

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms: Novice and Veteran Teachers
Perceptions of Working with Educational Assistants.

by

Rosemary Vogt

A Thesis submitted to the Faculty of Graduate Studies of
The University of Manitoba
in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the degree of

Master of Education

Department of Educational Administration, Foundations and Psychology

University of Manitoba

Winnipeg

Copyright © 2011 Rosemary Vogt

Abstract

This research study documents the perceptions of Manitoba teachers working with educational assistants as schools comply with the *Appropriate Educational Programming Amendment* to the *Public Schools Act* (Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth, 2005). Eight teachers who work with educational assistants in rural and urban Manitoba were asked about four aspects of this emerging role: (i) What are their experiences working with educational assistants in the classroom (what roles do they perceive educational assistants to perform), (ii) the competencies they think they need for their work, (iii) how they have been prepared for this responsibility, and (iv) how they think teachers should or could be (better) prepared for their work with educational assistants. The study invited four novice teachers (less than two years of teaching experience) and four veteran teachers (more than 10 years of teaching experience) to participate in one-on-one face-to-face interviews. Open-ended questions based in current research prompted the participants to reflect on their own practice. The study reveals some of the perceived issues teachers report as challenges in their changing role to meet new legislative mandates. It examines the need to introduce collaboration with educational assistants during pre-service training and access to professional in-service learning opportunities to facilitate teachers understanding of the role of educational assistants in Manitoba schools. The study also reveals some of the competencies required for managing the activities of educational assistants.

Acknowledgements

I would like to thank a number of individuals who have had an impact on my choice of topic for this thesis. First, Gail Mireau for affording me the opportunity to work as an instructor in the Educational Assistant Certificate program at Red River College (2007-2010), and second, my former colleague Paul Bourget who tirelessly lent a listening ear and sent links to research literature on the topic.

Many thanks to my thesis advisor, Dr. Marlene Atleo for her relentless encouragement, support and helpful replies to my incalculable e-mail inquiries and for the numerous hours she spent providing valuable feedback on my work. Sincere thanks to Dr. Jon Young and Dr. Thomas Falkenberg for serving on my thesis committee.

I acknowledge the remarkable teachers who gave of their precious time to meet with me for the purpose of obtaining data for the one-on-one interviews. It was truly an honour and privilege to hear all your stories. My gratitude goes out to the school superintendents and principals who permitted me to recruit research participants from within their jurisdictions. I would also like to acknowledge all those individuals who heard about my study through word-of-mouth and sent emails with wishes to participate even though distance created a geographical challenge.

Finally, I thank Dr. Michael Farris, John Nicklin, Joanne Spencer and Claudius Soodeen, my colleagues, mentors and advisors at the Teaching Learning and Technology Centre at Red River College in Winnipeg Manitoba, Canada.

Table of Contents

Abstract i

Acknowledgements ii

Table of Contents iii

List of Tables viii

CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEXT 1

Introduction 1

 History of Special Education in Manitoba 2

The Problem 5

 Increased Numbers of Educational Assistants 5

 The Role of Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools 9

 Teacher Action Cohorts 11

The Purpose of the Study 12

Research Questions & Method 13

Significance of the Study 14

Chapter Summary 15

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE 17

 Introduction 17

 Internet Research Strategies and Description 17

History of the Development of the Role of Educational Assistant 18

 Developments in the United States 18

 Paraeducators Essential in Providing Inclusive Education 20

iii

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Developments in Canada	20
The Pre-1970 Period	21
The 1970-1985 Period.....	23
The Post 1985 Period	24
Teacher Preparation for Working with EAs	25
Developing Competencies	25
Assuming Managerial Roles.....	26
Related Literature.....	26
Role Clarification.....	28
Understanding Roles & Responsibilities.....	29
Competencies	30
From Gracious Host to Engaged Teaching Partner	32
Competency Skill Areas	33
Emerging Themes	34
Different Perceptions.....	35
Teachers as Managers	36
Inadequate Competencies to Manage	37
Where Should Teachers be Prepared to Manage.....	38
A Gap in the Literature.....	41
Chapter Summary	42
CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS	44
Introduction.....	44
Ethics	46
Researcher's Position in the Study	47
Participation and Participant Recruitment	49

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Research Procedure.....	51
Research Questions: Rationale and Source	53
Transcription, Data Management and Technical Analysis	55
Chapter Summary	58
CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS.....	59
Introduction.....	59
Experiences working with EAs.....	59
Similarities and Differences.....	61
Emerging Themes	62
Competencies Teachers Need	62
Similarities and Differences.....	67
Emerging Themes	68
Preparation for Working with EAs	69
Similarities and Differences.....	71
Emerging Themes	71
How Should Teachers be Prepared for Working with EAs	72
Similarities and Differences.....	76
Emerging Themes	76
Chapter Summary	77
CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS	78
Introduction.....	78
Final Analysis	78

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Teachers' Experiences Working with EAs	78
Value of the EAs Role.....	79
Competencies to Collaborate with EAs	80
Value of Competencies	84
Preparation for Working with EAs	90
Value of Preceding Experiences.....	95
Teacher Recommendations for Preparation to Work with EAs.....	97
Value of Professional Development	100
Access to On-Going Professional Development.....	100
Administrator Role	103
Relationship of the Framework to the Purpose of the Study	108
Practice Implications of the Research.....	110
Need for Teacher Awareness Regarding Competencies.....	110
Need for Pre-service Introduction to Working with EAs	112
Need for On-Going Professional Development	113
Implications for Further Research.....	113
Conclusion	115
References.....	117
Appendix A.....	130
Letter to School District Superintendent.....	130
Appendix B	133
Letter to Principal	133
Appendix C	135

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Volunteer Recruitment.....	135
Appendix D.....	136
Consent Form.....	136

List of Tables

Table 1: Participant Profiles.....	53
Table 2: Research Questions, Rationale and Source.....	54
Table 3: Wall Chart of Research Findings.....	57
Table 4: Teachers Experiences Working with Educational Assistants.....	60
Table 5: Competencies Considered Important in Teachers’ Work with EAs.....	63
Table 6: Preparation for Working with EAs	69
Table 7: How Should Teachers be Prepared for this Role	72

CHAPTER 1: THE CONTEXT

Introduction

Classroom teachers may be elated to discover they will have an educational assistant¹ in their classroom to help support the learning environment. However, when the daily reality of the classroom sets in, they may discover that they are challenged with the competencies (ability or skill) and knowledge (information, understanding, or awareness) required to successfully work with an educational assistant in the classroom. For many teachers, managing educational assistants in the classroom is one more task to consider amongst the myriad other responsibilities required of the teaching profession. Teacher candidates may not have considered managing the work of another adult in the classroom as part of a teachers' role and responsibility or even as being part of what teaching involved. As teachers advance in their career, they generally acquire individual strategies that allow them to work more comfortably with educational assistants in the school setting. This thesis addresses the experience of teachers working with educational assistants in the classroom; their views on the competencies needed for them to work well with educational assistants; how they were prepared for their work and how they think they should or could have been (better) prepared for their work with educational assistants. I will begin by providing an overview of the history of special education in Manitoba and the role of educational assistants in Manitoba schools. I will then identify the research problem, the purpose of the study,

¹ When I refer to educational assistants (EAs) I mean people working under the direction of the classroom teacher in K -12 classrooms – the most common Manitoba situation.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

the research questions as well as the methodology selected for conducting the research and articulate the significance of the study.

History of Special Education in Manitoba

During the 1950's and into the 1960's, special education² in the province for students with disabilities was exclusionary and separate. For example, blind children attended a school in Brantford Ontario (funded by the Manitoba Department of Education) and deaf children either at the Manitoba Day School for the Deaf in Winnipeg or the Saskatoon School for the Deaf in Saskatchewan. There were minimal provisions for emotionally, physically or cognitively delayed students in Winnipeg (Manitoba) school divisions (Blais, 2005).

Throughout 1956 -1957, The MacFarlane Commission of Manitoba noted that the current services for students with special needs were inadequate and recommended that school divisions should provide facilities and teachers for students with disabilities³. In 1963, the Christianson Report recommended that students with disabilities should be educated in regular schools in their home community. As an outcome of the Christianson Report, the exclusion of students with special needs in the Manitoba public school system came to be partial inclusion (Blais, 2005).

These events resulted in students with special needs beginning to receive some special

²The term *special education* is a broad term used within the Manitoba educational community that refers to learner needs that are not adequately supported by the standard delivery of the provincial curriculum. The term describes students who require adaptations, personal supports, modified or enriched, or individualized programming.

³ In Manitoba the terms “special needs”, “special education”, and “students with disabilities”, generally refers to students with physical, cognitive or emotional disabilities. The language used in this thesis will always represent the child first preceding the label which denotes the disability. For example, rather than the “special needs student” it will be written as the “student with special needs”. This is more respectful and recognizes the student as an individual first with many different characteristics. It is also in accordance with the American Psychological Association Publication Manual (2009, 6th Edition) which states “Use people-first language, and do not focus on the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

programming in regular schools. However, “There were often competing philosophies affecting what services to provide students with special needs, how to best provide it, by whom and in which setting” (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 38). Generally, students from segregated schools were moved to segregated classrooms within mainstream schools.

During this time provincial governments in Canada each developed their own special education legislation regarding specific educational rights, supports and services. Since Bill 16 in 1957, school divisions have experienced complete autonomy in developing their own policies concerning the education of students with special needs. In 1981, Section 15 of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* set the foundation for the delivery of special education by declaring the duty to accommodate students with disabilities unless doing so caused undue hardship. Determining appropriate curriculum for students with special needs was left to individual school divisions, school boards and schools. Therefore, the mandated changes varied not only from one province to another, but also from one district to another and from one school to another as school boards and schools had the flexibility to develop individual policies with very little direction and minimal standards. In 1988, the Manitoba government began to provide school divisions with funding for the purpose of supporting students who were regarded as “high incidence” or Level I⁴ students with special needs. Once funding was received, divisions were in control of how they spent monies to support students (Zaretsky, 2010).”It was also about this time that school divisions began to recognize the need for additional supports for teachers in the

individual’s disabling or chronic conditions” (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 76).

⁴Level I includes a variety of learning disabilities such as less severe emotional or behavioral disorders as well as gifted students (Zaretsky, 2010).

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

classroom with students with special needs and started to hire educational assistants” (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 44).

In 1998, the “Manitoba government formally began to recognize the need to provide school divisions with more direction and guidance” (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 46). The Department of Finance and the Department of Justice collaborated on the initiation of a Special Education Review of the services for students with special needs. The comprehensive review of provincial service delivery for students with special needs resulted in eighty-four recommendations aligning with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Recommendations included the need for legal and policy frameworks to provide guidance and assistance to school divisions, a need to formalize program requirements, and the development of public accountability indicators for school divisions about programs delivered and funding received. The review resulted in changes to service delivery not only to align with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*, but also with what was already occurring in the rest of Canada (Zaretsky, 2010).

In October of 2005, the Manitoba provincial government tabled specific legislation to address the education rights of students with special needs. “The Appropriate Educational Programming” Amendment to the *Public Schools Act* mandated that schools not only provide access to education for all students regardless of disability, but that schools also provide *appropriate* education for all students. It then became the role of school divisions to interpret appropriate services for individual students aligning with the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms*. Provincial government funding has increased each year since the review in an effort to

assist school divisions in providing the resources and services needed (Zaretsky, 2010).

The Problem

Increased Numbers of Educational Assistants

The role of educational assistants in supporting special education in school settings is of increasing importance in Canada:

With increasing workloads and greater number of students with exceptional needs, teachers are feeling pressure and are rightfully demanding that more classroom support be provided. Education/Teacher Assistants are frequently called upon to provide this support to the teacher and to the students. However, concerns about role infringement, teacher-to-assistant ratios and supervision responsibility, suggest that the introduction of assistants requires monitoring. In some jurisdictions it has been reported that the teacher-to-EA/TA ratios are alarmingly high. (Canada Teachers' Federation Research and Information Services, 2009, p.1)

The latest data collected in Manitoba from the FRAME⁵ report in 2009/2010 indicated that there were 6, 713 educational assistants and 11, 770 FTE (Full Time Equivalent) teachers thereby creating a ratio of 1.7 teachers to 1 educational assistant; the highest ratio in all of Canada (McRuer, 2010). The Manitoba Teachers' Society (the union representing Manitoba teachers)

⁵ The FRAME (Financial Reporting and Accounting in Manitoba Education) manual is produced to meet the need for standardization of accounting terminology and financial reporting as recognized by school divisions and the Department of Education.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

values the contributions of educational assistants, it is nonetheless concerned that the increasing practice of hiring EA's may be "a cheap solution to complying with the appropriate educational requirements of their students with special needs" (Zaretsky, 2011, p. 2). This concern has been voiced since the enactment of the provinces' *Appropriate Educational Programming Amendment* (AEPA) to the *Public School Act* in 2005. MTS is also concerned with an absence of regulations and standards in the province for educational assistants. Currently, there are no hiring criteria governing educational assistants and qualifications of EAs range from EAs who have education degrees while others have no specific preparation (Canada Teachers' Federation Research and Information Services, 2009).

An annual survey of Manitoba teachers by MTS revealed that teachers would rather see an increase in the hiring of more teachers rather than EAs in an effort to help reduce the workload (Canada Teachers' Federation Research and Information Services, 2009). "For some teachers, having an EA in their classroom, may actually add to their workload by increasing demands for organization, space and supervision" (Canada Teachers' Federation Research and Information Services, 2009, p. 2). In the fall of 2009, Manitoba Education and Training issued the document, "Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools" (Government of Manitoba, 2009). The document provided classroom teachers and administrators with information about how to appropriately use educational assistants in the classroom; the expansion of EA roles has in many circumstances blurred the line between what classroom teachers do and what educational assistants do. In the United States, it has been noted that EAs, particularly those with numerous years of experience may with all good intentions take initiative for the development, implementation and monitoring of student programs,

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

and a beginning teacher may be all too willing to relinquish those responsibilities to a seemingly capable paraprofessional (Calder & Grieve, 2004). Similar concerns have been noted in Manitoba:

Students with disabilities receive their primary instruction from EAs, while resource teachers do paperwork and manage the activities of EAs . . . classroom teachers are minimally or superficially involved with students with disabilities who are placed in the classroom; EAs make curricular or instructional decisions or adaptations without classroom or resource teacher consultation or knowledge; students with disabilities are highly and unnecessarily dependent on EAs; EAs have more frequent communication and more developed working relationships with parents of students with disabilities than the classroom or resource teachers. (Zaretsky, 2011, pp. 2-3)

School divisions and schools in Manitoba receive funding from the provincial government for the purpose of supporting students with special needs. Since 1988, school divisions have received a base funding and have been placed in control of how they spent those funds as well as how they supported students with special needs. Funding for the purpose of supporting students with special needs in the province is based on categorical funding. Manitoba Education Student Services Special Needs Categorical Funding, Level II and Level III are part of the categorical support provided by the Funding of Schools Program in the province. Eligibility for funding is based on an individual student bases determined by student requirement for individualized instruction for a major part of the school day. For example, to be eligible for Level II funding, the following conditions are considered: a student having severe multiple disabilities, being severely psychotic, having moderate autism

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

spectrum disorder, being deaf or hard of hearing, being severely visually impaired or severely emotionally or behaviorally disordered. Other conditions may also be considered; Level II support per student is \$8,955.00 (Government of Manitoba). Funding for Level III support is based on the students' need for individual instruction for the entire school day. Students with the following conditions are considered for Level III support: profound multiple disability, severe to profound autism spectrum disorder, deaf, blind, and profoundly emotionally or behaviorally disordered. Funding for Level III support is \$19,920 per student (Government of Manitoba).

Generally speaking, the higher the level of need, the greater the level of funding. The Program and Student Services Branch at Manitoba Education determines final eligibility based on identifying criteria in the funding application submitted by a school; this is how funding transfers to schools. Receiving a Student Services Grant makes it possible to combine several categorical grants into a single grant providing more flexibility to school divisions in deciding how to allocate their student services dollars. The student services dollars received by a school division or school may be used by administrators in the school division or school to manage the allocation of educational assistant resources. School divisions have autonomy in determining how to allocate their funding dollars on the basis of a policy called "Flexible Base Support" (Frontier Centre for Public Policy). It could be assumed that when school divisions and schools receive student services dollars, some of the money may be spent on the hiring of educational assistants⁶. The hiring of educational assistants may help support the educational programming of

⁶ There is a common myth that students who receive categorical funding automatically receive some EA time; that is not true. The decision is left to the discretion of the division and individual school teams (Zaretsky, Personal

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

students with disabilities which in turn help the school to meet the educational goals of the student. Since school divisions and schools receive student services dollars and the student services dollars may be used to hire educational assistants who help support the learning environment of students with disabilities, it is realistic to assume that educational assistants would be given responsibilities in the school setting.

The Role of Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools

Manitoba Education describes the role of educational assistants as an individual who is hired to support the work of professional staff, such as teachers and clinicians. Their day-to-day activities are directed by the principal, teacher, or other professionals under whose supervision they work (Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools, 2009⁷). Ultimately, the roles of EAs are determined by the needs of the school division (Government of Manitoba, 2009).

Educational assistants (referred to as paraprofessionals in the Manitoba Education Administration Act⁸):

Shall perform the duties assigned by the principal. Those duties may not include any of the following:

- (a) Organizing or managing the classroom;
- (b) Planning teaching strategies;

communication, September 6, 2011).

⁷The purpose of *Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools* is to provide educators, school administrators, and school division administrators with a resource to support the work of educational assistants in Manitoba schools.

⁸*The Public Schools Act* uses paraeducator as that was the term generally agreed to when the regulations were developed. It has not been changed as it also applies to other non-teacher roles in schools. For most stakeholders the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

- (c) Directing the learning experiences of pupils, including assessing individual needs,
- (d) Selecting materials to meet those needs and evaluating progress.

(Manitoba Education Administration Act)

The administration of all the activities in a school is under the supervision of the principal; the principal assigns specific duties to the staff in the school. An example is the principal assigning an EA to duties supporting the programming needs in a grade 3 classroom. In that classroom, the person responsible for developing the teaching, learning and assessment materials is the classroom teacher. If there is an educational assistant in that classroom, providing the EA with assignments, materials, and guidance is also the responsibility of the classroom teacher. This includes the day-to-day management of educational assistants (Blais, Personal communication, September 9, 2011). Joan Zaretsky, Staff Officer of Professional Issues at the Manitoba Teachers' Society notes speaking with an elementary classroom teacher at a 2011 MTS summer seminar who had 7 EAs in the classroom during the 2010-2011 school years. For the 2011-2012 school year, this teacher will now be co-teaching with one additional teacher; however, there will still be several EAs in the classroom (Zaretsky, Personal communication, September 6, 2011).

Manitoba Requirements for EAs

The hiring of EAs in Manitoba is based on local requirements:

School divisions determine the general qualifications and/or specific requirements of the educational assistants they hire. Depending on the position, typical factors for consideration include formal education, experience, and demonstrated abilities. A child

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

abuse registry check and a criminal record check are part of the hiring process. School division administration typically oversees the hiring of educational assistants and the allocation of educational assistant time in schools. Consultation with school principals and teaching staff identifies skills required for educational assistants' work assignments.

(Government of Manitoba, 2009)

Manitoba Teachers' Society is concerned over the absence of mandated certification or training requirements for EAs. They believe there should be a certification process similar to Early Childhood Educators to ensure improved EA consistency (Zaretsky, 2011).

Teacher Action Cohorts

In an effort to support MTS members who work with educational assistants, a Teacher Action Cohort (TAC) Team conducts workshops on working with EAs (Manitoba Teachers' Society). Teacher Action Cohorts are Manitoba Teachers' Society members who are trained in facilitation strategies to deliver workshops on a variety of topics; these volunteers are available at no cost to teacher associations and public school staffs within the province. Teacher Action Cohorts facilitate teacher voice and learning through activity based workshops (Manitoba Teachers' Society). Two workshops about teachers' work with educational assistants were included in the 2010-2011 professional development opportunities including a one day workshop for teachers and a two day workshop for resource teachers and principals (Zaretsky, 2011). MTS has up-dated their publication, "Teachers and Educational Assistants: Roles and Responsibilities," and is consistently "lobbying the government to regulate or issue guidelines

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

regarding EA roles” (Zaretsky, 2011, p.3). Unquestionably, educational assistants play an essential role in the implementation of inclusion policies that ensure all children with disabilities are educated in an environment appropriate for them. In Manitoba, educational assistants have become an essential component in the process of providing classroom educational support for students with disabilities. Therefore, the competencies necessary for teachers to successfully collaborate with educational assistants deserve attention and research.

The Purpose of the Study

There is a noticeable lack of formally documented data or research to support or challenge the verbally expressed experiences of teachers working with educational assistants in K – 12 school settings in Manitoba and Canada. The primary purpose of this study was to document the perceptions of teachers working with educational assistants as schools comply with Appropriate Educational Programming legislation. The perspectives of teachers regarding the challenges they experience as they collaborate with educational assistants in the classroom setting have been collected and analyzed in this study.

The secondary purpose in conducting this research was to examine the need for teacher training to work more collaboratively with educational assistants. Although teachers have the responsibility for developing the teaching, learning and assessment materials in the classroom, and are ultimately responsible for the education of the students and everything else that goes on in that classroom including the management of EA(s), they may be struggling in their best efforts

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

to do so. The role of empirical research in collecting data and using that data to initiate dialogue and action materials in educational forums is an advantage for all stakeholders.

Special Education legislation has mandated new responsibilities for school divisions and consequently classroom teachers regarding the provision of appropriate educational programming for all students. With the implementation of appropriate educational programming there has been an increase in the number of educational assistants in the school setting whose role is to support the teaching and learning environment under the management of the classroom teacher. This study reveals some of the perceived issues teachers report as challenges in their changing role to meet new legislative mandates. It examines the need for teachers to receive professional learning opportunities in order to increase their understanding of the roles and responsibilities of educational assistants in Manitoba schools; it also reveals some of the competencies required for managing the work of educational assistants. This qualitative research study focuses on the documentation and analysis of the perceptions of eight Manitoba teachers and their experiences managing the work of educational assistants in a school setting.

Research Questions & Method

The focus of my study was to pose the following questions focusing on the perceived experiences of eight rural and urban teachers in Manitoba working with educational assistants:

1. What are teachers' experiences with working with educational assistants in the classroom?

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

2. What are teachers' views on the competencies that are needed for them to work well with educational assistants?
3. How were they prepared for their work with educational assistants?
4. How should or could they have been (better) prepared for their work with educational assistants?

Finally, what recommendations can be made for helping teachers develop essential competencies for their work with educational assistants in the light of the existing literature and this study's responses?

In-depth individual interviews were conducted over a five week period from March 7 to April 9, 2011. The one-on-one interviews took place in various neutral and accessible locations as preferred by the participant including university campuses and school classrooms. Eight teachers were interviewed including four novice and four veteran teachers. The rationale for this selection of participants is that veteran teachers have more familiarity working with educational assistants and with in-service professional development. Novice teachers are closer to their pre-service teacher training education as well as the challenges faced by a teacher starting out their career working with an educational assistant. For each of the informants, the interview data was transcribed and analyzed for common themes; the themes are represented in the findings.

Significance of the Study

This study will be of significance due to the current scarcity of Canadian research concerning teachers' experiences working with educational assistants. Three key points suggest

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

the importance of the topic for this thesis: (i) the rapid increase in the number of EAs, (ii) the centrality of EAs to the development of the special education policy of inclusion; and (iii) MTS's concern with the lack of training for either EAs or teachers working with EAs. There is also a shortage of research regarding teachers' views about the competencies that they perceive are needed for their work with educational assistants in the school setting, how they were prepared for their work with EAs and how they should or could have been (better) prepared for their work with EAs. Teacher's responses to questions regarding their experiences working with EAs in the school setting may inform the professional development of teachers. The benefit of better informed professional development for teachers working with EAs is teachers who collaborate more successfully with educational assistants, which ultimately results in more appropriate educational programming for students with special needs.

Teachers are the primary agent to the enhancement of education; this requires them to continually modify their roles and responsibilities. In Manitoba, a teachers' role has changed since the enactment of *The Appropriate Educational Programming Amendment to the Public School Act* (The Government of Manitoba, 2005). In addition to being responsible for developing the teaching, learning and assessment materials for students and managing student behavior, the classroom teacher is also responsible for managing the work of educational assistants who may be present in the classroom to help support the learning environment for students with special needs.

Chapter Summary

In this first chapter, I have provided a synopsis of the history of special education in

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Manitoba and identified the research problem. I have also explained the role of educational assistants in Manitoba schools, identified the purpose of the study, the chosen methodology and articulated the significance of the study. The next chapter will examine the literature surrounding teacher competencies for collaborating with educational assistants, teacher preparation for collaborating with educational assistants, as well as the teacher/educational assistant working relationships in the school setting.

CHAPTER 2: A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

Introduction

In this chapter I examine the literature as it pertains to the teacher/educational assistant working relationship in the school setting. The first section describes the nature of the research including the databases used and the search criteria. The second section is organized historically based on the development of the role of educational assistant in national jurisdictions. The particular area of interest in the third section is the literature related to specific teacher competencies and pedagogical ideas. Finally, in the fourth section a gap in the literature is acknowledged. The chapter concludes with a summary and a glimpse into the design of the study.

Internet Research Strategies and Description

With the advent of internet research strategies it becomes important to document the process whereby the search engines employed and the process of their deployment are recognized in the research process. For this study there were five points of entry to the search using the following search engines and data bases:

1. University of Manitoba library @ <http://umanitoba.ca/libraries/>. Under Subjects, I chose Education that led me to an Education Guide with links to articles, subject data bases and thesis selections.
2. Library and Archives Canada @ www.collectionscanada.gc.ca. From the Home Page under Introduction I chose “Search the Thesis Collection”.
3. Red River College Library @ <http://library.rrc.ca/default.aspx>. Using the Search Articles and Data Bases selection options, I chose Subject List and searched under Academic

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Research Primer. I also consulted with the librarian who assisted me with searching for information and tracking down articles.

4. ERIC Education Resources Information Centre @ <http://www.eric.ed.gov/>. Generally I searched under the Key Words option.
5. Google @ <http://www.google.ca/> and Google Scholar @ <http://scholar.google.ca/> for random searches and electronic texts.

Keyword criteria used for searches were: Educational assistants, paraeducators, paraprofessionals, teachers' assistants, teachers and educational assistants. The criterion for including articles was that they were about teachers working with educational assistants in the school setting.

History of the Development of the Role of Educational Assistant

This section provides a background for various jurisdictions in which the role of the educational assistant has developed. It is only recently that educational assistants have become a fixture in the K-12 school classroom in the United States and Canada.

Developments in the United States

In the United States, the presence of educational assistants in the school setting may be traced to the aftermath of World War II when teacher shortages in some jurisdictions resulted in the hiring of uncredentialed college educated persons to work as teacher aides. These individuals monitored students and performed basic clerical and administrative tasks in K-12 school settings; this gave teachers the opportunity to spend more time with students on instructional activities. During the 1960's and 1970's funds became available in some jurisdictions to recruit and employ

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

individuals from under-represented social groups in deteriorating inner city neighborhoods to function as liaisons between communities and schools. Gradually, these people moved from functioning as community liaisons to interacting directly with individual students and small groups (Pickett & Gerlach, 1997; Genzuk, 1997). American legislative action such as the *Education of the Handicapped Act Amendments* of 1986, and the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA) (2004) augmented by teacher shortages have resulted in an interest in the development of paraeducators⁹ (Morrissette et al, 2002).

In the United States, the *Individuals with Disabilities Education Act* (IDEA)¹⁰ (2004), allows paraprofessionals *who are properly trained*¹¹, to assist in special education and related services. Additionally, the federal mandate being implemented across the US under the *No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) (2004)¹² requires paraprofessionals to obtain at least an associate's degree (a two year degree)¹³ and pass an assessment of knowledge (US Department of Education,

⁹ American literature uses the terms paraeducator and paraprofessional when referring to persons working with the classroom teacher in an individual classroom.

¹⁰ A federal law designed to protect the rights of students with disabilities by ensuring that everyone receives a free appropriate (FAPE) education regardless of ability.

¹¹ Qualifications for paraprofessionals are to be consistent with state approved or state recognized certification licensing, registration or other comparable requirements that comply with regulations.

¹² Section 1119 Qualifications for Paraprofessionals: All paraprofessionals hired after the date of enactment of the NCLB Act of 2001 and working in a program supported with funds shall have completed at least 2 years of study at an institute of higher learning obtaining an associate's degree or higher meeting a standard of quality through a final state or local academic assessment knowledge of and ability to assist in instructing reading, writing and mathematics. The receipt of a secondary school diploma being necessary, but not sufficient to satisfy requirements. Paraprofessionals hired prior to 2001 have 4 years to satisfy these requirements of the enactment.

¹³ A 2 year degree granted by US colleges. There are 3 classes of Associate degrees: Associate of Arts degree; Associate of Applied Science, and, Associate of Science degree.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

2004; Tejero Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008) Legislative action such IDEA (2004) brought renewed interest toward the role and development of paraeducators (Morrissette et al, 2002).

Paraeducators Essential in Providing Inclusive Education

Some of the literature in review suggests that in the United States, educational assistants or paraeducators are essential in providing inclusive early childhood education (Tejero Hughes & Valle-Riestra, 2008; Killoran et al, 2001). Comparable to the situation in Manitoba, paraeducators in the United States are one of the fastest growing populations working within the school system. Prior to 1965, there were fewer than 10,000 paraeducators employed in public schools in the United States (Picket, 1986) and by the mid 1980's the number had risen to approximately 150,000. It is estimated that currently 250,000 – 280,000 paraeducators work in special education, and another 500,000 provide instruction or some sort of direct service to students in public schools (Drecktrah, 2010). The increased practice of hiring paraprofessionals in the USA can be attributed to numerous factors such as the expansion of related services as a result of legislative mandates, scarcity of certified special education teachers, the availability of paraeducators and relative low cost (Drecktrah, 2010; Frith & Lindsey, 1982; Picket & Gerlach, 1997). The next section will examine the development and expansion of special education services in Canada.

Developments in Canada

In Canada, education is a provincial responsibility, therefore each Canadian province and territory has its own policies concerning special education. Noting a general absence of any history

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

of special education across Canada, Zaretsky (2010) drew from many non-research basis sources, such as undergraduate textbooks, and a special edition of *Exceptionality Education Canada* (2001). Zaretsky (2010) noted that, “Legislative development and service delivery in Manitoba for students with special needs passed through the same stages as in other parts of Canada, but at a slower pace than in other provinces” (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 24). The following section summarizes Zaretsky’s (2010) account of these developments, divided into three time periods: Pre-1970, 1970-85, and Post-1985.

The Pre-1970 Period

In the 19th and 20th century, Canadian children with disabilities were placed in psychiatric hospitals, residential institutions, or looked after in the home by parents. The first specialized day classes for students who were deaf, blind or cognitively delayed were set up in 1906. Children who had disabilities were dealt with individually which saw some attending special segregated schools while others were placed in dedicated classrooms in regular school settings. The polio epidemic of the 1950’s and rubella epidemic of the 1960’s resulted in an increased demand for special education services; sometimes itinerant teachers even provided instruction in the homes of children who had suffered from polio. The concept of normalization in the 1950’s championed by Wolf Wolfensberger (1972, 1978) argued against institutionalization and recommended that individuals with special needs be viewed through a lens of similarity to others as opposed to being viewed through a lens of difference. During the 1960’s and 1970’s, teachers as well as school divisions moved away from

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

traditional medical models which placed limitations on students to a more holistic approach (Zaretsky, 2010).

The Report of the Royal Commission on Education (the McFarlane Report) constituted one of the first studies by the Manitoba provincial government that addressed issues related to special education. Completed in 1959, it provided a basis for change and development regarding educational service delivery for students with disabilities. Later, in 1965, Bill 16¹⁴ changed school divisions' responsibilities concerning the education of students with special needs within the province. By 1967, students previously labeled "mentally retarded" were allowed to receive their education in the regular school setting (Zaretsky, 2010).

Throughout this time, parental and advocacy groups played a key role in contributing to the development of special education by demanding improved services for their children. They drew attention to influential families in the public eye such as President John F. Kennedy's mentally retarded sister Rosemary¹⁵. It was President Kennedy who struck the Presidential Committee on Mental Retardation which "acknowledged and gave credence to the parental movement for improved community services" (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 30). The Kennedy family also provided extensive funding for research and made it easier to talk about persons with disabilities in public places (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 30).

¹⁴ Bill 16 was the first enacted legislation which changed the school division's obligation to educate students with special needs in Manitoba. This Bill repealed the section of the *Public Schools Act* excluding so-called mental defectives (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 29).

¹⁵ Rosemary Kennedy was the inspiration for the Special Olympics.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

The Canadian Association for the Mentally Retarded (CAMR), founded in 1959 by parents of children with disabilities, was the first national advocacy group for children with special needs. It exerted pressure on the school system to include children with special needs in the regular school setting. For those special needs children that began to be educated in regular schools some accommodations were made to support their learning; other times children received the same instruction and assessment as regular students. There was very little discussion or accountability to determine whether schools were meeting the educational needs of these students. Legislation was vague and permissive merely stating that students between the ages of 5 and 16 had the right to an education; there were no requirements for the quality of the education. Families generally accepted that their children were being provided with the best possible instruction (Zaretsky, 2010).

The 1970-1985 Period

As a result of parental activism and the mainstreaming movement, during the 1970's students with disabilities went from being excluded to participating in segregated educational settings on an individual basis according to need. When the United Nations passed the *Declaration of the Rights of the Mentally Retarded* in 1971, it committed signatory countries to ensure that mentally retarded children received the equivalent rights as other persons. This included access to education that would allow them to develop to the best of their potential. Canada affirmed the declaration even though it provided only guidelines with no binding legal authority which resulted in selective provincial implementation of its' suggested practice (Zaretsky, 2010). Differential treatment of students with disabilities developed throughout Canada as legislation granted school divisions autonomy in

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

determining the services and programs provided. Even after the proclamation of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* (a driving force to inclusion) in 1982/5¹⁶ service delivery for students with special needs varied from one division to another in Manitoba as school boards had flexibility “to develop their own policies with little direction and no minimal standards” (Zaretsky, 2010, p. 42). The 1985 Equality section of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* served as the ultimate source of Canadian law providing a legal framework for legislation at all levels of the legal system. At the core of this legislation was the provision of education to meet the needs of all students across Canada (Zaretsky, 2010).

The Post 1985 Period

To comply with the Equality section of the *Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms* the Manitoba Department of Education began to provide school divisions with funding for high incidence disabilities (Level I)¹⁷ in 1988. Given the autonomy to use the money as they saw fit to support the education of students with special needs and recognizing that teachers required additional support for students with special needs, educational assistants began to appear on the scene (Zaretsky, 2010). This is relevant and important to my study since it provides a context for why EAs appeared and their numbers increased in Manitoba schools. The inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms created a new set of roles and expectations for classroom teachers that called into play additional supports which were provided by non-certified

¹⁶ While the Charter was passed in 1982 the equity provisions did not come into effect until 1985; hence the two dates.

¹⁷ Typically less visible disabilities such as learning disabilities or behavior disabilities.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

(originally at least) adults – EAs.

Teacher Preparation for Working with EAs

Developing Competencies

In the United States, educational assistants (paraeducators, paraprofessionals) have worked alongside teachers, special educators and related services for nearly forty years. During this time teachers have received little if any preparation for working with EAs (French, 2010). Real life experience as opposed to training has been reported as being the main source of knowledge for many educators working with EAs (Trautman, 2004). Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) point out that teachers lamenting over inadequate preparation to work with a paraeducator is no excuse for the failure to *develop* competencies for a collaborative working relationship; that most teachers do not receive preparation for the role other than perhaps during a student teaching practicum placement. The authors believe that all teachers and paraeducators can learn to successfully work together as a team. The capacity with which teachers and paraeducators may learn to work together successfully as a team hinges on the development of the teachers' competencies. For example, the teacher must have the competency to realize that they are the leader in the classroom with the overall responsibility for the students. Where appropriate, the teacher requires the knowledge and skills to delegate tasks providing clear expectations for the paraeducator. In order to foster the relationship, teachers can cultivate competencies for recognizing the varied approaches individuals hold toward communication, get to know the paraeducators' skills and abilities, provide on-the-job training as appropriate as well as establish a procedure for providing and receiving feedback (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001).

Assuming Managerial Roles

Educational assistants have become essential contributors in special education service delivery: their roles and responsibilities topics of recurrent discussions and debate within educational forums. It has been noted that the management and supervision of EAs frequently falls on the shoulders of teachers who may be relatively unprepared to assume a managerial role (French, 1998). In general, there is a growing awareness of the need for teacher competencies to collaborate with and manage the work of the EAs who help support the learning environment for students with special needs. There is also consensus in the literature about topics in support of teacher preparedness to manage the work of EAs.

Related Literature

The University of Vermont Center on Disability and Community Inclusion highlights selected paraprofessional¹⁸ references on data based and non data based literature related to paraeducators from 1990 – 2010 with some of the articles having links to full text sources. The availability of literature focuses on topics such as strategies for working effectively with paraeducators (McGrath et al, 2010); supporting paraeducators (Carnahan et al, 2009; Tobin, 2006); guides to co-teaching with paraeducators (Nevin et al, 2009; Appl, 2006); creating effective teacher – paraprofessional teams (Devlin, 2008; Pickett et al, 2007; Hauge & Babkie, 2006); and training models for preparing teachers to supervise¹⁹ paraeducators (Stecklberg et al,

¹⁸ Paraprofessional is a term frequently used in American literature.

¹⁹ In Manitoba, “supervision” falls to the principal. Classroom teachers do not supervise, that is done by an administrator who may be the principal (but not always a principal), but it is not the classroom teacher (Blais, personal communication, September 6, 2011).

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

2007). While this list of selected references did not identify specific literature by title on competencies required of teachers for collaborating with or managing the work of paraeducators, this information may be deduced from the literature.

An analysis of 43 pieces of literature by Giangreco et al (2001) concerning the utilization of paraeducator²⁰ support published between 1991 and 2000, included 26 non data-based sources and 17 research studies. Findings indicated that literature on paraeducator support has increased over the last decade and the trend continues. However, the number of reviewed articles within the professional literature remains limited. The current literature consists mainly of non-data-based articles identifying the need for role clarification and suggests that gaps in scholarly literature continue to exist surrounding the nature of paraeducator supervision. What the field requires is literature that fills these gaps as well as provides a description and development of conceptually grounded models of what paraprofessional support looks like (Giangreco, et al, 2001).

The related research studies I reviewed for this thesis were exclusively American. My research did not discover any Canadian empirical research studies connecting to teacher's experiences working with educational assistants in the school setting. It is essential to differentiate between the American context that the related research studies are drawn from and the Canadian context where my research is situated in order that the findings of this study can be understood in terms of legal and policy contexts.

²⁰ Paraeducator is a term used in American literature.

Role Clarification

A re-occurring theme in the literature denotes that to make the most out of working with another adult in the classroom teachers need to understand their roles and responsibilities. Calder and Grieve (2004) examined the way teachers manage the work of other adults in the classroom to support learners with difficulties. Their data, based on the Scottish school system, has wider implications in that it endeavors to explain the necessity for teachers to think about the way they collaborate with another adult in the classroom. Teachers need to think about themselves as managers and leaders in the classroom and as the leader, they need to establish a process of communication with other adults in the classroom through which they impart their vision for the class. They need to have a plan for how that vision will be implemented in the classroom and encourage dialogue with the other adults about implementing their vision. Teachers need to be cognizant about their discourse and shape their dialogue so that it invites communication. In essence, all adults in the classroom have a responsibility to develop relationships with each other. Yet, it is the classroom teachers' primary role and responsibility to assume a managerial role through which they impart their vision for the class (Calder & Grieve, 2004).

It is important to recognize paraprofessionals' perceived need for teacher-paraprofessional role clarification. The literature notes that teachers as well as administrators sometimes report more positively than paraprofessionals regarding teachers' awareness of roles and responsibilities. Quite possibly paraeducators perceive the manifestation of teachers' awareness of roles and responsibilities regarding the management of paraeducators differently than teachers and administrators do (Wallace et al, 2001). Other studies have also reported a

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

difference in perception between paraprofessionals and teachers concerning the work related to teachers' as well as paraprofessional roles and responsibilities (Stahl & Lorenz, 1995; Wallace, 1997). In a study by Bauman et al (2010), teachers reported "that they were dissatisfied with their lack of knowledge about their role of a paraeducator and their lack of experience regarding how to collaborate with the paraeducator" (Bauman et al, 2010, p. 505).

Defining specific roles and responsibilities for teachers and paraeducators was one of the primary recommendations resulting from a study by Riggs (2004) who interviewed thirty-five paraeducators on the topic of the teacher-paraeducator collaborative process. Similarly, Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) produced an inventory of ways teachers can work more effectively with paraeducators; the primary recommendation called for teacher awareness of school and district policies for managing paraeducators and teacher awareness of teacher-paraeducator roles and responsibilities. The authors suggest that if teachers work with more than one paraeducator, to make certain that everyone understands each other's roles.

Understanding Roles & Responsibilities

Gerlach (2001, 2002), recognized nationally for his contribution to research on the supervision and training of paraeducators provides a checklist to help teachers, paraeducators as well as principals understand their respective roles as they collaborate with each other in the school setting. Written in response to the changes in school policies and practices requiring more focus on teamwork and communication in school settings, *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers and Principals* (2001) has been used in teacher and principal training

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

programs throughout the United States as well as in school districts as part of in-service professional development to help teachers and paraeducators understand their respective roles and responsibilities. The checklist helps to provide a useful focus for teachers working with paraeducators providing suggestions for appropriate ways to manage their work. For example, the checklist includes suggestions for how to assign tasks, give direction and discuss curriculum, as well as student behavior, provide on-the-job training, and offer useful feedback (Gerlach, 2001, 2002).

The checklist (intended to be flexible) may be used for teacher-paraeducator orientation as they begin their work together at the beginning of the school year or anytime throughout the year to strengthen their knowledge about roles and responsibilities. When teachers are more aware of their roles and responsibilities, they are more equipped to perform effective roles as educational leaders. The checklist may also prove useful as a guide for team meetings and staff development throughout the school year for improving overall teacher competencies for managing the work of paraeducators. Most importantly, the checklist may help all members of the educational team understand their respective roles and responsibilities, and how individual roles and responsibilities relate to each other (Gerlach, 2001, 2002).

Competencies

In the United States, changes to the Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA) (2004) has resulted in considering the importance of preparing paraeducators to provide appropriate required services for students with special needs and ensure they are effectively

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

managed and supervised. The literature draws attention to competencies required of paraeducators (Carroll, 2001; Riggs, 2002; Cobb, 2007; Christie, 2005), yet little attention has been paid in the literature to the competencies needed by teachers to manage the work of paraprofessionals (French, 1997; Meuller, 1997; Picket & Gerlach, 1997; Radaszewski-Byrne, 1997; National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities, 1998; Wallace et al, 2001). Some research focuses exclusively on resource teachers and paraeducators working together (French, 1998, 2010; Laarhoven et al, 2007; Kilgore & Griffen, 1998; Mahfood, 2008; Strawderman & Lindsey, 1995) while other literature shows the inclusion of general education teachers as well (Carnahan et al, 2009). Wallace et al, (2001) report that in general educators consider teacher competencies for managing the work of paraeducators in the classroom to be very important.

What competencies a teacher requires for working with paraeducators depends on context and the skills or attributes that paraeducators bring to the context. Although competencies required for working with paraeducators vary from one context to another, some themes arise in the literature. For example: the importance of the teacher as engaged teaching partner (Giangreco, 1997, 2003); the ability to collaborate with individuals (Doyle, 2002; French 2003; Gerlach, 2001; Giangreco, 2003); the competency to know that paraeducators should not make educational decisions on their own (Giangreco, 2003); the competency to know what is and what is not appropriate for paraeducators to do (the scope of paraeducators duties) (Giangreco, 2003); the appropriateness of paraprofessional support (Giangreco, 1997, 2003; Giangreco et al, 1997); avoiding the “training trap” (teachers should not assume that paraeducators have job related training as the literature continues to suggest that paraeducators are undertrained as well as

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

untrained) (Giangreco, 2003; Morrisette et al, 2002); the awareness of moral, but not professional equality between teacher and paraeducator (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001); the competency to communicate clearly, foster positive working relationships and provide written job descriptions and daily schedules for paraeducators (Trautman, 2004); the competency to foster mutual respect and teamwork (Rosales, 2002); the importance of shared beliefs about working as a team, the importance of a supportive working environment, and an inclusive school culture (Ramsey, 2007).

From Gracious Host to Engaged Teaching Partner

To make the most out of paraprofessional support, teachers need to modify their role from gracious host to engaged teaching partner (Giangreco, 2003). Teacher engagement involves the competencies, knowledge and skills to include paraeducators in collaborative participation in the instructional decision making process. Teacher engagement means the teacher has the competency to direct the work of the paraeducator in the classroom, to plan lessons appropriate for the paraeducator to support, and the competency, knowledge and skills to maintain an instructional dialogue. Teacher engagement also means that the teacher will phase out the paraprofessional support when the student(s) no longer need it (Giangreco, 1997; Giangreco, 2003).

A study by Wallace et al (2001) examined the competencies important for teachers and other professionals who manage the work of paraeducators. Using a survey of competencies developed through a modified DACUM (Developing a Curriculum) process to obtain

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

information about what competencies teachers should have to manage the work of paraeducators, participants were randomly selected from various mailing lists resulting in 266 teachers, 92 administrators, and 211 paraprofessionals from the Midwest in the United States. First, participants were asked about the importance of competencies for teachers who manage the work of paraeducators, and secondly, participants were asked to rate the frequency of their own demonstration of competencies using a 3-point Likert scale (Wallace et al, 2001).

Competency Skill Areas

The competencies were categorized into seven skill areas including: “Communication with Paraprofessionals, Planning and Scheduling, Instructional Support, Modeling for Paraprofessionals, Public Relations, Training, and Management of Paraprofessionals” (Wallace et al, 2001, p. 523). Results showed that all groups (paraprofessionals, teachers and administrators) considered the seven skill areas as important. However, differences occurred in the level of importance of the competencies between respondent groups. For example, paraprofessionals rated training and public relations as more significant than did teachers and administrators; public relations in this context referring to the “role of teachers as advocates for paraprofessional role clarification, training, involvement in decision making, and support for training” (p. 527). The teachers in the study indicated that they were already demonstrating the identified competencies required for working successfully with paraeducators. However, the paraeducators identified that the teachers required more competency with specific reference to awareness and understanding of teacher and paraeducator roles and responsibilities. The results

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

of the study suggest that the major competency teachers require for managing the work of paraeducators is information about teacher-paraeducator respective roles and responsibilities (Wallace et al, 2001).

Emerging Themes

The primary themes that emerge from the review of this literature focusing on the competencies required of teachers to collaborate with educational assistants in the school setting are:

- 1) Teacher preparedness to manage the work of paraprofessionals;
- 2) Teacher knowledge regarding the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators in their specific school and district;
- 3) Teamwork as essential for the teacher - paraeducator working relationship;
- 4) On-going dialogue (communication) between teacher and paraeducator;
- 5) Teacher – paraeducator collaborative participation in the instructional decision-making process.

The teaching profession involves working with other people; students and co-workers in the school setting including educational assistants. To manage educational assistants in the classroom and promote successful collaborative working relationships, teachers require the competency to promote collaborative practices. For example, the teacher needs to be able to organize, lead, direct, motivate, coach and train EAs. The teacher is the leader whose responsibility it is to allocate tasks to paraprofessional adults appropriate to the individual needs

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

of the student(s). It is the teacher's responsibility to manage all supporting adults. Managing means communicating vision and sharing expectations which are negotiated and shared through a process of communication and collaboration. Classroom teachers must be prepared to manage and coach supporting adults in the classroom and coaching must be modeled on pedagogy. It is also the teacher's responsibility to motivate supporting adults through modeling approaches appropriate for supporting students with disabilities. The teacher is ultimately responsible for everything that goes on in the classroom and *must* adopt a managerial role (Calder & Grieve, 2004).

Different Perceptions

Bauman et al (2010) examined the comfort level of first and second year teachers working with educational assistants. To accomplish their research, they posted a 17 item survey on surveymonkey.com with a 5 point Likert scale which measured teachers' comfort level for working with educational assistants in the classroom; the survey had been developed by researchers and reviewed for validation by teachers, principals and special education supervisors. Letters were sent to randomly selected school districts in urban and rural areas across the United States with instructions for accessing and completing the survey (Bauman et al, 2010).

In total, 125 responses were received in reply to the survey. Forty-one percent of the respondents indicated they were *very* comfortable collaborating with educational assistants, and 29 percent indicated they were merely comfortable. Six percent indicated they were very uncomfortable including educational assistants in collaborative processes. Of particular interest

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

were 71 percent who indicated they made time to plan and collaborate with their EA. Of those respondents who did plan and collaborate with an EA, only 3 percent did so for more than 5 hours per week. Ten percent indicated that they planned or collaborated with an EA up to 3 or 4 hours a week with 17 percent indicating one or two hours of collaborative planning with an EA each week (Bauman et al, 2010). The results of the study concluded that first and second year teachers vary in regards to comfort level collaborating with educational assistants.

In 1995, Salzberg & Morgan observed that studies of competencies required by teachers to collaborate with educational assistants were relatively sparse. In the fifteen years that have followed, various scholarly works have focused on the teacher-paraprofessional working relationship (Giangreco, 1997; Picket & Gerlach, 1997; Kilgore & Griffen, 1998; Freschi, 1999; Katsiyannis, 2000; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Rosales, 2002; Gerlach, 2002; Clancy, 2002; Doyle, 2002; French, 2003; Trautman, 2004; Ramsey, 2007; Mahfood, 2008; Bauman et al, 2010; French, 2010). Although frequently not explicitly identified in the writings, the competencies required of teachers to work successfully with educational assistants in the school setting may be extrapolated from the literature.

Teachers as Managers

There appears to be a re-occurring theme in the literature indicating that too many paraeducators are inadequately supervised (Doyle, 2002; Giangreco & Doyle, 2002; Picket & Gerlach, 1997; Giangreco et al, 2001; Jones and Bender, 1993) even though there appears to be a variety of material for training *to* work with paraprofessionals (Steckelberg & Vasa, 1998; Parsons & Reid, 1999; Salzberg et al, 1993; Cichoski et al, 2000). Recommendations for helping

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

teachers learn to manage the work of paraeducators include Gerlach's (2001) *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers and Principals*, as well as the work by Giangreco et al (2001); *A Guide to School Wide Planning*, a ten step planning process designed to assist school teams in professional support through self-assessment to identify priorities for learning to manage the work of paraeducators. Implications for practice indicate that initiatives to improve the collaborative process between teachers and paraprofessionals are stronger when undertaken by teams as opposed to individuals (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002).

In the literature, teachers repeatedly reported inadequate competencies for managing educational assistants due to lack of preparation. Lack of preparation may be ascribed to changing and progressively more demanding expectations of teachers who may have limited preparation for their new roles as managers. Teacher professional development and support to carry out the managerial functions of collaborating successfully with educational assistants in the school setting is recommended (Wallace et al, 2001).

Inadequate Competencies to Manage

The increased numbers of educational assistants being employed in the school setting may be an issue that complicates the practice of many teachers who are then required to assume a managerial role. Minondo et al (2001) identified 15 roles which educational assistants assume. Some examples include adapting material, providing personal care or emotional support, and working with academic content with individual students or an entire class. Mackenzie and Lewis (2008) note that educational assistants may be responsible for assisting with behavior management issues, personal tutoring, providing general classroom support or working in

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

numerous other supportive ways under the direction of a supporting teacher. Whatever the task, educational assistants must be managed at all times in the classroom and that responsibility falls on the shoulders of the classroom teacher. Managing the work of educational assistants is important since their presence in the classroom is for the purpose of helping students learn (Conroy, 2007). French (2010) finds that most educational assistants work without being managed due to teachers' inadequate competency to manage the work of another adult in the classroom.

Where Should Teachers be Prepared to Manage

Giangreco et al (2003) recorded a process of "Schoolwide Planning to Improve Paraeducator Supports" by establishing teams of participants in 46 schools, in 13 states during the 2000-2001 and 2001-2002 school years. The data from their study demonstrated the use and end results of a process to improve paraeducator supports together with the viewpoint of 331 individual team members. School recruitment occurred through e-mail letters with a one-page application targeted at approximately 400 special education professionals. Schools were offered \$1,000 grants for participation in the planning process for improving paraeducator supports and supplying data. Eligibility for participation was based on demographic information about the school, administrative support for the project, philosophy of inclusion, employment of paraeducators and a voluntary commitment to participation (Giangreco et al, 2003).

Over a two year period 52 schools submitted applications and 46 schools participated in the study. Of the 331 participants 125 were paraeducators, 59 special educators, 61 general

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

education teachers, 36 school administrators, 12 related service providers, 27 parents, and 11 others comprised of school board members, custodial staff, bus drivers and community members. Each school received a 27- page booklet called, *A Guide to School-wide Planning for Paraeducator Supports* (Giangreco et al, 2003) which included directions and worksheets with which to identify priorities, assess school needs, develop, implement and evaluate plans for paraeducator support. Teams were encouraged to be flexible to maximize relevance in each particular setting (Giangreco et al, 2003).

Data collected came from each team's completed planning booklet which provided facts about team membership, priorities, action plans, timelines for the completion of goals and self assessment ratings. Data also came from individual team members' completed questionnaires regarding the paraeducator planning process. The questionnaires, using a Likert²¹-style scale endeavored to identify participant perspectives on whether or not the paraeducator planning process accomplished its' goals. Finally, each team submitted a written report about actions taken by schools (Giangreco et al, 2003).

The most frequently identified priorities for improving paraeducator supports concerned orientation to the school setting, entry-level training, work-place training to match job responsibilities, job descriptions for EAs and access to professional development. Data from the participant questionnaire feedback indicated that 96% - 98% of individual team members either "agreed" or "strongly agreed" that the planning process had helped them gain insights into EA

²¹ A psychometric scale commonly used in research that employs questionnaires. When responding to a Likert questionnaire, respondents generally specify their level of agreement or disagreement on a symmetric agree-disagree scale.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

issues in their school which in turn helped them to develop appropriate plans to address priorities for managing the work of paraeducators (Giangreco et al, 2003). The impact of participation in the study was that paraeducators were more familiar with the requirements of their jobs as a result of the planning process and subsequent actions. Teachers discovered how much more valuable paraeducators were when they understood their roles and responsibilities. One participant wrote:

I found that during my first two years of teaching I was having frequent conflicts with paraeducators. In part this was due to role confusion and seemingly incompatible belief systems about how to work with persons with disabilities. By participating in the action-planning process with paraeducators that I respected, I came to better understand the issues that are important to them. (Giangreco et al, 2003, p. 71)

As a result of this study, teachers became more aware of how to effectively manage the work of paraeducators and began to meet more regularly to discuss student needs and educational goals. Six of the participating schools also identified a positive impact on retaining paraeducator staff. Efforts to demonstrate respect, clarify roles and responsibilities, model best practices and improve supervision resulted in higher job satisfaction for paraeducators and less turnover (Giangreco et al, 2003). Five of the participating schools reported an improvement in the delivery of instruction as a result of paraeducator planning. A team member explained, “Students [with disabilities] are more successful in class because we now structure our meeting time and conclude our meetings with an action plan suitable to our students” (Giangreco et al, 2003, p. 72). Students subsequently received more appropriate modifications and adaptations; clearly,

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

planning for paraeducator support results in improved teacher competencies for managing the work of paraeducators in the school setting (Giangreco et al, 2003).

A Gap in the Literature

Little Research has attempted to explore the teacher's experience working with educational assistants even though there is a growing awareness of the increasingly demanding role that teachers fulfill in their work in collaborating with educational assistants in the school setting. The competencies associated with managing the work of educational assistants may be considered as everyday common sense. Yet, busy classroom teachers have many things on their minds ranging from best practices to delivering the curriculum, meeting individual student needs and the accountability thereof; an extra set of helping hands, eyes and ears is generally much appreciated (Daniels & McBride, 2001; French and Chopra, 1999). When teachers have the competency to manage educational assistants, a second adult in the classroom serves numerous valued roles such as providing the teacher with more time to focus on planning for and instructing the whole class; allowing the teacher more time to engage in one-on-one student assistance. Educational assistants may provide cultural perspectives, or language assistance with learners for who English is a second language (Giangreco et al, 2005). Collaboratively teachers and educational assistants are more effective than when working in isolation or at cross purposes (Giangreco et al, 2005). Current literature suggests that teacher competencies for collaborating with educational assistants is important and worthy of further research.

Chapter Summary

In this chapter I have examined the development of the role of educational assistant in American and Canadian jurisdictions that reflects the teacher-educational assistant working relationship in the school setting. The findings in this literature review should be considered in terms of legal and political contexts as this literature reflects the legal and political structures that shape the relationship between the teacher and the educational assistant in diverse jurisdictions. Of specific interest in this chapter was the identification of competencies and skill areas for teachers collaborating with educational assistants.

There were a number of key themes that emerged in this chapter that have an impact on teachers' experiences working with educational assistants. The literature reveals that teachers may feel inadequately prepared for collaborating with educational assistants due to perceived lack of preparation and training. A foremost re-occurring theme in the literature is that when working with another adult in the classroom, the teacher should understand their role as teacher and understand the role and responsibilities of the educational assistant. There were some things that I thought I would discover during the literature review although I did not. For example, I was looking for teachers' views on the competencies *they* perceive to need for working with educational assistants. The concepts and issues reviewed in relation to roles and responsibilities of teachers and educational assistants and the competencies teachers perceive to need for working with EAs are relevant to this research study on co-constructing collaborative classrooms. The literature review provides a foundation for understanding the framework of

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

teachers' work with educational assistants. The issues presented in this section will be further elaborated on in the chapter on findings (Chapter Four) and discussed further in Chapter Five in implications for future action.

Chapter Three will provide a description of research methodology, the methodology selected to conduct this research study, reveal the ethical considerations and develop the interview questions.

CHAPTER 3: METHODOLOGY AND METHODS

Introduction

In this chapter I will focus on the practical aspects of the research study and describe the research methods that I used to conduct the collection and analysis of the data. I include an overview of research methodology considerations, a discussion of qualitative research methodology, ethical issues, the research questions, and limitations of the study followed by an explanation of the recruitment of participants, participant characteristics, and transcription of the data.

Research methods or designs provide a template, a plan and a procedure for research and the researcher must make a decision about which plan would be most appropriate for the study of a particular topic. Considering my focus on teachers' experiences with and views on working with educational assistants in the classroom, I chose a qualitative research methodology. Qualitative research methodology "Is a means of exploring and understanding the meaning individuals or groups ascribe to a social or human problem" (Creswell, 2009, p.4) in the context of their personal circumstance or setting. A unique aspect of qualitative research methodology is that it explores phenomenon from the perspective of the participant through using methods which take into consideration the context of the study. Qualitative research endeavors to capture data that is detailed, rich and complex with information about the participants' individual subjective experience. This process generally occurs through an inductive rather than deductive process. Inductive referring to more open ended reasoning as opposed deductive being more narrow in

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

focus (Spencer et al, 2003). Qualitative research methodology is more inductive than deductive in that it develops explanations at the level of meaning rather than arriving at a hypothesis with disregard to context in seeking answers to how and why questions (Spencer et al, 2003).

Qualitative research methodology uses a variety of methods for conducting inquiry such as exploratory interviews, focus groups, observation, documentary, video, or narrative analysis. It is useful for various purposes. For example, it can be used to evaluate programs, services or interventions underlying factors that contribute to the success or failure of a program. It can be used to develop or evaluate criteria where policy, procedure or implementation is unclear and when alternative criteria are sought (Spencer et al, 2003). Qualitative research methodology seems to be an appropriate method of inquiry for examining Manitoba teachers' experiences with and views on collaborating with educational assistants in their classroom.

There are many different approaches to qualitative research as well as concerns about the quality of the data collected. Questions arise as to whether or not qualitative research should be assessed in similar ways to quantitative research. This question emanates from the view or consensus behind conceptions about quality in reference to qualitative inquiry. Qualitative inquiry is inherently different from qualitative methodology and needs to be assessed on its' own terms with criteria relating to the context that is central to the purpose of inquiry (Spencer et al, 2003).

There is also discussion about how qualitative inquiry can become more formalized. For example, there are increasing calls for guidance about quality assessment so that the criteria used to assess qualitative research is specific criteria designed for the purpose of assessing qualitative

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

research as opposed to research criteria imported from other research methodologies. Some guiding principles for qualitative research methodology have been based on reoccurring themes in the literature. Additionally, qualitative research methodology should have something to contribute to a particular practice or theory. It should be defensible in design and credible, offering well-rounded plausible arguments about the significance of the evidence (Spencer et al, 2003).

Qualitative research methodology is applicable to research in educational settings for several reasons. First, it lends itself to participant observation (fieldwork or naturalistic observation) where the data can be gathered in a natural environment which encourages natural behavior. Second, through its' use of in-depth participant interviews using open ended questions to elicit as many details as possible from the informant, participants can answer from their own frame of reference, freely expressing their thoughts and feelings (Bogdan & Knopp Bilken, 2006).

Ethics

The participant recruitment and interview process for this research project began when permission had been received from the thesis proposal review committee, the University of Manitoba's Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB), followed by school board approval, and approval by the principals. Each volunteer participant was presented with a Letter of Consent for pre-viewing prior to the commencement of the face-to-face interview for the collection of the data. I made certain to clarify that participation in the study was voluntary and that the participant was free to withdraw from the study at anytime without prejudice or

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

consequence.

Confidentiality and anonymity are ethical concerns especially when using audio recording for the purpose of participant interviews and transcribing data verbatim. Participants were free to choose a pseudonym of their choice for the study; otherwise I assigned one. The physical audio tapes from the one-on-one interviews were kept in a locked drawer in my home and then erased and destroyed after all data has been successfully transcribed. Transcriptions from any audio recordings will be kept for a period of five years in a locked drawer in my home and then destroyed.

When gathering data for a research study, real participants in real life situations must participate. Following correct ethical guidelines ensures that everyone benefits from the research experience. Gay and Airasian (2000) state:

Perhaps the fundamental role of ethics is that participants should not be harmed in any way, real or possible, in the name of science. Respect and concern for your own integrity and for your participant's dignity and welfare are the bottom lines of ethical research.
(p. 100-101)

This research study was designed to address two ethical considerations: protecting the participants from undue harm and informed consent (Bogdan, Knopp Bilken, 2007).

Researcher's Position in the Study

Every researcher has their own biases and it is important that these biases be recognized at the onset of a research project. Creswell (1998) believed the researcher must attempt to reduce

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

the influence of any prejudgments and past experiences. It is the researcher's responsibility to remain neutral and unbiased during the data collection process and analysis (Kirby et al, 2007). Prior to the commencement of the participant interviews in March 2011, at the request of my thesis advisor, I articulated my position in the study in an endeavor to promote self awareness, disclosure and transparency in the research. Being aware of my preconceived potential biases helped me to monitor my impending assumptions during the data collection and analysis process.

I began my career in education as an educational assistant in rural schools in Southeastern Manitoba; first without training, then with training provided through the University of Winnipeg, Division of Continuing Education, which resulted in the successful completion of the Educational Assistant Diploma program. Shortly afterwards, I entered into the Bachelor of Education program at the University of Winnipeg and graduated in 1999. Throughout my career as a classroom teacher, I encountered various experiences working with an educational assistant in the classroom; some of the experiences were positive while others were not. I do not know whether or not any of the educational assistants that I worked with had any formal training.

In contemplating options for career advancement, I enrolled in the Post Baccalaureate Diploma Program in Education at the University of Manitoba in the fall of 2007. I chose to focus on Special Education and Inclusion thinking that perhaps I would become a resource or special education teacher. It was in the introductory course on Special Education and Inclusion that I first encountered a discussion on the role of educational assistants in the classroom; it became evident that many members of my cohort were bewildered about the correct use and legal limitations of paraeducators in the school setting.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Concurrently in 2007, I left the public school system to take a position at Red River College as an instructor in the Para-educators Certificate program. The program has a strong directive to ensure that all participants are knowledgeable on the roles and responsibilities of educational assistants based on guidelines issued through Manitoba Education²² most recently the document “Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools” (2009). It was my experience that many paraeducator candidates returned from their practicum experiences with reports of cooperating teachers requesting the completion of tasks or duties that were unethical for paraeducators to perform; For example, being asked to take charge of an entire classroom results in teacher /paraeducator role confusion.

In 2009, I was accepted in to the Master of Education program at the University of Manitoba. It was in this program that for a Qualitative Research Methods course, I conducted a pilot study titled “First year teachers’ experiences directing the work of an educational assistant in the classroom” (2010). In that study, I interviewed three first year teachers managing and supervising educational assistants and analyzed the data. The first year teachers reported that they needed to seek out further professional development to enhance their competencies for collaborating successfully with educational assistants in the school setting. Moreover, they had not imagined their careers would include managing the work of another adult in the classroom.

Participation and Participant Recruitment

The recruitment of participants occurred following research ethics board approval from

²²The Department of Education went through three name changes from 2001 to 2010. In 2001, it was entitled

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

the University of Manitoba's Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). Once approval had been granted by ENREB, I invited participation from school boards in rural and urban Manitoba. E-mail letters were sent out to superintendent's (Appendix A) articulating the purpose of the study, requesting volunteer participation, detailing the time commitment required for participation, ensuring anonymity, and offering a token of appreciation for participation in the study (a \$25.00 gift certificate for books). Based on authorization that was received from school division superintendents, I sent out an e-mail to principals (Appendix B) in that division describing the study, identifying the research questions and inviting participation. The e-mail to principals included a Volunteer Recruitment form (Appendix C) to be posting in the school staff room or placed in teacher mailboxes. Positive supportive replies were received from many principals who recommended individuals for participation; the recommended individuals contacted me by email shortly after the principal had granted permission. During the course of e-mail dialogue with the potential participants, I ensured that they met the required qualifications for participation in either the veteran or novice teacher group. Research participants were selected to be interviewed on a first come basis providing they met the criteria. In short order, four veteran teachers volunteered to participate. The recruitment of beginning teachers came only after a second and third round of e-mails that were sent to principals requesting participation in the study. One reason the recruitment of beginning teachers may have come more slowly may be attributed to report card time and Spring break. All of the participants were unfamiliar to me; they were all female.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

For this study I drew on both novice and veteran teachers' views for answers to my research questions concerning Manitoba teachers' experiences with and views on collaborating with educational assistants in their classroom. The rationale for this selection of participants was that veteran teachers have more familiarity working with educational assistants and with in-service professional development. Novice teachers are closer to their pre-service teacher training education and the challenges faced by a teacher starting out their career collaborating with an educational assistant.

Research Procedure

At the beginning of each interview I reviewed the purpose of the study and the details of the Consent Form. Then I asked the participant if they had any questions regarding the study or participation in the study; lastly, I asked the participant to sign the Consent Form (Appendix D). Subsequent to the participant signing of the Consent Form, I began the interview process. Prior to beginning the questioning, I turned on the manual physical audio recording device and placed it between the participant and myself. I began with two competency focused questions:

1. What are your experiences working with an educational assistant in the classroom?
2. What are your views on the competencies that are needed for teachers to work well with educational assistants in the classroom?

The next two questions had a professional development focus:

3. How were you prepared for your work with educational assistants?

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

4. How should or could you have been (better) prepared for your work with educational assistants?

Following the completion of the questioning, I thanked the interviewee for their participation and present the participant with a \$25.00 gift certificate for books as a token of appreciation for their participation in the study. Participants were informed that they would receive an electronic copy of the transcribed audio recording for the purpose of member checking. After reading the transcript and checking it for accuracy, participants were asked to return it with their comments within 2 weeks if there were any errors. None of the participants reported errors or discrepancies in the transcription.

Overall, I was pleased with the outcome of the interviews. The veteran teachers in particular were eager to share their stories and experiences often getting off topic. As a result, it was sometimes challenging to re-direct them to the interview questions. The novice teachers were a little more difficult to draw out and required more coaching to elaborate on their responses. I found each of their stories interesting and I endeavored to understand and learn from their individual experiences. Part of my enthusiasm and interest was motivated as a result of my past experience as an educational assistant as well as a novice teacher. I felt particular empathy and concern for one of the novice teachers when she shared some of her painful stories, experiences and challenges in being a novice teacher learning to collaborate with an educational assistant in the classroom. I was also impressed by veteran teachers who had often completed (in addition to a degree in education) two post-baccalaureate diplomas in education as well as a Master's degree in education. Table 1 provides a summary of participant profiles.

Table 1: Participant Profiles

Name	Years of Experience	Current Position	Grade Level
Bev	20	Resource Teacher	Middle/Senior Years
Gail	14	Resource Teacher	Middle/Senior Years
Heather	11	Counseling/Resource	Middle/Senior Years
Maryann	10	Classroom Teacher	Early Years K - 3
Leah	2	Classroom Teacher	Middle/Senior Years
Chloe	2	Classroom Teacher	Middle/Senior Years
Cindy	2	Classroom Teacher	Middle Years
Debbie	2	Classroom Teacher	Early Years

Research Questions: Rationale and Source

Table 3 juxtaposes the interview research questions and the probing questions I asked participants in this study. The research questions and probing questions link back with a reference to the literature providing a rationale for the questions. Ideally, the results from participant interviews would be identified in a third column, However, for the sake of aesthetics, I have chosen to present the findings in a separate chart further on in this paper.

The number of female research participants being only eight from a relatively small geographic area in Manitoba presents potential limitations to this research study. A larger number of interview participants, including male, over a greater geographic area and longer period of time may result in a more in-depth representation of teachers’ experiences collaborating with educational assistants.

Table 2: Research Questions, Rationale and Source

Research Question	Interview Questions & Probes	Connection to the Literature
<p>1. What are teachers' experiences collaborating with an EA in the classroom?</p>	<p>What role do EAs perform in your classroom?</p> <p>Probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Do EAs help with organizational tasks? · Do EAs provide assistance for students with disabilities? · Do EAs provide emotional or cultural support? · Do EAs help with tutoring? · Do EA's help with behavioural management? 	<p>Educational assistants may be used in many different ways as required by schools such as helping to perform organizational tasks in classrooms, providing assistance with students with disabilities, providing emotional or cultural support for students, tutoring, helping with behavioral management, or assisting with classroom support under the supervision of a trained professional (Bauman, Silla & Stufft, 2010).</p>
<p>2. What are teachers' views on the competencies that are needed for their work with EAs?</p>	<p>What competencies do you consider important in your work with EAs?</p> <p>Probing questions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · Tell me how you manage the EAs in your classroom. · Tell me about communication between yourself and an EA. · Tell me about planning and scheduling for the EAs work. 	<p>Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay and Stahl (2001) identify specific competencies as important for teachers collaborating with EAs:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> · On-going teacher/EA communication. · Planning and scheduling of the EAs work. · Providing instructional support for EAs. · Modeling for EAs. · Advocating for EAs · Management of EAs. · Access to available training · Ability to work as part of a team (p. 527).

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Research Question	Interview Questions & Probes	Connection to the Literature
3. How are teachers prepared for their work with educational assistants?	<p>How were you prepared for working with an EA?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • How did you learn to develop appropriate ways to supervise, manage and direct the work of EAs? • How did you learn to assign tasks, give direction, discuss curriculum, and student behaviour with an EA? 	<p>Gerlach's (2007) <i>Let's team up: A checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers and Principals</i> has been used in teacher training programs throughout the United States as part of in-service professional development. The checklist helps to strengthen teachers' roles as educational leaders (Gerlach, 2007).</p>
4. How should or could teachers be (better) prepared for their work with educational assistants?	<p>How do you think teachers should be prepared for working with educational assistants?</p>	<p>Giangreco, Broer & Edelman's (2001a), <i>A Guide to School-Wide Planning</i>, a ten step planning process designed to assist school teams in professional support through self-assessment to identify priorities to improve the collaborative process between teachers and educational assistants.</p>

Transcription, Data Management and Technical Analysis

I personally transcribed the raw data from the audiotapes from the one-on-one interviews. Each interview transcript took from three to four hours to transcribe. This allowed me to process the responses from the interviews and become more familiar with the data. It also helped me to begin formulating thoughts and ideas about the emerging themes in the research. Once the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

transcription of the audiotapes had been completed, I sent the transcripts by e-mail to interview participants for member checking. Each of the participants verified the accuracy of their interview transcript and I proceeded onto the next step in analyzing the data.

Working with electronic as well as hard copies of the interview transcriptions, I highlighted the responses to each research question in a different color. I then created a wall chart from my data with interview participant pseudonyms, education, years of experience and any work related experience written on green cards and placed them in a column on the left side of my wall. I made color coded cards for each of the research questions in pink, purple, yellow and blue which I placed in a row across the top of my wall. Then, I transferred data onto color coded cards corresponding to the interview questions. To complete this task, I used dual computer screens, one for the interview transcript and another screen for completing the chart (Table 2). I read each interview transcript and categorized teacher's comments by highlighting the answers to my questions in a different color. For example, for the question, "What role do educational assistants perform in your classroom?" I read the transcript carefully and highlighted in yellow each response that answered the question to a role an educational assistant performed in the classroom such as "monitor activities in the classroom" or "depends on students needs." When I changed my focus to the next research question, for example "What competencies do you consider important in your collaboration with educational assistants," I changed my highlighting color for the purpose of highlighting the responses that answered my question in a different color. In this manner of highlighting the responses, I electronically worked through each of the interview transcripts. Then, to double check my data for accuracy, I went through the identical

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

procedure with hard copies of the interview transcripts. It is important to note that the interview participants may not all have worked with educational assistants throughout their entire career be it two years or less or ten years or more; criteria for participating in this research study was that participants be currently working with educational assistants. Here is an illustration of what my wall chart looked like.

Table 3: Wall Chart of Research Findings

Name of Participant	Interview Question #1 (Blue)	Interview Question #2 (Yellow)	Interview Question #3 (Purple)	Interview Question #4 (Pink)
Years of Experience	What role do EAs perform in your classroom?	What competencies do you consider important in your collaboration with EAs?	How were you prepared for collaborating with EAs?	How do you think teachers should be prepared for this role?
Bev (20 years)	Response	Response	Response	Response
Heather (11 years)	Response	Response	Response	Response
Gail (14 years)	Response	Response	Response	Response
MaryAnn (10 years)	Response	Response	Response	Response
Leah (2 years)	Response	Response	Response	Response
Chloe (2 years)	Response	Response	Response	Response
Cindy (2 years)	Response	Response	Response	Response
Debbie (2 years)	Response	Response	Response	Response

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

A method for phenomenological data analysis, described by Creswell (2007) has the data divided into statements (horizontalization) and these units transformed into clusters of meaning. The clusters of data are linked together to formulate a general description of the experience (Creswell, 2007). Once I had transferred all the data from the interview transcripts to clustered color coded cards on my wall, I compiled the data into the Tables in the next section. The Tables each have two columns; one for teachers with two years or less experience and another for teachers with ten years or more experience. The results will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Summary

This chapter has provided an overview of research methodology considerations with a focus on qualitative research methodology. The practical aspects of the study have been presented such as the research methods that were used to conduct the collection of the data, a consideration of ethical issues, an explanation of the recruitment of participants, participant characteristics, the research questions, as well as limitations of the study have been discussed. The next chapter will discuss the findings of the research study and prominent themes that emerged.

CHAPTER 4: FINDINGS

Introduction

In this chapter, I present the study findings on co-constructing collaborative classrooms. The findings are presented in four distinct sections: (a) Teachers' experiences collaborating with educational assistants in the classroom (the roles they perceive educational assistants to perform), (b) teachers' views on the competencies that are needed for them to collaborate with educational assistants, (c) how were they prepared for their work with EAs, and (d) how they should or could they have been (better) prepared for their work with EAs. The results from this study may present limitations stemming from interviews with only four participants from two small groups of teachers; a novice teacher group and a veteran teacher group. The differences may or may not be representative of age and experience. If I interviewed more educators from each group the differences may disappear.

Experiences working with EAs

The *Appropriate Education Programming Amendment* legislation was proclaimed in October of 2005. These interviews were conducted in March/April of 2011; six and a half years after the legislation came into effect. This research study provides insight into how the inclusion of students with special needs in mainstream classrooms has created a new set of roles and expectations for classroom teachers; specifically, collaborating with educational assistants (who may or may not have certified training). The hiring of EAs helps support the educational programming of students with special needs, so it is realistic to assume that they would be given responsibilities in the school setting. My first research question asked participants, "What are

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

your experiences with collaborating with educational assistants in the classroom (what roles (function, duty, activity) do educational assistants perform in your classroom)”? Table 4 indicates what novice and veteran teachers had to say about the roles educational assistants perform.

Table 4: Teachers Experiences Working with Educational Assistants

Novice Teachers	Veteran Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Monitor activities • Keep students on task • Assist with note taking • Assist with special needs • Help struggling learners • Help organize students • Provide academic assistance • Monitor student behavior • Help implement behavior plans • Work one-on-one with students • Read to students • Help gather data • Help monitor student progress • Help support students in a variety of different ways • Provide support depending on student need • Provide an extra pair of hands • Help students who are struggling or at risk 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Depends on student needs • Help organize students • Collaborate with teacher to modify student assignments • Assist with students on behavior plan • Make certain students have covered material • Work one-on-one with students • Assist small groups of students • Build relationships with students • Help with reading • Circulate in classroom, help as needed • Accompany students on field trips • Help make field trip activities fun • Help students transition to and from work experience • Support students with physical needs • Provide emotional or cultural support • Assist teacher wherever directed, not necessarily exclusively with one student

The roles identified may occur while providing individual or group academic (or non-academic) support, individual or group student management or assisting one or more student(s) with special education support. Maryanne, a resource teacher for over ten years summarizes the various roles performed by educational assistants; she states, “Educational assistants perform

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

such duties as working one-on-one with students with academics, working along with the teachers, guidance counsellors or resource teachers . . . sometimes with behavioural issues either in or outside of the classroom”. Roles that educational assistants perform in the classroom also depend on students that are being placed in a particular classroom as well as the course the classroom teacher may be teaching. Chloe states, “I would say they definitely play a role in supporting students, in offering a variety of different things”. Gail responds:

Right now I have some educational assistants working in a class in a general type of setting where they are there to assist the teacher . . . there are others working with individual students that may have more needs, maybe physical needs, or needs where they have to leave the classroom from time to time . . . so I’ve got a range of needs that EAs are addressing. (Gail)

Most participants identified a variety of experiences working with EAs in the roles they perceive EAs to perform. “I find their role essential, I mean there’s a lot of things we can’t do without them. I’m very fortunate to work with individuals who are caring, supportive, kind, and make connections to kids in a way that some teachers just can’t” (Gail). Bev informed me that her desire to participate in the study stemmed from the fact that she was currently “Working with an exceptional EA”. Bev notes a perceived difference from one EA to another in that some EAs seem to have a natural affinity for their role; when she perceives the EA to have a natural affinity for their role, Bev feels really confident in the EAs abilities.

Similarities and Differences

Novice teachers identified six roles educational assistants perform in the classroom that

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

were not identified by the veteran teachers. These roles were: making sure students are on task; assisting with note taking; helping gather data; providing extra support – an additional body-extra person in the classroom; helping students who are struggling or at risk and providing an extra pair of hands. Veteran teachers provided ten responses not provided by the novice teachers. These responses included: assisting small groups of students, building relationships with students, circulating in the classroom providing help as needed, accompanying students on field trips, participating in student activities on field trips, helping to make field trip activities fun, accompanying students to and from work experience placements, helping students transition to and from work experience, assisting the teacher wherever the teacher directs them according to the needs in the classroom (not necessarily exclusively with one student, it could be with a group of students or with a whole class) and providing emotional and cultural support.

Emerging Themes

The themes that may arise from this data may suggest that novice teachers perceive EAs to perform roles in the classroom which frequently involve one-on-one support; veteran teachers may be identifying roles with more of a group or whole class focus. The format of using similarities and differences to examine the experiences of novice and veteran teachers' is an interesting one. Whether or not these roles are really significantly different or not may be debatable; the responses to my question may just have been articulated differently.

Competencies Teachers Need

The research participants identified various important competencies for working with

educational assistants in the school setting. Table 5 indicates what novice and veteran teachers have to say about the competencies they perceive teachers to need for collaborating with EAs.

Table 5: Competencies Considered Important in Teachers’ Work with EAs

Novice Teachers	Veteran Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Assertiveness • Ability to delegate tasks • Organizational skills • Ability to collaborate • Team work skills • Strong communication skills • Supportiveness • Ability to work with different personalities • Ability to change job according to EAs ability • Awareness or roles 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • A foundation of knowledge on how to manage another adult in the classroom • Communication skills • Ability to develop relationship with EA • Respect • Professionalism • Ability to recognize EAs strengths, skills • Collaboration • Organizational skills • Ability to be directive • Initiative

Leah, just in her second year of teaching believes that teachers require the competency to be assertive when managing the work of an EA in the classroom. She explains that she thinks the competency to be assertive is important for working with an EA because she is struggling with being assertive in her situation; specifically, she struggles with being assertive in delegating tasks to the EA(s). Leah also mentions, “I think we assume that they [EAs] should know what they’re supposed to do, and I think that’s where I’m wrong – because they’re [EAs] coming into a blank situation a lot of times” (Leah). I asked Leah to explain what she meant by “a blank situation” and she explained that she meant a situation where the EA did not know what to do. Leah candidly admits that she struggles with the competency to be assertive when working with

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

educational assistants:

I struggle with the fact that a lot of the people [EAs] are older than me . . . I find it really difficult to say to a forty year old woman that you need to be doing this instead of that. And even, I have an EA, who is a twenty year old male and I feel like I don't have the power to tell him that you've been leaving the classroom frequently for no reason. I think the one struggle would be the fact that some EAs are older than me, and another would be the male factor. So for me, I need to have more assertiveness. For me the biggest hurdle is that I'm young. I feel like I'm going to hurt their feelings. I think of them as my mom, or my aunt, like someone I need to respect. (Leah)

As Leah is a novice teacher, she may not yet realize or understand that asking an educational assistant “to do this instead of that,” (which she associates with being assertive) is not indicative of being disrespectful. Neither is it disrespectful to manage the work of an educational assistant who is older than she is, or a male of similar age. Leah admits that she needs to develop the skill of assertiveness and believes that she struggles with her perceived current absence of the skill due to her age; she believes that her confidence will improve with experience and age resulting in enabling her to “feel like I'm equal . . . be more assertive and tell them what to do” (Leah). It appears that Leah associates equality with age for Leah believes she will be more of an equal and be able to “tell them [EA's] what to do” as she becomes older and develops more experience. Leah's perceived challenge with assertiveness could just as easily be referred to as an absence of communication skills; there may be an overlapping nature of these skills.

Heather places importance on the competency to discern “EA's strengths and areas where

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

they are not comfortable and working around putting them in an uncomfortable position based on what they have in terms of skills” (Heather). Heather’s approach to working with an educational assistant echoes Giangreco (2003) in that teachers require the competency to know that paraeducators may not be fluent with all academic content across the curriculum. Leah also noted challenges working with an EA who is not fluent with curriculum; “I find the biggest problem is that they’re not necessarily qualified to help with the material” (Leah). Giangreco (2003) noted that many well meaning paraeducators face academic content that they may have found difficult as a student. Teachers require the competency to “play to the EAs strengths,” assigning them roles that they are comfortable with (and/or finding opportunities for them to gain the needed skills).

Gail, a resource teacher with many years of experience notes that some teachers feel they do not have any jurisdiction over managing the work of another adult in the class; perhaps they have not given themselves the right to “manage someone else’s day” (Gail). Gail states, “There’s a real gap in what expectations are for teachers working with EAs in their class”. Gail says, “I think the literature is out there, I think the directives are clear, but it’s still not put into practice.

Asked to elaborate she commented:

Manitoba Education and Training has information on their website about educational assistants and their roles and responsibilities, and teachers roles and responsibilities in relation to them . . . for some reason it doesn’t translate well into practice . . . sometimes it just gets lost. (Gail)

Gail’s comment provides numerous possible avenues for discussion such as further illumination

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

on the available information through Manitoba Education and Training about teachers' roles and responsibilities in relation to working with educational assistants. Yet, I directed the conversation to what Gail meant by, "For some reason it doesn't translate well into practice . . . it just gets lost". At this point the conversation turned toward the importance of communication between teachers and educational assistants. I asked Gail, "Do teachers take the time to plan together with the EA in their classroom"? Gail responded:

As often as I think it needs to happen – that's something I've thought about for myself as a resource teacher. Do I step in and allow for some planning time between the teacher and the EA or maybe take over the class while they go and do some talking and planning? If there was a demand for that, I would definitely be doing that a lot more. (Gail)

According to Gail's response, teachers may not be requesting specific time for planning with educational assistants. This seems to be getting at an important idea – the need for the teacher to see themselves as the focal point of a team responsible for teaching and learning in their classroom. This means both managing and directing the EA and communicating with other professionals – resource teachers and administration – to get things like planning time with the EA. When I asked Gail whether or not the teachers and EAs saw themselves as part of a team, she stated, "Mmmm, not always so- not as much as they should be. On the other hand, when it does occur, when you see a team happening between the EA and the teacher, it's great, it's magical – it's like – this is what it's all about" (Gail). A number of experienced teachers used the word "collaboration" when referring to their interaction with educational assistants as opposed to

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

using the specific language “team work”.

Similarities and Differences

Both novice and veteran teachers mentioned the importance of communication skills. However, with the exception of Maryann, they did not identify regular and on-going communication. Maryanne mentions planning in collaboration with the educational assistant. “I do a meeting, a mini meeting over coffee. And then they know what they’re to do. There’s a different educational assistant who works with me in the afternoon and I make time over lunch to do the same thing” (Maryann). A number of participants mentioned providing instructional support for EAs although none of them spoke specifically about modelling for them. Likewise, none of the participants mentioned advocating for educational assistants’ access to available training.

I asked Gail one of the probe questions I had prepared based on Riggs’ (2004) list of top ten things teachers need to know about working with paraprofessionals. Specifically, the foremost entry on Riggs’ (2004) list was the importance of teachers knowing the names of the EAs in their classroom. When I asked Gail if teachers in her school knew the names of the educational assistants they worked with she replied: “Know their names? In our school they do. For sure. We’re a smaller school and everyone knows everyone very well” (Gail). Maryann believes that teachers require the competency to show respect to educational assistants; she has always been proud of her skill for working with people. Maryann states, “I respect the educational assistant” and Bev concurs with “There needs to be respect on the part of the teacher for the role of the educational assistant, and vice versa”.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Emerging Themes

The emerging overall themes concerning competencies required for working with educational assistants are organizational skills, communication skills and the ability to collaborate; these competencies were similar regardless of length of experience. However, differences in acknowledged essential competencies occurred between novice and veteran teachers. Novice teachers seem to still be focusing on the competencies to be assertive, learning to delegate tasks/responsibility, developing team work skills and the competency to work collaboratively with different personalities including changing their work according to the ability/characteristics of the EA as well as developing an awareness of teacher/EA roles.

The veteran teachers seem to have developed the language with which to articulate the important competencies for collaborating with educational assistants more precisely. This group seems to identify overarching competencies or the bigger picture. For example, a foundation of knowledge on how to manage another adult in the classroom, the ability to build and develop a relationship with the EA, the ability to recognize the EAs strengths, weaknesses, talents and skills, the ability to be directive, demonstrate initiative, respect and professionalism. This cohort is no longer focusing on the same competencies the novice teachers are focusing on such as assertiveness for managing the work of educational assistants. My hypothesis is that teachers may recognize different attributes or competencies for collaborating with educational assistants under different circumstances and dissimilar contexts during various stages of their career. As shown previously, Leah believes she will develop the skill to be more assertive as she becomes older and progresses in her career; Chloe corroborates that as a teacher's career progresses the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

competencies required to work with an EA change.

Preparation for Working with EAs

Table 6 identifies what teachers said about how they were prepared for their work with educational assistants.

Table 6: Preparation for Working with EAs

Novice Teachers	Veteran Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Solely through student teaching• Observing my cooperating teacher during student teaching• On-the-job training/experience• Pre-service professional development• Prior work experience managing adults in other agencies• “I don’t think I was”	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• “I was an EA so I walked in their shoes”• Through life experience• Through the IEP which identifies what everyone’s role is• Observing other teachers/situations• From previous career in business administration• Practice, on-the-job training• “I wasn’t prepared at all”

The novice teachers identified that they were prepared for working with an educational assistant solely through student teaching, observing their cooperating teacher during student teaching, on-the-job training/experience, attending a pre-service professional development workshop and prior work experience managing adults in other agencies. One of the respondents stated, “I don’t think I was [prepared to work with educational assistants]” (Leah). Leah, who does not “remember much” about preparation to work with EAs prior to induction states; “I don’t think I would be able to - - for the most part, handle all of my classrooms, or classes without the help of an EA” (Leah). Leah talks to her resource teacher a lot about what the EA is supposed to

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

be doing in her classroom in an effort to understand the educational assistants' role in the classroom; she is learning through experience (Leah).

Veteran teachers stated they were prepared for working with educational assistants through life experience, through the IEP which identifies what everyone's role is, through observing other teachers and other situations, from a previous career in business administration, and practice or on-the job training. One of the respondents stated; "I was an EA so I walked in their shoes" (Maryann), and another respondent stated, "I wasn't prepared for that at all. I have to say when I first started teaching, if I had an EA in the room, I relied on them knowing what their job was because I was just struggling trying to do my own thing" (Gail). Gail noted, "There weren't a lot of guidelines [for working with EA's] other than relying on a connection with each other and unfortunately, you're not always going to have a connection with your EA" (Gail). Gail identified that she learned how to work with an EA, "just through practice and learning experiences and finding out what that person is like, getting to know them quickly so I could use their strengths as my advantage . . . and build on the things the person was good at" (Gail). Bev learned how to work with educational assistants by observing a student services coordinator who worked really well with EAs; she learned to model her own interactions with EAs based on what she observed. Although she confesses, "I still find it very difficult when I have to be more directive" (Bev). Bev thinks, "Role modelling and also having some really good EAs . . . "is valuable.

Teaching is not Heather's first career; she previously worked as a facilities manager in businesses overseas where staff reported to her. She believes her previous experience has helped

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

her to manage EAs because she is “not uncomfortable directing adults” (Heather). Heather has noticed:

That’s an area where [some of my colleagues] don’t feel comfortable, they don’t feel that they should be directing them [EAs]. That technically they fall under the responsibility of the principal . . . I think that’s hard for educational assistants when they work with teachers who don’t feel comfortable directing them. I, on the other hand am quite capable of being bossy - so it works for me. (Heather)

Heathers’ previous career experiences have resulted in the acquisition of transferable skills which she is now able to apply in her teaching career managing the work of educational assistants in the school setting.

Similarities and Differences

Both novice and veteran teachers provided responses indicating they had been prepared for working with educational assistants in school settings. This preparation in school settings sometimes occurred as a result of observing their cooperating teachers during student teaching practicum placements; other times the preparation in school settings occurred following teacher induction. One respondent from each cohort indicated they brought transferable skills from previous careers which helped them to manage the work of adults. One respondent in both the novice and veteran teacher group responded, “I don’t think I was” and “I wasn’t prepared at all for that” (Leah and Gail).

Emerging Themes

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

There appear to be two emerging themes in response to where teachers said they were prepared for working with educational assistants. The first emerging theme focuses on learning to work with an EA in the school setting either during pre-service training as a result of observing a co-operating teacher or after induction by observing other professionals in the school setting; frequently a resource teacher or student services personnel. This emerging theme reinforces the significance of role modeling and mentoring for novice teachers. The second emerging theme indicates that some teachers may not have had an opportunity to learn how to collaborate with EAs as a result of observing a cooperating teacher either during pre-service training or after induction.

How Should Teachers be Prepared for Working with EAs

Table 7 indicates what novice and veteran teachers say about how they should or could have been (better) prepared for their work with EAs.

Table 7: How Should Teachers be Prepared for this Role

Novice Teachers	Veteran Teachers
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-service training• Access to on-going professional development• Teachers need to be well-rounded individuals to begin with• Expect to learn through experience	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pre-service training• Workshops/professional development• Teachers/EA training sessions• Identifying expectations at the beginning of the school years• Relationship building with EAs• Through collaboration as a school community• Administrators should play a role

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Leah states that she expects to learn to work more effectively with an EA as she gains more experience in her career; “I think with experience comes age, comes wisdom, so I think that I might have more confidence in my career . . . I think I should be able to be assertive and tell them [EAs] what to do”. Debbie states, “I think that it’s definitely something that could be put into a university program – like introduced . . . cause your gonna be working with EAs in your classroom.” Cindy noted:

There should be more instruction at the university level for pre-service teachers. It would be beneficial for people from the department to speak in university classrooms about funding and possible roles EAs could serve in classrooms. As well, professional development and frequent planning time together would help EAs and teachers with ongoing communication and teamwork throughout the year. (Cindy)

Chloe, on the other hand seems satisfied with her pre-service training: “We all have received a lot of training, and I think we should be very skilled in quite a few areas, and I think like I said, teachers should be a very well rounded person . . . we should have the educational background (Chloe). Chloe also identifies that “on-going professional development is so important”.

Novice teachers focused primarily on expecting to learn to collaborate with EAs through experience; however, they did not identify what those experiences would be. One of the respondents suggested that teachers need to be “well rounded” individuals in the first place. Responses from the veteran teachers differed considerably from the novice teachers. They acknowledged that teachers should be prepared to work with educational assistants through teacher/EA training sessions, identifying expectations at the beginning of the school year,

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

relationship building with the EA(s), through collaboration as a school community and that administrators should play a role.

Responses from veteran teachers were more specifically articulated suggesting interactions or functions among individuals through the collaborative processes of teacher/EA training sessions, identifying expectations at the beginning of the school year, relationship building with the EA(s), through collaboration as a school community and through the involvement of administrators. All of these suggestions imply a process of learning through experience. One of the veteran teachers spoke of the challenge of working with potentially untrained educational assistants in the school setting:

This is an adult [the EA] that's present in your room with a grade 12 and a driver's license. There's no standard in terms of if they've had WEAVAS (Working Effectively with Violent and Aggressive Students), if they've had Non-Violent Crisis Intervention [training], if they've had any training – like they're an un-trained adult in my room. So I think that if EAs are the future, which they seem to be, that there should be some discussion at the faculty about how to manage them, as well as some kind of standard for EA training that they have to receive before they enter the school system to work with children. It's a big challenge . . . I've been doing this for awhile . . . I've had years where the educational assistant seemed – well - - more work than the students. Working with EAs is a big challenge sometimes. (Heather)

Maryann noted the school could play a role in helping to prepare teachers to work with educational assistants by promoting planning time for teachers and EAs at the beginning of the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

school year when class lists are established. During this time the teacher and EA would benefit from communication to get acquainted with each other, discuss student needs and establish schedules. Bev states:

Maybe this is pie in the sky, but maybe there should be teacher/EA training sessions together. You know, where people get together, and maybe they look at lessons . . . and say, 'Let's see how we can work through this together, what do you think about what the needs are, and do you think this child is going to be able to work through this. Again, it's about the time though - and the willingness . . . a lot of people don't want to put any extra time in. There needs to be a realization from admin that somehow time needs to be set aside for teachers and EAs to work together. (Bev)

Gail thinks:

Administrators need to be brought into the picture. I think it needs to be administrators valuing collaboration as a whole – in a school community . . . why aren't we valuing relationships, fostering relationships between teachers and EAs and giving them time to meet . . . like giving time is difficult . . . but maybe it's something that can be coordinated as a school goal or something – maybe it can be made a priority somehow.

So I think it's a bigger picture thing. I think it's not a one size fits all approach. (Gail)

A single method or process or function of preparing teachers to work with educational assistants may not be sufficient; it may be more probable that multiple experiences contribute toward how teachers should or could be prepared to collaborate with educational assistants.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Similarities and Differences

Both interview cohorts identified that teachers should be prepared for working with educational assistants through pre-service training, workshops and professional development and access to on-going professional development. The novice teacher group identified that they expect to learn how to work with an educational assistant through experience, through teacher/EA training sessions, identifying expectations at the beginning of the school year, relationship building with the EA, through whole school collaboration and that administrators should play a role in helping teachers learn to collaborate with EAs.

Emerging Themes

A single method of preparing teachers to work collaboratively with educational assistants may not be sufficient. Emerging themes seem to imply the benefit of multiple experiences to help prepare teachers for this managerial role. The settings identified by participant responses in this study imply emerging themes suggesting that teachers expect to learn to collaborate with EAs in school settings either during pre-service training or following induction. Post induction training includes school-wide initiatives supported by administration. These initiatives would present collaborative planning opportunities for teachers and EAs as well as access to on-going professional development. Access to on-going professional development dove-tails with the expectations of teachers to learn how to work more collaboratively with EAs as their career progresses.

Chapter Summary

This chapter thematically reported the findings in a particular order focusing on the answers to my questions that considered participant's perspectives regarding co-constructing collaborative classrooms with educational assistants. The answers to these questions were organized by teacher experience followed by a discussion of the similarities and differences of response between the two experience conditions. In the final chapter, I will present a framework which addresses the outcomes of the findings in this study. The implications of these findings for practice and future research will be proposed.

CHAPTER 5: ANALYSIS, DISCUSSION & CONCLUSIONS

Introduction

In the previous chapter, I reported the findings about how teachers saw various roles performed by educational assistants in the school setting; their views on the competencies that are needed for teachers to work well with EAs, how they were prepared for their work with EAs, and how or where they should or could have been (better) prepared for their work with EAs. In this chapter, I will discuss the findings in the light of the literature review, the overall themes that emerge, reach some conclusions and provide recommendations (based on the findings) for helping teachers develop essential competencies for co-constructing collaborative classrooms with educational assistants.

Final Analysis

Three key points have driven this study: (i) the rapid increase in the use of EAs, (ii) their centrality to the development of the special education policy of inclusion; and (iii) MTS's concern about the lack of training for either EAs or teachers working with EAs. There is an absence of research from a Canadian perspective regarding teachers' views on the competencies that they perceive are needed for their work with EAs, how they were prepared for their work, and how or where they should or could have been (better) prepared for their work with EAs. Teacher's responses to questions regarding their experiences working with EAs inform my hypothesis about overall themes, conclusions and recommendations.

Teachers' Experiences Working with EAs

It is clear from the recent literature that educational assistants (paraeducators,

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

paraprofessionals) make significant contributions in the context of the school setting. They are generally appreciated and valued by the teachers they collaborate with as evidenced by the participant's experiences in this study. Educational assistant support facilitates inclusion ensuring that all students with special needs receive appropriate education. The data from this study indicates that EAs perform a variety of roles in supporting students in various different ways depending on the students' need in a particular classroom; they assist with issues related to academics and/or student behaviour, help with organizational tasks (make certain students have required materials such as text books, paper, pencils), help monitor the classroom (with behaviour or academic issues), work one-on-one with students, work with students in small groups, and work alongside the teacher, guidance counsellor or resource teachers as required.

Value of the EAs Role

The findings confirm the significance of the role of educational assistant and I have personally observed the exceptional connections that EAs are able to make with students of all ages. However, a number of issues remain of concern: (i) the rapid increase in the use of EAs as evidenced in the increased practice of hiring EAs in the province resulting in a ratio of 1.7 teachers to 1 EA (2009/2010), the highest ratio in all of Canada (McRuer, 2010); (ii) their centrality to the development of special education and the policy of inclusion raising the question as to whether the practice of hiring generally uncredentialed EAs is a solution to complying with *The Appropriate Educational Programming Amendment to the Public School Act* (The Government of Manitoba, 2005) (Zaretsky, 2011); (iii) MTS's concern about the lack of

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

training for either EAs or the teachers working with EAs, and (iv) the absence of mandated certification or training requirements for EAs (Zaretsky, 2011). As previously discussed in this study, it has been noted that one teacher may have as many as 7 EAs in an elementary classroom (Zaretsky, personal communication, September 6, 2011). A question which begs to be considered is whether or not a generally under-educated uncredentialed EA is the best person to be guiding the reading activity of a student reading below grade level, helping students who struggle with academic content, making sure students are on task or implementing behavior plans.

The results of the data are important as it confirms that EAs provide support for teachers by carrying out a variety of non-professional tasks (Canada Teachers' Federation Research and Information Services, 2009). The major lessons learned are that EAs are available to "Assist the teacher where the teacher directs them - where the needs may be" (Gail); the EAs role is really important in managing a lot of the organizational aspects of supporting student learning (Bev), or even with relationship building with students (Chloe, Maryann & Bev); EAs allow that extra person to be there and be supportive for some of the students who are struggling and at risk (Chloe). Readers may be interested in knowing that the hiring of generally under-educated, uncredentialed persons to support the teaching and learning environment for students with special needs contributes to the learning environment in a significant way.

Competencies to Collaborate with EAs

Giagreco (2003) acknowledged that it is important for teachers working with educational assistants to be engaged teaching partners. Teacher engagement includes the competency to collaborate with EAs in the instructional process. This means the teacher has the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

competency to become familiar with the EAs skills and abilities (Giangreco, 2003; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). A teacher working with an EA requires the competency to be flexible as EAs are not all going to bring the same set of skills to the context. Some teachers, such as Chloe, want the EA to inform her of their specific strengths and skills so that she can adjust herself accordingly, or “fill in the blanks” as she put it:

We need to see what EAs can bring to the table, allow them to do the skills that they’re really good at, and then kind of do the rest around it . . . I feel like it would be more productive that way. If somebody is really good at something, I’d rather have them do that, than tell them what they’re doing. I would rather say, ‘What is it that you’re good at?’ ‘What can you bring to my classroom?’ have that person do those things, ‘cause then I can do the others [whatever the EA is not good at] . . . why not take advantage and use those skills. (Chloe)

Chloe likes, “build[ing] around” skills the educational assistant brings to the task. She adds, “This is kind of how I like to do my job” (Chloe)!

Chloe was the single informant to identify the importance of the ability to change her job according to the ability/characteristics of the educational assistant. It may be that the ability to change jobs according to the ability/characteristics of the educational assistant also coincides with the ability to recognize the EAs strengths, weakness, talents and skills. For example, Heather places value on the ability to work with different personalities and change her own tasks to accommodate the strengths and weaknesses of an EA. She believes that teachers require “An understanding of discerning people’s strengths and areas where they are not comfortable and

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

working around putting them [EAs] in an uncomfortable position based on what they have in terms of skills” (Heather). French (2010) recommends that teachers consider individual EA working style preferences. Teacher competency to re-direct the work of EAs as required emerged as a primary theme from various scholarly works on teacher – educational assistant working relationships (Giangreco, 1997; Picket & Gerlach, 1997; Kilgore & Griffen, 1998; Freshi, 1999; Katsiyannis, 2000; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Rosales, 2002; Gerlach, 2002; Clancy, 2002; Doyle, 2002; French, 2003; Trautman, 2004; Ramsey, 2007; Mahfood, 2008; Bauman et al, 2010; French, 2010).

Novice teachers spoke frequently about competencies such as organizational skills, collaboration, team work and communication skills. Debbie, explicitly articulated all of these competencies: “The teacher needs to be organized . . . organized would be a big thing” (Debbie). Debbie places importance on the competency to be organized because:

As a teacher it’s your job to have the task, or the main idea, ready for the student with special needs. It’s not the EAs job to be researching or finding all of those materials. But if they were interested, then you could collaborate together. But, you have to be organized . . . so that it’s a good situation for everyone that’s involved. (Debbie)

Debbie may be only in her second year of teaching; however, she placed considerable value on the importance of organizational skills. It is apparent that teachers working with educational assistants require the skill to be organized (Trautman, 2004). During data collection, the identification of organizational skills typically coincided with the ability to collaborate, working as part of a team and communication skills; these themes appear to be inter-related and tricky to

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

examine in isolation. These competencies were also enmeshed in the review of the literature (Giangreco, 1997; Picket & Gerlach, 1997; Kilgore & Griffen, 1998; Freshi, 1999; Katsiyannis, 2000; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Rosales, 2002; Gerlach, 2002; Clancy, 2002; Doyle, 2002; French, 2003; Trautman, 2004; Ramsey, 2007; Mahfood, 2008; Bauman et al, 2010; French, 2010).

The literature was sparse on the topic of delegating tasks and being assertive, and the interview data specifically identified these competencies. Leah stated that the competency, “To delegate tasks, to be assertive . . . is really necessary.” Novice teachers sometimes find it difficult to be assertive when the EA is considerably older representing a mother figure or another individual in authority, or when a female teacher is required to direct an EA who is a young adult male of similar age (Leah). In the situations where the challenges regarding assertiveness were mentioned by novice teachers, the lack of assertiveness or directedness was associated with the intent on behalf of the teacher to be respectful. As their career continues to evolve, novice teachers may no longer view that being assertive indicates a lack of respect, but rather the contrary. It may be argued that the competencies to be assertive and delegate tasks are intertwined in the competencies to work as part of a team. For example; the ability to carry on a professional dialogue with EAs, providing clear expectations for EAs, collaborating in the instructional decision-making process, knowing the roles and responsibilities of EAs, having the competency to re-direct the work of EAs as required, all require the ability to work as part of a team.

Value of Competencies

Wallace et al (2001) believe teachers require the competency to model supportive practices for educational assistants. As a resource teacher, Gail observed a classroom teacher modeling for an EA in a math class:

In a math class right now, I have an EA that's working alongside a teacher in a general class setting helping students that need help, and she goes along with the instruction of the teacher and then brings it back to the student. So she's kind of following along with the instruction that the teacher is providing and knows what's going on that way. So she's kind of learning as the students would be learning. (Gail)

According to Gail's observation it seems apparent that some EAs may learn how to perform the various roles required of them by working alongside a teacher, frequently learning academic content as the students are learning. A teacher modeling for educational assistants is essential in nurturing an attitude of teamwork (Groom, 2006).

Considering Gail's observation, the competency to model supportive instructional practices for an EA requires the ability to take initiative and be directive. For teachers like Heather, the ability to be directive is not an issue; teaching is not her first career as she worked in an administrative position previously. The skills she gleaned from this previous experience have helped her to manage EAs and she is not uncomfortable directing them, although, she acknowledges that for some of her colleagues, being directive is a challenge. Gail places importance on the ability to manage the work of another adult in the classroom:

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

I think teachers need a foundation on how to manage another adult in their classroom . . .

Some teachers will head on directly and talk to an EA every day and make sure they know what the task is or what the expectations are of that day. Other teachers will never even speak to the EA that's in that classroom and feel that they don't have, ah – sort of a jurisdiction over talking with this person or directing them even though this person is assigned to their class. I guess they haven't given themselves the right to manage someone else's day. I don't know, or, I'm not sure, but I think there's a real gap in what the expectations are for teachers working with EAs in their class. I think the literature is out there, I think the directives are clear, but it's still not put into practice. I think there is still a gap in what people are expected to do and what actually happens. (Gail)

The relationship between teacher and educational assistant may be a precarious one: For example:

When it comes to managing and supervising an additional person in the classroom, it can be a great thing and it can be not a great thing. Right? Because if I have someone that is competent and can see when students need someone to sit beside them, or can see when a student doesn't have someone to sit beside them, then that's a great thing. But, if I have someone who has difficulty reading the students or reading the situation, then not only do I have to manage the student's needs, but I also have to politely manage an adult.

(Heather)

Heather's conundrum illustrates how EA support can be a great thing or not a great thing depending on the attributes of the EA. Heather acknowledges the permanency of EAs in the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

school system having observed the data from her division indicating the increased practice in employing EAs over the last five years, and a noted decrease in the hiring of teachers. As there is no standard for hiring EAs, and the practice of hiring EAs is not likely to decrease, she would like to see some discussion about competencies required to manage their work.

Manitoba Teachers' Society is providing support for teachers working with educational assistants through workshops facilitated by Teacher Action Cohorts. The workshops provide the opportunity for participants to assess their own attitudes towards working with educational assistants work through scenarios based on real life experiences. The MTS document, "Teachers and Educational Assistants: Roles and Responsibilities," (2010) identifies how teachers can prepare to work successfully with educational assistants. Gail is aware of the available literature concerning EA roles and responsibilities:

Manitoba Education & Training has information on their website about educational assistants and their roles and responsibilities, and teachers roles and responsibilities in relation to them - working with them . . . and in some ways its straightforward – it's simplistic . . . and in other ways it's vague . . . and for some reason it just doesn't translate well into practice. That literature is made available by me and by administrators in the school and I don't know, sometimes it just gets lost. (Gail)

Further questioning on my part may have resulted in acquiring in greater detail on where the document(s) are vague, where the documents do not translate well into practice or where they just simply get lost.

In combing the interview transcripts for data relating to respect, I resolved that it may not

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

be viable to separate respect from relationship building, professionalism and collaboration.

Maryann's response was the primary data which drew my attention to the inter-relatedness of these competencies. While Maryann placed emphasis on the competency to be respectful first and foremost, she prides herself in the skill she has for working with people. She respects the educational assistant and utilizes them for more than just the "Joe Jobs" [photo copying or clerical]. She begins by developing a relationship with the educational assistant where there is mutual respect:

I treat them professionally. I model good professionalism, so I hope they will show me the same courtesy . . . If you don't relationship build with your educational assistant . . . there'll be friction sometimes, or there'll be unwillingness . . . so I would say that relationship building with the other adult in the room is really important. Once you've established that, it's really important to be able to tell an educational assistant what it is you want them to do. (Maryann)

This quote by Maryann provides confirmation concerning the inter-relatedness of respect, relationship building, professionalism and collaboration. These four competencies may go hand-in-hand, or be pre-cursors for the competency to take initiative and the ability to be directive. Maryann has "never found anything more successful than being respectful to the peers [she] works with and being very professional" (Maryann). Being very professional and collaborating requires time:

You need to take time – then we can do a way better job at this for sure – taking the time to do that planning - meeting with the educational assistant, seeing what their talents are.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Like maybe they've got a talent for art, and that would really help me out in the classroom, because I'm not very good at art. (Maryann)

The inter-relatedness of professionalism and collaboration may also be an antecedent to the ability to recognize the EAs strengths, weakness, talents or skills.

The major themes that emerged from the literature in review did not specifically identify respect (Giangreco, 1997; Picket & Gerlach, 1997; Kilgore & Griffen, 1998; Freshi, 1999; Katsiyannis, 2000; Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001; Rosales, 2002; Gerlach, 2002; Clancy, 2002; Doyle, 2002; French, 2003; Trautman, 2004; Ramsey, 2007; Mahfood, 2008; Bauman et al, 2010; French, 2010). In reviewing the themes from this literature it could be argued that respect is inherent in fostering a successful teacher-educational assistant working relationship; teamwork, providing clear expectations, collaborative participation in the instructional decision-making process, the competency to re-direct the work of EAs, awareness of EA roles and responsibilities and on-going professional dialogue would require the competency to demonstrate respect.

Debbie, Cindy and Heather all placed value on the competency to communicate. Heather states, "Making time to communicate is a challenge. A lot of things happen on the fly and you don't have time to discuss things in great detail". Maryann takes time to communicate with an EA at the beginning of the day or at noon to discuss the plan for the day. Then, she explains how she would like the EA to work with specific students. Maryann believes, "The more information you can give, the better". Bev also states, "There needs to be communication". She wishes there were more time built into the teaching day, or built into the teaching schedule where there would

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

be more time to communicate with the educational assistant. “There has to be communication on the teacher’s part” (Bev). It is clear from the data collected for this study that teachers placed significant importance on the competency to communicate.

The competency for teachers to communicate effectively with educational assistants has also been woven in and out of other competencies identified in this study. French (2010) advocated for daily communication between teacher and educational assistant, Trautman (2004) advocated for clear communication, Fisher et al (2003) hold that teachers should be skillful negotiators (which would require the ability to communicate effectively), Wallace et al (2001) recommend teacher communication with paraprofessionals and Pickett (1999), Salzberg & Morgan (1995), & Carnahan et al (2009) agree in the importance of teacher communication skills for working with educational assistants.

Based on the findings from the informants in this study, it is noticeable that individual competencies influence teachers’ work with educational assistants. The data indicates that teachers require a range of competencies for working with EAs; the competencies vary from one context to another depending on the skills or abilities that the EA brings to the context. The literature has indicated that the competencies EAs bring to the context are inconsistent in Manitoba as well as the rest of Canada as currently there is no hiring criteria governing educational assistants and qualifications range from some EAs who have education degrees while others have no specific preparation (Canada Teachers’ Federation Research and Information Services, 2009). It is important to note that the reported data reflects the findings in the literature which emphasizes the need for teachers to develop their competencies for working with

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

educational assistants. The major lessons learned from the results of the data are that teachers do not all bring the same competencies to the classroom context for collaborating with EAs. Some teachers and school administrators may be interested in knowing that it is not unusual for teachers to face challenges when working with or developing competencies for collaborating with EAs. In the next section I will discuss what teachers had to say about preparation for working with educational assistants.

Preparation for Working with EAs

Participants were asked in the interview to inform me where they were prepared for their work with educational assistants. The question was meant to be open-ended as I wanted to find out what circumstances, situations or contexts they perceived helpful for preparing them to collaborate with EAs. All of the participants indicated that their preparation for working with EAs developed as an outcome of observing supportive mentors. Some of the participants indicated the process began during student teaching. Cindy, a novice teacher stated that she was prepared for working with an educational assistant:

Solely through student teaching. In university we were always told that we would have educational assistants, but they didn't ever say *why* they would be there. We never talked about what roles we would use them in, but just that we *might* have them. It was more through student teaching and watching how my cooperating teacher organized the classroom and how they used EAs that I learned. (Cindy)

Cindy also indicated that during her first year of teaching she had an EA who would offer to help her in different ways. The EAs support helped her understand typical roles and responsibilities

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

for EAs in the classroom. This situation is problematic as the educational assistant should not be informing the teacher of the EAs roles and responsibilities; Conversely, Cindy should not be assuming that she is being accurately informed by the EA. The document “Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools” (Manitoba Education, 2009) clearly identifies what roles EAs perform and the orienting procedure for EAs in the school setting. The Manitoba Teachers’ Society document, “Teachers & Educational Assistants: Roles and Responsibilities” (Manitoba Teachers’ Society, 2004) identifies procedures for teachers working with EAs, suggested activities for teachers, duties of teachers and *Teachers’ Assistants* (the term used in the document), a code of professional practice and knowing the limits or parameters for working with EAs.

Debbie tells me that she attended a pre-service professional development workshop about working with educational assistants; however, did not find it especially helpful – at least she could not remember anything significant about the workshop. Likewise, she could not remember anything ever being presented about working with EAs during the completion of her Bachelors’ degree in education. It was while attending an introductory course to Special Education during her studies in a Post-Baccalaureate program in Education that Debbie states:

We kinda talked about it, and then it’s not really addressed again – and it wasn’t really on how to affectively work with somebody. You were made aware that EAs must take direction from the principal – it’s a provincial outcome. But . . . that’s all there was. They didn’t really talk to us about using their [EAs] strengths or using their talents, or what to do when you’re faced with a difficult situation. (Debbie)

“Teachers & Educational Assistants: Roles and Responsibilities” (The Manitoba Teachers’

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Society, 2004), includes a section on what teachers can do about inappropriate EA behavior. The document also includes 4 pages of real-life scenarios based on actual situations.

Chloe's preparation for working with EAs has to do with past experiences working in a lot of different agencies where teamwork is important. For example, Chloe gained valuable experience working for Child & Family Services, various women's shelters and group homes; all of these settings required a team approach where everyone works together in various circumstances. Similarly, Heather previously worked in a business environment overseas where she managed a facility and staff reported to her. She states, "I honestly feel that, my job in terms of business administration experience has helped me manage EAs, because I'm not uncomfortable directing adults" (Heather). Heather acknowledges that this is not necessarily the situation with some of her colleagues who feel uncomfortable managing the work of educational assistants. "I on the other hand am quite capable of being bossy"! Debbie believes that she learned how to work with an EA as a result of her "people skills" and a helpful resource teacher; basically, she learned through on-the-job training. Debbie's experiences are validated in the literature by French (2010) who noted that in the United States teachers have historically received little, if any preparation for working alongside educational assistants. Ashbaker & Morgan (2001) believe all teachers and EAs can learn to work together collaboratively as a team.

Leah does not think she was prepared at all to manage the work of an educational assistant: "I don't think I was. My education was brought up in the whole hard-core inclusion – all students should be in the classroom approach, so I understood that EAs are necessary in the classroom *sometimes*". However, Leah does not think she was prepared to manage the work of an

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

EA. Leah recently attended a conference where the presenter, “. . .was adamantly against having EAs in the classroom, saying that even in the toughest behavioral situations and weakest classrooms a teacher should be able to handle it on their own”. Leah identified frustration over the presenter’s stance regarding EA support in the classroom sharing that she felt she would be unable to manage a classroom without the support from an EA. At the time of the interview, Leah was working on developing her skills for working with EAs by communicating with her resource teacher about EA roles and responsibilities.

During my career experiences in public and private schools throughout Winnipeg and Southeastern Manitoba, I encountered colleagues who were “deer in the headlights’ when confronted with the task of managing the work of an educational assistant in the school setting. Gail’s experience is not so dissimilar from many of the stories I’ve have heard throughout my career. It’s the very reason I undertook on this research project. Gail states:

I wasn’t prepared at all for that [working with an educational assistant]. I have to say that when I first started teaching, if I had an EA in the room, I relied on them knowing what their job was because I was just struggling trying to do my own thing. As a teacher, the last thing I’m thinking about is the management of another adult. I’m too busy managing my students and managing the materials I’m supposed to be teaching. I’m trying to differentiate, I’m trying to do all these things – and I’m hoping that the EA that is assigned to me will know his or her job and *just do it*. I don’t want to manage them, and I don’t want to be spending a lot of time telling them what to do step by step. If I have to do that, I feel like that’s a waste of teacher time – it’s time

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

that could be spent doing something else. (Gail)

Gail believes that she developed the competency to work with educational assistants by making connections with them, by discovering what the other person was like; getting to know them quickly so she could utilize their strengths and build on the weaknesses. Presently, Gail believes that EAs need to “feel they’re important and valued”. She thinks “that’s where a lot of success can happen when you make that person feel like they’re important.”

Bev developed the competencies to work with educational assistants through communication with a student services coordinator who worked respectfully with EAs. She asserts that positive role modeling played a significant function in her professional development. Bev states: “Definitely role modeling . . . I still find it very difficult when I have to be more directive”. Bev has learned to be more appropriately directive through practice and on-the job training as a result of consulting with a student services coordinator she observed working respectfully with EAs.

Perhaps being an educational assistant for several years prior to completing my undergraduate degree in education helped to prepare me for working with EAs in the school setting. Likewise, this has been Maryann’s experience.

I would probably say that I was prepared to work with EAs because I was one. I walked in their shoes . . . it just so happened that a year or two after working, a new position was created for a teacher and I got the job [She already had a degree in education]. So I guess the one thing that has prepared me is being on the other side. Quite honestly, I don’t think we really had enough actual training . . . on the role of

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

the educational assistant. I know a lot is spelled out in an IEP, what everybody's role is-what the educational assistant's role is. But sometimes it gets a little fuzzy, and it's all about really making clear what everybody's role is. (Maryann)

Maryann developed the competency to work with educational assistants through life experience as she went along.

Value of Preceding Experiences

Wallace et al (2001) advocate for teacher professional development and support to carry out the managerial functions of collaborating successfully with EAs. *A Guide to Schoolwide Planning for Paraeducator Supports* (2000-2001) is a resource for how teachers can work more collaboratively with EAs and is available on-line at no cost; the guide provides the opportunity for immediate use and is applicable to schools of various sizes and settings (Giangreco et al, 2003). *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers and Principals* (Gerlach, 2001), was written specifically in response to changes in school policies and practices requiring more focus on teamwork. This document is designed to assist school teams in professional support through self-assessment to identify priorities and has been used in the United States for in-service professional development. Implications for practice indicate that initiatives to improve the collaborative process between teachers and paraprofessionals are stronger when undertaken by teams as opposed to individuals (Giangreco & Doyle, 2002). Moreover, Riggs (2004) produced a list based on thirty five participants top ten things teachers need to know about working with paraprofessionals. French (2010) noted that paraeducators in the USA have worked alongside

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

teachers, special educators and related services for nearly forty years during which time they received little if any preparation for working with EAs, attributing real life experience as opposed to training as being the main source of knowledge for many educators working with EAs (Trautman, 2004). Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) point out that teacher's lamenting over inadequate preparation to work with EAs is no excuse for the failure to develop competencies for a collaborative working relationship; that most teachers do not receive preparation for the role other than perhaps during a student teaching practicum placement. Morgan and Ashbaker (2001) believe that all teachers and EAs can learn to work together successfully as a team. Wallace et al (2001) suggested that teachers need enhanced knowledge, skills and strategies for working effectively with EAs before changes in the collaborative working relationship can occur.

The data indicated that teachers interviewed for this study were prepared for working with educational assistants in a variety of ways: through student teaching; pre-service professional development; observing a co-operating teacher, resource teacher or student services coordinator and practical on-the-job training. Participants also identified acquiring the skills to work with an EA through developing personal skills, making connections with EAs through relationship building; previous life experiences including being an EA and course work in a Post Baccalaureate Diploma program in Education.

It is important to know that the data reflects the findings in the literature (French 2010; Trautman, 2004) indicating that it is possible for teachers to learn how to work more collaboratively with educational assistants even if they have little or no prior training. The major lessons learned may be that teachers' competencies for working with educational assistants

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

develop over a period of time. Teachers and school administrators may be interested in knowing that the resources are available to help them to learn to work more collaboratively with EAs and that initiative for fostering teachers' development for working with EAs is generally more successful when undertaken through a hands-on team approach. In the next section, I will discuss what teachers had to say about how they should or could have been (better) prepared for their work with educational assistants.

Teacher Recommendations for Preparation to Work with EAs

Of all the interview participants, I perceived that Leah was experiencing the most challenges collaborating with educational assistants. To begin with, I surmised that Leah was unclear about teacher-educational assistant roles and responsibilities. She stated, "I think that we first of all need to understand their roles [EAs] in the classroom" (Leah). Leah's statement does not indicate that she is unaware of EA roles in the classroom; rather she is expressing a need to *understand* the roles. Rosales (2002) noted that teachers' lack of knowledge about roles and responsibilities of paraeducators was the greatest deterrent to establishing and maintaining successful working relationships between teachers and paraeducators. The author reported that many teachers still assume that paraeducators' roles consist of performing clerical tasks such as photo copying and correcting papers as opposed to being directly involved in the teaching and learning environment. Stahl & Lorenza, (1995) and Wallace (1997) reported a difference in perception between paraprofessionals and teachers concerning the work related to paraprofessional roles and responsibilities. Research conducted by Wallace et al (2001) indicated that is important to recognize paraprofessionals' perceived need for role clarification. What is

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

especially noteworthy about the study by Wallace et al (2001) is that teachers and administrators reported more positively than paraprofessionals regarding awareness of role clarification. Leah's interview indicated a lack of awareness of teacher-EA roles and responsibilities; she states, "I was never told it's your job to tell them this [roles and responsibilities] (Leah).

The literature reviewed in this study has indicated that a lack of understanding teachers' roles and responsibilities as well as EA roles and responsibilities is the greatest deterrent to successful teacher-educational assistant working relationships. There is sometimes a difference in perception between teachers and EAs concerning awareness of roles and responsibilities. For example, teachers in one study reported more positively about awareness of roles and responsibilities than the EAs did; teachers perceived they were already demonstrating an awareness of roles and responsibilities whereas EAs in that study did not perceive teachers to be doing so (Wallace et al, 2001). Leah reported that she was never told that it was her responsibility to inform the EA of their roles and responsibilities.

Teachers are managers and leaders in the classroom, and as the leader, they need to establish a process of communication through which they impart their vision for the class. It is Leah's responsibility to take initiative in this situation. As the adult who has the primary responsibility for the teaching and learning process, teachers require the competency to take a leadership role. As the leader, it is the teachers' responsibility to allocate tasks to other adults appropriate to the individual needs of the student(s) (Calder & Grieve, 2004). It is the teacher's responsibility to seek out the scope of the EAs duties (Giangreco, 2003). An opposing argument could reassign the responsibility of teacher awareness of teacher-educational assistant roles and

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

responsibilities to the school principal, as the supervision of all that goes on in a school is under the supervision of the principal (Blais, personal communication, September 9, 2011). It could also be argued that pre-service teacher credentialing institutions have a responsibility to inform teacher candidates of teacher- EA roles and responsibilities. Cindy states: “There should be more instruction at the university level for pre-service teachers. It would be beneficial for people from the department to speak in university classrooms about funding and possible roles EAs could serve in classrooms” (Cindy). Debbie concurs:

I think it’s definitely something that could be put into a university program – like introduced. I took an inclusive education course . . . but there wasn’t anything about working with EAs, we learned about a variety of disabilities, but nothing about working effectively with an EA. I think that would be a course that should be considered, cause your gonna be working with EAs in your classroom . . . the courses [in university] aren’t always reflecting what real teaching is . . . there could be something like ‘Working effectively with EAs,’ they could have a course like that, and new teacher PD because when you’re hired, schools are assuming that everyone who comes in is exposed to that.

(Debbie)

Giangreco (2003) would bring the argument back to the teacher maintaining that ultimately engaged classroom teachers seek out clarity about the scope of teacher-EA roles and responsibilities.

Value of Professional Development

The research data suggests that teacher competencies to collaborate with EAs develop over the span of a teachers' career. The competencies required of teachers to work with EAs also fluctuate based on the individual attributes of EAs. On-going professional development for teachers to collaborate with EAs may be a valuable consideration. In-service professional development workshops for teachers as well as teacher-educational assistant teams provide a collaborative opportunity for acquiring new strategies that are immediately transferable to the classroom setting.

Access to On-Going Professional Development

Bev considers how teacher-EA training sessions could be helpful for teacher-EA teams. For example, teachers could bring in a lesson and say to the EA; 'Let's see how we can work through this together. What do you think about what the needs are and do you think this child is going to be able to work through this'? The notion of teacher-educational assistant training sessions seems like a rationale consideration for all teachers working with EAs as well as teacher-EA teams; Teacher-EA training sessions would provide a context for fostering the teacher-EA working relationship. If those training sessions were to be held at the beginning of the school year as Maryann suggests, they would also provide a setting during which to identify expectations for the school year:

I think there should be time at the beginning of the school year when things are set, when class lists are set, and you know the kids you have . . . it would be nice to get to know the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

EA(s) that your working with, sit down and talk with them, and maybe just see what their interests are . . . and talk about what their role will be in the classroom. Just make it clear to them what their job is. (Maryann)

Riggs (2004) acknowledged the importance of defining specific roles and responsibilities for teachers and paraeducators in the school setting. Gerlach's (2007) *Let's Team Up: A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers and Principals* could be used for teacher-EA orientation at the beginning of the school year to assist in establishing teacher-EA roles and responsibilities. It is also a helpful guide for on-going in-service professional development on various topics relating to teacher competencies for working with EAs.

Wallace et al (2001) consider how schools and school districts may be able to play a role in providing professional development through in-service training for teachers and educational assistants. Groom (2006) advocates for teachers planning together with EAs through regular communication and setting aside time for meetings and planning as teacher-EA teams. Calder & Grieve (2004) noted that the teacher is the leader whose responsibility it is to allocate tasks to EAs appropriate to the individual needs of the student(s). The teacher is responsible to manage the work of the EA; managing the work of the EA means communicating vision and sharing expectations through shared communication.

The literature in review and the research data correspond on the importance of teacher preparation for working with educational assistants in the school setting through on-going professional development in-service opportunities. These opportunities were considered to be especially beneficial when comprised of teacher-EA teams. In-service opportunities for teacher-

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

EA teams provide a setting for relationship building and fostering collaborative relationships.

Teacher-EA collaborative professional development opportunities are considered to be especially helpful when held at the beginning of the school year when specific roles and responsibilities can be defined. Schools and school districts play a significant role in allowing for teacher-EA instructional planning time.

Teacher-EA planning time at the beginning of the school year to establish roles and responsibilities would be a valuable experience. My own personal experiences working with EAs in the school setting do not include planning time with EAs at the beginning of the school year. The beginning of the school year generally includes an array of administrative meetings which may or may not include the EAs in the school. Regardless, these meetings are never about specific instructional process that may or may not include the support from an EA. An argument in favor of teacher-EA planning time at the beginning of the school year would echo Maryann's idea of providing an opportunity to get to know the EA, find out about their skills and abilities, talk to them about their role and responsibilities in the classroom, and make it clear to them what their job is. Opposition to this argument would stem from my personal experiences in the school setting where the hiring of EA staff may not yet be finalized during the time when teachers are returning to work and beginning preparation for the school year. EA assignments may not yet be finalized depending on student needs in the context and student enrollment that has the tendency to fluctuate based on the mobility of the population in the school catchment area. The EA hiring process is generally based on funding and the allocation of EA duties is contingent upon funding, and the specific needs of students within the context; it may take several weeks following the

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

beginning of the school year for the clarification of EA assignments. Even if EA assignments take several weeks to be solidified subsequent to the beginning of the school year, Maryann's idea of providing an opportunity to get to know the EA, to find out about their skills and abilities clarifying role(s) and responsibilities seems plausible.

Administrator Role

All of the suggestions provided so far in this discussion about Manitoba teachers' experiences with and views on collaborating with educational assistants in the classroom, specifically their views on the competencies that are needed for teachers to work well with educational assistants seem realistic and obtainable; yet how effective are each in isolation or even all in conjunction if there is a lack of support, or an absence of 'buy in' from the school community as a whole, predominantly administrators? Bev states:

There needs to be a realization from up above, and I'm thinking about the senior admin level, that somehow time needs to be set aside for teachers and EAs to work together . . . for all the learning needs of the kids. Like, if we're talking about the most at-risk [students] because of academic [challenges], or whatever, why aren't we putting more time into that? (Bev)

Gail echoes Bev's recommendation:

I think that administrators need to be brought into the picture. I don't think that it's a resource teacher, special education department problem. I think it needs to be administrators valuing collaboration as a whole – in a school community . . . fostering

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

relationships between teachers and EAs and giving them some time to meet . . . like giving time is difficult, but maybe it's something that can be coordinated within a school goal or something. Maybe it can be made a priority somehow – so I think it's a bigger picture thing, I think it's not a one-size fits all approach. (Gail)

Teachers play a key role in fostering a philosophy of teamwork with educational assistants; however, it can only be truly achieved through a consistent collaborative school-wide effort (Groom, 2006). Gerlach's (2007), *Let's Team Up" A Checklist for Paraeducators, Teachers and Principals* indicates that principals play a role in preparing teachers to work with paraeducators; the guide is useful for conducting team meetings or in-service staff development for improving teachers' competencies for working successfully with EAs in the school setting. *A Guide to School Wide Planning* (Giangreco et al, 2001b) is also designed to assist school teams in professional development for working with paraprofessionals. I am making the assumption here that the references to 'school wide planning' and 'assisting teams' would involve participation from, or at the very least 'buy-in' from school administrators. In the study by Wallace et al, (2001), it was noted that administrators reported more positively than paraprofessionals regarding teacher competencies for working with paras. Paraprofessionals may perceive teacher competencies for working with them differently than administrators do. The provincial document, "Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools" (2009) provides administrators with a resource to support the work of EAs in the province (The Government of Manitoba). The document clearly states that the roles of educational assistants are determined by the needs of the school division and "their day-to-day activities are directed by the principal, teacher, or other

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

professionals under whose supervision they work” (Government of Manitoba, 2009, p.3). The principal is responsible for all the supervision that goes on in a school; however, the principal may assign specific tasks to teachers in the school such as assigning EA duties to supporting the programming in a specific classroom. In that classroom the teacher has the responsibility for managing everything that goes on in the classroom, including managing the work of the EA (Blais, personal communication, September 9, 2011). The Manitoba Teachers’ Society document, “Teachers & Educational Assistants: Roles and Responsibilities” (2004) states, “Principals and teachers are responsible for preparing educational assistants to work successfully” (Manitoba Teachers’ Society, 2004, p. 8). There is an absence of literature identifying where the responsibility lies for preparing teachers to work with educational assistants. Teacher Action Cohorts in Manitoba endeavor to fill this gap by delivering professional development workshops for teachers collaborating with educational assistants.

The significance and importance of support from school administrators (principals) for teachers collaborating with educational assistants is indicated in the literature in review and the perceptions of the participant. It has been suggested that setting aside time for teachers and EAs to work together or plan together collaboratively would be beneficial for the teacher-EA team. The concept of being part of a team enhances teacher-EA collaborative relationships. However, persistent concerns remain such as busy timetables and challenges to find the time to collaborate (Morgen et al, 1998). It is important to bring administrators into the picture as teacher competencies for working with EAs is more than a resource teacher or special education department problem. Administrators need to value collaboration as a whole fostering

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

relationships between teachers and EAs by giving them time to meet. Recognizing it is difficult to give teachers and EAs time to meet, it could be made a priority and coordinated within the school community.

Principals play a key role in preparing teachers to work with EAs (Gerlach, 2006). The document “Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools” (2009) provides a resource for principals to support the work of EAs in the province. Principals need to take responsibility for making certain that teachers have the competencies, knowledge and skills to work collaboratively with EAs in the classroom. They can begin by providing the documents “Educational Assistants in Manitoba Schools” (The Government of Manitoba, 2009), and “Teachers & Educational Assistants: Roles and Responsibilities (Manitoba Teachers’ Society, 2004) for all the staff in the school followed by a professional development in-service for all teachers and educational assistants to ensure that everyone has read and understood the documents. This introduction to teacher and educational assistant roles and responsibilities could be followed by professional development in-services for both teachers and EAs facilitated by Teacher Action Cohorts. To be successful, teachers and paraeducators must view themselves as teams and partners in the educational process (Gerlach, 2002). Teachers can cultivate competencies for working with EAs (Morgan & Ashbaker, 2001). The development of teacher relationships with EAs requires patience (Trautman, 2004). Collaboratively, teachers and EAs are more effective than working in isolation or at cross purposes (Giangreco et al, 2005). School districts and school administrators can play a role in helping teachers and EAs develop the competencies required to work collaboratively (Wallace et al, 2001; Groom 2006; Gerlach, 2007; Giangreco et al, 2000-2001;

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Grieve, 2003)

An opposing argument to the significance of school administrators playing a key role in helping teachers develop the competencies for collaborating with educational assistants may focus on placing the responsibility on pre-service teacher credentialing institutions. Minnesota and Washington State (in the USA) have already incorporated provisions into their teacher credentialing systems requiring teacher education programs to develop curriculum content to prepare teachers for their roles collaborating with paraprofessionals (Pickett, 1999). These American initiatives may be a harbinger of things to come in Canada regarding pre-service teacher education.

It is important to know that the findings from the research data and the information gleaned from the literature indicate that teachers should be prepared for working with educational assistants through pre-service teacher credentialing (Pickett, 1999) as well as during in-service professional development opportunities championed by administrators. As a result of organizing the data and reviewing the literature I learned that in Manitoba, all teacher candidates are required to take six credit hours of special education/diversity coursework and there is a minimum requirement of 24 weeks of student teaching practicum during which time teacher candidates have the opportunity to develop skills for working collaboratively with EAs (Young, personal communication, August, 29, 2011). An examination of current pre-service teacher education practices of the preparation of teachers to work with educational assistants in the province was not within the scope of this study. The major lessons learned from this study point to the potential value of pre-service training to begin preparing teacher candidates for working

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

with EAs and the value of on-going professional development support following induction.

Faculties of Education and school administrators may be interested in what the interview participants for this study had to say about how they should or could have been (better) prepared for their work with educational assistants.

In conclusion, I have highlighted the perspectives of four novice teachers with two years or less teaching experience and four veteran teachers with ten years or more teaching experience working with EAs in various school settings in Manitoba; the data collected for this study is linked to the literature. The data and the literature lead to a framework that focuses on Manitoba teachers' experiences with and views on co-constructing collaborative classrooms with educational assistants. In the next section, I will relate the purpose of the framework to the purpose of the study.

Relationship of the Framework to the Purpose of the Study

In Chapter One, three major problems were identified which this research addressed: (i) the rapid increase in the use of EAs, (ii) their centrality to the development of the special education policy of inclusion; and (iii) Manitoba Teacher Society concern about the lack of training for either EAs or teachers working with EAs. There is also a shortage of research regarding teachers' views on the competencies that they perceive are needed for their work with EAs, how they were prepared for their work, and how they should or could have been (better) prepared for their work with EAs. The findings organized by the framework provide formal articulation of the issues to illustrate the need for collaboration within the school community. The need for pre-service introduction to working with educational assistants as well as on-going

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

professional development opportunities following induction to enhance teachers' capacity for working with educational assistants is evident. All three research problems were illustrated in the articulated framework through the discussion reflecting the formal research data collected in this study.

The purpose of this qualitative research study was to focus on the experience of Manitoba teachers with and views on co-constructing collaborative classrooms with educational assistants. Specifically: (a) What are teacher's experiences with working with educational assistants in the classroom (what roles do they perceive EAs to perform in the classroom); (b) What are teachers' views on the competencies that are needed for them to work well with educational assistants; (c) How were they prepared for their work with educational assistants; and (d) How, or where should or could teachers be (better) prepared for their work with educational assistants. The absence of information on these topics from a Canadian perspective was achieved through the collection of interview data from participants in this study. The conceptual framework articulated in this study illustrates the need for communication and collaboration between various invested interests. My ultimate goal was to identify and articulate some of the perceived challenges teachers face when working with EAs in the school context. The framework, with its accompanying discussion focused on the perceptions of Manitoba teachers views on collaborating with educational assistants in their classroom. The articulation of this framework completes the examination of the problem identified in this study and the purpose for completing the study. It also provides a departure point for future researchers focusing on the experiences of Manitoba, or Canadian

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

teachers with and views on working with educational assistants in their classroom. The next section provides practice implications of the research.

Practice Implications of the Research

In this section, I will present the three major implications of the findings of this study. The three areas which will be discussed are: (a) the need for teachers' awareness regarding competencies; (b) the need for pre-service introduction to working with educational assistants; and (c) the need for effective in-service professional development.

Need for Teacher Awareness Regarding Competencies

I grew up within a culture and period in history when women who had careers were either teachers or a nurse. As I was really good at entertaining or occupying my younger cousins, the older women in my family used to say, "Oh, she should be a teacher"! During my teens I did the usual things in my community that allowed me to occupy teacher roles; I taught Sunday School, Vacation Bible School, I was a camp counselor, story reader at the library and day care worker. As an adult I became a school parent volunteer, educational assistant and eventually school teacher. All those years I carried with me the idea or belief that in order to become a teacher, or be a teacher, all I needed was to be good with kids. Other attributes or competencies for being a teacher never entered my mind. My vision of teacher was that of solitary educator in a classroom filled with engaged learners. Another adult in the classroom never entered the picture I had in my mind of being a teacher even though I had worked as an educational assistant. So it may also be with other individuals in the teaching profession.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

All the interview participants in this research study reflected on the value of competencies such as organizational skills, the ability to collaborate with others and strong communication skills for working with educational assistants; respect was noticeably enmeshed with each of these three competencies. Giangreco, (2003) expressed the need for teachers to be engaged teaching partners. Engaged teaching partners have the competency to direct the work of educational assistants in the classroom as opposed to hosting their company in the room. Teacher engagement means having the competency to plan and organize tasks that are appropriate for the EA to support, the ability to collaborate with EAs in the execution of the tasks and the competency to maintain an instructional dialogue (Giangreco, 1997; Giangreco, 2003). Engaged classroom teachers need to have the competency to decide what is appropriate for the EA to do and what is not. What Giangreco (2003) did not articulate is when or how or where teachers learn to become engaged teaching partners. Moreover, how long does it take to become an engaged teaching partner? Does anyone assist the teacher in this process of becoming an engaged teaching partner, or is it a solitary journey? Individuals considering the teaching profession would be well advised to explore contemporary school settings and observe teacher roles. Specifically, how teachers organize the work for EAs in the classroom, how they collaborate with EAs and how they communicate with them. Then, individuals should engage in a process of self-examination taking a personal inventory regarding the competencies required for working with an educational assistant in the school setting.

The competencies required for working with educational assistants may not be something that pre-service training can fully prepare teacher candidates for, other than by providing an

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

awareness of competencies required for working with EAs and the awareness of EA roles and responsibilities; the development of the competencies themselves may occur across the span of a teachers' career. The data from this research showed that teachers are sometimes challenged with the competencies to work with educational assistants in the school context. However, some interview participants believe that they will develop those competencies through experience.

Need for Pre-service Introduction to Working with EAs

Throughout the discussion of the findings in the articulated framework, it has been emphasized that teachers perceived a need for pre-service training to work with educational assistants, particularly in regards to the clarity of the roles and responsibilities of teachers and EAs in supporting appropriate educational programming for students with special needs. During the interviews, teachers reflected on the brevity of pre-service discussion concerning the role of the educational assistant, and a perceived absence of how a teacher collaborates with or manages and co-constructs a collaborative classroom with EAs.

There is a perceived need for pre-service training to provide clarity regarding teacher and educational assistant roles and responsibilities and how awareness of roles and responsibilities contributes to co-constructing collaborative classrooms. Perhaps Faculties of Education are already providing information and encouraging dialogue about the appropriate roles for educational assistants and the distinction between teachers' roles and responsibilities and EA roles and responsibilities. It is not the intention of this study to point fingers to, or find fault with pre-service teacher preparation programs in the province or anywhere else; the purpose of the study was to focus on Manitoba teachers' experiences and views on working with educational

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

assistants and document the data.

Need for On-Going Professional Development

Nearly every interview participant reflected on the need for on-going professional development for teachers and teacher/educational assistant teams. For professional development to be effective, recent literature has emphasized the need for it to be “based on careful needs analysis linked to evidence of existing practice and thus, targeted training” (Craft, 2000, cited in Zaretsky, 2010). In Winnipeg, The Manitoba Teachers Society (MTS) offers professional development workshops facilitated by Teacher Action Cohorts on various topics related to teachers working with educational assistants. Teachers need access to professional development opportunities in working with EAs that is immediately useful and transferable to their situation. MTS Teacher Action Cohort workshops identify and discuss various scenarios with teachers working with educational assistants, specifically issues that may arise in the classroom and how to handle them. In addition to access to formal professional development workshops, teachers need professional development opportunities *within their work context*; for example opportunities to meet with the EAs that they work with for the purpose of planning activities and student supports. Professional development activities need to take place in schools between colleagues as a team.

Implications for Further Research

This research study about what teachers have to say about working with educational assistants is the first of its kind, to my knowledge, in Canada. The results from the study are not

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

comprehensive. Therefore, they do not articulate the experiences of all teachers in all provinces and schools across the country. I will suggest ten research topics which could be explored to enhance the findings of this research or offer additional insights into the teacher/educational assistant dynamic. These potential research topics include:

1. Now that there is data about what teachers have to say about collaborating with educational assistants, it would be useful to have observational data from the classroom context. Questions deserving further research are (i) how do roles and classroom structures play out in the interaction between teachers and EAs; (ii) what kind of situations between teachers and EAs stimulate or support changes; (iii) are there ideal educational assistants; (iv) are there specific skills EAs should have; and (v) should there be credentialing of EAs?
2. Research concerning what teachers have to say about collaborating with educational assistants across a larger geographic area in Manitoba as well as Canada. This research could support and enhance the current study provided here.
3. A study of what educational assistants have to say about collaborating with teachers in Manitoba as well as other Canadian provinces.
4. A comparative study on the roles and responsibilities of teachers and educational assistants across Canada.
5. A study on the effect of supervision or mentorship of beginning teachers who work with educational assistants.
6. A comparative study of beginning and experienced teacher/educational assistant teams

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

over a period of time for the purpose of exploring the relationship building process.

7. A comparative study on the outcome of teacher/educational assistant professional development workshops.
8. A study of the amount of time and training allotted to pre-service teacher education in regards to preparing teachers to work with an educational assistant.
9. A study about how teachers develop the competency to work with educational assistants.
10. A comparative study of effective teacher/educational assistant teams.
11. A study of pre-service teachers working with educational assistants during student teaching practicum.

These are just a few of the many research studies which could be conducted to support or enhance the findings of this study.

Conclusion

In this research study, I examined a small group of Manitoba teachers for their experiences with and views on collaborating with educational assistants in the school setting. It is evident that teachers in the province perceive EAs to perform a variety of tasks based on students' need in the context. It became apparent that some teachers may be challenged with the competencies required for collaborating with educational assistants. All teachers in the study reported learning to work with educational assistants through observation, either during the student teaching practicum or following induction. Two out of the eight interview participants noted prior work experience managing adults in other agencies as providing transferable skills for managing the work of educational assistants in the school setting. All of the participants in

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

this study noted pre-service training, workshops and professional development as well as access to on-going professional development as recommendations for how teachers should be prepared to work with educational assistants.

References

- Appl, D. (2006). First-year early childhood special education teachers and their assistants: "Teaching along with her." *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 38, 34-40.
- American Psychological Association. (2001). *Publication manual of the American Psychological Association*. Washington, D.C.: American Psychological Association.
- Bauman, D., Silla, V., & Stufft, D. (2010). First and second year teachers' comfort and training for working with paraeducators. *The International Journal of Learning*, 17, 3, 501-507.
- Blais, J. (2005). A history of special education in Manitoba. *Education Manitoba*, 3, 3, 4-5.
- Bodgan, R., & Knopp Biklen, S. (2007) *Qualitative research for education: An introduction to theories and methods* (5th ed.). Don Mills, Ont.: Allyn & Bacon.
- Calder, I. & Grieve, A. (2004). Working with other adults: What teachers need to know. *Educational Studies*, 30, 2, 113-125.
- Canada Teachers' Federation Research and Information Services, (2009). Issue Brief on Teachers' Assistants. Retrieved from www.ctf-fce.ca.
- Carnahan, C. R., Williamson, P., Clarke, L., & Sorenson, R. (2009). A systematic approach for supporting paraeducators in educational settings: A guide for teachers. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 41(5), 34-43.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Carroll, D. (2001). Considering paraeducator training roles and responsibilities. *Teaching Exceptional children*, 34, 60-65.

Christie, K. (2005). Paraprofessionals on the front line. *Phi Delta Kappan*, 87, 181-182.

Cichoski, E., Backus, L., Giangreco, M. F., Sherman-Tucker, P. (2000). *Paraeducator entry-level training for supporting students with disabilities (Instructor and participant manuals)*. Stillwater, OK: National Clearinghouse of Rehabilitation Training Materials.

Clancy, J. (2002). Worries over new teachers training assistants. *Tess Magazine*. Retrieved from <http://www.tes.co.uk/article.aspx?storycode=370841>.

Cobb, C. (2007). Training paraprofessionals to effectively work with all students. *Reading Together*, 60, 686-689.

Conroy, P. W. (2007). Paraeducators and students with visual impairments: Potential pitfalls and solutions. *Review*, 39, 2, 43-55.

Creswell, J. W. (2007, 1998). *Qualitative inquiry and research design: Choosing among five traditions* (2nd Ed). Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage.

Creswell, J. W. (2009). *Research design: Qualitative, quantitative, and mixed methods approaches*. (3rd ed.). London: Sage.

Daniels, V. I. & McBride, A. (2001). Paraeducators as critical team members: Redefining roles and responsibilities. *NASSP Bulletin*, 85, 623, 66-74.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

- Devlin, P. (2008). Create effective teacher-paraprofessional teams. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 44(1), 41-44.
- Doyle, M. B. (2002). The paraprofessional's guide to the inclusive classroom: Working as a team (2nd ed.). Baltimore: Paul H. Brookes.
- Drecktrah, M. E. (2000). Preservice teachers' preparation to work with paraeducators. *The Journal of the Teacher Education Division of the Council of Exceptional Children*, 23, 2.
- French, N. K. (1997). Management of paraeducators. In A. L. Pickett & K. Gerlach (Eds), *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach* (pp.103-109). Austin, TX: Pro Ed.
- French, N. K. (1998). Working together: Resource teachers and paraeducators. *Remedial and Special Education*, 19, 357-368.
- French, N. K. (2003). Managing para-educators in your school: How to hire, train, and supervise non-certified staff. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin Press.
- French, N. K. (2010). An introduction to working effectively with paraeducators. *Special Connections*. Retrieved from <http://www.specialconnections.ku.edu>.
- French, N. K. (2010). Supervising paraeducators - - What every teacher should know. *Council for Exceptional Children*. Retrieved from cec.sped.org.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

French, N. K. & Chopra, R. (1999). Parent perspectives on the roles of paraprofessionals.

Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps, 24, 259-272.

French, N. K., & Pickett, A. L. (1997). Paraprofessionals in special education: Issues for teacher educators. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 20(1), 61-73.

Freschi, D. F. (1999). Guidelines for working with one-to-one aides. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 31, 4, 42-45.

Frith, G. H. & Lindsey, J. D. (1982). Certification, training and programmic issues affecting special education paraprofessionals: A state of the art. *Journal of Special Education*, 16, 229-236.

Frontier Centre for Public Policy: Ideas for a better tomorrow. Retrieved from

<http://www.fcpp.org/education.php>

Gay, L. R. & Airasian, P. (2000). *Educational Research: Competencies for analysis and application* (6th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Merrill.

Genzok, M. (1997). *Diversifying the teaching force: Preparing paraeducators as teachers*.

Washington, D.C. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No. 406362)

Gerlach, K. (2001). *Let's team up! A checklist for paraeducators, teachers, and principals*.

Washington, DC: National Education Association.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Gerlach, K. (2002). Teamwork: Key to success for teachers and paraeducators. *Impact: Feature Issue on Paraeducators Supporting Students with Disabilities and At-Risk*, 15, 2.

Minneapolis: University of Minnesota, Institute on Community Integration. Available from <http://ici.umn.edu/products/impact/152>.

Giangreco, M. F. (2001). A guide to schoolwide planning for paraeducator supports. Retrieved from <http://www.uvm.edu/~cdci/parasupport/downloads/guide.pdf>.

Giangreco, M. F. (1997). Helping or hovering? Effects of instructional assistant proximity on students with disabilities. *Exceptional Children*, 64, 1, 7-18.

Giangreco, M. F. (2003). Working with paraprofessionals. *Educational Leadership*, 61, 2, 50-53.

Giangreco, M.F. & Doyle, M. B. (2002) Students with disabilities and paraprofessional supports: Benefits, balance, and band-aids. *Focus on Exceptional Children*, 34(7), 1-12.

Giangreco, M. F., Broer, S. M., & Edelman, S. W. (2001). Teacher engagement with students with disabilities: Differences between paraprofessional service delivery models. *Journal of the Association for Persons with Severe Handicaps*, 26, 75–86.

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S., & Broer, S. (2003). Schoolwide planning to improve paraeducator supports. *Council for Exceptional Children*, 70, 1, 63-79.

Giangreco, M. F., Edelman, S. W., Broer, S.M., & Doyle, M.B. (2001). Paraprofessional support of students with disabilities: Literature from the past decade. *Exceptional Children*, 68,

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

45-63.

Giangreco, M. F., Yuan, S., McKenzie, B., Cameron, P., Fialka, J. (2005). "Be careful what you wish for . . ." Five reasons to be concerned about the assignment of individual paraprofessionals. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 37, 5, 28-34.

Government of Manitoba (2005). *Bill 13: The Public Schools Amendment Act (Appropriate Educational Programming)*. Winnipeg, MB: Author.

Government of Manitoba. Educational assistants in Manitoba schools. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/ed_assistants/educational_assistants.pdf.

Hauge, J.M. & Babkie, A.M. (2006). Develop collaborative special educator-paraprofessional teams: One Paras' view. *Intervention in School and Clinic*, 42 (1), 51-53.

Jones, K. H., & Bender, W.N. (1993). Utilization of paraprofessionals in special education: A review of the literature. *Remedial and Special Education*, 14, 7-14.

Katsiyannis, A. (2000). Paraeducators: Legal and practice considerations. *Remedial & Special Education*, 21, 5, 297-304.

Kilgore, K. L., & Griffen, C. C. (1998). Beginning special educators: Problems of practice and the influence of school context. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 21, 155-173.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

- Killoran, J., Templeman, T. P., Peters, J., & T. Udell (2001). Identifying paraprofessional competencies for early intervention and early childhood special education. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 34*, 34, 68-73.
- Kirby, S. L., Greaves, L., & Reid, C. (2007). *Experience research social change*. Peterborough, ON: Broadview Press.
- Laarhoven, T., Munk, D., Lynch, K., Bosma, J., & Rouse J. (2007). A model for preparing special and general education preservice teachers for inclusive education. *Journal of Teacher Education, 58*, 5, 440-455.
- Mahfood, S. (2008). The dynamics of student teaching: Bringing paraeducators into the discussion. *Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy in Special Education in the Graduate College of the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign*. Urbana, Illinois.
- Manitoba Education, Citizenship and Youth (2005). *Appropriate educational programming in Manitoba: Preliminary report*. Winnipeg, MB.
- Manitoba Education and Training (2009). *Educational assistants in Manitoba schools*. Retrieved from http://www.edu.gov.mb.ca/k12/docs/support/ed_assistants/educational_assistants.pdf
- Manitoba Laws. (2011). *The Education Administration Act*. Retrieved from <http://web2.gov.mb.ca/laws/statutes/ccsm/e010e.php>.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Manitoba Teachers' Society. *Teacher Action Cohorts*. Retrieved from

<http://www.mbteach.org/professional-development/tacs.html>.

McGrath, M. Z., Johns, B. H., & Mathur, S. R. (2010). Empowered or overpowered? Strategies for working effectively with paraprofessionals. *Beyond Behavior*, 19(2), 2-6.

McKenzie, A. R. & Lewis, S. (2008). The role and training of paraeducators who work with students who are visually impaired. *Journal of Visual Impairment and Blindness*, 102, 8, 459-471.

McRuer, G. (January, 2010). A synopsis of student support services provided by Manitoba public schools. Unpublished report for Manitoba Teachers' Society, Winnipeg, MB.

McRuer, G. (April, 2010b). [Full-time equivalent number of clinician personnel per Manitoba public school division and district (September 2009)]. Unpublished raw data for the Manitoba Teachers' Society, Winnipeg, MB.

Minondo, S. Meyer, L. H. & Xin, J. F. (2001). The role and responsibilities of teaching assistants in inclusive education: What's appropriate? *Journal of the Association of Person's with Severe Handicaps*, 26, 114-119.

Morgan, J. & Ashbaker, B. (2001). *A guide to working with paraeducators and other classroom aides*. Alexandria, VA: Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD).

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Morgan, J., Ashbaker, B., & Forbush (1998). Strengthening the teaching team: Teachers and paraprofessionals working together. *Support for Learning, 13*, 3.

Morrisette, D., Morrisette, P., Julien, R., (2002). Paraeducators in education. *Essays in Education*. Department of Education at the University of South Carolina. Retrieved from <http://www.usca.edu/essays/vol32002/morrisette1.pdf>.

Mueller, P. H. (1997). *A study of the roles, training needs, and support needs of Vermont's paraeducators*. Unpublished dissertation. University of Vermont, Burlington.

National Joint Committee on Learning Disabilities. (1998, February). Learning Disabilities: Use of Paraprofessionals. New York: National Center for Learning Disabilities. (ERIC Document Reproduction Service No: ED 429412).

Nevin, A., Villa, R. A., & Thousand, J. S. (2009). *A guide to co-teaching with paraeducators: Practical tips for K-12 educators*. Thousand Oaks, CA: Corwin.

Parsons, M.B., & Reid, D. H. (1999). Training basic teaching skills to paraprofessionals of students with severe disabilities: A one-day program. *Teaching Exceptional Children, 31*(4), 48-55.

Pickett, A. L. (1986). Certified partners: Four good reasons for certification of paraprofessionals. *American Educator, 10*, 3, 31-47.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Pickett, A. L. (1999). Strengthening and supporting teacher/provider-paraeducator teams:

Guidelines for paraeducator roles, supervision and preparation. *National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals in Education & Related Services: Center for Advanced Study in Education Graduate Center, City University of New York*. Retrieved from ERIC at www.eric.ed.

Pickett, A. L., & Gerlach, K. (Eds.). (1997). *Supervising paraeducators in school settings: A team approach*. Austin, TX: Pro Ed.

Pickett, A.L., Gerlach, K., Morgan, R., Likins, M., & Wallace, T. (2007). *Paraeducators in schools: Strengthening the educational team*. Austin, TX: Pro-Ed.

<http://www.proedinc.com/customer/productView.aspx?ID=3972>

Radaszewski-Byrne, M. (1997). Issues in the development of guidelines for the preparation and use of speech-language paraprofessionals and the SL supervisors working in educational settings. *Journal of Children's Communication Development*, 18, 5 m- 21.

Ramsey, J. (2007). A case study of an effective working relationship involving an educational assistant and an educator. Queens University Canada, 111. Retrieved from ProQuest

<http://www.nea.org/home/34078.htm>.

Riggs, C. G. (2002). Providing administrative support for classroom paraeducators: What's a building administrator to do? *Rural Special Education Quarterly*, 21, 10-14.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Riggs, C. G. (May/June 2004). To Teachers: What paraeducators want you to know. *Teaching Exceptional Children*, 36(5), 8-12.

Rosales, J. (2002). Para-teacher partnerships: What's the secret behind successful teacher-para relationships? *National Education Association*. Retrieved from <http://www.nea.org/home/34078.htm>.

Salzberg, C. L., & Morgan, J. (1995). Preparing teachers to work with paraeducators. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 18, 49-55.

Salzberg, C.L., Morgan, J., Gassman, G., Pickett, A.L. & Merrill, Z. (1993). *Enhancing skills of paraeducators: A video-assisted training program*. Logan, UT: Utah State University, Department of Special Education and Rehabilitation.

Spencer, L., Ritchie, J., Lewis, J. & Dillon, L. (2003). Quality in qualitative evaluation: A framework for assessing research evidence. *National Center for Social Research*. Retrieved from www.civilservice.gov.uk.

Stahl, B. J. & Lorenz, G. (1995). *Views on paraprofessionals*. St. Paul, MN: Minnesota Department of Children, Families and Learning. Retrieved from <http://www.BooksNow.com/Exceptional Children.htm>.

Steckelberg, A. L., Vasa, S. F., Kemp, S. E., Arthaud, T. J., Asselin, S. B., Swain, K., & Fennick, E. (2007). A web-based training model for preparing teachers to supervise paraeducators. *Teacher Education and Special Education*, 30(1), 52-56.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Strawderman, C., & Lindsey, P. (1995). Keeping up with the times: Reform in teacher education.

Journal of Teacher Education, 46, 2, 95-101.

Tejero Hughes, M., & Martinez Valle-Riestra, Diana (2008). Responsibilities, preparedness and job satisfaction of paraprofessionals: Working with young children with disabilities.

International Journal of Early Years Education, 16, 2, 163-173.

Tobin, R. (2006). Five ways to facilitate the teacher assistant's work in the classroom.

TEACHING Exceptional Children Plus, 2(6), Article 4. Available at

<http://escholarship.bcedu/education/tecplus/vol2/iss6/art4/>.

Trautman, M. (2004). Preparing and managing paraprofessionals. *Intervention in School &*

Clinic, 39, 3, 131-138.

University of St. Thomas. Minneapolis, Minnesota. Retrieved from @ www.stthomas.edu.

U.S. Department of Education. Retrieved from <http://www.ed.gov/>.

Wallace, T. (1997). *The role of paraprofessionals in effective transition programs.* Unpublished doctoral dissertation, University of Minnesota, Minneapolis.

Wallace, T., Shin, J., Bartholomay, T., & Stahl, B. (2001). Knowledge and skills for teachers supervising the work of paraprofessionals. *The Council for Exceptional Children, 67, 4, 520-533.*

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

Wolfensberger, W. (1972). *The principle of normalization in human services*. Toronto: National Institute on Mental Retardation.

Wolfensberger, W. (1998). A brief introduction to Social Role Valorization: A high-order concept for addressing the plight of societally devalued people, and for structuring human services. (3rd ed.). Syracuse, NY: Training Institute for Human Service Planning, Leadership and Change Agency (Syracuse University).

Zaretsky, J., (2011). "Educational assistants: Building blocks or stumbling blocks". Presented at Manitoba Teacher's Society workshop. Available from jzaretsky@mbteach.org.

Zaretsky, J., (2010). A study of northern Manitoba principal's perspectives regarding new special education legislation. Unpublished doctoral publication. University of Manitoba, Winnipeg, MB.

Appendix A

Letter to School District Superintendent

March 2, 2011

Dear Superintendent:

My name is Rosemary Vogt, and I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. For my thesis, I am conducting a research study involving teachers working with educational assistants. The purpose of the study is to examine teacher's experiences working with educational assistants. I would like permission to contact principals in schools in your division for the purpose of recruiting interview participants. I am looking for 4 interview participants who have less than two years of teaching experience and 4 participants who have ten years or more of teaching experience working with an educational assistant in the classroom. Potential benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to receive feedback about the study results and a greater understanding of teachers' practice working with educational assistants.

Participants will be asked to participate in a one-time face to face interview at a time and place which is mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. As a token of appreciation, interview participants will receive a \$25.00 gift certificate for McNally Robinson Bookstore. All interviews will be audio taped and transcribed verbatim. A copy of the transcript will be sent to

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

each respective interviewee for validation. These are the interview questions I will ask:

1. What role do educational assistants perform in your classroom?
2. What competencies do you consider important in your work with educational assistants?
3. How were you prepared for working with an educational assistant?
4. How do you think teachers should be prepared for this role?

At no point will any of the participants' names or any closely identifying information be included in any documents generated from this study. All information received from participants will be kept in an area to which only the researcher involved in this study will have access. For the interviewees, participants will be given pseudonyms at the onset of the study. I will remove names, locations and other identifying information to ensure anonymity. Identifying roles will be excluded to avoid specific identification. Consent forms will be stored in a separate place from the data collected. Any electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. Any print media such as notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Transcription of the audio tapes will be completed by the researcher and will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home. Only the researcher, Rosemary Vogt and the thesis advisor, Dr. Marlene Atleo will have access to the data. Electronic media will be deleted, and any print media such as notes will be disposed of in the confidential trash at the University of Manitoba and shredded following the successful defense of the thesis.

If you agree to grant permission for teachers in your school division to participate in this study, you will be required to provide a signature indicating your approval. A similar process will occur for school principals prior to contacting teachers at their school. The approach taken to utilize

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

and secure the appropriate approvals will be based on your recommendations.

This research project has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at *** or ***. In addition, you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Marlene Atleo at ***. Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Vogt

Appendix B

Letter to Principal

Dear Principal:

My name is Rosemary Vogt, and I am a Master's student in the Faculty of Education at the University of Manitoba. For my thesis, I am conducting a research study involving teachers working with educational assistants. The purpose of the study is to examine teacher's experiences working with educational assistants. I would like permission to contact teachers in schools in your division for the purpose of recruiting interview participants. I am looking for 4 interview participants who have less than two years of teaching experience and 4 participants who have ten years or more of teaching experience working with an educational assistant in the classroom. Potential benefits of participating in this study include the opportunity to receive feedback about the study results and a greater understanding of teachers' practice working with educational assistants.

Participants will be asked to participate in a one-time face to face interview at a time and place which is mutually agreed upon by the participant and the researcher. As a token of appreciation, interview participants will receive a \$25.00 gift certificate for McNally Robinson Bookstore. All interviews will be audio taped and transcribed verbatim. A copy of the transcript will be sent to each respective interviewee for validation. These are the interview questions I will ask:

1. What role do educational assistants perform in your classroom?
2. What competencies do you consider important in your work with educational assistants?
3. How were you prepared for working with an educational assistant?
4. How do you think teachers should be prepared for this role?

At no point will any of the participants' names or any closely identifying information be included in any documents generated from this study. All information received from participants will be kept in an area to which only the researcher involved in this study will have access. For the interviewees, participants will be given pseudonyms at the onset of the study. I will remove

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

names, locations and other identifying information to ensure anonymity. Identifying roles will be excluded to avoid specific identification. Consent forms will be stored in a separate place from the data collected. Any electronic data will be stored on a password protected computer. Any print media such as notes will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in my home. Transcription of the audio tapes will be completed by the researcher and will be stored in a locked cabinet in my home. Only the researcher, Rosemary Vogt and the thesis advisor, Dr. Marlene Atleo will have access to the data. Electronic media will be deleted, and any print media such as notes will be disposed of in the confidential trash at the University of Manitoba and shredded following the successful defense of the thesis.

If you agree to grant permission for teachers in your school to participate in this study, you will be required to provide a signature indicating your approval. The approach taken to utilize and secure the appropriate approvals will be based on your recommendations.

This research project has been approved by the University of Manitoba Education and Nursing Research Ethics Board (ENREB). If you have any questions or would like more information, please do not hesitate to contact me at ***. In addition, you may contact my faculty advisor, Dr. Marlene Atleo at ***. Thank you for your time. I look forward to hearing from you.

Sincerely,
Rosemary Vogt

Appendix C

Volunteer Recruitment

I, Rosemary Vogt, a graduate student at the University of Manitoba, am engaging in research that will examine the experiences of teachers working with educational assistants in the classroom.

I am looking for four volunteers who have less than two years of teaching experience and four volunteers who have more than ten years of teaching experience working with an educational assistant in the classroom. Volunteers should be willing to spend about up to one hour in a face to face interview with the principle researcher (Rosemary Vogt) during which time participants in the study will be asked to consider the following research questions:

1. What role do educational assistants perform in your classroom?
2. What competencies do you consider important in your work with educational assistants?
3. How were you prepared for working with an educational assistant?
4. How do you think teachers should be prepared for this role?

Participation in this study is voluntary and you may withdraw from the study at any time by simply telling the researcher that you no longer wish to participate.

As a token of appreciation for participation in this study, you will receive a \$25.00 gift certificate for McNally Robinson Bookstore.

If you may be willing to participate, please contact me by email at umvogtr@cc.umanitoba.ca , or by telephone at my home at ***, my cell phone ***, or my office at ***.

Sincerely,

Rosemary Vogt

Appendix D

Consent Form

Project Title: What teachers have to say about Working with Educational Assistants

Researcher: Rosemary Vogt, Graduate Student; Dr. Marlene Atleo (supervising professor)

This consent form, a copy of which will be left with you for your records and reference, is only part of the process of informed consent. It should give you the basic idea of what the research is about and what your participation will involve. If you would like more detail about something mentioned here, or information not included here, you should feel free to ask. Please take the time to read this carefully and to understand any accompanying information.

This study is being conducted by Rosemary Vogt, a Master's of Education student at the University of Manitoba in Winnipeg, Manitoba Canada. This is a project for Rosemary's Master's thesis, and the supervising professor is Dr. Marlene Atleo. If you have questions about this study, please contact Dr. Atleo at atleo@cc.umanitoba.ca or Rosemary Vogt at umvogtr@cc.umanitoba.ca. The purpose of this study is to examine WHAT TEACHERS HAVE TO SAY about working with educational assistants.

You were asked to participate in this study due to your willingness to participate and your role as a teacher working with an educational assistant in the classroom.

You are asked to consent to participate in one face to face interview which may last up to one hour. The time and place of the face to face interview will be determined by mutual convenience. The interview will be audio-recorded and transcribed verbatim by the researcher or a confidential transcriber and will explore what you have to say about working with educational assistants. I will ask:

1. What role do educational assistants perform in your classroom?
2. What competencies do you consider important in your work with educational assistants?
3. How were you prepared for working with an educational assistant?
4. How do you think teachers should be prepared for this role?

A copy of the interview transcript will be returned to by e-mail so that you can check the accuracy of my representation of what you have said, which may take about one more hour of your time. The audio tapes will be destroyed after you have checked the transcripts for accuracy and any required editing has occurred. The transcript data from the audio tapes will be kept for a period of seven years, and then confidentially destroyed. There are no expected risks involved in

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

this study. Benefits include the opportunity to receive feedback about the study results, and a greater understanding of your practice directing the work of educational assistants. As a token of sincere appreciation for participation in this study, you will receive a \$25.00 gift certificate for McNally Robinson Bookstore.

I will be presenting the completed research paper to my supervising professor, Dr. Marlene Atleo, the thesis review committee Dr. Thomas Falkenberg and Dr. Jon Young. I anticipate the publication of the thesis on the Canada Dissertation and Thesis portal. I may be using some direct quotations transcribed from our interview. I will make all efforts to remove any specific, identifying information to ensure that your identity will be kept confidential.

Please understand that you are free to withdraw your consent and discontinue your participation in this study at any time without prejudice or consequence. Please be assured that your confidentiality will be maintained at all times. At no time will your name or any closely identifying information be included in any documents generated from this study. You may choose a pseudonym for yourself if you like. All interview information received from you will be stored digitally by pseudonym on a computer to which only the researcher involved in the study will have access. The informed consent sheet containing your name will not be kept with the interview data, and will be stored in a locked drawer in the researcher's office where only she has access to it, avoiding the possibility of connecting your name to any information that you have given. You have the opportunity to request a copy of the summary of the study results.

The study has been approved by the Education/Nursing Ethics Review Board. If you have any questions about this study, please feel free to contact Rosemary Vogt at ***, or by email at umvogtr@cc.umanitoba.ca, or the course instructor Dr. Marlene Atleo at ***, or by email at atleo@cc.umanitoba.ca You may also call the Human Ethics Secretariat of the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board at (204) 474 7122 or by e-mail at Margaret_bowman@umanitoba.ca.

If you are interested in participating in this study, please read the following statement and sign and date it. One copy is yours.

I _____ agree to participate in this study. I understand that participation is voluntary and that I may withdraw from the study at any time by simply telling the researcher. I have read and understood the above description of the study. I understand that my privacy will be safeguarded as explained above. I understand that if I have any questions or concerns, I may contact the researcher and/or the Human Ethics Secretariat Board at the numbers given above.

Your signature on this form indicates that you have understood to your satisfaction the information regarding participation in the research project and agree to participate as a subject.

Co-Constructing Collaborative Classrooms

In no way does this waive your legal rights nor release the researcher, or involved institutions from their legal and professional responsibilities. You are free to withdraw from the study at any time, and/or refrain from answering questions you prefer to omit, without prejudice or consequence. Your continued participation should be as informed as your initial consent, so you should feel free to ask for clarification or new information throughout your participation.

This research has been approved by the Education/Nursing Research Ethics Board. If you have any concern or complaints about this project you may contact any of the above-named persons or the Human Ethics Secretariat. A copy of this consent form has been given to you to keep for your records and reference.

Signature of participant: _____ Date: _____

Signature of researcher: _____ Date: _____

I would like to receive a summary report of the findings:

_____ Yes _____ No

Please e-mail a summary report of the findings to:
