ABSTRACT

Measha Wilmer, TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL BEST PRACTICES (Under the direction of Dr. R. Martin Reardon). Department of Educational Leadership, May, 2024.

Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) asserted that teaching is a demanding job with unpredictable challenges which means that teachers' ability to be effective is partly dependent on their perceived self-efficacy. When teachers perceive their self-efficacy as waning, this may affect their commitment to their job and their willingness to implement instructional best practices. This poses a challenge for teachers' level of motivation and students' academic success as every student deserves quality instruction. The purpose of my study was to explore and alleviate a problem of practice regarding teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices. The participants in my study were teachers who worked at a rural middle school in the North Central area of North Carolina. They volunteered to participate in my study after being given detailed information about the procedures and ethical considerations. I used a parallel convergent mixed methods research design which means I collected and analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time. As a trained mentor, I implemented a mentorship and support initiative where I worked with participants to improve their instructional best practices and by extension, their self-efficacy. I administered the Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) Teacher Sense of Self-efficacy scale (TSES) to determine teachers' perception of their self-efficacy. While the data from the TSES were being analyzed, I conducted classroom observations over 2 weeks followed by post observation conferencing. I used the data from my classroom observations to inform my planning with participants for future lessons. Following my intervention, I made weekly visits to participants' classes to observe their implementation of instructional best practices then conducted post observation interviews to learn more about their

self-efficacy. I used the results to determine that associations could be made between teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices.

TEACHERS' SELF-EFFICACY AND THEIR IMPLEMENTATION OF INSTRUCTIONAL BEST PRACTICES

A Dissertation
Presented to the Faculty of the Department of Educational Leadership
East Carolina University

In Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Education in Educational Leadership

by
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May, 2024

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DEDICATION

For my children, Krista-Lee and Sebastian, who serve as my sources of motivation to aspire to and attain greatness, may my accomplishment fuel your love for learning.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

It took courage, sacrifice, and tenacity to begin and complete this journey and I remain grateful to all those who offered a word of encouragement, engaged me in a conversation about my problem of practice, shared resources, reviewed my writing or volunteered to participate in my research.

Sebastian, thank you for all your love and support, especially at times when my self-efficacy waned. I appreciate the hugs, pat on my shoulders or the comic relief that made the journey more bearable.

Krista-Lee, I admire your self-discipline and passion for learning so much that I persisted throughout my doctoral journey to ensure that I made you proud. Thank you for being so kind and helpful.

Mr. D, you have been very supportive and encouraging. Your words of encouragement made all the difference.

Dr. Reardon, we did it! You have gone above and beyond in your capacity as my dissertation Chair, and I remain grateful. Thank you!

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CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

The problem of practice on which I am focusing my study concerns the crucial and yet poorly cultivated relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of best practices. Teachers' beliefs about their ability to attain a goal is known as self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Teachers' beliefs guide how they filter their experiences and form thoughts that motivate their actions (Hoy et al., 2009). In essence, the views teachers have about students, school culture, and their purpose and duties will influence how they function in a school. If teachers believe that they cannot teach students because they are too challenging to deal with, then teachers would not explore and implement best practices to mitigate those challenges. The concept of self- efficacy, therefore, is worth exploring as a product or catalyst of school culture.

Teachers' self-efficacy is a factor in how they conduct themselves each day. According to Gibson and Dembo (1984), teachers who have heightened self-efficacy tend to "persist longer, provide a greater academic focus in the classroom, and exhibit different types of feedback than teachers who have lower expectations concerning their ability to influence student learning" (p. 570). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) found that teachers' self-efficacy had a significant impact on educational outcomes for both teachers and students. Other researchers have concurred with Tschannen-Moran and Hoy on the influence of teachers' self-efficacy as a factor in mediating teacher motivation and actions as well as student performance (Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2007). Consequently, self-efficacy has implications for how teachers do their jobs and cater to the needs of students.

Considering the literature regarding the value of teachers' self-efficacy, my study has implications for how schools perceive and support teachers' self-efficacy to maximize its value-added impact on quality education. My study has potential implications for instructional leaders

in comparable Title I schools in which teachers face challenges that may seem insurmountable. These schools, like mine, are likely to have a large percentage of students who face socio-economic issues and are on free and reduced lunch. If my study can provide insight into how to boost teachers' self-efficacy in such contexts, then the scale of equity would be at least somewhat tipped in the favor of disadvantaged students. In the following sections, I will provide the background to the problem of practice, the context of my study, and then the conceptual framework.

Background of the Problem of Practice

On Wednesday, September 15, 2021, at approximately 9:30 a.m., I sat at my rectangular, mahogany desk, which is adjacent to the entrance of the classroom, paralyzed by an overwhelming feeling of futility. The feeling was so overwhelming that I was unable to speak for fear of bursting out into tears. I was unable to teach my Grade 8 students who were present with me at the time. I was incapable of raising my motivation to try again. Some students stared in empathy at the look of defeat on my face; others dubiously scanned my face for cues that would tell them if they should join me in silence or proceed with their usual chatter. Wisdom cautioned them to sit in silence with me. It was at that moment that I knew I had to change the problem of practice on which I was planning to focus for my dissertation from culturally responsive teaching to teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of best practices. My self-efficacy had clearly been waning, but I never realized the impact of it until that day. I simply did not want to strategize and implement best practices to help my struggling readers or those Grade 8 students who were performing academically between kindergarten and Grade 3 level. It was as if my plummeting self-efficacy had immobilized me to the point that I felt there was no point in doing my job unless I intended to inflict emotional damage on myself and my young students.

As I sat at my desk, I resorted to my usual therapy for dealing with stressful situations- writing:

> This marks the day where I feel like I cannot handle the pressures of this job anymore. This must be my last year of teaching for my own sanity and self-preservation. There are kids who need me and my help, but I am in need too. I need respect, appreciation, and their willingness to stay true to the journey I have enlisted myself to help them on. I am losing my love and interest and today marks the day that I re-evaluate and plan my exit from the classroom.

I work at a Title I middle school where the challenges are many, but I had always been good at persevering despite those challenges. In essence, I thrived on intrinsic motivation. However, the day I sat at my desk with no belief in my capacity to do my job was the day I understood the plight of other teachers who have expressed their inability to teach because of discipline challenges, limited support from the leadership team, or their inability to fulfill their roles and responsibilities because they do not believe they can make a difference. The purpose of my study is to explore and alleviate a problem of practice with which I am also grappling and that I have observed as an issue in my school with colleagues at all grade levels. Further details will be discussed about the context of my school to anchor the problem of practice.

Administrators at Stellar Middle School (the pseudonym I have chosen to use for my school) had noted teachers' struggle with classroom management and had implemented a 4-week training session where I was invited to serve as a teacher leader/mentor for those teachers whose self-efficacy seemed to be waning. During that time, I observed teachers once per week and reported my findings to the administrative team without engaging with the participants. I questioned the impact of the process for me as a trained mentor as I observed teachers who were

not necessarily implementing instructional best practices, but, since I was asked to merely observe, I was unauthorized to offer the personalized support that some teachers needed and that would have benefited from. Thus, my problem of practice is one that needs to be addressed in the context of Stellar Middle School.

Context of the Study

Stellar Middle School is a Title I middle school in a rural area in the North Central area of North Carolina. There are approximately 551 students and 35 teachers. In 2022, the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) implemented statewide by the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction to track academic accountability at the school level outlined the demographic characteristic of Stellar Middle School as: 277 Blacks, 110 Hispanics, 133 Whites, 26 Mixed races, five Asians and, one American Indian. Information I retrieved from the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction indicated that during the 2019-2020 academic year Stellar Middle School was a low performing school with a performance grade of F. This means that Stellar Middle School was a low performing school where the EVAAS growth status was not met for the 2019-2020 academic year. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, a waiver exempted North Carolina schools from the school accountability data process so there was no performance grade for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Various stakeholders at Stellar Middle School have expressed their concerns about how teachers execute their duties as some seem to have mentally relinquished their posts as teachers (S. Grubbs, personal communication, February 9, 2021). This concern has been corroborated by administrators' observations of teachers not reinforcing rules or implementing best practices. Instead, teachers siphon their classroom challenges to administrators before attempting to address them because they do not believe they can do so. This results in an environment in which

young people with challenging family backgrounds (e.g., poverty, homelessness, violence, drug abuse, etc.) are being taught by demotivated teachers who have no confidence in their ability to provide quality education. This environment presents issues relating to social justice and equity in keeping with Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA, 2015) which dictated that disadvantaged students are to be provided equal opportunity to excel academically. In this current context, Stellar Middle School administrators perceive that my problem of practice is very relevant to the site as alleviating it may yield results that can impact teacher development and school culture.

Focus of the Problem of Practice

The focus of my study is teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices, namely differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching. The context of my study, Stellar Middle School, is a Title 1 school where some teachers display varying levels of self-efficacy and—as reported by administrators—this level of self-efficacy may be a contributing factor to teachers' feeling unmotivated to implement instructional best practices. The Assistant Principal's assessment of the situation was shared with me in my capacity as a teacher mentor who was asked to assist teachers with classroom management strategies. Consequently, my study is positioned to positively impact teachers' implementation of instructional best practices as they will learn about strategies that, when implemented effectively, can improve their classroom effectiveness. I contend that the effectiveness of their implementation of instructional best practices may then boost their self-efficacy and their confidence in their ability to do their job. The purpose of my study is to explore and alleviate a problem of practice regarding teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices at Stellar Middle School which is a Title I middle school in a rural area in the North Central area of North Carolina.

Problem of Practice Study Questions

My study is guided by the following questions:

Research Question 1: How do teachers at Stellar Middle School perceive their self-efficacy in their teaching capacity?

My rationale for asking this question is that teachers at Stellar Middle School work in a context where they have many duties to perform and their belief in their capability to perform these duties is the starting point for my research. When I understand what teachers believe about their self-efficacy then I can imply connections to their behaviors in their classrooms that may be related to their perceived self-efficacy.

Research Question 2: To what extent is it plausible to suggest an association at Stellar Middle School between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices in the classroom?

This question is pivotal to my research because after establishing teachers' perceived self-efficacy, I need to make plausible connections between it and their instructional practices. I want to suggest and substantiate a link between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their willingness to learn about and implement best practices regardless of the challenges they encounter in the classroom. My rationale is that self-efficacy could be the source of motivation (Lauermann & Berger, 2021) that can ignite a teacher's drive to implement tried-and-true instructional practices (Yost, 2002). While teachers are working in similar contexts, some implement effective instructional practices in their classrooms while others struggle to do so.

Research Question 3: To what extent is there an association between a teacher's involvement in a support intervention oriented to improving their proficiency with instructional

techniques and (a) their increased self- efficacy and (b) their implementation of instructional best practices in their classrooms?

My rationale for this question is that I want to understand the extent to which teachers' experience of being supported in their teaching can boost their self-efficacy and inspire them to implement instructional best practices. If I can make a plausible case for an association between my support intervention and participating teachers' increased use of instructional best practices, this would show a benefit to supporting teachers' development of proficiency.

Overview of Inquiry

In exploring teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices, I will use a mixed methods approach to collect and analyze data. The rationale for using this approach is that it utilizes both qualitative and quantitative methods and it gives a more detailed perspective than any one method could provide (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). Throughout the data collection process, I will collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time. This design, referred to as convergent parallel mixed method approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), involves my merging both qualitative and quantitative data to provide an in-depth analysis of the topic.

There are four distinct phases involved in my convergent parallel mixed method approach. During Phase 1, I will introduce my study to the staff of Stellar Middle School and invite them to participate in my study. Since I will observe and mentor participants, I will accept no more than three teachers. I will then administer the short form of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) which is well suited for a survey administration. I will commence Phase 2 with observations of participants using the NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric (https://www.dpi.nc.gov/educators/recruitment-support/educator-

standards; Standard II and Standard IV). Participating teachers will engage in a semi-structured interview as a post-observation exercise. I will also analyze data from the TSES and observations during Phase 2. Phase 3 is the implementation stage during which I will implement a teacher mentorship initiative. I will work with the participating teachers to improve their implementation of instructional best practices to ascertain if there is any association between their implementation of instructional best practices and their self-efficacy. Phase 4 will conclude with the analysis of data that I collected during Phase 3. I will also share my findings with the administrative team of Stellar Middle School in keeping with the confidentiality agreement of my participants.

During the four phases of data collection, I will be recording and analyzing data using specific procedures and software. I will administer the TSES in paper format then score the responses according to the protocol provided by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). I will be recording details about teachers' implementation of best practices on a paper copy of the NC DPI teacher evaluation rubric Standard II and Standard IV (see Appendix D). Microsoft suites applications will be used to store data. Additionally, I will be taking observational data notes (Mertler, 2019) so that I may later analyze how each teacher implemented their instructional strategies. I will voice record each interview then review the data so that I can code the data to develop themes. In my conceptual framework which follows next, I will discuss in detail the thought process that guided the data collection.

Conceptual Framework

Teachers' perception of their self-efficacy is subjective and influenced by their unique experiences. With this understanding as my guide, I am adopting a constructivist worldview (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) as the philosophical underpinning of my study. Through the lens of

the constructivist worldview, I believe teachers construct meaning based on their experiences and the context in which these experiences occur (Mann & MacLeod, 2005). Similar to the day I sat at my desk in my Grade 8 classroom questioning my self-efficacy because of the experiences I had that day, teachers may perceive their self-efficacy in light of their teaching experiences. While many teachers work in the same context and have similar experiences, the meaning they construct, and their ultimate perception of their self-efficacy is unique to them. Therefore, as depicted in Figure 1, the conceptual framework of my research is that teachers develop perceptions of their self- efficacy, this perception influences the instructional practices they attempt to implement, and the outcome of that implementation, if rewarding, has the potential to increase their self-efficacy which, closes a feedback loop and contributes to teachers' feeling motivated and committed to their profession.

Teacher self-efficacy (TSE) beliefs refer to teachers' perception of their capability, and this perception is relevant to classroom processes and performance outcomes (Zee & Koomen, 2016). Some studies (Chacón, 2005; Woolfolk et al., 1990) have suggested that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy establish effective classroom environments in which student behavior is managed successfully, and lessons cater to the needs of diverse learners. In such a classroom environment, teachers are implementing instructional best practices that are likely to result in positive outcomes. Guskey (1981) maintained that there is a correlation between teacher self-efficacy and teachers' willingness to implement instructional best practices. It is important to note that while teachers may know about these best practices and their potential benefit, according to Bandura (1977, 2001), if they do not believe in their capability to perceive positive results then they will not take the desired actions. Therefore, the framework of my study begins

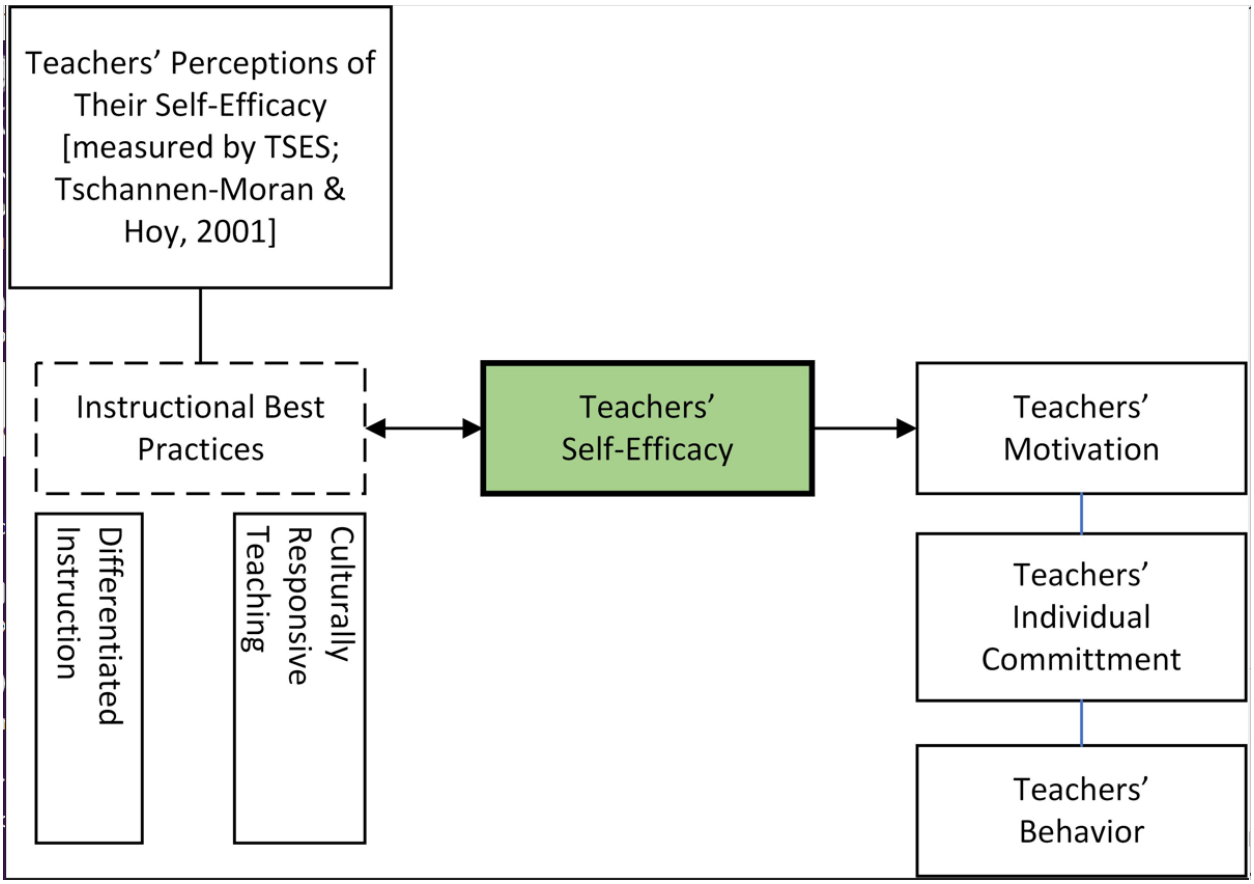

Figure 1. Conceptual framework.

with teachers' perception of their self-efficacy which correlates with the instructional practices that teachers implement in their classrooms. While there are many instructional best practices, the two instructional best practices I have chosen to include in my framework are culturally responsive teaching and differentiated instruction.

When teachers demonstrate assured self-efficacy, they are demonstrating their belief in their ability to implement teacher behaviors that positively impact student learning despite the challenges of the job (Klassen et al., 2011; Ross, 1998; Wolters & Daugherty, 2007). Within the framework of my study, I intend to explore the extent to which teachers' self-efficacy is associated with their implementation of best practices in a Title 1 school context. Ross (1998) and Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) have reported that teachers with increased self-efficacy utilize more student-centered and activity-based instructional practices, are willing to try new approaches and are more adaptive to and supportive of the needs of their students. My study will explore teachers' behaviors when they implement instructional best practices and how application of these best practices is associated with an increased sense of self-efficacy. Additionally, I am interested in observing how teachers with increased self-efficacy implement instructional practices in their classroom. Therefore, my framework highlights the causal relationship between self-efficacy and teachers' implementation of instructional best practices. Self-efficacy may precede their implementation of instructional best practices or teachers' implementation of best practices may precede their increasing self-efficacy.

My conceptual framework includes teacher motivation, teacher commitment, and teacher behaviors as associated with teachers' self-efficacy. When teachers have positive TSE beliefs, they are likely to experience psychological well-being which can strengthen their commitment to their jobs (Aloe et al., 2014; Collie et al., 2012; Klassen & Chiu, 2011). The concepts outlined in

my conceptual framework will be discussed in greater detail and further supported from the literature in Chapter 2.

Definition of Key Terms

The following key terms are important points of reference in my study:

Culturally Responsive Teaching- Teaching that centers classroom instruction on a multi-ethnic cultural frame of reference. Students are taught in a classroom where their cultural, social, and ethnic backgrounds are useful references (Gay, 2018).

Differentiated Instruction- The teaching and learning process where teachers devise strategies specific to students' needs regardless of differing abilities in the same classroom (Hall, 2002).

Teacher Mentorship- Mentorship provides an opportunity for mentees to increase their knowledge of classroom, school, and district practices (Mathur et al., 2013).

Self-efficacy- The belief that an individual has in his/her ability to effectively perform a task (Bandura, 1977).

Assumptions

Throughout my research, I made some assumptions about teachers' self-efficacy and its impact on their ability to implement instructional best practices. The main assumption was that teachers with increased self-efficacy are likely to research and utilize instructional best practices. I also assume that the outcome of such a likelihood would be a positive impact on student engagement and classroom management as these research-based instructional best practices, namely differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching, will improve students' academic performance.

The second assumption was that there is a reciprocal relationship between instructional best practices and self-efficacy. I assume that teachers with increased self-efficacy will exercise effective classroom strategies which I consider to be an element of instructional best practices. Conversely, teachers may have low self-efficacy but if they strive to implement instructional best practices, the outcome of their efforts may increase their self-efficacy. I assume that students' being more engaged and teachers' having better classroom management (because of their implementation of differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching) will manifest in teachers' experiencing improved self-efficacy. When teachers see the positive results of instructional best practices, they will feel confident and motivated enough to believe in their capabilities to do their job well.

Scope and Delimitations

Since I am a trained mentor at Stellar Middle School, I will be conducting the mentorship and support initiative for my research in this one school. As I am also a teacher at Stellar Middle School, my instructional workload limits the number of participants with whom I can engage in my study as I will not be able to mentor more than three teachers while executing my instructional duties. The fact that I work at the school and have been working with some teachers for several years may cause some teachers who otherwise would be suitable participants for my study to refrain from participating because they fear being scrutinized by a colleague.

Participants will self-select to participate in my study so their self-efficacy may not necessarily be an area of concern. However, their involvement in my study could prove beneficial since I would still be able to observe how their newly acquired self-efficacy contributes to their instructional practices. Another limitation is that participants may simply choose to participate in my study because they know me as a colleague, and they want to support

my research endeavors. Additionally, teachers who opt to participate in my study may be experiencing challenges beyond self-efficacy. For example, my research is not intended for teachers who lack content knowledge in their assigned role but rather those who know their content area but doubt their ability to effectively do their job.

My research is not focused on the school environment as a cause of teachers' low self-efficacy. I do not intend to explore why teachers have low self-efficacy but rather how self-efficacy can impact their implementation of best practices and how their self-efficacy can be increased. This does have implications for my research as the environment—as discussed in Chapter 2—can impact teachers' self-efficacy. Nevertheless, I contend that the ways to increase self-efficacy are not necessarily dependent on a specific environmental context.

Significance of Inquiry

My inquiry into teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices is of great significance in that it promotes social justice and equity in education. When teachers provide quality instruction through best practices such as differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching, they are catering to the needs of diverse learners. As a result of this, the Every Student Succeed Act (ESSA, 2015) is being realized.

Teachers have a major impact on students (Martin et al., 2014) and one way this impact can be evident is through the instructional strategies they implement. Therefore, if I am exploring teachers' implementation of instructional best practices, then my study is contributing to the literature that expounds on effective ways in which teachers can impact student learning. Effective teachers are those who are likely to incorporate a variety of strategies that cater to the needs of different learners (Fong-Yee & Normore, 2013) and my study focuses on some of these

strategies that can make a difference in the classroom. Consequently, there is value in my inquiry as it explores a concept that can positively impact the education system for all types of learners.

Despite teacher retention being the subject of many studies, teachers have been leaving the profession at an alarming rate (Geiger & Pivovarova, 2018; Yost, 2006). My study can prove beneficial in resolving this ongoing problem. Teacher retention is a concern at Stellar Middle School as we have had instances where we went an entire school year without a core subject teacher or years in which we lost between five and 10 teachers. Yost further asserted that some qualified teachers who remain in the profession do so by being persistent and resilient and both concepts are closely related to self-efficacy. Therefore, my study about teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices has the potential to not only demonstrate a way to boost teachers' self- efficacy but also to increase teacher retention rates.

Summary

Teachers' belief in their ability to do their job reflects their perceived self-efficacy (Bandura,1977). My study focuses on teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of best practices with some proposed outcomes in mind. My study proposes that teachers with increased self-efficacy may seek out and implement instructional best practices. It also proposes that teachers with low self-efficacy may boost their self-efficacy when they implement instructional best practices. The guiding thought is that instructional best practices can be associated with better classroom management which may leave teachers feeling more confident to do their jobs. Consequently, I want to further explore the associations that can be made between teachers' self-efficacy and instructional best practices.

CHAPTER 2: REVIEW OF LITERATURE

In reviewing the literature pertinent to my problem of practice, I have developed six major themes: school culture, teacher morale, self-efficacy, professional development, and mentorship. The first three of these themes are closely interconnected in that the culture of a school appears to be associated with teachers' morale, which appears to be related to the enhancing or lessening their self-efficacy. The interconnectedness of these themes is not linear but rather reciprocal. For example, teachers' morale can contribute to the school culture as much as the culture can engender a certain morale among teachers.

I consider the fourth and fifth of major themes—professional development and mentorship—as important in the context of my intervention to alleviate the problem of practice at Stellar Middle School because they also may be negative or positive moderators of teachers' self-efficacy. Through effective mentorship and professional development initiatives, school leaders can engender a culture that boosts teachers' morale, well-being, and self-efficacy. By contrast, limited mentorship—on-the-job-support—and superficial professional development can have undesirable results. My review of the literature will explore studies that have addressed the relationships that led to enhancement or lessening of teachers' self-efficacy within a school culture. I intend to consider each of the major themes as related to teachers' self- efficacy.

School Culture

The concept of culture has been explored by researchers as a causal factor of human behavior. For example, school culture was defined by Deal and Peterson (1999) as a social context that impacted people's belief and behavior over time. Years later, Elbot and Fulton (2008) proposed that a school's culture is formed as a causal response to the stakeholders it serves. This thought-provoking proposal envisaged that the pressures from parents, unique

character traits of a principal, or educational trends all played a part in how a school's culture was formed. Whether the culture that was created was toxic or thriving, Elbot and Fulton maintained that it impacted everything within a school. Their proposal was refined by Kaplan and Owings (2013) who asserted that culture was a tacit understanding that guided how people functioned within a group. Kaplan and Owings, like Elbot and Fulton, declared that culture influenced all aspects of a school from the wardrobe of its staff to the importance placed on certain academic subjects. For example, a new teacher enters a school building and observes male teachers wearing shirts and ties all week while the female teachers are dressed in professional attire. That new teacher should perceive the tacit understanding that the school's culture regarding wardrobe is one of professionalism. Thus, the new teacher has a cultural blueprint to follow. The same principle applies when schools adopt a curriculum, create a class schedule, and implement teacher training activities. If the math and English teachers are engaged in more professional development sessions and workshops in the school than the other teachers, then the unstated message is that these subjects are more important. If elective subjects are always removed from the schedule on an early release day while core subjects remain, then the unstated message is that elective subjects are not as important as the core subjects.

Deal and Peterson (2016) concurred with the researchers mentioned above when they articulated the idea that school culture is reflected in patterns of behavior among stakeholders in a school. It is important to note that, in their understanding, these patterns of behavior constituted unwritten norms that were manifested everywhere in the school. Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) reinforced the understanding of culture promulgated by Deal and Peterson (2016) when they described culture as an impactful force governed by unstated rules. They asserted that these unstated rules were "imprinted in our souls as we pledge[d] allegiance to our schools" (Gruenert

& Whitaker, 2017, p. 10). In essence, when teachers become a part of a school, over time they observe and adopt behaviors that become the norm. These norms are unstated but permeate the school in such a uniform manner that they seem to be embedded in the soul of the teachers.

In the cursory overview I have provided of culture in the context of organized schooling, there is one fundamental feature that cannot be ignored: culture is learned. Teachers who accept a position at a school bring with them their expectations for what it means to be a teacher of math or English and a whole series of expectations of what they will encounter from administrative leaders, teacher colleagues, janitors, and parents, but as they assimilate the culture of the school, their behaviors may reflect more of the school culture and less of their expectations. For example, a teacher may enter a school with the expectation that all teachers should stand by their doors and greet students in the mornings but after working at a school where this is not the norm, that teacher may adjust to the culture of the school where teachers simply stay in the class while students wander the halls. In such a case, the teacher would have learned the culture of the school.

In my practice, I have observed patterns of behavior, be they negative or positive, that seem to be so uniform and repetitive that I can appreciate the school of thought that holds that culture is a learned behavior. These patterns of behavior are evident in students' attitudes and work ethics, parents' support of the school and the way teachers execute their duties. All of these are displayed in varying levels of negativity and positivity but usually in sufficient uniformity that one could conclude that they reflect the school's culture.

Teacher Morale

Teacher morale is one of my major themes because I believe it is a contributor to the school's culture as much as it can be influenced by it. In either case, teacher morale plays an

important role in how committed and confident teachers feel about executing their duties. Consequently, it is necessary for me to discuss this theme in relation to my problem of practice which examines the relationship between teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices.

While reviewing literature on teachers' morale, I noticed three emerging sub themes: motivation, teacher working conditions, and teacher retention. Motivation, whether intrinsic or extrinsic, is a catalyst for action. Thus, teachers who are motivated are more likely to research and implement best practices than their unmotivated colleagues. Further, the conditions under which teachers work may influence their level of motivation and their willingness to remain as teachers. In the following, I will review the literature regarding to all three sub themes as they relate to teacher morale.

Motivation

Some theorists have proposed the notion that motivation is a prerequisite for people to effectively do their jobs (Hertzberg et al., 1993; Maslow, 1970; Ryan & Deci, 2000). Maslow (1970) indicated that people share similar needs that he prioritized in the order in which they must be fulfilled. For example, people's basic needs must be fulfilled before they can achieve their full potential. Once one need was met, Maslow conjectured, another need emerged in the following order: physiological, safety and security, belongingness and love, self-esteem, and self-actualization. Physiological needs referred to those basic biological needs that are necessary for human survival such as food, water, and shelter. Safety and security needs—such as emotional and financial security—emerged once the physiological needs were met. Subsequently, people's need for affiliation and interpersonal relationships became dominant at the third level. Once the third level of need was satisfied, people's self-esteem needs such as self-

worth, respect, and achievement took precedence. The final and highest level of need fulfilment, self-actualization, emerged when all other needs were met. At this level, Maslow suggested, people sought self-fulfillment and endeavored to grow into better versions of themselves.

Maslow (1970) believed that the fulfilment of people's needs could function as a source of motivation. In essence, when people lacked something, he conjectured, they would feel motivated to fill that void. Bringing Maslow's hierarchy of need fulfilment into the context of a school, a teacher may have an urge to fulfill a need that motivates their actions. Of course, their actions may not necessarily translate to effectiveness. For example, if diligent teachers are working at a school where they feel unappreciated and disregarded then the once supportive and actively involved teachers may rescind their involvement to highlight the negative impact of their subpar effort. The goal, then, is to show the void that is created when teachers are not performing at their best. This may translate to teachers not taking on voluntary roles without compensation or not maintaining high standards of achievement for themselves or their students. These actions pose a threat to the school's effectiveness because they clash with the vision and mission of the school.

Over time, ineffective action on the part of teachers seeking to fulfil their need to be appreciated can form a part of the school's culture (Whitaker et al., 2008). For example, teachers may form an alliance to fulfil the need to belong by allying with others who seek to fulfil the same need. This alliance would constitute a group of dissatisfied teachers who are likely to complain the most about administrators not being supportive or effective in mitigating student discipline and teachers being overworked, unappreciated, and underpaid. These teachers might approach their teaching with diminished motivation precisely because their need for appreciation

has not been fulfilled. This alliance, born out of the need for appreciation, can catalyze a state of low morale among all the teachers.

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs relates to teacher morale because unless teachers' physiological needs, safety and security, belongingness and love are met, they will not have a positive morale (Kaiser, 1982; Whitaker et al., 2008). The school cannot cater to the gamut of each need as some may be more applicable to teachers' personal lives. For example, focusing again on belongingness and love, the school cannot be solely responsible for giving teachers the friends with whom they need to form connections or providing the assets they need to acquire to form those connections. When I refer to needs in the context of my study, it is important to note that I am referring to needs that are specific to a school context. Thus, the need for safety and security refers to teachers working in an environment free of violence in which they feel comfortable and safe enough to execute their duties. The need for belongingness and love refers to teachers working in a school community where they are included in decisions and are welcomed as members of the team. The logic underpinning the pertinence of need fulfilment is that teachers should not be working in a school characterized by discord and animosity. The fulfilment of teachers' needs to feel safe, supported, valued, and included provides impetus for professional achievement and effectiveness. The implication is that educational leaders should be cognizant of the needs of their teachers if they intend to create a culture characterized by high morale.

Whitaker et al. (2008) acknowledged that there were some factors over which educational leaders have no control such as school district policy or remuneration, but there were factors they could reinforce in a bid to boost teachers' morale. For example, establishing and sustaining a culture of positivity, recognition, and promotion would inevitably boost morale. The rationale is

that if teachers are praised for their good work, given opportunities for leadership and career advancement, and treated with respect then their morale will be high.

Kaiser (1982) asserted that, while teachers experience achievement vicariously through their students' achievements, there were no noteworthy extrinsic teacher reward systems in schools. In fact, he believed that any semblance of a reward system lost its effect when it was wholistic and not directed to individual teachers. In essence, from Kaiser's perspective, activities like awarding one Teacher of the Year accolade or distributing generic gratitude cards with the same the message to all teachers were unlikely to motivate teachers. Consequently, Kaiser proposed that educational leaders should recognize individual teachers and utilize interpersonal strategies because they could be effective in increasing teacher morale.

Hertzberg et al. (1993) built on Maslow's (1970) theory and developed their motivation-hygiene theory which proposed that there is a correlation between peoples' job attitudes and their work ethic. Job attitudes refer to people's assessment of their jobs which determines their feelings towards or attachment to their jobs (Judge & Kammeyer-Mueller, 2012). Work ethic, on the other hand, refers to the diligence and discipline that guide how people do their jobs. The Hertzberg et al. (1993) two-factor theory proposed that there are hygiene factors which are dissatisfiers and motivational factors which are satisfiers. Hygiene factors are those external factors such as incentives, supervision, company policy, and interpersonal relationships while motivational factors are intrinsic factors such as recognition, achievement, professional growth, and advancement. Hertzberg et al. (1993) maintained that hygiene factors are dissatisfiers because they are associated with demotivation. It is important to note that the presence of hygiene factors does not cause satisfaction, but when hygiene factors are absent, employees tend to be dissatisfied. For example, people may work in a place where there is transparency

regarding company policies and procedures, but this does not cause job satisfaction. However, if there was no structure or transparency regarding company policies, people would be dissatisfied with their job. Motivation factors, unlike hygiene factors, cause satisfaction and motivation While motivational and hygiene factors are independent of each other, in the context of a school, they both impact teacher morale and heighten or lessen productivity. For example, if teachers are working in a school where they feel overworked (absence of adequate time to perform assigned tasks) and underpaid (absence of adequate financial compensation; both hygiene factors), they are likely to experience job dissatisfaction even if they recently received recognition as the Teacher of the Year (motivational factor). It is important for there to be a balance between both hygiene and motivational factors to effect productivity in a positive way.

Ryan and Deci (2000), as an extension of their earlier work (Deci & Ryan, 1985), articulated the impact of intrinsic motivation as a compelling force. While their theory concurred with that of Maslow (1970) and Hertzberg et al. (1993), in that the context of a job can lessen or heighten people's motivation, they underscored the power of self-determination and intrinsic motivation. Their rationale was that people who are intrinsically motivated and are allowed a greater sense of autonomy are likely to extend themselves despite the challenges of the job. They maintained that while intrinsic motivation can cause people to execute their duties regardless of job context, the working environment needs to be a supportive one as job challenges can lower people's morale and self-efficacy. In a school context, job challenges such as threats, pressured evaluations, and imposed goals and deadlines can lower teachers' motivation. By contrast, facilitating the exercise of choice, acknowledging feelings, and offering the opportunity for self-direction have been found to increase morale because teachers are not being micromanaged but are given the autonomy and a vote of confidence to do their jobs. Ryan and Deci (2000) implied

that this vote of confidence should be given to teachers who have proven that they can execute their duties effectively with little-to-no supervision. Allowing effective teachers a greater level of autonomy would boost their morale because it would send the message to them that administrators believe in their capabilities to do their jobs well. Consequently, effectiveness will be maintained amid autonomy in the school.

Teacher Working Conditions

Relevant, but not central to my project is the relationship between teachers' working conditions and their self-efficacy because their working conditions can negatively or positively impact their motivation, work ethic, and well-being (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011; Ford et al., 2019; Johnson et al., 2005). The concept of teacher working conditions encompasses a wide range of variables such as resources, facilities, and class sizes but for the purpose of this study, I will be examining principal's leadership as an impactful variable (Burkhauser, 2017; Johnson et al., 2005; Johnson et al., 2012; Ladd, 2011).

According to Bascia and Rottmann (2011), more attention has been given to teachers' educational credentials and their impact on students' learning than their working conditions. Consequently, they asserted, educational decision makers hold teachers accountable for students' learning regardless of teachers' working conditions. In support of their claim, Bascia and Rottmann referenced an incident that occurred in 2010 where the Rhode Island school superintendent fired all 74 teachers from a failing high school as a means of holding teachers accountable for students' failure. In this instance, decision makers failed to recognize and assess the correlation between teachers' working conditions and students' learning (Horng, 2009). Any disregard for teachers' working conditions perpetuates teachers' perception that they are mere "cogs in a machine or troops in a platoon" (Bascia & Rottmann, 2011, pp. 792-793). In essence,

when no consideration is given to teachers' working conditions, teachers may feel like workers in an impersonal system of employment that is void of empathy. Such a system could impact how teachers feel about their jobs and how they execute their duties. Therefore, the aim of this section will be to underscore the importance of teachers' working conditions, specifically principal leadership, and the ripple effect those conditions can have on teachers' self -efficacy.

As an educator, I believe principals play a critical role in building school culture, and an important part of this school culture is how principals support teachers. When principals create a supportive school culture for teachers, they are taking steps towards increasing teacher retention rates (Boyd et al., 2005). A supportive school culture could have a significant impact on student discipline (Kersaint et al., 2007), and teacher self-efficacy (Ingersoll & Perda, 2008). Hughes (2012) supported the proposition that principals have the responsibility of retaining highly qualified teachers by ensuring that teachers are supported, celebrated, given autonomy, and immersed in a collaborative community that propels their professional growth and development. Hughes asserted that such an environment is likely to boost teachers' self-efficacy.

Principal leadership is considered a source of motivation for teachers to the extent that effective principal leadership is associated with teacher self-efficacy (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008; Tschannen-Moran & Gareis, 2004). Principals can influence teachers' self-efficacy by promoting a shared and inspiring vision focused on learning and development for the school, establishing attainable goals, outlining clear performance standards for teachers and students, and effectively supporting and coaching teachers (Çalik et al., 2012; Leithwood & Jantzi, 2008). These actionable steps would suggest that the principal is leading by example in not only establishing high expectations for all but also in making sure that the support systems are in place to guarantee that these expectations are met.

When principals function as transformational leaders, they exhibit leadership behaviors that can influence teachers' self-efficacy (Leithwood & Jantzi, 2009). Principals as transformational leaders inspire and motivate teachers to the extent that teachers derive great meaning and purpose in their work environment (Eliophotou-Menon & Loannou, 2016). Eliophotou-Menon and Loannou (2016) conjectured that teachers are likely to trust a principal who is a transformational leader, be committed to the organization (in this case, the school), feel motivated to learn, and experience greater job satisfaction when they are guided and supported by such a principal. Principals can have this impact because through transformational leadership, they not only impact teachers' behaviors but also their perspectives. Therefore, principals serve in an impactful position that has the potential to either increase or lessen teachers' self-efficacy.

Teacher Retention

Teacher retention has been a major concern and not because there is a limited number of new teachers joining the profession but because there is a revolving door of teachers leaving the profession (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). Strauss (2017) underscored this concern by indicating that almost one-third of the teacher population leaves the profession during the first three years, and this makes teacher retention a national concern. While the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB, 2002) asserted that every child in every classroom will have a highly qualified teacher, the teacher shortage crisis has made this a challenging feat.

Chinn (2007) conducted research into the factors that contributed to secondary school teachers' remaining in a school district or school. While teachers' passion for teaching was indicated as the intrinsic motivator for teachers' remaining in the profession, Chinn listed a few extrinsic factors as well. Chinn asserted that teachers who worked in an environment where administrators were supportive of their professional development were likely to remain in

teaching. Additionally, when teachers worked in a collaborative school culture where there was a positive attitude towards teachers the retention rates were likely to be higher. Chinn's research suggested that teachers may stay amidst the challenges of the job when they feel valued and supported in their schools.

Kimball (2011) conducted similar research to Chinn's (2007) into teacher retention and factors that may have contributed to it. The findings indicated that administrative support was associated with teacher retention. Kimball asserted that principals had a responsibility to effectively manage and support teachers. When principals left teachers unsupported in a classroom then held them accountable for student performance, they were contributing to low teacher retention rates because teachers did not necessarily want to stay at a school where principals demanded accountability but provided no support. According to Kimball (2011), there were many ways that principals could boost teacher retention rates by (a) setting goals, (b) providing support and mentorship, (c) giving consistent feedback on performance, (d) acknowledging and rewarding effective performance, and (e) implementing accountability for poor performance. Kimball's research suggested that teachers remain in a school when they feel supported and are provided with the resources they need to feel efficacious in their classroom.

Teachers who exude self-confidence and belief in their ability to impact student learning are more likely to stay in the profession (Arnup & Bowles, 2016; Beltman et al., 2011). Therefore, a major contributor to teacher retention is building teachers' self-efficacy. This suggests that by building teachers' resilience, schools may reap the benefit of a significant increase in student success and teacher retention. Ledesma (2014) referred to resilience as an individual's ability to "bounce back from adversity, frustration and misfortune" (p. 1). Teaching is a challenging job with many unpredictable complexities, and I have worked in the profession

for over a decade and experienced some of those complexities. My experience validates that there is merit in the belief that teacher self-efficacy can be associated with teacher retention. Truth be told, I would have left the profession a long time ago if I had lost faith in my belief to make a difference in education.

Teacher Self-Efficacy

The construct of self-efficacy has been the topic of many studies such as that of Bandura (1977) who referred to it as the belief in one's ability to implement the actionable steps required to effectively complete a task. Individuals with this belief are not likely to shirk their responsibilities or remain doubtful amid challenges. Stajkovic and Luthans (1998) concurred with Bandura when they referred to self-efficacy as a predictor of an individual's performance on a myriad of tasks. In the context of the classroom, teacher self-efficacy is a teacher's conviction in their competence to positively impact student learning and behavior (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Therefore, teachers' sense of self-efficacy is the thought that guides their actions despite the demands of the job.

Bray-Clark and Bates (2003) asserted that teaching is a demanding job with unpredictable challenges which means that teachers' ability to be effective is partly dependent on their perceived self-efficacy. Künsting et al. (2016) supported this assertion when they conducted research which revealed that teachers who perceived themselves to be efficacious argued for effective classroom management and instructional quality. They further explained that self-efficacy refers to teachers' belief in effectively completing a specific task. This belief regulates choice, determination, and effort in the midst of challenges. Their findings suggested that self-efficacy has some association with the decisions and actions teachers take. It serves as the drive to accomplish a task even when that task seems difficult. When teachers work in a classroom

where they are faced with challenges to teach students, it is their self-efficacy that will make the difference. To teachers with high self-efficacy, students' disinterest or lack of motivation are not deterrents because such teachers would strategically research and implement best practices for their students.

Teacher Self-Efficacy and Instructional Best Practices

Bandura (1977) considered self-efficacy as task-specific, and, for the purpose of my study, I am focusing on teachers' classroom practices as the specific task associated with their self-efficacy. Researchers have proposed that teachers with increased self-efficacy are likely to provide quality instruction for students (Holzberger et al., 2013). The classroom practices that they implement would be oriented to making positive student impact. While there are many classroom practices that teachers can employ, I will be focusing on differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching as two best practices from which, if teachers implement them adroitly, they can derive a sense of increased self-efficacy because of the positive impact of these strategies.

Differentiated Instruction

Differentiated instruction is a curriculum framework that provides learning opportunities based on students' interests, differences, and unique learning styles (Tomlinson, 2014). This instructional approach is considered one of the best practices because its characteristic is instruction that caters to the needs of individual learners (Tomlinson, 1999). By catering to the needs of individual learners, teachers are planning, implementing, and adjusting lessons according to students' readiness level (Taylor, 2015). This readiness level is referred to as learners' zone of proximal development (Vygotsky, 1986) because it is an area of potential for students to acquire new knowledge when supported by a highly skilled teacher or peer.

Differentiation can be implemented through content, process, or product (Gubera & Aruguete, 2013). Content refers to the knowledge that students need to acquire through instruction. When teachers apply differentiation in content, they are using a variety of strategies to teach the same content with the understanding that even though students need to develop mastery in the same content area, they have different ways of processing the content to which they are exposed (Ferreri, 2009). For example, perhaps all the students need to be able to write an essay in a Language Arts class, but some may not know the parts of a sentence while others may not know the parts of an essay. In adopting a differentiated approach, the teacher would plan to teach the content in ways that account for the varying readiness level of the students.

Process is the methodology teachers employ in delivering instruction to students. In essence, it refers to how teachers teach. Differentiation through process means that teachers are giving students diverse ways of learning. For example, in a Language Arts class, a teacher may choose to have students listen to an audio or watch a video of someone reenacting the scene of a play. Others may be given an opportunity to read the scenes of the play. This individualized approach to instruction requires creativity and flexibility whereby the teacher uses a reservoir of strategies and activities while acting as the facilitator.

In the differentiation framework, product refers to how students demonstrate mastery. After being taught the content through a process of differentiation, students can be given a variety of summative assessments. In continuing the example in the context of a Language Arts classroom, differentiated instruction through product means the teacher may give students options to write a poem based on a theme, create a song based on the theme, or even develop an art piece and explain how it reflects the theme. Though these are different assessment activities,

they are all connected to the central objective of identifying and discussing themes. The products, like the content and process, are different in order to cater to the needs of students.

Studies (Little et al., 2014; Smit & Humpert, 2012) have recommended differentiated instruction as a framework which has a major impact on students' academic performance across grade levels. This is so because there are many differences among learners in a classroom, so it is not best practice for teachers to use just one teaching style to cater to the needs of their learners (Firmender et al., 2013). Taylor (2015) considered it to be a counterproductive exercise when teachers ignore the readiness levels of learners and approach teaching with a one-size-fits-all mentality. Taylor asserted that this would not meet the diverse needs of learners in a classroom.

Teachers with assured self-efficacy are likely to implement the framework of differentiated instruction because they believe in their capability to effectively do their job (Dixon et al., 2014). The task of implementing the differentiated instruction framework requires teachers to be flexible, intentional, and confident in their instructional and management strategies (Tomlinson, 2014). The teacher with low self-efficacy may be so concerned with the demands and possible challenges of successfully implementing differentiated instruction that they may refrain from using this framework (Dixon et al., 2014). Contrastingly, the teacher with high self-efficacy would be confident of their ability to implement differentiated instruction and would be inclined to do so because of their conviction that the effective implementation and outcome are attainable and beneficial.

Culturally Responsive Teaching

Students who have linguistically, and culturally diverse backgrounds have performed lower in math and reading than non-Hispanic White students. An increasing body of research has proposed culturally responsive teaching (CRT) as a solution to such a disparity because CRT is

associated with equitable educational experiences and increased student performance (Banks, 2010; Cochran-Smith, 2004; Delpit, 2006; Gay, 2010; Kraft, 2007; Ladson-Billings, 2009). Culturally responsive teaching is an instructional best practice that allows students to acquire new knowledge and skill within a contextual reference to their cultural and linguistic background (Gay, 2002).

The implementation of CRT requires teachers to be intentional about students' learning by fully understanding who their students are and how their students' cultural and linguistic backgrounds can be incorporated in the teaching and learning process (Young, 2010). In essence, teachers who practice CRT are "using the cultural knowledge, prior experience, frames of reference and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2010, p. 31). For example, an art teacher who works in a school where the student population consists of predominantly Black or Hispanic students may show clippings of historical figures like Harriet Tubman or Cesar Chavez and discuss the impact of their action and advocacy. Students may then be given the task of creating an art piece that represents the value they derived from such historical figures. A literature teacher may use a poem written during the Harlem Renaissance for students to not only analyze poetic elements but also learn about the significance of this cultural movement. In both contexts, the teacher would be providing students an opportunity to connect with their cultural background while learning the contents of the curriculum.

Despite the potential benefits of CRT in the classroom, many teachers are oblivious to this teaching framework (Gaias et al., 2019). To compound this problem, educational programs have been historically homogenous to Whites and the teacher population has a significant number of Caucasian females (Madhlangobe & Gordon, 2012). This reality suggests the need for

teacher preparation and professional development programs geared towards equipping teachers with strategies that promote equity and social justice in the delivery of school curriculum. By participating in such programs, teachers would not only be developing their critical consciousness—allowing themselves to be mindful of their students' realities outside of the school—but they would also be building their self-efficacy and professional capacity (Cruz et al., 2020).

Teachers who effectively implement CRT embrace social justice and equitable education for students (Banks, 2001), so promoting teachers' self-efficacy in implementing CRT (Cruz et al., 2020) may open a pathway to change inequitable educational circumstances. Cruz et al. (2020) maintained that teacher self-efficacy can influence teachers' thoughts about when or how to implement CRT. Teachers may have self-efficacy in their teaching practice in general but not in their ability to successfully cater to the needs of a culturally diverse student population. Their perceived low self-efficacy regarding the implementation of CRT can be addressed through professional development directed at increasing their knowledge of CRT. Teachers would then be mindful of diverse cultures as a fundamental framework for instruction and have accurate knowledge of and mutual respect for the cultures of their students. When teachers understand and implement CRT effectively, they are building trust and relationships with their students which then has the ripple effect of increasing teachers' overall self-efficacy. Therefore, Cruz et al. (2020) proposed, there is an association between teachers' overall self-efficacy and their self-efficacy with respect to CRT.

Professional Development

The aim of professional development is to improve teachers' instructional practice which is associated with improved student performance (Baird & Clark, 2018; Darling-Hammond &

McLaughlin, 1995). Teachers' improved instructional practice is also associated with their self-efficacy (Dixon et al., 2014). For such an impact to be realized, professional development activities should be carefully planned and implemented. Bayer (2014) suggested that quality professional development activities should (a) match teachers' needs, (b) match the school's needs, (c) involve teachers in the design/planning of professional development activities, (d) be engaging and conducive to teacher participation, (e) provide long-term support and engagement, and (f) be presented by quality instructors. Baird and Clark (2018) joined Whitworth and Chiu (2015) in concurring with Bayer about providing teachers the opportunity to plan, implement, and actively participate in professional development activities. They believed this would positively impact teacher learning and buy-in because teachers would be integral to the process of professional development.

Despite the potential impact of professional development activities, they can seem counterproductive if teachers do not perceive an inherent purpose or value in them (Cordingley et al., 2015; Walter & Briggs, 2012). This perception is not necessarily a reflection of teachers' self-efficacy but more so their belief that a particular professional development activity is useful or applicable to their school or classroom context. Adams (2014) conducted a study which revealed that some teachers who often participated in professional development activities did not perceive them as relevant to their day-to-day activities. Adams suggested that an effective way to address such a perception was to ensure that professional development activities addressed teachers' instructional needs. Doing so, they suggested, would help to equip teachers with useful strategies, develop teachers' mastery in the content area, and ultimately boost their self-confidence which can increase their self-efficacy.

Professional development is an impactful process because it can translate to improved instructional practice which is associated with teachers' self-efficacy (Ross & Bruce, 2007). It seems that teachers may doubt their ability to effectively teach their class if they lack confidence in their instructional practice. For example, a social studies teacher who is doubtful about how to engage middle school students in learning about the details of the Great Depression may doubt their self-efficacy because they do not think they possess the capability to use effective instructional practices that can garner students' interest in a historical period that the average teenager may be disinterested in. Ross and Bruce (2007) conducted field research in which teachers who participated in professional development to gain mastery in their content area not only gained mastery but also reported increased self-efficacy. The conclusion Ross and Bruce drew was that mastery of a task contributes to self-efficacy.) Mastery experiences are a significant source of self-efficacy. Knowing the content area and effective instructional practices is likely to boost teachers' self- confidence which is indicative of increased self-efficacy.

Mentorship

Teachers may go through a teacher preparation program prior to accepting a teaching job but that training may prove inadequate in equipping teachers with requisite knowledge and skills (Ingersoll & Strong, 2011). In such a case, teachers would need to engage in professional development exercises and mentorship programs to ensure they are able to deal with the demands of the job. Mentors are experienced educators who advise, support, and guide less experienced teachers to a state of independence where they are more experienced and confident in their role as an educator (Donaldson, 2008). When new teachers engage in an induction mentorship program, they get an opportunity to learn about district policies and procedures,

community demographics, instructional best practices, student needs, and the vision and mission of the district as well as of their assigned school.

Mentorship can have a major impact on teachers' professional development and commitment to the job. Sempowicz and Hudson (2011) asserted that teachers who worked with a mentor were likely to be confident, competent, and committed to teaching. They touted mentorship as a solution to teacher retention problems. The rationale was that intensive mentor-based induction programs could increase teacher retention because teachers who went through these programs were offered support and feedback. This caused teachers to feel confident in their ability to improve student performance because they had someone who was working in partnership with them to help versus criticize or assign a particular score on a teacher evaluation rubric. In such a case, teachers' self-efficacy might increase through mentorship.

Mentors are instrumental in impacting teachers' career development and psychosocial well-being (Ragins, 2012). Teachers may advance in their career when they show competence and mastery in various capacities. Mentors help to propel teachers' career development when they support them in acquiring skills that result in promotions or increased compensation. For example, a math teacher who worked with a mentor for a year learned about how to make math engaging and relatable to middle school students. The teacher planned interactive lessons that catered to the needs of diverse learners to the extent that student performance increased. Student performance was consistent the following year, so the teacher benefitted from the districts' performance bonus and was also promoted to the position of instructional coach. In this context, the mentor may have helped to advance the mentee's career. Mentors also serve as a support system for teachers, and this contributes to teachers' well-being. When the mentor acts as a confidant, friend, and advisor, they are providing a safe space for teachers to offload emotional

baggage that could otherwise thwart teachers' efforts to do their job well. For example, a teacher who is overwhelmed by the discipline challenges at their school or who simply had a rough day at work may turn to the mentor to vent about said issues. In doing so, the teacher may find the mentor-mentee exchange to be a therapeutic one. Therefore, in this multifaceted role, mentors provide some level of emotional stability for teachers.

Summary

Having examined literature related to school culture, teacher morale, self-efficacy, professional development, and mentorship, I have garnered insights about the interconnected ness of these variables and how they hold relevance to my problem of practice. The school culture provides a context that can impact teachers' morale and by extension their self-efficacy. This impact, if positive, requires no further action than that of sustainability of the effective practices that produced such a result. When teachers' experience low self-efficacy, then implementation of best practices through professional development and/or mentorship can yield impactful results. I intend to delve further into how teachers' self-efficacy can be increased, specifically through mentorship as they implement instructional best practices. Consequently, Chapter 3 of my study will delineate the research questions, inquiry design, methods of data collection, and data analysis procedures.

CHAPTER 3: METHODS OF INQUIRY

The focus of my study is teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices, namely differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching. Teachers at Stellar Middle School are working in a Title 1 context in which the experiences and demands they encounter impact their self-efficacy. The purpose of my mixed methods study is to determine teachers' self-efficacy in their teaching capacity in Stellar Middle School in a north central North Carolina school district and imply the potential association between their self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices in their classrooms. As an extension of this purpose, I will implement a research-based teacher support intervention that has the potential to improve teachers' implementation of two specific instructional best practices and gather evidence of the effectiveness of my intervention. Throughout this chapter, I will discuss the rationale for my research questions and inquiry design and expand on the context of my study as well as delve into its ethical implications and conclude by spelling out the process of data analysis and limitations of my study.

Problem of Practice Guiding Questions

My study is guided by the following questions:

Research Question 1: How do teachers at Stellar Middle School perceive their self-efficacy in their teaching capacity?

My rationale for asking this question is that teachers at Stellar Middle School work in a context where they have many duties to perform and their belief in their ability to perform these duties is the starting point for my research. When I understand what teachers believe about their self-efficacy then I can imply connections to their behaviors in their classrooms that may be related to their perceived self-efficacy.

Research Question 2: To what extent is it plausible to suggest an association at Stellar Middle School between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of two specific instructional best practices in the classroom?

This question is pivotal to my research because, after establishing teachers' perceived self-efficacy, I need to make plausible connections between it and their instructional practices. I want to suggest and substantiate a link between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their willingness to learn about and implement best practices regardless of the challenges they encounter in the classroom. My rationale is that self-efficacy could be the source of motivation (Lauermann & Berger, 2021) that can ignite a teacher's drive to implement tried-and-true instructional practices (Yost, 2002). While some teachers working in similar contexts implement effective instructional practices in their classrooms, others struggle to do so.

Research Question 3: To what extent is there an association between a teacher's involvement in a support intervention oriented to improving their proficiency with two specific instructional techniques and (a) their increased self- efficacy and (b) their implementation of instructional best practices in their classrooms?

My rationale for this question is that I want to understand the extent to which teachers' experience of being supported in their teaching can (a) boost their self-efficacy and (b) inspire them to implement instructional best practices. If I can make a plausible case for an association between my support intervention and participating teachers' increased use of these two specific instructional best practices, this would show a benefit to supporting teachers' development of proficiency.

Inquiry Design and Rationale

In exploring the problem of practice regarding teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of best practices in their teaching, I am focusing primarily on teachers' perceived self-efficacy and its association with their implementation of two specific instructional best practices (culturally responsive teaching and differentiated instruction). Though teachers may have similar experiences in their environment (namely, the school), their perceptions of the environment and their self-efficacy may differ. Consequent to the constructivist worldview that serves as the guiding principle for my study, my understanding is that teachers' historical and cultural setting and the interactions that characterize this setting will result in a complexity of subjective meanings (Creswell & Creswell, 2018). From a constructivist perspective and in the context of this study, teachers create meaning as they make sense of their environment (Crotty, 1998).

The philosophical underpinning of my study aligns with the mixed methods approach that will guide how I collect and analyze data. According to Creswell and Plano Clark (2011), this approach incorporates both qualitative and quantitative methods and provides greater insight that would not otherwise be available if only one of the two methods was used. Other researchers have touted the benefits of using a mixed method approach on the premise that it can reinforce the accuracy of the findings because one method can provide greater depth and understanding for the other method (Caruth, 2013; Tashakkori & Creswell, 2008).Therefore, in order to get a comprehensive understanding of how teachers perceive their self-efficacy and to support my implication that there is an association between teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of these two specific instructional best practices, a mixed methods approach seems most suitable.

Throughout the data collection process, I will collect and analyze both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time. This design, referred to as convergent parallel mixed method approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), involves my merging both qualitative and quantitative data to provide an in-depth analysis of the topic. I will use the short form of Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) which is well suited for a survey administration. I anticipate that teachers will be sharing their unfiltered thoughts about how they perceive their self-efficacy. Their responses will help me to make connections between how participating teachers perceive their self-efficacy and my observation of how they conduct their classes. The survey will be administered to teachers through convenience sampling (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) since I work in the same environment as the teachers and will have easy access to carry out the required research.

Concurrent with my distribution of the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), I will conduct participatory observations to observe how the teachers participating in my study implement two specific best practices in their classrooms. As stated above, differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching are the two best practices that I am interested in for my research. Additionally, by being immersed in the teachers' classroom environment, I will get an understanding of their experiences. This understanding may result in their feeling comfortable to share their genuine perspectives when they perceive me, a fellow colleague, as one who can identify with their experiences (Khan, 2018). While observations will be time-consuming (Khan, 2018; May, 2001), they will provide me a way to document teachers' implementation of these two best practices in their classrooms, and they will help me to understand teachers' views of their classroom setting (Taylor, 2002) which I will then relate to their perceived self-efficacy as indicated by their responses to the TSES.

As a follow-up to participatory observations, I will engage in semi-structured interviews with teachers as part of my mentorship intervention. This mentorship intervention will be conducted over a 6-week period during which post-classroom-observation sessions will be conducted with each teacher. I chose this type of interview on the basis that it potentially generates rich data about participants' personal experiences and perspectives as well as providing flexibility during conversations (Bihu, 2020), allowing me to modify prompts and pose follow up questions (Mueller & Seagal, 2014).

Teachers will self-select to participate in my research, and, through my convenience sampling of the teaching staff, I hope that I will secure the participation of no more than three teachers who teach different subject areas. I am hoping that the participants will provide relevant and critical information (Kelly, 2010) related to the problem of practice.

Context of the Study

As I mentioned in Chapter 1, the site for this study is in the north central area of North Carolina. The school district consists of numerous elementary schools, three middle schools, and a range of high school options. According to NCDPI school report data, there are more than 6,000 students enrolled in the school district. Several schools in this school district are categorized as Title 1 schools, meaning that students at these schools are from low-income families and are eligible to receive free or reduced-price lunch.

Stellar Middle School is one of the three middle schools in the district and is a Title I school in a rural area with a low performance grade of F. This means that Stellar Middle School is a low performing school where the Education Value-Added Assessment System (EVAAS) (https://www.dpi.nc.gov/districts-schools/districts-schools-support/district-human-capital/evaas) growth status was not met for the 2019-2020 academic year. Due to the coronavirus pandemic, a

legislative waiver granted was granted to exempt North Carolina schools from the school accountability data process so there was no performance grade for the 2020-2021 academic year.

Despite the academic challenges, the administrators and teachers at Stellar Middle School are committed to ESSA (2015) as evidenced in their mission and vision for preparing their students to be equipped with requisite skills to render them functional in an evolving society. As such, several tutoring and reading support systems are provided for students whereby teachers can nominate students to participate in these incentivized afterschool programs.

According to Bandura (1977), "people take action when they hold efficacy beliefs and outcome expectations that make the effort seem worthwhile" (p. 6). Some teachers at Stellar Middle School perceive themselves as struggling to cope with the demands of working in a Title I school. Consequently, their low self-efficacy beliefs may impact their instructional practices. In such cases, their students would be at a disadvantage since the quality of their education would be lacking. Providing a supportive intervention for teachers could result in their feeling efficacious enough to implement instructional best practices that promote social justice and equity for all students. As mentioned above, the EVAAS data indicate that the school is rated F as a failing school. My further analysis revealed that there is a stark disparity among the performance of demographic subgroups (Hispanics, Blacks, Mixed races, and Whites) in the Academically or Intellectually Gifted (AIG) classes as well as in the general education classes. This poses a question about social justice and equity in how best practices are implemented to ensure all students are provided with quality education through teachers' instructional practices. When teachers' self-efficacy empowers them to use differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching strategies, they are catering to the needs of diverse learners which means the mission and vision of ESSA (2015) will be realized.

Ethical Considerations

To ensure participants feel safe and that their privacy is maintained (Creswell & Poth, 2018), I began my research process by completing training and receiving certification from the Collaborative Institutional Training Institute (CITI). I completed the Social and Behavioral Responsible Conduct of Research course, and Social/Behavioral Research Investigators and Key Personnel course. These courses provided me with the requisite knowledge to enable me to adhere to ethical standards and procedures as a researcher.

Since I work at the school as a teacher but also serve as a mentor, it is important for me to meet with teachers and explain to them that my research and the information that I will collect will not be logged as a formal record at the school so it will not affect their employment status. I will explain the purpose of the study, the procedures involved in conducting the surveys, observations, and interviews, and how I will use the results from each. Teachers will be given an opportunity to ask any questions about the process so that they can feel comfortable about participating in my research. To ensure the privacy of the participants, I intend to gather and analyze data from the participants with the use of pseudonyms.

Inquiry Procedures

Figure 2 shows an outline of how I intend to conduct my research and the phases involved in the data collection and analysis process. My research will take the form of a convergent parallel mixed method approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) so there will be times when the phases overlap.

Instrumentation

The instruments that will be used in this study include the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), a classroom observation tool which consists of the

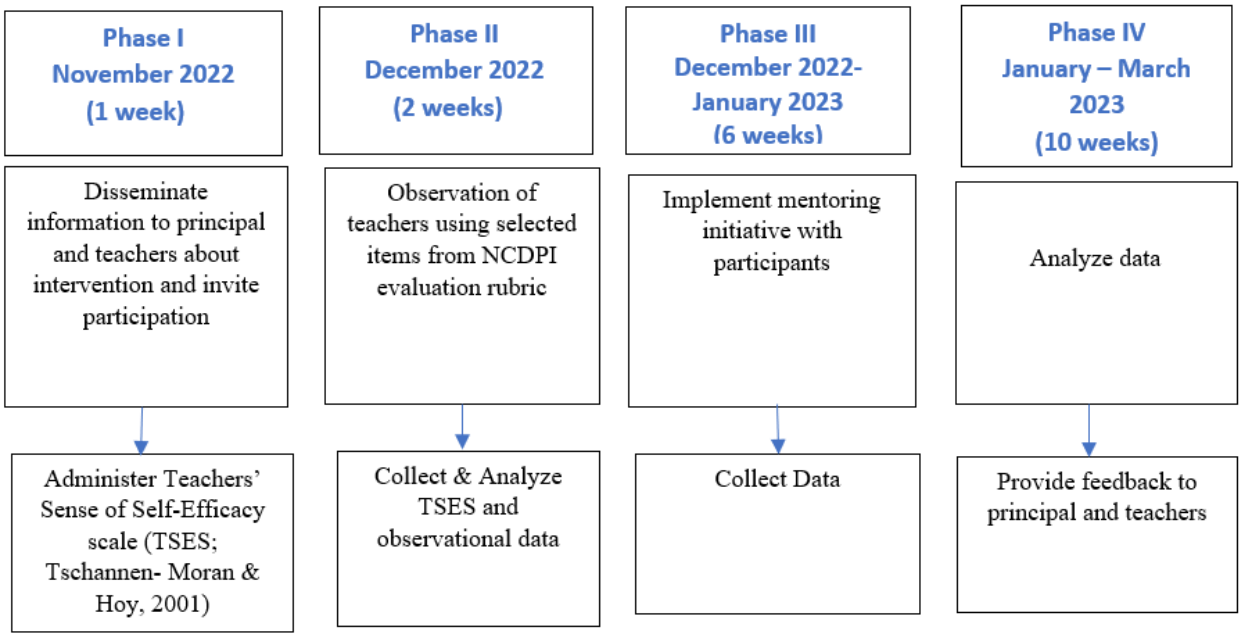

Figure 2. Plan of action.

NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric for Standard II and Standard IV (see Appendix D), and an individual teacher interview protocol (discussed subsequently). These instruments will be used in the process of data collection in the various phases of my research.

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES)

The Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES) scale was developed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) through collaboration with eight participants in a seminar about teacher self-efficacy in teaching and learning at the Ohio State University. The seminar participants were graduate students who had teaching experience. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy maintained that they reviewed several researchers' representation of teacher self-efficacy scales but that those scales did not accurately account for the tasks that teachers undertook, nor did they effectively measure teachers' self-efficacy. Consequently, they developed a new instrument.

I contacted Tschannen-Moran to seek and receive her written consent to use TSES (see Appendix C). TSES was created using some items from Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy scale in addition to items generated by the research team. According to Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001), items from Bandura's scale that compromised the validity of the scale as a teacher self-efficacy scale were removed and replaced with items that accurately represented teachers' experiences. To ensure construct validity, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy assessed their new measure against existing measures of self-efficacy resulting in positive correlations ranging from a low of .39 (with Bandura's teacher self-efficacy scale) to a high of .64 with teacher efficacy as defined in the Rand Corporation thereby attesting to the concurrent validity of their scale. After several rounds of implementation with in-service and preservice teachers and item adjustments, Tschannen-Moran and Hoy concluded that the Chronbach's alpha reliability rating for the 24-item scale was 0.94 and 0.90 for the 12-item scale. They referred to this as reasonable reliability.

I will be using the 12-item TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) scale based on the reliability rating previously mentioned. The scale consists of items that participants rate on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*nothing*) to 9 (*a great deal*). Items ask teachers about their beliefs in their ability to execute their instructional duties effectively (see Table 1). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) placed the items into three categories based on their factor analysis of their data: efficacy in instructional strategies (items 5, 9, 10, 12), efficacy in classroom management (items 1, 3, 6, 8), and efficacy in student engagement (items 2, 4, 7, 11). Once I have obtained informed consent from my participants, I will ask them to thoughtfully complete a copy of the short form of the TSES (see Table 1) by circling the number that corresponds to their perception of their teaching practice.

I chose TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) because it aligns with my research problem of practice, and it will help me to answer my first research question which is about how teachers perceive their self-efficacy. I will follow Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) protocol for calculating the respective efficacy scores from my participants' responses.

NC Educator Effectiveness Systems (NCEES) Teacher Evaluation Rubric

According to the North Carolina Department of Public Instruction (NCDPI) website (https://sites.google.com/dpi.nc.gov/ncees-information-and-resource/teachers?authuser=0), the North Carolina State Board of Education commissioned the North Carolina Professional Teaching Standards Commission to ensure that the Core Standards for the Teaching Profession accounted for teachers being prepared to teach in 21st century schools. Therefore 16 practicing educators who formed the Commission, worked together to develop standards that formed the basis for teacher preparation, evaluation, and professional development.

Table 1

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Short Form)

Directions: This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for teachers in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below. Your answers are confidential.

	How much can you do?								
Teacher Beliefs	Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal
1. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
2. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
3. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
4. How much can you do to help your students value learning?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
5. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
6. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
7. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

Table 1 (continued)

	How much can you do?								
Teacher Beliefs	Nothing		Very Little		Some Influence		Quite A Bit		A Great Deal
8. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
9. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
10. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
11. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9
12. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9

While there are six standards on the rubric, I will be using the evaluation rubric to conduct participant observations of the participating teachers using the Standard II and Standard IV rubrics which facilitate the assessment of teachers' ability to "establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students" and their ability to "facilitate learning for their students," respectively (see Appendix D for screen shots of the relevant rubric pages).

I chose these two standards because the elements embedded within them relate to differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching which are the two instructional practices, I will be focusing on during my observation of the teachers who self-select to participate in my study. Standard II lists observable steps that teachers can take to create an inclusive classroom where culturally responsive teaching is evident: "a respectful environment for a diverse population of students" (heading of Standard II; see Appendix D). Standard IV lists steps that teachers can take to cater to the different ways in which students learn thereby using a differentiated instruction model: "teachers facilitate learning for their students" (heading of Standard IV; see Appendix D). This rubric will help with my research questions because I want to make note of the instructional practices that teachers utilize in their classroom to determine if there is any association between teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of effective instructional strategies as specified by NCDPI.

Interview Protocol

During my implementation of my intervention, which is in the form of mentorship, I will be conducting one-to-one interviews using a semi-structured format. My rationale is that semi-structured interviews provide an opportunity for follow-up questions (Mertler, 2019). The questions I ask will be related to teacher's self-efficacy and the instructional practices that I observe in their classroom (see Table 2). I want to ensure that my questions are relevant to my

Table 2

Teacher Interview Questions

Question Number	Primary Prompt
1(a)	How do you think your class went?
1(b)	How confident were you during the implementation of the instructional practices you focused on today?
2	Do you think your confidence in your ability to implement best practices had any impact on how you implemented the instructional practices we worked on?
3	What did you notice about students' engagement in the lesson?
4	How would you describe your classroom management during your implementation of the best practices we discussed?
5	How do you feel about the ratings I assigned you on Standards II and IV of the NCDPI rubric?

problem of practice so I will have a member of the administrative team at Stellar Middle School review them before I begin the interview process. Data from the interview will help me to me triangulate (Andrew & Halcomb, 2009) data collected from the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) and my observations.

Phase I (November 2022)

During Phase 1, I will meet with administrators and teachers to share information about my study and let the teachers know how they can assist me by participating in it. I want to begin the process of data collection in this manner so that I can notify interested participants that they have the autonomy to self-select in the study after which they can provide their informed consent. I also want them to use the meeting as an opportunity to ask any questions about the process. Once all their questions are answered, I will administer the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; see Table 1) to teachers who are willing to complete all phases of my research. I anticipate working with no more than three teachers as I will be engaging in a mentorship program with them while executing my other teaching duties.

My first research question will be addressed in this phase as teachers will be invited to respond to the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Their responses to the TSES will help me to determine their perceived self-efficacy in their teaching capacity. I must first understand how teachers perceive their self-efficacy before I can implement an intervention that may result in increased self-efficacy.

Phase II (December 2022)

I will conduct observations once per week for 2 weeks for at least 20 minutes during my planning time in the afternoon as this is my only available time. Grades 6 and 7 students are in their Core 3 subject area at that time. Core 3 consists of students with diverse academic abilities

as students at Stellar Middle School are not grouped according to abilities. This means there may be students who are on an individualized education program (IEP) or students who are categorized as exceptional children (EC) in the Core 3 classes. Classrooms containing children with diverse needs require teachers to implement best practices such as differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching because of the diversity of needs. I will be using the NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric (Standard II and Standard IV) of the revised North Carolina Educator Professional Teaching Standards (NCDPI, 2013) to evaluate teachers' implementation of best practices in the classroom. I chose Standard II (Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students) and Standard IV (Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students) because these standards correspond closely to the concepts of culturally responsive teaching (Standard II) and differentiated instruction (Standard IV) which are the two best practices I am interested in for my research.

The NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric will allow me to gather insights into the instructional practices that the teachers participating in my study employ in their classrooms. While, as I discussed in Chapter 2, there are many instructional best practices, for this study, I will be focusing on differentiated instruction (Tomlinson & McTighe, 2006) and culturally responsive teaching (Gay, 2018). I chose these two instructional practices because they relate to the dual touchstones of education—social justice and equity—and because their application requires consideration of the complex blending of students' academic levels, learning styles, and cultural backgrounds to ensure that all students are treated fairly.

The NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric will help to answer my second research question which proposed a possible association between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices. By ascertaining teachers' perceived self-efficacy

as represented on the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) beforehand and comparing that with their observed instructional practices, I will better understand the correlation between the two. I want to understand if teachers who indicate a low perceived self-efficacy also struggle to implement best practices in their classroom while those who indicate increased self-efficacy demonstrably implement instructional best practices.

Phase III (December 2022- January 2023)

As mentioned above, I will be using a convergent parallel mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) so I will implement a teacher support initiative while I review the data that I have already collected. My literature review outlined the importance of extrinsic motivation in the form of recognition and interpersonal strategies that could be effective in increasing teacher morale (Kaiser, 1982). Consequently, I will be using mentorship as the intervention that could possibly increase teachers' self-efficacy. After observing teachers over an initial 2-week period (Phase II), I will meet with them and thoroughly discuss my findings. At this point I will make suggestions about how I wish to support them as a trained mentor by working on their perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices, namely differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching, in their classrooms over the course of the next 6 weeks.

I will conduct a second round of teacher observations over a 6-week period during the same class time and location as my initial 2-week round of observations after working with teachers on specific strategies that cater to the needs of diverse learners through differentiated instruction and culturally responsive teaching. Again, I will meet with each teacher and conduct post-classroom-observation meetings to review my observation notes as well as allow teachers the opportunity to share their perceptions of their lessons. I will revisit the class when the teacher

is taking an approach in alignment with my feedback to note any differences in terms of Standard II and Standard IV. I will collect data relevant to the implementation of the two instructional practices during this phase.

Phase IV (January- March 2023)

Following my debriefing with the teachers at the end of Phase III, I will again distribute paper copies of the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) to participants to ascertain how they perceive their self-efficacy following their mentored implementation of instructional best practices. After analyzing the data to determine if there is an association between teachers' implementation of instructional best practices and their self-efficacy, I will share my findings with relevant stakeholders at Stellar Middle School.

Data Analysis

During the three phases of data collection, I will be recording and analyzing data using specific procedures and software. The TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), will be administered in paper format then analyzed according to the protocol provided by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) using Microsoft suites applications. The semi-structured interview data will be recorded before it is reviewed and coded (Creswell & Creswell, 2018) as a means of thematic analysis. This will be useful in comparing participants' responses about their instructional best practices and their perceived self-efficacy. I will conduct interviews during the intervention process so any recurring or changing themes will be recorded and analyzed. For example, if teachers show increased self- efficacy but unchanged instructional practices or vice versa, then this information will help me to draw some critical conclusions about my study. A review of the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001), my observation data and my analysis of teachers' interview responses will help me to answer my research questions about teachers'

perception of their self- efficacy, associations between self-efficacy and best practices as well as the impact of mentorship on teachers' self-efficacy.

I will record my observation data on a paper copy of the NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric (see Appendix D) which has specific performance descriptors for each element of each standard (e.g., developing, proficient, accomplished, distinguished, and not demonstrated, with this last descriptor requiring a comment from the observer). These descriptors collectively determine if the criteria for each standard have been met. Additionally, I will be taking observational data notes (Mertler, 2019) so that I will later analyze to further illuminate how each teacher implemented their instructional strategies.

Delimitations, Limitations and Assumptions

Since I am a trained mentor at Stellar Middle School, I will be conducting the mentorship and support initiative for my research. As I am also a teacher at Stellar Middle School, my workload limits the number of participants I can engage in my study as I will not be able to mentor more than three teachers while executing my teaching assignments. The fact that I work at the school and have been working with some teachers for several years may cause some teachers who would be suitable participants for my study to refrain from participating because they fear being scrutinized by a colleague.

Participants will self-select in my study so their self-efficacy may not necessarily be an area of concern. Nevertheless, their inclusion in my study could prove beneficial as I would observe how their increased self-efficacy impacts their implementation of instructional practices. Another limitation is that participants may simply choose to participate in my study because they know me as a colleague, and they want to support my endeavors. Additionally, teachers who opt to join my study may have a greater challenge beyond self-efficacy. For example, my research is

not intended for teachers who lack content knowledge in their assigned role but more so those who know their content area but doubt their ability to effectively do their job.

My research is not focused on the school environment as a cause of teachers' low self-efficacy. I do not intend to explore why teachers have low self-efficacy but more so how self-efficacy can impact teachers' implementation of best practices and how teachers' self-efficacy can be increased. This does have implications for my research as the environment as mentioned in Chapter 2 can impact teachers' self-efficacy but the ways to increase self-efficacy are not necessarily dependent on a specific environmental context.

Stellar Middle School is currently impacted by the teacher shortage crisis, and this is a contributor to the limited number of participants I will be working with. I am teaching the entire grade 8 population as the school was unable to secure a second ELA teacher. This does impact my ability to mentor a larger number of participants as my schedule cannot be adjusted to account for the time I will need to observe more participants in their classrooms. While this has implications for how my data may be used, the level of rigor in the implementation of prolonged mentorship with my participants can yield very meaningful data.

Role of Scholarly Practitioner

I have been an educator for the past 17 years. During this time, I have worked in capacities of leadership such as Team Lead and Year Group Supervisor which puts me in a position to supervise a grade level of teachers and students. Additionally, I have taught in a few international contexts which has provided me an opportunity to gain insight about the commonalities in the challenges teachers encounter regardless of borderlines. I am currently a trained mentor, member of an Aspiring Leaders' program as well as an advisor on the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Duke Area Studies Teacher Advisory Council. I possess

knowledge and experience about effective teaching and mentorship which will prove useful in my research.

I am passionate about teachers' being adequately supported in their implementation of instructional practices as a lack of support affects both teachers and students. Consequently, I am committed to advocating for teachers and students in ensuring both are supported in their instructional endeavors in ways that communicate the value we place on learning. By promoting teacher support for their instructional practice, I expect an outcome of improved teacher implementation of effective classroom practices and utilization of value-added systems—an environment in which teachers remain in their jobs and willingly cater to the needs of diverse learners because the school is also catering to the teachers' instructional practice needs.

Summary

My mixed methods study is focused on teachers' self-efficacy and its potential association with their implementation of best practices. Teachers will self-select to participate in my study and share their perceived self-efficacy and instructional practices while they engage in a mentorship and instructional support initiative. To ascertain whether there is an association between teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of best practices, I will utilize a measure of participating teachers' efficacy (TSES, Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; see Table 1), the NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric for Standard II and Standard IV (see Appendix D), and semi-structured interviews (see Table 2). After I conduct the appropriate analyses, I will synthesize my findings and conclusions in Chapter 5.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of my study was to explore and alleviate a problem of practice regarding teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices—namely differentiation and culturally responsive teaching. Throughout the data collection process, I wondered whether teachers with high self- efficacy derive their self-efficacy from their implementation of instructional best practices or whether they innately have self-efficacy that propels them to utilize instructional best practices regardless of the challenges they encounter. I also wondered whether teachers with low self-efficacy first implement instructional best practices and later develop high self-efficacy because of the positive impact of these instructional practices. Consequently, I wanted to understand if high self-efficacy is the effect of teachers implementing best practices or if it is the cause of teachers implementing instructional best practices. In either case, my findings can inform professional development and mentorship practices that are intended to boost teachers' self-efficacy in conjunction with their instructional practices.

Problem of Practice Guiding Questions

As a reminder, my study was guided by the following questions:

Research Question 1: How do teachers at Stellar Middle School perceive their self-efficacy in their teaching capacity?

Research Question 2: To what extent is it plausible to suggest an association at Stellar Middle School between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices in the classroom?

Research Question 3: To what extent is there an association between a teacher's involvement in a support intervention oriented to improving their proficiency with instructional

techniques and (a) their increased self- efficacy and (b) their implementation of instructional best practices in their classrooms?

Participants

Teachers at Stellar Middle School were invited to participate in my study after being informed about the purpose of my study, the ethical procedures I was implementing, and the steps to follow if they wished to volunteer to participate in the study. I was interested in working with no more than three participants as I am a full-time teacher with the workload of two teachers due to the teacher shortage which has impacted Stellar Middle School. Teachers were informed that they could speak with me individually if they had any interest or concerns regarding my study. Only one teacher expressed interest in participating in my study. Consequently, I made a second attempt and announced in a staff meeting that I was still accepting participants, which yielded two more teachers who volunteered to participate. I met with each participant individually and reinforced the fact that their participation was completely voluntary, and any data I collected would be reported with the use of pseudonyms so their privacy would be protected. Each participant shared no concerns, so they willingly signed the informed consent forms.

At the time of my study, I had been a teacher for 17 years and had taught Language and Literature to students in Grades 7 and 8 for three years at Stellar Middle School. I had worked for many of those years to refine my instructional practice and implement both differentiated curricular approaches and culturally responsive pedagogy. I am a trained mentor and an advisor on the University of North Carolina Chapel Hill Duke Area Studies Teacher Advisory Council. I have worked in leadership capacities such as Team Lead and Year Group Supervisor which puts me in a position to supervise one grade level of teachers and students. Additionally, I have taught in a few international contexts which has provided me an opportunity to gain insight into the

commonalities in the challenges teachers encounter regardless of borderlines. Consequently, my ability to discern how my colleagues struggle to implement these two aspects of effective teaching gave rise to my study.

Teacher 1 Demographics

Teacher 1 has been a teacher for 15 years and has taught Social Studies to grade 8 students at Stellar Middle School for 2 years. They live in the district and are actively involved in co-curricular activities with the students coaching the step dance team and co-coaching the cheer leading squad. Their classes are known to be noisy, and it is common for students to be sent to the office for infractions. During PLC meetings, it is common for them to vent about the disrespect that the students show them in class even though they have the same students in their co-curricular coaching roles and have no difficulty eliciting their cooperation.

Teacher 2 Demographics

Teacher 2 has been teaching for 27 years as a math teacher. They have been teaching grade 7 students for 3 years at Stellar Middle School. They live on the outskirts of the district but usually volunteer to assist with outreach activities in the district. Teacher 2 has expressed a desire to become a school leader and tends to be vocal in staff meetings about students' behavior and how it impacts their academic performance. A visit to Teacher 2's classroom would show students having sidebar conversations with little to no redirection from the teacher. The classroom tends to be student-led in a manner that student behavior dominates. Nevertheless, Teacher 2 is one of the teachers with the least behavior reports in the school behavior support system which suggests that several of the behavior concerns they mentioned went undocumented. Teacher 2 has a child that attends Stellar Middle School and a spouse that teaches there.

Teacher 3 Demographics

Teacher 3 has been teaching English Language Arts (ELA) for 10 years but has been teaching ELA for the first year at Stellar Middle School. Teacher 3 teaches grade 7 ELA students during the day and supports students in the evenings as part of the after-school tutoring program. They live in the community and attend the local church as a member of the choir. They live close to the school and are well-respected in the community. Their spouse owns a small business and is a prominent member of the ethnic faith community.

Data Collection

To answer my research questions, I engaged in four stages of data collection and analysis. The first stage began in November 2022 after I successfully defended my dissertation proposal and received approval from the East Carolina University and Medical Institutional Review Board to proceed with my data collection. Since my research design was a convergent parallel mixed method approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I collected and analyzed both qualitative and quantitative data at the same time. By merging both qualitative and quantitative data, I was able to develop an in-depth analysis of the topic regarding teachers' self-efficacy.

Data were collected with use of the short form of the Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) TSES, semi-structured interviews, and participatory observations. These three sources of data collection were used to develop themes and gain a better understanding of the associations between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices.

Phase I (November 2022)

My three participants who self-selected to participate in my study completed a paper version of the short form of the Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) TSES. To summarize the data, I created tables and figures using Microsoft *Word*.

Understanding the TSES and Data Findings

The TSES measures teachers' perception of their capability to accomplish specific tasks associated with their role as an educator. I used the 12-item TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; used with permission), relying on the reliability and construct validity assessed and confirmed by Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001). The TSES consists of items that participants rate on a nine-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (*nothing*) to 9 (*a great deal*). Items ask participants about their beliefs in their ability to execute their instructional duties effectively. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy placed the items into three categories based on their factor analysis of their data: efficacy in student engagement (Items 2, 4, 7, & 11), efficacy in instructional strategies (Items 5, 9, 10, & 12), and efficacy in classroom management (Items 1, 3, 6, & 8). Table 3 and Figure 3 presents the responses of the three participants in my study to the TSES items.

Participants' Perceptions of Their Efficacy in Student Engagement

Table 3 and the associated Figure 3 reflect the three participants' responses to items 2, 4, 7, and 11 which determine their perception of their self-efficacy in student engagement. This means that the ratings teachers have shared indicate the extent to which they believe they possess the ability to keep students engaged in a lesson. I used abbreviations for each teacher: Teacher 1 (T1), Teacher 2 (T2), and Teacher 3 (T3).

T2 seemed to believe they could positively influence student engagement by both motivating students and helping families. T2's ratings ranged from 6 to 8 which suggested that they perceived their self-efficacy in student engagement to be *quite a bit*. T1 and T3, on the other hand, perceived their self-efficacy in student engagement to be *very little*. Their numerical rating for each question ranged from 3 which is *very little* to 5 which represents *some degree*.

Table 3

Efficacy in Student Engagement Questions

Questions	1 None at all	2	3 Very little	4	5 Some degree	6	7 Quite a bit	8	9 A great deal
2. How much can you do to motivate students who show low interest in schoolwork?				T1, T3			T2		
4. How much can you do to help your students value learning?				T 1	T3			T2	
7. How much can you do to calm a student who is disruptive or noisy?				T3	T1	T2			
11. How much can you assist families in helping their children do well in school?			T1, T3					T2	

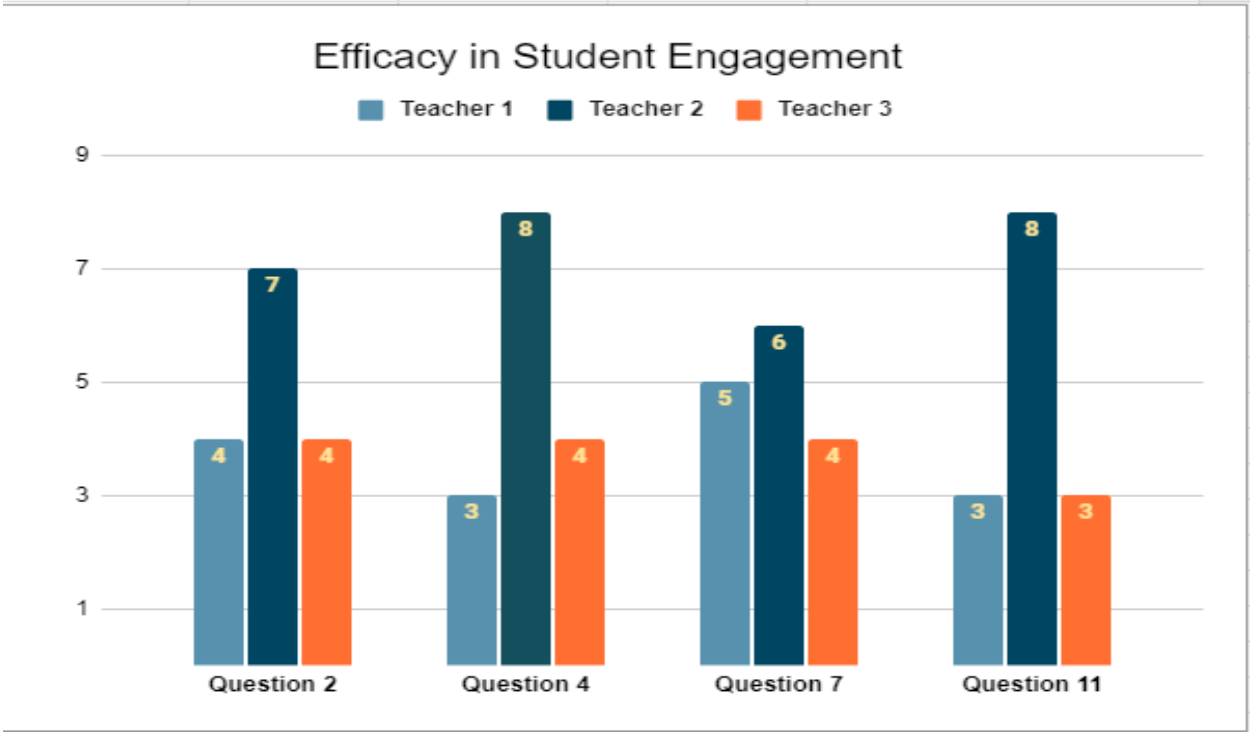

Figure 3. Efficacy in student engagement results.

They did not believe they could do very much to motivate students to value learning, assist families in helping their children or appease a disruptive student.

Participants Perceptions of Their Efficacy in Instructional Strategies

Table 4 and the associated Figure 4 reflect the three participants' responses to items 5, 9, 10, and 12 which determine their perception of their self-efficacy in instructional strategies. This means that the ratings teachers have shared indicate the extent to which they believe they possess the ability to discern and implement appropriate instructional strategies.

Efficacy in instructional strategies refers to teachers' belief in their ability to plan and execute their lessons with efficiency and expertise. All three participants did not select a rating above 6 on any of the questions in this section. This suggested that they did not perceive their self-efficacy to be a *great deal*. In fact, they seemed to think their self-efficacy ranged from *very little* to *some degree* in relation to their ability to effectively use instructional strategies. It is interesting to note that teachers' perception of their self-efficacy in implementing instructional strategies correlated with their ratings on their classroom management strategies (see Table 5 and Figure 5). This further reinforced the need for my study and the teacher support intervention, as participants believed that they did not have a significant impact on students' learning through their use of instructional strategies.

Efficacy in Classroom Management suggests that teachers can control the learning environment by establishing effective procedures, minimizing student disruption, and inspiring students to do well. T1 and T3 perceived their self-efficacy to be very low in the category of classroom management. Their ratings indicated that they had low self-efficacy and struggled with the ability to effectively manage their classrooms. T2, on the other hand, perceived their self-efficacy as relatively high in areas that required teachers to inspire students to do well.

Table 4

Efficacy in Instructional Strategies Questions

Questions	1 None at all	2	3 Very little	4	5 Some degree	6	7 Quite a bit	8	9 A great deal
5. To what extent can you craft good questions for your students?				T1	T3	T2			
9. How much can you use a variety of assessment strategies?					T1, T2, T3				
10. To what extent can you provide an alternative explanation or example when students are confused?				T2	T3	T1			
12. How well can you implement alternative strategies in your classroom?			T3	T1	T2				

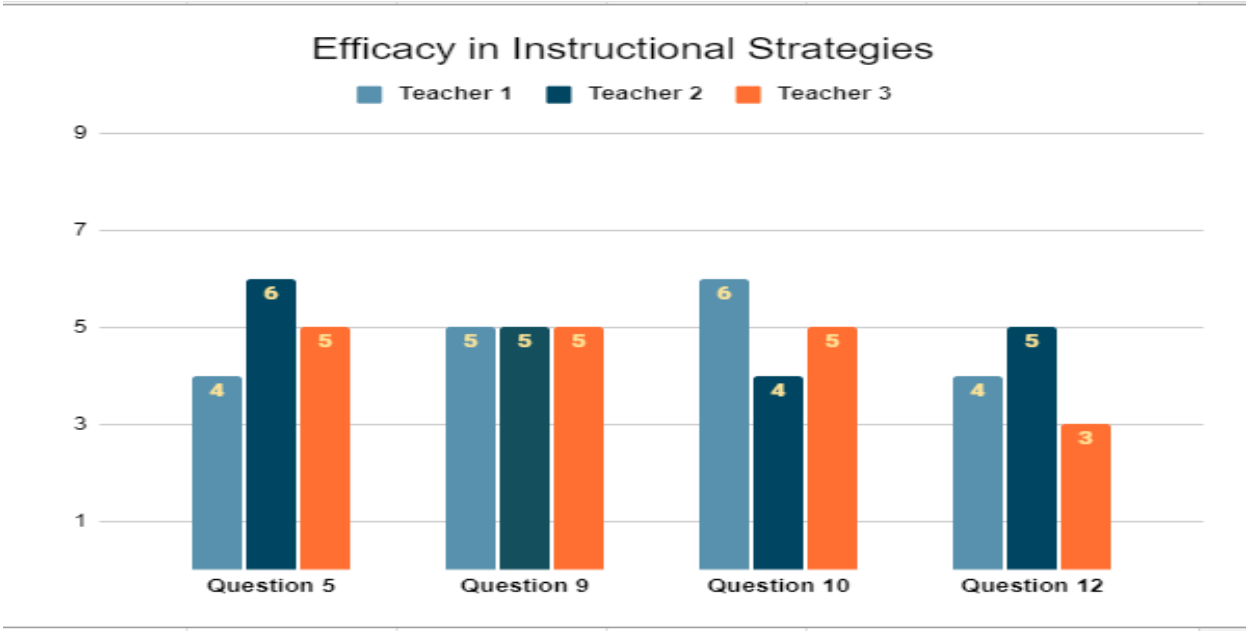

Figure 4. Efficacy in instructional strategies results.

Table 5

Efficacy in Classroom Management Questions

Questions	1 None at all	2	3 Very little	4	5 Some degree	6	7 Quite a bit	8	9 A great deal
1. How much can you do to control disruptive behavior in the classroom?		T3	T1		T2				
3. How much can you do to get students to believe they can do well in schoolwork?				T1, T3			T2		
6. How much can you do to get children to follow classroom rules?				T1, T3			T2		
8. How well can you establish a classroom management system with each group of students?			T1	T3	T2				

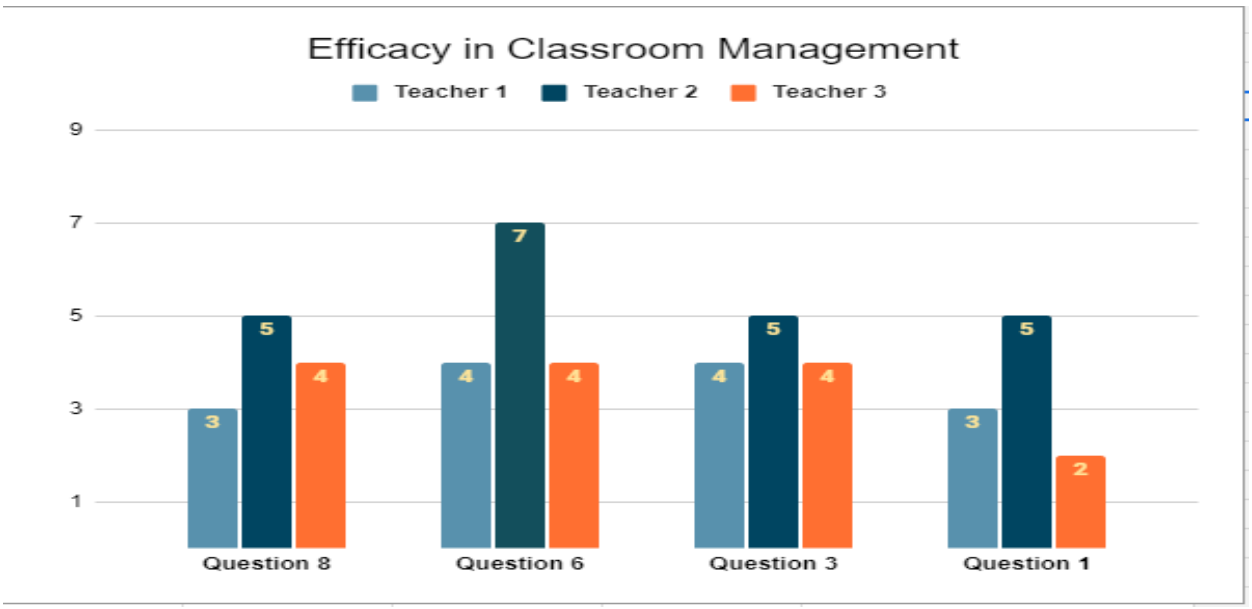

Figure 5. Efficacy in classroom management results.

Nevertheless, T2 perceived their ability to establish effective classroom management strategies and control classroom disruption as somewhat low. This means that the participants perceived their self-efficacy in classroom management to be low.

Phase II (December 2022)

During Phase II of my research, I conducted observations once per week for 2 weeks for at least 20 minutes during my planning time in the afternoon. Grades 6 and 7 students were in their Core 3 subject area at that time. (Core 3 consists of students with diverse academic abilities as students at Stellar Middle School are not grouped according to abilities.) This means that there may have been students who were on an individualized education program (IEP) or students who were categorized as exceptional children (EC) in the Core 3 classes.

I used the NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric (Standard II and Standard IV) of the revised North Carolina Educator Professional Teaching Standards (NCDPI, 2013) to collect my observation notes and evaluate teachers' implementation of best practices in the classroom. I chose Standard II (Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students) and Standard IV (Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students) because these standards correspond closely to the concepts of culturally responsive teaching (Standard II) and differentiated instruction (Standard IV) which are the two best practices I am interested in for my research.

The NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric helped me to answer my second research question which proposed a possible association between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices. By ascertaining teachers' perceived self-efficacy as represented on the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) beforehand and comparing that with my observation of their instructional practices, I determined the correlation between the two. I wanted to understand if teachers who indicated a low perceived self-efficacy also

struggled to implement best practices in their classroom while those who indicated increased self-efficacy demonstrably implemented instructional best practice. The following discussion presents my analysis of the data from the teacher evaluation rubric in relation to teachers' perceived self-efficacy.

Understanding the NC Teacher Evaluation Rubric

Supervisors rating teachers award ratings based on six categories. These ratings align with specific descriptors as shown in Tables 6 and 7. Teachers are given one of the following ratings if their performance matches the criteria:

- Developing: Teacher demonstrated adequate growth toward achieving standard(s) during the period of performance but did not demonstrate competence on standard(s) of performance.
- Proficient: Teacher demonstrated basic competence on standard(s) of performance.
- Accomplished: Teacher exceeded basic competence on standard(s) of performance most of the time.
- Distinguished: Teacher consistently and significantly exceeded basic competence on standard(s) of performance.
- Not Demonstrated: Teacher did not demonstrate competence on or adequate growth. achieving standard(s) of performance. (Note: If the "Not Demonstrated" rating is used, the Principal/Evaluator must comment about why it was used.

Standard II

Standard II relates to the instructional best practice of culturally responsive teaching. My observation data indicated that all participants had some areas that needed to be developed for them to demonstrate alignment of their practice with Standard II (establish a respectful environment for a diverse population of students). There was no participant whom I rated as

Table 6

Standard II: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students

Descriptors	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not demonstrated
a. Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults.		T1, T2			T3 (teacher seemed frustrated with students, so they generally shared a strained relationship)
b. Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world.	T1, T2, T3				
c. Teachers treat students as individuals.	T1, T3	T2			
d. Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs.	T1, T2, T3				
e. Teachers work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students.	T1, T3, T2				

Table 7

Standard IV: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students

Descriptors	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated
a. Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students.	T1, T2, T3	T2			
b. Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students.		T1, T2, T3			
c. Teachers use a variety of instructional methods.	T1	T2, T3			
d. Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction.	T1	T2, T3			
e. Teachers help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.	T2, T3	T1			
f. Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities.	T1, T3	T2			
g. Teachers communicate effectively.	T3	T1, T2			
h. Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.	T3, T2	T1			

accomplished on this standard, as shown in Table 6. Teachers did not demonstrate ability to use culturally responsive practices in the classroom to foster relationships and cater to the needs of diverse learners. T3 maintained a very strained relationship with students as they were dismissive when students needed help or wanted to have casual interactions. When I shared my observation with T3, they explained that students did not take the content area seriously and were very disruptive and combative during lessons so there was no point in "playing nice" with them. T1 and T2 had a more cooperative relationship with students but, like T3, they did not display any actions that showed them adapting their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs or diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds.

T2 engaged students in an activity that showed how universal mathematics is, which was useful in allowing students to make connections to culture and concepts. This intentional effort to use culturally responsive strategies within a math lesson is indicative of T2's perceived self-efficacy, as they scored the highest on the TSES. It is important to note too that T2 has been teaching for 27 years so one may wonder if the years of experience has contributed to T2's perceived self-efficacy and willingness to incorporate some best practices in the classroom. T1 and T2 showed little evidence of culturally responsive teaching during the observations. This is in keeping with their perceived self-efficacy ranging from *very little* to *some degree* in relation to their ability to use instructional strategies effectively. Their classrooms consisted of Hispanic, White, African American, and Middle Eastern students, yet they did not adapt their lessons to facilitate the richness of the cultural groups represented in their rooms. The lessons were conducted with little consideration for the individuality of the students, as teachers paced the lessons in a very rudimentary manner. Teachers further indicated they received little support from parents, so they could not collaborate with them in the best interest of the students.

Standard IV

Standard IV addresses differentiation as an instructional best practice. My observation data, as shown in Table 7, indicated that teachers needed support in the implementation of differentiation. I rated teachers as "proficient- Teacher demonstrated basic competence on standard(s) of performance" in most of the descriptors. While T3 and T2 integrated technology and used a variety of instructional methods in their lessons, they were still "developing" in the areas of using a variety of assessments and developing students critical thinking and problem-solving skills. Of the eight descriptors, I rated T3 as "developing" in five areas, T2 earned "developing" in three areas, and T1 earned "developing" in four areas. Despite the range in the ratings, all teachers showed a limited understanding of the ways in which learning takes place and the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students.

My observations correlate to teachers' rating on the TSES as they rated themselves between the range of *very little* to *some degree* in relation to their self-efficacy in implementing instructional strategies. Consequently, they perceived that they are not capable of effectively implementing classroom strategies and their execution of their lessons was indicative of this inadequacy. Despite the wide range of experiences that they have, their perceived self-efficacy seemed similar. Only T2 seemed somewhat more confident in their ability to implement instructional strategies effectively in comparison to T3 and T1 who seemed doubtful of their ability in this regard. A telling feature of my observations was that teachers underscored that their ability to go through an entire lesson without disruption while I was present was a noteworthy success as opposed to being able to utilize differentiation strategies. This helped me to understand the context within which the teachers had formed their perception of their capabilities.

Phase III (December 2022-January 2023)

In keeping with the convergent parallel mixed methods approach (Creswell & Creswell, 2018), I implemented a teacher support initiative while I reviewed the data that I had already collected. I used mentorship as an intervention that could increase teachers' self-efficacy. After observing teachers over an initial 2-week period (Phase II), I met with them and thoroughly discussed my findings. At that point I made suggestions about how I would support them as a trained mentor by working on their perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices, namely differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching, in their classrooms over the course of 6 weeks.

A review of teachers' responses on the TSES and their teaching style during the observations indicated that they could benefit from the mentorship program. Consequently, I met with each teacher at least once per week to share useful strategies in incorporating culturally responsive teaching and differentiation in their lessons. I spent 2 weeks focused on culturally responsive teaching then in the third week I observed a lesson that incorporated those strategies. I later spent another 2 weeks focused on differentiated instruction before I concluded the sixth week with another round of observations. The observations were conducted during the same class time and location as my initial 2-week round (Phase II) of observations to ensure that the context remained constant. As shown in Table 8 and Table 9, I used the NCDPI teacher evaluation rubric (Standard II and Standard IV) of the revised North Carolina Educator Professional Teaching Standards (NCDPI, 2013) to collect my observation notes and evaluate teachers' implementation of best practices in the classroom.

Standard II correlates with culturally responsive teaching in that teachers must execute their lessons strategically with great consideration for students' linguistic, cultural, and ethnic

Table 8

Standard II: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students

Descriptors	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not demonstrated
a. Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults.	T3	T1	T2		
b. Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world.		T1, T2, T3			
c. Teachers treat students as individuals.	T3	T1	T2		
d. Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs.	T1, T3	T2			
e. Teachers work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students.	T1, T3, T2				

Table 9

Standard IV: Teachers Facilitate Learning for Their Students

Descriptors	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated
a. Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students.	T1, T3	T2			
b. Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students.		T1, T2, T3			
c. Teachers use a variety of instructional methods.			T1, T2, T3		
d. Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction.			T1, T2, T3		
e. Teachers help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills.			T1, T2, T3		
f. Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities.	T1, T3		T2		
g. Teachers communicate effectively.		T3	T1, T2		
h. Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.		T1, T2, T3			

backgrounds. The observation data suggested to me that all three teachers were amenable to change to varying degrees when implementing culturally responsive strategies. None of the teachers regressed after receiving my mentorship and in fact received higher scores from me in at least two of the five descriptors.

T1, who was previously rated as proficient in one area (descriptor a), based on my observation, had made some progress in receiving a proficient rating in descriptors a through c. T1 explained that they had planned their lesson to be inclusive in a manner that students with disabilities would benefit greatly (descriptor d) but the disruption from a certain group of students changed the trajectory of the lesson. T1 resorted to assigning work instead of following through with some of the suggested activities that we had discussed. They attributed this digression to their frustration with student behavior in the school.

T2, of the three teachers, believed in their ability to do their job *quite a bit*. The scores I assigned them on the teacher evaluation rubric increased one level higher in all areas except for descriptor e which refers to teacher's effectiveness in working collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students. T2 considered their partnership with families to be a "work in progress," as families have not been very receptive to the idea that "it takes a village" to raise children. T2 felt like some families did not care as they scarcely addressed areas of concerns or attended parent-teacher meetings. This was also underscored by T1 and T2. Hence, this was the one area that none of the teachers made progress in.

T3 had not received a proficient rating from me during Phase II observations but they earned a rating of proficient in descriptor b which refers to their ability to embrace diversity in the school and the wider community. I observed them being intentional about choosing supplemental reading resources that provided a rich context for students. The lesson that I observed also gave students an opportunity to connect their experiences with that of characters

within story. T3 mentioned that they did not try some of the activities before because students sometimes deviated from the lesson, and this made it difficult to "reign them in." T3 had been working on their relationship with students but, in my estimation, there is still more room for growth as T3 tends to resort to pessimism when faced with resistance from the students. Hence, I awarded them a rating of developing for the other descriptors as their self-efficacy vacillates between *very little* to *some degree*.

Standard IV correlates to differentiated instruction as teachers are rated on their ability to understand how students learn in order for them to plan and execute lessons that cater to the diverse needs of students. The mentorship that teachers received from me was in keeping with the descriptors of the teacher evaluation rubric. While observing teachers, I noticed that they tried to apply the strategies I suggested in differentiating the process, content, product, or environment. Teachers showed improvement in most of the descriptors.

T1's and T3's ratings improved in all areas except for descriptors a and f. Both areas remain "developing" as I believe they need to spend a greater amount of time "learning" their students and using that knowledge to help students develop leadership qualities in groups. Their plans for and execution of lessons using differentiated instruction showed, in my estimation, that they were being very intentional. T2 maintained a rating of "proficient" or achieved a higher rating of "accomplished." T2 acknowledged that some strategies that I shared with them were not new to them, but they seemed to have regressed to the rudimentary ways of teaching. They attribute this to a sense of comfort in the profession having been in it for so long and having to deal with all types of students and leaders. All participating teachers shared with me that the differentiated strategies helped their lessons flow smoothly despite the occasional disruption from students.

Post-Observation Interview Data

Post-observation interviews took place during weeks 3 and 6 of the mentorship program. Participants had consented to being recorded during the interviews. While I followed the interview questions, I asked additional probing questions per the format of a semi-structured interview. I later transcribed the interview data, printed hard copies of each and read them over to identify and highlight repeated patterns. This process allowed me to make connections between the emerging themes and the research questions.

Week 3 Post-Observation (Culturally Responsive Teaching)

With respect to Interview Question 1(a) ("How do you think your class went?") teachers gave mixed reviews on their lessons. T1 and T3 thought the lessons went well for students because students got to make connections to their heritage during the activities they had to complete. Their reservations stemmed from their uncertainty with handling some of the conversations. T1 was very politically conservative in their personal beliefs, so when students shared divergent thinking about discrimination towards Hispanics in America, they felt uncomfortable at that moment. Nevertheless, they acknowledged the importance of creating a safe space for students to have those conversations.

With respect to Interview Question 1(b) ("How confident were you during the implementation of the instructional practices you focused on today?"), T1 and T3 had inadvertently responded to this question previously. They accepted that incorporating culturally responsive teaching strategies required them to confront their own biases to facilitate rich conversations in the classroom. T2 was confident during their implementation of culturally responsive strategies as they felt that the idea of showing students how culture and history connects to mathematical concepts was very interesting to students. Students' interest helped to boost their self-confidence.

With respect to Interview Question 2 ("Do you think your confidence in your ability to implement best practices had any impact on how you implemented the instructional practices we worked on?"), teachers were relatively confident in their ability to implement culturally responsive teaching strategies. They could not have prepared for the direction some of the conversations took, especially in T1's Social Studies class. T1 felt that their confidence impacted their implementation as they were doubtful about how they would manage the lesson since their classroom consists of students from varying cultural backgrounds; they thought giving them activities that connected to their heritage could potentially "open a can of worms." T2 and T3 were confident that they could implement culturally responsive teaching strategies and that their confidence influenced them to comfortably teach their lesson.

With respect to Interview Question 3 ("What did you notice about students' engagement in the lesson?"), all teachers agreed that students were very engaged in the lesson. T2 noted that while all students enjoyed cultural reference to math, a cheeky student questioning the relevance caused a disruption to the flow of the lesson. T2 and T3 considered students to be very engaged in the lessons and figured that it was due to their using their prior knowledge and personal experiences to make connections to the Social Studies and Literature texts respectively. They also found students' disruption to be at a minimum and manageable.

With respect to Interview Question 4 ("How would you describe your classroom management during your implementation of the best practices we discussed?"), all teachers felt that they managed the class well but acknowledged that they needed to work on how they utilized groups during their lessons. They understood that students working in groups could provide an opportunity for them to appreciate each other's diverse backgrounds while honing their leadership skills. However, T1 and T2 highlighted that group work sometimes makes it

difficult for them to manage the class because some students are very talkative and disruptive in that context. T2 did not find group work to be a classroom management issue.

With respect to Interview Question 5 ("How do you feel about the ratings I assigned you on Standards IV of the NCDPI rubric?"), teachers felt that the ratings I assigned them were very good because they were not very intentional about using culturally responsive teaching strategies before, so any favorable rating was appreciated. T3 was very candid in highlighting that they would have possibly rated themselves higher if the data were being used as part their performance. They considered "developing" to be a sign of ineffectiveness in the profession and would not want that rating on file.

Week 6 Post-Observation (Differentiation)

With respect to Interview Question 1(a) ("How do you think your class went?"), all teachers thought their lesson went well except for the occasional disruption caused by student behavior. T3 indicated that it was one of their better classes to date as students were usually noncompliant and combative. T1 found it surprising that students were so cooperative and willing to complete various activities from the choice board they were given. T2 thought math was one of those subjects that could be difficult to incorporate differentiation strategies but was pleased to see that it was possible.

With respect to Interview Question 1(b) ("How confident were you during the implementation of the instructional practices you focused on today?"), my participants highlighted that they were not always intentional about using resources or activities that connected with students' background but having seen the benefit of doing so had helped to boost their confidence. T2 expressed that they were always adequately confident as a teacher, but they began the lesson with reservations because they considered math to be a "sit and get" subject. T3

also expressed having some reservations because they were not accustomed to the level of planning that was required but their confidence increased as the lesson progressed.

With respect to Interview Question 2 ("Do you think your confidence in your ability to implement best practices had any impact on how you implemented the instructional practices we worked on?"), all teachers agreed that their confidence in being able to manage the classroom behaviors and effectively transition from one differentiated activity to the next had an impact on how they implemented the instructional practices. T3 clarified that their confidence was not just in their ability but also the students' ability to engage in and appreciate the format of the lesson. T2 shared a similar response except that they thought their confidence had a ripple effect of boosting student engagement.

With respect to Interview Question 3 ("What did you notice about students' engagement in the lesson?"), T1 and T3 had inadvertently responded to this question in their previous response. They thought most of the students were engaged, especially since students had the opportunity to demonstrate mastery through different activities. They also conceded that all students were not engaged as some were still playing around and had to be redirected repeatedly. T2 was pleased by the level of student engagement and thought the engagement lessened the behavior concerns.

With respect to Interview Question 4 ("How would you describe your classroom management during your implementation of the best practices we discussed?"), T3 thought they managed the class relatively well but the fact that they deviated from the lesson out of frustration meant that they needed to work on their classroom management some more. T1 and T3 felt they managed their classes—more so because they had fewer behavior issues to mitigate. T1 wondered if students were having a good day or if the activities may have kept them too busy to be as disruptive as they usually were.

With respect to Interview Question 5 ("How do you feel about the ratings I assigned you on Standards II of the NCDPI rubric?"), teachers felt that the ratings I assigned them were fair for the most part. T2 thought there were areas that they could have been rated as "accomplished" versus "proficient." After I thoroughly explained the factors that I considered in making the ratings, T2 conceded that their rating was acceptable.

Overall Impression of Post-Observation Interviews

In my estimation, teachers need more time to learn about the ways in which students learn and how they can leverage that knowledge to provide students with engaging lessons that cater to their diverse needs. The semi-structured responses given by teachers during the Week 3 and Week 6 post-observation conferences indicated that teachers felt more prepared to implement instructional best practices and manage their classroom with efficiency.

While their responses were affirming, T3 questioned their ability to maintain such a structured classroom as students' unpredictable behavior seemed daunting. They seemed to not only doubt their self-efficacy but the students' ability to attain academic excellence and good conduct. T3 would benefit from a year or more of mentorship and support that could result in a mind shift.

Phase IV (January-March 2023)

Following my debriefing with the teachers at the end of Phase III, I distributed the paper copies of the TSES (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) to participants again to ascertain how they perceived their self-efficacy following their mentored implementation of instructional best practices. I organized their responses in a table to analyze the extent to which teachers' perception of their self-efficacy changed.

The data indicated that teachers' perception of their self-efficacy changed for most items on the TSES after receiving support through the mentorship program. T1's and T3's perception

of their self-efficacy initially ranged from *very little* to *some degree* but it subsequently ranged from *very little* to *quite a bit*, as shown in Table 10. T2's perception of their self-efficacy was initially rated as *quite a bit* but later increased to *a great deal*. Despite the increases, all participants maintained the same rating of Item 11, which referred to their ability to assist families in helping their children do well. Participants considered parental support and collaboration to be one of those factors that were beyond their control although it had a ripple effect on their job as an educator. This suggests to me that teachers' perceived self-efficacy, though entirely dependent on their mindset, may be influenced by the context of the school and the support from the wider community. Consequently, items on the TSES that seemed to heavily depend on teachers' initiative received higher perception ratings.

With respect to Research Question 1 ("How do teachers at Stellar Middle School perceive their self-efficacy in their teaching capacity?"), my analysis of the data I gathered from all my methods of data collection indicate to me that the participants at Stellar Middle School perceived their self-efficacy as ranging from *very little* to *quite a bit*. Key phrases like "family support," "student behavior," and "teacher behaviors" are the compelling factors that influence my assessment. Participants rated their self-efficacy as *very little* based on the fact that students tended to be very disruptive—to the extent that they had lost confidence in their ability to teach effectively. They felt that minimal support from families contributed to the ongoing behavioral concerns they had to grapple with on a daily basis.

With respect to Research Question 2 ("To what extent is it plausible to suggest an association at Stellar Middle School between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of two specific instructional best practices in the classroom?"), my analysis of my data leads me to suggest that participants' perception of their self-efficacy impacted how they

Table 10

Teacher Self-Efficacy Comparative Results

Item #	Teacher 1			Teacher 2			Teacher 3		
				Student Engagement					
	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change
2	4	6	+2	7	9	+2	4	7	+3
4	4	5	+1	8	9	+1	5	6	+1
7	5	6	+1	6	8	+2	4	5	+1
11	3	3	0	8	8	-	3	3	0
Mean	4	5	+1	7.25	8.5	+1.25	3.7	5.25	+1.55
				Instructional Strategies					
	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change
5	4	6	+2	6	8	+2	5	6	+1
9	5	6	+1	5	7	+2	5	7	+2
10	6	8	+2	4	6	+2	5	6	+1
12	4	6	+2	5	6	+1	3	5	+2
Mean	4.75	6.5	+1.75	5	6.75	1.75	4.5	6	+2.75
				Classroom Management					
	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change	Pre	Post	Change
1	3	5	+2	5	7	+2	2	3	+1
3	4	6	+2	5	8	+3	4	5	+1
6	4	6	+2	7	8	+1	4	6	+2
8	3	4	+1	5	6	+1	4	5	+1
Mean	3.75	4.75	+1	5.5	7.25	2.75	3.5	4.75	+1.25

implemented instructional best practices to a great extent. T1 and T3 rated their self-efficacy between *very little* and *to some degree* which was in keeping with my observations during my visits to their classrooms. It seems to me that their low self-efficacy reflected in their conducting their lessons while paying very little classroom management. Based on my data, there was no evidence of either differentiation or the use of culturally responsive teaching strategies within their lessons. In general, they seemed to think that the poor behavior of the students exonerated them from making the effort to implement those strategies. That said, T2 had a greater perception of their self-efficacy but they still struggled with classroom management and the implementation of instructional best practices. T2 explained that they had developed a degree of complacency over the years not because of their low self-efficacy or lack of skill but more so by developing an attitude of indifference to the work required to implement those strategies; they thought mathematics did not require more than the fundamentals of direct instruction.

This is very interesting to me as it suggests that teachers may perceive their self-efficacy to be high even though they do not implement instructional best practices with fidelity. Idiosyncrasies stemming from a teacher's perception of a subject or even their laziness may have them believing in their capability to do the job well while not necessarily being deliberate in how they plan and conduct lessons. Working with teachers of varying perceptions confirmed my belief in their ability to do their job and that this belief in their perceived self-efficacy is a prerequisite to their effecting change.

With respect to Research Question 3 ("To what extent is there an association between a teacher's involvement in a support intervention oriented to improving their proficiency with two specific instructional techniques and (a) their increased self- efficacy and (b) their implementation of instructional best practices in their classrooms?"), having worked with participants whose perception of their self-efficacy varied, I have seen the positive impact of a

support intervention oriented to improving teachers' proficiency. The fact that T3 had the lowest rating for their perceived self-efficacy while T2 had the highest rating although both had challenges with classroom management and effective implementation of instructional best practices, suggests to me that teachers needed the support I provided. T2 perceived their self-efficacy to be high but they needed support with their implementation of best practices while T1 and T3 needed support in both areas. The data I collected showed an increase in teachers' perception of their self-efficacy after they worked with me as their mentor. All teachers were able to utilize differentiated instruction and culturally responsive strategies within their lessons which had them feeling even more capable of doing their job. Consequently, I maintain that there is an association between my mentorship support intervention, teachers' perceived self-efficacy, and their implementation of instructional best practices.

Results Summary

In summary, the data I gathered indicate that there is an association between teachers' perceived self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices. I validated this association through the implementation of a mentorship initiative. Teachers with initially low perceived self-efficacy subsequently reported a greater sense of self-efficacy while implementing culturally responsive teaching and differentiation strategies. The same held true for teachers who initially perceived their self-efficacy to be high. In either case, I maintain that mentorship is important in supporting teachers to unearth their full potential. The implementation of instructional best practices can boost teachers' perceived self-efficacy when they see the positive results of that implementation.

CHAPTER 5: SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The focus of my study was teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices, namely differentiated instruction, and culturally responsive teaching. Researchers have proposed that teachers with increased self-efficacy are likely to provide quality instruction for students (Holzberger et al., 2013; Künsting et al., 2016). Therefore, the purpose of my mixed methods study was to determine teachers' self-efficacy in their teaching capacity at Stellar Middle School which is in a north central North Carolina school district and research the potential association between their self-efficacy and their implementation of instructional best practices in their classrooms. To achieve this purpose, I implemented a research-based teacher support intervention that I had reason to believe had the potential to improve teachers' implementation of the two specific instructional best practices I had selected.

Teachers at Stellar Middle School worked in a Title 1 context in which the experiences and demands they encountered impacted their self-efficacy. The pre-intervention data revealed that teachers perceived their self-efficacy to range from *very little to quite a bit,* the latter rating being specific to only one participant. Teachers rated their self-efficacy in classroom management, instructional strategies and student engagement as outlined in the TSES. The pre-intervention data validated the need for my study and my subsequent findings affirmed my belief that an association exists between teachers' self-efficacy and their implementation of best practices. Consequently, my study bears directly on the complex interaction between teachers' ongoing increased self-efficacy and effective classroom practices which, by extension, would be expected to positively impact student performance and teacher retention.

Connections to the Literature

Deal and Peterson (2016) articulated the idea that school culture is reflected in patterns of behavior among stakeholders in a school. These patterns of behavior are evident in students' attitudes and work ethics, parents' support of the school and the way teachers execute their duties. The data I collected was indicative of some of these patterns as teachers underscored the challenge of student behavior and problematic parental support being so pervasive that they seemed to be a part of the fabric of the institution. These cultural patterns were seen by teachers as hindrances to their increased self-efficacy as they impacted their belief in their ability to do some aspects of their jobs.

Gruenert and Whitaker (2017) reinforced the understanding of culture promulgated by Deal and Peterson (2016) when they described culture as an impactful force governed by unstated rules. The fundamental feature embedded in the literature is that culture is learned. For example, in the context of my project, T2, a math teacher of 27 years, seemed to have learned the culture of math being a subject that required direct instruction with little regard for instructional best practices. They explained that they were aware of differentiation and culturally responsive teaching but over the years they had developed an attitude of complacency. T3 shared a similar attitude despite just being in their first year at Stellar Middle School. In considering all aspects of culture at Stellar Middle School, I believe the mentorship support I offered positively impacted teachers' learned behaviors to the extent that their self-efficacy increased.

Maslow's (1970) hierarchy of needs relates to teacher morale with the understanding that unless teachers' needs are met, they will not have a positive morale (Kaiser, 1982; Whitaker et al., 2008). Ryan and Deci (2000) concurred with Maslow and Hertzberg et al. (1993), in that the context of a job can lessen or strengthen people's motivation. They maintained that the working

environment needs to be a supportive one as job challenges can lower people's morale and self-efficacy. My findings revealed similar results as my mentorship initiative served as a support mechanism that helped to increase teacher morale and self-efficacy despite the challenges of the job. All participants' ratings of their perceived self-efficacy increased after their participation in my mentorship initiative.

Ingersoll and Strong (2011) asserted that there was a revolving door of teachers leaving the profession. Chinn (2007) and Kimball (2011) suggested that teachers were inclined to stay amidst the challenges of the job when they felt valued and supported in their schools. Consequently, I anticipated that mentorship could benefit Stellar Middle School in retaining quality teachers. While I cannot confirm that teachers who participated in my mentorship program have derived increased self-efficacy to the extent that they will remain in the profession, I can validate the importance of supporting teachers in a bid to boost their self-efficacy.

Bandura (1977) considered self-efficacy as task-specific, and, for the purpose of my study, I focused on teachers' classroom practices as the specific task associated with their self-efficacy. I reasoned that teachers with low self-efficacy may be so concerned with the demands and possible challenges of successfully implementing differentiated instruction that they may refrain from using this framework (Dixon et al., 2014). This proved true especially with T3 who struggled with student behavior during one of their lessons, which caused them to deviate from the planned differentiation activities we had devised. The ongoing support of teachers is critical in ensuring that teacher avoid being deflected from implementing their lesson plans by disruptive student behaviors.

Equity Implications

Although I refrained from discussing the demographic differences among the teachers and the students, such differences provided the subtext of numerous interactions. For example, some teachers believed that their efforts in implementing instructional best practices would not make a difference because of some students' cultural background where the unimportance of education is institutionalized. In seeing their efforts as futile and students as undeserving of these efforts, some teachers were perpetuating the inequities within the education system. They failed to see students' cultural and socio-economic background as a leveraging opportunity in the context of their instructional practices. This raised concerns for the social justice that all students are deserving of.

Teachers with a deficit mindset are likely to not implement instructional best practices which is tantamount to not providing equal opportunity for all students. Consequently, a robust mentorship program needs to be implemented by highly qualified and emotionally intelligent mentors who can guide those teachers to an empowered state of civic and professional duty to their students. Mentorship, then, could not be a one size fits all as the program would need to be tailored to the context of each school which encapsulates students' demographics, teacher demographics and teacher mindset. Mentorship requires differentiation in order to be effectively done as it needs to meet the needs of the school, students and teachers.

Limitations to the Study

My research focused on teachers' perception of their self-efficacy and their implementation of two specific instructional best practices. I did not focus on the school environment as a cause of teachers' low self-efficacy—nor did I explore why teachers had low self-efficacy but rather how self-efficacy may have impacted their implementation of best

practices and how their self-efficacy could be increased. During the data collection process, teachers underscored the challenges of student behavior and minimal parental support in dealing with these behaviors. I did not explore these external factors as causes of teachers' low self-efficacy.

Stellar Middle School was impacted by the teacher shortage crisis, which influenced the number of participants I could work with. At the time of my study, I was teaching the entire Grade 8 population as the school was unable to secure a second ELA teacher. Concurrently, I implemented my mentorship initiative in my role as a trained mentor. I was only able to mentor three teachers because I conducted my research without the flexibility to adjust my schedule to account for the time I needed to observe more participants in their classrooms. While the small number of participants has implications for the generalizability of my findings, the level of rigor of my implementation of my prolonged mentorship with my participants yielded attests to the validity of my findings.

Recommendations for Leadership

It behooves me to make some recommendations in keeping with my analysis of the data. I believe that school leaders must promote instructional best practices and insist that they should be implemented with fidelity because effective implementation of these practices will positively impact teachers, students, and, by extension, the school. Consequently, school leaders should provide ongoing professional development for teachers to hone their skills as experts whose execution of activities related to classroom management, instructional strategies, and student engagement is top tier. The rationale is that an increase in teachers' self-efficacy is associated with their feeling capable of implementing instructional best practices and this cycle of improvement starts with their being adequately prepared to do so.

School leaders must be attentive to the fact that, despite teachers' years of experience or prowess in implementing instructional best practices, they need to be supported. The participants in my study had varying years of expertise and competence but they all needed and benefitted from my mentorship intervention because their self-efficacy was waning. I maintain that schools should implement a robust mentorship program that provides ongoing support for their teachers with the understanding that teachers' self-efficacy is not a constant but rather a variable that can be impacted by several factors within the context of a school. Therefore, an effective mentorship program tailored to each teacher's needs should be implemented in every school and not just for beginning teachers.

School leaders must include mentorship as an ongoing line item in the school improvement plan. Considering that teachers' lack of belief in their ability to change can sabotage the mission and vision of the school, teachers' self-efficacy should be a yearly priority. By adding teachers' self-efficacy to the school improvement plan, educational institutions acknowledge its impact and hold themselves accountable for teachers' professional development and job satisfaction. The ripple effect of focusing on teachers' self-efficacy is likely to be evident in the school's culture, students' academic performance, teacher morale, and teacher retention.

Suggested Future Research

Considering the noticeable impact of the mentorship program, I suggest that future research extends beyond 6 weeks of implementation to gather more data that could yield even more impressive results. This could help the researcher to isolate some factors that may threaten to decrease teachers' self-efficacy. Additionally, my research was not focused on the school environment as a cause of teachers' low self-efficacy so I did not explore why teachers have low self-efficacy but rather how self- efficacy can impact teachers' implementation of best practices

and how teachers' self-efficacy can be increased. I recommend that future research focuses on the context in which teachers work because my participants seemed to have been affected by their work environment and the challenges they encountered. In exploring teachers' self-efficacy with consideration for their working environment, researchers could develop context-specific coping mechanisms that teachers could utilize in the hope of increasing their self-efficacy. For example, my participants referenced their struggles with getting parental support and how it was demotivating to their efforts. Research that focuses on the unique context and culture of the school could uncover coping mechanisms that would help to boost teachers' self-efficacy.

Impact of the Study

The data collected during my study supported my contention that mentorship as a support initiative can increase teachers' self-efficacy. Participants who perceived their self-efficacy as *very little* before participating in the mentorship program, later rated their self-efficacy as *a great deal*. I believe that providing teachers with the support they need is instrumental in effecting change in teachers' self-efficacy. There are so many mitigating factors that can lower teachers' self-efficacy that schools should not operate on the premise that years of service equates to increased self-efficacy. On the contrary, the reverse may be true so mentorship should be for all the teachers who need it.

Teachers' increased self-efficacy may impact all aspects of the school but, as my study showed, especially teacher and student performance. With this understanding, school leaders should consider how their schools implement their mentorship programs. In my study, when participants implemented instructional best practices with fidelity, they reported improvement in their classroom management and instructional delivery which allowed for more focus on academics versus behavior. Prior to my intervention, behavior had taken precedence—which

served as a demotivating factor for my teacher participants. When instructional time is optimized, one would expect increased student performance, which suggests that the provision of teacher mentorship is an effective marketing tool for schools in an era of bourgeoning school choice.

As I disclosed in Chapter 1, I was alerted to the association between self-efficacy and effective teaching by my own experience of feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the challenge of teaching a class of rambunctious adolescents whose academic achievements and levels of motivation ranged across a wide continuum. I knew I had to revise my own practice and reasoned that if I felt overwhelmed perhaps so did my teacher colleagues. This self-awareness urged me to reflect on my own practices and how my waning self-efficacy had a dual impact- on myself and my students. After deep introspection, I saw their limitations as a reminder of my purpose to be the change agent that students need. They needed adults who believed in them and their future. Thus, I had to revamp my resources, my instructional practices, and more importantly, my thought process.

Some teachers believe that they know their students even though they have few insights into how their students learn or their life situations. When their generic approach to teaching is greeted with disinterest or downright resistance from students, unless they are supported in changing their instructional approach, they take refuge in a self-protective belief—rarely expressed but deeply felt—that "they can't learn." In such teachers' minds, the daily challenges of maintaining discipline in the classroom validate their belief that "they can't learn" and exonerates them from making the effort to change. Even when they know that some instructional approach is well suited to their context, they resort to implementation avoidance behavior.

Against this gloomy background, my study shows that mentoring makes a difference. Teachers want to feel that they are teaching effectively, and students want to learn. As I have shown, one accessible, low-threshold way of aligning these wants is to offer effective mentoring.

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APPENDIX A: INSTITUTIONAL REVIEW BOARD APPROVAL

EAST CAROLINA UNIVERSITY
University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board
4N-64 Brody Medical Sciences Building· Mail Stop 682
600 Moye Boulevard · Greenville, NC 27834
Office **252-744-2914** · Fax **252-744-2284** ·
rede.ecu.edu/umcirb/

Notification of Exempt Certification

From: Social/Behavioral IRB
To: Measha Wilmer
CC: Robert Reardon
Date: 11/4/2022
Re: UMCIRB 22-001994
Teachers' Self-efficacy and their Implementation of Instructional Best Practices

I am pleased to inform you that your research submission has been certified as exempt on 11/4/2022. This study is eligible for Exempt Certification under category # 1 & 2ab.

It is your responsibility to ensure that this research is conducted in the manner reported in your application and/or protocol, as well as being consistent with the ethical principles of the Belmont Report and your profession.

This research study does not require any additional interaction with the UMCIRB unless there are proposed changes to this study. Any change, prior to implementing that change, must be submitted to the UMCIRB for review and approval. The UMCIRB will determine if the change impacts the eligibility of the research for exempt status. If more substantive review is required, you will be notified within five business days.

Document	Description
Informed Consent- Minimal Risk(0.02)	Consent Forms
Measha Wilmer Proposal 10 11 2022(Doc format).docx(0.01)	Study Protocol or Grant Application
Public Announcement Script(0.01)	Recruitment Documents/Scripts
Teacher Interview Questions(0.01)	Interview/Focus Group Scripts/Questions
Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy scale(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires
Teachers' Sense of Self-efficacy scale 2(0.01)	Surveys and Questionnaires

For research studies where a waiver or alteration of HIPAA Authorization has been approved, the IRB states that each of the waiver criteria in 45 CFR 164.512(i)(1)(i)(A) and (2)(i) through (v) have been met. Additionally, the elements of PHI to be collected as described in items 1 and 2 of the Application for Waiver of Authorization have been determined to be the minimal necessary for the specified research.

The Chairperson (or designee) does not have a potential for conflict of interest on this study.

APPENDIX B: INFORMED CONSENT FORM

East Carolina University

Informed Consent to Participate in Research

Information to consider before taking part in research that has no more than minimal risk.

Title of Research Study: Teachers' Self-efficacy and their Implementation of Instructional Best Practices
Principal Investigator: Measha Wilmer (Person in Charge of this Study)
Institution, Department or Division: ECU, College of Education
Address: East 5th Street, Greenville, NC 27858
Telephone #: 252-328-6131

Researchers at East Carolina University (ECU) issues related to society, health problems, environmental problems, behavior problems and the human condition. To do this, we need the help of volunteers who are willing to take part in research.

Why am I being invited to take part in this research?

The purpose of this research is to find out how teachers' belief in their ability to do their job relates to how they teach. You are being invited to take part in this research because you are a teacher. The decision to take part in this research is yours to make. By doing this research, we hope to learn about teachers' confidence in their ability to do their job and their teaching strategies.

If you volunteer to take part in this research, you will be one of about ____3___ people to do so.

Are there reasons I should not take part in this research?

I understand I should not volunteer for this study if I am under the age of 18 , I am planning to resign within 3 months or I have a mental or physical condition that will affect my participation in the research.

What other choices do I have if I do not take part in this research?

You can choose not to participate.

Where is the research going to take place and how long will it last?

The research will be conducted at your place of employment. I will visit your classroom at least 2 times per week during the study. The total amount of time you will be asked to volunteer for this study is 18 days over the next 2 months.

What will I be asked to do?

You will be asked to do the following:

- Complete a teacher sense of self-efficacy survey. This survey will have 12 questions that ask you how confident you feel to do certain teacher related duties in the environment you work.

- Allow me to observe you teaching for at least 20 mins for at least 2 days per week over a 2-month span.
- Meet with me after each observation to talk about my observation notes and recommendations
- Be willing to have our post observation meetings recorded so I can review them later. Your recordings will not be shared with anyone. You have the freedom to opt out of being recorded. In such a case, I will only summarize whatever we discuss.
- Review any notes that I take to make sure any information you share with me is correctly reported

What might I experience if I take part in the research?
We don't know of any risks (the chance of harm) associated with this research. Any risks that may occur with this research are no more than what you would experience in everyday life. We don't know if you will benefit from taking part in this study. There may not be any personal benefit to you, but the information gained by doing this research may help others in the future.
Will I be paid for taking part in this research?
We will not be able to pay you for the time you volunteer while being in this study
Will it cost me to take part in this research?
It will not cost you any money to be part of the research.

Who will know that I took part in this research and learn personal information about me?
ECU and the people and organizations listed below may know that you took part in this research and may see information about you that is normally kept private. With your permission, these people may use your private information to do this research:

- agency of the federal, state, or local government that regulates human research. This includes the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS), and the Office for Human Research Protections.
- The University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) and its staff have responsibility for overseeing your welfare during this research and may need to see research records that identify you.

How will you keep the information you collect about me secure? How long will you keep it?
The physical and electronic data collected in this study will be stored under fake names so no identifiers will link to you. The data will be stored for 6 months to a year. Once I have completed writing my dissertation, the data will be stored for 6 months to a year. The data will only be used for the purpose of my study.

What if I decide I don't want to continue in this research?
You can stop at any time after it has already started. There will be no consequences if you stop, and you will not be criticized. You will not lose any benefits that you normally receive.

Who should I contact if I have questions?

The people conducting this study will be able to answer any questions concerning this research, now or in the future. You may contact the Principal Investigator at Measha Wilmer, 2527621697 (between Monday and Friday from 9:00 am to 8:00 pm).

If you have questions about your rights as someone taking part in research, you may call the University & Medical Center Institutional Review Board (UMCIRB) at phone number 252-744-2914 (days, 8:00 am-5:00 pm). If you would like to report a complaint or concern about this research study, you may contact the Director for Human Research Protections, at 252-744-2914.

Is there anything else I should know?

At the end of the data collection process, my recommendations about teachers' belief in their ability to do their job and their use of instructional strategies will be shared with you.

I have decided I want to take part in this research. What should I do now?

The person obtaining informed consent will ask you to read the following and if you agree, you should sign this form:

- I have read (or had read to me) all of the above information.
- I have had an opportunity to ask questions about things in this research I did not understand and have received satisfactory answers.
- I know that I can stop taking part in this study at any time.
- By signing this informed consent form, I am not giving up any of my rights.
- I have been given a copy of this consent document, and it is mine to keep.

Participant's Name (PRINT)	**Signature**	**Date**

APPENDIX C: PERMISSION TO USE TEACHER SENSE OF EFFICACY SCALE

William & Mary
School of Education

MEGAN TSCHANNEN-MORAN, PHD
PROFESSOR OF EDUCATIONAL LEADERSHIP

April 2, 2022

Measha Williams,

You have my permission to use the Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale (formerly called the Ohio State Teacher Sense of Efficacy Scale), which I developed with Anita Woolfolk Hoy, in your research.

You can find a copy of the measure and scoring directions on my web site at https://mxtsch.pages.wm.edu/.

Please use the following as the proper citation:

> Tschannen-Moran, M & Hoy, A. W. (2001). Teacher efficacy: Capturing an elusive construct. *Teaching and Teacher Education, 17*, 783-805.

I will also attach directions you can follow to access my password protected web site, where you can find the supporting references for this measure as well as other articles I have written on this and related topics.

All the best,

Megan Tschannen-Moran
William & Mary School of Education

APPENDIX D: TEACHER EVALUATION RUBRIC

North Carolina Teacher Evaluation Process

Standard II: Teachers Establish a Respectful Environment for a Diverse Population of Students

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	Element IIa. Teachers provide an environment in which each child has a positive, nurturing relationship with caring adults. Teachers encourage an environment that is inviting, respectful, supportive, inclusive, and flexible.				
✓	❑ Appreciates and understands the need to establish nurturing relationships.	. . . and ❑ Establishes an inviting, respectful, inclusive, flexible, and supportive learning environment.	. . . and ❑ Maintains a positive and nurturing learning environment.	. . . and ❑ Encourages and advises others to provide a nurturing and positive learning environment for all students.	
	Element IIb. Teachers embrace diversity in the school community and in the world. Teachers demonstrate their knowledge of the history of diverse cultures and their role in shaping global issues. They actively select materials and develop lessons that counteract stereotypes and incorporate histories and contributions of all cultures. Teachers recognize the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, and other aspects of culture on a student's development and personality. Teachers strive to understand how a student's culture and background may influence his or her school performance. Teachers consider and incorporate different points of view in their instruction.				
✓	❑ Acknowledges that diverse cultures impact the world.	. . . and ❑ Displays knowledge of diverse cultures, their histories, and their roles in shaping global issues.	. . . and ❑ Uses materials or lessons that counteract stereotypes and acknowledges the contributions of all cultures.	. . . and ❑ Promotes a deep understanding of cultures through the integration of culturally sensitive materials and ideas throughout the curriculum.	
✓	❑ Demonstrates awareness of the diversity of students in the classroom.	❑ Acknowledges the influence of race, ethnicity, gender, religion, socio-economics, and culture on a student's development and attitudes.	❑ Consistently incorporates different points of view in instruction.	❑ Capitalizes on diversity as an asset in the classroom.	
	Element IIc. Teachers treat students as individuals. Teachers maintain high expectations, including graduation from high school, for students of all backgrounds. Teachers appreciate the differences and value the contributions of each student in the learning environment by building positive, appropriate relationships.				
✓	❑ Holds high expectations of students.	. . . and ❑ Communicates high expectations for all students.	. . . and ❑ Encourages and values contributions of students, regardless of background or ability.	. . . and ❑ Helps students hold high expectations for themselves and their peers.	

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	d. Teachers adapt their teaching for the benefit of students with special needs. Teachers collaborate with the range of support specialists to help meet the special needs of all students. Through inclusion and other models of effective practice, teachers engage students to ensure that their needs are met.				
✓	❑ Recognizes that students have a variety of learning needs.	. . . and ❑ Collaborates with specialists who can support the special learning needs of students.	. . . and ❑ Understands the roles of and collaborates with the full range of support specialists to help meet the special needs of all students.	. . . and ❑ Anticipates the unique learning needs of students and solicits assistance from within and outside the school to address those needs.	
✓	❑ Is knowledgeable of effective practices for students with special needs.	❑ Provides unique learning opportunities such as inclusion and research based effective practices for students with special needs.	❑ Effectively engages special needs students in learning activities and ensures their unique learning needs are met.	❑ Adapts instruction for the benefit of students with special needs and helps colleagues do the same for their students.	
	e. Teachers work collaboratively with the families and significant adults in the lives of their students. Teachers recognize that educating children is a shared responsibility involving the school, parents or guardians, and the community. Teachers improve communication and collaboration between the school and the home and community in order to promote trust and understanding and build partnerships with all segments of the school community. Teachers seek solutions to overcome cultural and economic obstacles that may stand in the way of effective family and community involvement in the education of their students.				
	❑ Responds to family and community concerns.	. . . and ❑ Communicates and collaborates with the home and community for the benefit of students.	. . . and ❑ Recognizes obstacles to family and community participation and conscientiously seeks solutions to overcome them.	. . . and ❑ Promotes trust and understanding throughout the school community.	

Standard IV: Teachers facilitate learning for their students

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	a. Teachers know the ways in which learning takes place, and they know the appropriate levels of intellectual, physical, social, and emotional development of their students. Teachers know how students think and learn. Teachers understand the influences that affect individual student learning (development, culture, language proficiency, etc.) and differentiate their instruction accordingly. Teachers keep abreast of evolving research about student learning. They adapt resources to address the strengths and weaknesses of their students.				
✓	❑ Understands developmental levels of students and recognizes the need to differentiate instruction.	. . . and ❑ Understands developmental levels of students and appropriately differentiates instruction.	. . . and ❑ Identifies appropriate developmental levels of students and consistently and appropriately differentiates instruction.	. . . and ❑ Encourages and guides colleagues to adapt instruction to align with students' developmental levels.	
✓		❑ Assesses resources needed to address strengths and weakness of students.	❑ Reviews and uses alternative resources or adapts existing resources to take advantage of student strengths or address weaknesses.	❑ Stays abreast of current research about student learning and emerging resources and encourages the school to adopt or adapt them for the benefit of all students.	
	b. Teachers plan instruction appropriate for their students. Teachers collaborate with their colleagues and use a variety of data sources for short- and long-range planning based on the North Carolina Standard Course of Study. These plans reflect an understanding of how students learn. Teachers engage students in the learning process. They understand that instructional plans must be consistently monitored and modified to enhance learning. Teachers make the curriculum responsive to cultural differences and individual learning needs.				
✓	❑ Recognizes data sources important to planning instruction.	. . . and ❑ Uses a variety of data for short- and long-range planning of instruction. Monitors and modifies instructional plans to enhance student learning.	. . . and ❑ Monitors student performance and responds to individual learning needs in order to engage students in learning.	. . . and ❑ Monitors student performance and responds to cultural diversity and learning needs through the school improvement process.	
	c. Teachers use a variety of instructional methods. Teachers choose the methods and techniques that are most effective in meeting the needs of their students as they strive to eliminate achievement gaps. Teachers employ a wide range of techniques including information and communication technology, learning styles, and differentiated instruction.				
✓	❑ Demonstrates awareness of the variety of methods and materials necessary to meet the needs of all students.	. . . and ❑ Demonstrates awareness or use of appropriate methods and materials necessary to meet the needs of all students.	. . . and ❑ Ensures the success of all students through the selection and utilization of appropriate methods and materials.	. . . and ❑ Stays abreast of emerging research areas and new and innovative materials and incorporates them into lesson plans and instructional strategies.	

Observation	Developing	Proficient	Accomplished	Distinguished	Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)
	d. Teachers integrate and utilize technology in their instruction. Teachers know when and how to use technology to maximize student learning. Teachers help students use technology to learn content, think critically, solve problems, discern reliability, use information, communicate, innovate, and collaborate.				
✓	❑ Assesses effective types of technology to use for instruction.	. . . and ❑ Demonstrates knowledge of how to utilize technology in instruction.	. . . and ❑ Integrates technology with instruction to maximize student learning.	. . . and ❑ Provides evidence of student engagement in higher level thinking skills through the integration of technology.	
	e. Teachers help students develop critical-thinking and problem-solving skills. Teachers encourage students to ask questions, think creatively, develop and test innovative ideas, synthesize knowledge, and draw conclusions. They help students exercise and communicate sound reasoning; understand connections; make complex choices; and frame, analyze, and solve problems.				
✓	❑ Understands the importance of developing students' critical-thinking and problem solving skills.	. . . and ❑ Demonstrates knowledge of processes needed to support students in acquiring critical thinking skills and problem solving skills.	. . . and Teaches students the processes needed to: ❑ think creatively and critically, ❑ develop and test innovative ideas, ❑ synthesize knowledge, ❑ draw conclusions, ❑ exercise and communicate sound reasoning, ❑ understand connections, ❑ make complex choices, and ❑ frame, analyze and solve problems.	. . . and ❑ Encourages and assists teachers throughout the school to integrate critical thinking and problem solving skills into their instructional practices.	
	f. Teachers help students work in teams and develop leadership qualities. Teachers teach the importance of cooperation and collaboration. They organize learning teams in order to help students define roles, strengthen social ties, improve communication and collaborative skills, interact with people from different cultures and backgrounds, and develop leadership qualities.				
✓	❑ Provides opportunities for cooperation, collaboration, and leadership through student learning teams.	. . . and ❑ Organizes student learning teams for the purpose of developing cooperation, collaboration, and student leadership.	. . . and ❑ Encourages students to create and manage learning teams.	. . . and ❑ Fosters the development of student leadership and teamwork skills to be used beyond the classroom.	

Observation	g. **Teachers communicate effectively.** Teachers communicate in ways that are clearly understood by their students. They are perceptive listeners and are able to communicate with students in a variety of ways even when language is a barrier. Teachers help students articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively.				
	Developing	**Proficient**	**Accomplished**	**Distinguished**	**Not Demonstrated (Comment Required)**
		. . . and	. . . and	. . .	
✓	❑ Demonstrates the ability to effectively communicate with students.	❑ Uses a variety of methods for communication with all students.	❑ Creates a variety of methods to communicate with all students.	❑ Anticipates possible student misunderstandings and proactively develops teaching techniques to mitigate concerns.	
✓	❑ Provides opportunities for students to articulate thoughts and ideas	❑ Consistently encourages and supports students to articulate thoughts and ideas clearly and effectively.	❑ Establishes classroom practices, which encourage all students to develop effective communication skills.	❑ Establishes school-wide and grade appropriate vehicles to encourage students throughout the school to develop effective communication skills.	
	h. **Teachers use a variety of methods to assess what each student has learned.** Teachers use multiple indicators, including formative and summative assessments, to evaluate student progress and growth as they strive to eliminate achievement gaps. Teachers provide opportunities, methods, feedback, and tools for students to assess themselves and each other. Teachers use 21st century assessment systems to inform instruction and demonstrate evidence of students' 21st century knowledge, skills, performance, and dispositions.				
		. . . and	. . . and	. . . and	
✓	❑ Uses indicators to monitor and evaluate student progress.	❑ Uses multiple indicators, both formative and summative, to monitor and evaluate student progress and to inform instruction.	❑ Uses the information gained from the assessment activities to improve teaching practice and student learning.	❑ Teaches students and encourages them to use peer and self-assessment feedback to assess their own learning.	
✓	❑ Assesses students in the attainment of 21st century knowledge, skills, and dispositions.	❑ Provides evidence that students attain 21st century knowledge, skills and dispositions.	❑ Provides opportunities for students to assess themselves and others.	❑ Encourages and guides colleagues to assess 21st century skills, knowledge, and dispositions and to use the assessment information to adjust their instructional practice.	