

CALIFORNIA STATE UNIVERSITY, NORTHRIDGE

EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL FACTORS AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATION  
PARAEDUCATORS EMPLOYED IN URBAN SCHOOL SETTINGS

A Dissertation submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements  
For the Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

by

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## DEDICATION

*“You are a shield around me, O Lord: you bestow glory on me and lift up my head.” Psalms 3:3*

*“I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will counsel you and watch over you.” Psalms 32:8*

This dissertation is dedicated:

To my husband: My solid rock here on earth. My academic, career, and life advisor. You are a silent yet profound intellectual who can cognitively process and articulate true life solutions to any challenge. Your sound expertise and wisdom never ceases to amaze me!

To my children: Thank you for playing down-stairs with Daddy while Mommy was upstairs working with the door closed. Thank you for checking on me periodically throughout the day by opening the door and giving me hugs and kisses. I hope to make both of you proud to call me your Mommy!

To my God-given family: Mommy, Daddy, and “Ing-Ding” thank you for caring for my children during the week while I had to go to class every Wednesday. They loved going to the mall and the bookstore and eating Mc Donald’s French Fries (sometimes chicken nuggets). Knowing that my children were well taken care of allowed me the opportunity to perform well-Thank you!

I’m honored to have these special people in my life. Without my family-the-God fearing people that contribute to my fundamental core, I would not have been able to fulfill my destiny and begin my life journey as Dr. Havaughnia N. Hayes-White!

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## ABSTRACT

### EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL FACTORS AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAEDUCATORS EMPLOYED IN URBAN SCHOOL SETTINGS

by

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Doctor of Education Degree in Educational Leadership

Who are paraeducators, and why are they involved in the educational system? Current literature already answers and evaluates the above questions. Most literature about paraeducators focuses on several topical issues: historical perspectives of paraeducators, the need for paraeducators, the many roles they conduct, current state policy standards and systems, lack of training prior to being placed in classrooms, current available training models, stressors while on the job, and stress levels that are likely to lead to burnout and attrition. What the literature does not address is the perceptions of these issues among paraeducators of color working in urban school settings.

A review of the literature highlights that teachers are often found training their classroom paraeducators along with teaching their students. Teachers themselves are very often not trained or responsible for training adult staff. The literature reveals that training suggestions and programs do exist in the field. However, due to the lack of money, time, and flexibility of decision-making power that agencies and districts have, training for paraeducators is still ignored and/or overlooked.

Giangreco and Broer (2005) found that paraeducators are not only an important support in special education settings, but are more likely to be used as de facto teachers to provide direct interventions to students with special needs. This implication means that paraeducators are often

expected to develop strategies and/or interventions which they should not be responsible for, to children with the most intensive needs or challenges (Carroll, 2001). This study unpacks or deconstructs the urban environment and discovers “The Conceptualization of Urban Taxation” which can be annihilated by school administrators implementing the five tenets of “The Urban Utopian Experience:” 1) Role Matrices, 2) Emotional Intelligence, 3) Paraeducator Input on Positive Behavior Support Plans, 4) High Morale, and 5) Inclusive Educational Teams.

## CHAPTER I

### STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Pearl has been employed as a paraeducator at a large urban middle school for ten years. Pearl works in an area where many students live in poverty. Their home lives vary, but some are toxic, including drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse, and neglect. Some students must raise their siblings and sometimes even their parents or extended family members (Curwin, 2010). Pearl is assigned as a one-to-one aide for a student who has severe behavioral challenges. Pearl is known to complain among her peers about not having the proper support she needs to effectively provide behavioral interventions to her student. Pearl has filed complaints about her student's occasional attempts to hit and kick her. Pearl is often seen outside at the lunch benches with her student during instructional hours because she claims that her "young-fresh-out-of-college" White female first-year classroom teacher, "does not know what I should be doing for this kid!" Borrero (2011) confirms, "an important challenge facing public urban education is the lack of new teachers of color teaching in their community schools" (p. 18). In fact, White females continue to dominate the teaching force even in urban communities where youth of color dominate student populations (Borrero, 2011).

Pearl is known to take off work for one to two days at a time without notifying her classroom teacher. When this happens, the instructional day for Pearl's classroom teacher, fellow paraeducators, and student is extremely difficult. Absolutely no instruction can occur due to the normal school routine being interrupted by Pearl's absence. Pearl's teacher and the other paraeducators who work in her class are frustrated, Pearl's student is uncontrollable, and the remaining students in the class miss valuable instructional time when Pearl is absent. Pearl's constant complaints to her peers about her lack of energy, body aches, lack of sleep (she is up

thinking about how to work with her student(s) at night) and concerns about her ineffectiveness are her way of seeking help. Pearl rarely sees school administrators during the instructional day, nor does she feel comfortable with seeking support from them. When Pearl does not receive the guidance she needs to properly support her student, she comes to work with low energy, expresses prolonged feelings of ineffectiveness, becomes cynical when speaking to students and fellow paraeducators, and calls out sick a couple of days every month.

### **Introduction**

Paraeducators are pivotal to the operation of most (if not all) classroom environments designed for students with special needs (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). Paraeducators, who may also be known as special education assistants, teacher assistants, aides, teacher aides, and paraprofessionals, are employed to assist teachers with ensuring that students with special needs are receiving individualized educational supports to access core or alternate curricula (Downey et al., 2000). Wonderful Unified School District (WUSD, a pseudonym), the urban Pre-K-12 setting for this study, views paraeducators as employees who assist teachers by caring for the academic, behavioral, and physical (including toileting and feeding) needs of students with disabilities and helping in student training and education through the presentation of educational materials or exercises (Giangreco & Broer, 2005). Although the term paraeducator will be used throughout this study to generally describe a classified, non-credentialed employee who serves in the role of an educational assistant to a credentialed special education teacher, it is people like Pearl that are the specific focus of this study: paraeducators of color in urban communities.

Title I, Part A, of No Child Left Behind Act of 2004, defines paraprofessionals as: employees of a Local Education Agency (LEA) who provides instructional support in a program supported with Title I, Part A funds. Paraprofessionals who provide instructional support, includes those who: (1) provide one-on-one tutoring if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher, (2) assist with classroom management, such as by organizing instructional materials, (3) provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory, (4) conduct parental involvement activities, (5) provide instructional support in a library or media center, (6) act as a translator, or (7) provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher (Title I, Section 1119(g) 2).

The usage of paraeducators in school settings has been rising constantly since they were initially introduced to classrooms in the 1950s (Ashbaker, & Morgan, 2001). As licensed teachers needed support while instructing pre-school, general compensatory, and special programs, along with developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), the employment of paraeducators began to gain momentum and significant changes began to occur in their roles and responsibilities (Downey et al., 2000). While paraeducators still performed routine clerical, monitoring, and housekeeping duties, they increasingly supported teachers with reviewing/reinforcing lessons, and providing one-to-one direct instruction to students with a wide range of abilities and needs. The trend of increased responsibility and accountability of paraeducators from housekeeping duties, to one-to-one direct instruction, may perhaps contribute to higher levels of stress for those persons who may perceive themselves as untrained to carry out a variety of roles (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003). Paraeducators can also be found servicing children in a variety of LEA settings. These settings include private schools, public schools, preschools, early intervention programs, hospitals, and special education campuses

Paraeducator training, management, and stressors have become hot topics in the field of education within the past decade. Due to the passage of the No Child Left Behind Act (NCLB) of 2001 and the reauthorization in 2004, the government has defined the requirements for districts and agencies hiring new paraeducators. According to Trautman (2004), the NCLB Act requires that all newly hired paraeducators must meet three of the following requirements:

- (1) meet a rigorous standard of quality that demonstrates, through a formal state or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics or in readiness activities for reading, writing, or mathematics, (2) have completed at least two years of study at an institution of higher education, or (3) have obtained an associate's or higher degree. (p. 132)

The Department of Education has taken a stand to ensure paraeducators are highly qualified staff. This decision may be so because although paraeducators are classified personnel who do not hold teaching credentials, their roles closely mirror the responsibilities of a credentialed special education teacher.

### **Problem Statement**

The National Center for Education Statistics (NCES) reported the use of paraeducators continues to increase over the employment of certificated teachers. However, despite the growing number in the education system, paraeducators remain a largely untrained work force that is given increased levels of responsibility in the classroom (Beal, 2001). The literature explains new concerns are developing regarding utilization, supervision, and training of paraeducators. These very important professionals often spend part of their day servicing students with severe to profound behavioral, physical, and/or cognitive needs in locations

separated from certificated teachers (i.e. playground, hallways, cafeteria etc.). Urban schools may rely heavily on paraeducators to assist with direct instruction even more heavily than suburban areas due to shortages in highly qualified teaching staff, and the need to provide services to a high-needs population (Riggs, 2002). This implication means that paraeducators are often expected to develop strategies and/or interventions which they should not be responsible for, to children with the most intensive needs or challenges (Carroll, 2001). These trends may contribute to high stress levels, emotional and/or physical exhaustion among paraeducators working in low income urban communities. Shyman (2010), defines emotional exhaustion as, “feelings of being emotionally spent and overextended by one’s work” (p. 829). When increased emotional and/or physical exhaustion is present on the job, employees may begin to feel “burned out,” display low morale, call out sick more often, and possibly perform poorly. Shyman (2010), reported these trends may be an implicit threat for paraeducators since “high rates of stress have been shown to develop into serious physical conditions such as heart disease, stroke, and certain cancers, among other serious diseases” (p. 829).

This is a problem because paraeducators have numerous roles and are expected to carry out different types of responsibilities such as teaching small groups, adapting instructional material(s), facilitating interactions with peers, implementing behavioral interventions, and assisting in caring for the physical (including toileting and feeding) needs of students with disabilities. When a paraeducator has low attendance rates, instructional programs are adversely impacted. A substitute paraeducator may or may not be placed in the position. If a substitute is not available, the remaining classroom staff remains responsible for meeting the needs of all students.

Paraeducators who have the same culture, language, and traditions as a class and/or student, are often hired to bridge language and cultural barriers. Pickett, Linkins, and Wallace (2003) explain that “then, as now, paraeducators were primarily women who were entering the workforce, who lived near the schools where they worked, and who represented the cultural and ethnic populations in their community” (p. 5). In order to move the conversation from general to specific, this study is particularly concerned with those “cultural and ethnic” paraeducators of color employed in “their community” of an urban setting and the stressors on their emotional and physical well-being.

### **Purpose and Significance**

Patterson (2006) found that paraeducators provide services without written plans, few formal sit down contact meetings with teachers, but were also ultimately responsible for IEP outcomes. Although studies have found an increase in the frequency of the roles of paraeducators, there still remains little research in the literature regarding the experiences of paraeducators of color working in the field (Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Patterson, 2006). This lends to the pressing need for research to begin exploring and investigating the experiences of these paraeducators and issues surrounding occupational stress while servicing students who have the most challenging needs. Common issues regarding paraeducators generally include: increase of responsibilities, various roles, accompanied with lack of training, which all may cause high levels of occupational stress. Therefore, investigating the cause of occupational stress among paraeducators of color is important to possibly prevent burnout, attrition, and a possible negative impact on instructional programs (Friend & Cook, 2007; Ghore & York-Barr, 2007). Although the literature lacks research in the area of occupational stress among paraeducators (both generally, as well as paraeducators of color), there is a large volume of research in the field

regarding teacher occupational stress. Since the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators closely mirror the roles and responsibilities of teachers, the literature developed for occupational stress among teachers can and should also apply to occupational stress among paraeducators.

Teaching can be a stressful profession and with such stress can come teacher turnover, low teacher satisfaction, and high teacher burnout, along with negative physical and psychological health outcomes (Harris, 2011). Teacher stress affects various aspects of teacher health and may influence the effectiveness of teacher performance in the classroom, with high consequences for their students' behavior and achievement (Richards, 2011). When teachers are stressed, they are often irritable, impatient, and easily frustrated. When this happens, teachers are unable to provide the necessary support(s) needed to help students succeed (Kipps-Vaughan, 2013). These stressors are only heightened and enhanced in urban settings where issues of fiscal resources, cultural relevance, and the larger sociocultural norms of the community impact the school (Nieto, 2004).

Many professionals, as well as teachers and including paraeducators, are often left with little education or training in how to recognize and deal with stress (Harris, 2011). As invaluable members to the field of special education, an increase of on the job stress could, over time, cause unnecessary low morale, low productivity, excessive absences, which then could lead to burnout and attrition. Therefore, the purpose of this study is to explore the perceptions that special education paraeducators of color working in urban special day class settings, may have regarding the factors which may cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors. A better understanding of how paraeducators perceive the causes of on the job stressors could provide recommendations for professional interventions and prevent high absenteeism, disability claims, and high turnover this study offers

recommendations of Urban Utopia a concept suggested to help contribute to addressing the needs of this invaluable population of educators in today's urban schools.

### **Research Questions**

The research questions guiding this study are:

1. How do paraeducators of color serving in urban special day class settings, perceive the factors that cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job?
2. How do paraeducators of color perceive the factors that prevent emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job?

### **Definition of Terms**

**Burnout:** A state of physical, mental, and emotional exhaustion resulting from chronic stress. It is characterized by feelings of alienation, indifference, and low self-regard, a loss of interest in work, and an inability to perform one's day-to-day job duties (Blazer, 2010; Coulter & Abney, 2008; Freudenberger, 1974; Hughes, 2001; Kipps-Vaughn, 2013; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Shyman, 2010; Steinhardt, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Thieman, Henry, & Kitchel, 2012).

**Disability:** With respect to an individual, means: A) a physical or mental impairment that substantially limits one or more major life activities of such individual, B) a record of such an impairment, or C) being regarded as having such an impairment (P.L. 110-325 Sec. 3406).

**Emotional Exhaustion:** Feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Feeling that one has nothing left to give (Blazer, 2010; Freudenberger, 1974; Hughes, 2001; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Richards, 2011;

Schwarzer, & Hallum, 2008; Shyman, 2010; Steinhardt, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Thieman, Henry, & Kitchel, 2012).

**Mild to Moderate Disabilities:** Students with mild/moderate disabilities typically have learning or behavioral difficulties which impede normal or expected academic achievement. Teachers work primarily with beginning or remedial skills in reading, writing, math, and social behaviors. Secondary teachers address these skills in addition to preparing students to transition into vocations or to post-secondary education. Students with mild/moderate disabilities generally spend all or part of their time in regular classrooms, but may also receive special education for part of the day in resource rooms or in self-contained classrooms within the school. Most mild/moderate students have learning disabilities, communication disorders, or emotional and behavioral disorders. Some students may have intellectual disabilities, high-functioning autism, or disabilities caused by traumatic brain injury (Heward, 1999).

**Moderate to Severe Disabilities:** Students with moderate to severe disabilities typically require functional academics and life skills instruction (i.e., communication, social behavior, and daily living activities). These students may have intellectual disabilities, autism, other health impairments, multiple disabilities, or severe effects of traumatic brain injuries. Students with severe disabilities are most often taught in self-contained classrooms within their home school. When and where appropriate, these students are included in general classrooms; some may attend separate schools designed to meet their special needs based on an IEP team decision (Heward, 1999).

**Paraeducator:** A classified, non-credential-holding employee who serves in the role of an educational assistant to a credentialed special education teacher (Downey et al., 2000; Friend & Cook, 2007; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001).

**Physical Exhaustion:** The general feeling of being tired and rundown. Physical problems associated with burnout include headaches, digestive disorders, high blood pressure, heart palpitations, and insomnia (Blazer, 2010; Freudemberger, 1974; Hughes, 2001; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Richards, 2011; Schwarzer, & Hallum, 2008; Shyman, 2010; Steinhardt, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Thieman, Henry, & Kitchel, 2012).

**People of color:** Is a term used primarily in the United States to describe any person who is not White. The term is meant to be inclusive among non-White groups, emphasizing common experiences of racism, prejudice, and bias. People of color was introduced as a preferable replacement to both terms of non-White and minority (Jernigan, Green, Helms, Perez-Gualdron, & Henze, 2010; Lindsay, Robins, & Terrell, 2009; Schiele, & Gary-Hopps, 2009; Trevino, Harris, & Wallace, 2008).

**Special Day Class (SDC):** Is a class consisting of students with disabilities whose needs cannot be met within a general education class, even with the use of supplementary aids and services. These students are grouped together because of similar individual needs so they can receive specially designed instruction. Instruction is adapted to ensure each student has access to the general curriculum and the opportunity to meet the state educational standards. These classes are taught by certificated special education teachers who are supported by non-certificated paraeducators (Carroll, 2001; Downey et al, 2000; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Heward, 1999).

**Stress:** Anxiety produced when events and responsibilities exceed one's coping abilities. When one perceives the idea that the workplace is a threat to self-esteem or well-being, which in turn creates a negative experience (Blazer, 2010; Coulter & Abney, 2009; Freudemberger, 1974, 1977; Harris, 2011; Kipps-Vaughn, 2013; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell, & Wang, 2009; Margolis, &

Nagel, 2006; Richards, 2013; Schaubman, Stetson, & Plog, 2011; Shyman, 2010; Steinhart, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Thieman, Henry, & Kitchel, 2012).

**Taxation:** Requiring a lot of energy, onerous, wearing. A taxing operative role (Merriam-Webster, 2005).

**Toxicity:** The quality or condition of being toxic (Merriam-Webster, 2005).

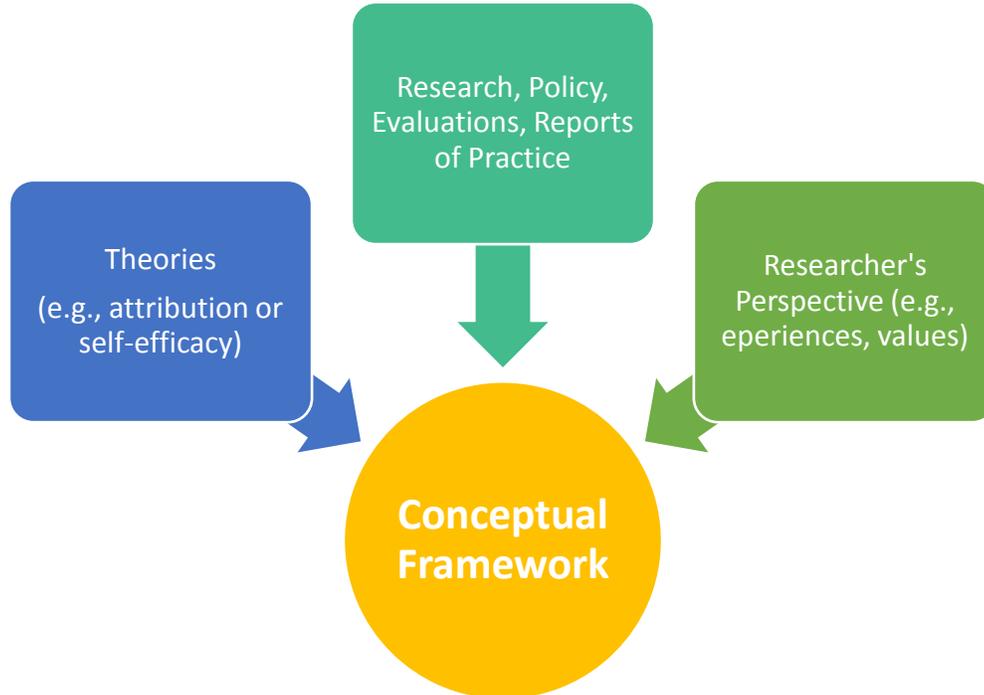
**Utopia:** A community or society possessing highly desirable or near perfect qualities (Merriam-Webster, 2005).

### **Conceptual Framework**

A conceptual framework is an existing structure of current literature that provides focus and direction to a project of inquiry (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). This structure organizes key ideas, central concepts from theory/practice, key findings from research, policy statements, and professional wisdom all of which will guide the project of inquiry (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). A conceptual framework provides a basis for a coherent logically flowing research study. As depicted in Figure 1, the conceptual framework is also grounded in the experiences that researchers bring to the study, along with existing research and most often an existing theoretical base.

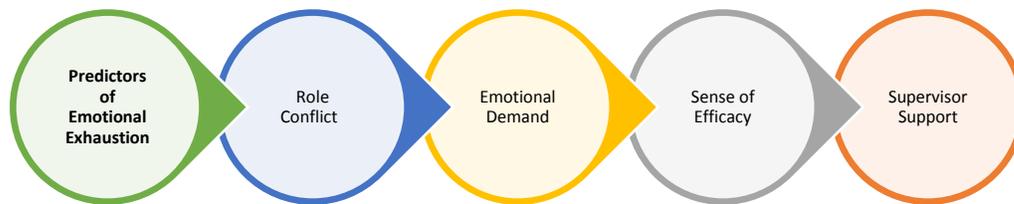
The conceptual framework selected for this study is Shyman's (2010) Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion. Shyman (2010) conducted a quantitative study that sampled 100 paraeducators from the Northeastern United States who were employed from both public suburban and rural school settings. The participants in the study were mainly comprised of 88% White females ranging from the ages of 21 to 71 years of age. The other 12% of the participants were comprised of African Americans, Asian/Asian Americans, and other.

Figure 1. Conceptual Framework



The results from Shyman's (2010) study revealed the best predictors of emotional exhaustion in order of significance were Role Conflict, Emotional Demand, Sense of Efficacy, and Supervisor Support (see Figure 2). These results demonstrate that there are potential stressors present among White female special education paraeducators working in suburban and rural school settings. One major limitation to this study is the lack of responses from special education paraeducators of color (African American and Latino/a men and women) who work at urban school settings. For the study under investigation here, the Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion theory was utilized as a frame for understanding the interpretation and perceptions of special education paraeducators of color working in urban school settings.

Figure 2. Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion (Shyman, 2010).



This study finds and reveals that these predictors when consistent over time, are even more prevalent in an urban school environment which has been identified as “The Conceptualization of Urban Taxation:” 1) Role Taxation, 2) Emotional Toxicity, 3) Physical Taxation, 4) Morale Toxicity, and 5) Supervisory Disconnection. These five challenges that paraeducators of color working in urban special day classes are constantly involved in, can be mitigated once school administrators understand, implement, and facilitate the five solutions within what has been discovered as “The Urban Utopian Experience.” The five tenets of “The Urban Utopian Experience” are as follows: 1) Role Matrices, 2) Emotional Intelligence, 3) Paraeducator Input on Positive Behavior Support Plans, 4) High Morale, and 5) Inclusive Educational Teams.

### **Overview of Methodology**

The purpose of this phenomenological case study, is to explore the perceptions that paraeducators of color working in urban special day class settings, have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors. Based on phenomenological research methods, this case study investigated the human experiences described by the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012) in order to gain a deep understanding of the stressors of being a paraeducator of color in an urban

setting. This case study targeted faculty and staff members of color who work specifically with students who have disabilities in a large urban middle school, and helps deconstruct the root(s) of on the job stressors for all participants. This study reveals preliminary best practices like for professional development and ideal faculty and staff behaviors that could help to mitigate urban taxation or urban stressors uncovered in this study.

### **Limitations of the Study**

Limitations set some conditions that acknowledge the partial and tentative nature of any research (Glesne, 2011). The limitations provided here stipulate the possible challenges to this study, thereby encouraging the reader to judge this project of inquiry with these limitations in mind: 1) The sample is homogenous only including people of color: African American, Asian American, and Latino/a men and women, and 2) The research setting only represents one urban minority school community omitting suburban and rural school communities. This acknowledgement serves to remind me, the principal researcher, and the reader, that no studies are perfect, and that findings are tentative and conditional, given the extraordinary complexity of the K-12 educational school system. The findings presented in this study should be used to contribute to future research.

### **Organization of the Dissertation**

Chapter one provided the foundation for this study by introducing the background and need for paraeducators and the theoretical underpinnings of this research. The remaining organization of this study will be designed in a traditional qualitative format. Chapter two reviews the literature relevant to this study. By reviewing the current literature I am attempting to link what I will find in this investigation with what is known within the literature (Hendricks,

2009). Chapter three outlines how the methodology, research design, and multiple methods of data collected were employed to establish credibility of the findings from this research. In chapter four the data collected is interpreted and described in thick, rich, and detailed story-like text that describes the experiences of each participant. In chapter five the answers to the research questions are explained based on the themes and patterns found within the data. The reference and appendix sections complete the document.

## CHAPTER II

### REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

#### **Introduction**

Chapter one introduced us to Pearl, a proxy for many urban paraeducators of color, and also provided the foundation for this study by introducing the background and need for paraeducators and the theoretical underpinnings of this research. This chapter first reviews the current research on the introduction of paraeducators into the field of education. Next, the lack of training that paraeducators receive to perform their jobs, all while the position is in high demand, will be explained. Third, the federal law that provides the funding for local education agencies (LEAs) to employ paraeducators will be defined. Fourth, the urban school community, the setting for this study, and occupational stress will be introduced. Fifth, the relevant literature explaining the conceptual framework used for this study (role conflict, emotional demand, sense of efficacy, and supervisor support), which was established from Shyman's (2010) research, will be identified and defined. Finally, the rationale for the current study as well as the shortcomings in the literature will be delineated.

#### **Historical Perspectives of Paraeducators**

In the mid 1950s a need to alleviate post WWII shortages of licensed teachers and the fledgling efforts of parents to develop community-based services for children and adults with disabilities stimulated interest in the employment of teacher aides (Picket, Likins, & Wallace, 2003). During this time-frame, two research projects were developed to address and assess the idea of employing teacher aides as one way to grant teachers more time to plan and carry out instructional lessons. The first project, called Fund for the Advancement of Education, originated

in Bay City, Michigan schools (Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001). This program recruited college-educated women who were not licensed teachers. The college women were trained to perform clerical, monitoring, and other routine classroom tasks. During the same time, a project at Syracuse University was designed to assess the efficiency of utilizing teacher aides in the field of special education which was beginning to emerge all across the United States (Katsiyannis, Hodge, & Lanford, 2000). The results of both projects showed potential, however it was not until the late 60s and early 1970s that the potential benefits of employing teacher aides to work alongside licensed teachers in both general and special education would be more fully tested (Beale, 2001).

According to Pickett, Likins, and Wallace (2003), in the 1960s and 1970s, demands from many constituencies for change in economic, social, health care, education, and other human services systems led to federal legislation that established and supported instructional and other direct services for learners who came from economically disadvantaged backgrounds. Many programs created by Congress to provide these services, including Title I and Head Start, provided funding for schools and other community organizations to employ and train paraprofessionals (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). In the mid-1970s, many parents and advocates of children with disabilities worked hard to achieve the passage of PL 94-142 (Patterson, 2006). The law was then called Handicapped Children Act, and is now called The Individuals with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA). Trautman (2004) found that “at the heart of each of these laws was a recognition of the importance of learner-centered instructional services to meet the needs of children and youth with diverse abilities, learning preferences, and other education needs” (p. 133).

As licensed teachers needed support while instructing pre-school, general compensatory, and special programs along with developing Individualized Education Plans (IEPs), the employment of paraprofessionals began to gain momentum and significant changes began to occur in their roles and responsibilities (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; French, 2003; Gerschel, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Patterson, 2006; Pickett, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003; Riggs, 2002; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). While paraprofessionals still performed routine clerical, monitoring, and housekeeping duties, they increasingly supported teachers with reviewing/reinforcing lessons, and assisted students with other activities (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). Paraprofessionals who had the same culture, language, and traditions as a class and/or student, were often hired to bridge language/culture barriers. During the same time that paraprofessional employment was expanding, there was a growing awareness of the need to eliminate barriers that prevented people from multi-lingual, multi-cultural, and multi-ethnic backgrounds from receiving professional opportunities (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; French, 2003; Gerschel, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Patterson, 2006; Pickett, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003; Riggs, 2002; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Then, as now, paraprofessionals were primarily women who were entering the workforce, who lived near the schools where they worked, and who represented the cultural and ethnic populations in their community (Morgan, Ashbaker, & Forbush, 1998).

Throughout the 1960s and 1970s, the federal government sponsored teacher education for paraprofessionals and other non-traditional students. One program that was popular during that time was Career Opportunities Program (COP), developed by George Kaplan (Pickett, Linkins,

& Wallace, 2003). COP described the results of a seven-year project supported by the U.S. Office of Education. The goals of COP were to: (a) develop flexible degree programs that would not diminish the quality of teacher preparation programs, and (b) would attract and support paraprofessionals in low income areas who wanted to enter the professional world, but needed to work full time while they earned academic degrees (Pickett, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003). Local Education Agencies (LEA) recruited the most promising and committed paraprofessionals they felt would develop and enrich the quality of their community schools. According to Pickett (1999) Institutions of Higher Education (IHE) scheduled undergraduate courses to accommodate worker-student needs, tutored candidates for high school equivalency tests, provided intensive academic counseling to help students navigate college bureaucracies, conducted study groups to help reinforce learning, and offered classes off campus near students' homes.

The results of the COP project found that the program was successful with recruiting and training more than 20,000 non-traditional students from various multi-cultural, multi-lingual, and multi-ethnic backgrounds to enter into the education field (Pickett, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003). However, when the federal government ended the funding, the majority of the programs ended also. Pickett et al. (2003) recorded, "currently we are seeing a resurgence of interest among teacher educators in the recruitment of paraeducators, and many of the lessons learned through COP are serving as a foundation for contemporary teacher preparation programs" ( p. 6). During the same time LEAs and IHEs were dedicated to developing COP models, numerous State Education Agencies (SEA) were developing credentialing procedures that established requirements for paraprofessional employment and preparation (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; French, 2003; Gerschel, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Patterson, 2006; Pickett, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003;

Riggs, 2002; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). The states that developed paraprofessional credentialing systems in the late 1960s and 1970s were the following: Alabama, Delaware, Georgia, Illinois, Kansas, New Mexico, New Hampshire, New York, Ohio, Vermont, and Wisconsin. All the above credentialing systems, with the exception of Kansas were more administrative-based as opposed to regulatory-based (Giangreco, 2002).

### **Lack of Training and High Demands of Paraeducators**

During the late 1960s and 1970s, local education agencies (LEA) were not required to have mandatory credentialing systems. Therefore, paraeducators did not have to follow or meet the standards set by state education agencies (SEA). Paraeducators were employed untrained. However, training was provided to individuals on a voluntary basis when career advancements were sought. As opposed to developing credentialing systems, the other remaining states decided to develop guidelines that outlined duties for paraprofessionals and placed the responsibility of setting standards for paraprofessional employment, roles, training, and supervision with local education agencies (Giangreco, 2002). With the exception of Kansas, none of the states provided financial support toward the development of systematic training for paraprofessionals.

According to Patterson (2006), despite the increased participation of paraprofessionals in all phases of the instructional process, only minimal references were made to teacher supervisory roles in state policies, regulatory procedures, and standards: e.g. “teacher aides work under the direction of licensed/certificated teachers” (p. 7). In fact, it was common practice for LEAs to designate principals as supervisors of paraprofessionals. This practice is still common among most contractual agreements or administrative guidelines in today’s schools (Patterson, 2006). As a result of this practice, teachers were not recognized as supervisors and were not trained for

supervisory roles, a practice which still occurs today (Wall, Davis, Winkler, & White, 2005) and which figures prominently in the participants' response in the study under investigation here.

“The decade of the 1980s was a time of vigorous debate about how to end a perceived decline in the quality of education services throughout the United States” (Pickett, Likins, & Wallace, 2003, p. 8). Governmental Agencies, Institutions of Higher Education (IHEs), and other stakeholders in the private and public sectors reported concerns with a significant need to reform education policies and practices. There were two major concerns during that time. They were: (1) the need for higher standards for learner performance and increased teacher accountability for learning outcomes, and (2) the need to attract and prepare highly qualified teachers. As time passed other issues were added to the reform agenda (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). Pickett (1999) explains that “as a result, leaders in education reform movements began to assess the practice of governing schools from central offices, and the concept of creating opportunities for site based management began to take shape” (p. 9).

The results of the reform movement in the 1980s, paved the way for current activities to strengthen the team leadership and program development roles for teachers. Still, the need to employ more staff in the classrooms, to allow teachers to attend to new, more complex duties was still ignored. The failure of governmental agencies to realize the growing need of paraeducators, has contributed to the lack of understanding the need to prepare teachers for supervising paraeducators (Carroll, 2001). A couple of agencies throughout the 1980s like the Council for Exceptional Children (CEC), and the National Resource Center for Paraprofessionals (NRCPP), were urging LEAs, IHEs, and SEAs, to establish curriculum content that prepared teachers to monitor/supervise paraeducators (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran,

Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). It was not until the 1990s that a few more IHEs began to follow the model of The University of Nebraska, and inserted programs to prepare teachers to monitor paraeducators (Patterson, 2006).

Limited federal government support for paraprofessional training during the 1980s, was one big factor that contributed to the decline of performances by teacher and paraprofessional teams in the delivery of instructional and other direct services (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). Katsiyannis, Hodge, and Lanford (2000) confirm that “by the close of the decade of the 80s, paraeducators had become the forgotten members of the education teams” (p. 232). Throughout the 1990s amendments to various federal laws stressed the need for but did not mandate SEAs, LEAs, and IHEs, to strengthen and expand professional development opportunities to assure the availability of highly skilled personnel at all levels, including paraeducators (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). Still today, some of the same issues are prevalent in the field. Research has revealed that paraeducators need preparation to successfully deliver services to students (Beal, 2001). However, exactly how to train paraeducators remains the choice of individual local education agencies.

The number of paraeducators employed in public schools has increased consistently and dramatically since they were introduced to classrooms in the 1950s (Ashbaker & Morgan, 2001; Katsiyannis, Hodge, & Lanford, 2000). In 2004, more than 525,000 people served as educational paraeducators in the United States (Trautman, 2004). Recently the U.S. Department of Labor has recorded that there are 1.3 million men and women serving as paraeducators (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007). Due to the large number of paraeducators, their recruitment, hiring, training, and supervision has received increased emphasis. Changes in the ways educators instruct diverse

student populations have clearly impacted the demand for paraeducators (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Schaubman et al., 2011).

Until a few years ago, special education instructional assistants worked exclusively in special education classrooms. Inclusion of children and youth with disabilities, increasing numbers of students with limited English proficiency, and the increase of students being assessed for special needs, all have contributed to the demand and placement of special education instructional assistants into the mainstream of general education classrooms (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Patterson, 2006; Pickett et al., 2003). Ashbaker and Morgan (2001) have also found that “schools are hiring more teacher assistants to provide students with personal instruction and remedial education they need” (p. 61). With this movement, instructional assistants are faced with dual roles and responsibilities.

### **No Child Left Behind**

The No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (NCLB) is a United States Act of Congress, or federal law, that provides money for extra educational assistance for children who come from low socioeconomic backgrounds, in return for improvements in their academic success. NCLB is the most recent version of the 1965 Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA). NCLB supports standards-based education reform based on the premise that setting high standards and establishing measurable goals can improve individual outcomes in education.

NCLB defines a paraeducator as an employee of a Local Educational Agency (LEA) who provides instructional support in a program with Title I, Part A funds.

Paraprofessionals who provide instructional support, includes those who: (1) provide one-on-one tutoring if such tutoring is scheduled at a time when a student would not otherwise receive instruction from a teacher, (2) assist with

classroom management, such as by organizing instructional materials, (3) provide instructional assistance in a computer laboratory, (4) conduct parental involvement activities, (5) provide instructional support in a library or media center, (6) act as a translator, or (7) provide instructional support services under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher. [Title I, Section 1119(g)(2)]

Title I of the ESEA, as amended by the NCLB Act, requires that paraeducators meet higher standards of qualification, and ensures that students who need the most help receive instructional support from qualified paraeducators. Mandates directly from the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 stipulate that: a) by June 2006 all paraeducators who work in Title I funded positions needed to have completed one of the three possible paths to keep their jobs, and b) all paraeducators hired thereafter must have the equivalent of a two-year college degree. The paths to meet NCLB requirements are:

**Path I:** Complete 60 credits at a higher education institution or obtain an associates's degree.

**Path II:** Pass any of the commercial tests available for paraeducators, i.e. ParaPro (ETS), or WorkKeys (ACT).

**Path III:** Demonstrate, through a formal State or local academic assessment, knowledge of and the ability to assist in instructing, reading, writing, and mathematics (or, as appropriate, reading readiness, writing readiness, and mathematics readiness).

Unfortunately, studies indicate that paraeducators are used in many Title I schools for teaching and assisting in teaching when their educational backgrounds do not qualify them for such responsibilities (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Pickett et al., 2003; Riggs, 2002).

### **The Urban School Community**

What is an urban school community? For many educators, the term “urban school” strikes an immediate mental image of a dilapidated school building in a poor inner-city neighborhood overpopulated with African American or Latino children. An urban school is typically defined as an educational facility that provides education to students who live in metropolitan areas (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Borrero, 2011; Curwin, 2010; Fayne & Trammell-Matthews, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Manz et al., 2010; Noel, 2010; Onore & Gildin, 2010; Smiley, 2006). These communities are, indeed, often characterized by high rates of poverty. At its worst, students in these communities may witness homelessness, panhandlers, teen pregnancy, garbage on the streets, and drugs (Curwin, 2010). Manz et al. (2010) explain that “census data indicate that 39% of children live in socioeconomic disadvantage nationally, and most of these children live in inner-city communities” (p. 56).

The urban school exists within a large bureaucratic school system that may occasionally lack resources required to handle various challenges in educating every student. Too often urban schools and the teachers within them are inadequately prepared for the social, political, and economic conditions impacting the lives of the students and families who live in these communities (Noel, 2010). Urban schools and communities typically face very serious challenges (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Curwin, 2010; Fayne & Trammell-Matthews, 2010). These

challenges often include “urban poverty; high mobility and displacement in and out of neighborhoods; inadequate funding to adequately cover the educational, social, and health needs of children and their families; and high teacher turnover and/or absenteeism” (Noel, 2010, p. 9).

Teachers who are employed in urban schools are often not residents of that neighborhood. Many of these teachers do not share the culture or race of the students whom they serve. Smiley (2006) acknowledges that “the majority of teachers currently teaching are of a different race, ethnicity, class, gender, and linguistic dominance from that of their students” (p. 244). Most teachers in urban classrooms often teach in areas which they have never visited before their initial interview (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Curwin, 2010; Fayne & Trammell-Matthews, 2010; Noel, 2010). After the school desegregation policies of the 1960s and 1970s urban schools continue to face the challenge of poor retention of highly qualified and dedicated teachers willing to teach in these areas for the long haul (Curwin, 2010). Abbate-Vaughn (2007) illustrates, “as mainstream families branch out to wealthier and whiter suburbs, so do teachers willing to work in what are perceived as ‘safer’ school settings” (p. 144). To alleviate critical shortages of highly qualified teachers in the neediest areas, a few efforts nationwide have identified urban paraeducators as professionals who could potentially help to staff urban schools with a reliable pool of local employees (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Borrero, 2011; Curwin, 2010; Fayne & Trammell-Matthews, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Manz et al., 2010; Noel, 2010; Onore & Gildin, 2010; Smiley, 2006). Manz et al. (2010) affirms that “a promising resource for urban schools is the employment of paraeducators, noncertified staff who can fulfill various roles and responsibilities to expand schools’ instructional capacity and foster home-school relationships” (p. 56). Paraeducators often live within the neighborhoods surrounding urban schools and are likely to represent the ethnic, cultural, and linguistic backgrounds of the students and families

they serve (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Borrero, 2011; Curwin, 2010; Fayne & Trammell-Matthews, 2010; Lee et al., 2010; Manz et al., 2010; Noel, 2010). It is this “promising resource” and “pool of local employees,” that is under investigation here. The findings and recommendations section of this study add their voices to the conversation in the existing literature on paraeducators.

### **Occupational Stress**

Teaching is widely recognized as a stressful occupation (Blazer, 2011; Coulter & Abney, 2009; Harris, 2011; Kipps-Vaughn, 2013; Lambert, McCarthy, O’Donnell, & Wang, 2009; Margolis, & Nagel, 2006; Richards, 2011; Schaubman, Stetson, & Plog, 2011; Shyman, 2010; Steinhart, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Thieman, Henry, & Kitchel, 2012). Public school teachers experience a great deal of stress throughout their careers with up to one-third indicating that teaching is a very or extremely stressful profession (Lambert et al., 2009). Teacher occupational stress has been recognized as a prolonged exposure to emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, often accompanied by insufficient recovery, resulting in detaching from their work, students, families, and school communities (Steinhardt et al., 2011). Occupational stress represents a response to an intolerable work situation. It occurs when a teacher is extremely fatigued and feels overextended by work and drained of emotional and physical resources (Harris, 2011). Teachers are more likely to develop an indifferent or cynical disposition while on the job when feeling emotionally exhausted and discouraged (Richards, 2011). Steinhart, Jaggars, Faulk, and Gloria (2011) warn educators that,

Stress, burnout, and teacher attrition have reached alarming levels, threatening quality education and subsequent student achievement. Teacher attrition due to work stress is increasing, with 40-50% of new teachers leaving the profession after only three years. Stressors that teachers regularly encounter include role

overload, disruptive students, non-supportive parents, lack of support from the administration, poor relationships with colleagues, being evaluated, and high stakes student testing. These stressors create and exacerbate stress, burnout, and high turnover rates in the teaching profession. (p. 420)

Although these demands and stressors have consistently appeared in the teacher stress research literature for more than 40 years, the working conditions for teachers have become more difficult in recent years (Blazer, 2011; Coulter & Abney, 2009; Harris, 2011; Kipps-Vaughn, 2013; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell, & Wang, 2009; Margolis, & Nagel, 2006; Richards, 2011; Schaubman, Stetson, & Plog, 2011; Shyman, 2010; Steinhart, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Thieman, Henry, & Kitchel, 2012). Teachers have the added responsibility of instructing students with a variety of behavioral, linguistic, and academic needs. These added responsibilities, and lack of pre-service training in how to teach a diverse group of students with a variety of needs, have created a great deal of occupational stress for teachers (Schaubman et al., 2011). Managing student problem behaviors has been consistently linked to teachers' reports of stress (Blazer, 2011; Coulter & Abney, 2009; Harris, 2011; Kipps-Vaughn, 2013; Lambert, McCarthy, O'Donnell, & Wang, 2009; Margolis, & Nagel, 2006; Richards, 2011; Shyman, 2010). Most teachers do not receive adequate pre-service training to learn or master how to work with students with behavioral challenges and become highly stressed if the students' behavioral needs exceed the resources or supports to effectively service them (Schaubman et al., 2011). To assist teachers with providing instruction and behavioral interventions to students with a range of needs, paraeducators are often hired and placed in classrooms to palliate maladaptive behaviors (Gessler-Werts et al., 2004;

Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Patterson, 2006). It appears to be a safe assumption that teacher occupational stressors are likely to apply to paraeducators currently working in the field, given the similarity of their responsibilities and the increase of their instructional and behavioral roles in the classroom.

### **Role Conflict**

Role conflict is a concept established in early business management theory (Bryan, McCubbin, & Van Der Mars, 2013; Pil Ha, Hums, & Greenwell, 2011). Farber (1991) articulates, “role conflict occurs when there is a lack of clarity regarding an individual’s rights, responsibilities, methods, goals, status or accountability” (p. 30). Recently, role conflict has become an often-used term for many people in dual-role positions in education (i.e. behavior interventionist/campus aide) to describe problem situations resulting from multiple role obligations (Bryan, McCubbin, & Van Der Mars, 2013; Pil Ha et al., 2011). The primary attribute of role conflict is incompatibility. Incompatibility involves a person dealing simultaneously with several different roles that demand incompatible behaviors (Bryan, McCubbin, & Van Der Mars, 2013). Role conflict develops when a person is forced to be responsible for two or more different roles at the same time. Pil Ha et al. (2011) interprets role conflict as having three sources:

- (1) Inter-role conflict: An individual is in charge of several different roles that demand incompatible behavior.
- (2) Intra-role conflict: An individual is in charge of one role from which different groups or individuals expect incompatible behaviors.
- (3) Person-role conflict: A role requires certain behaviors that are inconsistent with role players’

motives, abilities, or moral values. (pp. 222-223)

Paraeducators may be experiencing “person-role conflict.” Over the past 20 years, the need to extend the support of special education teachers has grown rapidly as students with disabilities are fully included into general education settings (Beal, 2001; French, 2003; Gessler-Werts et al., 2004). As a result, the use of paraeducators has increased as the main strategy for supporting students with a variety of complex needs. According to Gessler, Harris, Young, and Roark (2004), paraeducators in various school settings such as, early childhood, elementary, middle and secondary classrooms, and other programs, can be found carrying out the following duties:

- Engage individual and small groups of learners in instructional activities developed by teachers.
- Implement behavior management and disciplinary plans developed by teachers.
- Assist teachers with functional and other assessment activities.
- Document and provide objective information about learner performance that enables teachers to plan and modify curriculum and learning activities for individuals.
- Assist teachers with organizing learning activities and maintaining supportive environment.
- Assist teachers with organizing learning activities and maintaining supportive environments. (pp. 234-235)

As experts in the field of education, Bryan, McCubbin, and Van Der Mars (2013) assert, “many of the demands placed on paraeducators are unrealistic and burdensome, particularly for untrained individuals” (p. 164). For a paraeducator, the realities of their

frequently undefined roles, inappropriate responsibilities, and lack of appreciation and acknowledgement by others affect their perceived competence in their abilities to assist students with disabilities in all areas (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). Commonly, standards for defining and monitoring paraeducator roles and responsibilities and incorporating them into the organizational framework of school systems are lacking (Manz et al., 2010). Inadequate training and knowledge of teachers further prevents appropriate guidance of paraeducators to meet the educational needs of students (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). A paraeducator may be unsure as to what his or her specific responsibilities are, and may be under stress as a result. Person-role conflict will prevent the paraeducator from knowing whether or not he or she should be held responsible for a particular job, and may result in compromising difficult situations that the paraeducator is not trained to handle.

### **Emotional Demand**

Emotional exhaustion, also known as emotional demand, first proposed by Freudenberger (1974), is defined as a depletion of one's emotional resources. Emotional exhaustion is perhaps the most obvious and central quality of the complex syndrome of burnout. Freudenberger (1977) describes burnout as a physical and emotional exhaustion resulting from excessive demands on energy, strength, or resources. Freudenberger (1977) found that when frustration, tension, or anxiety persist or increase, stress develops into a syndrome now well known as burnout. Burnout occurs at the individual level. It involves feelings, motives, attitudes and expectations. It is a negative feeling for the individual that leads to exhaustion (both physical and emotional), a feeling of lack of energy, a tendency to view the individuals in a disinterested manner and the

perception of a lack of personal achievement (Hughes, 2001; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Naring, Briet, & Brouwers, 2006; Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). People who are burned out do not see themselves as cynical and depressed. They find fault with everything and everyone around them, complaining about the organization and reacting critically to whatever is suggested by others (Shukla & Trivedi, 2008).

Teaching is a profession with a high level of stress and a high level of burnout (Hughes, 2001; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Naring, Briet, & Brouwers, 2006; Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). Shukla and Trivedi (2008) warns that a burnt out teacher is losing or has lost the energy and enthusiasm needed to teach children. Teachers who remain in their jobs despite burnout symptoms may experience negative changes in attitudes and effort as well as decline in performance (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009). Friedman (1993) concluded from his analysis of data collected from over 1,500 teachers that "thinking of quitting" is one component of the climax of burnout. Burnout may also result in teachers leaving the profession. Hughes (2001) acknowledges that escape or the desire to escape is one of many outcomes of burnout. McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, and Melendres (2009) have reviewed data suggesting that "teacher shortages are not caused primarily by a lack of individuals entering the profession but instead are the result of a revolving door in which large numbers of teachers leave for reasons other than retirement" (p. 284).

Shyman (2010) implies teachers and paraeducators working in the field of special education may be likely to develop emotional attachments to students as well as emotional responses to the pervasive difficulties that their students encounter as a result of distinct learning and/or behavioral challenges. The outcomes of the present study demonstrate the connection between emotional demand and occupational stress and turnover documented in the literature

among teachers is equally true among paraeducators since both professionals work closely together with the same stressors and caseload(s) of students.

### **Sense of Efficacy**

Sense of efficacy, also known as self-efficacy, first proposed by Bandura (1977), is defined as people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is grounded in the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory which emphasizes that people can exercise some control over what they do (Bandura, 1977; Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Bandura (1977) suggests that people are self-organizing, proactive, self-regulating and self-reflecting. Self-efficacy affects one's goals and behaviors and is influenced by one's actions and conditions in the environment (Bandura, 1977; Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Efficacy beliefs determine how environmental opportunities and obstacles are perceived and effect choice of activities, the amount of effort which is given to any activity and how long people will persevere when faced with difficulties and failures (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy can enhance or hinder a person's motivation (Bandura, 1977). People with high self-efficacy may choose to perform more challenging tasks, set themselves higher goals, stick to them, and anticipate either optimistic or pessimistic scenarios in line with their level of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977; Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013).

Teacher efficacy can be defined as a belief in one's own ability to plan, organize, and carry out activities which are required to attain educational goals (Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013). Teachers' judgment about their ability to plan and execute actions necessary to achieve a desired outcome influence their goals, effort, and persistence with teaching tasks, which in turn influences their teaching performance (Oakes et al., 2013). Self- efficacy has been shown to predict teachers' goals and aspirations, teachers' attitudes toward innovation and change, teachers' tendency to refer students with difficulties to special education, teachers' use of instructional strategies and the likelihood that teachers will remain in the profession (Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013).

Teachers with high self-efficacy set higher goals for themselves, persist in difficult situations, deliver higher rates of reinforcement, spend more class time on academic instruction, provide more support for students having difficulties, and feel student can achieve despite student abilities or socioeconomic circumstances (Oakes et al., 2013). Self-efficacious teachers may perceive the objective demands of daily teaching as being less threatening than those teachers who harbor self-doubts about their professional performance (Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Brown (2012) has suggested that "symptoms of burnout could be reduced in environments in which teachers experience personal growth, self-efficacy and perceived success in their career" (p. 49).

Self-efficacy is an important stress resource factor in mitigating teacher burnout. A low sense of efficacy occurs when teachers experience prolonged feelings of ineffectiveness (Brown, 2012). Teachers with low self-efficacy consider themselves to be less competent in classroom

management practices and also have higher levels of burnout (Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy tend to have low self-esteem and have pessimistic thoughts about their accomplishments and personal development (Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013).

Paraeducators interact with students on a close and personal basis for the large majority of the instructional school day. As previously mentioned, a paraeducator is currently more likely to be involved in providing direct services to students with a variety of needs. Therefore, a sense of self-efficacy for a paraeducator may be an integral part of mitigating burnout among these very important professionals and the voices captured in this study help to enlighten a future that better addresses their needs.

### **Supervisor Support**

The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) of 2004 states that paraeducators must be appropriately trained, but other than to indicate that they must be trained in accordance with local law, it does not outline any specific requirements (Gerschel, 2005; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009). During the reauthorization of NCLB of 2001, the federal law then established minimum requirements for paraeducators who provide instructional support in schools that receive Title I funds that may be met through earning the equivalent of an Associate in Arts degree or passing a local state assessment (Gerschel, 2005; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Riggs, 2002; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001).

Both IDEIA and NCLB stress that paraeducators need to be supervised. NCLB requires that paraeducators may not provide any instructional service(s) to a student unless that person is

working under the direct supervision of a highly qualified teacher (Lewis & McKenzie, 2009). Researchers in the field agree that there is evidence that paraeducators may be providing direct instruction and making educational decisions for students without direct guidance from highly qualified teachers (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; French, 2003; Gerschel, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Patterson, 2006; Pickett, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003; Riggs, 2002; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001).

The management and supervision of paraeducators requires teachers to have knowledge, patience, and organizational skills (Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Trautman, 2004). However, teachers are rarely prepared through preservice or inservice training to effectively work with paraeducators in a way that will improve student performance (French, 2003; Pickett, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Similarly, teachers are not prepared to take on a supervisory role of other adults (Lewis & McKenzie, 2009). In fact, teacher credentialing or endorsement programs often have no formal course work with regard to effective evaluation or supervision of paraeducators (Gerschel, 2005; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Riggs, 2002; Shyman, 2010; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Lewis and McKenzie (2009) bring forth that “even when a new teacher is trained and prepared to supervise students, he or she is not equipped to address the balance of power and authority that exist between a teacher and a paraeducator, especially when the paraeducator is older than the teacher” (p. 482).

Paraeducators are typically required to be supervised by the lead classroom teacher. If the lead classroom teacher lacks pedagogy or supervisory skills and/or strategies, then the paraeducator often feels that he or she has no guidance or sense of support. This lack of supervisor support causes increased levels of stress by creating an unstable or unsupportive

school environment and the voices of the paraeducators of color in this study help to deconstruct why this instability occurs in urban settings.

### **Conceptual Framework**

A momentous concern within the field of education and special education is increased emotional exhaustion and overall burnout (Blazer, 2010; Coulter & Abney, 2008; Freudenberger & Hughes, 2001; Kipps-Vaughn, 2013; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Shyman, 2010; Steinhardt, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Thieman, Henry, & Kitchel, 2012). Shyman (2010) confirms that “research indicates between 30% and 40% of teachers leave the field completely within five years of teaching, with emotional exhaustion being one of the key components to make this ultimate decision” (p. 829). This movement has become an implicit threat for paraeducators as well—since the roles and responsibilities of paraeducators closely mirror the roles and responsibilities of teachers (Shyman, 2010).

Shyman (2010) conducted a quantitative study that sampled 100 paraeducators from the Northeastern United States who were employed from both public suburban and rural school settings. The participants in the study were comprised of 88% White females ranging from the ages of 21 to 71 years of age. The other 12% of the participants were comprised of African Americans, Asian/Asian Americans, and other.

Of the 100 participants, six percent indicated that their level of emotional exhaustion was Very High, 67% indicated that their level of emotional exhaustion was Notably High to High, and 27% indicated that their level of emotional exhaustion was Mild to Moderate. These results demonstrate that there are potential stressors present among White female special education paraeducators working in suburban and rural school settings.

## Summary

One shortcoming that remains to be seen within the literature is whether there are specific potential stressors among urban paraeducators of color, causing urban paraeducators to be vulnerable to the same risks associated with heightened occupational stress as teachers have been shown to demonstrate. This study addresses this lack of understanding regarding paraeducators of color in an urban setting.

As invaluable members to the field of special education, an increase of on the job stress could, over time, cause unnecessary low morale, low productivity, excessive absences, which then could lead to burnout and attrition. The data in this study provide a better understanding of how paraeducators of color individually perceive the causes of on the job stressors and provides recommendations for professional interventions that help prevent high absenteeism, disability claims, and high turnover.

## CHAPTER III

### METHODOLOGY

#### **Introduction**

The purpose of this interpretivist phenomenological case study, is to explore the perceptions that paraeducators and teachers of color working in urban special day class settings have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors. Richards (2013) found that an average of 50% of teachers retire, transfer, or resign from high-risk urban schools within the first five years of employment due to occupational or on-the-job stressors. Teachers often endure occupational stress in the areas of inadequate materials or resources, high student absenteeism, teen pregnancy, substance abuse, weapons possession, and maladaptive behaviors (Heyman & Vigil, 2008; Hudley, 2013). These stressors often shorten the careers of many urban teachers. This poses as a dilemma because paraeducators are often left behind in the classroom to “pick up the piece” and by default, become de facto teachers. This implication means that paraeducators are then subject to experience the very same occupational or on-the-job stressors as urban certificated teachers. Hence, this qualitative phenomenological case study addresses the voices of paraeducators of color through two types of in-depth interviews. A member check guide was also shared with each research participant to verify interview content on transcripts and allowed corrections, extensions, and elaborations to take place as each participant saw fit.

Based on phenomenological research methods, the goal of this case study is to investigate and gain a deep understanding of the experiences and/or challenges that paraeducators endure while working in urban school environments with students who have special needs (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). This case study focuses on faculty and staff members of color who work

specifically with students who have disabilities in a large urban middle school, and exposes the on-the-job stressors. As a result, I provide recommended support strategies and/or ideal professional development ideas and behaviors that urban school administrators can and should implement to prevent burn-out, low morale, high turn-over, low student achievement, and illness leaves.

### **Research Questions**

1. How do paraeducators of color serving in urban special day class settings, perceive the factors that cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job?
2. How do paraeducators of color perceive the factors that prevent emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job?

### **Chapter Organization**

The remaining organization of this chapter will be designed in a traditional qualitative format. The section of the chapter immediately following the research questions, explains the research tradition which “drives” this study, and describes the following in explicit detail: the context of the selected research setting, research sample/data sources, selected research instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, an explanation of the researcher’s role, and ends finally with a chapter summary.

### **Research Paradigm**

This research study is constructed out of the interpretivist social science research paradigm. The goal of a social scientist who operates from the interpretivist approach, is to clearly understand the actions, ideas, and interactions of human beings within a specific context

or in terms of the wider culture (Glensne, 2011). These social scientists aim to understand how people interpret and make meaning of some object, event, action, or perception within the environment which is occupied. The goal of the interpretivist approach is to interpret the perspectives of the actors within the context of their social environment. Social science researchers accomplish this by following research methods that include observations, asking questions, and interacting with participants as the researcher records their perceptions. When researchers triangulate among different data sources, this enhances the accuracy and reliability of the study. Triangulation is the process of drawing evidence from different participants, types of data, or methods of data collection in descriptions and themes in qualitative research (Creswell, 2012). “The role of the social scientist then becomes that of accessing others’ interpretations of some social phenomenon and of interpreting, themselves, others’ actions and intentions (Glense, 2011, p. 8).

### **Research Tradition**

This study sets out to use theoretical contexts of qualitative research. An instrumental case study is another form of qualitative research methodology that will be used in this inquiry. Creswell (2012) asserts, “A case study is an in-depth exploration of a bounded system based on extensive data collection. An instrumental case serves the purpose of illuminating a particular issue” (p. 465). Case studies require detailed description of the research setting and its participants along with data analysis for themes, patterns, and issues. “A caveat of case study research is that generalizability is not the goal, but rather transferability-how if at all, and in what ways understanding and knowledge can be applied in similar contexts and settings” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 31).

Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) confirm that “phenomenological research involves studying a small number of subjects through extensive and prolonged engagement to develop patterns and relationships” (p. 32). This makes meaning from the data collected in the context of the research setting, and does not generalize findings beyond it (Hendricks, 2009). This study takes the suggestion from Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), and follows the core research activities of phenomenological research. These core research activities are:

- The researcher targets a phenomenon or lived experience that is of critical concern.
- The researcher reflects on common themes within the nature of the lived experience.
- The researcher writes a vivid and detailed description of the phenomenon.
- The researcher writes and interprets the meaning of the lived experience.
- The researcher analyzes the data collected by reducing the information into quotes and thematic categories.
- Following analysis, the researcher produces a combination of thick, rich, and textural descriptions in order to display the overall essence of the social phenomenon.

(Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012)

### **Connection to the Research Tradition**

The most appropriate research genre of inquiry for this study is phenomenology. According to Bloomberg and Volpe (2012), “the appropriate research approach is the one that best fits with your research problem” (p. 27). I find the most appropriate research tradition for my study is a Phenomenological Instrumental Case Study. I believe this approach is best suited for this study because it accomplishes a “deep understanding of a social setting or activity as viewed from the perspective of the research participants” (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012, p. 27).

This study explores the perceptions that paraeducators working in urban special day class settings, have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job. The process of triangulation is used to corroborate evidence from individual semi-structured interviews from five pairs of teacher and paraeducator teams, document analysis, and member checks.

### **Research Setting and Context**

Creswell (2012) explains that narrative researchers must describe in great detail the setting or context in which the individual(s) experiences the central phenomenon. This is the place where the story physically occurs. The research setting for this study was conducted at a large urban K-12 school district by the name of Wonderful Unified School District (a pseudonym), or WUSD. This large urban Southern California school district is comprised of more than 630,000 students, over 800 Pre-K-12 schools, and over 83,000 certificated and classified employees. The district headquarters alone should and can be considered a large business corporation.

Happy Town Middle School (a pseudonym, or HTMS) is the selected school site where the central phenomenon of factors that cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job was explored. HTMS is nestled in the center of Lucky Village (a pseudonym). Lucky Village spans across 1.19 square miles. It is well known for being the center of African American arts. The area flourishes with Blues, Jazz, Hip-Hop, Art, and Poetry. Lucky Park is adjoined by middle class homes, shopping malls, and a theater. Lucky Park is also a popular place for social performances and political gatherings. The area almost remains comprised of African Americans: 79.6%, with a growing population of Latino Americans: 11.4%.

Happy Town Middle School's student grade levels range from sixth through eighth grades. There are approximately 826 students enrolled. At each grade level there are: 269 sixth graders, 274 seventh graders, and 281 eighth graders. The student population is comprised of 500 African Americans, 287 Latinos, 11 Whites, 10 Asians, and three Pacific Islanders. At HTMS approximately 701 students are from socioeconomically disadvantaged backgrounds, 143 students are English Language Learners, and 199 students have special needs that range from mild to severe learning, physical, and behavioral challenges. HTMS offers various Special Education programs and services. HTMS currently has eight special day classes that are comprised of four program types that include Resource Specialist Program (RSP), Autism (AUT), Specific Learning Disabilities (SLD), and Mentally Retarded Mild (MRM). This school site also offers various support services from Adaptive Physical Education (APE), Occupational Therapy (OT), Language and Speech (LAS), and School Mental Health Services (SMHS).

The HTMS certificated staff is comprised of 40 teachers, two Academic Counselors, one Psychologist, one Social Worker, one Mental Health Counselor, one Speech and Language Pathologist, one Registered Nurse, one Physical Therapist, and three Administrators. The HTMS classified staff is comprised of 16 special education paraeducators, three clerical staff, five campus aides, three janitors, and five cafeteria workers.

### **Selection of Research Setting**

Glesne (2011) recommends that researchers need to develop a rationale for selecting one or more sites for data collection. This decision must be made by looking at the research literature and carefully reflecting on what the researcher wants to learn while in the field (Glesne, 2011). Shyman (2010) found potential stressors present among special education paraeducators working

at rural and suburban areas. However, one limitation within his study was a relatively homogenous sample that did not include urban responders and only a small number of people of color. Shyman (2010), identified the need for future research to include data collected from diverse samples to further determine the appropriateness and significance of the findings within his study. The study under investigation explores the perceptions that paraeducators of color working in urban special day class settings have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors.

Within qualitative research, selecting research settings and participants is purposeful. Glesne (2011) finds, “different sampling strategies allow you to learn different things about your topic because each strategy you choose leads you to particular kinds of sites and people” (p. 44). I selected Happy Town Middle School by using the criterion-based sampling strategy. Criterion sampling works well when all the individuals studied within a site represent people who have experienced the same phenomenon (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). I selected HTMS based on the following criteria:

- 1) School site located in an urban community;
- 2) Students with moderate to severe needs enrolled in special day classes;
- 3) Paraeducators and teachers working together with students who have moderate to severe needs.

As the principal researcher, I am compelled to select and conduct this study at HTMS because I want to learn and understand why this site appears to be affected by paraeducators and teachers feeling emotionally and/or physically exhausted while working on the job.

### **Selection of Data Sources**

This study explores the perceptions that paraeducators and teachers of color working in urban special day class settings have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors. This study utilizes data sources that included two types of participants: special education paraeducators of color and teachers of color (both men and women). The types of data utilized in this study included two types of individual interviews, and member checking. The primary data collection method was twelve individual semi-structured interviews, consisting of six pairs of teachers and paraeducators of color.

### **Selection and Justification of Sampling Strategy**

When selecting participants to collect data from, Glesne (2011) suggests the researcher needs a justifiable selection strategy by which to choose people, events, and times. For this reason, this study used a combination of criterion and stratified purposeful sampling. Criterion sampling involves selecting participants that meet some predetermined criterion of importance (Hendricks, 2009). Patton (2002) defines stratified purposeful sampling as a method designed to ensure the sample has certain characteristics, usually representative of the population on key variables.

Creswell (2012), advises researchers to use stratification when the population reflects an imbalance on a characteristic of a sample (i.e. males versus females). This combination sampling strategy was ideal for this study because the educational field is traditionally comprised of females. Pickett et al. (2003) confirm, “Then, as now, paraeducators were primarily women who were entering the workforce, who lived near the schools where they worked, and who represented the cultural and ethnic populations in their community” (p. 5). To qualify as a participant for this study, the following characteristics were met:

- Employed as a special education paraeducator or teacher of color (i.e. African American, Latino, or Asian American).
- Worked in an urban school setting
- Worked with students who have a disability.
- The stratum desired (males) were represented in the sample in proportion to that existence in the population (Creswell, 2012).

This combination strategy of criterion/stratified purposeful sampling was most appropriate for this study because it helped to foster a clear understanding of the root(s) of on the job stressors for paraeducators. Criterion/stratified sampling strategy also helped to bring forth strategies and/or ideal professional behaviors that will perhaps prevent burn-out, low morale, high turn-over, low student achievement, and illness leaves. Bloomberg and Volpe (2012) find, “the logic or purposeful sampling lies in selecting information-rich cases, with the objective of yielding insight and understanding of the phenomenon under investigation” (p. 104).

I gained permission to sample my research participants by following the steps below: 1) Scheduled a meeting with the Instructional Director (the gate keeper) of the school to explain the intent and purpose of this study, 2) Provided a written overview of the research study and purpose, 3) Blast an email seeking willing participants, and 4) Distributed an informed consent form that highlighted: Voluntary participation, Aspects of this research that might affect the well-being of participants, and Free-will to cease participation at any point within this study (Glesne, 2011).

## **Characteristics of Sample**

The population from which sampled from is historically known for being undertrained. Educators are often concerned about paraeducators entering school settings without formal training or preparation when hired to provide services to students with disabilities. Most literature about paraeducators focuses on several topical issues: historical perspectives of paraeducators, the need for paraeducators, the many roles they conduct, current state policies standards and systems, lack of training prior to being placed in classrooms, current available training models, stressors while on the job, and potential solutions for the training of paraeducators.

Rossmann and Rallis (2012) assert researchers must make decisions about how many participants is enough to properly conduct a phenomenologic study given feasibility and constraints. Based on the three year time constraint given to complete this study (final date of August 2015), a practical sample for this study consisted of six pairs comprised of both paraeducators and teachers of color totaling a sample of 12 participants. These six paraeducator and teacher pairs represent the HTMS faculty and staff population containing both female and male professionals. These professionals were people of color (i.e. African American, Latino, and Asian American) and varied in age, years of experience, and educational background.

## **Ethical Issues**

Glesne (2011) explains, “codes of ethics instruct researchers to consciously consider and protect the rights of participants to privacy, to reflect on and mitigate deceptive aspects of research and to consider issues of reciprocity” (p. 172). As I upheld these standards within this study, I found an ethical issue that was addressed when conducting interviews, and member

checks, with both paraeducators and teachers. The ethical issue surrounding this study involved the issue of “trusting relations” between me, the principal researcher, and the participants; paraeducators and teachers. These professionals did not want to be known for being undertrained and burned out. Paraeducators and teachers were cautious about revealing their stressors and admitting to needing help with the students they serve. Paraeducators and teachers alike all wanted their names to remain anonymous for fear of losing their jobs because of sharing their candid responses, true feelings, and experiences. This anonymity was, of course, assured.

### **Mitigating Ethical Concerns**

Glesne (2011) highlights the need for researchers to take into account ethical aspects that have already been mentioned such as promises of privacy and anonymity, as well as ways to reciprocate and possibly collaborate with research participants. However, Rossman and Rallis (2003) advise researchers to keep in mind that ethical issues are not solvable, they are dilemmas that each researcher must reason through based on intuition, personal values, moral principles, and standards within the profession. To successfully mitigate through ethical concerns that surfaced throughout the duration of this study, I was open and honest and built trusting relationships with each research participant. Names of participants were converted into pseudonyms to conceal their identities. Each paraeducator and teacher participated in member checks to ensure their story was captured accurately. I, as the principal researcher, vowed to take every possible precaution to ensure no harm came to any research participant, as a result of their participation in this study. I also submitted the proposal for this study to the California State University Northridge Institutional Review Board (IRB) and was approved to conduct this study. Submission to this board ensured this study met the following criteria:

- Risks were minimized.
- Risk/benefit ratio was reasonable.
- Subject selection was equitable.
- Informed consent was obtained and documented.
- Data are mentioned and secured.
- Privacy and confidentiality are protected (Rossman, & Rallis, 2003).

## **Data Collection Instruments**

### **Selection of Data Collection Instruments**

Qualitative researchers must depend on a variety of data methods and/or approaches for obtaining data within the field. This practice of relying on multiple methods is commonly called triangulation, a term taken from surveying and navigation (Glesne, 2011). Rossman and Rallis (2012) acknowledge that triangulation is a process that uses multiple sources of data, multiple points in time, or a variety of methods used to build the picture which the researcher is investigating. Although multiple data collection methods is the most popular form of triangulation in qualitative research, Glesne (2011) notes that “triangulation also refers to the incorporation of multiple kinds of data sources, multiple investigators, and multiple theoretical perspectives” (p. 47). This study collected the perceptions that paraeducators and teachers, working in urban special day class settings, have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors.

The ebb and flow or mix of data collection techniques utilized in this study included two types of individual semi-structured interviews of both special education paraeducators and

teachers, and lastly, member checks. These techniques were selected to enhance the rigor, accuracy, trustworthiness, credibility, validity, and reliability of this study. These qualities ensure this study is accurate because the information draws on multiple sources of information, individuals, or processes. When this is established, Creswell (2012) finds that researchers develop a study that is both accurate and credible.

### **Interview Protocol**

Rossmann and Rallis (2012) share that in-depth interviewing is the hallmark of qualitative research. Interviewing takes the researcher into the participants' world at least as far as they can verbally relate what is in their minds (Rossmann & Rallis, 2012). In-depth interviewing is a conversation with a purpose between the interviewer and interviewee. The primary data collection method for this study was twelve individual semi-structured interviews, six from paraeducators and six from special education teachers. This instrument was selected (see Appendix C) as the primary data collection method with the purpose of gaining the following information: to understand the individual perspectives of paraeducators (and the special education teachers with whom they work), to deepen understanding of what causes on the job stressors, to gather insights into participants' thinking, and to learn more about the context of paraeducator training while working with students who have various special needs.

The interview guide approach was used to elicit the views of each individual participant. The instrument began with a "grand tour question that is literally inviting the interview partner to take you on a tour of whatever aspect of their social world you are interested in" (Rossmann & Rallis, 2012, p. 177). This approach to interviewing highlights an assumption within qualitative research-that each participant's perspective on the phenomenon of interest should unfold as the

participant views it and not as the researcher views it (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2008). My role as the principal researcher was to capture that unfolding.

### **Member Check Guide**

Creswell (2012) defines member checking as “a process in which the researcher asks one or more participants in the study to check the accuracy of the account” (p. 259). Interview tapes, transcripts, and all findings, were shared with each research participant in this study to elaborate, correct, extend, or argue about as he or she saw fit (See Appendix E). As the principal researcher, I also asked each participant if my descriptions of their experiences were accurate, complete, and fair.

### **Data Collection Procedures**

This study collected the perceptions that paraeducators working in urban special day class settings, have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors. Using criterion/stratified purposeful sampling, I interviewed paraeducators and special education teachers separately during the data collection process. I used four instruments to protect all human participants and connected the research data to my conceptual framework. The instruments for this study included a research invitation, informed consent form, interview protocol, and a member check guide. These instruments can be accessed in the appendices section A thru D of this document. As I prepared to enter the field as a qualitative researcher, my objective was to ensure freedom and integrity for all participants and myself (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). Upfront, I communicated with my participants that my sole intention was to “shed light” on this subject, not to outcast anyone for their opinions or experiences.

## **Research Invitation**

Creswell (2012) advises researchers that after identifying and selecting participants for their study, next the researcher needs to obtain their permission to be studied. Gaining permission from district personnel and research participants requires contacting them before the beginning of the data collection process, and obtaining their signatures. “The best way to seek permission from the necessary individuals or groups is to ask for it formally in a letter” (Creswell, 2012, p. 147). To locate participants, I used two methods to announce my study: 1) posted the invitation on the staff lounge bulletin board and 2) distributed the letter out by hand during after school hours. The invitation letter developed for this study (see Appendix A) included the purpose of my study, the projected amount of time I needed to collect data while in the field, the amount of time each research participant was asked to contribute, and how I would use the findings of this study. The invitation letter also specified the activities I conducted while in the field, the benefits and/or known risks when participating in the study, and the pact made to protect the rights and anonymity of each research participant. Creswell (2012) notes that providing this information shows a concern for the potential intrusion of the study into their natural environment(s), and set the stage for realistic expectations on their behalf.

## **Informed Consent Form**

Researchers must be sensitive to the potential harm that research participants may experience while involved in research studies. It is vital to protect the privacy and confidentiality of each individual who agrees to participate in this study. The informed consent form (see Appendix B) developed for this study explained that I, the principal researcher, guaranteed each research participant certain rights. When participants signed the consent form they were agreeing

to be involved in the discovery of emotional and physical factors among special education paraeducators employed in urban school settings, and acknowledge the protection of their rights. By signing the informed consent form developed for this study, both paraeducators and special education teachers agreed that: 1) Participation was voluntary, 2) Any aspect of this research could have caused discomfort, and 3) Each participant could discontinue participation at any time during the study. The research invitation and informed consent form were both designed using the existing procedures as described by the Office of Graduate Studies, Research and International Programs at California State University Northridge.

### **Data Collection**

The interview protocol developed for this study (see Appendix C and D) was used to conduct 12 individual informal standardized open-ended interviews, six from paraeducators (see Appendix C) and six from special education teachers (see Appendix D). Rossman and Rallis (2012) define standardized open-ended interviews as “tightly prefigured, having fixed questions that are asked of all participants in a particular order” (p. 178). The interview protocols for this study were prefigured and the questions were listed in a particular order, the questions were open-ended. Open-ended questions were designed to allow each research participant to expand their thinking and collect their candid responses as they emerged and the study unfolded. During each interview, all twelve conversations were recorded individually by a hand held digital voice recorder. This ensured an accurate record of each conversation. The interview protocol began with a “grand tour question that literally invited the interviewee to go on a tour of whatever aspect of their social world that I was interested in” (Rossman & Rallis, 2012, p. 177). All ten

questions on the interview protocol were developed in conjunction with the conceptual framework selected for this study, Shyman's (2010) Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion.

Participants who responded to the invitation letter were screened by phone to ensure their eligibility and understanding of their role as a participant in this study, and to schedule a time and date at their convenience to sign the consent form. Once all consent forms were collected, I contacted each participant by phone or email (their choice) to arrange a date, time, and confirm the location on campus to conduct each individual interviews. I conducted these interviews at a location free from distractions that lent to audiotaping, the local public library. I interviewed each participant on the weekend or during holiday breaks to prevent these people from being uncomfortable at their worksite. At the beginning of each interview session, I welcomed each participant and briefly explained my research purpose and the pact made to protect their rights and anonymity of each research participant.

For this study I used the interview guide approach which allowed me to collect the perceptions of each participant, yet allowing me the possibility to pose follow-up questions to elicit more in-depth responses. Each individual interview took up to 60 minutes depending on the rich descriptive data provided by each special education teacher and paraeducator. The types of questions these participants answered were:

- Describe any trainings you received while working on the job?
- Have you ever felt under trained or overwhelmed while working on the job?
- Describe what you do when you encounter difficulties or challenges, can you give an example?

At the conclusion of each interview, I verbally thanked each participant and assured him or her of the confidentiality of their responses (while reminding him or her that I was going to contact

them for the completion of the Member Check Form) and issued their ten-dollar Target gift card in appreciation of their time and efforts.

### **Data Analysis**

The analysis of qualitative data involves researchers understanding how to make sense of text derived from selected data sources to answer research questions (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Hendricks, 2009; Rossman, & Rallis, 2012). Analyzing and interpreting qualitative data is a daunting yet exciting aspect of the research process that brings piles of data collected in the field to life. Researchers must view data analysis as an ongoing and emergent attempt to understand information gathered in the field, as a process that relies on both inductive and deductive reasoning (Rossman, & Rallis, 2012). Glesne (2011) explains that a single piece of data carries no meaning. Instead, researchers must assign meaning to multiple pieces of data and label, code, categorize, build analytic descriptions, compare and contrast, find patterns, construct themes, and consider alternatives for answering research questions (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Rossman and Rallis (2012) describe this process as both iterative and sequential. Throughout the duration of a study, researchers will find themselves describing, analyzing, and interpreting data. This means that researchers can cycle back and forth between data collection and analysis. As the principal researcher, I formally reflected on my data collected in the field-by asking analytic questions, and writing descriptive analytic memos throughout this study.

The analytic process begins with an action plan that maps out how the researcher will navigate and successfully manage large amounts of data collected in the field (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). A dedicated plan contributed to a well-organized, structured, and meaningful study. I used Hendricks' (2001) analytic procedures that requires the following four steps:

### **Step 1. Record qualitative data and turn into text form.**

This study uses two types of individual semi-structured 60-minute interviews as the primary source of information. I recorded the responses of each paraeducator and special education teacher by a hand held digital voice recorder. Once I captured each individual interview I transcribed the information immediately. Creswell (2012) confirms that transcription is the process of converting audiotape into text data. Each transcription contained a verbatim account of the experiences shared with me. All transcriptions had personal information redacted and replaced with pseudonyms. Each transcript was stored in a safe locked location that ensured confidentiality and credibility.

### **Step 2. Analyze multiple data sources together.**

At the very beginning of qualitative analysis, all data must be organized and saved in file folders or computer files (Creswell, 2012; Glesne, 2011; Hendricks, 2009; Rossman, & Rallis, 2012). I organized my materials by type; all interviews and all member check forms by participant and date received. I then developed a matrix or table to guide my analysis of multiple data sources at once.

### **Step 3. Code data.**

Coding is the process of segmenting and labeling text to form descriptions and broad themes in data (Creswell, 2012). The results from Shyman's (2010) study revealed the best predictors or codes of emotional exhaustion in order of significance: Role Conflict, Emotional Demand, Sense of Efficacy, and Supervisor Support (see Figure 2). I initially coded my data using the codes developed from my conceptual framework. My data analysis provided new codes; I used Atlas-ti, a Windows PC program that supports researchers with organizing and coding data. I read, reread, and once more read through all my data to make sense out of it. Then,

I used Atlas-ti to divide the text into segments of information, labeled the segments with codes, examined codes for overlap and redundancy, and collapsed my codes into broad themes.

#### **Step 4. Analyze codes to find patterns and themes in the data.**

I answered my research questions using thematic analysis, which is based on themes and patterns that emerged from my data. I analyzed how categorizations or thematic ideas were represented by each code. Tables and charts were developed to help reveal and/or answer underlying complexities. I also wrote analytical memos throughout this process to record my thoughts and confront and check my biases.

#### **Role of the Researcher**

One strategy that helps to ensure that qualitative studies are rigorously conducted is when researchers make their position clear (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). Throughout the duration of this study, I carried out several roles. I functioned primarily as the principal research investigator. The role of the researcher is critical to qualitative research due in part to the subjectivity posed when the researcher constructs an understanding through interviews, observations, document analysis, and surveys (Rossman & Rallis, 2003). My second role was the researcher as learner. I am a third-year doctoral student who is interested in exploring social phenomena within K-12 special education settings. Glesne (2011), finds that researchers are curious students who come to learn from and with research participants. My third role was as a K-12 district certificated employee with WUSD. I coordinate special services for students with mild to severe disabilities. I ensure students are safe, properly placed in their appropriate classroom/program, and I monitor/document services over time.

## **The Researcher's Biases**

Becoming aware of my own subjectivities means that I have to be in tune with who I am and how my etic voice shapes my dispositions, assumptions, experiences, beliefs, values, and feelings. This study collected the perceptions that paraeducators of color working in urban special day class settings, have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors. I am aware of my prior connection(s) to my research topic, setting, and people and how these might affect my conduct throughout the duration of my study. In search of my own subjectivities, my research site and its conditions elicit two subsets of the six “subjective Is” described by Alan Peshkin (1988).

The Nonresearch Human I: As a former paraprofessional working with students in a special day class setting, I am certain I displayed empathy toward every paraprofessional I interviewed because my past experiences closely match their current experiences. This affection I have toward paraeducators “could have blocked the sharp, harsh light that dispassion usefully generates throughout one's research process” (Peskin, 1988, p. 20).

The Pedagogical-Meliorist I: My past experiences suggest that school administrators do not properly address the training needs of paraeducators during staff professional development meetings, if at all. My experience is that professional development meetings only target the needs of teachers.

## **The Mitigation of the Researcher's Subjectivities**

Rossmann and Rallis (2012), suggest that a researcher's reflectivity and reflexive process should be deliberate and conscious; decisions and actions should be explicated and displayed so

that others may understand the choices the researcher has made and the reasoning behind those choices. Researchers must document their intellectual and methodological pathways to establish trustworthiness, soundness, and rigor for their studies (Rossman & Rallis, 2012). To mitigate my research biases and establish intellectual integrity within my study, I engaged in the sustained systematic inquiry process of acting and reflecting, reflecting and acting. To monitor my subjectivities, I wrote short analytical memos throughout the research process and kept them in a personal reflection journal. I used these analytical memos to reflect on and critique my motives, assumptions, and personal experiences. Embedded within the analytical memos, I used Glesne's (2011) Triangulated Inquiry Reflexive Questions:

- 1). What are my theoretical and philosophical beliefs about doing research, and how do they guide me to do this kind of research?
- 2). What in my autobiography led me to this topic?
- 3). Why did I select each particular person who is in the study?
- 4). Why did I form the particular interview questions I use?
- 5). Why do I observe where I observe?
- 6). What kind of relationships have I developed with research participants and why?
- 7). What do I think I know and how do I know it?
- 8). As I analyze and interpret data, what do I choose to include and what do I choose to omit and why (pp.159-160)?

### **Summary**

Based on phenomenological research methods, the goal of this case study was to investigate and gain a deep understanding of the human experiences described by the participants (Bloomberg & Volpe, 2012). Shyman (2010) identified the need for future research to include

data collected from diverse samples to further determine the appropriateness and significance of the findings within his study. The study here responds directly to that call and collected the perceptions that paraeducators of color working in urban special day class settings have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors. Therefore, this qualitative phenomenological case study collected the voices of paraeducators and teachers of color through two types of in-depth interviews. This study proposes preliminary best practices for professional development and ideal faculty and staff behaviors that could help to mitigate the urban stressors uncovered in this study.

## CHAPTER IV

### RESULTS OR FINDINGS

#### **Introduction**

Chapter three provided a detailed account of the methodological approach used to conduct this qualitative study. I'll say. This study draws upon an interpretivist phenomenological tradition to explore the perceptions that paraeducators and teachers of color working in urban special day class settings have regarding the factors which cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors. The goal of this case study was to investigate and gain a deep understanding of the human experiences described by paraeducators of color who work specifically with students who have disabilities in a large urban middle school, and helps to expose the on-the-job stressors.

The organization and presentation of this chapter is modeled after Chenail's (1995) ideas about presenting qualitative data. To help with the daunting task of presenting substantive and robust qualitative data, Chenail (1995) advises researchers to consider using Openness, Data as Star, Juxtaposition, and Data Presentation Strategies:

*Openness:* Representing plenty of data will allow the audience to see what they see in the data. It is a way to "share the wealth" and invite another to continue the inquiry and conversation.

*Data as Star:* Data should "be the star." Instead of re-presenting just the slice of talk researchers should display their data with ample preceding and following talk so that readers can get a sense of flow and be able to see the data in its natural setting. By providing this "bigger picture" researchers can give their data its "star treatment."

*Juxtaposition:* Juxtapose data excerpts with talk about the data. The essence of presenting qualitative research comes down to how well researchers juxtapose their data with descriptions, explanations, analysis, or commentaries.

*Data Presentation Strategies:* Create a template for representing data so that there is a recognizable pattern throughout the Findings section. In this way, readers can begin to read in a rhythm.

Chenail (1995) reminds researchers that it takes two studies to present one in qualitative research. One is the “official” research project and the other is the study about the study. As reviewed earlier, the theoretical foundations selected for this study is modeled after Shyman’s (2010) Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion. The Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion theory will be utilized for this study as a frame for understanding the interpretations and perceptions of special education paraeducators of color working in urban school settings.

### **Demographics of Participants**

Happy Town Middle School (a pseudonym, or HTMS) was the selected school site where the central phenomenon of factors that may cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job was explored. The participants for this study ranged in age from approximately 30 to 70 years. Their years of special education experience ranged from approximately two to 30 years. Four of the participants were males and eight were females. All 12 participants were people of color; two Asian American, three Latino, and seven were African American (see Figure 3). All 12 participants worked at Happy Town Middle School’s special education program within the last two school years (i.e. 2012-2013 or 2013-2014). All 12 participants worked in either a Mild

to Moderate or Moderate to Severe self-contained class with students with varying abilities from learning disabilities to severe multiple disabilities, including Autism and pervasive behaviors.

Figure 3. Participant Demographics

### Paraeducator Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Grades Served	Type of Special Day Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Daffodil</li> <li>• Ecco</li> <li>• HighTower</li> <li>• Roseville</li> <li>• Talbert</li> <li>• Wizz</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Male</li> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Male</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 40s</li> <li>• 30s</li> <li>• 30s</li> <li>• 30s</li> <li>• 30s</li> <li>• 40s</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• African American</li> <li>• Latino</li> <li>• African American</li> <li>• Latino</li> <li>• Asian American</li> <li>• African American</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 8 Years</li> <li>• 10 Years</li> <li>• 2 Years</li> <li>• 9 Years</li> <li>• 12 Years</li> <li>• 5 Years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6-8th</li> <li>• 6-8th</li> <li>• 6-8th</li> <li>• 6-8th</li> <li>• 6-8th</li> <li>• 6-8th</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mild to Moderate</li> <li>• Moderate to Severe</li> <li>• Moderate to Severe</li> <li>• Moderate to Severe</li> <li>• Moderate to Severe</li> <li>• Mild to Moderate</li> </ul>

### Special Education Teacher Demographics

Name (Pseudonym)	Gender	Age	Ethnicity	Years of Experience	Grades Served	Type of Special Day Class
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Kittredge</li> <li>• Limpkins</li> <li>• Napa</li> <li>• Patchwood</li> <li>• Ropper</li> <li>• Witherspoon</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Female</li> <li>• Male</li> <li>• Male</li> <li>• Female</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 30s</li> <li>• 70s</li> <li>• 30s</li> <li>• 40s</li> <li>• 40s</li> <li>• 30s</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• African American</li> <li>• African American</li> <li>• Asian American</li> <li>• Latino</li> <li>• African American</li> <li>• African American</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 3 Years</li> <li>• 30 Years</li> <li>• 3 Years</li> <li>• 4 Years</li> <li>• 15 Years</li> <li>• 1 Years</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• 6th</li> <li>• 6-8th</li> <li>• 6-8th</li> <li>• 6th</li> <li>• 7-8th</li> <li>• 6-8th</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Mild to Moderate</li> <li>• Moderate to Severe</li> <li>• Mild to Moderate</li> <li>• Mild to Moderate</li> <li>• Mild to Moderate</li> <li>• Moderate to Severe</li> </ul>

All identifiable information was redacted and replaced with pseudonyms to protect the identity of each individual participant. Interview transcripts and electronic data were stored by the researcher in a safe, locked, and secured location to ensure confidentiality and creditability.

The major findings that emerged are presented and organized in conjunction with the research questions established for this study. The findings are organized by five major themes and categories primarily informed by Shyman’s conceptual framework of Predictors of Emotional Exhaustion with the addition theme of physical exhaustion that emerged from the data (see Figure 4). These five themes are:

**Role Conflict:** Lack of clarity regarding an individual’s roles and responsibilities on the job.

**Emotional Demand:** Feelings of being emotionally overextended.

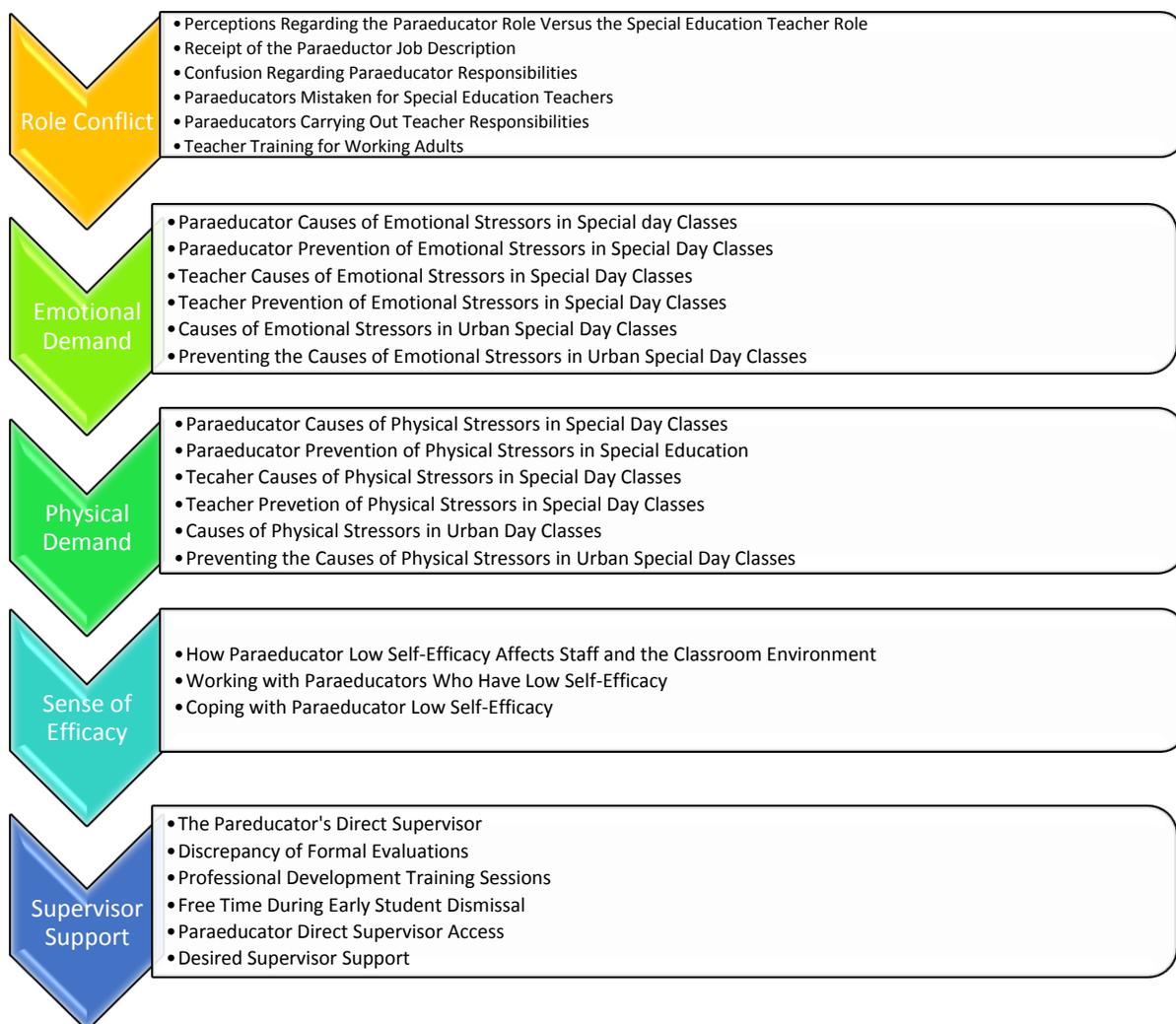
**Physical Demand:** A theme that emerged from the data collected from this study. Feelings of being physically overextended. The development of body aches, injuries, and/or illnesses.

**Sense of Efficacy:** An individual's perception about their capabilities and talents.

**Supervisor Support:** A level of support an individual receives from teachers and administrators.

The data collected for this study will be interpreted and described in thick, rich, and detailed story-like text that describes the true voices and individual experiences of each research participant.

Figure 4. Major Research Findings



Remember Pearl? I did not talk to Pearl. But, I did interview paraeducators who concretely share and explain their “Pearl” lived experiences. The data captured below is comprised of thick, robust, story-like interviews of paraeducators (and teachers) who share their versions of their “Pearl” experiences.

### **Role Conflict**

Farber (1991) articulates, “role conflict occurs when there is a lack of clarity regarding an individual’s rights, responsibilities, methods, goals, status or accountability” (p. 30). Recently, role conflict has become an often used term for many people in dual role positions in education (i.e. behavior interventionist-campus aide) to describe problem situations resulting from multiple role obligations (Bryan, McCubbin, & Van Der Mars, 2013; Pil Ha et al., 2011). The primary attribute of role conflict is incompatibility. Role conflict develops when a person is forced to be responsible for two or more different roles at the same time.

#### *Perceptions Regarding the Paraeducator role versus the Special Education Teacher Role*

Paraeducator participants were asked if they knew what their specific roles were in comparison to special education teacher roles. Most paraeducators were clear that they are placed in special day classrooms to support the certificated teacher with academic lessons and student behaviors. Most paraeducators also recognize teachers are responsible for lesson planning, assessments, and IEP goals and objectives. As one paraeducators, Ms. Daffodil said:

The paraeducator role is that of an assistant. I'm supposed to assist the teacher in whatever her directives are, whatever her goals are as based per her own observation of the student and her own personal goals for the student, as well as coinciding with the goals of the individual student's IEP. My goal is not to insert

my own goals, but to assist the teacher in enforcing her goals and her ways of teaching to reach the goal of the student. That's for the paraeducator. For the teacher, again, her job is to assess and assert and direct, and I'm supposed to just help that come to fruition.

There were however, a few paraeducators who were unable to articulate the difference between the roles of paraeducators versus the roles of special education teachers, as noted in the following two statements given by one female paraeducators, Mrs. Ecco and one male paraeducators, Mr. Wizz:

In my opinion, the difference is we are the teachers. The teachers is there to supervise us. We do everything.

I can't really explain the difference because to me, they're one and the same. So, I really can't explain the difference at all.

Special education teachers were also asked if they knew what their specific roles were in comparison to paraeducators. If there was role confusion on the part of paraeducators, the opposite was true with special education teacher participants in this study who all agreed that paraeducators are placed in special day classes to strictly support the teachers and the students. For example, one teacher who captured this sentiment was Mr. Ropper, who said:

My job is to guide the lesson. Their job is to support the lesson basically with whatever tasks I need them to do, whether it's supervising the students to make

sure they're on task working, get support material, pass out support material, maybe monitor a group so I can bring them individual group tasks, things like that.

Most teachers do recognize that a successful classroom environment is contingent upon their paraeducators because they help with the tone of the class and function as “the buffer” between the teacher and the students. Mr. Patchwood believes his paraeducators are essential to the success of his classroom:

The roles are to assist the students in the classroom. I see myself as the facilitator of the classroom. My success is contingent upon them because they're the ones that can really help me out with the students that need extra work or the students also that are highly-- that need to be challenged more. They can help with the tone of the classroom. They build rapport with the students. I think that we share similar roles in building rapport, providing an engaging in learning environment, a fostering environment. They set the tone in the class and again, just like I work with students at their need. They work with students that need. If they needed to defuse a situation in a class, they help a lot in that, but as a teacher, we have far more responsibility and accountability for the paraeducator or the special education assistants. They're not responsible for the grades, attendance. They're not responsible for the lesson planning. However, they could assist with that, the overall behavior management, but they can also help and rewarding kids and assisting with the positive and the consequences in class but I wouldn't count on my special education assistant, to contact the parent, to be in charge of sending

the students out on referrals or talking with the parents, talking to the administrator. There's definitely a line that a paraeducator has in class, in a role, in a place. However, I feel that there are an integral part of a teacher's success in a classroom. I just feel that they play an important role in a class.

### *Receipt of the Paraeducator Job Description*

Paraeducator participants were asked if they have ever received a type written job description prior to their employment. Some paraeducators said they have never seen a written job description detailing their responsibilities. For instance, one paraeducator Mr. Wizz said:

No. I have never received a typewritten job description. Sometimes I will wonder, was I doing more than I should be doing? Actually, I knew that I was doing more than I should, but I had to also improvise a lot. Like I've mentioned earlier, I kind of had to just "wing it" because there was no set job description. I carry a lot of hats.

Other paraeducators recall receiving a written job description before being hired to work with students. However, they report their job description does not include all the responsibilities a paraeducator performs in reality, as indicated in Ms. Daffodil's statement:

Yes. I did receive that. I can't actually say everything that it described that I was going to be doing because it was so long ago, but I do know I had a brief description of what I was supposed to do, although what you do out is so far removed from what is printed in black and white. You do way more than what is printed.

Special education teacher participants were also asked if they have ever received a written copy of a paraeducators job description. Most teachers never received a paraeducator job description. Mr. Patchwood struggles to recall if he ever saw a paraeducator job description:

No, I don't think I ever have. I do recall interviewing in between school districts.

No, I never have received one.

Another teacher, Mrs. Witherspoon quickly recalls that she has never seen a paraeducators job description. She admits that she develops a job description for the paraeducators in her class:

No, I never received one from the school. I had to create one on my own. I did have prior experience with creating paraeducator handbooks.

### *Confusion Regarding Paraeducators' Responsibilities*

For paraeducators generally, the realities of their frequently undefined roles, inappropriate responsibilities, and lack of appreciation and acknowledgement by others affect their perceived competence in their abilities to assist students with disabilities in all areas (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). A paraeducator may be unsure as to what his or her specific responsibilities are, and may be under stress as a result. Person-role conflict will prevent the paraeducator from knowing whether or not he or she should be held responsible for a particular job, and may result in compromising difficult situations the paraeducator is not trained to handle.

Commonly, standards for defining and monitoring paraeducator roles and responsibilities and incorporating them into the organizational framework of school systems are lacking (Manz et al., 2010). Most paraeducators are clear about what their responsibilities should be while they

are providing services to students with special needs. However, most paraeducators still remain confused about their roles and responsibilities as indicated by Mr. Wizz's comment which generally captures the voices of many participants:

I was confused almost every day what my role was because like I said, I had to just improvise a lot and just to make sure that the kids are able to be safe and get from lunch to ... back to the classroom and even once they get in the classroom that everyone is able to get their lesson and cooperate and also just everything is in order. It was very, very difficult without any training. It's just extremely difficult.

In addition, some paraeducators shared they received conflicting information from classroom teachers about what to do from time-to-time as evidenced by Ms. Roseville's comment:

I have been told that I am not to answer questions that should be directed to the teacher and to tell the parents that's something you need to address with the teacher, call the school and leave a message. I have been told on the flip side of that if you know the answer to a question, you can answer it and just say that's all I know. I'm not sure if I'm supposed to give that information or not. I have also asked the teacher directly what she wants me to do or if I should do anything or what they suggest should be my next plan of action.

Special education teacher participants were asked if they have ever been confused about what tasks they could or could not ask their classroom paraeducators. A few teachers admitted to some confusion. Ms. Kittredge, for instance, indicated this in the following statement:

Yes because I think as an instructor it's a sensitive issue working with another adult that has sometimes more experience than the teacher. At the same time, I'm not the direct supervisor of somebody else so you have to establish a good relationship to be able to know when to ask and what to ask. Sometimes it's confusing what the responsibilities might be because we don't have anybody that comes in and says, "Well these are the things we want you to take care of." You just have to figure it out as you go along.

Another teacher, Mr. Ropper, found his confusion did not spur from the inside of the classroom but rather from the time(s) when paraeducators are outside with students, or away from his direct supervision:

No, when it comes to the classroom, but yes, maybe when it comes to the supervision or escorting a student or when you can leave them with a student or something like that. That would probably be the boundary where it's hazy.

#### *Paraeducators Mistaken for Special Education Teachers*

The roles and responsibilities of paraeducators closely mirror the roles and responsibilities of teachers (Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). Paraeducator participants were asked if they have ever been mistaken for the teacher by a first time classroom visitor. Most paraeducators responded with an astounding yes:

Absolutely. If the teacher has given me an assignment to do which may or may not be really my job or my scope of competence or practice, yes. If someone were to come in and observe and see me sitting at a table conducting a lesson or the teacher sitting at her desk or his desk doing whatever, yes. At first sight it may appear that I actually am the teacher and not the paraeducator. Also I have a good command of the classroom and I have good control of the; not control, but good control for lack of a better term, but a good rapport with my students, typically in each class I go through a development relationship with the students as best I can and develop a certain level of respect. If someone does walk into the classroom, they don't know if I'm the paraeducator or the teacher. (Ms. Daffodil)

Mr. Wizz claimed his close relationships with the students in the class would often indicate to first time visitors that he was the classroom teacher, when in fact he was not:

All the time, because more times than not, it seemed like I have a better rapport with the kids more, more than the teacher for some reason. Sometimes, the counselor or visitor or even a first time parent would come in and would automatically assume that I'm the teacher because I guess, it's just the command. Well, not command, but just what I had on the class. It ran smooth when I was in there and whenever someone come around, they could see that definitely.

Special education teachers were also asked if they have been mistaken for the paraeducator while their real classroom paraeducator was mistaken for the classroom teacher. Most teachers claimed they have not experienced this. However, Ms. Kittredge has experienced this confusion due to her paraeducator appearing to be her elder. This teacher said:

Yes, sometimes. If we're both sitting in two separate desks sometimes it's not clear which one is for the teacher and which one is for the paraeducator. If a paraeducator is a little bit old or maybe that confusion can set in. (Ms. Kittredge)

Another teacher, Mr. Patchwood, shared he has yet to experience this confusion however, he would not be surprised if this happens in classrooms:

I don't think I have had that experience, but I wouldn't be surprised.

### *Paraeducators Carrying Out Teacher Responsibilities*

Ashbaker and Morgan (2001) found that "schools are hiring more teacher assistants to provide students with personal instruction and remedial education they need" (p. 61). With this movement, instructional assistants are faced with dual roles and responsibilities. Paraeducators were asked if they have ever been asked to carry out teacher responsibilities. Researchers in the field agree there is evidence that paraeducators may be providing direct instruction and making educational decisions for students without direct guidance from highly qualified teachers (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; French, 2003; Gerschel, 2005; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Patterson, 2006; Picket, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003; Riggs, 2002; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Many paraeducators have said they often perform responsibilities beyond their scope of expertise. Mr. Wizz recalled:

Absolutely. There had been times when the teacher doesn't come and I'm there. Therefore, no one had to tell me, but I just get worksheets and I'll just go along with a lesson that I know, that I've seen done or something that I knew and just to make sure that everything was running smooth as possible. I would just go ahead and do the lesson.

Another paraeducator, Ms. Talbert, shared that some, not all teachers have asked her to develop and execute lessons on her own without their instructional supervision:

Yes. I've worked with many different teachers. Not all of them, but there's been a few teachers where I was asked to make up a lesson and do an activity that I made up on my own.

Ms. Daffodil recalls teaching several lessons to students with special needs and feeling like she crossed her scope of competence:

Yes. I've been asked to teach a lesson plan; several lesson plans. I've been asked to supervise more than I'm supposed to, so yes, I definitely have gone beyond my scope of competence within my role as a teaching assistant.

#### *Teacher Training for Working with Adults*

Inadequate training and knowledge of teachers further prevents appropriate guidance of most paraeducators to meet the educational needs of students (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). Teacher participants were asked if they have received specific training to work with adults in their classrooms. All teacher participants agreed they did not receive adult paraeducator training from their school site administration. Lewis and McKenzie (2009) bring forth that “even when a new teacher is trained and prepared to supervise students, he or she is not equipped to address the balance of power and authority that exist between a teacher and a paraeducator, especially when the paraeducator is older than the teacher” (p. 482). Mr. Patchwood recalled:

No, I did not receive any training from a principal or an administrator, or a resource teacher. It was only the directions on how to best use an assistant. I think when I interviewed, the question would always come up. I think it was something

where I guess if you had your teacher credential, it was determined that you knew how to handle. You knew what to do with the teacher assistant in the classroom.

Another teacher, Ms. Limpkins shared that her credential program is where she received training to work with adults:

Yes during the credential program we covered that but not at my actual worksite.

***Role Taxation.*** Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study both shared their experiences regarding the problem(s) and/or concern(s) they had with paraeducators and Role Conflict. Some teachers and most paraeducators reported they were often mistaken for the classroom teacher by first time visitors, especially if the paraeducator appeared to be the elder. In fact, most paraeducators reported they often created and taught lessons, performed as the classroom teacher in the absence of the official teacher of record, and had more rapport and/or command of the classroom than the actual teacher of record. Although all paraeducators and teachers alike agree that paraeducators are hired and placed in classrooms to assist the teacher of record with academics and student behavioral challenges, most paraeducators remain confused about their roles because either paraeducators did not remember receiving their job description or because paraeducators in reality are expected to perform nearly all teacher roles and responsibilities. A few teachers admitted they too were confused about the exact responsibilities of their classroom paraeducator because no one explained to them what that role looked like. Also, there was some confusion regarding paraeducators supervising students in the classroom in the absence of the teacher. All concerns identified by the participants under this

section suggests these professionals may be experiencing a concept I identify as “Role Taxation.”

Why call these experiences role taxation? The paraeducators themselves said they most often perform the duties of the classroom teacher (i.e. lesson planning, behavior tracking, and teaching large groups) and are often confused about what duties they should and should not be performing because their roles are not defined. Paraeducators in urban schools often “cover” for the classroom teacher when he or she is absent and acts as the teacher of record even when a substitute teacher is hired. Students in schools with high concentrations of low-income Black and Latino students are more likely to have inexperienced or unqualified teachers, higher teacher absenteeism and turnover (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). Hence the manifestation of “Role Taxation” among paraeducators of color in urban school settings.

### **Emotional Demand**

#### *Paraeducator Causes of Emotional Stressors in Special Day Classes*

Shyman (2010) implies that teachers and paraeducators working in the field of special education may be likely to develop emotional attachments to students as well as emotional responses to the pervasive difficulties that their students encounter as a result of distinct learning and/or behavioral challenges. Paraeducator participants were asked if their job was emotionally demanding. All paraeducators confirmed their jobs are emotionally demanding. Ms. Roseville found her emotional investment to her students causes her to take her stress home:

If you're invested in the students, then it's going to be emotionally demanding because I, for example, feel like when one of my students is not feeling well, I try to make them feel better or try to understand why they're feeling the way they're feeling but a lot of our students can't verbalize why and if they're noticeably upset

and are struggling to help me understand that, I'm struggling to understand them and I feel bad because I can't help them. Yes, it can be emotionally and physically demanding in more than one way. I do take the stress home. I don't just leave the job at home. I reflect on what I can do better, what I did wrong or what could have helped the situation and all of that really affects me physically and emotionally.

Ms. Daffodil finds her job is mentally taxing because her students often display pervasive behavioral challenges and she often does not know what to do:

Mentally it's taxing because you can't hit the kids back of course. You have to take all this abuse, whether it's from the teacher or from ... Maybe they think you're not doing what you're supposed to do; from the administrator or from the parents who need you to do more than what you're doing, knowing that some of the things they may be asking you to do is something that the teacher is supposed to be doing, not the paraeducator. It's always a mental tug-of-war with what I need to do and what I should do; having to report abuse if the teacher's not warming up a child's food like they should; being fearful for your job if you do report something; the fear of retaliation from the teacher if you speak out on things that you know is not right for that child. It's all anguish. You don't know if you'll be called back to work the next year because you're speaking out and you're so vocal. A lot of times the paraeducator gets put into a box of can't and shouldn't because we're paraeducators, not knowing that many of us have our degrees and we're capable of being a teacher. There may be certain time restrictions or financial reasons or whatever as to why we're not teachers. If there's a huge lack

of respect, that messes with your psyche as well. Many of us can be teachers. We choose not to for whatever reason. I personally was ... I was getting my degree and even if I've earned my degree and I'm still a TA, I just didn't have the time to commit to being a teacher full time. I had taken on other responsibilities. There's a huge, huge component physically and emotionally and psychologically with being a paraeducator.

Special education teacher participants were also asked if they perceived the paraeducator job emotionally demanding. All teacher participants believe the paraeducator job is demanding. One teacher contributes the close interactions and contact that paraeducators have with both students and teachers as a cause of stress, as noted in Ms. Kittredge's statement:

Yes, it can be. I think paraeducators have a closer contact with students, more so than even the teacher. A paraeducator seems to be a buffer between the teacher and the student and so that can be a demanding role because the teacher depends on the paraeducator, the students depends on the paraeducator and the paraeducator sometimes seems to be in the middle. In that way, it could be if not handled well. It could be emotionally and physically demanding, yeah.

Mrs. Napa contributes the causes of paraeducator emotional stress to paraeducators being confused about their roles in the classroom and not being respected by the students they serve:

Yes. Well, in the very beginning I guess they, sometimes they're unsure of their roles and they have ... In the beginning of the year they asked myself, the special ed teacher, "What are my roles?" We talk about it and we make sure that it's

explained and actually let the students know. Sometimes the students don't give that respect to the paraeducators because they are paraeducators.

*Paraeducator Prevention of Emotional Stressors in Special Day Classes*

Paraeducator participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions as to what could release the emotional demands they experience while working with students who have disabilities. Most paraeducators said training and staff collaboration would help to prevent emotional stressors. Ms. Roseville and Ms. Daffodil share their thoughts:

Yes, I could if I do not involve myself and don't care about my students and the people that I work with. I feel like that would really prevent a lot but, like I said, I'm invested in my students and in my classroom and I have a good working relationship with the people that I work with so the things that happen at work do affect me and I do take it home with me. I think that a couple of things that can be done while still remaining invested in the students is to have weekly or bi-weekly meetings with the staff to see what's working and what's not, even maybe once a month with the classroom staff or bi-weekly with the classroom staff and then maybe monthly with the school staff to see what's working and what's not because sometimes I feel like there are unrealistic expectations set where we're told to do something or react one way to a situation but it's not a realistic thing to do when you're in that situation. I do feel like having meetings and checking in is something that can benefit everybody, not just the staff but the students as well because I'll know what the expectations are from all the staff. (Ms. Roseville)

I think it can be prevented with educating the teachers and the administrators and having proper and often staff development days, breaking the days up into groups and sub-groups of outside district employees, maybe from downtown, to come in and discuss or even role play the role of a teacher and of an assistant and the lack of education and understanding that we as assistants undergo and are exposed to and all of the dynamics that goes into our position and appreciating where we are. Many teachers go from college straight to the classroom. They've never been a paraeducator so they don't know what it's like to be an assistant. They don't understand the responsibility or what it is we endure, whether physically, emotionally or psychologically. They have no idea. There's no respect many times for what we do. (Ms. Daffodil)

Special education teacher participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions as to what could release the emotional demands their paraeducators experience while working with students who have disabilities. Most teachers said training, staff collaboration, and defining paraeducator roles would help to prevent emotional stressors. Ms. Kittredge, Mr. Patchwood, and Mrs. Napa each said versions of this sentiment:

Yes. I think by having the right skills. Skills like being a people/student caring person, I think that can help a lot. Also a paraeducator being clear about their responsibilities that can reduce stress for the paraeducator and make it physically less demanding. Yeah. Maybe just being clear with the person that they're working with, with the teacher that they're working with what those responsibilities are. I think that will be less stressful. (Ms. Kittredge)

If they have training. I feel that there's a big need in the training, just as I'm answering these questions I'm realizing that I wasn't provided with that training myself either, but it is something that ... I guess I just realized that it was one of my strengths, but with training, it can help diffuse situations, how to prevent situations, it can help out extremely, because I think it's important to be in an environment where there's emotional stability. Like I mentioned before the paraeducator or special education assistants, they play a strong role in that. (Mr. Patchwood)

In some ways. Clarification, they need to talk to the administrator or myself, the special ed teacher. Like I said, you can't take things personally. I think it's very important for them to understand feedback and it's not something negative but something positive. It's a learning experience. We all learned and I think it increases more teamwork and collaboration in the class. (Mrs. Napa)

### *Teacher Causes of Emotional Stressors in Special Day Classes*

Teaching is a profession with a high level of stress and a high level of burnout (Hughes, 2001; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Naring, Briet, & Brouwers, 2006; Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). Shukla and Trivedi (2008) warns that a burnt out teacher is losing or has lost the energy and enthusiasm needed to teach children. Teachers who remain in their jobs, despite burnout symptoms, may experience negative changes in attitudes and effort as well as decline in performance (McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009). Teacher participants were asked if their profession was emotionally demanding. All teachers responded

with an astounding yes. Teachers expressed they are discouraged to take days off days from work and their work load extends beyond their contractual work day. Ms. Kittredge and Mrs. Napa both shared their experiences:

Yes, it's emotionally demanding because you have to be present. (Ms. Kittredge)

Well, it's not only planning and the classroom but you are required to complete reports, follow up with parents, so you're constantly, you don't have enough time in the day or planning time given to you in a given day so you have to take the work home. (Mrs. Napa)

#### *Teacher Prevention of Emotional Stressors in Special Day Classes*

Special education teacher participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions as to what could release the emotional demands they experience while teaching students who have disabilities. All teacher participants believe the emotional demands of the teaching profession cannot be prevented. Teachers believe that emotional demands of their job can be modified to some extent by doing fun leisure activities outside the classroom. Mrs. Limpkins and Mrs. Napa have shared their insights and both said:

Yes, it can be modified some. One thing the teacher can do is to make sure that outside of the classroom, she takes or he takes time for himself or herself and the family, their family. (Mrs. Limpkins)

Well, there's no prevention. You can try to alleviate those things by exercising or taking just a walk in the middle of the day during lunch just to relieve some of

that. It's also very important to work as a team in collaborations. Oftentimes that does not happen. You just have to, like I said, always try your best and just be patient. (Mrs. Napa)

### *Causes of Emotional Stressors in Urban Special Day Classes*

Manz et al. (2010) explain that “census data indicate that 39% of children live in socioeconomic disadvantage nationally, and most of these children live in inner-city communities” (p. 56). Teachers have the added responsibility of instructing students with a variety of behavioral, linguistic, and academic needs. These added responsibilities and lack of pre-service training in how to teach a diverse group of students with a variety of needs has created a great deal of occupational stress for teachers (Schaubman et al., 2011). Paraeducator participants were asked what emotional challenges they specifically experienced while working in urban special day class environments. Mrs. Talbert noticed certain language barriers:

I think a lot of the language barriers. We work with a lot of students that are in the Latin community. There's parents where language barriers are a big part of the problem. Their expectations versus ours. Also, not being on the same page and having an understanding of whatever we do at school, they should carry out at home. That would probably be the biggest hurdle. Always having a translator. If a parent calls a classroom, not having somebody there that speaks Spanish, and you've got to transfer to look for somebody that can translate for you.

Mr. Wizz noticed African American male students “thirst” for adult African American male role models to replace absent father figures in their homes:

One thing that I will never forget is the young males. They just were ... just so, so thirsty for help or just guidance and leadership. They would gravitate to me because I showed them that I really cared. I'm not just here just to get a paycheck. I really, genuinely cared about their wellbeing and about them learning and about them having a productive day. Often times, the young males, especially in urban communities don't have as strong father-figure at home. They try to gravitate to the teacher or a paraeducator or a coach, something, just something they grab on to and kind of absorb how to conduct their self as a young man. That was one of the things that stands up the most.

Ms. Daffodil noticed parent involvement is absent in the urban setting due to single mothers being required to work and an inability to take the day off to support their child's education with their presence:

The challenges I face are the parents. I often say that the students aren't the problem. The parents are the problem. I will say that within the urban community there are one group of individuals that come to the school a lot. Then there's another group in the population of students that we have a difficult time with in terms of getting them to come to the school if we need them in an emergency. Typically our Latino population are very receptive to resources. They will take advantage of any and every opportunity to come to the school to see what's going on in the classroom, to meet with the teachers and the assistants and staff. They'll volunteer. They're very, very supportive. They're very hands on with their students. The African-American population, not so much in my experience. I

think that is a hindrance to what we try to do at school. What we want to do is have; everything we teach the students, we want to have that modeled and reiterated and displayed at home. We need the parents' help for that.

The urban school exists within a large bureaucratic school system that may occasionally lack resources required to handle various challenges in educating every student. Too often urban schools and the teachers within them are inadequately prepared for the social, political, and economic conditions impacting the lives of the students and families who live in these communities (Noel, 2010). Urban schools and communities typically face very serious challenges (Abbate-Vaughn, 2007; Curwin, 2010; Fayne & Trammell-Matthews, 2010). These challenges often include “urban poverty; high mobility and displacement in and out of neighborhoods; inadequate funding to adequately cover the educational, social, and health needs of children and their families; and high teacher turnover and/or absenteeism” (Noel, 2010, p. 9). Special education teacher participants were also asked what specific challenges they faced while teaching students in urban special day class environments. Ms. Kittredge experienced students in urban schools are exposed to substance abuse that negatively impacts their learning:

I think the experiences that urban kids bring to a classroom are different than the suburban students. I think those experiences that the kids bring in an urban setting they're the ones that are difficult to manage, they're difficult to address, at the same time deliver instruction. For example, just like something as simple as parent support. I think in a rural setting, parent support is going to be much different than with kids in the urban setting. If the parent is quite similar to the student who've been ... You really can't rely on the parent to provide support at

home if they don't really know how to address this behavior. It's up to you to mold that behavior for the student. In my feeling, I don't think kids in suburban areas and rural areas might have such experiences that hinder their instruction. I don't know...students from other areas might not have some of the inner city challenges that you find in a city, whether it's with abuses with substance. You might not find that in the rural setting. Some of these high city, fast activities for a child it's out of character and that affects them a lot in the classroom. Mostly, it's just the where they're exposed to. At a young age I think that does affect them negatively in the classroom.

Another teacher said schools in urban areas lack resources, and assessment materials.

Mrs. Napa also expressed students are often not placed in their proper classroom setting:

Lack of school materials. Having to get assessments or finding out where to locate assessment materials for your students. I think constant battle with administration to place students in the correct classrooms.

### *Preventing the Causes of Emotional Stressors in Urban Special Day Classes*

Paraeducator participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions as to what could release the emotional demands they experience while working specifically in urban classes with students who have disabilities. Most paraeducators said training and parent involvement would help to prevent emotional stressors in urban special day class settings. For instance, two paraeducators said:

The person, the paraeducator needs to be trained. Often times, when you come into these situations, you just get thrown in there and do the best you can. I always had like, am I doing this right? Is this appropriate? Is this ... Am I stepping over

the line? With that being said, I just think people need more training when they come into these schools, absolutely, more training. (Mr. Wizz)

I think if they started the year off with having more parent involvement in schools. Maybe have more regular meetings to make sure your at the same page as you go throughout the year. Nobody get sidetracked, nobody gets left behind. I think that would be more effective, both with the teachers and with the parents. If you constantly are in communication with each other on what's going on with the child. I think if the lines were more open and parents felt that administration was more approachable, it'd lessen some of these issues. I think for the most part, parents get intimidated talking to a school administrator. I guess not having an open bridge where they come and have meetings and make sure they're on the same page... that turns a lot of parents off. (Mrs. Talbert)

Special education teacher participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions as to what could release the emotional demands they experience while specifically teaching in urban special day class settings with students who have disabilities. Most teachers said outside partnerships and counseling programs and established protocols within schools would help to prevent emotional stressors in urban special day class settings. For instance, two teachers said:

In the school in the urban setting programs and people within that community that run programs that can deal with some of the challenges. I think if these organizations come in at an earlier stage, and the classroom partners up with an organization that provides an assistance in that way or a sports program, I think

that would have worked perfectly for the challenged kids in urban areas. (Ms. Kittredge)

We do with what we have. If we have a certain protocol in the school system where everyone can be in agreement, then I think it'll be more successful. (Mrs. Napa)

***Emotional toxicity.*** Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study both shared their experiences regarding the problem(s) and/or concerns they have with paraeducators and the Emotional Demands they often experience while working on the job. All paraeducators and teachers alike agree the paraeducator job is indeed emotionally demanding. Some paraeducators and teachers both shared that paraeducators receive little to no respect for their roles as professionals. Ms. Daffodil said: “There’s a huge lack of respect that messes with your psyche as well.” Mrs. Napa said: “Sometimes the students don’t give that respect to the paraeducators because they are paraeducators.” All paraeducators and teachers alike agree that working with students who have special needs within urban school settings may have different implications which causes emotional demands, for instance Ms. Kittredge said: “I think the experiences that urban kids bring to a classroom are different than the suburban students. I think those experiences that the kids bring in an urban setting they're the ones that are difficult to manage, they're difficult to address, at the same time deliver instruction. Whether it's with abuses with substance they're exposed to at a young age. I think that does affect them negatively at a young age.” Paraeducators also shared that language barriers, absent father figures in the home, and lack of parental support also plays a role with emotional demands. Ms. Daffodil said: “I think that is a hindrance to what we try to do at school.” All concerns identified by the

participants under this section suggest these professionals may be experiencing a concept I am identifying as “Emotional Toxicity.”

Why call these experiences emotional toxicity? The paraeducators who participated in this study themselves said they often work with high concentrations of low-income African-American male (and female) students who have no father-figure within their homes. These students are often found emotionally unstable and their behaviors are difficult to manage. Paraeducators said the investment and dedications they have toward their students and the job at large, often causes them to take the emotions they experience at work with them to their homes. Hence the manifestation of “Emotional Toxicity” among paraeducators of color in urban school settings.

### **Physical Demand**

#### *Paraeducator Causes of Physical Stressors in Special Day Classes*

Most teachers do not receive adequate pre-service training to learn or master how to work with students with behavioral challenges and become highly stressed if the students’ behavioral needs exceed the resources or supports to effectively service them (Schaubman et al., 2011). To assist teachers with providing instruction and behavioral interventions to students with a range of needs, paraeducators are often hired to support students with maladaptive behaviors (Gessler-Werts et al., 2004; Ghere & York-Barr, 2007; Giangreco & Broer, 2005; Patterson, 2006). Paraeducator participants were asked if their jobs were physically demanding. All paraeducators responded with an astounding yes. Paraeducators explained the biggest physical challenges they face is violence and lifting students. Ms. Roseville, Mrs. Ecco, and Ms. Daffodil all have said this:

Physically, there have been times when we have students who exhibit extreme behaviors and we try to protect the other students and we try to protect each other as a classroom staff and there have been times when I've been hurt. I've been scratched. I've been hit. I've been spit at. I've been kicked. I've been hit. I'm not the only one in the classroom but always always the students' safety is my priority even trying to protect a student from themselves when they have thrown chairs or try to throw desks. (Ms. Roseville)

Dealing with kids with mental behaviors is very stressing. I deal with people hitting me, pulling my hair, and violence period all day, every day. It's very hard. Then when you see kids like helpless, it takes a toll on you. (Mrs. Ecco)

Very. Very. It is, because you have to realize these are, especially at the secondary level, these are students can be taller and larger than the staff. I only stand five two. Many of the students are much taller than me. Many of them because of meds and because of a sedentary lifestyle because their care providers or two parents don't have the time or don't take the time or just simply can't get them the physical activity they need, many of them outweigh me by a lot, so it's physically demanding if a child has plummeted to the ground and I have to try to get them to stand. If you're try to hold on to them or you're trying to change their diaper or try to run after them if we have a runner; I mean it's so much more than that. That sounds like three little things, but it's so much more than that. It's very

physically demanding. If I'm riding the bus with a student, are they hitting me?

Are they pushing me? (Ms. Daffodil)

Special education teacher participants were also asked if they believed the paraeducator job was physically demanding. All teachers also thought the paraeducator job was physically demanding. Most teachers have seen the physical violence that some students display toward paraeducators. Mr. Patchwood and Mr. Ropper both recall their experiences:

There were situations where I had to break up a fight over here and then over there something else going on. I had a situation where a student was kicking a student that was right behind the special education assistant. One girl ran behind her to be protected and another boy just started to kick the girl that was right behind her. I remember having numerous conversations with my assistant in the classroom about how difficult and how she wish there would be training. It was difficult. (Mr. Patchwood)

I've seen a lot of them abused by their student. Their student has severe problems and acts out. I've seen them take a lot from students like that. I've seen them get hit, literally hit. I don't think they're also offered the restraint class that I had. I definitely think they need the nonviolence intervention training, how to hold, how to restrain, how to have it if you need it, "I need help. I'll take one arm. You take the other." I don't think they get that training. (Mr. Ropper)

### *Paraeducator Prevention of Physical Stressors in Special Education*

Teacher occupational stress has been recognized as a prolonged exposure to emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, often accompanied by insufficient recovery, resulting in detaching from their work, students, families, and school communities (Steinhardt et al., 2011). Occupational stress represents a response to an intolerable work situation. It occurs when a teacher is extremely fatigued and feels overextended by work and drained of emotional and physical resources (Harris, 2011). Paraeducator participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions that could perhaps prevent any of the physical demands they experience while working in special day classes. One paraeducator thought staff collaboration and partnerships from all staff members could prevent physical fatigue. Mr. Wizz said this:

Well, all parties, the teacher, the paraeducator, the bus drivers, everyone, the nurse. We need a lot of times, it's just everyone is doing their own thing and no one wants to really get involved or no one wants to help. This is where the fatigue comes in during the school year as far as you're being tired mentally and physically because you're doing, you're extending so much energy. Not just physical energy, but mental. You go home, you lay down and you think about, "Oh, I got to help this kid." "Oh, hopefully this kid has a good day." It's up to me to make sure they get what they need when they get here.

Another paraeducator suggested that paraeducators as a whole need specialized training to work with students in various disability categories. Ms. Daffodil said this:

I think it would help anyone getting into this field; it would be, like I say, maybe a staff development day perhaps just for the assistants, on what is special education;

sort of a Special Ed 101 for Dummies. Many of us don't really understand what special education encompasses; our physically handicapped students, our mentally handicapped students, our challenged students, as well as our GATE students or our Asperger students. We need to know the whole scope. We don't often learn about any of that until after we've got the job, which really doesn't make us as qualified as we should be to work with this population because many of us are learning on the job. I think it's such a specialized field, we really need to learn a lot more and have some sort of class; maybe like a two week crash session after we're hired, maybe at half pay or something to kind of give us a sneak peek into the world we're going to be entering into. I think for teachers; for those that have never been a paraeducator, they need to be educated on our job, our abilities, and have a respect for what it is that we do, and they need to know our roles as well. The teacher should be able to do our job. They shouldn't shrink back from changing the student's diaper just because they're the "teacher."

Special education teacher participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions that could perhaps prevent any physical demands their paraeducators face while working in special day classes. One teacher said paraeducators need to be able to participate in a forum and actually rotate paraeducator classroom assignments throughout the school year. Mr. Ropper said this:

It would be nice to probably have a forum where they are able to speak with their teachers or the teachers as a group. Or I would say every now and then even change assignments. Sometimes they'll be a year in one classroom. It would be

nice if they would move around. It would even probably help the students with different personalities. Seeing the same faces every day, and you have a student here, and you know this student is going to act up when this person says something to them, I don't think they necessarily have to be assigned to a class the whole year. They do have different skills. If this class over here is having a play or something and you need somebody to do hair and makeup, they might have to go over there and help the girls. It's just a lot of things that need to be worked out.

Another teacher said paraeducators should use relaxing techniques as needed when physical challenges arise. Mrs. Witherspoon shared her strategy:

A coping technique that I do is that sometimes if the student is upset or if the student is overly excited, we just tell them to breathe slowly, tell them to relax. We come up with de-escalating strategies. I would use student-like strategies such as time-out and things like that, but I just feel that those kind of techniques does not apply to daily life. I think paraeducators would also benefit from that, but sometimes, if they see the same coping techniques being applied to the students, they feel like you're belittling them by applying it to them. Sometimes I have to do it in a subliminal-type way. If I saw one of my paraeducators highly volatile, I go like, "Okay students, okay, it's time for everybody to relax, calm down." Then I turn off the lights. Now, even though the students are relaxed, the paraeducator is also relaxing, and they don't realize it. That's when I'll go over in a nice calm voice, "Would you like to take a break? Would you like ...?" Nine out of ten, they

tell me, "No." That's how I know that the strategies work, but like I said, when it comes to working with adults, you don't want to tell them that you're using those techniques.

### *Teacher Causes of Physical Stressors in Special Day Classes*

Public school teachers experience a great deal of stress throughout their careers with up to one-third indicating that teaching is a very or extremely stressful profession (Lambert et al., 2009). It occurs when a teacher is extremely fatigued and feels overextended by work and drained of emotional and physical resources (Harris, 2011). Special education teacher participants were asked if their jobs were physically demanding. All teachers responded with an astounding yes. Teachers explained the biggest physical challenges they face is working beyond their contractual hours and large class sizes. Ms. Kittredge and Mrs. Limpkins both stated:

It's physically demanding because you have to work not just the six hours allocated to you. You have to work after school, on the weekends, during the holidays, so it is. I would say it can be but it's also manageable as time goes on.

(Ms. Kittredge)

Yes, it is and it has become very demanding lately, the last five to seven years. If the class size is large, that becomes very physically demanding. If there are children with severe disabilities, that becomes very, very demanding because that child requires more help, more assistance, physical assistance and so that increases the demands on the teacher. If the child has severe behavior problems, that is very demanding. If because it will disrupt the classroom and the other children can feed into the behavior and it's very demanding. If the child's home is

any way disturbed, like if there's grief, that affects the child's behavior in school.

(Mrs. Limpkins)

#### *Teacher Prevention of Physical Stressors in Special Day Classes*

Special education teacher participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions that could perhaps prevent the physical demands they experience while teaching students in special day classes. One teacher thought documenting student trends and/or patterns and clearly defining teacher, paraeducator, and student roles would help to prevent physical challenges. Ms. Kittredge said this:

I think it's paying attention to what happens every time and keeping a note of it. Making sure that the next time it presents itself you learned from the first time it happened. Really maybe even keeping a journal or a reflection journal. Even just having responsibilities of each role in a classroom clearly laid out for the teacher, for the paraeducator, for the student. In that way, these definitions help maintaining order within the classroom, which would cause less stress.

Another teacher said assigning an extra paraeducator to an oversized class would help to prevent physical challenges. For instance, Mrs. Limpkins stated:

Maybe the teacher can ask for another assistant and then that could spread the duties and responsibilities around more. Maybe if some of the children require one-on-one, maybe they can ask for it. That will reduce the stress somewhat.

#### *Causes of Physical Stressors in Urban Special Day Classes*

Manz et al. (2010) affirms that "a promising resource for urban schools is the employment of paraeducators, noncertified staff who can fulfill various roles and responsibilities

to expand schools' instructional capacity and foster home-school relationships" (p. 56). Too often paraeducators within them are inadequately prepared for the social and economic conditions impacting the lives of the students and families who live in these communities (Noel, 2010). Paraeducator participants were asked what physical challenges they specifically experienced while working in urban special day class environments. One paraeducator noticed a fighting and/or gang culture. For instance, Ms. Roseville stated:

Some of our students come from areas where there are more gangs and violence and some are less noticeable than others, not all students are the same and not all communities are the same. One of the challenges that I can remember that sticks out is a student who was raised to be a fighter and protect himself and his family. When I say fighter, I mean he was taught to fight and he did. He fought a few of the adults and there really was no way to protect ourselves as a staff because we haven't been trained in years on how to deal with that kind of situation. I think that that has a lot to do with the community that that student grew up in and the kind of environment he was in where he really was taught to fight not to flee. This particular student also talked a lot about the cops and talked about being arrested and his dad being away and his mom throwing stuff in the house.

Special education teacher participants were also asked what physical challenges they specifically experienced while teaching in urban special day class environments. Another teacher noticed unusually large special day classes causes negative student behaviors. Ms. Kittredge said this:

Yes. Within urban communities I think one was the class size, on its own, class size seems to be, in my experience, a class was a huge class for a special day

class. At one point we had anywhere from 27 kids, 26 kids. At one point, we had 27 kids all day in self-contained classroom. Being that was highly stressful. When the class size is reduced, also there are other issues with behavior. They're sending kids in an urban setting that should not be in a special day classroom. It might be one student, it might be just a minimum of two but two kids in a class of even 12 or 15 kids can cause a lot of imbalance and a lot of chaos. The challenges for me were behavior issues, class size issues. I think also another setback was just sometimes not having the supplies necessary to be able to effectively manage the classroom. If a certain equipment is needed like computers or technologies that are used to run particular programs like reading programs, if they're missing and then instruction is delayed then that interferes with the classroom and that was very stressful.

#### *Preventing the Causes of Physical Stressors in Urban Special Day Classes*

Paraeducator participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions that could perhaps prevent the physical demands they experience while working specifically in urban special day classes. One paraeducator suggested that urban special day classes should be safe, welcoming, and caring. Ms. Roseville also suggests school administrators should provide training:

Having a caring environment, I think really makes a difference. Being able to make the students feel and have them know that they are cared for in that safe environment at school really makes a difference. I think that principals and other administrators can be really instrumental to helping resolve these challenges by keeping their staff up to date on training and asking for feedback. Like I said

earlier, maybe having meetings even once a month to see maybe not suggesting so much as to listen to what the issues are within each classroom because each classroom is different and maybe staff in another classroom have dealt with a similar situation and can offer some kind of insight or some alternatives or some advises to maybe how to deal with the situation because new eyes, outside perspective, a lot of the times can help spot things that maybe from the inside because you're so frustrated with the situation you don't see. Other than the administration, I do feel like if you have a classroom staff that gets along and trust each other and works together, you can help resolve and help buffer and avoid these situations before they even start.

Special education teacher participants were asked if they could provide any suggestions that could perhaps prevent the physical demands they experience specifically while teaching students in urban special day classes. Ms. Kittredge suggested urban schools should form prevention committees where counselors, administrators, and teachers can meet, discuss, and resolve issues:

I think special counselors would be good. Maybe one person that's dealing with just how to channel the kids that are having problems, where to channel them, and that person is aware of just a small group of kids that would need extra support. I think that will be fine. Other staff members, I would think administrators should be involved. Maybe not all of them, but at least there should be one administrator that is held responsible for dealing with some of these issues, and just the teachers in general. Maybe form like a sharing committee or like a planning time even if

it's once every two months to discuss and implement or even just identify some of the issues that are going on with the population, I think that would be ok.

***Physical taxation.*** Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study both shared their experiences regarding the concerns they have with the physical demands that paraeducators are often overwhelmed with while working with students in special day classes within urban school environments. Paraeducators and teachers all agree the paraeducators' job is physically demanding. The participants in this study find the causes of the physical demands that paraeducators experience on the job stems from working with severe maladaptive problematic behaviors. Male paraeducators have all reported being hit, scratched, and kicked. Female paraeducators have all reported being hit, scratched, pushed, spat at, and their hair pulled. Many paraeducators believe the violence often displayed towards them also plays a mental role. Ms. Daffodil shared: "Mentally it's taxing because you can't hit the kids back of course." Most paraeducators also shared that lifting students for hygiene needs or for resolving problematic behaviors is also demanding on their bodies over time. All teachers reported they have personally witnessed the violence and abuse paraeducators endure while working with students with special needs. Mr. Rooper said: "I've seen a lot of them abused by their student. Their student has severe problems and acts out. I've seen them take a lot from students like that. I've seen them get hit, literally hit." All concerns identified by the participants under this section suggest these professionals may be experiencing a concept I identify as "Physical Taxation."

Why call these experiences physical taxation? Paraeducators and teachers who participated in this study all agree that paraeducators are regularly physically abused by the students they service. Paraeducators complain about being hit, scratched, and kicked.

Paraeducators often file incident reports, disability claims, and are forced to take days off from work to heal and/or recover from the physical demands of the job. Hence the manifestation of “Physical Taxation” among paraeducators of color in urban school settings.

### **Sense of Efficacy**

#### *How Paraeducator Low Self-Efficacy Affects Staff and the Classroom Environment*

Paraeducators interact with students on a close and personal basis for the large majority of the instructional school day. A paraeducator is currently more likely to be involved in providing direct services to students with a variety of needs. Therefore, a sense of self-efficacy for a paraeducator may be an integral part of mitigating burnout among these very important professionals. Paraeducator participants were asked would another paraeducator with low self-efficacy in the classroom affect their work performance. Some paraeducators agreed other paraeducators who have low self-efficacy affects them in a major way. Ms. Roseville said:

It totally affects me. I do feel like you feed off of each other. It's a family. You become a family. If someone's in a bad mood, you're going to try to lift their spirits just like you do with your students. If someone's in a good mood and I happen to be in a bad mood, I try to feed off of that energy and try to remember that while I'm at work, I'm there for the students and whatever has happened outside, I need to leave it outside as best as I can if I am going to do my job to the best of my ability.

Another paraeducator feels his work performance can absolutely be affected by other paraeducators working around him. Mr. Wizz said this:

Yeah, absolutely. It's funny you should mention that because it seems as though all the paraeducators around me were just sluggish and they got like a dark cloud around them. It's like they're just beat down. Just dog right exhausted every day and I try to come in with some ... I try to infuse a new ideas and new energy, but it would often times just get shut down like, "Ah, we've been there, done that."

This is not going to work. Just negativity, so yeah, I believe the other paraeducators has a lot to do with my attitude because like I said, they're just walking around there like zombies for the most part.

Self-efficacy is an important stress resource factor in mitigating teacher burnout. A low sense of efficacy occurs when teachers experience prolonged feelings of ineffectiveness (Brown, 2012). Teachers are more likely to develop an indifferent or cynical disposition while on the job when feeling emotionally exhausted and discouraged (Richards, 2001). Burnt out people do not see themselves as cynical and depressed. They find fault with everything and everyone around them, complaining about the organization and reacting critically to whatever is suggested by others (Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). Mrs. Talbert has experienced other paraeducators around her who have developed prolonged feelings of ineffectiveness and hopelessness:

Oh, absolutely. I work with many paraeducators that are very cynical. They've become cynical. They've been in the job for too long. They don't see a lot of change. They don't see progress. That feeling of being in a rut and having your hands tied, not being able to do anything because you're not up there. Not feeling like you can really make a difference. Being around that does get negative. I try to

reset myself. For the most part I feel like I'm pretty positive, but you can't help that sometimes being around the people who just feel helpless.

Special education teachers were also asked if paraeducator low self-efficacy affects their work performance. Some teachers agreed low self-efficacy plays a huge role in the comfort of a successful classroom. One teacher explains the wrong pairing of a paraeducator/teacher team can negatively impact a classroom or the school. Ms. Kittredge made this remark:

Yeah, it could affect you. I think the wrong pairing could affect a classroom and it could go a long way. It could affect the entire school, not just between the teacher and the peer educator but it could be between two teachers across the hall, could be between the teacher and an administrator. I think an imbalance between how people communicate or even just with what's going on personally in the adult's life affects instruction. Yeah, the wrong pairing could ... I think if people buy into what these issues might be can ruin an entire class if you pay attention to it.

#### *Working with Paraeducators Who Have Low Self-Efficacy*

Teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy tend to have low self-esteem and have pessimistic thoughts about their accomplishments and personal development (Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Paraeducator participants were asked if they have ever worked with other paraeducators who had low self-efficacy. All paraeducator participants confirmed that there is always a paraeducator with low self-efficacy working beside them. Mr. HighTower, Mr. Wizz, and Mrs. Talbet all spoke from their experiences:

Yes. Pretty much all the time. That one question when you asked how my day started, my day starts great with the kids, but with staff it's never good. It's always a complaint. Someone's complaining. Someone's tired. Someone's hurt. Yes, we have plenty of those. (Mr. HighTower)

Actually, yeah. Pretty much, all of my experiences, my colleagues were just ... lack of better word, beat down. Just like I said, just no energy, no ... Just tired. Just like they don't know what to do next and that really ... When I've seen that... that played a role in my head, well, "I don't want to be like this." I'm going to have find ways to not end up like this, but I will admit some days I was joining right in you know just like "Where is this going?" "What am I doing?" "Am I doing the right things?" It's easy for that to rub off amongst all the paraeducators. (Mr. Wizz)

Yes. For the most part I feel like I've worked more with colleagues like that. For the most part I have. You have to think these women that I work with, and men, they have their own lives, so to come into a job where you feel like you're not appreciated, you're going through the motions and not really feeling like you make a difference in these children's goals. That can get frustrating. (Mrs. Talbert)

Special education teacher participants were also asked if they have ever worked with other paraeducators who had low self-efficacy. All teacher participants confirmed they have

indeed worked with paraeducators who had low self-efficacy. Hughes (2001) acknowledges that escape or the desire to escape is one of many outcomes of burnout. Mrs. Limpkins explains her experience with a paraeducator who had low self-efficacy and was absent frequently due to this condition. She said this:

Yes I have. If the classroom is supposed to have two people and two paraeducators and one is absent a lot, that affects both the teacher and the other paraeducator because that person's duties will have to be assumed and it just throws the classroom off. It throws the schedule off. It greatly affects running the class.

Mrs. Witherspoon explains paraeducator low self-efficacy in her classroom made her uncomfortable with being around her staff:

As a special education teacher there at that school, the way it affected me was that it was hard for me to teach under those circumstances. It made me uncomfortable being around the students ... No, I'm sorry. It made me uncomfortable being around the staff. I became secluded, where I didn't want to speak to no one. I didn't want to speak to no one about my experiences in special education because I knew they wouldn't relate.

#### *Coping with Paraeducator Low Self-Efficacy*

Teachers with high self-efficacy set higher goals for themselves, persist in difficult situations, deliver higher rates of reinforcement, spend more class time on academic instruction, provide more support for students having difficulties, and feel student can achieve despite student abilities or socioeconomic circumstances (Oakes et al., 2013). Self-efficacious teachers may perceive the objective demands of daily teaching as being less threatening than those

teachers who harbor self-doubts about their professional performance (Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Brown (2012) has suggested that “symptoms of burnout could be reduced in environments in which teachers experience personal growth, self-efficacy and perceived success in their career” (p. 49). Some paraeducator participants have acknowledged and adopted a positive sense of self-efficacy to cope with other paraeducators around them who have low self-efficacy. Mr. Hightower said:

Since I'm there to help the child, the child is number one priority. Usually, if you have kids or if you've worked around kids, kids will always give you that inspiration. They will always give you that inspiration. They might get on your nerve but, trust me, they'll give you the inspiration to keep on going. Somethings just fall off. No, I never will be affected by that.

Ms. Daffodil copes with colleagues who have low self-efficacy by listening to their concerns and ultimately suggesting that paraeducators who appear to display occupational stressors to use their medical insurance cards and seek professional help. Ms. Daffodil revealed:

If you have low self-esteem, I'm going to talk to you just like I would my special ed students who can understand what I'm saying and try to uplift you and find out what's going on and perhaps ask you to use your insurance card and go get some one-on-one counseling for the betterment of yourself or maybe those around you. People like that, if you're having that much anguish and you're in the workplace, kids sense your tension and they sense your anguish. They may not be receptive to you wanting to help them do something, you might be frustrated and flip out, so it's really a ticking time bomb. If you're not willing to go seek help for

whatever it is, you need to go speak to somebody to resolve your issues. We're all human. We all get burnt out, but we need to have somebody to go to, to get it worked out so that we can be as effective as we can while we're in that workplace environment for the kids' safety and their benefit.

Special education teachers were asked how they cope with paraeducator low self-efficacy in their classroom environments. Most teachers said their primary concern was to focus on the students. However a couple of teachers said they just dealt with their paraeducators' low self-efficacy to avoid any further issues or problems. Mr. Patchwood and Mrs. Witherspoon both shared their experiences:

It's very difficult. It's extremely difficult. I remember one time I wanted to have my paraeducator to maybe move to a different placement, but there's a lot of politics. In order for me to avoid future problems, I'm just accepted the problem, but it's not fair for the kids. I mean she had strengths where she built good rapport with the students, but she really didn't assist them with the work, which I think is a big problem. (Mr. Patchwood)

I had to work around it. When I knew that I had to teach a lesson, I sent the aides out on lunch breaks. I literally had to say to myself, "You know what? I'm going to prove to you that you're not really needed in this classroom because low self-efficacy obviously is not going to help my classroom environment. If you're going to conduct yourself that way then I need to remove you." Yeah, it was very irritating. The way that I cope with it is that I understood disrespected so I set up

my groups where there was a group that I worked with where I actually did the academics and the guided practice. In their group I actually entertained what they wanted. I let them play Trouble. I let them color. I let them do all those things because after they did the assignment with me, the second group was basically the students taking a break that was related to the assignment. I had them do that. For some reason the paraeducators were happy about being in the group where all the kids had to do was play Trouble. They were happy to be in a group that all the students had to do was just color. That's how I cope with it. I just modify my curriculum. I modify the environment, basically, to deal with that. (Mrs. Witherspoon)

***Morale toxicity.*** Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study both shared their experiences regarding the problem(s) they have with paraeducators and low self-efficacy. Paraeducators and teachers all agree they work daily with a paraeducator(s) who has low self-efficacy. When paraeducators were asked if they ever worked with other paraeducators who had low self-efficacy, each participant quickly responded with an astounding yes. Mr. Hightower answered: “Yes. Pretty much all the time. It’s always a complaint. Someone’s complaining. Someone’s tired. Someone’s hurt. Yes, we have plenty of those. Mr. Wizz said: “Actually yeah. Pretty much all of my experiences my colleagues were just...lack of a better word, beat down. Just like I said, just no energy, no...just tired.” Mrs. Talbert shared this: “Yes. For the most part I feel like I've worked more with colleagues like that. For the most part I have. To come into a job where you feel like you’re not appreciated, you're going through the motions and not really feeling like you make a difference in these children's goals. That can get frustrating.” Some paraeducators explained low self-efficacy in their work environment “rubs off

on them.” Some teachers said paraeducators with low self-efficacy may be absent a lot. When this occurs, absences throw off the classroom schedule, and greatly affect how the class is typically run. Another teacher said low self-efficacy greatly affects her teaching. Mrs. Witherspoon replied: “The way it affected me was that it was hard for me to teach under those circumstances. It made me uncomfortable being around the staff.” All concerns identified by the participants under this section suggest these professionals may be experiencing a concept I identify as “Morale Toxicity.”

Why call these experiences morale toxicity? The concentration of poverty, racial isolation, the increase of students with intellectual disabilities, and persistently low student achievement can negatively impact the performance of staff employed in urban schools (Ahram, Stembridge, Fergus, & Noguera, 2011). The paraeducators and teachers who participated in this study said themselves that low self-efficacy within paraeducators can spread to others that work closely with them. Paraeducator low self-efficacy persistent over-time can spread and cause high absenteeism and throw off effective collaborative partnerships needed to build healthy learning environments for students with disabilities. Hence the manifestation of “Morale Toxicity” among paraeducators of color in urban school settings.

### **Supervisor Support**

#### *The Paraeducator’s Direct Supervisor*

According to Patterson (2006), despite the increased participation of paraprofessionals in all phases of the instructional process, only minimal references were made to teacher supervisory roles in state policies, regulatory procedures, and standards e.g. “teacher aides work under the direction of licensed/certificated teachers” (p. 7). In fact, it was common practice for LEA’s to designate principals as supervisors of paraprofessionals. This practice is still common among

most contractual agreements or administrative guidelines in today's schools (Patterson, 2006). As a result of this practice, teachers were not recognized as supervisors and were not trained for supervisory roles, a practice which still occurs today (Wall, Davis, Winkler, & White, 2005). Paraeducator participants were asked who they perceived to be their direct supervisor. All paraeducators stood firm with their beliefs that their classroom teacher is their direct supervisor. Mr. Hightower indicated in his statement:

My director supervisor, I say the teacher. I believe that's the correct working relationship to have within the school. I believe in a chain of command also. I think you should always work, especially in a classroom setting, if you're working side-by-side with someone and if they have credentials and they are the teacher as I am the paraprofessional, yes, that should be my supervisor.

Another paraeducator had been confused at one point in his career about who his direct supervisor was due to who he worked with more. Mr. Wizz said:

Well, all along, I always thought that my direct supervisor was the principal, the administrator, but they were rarely around unless they needed something or there's a major problem. I was always thinking my direct supervisor was the teacher because they were the ones that evaluated me.

Special education teachers were also asked who they thought were their paraeducators' direct supervisor. Most teachers said their paraeducators' direct supervisor was someone other than themselves. Ms. Kittredge and Mr. Ropper shared their views:

I think in the special education administration, I believe. When I first got to the middle school, it was the administrator in charge of special education and so my supervisor in a sense was a supervisor for the peer educator as well. Yes. (Ms. Kittredge)

I would say the head of the special education department, the coordinator. I don't think, as teachers, we're their supervisors. That's still administration. I don't even like having to really talk to paraeducators because it messes the bond up between you and them. It's just a weird situation. I'm not your boss really. I don't care if you're not going to come tomorrow. Call the hotline. You can tell me, but it's not really that big of a deal to me. I think that's another gray area. No, not around adults, no, and you're not paying me for that either, no. It would be the special ed coordinator. They're the ones that give them and say where you're going to go anyway. It's not me. I don't get to pick who comes in my classroom that's going to be my aid. If I was the direct supervisor, I would get to pick them. They're placed with me. Whoever placed them has that power. (Mr. Ropper)

### *Discrepancy of Formal Evaluations*

The management and supervision of paraeducators requires teachers to have knowledge, patience, and organizational skills (Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Trautman, 2004). However, teachers are rarely prepared through preservice or inservice training to effectively work with paraeducators in a way that will improve student performance (French, 2003; Pickett, Linkins, & Wallace, 2003; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Similarly, teachers are not prepared to take on a supervisory role of other adults (Lewis & McKenzie, 2009). In fact, teacher

credentialing or endorsement programs often have no formal course work with regard to effective evaluation or supervision of paraeducators (Gerschel, 2005; Lewis & McKenzie, 2009; Riggs, 2002; Shyman, 2010; Wallace, Shin, Bartholomay, & Stahl, 2001). Paraeducator participants were asked who conducted their formal work performance evaluations. All paraeducators thought their classroom teachers were responsible for their formal evaluations. However, some confusion was found with the paraeducator evaluation process. Mr. Wizz and Mrs. Ecco both shared their concerns:

Yeah. One incident happened where the teacher was very pleased with the work that I had done for the year and gave me high, high numbers, high regards throughout the evaluation. Once they got to the principal, the principal said, no that it can't be so. It can't be just high marks through the whole evaluation. It's something you have to tweak that a little bit. I found that to be very, very interesting. Very interesting. (Mr. Wizz)

They do but once it gets to the principal, they change it up. If the teacher said you did an excellent job, by the time it gets to the principal it somehow becomes a good job or an average job. (Mrs. Ecco)

Ms. Daffodil had to recall who conducted her formal evaluations. She shared her concerns with who should and who should not evaluate her work performance based on how much and/or how often the evaluator actually saw her performance on a daily bases. Ms. Daffodil said this:

Yes. They formally evaluate my work performance. But, you know, I think it's the principal that does it actually. Yeah, as a matter of fact, I think it is the principal. My immediate person does not do my evaluation. It's the principal. The principal doesn't really see what I do, so I don't really know how ... Yeah, that's wild. I just thought about that. I don't really know how they get the information to determine whether I come back or not. I guess it would sort of be hearsay. If the teacher didn't like me, they could say I'm not doing my job. I don't think any parents are even involved to say yes, she's working with my son or my daughter. Really I think it should be an evaluative effort on the teacher's part and every person that I connect with; each teacher my student goes to in terms of their class transition, even the parent. Everybody should be in on my evaluation and not the person who never sees me only.

Special education teachers were asked who formally evaluated their paraeducator's work performance. All teacher participants were clear that they do not evaluate their paraeducators and assumed their supervisor must have conducted all the classroom staff evaluations. For instance Ms. Kittredge said:

I haven't yet evaluated a paraeducator so I believe the administrator is charged with evaluating the performance of the paraeducator. I'm not the direct supervisor of somebody else or adults. (Ms. Kittredge)

Mrs. Witherspoon recalled at her previous school district she was required to conduct paraeducator evaluations. However, she raised several concerns about not having any input in the evaluations of her current paraeducators. Mrs. Witherspoon said this:

I'm coming from North East Unified School District where the teacher did the evaluation. The only thing the administrator did was when we had the meeting was discuss it and if the paraeducator and the teacher agreed, the only thing the administrator did was sign it. This would be the first time I've ever came to a classroom where the teacher did not have a say or an opinion on how the evaluation was done. Matter of fact, what scared me was I knew that my paraeducators weren't doing a good job. How is it that this administrator who's never been in my classroom, who's never observed my administrators can say, "Oh, I'm going to give you satisfactory all the way across even though I've never seen your work performance." I did feel that that was unfair. I did feel that and I don't understand. I could understand the administrator's role in being a mediator but not as the person who actually formally do the evaluation and sign off. In reality the administrator does not work with the paraeducator. Point blank, period. I don't care what district you go to or anything. That is the way it is.

### *Professional Development Training Sessions*

Paraeducators are often employed untrained. Paraeducator training is typically provided to individuals on a voluntary basis when career advancements are sought (Giangreco, 2002). Research has revealed that paraeducators need preparation to successfully deliver services to students (Beal, 2001). However, exactly how to train paraeducators remains the choice of individual local education agencies. Paraeducator participants were asked if their direct

supervisor provided them with professional development sessions. Most paraeducators said they did not participate in any professional development training. Mrs. Talbert shared her experience:

No. Absolutely not. We just wing it between my coworkers and I, my colleagues and I. It's like "Oh, I heard this would be easier if we did this." Little techniques we do with kids. We figure stuff out on our own. When you've known a student for a while, you know certain techniques that work. We do it amongst ourselves to just adjust. I also help transport the kids to and from their homes, so I do ride the bus. I do miss the professional development meetings.

Other paraeducators explained their classroom teachers may from time-to-time have mini professional development sessions amongst their classroom staff. However, school-wide professional development sessions carried little relevance to the paraeducator job. As Ms. Roseville indicated in this statement:

If I'm talking about my teacher, we try to do that on a daily ... We try to reflect or talk about it. Even if we can't do it daily, we do it at least once a week, talk about what worked or what didn't or how we can improve lessons for the next time. As far as the administrators, there are professional development sessions sometimes a few times a month but they're not ... A lot of times are not applicable to paraeducators so it feels like a waste of time. There's nothing for us to do and there are many things that specifically say that we, as paraeducators, cannot do and cannot implement like assessments or CAPA testing which is the alternative testing platform. There really is no type of formal training. There are also things that I've had that have, like I said, nothing to do with my job so I'm not sure what to do with that information. It's like in one ear and out the other, sometimes I'm

not sure what I'm doing at these meetings except for signing my name for attendance purposes.

Special education teachers were also asked if they saw their paraeducators participating in school-wide professional development sessions. Some teachers said yes. However, paraeducators training sessions had time constraints. Mr. Patchwood said:

Yes and no. What happens is when we have meetings ... if it's an after-school meeting, the paraeducator can only stay a certain amount of time, so in some cases they only stay 10, 15 minutes and once it reaches a certain time when they're off the clock they leave, but I wouldn't ... There's very, very few where they offer PD professional developments. I have asked my peer educator and I would say in most cases no. There are times where they just stay in the classroom. It seems like only when they want them to do something ... If they want something out of them and then they'll gather them all in a meeting and they'll say this is a change or this is what we want you to do, but other than that they're not offered the professional development.

Other teachers attempted to give their classroom staff mini professional trainings to compensate for the lack of school wide professional development:

I did try to provide professional sessions, particularly how to work with students with autism, how to work with students with ADD. Now, at our school we were told that an administrator was supposed to provide professional development for the paraeducators. However, it never took place. (Mrs. Witherspoon)

### *Free Time During Early Student Dismissal*

Paraeducator participants were asked where their time was spent when students were dismissed early for staff to have their professional development sessions. Most paraeducators said they would “do stuff” in their classrooms until the end of their work day. Mr. HighTower, Mr. Wizz, and Ms. Daffodil all shared similar experiences:

In the class, again, with the teacher. If it was helping her with correcting paper or just moving some things around or even cleaning up the classroom. That was usually how the day went on a minimum day. I think we had a PD twice probably, which was all staff and didn't have nothing to do with really me as a paraprofessional or any special education. It's pretty much a waste of time. (Mr. Hightower)

Well, we would sometimes just work on stuff in the classroom until it's time to go amongst ourselves, just things that we come up with. Then every once in a while, we would have a meeting just to discuss how we could have a better day and then that was it. (Mr. Wizz)

I'm usually cleaning or straightening or just hanging out. It's kind of free time. (Ms. Daffodil)

Special education teacher participants were asked if they knew where their paraeducators spent their time when students were dismissed early for staff to have their professional

development sessions. Most teachers said their paraeducators were either “hanging out,” signing out of work, or just sitting in the classrooms. Mr. Witherspoon, Mr. Ropper, and Mr. Patchwood all indicated versions of this in their statements:

What they did was they basically hung around the classroom, gossiped and pretend like they were doing anything. They did absolutely nothing. Nothing professional development related. Nothing. They didn't do anything. They basically told us to give them something to do. If the classroom need to be cleaned, do that. Grade papers, something like that. For the most part on early outs the paraeducators did not do any professional development. (Ms. Witherspoon)

I believe they get to go home. When we have professional development, they don't have to stay. I think their time is either 2:00 or 2:30 or something like that. Or if it's a short day, the district doesn't pay them. They get to leave. We have to stay to meet our obligation for our contract is what I understand. (Mr. Ropper)

There's been a lot of times where they'll just stay in the classroom. We don't even, as special education teachers, have that many PDs. Some of those cases if we meet once a month, the paraeducators might join us for 15 minutes but when we meet just generally, those paraeducators just stay in the classroom. They don't go when the teachers are meeting. Sometimes they're hanging out with the security of the school. (Mr. Patchwood)

### *Paraeducator Direct Supervisor Access*

Paraeducator participants were asked if they needed support for any reason would they be able to access their direct supervisor during the instructional school day. Most paraeducators said they did not have access to their direct administrative supervisor because they were either too busy, not visible, or unapproachable. Ms. Roseville, Mr. Wizz, and Mrs. Talbert all recalled their experiences:

To the administrators? No, because my administrators are very busy. Many times I won't see administration for days at a time. (Ms. Roseville)

No. I had very little support from the administrator like I said. The administrator would come in only if there was a visitor from somewhere else, somewhere from the district. That's the only time I would see her and that's one of the things I really, really that ... really I remembered how the administrator would only come around. Like I said, if there was special visitor, special guest, that's the only time I would really ever see the administrator. (Mr. Wizz)

I do have access to my direct supervisor. It also depends on how approachable they are. The current one I'm working with, it's a little bit hard to ask for support. I feel like there's so many things going on, that it's hard for me to add on to whatever else they are doing. (Mrs. Talbert)

Special education teacher participants were also asked if their paraeducators needed support for any reason, do they have direct access to their supervisor during the instructional school day. All teachers responded that paraeducators do, indeed, have access to their direct administrative supervisor during the instructional school day. Mr. Patchwood said this:

In my class they do. If they want to go, but when I talked to my peer educator or special education assistant, they tell me that they really don't know who their supervisor is or where to go. They're asking me for guidance, so I usually just send them to my supervisor. If they need to go by all means I'll let them go. I treat them with that respect and just as if I were in their shoes I would want to be able to go somewhere if I needed help.

One teacher said paraeducators can see their direct supervisors within appropriate timing. She also said access to the supervisor of paraeducators can be "hit or miss." Mrs. Napa indicated:

Yes. Well, appropriate timing. I guess we know pretty much the schedule and the paraeducators will come see them when they know that their supervisor is available. A lot of times it's a hit and miss. Emergencies happen but they know where they're supposed to go.

### *Desired Supervisor Support*

Paraeducators are typically required to be supervised by the lead classroom teacher. If the lead classroom teacher lacks pedagogy or supervisory skills and/or strategies, then the paraeducator may feel that he or she has no guidance or sense of support. This lack of supervisor support may be a component that causes increased levels of stress by creating an unstable or unsupportive school environment. Paraeducator participants were asked how they would like their direct supervisor to support them. Most paraeducators provided suggestions as to how their

school administrator, not their classroom teacher, could support their responsibilities. Most paraeducators want their school administrators to be visible, and offer weekly professional development sessions. Ms. Roseville, Mr. Wizz, and Mrs. Talbert all offered various suggestions:

It would be nice to know who to ask questions of when the direct supervisor is not present so that we as staff, not just as paraeducators but teachers as well, have a chain of command or know who to direct our comments or our questions and concerns to not just for our benefit but for the benefit of our students because there have been situations where we're dealing with aggressive behaviors of the students. (Ms. Roseville)

I would like my supervisor to come around way more than they did, give me tools to do my job better, have meetings, training to discuss different situations on different ways we can keep the kids, progressing. Just more support from the administrator, way, way more support. I guess she could have gave me some insight on what to do, how to do things, how to do things when the kids are throwing chairs and we're just in a day where they're just not going to do any work where because something is going on at home or something is going on like I said, in their personal life. I just needed more help. I needed my administrator to just ... I didn't feel like I had any support at all, any support, any guidance, any tools. Just like I said, I had to go back to ... I was just thrown in there. Just thrown in there to do the best I can and that seems to me like they set me up for failure. (Mr. Wizz)

I like the idea of having a weekly get together. Just see what works that week.

What didn't. What we could do to change it the following week, and then just do trial and error. (Mrs. Talbert)

Special education teacher participants were also asked if they could offer suggestions as to how the direct supervisor of their paraeducators could support them in the future. All teachers offered suggestions that school administrators could use to support paraeducators. Teachers Mrs. Witherspoon and Mr. Patchwood both offered their insights on this matter:

The administrators should actually be more proactive with the paraeducator. They should actually provide the professional development. They should keep them updated. They should provide them with the district paraeducator handbook. They should actually have a meeting where they go over their job descriptions. (Ms. Witherspoon)

I feel that they need to have a direct chain with a person outside of the classroom where they feel comfortable, maybe they have a problem with me or they're having a problem with certain student. I don't think I am fully equipped to meet their needs. I know that I've advocated for some training for them but very little has been done. They need a space where they can address their issues, where they can debrief. As a teacher it's easy for me to go talk to my colleagues, my peers. For them, they just go among each other or I can go talk to my administrator if I have a problem, the principal, or the assistant principal. I kind of feel from their conversations, they don't feel comfortable to go and talk to an administrator.

They're always thinking about their job. I realized how difficult it could be for them in the classroom. (Mr. Patchwood)

***Supervisory disconnection.*** Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study both shared their experiences regarding the problem(s) and/or concerns they have with the lack of Supervisory Support paraeducators receive while assisting students with special needs within urban school settings. Paraeducators were asked who they perceived to be their direct supervisor. All paraeducators stood firm in their beliefs that the official teacher of record for the class they were placed in, is their supervisor. However, when teachers were asked who they perceived to be their paraeducators direct supervisor, most teachers said the school administrator is the direct supervisor. When paraeducators were asked who formally evaluated their work performance all paraeducators said their classroom teacher evaluated them. However, when teachers were asked who evaluated their paraeducators, all teachers said they never evaluated their classroom staff and assumed the school administrator performed this responsibility. All concerns identified by the participants under this section suggest these professionals may be experiencing a concept I identify as “Supervisory Disconnection.”

Why call these experiences supervisory disconnection? Paraeducators and teachers who participated in this study themselves said they are unclear who truly functions as the supervisor over paraeducators. Although all paraeducators believe the classroom teacher is the person who should be their supervisor, all teachers believe school administration is responsible for supervising paraeducators. Paraeducators report they do not feel comfortable with approaching school administrators with work related concerns or challenges. In fact, paraeducators report they rarely see school administrators during the instructional day, making it nearly impossible to build

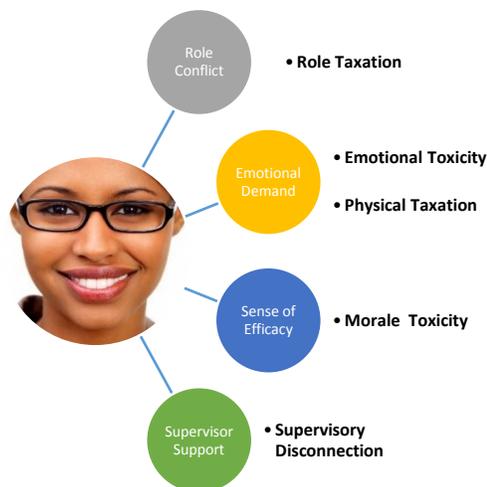
working relationships with school administrators. Hence the manifestation of “Supervisory Disconnection” among paraeducators of color in urban school settings.

### Summary

This chapter presented themes, categories, and specific findings related to the study’s research questions. The findings were organized and presented using Chenail’s (1995) Openness, Data as Star, Juxtaposition, and Data Presentation Strategies. Data collected from individual informal standardized open-ended interviews, provided insight into participants’ perceptions of emotional and/or physical exhaustion while working with students in urban special day classes. Samples of quotes and excerpts from paraeducators and teachers of color are included by the researcher to build confidence in the reader as to the accuracy representing the perspectives and lived experiences of the participants in this study.

The major findings that emerged in conjunction with the research questions established for this study are displayed below (see Figure 5):

Figure 5. Pearl the Paraeducator Serving in Urban Special Day Class Settings



Paraeducators of color who participated in this study appear to be experiencing emotional and/or physical exhaustion while working on the job. Paraeducators are often confused about

their roles while serving students with special needs. Although paraeducators are typically clear they are hired to support classroom teachers, how paraeducators are to provide this support to classroom teachers is typically not defined, which causes confusion. Paraeducators experience emotional exhaustion due to lack of respect from both teachers and students alike. Paraeducator emotional exhaustion also becomes a factor when challenging situations are carried home for reflection. Paraeducators often experience physical exhaustion due to students physically abusing them (i.e. hitting, kicking, scratching, etc.). Paraeducators often work with peers who have low self-efficacy, which can have a negative and/or uncomfortable impact on the classroom and/or school environment. All paraeducators want consistent professional development sessions and support from their direct supervisor(s). All concerns collected and addressed above lends itself to a greater concern, a concern I frame as “Conceptualization of Urban Taxation.” These ideas will be deconstructed in chapter five and help frame recommendations to combat the toxicity and taxation experienced by paraeducators of color in urban school settings.

## CHAPTER V

### DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

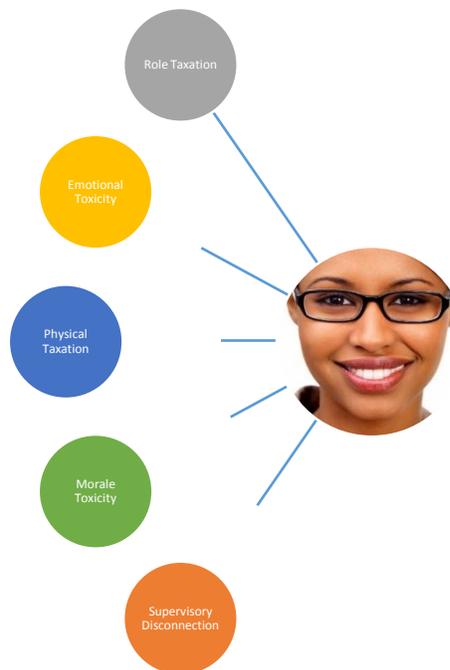
#### **Introduction**

Paraeducators of color who work in urban settings find their jobs stressful, exhausting, and difficult. “It’s all anguish. ....It’s taxing.” These very words from Ms. Daffodil provide a framework of Urban Taxation that builds on Shyman’s previous work and addresses the unique stressors experienced by paraprofessionals of color created by supporting students with special needs in an urban environment. Remember Pearl? Pearl has been employed as a paraeducator at a large urban middle school for ten years. Pearl works in an area where many students live in poverty. Their home lives vary, but some are toxic, including drug and alcohol abuse, physical abuse, and neglect and is an example of Urban Taxation that impacts on-the-job stressors for paraprofessionals of color in urban settings. When Pearl does not receive the guidance she needs to properly support her student, she comes to work with low energy, expresses prolonged feelings of ineffectiveness, becomes cynical when speaking to students and fellow paraeducators, and calls out sick a couple of days every month. These constant stressors in Pearl’s work environment have developed into an overall environmental stressor called Urban Taxation (see Figure 6). The sections below will be used to offer potential solutions to resolve Pearl’s feelings (and other “Pearls” in similar school settings) of Urban Taxation.

This chapter interprets and discusses the research findings generated from individual interviews of six paraeducators and six teachers of color, from one school site within the context of a large urban school district in California. This chapter begins by presenting the research questions posed for this study. The major findings resulting from data analysis assisted with

answering these questions in explicit details. This chapter concludes with a discussion of the implications of this research study for educational policy and practice, and suggests recommendations for future research related to special education.

Figure 6. Urban Taxation



### Summary of Major Findings

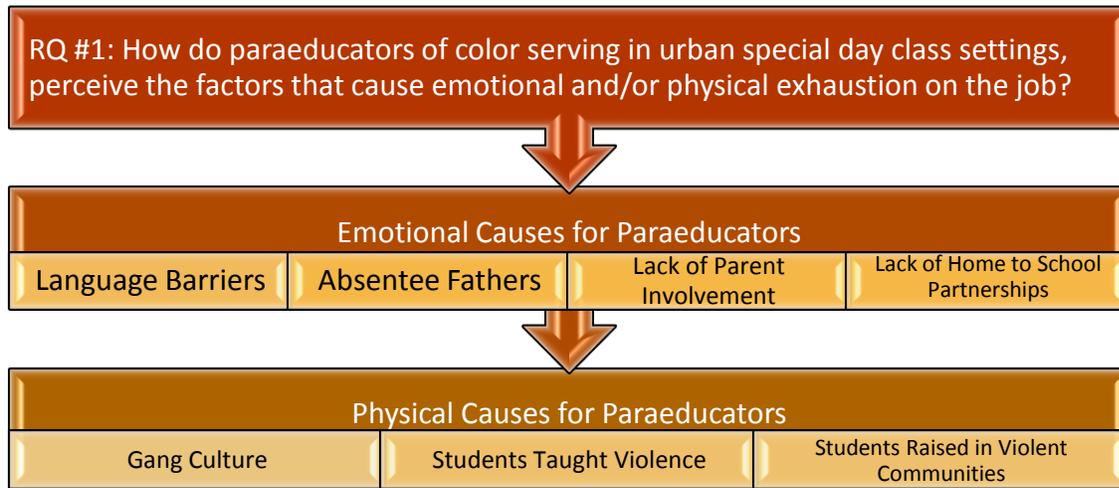
This section is organized to address and answer the research questions developed for this study:

1. How do paraeducators of color serving in urban special day class settings, perceive the factors that cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job?
2. How do paraeducators of color perceive the factors that prevent emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job?

Therefore, providing a complete overview of themes and findings directly related to the research questions written for this study. This section summaries findings on: (1) emotional demand and (2) physical demand.

**Emotional demand.** Paraeducators and teachers of color who work in urban school settings were asked how they perceived the factors that cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job. Paraeducators in this study reported three major concerns that cause emotional exhaustion on the job: (1) language barriers, (2) absentee father figures within the home, and (3) lack of home to school partnerships. Paraeducators explained that language differences can be a challenge when no one in the classroom can speak or write the student's primary language. If there is a breakdown in communication between home and school, paraeducators can feel the disconnection. When this happens, it is often a challenge to find or borrow an employee who can translate phone calls, teacher/parent conferences, and written communications. When young men in urban schools do not have a father figure in their home it shows in their behavior(s) at school. Paraeducators shared that young men who have absentee fathers are often unaware of how to properly behave in school. This causes emotional exhaustion for male paraeducators because they are often modeling appropriate behaviors and correcting inappropriate behaviors. Lack of home to school partnerships becomes an issue because paraeducators feel families are often failing to carry over academic and/or behavioral strategies from school into the home. When this happens, paraeducators feel student progress becomes stagnant which means they have to work harder at supporting students and their special needs (see Figure 7).

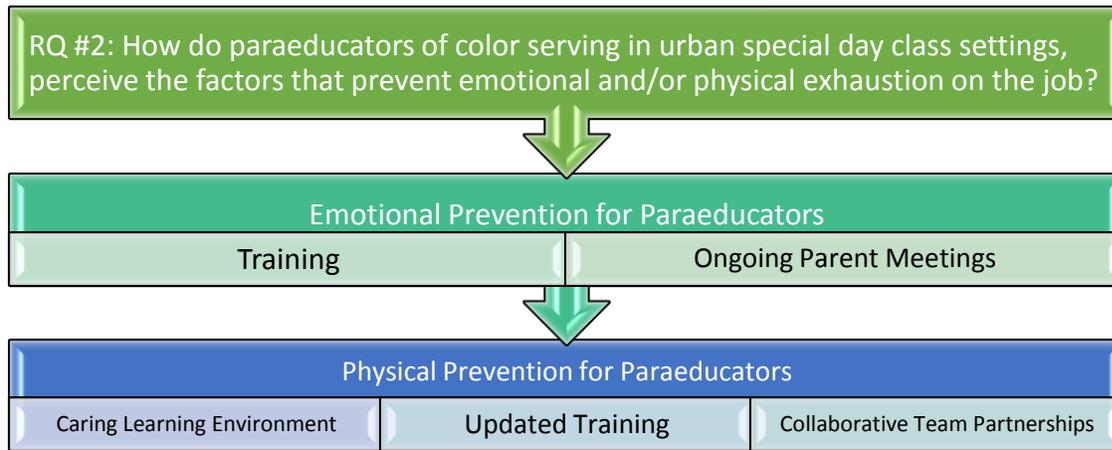
Figure 7. Summarization of Research Question #1



Paraeducators were asked if they could identify factors that could perhaps prevent emotional exhaustion they experience while working in urban special day classes. Paraeducators recommended two solutions; (1) training and (2) ongoing parent meetings. Paraeducators believe if they were properly trained they could prevent some emotional fatigue. If parents were offered and motivated to attend school meetings, paraeducators believe they would be able to build and maintain necessary home to school partnerships needed to gain student achievement.

**Physical demand.** Paraeducators who participated in this study were asked to identify the causes of physical exhaustion they experience on their jobs. Paraeducators reported three major concerns; (1) gang culture, (2) students taught to be violent, and (3) students living in violent neighborhoods. When student live in violent communities they are often taught how to fight by family members (i.e. older siblings) to prevent themselves from being bullied or even stolen from. Students are often drawn to join gang culture to protect themselves and to have a sense of belonging to something powerful. When violent behaviors are displayed at school, paraeducators are typically first on the scene to break up fights and maintain school safety.

Figure 8. Summarization of Research Question #2



Paraeducators who participated in this study were asked if they could recommend solutions that could perhaps prevent the physical demands they experience on the job. Paraeducators recommended three solutions; (1) updated training, (2) collaborative team partnerships, (3) Ongoing parent meetings, and (4) caring/ safe learning environments (see Figure 8). Paraeducators believe they need to be trained and trained often to appropriately support students with challenging behaviors. Special day classes can have multiple adults (i.e. 2-4 adults) assigned to one room. These adults work closely together for six hours. If these adults are not partners working together toward one goal, students can sense disconnection within their classroom environment and try to manipulate situations based on this type of environmental weakness. Paraeducators believe it's important for classroom adults to work together collaboratively to build and maintain caring/safe learning environments where students can thrive. The overall intent of this section was to provide readers with an overview of the findings and themes directly related to the research questions developed for this study. Findings and themes to complement the more detailed results of this study will be provided within the section(s) below.

## Discussion

Consistent with current research on teacher stress literature, paraeducators and teachers of color who work in urban school settings do consistently experience emotional and physical exhaustion on the job. The paraeducators of color who participated in this study have identified causes and potential solutions to possibly solve the exhaustion they experience while working in urban special day class settings. This section discusses how findings from this study contribute to research on teacher stress and general occupational stress literature, and thereby contributing to the literature on paraeducator stress.

**Role taxation.** Role conflict can occur when lack of clarity regarding an employee's rights, responsibilities, methods, goals, status, or accountability exists at the workplace (Shyman, 2010). Paraeducators and teachers of color in this study shared indications that they indeed experience role conflict. Paraeducators are often unsure of what to do while in their assigned classes. "I was confused almost every day what my role was because like I said, I had to just improvise a lot" (Mr. Wizz). Mrs. Talbert admitted: "Yes, many times. I'm not a person to speak up and complain, so depending on the teacher that I'm with, I adjust accordingly." Teachers also found that paraeducators are often confused about their roles and need clarification: "Yes. Well, in the very beginning I guess they, sometimes they're unsure of their roles and they have ... In the beginning of the year they asked myself, the special ed teacher, "What are my roles?" (Mrs. Napa) Shyman (2010) reports "for paraeducators, role conflict often manifest as an inability to distinguish between their expected roles in different classes and with multiple students in different grades and with differing supportive needs" (p. 830). This echoes the findings within this study. Mr. Wizz shared his sentiments; "I can't really explain the difference because to me, they're one and the same. So, I really can't explain the difference at all."

Teachers at times had a hard time with understanding what roles and/or responsibilities they should be delegating to their paraeducators, contributing to this role taxation: “Sometimes it's confusing what the responsibilities might be because we don't have anybody that comes in and says, well these are the things we want you to take care of. You just have to figure it out as you go along. (Ms. Kittredge) Mr. Roper shared his confusion: “Yes, maybe when it comes to the supervision or escorting a student or when you can leave them with a student or something like that. That would probably be the boundary where it's hazy.” Difficulty with distinguishing what is expected of one’s role and/or responsibilities would seem likely to be exhausting over time for both paraeducators and teachers.

Shyman (2010) also identified the issue of paraeducators being confused about their supervisory hierarchy as an indicator of role conflict and occupational stress. Shyman (2010) determined “the supervisory hierarchy and the distinction between direct supervisors and indirect supervisors may also be unclear and yield a feeling of uncertainty as to who they should go for role clarification and professional support” (p. 830). The link between role conflict and occupational stress was also clearly present within this study. “I perceive that my direct supervisor is the teacher. That's my direct supervisor. That may not be the right answer, but that's who I perceive to be is my immediate supervisor. (Ms. Daffodil) Mr. Wizz explained his confusion: “Well, all along, I always thought that my direct supervisor was the principal, the administrator, but they were rarely around unless they needed something or there’s a major problem. I was always thinking my direct supervisor was the teacher because they were the ones that evaluated me.” Not only were paraeducators confused about the supervisory hierarchy, but teachers in this study were also confused: “I would say the head of the special education department, the coordinator. I don't think, as teachers, we're their supervisors. That's still

administration. I don't even like having to really talk to paraeducators because it messes the bond up between you and them. It's just a weird situation.” (Mr. Ropper)

Paraeducators in this study appear to be really confused regarding their roles, responsibilities, and their direct supervisors. For a paraeducator, the realities of their frequently undefined roles, inappropriate responsibilities, and lack of appreciation and acknowledgement by others affect their perceived competence in their abilities to assist students with disabilities in all areas (Downey, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000; Killoran, Templeman, Peters, & Udel, 2001; Patterson, 2006; Riggs, 2002). Confusion of roles, responsibilities, and who to report to will certainly have a negative impact on paraeducators especially those who work with the most challenging students. Paraeducators who are consistently exhausted from role conflict, can over time develop role taxation. When paraeducators experience role taxation their roles are perceived as onerous and wearing.

**Emotional toxicity.** Emotional demand or burnout involves negative feeling(s) for an individual that leads to exhaustion (both physical and emotional), a feeling of lack of energy, a tendency to view the individuals in a disinterested manner and the perception of a lack of personal achievement (Hughes, 2001; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Naring, Briet, & Brouwers, 2006; Shukla & Trivedi, 2008). Shyman (2010) discovers teachers and paraeducators working in the field of special education may be likely to develop emotional attachments to students as well as emotional responses to the pervasive difficulties that their student encounter as a result of distinct learning and/or behavioral challenges. The connection between emotional demand and personal investment was found in this study:

If you're invested in the students, then it's going to be emotionally demanding because I, for example, feel like when one of my students is not feeling well, I try to make them feel better or try to understand why they're feeling the way they're feeling but a lot of our students can't verbalize why and if they're noticeably upset and are struggling to help me understand that, I'm struggling to understand them and I feel bad because I can't help them. Yes, it can be emotionally and physically demanding in more than one way. I do take the stress home. I don't just leave the job at home. I reflect on what I can do better, what I did wrong or what could have helped the situation and all of that really affects me physically and emotionally. (Ms. Roseville)

In fact, Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study both agree that emotional exhaustion on the job can be reduced if they decided not to care or invest in their students:

Yes, I could if I do not involve myself and don't care about my students and the people that I work with. I feel like that would really prevent a lot but, like I said, I'm invested in my students and in my classroom and I have a good working relationship with the people that I work with so the things that happen at work do affect me and I do take it home with me. (Ms. Roseville)

The connection between emotional demand and occupational stress documented in the literature among teachers-appears to have the same connection among paraeducators of color who participated in this study. Paraeducators are professionals who are invested in the development and academic progress of their students. These emotional attachments cannot be turned off when the school day ends. Paraeducators take their challenging feelings home with

them attempting to cognitively process potential academic and/or behavioral strategies.

Paraeducators who consistently experience lack of energy by the day's end, harbor bad feelings about their student's behaviors and/or grades not progressing, or are becoming disinterested in their personal achievements, can over time develop emotional toxicity. When paraeducators experience emotional toxicity, they can easily spread their low energy, bad feelings, and their disinterests to others within their classroom or school environment.

**Physical taxation.** Physical demand or exhaustion involves the general feeling of being tired and rundown. Physical problems associated with burnout include headaches, digestive disorders, high blood pressure, heart palpitations, and insomnia (Blazer, 2010; Freudenberger, 1974; Hughes, 2001; McCarthy, Lambert, O'Donnell, & Melendres, 2009; Richards, 2011; Schwarzer, & Hallum, 2008; Shyman, 2010; Steinhardt, Jaggars, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011; Thieman, Henry, & Kitchel, 2012). Paraeducators reported either they at times were physically exhausted or they worked with colleagues who were physically exhausted: "My colleagues were just ... lack of better word, beat down. Just like I said, just no energy, no ... Just tired. Just like they don't know what to do next. (Mr. Wizz).

Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study have either experienced or have witnessed physical violence or abuse from students at some point within their careers. Paraeducators are typically known for not only supporting the classroom teacher during instruction, but are also known for being sole support providers to students with extreme behavioral challenges. Paraeducators have reported being hit, kicked, scratched, and even spat at:

Dealing with kids with mental behaviors is very stressing. I deal with people hitting me, pulling my hair, and violence period all day, every day. It's very hard.

Then when you see kids like helpless, it takes a toll on you. (Mrs. Ecco)

Teachers also agree that paraeducators experience physical exhaustion while working in urban special day classes:

I've seen a lot of them abused by their student. Their student has severe problems and acts out. I've seen them take a lot from students like that. I've seen them get hit, literally hit. (Mr. Ropper)

As the roles of paraeducators become more involved, concerns have developed in the field. For example, should paraeducators be making unilateral decisions about removing students from classes, and dealing with resistant behaviors away from certificated classroom teachers (Downey et al, 2000)? Paraeducators in this study appear to be experiencing physical taxation. Paraeducators who consistently work with students who have problematic behaviors without the support of a certificated teacher and/or updated behavioral training, can over time develop physical taxation. When paraeducators experience physical taxation, they take many sick days, complain about being tired, complain about headaches, and file work related injury claims.

**Morale toxicity.** Sense of efficacy, also known as self-efficacy, first proposed by Bandura (1977), is defined as people's belief's about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave (Bandura, 1977). Self-efficacy is grounded in the theoretical framework of social cognitive theory which emphasizes that people can exercise some control over what they do (Bandura, 1977; Brown, 2012; Oakes,

Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study both agree that they mostly work with paraeducators who display low self-efficacy. Paraeducator with low self-efficacy can take a toll on a classroom environment. These type of professionals typical don't like their job anymore and just remain on the job because they are familiar with the school site. As Mrs. Talbert says:

Yes. For the most part I feel like I've worked more with colleagues like that. For the most part I have. You have to think these women that I work with, and men, they have their own lives, so to come into a job where you feel like you're not appreciated, you're going through the motions and not really feeling like you make a difference in these children's goals. That can get frustrating.

Self-efficacy is an important stress resource factor in mitigating teacher burnout. A low sense of efficacy occurs when teachers experience prolonged feelings of ineffectiveness (Brown, 2012). Teachers with low self-efficacy consider themselves to be less competent in classroom management practices and also have higher levels of burnout (Brown, 2012; Oakes, Lane, Jenkins, & Booker, 2013; Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008; Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Teachers with a low sense of self-efficacy tend to have low self-esteem and have pessimistic thoughts about their accomplishments and personal development (Vesley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013).

The teacher literature on self-efficacy appears to have the same connection among paraeducators of color who participated in this study. Paraeducators interact with students on a close and personal basis for the large majority of the instructional school day. As previously mentioned, a paraeducator is currently more likely to be involved in providing direct services to

students with a variety of needs. Therefore, a sense of self-efficacy for a paraeducator appears to be an integral part of mitigating burnout among these essential professionals.

Paraeducators and teachers in this study appear to be experiencing moral toxicity. Paraeducators and teachers who consistently work with paraeducators who have low self-efficacy, have pessimistic thoughts, and become cynical, can over time develop morale toxicity. Mrs. Witherspoon reported how morale toxicity affected her within her classroom:

As a special ed teacher there at that school, the way it affected me was that it was hard for me to teach under those circumstances. It made me uncomfortable being around the students ... No, I'm sorry. It made me uncomfortable being around the staff. I became secluded, where I didn't want to speak to no one. I didn't want to speak to no one about my experiences in special education because I knew they wouldn't relate.

When paraeducators experience morale toxicity they can easily spread their pessimism, low energy, cynicism, and their disinterests to others within their classroom or school environment.

**Supervisory disconnection.** Shyman (2010) acknowledges “perceived supervisor support refers to the level of support that an individual receives from supervisory teachers, principals, and central administration” (p. 830). Shyman (2010) has also discovered “if the supervisory hierarchy is unclear, unsupportive, or non-existent, however, the paraeducator may feel that he or she has no guidance, sense of support, or any recourse for role clarification” (p. 830). This finding mirrors the perceptions from paraeducators of color who participated in this

study. Paraeducators not only reported they don't have access to administrators, but also feel they are not supported by them:

To the administrators? No, because my administrators are very busy. Many times I won't see administration for days at a time. (Ms. Roseville)

Combined with other factors, lack of supervision may be a component of increased stress levels by creating an unstable or unsupportive work environment (Shyman, 2010). Other factors or concerns that paraeducators reported which cause increased stress are: discrepancies with evaluations, lack of professional development, and confusion regarding the identification of their direct supervisor:

Yeah. One incident happened where the teacher was very pleased with the work that I had done for the year and gave me high, high numbers, high regards throughout the evaluation. Once they got to the principal, the principal said, no that it can't be so. It can't be just high marks through the whole evaluation. It's something you have to tweak that a little bit. I found that to be very, very interesting. Very interesting. (Mr. Wizz)

The current literature on perceived supervisor support appears to have the same connection among paraeducators of color who participated in this study. Paraeducators in this study appear to be experiencing supervisory disconnection. Paraeducators who consistently work in special day classes feeling like they don't know who to report to, confused about who evaluates them, rarely receives professional development training, and feel like school administrators are not accessible for support, can over time develop supervisory disconnection.

When paraeducators experience supervisory disconnection they don't interact with school administrators, they look for support from other paraeducators as opposed to certificated faculty members, and they withhold requesting the help or support they need.

### **Implications for Policy and Practice**

In education, the term professional development may be used in reference to a wide variety of specialized training, formal education, or advanced professional learning intended to help teachers and staff improve their professional knowledge, competence, skill, and effectiveness (Warren, 2006). In practice, professional development for educators encompasses an extremely broad range of topics and formats. Professional development experiences may be funded by districts, schools, or state budgets and programs, or they may be supported by a foundation grant or other private funding sources (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010). They may range from a one-day conference to a two-week workshop to a multiyear advanced-degree program. They may be delivered in person or online, during the school day or outside normal school hours, and through one-on-one interactions or in group situations (Mendels, 2010; Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010; Warren, 2006). Professional development sessions are typically led and facilitated by school principals or administrators within a school or provided by outside consultants or organizations hired by a school or district (Mendels, 2012). However, in far too many urban schools professional development misses the mark. Regrettably, the paraeducators who participated in this study acknowledge that what they need to successfully cope and manage their craft, is rarely offered during professional development trainings. Too often paraeducators have little to no input in determining what subjects and/or content is delivered, who delivers it, and when they participate in professional development trainings. In fact, paraeducators reported much of what is offered to them in professional development is sketchy and/or vague content

that is irrelevant to their specific skill set(s), or content that is filled with the exploration of mandated textbooks/materials and/or scripted dialogue that are obviously targeted for certificated teachers.

Urban school administrators are ultimately responsible and charged with providing paraeducators with the opportunity, guidance, and voice to identify what practices and supports they need to help them build on professional competencies and engage them in learning essential skills that manages and/or prevents unwanted environmental occupational stressors and burnout. Urban school administrators can accomplish this by facilitating and implementing ongoing, consistent school-wide collaborative inquiry (Waldron & Mcleskey, 2010). Professional development plans that promote school-wide collaborative inquiry are designed with a constructivist approach to adult learning as a framework that:

- Have considerable faculty and staff input over process and content.
- Critically discuss school-wide issues and/or challenges in a collaborative school culture.
- Draw upon relevant data and research to inform deliberations, and sustain a focus on a topic or problem and reach a collective decision to solve the problem (Mendels, 2012).

Waldron and Mcleskey (2010) assert “administrators who are outside of the classroom hold the power over change” (p. 63). This research suggests urban administrators can potentially change the progression of Urban Taxation that paraeducators experience by providing the following supports and/or strategies in ongoing school-wide professional development that promotes collaborative inquiry.

## Preventing Role Taxation

Paraeducators who participated in this study mostly agreed they have seen and reviewed their job descriptions when hired to work in special day classes. These paraeducators also expressed their roles and responsibilities are unclear once actually assigned to classrooms with students. Confusion sets in because paraeducators mostly believe they carry out teacher responsibilities, so much so, they are often mistaken for the classroom teacher by first time visitors. To prevent and/or combat paraeducators from experiencing role ambiguity or ultimately role taxation, classroom teachers in partnership with school administrators should consider incorporating Responsibility Matrices within their classroom environments. A Responsibility Matrix is a structural map or chart that illustrates where responsibilities and assignments lie in an organization. Each member is represented on the map or chart and has their assignments and responsibilities labeled on the matrix (Culp & Smith, 1997). A Responsibility Matrix can look something like this (see Figure 9):

Figure 9. Sample Responsibility Matrix

Task/Responsibility	Special Ed. Teacher	Paraeducator 1	Paraeducator 2
Recess Supervision	X	✓	✓
Lunch Supervision	X	✓	✓
Behavior Charting	✓	✓	✓
Large Group Instruction	✓	X	X

Legend:

✓: Participant responsible for task

X: Participant not responsible for task

A responsibility matrix is a simple tool that can be used to help paraeducators and teachers to:

- Summarizes the tasks to be accomplished and who is responsible for what in the classroom.
- List classroom tasks and classroom team.
- Clarify critical interfaces between units and individuals that need coordination.
- Provide a means for all classroom team members to view their responsibilities and agree on their assignments.
- Clarify the extent or type of authority that can be exercised by each classroom team member.

### **Preventing Emotional Toxicity**

Paraeducators who display negative emotions--especially chronic sadness, anxiety, anger, or a sense of futility--powerfully disrupt work, hijacking attention from task(s) at hand (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). Distress not only erodes mental abilities, but spreads and make people less emotionally intelligent. People who are upset have trouble reading emotions accurately in other people--decreasing the most basic skill needed for empathy, as a result impairing their social skills (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). When this occurs, especially in school settings, social skills must be re-taught preferably by an emotionally intelligent leader within the school who displays and can create resonance. To guide or rebuild social skills within individuals or groups, it is suggested that a school Psychologist in partnership with school administrators facilitate professional develop sessions throughout the school year as needed. Understanding and learning Emotional Intelligence (EI) can build resonance within individuals and those learned abilities can spread resonance within groups. Emotional Intelligence (EI)

competencies are not innate talents, but learned abilities, each of which has unique contribution to making people more resonant, and therefore more effective in the workplace. The following are practical guidelines for building resonance and mitigating emotional toxicity in individuals and ultimately in groups (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013):

### *Emotional Intelligence Domain and Associated Competencies*

**PERSONAL COMPETENCE:** These capabilities determine how we manage ourselves.

#### **SELF-AWARENESS**

- Emotional self-awareness: Reading one's own emotions and recognizing their impact
- Accurate self-assessment: Knowing one's strength and limits
- Self-confidence: A sound sense of one's self-worth and capabilities

#### **SELF-MANAGEMENT**

- Emotional self-control: Keeping disruptive emotions and impulses under control
- Transparency: Displaying honesty and integrity; trustworthiness
- Adaptability: Flexibility in adapting to changing situations or overcoming obstacles
- Achievement: The drive to improve performance to meet inner standards of excellence
- Initiative: Readiness to act and seize opportunities
- Optimism: Seeing the upside in events

**SOCIAL COMPETENCE:** These capabilities determine how we manage relationships.

### **SOCIAL AWARENESS**

- Empathy: Sensing others' emotions, understanding their perspective, and taking active interest in their concerns
- Organizational awareness: Reading the currents, decision networks, and politics
- Service: Recognizing and meeting follower, client, or customer needs

### **RELATIONSHIP MANAGEMENT**

- Inspirational leadership: Guiding and motivating with a compelling vision
- Influence: Wielding a range of tactics for persuasion
- Developing others: Bolstering others' abilities through feedback and guidance
- Change catalyst: Initiating, managing, and leading in a new direction
- Conflict management: Resolving disagreements
- Building bonds: Cultivating and maintaining a web of relationships
- Teamwork and collaboration: Cooperation and team building

### **Preventing Physical Taxation**

The key finding that causes physical taxation among paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study, is physical violence demonstrated from students with extreme behavioral challenges. The possible solution to preventing paraeducators from being hurt by the students they service is by allowing paraeducators to be active participants in the development of Positive Behavior Support Plans (PBS).

Positive Behavior Support (PBS) is a process for understanding and resolving the problem behavior of children that is based on values and empirical research. It offers an approach for developing an understanding of why the child engages in problem behavior and strategies for preventing the occurrence of problem behavior while teaching the child new skills. Positive behavior support offers a holistic approach that considers all factors that impact on a child and the child's behavior. It can be used to address problem behaviors that range from aggression, tantrums, and property destruction to social withdrawal. (McClean & Grey, 2012, p. 221)

Paraeducators are typically responsible for serving students with extreme behavioral challenges on a one to one basis. Paraeducators are also typically responsible for tracking and monitoring students with challenging behaviors without the presence of a certificated teacher. Paraeducators are often subject to physical aggression by the students they serve because they work very closely with these students daily, and because they are not seen as valuable trained employees who should be included in developing Positive Behavior Support Plans. Perhaps paraeducators would not feel physically taxed if teachers created PBS goals with the key practitioners in mind-the paraeducators.

McClean and Grey (2012) warns that step one of a PBS plan begins by building a behavior support team of key individuals and stakeholders who are most involved in the child's life. Team members collaborate in multiple ways in order to develop, implement, and monitor a child's support plan. The collaborative process of a PBS includes the following steps:

- 1: WHO are the key stakeholders and individuals in this child's life?
- 2: WHY is collaborative teaming a key element of PBS for this child?
- 3: WHAT do we need to do to make this a successful collaborative experience that will benefit the child and family?
- 4: HOW are we going to promote the active participation of the family and all team members in the behavior support planning process?

The question: Who are the key stakeholders and individuals in this child's life, is the very first of four important questions. Teachers and school administrators must not continue to leave paraeducators out of the PBS collaborating process. In fact, McClean and Grey (2012) assert:

Potential team members include anyone who the family or teacher feels knows the child well and will be a part of the behavior support process. Parents and family are absolutely essential to the PBS teaming process. The goal is to create a team that represents all of the adults who will interact with the child in the natural environment. When that occurs, the team will be able to develop a behavior support plan that can be used across environments. Plans that are consistent across environments are more likely to be effective and new skills are more likely to be learned and generalized. Other potential members can include therapists, paraeducators, administrative staff, program consultants or resource professionals, and possibly even other key stakeholders (such as, extended

care providers, individuals who transport the child, or even medical professionals).

Once paraeducators are viewed as valuable contributing members of the educational team, they can begin to gain the respect of other certificated employees and students alike. In turn, paraeducators would have buy-into the behavioral strategies they often are responsible for tracking and monitoring. These turn of events would very likely allow paraeducators to have a “better handle” on problematic behaviors which will perhaps decrease and eventually mitigate the physical taxation they experience while working on the job.

### **Preventing Morale Toxicity**

Emotional contagion spreads most readily from the top down, an intimidating, cold person contaminates everyone’s mood, and the quality of the overall climate spirals down. This same effect applies in offices, schools, and in boardrooms. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2013) conclude, “people in groups at work inevitably “catch” feelings from one another, sharing everything from jealousy and envy to angst or euphoria. The more cohesive the group, the stronger the sharing of moods, emotional history, and even hot buttons” (p. 7). On the other hand, a good laugh or an upbeat mood more often enhances the work environment and have real consequences for getting work done (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). Good moods and humor help people feel more optimistic about their ability to achieve personal and work related goals, enhance creativity and decision-making skills, and predisposes people to be helpful to their colleagues (Altman, 2010).

High morale within the workplace makes it easier to support the implementation of new strategies and/or creative ideas. It helps schools to attract and retain talented people, makes the

environment easier to manage, and increases productivity and student achievement. High morale can lead to less absenteeism, stress, and overall workplace satisfaction (Altman, 2010; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013). So, what is the secret to high morale? The secret to good morale in the workplace is good leadership (Altman, 2010; Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013).

A workplace that possesses high morale has a leader or leaders who set the tone, drive the culture, inspire and display Emotional Intelligence (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013).

Holloway (2006) suggest reward programs are a good way to boost morale in the workplace. In lieu of money, employees want to be recognized and valued for their talents and efforts.

Holloway (2006) offers leaders key strategies to help build workplace morale:

1. Celebrate and recognize each team member's achievements
2. During holiday seasons send personalized cards noting each employee's achievement(s)
3. Know who your staff members are and understand their strengths and weaknesses.
4. Cater professional development meetings with light healthy lunches, laugh and have fun.

Creating and maintaining high morale is an on-going task that is essentially the responsibility of the leader of an organization, but involves every individual within the workplace environment.

School leaders can essentially combat and prevent morale toxicity by spreading their good mood, Emotional Intelligence, and laughter.

### **Preventing Supervisory Disconnection**

Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2013) proclaim there are many leaders within an organization. Leadership is distributed. Leadership resides not solely with the individual at the top, but with every person at every level who, in one way or another, acts as a leader to a group

of followers-wherever in the organization that person is, whether principal, teacher, department chair, or paraeducator (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013).

Paraeducators who participated in this study feel disconnected from their school administrators-so much so, they rarely see them during the instructional day nor feel comfortable approaching them when they do occasionally see them. Paraeducators also feel disconnected as valuable team members. Paraeducators are often left out of professional development meetings or if invited, they feel the information presented in professional development sessions do not apply to their scope of responsibilities. Paraeducators report they desire clear communication and professional training from school leaders. Goleman, Boyatzis, and McKee (2013) warns “dissonant leadership produces groups that feel emotionally discordant, in which people have a sense of being continually off-key” (p. 21). Holloway (2006) declares the more demanding the work load, the more empathic and supportive the leader(s) need to be. School leaders drive the climate of the school environment and thus the predisposition of paraeducators to satisfy their work with students who are diagnosed with special needs.

How can school leaders formal and informal demonstrate to paraeducators that they recognize and value the contributions they make daily to the school environment? School leaders should openly recognize daily contributions and demonstrate their appreciation for paraeducators by visibly acknowledging their membership on the educational team. Ashbaker and Morgan (2001) offer school leaders potential suggestions to perhaps help paraeducators feel connected to their classroom and school environments:

- **Provide mailboxes for paraeducators and include them in internal mailings:**

Paraeducators often depend on their classroom teacher to share general school

information about training and district events. If paraeducators had their own mailboxes they would enjoy direct clear communication without depending on other adults to share essential school site information.

- **Include paraeducators in faculty meetings:** Paraeducators will feel valued if required to participate in faculty meetings where pertinent information is distributed and important decisions are made regarding the school and the students they work the closest with.
- **Include paraeducators in parent-teacher conferences and in Individual Education Plan (IEP) meetings:** Paraeducators spend a great deal of instructional time with students. It may be appropriate for paraeducators to participate in conferences and IEP meetings. If not appropriate, teachers should consider consulting with paraeducators before hand to obtain full accurate information about students' needs and progress so this knowledge can be shared with parents.
- **Provide time for teachers and paraeducators to plan their work together:** Scheduling planning periods as short as 20 minutes on a weekly basis will help to increase the classroom team's efficiency, ensure timely communication of concerns/needs, and acknowledge the paraeducator's role within the instructional process.
- **Provide and support training opportunities:** School leaders should consider the inservice needs of paraeducators when planning for the annual professional development schedule. When appropriate or as needed school leaders should budget for and obtain outside resources and training materials paraeducators can value and add to their professional library.
- **Orient paraeducators hired during the school year:** School leaders should consider compiling a binder of basic information about school routines, schedules, organizational

structure, district programs, discipline policies, and emergency procedures that will enable the paraeducator to quickly acquire the school culture. Such a binder as this could also be used to orient substitute teachers and volunteers to become familiar to the school culture.

- **Clarify appropriate communication channels for paraeducators:** Paraeducators should be clear who to contact if they have concerns, challenges, or emergencies. School leaders should provide paraeducators with names and assignments of school personnel so paraeducators are clear who to address if questions arise regarding payroll, evaluations, supplies, injuries, and/or illnesses.
- **Provide supervisory training to teachers:** Although teachers can model ideal instructional skills and practices for students and parents, they often need training to teach these strategies to adults. School leaders should invest in teacher adult trainings as needed to develop team efficiency and cohesive collaboration (pp. 63-64).

### **Recommendations for Future Research**

Despite extensive literature on occupational stress in various fields, including teacher education, there is little to no research available specifically addressing occupational stressors among paraeducators within the field of special education. As to date, there is considerable direction for future research on this topic.

The perceptions of paraeducators serving in urban communities alone are not sufficient to understand the true extent of their occupational stress. Further research that utilizes observations witnessing the challenges and/or concerns paraeducators of color have expressed within this study should be documented.

Rossman and Rallis (2012) suggest, “gathering documents and other aspects of material culture is relatively unobtrusive and potentially rich in portraying the values and beliefs in a setting or social domain” (p. 196). Future research should also include material culture (collection of professional development meeting agendas, transfer requests, extended leave of absence, and daily absent forms). Review of these materials will perhaps provide historical, demographic, and personal information either confirming or negating the findings within this study. Rossman and Rallis (2012) confirm that material culture can also offer data that either confirms and/or contradicts words or insights collected during individual interviews.

More exploratory research should be conducted to further validate the prevalence of Urban Taxation among paraeducators of color serving in other grade levels (i.e. Elementary Schools and High Schools). It would also be necessary to determine how the sample in this study differs from paraeducator and teacher demographics across counties, and whether school staffing between district paraeducators and paraeducators contracted through outside education agencies warrant commonalities or differences. Also, the five tenants within the Urban Utopian Experience should be piloted to verify their effectiveness on similar urban school settings. This research will expand on how significant the phenomenon is in the field as a whole, as opposed to one urban middle school with unique paraeducator and teacher demographics.

### **Concluding Statement**

The most current statistics from 2012 show 830,000 paraeducators in the workforce today (Rosales, 2014). Paraeducators working full-time has increased from 61 percent in 1990 to 75 percent in 2012. The Individuals with Disabilities Education Improvement Act (IDEIA) “recognized paraeducators as more than just backup personnel working on the periphery of the

classroom. IDEIA acknowledged the key instructional role paraeducators play in their work with students with special needs including those with autism and deaf-blind disabilities” (Rosales, 2014, p. 3). Over time, paraeducators have become essential partners to teachers, significant instructors to students, and reliable communication sources for parents and families. Rosales (2014) confirms paraeducators have become a significant force in helping students succeed in and out of the classroom:

- **Academically:** Providing one-to-one and small group instruction, particularly with students who have learning disabilities, language barriers, and other special needs.
- **Behaviorally:** Helping students learn impulse control techniques to generalize across environments, and facilitating anti-bullying interventions.
- **Socially:** Supporting students with communication skills, encouraging students to meet their peers and participate in school activities.
- **Physically:** Helping students in wheel chairs to eat, dress, hygiene, and move from being seated to standing. Helping students with physical disabilities on and off the bus, administering medical procedures (when state certified).

Paraeducators and teachers of color who participated in this study appear to be experiencing emotional and/or physical exhaustion while working on the job. Paraeducators expressed they are often confused about their roles while serving students with special needs. Although paraeducators are typically clear they are hired to support classroom teachers, how paraeducators are to provide support to classroom teachers is typically not defined which causes confusion. Paraeducators experience emotional exhaustion due to lack of respect from both teachers and students alike. Paraeducator emotional exhaustion also becomes a factor when challenging situations are carried home for reflection. Paraeducators often experience physical

exhaustion due to students physically abusing them (i.e. hitting, kicking, scratching, etc.). Paraeducators often work with peers who have low self-efficacy, which can have a negative and/or uncomfortable impact on the classroom and/or school environment. All paraeducators want consistent professional development sessions and support from their direct supervisor(s). These concerns lend itself to a greater concern, a concern called “The Conceptualization of Urban Taxation.”

Educators in urban schools have a host of challenges to overcome more so than their counterparts in suburban and rural school settings. Urban schools are consumed with many unique obstacles that suburban and rural settings are privileged not to encounter. The majority of students in urban schools come from single parent households where the parent (the mother) is likely working a full time job to support the family (Hudley, 2013). The single parent is typically not able to actively participate in the child’s education or take off from work for fear of losing their full time position. Student behavior problems in the areas of absenteeism, classroom discipline, weapons possession, substance abuse, and teen pregnancy are common in urban schools (Heyman & Vigil, 2008). Another challenge is outdated computers and technology; and inadequate textbooks in short supply (Hudley, 2013).

When exposed to these obstacles, novice teachers in urban school settings often succumb to stress, insecurity, and occupational fatigue (McCarthy et al., 2009). Urban teachers are often not provided with the emotional support they need to relieve their stressors or survive the profession (Noel, 2010). In fact, urban teachers are offered very limited administrative support(s) and are expected to assume full duties and/or responsibilities of tenured teachers (Oakes et al., 2013). Lack of self-confidence, conflicts between personal life issues and professional requirements, paired with the inability to cope and handle stress all have undermined the careers

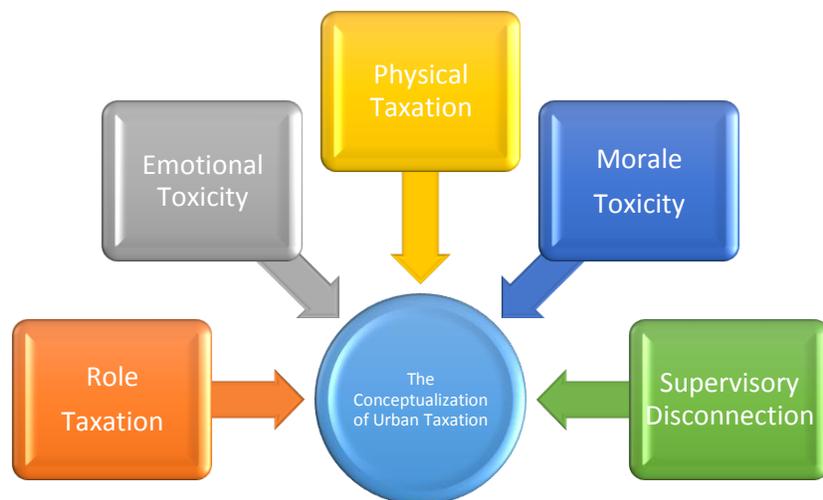
of promising urban educators (Veseley, Saklofske, & Leschied, 2013). Due to these challenges, many teachers that begin their careers in urban schools often times end up moving to different schools or quitting the teaching profession. An average of 50% of teachers transfer, resign, or retire from high-risk schools within the first five years of employment (Richards, 2013). When this occurs, the paraeducators who are left behind in urban schools typically resume the role as classroom leaders and essentially become “teachers in the closet.” While school administrators are working through the hiring process, urban classrooms typically experience large numbers of substitute teachers who ultimately depend on paraeducators (the consistent adult figure) to lead and facilitate classroom management and instruction. Paraeducators who are by default “teachers in the closet” experience the exact urban occupational stressors as credentialed teachers in combination with the following prolonged occupational stressors;

1. Paraeducators experience role conflict. Paraeducators are consistently confused about their roles because they take on multiples roles and/or take on the role that is needed at that time (i.e. teacher, paraeducator, counselor, behavior specialist, etc).
2. Paraeducators experience emotional toxicity because they are often invested in their careers and are more likely to harbor, carry, and spread their emotional challenges home and back to their school site.
3. Paraeducators experience physical taxation because they are often paired with students who possess maladaptive behaviors and are often verbally and physically abusive.
4. Paraeducators are often burned out and/or overwhelmed with their urban work conditions and often display low morale and can easily spread their pessimism, cynicism, and disinterest to other faculty, staff, and students around them.

5. Paraeducators experience supervisory disconnection. Paraeducators are often not included in professional development trainings because they are aimed solely for credentialed teachers. Paraeducators look for support from their peers because school administrators are often not visible or approachable.

These abysmal challenges speak to the broader economic and social inequities that urban paraeducators are confronted with. These enigmatic challenges manifest themselves into Urban Taxation and Toxicity which then authenticates “The Conceptualization of Urban Taxation” (see Figure 10).

Figure 10. The Conceptualization of Urban Taxation



The findings established by this preliminary study identify some strong future directions for research and suggest that particular environmental occupational stressors can be determined to be predictive of Urban Taxation (see Figure 10). While the overall literature in the area of occupational stress among paraeducators is scarce, the increased reliance of these pertinent professionals calls for a greater understanding of their occupational experiences and perceptions.

Implications for policy and practice were presented, calling urban school administrators to ultimately annihilate Urban Taxation by implementing professional development and facilitating a concept identified as “The Urban Utopian Experience.” The Urban Utopian Experience targets each environmental challenge that paraeducators are often involved in, and addresses their needs with concrete solutions that suggests will make their work environment less toxic and more positive (see Figure 11).

Figure 11. The Urban Utopian Experience

<b>The Urban Utopian Experience</b> <b>(Administrative Solutions for Mitigating Urban Taxation)</b>	
<b>Role Taxation</b>	Tenet 1: Incorporate responsibility matrices in all classrooms
<b>Emotional Toxicity</b>	Tenet 2: Display and teach staff Emotional Intelligence
<b>Physical Taxation</b>	Tenet 3: Develop Positive Behavior Support plans with paraeducators
<b>Morale Toxicity</b>	Tenet 4: Foster high morale
<b>Supervisory Disconnection</b>	Tenet 5: Fully include and recognize paraeducators as educational team members

This study challenges urban school administrators to combat and mitigate Urban Taxation by adopting the five tenets described within The Urban Utopian Experience. These five tenets would foster Role Clarity, Emotional Intelligence, Appropriate Social Behaviors, High Morale, and Inclusive Educational Teams. These five tenets describe the Urban Utopian Experience:

What would our schools-and children-be like if education also included those emotional intelligence abilities that foster resonance? For one thing, employers of every kind

would have the pleasure of taking into their ranks new generations of leaders to be who were already adept at these key skills. The personal benefits for young people themselves would also be reflected in a decline in social ills-ranging from violence to substance abuse-that stem in large part from deficits in skills such as handling impulses and rocky emotions. Beyond that, communities would benefit from higher levels of tolerance, caring, and personal responsibility. The best hope of a nation lies in the proper education of its youth (Goleman, Boyatzis, & McKee, 2013, p. 1).

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Appendix A

**California State University, Northridge  
Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Doctoral Program  
INVITATION TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT**

Dear District Employee,

I am writing to invite you to participate in a dissertation study being conducted at California State University, Northridge (CSUN) regarding special education paraeducators and occupational stressors. Havaughnia Hayes, a doctoral candidate, is conducting this study as part of the Ed.D. degree requirements.

The purpose of Havaughnia Hayes' dissertation study is to explore the perceptions that paraeducators and teachers of color working in urban special day class settings, may have regarding the factors which may cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job. This study will help bring forth strategies and/or ideal professional behaviors that will perhaps prevent burn-out, low morale, high turn-over, low student achievement, and illness leaves. Your participation in this study includes a one-time 60-minute one-on-one interview and a one-time 30-60 minute member check session (i.e. reviewing the accuracy of your transcribed interview).

Any personally identifiable characteristics, such as your name or school, will not appear in the study. Participating in this study is completely voluntary and you may withdraw at any time.

Your time investment in this study is greatly appreciated. If you would like to participate, please contact Havaughnia Hayes at [havaughnia.n.hayes@my.csun.edu](mailto:havaughnia.n.hayes@my.csun.edu). Thank you in advance for considering participation in this study.

High Regards,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Havaughnia Hayes-White".

Havaughnia Hayes, M.A.

Principal Researcher

## Appendix B

### California State University, Northridge CONSENT TO ACT AS A HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT

#### EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL FACTORS AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAEDUCATORS EMPLOYED IN URBAN SCHOOL SETTINGS

You are being asked to participate in a research study. Emotional and Physical Factors Among Special Education Paraeducators Employed in Urban School Settings, a study conducted by Havaughnia Hayes as part of the requirements for the Ed.D. degree in the Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Department. Participation in this study is completely voluntary. Please read the information below and ask questions about anything that you do not understand before deciding if you want to participate. A researcher listed below will be available to answer your questions.

#### **RESEARCH TEAM**

##### **Researcher:**

Havaughnia Hayes  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS)  
18111 Nordhoff St.  
Northridge, CA 91330-8265  
818-277-0723  
havaughnia.n.hayes@my.csun.edu

##### **Faculty Advisor:**

Gregory Knotts  
Department of Educational Leadership and Policy Studies (ELPS)  
18111 Nordhoff St.  
Northridge, CA 91330-82-65  
818-677-3189  
greg.knotts@csun.edu

#### **PURPOSE OF STUDY**

The purpose of this research study is to explore the perceptions that special education paraeducators and teachers of color working in urban special day class settings, may have regarding the factors which may cause emotional and/or physical exhaustion on the job, and perceptions on how to prevent those very same factors.

#### **SUBJECTS**

##### **Inclusion Requirements**

You are eligible to participate in this study if you:

- Are employed as a special education paraeducator or teacher of color (i.e. African American, Latino, or Asian American).
- Work in an urban school setting.
- Work with students who have a disability or
- Have previously worked as a special education paraeducator or teacher of color (within the last 2 school years i.e. 2012-2013 or 2013-2014) in an urban school setting with students who had a disability.

### **Time Commitment**

This study will involve approximately 2 hours of your time over the course of 2 days within one calendar month. Data will be collected during 2 weekends within one calendar month of your choice (October 4<sup>th</sup>, 5<sup>th</sup>, 11<sup>th</sup>, 12<sup>th</sup>, 18<sup>th</sup>, 19, 25<sup>th</sup>, 26<sup>th</sup>, or November 1<sup>st</sup>, 2<sup>nd</sup>, 8<sup>th</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup>, 15<sup>th</sup>, 16<sup>th</sup>, 22<sup>nd</sup>, 23<sup>rd</sup>, 29<sup>th</sup>, 30<sup>th</sup>, or December 6<sup>th</sup>, 7<sup>th</sup>, 13<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup>, 20<sup>th</sup>, 21<sup>st</sup>, 27<sup>th</sup>, 28<sup>th</sup>). Your participation in this study includes a one-time 60-minute one-on-one interview and a one-time 30-60 minute member check session (i.e. reviewing the accuracy of your transcribed interview).

### **PROCEDURES**

The following procedures will occur:

1. You will complete a one-time 60-minute one-on-one interview which you will answer 10 questions regarding paraeducator occupational stressors and
2. Once your audio recorded interview is transcribed, I will contact you to schedule a one-time 30-60 minute member check session (i.e. reviewing the accuracy of your transcribed interview).
3. During the 30-60 minute member check session, you will review your transcribed interview file to elaborate, correct, extend, or dispute the content by answering four questions on the provided Member Check Guide.

### **RISKS AND DISCOMFORTS**

The possible risks and/or discomforts associated with the procedures described in this study include: embarrassment and mild emotional discomfort. To successfully mitigate through possible risks and/or discomforts that may arise throughout the duration of this study, I will be open and honest and build a trusting relationship with you. Your name will be converted into pseudonyms and any other identifiable information will be redacted to conceal your identity. To mitigate against potential risks of embarrassment and mild emotional discomfort you will be able to:

1. Request a 5 minute break at any time during the interview session.
2. Request to reschedule the interview or
3. Skip a question and return to the question at the end of the interview session.

### **BENEFITS**

#### **Subject Benefits**

The possible benefits you may experience from the procedures described in this study may include learning about behaviors that will help to mitigate personal occupational stressors.

**Benefits to Others or Society**

This study will help bring forth strategies and/or ideal professional behaviors that will perhaps prevent burn-out, low morale, high turn-over, low student achievement, and illness leaves in the field of special education on urban campuses.

**ALTERNATIVES TO PARTICIPATION**

The only alternative to participation in this study is not to participate.

**COMPENSATION, COSTS AND REIMBURSEMENT****Compensation for Participation**

You will receive a one-time \$10 Target Gift Card after the completion of the one-to-one 60 minute interview.

**CONFIDENTIALITY****Subject Identifiable Data**

All identifiable information that will be collected about you will be removed and replaced with a code. A list linking the code and your identifiable information will be kept separate from the research data.

**Data Storage**

All research data will be stored on a laptop computer that is password protected.

The audio recordings will also be stored in a password protected cabinet in my home; then transcribed and erased at the end of the study.

**Data Access**

The researcher and faculty advisor named on the first page of this form will have access to your study records. Any information derived from this research project that personally identifies you will not be voluntarily released or disclosed without your separate consent, except as specifically required by law. Publications and/or presentations that result from this study will not include identifiable information about you.

**Data Retention**

The researchers intend to keep identifiable and de-identifiable data until analysis of the information is completed and then it will be destroyed by July 9, 2015.

**IF YOU HAVE QUESTIONS**

If you have any comments, concerns, or questions regarding the conduct of this research please contact the research team listed on the first page of this form.

If you have concerns or complaints about the research study, research team, or questions about your rights as a research participant, please contact Research and Sponsored Projects,

18111 Nordhoff Street, California State University, Northridge, Northridge, CA 91330-8232, or phone 818-677-2901.

**VOLUNTARY PARTICIPATION STATEMENT**

You should not sign this form unless you have read it and been given a copy of it to keep. **Participation in this study is voluntary.** You may refuse to answer any question or discontinue your involvement at any time without penalty or loss of benefits to which you might otherwise be entitled. Your decision will not affect your relationship with California State University, Northridge. Your signature below indicates that you have read the information in this consent form and have had a chance to ask any questions that you have about the study.

**I agree to participate in the study.**

- I agree to be audio recorded.
- I do not wish to be audio recorded.

_____	_____
Participant Signature	Date
_____	
Printed Name of Participant	
_____	
_____	_____
Researcher Signature	Date
_____	
Printed Name of Researcher	

## Appendix C

### California State University, Northridge HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL FACTORS AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAEDUCATORS EMPLOYED IN URBAN SCHOOL SETTINGS

Timing: Today's interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

#### **Paraeducator Interview Questions:**

**Warm up:** What drew you to the field of special education?

1. What is your job title?
  - How long have you been working under this title?
2. What are your primary responsibilities?
  - Describe what your typical day looks like?
3. What types of students with special needs do you work with?
  - What ages?
  - What is the severity of your student's needs?
  - In what type(s) of educational settings?
4. What skills did you bring to the job?
  - Describe how these skills helped you to support students with disabilities?
5. Have you ever received a type written job description?
  - Upon being hired were your specific roles explained to you by a school administrator?
  - Have you ever received specific training for a particular student or a group of students with whom you are currently working with?
  - Have you ever been confused about your roles?
  - What did you do to resolve your confusion?
6. Have you ever been asked to carry out special education teacher roles?
  - What were some of those tasks?
  - Can you explain the difference between paraeducator roles versus special education teacher roles?
  - Have you ever been mistaken for the classroom teacher by a first time visitor?
7. Is your job emotionally and/or physically demanding?
  - Can you explain what makes your job emotionally and/or physically demanding?
  - If your job is not emotionally and/or physically demanding, please explain why you feel this is so.
  - Can you prevent what makes your job emotionally and/or physically demanding?
  - If so, can you list and explain what your suggestions are?

- If you can't prevent what makes your job emotionally and/or physically demanding can you list and explain who and/or what you need to resolve this issue?
8. Can you list specific challenges that you face while working in special day classes within urban communities?
- Do you think these challenges would be the same for paraeducators serving in suburban or rural school communities, why or why not?
  - Can you offer any suggestions that can perhaps prevent the challenges you listed within urban communities?
  - What school employee(s) would be best to help resolve these challenges if any?
9. Do you feel other paraeducators around you and how they feel about special education may affect your personal feelings about special education?
- If so, can you explain how you were affected?
  - Have you ever worked in a classroom with colleagues who had low self-efficacy?
  - If so, how did you cope with low self-efficacy in your daily work environment?
10. Who do you perceive is your direct supervisor?
- Does the person you identified as your direct supervisor also formally evaluates your work performance?
  - If not, why have you identified this person as your direct supervisor?
11. Does your direct supervisor provide monthly professional development sessions?
- If so, can you list some examples of session topics?
  - If not, where and how do you spend your time when students have early dismissal?
  - Were the majority of professional development sessions that you were required to participate in directly related to daily roles and/or challenges that paraeducators experience in the field?
  - If so, how did your participation in these professional development sessions help to make your job and/or challenges better over time, if at all?
  - If not, who were the professional development sessions mainly directed towards?
12. Do you have access to your direct supervisor during the instructional day if you need support?
- If so, can you explain how your direct supervisor has supported you?
  - If not, can you explain how you would like your direct supervisor to support you?

## Appendix D

### California State University, Northridge HUMAN RESEARCH PARTICIPANT INTERVIEW PROTOCOL

#### EMOTIONAL AND PHYSICAL FACTORS AMONG SPECIAL EDUCATION PARAEDUCATORS EMPLOYED IN URBAN SCHOOL SETTINGS

Timing: Today's interview will last approximately 60 minutes. Are there any questions before I get started?

#### **Special Education Teacher Interview Questions:**

**Warm up:** What drew you to the field of special education?

1. What is your job title?
  - How long have you been working under this title?
2. What are your primary responsibilities?
  - a. Describe what your typical day looks like?
3. What types of students with special needs do you work with?
  - a. What ages?
  - b. What is the severity of your student's needs?
  - c. In what type(s) of educational settings?
4. What skills did you bring to the job?
  - Describe how these skills helped you to support students with disabilities?
5. Have you ever received a copy of a paraeducator job description?
  - Upon being hired were your specific roles and paraeducator roles explained to you by a school administrator?
  - Have you ever received specific training on how to work with adults in your classroom?
6. Have you ever been confused about what tasks you could or could not ask your paraeducator to carry out?
  - What were some of those tasks?
  - What did you do to resolve your confusion?
  - Can you explain the difference between paraeducator roles versus special education teacher roles?
  - Has your paraeducator ever been mistaken for the classroom teacher by a first time visitor?
7. Is the teaching profession emotionally and/or physically demanding?
  - Can you explain what makes the job emotionally and/or physically demanding?
  - If the teaching profession is not emotionally and/or physically demanding, please explain why you feel this is so.
  - Can a teacher prevent what makes their job emotionally and/or physically demanding?
  - If so, can you list and explain what your suggestions are?

- If a teacher can't prevent what makes their job emotionally and/or physically demanding can you list and explain who and/or what they need to resolve this issue?
8. Is the paraeducator job emotionally and/or physically demanding?
- Can you explain what makes the job emotionally and/or physically demanding?
  - If the paraeducator job is not emotionally and/or physically demanding, please explain why you feel this is so.
  - Can a paraeducator prevent what makes their job emotionally and/or physically demanding?
  - If so, can you list and explain what your suggestions are?
  - If a paraeducator can't prevent what makes their job emotionally and/or physically demanding can you list and explain who and/or what they need to resolve this issue?
9. Can you list specific challenges that you face while working in special day classes within urban communities?
- Do you think these challenges would be the same for paraeducators serving in suburban or rural school communities, why or why not?
  - Can you offer any suggestions that can perhaps prevent the challenges you listed within urban communities?
  - What school employee(s) would be best to help resolve these challenges if any?
10. Do you feel other paraeducators around you and how they feel about special education may affect your personal feelings about special education?
- If so, can you explain how you were affected?
  - Have you ever worked in a classroom with paraeducators who had low self-efficacy?
  - If so, how did you cope with low self-efficacy in your daily classroom environment?
11. Who is your paraeducator's direct supervisor?
- Does the person you identified as your paraeducator's direct supervisor also formally evaluates their work performance?
  - If not, why have you identified this person as their direct supervisor?
12. Does your paraeducator's direct supervisor provide monthly professional development sessions?
- If so, can you list some examples of session topics?
  - If not, where and how does your paraeducator spend their time when students have early dismissal?
  - Does your paraeducator have access to their direct supervisor during the instructional day if they may need support?
  - If so, can you explain how their direct supervisor has supported them?
  - If not, can you explain how you would like their direct supervisor to support your paraeducator?

Appendix E

**California State University, Northridge**  
**Educational Leadership and Policy Studies Doctoral Program**  
**MEMBER CHECK GUIDE**  
*Research Participants*

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**Instructions:** Review the transcribed interview file. Using the transcribed interview file, please respond to the following questions. Once you have completed the questions, submit the form to Havaughnia.

<b>Question</b>	<b><i>Your Response</i></b>
Does the transcript accurately reflect the interview?	
Does your voice and perspective emerge in the transcript?	
Do you want to change, modify, or delete any part of the transcript?	
Do you want to add anything to the transcript that you did not say during the interview?	