also worked through them against their other peers of Color, especially African Americans. From the Global South informed DisCrit perspective, while the deficit views about their transnational cultural selves as experienced in schools through cultural and linguistic racism and ableism is important to be called out, it is equally and, in some ways, critical to calls out the anti-Black racism, ableism, and culture of poverty that they learned systematically in the system. I believe that this is a critical finding that emerged from the data of this study and requires further exploration to unpack how racism and ableism intersect not only as a
lived experience, but also as it is taught systematically to the newcomer immigrants and refugees upon their arrival (De Certeau, 2005; Giddens, 2005; Forgacs, 1988).

Additionally, my findings align with Baffoe’s (2011) conclusion that the identity formation of first-generation immigrant students includes juggling the competing and opposing cultural values between their country of origin and resettlement. For my study participants, this represented the contradictory expectations between their families and the broader U.S. society. For example, Lema discussed the struggles of navigating her cultural gendered expectations in family such as early marriages and dress code. Within the context of schooling, this navigation of cultural identity was represented as continued 

*deficit-based* questions about their culture and cultural identities. Participants received bullying, and cultural and linguistic racism for their African background.

Similar to Baffoe’s (2011) study, my participants experienced the “issues of cultural clash, [and] cultural alienation” (p. 480) throughout their schooling experiences. This was specifically evident in Lema’s middle school experiences of losing her native language when she stated: “so it becomes really difficult to figure out which identity is [you]… and it was, I mean it's a struggle, kind of trying to figure out what your identity is”. However, this study does not align with their findings that participants experienced an “identity loss” for their cultural selves. While my study participants experienced tensions which made them feel awkward and socially isolated in schools, most of them took pride in their ethnic cultural and racial identities.

Despite their centrality of African racial, cultural identity, participants also centralized their other multiple and intersectional identities in different situations
(Annamma et al., 2013). This finding aligned with Elder (2015) who conducted his study with refugee students with disabilities. Describing the multidimensional experiences of his refugee participants with disabilities he shared that “at various points in time, different identities were more salient than others.” (p. 22). Within the context of my study, and consistent with DisCrit theory, my participants consistently gave importance to their gendered, racial, refugee and immigrant identity, and their linguistic abilities. However, in addition to Elder’s study (2015) findings, their experiences of marginalization, oppression, resistance, as well as privilege(s) were intertwined with their cultural identities (Kalyanpur, 2020). For example, all participants discussed experiencing linguistic and cultural racism due to their countries and continents of origin.

### Becoming Black in the U.S.: Racial-Cultural Identity Formation

Another major finding of this study participants’ identity formation was a developing understanding of their intersectional racial-cultural identity formation in the context of the U.S. schools and society. The four Black African participants of this study were reluctant to self-identify as African Americans because of the historical differences of their differential cultural identities and their recent arrival to the U.S. While Lema shared recognizing herself as an African American after the change in her citizenship status, their cultural differences remained intact in their interactions with their U.S. born African American peers. Within U.S. culture and history, Asante and colleagues (2016) discussed that

Blackness is more than a skin color; it is a contested terrain of memory, identity, culture, and politics. Blackness is a space of transnational cultural construction, an ongoing formation with multiple axes/intersections in which historical narratives,
local politics, and self-identifications are enunciated and debated (pp. 368-369). The findings of this study aligned with Asante et al. (2016) that the totalizing experience of Blackness was not the lived reality of these immigrant and refugee students. They learned and unlearned the anti-Black narratives and culture of poverty as a process of identity formation. This finding is especially important to highlight how systemic racism ran through the participants, which maintains the power dynamics of white middle class “able-bodied” experience as the “norm”, and systematically teaches racism to newcomer immigrants and refugees. A common thread identified within study participants’ narratives was their understanding of their differently lived and educational realities from their African American peers. Lema, Eli, and Kabaka extensively discussed their qualitatively different Black experiences as represented in their academics and social life.

My findings further aligned with Asante et al. (2016) discussion that in addition to being impacted by history of colonization, slavery, and resistance, the first-generation Africans are equally impacted by “U.S. modernity, global inequities between the West and the Rest, [and] socioeconomic positions of African migrants, among many other factors (p. 369)”. From the Global South informed DisCrit perspective, my study participants aligned more with their African cultural identities than with their American identity of being a U.S. citizen. They navigated their racial and cultural identities by at times attempting to learn the culture of their African American peers, while other times they distanced themselves in an attempt to value their ethnic-cultural selves and because of the internalized anti-Black racism. This finding is aligned with theories of ethnic and cultural self-identification and ethnic-knowledge (Bernal et al., 1990, Umaña-Taylor et
al., 2014), which suggests that children over time become more aware of their ethnic and cultural identities and ethnic sense of self. From critical disability studies and DisCrit perspective though, the learned anti-Black racism was also at play which often made them distance themselves and buy into the deficit and racist views about their African American peers.

Verma et al. (2017) introduced a model of racialization in their study conducted with high school immigrant students and their teachers in seven U.S. cities. This model explained that at the core of identity formation are the messages students receive about “normative” behaviors aligned with the existing deficit U.S. racial paradigm—which creates divisions among people of Color. I argue that while at one hand the cultural and linguistic racism was pronounced for them because of their positionality and experiences, my analyses embedded within CDS and DisCrit suggest that they also learned the anti-Black racism about other people of Color, especially African American peers. They distanced themselves, what Bonilla-Silva (2017) would call, *racism without racist*, through discussion such as stating that Black neighborhoods are inherently “bad”, “dangerous” and “fear of our lives”. I argue that the systemic racism and deficit ideologies were processed through them as they learned them in schools and society. (Dumas, 2016).

This racial-cultural self-identification was complicated and messy for these first-generation Africans in the U.S. Within their narratives it was also identified that there was a constant identity navigation, followed by within group bullying, between participants and their peers including their White, international, and African American
peers. In this context, my study findings aligned with Mendez et al. (2012) who discussed the pattern of language based and superiority-based bullying experienced by first generation immigrants. In alignment with their study findings, the first-generation African participants of this study also discussed numerous occasions of being bullied for their African linguistic abilities, and migration and refugee status from countries of Africa. From a Global South informed DisCrit perspective, it aligns with Mthethwa-Sommers and Kisiara’s (2015) identification of three types of bullying that first-generation immigrant and refugee students endure; race based bullying, and language and accent based bullying. My findings identified that the root of this bullying originates in deficit perceptions about their African cultures and bodyminds. My participants consistently experienced cultural and linguistic racism for their countries and continent of birth.

Additionally, while the discussion of racism and ableism experienced by African American students is beyond the scope of this study, the first-generation participants of this study discussed being taught racism against African American peers in American society. From a DisCrit solidarity and Disability Justice perspective, this is problematic. Within the context of Lema and Eli’s family resettlement experiences, such racism was taught by the UNHCR officials before their arrival in the U.S. Growing up Lema extensively discussed the impact of that learning and the added perceptions based on media representation of African Americans in the U.S. From the DisCrit theory and critical disability studies perspective, I identify that such deficit narratives—interlocked within white and ability supremacy—produce and reproduce hierarchies of difference, pin
people of Color against each other, and should be acted and resisted against (Baglieri et al., 2011b; Erevelles & Minear, 2010). While my study participants often discussed the tensions that existed between their African American peers and themselves, they also recognized and discussed the importance and solidarity of African history as well as racism experienced as a common thread among their multicultural selves. For example, in specific context to his African American classmates Mandla discussed that even if his African American friends have not been to Africa does not mean that they are not Africans. Participants experienced an emerging sense of solidarity with their friends and peers from multiply marginalized identities.

Considering identity formation is messy and multidimensional, my participants also experienced learning and unlearning the racist narratives widely prevalent within U.S. society. As explained above racism is taught systemically in implicit and explicit ways, which often made them wanting to distance themselves from their U.S. born Black peers. This was specifically represented structurally in their neighborhood placement to represent how the legacies of racial capitalism were at play. Building on the work of Du Bois (1899, 1935), Cedric J. Robinson (2000) explained racial capitalism as a process of taking away social and economic benefits from communities of Color, especially African American communities as they have historically fought for equal rights (Dantzler, 2021). Within their narratives, participants represented these deficit views against their U.S. born Black peers when discussing their neighborhood placements. It was Lema, who explicitly discussed unlearning such racism when she discussed taking a class with all Black peers in College. Cultural differences intact, Eli also discussed his attempts to learn
the culture of his African American peers to ‘fit in’ with his neighborhood peers. However, since Kabaka and Mandla are relatively recent immigrants to the U.S. their narratives often presented passivity towards the history of U.S. racism. This finding is crucial to understand how white supremacy, white fragility, and white hegemony is maintained structurally within U.S. culture, not only through the education system but structurally through the economic structure of the society. I understand that it is important to unpack in future research to explore how communities of Color are pinned against each other and how structural oppression is (re)produced and maintained against people of Color, especially against African American students.

The participants’ ethnic, racial, linguistic, gendered, social class and other intersectional experiences informed and shaped their identities. In the figured world of schooling, their narratives revealed the challenges, attachments, and detachments experienced in their intersectional lives. The schools’ unwelcoming practices, persistent racialized territories in classrooms, and the cultural racism and mistreatment they experienced from teachers and peers influenced their sense of self. Aligned with the Multidimensional Model of Racial Identity (MMRI), the participants’ racial centrality and racial regard as Black Africans was illuminated. Consistent with DisCrit tenets, the participants experienced racism and ableism as interconnected experience, while also demonstrating racist and ableist acts towards their peers of Color with and without dis/abilities. The navigation of these layers of Black and African identities, as well as the ability-centric and linguistic subordination and marginalization, are summarized in the final research question.
Question 3: How do first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students, with and without dis/abilities, experience schooling and navigate their intersectional identities on a daily basis?

The third research question for this study intended to explore participants’ intersectional experiences with inclusive practices in schools and navigation of their intersectional identities in the American public schools and society. My participants discussed that while they had better educational opportunities in the U.S. in comparison to their countries of birth, the impact of the attached intersectional identities on their schooling resulted in ability-centric experiences, bullying, and cultural and linguistic racism. Their socializing experiences in and outside of schools created an exclusionary pathway for them. They described their intersectional navigation in contrast to their American peers.

Participants further described how the act of resettling refugees and immigrants in the U.S. introduced a cultural hegemony of white middle class ability-centric orientation, such as being forced to learn the host language and culture by introducing ELL and special education classrooms, and identifying their culturally diverse selves as “less than” from an ability lens as described above (Artiles, 2015; Giddens, 2005). While at times internalizing this hegemony as part and parcel of intersectional navigation, participants consistently employed agency within the bounds of these classrooms to ‘use’ and ‘consume’ the available cultural artifacts for making liberatory choices in day to day life (De Certeau, 2005). They understood that the bias and presumptions about their multiple intersecting identity markers excluded and marginalized them, and that they needed to be
more involved members of society when it comes to knowing their rights and laws.

Within the school culture, participants did not feel included within curriculum and school culture, and felt unwelcomed by the school personnel and students alike. They described that their intersectional experiences were different from other immigrant students from European countries, and discussed being aware of the major differences between refugee and immigrant students. They felt excluded not only because of their race but also through their ethnic and linguistic differences—where difference was often viewed through a “deficit” approach.

The bullying and intersectional racism that my participants experienced impacted their psychological and emotional sense of self and left them second-guessing their abilities. They often felt they were not enough which made them feel that they were not the “standard” or that they were “weird kid(s)”. While the deficit views impacted their emotional sense of self, they also resisted/stressed that their White American peers were more “smart” because they received primary education in this society (Hernández-Saca, 2019). Within schools, this resistance also represented not needing teachers’ help all the time. Outside of schools, they discussed navigating their assigned intersectional identities within their communities and society, including U.S. specific racial identity, assigned dis/ability identity, cultural gendered experiences, and social class. The social, psychological, and emotional construction of their intersectional experiences were influenced by positive and negative school experiences, post-school interactions, and family expectations.
Situating the Findings in Theory and Literature

From a DisCrit standpoint, participants of this study recognized whiteness and ability as property and discussed how their confounding identities uniquely intersect to generate the cyclic experience of exclusionary practices in school which resulted in lowered expectations, stereotypes and stigmas, and consistent bullying from peers and educators (Annamma et al., 2013). My study findings align with Mthethwa-Sommers and Kisiara (2015) who discuss that the newly arrived migrant and refugee students often experience race-based bullying because they look different and/or because of their language differences. Within the figured world of schooling, participants’ intersectional experiences were unique due to an additional layer of their ELL placement, and they often discussed feeling “minority of minorities” in school spaces.

My participants navigated their intersectional identities by employing cultural artifacts and tools to navigate schooling experiences, such as using ESL tests to exit the ESL classrooms, learning the American accent to ‘fit in’ the school and broader society, and school’s connections with the outside organizations available via work experience class to find a job. They also used ESL classrooms for learning English grammar and became proficient in the language. This finding aligns with theories and models of ethnic constancy (i.e., knowledge that ethnicity is unchanging), use of ethnic role behaviors (i.e., engaging in behaviors involving one’s culture), ethnic knowledge (i.e., knowledge of culturally-relevant behaviors, customs, and values), and ethnic preferences (i.e., feelings and preferences about being a member of one’s ethnic group) (Bernal et al., 1990). My participants gained knowledge of their host culture’s values, beliefs, norms,
characteristics and practices (Kim, 2018; Wan & Chew, 2013). As discussed above, sometimes these belief systems and ideologies were deficit oriented, including anti-Blackness, culture of poverty, racism without racist.

While they mostly resisted the hegemony of their *ability-centric* placements and identity grouping in ESL and special education setting, they also employed agency within the bounds of these classes to ‘use’ and ‘consume’ the available cultural artifacts for making liberatory choices in day to day life (De Certeau, 2005). According to Holland and Cole (1995) cultural models have both ideal and material realities. They are living artifacts which coordinate joint activities and are used to assign the subjects certain positions, roles and tasks. Within the figurative world of ELL classrooms, my participants used cultural tools to become proficient in the English language and exit these classes, specifically in Lema and Eli’s case. At times, they employed strategies such as learning the accent, becoming friends with American peers to learn language, and joining sports and making friends with a specific social class to gain social capital for future success. Additionally, they used work experience classes to find a job.

Their experiences in relation to these artifacts were operationalized through a multidimensional view of power and privilege at the personal, interpersonal, structural and political dimensions of their intersectional experiences (Annamma et al., 2013; Crenshaw, 1989). From the perspective of dis/ability integrated ERI framework (Umaña-Taylor et al., 2014) they recognized the relationship between educational practices, cultural artifacts, as well as activities conducted in the figured world of schooling that marginalizes and ‘sort’ students into racial, ability and cultural groupings confer a depth
to figure landscape that extends beyond the figured world of schooling and the interactions at personal and interpersonal levels. From the intersectional perspective of structural and political levels, they discussed how the education system privileges certain social classes and questioned the role of education in maintaining class hierarchies. For example, Mandla questioned the existence and maintenance of special education and ELL classrooms by asking who creates these rules to segregate students. Eli also discussed the social detriment of being placed in an ELL classroom which gave him access to a certain social class and social capital (Bourdieu, 1977).

**Psycho-Emotional Impact of Social Construction of Race, Culture, and dis/ability.**

This study employed Sedikides’ et al. (2011) concept of relational self to understand participants’ social and emotional integration within the school culture and society. The findings of this study discussed the impact of intersectional cultural and linguistic racism and the psychological pain the participants experienced when socially and emotionally excluded. My study participants consistently experienced marginalization and exclusion through racial stereotypes and bullying, embedded in the perceptions about their dark skin Color, ethnic-cultural identities, and their accent and linguistic abilities in schools. They discussed feeling “sad”, “mad”, “hurt”, “ashamed”, “embarrassed”, “not welcomed”, “discriminated against”, “less intelligent”, “idiot”, “stupid”, “mute”, and being made feel the “weird kid(s)” in classes, which made them feel they were not the “standard” in schools. For example, Lema discussed “it's sad that I noticed that I could sit in class and like, actively notice that I'm not the standard. I am like the “weird kid””. At times, participants internalized these deficit views about their intersectional identities.
For example, Kabaka shared internalizing the deficit view about his “abilities” in the earlier phase of resettlement and feeling that there was something wrong with his “brain”. The social construction of race, culture and dis/ability presented marginalizing and oppressive experiences for the participants.

**Intersectional Disablism: Multiple Oppressions.** Participants experienced exclusion from the school culture in multiple ways. The stereotypical cultural labels at times limited their understanding of what they could do or become in future. Within the field of Disability Studies in Education, Carol Thomas discussed the psychological and emotional impact of ability materialization because of disability labels in the life of people with dis/abilities, by impacting what they can do or become in future (Thomas, 1999, 2007). Within the context of this study, I understand that participants experienced intersectional disablism (Iqtadar et al., 2020), a form of social oppression enacted by the social, emotional and psychological impact of intersectional racism, ableism, and linguicism, which impacted their life trajectories and future goals. The cultural, racial, and ability centric stereotypes associated with their intersectional identities often made psycho-emotional disablism an intersectional experience for them. At times, this represented in feeling obligated to do something for the host country, such as joining the Marine Corps for acceptance in the U.S. culture. Within the educational context and school culture it impacted their education and socialization. For example, sometimes it impacted their choice to work on group projects and presentations because of the comments about their reading and writing which often made them feel “less intelligent” (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). Other times it impacted their friendships and choices to
retain their group membership even after receiving bullying, and cultural and linguistic racism for their membership, such as in the case of Kabaka and Mandla.

**Acts of Resistance when Navigating Intersectional Identities.** Participants of this study discussed feeling discriminated against, and internalizing certain deficit views about their intersectional identities. However, they consistently resisted these deficit perceptions about their culturally rich and diverse intersectional selves in schools. Participants’ agency was represented in their “use” and “consumption of” strategies and cultural artifacts for making informed and liberatory decisions in school and social life (De Certeau, 2005). Their resistance to special education and ELL placement, cultural racism, and bullying they experienced in schools also reflected in their career choices and dress codes outside of school spaces. For example, in all the interview meetings with Lema, this resistance was represented in her dress code. While she discussed arguing with her mother as a high schooler to dress up like an American girl, I identified that she proudly wore traditional African wrappers in each interview. When asked about her daily dress choices, Lema discussed feeling proud of wearing African head scarfs and African wrappers to feel associated and represent her cultural and racial identity in her day-to-day life in the U.S.

Within the context of schooling, it was represented in resistance to receiving quality education, and being considered equal partners in their education. The resistance was also depicted in their interactions with peers when bullied and with educators when being misunderstood for their racial and ethnic selves. Their also employed acts of resistance for being considered “token African” for language abilities, “forced
assimilation” in ELL and special education placement, “physical and verbal resistance” by opting out of College English language class, and by demonstrating acts of resistance and activism by speaking up for themselves and their friends against the racialized territories in the classroom, such as in the case of Kabaka.

Participants of this study discussed their intersectional experiences in U.S. schools and society as shaped and informed by the cultural hegemony of White middle class ability-centric orientation. They recognized that their different ethnic-cultural identities were viewed as deficit and/or dis/abilities by peers and teachers alike. The bullying, ableism, and cultural and linguistic racism that they experienced impacted their psycho-emotional wellbeing, and limited their educational and future opportunities. However, other times these participants also used agency to resist the system and benefit themselves. At times their agentive tasks appeared in using the cultural artifacts, and school practices and activities to gain benefits. Other times it appeared in explicit resistance to the biased systems of power, such as their placement in ESL and special education classrooms. In the final section of this chapter, I now explain the practical recommendations of this study at the macro, meso, and micro levels of educational policy (Talib & Fitzgerald, 2016). I then present the study’s limitations and areas for future research.

**Macro, Meso, and Micro Implications**

In this final section of the chapter, I now discuss implications across macro, meso, and micro levels of schooling and education. Responding to the call by Annamma and Morrison (2018) I use praxis and social justice to “dismantle the dysfunctional education
ecologies” (p. 70) for first generation immigrant and refugee students of Color with and without dis/abilities. I specifically use DisCrit classroom ecology constructs of Pedagogy, Curriculum, and Solidarity at the micro and meso levels to discuss inclusive practices for these first-generation students (Talib & Fitzgerald, 2016).

Implications at the Macro Level

The central goal of inclusive education is equity and justice in education for all students. Waitoller and Kozleski (2013) define inclusive education as:

a continuous struggle toward (a) the redistribution of quality opportunities to learn and participate in educational programs, (b) the recognition and value of differences as reflected in content, pedagogy, and assessment tools, and (c) the opportunities for marginalized groups to represent themselves in decision-making processes that advance and define claims of exclusion and the respective solutions that affect their children’s educational futures (p. 35).

Within the international education policy and practice, the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities employs the inclusive education framework to achieve equitable and just education for ALL students with dis/abilities globally. Adopted on December 13th, 2006, the current status (May 6th, 2022) of the convention shows that 164 nation States have become signatory members of the convention, with 185 becoming a party through ratification and accessions. Since UNCRPD is the first international convention on the rights of persons with dis/abilities, it is critical to unpack how the

---

14 Signing the treaty is the first step in becoming a party to the convention. States and regional organizations may sign the convention articles and/or optional protocol. This step indicates the party's intention to sign the treaty later. Ratification and/or accession are the next steps. Ratification is considered a concrete action in undertaking convention’s legal rights and obligations. Accession has the same legal effect as ratification; however it does not legally bind the nation states under the international law (UNCRPD, 2022)
inclusive education project, representing an assimilation model, influenced by the traditional special education ideologies from the Global North, and appropriated by the Global South (Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018), is influenced by the international organizations such as UNCRPD (Iqtadar et al., 2021). Scholars from the Global South have identified that such a project has power to undermine or subvert the just inclusive education agenda in contexts shaped by neo-colonialism and neoliberalism—understanding dis/ability through the ableist construct of productivity (Muthukrishna & Engelbrecht, 2018; Jenks, 2017; Stiker, 2019).

I understand that such a project is currently employed through the UNCRPD convention, and appropriated by many Global South countries. This is specifically true for two reasons:

1. the convention’s binding document has stark similarities with the U.S. educational and civil rights laws including the Education for All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Public Law 94–142), now known as the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and American with Disabilities Act (ADA) of 1990 (Ribet 2011; Walker 2014).

2. The document and the convention at larger needs to employ an intersectional approach to acknowledge the enormously diverse and intersectional needs of students of Color with dis/abilities globally.

Employing such a framework will strengthen the education policies that are developing and have been developed in the nation states who ratified their decision to employ an inclusive education approach. In a sense, by employing an intersectional lens\(^\text{15}\)

---

\(^{15}\) Within the convention document, race is mentioned once only in the preamble. Additionally, the convention lacks any mention of the intersectional oppression that people and students of Color with dis/abilities experience globally (Iqtadar et al., 2021)
convention would open more avenues for accounting the educational experiences of multiply marginalized students with dis/abilities globally, by truly employing an equitable and just inclusive education approach (Waitoller & Kozleski, 2013). This will also have implications for the growing immigrant and refugee population in today’s world. Children moving to new states and countries between and across Global North and Global South would have better educational opportunities, recognition of their intersectional selves, and receiving equitable and just education in their host country.

This brings me to the context of this study as situated within the U.S. education system. The current U.S. education policy is structured through the statues of Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) and Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA). Scholars have identified that this education policy fails to take into consideration students’ multidimensional and intersectional identities, such as race, culture and ethnicity, gender, social class and other identity markers, and privileges singular notions of identity, such as race or dis/ability or social class (Annamma et al., 2013; McCall & Skrtic, 2009). Additionally, current education policy facilitates a deficit based assimilationist model of education (Artiles et al., 2016; Erevelles et al., 2006; McDermott et al., 2006), which requires students of Color with and without dis/abilities to assimilate into a hegemonic “normed” “White middle-class” education structure (Artiles et al., 2011; Connor, 2019) and fails to take into consideration the historical, political, social, and emotional contexts in which the education system exists (Hernández-Saca, 2017).

Specifically, IDEA’s categorization of dis/ability labels is based on the deficit based medical model of dis/ability which places individuals with dis/abilities at the
margins of society and identify a “problem” within the child (Patton Davis & Museus, 2019; Dudley-Marling, 2015). This approach wants to “fix” the child, instead of fixing the system (Annamma et al., 2013). Hence, it requires schools to locate the child, conduct assessments and/or evaluation, categorize students based on the dis/ability label, place students in special education classrooms for some or all day and confirm that they receive special education services and protections. This model of identification and sorting of students in the education system follows the medical profession of identifying and “ruling out” the medical needs or emergencies of patients needing medical assistance, such as taking histories, conducting assessments, evaluating, and providing diagnoses (Connor et al., 2008). In alignment with the medical profession, this approach creates a false binary of “normal/abnormal” in the education system, which reinforces who is “normal” and who deviates from “typical”, “normal” “able-bondedness” and needs “fixing” (Annamma et al., 2017). To assimilate students with dis/abilities, schools lower their expectations and limit educational opportunities such as access to the general education curriculum and restricted post-secondary opportunities. These ability-centric and racialized outcomes were experienced by my participants such as, “easy work”, “smart”, “small groups”, “AP classes” class.

Additionally, this deficit “normed” based education policy approach has historically affected students of Color with and without dis/abilities. The more than four decades old issue of disproportionality within special education has impacted the educational experiences of students of Color with intersectional identities (Artiles, 2003, 2011, 2013; Connor et al., 2008; Voulgarides et al., 2017). Their overrepresentation
within special education classroom, embedded within the deficit views about their race, culture, language, and other identities, and a need to align with the “normed” White “middle-class” oriented education system has created trajectories for students of Color that require historical, economic, sociopolitical, and moral debt for students and families of Color in schools and society (Artiles et al., 2005; Bal, 2009, 2014; Ladson-Billings, 2006).

Rather than focusing on the deficit model approach and remediating children, special education law must recognize intersectionality to contextualize and visualize students’ rich and diverse backgrounds (Crenshaw, 2015). The IDEA does not lead to widespread systemic changes to ensure all students with dis/abilities, including students of Color with ethnic, racial, and linguistic diversity, are educated in inclusive settings (Sauer & Jorgensen, 2016). Rather than anchoring educational policy with an assimilation framework which constrains student agency, educational law must shift toward cultural inclusion:

(ESSA) policy implementation for migrant populations will remain ineffective without fundamental changes to the climate and organization of state and local systems. Schools must become places of difference, multiple discourses, and myriad voices. Curricula should include literature and knowledge from other cultures, and teachers should celebrate a diverse classroom (Reeb-Reascos & Serniuk, 2018, p.10).

I now move to a discussion of implications at that meso level.


Annamma and Morrison (2018) conceptualized a Disability Critical Race Study
(DisCrit) classroom ecology framework for centering and privileging the voices of students who are multiply marginalized through race, dis/ability, gender, and other intersectional experiences in the U.S. classrooms. Within the school systems this marginalization and segregation is practiced through students’ overrepresentation in special education classes, behavioral plans, school to prison pipeline and drop-out rates, and an underrepresentation in higher test grades, attending college, and Advanced Placement classes (Artiles, 2011, 2013; Brayboy et al., 2007; Dunn, 1968; Hosp & Reschly, 2004; Voulgarides et al., 2017). In their DisCrit classroom ecology theorizing, Annamma and Morrison (2018) proposed that future inclusive classrooms recognize the gifts of multiply marginalized students through three interrelated constructs of DisCrit pedagogy, curriculum, and solidarity (Du Bois, 1924). I employ these three constructs to deconstruct the deficit views about culturally, racially, ability, and linguistically diverse student populations and propose classroom ecology that accounts for those intersectional dimensions in inclusive classrooms.

DisCrit Meso Pedagogy: Blending Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)

Embedded within DisCrit meso ecology, I propose blending Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) (Paris & Alim, 2014) and Universal Design for Learning (UDL) (CAST, 2021) approach to develop pedagogy and curriculum responsive to the needs of culturally and linguistically diverse student populations who experience a) interlocking marginalization and segregation within ESL and special education classrooms, b) limited access to general education settings, and c) receiving cultural and linguistic racism and
ableism embedded within white middle class ability-centric classroom orientation (Paris & Alim, 2014; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). Offering a loving critique of the asset pedagogies in classrooms, Paris and Alim (2014) theorized culturally sustaining pedagogy’s goals of linguistic, literate, and cultural pluralism as part of the democratic project of schooling. CSP aims to sustain, value, and use students’ cultural and linguistic practices as assets in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2014; McCarty & Lee, 2014; Paris, 2012; Paris & Alim, 2014). Coupled with UDL, which seeks to improve and optimize teaching and learning for all students while eliminating the systematic and educational barriers for them (CAST, 2021), a pedagogy responsive to diverse student populations emerges.

Developed at the Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST), UDL is a multipurpose framework of resources, techniques, and strategies to meet the unique needs of all students in the general education classroom. Three guiding principles serve as the access points to eradicate learning barriers. First, multiple means of representation, also identified as the “what” of learning, accounts for multiple ways in which students perceive, use language and symbols, and comprehend the available information. Teachers present information in different formats such as youtube videos, crafts, worksheets, and tests. Second, multiple means of engagement, the “why” of learning, offers different ways to engage and sustain students’ interests, by building multiple activities for student motivation. Such as opportunities for flexibility through choice of learning context such as optional groupings, providing multiple resources such as learning softwares with multiple difficulty levels, online version for the test, and providing frequent feedback.
Third principle of UDL is multiple means of actions and expression, also known as the “how” of learning. This principle gives access to various means of methods and resources which students can use to demonstrate their new skills or ideas. Some examples include oral or written format to demonstrate learning, use of technology, and using a variety of assessment formats and data sources.

While DisCrit classroom ecology is rooted in culturally responsive, relevant and sustaining pedagogy, the proposed blending of CSP with UDL will provide an important tool to educators to engage activism in classroom spaces and counter the deepening inequalities and inequities against culturally and linguistically diverse immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities (Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Artiles, 2015; Artiles & Dyson, 2005; Suárez-Orozco, 2001; Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). Specifically, this hybrid pedagogy will provide teachers with tools, resources, techniques, and strategies which defy the existing racist and ableist assumptions against monolingual and/or bilingual students of Color with and without dis/abilities.

Scholars within the fields of DSE, critical special education, and inclusive education have already identified that a UDL approach critiques that simply providing the modifications and adaptations in classrooms maintain the status quo and the myth of “normal child” (Dudley-Marling & Gurn, 2010; Edyburn, 2010). The proactive approach of UDL with it’s three access points of *multiple means of representation, multiple means of engagement, and multiple means of action and expression* resist the underlying deficit views against students with dis/abilities which hold “normalcy” in question and contributes to the asset pedagogies in classrooms (Hanesworth et al., 2019; Waitoller &
Additionally, aligned with CSP, the robust approach will prompt educators to ensure that UDL principles explicitly engage the cultural, linguistic and literate diversity in classrooms as valuable and socially just for students’ learning, growth, and assessment (Hanesworth et al., 2019; Kieran & Anderson, 2019; Kusumaningsih, 2021). Within the context of my study, Lema’s advice that “allowing children to embrace their Africanness… at the school district [level, and] encouraging [them] to continue to learn and speak their language…” is an important consideration which can serve as the underlying ideology and a beginning point to embed culture throughout the learning process for students.

Additionally, these three access points in UDL can also serve as a tool to embrace diversity in ways of thinking and engaging when assessing growth among students. Rooted in McArthur (2016), Nussbaum (2006, 2011) and Sen’s (2007, 2010) capabilities and social justice approaches to assessment, Hanesworth et al., 2019 provide a typology for a social justice approach to assessment praxis by engaging UDL and CSP. A socially just Global South informed DisCrit classroom for multilingual students with and without dis/ability labels can provide students with a) access to assessment information with clarity, including “assessment brief, expectations and processes, [and] feedback practices”, b) different ways and methods of expressing learning beyond essay writing and exams, and c) multiple means of engaging students with the assessment content and information by providing choice in assessment methods, timely feedback and options for levels of engagement for growth purposes (Hanesworth et al., 2019, p. 103). As Nussbaum (2006, 2011) says:
Although the following analogy may strike some fans of procedural justice as a bit unfair, it seems to the outcome-oriented theorist as if a cook has a fancy, sophisticated pasta-maker, and assures her guests that the pasta made in this machine will be by definition good, since it is the best machine on the market. But surely, the outcome theorist says, the guests want to taste the pasta and see for themselves. (p. 83)

Building on learner histories and needs through capabilities and asset approaches that value culture, educators can develop socially-just assessments of student growth while responding to the multidimensional linguistic and literate identities of students. From a DisCrit classroom ecology perspective, the blended pedagogy will help educators make their students’ culturally and linguistically diverse identities visible in the curriculum and assessment procedures and outcomes (Coppola et al., 2019). Rooted in disability studies and critical race theory, engaging UDL and CSP will serve as a tool to counter the historical, ideological, political and legal hegemony of whiteness and ability as used to deny rights of students who experience multiple and intersectional marginalization through race, dis/ability, culture and other identity markers (Artiles, 2015; Annamma & Morrison, 2018; Valencia, 1997). I now turn to discuss how the blending of UDL and CSP can provide a valuable approach to the DisCrit curriculum (Annamma & Morrison, 2018).

DisCrit Curriculum at the Meso Level: Blending Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP)

With the inclusive education framework in mind, my understanding of the character of curriculum is grounded in four interlinked and equally important constructs: (a) conceptual, technical, and organizational tools, (b) communication and recognition that the curriculum instead of the child needs “fixation” (c) problem solving, and (d)
relationships between teachers and students and their families (see figure 6) (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Gabel & Danforth, 2008; Heller, 2012; Marsh & Willis, 2007; Margiotta, 2010). From a UDL and CSP perspective, I understand that the curriculum is dynamic, and engages students and teachers in creative, imaginative, and communicative ways for a dialogic learning experience. The instructor, being the supervisor, may bring the necessary tools and resources to the classroom—such as identified readings and assignments, it is the active engagement, critical thinking, and problem solving together in the classroom that makes the curriculum interactive.

Scholars in the field of disability studies in education, inclusive education and critical special education have identified that students’ histories, their rich and diverse ethnic and cultural backgrounds, their association and/or lack thereof with the dis/ability identity and their racial and other intersectional identities and experiences are often invisible and not valued in the curriculum (Annamma & Handy, 2019; Ladson-Billings, 2006). Additionally, the teaching force in U.S. public schools overwhelmingly remain white middle class female educators (Feistritzer et al., 2011), which maintains the intersection of race and dis/ability an interlocking experience for students of Color with dis/abilities in curriculum decision making and learning.

Within the DisCrit curriculum, Annamma and Morrison employ a gift theory from Du Bois (1924) to acknowledge that the gifts of students of Color with dis/abilities must be acknowledged if we want to achieve a socially just and equitable curriculum. They highlight that:

this gift is about history, not to be reduced to the history of slavery but instead expanded to the history of domination, struggle, and accomplishments made by
Black people as part of the (re)construction of America (Du Bois, 1924). Thus, centering the lives of the multiply-marginalized in DisCrit curriculum means 1) explicitly naming the intersectional injustices they face; and 2) exploring ways multiply-marginalized people fight intersecting oppressions… 3) counter[ing] the invisibilizing in all content areas through the systemic inclusion of the histories of multiply-marginalized Communities of Color. This is beyond heroes and holidays or even Black History month, which allows the rest of the year to focus on whiteness without naming it such (p. 74).

In lieu of the call for DisCrit curriculum, I recommend from a Global South perspective that the history of African and other cultures and cultural identities are valued in the curriculum. Within the Iranian education system, Mostafazadeh et al., (2019) conducted a qualitative study to explore the nature and reasons for multicultural curriculum. Their findings suggest that “anti-racism education, acceptance of diversity & plurality, peaceful coexistence with other groups, regarding educational justice, flexibility in educational programs, variety in using of teaching methods, and so, variety in using of educational materials, to protect minority languages” must be considered as components of multicultural education in multicultural curriculum (p. 20).

As the findings of this dissertation study identify that for the first-generation Black immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities, the deficit ideologies about their ethnic-cultural identities and bodymind are widely present within U.S. schools. To combat cultural and linguistic racism and ableism, it is timely to incorporate linguistic, literate and cultural diversity in our schools beyond celebrating the ethnic days once in a school year (Paris & Alim, 2014). Additionally, GSI-DisCrit debunks the idea of model-minority which continually creates and expands on the systemic oppression for certain immigrant and refugee student groups in the classrooms. As participants of this study discussed feeling forced to a) align with specific racial categories in the U.S. for the
system to identify them as such, and b) to be differentiated within groups for not being “American” enough for their “ability”, linguistic, and cultural differences. A GSI-DisCrit approach, in alignment with the tenets of DisCrit, values the individual as a whole and privileges students’ voices and cultures to be included within the school curriculum.

One way of establishing such a curriculum is through the blending of UDL and CSP within the DisCrit curriculum (Waitoller & Thorius, 2016). For example, a CSP focused UDL approach to curriculum will critically engage and interrogate the questions such as what role do common core standards play for maintaining the deficit assumptions about immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities, and their “assimilation” in the goals of democratic education? Scholars have critiqued that the common core standards are designed to foster “college and career readiness” for economic purposes, and invisibilize the cultural knowledge and diversity in curriculum and democratic education (Bindewald et al., 2016, p. 3; Neem, 2018). From a DisCrit classroom ecology perspective, such underlying deficit orientation to ‘fit’ the Global South bodyminds into an existing understanding of being a “good citizen” is problematic and questionable as it erases students’ rich and deep ethnic cultural backgrounds and knowledge, and maintains the ideas of “normalcy” of white middle class bodymind. This ideology has wider deficit implications beyond school and education, such as understanding Global South immigrant and refugee communities as deficit cultures lacking intelligence and/or “abilities”. The GSI-DisCrit encourages educators to engage in critical conversations such as the role of cultural, linguistic and literate differences in creating and maintaining translingual students’ placement in ESL and special education
classrooms. Do such placements suggest and maintain cultural racism and ableism that first generation students experience within and beyond schools?

Employing a culturally sustaining pedagogy framework to teaching curriculum, Jaffe-Walter and Lee (2018) conducted an ethnographic study in urban schools of New York city serving recently arrived immigrant students. Their findings suggest that by recognizing and engaging students’ transnational knowledge, experiences, and attachments to their homelands in the teaching of academic content, the culturally sustaining pedagogy engages all students: students read, write and reflect on their knowledge and experiences in their native countries as “experts” and are “asked to share their stories of migration and their knowledge of cultural practices and political situations in their homelands. Furthermore, they are encouraged to think critically about issues of justice and injustice in their home countries and in the United States.” (p. 272). The educators employed global poetry units, personal essays, artwork, and performances to provide a meaningful and culturally-responsive avenue to enhance students’ linguistic and academic skills.

Similarly, Martell and Stevens (2019) conducted a qualitative multiple-case study to better understand the teaching practices of 10 social studies teachers who self-identified as culturally sustaining educators. Their findings suggest that teachers approached culturally sustaining pedagogies through exchanging information in classroom discussions, discovering various cultural perspectives, and challenging students to question injustice and develop ways to serve as agents of change (Martell & Stevens, 2019). Additionally, developing a cultural framework that includes school-wide
strategies, language-based interventions, and educators’ self-reflection reflects a culturally-sustaining pedagogy (Steketee et al., 2021). By blending UDL with the culturally sustaining pedagogy approach, educators can engage students’ transnational knowledge, histories, and lived experiences in curriculum. Equally important is the ethics of care and relationship building with students to which I now turn.

**Figure 6**

*Grounding Curriculum*
Individual Educational Experiences at the Micro Level: A Call for Solidarity

DisCrit Solidarity: An Ethic of Care and Advocacy

Scholars have identified that the needs of first-generation immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities are insufficiently addressed in school systems (Vedder et al., 2006). These needs call for facilitating their cultural transition by valuing students’ cultural repertoire and their translingual and multicultural funds of knowledge (Artiles, 1998; Artiles et al., 2005; Bal, 2009; Moll et al., 1992; Minow, 1990). The role of schools as a cultural actor to promote deficit and racist ideologies about students’ racial, ethnic-cultural, dis/abilities, and rich linguistic selves maintain the structural hierarchies which need a systemic change altogether (Hernández-Saca et al., 2018; Warikoo & Carter, 2009).

Especially important are students’ own accounts of their feelings in relation to the segregation, discrimination, isolation and marginalization that they experience in schools. In a systematic qualitative analysis about how schools address cultural diversity among students across the world, Makarova and Birman (2016) explored studies addressing the cultural transition of minority youth in schools. The studies reviewed discussed that students often experienced “psychological alienation (Good et al., 2010), peer separation (Li, 2009), “low self- esteem”, “loss of self-worth” [among students from cultures devalued by majority cultures] (Aronowitz, 1984; Castro-Vazquez, 2009), . . . intensive coping process (Li, 2010; Walters, 2007), and adaptation difficulties (Good et al., 2010)” (p. 5).
At the micro level of interpersonal relationships, Annamma and Morrison (2018) discuss that a DisCrit solidarity represents authentic classroom relationships, love, and care between students and teachers, without which the goals for pedagogy and curriculum are not possible to achieve. The impact of such an authentic relationship which conveys respect and care is lifelong for students (Noddings, 1984). Especially within the life of a young recent migrant or refugee student of Color, this type of relationship holds specific significance when they are also navigating the new culture and their intersectional experiences in schools. In my discussions with Eli, he often spoke very highly and with great respect for his ELL teacher. In one such interaction, he shared:

She made us believe that we could make a difference; we could read, write, and spell. She just made us believe. I don’t know how she did it, but she made all of us believe. To this day, all the students that she taught remember her. We stayed in touch, anytime there is an event or something going on, we invite her because she was impactful in our lives.

*Rooting our pedagogies and curriculum in deep respect and care for students’ ways of thinking and learning, honoring their backgrounds and global linguistic, cultural and literate diversity, and educators’ ongoing pedagogical reflexivity is the way to build solidarity in classrooms* (Dávila & Linares, 2020; Ransom, 2020).

Additionally, Pérez and Saavedra (2017) call for a Global South ontological diversity in education, specifically early childhood education. In alignment with their call, I understand that such an epistemological shift and centering of lived experiences of students and Global South communities of Color is significant when working with multicultural, multilingual, and multiliterate students. Mainstream K-16
education in the U.S. is dominantly constructed from a Global North, specifically white middle-class, heterosexual version of humans’ social, emotional and “intellectual”
growth, which views students from Global South cultures as “intellectually” and socially “inferior” (Pérez & Saavedra, 2017). From the DisCrit solidarity view, valuing students’ cultures and dis/abilities is paramount in developing authentic relationships with the growing immigrant and refugee student populations. Instead of siloing students in ELL and/or special education classrooms for lack of English-speaking skills and for assigned dis/ability labels, teachers can begin with radically valuing the multicultural and multiliterate gifts they bring to our classrooms (Annamma & Morrison, 2018).

One way educators can develop such authentic relationships in classrooms is by embracing a multidimensional understanding and respect for human differences and valuing the identities of all students. UDL can benefit from CSP by valuing the intersectional diversity among students with dis/abilities and embedding that when developing universally designed curriculum and pedagogy in the classrooms, such as being open and understanding to culturally rich and diverse models of dis/abilities and inclusive education, and/or respecting cultural differences when designing transition plans for after school graduation (Trainor & Robertson, 2020). On the other hand, CSP joined with UDL when working with Glocal students of Color, will honor students' identities, backgrounds and histories such as by providing list of options to choose a culturally relevant text and/or choice to research and bring text of their choice to read for in-class activities (Kibler & Chapman, 2019), honoring transnational languages and making it a new “norm” in classroom to value cultural languages, and valuing
multilingual, multicultural and multiliterate forms of self-expression in assignments.

Additionally, the ethic of care necessitates teachers to self-reflect on the biases and assumptions, that work through ideologies in the system, about certain immigrant and refugee groups. Dávila and Linares (2020) explored ESL teachers’ ethics of care in their relationship with newcomer multilingual, multiracial, and multicultural ESL students from diverse immigrant backgrounds. The teachers in their study continuously engaged in pedagogical reflexivity and upheld and valued translingual identities and backgrounds of their students to encourage and facilitate their native language and literacy development. At the core of this was the empathy and trust that they shared with their students. In DisCrit solidarity, such reflections of teachers’ own biases and assumptions will help inquire students’ cultural, dis/ability, race, and other intersectional identities as social and political identities which necessitate resistance from students and educators alike. I now discuss the limitations of this study and areas for future research.

Limitations of the Study

This qualitative study is inevitably bound by limitations. First, the data collection is reliant on the limited number of participants’ lived experiences. While the data analysis presents important findings of participants’ multidimensional and intersectional identity formation and ELL and/or special education experiences, readers should be careful before making generalizations to the experiences of other first generation Black African immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities. Second, while the majority of the interviews in this study were conducted face-to-face, the final three interviews were conducted via Zoom due to COVID context. Finally, due to the difficulty of access
into the school districts and to the participants attending K-12 school settings during this study, the findings are representative of four participants’ experiences, with two adults recalling and reflecting on their in-school experiences. These findings are nonetheless important and relevant to study the educational experiences of immigrant and refugee students, and suggest that future research is essential.

**Directions for Future Research**

It would be useful to investigate the in-school intersectional experiences of first-generation immigrant and refugee students with and without dis/abilities. This will provide future researchers an opportunity to conduct observational analyses in school settings and interviews with the school personnel. Longitudinal studies are recommended where researchers spend more time with the participants and follow students from within schools to post school settings over time. This will give important insights and findings about the life worlds of participants across time and space. Such studies will also provide much needed data to understand the on-going identity formation of first-generation immigrant and refugee students in U.S. schools and society. Additionally, within classroom action research with blending Universal Design for Learning (UDL) and Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy (CSP) for first generation immigrant and refugee students is important to achieve just and equitable inclusive education.

It is equally important to investigate the impact of variables such as economic, cultural and social and emotional difficulties in the life of first-generation immigrants and refugees with and without dis/abilities. Such studies will reveal important intersectional findings about students’ ESL and special education placements and the difficulties they
experience outside of school settings revealing holistic life worlds and experiences in new culture and society. Finally, further exploration of the immigrants and refugees identity formation, especially the navigation of becoming non-monoracial Black Americans (emphasis added due to monoracial African backgrounds) within U.S. that they navigate upon their arrival, and its intersectional analyses that emerged in this research study is important. This is especially important to understand and underscore how the hegemony of White middle-class racial domination is produced, reproduced, and maintained in the structures of U.S. society and education. Doing so will have implications for classroom pedagogies.

**Conclusion**

I felt myself to be a shameful outsider to the world that Miss Clark and Murray wished to exclude me from. Nationality, background, real origins, and past actions all seemed to be sources of my problem … So beginning in America I resolved to live as if I were a simple, transparent soul and not to speak about my family or origins except as required, and then very sparingly. To become, in other words, like the others, as anonymous as possible (Said, 2000, p. 136-137)

Edward Said (2000) experienced what many first-generation immigrants and refugees encounter when they have to silence aspects of their life and histories in order to ‘fit’ in a new school and society. They pause and question themselves and their histories, silence their voices, self-doubt, live in fear of saying something that offends the other, and just living life. Many students who receive additional dis/ability labels and/or experience special education placements, such as Kabaka and Mandla, undergo this internal and external navigation unimagined for a world that intersectionally “disable” them. They are put in different boxes of race, dis/ability, gender, culture and ethnicity and are oppressed
intersectionally living those identities. Sometimes these young souls internalize, while other times they exercise agency and resist. However, this journey is not an easy one. I often ask myself: *What role do we, as educators, hold in making this a journey of hope and resistance?*

As I write the conclusion to my study, I am reliving many emotions that often remained unsaid through an almost entire decade of my academic and social life living in the U.S. To the best of my abilities, I do not want another soul to experience some of these emotions, such as feeling unwelcomed across places, experiencing linguicism, xenophobia, racism and ableism. At this point, I want to acknowledge and thank my participants who shared with me their experiences of living life at the intersection of their multiply marginalized experiences, some of which they never felt belonged to, such as special education and ELL placements. Their sharing of these experiences has affirmed my belief that theory and praxis need to go hand in hand. Like many of my inclusive education educator friends, who teach in K-12 settings, and scholar colleagues in the field of Disability Studies in Education, I too believe that a classroom is a place for social justice, activism, and developing solidarities and relationships with students. It is my hope that none of my students and their students and ALL our students experience the *isms* that surround these young souls everywhere in the system.

As I began teaching special education methods courses, I started engaging UDL and CSP purposefully in my own classroom and in supporting and preparing my pre-service and in-service student teachers for their teaching placements, such as through developing UDL and CSP embedded lesson plan assignments. I unlearn and relearn
everyday with my students, many of whom are eager to live up to the ideas of inclusive 
education at both structural and ideological levels. This includes acknowledging and 
countering our own biases and assumptions, and welcoming ALL our students by valuing 
the *differences* and *diversity* they bring to our sacred classroom spaces.
REFERENCES


Bonilla-Silva, E. (2017). What we were, what we are, and what we should be: The racial problem of American sociology. *Social Problems, 64*(2), 179-187.


Ferri, B. A., & Connor, D. J. (2010). ‘I was the special ed. girl’: Urban working-class young women of colour. *Gender and Education, 22*(1), 105-121.


Harry, B., & Klingner, J. (2014). *Why are so many minority students in special education?* Teachers College Press.


Iqtadar, S., Hernández-Saca, D. I., & Ellison, S. (2020). “If it wasn’t my race, it was other things like being a woman, or my disability”: A qualitative research synthesis of disability research. *Disability Studies Quarterly, 40*(2).


Tatum, B. D. (2017). *Why are all the Black kids sitting together in the cafeteria?: And other conversations about race*. Hachette UK.


APPENDIX A

ORAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – PARENTS/GUARDIANS

Name of Investigator(S): Shehreen Iqtadar

Title: “Educational Experiences of First Generation Black African Students with and without Dis/abilities”

Dear Parent/Guardian,

Your child is invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The focus of this study is to explore and understand the school day of immigrant and/or refugee students who receive English as Second Language (ESL) and/or special education services to learn more about how they experience school.

This is such an important area for educators to learn more about immigrant and/or refugee students who receive ESL and/or special education services may experience difficulties not common to their peers - the voice of your children is important. I (the researcher) am going through the family immigration process myself right now, so I am particularly sensitive to the needs of immigrant and/or refugee students.

Basic procedure for student interview

- Primary investigator, Shehreen Iqtadar, will face to face and/or remotely conduct 2-3 individual interviews with your child.
- Each interview will be conducted in person and/or online (such as Skype, Zoom, Google hangouts) or using telephone, as per your choice.
- 2-3 interviews (20-30 minutes each) will be conducted with your child face to face and/or remotely.
- A compensation of total $25 per family is offered for your child’s participation at the end of the study.
- The interviews will be conducted in Spring 2020 (February 2020 to June 2020).
- Primary information obtained during this study that could identify participants, will be kept confidential.
- Pseudonyms will be used for confidentiality purposes.

If interested, please email Shehreen Iqtadar at iqtadars@uni.edu. Thank you for your time.
APPENDIX B

ORAL RECRUITMENT SCRIPT – STUDENTS/PARTICIPANTS

Name of Investigator(s): Shehreen Iqtadar

Following points will be used as an oral script while recruiting participants for the study.

Title: “Educational Experiences of First Generation Black African Students with and without Dis/abilities”

Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand the school/college day of immigrant and/or refugee students who receive English as Second Language (ESL) and/or special education services to learn more about how they adjust to new setting.

This is such an important area for educators to learn more about immigrant and/or refugee students who receive special education services may experience difficulties not common to their peers - your voice is important. I (the researcher) am going through the family immigration process myself right now, so I am particularly sensitive to the needs of immigrant and/or refugee students.

Basic Procedure:

- Primary investigator, Shehreen Iqtadar, will face to face and/or remotely conduct 2-3 individual interviews with you.
- Each interview will be conducted in person and/or online (such as Skype, Zoom, Google hangouts) or using telephone, as per your choice.
- Interviews will be conducted in English.
- Each interview will last between 45-60 minutes.
- A compensation of total $25 per family is offered for your participation at the end of the study.
- The interviews will be conducted in Spring 2020 (February 2020 to June 2020).
- Primary information obtained during this study, that could identify participants, will be kept confidential.
- Pseudonyms will be used for confidentiality purpose.

If interested, please provide your contact number and email address to the person/office sharing this with you and/or call Shehreen Iqtadar at email iqtadars@uni.edu
My name is Shehreen Iqtadar. I am a student in the Department of Education at the University of Northern Iowa, Cedar Falls. I am doing a research study, and I want to ask if you will be part of it.

**What is a research study?**
A research study is when people like me collect a lot of information about a certain thing to find out more about it.

This letter tells you about my study so you can decide if you want to be in it. I also spoke with your parents/guardian about this study, and I am talking with you because your parents/guardians gave me permission to speak with you. Before you decide, you can talk about it with your parents/guardian if you want to. If you have any questions about the research, just ask me.

**Why are we doing this study?**
I am doing this study to understand the school day of immigrant and/or refugee students who spend a few hours of their school day in the English as a Second Language (ESL) and/or special education classroom. I am interested in knowing how students adjust to a new school setting.

I am doing this study to find out more about students’ day-to-day school and what do they enjoy most and what do they not enjoy at all about ESL and/or special education in their new school setting. This is a very important thing for teachers to learn more about immigrant and/or refugee students receiving ESL and/or special education services because their experiences may be different from their other American friends – your voice is very much important.

I (the researcher) am also going through the family immigration process myself right now, so I am particularly sensitive to the needs of immigrant and/or refugee students. This study is not part of your schoolwork, and you won't get grades on it.

**Why are we talking to you about this study?**
I am asking a lot of children your age who go to the ESL and/or special education class/resource room if they would like to help in my research. I’m inviting you to take part because your family recently moved to the U.S., and you currently go to the school.

**What will happen if you are in this study?**
If you agree to be in the study and your parents say it’s okay, I will:

Meet in person and/or online with you to do 2-3 interview on different days. This will be face to face and/or online (such as Skype, Zoom, Google hangouts) or using telephone that you and your parents decide is convenient. I will ask you questions about the way you study and learn in school, and audiotape (record what we're saying) if you give me permission. The interviews will be conducted in Spring 2020 (between February 2020 – June 2020) and each interview will take about 20-30 minutes.

**You can take a short break during this time if you want to.**

**Will good things happen from being in this study?**
Being in this study won’t really change anything for you. But I hope that what I find out from this research will help other immigrant and/or refugee kids in the future to learn about typical school day in U.S. schools. It will help them learn about ESL and/or special education classroom and also help future teachers learn when working with immigrant and/or refugee students.

**Are there things you might not like about being in the study?**
You might feel uncomfortable by a few questions. I will try to make sure that you are comfortable in following ways:

1. I will talk with you at a time you and your parents/guardians choose.
2. We may take a break at any time and/or opt out of the study if you choose.
3. I will ask questions that hopefully will not make you uncomfortable.
4. You parents/guardians will be invited to join you during the interviews.

You might get bored or tired and decide that you don’t want to finish the interview. If this happens, just tell me you want to stop.

**Who will know that you are in the study?** *(optional for this age range)*
You, your parents/guardians, and the researcher are the only ones who will know the details of your being in the study. If I write up a report or give talks about this research, I won’t use any real names of people who were in it. I will just talk about what I learned from all the results put together.

**Will you get paid for being in the study?**
Upon completion of this study, your family will receive a $25 gift card as a thank-you for your time and effort to take part in this study.

**Do you have to be in the study?**
No, you don’t! Research is something you do only if you want to. Nothing bad will happen if you don’t want to be in the study. Just tell me. Whether you decide to participate or not, either way will have no effect on your grades at school. And remember, you can always change your mind later if you don’t want to be in the study anymore.

**Do you have any questions?**
You can ask questions about this study at any time, now or later. You can talk to me, or your parents, or someone else if you like.

You can contact me, [Shehreen Iqtadar], at iqtadars@uni.edu.

**********************************************************

**ASSENT OF CHILD (7-18 years old)**

If you decide to participate, and your parents agree, I will give you a copy of this form to keep. That way you can look at it later if you want to.

**If you would like to be in this research study, please sign your name on the line below.**

__________________________                            _______________
Child’s Name/Signature (*printed or written by child)*                                  Date

__________________________                            _______________
Signature of Investigator/Person Obtaining Assent                           Date

**********************************************************

*If verbal assent only is being obtained:

Investigator or Person Conducting Assent Discussion: Initial here if child cannot sign, to document that child received this information and gave assent verbally: ______
APPENDIX D

PARTICIPANT CONSENT FORM

Project Title: “Educational Experiences of First Generation Black African Students with and without Dis/abilities”

Name of Investigator(s): Shehreen Iqtadar

Invitation to Participate: You are invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The focus of this study is to explore and understand the educational lives of immigrant and/or refugee students who receive English as Second Language (ESL) and/or special education services to learn more about how they experience school. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to participate in this study.

Nature and Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand the school day of immigrant and/or refugee students who receive(d) ESL and/or special education services. It is to explore how students adjust to new setting.

Explanation of Procedures: You are invited to participate in 2-3 interviews carried out over the course of six months (Feb 2020 – June 2020). The purpose of the interviews is to learn more about your day-to-day school experiences and challenges in a culturally new setting. This is such an important area for educators to learn more about immigrant and/or refugee students who receive(ed) special education services may experience difficulties not common to their peers – your voice is important. I (the researcher) am going through the family immigration process myself right now, so I am particularly sensitive to the needs of immigrant and/or refugee students. I am interested to learn about the challenges and difficulties immigrant and/or refugee students with disabilities face and navigate within schools.

I will conduct 2-3 interviews with you. Each interview will be conducted face to face and/or online (such as Skype, Zoom, Google hangouts) or using telephone, as per your choice. Each interview will be about 45-60 minutes. With your permission the interview will be audio-recorded. This information will be transcribed and kept for three years after the completion of the study. The transcribed interviews will be kept confidential and in my locked desk.

The information collected during this research study may be used to help teachers.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study that could identify you will be kept confidential. No personal information about you, your current/past school district and/or the name of State will be shared in any published and/or presented
work at the conferences. My results will be included in my dissertation and may be published.

**Discomforts, Risks, and Costs:** You might feel uncomfortable during the interviews. I will try to make sure you are comfortable in following ways:

1. I will talk with you at a time you choose, and you may take a break at any time and/or opt out of the study if you choose.
2. I will ask questions that hopefully will not make you uncomfortable.

**Benefits and Compensation:** Although your participation may be of no direct benefit to you, you may benefit from this study by having the opportunity to share your experiences. A compensation of total $25 is offered for your participation.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw:** Your permission to participate in this study is completely voluntary. You are free to opt out of the participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not experience any negative effects.

**Questions:** If you have questions regarding your participation in this study or about the study in general, please contact Shehreen Iqtadar at iqtadars@uni.edu. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 001-319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

**Agreement:** Include the following statement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree that I will participate in this project. I know that I will receive a copy of this consent statement.

_________________________________  __________________________
(Signature of Participant)  (Date)

_________________________________  __________________________
(Signature of Investigator)  (Date)

_________________________________  __________________________
(Signature of Instructor/Advisor)  (Date)
APPENDIX E

PARENTAL PERMISSION FORM

Project Title: “Educational Experiences of First Generation Black African Students with and without Dis/abilities”

Name of Investigator(s): Shehreen Iqtadar

Invitation to Participate: Your child is invited to participate in a research project conducted through the University of Northern Iowa. The focus of this study is to explore and understand the educational lives of immigrant and/or refugee students who receive English as Second Language (ESL) and/or special education services to learn more about how they experience school. The following information is provided to help you make an informed decision about whether or not to give permission to your child to participate.

Nature and Purpose: The purpose of this research is to better understand the school day of immigrant and/or refugee students who receive(d) ESL and/or special education services. It is to explore how students adjust to new setting.

Explanation of Procedures: Your child is invited to participate in 2-3 interviews carried out over the course of six months (Feb 2020 – June 2020). The purpose of the interviews is to learn more about his/her day-to-day school and challenges in a culturally new setting. This is such an important area for educators to learn more about immigrant and/or refugee students who receive special education services may experience difficulties not common to their peers - the voices of your children are important. I (the researcher) am going through the family immigration process myself right now, so I am particularly sensitive to the needs of immigrant and/or refugee students. I am interested to learn about the challenges and difficulties immigrant and/or refugee students with disabilities face and navigate within schools.

2-3 interviews will be conducted with your child face to face and/or remotely (with you present if you choose). Each interview will be conducted in person and/or online (such as Skype, Zoom, Google hangouts) or using telephone, as per your choice. You will be invited to join your child during the interview (if you choose). Each interview will be about 20-30 minutes. With your permission the interview will be audio-recorded. This information will be transcribed and kept for three years after the completion of the study. The transcribed interviews will be kept confidential and in my locked desk.

The information collected during this research study may be used to help teachers.

Privacy and Confidentiality: Information obtained during this study that could identify your child will be kept confidential. No personal information about your child such as his/her name, name of the school district and/or the name of State will be shared in any
published and/or presented work at the conferences. My results will be included in my dissertation and may be published.

**Discomforts, Risks, and Costs:** Your child might feel uncomfortable during the interviews. I will try to make sure your child is comfortable in following ways:

1. I will talk with your child at a time you choose, and your child may take a break at any time and/or opt out of the study if your child chooses.
2. I will ask questions that hopefully will not make him/her uncomfortable.
3. You will be invited to join your child during the interviews.

**Benefits and Compensation:** Although your child’s participation may be of no direct benefit to him/her, your child may benefit from this study by having the opportunity to share his/her experiences. A compensation of total $25 per family is offered for you and your child’s participation.

**Right to Refuse or Withdraw:** Your permission for your child’s participation is completely voluntary. You are free to stop your child from participation at any time or to choose not to participate at all, and by doing so, you will not experience any negative effects.

**Questions:** If you have questions regarding your child’s participation in this study or about the study in general, please contact Shehreen Iqtadar at iqtadars@uni.edu. You can also contact the office of the IRB Administrator, University of Northern Iowa, at 001-319-273-6148, for answers to questions about rights of research participants and the participant review process.

**Agreement:** Include the following statement:

I am fully aware of the nature and extent of my child’s participation in this project as stated above and the possible risks arising from it. I hereby agree that my child will participate in this project. I know that I will receive a copy of this consent statement. I am parent of an immigrant child with disability who is not 18 years of age or older.

___________________________
(Signature of parent/guardian) (Date)

____________________________
(Printed name of parent/guardian)

___________________________
(Signature of investigator) (Date)

____________________________
(Signature of instructor/advisor) (Date)
APPENDIX F

INTERVIEW QUESTIONS FOR STUDENTS

Adapted from Hernandez-Saca Interview Guide (2016)

* It is important to note that this interview guide is simply a guide and is designed to take place over a period of 5-6 months. Not all questions will be asked in one sitting. Trust will be built overtime and more questions will be asked each time we meet.

* In addition, each interview will begin with an activity and the interviewer will ask the questions during the activity, in relation to the activity. For example, while asking personal/family related questions, the researcher may begin with asking the student to draw their house first.

Student Interview Protocol Background Questions:

General

These first couple of questions have to do with basic information about yourself so I can make sure I have these basic answers recorded.

- What is your name?
- What grade are you in?
- How old are you?

Some of these other questions have to do with where you were born and how many languages you speak.

- How many languages do you speak?
- Do you speak a language other than English? If so, what is it?
- Can you tell me about the times that you speak your other language(s)?
- Where were you born?
- How old were you when you came to the US?
- Can you share why your family migrated to US?

(If the student was born in another country, besides the United States, I will ask her or him: How old were you when you came to the United States?).

- Do you recall living in X country? How was it living back there?

Personal

Okay, these next questions are a little bit more personal, so I can get to know you a little more:
1. Now that you’ve told me where you were born, X, can you tell me where you live (or your neighborhood) now? Can you tell me what it’s like there for you?
2. Do you have brothers and/or sisters? If so, how many? Which one are you? Are you the youngest, middle child or the oldest child?
3. Can you tell me more about your neighborhood? How do you like it? Can you tell me about the friends in your neighborhood or at school?

School

Now these next set of questions have to do with school.

1. What is your favorite subject in school? Why do you like it?
2. What is your least favorite subject in school? Why do you dislike it? (Or why do you not like X?)
3. In what classes are you doing good in? and why? (What's helping you make it easier for you?) How does it make you feel to be doing good in that/those classes?
4. In what classes are you struggling in? and why? How does it make you feel to be struggling in that/those classes? (And how does that make you feel?)
5. What is your favorite thing about school? and why?
6. What is your least favorite thing about school? and why?
7. What does school mean to you? What is your favorite time and activity in school?
8. You’ve told me that you speak X and X... I want to know a little more about how you use your languages. Do you use your other language while at school? If so, when and why? How does it make you feel when you use your other language in school? And why?
9. Did you go to school in X country?
10. How does it make you feel to be from X country in school? Does anyone want to talk about it? How does that make you feel? For example, what sort of stories or ideas have you heard about students from other countries?
11. Do you speak X language with your friends at school? How do you feel speaking X language with friends?
12. Sometimes it is hard to make new friends in a new school. Can you tell me if you find it difficult or easy to make new friends here? How does it make you feel? How do you spend most of your time and with who mostly?

Immigration

Now that you told me that you were born in X, the next few questions are related with your family’s immigration to the U.S.

1. Can you tell me why your family decided to come to the US?
2. What do you like most about living in the US? What do you like least about living in the US? And why?
3. What do you like most at school in relation to your immigrant status/identity?
4. What do you like least at school in relation to your immigrant status/identity?
5. Does your immigrant and/or refugee status impact making friends at school? In what ways?

Ok, now that you have told me your experiences as being from X country, I want to ask some questions related with the term “special education” and/or ELL classroom.

**Questions about Research Question One: How do immigrant and/or refugee students, labeled with disabilities, make meaning of their disability labels?**

**Meaning-making** (researcher may show the picture of special education teacher as a prompt here - after requesting and obtaining it from the special education teacher)

- If I say the word, “special education”, what does that mean to you? For example, some kids take more time to finish homework, why do you get special education help?

- Some people in special education sometimes don’t like that word because it seems to ignore all the stuff they can do. Can you tell me some things you are good at?
  - Now can you tell me some things you are having difficulty with at school?
  - Can you now tell me how you feel when you complete the thing(s) you are good at?

You’ve told me about how you feel about special education, can you tell me how you get help through special education?

So, I have a story to tell you. When one of my friends was in elementary school (X grade), he had to sit at the table for longer to finish his homework, because he read and understood slower than most of the other students. He spent so much time on his work. He still spends a lot of time today on his work than other students. When he was younger this made him angry and he thought why is it like that. But other days he felt better at finishing the work and it wasn’t hard for him. He decided when he got to high school to start running so he can overcome for how slow he was at reading and writing. This is an example of one of my friend’s special education stories. Can you share any stories you may have about your disability/special education with me? How does it feel?

**Personal**

- Sometimes it’s hard for kids who receive special education to talk about the extra help they might get. Do you talk about special education to anyone? If so, how does it make you feel?
  - Do you like or do you not like talking about it? Why? Why not?
• You’ve told me about times in school where you received special education help, can you tell me when that occurs if you are outside of school? Do you ever need help outside of school?

School

• You’ve told me a lot about your experiences and feelings about school. For example, the time that you X... When at school can you tell me what it means to be a student who gets special education help? and how does it feel?
• When at school can you tell me what it means to be a student who receives english language help in the ELL classroom? and how does it feel?
• I know that you go to Ms. X room (resource/special ed. room/ELL classroom) and Ms. Y (general education room) and back throughout the day at school. Which classroom do you like more? Why? Why not?

Counter Narratives General

In your own words, can you tell what a disability/special education is? (I will use either disability or special education as mostly used within the school)

• Who told you about a disability or why you get special education help? What did they tell you? Did you get to ask any questions? Did it make sense what they were saying? How do you feel as you remember the day you were told?
• What sort of stories or ideas have you heard about people or kids with disabilities or kids who get special education help? These could be from conversations you’ve heard or were a part of inside school or outside school. These stories could be from adults or children or your friends.
• What sort of stories or ideas have you heard about immigrant and/or refugee students who receive ELL services? And what sort of stories about immigrants and/or refugees in general. These could be from conversations you’ve heard or were a part of inside school or outside school. These stories could be from adults or children or your friends.
• How do these stories make you feel?

Personal

• Now that you have told me your experience when you need more help from Ms. X. Can you tell me what sort of things happen or make you feel that you know you need more help or support?
• How often do you think about special education or your disability? When does it occur? Are these good thoughts? If so, can you tell me about them? If they are bad, can you tell me about them? If they are neither good or bad, can you describe those thoughts?
• How often do you think about your immigrant and/or refugee status? When does it occur? Are these good thoughts? If so, can you tell me about them? If they are good or bad, can you tell me about them? If they are neither good or bad, can you describe those thoughts?

School

• Can you tell me about the times in class when you struggle the most in learning? When does it happen? In what classes?
  o Can you tell what happens? How do you know it is happening? How does it make you feel when this happens?
• You’ve told me about times when your disability happens. For example, X...Now can you tell me when your disability happens at school? How does that make you feel? Are the feelings different from when your disability happens at school verse outside of school?
• Thank you for sharing with me when your disability happens at school. For example, you have shared stories about X...Can you share one good thing and one not so good thing about going to the X (special ed.) class?? Saying that, how does that make you feel about yourself and your disability?

Relationship to disability, race, and immigration in General

• If you were to describe your disability or special education in one word, what would it be? If you were to draw your disability or special education what would you draw? Can you draw your disability? Now, can you add yourself in the drawing? How would you represent it? How does this drawing make you feel? If I say the word X (the one word she or he said) how does it make you feel?
• If you were to describe your race and disability together in one word, what would it be? If you were asked to share in a word and/or draw what would you say/draw? Can you draw your complete identity?
• If you were to draw your ELL class or describe it in one work, what would it be? Can you draw the class? now, can you add yourself in the drawing? How would you represent it? How does this drawing make you feel? If I say the word X (the one word she or he said) how does it make you feel?
• If you were to describe your race and immigrant and/or refugee status together in one word, what would it be? If you were asked to share in a word and/or draw what would you say/draw? Can you draw your complete identity?

Question about Research Question 2): How do immigrant and/or refugee students, labeled with dis/abilities, experience schooling and navigate their intersectional identities on a daily basis?

Intersectionality

General
a. Now that we have talked a lot about what you are good at and what you need more
time to complete, I want us to talk about some of your other identities (Here be aware that
you might have to do some teaching about these words or defining these words a little bit
for the students. Also, throughout this section, and all of the sections of the interview
protocol, I could ask the student how she is feeling about the topics now, during the
interview - I would be be aware to offer breaks, omit the particular questions, and/or
finish the interview early if the student is uncomfortable with the questions).

i. Last week, we talked about disability/special education, when I say the word disability,
what comes to mind? What does a disability mean? When I say the word impairment,
what comes to mind? What does impairment mean?

ii. When I say the word race, what comes to mind? What does race mean?

iii. When I say the word immigrant and/or refugee, what comes to mind? What does
immigration and/or refugee mean?

iii. When I say social class, poor, what comes to mind? What does class mean?

**Personal**

a. Now that we talked about race, immigration, refugee, class, and disability (If the
student does not know what these words mean, I will define them for her or him; this is
not problematic, given my epistemological stance and methodological point of view that I
will be contributing to their narratives and talk about all these issues since
epistemologically I see knowledge being co-constructed with me. Again, according to
Holstein and Gubrium (1995), from an active interviewing perspective “the interviewer
invites and assists narrative production, suggesting the parameters of the sort of narrative
being solicited” (p. 41):

i. Let’s compare and contrast the different social classes—poor, working class, middle
class, upper class. What social class mostly reflects your own experiences? Why?

ii. How does the word immigrant and/or refugee relate or not relate to how you see
yourself? What does be an immigrant and/or refugee mean to you? Why?

Ok i wanna share my nephew’s story with you. 2 years ago my sister moved to the U.S.
with her only son. Let’s call my nephew Esa who was 13 years old at that time. Now I am
going to read Esa’s narrative that he wrote for me to share with you about one of his
minority identity in a Midwest school:

“I was really excited because everything was new here e.g., new culture, new people.
What I didn't know was that it isn't always how they show it in the movies. After moving
to the U.S. one week later I joined a school in Iowa. I was really excited because I
thought I'm gonna meet new people and start a new life. The 1st day of school was pretty
good. I met a lot of good people. But when people learned that I was a muslim, some of
them started to keep their distance from me and some of them started making racist jokes. I still had some friends but I figured that they were scared of me because I was a Muslim. Almost in every class I would get made fun of for being a Muslim. They would just keep yelling that “please don't blow us all up” and then they would start laughing. The teachers wouldn’t say anything either. 1 year passed by and nothing changed. Everytime I asked them why they make fun of me they would just say because it’s funny don’t worry about it, we’re just joking. Don’t take it seriously, and I would just say ok but deep down it got to me. Some time passed by and thank God we moved from Iowa to Arizona. In Arizona I felt a lot more comfortable because unlike in Iowa nobody really cared if I was a Muslim they just wanted to be friends with me, and now 6 months have passed by and I really love it here.”

Here Eisa shared his story about one of his multiple identities living in the Midwest, do you want to share any stories (good or bad) about your many different minority identities within the school? It could be in relation to your race, your gender, your immigrant status.

iii. How does the word disability relate or not relate to how you see yourself? What does disability mean to you and how do you identify with the notion of a disability?

iv. How does the word race relate or not relate to how you see yourself? What race do you identify as?

v. How do you feel about your disability, immigrant and/or refugee status, race, social class, and gender? What experiences do you have about each or a combination of each?

b. What does being immigrant and/or refugee with a disability, working class or poor mean to you?

c. What other identities do you have? How are these influenced within your other identities and are an indication of who you are and becoming?

School

Now I would like us to talk how you may be experiencing disability, immigration and/or refugee status, race, class and any other form of differences at school.

1. You’ve told me that immigrant and/or refugee and disability means X for you. When at school how do you experience being immigrant and/or refugee and your disability together? What kinds of things do you learn about immigrants and/or refugees and disability at school?

1) How accurate do you think those ideas are for you?
2) What are some of the positive things that you learn? How does that make you feel?
3) What are some of the negative things? How does that make you feel?
4) What kinds of things do you learn about an immigrant/refugee and disability from your interactions in school with your peers? teachers?

5) When that happens, how do you feel?

6) How do the positive things make you feel about your race (X) and disability?

7) How do the negative things make you feel about your race and disability?

8) What kinds of things do you learn about your race from and disability from your interactions in school with your peers? Teachers?

9) When that happens, how do you feel?

Now that you have told me about how you experience being an immigrant/refugee, your race and disability at school and you’ve told me that social class means X for you, when at school how do you experience your disability and social class together? What sort of things have you learned about your disability and your class together at school?

1. How accurate do you think those ideas are for you?
2. What are some of the negative things?

Now that we have talked about immigration/refugee, race, disability and class, and you’ve told me about your experiences of all now I would like to talk about how you experience all of these things:

i. What are you taught about immigrants and/or refugees, race, disabilities, and class together at school?

ii. Do you think they are different from your own experiences? What are some differences between the information you learned about these from school, and your own experience of it?

**Personal**

1. Another view regarding people with disabilities is that they tend to not see themselves very highly when compared to those without a disability. In your experience as an immigrant and/or refugee student with a disability, who do you see yourself in relation to your disability and how you feel and think about yourself?

2. How do you think that differs from another student who is not an immigrant and/or refugee? What do you think their experiences are and how they differ from your experiences of being an immigrant and/or refugee with a disability label?

**School**

b. You’ve told me a lot about your strengths and areas that you could improve on while at school. Think about the types when you are reading and writing at school. Do you think having a disability is different for a student if they’re white, black, Asian, native
American, or Latina/o? Is disability the same for all races? Is it different for immigrant and/or refugee students in any way?

Questions about Research Question Three: How do immigrant and/or refugee students, labeled with dis/abilities negotiate these labels within school settings?

So, in our last meeting you told me about some of the things you have difficulty with at school

During the day when you are in your special education room, with (teacher’s name), like you’ve talked to me about.

- Can you tell me about some of the good stuff that you get from being there?
- Now that you’ve told me some of the good stuff can you tell me some of the bad stuff, if any, from being in your special education resource room, with (teacher’s name)?
- Can you tell me how it feels when you complete the things you are good at?

During the day when you are in your ELL classroom, with (teacher’s name), like you’ve talked to me about.

- Can you tell me about some of the good stuff that you get from being there?
- Now that you’ve told me some of the good stuff can you tell me some of the bad stuff, if any, from being in your special education resource room, with (teacher’s name)?
- Can you tell me how it feels when you complete the things you are good at?

Now, can you now tell me how you feel when you cannot complete the things/classwork/homework?

What do you do when you cannot complete the work? Who do you ask for help? How do you share with Ms. X that you cannot complete the work? Can you tell me how Ms. X helps you complete the work?

Personal

Personally, during the day, how does your disability impact you? (either positively or negatively, or neither?).

- What is one thing that you would wish others would know about your abilities?
- What is one thing that you would want Ms. X and Ms. Y know about your abilities?
- What is one thing that you would want your peers know about your abilities?
- What is one thing that you would wish others would understand about your disability/special education and/or ELL classroom? (If you would like to tell me at a later time, that is fine too.)
Navigation/Resistance

General

a. In your opinion, is getting help from special education a good thing? If yes, what are the good parts about it? If not, what are the bad parts about it? How do you think kids feel about getting special education help? Or How come? Or Why not?

b. In your opinion, is getting help from the ELL classroom a good thing? If yes, what are the good parts about it? If not, what are the bad parts about it? How do you think kids feel about getting ELL help? Or How come? Or Why not?

School

Now let's talk about what strategies and beliefs you have that help you figure out what works for you in school learning. Can you name 1 or 2 things that really help you succeed in school? Or So, what works for you when you learn in school?

- Can you tell me about the times when you know things are going well in class? What things have you done in the class (such as talking to a friend, hand up etc) that help you with disability/completing your work/homework in SPED and/or ELL classroom?
- What does not help you in completing homework?
- How do you see yourself as a learner? Boy? Female? immigrant?
- Sometimes, if you are taking more time to complete homework/classwork, does it make a difference with the friends you have? (After all these subquestions, you can ask how does that make you feel?).
  - Does it make a difference to your friends?
  - Have you ever talked about it with your friends?
  - Do your friends talk about it with each other?
  - Does it make a difference with Ms. X and Ms. Y? What do they tell about special education?
  - Do you think people understand you?
- Do you think your friends understand what school is like for you? Or Do you think your friends understand if you struggle in school? If yes, what makes you say yes?
- Do people treat you the same due to having a disability? (If no, say: That’s interesting because some other students have said they have been bullied. If they say yes, oh, am interested in this. Can you tell me how you were treated differently? So how does that make you feel when that incident occurred? (Can you tell me about it?)
- Your IEPs meetings are a chance for your teachers, your parents and you to discuss your progress as a student. Do you go to the IEP meetings? If so, what
does it feel like when you are there? What was/is the purpose of IEPs? How helpful was it for you?
- If you could tell Ms. X and Ms. Y how they can better understand kids who have a disability/special education, what would you like to tell your teachers?

So, I shared my friend’s story last time. Sometimes when it took him longer to complete his homework or he could not finish it, some people encouraged him that he can finish it but some other people said he cannot complete it because he is a special education student. Can you tell me if someone ever told you that you can complete your work? Now can you tell me when someone said you cannot complete your work? What did you tell them? How did you respond?

The following are probes that I may use throughout the pre-interview and interview protocol.

I intent to use various probing questions for rich descriptions [e.g., attention, steering, clarification, sequence, continuation, elaboration, slant, evidence, etc.]

- What do you mean?
- How were you feeling?
- What emotions came up for you?
- I’m not sure that I am following you.
- Could you tell me a little more about that?
- Go one--this is great
- Would you explain that?
- What did you say then?
- What were you thinking at the time?
- Give me an example.
- Tell me about it.
- Take me through the experience.

Note. These Probes were Adopted from Bogdan & Biklen (2007), p. 104 and Rubin & Rubin (2011) p. (139)

- Attention probes:
  1. that’s interesting
  2. Wow
  3. now I understand
  4. slow down, this is good stuff, I want to get it down.

Conversational Management probes: Repeating or summarizing what you thought you heard. The interviewee might agree or modify the statement.

- Steering Probes:
1. Okay, could you go back?
2. To something I missed because I get all the memos?

- **Confirmation Probes:**
  1. You mean … “this”? 

- **Clarification Probes:**
  1. Could you run that one for me again?
  2. Could you repeat this information please?
  3. Who is we? To whom does we refer?

**Credibility Probes:** helps you decide how heavily to rely on what the interviewee has said.

- **Evidence Probes:**
  1. Were you there when s/he said that?
  2. Is this something you personally experienced, seen or witnessed?

**Note:** Adopted from Rubin & Rubin (2011) pp. (139-147)