

What Factors Contribute to Self-Efficacy

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Abstract

This study examined the self-efficacy of paraeducators serving students with moderate to severe disabilities in a specialized public school. Quantitative methods explored the relationship among paraeducator self-efficacy, personal factors (including work experience, age level of teaching assignment, and disability served), and organizational factors (including role of paraeducator, collaboration, professional development, job satisfaction, and supervision). Seventy-five paraeducators working in a suburban public school responded to the Paraeducator Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale and the Paraeducator Descriptive Questionnaire. Findings indicated that overall, personal or organizational factors were not predictors of self-efficacy. However, the organizational factor of job satisfaction was a significant predictor of self-efficacy, suggesting that paraeducators should be encouraged to express their wants and needs. Additionally, strong relationships were present between supervision and role definition and also between job satisfaction and collaboration.

What Factors Contribute to Self-Efficacy

Paraeducators are an integral part of special education classrooms and help to facilitate positive learning outcomes for students with disabilities (Chopra & French, 2004; Downing, Ryndak, & Clark, 2000). Historically, paraeducators worked as clerical assistants in the classroom, performing duties such as record keeping, making copies, and running errands for supervising teachers (French & Pickett, 1997). Paraeducators are now taking on an instructional role under the supervision of a general or special education teacher (Giangreco, Edelman, & Broer, 2003; Keller, Bucholz, & Brady, 2007). This shift has changed the classroom dynamic and has placed additional burdens on the paraeducator who is often unprepared to fulfill this role (Chopra, Sandoval-Lucero & French, 2011).

These new instructional burdens are experienced by paraeducators who are assigned to provide one-to-one supports for students with severe disabilities. Without supervision and clear directions from the supervising teacher, paraeducators are at risk for undermining peer interactions and hovering over their charges (Giangreco, Edelman, Luiselli, & McFarland, 1997). In addition, often paraeducators have not been trained in techniques to facilitate students with disabilities in their interactions with the rest of the class (Carter, O'Rourke, Sisco, & Pelsue, 2009). Furthermore, paraeducators often report the need for professional development when they are faced with students who have challenging behaviors or when they are asked to provide services that are beyond their skill set (Wall, Davis, Crowley, & White, 2005).

It has been well documented that paraeducators often lack time for collaboration with supervising-teachers, roles are not well-defined, and supervision is minimal from supervising teachers or other authority figures (Devlin, 2008; Downing et al., 2000; French & Pickett, 1997; Giangreco, Edelman, Broer, & Doyle, 2001; Riggs & Mueller, 2001; Walter-Thomas, 1997). Additionally, research has shown that paraeducators do not receive enough professional development, and are not given sufficient opportunities to provide reflections on their job satisfaction (Carter et al., 2009; Keller et al., 2007; Lasater, Johnson, & Fitzgerald, 2000; Patterson, 2006). However, paraeducator self-efficacy and the relationship to these variables are not well documented. These issues are becoming extremely pertinent in many school districts throughout the country as paraeducators are increasingly being thrust into more instructional roles for which they are ill prepared (Chopra et al., 2011).

Purpose and Objectives

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationships among personal and organizational factors and self-reported paraeducator self-efficacy. Personal factors were those factors that impact the paraeducator as an individual within the classroom, including amount of work experience, age level of the teaching assignment, and disability served. Personal factors such as these have not been reported in a codified manner, but only as incidental information in prior research. This study also examined self-efficacy of the paraeducator as it related to the organizational factors of collaboration, job satisfaction, professional development, role definition, and supervision. Those factors that impact the school as a whole (collectively) were defined as organizational factors. Self-efficacy was defined as the paraeducator's perceived level of capability to carry out assigned tasks.

Methods

Setting

Participants in the current study were recruited from a small suburban public school located in upstate New York. This public school serves students; ages 3-21, who require mandated special education services. It has a high teacher to paraeducator ratio, averaging approximately three paraeducators to one special education teacher. All students have Individual Educational Programs (IEP) and are in self-contained classrooms. The most common disability within the self-contained special education classrooms at this particular site was Down Syndrome (intellectual disability) followed by students who were classified as severely and profoundly intellectual disabled, autistic, and other health impaired.

Participants

Seventy-five paraeducators responded to the surveys. All paraeducators were White and Hasidic, and were either bilingual Yiddish-English speaking or trilingual Yiddish-English-Spanish speaking. All paraeducators in the school were high school graduates and were considered highly qualified as per New York State education department. To be considered highly qualified, all paraeducators must have either (a) completed two years of college (48 credit hours) or have an associate degree or higher or (b) passed a formal state or local assessment (NYSED, 2011). All paraeducators in this study have passed a local assessment that was developed by the New York University Department of Education and accepted by the NYSED.

Data Collection

The new scale, The Paraeducator Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale (see Appendix A) was devised to measure a paraeducator's beliefs in their abilities to fulfill varied levels of task demands. The Paraeducator Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale was designed to measure the extent to which paraeducators' perceived self-efficacy relates to collaboration, job satisfaction, professional development, role definition, and supervision. Participants were also asked to complete a separate 17-question demographic survey, the Paraeducator Descriptive Questionnaire (see Appendix B), in order to gather information about their background and personal factors of self-reported self-efficacy. The background information included years working as a paraeducator, years working with the same population and/or group of students, primary student disability, primary job in classroom, and number of professional development courses taken.

Data Analysis

The data were used to explore the relationships between the dependent variable of self-efficacy and the independent variables' personal factors: (a) amount of work experience; (b) age level of teaching assignment; (c) disability served and organizational factors; (d) collaboration; (e) job satisfaction; (f) professional development; (g) role definition; and (h) supervision in a special education setting. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze demographic information and for preliminary analysis of the survey. The hypothesis that there would be no difference in the personal perception of self-efficacy (dependent variable) as it relates to work experience as a paraeducator, age level of teaching assignment, and disability served (independent variables) was tested. Additionally, the hypothesis that there would be no difference in the organizational perception of self-efficacy (dependent variable) as it relates to collaboration, job satisfaction, professional development, role definition, and supervision (independent variables) was tested using regression.

Descriptive data was computed including multiple R (R denoting correlation), R square, adjusted R square and standard errors of all study variables. A regression was performed for any variables that significantly related to self-efficacy in bivariate correlations. If only one variable was significant, a linear regression was performed, but if more than one was significant, a multiple regression was performed. Additionally, Factorial Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) analyses were used to report findings. One-way ANOVAs were also used to report findings.

Findings

The Paraeducator Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale was devised by the researcher to measure a paraeducator's beliefs in their abilities to fulfill varied levels of task demands. The scale has 32 questions and employs a 5-point Likert-scale anchoring at *not at all true*, *somewhat true*, and *very true*. This measure was distributed to 106 paraeducators, of which 75 completed and returned it, resulting in a 70% return rate. The analyses used for the quantitative data included descriptive statistics, frequencies, and linear regression.

Participants were also asked to complete a researcher-generated descriptive survey, the Paraeducator Descriptive Questionnaire, in order to gather information about their background and personal factors of self-reported self-efficacy. This measure contained 17 questions. The

scale was also distributed to the same 106 paraeducators, of which 75 completed and returned it, resulting in a 70% return rate. Descriptive data responses were aggregated and analyzed using descriptive statistics which included frequencies, percentages, ranges, means, and standard deviations.

Statistical Program for Social Sciences (SPSS) Version 21 (2013) was used in the statistical analyses of data from both instruments. Statistical outcomes are presented for all research questions. All data were used to answer the three research questions relative to the examination of: (1) extent of paraeducator self-reported self-efficacy related to organizational factors, specifically, collaboration, job satisfaction, professional development, role definition, and supervision; (2) extent of paraeducator self-reported job satisfaction related to personal factors, specifically, amount of work experience, age level of teaching assignment, and disability served; and (3) how paraeducator reports of the organizational factors, collaboration with supervising teachers and supervision from supervising teachers, differ based on their assigned roles.

Organizational Factors

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviation, and Reliability of Six Organizational Factors (N=75)

Subscale	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>	<i>A</i>
Collaboration	4.06	0.69	.65
Job satisfaction	4.01	0.71	.77
Professional development	3.04	0.78	.63
Role definition	4.00	0.79	.75
Supervision	3.39	0.97	.81
Personal teaching efficacy	3.25	0.51	.56

Most of the subscale means were in the middle of the item scale; the range of the Likert Scale was 1-5. The collaboration, job satisfaction, and role definition subscales were overall relatively high, which indicates that the population has high job satisfaction and positive views of their role definition and supervision. Findings based on reliability coefficients and linear regressions were that paraeducators had relatively high job satisfaction (.75), role definition (.77), and supervision (.81).

Table 2
Intercorrelations of Organizational Factors for Self-efficacy (N=75)

Measure	1	2	3	4	5	6
1. Collaboration	—					
2. Job satisfaction	.60***	—				
3. Professional development	.13	.33**	—			
4. Role definition	.23	.20	-.02	—		
5. Supervision	.35**	.28*	-.01	.52***	—	
6. Self-efficacy	.15	.17	.10	.05	.30**	—

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

Job satisfaction was also shown to be a predictor of self-efficacy; job satisfaction statistically significantly predicted self-efficacy, $t(1, 73) = 2.67, p = .01$, and explained 8.70% of the total explained variance. These findings align with the study by Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008) which found through supporting a team approach, paraeducators and teachers collaborated and defined roles. Paraeducators reported greater job satisfaction using this model.

Personal Factors

Findings showed that paraeducators were satisfied with their jobs regardless of the personal factors. A 3x4x4 Factorial ANOVA was implemented to describe the interactions of job satisfaction with amount of work experience (years working as a paraeducator), age level of teaching assignment (student age groupings 3-5, 6-9, 10-13, and 14-21) and disability served (e.g., autism, intellectually impaired, physically impaired, and other health impaired) and none were found to be significant. The main effect for working experience was not statistically significant, $F(2, 42) = 1.32, p = .79$; neither were the main effects for disability served, $F(3, 42) = .49, p = .69$, nor age group of students, $F(3, 42) = 1.32, p = .28$. The interactions between working experience and age level, $F(5, 42) = .31, p = .90$, working experience and disability served, $F(5, 42) = .59, p = .70$, age level and disability served, $F(7, 42) = .44, p = .87$, as well as working experience by age level by primary disability, $F(4, 42) = .60, p = .66$, were not statistically significant.

Table 3
Frequencies and Age Levels of Assigned Roles (N=75)

Teaching roles	Frequency	Percentage
Age level of teaching assignment		
3-5 years old	20	26.70
6-9 years old	22	29.30
10-13 years old	17	22.70
14-21 years old	16	21.30
Primary student disability		
Autistic	10	13.30
Intellectually impaired	28	37.30
Physically impaired	24	32.00
Other health impaired	12	16.00

Table 4
Average Levels of Job Satisfaction by Working Experience, Primary Disability, and Student Age Groups (N=75)

Group	n	M	SD
Working experience			
0-5 years	44	10.84	2.92
6-10 years	17	10.82	2.78
10+ years	12	11.25	2.21

Primary disability			
Autistic	9	10.89	2.03
Intellectually impaired	28	11.32	3.06
Physically impaired	23	10.52	2.91
Other health impaired	12	10.75	2.45
Student age groups			
3-5 years old	20	10.60	3.15
6-9 years old	22	10.77	2.62
10-13 years old	16	10.38	2.92
14-21 years old	15	12.07	2.09
Overall total	75	10.90	2.76

Using two sets of one-way ANOVAs, it was found that regardless of the primary disability served, teachers and paraeducators collaborated and paraeducators were supervised. The first ANOVA assessed whether primary disability impacted the level of collaboration paraeducators had with their supervising teachers. The model was not significant, $F(3, 70) = .06, p = .98$. The second ANOVA assessed whether primary disability impacted the level of supervision received and was not statistically significant, $F(3, 70) = .46, p = .71$.

Table 5
Average Levels of Collaboration and Supervision by Primary Disability (N=75)

Group	n	M	SD
Collaboration			
Autistic	10	3.50	.53
Intellectually impaired	28	3.57	.79
Physically impaired	24	3.50	.59
Other health impaired	12	3.50	.67
Overall total	75	3.53	.66
Supervision			
Autistic	10	3.00	.67
Intellectually impaired	28	3.07	.60
Physically impaired	24	3.25	.73
Other health impaired	12	3.17	.67
Overall total	75	3.13	.66

Discussion

Organizational Factors

In the current study, linear regression findings determined job satisfaction was a statistically significant predictor of self-efficacy. This was a logical outcome because paraeducators who are satisfied in the position will also be more efficacious. Bandura's (1977) theory supports this outcome; he asserts that mastery experiences are powerful forms of efficacy because they offer examples in which a person displays skill and success. For example, a paraeducator successfully

teaches a child to complete a mathematical equation; the paraeducator identifies with the success and is reinforced for being a valued member of the paraeducator-supervising teacher team.

Additionally, it was found, though not statistically significant, that collaboration and job satisfaction had a strong relationship. Teachers and paraeducators in the school discuss student programs and ways in which they should be carried out. These positive collaborative experiences can explain the strong relationship with job satisfaction. This relationship is supported by the current findings and is also a consistent theme in literature. Chopra et al. (2011) discussed the need for collaboration among paraeducators and teachers, considering it to be fundamental for the success of school teams. French and Chopra (2006) stressed face-to-face communication on a regular schedule was vital for student and team success, and helped maintain a culture of collaboration within the classroom.

With regard to job satisfaction and professional development, the current study found job satisfaction and professional development had a moderate relationship, though not statistically significant. The importance of job satisfaction as a factor related to paraeducator professional development was confirmed by Hughes and Valle-Riestra (2008), who found paraeducators working with young children with disabilities reported high levels of job satisfaction when they received training and opportunities for professional development. Carter et al. (2009) found the same conclusion and reported that improved paraeducator training practices was one factor that increased overall job satisfaction. The school district provides professional development through in-service courses which paraeducators are required to attend. Furthermore, the paraeducators in the district have an opportunity to follow the paraeducator-to-teacher pipeline through a school partnership with a local college.

The current study also found job satisfaction and role definition had relatively high reliability coefficients, .75 and .77 respectively, which indicated the population had relatively high job satisfaction and positive views of their role definition. The finding was not statistically significant. Consistent with this study's findings, Fischer and Pleasants (2011) found salient factors of job satisfaction related to collaboration, roles, and responsibilities, such as acknowledgement of their opinions about students, inclusion in team meetings, and a school culture of collaboration that includes the paraeducator. This could explain the high reliability in the reported data. Paraeducators who have their roles defined are more accepting of supervision (Riggs, 2001). Furthermore, intersubjectivity which is a principle of Vygotsky's (1934/86) social cultural theory also supported these findings. Intersubjectivity stresses the need for peers to work together, thus promoting a collaborative environment.

Finally, the current study found strong relationships between supervision and role definition through linear regression, though not statistically significant. This finding is also consistent with common themes of supervision and role definition in the literature, with paraeducators requiring supervision under NCLB (2002) that was often provided by unwilling teachers (Chopra et al., 2011). Applying Bandura's (1977) assertion that behavior is learned observationally through modeling, supervising teachers must look beyond these circumstances and emphasize the paraeducators' potential as productive partners. This outcome was supported by French and Pickett (1997) who identified supervision as the first of five issues of concern regarding paraeducators in the classroom, another being role definition.

Using a 3 x 4 x 4 Factorial ANOVA to describe the interactions of job satisfaction with amount of work experience (years working as a paraeducator), age level of teaching assignment (student age groupings 3-5, 6-9, 10-13, and 14-21) and disability served (autism, intellectually impaired, physically impaired, and other health impaired), none were found to be significant. Findings indicated paraeducators were satisfied with their jobs regardless of personal factors.

In regard to work experience and job satisfaction, experienced paraeducators who have worked alongside supervising teachers were better able to address the needs of the students regardless of the number of years working as a paraeducator (Riggs, 2001; Chopra et al., 2004). This aligns with Vygotsky's (1934/86) principles of zone of proximal development (ZPD) and intersubjectivity. Collectively, ZPD and intersubjectivity can promote an environment within the classroom in which the teacher and paraeducator nurture a personal and professional relationship for the benefit of their students.

Using two sets of one-way ANOVAs, it was found regardless of the primary disability served, paraeducators and their assigned supervising teachers collaborated and paraeducators were supervised. Though the means of collaboration was slightly higher than that of supervision, it did not impact the ability to achieve statistical significance. One explanation of this finding was for this specific school setting; paraeducator roles may not have been clearly defined. This is supported in literature as Morgan et al. (1998) suggested defining roles and responsibilities of the paraeducator and teacher would lead to purposeful collaboration and team building. Vygotsky's (1934/86) principle of zone of proximal development provides a rationale for the collaboration and supervision of paraeducators, in that, collaboration occurs through the social interactions with a more able peer. French and Chopra (2006) also noted those teachers who displayed leadership took on a supervisory role and had defined roles for their paraeducators. The outcome of clearly defined roles was that paraeducators accepted supervision and collaborated with their assigned supervising teacher.

Implications of this Study for Education Practices at the Research Site

The results of this examination demonstrated that paraeducators at this specific setting, regardless of their grade level or disability served, collaborated and received supervision from the assigned supervising teacher. It may be useful for the school to explore the extent to which roles are defined for both supervising teachers and paraeducators. Additionally, paraeducators who received professional development were slightly more efficacious, though it was not a significant difference. Professional development provided by the school that is accessible and directed to the needs of both supervising teachers and paraeducators might produce more collaborative partnerships. Furthermore, paraeducators, though satisfied with their jobs, were not typically interested in pursuing a professional career. More opportunity for growth might be initiated by the school so future teachers could come from within the ranks of paraeducators. Lastly, based on findings in this study that paraeducators job satisfaction significantly predicted self-efficacy, it is suggested paraeducators speak-up about their wants and needs. Better communication among teachers and paraeducators may improve academic outcomes for students and collaboration among staff.

Recommendations for Future Research

In order to achieve statistical significance, it is recommended future studies utilize a larger population of subjects. Replication of this study using participants from other geographical areas and more diverse educational settings (such as inclusive schools) may provide a richer understanding of the supervising teacher-paraeducator dynamic and the relationship to the personal and organizational variables. Additionally, a paraeducator professional teaching efficacy subscale with valid and adequate psychometric properties is needed. Furthermore, future studies would benefit from adding focus groups to the research design in order to elicit a discussion of qualitative questions. After the data collection was complete, more in-depth and complex answers were revealed through casual conversations about the instrument. The current study offers a good starting point for further inquiry.

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Appendix A

Paraeducator Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale

Paraeducator Perceived Self-Efficacy Scale

Number _____

This questionnaire is designed to help us gain a better understanding of the kinds of things that create difficulties for paraeducators in their school activities. Please indicate your opinion about each of the statements below by circling the appropriate number. Your answers are confidential and will not be identified by name.

Efficacy and Collaboration

1. I can communicate to my teacher about issues in the classroom.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
2. I can collaborate with my teacher about lesson plans.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
3. I can collaborate with other paraeducators within the classroom.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
4. I can help other paraeducators with their teaching skills.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
5. Teachers can help me prepare for lessons.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5

Efficacy and Job Satisfaction

6. Professional development impacts my job satisfaction.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
7. Collaboration with a teacher impacts my job satisfaction.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
8. I am satisfied with what I achieve at work.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
9. Work conditions impact my job satisfaction.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
10. Role definition impacts my job satisfaction.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5
11. I feel good at work.
Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
1 2 3 4 5

Efficacy and Professional Development

12. I can deal with students with disabilities behaviorally because I have received professional development.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

13. I can use computers to further student learning because I have received professional development.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

14. I understand different student disabilities because I have received professional development.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

15. I am well prepared and can teach subjects that I am assigned to teach because I have received professional development.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

16. My professional development consists of learning one to one with a teacher.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

Efficacy and Supervision

17. I like to be supervised closely.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

18. I like to get frequent feedback on my performance.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

19. I like to get frequent feedback on how I prefer to be supervised.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

20. I like to discuss when activities do not go well.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

Efficacy and Role Definition

21. I like to be told how to do each task.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

22. I like to work with a lesson plan.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

23. I like having a written work schedule.

Not at all true	Somewhat True			Very True
1	2	3	4	5

24. I like to know exactly what is expected.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

Personal Self-efficacy

25. If I try really hard, I can get through to even the most difficult student.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

26. Factors beyond my control have a greater influence on my students' achievement than I do.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

27. I am good at helping all the students in my classes make significant improvement.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

28. Some students are not going to make a lot of progress this year, no matter what I do.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

29. I am certain I am making a difference in the lives of my students.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

30. There is little I can do to ensure that all my students make significant progress this year.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

31. I can deal with almost any learning problem.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

32. There are certain learning issues that I cannot deal with.
 Not at all true Somewhat True Very True
 1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B

Paraeducator Descriptive Questionnaire

Paraeducator Descriptive Questionnaire

Number _____

Please answer the questions below to the best of your ability. This information is confidential and your name will not appear anywhere on this form. This information will help provide a deeper understanding of the participants in the research study. You can use the back of this paper if you need more room to complete your answers.

1. State number of years you are working as a paraeducator.

2. State the student age group you are currently working with as a paraeducator.

3. State the primary student disability you are currently working with as a paraeducator. _____
4. State number of years you are working with this group of students.

5. State your primary job in the special education classroom.

6. How many professional development courses have you taken in the last year?

7. How often do you collaborate with your teacher throughout the day?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Rarely
 - c. Often
 - d. Very often
8. How often does your teacher supervise the work you do with the students in class?
 - a. Not at all
 - b. Rarely
 - c. Often
 - d. Very often
9. Rate how much time you *actually* spend in each area, with **1** being the most time and **4** being the least amount of time.
 - a. Instruction _____
 - b. Behavior _____
 - c. Clerical _____
 - d. Hygiene _____

10. Rate how much time you *want* to spend in each area, with **1** being the most time and **4** being the least amount of time.
- a. Instruction _____
 - b. Behavior _____
 - c. Clerical _____
 - d. Hygiene _____
11. Rate which part of your job you like the most and which you like the least, with **1** being the most and **4** being the least.
- a. Instruction _____
 - b. Behavior _____
 - c. Clerical _____
 - d. Hygiene _____
12. Do you like your job? Circle Yes or No
13. What disability would you prefer to serve in the classroom?
14. What age level would you prefer to teach?
15. Describe how the professional development courses you have taken in the past made you a better paraeducator.
16. Describe how you collaborate with your teacher throughout the day.
17. Describe how your teacher supervises the work you do with the students in class or do you design your own lesson plans?