A Comparative Analysis Increasing of Efficacy of Support Staff through Professional

Development

by

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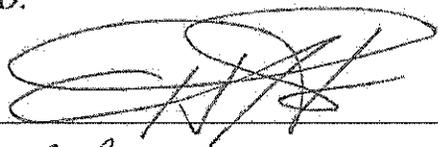In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements

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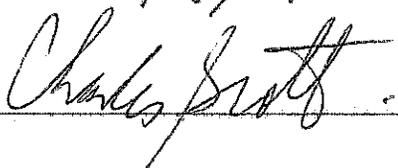
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Dedication or Acknowledgement

To my amazing husband, who made me write and rewrite until he understood what I was trying to say, and my incredible girls who, each in their own way, remind me on a daily basis what is true strength. I must also thank the incredibly supportive teachers and staff with whom I was blessed to work in Central Alberta. Last, and definitely not least, I owe a huge debt of gratitude to my students. I was brought in to help them find their voices, and, in kind, they empowered me to find mine.

Abstract

There has been an increase in the utilization of educational assistants in Central Alberta schools. The author questions how best to maximize the use of the educational assistants in the classroom setting. This paper summarizes a selection of the current research which highlights the absence of a cohesive definition of the role of the educational assistant which, in turn, impacts access to relevant professional development opportunities. The research suggests that increasing an individual's self-efficacy through relevant and engaging professional development has measurable positive effects in the education system. Review of the data presented in this paper may potentially guide school districts towards providing professional development opportunities that increase self-efficacy for educational assistants.

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Chapter 1: Introduction

Background to the Problem

In the past decade there has been a change in how people work within schools; substantial importance has recently been focused on collaboration (Chiaburu 2008; Devecchi 2010; Fullan; Cuttres & Kilcher, 2005).   The development of the factory system, at the time of the Industrial Revolution, took individuals away from the traditional service roles of that had developed over generations. A disconnect soon developed within the familial and historical lineage of that service, and employment became commoditized to a base theme of work for profit (FamTecBk, 2014). Recent studies have shown that workers are more productive when they are engaged in the workplace and that compensation has been shown to have a limited effect on motivation for employment (Harvard Business Review, 2013). While this information provides value, progressive employers have recently begun utilizing measures that are designed to address more than simple pecuniary return for workers' labours. Job satisfaction has been viewed as more significant now than in previous iterations of employment, and with greater than ever demands being placed on doing more with less resources it has become critical to fully engage workers to maximize the potential return.

Nowhere, is this notion of maximizing return, more significant than in the educational system, which is tasked with preparing the next generations of societies' workers. Teachers have chosen to avoid characterization as rote industrial workers, sending the pupilage along a conveyor belt of an educational system. Modern education is tasked with sending its graduates

into society with more than just the basic skills of hunting and gathering. As societies become more complex through advance in globalization and technology, the developing members of those societies must be equipped with different skills, knowledge, and competencies. Casting a significant shadow over educators' abilities to meet these expectations is the notion that they are now expected to increase the scope of competencies, while working within finite resources. The theme of doing more with less is fast becoming ubiquitous in Canadian education systems. Larger classrooms, decaying infrastructure, funding crises, and strained resources have placed educators in an unenviable position of having to look inward to find solutions to the problems which have been thrust upon them by outside forces. One such solution is the increasing use of educational assistants in the modern educational system (Graves, 2014).

While the use of support personnel has long been the case in other societal endeavors such as medicine, through the use of nurses and orderlies, and in law, through the use of legal assistants and librarians, the educational system has traditionally been limited in the use of non-accredited personnel.   Just as the use of paraprofessionals has proliferated in medicine, with licensed practical nurses and physician's assistants, and law, with case workers and paralegals, the educational system is being asked to incorporate non-professionals to an increased degree of engagement. All of this in an attempt to satisfy society's desire for increasingly inclusive educational programming while working within more restrictive budgetary measures. The use of skilled individuals, who are not subject to the formal educational requirements of teachers, can be seen as a positive tool to effect change in schools. Kelchtermans (2006) spoke to the notion of "professional learning communities" as being more expansive formats for professional development, rather than the traditional lecture-recipient paradigm. There is encouragement for recognition that true collaboration, while having structure, is not defined to be a structure in and

of itself. It is a byproduct of idea sharing, through cultural and political environments, in which collaboration and collegiality takes place. This in turn, contributes to the larger goals of pupil learning, teacher development, and increased quality of school improvement (Kelchtermans, 2006). The delicate balance that must be addressed is one of scope. Educational assistants are not certified teachers, however they posse strengths which may be beneficial to the inclusive classroom.

Statement of the Problem

Modern educational hierarchy makes significant and increasing use of educational assistants to supplement the teaching process. While there is formalized initial education and certification for educational assistants, there remains the question of whether continuing education may better the integrative services that they provide. In order to best cultivate the inclusive ideal, Symes and Humphery (2011) identified the desirability for whole-school inclusion and the necessity of a high level of collaboration and information sharing among teachers, senior management, educational professionals, support staff, and parents. While educational calendars have traditionally provided professional development activities to serve as engagement opportunities for the teachers, the author identified a gap in similar programming for the educational assistants. Does an absence of meaningful professional and peer interactions outside of the active classroom setting, limit the potential benefit that these paraprofessionals bring to the educational system?

Purpose of the Study

Notwithstanding the available opportunities in the educational calendar, there is presently a palpable vacuum of professional development opportunities for educational assistants in Alberta. The purpose of this paper is to explore the studies regarding the effects of targeted professional development and peer interaction as they pertain to educational assistants. The

author seeks to discern if there is a demonstrable connection between professional development opportunities for educational assistants and increased efficacy in school environments. If a positive correlation of effects is found, there is opportunity for these interactions to take place within the present educational framework. The author seeks to establish the rationale and mode of such implementation.

Statement of Hypothesis for Evaluation

Educational assistants are now entrenched in the modern educational system. The author posits the view that relevant professional development opportunities for educational assistants will serve to more fully engage them as they contribute and provide demonstrable benefits to student performance and engagement. The beneficial effects of professional development for teachers has been identified (Morgan, J., Ashbaker, B., & Forbush, D. 1998; Stewart, C. 2014). The author hypothesizes that there should be an accompanying benefit for educational assistants by engaging in their own appropriate and relevant professional development. This paper proposes, through the review and analysis of extra-jurisdictional studies, to determine whether there is an integrative link that can be demonstrated between relevant professional development for support staff and measurable beneficial effects in the educational system.

In assessing the available scholarly review, there must first be recognition of not only potential differences in the educational systems in other countries but also that there are variances in the delivery of services. This recognition, however, is not limited to pedagogy. There must also be a focus on the role that educational assistants have in the delivery of programming. The researcher must also acknowledge what measures of professional development had proven effective in enhancing delivery of programming to educational assistants. The author submits that meaningful professional development must be relevant and

directed. Educational assistants, while critical to the delivery of education to students, are not

cast in the same role as teachers. The roles being differentiated; it is suggested that the

professional development must also be differentiated. In other words, it is proposed that in order

to target the different tasks that are assigned to educational assistants, different professional

development exercises must be used than for teachers. Given the widespread use of professional

development for teachers, a focused, targeted program for educational assistants is what is

sought for analysis.

Importance of the Study

There are professional development opportunities allocated for teaching professionals.

As such, the same opportunities of time exist for application to the in-classroom support

personnel. It is identified that while there are similarities between teachers and educational

assistants, the assistants are in a complementary role and at the direction of the teacher in the

classroom. If it is evident that educational assistants can benefit from additional peer interaction

and relevant professional development. The author suggests that it would be irresponsible not to

consider the cost of providing programming for those services relative to the benefits that could

be achieved. It is incumbent upon school administration to maximize the engagement and

productivity of the classroom environment (McIntosh, K., et al. 2011).   This obligation

transcends the notion of budgetary restrictions. The larger consideration is how best to develop

excellence in educational programming. If it can be shown that the use of educational assistance

has a contributory effect to learning, then responsible administrations must consider how best to

utilize and develop that resource.

While it seems intuitive that if professional development is beneficial to teachers, it

should be beneficial to educational assistants as well, this has not however not been reflected in

the literature. It is suggested that a more reflective approach must be taken to professional

development activities. Professional development is not a "one-size-fits-all" approach. The

author submits that in order for such exercises to maximize value, they must be targeted and

relevant to the target group. Fortunately, there is a large number of capable and devoted

educational assistants that can be leveraged to provide input and experience into valuable peer

interactions (Devecchi & Rouse 2010; Gerschel, 2005; Giangreco 2013). Should the specific

curriculum for professional development activities be perceptible, it is suggested that an

excellent and easily integrated opportunities for development can be explored.

Scope of the Study

Given the significant differences in educational methodology throughout the world, the

author has deliberately narrowed the focus of this discussion to those studies which address

western world educational opportunities. Giangreco (2013) compiled data from throughout

western educational systems and identified that the utilization of teaching assistants has

increased in Australia, Canada, Finland, Germany, Iceland, Ireland, Malta, the United Kingdom,

and the United States. As such, there is a relatively varied experience from which to draw

analysis. The study is intended to be a survey of effective collaborative professional

development activities in western world school settings and to arrive at conclusions regarding the

validity of such exercises as they pertain to the specific development of educational assistants.

Utilizing the work of Giangreco (2013) as appropriate comparables, the study will focus on the

studies propagated in the school systems of the countries identified.

Summary and Outline of Remainder of the Paper

This paper will consider the evolving role of educational assistants in an integrated

educational system, by assessing different school jurisdictions' use of paraprofessionals. The

author will then provide an analysis of relevant scholarly consideration of professional

development opportunities and systems for educational assistants working in those systems.

Scrutiny of the studies in Chapter 3 will seek to establish baseline considerations of the types of

programming attempted and critically assess whether there are measurable benefits expressed

through those activities. Informed by the studies, the paper will then assess a pilot project of

educational assistant professional development that was implemented at an elementary school in

Alberta.   Anecdotal replies from the staff members involved in the targeted professional

development activities will be provided in chapter 4. The assessment will conclude with a

collation of the benefits of relevant professional development activities, through both empirical

analysis and qualitative assessment of the experiences of the pilot project in Alberta.

Definition of Terms

Administration: The individuals charged with administrating the daily operations of the school.

Classroom teacher: The individual in the classroom charged with overseeing each students academic program. The role includes, but it is not limited to; promoting learning, collaborating and coordinating with educational assistants and teachers, adapting instruction and promoting learning.

Collaboration: A process that involves two or more organizations or people working in cooperation towards an expressed shared goal.

Professional Development: Refers to a wide variety of facilitated learning opportunities directly related to an individual's profession.

Professional Learning community (PLC): A group of individuals that have been grouped together to foster collaborative learning.

Educational assistant: The term used in this paper to refer to an individual that is paid to assist a teacher with multiple classroom responsibilities usually at the direction of a classroom teacher. Also referred to in various literature as a: para-educator, para-professional, support staff, teacher assistant.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

Introduction

The steady increase in the utilization of educational assistants within the education system can be directly associated to the current pedagogy of inclusive education (Gerschel 2005). Deppeler, Harvey, and Loreman, (2005) define inclusive education as a paradigm wherein children, with and without disabilities, participate and learn together in the same classes with teachers making adjustments for the varying needs of students (Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero, & French, 2011, p. 15). The issue of what adjustments must be made and the framework for addressing those modifications, however, is the subject of significant and, at times, differing analysis. As with any differential adjustment system, identification of the divergent aspects of the participants is critical to the successful implementation of the program. After the differences are identified, mechanisms can then be proposed to address harmonization of the program. In inclusive education, given variables such as the size of classrooms, reduced teaching time, finite supports, budgets, and other considerations, it is unreasonable to expect that teachers alone can successfully make the adjustments contemplated by Chopra et al (2011). This review is intended to analyze the considerations that have been made to successfully integrate the educational system and how the use of educational assistants has been addressed. With a view to identifying deficiencies in the full engagement of these educational supports.

Historical Background

In earlier societies, students with increased needs were often placed in separate classroom environments, or, more often, relegated to their parents where there was no expectation of successful integration (McIntosh et al., 2011). As western society came to evolve and understand the pragmatic purpose served by educating its more vulnerable members, the formal

educational system was tasked with addressing this new imperative. Given, that the system was

not one that was tasked with integrative measures, there was a dearth of formal analysis

regarding the particulars of integration. Authors identified different hypotheses for what would

constitute successful programming, and those efforts were often assessment retroactively rather

than proactively (Carnahan, C.R., Williamson, P., Clarke, L. & Sorensen, R. 2009; Devecchi, C.,

& Rouse, M. 2010; Graves, S. 2014; O'Brien, E. 2010). The role of educational assistants in the

modern inclusive education system has been subject to more recent formal assessment given the

more prolific work that is being done by support workers (Gerschel 2005; Giangreco, 2013).

Purposes to be Served by Review

The developmental work of Graves (2014), builds upon the work of Acker (1994), and

O'Brien (2007). This research discusses the evolution of the role of support worker from that of

parent helper which suggested that the role had been a gendered one. Historically, the role of

educational assistants may have been somewhat marginalized. To some, it may also have been

seen as an extension of the female parental role. The quasi-professional contributions may have

not been properly understood. As the understanding of the role served by educational assistants

has evolved, there has been a related evolution in the formal assessment of how best to support

and develop those who fill that role. The author has hypothesized that in the Alberta education

system, there has been an absence of professional collaborative opportunities for educational

assistants. The vacuum that has resulted has created a less than optimal implementation of the

full opportunity for the contributions of educational assistants. In this respect, a review of the

literature addressing professional development opportunities for educational assistants is

expected to show that while the contributory role in the western education system has increased,

the opportunities for professional development, specifically through professional collaboration,

has not kept pace with the increasing reliance of these supports. The author also posits the view that there is a positive correlation between increased opportunities for professional collaboration and the engagement of educational assistants. Review of the literature surrounding the topic is intended to assess the hypothesis and to provide suggestions to increase the opportunities for development and engagement.

Defining the Role of the Educational Assistant.

Giangeco (2010) spoke to the absence of a meaningful definition for the educational assistant, suggesting that it has been an exclusionary definition rather than an integrative one. The requirement for a known definition of the role of educational assistant is discussed in Jerwood's (1999) research. Jerwood (1999) suggested that there are problems of inadequate training and development for classroom assistants. This writer will explore the correlation between defined parameters and professional development. Graves (2014) surveyed the studies of Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle (2010), Fisher and Pleasants (2012), Lyons (2012), and Rutherford (2012) and suggested there is demonstrable correlation between the vague definition of the role educational assistant and its impact on pupil attainment.

Understanding the Role of Self-Efficacy.

The earliest self-efficacy research focused on Rotter's (1966) locus of control theory… a person's level of self-efficacy will be determined by whether they have an internal or external explanation for outcomes of tasks and / or responsibilities…" (p. 123). In that respect, self-efficacy can be understood as integrated to the definition of the role of educational assistant and their role in inclusive education. Bandura (1977) presented a seminal re-statement on the topic of self-efficacy and its malleability in different roles and contexts. This was assessed further by Enderlin-Lampe (2002) in terms of the importance of "perceived self-efficacy." Enderlin-Lampe

(2002) expanded on Bandura's assessment of the adaptability of self-efficacy and enumerated specific opportunities for the adjustment of perceived self-efficacy through accomplishments. Chiabura and Lindsay (2008) also engaged in an analytic study linking engagement and understanding to efficacy, suggesting that individuals are more fully engaged and higher performing when they understand the purpose of activity and are unified in seeking a particular outcome. The work of Gebbie, Ceglowski, Taylor, & Miels (2012) discussed increased self-efficacy efforts for teachers. Self-efficacy builds upon the themes identified by Hastings and Bham (2003) and others, that discusses the salutary effects of engagement on teacher stress and objective student performance measures. Based upon these studies, this writer suggests that engagement of the educational assistants will have similar effects on engagement and self efficacy.

Identifying Benefits of Professional Development.

There has been significant scholarly review of professional development techniques and models. The underlying theme, of this review has been premised upon the notion that significant professional development has demonstrable benefits to its practitioners and, by implication, to the end users of its product. For learners to experience an applied benefit, Staed, Lloyd, Munn, Riddell, and McLeod (2007), suggested that professional development opportunities must be ongoing and represent tangible improvements for learners. Stewart (2014) engaged in a comparative review of traditional professional lecture-based development methods, as well as what are described as the more collaborative efforts of "professional learning communities (plc's)". PLC's are understood to be collaborative and peer-driven in nature. Stewart (2014), surveyed various approaches to professional development, the objectives that each purports to achieve, and core features in relation to the depth of learning provided. Stewart (2014) analysed

the work of Wiggins and Damore (2006) and Fullan (2005), which enumerated process efficacy

for what is termed "change knowledge," a term used to describe actual implementation of

theoretical learning and the positive effects it has on efficacy.

Gabriel and Lester (2012) conducted a review of the literature and suggested that there

are several indicators of what they term "high quality professional development". In this respect,

the challenge is to ensure that such development is incorporative rather than reflective, meaning

that application of the learned principles is more significant than the rote memorization of those

principles. The incorporation of high quality professional development specific to educational

assistants, is a more specific endeavor.

Picket et al (2003), assed training specific for educational assistants and concluded that

"…that the training for para-educators, when provided, remains sporadic and parochial, is

generally not based on building specific competencies, and does not address the core skills

needed by the majority of people who work in this position" (p. 482). Picket (2003) proposed

that teachers, in a leadership capacity, needed to take an active role in the professional

development of educational assistants. The approach can be contrasted with the later study of

Liston, Nevin, and Malian (2009), which emphasized that educational assistants themselves must

become advocates for their own professional development. The research of Liston et al (2009)

also concluded that support staff are in a better position to identify the issues that require

continuing education given their differential role from teachers.   The complementary work of

Carnahan, Williamson, Clarke and Sorenson (2009) inventoried and advocated systemic

approaches to supporting educational assistants. From the review of the stated literature it is

suggested that this support should be for ongoing professional education opportunities that are

codified and systemically incorporated into the education system.

The Role of Collaboration in Education

      The Irish research of O'Brien (2010) echoed the work of Jerwood (1999) regarding the salutary effects of collaboration as a professional development activity among teachers. Wiggins and Damore (2006) provided a formal definition of collaboration as "a system of planned cooperative activities," which connotes something different than a plenary assembly for group instruction. The distinction was further made by Higgins and Gulliford (2014), wherein they concluded that collaboration is more likely to develop positive self-efficacy, rather than just simple group training.   More significantly, there has been some research (Wu and Ya-Hsueh, p.47) to show that collaborative activities which result in "knowledge sharing" have measureable beneficial effects on team performance. A perspective shift is therefore required to consider the traditional teacher-lead education system to be something akin to team delivery of services. That perspective shift has led to greater consideration being given to the roles of all individuals involved with the delivery of services, including therapists, teaching assistants, counselors, speech pathologists, teachers, and administrators.

      The work of Morgan, Ashbaker and Forbush (1998) acknowledged this aforementioned shift in the educational pedagogical paradigm. The authors studied the implementation of an eight-week program developed by Utah State University program to address collaborative skills of classroom teams. The program was developed based on the researchers' observations at the time of the study; this study revealed that there had been relatively little attention paid to developing the collaborative skills of a classroom team, as differentiated from a single teacher-lecturer model.   A proposed model differentiated from the lecturer model is that of collaboration.

Stewart (2014) proposed a set of principles to govern learning communities, these closely align with the elements of collaboration as proposed by Wiggins and Damore (2006). Wiggins and Damore discussed the connectivity between professional development and collaboration, by highlighting the importance of participants being the co-planners of professional development in-services. A significant study by Symes and Humphrey (2011) also assessed active information sharing by support staff; this will be assessed in this author's hypothesis regarding the desirability of collaboration, both as a systemic resource and within the microcosm of teaching assistants.

Identifying the Role of Leadership in Integration.

A variety of writings by the American inspirational writer Sullivan (2009a, 2009b, 2010) describes the process of growing leadership. Sullivan (2009a, 2009b, 2010) discussed the engagement of leadership at all levels of an organization.   Engagement is achieved through mechanisms of personal leadership and accountability rather than simply rote application of traditional hierarchical models of leadership. Effective leadership includes coaching and mentoring. Sullivan's (2009a, 2009b, 2010) model has led this writer to suggest that leadership is best understood in terms of professional development as including directive coaching, motivation, team-building, and engagement. The author posits the view that educational assistants must be given effective collaborative engagement opportunities, and those opportunities will manifest themselves in measurable subjective and objective benefits in terms of inclusive education models.

Sources for Literature Review

The author has deliberately restricted consideration of literature to that of educational assistants in the western educational system. The material considered has taken the form of etymological studies, surveys, analysis, and methodical and phenomenological work. The materials outlined previously have been provided with the intent to reconcile positions that are not necessarily oppositional, and to address the application of the study results to support this authors position.

Selection and Arrangement of Literature Review

This chapter is a comparative analysis of the scholarly treatment of the subject of peer-supported collaborative professional education for educational assistants.   Assessment of the literature will be organized by the topics previously noted: defining roles, the role of self-efficacy, the benefits of professional development, the role of collaboration, and integrative leadership. Attention will be paid to the latter two topics as they are of particular interest to the role that collaborative professional development has for educational assistants.

 Summary of Literature Review

The literature surveyed for analysis ubiquitously espouses the benefits of ongoing professional development and education for educational assistants. While the general proposition is relatively easily understood, there is limited analysis of its applicability to peer-determined and supported collaborative education for educational assistants. Studies that apply to teacher professional development may not be unreservedly translated to educational assistant development. Educational assistants are differently qualified than teachers in their initial schooling requirements, and they serve a different role than teachers in the educational system. As discussed, there has been some scholarly debate regarding whether the educational assistant

should be educated by the teacher in more of a supervisory and traditionally hierarchical model or whether the educational assistants are benefitted greater by peer-driven development opportunities (Devecchi & Rouse 2010; Higgin & Guilliford, 2014). This author suggests that such professional development activities serve to increase engagement of the assistants and can provide demonstrable benefits to student performance and engagement. Collaboration has shown salutary effects in terms of the delivery of services by teachers. It is also suggested that with recognition to the differential services provided by educational assistants, a collaborative model of support can produce similar results for educational assistants.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

Introduction

Educational assistants have taken on an increasingly significant role in modern western educational systems. While a purely pragmatic view may espouse the notion that the role has been increased for budgetary considerations, it is suggested that there is a more fulsome consideration that can be made. Education is embracing the structures found in other industries where assistants are used to amplify the results of the professionals, as well as for the end consumers of the industry. Just as physician assistants, legal assistants, and accounting technologists allow for a streamlined, but beneficial experience for the consumer, educational assistants can be seen to supplement the efforts of teachers in the delivery of a quality educational product (Devecchi & Rouse 2010). The author suggests that individual teachers and educational assistants will manage their relationships to find a functional equilibrium. These relationships take place in the microcosm of the classroom. While it is expected that leadership may have to take some proactive management steps in those relationships, it is hypothesized that the more significant involvement may be founded on more of an institutional level. Specifically, the analysis in this chapter is focused on the effective implementation and supervision of collaborative professional educational opportunities for educational support staff.

Description of Methodology

This chapter is an integrative review of the available literature pertaining to the following topics:

(a) Defining the Role of the Educational Assistant;

(b) Understanding the Role of Self-Efficacy;

(c) Identifying the Benefits of Professional Development;

(d) The Role of Collaboration in Education; and

(e) Identifying the Role of Leadership in Integration.

The research review that is contemplated will have particular focus on the latter two topics, which are viewed as the most critical to the analysis of the effective delivery of collaborative professional development opportunities for educational assistants.

Necessary Assumptions and Identifiable Concerns.

With respect to the identified literature, particular attention must be paid to subject identification. The treatment of a school setting as a collaborative environment, regardless of traditional hierarchy, is a relatively new concept (Devecchi & Rousse, 2010). Accordingly, the preponderance of literature is dedicated to the professional development of teachers. There is a limited survey of material that is exclusively targeted to the professional development activities of educational assistants. There is even less research related to a non-hierarchical approach of that development. The author has posited the view that collaborative peer-initiated professional development of educational assistants would prove positive for the delivery of the educational model to students.

When researching the peer-initiated professional development it is necessary to identify and reconcile when selected studies may not have universal application to this hypothesis. Additionally, while care has been taken in the selection of analyses that have considered western world educational systems, there are still identifiable differences even between the countries of study. Some regard therefore, must be given to indiscriminate application to Canadian educational systems. Finally, since this analysis is based upon a literature review from available sources, the conclusions reached in the analysis are subject to the same caveats and restrictions in the research methodology as existed in each of the studies when they were undertaken.

Analysis of Literature

Defining the Role of Educational Assistants.

In assessing the modern role of educational assistants, it is necessary to appreciate from where the role developed. Graves (2014) identified the beginning role, for what is now considered an educational assistant, to be a support worker that was largely staffed on a volunteer basis by mothers. Where children were found in need of additional assistance in the classroom, it was historically provided as an extension of the female parental role in society (Gerschel, 2005). In this way, one can understand that the support was gender-based and that it involved little to no formal educational requirements. In this way, the educational assistant has not historically been understood to be a peer to the classroom teacher; rather, it was a subjugated position that came about largely as an extension of the motherly role (Devecchi & Rouse 2010; Gerschel, 2005). Since that point in time, the educational assistant has come to be understood as a different enterprise. although, it would not be surprising to find that it is still subject to gender inequality. Notwithstanding the gender issue, the role has been formalized in contemporary western educational schools and is subject to some minimum educational requirements (Higgins & Guilliford 2014). The wide variability of formal schooling among educational assistants has not grown. There has been supplantation in the recognition that the position requires some amount of formal education; although, the precise degree of education, as noted below, is still subject to some differential assessment.

Further hampering the development of a definition of what a teaching assistant is the prevailing common practice to define the position in an exclusionary fashion; in that educational assistant is not a teacher. Defining something by what it is not, may not be conducive to understanding what it is. Giangreco (2010) however, highlighted that "the question of the

boundary between teaching assistants and teachers is one which resonates internationally, particularly in terms of their effective deployment in inclusive schools to support pupils with special needs (Graves, 2014, p.257). This boundary can be found in the definitional components of teaching assistants. While educational assistants cannot be principally responsible for the delivery of curriculum to students, to suggest that they do not have any responsibility for this aspect of education would be miscast (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010). Indeed, modern educational theory must recognize an expansive definition of education as a concept. With that expanded consideration, which contemplates something more than standing at the front of a classroom and authoritatively lecturing on a particular subject, there is recognition that virtually anyone who has contact with a student has the opportunity to be cast in the role of an educator (Sullivan, 2009a).

Bearing these considerations in mind, it is still critical to understand that the educational assistant, by necessity, assists a teacher in the delivery of curriculum. The degree of what constitutes "assistance" is situation specific and subject to some understanding between teacher and assistant. Given that variable role, there must be some understanding of basic qualifications. Jerwood (1999) reviewed a British study regarding the role of classroom assistants and concluded that there "…problems of inadequate training and development …" (p. 128). It is suggested here that "training and development" cannot be viewed as isolationist activity that takes place prior to commencing a career; rather, there must be acknowledgment that there is an element of continuing education, and, thus, the subject of what form that education should take. In one impactful statement, Graves (2014) summarized the work of Giangreco, Suter, and Doyle (2010); Fisher and Pleasants (2012); Lyons (2012); and Rutherford (2012): "…issues of [teaching assistant] or para-educator role ambiguity, preparedness, adequacy of training and

deployment impact on pupil attainment and development of the teacher role" (Graves, 2014, p.

265). The educational assistant's role, then, if miscast or improperly educated, can be seen to

have deleterious effect not only on students, but also on the teacher in an educational setting.

The concept is a naturally gleaned one: if many people are understood to have the potential to

teach, (Sullivan 2009a) their miss-teachings may affect others. Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero and

French (2011) concluded that "para-educators are more prominently recognized as an integral

part of the instructional process and critical supports for the success of the students in inclusive

educational settings" (p. 18). As such, Giangreco (2010) suggested that an effective educational

system must "…clarify [educational assistant] roles, and provide appropriate training…." (p. 96),

particularly in an inclusive education setting where the challenges in the classroom can be more

significant than what may have been the case in a more academically homogenous classroom.

Understanding the Role of Self-Efficacy.

If educational assistants are understood to provide not only a supplementary, but also a

complementary role in the delivery of curriculum, one must be cognizant of what may make

those individuals perform their vital roles more effectively. In this respect, there are two notions

for assessment; these identify whether the individual is extrinsically or intrinsically motivated.

Extrinsic motivation, for the purposes of this analysis, can be said to be largely concerned with

position, power, and compensation. Intrinsic motivation is largely self-determined and has

reference to concepts such as worth, value, and pride in job performance. While each of the

motives may be maximized in different ways, they both still come back to a core competency of

performance. A key component of performance is the related concept of self efficacy.

Bandura (1977) is credited with expanding the theories of self efficacy and is considered

influential in the development of studies in this area (as cited in Higgins & Gulliford, 2014, p.

123). In the seminal study, it was concluded that "…self-efficacy is domain specific and situational and can therefore change over time and in different contexts." (Higgins & Gulliford, 2014, p. 123). The domain of self-efficacy is not limited to initial development but requires nurturing in order to evolve. The work of Chiaburu and Lindsay (2008) supported the research of Bandura (1986) and posits the view that "…individuals higher in self-efficacy set more challenging goals for themselves than do individuals with lower self-efficacy" (p. 200). In this respect, individuals must be consistently encouraged and challenged to set higher goals for attainment and to structure plans working towards the achievement of those goals. Chiabura and Lindsay (2008) analytically studied survey data that they collected in assessing this principle and concluded that "…trainees need to be confident in their abilities in order to be motivated to transfer (high self-efficacy), they also need to perceive a clear link between performing at required levels and the outcomes they value (high instrumentality)" (p. 203).

In 2002, Enderlin-Lampe expanded on Bandura's work and isolated the concept of perceived self-efficacy. "This is argued to be fed by: performance accomplishment (achievements); vicarious learning (apprenticeship experiences); verbal persuasion; and emotions arousal… also influenced by how the individual exercises choice (engaging versus avoiding) performance (linked to effort and intensity) and persistence" (as cited in Higgins & Gulliford p. 123). Self-efficacy, in this way, can be best thought of as internalization of considerations. It is the desire to better one's self over a variety of topics and situations. It is not specific to any particular profession or occupation, and if it is understood to be a universally applicable condition, despite its personalization, it may be cross-pollinated throughout society.

Narrowing the focus of the concept of self efficacy development to teachers, it is evident that there has been limited scholarly consideration of self-efficacy developments within the education

system. Gebbie, Ceglowski, Taylor and Miels (2007) surveyed many of the current works on

increasing self efficacy in teachers. Citing the work of Hastings and Bham (2003), it was noted

that "increasing teacher competence and efficacy through training and social supports not only

contributes to the alleviation of teacher stress but also positively impacts teaching practices"

(Gebbie et. al, p. 35). In that respect, ameliorating effects can be seen for teachers both

personally and professionally by applying self-efficacy development methods. The salutary

notion of such development was observed by subsequent authors to have positive effect through

affective experiences (Lamorey and Wilcox, 2005; Massengill, Shaw, et al, 2007 as cited in

Gebbie et al 2012). The operative observation is that "when teachers build a history of positive

experiences, their efficacy is increased" (Gebbie et al, 2012, p. 35).   There is a challenge

therefore for leaders and administrators to facilitate positive staff building experiences that are

based on self motivation. These positive, self motivated experiences must include administrators,

teachers and support workers in order to increase efficacy (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Fullan,

Cuttress & Kilcher, 2005; and O'Brien, 2010).

Identifying the Benefits of Professional Development.

Professional development for teachers has been available in western education systems.

Implicit in that exercise is a fundamental acknowledgment that continuing professional

development is beneficial. Research has demonstrated that, as a function of engagement,

professional development is beneficial both on a personal and systemic basis (Gabriel & Lester,

2012). The 2012 research of Gabriel and Lester concluded that "high quality professional

development requires investment in the development of individual and collective expertise and

not the mechanical accumulation of basic skills" (p. 52). As such, leaders should be identifying

quality professional development activities not only by the perceived content, but also by the

degree to which the proposed curriculum may engage its recipients. A sense of engagement in professional development activities can be seen to harmonize with the earlier stated intent to foster self-efficacy.

While there has been significant literature devoted to the analysis of professional development in teachers, the same statement cannot be made with respect to the level of discourse regarding educational assistants. The qualitative work of Graves (2014), noted that a "…lack of access to professional development and training has a particular impact on female workers in today's workplace" (p. 263). Given the genesis of educational assistants' work as extensions of maternal roles, the lack of access adversely affects educational assistants. But for an isolated study in 1998 by French, the preponderance of analysis of professional development opportunities for educational assistants has occurred over the last 10 years. Adversely, to the suggestion found in Gabriel and Lester, Picket et al, as discussed in Lewis and McKenzie (2009), noted "…that the training for paraeducators, when provided, remains sporadic and parochial, is generally not based on building specific competencies, and does not address the core skills needed by the majority of people who work in this position" (p. 482). The suggestion remains that the professional development opportunities for educational assistants do not currently provide for self-efficacy.

The 2009 research of Liston, Nevin and Malian highlighted the importance of educational assistants becoming advocates for their own professional development, and therefore increase educational assistant self-efficacy. The suggestion of personal engagement in an individual's professional development activities is one that accords with the conclusion reached by Enderlin-Lampe (2002). In fact, the survey work of Liston, et al, (2009) revealed that "…paraeducators value enhancing their knowledge and skill base" (p. 14), and that 64% of paraeducators

emphasize the need for professional development on a continuous basis (Liston, 2009). Griffin-Shirley and Matlock (2004), Marks et al., and Picket et al (2003) reported that educational assistants have consistently reported a desire for more in depth training (cited in Lewis, 2009, p. 491). The training sought would exceed the mechanical skills discussed as a lower level of professional development largely because of the engagement of the participants in their own growth. Chopra et al. (2011) reviewed the literature on the supervision of para-educators clearly stated that "a career development continuum which includes increased training and development of paraeductors to be able to effectively serve in their current role is clearly demanded in the literature" (p. 16).

The Role of Collaboration in Education

Wiggins and Damore (2006) defined collaboration "…as a system of planned cooperative activities" (p. 49). Various studies reviewed by Higgins and Gulliford, (2014) suggested that supportive and collaborative training is "…more likely to develop positive self-efficacy than simple group training" (p.125). If self-efficacy is a valid metric for assessing the effect of professional development activities, as is suggested by Chiabura and Lindsay (2008), then it stands to reason that those activities which contribute to positive development of self-efficacy are of greater benefit than mandated activity that is engaged only by proclamation.

The Irish research of O'Brien (2010) supplemented the work of Jerwood (1999) regarding the notion that teachers need time and opportunity for peer-interactions as a form of professional development: "…to meet outside of the classroom made a significant contribution to both teamwork and also cooperation between teachers and assistants" (p. 91). These comments do not identify a striation between teacher and educational assistant; rather, they suggest a unity of purpose and cooperative effort in the delivery of education to students. The conclusion

reached is bolstered by reference to Wu and Ya-Hsueh (2014) whose analytical research

concluded that knowledge sharing had a significant salutary effect on team performance. Higher-

level, collaborative development opportunities can be seen to be demonstrably beneficial to

settings where teams deliver services to the public. Gebbie et al (2012) concluded that "…social

supports from co-workers with similar experiences are a critical factor for increasing teacher

efficacy" (p. 36), suggesting that peer interaction in the educational setting is of measurable

benefit.

One of the rare discussions of collaboration among education assistants was found in the

methodical and phenomenological work of Symes and Humphrey (2011). The researchers

concluded that "[teaching assistants] felt that access to the expertise of others was a key

facilitator of their role" (p. 156), and that "information sharing between [teaching assistants] was

valued" (p. 157). This assessment further addressed the desirability of an open dialogue between

teachers and educational assistants, as well as the engagement of other experts; all collaborating

towards a purpose of engagement and heightened performance in the school culture. The

research concluded that "…it is vital that, if the expertise of others is to be utilized, creating an

atmosphere in schools where asking advice is acceptable (and even encouraged) is of paramount

importance." (p. 159).

Morgan, Ashbaker and Forbush (1998) studied the implementation of an eight-week

program developed by Utah State University program to "…address collaborative skills of

classroom teams" (p. 117). The program was developed based on the researchers' observations

that, to that date, the literature revealed that there had been relatively little attention "…paid to

developing the collaborative skills of the actual classroom team…" (Morgan, Ashbaker and

Forbush, 1998, p. 115). Analysis of the program implementation yielded reports from support

workers of "… an increased worth and esteem" (Morgan, Ashbaker and Forbush, 1998, p. 117).

Concurrent with other reported findings, participants expressed concerns about the sustainability

of the program without time table support from administration.

Chopra et al (2011) took an even more expansive view of the desirability of

collaboration, suggesting that collaboration should not only take place within peer groups, but it

should also be considered as a whole building initiative, bringing together all of the stakeholders

in inclusive education. The study proposed that "…collaboration among para-educators, parents,

teachers, and related service providers is a fundamental contributing factor to inclusion"

(Chopra, 2011, p. 18). If inclusive education classrooms are to remain as the preferred method

of delivery for educational curriculum, then the study suggests that a wider view of collaboration

than previously considered, is an appropriate consideration that is worthy of further exploration.

Identifying the Role of Leadership in Integration

The seminal discussion of leadership begins with Sullivan (2009a, 2009b, 2010).

Sullivan's (2009b) methodology suggested that effective leadership must be empowering in

terms of its preparedness to consider what Bandura called self-efficacy: "it is very important to

know where people want to go, who they want to be, and what they want to do" (p.7).

Professional and career development and mentoring must pay heed to analysis and introspection

in order to coach and identify opportunities that will be taken to do more than learn mechanical

skills.

Higher level professional development engages its participants in very personal and

focused ways. Creative mentor-leaders are cognizant of the pervasiveness of leadership within

an organization and should not be limited to title or position within the organization. Sullivan

(2009a) stated that "we can start by truly believing that leadership can, does and should exist at

all levels and with every person in our organizations" (p.16). Sullivan also posits what can be described as a significant engagement view in stating that "a creative mentor leader makes sure everyone has an opportunity to be in charge of something and provides opportunities for every adult to be successful and shine" (p.8).

The notion of leadership espoused by Sullivan (2009a 2009b, 2010), is that of coaching and encouragement. It represents a departure from traditional hierarchical models of leadership, which limited opportunities for discourse and decision-making to a select group of stratified individuals within an organization. Instead, Sullivan (2009a, 2009b, 2010) seeks to democratize leadership input opportunities. Professional development, as discussed by Sullivan, (2009a, 2009b, 2010) is a deeply personal experience, and effective development seeks to emphasize that notion by engaging participants in processes that affect them. Given the degree to which Liston and Picket (2009) suggested involvement in professional development opportunities by educational assistants, Sullivan's (2009b) comments are poignant: "[individuals] have knowledge of human development, so have patience and give yourself time to grow and develop." (p. 8)

Chapter 4: Summary and Conclusions

Summary

At the outset, the author proposed that relevant professional development opportunities for educational assistants will serve to more fully engage these individuals in the valuable service that they contribute to the educational system. The author also proposed that self-efficacy would provide demonstrable benefits to student performance and engagement. A thorough canvass of related studies supports the view that collaborative professional development benefits not only the participants in the education, but also the end consumers of the product. In the case of educational settings, the preponderance of research to date, has focused on a survey of professional development methodology for teachers, and the effect that peer-based collaboration has on the efficacy of the teaching position. Though there is limited research directly related to educational assistants, the review of the literature presented within this paper supports the premise that professional development and collaborative opportunities for educational assistants has the potential to create an increase in the positive contribution of educational assistants within the inclusive educational system.

The author has conducted a critical analysis of the literature, to address the fact that the role of an educational assistant is different than that of a primary classroom teacher. Differences that are found both in terms of responsibility and the specific delivery of services. While the author has adopted an expansive view of educational opportunity, seeing all individuals as potential educators of others, there is a keystone that must be addressed: teachers are the professionals who are principally responsible for the delivery of curriculum to students, while educational assistants are complementary supports to the method of that delivery. Thus, the professional development opportunities for teachers will differ, in content and form, from that

experienced by the educational assistants. That being said, this paper posits the view that an expansive team approach is desirable in addressing professional development opportunities. Just as teachers do not deliver curriculum in isolation, educational assistants do not work in a vacuum from the teachers. Educational assistants and teachers have a hierarchy based upon the responsibility for the delivery of curriculum; however, there must be an implicit recognition that there is a common purpose to their efforts.

The delivery of quality education is aspirational for both teachers and educational assistants. The concept must go further then a mission statement that appears on the public consumption materials of educational ministries and school divisions. Teachers and educational assistants serve in complementary roles, and the professional continuing education that they receive must acknowledge the differences and similarities that allow the providers to be complementary to one another. This paper has avoided a linear conclusion model stating that what has worked for teachers will work for educational assistants. Such a proposition does not recognize that there is a difference in the roles that each position fills in the educational system. Rather, the author has undertaken an analysis of why particular efforts have demonstrable salutary effects and contemplated what adaptations would be appropriate for the educational assistant's position from the peer opportunities conducted for teachers. Simply put, teachers and educational assistants perform different roles in the educational system. As such, their professional development paths, while harmonic, are not fully integrated. The research that has been assessed supports the view that specific professional development activities for educational assistants, as discrete from those conducted for teachers, have a salutary effect on engagement and development of these paraprofessionals.

Summary of Professional Development

(a) Meaningful Professional Development opportunities for educational assistants

Accepting that the role performed by educational assistants is different than that of teachers, it has been suggested that there must be peer-guided opportunities for educational assistants. These opportunities will provide for a knowledge sharing exercise that is targeted to the educational assistants as well as the role that they play in the classroom environment. In order to assure meaningful input from educational assistants, there should be an educational assistant on each school's professional development planning committee to advocate and communicate for and with the school's educational assistants. That individual must have time allocated to meet regularly with the remaining educational assistants to discuss their professional development requirements.

Programming in this respect is suggested to meet two significant objectives. First, the programming recognizes the discrete services that are delivered by the educational assistants and fosters a community of para-educators in the school. Secondly, by having direct input into their professional development programming, the educational assistants will be engaged stakeholders in the process. Direct input into professional development programing has been supported by the discussed research to show increased engagement and performance. While the programming for educational assistants may have some differentiation from that of the teachers in the school, the format should follow a plan similar to that of the whole school, with administration, teachers, and educational assistants having input into the form of professional development that will be offered within the school. It is not suggested that the notion of plenary, school-wide professional development should be abandoned; rather, there should be time allocated in the entirety of the professional development sessions for educational assistants to have discrete time allocated for their particular requirements.

Complimentary to discrete educational professional development, but of equal importance to the development of self efficacy, is an allocation of collaboration time. Collaboration should occur not only among the educational assistant peers, but also engaging educational assistants and the teachers with whom they work (O'Brien 2010; Jerwood 1999). The classroom teams must be given their opportunity to specifically address and have input into the professional development activities that would be benefit the particular classroom environments. It was suggested at the outset of this paper that the classroom can be understood as a microcosm of society. Just as in society, the classroom is a living, breathing entity, and there rarely are two classroom environments that are identical in their makeup and conduct. The individual participants present opportunities as well as challenges to educators, and professional development activities must address the needs of the ever-changing classrooms.

With respect to the differentiated professional development programming for educational assistants, it is suggested that recognition of the discrete services provided by educational assistants must be considered. Doctors and physician's assistants do not receive the same professional development programming. Neither do lawyers and paralegals. The content and delivery of the programming must engage its audience by identifying the particular requirements of that audience. Peer-based professional development programming has the benefit of engaging in knowledge sharing activities by individuals that have common experience (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010; Higgins & Guilliford, 2014). The collaboration of peers allows for the sharing of knowledge that may offer different and previously unrealized perspectives and insights.

The benefits of collaboration are founded in the notion that peer based measures are delivered differently than lecture-based models. The literature suggested that peer based measures are normally engaged more fully (Symes & Humphrey, 2011; Devecchi & Rouse,

2010; O'Brien, 2010; Higgins & Guilliford, 2014). In this respect, professional development can be viewed to have two elements: vertical and horizontal delivery. Traditional plenary style lectures, such as are experienced at university level courses, are delivered with a vertical delivery of knowledge. In this system, the knowledge is, quite literally, passed down from the lecturer to the recipients in the form of a one-way dialogue. Some individuals are capable of learning in this environment, but, many times, students will then form study groups to discuss the class, and in this fashion, they utilize a horizontal delivery of information. The study group represents the quintessential model of peer based discussion and integration of information. The collaborative approach allows for participants to assume the dual role of not only learner, but also educator. In the professional setting, if peer based collaboration is tantamount to the study group, it is anticipated that there will knowledge sharing being conducted on several different levels. This will be accomplished first by assessing the different techniques available for addressing issues in the classroom. Secondly a comprehensive and inclusive evaluation of the different supports that may be participating in the programming. Third, and perhaps most importantly from an individual perspective, will be the opportunity to share knowledge and information with respect to a particular student as he or she makes his way through the grade levels at a particular school. It is suggested that professional development programming includs a component of collaborative interaction, but that it not be an exclusive delivery model. Some interactions will take the form of vertical delivery, if for no other reason than for efficiency. The critical notion is that there must be some opportunity for collaborative professional development activity.

The reviewed literature suggests that, to date, there has been a less than optimal implementation of the full opportunity for educational assistant contribution to professional development activities. This paper hypothesizes that a greater degree of involvement in the

programming aspects of professional development will lead to increased engagement and self-efficacy on the part of the educational assistants. The literature reviewed acknowledged that there are certain topics that will not be amenable exclusively to a collaborative professional development regime. Administrators are encouraged, however, to be mindful of opportunities for collaboration and differential professional development opportunities for educational assistants. By way of example, educational assistants require professional development on new curriculum roll outs. That programming, however, does not have to be identical to the programing that teachers, who ultimately have the responsibility to teach and assess students. Professional development regarding curriculum changes could be offered in two phases by administration who is cognizant of the benefits of collaborative education. The first phase could be a general overview and introduction to the new concepts and curriculum that is conducted in plenary for all staff with a subsequent secondary stage for teachers on embedding these practices. While the teachers address their professional responsibilities and pedagogy for implementing the changes, educational assistants would have their own opportunity to collaborate. The research discussed in this paper supports the view that such a model would create a more cohesive understanding of the practices within the classroom and result in a more supported learning and working environment for those in the classroom.

(b) Fledgling Efforts in Central Alberta

Within Central Alberta, two school divisions have begun the process of adopting new and evolving approaches to educational assistants and the integration of professional development opportunities. One school division in Central Alberta has increased the quantity of professional development over the course of the school year by two full days. As part of this increase there has been an allocation in the professional development calendar of opportunities specifically for

educational assistant informational programming. While the development is still in its infancy,

anecdotal reports from the participants were largely positive and suggested a more engaged

participation than prior to the measure. The author suggests that further and specific

development of opportunities for peer collaboration be implemented. At the conclusion of the

school year the participants should be canvassed to measure the degree of personal integration

that has occurred. This qualitative measure could also be supplemented by similar input from the

supervising classroom teachers involved with the educational assistants to determine whether

there is a qualitatively demonstrable benefit that is seen in the classroom consequential to the

activities.

The other school division has chosen to begin with an attempt to provide an encompassing

definition of the educational assistant role. As discussed earlier in this paper, the role of the

educational assistant has been a highly fluid and variable one. It has been noted that the origins

of the position were an extension of the female parental role and lacked formalization. The

absence of a uniform understanding of the role that the educational institution expects the

educational assistant to fill has possibly limited the professional development and growth

opportunities that can be identified for these supports. By defining the role, the writer is hopeful

that a critical first step is established that will allow programming targeted for that specific role

to be further developed and integrated. As Giangeco (2013) concluded, once the role is defined,

appropriate professional development opportunities can be crafted for the position. Part of the

difficulty with an ill-defined role is that there is a significant limitation to the identification of

appropriate, measured development opportunities.

Peer collaboration may prove useful to the initial definition of the role and subsequent

programming opportunities that may benefit that role. Hastings and Bham (2003) and Gebbie et

al (2012) identified a positive correlation between engagement of teachers and objective student performance measures. While the educational assistants do not assess curriculum, they have direct and substantial interaction with with the students in need of educational supports, who, in turn, further interact and impact with the remaining students in the classroom. In this respect, the impact of the educational assistant can be seen to have a waterfall effect on all of the students in the classroom. Since the educational assistant is not principally charged with the delivery and evaluation of curriculum, his or her contributions can be best measured through qualitative assessment rather than the quantitative assessment of improvement in student grade scores. In this respect, strong interaction and collaboration between the educational assistant and the classroom teacher is necessary to gauge the contribution of the professional development opportunities for educational assistants.

(c) The Benefits of Collaborative Professional Development

The seminal study of the effect of collaboration can be found in Rotter (1966) and what is termed the "Locus of Control" Theory. Simply put, "a person's level of self efficacy will be determined by whether they (sic) have an internal or external explanation for outcomes of tasks and/or responsibilities" (p. 123). Subsequent studies and analysis have shown a positive correlation between the personalization that collaborative conduct emphasizes and the engagement and investment by an individual in the result that flows from the task. Gebbie et al (2012) and Hastings and Bham (2003) identified the salutary effect of collaboration with respect to teachers measured by teacher stress and student outcomes. Educational assistants are tasked with a significant, specialized interaction in the classroom that can be seen to be contributory and collateral to that of the teacher. In this respect, though, while some of the measures for the benefits of teacher collaboration may be implicit to those of educational assistant collaborative

opportunities, there has been little scholarly attention to the discrete role of the educational

assistant and its specific impact upon these outcomes. Kelchtermans (2006) research spoke to

the notion of "professional learning communities," and how educational assistants must be seen

as a vital component of those communities. The anecdotal reports from the educational

assistants participating in discrete professional development activities in central Alberta is a good

start. It is suggested that the professional development paths for teachers and educational

assistants be viewed as parallel rather than identical. Sullivan (2009a, 2009b, 2010) discussed an

expansive view of leadership. It is the view of Sllivan (2009a, 2009b, 2010) that effective

leadership is engaged and active in terms of coaching and mentoring rather than vertical in terms

of lecturing and authoritative. In this respect, collaborative professional development has the

potential to develop such capabilities to large measure owing to the personal component of it.

Collaboration leads to personal engagement, and that engagement can be manifest through peer

interaction, evaluation, and assessment. In this respect, an effective administrator can create

layers of leadership within the school environment where the hierarchy model, with its external

reports and accountability, is supplemented with a more personal and internal engagement as is

suggested by (Devecchi & Rouse, 2010). The parallel path of professional development for

teachers and educational assistants will see them working towards the same end goal, but it has

the benefit of identifying that their roles in achieving that goal, measured through efficacy and

classroom performance, are differentiated. The differentiation, however, is not divisive; rather, it

acknowledges that the contributions are complementary and seeks to permit development of

teacher and educational assistant separately, when required. The traditional model of integrative

professional development, where the educational assistants are excused for those portions of the

program that do not pertain to them, misses the opportunity for that time to be used in a

meaningful, peer-conducted program, similar to those that have had demonstrable benefit for teachers. Educational assistants, as para-professionals in the educational system, should be afforded those same opportunities, where their specific concerns, insights, and contributions can be assessed and implemented.

Conclusion

An examination of the research determined that educational assistants do not have consistent access to relevant and engaging professional development opportunities that is complimentary to those opportunities that are afforded to teachers.   As such, there is a gap in the contribution level of educational assistants in the education process. The research supported the writer's theory that a definition of the role of the educational assistant was a necessary precursor to establishing relevant and engaging professional development. The research also exposed, however, that there is currently a disconnect among educational jurisdictions on both a cohesive definition of the role of the educational assistants and the quantity and quality of professional development afforded to them. As noted there are incremental changes being made in two Central Alberta educational jurisdictions. It is the hope of the writer that the efforts of these jurisdictions will merge into relevant and engaging professional development that benefits all members of the educational system.

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