Spring 2018

Educational Assistants And Classroom Management: Increasing Self-Efficacy

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EDUCATIONAL ASSISTANTS AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT:

INCREASING SELF-EFFICACY

by

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A capstone submitted in partial fulfillment of the

requirements of the degree of Master of Arts in Teaching.

Hamline University

St. Paul, Minnesota

May 2018

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Abstract

Theodotou, J. Educational Assistants and Classroom Management: Increasing Self-Efficacy (2018)

The research question addressed in this project was, how can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school? The project documents the creation of a quick reference guide for educational assistants (E.A.s) in a local education agency (LEA) on the topic of classroom management. The project uses the two established classroom management systems already in use in the LEA as its base. The quick reference guide is designed in such a way that E.A.s can reference it on the go, take it home to study, and practice the skills in real-time, giving them opportunities to build their self-efficacy with these systems. The author was influenced by the work of Brock & Carter, specifically around the training and professional development of E.A.s. In addition, the work of Bandura was tantamount to the success of this capstone, since his groundbreaking work concerning self-efficacy was central to the research question. Finally, Prothero and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS) proved to be a valuable resource. The data compiled each year on the growth of charter schools added some much needed hard numbers to the discussion of charter school growth, as well as the challenges faced by this burgeoning group of schools. The author synthesized the findings from the literature review and found that the training, education, and experience of E.A.s is inconsistent, teacher self-efficacy can impact student achievement, charter schools continue to grow in the U.S. (despite a variety of challenges), and classroom management is a serious challenge facing teachers.

To my Lord, God, and Savior, Jesus Christ, through whom I am saved. His unwavering love for my poor soul has kept me afloat during the late nights, the stress, and the anxiety. To my wife, Kyrsten, for her devotion, patience, and love throughout the entire three years of my masters work. You have endured the late nights, the stress, and the anxiety first hand, and you have done it with grace. We did this together, sweetheart, and now it is finished. To my children, Eleni and John, for your laughs, hugs, and all-around cuteness. You helped your daddy keep a smile on his face through all this. And now he's done. Time to play. To my parents, Ann and Andy, for all of your love, support, and guidance, both now, and throughout my life. To my in-laws, Wes and Patty, for your unending stream of unconditional love and positivity. Both you and my parents' unwavering support for Kyrsten, the kids, and me has been nothing short of saintly, especially when coupled with your own set of life's challenges. To my sister, Lea, and my siblings-in-law, Mark, Laryssa, Josh, Jonathan, and Matthew. Thank you for always loving me, checking in on me, and for your collective sense of humor. You brought some much-needed levity to this process. To all of my Hamline professors who have guided me along this journey every step of the way. Thank you for believing in me and supporting me in my decision to uproot my old career, and join the noble profession of teaching. To all of the staff at Seven Hills Preparatory Academy. You offered me my first job as an educational assistant, and that work inspired me to become a teacher. You have also supported me through my first year of teaching, and for that I am eternally grateful.

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

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CHAPTER ONE

Introduction

Like many educators, I came to teaching as a second career. After spending the first part of my career working in public relations and marketing, I entered the education profession as an educational assistant (E.A.) in the fall of 2014 at an urban charter school. By the fall of 2015, I began my initial licensure program at Hamline University. In the spring of 2017, I was in the midst of student teaching, and by the fall of 2017, I was a licensed teacher. I started my first job as a 2nd grade teacher at the same urban charter school where I was I was previously an E.A..

During these three years, I was exposed to a variety of classroom management skills and strategies, and my own practice has come to be a blend of them all. When I was an assistant, I worked to build my self-efficacy of these various strategies, so I could better support the teachers I worked with, and the students I served. Having confidence in my abilities allowed me to handle a wide variety of situations with students (from teaching, to management, to discipline), and I could approach each situation with the belief that I could handle it.

Now, as a teacher, I am using these strategies constantly, and working with E.A.s with varying levels of education, training, and experience in these various strategies. My changing role and perspective has led me to this question: *How can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school?*

My journey to teaching

For years, I tossed around the idea of becoming a teacher. I have always loved being around kids. Even as a middle-schooler, I remember going back to my elementary school as a volunteer. As I got older, I still found that I got a positive energy from being around kids. I even spent almost ten summers as a camp counselor.

Friends and family would tell me "Oh, you'd make a great teacher," and, "You're so great with kids." As I got further and further into my previous career in marketing and public relations, I began to think that being a teacher was slowly turning into an unrealized dream. Maybe when I retire, I could be a substitute, I thought. But, the itch remained.

I decided to scratch that itch in the spring of 2014, just months before my fiancé and I were planning to marry. I left my old career behind, knowing only that I wanted to work in the field of "youth development." Through a friend, I heard of an opportunity as a special education educational assistant at an urban charter elementary school, so I applied and was hired. As I quickly learned, it took much more than "being great with kids" to be a successful assistant. It took patience (when a fourth grader decided to use me as a jungle gym during a tantrum). It took thick skin (when a second grader repeatedly screamed that he hated me). It took perseverance (when a second grader refused to complete a writing assignment I knew he was capable of). Through these experiences, and many others, I knew I would need more tools in my educator tool belt.

At first, I took to learning my school's chosen classroom management and instruction system – Teach Like a Champion (Lemov, 2011) – quickly. Then, as part of my initial

licensure program, I was trained in More Time to Teach (ChildSense, 2007). Finally, during my student teaching, I was introduced to the ENVoY suite of classroom management techniques (Grinder, 2016). I will discuss these three systems in more depth in Chapter 2. The tools in my tool belt were multiplying, as was my passion to become a better and better classroom manager.

Great models of classroom management

Before becoming an educator, the term "classroom management" didn't really mean anything to me. In fact, I'm not even sure I'd heard the term before starting my first job as an E.A. in 2014. However, I quickly learned that the way a teacher chooses to manage his classroom has a huge impact on his students.

My first experience with what I considered excellent classroom management skills came during my time as an assistant. One of our building's math specialists taught a small group of fourth grade students who struggled with math. These eight students had wide and varied needs and an Individualized Education Program (IEP) supported about half of them. Included in this group were students with behavior problems, students with learning disabilities, students who genuinely wanted to work hard and improve their math skills, and students who just plain didn't seem to care much about math. Needless to say, this group could be a handful, be it behaviorally, emotionally, or academically.

Despite this variety of needs, this teacher handled the management of this group skillfully. He was constantly differentiating instruction and meeting students at their level academically. By way of discipline (of which there was plenty), he handled anything more than a minor correction privately in a way that did not embarrass students in front

of their classmates. One student in particular seemed to be off task almost constantly, and often refused to work altogether. This teacher would make minor corrections to him publically, but would always kneel down beside his desk and whisper to him for anything more severe. This student – along with all others in the class – he treated respectfully and with humanity. He was fair and held all his students to high standards. Does this mean that his classroom was always serene? Certainly not. This was a challenging group. But I do think his management style resulted in a classroom environment in which all students felt safe and able to learn.

Another time when I was surrounded by examples of excellent classroom management was during my student teaching. I was fortunate to have three excellent cooperating teachers to learn from during my 12 weeks in the classroom. In the school where I student taught, many teachers in the building were trained in the ENVoY system of classroom management, which employs the use of non-verbal communication in the classroom, and stresses the use of teacher influence over teacher power. My three cooperating teachers were trained in this system, used it effectively, and each taught me so much about managing a classroom of young people. One teacher in particular I found to be particularly masterful to watch.

Seemingly, with only a glance or a wave of his hand, students would comply and follow his lead. He seemed to have an uncanny ability to build positive relationships with students, while also holding each one to the highest expectations. He had systems and routines in place that I could tell he upheld and that students knew how to follow. His classroom was predictable for students, which I believe created a feeling of safety and security.

Poor models of classroom management

During my short time in education, I've been fortunate to see the inside of many classrooms, and experience many teaching styles and teacher personalities. Some, as I mentioned above, have been masterful. Others, unfortunately, have been much less so.

One example was during an observation of a middle school classroom during my initial licensure program. The teacher in this classroom frequently used cutting sarcasm with and about her students. She engaged students in public conversations and exchanges during student independent work time (thereby pulling other students off-task), and publicly called out students for misbehavior. She also conceded to me that by this point in the year (it was midway through spring semester) students should know how to behave, and that she was done trying to teach them how to behave.

Many students were doing as she asked, but a number of them either were not, or could not, and she didn't seem to mind. The students that refused to comply, she either sent out of the room, or negotiated some kind of deal with them in order for them to complete their work.

All of this communicated to me that she no longer had high expectations for the behavior of her students, and, in my estimation, the environment of her classroom suffered.

This example, and a bevy of others from various classrooms in which I have worked and observed, has driven my desire to become a great classroom manager.

Great management can be taught and learned

Another reason for my ever-growing passion for high-quality classroom management is that so much of what is considered good management can be taught to and learned by teachers and other educators.

Before my career in education, I volunteered regularly with youth of all ages. Most notably, I was a summer camp counselor for nearly ten summers. I always considered myself to be, "great with kids." I felt that I was able to quickly build rapport with them and relate to them on their level. I felt comfortable around them and got my energy from them. I often referred to my week at camp each summer as "the best week of the year."

I suppose I used a form of "classroom management" during these weeks of summer camp, but, if memory serves, my most common strategies were the use of more language and more volume. If the kids weren't listening, I'd compel them to listen by asking or telling them to listen. If they were participating in off-task behaviors, I'd usually increase my volume as they'd increase theirs. Was it effective? Not consistently. But, I'm sure it was one of the reasons I came home exhausted after each week of camp. My strategies were not sustainable.

Thankfully, I've been able to learn about and implement three different, but I think, complementary, classroom management systems during my time in education. They are Teach Like a Champion, More Time to Teach, and ENVoY. The systems of Teach Like a Champion and ENVoY are already in place at the urban charter school at which I work, and that will eventually benefit from this capstone project. These two systems will be discussed in more detail in Chapter 2.

I know that without this host of strategies to both manage and instruct students, my teaching practice would not be what it is today. I am still in the infancy of my teaching career, but I'm counting on these strategies as one way I will sustain this new vocation.

Rationale

I see effective classroom management as an essential part of a productive classroom. I've experienced the effectiveness of properly implemented More Time to Teach, Teach Like a Champion, and ENVoY strategies, both in individual classrooms and across grades and schools. My belief is that, the higher the number of staff who are implementing theses strategies across a school, the more consistency, and therefore safety, that creates for students. I imagine an environment where all staff are "singing from the same song sheet." Clearly, many staff in my current building are following these strategies and systems (Teach Like a Champion, ENVoY), but I'm envisioning 100 percent adoption.

Even for someone like me who worked in my LEA for two years as an assistant, the before-school workshops where new classroom management systems are introduced come fast and furious. LEA staff is expected to digest and synthesize lots of information all at once. Especially for new staff, implementation of these strategies may be spotty if not given the proper support and guidance. My hope is to create something that would help build staff adoption and implementation of our LEA's chosen Teach Like and Champion and ENVoY strategies.

Pushing for more

One group in particular that I see as needing additional support and guidance with these strategies is our staff of E.As. While licensed staff has always been a part of professional learning communities (PLCs) regarding our classroom management systems, this is the first school year where assistants are also being included. This is a great step in the right direction, and will only benefit our school and students.

However, it's my belief that these brief trainings a few times during the school year will not likely bring about sweeping change or increased adoption of these strategies. What about in the moment of teaching or supporting? The strategies available for our assistants to use should be close at hand. Each assistant in our school is given a binder at the beginning of the year that contains information they need to do their job: information about our LEA, policies, student IEP information, etc. It also contains excerpts from a Paraprofessional Manual from Innovative Special Education Services (ISES), with only three pages dedicated to student behavior management.

After discussing our LEA's needs with both my principal and our special education director, we found a need to expand upon this manual to include a host of Teach Like a Champion and ENVoY strategies within this binder, that assistants can access in the moment, on the go, or to study. My intent is to add a section to the binder that includes a number of these aforementioned strategies. My hope is that this addition to the E.A. binder will help answer this question: *How can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school?*

Summary

In chapter one, I provided background of my journey to becoming a full-time classroom teacher. I also shared examples of high-quality classroom management, and classroom management that left something to be desired. I shared my belief that great classroom managers are made, not born. I also believe that a well-managed classroom is a productive classroom and that my hope is to increase adoption and efficacy of the classroom management systems used in my LEA. Finally, I proposed an addition to the current E.A. manual that highlights a number of these systems, so assistants can refer to them as needed.

Chapter two of this capstone will explore what the current literature says about the four critical parts of the research question: educational assistants, self-efficacy, classroom management, and urban charter schools. In chapter three, a detailed explanation of the project will be presented. In chapter four, a reflective narrative will be presented.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature Review

The question being explored in this capstone project is: *How can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school?* This chapter will explore what the current literature says about the four critical parts of the research question: educational assistants, self-efficacy, classroom management, and charter schools.

Educational Assistants

Educational assistants (E.A.s) are an important part of the learning environment. They are responsible not only for supporting students academically, but facilitating peer and professional relationships to help them be a well-rounded person. But, these assistants often do not receive the same amount of professional development as other educators (McKenzie, 2011). Despite this, they are often entrusted to work with some of the most challenging students who have a wide range of disabilities, including, but not limited to: attention deficit hyperactive disorder (ADHD), Autism Spectrum Disorder (ASD), emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), genetic conditions that impact cognition, developmental delay, and many others.

The following section will provide information regarding the definition of what an educational assistant is, their roles and responsibilities in education, and the current education, training, and experience required to become an E.A.. Furthermore, this section

will discuss the documented need for E.A.s in the educational setting, concerns raised about E.A.s in education, and the need for the proper training of E.A.s.

Definition and roles. E.A.s go by many names, including, but not limited to: paraprofessionals, teaching assistants, teacher aides, instructional aides, classroom aides, and paraeducators. Currently, there are more than 1.3 million E.A. jobs in the United States, and according to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, that number is expected to grow within the next several years (U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics, 2017). E.A.s work under the supervision of a licensed teacher or teachers, and, according to Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, and Pelsue (2009), fill wide and varied roles, and have a great breadth of responsibilities. These include instructing students and reinforcing curriculum, to teaching social skills and assisting students with personal care. Some E.A.s also support teachers by doing clerical work. Carter et al. (2009) go on to say that, "Paraprofessionals worked with a broad range of students in multiple types of classrooms within varied instructional contexts" (p. 344). The U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017) adds that, "teacher assistants…give students additional attention and instruction," in the education setting.

Needless to say, the roles of E.A.s ebb and flow from school to school, and indeed, from day to day, and per the literature reviewed, the responsibility of an E.A. is not limited to instruction or curriculum. This variability in the duties and responsibilities of an E.A. can make it challenging at the school, local, state, and national level to develop standardized instructional guidelines for E.A.s to become familiar with, and even master, their roles and responsibilities.

Education, training, and experience. Despite the often-complex nature of their role, E.A.s vary greatly in their personal amount of education, training, and experience. According to the U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics (2017), most school districts require E.A.s to have at least an associate's degree, or have completed two years of college.

Despite this degree requirement of most school districts, Downing, Ryndak, & Clark (2000, as cited in Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017) found that E.A.s may not have the right training and support from their school about how to properly educate students with disabilities, and that schools often hire untrained individuals to fulfill needs. Indeed, many E.A.s learn while on the job. According to Carter, et al. (2009), the most common type of training accessed by E.A.s – across every knowledge area – was on-the-job training. The contradiction of needing to fulfill the needs of the school with paraprofessionals who are often undertrained or untrained leaves students (often those with the highest need) being instructed by educators who lack the proper training and/or credentials.

As it relates, the amount of professional development received by E.A.s does not match the level of professional development other service providers and educators receive. In order to retain E.A.s, the level of professional development is critical (McKenzie, 2011). When given the proper training, however, Brock and Carter (2013) found in their review of the literature that E.A.s, "are capable of effectively implementing a number of educational practices that result in improved academic and social outcomes," for students (p. 211). These two articles suggest that while E.A.s have a range of education, training and experience upon entering their role, many E.A.s have to rely on on-the job training. Although on-the-job training may not seem ideal, the literature suggests that E.A.s are

trainable and the work and support they provide their students can improve educational outcomes.

Need in education. As presented above, there is a clear need expressed in the literature for E.A.s in the educational system and although there are specific requirements in place, school systems will sometimes hire unqualified paraprofessionals in order to fulfill that need.

In a systematic review of the literature, Brock and Carter (2013) found that E.A.s can have a strong influence on the school experiences of students with disabilities, and Carter (2009) found that they can even have an impact on student achievement. In addition, specifically for students with disabilities, E.A.s often fulfill a majority of the direct service hours required, so they play a critical role on a child's IEP team (Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017, citing Giangreco et al., 2002). Stockall (2014) suggests that E.A.s are essential to the support of students with disabilities, a view held by both teachers and parents. Indeed, when they are properly prepared for their role of support, Stockall (2014, citing Hall, Grundon, Pope, & Romero, 2010) also reported positive effects for students.

The literature strongly supports the need for E.A.s in education, as they support students in the classroom setting so they can participate academically and socially with their peers. The outcomes of improving academic student achievement are positive, especially for those children with disabilities. The need for E.A.s in education seems to be clear, however there are conflicting views to suggest otherwise.

Concerns. While the literature has shown the need for E.A.s in education, the literature also shows a contrasting view. While, "few studies have focused on the

association between paraprofessional implementation and student outcomes"
(Suhrheinrich & Chan, 2017, citing Young, Simpson, Myles, & Kamps, 1997), there is
still clear dissent in the literature about the effectiveness of E.A.s. Specifically, Brock and
Carter (2013) found that "many scholars and advocates have raised concerns about the
roles these staff members play in schools and the degree to which there is empirical
support for their direct work with students." Brock and Carter go on to list three areas of
concern about the use of E.A.s, including (a) entrusting them with primary instructional
responsibilities; (b) utilizing E.A.s in ways that research does not support; and (c)
insufficient training and supervision of E.A.s.

By entrusting E.A.s with primary instructional responsibilities (i.e. planning lessons,
leading instruction, creating and administering tests, and assigning grades), students are
not being instructed by a licensed teacher, and therefore are not receiving an appropriate
public education (Patterson, 2006; Etscheidt, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2007; as cited in
Brock & Carter, 2013).

Also, questions have been raised in the literature as to whether there is empirical
evidence to show that paraprofessional-delivered educational practices actually improve
outcomes for students with disabilities (Carter, Sisco, Brown, Brickham, & Al-Khabbaz,
2008; Chung, Carter, & Sisco, 2012; Giangreco, Broer, & Edelman, 2001; as cited in
Brock & Carter, 2013).

The last concern raised by Brock & Carter is that E.A.s often receive training that is
inefficient and don't get the supervision they need. The researchers call this, "unethical
and unfair to both students and the paraprofessionals themselves" (p. 212).

Indeed, Stockall, (2014, citing Blatchford, Russell, & Webster, 2012) found, that students working with E.A.s had little, if any, positive outcomes, and, that E.A.s instructed them inadequately (Stockall 2014, citing Giangreco (2010a, 2010b; Giangreco, Suter, & Hurley, 2011)). Not surprisingly then, there are concerns about pairing the staff with the least training, with the students with the highest needs of support (Carter, et al., 2009).

Although the literature has expressed the need for E.A.s, the way in which E.A.s are hired, trained, and utilized are not consistent across educational settings at the local, state and national level. This can be a barrier to student success and impact outcomes for both the student and the classroom. The above-cited research suggests the need for this training; therefore this author would like to investigate further ways to standardize this training for a group of E.A.s in an urban charter school.

Need for training. As stated above, the literature evidenced the growing need in education for the proper training, support, skill development, and supervision for E.A.s so that they may effectively serve students with disabilities (Carter, et al., 2009, citing Giangreco & Broer, 2007; Deaddorff, et al., 2007). According to Deaddorff, et al. (2007, citing Carroll, 2001, and Fenner, 2005), the training received by E.A.s is directly proportional to the quality of instruction they provide to students with disabilities. E.A.s themselves have even called for additional training (Carter, et al., 2009), leading one to presume that E.A.s have a desire to improve their skills in order to better serve the students under their charge.

One challenge, however, is the struggle by many states to provide this professional development to E.A.s in a cost-effective and relevant way and unfortunately, there has been, "little progress in finding viable solutions to the problems connected with the

employment, preparation, and supervision of paraeducators." (Deaddorff, et al., 2007). In some cases, E.A.s reported dissatisfaction with their job and low morale when not given training opportunities (McKenzie, 2011). This is not surprising given the ways to appropriately train and involve E.A.s is often unclear (Brock & Carter, 2013), even though a critical element to utilize and retain E.A.s is to properly train them (Deaddorff, et al., 2007).

Altogether, while proper training is an area of need for E.A.s, there is not a clear way forward on how to structure and deliver such training. This, in turn, can lead to such things as job dissatisfaction and turnover, even though states continue to explore the best ways to train E.A.s

Summary. In this section, information regarding the definition of what an educational assistant is, their roles and responsibilities in education, and the current education, training, and experience required to become an E.A. were shared. In addition, this section discussed the documented need for E.A.s in the educational setting, concerns raised about E.A.s in education, and the need for the proper training of E.A.s.

As the literature revealed, educational assistants (E.A.s) continue to be a growing part of the learning environment. Their responsibilities include supporting students academically, socially, and behaviorally. Despite the fact that they are often entrusted to work with some of the most challenging students who have a wide range of disabilities, these assistants often do not receive the same amount of professional development and training as other educators. When properly trained, E.A.s can have positive impacts on the students they support.

Self-Efficacy

Bandura (1997) defines self-efficacy as, "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments." In other words, self-efficacy is one's belief in one's self about how they perform a task. This belief in one's self is important in many areas of life, but comes into focus especially in one's professional life, including the lives of educators. The section on self-efficacy will discuss the origins of the term, how self-efficacy is related to teachers and teaching, as well as methods to increase self-efficacy in the education setting.

To date there is little research that has focused on self-efficacy and E.A.s, so the self-efficacy research cited in this literature review focuses mostly on the self-efficacy of teachers. It is assumed that the lessons learned by the existing research would also apply broadly to E.A.s

      Origins. The origins of self-efficacy came about in 1977, with the introduction by Bandura of the construct in his oft-cited article, "Self-efficacy: Toward a unifying theory of behavioral change." In brief, self-efficacy is one's belief in one's self about how they perform a task. An individual's self-efficacy can often be determined by how they talk about certain skills they possess. They may use phrases like, "I can" or "I cannot." These statements have proven to be a powerful way to predict how individuals will behave (Siwatu, 2011).

      Teachers and self-efficacy. In their review, Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998, cited in Siwatu, 2011, p. 212) defined teacher self-efficacy as, "a teacher's belief in her or his ability to organize and execute the courses of action required

to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context." Taken as a specific example: how much does a teacher believe in his ability to plan a lesson on multiplication and successfully teach it to his class of second graders? The self-efficacy of teachers, then, plays an important role in their ability to do their job.

   High self-efficacy. As stated in Ross (1998, cited in Siwatu, 2011, p. 212), the literature suggests that a teacher's own self-efficacy beliefs can influence their enthusiasm to apply new approaches to instruction. What's more, teachers who exhibit high self-efficacy beliefs about their teaching practices tend to be more likely to use instructional strategies that are effective and innovative, like hands-on learning activities and inquiry methods. The higher a teacher's self-efficacy, the more willing they seem to take risks in the classroom and experiment with new ways of doing things.

   Low self-efficacy. Not surprisingly, the inverse is also true. Ross (1998, cited in Siwatu, 2011, p. 212) reported that teachers with lower self-efficacy beliefs are less willing to try new approaches, and tend to depend on teaching methods and strategies that are simpler to implement, such as direct instructions and whole-group learning; they are less likely to take those risks that the teacher with high self-efficacy might take.

   Other considerations. Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy (2001, cited in Siwatu, 2011, p. 212) describe that teacher self-efficacy is also related to student achievement, how long the teacher persists through challenges, and how much effort is put forth by the teacher. Self-efficacy is not enough, however, as those in education must also have the requisite skills, and be able to put those skills to use by using their self-efficacy (Siwatu, 2011). Indeed, self-efficacy also plays a role in teacher retention in the profession.

Teachers that remain in the profession have higher self-efficacy beliefs than teacher who leave the profession.

Increasing self-efficacy. Siwatu (2011) suggest a number of self-efficacy building interventions for pre-service and student teachers, specifically those preparing to work with African American students. Even though these strategies are related to working with African American students, some strategies may apply to teachers educating diverse students, or indeed, any students. They are:

- Provide multiple opportunities to engage in the practice of culturally responsive teaching

- Situate field experiences in classrooms with African American students

- Carefully structure pre-service teachers' clinical experiences

- Provide prospective teachers with opportunities to engage in authentic learning activities

- Provide opportunities to observe, examine, and analyze the practice of culturally responsive teaching

- Encourage teachers to attribute classroom events and outcomes to controllable causes

- Provide novice teachers' with gradual and scaffolded induction experiences

Positive outcomes from professional development. Likewise, McKenzie (2011) implemented a professional development series, specifically for E.A.s, on the topic of learning strategies for students. Participants created their own learning strategies to teach

to the students with whom they work. Upon completion of this 2-day professional development series, E.A.s became, "excited about putting the research into practice. They have also begun to demonstrate more self-confidence and professionalism in their roles." When asked about how the teacher responded to her learning strategy, one of the E.A.s who participated in the workshop announced, "She gave me the opportunity to try this strategy with confidence." No doubt, the self-efficacy of this E.A. – and others who participated in this professional development series –increased because of the confidence-inspiring result of creating and using a learning strategy that wins the approval of the classroom teacher.

Self-efficacy is one's belief in one's self about how they perform a task. This belief in one's self is important in many areas of life, but comes sharply in focus in one's professional life, educators included.

Summary. This section discussed the origins of the term, how self-efficacy is related to teachers and teaching, as well as methods to increase self-efficacy in the education setting. While there is little research that has focused on self-efficacy and E.A.s specifically, the self-efficacy research presented focused mostly on the self-efficacy of teachers. Presumably, the lessons learned from the existing research would also apply broadly to E.A.s.

For the purpose of this capstone, the above stated definition of self-efficacy directly relates to how a teacher believes in his/her ability to manage a classroom. As previously discussed, classroom management has a positive impact on student outcomes, therefore, if a teacher feels confident in their ability to manage a classroom or student's behaviors,

they will in turn provide an atmosphere that will support positive academic outcomes. This is the power of high self-efficacy in educators when working with students.

Charter Schools

Over the last ten years, enrollment in charter schools in the United States has nearly tripled (Prothero, 2017). Charter schools continue to be a compelling choice for more and more families. Charter schools allow parents to choose an alternative education system for their children, and they are not beholden to the district schools in the neighborhood or city in which they live. In this section, urban charter schools will be discussed, including their definition, history, challenges they face, their current growth, and community and parental support.

   Definition. According to Uncommon Schools (n.d.) and The National Charter School Resource Center [NCSRC] (n.d.), charter schools are tuition-free public schools that operate independently of established school districts. As public schools, they receive public funds like traditional public schools, but not always at the same level as traditional districts. A "charter," or contract, exists between the school and it's authorizing body (the state, a non-profit, etc.). The authorizing body (which holds the school accountable financially, organizationally, and indeed, academically) may close the school if it is not meeting its goals, or living up to its charter. Prothero (2017) adds that, "charter schools…have flexibility to meet students' unique needs, while being held accountable for advancing student achievement." Charter schools allow parents to select schools that maintain state and national standards for education, while often giving their children an opportunity to attend a school with a special focus that is of interest to the child, the parent, or both (i.e., classical education, Montessori, performing arts).

History. The idea of "charter schools" in the public school setting is relatively new in the history of American education. Considering the history of charter schools – and the term "charter" itself – the NCSRC (n.d.) shares this account:

> The term "charter" may have originated in the 1970s when New England educator Ray Budde suggested that small groups of teachers be given contracts or "charters" by their local school boards to explore new approaches. Albert Shanker, former president of the American Federation of Teachers, then publicized the idea, suggesting that local boards could charter an entire school with union and teacher approval to serve as labs for ideas that could then expand.

> In the late 1980s, Philadelphia started some schools-within-schools and called them "charters." Some of them were schools of choice. The idea was further refined in Minnesota where charter schools were developed according to three basic values: opportunity, choice, and responsibility for results. This was occurring at a time when greater accountability in education, oversite of public funds, and high quality training for educators were priorities. Charter schools were seen as a way to meet these many goals.

> In 1991, Minnesota passed the first charter school law, with California following suit in 1992. By 1995, 19 states had signed laws allowing for the creation of charter schools, and by 2015 that number increased to 42 states, Puerto Rico, and the District of Columbia. (n.p.)

As mentioned above, the rise of charter schools has been occurring over the course of the past four decades. What started off as a small group of teachers in a school developing

alternative approaches to education in a local setting, have resulted in more than 40 states

that have adopted the laws to incorporate charter schools into the public school model.

Although the number of charter schools increased by 6 percent a year from 2009 to 2014

(NCSRC, n.d.), the arrival of charter schools to their current place in U.S. education

history has not always been as steady.

Challenges faced. Since their inception (and, indeed, since before they came into

being), charter schools have faced a number of challenges. A few of those challenges will

be discussed in the section that follows.

Funding. One challenge faced by many charter schools is funding. Although

traditional public schools also face funding and financial challenges, funding for charter

schools can be even more complex and challenging; while charter schools are funded on

a per pupil basis – like their traditional district counterparts – this funding is not

consistent (NCSRC, n.d., Uncommon Schools, n.d.). According to Uncommon Schools

(n.d.) and Smarick (2008), in some states, financing is an issue for charter schools

because the charter school may not receive 100 percent of the funds allocated for school

operations, as do their traditional district counterparts. It is estimated that charter schools

receive approximately 28 percent less funding per pupil than established districts

(NCSRC, n.d.). This discrepancy in charter school financing compared to traditional

public school financing is concerning, however, this discrepancy is not universally true.

In California, for instance, loans or additional funds are available to charter schools

(Uncommon Schools, n.d.). As it relates, California has, by far, the most charter schools

of any state, at more than 1,000 schools, enrolling an estimated 604,700 students. This

supports that although charter schools may not get comparable funding as traditional

public schools receive, it is not necessarily a barrier in creating new charter schools as evidenced by the growth in charter schools across the country, specifically in California.

Caps on growth. As has been alluded to above, and will be discussed in more details in the next section, charter schools are experiencing healthy growth (Prothero, 2017), especially over the last ten years. However, not all states and jurisdictions support such growth, and many states or jurisdictions require a cap on the expansion of charter schools, with a few states whose caps actually constrain the growth of charter schools (Smarick, 2008). Currently, the number of states or jurisdictions with a cap on the number of charter schools sits at twenty-three, while twenty-one have no caps on the number of charter schools. In all, 43 states (plus the District of Columbia) have charter school laws in place (Ziebarth, Palmer, & Schultz, 2017). These caps may limit the opening or expansion of charter schools that may benefit children who have special learning needs or areas of interest.

Student performance. Another challenge facing charter schools is student performance. Critics often find fault with charter schools based on student's academic performance data. The question remains: Do students at charter schools perform better than students in traditional public schools? The answer is not always clear, but there is a growing body of research and data to suggest that the performance of students in charter schools is improving.

According to Smarick (2008), the research done on student achievement in charter schools is encouraging. Citing an analysis of charter school studies since 2001, Smarick reported that 29 of 33 studies found that the academic performance of students at charter schools was the same or better than at traditional public schools.

Rotherham (2015) notes a pair of Stanford studies from 2009 and 2013 in which charter

school performance was measured across 16 states. In the initial 2009 study, the results

were encouraging for charter schools, but still mixed. The study found that, "in math 46

percent of charter schools performed the same as other public schools while 37 percent

were worse and just 17 percent performed better."

When the study was updated in 2013, the academic results of students had improved.

According to the data, "29 percent of charters outperformed in math, while the percent of

underperformers had fallen to 31 percent."

The above data suggests that while charters are clearly not the "magic bullet" to help

boost student academic achievement, there is a promising trend for charter schools, with

student performance improving over time.

Growth and support. Despite these challenges, charter schools have shown rapid

growth, especially over the last ten years. Since the 2006-07 school year, enrollment in

charter schools has nearly tripled to more than 6,900 charter schools nationwide,

enrolling more than an estimated three million students (Prothero, 2017). In the fall of

2016 alone, more than 300 charter schools opened nationwide, with the most schools

opening in Texas (64 schools), California (56 schools), and Florida (26 schools).

In Minnesota in particular, there are 167 charter schools, enrolling an estimated 53,400

students. Of the 856,687 students being served by K-12 public institutions, charter school

enrollment makes up for roughly six percent of public, K-12 students in the state

(Prothero, 2017; Minnesota Department of Education, 2017).

Support for charter schools comes from a wide variety of sources, including state governors and legislators, and secretaries of education. The U.S. Department of Education has provided grants to support charter schools in states around the country. Since 1994, when the first Charter School Program grants were issued, the U.S. Department of Education has spent close to $4 billion in supporting charter schools (NCSRC, n.d.).

In addition to support from state and national governments, parents also are in support of charter schools. According to Prothero (2017), in a national study, 73 percent of parents with school age children said they favor increasing the number of charter schools so that more students could enroll in them. As well, seven out of ten Americans support public charter schools, "particularly when they're described as schools that can operate independently and free of regulations" (Bushaw & Calderon, 2014, p. 10).

Summary. It is evident the growth in charter schools continues to increase at a rapid pace. In addition to increasing the number of charter schools across the United States, charter schools have also seen an increase in student academic performance. Growth and enrollment in charter schools is set to continue to rise. It would be suspected that the growth in success of academic performance is due to the increase in funding at the state and national level to support these schools, but perhaps more importantly, the personal investment parents and families have in more actively participating in the development and implementation of the charter schools so their own children can be successful. This investment of the parents, and local, state, and national governments has allowed for the growth and expansion of charter schools.

Classroom Management

Rawlings (2017) says that, "Teachers must be able to competently organize classrooms and manage student behaviors in order to achieve desired learning outcomes." Excellent classroom management, then, leads to student success. This section will provide definitions of classroom management, how classroom management impacts student learning, review some challenges related to classroom management, highlight the importance of classroom management skills, and review the systems already in place at the urban charter school that will benefits from this capstone project.

Definitions. Classroom management has varied definitions, but Unal and Unal (2012) define it broadly as everything a teacher does to oversee the activities of the classroom. Unal & Unal also cite another broad definition by Brophy (1986) concerning classroom management, as the effort put forth by teachers to establish and maintain an environment for teaching and learning. Classroom management is necessary for optimal instruction and supporting the student's learning and outcomes.

Student learning. Classroom management has a direct effect on student learning. Unal & Unal cite a meta-analysis of 50 years of classroom research complied by Wang, Haertel & Walberg (1994), that concluded that the most important factor effecting student learning is classroom management. Lester, Allanson, & Notar (2017) agree, saying the key to learning is classroom management, and classroom management is a necessity to facilitate teaching and learning.

As evidenced by the literature above, classroom management is vital to a student's continued learning and academic success. Classroom management provides students with structure, clarity, and expectations so that they may effectively be active participants in

the classroom and in their own learning. Classroom management may positively or negatively impact student outcomes for learning.

Challenging task. Unal & Unal say that classroom management is one of the most serious challenges faced by beginning teachers. In fact, as reported by beginning teachers in Fideler and Haskelhorn (1999), classroom management skills and disruptive students are the most significant barriers to professional success.

In addition, Unal & Unal (citing Jones, 2006) say that many teachers who leave the profession of teaching, cite problems with classroom management as a major factor influencing their decision to leave. As well, Unal & Unal, citing multiple sources, say that developing into a competent teacher takes between four and seven years.

Not only does classroom management impact student outcomes, it has a direct impact on longevity of the teacher in the workforce. Classroom management, then, is a key factor in determining the longevity of the teacher workforce itself.

Important skills. Finally, Unal & Unal (citing Landau, 2001, p.4), say classroom management strategies are "the most valuable skills set a teacher can have," and skills in classroom management can be gained via years of experience in the field, as well as training (Unal & Unal, citing Bosch, 2006). Overall then, it can be said that a teacher who manages his classroom well is essential to a productive and successful classroom environment.

In regards to this thesis project, management of students in the classroom is imperative, whether it is the classroom teacher providing instruction, or the E.A. supporting a child with special needs and directing their behaviors in a positive way to promote optimal

learning. This need for successful classroom management skills for a paraprofessional supports this thesis project, as efficient management skills by the teacher and E.A. will directly impact a student's academic performance.

Systems in place. At the urban charter school that this capstone project will benefit, two classroom management systems are already in place.

Teach Like a Champion. The first is Teach Like a Champion. This suite of both classroom management and instructional techniques I first used during my time as an assistant. Focused on improving the practice of teachers and ensuring students are college and career ready, these 49 techniques are broken down into 7 categories: (a) setting high academic expectations, (b) planning that ensures academic achievement, (c) structuring and delivering your lessons, (d) engaging students in your lessons, (e) creating a strong classroom culture, (f) setting and maintaining high behavioral expectations and, (g) building character and trust.

ENVoY. The third system I've integrated into my teaching is ENVoY. Short for Educational Non-Verbal Yardsticks, this suite of non-verbal classroom management strategies has proved to be invaluable to managing students with wide and varied needs and it's a system I use every day. The system breaks down the teaching of a lesson into four phases: Getting Their Attention, Teaching, Transition to Seatwork, and Seatwork. Within each phase, ENVoY skills provide expectations for students to be successful: Focus (Getting Attention), Engagement (Teaching), and Productivity (Transition to Seatwork, Seatwork). Within the four phases of the lesson reside The 7 Gems strategies: (a) Freeze Body, (b) ABOVE (Pause) Whisper, (c) Raise Your Hand, (d) Exit Directions,

(e) **M**ost **I**mportant **T**wenty **S**econds (MITS), (f) Influence Approach, and (g) OFF/Neutral/ON.

Summary. In this section, definitions of classroom management were provided. In addition, how classroom management impacts student learning was discussed, along with a review some challenges related to classroom management. Classroom management skills and their importance were also highlighted. Finally, the systems already in place at the urban charter school that will benefits from this capstone project were reviewed.

Rationale

The main focus of the literature review was to explore the four essential elements of the research question (educational assistants, self-efficacy, charter schools, and classroom management) in order to inform the work to be done as part of the capstone project. The understanding gained by the exploration of research related to these essential elements has revealed a number of pertinent points that will inform the work to be completed as part of the capstone. Namely that:

- E.A.s are undertrained, and indeed seek out additional training and benefit from it, and that this training is often accessed on-the-job
- Self-efficacy is an important determinant in educators staying in the field, and in their use of more effective teaching strategies.
- Charter schools continue to experience growth nationwide, and that academic outcomes of students enrolled in them continue to rise.

- Effective classroom management skills are paramount to the success of students in school.

Concluding Thoughts

The question being explored in this capstone project is: *How can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school?* This section explored what the current literature says about the four critical parts of the research question: educational assistants, self-efficacy, charter schools, and classroom management.

In the review, it was reported that E.A.s fill wide and varied roles in education, not least of which is supporting students with disabilities. E.A.s also possess a broad range of education, training, and experience, but may lack the proper training and support from their school. Many E.A.s learn while on the job, but even then, the amount of professional development they receive does not match the level received by their licensed peers. However, when they are properly trained, they can produce positive outcomes for students. Indeed, E.A.s play a critical role on a child's IEP team, since they often fulfill a majority of the direct service hours required. There was also dissent in the literature about the use of E.A.s and how effective they are, and if their use amounts to free and appropriate public education for students. The literature also revealed that the training received by E.A.s is proportional to the quality of instruction they provide to students with disabilities.

In regards to self-efficacy, the literature made known that this construct is relevant in teaching, wherein teachers with higher self-efficacy tend to choose instructional

strategies that are more effective and innovative. Teachers with low self-efficacy tend to be more risk-averse. Teacher self-efficacy can also have an impact on student achievement. Additionally, the literature revealed ways that teachers and E.A.s can work to build their self-efficacy.

When considering charter schools, they continue to grow in number in the U.S., giving families increased choices on where to send their children to school, including schools with a special focus or theme. Charter schools continue to face challenges, however, including adequate funding, caps on growth put in place by states, and mixed results in student achievement.

Finally, it was found that classroom management is one of the most serious challenges facing teachers, especially beginning teachers, and that classroom management can impact a teacher's decision to leave the profession. As well, the classroom management choices of the teacher can impact student learning.

In chapter 3, a detailed plan of the capstone project will be presented, in which the author will expand upon the current E.A. manual to include a host of Teach Like a Champion and ENVoY strategies that assistants can access in the moment, on the go, or to study. A section will be added to the binder that includes a number of these aforementioned strategies. My hope is that this addition to the educational assistant's binder will help answer this question: *How can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school?*

CHAPTER 3

Project Overview

The question being explored in this capstone project is: *How can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school?* At the local education agency (LEA, also called a school district) that will benefit from this project, each E.A. is given a three-ring binder at the beginning of the year that contains information they need to do their job: basic information about the school (phone number, address), list of applicable school policies, the IEP information of students whom they will be supporting, etc. This three-ring binder also contains excerpts from the Paraprofessional Manual from Innovative Special Education Services (ISES), three pages of which are dedicated to student behavior management.

The goal of this capstone project is to add a section to this three-ring binder that will include approximately fifteen of the Teach Like a Champion and ENVoY classroom management strategies already being implemented within the LEA.

Research Paradigm

Educational assistants. As was discussed in the literature review, E.A.s possess a broad range of education, training, and experience, but may lack the proper training and support from their school. Many E.A.s learn while on the job, but even then, the amount of professional development they receive does not match the level received by their licensed peers. However, when they are properly trained, they can produce positive outcomes for students. Indeed, E.A.s play a critical role on a child's IEP team, since they

often fulfill a majority of the direct service hours required. The literature also revealed that the training received by E.A.s is proportional to the quality of instruction they provide to students with disabilities.

Knowing this, the project being proposed will help address the lack of training often received by E.A.s by giving them a tool to study and learn from. The hope is that now that they will have this information at their fingertips, they will review and become more familiar with the classroom management systems already in place, and that they would increase their use of these strategies.

Self-efficacy. In regards to self-efficacy, the literature was clear that this construct is relevant to those working in education. As was discussed, teachers with low self-efficacy tend to be more risk-averse, while teachers with higher self-efficacy tend to choose more innovative and effective instructional strategies. Most notably, student achievement can also be impacted by a teacher's level of self-efficacy. Lastly, the literature made known ways that teachers and E.A.s can work to build their self-efficacy.

With this in mind, the proposed project aims to help E.A.s in this LEA increase their self-efficacy in these established classroom management strategies by offering them a quick-reference guide that they can use to reference on the go, to study, and to practice in real-time, thereby giving them opportunities to build their self-efficacy of these strategies.

Classroom management. It is known that the classroom management choices of the teacher can impact student learning. As discussed in the literature review, beginning teachers especially cite classroom management is one of the most serious challenges they

face. Ultimately, struggles with classroom management can impact a teacher's decision to leave the profession.

Knowing that classroom management can have such far reaching effects on both educators and students, the project being proposed aims to equip E.A.s with the tools they need to properly support both the classroom teacher or special education teacher, and the students in their charge.

Choice of Method

While professional development for educators is usually reserved for the beginning of the school year, with smaller refresher sessions sprinkled throughout the remainder of the school year, the author of this capstone saw an opportunity to make professional development available to E.A.s whenever they felt the need to access it.

E.A.s in the LEA already carry the aforementioned binder with them around the school building, so it made sense to add a section regarding the already established classroom management strategies of Teach Like a Champion and ENVoY.

Also, since there are at least 80 strategies combined between the two classroom management systems, it only made sense to include those strategies that are used most often. Pairing down the list of 80 to around 15 helped achieve that goal.

Setting/Audience

The audiences for this project are two-fold. The first audience is the 20-plus E.A.s at an urban, public charter LEA in the Midwest. The LEA has two campuses, one that serves students in grades K-5, the other that serves students in grades K-2 and 6-8. The assistants in these two buildings work both full-time and part-time. These E.A.s support

students at this school in a variety of ways, including, but not limited to academically, emotionally, and behaviorally. These supports happen in the general education classroom, in the special education office, and various other places throughout the school buildings.

The secondary audience for this capstone project is the students with whom the E.A.s will be interacting. The grades of the students range from Kindergarten through 8th grade. According to data from the 2016-2017 school year:

- 817 students attend the two schools

- 9.4 percent of the students are Hispanic/Latino

- 0.2 percent of the students are American Indian/Alaska Natives

- 6.9 percent of the students are Asian

- 10.4 percent of the students are Black/African American

- 0.1 percent of the students are Native Hawaiian/Pacific Islander

- 66.8 percent of the students are White

- 6.1 percent of the students are two or more races

- 10.9 percent of students receive ELL services

- 11.1 percent receive special education services

- 19.1 percent receive a free or reduced price lunch

Project Description

In order for this information to be useful to the E.A.s in this LEA, the format of these Teach Like a Champion and ENVoY strategies must be short enough to quickly read and review, but long enough to contain the needed information to learn and execute the strategy.

Therefore, the format being proposed is in the form of a "one sheet," where each strategy is limited to one, two-sided sheet of 8½" x 11" paper. The information may appear on one or both sides, depending on the complexity of the strategy. The strategy will be presented with both text explanation and a link to an online video of a teacher demonstrating the strategy, or the strategy being explained in more depth. Each strategy included in the binder will contain the name and number of the strategy, a short description, the steps on how to do it, classroom examples (real or fictitious), the aforementioned link to an online video, and a list of other related Teach Like a Champion or ENVoY skills.

Timeline:

In order to complete the project in a timely and efficient manner, the following timeline is being proposed:

1. January – Compile list of Teach Like and Champion and ENVoY strategies to include in three-ring binder (about 15); solicit feedback and gain approval on included strategies from the LEA administration; decide on final page format; begin drafting and compiling the first five pages

2. February – Draft and compile five pages

3. March – Draft and compile five pages

4. April – Solicit feedback from three peer reviewers and make necessary edits

5. May – Finalize project and submit to Hamline

This timeline is ambitious, given that the project will be ready for solicitation of feedback by peer reviewers by April.

Summary

Being able to immediately access the classroom management information they need will help E.A.s familiarize themselves with the chosen strategies. This, in turn, will help them increase their self-efficacy with these strategies, so they can use them with confidence. Helping to manage the classroom allows all other students to continue learning without undue interruption.

CHAPTER 4

Critical Reflection

The question being explored in this capstone project is: *How can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school?* In this chapter, I will critically reflect up on the process of undertaking and bringing this capstone project to a conclusion, including highlighting my learning as a researcher, writer, and learner. The literature review will be revisited, including those parts most essential to the successful completion of this capstone project. Project implications and limitations will be discussed, and future research or projects will be explored. In addition, I will highlight project communication, and the benefits of the project to the profession. I will also share my concluding thoughts.

The Author as a Reviewer, Writer, and Learner

Learning is inherent in the capstone process. I would not be at this point if I did not have a desire to learn about my chosen profession, my capstone topic, and myself.

Reviewer. As the professor of my Capstone Practicum class put it to us during an evening's class, the literature review is "the mountain to climb." That it was. I spent what felt like countless hours pouring over decades of research; the work of educators that have gone before me. It was often hard for me to see the value in doing my own research, when I knew what I wanted to do for my project from the start. However, at the end of it all, I found much of the research I read valuable, not only for my project, but for my own teaching practice.

Writer. I have always enjoyed writing, and considered myself to be good at it. My writing as a high school and college student had been mostly personal prose. Even

during my initial licensure program, much of the writing I did was reflective on my personal experiences. Until this thesis, I had never done any meaningful amount of academic writing. As I read other research and reviewed the capstone projects of other students, to be honest, I felt intimidated. Could I complete a project of this magnitude? Could I do it well? The only way to know was to do it. As I come to the completion of this process, I can confidently say that this is the most ambitious educational project I have ever undertaken, and I am proud of the result.

Learner. During both my initial licensure program, and this last year of my master's work, I have often remarked to family, friends, and coworkers how I was a much better graduate student than I ever was an undergraduate student. Besides the usual distractions of undergraduate work, I feel that one reason for this increased vigor is that this is the educational path of my choosing. As an undergraduate, I choose my major largely by process of elimination (picture the scene of me and my parents at the kitchen table, course catalog in hand, traveling alphabetically down a list and circling majors that sounded appealing). While I largely enjoyed my course of study as an undergrad (communication major, English minor), my passion for and enjoyment of the work now is greatly magnified. This has kept me motivated and engaged.

Literature Review Revisited

While I often bemoaned the literature review process, in the end, I did find it valuable. A few resources in particular I found particularly beneficial. The work of Brock & Carter I found to be an important resource when learning about E.As. Their work around the training and professional development of E.A.s helped inform my project and reaffirm the need for the resource I am creating with this capstone.

In addition, the work of Bandura was tantamount to the success of my capstone, since his groundbreaking work concerning self-efficacy was central to my research question. Finally, I found a valuable resource in Prothero and the National Alliance for Public Charter Schools (NAPCS). The data compiled each year on the growth of charter schools added some much needed hard numbers to the discussion of charter school growth, as well as the challenges faced by this burgeoning group of schools.

One area I was surprised to find in my research was the difference of opinion on the need for E.A.s in the classroom setting, and even in the educational setting at all. From my short experience in education, I have always heard about the value of E.A.s., from both teacher and administrators. Having served as and E.A. for two years, I suppose I am a bit biased, but teachers I talked to almost always embraced having an additional adult in their room to help with classroom management, student behavior management, or small group instruction. That seems to be one side of the argument. The other side says that E.A.s lack the proper training, experience, and education, but are somehow still entrusted to work with students that can be the most challenging, both academically and behaviorally.

These resources in particular – on E.A. training and development, on self-efficacy, on charter school growth – as well as some surprising findings regarding the need for E.A.s in education, made for a compelling research journey in completion of the literature review.

Project Implications

Successful classroom management is commensurate with successful teaching. The E.A.s who will benefit from this project will improve their skills as educational

practitioners – thereby increasing their self-efficacy – and be more well equipped to serve the students with whom they work. Teachers will benefit from this project by being able to share more of the load of classroom management with E.A.s in their classrooms, in some instances, freeing them up to continue teaching, and not having to stop and correct or redirect students as frequently. School administration will benefit from this project by gaining confidence that E.A.s in the LEA are receiving additional training and information on these established classroom management strategies. Finally, students in the LEA will benefit from this project because of the predictable use of these classroom management strategies across teachers, grades, and classrooms. This consistency will help students know what to expect so there is less confusion about what certain educators expect of them academically and behaviorally.

Project Limitations

One major limitation of this project is the lack of a PLC or training to introduce this project to the E.A.s in the LEA. The author intends to formally introduce this project to the E.A.s during back-to-school workshops in Fall 2018, but no plan has yet been proposed to the LEA. Also, the author self-selected the strategies to include in this project, base on his limited (two years as an E.A., one as classroom teacher) experience in the LEA. In hindsight, the author could have solicited feedback from the E.A.s on what strategies to include, perhaps increasing their buy in, and putting the ownership of the project more in their hands. However, the author did solicit feedback from the special education director on which strategies to include. As the head of special education for the two-campus LEA, I needed the approval of the director for this project. She oversees the

work of the special education teachers, and E.A.s who will be the final implementers of this capstone project.

Future Research and Projects

Some interesting questions are raised when thinking about future research in this area. With E.A.s specifically, future research could focus on what skills an E.A. should have to make them most effective. In addition, how could effectiveness be measured? And, is there "model" E.A. behavior? Are there state or national standards by which the effectiveness of E.A.s can be measured? Information like this could help refine resources of schools on how to train and educate their E.A. staff.

In addition, the issue of funding for charter schools was briefly discussed, but more research could be done in that area, specifically how funding presents challenges for the hiring and training of staff, including E.A.s.

Project Communication

I have been in communication with LEA administration about this project since its inception, and through its completion. I plan to communicate the end result of this project to the LEA, as well as present it to the E.A. staff (as mentioned previously, formally in Fall 2018 during back-to-school workshops).

Benefits to the Profession

As mentioned in the literature review, classroom management is a major factor in educators leaving the profession. It can be said then, that classroom management can be a point of stress and frustration to educators, to the point where they quit. The two systems used as part of this project (Teach Like a Champion and ENVoY) are proven techniques and strategies used by educators across the country. An experienced educator will tell you

that children thrive on routine, structure, and consistency. By adopting these techniques and strategies LEA-wide, E.A.s can provide consistency for students across the LEA, so students know what to expect, from classroom to classroom, and from E.A. to E.A.. This LEA could be a model for other districts or LEAs who have not yet implemented a district or LEA-wide classroom management system. Data about things like behavior referrals to the office before and after implementation could be shared, as well as best practices for introducing the system and training staff.

Summary

The question being explored in this capstone project is: *How can educational assistants increase their self-efficacy of established classroom management strategies at an urban charter school?* In this chapter, I critically reflected upon the process of undertaking and bringing this capstone project to a conclusion, including highlighting my learning as a researcher, writer, and learner. I revisited the literature review, and noted those parts most essential to the successful completion of this capstone project. Project implications and limitations were discussed, and future research or projects were explored. Finally, I highlighted the communication of the project, and the benefits of the project to the profession.

Concluding Thoughts

As stated at the outset of this chapter, learning is inherent in the capstone process. I would not be at this point if I did not have a desire to learn: about my chosen profession; about my capstone topic; about myself. To me, the willingness to learn is to be humble; to know that I don't know everything; to know that I need to be a lifelong

learner (and model that for my students); to know that patience (with my students, my fellow educators, with myself) is of the utmost importance.

Perhaps not so ironically, I've completed this project during the spring semester. Ask any K-12 teacher and they will tell you that this is the time of year where student behaviors tend to ramp up, where teacher expectations tend to drop off, and where learning tends to slow down. These things, as it happens, have also been happening in my classroom. As I reviewed and attempted to synthesize the skills found in Teach Like and Champion and ENVoY, I was constantly reminded of my potential as an educator, and the potential inside my students. Seeing video examples of other educators implement these skills almost flawlessly was heartening. Seeing how their students responded was inspiring. Can I teach like that? Can my students also be like that?

These reminders set me on a course of higher expectations for myself, and in turn, for my students. Because of my work done on my capstone this spring, I have resolved to be a better educator: to hold my students to higher expectations, to demand their best effort, and to find joy in my work everyday. This capstone, it turns out, was exactly what this fledgling educator needed at the end of his first year of teaching; the push I needed to soldier through the last weeks of the term, and a springboard into the rest of my teaching career.

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