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SELF-EFFICACY ISSUES THROUGH CURRICULUM FOR TEACHERS OF STUDENTS LABELED WITH EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

EDUARDO ADOLFO REGALADO

Submitted in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts in Education

AUGSBURG COLLEGE
MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

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MASTER OF ARTS IN EDUCATION
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MINNEAPOLIS, MINNESOTA

CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This is to certify that the **Action Research Final Project** of

Eduardo Adolfo Regalado

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has been approved by the Review Committee, and fulfills the requirements for the Master of Arts in Education degree.

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ABSTRACT

SELF-EFFICACY ISSUES THROUGH CURRICULUM FOR

TEACHERS OF STUDENTS LABELED WITH

EMOTIONAL AND BEHAVIORAL DISORDERS

EDUARDO ADOLFO REGALADO

JANUARY 10, 2012

Action Research (EDC 593) Final Project

Teachers have the responsibility of providing appropriate education through curriculum content and instructional practices regardless of student population. Teachers cannot tackle this huge task without the necessary components, such as curriculum that is appropriate, engaging, challenging, interesting, culturally responsive and differentiated. Curriculum availability and quality are essential for program, school, or district-wide achievement and student participation. They are also critical for students to engage in the learning process. Therefore, there is little doubt that teachers need some form of curriculum to do their job well.

Through qualitative methods using narrative and descriptive approaches, this study investigates special education teacher self-efficacy as it relates to the availability and degree of quality of their curriculum. Furthermore, the research depicts the self-efficacy attitudes developed by teachers of students labeled with Emotional and Behavioral Disorders (EBD) in Federal Setting IV schools due to

specific curriculum practices at their particular schools. This research provides perspectives about curriculum's effectiveness or ineffectiveness within institutional structures as well as administrative polices that revolve around it. In addition, it demonstrates how those responsible for designating curriculum are falling short in providing adequate resources to special education teachers.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

It is your first day on the job as a teacher of students labeled with emotional and behavioral disabilities. You are walking through an empty hallway, void of student work or pictures. As you enter your classroom you see more bare walls, a mere four tables and a few chairs, with no desks or special one-on-one work areas. As you survey the room, your thoughts turn to content: what will you teach this year? Which books will you choose? What type of curriculum will be available to you? As you search and ask some questions, you find out that there is a curriculum room. When you visit the rather small room you find sets of 10-20 books of each subject which are outdated, oversized, uninviting, complicated and—above all—lack teachers' editions. Next you ask about the library for students, only to learn there is no library in the building. The only room that contains books is the curriculum room you already visited. You ask yourself, "How am I supposed to do my job without any tools—much less the right types of tools for teaching students labeled with emotional and behavioral disabilities?"

Teachers have the responsibility of providing appropriate education through curriculum content and instructional practices regardless of student population. This responsibility is based on the Free Appropriate Public Education law, a federal law established in 1973 which declared that all public schools should provide all students with a free, appropriate public education, regardless of ability or disability.

Today, teachers need curriculum that is engaging, challenging, interesting, and culturally responsive, which can support the retention of students in school (Stodden & Galloway, 2003). The availability of appropriate curriculum to teachers is essential for school- or district-wide program achievement, student participation, and is also critical for students to learn and engage in the learning process. The goal of curriculum is to provide teachers with a concrete road map which directs the academic and social development of all students, regardless of ability.

In addition, curriculum for students in special education—notably, students labeled with emotional and behavioral disorders (EBD), which will be the focus of this study—includes the methods of instruction. Curriculum for students in special education has been structured and broadly defined by outcomes dependent upon goals and objectives that are generated by the special education team (Gunter, Denny & Venn, 2000). The special education team includes the student, parents, special education teacher, district representative and any other individual deemed important in the education of the student.

Unfortunately, the exclusive focus on individualized education goals and objectives can represent the experience of fragmented curriculum (Wenger, 1988), meaning that students in special education don't receive curriculum that has been adapted from the general education curriculum. The fragmented curriculum results in curriculum which "is often watered-down" (Wasburn-Moses, 2006, p. 21), with little to no connection to earlier content. (Wasburn-Moses (2006), in referencing Pugach and Warger (1996), describes this

fragmented curriculum "de-emphasizing the general education curriculum in favor of teaching basic skills and strategies. As a result of all this, special education itself has become "a-curricular" (p. 27-28).

Students labeled with EBD should receive the same type of curriculum as the general population in a modified manner as their Individualized Education Plan (IEP) describes. Gunter, Denny and Venn (2000) refer to the 1997 Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA):

> The individualized education program (IEP) must include a statement of the special education and related services and supplementary aides and services…and a statement of the program modifications or supports for school personnel that will be provided for the child…to be involved in the general curriculum (p. 116).

Furthermore, it is presumed that the content of instruction for all students has been aligned with state standards across core subjects. IDEA (1997) has explicitly indicated that the "general curriculum is the curriculum used for students without disabilities and should be used for students with disabilities as well" (Gunter, Denny & Venn, 2000, p. 116; IDEA 300.347).

Generally speaking, however, students labeled with EBD are separated from the regular education classroom, and as a result they may receive substandard curricular content (Stodden, Jones & Chang, 2002). This is the case for students labeled with EBD who are often educated in separate setting schools or separate classrooms in the general school setting. Lane, Gresham and O'Shaughnessey (2002) found that:

> Many students with EBD are currently receiving services in segregated settings. Even if these students were to make substantial progress by achieving their IEP goals and objectives, which typically target affective socio-behavioral domains, returning to the general education setting becomes difficult. Without exposure to the core curriculum, many of these students are likely to experience academic deficiencies in basic skills and content knowledge. (p.511)

The disconnect between general education curriculum and the substandard curricular content in the special education setting creates gaps in knowledge for students labeled with EBD relative to their general education peers. Shriner and Ysseldyke (1994) comment upon the general education/special education disconnect by mentioning that the lack of consistency and coordination is a barrier in raising the performance of the entire student population. Based on these observations, it would seem that both students labeled with EBD and their special education teachers could be affected by this disconnect.

According to Ross, McKeiver and Hogaboam-Gray (1997), teacher expectations about their ability to teach fluctuate in response to the characteristics of teaching assignments and instructional tasks. Among other elements, access to curriculum resources is an important characteristic of an educator's teaching assignment. According to Smylie (1990), there is a particular significance between teachers' high self-efficacy and the achievement levels of students in their classrooms.

Identifying the impact of a set or fragmented curriculum on teacher performance and self-efficacy can potentially uncover ways to further the effectiveness of instruction.

Furthermore, research helps educators identify and understand the ineffectiveness of institutional structures and administrative polices which result in inadequate curriculum content and practices for students labeled with EBD.

How can teachers of students labeled with EBD be expected to succeed and excel as professionals using fragmented curriculum? When this is the case, why are their students being exposed to these educational practices? Why are these teachers not given a set curriculum to instruct students labeled with EBD? Furthermore, where does this leave those instructors in terms of professional and personal self-efficacy? These were some of the questions that I wanted to explore in researching the relationship between curriculum and teacher self-efficacy.

This research proposes, through qualitative measures (Leady & Ormrod, 2005), to investigate the impact of curriculum on the self-efficacy of special education instructors of students labeled with EBD in Federal Setting IV sites. Here, self-efficacy is defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). This research study uses the phenomenological perspective (Leady & Ormrod, 2005). The phenomenological approach attempts to understand people's perceptions, perspectives, and understandings of a particular event or situation. This study aims to discover the perceptions teachers hold of their roles in relationship to their curriculum, the concerns they have about it, the efficacy

attitudes they develop in response to it, and how their efficacy attitudes affect their teaching practices.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

There is a paucity of studies related to the self-efficacy of, specifically, special education teachers (McDaniel, 1989; Breton & Coladarci, 1997; Almog & Shechtman, 2007; Albrecht, Johns, Moundsteven & Olorunda, 2009). This is most likely due to the unique and ever-changing demands facing special education teachers. Most of the self-efficacy research available revolves around aspects of the general education setting, inclusion, and assessment and qualification.

This chapter will examine some of the available literature to contextualize the self-efficacy issues developed by special education teachers of students labeled with EBD. The chapter will establish a definition of curriculum and its historical importance to teaching, and discuss curriculum practices in the special education setting and in the EBD classroom. It will then examine curriculum as a tool and its relationship to teachers' development of content expertise, and its effects on special education teachers. Finally, it will review the behavioral concepts of self-efficacy and teacher efficacy.

A definition of curriculum and its historical importance

Prior to the turn of the 20th century, an elementary education was the common ideal for children. The beginning of the 20th century saw an expansion of that ideal from elementary education to include secondary education as well. "With the expansion of these offerings, the purpose of public high school in the U.S. began to shift from a near-exclusive focus on preparation for college to increasing recognition of the imperative of education for life" (Wraga, 1999, p.

525). It was after this point that curriculum would grow out of a problem-focused approach to issues affecting society and people (Wraga, 1999). In a model popular before the mid-20th century, general education content was traditionally segmented into varied areas, or subjects, which are deemed as substantial, influential and necessary. This curriculum model would then be designed and organized into units for students where they would not only read about problems, but also work out solutions (Wraga, 1999). According to Wraga (1999), the idea behind the problem-focused approach and the organization of content into units had to do with allowing students access to as many possible major life realities as possible. Students would get a chance to discuss and practice confronting social and personal problems. This framework, then, can define a time in history where the general education curriculum was "grounded in the ideals of democracy," and aimed "to provide a common experience for all youth in which knowledge was integrated and applied to the examination and resolution of personal and social problems" (Wraga, 1999, p. 534).

Since the middle of the 20th century the general education curriculum has been through many changes. Curriculum has been affected, among other issues and events, by implications of the Cold War with the Soviet Union, the civil rights movements, IDEA, the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education Publication *A Nation at Risk* and the politics of the ruling administration in power at a given time. Cohen (1990) observes that changes in curriculum structure arose partially from political failures in education: "the schools' discriminatory

treatment of students who were neither white, nor English speakers, nor from reasonably well off families, nor entirely 'normal'" (Cohen, 1990, p. 521).

The question of what should be taught has been a source of disagreement for many years among researchers and educators. Today that debate is still in constant flux as parents, politicians, teachers and other adults working with kids struggle to find common ground. The idea of what should be taught in our schools seems more important than ever. It is constantly at the forefront of the political discourse. For that reason, it is important to note why the meat and potatoes of what is taught in our schools is so captivatingly pertinent. This is what Palmer (1998), Rilke (1986) and Hart (2002) call the "great thing": the subject matter itself.

According to Apple (1990), it is important to realize that curriculum within our educational settings distributes not just knowledge, but also ideological values. The ideology and knowledge represented in schools today have deep roots in the histories of the stratification of classes, the distribution of wealth and the continual striving by those in power for the status quo to remain. Apple (1990) exemplifies this historical idea by depicting "very strong connections between the formal knowledge and informal knowledge within the schools and the world at large with all of its inequalities and imperfections" (p. x). However, for matters of this discourse we are concerned with what Weisz (1989) refers to as overt curriculum. McCutcheon (1982) and Weisz (1989) describe curriculum as "what students have an opportunity to learn in school" (p.9). They further define it as "the specific academic materials which teachers intend to convey to students,

sometimes through activities referred to as lessons" (p.156). The importance of curriculum to teachers comes to light when one thinks about what the curriculum intends to accomplish: it needs to provide a road map for teachers that describes and directs the academic and social development of all students (Gunter, Denny & Venn, 2000). Teachers will use the curriculum material as a "coherent and sequential set of guidelines in the core academic disciplines, specifying the content knowledge and skills that students are expected to learn over time" ("A Call for Common Content," 2011, p. 41). One could say that curriculum creates a common ground, or breadth of information to use so that teachers may have pertinent content to educate all types of learners in varied educational settings. In schools today, the education of students has its foundation in what is used within the classroom as teachers and students interact over the curriculum (Forzani, 2011). Curriculum is significant because it deals with the one central element which binds teacher, student, instruction and learning (Garrett, 1994).

Curriculum practices in the special education setting

After the 1983 National Commission on Excellence in Education publication *A Nation at Risk*, which reported underachievement and performance by students in U.S. schools, much of general education reform has revolved around modifying the curriculum in some way, shape or form. The general education curriculum remains a major issue as evidenced in our political and school climates; for example, in the huge push toward legislation by state education officials to delineate specific concepts to be taught in the classroom, and in the high stakes assessment practices that have accompanied them. Taking

this climate into consideration, the special education field's access to the general education curriculum for students labeled with disabilities is also now a major issue (Pugach & Warger, 2001). The field of special education acknowledges that the answer to the question of what students labeled with disabilities are supposed to learn within the classroom setting is one that demands research and professional development activity (Pugach & Warger, 2001). This acknowledgement comes in response to the lack of progress that students labeled with disabilities have made within the general education curriculum. To improve the progress and lives of children labeled with a disability, it is imperative that educators "apply empirically sound practices in a systemic and sustained way" (Landrum, 1997; Conderman & Kasiyannis, 2002).

Recent legislative changes such as IDEA 1997 clarify that "the general education curriculum is the curriculum used for students without disabilities and should be used for students with disabilities as well" (Gunter, Denny & Venn, 2000, p. 2; IDEA 300.347). The philosophical rationale behind this legislation is based on what Kalyanpur and Harry (2004) describe as choice: "Implicit in the right to freedom of choice are the individualistic beliefs that each person may—indeed, has the right to—aspire to the valued goal of upward mobility" (p. 23). In addition, they state that "no individual should be placed at a disadvantage as a result of 'immutable characteristics', or those aspects of self that are not within a person's choice, such as a disability or gender" (p. 23). Kalyanpur and Harry (2004) and Powers, Singer and Sowers (1996) point out that the massive underlying assumption here lies in that a "meaningful education maximizes their

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potential toward the ultimate goal of independence: open, competitive employment" (p. 21). Furthermore, the authors also note that in reality, this achievement is not guaranteed.

Traditionally, it has been the general education curriculum which has posed problematic for students labeled with disabilities (Pugach & Warger, 2001). This is due to the normalizing aspects of the curriculum that have rendered disability invisible (Ervelles, 2005) by failing to account for a diversity within the populations of schools. In response to this, special education has typically practiced two interpretations of curriculum: functional curriculum and remedial programs (Pugach & Warger, 2001). Functional curriculum is meaningful individualized curricula directly tied to "increasing independence in identified current and future environments" (Ayers, Douglas, Lowery & Sievers, 2011, p. 11). This type of curriculum is used for students who are labeled with severe disabilities. Remedial programs are essentially a watered-down version of the general education curriculum (Bouck, 2004). A remedial curriculum might be used with students labeled a milder disability, allowing them to access certain parts of the general education curriculum. Students who are labeled with a milder disability have most trouble with the difficult or complex aspects of the general education curriculum.

In recent decades, the special education setting has seen less use of both remedial programs as well as functional programs and an increase of the regular education initiative (Carlson, 1985). The regular education initiative aims to stop students moving out of the general education setting, keeping them—or moving

them back—in the general education setting, and providing them with accommodations and more support (Reynolds, 1989). This practice, which has come to be widely known as mainstreaming of students, exists so that the full range of pupils, both general and those labeled with a disability, can be educated together (Reynolds, 1989). Taking all of this into account, students labeled with a disability cannot be denied an education and must receive access to the same education which, in turn, may enable them to access the same life-long opportunities as people without disabilities (Kalyanpur & Harry, 2004).

Curriculum practices in the EBD classroom

According to Lane, Gresham and O'Shaughnessy (2002), "there is a need to better understand the curriculum and instruction currently used to educate students labeled with EBD" (p. 507). A better understanding of curriculum and instruction for students labeled with EBD would allow for more effective program development for them. According to Wood and Cronin (1999), students labeled with EBD have dismal academic performance and are in need of "a functional curriculum" to help in their success (p. 344). In their study, Gagnon and McLaughlin (2004) found that day treatment and residential schools for students with various disabilities, including EBD, are exposed to curriculum that has little link with the general education curriculum. Specifically, students labeled with EBD are confronted with curriculum that is at an inappropriate instructional level within the classroom setting (Tyler-Wood, Cereijo & Pemberton, 2004). Due to inappropriate curriculum, academics-related problems can arise. One can

correlate the decline of student performance and positive behavior with inappropriately leveled curriculum. According to Wasburn-Moses:

> Special education programs do not appear to individualize instruction, curriculum is often watered down or non-existent, and service delivery models are unfocused and fragmented. As a result, many special education students… have extremely poor academic skills and high delinquency rates. (Fuchs & Fuchs, 1994; Winzer, Malian & Love, 1998; Pugach & Warger, 2001; U.S. Department of Education, 2001; Wagner & Blackorby, 1996; as referenced by Wasburn-Moses, 2006, p. 21)

Students labeled with EBD need to have supports in place to help them expand their repertoires of strategies and help bypass their weaknesses (Brodesky, Parker, Murray & Katzman, 2002). To address this, an array of modifications and supports has been developed. Modifications and supports can be described as accessible tools or strategies which target improving the learning experience for students with disabilities (Brodesky, Parker, Murray & Katzman, 2002). The result of using modifications and supports with students labeled with EBD is to attain the same positive outcomes from instruction as students without disabilities (Gunter, Denny & Venn, 2000). Unfortunately, according to Gunter, Denny and Venn (2000), few, if "any modification for students with disabilities was being made" (p. 117). This included students labeled with EBD.

Wood and Cronin (1999) have established in their extensive review of literature that curriculum and transition are two barriers that repeatedly arose as negative themes when it comes to the academic and post-schooling success of

students labeled with EBD. This speaks volumes about the need to address transition and curriculum changes for students labeled with EBD. If few modifications are being made to help assure the general success of students labeled with EBD, then what are schools, parents, educators, school boards and communities doing to meet their needs? Furthermore, if youth are to be held accountable under today's specific content legislation and the assessment practices that accompany them, then students labeled with EBD are at a serious educational disadvantage (Gagnon & McLaughlin, 2004).

Curriculum as a tool, and its relationship to teachers' development of content expertise

People in all types of professions need tools: from doctors who use equipment to diagnose and treat patients; to the construction worker that needs designing, building and measuring tools; to investors who need market projections and historical data. Teachers are no different. No matter what profession you are in, the tools you use are there to help you accomplish facets of your job successfully. Pillay and McCrindle (2005) define tools for professionals as "artifacts used in practice which can "significantly assist reasoning, diagnostic capacity and meaning-making processes and enhance facilitation of professional expertise" (p.72).

Using Pillay and McCrindle's definition of tools for professionals, one could argue that any professional, without the proper tools, would fail to be successful within their work setting, for they would not have the resources necessary to develop their professional expertise. Accumulating significant

professional knowledge becomes a struggle without tools to draw from. Although teachers do not need the same tools as doctors, construction workers and investors, they do have a need for a set of tools that they use in their classrooms to teach students on a daily basis. Among others, some of these tools include textbooks, assessments, classroom management training, technology, and curriculum.

Curriculum can be considered a professional tool using Pillay and McCrindle's definition. Curriculum assists teacher reasoning by helping them determine how to represent concepts and ideas to students. It assists their diagnostic capacity by allowing them to determine levels of student performance. It assists their meaning-making processes by extending their knowledge of the subject field they are teaching and translating subject matter into accessible student language. It enhances facilitation of their professional expertise by giving them a comprehensive understanding of the content-to-teacher-to-student process (Pillay & McCrindle, 2005).

In addition to the functions of curriculum mentioned above, curriculum also helps teachers develop substantive content knowledge, which involves developing critical insight in a particular subject or area (Pillay & McCrindle, 2005). Substantive content knowledge is defined by Pillay and McCrindle (2005) as "the ability to combine domain knowledge with appropriate professional tools and strategies to solve problems within the socio-cultural context of a profession" (p. 67). This deep understanding allows professionals to "interpret and scrutinize information regarding relationships between domain knowledge and context so

that it privies one the capability of optimal learning and performance" (Pillay & McCrindle, 2005, p. 71). Therefore, substantive content knowledge can be characterized as having a deep comprehension of a discipline or subject, including its scope, structure and function; combined with a professional tool to achieve goals in a particular profession, such as teaching. Curriculum allows teachers to develop substantive content knowledge by providing a breadth of knowledge from which they extract content to be taught in order to successfully guide students in academic tasks. In education in general, the construct of expertise has been used to signify and denote an extensive knowledge base that superior teachers possess (Stough & Palmer, 2003).

According to Pillay and McCrindle (2005), both tools and the development of substantive content knowledge that they afford are essential in creating some form of professional expertise. According to Swanson (2007), workplace expertise fosters individuals with a high level of training, skill and knowledge. In other words, the correct tools can help professionals develop their own expertise, which can lead to a competent, efficient and successful workforce. To a teacher, the development of substantive content knowledge, teacher reasoning, diagnostic capacity, meaning-making processes, and enhanced expertise through curriculum are important because they allow the teacher to "master both the content they will teach and the best ways of teaching it" (Mirel, 2011, p. 11). Without the tool of curriculum, teachers do not have access to the educational foundations of their subject matter, nor any of the other aforementioned resources to teach. In a situation with the above absences,

teachers would not develop the same substantive content knowledge without curriculum as they would with curriculum.

Curriculum and its effects on special education teachers

"Curriculum—the content of instruction—is interpolated from goals of education that are set forth by state and local education agencies" (Goldstein, 1982, p. 3). These educational goals are relatively similar and apply to all learners, regardless of culture, language, background or disability. In education, and specifically in the classroom, students "gather around a subject, and the teacher's task is to show the way into it" (Hart, 2002, p. 176). Curriculum affects the classroom practices which teachers employ.

Wasburn-Moses (2006) states that, "researchers have found that special education programs do not appear to individualize instruction" (p. 21). Individualized instruction is based on modifications or accommodations made from a curriculum to help support a specific need in a student. Wasburn-Moses (2006) further refers to Kozleski (2002), citing that "many special education students do not receive a high-quality education" as a result of this non-individualized instruction (p. 21). When instruction does not meet the needs of the student, one may conclude the existence of a curriculum problem. "In the absence of a curriculum base that provides direction for education programs, instructional decision making and practices are often haphazard and widely divergent" (Goldstein, 1986; Grosenick, George, George & Lewis, 1991; Lynch & Beare, 1990; Pugach & Warger, 1993; as referenced by Sands, Adams & Stout, 1995, p. 69).

Without curriculum then teachers can only be left with their best guess at what content should be mastered, as well as the best way of teaching it (Mirel, 2011). In this type of situation some teachers may need to be prepared to teach under a set curriculum, while others may "need to be prepared to write their own curriculum" (Mirel, 2011, p. 11). In many cases, special education teachers of students labeled with EBD are expected to use fragmented curriculum; that is, curriculum that might be outdated or incomplete, without all of the necessary components such as teacher guides, student workbooks, and reproducible handouts or differentiated content. According to Pugach and Warger (2001):

> Curriculum limitations are being addressed by taking a hit-or-miss approach to modifying existing materials, placing teachers in the position of tinkering with a limited curriculum at the same time that they are busy teaching, often not making modifications until a student has begun to fail. (p. 196)

Teachers are also given few resources and/or little training, yet they are expected to teach. According to Mastropieri (2001), special education teachers like herself struggled to find "optimal curriculum materials and strategies for teaching" (p. 68). She further explains that resources, support and training are challenges that special education teachers face on a regular basis.

"Understanding teacher beliefs, practices and perception is an essential line of research" (Floden & Klinzing, 1990; as referenced by Sands, Adams & Stout, 1995, p. 69) because those beliefs, practices and perceptions greatly influence both curriculum practices in classroom and reform initiatives for

curriculum implementation and evaluation (Conley, 1991; as referenced by Sands, Adams & Stout, 1995). Curriculum plays an essential role in providing special education teachers with opportunities to fine tune, design and analyze instructional practice; these opportunities, in turn, give special education teachers a greater "sense of control over the outcomes (self-efficacy)" produced with students in the classroom (Chwalisz, Altimaier & Russell, 1992, p. 396). The more the environment created by special education teachers is conducive to developing positive interaction using, digesting, interpreting and modifying curriculum, the better they become at teaching. In general, teachers who "feel a greater sense of control" about their roles within a school "increase their sense of efficacy and make for greater effort, persistence and resilience" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 27)

Social learning theory and self-efficacy: a framework

Why is this idea of control so important for people? It is important because it gives people a better command of the desired outcome, allowing them to have some influence over the end result:

> The ability to affect outcomes makes them predictable. Predictability fosters adoptive preparedness…inability to exert influence over things that adversely affects one's life, breeds apprehension, apathy, or despair. The capability to produce valued outcomes and to prevent undesired ones, therefore, provides powerful incentives for the development and exercise of personal control. (Bandura, 1995, p. 1)

Ideas about control, and its role in how people behave, function and think stem from the research of many, such as DeCharms (1968), Rotter (1966), and White (1982). This perceived control is based upon what people believe, not what is objectively concrete. Therefore, what people believe about their abilities to bring about a specific outcome within a given social context drives the idea of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1995).

The term perceived efficacy specifically refers to "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage perspective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). Perceived self-efficacy involves mental and social determinants of the self such as personal aspirations, perceived opportunity and constraints, and conceptions of personal ability (Bandura, 1997). Other socio-cognitive determinants include self appraisal, idea developments about the self, and emotions generated from this process, and are the pertinent mechanism by which behavior is motivated, regulated, adapted and changed. These socio-cognitive determinants, working together, provide an integrated view of the self (Bandura, 1986). The self piece is important because it has to do with self-perceptions of competence, rather than actual level of competence (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). People's self-efficacy beliefs developed through that self-appraisal process "influence how people think, feel, motivate themselves, and act" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2).

The theory of self-efficacy is a theory of behavior and human thought grounded in the framework of social learning first brought to the forefront of psychological research by Bandura in the late 1970's. Bandura's research relied

on previous research conducted by Miller and Dollard (1941), which described the learning process of human behavior through clear observation of a model (Culatta, n.d.). Bandura expanded upon Miller and Dollard's work by tying outcome expectancy to their ideas about human behavior and thought. Bandura (1977) and Colodarci and Breton (1997) define outcome expectancy as the degree to which a person estimates that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes. Outcome expectancy can be further described as the appraisal process by which a person formulates beliefs about how a specific action will produce a certain outcome. Therefore, producing a desired outcome can be influenced by both environmental and cognitive factors which, in turn, influence human learning behavior.

In their further development, self-efficacy and its conceptual forerunner, social learning theory, are psychosocial, as they relate a person's psychological development to interaction with the social environment, such as the learning of behavior through observation of a model (Culatta, n.d.). In other words, a person's behavior, environment and personal qualities are constantly affecting each other. The idea is that human behavior is not just driven by actions and reactions to environmental stimuli, but is driven by a complex and multi-layered web of influence/effect and counter-influence/counter-effect, where people are direct contributors.

From the explanation of self-efficacy and the propositions about how self-efficacy works, it may be concluded that individuals can differ in their self-efficacy, and that these differences have behavioral correlates (Sherer & Adams,

1983) which are dependent upon self-appraising, self-regulatory, cognitive and environmental factors. That is to say that self-efficacy produces specific behaviors which are based upon beliefs of personal causation as affected through a social context within an environment (Bandura, 1977).

One clear distinction needs to be made between self-efficacy and self-esteem because they refer to entirely different things yet are sometimes erroneously used interchangeably. Self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of personal capability, and self-esteem is concerned with judgments of self-worth (Bandura, 1997). Self-efficacy's distinction from other "self conceptions such as self-concept, self-worth and self-esteem is that self efficacy is specific to a particular task" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 7) such as teaching.

Estimations of abilities about the self are particularly important to teachers because they can determine specific courses of action, as well as amounts of effort exerted in the face of opposition or challenge (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998).

Teacher efficacy and its relationship to self-efficacy

The basis for the efficacy inquiry with respect to teaching came out of a theory developed by Rotter in 1966. The main idea in Rotter's social learning theory is that personality represents an interaction of the individual with his or her environment. According to Rotter (1966), personality within the individual cannot come to be independent of the environment. In the same reciprocal way, neither can one focus on behavior as an automatic response to environmental stimuli

(Rotter, 1966). Therefore, in understanding behavior, Rotter discovered that "one must take both the individual (i.e., his or her life history of learning and experiences) and the environment (i.e., those stimuli that the person is aware of and responding to) into account" to describe personality and behavior as an ever-changing set of potential responses, depending upon the environment (Mearns, 2000).

With this theoretical groundwork in social learning theory, teacher efficacy was first conceived by Rand Corporation researchers as "the extent to which teachers believed that they could control the reinforcement of their actions; that is, whether control of reinforcement lay within themselves or in the environment" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 2). Early efficacy studies conducted by the Rand Corporation spawned considerable interest in the area of teaching because the studies included efficacy questions regarding teachers' perceptions about their own teaching efforts (Mulcahy & Mulcahy, 1998).

In comparison to this research, Bandura identified teacher efficacy as:

> …a type of self-efficacy—a cognitive process in which people construct beliefs about their capacity to perform at a given level of attainment. These beliefs influence how much effort people put forth, how long they will persist in the face of obstacles, their resilience in dealing with failures and how much stress or depression they experience in coping with demanding situations. (Bandura, 1977; as referenced by Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 2)

The concept of teacher efficacy, based on the research conducted by Rand (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998), was further developed in the early 1980's by the researchers Gibson and Dembo (1984). Gibson and Dembo developed a more extensive and reliable measurement for teacher efficacy which was based on the Rand Studies (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). This new measurement was a milestone in the teacher efficacy area of research because Gibson and Dembo were able to isolate two factors that they described as personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and general teaching efficacy (GTE), which could identify how teachers would fare even when confronted with a student failure (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). PTE and GTE need to be differentiated because while teachers may believe that specific behaviors will produce certain outcomes, at the same time, within their self-assessment, they might not believe that they can perform necessary activities to achieve a favorable outcome (Gibson & Dembo, 1984).

According to Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998), PTE "has to do with one's own feelings of competence as a teacher" (p. 16). Bandura (1986) asserted that PTE accounts for the projected appraisal of ability that someone brings to a situation. The term PTE is intimately linked in the literature to the concept of efficacy expectancies: efficacy expectancies are "convictions that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193). The concepts of PTE and efficacy expectancies are essential to the study of teacher efficacy because "the strength of people's

convictions in their own effectiveness is likely to affect whether they will even try" (Bandura, 1977, p. 193).

Conversely, GTE is defined as the degree to which a teacher estimates that a given behavior will lead to certain outcomes (Banduara, 1977; Coladarci & Breton, 1997; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). In contrast with PTE's link to efficacy expectancies, GTE is tied to outcome expectancies. Outcome expectancies refer to "outcomes the individual teacher could expect given certain actions or means he or she felt capable of delivering" (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 17). Within the context of teaching, an outcome expectancy can be illustrated by the teacher who believes that "skillful instruction can offset the effects of an impoverished home environment" (Coladarci & Breton, 1997, p. 1). By contrast, an efficacy expectancy would be reflected by the teacher's "confidence that he or she personally is capable of such instruction" (Coladarci & Breton, 1977, p. 1). According to Tschannen-Moran, Wookfolk Hoy and Hoy (1998), "temporally, efficacy expectations precede and help form outcome expectations" because efficacy expectations transpire within" (p. 6). This equates to how a teacher might first self-appraise before thinking about how a specific action in the classroom might render a result.

The literature has displayed two different, yet intertwined descriptions of teacher efficacy: those of PTE and GTE. The discussion about teacher efficacy is important because of its many implications for positive or negative outcomes related to teachers' performance as well as their students' performance (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk

Hoy and Hoy (1998) describe some of the effects of self-efficacy on teacher performance:

> It affects the effort they put into teaching, the goals they set and their level of aspiration. Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy…tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization (Allinder, 1994)…Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching (Allinder, 1994; Guskey, 1984; Hall et al., 1992), have greater commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992; Evans & Tribble, 1986; Trentham et al., 1985) and are more likely to stay in teaching (Burley et al., 1991; Glickman & Tamashiro, 1982). At the school level, higher teacher efficacy is related to the health of the organizational climate (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993), an orderly and positive school atmosphere, greater classroom-based decision making (Moore & Esselman, 1992), and the strength of the collective efficacy (Fuller & Izu, 1986; Newmann, Rutter & Smith, 1989).

This chapter has presented a review of the literature pertaining to curriculum and its historical importance, curriculum practices in the special education setting and in the EBD classroom, curriculum as a tool and its relationship to teachers' development of content expertise, curriculum and its effects on special education teachers, and a framework for social learning theory and self-efficacy. The following chapters of this action research project use this historical and educational background as a context for understanding self-efficacy issues for teachers of students labeled with EBD.

Chapter 3

Research Methodology

This is an action research project. Action research is defined as "any systematic inquiry conducted by teacher researchers, principals, school counselors, or other stakeholders in the teaching/learning environment to gather information…this information is gathered with the goals of gaining insight, developing reflective practice, effecting positive changes in the school environment (and on educational practices in general), and improving student outcomes and the lives of those involved" (Mills, 2007, p. 5). The process of action research consists of identifying an area of focus, collecting data, analyzing and interpreting data, and the development of an action plan (Mills, 2007).

Through qualitative research methods using narrative and descriptive approaches to data collection (Mills, 2007), such as face-to-face recorded interviews, this project investigates the impact of curriculum on the self-efficacy of special education instructors of students labeled with EBD in Federal Setting IV schools. "Federal Setting IV school programs teach students with disabilities in separate public settings. This includes youth with disabilities receiving special education and related services for greater than 60 % of the school day (Minnesota Department of Education, September, 2004). For the purposes of this project, self-efficacy is defined as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (Bandura, 1995, p. 2). This research project will use the phenomenological perspective (Leady & Ormrod, 2001), which attempts to understand the meaning of events from the

participants' points of view. This study attempts to understand how teachers see, feel and react to themselves in the classroom; the questions they have developed about their teaching practices; the efficacy attitudes they have developed due to the curriculum available; and how their efficacy attitudes affect the quality of their teaching and positive student outcomes such as achievement and motivation.

In-depth interviews and participant selection

Participants for this project were recruited and selected verbally through personal and professional contacts from various school districts throughout the Twin Cities metro area. Six participants were selected for this project, all of whom are current special education teachers with valid special education licenses, working in Federal Setting IV EBD programs. They are between the ages of 21 and 65, and represented four different school districts in either urban or suburban locations.

In-depth interviews for each participant consisted of one to two interviews, each of which lasted one to three hours. In-depth interviews are "carefully planned" (Leady & Ormrod, p. 199) sets of general questions in the beginning of the interview. As the participants respond, the researcher then composes additional questions based on previous responses. In addition, the researcher encourages "the subject to talk in the area of interest and then probes more deeply, picking up on the topics and issues the respondent initiates" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 95). The interviewer uses spiraling questions based on the topics and issues the participant has generated. The act of spiraling questions allows the interviewer to elicit a rounded response from the participant

by asking the same question in various forms. The researcher also uses both convergent and divergent questions (Mills, 2007). This requires the interviewer to use both open-ended and closed questions.

The interviews took place at various locations throughout the Twin Cities area. Participants were asked a series of questions within the in-depth interview process. They answered the questions depicting their personal experience with as much or as little detail as they wished. Participants were also allowed to elaborate at times when they felt that they had something further to add. All interviews were audio recorded with written consent from the participants.

Participants

All names of the participants have been changed and no identification has been made to the school districts that employ them or the colleges they attended.

Karen

Karen is a special education teacher in a school district located in a suburb of the Twin Cities. She has been teaching for five years. Karen is 36 years old and was born and raised in Minnesota. Karen holds both an undergraduate degree and a master's degree. Karen started her career in education as a paraprofessional. She became a special education instructor because she wanted to work with kids who had special needs. Karen describes herself as a very driven teacher who really wants to make a strong impact on her students. One of the big things that she hopes for in her lessons is that students take and apply them beyond the classroom walls. She currently teaches language arts.

Greg

Greg is a special education teacher in a school district located within the Twin Cities metro area. Greg has been a special education teacher for four years and is in his mid 30's. Greg was born in Minnesota and grew up in the Twin Cities, yet he is well-versed in several languages as he has lived in many different parts of the world. Because of these experiences, he is very receptive to how different cultures view and approach education. He calls himself a hard worker and a strong believer in the ability of all students that he engages. Greg wanted to become a teacher because teachers were important in his life. Greg feels that all of his students can learn and be successful, regardless of any disability.

Luis

Luis is 40 years old and has been a special education teacher for 12 years. Luis was born in Brazil and grew up in many places around the world and the US. Luis became a special education teacher because he needed a job and they were hiring special education instructors at the time. Luis started his education career as a licensed teacher. He holds both an undergraduate degree and a master's degree. Luis says he cares a lot about his students. He says that he shows a lot of emotional empathy towards his students' life situations and attempts to really understand things from their perspective. Luis is currently working at a school district located in a suburb of the Twin Cities.

Ellie

Ellie is a teacher of EBD as well as students with learning disabilities (LD). She teaches in a school in the south metro area. She has been a special

education teacher for six years. She explains that she has an evolving philosophy in working with students, and is firm on putting student experiential learning first and making sure that even the smallest progress is noted in their favor. She explains how her frame of mind is all about growing with her students, instead of being personally responsible for her students' growth. Ellie sees her role in the classroom as a facilitator.

May

May has been a special education teacher for over 20 years. She has taught in three different school districts located in various parts of the Twin Cites metro area. She believes that using the local community as a educational tool for her students is key in having lessons 'stick' with them. She feels that any learning that can be done outside of the classroom, using as many different pathways to the brain as possible, is essential for the development of her students as 'whole' people. She says that she has seen many trends in education come and go, and sees stable resources for education as a key component in providing students with disabilities with the best education possible.

Gretchen

Gretchen has been a teacher for over 10 years. She has taught in three different districts, two in the Twin Cities and one out-of-state. Gretchen has worked with elementary students in a general education setting and has been working with students labeled with EBD for the past seven years. Gretchen focuses on balance, both in life and in her classroom. She likes providing students with that initial spark for interest in a topic, so that they continue to dig

deeper and do some learning on their own. She mentions that she is thankful for being able to work with her students because they provide her with avenues to learning new things about teaching, as well as new things about herself.

Data collection and analysis

The research project involved the collection of data through in-depth interviews with the participants. These interviews were transcribed and field notes were added. Field notes are rough "written accounts of what the researcher hears, sees, experiences and thinks in the course of collecting and reflecting on the data in a qualitative study" (Bogdan & Biklen, 1998, p. 107). The interview transcriptions and field notes were then read, organized and analyzed. In analyzing the field notes, the data were coded. Coding is defined by Mills (2007) as "the process of trying to find patterns and meaning in data collected through the use of surveys, interviews, and questionnaires" (p. 124). In coding the data, themes began to emerge as patterns that continually repeat themselves within the data (Mills, 2007). The next piece to the analysis of the data was done using grounded theory. Grounded theory is described as the discovery of theory from data (Glasser & Strauss, 1967). Grounded theory "provides us with relevant predictions, explanations, interpretations and applications," all within the qualitative research analysis (Glasser & Strauss, 1967, p. 1). In the study, it was possible to generate theory from the data that was based on the participant interviews. The end result of grounded theory is not to come to any conclusive set of reasons for the phenomenon, but to comprise a set of probability statements

and hypothesize about the relationships between conceptual categories generated from the data (Glaser & Strauss, 1999).

In summary, this action research project proposes to attempt to gain a greater understanding about the self-efficacy attitudes developed due to curriculum, or lack thereof, by teachers of EBD students in Federal Setting IV schools. This action research project uses a phenomenological approach as well as in-depth interviewing with qualitative research techniques to enhance our understanding of the teacher participant perspectives. In the following chapter the findings are presented.

Chapter 4

Findings

This chapter discusses the findings from the interviews conducted with the teachers. These findings represent the four main themes emerging from the data. The first is the theme of curriculum availability issues for teachers. The second is the relationship of curriculum availability and self-efficacy. The third theme revolves around special education structure and the self-efficacy of teachers with regard to that structure. Finally, the fourth theme is how teacher self-efficacy can affect student outcomes.

"Well, I just think that it's not professional to not provide curriculum to us teachers…": **Curriculum availability issues and fragmented curriculum at Federal Setting IV sites**

The teacher participants were interviewed about the availability of curriculum within their school, program or classroom, and asked what thoughts they had about their curriculum situation or about the instructional materials provided to them. Their responses all represented different experiences of fragmented curriculum. Four out of the six participants mentioned that they had little to no curriculum available to them; two reported that they had "some" curriculum available. Karen expressed her frustration with the lack of curriculum and says:

> No, we don't really have curriculum; we have really old textbooks…. We provide a valuable service to the community in a lot of ways, so I think

> that we should have good curriculum. It would be helpful…right now, I just sort-of draw straws and go with stuff.

Karen's remarks suggest that there is very little available for her to use with her students. Her tone is serious and dictates that something is not correct with the current state of things.

These words were echoed by three other participants. Gretchen shares her version of the previous by saying:

> No, we have to go out and find our own curriculum, pretty much, and we have to go and ask for curriculum. And so everything we get is, like, ten years old. It's ridiculous that we get everything second-hand. Like, we get the thrift store curriculum that's already gone through several hands, and it's old and outdated. Well, I just think that it's not professional to not provide curriculum to us teachers. That's just backwards.

Gretchen's tone expresses disapproval and she has an appalled look on her face when she specifically states that it is unprofessional that she has not been provided with curriculum to use with her students.

When Greg was asked about available curriculum he responded with a concerned look on his face and an air of disbelief in his voice:

> Well, we do and we don't. We have Saxon Math. Saxon Math doesn't touch on a lot of the stuff the students need to be prepared for the MCA Tests. …language arts, there is curriculum available, but in my personal opinion most of it is useless. I wish that we would have had more available in terms of just resources, because there was so much stuff that

wasn't there. There were books, but it was very boring, basic English grammar stuff.

Greg's comments mirror the previous two teachers' comments. Greg's comments suggest that there were materials at his disposal, but upon further observation the materials really weren't that useful.

Luis adds to the comments concerning the lack of curriculum by adding, "…where I teach, being the judge, the jury and the adjudicator, I am also the curriculum specialist. Curriculum comes from…uh, uh, uh…yes, it comes from there." Luis's comment was referring to the fact that he is the only teacher in his department teaching math; furthermore, his pause suggests that his curriculum comes from thin air, as if he has to make it up himself. In mentioning the judge, jury and adjudicator, he is using a court analogy where he is all three independent parties in a court of law. This is suggestive of an incredibly isolated teaching situation where he has very little collaborative time.

The comments made by the participants suggest that the fragmented curriculum available to them is preventing them from accomplishing their purpose. Furthermore, it seems to be baffling them. These comments lead us to another area of importance for teachers regarding the development of curriculum: the additional responsibility of providing curriculum. This is an area of importance because when curriculum is fragmented or unavailable, then the responsibility to develop it falls on the teacher. All six teachers shared their thoughts on creating curriculum on their own.

When asked about development of curriculum Karen says, "Yes, I did everything: assessment, subject matter to teach the whole year, thematic units, lesson plans, textbooks and the layout of weeks." Karen is describing all of her duties, which are fairly substantial and time-consuming. Her comment points to the fact that she is the one person responsible for all of the above. Having multiple heavy responsibilities such as assessment, teaching and tracking down one's own curriculum creates a situation where teachers are overwhelmed. When Gretchen was allowed to elaborate about having multiple responsibilities, like teaching multiple subjects, she exclaimed, "It's like, ok, go, teach language arts and math. Ok, one, two, three, run! Run with what? You didn't give me a skill set to run with." It appears as though Gretchen is expected to teach two subjects without any materials.

Greg, who is also responsible for teaching multiple subjects, and therefore has multiple responsibilities, adds, "Most of language arts I had to come up with myself. I went out and got books; I ordered novels off of Amazon that I paid for out-of-pocket."

May is responsible for teaching various subjects as well. She adds, "Yes, we do have a curriculum library with some different curricula and resources in it, but we do have to do a fair amount of creating of curriculum by our own means." Ellie, who also has to teach multiple subjects, exuberantly adds, "Well, I write my own curriculum and I would prefer to do that most of the time. It's just a tool." Ellie is the only participant out of the six participants who comments positively about having to create her own curriculum. This is partly because she is teaching

students that are in the 12th grade and beyond, who have not graduated yet; therefore, there is no high-stakes testing involved. Ellie's acknowledgment that she does not have to worry about testing contrasts with the comments of the other teacher participants, and makes her the outlier in this study.

All six teachers, to some degree or another, are responsible for the development of their curriculum. When talking about this area of their work, the internet was discussed by all six teachers. Many mentioned the internet as a place that helps them find material to teach their students. It seems to be a valuable resource in acquiring materials for curriculum.

Ellie says, "In the age of the internet, I can look up articles and I can look up lesson plans." Greg seconds that by saying, "I had to go on-line, I had to go to a lot of different websites to find ideas." Gretchen adds, "I find myself on the internet looking for curriculum ideas and things that I can develop." May contributes, "We do have to do a fair amount of getting resources from the internet." The quotes from the teachers seem to suggest that looking on the internet was important when curriculum was not available by other means.

Curriculum development, as an added responsibility for the teacher participants, elicited intense efficacy comments. Teachers were asked to further elaborate about how developing curriculum affects them personally.

According to Greg, "In pulling together stuff that I had to find on my own, because what was available was garbage. It became very frustrating and stressful." Greg's frustration during the interview was very apparent. He seemed to be feeling responsible, as though he had not done enough.

The issue of time came up for several participants. The amount of time it takes to develop curriculum is important because the daily development of curriculum is an additional responsibility for the teachers, on top of the multiple responsibilities that they already take on. All participants mentioned that it takes them much more time to accomplish their responsibilities than the time that they are allowed. This creates an even heavier load for the teacher participants who have to develop curriculum on a daily basis. May addresses this issue as an additional comment to an open-ended question: "…and another facet to creating curriculum, the issue of time." She continues:

> …very frustrated at times. It takes a lot of time. I am not somebody that can just whip something out. Yeah, many nights here after hours. I am still at this point after 20 years thinking, what is going to happen tomorrow?

Gretchen says, "I don't have time to do that [curriculum development]. I have due process paperwork to worry about." Greg adds that he "would spend hours and hours photocopying, rather than having ten to twelve copies that you use in your classroom. I mean, sometimes I would spend my entire prep just photocopying." All the teachers that commented on the issue of time seemed to do so in a negative manner because they described it as extra or hidden responsibility within their day. In talking about time, the word frustration was mentioned many times by the teacher participants. They seemed to have resigned demeanors as they described the time use, as if the added responsibilities added insult to injury.

"It makes me feel lonely, isolated and it makes me feel vulnerable. I feel utterly insecure as a professional.": **Curriculum availability issues lead to reduced substantive content knowledge and loss of positive self-efficacy**

According to Bandura's (1997) research on self-efficacy, self-determinants are the pertinent mechanism by which personal behavior is regulated, adapted and changed. Therefore, thoughts externalized by the participants can be indicators of self-efficacy. This makes the perceptions voiced by the teacher participants another important facet of this theme. Participants were asked to describe any feelings or self-talk that they had with respect to the current curriculum situation at their site or school. The teacher participants shared intense stories of how they feel due to their current curriculum situations. Karen begins:

> I felt like I was constantly justifying not feeling like I was competent, so I was justifying it all the time. I feel like I am competent, but the reason why I am not is probably because I don't have any curriculum. So I felt like I'm walking into something that I was not prepared for at all.

Karen's description of her nonexistent curriculum translates into a lack of substantive content knowledge. Because she cannot develop substantive content knowledge, she is led to feelings of incompetence, which she attempts to justify. Ultimately, through her comments about walking into something she isn't prepared for, she illustrates a loss of control over her teaching environment.

Karen's disgruntled tone when she continues about how the load at her school affects her self-efficacy was powerful:

> I think that it affects the way you view yourself as a qualified professional. Like, if you do not have the support and knowledge base to teach your students, you are not going to feel like you are qualified. You can have all of the knowledge in the world, but without the material, how can you feel like you are doing a good job?

Here, Karen seems to understand that her inability to develop substantive content knowledge is directly tied to her negative self-efficacy. She also seems frustrated at the disconnect between professional knowledge, which she believes should make you a "qualified professional" and substantive content knowledge, which she sees as the determining factor in whether she is successful.

Gretchen squeezes out a smile that seems to hold back tears as she comments, "…at this point, better laugh or I'm going to be crying about it while talking to you." Gretchen is recounting her thoughts about being a teacher who must develop her own curriculum. In responding to questions, her non-verbal language suggested that she was uncomfortable answering the question honestly. During this part of the interview, she seemed disappointed and slightly down on herself. These types of comments about her teaching experiences are usually indicative of negative efficacy development (Bandura, 1986). At another point in her interview, she explains: "I'm not a curriculum writer and developer. I went to school to be a teacher where I am provided good curriculum." Here, she is expressing that she has the professional skills and training to be a successful instructor, but due to the lack of curriculum she does not have the opportunity to

develop the substantive content knowledge she needs to feel like an effective teacher.

Greg expounds with feeling as he seems to search for the best way to describe his feelings of self-efficacy:

> Frustration, self-confidence issues, and then I guess a feeling for a need for some kind of change, for things to improve. I'm not sure how that's going to go at this point. I feel upset that I can't be the teacher that I want to be.

Greg's curriculum situation obviously hinders him from feeling like an effective instructor, the instructor he sees himself being. He clearly states that he lacks self-confidence when in the classroom. Additionally, his explanation that he is "not sure how that's going to go" illustrates an inability to control his teaching environment.

Luis described his self-talk experiences due to his curriculum situation by forcefully and decisively stating:

> It makes me feel lonely, isolated and it makes me feel vulnerable. I feel utterly insecure as a professional. I want to have solidarity with other math teachers…there is nobody out there. I can talk to other teachers where I work, but even they don't really understand. I have to commiserate with my damn self, because no one knows. I can't get empathy from people near me at work.

When asked how many of his feelings were specifically attributed to the curriculum piece of his job, Luis says, "I think that it is a great amount; it amounts

to anxiety." These feelings seem to be very heavy with Luis. He seemed angry and resentful that he had to work under these conditions. He seems to try very hard to understand why this is happening to him. Again, these types of experiences are usually indicative of negative efficacy development.

May comments: "It affects your self-confidence. It can be very frustrating…yeah, burn out, stress, feeling fried all the time. I can't manage all these pieces…yeah, overload! Yeah, definitely, the curriculum piece is so overwhelming." May seemed shocked as she was telling me of this; her tone of voice got louder and more indignant. The overwhelming feelings described by May seemed to conjure up an image of what is it like to barely be hanging on. It is as if during her 20-year teaching career, her expectations and competence at her job have regressed. Though her pedagogical expertise has increased, she has not had a parallel development of her substantive content knowledge, which has caused her feelings of burnout, frustration and lowered self-confidence.

Ellie was the only one of the participants who expressed positive perceptions of her curriculum availability. She mentions that feeling capable:

> …comes from what happens every day in the classroom, and the observations of students, and the understanding of when they get something, of when there is a connection, when there is communication established, or when critical thinking goes on. You know, that's what tells me how I am doing and I can achieve that with or without this [curriculum]. It's just a tool.

Ellie sees curriculum as a simple tool to get a lesson across, and not as an integral part of what she needs, so that she feels successful in her classroom. She describes curriculum as "the dirt outside." Her comments are indicative of a teacher who sees anything tangible as a potential tool to teach students. In her comment about her successes, Ellie is demonstrating that she has developed competence by being able to know when and how her students are progressing. She does not seem to need to rely upon curriculum to gauge her sense of competence.

The teacher participants, above all, seem to have deep reactions to their current situations with respect to curriculum. Most teachers, either directly or indirectly, comment on the effects of their inability to develop substantive content knowledge due to the curriculum situations of their teaching positions. All mention some type of negative emotion or tone, which could be leading to the development of negative self-efficacy within the participants through the self-questioning and the self-appraisal process. The feelings that teachers voiced seemed to lead into comments about longevity, the future of their teaching careers, and possible negative health effects due to their current working conditions.

***"I guess that they are more concerned with how I am going to write IEP's than how I am going to teach them about language arts."*: Special education structure, administrative ineffectiveness and the efficacy of teachers at Federal Setting IV sites**

School environments can be directly related to teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Teaching materials and support from school policies, school officials and administrators is essential in having teachers implement curriculum and run programs in a successful manner. This support is a significant factor in the development of satisfaction with the present job situation. Furthermore, provisions, such as classroom curriculum, from a teacher's perspective, is viewed as positive administrative support (Freads, Josh, Moundsteven & Olorunda, 2009). Positive administrative support or district support was commented upon by all of the participants. This theme emerged as the participants were asked to think about their current curriculum situations. Their comments about administrators or districts seemed to be thoughts that they had been harboring for a while, but had not yet been expressed. Greg explains:

> There was a novel that I taught. This is one of the things that really pissed me off. I started teaching a book called *Touching Spirit Bear* about three months into the school year and the kids really got into the book, and as we read it I had to come up with questionnaires. Well, I found out about three-quarters of the way through the book that one of my administrators had a copy of these entire lessons and study guides for this book, so it was very frustrating to find that out.

It is apparent that this particular example really upset Greg. The end of his commentary seems to signify a disconnect between the administration and the teachers. This particular response from his administrator appears to be interpreted by Greg as unsupportive.

Karen was asked about the district's role in helping her with her curriculum problems. She describes her thoughts after a workshop week meeting with a district administrator regarding the material she would be teaching. She shares:

> They had us meet with the curriculum person or the head of the subject area. Well, you know you are not even going to remember this person's name and you had, like, ten minutes to meet with them, and I didn't even get a chance to meet with the language arts person because we met with the special ed. director instead.

When I met with Karen a second time, and reminded her about the experience she described above, she added:

> I was thinking, I guess that they are more concerned with how I am going to write IEP's than how I am going to teach them about language arts. I remember thinking that I have no idea what the standards even are.

Here Karen seems to be receiving the message from the district that her due process paperwork is more important than the curriculum content for her classroom.

Along the same lines as Karen, Luis was asked to elaborate on his feelings of anxiety when it comes to having school administrator support with teaching materials. Luis explains:

> Nobody tells you what to do, but they tell you what not to do. And so they will say, cut out some of the music in class, cut out some of the reading in class, cut out some of the extra-curriculars in class. And I'll say ok, well,

do you have any suggestions? And they say, well, you are the professional, make a professional decision. So everybody is abdicated.

Luis seems to be feeling as though, regardless of what he asks of his administrators, they will relinquish the authority back to him when it comes to curriculum. During this part of the interview, Luis added some commentary about the overarching structure of special education from the Minnesota Department of Education down to the districts and individual schools. He noted that he had been trying to ask administrators and the Department of Education about whether other Federal Setting IV programs had the same bouts with the curriculum issue that he was having:

> Where's the curriculum? There isn't any…and so what would be good would be… [to] network more and more with other professionals in similar programs, to compare and contrast what is working and what is not, and why is it, and why isn't it. And so you know, I have called the Minnesota Department of Education. I have emailed five different administrators in different districts and said I am looking for [redacted] programs; can anyone give me a list? The Minnesota Department of Education emailed me back and said, we have no such list of [redacted] programs. I said, wait a minute, I am a school teacher in Minnesota and am asking for a list of [redacted] programs and you are telling me that you don't have one? So if I can't contact the Minnesota Department of Education, who should I be calling, the Department of Agriculture? I

> mean, come on! And they don't keep track of that. The funny farm! And so there is no data; we are all winging it.

Luis is commenting on the fact that he would like to contact other programs like his to be able to have discussions about what is working or what is not working. His words seems to transpire a sense of resignation, a sense of unresisting acceptance of something inescapable that seems to make very little sense to him. His tone here seems jaded and cynical.

Gretchen commented about using the internet as a curriculum resource. She was asked to elaborate about why she thinks that she has to use the internet. Her response included her viewpoint about how the special education system works as a whole within the state. She quickly responded:

> Well, I think that it is a systemic issue. Maybe it's just the way that special education is run in the state. It just doesn't have priority, so it will always feel like we will be taking a couple steps backward, and then a step forward, and then a couple steps backward. I don't know specifically, but I think it's a systemic, foundational sort of problem.

Gretchen seems to be expressing that the special education system is set up in a way where doing what she is doing to produce curriculum is expected. There is an air of resignation in her commentary about having to go out, search for, and find the entire curriculum for her classes on her own. The most striking part of her comment is that she doesn't seem to think that the work she is doing is a priority to those in charge. Once again we see a comment suggestive of the

acceptance of something inescapable. Gretchen seemingly thinks that special education is simply managed this way by those in charge.

Ellie was asked about whether she likes the curriculum available to her, and whether her administrators or district have anything to say about it. She shares:

> Yeah, I like having everything, but I don't like being told what to use. I mean, I like being able to have a million different choices, yeah, but I will tell you that I will never use one curriculum no matter what—even if that student is a traditional learner, even then. I like having lots and lots of choices. The curricula that are out there are way more geared towards the classroom and efficiency model of educating mass students. I think that they have this idea of what a special needs student needs or what an emotionally disabled student needs. To me it's all malleable; none of it can be trusted 100 percent. It's all going to look different to each student.

Ellie is commenting on how the district sees curriculum as a way to educate her students as a mass group based on what a typical student in special education might need. Therefore, that is what is provided to her. I got a sense of frustration coming from her while she was responding. It seemed to stem from the fact that she and the district don't have matching philosophies about the role of curriculum in the class. For Ellie, the curriculum seems to only be a starting point for what she is going to do with her students.

"I feel bad for those kids; I feel like I am not doing my job. If they were in a regular setting, that wouldn't be happening to them, so then I feel bad; I feel like I am not doing them justice.": **Curriculum, student learning, efficacy, and the impact of fragmented curriculum on student learning**

A teacher's self-efficacy has been shown to be a powerful indicator of positive student outcomes (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). How a teacher feels about him- or herself has also been linked to the positive outlook that students have about school in general (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998).

Karen was asked to elaborate on how she thought her curriculum situation affected her students. She shares:

> I have no idea if they are successful. I don't know. The only thing that I can hope for is that…I am sort-of exposing them to different ways of learning. Hopefully, when they go back to the mainstream classroom they will have had the exposure [to curriculum] and will feel more comfortable with a mainstream teacher giving them the same type of work.

Her comment seems to be indicating at the fact that she has pulled all sorts of activities and assignments in the creation of the curriculum that she uses in her classroom and, therefore, hopes that her students have gained from that varied exposure.

Karen was also asked to comment about how she feels that her curriculum situation is affecting student outcomes:

> I feel bad for those kids; I feel like I am not doing my job. If they were in a regular setting, that wouldn't be happening to them, so then I feel bad; I feel like I am not doing them justice. They are not learning what they should be learning and it is up to me to make that right for them.

Karen is describing her disappointed feelings about the lack of curriculum. She seems to feel inadequate at fulfilling her role as a teacher. She is also making a comparison between her special education site and general education settings, where she seems to feel responsible for her students not getting the curriculum that is due to them and for the inequities that exist within the system.

May adds, "Oh my gosh, am I getting everything that I want to get across? Am I getting all of the material across to them? Am I doing it in the correct way?" Again, May's comments seem to depict self-questioning about whether what she is doing is enough for her students to learn. This type of self-questioning can affect efficacy beliefs. There seems to be an air of self-doubt in her commentary about whether she is doing enough, and doing the right thing for her students.

Luis adamantly adds, "Yeah, it affects the kids, sure!" He did not elaborate very much on how lack of curriculum affects his students, but did continue to talk about how it affects him. He explains:

My sense of self-efficacy, it really waxes and wanes based on how I choose to think about my job, and I am really trying to think that no matter what, if I can meet the kid where they are—that day, that hour, that minute—that is why I go to work.

Luis seems to know that his students are affected by the lack of curriculum, yet he returns with comments about how this is affecting him. In this case he even uses the term self-efficacy. He acknowledges that his thoughts about himself will affect his performance and the outcomes of his students.

Gretchen relates student success to Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) and vehemently comments:

> I think that I am a little harder on myself than maybe I need to be, because we make AYP in our program. We made it! Obviously we are doing something right and I need to remind myself of that. I think that the outcomes are positive for students because we are meeting AYP and we see little glimpses of success with these kids and the 'aha, I got it.' I've seen our kids do that, so obviously the curriculum and the implementing of the curriculum is working because we do see those results.

Gretchen is commenting on how the AYP results are proof that the implementation and selection of the curriculum that she has created are effective. This comment was the single positive comment she had during the interview about student outcomes.

According to Greg, his curriculum situation does not yield enough results. He adds:

> I don't think that students were benefiting as much as they could have, had they had better, more interesting curriculum. It probably affected their ability to learn and their ability to succeed because I didn't have a good set curriculum and I was trying out different things on them.

Greg also commented on some self-talk that he has with respect to how his curriculum situation affects his students:

> I think that in some cases, some of those days when I left, especially my first two years because I was working with a particularly rough group of kids, I think in the stress [of the job] what goes through my head is this shouldn't be happening. I would walk out and say, what did I do today? Did I even teach them anything today? What was I doing? Babysitting today?

In this case, Greg seems to think that his lack of good curriculum produces very little results for his students. He also self-questions about whether anything was accomplished during his day. In terms of efficacious beliefs, negative student performance will usually lead to some form of negative impact for the teacher (Bandura, 1986). That negative thought process can lead to very low self-efficacy because the emotional and physiological response a person experiences in teaching situations can add positively or negatively to views of competence (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 2006). In this case, Greg's self-efficacy beliefs are negative.

This chapter has presented the findings of the research through four themes: curriculum availability issues, curriculum availability and self-efficacy, special education structure and the efficacy of teachers, and finally curriculum, student learning and efficacy. These findings indicate that the teacher participants are negatively affected—on many levels—by the fragmented curriculum in their Federal Setting IV special education classrooms. The curriculum availability

issues experienced by these teachers prevent them from generating substantive content knowledge, thereby affecting their level of professional engagement. Additionally, it has been shown to create isolating experiences that cause the teachers to develop negative self-appraisals about themselves and their teaching capacities. These appraisals, in turn, affect their sense of positive self-efficacy, which has been shown to have an effect on student achievement. The next chapter will present a summary of these implications and a set of recommendations based on them.

Chapter 5

Conclusion and Recommendations

It became clear through the interviews that most of the teacher participants are deeply affected by the lack of curriculum at their sites. This lack of curriculum translated to feelings such as anxiety, frustration, resignation, and a general sense that they were overwhelmed. The negative impact on the efficacy of the teacher participants due to the lack of curriculum seems to be thwarting positive student outcomes. The data collected from the interviews has led me to believe that this issue can cause burnout, lower teacher retention, and possibly negative mental health issues for any teacher who sees him- or herself without the necessary tools to do their teaching job, including the opportunity to develop substantive content knowledge and the benefit of emotional support from administrative personnel.

Curriculum availability issues

There is little doubt that teachers need a good curriculum to do their job well. Teachers need that solid breadth of knowledge, that roadmap, to use as a springboard toward guiding student learning. The breadth of knowledge is essential in allowing teachers to maneuver and steer student learning (Gunter, Denny & Venn, 2000). Furthermore, teachers use curriculum as a basis for how supporting lesson differentiation, provide proper student scaffolding, and extend challenge opportunities (Brodesky, Parker, Murray & Katzman, 2002; Carlson, 1985). To have teachers without curriculum is to have them before a classroom without a necessary tool to start their job. Without this tool, the teacher

participants struggle more at being positive players in the school, and it becomes increasingly difficult to increase district-wide success of students. All of the above become integral when teaching students labeled with EBD in Federal Setting IV sites. In the reality of teaching students labeled as EBD there is no 'one-size fits all', which is why a referential curriculum is a key to being an effective teacher. All of the teacher participants who experienced fragmented curriculum at their schools or sites lack a starting point for engagement in the learning process with their students. According to Mosely, Huss and Utley (2006), a high sense of self-efficacy has been identified as one of the teacher dispositions associated with effective practice, professional engagement, and commitment to teaching. The current problem with curriculum for these teacher participants does not allow them to have that high level of professional engagement. The teacher participants are simply 'going through the motions' of teaching without having anything concrete to teach.

Teachers expect to have the necessary tools to do their job, including special education teachers. When the teacher participants did not receive what they expected to have—and legally speaking are supposed to be provided with—then there is a disconnect between those expectations and reality. There is of particular importance between teachers' expectations about curriculum and their efficacy expectancies; that is, how much they see themselves as being capable of doing their job. Teachers cannot be expected to walk into a classroom and simply make up the material that is to be taught. The availability of curriculum needs to be a priority for most of these programs. In the interview process, the teacher

participants acknowledge that they have voiced their concerns about curriculum. As mentioned in the previous chapter, the teachers seem to be told in response that they need to go out and find curriculum for themselves, which creates an extra responsibility for the teachers. According to Webb and Ashton (1987), who interviewed teachers, a number of factors contribute to lower teacher efficacy. These include an excessive role demand. That is to say, when teachers are asked to take on too much, it may lead to lower self-efficacy. Lack of curriculum is an excessive role demand placed on teachers as evidenced by their commentary in the previous chapter.

Curriculum availability and self-efficacy

Bandura (1997) explains that perceived self-efficacy is concerned with judgments of personal capability. On a daily basis, individuals access their own efficacy to go about their daily endeavors. Teachers are no exception. Special education teachers rely on their efficacious thoughts and beliefs in providing instruction to students labeled with EBD. Teachers' dependency on their self-efficacy in the realm of daily teaching is important because it enables them to make the most out of their capabilities (Bandura, 1986).

As evidenced by the teacher participants' comments, one can see that they perceive their personal teaching capabilities in a negative fashion. Their comments were indicative of a shared experience of a teaching environment that lacks curriculum and teaching resources, prevents them from developing their substantive content knowledge, and creates a space to develop negative appraisals and beliefs about their teaching capabilities. The teacher participants exhibited or

expressed resignation, self-doubt, frustration, a feeling of being overwhelmed, anxiety, and stress.

Accurate appraisal of one's abilities is essential in designing the best courses of action for teaching. Due to their fragmented curriculum situations, both the appraisal and the design processes are negative experiences for the teachers. Instead of being able to spend time getting comfortable with their material and generating pedagogical content knowledge (Mirel, 2011; Harris & Bain, 2011), the teacher participants have had to use their time to track down, find, copy, and digest curriculum that is at best incomplete in addressing the needs of their students. This has left then in a vulnerable position and has subjected them to an unnecessary emotional burden that has the ability to devastate their psychological well-beings.

Special education structure and the efficacy of teachers

Recently, there has been an emphasis in education on core content curriculum and standards. This has arisen over the past decade in response to various studies that have acknowledged that school-age children in America are out-performed by their peers in other countries. The emphasis on core content curriculum and standards has happened due to the sweeping legislative regulations of No Child Left Behind (NCLB), and IDEA. This legislation intended on having curriculum content shift away from simple rote teaching practices and toward the development of conceptual understanding. In the fall of 2004, IDEA was reauthorized through the legislative process. In this reauthorization, it was affirmed that public school districts had the responsibility

to ensure that students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum (IDEA, 2004; IDEA, 1997). The intersecting points of legislation and policy regarding both IDEA and NCLB have created intense pressure on school district officials and teachers to have systematic student achievement increases based on standardized testing. Given the broad influence of these reforms and the concurrent implications of policies mandating students with disabilities have access to the general education curriculum, these issues merit much inquiry (Jackson & Neel, 2006).

In the cases of the teacher participants, we see that the legislation regarding students with disabilities has yet to trickle down to specific programs, specifically, Federal Setting IV sites serving students labeled with EBD. The teacher participants' curriculum is either non-existent or fragmented; some teachers mention that they have some curriculum, while others mention that they have none. Traditionally, school districts and administrators have been responsible for providing curriculum and material for teachers to use within the classrooms. But in the interviews it was noted that teachers were instructed by school administrators to go out and get curriculum from other places in their respective districts. This practice may be due to the tendency that administrators—and districts in general—place a very small focus on the educating the exceptionalities within their districts. Special education seems not to be a priority to districts. The teacher participants commented upon how they felt being isolated. Administrators and school districts have very different perspectives on the goals and character of instruction of special education

teachers. Special education teachers are trained in using instructional strategies that are currently at odds with the underlying directive of legislation which places a focus on high stakes testing and content standards. This opposition might be a glimpse into why we see comments such as the ones made by the teacher participants. The lack of recognition of their curriculum situation by the administrators and district officials can be stifling the growth and development of teachers, as evidenced by the comments made by the teacher participants regarding how teachers are being treated. I contend that the teacher responses are indicative of having little to no support from the administration and school districts with regard to remedying the curriculum issue for the teacher participants. Therefore, it is essential for teachers, districts and administrators to communicate about having the same types of goals and outcomes for students under current legislation and teaching practices.

School administrators in Federal Setting IV sites need to evaluate the philosophy toward their special education programs. The schools need a clear focus about what their main roles and goals will be when it comes to educating students labeled with EBD. Re-evaluation of the roles and educational responsibilities they have to serve students labeled with EBD is a fundamental practice in deriving successful outcomes with this population of students.

Curriculum, student learning and efficacy

The intent of the special education setting is meant to support students, so that they can succeed in the general education curriculum. Students labeled with a disability are usually then set apart from their general education counterparts

(Sands, Adams & Stout, 1995). The separation of these two populations creates a massively unequal playing field where students in special education and teachers are no longer equipped or supported with the same resources as their general education counterparts. Students with a special education label tend to have diminished contact with the general education curriculum. As evidenced by the teacher participant interviews, they are feeling incredibly ill-equipped to provide a good education due to their lack of curriculum. Ethically, this should not be happening. According to Lane, Gresham and O'Shaughnessy (2002), "omitting instruction in the core curriculum [through reduced contact with the general education curriculum] not only violates a number of federal laws, but is also socially irresponsible" (p. 510). Students in special education as a population are in need of modified services and specialized instruction based on the general education curriculum. The teacher participants perceive a lack of success by their students due to a lack of curriculum. Success in neither area is happening, according to the teacher participants. Without exposure to the core curriculum, students labeled with a disability are more likely to experience academic failure. Furthermore, teachers who lack access to proper curriculum cannot positively support students academically. As the interviews show, the lack of curriculum creates internal turmoil for the teachers.

Recommendations

Based on the conclusions drawn from the teacher interviews, the following recommendations are proposed:

1. School administrators need to evaluate their programs' philosophies toward serving students labeled with EBD in Federal Setting IV sites.
2. School districts should address the inequalities in resources that currently plague the Federal Setting IV special education setting.
3. School districts should increase access to the general education curriculum and other teaching resources for special education teachers in Federal Setting IV sites. The increased access should focus on implementing functional curriculum that addresses the needs of students labeled with EBD.
4. School administrators should support teachers of students labeled with EBD in Federal Setting IV sites in addressing professional development areas that help develop positive self-efficacy: skills training, exploration of self-knowledge, modeling, role-playing and observational learning.
5. Scholars and action-researchers should conduct follow-up research on teacher self-efficacy, specifically of teachers of students labeled with EBD in Federal Setting IV sites.

By following these recommendations, Federal Setting IV sites would provide focused attention and a clearer direction toward meeting the needs of both its special education teachers and its students labeled with EBD. In addressing the issues presented above, administrators and teachers can work together to balance the disparity in curriculum availability and the negative effects that it produces. These recommendations provide a step in the direction of best practice to foster

the growth of great teachers in Federal Setting IV sites, and to raise the educational achievement of their students labeled with EBD.

Chapter 6

Self Reflection

The purpose of this chapter is to look at what it means to me to become a critical educator and to revisit the development of my thinking and pedagogy.

I have come to realize that I have had this research topic rumbling in my head since 2006 and it is now 2011. I still think about the start of my journey, when I first came to Augsburg as a graduate student in the fall of 2004. I remember asking myself several times, over and over, whether I 'really' wanted to do this...whether I was ready to tackle classes part-time, work-full time and in the end write a thesis. At that time, I still had no clue what 'write a thesis' really meant.

This action research thesis for me would be the culmination of a process leading to a new beginning in becoming a critical educator. It meant, letting go of being just a student and moving into a maturity of critical engagement with my own learning, on my own. Nobody telling me when and what to do or how many pages things need to be. In using the word critical I don't just mean being analytical, I also mean reflective. I recognize now that this action research process was about entering the ranks of those reflective teacher researchers that learn how to think about classroom events so that in the end, things might be better for themselves, their colleagues and their students. In giving conscious thought to my topic and opening up my internal thinking and inquiry to examination and testing with the ideas of others, I want to make two statements.

First, I want to acknowledge that my 'discoveries' or 'findings' are subjective to my learning and my capacity to step outside my personal given norm. Furthermore, I would also acknowledge that in beginning to ask questions about a particular subject, one first has to think that something is not right. Be it by influence or exposure to ideas from others, my questions about my topic have become pertinent and real enough for me to delve into this project in hopes of some understanding.

This action research thesis was all about prodding and probing and not actually being sure of what I was going to find in my participants as well as in myself. The one thing that was certain was that I would learn something about how emotions affected my practice and the practice of fellow teachers with whom I have worked, and those where I currently work. In the beginning I knew that I wanted special education teachers' trials and tribulations to be heard. I wanted them to have space to tell their 'inner' stories. I wanted their voices to be heard through mine. I chose to take on this action research after I had become one of the teachers I wanted to study. So in a sense, I was researching some of my own feelings and my own thoughts. I wanted to know what teachers thought about themselves as they interacted with curriculum in Federal Setting IV sites for students labeled with EBD. Furthermore, I wanted to know if my emotional strife matched theirs.

I had always felt that there was an emotional undercurrent in dealing with students that were labeled with EBD. It takes a lot to work with students who need so much. It takes a giving person to try to provide students with the best

everything, all around. This is generally true of all teachers, not just those who teach in the special education field. What did teachers feel when trying to educate students who assaulted other students? How did teachers cope with nonverbal students? How did teachers make curricular decisions to engage students who self-isolate? These are the types of questions I wanted to answer because to me, emotions are a biological truth of the human experience…the affective side of teaching being an interplay between how we feel, think, and act when we are teaching.

What I found is that all teachers are feeling frustrated, tired, unsure of themselves, and incredibly lonely. These teachers communicated that they feel fear, pain, compassion, angst, and resignation all rolled into one when they are in the classroom. They are human, but are not seen or treated as such. They feel completely abandoned at times. These teachers didn't feel as though they were being heard. These were all things that I had felt before. I was determined to let as many people as possible know that teachers' emotions and the efficacy beliefs developed due to the day-to-day grind have an effect and take their toll.

I am grateful for choosing a topic such as self-efficacy because the view that a teacher has about him or herself can be one of the most important determiners in the quality of education that is delivered in a classroom. Areas that deal with feelings and emotions can seem vague, flighty and erratic at times. I felt that if I could shed some light on this area, I could get people to recognize—and become more mindful of—their thoughts and emotions about themselves and their teaching practice. I wanted to do this because emotions and self-appraisal

drive attention and help create meaning and context for our experience. All of the educators—both general and special education teachers—that I have spoken to about my topic seem to do a small type of reflecting of their own efficacy beliefs from time to time. No matter how brief or long our conversation is, they seem to take inventory of how they feel about themselves in their current situation. I truly love that one question can have such an immediate impact on people. One simple comment about how they are feeling can stop them in their tracks and provide them with a space for intense reflection. This lets me know that so much is at stake here, yet almost invisible. So much is constantly going on within us that we do not think about, both physically and emotionally. That emotion and how we feel about ourselves are processes which are constantly changing in the background of our consciousness, always influencing decisions and actions that we make for ourselves and our students.

For myself, this research has helped me become more mindful about my emotions. It has taught me not just to reflect upon my practice in making classroom adjustments, but has also caused me to pay attention to my emotions, and the root of them. I have come to understand, through this research, that my mindset about myself was not fixed, but I always thought that it was. I believed that we were all born with a certain lot in life and that we had to do the best with what we were given. This is what author Carol Dweck (2006) would describe as two meanings for ability: one that is unchangeable and static, and one that can be developed through learning. The odd part about this fixed mindset is that I was constantly bucking it. I would never back down from any challenge, yet my

emotions made challenges incredibly uncomfortable. I believe that the thesis process has allowed me to develop out of my fixed emotional mindset into one where I know that learning, education and practice will breed success.

I have also begun to prod and ask about the emotional state and the mindset of my students and my fellow instructors. I now teach with emotions in mind and the idea that social-emotional education can sometimes be as important—or more important—for teachers and students alike. Therefore, I am doing things for myself and my students that engage our emotions as part of my teaching and their learning. I am asking them to check in with themselves about how they feel or what they think about their abilities at school. I have also begun to check in with my fellow teachers about how they are feeling and offer space and an ear for them to talk. I try to guide as best I can and influence those around me in a positive manner, so that we can continue to feel competent about walking into the classroom on a daily basis. Far from just being an afterthought, emotions are a form of learning: emotional intelligence, for example. Detailed attention to this intelligence has helped me build relationships with my students and has helped me guide them.

This practice has also given me insight into how our mindset and emotions are powerful forces in our minds that we have to be very aware of, so that in the end we can reflect about how we would like to be successful and which mindset and emotional state can take us there.

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