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**PERCEPTIONS OF EFFECTIVE PEDAGOGICAL PRACTICES
AND CLASSROOM MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES: A CROSS-CASE
ANALYSIS OF FOUR MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS**

by

Igor Gusyakov, B.A., M.Ed.

Presented to the Faculty of the Graduate School of

Stephen F. Austin State University

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For the Degree of

Doctor of Education

STEPHEN F. AUSTIN STATE UNIVERSITY
(May 2017)

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by

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ABSTRACT

This study sought to identify and describe the pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies of consistently effective and successful teachers as evidenced by teacher perceptions and observations.

Four middle school teachers from two middle schools within the same school district were selected to participate in the study. The teachers were selected based on their effectiveness identified by their supervisor. The teachers were interviewed about their own perceptions as to what effective pedagogical practices are, based on their teaching experience. The teachers were also observed in their classrooms.

The key findings of the study indicated the importance of establishing classroom procedures, consistency in their implementation, and building genuine trusting relationships with students. Also, teacher effectiveness does not directly depend on such external factors as administrative assistance or professional development opportunities, unless the professional development opportunities include collaboration with colleagues.

The findings of the study can be used to improve instruction on the classroom level in order to increase student achievement in the age of accountability and high stakes testing. In addition, the findings can be used by school and district administrators for planning teacher professional development opportunities.

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to:

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CHAPTER I

Introduction to the Study

Background of the Problem

Public school teaching is one of the most common jobs in America, being the primary occupation for 3.1 million educators (NCES, 2016a). With such a high demand for the profession, “Total expenditures for public elementary and secondary schools in the United States amounted to \$621 billion in 2011–12, or \$12,401 per public school student enrolled in the fall” (NCES, 2016b).

Consequently, Staiger and Rockoff (2010) explained:

Teaching may be the most-scrutinized occupation in the economy. Over the past four decades, empirical researchers—many of them economists—have accumulated an impressive amount of evidence on teachers: the heterogeneity in teacher productivity, the rise in productivity associated with teaching credentials and on-the-job experience, rates of turnover, the costs of recruitment, the relationship between supply and quality, the effect of class size and the monetary value of academic achievement gains over a student's lifetime. Since the passage of the *No Child Left Behind* Act, along with a number of state-level educational

initiatives, the data needed to estimate individual teacher performance based on student achievement gains have become more widely available. (p. 97)

According to the most recent data available from the National Center for Education Statistics, in 2013 the national drop-out rate was at 7 percent (NCES, 2016c). This means that every year approximately \$44 billion spent on education are used ineffectively. In order to put these numbers in perspective, according to the *World Factbook* from the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), what the U.S. spends on education is the equivalent of the national budget of Brazil or three national budgets of Russia, however, what we use ineffectively is the equivalent of the national budget of Chile (CIA, 2016).

Staiger and Rockoff (2010) discovered

. . . large differences in student achievement in different teachers' classrooms, even after controlling for students' prior achievement and characteristics. [Sic] Especially following the *No Child Left Behind* Act, many states and school districts began collecting annual data on students and matching it to teachers. Research has produced remarkably consistent estimates of the heterogeneity in teacher impacts in different sites. (p. 99)

Thus, according to the study conducted by Rivkin, Hanushek, and Kain (2005), “Teachers and therefore schools matter importantly for student achievement” (p. 449). In addition, their research “analysis identifie[d] large differences in the quality of instruction in a way that rules out the possibility that the observed differences are driven by family factors” (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005, p. 449). This data suggests that it is possible

to close the achievement gap among public school students by raising teacher quality, without using family background as an excuse for poor school performance. The reason for poor performance of many disadvantaged students, however, is that “low income and minority students face higher teacher turnover and tend to be taught more frequently by beginning teacher” (Rivkin, Hanushek, & Kain, 2005, p. 449). This is another reason why raising teacher effectiveness is crucial for increasing student performance.

In the broad spectrum of Texas public schools, we can find the schools that are high achieving, despite the fact that they are serving high percentage of economically disadvantaged students, e.g. KIPP Houston High School (TEA, 2015a). Other schools, however, have low levels of student achievement. Thus, according to the Texas Education Agency, there are as many as 610 Improvement Required (IR) Texas public school campuses out of 8,646 campuses in total (TEA, 2015b). Each school, however, regardless of its rating, has individual educators, or groups of educators, who successfully and consistently help students achieve academically, disregarding their students’ racial or socio-economic stigma. There are also educators, on both IR and non-IR campuses, who keep struggling in trying to find the teaching style that would be effective for both themselves and for their students.

Connelly, He, and Phillion (2008) assured that school failure is not a student problem, but rather a problem of schools and teachers within those schools who are unable to teach the students assigned to them (p. 213). This phenomenon persists despite the increasing number of teacher preparation programs available in the state of Texas,

countless hours of professional development opportunities, department collaborations, district initiatives, and teacher-proof commercial curriculum products.

Richardson (2013) stressed that “To ensure that every child gets a high-quality education, we must ensure that every child has highly effective teachers” (p. 4). Stronge (2002) pointed out that “A major educational debate today concerns how to recruit and prepare teachers [sic] who can maintain excellent instructional programs that increase student achievement” (p. 3). In addition to traditional preservice teacher preparation programs, “Alternative programs for recruiting and preparing teachers [sic] from different types of [sic] backgrounds” (Stronge, 2002, p. 3) have become rather ubiquitous.

Statement of the Problem

School districts spend considerable portions of their annual budgets in order to improve their student achievement ratings by purchasing new initiatives from commercial educational companies, by providing more competitive compensations schedules, and by implementing rigorous hiring procedures. However, whether or not all these efforts are actually effective depends on each individual teacher in the classroom.

Differences in pedagogical practices and classroom management techniques cause differences in student success. Each teacher, unwillingly or purposefully, create enacted curriculum, i.e. what is actually taught explicitly or implicitly (Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2008, p. 352). He or she modifies and projects onto students the district initiatives and curriculum through their own personal and pedagogical prism that fits their own teaching styles as well as students’ needs, thus producing the achieved curriculum that differs from

the intended curriculum (Connelly, He, & Phillion, 2008, p. 352). How much of this “freedom” and modification actually influences public school student achievement? What do successful teachers do that their less successful colleagues do not do? The problem this study addressed is quality of teacher effectiveness in helping students succeed academically in the age of accountability and standardized testing.

Purpose Statement and Research Questions

The purpose of this research was to identify and describe the pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies of consistently effective and successful teachers as evidenced by teacher perceptions and classroom observations. Research suggests that there are multiple school variables that influence student achievement, including class size, school size, and teacher experience and qualifications (Darling-Hammond, 2000).

The following research question guided the study:

What pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies do teachers consider as effective or ineffective in securing students’ high academic performance in student assessment?

Significance of the Research

The significance of this research is two-faceted. One facet of the issue is accountability. Sims (2012) noted: “Many school accountability programs are built on the premise that the sanctions attached to failure will produce higher future student achievement” (p. 262). This premise has been substantiated by studies suggesting that “both self-adopted state accountability regimes and those implemented to meet the

federal mandate of *No Child Left Behind* have led to test score improvements for at least some groups of students” (Sims, 2012, p. 262). Stonge (2002) indicated that with “a stronger focus on accountability and on careful analysis of variables affecting educational outcomes, the teacher has proven time again to be the most influential school-related force in student achievement” (p. viii).

Another facet of the issue, however, is immeasurable in terms of money, merits, or ratings. Stronge (2002) pointed out:

Teachers have a powerful, long-lasting influence on their students. They directly affect how students learn, what they learn, how much they learn, and the ways they interact with one another and the world around them. Considering the degree of the teacher’s influence, it is important to understand what teachers should do to promote positive results in the lives of students—with regard to school achievement, positive attitude toward school, interest in learning, and other desirable outcomes. This understanding should be based both on what experts and stakeholders think teachers should do and on what educational research has shown to be significant in the preparation and practice of effective teachers. (p. vii)

Teachers, school administrators, and teacher preparation programs are in a constant search of effective pedagogical practices that would increase student achievement in standardized tests and improve discipline management. The results of this research will be of interest to four levels of educators.

First, the results can be used by school district administrators in teacher hiring process. Teachers that have certain natural and/or professional dispositions and/or acquired skills identified by this research may be sought after more than those teachers who do not possess such dispositions and skills.

Second, the results of the research can be used by school administrators for professional development purposes. Developing the teacher qualities and pedagogical techniques that are proven to work is of utmost interest for principals and other administrators who are involved in teacher professional development.

Third, the results of the research can be used by classroom teachers. Teachers are the ones who have direct contact with students and, ultimately, they have the final word in how they teach and what drives their pedagogical decisions.

Fourth, the results of this research can be used by educators in teacher preparation and educational leadership development programs. Filling such programs with practical and research-based content on teacher effectiveness can ensure that the educators who are coming to public education are better equipped to help their students be more academically successful.

Definitions

In order to ensure a common understanding of key terms and terminology between the author of the dissertation and the audience, it is essential to define important terms that are used throughout the dissertation. The need arises from the fact that the same terms may carry a different connotation for a reader with a different educational and/or cultural background. Also, Goes and Simon (2015) noted “Definitions of specific

concepts and terminology should be grounded (whenever possible) by peer-reviewed sources that support the definition. This helps [sic] to rationalize terminology and understanding, and connects your language to common usage of terminology within the field” (para. 6).

Academic success.

Academic success in this study is defined as students receiving: (a) Passing grades throughout school year, and (b) Passing grades on standardized achievement tests (Finn & Rock, 1997, p. 221).

At-risk students.

The term “at-risk student” indicates whether a student is currently identified as at-risk of dropping out of school using state-defined criteria. The criteria include such factors as maintaining an average equivalent to 70 on a scale of 100 in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum during a semester in the preceding or current school year or not maintaining such an average in two or more subjects in the foundation curriculum in the current semester, not advancing from one academic year to another for one or more school years, being pregnant or being a parent, being a student of limited English proficiency, etc (TEA, 2017a).

Classroom management.

Classroom management is the wide variety of skills and techniques that teachers use to keep students organized, orderly, focused, attentive, on task, and academically productive during a class (GER, 2014, para. 1).

Classroom teacher.

Classroom teacher means an educator who is employed by a school district and who, not less than an average of four hours each day, teaches in an academic instructional setting or a career and technology instructional setting. The term does not include a teacher's aide or a full-time administrator (TEC, Ch. 5, Sec. 5001).

Economically disadvantaged student.

An economically disadvantaged student is defined as one who is eligible for free or reduced-price meals under the National School Lunch and Child Nutrition Program (TEA, 2017b, para. 5).

Limited English proficient (English language learner).

A student is classified as limited English proficient when: (1) A language other than English is used as the primary language in the home; and (2) The student's English language proficiency is determined to be limited by a Language Proficiency Assessment Committee (LPAC) or as indicated by a test of English proficiency (TEA, 2017c, para. 10).

Pedagogical practices.

Pedagogical practices are the teachers' use of a variety of tasks representing traditional, or any deviations from traditional, including innovative didactic practices (Körös-Mikis, 2001).

Standardized test.

Standardized test is any form of test that (1) requires all test takers to answer the same questions, or a selection of questions from common bank of questions, in the same

way, and that (2) is scored in a “standard” or consistent manner, which makes it possible to compare the relative performance of individual students or groups of students (GER, 2015a, para. 1).

Student assessment data.

Student assessment data is the information collected via a wide variety of methods or tools that educators use to evaluate, measure, and document the academic readiness, learning progress, skill acquisition, or educational needs of students (GER, 2015b, para. 1).

State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness (STAAR).

STAAR is the acronym for The State of Texas Assessments of Academic Readiness. STAAR is a standardized assessment program which was implemented in spring of 2012 and includes annual assessments for reading and mathematics in grades 3–8, writing at grades 4 and 7, science at grades 5 and 8, social studies at grade 8, and end-of-course (EOC) assessments for English I, English II, Algebra I, biology and U.S history (TEA, 2016).

Team teaching.

Team teaching is a type of instructional pattern in which two or more teachers pool their expertise, interests, knowledge, and available resources and take joint responsibility for meeting a significant part of the instructional needs of the same group of students (Moore, 2001, p. 15).

Assumptions

Among the assumptions for this study, the most significant one was that the participants were truthful and honest in their responses. It is essential that teachers describe what they actually do in the classroom and substantiate why they do it as opposed to what they think they should say, what they think the researcher wants to hear, or what they think will make them look good.

Another assumption of the study was that the principals who recommended the candidates had a pool of teachers big enough to choose from. In addition, the assumption was that the recommended teachers were truly effective and would be valuable for the study.

Limitations and Delimitations

The interview data collected from the participants are based on the assumption that the answers provided are accurate, truthful, and honest. Interviews were used as one of the sources of data collection.

Another source of data collection in this study were direct classroom observations. One of the limitations of this method of data collection is that physical presence of the researcher in the classroom could have influenced the way the teachers taught and interacted with their students. It may have also influenced students' overall behavior and reaction to the teacher's instruction. Thus, Neuman (2011) explained that the observer's presence, "[sic] may even create some harm by disturbing the participants or the location by disrupting the ongoing activities" (p. 150).

The participant selection process can also be considered as one of the limitations of the study. Although the researcher provided the principals with the desired criteria for the participants, the final decision was made by the principal. The possibility is that a different individual in the principal's capacity may have chosen a different set of educators.

Another limitation is the number of cases. As it is described in the *Methodology* chapter of this dissertation, the optimal number of cases per multicase study research is 4 to 15 (Stake, 2006, pp. 22-23). The more cases the better it is for understanding the concept that is being studied, however considering the fact that only one researcher was involved in the study, the number of cases that have been selected for the study was four, which is within the range of the number of cases recommended by peer reviewed literature. Each teacher was interviewed separately, therefore, if each teacher is considered to be a case unit, then that sample of four teachers satisfies the requirements for a reliable multicase study.

In addition, the participants were selected based on individual teachers' willingness to become involved and collaborate with the research. Therefore, the researcher utilized convenience sample as type of non-probability sampling method.

Also, the qualitative data gathered from the interviews were subjective, limited to the participants' perspectives, and the geographic and cultural location of the district. Thus it is difficult to generalize the findings of this research to other schools in other parts of the country or other parts of the world.

Summary

Chapter I presented the background of the problem of teacher effectiveness. It also formulated the problem and purpose statements of the study and its significance. Knowing the factors that influence teacher effectiveness and being able to use this knowledge in teacher training and teacher hiring processes is essential for schools to be able to provide high quality education to students and meet their individual needs. The research question provided a guideline for the researcher to stay focused on identified issues. The definitions provided in this chapter ensured clarity of the specific terms used through this proposal paper. Finally, the assumptions, limitations, and delimitations indicated the boundaries within which the research has been conducted.

Organization of the Study

Chapter II familiarizes the reader with the opinions available in modern literature concerning teacher effectiveness. Among the topics covered in Chapter II are such factors that influence teacher effectiveness as teacher's mastery of content knowledge, teaching and lesson delivery strategies, teaching to the test, teacher's experience, teacher's education, teacher's certification, professional development opportunities, discipline management strategies, relationships with colleagues, parents, and administrators, and the challenges and the needs of students from generational poverty.

Chapter III describes the method that was used by the researcher in order to assess teacher effectiveness of the participating educators. Based on the nature of the research question, the researcher will advocate for a multicase study as a research method for the proposed research. Chapter III will provide an overview of what case study research is in

general. Then, it will describe in detail the peculiarities of multicase research, its primary data collection sources, ways of ensuring validity and reliability of multicase research, ways to analyze collected data, and discuss the role of the researcher in this particular study.

Chapter IV describes the peculiarities of the participating district. It will also provide the introductory information on each of the four participants of the study. The participants' introductory information will include such aspects as their education, values and beliefs concerning teaching, years of professional experience, etc.

Chapters V, VI, VII, and VIII describe pedagogical practices, classroom management strategies, and other pertinent information of each of the four individual participant. In each chapter, upon analysis through coding, the following themes were identified: Advice for teachers, relationships with students, importance of students' names, parental involvement, students' potential, differentiation and learning styles, use of technology, teaching to the test, providing additional help to students, the Fundamental Five lesson framework, classroom management, work environment, collaboration with colleagues, professional development opportunities, and working overtime.

Chapter IX provides a cross-analysis of the four cases described in Chapters V, VI, VII, and VIII. Similar themes from each chapter were compared and presented in concise form.

Chapter X summarizes the study. It also provides conclusions in regard to effective classroom instructional practices, discipline management strategies, and other factors that influence teacher effectiveness. Based on the conclusions, implications for

practice are discussed. In conclusion of the chapter, recommendations for practice and future research are shared.

CHAPTER II

Review of Literature

Introduction

It has to be noted that the structure and the content of this chapter is of inductive nature. This literature review started as a compilation of the literature available on teacher effectiveness. It influenced the questions that the participants were asked during interviews and the things that the researcher was looking for during field observations. However, the final version of this literature review was not completed until the analysis of all the four cases were finalized. In the process of data analysis, sections of this literature review were added, edited, and eliminated based on the findings. Therefore, the current version of this chapter is the reflection of the findings of this study on teacher effectiveness.

Stronge (2002) stated that “*Effectiveness* is an elusive concept when we consider the complex task of teaching” (p. vii). Steele (2010) confirmed that “The question of what makes an effective teacher has no clear answer. Each teacher brings with him or her certain natural traits as well as learned behaviors and characteristics” (p. 71). For example, “Some researchers define teacher effectiveness in terms of student achievement. Others focus on high performance ratings from supervisors. Still others rely on

comments from students, administrators, and other interested stakeholders” (Stronge, 2002, pp. vii-viii).

The ultimate list of pedagogical practices that claim to have the final word in quality of teaching does not exist (Effective Pedagogy, 2004). Steele (2010) noted that “The characteristics of effective teachers have been extensively discussed, making the compilation of a comprehensive list of traits very difficult. For every good teacher there is a unique list of personal characteristics; however, there are some that frequently recur” (p. 71).

Multiple authors define a number of important variables that influence teacher effectiveness in the classroom. Such variables include but are not limited to teacher’s knowledge of content, availability of instructional resources, years of teaching experience, lesson delivery, student engagement, teacher collaboration (Professional Learning Communities or PLCs), level of education and certification status, professional development opportunities, teacher efficacy and self-concept, good verbal and non-verbal communication skills, state policies, and classroom management strategies (Darling-Hammond, 2010; Flores, 2013; Hess, 1969; Jones, 2014; MacLeod & Napoles, 2015; Steele (2010); Tournaki, Lyublinskaya, & Carolan, 2009). Additionally, “[sic] individuals with demonstrated leadership and organizational ability, evidence of critical thinking skills, respect for diversity, superior interpersonal skills, and a desire to work hard” (Predicting effective teachers, 2011, p. 6) also proved to be effective educators.

There is yet another aspect to teacher effectiveness. Thus, Moore (2001) suggested that, “[sic] different teachers are effective under different circumstances. For

example, a teacher might be quite effective at the elementary level but quite ineffective at the secondary level, or vice versa” (p. 8). For example,

At the secondary level, adolescents are going through puberty. They experience a spurt in growth patterns and are maturing sexually. These changes can lead to an exaggerated concern about appearance and size. Socially, adolescents try to achieve independence from the family and often become greatly influenced by peer groups and overly involved in extracurricular activities. [Sic] Thus, adolescent students need teachers who can model and help them acquire complex physical, social, emotional, and cognitive skills. What is needed is a combination subject matter expert, counselor, social psychologist, mental health worker, and youth group worker.

In contrast, students at the elementary level, particularly in the primary grades, are still quite dependent and need teachers who can display and provide affection and act as surrogate parents. As a result, of these developmental differences, vastly different skills are needed to work effectively with elementary and secondary students. (Moore, 2001, p. 9)

Glatthorn, Boschee, Whitehead, and Boschee (2012) stressed that “[sic] specific indicators of effective teaching do exist to a greater degree in classrooms with high overall student achievement versus classrooms with low overall student achievement. [Sic] [I]t is important that effective teaching be maximized for each student” (p. 374). Specifically, in Homan’s research (as cited in Glatthorn et al., 2012, p. 374), which studied fifth grade teachers whose students always scored consistently higher on

standardized tests and the fifth grade teachers whose students scored consistently below expectations on the same tests, it was established that “re-teaching” and teachers’ positive self-concept made no difference in student achievement, whereas such factors as instructional planning, instructional techniques, providing feedback, communicating expectations, managing behavior, and maximizing instructional time made the greatest difference in students’ scores.

Also, according to the Department of Education and Early Childhood Development in Victoria, Australia (Effective Pedagogy, 2004), students learn best when:

1. The learning environment is supportive and productive;
2. The learning environment promotes independence, interdependence and self-motivation;
3. Students’ needs, backgrounds, perspectives and interests are reflected in the learning program;
4. Students are challenged and supported to develop deep levels of thinking and application;
5. Assessment practices are an integral part of learning and teaching; and
6. Learning connects strongly with communities and practice beyond the classroom.

(p. 9)

Slater, Davies, and Burges (2012) explained that “family background is not everything. The same student [sic] can systematically score significantly different marks in different subjects given different teacher quality” (p. 644). Sanders and Rivers (1996) claimed that “the single most dominant factor affecting student academic gain is teacher

effect” (p. 6). In addition, research has shown that teacher effectiveness has a cumulative effect, i.e. “students benefiting from regular yearly assignment to more effective teachers [sic] have an extreme advantage in terms of attaining higher levels of achievement” (Sanders & Rivers, 1996, p. 6).

The remainder of the literature review will focus on the major variables of teacher effectiveness. As indicated earlier in this chapter, multiple researchers defined certain variables to be important in influencing student academic achievement as evidenced by student scores.

Content Knowledge

Every teacher, at least once in their career, has heard the following phrase from a student “You are the teacher. Aren’t you supposed to know everything?” This is especially true, if the conversation preceding this comment was related to the content area in which the teacher specializes. “Strong content knowledge consistently has been identified as an essential element among those who study effective teaching” (Stronge, 2002, p. 8).

It is logical to think that an effective teacher would know their content well. Eventually, you cannot teach something that you do not know. Stronge (2002) explained that

Teachers with subject matter knowledge are better able to go beyond the basic textbook content and involve students in meaningful discussions and student-directed activities. [Sic] Additionally, a strong background in content and subject matter assists teachers in planning and organizing lessons that are sequential

and interactive. (p. 8)

Therefore, in order for teachers to employ their pedagogical skills and teach effectively, they need to know the content (Ayvazo, Ward, & Stuhr, 2010, p. 40). Specifically, “Using their knowledge of pedagogy, of their students, and of curricular materials, teachers transform CK [content knowledge] into teaching that facilitates student learning” (Ayvazo, Ward, & Stuhr, 2010, p. 40). Thus, Stronge (2002) suggested that “[sic] the definition of subject matter expertise must include the ability to convey and teach the content to others, as well as having an acute awareness of the concepts and ideas being taught” (p. 8).

However, while “transforming” knowledge in order to deliver it to students, teachers present it to students in a “pre-packaged,” “polished,” “compressed” and convenient form. Cohen (2008) warned us that this “finished material often nicely represents teachers’ intellectual accomplishments, but it usually is quite remote from learners’ tentative and often puzzling formulations (p. 359). Consequently, “Because they do not unpack knowledge, teachers who work in this way limit the routes by which students gain access to it and the paths they can find through it” (Cohen, 2008, p. 359).

Cohen (2008) identified another aspect of content knowledge of importance:

Knowledge is not a neutral material that teachers transmit. It must be construed somehow to be taught or learned, and teachers construe it in radically different ways. Some treat it as though it was established, objective facts and procedures, while others treat knowledge as though it was contested and constructed. Such

differences have an enormous influence on the material teachers launch toward learner. (p. 364)

So, what is the relationship between teachers' content knowledge and their effectiveness? The research is not unanimous in this matter. Some research shows that "teachers (particularly in the areas of mathematics and science) who have majored or minored in the subject area they teach, attain better achievement results with their students than the teachers without background in their subject areas" (Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004, p. 10). Additionally, Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman (2004) argued that because "people tend to study a topic in which they are interested in greater depth, those with a greater content knowledge tend to be more enthusiastic about their subject, and they can better engage the learner during the presentation of the lesson" (p. 11).

According to multiple other studies, however, it has been found that teachers' scores on the subject matter tests of the National Teacher Examinations (NTE) have no consistent relationship between the measure of subject matter knowledge and teacher performance (Andrews, Blackmon & Mackey, 1980; Ayers & Qualls, 1979; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haney, Madaus, & Kreitzer, 1986; Summers & Wolfe, 1975; Quirk, Witten, & Weinberg, 1973). Stronge (2002) concluded that "Clearly, subject matter knowledge positively affects teaching performance, however, it is not sufficient in or of itself" (p. 8). Additionally, it has been demonstrated that "Teacher training programs that emphasize content knowledge acquisition and neglect pedagogical coursework are less effective in preparing prospective teachers to teach today's students than programs that offer both content and pedagogical knowledge" (Stronge, 2002, p. 8).

Pedagogical Strategies and Lesson Delivery

Teaching a lesson and providing information are not synonymous concepts, as some may believe. Of course, “Information constitutes the foundation for learning and thinking. Without information we can’t think, make decisions, solve problems, or be creative. Once we have adequate information, we can proceed to build concepts, develop generalizations and do higher level thinking” (Hunter, 1984, p. 33). However, “There are many ways to acquire information and *there is no one best way*” (Hunter, 1984, p. 33).

How a teacher delivers information and how that information is used by a student is a part of lesson delivery process. “To really [sic] understand something requires artful instruction on the part of the teacher and active learning on the part of the learner” (Feden & Vogel, 2003, p. 111). Lesson delivery is an extremely important element of effective teaching (McLeod & Napoles, 2015, p. 34). Vieluf, Kaplan, Kleime and Bayer (2012) noted that “High quality instruction is often defined by the use of a variety of classroom teaching practices allowing for both teacher-directed and self-regulated learning” (p. 16). In addition, “Effective teachers implement routines, models, strategies, and carefully constructed approaches to scaffold student learning (Silva Mangiante, 2011, p. 57). For effective teaching to take place in the classroom, it is important for teachers to maintain balance between enhanced activities and content, student-oriented supportive practices, and teacher-directed practices that provide structure and clarity (Vieluf et al., 2012, p. 16).

Direct and indirect instruction.

Petrina (in press) noted that “Instructional strategies, or teaching methods, depend on a number of factors such as the developmental level of students, goals, intent and objectives of the teacher, content, and environment including time, physical setting and resources” (p. 127). Particularly, Petrina (in press) identified four models of instructional strategies:

1. Didactic: Refers to direct teaching. It is typically verbal instruction in the form of a lecture or presentation.
2. Modeling: Refers to direct teaching as well. However, it is visual and typically in the form of demonstration and practice.
3. Managerial: Refers to indirect or interactive teaching. This type of instruction is characterized by facilitation, individualization of instruction and group management.
4. Dialogic: Refers to indirect interactive teaching. It is characterized by the Socratic technique of dialogue, questions, and thought provocations.

Petrina (in press) went on to explain:

In the *Direct Instruction* models, the teacher imparts knowledge or demonstrates a skill. In the *Indirect Instruction* models, the teacher sets up strategies, but does not teach directly; the students make meaning for themselves. In the *Interactive Instruction* models, the students interact with each other and with the information and materials; the teacher is organizer and facilitator. (p. 127)

The choice of which lesson delivery method to choose, depends on the lesson objectives. “Direct instruction strategies are best suited for the teaching of facts, rules, and action sequences, [sic] [whereas] indirect instruction strategies are best suited for teaching concepts, patterns, and abstractions” (Borich, 1996, p. 291).

More specifically,

Indirect means that the learner acquires a behavior indirectly by transforming—or constructing—the stimulus material into a meaningful response or behavior [sic].

There is rarely a single, best answer when using indirect model of instruction.

Instead, the learner is guided to an answer that goes beyond the problem or content presented.

Indirect instruction would be inefficient for teaching facts, rules, or action sequences because the desired response is almost identical to the stimulus material and no new constructions or meanings are necessary. (Borich, 1996, p. 292)

According to Feden and Vogel (2003), “Marzano, Gaddy, and Dean (2000) authored a comprehensive study of what works in classroom instruction” (p. 112). As a result of their findings, they identified nine instructional strategies that strongly affect student achievement, which included: Identifying similarities and differences, summarizing and note taking, reinforcing effort and providing recognition, homework and practice, nonlinguistic representations, cooperative learning, setting goals and providing feedback, generating and testing hypotheses, and activating prior knowledge. (Feden & Vogel, 2003, pp. 112-113).

Additionally, Glasgow and Hicks (2003) recommended “[sic] the systematic use of a few additional teaching methods that overlap learning styles and contribute to the needs of all students” (p. 65). Particularly, they suggested “[sic] giving students experience with problems before giving them the tools to solve them, balancing concrete with conceptual information, liberally using graphic presentations, physical analogies, and demonstrations, and showing students how concepts are connected within and between subjects and to everyday life experience” (Glasgow & Hicks, 2003, p. 65).

Teaching to the test.

The introduction of standardized testing in the 1970s and the implementation of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) in 2001 added a new aspect to teaching (Feden & Vogel, 2003; Jennings & Bearak, 2014; Phelps, 2016). It may have even redefined what an effective teacher looks like. Phelps (2016), explained that,

Under pressure to raise test scores by any means possible, teachers reduce the amount of time devoted to regular instruction and, instead, focus on test preparation that can be subject-matter free (i.e., test preparation or test coaching).

Test scores rise, but students learn less. (p. 7).

Jennings & Bearak (2014) referred to this phenomenon as “teaching to the test” (p. 381). Teaching to the test has resulted in “score inflation on state tests, where score inflation is defined as gains in student test scores larger than gains in student learning in the domain to which the test intends to generalize” (Jennings & Bearak, 2014, p. 381). However, research concluded that

[the] teachers who spend more than a brief amount of time focused on test

preparation do their students more harm than good. Their students score lower on the tests than do other students whose teachers eschew any test preparation beyond simple format familiarization and, instead, use the time for regular subject-matter instruction. (Phelps, 2016, p. 7)

With the transition to the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), more freedom has been granted to individual states in deciding how to hold schools accountable for serving their students. However, as under NCLB, states must still assess students in reading or language arts and math annually in grades 3-8 and once in grades 10-12, and in science once in grades 3-5, 6-9 and 10-12. The difference is that under ESSA states will now have flexibility in how and when they administer those tests. Also, states are allowed to set a cap limiting the time students spend taking tests (U.S. Department of Education, 2017).

Use of technology.

Modern classroom technology includes, but is not limited to graphing calculators, smart boards, desktop and laptop computers, tablets, overhead projectors, Elmo projectors, the broadband Internet, Wi-Fi, web cameras, and multiple software and on-line applications. Such items as tape players and recorders, TVs, VCRs, and CD/DVD players are becoming obsolete.

Moore (2001) pointed out that

Technology is revolutionizing education at all levels of teaching and learning process. [Sic] Successful teachers must be aware of the new technology—what beneficial characteristics it offers and how it may best be incorporated into the

teaching-learning process. If nothing else, this information and know-how will help reduce classroom boredom for both teacher and students. (p. 317)

Teachers should be aware possible pitfalls when it comes to incorporating technology into their lesson plans. Thus, Glasgow and Hicks (2003) pointed out that “Teachers should not underestimate the amount of work, for both themselves and their students, involved in making technological transitions. Frustrated students can sabotage your best efforts by not authentically engaging in the new type of instruction” (p. 159).

In addition, the success of incorporating technology depends on several other criteria. Moore (2001) identified the following criteria:

1. The motivational value of the media and technology should be assessed in light of the teaching-learning situation and the desired learner objectives.
2. Instructional media and technology must be planned as an integral part of the lesson. They will be of little value if there is insufficient time for their proper use or if other components make them inappropriate.
3. The user should know how to use the technology and ascertain that everything is in the working order before exposing students to it. (p. 317)

Regardless of how much technology is available within every individual classroom, there is one common denominator that is decisive on how beneficial the technology use will be for students’ success. Bitner & Bitner (2002) pointed out that “it is the skill and attitude of the teacher that determines the effectiveness of technology integration into the curriculum” (p. 95).

Classroom climate.

Classroom climate that a teacher creates can also be considered one of the vehicles of effective lesson delivery. According to Borich (1996), “Classroom climate is the atmosphere or mood in which interactions between you and your students take place” (p. 470). Among the factors that create classroom climate are “[sic] the manner and degree to which you exercise authority, show warmth and support, encourage competitiveness or cooperation, and allow for independent judgement and choice” (Borich, 1996, p. 470).

The climate of an effective classroom sends the message to students that the focus is on extending students’ thinking and abilities in addition to providing a welcoming environment that creates a sense of trust and community within the classroom (Silva Mangiante, 2011, pp. 57-58). Particularly, this kind of classroom environment is fostered by teacher’s sensitivity, observations, actions to address student needs and problems, making connections to the students’ community, communication with parents, bringing students’ lives into the classroom, using culturally relevant texts, and inviting students to talk and write about their culture (Silva Mangiante, 2011, p. 58).

Borich (1996) stressed that “The effective teacher not only uses a variety of teaching strategies but also creates a variety of classroom climates. However, your ability to create a classroom climate is less important than your ability to *change* the climate when the objectives and situation demand” (p. 471).

For example,

[Sic] a group discussion might be a colossal failure in a rigid authoritarian climate, because the climate clues students that their opinions are less important than yours [teacher's], that teacher talk and not student talk should take up most of the instructional time, and that the freedom to express oneself spontaneously is your [teacher's] right not theirs. In a more open atmosphere this same attempt at discussion might well be a smashing success, because all the ingredients of a good discussion—freedom to express one's opinion, high degree of student talk, and spontaneity—have been provided by the classroom climate. (Borich, 1996, p. 471)

Lesson preparation.

Duncan-Andrade (2007) reported that intense commitment to preparation and instruction results in students being “the top of their schools in traditional measures of student success” even for those students who were forced out of their colleagues’ classrooms and/or entered the class mid-year (p. 629). Silva Mangiante (2011) also indicated that “The intensity of preparation both of pedagogical approaches and content knowledge fosters excitement and passion in the instruction they [teachers] deliver to their students” (p. 57).

Stronge (2002) noted that “Organizing time and preparing materials in advance of instruction have been noted as important aspects of effective teaching. Both the organization of time and the preparation of materials are components of the broader practice of planning carefully for instruction” (p. 38).

According to Stronge (2002), the following are the elements of effective instructional planning:

Identifying clear lesson and learning objectives [sic], planning the instructional strategies to be deployed in the classroom and the timing of these strategies, recognizing the importance of linking instruction to real life, using advance organizers, graphic organizers, and outlines to plan for effective instructional delivery, considering student attention spans and learning styles when designing lessons, systematically developing objectives, questions, and activities that reflect higher-level and lower level cognitive skills as appropriate for the content and the students. (p. 39)

These elements of effective instructional planning are supported by the components of the Fundamental Five in one of the sections of this literature review. Specifically, it relates to identifying objectives, timing of activities, and considering student attention spans (Cain & Laird, 2011).

Teaching Experience, Education, and Certification Status

If a parent had an option of choosing a teacher for their child, this parent would naturally choose a more experienced teacher. But, does experience always equal better teaching? Research shows that not always. Some studies have found a relationship between teachers' effectiveness and their years of experience indicating that inexperienced teachers are less effective than more senior teachers (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Klitzgaard & Hall, 1974; Murnane & Phillips, 1981; Rozenholtz, 1986). Hess (1969) and Jones (2014) affirmed, however, that according to their studies, neither

teacher education nor years of teaching experience related significantly to teacher effectiveness.

If there does exist a relationship between years of teaching experience and teacher effectiveness it is not linear. Thus, "This curvilinear trend is due to multiple factors including such as older teachers do not always continue to grow and keep up with the latest research, whereas some very well-prepared beginning teachers have proven to be very effective" (Darling-Hammond, 2000, pp. 6-7). Furthermore, a study of five-year education programs by Andrew & Schwab (1995) has shown that the graduates with a master's degree are more confident than their bachelor's degree peers and as effective as most experienced teachers.

However, as Darling-Hammond (2000) noted:

Among variables assessing teacher "quality," the percentage of teachers with full certification and a major in the field is a more powerful predictor of student achievement than teachers' education levels (e.g., master's degrees). This finding concurs with those of other studies cited earlier. It is not surprising that master's degrees would be relatively weaker measures of teacher knowledge, given the wide range of content they can include, ranging from specialist degrees in reading or special education that are directly related to teaching to fields like administration and others that have little to do with teaching. (p. 32)

In addition, the benefits of experience may interact with educational opportunities. Veteran teachers in settings that emphasize continual learning and

collaboration continue to improve their performance (Darling-Hammond, 2000; Rosenholtz, 1984).

Also, the availability of alternative certification programs is essential for meeting the federal requirement to have highly qualified teachers. Thus, Tournaki (2009) stated that without alternative certification programs “districts could not likely meet state and federal requirements to have a qualified teacher in every classroom. [sic] State and federal requirements can be met by providing differentiated pathways into the profession without compromising teachers' effectiveness or efficacy” (p. 107). According to Darling-Hammond (2000) two studies of alternative certification in Texas did not find gaps in the performance of students of alternative and traditionally licensed teachers (pp. 6-7).

Generally, “Certification or licensing status is a measure of teacher qualifications that combines aspects of knowledge about subject matter and about teaching and learning. Its meaning varies across the states because of differences in licensing requirements [sic]” (Darling-Hammond, 2000, p. 7). Talking about standard teacher certification, Darling-Hammond indicated that

. . . a standard certificate generally means that a teacher has been prepared in a state-approved teacher education program at the undergraduate or graduate level and has completed either a major or a minor in the field(s) to be taught plus anywhere from 18 to 40 education credits, depending on the state and the certificate area, including between 8 and 18 weeks of student teaching. (p. 7)

Among other factors that potentially influence teacher effectiveness Hess (1969) found that there is no significant relationship between teacher effectiveness and preparation beyond the minimum required for the B. A. degree, teacher's gender, or teacher's compensation rate (pp. 119-120). However, Hess (1969) found a significant relationship between teacher effectiveness and years employed with the same district as opposed to overall years of teaching experience, teacher's age, and the subject matter (pp. 119-120).

Discipline Management Strategies

Although teacher's content knowledge, lesson delivery, and student motivation are important factors in teacher effectiveness, "empirical research also suggests that these factors are not sufficient to foster learning. Cognitive outcomes may also require [sic] good classroom management" (Vieluf, Kaplan, Kleime, & Bayer, 2012, p. 19). Generally, "Effective teachers create focused and nurturing classrooms that result in increased student learning" (Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004, p. 66). Metaphorically, "classroom management is like salt in a recipe; when it is present it is not noticed, but when it is missing, diners will ask for it" (Stronge, Tucker, & Hindman, 2004, p. 66). Flores (2013) noted that "Effective teachers feel that order in the classroom translate to better academic success for their students, or at the very least, the possibility for strong academic success" (p. 104).

Definitions of what classroom management is vary, however they "usually include actions taken by the teacher to establish order, engage students, or elicit their cooperation" (Emmer & Stough, 2001, p. 103). Particularly, the view of classroom

management “encompasses establishing and maintaining order, designing effective instruction, dealing with students as a group, responding to needs of individual students, and effectively handling the discipline and adjustment of individual students” (Emmer & Stough, 2001, p. 104).

The nature of classroom management is comprehensive and, according to Jones (1996) includes five main features:

1. An understanding of current research and theory in classroom management and students’ physiological and learning needs.
2. The creation of positive teacher-student and peer relationships.
3. The use of instructional methods that facilitate optimal learning by responding to the academic needs of individual students and the classroom group.
4. The use of organizational and group management methods that maximize on-task behavior.
5. The ability to use a range of counseling and behavioral methods to assist students who demonstrate persistent or serious behavior problems. (p. 507)

Del Guercio (2011) singled out the basics for classroom management, which include establishing control, creating effective discipline policies, building rapport with students, and determining the needs of problem students (p. 39). Specifically, by establishing control a teacher creates an environment optimized for learning (Del Guercio, 2011, pp. 39-40). Among the strategies to establish control Del Guercio (2011) identified creating a seating chart from day one, being as organized as possible as you present the lesson, greeting students as they enter the room, giving students direction on

what they need to do as soon as they enter the room, identifying class leaders and gaining their respect, never arguing with a student when addressing misbehavior, and providing positive reinforcement.

Creating effective discipline policies insures that all the students know the teacher's expectations and will be treated equally. Effective discipline policy strategies include making clear and concise rules, making sure that consequences fit the offence, being committed to following the established classroom discipline policies, gaining parents' support, discussing the infraction and the consequences with the student who committed the infraction (Del Guercio, 2011, p. 41).

Building rapport may be the most important classroom management strategy because "today's reality is that students must respect you (they would say "like you") before they obey you" (Del Guercio, 2011, p. 42). The strategies to build rapport include showing students that you are a "real person" (displaying family pictures in the classroom, talking about your hobbies, using humor, etc.), observing students and learning more about them, attending and chaperoning school events. However, care should be taken not to overstep professional boundaries and remember that being friendly and being a friend are different concepts and the teacher is not a student's peer or friend (Gel Guercio, 2011, p. 42).

As far as problem students are concerned, their behaviors may stem from what is happening outside the classroom. Thus, Del Guercio (2011) noted that "Many teenagers haven't learned the skills to cope with stress and therefore exhibit inappropriate behavior

when something is really bothering them” (p. 43). Therefore, it is important to identify the issue and work with parents and other professionals to help the student in need.

At-risk Students and Generational Poverty

Part of building rapport with students, building relationships with them, and dealing with their undesired behaviors is learning about and understanding your students’ backgrounds. Ruby Payne (1996) explained that

One of the reasons it is getting more and more difficult to conduct school as we have in the past is that the students who bring the middle-class culture with them are decreasing in numbers, and the students who bring the poverty culture with them are increasing in numbers. (p. 61)

In order for educators to better understand their students who come from generational poverty and the root of their behaviors, it is important to know what generational poverty is and how it influences students’ mentality. Payne (1996) defined generational poverty as “being in poverty for two generations or longer” (p. 3). In addition, the teachers’ definition of “poverty” need to be expanded. We need look at poverty not as a mere lack of money, but as a lack of multiple resources:

1. Financial: Having the money to purchase goods and services.
2. Emotional: Being able to choose and control emotional responses, particularly to negative situations, without engaging in self-destructive behavior.
3. Mental: Having the mental abilities and acquired skills (reading, writing, and computing) to deal with daily life.
4. Spiritual: Believing in divine purpose and guidance.

5. Physical: Having physical health and mobility.
6. Support systems: Having friends, family, and backup resources available in times of need.
7. Relationships/Role models: Having frequent access to adult(s) who are appropriate, who are nurturing to the child, and who do not engage in self-destructive behavior.
8. Knowledge of hidden rules: Knowing the unspoken cues and habits of a group.
(Payne, 2011, p. 7)

Payne (1996) went on to explain that “The ability to leave poverty is more dependent upon other resources than it is upon financial resources. Each of these resources plays a vital role in the success of an individual” (p. 8).

A list of common student misbehaviors can be linked to poverty. Payne (1996) identified such behaviors, the underlying reasons for such behaviors, along with possible interventions:

1. Laugh when disciplined: A way to save face in matriarchal poverty. Intervention: Teach students three to four other behaviors that would be more appropriate.
2. Argue loudly with teacher: The culture has a distrust in authority. Intervention: Do not argue with students. Model respect.
3. Angry response: Anger is based on fear. Intervention: Respond in an adult voice, let the student cool down, discuss other possible response's they could have used.

4. Inappropriate or vulgar comments: Reliance on casual register; may not know formal register. Intervention: Teach students appropriate phrases that could be used to say the same thing.
5. Physically fight: Do not have language or belief system to use in conflict resolution; see themselves as less than a man or a woman if they do not fight. Intervention: Stress that fighting is unacceptable in school. One way to avoid fights is not to settle the business at school.
6. Hands always on someone else: Poverty has a heavy reliance on non-verbal data and touch. Intervention: Give them as much to do with their hands as possible in a constructive way.
7. Cannot follow directions: Little procedural memory is used in poverty; sequence not used or valued. Intervention: Write steps on the board; have them practice procedural self-talk.
8. Extremely disorganized: Lack of planning, scheduling, or prioritizing skills; not taught in poverty. Intervention: Teach a simple, color-coded organization in the classroom.
9. Complete only part of a task: No procedural self-talk; do not “see” the whole task. Intervention: Write on the board all the parts of the task; require each student to check off each part when finished.
10. Disrespectful to teacher: Have a lack of respect for authority. May not know any adults worthy of respect. Intervention: Identify for students the correct voice tone and word choice that are acceptable.

11. Cheat or steal: Indicative of weak support system, weak role models/emotional resources; may indicate extreme financial need. Intervention: Address the reason or need; emphasize that the behavior is illegal and not an option in school.
12. Talk incessantly: Poverty is very participatory. Intervention: Build participatory activities into the lesson. (Payne, 1996, pp. 79-80)

The Fundamental Five

When it comes to lesson delivery and classroom management, Cain & Laird (2011) identified “five critical practices that are at the core of highly effective instruction” (p. 5). These practices are:

1. Framing the lesson;
2. Working in the power zone;
3. Frequent small group purposeful talk about the learning;
4. Recognizing and reinforcing;
5. Critical writing.

This is not a newly invented formula that is designed to improve instruction overnight. Every successful teacher is already engaged in these practices on a daily basis. These five elements are not a list of recommendations that can be randomly or selectively implemented. Rather, according to Cain & Laird (2011), “they represent five individual practices that interact and interconnect in such a manner that their dramatic positive effect is dependent on their coordinated use [sic]” (p. 15).

Framing the lesson.

A lesson frame is a daily objective made up of two parts. The first part is the learning objective for the lesson, i.e. what students can expect to learn today in class. The second part of the lesson frame is the closing question, product, or task: “The closing question, product, or task clearly states how the student will demonstrate his or her understanding of the learning objective for that day” (Cain & Laird, 2011, p. 25).

The lesson frame is presented in a student-friendly language in the form of a “We will . . .” statement, i.e. the learning objective for the lesson, and a “I will . . .” statement, i.e. how the student will demonstrate his or her understanding. Cain & Laird (2011) stressed that “Because the lesson frame serves as an external mental filter, it is important that the teacher post it prominently in the classroom and that it remain posted throughout the class period so students can refer to it as needed” (p. 32).

Working in the power zone.

This element of the Fundamental Five is the easiest to implement and does not take any preparation time, however it does take more energy on the teacher’s part. Cain & Laird (2011) use the term the “power zone” as a synonym to “proximity.” The authors went on to explain why it is important to work in the power zone:

When teachers are in the power zone, they position themselves right in the middle of the action. [Sic] One can easily identify and respond to minute changes in student performance and/or behavior. Now the teacher can reinforce positive behaviors that might otherwise be unnoticed, or, alternatively, extinguish negative behaviors before they reach the crisis stage. [Sic] The teacher is in the absolute

best position to conduct frequent and ongoing formative assessment that allows the teacher to perform continuous microadjustments to instruction that are based on instantly identified student needs. (Cain & Laird, 2011, p. 47)

Thus, working in the power zone does not only improve classroom management, but also instructional effectiveness and student performance.

Frequent small group purposeful talk (FSGPT).

This element of the Fundamental Five is explained by its authors as “the practice where, after every ten to fifteen minutes of teacher-driven discussion, [sic] the teacher briefly stops talking and has groups of two to four students [sic] briefly discuss a seed question related to the instruction or the instructional activity” (Cain & Laird, 2011, p. 51). These are brief conversations from 30 seconds to three minutes intended to give a mental break to students and increase student retention and understanding.

Every FSGPT in a lesson serves like a paragraph in a book. It allows students to mentally break up the lesson into smaller sections and reset the attention span clock. According to Cain and Laird (2011), “By introducing a small-group purposeful talk session, the teacher can circumvent the loss of student attention and the ensuing wave of boredom that follows” (p. 58).

Another instructional benefit of FSGPT is that the students have frequent opportunities to peer teach and “translate” the “adult speak” into the “student speak” for those peers who have difficulty understanding. As a result, “This simple process has a dramatic effect on the climate and the culture of a classroom. Students quickly take ownership [sic]” (Cain & Laird, 2011, p. 54).

While conducting FSGPT, however, it is important to remain in the power zone.

This is critical because when in the power zone “the teacher is in the best position to ensure that the students remain focused on the task at hand, participating in an academic discussion” (Cain & Laird, 2011, p. 53).

Recognizing and reinforcing.

There are two types of recognition and reinforcement—academic and behavioral.

Both of these types are crucial for student success, especially for the students who are identified as “at-risk” because they “see little connection between their effort and earned reward” (Cain & Laird, 2011, p. 72). Specifically, Cain & Laird (2011) asserted:

“Reinforcement of the work and effort it takes to achieve academic success builds habits and understanding that students can access throughout their academic career and well into their adult life” (p. 72).

Academic recognition is the recognition of any academic success. It is easy to recognize an A on a test or a high class rank. However, the power of academic recognition is in the ability to recognize intermediate success, even if it is an assignment turned in on time.

Academic reinforcement is the acknowledgement of the effort that a student made in order to complete an assignment or a task. It provides the student who is not intrinsically motivated the encouragement to persist and to make this behavior a regular reoccurrence.

Behavioral recognition is based on the principle of personalization and specificity. For example, “Instead of applying comments to broad groups of students, the teacher

addresses specific groups of students or, better yet, individual students. Specificity addresses the need to clearly state the behavior or action that warranted the attention” (Cain & Laird, 2011, pp. 73-74).

Behavioral reinforcement has to do with acknowledging the desired behaviors. However, according to Cain & Laird (2011), “Unfortunately, [sic] teachers actually do the reverse” (p. 76). They tend to pay more attention to the undesired behaviors and correct those as opposed to recognizing the desired behaviors.

Summarizing the power of recognizing and reinforcing, Cain & Laird (2011) said that “Teacher who deliberately engage in the practice of recognition and reinforcement quickly create classroom environments that are nurturing, engaging, and empowering to an increased number of students” (p. 79). This is another element of the Fundamental Five that does not require additional preparation. It simply takes a conscientious effort on the teacher’s part to notice the desired behaviors in the classroom and to acknowledge them.

Critical writing.

Critical writing is defined by Cain & Laird (2011) as “writing for the purpose or organizing, clarifying, defending, analyzing, dissecting, connecting, and/or expanding on ideas or concepts [sic]” (p. 81). In any classroom, it is the least observed element of the Fundamental Five.

The benefit of critical writing in every class, not just English, is that it “[sic] requires the learner to take a subconscious idea, expand on that idea, connect it to other subconscious ideas, and bring that to the conscious level through the tangible act of

writing” (Cain & Laird, 2011, p. 82). According to Cain & Laird (2011), it can come in the form of “[sic] a simple list, a short comparison paragraph, a quick summary, a mind map, purposeful note taking, a written exit ticket, or even a formal essay or term paper” (p. 83).

Among the benefits of critical writing is students’ better understanding of the content. Also, critical writing increases students’ literacy skills. In addition, it is a source of formative assessment. According to Cain & Laird (2011), “During the critical writing activity, the student is able to identify gaps in his or her learning, questions he or she wants to ask, and/or insights he or she has developed” (p. 90).

Other Factors Influencing Teacher Effectiveness

Teacher effectiveness is not influenced only by what happens in the classroom or how much time a teacher spends lesson planning, grading papers, or tutoring. Working with other individuals at school also has an impact on teacher effectiveness. Thus, Arends (2001) mentioned such groups of individuals as colleagues, administrators, and parents that teachers encounter on a daily basis.

Colleagues.

As far as colleagues are concerned, “Establishing good working relationship with colleagues is an important challenge for a [sic] teacher. Being successful in this endeavor requires an understanding of important norms governing collegiality and specific actions that can be taken” (Arends, 2001, p. 424).

The actions that require engaging with colleagues can be: (1) Working in small groups and at meetings, e.g. Professional Learning Communities; (2) Discussing

educational issues with colleagues, e.g. exchanging materials or classroom management tips; and (3) Observing other teachers (Arends, 2001, p. 425).

Administrators.

Today the administrators' role is multi-faceted: Instructional, disciplinary, managerial, etc. When talking about administrators, Arends (2001) noted that they [sic] vary greatly in their educational beliefs and management styles. Some are very supportive, and some are not. Some have excellent organizational and interpersonal skills, and some don't. One principal's priorities and values will differ from another's. In some instances, these values and priorities will be consistent with the values of a [sic] teacher; in other cases they will be diametrically opposed. (p. 426)

According to Feiman-Nemster & Floden (1986), teachers expect school administrators to be a

buffer between themselves and outside pressures from district administrators, parents, and other community members [sic]. In addition, they want the principal to be a strong force in maintaining student discipline—backing the teachers in their classroom discipline policies and maintaining consistent school-wide policies. In return for those services, the teachers are willing to cooperate with the principal's initiatives. (p. 509)

In order to be effective in the classroom, teachers need to build positive communication channels with administrators and be clear about their expectations. On the other hand, it is also important for administrators to understand the teacher's

instructional program and activities (Arends, 2001, p. 426).

Parents.

Parents is another category of people that is integral in teachers' daily routine. Arends (2001) indicated that "Teacher-parent interactions can take several forms, including reporting to parents, holding conferences with parents, and enlisting parents' help in school and at home" (p. 427).

The relationship between parental involvement and students' academic success has not been unanimously proven. Thus, a meta-analysis of correlation between parental involvement and students' academic success conducted by Fan and Chan (2001) indicated that parental involvement does not always equal better academic success for students. Specifically, they commented that,

Although the appeal of parental involvement as part of remedy for school education has been strong in the society as a whole, there remain some thorny issues related to research on parental involvement, because the research findings in this area have been somewhat inconsistent. Generally speaking, while many studies showed positive effect of parental involvement on school learning [sic], some others found little, if any, such measurable effect [sic]. (Fan & Chan, 2001, p. 4)

A call home or a teacher-parent conference has a potential to solve some disciplinary or academic issues. However, "Sometimes teachers may need to accept the fact that they are on their own and need to come up with strategies that won't include the parents" (Glasgow & Hicks, 2003, p. 197).

Professional development opportunities.

An integral part of every teacher's professional life is professional development. According to the National Staff Development Council (2015) professional development is "a comprehensive, sustained, and intensive approach to improving teachers' and principals' effectiveness in raising student achievement" (p. 1).

The quantity of professional development available to teachers has steadily increased during the past several years [sic] (Hutchison, 2012, p. 38). However, Lawless and Pellegrino (2007), when talking about professional development, stated that, "driven by a strong perceived need for action, [sic] it is often not guided by any substantial knowledge base derived from research about what works and why with regard to technology, teaching, and learning" (p. 576). In addition, "Efforts to provide professional development are often generalized for large groups and are not driven by teacher needs (Hutchinson, 2012, p. 38)."

Also, the research study conducted by Hayes (2016) found that teachers perceived seldom:

- (1) Having a choice in the professional development they received;
- (2) Evaluating the effectiveness of the training;
- (3) Being provided opportunities to gain deeper understanding of the subjects they teach; and
- (4) Receiving training on curriculum and instruction for students of different levels of learning. (p. iii)

In addition, Bryant (2007) conducted a survey among 57 school districts. One of the conclusions made from the survey was that "most districts provide brief professional development programs that do not allow sufficient opportunity for teachers to master the

content or skills presented” (Bryant, 2007, p. 104). Therefore, despite the importance of high quality professional development for teachers in the era of high-stakes testing, teachers are not always able to receive the kind of professional development that would address their instructional needs and would enhance student learning (Hayes, 2016; Hutchison, 2012; Lawless & Pellegrino, 2007).

The negatives of teaching.

This chapter has included multiple factors that influence teacher effectiveness. In addition to the aspects already mentioned, Myers & Myers (1990) created a list of teaching aspects that most teachers identify as negative when talking about their job:

- Set bureaucratic procedures;
- Insensitive, impersonal, and impractical regulation;
- Inadequate supplies and resources;
- Too many students and too large classes;
- Too little planning time;
- Old and worn-out facilities;
- Demanding and insensitive administrators;
- Lack of student discipline;
- Unprofessional colleagues;
- Too much paperwork;
- Criticism from parents and community groups; and
- Stress.

These items have a potential to negatively influence students' academic achievement by lowering teacher dedication and performance. In addition, Youngs (1993) identified the issues that tend to cause teachers' stress at work. Some of the items from the list include: Required attendance at in-service meetings, overcrowded classrooms, managing "disruptive" children, developing and completing daily lesson plans, talking to parents about their child's problems, being a target of verbal abuse by students, evaluating student performance or giving grades, teaching students who are "below average" in achievement level, teacher-parent conferences, seeking principal's intervention in a discipline matter, etc. (Youngs, 1993, p. 24).

Summary

Chapter II provided an extensive overview of the factors that influence teacher effectiveness. The factors discussed in this literature review included: Teacher's knowledge of subject matter, methods of lesson delivery, types of instruction, classroom climate, lesson preparation, use of technology, understanding the needs of at-risk students, teacher's instructional experience education and certification status, discipline management strategies, the Fundamental Five instructional framework, collaboration with colleagues, relationships with parents and administrators, and the negative and stressful aspects of teaching as elements influencing effectiveness of instruction.

This review of literature identified that "The ability to convey the content to students in a way that they grasp, use, and remember is important, but it is not necessarily related to additional knowledge or coursework in the content area" (Stronge, 2002, p. 9). Also, Hess (1969) did not find any significant relationship between teacher effectiveness

and preparation beyond the minimum required degree (pp. 119-120). As far as instruction is concerned, when delivering a lesson and choosing instructional strategies, it is important to consider lesson objectives, content, and students' learning styles, and then create the classroom atmosphere, using a variety of discipline management strategies when necessary, that is conducive to reaching desired outcomes (Borich, 1996; Cohen, 2008; Feden & Vogel, 2003; Glasgow & Hicks, 2003; Hunter 1984; Moore, 2001; Stronge, 2002).

CHAPTER III

Research Method

Introduction

The primary purpose of this study was to investigate the research questions that relate to teachers' pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies that influence academic achievement of students. The instruments that are utilized to collect data are teacher interviews (see Appendix A) and classroom observations (see Appendix B). This chapter is organized into six sections: (a) Participants; (b) Overview of case study research; (c) Multicase studies; (d) Data collection, (e) Triangulation; and (f) Multicase analysis and reporting.

Participants

The participants of this dissertation research were middle school teachers. The number of participants that took part in this study was four, selected from two different middle schools in East Texas. Two out of the four participating teachers were teachers of mathematics; two other teachers were teachers of English language arts. Participating schools were selected within the same school district as a convenience sample based on recommendations from campus principals and availability of participants. The criteria for selection of schools include middle school designation, the subject matter taught by

the teachers, and their effectiveness in the classroom based on their principals' recommendation. It should be noted that, although the principals were asked to suggest the best teachers on their campus for the study, their choices were partially based on student assessment data and partially on their own understandings of what an effective teacher is.

Teachers were asked to participate voluntarily. The participants had the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The selection of participants was not based on their age, gender, ethnicity, or national origin. There was no honorarium offered for participation in this study.

Overview of Case Study Research

Case study is one of many qualitative approaches to social science inquiry. Other approaches include narrative research, phenomenological research, grounded theory research, ethnographic research, experiments, surveys, histories, and archival analyses (Creswell, 2013; Yin, 2014). According to Creswell (2013), "Case study research is a qualitative approach in which the investigator explores the real-life, contemporary bounded system (a case) or multiple bounded systems (cases) over time, through detailed, in-depth data collection involving multiple sources of information" (p. 97).

Yin (2014) explained: "As a research, the case study is used in many situations, to contribute to our knowledge of individual, group, organizational, social, political, and related phenomena" (p. 4). "[sic] The distinctive need for case study research arises out of desire to understand complex social phenomena. [sic] A case study allows

investigators to focus on a “case” and retain a holistic and real-world perspective” (Yin, 2014, p. 4).

Yin (2014) further explained the conditions when to use the case study research method. First, we need to consider the type of a question that our research is trying to answer. In most cases the “how” and the “why” questions are indicative of case studies because “such questions deal with operational links needing to be traced over time rather than mere frequencies of incidents” (Yin, 2014, p.10). In addition, the “what” question may also serve as a case study type of a question if it is an exploratory question, the goal being “to develop pertinent hypothesis and propositions for further inquiry” (Yin, 2014, p. 10).

Another condition for choosing a case study is the extent of control over behavioral events. “Case study is preferred [sic] when relevant behaviors cannot be manipulated” (Yin, 2014, p. 12). In addition, when conducting a case study, we employ direct observations and interviews of those involved in the events (Yin, 2014). Thus, the third condition for choosing a case study research method is “The degree of focus on contemporary as opposed to entirely historical events” (Yin, 2014, p. 9).

Multicase Studies

Stake (2006) explained that “Multicase research starts with the quintain” (p. 6). According to Stake, “A quintain (pronounced kwin´ton) is an object or phenomenon or condition to be studied [sic]. The quintain is the arena or holding company or umbrella for the cases we will study [sic]. Neither “program” nor “phenomenon” is a big enough word” (Stake, 2006, p. 6). Therefore, multiple case research helps us understand quintain

better by contrasting multiple cases and finding similarities and differences among them. However, Stake (2006) stated that researchers doing cross-case analysis are emphasizing the common relationships across cases” (p. 39). While studying a case we gain understanding about a particular phenomenon or entity, the contexts of each case of a multicase study helps us understand the complex meanings of the quintain (Stake, 2006, p. 40).

There are no prescribed procedures for selecting cases for a multicase study. They can be selected by the researcher or by a third party (Stake, 2006, pp. 22-23). However, Stake (2006) identified three main criteria for selecting cases: (1) Relevance of the cases to the quintain; (2) Diversity of cases across contexts; and (3) Whether the cases provide good opportunities to learn about complexity and contexts (p. 23).

For this study I selected four middle school teachers with the help of the third party, their principals. The participants taught similar populations of students within the same school district, regardless of their students’ individual achievement level. However, their students’ overall achievement level was higher than that of their colleagues’ who were not suggested for the study. All the selected teachers taught eighth grade mathematics or English language arts. According to the 2015 TAPR report, approximately 75% of the students within this particular school district were identified as “at-risk,” 81% were identified as “economically disadvantaged,” and 28% were identified as English language learners.

Yin (2014) mentioned five essential components of a case study research design: (1) A case study’s questions; (2) Its propositions; (3) Its unit(s) of analysis; (4) The logic

linking the data to the propositions; and (5) The criteria for interpreting the findings (p. 29). Thus, although selecting the right questions is important in order to help the researcher identify what s/he needs to study, the propositions help him/her move in the right direction by reflecting an important theoretical issue and by telling him/her where to look for relevant evidence (Yin, 2014, p. 30). Next, when talking about the units of analysis for a case study, Yin (2014) stated “ . . . case studies usually focus on an individual person” (p. 31). Having the right questions and propositions helps the researcher identify the relevant information that needs to be collected about the individual of the individuals studied (Yin, 2014, p. 31). Among the analytic techniques to link data to propositions, Yin (2014) included pattern matching, explanation building, time-series analysis, logic models, and cross-case synthesis (p. 36). And finally, the criteria for interpreting a case study’s findings are based on so called rival explanations of the study, where “The more rivals [sic] have been addressed and rejected the stronger will be your findings” (Yin, 2014, p. 36).

As far as the number of cases per multicase study is concerned, many multicase studies have fewer than 4 or more than 15 cases, however, the optimal number of cases is from 4 to 10. Two or three cases may not show enough interactivity among cases. The reason to choose the multicase research design is to examine a phenomenon in different environments, therefore, not having enough cases may impede the validity of the research. On the other hand, more than 10 cases may provide more interconnectedness than the researcher is able to understand or analyze (Stake, 2006, pp. 22-23).

Data Collection

The most common methods of any case study are observation, interview, coding, data management, and interpretation (Stake, 2006, p. 29; Creswell, 2013). In this study interviews and classroom observations were used. The information gathered via the interview process and the observations was coded and interpreted.

Interviews.

According to Neuman (2011), there are two major types of field interviews, which are unstructured field interviews and survey field interviews (p. 449). Survey interviews have clear beginning and end, have the same questions asked of all respondents, and the questions are closed-ended with infrequent probes. An unstructured field interview does not have a clearly defined beginning and end, questions may vary depending on situations and people interviewed, and questions are mostly open-ended with frequent probes.

In addition, in a survey interview the interviewer is neutral at all times, s/he is the one who controls the pace, molds the one-on-one conversation into a standard framework ignoring social context, and asks structured questions. In an unstructured field interview, however, the interviewer shows interest and encourages elaboration often among multiple interviewees, the atmosphere is more relaxed and informal, the pace of the conversation is defined by all the participants, and social as well as linguistic contexts are important (Neuman, 2011, p. 451). It is important to note, however, that the field interview differs from a friendly conversation having the purpose of learning about the member and setting (Neuman, 2011, p. 451).

During the three-tiered interview process (see Appendix A), the researcher interviewed selected teachers about their teaching practices, discipline management strategies, relationships with students and their parents, collaboration with other teachers, relationships with administrators, etc. The initial interviews lasted from one hour to one hour and twenty minutes. Each participant was asked the same questions in the same order. Sometimes, the participants were asked clarifying questions or were asked to elaborate more. The second level of interviews was less structured and was geared more toward clarifying the details or inaccuracies from the initial interviews. They lasted approximately 5-15 minutes, depending on each individual case. The third level of interviews consisted on gathering more qualifying information via email and telephone conversations.

The initial interview questions were organized around predetermined themes based on the literature review conducted prior to the interviews. However, some questions in different sections overlapped in order for the researcher to be able to obtain more accurate understanding of the participants' daily practices.

Observations.

Creswell (2013) stated that "Observation is one of the key tools for collecting data in qualitative research" (p. 166). When conducting observations, researchers normally take notes. However, Creswell noted that "[sic] writing down everything is impossible" (p. 166). Neuman (2011) singled out five types of field notes:

1. Jotted notes—notes inconspicuously written while in the field on whatever is convenient in order to "jog the memory" later.

2. Direct observation notes—notes that attempt to include all details and specifics of what the researcher heard or saw in a field site and that are written to permit multiple interpretations later.
3. Inference notes—your interpretations of what the information means.
4. Analytic memos—notes a qualitative researcher takes while developing more abstract ideas, themes, or hypotheses from an examination of details in the data.
5. Personal notes—notes that include personal reactions and feelings toward the observed situations. (pp. 444-447)

According to Creswell (2013), during the observation “You may watch physical setting, participants, activities, interactions, conversations, and your own behaviors [sic]” (p. 166). In addition, normally there are four types of observations based on the degree on observer’s involvement in what is being observed: complete participant, participant as observer, observer as participants, and complete observer (Creswell, 2013, pp. 166-167). In this study I took on the role of observer as participant, meaning that I will be watching and taking notes without direct involvement with classroom activities (Creswell, 2013, p. 167).

While observing the participants in their classrooms, using a laptop, the researcher scripted about the interactions in the classroom, classroom climate, and classroom environment. The researcher also took note of such aspects of their performance as evidence of knowing subject matter, use of relevant teaching methods and techniques, their lesson delivery, evidence of thorough preparation and organization,

discipline management strategies, and even such issues as physical aspects of the classroom, and teacher professionalism.

After and/or before the observations, a short debriefing session took place. The researcher discussed with the participants the content of the lesson, what went well, and what could have been improved. The sessions were of non-evaluative and reflective nature.

Reliability, validity, and trustworthiness.

Neuman (2011) defined two types of field research data consistency: Internal and external (p. 455). Internal consistency simply refers to the plausibility of the collected data in regard to what is commonly known about the people of the phenomena, whereas external consistency “refers to data that have been verified or cross-checked with other, divergent sources of data” (Neuman, 2011, p. 455).

The obstacles of reliable field data include misinformation, evasions, lies, and fronts. Misinformation refers to an unintended falsehood of information due to uncertainty or lack of information. Evasions, however, refer to an intended avoidance of answering questions or providing vague answers. Lies are intended acts of misinformation intended to mislead the interviewer. And finally, fronts are shared and learned lies and deceptions (e.g. Santa Clause is a “front” for children) (Neuman, 2011, p. 456).

Explaining the essence of validity in field research Neuman (2011) stated that it “[sic] comes from your analysis of data as accurate representations of the social world in the field. [Unlike experimental research], [r]eplicability is not a criterion because field

research is virtually impossible to replicate” (p. 456). In order to confirm the validity of a field research, there are four criteria: Ecological validity, natural history, member validation, and competent insider performance (Neuman, 2011, p. 456). Ecological validity is reached if the presence of the researcher did not influence the events reported. Natural history refers to the accuracy of the description of all the procedures a researcher conducted in order to obtain research data. Member validation takes place when the participants of the research confirm research results. Finally, competent insider performance means that the researcher provides sufficient detail in order for a reader to feel like they are an insider in the described settings (Neuman, 2011, p. 457).

In qualitative research, instead of validity, we may use the term *trustworthiness* (Creswell, 2013, p. 65). Data trustworthiness is created by a variety of validation strategies that may include: Prolonged engagement and persistent observation, triangulation, peer-reviewing or debriefing, clarifying researcher bias, member checking, rich description. All the validation strategies mentioned above have been employed in this study (Creswell, 2013, pp. 250-252).

Triangulation.

The process of gaining assurance that the researcher is not oversimplifying the situation, that the researcher is not reading too much into what they see, that the meaning gained and the meaning conveyed are the same is called “triangulation” (Stake, 2006, p. 33). In other words, “Triangulation is mostly a process of repetitious data gathering and critical review of what is being said” (Stake, 2006, p. 34). Stake (2006) continued to explain, “Triangulation is expected to lead either to confirmation that the observation

means what we think it means or to ideas about how the observation would be interpreted differently by different people” (pp. 35-36). Triangulation helps identify multiple realities within which people live by providing diversity of perception (Stake, 2006, p. 38).

An integral part of triangulation is “member checking.” After all the data are gathered, the researcher asks the participants of the study to read the report for accuracy and possible misinterpretations, which provides improved interpretation and reporting of data (Stake, 2006, p. 37). Also, “As a form of validation, triangulation follows a classical strategy—seeing whether the new views are consistent with what is already well known about the [c]ase and about the [q]uintain” (Stake, 2006, p. 77). Another important aspect of triangulation that Stake (2006) pointed out is checking with knowledgeable people who know about the quintain from their practical experience and can detect inconsistencies or mistakes in conclusions based on their field experience overtime (Stake, 2006, p. 77).

Each initial interview was recorded with a digital recorder. The interviews were transcribed word-for-word. First two interviews were transcribed by the researcher, whereas last two interviews were transcribed by employing a transcribing agency. The interviews were send to the participants for member checking. For Level 2 and Level 3 interviews only written notes were taken. No recording, transcription, or member checking were used.

Coding.

According to Neuman (2011), “When you code quantitative data, you arrange measures of variables into a machine-readable form for statistical analysis” (p. 510). In addition, “In qualitative research you organize the raw data into conceptual categories and create themes or concepts” (Neuman, 2011, p. 510).

There are three types of qualitative data coding:

1. Open coding—a first pass through a recently collected data. You locate themes and assign initial codes in your first attempt to condense the mass of data into categories.
2. Axial coding—a second pass through the data. You focus on the initial coded themes more than on the raw data. Additional codes or new ideas may emerge during this pass. You move toward organizing ideas or themes and identify the axis of key concepts in analysis.
3. Selective coding—involves scanning all the data and previous codes, looking selectively for cases that illustrate themes, and making comparisons after most data collection has been completed. (Neuman, 2011, pp. 511-514)

Multicase Analysis and Reporting

Yin (2014) noted: “The analysis of case study evidence is one of the least developed aspects of doing case studies” (p. 133). Although there are few fixed formulas for case study data analysis, it is crucial to know how the gathered data will be used and analyzed before beginning the process of data collection. In the case study analysis “[sic] Much depends on a researcher’s own style or rigorous empirical thinking, along with the

sufficient presentation of evidence and careful consideration of alternative interpretations” (Yin, 2014, p. 133).

When reporting cross-case findings, it is important that the assertions that the researcher makes are based on evidence, i.e. logical persuasion, that the assertion is credible. In other words, “The reader should have an opportunity to learn the reasons behind each Assertion [capitalized in source]” (Stake, 2006, p. 41).

When reading and analyzing the collected reports for each case, it is crucial to identify the reoccurring themes. The themes can be initially identified in the project proposal and/or further modified after the research is in progress (Stake, 2006, p. 42). While preparing a report it is a good idea to read some related literature in order to gain a deeper understanding of the issues. Also, keeping systematic notes, adding tabs to the certain pages that will need further attention, underlining, color-coding, adding marginal notes, keeping a log, creating data displays, tabulating the frequency of different events, and putting the information in chronological order are all important techniques that will ensure an effective cross-case analysis (Stake, 2006; Yin, 2014).

After all the themes have been identified, it is time to analyze them. For the cross-case analysis Stake (2006) offered three approaches or three tracks. Track I emphasizes case findings, Track II merges similar findings while maintaining some of the situationality, and Track III shifts the findings from findings to factors. Track III is the most quantitative track (Stake, 2006).

The next step is making assertions based on the identified themes and the data gathered. If it looks like there will be too many assertions, the researcher needs to look

for any overlap, the possibility of rewriting, or the need to rearranging the order of the assertions (Stake, 2006, p. 74). It is essential to start not with the order of assertions based on identified themes, but with the assertions that the researcher considers most important for the reader to know (Stake, 2006, p. 74). Not all the cases in a multicase study may have strong enough evidence to support an assertion, but “it is rare to find strong evidence for an Assertion [capitalized in source]” (Stake, 2006, p. 75). However, it is important to keep in mind that all the assertions need to contribute to a better understanding of quintain (Stake, 2006, p. 72).

A multicase study report normally consists of the individual cases each presented in a separate chapter and an additional chapter that contains cross-case analysis of material (Yin, 2014, p. 184). However, as Stake (2006) stressed: “Multicase study is not a design for comparing cases. The cases studied are a selected group of instances chosen for better understanding of the quintain” (p. 83). Interestingly, Stake (2006) also noted that “Multicase studies are sometimes created at least partly to promote the quintain or to advocate the spread of its policies and practices” (p. 84).

A case study report has to be of a constructivist philosophy and has to be written in the manner that fits the readers’ conceptual space. The author of the research is responsible for the validity of the readers’ interpretations (Stake, 2006, p. 35). In order to reduce the likelihood of readers’ interpretation, the researcher can employ such strategies as redundancy of data gathering and procedural challenges to explanations (Stake, 2006, p. 35). Redundancy of data gathering is self-explanatory and simply means having multiple confirmations and excessive evidence of suggested explanations. By

“procedural challenges to explanations” Stake (2006) means involving another person for interpreting the gathered data or role-playing another point of view (p. 35).

As a case study unit, this dissertation research considered each individual teacher and the data collected about him/her from the interviews and classroom observations. In this study, when re-reading the first interview, the researcher identified possible themes by assigning a number to a potential theme and color coding with a highlighter for visual assistance. When re-reading the second interview, if a theme from the previous interview re-emerged, it was given the same number and the same color as in the first interview. Each new potential theme was given an original number and a color. The process was repeated for all four interview transcripts. The information from the observation scripts was also analyzed in the same manner.

After the open coding process was completed, the themes within each interview and observation, and then the themes across interviews and observations were compared. For this purpose, a hand-written spreadsheet was created with each theme as a sub-heading and four columns for each participant under each sub-heading. This concluded the axial coding phase.

Lastly, after all the information was conveniently distributed on to the spreadsheet, it facilitated analysis. The researcher was able to identify trends and find similarities and differences across cases. The findings were reported in the narrative form.

Role of the Researcher

According to Creswell (2013), the researcher is key instrument in a research. “The qualitative researchers collect data themselves through examining documents, observing behavior, and interviewing participants. They may use an instrument, but it is one designed by the researcher using open-ended questions” (p. 45).

Yin (2014) warned that case study researchers are prone to seek to use a case study to substantiate a preconceived position or to advocate a particular orientation to the issues, therefore it is essential to understand this problem and avoid bias (p. 76). However, avoiding bias is not the only issue in field research ethics about which the researcher needs to be aware. Thus, Yin (2014) stressed that “A good case study researcher, like any other social scientist, will strive for the highest ethical standards” (p. 76). Such standards include avoiding plagiarism, falsification of information, and deception; being honest and responsible for one’s own work; maintaining a strong professional competence by “keeping up with related research, ensuring accuracy, striving for credibility, and understanding and divulging the needed methodological qualifiers and limitations to one’s work” (Yin, 2014, pp. 76-77).

In this multicase study the researcher needed to be aware of his own biases. As a first-year public high school administrator, a teacher of five years in the United States and as a private school director, and a teacher of seven years in Ukraine, there were many preconceived notions from which he had to distance himself. The notions include not only professional issues like what practices he personally considered as effective or

ineffective as a classroom teacher who deals with it on a daily basis, but also cultural influence that he may have had being a native of a post-Soviet country.

Post-Soviet pedagogy heavily relies on behavioristic methods, whereas pedagogical philosophy in the U.S. is mostly of socio-constructivist nature (Vieluf et al., 2012, p. 19). However, the researcher's educational views have been heavily influenced by constructivism and post-modernism as a result of completing a Master's program in Education and the course work of a doctoral program in Educational Leadership at a U.S. state university. Therefore, I am aware of the possible biases as a researcher and a doctoral student with abundant classroom and educational leadership experience.

What put the researcher in a less biased position in this study, however, was the fact that he have not had practical experience of teaching middle school students. As a result of the lack of such experience, he was potentially less biased to what teachers would have to share with him as far as their pedagogical and classroom management preferences and styles.

In addition, the researcher believes that his teaching experience was an advantage rather than an impediment in conducting this research because he was able to better understand the terms teachers used, the challenges and successes they shared, and pieces of pedagogical advice they provided. Also, the interviewees were likely more comfortable knowing that they were being interviewed by a former teacher, therefore they may have been more willing to go into more depth of what they had to share.

Summary

This chapter described the research method that was used in this study in order to assess teacher effectiveness of the participating educators. Based on the nature of the research questions, the researcher advocated for a multicase study as a research method for the proposed research. This chapter provided the overview of what case study research is in general. Then, it described in detail the peculiarities of multicase research, its primary data collection sources and the ways of data analysis, ways of ensuring validity and reliability of multicase research, and the role of the researcher in this particular study.

CHAPTER IV

The Participants and the District

Introduction

The participants selected for this study were four middle school teachers: Amber, Karen, John, and Ellis. Amber teaches 7th grade Math, Karen teaches 8th grade Language Arts, John is an 8th grade math teacher and soccer coach, and Ellis is an 8th grade Language Arts teacher. All four teachers teach at the Lone Star Independent School District (LSISD) in Texas. For confidentiality reasons, the names of the participants and the name of the school district have been changed.

The Lone Star Independent School District has over 6,000 students. Among those students, 30% are African-American (State of Texas 12%), 45% Hispanic (State of Texas 52%), 20% White (State of Texas 29%), and 5% other races. Out of the school student population, 81% are identified as economically disadvantaged (State of Texas 59%), 28% are English Language Learners (State of Texas 18%), and 75% are at-risk students (State of Texas 50%).

LSISD and especially its middle schools that employ the participants have had a substantial staff and leadership turnover in the past several years. For example, one of the participating schools has had 5 principals in the past 4 years. The instability in

leadership has caused many teachers to seek employment in other school districts. Thus, this particular school had over 50% first-year teachers in 2016-2017 school year.

However, even in such unstable times, the middle schools at LSISD were able to retain many highly effective teachers. These teachers, despite administrative and curricular instability, have been able to stay dedicated to providing high quality education to their students, who are mostly at-risk and economically disadvantaged.

When selecting participants, the researcher approached the principals of the middle schools of LSISD and asked them to refer him to their best teachers, more specifically, the teachers whose students tended to perform consistently better on standardized tests and have better end-of-year scores than those of their colleagues. Out of six teachers identified by the principals, four teachers agreed to participate in the study. According to the principals, these were the “star” teachers. They have been distinguished by their supervisors as highly effective educators and professionals who were looked up to by their colleagues.

The rest of this chapter will introduce the participants and tell their brief life stories. The following four chapters will describe in detail their pedagogical practices and views about education.

Amber

Amber teaches 7th grade math. She said that she is very family oriented. According to her, she is also a hard worker, a team player, and “a leader in pretty much a lot of different aspects.”

This is Amber's 6th year with LSISD. She skipped a year after graduating from a mid-sized state university with her teaching degree and was hired at LSISD. She is the oldest of four children in the family and she stated that she had always wanted to be a teacher. Her mother was a special education teacher, so under her mother's influence she always knew she wanted to be able to help people. Her father also had started college to be a teacher, however he decided that it was not something for him, so he became a Walmart stocker. Growing up she enjoyed school, she was a school band member, and overall she was a diligent student. Amber was somewhat more defiant at home, however her parents had high expectations for her when it came to academics. "My parents expected A's and B's," Amber said.

She started her undergraduate studies at a community college, and then transferred to a mid-sized state university. Amber enjoyed her college experiences as a band member and an early childhood through eighth grade education student. In college she narrowed down her options as to what she wanted to teach. Amber shared, "I don't enjoy reading, so I think I kind of stuck to 'Let me do math'."

She believes that the most challenging aspects about teaching are "[sic] discipline and motivating students who are hard to motivate." The difficult part of teaching, according to Amber, is "[sic] challenging that student who doesn't really want to do anything to do something, and within that is the discipline aspect of it."

In Amber's opinion, teaching math is neither more difficult nor easier than other subjects. Although she has had the opportunity to try teaching both English and Math in college, she enjoys math more. Talking about math, Amber said that, "To certain people,

I think, it feels like it's a lot easier because it's more structured, [however] [sic] I think you can make any subject area structured and easier for the kid to understand." She learned to love math in college, since her high school math experiences were not as enjoyable. She does not consider herself a math genius: "I wouldn't say that I am actually too fabulous at math though. I've learned to teach and I think I've become good at it, but it wasn't one of my "I really love math, let me go teach it." According to Amber, it would not matter to her what to teach. She is in this profession for human interaction, not the subject matter.

When it comes to teaching overall, Amber said that her most favorite part is being in the classroom and working with students. The part that brings her down is the "[sic] the other stuff that goes with it: paperwork, the documentation, the grades, class size." In addition to being a classroom teacher, Amber is also a UIL coordinator, department head, and a team leader. Another aspect that makes Amber's job more enjoyable is her co-workers. Particularly, Amber shared that,

[sic] to a certain extent co-workers around you kind of help [sic]. So, I do like that we are a team, so it helps make the job more enjoyable [sic]. We're helping each other with kids, and communicating with parents, and . . . so I feel like that team aspect is very beneficial to helping enjoy your job.

Amber admitted that although she tries to make her lessons interesting and engaging for everybody, it is not always possible. Advanced students sometimes tend to get bored because they might not be challenged enough, whereas lower students may get bored because of the lack of understanding of the content. However, Amber tries to meet

all the students' needs by providing opportunities for group work, discussion, scavenger hunts, incorporating technology, doing foldables and interactive journals.

Karen

Karen is the 8th grade Language Arts teacher. She stated that she values family time above everything else. She believes that one should always like his/her job, or not be doing it. And, she also believes that everybody should be reading books.

Karen's parents did not have a prominent educational background:

My dad is and was a pipefitter growing up, which he did a whole lot of traveling, and a whole lot of not being present. I think he sometimes would be home, but we wouldn't see him because we were up from six or seven in the morning until we went to bed at nine at night, he would be gone the whole time, but always some kind of construction or some outside work. And then my mother did various things. She worked at fast food restaurants, she eventually finished her GED, both of my parents dropped out of high school when they were sixteen and seventeen and began to have children. And so my mom at one point finally got her GED, took a few college courses, and started working at a hospital, so she did medical records for most of my high school years, which was the most stable job that she had.

This is Karen's fourth year in public education and the third year with LSISD. However, she did not come to public education directly from college. After attending two major universities in Texas, she graduated and started working in social services for eight years. Particularly, Karen stated that, "The thing that I most enjoyed about [sic]

[social services] is that I got to teach adult education, so I did a lot of health classes, and bilingual health classes because Spanish was my minor.” However, eventually her responsibilities changed and

It just became very administrative. I hated it. And so, after not liking my job for about a year, I decided I don’t like this, so I need to do something else. And I was “Oh, I like the teaching part, maybe I would like it.” So, I went back to school, I got my certification four years ago, and then I started.

Karen did not have any doubts about the subject matter that she wanted to teach. She stated that she had always been “naturally good at it [English].” Particularly, she asserted that “English is what I enjoy doing. And I think you can learn so much about people, about other cultures through reading. It was also my major [sic], so it made sense to go back and get certified in it.”

She obtained her teaching certificate through an alternative certification program and “walked into a classroom with zero background information or training [sic] on classroom management or learning strategies.” Karen also added, “It worked out for me because I needed a job while I was getting my certification, but I do feel bad for my first-year kiddos.”

For Karen, the best part about teaching is the “kid part” and the “classroom part.” Among the challenges of being a teacher she identified not getting burned out, multiple demands on teachers’ time, and the paperwork. In addition to being a teacher, Karen is also a team leader and a department chair. Another challenge identified by Karen was the administrative changes within school that happened the year before:

At the beginning of the year we had new administration, all new administration, so everything from a new PEIMS clerk to a new secretary, to a new front desk secretary, to two . . . no three administrators . . . I mean, everyone . . . curriculum coordinator . . . Everyone was new . . . And so there was a lot of stress from that because those who have been here for a few years kind of had an expectation and then the administrators had had expectations, but no one was communicating with one another, so three administrators would say different things, three teachers would interpret that different ways, it was just very stressful . . . and I think because of that I don't think I'd bonded very well with those kids at all that first six weeks because I was very distracted, you know, emotionally. So, I think last year I would have said "No, I don't think I can do this much longer." But this year, this year has been much better. I mean, we have consistency, well, we have two years of consistency, not many people left, so that helped.

Karen does not believe that teaching English is easier than teaching other subjects "because there is not an exact answer in English, so sometimes I am a little jealous of the math teacher. [sic] It's either right or not right." At this grade level teaching English is especially challenging because you are really teaching students "how to think" by teaching them how to analyze texts. Karen stated, "It's so much more subjective, than a lot of subjects, and even in social studies I get jealous because they get specific terms listed."

Karen thinks that her classroom has become more structured and consistent this school year, which may have taken away some of the "fun" aspects of pedagogy, like

projects or moving around the classroom, however it helps the students who need that structure in the classroom. Karen's pedagogical tool kit also depends on each individual class:

I think that sometimes when you ask my fifth period and my second period that are doing exactly the same content and really being taught the same thing, I think they would even reflect differently on how the class is, because so much of it depends on what the students are contributing every day . . . um, yeah because we do, I mean, much of what we do is discussion based or, you know, turn and talk to your partner and we kind of take from that what we're doing that day, so every class is very different.

John

John teaches 8th grade Math and Algebra 1. He is also an assistant coach for the high school soccer team. This is his third year with LSISD and his seventh year in public education.

John said that he is a perfectionist and takes everything he does very seriously. He expects the same from his colleagues and his students: "I like people following through, I like people being serious about their tasks, you know. For students that would be their education."

He grew up in a small town in Texas. When growing up, he dreamt of being a ball player: "I was a baseball and a soccer player, and that was kind of what I identified with for a long time."

For most part, school was easy for John: “I loved going to school up until probably about . . . I was eight and that’s when my father died, and then . . . I didn’t want to go to school anymore. I mean, I went, I enjoyed socializing, and I was good at doing classwork.”

John’s mother was in nursing administration and his father owned his own business up until he passed away. His stepfather was building oil pumps for an industrial company. He appeared in John’s life when he was 17, “it was a bit when I’d already established my own identity and things like that.”

John did not go to college to become a teacher. He saw college as an opportunity to play soccer: “I played soccer in college and it paid for me so I went [sic]. So, I played ball and got my education in Sports and Entertainment Promotion Management.” His first two years in college were mostly about playing sports and partying: “I played ball and probably partied too much.” John had to go to academic probation at that point: “My coach could tell I’d put on some weight and he hammered me. I think a lot of my teammates hammered me as well. They were like, ‘Man, you’ve got to get it together.’” Then, in John’s junior year his history professor inspired him to be better and made him believe that he can do well academically: “Then it got fun and my junior and my senior I think I made the Dean’s list three different times, so yeah. It was kind of like a late bloomer in the education department.”

After graduation John had an opportunity to go to Germany for two years and play soccer at the professional level. However, he “got hurt” and had to come back home. He decided he did not want to have anything to do with soccer anymore since he

could not play. He took a managerial position at Abercrombie & Fitch for some time, but he “just hated it.” John explained how he got into coaching and teaching:

Then some people slowly but surely coerced me to . . . got me to come back and they were like, “Man, you’d be a good coach. Step in.” I’d been coaching club for a long time. But they were like, “Man, you’d be good with kids. Just come in and give it a shot.” I didn’t for a while, and then about a year after that I said, “All right, I’ll do it.”

So, John moved back to his home town, started teaching, coaching, and helping his parents at the farm. Before he came to LSISD, he had taught sixth grade history and science, eighth grade history, and he also was a fourth grade math teacher for two years. John said, “I could teach anything because my classroom management was good.” However, his favorite subject to teach is Math: “I am just good at Math [sic]. I am a math guy, I do numbers, I like numbers. That’s easy.”

The most challenging aspect of teaching for John depends on a district: “Sometimes the students can be challenging, but sometimes it’s administrators, sometimes it’s other teachers.” When it comes to John’s current district, he thinks that current leadership and staffing chaos on his campus negatively influences him as an instructor along with his students:

Well yeah, it does affect my teaching. It does. Not the way I teach or my classroom, other than the fact that I’m treated as almost like a parole officer or a prison guard. I’m up and down that hallway. Especially for the first six to nine weeks. I was getting 30 phone calls a day. “Can you come help, can you come

do this, can you come get this?" We have a school full of 22 new teachers, and 20 new teachers to our district, and 22 new teachers. Most of them are either new to the profession or fresh out of college. They have this idea, the book knowledge, but they don't have the actual . . . they don't know how to apply it [sic]. When they're coming to me asking me, could I be a disciplinarian guru, specialist, and take time from my class, which is tested, it falls back on me if we don't score well, but they want me to come out of the classroom for a month, month and a half, two months. Makes it kind of get a bit scary. Well then, coach you can go back to your classroom every bit and check on your class. Well, they're not getting the same education. So I think that just the chaos leadership, it's just all over the place.

John believes that because of his discipline and classroom management style, his students do not always enjoy his class, especially at the beginning of the year.

Specifically, he described his classroom as, "the place they don't want to go. Until they finally learn that there's a reason for it." John went on to explain that,

A lot of these kids I've got, they've come from complete chaos. I mean, I'm in the same camp and I'm saying that. [Sic] I've got a lot of energy. It doesn't bother me to say, "Stop." And say it a hundred times. I'm a coach, too, so I mean it's just, you have to repeat yourself a lot. So I don't let anything go. So that can be tiresome. So there's a lot of kids in the beginning, they want to try to stake their dominance and it doesn't work, and so they get a bit fed up. But at this point it just starts to work. They start to understand, because at the same time I was one

of those guys. I understand where they're coming from. I understand most of their personalities, for the most part.

Despite all these challenges, John enjoys teaching:

I like teaching. Would I say that it's going to be what I do forever, probably not because I do want to stay in education, I want to be a coach, but at the collegiate level. I think that most people knew that going into this, but I'll be honest, I could have quit if I wanted to, to go do something else, I could have pursued other careers. I enjoy it. I like working with these kids, I think that it's fun because I was a kid who was very troublesome, very provocative, I did a lot of different things that I shouldn't have, and I think that's what I get through to these kids. I don't let them get away with anything. The things they did, I mean I was clever. These kids aren't clever. You know? They're just doing bad stuff. I was clever and bad kind of kid [sic].

I had a teacher today say . . . Or not today, this year, "Why do these kids not want to learn?" These kids, this is the least of their worries. They're here to socialize, get a free meal, and get out. It's our job to make them want to learn. Sometimes you just have to hit them over the head with it until one day, like me, it goes, "Hey, I needed that. I need all this stuff that they made me learn. Didn't want to, but you had to." Then they'll come back and they'll thank you. Or if they don't, part of the job, I guess.

Ellis

Ellis is an 8th grade Language Arts teacher. The most important thing in her life is being a mom. Ellis loves children, loves teaching, and loves her subject matter. This is her 13th year as a public school teacher and her 7th year with LSISD. Ellis said, “I’ve taught from 6th grade all the way through 11th grade, Language Arts plus some Spanish and some theater for fun.”

Ellis grew up in a Mormon and LDS culture (The Church of Jesus Christ of *Latter-Day Saints*). Her mother stayed at home. She got married right after high school to her father who was a police officer. Talking about her parents, she said, “My parents both started regular life right after high school, but my dad put himself through college. By the time I was 14, I think, he earned a master’s degree. He retired as chief of police and did a stint as a sheriff.”

Growing up, Ellis wanted to be many different things. Particularly, she said, “I wanted to be a sign language interpreter, a lawyer, a child psychologist, and at one point, I think I wanted to be a stay-at-home mom.”

Ellis’ way to becoming a teacher was not easy or linear. She started at Utah State University and finished at a mid-sizes state university in Texas. Her first attempt at college was not very successful:

I dropped out of college after . . . there were quarters back then, after three quarters in 1998. I had a baby when I was 18. I went back to school a couple of years later. I had two kids and a husband. I wanted a job that worked for being a

mom. I was like, “Well, I love English. I could get an English degree and teach, and then, I can be with my kids.” It’s turned out to work out great.

[Sic] I had two kids when I started college. I had a third child in my senior year of college. I took a heavy workload because I had to hurry and get done because I needed to provide for these kids. I did not enjoy college as far as any in the social stuff. I actually loved my classes. I loved being in the classroom. I loved learning. I loved writing my papers and reading all of the literature. Mostly, college, I loved it.

The most challenging aspect about teaching Ellis considers classroom management and administrative support: “If we had administrative support and follow through on our issues, I think things would be better.” Overall, she enjoys teaching, however,

It is super stressful at this point in my life because we have had our complete chaos with administration this year. It’s like we’re in a ship and we’re bailing ourselves out as we go this year. Right now, the thing that I hate about teaching is that I feel like we are just bunch of random people thrown in a ship that’s sinking and we’re trying to bail it out as we go. That is making me hate what I do right now.

However, when it comes to working with students, Ellis shared,

I love teaching kids stuff. [Sic] today, we did an article about immigration and we pulled up the Statue of Liberty and we read what the inscription says. Then, we showed a picture of how the Statue of Liberty is right next to Ellis Island, and

how you see the sign of hope and then, they throw you at Ellis Island where you get stuck for five months. I love that. I love teaching kids and I love when they get excited. We can have those moments that are not in the lesson plan, but they're going to remember the Statue of Liberty and Ellis Island.

She believes that teaching Language Arts is more challenging than other subjects: "Science and Social Studies, they have a set of curriculum. You start here and you go through there." Teaching English, however, according to Ellis, is different:

In Language Arts, we are constantly cycling through all of them and the grading is really hard because you're reading so much writing. The way we do Language Arts in middle school, we're teaching reading and writing. Lots of districts have them as two separate courses because both of them are so challenging, and we have to do all of them in the same amount of time. It's really hard trying to do both of those.

Ellis is passionate about her subject matter, because "without writing and reading, none of the other things matter and because language is beautiful." Ellis, also added that,

I love English and I love reading, and all of that stuff but I think I like the people. I think I like the human interaction because when I did one year of pushing in with my ESL kids and I didn't have my own room and my own group of students, it was really sad and depressing. I like to have those kids and I like to be their teacher. It makes me happy.

When describing her class, Ellis said that, "some days we have very cool, interesting things to do and sometimes, we're doing stuff we got to do. I think it can be

interesting.” However, she believes that it is difficult to balance the students with diverse backgrounds and abilities. She thinks that her advanced students might consider some of her classes boring because they are not always challenged enough. On the other end of the issue, “If you can’t read well and you’re in a class where you have to read and your grade is based on your success at reading, you’re not going to like it.” Overall, however, “I think my class is good. I cover my TEKS and we get done the things that must be done. Sometimes, we enjoy it and sometimes, we don’t, but we do it. We’re getting the job done.”

Summary

Chapter IV introduced the participants of the study and the school district where they teach. The school district is characterized by a high number of at-risk and economically disadvantaged students. Both the participating middle schools and the whole district have undergone considerable leadership, staff, and faculty turn over in the past five years.

The four teachers who agreed to participate in the study ranged in their teaching experience from four to thirteen years, however their instructional effectiveness was equally recognized by their campus administrators. Amber and John teach 7th and 8th grade math, respectively. Karen and Ellis teach 8th grade English Language Arts.

The following four chapters will focus on each individual participant and describe the pedagogical, behavior management strategies, and other factors that make them successful in the classroom.

CHAPTER V

Amber

Introduction

Amber believes that her role in the classroom is three-fold. First, it is to foster students' love for math. Second, it is to facilitate her students' learning by creating the environment conducive to learning. Third, it is to make sure that students take ownership of their learning.

She is convinced that her students have not only educational, but also emotional needs that teachers have to be able to meet. Amber thinks that for some students, especially the advanced level students, all they really need is the subject matter from her. However, with "lower" children, whose emotional needs are not always met at home, her job is to make a difference in their life and show them that she cares for them: "If I hadn't built that relationship with them, and try to help make a difference in some area or aspect of their life, they're not gonna learn math."

Advice for Teachers

As mentioned in previous chapter, this is Amber's sixth year with LSISD. Based on Amber's practical experience, she believes that a teacher, in order to be successful in

the classroom, should do the following: (1) Stay organized; (2) Find the classroom management strategies that work for them; and (3) Be assertive.

All these three tips run together in the way that in your classroom you have to create and enforce structures and routines that are clear for students to follow and that facilitate instruction. Part of creating these structures is being assertive. Amber explained that

. . . sometimes we get “assertive” and “mean” confused. I am the teacher that they all think is mean, but I feel like it’s because I am very assertive in how I teach, I am very assertive in saying “This is what I expect you to do,” whereas as a new teacher [sic] we go in and we are kind of nervous about it all, but we forget to be assertive.

Relationships with Students

Amber is convinced that the relationships that she has built with her students are helping her be more efficient in the classroom. She does a variety of things in order to build those relationships.

Extracurricular events.

Amber thinks that students are “apt to rise to your expectation if they feel like you care about something that they are involved in.” Therefore, attending extracurricular events and supporting students outside the classroom is an invaluable tool of a successful teacher:

I feel like that's important to them, they feel like that's important just like if I were a parent, they want you to come, and so if they see you, they are more apt to come and do things in class and more for you.

Students' names.

Amber manages to learn the names of her students within a week. She said, "It sounds pretty braggatory and arrogant, but I am actually pretty good at learning names by a week." Here is how she does it:

I normally do a suitcase activity, and in the suitcase, on an index card, they have to draw three to five things that describe them. Normally I do that the second day. So, the first day I usually have them in alphabetical order and we'll move to group later in the year, but . . . to help facilitate me learning their names, I stick them in alphabetical order from the first week or so. The suitcase activity forces my brain to learn three things about them that I can identify with their name, but I don't ever say their . . . I say their name at the beginning of day, but I hate butchering their name, so I either say the last name or the first name, but I feel like to help me is that suitcase activity, they actually do it. They guess each other's card and they say each other's name. And then one of the conditions is that they have to actually say that person's name, so they can't say "The person in the green shirt." So, one, it's helping them learn their names and build that sense of community. But, two, so I don't have to repeat their name five times, they are repeating their names. That helps my brain see them . . . and then I have to see their face, so

we'll do several activities to help to get to know them, but my goal is usually ultimately one week.

Another method that Amber uses to help her learn her students' names is shaking their hand at the door and saying their names. This is normally a trial-and-error process: "I usually get them all mixed up. Not that anybody doesn't, but they all look the same the first week of school."

Amber goes through this process for a good reason. It goes back to building relationships with students: "I think that the best thing you can do to help the kid be able to perform for you in class is build that relationship."

Parental involvement.

As far as parents' involvement is concerned, "There are some that are really involved, maybe too much. And there is the ones that just are absolutely never [sic] involved."

In order to reach out to her students' families and build positive relationships, Amber sends out a "Get to know you" letter home with students in order to introduce herself to parents. In addition, "we call our home room class to get to get that positive interaction from the very beginning from that kid." Amber said that she also calls home in the middle of class if a student is unable to get his or her behavior under control: "Most of the time it's positive feedback "struggling with this, I need help with this particular issue . . ." And normally the parents are pretty helpful in helping fix the problem."

Students' potential.

Amber assured that she does not have pre-conceived notions about her students at the beginning of the year: "When they come in, it's a blank slate." This is true when it comes to either academics or discipline:

In the past we've done a "let's let this discipline file follow them to the next." We do a Google documentation and document when we've called and they wanted that to follow them the next year, but from sixth grade to seventh grade they grow so much that I feel like as a sixth grader they are completely different than as a seventh grader. So, I feel like it should start off on a blank slate. Discipline-wise, I don't normally go . . . I don't normally look at anything from previous . . . to decide what's happening now. I'm gonna look how now . . . what you're doing now to determine how to handle discipline.

However, in order to provide quality instruction, she needs to know where they are when it comes to content matter: "I'll do some kind of pre-assessment to kinda see what they know about math just as a background." It is mostly an ongoing assessment in the form of a daily warm-up of filling in the blanks: "Most of them that I am getting are pretty low, so I usually know them within the first six weeks based on their STAAR where they are at."

Although Amber is a very optimistic and positive teacher, she admits that the school system and she personally is not always able to reach every student every day:

I think certain kids lean towards a school environment and other kids need more of a one-on-one. So, I feel like [sic] those are usually our discipline issues in

middle school [sic]. Certain kids are going to go further, and certain kids need the here and now, a physical skill that they can do. So, I feel like, yes, we can reach certain kids in different aspects of where they are going ultimately, whether they are going to college or whether they need a skill, so I feel like we can do a better job of helping reach the students down here with the skill that they see here and now. And some of them maybe in a different setting. And I feel like it's only a certain few . . . like these five kids could get one-on-one every day, I feel like that they would be better. But we don't have anything that leans towards that. It's "sit in the classroom even though we can't handle the classroom necessarily," so I feel like to a certain extent we don't reach kids down here because we don't lean towards something that they can handle or something they can do.

Students' Academic Success

Academic success of Amber's students depends on her daily effort and going the extra mile. She makes the effort to meet her students' academic needs in a variety of ways.

Student learning.

Amber believes that to be an efficient teacher, one has to employ the kinesthetic, visual, and auditory visual styles. In her classroom, she said,

I think they get a variety of different ones. On a daily basis, I think, I gear more towards the visual and auditory learning styles versus kinesthetic, because we don't always do something that's moving and I think that partly stems from whatever the lesson is for the day, so whatever the curriculum lesson leads to. I

feel like certain aspects of math lean towards more kinesthetic things and others are more geared towards “I have to teach you this particular way to do the math visually.” But I normally try to do visual and auditory very frequently, every day. They need that picture of what they are seeing for what they’re hearing.

When it comes to student freedom and taking ownership of their learning, Amber thinks that in seventh grade, students might not be ready for much freedom. Nevertheless, they should be given such opportunities whenever possible: “By twelfth they should have some sense of “I’m gonna do this, I’m gonna take ownership of doing this on my own . . .” [In seventh grade] they obviously don’t have all the concepts down, but I feel like they should have some desire to be motivated to take ownership of them doing their work.”

Technology.

When it comes to using technology in the classroom, Amber used the Elmo projector and the Promethean board throughout the whole observed lesson. She thinks that it is important to integrate technology into student learning because “the kids are so geared toward technology.” Her classes have a computer lab day every week, where they use the *Think through Math* software to reinforce the math concepts that she teaches in class. Using technology, according to Amber, makes learning more fun for her students. For her, it is one of the ways to make learning for her students more engaging.

Teaching to the test.

Students’ academic success is normally measured by some kind of a test. Therefore, teaching to the test seems to be a natural and a logical avenue to follow for a

teacher whose students demonstrate consistently high scores on standardized tests.

Amber said that she does not agree with teaching to the test, however,

I think, as a teacher, we fall into that trap of “I gotta teach to the test,” because this is how this question’s assessed. I feel like we spend too much time assessing a question on how it’s gonna be worded than we do about teaching the concept and the material and having the understanding of the understanding it. I feel like more so this year we have fallen into that trap, because that’s what our professional developments are about—how are we going to look at this question and analyze this question and get better at this type of question” versus teaching a skill and helping them fill the gaps that they need of math.

Amber is constantly making an effort to avoid the trap of teaching to the test: “I am kinda of an opinion that I’ll go against and I’ll be ok with being a little bit behind in the scope and sequence to help them get the material, versus being on track to this particular question.” She continued explaining her position of teaching to the test:

I am not gonna teach so they can pass this test. Yes, that’s what they need to do, but at this certain point in time if [sic] my kids are back here, then I am teaching those skills that they need to be successful on those versus what they need for that particular test. Do I pull questions from the test and look at questions from the test? Yes, but I think that’s one of the avenues that we have for them to be successful there. They need to know the skill versus teaching to that particular question of that particular test.

Passing and extra help.

Amber asserted that the most reliable way to help students “pass” is “giving them a variety of ways to learn the material, as well as constant spiraling back.” More specifically Amber indicated that she uses

. . . a warm-up that spirals questions from fourth grade up to seventh grade for the most part. So, every kid all day long is getting some basic form in ten questions of basic math skills without the word problem aspect of it, just basic math facts that they needed from fourth grade to seventh grade. And that’s just a five minute “come in, sit down, get started on this warm-up to see what you know about these.”

In all of her classes Amber does an interactive journal,

. . . so they have that to constantly refer back and look at. I did not do it my first year, and so I feel like the kids had papers everywhere, they never knew where anything was. And so, my second year, I’d gone to a training and looked at interactive notebook, I feel like that one aspect that helps them be able to prepare because I can say “Look through your notebook, study these particular concepts, this is what’s gonna be on the test.”

In addition, Amber believes in the power of reviews:

My reviews look very similar to the test, so we do the review and then do some kind of aspect of review game to go along with it. And I normally give it to them. I try to plan them on Thursdays, so I try to normally give it to them on a Monday and they work on gradual pieces of the review each night until the day of the test.

But, we'll usually do some kind of activity or game to help them prepare for that particular material.

Another method that Amber does to help her students master material better is allowing them to be a teacher:

So, for the first two six weeks of school I usually stand up and I show them what I expect on the warm up. And then they are allowed to get up and work on it [sic]. I feel like in helping them be successful I give them modes to want to teach it to other people. Whether that's whole group or helping be the teacher for the warm-up [sic]. To work out that problem and then do various activities, not just me standing up, constantly teach-teach-teach. Letting them be part of their own learning [sic].

Indeed, during the observation of one of Amber's classes, a female student went to the Promethean board and went over the problems on the warm-up with the whole class. The student called on the students who she wanted to do the next problem. Meanwhile, the teacher was walking around the room, looking at students' work, providing individual feedback while simultaneously paying attention to what the student at the board was doing and what the student who was called upon was answering. She also asked probing questions and provided constant encouragement and positive reinforcement: "Awesome job, and thank you for knowing the rule off the top of your head," or " $x-2=3$ off the top of your head, what do you think goes in there? You know it. We did it yesterday. Don't be afraid."

For the students who need additional help, “I am here before school and after school, except Wednesdays, that’s normally when I call home . . . and the kids know this too, they can come for [sic] test corrections, they can come in get extra help pretty much any day.”

The Fundamental Five

Amber complied with the majority of aspects of the Fundamental Five instructional framework. She skillfully used them to ensure that the students were engaged and learned new material.

Framing the lesson.

When it comes to framing the lesson, Amber said that she posts . . . the agenda or just a brief description of what we’re gonna do for the day and then I’ll post the learning objective from the student side “Today I will . . .” and so whatever we are going to do. So, today it was “Today I will identify proportional and nonproportional relationships,” which is taken from the TEK[S], but in something they understand in brief concise words that they also copy in their agenda, so the parents are knowing, kinda what we’re doing in class.

Amber also thinks that when posting objectives for the day it is important to “include the verb, the language that’s within the TEK[S] so that kid understand those vocabulary words there within the TEK[S] because those are important to know for the STAAR test, too.” However, “I am not including the whole TEK[S] necessarily when I write it up there, I am writing it in concise words that they can understand.”

When it comes to having a closing question or product with every lesson, Amber tries to have it, but she is not always able to achieve it:

Some days [sic] if I've gotten done with the notes, depending how long that activity took, it's normally a discussion at the end of the class period. So, discuss with the group or a partner what you did. Other days, and I'll use this week, for instance, because this is the one that does this, we did notes yesterday and we did a video and so they were taking notes and at the end of the class period. They have their notes and their facts, at the end of the class period we said "Discuss with a partner." But today, after the scavenger hunt, they did the exit ticket out of the door. So, I couldn't do an exit ticket completely yesterday over complete notes.

On the day of the observation, Amber was teaching her students how to solve equations. As a closing activity, they had to create their own equation on a piece of paper, wrinkle it in a paper ball and toss it across the room. Then, each student had to pick up a paper ball closest to them, open it, solve the equation, and turn it in.

Working in the power zone.

Amber stated that she probably teaches approximately 75% of her lesson in the power zone:

I feel like I stand close to the Promethean board most of the time . . . however, warm-up times normally I am letting a kid get up there and teach, so I am able to walk around the room and facilitate the things that are going on in the class, but there is never a time that I actually . . . I never sit down. There is never a time

throughout the whole day that I am sitting down anywhere. It's constantly either walking or moving or roaming around the room.

Amber believes that teacher proximity is crucial for classroom management:

The more that you're able to be closer to the kid, the more they are able to be doing what they want them to do. [Sic] I feel like that's one thing that helps with the classroom management is being next to them [sic] so they know you're watching what they are doing, what they are supposed to be doing.

Amber said that she does not have a power place in the classroom that would indicate that she is about to talk, or teach, or give directions:

I am moving around so much that and we do so many activities in here, I feel like it doesn't matter where I am standing, they are still gonna listen. I am not saying they are all listening and it's all going in, but they will turn . . . depending on the mode of attention getter that I've had, they will turn and listen.

Indeed, during my observation in Amber's classroom, regardless of her position in the classroom and regardless of the noise level in the classroom, she was able to get everybody's attention by calmly saying either "If you hear my voice, clap once" or "If you hear my voice, snap once." It worked well every time she used it. Every time her students were able to refocus their attention from an individual or a group activity to the teacher.

Amber's classroom is arranged in groups of three and four. During my observation, both the students and the teacher were able to easily circulate around the room and get to where they needed to be. However, as she shared:

At the very beginning of the year I put them in rows, but I am able to get around in a circular path for the most part. And I'm able to get to my computer if I need to, but [I can] get to pretty much every kid if need be.

Frequent small group purposeful talk (FSGPT).

Although it is a math class, Amber said that she is able to integrate FSGPT into her daily instructional routine:

If it's the day that is more taking notes, I'll normally integrate some form of an introduction to what I am teaching and an example and let them discuss or "share with your group," "share with your partner" whether it's working a question together or it's reading together, some form of a break to get their brain a break from the complete material.

She tries to have FSGPT every ten to fifteen minutes. The length of these "breaks" depends on the content of the lesson:

Normally it's anywhere between thirty seconds to two-three minutes. If we're working the question, most of the time on an example, I'm kinda getting them started, "and now it's your chance to work it for three minutes."

When it comes to pre-planning for questions that expand student understanding of the material, Amber said that,

I feel like sometimes I plan a question and sometimes I don't necessarily ask it. It doesn't necessarily come out. But, I think in teaching the material for several years and the same concept, most of the time there is things that I'll think of right while I am teaching. So, I would say that a lot of the times it's the teachable

moment times where a kids has gone “Oh . . . ” had this question and then I thought, “Oh yeah, we need to go over this question.” So, both aspects. I try to plan at least one that I know for sure I’m gonna ask this main question, but then the other just come as I go.

Recognizing and reinforcing.

Amber tends to focus on positive behaviors and compliance with her expectations, more than on undesired behaviors. During the observation conducted in Amber’s classroom, she was proactive at spotting desired behaviors and praising the students who are on task, students who are meeting her expectations, or the students who are at least trying.

Critical writing.

Amber provides opportunities for her students for critical writing, however, as she explained:

Not as much as I would like to. At the end of some lessons and some years I’ve done a better job of doing this than others. At the very end [sic] we’ll do a summary of what we learned in that lesson, so they have to write, you know, three to five sentence explanation of what they did and they will have a partner read it. I don’t necessarily do it in every lesson, but I’ll do some writing aspect of what information they got from the lesson for the day.

Discipline Management

Among the discipline issues that Amber observes in her classroom are talking and throwing objects:

I think some of it stems from [sic] the age group. We've seen throwing crayons, throwing pencils . . . I see throwing objects and talking [sic] than anything else. And not necessarily talking about anything that's going on outside the class [sic]: it's the "shut up, quit talking to me, quit hitting me, quit kicking me," that personal space aspect.

Amber had several discipline tips that she would give to a brand new teacher.

One of the most important ones is being assertive:

the kid has to know that . . . probably in every grade, but I feel like more so in middle school just because they are just in that "testing the waters" phase and seeing "what I can do" . . . but being assertive and telling the kid, "This is what I expect, these are the expectations, here is the consequences to what's gonna happen" and following through with those consequences.

The second tip that she believes is crucial is being consistent. Particularly, Amber mentioned that she feels like "out of anything would be making sure you're consistent of following through with what expectations you've set for . . . And the kid knows how to play the system, so they're gonna know whether you remembered or whether you didn't." She also added that, "my biggest one is just following through. The kid has to know that you are gonna follow through with that expectation and do what you say you gonna do."

Another discipline tip from Amber is being aware of what's going on around you:

I am at my computer taking roll, but you have thirty kids that are doing who-knows-what while you're taking roll. I am usually very . . . probably more so . . . I have very good hearing . . . and the kids will say that "Man, she heard that clear

across the room.” But being very keenly aware of what’s going on around you has helped with making sure you know what’s going on with every kid.

The next disciplinary tip is less direct and has to do with parent communication. She stated that the parent needs to be a part of teachers’ discipline management plan: “The parent needs to be able to help, but if you never call home, then they are not there to help and so that has helped with discipline and management.”

School Environment

It is not only instructional practices and classroom management that influence teacher effectiveness. Amber shared her thoughts about administrators, collaboration with colleagues, professional development opportunities, and other aspects of her job that have an impact on her effectiveness.

Administrators.

According to Amber, the role of school administrators should primarily be disciplinary. Unfortunately, she does not always feel like she is getting all the support that she needs. She is not one of those teachers who writes up a lot of students. She tries to manage as much as possible within her classroom before she asks for administrative assistance. However, when she does ask for support from an administrator, she wishes the consequences would be more “severe”:

Their role mostly is to see the kid after I’ve written a referral. I feel like, what they could help with is being in the classroom a little more to help know kinda have that understanding of actually what’s going on in that particular classroom. And I’ve seen both sides. I’ve had some administrators, assistant principals or

administrators who have been in here and kind of been able to come in and say “Hey, I’m gonna come help you with this one class period” or not necessarily to sit in here the whole class period, just to have that presence of “I’m gonna peek in, check and see how it’s going, and kind of have your back I guess.” And on the other end, some years there’s been nobody come in or come in and watch, come in and see kind of what’s going on, and I feel like it’s helped to have that better understanding of what that class looks like, the makeup of that group of kids, to help with discipline issues, but I don’t write up a ton of kids, unless I absolutely have to, because I feel like I’m gonna try to control it where I can, and then send them to the office [sic] You know, torturing the kid as long as you can with your discipline methods before you send them there and it’s out of your hands. But I think they could do a better job of helping us manage that kid. Like, I’ve sent them to the office knowing that . . . or knowing the teacher . . . because if *I’ve* sent them to the office, and some of them do know that, certain teachers, that if I’ve sent them to the office, I’ve had enough, like it’s been up to the max, but then I don’t feel like the kid gets, I would say harsh enough consequence, but they get “Let’s write a behavior essay.” Well, I’ve already gone through those modes, they’ve written the behavior essay, and lunch detention, or after school, or this . . . I feel like I’ve gotten to that extent that it’s severe, so I feel like they could do a better job of helping understand the teachers on campus and actually what’s going on in that classroom and kinda where to help.

This should not give an impression as if Amber is all about punitive measures.

During my observation, she acknowledged positive and desired behavior more than any other teacher observed for this study. For example, as students were walking into her classroom, she said, “Jane, come see me for a ticket for walking quietly in the hallway and having your voice at the level zero,” or “Robert, thank you for your table being all about the warm-up.” Amber said,

I think they all need positive reinforcement, but more so the kid that’s low, needs way more than the one who’s capable of managing behavior. I mean managing both, but I do feel like the kid up here that is doing that is supposed to needs to be reinforced positively to know that this behavior is ok. [Sic] But I feel like those punitive measures should be there for the kid, so the kid knows that there is a consequence to things that happen. I can’t just be praised every time for everything, I’ve got to have a consequence to something.

Collaboration.

Collaboration with colleagues is an integral part of Amber’s professional routine, considering the fact that she is not only a teacher, but also a team leader and a department head:

I collaborate with the team, which helps with discipline, because we’ll have a reading teacher, science, history, and math that all have the same 110 kids so we’re able to collaborate discipline-wise and how we’re gonna help that kid and then content-wise.

Having that team we have two off periods. So, we have one that's devoted to team time, and then one forty-five minutes that's devoted to our content area. So, I am usually able to collaborate with other teachers either during one of those conference periods [sic]. And if we can't do it during one of those times, then it's after school . . . So, within that we'll talk about pacing, scope and sequence, kind of where we're at, activities, that we are all working. It kind of depends on who I'm working with. So, I've worked with a variety of different people. Some of them "This is what I'm gonna do. We're gonna talk about the pacing, but this is the activities I'm doing versus what you're doing." And we've had years where we've really collaborated with the activity and this is what we're both doing." It's the same activity . . . and then comparing how those activities went. So, it kind of depends on who I am working with for the year.

Professional development.

Amber feels like she has had plenty of opportunities for professional development:

I'll elaborate on why. I think part of it is stemming from being a department head. I feel like this year I've been out a ton, I've been out almost two weeks with the professional development, and when you look at pacing, scope and sequence . . . [Sic] I am having to go to certain professional development to help the campus or help the department, but on my aspect, yes I feel like I've gotten a lot of professional development.

Working overtime.

Amber said that she does work overtime a substantial amount:

Sometimes I feel like it's teach during the day and have a second job in the evening, whether I am grading papers at home or I am up here. I would say at least twenty hours, probably way more than that, but I spend a lot of time doing extra stuff. A lot!

Amber did not spare time of effort in order to ensure her students' academic success. Multiple factors contributed to her effectiveness as a classroom teacher.

Summary

Amber believed that efficient classroom procedures and staying assertive are important for any teacher. She built trusting relationships with her students by attending extracurricular events, learning their names within a week, involving their parents, and believing in their potential.

She ensured her students' academic success by meeting multiple learning styles, incorporating technology where appropriate, and tried to avoid teaching to the test. She ensured her students' passing scores by spiraling back, using an interactive journal, peer teaching, and using before or after school tutorials.

Amber complied with the majority of the Fundamental Five requirements. The only element she still needs to work on is critical writing.

As far as discipline management is concerned, Amber believed in being assertive in communicating your expectations and being consistent. Another tip that she had for teachers was about communicating with parents.

Amber was generally pleased with her school environment. She felt like she had administrative support for the most part, however, not always. She felt like her collaboration with colleagues is very productive and positive. Amber also felt like she has had a more than a sufficient amount of professional development opportunities.

CHAPTER VI

Karen

Pedagogy

This is Karen's 4th year in public education and her 3rd year with LSISD. Karen sees her role in the classroom as giving students a goal and helping them achieve it by the end of the class. She believes that her main task in the classroom is keeping students on track to getting to the set goal.

She also believes that although delivering knowledge is important for her as a teacher, she hopes she also makes a difference in the lives of her students by creating a safe learning environment: "Because [sic] [the] goal is that they all would just feel safe in a stable environment where they can learn, right? Where aren't other kinda crazy things going on."

Advice for Teachers

After eight years in public service and almost four years as a public school teacher with LSISD, Karen has advice that she wishes to share with her colleagues: "I would say, first, before you walk into the class, please, read a book about classroom management. Talk to some teachers on your hallway so that you know the systems for classroom management." By talking about "systems for classroom management", Karen means that

it is important to be in sync with other teacher on campus and use similar procedures, which, in turn, helps with consistency across campus and thus helps with many potential discipline issues.

Karen's second piece of advice is that "you have to like your students." Karen explained that "if you don't, then something's wrong with your structure, [sic] you've gotta fix the structure." Therefore, Karen suggests that the reason why teachers do not like their students is because they do not have efficient procedures in the classroom that help them teach, manage discipline, and enjoy what you do on a daily basis.

The third piece of advice from Karen is "be willing to learn from the people around you." Sharing her experiences, she said that teachers need to "be able to step into the other classrooms and observe. I feel like I learn tons. Every time I go to a new classroom, I go like 'Ooh, I could try that, that's such a good idea!'"

Relationships with Students

Karen believes that building relationships with your students "has to be the first thing." She thinks it's important because otherwise "you can have a class where the entire class it's the class versus the teacher. Like, what they can get away with, right?" Also, it is important to build relationships with students in order to be able to hold them accountable, while not taking it to the personal level, especially with "difficult" students:

. . . there always gonna be kids [sic] who have severe behavioral problems, you know, just from teacher to teacher and year to year they are having trouble. And so, if I can get into relationship built with him early, not a friend relationship, but so that they know this is the rule, if this doesn't happen, this is what's going to

happen, but I am not angry, I am not mad at you, but you are still going to have to do this. I feel like it goes such a long way. So that whenever they do something that's obvious, you know, that's a big blow up, they are not upset with me then, whenever that consequence is enforced, because they know that that's not out of anger, that's just, that is the system.

Karen also shared how she manages to build positive rapport with her students:

Something that I am really focusing on is trying to build some kind of relationship between myself and the students and also between them as a class. [Sic] I think, it's important in those first weeks to get down like "We are all in a team, we do this together." And if someone's doing something that's way off task, you know "Ok, pause. Ok, so-and-so, what do you think? Why is this happening? Ok, what's our rule? Ok, tell him, tell him what our rule is. Everybody turn around and tell . . ." You know, like make it a team activity so that no one . . . I don't know, just so that everyone [sic] takes ownership of stuff, I think really helps.

Students' names.

Karen stated that normally by the end of the second week of school, she manages to learn her students' names. Karen explained that

it makes a huge difference because behaviorally I don't have . . . if I don't have a seating chart that has their name so that I could call them out, if that doesn't happen, then by week two I'm gonna have some crazy kids, because that ones who want to act up, just saying their name has a magical effect. You know, "Oh, ok they know who I am, right? Because they can call my mom, they can write a

referral, they can do, who knows . . . ” So it helps in that way, but also I am sure it helps just to connect, “Ok, she knows who I am.”

The way Karen learns her students’ names is the following:

In those first few weeks when we are learning structures, [sic] I try to do games that involve their names as much as I possibly can within the structure so that I get practice, so we I’ll do [sic] little community circles and have them, you know, go around and say each other’s names and then you have to snake back, so you have to say everyone’s name before you and then your name. So, as many things as I can think of . . . So, I have to say their names and I force myself the first few weeks, whenever I call on someone, say their names so that I would remember it. I am pretty good at that.

Parental involvement.

Karen stated that she loves parents because it is one of the structures that help her be an effective educator. She went into more detail explaining how parents are a part of her daily routine:

If I have to say your name more than twice in a day, then we are calling that parent that day. [Sic] I think it’s a big deal because sometimes talking to that parent illuminates a lot what’s going on with that child, right? [Sic] Sometimes when I talk to the parent and they are very-very involved and they’re, you know, shocked that that happened or whatever . . . you know disruption, and they are gonna address it with their child . . . And knowing that changes a lot for the child because . . . I mean, changes a lot for that dynamic, because then if anything even

begins to happen, we can just be like “Ok, we’re going to talk to mom today.”

And it’s all that it takes, you know.

[Sic] Then sometimes I call and talk to a parent and think “Ok, this child has more problems than my English class right now.” And so I think sometimes does make me give them a little bit more, like “Ok, sit out in the hallway and calm down” or just it can reframe the way I am thinking about what’s going on with the kiddos sometimes.

When it comes to less personal parental communication, Karen uses technology to send out reminders on Remind 101 via cell phone texts that she has set up for each of her classes. It allows her to distribute major information pertinent to each class.

Also, Karen admitted that she should try to reach out to the parent of her advanced students more often. Those parents tend to receive less contact from her, because she does not “have to worry about them as much.”

Students’ potential.

According to Karen, it normally takes her some time for fully understand the potential of each student because sometimes it is not that they are not capable, they are just not always willing to do the work in class, so they seem less capable than they really are:

I think it takes quite some time for me to figure out academically how much they are capable of, especially when they not [sic] performing to the level that they can. Sometimes it takes me till the first or second CBA before I see, “Oh, he’s brilliant, he’s just not doing anything in my class.” [Sic] So, I do sometimes have

the moments, feel like, too late. But academically it doesn't necessarily impact anything because without an accommodation all the grading rubrics are the same. [Sic] I feel like, behaviorally generally, unless they have a BIP, I am holding them to the same standard.

Karen also mentioned that her behavior expectations sometimes depend on the class dynamics:

Perhaps if a student in my second period walked into my sixth, they'd be like "Ha, they are allowed to do that?" But I don't know if that's the result of my expectations being different or my body being tired at the end of sixth period. But generally, I think, [sic] I expect everyone to do all the same thing, not necessarily they do, unless they have some kind of accommodations or a behavior plan.

Karen thought that at LSISD in order to reach every student and to uncover every student's potential, one of the things that could help is the reduced class size:

We have such big classes that it's easy for some kiddos to hide, right? And to not be called on, not be pushed. As long as they are not being disruptive, that maybe be [sic] we'll leave them alone. So, I don't know. I want it to be feasible, but I feel like there are some kiddos who have extra things going on and I can't see what it is. I can't find the thing, the reason, you know, [sic] why they are checked out and how to get them back. And I don't know if I am kidding myself thinking if I had a smaller class, maybe I could figure it out.

Students' Academic Success

Karen had a profound understanding of her students and their needs. She always made an effort to provide her students with multiple opportunities to succeed.

Student learning.

Karen believed that her students learn best when they have different and diverse opportunities to be exposed to the material:

The phrase “learning styles” all together is kind of odd to me because I feel like people aren’t generally just one type of learner. But I do think that it’s important to hit all . . . hit many different . . . You know, learning styles in a lesson. And so, daily trying to get kids the same information just verbally and then having them write it down, and then having them tell it to someone else, and then telling them draw something at half time. I think is important just for repetition in different ways to kinda make different connections in your brain. So, in that way I feel like it’s important, and I do feel, especially at this age, I feel like it’s still important that they are moving around some.

Technology.

Karen believed that technology is important because it tends to be engaging and spikes students’ interest in the material that they are being exposed to through the technology:

Something about their brain just turns on when they have technology in front of them, you know. They wake up and, so I think that it’s important to incorporate,

but just feel like we have to careful. I feel like on some level some people think

“Technology. Good.” Without thinking, you know, how you’re using it.

For example, one of Karen’s frustrations was the required computer lab time.

Since it is mostly used as an additional assessment tool, she saw it as a waste of time:

We have to have them in a lab every two weeks. And one of those times we have to have them do *iStation*. *iStation* is like an assessment tool. So, in general I don’t like computer lab time because I feel like it’s wasted on yet another test, and I am not teaching them anything, they are not learning anything. That’s my assessment of that assessment. So, that’s not how I prefer to use technology at all. So, when I can, what I prefer to is bringing [sic] an iPad lab. Now, I have thirty students per class and we only have twenty-two iPads, so that presents its own issue. But when I can, I prefer bringing that in because it means in a sixty-five-minute lesson or so, I can have ten to twenty minutes of a technological [sic] component. But it doesn’t take out the entire class, but it gives them the second way to look at whatever that is we’re doing.

Teaching to the test.

Karen felt very strongly about teaching to the test: “I hate teaching to the test. Hate it with passion.” She thought that it is a federal problem and a state board problem that comes down to teachers. However, Karen noted,

I do it because I have to. I mean truly, every day is teaching to the test. Our entire ELA curriculum, which we just revamped last year, we have a consultant that the district is paying quite a bit to come in, Cody Freeman for ELA, who has

some good teaching strategies and certainly helps align what's on the test with the TEK[S] with what should be taught, so if you accept that we should be teaching to the test, it's a really good program, because it's very targeted, but the entire premise is teaching to the test, which makes me crazy. And so, I want to kick and scream and fight and be like "We need to teach them to love literature and love learning and . . ." But that's not . . . I mean, we're teaching them how to, I don't know, analyze a graph and . . . It's just . . . I think it's frustrating, I think that's probably why a lot of teachers burnout. It's just because they are so tired of looking at data. Like, I purposely don't get certified in math. Why, why I am looking at data again? So, it takes some of the joy out of just teaching. And it doesn't allow anymore for, maybe it's a fairytale in my head, but it doesn't allow for "Oh, the kids seem really interested in blank. Let's study blank!" Like, that is not a thing that can happen, like "blank" is not in my TEK[S], and even if it is, like it's in my TEK[S] in nine weeks, we are not teaching it right now. "This week we are teaching this." You know? And so, that's very-very frustrating.

Passing and extra help.

Karen identified several levels of reasons of why students fail and what kind of support she provides for those students. First of all, Karen said, "if there is an assessment and most of the class bombs, then obviously that's not a kid problem, that's something didn't get communicated, so we would redo things like that."

However, if it is just several students who failed, her first resort was calling the student's parent. She said, "Because [for] about half of those students, that's gonna take

care of it. A parent contact and they're gonna start coming for tutorials, once a week and we're gonna be fine."

There are also the students who need help, but whose parents are hard to contact: "the parent for some reason is unavailable because they are working after school and that kind of thing, I do still allow them to come in and do corrections, like, in advisory class."

Karen explained how they utilize the advisory class:

When we get our test results, we . . . the math teacher and I especially, we look at our test results and decide, "Ok, who needs more time?" We stick those kiddos into our advisory classes, so that we could do just intervention. I mean, it's not required intervention, but "for-us" intervention . . . with just those students, so this Monday I'll have a new group who scored somewhere between seventeen and fifty-three percent on their last CBA, and I'll have them during advisory, so we could do more one-on-one . . . not one-on-one, no, twenty-on-one. But at least a little smaller group than the thirty that we normally have in class. And then, I don't have the students who are bored because they made, you know, a ninety on it. So, that's one way, we use that advisory time.

The next level of the challenge of failing students was

. . . a kid that I just really cannot get [sic]. Then sometimes I'll exempt them from one lesson, right? Like we are doing a repetition lesson, something that we've done before and have them come in here [a small computer lab], to have just quiet and just focus and just do this. So, I give them the opportunities that I can. The time that really use this space, which I love having the mini-lab right beside my

class so that I can have the place that's fairly quiet so that can still work, is when they [sic] are not completing assignments. That makes me crazy. Because if a student, you know, has twelve questions and they finish one, that is not happening. And so [sic] I feel like it just teaches them well "You don't... have to ever to the work and you don't have to learn." So, I want them to know that they can do the work and they will. So, on some level I am trying to push them. And but then, of course, I mean there comes the point when I can't really do much anymore.

With the next grading period Karen repeats her steps: calling home, inviting for tutorials, forcing to tutorials and corrections, and pushing them to perform at their best, and hoping that this time it will work.

Karen also thought that some of the students who are struggling, may need special services or accommodations: "I think that's the most kind of frustrating thing is feeling like [sic] the student isn't doing well not because they are not choosing to do well, they actually need more help, but it's not officially on the paperwork yet."

The Fundamental Five

Karen complied with the majority of aspects of the Fundamental Five instructional framework. She skillfully used them to ensure that the students were engaged and learned new material.

Framing the lesson.

When Karen posts lesson objectives for the day, she tries to do it using the vocabulary that is familiar to students. But she said,

I also want to use the vocabulary that's gonna be higher than they would normally use [sic] in a day-to-day conversation. So, we try to repeat those objectives several times, and ask the question several times, "Ok, can we now do that?"

Because they have to be able to know things like text features even though it's not something they would normally say.

Also, she does not always have a closing question or product at the end of every lesson: "I have an ideal answer to that, but I don't do it every day."

Working in the power zone.

Karen said that she never teaches from her desk:

I have a stool, sometimes when we're reading I do sit on my stool, so that might count. Uhm, but I mean, like five percent, maybe ten. There is . . . I don't understand how that occurs, like I don't understand how you sit and teach. I can't sit . . . I feel like if I sit, I feel like they would all stand or, I don't . . . I don't know . . . I feel like it would throw everything off. I don't know how it would work.

Observation in Karen's classroom confirmed her statement from the interview.

Karen and her teacher assistant constantly circulated the room and worked with individual students and small groups of students.

Karen thinks that teacher proximity is "super important." More specifically she went on to explain,

I think there are a lot of advantages to being close. Disadvantages maybe: sometimes, like if were just at the front of the classroom, I may not hear some of

the lip . . . you know like . . . sometimes they are just whispering something to someone, but if I am beside then, I gonna stop that because we . . . I need you to focus. But at the same time, I think from the perspective of a student, I mean they've been in class . . . by the time they get to me sixth period, they've been there like six hours sitting and learning. And so at some point you might just want to whisper to your friend. I mean I do that in faculty meetings. I am like "Let me check my text real fast," I am still listening, but come on . . . right? So, and so maybe some of that student freedom might be bad, but generally I think teacher proximity is . . . I mean that's the goal I would think.

Karen said that she has a power spot in her classroom that she uses to give directions to students:

They do a lot of group activities or, like, "turn and talk" kind of stuff, but whenever I need their attention, I go the same place [sic]. We have a little projector that's right up here, so if need their attention I go stand right up in front of the projector, and raise up my hand to get their attention. And then [sic] I generally give instructions from that point. And then once I am starting to walk they know they can kinda start talking around.

Karen's room is arranged in groups of four. There is one group of two desks. During the observation, she had a class of 27. Students were sitting in groups of three or four. When it was discussion time, she encouraged the two students from the group of two to find a group of three and join them for discussion. However, the room is arranged to allow movement for both students and the teacher:

I still have [sic] a little back grouping of desks [sic] that are set up in teams that I feel like I can never get it. [Sic] We have very large classes this year compared to normal, and so I feel like I can't always get to that back one, so, of course back there I am trying to put my students that are the most quiet and yeah, academically they, you know, they're high achieving. But then, that means sometimes then [sic] they are not getting as much proximity.

Frequent small group purposeful talk (FSGPT).

Based on the nature of her class, they always have a substantial amount of discussion:

We always have discussion built in, so generally I teach them something or [sic] give them a [sic] mini-lesson and then stop and have them "Ok, so, here is the question . . ." And I'll ask them the question I just answered for them, and then ask them "Ok, so tell to the people at your table, answer the question, tell it to the people at your table." And so, they kind of discuss for a minute and inevitably some of them . . . you generally at the table at least one person has it right, so that can share it, but inevitably you hear like "What? What is that?" When you just said it outloud, and so then they get to tell each other, and then we come back, and again I'll give instruction and have them write it down [sic]. So we try to have a lot of that, and then whenever we're reading, that's the best time for that because we can pause every few paragraphs and ask a question and then have them not tell me, but tell each other the answer, and then have a class discussion.

Karen said that she always pre-plans the questions that she wants to ask her class:

I put little sticky notes wherever we're gonna have those questions. Because, especially in literature, if I don't have them pre-planned, we will go all over the place. I mean because I can intend to be teaching about figurative language and then instead start talking about alliteration. I mean, you know, just because there is so much in every text that you read. They can ask me something about dinosaurs, and then I am really off, so I have them all written, or I try . . . I should try not always, but I should try to have them written down. And then [sic] after we read a text, I'll have them create questions, like level one, two, and three questions, which is fun because then we can have a whole discussion day, when, you know, they really are just asking each other questions and answering it, but that's . . . that's not my lesson really, that's just them kinda analyzing and thinking.

Recognizing and reinforcing.

Karen constantly monitored her students during her lesson and provides frequent recognition of students being on task or answering questions:

What I try is, while they are having discussion, to walk around and listen so that when I find students who have the correct answer, especially if they are students that aren't normally speaking up, then whenever we come back together as a class, have them go ahead and give me the answer so that we can do quick like "Ok, that was perfect." Right, you want to right it exactly as so and so said. And I think that kind of stuff is good, because it kind of builds them and helps them

create more of a connection with me and be willing to offer their answers in the future.

When it comes to reinforcing her expectations, Karen relied on CHAMPS for most activities:

They know the expectations for most activities because we've done them now, but if, like, the other day we did a new activity. So, when we do a new activity, we go back over the expectations explicitly [sic] which is something I know I was not good at the first year or two, and so explicitly what I expect from you is to talk at this level, what I expect from you is to . . . for discussion to do this. And so, I try to just explicitly go through what I exactly expect them to do.

[Sic] I want to make sure everyone is clear, so if you are not doing the expectation, there is gonna be repercussion.

Critical writing.

Karen stated that her students write every day. However, she thought that she needed to increase the length of her writing prompts from two or three sentence to at least half a page. The issue is that writing is not a part of the STAAR test in eighth grade:

What's not on the eighth grade test? Writing! It's not. It's on the ninth grade test. So, eighth grade is just reading comprehension. So, writing is not prioritized in eighth grade, so if we spend time doing writing, that's fine, but somehow we still have to get through all the testing material for the reading, so, they have it.

Certain aspects of the Fundamental Five, such as FSGPT or critical writing were easier for Karen to implement due to the nature of her class, as opposed to, for example, a

math class. However, Karen thought that there is still room for growth, especially when it comes to critical writing or having a final product or an exit ticket at the end of each class.

Discipline Management

Karen believed that a crucial part of effective management is structure. In order to be a successful classroom teacher, one has to be able to establish structures:

The kids in eighth grade [sic] tend to like structure. So, [with] the systems that are consistently in place, they do really well. So, they come in, they start a warm-up, they turn in their warm-up by the time the timer goes off [sic]. So, one behavior I see all the time, they just [sic] have become consistent because they know what to expect.

As far as the misbehaviors are concerned,

Most of the misbehaviors are just little, like, [sic] communicating with other students, quietly, but to be annoying and [sic], like, just messing with each other across the room. That's most of what's going on. And it's almost never malicious.

Therefore, one of Karen's most important discipline tips to other teachers was to learn the school structures, more specifically, discipline structures:

That's I think is the biggest thing, because if there is already something that's happening in every class, that's what you need to be doing, right? So, follow whatever this one's structures already are in. Here [sic] we use agendas and we do agenda points, that's fairly effective for the kids. And all you have to say is

“Get out your agenda,” and you get a lot of “Oofff,” and then they’re quiet, and so, know the structure of the school first. Then discipline, just like parenting, don’t discipline when you’re angry. So, don’t take off points when you’re angry. Don’t write a referral when you are angry, please. And then, the third thing I would say is “document.” Like, for behavior, because otherwise you’re gonna feel like the whole class is wild when really it’s probably just one or two students. And so to document every day, like, who’s doing what to see . . . to help you see patterns.

When asked about positive reinforcement versus punitive measures, Karen replied with confidence that,

Positive reinforcement going a lot longer . . . it goes a lot further in discipline . . . Even, I mean, sometimes they get so worked up right if they’re bickering in the hallway with somebody and that spills over into the classroom. Sometimes you can have a student that stands up as if they’re about to try to fight somebody and if you just take them outside and let them breathe for a second and then talk to them, like they, I mean they become almost a different person. But I think that sometimes we get so caught up in discipline and we’re like “No, you have to be out of class, you have to . . .” [Sic] I don’t know if we’re busy or distressed, but if you could just avoid attacking the students and just enjoy having them, sometimes you can kind of see their perspective, which I think helps some.

School Environment

Instructional practices and classroom management are important elements that influence teacher effectiveness. However, other factors, such as relationships with administrators, collaboration with colleagues, professional development opportunities, and other aspects of a teaching job also have an impact on student success.

Administrators.

Karen's overall impression from administrative support is rather positive:

I feel like I am really satisfied with our discipline. I think that our discipline structures or campus are [sic] very good. So, I feel like the APs, whenever I do send someone to them, I feel like they take it seriously, and the students know [sic] that there is a process they are going to go through.

She also believes that the role of administrators is to support their teachers. She compared the teacher-administrator relationships with the student-teacher relationships:

I feel like my job towards the students is to support them in what they need and to shield them from anything that's distracting. And so, I want my administrators to do the same thing for me. I want my campus administrators to shield me from anything crazy at district and just take care of us. Right? I want them to provide the support for us. And then, and hopefully, their boss above them would do the same thing: anything crazy from the state that they can shield from, that's what super should be shielding our campus principals from. We should have barriers along the way. [Sic] I think part of their role should also be to diversify their instruction. Like, in the same way we [sic] are meant to diversify our lesson plans

for various kiddos, various types of students. I wish that it was happening also for administrators [sic]. These teachers have been teaching for ten or more years, this is the type of training that might be helpful for them. These are our new teachers, this is the type of training that may be helpful to them. I feel like that kind of thing should be the role. And I feel like . . . to a certain extent some of that happens certainly, but I think the biggest role right now for administrators is to collect data . . . is what's happening. And so I think they feel like they need to collect data and they feel like they need to prove things a lot. And so, then they give us more work all the time that is not related to the students, and from our "on-the-ground" perspective it doesn't seem to be related to students.

Collaboration.

Karen enjoys the possibility of collaborating within her small department and within her team:

[I] really only have one other eighth grade full-time ELA teacher. She and I collaborate constantly, so we have our official planning meeting every Thursday [sic] during seventh period, but other than that we work together several times a week, because of course, I am sure that you know, you have a lesson plan and then you realize of Tuesday "There is no way that they are going to do that on Wednesday," and so then we, you know, have to come together mid-week and like rush to "Ok, we have to fix this. This isn't gonna work for them." So, there is a lot of collaboration there and then [sic] we also work as a team at the middle school, so most of our collaboration as a team is for student behavior overall.

You know, if we have one student that's really having trouble with in class, working together to figure out, like, why is it happening in this class, not that class. Or, do we need to move things around. You know, just work together to see what we can do for the kids. And then, because we are a small district I do . . . I do a lot of teacher collaboration online, because I feel like I need extra input. This is going to sound very teenage when I say it, which is appropriate because I work for the eighth graders, so, I am on Instagram constantly looking at other teachers, you know, and that's just kinda being "Ok, well, today I am teaching whatever non-fiction text features. Do you guys have any good ideas?" And kind of sharing that information that way. And so, I feel like that's important because we're such a small districts, I think we need to have more of that. Like, not necessarily online, but more outside opportunities to learn from teachers who are not in a small district in a rural in an economically disadvantaged district, I think we need to be able to learn people who are in a *very* different circumstances because I think we could bring a lot that could help.

When describing her collaboration opportunities, Karen expressed her fascination with the team model at the middle school:

I love teams. I love having a team model, it makes me so happy, because there are so many structures that you can put in place just as a team, and that means that all of your students see it at least four times a day, exact same structure. And then, also just emotionally, like, when you need a place to go and say "So-and-so did this again in class today. Why is she doing that?" Then, you have a safe

space to do it with someone who has the same student population and can listen to your rent for a moment but and then give you some actual support, you know, that might help you.

Professional development.

When it comes to professional development, Karen stated that the quantity and the quality of professional development she is getting do not match. Particularly, the quantity overweighs the quality:

I've been called out to . . . one, two, I think, three different trainings during the school day this year for professional development. None of those have been actually helpful to me in the classroom, I don't feel like. I feel like they just made me more stressed that I'm not calling parents or planning or doing something that I feel like would really be helping my kids.

According to Karen, a quality professional development session is the session that can provide her with strategies that she is able to immediately implement in her classroom:

We did have a great professional development right before school began [sic].

We went to the high school and did the breakout sessions. And I felt like we got really like "Ok, I can use that one right now," you know, strategies. And so, I did really like that one. Yeah, but there are things we need, right? Like, the Texas Association of English Language Arts Teachers has a conference every year.

Like, if we're gonna miss any school for any trainings, that should be something

that's actually hosted by . . . you know, someone who has a variety of educators coming together. So, I feel like we're lacking in quality.

Also, Karen added that,

Because this is only my fourth year, I crave training, I mean, I want to be effective for the kids, and, you know, I want to get better and so I feel frustrated whenever I sit right here again about how to right a lesson plan. Like, I want to stab someone, it makes me crazy. I won't stab anyone, but I mean it does make me just feel like . . . "What am I doing?"

Working overtime.

Karen stated that she definitely works overtime. It is virtually impossible to get everything done if you just work the regular hours that you are expected to be at school by your contract obligations:

We get here at six thirty. I mean, we have to be here at seven, but I get here at six thirty, because you can't get here at seven and get it done. And we leave around five, so, I don't know . . . seven . . . it's an hour and a half . . . hour and a half more than normal people? Normal people work eight to five. And I am six thirty to five. Oh, but I don't also have an hour of lunch break, I have a twenty-minute lunch break if I am lucky, so an hour and forty-five, a little bit more than that a day, so maybe, so it's eleven, and then on Fridays or Saturdays. I either stay really late on Friday or come up on Saturday. So, maybe five to ten hours over forty I guess. Is that it? Like, today I am here until nine tonight, because . . . and I got here at six thirty this morning, but that's not every week, but tonight there is

dance. What group is doing the dance? . . . Model UN, model UN is hosting a dance from six to nine. That's where I am supposed to go chaperone. That's not a requirement obviously.

The following section will summarize the information that Karen shared in her interviews and the information collected during field observations. Her effectiveness as a teacher was influenced by a variety of factors.

Summary

Among the pieces of advice that she would give to a teacher, Karen shared learning about classroom management basics, knowing the existing discipline structures on campus, liking your students, and the willingness to continuously learn from others. Due to the structures that Karen had in her classroom, she did not observe any major behavior issues.

Karen believed that building relationships with students is the corner stone of efficient pedagogy. Normally it takes her approximately two weeks to learn her students' names, which is an important classroom management tool as well. She tried to learn about her students' home environment to have a better understanding of their needs and, if necessary, receive support from parents.

Karen's expectations for her students depended on a class dynamic. Some students can be entrusted with more freedom, while others require more of the teacher's assistance and guidance.

During instruction, Karen made an effort to differentiate for different learning styles. She also incorporated technology into her teaching routine, however, she was not

always completely satisfied with the level of efficiency of the required computer lab days.

Karen made an effort not to teach to the test, however, multiple professional development sessions are geared toward teaching to the test. Professional development was one of the areas of improvement Karen wished to see in her district.

Karen provided multiple levels of support for the students that require additional help. These levels varied from re-teaching a concept to forcing a student to complete an assignment in class when such resources as advisory and parental involvement were exhausted. She invested additional five to ten hours a week in order to make sure that everything is done when it came to grading, lesson planning, etc.

Karen complied with the overwhelming majority of the Fundamental Five requirements. The areas she wished to improve were having a final product at the end of the class and increasing the length of the writing piece prompts.

Working with other teachers and administrators are mostly positive aspects of her job. She believed that administrators were mostly supportive. The team model at the middle school provided multiple collaborative opportunities.

Overall, Karen was satisfied with her school climate. She seemed to understand what she was expected to do as a teacher and had structures in place to achieve it.

CHAPTER VII

John

Introduction

This is John's 7th year in public education and his 3rd year with LSISD. John believes that an effective teacher primarily has to establish classroom procedures and rules and be consistent implementing them. He sees his role in the classroom as "almost a dictator": "It's my way. It's not the principal's, it's not anybody else's. This is my class. You're in my room. This is my world, you'll do it the way I want, and we're going to follow the same rules that I've been at."

According to John, such approach is especially important at the beginning of school year:

But as the year goes on right now, it's almost like I'm a bit more [sic] gracious with them. They know now [sic] the teeth are gone, I'm not biting so much, it's more bark. [Sic] They know where it could go, and they know if they push me to that point they know that they're going to get in trouble. So now everybody understands. It's basically just really establishing your classroom procedures, your classroom rules, and then being consistent with them.

John thinks that consistency goes a long way and takes care of many of the issues that his colleagues are currently struggling with:

That's where I see a lot of people struggle, they're not consistent. They get tired, they feel defeated. I see so many people at my campus, they're defeated. You can see the teachers. You see it in their face every day. So they get into shouting matches or they just like, whatever. I mean, so I think if you just stay consistent, establish those, at this point it's clockwork.

Besides delivering knowledge to students, John also has daily conversations with his students about life and about success:

I spend a lot of time hitting them with the cold hard facts, tell them, "Hey man, [sic] you don't want to do anything? Let me get you a broom. Let me show you." I tell them. "Look, I have nothing wrong with you. We need somebody to be a janitor, we need somebody to flip burgers, we need somebody to do all these things, but I guarantee you if you feel like I'm talking down about you because maybe your parents do that, I want you to go home tonight, I want you to ask you parents, is that what they want you to do? They want you to have the same life they have? Push brooms and stuff? No harm, no foul. People need . . . It's a job. I respect that more than just sitting and [sic] waiting for the government to hand you something. But I guarantee your parents are going to want you to get this education so you can go do something with yourself so you don't have to struggle like maybe they're struggling."

Advice for Teachers

Besides consistency which John mentioned throughout his interview multiple times, the advice that he would give to his teacher colleagues is be yourself and find the teaching style that works for you and your students:

Don't try to be a carbon copy of somebody else. Yeah, you want to pick up things from other people but be yourself. Nobody else can . . . A lot of people can't be me. They don't have the same delivery. I can't go be . . . We had a great teacher last year, I can't remember what they called her, they called her Mama something. She was the sweetest lady. If I came in and I was like, "Hey guys, I brought you some snacks today." They wouldn't buy it. They'd be like, "This guy's a clown." But it's be yourself and then be consistent.

Relationships with Students

Like mentioned earlier, John does work hard in order to make students understand that math concepts that they need to know. However, he also gives them the so-called "tough love," which is his way to show that he cares for them and build those relationships:

So I try to get to them on a personal level, but I don't really think I forge those bonds until late in the year. I think I spend probably 80, 75% of the time hitting them with the knowledge, there's a reason why my scores are so good, I close a lot of gaps and the scores I get are high. But at the same time, there's also a reason why the kids come back to me and always want to talk and hang out and shoot the bull.

John said that with his harsh discipline and attitude he is gradually able earn his students' trust and respect:

You've got to understand you can't force yourself on these kids. If you do that, like some of these kids, they don't want to talk to me. Not now. They don't want to be my friend. They think I'm a teacher, they go, "Oh, he's whack," or whatever. But then, once the kids start to slowly come around, [sic] [they] want to do what they're supposed to [sic]. So I'm harsh. I'm harsh. I'm a harsh critic. But I think that they respond to that better than just . . . Because I'm not a pushover. A lot of these kids come from a hard environment too.

Students' names.

John admitted that he is "terrible with names." It takes him from one to two months to learn all of his students' names:

I go ahead and I tell the kids that in the very beginning. I'll say, "Guys, look, I'm terrible at it," and it almost comes off as a joke with the kids. I hate to say it, but they almost like it more because the names I call them. It's crazy. I can't even think of the things I can call them. I think they know it, and because my reputation's already stated there [sic]. I'm young, I'm pretty fit, people know that I played professional soccer and people also know that I coach here. Kids are drawn to me. Whether they like me or not, they still want to be around. I don't really get a lot of feedback from that, but I definitely think that it's important to learn your kids' names.

Parental involvement.

John is rather disheartened about the level of parental involvement that he is able to have. Most of the time, the parents of the students that he really needs to reach, are impossible to engage, “Then when you do, they tell you they either are upset with you or they agree with you and tell you exactly what you want to hear, but they don’t ever follow through.”

John stated that he is required to have a parent contact log and document all the parent contacts. He does it “just to cover bases” when it comes to the requirements from school administrators. However, parents do not have a substantial influence on John’s pedagogical practices. When it comes to parents,

I’m not looking for a lot of support or a lot of help. I think that’s why we have to be so committed to consistency, give these kids a little bit of that, and be committed to helping these kids obviously get the education, because that’s what they need. They don’t need me to be another parent for them or be another person to be just a yes-man for them. They don’t need me to . . . They’ve got counselors and everybody else for that. But for us to also be strict and a bit at the same time, understanding.

Students’ potential.

John stated that it takes him from two weeks to a month, at most, to be able to define the needs and capabilities of his students. Academically there can be some tricks, You know, a few kids who are a bit quiet in the beginning because they’re trying to read the situation as well, and then a few kids who maybe they come in and

they're trying to like, kind of just show out in the beginning and then all of a sudden once they start to settle down and get back into the swing of things, if it's school's in session, they start to click. So, there's always a few curve balls.

Discipline-wise, John is extremely strict, which regardless of students' prior disciplinary history, assures that students meet John's expectations:

I would say 95% of the time my kids are in their seats. There's no moving in my room. I know that that can be hard for some of the kids. I will allow a kid, like if a kid's falling asleep, I'll wake them up. If they go to sleep again, they don't have a choice. They have to go stand and they have to go do their work standing, and they either get a textbook or they get a ledge. And they can't lean, they have to stand. So, then I would let them up. Other than that, if somebody were to get up, [sic] in my room I think the kids would kind of go, "Are you crazy?" "No-no, what are you doing? Did I say you could move? Sit down."

Thus, during my visit to John's classroom, I did not observe any off topic conversations among students at any time. They did what they were expected to be doing or simply stayed quiet.

John is very skeptical about school being able to reach every student and to uncover each student's potential:

Some of those kids don't want it. They don't want it. Not now. They may never. I'm going to be honest with you. I have friends that didn't want it till just now. Like yesterday, they're in their 30s, they go, "Man, it sucks waking up working on a loading dock." Yeah, it does, doesn't it boy? "Man, I'm struggling to make

ends meet.’ Look, I’m friends with these guys, I have guys that I grew up playing ball with, I would never disrespect and things like that, but it’s hard to watch them work five jobs to support their kids and their family or multiple families. But look, what are you supposed to do? I can’t give them all my money. I can help them if they ask for it, but I can’t help everybody. So I can’t help everybody in class. If they want it, I will give it to them. If they don’t want it, I’ll give it to them. If they throw that away, I can’t chase them down and give it to them 15 more times.

In addition, John tries to inspire his students to believe in themselves and to make an effort in the upcoming benchmark testing. Specifically, during my observation he said to his students about tests:

You guys are smart enough to do well on them. You have to make an effort because these benchmarks will give us the information about your placement, whether you need stay in 8th grade or need to move on to 9th grade. There is somebody in this class who is completely capable, but they bombed it because they were not having good day.

On another occasion during the same class, John said that most of them, 99% know the things that are on the test, but they are not reading the questions correctly that’s why only about 70% of them are getting it.

Students’ Academic Success

John was convinced that students’ academic success can be ensured through repetition, spiraling, and through exposure of his students to the same content in many

different ways. He also attributed his student' academic success to his discipline management proficiency.

Student learning.

John admitted that he is "old school" when it comes to meeting different learning styles in his classroom:

I'm very much old school, almost to that point where it's a bit "drill-and-kill." "Drill-and-kill," I'm just going to say drill. [Sic] But these kids, they need it. There's never enough, they can't ever hear it enough. They're not dead, they're going to be fine.

John believes that trying to match all the students' learning styles falls under the ideal world conditions. The real world conditions are such that teachers are not always able to adjust instruction to accommodate different learning styles:

I do think it's important, but at the same time I don't go crazy. We've got so much on our plate as teachers, we really do, that I'm not going to go crazy trying to meet this one and this one and this one and this one and this one. That kind of falls into that ideal world. If I could do that for each one of them, I would love to. But then I've got Tommy and James and Rory and all these other people here acting crazy, so I really say, if you set those standards and those policies and those rules and procedures in your class and you stick to them and you're consistent, the kids are going to learn. If you give them the information, they don't have a choice but to. I don't care if they're auditory or kinesthetic. You give them the information, they'll have to learn it.

In addition, John believes that trying to accommodate a variety of learning styles is not doing students any favors:

We try to meet everybody's needs with 50 different ways to teach, that when they get into the real world they're like, "Well, hey look, I don't work this way. I need this. They gave me this in school." "No, no, no, you're going to do it the way I want or you're fired." "Do what?" These kids need some real world application. I'm tired, everybody's so like . . . It's not all rainbows, you know? Life's hard.

When it comes to student freedom in the classroom, John believes that it depends on the group of students that he is working with. If it is his algebra students, who are able to handle more independence, then he thinks that more freedom and independence are very beneficial. However, for many students, "If you give them an inch they will take a mile."

During the observation, John gave his students some freedom in grading their own papers. He went over the correct answers on the board and told them how many points each problem or each section of the problem was worth. However, he warned them that he was going to go over those papers as well. So, if he notices that they cheated, then they were going to get a zero on that assignment.

Technology.

John is convinced that technology should be used when appropriate, but it should not be a goal in itself:

I'm not super technologically advanced, okay? Some teachers love it. Again, it's what works for you. I think it's great. If my kid could go to somebody's class

and they're great at it, and they know how to work with technology, I'm happy as a parent. If my kid goes to somebody's class, who's being told that they have to use all this technology and they spend 45 minutes trying to figure it out, and I don't care if they spent four days practicing it, but if it's more of a nuisance to force somebody to use something they're not comfortable with. If they know how to use it and it's what they want to, great.

During the observation of John's class, he used the Elmo projector throughout the whole class period. He was demonstrating his students the types of graphs along with the ways how to solve graph problems. It was an organic use of technology that facilitated educational process.

Teaching to the test.

According to John, he teaches what the written curriculum tells him to teach. He has his structures and his ways of doing it and he is being successful with what he does in order to ensure student success. It so happens, however, that the measure of student success is the test. His teaching style helps him make sure that his students are successful taking those tests:

If they don't want us giving the test, get rid of it. Otherwise we're going to teach to it. I don't. I teach my curriculum. My curriculum goes with the test. Again, because you told me [sic] [the principal] gave you me because of my results on end of the year tests and things like that? That's the bread and butter. That's what everybody wants. So if you let me get a bit more creative and I didn't have

to think about, “Do they pass STAAR at the end of the year?” Okay, maybe I'd be a bit more free in class.

Passing and extra help.

According to John, part of his success in the classroom was due to him being able to consistently hold his students accountable for their work. They are able to pass because he has high expectations for the quality of their assignments: “They got to earn it. If they work for me, there’s no way they can’t pass. [Sic] Because if they’re doing their work they’re going to get the information. There’s no way they can’t.

He did not have a problem giving students a zero when he feels like the student cheated:

“Why did you give me a zero?” [Sic] “Answer that problem for me right now.”

“Why?” “Well, show me. Right now. I know right now you didn't do any of this work, you sat by her, your answers all the same.”

His main strategy to helping students perform academically well was practice and spiraling:

I don’t do a lot of manipulatives, I don’t do a lot of games, basically we practice.

We practice, we practice, we practice. We talk about how it relates to something in everyday life, we practice it again, we do it in different . . . I probably deliver it in a few different variations, whether it be a word problem or whether it be a graph or a table, however I can represent it in a few different forms I’ll try to give it to them, but it's just practice. Repetition, repetition, repetition. [Sic]

We've done a lot of spiraling sessions, but not elaborate ones. [Sic] We give our kids what's called a skills test every week, one day a week, they know they're going to have their skills test, and it cycles back to everything that we've already taught. [Sic] If it were something that was directly, like we needed to take care of it right then, I would probably devote a lesson to it, some type of spiraling session.

During the observation, John explicitly stated that they are going to spiral into several concepts that they had learned before in order to be able to continue with today's lesson. He sought out feedback from students as they were reviewing some of the concepts from previous material.

John said that he is always willing to help and provides opportunities for students to master the concepts that they do not understand:

I am very accessible for the hours I have. So, I really offer my kids time to come in the mornings. I know that the kids don't want to, but I tell them: "I will work for you if you work for me. So if you come to me complaining and telling me you're not going to get this, you're not going to get that."

He has also built good working relationships with the other 8th grade teacher who is able to tutor John's students if he is not available due to his athletic schedule:

If you're in a situation like me and you've got limited time because you've got other duties, it's good to build a rapport with other teachers who have the same type of knowledge or better knowledge than you, and they want to help you.

The Fundamental Five

There were certain components of the Fundamental Five framework with which John complied. Some components, however, he still had to improve on.

Framing the lesson.

John framed each lesson with the “We will” statement. He explained how he started doing it and why it works:

“Today we will . . .” I’ve been doing that. Somebody taught me that my first year and I’ve been doing it ever since. [Sic] I hated it when I first started it and now it becomes nature. It’s just, I do it, and so it’s just “ping-ping-ping” [Sic]. That way they don’t have to go, “What are we doing today?” Because I hate that kind of stuff. Just it’s up on the board. [Sic] That way they can already start headlining their notes and stuff like that.

John normally does not have an exit ticket or a final product at the end of the lesson. Part of the reasoning is that they actually do not exit the classroom by themselves:

I teach to the bell, and sometimes it's just kind of like, “Well, the bell’s rung.”

They don’t get up until I announce them to get up. It’s not chaos, but we only have a short transition period, and because it’s been so chaotic over there we have to walk them through the transition, they can’t just go in the hallway and then go.

During the observation John framed the lesson by having the “We will . . .” statement on the board. He also went over the specifics of today’s lesson orally. He also

closed the lesson by talking about homework expectations and warning about an upcoming benchmark test.

Working in the power zone.

John believed that teacher proximity to students is crucial, “If you can't see your students, you need to figure something out. You're not doing your job.”

During the observation in John's classroom, there was not a lot of teacher movement among the desks and rows of students. He remained around his desk most of the class period. This area around the teacher's desk is also his “power spot.” He explained how it works:

I'm on a perch. [Sic] I sit on my desk and then on top of that I have my cart, and it's kind of where I can see over everybody. So, I'm not behind a desk. I would say I'm close to my desk 60% of the time, and then I'm kind of like just a warden walking around the rest of the time. But mainly trying to get . . . I'm not trying to catch anybody, but I will catch them if they're playing around. It's basically so I can offer them my help.

John claims that, although he may not move around much, his students are keenly aware of the fact that the lesson has begun and they need to start paying attention without him having to be in physical proximity:

Most of the time, as soon as I walk in the door it's kind of like . . . I kind of shut the door with some authority. It's not a loud slam, but they definitely know.

Then, to be honest with you, it's about this point in the year [mid-December] where the kids know if I'm not giving them a lesson and I'm just kind of sitting

there, they'll start going, "Shh." Because they know it's about to get serious if they don't "shh" pretty quick . . .

Expanding on the power zone, John added,

People saying [sic] you've got to be up moving around all the time. No you don't. If you establish good, consistent rules, procedures in your class, and your kids know that you don't play around, they do what they're supposed to. You have to watch them. Just like I said, if I were to give them too much where I went one way, there's some differentiation for the group of these guys over here who can think at that level, and then I'll work here . . .

In addition, John shared his philosophy about his room arrangement and how it effects his teaching and teaching at his school overall:

I'm sure we got an email that I just happened to skip over, or if it was just my campus, but forever they didn't want us having them in rows. [Sic] I've always put them in rows. Now this year they're mandating us, when we got to the school they said, "You must have your desk in rows." Yeah, we had to have them in rows. So for me, I know that that makes it difficult, but I can stand from one side and see everybody in my classroom. I have access to all the kids. I don't know another way with as many desks as I have not to put them in rows. But yes, I think it's good if you . . . You need to be able to access all your kids, but I feel like rows is for me the best way. It keeps them separate.

Frequent small group purposeful talk (FSGPT).

FSGPT has its expression in John's classroom. Although his desks are in rows, student movement is very limited, and talking off topic is almost not an option, John still finds educational value in student interaction during instruction:

It's more like, "Hey guys, here's an example. I want you guys to work it alone, don't ask me to help, I want you to work it, and if you have a question, rather than ask me, ask the person next to you, behind, in front of you." So yes, I do. That way they can teach each other, they can find each other's mistakes. That helps them be more engaged in their learning. They cannot ask me. That two-to-five-minute spell that I give them, they cannot ask me a question. [Sic] It's on their own. Sort it out. Be a problem solver. "Five minutes is up, who thinks they have the answer? Who thinks they got on the right track? Tell me what you got?" Then we kind of see, "Okay, well you were good up until here. This is where it broke down. Now let's . . ." And I'll do it on the board. I do everything where everybody can see it on the board.

Having had several years of teaching the same content and having a very efficient colleague with who he collaborates on a daily basis, when it comes to asking students questions and pre-planning those questions, it is mostly

Teachable moments. I preplan some questions. A lot of the notes, we pre-make them. Miss Smith's phenomenal with that. To be honest with you, for three years I made my own notes and all that stuff, and I would pretty much . . . I pre-made all my notes and kind of read through my own lesson. I could see where there

going to be some questions, so I kind of thought about that, but for me it's just pretty much kind of spontaneously.

Recognizing and reinforcing.

John recognized student's work mostly by providing them feedback on their class assignments and homework:

I just pretty much, I use tests, I check my kids' work all the time, constant feedback on homework. Some places, they don't ever want you to give homework because we don't understand what goes on in these kids' lives outside of school and yada yada yada. But if they're not getting all that practice . . . Yeah. Just homework. Tests. Personal feedback from them.

John is a strong believer in repetition. The way he reinforced his academic and behavioral expectations is by being consistent in repeating his expectations multiple times:

I think that's one of the reasons why I have success, like sometimes I almost drive myself crazy. I harp on the small things all the time. "This is where this one go," because my guys, a lot of my students are very behind, so it's just easier if I constantly, constantly, constantly remind them. I repeat myself. Normally like five to ten times, and I know that sometimes that can be frustrating for even myself, for other people. Why do I want to keep repeating myself? Well, look, unless you've got some kind of magic wand, do you want your kids to be successful? Because you're dealing with the same kids I've got, these kids don't

necessarily want to be here. Command their respect, hit them over the head with it, and they'll pick it up.

Critical writing.

As a math teacher, John admitted that he does not provide many critical writing opportunities, unless it is a requirement from the district or his campus administrators:

We'll do TELPAS kind things. [Sic] We've got our district mandated things that we've got, and we do those. That's about it. We kind of have them pre-installed into our year at a glance. We've got them into our calendar for the year, when we're going to do them. We hit like three or four. We don't do a lot of it, if I'm being honest.

Discipline Management

Most of John's success in the classroom is due to his efficient discipline and classroom management strategies. Almost every question answered by John boiled down to some sort of disciplinary measure or a classroom structure. Because of this, John does not have many discipline issues in his classroom, "just probably talking when they're not supposed to." During the observation, students were also observed sleeping. However, the students were promptly re-directed. One student was made to stand up and do his work standing because he would not stay up.

The main piece of advice that John would like to give to his colleagues is, "Be true to yourself, take advice from the experienced teachers, find what works for you and then be consistent."

School Environment

John expressed his frustration with certain aspects of his school culture. He believed it negatively influenced his effectiveness as a teacher. However, other aspects of school environment proved to be beneficial and productive.

Administrators.

John believes that school administrators at his current school do not always meet his idea of what an efficient school administrator should do in order improve school climate, retain good teachers, and increase student success. One of the issues that he sees is commitment: “They need to be a bit more committed to just being there for their team as well as for their own job as well.” Additionally,

I think that they need to be the leaders, I think they need to be there for their team and help them out. It’s great if you even want to call it a family. I call my team a family, my soccer team a family, because we are. But we act that way. I get it, it’s hard. If you don’t have that kind of commitment, if you don’t want to really treat everybody like a family then don’t call it a family because then people take you as disrespectful. People pride themselves on their family. So if you’re going to throw that out there, then you’ve got to be committed to treating them like a family.

Another issue is the administrators’ visibility and ability to gain respect from students:

I think that all principals need to be a bit visible, because they hold a higher standard. They’re supposed to command a bit of respect, and some of these kids .

. . Last year, some of the principles I would say here didn't demand that respect the way they should have. Kids didn't really respect them. I saw that here. That was crazy to me. Then at my middle school now, it's the same. Kids just kind of walk by them like they're not even there. I've seen principles beg and plead for kids to do something. Are you crazy? They're never going to respect you now.

In addition, John thinks very often teachers and administrators are not held accountable for the "product" they produce at schools. He thinks that if we treated schools as a business and students as our customer, students would have been taken care off much better emotionally and educationally.

Finally, talking about the administrative part of education, John said that he would like to see his campus leaders to be able to retain good teachers in order to upkeep morale. He wishes the leaders would:

quit running off the good teachers, because we've had that. I've seen that last year. [Sic] I've heard a person who's now in a position of authority and principal say, "Well, if they don't want to be here, they can leave." That's not your job as a leader. Your job is to want them to stay.

Going back to student discipline, John said that these days people have become "softer" and "lazier." This includes students. They do not want to work and expect to get away with minimum consequences:

I think now it probably needs to be a bit more consistent and things like that, so people realize they can't get away with everything. Not everything's free. You

mess up, there's consequences. Because I got hit with consequences. I spent plenty of time in alternative school.

Collaboration.

Although John has a lot of confidence in his teaching and disciplinary abilities, he does not shy away from learning from others. When asked if he collaborates with other teachers in his subject area, John said,

Yes. 100%. [Sic] Miss Smith. She's the boss lady. I'm in a tough situation because I don't have any conferences, I got zero conference. She's been doing this for a long time and I pick her brain as much as possible. She helps me a lot with my lesson plans and with my assignments, we work together, we make a calendar, and then we kind of just vibe off each other. I really help her with discipline, but to be honest with you she's got hers in check. The only time she ever needs me is if she really needs somebody to step in. She helps me with my lesson plans and things like that, because I don't have the lesson planning time. Then in the evenings I go back over there. When I get done here [soccer practice at the high school], I'm usually over there [middle school] till when I go, probably about between seven to nine. Then I'm just kind of trying to do the things that she tells me to. She's the boss lady. She's the boss lady. If I'm being honest, she probably holds more weight than my principles over there, in my . . . And we have a really good working relationship. So for sure with her.

As far as collaborating with math teachers from other levels is concerned, John shared,

I will work with a few other people in the sixth and the seventh grade, but mainly just to kind of help them. A lot of those people have math brains, and I do too, but they've gone ahead and got their masters in math and stuff like that. So I'll pick their brains on ways to do things, but since I know how to get through to a lot of these kids and a lot of these times they'll come in here and they'll want to say, " $E = mc^2$ " and these kids are like spinning. "Hey man, maybe you want to just kind of dumb this down or simplify this a little bit for these kids, because you're talking over their heads. You're talking over my head." So really try to help them do things like that.

John's collaboration within his team is mostly limited to the role of the discipline expert. He said that,

[I] have two veteran teachers who [sic] have almost non-existent disciplinary action in their room, and I try to help. They'll go, "Oh, okay." They'll be very polite about it, and then they just kind of go back in the room and it's chaos again, and so I've kind of just said, they're going to defend for themselves, I'll step in when I need to, and I have the young teacher who's fresh out of college and I try to help her. But I leave at 1:30 and then she's got all these other people to contradict what I already tell her, so I haven't really been able to help them as much as maybe they would want me to. It's not because I don't want to, it's just that I told them, I said, "Look guys, I've done what you've asked me, the principles at this point. I've stepped in, I've tried to help, but if you're not there to really enforce the things that I'm trying to help enforce yourself . . ." They're

not getting anything out of it. They do a lot of complaining. I don't have time for complaining. I don't have a lot of time for that.

Professional development.

John thinks that he receives more than plenty professional development opportunities, however he believes that there is a problem with it:

I think that it's good to go to some of these further education and to some of these math development for me, since I'm in math and things like that, but when we get there it's almost more stuff that's . . . It's not conducive to the kind of kids we teach. They teach everything in an ideal world, they show these things and they say, "Hey, look, don't you want a class where you can be with six year olds and they can answer the question by doing the math in their head and things like that?" Yeah, you've trained those kids from that age. My kids haven't been trained. They've been held from school, switched to five, six, seven, eight different schools in one year. These are not your ideal students, so give me some ideal stuff, this stuff that we go to is a joke.

John believes it would be more effective if his professional development opportunities came from the veteran teachers who work with similar demographic population as he does: "I think that I don't have all the answers for sure, but there are enough teachers out there that have been doing this for long enough that we can work through them."

Working overtime.

As a math teacher and a soccer coach, John's daily schedule is extremely busy.

He has to work overtime since he does not have conference periods:

You want me to throw coaching in there too? Or just strictly in the classroom?

Because that's difficult. I work that extra overtime because I'm here and because

I have to get over there, but I mean if you want to talk about overtime, probably

20, 30 hours. [Sic] I don't get a lunch, I work through my lunch, I just . . . I don't

like to get behind, and so I grade during class when the kids are working on an

assignment by themselves.

John's pedagogical philosophy had distinct flavor. Some of his ideas were very different from the ideas of other participants of the study.

Summary

John's attributed his success as a classroom teacher to his discipline management style and his ability to be consistent and hold his students accountable for their actions and their learning. John believed that being genuine and being consistent are the key aspects of a successful classroom teacher.

When building relationships with his students, he gave them "tough love" because, according to John, it is the only way they were going to take responsibility and learn. Learning his students' names was not John's forte. However, he compensated his inability to learn his students' names fast by giving them nick names, which some preferred even more than their proper name. John did not rely on parental involvement in

order to help him in the classroom, since the parents whose help he really needed were never available.

He believed in accommodating different learning styles only to a certain degree. The reason is because if we “go crazy about it,” then we are not preparing our students for the real world. However, he believed in giving students as much learning freedom as they can handle, based on their ability.

John’s was rather comfortable with technology. He believed that technology should only be of assistive nature in the classroom.

Jon’s main strategy in helping his student be academically successful was practice and spiraling back. He also used other math teacher’s help to tutor his students when he was not available.

The Fundamental Five elements were not all used in John’s classroom. Thus, he did not use the power zone (at least not in its traditional way), did not have a closing product for the lesson, nor did he provide opportunities for critical writing. However, he did use the “We will” statement, reinforced and recognized student learning, and provided some opportunities for FSGPT.

John’s impression of the school climate was two-fold. On the one hand, he was dissatisfied with the school leadership team. On the other hand, he enjoyed collaborating with his colleagues in the area of pedagogy. Another area of dissatisfaction for John was professional development opportunities. He felt like what he was learning was not applicable to his student population.

CHAPTER VIII

Ellis

Introduction

Ellis said that she sees her role in the classroom as a facilitator, however it is not always possible and depends on what kind of group of students she is working with:

I'm trying to move to the point where I am more like facilitator and giving the students information and present things, a lesson and giving them inputs, so that they can do stuff with it. I find that with, well, three or my four groups of kids that doesn't work because I have lots of these struggling kids because they just can't get through some of it. There are lots of days where I end up just being the direct teacher-teacher the whole time and they're just being little sponges trying to absorb it.

Ellis believes that she is doing more than just providing instruction to her students. It is not always to be a classroom teacher, however,

I had one girl write me a letter when I was thinking of taking another job, and I found in my mailbox one day telling how she loved my class on the days that she didn't want to go to school. It was coming here that made her come to school. I

like to think I've done that maybe for more than one kid. I cry about stupid stuff, so to speak. [Ellis tiered up]

Making a difference in people's life is one of the reasons she has stayed in this profession for thirteen years: "As a teacher, you feel like you're just rushing through trying to get everything done. It's nice to know that you made people like school."

Advice for Teachers

When it comes to advice for colleagues, Ellis believed in consistency, and staying organized. Sometimes it is advised to new teachers not to smile the first weeks of schools or even the first semester. Ellis disagreed with such philosophy:

The first thing, read Harry Wong's "First Days of School." I don't believe in that whole "don't smile" business. I think that's a load of garbage. I think that you need to start out day one, you have to be very consistent and you need to be organized. I still am really bad at being organized.

Ellis also believes that in order to be an effective teacher, one has to be flexible, and, most importantly, one must love children:

You have to be flexible because teaching is a roller coaster between what you're told you have to do and your students. You can have the same lesson for all of our classes and it will go differently in all of your classes. You have to love the kids or you will burn out very quickly. You've got to find a way to make relationships with those kids because if you don't, you can't handle them when they are evil.

Relationships with Students

According to Ellis, without strong and trustful relationships built with students, effective teaching cannot even happen:

I think that that [relationships] is the most important thing, because if the kids know you care about them, then they will do what you need them to. If you have to get on them and fuss at them, they know that you care about them and so, you can get past that. If you don't make that relationship and you have to get on to them, they do not forgive you and they hate you, and then, they do not learn in your classroom because they're too busy hating you. You can understand them. I have a student who's really challenging. Today, I wanted to duct tape her to a chair, but I know where she's coming from. I know what her home is like and I know what she's capable of, and so I am able to deal with her better because I understand her. I'm running out of breath, I'm sorry. This is so sad. [Ellis tears up]

During the classroom visit, Ellis demonstrated how she builds those teacher-student relationships. At the end of the class, she shared with the class that one of the teachers at the school just had a baby. She showed them the picture of the baby by mirroring it from her phone to the Promethean board. The students were excited and asked Ellis questions about the name and the weight of the baby. It took only several minutes, however it helped Ellis build some rapport with that class.

Students' names.

One of the factors that help teachers build good working relationships with their students is knowing the students' names. Therefore, learning the names as soon as possible is crucial for an effective teacher:

I usually have all their names done within two days because I feel that it is super important to know their names. I think names should be pronounced and spelled correctly even if you mispronounce and misspell any other word in the world, someone's name is so intrinsic to them like it's who you are. I correct teachers when they say kids' names wrong. If someone tells me I'm saying a student's name wrong, I go ask them because it's your name, for heaven's sake and it is that important. If your name is spelled wrong on your e-mail, that distresses me beyond words when people's names are spelled wrong.

Parental involvement.

Ellis has a range of parents from "helicopter" parents, who want to be contacted every time their child makes less than a 70 on an assignment, to the ones that are difficult to engage regardless whether it is an academic or a disciplinary reason:

I like parents being involved. I wish every single parent could come spend a day in the school and see every single person, the community should come spend a day in the school. [Sic] I like talking to them. I get anxiety about calling people on the phone. I have a really hard time calling parents, but when I do, it always ends well even if they're frustrated to begin with. I think it's really important to have parents.

Ellis stated that when she does make a parent contact over the phone, it is normally not to talk about positive issues:

With my positive ones, I have this little, orange notes and when the kids are being good, I'll send it . . . or not good, doing well, I will try and send a little note telling them their child was awesome today just because it's so hard to find the time and to get over my "argh" about calling parents, so I try to do it that way. We are mandated to call parents if we give students any kind of disciplinary consequence.

Ellis was convinced that parental involvement helps children do better at school:

Parents are usually really helpful and insightful about what we do. As part of that building the relationship with the kids is to know the parents because when we're all on the same page, it seems to help the kids do better. I think it's more important to do than what I do. I don't do it enough and I should do it more.

Students' potential.

Ellis spends approximately one month at the beginning of the year trying to define her students' needs and their academic potential. She needs to see their writing, test scores, etc. However, taking this time pays off later because:

I know which kids I need to pull out of their shell and get to talk in class discussions. I know which kids I need to walk by and product along, and explain what words mean. I like formative assessment as we're going along because I can see which kids aren't getting it and who I need to work with more and try and pay

more attention to. Lots of times, those are the quiet kids who try to secretly fail without you noticing.

Talking about student potential, Ellis also mentioned that it important to differentiate between the students with special educational and behavioral needs and those who simply decide to disrupt and push their limits:

This year was very interesting because I came five weeks in and I had a class, and I've never had as many Special Ed in five or four students in my life all together as I do this year. It's very overwhelming to me and I came in already in the middle. I have this one class with a whole bunch of Special Ed kids in it. I had this one boy and based on his behavior on my first few days, I thought he was one of my Special Ed kids. I was trying to be very gentle and easy with him because I had not read through all the paperwork yet. My goodness, you know, that was just a plain, old, normal Joe and he decided to act that way. I put the kibosh on him very quickly and he does really, really well for me now.

Ellis is convinced that she is not always able to reach every child every day:

That's the dream, right, that I am going to reach each of these kids. I don't think that I do. I don't think I've reached through and grabbed every single one of them, at least not every day but that's the goal? Is it feasible? I don't know because they don't really know that there's a measurable way to see if you have reached them all.

Ellis, also added that,

It's the goal of education is to reach every child. Not "No Child Left Behind," because that doesn't seem to work out so well, but they're at least with you. They may not understand why they're in the bus with you, but that they're at least in your metaphorical bus with you riding along and they see some value in themselves and then, learning.

Students' Academic Success

Ellis understand understands the needs of her diverse students. In order to meet those needs, she realized the variety of learning styles that students have and the importance of engaging all students by meeting those learning styles.

Student learning.

Ellis understands the fact that not all the students learn in the same way. Some people, including herself, are able to sit down, listen, read, and learn in a passive way. However, many students are not able to fully benefit from this kind of instruction:

I do believe in learning styles. I wish that they were not real because they're really annoying and it'd be so much nicer if kids all learned like I did where they sit down and listen. I just talk to them and show them stuff, and they go, "Ah!," and then, they do it. [Sic] I had one little boy today who stood in the back of the classroom almost the whole class period because if he had sat down, he would've gotten into mischief because he just needs to be up. I try to do where we shift what we're doing about three times during the class period. I try not to have something where they're just sitting down for 64 minutes or we'll break it up.

We'll watch, like we were talking about Ellis Island today, so we pulled up and we watched a little video on Ellis Island, and then, we finished reading.

Ellis went on to explain further how she meets the diverse learning needs of her students. Sometimes a teacher needs to be inventive in making sure that learning is happening and discipline issues do not arise because those student needs are not met:

I try to break it up for kids who need to, you know, with shorter attention spans, I let them get up if they need to stand up or lots of times, they'll go sharpen a pencil or something just because they need to get up and move. I'm not so good at all in break brains where you get up and have them do stuff, but I'm trying. I tried to, like we'll do a direct instruction piece, and then, work on their own. I let them get up and move. You have 30 seconds to get where you want to work on this assignment at and they get to move with someone. When we're done 30 seconds, put the desks back and get back in your normal seat. Sometimes, we make 30 seconds and sometimes, we don't but they're getting to move around and especially because I teach lots of ELL students, we do lots of videos and pictures. We do lots of the graphic organizers and stuff. I think it usually works for them.

Technology.

Ellis stated that the use of technology enables students to be more focused on an assignment. She did not consider herself very technologically advanced, however, there is already so much technology integrated in the classroom, like overhead projectors and smart boards, that if that is considered "the use of technology" in the classroom, then she definitely uses it every day:

I don't love the technology so much, but our kids do. I'm starting to see every year, more and more our kids do better when they're getting to use technology. I guess their attention spans are so short and they're used to those "wines" they watch where every 15 seconds, it's a new thing. I feel like I'm trying to embrace technology more. I would like it if we ended up with a world where all of the kids had their own iPad or something, and they could work on that because for some reason, when I give them that, they will answer the same questions as I give them on paper but they'll actually focus and do it. It's like a little hypnotizer. They'll look into a screen. Mostly, we use the overhead projector and videos, and stuff as technology. We don't have lots of computer or iPad days in here. It just depends what you're considering technology. At this point, I don't know that an Elmo and an overhead projector is high tech.

During the observation, Ellis used Elmo and the overhead projector in order to go over the assignment, that the student had had 15 minutes to work on individually. Also, as it was mentioned before, she used the Apple Air Play in order to stream the pictures of a baby from her personal cell phone on to the Promethean board.

Teaching to the test.

Ellis assured that she never teaches to the test. She has the standards, or the TEKS, and that is what she teaches. If a student is able to in class what TEKS require, then they should be able to pass any test that is based on TEKS:

I think that it's completely possible because that's what I did at my last campus. I never ever, ever taught the test. I go, "Hey, guys. You know that STAAR test?

That test is coming in a couple of weeks.” You could tell them, “For this test, you have to be able to write a paragraph that fits in this box, so I’m going to teach you how to make sure a paragraph will fit in this box.” In reality, when you take away all of the mandates and the things because, yes, we are mandated to teach to the test which is the thing I have not been doing for the last three weeks. I have been going “pff” to the lady who came and told us we had to teach the test for six weeks because I refuse to do it. Before I was mandated to teach to the test, you teach your TEKS. The TEKS are what they make the test from. If the kid knows the TEKS, guess what? They can pass the test without me ever having to give them four practice STAAR tests before the STAAR test. I think teaching them the test is a bunch of crap. I really, I just do.

According to Ellis, teaching to the test is simply making students understand the test technicalities. It does not hurt to familiarize your students with the test format:

I think there are kids who struggle and I think that they do need to see what it looks like. They need to see this is what it looks like and this skill that you know, “Look, they’re making inferences here.” We do that all the time in class. Now, you got to do it on a multiple choice question. This is easier than in class where you have to make up the answer because they have it.

I don't think it's bad to [sic] walk them through maybe the process of doing it. I think you can do it in a way that’s not the test. When you practice the test every week leading up to it for six weeks, they’re already tired of it before they see it. Then, the high-stakes testing is the thing that’s ridiculous. That you cannot pass

8th grade if you've passed all of your classes, and you're a good a student if you failed the test. To me, that seems like the dumbest thing ever imagined in the world.

Passing and extra help.

Ellis believes that teaching to the test is not the answer when it comes to helping students pass:

We teach, too the test on our campus and they still don't pass because teaching it really does not work. I teach them the TEKS. I teach them what is on the test. They still don't all pass, but I have yet to figure out how to magically make everyone pass.

Ellis shared that she tries to take care of her students' needs in class during school day utilizing the advisory period, the after school tutorial program, as well as the special education co-teacher, who helps her modify assignments. For example, during the visit to Ellis' class, a special education co-teacher came into her room and helped work with several special education students in a small group. She also took those students with her out of the classroom so that they could take the quiz in a less distracting setting.

One of the reasons she makes the effort to provide as much help as possible in class is that she recently had a new baby, which requires a substantial amount of her time:

Mostly, I just do it in class. If they're not doing well, I just go harass them and bring them stuff, and talk to them, and make them do it. I try and do it in class because I don't have the time to stay up here.

Ellis explained what exactly she does in class: “We just keep doing it over and over and over again, and we do it in 500 different ways. I gave them a thing last week and they didn’t do it right.” She keeps spiraling back to what her students need to know until they get it:

We just keep bringing it back. We’ll do another little, “Okay, watch. This is how you do this,” and we do it again. We try and cycle all those kids. We just, what do they call it, spiraling it in so that they keep seeing it over and over and over until they can do it in their sleep.

For Ellis, one of the ways to increase student interest in their learning is giving them as much independence as they can handle as well as tapping into their interests:

I think students should have a lot more independence that they have. I think that and things that they are able to be independent and they should be. When we do informational text, I try taking them to the lab with computers to let them find their own news article about something they were interested in and I learned that with about 80% of my students, they're not ready to do that yet. I try sometimes to give them independence. My advanced, because they're writing an essay now and I gave them a topic, “Guys, if you have your own idea of what you think you want to write about, then just bring that to me and show me. I would rather you pick a topic you feel strongly about than just a random one I just made up.” I try to give them independence, but also give them whatever in case they're not ready to do it, they can still be successful.

The Fundamental Five

Ellis complied with the majority of the Fundamental Five elements. However, the implementation of some of those elements still require work on her part.

Framing the lesson.

Besides posting the objectives for the whole week, Ellis also “translates” it into the student-friendly language. For example, when teaching how to make inferences from informational texts, she explains to her students, “You take something read, plus something in your brain, and you stick them together. Yes, they know what we’re doing. Like, they know today we’re going to compare stuff because it says we’re comparing selections.”

Ellis went on to explain:

I put up a PowerPoint every day because I need . . . I keep the week on the board because I need that at the beginning of class every day. Right now, we’ve been studying the Holocaust, so I’ll put a picture or two pictures that pertain to what we’re doing. Before we start class, I tell the kids what we’re doing. We’re growing our vocabulary today, so we’re going to do this lesson in our vocabulary book. We’re going to be comparing on a Venn diagram this video with this article that we read today. We walkthrough what we’re going to do and why we’re doing it.

During the observation, Ellis had her objectives for today and for the week written on a dry-erase board. In addition, she framed the lesson orally by going over the goal of that specific lesson.

When it comes to having a closing question or a final product, Ellis admitted, “Nope. That’s the thing that I need to do better. [Sic] I believe in that. I think having a closing thing makes lessons more powerful. We just don’t always get there.”

However,

A product, yes. They have an assignment they have finished. I like doing like this to kids to leave or where we stopped and talked to someone about what we did. Those get left off a lot because things take longer than they’re supposed to.

Working in the power zone.

Ellis does not teach from her desk. Actually, in several classes she has students sitting at her desk to ensure proper behavior and focus:

I sit on my chair sometimes. I sat on that [high] chair [in front of the classroom] probably for 10 minutes today because by 4th period, I was exhausted and I sat down for a few minutes. [Sic] Sometimes, I’ll lean against the desk for a minute or I’ll sit on top of the desk for a minute. I do believe that you have to be moving around. If you sit down even for the few minutes I sat down today, the kids start wiggling.

During the observation of Ellis’ classroom, most of the time she walked around the classroom monitoring students’ work and locating herself near the pockets of noise. One time, she had to pull one student to the side and have a conversation with her about her behavior without arguing with her in front the rest of the class.

Ellis does not utilize her power zone to simply ensure desired behavior. She also moves around the classroom all the time in order to help her students:

I have so many kids who need things read to them and helping all of my special populations of kids, this way, I'm able to help kids without it being like, "Everyone come sit at this table with me," and eyes looking at them, without identifying them as being different. I can go through and all help all of the kids. In this way, you see the kids who are working and who aren't working. I don't know. I just don't see how you can teach from your desk. You can monitor from your desk.

When talking about power zone and proximity to students while providing instruction, Ellis also shared,

Where you stand is important and they will remember. If you stand at the same spot when you say something, they can look at that spot and remember the answer. So, yes. Power position is important and standing right behind them also can be important. That's how you find your kids who are trying to cheat and stuff, is they're trying to see where you are.

Ellis, also talked about her desk arrangement:

I keep my room arranged where I can get to every single kid on both sides. They keep trying to move that last row against the wall. One desk got scooched over there. I tell them, "It must be far enough that Ms. Ellis can fit through this walkway." I have to be able to get to them. If I can't, I end up crawling through chairs to get to kids, but I will get to them.

Frequent small group purposeful talk (FSGPT).

Ellis sees great value in FSGPT because it allows the students who are not prone to talk in front the whole class, to discuss the material with partners in small groups:

While they're talking and discussing stuff, I can go around. If they get validation that what they're saying is good, then when we come back to hold classes, then they're willing to share because they know they have a right answer. That is the absolute best way to get your kids who are not at your subject or your kids who doubt themselves, or who are scared they're not saying something correctly to participate, is to give them that validation and then, they're not scared to speak. You can be like, "Yes, that's right." The kids who know that they're low, they can look at the rest of the class with a little bit of pride that they got something right, and some of the kids need that.

When it comes to preplanning her questions for each lesson.

We have our questions that are written on the board, but that doesn't actually happen for me. I try and just put them in whatever they're doing and have their last question they answer be that. We'll ask one up on the board and then, at the end of the class, we'll answer it. That's where I like them to talk to the partner or to their group.

During the class visit, no FSGPS were observed. Students did discuss some of the answers while working in a whole-class activity, but it was more of a random than a preplanned nature.

Recognizing and reinforcing.

Ellis provided constant verbal reinforcement throughout her each of her lessons:

I am a verbal praise person. When they do well, I'll draw up a happy face by what they're doing. If they're not working, I go, "So sad. I have to put a sad face." They're, "Why do I get a sad face?" "Because you did not work." I'll put little happy faces on their paper or tell them like, one of my classes was working on essay today and they would just be like, "I don't think that this is good." I said, "Yes, this is good. Your grammar sucks, we'll get it fixed later, but your content is good." "Oh, okay. Good." I think they just need that, like validation. We also hang their work in the hallway, but that's mandated. That's not me or like I said, I send home little, happy notes to their parents.

During observation, Ellis constantly used verbal praise. She used such phrases as "Excellent job," "Thank you, this is correct," "You are paying such a good attention today."

For her classroom management, Ellis used CHAMPS:

I just say, "Students, do you remember your Champs? This is what you should be doing right now." It actually works. It's really not different than what I did before other than we get to look at the poster now. I am teaching, so "I'm directing instruction, you are doing what?" We didn't say, "I'm sitting on a blue chair." "Yes. Where are my eyes?" "They're aimed at me." "Where are my ears?" "They are listening." Only to the teacher. Then, we have to talk about volume and stuff working with partners.

During observation, Ellis used of CHAMPS when the class became excessively loud on several occasions. She discussed the expectations for the level of voice of that particular activity.

The key to successful expectations reinforcement is repetition:

We just will go over them. If they're not meeting, then we stop. We're watching a little video clip and they started talking, so I turned on the lights, stopped the video. "We're being good." "No. You are not being good. What do you have to do to be able to watch a video?" They'll go over it. I said, "I'll try one more time." Because they know I will turn that off like that, they were good and they watched it. Going over it when they forget or taking away what they want to do.

Critical writing.

Since this is a language class, Ellis stated that her students have daily opportunities to express themselves in writing: "We do free writing. We do answering questions. I don't know. They write stuff, everything. This is Language Arts. We write all the time."

Discipline Management

Ellis stated that she normally does not have serious discipline issues. Most of the disciplinary disruptions come from students being tired from sitting all day:

Most of it is just silliness. It's talking. It's throwing papers at people. It's picking and it's because kids get bored, they don't pay attention or what you're doing is not holding their interests. Those are most of them. You have your one or two kids in each class who are seriously disturbed and trying to . . . that have

real issues and cause a huge amount of problems. Most of it is just silliness because they have been sitting in a desk all the day and they're tired, and they want to do something more fun like throw paper balls at the kid in front of them.

Based on her 13-year experience as a public school teacher, Ellis has several tips to share with her colleagues:

Be consistent. Don't say it unless you're going to follow through. Well, that's assuming. Don't say it unless you mean it. You can say, "Hey, it looks like you're running towards a long form if you continue this." Don't say, "I'm writing you a long form," and then, don't do it because then, they know they can run all over you. Do not put your children in groups and tables, and stuff if you cannot manage them in rows. It's a very dumb thing to do. Never ever, ever argue with a child, ever argue with a child. Don't be afraid to ask for help because there are situations you're not going to win.

According to Ellis, disciplinary consequences should depend on the situation and the student. Sometimes punitive measures are more effective than positive reinforcement, while in other cases positive reinforcement might work better.

School Environment

Ellis considered herself a rather self-sufficient educator. Her conviction was that if it was not for all the interference from different levels of administrators, it would have allowed her to be more effective as a classroom teacher.

Administrators.

Ellis' stance on the role of administrators is rather critical when it comes to either instructional or the discipline aspects of administration. When it comes to teaching Ellis said,

I have this theory that I would love to test out where the administrators let us spend one whole year, like they say, "These are your TEKS. These are what your students have to know. This is the day of the big state test." Then, they go away. They let me do whatever I need to do to put down information and my students had, and see how we do on a test without any other help. Just that's what I get. That's what I got in the district I spent four years in. "You teach your students. You're going to have this test." I had in my last, all but one student passed and that was because he was at the alternative campus all but about 12 days of the year, so I taught him 12 times.

The biggest issue with the administrative part of instruction, according to Ellis, is that there are too many mandates and testing. Teachers are told what to teach, how to teach it, and then students are tested before most teachers are able to effectively teach all the necessary concepts.

Ellis is rather frustrated about the disciplinary part of administration:

I can't give a kid a D-Hall without doing 30 things before I do it. I can't write a kid a long form without doing 80 things before I do it. I can't send a student to an administrator to have a problem fixed. If I send a student to an administrator, it's because they're disturbing my class and nobody can learn. It's not because

they're sleeping. It's not because they're being irritating. No one can learn, so I send them out to an administrator. Sometimes, I hear them talking back to the administrator through my door. Then, they come walking back in and continue with what they were doing every single time. On a daily basis, I spend my day dealing with kids who should not be in my classroom because they will not just make them go away and put them somewhere where they will not disturb 23 other kids. That is how I feel.

[Sic] The role of the school administrator is we have to do five bazillion things and then, we write up a long form and they'll put it back in our box to tell us that we have to attach more paperwork.

Ellis concluded her statement about administrators by saying that,

We have a discipline policy on our campus that is clearly not working, and yet they are like, "You must stick to it. You must stick to it." It's not working.

We're following exactly how they say. There are things that just don't get dealt with because we have to do it and I am not here to discipline kids. I am here to teach kids and manage kids. Once they become a discipline issue, there should be someone who does that.

Collaboration.

Ellis constantly collaborates with her colleagues within her content area and within her team. When she collaborates with the content area teachers, it is mostly in regard to curriculum and instruction:

My 8th grade Language Arts cohort and I, we meet every single Friday and we plan. Then, we talk, not every day but almost every day. “How did this go?” “I did this.” We talk a lot and it helps because then, we have the whole two minds are better than one. We don’t so much as we do sometimes as Language Arts on the whole campus.

When Ellis meets with her team, it is mostly to discuss students and their concrete needs:

That’s when we talk about our kids. We teach where our students all see the same four core teachers and we can talk about concerns with students, things we need to shift or adjust. We get three students this year and they were ridiculous together. We call them The Three Amigas. We broke them up. We got administrator approval. We broke them up and two of three are now passing and being successful because they got away from that situation. We do work a lot as teams and it has helped.

Professional development.

Ellis also has some critical views about her professional development opportunities:

I think we spend lots of professional development time on things that are completely useless to me and not enough time on things that are. I’m our LPAC coordinator and somehow, I’m supposed to be this wise ESL guru, but I get no training in that. Instead, I spend all of this training doing things like lead forward that does not help me in my classroom. I know you all like it, but it does not help

me in my classroom because as soon as I get a DMAC report that says, how my kids did and which TEKS they didn't do well and I know what to do. I don't need an 80-page report to break down every subset of the subjection to tell me what I need to work on. I think lots of times, it's not on helpful things. This year, it's on a lot of new teacher stuff. I've been doing this 13 years. I don't want to hear again the same thing.

Working overtime.

Despite the fact that Ellis has a busy family life and does not tend to spend much time beyond the required hours 7:05 a.m. to 3:35 p.m. at school, she estimates that she works approximately six to seven extra hours every week:

I work overtime every single day. I come to school only a few minutes early. I get to school by seven every morning. On days I don't have children to pick up, I leave at 4:00, well, when I have only one to pick up. I leave at 3:35 only when I have somewhere I must be. I take home either something to grade or something to plan every single night. I spend at least half-a-day on the weekend working. Almost every week, I come up here for anywhere between one to three hours one day on the weekend.

Ellis is a teacher who loves children and has a lot of patience. She has a deep understanding of her students' educational and emotional needs. She shared that the outside factors were preventing her to be a more effective teacher in the classroom.

Summary

Ellis' daily inspiration at work is the difference that she makes every day. It does not happen every day, but she tries.

The pieces of advice that she would extend to her colleagues, were staying organized, staying consistent, finding a classroom management system that works for you, never arguing with a student, and loving children.

She was able to build relationships with her students, which helps her as a teacher on a daily basis. She is normally able to learn her students' names within several days because a name is a very personal thing and knowing a student's name helps in building relationships. Talking to parents on the phone was not Ellis' most favorite activity because those conversations are mostly about negative issues. However, she stated that she does send positive notes home with students.

In order for learning to happen, Ellis said that the teacher has to be inventive. She talked about allowing students to refocus their attention, to move around, and the use of technology. Ellis stated that she did not believe in teaching to the test, and she never does it, however familiarizing students with the test format and the types of questions on the test should not be ignored.

When it comes to the Fundamental Five, Ellis complied with most elements of the framework. However, complete implantation of all five elements depended on the type of lesson and the day. Due to the nature of her class, such important elements as FSGPT and critical writing frequently took place in her classroom.

Ellis shared that should did not normally have serious discipline issues, other than excessive talking and throwing papers. However, that is the result of having to sit in a classroom all day, so she did not take it personally.

Ellis felt like she did not receive sufficient support from her administrators when it comes to discipline. She was also critical about her professional development opportunities that focused less on instructional strategies and more on data analysis.

Overall, Ellis did not feel like her school functioned as one team. This factor, along with several others mentioned earlier, might have also influenced her effectiveness as a classroom teacher.

CHAPTER IX

Cross-Case Analysis

Participants' Backgrounds

All four participants in the study were identified by their supervisors as highly effective teachers, whose students' scores at the end of the year are consistently high and whose classroom management skills allow them to achieve those results. These four teachers, who agreed to participate in the study, work in two middle schools at Lone Star Independent School District. Amber teaches 7th grade and John teaches 8th grade Math. Karen and Ellis are both 8th grade English Language Arts teachers. Their teaching experience in the public school system ranges from four to thirteen years.

Amber, Karen, and Ellis, when talking about values, explicitly indicated that they are very family oriented. John, on the other hand, is more dedicated to his teaching, coaching, and overall working with at-risk students, since it is his background.

When talking about family backgrounds, it turned out that only Amber's mother had a university degree and was a special education teacher. The rest of the parents of the participants were working class people. They all came from lower-middle or middle class families. Amber and John were able to go to college thanks to the band and athletic scholarships respectively.

Amber and Ellis went to college knowing that they wanted to be teachers. John and Karen had other careers until they decided to make a change in their lives, obtain alternative teachers certification, and become public school teachers.

The participants did not entirely agree on the biggest challenges of teaching. Despite the fact that both schools have majority of their student population at-risk and economically disadvantaged students, discipline management is seen as a challenge only by Amber and Ellis. What everybody agreed on, to a smaller or a greater degree, is that administrators' support is one of the challenges they are facing on the daily basis. In addition, Amber and Karen identified paperwork, documentation, and other "extra stuff" outside the classroom as the biggest challenges in their teaching careers. Among other challenges, Amber named motivating unmotivated students, Karen talked about getting burned out, and John mentioned other teachers and staff as factors that may cause challenges to teacher. All four participants indicated, however, that the best part of their job is being in the classroom with their students on a daily basis and experiencing those personal interactions.

When talking about their subject matter, both ELA teachers indicated that they believe English Language Arts to be a more difficult subject to teach than other subjects, because there is never a definite answer and they have to teach students, basically, how to think. However, both ELA teachers are extremely passionate about reading and about literature in general.

Both Math teachers confessed that they do not particularly enjoy reading, so they chose Math as their content area. However, neither of the math teachers has advanced

degrees in math and do not consider themselves math geniuses. It is teaching math to students that gets them excited every day.

When describing their own classes and trying to analyze how students in their classes feel, all four participants were rather self-critical. Thus, they indicated that, to a smaller or greater degree, their students may be bored or may not even want to be in their class. The reason for it is because it is difficult to balance students with diverse backgrounds within the same classroom. They believe that their advanced students may not be challenged enough, whereas their struggling students are bored and frustrated because they are not always able to keep up with the rest of the class. However, the teachers admitted that they do their best to differentiate and to push every child to the maximum degree possible in order to help them be more academically successful, while, at the same time, trying to take care of their emotional needs and prepare them for life outside the classroom.

The participants used a variety of similar strategies that they employ in the classroom. There were some strategies that were unique to each participant.

Advice for Teachers

Many pieces of advice to teachers provided by the participants overlapped. Thus, John and Ellis felt strongly about being consistent, especially when it comes to discipline and overall expectations for students. John and Amber both mentioned finding your own classroom management style and being genuine. Amber and Ellis also talked about the necessity of staying organized at all times. Another piece of advice that overlapped was from Karen and Ellis. They both talked about the importance of loving children.

Some participants also provided the pieces of advice that other participants did not mention in their interviews. Thus, Amber thought being assertive plays an important role in teaching. Karen said that teachers should not be afraid to ask questions from colleagues and supervisors if they need answers. She also talked about the importance of learning the systems that are already in place at school so that you do not have to reinvent the wheel. Also, as much as Ellis stressed the importance of consistency, she also thought that being flexible is an integral part of being a teacher because you always have to adjust to your students, curriculum requirements, etc.

Relationships with Students

All the participants agreed that almost the most important thing in teaching is being able to build good rapport and teacher-student relationships. Thus, both Amber and Ellis talked about the fact that if you show your students that you genuinely care for them, they are more apt to rising to your expectations and going an extra mile for you. Karen said that having positive teacher-student relationships ensures that it does not come to the point when it is teacher versus the whole class. John said that he gives his students “tough love” by being consistent and holding them accountable for their actions. At first they resent, but later in the year they understand how this approach makes them be more successful.

Students’ names.

All four participants admitted that learning students’ names as soon as possible is an important element of building teacher-student relationships. Amber, Karen, and Ellis make a conscientious effort, through activities and games, to learn their students’ names

as soon as possible at the beginning of the year. Ellis assured that it takes her approximately two days to learn all her students' names, while Amber and Karen take one and two weeks respectively, learning the names.

John's approach is rather different however. He admitted that he is "terrible" with names and it normally takes them one to two months to learn everybody's names. The reason he is still able to connect with his students is because if he cannot remember a student's name, he may give him or her a different name that reflects their behavior or personality. He claimed that some students even prefer he uses the invented names, rather than their own name.

Parental involvement.

Amber, Karen, and Ellis agree that parental involvement is one of the structures that helps students do better at school. John, however, does not rely on parents for his teacher effectiveness because the parents of the students who need that parental input are impossible to reach or have them help you with their own children.

Amber and Ellis talked about the "helicopter" parents versus the parents who are impossible to engage. Both of these extremes are counter-productive and are not helping students. In addition, Karen and Ellis admitted that they are guilty in not making as much positive parental contacts.

All the participants indicated that they do make parent contacts at least several times a week, mainly because they are mandated by administrators to do it when some kind of a disciplinary consequence is assigned to a student. Amber said that she tends to call parents even in the middle of class if a student is excessively disruptive. Ellis

admitted that she has anxiety calling parents on the phone, however, she still calls as required by administrators.

Among the ways to make positive contacts, Amber mentioned sending “get to know you” letters at the beginning of the year. Karen uses Remind 101 to relay information to parents. Ellis sends home brief notes when a student does well in class.

Students’ potential.

None of the four participants believes that it is possible to reach all the students and have them uncover their full potential. They blame it on the educational system. Amber and Karen believe that it would be more feasible if the class sizes were not as big. In big classes it is easier to hide and fail quietly. Ellis thinks that the No Child Left Behind is not designed to serve all the students, but we are trapped in it.

John said that because of their home background, some students do not see the value of education until later or even until after they graduate. This is why he talks to them every day trying to convey that the world is not fair and it is harsh, however each one of them has the potential to be somebody.

Students’ Academic Success

The participants shared a variety of methods of ensuring their students’ academic success. Many of those methods overlapped, others were more unique.

Student learning.

Amber, Karen, and Ellis believe modern students need a variety of exposures to the same material in order for instruction to be effective, therefore they provide those opportunities by having their students do interactive journals, moving around the

classroom, incorporating technology, etc. Ellis said that she wished different learning styles were not real, because she is the kind of a person who can just sit and learn, but it is not effective for most students.

John, however, explained that although he believes in effectiveness of differentiation and learning styles, he is more “old school” and “drill-and-kill” kind of a person. He is not very creative in accommodating different learning styles every day, however he does try to make sure that students are exposed to the same material multiple times by spiraling back.

All the teachers agreed that all students need to have a certain level of freedom in their learning. Karen and John stated that the amount of freedom they grant to their students depends on the group. More advanced students are better at taking advantage of such freedom, whereas the students who are struggling need more guidance and direction. Ellis believes that tapping into students’ interests can help students be more independent and take ownership of their learning.

Technology.

All the participants agreed that technology has a hypnotizing effect and is able to raise students’ interest in the material. However, both Karen and John said that technology should be used to facilitate instruction. If technology is used thoughtlessly, it does not improve student learning. Thus, Karen talked about the required computer lab day for her students. She does not see value in it because it is mostly used for additional assessment, which she as a teacher does not need. She would rather spend this time in the classroom working directly with her students.

Neither of the participants consider themselves technological gurus, however, during my observation they all used ELMO and the Promethean board during instruction. Amber also used a specialized Math software to teach her students how to solve equations.

Teaching to the test.

When talking about teaching to the test, all the participants agreed that they do teach to the test because they have to. They admitted that besides teaching the concepts required by TEKS, they also spend time teaching students how to answer specific type of questions.

In addition, the curriculum that they have follow takes away teacher's freedom in the classroom, which, according to Karen, is frustrating and takes joy out of teaching. John also said that if it was not for the test at the end of the year that all the students have to pass, he would probably allow more student freedom in the classroom.

Passing and extra help.

All four participants employ a variety of ways to help their students pass. John and Ellis felt strongly about practice and repetition. John and Amber talked about spiraling back. Karen and Ellis also rely heavily on the advisory period to provide extra help to their students. In addition, Karen and Ellis talked about utilizing the special education services. Both of them also agreed on the fact that they do not let their students turn in incomplete assignments and they "harass" those students until the assignment is properly completed. Also, Amber and Ellis stressed the importance of providing students with a variety of ways to learn the material.

The participants also had some ideas that did not overlap with the ones of their colleagues participating in the study. Thus, to get help with academics, Karen often calls home. She also thinks that before assessing students, we need to make sure that the assessment tool is valid. John said that he ensures his students' academic success by consistently holding them accountable for their work. He also utilizes his colleague's help in tutoring his students, whenever he is not available because of his coaching schedule.

The Fundamental Five

The participants did not completely comply with the Fundamental Five. However, the majority of the elements of the framework have been observed in the participants' daily practices.

Framing the lesson.

All the participants indicated that they have daily and/or weekly objectives posted in their classrooms. Specifically, Amber said she uses the "I will . . ." statement for her objectives and John uses the "We will . . ." statement. Karen and Ellis do not use the "We will . . ." or "I will . . ." statements.

In addition, all the participants unanimously admitted that they did not always have a closing question, a closing product, or an exit ticket. However, they understood the value of it and they agreed that this was something that they needed to work on.

Working in the power zone.

All the participants agreed that teacher proximity is crucial in order to ensure student learning and to minimize disruptions. However, their ideas of teacher proximity

somewhat differed. Thus, Amber, Karen, and Ellis stated that they never teach from their desk. They are constantly on their feet monitoring students, providing feedback, or helping them stay on task.

John, on the other hand, stated that he is able to control his classes by being “on a perch” and watching over his students at all times. He does not believe that a teacher needs to be moving around at all times. The observation confirmed that John sat on top of his desk almost the whole time during the lesson. However, the level noise in his classroom was lower than in any of the classrooms of other participants. Students were not distracted by random conversations, participated in the lesson, and worked. When two students were falling asleep, he redirected them and they joined the rest of the class working.

Amber and Karen’s desks were arranged in groups of three or four. The arrangement allowed free teacher and student movement around the classroom. John’s and Ellis’ desks were arranged in rows as mandated by the school administrators. However, the isles were wide enough to allow student and/or teacher movement on both sides of each desk.

Frequent small group purposeful talk (FSGPT).

All four participants indicated that they employ FSGPT in their classrooms. Karen and Ellis, due to the nature of their class stated that they always have discussions built into their lessons.

The math teachers Amber and John also use FSGPT in their class. Amber stated that she makes an effort to give her students a short mental break every 10 to 15 minutes

by letting them turn to their partner discuss the concepts learned. John uses a similar approach during individual student work. She allows students to turn to each other and ask questions if they need help.

When it comes to pre-planning their questions, the English teachers Karen and Ellis always pre-plan their questions because it is easy to become side-tracked. The math teachers Amber and John said that they try to pre-plan their questions, however, due to teaching the same concepts for many years, they have questions in their mind and they ask those questions when it is appropriate to facilitate instruction.

Recognizing and reinforcing.

All the teacher in this study use constant positive reinforcement and verbal praise. This was confirmed by classroom observations. Thus, Amber stood out by constantly “catching” students doing what they are expected to do and praising this behavior. Karen, as she walked around the classroom and listened to student discussions, encouraged the students with correct answers to speak up and share with the class. John provided positive feedback even when the answer was incorrect by praising the effort. Ellis said she draws smiley faces and sad faces on students’ work to encourage them work better.

Karen and Ellis mentioned the use of CHAMPS to reinforce their behavior expectations. All four teacher had the CHAMPS expectation charts posted in their classroom. John said that he reinforces his expectations by constant repetition of what he expects.

Critical writing.

The math teachers Amber and John admitted that they do not provide their students with many opportunities for critical writing, other than TELPAS. That is something they think they need to work on.

The English teachers Karen and Ellis, due to the nature of their class, provide daily opportunities for their students to express themselves in writing. Karen mentioned that she probably needs to increase the length of the writing prompts that she gives her students.

Discipline Management

None of the participants admitted to having any major discipline issues, e.g. physical or verbal altercations, continuous disrespect toward the teacher, etc. Everybody mentioned excessive talking. In addition to excessive talking, Amber and Ellis mentioned throwing objects at each other. John said that sometimes he observes students falling asleep in class.

When it comes to disciplinary tips, all the teachers mentioned consistency and following through. Karen added establishing structures and knowing the structures that already exist within school. If you are not consistent, none of the structures you put in place will work. John and Ellis would encourage their colleagues not to be afraid to ask questions and to learn from more experienced educators with whom you work.

Among the pieces of advice that did not overlap there were several essential ones. For example, Amber stressed the importance of being assertive and always monitoring your students, even when taking roll. Karen believed that disciplining a student when

you are angry is a poor practice. She also stressed the importance of documenting behaviors in order to be able to see the trends. Ellis said that, when considering desk arrangement, one should not put students in groups if s/he struggles with managing students when they sit in rows.

School Environment

Work environment is an important aspect of teacher effectiveness. Among many possible things, it includes working with administrators, colleagues, and having professional growth opportunities.

Administrators.

The teachers in this study were rather critical of their administrators. Thus, Amber and Ellis felt like they do not get enough support and understanding from their campus administrators when it comes to disciplining disruptive students.

Karen was more diplomatic in expressing her opinion. She indicated that overall she is satisfied with administrative support in her classroom, however, they need to be doing a better job by not loading more extra work on already overworked teachers, like collecting and analyzing data.

John was the most critical of his campus administrators. He does not ask for any help when it comes to discipline. It is rather the opposite—they ask him to step into other teachers' classroom to take care of discipline issues. It frustrates him because it takes away from his students. He thinks his administrators are not entirely committed to their work, they are not respected by either the faculty or even the students, and they are not making an effort of retaining good teachers.

Collaboration.

All the participants collaborate at their department level and their team level. When collaborating within the department, it is mostly about the content and curriculum. When collaborating in teams, they discuss individual students, especially the ones with discipline issues. All the teachers are excited to be willing to share their experiences and are always ready to learn something new from their colleagues either within the department or within the team. In addition, Amber and Karen were very happy with the team concept since it allows them to have many structures in place to help students succeed.

Also, Karen added that she likes collaborating online on social media with other teachers across the state and the nation. It is a constant source of new ideas for her.

John felt that within his team and even the whole school, he was seen as a discipline expert. So, for him collaboration at the team level ended with providing discipline tips to other teachers.

Professional development.

Three out of four participants expressed their frustration with their professional development opportunities. Thus, Karen, John, and Ellis expressed that they received plenty of professional development opportunities, however, quantity does not mean quality. Karen and John felt that the content of the session that they had attended was not practical and that was something that they would not be able to utilize in their classroom either because it does not fit the curriculum or it is not applicable to the population of their students in the classroom. Ellis said that much of the professional

development that she has experienced was about segregating data, which was excessive and not helpful at the classroom level.

Amber, however, was satisfied with her professional development opportunities. The only issue is that she has had to be away from her students for over 20 school days by mid-February already, which may eventually have detrimental effect on her students' learning.

Working overtime.

All the participants claimed that they worked overtime. All, but John, took papers to grade at home and come to school for at least several hours during the weekend. John comes to school before 6 a.m. and sometimes comes back from the soccer practice and stayed at the school till 10 p.m. in order not to fall behind on grading, lesson plans, or other paperwork.

John estimated that he worked from 20 to 30 extra hours a week. Amber stated that she worked at least 20 hours a week extra. Karen said that it is impossible for her to get everything done within work hours, so she worked approximately 8 extra hours a week. Even Ellis, with her busy family life mentioned that she probably worked 6 to 7 extra hours a week.

All the participants had unique teacher personalities and, at times, unique approaches to teaching and discipline. However, the majority of their practices and their educational philosophies overlapped in several key aspects described above.

Summary

The four participants of the study teach 7th and 8th grade Math and English Language Arts. All four were identified by their campus administrators as highly effective teachers.

They all had humble family backgrounds. Neither of them had an advanced degree in their field, however they are passionate about their respective subject matters. Two of the four participants obtained their teacher certification through alternative certification programs.

Among the biggest challenges identified by the participants were managing student discipline, paperwork and documentation, the lack of administrative support, and the lack of appropriate professional development opportunities. The biggest reward, however, was identified as working with students in the classroom and making a difference.

All participants also agreed on the fact that they were not always able to meet the needs of all the students in their classrooms at the same time. When teaching a classroom with diverse student needs, their advanced students sometimes may have become bored due to the lack of rigor, or, vice versa, some students may have become frustrated due to the lack of understanding or inability to keep up with the pace.

The participants advised that in order to be a successful teacher, one has to have structures in place, both instructional and disciplinary, and to be consistent implementing those structures. Loving your job and loving children was another theme identified during the cross-analysis of cases.

The importance of building relationships with students was identified by the participants as paramount for a successful teacher. The participants built their relationships with students by being genuine, fair, caring, and consistent. For two participants keeping in touch with parents was also a part of building relationships.

All four participants worked in and outside the classroom to ensure student academic success. They used a variety of methods such as interactive journals, engaging activities, incorporating technology, contacting home, providing tutorials, and make up sessions.

All the participants agreed that teaching to the test is a part of their reality, regardless if they agree with it or not. They tried to avoid it and to teach to the standards, however, familiarizing students with the test format has its benefits when it comes to standardized testing.

The implementation of all the elements of the Fundamental Five was challenging to all the participants to a certain degree. Thus, the two elements that were the least used by the participants were the FSGPT and critical writing.

None of the participants reported having major discipline issues with their students. The most frequent disciplinary infractions that they mentioned were talking and throwing objects at each other.

Among other factors influencing their effectiveness, the participants mentioned collaboration with colleagues, which helped extend their professional knowledge base more than the formal professional development sessions. The team teaching model was also mentioned as a structure that positively influenced them as educators.

Overall, the teachers were not unanimous about being satisfied with their current school or district. However, none of them mentioned the possibility of leaving the teaching profession.

CHAPTER X

Summary, Conclusions, Implications, and Recommendations

Introduction

In an attempt to discover the practical formula for ideal instructional practices and classroom management strategies, the researcher interviewed and observed in their classrooms four teachers identified by their campus supervisors as “star” teachers who are effective in securing high rates of student achievement. The teachers who were identified as such and who agreed to participate in the study were not completely unanimous on how to help students be academically successful. Their instructional and classroom management philosophies at times were opposite, however it worked for them, their setting, and their population of students.

Summary of the Study

This qualitative research study addressed the problem of quality of teacher effectiveness in helping students succeed academically in the age of accountability and standardized testing. The purpose of this research was to identify and describe the pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies of consistently effective and successful teachers as evidenced by teacher perceptions and classroom observations.

This qualitative multicase study was guided by one question:

What pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies do teachers consider as effective or ineffective in securing students' academic performance in student achievement?

Four participants from two middle schools within the same school district were selected to participate in the study. Primarily six teachers were recommended by their campus supervisors for the study. Four teachers eventually agreed to be interviewed and to be observed in their classrooms. Based on the interviews and the observations, the details about the school district and each participant and their educational careers were presented in five separate chapters.

For the cross-case analysis of all four cases open coding, axial coding, and selective coding were used in order to identify themes and patterns. Based on the cross-analysis, conclusions have been drawn about the best pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies that lead to students' academic success.

Conclusions

The conclusions of this study have been organized in three sections. The section on pedagogical practices describes what the participants do in and outside the classroom in order to help their students be academically successful. The section on classroom management talks about the techniques that the participants employ in order to ensure that the classroom environment is conducive to learning. The section on additional findings describes the factors that are beyond teachers' control that also tend to influence teacher effectiveness.

Pedagogical practices.

The participants of the study used a variety of instructional strategies in order to ensure that academic success of their students. These strategies included in-class techniques along with the activities beyond their classrooms. The following are the conclusions made about best instructional practices based on the information received through cross-case analysis.

First, all participants talked about repetition and spiraling back to the earlier learned concepts. This falls into one of the Marzano strategies about activation prior knowledge (Feden & Vogel, 2003; Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). However, the approaches to the repetition and spiraling used by the participants differed from more engaging to the “drill-and-kill” approach. This discrepancy is not surprising because “For every good teacher there is a unique list of personal characteristics” (Steele, 2010, p. 71).

Second, allow student interaction in the form of discussion and peer teaching. It allows the quiet students to speak up. It also allows students to explain the material to each other in the “student” language, which increases understanding. In addition, a brief student discussion of the material resets their attention span clock (Cain & Laird, 2011; Stronge, 2002).

Third, incorporate technology in order to engage students and to facilitate instruction. However, technology does not equal good instruction. Technology is not the goal, but an instructional media of an assistive nature (Glasgow & Hicks, 2003; Moore, 2001).

Fourth, teachers need to make sure that the learning objectives for the day are clear for students. It helps students maintain focus and stay on task. (Cain & Laird, 2011; Stronge, 2002).

Fifth, utilize external/out-of-class resources such as advisory periods, tutorials, and other structures existing in school to help the struggling students.

Sixth, teach to the test within reason. All the participants indicated that although they do not like the idea of teaching to the test and they try to avoid it as much as possible, they ended up doing it to a certain degree regardless because the test is ultimately the measure of student success. This approach aligns with the available research on teaching to the test (Jennings & Bearak, 2016; Phelps, 2014).

Seventh, learn from and collaborate with your colleagues. All the participants talked very positively about learning from other teachers and sharing their own expertise with them. This instructional aspect can be considered as part of lesson preparation, which is one of the important components of effective teaching (Stronge, 2002, p. 38). The educators who work in the same school district and have the same population of students can be an invaluable resource for instructional ideas.

Eighth, be prepared to work overtime. The overtime hours are mostly used to grade papers, to plan lessons, and to conduct tutorials. As Stronge (2002) indicated, “Both the organization of time and the preparation of materials are components of the broader practice of planning carefully for instruction” (p. 38).

Ninth, adopt the Fundamental Five framework (Cain & Laird, 2011). Although the Fundamental Five is not the official instructional framework on either of the

campuses where the participants teach, these teachers already comply with the overwhelming majority of the Fundamental Five elements. Thus, they all frame the lesson, however, they normally do not have a closing question or a final product that is specific to that particular lesson. As far as the power zone is concerned, three out of four participants never sat down when teaching, while one participant was still able to observe all of his students at all times during class. Critical writing barely ever happened in the Math classes, but it was a daily practice in the ELA classes.

Classroom management.

Managing a classroom is a skill that requires not only the knowledge of specific behavioral patterns and possible interventions, but also the ability to connect with students in a variety of ways (Jones, 1996, p. 507). The following paragraphs describe the conclusions made based on the ways the participants managed their classrooms.

First, build positive teacher-student relationships. According to Jones (1996), “creation of positive teacher-student and peer relationships” (p. 507) is one of the main features of classroom management. If students see that their teacher cares, they are more prone to work harder in that class. In order to build those relationships, teachers can attend extracurricular events, learn their students’ names quickly in the beginning of the year, show respect and fairness in daily interactions, learn about their home and family life, and use positive reinforcement (Borich, 1996, p. 470).

Second, it is crucial to be genuine and to find the classroom management style and classroom procedures/structures that work for both the teacher and his/her students

(Del Guercio, 2011, p. 42). Without such structures a class can become very chaotic, which, in turn, prevents effective instruction.

Third, be consistent and follow through. Sporadic enforcement of discipline makes overall classroom management ineffective (Fallon, McCarthy, & Sanetti, 2014, p. 18). Irby & Clough, (2015) stated that “consistency is important for collegiality’s sake and provides a cognitive frame for teachers to think about how to improve discipline” (p. 153).

Fourth, teach your behavior expectations explicitly and repeatedly, until all students know them and comply with them. Stronge (2006) affirmed that “Clarity in explanation [is] an important communication skill” (p. 45). Have visuals in the classroom to help you reinforce your expectations (Del Guercio, 2011, p. 41).

Fifth, use power zone. Make sure students do not feel like they can hide from you in your class. Use proximity to students as a way to align their behavior with your expectations. Thus, Cain & Laired (2011) explained that when working in the power zone, “On-task behaviors increase, discipline issues decrease, and student retention of the content increases” (p. 45).

Findings indicate that none of the four participants had major discipline issues in their classrooms. Their experiences with discipline were limited to excessive talking and throwing objects. Considering the fact that approximately 75% if their students are at-risk and economically disadvantaged, it confirms that fact that the participants were able to build relationships with their students, establish routines, and learn to meet their students’ academic and emotional needs.

Additional findings.

A variety of factors that are normally an important part of any public school life did not turn out to be of an assistive nature to the participants when it comes to their instructional and behavior management daily practices. Thus, all the participants were critical about parental involvement, professional development opportunities, and administrative support (Arends, 2001; Fan & Chan, 2001; Feiman-Nemster & Floden, 1986; Slater, Davies, & Burges, 2012). These aspects of their careers as instructional professionals, if anything, were preventing them from being more effective classroom teachers by taking away instructional time or adding additional stress.

It is not clear from the study whether content knowledge played an important role in teacher effectiveness. The literature on the topic of content knowledge and teacher effectiveness is not conclusive either (Andrews, Blackmon & Mackey, 1980; Ayers & Qualls, 1979; Darling-Hammond, 2000; Haney, Madaus, & Kreitzer, 1986; Summers & Wolfe, 1975; Quirk, Witten, & Weinberg, 1973). Two out of the four participants, both math teachers, did not consider themselves experts in their content areas, however they were considered effective teachers in their district. The English teachers, however, had college degrees in their subject matter and were passionate about the subject they taught.

In addition, this study was not able to identify the pattern between teacher effectiveness and the method of the teachers' obtaining their teacher certifications (Tournaki, 2009, p. 107). Thus, two participants obtained their certification through alternative certification programs, while the other two used a traditional route and went to a four-year college. In addition, teacher experience was not a substantial factor in teacher

effectiveness either (Darling-Hammond, 2000, pp. 6-7). Thus, the participants' teaching experience ranged from three to thirteen years.

Another aspect of being a public school teacher that was frustrating to the participants was paperwork when it comes to documentation. Also, excessive assessments, instructional mandates and restrictions, along with data analysis sessions take the joy out of the teaching profession.

Implications

The findings of the study have multiple implications on several levels. These implications are both of theoretical and practical value.

First, the fact that only six teachers, out of almost a hundred in both middle schools, were identified by their supervisors as effective, implies that the overwhelming majority of teachers in the participating district that serves mostly at-risk students were perceived as less effective. This puts the already disadvantaged students at an even greater disadvantage.

Second, although the school climate, the district climate, parental involvement, availability of resources, and the professional development opportunities are important to an effective teacher, they are not decisive elements of effective pedagogy. What matters in the end, however, is what the teacher actually does in and outside the classroom to help students be more successful.

The third implication derives from and somewhat contradicts the second implication. Namely, teachers need to be educated about effective pedagogical strategies that they can employ in and outside their classrooms. This leads us back to the relevant

and effective professional development that both novice and relevant educators crave. It is up to the school administrators to ensure that the professional development opportunities that teachers receive, do not simply comply with the district professional development policies that may be too broad, vague, or obsolete, but that those opportunities are practical and truly developmental for the classroom practitioners.

Fourth, the implementation of standardized tests has created the issue of teaching to the test. Teaching to the test takes time away from teaching content and teaches students how to take the tests, which is the opposite to what the idea of standardized tests is, namely, to objectively evaluate the level of knowledge of all students. What standardized tests actually evaluate is merely how well students are able to do on a standardized test.

These implications should provide plenty of food for thought for both educators at the classroom and the administrative levels. The constantly changing school population requires more rapid adjustments of the educational system in order to better meet the needs of the children who are entrusted to this system by the parents with or without choice.

Recommendations for Practice

Recommendations based on the conclusions of this study will provide practical advice about effective pedagogy. It can be used by teachers, administrators, and educators in teacher preparation and leadership development programs in order to improve instruction, discipline management, and school climate to enhance student achievement.

Recommendations for teachers.

Based on the findings of the study, some recommendations for teachers can be made. It is important to create structures and procedures in your classroom that work for you and your students. In addition, it is necessary to be consistent enforcing your classroom structures and procedures. It is crucial to build relationships with your students by learning about them, by learning about their family life, and by being genuine. Learning from your colleagues provides easy and effective professional development opportunities. Working overtime is an integral part of the teaching profession.

Recommendations for administrators.

Teachers need to be provided with professional development opportunities that are practical and applicable to their setting and their population of students. Teachers need opportunities to meet with their colleagues who teach similar populations of students and exchange their experiences. Administrators need to have more open communication with teachers in order to be aware of their needs and expectations. Teachers need more freedom in the classroom and less mandates when it comes to curriculum. The Fundamental Five instructional framework can be implemented on the campuses that struggle with student achievement and discipline. Instructional and disciplinary consistency should be encouraged at the classroom and the campus levels.

Recommendations for educator preparation programs.

Teacher preparation programs need to focus on teaching new educators such basics of the teaching profession as having clear expectations for students and explicitly

teaching academic, behavioral expectations at the beginning of the year, and establishing and enforcing procedures and routines in the classroom. An integral part of teacher preparation programs should also be the training on how to build positive relationships with students and their families. It is crucial to provide new teachers with the tools they need in order for them to survive their first year in the classroom, not to burn out, and want to come back the following year.

Recommendations for Future Research.

There are several needs for further research that has arisen from this study:

1. The findings from this study derived from one school district. Replication of this study in multiple districts or with other types of student population could help further examine the issue of teacher effectiveness.
2. The study examined a variety of aspects of instructional practices. Focusing on one issue, for example, effective classroom management, and studying the issue in more detail with more participants and more field observations could yield more accurate results.
3. Comparing student achievement on similar campuses one of which utilizes the Fundamental Five as their instructional framework and one that does not, could disclose more information about its effectiveness and thus help campuses be more comfortable making a decision about adopting it in an effort to improve student achievement.

Final Reflections

Well into the 21st century, with all the available brain power, research, and the amount of money spent on education annually, it seems that by now we should have been able to create an educational system that could uncover every student's potential, provide high quality education to all students, and help them find their path in life regardless of students' background and home life. Unfortunately, this is not the case. When parents send their children to public schools, it is almost a gamble as to what the outcome will be, especially if those parents are not involved in their student's education and rely entirely on the system.

Even within the same school, students are not always able to get equal access to high quality education. Effective teachers are a common denominator behind every successful student. Therefore, all the efforts of teacher preparation programs and school district administrators should be directed toward helping every educator to become a highly effective teacher. Some individuals are good teachers by nature, but relying on hiring a naturally good teacher means jeopardizing the future of our students.

The only natural quality that is required of a teacher is love for children. This is something that cannot be taught or explained. However, there is an array of methods and techniques in order to teach an individual to be a highly effective educator. This study was conducted in an effort to discover what those methods and techniques are.

The biggest finding for me was that regardless of what your classroom structures and routines are, as a teacher you have to be assertive and consistent with them. In

addition, teaching is a very “people” job, therefore, it requires love for children and a lot of patience in order to be able to build relationships with them and their families.

Overall, teaching is both a calling and a skill. In order to be successful in it, you have to have a heart for it and you have to learn its technicalities. My hope is that this research has helped at least one teacher to be a more successful educator and make a world of a difference in his or her students’ life.

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APPENDIX A

Consistently Effective Pedagogical Practices among Middle School Teachers

Interview Questions

Date: _____
Name of interviewee: _____
Position of interviewee: _____
Location: _____
Interview start time: _____
Interview end time: _____

Level 1 – Estimated Interview Length: 1 Hour

General/background questions.

1. What is your name? What subject do you teach?
2. Tell me three to five things, professional or personal, that you would like every person with whom you communicate on a daily basis to know.
3. Where did you grow up?
4. Where did you go to college?
5. When you were a child, what did you say when people asked you ‘What do you want to be when you grow up?’
6. What did you think about school when you were growing up?
7. What is the background of your parent(s) or your guardians when you were growing up? What did he/she/they do for a living?
8. How did you become a teacher?
9. How did you decide what subject area you would like to teach?
10. Did you enjoy your college experiences? What are some of the brightest memories?

11. Did you teach in any other districts and/or grade level before you started teaching at this school / school district?
12. What do you find is the most challenging aspects about teaching?
13. Do you think teaching your particular subject matter is easier than other subjects? Explain.
14. Do you like your job? Please be honest. What are the factors? Is it because of what you teach, whom you teach, or with whom you work?
15. If you had to choose one, what do you like more about your job—the subject matter or the human interaction? Elaborate.
16. Are you passionate about your subject matter? Why?
17. Do you have any other than your primary are of teaching certifications?
18. How did you obtain your teaching certification (four-year college, alternative certification, etc.)?
19. How would the smartest student you have in class describe your class?
20. How would the most difficult student you teach would describe your class?
21. If you were a student in your class, how would YOU describe it?
22. Why do you think there is discrepancy? (If any. Depends on the answers to the preceding three questions?)

Pedagogy.

1. What is your role in the classroom?
2. What would you say is your forte—delivering knowledge or making a difference in your students' lives? Elaborate.

3. What five pieces of advice when it comes to teaching would you give to a brand new teacher? Elaborate.
4. There has been much discussion lately about building positive relationships with students. What do you think about? What is the value of it when it comes to delivering a lessons, teaching a concept, or working on a project?
5. If there is a concept that your students absolutely need to know for the test, how do you make sure your students master it?
6. How much independence do you think students need to have in their quest for knowledge?
7. How much does parental involvement influence your daily practices as a classroom teacher?
8. At the beginning of the year, how soon do you manage to learn your students' names? What is the value in knowing students names?
9. At the beginning of the year, how long does it take you to define how much each student is capable of? Does this knowledge help you when you are assessing your students? Does it help you when you are dealing with discipline?
10. Do you collaborate with other teachers in your subject area? How?
11. Do you collaborate with your team on how and what you teach? How?
12. Do you think you receive a sufficient amount of professional development? Elaborate.
13. Do you ever work overtime? If so, how many hours a week?

14. What do you think is the role of school and district administrators in what you do on daily basis when it comes to teaching? Elaborate.

15. How do you meet the needs of students who need additional help?

16. How important do you think is to meet different learning styles?

17. Honestly speaking, what learning style needs of your students do you normally meet on a daily basis? Is it because of your personal teaching style (you are more comfortable or more efficient when you teach in that way), because of the curriculum requirements, because of the department or district decisions?

18. In your opinion, how much technology should be used in teaching? How much does technology influence what and how YOU teach? Elaborate.

19. Is it feasible to make sure that we reach every student and uncover every student's full potential? Elaborate.

20. What do you think of the concept of "teaching to the test?" Can we avoid teaching to the test when the only measure of student achievement and teacher effectiveness is the test?

21. How do you make sure that your students pass?

Discipline.

1. What five discipline tips would you give to a brand new teacher?

2. What types of behavior do you normally observe in your classroom? Why do you think it is so?

3. Have you ever been accused (formally or informally) by a student or parent for "picking" on a student? Elaborate.

4. What is the role of school administrators in the way you handle discipline issues in the classroom? Is there something you wish they did or you wish they did not do?

5. What do you think is more effective, consistent and severe punitive measures or positive reinforcement? Elaborate.

Closing.

Is there anything else that you think we have not discussed or you would like to talk about?

APPENDIX B

SAMPLE SUPERINTENDENT'S LETTER

September 1, 2016

[Name of Superintendent]

Superintendent
XXXX Independent School District
XXXX, Texas

Dear [Name of Superintendent],

My name is Igor Gusyakov, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University. The purpose of this letter is to solicit your support and cooperation in my dissertation study, which is a qualitative multicase study of consistently effective pedagogical practices among middle school teachers. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies of consistently effective and successful teachers as evidenced by teacher perceptions and student assessment data.

I am requesting your permission to interview from four to six middle school teachers. This research is a qualitative multicase study that includes collection of data via interviews, observations, and student assessment data review. There will be three rounds of interviews with each teacher. The teacher interviews will be conducted individually at their convenience and are expected to last 30-90 minutes each. Each interview will be audiotaped to ensure that the findings I report are accurate. The teacher observations will be conducted once for each teacher. The time and the date will be agreed in advance with each teacher and the respective campus principal.

All the data collected will be held in strict confidence. To ensure confidentiality, the school district, schools, and participants will be identified with a special code or a nickname in the final documentation of the study.

The results of this research will be of interest to three levels of educators.

First, the results can be used by school district administrators in teacher hiring process. Teachers that have certain natural and/or professional dispositions and/or acquired skills identified by this research may be sought after more than those teachers who do not possess such dispositions and skills.

Second, the results of the research can be used by school administrators for professional development purposes. Developing the teacher qualities and pedagogical techniques that are proven to work is of utmost interest for principals and other administrators who are involved in teacher professional development.

Third, the results of the research can be used by classroom teachers. Teachers are the ones who have direct contact with students and, ultimately, they have the final word in how they teach and what drives their pedagogical decisions.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me via cellular phone 936.615.7362 or email ihusyakov@nacisd.org, or contact Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink, my dissertation chairman at his office at 936.468.1756 or via his email pjenlink@sfasu.edu.

Sincerely,

Igor Gusyakov

District/School Participation Consent Form

“I understand the purpose of this study, and I agree for this study to be conducted at _____ Middle School and _____ Middle School. I also agree to the researcher collecting data in the form of interviews, observations, and final grade reviews. I understand that the real names of the district, the schools, nor teachers will be used in the final report. I understand that all the data collected in the research process will remain confidential through the use of coding. I also understand that I can withdraw my consent of participation in this study at any time if I so choose.”

Superintendent/Assistant Superintendent

Date

Researcher

Date

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APPENDIX C

SAMPLE CAMPUS PRINCIPAL'S LETTER

September 7, 2016

[Name of Principal]

Principal
XXXX Independent School District
XXXX Middle School
XXXX, Texas

Dear [Principal],

My name is Igor Gusyakov, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University. The purpose of this letter is to solicit your support and cooperation in my dissertation study, which is a qualitative multicase study of consistently effective pedagogical practices among middle school teachers. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies of consistently effective and successful teachers as evidenced by teacher perceptions and student assessment data.

I am requesting your permission to interview from six to eight teachers at your campus. This research is a qualitative multicase study that includes collection of data via interviews, observations, and student assessment data review. There will be three rounds of interviews with each teacher. The teacher interviews will be conducted individually at their convenience and are expected to last 30-90 minutes each. Each interview will be audiotaped to ensure that the findings I report are accurate. The teacher observations will be conducted once for each teacher. The time and the date will be agreed in advance with you and each teacher who agrees to participate.

All the data collected will be held in strict confidence. To ensure confidentiality, the school and participants will be identified with a special code or a nickname in the final documentation of the study.

The results of this research will be of interest to three levels of educators.

First, the results can be used by school district administrators in teacher hiring process. Teachers that have certain natural and/or professional dispositions and/or acquired skills identified by this research may be sought after more than those teachers who do not possess such dispositions and skills.

Second, the results of the research can be used by school administrators for professional development purposes. Developing the teacher qualities and pedagogical techniques that are proven to work is of utmost interest for principals and other administrators who are involved in teacher professional development.

Third, the results of the research can be used by classroom teachers. Teachers are the ones who have direct contact with students and, ultimately, they have the final word in how they teach and what drives their pedagogical decisions.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me via cellular phone 936.615.7362 or email ihusyakov@nacid.org, or contact Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink, my dissertation chairman at his office at 936.468.1756 or via his email pjenlink@sfasu.edu.

Sincerely,

Igor Gusyakov

School Participation Consent Form

“I understand the purpose of this study, and I agree for this study to be conducted at _____ Middle School. I also agree to the researcher collecting data in the form of interviews and observations. I understand that the real names of the school or the teachers will not be used in the final report. I understand that all the data collected in the research process will remain confidential through the use of coding. I also understand that I can withdraw my consent of participation in this study at any time if I so choose.”

School Principal

Date

Researcher

Date

Igor Gusyakov
483 CR 200
Nacogdoches, TX 75965
936.615.7362 (cell)
ihusyakov@nacid.org

Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink
Dissertation Chair
Stephen F. Austin State University
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APPENDIX D

SAMPLE LETTER TO PROSPECTIVE INTERVIEWEES

September 14, 2016

[Name of Teacher]

Teacher
XXXX Independent School District
XXXX Middle School
XXXX, Texas

Dear [Teacher],

My name is Igor Gusyakov, and I am a doctoral candidate in the Department of Secondary Education and Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University. The purpose of this letter is to solicit your participation in my dissertation study, which is a qualitative multicase study of consistently effective pedagogical practices among middle school teachers. The purpose of this study is to identify and describe the pedagogical practices and classroom management strategies of consistently effective and successful teachers as evidenced by teacher perceptions and student assessment data.

Your participation in this research study will involve three rounds of interviews. The interviews will be conducted one-on-one with me at your convenience and are expected to last 30-90 minutes each. Each interview will be audiotaped to ensure that the findings I report are accurate. I will also request to conduct observations in your classroom. The time and the date will be agreed in advance with you and your campus principal.

All the data collected will be held in strict confidence. To ensure confidentiality, the school and participants will be identified with a special code or a nickname in the final documentation of the study.

If you have any questions or concerns please contact me via cellular phone 936.615.7362 or email ihusyakov@nacisd.org, or contact Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink, my dissertation chairman at his office at 936.468.1756 or via his email pjenlink@sfasu.edu.

Sincerely,

Igor Gusyakov

Research title: “Consistently effective pedagogical practices among middle school teachers”

Teacher Participation Consent Form

“I understand the purpose of this study and I consent to participate in the study by meeting with the researcher for interview sessions at my convenience, providing the researcher with opportunities for observations in my classroom. I understand that my real name will not be used in the final report. I understand that all the data collected in the research process will remain confidential through the use of coding. I also understand that I can withdraw my consent of participation in this study at any time if I so choose.”

Teacher Participant

Date

Researcher

Date

Igor Gusyakov
483 CR 200
Nacogdoches, TX 75965
936.615.7362 (cell)
ihusyakov@nacisd.org

Dr. Patrick M. Jenlink
Dissertation Chair
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VITA

Igor Gusyakov graduated from high school in 2000 in Ukraine. In 2004 he received his Bachelor's Degree in Linguistics from Khmelnytsky National University, Ukraine. In 2003-2004 he had an opportunity to participate in a two-semester study abroad program at Stephen F. Austin State University. In 2005, he founded a private language school in Khmelnytsky, Ukraine. As he directed the school from 2005 to 2010, he concurrently organized international summer baseball camps. In August of 2010, he immigrated to the United States and received his Master's Degree in Early Childhood Education in August, 2011 from Stephen F. Austin State University. In August, 2011 he was hired as a high school Spanish teacher at Nacogdoches ISD. During his time as a classroom teacher at Nacogdoches High School from August, 2011, to June, 2016, he taught Spanish, supervised Saturday school, and served on multiple school and district committees. In 2014, he joined the doctoral program in Educational Leadership at Stephen F. Austin State University. In July of 2016, he was hired as an assistant principal at the Nacogdoches High School. He earned his doctorate May 2017.

Permanent Address: 483 County Road 200, Nacogdoches, TX 75965

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