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A WORLD BOTH BIG AND SMALL: UNDERSTANDING URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY IN AN ERA OF ACCOUNTABILITY

A Dissertation Presented

by

RICHARD GALLUCCI

Submitted to the Office of Graduate Studies,
University of Massachusetts Boston,
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of

DOCTOR OF PHILOSOPHY

May 2016

Urban Education, Leadership and Policy Studies Program

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A Dissertation Presented

by

RICHARD GALLUCCI

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ABSTRACT

A WORLD BOTH BIG AND SMALL: UNDERSTANDING URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY IN AN ERA OF ACCOUNTABILITY

May 2016

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This explanatory case study seeks to understand the nature of middle school educators' self-efficacy in an urban public school district during an era of accountability. The study was conducted in a progressive school district, known as OakRidge Pubic Schools. A sequential mixed methods design with a participant-selection model variation was employed. The study identified teachers' level of self-efficacy via the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), a quantitative survey used to determine high and low self-efficacy focus groups. During these subsequent focus group interviews, the competing objectives of fulfilling responsibilities levied from accountability mandates and initiatives, as well as meeting the dynamic

needs of students during the years of adolescence, were each explored as influences on the educators' general teaching efficacy.

Quantitative findings revealed that middle school educators in the OakRidge district had a high sense of self-efficacy overall. Of the three composite variables measured—instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement—middle school OakRidge educators reported the lowest sense of self-efficacy in terms of their ability to engage students. Consistent with other quantitative studies (Ross, 1994), female educators had a significantly higher sense of efficacy than their male counterparts. No other categorical data point measured—years' experience, degree type, degree level, content area, current grade level taught, or historical grade level taught—revealed any significance in terms of the survey overall or any of the three composite variables.

Qualitatively, both groups of educators (high and low) expressed frustration with the impact of standardized testing. However, the higher group displayed resiliency in the face of this adversity. Both the high and low educator groups highlighted the complex dynamic of working with adolescents, identifying empathy as a crucial practice in middle grades education. Finally, educators in the high efficacy group revealed an ability to seamlessly embed "life lessons" in order to simultaneously meet the dual academic and holistic objectives of being a middle grades educator. Low efficacy group members presented these objectives as more of a binary, expressing frustration in meeting both. Findings from this case study can serve to inform professional development for middle grades educators.

DEDICATION

To my family.

Without the love and support of those closest to me, none of this work would have been remotely possible. To Danny—an amazing educator, and the most kind and generous brother a person could ask for. Thank you for all of your help and support during this program. Our trip to China was a once and a lifetime experience and is something that I will never forget. To my three beautiful children—Karly, Drew, and Cameron. There have been far too many days over the past five years where you have had to endure watching Daddy typing away on his keyboard in working on this study, instead of doing something fun. I want you to know just how much I love you and that you serve as my inspiration for everything that I do. To my wife Kerry—there are no adequate words that can capture how appreciative I am for the love, support, and encouragement that you provided over this journey. There were far too many days to count where you lugged our three kids out of the house to give me time to read and write. During the most the challenging moments of this work, you served as a beacon of optimism in pushing me towards the finish line. This dissertation is as much yours as it is my own. I love you more than you can possibly imagine. Finally, to my mother Patty—you have been my inspiration since I can remember. From the moment you pushed me to remain on the ice in hockey early in my life, to the challenging days during this doctoral program, you were the epitome of perseverance in the face of adversity. You spent most of your life ensuring that our upbringing was the best it could possibly be, preaching an unwavering commitment to anything we set our minds to. I love you and I am eternally grateful of all that you have done for our family over the course of our lifetime together.

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To Dr. Yan, Dr. Leonard, and Dr. French—thank you for all of your advice, critique, and support in shaping this study over the past five years. Your willingness to share your expertise and knowledge is beyond appreciated. To the 2011 LIUS Cohort—one of the greatest aspects of this program was the opportunity to meet such a remarkable group of educators and people. I will forever remember our time together and wish each of you the very best in your future endeavors. To Dr. Kress—I cannot thank you enough for your support, guidance, and encouragement during this program. I would have never made it to the finish line without you. To Danielle Mokaba—you have been an amazing principal, colleague, mentor, and friend over the past five years. I have learned so much from your leadership style and feel very fortunate that I was able to complete this program with you. Your competitive spirit, support, and encouragement will always be remembered and appreciated. To Paul Dakin, Dianne Kelly, and Chris Malone—I have been so fortunate to have had the opportunity to learn from each of you over the course of the past ten years. You are the epitome of what true leadership is all about. To Kelly Chase—during the most difficult moment of this study, you stepped forward to rescue it. I am forever in your debt, and cannot thank you enough for your generosity and dedication to my work. To my friend and colleague Joanne Willett—I feel as though you will forever be my mentor. Your guidance and assurance during my early years as a teacher continues today throughout my early years as a principal. Thank you for all of the support, guidance, and care you have continuously given since I walked into the SBA as a career changer in 2006. To Bianca Quirk—you have been a dear friend since high school and someone I can always turn to. Your support and advice is second to none and

I am grateful to call you a dear friend. To Jack and Susann—I am eternally grateful for your love and support over the course of this process. Without your help, this study would have never been possible. You are two of the kindest people I know and I am so proud to be a part of your family. To my friend Billy—you are the best friend that a guy could ask for. You are a constant source of encouragement and support. I am continuously thankful for the day that you lined up next to me on the offensive line, sparking a lifelong friendship that continues to this day. To my cousin Traci—as we grow older, our bond only goes stronger. You were one of my rocks during the course of this program and I want you to know how fortunate I feel to have you in my life. My children could not be luckier to have you as their auntie and godmother, particularly when you spent two weeks with them while I was away in China for an elective course as part of this program! To my colleagues—there is no job more complex than being a middle school educator. Your work on a daily basis inspires me, continuously igniting my passion and commitment to being a lifelong learner. To all of the educators that participated in this study—thank you for taking time from your lives to share your experiences, insight, and expertise in regards to the middle school teaching profession. My hope is that this study serves as a platform for middle school educators' voices, shaping policy to improve the middle grades experience, for all involved, in the years to come. Finally, to all of my former middle school students—thank you for being you. While it was my charge to teach each and every one of you on a daily basis, I learned more from you than you did from me. You are what makes teaching the greatest job in the world.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

DEDICATION……..vi

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS……..vii

LIST OF TABLES……...xiii

LIST OF FIGURES…….xiv

CHAPTER Page

1. RATIONALE FOR EXPLORING URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' SENSE OF EFFICACY 1
Introduction 1
Statement of the Problem 11
Research Purpose and Conceptual Framework 15
Research Questions.....19
Rationale 19
Theoretical Framework.....20
Theory of Self-Efficacy within Social Learning Theory 21
Caring Theory 23
Loosely Coupled System as an Organizational Theory 25
Context/Background.....26
Significance & Potential Benefits.....28

2. A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE 31
Introduction 31
Teacher Efficacy.....33
What is Teacher Efficacy? 33
The Origins of Efficacy.....37
Teacher Efficacy's Emergence and Significance.....39
Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy and Social Learning Theory 42
Teacher Efficacy Gaps in Literature 46
The Middle School 49
Introduction to the Middle School.....49
The Junior High School: The Genesis of Today's Middle School 51
The Junior High School Becomes the Middle School 61
The Carnegie Report and a Focus on the Middle Grades 63
Current Literature on Middle Schools in the United States 66
Caring Theory 68
Accountability and Subsequent Policy 71
A History of Accountability in U.S. Education 71
No Child Left Behind.....74
Race to the Top 79

Teacher Impact of Accountability Measures 80
Loosely Coupled Systems 86
Conclusion 91

3. METHODS 92
Introduction to Methods 92
Research Questions 95
Methodology 95
Guiding Worldviews 97
Conceptual Framework and Rationale for Mixed Methodology 99
Research Site and Participants 101
Quantitative Survey 103
Review of Existing Teacher Efficacy Instruments 103
Existing Efficacy Instruments 104
Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) 106
The Use of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale 107
Categorical Data 108
Continuous Data for Traditional Efficacy Factors 108
Validity and Reliability 110
Qualitative Interviews 113
Study Parameters and Timeline 115
Quantitative Survey 116
Qualitative Interviews 116
Ethics 117
Data Collection and Analysis 118
Quantitative Survey Data Collection 118
Quantitative Survey Data Analysis 119
Qualitative Interview Data Collection 120
Qualitative Focus Group Interview Data Analysis 122
Data Management 123
Limitations of Study and Role of Researcher 123

4. FINDINGS 126
Statistical Analysis 126
Introduction 126
Demographics 127
Reliability 128
Descriptive Statistics 130
Instructional Strategies 132
Classroom Management 133
Student Engagement 135
Comparative Data Analysis 136
T-Tests 136
Gender 136
Type of Undergraduate Degree 139

ANOVAs 141
Years' Experience 141
Content Area 148
Degree Level 152
Current Grade Level.....158
Historical Grade Level 161
Conclusion 165
Focus Groups 166
Selection 166
High Efficacy Group 169
Standardized Testing & Data: Compartmentalized Factors Beyond Educators' Control.....169
Resilience in the Face of Challenging Student Home Lives.....172
Empathy for Adolescent Students 175
"Stealing" of Instructional Strategies.....177
Welcoming Constructive Feedback 180
Context: Acknowledgement of the Complex Nature of Adolescence and a Commitment to Life Lessons 184
Low Efficacy Group 191
Factors Beyond Control: Mental Health & Time.....191
Frustration with Dual Objectives 194
Standardized Testing as a Disruptive Force.....198
Vicarious Experiences & Verbal Persuasion: Positive & Negative Influences on Self-Efficacy 203
The Challenging Nature of Adolescence and an Empathetic Approach.....208
Comparison of High and Low Efficacy Groups.....215
Introduction 215
Verbal Persuasions & Vicarious Experiences.....218
Empathy as a Middle School Educator 222
Different Responses to the Challenges of Adolescence.....227
Conclusion 231

5. CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH ...233
Introduction 233
Summary of Study 235
Findings 239
Focus groups 241
Revisiting the Research Question and Identified Gaps in Literature 244
Identified Gaps in Literature 244
Research Question.....246
Inferences & Implications 248
Recommendations for Further Research 255
Reflection.....258
Conclusion 261

APPENDIX

A. WEBB'S EFFICACY SCALE...……264

B. ASHTON'S EFFICACY VIGNETTES…….…..……266

C. DEMBO & GIBSON'S TEACHER EFFICACY SCALE……..…269

D. BANDURA'S UNPUBLISHED EFFICACY SCALE……..….271

E. TEACHER'S SENSE OF EFFIACY SCALE (LONG FORM)…….275

F. PERMISSION TO USE THE TSES……...……276

G. PARTICPANT CONSENT FORM……..……277

REFERENCES……280

LIST OF FIGURES

Figure Page

1. Average OakRidge Grade Retention Percentages from 2008 to 2013….....5

2. Original Design of the Middle School—A Responsive, Loosely Coupled System…….....11

3. Contemporary Middle School—A Tightly Coupled System Impinging Upon a Loosely Coupled System……...12

4. Conceptual Framework—Contemporary Middle School According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Environment…….....17

5. Methodology Design of Urban Middle School Teachers' Self-Efficacy…...…96

6. Conceptual Framework of Study……..…100

7. Accountability Initiatives & Measures in the OakRidge District…….…....113

8. Focus Group Interview Protocol……...114

9. Timeline of Study…….116

LIST OF TABLES

Table Page

1. Cronbach's Alpha for Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) Long Form…….106

2. Categorical Scales of Measure…….…..…108

3. Continuous Data Factors……..….110

4. Cronbach's Alpha for OakRidge Educators' Overall TSES and Sub Categories…….….129

5. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (All Items)…….131

6. Descriptive Statistics for Composite Categories of TSES…….…...132

7. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Instructional Strategies)…….…..133

8. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Classroom Management)…….....134

9. Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Student Engagement)….....135

10. Results of t-tests TSES, Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, Student Engagement Composites, by Gender…….…….….136

11. Significant Factors Identified by t-tests of TSES Questions and Gender….....138

12. Results of t-tests TSES, Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, Student Engagement Composites, by Undergraduate Degree……..…139

13. Summary Years' Experience Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics…….…...141

14. Summary Years' Experience Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics…….…....142

15. Summary Years' Experience Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics…….…....143

16. Summary Years' Experience Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics……...…..144

Table Page

17. Summary Grouped Years' Experience Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics…….…...145

18. Summary Grouped Years' Experience Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics……146

19. Summary Grouped Years' Experience Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics……146

20. Summary Grouped Years' Experience Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics……147

21. Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics…….….….149

22. Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics…….….…..150

23. Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics……150

24. Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics……151

25. Summary ANOVA Degree Level Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics……...152

26. Summary ANOVA Degree Level Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics……153

27. Summary ANOVA Degree Level Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics……154

28. Summary ANOVA Degree Level Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics……154

29. Summary ANOVA Degree Level and Making Expectations Clear…….....155

30. Summary ANOVA Degree Level and Controlling Disruptive Behavior……...156

Table Page

31. Summary ANOVA Degree Level and Getting Children to Follow Class Rules……...156

32. Summary ANOVA Degree Level and Fostering Creativity……157

33. Summary ANOVA Current Grade Level Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics……159

34. Summary ANOVA Current Grade Level Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics……...159

35. Summary ANOVA Current Grade Level Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics……..160

36. Summary ANOVA Current Grade Level Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics……....160

37. Summary ANOVA Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics……162

38. Summary ANOVA Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics…….163

39. Summary ANOVA Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics…….163

40. Summary ANOVA Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics……..164

41. High Sense of Efficacy Focus Group Invitees……166

42. Low Sense of Efficacy Focus Group Invitees…….167

43. High Sense of Efficacy Focus Group Participants……..167

44. Low Sense of Efficacy Focus Group Participants…….....168

CHAPTER 1

RATIONALE FOR EXPLORING URBAN MIDDLE SCHOOL TEACHERS' SENSE OF EFFICACY

Introduction

> *The tallest oak in the forest is the tallest not just because it grew from the hardiest acorn; it is the tallest also because no other tree blocked its sunlight, the soil around it was deep and rich, no rabbit chewed through its bark as a sapling, and no lumberjack cut it down before it matured. We all know that successful people come from hardy seeds. But do we know enough about the sunlight that warmed them, the soil in which they put down the roots, and the rabbits and lumberjacks they were lucky enough to avoid? (Gladwell, 2008, p. 15)*

Perhaps no set of words more eloquently captures the essence and purpose of an urban middle school ambiance than those above from Malcolm Gladwell's *Outliers*. Like the forest in Gladwell's metaphor, the urban middle school environment possesses incredible power over its actors, an atmosphere with a dialectical capacity capable of fostering success or failure during what are often the most complex years of any given student's educational life. According to Turning Points (2003), a subsidiary of the Center for Collaborative Education focused on improving today's junior high and middle schools, "Between the ages of ten and fourteen, the young adolescent grows and develops more rapidly than during any other developmental stage except for infancy" (p. 8). The publication noted that adolescents, unlike infants, often have an "acute, sometimes painful, self-awareness" (Turning Points, 2003, p. 8) of this incredible growth process as

it is occurring. To complicate matters, this growth process often coincides with a time period that has a significant influence on the learning process, as well as a subsequent impact on the student's future growth in their respective educational system. Adolescent students within this particular age range require an incredible amount of support, often encouraged through strengthened student-teacher relationships in the middle school setting (Turning Points, 2003). Jackson and Davis (2000) explained:

> There is a crucial need to help adolescents at this early age to acquire a durable basis for self-esteem, flexible and inquiring minds, reliable and close human relationships, a sense of belonging in a valued group, and a way of being useful beyond one's self. They need to find constructive expression for their inherent curiosity and exploratory energy, as well as a basis for making informed, deliberate decisions—especially on matters that have large and perhaps lifelong consequences, such as education and health. (p. ix)

Yet, despite the encouraged, holistic purpose behind today's urban middle schools, it has been identified as the crucial time period in which education's quest for academic progress has been halted (Balfanz & Mac Iver, 2000), contributing to the drop out phenomenon at the secondary high school level. As is often the case in education, the historical genesis of the middle school concept seems to inform the nature of success or failure with regard to the entity in today's academic setting. During its rise in the early twentieth century, the intermediate concept of middle school, then dubbed "The Junior High School," was created as a responsive academic entity, one which could support all students during their incredibly complex time of adolescence with the hope of sustaining students' presence in secondary schooling (Briggs, 1920; Koos, 1920). Yet, Neild,

Balfanz, and Herzog (2007) noted that today's middle schools are holistically falling short in responding to early distress signals sent from the middle grades, resulting in a greater contribution to America's[1] drop out phenomenon when these students reach secondary schooling. As such, the concept of America's present day middle school entities are not meeting the original, intended purpose tied to its development during the early part of the twentieth century.

A number of studies (Schommer-Aikins, Mau, Brookhart, & Hutter, 2000; Anderman, 2003; Woolley & Bowen, 2007) have focused on students' experience at the middle school level. However, few studies seem to focus on the middle grade teachers, the educators that are so crucial in fostering a supportive environment for students. This foundation is a critical component for success in today's middle schools. As Turning Points 2003 explains, "Middle school teaching is highly complex, involving content knowledge, knowledge of young adolescent development, and dozens of interconnected skills (e.g., the ability to relate to and engage students, and to coach, present, reflect, and analyze)" (p. 4). Often, professional development sessions are driven by topics such as effective instructional practices or data analysis, each of which can be ultimately linked to accountability measures that often seem to dominate discussions around student achievement. These professional development sessions often focus on improving the academic experience for our students at the classroom, school, and district level, but neglect holistic measures which cannot be measured via a standardized test.

For the purposes of this study, "holistic" education will refer the definition set forth by Pridham and Deed (2012) where they describe an applied type of learning as "a

[1] The terms "America" and "United States" are used interchangeably, while recognizing other's claims to the connotation of the terms.

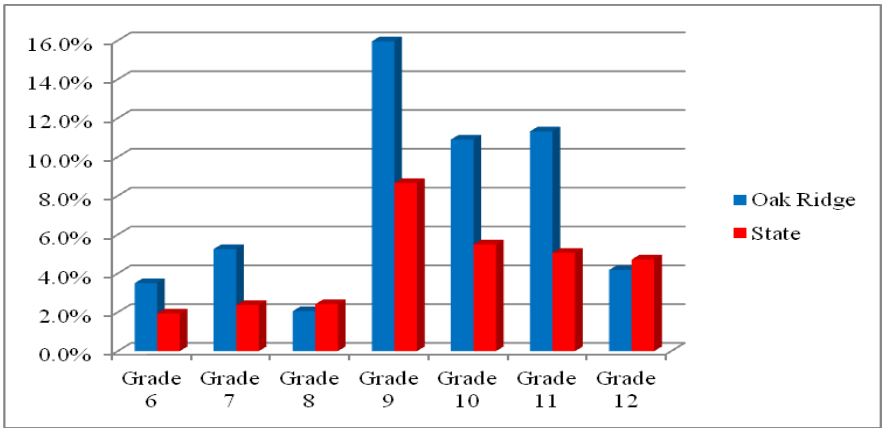
holistic approach to education that encourages the learner to make connections to what is characterized as 'the real world,' as opposed to the traditional school-based classroom" (p. 36). While this approach is descriptive of the instructional component of a holistic education, the Pridham and Deed describe the underlying vision of such an education. They cite Victorian Curriculum & Assessment Authority [VCAA] (2006) in defining the foundation of this approach as "a humanistic concern with nurturing and working with each student in a holistic manner, taking into account his or her personal strengths, interests, goals, and previous experiences" (p. 36). When the word "holistic" is used in this study, it will refer to the notion set forth by Pridham and Deed (2012) as well as VCAA (2006). As a middle school educator for over eight years, working in what I consider to be an incredibly progressive and supportive district, I cannot remember a single professional development session devoted to garnering the greater understanding of middle school adolescent students referenced in this definition.

OakRidge[2] district, the research site (or context) for this study, is a northeastern urban school district located in a metropolitan area. According to the National Center for Education Statistics (1996), "high poverty" can be defined as a school where over 40% of the student population qualifies for free or reduced lunch (p. vi). Of the students that comprise OakRidge, 75% are classified as "low income" students, receiving either free or reduced lunch (2014). The dominant ethnicities in this school district are Hispanic (44.9%) and White (41.3%). In terms of language proficiency, 11% of the students are categorized as Limited English Proficient (LEP) while 14.7% of the students are classified as special education students. The district has three separate middle schools

[2] OakRidge is a pseudonym for the sake of anonymity

that house grade 6, 7, and 8 students. These middle schools serve as an intermediate stop as students make their way towards a single, culminating high school. All three middle schools are identified as level 1 or 2 according to state accountability rankings. Despite these favorable ratings, Figure 1 reveals disconcerting data in terms of grade retention, as the district nearly doubles the state average of students' retention percentage in grades 6, 7, 9, 10, and 11 (State[3] Grade Retention Reports, 2008-2013).

Figure 1: Average OakRidge Grade Retention Percentages from the 2008 to 2013



Recent literature has identified student performance at the middle school level as a predictor for performance at the high school level (Balfanz & Mac Iver, 2000). The high retention rates in grades 9, 10, and 11 seem to call into question the preparedness of students for secondary education, casting a spotlight on the crucial middle school years in the district. These retention rates, during the middle and early high school years, are an important consideration in addition to the successful standardized testing data which currently ranks the middle schools as either level one or two. The failure to finish high school provides a more comprehensive view of students' educational experience and can

[3] State is a generic term to maintain anonymity of OakRidge's actual state

serve as an indictment of students' readiness after their departure at the middle school level.

A glance at the mission statements from each of the three middle schools in this particular district reveals evidence of holistic aspirations and objectives. The first references "the importance of educating the 'whole' child on multiple levels: academic, social/emotional, and physiological. Through partnerships and community involvement, we will endeavor to create meaningful educational and enrichment opportunities that support our vision and school goals and meet the needs of our students." Another middle school in the district explains that the "teaching staff is committed to the comprehensive development of each student to include academics, social responsibility, self-esteem, and the creation of a foundation for students as life-long learners." The third middle school's mission statement declares that its composition "ensures that students of all ability levels are well equipped to meet the challenges of becoming independent and self-sufficient learners who will succeed at the next level of education." However, personal experience suggests that these optimistic, holistic notions of "educating the whole child" often take a back seat to initiatives that are more aligned with improved performance on standardized tests. In a sense, the mission statements set forth result in urban middle school teachers being presented with competing objectives that can complicate their overall mission as an educator.

Ravitch (2010) explained that the main issue with standardized testing is not the testing itself, but rather "the belief that tests (can) identify with certainty which students should be held back, which teachers and principals should be fired or rewarded, and which schools should be closed" (p. 150). A compounding issue with this mantra is the

assumption that this type of identification ultimately leads to an improved educational process (Ravitch, 2010). When accountability statistics define a struggling population in education, *someone* has to be culpable for its presence. It is this point of view that has ignited a firestorm of blame in the educational field, casting an ominous cloud over the teaching profession and its daily responsibilities. Even if educators are not personally or directly impacted by districts that are overtaken by state agencies, administrators being removed from their positions, and teachers who are constantly under fire for improving test scores, the overall effects of these punitive actions seem to influence teachers' self-confidence with regard to carrying out the responsibilities that comprise an urban middle school teaching occupation.

Some posit that the intensive focus on data has academic benefits, but ultimately prevents teachers from reaching and connecting with the very students that such data claims to help identify and support. Valli and Buese (2007) explained that standardized, accountable testing movements often have beneficial components, particularly in terms of using data to aid instruction. However, the pitfall of this narrowed focus on standardized testing rests in education's refusal to acknowledge the impact on the teaching role itself as a result of the unintended, accompanying consequences that such movements bring (Valli & Buese, 2007). The researchers, through a qualitative analysis, reveal how the demands of accountability measures have expanded the teacher role into expansive areas that have left teachers feeling stressed and overwhelmed (Valli & Buese, 2007). This is of particular significance at the middle school level when taking into consideration the personal and academic changes that students experience at this transitional point in their lives. As such, teachers must balance the encouraged holistic response that is required

from a middle school teaching position, while simultaneously managing a host of initiatives that are geared at improving standardized test scores. Valli and Buese (2007) explained, "(Teachers) were torn between accepting the district's stance that knowing the students' needs meant knowing their assessment data and their belief that the information they garnered through interacting with students was equally as valuable" (p. 548). The researchers go on to state that teachers who participated in the study believed that the focus on testing was not worth the diminished relationship with their students (Valli & Buese, 2007). In this instance, standardized testing, under the guise of supporting teachers in promoting student progress, seems to have a counterproductive impact on the teacher's sense of confidence in their ability to perform.

In today's high stakes middle school environment, test scores have become a concrete part of teachers' evaluation. In fact, the OakRidge district has employed a standardized test at the district level, called District Determined Measures (DDMs). Results from DDMs will determine the type of evaluation plan for teachers (one or two year plans). According to literature presented in chapter two, it seems that the culpable nature of attributing test scores to teachers creates a negative atmosphere in an educational setting. However, given the district's overall Level 2 ranking, teachers in this progressive urban school district seem to strive under these conditions.

Middle school teachers must attempt to balance dedication to curriculum and standards, while establishing personal connections that are so critical during students' tenure in the transitional entity that is the middle grades. In the conclusion to their study, Valli and Buese (2007) asked that more research be conducted "on the relationships among external policies, workplace cultures, and teacher roles" (p. 554). It is my hope

that my research will contribute to this gap in the literature, exploring how these policies and the holistic purpose of middle school affect the teachers' confidence in promoting academic progress in this forum.

Maxine Greene, in her 1995 collection of essays titled *Releasing the Imagination: Essays on Education, the Arts, and Social Change*, alludes to a Thomas Mann novel where the main character questions whether one benefits more by viewing the world as small or big. Greene (1995) explained, "To see things or people big, one must resist viewing other human beings as mere objects or chess pieces and view them in their integrity and particularity instead" (p. 10). Later, Greene (1995) connects this viewpoint to education, explaining, "Whatever the precise vantage point, seeing schooling small is preoccupied with test scores, 'time on task,' management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures, while it screens out the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons" (p. 11). Middle school teachers are expected to effectively view education as both "big" and "small," negotiating the competing objectives, defined by mandates from policy level and meeting the needs of the student at the middle school level. As such, it is appropriate to question whether this required, dual perspective influences teachers' sense of self-efficacy in reaching and promoting academic progress with all of their students.

This study seeks to explore the various factors that influence contemporary middle school teachers' sense of efficacy, particularly in terms of how accountability measures influence this concept. Dembo and Gibson (1985) defined teacher efficacy as "the extent to which teachers believe they can affect student learning" (p. 173). In my experience as an urban middle school educator, I have wrestled daily with accountability

mandates and the holistic objective of the middle school concept itself. I have felt the enormous pressure that accompanies data analysis from the standardized testing movement, while simultaneously attempting to authentically support students during this incredibly complex time period of their lives. I have witnessed a range of middle school teacher experiences—those who have excelled, those who struggle daily, those that have maintained, questioned, or compromised their initial intentions for entering the profession, and those that have been defeated by the pressure created in this environment. I have watched as middle school educators have left for seemingly greener pastures at the elementary or high school level, or those that have exited the profession altogether. On the other hand, I have watched very few teachers from the elementary or high school level make their way into the middle grades. Ultimately, it seems as though the middle school environment has become as complex for teachers as it is for students.

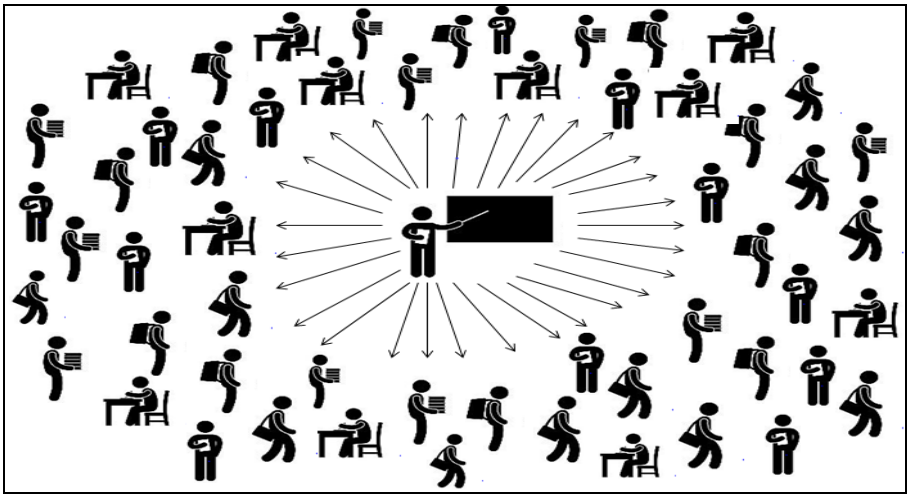
My experience as a tested (English Language Arts), middle school educator is what has spawned this passion for bringing to light the urban middle school teachers' plight. Having recently transitioned away from being a classroom teacher to a departmental coach and principal, I have been further exposed to the challenges that this paradigm presents for urban middle school educators. I always thought of middle school *students* as the trees in Gladwell's aforementioned metaphor in the opening of this study. However, my experience as a coach has led me to believe that the trees are now representative of urban middle school *teachers* in the very same capacity, specifically in terms of their efficacy in providing an atmosphere where everyone—teachers and students—has the opportunity to be the tallest oak in the forest.

Statement of the Problem

> *To maintain ceremonial conformity, organizations that reflect institutional rules tend to buffer their formal structures from the uncertainties of technical activities by becoming loosely coupled, building gaps between their formal structures and actual work activities. (Meyer & Rowan, 1977, p. 341)*

According to definition set forth by Meyer and Rowan (1977), middle schools have become a loosely coupled system, an entity that "dramatically reflect(s) the myths of their institutional environments instead of the demands of their work activities" (p. 341). However, this study will position middle school as an entity that was intended to be loosely coupled, consistent with Weick's (1976) original conceptualization of the term. Weick (1976) originally presented the concept of a loosely coupled system as one that offers autonomy and flexibility in responding to the dynamic task of educating a myriad of students (Figure 2).

Figure 2: Original Design of the Middle School—A Responsive, Loosely Coupled System



In essence, present day middle schools seem to have become influenced by a tightly coupled system, an automated, one-size-fits-all mode of education that is often developed as a reaction to accountability measures and mandates (Figure 3). In one

particular study, Balfanz and Mac Iver (2000) explained that urban middle school teachers are often pulled from their responsibilities to attend to administrative tasks and "as a result, they are unable to provide a regular schedule of teacher support" (p. 155). This study positions the interwoven relationship between tightly coupled accountability measures in education and the loosely coupled purpose of middle school as a potential influence of urban middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. Historical variables that measure a teacher's sense of efficacy will also be explored as a means of understanding the challenges of serving as an urban middle school educator.

Figure 3: Contemporary Middle School—A Tightly Coupled System Impinging Upon a Loosely Coupled System

Here, I position a statement of reflexivity: I believe that the job of being an urban middle school educator is unmatched in its complexity. Middle school teachers, like their elementary and high school counterparts, live in today's dynamic educational environment on a daily basis, a milieu that can elicit moments of success, failure, passion, pressure, certainty, and uncertainty from one moment to the next. However, the compounding component to the middle school position is the incredibly perplexing time

period that is adolescence, one where students are experiencing social, emotional, and physical changes that often require support, guidance, and a holistic approach to education (Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Turning Points, 2003). Other influences, such as proper training, experience, and poverty level (just to name a few) also factor in to teachers' sense of efficacy.

In advocating for marginalized students, Kumashiro (2000) pled for public schools to provide separate spaces that can support and empower academically marginalized students, particularly those that have been unable to experience academic progress or a connectedness in their academic experience. As the direction of U.S. education aligns itself with more rigid policy mandates (which will be explored further in chapter two), many of today's urban middle school adolescent students have become marginalized student populations. Personal experience suggests that we have not provided these spaces for our urban middle school adolescent student population. To further complicate matters, I question whether we have provided these spaces for our teachers to work with these students. A minute or two between classes, five to ten minutes during class, an after-school session if students were willing and able to stay—these small windows have served as spaces for providing the support and guidance required during students' adolescent years. Even middle school concepts like advisory periods, created specifically for the purpose of eliciting spaces for more holistic educational moments, have been a source of discontent in attempting to build the necessary support that is encouraged by a middle school entity (Galassi, Gulledge, & Cox, 1997). Holistic moments have been confined to the instructional periods where

teachers and students meet, often serving as an afterthought to the content that must be delivered during those precious minutes.

Memories of my first few years as an urban middle school educator are not pleasant. I recall coming home feeling overwhelmed, defeated, and pessimistic with regard to my chances of fulfilling a sustained career in middle school education. The incredible responsibilities levied from administration, the district initiatives, the lesson planning, the feedback, the district requirements, state mandates, evaluations, professional development—if the job is executed to the fullest, it is nearly an impossibility to complete all tasks to the best of an educator's ability without having feelings of doubt or reservation. Over the course of those first three initial years, I eventually found my groove, not only with the students but the professional responsibilities that accompany the job itself. I certainly helped my students to improve as readers and writers, subsequently aiding the school and district in their efforts to raise achievement on standardized test scores. Yet, I never quite felt like I was fulfilling my ultimate duty as a middle school educator in a system designed to support students beyond standardized test performance.

Holistic moments, and the small windows in which they are fit into, do not capture the true essence behind why the middle school notion was created. When the junior high school concept was created in the early twentieth it was intended to be a reactive entity, one which could meet the often difficult needs of the changing adolescent. During its conception, educators painted the model as a holistic atmosphere that would help guide the youth of America into adulthood, while simultaneously sustaining students' tenure in secondary schooling (Briggs, 1920; Koos, 1920). This purpose, later

reinvigorated during the late 1990's, seems to have dissipated in the face of accountability mandates levied upon education at the turn of the century. While the middle school purpose of yesteryear still persists today in the form of mission statements and objectives, it seems to be overshadowed by accountability mandates and the subsequent policy that is created from such measures. At times, this policy can be viewed as dichotomous when considering the daily tasks that are required of an urban middle school educator. It is my position that this paradox, where a tightly coupled system of accountability interacts with the loosely coupled system that is the middle school concept, has a direct impact on a teacher's sense of efficacy and his or her subsequent confidence to perform the multilayered responsibilities of being a successful middle grades educator in today's urban schools.

Research Purpose and Conceptual Framework

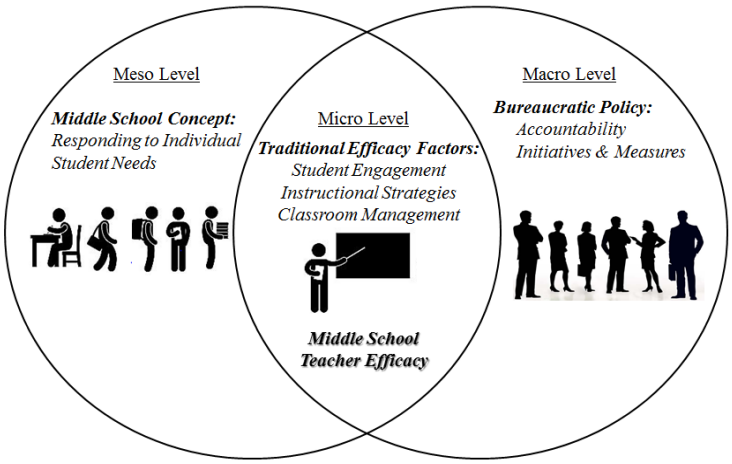
> *The understanding of human development demands going beyond the direct observation of behavior on the part of one or two persons in the same place; it requires examination of multiperson systems of interaction not limited to a single setting and must take into account aspects of the environment beyond the immediate situation containing the subject. (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514)*

This study seeks to understand the factors influence urban middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy in a single school district. Today's urban middle school teachers seem to be caught between different paradigms, a concept built on varied perspectives surrounding the educational process. Lincoln (1985) described a paradigm as being "much more than a model or pattern" (p. 29), as it is often defined in literature. Rather, she defines the term as a "view of the world," one which "reflects our most basic beliefs and assumptions about the human condition" (Lincoln, 1985, p. 29). She goes on to

explain that people often operate in these paradigms on a daily basis in their work lives, maneuvering in and out while often failing to consider or recognize "the value systems that undergird them" (Lincoln, 1985, p. 29). The hope is that this study will bring these underlying value systems to light, providing insight as how these paradigms influence urban middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy in an urban school district.

In considering the conceptual framework which positions holistic goals set forth by the middle school concept and the fulfillment of accountability mandates from the teaching profession, I employ Yurie Bronfenbrenner's concept of research that explores a person's ecological environment as a means of understanding their beliefs. Bronfenbrenner (1977) advocated for a type of research that participates in a comprehensive analysis beyond one's environment, considering forces that may reside somewhere that is beyond that person's immediate situation. By applying this line of reasoning to a middle school teacher's sense of efficacy, Bronfenbrenner's ecological, environmental lens allows for the consideration of various factors that influence a teacher's ability to reach the students that sit before them. The concept map in Figure 4 introduces the relationships of accountability measures at the policy level and the intended purpose of the middle school concept at the practitioner level, while positioning the teacher at the core of these competing objectives. The visual representation calls into question the potential influence that these factors can have on a middle school teacher's sense of efficacy.

Figure 4: Conceptual Framework—Contemporary Middle School According to Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Environment



When considered according to Bronfenbrenner's broader analysis of one's ecological environment, the middle school teacher conundrum seems to fit neatly into three specific categories: the macro, meso, and micro systems. The macro system, described as "the overarching institutional patterns of the culture or subculture" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515) describes accountability policy, often shaped at the federal or state level. Such policy often results in flawed accountability measures that result in school closings, mass firings, and burnout amongst staff (Ravitch, 2010). While these significant occurrences may not personally or directly impact teachers in the OakRidge school district, they cast an ominous hierarchal cloud over the profession from the macro level of the ecological environmental concept. As such, the ramifications of this accountability system must be considered as a potential influence on educators' sense of self-efficacy.

For the purpose of this study, the ecosystem, which "comprises the interrelations among major settings containing the developing person at a particular point in his or her life" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 515), would represent the middle school entity itself. The intermediate system of schools known as "middle schools" encompasses a concept that was created to meet the needs of students during their transitional years between elementary and high school (Briggs, 1920 and Koos, 1920). The meso system plays a significant role in an urban middle school teacher's experience. The aforementioned mission statements from the three middle schools that comprise the OakRidge School District convey a holistic approach to education. Thus, the teachers are ultimately responsible for carrying out this holistic approach, while simultaneously adhering to the policy requirements that are levied from the macro level.

Finally, the micro system, defined as "the complex of relations between the developing person and environment in an immediate setting containing that person" (Bronfenbrenner, 1977, p. 514), will be used to define the concept of middle school teacher efficacy. The micro system becomes the level in which a teacher's sense of efficacy resides. This particular study will be centered on the micro level, determining how factors influence an urban middle school teacher's sense of self-efficacy.

Ross (1994) defined teacher efficacy as "the extent to which teachers believe their efforts will have a positive effect on student achievement" (p. 3). Furthermore, Ross (1994) distinguished between "personal teaching efficacy" and "general teaching efficacy" (p. 5). Ross (1994) explained:

> Personal teaching efficacy is the respondent's expectation that he or she will be able to bring about student learning; general teaching efficacy is the belief that the

teacher population's ability to bring about change is limited by factors beyond their control.

Three traditional efficacy variables, measuring both personal and general teaching efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001), were used to quantitatively measure middle school teachers' sense of efficacy in the OakRidge district. These variables measured their confidence in terms of instructional strategies, student engagement, and classroom management. In addition, the two general teaching efficacy variables outlined earlier—adherence to accountability measures and the holistic responsibility of meeting the needs of middle school adolescents—will be introduced during the qualitative portion, and will be explored as potential influences on urban middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy. As such, a mixed methodology will be used to uncover which variables influence contemporary middle school teachers' sense of efficacy in the OakRidge school district.

Research Questions

This study of urban middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy will be guided by the following research question:

- What is urban middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy like in an era of accountability?

Rationale

> *All Americans have a vital stake in the healthy development of today's young adolescents, who will become tomorrow's parents, workers, and citizens. But Millions of America's young adolescents are not developing into responsible members of society. (Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1992, p. 9)*

The rationale for this study is grounded in the struggles of contemporary U.S. urban middle school education. From a personal standpoint, I view students' middle school years as the most impactful, fragile, and influential years in their educational lives. Students are not only transitioning on an educational level, but on a personal level as well. Yet today's middle school philosophies seem to be headed in a very different direction. As Donna Schumacher (1998) explained, "Meeting social needs during the transition from an elementary to a middle level school is a moral consideration because most programs focus more on academics and regulations" (p. 1). In a study somewhat parallel with my particular research interests, Wanda Cassidy and Anita Bates (2005) explored how middle school administrators, teachers, and students perceive and actualize care in the various school policies and practices that embody their middle school settings. Through narratives, students, teachers, and administrators were able to give their voice on how the middle school "cares" for the students in "their building." The researchers' findings are parallel with sentiments expressed in the forthcoming theoretical framework of this study, stating, "Finding spaces for caring is becoming increasingly difficult as administrators, teachers, and students are pushed toward preordained goals set by distant bureaucrats" (p. 66). This finding is particularly significant at the middle school level, given the nature of the changing adolescent. How OakRidge middle school educators process and balance the relationship between accountability mandates at the policy level and holistic responsibilities at the practical level, can serve as a valuable addition to existing literature on present day urban middle school teachers' sense of efficacy.

Theoretical Framework

> *Authentic education is not carried on by 'A' for 'B' or by 'A' about 'B,' but rather by 'A' with 'B,' mediated by the world—a world which impresses and challenges both parties, giving rise to views or opinions about it. These views, impregnated with anxieties, doubts, hopes or hopelessness, imply significant themes on the basis of which the program content of education can be built. (Freire, 1970, p. 93)*

Freire (1970) spoke of an authentic type of education, one where all actors work together to create the most genuine form of education. Yet, much of today's educational policy seems to carry an "A" for/about "B" mentality, where policy is shaped for teachers instead of *with* teachers. This ideology, positioned as a means of understanding urban middle school teachers' sense of efficacy, rests at the heart of this study. As such, the theoretical framework draws from three specific theories: Nodding's caring theory, Weick's loosely coupled systems as organizational theory, and Bandura's concept of efficacy as part of his greater social learning theory. Each theory offers a unique lens from which to view each particular aspect of the set forth conceptual framework. The theoretical overview presented here will serve as a precursor to a further, in-depth analysis in chapter two of this study.

Theory of Self-Efficacy within Social Learning Theory

Bandura's social learning theory, from which the theory of self-efficacy is derived, is applicable for this research in that it illustrates how effective actions on the part of individuals manifest in a particular environment. Bandura (1977) explained that self-efficacy within social learning theory can determine one's method of approach, degree of motivation, and sustainment of this motivation in the face of adversity. Bandura (1971) noted that theorists often carelessly position personal attributes and environmental pressures as separate entities, when in fact, the two interact in a reciprocal

manner. Bandura (1971) explained, “In the social learning view, psychological functioning involves a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavior and its controlling conditions” (p. 39). He later continues, “Behavior partly creates the environment and the resultant environment, in turn, influences the behavior” (p. 40). This is of particular significance when considering the function of a middle school urban educator. In the urban middle school environment of today, the teacher becomes a middle manager of policy and practice, balancing mandates at the macro level and the purpose of middle school at the meso level. Bandura’s assertion that the environment in which one operates can influence their actions or convictions is directly related to the previously referenced policy/practice paradigm.

Bandura (1971) warned, “Interpersonal difficulties are most likely to arise when a person has developed a narrow range of effective behaviors and must thereby rely on coercive methods to force desired actions from others” (p. 41). As an example, Bandura (1971) offered, “At universities the administrators, faculty, students, and alumni all feel that other constituencies are unduly influential but that they themselves have insufficient power to alter the institutional practices” (p. 41). It is my position that the same line of reasoning can be applied to urban middle school educators. These teachers often seem to feel powerless to evoke any type of agency that would bring about practical change during this critical period of schooling. Instead, teachers become middle managers that must negotiate directives from the macro level and encouraged practices at the meso level of Bronfenbrenner’s model.

Caring Theory

In her 1988 essay titled *An Ethic of Caring*, Nel Noddings advocates for an educational experience that prioritizes the concept of caring in today's schools, while subsequently transcending policy which aims solely at improving academic achievement. Noddings (1988) explained that academic skills in America's educational system have always been misidentified as a means for promoting good character development. As such, educational systems have focused their efforts on academic achievement, while ignoring moral objectives aimed at improving the whole child. Noddings (1988) explained, "In a classroom dedicated to caring, students are encouraged to support each other, opportunities for peer interaction are provided, and the quality of that interaction is as important (to both teacher and students) as the academic outcomes" (p. 223). However, personal experience suggests such an environment is difficult to establish in contemporary urban middle school settings. Building authentic relationships with students often takes a back seat to an allegiance to standards, pacing, and initiatives geared towards improving students' academic performance. This study does not position these mandates in a negative light, as literature in chapter two will explain that such measures do, indeed, improve academic performance. Instead, the study's goal is to explain how these competing objectives influence teachers' overall sense of efficacy.

In her work, Noddings (1988) warned against researchers becoming part of the educational system that places a focus on academics above holistic purposes. Noddings (1988) explained that "research *for* teaching would concern itself with the needs, views, and actual experience of teachers rather than the outcomes produced through various instructional procedures" (p. 227). She continues, "Research *for* teaching would not treat

teachers as interchangeable parts in instructional procedures, but, rather, as professionals capable of making informed choices among proffered alternatives" (Noddings, 1988, p. 227). Finally, Noddings (1988) explained, "Research *for* teaching would address itself to the needs of teachers—much as pharmaceutical research addresses itself to the needs of practicing physicians" (p. 227). In the pages that follow, Noddings (1988) cautioned researchers against the practice of analyzing teacher responses against predetermined expectations. Noddings (1988) employed a hypothetical example of a teacher potentially responding that "materials" was the greatest need in engaging students in work, when researchers often assume the answer would (should?) be "training." This particular study seeks to empower teachers, providing a quantitative and qualitative forum for them to answer and elaborate on potential variables that influence their sense of efficacy in an urban middle school setting.

In a later essay, Noddings (1995) noted, "In direct opposition to the current emphasis on academic standards, a national curriculum, and national assessment, I have argued that our main educational aim should be to encourage the growth of competent, caring, loving, and lovable people" (p. 366). As such, the caring theory is directly applicable to this study in exploring the potential tension between academic performance and holistic caring in terms of middle school students. Given the literature that will be set forth in chapter two of this study in regards to the holistic purpose of middle school as an entity to support students through adolescence, one can make the argument that no other time span in education is more parallel with this theory than the middle grades experience. At the crux of this theory, particularly as it relates to this study, is middle school teachers' ability to establish care as a foundational aspect of their pedagogical

practices while simultaneously meeting objectives of accountability mandates that focus exclusively on academic progress.

Loosely Coupled System as an Organizational Theory

Weick (1976) explained that "concepts such as loose coupling serve as sensitizing devices. They sensitize the observer to notice and question things that had previously been taken for granted" (p. 2). The middle school concept was designed to be a loosely coupled system, an entity created to serve as a responsive force in supporting the complex needs of adolescent students. Glassman (1973) distinguished between tightly and loosely coupled systems, explaining that "automatic control systems usually include tight coupling" (p. 84) and "living systems and subsystems are both more complex and more autonomous" (pp. 84-85). Weick (1976) explained, "By loose coupling, the author intends to convey the image that coupled events are responsive, but that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness" (p. 3). This theory will be employed to study the effects of a tightly coupled system (accountability mandates) infringing upon a loosely coupled system (the concept of middle school). This study seeks to explore how a perceived, illogical separateness between dynamic accountability and holistic variables must be processed at the educator level, particularly in terms of its influence on teacher efficacy.

Orton and Weick (1990) noted the theory's popularity in educational research, but warn that "the concept of organizations as loosely coupled systems is widely used and diversely understood" (p. 203). Orton and Weick (1990) explained that the concept has been used in a host of organizational studies in an attempt to understand complex

conceptual dilemmas. Despite the term's ambiguity, Orton and Weick (1990) stated that "loose coupling has proven to be a durable concept precisely because it allows organizational analysts to explain the simultaneous existence of rationality and indeterminacy without specializing these two logics in distinct locations" (p. 204). For this particular study, the theory lends itself to the complex environment that middle school educators face on a daily basis. Middle school educators, operating in a loosely coupled system that intends to employ autonomy meeting the needs of adolescents during this complex time of schooling, must also negotiate the tightly coupled mandates that result from accountability policy from above. In addition to explaining the influence of traditionally measured efficacy variables, this study seeks to understand how this negotiation influences urban middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy.

Context/Background

> *Who the teacher is, who the students are, what they are trying to accomplish separately and together all matter in designing instruction. Educational research, like behavioral science in general, has made the error of supposing that method can be substituted for individuals, and this attempt may well have increased the alienation of students. Administrators assume that there must be a method that will allow teachers to meet 150-200 new students every year and yet establish the atmosphere of caring that teachers such as mine did years ago. A main message of (my) book is that there is no such method. People are not reducible to methods except, perhaps, in their work with objects. This form of reduction is called automation, and it simply does not apply to interpersonal activities. (Greene, 1995, p. 8)*

According to Leithwood and Earl (2000), accountability ensures alignment between the public's aspirations and the objectives of its schools, while encouraging continued improvement of the public's schools through standardized measures. Yet, the accompanying negative consequences of such mandates and the subsequent impact on

teacher morale, are often ignored. Linn (2000) argued that these negative consequences, which are often unintended, far outweigh the positive gains achieved through such policy. School closings, the loss of teacher's tenure, and teacher termination have a tremendous impact on how today's educators function in their day to day classrooms. The looming aura of such actions, even from afar, can encourage a narrowed curriculum, monotonous instructional practices, and the practice of teaching to the test. As such, these practices can often lead to misleading gains in terms of comparative accountability measures that are connected to state norms (Linn, 2000). The larger question at hand is whether these policies, established to ensure equitable education for all, are contributing or detracting from teachers' efforts to accomplish such lofty objectives. Perhaps a more important consideration is whether or not these mandates affect teacher's confidence to reach the students they intend to teach.

Haney's (2001) critical look at the Texas' standardized test movement, which became known as the "Texas Miracle," is just one example that reveals the damaging effects that such rigid accountability movements levy both actors in the teacher-student dynamic. Haney (2001) exposed the significant gains as a myth, demystifying the claims of progress in achievement and narrowing in terms of the achievement gap. Students were mislabeled as special education students as a means of disqualifying their scores from the state's standardized testing system. Other students were repeatedly retained prior to their sophomore year, the first year in which they were required to take this standardized test. These repeated grade retentions often resulted in students dropping out of high school, another means of eliminating scores that could potentially diminish

achievement results. While the methods that Haney (2001) outlines are deplorable to say the least, the impact on educators seems to be equally harmful.

Perhaps more telling than the disingenuous gains perpetuated by these Texas schools is the feedback that teachers provided with regard to the impact of accountability mandates such as No Child Left Behind (NCLB). Haney (2001) referenced three independent statewide surveys in which educators revealed four general findings. Participants explained that the new accountability measures narrowed focus towards teaching to the test, hurt teaching and learning more than it helped, was particularly harmful to students deemed at-risk, and contributed to the grade retention and the act of dropping out of school. When looking at its impact on teachers, 85% of respondents agreed that the narrowed autonomy that accompanied such accountability measures was encouraging some of the most talented teachers to leave the profession (Haney, 2001). A teacher's lack of autonomy in our age of accountability, a feeling so strong that it can cause some of the most talented educators to leave the profession altogether, speaks to the power struggle that is a regular part of today's urban middle school experience. It echoes Greene's notion of a desired automation of the teaching profession, a concept that seems at odds with the authentic purpose of the middle school entity.

Significance & Potential Benefits

> *In many respects, it is during the middle grades that the battle of urban education is lost. (Balfanz, Mac Iver, 2000, p. 137)*

Recent literature from the past decade has cast a spotlight on the critical role that students' middle education plays in determining student achievement or mortality in America's educational institutions. Balfanz, Herzog, and Mac Iver (2007) explained,

"Middle-grades students—especially those attending high poverty urban schools with student bodies primarily made up of minority students—continue to be the underperformers of the U.S. educational system" (p. 223). The researchers go on to explain that students who misbehave, fail to attend school regularly, or demonstrate a lack of motivation at the middle school level are far more prone to mortality at the secondary school level. These transgressions, which can start as early as the sixth grade, serve as a significant predictor as to whether or not these students will drop out during their high school years (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007). Teachers are the most direct force in countering the drop out phenomenon, but must be given the capacity to provide the comprehensive support that is required to do so. A focus on the transitional entity that is today's urban middle school is perhaps more important than ever before, particularly in an urban setting.

A number of researchers have directly connected teacher efficacy, in a collective or individual capacity, with student performance (Midgley, 1991; Dembo & Gibson, 1985; McGuigan & Hoy, 2006). According to Midgley (1991), performance in the transition year to middle school in terms of students with a history of underachievement was directly correlated with their middle school teacher's sense of efficacy. Low performing students with teachers who had a higher sense of efficacy outperformed those that were paired with low efficacious teachers. Based on her results, Midgley (1991) pondered whether the period of adolescence has been given a "difficult and unproductive" (p. 13) stereotype, asking if the middle grades concept has allowed this label to flourish. In offering the initial steps to her solution, Midgley (1991) encouraged that the "first important step is to talk with middle school and junior high school teachers

and hear their interpretations and explanations" (p. 13). This study, from both a quantitative and qualitative methodology, seeks to fill this gap in the literature by offering a platform for middle school teachers to explain their sense of self-efficacy.

Balfanz and Mac Iver's (2007) words about the urban middle school decline are powerful beyond measure. The significance of this proposed study rests in the knowledge that teacher efficacy is an aspect of education that seems to have a direct correlation with student achievement.

This study will provide a snapshot as to whether or not a contemporary urban middle school educator's sense of efficacy is impacted by a dynamic relationship between policy and practice, in addition to variables established as contributors to teachers' sense of self-efficacy. The hope is that findings from this study will serve as a contribution in helping to influence policy, ultimately curbing the decline that persists in today's urban, middle school environments. Additionally, this study will provide a platform for a group of urban middle school educators to elaborate on the factors that influence their confidence and conviction in executing complex professional responsibilities. The quantitative and qualitative analysis would offer a statistical and emic perspective from urban middle school educators in an urban district, one that seems to be relatively absent from educational literature. Results garnered from this study will serve to improve understanding of the middle school teaching occupation, particularly with regard to the middle school composition and the professional development opportunities that are provided for urban middle school educators.

CHAPTER 2

A REVIEW OF EXISTING LITERATURE

Introduction

The time period of middle school has often characterized as the most challenging and complex years of students' educational lives (Briggs, 1920; Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development, 1989; Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development (1992); Cassidy & Bates, 2005; Jackson & Davis, 2000; Koos, 1920; Neild et al., 2007; Turning Points, 2003). As such, middle school teachers' responsibilities have become equally complex, particularly as these responsibilities require educators' simultaneous attention to both the professional accountability mandates set forth by the high stakes testing atmosphere and the holistic needs of the students that reside before them. This study contends that the tension between these two sets of expectations set forth by these variables, in addition to more traditional variables that have been used to measure efficacy, ultimately influences urban middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. To guide this study, the following literature review explores three main tenants of this claim: (1) teacher self-efficacy, (2) the influence of accountability mandates, and (3) the middle school construct. The exploration of literature surrounding these three components serve as the foundation from which to

build a study that can serve as a valuable contribution to educational research and middle grades education in general.

Educational reform has become a constant part of the American educational system's landscape (Linn, 2000). Some have questioned whether this continuous reform has served as an empty type of improvement, a concept that serves as justification for countless initiatives, repetitive practices, and proposed "magic bullets" that seem to never come to fruition. Greene (1995) explained that to "approach teaching and learning in this fashion is to be concerned with action, not behavior" (p. 15). She posits that, when approached in this manner, those involved in educational restructuring "are interested in beginnings, not in endings" (p. 15). Educational policy and its subsequent initiatives have become part of a swinging pendulum, one where "new reform involves a major shift or pendulum swing as one ideological camp gains ascendance over another" (Linn, 2000, p. 4). For the three aforementioned, foundational aspects of this study, it was critical to explore where the pendulum swing began, as only then is it possible to make sense of where it currently stands. More importantly, it was crucial to consider how this pendulum swing impacts the educators in which it intends to guide. Thus, this literature review explored the historical genesis of the middle school construct, accountability mandates, and the concept of teacher efficacy, as well as the contemporary standing of each.

Teacher Efficacy

What is Teacher Efficacy?

In addition to Dembo and Gibson's (1985) aforementioned definition of teacher efficacy, which described the concept as "the extent to which teachers believe they can affect student learning" (p. 173), a number of researchers have offered their own definitions of teacher efficacy. Guskey and Passaro (1994) explained that teacher efficacy is "teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those that may be considered difficult or unmotivated" (p. 628). Ashton (1984) offered, "Teachers 'sense of efficacy' refers to the extent to which teachers believe that they have the capacity to affect student performance" (p. 28). Finally, Bandura (1977), who will be further explored in the theoretical analysis below, defined "efficacy expectation" as "the conviction that one can successfully execute behavior required to produce the outcomes" (p. 193). Given each of the definitions set forth, teacher efficacy serves as a significant factor in promoting success at the middle school level.

Two key terms resonated when considering the aforementioned definitions served as the foundation for the teacher efficacy concept: capacity and conviction. The capacity, or perceived capacity on behalf of educators, seems to play a significant role with regard to their confidence or convictions in achieving their set forth goals. Thus, it has become incumbent upon researchers to consider the potential variables that can impact an educator's perceived capacity as it relates to their confidence in carrying out their objectives for their particular teaching occupation. For this study, teacher efficacy was defined as middle school educators' perceived capacity as it influences their conviction to carry out their set forth objectives.

Ross (1994) defines Bandura's theory of self-efficacy as "individuals' judgments of their ability to complete future actions" (p. 3). Ross (1994) conducted an analysis of 88 studies around the concept of self-efficacy and noted four antecedents that serve as the foundation for the concept. The first antecedent outlined how past performance influences future actions. Ross (1994) states, "These judgments are based on personalistic interpretations of past actions rather than on some extra-individual criterion of performance" (p. 3). Ross (1994) went on to explain that these interpretations ultimately evolve to be "persistent" but "not static" (p. 3) expectations. The second antecedent, as defined by Ross (1994), was vicarious experiences. According to Ross (1994), teachers' sense of self-efficacy is influence through observations of peers, particularly in terms of their success or failure. Ross (1994) adds that verbal persuasion which encourages teachers in terms of their capability to perform purposeful action (particularly in terms of feedback from peers or supervisors) was referenced as a third antecedent. Finally, Ross (1994) lists physiological responses in communicating the ability (or inability) to perform effectively as a final antecedent. Ross (1994) notes that the latter two antecedents (verbal persuasion and physiological responses) have served as lesser influences over teachers' sense of self-efficacy. The set forth definitions and antecedents served as core tenets in creating a qualitative focus group interview protocol.

Chapter 3 will review existing efficacy instruments, revealing three primary quantitative variables, including student engagement, teachers' instructional strategies, and teachers' classroom management. These variables served as the core tenets that were measured in the quantitative portion of this mixed methods study. The additional variables that were considered are the holistic responsibilities at the meso system level in

terms of the contemporary middle school concept, as well as accountability measures and subsequent initiatives born from the macro level. Teacher efficacy was characterized in a quantitative analysis, and the potential influence of these two powerful variables will be explored in the subsequent qualitative portion.

Guskey and Passaro (1994) explained that research surrounding teacher efficacy, particularly in its early years, was steeped in the psychological construct known as locus of control. A person's locus of control is often used to explore one's perceptions in regard to their responsibility, or lack of responsibility, with regard to an outcome. Rotter (1975) explained that an internal locus of control is when one believes that an event has occurred because of his or her own actions, while those with an external locus of control believe that an outside force (luck, chance, fate) determines one's destiny. The locus of control concept is grounded in the assumption of responsibility, and ultimately asked participants to consider whether the individual themselves or surrounding circumstances were responsible for a particular outcome.

While Guskey (1987) acknowledged the relationship between teacher efficacy and responsibility, he distinguished between the two constructs through the simple use of tense. According to Guskey (1987), "Efficacy refers to projected potency in a particular situation and is generally present or future directed" (p. 41) while "responsibility, on the other hand, is an attribution reference that is reflective and directed towards the past" (p. 41). While the two terms are often referred to as synonymous (Guskey 1987), it was important to acknowledge the distinction between the two (Bandura, 1977). Exploring efficacy in terms of urban middle school teachers' beliefs spoke to their perceived agency in eliciting desired outcomes in academic settings, as opposed to assigning responsibility

for results that have already occurred. As Goddard, Hoy, and Hoy (2000) explained, "Indeed, perceived self-efficacy and locus of control bear little or no empirical relationship with each other. Further, perceived self-efficacy is a much stronger predictor of behavior than locus of control" (p. 481). Considering that teacher efficacy serves as a greater predictor of teacher action, the quantitative and qualitative measures did not focus on assumed responsibility for an outcome. Rather, the focus centered on teacher's perceived capacity and their convictions in promoting continuous student progress in contemporary urban middle schools.

While teacher efficacy is centered on an educator's core belief system, there is far more to consider when exploring the term. Literature identified a host of factors can impact whether or not a teacher is efficacious. Ashton (1984), through a host of qualitative interviews, explained that other variables make it challenging for educators to maintain a strong sense of efficacy. Ashton (1984) explained that "the isolation, the difficulty assessing one's effectiveness as a teacher, the lack of collegial and administrative support, and the sense of powerlessness that comes from limited collegial decision-making" (p. 28) all play a role in diminishing the efficaciousness of educators. Personal experience has suggested that many, if not all, of these factors continue to persist in today's educational environment. A teacher's efficacy is challenged by these variables on a daily basis and the recent crush levied upon the system by accountability mandates over the past decade provided more of a challenge to their plight. Other studies (Dembo & Gibson, 1984; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) have explored traditional variables: student's home life, teacher instructional skills, and teachers' classroom management skills. Noticeably missing from this list of factors are the two

constructs at the heart of this proposed study: accountability mandates and the subsequent initiatives born from such policy, as well as meeting the holistic needs of middle school students during what is often described as the most complex time period of their schooling. This study sought to further explain the influences of teacher efficacy, shedding new light on whether or not these variables truly serve as an influence on urban middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

The Origins of Efficacy

Before exploring teacher efficacy in today's educational climate, it was critical to uncover the genesis of the construct. Guskey and Passaro (1994) explained that teacher efficacy's origins is often credited to the research of Heider (1958) or White (1959), each of whom explored how motivational functioning behind how human beings operate manifested in particular environments. Although neither Heider nor White coined the phrase "teacher efficacy," their research with regard to human motivation as well as the subsequent interaction with their environment, laid the groundwork for the future construct of the term.

Heider's 1958 publication titled *The Psychology of Interpersonal Relations* explored people's cognitive interpretations as a means influence in terms of behavior. Heider (1958) explained that the particular events that occur in people's lives are "always interpreted in terms of the relatively invariant contents of the world around (them). These contents must be consistent with each other, and that means that we have definite ideas about fittingness, about consonance and dissonance" (p. 297). Heider's reference to consonance and dissonance, particularly in terms of the contents of one's environment,

seemed particularly relevant to the atmosphere in which urban middle school teachers' of today operate. Heider's "contents" (p. 297) can be applied to the set forth notion that urban middle school teachers' participate in an ongoing negotiation between accountability mandates and middle school students' complex needs at this stage of adolescence. The dissonance between these two variables that reside in today's middle school environments seemed to inevitably have some influence, positive or negative, on urban middle school teacher's sense of efficacy. Heider (1958) explained that people have "specific ideas" about "possible conditions and effects" that are shaped by their immediate environment. Heider (1958) explained, "Our implicit knowledge of the conditions allows us to influence the distal parts of the world in purposeful action; and our knowledge of the effects makes cognition and expectation possible" (p. 298). This study sought to apply this logic to an urban middle school environment, exploring how educator's immediate environments impact their own action and expectations.

White introduced the terms "feeling of efficacy" (p. 322) in his 1959 publication titled *Motivation Reconsidered: The Concept of Competence*. In this essay, White (1959) spoke of an environmental competence, one where a person is continuously exploring the various facets of their immediate environment. White (1959) explained, "Dealing with the environment means carrying on a continuing transaction which gradually changes one's relation to the environment" (p. 322). In this instance, White (1959) highlighted the continuous, dynamic relationship between a human beings and their immediate environment. This line of reasoning served as a valuable explanation of how a teachers' relationship with their ever-changing environment can impact their overall confidence in attempting to elicit progress with their students. White (1959) continued, "Effectance

motivation must be conceived to involve satisfaction—a feeling of efficacy—in transactions in which behavior has an exploratory, varying, experimental character and produces changes in the stimulus field" (p. 329). In applying White's notion to academia, it was clear that a teacher's sense of efficacy hinges upon successful interactions with their immediate environment as a means of promoting progress with the students in which they are attempting to reach. White's work on motivation as a potential origin of the concept of teacher efficacy harkened back to the key terms referenced earlier, namely a teacher's "capacity" and "conviction." Teachers' perceptions about the capacity in which they can successfully interact with their environment could potentially influence their convictions in reaching their established objectives for the students that sit before them.

Teacher Efficacy's Emergence and Significance

It has been quantitatively proven that the concept of teacher efficacy has had a direct relationship to student achievement (Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonnel, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Ashton, 1984; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Guskey & Passaro, 1994). Teachers that exhibit a greater sense of efficacy have been directly linked to improved student achievement. Measuring student progress according to teachers' sense of efficacy is not an objective of this study. However, this relationship serves as a key rationale for exploring the multi-layered facets of the concept in providing a greater understanding of teacher efficacy.

Ashton (1984) explained that teachers with a high sense of efficacy have positive feelings with regard to themselves, their mode of teaching, and the students that sit before them. On the other hand, teachers with a lower sense of efficacy have been linked to low student performance and a cessation from the profession. Ashton (1984) noted, "Teachers with a low sense of efficacy are frustrated with teaching and often express discouragement and negative feelings about their work with students" (p. 29). As such, the construct of teacher efficacy was a critical factor in examining the struggles of urban middle schools of today, particularly in terms of the educators that comprise these particular institutions. The findings of such research has the potential to aid educational institutions in limiting the potential middle school impact on the drop-out phenomenon at the secondary school level.

Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) described Barfield and Burlingame's 1974 *The Pupil Control Ideology of Teachers in Select Schools* as "the earliest citation provided by an Educational Resources Information Center (ERIC) search of the term *teacher efficacy*" (p. 81). Barfield and Burlingame (1974) found that teachers with a lower sense of efficacy tended to view control as a more significant factor in the educational experience. Perhaps the prioritization of the aspect of control was a product of low efficacious teachers having a feeling of helplessness in shaping their own environment. Barfield and Burlingame (1974) noted that "every individual has a general awareness of wins and losses in transactions with the environment" (p. 10). Thus, those that perceived "losses" begin to develop a low sense of efficacy. According to Barfield and Bulingame (1974), teachers with this low sense of efficacy "will have to spend more energy coping with the environment than teachers with a high sense of efficacy" (p. 10). This study, while being

referenced as one of the first to coin the term *teacher efficacy*, helped establish the roots of the concept as an important factor for consideration in educational research. Despite being credited with being one of the first studies to pilot the concept of teacher efficacy, Barfield and Burlingame's 1974 research was not considered the foundational study for the term. Two Rand Corporation evaluation studies were credited with the conceptualization of the term "teacher efficacy" (Ashton, 1984; Dembo & Gibson, 1985). The Rand evaluation studies, each conducted in the late 1970's, introduced teacher efficacy as a powerful characteristic that deserves consideration in educational research. More importantly, both studies identified teacher efficacy as an attribute that has a direct impact on student progress, providing credibility to future exploration of the concept.

Armor et al. (1976) conducted a study that measured progress in the third year of Los Angeles Unified School District's participation in the School Preferred Reading Program. In this study, the researchers collected data on a host of teacher attributes including "race and ethnicity, college attended, undergraduate major, whether any graduate training was received, amount of college instruction in reading, and teaching experience" (p. 23). Upon examination, the researchers stated that they found "no evidence of a relationship between any of these characteristics and students' reading achievement" (p. 23). However, the researchers went on to explain that they measured teacher efficacy—"the extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to produce an effect on the learning of students" (p. 23)—as it pertained to their work with minority students in this school district. The result? Armor et al. (1976) explained, "The more efficacious the teachers felt, the more their students advanced in reading achievement" (p. 23). The significance of this study is twofold. First, the researchers

refuted common assumptions about a host of teacher attributes that have been presumed to have had a positive impact on student progress, rendering them as insignificant. More importantly, the researchers identified teacher efficacy, a concept still in its infancy, as a major factor in promoting student achievement.

Berman et al. (1976) explored the concept of teacher efficacy as it was related to two important initiatives form the 1950's and 60's, specifically the National Defense Education Act (NDEA) of 1958 and the Elementary and Secondary Education (ESEA) act of 1965. Berman et al. (1977) explained that the "NDEA sought to stimulate curriculum development in subjects such as science" (p. 21) that were directly related to national interests of the time. The ESEA, according to Berman et al. (1977), included a focus on "large-scale federal support for special education for disadvantaged and for bilingual education, encouragement of innovations in the public schools, and grants to strengthen state departments of education" (p. 21). In exploring teacher attributes, efficacy once again was identified as a "powerful explanatory variable" (p. 73). Berman et al. (1977) explained that teacher efficacy "had major positive effects on the percentage of project goals achieved, improved student performance, teacher change, and continuation of project methods and materials" (p. 73). As a result of the Rand findings, teacher efficacy was established as a significant factor in promoting student achievement.

Bandura's Theory of Self-Efficacy and Social Learning Theory

When exploring the concept of teacher efficacy, numerous researchers cited Bandura's social learning theory as a foundational component of the construct (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy 2000; Guskey, 1987; Guskey & Passaro, 1994;

McGuigan & Hoy, 2006; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990). Bandura (1977) explained that self-efficacy expectations can determine the type of behavior that is employed, the degree of effort that will be exerted, and the subsequent duration of this effort in the face of adversity. As such, this theory provided a critical lens from which to view construct that is teacher efficacy, particularly as it relates to current urban middle school educators.

Bandura (1977) compartmentalized efficacy into two distinct categories: outcome expectancy and efficacy expectancy. Bandura (1977) defined an "outcome expectancy" (p. 193) as a person's belief that a course of action will produce specific outcomes. In applying this theory to an urban middle school setting, this would be defined as a teacher's internal belief that they can promote academic progress with their students. Expanding upon this notion, Bandura (1977) introduced an efficacy expectation as "the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes" (p. 193). Harkening back to the urban middle school teacher construct, the efficacy expectation can be described as the teacher's confidence that they can execute the actions required to produce the desired outcome. Bandura (1977) differentiated between these two expectations, noting that a person can have a strong belief that a particular action will produce an outcome. However, if that same person had a lowered sense of self-efficacy in carrying out the necessary steps to achieve this action, their behavior will not be altered to align with that course of action.

Equally significant to Bandura's categorization of efficacy as a construct was its relationship to the immediate environment as a potential influence. Bandura (1977) wrote, "Expectations of personal efficacy do not operate as dispositional determinants independently of contextual factors" (p. 203). Thus, an educator's personal expectations

of efficacy cannot be separated from the environmental factors that impact it. Whether or not an urban middle school teacher believed that they are able to promote progress with their students was of no significance if the context of their environment was not granted the same analysis. Bandura (1977) continued, "Some situations require greater skill and more arduous performances and carry higher risk of negative consequences than do others" (p. 203). This study positioned middle school as a context that required a significantly greater performance on the part of the educator, particularly in considering the previous and forthcoming referenced literature that outlined the complex student attributes at this time period along with the accountability mandates that add additional responsibilities. The hope was that this study added value to existing literature by exploring both the teacher's sense of efficacy as well as two potential mitigating factors that can influence this sense of efficacy.

Bandura (1989) described a reciprocal relationship between one's self-efficacy beliefs and the context of their surrounding environment. Within this relationship between internal belief and surrounding context, a type of human agency develops. Bandura (2000) explained, "people are party the products of their environments, but by selecting, creating, and transforming their environmental circumstances, they are producers of environments as well" (p. 75). However, Bandura (2000) also noted that in many circumstances, "people do not have direct control over social conditions and institutional practices that affect their lives" (p. 75). This study sought to explore those instances where actors do not feel capable of establishing their surrounding environments. I posited that while urban middle school teachers may have had some control over what happened in the designated time span that a typical school period

encapsulates, they have little control over students' home lives, curriculum, spaces for authentic caring, and initiatives that are born from the macro level. Bandura (1989) explained that people that "have a high sense of efficacy visualize success scenarios that provide positive guides for performance" (p. 1176). He later continued, "Those who judge themselves as inefficacious are more inclined to visualize failure scenarios that undermine performance by dwelling on how things will go wrong" (p. 1176). Upon determining how efficacious teachers are in this particular urban district, the focus of this study then shifted to the environmental influence efficacy. The exploration of the urban middle school educators' environment through qualitative inquiry identified the influence of the significant variables, referenced earlier in this literature review, which had the potential to impact teacher efficacy.

In referencing Bandura's social learning theory, it was more than plausible to posit that an urban middle school teacher may have strong convictions in regard to a particular course of action, but may feel as though they are unable to carry out the necessary steps in executing this action due to circumstances in their environment. As a result, the educator's pedagogy will not be adjusted if their sense of self-efficacy was lowered by surrounding variables that can impact their confidence in carrying out the actions required to elicit an effective outcome. This theory called into question the potential variables that can influence an urban middle school teacher's capacity and conviction in attempting to promote academic progress. Of particular interest were the dual responsibilities of meeting student needs at this critical juncture of their educational lives and accountability requirements. Bandura's self-expectancy spoke directly to the quantitative analysis portion of this study, one which characterized middle school

teacher's sense of efficacy in an urban middle school district through a comparative analysis of categorical and continuous data. The subsequent qualitative measure intended to inform the initial statistical analysis, particularly in terms of the two variables that have been referenced by urban middle school educators on a daily basis. Therefore, this study employed social cognitive theory as a means of providing a comprehensive interpretation of teacher efficacy in a contemporary urban middle school environment.

Teacher Efficacy Gaps in Literature

The conducted literature review identified a number of gaps, many of which positioned this study as a valuable contribution to educational literature at large. Middle school teachers and educators' sense of self-efficacy, concepts that serve as the cornerstone components of this study, seemed underrepresented in the most recent educational literature over the past decade. Teachers' sense of self-efficacy, along with the middle school vision outlined prior to the crush of accountability, seemed to have fallen by the educational research wayside during the current high stakes testing environment. Most recent middle school studies focused around STEM initiatives (e.g. Calabrese Barton, Tan, & Rivet, 2008; Hill, 2007; Wang & Goldschmidt, 2003; Zvoch & Stevens, 2006). Other recent studies centered on student perspectives in a middle school environment (e.g. Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Zvoch & Stevens, 2006). Studies with regard to efficacy have started to trend away from self-efficacy and towards collective agency, perhaps a product of teachers searching for a proxy type of agency in an atmosphere which is not conducive to self-efficacy (Bandura, 2000). It is my contention that teachers' sense of self-efficacy in today's accountability environment was all the

more important, particularly at the middle school level where the responsibilities of teaching are so complex given the dynamic nature of adolescent students.

Proposed calls for further research, shortly after the completion of the two Rand studies (Armor et al., 1976; Berman et al., 1976), which established teachers' sense of self-efficacy as having a direct correlation with student achievement, have seemed to gone unnoticed. Many of the following calls for further research were quite dated, however, their recommendations seemed to be relatively unanswered when exploring more current research. Guskey (1987) referenced Ashton (1984) in explaining that despite the fact that "teacher efficacy is likely to be dependent upon certain context variables, few investigations have sought to determine the nature of these variables or their precise effects on measures of teacher efficacy" (p. 42). Subsequent studies measured particular variables, including the presence of a collaborative environment, student engagement, teaching subject, and personal stimulation (Bandura, 1997; Raudenbush, Rowen, & Cheong, 1992) as potential influences on teacher self-efficacy. Others have explored the concept of collective efficacy (Hoy, Tarter, & Hoy, 2006; Ware & Kitsantas, 2007). Yet, few (if any) have focused on accountability measures and adolescent student needs as potential variables on a teacher's sense of efficacy. As such, this study aimed to fill this void in the existing literature, exploring both traditional as well as unchartered variables that could potentially impact a teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Other suggestions for further research called for a characterization of a teacher's sense of self-efficacy through the creation of an instrument that could capture the interaction between categorical and continuous data. Dembo and Gibson (1985)

explained, “Studies should further validate and refine instruments to measure teacher efficacy and investigate the relationships between teacher characteristics (i.e., gender, years of teaching experience, grade levels, and personal attributes) and sense of efficacy” (p. 182). Garnering categorical information from participants during the initial quantitative portion of this study sought to accomplish just that. The interaction of categorical and continuous data aimed to fulfill Dembo and Gibson’s (1985) call for further research in determining the characteristics that contribute to a teacher’s sense of self-efficacy. The qualitative study explored how accountability measures and the holistic needs of adolescent students influence educators’ sense of self-efficacy. The analysis of categorical and continuous data provided intriguing data in terms of how teacher characteristics aligned with their sense of efficacy. The subsequent, qualitative follow up was used to inform established trends on the quantitative piece.

The final identified gaps in this literature review stem from a study conducted in 1991 by Carol Midgley. Midgley (1991), in comparing elementary and junior high school teachers’, hypothesized that elementary teachers’ would have a greater sense of self-efficacy. Midgley (1991) noted that while her hypothesis was proven correct, she was “surprised at the magnitude of the differences” (p. 10) between elementary and junior high school teachers. In her concluding remarks, Midgley (1991) offered that early adolescence is often interpreted as a challenging and unproductive moment of life. She questions whether this label has penetrated teachers’ sense of conviction and confidence. As such, Midgley (1991) asked, “Is there something about an institution for young adolescents that allows these stereotypes to flourish and become the dominant ethos?” (p. 13). Midgley’s (1991) words speak directly to the foundation of this study,

one which seeks to explore the middle grades construct as a potential influence on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Midgley (1991) concluded by stating, "We believe an important first step is to talk with middle school and junior high teachers and hear their interpretations and explanations" (p. 13). Despite these dated calls for further research, existing studies that explore the concept of teacher efficacy seem to be few and far between. This study will serve as the vehicle in providing access to the middle school teacher voice that seems to be absent in past and present literature with regard to the concept of urban middle school teacher's sense of self-efficacy, particularly as it relates to the set forth variables presented in this literature review.

The Middle School

Introduction to the Middle School

As Christopher C. Weiss and Lindsay Kipnes explained in their 2006 middle school composition study, "The history of efforts in the United States to develop structures of schooling for the 'middle grades'—the span from fifth grade through eighth grade—is one of continual tinkering and persistent dissatisfaction" (p. 239). Since the concept's inception at the turn of the twentieth century, the middle school conundrum has plagued the United States educational system. Despite the warnings set forth by the Carnegie Council at the end of the twentieth century, middle school continues to be identified as a problematic function of today's public schooling (Conklin, 2008). Conklin (2008) referenced Wallis' (2005) *Time* magazine article titled "Is Middle School Bad for Kids?" as means of critiquing the concept, while simultaneously stressing the importance of teachers' role in this entity. In critiquing the construct, Wallis (2005) wrote that

middle school is “the place where kids lose their way academically and socially--in many cases never to resurface” (p. 166). Wallis (2005) expanded on this notion, explaining, “Instead of warm incubators of independence and judgment, (middle schools) became impersonal, oppressive institutions” (p. 166). When such rhetoric is presented in the media around a particular aspect of American education, it is only natural to question why such a transgression has occurred. It is my contention that urban middle school teachers were the premier source for beginning to develop answers to this dilemma.

More recently, the documentary *Middle School Moment* (Robertson, 2012), a product of *Frontline’s Dropout Nation* community engagement campaign, revitalized the theory that middle school is the critical moment in determining student mortality in high school (Balfanz, Herzog, & Mac Iver, 2007; Briggs, 1920; Koos, 1920). Robert Balfanz, featured as a lead educational researcher in the film, identified middle school as the key moment in which students begin a path towards dropping out of high school. The documentary explains that Balfanz and his team garnered data from dozens of high poverty schools, exploring forty different variables which could potentially provide a statistical analysis in explaining the dropout phenomenon. Will Lyman, the narrator of the documentary, explained that Balfanz’s analysis “showed that if a 6th grade child in a high-poverty school attends school less than 80 percent of the time, or fails math or English, or receives an unsatisfactory behavior grade in a core course, that absent effective intervention, there is a 75 percent chance that they will drop out of high school” (Robertson, 2012). In the documentary, Balfanz targeted three particular areas of concern centered in the acronym ABC: attendance, behavior, and course performance. The documentary, like Conklin’s (2008) study, positions teachers as a significant factor

in a middle school setting. The middle school featured in the film, Middle School 244 in the Bronx, New York, demonstrates a holistic approach to its middle school program. In addition to their content responsibilities, teachers work in teams comprised of other teachers, administrators, and counselors, in monitoring Balfanz's ABC's. These teams of educators were able meet with students in a holistic capacity, ensuring that students' social and emotional needs (in addition to their academic needs) are being met on a consistent basis. The program, admirable in its focus, raised questions as to why this holistic approach is not prominent in all middle schools across America.

The Junior High School: The Genesis of Today's Middle School

In 1920 Leonard V. Koos, professor of secondary education at the University of Minnesota, and Thomas H. Briggs, professor of education at Columbia University, each explored the initial genesis of the junior high school movement in separate publications titled, *The Junior High School*. Both Koos (1920) and Briggs (1920) appear to argue in favor of this newfound, transitional entity between elementary and secondary education. Their works analyzed existing data and literature, highlighting the junior high school's potential, while exploring aspects that have been (or could be) beneficial to the educational process of the time. As such, these works served as seminal texts of this literature review when exploring the genesis of the middle grades concept. They provided a foundation from which an understanding of the middle school model's origins could then aid in analysis of today's current middle school literature.

Henry Suzzallo (Briggs, 1920), who wrote the foreword to Koos' publication, explained that one must acknowledge the "multiple functions of the public school

system" (p. v) before exploring the adjustments that a concept like the junior high school would deliver. Suzzallo (Briggs, 1920) explained that an analysis of any aspect of education often pinpoints the most pressing educational area in need of improvement of the time, highlighting the significance of a reorganizational shift to a middle school experience in the early twentieth century. He continued to explain that exploration of the junior high school movement, as Koos presents in this particular work, is "one of the most significant views of current educational thought and practice" (p. vi). In these decisive works, both Koos (1920) and Briggs (1920) exposed significant hopes and challenges for consideration during the initial stages of today's middle school concept, often echoing each other's sentiments and cited literature in doing so.

In the opening pages of the initial text, Koos (1920) outlined significant forces that are responsible for prompting an educational reorganization in America. The particular concepts that are set forth seem to build upon one another in promoting the potential of a junior high school concept. Initially, he explained that advocates of junior high school feel that American students' entrance into secondary education (particularly when compared to children in the European school system) is far too delayed. According to Koos (1920), statistics, the second driving force behind the consideration of a junior high school, demonstrated that pupil mortality began at the start of sixth grade and continued into the early years of high school during this particular time period. Koos (1920) connected these two forces, ultimately linking the delayed entry into secondary schooling to the significant mortality (in today's terms, "drop out") rate in the sixth grade. This concerning dropout data seemed to highlight significant gaps in terms of equity in U.S. education. Koos (1920) went on to note that "upon the heels of these

disconcerting data" (p. 2), facts about students' interests and needs, both in and out of school, began to surface as an explanation as to why they were not completing their schooling at the high school level. These interests, harkening back to earlier references to the challenging dynamic that is the time period of adolescence, were beginning to emerge as potential contributors to students' success or failure in America's educational institutions.

Suddenly, middle school-aged students were not viewed as monolithic entity, but rather a diverse body with varying interests and needs. As Koos (1920) referenced in his early chapters, the school system was forced to examine a potential diversification of its structure in order to harvest these unique interests, while simultaneously servicing the varying needs of the student body. Koos (1920) highlighted a final force behind the movement towards a middle grades concept, calling it perhaps that most influential of all that are referenced in the text:

> The increasing appreciation of the fact that during the later years of the common school most children are undergoing changes in nature of a rapid approach to adulthood, changes which make unsuited for them many of the features of (the conventional) school. Among these incompatible features are the complete disciplinary dominance of the one-teacher regimen and the repetition and extension of the materials and methods of the 'common branches' at a time when the child needs to be engaged by new interests. (pp. 2-3)

This statement captured the essence behind the purpose of junior high schools of yesteryear and middle schools of today. Koos' (1920) outline of the potential that a transitional entity between elementary and secondary schooling offers served as guiding

force for this study. Forthcoming literature will demonstrate a middle grades evolution from the early twentieth century to its end. After decades where the junior high school model strayed from its original purpose noted above, the end of the century brought a renewed focus to a middle grades, echoing the notion that the entity's purpose was to meet the significant changes outlined during its inception.

Like Koos, Briggs (1920) conveyed the importance of providing support for the unique and challenging time period that is adolescence. Briggs (1920), in noting critics convictions in regard to the existing format, noted, "There is inadequate provision for personal guidance or direction-social, educational, and vocational—either in the elementary or in the high school" (p. 19). Briggs (1920) noted that the junior high school concept, although in its infancy, would better serve the individual differences of adolescents of the time, painted the concept as a blank canvas, one that offers the opportunity "to try new programs that promise advantages to boys and girls of early adolescence" (p. 20). Briggs (1920) suggested that advocates view the undefined composition of a junior high school concept as ripe with potential for molding an atmosphere conducive to servicing the complex needs of middle grade-aged students. This early literature with regard to meeting the unique needs of adolescent students is a critical factor for this study, as it (once again) brings the middle school concept's initial purpose to light. This intermediate entity was initially created to provide an individualized, supportive program for middle grade students, calling into question whether today's urban middle schools function in this manner.

Koos (1920) explained that educational leaders embarked on reform towards a junior high school model as early as 1893.

The influential Report of the Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies (1893) recommended that students be exposed to a variety of subjects, including those which were once reserved for high school, at much earlier moment in their schooling. The Committee asserts that "the seventh grade, rather than the ninth, is the natural turning point in the child's life, as the age of adolescence demands new methods and wiser direction" (The committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies, 1893, as cited in Koos, 1920, p. 6). As a result of their assertion, the committee argued that the transition from elementary to high school "might be made more natural and easy by changing gradually from the one-teacher regimen to the system of special teachers, thus avoiding the violent shock now commonly felt on entering high school" (The Committee of Ten on Secondary School Studies, 1893, as cited in Koos, 1920, p. 6). Although it may be impossible to pinpoint the exact turning point of a child's journey into adolescence, the committee's declaration established the groundwork for the future of the middle school concept. In referencing the complex time that is adolescence, The Committee of Ten 1893 report initiated the middle school movement by accurately identifying the deficiencies that the existing, two-tiered, elementary to high school system had in supporting such changes. Once again, it was important to consider this early vision in evaluating whether or not our middle grades schools of today, particularly in terms of the teachers attempting to promote progress, were meeting the needs of students as they reach this adolescent turning point. More importantly, the structure of middle schools of today offers an avenue of exploration in terms of whether or not it serves as an influence on teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Briggs explores the origins of the concept from a slightly different perspective. Briggs (1920) explained that upon entering the World War, the United States slowed any progressive movements in education. Plans for reorganization or anything considered "outside the box" were put on hold, halted by the circumstances of the time. Yet, Briggs (1920) explained that while actions were brought to a standstill, progressive planning was not. The junior high school movement had commenced, but many were hesitant to claim this newfound identity of a transitional entity between elementary and high school. In fact, Briggs (1920) explained that it was often difficult to garner accurate survey data because many institutions at the time were not sure if their school program actually constituted the label of a "junior high school." Other instances revealed that schools were hesitant to admit that the reorganizational label that accompanied such a movement applied to their school. Briggs (1920) cited instances where school districts denied having junior high schools in a particular year, only to admit to having multiple junior high entities the very next year. The middle grades reform was underway, but ambiguity seemed to be widespread in terms of what actually constituted a junior high school. In his work, Briggs (1920) outlined an array of definitions, offered by various sources, in attempting to capture the indistinctness of the junior high concept in its early years. Briggs (1920) referenced *The New International Dictionary's* definition of the junior high school as:

> A school organization intermediate between the grammar school and the high school, formed by a union of the upper grades of the grammar school usually with one, and occasionally with two, grades of the high school, making a separate group and aiming to provide for individual differences among students and also to

facilitate transfer from the grammar school to the high school, especially by allowing a limited amount of election of studies and by employing departmental teachers. (The New International Dictionary, as cited by Briggs 1920, p. 51).

Briggs (1920), in addition to other publications, cited The North Central Association of 1918's definition of a middle school:

> The junior high school shall normally include the 7th, 8th, and 9th years of public-school work. The junior-high-school organization and administration shall realize the following aims and purposes:
>
> 1. To continue through its instructional program the aims of public education in a democracy.
> 2. To reduce to the minimum the elimination of pupils by offering types of work best suited to their interests, needs, and capacities
> 3. To give the pupil an opportunity under systematic educational guidance to discover his dominant interests, capacities, and limitations with reference to his future vocational activities or the continuance of his education in higher schools.
> 4. To economize time through such organization and administration of subjects and courses both for those who will continue their education in higher schools and for those who will enter immediately into life's activities. (p. 51)

Each of the set forth definitions referenced a type of individualized program for students, one that can be tailored to their interests or needs during the transitional time period that is adolescence. Koos (1920) echoed the holistic essence present in each of these definitions, using the tailored potential of the departmentalized junior high school entity to outline "peculiar functions" (p. 81). These "peculiar functions" were characteristics that a middle school concept, unlike the existing conventional school model, was capable of delivering support to adolescents as they experience tremendous

and complex changes. Koos (1920) recognized an "absence of unquestionable evidence" (p. 81) behind the claim that junior high schools are able to retain pupils better than conventional schools. However, with the concept still in its infancy, Koos outlined nine peculiar functions of the junior high school as a means of highlighting the entity's potential to curb the dropout rate of the time. He recognized that "they are not discrete purposes, but are, instead, much intervolved" (p. 83). Koos (1920) continued, "Realizing one of them will often mean partially realizing several others" (p. 83). One of these particular functions stated, "The junior high school can also better recognize than can the traditional plan the important changes taking place in the child's nature at adolescence" (pp. 82-83). In considering this holistic responsibility of the entity, along with the peculiar, interwoven characteristics, Koos (1920) explained that advocates argued that the unique composition of the junior high concept would elicit a confidence that a junior high school model can better service America's adolescent students than the traditional model. How present day middle grades schools are carrying out Koos' early vision remains open for exploration, particularly in terms of whether or not it serves as an influence (positive or negative) on teachers sense of self-efficacy.

Additional literature from the early twentieth century echoed the holistic notion of the junior high school of supporting students through the challenges of being a student during adolescence. Franks (1922), in reporting about a school's switch to a junior high school format, explained that the purpose of "was to help the students to make the transfer from the grammar grades to the difficult first year of high school" (p. 121). Judd (1915), in advocating for a middle grades concept between elementary and highs school, noted, "The eight-and-four plan is a painful reminder of the fact that the common school

of America was modeled on the limited, undemocratic people's school of Europe" (p. 28). He continued, "Let us divide only where changing development in a child's mind call for change in method" (pp. 28-29). Finally, Rorem (1920), in speaking to the heart of this particular study, stated:

> The new name given to this school gives an opportunity to lead the children of the three Junior High years away from the formal, rote, review-chaos required by over-rigid pedagogues into a natural, vivacious understanding of their relation to the outside world, to the information they find in their books, and to the teachers with whom they study. (pp. 11-12)

Rorem's (1920) optimism from long ago calls into question the function of present day, urban middle schools. This study sought to find out if these schools, born from a concept that intends to provide the ultimate support for its complex student body, have reverted to the narrowed pedagogical practices that the concept was actually created to combat and eliminate. If so, this study called into question whether these narrowed pedagogical practices serve as an inhibiting influence on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Rorem's (1920) words are crucial in that they captured not only the thinking of education reform in the early twentieth century, but perhaps serve as cause for change in today's middle school climate. Are present day middle school teachers still bound by "over rigid pedagogues" or are they able to exercise autonomy and professionalism in providing a "vivacious understanding of (students') relation to the outside world" (Rorem, 1920, p. 11-12)? These questions will influence the qualitative line of questioning for each of the two established focus groups.

Briggs (1920) closed his text with an optimistic outlook on the middle school concept. His words, powerful and positive, captured the importance of an effective intermediate school, one which can bridge the gap between elementary and secondary schooling through its capabilities of providing support for its adolescent students. His assertion provided an ideal understanding for the basis for why middle grades schools were created. More importantly, they served as a stark reminder of the purpose behind present day middle grades education, a concept that seems to have been lost in the years following the accountability and standardized testing movement. Briggs (1920) stated:

> There is a demand for purposes so clear and so cogent that they will result in new curricula, new courses of study, new methods of teaching, and new social relationships—in short, in a new spirit which will make the intermediate years not only worthwhile in themselves, but also an intelligent inspiration for every child to continue as long as profitable the education for which he is by inheritance best fitted. In its essence the junior high school is a device of democracy whereby nurture may cooperate with nature to secure the best results possible for each individual adolescent as well as society at large. (p. 327)

This study explored whether urban middle school teachers felt as though they had the capacity and ability to deliver such a personalized education. Whether or not middle school educators feel that they are able to provide an education that is suitable for the each student, one where students' nature is nurtured in respective classrooms, rested at the heart of the study. The transition from the junior high school to the middle school model served as the next logical step for this exploration.

The Junior High School Becomes the Middle School

The early growing pains and ultimate dissatisfaction with the junior high model ultimately gave way to a newfound concept during the 1950's and 60's—the middle school (Callaway, 1973). The middle school inception seemed to move at a furious pace during the decade, with many school districts abandoning the "junior high school" model in favor of this newfound, holistic concept. Gatewood (1971) wrote, "The national emergence of the middle school from less than a hundred to over 2000 in less than ten years has been one of the most spectacular phenomena of recent educational history" (p. 12). The tenants of the new middle school concept during the middle of the century were eerily familiar to the original purpose of the junior high school model developed decades earlier. Dooley and Scullen (1972) wrote, "The true middle school stands in an enviable position to offer unique services to the community it serves" (p. 14). It seemed as though the junior high school became little more than a stopping ground between elementary education and secondary education. Dooley and Scullen (1972) explained, "A combination of factors—e.g., a highly flexible curriculum, enlightened instruction, and malleable school population—allow this level of public instruction to develop as a microcosm of its larger society" (p. 14). The middle school, in a sense, returned to its roots as a holistic entity that could help any and all students during the complex time that is adolescence. However, this movement was not without its detractors.

Gatewood (1971) discussed four major findings of middle school research of the time, first explaining, "Middle schools are neither different from nor an improvement over existing junior high schools, making choice of one over another virtually impossible" (p. 12). Gatewood (1971) also explained that the vast number of middle

schools were created for reasons that were more administrative than educationally supportive. He argued that overcrowded classrooms, racial segregation, and plant utilization were greater factors in the establishment of the middle school entity than providing holistic education for middle grade students. Gatewood (1971) also explained that research is ambiguous in determining which grades should constitute the middle school years, an aspect that the original junior high school model also struggled with. Finally, and perhaps most significantly, Gatewood (1971) explained, "The programs of study and teaching practices of many middle schools have not fulfilled very successfully the ideals expressed in the middle school concept" (p.13). He continued, "Instead, middle school schools have been guilty of many of the same dysfunctional practices that have long plagued junior high schools" (p. 13). This same rhetoric has been expressed in regards to current middle schools of today, questioning whether the entity, and the teachers that comprise them, are able to provide the holistic experience that was originally intended for such a model.

The middle school concept continued to struggle as it was firmly established as part of the educational landscape over the later part of the century. Walter and Fanslow (1981) stated, "The lack of properly prepared teachers has been a major cause of the failure of the middle school to miss some of its original goals, such as providing youth with personal-individualized instruction and an exploratory curriculum" (p. 23). Henson (1986) noted, "The American middle school is one of the most misunderstood institutions in our society" (p. 345). Yet, despite the problems that the middle school concept encountered over its early inception, Henson offered an optimistic outlook with regard to the potential behind such a model. He stated, "It is also one of the most interesting and

challenging concepts, with unlimited possibilities" (Henson, 1986, p. 345). Henson (1986) explained that the middle school of the time has not experienced the vast problems that that the junior high school experienced. The potential for middle school success resides in its very clear purpose, a purpose focused on "nurturing the emotional, and cognitive growth of students" (p. 347). This holistic purpose, originally referenced when the junior high school concept was established earlier in the century, served as the foundational mantra for reforming middle schools over the last decade of the twentieth century. This reform movement was spearheaded by the Carnegie Council of New York.

The Carnegie Report and a Focus on the Middle Grades

Prior to the onset of significant accountability measures at the turn of the century (which will be outlined in the forthcoming section of this literature review) the Carnegie Council on Adolescent Development released a seminal 1995 report on the state of adolescents as the United States approached the new century. The Carnegie Corporation of New York (1995) explained that the council was comprised of leaders from a host of community constituents including education, law, science, health, religion, business, the media, youth-serving agencies, and government. For over a decade, this panel dedicated their efforts in bringing to light the challenges that America's youth face during the complex time that is adolescence. Perhaps more importantly, the Carnegie Council's mission was to ensure that these challenges merited a more prominent place on the nation's agenda for action.

The report, titled *Great Transitions: Preparing Adolescents for a New Century*, is the culminating work of three seminal reports produced by the Carnegie Council, namely:

Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century (1989); *Fateful Choices: Healthy Youth for the 21st Century* (Hechinger, 1992); and *A Matter of Time: Risk and Opportunity in the Nonschool Hours* (1992). Based on the findings of these significant reports, the Carnegie Council developed six concepts that serve as the foundation for their recommendations (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995):

- The years from ten through fourteen are a crucial turning point in life's trajectory. This period, therefore, represents an optimal time for interventions to foster effective education, prevent destructive behavior, and promote enduring health practices.

- Education and health are inextricably related. Good health facilitates learning, while poor health hinders it, each with lifelong effects. Commensurately, a positive educational experience promotes the formation of good health habits, while academic failure discourages it.

- Destructive, or health-damaging, behaviors in adolescence tend to occur together, as do positive, health-promoting, behaviors.

- Many problem behaviors in adolescence have common antecedents in childhood experience. One is academic difficulty; another is the absence of strong and sustained guidance from caring adults.

- Preventive interventions are more likely to be successful if they address underlying factors that contribute to problem behaviors.

- Given the complex influences on adolescents, the essential requirements for ensuring institutions that powerfully adolescents' experiences. These pivotal institutions must begin with the family and include schools, health care institutions, a wide array of neighborhood and community organizations, and the mass media. (n.p.)

Based on the these foundational concepts, the Carnegie Corporation of New York (1995) set forth a host of findings aimed at improving support for America's adolescent youth. The Carnegie Council identified the ages of 10 to 14 as the critical years in which adolescent problems begin to surface. As such, the report made a direct recommendation to schools, stating, "To schools, the Council asks that they understand

and meet the unique developmental needs of young adolescents" (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995, n.p.), harkening back to the initial purpose of the middle grades concept which was outlined in the publications from Briggs (1920) and Koos (1920). Adding significance to their holistic request, the Carnegie Council identified remaining in school as the most significant factor in improving future economic prosperity. The findings of the 1989 Carnegie Council report, *Turning Points: Preparing Youth for the 21st Century*, prompted a middle school reorganization in the United States (Carnegie Corporation of New York, 1995, n.p.). The new middle schools would now be designed to meet the developmental challenges faced by middle grade students. The Carnegie Corporation of New York (1995) stated:

> Middle grade education, said the report, should be more intellectually challenging, in line with young adolescents new appreciation for the complexity of knowledge and ideas, and supportive of their desire for individual attention. Schools should have curricula that provide the information, skills, and motivation for adolescents to learn about themselves and their widening world. They should promote a mutual aid ethic among teachers and students, manifest in team teaching and cooperative learning. (n.p.)

The recommendations of the Carnegie Council's three seminal reports, once again, echoed educational leaders from history. Middle schools of today continue to exist, but their format does not seem to be shaped around the recommendations of these reports. As such, this structure may play a significant role in teachers' sense of efficacy. The forthcoming literature will explore the middle school ambiance of today.

Current Literature on Middle Schools in the United States

A search of various peer reviewed academic journals revealed that current research on middle schools seem to have a focus on either student perspectives (e.g. Wang & Holcombe, 2010; Xu, 2005) or specific content areas, many of which were focused on science, technology, engineering, or math (commonly referred to as STEM) (e.g. Calabrese Barton, Tan, & Rivet, 2008; Hill, 2007; Wang & Goldschmidt, 2003; Zvoch & Stevens, 2006). A search of four peer-reviewed databases produced 31 studies with the term "middle school" present in the title. Of these 31 studies, 16 were dedicated to some aspect of the STEM content areas. Other studies focused on content areas outside of STEM, including reading and writing. Studies that focused on urban middle school teachers seemed to be missing from the literature, lending credence to the assertion that the academic purpose of school drove everything, perhaps even, academic research. Even those studies that do, indeed, focused on middle school teachers as the subject of the research, there are few (if any) that specifically explored middle school teachers' sense of efficacy as a means of understanding how to improve today's middle school environments. As such, this study has the potential to fill a missing gap in urban middle school literature of today.

In one study that focused on middle school teachers specifically, Hilary Conklin (2009) conducted a study which explored the educational pathways that teachers take in becoming middle school educators. Conklin (2009) explained that "many middle school teachers are not well prepared to meet middle school students' intellectual needs" (p. 464), despite the fact that the middle school adolescent is just starting to gain higher order thinking ability that will carry them through their secondary schooling. Conklin (2009)

noted that "most middle school teachers are prepared through generalist elementary programs or subject-specific secondary programs" (p. 464). While Conklin's (2009) study ultimately found that neither elementary nor secondary education were superior or inferior to one another, it did find that pedagogical practices were a significant, influential factor in the classroom setting. However, Conklin's (2009) identification of only two major training programs (elementary or secondary) for middle school teachers was of particular concern. Middle school teacher programs, despite a recommendation from the Carnegie Corporation of New York (1995), remained non-existent in today's educational world. Considering the set forth literature that identified the unique teaching experience in a middle school setting, one has to wonder why middle school programs have not been developed to train teachers to meet the complex needs of adolescent students.

The Cassidy and Bates (2005) study referenced in chapter one of this study explored the notion of "caring" as a means of promoting student progress. Much of the qualitative interview provided students' perceptions in regards to the notion of caring in today's public schools. However, the researchers also explored administrators' and teachers' perceptions of care. In terms of the featured school in their study, Cassidy and Bates (2005) explained:

> The administrators talked most about creating the right environment and embedding care in school policies and practices. The teachers focused on building relationships with students and developing a flexible and responsive curriculum that allowed each student to succeed academically, socially, and

emotionally. Students talked about caring in relation to their own life experiences and needs—of wanting to be accepted, understood, respected, and helped. (p. 95)

Cassidy and Bates (2005) explained that the challenge for administrators and teachers is to find opportunities for care in school "in an era of competing expectations and pressures" (p. 99). Furthermore, the researchers noted, "How to balance these demands, in various educational contexts, is a topic that merits further study" (p. 99). In exploring the concept of teacher efficacy in an urban middle school environment, this study sought to do just that. It is the "balance" that Cassidy and Bates (2005) spoke of that rests at the heart of this study. In order to embark on this exploration of efficacy, it was important to investigate the Nel Noddings' caring theory as a means of continuing to define the holistic responsibility that has been identified (via literature) as the purpose of middle grades education.

Caring Theory

Nel Noddings (2005) explained in *The Challenge to Care in Schools*, "despite our determined optimism and insistent everyone-can-do-it (attitude), students complain, 'They don't care!' They suspect that we want their success for our own purposes, to advance our own records, and too often they are right" (p. 13). The question raised by Noddings (2005) was whether educational policy is shaped around authentically caring about the student as a person, or aesthetically caring about that student's academic performance. Too often, the latter concept seems to be the perceived dominant force in today's school climate. And middle school students seem keenly aware of it. Noddings (1995) made the determination between authentic caring and aesthetic caring using

student meal services as a means to explain this dynamic. Noddings (2005) questioned whether educational institutions authentically care about whether students are fed or if they aesthetically care because nourishment will help support academic progress. Noddings (2005) succinctly and effectively stated, "the academic purpose of the school drives everything" (p. 13).

In her open letter to Nel Noddings, Kress (2012) questioned whether authentic caring can exist in today's vertical composition between teachers and students, stating:

> While, undoubtedly, some horizontal relationships can and do develop despite these deeply rooted vertical structures, most teacher-student relationships will necessarily be vertical by default, since hierarchies are consistently reinforced through grading, testing, benchmarks, and promotion for students and through standards, evaluation, tenure, and promotion for faculty. (p. 56)

Kress (2012) was accurate in positing that "some horizontal relationships can and do develop despite these structures" (p. 56). A minute or two between classes, a visit to the guidance counselor's office, a one-on-one meeting with an administrator to discuss the day's events: these represent the few outlets where such a relationship can be fostered. The classroom? Here, these humanitarian horizontal moments, sadly, remained few and far between. Ever-expanding class sizes are an obvious deterrent, but allegiance to standards, data, curriculum, and prescribed modes of instruction over a focus on building genuine relationships, was a major underlying cause. For the most part, the "hierarchies" seem to rule the day in today's urban public middle schools, and their focus becomes the school's focus. Thus, Kress captured many of today's middle school teachers' plight in attempting to genuinely care about students while adhering to

mandates that must be fulfilled in order to maintain employment or gain promotion within their school system.

As Greene (1995) asked for consideration for students' outside lives in the educational experience, teachers' outside lives and responsibilities must also be considered in terms of how *they* operate in school. To deny that educational hierarchy influences teachers' ability to authentically care is to deny reality. Teachers bring mortgages, children, massive student loans, and other monetary costs of living to the teaching occupation. Parents wrestle with these very same burdens, however, their methods of fostering caring relationships with their children are not restricted by the occupational requirements bestowed upon contemporary urban middle school teachers. Therefore, even the most creative, caring, and independent of the teaching force must, at some point, conform to the rules and regulations set forth by today's educational hierarchy (Ravitch, 2010). In order to maintain employment these teachers succumb to mandates whose primary focus is on standards, grading, testing, evaluations, and benchmarks. They must see the world small because they are told to do so, when much of their daily interactions seem to ask them to view the world as big. Given these circumstances, one has to wonder if this type of authentic, holistic relationship is possible in today's urban middle school settings. And if establishing such a relationship was, indeed, possible, it was crucial to explain how educators manage to accomplish this dynamic task.

Noddings (1995) noted, "At the present time, it is obvious that our main educational purpose is not the moral one of producing caring people but a relentless—and, as it turns out, hapless—drive for academic adequacy" (p. 366). Noddings (1995)

explained that she certainly does not advocate for academic inadequacy, but rather a reordering of current educational priorities in balancing our academic and spiritual objectives. As such, Noddings (1995) called for a transformation in educational structures and organization, one that "requires a move away from ideology of control, from the mistaken notion that ironhanded accountability will ensure the outcomes we identify as desirable" (p. 368). While Noddings theory of care can be applied to almost any educational setting, it was particularly impactful given the literature presented on the importance of middle school as a construct that can holistically support students during their turbulent adolescent years. The transformation that Noddings advocates for was bound by mandates that have been levied upon educators over the past decade. Therefore, the upcoming literature will explore the genesis of accountability in United States education and its subsequent influence on teachers and their sense of self-efficacy.

Accountability and Subsequent Policy

A History of Accountability in U.S. Education

In *Subtractive Schooling*, Valenzuela (1999) described an instance where educators "misremember the past as a golden era," resulting in a deficiency label pertaining to contemporary students' failure to live up to this "misty, mythical image of their historical counterparts" (p. 66). A look into history suggested that the very same rhetoric surrounding today's standardized testing movement and subsequent student performance persisted as far back as the nineteenth century, affirming Valenzuela's mythical description of America's educational past. Accountability measures and

concerns have long been a part of American educational system (Rothstein, 1999), and the nature of their impact has grown exponentially over the past decade and a half.

Rothstein (1999) explained that the very first standardized test was administered to a group of prominent Boston, Massachusetts students, known as "brag scholars," in 1845. The results of this initial standardized test were disheartening, as these top students' performance failed to live up to expectations. As an example of their struggles, Rothstein (1999) explained that nearly half of these top students were not aware of water's expansion as it reached a frozen state. These discouraging results led to Massachusetts secretary of public instruction, Horace Mann's conclusion that schools had ignored higher order thinking skills in favor of rout memorization (Rothstein, 1999). The results from this early standardized test, one in which a handful of select students were tested, suddenly began to shape instructional and pedagogical practices in education. As a result, the groundwork for standardized testing's influence in education had been established, a foundation that would be expanded upon over the coming years.

Reform in the U.S. education system is often born from a functionalist perspective. Feinberg and Soltis (2009) explained, "Much of educational reform has been built on the functionalist view that schools serve to help people adapt to the changing life of modern society" (p. 20). Rothstein (1999) outlined a host of such societal concerns in regards to public education over the course of the twentieth century. The early decades of the century were filled with public concern over literacy, bilingual education, and workforce preparedness, aspects that are referenced in today's public education failure rhetoric (Rothstein, 1999). Such concerns led to the abandonment of phonics as a means of promoting improved literacy throughout the country (Rothstein,

1999). Student failure in public schools was viewed as unacceptable given a host of mandates that were established at the turn of the twentieth century, measures which included age groupings, the establishment of both a minimum entry and exit age (Resnick, 1981). Failure that resulted in grade retention was particularly of concern as it "came to mean dropping out of step with one's age group" (Resnick, 1981, p. 542). In addition, such failure suggested ineffectiveness on the part of the school, curriculum, and the instructional procedures that resulted in the breakdown in the first place (Resnick, 1981).

Concern over public schooling stretched from the early decades to the 1960's, 70's, and 80's. Phonics, which had been eradicated as an ineffective literacy practice, suddenly became the answer to the country's literacy dilemma (Rothstein, 1999). Rhetoric with regard to America's failing public schools continued to persist, with private schools being hoisted as a potential solution to the country's educational quandary.

Resnick (1981) charged applied historians with the task of examining past policy practices to better inform our future policy decisions. However, Resnick (1981) explained that educational policy environment has not often been reflective in nature. Resnick (1981) wrote, "Attention is more often given to present matters than it is to the direction of past development and efforts to learn from past experience" (p. 539). As a result of this neglect, "issues are often poorly formulated, current definitions of policy issues are allowed to delimit boundaries for discussion, and future development appears either over-determined or unfathomable" (Resnick, 1981, p. 539). Resnick's words, crafted over two decades ago, provided a pertinent segue to accountability measures over the past decade that have significance to this study's exploration of teachers sense of self-

efficacy. The accountability measures and subsequent policy established at the turn of the century have had a significant influence on districts and schools, but more importantly, on the way in which teachers perform on a daily basis. This influence was particularly of note when considering contemporary urban middle school educator's sense of efficacy, or their confidence or conviction in accomplishing their set forth objectives of promoting progress in their students.

No Child Left Behind

Leithwood, Edge, and Jantzi (1999) explained, "Greater accountability sometimes has been advocated for schools and school systems simply as a means of demonstrating to taxpayers that they are getting reasonable value for their educational dollar" (p. 9). On January 8, 2002, President Bush signed the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001, an amendment to the Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965. The act gives the federal government unmatched regulatory control over school districts, forcing states away from improvement based systems to more punitive driven approaches (Darling-Hammond, 2007). The requirements and parameters of this law have forever changed the landscape of education in the United States, levying unprecedented accountability benchmarks on educational institutions throughout the country. As a result of this legislation, a number of states were forced to adopt new standardized testing and accountability standards, subsequently creating serious implications for all educators across the country, for a number of related reasons (Linn, Baker, & Betebenner, 2002).

Linn, Baker, & Betebenner (2002) described one of these implications as follows:

NCLB specifies that states must develop AYP objectives consistent with the following requirements in the law:

> 1. States must develop AYP statewide measurable objectives for improved achievement by all students and for specific groups: Economically disadvantaged students, students from major racial and ethnic groups, students with disabilities, and students with limited English proficiency.
>
> 2. The objectives must be set with the goal of having all students at the proficient level or above within 12 years (i.e., by the end of the 2013-2014 school year).
>
> 3. AYP must be based primarily on state assessments, but must also include one additional academic indicator.
>
> 4. The AYP objectives must be assessed at the school level. Schools that have failed to meet their AYP objective for 2 consecutive years will be identified for improvement.
> 5. School AYP results must be reported separately for each group of students identified above so that it can be determined whether each student group met the AYP objective.
>
> 6. At least 95% of each group must participate in state assessments.
>
> 7. States may aggregate up to 3 years of data in making AYP determinations. (p. 4)

Linn et al. (2002) explained that "NCLB relies on assessment and accountability requirements as a major mechanism for bringing out desired improvements in student achievement" (p. 15). While the tenants of NCLB can seem commendable when taken at face value, the law has caused significant challenges for states, districts, and schools throughout the country (Linn et. al, 2002). The various forms of standardized tests across a multitude of states have led many to question validity and consistency of reported scores. To complicate matters, Lipman (2011) explained that the unrealistic expectations set forth by the law seemed to set districts, schools, teachers, and students up for failure.

As such, there are some that argue that the law is born from a neoliberal, ulterior motive that seeks to privatize public education. As Lipman (2011) stated, "The predictable failure of school districts to meet NCLB targets set the stage for corporate and state actors to move the discourse of education markets from a side role in urban education to the main event" (p. 46). The law, under the guise of ensuring an equal education for every student in America, ultimately sought to end public education as it is known, offering privatization as its solution for failing schools (Lipman, 2011).

Hursh (2007) positioned "NCLB as part of a larger shift from social democratic to neoliberal policies that has been occurring over the past several decades; a shift accompanied by both discursive and structural changes in education and society" (p. 493). In echoing Lipman's sentiments, Hursh (2007) outlined the pitfalls of the NCLB act while simultaneously identifying its beneficiaries when the law identifies districts and schools that have failed to live up to those expectations. According to Hursh (2007), NCLB's AYP ranking does not accurately reflect whether or not a school is improving. Instead, schools are held to benchmarks, independent of the school's most recent performance, which continuously increase each year. Thus, a school that has extremely low baseline data, but has experienced significant improvement over the years, can be given the label of failing due to the fact that it did not reach set forth benchmarks (Hursh, 2007). With regard to this particular study, it was important to consider this legislation as a means of influence on a teacher's sense of efficacy, or belief that they have the capacity to promote academic progress in their immediate school environment. Even those educators who question the accountability measures that sweep in and out of their

professional lives, often succumb to these set forth laws as a means of professional survival (Ravitch, 2010).

The pressure from the NCLB act seem to be even more impactful in urban school settings. Hursh (2007) explained, "Because of the pressure to raise test scores, particularly in the urban school districts, teachers are compelled to teach the skills and knowledge that will be tested, neglecting more complex aspects of the subject and, indeed, some subjects altogether" (p. 507). As such, urban educators are often forced to compromise their core values in order to meet the script set forth by bureaucratic mandates. This lack of autonomy, which will be later referenced in this literature review as a tightly coupled system, seems to be prevalent in today's urban middle school environment. From a personal standpoint, I have watched as teachers have wrestled with mandates, initiatives, and prescribed modes of instruction, all while trying to meet the complex needs of middle school adolescent students. In many instances, as a means of professional survival, the students that are in the need of the most support have been neglected.

Hursh (2007) attributed the standardized testing environment to the practice of labeling undeserving students as special education students, keeping their scores from impacting the school's accountability rating. In addition, Hursh (2007) noted teachers are often encouraged to focus their efforts in working with students that are on the cusp of proficiency, while neglecting students who are in the need of the most support. According to Hursh (2007) these students experienced such a degree of failure that they are "likely to be retained in previous grades or have become so discouraged that they quit school altogether" (p. 509). Unfortunately, both students and educational professionals

have become victims of the culpability/accountability binary. Blame often shifted from system to teacher to student, particularly when it seems as though all means of promoting potential progress have been exhausted.

Current educational research has become cognizant of this effect in establishing the term *pushout* as an alternative to the commonly accepted *dropout*. Fine (1991) highlighted this shift in thinking in examining the concept of "failure" from a lens that defines it as systemic in nature. She explained that students in jeopardy of dropping out are often characterized as deficient students operating in a just system. Yet, today's educational world has not seemed to consider that the system itself may be the deficient component in the conundrum, refusing to acknowledge the influence that standardized testing has essentially alienated this group of students. She posited that the act of dropping out, if viewed through an objective lens, is merely a student gaining control while attempting to operate in uncontrollable circumstances. Thus, the act of dropping out on behalf of the student becomes one of empowerment, not deficiency. The teacher, on the other hand, has often been left to pick up the pieces of this lost education as a result of the byproducts the NCLB act.

Often, culpability has been easily assigned to *dropouts*, however, the term *pushout* asks for consideration of systemic flaws such as a teacher's instructional practices. The byproducts of accountability mandates such as NCLB are visibly subtle, but incredibly powerful in terms of how they impact a teacher's daily actions. Teachers' instructional practices, through rankings, evaluations, and test scores, have been narrowly molded in the automation model earlier referenced by Greene (1995). Similarly, Delpit (2006) argued:

> The country's educational system has become caught in the vise of the No Child Left Behind Act, which mandates more standardized testing of children than the country has ever seen, with more and more urban school districts adopting 'teacher-proof' curricula to address low test scores, along with school consultants whose sole purpose is to police teachers' adherence to scripted lessons, mandated classroom management strategies, and strict instructional timelines that ignore the natural rhythms of teaching and learning. (p. xiiv)

Hursh (2007) advocated for a society where "teachers would not merely employ the curriculum, pedagogy, and assessments as determined by others but would become educative leaders engaged in deliberation with the community" (p. 515). As such, Hursh (2007) called into question the purpose of education. Considering this particular study, it was critical to question whether such a strict act of policy can co-exist with the intended, holistic nature of the middle school concept. As a result, this study sought to understand how middle school educators successfully or unsuccessfully negotiate these two variables and explore how this negotiation influences their sense of self-efficacy.

Race to the Top

Despite the calls for innovation and academic progress, critics of the RTT initiative have expressed concern that the plan will perpetuate (if not exacerbate) the groundwork laid by the NCLB act. Onosko (2011) stated, "President Barack Obama's Race to the Top is a plan that profoundly increases standardization, centralization, and test-based accountability in our nation's schools" (p. 1). Onosko (2011) argued that schools, principals, and teachers will be tied to standardized test scores more than ever

before, with federal funding now looming over their performance. Like the critiques of NCLB, Onosko (2011) posited that "the plan creates hostile school environments, undermines teacher-student relations, and inflicts the greater harm on students in greatest need—that is, minority students and student living in poverty" (p. 2). As with NCLB, the effects of such bureaucracy have not been limited to students. Winerip (2012) explained that the act will rate "teachers and principals by their students' scores on state tests; using those ratings to dismiss teachers with low scores and to pay bonuses to high scorers; and reducing local control of education" (n.p.). This public discourse and critique is particularly significant to this study, as with the NCLB act, it serves as a potentially significant influence on urban middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Teacher Impact of Accountability Measures

The United States' most recent federal initiative, Race to the Top (RTT) was established by President Barack Obama as part of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). RTT intended to support innovative strategies that will "lead to improved results for students, long-term gains in school and school system capacity, and increased productivity and effectiveness" (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 2). The Race to the Top Fund offers $4.35 billion in competitive grants designed to reward States that demonstrate innovative strategies, narrow achievement gaps, improve graduation rates, and advance college and career preparedness (U.S. Department of Education, 2009). In addition, States are required to implement effective plans geared towards four educational reform areas:

- Adopting standard and assessments that prepare students to succeed in college and the workplace and to compete in the global economy;

- Building data systems that measure student growth and success, and inform teachers and principals about how they can improve instruction;
- Recruiting, developing, rewarding, and retaining effective teachers and principals, especially where they are needed most; and
- Turning around our lowest-achieving schools. (U.S. Department of Education, 2009, p. 2)

Carnoy and Loeb (2002) named standardized testing and the public accountability as American educational traditions, explaining that the combination of the two "seems to be changing what schools do and how they do it" (p. 305). While researchers have found that accountability measures improve scores for all students (Carnoy & Loeb, 2002; Hanushek & Raymond, 2004), others highlight the unintended damaging consequences that accompany such measures (Darling-Hammond, 2007; Linn, 2000).

Darling-Hammond (2007) explained that these consequences include a narrowed curriculum, inadequate assessment of ELL and special needs students, and the exclusion of low-performing students from schools. In addition, Darling-Hammond (2007) explained that the policy fails to resolve inadequacies between poor and wealthy students, particularly in terms of their exposure to resources and highly qualified teaching staffs. While personal experience suggests that Darling-Hammond is accurate in her identification of the negative consequences born from such policy, missing is the influence that this policy has had on teachers and their sense of self-efficacy. Accountability measures such as NCLB and RTTT have created a results-driven environment, where a host of initiatives dedicated to raising test scores have dominated the agendas of present-day, urban middle school environments. The pedagogy that is born from such initiatives seem to echo Greene's (1995) aforementioned sentiments

about automating the teacher profession, stripping away personal viewpoints, autonomy, and the interpersonal component required to elicit genuine care in an educational setting.

Ohanian (2009), a staunch opponent of such measures, positioned accountability mandates as an assault on teacher professionalism. Ohanian (2009) wrote, "The tragic legacy of the data worship spawned by No Child Left Behind is that with no protection from their unions or their professional organizations, veteran teacher lose sight of what professionalism was, and new teachers never know it" (p. 375). Referencing a forum where teachers speak freely about the impact of accountability on their daily practice, Ohanian outlined the narrowed pedagogical practices that have resulted from such mandates through stories of dedicated teachers who are frustrated by the process. She explained, "I hear from teachers who are grieving in the knowledge that doing what you're told is not the same as doing what you can. Or should" (Ohanian, 2009, p. 375). Ohanian (2009) posited that teachers in today's heavy accountability environment are not treated as professionals. She explained that professional teachers should not be expected to follow a script, one which instructs them on what type of environment to create in their classroom, what books can be read, and what the curriculum should look like for the "children in their care" (Ohanian, 2009, p. 375).

This narrowed, prescriptive automation of the teaching profession described by Ohanian (2009), may have an influence on the conundrum presented in today's middle schools. Teachers must decide between what they are instructed to do as opposed to what they want to do for the students they intend to elicit progress with. Ohanian (2009) declared, "A pedagogy of submission requires intellectual denial and emotional bulletproofing" (p. 375). She continued, "You can only teach who you are, and if you try

to do it while submitting to a script dominatrix, then you lose not only your professionalism, but also your soul" (p. 376). With her words, Ohanian (2009) offers a potentially accurate description of an urban middle school teacher's plight. Situated in a world where accountability expectations rain down from the macro level and the complex needs of adolescent students surface as a function of middle school at the meso level, teachers may feel as though they are in constant negotiation with this paradox.

Gasoi (2009) echoed Ohanian's sentiments with regard to the negative impact that standardized testing can have on a teacher's sense of professionalism. She explained that "the design of the tests and the stringent accountability measures attached to them contradicted many of the staff's fundamental beliefs about the purpose of schooling, what constitutes an effective learning community, and what it means to be educated" (p. 175). Gasoi (2009) referenced a carrot-and-stick approach, one which levies rewards and sanctions on educators according to how students perform on standardized tests. Instead of this approach, Gasoi advocates for innovation in the face of pigeon-holed conformity levied upon today's educators. Gasoi (2009) explained that it is critical "not to allow the appeal of tough love truisms and silver bullet solutions to drown out the voices of educators whose criteria for school success encompass more than student test scores" (p. 173). Gasoi (2009) advocated for a teacher voice in policy construction, something that is often missing in today's bureaucratic hierarchies. Her words carry significant weight in calling for a transition from punitive measures that have seemed to dominate today's educational landscape, to an empowering of our educators of today in shaping policy. In doing so, teachers would be able to construct the *innovative approach to education* that is so often referenced in today's proclamations of educational reform.

Instead, Gasoi (2009) offered, "What both policy makers and the media often fail to acknowledge is that a diversity of innovative schools exist around the country whose standards do not mesh with the values inherent in the current high stakes accountability mandates" (p. 173). According to Gasoi (2009), the prescribed, narrowed pedagogy that results from accountability measures inhibits innovation in America's schools, impeding the very progress that such mandates intend to promote. Furthermore, such mandates challenge the professionalism of the teaching profession, disempowering today's educators (Gasoi, 2009). As such, this study seeks to explore whether the perceived disempowerment influences teachers' sense of efficacy.

Despite Gasoi (2009) and Ohanian's (2009) passionate stances regarding the dangers of accountability, not all teachers present a negative outlook towards accountability measures and mandates. In exploring the impact of state-mandated accountability measures in high schools, Louis, Febey, and Schroeder (2005), uncovered a mixed feeling from teachers at three separate high schools. One high school echoed the previous sentiments of Gasoi (2009) in referencing teacher professionalism as the greatest source of promoting academic progress (Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). However, another high school embraced the role of state standards. Louis, Febey, and Schroeder (2005) explained, "Teachers supported state standards because they believed that they promoted better teaching and facilitated coverage of material, factors that helped guarantee their students a quality education" (p. 186). Later, the researchers continued, "Teachers saw themselves as more goal oriented because of their clear expectations, and alignment fostered collective sensemaking efforts designed to ensure that students met the state's targets" (p. 187).

A final high school in the study experienced some confusion and lack of clarity with the implementation of standards (Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005). However, "More than a few teachers reported that they accepted the state's standards because they effectively captured what students should learn and emphasized student demonstrations of mastery" (Louis, Febey, & Schroeder, 2005, p. 191). The researchers concluded, "When teachers observe active attempts on the part of administrators to make sense of a policy and mold it to local conditions, they appear to be more willing to engage in the elaboration of its implications for their school and classroom" (p. 200). Therefore, it was critical for administrators to shape policy around existing conditions and practices in garnering support at the teacher level.

Smith and Rowley (2009) referenced Rowan (1990) in outlining two types of organizational design that rest at the foundation of the accountability conundrum. Smith and Rowley (2009) described the first as a "control strategy (which) relies on externally determined input, behavior, and output controls to standardize teaching and students' opportunities to learn" (p. 126-127). When education is organized in this manner, it brings Ohanian's (2009) "teaching to a script" reference or Greene's (1995) automation of the profession itself. In this type of organization, educators are told what to teach, when to teach it, and how to teach it. Such an organization seems to have questioned the concept of the teaching profession itself, and can often lead to lowered morale on behalf of the educators (Leithwood & Earl, 2000).

Rowan's (1990) second strategy is described by Smith and Rowley (2009) as one that "rejects bureaucratic controls in favor of collaborative and participative management strategies as the primary means for improving teaching quality and student achievement"

(p. 127). Under such a system, teachers would be empowered to shape policy, pedagogy, and curriculum. Creative and innovative instructional practices would be encouraged, maintaining the autonomy of the classroom that draws most teachers to the profession in the first place.

Smith and Rowley (2009) explained that neither of these strategies is practiced exclusively in educational settings. Most often, schools subconsciously implement a mix of the two. As such, one can question how teachers process this interaction between two very different strategies. Smith and Rowley (2009) explained:

> Understanding how these organizational strategies affect teacher commitment to their school and profession is important, as the mix of strategies could influence the degree to which teachers invest in improving their teaching, as well as the likelihood that they will remain in the teaching profession. (p. 127)

This study sought to understand how the balancing of these strategies affects middle school teachers' sense of efficacy. The set forth authors in this chapter have outlined the tremendous impact, both positive and negative, that accountability mandates can have on a teacher's sense of professionalism. Rigid policy mandates from above, along with spontaneous moments at the student level, have created a complex dynamic in today's urban middle school setting. As such, Weick's (1976) loosely coupled system construct issued as an organizational theory in explaining this conundrum.

Loosely Coupled Systems

This literature review employed Weick's (1976) loosely coupled system theory as a means of exploring teachers' sense of self-efficacy in terms of the responsibilities of

adhering to accountability measures while simultaneously meeting the needs of middle school students at the critical age that is adolescence. Weick (1976) explained that the term "loose coupling" is represented by "coupled events (that) are responsive, *but* that each event also preserves its own identity and some evidence of its physical or logical separateness" (p. 3). Weick (1979) used the principal and guidance counselor's office as a means of illustrating the practical use of the term. Weick (1979) wrote, "The image is that the principal and the counselor are somehow attached, but that each retains some identity and separateness and that their attachment may be circumscribed, infrequent, weak in its mutual affects, unimportant, and/or slow to respond" (p. 3). For the purpose of this study, this theory is used to position the accountability system as a tightly coupled system which pervades a middle school organization designed to be a loosely coupled system, a system created to meet the needs of students at the critical time period of adolescence. It is this dynamic that teachers must process on a daily basis in an attempt to promote student progress, one which seems to have had a significant influence on their sense of efficacy in today's urban middle school settings.

While the loosely coupled concept is often assigned a negative connotation, it is important to note that initially presented the term in a "neutral, if not mildly affectionate" manner (Weick, 1976, p. 6). A middle school that is loosely coupled offers autonomy to each of the actors that comprise its makeup. Weick (1976) explained that a loosely coupled school system offers teachers a greater sense of control over their professional responsibilities. Weick (1976) noted, "It is possible that much of the teacher's sense of—and actual—control comes from the fact that diverse interested parties expect the teacher to link their intentions with teaching actions" (p. 8). This line of reasoning identified

rigid accountability mandates as a counterproductive force that puts holistic needs of students at risk. In essence, these accountability measures served as an extremely tightly coupled system, one which sought to control how teachers operate on a daily basis, leaving little to no room for authentic, holistic caring in a middle school setting. Weick (1976) continued, "Such linking of diverse intentions with actual work probably involves considerable negotiation" (p. 8). As such, the middle school teacher would be forced to negotiate two very complex and different responsibilities in attempting to promote academic progress in today's urban middle schools. Weick (1976) explained,

> If it is argued that a sense of efficacy is crucial for human beings, then a sense of efficacy might be greater in a loosely coupled system with autonomous units than it would be in a tightly coupled system where discretion is limited. (p. 8)

Given that the prominent measure of this study is teacher efficacy, it is important to explore the nature of relationship between the two variables. Glassman (1973) explained, "The degree of coupling, or interaction, between two systems depends on the activity of the variables which they share" (p. 84). In this instance, the characteristics of accountability mandates and middle school adolescents holistic needs seem to be dichotomous in nature. Yet, as part of the educational system as a whole, each of these variables are symbiotic in that they are expected to be processed and implemented by the educator at hand, with the objective of producing a common outcome: student progress. Despite the variables' dialectical interaction, the coupling of the two could not be more independent. The irony in this context is that one of the two variables at the heart of this study—accountability mandates—seeks to form a very tightly coupled system from the macro level, one which ignores the function of the middle school at the meso level and

strips away autonomy from teachers at the micro level. As a result of this attempt pedagogical automation, a type of disconnect has seemed to develop between the two layers of Bronfenbrenner's system.

In this disconnect, teachers have become middle managers that are forced to prioritize actions according to the two variables that they must process. As Glassman (1973) noted, "A system whose parts are less richly interconnected, one with independence or temporary independence between parts, forms local stabilities which ignore limited perturbations elsewhere in the system" (p. 84). This study explored the trepidations that are experienced by today's urban middle school teacher as a result of the two variables that they must negotiate. This angst, which is often ignored in the policy mandates that are levied upon urban middle schools of today, may have served as a significant influence on a teachers' sense of efficacy. Today's middle school teachers, serving in the role of a middle manager between the two variables at hand, may have developed an allegiance to one of these variables over the other, simultaneously eliciting angst with regard to the variable that is receiving less attention. Or, perhaps, urban middle school educators are able to successfully negotiate these two variables in this system. In either circumstance, it is plausible to consider whether or not urban middle school teachers' sense of efficacy is influenced by this dynamic.

In a sense, this study redefines a "loosely coupled system" in today's urban middle school environment. The set forth conceptual framework was complex in that it argued that middle school teachers must negotiate between accountability measures and student needs at the middle school level. Yet, in the same instance, it questions whether teacher autonomy has been stripped in the tightly coupled system that today's state of

accountability offers. Weick (1976), in cautioning against potential pitfalls in exploring loosely coupled systems in education, warned,

> The basic methodological point is that if one wishes to observe loose coupling, then he has to see both what is and is not being done. The general idea is that time spent on one activity is time spent away from a second activity. A contextually sensitive methodology would record both the fact that some people are in one place generating events and the fact that these same people are thereby absent from some other place. The rule of thumb would be that a tight coupling in one part of the system can occur only if there is loose coupling in another part of the system (p. 10).

Weick's warning about loose coupled methodology outlined the potential for this particular study. According to this line of reasoning, it was of interest to explore how teachers negotiate the conundrum that comes with being a middle grades teacher in today's urban schools. Personal experience suggested that teachers do, indeed, feel torn between mandates and holistic caring in schools. As such, teachers seem to have developed an allegiance towards either the set forth curriculum or the needs of students, echoing Weick's (1976) theory about people being present and active in one place while being absent and deficient in another, as well as Glassman's (1973) reference with regard to emergence of "perturbations" (p. 83) within the system. It is this tug-of-war in terms of an urban middle school teachers' allegiance that seems to have influenced their sense of efficacy.

Conclusion

The review of professional literature has confirmed the dynamic, complex responsibility of being a contemporary urban middle school teacher. Accountability acts such as NCLB and RTT have seemed to create a narrow-minded, heavy testing environment in today's public schools, one which encourages a teacher focus on data and predetermined teaching routines. Middle school students, perhaps more than any other age group in public education, require a holistic teaching approach where educators must base their practice on supporting the whole adolescent child in capacities that reach far beyond a mere test score. As such, modern urban middle school educators must successfully negotiate both aspects of the profession, in addition to more traditional challenges, an incredibly complex task to say the least. As a result, it was feasible to the question how, or if, they successfully maintain a positive sense of self-efficacy with regard to the urban middle school teaching profession.

Teacher efficacy was once at the forefront of educational research, established as a significant predictor of student progress. However, a current search of literature within the last ten years revealed a lack of focus on this particular topic. Similarly, current literature on middle school seems to focus on STEM initiatives and practices, with very few studies exploring the middle school teacher voice. The absence of significant literature on urban middle school teacher's sense of efficacy served as justification for this research. This study sought to provide valuable insight with regard to the urban middle school teaching profession, particularly as it relates to self-efficacy. The coming chapter will explain the methodology that will be used to bring urban middle school teachers' sense of efficacy to light.

CHAPTER 3

METHODS

Introduction to Methods

> *When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much (because) most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment. (*Armor et al., 1976, p. 23).
>
> *If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students. (Armor et al., 1976, p. 23)*

Nearly forty years ago, teacher responses to the two statements presented above (Armor et al., 1976) established a direct correlation between teachers' sense of self-efficacy and student performance. As a result, a host of researchers began creating teacher efficacy instruments (Ashton, 1984; Ashton, et al., 1982; Bandura, 1997; Dembo & Gibson, 1984; Guskey, 1981; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Woolfolk Hoy, 2000) aimed at capturing the elusive construct that is teacher's sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy instruments, some of which will be reviewed in this chapter, have established a direct correlation between teacher efficacy and student achievement (Armor, Conry-Osequera, Cox, Kin, McDonnel, Pascal, Pauly, & Zellman, 1976; Ashton, 1984; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Guskey & Passaro, 1994). However, few instruments seem to have provided an accurate picture of the interaction of categorical and continuous data as it relates to teachers' efficacy. More importantly, existing studies have not provided a forum for middle school

teachers to explain how particular variables influence their sense of efficacy. As such, the purpose of this study is to provide both, attempting to identify middle school educators with high and low senses of self-efficacy in an urban school district, allowing them the forum to explain the factors and characteristics that influence their self-efficacy standing. As such, this study aims to fulfill calls for further research around the concept from a few decades ago (Dembo & Gibson, 1984; Guskey, 1987; Midgley, 1991).

Pajares (1992) posited, "The investigation of teachers' beliefs is a necessary and valuable avenue of educational inquiry" (p. 326). Yet, he explained, "As a global construct, belief does not lend itself easily to empirical investigation" (Pajares, 1992, p. 308). Thus, Pajares (1992) advocates for a careful and appropriate methodology when measuring teacher beliefs such as self-efficacy. Pajares (1992) wrote, "Clearly, when specific beliefs are carefully operationalized, appropriate methodology chosen, and design thoughtfully constructed, their study becomes viable and rewarding" (p. 308).

This chapter will outline a carefully constructed mixed methodology, a two phase explanatory study where quantitative and qualitative data will characterize the sense of self-efficacy of teachers at three middle schools across an urban school district. This study is unique in that it maintains three of the primary factors used to measure personal and general self-efficacy in the quantitative phase while introducing two general teaching efficacy constructs introduced in chapters 1 and 2 in the follow-up qualitative phase. In essence, the combination of the traditional and newfound factors will paint an important snapshot of middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy in a highly functioning urban school district. The unique framing of this efficacy study, statistical analysis of survey

data, and the subsequent interpersonal follow-up focus group interviews aim to offer a unique view of urban middle school self-efficacy from a single school district.

Chapter one provided a conceptual framework which outlined dual objectives that today's urban middle school educators are expected to fulfill. Literature explains that contemporary middle school teachers must function and operate in an intermediate school setting, an educational construct originally designed as a loosely coupled system, with the objective of supporting students through the challenging time period that is adolescence. While attending to this holistic objective of middle school, one which aims to support students during adolescence and their transition from elementary to secondary education, these educators must simultaneously meet the demands set forth by today's high stakes, tightly coupled accountability environment. In a sense, they are faced with competing objectives, each aimed at promoting academic progress during students' most complex years of schooling.

Chapter two outlined the history of middle school, accountability in education, and the concept of self-efficacy as a means of promoting student achievement. The review of existing literature identified a host of variables related to teachers' sense of self-efficacy. In addition, literature related to middle grades education outlined the influence of the adolescent, dynamic objectives that middle school teachers are presented with. The initial aspect of this explanatory study identified OakRidge teachers who have a high and low sense of self-efficacy through quantitative analysis. In a follow-up qualitative focus group, participants were asked about the factors that influence middle school educator's general teaching sense of self-efficacy, with the students' adolescent needs and standardized testing objectives serving as potential influences to the self-

efficacy concept. As such, this study offered statistical data through quantitative analysis and an emic teacher perspective through qualitative analysis, both aimed at garnering a greater understanding of the influences on middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy through a case study focused on the OakRidge school district. The findings from this study painted an accurate picture of what self-efficacy looks like in an urban school district during an era of unprecedented accountability. The qualitative analysis offers perspectives from teachers with both high and low senses of self-efficacy, providing valuable information with regard to the middle school conundrum that persists in today's U.S. schools.

Research Questions

As stated in chapter one, this research is guided by the following research question:

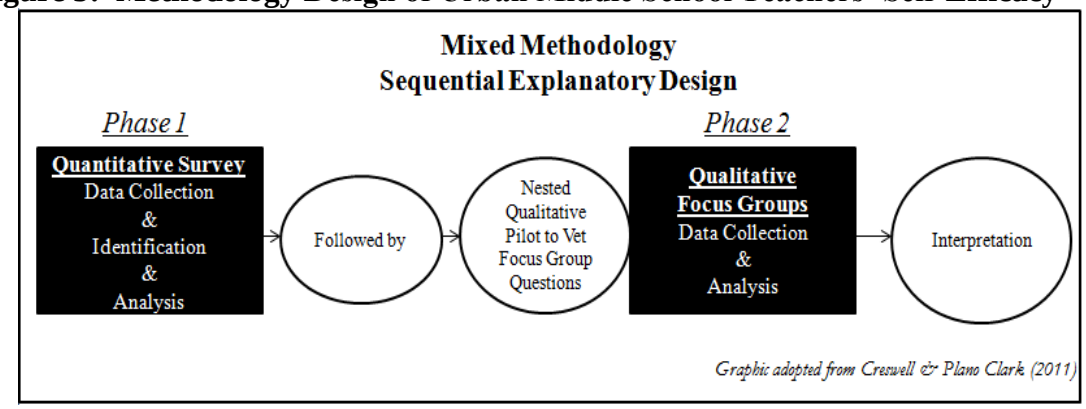
- What is urban middle school educators' sense of efficacy like in an era of accountability?

Methodology

In order to effectively explain urban middle school teachers' sense of efficacy, a sequential explanatory study was employed. Creswell (2009) explained, this strategy is "characterized by the collection of analysis of quantitative data in a first phase of research followed by the collection and analysis of qualitative data in a second phase" (p. 211). This study employed Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's 2001 survey, adding categorical to the survey's continuous data, in order to identify OakRidge's middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy, categorized as either "high" or "low." The focus group interview process was informed by the phenomena originating from the initial

quantitative analysis, as the statistical analysis was followed up by qualitative focus group interviews—one group of teachers with a "high" sense of efficacy and another with "low." This combination of quantitative and qualitative inquiry "provides a more complete picture by noting trends and generalizations as well as in-depth knowledge of participants' perspectives" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 33). Thus, such a combination of qualitative and quantitative data provides a comprehensive picture of what middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy looks like in a highly functioning urban school district. Figure 5, adopted from an explanatory design model from Creswell and Clark (2007), provides a visual outline of this case study.

Figure 5: Methodology Design of Urban Middle School Teachers' Self-Efficacy



The case study explanatory design variation that was employed for the qualitative portion of this study is the participant-selection model. Creswell and Clark (2007) explained that under this type of variation, the researcher "places priority on the second, qualitative phase instead of the initial quantitative phase" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 86). The subsequent qualitative component provided a platform for the middle school teacher voice that seems to be absent from existing literature. It also provided a forum for exploring the responsibility of simultaneously meeting accountability benchmarks as

well as the needs of adolescents in a middle school setting. These two phenomena were explored as potential influences of teacher's self-efficacy. Participants for the follow-up, focus-group interviews were grouped according to level of self- efficacy, offering two perspectives from those that feel highly efficacious and those that are on the lower end of the efficacy scale. In the literature review for this study, Midgley (1991) stated that the "first important step is to talk with middle school and junior high school teachers and hear their interpretations and explanations" in regards to their sense of self-efficacy (p.13). The interview component of this study provided this forum for these sought after interpretations and explanations about what influences middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Guiding Worldviews

Creswell and Clark (2007) explained that the terms "*worldview* and *paradigm* mean how we view the world and, thus, go about conducting research" (p. 21). They continued, "They are a philosophy deeply rooted in our personal experiences, our culture, and our history" (Creswell & Clark, 2007, p. 21). Therefore, it was important to identify the worldviews that underlie this proposed study of middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy. This study intended to provide a comprehensive perspective of contemporary middle school teachers' sense of reality with regard to their level of self-efficacy. In terms of ontology—the nature of one's reality—this study exercised two worldviews for practice in order to provide the most comprehensive analysis possible: post-positivist and constructivist. Creswell and Clark (2007) warned that researchers "must not see these categories as rigid classifications but rather organizing frameworks to use in viewing

different stances" (p. 22). Creswell and Clark (2007) asked that researchers consider different worldviews during the various stages of a study. In line with this particular study,

Creswell and Clark (2007) stated:

> Since the study begins quantitatively, the researcher typically begins from the perspectives of post-positivism to develop instruments, measure variables, and assess statistical results. When the researcher moves to the qualitative phase that values multiple perspectives and in-depth description there is a shift to using the assumptions of constructivism. (p. 83)

Thus, this study employed a post-positivist worldview in the initial stages of the study, while shifting towards a constructivist lens as the study progressed. Postpositivism is defined as a philosophy that identifies causes as determining factors of outcomes (Creswell, 2009). Creswell 2009 explained, "Thus, the problems studied by post positivists reflect the need to identify and assess the causes that influence outcomes" (p. 7). This worldview holds prominence in this particular study, where the quantitative portion of the study identified teachers with a low and high sense of self-efficacy. Creswell (2009) described numerical observations as "paramount for the post-positivist" (p. 7), lending credence to the necessity of statistical analysis in determining teachers' sense of self-efficacy. With this critical lens, the study painted a comprehensive picture of the relationship between categorical and continuous data for urban middle school teachers in the OakRidge district and identified two very distinct groups for participation in the follow-up qualitative study.

The follow-up, qualitative focus group portion of this study shifted towards a constructivist worldview. Creswell (2009) defined this type of worldview as one where researchers "hold assumptions that individuals seek understanding of the world in which they live and work" (p. 8). My personal experience of eight plus years in a middle school setting provided the inspiration for this study, particularly as it related to the complex nature of being a middle school teacher. When considering the concept of self-efficacy in this environment, I posit that no quantitative analysis can adequately paint a comprehensive picture of the influences of the middle school educator's sense of self-efficacy. Constructivists "focus on the specific contexts in which people live and work, in order to understand the historical and cultural settings of the participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 8). Earlier literature on the concept of self-efficacy stressed the reciprocal nature of one's action and their environment. The four antecedents of efficacy, referenced by Ross (1994), are born from the environment. Other literature related to middle grades education painted the middle school environment as complex in nature. As such, the constructivist nature of the follow-up qualitative aspect of this study served as an ideal vehicle for understanding the dynamic nature of middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy, particularly in an environment full of accountability measures that are designed to move education forward.

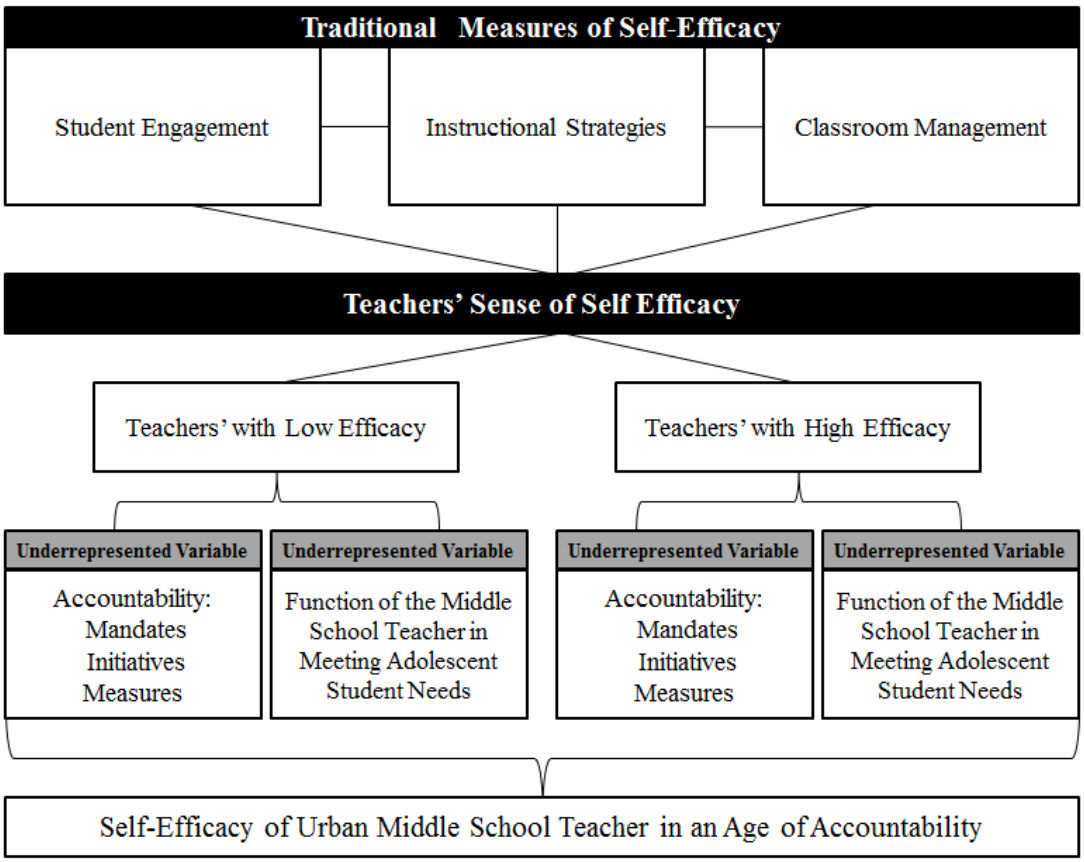
Conceptual Framework and Rationale for Mixed Methodology

This sequential explanatory case study took place over the course of the 2014-2015 school year in the OakRidge school district. The rationale for such a methodology rested in the interaction between categorical and continuous data, as well as the follow-up

perspective offered by the qualitative interview component. Such a study offers a snapshot of the efficacy of the entire district through quantitative analysis and a more emic perspective from the subsequent qualitative analysis. Together, this study characterized the concept of teacher efficacy in an urban middle school setting.

The study was guided by the conceptual framework provided in Figure 6 below:

Figure 6: Conceptual Framework of study



Drawing from the proposed conceptual framework, the initial, quantitative instrument will have three major variables: student engagement, teacher instructional strategies, and classroom management. Each of these variables was focused on the classroom experience and was employed via an existing instrument (the TSES) that has proven to be both reliable and valid when measuring the self-efficacy concept

(Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The final two variables (accountability measures and meeting the responsibilities of working adolescent students at the middle school level) were introduced as potential general teaching influences to teachers' sense of self-efficacy at the qualitative stage, providing a slight exploratory component within the explanatory nature of this case study.

Research Site and Participants

The primary research site for this case study was the OakRidge Public School district referenced in chapter 1. The OakRidge Public School district was known as an incredibly supportive and progressive school district. The district has been known to pilot many initiatives at the state, district, and school level. During the 2014-2015 school year, OakRidge will be instituting District Determined Measures (DDMs), which link student performance on district assessments to all teachers' (not just state-tested subjects) evaluation status. OakRidge is considered a level two school district by the State of Massachusetts, meaning that all three middle schools are ranked as level one or two schools, as are the all of the elementary schools and secondary high school (Massachusetts district ratings are based on the lowest ranking of any school in the district). According to the Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education (2014):

> "For a school to be classified into Level 1, the cumulative PPI for both the "all students" group and high needs students must be 75 or higher. If not, the school is classified into Level 2. A school may also be classified into Level 2 if it has low MCAS participation rates for any group (between 90 and 94%). Schools are

classified into Level 3 if they are among the lowest 20 percent relative to other schools in the same school type category statewide, if one or more subgroups in the school are among the lowest performing 20% of subgroups relative to all subgroups statewide, if they have persistently low graduation rates (less than 60% for any subgroup over a four-year period), or if they have very low MCAS participation rates for any group (less than 90%). The lowest achieving, least improving Level 3 schools are candidates for classification into Levels 4 and 5, the most serious designations in Massachusetts' accountability system" (Massachusetts Department of Elementary and Secondary Education, 2014).

OakRidge served as an ideal setting for conducting this particular research, as they employ a middle school model (reviewed in depth in chapter two) which ultimately filters to their culminating high school. Three middle schools—[4]Kent Middle School, Dearborn Middle School, and Clarke Middle School—will serve as the primary settings for this study. The participants for this proposed study will be recruited from all classroom teachers who work in these three middle schools. The initial quantitative survey was delivered at principal meetings in the fall and winter of 2014. Participants were made fully aware of the voluntary nature of the survey, providing the opportunity to not participate. At the end of the quantitative survey, participants were asked about their willingness to participate in a ninety minute, follow-up, focus group interview. Those that agreed to participate in the follow-up interview will be asked for their contact information via the final question on the quantitative survey in order to arrange a meeting time and place.

[4] Kent, Dearborn, and Clarke are pseudonyms to maintain anonymity of the school district and schools

Qualitative participants were selected from the pool of teachers who volunteered for the follow-up interview portion of the study. Phenomena arising from the initial quantitative analysis guided the selection of teachers for interviews, as teachers will be categorized as having a "high" or "low" sense of efficacy. Given the nature of the literature presented in chapter two, I chose to consider all content areas for potential interview candidates, particularly as the OakRidge school district instituted the concept of District Determined Measures which links student performance to teachers' evaluations.

Quantitative Survey

Review of Existing Teacher Efficacy Instruments

In order to identify an instrument that was able to measure urban middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy, it was critical to review existing teacher efficacy instruments. This section presents an overview of particular educational efficacy instruments and a more detailed review of the *Teachers' Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES)* (also known as the *Ohio State teacher efficacy scale (OSTES))*, developed by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001). The *TSES* will be used to measure the three traditional variables (student engagement, teacher instructional strategies, and classroom management) as a means to identify teachers with high and low senses of self-efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) reviewed a number of existing efficacy instruments in creating the *TSES*, referencing the challenges of measuring teachers' sense of efficacy. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) described two factors, identifying a "general agreement that the first factor, commonly called personal teaching efficacy, has to do with one's own feelings of competence as a teacher" (p. 792).

However, they also stated that the second factor is not as neatly defined, often being labeled as a "component of Bandura's social cognitive theory in which a person assesses the likely consequences of the performance level he or she expects to achieve" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 792). Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) referenced Bandura (1997, 2001) and Pajares (1996) in warning that the development of an efficacy instrument can neither be too general nor too specific. They warned, "In order to be useful and generalizable, measures of teacher efficacy need to tap teachers' assessments of their competence across the wide range of activities and tasks they are asked to perform" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 791). The quantitative and qualitative components of this case study aimed to provide a useful picture of an urban middle school teacher's sense of self-efficacy.

Existing Efficacy Instruments

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) first reviewed *The Webb scale* (Appendix A) created by Ashton et al. (1982). The authors noted that this was "an attempt to extend the measure of teacher efficacy while maintaining a narrow conceptualization of the construct" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001, p. 787). *The Webb scale* employed a seven item, forced choice model, finding that high scoring teachers experienced less negative interactions (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). However, the authors explained that the measure never experienced wide acceptance and was never used beyond the initial study (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) also reviewed The Ashton Vignettes (Appendix B), an instrument that aimed to provide more specific situations that could influence a teacher's sense of efficacy. Teachers were asked to respond to specific educational situations presented in a vignette format. Participants were then asked to rank how effectively they would be able to manage the situation that was being presented. A second test asked them to compare their own effectiveness against other teachers' effectiveness in responding to the situations (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Ultimately, it was determined that stress was not correlated with efficacy, and like *The Webb scale*, the instrument was not widely accepted and barely ever used beyond its initial study (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) also reviewed Dembo and Gibson's (1984) teacher efficacy scale (TES) (Appendix C). While Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) acknowledged the 30-item measure's popularity amongst researchers, they identified concerns, both from a conceptual and statistical standpoint. Dembo and Gibson (1984) separated items according to the aforementioned two factors at the heart of efficacy studies—personal sense of efficacy and outcome expectancy. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) stated, "The lack of clarity about the meaning of the two factors and the instability of the factor structure make this instrument problematic for researchers. A new, clearer measure is needed" (p. 789).

One of the final efficacy measures that Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) reviewed was Albert Bandura's unpublished measure which was aimed at providing a multi-faceted look at teachers' sense of efficacy (Appendix D). According to Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) the 30-item instrument had seven subscales

which included "efficacy to influence decision making, efficacy to influence school resources, instructional efficacy, disciplinary efficacy, efficacy to enlist parental involvement, efficacy to enlist community involvement, and efficacy to create a positive school climate" (p. 791). Unfortunately, neither reliability nor validity was available for this particular instrument (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, 2001)

From the reviews of various efficacy instruments, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy developed their own measure of teacher efficacy, the aforementioned *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale*. The original measure was comprised of 52 items when it was first employed in the pilot study. Upon receiving results from the first study, the measure was later scaled down to 32 items in a second study, and further scaled down to 18 items in a third study. Ultimately, the three studies resulted in a 24-item long form and a 12-item short form, with a 9-point Likert scale ranging from *nothing* to *a great deal* (Appendix E).

In terms of reliability of the instrument, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) presented the following table:

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha for Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) Long Form

Variable	Mean	SD	Alpha
Teachers Self Efficacy Scale	7.1	.94	.94
Instructional Practices	7.3	1.1	.91
Classroom Management	6.7	1.1	.90
Student Engagement	7.3	1.1	.87

In addition to presenting high reliability, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) also measured construct validity. The TSES was measured against the original Rand items referenced at the beginning of chapter three, as well as the Dembo and Gibson (1984) *TES* which was referenced in the previous section. Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) stated, "As expected, total scores on the OSTES (24-item long form) were positively related to both the Rand items ($r = 0.18$ and 0.53, $p < 0.01$) as well as to both the personal teacher efficacy (PTE) factor of the Dembo and Gibson measure ($r = 0.64$, $p < 0.01$) and the general teacher efficacy (GTE) factor ($r = 0.16$, $p < 0.01$)" (p. 801). The researchers concluded, "The results of these analyses indicate that the OSTES could be considered reasonably valid and reliable" (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy , 2001, p. 801). Thus, the *TSES* served as an ideal instrument in measuring the traditional factors that have been identified as having an influence on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. This has proven to be the most reliable and valid measure of efficacy and served as an effective mode for participant selection for the two aforementioned focus groups based on survey responses.

The Use of the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

A TSES survey served as the initial quantitative analysis tool that will guide this study. The survey employed Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2001) existing self-efficacy instrument to measure the three traditional variables of student engagement, teacher instructional strategies, and classroom management. This reliable and valid tool served to identify participants for the follow-up, qualitative focus groups of teachers with high and low senses of self-efficacy. The additional categorical data component served

to paint a comprehensive picture of what efficacy of an urban middle school teacher looks like in the OakRidge school district.

Categorical Data

The very first component of the TSES instrument required categorical data from all participants. Dembo and Gibson (1985) explained, "Studies should further validate and refine instruments to measure teacher efficacy and investigate the relationships between teacher characteristics (i.e., gender, years of teaching experience, grade levels, and personal attributes) and sense of efficacy" (p. 182). Considering the demand for teacher characteristics as they pertain to self-efficacy, it will be important to establish participants' categorical data that can then interact with continuous data points to follow. Table 2 provides the categorical data points that will be measured in this case study:

Table 2: Categorical Scales of Measure

Category	Measure	Scale
Gender	Male / Female	Nominal
Major	Degree in: Education / Content Area	Nominal
Years of Experience	0-1 / 2-3 / 4-5 / 6-7 / 8-9 / 10-11 / 12-13 / 14-15 / 16-17 / 18-19 / 20+	Ordinal
Content Area	ELA / Math / Social Studies / Science / ELL / Technology / Support Staff / Health & PE / Special Education / Arts (Music & Art)	Nominal
Current Grade Level(s) Taught	6 / 7 / 8 / 6 & 7/ 7 & 8 / 6 & 8 / 6, 7, & 8	Ordinal
Historical Grade Level(s) Taught	6 / 7 / 8 / 6 & 7/ 7 & 8 / 6 & 8 / 6, 7, & 8	Ordinal
Highest Level of Education	BA / Masters / CAGS / Ed.D or Ph.D	Ordinal

Continuous Data for Traditional Efficacy Factors

This case study employed the use of Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's (2001) existing self-efficacy instrument to measure the traditional efficacy variables in

establishing distinct categories for the follow up qualitative session. Permission to use the TSES was obtained prior to the commencement of the study (Appendix F). The following questions, adopted from Table 4 from Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001), will be presented after the categorical data in a 9-point Likert scale format, with answers ranging from *nothing* to *a great deal*. Just as Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) scored participants answers, unweighted means will be calculated for items that load each factor.

Table 3: Continuous Data Factors

The Teacher's Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale

Factor 1: Efficacy for Instructional Strategies

- To what extent can you use a variety of assessment strategies?
- To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?
- To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?
- How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?
- How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students?
- How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?
- To what extent can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?
- How well can you provide challenges for very capable students?

Factor 2: Efficacy for Classroom Management

- How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?
- How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?
- How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?
- How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?
- How well can you keep a few problem students from ruining an entire lesson?
- How well can you respond to defiant students?
- To what extent can you make your expectation clear about student behavior?
- How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?

Factor 3: Efficacy for Student Engagement

- How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?
- How much can you do to help your students value learning?
- How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?
- How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?
- How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?
- How much can you do to help your students think critically?
- How much can you do to foster student creativity?
- How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?

Validity and Reliability

Check and Schutt (2012) described reliability as a precursor to validity measures. According to Check and Schutt (2012), reliability is a measurement that regularly yields

consistent results. In addition, Check and Schutt (2012) added, "If a measure is reliable, it is affected less by random error, or chance variation, than if it is unreliable" (p. 83). For this particular study, reliability was calculated via Cronbach's alpha.

Check and Schutt (2012) outlined three forms of validity that must be considered when conducting educational research. The first, content validity, "establishes that the measure covers the full range of the concept's meaning" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 82). The authors continued, "To determine that range of meaning, the researcher may solicit the opinions of experts and review literature that identifies the different aspects, or dimensions, of the concept" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 82). Although no existing instrument covers the full span of a teacher's sense of self-efficacy, the TSES has proven to be both valid and reliable. Furthermore, it captures three integral components of effective classroom performance. The subsequent, qualitative analysis sought to further establish content validity.

Criterion validity occurs "when the scores obtained on one measure can be accurately compared with a more direct or already validated measure of the same phenomenon" (Check & Schutt, 2012, p. 82). In this instance, the OakRidge participants' responses to the TSES survey were compared to the results set forth by Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001). In terms of the introduced variables of accountability and holistic education, Check and Schutt (2012) noted, "Criterion validation greatly increases our confidence that a measure works, but for many concepts of interest to educational researchers, it's difficult to find a criterion" (p. 82). With no existing study from which to compare this case study, criterion validity served as a limitation of this case study.

Finally, Check and Schutt (2012) described construct validity as a critical measure, but noted that it cannot always be distinguished from criterion validity. According to Check and Schutt (2012), construct validity "is commonly used in social and educational research when no clear criterion exists for validation purposes" (p. 82). Thus, construct validation would be applicable to the two new factors in this study aimed at measuring educators' general sense of self-efficacy. However, it was difficult to establish a comparative study from which to compare, rendering this type of validity as a limitation.

Creswell (2009) explains that there are two types of threats to validity: internal and external. He goes on to state, "Internal validity threats are experimental procedures, treatments, or experiences of the participants that threaten the researcher's ability to draw correct inferences from the data about the population in an experiment" (Creswell, 2009, p. 162). An internal threat to the validity of this particular study was the threat of participants can dropping out or refusing to participate in the study altogether. This posed a particular threat to the qualitative portion of this study, as potential participants were limited to those that volunteered for the follow up interview. Where the qualitative selection process is based on phenomena arising from the quantitative portion, the hope was that enough volunteers in the desired population, as identified by the survey results, offered their time. As a response to this internal threat, other districts would have been considered if the OakRidge participation rate was not adequate. Another internal threat to validity was the limited scope of teachers that were surveyed. OakRidge elementary and high school teachers were not given the survey, limiting the ability to compare the middle school educators' results.

External threats to validity "arise when experimenters draw incorrect inferences from the sample data to other persons, other settings, and past or future situations" (Creswell, 2009, p. 162). Thus, interaction of selection and treatment became a potential external threat to validity. Interaction of selection and treatment is described as follows: "Because of the narrow characteristics of participants in the experiment, the researcher cannot generalize to individuals who do not have the characteristics of the participants" (Creswell, 2009, p. 165). Where this case study was being conducted in a single school district, generalizability, which will later be discussed as a limitation of this study, was considered. In response to this validity threat, statements about results were limited to the OakRidge school district, with only slight considerations given to a larger middle grades population.

Qualitative Interviews

The subsequent qualitative component to this case study was comprised of two focus groups: teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy and teachers with a low sense of self efficacy. Groupings were based on their respective responses to the TSES. Both the high and low group were comprised of 5-7 members who volunteered their time on the initial quantitative survey. The newly introduced variables of accountability and the complex adolescent middle school education served as the foundation for the qualitative line of questioning. Questions were generated from existing literature and a qualitative pilot that was conducted with an expert panel that specialized in efficacy, middle school, adolescent education, and accountability policy. These interviews helped shape the

qualitative questions for each of the focus groups. Participants were selected based on their expertise in the areas of policy, middle school, and adolescent education.

Semi-structured focus group interviews were scheduled for 90 minutes, but more time was afforded if necessary. Figure 7 outlines the various initiatives and measures that are often associated with accountability in the OakRidge School district. Once the quantitative analysis was complete, the guiding interview protocol in Figure 8 was employed. The protocol listed in Figure 8 captures the range of questions that were posed to participants.

Figure 7: Accountability Initiatives & Measures in the OakRidge District

Initiative / Measure	Description	Source
PARCC	Partnership for Assessment of Readiness for College & Career	State
State Test	Generic Name for Specific State Test	State
DDM	District Determined Measures	District
State Practice Test	State Practice Test Network	District
RETELL	Rethinking Equity and Teaching for English Language Learners professional development	State
PLG	Professional Learning Groups	District
Educator Growth Evaluation System	Educator Evaluation System	State & District
Peer Observations	Varies from school to school	School
Director's & Principal's Meeting	Professional Development	District

Figure 8: Focus Group Interview Protocol

Questions
How does standardized testing (PARCC/MCAS) impact your ability to perform as a middle school educator?
How do internal district measures, such as ANet or DDMs, influence your sense of efficacy?
How does the use of data, from any of these forums, influence your ability to successfully educate your students?
How does common planning and PLG time influence your sense of efficacy as a middle school educator?
How does the educator growth system influence your ability to teach middle school adolescent students?
How does district professional development influence your sense of efficacy as an educator?
How do peer observations influence your sense of self-efficacy?
How do your students' home lives influence your ability to promote academic progress in your classroom?
How are you able to meet the demands created by social, emotional, and physical changes that can influence how adolescents engage during classroom time?
Do you have the capacity to meet the academic and holistic objectives set forth by your school? Why or why not?

Study Parameters and Timeline

On May 29, 2014, I participated in a dissertation proposal defense hearing. Prior to this hearing, I received approval from the Superintendent of the OakRidge School District, as well as the three principals from the three middle schools. After the defense hearing, I submitted all required paperwork to the University of Massachusetts at Boston's Internal Review Board (IRB). Upon receiving approval from the UMass IRB, I conducted the upfront quantitative analysis of all classroom teachers in the OakRidge district. Before conducting the qualitative portion of this study, I participated in nested

qualitative pilot interviews with experts in the field of middle school education, self-efficacy, accountability policy, and holistic education. These interviews were structured interviews aimed at shaping effective questions for the two new constructs—accountability policy and adolescent education—being introduced as influences on an educator's sense of efficacy. The qualitative survey was vetted by the University of Massachusetts at Boston Institutional Review Board prior to its delivery to teachers.

Quantitative Survey

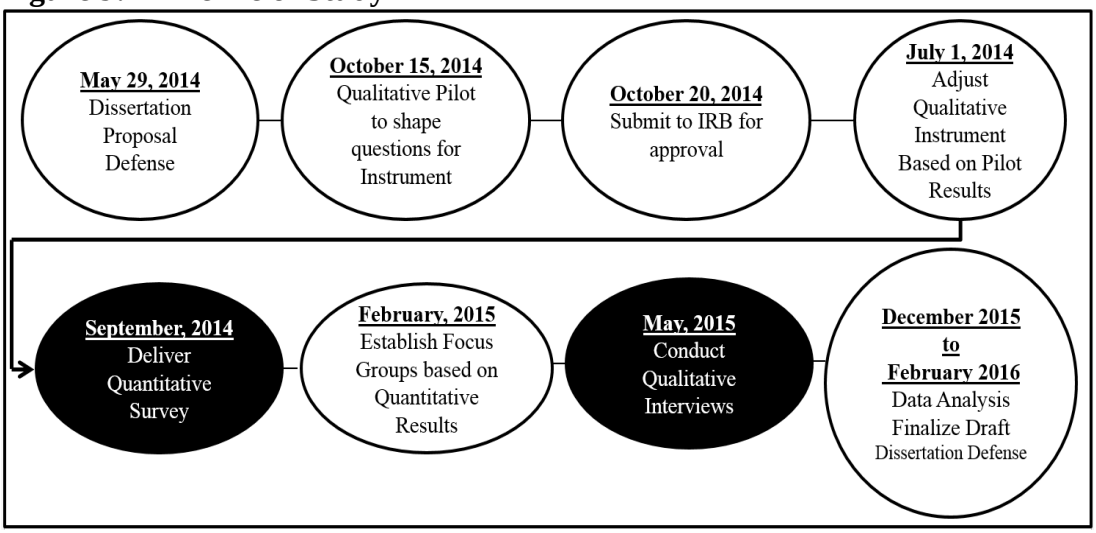
Levels of teachers' sense of self-efficacy was measured through a quantitative analysis using the TSES survey. Surveys were delivered over the course of the early months of the 2014-2015 school year at each of the three middle schools, ranging from October to December. Teachers were provided with a consent form (Appendix G) adapted from Check and Schutt (2012). The consent form provided contact information, a description of the study, and an explanation of participants' rights, risk, and confidentiality. Consent forms were provided one week prior to participation and were collected in person before participants began taking the survey. An analysis of survey data was completed by February 1, 2015.

Qualitative Interviews

Phenomena that emerged from the quantitative analysis were used to group educators for the follow-up qualitative, focus group interviews. The population for the qualitative portion of this study was limited to those participants that volunteered for this additional phase solicited on the last question of the quantitative survey. These interviews were conducted in March and April of 2015. Subsequent analysis of the

qualitative interviews was completed during the fall of 2015. Figure 9 represents the timeline for this study.

Figure 9: Timeline of Study



Ethics

The risk to participants for this study was minimal, meaning that participants experienced no greater risk or discomfort than they would with ordinary events in their everyday lives (Check & Schutt, 2012). All participants were required to sign the aforementioned consent form. The consent form provided a description of the study and outlines participants' rights. Although the consent form explained that participation in the study was completely voluntary, I will verbally reiterated specific language that explained the voluntary nature of this study. In particular, I reminded candidates that this study posed no threat to teachers' standing or employment in the OakRidge district.

Data Collection and Analysis

Quantitative Survey Data Collection

Data was collected and analyzed in two phases over the course of this study. The initial quantitative phase consisted of the aforementioned urban middle school teacher efficacy survey, measuring categorical and continuous data. The survey was administered in a Survey Monkey online forum. Despite the online nature of the survey, the instrument was delivered in person at administrative meetings at each of the three middle schools, in a computer lab. My presence at these meetings offered neither bias in terms of responses to self-efficacy, nor pressure to participate in the study. Rather, the personable meeting with participants aimed to increase my return rate by offering a brief verbal overview of the study, answers to any questions that participants had, and delivery of the survey during a time period in the required working hours for educators in the OakRidge district.

As principal of one of the participating buildings in this study, confidentiality was of the utmost importance. As such, significant steps were taken to maintain confidentiality during both phases of the study. The bulleted list below captured the steps that were taken during the quantitative portion of this study.

- I explained the voluntary nature of the survey and was not present while teachers participated in the quantitative TSES survey.
- My Dissertation Seminar advisor, Dr. Tricia Kress from LIUS, maintained all data in the Survey Monkey forum until all three schools had taken the survey.
- Dr. Kress assigned random numbers to participants, presenting their data in a completely anonymous spreadsheet. She maintained the volunteers' contact information from the final question on the survey that asked for them to participate in a focus group.

- In identifying the data, I presented Dr. Kress with 6-8 numbers for educators with high sense of efficacy and 6-8 numbers for educators with a low sense of self-efficacy.

- Dr. Kress arranged interview times with these participants for the focus group interviews.

Realizing how busy educators are, my hope was that the embedding of this survey during the work day would gain a greater rate of participation, and subsequently, a more expansive amount of data. The confidentiality process was explained to educators before they took the survey, ensuring that those that volunteered for the subsequent focus groups felt completely secure in their participation. Participants were then selected from the pool of respondents that offered their time beyond the *TSES*.

Quantitative Survey Data Analysis

Creswell (2009) defined quantitative research as "a means for testing objective theories by examining the relationship among variables" (p. 4). This case study used quantitative research in both a descriptive and causal-comparative manner. The analysis process was guided by the six step outline provided by Creswell (2009), paraphrased below:

- Step 1: Develop report with regard to participation rate—those who did and did not participate.

- Step 2: Discuss response bias to determine whether non-participants responses would have changed the overall results. This step was not applicable as all survey questions required an answer.

- Step 3: Provide a descriptive analysis for all independent and dependent variables, including mean, median, mode, standard deviations, and range.

- Step 4: Identify statistical procedure for the development of schools, while also ensuring reliability checks for consistency of scales.

- Step 5: Identify the statistics and computer program for testing the major inferential research questions.
- Step 6: Present the data analysis in tables or figures, interpreting results from the statistical test.

This study used purposive sampling as a means of identifying participants. A descriptive narrative was used to identify number of participants and non-participants. A descriptive analysis was provided to determine central tendency before employing statistical tests. The statistical procedures that were used for this particular study are t-test and one-way ANOVA. Reliability was checked via the Cronbach alpha statistic. Statistical analysis was conducted via the aforementioned SPSS program. Finally, results are presented in tables and figures for analysis and grouping in upcoming chapter four.

Qualitative Interview Data Collection

The qualitative phase of this study was completed at the conclusion of the quantitative collection and analysis. Check and Schutt (2012) define focus groups as "groups of unrelated individuals that are formed by a researcher and then led in group discussion for 1 to 2 hours" (p. 2015. In this instance, focus groups were comprised of five and seven members for the high and low groups respectively. The study employed semi-structured, in-depth phenomenological focus group interviews that aim to capture the middle school lived experience that can expound upon the initial quantitative analysis of self-efficacy. The structured component of the focus group interview was based on the literature review presented in chapter two and the phenomena that emerged from the initial quantitative analysis. In employing focus groups as a qualitative measure, Marshall and Rossman (2011) cautioned, "The primary ethical issues that may arise in conducting

focus-group interviews center on the dynamics of power and influence that may play out in any group" (p. 150). Dr. Barbara Smith[5], through careful moderation, ensured that participants had equal speaking time for the various questions posed in the interview.

Potential participants in the focus group interview process were recruited during the initial quantitative phase of the study and were categorized according to their level of efficacy. The very last question on the quantitative survey asked participants if they would like to be interviewed as a follow-up to the online survey. Participants who selected "yes" were asked for their contact information (name, email, and phone number). From the field of participants who agreed to a follow up interview, 5-8 teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy and 5-8 teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy were selected according to the results that emerged from the initial quantitative analysis. These focus group interviews were used to further explain how variables or characteristics influenced middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

As with the quantitative portion, careful steps will be taken to protect participants' anonymity. The list of steps below will be employed to ensure anonymity.

- Dr. Barbara Smith facilitated the focus group interviews.
- Participants were assigned pseudonyms before the interview commenced.
- Dr. Smith sent out the audio recordings to an independent transcription service.
- Pseudonyms were changed once again to further maintain anonymity.
- Dr. Smith provided me with a copy of the transcripts for analysis.

Dr. Kress and Dr. Smith's roles ensured the protection of participants' identity and served to alleviate any pressure they may have felt to participate in the study as a

[5] Barbara Smith is a pseudonym to protect anonymity.

result of my former or current affiliation with the OakRidge school district. At no point during the research did I have the ability to identify who did or did not participate in either portion of the study. In terms of the focus groups, the only involvement I had in the process was the review of transcripts delivered in a Microsoft Word document.

Qualitative Focus Group Interview Data Analysis

The qualitative data analysis was ongoing throughout the interview process. Data was transcribed from recorded audio to typed text. The data analysis process was guided by the seven steps offered by Marshall and Rossman (2011):

1. Organizing the Data
2. Immersion in the Data
3. Generating Categories and Theme
4. Coding the Data
5. Offering Interpretation Through Analytic Memos
6. Searching for Alternative Understandings
7. Writing the Report or Representing the Inquiry (Marshall & Rossman, 2011, pp. 210-222).

In following Marshall and Rossman's (2011) guidelines, interviews were transcribed and organized into separate files once each interview was complete. In terms of immersion, I was unable to transcribe each interview to develop complete intimacy with the qualitative data. However, once all interviews commenced, I coded data according to emerging trends across the range of participant responses within each focus group. Categories and themes were established according to these trends, with subsequent coding of data to follow. I employed written memos in a Microsoft Excel

spreadsheet that offered interpretation for the identified categories and themes. Data was then analyzed in an attempt to identify alternative understandings. Finally, the qualitative data analysis resulted in a culminating report that presented findings from the qualitative inquiry.

Data Management

Data was stored on two personal, password-protected laptops. All files located within these laptops were password protected to ensure safe keeping. Quantitative Data was collected via the Survey Monkey database to which only Dr. Kress had access. She sent me an anonymous spreadsheet with participants' responses, and this data was transferred to SPSS Statistics, a data management program which offers analytical processing. I selected 5-8 volunteers with a high sense of efficacy and 5-8 people with a low sense of efficacy for each respective focus group. Dr. Smith was responsible for arranging two 90 minute sessions with educators who volunteered to participate. Data from the subsequent, qualitative focus group interviews was sent to an independent transcription service. All components of the focus group interviews—including audio recordings, transcriptions, and notes—were stored on the second password protected laptop. Only Dr. Smith had access to the original data. An anonymous transcript was provided from the independent transcription service.

Limitations of Study and Role of Researcher

Given the composition of a case study, validity was a significant limitation. Internal validity was a limitation given the fact that only one population within the OakRidge district was surveyed. The subsequent focus group interviews were also

limited to those educators that agreed to the follow up portion of the case study. Where this case study was conducted in a single school district, external validity, specifically generalizability, is a major limitation that must be considered. While the study is comprehensive in providing a single snapshot of self-efficacy for one particular school district, the findings may not generalizable to other school districts or middle school institutions. Therefore, the extent to which this study can inform us about another school district is limited by its homogenous nature.

Despite generalizability limitations, the practical significance of this study remains strong, particularly in terms of the teaching profession. The case study offers insight into factors that influence the everyday practice of teaching in an urban middle school setting. More specifically, the findings paint an accurate picture of teachers' general sense of self-efficacy in this specific school environment. Such information can be useful in shaping not only policy, but professional development for future educators.

From a researcher's standpoint, I had either a former or current affiliation with the OakRidge school district. As such, I was cognizant of this potential limitation and took active steps to minimize any bias it may inspire. First and foremost, I have generalized all survey questions to ensure that they are not specific to the district itself. I took careful steps to withhold the nature of this research from conversations in order to maintain integrity of the case study when it was ultimately presented to participants. I took careful steps to ensure that participants anonymity was protected, ensuring that my affiliation did not influence their decision to participate.

In some respects it can be argued that my former or current affiliation with the district can be looked upon as a strength of this study. As Check & Schutt (2012) note,

"teacher research has become increasingly popular because it bridges the gulf between theory and practice, between research and implementation" (p. 257). The background knowledge of the OakRidge district helped aid my understanding of teacher responses to questions posed, serving to clarify any potential misconceptions. In addition, this background knowledge helped develop effective questions for focus group participants.

The OakRidge district recently considered redesigning its middle grades model after the 2014-2015 school year. With this consideration, central office asked for volunteers to perform research in exploring data related to all shareholders that operate within the district's middle grades model. Therefore, this study offered valuable insight in terms of the level of self-efficacy of the teachers who operate and function in the district. The hope was that the findings from this study would help to inform the OakRidge school district's decisions around this potential middle school reorganization.

CHAPTER 4

FINDINGS

Statistical Analysis

> *"Studies should further validate and refine instruments to measure teacher efficacy and investigate the relationships between teacher characteristics (i.e., gender, years of teaching experience, grade levels, and personal attributes) and sense of efficacy" (p. 182).*

Introduction

The analysis of survey results from the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale offered the potential analysis of descriptive statistics called for by Dembo and Gipson (1985) above. The results of such an analysis served to provide valuable insight into the variables that affected educators' sense of self-efficacy as it related to classroom practice. The primary purpose of this statistical analysis was to place teachers appropriately in the focus groups established around high and low senses of self-efficacy. However, respondents' responses were also analyzed from their characteristics in order to inform the follow-up qualitative focus group interviews.

Over the course of three principal meetings in the fall of 2014, 152 educators were given the opportunity to take *Teachers Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). The total number of educators that completed the survey was

136, producing a 90% return rate. Responses from guidance counselors, social workers, and other educators that do not have classroom responsibilities were excluded from the data, lowering the number of participants to 127. Removing these educators resulted in 142 overall potential middle school respondents. With the 127 responses received the return rate was slightly lowered to 89%.

The *Teachers Sense of Efficacy Scale* (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) was used to measure middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. The TSES, with its nine point Likert scale, offered responses ranging from *nothing* to a *great deal*. In addition to continuous data found in this range, categorical data was collected from participants including, gender, years' experience, type of degree, current grade levels taught, and historical middle school grade levels taught. The 24 questions offered in the *TSES* had three, distinct efficacy sub-categories, including instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. In addition to the overall survey itself, each of these categories will be explored in terms of reliability, central tendency, and correlations (t-tests and ANOVAs).

Demographics

Participants were asked six questions pertaining to demographics in terms of background and teaching experience. The following six variables were used as categorical data points from which subsequent continuous survey data point's interaction was measured. A frequency analysis was conducted in SPSS to identify participants' demographic distribution. Of the 127 participants, 68.5% were female, while 31.5% were male. This could be attributed to the district's overall gender breakdown of 81%

female, 19% male. In terms of teaching experience, the middle school teaching staff was relatively young experience-wise, as just over a third of respondents (33.9%) were within their first three years of teaching. More than half of respondents (52%) had seven years or less in terms of teaching experience. Only 37% of the respondents had 10 or more years of experience. Over half of the respondents (52.8%) were from the tested subjects of Math, English Language Arts (ELA), and Science. The largest number of respondents was Math teachers (20.5%), followed by ELA (19.7%), and Special Education teachers (16.5%). These demographics were closely in line with the overall district's hiring of middle school teachers in that 18% are licensed in Mathematics, followed by 14% in ELA, and 13% in Special Education. In terms of degree type—a major in education or content area—the majority of respondents held a degree in their respective content area (68.5%) as opposed to just 31.5% who held a degree in education. Over half of the participants (61.4%), at one time or another, have taught each of the three middle school grade levels—6, 7, and 8. The majority of teachers (83.5%) have taught at least two of the three middle school grade levels over the course of their career. In terms of current grade level taught, 44.9% were exclusive to one grade level while 26% taught all three. These statistics provided a background of the participants that completed the quantitative portion of this study.

Reliability

The reliability of the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) in the OakRidge district, a survey consisting of 24 items, was found to be "excellent" (George & Mallery, 2003, p. 231), two steps above "acceptable"

(George & Mallery, 2003, p. 231). Each sub-category—Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, and Student Engagement—proved to have "good" (George & Mallery, 2003, p. 231) reliability. Table 4 outlines the results for the OakRidge district and compares them to the original findings of the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) in Table 1.

Table 4: Cronbach's Alpha for OakRidge Educators Overall TSES and Sub Categories

Variable	Mean	SD	Alpha
Teachers Self-Efficacy Scale	7.1	1.3	.92
Instructional Strategies	7.3	1.2	.84
Classroom Management	7.3	1.3	.88
Student Engagement	6.6	1.4	.80

Table 1: Cronbach's Alpha for Original Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale (TSES) Long Form

Variable	Mean	SD	Alpha
Teachers Self Efficacy Scale	7.1	.94	.94
Instructional Strategies	7.3	1.1	.91
Classroom Management	6.7	1.1	.90
Student Engagement	7.3	1.1	.87

A comparison between the two instances where the survey was distributed reveals similar reliability results, both in terms of the full survey and the three sub categories. The overall mean for the test was same ($M_{\text{OakRidge TSES}} = 7.1$ vs. $M_{\text{Original TSES}} = 7.1$). Each instance where the survey was employed turned out to have excellent reliability, as OakRidge $\alpha = .92$ while Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) $\alpha = .94$. As observed from the two tables above, statistical reliability was slightly higher for the three

sub-categories for Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy (2001) when compared to the sub-categories for the OakRidge survey. Means were similar for instructional strategies but differed for classroom management and student engagement as Oakridge was slightly higher for the first ($M_{\text{OakRidge Classroom Management}} = 7.3$ vs. $M_{\text{Original TSES Classroom Management}} = 6.7$) and slightly lower for the latter $M_{\text{OakRidge Student Engagement}} = 6.6$ vs. $M_{\text{Original TSES Student Engagement}} = 7.3$). Given the excellent reliability status from the OakRidge results, a statistical analysis was conducted.

Descriptive Statistics

This analysis of descriptive statistics explored middle school educator's sense of self-efficacy as it related to middle school educators beliefs in regards to instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Surveys from 127 respondents were collected and tallied to provide interval/ratio analysis. A Likert Scale was used as the measurement tool, with nine categories ranging from one to nine, with number one serving as "none," three as "very little," five as "some influence," seven as "quite a bit," and nine as "a great deal." Likert points two, four, six, and eight serve as intermittent categories that fall somewhere between the aforementioned defined categories. Descriptive statistics from the 24 responses in the survey are presented in Table 5 below.

Table 5: Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (All Items)

Variable	*N*	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Get Through to Difficult Students	127	6.39	7.00	1.50	1	9
Help Students Think Critically	127	6.92	7.00	1.26	4	9
Control Disruptive Behavior	127	7.20	7.00	1.33	4	9
Motivate Students With Low Interest	127	6.20	6.00	1.41	2	9
Make Behavior Expectations Clear	127	8.08	9.00	1.16	4	9
Get Students to Believe They Can Do Well	127	7.24	7.00	1.17	4	9
Respond to Difficult Questions From Students	127	7.37	7.00	1.15	4	9
Establish Routines to Keep Activities Running	127	7.67	8.00	1.24	4	9
Help Students Value Learning	127	6.81	7.00	1.45	1	9
Gauge Student Comprehension	127	7.32	7.00	1.22	4	9
Create Good Questions for Students	127	7.55	8.00	1.21	4	9
Foster Student Creativity	127	6.82	7.00	1.39	3	9
Get Children to Follow Classroom Rules	127	7.24	7.00	1.27	3	9
Improve Understanding of Failing Students	127	6.67	7.00	1.37	3	9
Calm a Student Who is Disruptive or Noisy	127	6.77	7.00	1.27	4	9
Establish Classroom Management System	127	7.37	7.00	1.25	4	9
Adjust Lessons to Proper Level for Students	127	7.33	7.00	1.31	3	9
Use Variety of Assessment Strategies	127	7.39	7.00	1.09	5	9
Prevent a Few Problem Students from Ruining Lesson	127	6.72	7.00	1.43	2	9
Give Example or Alternate Explanation When Students are Confused	127	7.66	8.00	1.22	4	9
Effectively Respond to Defiant Students	127	6.91	7.00	1.33	3	9
Assist Families in Helping Children Do Well	127	5.92	6.00	1.62	1	9
Provide Alternative Strategies in the Classroom	127	7.04	7.00	1.12	4	9
Provide Appropriate Challenges for Capable Students	127	7.25	7.00	1.29	3	9

Using the SPSS, the central tendency and variability were computed for each of the 24 variables. The following discussion is based on the data tables, charts, and calculations that were generated according to the group's responses to the Likert-Scaled survey questions.

When the data for the all variables was analyzed, the means (ranging from 6.20 to 8.20) revealed that educators in this particular district had a high sense of self-efficacy and felt as though they can control "quite a bit" in terms of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. An overall summary reveals that

respondents had a high sense of self-efficacy in terms of these crucial educational practices. The highest of means was found in the survey questions related to instructional strategies, while the lowest of means was related to student engagement. In terms of the highest and lowest responses from the TSES survey, educators in the OakRidge district felt as though they can do between "quite a bit" and "a great deal" when it comes to making behavioral expectations clear ($M_{\text{behavioral expectations}} = 8.08$). On the other hand, educators felt as though they have between "some influence" and "quite a bit" when it comes to motivating students with low interest ($M_{\text{motivate low interest students}} = 8.08$). From the overall statistical variables, three composite variables (Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, and Student Engagement) were created.

Table 6: Descriptive Statistics for Composite Categories of TSES

Variable	*N*	Mean	SD	Min	Max
Teacher Self-Efficacy Scale	127	7.08	.78	5	9
Instructional Strategies	127	7.37	.82	5	9
Classroom Management	127	7.25	.94	4	9
Student Engagement	127	6.62	.90	3	9

Instructional Strategies

Eight of the twenty-four questions were related to Instructional Strategies. A composite *Instructional Strategies* variable was created from the responses below, outlined Table 7. Descriptive statistics for questions from the *Instructional Strategies* composite were as follows.

Table 7: Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Instructional Strategies)

Variable	*N*	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Respond to Difficult Questions From Students	127	7.37	7.00	1.15	4	9
Gauge Student Comprehension	127	7.32	7.00	1.22	4	9
Create Good Questions for Students	127	7.55	8.00	1.21	4	9
Adjust Lessons to Proper Level for Students	127	7.33	7.00	1.31	3	9
Use Variety of Assessment Strategies	127	7.39	7.00	1.09	5	9
Give Example or Alternate Explanation When Students are Confused	127	7.66	8.00	1.22	4	9
Provide Alternative Strategies in the Classroom	127	7.04	7.00	1.12	4	9
Provide Appropriate Challenges for Capable Students	127	7.25	7.00	1.29	3	9

Middle school educators felt as though they could do "quite a bit" with their instructional strategies. The highest frequency, or mode, was located in the category "a great deal." Teachers felt as though they could do "a great deal" in terms of how much they could do when an example or alternative explanation was required when students were confused. Forty responses fell into this particular category. The standard deviations reported for providing appropriate challenges for capable students (1.29) and adjusting lessons to proper level for students (1.31) indicated that there is a large range of responses for these particular questions, spanning between "very little" and "a great deal." Overall, teachers expressed a high sense of self-efficacy in terms of their work with instructional strategies.

Classroom Management

Eight of the twenty-four questions were related to Classroom Management. A composite *Classroom Management* variable was created from the responses below

outlined Table 8. Descriptive statistics for questions in the *Classroom Management* composite were as follows.

Table 8: Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Classroom Management)

Variable	*N*	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Control Disruptive Behavior	127	7.20	7.00	1.33	4	9
Make Behavior Expectations Clear	127	8.08	9.00	1.16	4	9
Establish Routines to Keep Activities Running	127	7.67	8.00	1.24	4	9
Get Children to Follow Classroom Rules	127	7.24	7.00	1.27	3	9
Establish Classroom Management System	127	7.37	7.00	1.25	4	9
Calm a Student Who is Disruptive or Noisy	127	6.77	7.00	1.27	4	9
Prevent a Few Problem Students from Ruining Lesson	127	6.72	7.00	1.43	2	9
Effectively Respond to Defiant Students	127	6.91	7.00	1.33	3	9

Middle school educators feel as though they can do "quite a bit" in terms of their ability to manage a classroom. This particular sub-category holds the highest mean (8.08) in terms of making behavioral expectations clear. While teachers expressed a high sense of self-efficacy for questions that were exclusive to classroom management practices, means began to lower when disruptive student behavior was factored in. Preventing a few problem students from ruining a lesson had the highest standard deviation (1.43), with answers ranging between "nothing/very little" to "a great deal." Continuing this trend, teachers felt as though they could do "very little" to "a great deal" in effectively responding to defiant students. These two particular variables, along with calming a student who is disruptive or noisy, reveled a mean score below "quite a bit." Overall, teachers expressed a high sense of self-efficacy in terms of their sense of efficacy with classroom management, with a noted split between rules and routines and responding to challenging students.

Student Engagement

Eight of the twenty-four questions were related to student engagement. A composite *Student Engagement* variable was created from the responses below outlined Table 9. Descriptive statistics for questions from the *Student Engagement* composite were as follows.

Table 9: Descriptive Statistics for Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Student Engagement)

Variable	*N*	Mean	Median	SD	Min	Max
Get Through to Difficult Students	127	6.39	7.00	1.50	1	9
Help Students Think Critically	127	6.92	7.00	1.26	4	9
Motivate Students With Low Interest	127	6.20	6.00	1.41	2	9
Get Students to Believe They Can Do Well	127	7.24	7.00	1.17	4	9
Help Students Value Learning	127	6.81	7.00	1.45	1	9
Foster Student Creativity	127	6.82	7.00	1.39	3	9
Improve Understanding of Failing Students	127	6.67	7.00	1.37	3	9
Assist Families in Helping Children Do Well	127	5.92	6.00	1.62	1	9

On average, middle school educators felt as though they could do slightly less than "quite a bit" in terms of their ability to engage students ($M_{\text{student engagement}} = 6.62$). This particular sub-category held the lowest mean of the three sub-categories, speaking to the literature in chapters 1-2 which outlined the complex nature of adolescent middle school students. While teachers expressed a high sense of self-efficacy for the question that spoke to student confidence ($M_{\text{get students to believe they can do well}} = 7.24$), the mean was far lower for students that had low interest ($M_{\text{motivate students with low interest}} = 6.20$). The lowest mean of the entire survey ($M_{\text{assist families in helping children do well}} = 5.92$), and largest standard deviation (1.61) was found in the question that asked what teachers can do to assist families in helping students do well. For this particular question, teacher responses ranged from being able to do "nothing" to "a great deal." The high standard deviations throughout this composite variable indicated a large response range for the majority of

questions, suggesting a polarizing split in teacher beliefs related to the engagement of students. Overall, teachers expressed a high sense of self-efficacy in terms of their work with student engagement, with a slightly lower mean for the aforementioned *Instructional Strategies* and *Classroom Management* composites.

Comparative Data Analysis

Composite variables were used as to determine significance between categorical and continuous data. A TSES full composite variable was created for the full twenty-four question survey, in addition to the three aforementioned eight question composites created for the sub-categories of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. These composite variables were comparted to categorical data points via t-tests and ANOVA tests.

T-Tests

Gender

Table 10: Results of t-tests TSES, Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, Student Engagement Composites, by Gender

	Male			Female			95 % CI for Mean		
Variable	**M**	**SD**	**n**	**M**	**SD**	**n**	**Difference**	**t**	**df**
TSES Full Survey	6.86	.85	40	7.18	.76	87	.04 , .60	2.23*	125
Instructional Strategies	7.20	.70	40	7.44	.87	87	-.07 , .55	1.54	125
Classroom Management	6.97	.90	40	7.37	.94	87	.05 , .75	2.28*	125
Student Engagement	6.41	.97	40	6.72	.86	87	-.03 , .65	1.81	125

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Tests for significance were run for male and female educators' sense of self-efficacy. A t-test was calculated to determine the observed level of significance between gender and composite measures for the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Survey and its three composite sub measures including, *Instructional Strategies*, *Classroom Management*, and

Student Engagement. The descriptive data that was presented in Table 10 t-test results indicated that there was a significant difference between male and female educators and the full TSES survey, $t(125) = 2.23$, $P = .027$. The p-value of .027 was less than $\alpha = 0.05$; therefore the null hypothesis was rejected. In general, it appeared that there is a significant difference between males and females with regard to teachers' sense of self-efficacy ($M_{males} = 6.86$ vs. $M_{females} = 7.18$). Delving into the sub category composites, it was evident that there was a significant difference between male and female educators and classroom management, $t(125) = 2.28$, $P = .024$. The p-value of .024 was less than $\alpha = 0.05$; therefore the null hypothesis is rejected. There was a significant difference between males and females with regard to classroom management ($M_{males} = 6.97$ vs. $M_{females} = 7.37$). In terms of efficacy with instructional strategies, there was no significant difference in terms of gender, $t(125) = 1.54$, $P = .126$. The p-value of .126 was greater than $\alpha = 0.05$; therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. However, six responses to questions from the TSES revealed significant findings. The six responses are presented in Table 11 below.

Table 11: Significant Factors Identified by t-tests of TSES Questions and Gender

Variable	Male			Female			95 % CI for Mean Difference	t	df
	M	SD	n	M	SD	n			
Make Expectations Clear	7.73	1.43	40	8.24	.98	87	.09 , .95	2.38**	125
Establish Routines to Keep Activities Running	7.05	1.32	40	7.95	1.09	87	.46 , 1.35	4.06***	125
Get Through to Difficult Students	6.00	1.50	40	6.57	1.47	87	.02 , 1.13	2.04*	125
Help Students Think Critically	6.55	1.22	40	7.09	1.25	87	.07 , 1.01	2.29*	125
Motivate Students with Low Interest	5.80	1.54	40	6.38	1.32	87	.05 , 1.11	2.18*	125
Understand Students that are Failing	6.35	1.51	40	6.82	1.28	87	-.05 , .98	1.80*	125
Respond to Difficult Questions from Students	7.05	1.11	40	7.52	1.14	87	.04 , .89	2.16*	125

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Two classroom management questions elicited responses that demonstrated noteworthy significance. In general, female educators demonstrated a higher sense of efficacy in terms of making expectations clear and establishing routines to keep activities running smoothly. Their significance is noted in Table 11 above. Despite the fact that the null hypothesis was maintained when analyzing the student engagement composite variable, four questions rejected the null hypothesis. Gender was found to be a significant factor in terms of getting through to difficult students, helping students to think critically, motivating students with low interest, and understanding students that are failing. Once again, female educators demonstrated a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy in responding to these four questions. Finally, in terms of instructional strategies, gender was found to be a significant factor. Females also displayed a significantly higher sense of efficacy in responding to difficult question from students.

For each gender question that proved to be significant, females demonstrated a higher sense of self-efficacy.

Overall, it appeared that there was no significant difference between males and females with regard to efficacy in terms of instructional strategies ($M_{males} = 7.20$ vs. $M_{females} = 7.44$). Finally, in regards to gender and educator's sense of efficacy with student engagement, there was no significant difference, $t(125) = 1.81$, $P = .074$. The p-value of .074 is greater than $\alpha = 0.05$; therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. It appears that there is no significant difference between males and females with regard to efficacy with engagement of students ($M_{males} = 6.41$ vs. $M_{females} = 6.72$). Overall, the difference in gender was primarily driven by females' greater sense of efficacy in regards to establishing effective classroom management strategies, with no significant difference found for instructional strategies or student engagement.

Type of Undergraduate Degree

Table 12: Results of t-tests TSES, Instructional Strategies, Classroom Management, Student Engagement Composites, by Undergraduate Degree

	Education			Content			95 % CI for Mean		
Variable	**M**	**SD**	**n**	**M**	**SD**	**n**	**Difference**	**t**	**df**
TSES Full Survey	7.14	.85	40	7.05	.71	87	-.19 , -.38	.67	125
Instructional Strategies	7.40	.91	40	7.35	.78	87	-.26 , .37	.35	125
Classroom Management	7.38	1.13	40	7.18	.84	87	-.15 , .56	1.13	125
Student Engagement	6.64	.83	40	6.61	.94	87	-.31 , .38	.19	125

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Tests for significance were run for educators' undergraduate major's (education or content area) influence on sense of self-efficacy. A t-test was calculated to determine the observed level of significance between type of undergraduate major and composite measures for the Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Survey and its three composite sub

measures including, *Instructional Strategies*, *Classroom Management*, and *Student Engagement*. The descriptive data that was presented in Table 12 t-test results indicated that there was not a significant difference between those who majored in education and those who majored in content and the full TSES survey, $t(125) = .67$, $P = .50$. The p-value of .50 was greater than $\alpha = 0.05$; therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. In general, it appeared that there is not a significant difference between education majors and content majors with regard to teachers' sense of self-efficacy ($M_{\text{education major}} = 7.14$ vs. $M_{\text{content major}} = 7.05$). Delving into the sub category composites, it was evident that there was not a significant difference between education majors and content majors and classroom management, $t(125) = 1.13$, $P = .26$. The p-value of .26 was greater than $\alpha = 0.05$; therefore the null hypothesis is maintained. There was no significant difference between education majors and content majors with regard to classroom management ($M_{\text{education major}} = 7.38$ vs. $M_{\text{content major}} = 7.18$). In terms of efficacy with instructional strategies, there was no significant difference in terms of education majors and content majors, $t(125) = .35$, $P = .73$. The p-value of .73 was greater than $\alpha = 0.05$; therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Finally, there was no significant difference between education majors and content majors with regard to student engagement ($M_{\text{education major}} = 6.64$ vs. $M_{\text{content major}} = 6.61$). In terms of efficacy with engaging students, there was no significant difference in terms of education majors and content majors, $t(125) = .19$, $P = .85$. The p-value of .85 was greater than $\alpha = 0.05$; therefore the null hypothesis was maintained.

ANOVAs

Years' Experience

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether years' experience affected educators' sense of self-efficacy. In addition, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for the three composite variables of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Results from all one-way ANOVAs that explored educators' years' of experience as a significant efficacy factor is presented in Tables 13-16 below.

Table 13: Summary Years' Experience Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics

Years' Experience	N	M	SD
0-1 years	11	6.74	.90
2-3 years	32	6.95	.72
4-5 years	14	7.17	.82
6-7 years	9	7.15	.68
8-9 years	14	6.99	.60
10-11 years	15	7.38	.92
12-13 years	6	6.92	.70
14-15 years	5	7.27	.67
16-17 years	4	7.11	.70
18-19 years	3	7.39	.32
20+ years	14	7.19	.84

Summary ANOVA Years' Experience Composite Full Survey

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	4.22	10	.42	.72	.70
Within Groups	67.92	116	.59		
Total	72.14	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 14: Summary Years' Experience Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics

Years' Experience	N	M	SD
0-1 years	11	6.98	.84
2-3 years	32	7.20	.78
4-5 years	14	7.60	.88
6-7 years	9	7.40	.91
8-9 years	14	7.20	.71
10-11 years	15	7.64	.85
12-13 years	6	7.38	.98
14-15 years	5	7.60	.84
16-17 years	4	7.59	.86
18-19 years	3	7.42	.38
20+ years	14	7.51	.90

Summary ANOVA Years' Experience Composite Instructional Strategies

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	5.68	10	.57	.83	.61
Within Groups	79.84	116	.69		
Total	85.52	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 15: Summary Years' Experience Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics

Years' Experience	N	M	SD
0-1 years	11	6.52	.95
2-3 years	32	6.98	.95
4-5 years	14	7.33	1.05
6-7 years	9	7.47	.78
8-9 years	14	7.29	.73
10-11 years	15	7.73	.83
12-13 years	6	7.10	1.18
14-15 years	5	7.63	.91
16-17 years	4	7.25	.67
18-19 years	3	7.67	.64
20+ years	14	7.45	.97

Summary ANOVA Years' Experience Composite Classroom Management

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	13.91	10	1.39	1.65	.10
Within Groups	97.60	116	.84		
Total	111.51	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 16: Summary Years' Experience Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics

Years' Experience	N	M	SD
0-1 years	11	6.72	1.15
2-3 years	32	6.66	.80
4-5 years	14	6.57	1.04
6-7 years	9	6.58	.77
8-9 years	14	6.48	.62
10-11 years	15	6.77	1.39
12-13 years	6	6.29	.53
14-15 years	5	6.58	.58
16-17 years	4	6.50	.80
18-19 years	3	7.08	.59
20+ years	14	6.61	.96

Summary ANOVA Years' Experience Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	2.15	10	.22	.25	.99
Within Groups	100.91	116	.87		
Total	103.06	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

In terms of years' experience as a significant factor, the null hypothesis was maintained. There was no significant difference in terms of teachers' sense of self-efficacy and years' experience. The p value was greater than .05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in Table 13. As shown in Table 13, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their years' experience, $F(10, 116) = .70$, $p > .05$. Tables 14-16 revealed that years' of experience was not a significant factor in terms of educators' instructional strategies ($F(10, 116) = .61$, $p > .05$), classroom management ($F(10, 116) = .70$, $p > .10$), or student engagement ($F(10, 116) = .99$, $p > .05$). Overall, years' experience was not a significant factor in

determining teachers' overall sense of efficacy in any capacity. It appeared that newer educators (within their first three years) and more experienced educators (close to twenty years) had a similar sense of efficacy in terms of years' experience. Educators report being able to do "quite a bit" in terms of various scenarios from instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement ($M_{\text{educators in yrs. 0-1}} = 6.74$ vs. $M_{\text{educators in yrs. 1-2}} = 6.95$ vs. $M_{\text{educators in yrs. 2-3}} = 7.17$ vs. $M_{\text{educators in yrs. 16-17}} = 7.11$ vs. $M_{\text{educators in yrs. 18-19}} = 7.39$ vs. $M_{\text{educators in yrs. 20+}} = 7.19$). Overall, teachers, across various years of experience, reported a high sense of efficacy in the OakRidge school district.

After finding no significance in two year groupings, respondent's data was then regrouped into three categories. Early educators were considered those in their first five years of teaching. Educators in the middle of their career were considered to have taught between six and thirteen years. Finally, those that had taught fourteen years or more were grouped into a veteran educators' category. Results from all one-way ANOVAs that explored educators' years' of experience as a significant efficacy factor is presented in Tables 17-20 below.

Table 17: Summary Grouped Years' Experience Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics

Years' Experience	N	M	SD
0-5 years	57	6.96	.78
6-13 years	44	7.15	.75
14+ years	26	7.21	.71

Summary ANOVA Years' Experience Composite Full Survey

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	1.48	2	.74	1.30	.28
Within Groups	70.66	124	.57		
Total	72.14	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 18: Summary Grouped Years' Experience Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics

Years' Experience	N	M	SD
0-5 years	57	7.25	.83
6-13 years	44	7.41	.83
14+ years	26	7.53	.80

Summary ANOVA Years' Experience Composite Instructional Strategies

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	1.53	2	.77	1.13	.33
Within Groups	83.99	124	.68		
Total	85.52	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 19: Summary Grouped Years' Experience Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics

Years' Experience	N	M	SD
0-5 years	57	6.98	1.00
6-13 years	44	7.45	.84
14+ years	26	7.48	.85

Summary ANOVA Years' Experience Composite Classroom Management

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	7.26	2	3.63	4.32	.02*
Within Groups	104.25	124	.84		
Total	111.51	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 20: Summary Grouped Years' Experience Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics

Years' Experience	N	M	SD
0-5 years	57	6.65	.92
6-13 years	44	6.57	.95
14+ years	26	6.64	.82

Summary ANOVA Years' Experience Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	1.52	2	.08	.09	.91
Within Groups	102.91	124	.83		
Total	103.06	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

In terms of grouped years' experience as a significant factor, the null hypothesis was maintained. There was no significant difference in terms of teachers' overall sense of self-efficacy and years' experience. The p value was greater than .05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results are presented in Table 17. As shown in Table 17, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their years' experience, $F(2, 124) = .28$, $p > .05$. Tables 18 and 20 revealed that years' of experience was not a significant factor in terms of educators' instructional strategies ($F(2, 124) = .33$, $p > .05$) or student engagement ($F(2, 124) = .91$, $p > .05$). Table 19 revealed that years' experience was a significant factor in terms of educators' sense of self-efficacy regarding classroom management ($F(2, 124) = .02$, $p < .05$). As educators gained more years of experience, they felt significantly more efficacious in terms of classroom management as compared to those in teachers earlier in their careers ($M_{\text{educators in yrs. 0-5}} = 6.98$ vs. $M_{\text{educators in yrs. 6-13}} = 7.45$ vs. $M_{\text{educators in yrs. 14+}} = 7.48$).

Largely, years' experience was not a significant factor in determining teachers' overall sense of efficacy. However, years' experience did serve as a significant factor in terms of classroom management. The more years' experience educators gained, the higher their sense of self-efficacy in managing a classroom. Years' experience, however, did not serve as a significant factor in developing effective instructional strategies or student engagement techniques.

Content Area

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether content area affected educators' sense of self-efficacy. In addition, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for the three composite variables of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Results from all one-way ANOVAs that explored educators' content area

as a significant efficacy factor are presented in Tables 21-24 below.

Table 21: Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics

Content Area	N	M	SD
Math	26	6.93	.82
ELA	25	7.08	.77
Science	16	7.19	.60
Social Studies	13	7.18	.85
Special Education	21	7.21	.83
Technology	7	6.68	.70
Arts (Music & Art)	7	6.96	.42
Wellness (Phys. Ed & Health)	6	6.85	.88
ELL	6	7.51	.54

Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Full Survey

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	3.93	8	.49	.85	.56
Within Groups	68.21	118	.58		
Total	72.14	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 22: Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics

Content Area	N	M	SD
Math	26	7.15	.82
ELA	25	7.32	.85
Science	16	7.66	.64
Social Studies	13	7.40	.96
Special Education	21	7.43	.91
Technology	7	7.16	.88
Arts (Music & Art)	7	7.18	.46
Wellness (Phys. Ed & Health)	6	7.44	.90
ELL	6	7.79	.80

Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Instructional Strategies

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	4.41	8	.55	.80	.60
Within Groups	81.11	118	.69		
Total	85.52	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 23: Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics

Content Area	N	M	SD
Math	26	7.16	1.17
ELA	25	7.35	1.02
Science	16	7.27	.84
Social Studies	13	7.32	.74
Special Education	21	7.34	.89
Technology	7	7.18	.65
Arts (Music & Art)	7	7.04	.76
Wellness (Phys. Ed & Health)	6	6.67	1.15
ELL	6	7.50	.77

Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Classroom Management

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	3.45	8	.43	.47	.88
Within Groups	108.06	118	.92		
Total	111.51	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 24: Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics

Content Area	N	M	SD
Math	26	6.49	.91
ELA	25	6.57	.80
Science	16	6.65	.85
Social Studies	13	6.83	1.02
Special Education	21	6.86	.87
Technology	7	5.70	1.37
Arts (Music & Art)	7	6.68	.56
Wellness (Phys. Ed & Health)	6	6.46	.82
ELL	6	7.25	.52

Summary ANOVA Content Area Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	10.89	8	1.36	1.74	.10
Within Groups	92.17	118	.78		
Total	103.06	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether a teacher's content area was a significant influence in their sense of self-efficacy. In this instance, the null hypothesis was maintained. Content area was not a significant influence on middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy. The p value was greater than .05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results were presented in Table 21. As shown in Table 21, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy and their content area, $F(8, 118) = .56$, $p > .05$.

Tables 22-24 revealed that content area was not a significant factor in terms of educators' instructional strategies ($F(8, 118) = .60$, $p > .05$), classroom management (F(8,

118) = .88, p > .05), or student engagement (F(8, 118) = .10, p > .05). Therefore, content area was not a significant factor in teachers' overall sense of efficacy, as educators across content areas felt as though they could do "quite a bit" in ensuring successful instructional, student engagement, and classroom management practices. While English Language Learner (M_{ELL} = 7.79) and Science teachers ($M_{Science}$ = 7.66) were on the higher end of self-efficacy, Technology ($M_{Technology}$ = 7.16) Math (M_{Math} = 7.15) teachers resided on the lower end. However overall, teachers across all represented content areas in the OakRidge district reported an equally high sense of efficacy.

Degree Level

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether degree level affected educators' sense of self-efficacy. In addition, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for the three composite variables of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Results from all one-way ANOVAs that explored educators' degree level as a significant efficacy factor are presented in Tables 25-29 below.

Table 25: Summary ANOVA Degree Level Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics

Degree Type	N	M	SD
Bachelor's	27	6.92	.67
Master's	76	7.15	.72
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study	23	7.10	.88
PhD or EdD	1	5.29	-

Summary Degree Level Composite Full Survey

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	4.31	3	1.44	2.61	.06
Within Groups	67.83	123	.55		
Total	72.14	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 26: Summary ANOVA Degree Level Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics

Degree Type	N	M	SD
Bachelor's	27	7.18	.83
Master's	76	7.44	.81
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study	23	7.40	.81
PhD or EdD	1	5.63	-

Summary Degree Level Composite Instructional Strategies

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	4.45	3	1.48	2.24	.09
Within Groups	81.07	123	.66		
Total	85.52	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 27: Summary ANOVA Degree Level Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics

Degree Type	N	M	SD
Bachelor's	27	7.00	.84
Master's	76	7.31	.89
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study	23	7.40	1.09
PhD or EdD	1	5.13	-

Summary Degree Level Composite Classroom Management

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	7.03	3	2.34	2.76	.05*
Within Groups	104.48	123	.85		
Total	111.51	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 28: Summary ANOVA Degree Level Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics

Degree Type	N	M	SD
Bachelor's	27	6.57	.78
Master's	76	6.70	.84
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study	23	6.49	1.19
PhD or EdD	1	5.13	-

Summary Degree Level Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	3.12	3	1.04	1.28	.28
Within Groups	99.94	123	.81		
Total	103.06	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether degree level was a significant factor in determining middle school educators' sense of efficacy. In this instance, the null hypothesis was maintained. There was no significant difference in terms of educators' degree level and their sense of self-efficacy. The p value was slightly greater than .05, and therefore the null hypothesis is maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of results were presented in Table 25. As shown in Table 25, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in an educators sense of efficacy

among the four different degree groups, F(3,123) = .06, p > .05. Tables 26-28 revealed that degree level was not a significant factor in terms of educators' instructional strategies (F(3, 123) = .09, p > .05), classroom management (F(3, 123) = .05, p = .05), or student engagement (F(3, 123) = .28, p > .05). Where p value was so close to significance, a deeper analysis identified four responses where degree level served as a significant factor. Three of the four are related to classroom management while the final response is related to instructional strategies. These responses are presented in Tables 29-32 below.

Table 29: Summary ANOVA Degree Level and Making Expectations Clear

Degree Type	N	M	SD
Bachelor's	27	8.00	1.24
Master's	76	8.24	.98
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study	23	7.78	1.41
PhD or EdD	1	5.00	-

Summary Degree Level Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	13.56	3	4.52	3.58	.02*
Within Groups	155.65	123	1.27		
Total	169.21	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 30: Summary ANOVA Degree Level and Controlling Disruptive Behavior

Degree Type	N	M	SD
Bachelor's	27	6.78	1.45
Master's	76	7.25	1.15
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study	23	7.61	1.62
PhD or EdD	1	5.00	-

Summary Degree Level Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	13.68	3	4.56	2.67	.05*
Within Groups	210.40	123	1.71		
Total	224.08	126			

*p ≤ .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 31: Summary ANOVA Degree Level and Getting Children to Follow Class Rules

Degree Type	N	M	SD
Bachelor's	27	7.00	1.07
Master's	76	7.33	1.27
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study	23	7.39	1.34
PhD or EdD	1	4.00	-

Summary Degree Level Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	13.18	3	4.39	2.84	.04*
Within Groups	190.26	123	1.55		
Total	203.43	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 32: Summary ANOVA Degree Level and Fostering Creativity

Degree Type	N	M	SD
Bachelor's	27	6.52	1.07
Master's	76	7.04	1.27
Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study	23	6.57	1.34
PhD or EdD	1	4.00	-

Summary Degree Level Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	15.56	3	5.19	2.78	.04*
Within Groups	229.27	123	1.86		
Total	244.84	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

In terms of classroom management, degree level was found to be a significant factor in making expectations clear, controlling disruptive behavior, and getting students to follow classroom rules. Educators with a Master's degree had the strongest response in terms of making expectations clear ($M_{\text{Master's Degree}} = 8.24$). In terms of controlling disruptive behavior, efficacy increased as degree level increased from Bachelor's degree to a Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study ($M_{\text{Bachelor's degree}} = 6.78$ vs. $M_{\text{Master's Degree}} = 7.25$ vs. $M_{\text{CAGS}} = 7.61$). However, the one doctoral respondent reported a low sense of efficacy in this category ($M_{\text{PhD or EdD}} = 4.00$). Finally, within the classroom management composite, efficacy once again increased as degree level increased ($M_{\text{Bachelor's degree}} = 7.00$ vs. $M_{\text{Master's Degree}} = 7.33$ vs. $M_{\text{CAGS}} = 7.39$), with the one doctoral respondent reporting a lower sense of efficacy ($M_{\text{PhD or EdD}} = 4.00$). Degree level was a significant influence on one instructional strategy—fostering creativity. Like making expectations clear, educators with who attained a Master's degree reported the highest sense of efficacy of the four levels ($M_{\text{Master's Degree}} = 7.04$ vs. $M_{\text{Bachelor's degree}} = 6.52$ vs. $M_{\text{CAGS}} = 6.57$ vs. $M_{\text{PhD or EdD}} = 4.00$).

Overall, it appeared that educators, regardless of degree level, demonstrated a similar sense of efficacy where they felt as though they could do "quite a bit" in establishing effective instructional, classroom management, and student engagement practices. The educator with the highest degree (PhD or EdD) felt as though they had "some influence" in terms of these areas, while the remaining three degree levels felt as though they could do "quite a bit" ($M_{\text{educator with EdD or PhD}} = 5.63$ vs. $M_{\text{educator with CAGS}} = 7.44$ vs. $M_{\text{educator with Master's degree}} = 7.40$ vs. $M_{\text{educator with bachelor's degree}} = 7.18$) with these important aspects of the profession.

Current Grade Level

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether current grade level taught affected educators' sense of self-efficacy. In addition, a one-way ANOVA was conducted for the three composite variables of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Results from all one-way ANOVAs that explored educators' current grade level as a significant efficacy factor are presented in Tables 33-36 below.

Table 33: Summary ANOVA Current Grade Level Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics

Grade Level	N	M	SD
6th	20	6.84	.81
7th	17	6.84	.79
8th	20	7.36	.77
6th & 7th	15	7.12	.79
7th & 8th	12	7.06	.45
6th & 8th	10	7.08	.57
6th, 7th, & 8th	33	7.16	.80

Summary Current Grade Level Taught Composite Full Survey

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	3.94	6	.66	1.16	.34
Within Groups	68.20	120	.57		
Total	72.14	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 34: Summary ANOVA Current Grade Level Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics

Grade Level	N	M	SD
6th	20	7.06	.88
7th	17	7.11	.69
8th	20	7.57	.92
6th & 7th	15	7.50	.93
7th & 8th	12	7.48	.76
6th & 8th	10	7.08	.75
6th, 7th, & 8th	33	7.54	.74

Summary Current Grade Level Taught Composite Instructional Strategies

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	6.06	6	1.01	1.53	.18
Within Groups	79.46	120	.66		
Total	85.52	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 35: Summary ANOVA Current Grade Level Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics

Grade Level	N	M	SD
6th	20	6.94	1.16
7th	17	7.08	1.02
8th	20	7.63	.85
6th & 7th	15	7.28	.99
7th & 8th	12	7.11	.46
6th & 8th	10	7.48	.47
6th, 7th, & 8th	33	7.25	.99

Summary Current Grade Level Taught Composite Classroom Management

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	6.08	6	1.013	1.15	.34
Within Groups	105.43	120	.88		
Total	111.51	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 36: Summary ANOVA Current Grade Level Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics

Grade Level	N	M	SD
6th	20	6.53	.88
7th	17	6.32	.88
8th	20	6.89	.89
6th & 7th	15	6.58	.70
7th & 8th	12	6.59	.67
6th & 8th	10	6.68	.84
6th, 7th, & 8th	33	6.68	1.11

Summary Current Grade Level Taught Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	3.33	6	.56	.67	.68
Within Groups	99.73	120	.83		
Total	103.60	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether current grade level served as a significant influence on middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. In this instance, the null hypothesis was once again maintained. There was no significant difference in terms of middle school educators' current grade level and their sense of self-efficacy. The p value was greater than .05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and summary statistics are presented in Table 33. As shown in Table 33, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy and their current grade level(s). Educators reported a high sense of efficacy across multiple grade levels, $F(6,120) = .34$, $p > .05$. Tables 34-36 revealed that degree level was not a significant factor in terms of educators' instructional strategies ($F(6,120) = .18$, $p > .05$), classroom management ($F(6,120) = .34$, $p > .05$), or student engagement ($F(6,120) = .68$, $p > .05$). Teachers from various grade levels feel as though they can do "quite a bit" to effectively manage a classroom, employ instructional strategies, and engage students ($M_{\text{educators that teach grade 6}} = 7.06$ vs. $M_{\text{educators that teach grade 7}} = 7.11$ vs. $M_{\text{educators that teach grade 8}} = 7.57$ vs. $M_{\text{educators that teach grades 6 \& 7}} = 7.50$ vs. $M_{\text{educators that teach grades 7 \& 8}} = 7.48$ vs. $M_{\text{educators that teach grades 6 \& 8}} = 7.08$ vs. $M_{\text{educators that teach grades 6, 7, \& 8}} = 7.54$). As such, current grade level taught did not serve as a significant influence over teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Historical Grade Level

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether historical grade levels taught affected educators' sense of self-efficacy. In addition, a one-way ANOVA

was conducted for the three composite variables of instructional strategies, classroom management, and student engagement. Results from all one-way ANOVAs that explored educators' historical grade level as a significant efficacy factor are presented in Tables 37-40 below.

Table 37: Summary ANOVA Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Full Survey Descriptive Statistics

Grade Level	N	M	SD
6th	8	6.83	1.05
7th	6	6.81	78
8th	7	7.28	.84
6th & 7th	14	6.96	.72
7th & 8th	11	7.02	.90
6th & 8th	3	7.36	1.25
6th, 7th, & 8th	78	7.12	.70

Summary Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Full Survey

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	1.83	6	.31	.52	.79
Within Groups	70.31	120	.59		
Total	72.14	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 38: Summary ANOVA Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Instructional Strategies Descriptive Statistics

Grade Level	N	M	SD
6th	8	7.08	1.13
7th	6	6.92	.70
8th	7	7.45	.98
6th & 7th	14	7.22	.82
7th & 8th	11	7.19	.88
6th & 8th	3	7.46	1.48
6th, 7th, & 8th	78	7.47	.76

Summary Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Instructional Strategies

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	3.37	6	.56	.82	.56
Within Groups	82.15	120	.69		
Total	85.52	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 39: Summary ANOVA Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Classroom Management Descriptive Statistics

Grade Level	N	M	SD
6th	8	6.92	1.47
7th	6	6.94	.88
8th	7	7.23	.72
6th & 7th	14	7.14	1.02
7th & 8th	11	7.45	1.14
6th & 8th	3	7.63	.88
6th, 7th, & 8th	78	7.28	.87

Summary Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Classroom Management

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	2.55	6	.43	.47	.83
Within Groups	108.96	120	.91		
Total	111.51	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

Table 40: Summary ANOVA Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Student Engagement Descriptive Statistics

Grade Level	N	M	SD
6th	8	6.50	.91
7th	6	6.56	.99
8th	7	7.16	.97
6th & 7th	14	6.53	.79
7th & 8th	11	6.40	1.00
6th & 8th	3	7.00	1.54
6th, 7th, & 8th	78	6.62	.89

Summary Historical Grade Level Taught Composite Student Engagement

Variable	Sum of Squares	*df*	Mean Square	*F*	*p*
Between Groups	3.28	6	.55	.66	.68
Within Groups	99.78	120	.83		
Total	103.06	126			

*p < .05 **p<.01 ***p<.001

A one-way ANOVA test was conducted to examine whether historical grade levels taught served as a significant influence on middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. In this instance, we once again maintained the null hypothesis. There was no significant difference in terms of middle school educators' experience at middle school grade levels and their sense of self-efficacy. The p value was greater than .05, and therefore the null hypothesis was maintained. Descriptive data and a summary of ANOVA test results were presented in Table 37. As shown in Table 37, the ANOVA results indicated that there was no significant difference in middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy and their historical grade level(s). Educators reported a high sense of efficacy across multiple historical grade levels, $F(6,120) = .79$, $p > .05$. Teachers from various historical grade levels felt as though they could do "quite a bit" in effectively managing a classroom, promoting instructional strategies, and engaging students ($M_{\text{educators that have only taught grade 6}} = 7.08$ vs. $M_{\text{educators that have only taught grade 7}} = 6.92$ vs. $M_{\text{educators that}}$

have only taught grade 8 = 7.45 vs. $M_{\text{educators that have taught grades 6 \& 7}}$ = 7.22 vs. $M_{\text{educators that teach grades 7 \& 8}}$ = 7.19 vs. $M_{\text{educators that have only taught grades 6 \& 8}}$ = 7.46 vs. $M_{\text{educators that have taught grades 6, 7, \& 8}}$ = 7.47). Thus, historical grades taught did not serve as a significant factor in middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy.

Conclusion

In terms of characteristics related to a higher sense of efficacy, Ross' (1994) analyzed 88 studies related to the antecedents and consequences of teacher efficacy. A theme emerging from this expansive look at multiple studies that explored efficacy was that female teachers have a higher sense of efficacy than males. This finding is consistent with the results of the TSES survey given to middle school educators in the OakRidge district. An interesting finding from the OakRidge district was female's higher sense of efficacy over male's as it specifically related to classroom management, but also in terms of specific questions pertaining to student engagement. Female educators demonstrated a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy when considering the TSES as a whole. When years' experience was grouped into three categories, teacher efficacy (in terms of classroom management) began to increase as experience increased. This finding was in line with Ross' (1994) assertion that personal teaching efficacy increases with service time.

Ross (1994) also found that elementary teachers have a higher sense of efficacy than middle and high school educators. Yet, middle school educators from the OakRidge district report a very high sense of efficacy ($M_{\text{all middle school educators full survey}}$ = 7.08). This served as a significant finding in that the study provided the opportunity for an emic

follow-up perspective of a highly efficacious middle school program. According to the provided Likert Scale, educators in the OakRidge district felt as though they could do between "quite a bit" and "a great deal" in terms of promoting progress within their classrooms. Interestingly, educators felt most efficacious in terms of classroom management and instructional strategies. They lowest efficacy category was student engagement, perhaps demonstrating the complex nature of adolescence outlined in chapters one and two. The subsequent focus groups, in addition to discussing the influence of accountability, explored this notion.

Focus Groups

Selection

Responses from the TSES survey revealed a high sense of efficacy among middle school educators in the OakRidge school district. For the high efficacy group of potential participants, educators' scores ranged from 7.79 to 8.73. Low efficacy potential candidates' scores ranged from 4.88 to 6.79. A total of ten educators were invited to each focus group. High and Low efficacy educators that were invited to participate in focus groups are listed in Tables 41 and 42 respectively.

Table 41: High Sense of Efficacy Focus Group Invitees

Identifier	Mean	Gender	Undergrad Major	Yrs. Exp.	Content Area	Highest Degree	Current Grade	Historic Grade
Teacher A	8.62	F	Content	4-5	SPED	CAGS	6, 7, & 8	6, 7, & 8
Teacher B	8.54	F	Content	2-3	SPED	Graduate	8	8
Teacher C	8.50	F	Content	10-11	SS	Graduate	6 & 7	6, 7, & 8
Teacher D	8.17	F	Content	10-11	Science	CAGS	8	6 & 8
Teacher E	8.08	F	Education	14-15	ELL	Graduate	8	6, 7, & 8
Teacher F	8.08	F	Content	4-5	ELA	Graduate	8	6, 7, & 8
Teacher G	7.83	F	Content	2-3	Math	Bachelor	7	8
Teacher H	7.83	F	Education	14-15	Science	Graduate	8	6, 7, & 8
Teacher I	7.79	M	Education	20+	ELA	CAGS	6 & 8	6, 7, & 8
Teacher J	7.79	F	Education	10-11	ELA	CAGS	6	6, 7, & 8

Table 42: Low Sense of Efficacy Focus Group Invitees

Identifier	Mean	Gender	Undergrad Major	Yrs. Exp.	Content Area	Highest Degree	Current Grade	Historic Grade
Teacher Z	4.88	F	Education	0-1	Math	Graduate	6	6
Teacher Y	5.54	F	Content	8-9	SPED	CAGS	7	7
Teacher X	6.04	M	Content	4-5	Math	Graduate	6, 7, & 8	6, 7, & 8
Teacher W	6.29	F	Education	10-11	SPED	Graduate	7	6, 7, & 8
Teacher V	6.29	M	Content	2-3	Math	Bachelor	8	8
Teacher U	6.33	F	Education	2-3	SPED	Bachelor	6	6
Teacher T	6.42	F	Content	2-3	ELA	Graduate	6	6
Teacher S	6.50	F	Education	8-9	SPED	Graduate	6 & 7	6, 7, & 8
Teacher R	6.71	F	Content	20+	Arts	CAGS	6 & 8	6, 7, & 8
Teacher Q	6.79	M	Content	10-11	SS	Graduate	6 & 8	6, 7, & 8

Of the ten invited to the high efficacy group, five reported on the day of the focus group. Their mean scores ranged from 7.79 to 8.50. In terms of content, three of the four core subjects were represented, including ELA, Science, and Social Studies. Three of the five majored in education while just two held an undergraduate degree in their content area. Four of the five participants had taught all three grade levels at one point in their career. All members of this focus group have at least 10 years of teaching experience and three possessed a degree above a Masters (Certificate of Advanced Graduate Study), while the two others have garnered a Master's degree. Finally, four of the five members from this particular focus group were female, conveying the aforementioned significance of gender as an influence of self-efficacy. Participants and their respective pseudonyms are listed below in Table 43.

Table 43: High Sense of Efficacy Focus Group Participants

Name	Mean	Gender	Undergrad Major	Yrs. Exp.	Content Area	Highest Degree	Current Grade	Historic Grade
Patricia	8.50	F	Content	10-11	SS	Graduate	6 & 7	6, 7, & 8
Karly	8.17	F	Content	10-11	Science	CAGS	8	6 & 8
Renee	7.83	F	Education	14-15	Science	Graduate	8	6, 7, & 8
Danny	7.79	M	Education	20+	ELA	CAGS	6 & 8	6, 7, & 8
Elaine	7.79	F	Education	10-11	ELA	CAGS	6	6, 7, & 8

Of the ten teachers in the low efficacy group, seven reported to the focus group session. Their mean scores ranged from 4.88 to 6.79. In terms of content, three of the four core subjects (ELA, Math, and Social Studies) were represented, along with two special education teachers and one Arts teacher. Five of the seven participants possessed an undergraduate degree in their content area and just two majored in education. In terms of years' experience, there was a wide range spanning from 0-1 years' experience to 20+. Four of the seven educators in this group had only taught one grade level, while the remaining three members have experienced each of the three grade levels at some point in their career. Bachelor's, Master's, and CAGS degrees were all represented in this particular group. Finally, five out of the seven were female. Participants and their respective pseudonyms are listed in Table 44 below.

Table 44: Low Sense of Efficacy Focus Group Participants

Name	Mean	Gender	Undergrad Major	Yrs. Exp.	Content Area	Highest Degree	Current Grade	Historic Grade
Kerry	4.88	F	Education	0-1	Math	Graduate	6	6
Traci	5.54	F	Content	8-9	SPED	CAGS	7	7
Cameron	6.29	M	Content	2-3	Math	Bachelor	8	8
Audrey	6.42	F	Content	2-3	ELA	Graduate	6	6
Barbara	6.50	F	Education	8-9	SPED	Graduate	6 & 7	6, 7, & 8
Laura	6.71	F	Content	20+	Arts	CAGS	6 & 8	6, 7, & 8
Drew	6.79	M	Content	10-11	SS	Graduate	6 & 8	6, 7, & 8

The focus groups provided an emic view of middle school teachers' beliefs on their sense of self-efficacy. Data was coded separately and then comparatively. Various themes emerged from focus group responses. These themes, first isolated to each respective group and then later compared between the two groups, are presented in the subsequent sections below.

High Efficacy Group

Standardized Testing & Data: Compartmentalized Factors Beyond Educators' Control

As referenced in Chapter 2, middle school was originally designed as a loosely coupled system, one aligned to Weick's (1976) concept whereby teachers were granted autonomy in meeting various students' needs. Literature surrounding accountability and the subsequent mandates seemed to suggest a tightly coupled system impinging upon this ubiquitous format. When asked about factors beyond their control that influence their sense of self-efficacy, middle school educators with a high sense of self-efficacy identified this phenomena as an influence over their sense of self-efficacy and autonomy in the classroom. The following exchange illustrates the influence that a tightly coupled system impinging upon a loosely coupled system has on their sense of self-efficacy.

> Elaine: I think sometimes being required to do an initiative a certain number of times or term throughout the year that maybe doesn't jive with what I normally want to do, or I don't see it as being very beneficial to my students, but it being—being something that is mandated and I have to include in class.
>
> Danny: (Standardized Test Practice) testing. I think to stop and give a practice test in the middle of my curriculum; that is a good way to, I guess, test to see if what I am doing is correct. But it's still a pull up moment. And then we have reteaching, where, again, I have to stop what I'm doing, reteach something that was analyzed as a weakness from (the test).
>
> Patricia: I guess I agree with Elaine about testing and timing a bit. Sometimes I feel like I have to cover a certain amount of material before I test, rather than going in-depth about things that I like, and I think it's really when students are

going into depth that I really feel like they're learning something, rather than just covering things on the surface.

Here, educators identified the impact that particular practices (particularly those which are centered on fulfilling accountability mandates) have on their practice. Their words revealed an underlying frustration with the prioritization of coverage over depth, echoing Delpit's (2006) description of a "teacher-proof curricula" (p. xiiv) aimed at ensuring successful performance on standardized testing. If left to their own volition, middle school educators expressed that they would like to delve deeper into particular concepts which they deem important to student progress. Yet, despite their frustrations, these middle school educators did not seem overwhelmed by this pervasive aspect of their job. Subsequent conversations revealed a certain acceptance of the fact that particular aspects of the job are not directly in line with their belief system. However, such proclamations were accompanied by statements where they suggested a willingness to participate in the educational process nonetheless.

Educators expressed a similar sentiment when considering data analysis as an influence over their sense of self-efficacy. Again, they revealed a sense of acceptance of data analysis as a part of their teaching process. Educators in this particular focus group expressed the sentiment that, once again, they do not feel overwhelmed by the process or responsibility of data analysis. Their voices served as a bit of a counter narrative to Ohanian's (2009) description of a "data worship" (p. 375) culture that has narrowed teachers' pedagogical practices to the point where they do not feel as though they are being treated as professionals.

Renee: I like looking at the data, only because it — for me it only happens by the quarter, and it's not tied into everything I do, but seeing that I taught a concept and had success on it, that is good for me.

Elaine: I don't know, I feel like I try to keep an even keel about the data. If I know I focus on a standard, of course I'm going to look for that when I get the data back, but there's some factors within the data, that you — of course it's easy to blame the question, but sometimes really it's just — it isn't a great question, or — so I don't try to get too excited when the data is good, and I don't get too down it when it's bad, because there are — I know there are always a bunch of factors, so in general I feel like it's never super problematic, so I know, "Okay, just keep doing what you're doing. It's — it'll even out." So when my kids don't do very well on an (Standardized Test Practice Exam) test, but the entire network doesn't do very well on the unit test, it would be kind of silly for me to get that upset about it when there's obviously more factors.

Renee: I like to look at the data and talk to the kids about it, you know like especially if it's something that I know that we did, just thinking of one standard that I knew we had done a ton of work on leading up to the (Standardized Test Practice Exam), and then they didn't do as well as I would have anticipated, and so I showed them what they did; we looked at the question, and then we kind of brainstormed like how that question was actually asking them a bunch of different things. It was just a different way of asking things that we had done in class, and I think they were like, "Oh!" It was just kind of looking at it in a different way.

So think bringing — you had mentioned bringing the data to the kids also, and just kind of showing them, "You have the skill set to do this!"

Educators from the high efficacy group seem to use the data as an indication of their practice, rather than an indictment. Teachers in the high efficacy group did not express incredible frustration with the data process. As Elaine notes, “I try to keep an even keel about the data.” She considers greater factors as influences of the data. She conveys a quiet confidence in staying the course, addressing areas in need of improvement, while consciously celebrating successes. Renee, conveying a similar attitude, promotes confidence telling students, “You have the skill set to do this!” She also explains her belief in sharing the data with students, empowering them to take ownership over their performance. Data analysis, in this instance, seems to be a positive influence on this group of educators’ overall sense of self-efficacy. Their approach does not seem to fit Ravitch’s (2010) description of succumbing to a standardized testing ideology. Instead, the concept seems to symbiotic with their instructional practices, serving as a positive influence behind their high efficacy.

Resilience in the Face of Challenging Student Home Lives

Student home lives served as a second theme, one that was identified as a factor beyond educators’ control. This barrier seemed to negatively influence teachers’ sense of efficacy, particularly in terms of their general teaching efficacy as defined by Ross (1994). Teaching in an urban district, where close to 80% of the students are categorized as “low income” and qualify for free or reduced lunch, serves as a particularly

challenging dynamic from which these middle school educators operate. Consider the following exchange below from teachers when asked about factors beyond their control.

> Renee: I find my biggest barrier is that their home lives are crazy, and for them to effectively learn, they have to figure out how to behave in school. And I think that's for me the biggest factor.
>
> Karly: Just the lack of parent involvement and what students have to deal with after school is much more of a focus for them than my homework assignment or my upcoming project.
>
> Danny: I think it's difficult for kids of a middle school age to sort of leave that baggage at the door, regardless of whether it's Renee saying it's home life, or whether it's something that may have happened in the period before or two periods before, or whether they didn't have their uniform on or not and had to wait for someone to bring clothing. This is outside of my realm, and it may set up a kid for failure in my class that I wasn't aware of beforehand.

Despite the fact that these educators recognized students' home lives as a negative influence on their sense of self-efficacy, an overarching theme of resilience was prevalent when discussing their approach to this challenge. This was particularly notable when educators were asked about meeting the responsibilities set forth by the competing objectives of making academic and holistic progress with middle school students. The exchange between Karly and Patricia illustrates the educators' determination in not letting a challenging home life become a roadblock to student progress.

> Karly: Or there's no one at home. Sometimes I find those kids can't get work done because they don't have help. I have kids in my room every day until about

4:30 some days, just hanging out doing homework, even for other classes, because there's nothing at home.

Patricia: Sometimes there is a student who has such a terrible time at home that you see them hanging around school, or they'll come by your room just to like have a quiet spot to do homework. I feel like those, I think, are some of my best moments—where the kids working on their math homework, or whatever, and you kind of talk to them, "Well, what's going on?" And you kind of build a relationship that way with those really quiet kids. I think some of the students that don't have a good home life—you can see that if you build a relationship with them, things get better.

Reflecting on the quantitative analysis, it was no surprise that educators struggled with assisting students in overcoming turbulent or challenging home circumstances. Of the 24 items, the question that asked if educators felt that they could *Assist Families in Helping Children Do Well* had the lowest mean result ($M_{\text{assist families in helping children do well}} = 5.92$). However, educators from the high group offered a bit of a counter narrative to this statistical data point, grounded in realistic expectations of how they can help bridge the gap between home and school. They referenced moments beyond the school day as opportune times to build genuine relationships. Earlier, in chapter two, Kumashiro (2000) was referenced in ensuring that separate spaces were provided for students along the margins. Here, middle school educators from the high efficacy group seem to carve out their own spaces for students that struggle to complete work at home. Patricia, in describing this space and interaction, referenced it as “some of (her) best moments,”

instances where she has connected with the students and checked in regarding their overall well-being.

In a sense, these educators debunked the notion set forth by Noddings (2005) that poses authentic and aesthetic caring as binary concepts. Instead, they seem to have found a middle ground where both can be accomplished, after school being a time and space necessary to accomplish this genuine notion of care. Noddings (2005) posited that "the academic purpose of the school drives everything" (p. 13). Yet, educators from the high sense of efficacy group, when discussing standardized testing and data analysis, seem to be able to successfully compartmentalize these concepts as expected aspects of the job. These concepts did not seem to be as domineering as presented in the literature in chapter two. Educators recognize the frustration, but have found a means of maintaining their core values in supporting students in their complex time of adolescence. Their empathy towards adolescents served as another theme that emerged from this particular focus group.

Empathy for Adolescent Students

An interesting theme that emerged, one that is not connected to literature presented in chapter two in regards to self-efficacy, was the notion of empathy expressed by the educators in the high focus group. When speaking about their respective approaches, educators from this focus group continuously expressed empathy as a means of promoting progress with their students. They continuously referred to their own children and their own middle school experience as inspirations for this empathy found in their classrooms. The empathy expressed in their classroom served as a positive

influence over their sense of self-efficacy. The exchange below captures the genesis for their empathetic approach towards students during the time period of adolescence during students' middle school years.

> Elaine: I feel like I've been able to do this better since I've become a parent, because I look at the kids like--those are somebody else's kids, just like I'm going to have to send my kids out into the world. So I definitely felt a shift in my own teaching about the way I looked at kids once I had my own children, but I also notice the difference in how competent I feel about this, depending on the number of students I have in my whole caseload, and how long the periods are.
>
> Danny: I teach middle school and I have two middle school students at home. So again, it's being a parent of middle school students and having to teach them has definitely shifted my thought process and how I set up my class, how I react to poor behavior, and how I react to a lack of homework (turn-in) and what not. Because, again, I like trying to sort of remove myself from the situation and think like Elaine said—I'm talking to someone's son, I'm talking to someone's daughter, and would I want someone to talk to my son or daughter in this way?'
>
> Elaine: So just putting it all out there, and then I think they trust me more. Like, they know that I'm not just an old person and I remember what it was like to be in 6th grade.
>
> Danny: I think being a product of a time period when none of this was taken into consideration: It's one of the only things I take into consideration. Kids are day to day. Waking up knowing that the child that you had before, as Patricia said, the one that was so successful yesterday may not be today. And to take that into

consideration during every class period, to try to I guess—for lack of a better word—win them over every single period—is basically what I try to do. I think through understanding what they're going through and knowing that it's a day to day basis with them, it works out best.

Karly: I think for me I had a rough time in middle school, so I can identify with that and I had two really influential teachers, and—yeah, I won't mention that again—so they had an impact on me, and that's kind of what made me like the subjects that I teach.

This exchange reveals that highly efficacious teachers possess an attribute not found in the literature around self-efficacy. The ability to empathize with students, either through consideration of their own family members or own middle school experiences, seems to have a positive influence on their sense of self-efficacy and has a positive impact on their confidence to inspire progress with their students. By understanding the students before them, the educators feel as though they have a better foundation from which to operate.

"Stealing" of Instructional Strategies

Perhaps the most intriguing narrative theme that emerged from the high efficacy focus group was the concept of "stealing" when building a professional teaching repertoire. Consider the earlier definitions presented in chapter 2: Guskey and Passaro (1994) explained that teacher efficacy is "teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those that may be considered difficult or unmotivated" (p. 628). Ashton (1984) offered, "Teachers 'sense of efficacy' refers to the

extent to which teachers believe that they have the capacity to affect student performance" (p. 28). From these set forth definitions, one could assume that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy are filled with confidence to develop original, creative, and engaging lessons, from scratch, which enable them to reach all students. However, educators in this focus group paint a very different picture in terms of where their ideas are generated.

They credited observations and conversations with colleagues as keys to their success, echoing the "vicarious experience" tenet of self-efficacy as the driving force behind belief in their ability to affect student learning. These educators seem to affirm Ashton's (1984) notion that "isolation, the difficulty assessing one's effectiveness as a teacher, the lack of collegial and administrative support, and the sense of powerlessness that comes from limited collegial decision-making" (p. 28) can lead to a lower sense of self-efficacy. These educators seemed purposeful in their determination to make these vicarious experiences happen, whether it was via peer observations, professional learning groups, or through the evaluation system. Their craft was built on a foundational medley of other educators' pedagogical practices.

> Elaine: Taking things that work for other teachers and seeing if they're effective for you. So, like, the giving and taking things that are effective in each other's' classrooms certainly would increase student learning.
>
> Danny: I think a lot of the stuff that I do is based on observing and being in the system so long. I've sort've stolen a number of different things that I may have tweaked and made my own. And combined with different things that I've seen other teachers do, that I have sort of manipulated into my own repertoire of tricks.

And I think my entire career has been based on stealing what works for me. Not everything that I've seen is going to work in my realm, but there are certain things that will, and I think basically that's been my MO for a while is to, just sort of, steal what I see works.

Later, participants were specifically asked about the impact of the district's dedication to PLG time and peer observations have on their sense of self-efficacy. Members of the high efficacy group continued to reference aspects of "stealing" as a means of promoting their sense of self-efficacy. Participants were particularly appreciative of the opportunity to experience other modes of instruction and classroom environments. It seemed as though these vicarious experiences (a core tenet of self-efficacy) helped improve their own sense of self-efficacy. The exchange below exemplifies this phenomenon.

Patricia: What I noticed with peer observations was that I can see a student in another class that I might have and I can see them thrive in another environment. I can, sort of, learn from what that teacher is doing and how that student is acting in that room and try to use that. I can see that student learning and I go back to my room and I think about what I can do to reach that kid.

Sarrah: It's putting me in somebody else's classroom, seeing what works for them, or like you said, Patricia, what works for that student, and then I can steal that for my own classroom.

Danny: I really enjoy the fact that not only do I get to observe people in my discipline, but going out of discipline seeing how students or how science

teachers or Math teachers and English teachers and Social Studies teachers can apply some of the tricks of my trade into their other subjects and what not.

Elaine: Going over somebody else's lesson piece by piece kind of helps me to better understand how I might change my own practice, so if I'm helping somebody else kind of tweak their lesson to make it more universally designed, then than helps me (as well).

Ross (1994) noted three prospective influences that collaboration can have on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Ross (1994) noted, "Collaboration might influence teachers' perceptions on how effective they are by developing and maintaining shared appraisals" (p. 15). In this instance, educators in the high efficacy group echo this positive influence through peer observations. The educators have clearly benefited from vicarious experiences, many of which were initiated by them as a means of promoting their own self-efficacy in improving their instructional practices. These vicarious experiences served as a foundational component of their success in reaching all students.

Welcoming Constructive Feedback

When presenting alternative influences that collaboration poses on an educator's sense of self-efficacy, Ross (1994) referenced Smylie (1988) in noting, "On the other hand, increased collaboration might, in some instances, reduce the confidence of some teachers if they received negative feedback on their performance from their peers" (p. 15). An emerging theme from this particular group served as a counter narrative to this point, as educators from the high efficacy group's expressed a desire for constructive feedback, particularly through the evaluation system and professional conversations with

colleagues. Many educators in this group welcomed and appreciated the new form of an evaluation system, a system aimed at facilitating continuous dialogue based on numerous observations throughout the school year. The group was unanimously in favor of the new evaluation system, and at times, asked for more even more feedback from various evaluators. Danny, under the old evaluation system, was asked to regularly submit journals as his culminating evaluative product. Below, he explained his frustration for this type of evaluation and appreciation for the new format.

> Danny: And I was on journal for over 10 years. So I'm writing nine journals a year for ten years, that's ninety-plus journals, and I didn't get much out of it. By year five you just run out of stuff to say. Nobody's been in your room. Nobody has seen you teach. Nobody has given you any feedback, and I ended up getting myself off (journal writing), and requested that I start getting observed again. Because I had no idea whether what I was teaching was right or wrong. It turns out it was completely wrong, so it was a tough goal for a few years when I was getting completely ripped to shreds, but I think I like the fact that administrators and directors come in, they see you for 10 minutes, and they will write up what they see, and for me it's — it's nice because it keeps me on my toes all the time. I need to be up and teaching all the time. There is no — like, back when I first was hired, there were those teachers that would mail it in every once in a while, and the worksheet packet would go out, and you would just take the day off, sort of. That does not happen. At least in my classroom it doesn't, and I love the fact that I have to be efficient. I have to be effective. And I have to be up and teaching all the time, and it's really made me accountable for every second of every period.

Danny, using hyperbole and humor when stating that he was “ripped to shreds,” seems to appreciate the continuous observational component that accompanies the new evaluation system. At one point, he voluntarily removed himself from the journal writing process and switched back to the observation format to get an “idea (of) whether what (he) was teaching was right or wrong.” Like the aforementioned theme of stealing, high efficacy teachers seemed to be reliant on other’s feedback, praise, and critique as a means of progressing their own practice forward. Ross (1994) explained that verbal persuasion serves one of the inferior antecedents of self-efficacy. However, educators in the high group seem to place a premium on this notion, as other teachers echoed Danny’s sentiment about evaluation serving as a positive influence on their sense of self-efficacy.

> Karly: I think (the evaluation system) opens up more of a dialogue, so it's — and there are the other aspects of your job are commented on as well. So, like, if you're on committees, and you as a professional rather than the one snapshot of that one day where you break out all the amazing things that maybe you think they want to see, as opposed to just things that they notice on a daily basis that you do to contribute to the school.
>
> Elaine: I was thinking that it just — it's a much more realistic picture, I feel, like of who you are.
>
> Renee: I like that we get to set our own goals, our smart goals. So being able to decide that instead of — I don't even think the directors really gave us a goal when we had our old evaluations. I don't think there was any goal, there was just, "Are you teaching?" And/or they used to just write every single word that people said in the classroom, all different things. So I like having a goal. I think it's kind

of hard, because sometimes you set your goals, and you say, "Whoa, that's — I'm never going to be able to reach that, so I think thinking about that, and then setting your goal, and being realistic and — at the end what if I don't actually get that all done, like what's going to happen is a little scary too, so I think about that.

Patricia: I know it's a pain in the neck, but I kind of like the evidence. This is Patricia. I like uploading. I like going through old work, especially when it's two years old, and being like, "Oh, that was a really good lesson." It kind of like forces me to be a little bit reflective, and then figuring out what I upload, so I think it — I agree that it's a realistic picture, and I like it.

This conversation was significant as educators in the high efficacy group presented a counter viewpoint of verbal persuasions (specifically “attempts by peers or supervisors to convince subjects that they are competent to perform target actions”) serving as “lesser impacts” (Ross, p. 3, 1994) on one’s sense of self-efficacy. Middle school teachers in the high efficacy group seemed to crave more feedback from peers and supervisors in regards to their performance in the classroom. These educators even went so far as to ask for more voices in the evaluative process. Teachers were assigned a primary evaluator who engages in the large majority of observations, conversations, and evaluations. Teachers seem to want a variety of avenues of feedback beyond this primary evaluator. The exchange below portrayed their desire for a multitude of voices in the evaluation process.

Danny: I've had the same evaluator now for five years. And if that could rotate at any given point—it’s just that that one evaluator has come into my class doing my shtick four or five straight years, and no matter when you come in, it's, "been

there, done that, seen it already" and it's — I think it might stagnate for both the evaluator and the (teacher being evaluated). That's the only negative impact that I can see is stagnation.

Karly: I think from a — I agree with what you're saying — this is Karly — that you probably could benefit from just the way that kids have different teachers. To feel like the feedback is coming from somebody else would be helpful.

Patricia: Right. And if they have — like if the evaluator has a particular way of seeing things or doing things: I know it's not for me, but I know for other people they have had — oh, "a lecture is the best way to teach history" and that's not your style.

Educators in this focus group called for a comprehensive evaluation system, one that brings a variety of feedback from multiple evaluators. These educators, once again, seemed to place a value in verbal persuasion as a means of increasing their sense of efficacy. Interestingly, they do not limit verbal persuasion to only positive feedback. In a sense, these educators prioritize constructive feedback as a means of improving their sense of efficacy. This dialogue represented a unique finding in regards to the verbal persuasion as a significant antecedent to educators' sense of self-efficacy.

Context: Acknowledgement of the Complex Nature of Adolescence and a Commitment to Life Lessons

In chapter two, Turning Points (2003) described adolescence as a time period of rapid developmental growth period with an accompanying "acute, sometimes painful, self-awareness" (p. 8) for students as they experience it. Turning Points (2003), in recognizing the challenge that such a time period presents, describes the complex nature

of being a middle school teacher. They explained, “Middle school teaching is highly complex, involving content knowledge, knowledge of young adolescent development, and dozens of interconnected skills (e.g., the ability to relate to and engage students, and to coach, present, reflect, and analyze)” (p. 4). Such a complex description begs the question: Do middle school educators understand and (perhaps more importantly) acknowledge the time period that is adolescence during their teaching tenure? In the high efficacy group, the answer was a resounding, “yes.” Middle school educators from this particular focus group presented a keen awareness of the complex nature of adolescent students. Conversations in this particular focus group centered on the dual responsibility of providing an effective academic lesson while simultaneously working through challenges created by this age group. Consider Elaine’s statement below:

> Elaine: It can be hard I think as a teacher, where you feel like you really can reach a kid, but it's just a bad day for that kid, and it’s because of adolescence. I think being cognizant that it's because of the time period they are in is important, but I think you can get down on yourself, especially (towards the end of the year), where they don't want to be in school and trying to get them engaged can be a challenge.

Elaine was forthcoming in admitting that a lack of student engagement is not necessarily an indictment on the quality of the lesson at hand. She referenced the challenges of adolescence, particularly in terms of specific circumstances (i.e. end of the year), that can impact a student’s mood and subsequent performance. More importantly, she highlighted the importance of being cognizant of this complex time period and the unpredictable behaviors that can accompany it. In recognizing the unpredictable dynamic

that adolescence brings to any lesson or plan, Elaine is able to maintain a high sense of efficacy as a middle school educator.

When asked about competing responsibilities from academic and holistic standpoints, educators from the high efficacy group continued to recognize adolescence as a complex time period and prioritized life lessons as *the* most important objective in their respective classrooms. Ross (1994) referenced Ashton, Webb, and Doda (1983) in exploring outcomes, observing that teachers defined their sense of efficacy based on either academic or social outcomes. As Ross (1994) noted, "The investigators speculated that (teachers concerned with social outcomes) would likely be less threatened by low achievers, suggesting there were interactions among teacher expectations, student outcomes, and class composition" (p. 13). Educators in the high efficacy never seemed to be rattled or overwhelmed by any topic of discussion. They did not seem threatened by low achieving students and continuously highlighted their ability to weave life lessons into their pedagogy.

Additionally, educators in the high efficacy group displayed a keen understanding of their contribution as just part of the overall education process, compartmentalizing their role in the gamut of their academic experience from pre-K through twelfth grade. This ability to recognize the context of middle school as a transitional entity, as well as the subsequent understanding of their role in that process, seemed to serve as a positive influence on their sense of self-efficacy. As a result of this recognition, educators in the high efficacy group avoided the sentiments often expressed when middle school educators feel overwhelmed or burned out. Consider the exchange below, where teachers

discussed the prioritization of life lessons and an understanding of their place in their students' overall experience.

Renee: In terms of do I have the capacity to meet the academic goals? I think — I don't know if it's the capacity, but I definitely feel like I have given kids the opportunities to be lifelong learners, and to ask questions why stuff happens, but I don't know if capacity is the right word that I would — I don't know, it's a tough question.

Patricia: I feel like it goes back to what we were saying before, what we're trying to teach them the tools, and it may not necessarily be about science, but it's about question or —

Danny: Life skills.

Patricia: — questioning, or — yeah, life skills. So I feel like as far as becoming lifelong learners, I feel like — I don't know, I feel like maybe part of — the bigger part of our job is teaching them how to be lifelong learners as opposed to the science standards for 8th grade science. And I think the 8th grade science standards come after I teach them the tools, and I think it's a constant balance between the two. Can I, me on my own, get this one kid to meet their academic goals? Can I, me on my own, get this one kid to meet their academic goals? No, I don't think I can on my own do that, but I think I'm big — part of a bigger picture, that like within the year, or within middle school, I can definitely play a part in helping us a student reach that, but I feel like putting it on me that all 87 kids that I have — every single one of them is going to leave my classroom a lifelong learner and then good. I feel like that's too much pressure, but I feel like

I'm a part of a bigger picture of the middle school and maybe even just within my grade is helping them drive toward that. I feel like that's too much pressure, but I feel like I'm a part of a bigger picture of the middle school and maybe even just within my grade is helping them drive toward that.

Elaine: I was thinking a similar thing, Patricia. This is Elaine — that it's got to be sort of a schoolwide focus; that it's obviously it's about content, but it's also about so much more than that, and just never putting any of these things we just talked about in the previous sections — the testing, the mandates, never putting that ahead of the goal of being good people, who are creative and curious, and I think that definitely — like I feel like I have the capacity to at least say that in my class and follow through on it every day. To show them that that's the type of person that I am too, but it definitely — I remember — I distinctly remember — I took this class once that the teacher talked all the time about how what happens within the four walls of your classroom is never enough. It's got to also be outside of that, and it has to be the focus for the school, or else it's going to begin and end in my class.

Danny: I mean, I think for me I think it becomes a trust issue, earn their trust, talk to them not at them, and I think every one of us has said it in some capacity, where we individualize each student; we greet them each time they walk into the classroom. We see what their needs are, whether they're cashed in or cashed out, how to get — how to win them back. I think these are all things that are floating through our minds simultaneously as we meet the curriculum demands and teach (Standardized Test Practice Exam) and prepare them for PARCC. And I think it's

just this — it's multifaceted. We all are taking that into consideration as we forge forward with our own curriculums, and that's basically what I think is the most important: is that we earn the kids' trust and they're more apt to do better if they trust you, and they're more apt to take those life skills that you're trying so hard to embed in them onto the next — onto the next show, so.

Patricia: I think that if they see that the — whatever the standard might be, or whatever the skills you are teaching are relevant to them in real life then that — then further drives the point home, and I agree with what you just said, Danny, but just to add that piece that if you can try to make it relevant, then hopefully that will sort of drive home that lifelong learner aspect.

Harkening back to Wallis' (2005) critique of middle school where she stated, "Instead of warm incubators of independence and judgment, (middle schools) became impersonal, oppressive institutions" (p. 166), it is clear that educators in the high efficacy group exercised a very different vision in their respective classrooms. Their vision was parallel to the sentiment expressed by Jackson and Davis (2000), a call for educators to create a curriculum designed to encourage adolescents to make "informed, deliberate decisions—especially on matters that have large and perhaps lifelong consequences, such as education and health" (p. ix). While they do not stray from the required state standards, they make a conscious effort to make these standards relevant to students' lives. As such, they provided a foundation where students are encouraged to engage in conversations and discussions around life.

Elaine: Middle School, I feel, is all about teaching them how to learn or how to make right decisions, to make right choices. And then to make a mistake (in life)

is okay, but then to learn from it is more important than the kids who are not successful or not learning from these experiences.

Danny: I do feel like I spend the bulk of my time teaching them universal skills, not just skills that are based on the Common Core. I think it's—there's some stuff that needs to be done, whether it's life skills or something else. Like Renee said, you screw up, but you've got to be able to pick yourself up and move on. It's not something every kid wants to learn how to do, and I think, like again, you're only so powerful with the time you have them. I have them for an hour a day for 180 days and then they move on.

Ross (1994) referenced Midgley, Feldlaufer, and Eccles (1989) in outlining the impersonal nature of middle and high schools, where time with students is based on short-lived time periods given the departmentalized, rotating schedule. Ross (1994) noted, "These factors inhibit teachers from acquiring the knowledge of student needs essential to good teaching and may result in lowering beliefs about personal and general teacher efficacy" (p. 12). Yet, teachers in the high efficacy group demonstrated an ability to recognize this brief window of opportunity, using it to build their sense of efficacy in maximizing their time with students. This brief time spent with students seemed to serve as a core, foundational aspect of their approach in creating lifelong learners. As such, they offered an opposing view to theory presented by Ross (1994), referenced above, and earlier literature from Briggs (1920) which suggested that shorter time periods may diminish the personal influence of a teacher.

Low Efficacy Group

Factors Beyond Control: Mental Health & Time

Members of the low efficacy group revealed two significant factors that influence their general teacher efficacy, or the "belief that the teacher population's ability to bring about change is limited by factors beyond their control" (Ross, 1994, p. 5). In discussing the most challenging factors beyond their realm of control, teachers from the low efficacy group referenced students' mental health and time as significant factors that influence their ability to reach all students in their classroom. When asked about factors beyond their control, the exchange between Laura, Traci, and Barbara (below) revealed teachers' concerns about the health and well-being of their students as negative influences over their sense of self-efficacy.

> Laura: Problems at home, or I find students' mental health as well.
>
> Moderator: So in what ways would they affect (your sense of efficacy), so problems at home or their mental health?
>
> Laura: So a sense of apathy, or unwilling to participate, or it's a struggle to get them motivated, I find.
>
> Traci: I was actually going to mimic what Laura said, just sort of piggyback off of that in terms of their mental health. I am, unfortunately, struggling with several students because of mental health issues; it's impacting their learning in the classroom environment. So it's really difficult to tell what their true ability versus their social, emotional needs. Because sometimes if they're coming into a classroom and then they're getting assessed for safety, or they're getting assessed by outside evaluations, and sometimes even as significant as outside placements.

That is definitely impacting the quality of the education, not only for them, but also for the students that they're in that classroom with.

Barbara: I'm working on — working with—some of the same students, and I agree with — especially with the Special Ed, and children on the spectrum: the scheduling interferes, and some of them have mental illness: I think that no matter what you do, they are affected.

This dialogue informs earlier quantitative data where student engagement was identified as the lowest of the three composite variables ($M_{\text{OakRidge Student Engagement}} = 6.6$) in terms of self-efficacy. Educators believed that mental health issues are beyond their scope of control, and as a result, feel as though these issues have a significant impact as to whether they can promote student achievement in their classrooms. This exchange serves as a reminder of the challenging dynamic of understanding students from both an academic and personal standpoint. As Valli and Buese (2007) explained earlier in chapter two, "(Teachers) were torn between accepting the district's stance that knowing the students' needs meant knowing their assessment data and their belief that the information they garnered through interacting with students was equally as valuable" (p. 548). Capacity to meet both, once again, emerged as a challenging aspect that influences their sense of efficacy. Later, when discussing factors beyond their control, “time” was raised as a significant factor.

Cameron: I think one of the more obvious (factors beyond our control) is time. I think as teachers we have a lot of good supports. We have definitely the idea of — I'm thinking specifically like feedback, if we're — if we're trying to improve a student's learning, definitely the role of feedback plays in to that a lot. But as

teachers, whether it's planning, it's — there's PLG, there's all of these other commitments that eat up at our time, that often times we don't have the time to, kind of, implement the supports that will best affect the students' learning.

Drew: I agree. There's so many — you know — extra, well not extra—there are — I think they are an integral part of what we do, and obviously they are working. I think they are helping us address the needs of our students, but it just does seem like I need a secretary sometimes, and I get home and I'm exhausted, or my — you know I want to spend time with my wife, you know? And you know it's just like I stay at school every day until 5:00, I get there at the last minute, but I stay every day in the system and there's just not enough hours in the day.

Kerry: I would agree along with time also there's scheduling; I think that has been kind of an issue. Because there have been so many standardized tests, and I know that's out of our control, but there have been so many scheduling changes that it really affects the kids and whether I have them in the morning or in the afternoon, whether I have them at all that day. That's definitely been affecting my teaching.

Based on this exchange, educators continued to express frustration with the amount of time exclusively devoted to planning their lessons for students. While they referenced the positive impact that vicarious experiences and verbal persuasions have on their sense of efficacy, the unintended byproduct seems to be an overextension of their efforts into multiple areas of the profession. Towards the end of the exchange, Kerry introduced standardized testing as yet another responsibility that erodes teachers' time dedicated to planning. A lack of time was also referenced in the emerging theme of

experiencing frustration in meeting the dual objectives set forth for middle school educators, with sentiments suggesting that educators are spread too thin over these areas of the profession.

Frustration with Dual Objectives

Earlier in chapter one, Maxine Greene's (1995) metaphor about viewing the world as either big or small captured the competing objectives levied upon urban middle school educators. Greene (1995) explains, "Whatever the precise vantage point, seeing schooling small is preoccupied with test scores, 'time on task,' management procedures, ethnic and racial percentages, and accountability measures, while it screens out the faces and gestures of individuals, of actual living persons" (p. 11). Given the complex time period that is adolescence, middle school educators are charged viewing school from both vantage points—big and small. This dual viewpoint is expressed in each of middle schools in Oakridge's mission statements. Educators from this particular focus group, when asked about meeting these competing objectives, expressed frustration with the current format of the middle school program.

> Traci: I just think it kind of goes back to what I had said or talked about before, where I think a lot of the focus is on the academic goals. And a lot of students struggle with that, despite interventions, despite everything that we're doing for them in terms of helping them out with academics. So I think it's really — in order that take a holistic approach sometimes we have to ease up a little bit on the academics and offer them stuff that you would — you use the word that I like, is to make them feel good competent in something other than strictly academics.

Because if we're supposed to be preparing them for life, then they need life skills, not just book skills, and giving them that vocational opportunity, I think at a middle school level is kind of a way to peak their interest to, you know prevent dropout rates, to prevent retention rates.

Laura: Previously in our conversation, there's so much talk about standardized tests, PLGs and a lot of those things which are so heavily focused on academics, and even for students to have some other operations, they can still be lifelong learners if they're learning about woodshop or if they're in a mechanic situation. So I feel like a lot of those things have been taken away, and we have — we have a need for it. We have a group of students I think that could benefit greatly from something like that.

Drew: I think that one thing that impedes our teaching or the whole child is the fact that they only — they only have to pass the four core classes. And so because of this and my previously stated belief that students will only do what you basically mandate that they do. So if you put them in an art class and say, "if you don't pass this art class, you're not going to graduate" then you might find that they might discover, themselves, that they are an artist. But prior to that discovery, it's a drudge to do something that they're not accustomed to doing.

Kerry: I think it's also interesting to see that just different districts in (OakRidge's State) how middle school is so different in what classes they offer. When I did my student teaching in (a different city), they don't teach science or social studies until they got to middle school because standardized tests only test English and Math. They do teach those subjects. Yes, it's crazy. So, but where I grew up in

(a different city) we had — first of all, we did field trips all the time and I think field trips are very important. And I know we don't have the funds to do that here, but I think field trips would be very important. I took *Foods of the World* classes in middle school, sewing, I did woodshop, I did all of these vocational activities. So it's sad almost to come to where it's a beautiful school, but the kids aren't able to take any of these classes and get those experiences. So they think that they can't do anything just because they can't do Math, or ELA.

Educators in the low group seemed to describe Weick's (1974) concept of a tightly coupled system as a negative influence on their sense of efficacy. Often standardized testing's influence is discussed in terms of how it influences classroom practice. However, in this instance, educators expressed frustration with standardized testing's influence over how the middle schools are organized from a structural standpoint. They referenced a limited scope of classes, specifically those that are academic-based, and even more specifically, standardized tested subjects (i.e. Math and ELA). Educators in the low efficacy group viewed this tightly coupled system as a limitation in promoting life skills. As such, the educators expressed a negative outlook when asked if they are able to simultaneously meet the goals set forth in the mission statements from each of the three OakRidge middle schools. Consider the exchange between Cameron and Audrey below.

Cameron: I quickly wanted to say I feel like we do have the capacity to meet goals; however not within the timeframes that we're required to work. So if you — if you came in from 7:35 to 2:20, I don't think there's a way that you can meet both of these goals. However, if you put in the time, then you can, but there's a

burnout factor that sinks in I think at some point, but addressing that last question: how can you meet the simultaneous needs of both? You need to be able to incorporate relevance into our students, whether it's in Math, English, Science, any of the non-core anything. You need to be able to figure out why they're going to be able to do it in life, and secondly you need to be on top of everything. You need to know behaviorally what's going on with the student. You need to know academically what's going on with the student, and there's just not enough time within the day.

Audrey: We've pushed too fast, with the standards and everything. It's like you can never just go back and reflect and try to build upon that, you have to just keep moving. So the structure of the — the school day and the hours that you have mean that you can only address so much— either one part of it or both parts inadequately.

Educators in the low efficacy group (once again) express time as a significant, negative influence on their sense of efficacy in meeting the benchmarks set forth by the aforementioned dual objectives. The limited structure provided by a tightly coupled system, induced by a focus on standardized testing, was specifically identified as a concern. As a result, Cameron and Audrey expressed sentiments of being spread too thin. As educators, they believed as though they have attempted to accomplish too much, too soon. Cameron expressed the belief that he does, indeed, have the capacity to meet these objectives. However, he was not confident that these objectives could be accomplished in the timeframes that are provided by the current structure of the middle school. Time, specifically the less-than-seven-hours spent with students, was not

sufficient. As such, educators are faced with the dilemma conveyed by Audrey where they can successfully address “either one part” or “both parts inadequately.”

Standardized Testing as a Disruptive Force

Valli and Buse (2007), in revealing their findings on the changing role of teachers in an era of high stakes accountability, noted, “Although too many fast-paced policy demands can affect teacher’s roles in all schools, the demands that come from high-stakes accountability disproportionately affect teachers in at-risk schools, typically those with higher rates of poor, minority, and ELL students” (p. 553). Standardized testings’ negative influence was identified as a theme in the low efficacy group. Educators offered an array of unintended consequences that have a negative influence on their ability to reach all students. Cameron, referenced Gasoi’s (2009) notion that describes the set forth standards not being in line with his core teaching beliefs.

> Cameron: I would say that the biggest push with Common Core is to incorporate real world, relevant issues into our education, and speaking from a math background, I think PARCC almost shies us away from that. It's more accurately addressing the math standards of, “Can this student solve an equation,” rather than, "How can this student use the idea of solving equations to find an answer to a problem, or develop a strategy that will help them in the real world." So I think it puts a lot of pressure on middle school educators to shy away from these real world, relevant tasks that the students would enjoy more in order to focus on, "Am I hitting my standards?"

Cameron alluded to an allegiance to standards over an education that would provide practical use in the real world. Ironically, he highlighted the Common Core as a set of standards that does not promote relevance in terms of content and instruction. Rather, it serves as a finite set of mathematical standards that drive his focus as an educator, despite the fact that the ideology runs counter to his core belief system. He referenced this allegiance as a negative impact on his sense of self-efficacy, describing the "pressure" it puts on middle school educators. Traci, in building on Cameron's initial comment, described a more serious impact.

> Traci: I think, how does the standardized testing part, MCAS, impact the ability to perform as a middle school teacher? I'm now going to switch it, because I was just thinking about like education in general, because I know a few months back at the beginning of the school year there was an initiative put out by the state to tie — possibly tie PARCC and MCAS into teachers' evaluations. So I'm thinking, as an educator that's going to affect every single thing you start doing in the classroom. You are now no longer going to be teaching and adhering to the Common Core, and you're going to start teaching to a test. And that's — that's going to affect everything, but also — it's also scary to think that your entire teaching career could come down to how a kid performed one day on one test. That's — that's a little scary. [Laughter.] It's going to affect everything.

Traci referenced Ravitch's (2010) and Ohanian's (2009) earlier notions of teachers' feeling as though the impact of standardized testing impacts the core of their professionalism. Traci's fear of standardized testing "affect(ing) everything" epitomized Ravitch's (2010) notion of professional teachers succumbing to the pressure of

standardized testing. As a result of this lack of autonomy, their sense of general teaching efficacy is negatively impacted. Audrey, in building on Traci's description of the emphasis that standardized testing has on instruction, echoed Valli and Buse's (2007) revelation of a disproportionate impact on teachers of low income or ELL students. Kerry extended this disproportionate influence to her special education students.

> Audrey: But I do feel like there is a lot of emphasis put on — I also agree with Traci that I feel like it is a lot emphasis. Like, I do feel like I have to prepare the kids for testing, and both for MCAS and for PARCC—the type of writing, specifically, that the students need to be able to do when they get on that test isn't something that they come to me knowing. And it is a very long and involved process to get them where they need to be when it comes to the writing. So, again, you mentioned time at the very beginning. It comes down to time. I can either do a really in-depth project that they can sink their teeth into and get them really thinking, or I can have — be teaching this writing style, make sure that they are doing that; that they are doing that correctly, so that by the time they get to PARCC, they know how to do it. I do think that that also is affected by the population that we have. I think that there are — that certain transition words and certain — just certain things, like a fluency of language that comes more naturally to students who having been speaking English their whole life. For example, or — I just think there are a lot of factors that go into an urban education where you really have to explicitly teach things that might not be true in a suburban atmosphere. So yeah, I have to spend a lot of time. That is how it impacts me, is that I have to spend a lot of time teaching them those things explicitly, and I think

I — when I was in middle school, and when I was in high school too, I did tons of project-based learning, and I think part of who I am today is based on those projects. I still remember maybe half of them, so — and I remember the things I learned too. So I think that's something that — that we're — that our kids are missing out on, that they could be doing, and I think those things develop critical thinking and develop investigator skills, and things like that.

Kerry: I think it's very discouraging when you have students who can't count to 20 that have to take the same standardized tests as students in AP classes and are supposed to be learning the same standards, at the same pace, as a lot of the other classes. It's just so discouraging for my students to have to take these tests at a certain time, and it drives me nuts, because I haven't even gone through (Standardized Practice Test #2's) standards yet. And you know you can only teach the student—you can't just race and teach all the standards and expect them to learn them, so I think that that has affected me a lot as a new teacher.

Both Audrey and Kerry's capitulation to the intensive focus on standardized testing further highlights the impact on their general sense of teaching efficacy. In both instances, educators seemed to sacrifice their core values in favor of an allegiance to preparing students for a standardized test. Audrey referenced her own experiences with project-based learning, a concept she has sacrificed in favor of test preparation. She expressed regret with this concept's absence in her classroom, particularly in terms of the staying power that such experiences had in her own life. Kerry referenced an absence of remedial skills from her special education classroom, highlighting unrealistic pacing as a negative influence. Once again, "time" is raised as a concern. Standardized testing,

specifically in how it impacts educators' time, serves as a negative force on teachers' sense of self-efficacy. Audrey articulated this notion when closing out the discussion of standardized testing's impact on their sense of self-efficacy.

> Audrey: My biggest issue is that it breaks up the schedule. Just look at the end of the year this year: you know, it's the end of May, and we still have a (Standardized Practice Test) exam, and we still have a common assessment exam, and it's — just even trying to, just, get through the curriculum I think is difficult. Because when you start to schedule: I'm going to teach this this day, and this this day, and then it just feels like there's always a test that's coming up that is breaking up your schedule. So it — so it feels impossible to like get through anything in its entirety. It— I feel like it makes scheduling difficult, like scheduling or planning your lessons difficult. It just — it just feels like it's constant that something is happening that's a test. Especially—I know this isn't until later — but especially this year with PARCC that the schedule's been all kind of crazy. So, you never sort of know what's going to happen from day to day, and just trying to put together, "I need to get through this and this before they get here" can be a big challenge.

Audrey concluded the conversation on standardized testing, explaining that "it feels impossible to, like, get through anything in its entirety," once again raising "time" as a significant, negative influence over one's sense of self-efficacy. Educators in the low efficacy group sacrificed in-depth learning in favor of test preparation, referencing "time" as an obstacle. Time devoted to standardized testing practice negatively impacted

their sense of self-efficacy. In terms of general teaching efficacy, standardized testing served as the most powerful outside factor.

Vicarious Experiences & Verbal Persuasion: Positive & Negative Influences on Self-Efficacy

Ross (1994) explained, "Since there is evidence that teacher effectiveness is higher in schools with heightened teaching collaboration, it may be that teachers feel more efficacious because mutual help giving has increased their ability to bring about learning" (p. 16). OakRidge school district offers the opportunity for such collaborative time through daily professional learning groups (PLGs). The district has conducted extensive training for educators who serve as PLG facilitators and others who aspire to serve in this role in future years. These collaborative meetings spoke to two of the four aforementioned antecedents of efficacy, specifically vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion. Educators in the low efficacy group seem to appreciate this time allotted for collaboration and describe how it has influenced their practice.

> Audrey: So I'm a huge fan of common planning time and PLG time. I think particularly because I'm still in my first few years of teaching, and I think that as — when you sit down with a group of people who really know what they're doing and you see what they're doing in their class, you certainly can't help but say, "Okay, I really need to bring up my game here" or "That's a great idea, I'm going to use that." And I think that makes you a better teacher. And I'm just finding that as new teachers come in, I feel the PLG time almost serves as like a mentor system, like that — that I'm now giving sort of guidance or advice to newer teachers than me, and that has been helpful for me as well, right? Just to kind of

talk about, "Well, this is what we do. How can we all do it better?" And I think just having that time is really, really value. Because I think your individual planning time is really probably the most important time of your day, where you're getting together what you're going to do, but I think the common planning time adds something to that. It makes you think about what you did. So it makes you question, "Well, was that the best thing to do, or should I have tried something different? Oh, I could have given — organized things like this, or I could have organized things differently." And I think that's really helpful. So I think as somebody who's like still relatively young in their career, I feel really lucky that I'm in that district that has that common planning time, because I think it's just huge for me, and for self-esteem and for just surviving [laughter] the first couple years.

Cameron: So, I'm in a similar position with Audrey. I agree everything that she said. The one — one thing I keep going back to is this weird relationship with colleagues, and I think Audrey has a very good approach to it. She's looking at it like she has room to improve; everyone has room to improve, we're collaboratively doing it, and I think that's the most crucial part of it, because like you said — like Audrey said—it has so many beneficial factors to it. We can learn new strategies. We can — pose questions to one another. I wonder if you did it this way, what would happen? But you need that sense of trust in each other in each other, and the belief that everyone can learn something.

Part of PLG time is to realize to improve our teaching, so I think if everyone has that mindset, then the results are going to be beneficial to everyone.

Audrey and Cameron have a great appreciation for the time spent in professional learning groups. The vicarious experience of planning with colleagues and being able to present their work for constructive feedback served as a positive influence over their sense of self-efficacy. Both educators seemed to appreciate the feedback from fellow colleagues regarding their work. They stressed the need for an open-minded attitude in order for this experience to be beneficial, a philosophy subsequently echoed by Barbara and Kerry.

> Barbara: I agree you have to be open-minded with each other and not take it as a criticism, but you know how can that help? We had one PLG and a teacher was having difficulty with her first period, and I said, "How about if I come in the room and just see what I see?" And then — and I'd — and then we sat and I said, "This is what I saw." And she said, "Oh." You know, and I said, "Maybe if you change the seating arrangement?" and it worked. I mean, you know, a little bit. But — so sometimes fresh eyes that you wouldn't know unless you (had time to peer review and meet).
>
> Kerry: I agree. I think sometimes in your own classroom you don't see a lot of things that are happening, so it is good to have other teachers there, and I also co-teach with a general education teacher, and I'm a Special Education teacher, and that's also really good to have planning time with a teacher that has eight more years' experience than I do, and being able to give him new ideas, and he is able to give me ideas, and we're able to really work together and build a relationship and learn from each other, so that's been definitely beneficial.

Barbara and Kerry echoed the importance of the appropriate mindset for eliciting progress during PLG time. Ross (1994) described verbal persuasion as having a lesser impact on one's sense of self-efficacy. Barbara's offer of coming in personally to observe the challenging class seemed to provide more credence to her verbal recommendations. By taking the next step in conducting a peer observation, Barbara strengthened the weight of her subsequent recommendations in the PLG setting. Kerry appreciated the objective lens provided by a visitor in the classroom. The observational component seemed to be a critical aspect of PLG time for educators in the low efficacy group. The appropriate attitude and mindset, combined with a willingness to go the extra mile in observation, produced an atmosphere of progress and forward-thinking. When there is not an optimal structure, educators viewed this opportunity as a negative force on their sense of self-efficacy.

> Kerry: We very rarely have time. We do get some time, but you know we fit it in where we can, where we actually plan together, which I know in some of the other disciplines it's — that's the main focus, is the actual planning time, whereas a lot our time is spent analyzing data, which has — that has — you know, its benefits as well, but it just — it's less about planning and it's more about sitting down and sort of like sharing experiences, sharing data, looking at where the kids are.
>
> Cameron: I think when you have — when you have different personalities of teachers in the room — like one of our PLG's personalities would have an overpowering personality; then you have other personalities that don't see the purpose behind the PLG, and you have all of these different factors, and it creates

this almost — I heard somebody say they can feel the stress in the room. And that's kind of what you walk into is you walk into a period in which it's supposed to be beneficial. You're supposed to learn from each other, and what it really ends up creating is this awkward tension, people pushing ideas on each other, when now they don't want to hear that, because that person's very overpowering, and they're — it sounds like they're pushing the idea rather than suggesting it. So it creates an unbearable tension between people, and I think that gets focused on more than the beneficial aspects that could be being discussed, and it — it just becomes more stress to our schedule, as opposed to something where it's supposed to be helping us. For me personally, it — it diminishes it a lot, because I feel I'm going into PLG to avoid this tension, rather than affect student learning.

Traci: My understanding is maybe are you saying that you can't necessarily — the people in there won't necessarily be as honest or up front as they want to, because some — if somebody's going to take criticism maybe to looking at the student work, why did you do it like this, or whatever? You might have to think to yourself: Can I be as open and honest in this particular PLG as I want to be, or is what I'm going to say going to cause an eruption? And then one other person who has — you know, that one personality who's — I want to say — not in an evaluative position, but is kind of [laughter] along those realms —unfortunately has a negative effect on the group, because a lot of what being said comes across as very critical, condescending, and unprofessional. And unfortunately very knowledgeable about the content, but you can have somebody who's in a position

that has an immense amount of content knowledge, but if people become unwilling to work with that individual, it becomes useless.

Here, educators in the low efficacy group expressed the importance of an ideal setting, along with committed professionals, as a means of a positive influence on their sense of self-efficacy. Without these dynamics, educators felt as though the vicarious experiences found in a PLG are not positive influences on their sense of self-efficacy. In fact, Cameron described an "unbearable tension" that can develop between colleagues when they are not committed to the PLG cause. Rather than having a positive influence on their practice, such a dynamic created "more stress" on top of an already crowded schedule. Ultimately, this negative effect had a negative impact on student learning. These collaborative opportunities, designed to improve their sense of self-efficacy, can have an adverse effect if optimal conditions are not provided.

The Challenging Nature of Adolescence and an Empathetic Approach

Jackson and Davis (2000) described middle school as a time period when students must begin to understand how their decisions correspond with lifelong consequences, particularly in terms of education and health. When asked about the responsibility of bringing this understanding to their classroom, along with fostering self-esteem, inquiry, close human relationships and a sense of belonging, middle school educators in the low efficacy group expressed reservation. They referenced structure, transition from elementary, and class sizes as key inhibitors in this process. Their reservations served as a negative influence on their sense of self-efficacy.

Drew: That's kind of what I was talking about, and that — the old, "this is the first day of the rest of your life"—that kind of stuff. I do think of it as being a responsibility for us, and as far as sense of belonging, I focus not only on kids feeling like they belong with their — in the school, but also I try to — I try to nurture relationships between the kids, reminding them that they are going to move through all the grades together and that they need to stick by each other. And I want to foster those friendships, and the responsibility students have to their classmates to not be rude to them, and that sort of thing. I think that's really important. I really stress that in my class.

Barbara: And with that said, on the other side I'm finding with students coming from 5th to 6th grade, there is a huge jump from how they're treated in elementary, especially kids on the spectrum. So I think in middle school it's important for us to be consistent and to help them establish a sense of consequences. I think that's huge right now, because we are preparing them for high school. So that's what I find is a big challenge, I think, with going from elementary where they're a little more coddled, which they should be, to middle school, where we need to really instill a sense of responsibility and that they need to be held accountable.

Both Drew and Barbara expressed a desire to accomplish the aforementioned responsibilities of being a middle school educator. However, Barbara referenced the jump from elementary to middle school as a significant constraining factor. Her focus seemed to be centered around consequences as opposed to the set forth life factors of building self-esteem, a sense of belonging, and close human relationships. Drew stressed

that human relationships, particularly from a student to student perspective, are encouraged as a sense of belonging and as a means of building friendships between students. Subsequent comments seemed to focus more on a lack of capacity and reference restrictive structures that prevent such progress.

> Audrey: Yeah. I'm going to just jump in on that. The — the biggest thing for me is that when they're in elementary school, they have 20, 25 kids in a class. And so as far as how many kids I'm looking out for—it's somewhere in the range of 100, and so think about self-esteem and close human relationships, and sense of belonging, and all of those things. I think there are a lot of things that we can do to promote those things, but I do think that there are so many kids that you're looking after when you're a middle school teacher, that sometimes it's tough. Like, there's the possibility that there's that one quiet kid in the back that's going through something. And you just have no idea. Because it just would be impossible to spend one on one time with every kid, every single day. But we're really spending the amount of time that you need to — to make them feel like that they — that they're part of the classroom. I think the school can do a lot of things to give the kids self-esteem and a sense of belonging. In advisory you can do that. There's only 15 kids in my advisory, and I really try and work hard to form relationships with the kids during advisory time, because I have those kids for a certain amount of time every day, and I can have a conversation with every kid, every day in advisory. I can check their grades and make sure that they're doing well. But I feel like in my academic classes, it is a lot tougher to foster those really close relationships with kids in the way that you would really like to over

the course of the school year. And that's not to say it's impossible. I just think it gets — the task can seem a little overwhelming. You need to know so many data points about your students. You need to know their academic data points, their (Standardized Practice Test) scores and their MCAS scores, and I think sometimes like, the "What does this kid like?" gets lost, you know? The idea of, like, "This kid's into sports…this kid's into dancing" or whatever. And then sort of targeting those things and forming relationships with kids based on those things. I try and do that as much as possible, but there are some kids that I'm sure are into sports and I have no idea, because I just haven't had the chance to really sit down with them and talk with them about it, so.

Cameron: I was really going to quickly say about I — I actually — my first year of teaching I was lucky to have all split classes, and I was able to live up to the responsibility of meeting those needs, because I knew every one of those kids in and out.

Now I'm in my third year, and my class size has doubled, and I don't feel like I'm able to live up to those needs, so for me it ties directly into class size. If I'm able to build a close relationship, I can do that with a half class. I can't do it with a full class of 25 students.

Audrey and Cameron, like Barbara and Drew, stressed an understanding of the set forth responsibility of educating adolescent students from both a holistic and academic standpoint. However, their belief in their own ability to accomplish this is hindered by the structures provided at the middle school level. Class size and time seemed to be at the heart of their frustration. Cameron referenced an inability to meet the set forth needs

because of the size of his classes. He feels as though he was able to effectively meet this responsibility in his first year of teaching, given the fact that his classes were split in half. Audrey referenced advisory as a space where she can begin to establish these deep relationships with students, but expressed frustration about attempting to do so during her regularly scheduled classes. She described a lack of time and the academic responsibility of standardized test data as key inhibitors in this process, explaining that it can often feel "overwhelming." Yet, despite the feelings of frustration, these educators maintained a level of empathy in working with adolescent students. Consider the exchange between Audrey and Kerry.

> Audrey: I think that working with middle school students for me — with middle school students — for me how it affects my sense of self-efficacy is that oftentimes I forget that the students that I'm teaching are 11-13 years old. I forget their age, and I'll be — I mean I have — I try and have really high expectations for my students, for what they're able to accomplish. Sometimes I just have to tell myself, "okay, this kid is really interested right now in something other than what I am teaching them." You know? I just think that their attention span is often kind of all over the place. They have a lot of things going on. Like we talked about all these home issues, but just adolescence itself is an issue. I mean, I — I had a fairly stable upbringing, and I remember just being a mess in middle school, and I think that sometimes we lose our — as a teacher sometimes I lose track of, "Why are they not being productive? Why are they giggling?" or, "What's going on?" And so for me personally I often forget about their adolescence, and I think that that's a big issue. Because, you know sometimes I think we need to cut them

a little slack. They're [laughter] they're kids, you know? And they have all these things going on — I'm going to ask this girl out, or I'm going do this, or — [Laughter.]— they're sort of like babies at life. You know, like they're just practicing being adults for the first time, and that's tough.

Kerry: I feel that I'm pretty well aware, most of the time, of how tough adolescence really is, because the students — I don't want to say they're very immature, but most of my students do behave pretty immaturely [laughter]. And I'm a very new teacher, so it is difficult sometimes going home, because sometimes I feel like I have 60 kids that I need to take care of. And they are going through a lot, and it's also difficult when they ask to go to the guidance counselor every single day and having to meet with parent every week and just keep — I don't know, it seems — it's a lot. You have to have a lot of patience, and I think that — I don't know, it's — a big part of teaching is just understanding the students as people and not just as your students, and what they can do and can't do, but understanding why they're acting out , and why they're so anxious about little things.

I have a lot of students with really bad anxiety, and I can remember, and a lot of times I'll try to relate, "When I was your age" because it wasn't super long ago. [Laughter] And I'll just tell them that it will get better, but yeah I'm aware of it every day that these are little 11, 12, and 13-year-old kids. You know, just because they're behaving like that, it's not my fault, necessarily.

Audrey: Yeah, it produces a lot of mini drama, so for me as far as how it affects my self-efficacy is that I think it makes it more difficult to teach. It certainly

> makes it more difficult to teach them, but I think it affects how I think about my teaching as well. Because sometimes I think like I'm not being successful for factors that have to do with something that I'm doing. When really, it is out of my control. To go back to that first question, that there's something else going on that, like, I'm completely unaware of, that has to do with the social or the emotional factors of adolescence, basically.

Audrey and Kerry stressed the importance of recognizing the complex time period that is adolescence when experiencing challenging or difficult moments in the classroom. As Audrey noted, "often times I forget that the students that I am teaching are 11-13 years old." Audrey pointed out the danger of failing to recognize this complex time period. While the behavior in the classroom may frustrate her, she consciously attempts to recognize that it is typical of this age group. Kerry referenced an ability to empathize with this time period, as she is a younger teacher not far removed from adolescence. At times, this behavior can serve as a negative influence over her sense of self-efficacy. However, she responds by reminding herself that such behavior is a manifestation of outside factors, refusing to internalize it as being her fault. Audrey closed by explaining that such behavior does, indeed, serve as a negative influence over her sense of self-efficacy. Despite the fact that she is able to recognize that such behavior is beyond her control, Audrey felt as though she is not as successful as she could (or would like to) be given the challenges presented by this behavior.

Comparison of High and Low Efficacy Groups

Introduction

From the various themes that emerged from each of the respective focus groups, a comparative analysis was conducted. Specific, interrelated themes were identified to determine similarities and differences between teachers with high and low senses of self-efficacy. These related themes offered a chance to distinguish findings between the two focus groups.

Influence on General Teaching Efficacy: Factors Beyond Educators' Control

When asked about the "types of factors that are beyond your control influence your sense of efficacy in a middle school setting" by the moderator, different themes emerged from the high and low efficacy groups. Educators in the high sense of self-efficacy group referenced standardized testing, data, and student home lives as the most influential factors. Educators in the low group referenced students' mental health and time as the primary influences on their sense of self efficacy. Each respective group considered factors beyond their control to be negative influences on their sense of self-efficacy.

Patricia captured the high group's frustration with standardized testing's influence when she spoke about its influence over teachers' sense of autonomy. She stated, "Sometimes I feel like I have to cover a certain amount of material before I test, rather than going in-depth about things that I like. She continued, "And I think it's really when students are going into depth that I really feel like they're learning something, rather than just covering things on the surface." Later, when asked specifically about standardized testings' impact, educators in the low efficacy group referenced a similar frustration.

When talking about the incredible amount of work dedicated to preparing students for standardized tests, Audrey explained, "I can either do a really in-depth project that they can sink their teeth into and get them really thinking, or I can have — be teaching this writing style…that by the time they get to PARCC, they know how to do it." While neither group spoke about standards as a limiting factor, they agreed that standardized testing had an impact on how the standards are taught. Referencing Ravitch's (2010) comments about succumbing to the pressure of high stakes testing, it was clear that both the high and low efficacy groups epitomized this concern. They seem to have sacrificed in-depth learning in favor of pacing that will ensure success on standardized testing.

The low efficacy group referenced time as the most significant negative influence on their sense of general teaching efficacy. Drew asserted, "there's just not enough hours in the day" when referencing all of the responsibilities levied upon the teaching profession. Teachers in the low efficacy group seemed to have an appreciation for all of the supports provided by the district, but referenced a lack of time for implementation and execution as an inhibitor for promoting student progress. Time, or a lack thereof, was continuously referenced as a negative influence over the low group's sense of self-efficacy. As Audrey noted, "We've pushed too fast, with the standards and everything. It's like you can never just go back and reflect and try to build upon that, you have to just keep moving." Yet, teachers in the high efficacy group did not surface time as an inhibiting factor over the course of the focus group interview. While time was indirectly referenced as something that prohibited them from delving deeper into topics, a byproduct of standardized testing, it was not raised as a significant factor that negatively

influenced their sense of self-efficacy. They seemed to use data as a reference point and not a driving force in their approach, thus rendering its impact to a moderate status.

The high efficacy group referenced students' home lives as a significant negative influence over their sense of self-efficacy. Yet, educators in the high group conveyed resilience in the face of this adversity. They referenced spaces beyond the school day as optimal moments for attempting to overcome the obstacles created by a turbulent home life. Patricia referenced after school time as a space that produced some of her "best moments" as an educator. She noted, "I think some of the students that don't have a good home life—you can see that if you build a relationship with them, things get better," referencing after school as an effective space where this can be accomplished. Educators in the low group did not reference home lives as a factor beyond their control, but noted students' mental health as a significant challenge in attempting to promote progress. Traci noted students' mental health challenges as significantly "impacting (students') learning in the classroom environment." Interestingly, mental health was not raised as an influence during the high group discussion.

Finally, the most interesting finding centered on the use of data in an educational setting. The high efficacy group actually referenced data as a factor beyond their control. Educators in the high group did not dismiss their responsibility in students' performance on standardized tests, but rather seemed to reference the uncertainty of questions posed on these exams as a factor beyond their control. Adding this context to results, educators from the high group were able to successfully work with data results. Elaine's describes this approach when she explained, "I don't try to get too excited when the data is good, and I don't get too down it when it's bad." As such, data analysis did not seem to serve as

a negative influence on teachers' sense of self-efficacy in the high group. When discussing data analysis in the low group, educators' beliefs were more in line with Valli and Buse (2007) when they explained, "(Teachers) were torn between accepting the district's stance that knowing the students' needs meant knowing their assessment data and their belief that the information they garnered through interacting with students was equally as valuable" (p. 548). Audrey exemplified this belief when she explained, "You need to know their academic data points, their (Standardized Practice Test) scores and their MCAS scores, and I think sometimes like, the 'What does this kid like?' gets lost, you know?" Data analysis seemed to be moderately positive influence on teachers in the high group, while it seemed to serve as a negative influence in the low group.

Overall, the two groups identified different aspects of the profession when asked about factors beyond their control that influence their sense of efficacy. Standardized testing, while raised as a factor beyond their control by only the high group, was a negative influence for both groups. Subsequent data analysis served as a positive influence for the high group and as a negative influence for the low group. Finally, the high group and low group referenced home lives and mental health, respectively, as negative influences on their sense of efficacy.

Verbal Persuasions & Vicarious Experiences

Ross (1994) describes vicarious experiences and verbal persuasions as antecedents to one's sense of efficacy. In the two groups, discussions around evaluation, collaboration, and observation surfaced as types of vicarious experience and verbal persuasions. The high and low efficacy groups demonstrated differing beliefs around the

influence of vicarious experiences and verbal persuasion on their respective senses of self-efficacy.

Educators in the high efficacy group placed an immense value on vicarious experiences as a positive influence over their sense of self-efficacy, referencing "stealing" as a means of building their own personal repertoires. In fact, they credited peer observations and collaborative opportunities as the cornerstones of their own personal instructional approach. Danny, an educator with over twenty years of experience, put forth a strong statement when he explained, "I think my entire career has been based on stealing what works for me. Not everything that I've seen is going to work in my realm, but there are certain things that will." He continued, "that's been my MO for a while is to, just sort of, steal what I see works." While teachers in the high efficacy group stressed the importance of visiting other classrooms in garnering new ideas and strategies, teachers in the low efficacy group stressed the value of having others come into *their* rooms as a positive influence. Kerry noted that "sometimes in your own classroom you don't see a lot of things that are happening, so it is good to have other teachers there." Teachers in the low efficacy group did not seem to place as much value in the role of observer as they did in the role of the teacher being observed.

Educators in the higher efficacy group considered verbal persuasion a more positive influence than those in the low efficacy group. Interestingly enough, educators from the high efficacy group seemed to crave constructive (as opposed to positive) feedback from evaluators and peers alike. In speaking about the evaluation system, educators in the high efficacy group went so far as to ask for a rotation of evaluators so that feedback would not grow stagnant. They referenced the importance of multiple

lenses offered by various evaluators as a means for progressing their own practice. Feedback garnered from these evaluators, particularly constructive feedback, seems to improve educators from the high group's sense of self-efficacy. Consider Danny's description of his transition from journaling to live observations by various evaluators:

> I had no idea whether what I was teaching was right or wrong. It turns out it was completely wrong, so it was a tough goal for a few years when I was getting completely ripped to shreds, but I think I like the fact that administrators and directors come in, they see you for 10 minutes, and they will write up what they see, and for me it's — it's nice because it keeps me on my toes all the time. I need to be up and teaching all the time. There is no — like, back when I first was hired, there were those teachers that would mail it in every once in a while, and the worksheet packet would go out, and you would just take the day off, sort of. That does not happen. At least in my classroom it doesn't, and I love the fact that I have to be efficient. I have to be effective. And I have to be up and teaching all the time, and it's really made me accountable for every second of every period.

Danny's appreciation for accountability and his role in an evaluation process focused on continuous growth is evidenced by his sentiment above. His resiliency and reflective nature, particularly in the face of critical feedback, serves as a positive influence on his sense of efficacy. His words and approach solidified Bandura's (1977) assertion that the approach born from one's sense of self-efficacy influences their degree of motivation and sustainment of this motivation in the face of adversity. However, other participants, when speaking about the evaluation system, appreciated the independence and autonomy in setting goals to improve their practice.

Educators in the low efficacy group referenced the importance of verbal persuasion in PLG groups. They seemed to appreciate the time dedicated to this important initiative. Educators early in their careers, Audrey and Cameron were particularly appreciative of these conversations and experienced. Consider Audrey's words below:

> So I'm a huge fan of common planning time and PLG time. I think particularly because I'm still in my first few years of teaching, and I think that as — when you sit down with a group of people who really know what they're doing and you see what they're doing in their class, you certainly can't help but say, "Okay, I really need to bring up my game here" or "That's a great idea, I'm going to use that."

However, ideal mindset and conditions were aspects that were referenced as significant determining factors of whether or not a PLG was successful. This theory was presented in the low efficacy group and not in the high efficacy group. Cameron explained, "Part of PLG time is to realize to improve our teaching, so I think if everyone has that mindset, then the results are going to be beneficial to everyone." However, when conditions are not optimal, Cameron explained that an ineffective PLG can create "an unbearable tension between people." In particular, he stresses the importance of a growth mindset, and when members have overbearing personalities, it can "create stress in the room." Traci worried that members are not always open and honest and has often asked herself, "Can I be as open and honest in this particular PLG as I want to be, or is what I'm going to say going to cause an eruption?" She references a particular experience with one overbearing team member where feedback took morphed into a very critical, condescending, and unprofessional" tone.

While there was appreciation for PLG time in both groups, the low efficacy group referenced the necessity for optimal conditions a means for successful meetings. Amidst the benefits presented, members of the low efficacy group also shared negative experiences within the PLG dynamic. They referenced the importance of a growth mindset, one where members are able to deliver and accept constructive feedback as a means of improving their sense of self-efficacy. Members of the high efficacy group, on the other hand, did not reference negative aspects of verbal persuasions. In fact, they seemed to appreciate the feedback (from evaluators and peers alike) that was more critical than it was reassuring. This presents an interesting finding around the type of feedback that appeals to educators with different levels of self-efficacy.

Empathy as a Middle School Educator

A finding not directly related to level of self-efficacy was the concept of an empathetic approach in working with adolescent students. Set forth as a means of understanding the challenges that are created by a turbulent home life, educators in the high efficacy group displayed a significant sense of empathy, based on experience in working with adolescents in a district with a low socioeconomic status, in understanding how these challenges impact students. Danny noted:

> I think it's difficult for kids of a middle school age to sort of leave that baggage at the door, regardless of whether it's Renee saying it's home life, or whether it's something that may have happened in the period before or two periods before, or whether they didn't have their uniform on or not and had to wait for someone to bring clothing.

Educators in the high efficacy group personalized this empathetic approach, explaining that this approach evolved from their own experiences as a middle school student, as a parent, and specifically as a parent of middle school students. Elaine explained:

> I feel like I've been able to do this (job) better since I've become a parent, because I look at the kids like—those are somebody else's kids, just like I'm going to have to send my kids out into the world.

Danny responded:

> I teach middle school and I have two middle school students at home. So again, it's being a parent of middle school students and having to teach them has definitely shifted my thought process and how I set up my class, how I react to poor behavior, and how I react to a lack of homework (turn-in) and what not. Because, again, I like trying to sort of remove myself from the situation and think like Elaine said—I'm talking to someone's son, I'm talking to someone's daughter, and would I want someone to talk to my son or daughter in this way?

Referencing their own children as the inspiration for this empathetic approach, Elaine and Danny explained how their own experiences at home inspired their work in the classroom. Danny, as a veteran teacher with middle school children of his own, referenced his experience in working with his own children as a significant influence on various aspects of his classroom. Elaine related her improvement in her practice to having children of her own. She referenced an increased consciousness, often ensuring that her approach would be in line with how she would want her children treated.

Teachers in the high efficacy group delved beyond parenting as the sole means of displaying empathy. Karly describes her own "rough time in middle school," explaining that she is able to identify with students who struggle during this time. She continued, "I had two really influential teachers, and…they had an impact on me, and that's kind of what made me like the subjects that I teach." Elaine, in addition to referencing parenting as a positive influence, noted that students "know that I'm not just an old person and I remember what it was like to be in 6th grade." Each teacher referenced their own adolescent experience as a means of promoting progress with their current students.

Teachers in the high efficacy group referenced empathy as a crucial component for success in their respective classrooms, particularly as a means of promoting progress with adolescent middle school students. Whether their own experience or own children served as inspirations, these educators consciously employed empathy as a foundational component of their interactions with students. Interestingly enough, a similar theme resonated in the low efficacy group.

Empathy surfaced during conversations between educators in the low efficacy group. The conversation centered on attempts to understand the complex nature that is adolescence. Educators referenced their own upbringing and the time period of adolescence, as well as their own middle school experience, as influences to their teaching practices. While they referenced the importance of empathy in their practice, they also noted how challenging it can be to employ it on a consistent basis. It seemed to be particularly difficult during instances where students were acting out. Consider the exchange between Audrey and Kerry:

Audrey: I think that working with middle school students for me — with middle school students — for me how it affects my sense of self-efficacy is that oftentimes I forget that the students that I'm teaching are 11-13 years old. I forget their age, and I'll be — I mean I have — I try and have really high expectations for my students, for what they're able to accomplish. Sometimes I just have to tell myself, "okay, this kid is really interested right now in something other than what I am teaching them." You know? I just think that their attention span is often kind of all over the place. They have a lot of things going on. Like we talked about all these home issues, but just adolescence itself is an issue. I mean, I — I had a fairly stable upbringing, and I remember just being a mess in middle school, and I think that sometimes we lose our — as a teacher sometimes I lose track of, "Why are they not being productive? Why are they giggling?" or, "What's going on?" And so for me personally I often forget about their adolescence, and I think that that's a big issue. Because, you know sometimes I think we need to cut them a little slack. They're [laughter] they're kids, you know? And they have all these things going on — I'm going to ask this girl out, or I'm going do this, or — [Laughter.]— they're sort of like babies at life. You know, like they're just practicing being adults for the first time, and that's tough.

Kerry: I feel that I'm pretty well aware, most of the time, of how tough adolescence really is, because the students — I don't want to say they're very immature, but most of my students do behave pretty immaturely [laughter]. And I'm a very new teacher, so it is difficult sometimes going home, because sometimes I feel like I have 60 kids that I need to take care of. And they are

going through a lot, and it's also difficult when they ask to go to the guidance counselor every single day and having to meet with parent every week and just keep — I don't know, it seems — it's a lot. I have a lot of students with really bad anxiety, and I can remember, and a lot of times I'll try to relate, "When I was your age" because it wasn't super long ago. [Laughter] And I'll just tell them that it will get better, but yeah I'm aware of it every day that these are little 11, 12, and 13-year-old kids. You know, just because they're behaving like that, it's not my fault, necessarily.

Audrey: I mean, I — I had a fairly stable upbringing, and I remember just being a mess in middle school, and I think that sometimes we lose our — as a teacher sometimes I lose track of, "Why are they not being productive? Why are they giggling?" or, "What's going on?" And so for me personally I often forget about their adolescence, and I think that that's a big issue. Because, you know sometimes I think we need to cut them a little slack. They're [laughter] they're kids, you know? And they have all these things going on — I'm going to ask this girl out, or I'm going do this, or —[Laughter.]— they're sort of like babies at life. You know, like they're just practicing being adults for the first time, and that's tough.

While both educators stressed the importance of efficacy, they also noted the challenges in employing the concept in their daily interactions with students. Despite recognizing the complexity of adolescence, Audrey noted that she often forgets how the age of her students influences their decisions and subsequent actions in her classroom. She added that she often has to remind herself to “cut them a little slack” when their

actions are not in line with her set forth expectations. Kerry noted how "difficult" the profession can be, explaining that she often goes home frustrated by her large caseload and the subsequent challenges that accompany it. Kerry also referenced difficulty in employing empathy when students experience stretches away from class in receiving social/emotional services from support staff members. Despite these challenges, she described an environment where she recognizes the turbulent nature of adolescence while assuring students of better times on the horizon. This description of empathy differed from that of educators in the high efficacy group.

Considering conversations from both the high and low efficacy group, empathy emerged as a critical component in the process of working with middle school students. While educators from the high efficacy group described this concept as a symbiotic with their everyday practices. Teachers in the low efficacy group highlighted the importance of empathy in a middle school setting. While they recognized the time period as incredibly complex, they expressed the difficulty in continuously being cognizant of this fact. Both group of educators recognized the importance of efficacy in a middle school classroom. Comparatively, the high efficacy group explained that it serves an intrinsic component of their pedagogy while low efficacy educators often had to remind themselves of the nature of the student before them.

Different Responses to the Challenges of Adolescence

Each of the two focus groups acknowledged the complex nature of adolescence, but their approach in meeting the dual objectives set forth by the occupation of being a middle school educator differed. Participants in the high efficacy group continuously

outlined an approach that incorporated “life lessons” into their instructional practices. They referenced this ability as a positive influence over their sense of self-efficacy. The exchange between Patricia and Danny captures this mindset:

> Patricia: I feel like it goes back to what we were saying before, what we're trying to teach them the tools, and it may not necessarily be about science, but it's about question or —
>
> Danny: Life skills.
>
> Patricia: — questioning, or — yeah, life skills. So I feel like as far as becoming lifelong learners, I feel like — I don't know, I feel like maybe part of — the bigger part of our job is teaching them how to be lifelong learners as opposed to the science standards for 8th grade science.

In line with Danny and Patricia’s sentiments, Elaine expounded on the notion of creating lifelong learners at the middle school level.

> Elaine: Middle School, I feel, is all about teaching them how to learn or how to make right decisions, to make right choices. And then to make a mistake (in life) is okay, but then to learn from it is more important than the kids who are not successful or not learning from these experiences.

Finally, Danny explains his dedication to teaching important life skills at the middle school level.

> Danny: I do feel like I spend the bulk of my time teaching them universal skills, not just skills that are based on the Common Core. I think it's—there’s some stuff that needs to be done, whether it's life skills or something else.

Each teacher in the high efficacy group referenced the weaving of holistic and standards-based curriculums, one that focuses on teaching crucial life skills as a means of progress. They stressed important life lessons, particularly determination in the face of adversity, as integral aspects of their classrooms. More importantly, the incorporation of life lessons into educator's respective curriculums seemed to be seamless in nature. Their description does not match sentiments expressed by Ohanian (2009), Darling-Hammond (2007), or Ravitch (2010) which presented this concept as a disruptive occupational force. In terms of their sense of self-efficacy, teachers in the high group seemed to report the incorporation of life lessons as a positive influence over their motivation.

Educators in the low efficacy group acknowledged the complex nature of adolescence, but painted a different picture in terms of how it is responded to. They tended to focus on the difficulty in meeting the dual responsibilities as opposed to highlighting the opportunities. Barbara and Audrey's exchange (below) illustrated this theme, as Barbara referenced accountability as a means of ensuring success while Audrey painted a pessimistic picture in attempting to deliver a holistic approach with each and every student.

> Barbara: So I think in middle school it's important for us to be consistent and to help them establish a sense of consequences. I think that's huge right now, because we are preparing them for high school. So that's what I find is a big challenge, I think, with going from elementary where they're a little more coddled, which they should be, to middle school, where we need to really instill a sense of responsibility and that they need to be held accountable.

After Barbara's statement, Audrey referenced the importance of trying to promote "close human relationships" and "a sense of belonging" in her classroom. However, both she and Cameron expressed frustration with their ability to accomplish this task, given the structure imposed upon her by her middle school format. Their words echo the crucial role that environment plays in one's sense of self-efficacy. Consider Bandura's (1971) sentiment from chapter two where he explained, "In the social learning view, psychological functioning involves a continuous reciprocal interaction between behavior and its controlling conditions" (p. 39). Audrey and Cameron, with the very best of intentions, each did not feel as though their environment provided the opportunity for this important aspect of education.

> Audrey: I think there are a lot of things that we can do to promote those things, but I do think that there are so many kids that you're looking after when you're a middle school teacher, that sometimes it's tough. Like, there's the possibility that there's that one quiet kid in the back that's going through something. And you just have no idea. Because it just would be impossible to spend one on one time with every kid, every single day. But we're really spending the amount of time that you need to — to make them feel like that they — that they're part of the classroom. I think the school can do a lot of things to give the kids self-esteem and a sense of belonging. In advisory you can do that.
>
> Cameron: My first year of teaching I was lucky to have all split classes, and I was able to live up to the responsibility of meeting those needs, because I knew every one of those kids in and out. Now I'm in my third year, and my class size has doubled, and I don't feel like I'm able to live up to those needs, so for me it ties

directly into class size. If I'm able to build a close relationship, I can do that with a half class. I can't do it with a full class of 25 students.

Comparatively, the two groups share an appreciation for the dynamic nature of adolescence. However, in terms of meeting the academic and holistic objectives set forth in the three middle schools' mission statements, the two groups differed in their approach. Educators in the high group referenced "life lessons" as a core aspect of their pedagogy while educators in the low group expressed an inability to integrate this aspect into their classroom.

Conclusion

Educators from the high and low efficacy focus groups identified different influences as factors beyond their control. Educators in the high efficacy group noted standardized testing and students' home lives while those in the low efficacy group referenced mental health and time as factors beyond their control. Educators in the high efficacy group conveyed more of resilience when discussing these factors, explaining their ability to compartmentalize data while finding spaces, particularly after school, as a means of combating turbulent home lives. In terms of the antecedents of efficacy, including verbal persuasion and vicarious experiences, themes from each focus group differed. Teachers from the high efficacy group found value in observing various classrooms while teachers in the low efficacy group noted a preference for being observed by peers. While both groups explained the positive influence of these experiences, educators from the low efficacy group stressed the importance of ideal settings as a means of making it worthwhile. Middle school educators in each focus

group stressed the importance of empathy as a means of improved self-efficacy. Teachers in each group brought forth their own circumstances, particularly in terms of their own children or own middle school experience, as an inspirations for this empathy. Finally, each group recognized the challenge of meeting the dual objectives of promoting academic and holistic progress. Yet, the groups differed in their approach. Educators in the high efficacy group referenced "life lessons" as a foundational component of their classroom, able to meld this with their required curriculum. Educators in the low efficacy group continuously referenced structures as a limiting factor in accomplishing each of these important goals.

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

Introduction

> *Middle school is a netherworld between elementary school and high school, and teachers can be the key. –NY Times, 2007*

I have spent my entire ten year career as a middle school educator—six years as a teacher, two years as a coach, and two years as a principal. My career trajectory over these ten years has offered a wider lens from which to view the middle school educational process. This comprehensive view has spawned a greater appreciation for the work and perseverance necessary for success as an educator in this venue. As a career changer from business to education, my own personal struggles as middle school English Language Arts teacher served as the initial seeds of interest behind this study. However, my subsequent work with middle school educators in the capacities of both coach and administrator served as the ultimate inspiration for the pursuit of a study that can help to begin explaining what self-efficacy looks and feels like in the dynamic setting that is middle school.

Despite research that identifies adolescence as the most pivotal moment in a student's educational trajectory, the concept of middle school often seems to be overlooked in favor of elementary or high school settings. With minimal professional training offered for this specific level (Conklin, 2009), I have watched many middle school educators, overwhelmed from the challenges that are presented in this forum, leave for the greener pastures at the elementary or high school tiers. Yet, it is at this crucial time period in the educational process where our strongest educators are needed most. The time span between elementary and high school elicits tremendous vulnerability in students, an emotion that can often manifest in a variety of ways. A skilled educator, one who can navigate both the academic and holistic responsibilities of being a middle school teacher, can serve as a positive influence in leading students down the proper path of secondary schooling. And given that the path determined at the middle school level often serves as an accurate predictor of success or failure at the secondary schooling level and beyond (Balfanz & Mac Iver, 2000), it is safe to say that no other group of educators have a greater impact on students' lives than those that work with students during these pivotal adolescent years.

Despite the challenges presented by adolescence, the middle school teaching position has become more complex given the unprecedented crush of accountability in the early part of the century. On any given day, middle school hallways are ripe with conversations of frustration in terms of the impact that standardized testing has on the profession. Interestingly, these words are not exclusively elicited from those that teach tested subjects. Both tested and non-tested subject educators seem to feel the ripple effect of accountability mandates and initiatives aimed at improving standardized testing

performance. School days dedicated to standardized testing and practices standardized testing have disrupted educators' pacing plans. Increased intervention classes, often in lieu of arts and wellness classes, have changed the dynamics of a more well-rounded school day. The perception is often one where autonomy has been supplanted by an automated and scripted education with a single objective—improved standardized test performance. While elementary and high school educators experience the same standardized responsibilities, they do not have the added complexity (and responsibility) of meeting the needs of adolescents as part of their practice.

The purpose of this study is to explore self-efficacy in the most complex time period of public schooling. Without discounting the challenges faced by elementary and high school teachers, the academic and holistic responsibilities that middle school educators face are unmatched in their complexity. On a number of occasions, I have watched middle school educators express frustration, doubt, uncertainty, and demoralization. On the other hand, I have watched a number of middle school educators experience success in this forum, displaying an ability to create a classroom environment that promotes social, emotional, and academic progress. This study aimed to paint an initial picture of middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy in a single district, through quantitative and qualitative analysis educators who are efficacious and those that are not.

Summary of Study

This study was born from a passion for middle school education. As my work evolved from working primarily with students as a teacher, to working primarily with educators as both a coach and principal, so too did my focus as a researcher. During the

early stages of my doctoral program, my attention centered on middle school students who were failing. As I explored this phenomenon through the various classes in the early stages of the program, I often found that the teacher was identified as the most significant force by which failure could be averted during this important time period in students' lives. Given my experience with teachers in the middle school setting and newfound literature on the concept of self-efficacy, I found my focus shifting my research towards the educator and their beliefs or convictions in accomplishing the responsibilities of their position. Given the incredibly challenging dynamics of serving as a middle school teacher in an urban district, no concept seemed more appropriate than middle school teacher's sense of self-efficacy.

The gamut of literature on educator's sense of self-efficacy presented the concept as one of the most powerful measures in educational research. The direct correlation between educator's sense of self-efficacy and student progress served as an initial appeal for this study, particularly in terms of OakRidge's success as a level two district at the middle school level. Diving beyond the allure of the academic correlation to educator's sense of self-efficacy, the concept offered the opportunity to explore middle school teachers' approach, motivation, and sustained motivation in the face of adversity (Bandura, 1977). In exploring research focused on efficacy, studies often referenced higher levels of self-efficacy being reported at the elementary level as opposed to the middle and high school levels (Ross, 1994). A study exploring the transition to middle school, Midgely (1991) further solidified the correlation between efficacy and student achievement, while noting an additional finding that presented elementary teachers as having a higher sense of efficacy than those at the middle school level. Midgely (1991)

subsequently recommended talking to middle school educators as an important first step in determining why this phenomenon occurs. While Midgely (1991) wondered about a deficiency perspective emanating at the middle school level, I began to question whether the dynamic nature of adolescence was underlying cause of this subpar sense of self-efficacy being reported at the middle school level.

In setting out to explore middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy, various themes had to be considered. The concept of middle school served as an obvious foundational aspect that warranted exploration. An analysis of the genesis and subsequent evolution of the middle school concept revealed a great deal of attention around the structure and purpose of this entity. As such, Weick's (1976) organizational theory, centering on loosely coupled systems, was a logical theme to explore. The autonomy referenced in a loosely coupled system served as a key aspect for this study, particularly given the rigid accountability mandates and spontaneous challenges that originate from working with adolescents. The reciprocal relationship of one's sense of self-efficacy and the environment in which they operate lent further credence to the exploration of the middle school concept.

The middle school design was originally created as a loosely coupled system which offered teacher autonomy in doing what is best for kids, meeting students' needs and interests. Yet, the impact of unprecedented accountability seems to have produced a tightly coupled system where teachers are bound by set forth mandates and practices related to initiatives born from this quantitative data point. Thus, literature on the impact of accountability was explored in order to shed light on the potential of a tightly coupled system influencing one's sense of self-efficacy. The crux of navigating a tightly coupled

system impinging upon a loosely coupled system served as a cornerstone concept for this study. Nel Noddings' caring theory was employed as a means of gaining a better understanding of this conundrum. Given the dual responsibility of balancing the competing objectives of a holistic and academic progress with adolescents, this theory was particularly appropriate for the explanatory nature study.

The various aforementioned themes were synthesized in creating a conceptual framework. Bronfenbrenner's ecological lens, which considers macro, meso, and micro levels of analysis, was employed to galvanize these themes. Ultimately, this study sought to explain how the expectations levied at the macro level from an accountability standpoint, along with the purpose of the middle school concept set forth at the meso level, influence self-efficacy at the micro level.

In exploring positivist and constructionist worldviews throughout this process, I found that my allegiance rests somewhere in the middle of these two epistemological positions. Crotty (1998) notes, "In the way of thinking to which intentionality introduces us, such a dichotomy between the subjective and the objective is untenable. Subject and object, distinguishable as they are, are always untied" (p. 45). I do not align with those that believe that research must be born from pure objectivity. Personal experience always exerts some influence over one's research. Yet, I do not believe that research should be saturated with subjectivity either. As Crotty (1998) explains, "To embrace the notion of intentionality is to reject objectivism. Equally, it is to reject subjectivism. What intentionality brings to the fore is interaction between subject and object" (p. 45). I believe in the interaction between objectivity and subjectivity, a belief that led to a mixed methods study where hard quantitative numbers provided discovery while qualitative

accounts from participants helped construct subsequent meaning. Thus, a sequential explanatory study was employed to provide a comprehensive picture of middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. Through both quantitative and qualitative analysis, the study aimed to provide etic and emic perspectives of middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy, capturing the concept's essence in a single urban school district.

Findings

> *Nothing about the notion of pedagogy (parenting or teaching) should be considered "given" or "granted"; only that the meaning of pedagogy needs to be found in the experience of pedagogy, because the lived experience of pedagogy is all that remains if presuppositions are suspended. (Van Manen, 1990, p. 53)*

Data from the TSES survey revealed a high sense of efficacy amongst middle school educators in the OakRidge school district. Overall, teachers felt as though they could do "quite a bit" in promoting effective instructional strategies, classroom management practices, and student engagement. This finding is consistent with the previously mentioned correlation of teacher efficacy and student achievement. Given OakRidge's success at the middle school level on state testing, it was logical that the teaching force would present a high sense of self-efficacy when surveyed. Delving further into the sub categories of the TSES survey, the most interesting finding was that educators felt as though they only had between "some influence" and "quite a bit" of influence when it came to student engagement. Teachers felt highly efficacious in promoting effective instructional strategies and classroom management techniques, yet did not report as high of a level in terms of engaging students. This was an interesting

finding in that it ran counter to the findings of the original TSES which found a higher level of efficacy with student engagement than classroom management. It is important to note that the original TSES was conducted with a mix of pre-service and in-service teachers across various levels (elementary, middle, and high school) of education (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Considering the original findings of the TSES, where student engagement (along with instructional strategies) served as the highest mean scores, it is reasonable to assume that OakRidge's low mean score was related to the complexities involved in working with adolescence students.

In terms of categorical data, gender served as the only significant factor in determining one's level of self-efficacy. Consistent with a number of efficacy findings referenced by Ross (1994), gender was found to be a significant factor as OakRidge female educators reported a higher sense of self-efficacy than their male counterparts. Female educators reported a significantly higher sense of efficacy in terms of the eight questions that comprised the classroom management composite. While the student engagement composite did not produce significance overall, four questions within the composite measure did. Female educators reported a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy in getting through to difficult students, helping students to think critically, motivating students with low interest, and understanding students that are failing. Given the complex nature of successfully educating adolescents, this finding is of particular interest given that three of the four questions are related to student motivation (i.e. students who are difficult, uninterested, and failing). These characteristics are often the most challenging aspects of promoting student progress at the middle school level. Thus, this finding is worthy of further research.

Perhaps more interesting than the factor that was determined to be significant were those factors that were not. No other categorical data point—undergraduate major, years of experience, content area taught, current grade level taught, historical grade level taught, highest level of education—proved to be a significant factor in determining an educator's self-efficacy. This finding is noteworthy given the emphasis placed on these categorical data points when attempting to construct a teaching force that can promote student progress. It can also serve to inform teacher induction, mentoring, and retention processes for educators in a particular district.

Focus groups

In terms of the qualitative aspect to this study, a host of themes emerged between the high and low efficacy focus groups. In terms of factors beyond their control that influence educators' sense of self-efficacy, the groups differed. The high efficacy group referenced data and standardized testing as factors beyond their control. However, their explanations revealed that these factors did not necessarily have the expected negative impact. Instead, they outlined an ability to compartmentalize these factors, using the data derived from this testing to guide their practice without feeling overwhelmed. Students' home lives, also referenced as a factor beyond their control, was presented as a challenge for highly efficacious educators. Once again, these educators revealed strategies (incorporation of life lessons, after school homework sessions, etc.) as a means of combatting the potential negative influence of prescribed curriculum.

Educators in the low efficacy group referenced students' mental health and time as factors beyond their control, with time serving as the more significant of the two.

Unlike the educators in the high efficacy group, they did not reveal resiliency strategies in the face of these factors they deemed beyond their control. In fact, it was noted that these educators felt as though they were spread too thin to meet the competing objectives (academic and holistic) set forth in the earlier chapters of this study. The educators in the low efficacy group presented the balance of these factors as overwhelming, negative influences to their sense of self-efficacy. Thus, resiliency in the face of adversity was raised a significant difference between the two groups.

In terms of the antecedents to self-efficacy, educators with a higher sense of efficacy placed a greater emphasis on the influence vicarious experiences and verbal persuasions. Educators with a high sense of efficacy coined the term "stealing" as a foundational component in building their professional repertoire, explaining that their arsenal of instructional strategies is comprised of various techniques observed over the course of time in a variety of classrooms. High efficacy middle school educators also placed a greater value on the influence of verbal persuasions. Whether the verbal advice was positive or constructive, these educators expressed a desire for this feedback as a means of boosting their sense of self-efficacy. They seemed to favor constructive feedback as a positive influence to their sense of efficacy, a concept that runs counter to Ross' (1994) assertion that positive verbal persuasions result in a higher sense of self-efficacy.

Interestingly, in terms of vicarious experiences, teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy placed more value on being the person observed as opposed to the observer. While low efficacy teachers placed value on the influence of verbal persuasion in their professional learning group, they also highlighted many of the pitfalls that can lead to a

negative experience. It seemed as though optimal conditions were a necessary component to whether or not verbal persuasions had a positive or negative influence over their sense of self-efficacy. The difference between the groups seemed to be willingness to exude vulnerability, a concept more consistently demonstrated by the higher group of educators. This vulnerability, particularly in terms of acceptance of constructive feedback, allows educators with a higher sense of self-efficacy to grow from any type of experience or verbal conversation, both positive and negative alike.

The theme of an empathetic approach to adolescence emerged in both the high and low efficacy groups. Educators referenced the importance of employing empathy in understanding and working effectively with adolescent students. They referenced their own experiences at the middle school level, as well as their own children's experiences in school as inspirations behind this sense of empathy. Consistency was a slight difference between the two groups, as educators in the low efficacy group often had to remind themselves of the students' age (and the behavior that typically accompanies this timespan) before them. Each group, regardless of their sense of self-efficacy, placed a tremendous value on empathy as a means of success in their classroom.

In terms of their instructional approach in a middle school setting, the two groups differed. While each acknowledged the importance of "life lessons" for this particular age group, only one seemed to be able to consistently (and seamlessly) employ this concept in their practice. Educators in the low efficacy group expressed frustration with the confining middle school environment, rendering them unable to accomplish this task. Educators in the high efficacy group referenced "life lessons" as a crucial component to their pedagogy. These life lessons seemed to be seamlessly embedded into their

curriculum, regardless of content area. Motivation, inspiration, and resilience were referenced as components of this life lesson approach to middle school education. This finding refutes the binary nature posed by Noddings (1995) over the course of chapters one and two. Middle school educators from the high efficacy group do not seem to be exclusively driven by the academic purpose of schooling. Instead, they incorporate life lessons as part of this academic experience. The dedication to life lessons and an empathetic approach, along with a corresponding focus on academic progress, seems to find the balance between academic and holistic education.

Revisiting the Research Question and Identified Gaps in Literature

Identified Gaps in Literature

> *"Studies should further validate and refine instruments to measure teacher efficacy and investigate the relationships between teacher characteristics (i.e., gender, years of teaching experience, grade levels, and personal attributes) and sense of efficacy" (Dembo & Gibson, 1985, p. 182).*

A statistical analysis of survey data from the OakRidge school district revealed little significance in regards to the characteristics outlined by Dembo and Gibson (1985). Years of teaching experience, grade levels taught (current or historical), content area, major, and level of education yielded no significant relationship to a teacher's sense of self-efficacy. Gender, however, did serve as a significant factor in terms of how efficacious teachers reported being. This finding is in line with Ross' (1994) analysis of multiple self-efficacy studies. However, given the nature of a case study, the findings serve as potential inspirations for future in-depth research around gender and self-

efficacy, a recommendation that will be made in the forthcoming "Recommendations for Future Research" section.

Guskey (1987) referenced Ashton (1984) in explaining that despite the fact that "teacher efficacy is likely to be dependent upon certain context variables, few investigations have sought to determine the nature of these variables or their precise effects on measures of teacher efficacy" (p. 42).

This particular research study focused on the context of middle school as a means of garnering an understanding of what influences their sense of self-efficacy. The qualitative portion of this study raised a number of potential variables that can be explored in greater depth. At the forefront of middle school educators' explanations was the complex nature of adolescence, particularly in terms of the concept's unpredictability and its subsequent impact on teacher self-efficacy. Teachers describe the nature of adolescence as an influence to their belief that they can accomplish their objectives. While questions in the student engagement portion of the TSES touched upon this concept, a more in-depth study that attempts to quantify this phenomenon will be presented in the forthcoming chapter as a consideration for future research.

"We believe an important first step is to talk with middle school and junior high teachers and hear their interpretations and explanations" (Midgley, 1991, p. 13).

Conversations with middle school educators revealed findings that ran counter to Midgley's (1991) call for future research as to why middle and junior high school teachers' sense of self-efficacy was reported as low. Educators in the OakRidge district, reporting a high sense of self-efficacy ($M_{\text{OakRidge TSES}} = 7.1$), expressed the importance of empathy in their classrooms, specifically (but not limited to) the struggles that

accompany adolescence. They also highlighted an ability to incorporate life lessons as a means of balancing the challenging dynamic in meeting the responsibilities of holistically and academically educating their students. A comparative study which measures all three levels (elementary, middle, and secondary schooling) in a particular school district will be put forth as a recommendation for further research.

Research Question

What is urban middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy like in an era of accountability?

Educators in the OakRidge district reported a high sense of efficacy in terms of their overall work with adolescent students. Instructional strategies and classroom management served as the highest composites that were measured. Student engagement, however, fell below these two variables and it is more than reasonable to suggest that this is directly related to the complex nature of adolescence. In terms of survey data, female teachers reported a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy than their male counterparts. Within the sub-categories, it was determined that the classroom management had a significant relationship to gender, with females being more efficacious than males. Female educators also had a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy in terms of particular questions in the student engagement sub-category and one question in the instructional strategies category. No other categorical data point showed significance in terms of their relationship to educators' level of self-efficacy. Thus, one can assume that these variables do not play a significant role in determining an educator's level of self-efficacy.

The focus groups provided an emic perspective of the various influences on middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. Described as unpredictable given the changing nature of adolescence, the middle school environment has various factors that positively and negatively influence educators' beliefs in achieving set forth objectives. Dialogue from educators with both high and low senses of self-efficacy revealed that empathy plays a crucial role in their success as a middle school educator, referencing an understanding and appreciation for how difficult the timespan of adolescence is for students. Personal experiences during their own middle school tenure, as well as their children's experience, served as inspirations for this sense of empathy. While educators from the low sense of self-efficacy group often had to remind themselves of their students' age and subsequent behaviors, educators in the high efficacy group referenced this time period in a more innate manner. The ability to employ empathy served as a crucial component of the middle school experience. How consistent empathy was employed seemed to be dependent upon how efficacious the teacher was.

A higher sense of self-efficacy seemed to produce an ability to compartmentalize the various factors that influence their performance in this dynamic setting. Any factor that was deemed beyond their control or impinged upon the teachers' core set of beliefs was relegated to a reference point in guiding their practice and not elevated to the level of a dominant, disruptive force. In particular, educators with a higher sense of self-efficacy displayed a tranquil approach when discussing data analysis and standardized testing. Factors that were outside of their immediate control were seamlessly infused in their pedagogical practices. Rather than expressing concern over their limited time with students, these educators maximized these opportunities, incorporating life lessons and

opportunities beyond the school day to solidify the ever important teacher-student relationship. Factors were not viewed as being separate from their practice, but rather as complimentary components to a demanding, but nonetheless rewarding job.

Inferences & Implications

This study sought to paint an accurate picture of how urban middle school educators' professional responsibilities were impacted by their sense of self-efficacy during an unprecedented era of accountability. In the process, the statistical analysis confirmed a number of findings presented by Ross' (1994) study which analyzed data from 88 self-efficacy studies. In terms of statistical analysis, only gender served as a significant factor in determining middle school teachers' sense of self efficacy. Female educators had a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy than their male counterparts, particularly in terms of classroom management. Female educators also showed significantly higher sense of efficacy in multiple questions in the student engagement category and one question in the instructional strategies category. Literature published on transformational leadership, a concept attributed to women in leadership positions, describes the concept as an effective form of leadership that focuses on establishing trust and confidence with colleagues (Lopez-Zafra, Garcia-Retamero, & Berrios Martos, 2012). It would be interesting to see if this type of leadership influences the teacher-student relationship as well, serving as a possible explanation for female educator's higher sense of self-efficacy in the middle school classroom.

Perhaps most interesting (particularly in terms of the impact of accountability) was the difference of approaches between educators in the high and low efficacy groups.

While each group admitted to the invasive nature of such measures, the high group demonstrated an imperturbable approach in terms of how impactful these measures were on their sense of self-efficacy and practice. The impact of accountability measures seemed to have a more lasting and impactful influence over educators who reported a lower sense of self-efficacy. The descriptions presented in chapter 4 can help inform how data (particularly standardized testing data) is interpreted, presented, and discussed in an educational setting. It is critical for educational leaders to gauge the impact that these conversations are having on an educator, particularly those teachers who may not feel efficacious. Too often, even when it is most delicately phrased, data is viewed as an indictment as opposed to an indicator. Personal experience suggests that educators who experience success in the standardized testing universe display the aforementioned imperturbable approach towards the concept itself. In working with educators with a low sense of efficacy, it would seem that the first step would be some form of a liberation from the pressure and angst that such data levies upon them. In using the data to inform as opposed to indict, it may help to inform these educators' instructional practices.

The greatest refutation of literature presented in chapters one and two was the ability of teachers to balance the academic and holistic responsibilities of being a middle school educator. Teachers in the high efficacy group referenced the incorporation of life lessons as a foundational component of their curriculum. In doing so, they rebut the binary relationship between the academic and holistic purpose of education presented in chapters one and two. On the other hand, educators in the low efficacy group confirmed the frustration in meeting these competing objectives, referencing time as their greatest inhibitor. One can infer that educators' high sense of efficacy and ability to incorporate

the holistic component in their classroom are reciprocal in nature. Such practices can serve as crucial components in building an effective middle school educator licensure/preparation program that Conklin (2009) advocated for as an addition to existing elementary and secondary programs. In addition, these findings call into question the current length of a typical middle school day. Even with one of the schools working an additional 300 hours per year in the OakRidge district, educators felt as though time served as an inhibitor when working with adolescents.

Additionally, and perhaps most importantly, middle school educators from this particular study revealed the complexities involved in working with adolescents, citing empathy as one of the most important aspects of their pedagogy. Within this empathetic approach, these educators displayed a keen understanding of the dynamic nature of adolescence, as well as mitigating factors that prevent academic and social progress. While each focus group (high and low) explained the importance of empathy as a means of successfully educating middle school students, those that seemed most empathetic referenced their children as students or own middle school experience as inspirations of this empathy. The question that begs to be asked: What about those educators that do not have children in middle school or personal experiences that match their students' current circumstances? Gaining an understanding of the complexities of adolescence would seem to serve as a plausible solution. The empathetic approach and understanding of adolescence portrayed in the findings of this study can serve as potential content areas for a middle school training or licensure program.

The greatest implication for this particular study rests in its potential influence on teacher professional development. As Guskey (2002) noted, "High-quality professional

development is a central component in nearly every modern proposal for improving education." Guskey (2002) went on to note that many educators feel as though professional development is a key to growth in their profession. Guskey (2002), in referencing Fullan and Miles (1992), explained that teachers desire "specific, concrete, and practical ideas that directly relate to the day-to-day operation of their classrooms" (p. 382). He continued, "Development programs that fail to address these needs are unlikely to succeed" (Guskey, 2002, p. 382). As such, the findings presented in this particular study offer insight into the day-to-day struggles of middle school educators with high and low senses of self-efficacy, insight that can be used to lend relevance to professional development programs. Professional development topics such as the nature of adolescent students, empathy in the middle school classroom, and the seamless incorporation of life lessons into a middle school curriculum can serve as valuable additions to the OakRidge professional development program and beyond.

In terms of understanding the complex nature of adolescence, the districts should consider middle school case-based professional development advocated for by Muth, Polizzi, and Glynn (2007). The authors note that case discussions promote professional relationships and provide instructional, emotional, and managerial support in middle school teaching" (Muth et. al, 2007, p. 9). Such cases serve as a window into various middle school conundrums that can arise on a daily basis in a middle school setting, offering the opportunity for dialogue aimed at overcoming adolescent challenges. The hope is that the understanding garnered from the OakRidge educators' conversations will surface the concept of "empathy" as a potential solution to daily dilemmas that students face. A professional development program focused on the ways in which empathy is

employed in a middle school classroom would benefit all middle school educators in the district, particularly in terms of their work in understanding adolescent students.

Too often, the expectation is that middle school students arrive as mature young men and women as opposed to adolescent students who need time to grow and mature over the course of their middle school tenure. As such, the incorporation of life lessons into the practice, as described by educators from the high efficacy group, serves as a potentially valuable professional development topic. The seamless incorporation of life lessons into various content areas should be explored as a means of promoting success with adolescent students. Considering earlier literature around the importance of vicarious experiences in supporting one's sense of self-efficacy, peer observations focusing on the embedment of these life lessons can serve as a potential effective form of professional development. Dedication to the holistic practice incorporating life lessons can aid the maturity process over the course of their middle school tenure, helping to prepare them for the challenges of secondary schooling.

The findings around Ross' (1994) four antecedents to self-efficacy—past experience influencing future actions, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological responses—warrant consideration as professional development topics. An understanding of the antecedents of one's own sense of self-efficacy can lead to an informed approach in improving educators' sense of self-efficacy. Prior to this study, I had no knowledge of the concept and never considered how the four antecedents influenced my actions as a teacher. In order to improve one's sense of efficacy, educators must first understand the genesis of the concept and the corresponding antecedents. Understanding how efficacy impacts performance can serve as an intriguing

concept when exploring why high efficacy teachers prefer to be the observer, while low efficacy teacher prefer to be observed. This finding was particularly noteworthy and can serve to inform. Consider Guskey's (2002) findings about professional development and change in practice:

> According to the (change) model, significant change in teachers' attitudes and beliefs occurs primarily after they gain evidence of improvements in student learning. These improvements typically result from changes teachers have made in their classroom practices—a new instructional approach, the use of new materials or curricula, or simply a modification in teaching procedures or classroom format. The crucial point is that it is not the professional development per se, but the experience of successful implementation that changes teachers' attitudes and beliefs. They believe it works because they have seen it work, and that experience shapes their attitudes and beliefs. (p. 383)

In terms of professional development, this model of change stresses implementation as a means of shaping teacher beliefs. High efficacy teachers' ability to observe a classroom practice and mold it to ensure success in their own classroom serves as a notable topic for professional development. On the other hand, low efficacy teachers that prefer to be observed may not gain meaningful feedback from peers that will elicit professional growth. Being observed may not be as valuable to increasing one's sense of self-efficacy as *observing*, and subsequently implementing strategies from a peer's classroom. The concept of "stealing" practices and eventually molding them to fit one's own classroom pedagogy would serve as a valuable professional development topic in beginning to understand the concept of self-efficacy as it relates to vicarious experiences.

Finally, and perhaps most importantly, this study revealed the impact of standardized testing on educators in a middle school environment. Educators recounted the gravity of discussions around standardized testing, as well as the overall impact of process itself. As one participant put it, “It's also scary to think that your entire teaching career could come down to how a (middle school) kid performed one day on one test.” The uncertainty of students’ performance on standardized tests perhaps resonates more at the middle school level, where students can be so unpredictable in terms of motivation. Any progress made by a student who has performed well during the duration of the school year can be lost in an apathetic moment where the student decides that he or she does not want to put forth an effort on a particular day for an unknown reason. Upon finishing her thought about connecting student performance to one’s career, the focus group participant reminded, “(Standardized testing is) going to affect everything.” As such, teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy expressed frustration with the time dedicated to standardized testing initiatives, as well as a lack of time to engage in more in-depth learning experiences. Yet teachers with a high sense of efficacy used standardized testing and data as a mere reference point to guide their instruction. This finding should influence how conversations around standardized testing and subsequent data are framed in order to maintain (in the case of high group of teachers) or improve (in the case of low group of teachers) one’s sense of self-efficacy.

Everyone involved in education is impacted by accountability measures. Neither elementary nor high school are exempt from the concept’s impact. However, middle school educators seem particularly on edge given the complex adolescence dynamic they face on a daily basis. The voices from the focus groups demonstrate the impact of this

practice in a number of ways. Given the descriptions provided, movements like the Obama administration's call on congress to reduce time dedicated to standardized testing (Zernike, 2015) can serve as a great start in limiting its influence. However, beyond the time dedicated to the actual standardized testing, districts should also take into account the time spent preparing for the test and the manner in which this is accomplished. In addition, it is important to explore how results are discussed in educational settings. While educators with a high sense of self-efficacy in the OakRidge district spoke about an ability to compartmentalize results from standardized testing, OakRidge educators with a low sense of self-efficacy report a more lasting impact. Regardless of how carefully these conversations are worded, it seems as though the inherent concern over maintaining one's job rules the day. As such, it is important to focus conversations concerning data around the information provided by student performance instead of punitive measures around student results.

Recommendations for Further Research

> *Science never pursues the illusory aim of making its answers final, or even probable. Its advance is, rather, towards the infinite yet attainable aim of ever discovering new, deeper, and more general problems, and of subjecting its ever tentative answer to ever renewed and ever more rigorous tests. (Popper, 1959, pp. 278, 280, 281)*

Working in education for almost a decade now, it is difficult to fathom the concept of discovering an absolute truth in this field. There is no atmosphere in the world that is more dynamic than that of education, particularly at the middle school level.

While Popper's (1959) stance on a lack of finality in research is extreme, it paints an accurate picture of the value of findings and subsequent future research they inspire. This case study is no different, in that each finding carries the potential for further research in the area of self-efficacy at the middle school level.

Given the small scale nature of this study, identified in chapter 3 as a limitation in terms of generalizability of findings, a larger scale study focusing on the categorical data points explored would lend credence to findings from the quantitative analysis from this study. Of particular interest is the categorical data point of years of experience. Chester and Beaudin (1996) found that self-efficacy beliefs decline in the first year of teaching, yet this study did not find years' experience as a significant factor in determining an educator's level of self-efficacy. In fact, on average, educators in their first year reported a higher sense of efficacy than those in years two through nine. A larger scale study would provide generalizability for significance in terms of years of experience and all other categorical data points explored. Also related to the limitation of generalizability was the fact that the findings form this case study refuted the notion that middle school educators have a low sense of self-efficacy. A larger scale, comparative study where educators' sense of self-efficacy from all three levels of education (elementary, middle, and high school) would serve as a more comprehensive finding in solidifying this assertion.

Like Ross' (1994) analysis of 88 studies involving educators' efficacy, female educators reported a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy. Given the validity of this finding across multiple studies, a future qualitative efficacy study that disaggregates female and male middle school educators may prove to be beneficial in extracting the

reasons behind this difference. Particular areas that are worthy of exploration would include (but are not limited to) classroom management and student engagement. Student engagement at the middle school level would serve as an interesting topic, particularly given the challenges in motivating and engaging middle school students during adolescence. One of the more interesting findings from this study was that female educators reported a significantly higher sense of efficacy in terms of getting through to difficult students, helping students to think critically, motivating students with low interest, and understanding students that are failing. Studies that employ individual or focus group interviews focused on these concepts may help surface the techniques that inspire this higher sense of self-efficacy for these particular student engagement areas.

Another potential area for exploration is the concept of "empathy" in middle school education, particularly as it relates to one's sense of self-efficacy and work with adolescent students. Where educators in this study referenced their own children as an inspiration of empathy in the classroom, a categorical data point for future efficacy studies may ask whether the educator has children or not. Beyond their own children, educators from the high efficacy group referenced an empathetic approach given their own personal history in a middle school setting. Qualitative studies that explore the factors that inspire this empathetic approach as well as the manner in which educators employ empathy in a middle school setting should be considerations. In addition, it would be interesting to garner students' perspectives on how teachers' empathy influences their middle school experience.

The findings of this particular study can be further built upon via future phenomenological research focused on middle school educators. Van Manen (1990)

explained, “The essence of a phenomenon is a universal which can be described through a study of the structure that governs the instances or particular manifestations of the essence of a phenomenon” (p. 10). The seamless incorporation of life lessons as a crucial instructional strategy of middle school educators with a high sense of efficacy may be explored via an ethnographic study focused on observing their pedagogical practices. Given the results of the three components measured, where instructional strategies and classroom management trumped student engagement, future studies may want to focus on successful engagement strategies of middle school adolescent students specifically. Finally, the role that empathy plays in successfully working with middle school adolescent students should be considered, particularly how it manifests in the classroom. Embedded observational forms of research would yield the most useful results in understanding these phenomena at the middle school level.

Reflection

In bringing perspective to the research process, Crotty’s (1998) *The Foundations of Social Research: Meaning and Perspective in the Research Process* references Archbishop of Canterbury in Act I, Scene II of William Shakespeare’s *Henry V*, explaining “…many arrows, loosed several ways, Fly to one mark.” In making this analogy, Crotty (1998) brings light to the diverse nature of research, where a number of different approaches, worldviews, theories, and paradigms meld together to paint a comprehensive picture of a common target. In a sense, this case study is representative of a single arrow aimed at the common objective of improving urban middle school education in the twenty first century. While more appealing to practitioners than

academics, the case study offers an initial window into middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy in an era of accountability in a single school district.

Despite this window and the answers that the study provided, it raises further questions about middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. Focus groups centered around two specific topics: the holistic education of adolescents and accountability mandates and initiatives. These interviews, while providing important information for consideration, did not capture a comprehensive list of factors that impact educators' sense of self-efficacy. As such, the study did not delve into factors such as student composition in classes, schools in which the educators work, and other factors that influence self-efficacy on a daily basis. It is important for future studies, particularly those that are exploratory in nature, to question what other factors serve as influences on middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy.

Given the nature of a case study, it is difficult to determine whether or not the beliefs portrayed by educators are unique to the OakRidge district, harkening back to the generalizability limitation referenced in chapter three. OakRidge is an extremely progressive district, one that often offers to pilot a host of initiatives in order to ensure that they are at the forefront of educational practices. This context raises questions about what middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy would look like in a non-progressive district.

Composition of each OakRidge focus group (high and low) was based on respondents' responses to the self-efficacy survey. Women were found to have a significantly higher sense of self-efficacy, it is interesting to consider Ross' (1994) potential rationale that references the "cultural stereotype that teaching is a predominately

female occupation (pg. 7). If findings are not in line with this conjecture, it would be interesting to delve further into this phenomenon. Given that class composition was relatively equal between the three schools, it is interesting to consider the factors that make women possess a higher sense of self-efficacy than their male counterparts.

In terms of quantitative data, student achievement was not measured for this particular study. As such, the case study relied on a host of research that specifically connects level of efficacy with level of achievement. A study that measured level of achievement for each participant's classroom would have provided further credence to the findings of each group. Furthermore, this case study did not explore longitudinal data, rendering findings to a snapshot of the overall functioning of the OakRidge district during an era of accountability. It would have been interesting to compare middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy over a longer time span, particularly one that ranges back to the era before the crush of accountability at the turn of the century. Finally, it was reasoned that OakRidge middle school educators scored higher in classroom management and instructional strategies than student engagement due to the nature of adolescents. However, instructional practices of each participant were not explored, calling into question the level of engagement that each educators' style and pedagogy elicits. Future observational studies recommended earlier in this chapter can capture the classroom practices that elicit high and low ratings from the TSES survey.

The findings from this study can serve as a valuable first step in understanding middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy. However, future references to this study should be cautioned of the limitations found within a case study format. While findings are significant and important, they may not be generalizable to other school districts or

larger populations of urban middle school educators. Instead, these findings serve as the initial arrow in exploring the factors that influence how urban middle school educators perform in an era of accountability.

Conclusion

Whether you believe you can do a thing or not, you are right.

— Henry Ford (1947)

The power of belief. The foundation of successful teaching is born from the educators' initial beliefs as to whether or not they can accomplish the complex task of educating their students. Without this inner belief, all of the professional development in the world will not make a difference in promoting and fostering student success. Self-efficacy serves as the foundational concept behind educators' beliefs, and the concept's correlation to student achievement solidifies this assertion. Given the importance of belief and the complexities of middle school, this study served to explain the influences on middle school educators' sense of self-efficacy in the hopes that it would provide information for further research in this area.

Findings from this particular case study provided etic and emic views of an urban middle school district, views that can serve as the initial steps in beginning to explain the middle school educator occupation. Teacher characteristics, other than gender, did not have much of an influence in determining level of efficacy. However, outside factors including (but not limited to) standardized testing, data analysis, student home life, and time served as significant influences that required specific actions on behalf of the educator. These pedagogical practices included the employment of empathy in the

middle school classroom, the engagement in vicarious experiences, responding to verbal persuasions, and the embedding of life lessons into one's curriculum. Knowledge gained from this case study can serve to inform middle school professional development programs, the structure of middle school, as well as approaches in working with middle grades educators. Findings from this explanatory study may inspire future studies that explore the aspects gleaned from the lived experience of educators in the OakRidge school district. The hope is that the case study serves as yet another step in improving what has been described as a broken middle school education system in America.

Many aspects on the forefront of educational research seem to be polarized in nature, focusing on early beginnings and absolute endings, while middle school years seem rendered to the background. As new literature (Belfanz, 2000) brings focus to this crucial turning point, this study has shed light on one of the more challenging aspects of America's educational system, namely serving as a middle school educator in an urban district. The challenges, like many education jobs, are tremendous. However, the distinction that sets these challenges apart—adolescence—is far more complex than other stages of student development. Additionally, the tremendous crush of accountability measures levied upon these educators serves as yet another layer to their already full plate. As such, an explanatory case study was employed to garner a greater understanding of these educators sense of self-efficacy.

As a former middle school English Language Arts teacher, I could not help but recall my days of teaching writing when arriving at the conclusion for this study. Experiencing frustration in teaching writing at the middle school level, I consulted with a colleague for whom I have a tremendous amount of respect for. Her advice, as always,

was direct and effective. She explained, “It’s important to stress that everything has a beginning, middle, and end. The essay, each paragraph, each sentence, each word—they all have a beginning, middle and end.” She added, “And more than anything else, each part is important in its own way.” In a sense, education is no different.

Recent research has focused on the importance of a middle school education. However, there do not seem to be many studies focusing on the educators that reside in this environment. Middle school can serve as a significant predictor of success or failure at the secondary education level. As such, understanding middle school educators is the key to fostering student success during adolescence, a notion that is so desperately sought after. If middle school educators’ realities are not considered, there is a lack of understanding necessary to make improvements to this important transitionary time period in students’ educational lives. As such, this case study aimed to provide initial insight to the middle school teaching profession, complying with calls for an increased focus on what an effective middle grades education looks and feels like. The findings serve to promote an understanding for the pivotal middle school years, equally as crucial as elementary and secondary schooling. For students in the OakRidge district and across our country, a beginning without an effective middle is without meaning, and without a meaningful middle there may be no ending.

Appendix A
WEBB'S EFFICACY SCALE

Webb Efficacy Scale*

Instructions: Read each of the following paired statements: Determine if you

1. agree most strongly with the first statement
2. agree most strongly with the second statement

1. A. A teacher should not be expected to reach every child; some students are not going to make academic progress.

   B. Every child is reachable. It is a teacher's obligation to see to it that every child makes academic progress.

   Circle one:

   1. I agree most strongly with A
   2. I agree most strongly with B

2. A. Heterogeneously grouped classes provide the best environment for learning.

   B. Homogeneously grouped classes provide the best environment for learning.

   Circle one:

   1. I agree most strongly with A
   2. I agree most strongly with B

3. A. My skills are best suited for dealing with students who have low motivation and who have a history of misbehavior in school.

   B. My skills are best suited for dealing with students who are academically motivated and generally well behaved.

   Circle one:

   1. I agree most strongly with A
   2. I agree most strongly with B

4. A. Low ability students should be encouraged to develop their vocational skills when they enter high school.

   B. Low ability students should be encouraged to develop their academic skills when they enter high school.

   Circle one:

   1. I agree most strongly with A
   2. I agree most strongly with B

Appendix A (continued)

5. A. Students who are not interested in education and who continually misbehave should be expelled from school until their attitudes improve.

   B. Students who are not interested in education and who continually misbehave should be kept in school so that trained teachers can help such students to improve their attitudes.

   Circle one:

   1. I agree most strongly with A
   2. I agree most strongly with B

6. A. Most of my low-ability, poorly motivated students will eventually graduate from high school.

   B. Most of my low-ability, poorly motivated students will not graduate from high school.

   Circle one:

   1. I agree most strongly with A
   2. I agree most strongly with B

7. A. When I let myself think about it, I experience anxiety because I can't really know for certain that I am making a difference in the lives of students.

   B. When I evaluate my teaching I have a feeling of professional confidence because I know rather certainly that I am making a difference in the lives of my students.

   Circle one:

   1. I agree most strongly with A
   2. I agree most strongly with B

Retrieved from (Hoy, 2014)
http://people.ehe.osu.edu/ahoy/research/instruments/#Web

Appendix B
ASHTON'S EFFICACY VIGNETTES

Ashton Efficacy Vignettes*

Read each situation carefully. Consider similar situations from your own teaching experiences. Indicate how effective you would be in handling each situation by circling the appropriate number

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

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1. One of your students misbehaves frequently in your class and is often disruptive and hostile. Today in class he began roughhousing with a friend in the back of the class. You tell him firmly to take his seat and quiet down. He turns away from you, says something in a belligerent tone that you can't hear and swaggers to his seat. The class laughs and then looks to see what you are going to do. How effective would you be in responding to this student in a way that would win the respect of the class?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

2. Maria, an educable mentally retarded student in your class, has been working diligently, but still performs below grade-level in all subjects. At a conference the mother says that she doesn't expect much of the girl, because Maria is "dumb" just like herself. How effective would you be in talking to Maria's mother about her feelings and about the effect that parents' expectations can have on their child's school achievement?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

3. Your county has mandated that all teachers must restructure their course requirements to insure adequate development of students' basic skills by including these elements in each lesson plan. How effective would you be in incorporating achievement of basic skills objectives into your lesson plans?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

4. Students in your school gang together in same sex, same race cliques. Your principal has requested that each teacher work to promote more positive interactions among these groups. How effective do you feel you would be in helping your students develop more positive interactions?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

5. Half a dozen low-achieving female students are not getting much from your class. Lately they have begun to "hang around together" and to advertise that they don't like you or your class. They have begun to fool around, disrupt our lessons, and occasionally "talk back." When you attempt to involve them in class work they either make jokes or sit sullenly. How effective would you be in eliminating their disruptive behavior?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

Appendix B (continued)

6. This year your principal has assigned you to teach a class of low ability students in your subject matter area. The teacher who taught this class last year tells you that these are the slowest students that she's taught in her twenty year teaching career. How effective would you be in increasing the academic achievement of the students in this class?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

7. You have a student who never hands in assignments on time, seldom gets to class before the bell rings and inevitably forgets to bring books or pencil to class. He obviously has the ability to do above average work, but you have discussed this matter with his parents, and they don't seem to understand the importance of school achievement. How effective would you be in motivating this student to get to work?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

8. A new student has been assigned to your class. Her records indicate that she never does her homework and does not seem to care about her education. Her IQ score is 83 and her achievement scores have been below the 30th percentile. How effective would you be in increasing her achievement test scores?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

9. The student-teacher ratio in your class of compensatory education students is 20 to 1. You must plan your lessons to meet the individual interests and abilities of the students. How effective would you be in designing activities to match the individual interests and abilities of the students in your class?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

10. Because of repeated failure, one of your students confides to you that she has given up and will attend school only until she can find a way to drop out. How effective would you be in persuading her that she can be successful in school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

11. A number of your students have been sleeping in class. They do poorly on in class assignments and seldom turn in homework. You learn that they are taking drugs. How effective would you be in helping the students with their drug problem?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

12. A learning disabled student has been mainstreamed into your classroom. He has been described by his previous teachers as being extremely hyperactive and having severe reading problems. How effective would you be in teaching this student?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

Appendix B (continued)

13. A new teacher in your school has been reviewing cumulative records for her students and asks you to explain the difference between grade equivalent and percentile ranks for several of her students on the standardized achievement battery. How effective would you be in explaining the difference between these two types of scores?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

14. You have been selected to work on a curriculum selection committee to choose textbooks and materials to be used in your county for the coming year. The materials chosen must fit a wide range of instructional needs for students of differing abilities. How effective would you be in doing this work?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

15. Your school has adopted an instructional textbook series in your area with excellent objectives and teaching materials, but almost nothing in the form of tests or exercises to monitor student progress. How effective do you feel you would be in developing a set of evaluation procedures to accompany the text for your grade level?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7
extremely ineffective			moderately effective			extremely effective

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Appendix C

DEMBO & GIBSON'S TEACHER EFFICACY SCALE

Teacher Efficacy [1]

A number of statements about organizations, people, and teaching are presented below. The purpose is to gather information regarding the actual attitudes of educators concerning these statements. There are no correct or incorrect answers. We are interested only in your frank opinions. Your responses will remain confidential.

INSTRUCTIONS: Please indicate your personal opinion about each statement by circling the appropriate response at the right of each statement.

KEY: 1=Strongly Agree 2=Moderately Agree 3=Agree slightly more than disagree
4=Disagree slightly more than agree 4=Moderately Disagree 6=Strongly Disagree

1.	When a student does better than usually, many times it is because I exert a little extra effort.	1 2 3 4 5 6
2.	The hours in my class have little influence on students compared to the influence of their home environment.	1 2 3 4 5 6
3.	The amount a student can learn is primarily related to family background.	1 2 3 4 5 6
4.	If students aren't disciplined at home, they aren't likely to accept any discipline.	1 2 3 4 5 6
5.	I have enough training to deal with almost any learning problem.	1 2 3 4 5 6
6.	When a student is having difficulty with an assignment, I am usually able to adjust it his/her level.	1 2 3 4 5 6
7.	When a student gets a better grade than he/she usually gets, it is usually because I found better ways of teaching that student.	1 2 3 4 5 6
8.	When I really try, I can get through to most difficult students.	1 2 3 4 5 6
9.	A teacher is very limited in what he/she can achieve because a student's home environment large influence on his/her achievement.	1 2 3 4 5 6
10.	Teachers are not a very powerful influence on student achievement when all factors are considered.	1 2 3 4 5 6
11.	When the grades of my students improve, it is usually because I found more effective approaches.	1 2 3 4 5 6
12.	If a student masters a new concept quickly, this might be because I knew the necessary steps in teaching that concept.	1 2 3 4 5 6
13.	If parents would do more for their children, I could do more.	1 2 3 4 5 6
14.	If a student did not remember information I gave in a previous lesson, I would know how to increase his/her retention in the next lesson.	1 2 3 4 5 6
15.	The influences of a student's home experiences can be overcome by good teaching.	1 2 3 4 5 6
16.	If a student in my class becomes disruptive and noisy, I feel assured that I know some techniques to redirect him/her quickly.	1 2 3 4 5 6
17.	Even a teacher with good teaching abilities may not reach many students.	1 2 3 4 5 6

Appendix C (continued)

18. If one of my students couldn't do a class assignment, I would be able to accurately assess whether the assignment was at the correct level of difficulty.	1	2	3	4	5	6
19. If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.	1	2	3	4	5	6
20. When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.	1	2	3	4	5	6
21. Some students need to be placed in slower groups so they are not subjected to unrealistic expectations.	1	2	3	4	5	6
22. My teacher training program and/or experience has given me the necessary skills to be an effective teacher	1	2	3	4	5	6

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Appendix D

BANDURA'S UNPUBLISHED EFFICACY SCALE

BANDURA'S INSTRUMENT
TEACHER SELF-EFFICACY SCALE

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinions about each of the statements below by circling the appropriate number. Your answers will be kept strictly confidential and will not be identified by name.

Efficacy to Influence Decision making

How much can you influence the decisions that are made in the school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you express your views freely on important school matters?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Efficacy to Influence School Resources

How much can you do to get the instructional materials and equipment you need?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Instructional Self-Efficacy

How much can you do to influence the class sizes in your school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to promote learning when there is lack of support from the home?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to keep students on task on difficult assignments?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to increase students' memory of what they have been taught in previous lessons?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Appendix D (continued)

How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to get students to work together?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to overcome the influence of adverse community conditions on students' learning?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to get children to do their homework?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Disciplinary Self-Efficacy

How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to prevent problem behavior on the school grounds?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Efficacy to Enlist Parental Involvement

How much can you do to get parents to become involved in school activities?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you assist parents in helping their children do well in school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Appendix D (continued)

How much can you do to make parents feel comfortable coming to school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Efficacy to Enlist Community Involvement

How much can you do to get community groups involved in working with the schools?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to get churches involved in working with the school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to get businesses involved in working with the school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to get local colleges and universities involved in working with the school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Efficacy to Create a Positive School Climate

How much can you do to make the school a safe place?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to make students enjoy coming to school?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to get students to trust teachers?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you help other teachers with their teaching skills?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

Appendix D (continued)

How much can you do to enhance collaboration between teachers and the administration to make the school run effectively?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to reduce school dropout?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to reduce school absenteeism?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?

1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite a Bit		A Great Deal

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Appendix E

TEACHER'S SENSE OF EFFICACY SCALE (TSES)

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale[1] (long form)

Teacher Beliefs	How much can you do?								
Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.	Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal
1. How much can you do to get through to the most difficult students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
2. How much can you do to help your students think critically?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
3. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
4. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
5. To what extent can you make your expectations clear about student behavior?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
6. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in school work?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
7. How well can you respond to difficult questions from your students ?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
8. How well can you establish routines to keep activities running smoothly?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
9. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
10. How much can you gauge student comprehension of what you have taught?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
11. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
12. How much can you do to foster student creativity?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
13. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
14. How much can you do to improve the understanding of a student who is failing?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
15. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
16. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
17. How much can you do to adjust your lessons to the proper level for individual students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
18. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
19. How well can you keep a few problem students form ruining an entire lesson?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
20. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
21. How well can you respond to defiant students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
22. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
23. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)
24. How well can you provide appropriate challenges for very capable students?	(1)	(2)	(3)	(4)	(5)	(6)	(7)	(8)	(9)

Appendix F

PERMISSION TO USE THE TSES

THE OHIO STATE UNIVERSITY COLLEGE OF EDUCATION AND HUMAN ECOLOGY

ANITA WOOLFOLK HOY, PH.D.

PROFESSOR
PSYCHOLOGICAL STUDIES IN EDUCATION

Dear

You have my permission to use the *Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale* in your research. A copy of both the long and short forms of the instrument as well as scoring instructions can be found at:

http://www.coe.ohio-state.edu/ahoy/researchinstruments.htm

Best wishes in your work,

Anita Woolfolk Hoy

Anita Woolfolk Hoy, Ph.D.
Professor

Appendix G
PARTICPANT CONSENT FORM

Consent Form for Participation

University of Massachusetts at Boston
Graduate College of Education
Leadership in Urban Schools
100 Morrissey Boulevard
Boston, MA 02125-3393

Principal Investigator: Richard Gallucci

Introduction and Contact Information

You are being asked to participate in a dissertation research project aimed at understanding urban middle school teachers' sense of self-efficacy, specifically in the OakRidge Public School (OPS) district. My name is Richard Gallucci and I am the principal researcher as well as an employee of the OPS district. I am a doctoral candidate in the Leadership in Urban Schools Program at the University of Massachusetts, Boston.

Please read this form carefully and feel free to present any questions or concerns you may have. If you have further questions, or do not feel comfortable asking them at this time, I can discuss them in private at a later date. I can be reached any time via email at rgallucci@xxxxxxxxxx or by phone at 781-520-9290.

As a doctoral candidate, this research study will serve to meet the requirements for a Doctorate of Education (Ph.D). My researcher is being conducted under the supervision of Wenfan Yan, Ph.D., Chair of the Department of the Department of Leadership in Education at the University of Massachusetts at Boston. You may contact Dr. Yan at the above address, via telephone at 617-287-7601, or via email at WenFan.Yan@ umb.edu.

Description of the Project

This study, which will be conducted during the 2014-2015 school year, attempts to identify, explain, and understand the factors and characteristics that influence urban middle school teachers' sense of efficacy. The study will explore teachers' sense of efficacy through both quantitative and qualitative analysis.

As a participant, you will be asked to participate in a survey (quantitative) that measures teacher's sense of efficacy. At the end of the survey, you will be asked for personal information in arranging a potential follow-up interview (qualitative). Participants for the interview process will be selected based on the results of the initial survey. Not all participants will be asked to participate in a follow-up interview.

Appendix G (continued)

The survey is expected to take no more than 30 minutes and will be conducted during a principal's meeting. The follow up interviews are scheduled to be 60 minutes and will take place during non-school hours.

Risks or Discomforts

This study is considered to be of minimal risk, not exceeding the risk you would experience in normal, everyday activities. The only discomfort that can be associated with this study would be the surfacing of stressful feelings in completing the research activities. If you feel any risk or discomfort over the course of this study, you may speak with me at any time during the process.

Benefits

This study will reveal whether or not an urban middle school educator's sense of efficacy is impacted by a dynamic relationship between policy and practice. The hope is that findings from this study will help influence policy, ultimately curbing the decline that persists in today's urban, middle school environments. Additionally, this study will provide a platform for today's urban middle school educator to convey the factors that influence their confidence and conviction in executing complex professional responsibilities. The quantitative and qualitative analysis would offer both numeric and emic perspectives from urban middle school educators, one that seems to be relatively absent from educational literature. Results garnered from this contribution will improve the middle school teaching occupation, particularly with regard to the middle school composition and the professional development opportunities that are provided for urban middle school educators.

Confidentiality and Anonymity

Your participation in this research in confidential. The district name will not be revealed in the study, as I will employ the pseudonym *OakRidge Public School district*. Individual middle schools within the district will also be given the following pseudonyms in order to maintain anonymity: *Kent Middle School*, *Dearborn Middle School*, and *Clarkson Middle School*. Individuals who participate in the follow-up interview process will be asked to choose a pseudonym in the place of their name. To the very best of my ability, I will attempt to omit or alter any details which may lead to the identification of a specific participant. All research materials and data that I collect will be stored on one of my two computers, each of which are password protected, and only used by me. Once this dissertation has been accepted, all research materials, including data, notes, audio-tapes, and emails will be destroyed.

Voluntary Participation

Appendix G (continued)

The decision whether or not to participate in either phase of this study is completely voluntary. If you do initially decide to participate, you may terminate this participation at any point during the process. Refusal to participate in the study, withdrawal at any time during the study, or the skipping of questions during the study will have absolutely no bearing whatsoever on your standing or employment status in the OakRidge Public School district.

Rights

You have the right to ask any questions about this research prior to the signing of this form or during the study itself. Please contact my research supervisor, Dr. Yan, or me at any time using the aforementioned contact information. If your concerns are related to your rights as a research participant, please contact a representative of the Institutional Review Board (IRB), at the University of Massachusetts, Boston. This department is responsible for the oversight of research involving human participants. The IRB may be reached at the Office of the Vice

Provost for Research and Dean of Graduate Studies by phone at 617-287-5608 or by email at ZongGuo.Xia@umb.edu.

Signatures

I HAVE READ THIS CONSENT FORM. MY QUESTIONS HAVE BEEN ANSWERED. MY SIGNATURE ON THIS FORM INDICATES THAT I CONSENT TO PARTICPATE IN THIS STUDY.

Printed Name of Participant _____
Signature of Participant _____ Date _____

Printed Name of Researcher _____
Signature of Researcher _____ Date _____

Consent form adopted from Exhibit 3.7 from Check & Schutt (2011)

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