3-21-2019

Understanding alternative education student self-efficacy related to experiential and organizational factors

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UNDERSTANDING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION STUDENT SELF-EFFICACY RELATED TO EXPERIENTIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS

by

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A Dissertation

Submitted to the
Department of Educational Services and Leadership
College of Education
In partial fulfillment of the requirement
For the degree of
Doctor of Educational
at
Rowan University
March 6, 2019

Dissertation Chair: JoAnn B. Manning, Ed.D.

Acknowledgements

To Mom and Dad. You have supported my dreams for the past 30 years. Thank you for giving value to my education.

To Matt. You bring out the best in me. Thank you for drying my sad tears and being the reason for happy ones.

To Carson and Luke. Your happiness is our greatest achievement. Thank you both for being a daily reminder of what is important in life.

To Geno. You have laid right beside me since the start of this journey. Thank you for greeting me with excitement every day.

To Our Village. They say it takes a village to raise a child. I am proof it takes a village to earn a doctorate.

To My Committee. Dr. Manning, Dr. Mitani, and Dr. Sun. You have shown me unwavering support throughout this process. Thank you for pushing me further than I knew possible.

Grandma. To whom the pseudonym Kane School District is named after. You were the greatest cheerleader of your grandchildren. We hope to be making you proud.

Abstract

Megan Maczonis Brown
UNDERSTANDING ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION STUDENT SELF-EFFICACY RELATED TO EXPERIENTIAL AND ORGANIZATIONAL FACTORS
2018-2019
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Doctor of Education

The need for a high school diploma is a social justice concern as the consequences of not earning a diploma or equivalent degree are lower income, higher crime rates, and poorer health (McClatchy, 2013; NCES, 2015; NCES, 2017; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Thrane, 2006). The median earnings of young adults with a high school diploma or a bachelor's degree were 22 and 100 percent higher respectively than those without a high school diploma. Additionally, lower levels of educational attainment are related to higher rates of arrests and incarceration as well as higher levels of health related issues (Eby, 2013; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Thrane, 2006). In addition to the social justice need for a high school diploma, the experiences of alternative education students impact student self-efficacy levels. A high level of self-efficacy is related to enhanced resilience, increased positive self-image, and prosocial behavior (Diekstra, 2008; O'Conner et al., 2017). The key themes of this study are which experiential (student prior knowledge, student sense of belonging, teacher pedagogy, extracurricular activities) and organizational (class size, time of day school occurs, flexible student schedules, leadership practices) factors relate to student self-efficacy levels. Better understanding the self-efficacy of students participating in alternative education programs could advance policies, practice and future research aimed at improving influential leadership practices.

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Chapter 1

Introduction

The landscape of public education is transforming in parallel with the changing needs of the students it serves. Public education in the United States does not look the same for all students in terms of the organization of facilities, curricula, and student experiences. A growing number of high school students are enrolling in alternative education programs (AEPs) in the United States (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). Students enrolling in AEPs have struggled in traditional public school settings, typically exhibiting attendance, academic performance, and behavioral issues. AEPs aim to help these students avoid falling within the almost six percent of high school students who drop out of school each year before earning their high school diplomas (National Center for Education Statistics [NCES], 2015). To combat the dropout rate, many public school districts have thus developed their own AEP for students (Carver et al., 2010; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009).

Research has attributed three overarching themes to the unique experience of alternative education students: the impact of constructivism on student learning, the organization of AEPs, and the emphasis on self-efficacy in education (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Hoover, 1996; McBrien et al., 1997; van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002; Gecas, 2004; Leithwood & Levin, 2010; Lunenburg, 2011; Bush, 2015). These three factors have the potential to set students up for success in their academic goal of obtaining a high school diploma.

To examine the self-efficacy levels of alternative education students (AESs), this phenomenological research study has applied a quantitative research approach intersected

with a secondary method of collecting descriptive data from interviews. This two-part study aims to answer the following research questions:

- *What are the general perceived self-efficacy levels of alternative education students in Kane School District?*
- *What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and experiential factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District?*
- *What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and organizational factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District?*
- *To what extent are the experiential and organizational factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District related?*

This study aims to generate better understanding of the factors that influence student self-efficacy levels. Understanding these factors enables this study to recommend practices for how educational leaders can appropriately organize and construct learning environments and experiences to better serve AESs (Schunk, 1991).

This first chapter of the study outlines the research gap, highlighting what needs to be researched in order to address the limited attention that has been paid to the self-efficacy of AESs. This chapter also describes the conceptual framework used in designing the research questions and the methodology that has guided this study. The second chapter is the foundation on which the study has been built and acts as a basis for discussing results, findings, and implications. The review of literature describes results from previous studies and identifies the theoretical considerations used in the development of this study. The third chapter describes the methods that were taken in order to conduct the study. Namely, quantitative research occurred according to a

constructivist view, which pushes researchers to seek a better understanding of the world in which we live, work, and learn (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2003; Edmonds & Kennedy, 2017; Thibodeau, 2011). Through a quantitative research design, subjective meanings of experiences and the particular phenomena of AES self-efficacy have been developed. In the fourth chapter, the factual findings and results of the study are presented, organized around the four research questions. In the fifth and final chapter, implications and recommendations are made based on the findings and within the context of the existing literature, best leadership practices, and recommendations for future studies.

Background

Alternative education programs are a public education option outside the category of regular, special, or vocational education. AEPs are for students who may otherwise choose to drop out of high school or who are at risk of being moved to correctional settings. To combat the current high school dropout rate of almost six percent, public school districts have developed alternative schools and programs for their students (NCES, 2015). Currently, there is no federal definition for alternative programs as the continuous expansion of school, curriculum, and program types complicates efforts to define even traditional schooling (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014).

Previously, alternative education and self-efficacy have been researched as separate ideas. This study couples the two ideas and thereby adds to the literature, as little attention has been paid to the self-efficacy of AESs relative to the self-efficacy of public high school students in the United States. The existing literature has defined alternative education, explored the organization of AEPs, explained the impact of constructivism on

student learning, and described the role of self-efficacy in education. The literature has not, however, independently created a comprehensive understanding of student self-efficacy and its role in the academic performance of AESs. This study addresses this research gap by uncovering the experiences and practices of how educational leaders can organize and construct learning environments and experiences to better serve AESs.

It is important to understand the phenomena of the self-efficacy of AESs because an increasing number of children are discouraged every day as a result of being unsuccessful in traditional public education settings (Lehr et al., 2009; Lehr & Lange, 2003). Unfortunately, this discouragement leads to many students dropping out of school prior to earning their high school diplomas. AEPs are designed to provide students with an environment that has adjusted both its teaching and learning in order to meet the needs of all learners. AEPs aim to help students regain their confidence and uncover personal interests by appealing to individual needs. Additionally, studying AESs is particularly important because without AEPs, the number of students dropping out of high school may increase and widen the socioeconomic gap between high school diploma recipients and dropouts (Lehr et al., 2009; Lehr & Lange, 2003).

Research Problem

Alternative education programs help increase the number of students earning their high school diploma. The need for a high school diploma is a social justice concern. Dropping out of high school directly relates to lower income, higher community crime rates, and poorer health (McClatchy, 2013; NCES, 2017; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Thrane, 2006). The pay gap between individuals who do and do not hold a high school diploma or equivalent is prevalent in today's society (NCES, 2015). The median earnings

of young adults with a high school diploma (30,500 USD) and young adults with a bachelor's degree (50,000 USD) were 22 and 100 percent higher respectively than those of young adults without a high school diploma (25,000 USD). Additionally, states could save in annual crime costs if high school male graduation rates increased by 5 percentage points (McClatchy, 2013). The impact of education on crime reduction builds upon research that links lower levels of educational attainment with higher rates of arrests and incarceration (Eby, 2013). Finally, the more schooling people have the better their health is likely to be (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). More education is consistently associated with lower death rates, while less education leads to higher levels of risky health behaviors such as smoking, being overweight, or having a low level of physical activity (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Thrane, 2006).

In addition to the social justice need for a high school diploma, the experiences of AESs may impact self-efficacy levels. According to recent statistics, a high level of self-efficacy is coupled with enhanced resilience, increased positive self-image, and prosocial behavior such as being helpful and selfless (Diekstra, 2008; O'Conner et al., 2017). Additionally, high levels of self-efficacy also lead to reducing violence and improving grades and test scores in school (Diekstra, 2008; O'Conner et al., 2017; Price, Biehl, Solomon, & Weir, 2014). Better understanding the self-efficacy of students participating in AEPs could advance policies, research, and other efforts aimed at improving influential leadership practices.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is to understand the self-efficacy of AESs and to uncover what experiential and organizational factors lead to particularly high levels of

student self-efficacy. A quantitative research approach with an intersecting secondary method has been adopted to collect quantitative data via surveys and descriptive data from follow-up interviews. The survey data were collected from all students enrolled in Kane School District's Extension School (pseudonym) to determine levels of self-efficacy relative to experiential and organizational factors. After the quantitative data were analyzed, the researcher conducted interviews to clarify and explain the quantitative findings.

Conceptual Framework

Factors based on constructivist learning theory and organizational theory may impact the experiences of AESs and the organization of AEPs. Additionally, student educational experiences may be related to students' own levels of self-efficacy. As a result, the implications of the study may lead to recommendations as to how AEPs can best be organized and create meaningful student experiences in order to encourage and facilitate the development of high levels of student self-efficacy.

Organizational Theory

AEPs consist of multiple, interdependent parts that collectively form more than the sum of their parts (Barr, 2012). These independent parts include but are not limited to the structure, culture, and context of the educational institution. The interactions between the parts of the system are seen as purposeful, fluid, and interconnected (Barr, 2012).

Bush (2015) observes that the purposes of an organization lie at the heart of theory and practice in education. An AEP is influenced by the structure, culture, and context of its organization. Structure is one of the most visible aspects of an AEP, but it may also differentiate between AEPs. An AEP may have either a vertical or horizontal

structure. There is also tension between 'fixed' structures, with little regard for individual talents and experience, and 'flexible' structures, which adapt to suit the capabilities of staff.

The culture of an organization tends to be invisible (Bush, 2015). In AEPs, the culture is based around the desire to give all students an opportunity to succeed. Though the values and beliefs entailed in that aim are intangible, they relate to the development and sustainability of a positive school culture.

While AEPs are now a feature of almost every state across the United States, there is growing recognition of the importance of context (Leithwood et al.,1999). A large school in a big city in a highly developed country is very different from a small rural school in a developing country. These differences pose a challenge for organizational theorists who assume that educational reform models are universally applicable. The influence of context is displayed partly through the relationship between the organization and its external environment (Bush, 2015).

Additionally, organizational theory also helps determine who establishes the goals of an organization, whether all stakeholders will embrace the goals, and what leadership styles the administration and staff embody (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Bush, 2015). Varied leadership styles may impact the culture of the school and influence the experiences of students differently within and across AEPs (Evans, 2001; Leithwood & Levin, 2010; Weick & Quinn, 1994).

Constructivist Learning Theory

The structure, culture, and context of an AEP are related to how students expand their knowledge of information previously learned in traditional public school settings.

Constructivism is a pedagogical framework that concerns how a learner makes meaning and creates new knowledge by building on their prior knowledge (Hoover, 1996; McBrien et al., 1997). The theory of constructivism implicitly recognizes that not all students come to the classroom possessing the same set of beliefs and values. Constructivism assumes that all knowledge is constructed from a learner's previous knowledge, regardless of how one is taught (Hoover, 1996; McBrien et al., 1997). Thus, the way in which students experience previous teaching practices impacts how they create new knowledge.

Theorists Piaget and Vygotsky believe in two different versions of constructivist learning. Piaget believes that a constructivist classroom must provide a variety of activities to challenge students to accept individual differences, increase their readiness to learn, discover new ideas, and construct their own knowledge. Vygotsky believes that learning is a collaborative activity and that cognitive development occurs through socialization. Further, Vygotsky explains that when students are exposed to discussions, research collaborations, electronic information resources, and project groups, learning occurs through assisted discovery (as cited in Wilson, 1987).

Regardless of students being in a "Piagetian Classroom" or a "Vygotskian Classroom" though, the learning situations in AEPs impact students by providing new meanings to learning and enabling students to become active, rather than passive, participants in the classroom (Hoover, 1996; McBrien et al, 1997). Ultimately, each student enters an AEP with a different background and may construct their experiences differently. The relationship between organizational and constructivist theories play a role in what an AEP looks and feels like to the AESs.

Self-Efficacy Theory

Self-efficacy theory supports the idea that individuals are more likely to engage in activities for which they have high self-efficacy and less likely to engage in activities for which they do not (van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002). The self-efficacy of individuals is driven by how their own personal motivation is related to their success in a particular situation. Ultimately, self-efficacy has influence over people's abilities to learn, their motivations, and their performances, as people will often attempt to learn and perform only when they believe they will be successful (Gecas, 2004; Lunenburg, 2011). Students have some level of self-efficacy prior to being enrolled in an AEP. This level can, however, change. A shift from a low level of self-efficacy to a high level of self-efficacy may positively influence a student's future ability to overcome difficult tasks, such as obtaining a high school diploma.

According to Bandura's theory and research relating to self-efficacy, a high or low level of self-efficacy can make a difference in people's perceptions of the outcomes of their actions (as cited in Zulkosky, 2009). People with low self-efficacy tend to have low self-esteem and feel pessimistic about their accomplishments and development (Zulkosky, 2009). In contrast, people with high self-efficacy tend to have high motivation and view difficult tasks as challenges instead of obstacles (Zulkosky, 2009). As Bandura (1989) summarizes, "People's self-efficacy beliefs determine their level of motivation, as reflected in how much effort they will exert in an endeavor and how long they will persevere in the face of obstacles" (p. 1176). The obstacle of successfully earning a high school diploma is influenced by a student's self-efficacy level.

Student Experiences

Student experiences play two roles in the conceptual framework used for this study. An AEP as a whole impacts the experiences of students due to the organization of the program, personnel, curriculum, and course offerings. Previous student experiences both inside and outside of an AEP also impact self-efficacy levels. Experiences outside of AEPs may be either negative or positive. For example, negative student experiences with discipline problems can lead to students not wanting to return to school altogether (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). In comparison, having a supportive family can help students feel empowered to share their stories. Students may reflect on their placements in AEPs as a second chance to reach their own goals (Hutchinson, Wilson, & Wilson; 1994; Morrissette, 2011).

Alternative Education Student Self-Efficacy

From an outside perspective, it is possible to measure student confidence and self-esteem levels. Body language and other non-verbal cues help educators begin to understand their students' feelings and perceptions. Understanding student self-efficacy, however, uncovers deeper feelings and perceptions. Research has shown that self-efficacy beliefs are some of the better predictors of behavior (Schunk, 1991). Further, when comparing self-efficacy to self-esteem, efficacy is a better predictor of academic outcomes than self-esteem (Schunk, 1991). With a better understanding of the self-efficacy levels of AESs, educational leaders can organize and construct learning environments appropriately.

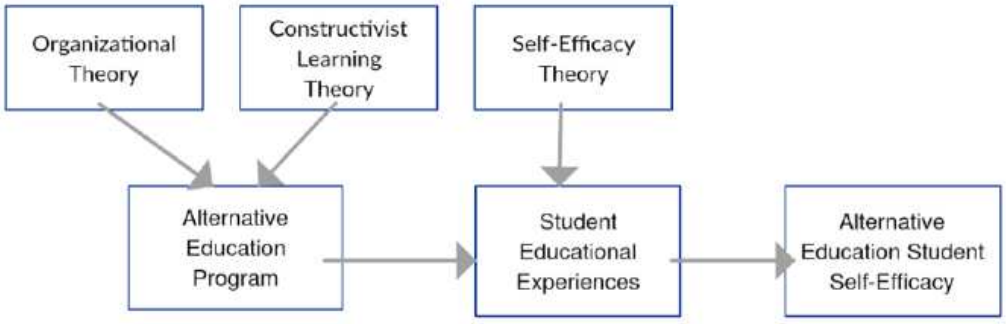

Figure 1.Conceptual Framework

Significance of the Study

The results of this study have the potential to contribute to the development of effective policies and best practices in AEPs. The organization and structure of AEPs across the United States are varied and inconsistent (NCES, 2016). While the autonomy across states and school districts allows schools to create programs that work within their own schedules, with their own personnel, and with their available funding, the results of this study may imply that certain necessary standards should be followed by all AEPs to ensure that the needs of AESs are met. Additionally, this study aims to fill gaps in the literature where little understanding of the self-efficacy of AESs exists.

The implications from the findings of this study may empower others in academia to continue researching the expanding landscape of alternative education. The findings of this study relating to influential organizational practices will quickly impact student experiences as curricula offerings and interactions with school leaders occur on a daily

basis. Based on the previous and present experiences of AESs, this study will also not only indicate which organizational practices positively impact their experiences, but will also shed light on examples of organizational practices that hinder student progress in completing an AEP and obtaining a high school diploma (Leithwood & Levin, 2010; Means, 2015).

Definition of Key Terms

Administrators. Administrators include the superintendent, curriculum coordinators, principals and vice principals. These individuals make district-level decision.

Alternative education leaders (AELs). The one (or more) principal(s) in charge of the district's alternative education program.

Alternative education teachers (AETs). Certified individuals hired to teach in a school district's alternative education program

Experiential factors. Aspects of alternative education students' academic experience. Experiential factors being explored in this study are student prior knowledge, student sense of belonging, teacher pedagogy, and extracurricular activities.

Prior knowledge. The amount of academic knowledge a student enters with into an alternative education program (Hoover, 1996; McBrien et al., 1997).

Sense of belonging. The sense of acceptance, trust, and belonging students feel when enrolled in an alternative education program (Hansen, 1998; Raywid, 1994; Swaminathan, 2004).

Teacher pedagogy. Strategies used by alternative education teachers to engage students while being cognizant of students' home, school, and social life struggles (Ahn & Simpson, 2013; May & Copeland, 1998).

Extracurricular. Activities and programs that occur outside of the classroom that students are involved in (Ahn & Simpson, 2013).

Organizational factors. Aspects of the structure of alternative education programs. Organizational factors being explored in this study are class size, time of day, flexible scheduling options, and leadership practices.

Class size. The number of students in an alternative education program's academic class (Bush, 2005; Raywid, 1994).

Time of day. The hours when students attend an alternative education program (Bush, 2015).

Flexible scheduling. The opportunity for students to enroll in academic courses less than 5 days a week, as well as the opportunity for students to move between classes throughout the year as needed to earn credits (Raywid, 1994).

Leadership. The style of leadership practiced by alternative education leaders. This style could be instructional, democratic, moral, and/or transformational.

Parabolic trend. An increase then decrease in the dependent variable as the independent variable increases.

Self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is the belief individuals have in their own ability to meet challenges and/or complete a task successfully (Bandura, 1997)

Summary

The expanding landscape of alternative education in the United States, as well as the reality of the socioeconomic gap that exists between individuals with and without a high school diploma, has led to the need to better understand the students enrolled in AEPs. This research study helps enhance understanding of the self-efficacy of these students and sheds light on their experiential and organizational needs in order to lead more students towards a high level of self-efficacy. The following chapter explores the existing literature surrounding AEPs and the theories that play roles in the experiences and self-efficacy of the students that AEPs serve.

Chapter 2

Literature Review

The following literature review explores the self-efficacy of alternative education students (AESs) in public high schools in the United States. It focuses on the following four areas relating to alternative education: defining alternative education as a concept, outlining the structure of alternative education programs (AEPs), and identifying the alternative education population and personnel. The literature review then discusses theoretical considerations: organizational theory, constructivist learning theory, and self-efficacy theory. The aim of this study is to improve the understanding of the factors that influence the self-efficacy of students who enroll in AEPs. This aim has been defined based on the existing literature.

Defining Alternative Education

The term *alternative education* refers to all educational activities outside of the traditional K-12 system (Lehr & Lange, 2003). More specifically, the term describes programs serving students who are struggling or underperforming in mainstream environments (Argyris, 1974; Aron, 2006; Lehr et al., 2009; Lehr & Lange, 2003; McKee & Connor, 2007; Moore, 1978; Raywid, 1983, 1994; Watson, 2011; Wilson, 1976). In 1998, only twenty-two states had a formal definition of alterantive education; in 2002 that number increased to thirty-four. As of 2016, the NCES (2016) found that fourty-three states have developed a definition of alternative education. In the state of New Jersey, an AEP is a comprehensive educational program delivered in a non-traditional learning environment that is distinct and separate from the existing general or special education program.

Furthermore, in New Jersey, AEPs are classified as programs needed in order to support student development. Programs to support student development include school health services, physical examinations, intervention and referral services, substance use programs, school safety and security, student discipline, reporting of abused or neglected child situations, and home instruction and approved AEPs (New Jersey Administrative Code [N.J.A.C.] 6A: 16). The literature suggests that a state's definition of alternative education should include the program's target population, physical setting, services provided, and structure of learning (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014). The New Jersey Department of Education specifies minimum standards for district boards of education in establishing policies and procedures and in operating programs to support the social, emotional, and physical development of students (N.J.A.C., 6A: 16).

According to recent statistics, alternative education in the United States primarily serves students with behavioral problems. The most common alternative education services include comprehensive academic instruction, individual and group counseling, the development of social and life skills, and behavioral services (Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014). In comparison with traditional public education — in which students adjust to a standardized structure and curriculum — alternative education offers students the opportunity to learn using their own style at their own pace academically, behaviorally, and therapeutically (Raywid, 1994; Morrissette, 2011). Alternative education programs are unique in their population of students, the structure of the school day, the placement of students, and the resources available.

Alternative education programs help increase the number of students earning their high school diploma. The need for a high school diploma is a social justice concern.

Dropping out of high school directly relates to lower income, higher community crime rates, and poorer health (McClatchy, 2013; NCES, 2017; Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Thrane, 2006). The pay gap between individuals who do and do not hold a high school diploma or equivalent is prevalent in today's society (NCES, 2015). The median earnings of young adults with a high school diploma (30,500 USD) and young adults with a bachelor's degree (50,000 USD) were 22 and 100 percent higher respectively than those of young adults without a high school diploma (25,000 USD). Additionally, states could save in annual crime costs if high school male graduation rates increased by 5 percentage points (McClatchy, 2013). The impact of education on crime reduction builds upon research that links lower levels of educational attainment with higher rates of arrests and incarceration (Eby, 2013). Finally, the more schooling people have the better their health is likely to be (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). More education is consistently associated with lower death rates, while less education leads to higher levels of risky health behaviors such as smoking, being overweight, or having a low level of physical activity (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Thrane, 2006).

Alternative Education Structure

The physical and organizational structures of alternative education facilities vary across districts and states. Establishing an AEP focuses more on organizational structure and curriculum than it does on a school's leadership and culture (Means, 2015).

Alternative schools. At the federal level, an alternative school is defined as "a public school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides non-traditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular schools, or is outside the categories of regular, special, or vocational education" (Sable, Plotts, &

Mitchell, 2010, p. 61). Alternative schools are usually housed in a separate facility where students are removed from the traditional school congregation (Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014).

Alternative programs. Alternative programs are typically housed inside a traditional K-12 school (Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014). Currently, there is no federal definition for alternative educational programs (AEPs). This may be due to the continuous expansion of schools and changes taking place in curriculum and program types that complicate the definition of traditional schooling (Aron & Zweig, 2003; Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014). In an effort to categorize these establishments, Raywid (1994) provides a framework for three types of AEPs. They are as follows:

Type I. Type I programs are full-time, multi-year, academic education options for a variety of learners. This type of AEP is generally recommended for those needing more individualization, those seeking an innovative or challenging curriculum, or dropouts wishing to earn their diplomas. A full instructional program is typically available, and these programs offer students the credits needed for graduation. Type I programs are designed to incorporate caring staff, small classes, career counseling and a personalized, whole-student approach (Raywid, 1994).

Type II. Type II programs focus on discipline and aim to segregate, contain, and reform disruptive students (Raywid, 1994). Students typically do not choose to attend these programs, but are rather sent for specified time periods until behavior requirements are met. Academically, the curriculum in Type II programs is limited to a few basic courses (Raywid, 1988). Disciplinary alternative education programs (DAEPs) are common Type II programs (Aron, 2003; Aron, 2006; Raywid, 1994). DAEPs serve as

alternative education settings for students temporarily removed from their regular instructional settings for disciplinary purposes. These programs have become increasingly common throughout the United States as a response to school crime, violence, and classroom disruptions (Education Commission of the States, 2007).

Type III. Type III programs are short-term therapeutic settings for students with social and emotional struggles. These programs bridge the gap between academic and emotional stress. The curriculum of Type III programs focuses on counseling, social services, and academic remediation (Gregg, 1998; Raywid, 1988). Type II and III AEPs rest on the assumption that a problem lies within the student. In contrast, Type I programs assume the perspective that difficulties may be a result of a poor student-school match.. Thus, Type I programs are designed around the idea that a change in services may alter a student's performance and achievement (Morrissette, 2011).

Alternative Education Population

Alternative education schools and programs serve as a potential solution for students who are unable to be successful in traditional school settings (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Lehr & Lange, 2003; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). Alternative education is often considered a final option for students before either dropping out of school or moving into correctional settings. Public school districts have developed alternative schools and programs for their students in order to combat the current high school dropout rate of almost six percent (NCES, 2015). The current dropout rate has been determined by the percentage of 16 to 24-year-olds who are not enrolled in school and have not earned a high school credential — either a diploma or equivalent such as a GED certificate (NCES, 2016). Ultimately, alternative education settings support youth with an

assortment of behavioral needs and challenges in a variety of settings (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009).

Alternative education schools and programs, including those housed in juvenile detention centers, serve approximately 645,500 youth in the United States (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). Public school districts report transferring youth to alternative education settings for a variety of reasons. Between 12% and 50% of these youth have disabilities, and most are placed in restrictive settings as a result of significant behavior challenges (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; Quinn et al., 2006). According to recent studies, most AESs have previous experiences with inconsistent attendance, lack of academic achievement, and/or increasing behavioral issues (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Foley & Pang, 2006; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009).

AEPs are predominately located in high-need urban school districts (Carver & Lewis, 2010; Kim, 2010). Students in these programs are perceived as "poor, ethnic minorities, who have limited English proficiency, or who are from lower- or working-class family backgrounds, rendering alternative schools subject to social, political and educational inequalities" (Kim, 2019, p. 90). These student characteristics are the same traits that put students at risk of dropping out of high school.

Attendance. One of the leading indicators of a successful school system is its attendance rate (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Hamden, 2016). This is because students who do not attend school regularly are more likely to fall behind and eventually drop out compared with their peers who attend regularly (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Hamden, 2016). According to recent studies, 53% of students enrolled in AEPs have previously

been truant in a traditional education setting (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010).

Different states and jurisdictions define truancy differently. In Texas, students are considered truant if they have more than three unexcused absences within one month (Lindstadt, 2005). The Colorado Foundation for Families and Children identifies truants as children between the ages of seven and sixteen who skip school in excess of four days without an acceptable excuse. New Jersey, similar to Texas, California, and other states, follows attendance regulations (*N.J.A.C.* 6A:16-7.6) requiring each district board of education to develop, adopt, and implement policies and procedures regarding the truancy and attendance of students. These are to include the adoption of a definition of an "unexcused absence" that counts towards truancy. In New Jersey, the compulsory education law (New Jersey Statuses Annotated [*N.J.S.A.*] 18A: 38-28 through 31) requires all children between the ages of 6-16 to attend school.

Academic achievement. According to recent statistics, 57% of students enrolled in AEPs have experienced chronic academic failures (Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009; Carver, Leis, & Tice, 2010). Providing the least restrictive learning environment for all students to thrive has dominated discussions of special education since the implementation of The Education of All Handicapped Children Act of 1975 (Connor & Ferri, 2007; Lindsey, 1983). This act mandates that all learning-disabled children receive a public education as close to their non-handicapped peers as possible. A recent study compares grade point averages of students receiving regular education (2.86), special education (2.17), and alternative education (1.88) in large comprehensive high schools in California (Wiest et al., 2001). As shown, the study reveals a significant difference

between the three categories of programs (Wiest et al., 2001). The services provided in alternative settings seek to provide students with the greatest opportunity (or the least restrictive environment) to grow academically and socially. Thus, all students enrolled in alternative education schools and programs are not receiving special education services. Simply put, a student does not need to have a clinically identified handicap in order to benefit from instructional accommodations in an AEP.

Behavior. According to a study conducted by the NCES (2016), districts reported that students tend to be enrolled in alternative education schools and programs due to physical violence (61%), drug-related issues (57%), disruptive verbal behavior (57%), continual academic failure (57%), chronic truancy (53%), and weapon-related charges (51%). Additionally, the placement of these students occurs primarily by regular school staff (75%). This is followed by placement by counselors (71%), administrators (54%), parent request (48%), and student request (41%). These statistics show the heterogeneous nature of alternative school and program attendance.

Additionally, studies reveal that behavioral issues are indicators of the likelihood of a student dropping out of high school (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). Experiences with discipline problems can lead to students not wanting to return to school altogether (Jimerson & Ferguson, 2007; Stearns & Glennie, 2006). Many students are pushed out of traditional school settings due to discipline problems that have led to suspensions or expulsions. According to statistics, discipline programs include one or more of the following: physical aggression; disruptive verbal behavior; possession, distribution, or use of controlled substances; possession or use of firearms or other weapons; and arrests or involvement with the criminal justice system (Carver,

Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). Due to the variance in attendance, academic, and behavioral needs, there is also a variance in the structure of alternative education schools and programs.

One of the major findings of Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke's (2009) study was that the students enrolled in AEPs face multiple challenges and have a variety of needs. These needs include behavior problems, poor attendance, and/or learning difficulties. To address the multiple needs of these students, appropriate staffing is necessary.

Alternative Education Personnel

The "alternative" nature of an unconventional education program rests on the resources available such as time, location, and personnel (Raywid, 1994). The very essence of alternative education programs is formed by the curriculum needs of the attending students. These needs may change as the students entering the program change. Student needs are not standardized. Therefore, the curricula offerings are not standardized (Raywid, 1994). Alternative education leaders, teachers and outside agencies work together to meet the needs of the growingly unique alternative education population.

Leaders. In public school districts, there are multiple administrators, but among those administrators, there are only a few alternative education leaders (AELs) (Raywid, 1994). Administrators look to the AELs for information pertaining to the district's alternative program. AELs believe that their role has the potential to assist in the implementation and execution of alternative education practices within their district (Gode, 2012). In order to expand the network of AELs, the Educational Service Center of Central Ohio offers a forum for AELs to meet 3 times a year to share evidence-based

practices, facilitate peer-to-peer learning, promote collaborative problem solving (ESCCO, 2018). Similar networks exist in Illinois and California that create a space for alternative leaders to collaborate.

A previous study by Gode (2012) researched the role of AELs. The study found that AELs believe that the effectiveness of alternative education programs is dependent on the goals of the district and the student population their program serves. AELs indicated that there are measures of effectiveness that are official measures, as prescribed by the district, and unofficial measures that leaders use when considering their student population (Duke & Greisdorn, 1999; Gode, 2012; Lange et al, 2002). Gode (2012) also found that budgetary factors, including on-going cuts and inadequate resources for particular student groups, impact the AELs' ability to maintain effectiveness in their alternative education program.

Teachers. Alternative education teachers (AETs) in public school districts are certified to teach in traditional education programs and may also teach in an alternative program (Zimmerman, 2003). Effective programs have a student and teacher population that *chooses* to be involved in such programs (Conley, 2002; Garrison, 1987; Groves, 1998; Smith, Gregory, & Pugh, 1981). The choice to teach in an alternative education program may come with little to no preparation for teaching in an alternative environment (Zimmerman, 2003). With preparation and additional support, teachers are likely to stay in current positions for 5 years or more, as opposed to teachers staying in positions for less than 5 years with limited training (Burstein et al, 2009).

Outside agencies. In addition to alternative education leaders and teachers, alternative schools and programs collaborate with outside agencies to identify students in need and provide appropriate services. These collaborations occur with the criminal justice system, community mental health agencies, child protective services, police departments, drug and alcohol clinics, and crisis intervention centers (Porowski, O'Conner, & Luo, 2014). As the needs of students develop, the amount of time spent collaborating with particular agencies shifts accordingly.

Theoretical Considerations

This study was designed with various theoretical considerations. While its theoretical framework is driven by existing theory, this study further guides the research through the phases of data collection and analysis (Bogdan & Biklen, 2007). The theoretical framework used in this study stems from the ideas of organizational theory, constructivist learning theory, and self-efficacy theory.

Organizational theory. Organizations consist of multiple interdependent factors that collectively form more than the sum of their parts. Interactions between parts of the system are seen as purposeful, and boundaries are esteemed as permeable. Likewise, cause and effect are considered as dynamic, nonlinear processes (Barr, 2012). As a topic within systems theory, organizational theory investigates micro-organizational behaviors (such as individual and group dynamics) and macro-organizational issues (such as structural power relations). More recently, ideas have emerged from the meso-organizational level, which focuses on local cultures and information networks (Helme, Jones, & Coyler, 2005; Reeves, Lewin, Espin, & Zwarenstein, 2010).

Organizational theory plays a role in the experience of AESs and the degree to which alternative education impacts academic performance on micro, macro, and meso levels. The organizational factors of AEPs include the structure, culture, and context they create for students. The structure, culture, and context of AEPs include ideas of organizational theory by considering what the goals of the program are and how the program is organized in order to meet said goals. Organizational theory helps determine who establishes the goals of an organization and whether the goals are embraced by all stakeholders (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Bush, 2015).

Structure. The structure of an AEP may be either fixed or flexible. Fixed structured AEPs have little regard for individual needs, but meet previously established standards set by local and state governances. For example, a fixed AEP may meet national, state, and local standards set by appointed officials. However, said AEP is likely not to be a least restrictive or most encouraging environment for individual students. Conversely, flexible structures adapt to the needs of stakeholders (Bush, 2015). A flexible structure may still follow national, state, and local standards while adjusting how the program looks and acts within those standards. For example, Type I AEPs provide options for a variety of learners in a public school setting with the ultimate goal of students earning a high school diploma (Raywid, 1994). Class size and scheduling options are flexible aspects of AEP structure that may impact an AEP as a whole.

Culture. Organizational theory also explores the culture of an institution. The culture is intangible and is based on the values and beliefs of the community (Bush, 2015). The culture of type I programs may initially mirror that of the traditional school in which the students previously attended. Type II organizations reflect the culture of the

behavioral needs of the students who attend, and type III organizations reflect the culture of the social and emotional needs of the attending students. While all three types of AEPs may have varying cultures, they share the goal of educating a unique population that was unsuccessful in traditional public education settings. Sense of belonging is an aspect of an AEP's culture that may impact an AEP holistically. The sense of belonging a student feels in an AEP is also related to organizational theory and the culture that is established.

Context. There is a growing focus on recognizing the importance of context in deeply understanding schools (Bush, 2015; Leithwood et al., 1999). The context of the organization describes the physical location of the institution, including time and facility offerings. The context often overlaps with the construction of an organization, as the structure, including academic offerings, rests on facility and personnel availability.

The United States Department of Education's working definition of an alternative school or program is "a public elementary/secondary school that addresses needs of students that typically cannot be met in a regular school, provides non-traditional education, serves as an adjunct to a regular school, or falls outside the categories of regular, special education or vocational education" (Young, 2002, p. 55). When considering the organizational context of AEPs, the least restrictive environment is at the forefront of administrators and program developers' minds as they reflect on how learners in an alternative context can receive a public education as close to traditional education as possible. In considering each of the five aspects of organizational theory, alternative education institutions use each aspect as a guide to develop their own school or program. The time of day an AEP operates is also an aspect of the context of an AEP that may impact an AEP as a whole.

Leadership. Means (2015) states that the structure of an AEP focuses more on organizational opportunities and curriculum needs than it does on a school's leadership and culture. However, the leadership and culture of an educational program plays a role in student experience (Leithwood & Levin, 2010). Among the 43 states that have created their own working definition of AEPs, only one state (North Carolina) includes "leadership" in its definition. Leadership is described in education using a variety of adjectives, such as instructional, democratic, moral, and transformational. These labels capture different styles or methods used in order to read two of the same objectives: helping the organization set a defensible set of directions and influencing members to move in those directions (Leithwood & Levin, 2010). Each of these leadership styles impacts the experience of AESs through their organizational beliefs and tendencies.

Instructional leadership. Instructional leaders believe that both students and staff are constantly learning and evolving, as learning is measured by improvement in instruction and the quality of student learning (Fullan, 2011; Stronge et al., 2008). Instructional leaders are the leaders of leaders. A culture of public and reflective practice is essential for effective instructional leadership and the improvement of instructional practice. Additionally, instructional leadership addresses cultural, linguistic, socioeconomic, and learning diversity in the school community. Finally, instructional leadership focuses upon the effective management of resources and people through recruiting, hiring, developing, and evaluating. An instructional leader in an AEP is cognizant of the curricula offerings and instruction inside and outside of the classroom (Fullan, 2011; Stronge et al., 2008).

Democratic leadership. Democratic leaders establish a participative environment that encourages others to be decision makers. It should be noted, however, that although democratic leaders share responsibilities with followers, the leader has the final say after collecting input from the team. While democratic leadership builds trust between stakeholders and can produce high work quality and quantity, democratic leadership is often a slow process of change that is not always cost effective (Oats, n.d.). Democratic leaders in an AEP aim to create an environment that is welcoming and comfortable for students and staff to voice their opinion. However the final decision is in the hands of the leader. Student experiences with a democratic leader may include positive and trusting relationships, but change recommended by stakeholders occurs slowly due to the number of voices collaborating in such processes.

Moral leadership. Moral leaders consider situations from many lenses, and their decisions are often reached after examining a condition from multiple perspectives. Examining a situation from only one lens limits a leader when seeking to make a decision that is fair, caring, and just. Moral leaders may face the ethical challenges of power, privilege, responsibility, knowledge, consistency, and loyalty (Goodstein, 2000; Johnson, 2012). Knowledge and consistency are key when considering the organization of an AEP. A moral leader must have access to the knowledge necessary to meet student academic needs. A moral leader must also be consistent in their expectations of students and staff in terms of the effort and best practices provided.

Transformational leadership. Transformational leaders encourage change, and all tasks are aligned with purpose (Shields, 2010). Leaders can be defined as either "cage-dwellers" or "cage-busters". Dwellers are reactive, as they spend most of their energy

putting out fires, satisfying stakeholders, and searching for resources. In an AEP, it may be easy to find a leader putting out fires in order to satisfy the variety of learners in the program. A transformational leader, however, needs to be a cage-buster. Cage-busters identify challenges, organize solutions, and move forward with a plan. Cage-busters in education have one thing in mind: to create great schools for all learners (Hess, 2013). A transformational leader in an AEP may be proactive in their actions by encouraging reflection, reaching out to resources to organize solutions, and being confident in moving forward with collaborative plans.

Constructivist learning. Constructivist learning theory recognizes that all students do not come to the classroom with the same set of beliefs and values (Hoover, 1996; McBrien et al., 1997). Theorists Piaget and Vygotsky (as cited in Wilson, 1987) break down constructivism into two models: cognitive and social constructivism. Student engagement in one of the two models takes the student to higher-level, more meaningful cognitive processing. In addition, when applied with an interactive approach, teacher-facilitated learning provides students with the ability to approach learning differently. Instructional practices that foster collaboration, meaningful investigation, and dynamic problem solving afford enriched learning experiences through activities designed to engage active participants in reflection and discussion (Resnick & Collins, 1996; Wilson, 1987).

According to implications made from a phenomenological study by Morrissette (2011), students enrolled in alternative education schools and programs report five major themes that influence their experience in the school or program and aid in the construction of their learning. The themes are ambiance, sense of belonging, pedagogical

expertise, program flexibility, and their own self-awareness. These themes aid in the construction of knowledge and reinforce the idea that all students come to the classroom possessing unique individual experiences.

Ambiance and sense of belonging. Students who attend AEPs report that teacher support and individualized attention are some of the best parts of an AEP (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Hamden, 2016; Quinn et al., 2006). The theme of ambiance that emerged the most in Morrissette's (2011) study was that of an "ambiance of acceptance." Students reported that a relaxing environment helped them to relax and be themselves.

Students in AEPs report feeling welcomed and embraced by teachers and staff. This sense of welcoming contributes to a sense of acceptance, trust, and belonging (Hansen, 1998; Raywid, 1994; Swaminathan, 2004). Students in Morrissette's (2011) study reported that AESs did not "dread" going to school as they had previously in the traditional school setting. Both Raywid (1994) and later Swaminathan (2004) find that cultivating a sense of community and a safe space over time contributes to a sense of commitment, integration, and alliance among students and faculty. The sense of belonging experienced by AESs may be related to the meaningful organization of an AEP.

Pedagogical expertise. Teachers of AEPs are certified to teach in traditional education programs without an alternative education focus. In spite of this, they choose to teach in alternative programs (Zimmerman, 2003). Academic engagement and positive relationships formed with teachers in these programs are among the top factors that influence student learning (May & Copeland, 1998). In addition to teacher expertise, teacher willingness to enter into the alternative education field displays these teachers'

flexibility to function with uncertain and/or inconsistent students and schedules. According to a study by Ahn and Simpson (2013), alternative education teachers appear to have a decent understanding of their students' home, school, and social life struggles. Also, these faculty members seem to be well equipped to deal with students' disruptive behaviors. The pedagogical expertise of AEP teachers may be related to academic achievement in an AEP as students feel engaged inside classrooms.

Program flexibility. As described through organizational theory, AEPs are flexible in nature because they need to meet the curricula needs of a specific population of students (Hansen, 1998; Morrissette, 2011). Program flexibility also includes the potential for student membership in extracurricular activities. Students who participate in extracurricular activities report a higher feeling of school membership than those who do not (Ahn & Simpson, 2013). The opportunity to participate in extracurricular activities may be related to academic achievement in an AEP.

AESs also note the flexibility of time offered inside the classrooms. According to the Morrissette (2011) study, teachers are willing to transition from formal instruction to conversation about life or struggles. At the same time, however, students report that they appreciate clear structure and expectations from an alternative program. The classroom may be relaxed, but students understand what they need to do in order to meet objectives.

Self-awareness. Students, feel empowered to share their story. Students reflect on their placement in AEPs as a second chance to reach their goals (Hutchinson, Wilson, & Wilson; 1994; Morrissette, 2011). The opportunity to reflect and enhance self-awareness may be related to academic achievement in an AEP. Furthermore, this reflection may be related to a student's ability to pull in prior knowledge when making decisions.

Self-efficacy in education. Bandura (1977; 1997) defines perceived self-efficacy as personal judgments of one's capabilities to organize and execute courses of action to attain designated goals. Additionally, he assessed self-efficacy levels, generality, and strength across activities and contexts. The level of self-efficacy refers to its dependence on the difficulty of a particular task, such as spelling words of increasing difficulty. Generality pertains to the transferability of self-efficacy beliefs across activities, such as from algebra to statistics. Strength of perceived efficacy is measured by the amount of one's certainty about performing a given task (Zimmerman, 2000). Self-efficacy beliefs differ across three closely related concepts: outcome expectations, self-concept, and perceived control.

Outcome expectancies. The distinction that Bandura (1986) draws between academic self-efficacy and outcome expectancies emerges from research on reading and writing achievement. Shell, Murphy, and Bruning (1989) measure self-efficacy in terms of perceived capability to perform certain reading and writing activities. As a result of assessing outcome expectancies regarding the value of these activities in education, self-efficacy was a significant predictor of writing achievement (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985).

Self-concept. Historically, self-concept was defined as a global perception of oneself and one's self-esteem. While self-concept is one of the closest constructs to self-efficacy, it is a more general, self-descriptive construct that incorporates many forms of self-knowledge and self-evaluative feelings (Marsh & Shavelson, 1985). Over time this global measure of self-concept was not found to be consistently related to students academic performance (Hattie, 1992; Rogers, 1951; Wylie,1968).

Perceived control. Another closely associated construct to self-efficacy is perceived control, which emerged from research on locus of control (Rotter, 1966). Perceived control refers to general expectancies about whether outcomes are controlled by one's behavior or by external forces. It is theorized that an internal locus of control should support self-directed courses of action, whereas an external locus of control should discourage them. Locus-of-control scales are neither task nor domain specific in their item content, but rather refer to general beliefs about the internality or externality of causality. Bandura (1986) questions the value of general control beliefs because students may feel anxious about controlling only one type of subject matter or performance setting (e.g., solving mathematical problems in a limited time period). In support of Bandura's idea, Smith (1989) finds that locus of control measures did not predict improvements in academic performance. Instead, self-efficacy scales did predict such improvements (Zimmerman, 2000).

Judging self-efficacy. Judgments of self-efficacy are generally measured along three basic scales: magnitude, strength, and generality. Self-efficacy magnitude measures the difficulty level an individual feels is required to perform a certain task (e.g. easy, moderate, and hard) (van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002). Self-efficacy strength refers to the amount of conviction an individual has about performing successfully at diverse levels of difficulty (van der Bijl & Shortridge-Baggett, 2002). Generality of self-efficacy refers to the degree to which the expectation is generalized across situations (Lunenburg, 2011). Bandura (1977) describes four sources of information that individuals employ to judge their efficacy: performance outcomes, vicarious experiences, verbal

persuasion, and physiological feedback. These components help individuals determine whether they believe they have the capability to accomplish specific tasks.

Performance outcomes. Performance outcomes, or past experiences, may influence an individual's ability to perform a given task. If one has performed well at a task previously, they are more likely to feel competent and perform well at a similarly associated task (Bandura, 1977). For example, if an individual performed well in a previous job assignment, they are more likely to feel confident and have high self-efficacy in performing the task when their manager assigns something similar. Due to an individual's high level of self-efficacy, they are more likely to try harder and complete the task with better results. If an individual experiences a failure, they will most likely experience a reduction in self-efficacy because of the negativity they have felt. However, if these failures are later overcome by conviction, this can serve to increase self-motivated persistence when the situation is viewed as an achievable challenge (Bandura, 1977).

Vicarious experiences. People can develop high or low self-efficacy vicariously through other people's performances. A person can watch someone in a similar position perform, and compare his own competence with the other individual's competence (Bandura, 1977). If a person sees someone similar to them succeed, it can increase their self-efficacy. However, the opposite is also true — seeing someone similar fail can lower self-efficacy.

Verbal persuasion. According to Redmond (2010), self-efficacy is also influenced by encouragement and discouragement pertaining to an individual's performance or ability to perform. Additionally, the level of credibility directly influences the

effectiveness of verbal persuasion. Where there is more credibility, there will be a greater influence. Although verbal persuasion is likely to be a weaker source of self-efficacy beliefs than performance outcomes, it is widely used because of its ease and availability (Redmond, 2010).

Physiological feedback. People experience sensations in their bodies, and how they perceive this emotional arousal influences their beliefs of efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Some examples of physiological feedback include giving a speech in front of a large group of people, making a presentation to an important client, or taking an exam. All of these tasks can cause physical reactions such as agitation, anxiety, sweaty palms, or a racing heart (Redmond, 2010). Although this source is the least influential of the four, it is important to note that if one is more at ease with the task at hand, they will likely feel more capable and have higher beliefs of self-efficacy.

Self-efficacy and performance. Self-efficacy theory states that the combination between the four factors of judging self-efficacy and the three assessment processes used to interpret self-efficacy will determine the level of self-efficacy which directly affects performance outcomes. The three assessment processes for self-efficacy include the analysis of task requirements, analysis of experience, and assessment of personal and situational resources and constraints (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

Analysis of task requirements. The analysis of task requirements is an individual's determination of what it takes to perform a task. It is supported by the student's belief they can accomplish the task, how much time and effort is dedicated to task, and the quality of work put into the task (Gist & Mitchell, 1992).

Analysis of experience. The analysis of experience is an individual's judgment about why a performance level occurred (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). This personal perception and understanding is driven by the following questions: Was there enough time put into completing the task at hand?, Did the time spent or lack thereof affect the outcome?, Was there enough energy put into completing the task at hand?, Did I do minimal work or go above and behind to achieve the end result?, Was there enough communication between the professor and me?, and Did asking, or not asking questions affect the outcome?

Assessment of personal and situational resources and constraints. The assessment of personal and situational resources and constraints is an individual's consideration of personal and situational factors. Personal factors could include such things as skill level and available effort. Situational factors could include factors such as competing demands (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). Quality and quantity of work could be affected by surroundings, environment and emotions. The personal situation can be influenced by the following ideas: Where is studying occurring?, Do calm or chaotic individuals surround me?, Do I feel comfortable and confident in completing all tasks at hand?, Am I taking courses at a level in which they I succeed?, or Am I taking courses that are too easy or too difficult for my skill level and abilities?

Relative to this study, the self-efficacy of students enrolled in an AEP is driven by what they believe they can accomplish using their own skills under a specific circumstance. Historically, studies have shown that student success in school cannot be obtained without the self-efficacy of the students themselves (Bandura, 1977; 1986; 1997; Rotter, 1966; Shell, Murphy, & Bruning, 1989).

Summary

The organization of alternative education schools and programs impacts the potential experiences of enrolled students. These experiences are also guided by the leadership styles and teaching practices which students encounter from program personnel. Based on experiences, students develop a particular level of self-efficacy, which leads them to believe that they can or cannot reach a particular goal.

The literature review provides the theoretical framework that supports this study. The self-efficacy of students is influenced by both organizational and constructivist theories. Existing research describes the use of organizational theory in offering appropriate educational opportunities to students in AEPs, and it explores constructivist learning's influence on student academic performance. This study will add to the literature, as little attention is given to student self-efficacy in alternative education. The following chapter explains the research methods used to understand student perceptions relating to their own academic experiences while enrolled in AEPs.

Chapter 3

Methodology

The purpose of this study is to understand the self-efficacy of alternative education students (AESs). Using a quantitative research approach intersected with a secondary method of collecting descriptive data from interviews, the researcher aims to connect the understanding of student self-efficacy to the experiential and organizational factors of alternative education programs (AEPs). This research involved using surveys to collect quantitative data, which are then supported by descriptive data collected via interviews. The participants were students enrolled in Kane School District's Extension School (pseudonym). After the quantitative data were analyzed, the researcher clarified and further supported findings with the descriptive data from the interviews. This design was selected to determine the relationship between experiential and organizational factors in terms of self-efficacy levels.

Research Questions and Rationale

The research questions aim to understand self-efficacy levels and the factors that potentially impact the self-efficacy levels of AESs. The research questions guide the methodology and were carefully constructed to analyze experiences using phenomenological reduction (Moustakas, 1994). Phenomenological reduction qualifies each reported belief and described experience. The surveys provide an understanding of the phenomena of students' self-efficacy levels. The surveys further provide an answer to the research questions, which relate to experiential and organizational factors. The follow-up interviews clarify specific ideas relevant to the studied factors.

1. What are the general perceived self-efficacy levels of alternative education students in Kane School District?
2. What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and experiential factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District?
3. What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and organizational factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District?
4. To what extent are experiential and organizational factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District related?

Research Design

This study is based on a quantitative research design and the collection of supplemental data. The quantitative research was conducted via surveys, and the supplemental data was collected through semi-structured interviews. Through survey research, the researcher obtained a numerical description of the studied population's opinions (Creswell, 2014). The survey consisted of two sections. The first section of the survey analyzed student self-efficacy levels on a scale from 10 to 40. The second section collected students' opinions of the level to which they agreed with a statement on a continuous scale, relative to experiential and organizational factors. The multi-faceted use of the survey provided the researcher with a more comprehensive understanding of self-efficacy levels relative to these factors.

A constructivist view was adopted to seek an understanding of the world in which we live; the constructivist view argues that all existing knowledge and experiences are connected to the individual's consciousness of the surrounding world (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, the researcher's worldview plays a role in the design of this study. When

conducting interviews or other qualitative inquires, researchers carry with them certain assumptions and worldviews through which they comprehend everyday life (Creswell, 2014). These assumptions and worldviews are present in this study with the collection of supplemental data. The researcher has had multiple experiences that are relevant to the topic of this dissertation which were carried with them while conducting the study. The researcher previously worked in a low-income school district where graduation rates of their general population are 79% (SDP, 2018). Currently, the researcher works in a school district where the graduation rate is 95%. From these two different environments, the researcher has formed opinions about reasons why graduation rates vary across districts. This study is focusing on an academically low-achieving subgroup of students in a high-achieving school district. The participants of this study are identified as low achieving in a traditional educational environment prior to entering an alternative program. The researcher has previously taught in Kane School District's Extension School during the 2015-2016 school year.

As a result of these experiences, the researcher has developed specific beliefs and assumptions regarding the academic performance and needs of alternative education students. The researcher believes that the students need a safe and encouraging space to thrive academically. The researcher also believes that students who are enrolling in alternative education programs want to continue their education and reach the goal of obtaining a high school diploma. These beliefs have influenced the way that the researcher is approaching this research in that they are more aware of how students construct knowledge through educational experiences and the way in which school is organized. This assumption is connected to a constructivist worldview in that the

researcher is seeking to understand how alternative education students develop a high level of self-efficacy as a result of particular experiential and organizational factors (Creswell, 2014).

In addition to the constructivist view and the researcher's worldview, distinction exists between the phenomenology of natural sciences and human sciences (Brentano, 1973; Husserl, 1975). Natural sciences explore physical phenomena, whereas human sciences explore mental phenomena. The mental phenomena of perception, memory, and judgment are related to the influential experiences of students in alternative education and play a role in their self-efficacy levels (Moustakas, 1994). Human sciences focus on the wholeness of experience, rather than its parts, while searching for the meaning of experiences rather than measurements and explanations (Moustakas, 1994). Additionally, human sciences formulate questions that reflect the interests and personal commitments of the researcher, who views described experiences and behavior as integrated and inseparable relationships (Moustakas, 1994). The nature of this study has been constructed to allow the study to explore ideas and derive findings that will provide the basis for future research and reflections.

Site selection and access. The location of the study is the Kane School District. Kane is a public K-12 school district consisting of approximately 2,500 students local to the community. The community that Kane serves is predominantly white, middle-class families in southern New Jersey. The Kane School District was chosen because it falls in the category of a Type I AEP, as identified by Raywid (1994). Kane's Extension school is a full-time, multi-year, education option for regular and special education students needing an educational option outside of the regular or special education offerings in

traditional comprehensive high schools. The goal of this AEP is to allow students to earn necessary course credits required for graduation (Raywid, 1994). Additionally, the school superintendent is interested in understanding the students enrolled in the AEP. The researcher is a teacher in the Kane School District's regular education program and has previously taught in Kane's Extensions School. Further, the researcher can gather data during the students' scheduled advisory period, which occurs every school day.

Population. The population invited to participate in this study is composed of students enrolled in the Kane School District's AEP. This program consists of 24 high school students in grades 11 and 12 in the Kane School District.

Participants. The researcher invited students to participate who qualified based on being a student enrolled in Kane's Extension School. The total number of potential participants was 24 students. Of the 24 potential participants, 22 students gave consent to participate.

Recruitment. The researcher met with all the students enrolled in Kane's Extension School during an advisory period on a single prescheduled day. The researcher described the research project to give potential participants an understanding of what the project would entail. The researcher explained that the goal of the project is to understand the experiences and needs of AESs by analyzing their levels of self-efficacy. Additionally, the researcher explained that student participation and input will contribute to the field of education, which will allow leaders to ensure that they are providing young adults with the resources necessary to meet students' wants and needs.

Fraelich's (1989) Investigation of Presence describes the interactions between the researcher and potential participants. In the initial meeting, during which the researcher

described the study, each participant was not only informed of the true nature of the study, but also encouraged to join the researcher as a seeker of knowledge in understanding the self-efficacy of students in AESs (Moustakas, 1994). After the initial meeting, the researcher welcomed questions, both as a group and individually (Moustakas, 1994).

Students were informed that if they agreed to participate, they would be rewarded with a $5 Wawa gift card for each phase of the study in which they participated. Wawa is a convenience store local to the area and an appropriate form of appreciation for high school students.

Sampling strategy. In this study, the researcher used surveys and interviews to collect data from the students. All 24 students enrolled in Extension School were invited to participate in the study. Of the invited participants, 22 students gave consent to participate. In order to address the sampling error, the researcher made note of the demographics of the 2 non respondents during data analysis. After the quantitative data was analyzed, participants were given the opportunity to volunteer to discuss the experiential and organizational factors of AEPs in the follow-up interviews.

Instrumentation

In this study, the researcher relied on two methods of data collection to aid in the development of a rich and descriptive quantitative study. The methods of data collection included surveys and interviews. The researcher relied on the survey data to draw conclusions about the relationship between organizational and experiential factors in terms of self-efficacy levels. The descriptive data from the follow-up interviews expanded on the quantitative findings.

Survey. The quantitative data collection was conducted with an adapted version of the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) survey along with eight researcher-created questions related to the conceptual framework. The GSES is a ten-item survey that assesses the strength of an individual's belief in their own ability to respond to novel or difficult situations and deal with obstacles or setbacks (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). In addition to the items on the GSES, the researcher-created questions allowed for an analysis of the relationship between self-efficacy and experiential and organizational factors.

The survey took approximately five minutes to complete as respondents indicated the extent to which each statement applies to them. Responses for the self-efficacy portion of the survey range from "Not at all true" (1), "Barely true" (2), "Moderately true" (3), to "Exactly true" (4). The scores were summed to a total score. The score on this scale reflects the strength of the individual's generalized self-efficacy belief. The score range of the survey was from 10-40. Responses were categories as low self-efficacy (10-20), moderate self-efficacy (21-30), and high self-efficacy (31-40). These categories were chosen based on previous studies surrounding self-efficacy level evaluation using Schwarzer & Jerusalem's GSES instrument (Pant, 2016; Rambod et al., 2018; Singh, 2019; Waraporn mongkholkul et al., 2018)

Responses to the experiential and organizational factor sections of the survey range from "Strongly disagree" (1), "Disagree" (2), "Neither disagree or agree" (3), "Agree" (4), to "Strongly agree." These scores were also summed to a total score. The scores on these scales indicate the level in which particular experiential and/or organizational factors are relevant in academic performance.

The appropriateness of the survey for this study is that the survey is consistent across participants and academically appropriate. The survey questions were presented to the Extension School leadership personnel and it was determined that the language and directions are clear and easy to understand for high school-aged students in the Kane School District., the survey aided in triangulating data from additional data collection instruments.

Permission. The GSES is available to the public and may be used for non-commercial research and development purposes. Permission is granted publically to researchers to print an unlimited number of copies on paper for distribution to research participants. Furthermore, the scale may be used in online survey research if the user group is limited to certified users who enter the website with a password. Additionally, permission is granted to store and/or modify the survey to meet the particular requirements of the research context (Appendix B). Permission is not granted, however, to print the survey in publications (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995).

Survey reliability and validity. The GSES was used based on the idea that the questions provided are relevant to the research and representative of the data that the researcher anticipates collecting. Expected positive correlations have been identified with measures of self-esteem, internal control beliefs, and optimism. Expected negative correlations have been identified as general anxiety, performance anxiety, shyness, and pessimism (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). Cronbach's alpha ranged from .76 to .90, with the majority in the high .80s. Scholz et al. (2002) found that the internal consistency reliability of the scale ranged from .75 to .91 across numerous studies, and that the self-efficacy scale was positively related to effective coping, optimism, perception of

challenges, and self-regulation. The GSES has been used internationally and is a suitable indicator of the quality of life of participants at any point in time (Luszczynska, Scholz, & Schwarzer, 2005; Steese et al., 2006).

*Internal threats***.** An internal threat to the validity of this experiment was the non-response bias of the 2 nonrespondents since not all 24 potential participants choose to participate. The characteristics of nonrespondents were not systematically different from those of respondents. To address the potential issue that survey responses would be biased or skewed towards a certain direction given nonrespondents, however, the researcher made note during quantitative data analysis of where the missing data would be based on nonrespondent demographics (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Fowler, 2014, Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

The researcher used a number of strategies to encourage the high response rate of 92%. Firstly, the researcher met with potential participants as a whole group a week before conducting the survey. This meeting informed the participants of the purpose of the study and described how their feedback would be used. Secondly, the researcher stayed considerate of the participants' time and made it clear how many questions would be asked and how long the survey would take to complete. Finally, the researcher ensured that the questions were appropriate and easy to interpret and understand by participants (Fowler, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

Another internal threat to the validity of this experiment was history. History, in this experiment, is specific to unanticipated events that may have taken place during data collection. Unanticipated events may have lead to changes in the potential outcome (Creswell & Creswell, 2014; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). An unanticipated event that

occurred was the late enrollment of almost half of the participants. Since students enrolled in Extension School after the study began, the time students have been enrolled in the program became a factor. After this internal change occurred, the researcher was transparent in identifying and addressing the threat in the discussion of the findings.

Another internal threat to validity was maturation. The maturation of the participants (17 and 18 years old) may alter their opinions of the experiential and organizational factors being studied. Varied responses between the survey and interview answers may be caused by students' increasing maturity levels rather than the factors being studied (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). While this threat does exist, data collection was conducted over a short period of time (approximately one month). Therefore, it is unlikely that participants' maturity levels altered significantly enough to modify the study outcomes. Furthermore, because the participants are of a similar age group, the rate at which they are maturing is similar (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

A final internal threat to the validity of this study was student attrition, or participating students no longer enrolling in Extension School. To address this threat, the researcher conducted surveys and interviews over a short period of time to avoid the attrition of a high number of students.

*External threats***.** An external threat to the validity of this experiment was the small sample size of the studied population (N=22). This sample size does not allow for findings to be generalized to other populations. Readers are cautioned, and results should be interpreted with care (Howell, 1995; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Ryan et al., 2002).

Time was another external threat to the validity of this study. The results found in this research were time-bound, meaning that the researcher cannot generalize the results

to past or future situations (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Ryan et al., 2002). To combat these external threats, the researcher recommends replicating the study at a later time with a larger sample size to determine if the same results occur, and if the findings can be generalized across the greater population of AESs (Eriksson and Kovalainen, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Interview. The follow-up interviews consisted of researcher-created 10-question semi-structured interviews. The goal of these interviews was to give students a voice in describing their experiences in terms of self-efficacy. This opportunity for reflection aided the researcher in understanding AES self-efficacy and its relationship with theory (Eisenhart, 1991; Grant & Osanloo, 2014). Additionally, the interview is an important method in constructivist research. For the purpose of this study, it was essential to focus on the idea that interviews generate data, rather than collect it, and that facts are not discovered, but instead are constructed (Bikner-Ahsbahs, Knipping, & Presmeg, 2015; Birks & Mills, 2011). Therefore, the interview was used to expand upon survey results.

The ten interview questions were adapted from Miller's (2010) dissertation, *The Impact of Intrusive Advising on Academic Self Efficacy Beliefs in First Year Students in Higher Education*. The adaptation and development of the 10 questions used for this study were based on the conceptual framework. Interview questions 1, 2, 6, and 7 relate to constructivist learning and ask the students to discuss past experiences and beliefs, as these are relative to the students' own self-awareness of academic success and/or failure. Interview questions 3 through 5 relate to organizational theory and ask the students to reflect on outside factors that may influence success and/or failure. Finally, interview

questions 8 through 10 relate to the general perceived self-efficacy scale and ask the students to reflect on their own confidence levels.

The results of the interviews have been triangulated with established literature and data collected from the survey in order to support the quantitative findings to the research questions. The method of triangulation, or using more than one method to collect data on the same topic, allows researchers to understand the various dimensions of the same phenomenon (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

Interview data were collected with a recording device and stored on the researcher's personal computer. The recordings were submitted to www.rev.com for transcription. According to the www.rev.com website:

> Files are securely stored and transmitted using TLS 1.2 encryption, the highest level of security available. We will never share your files or personal information with anyone outside of Rev. Files are visible only to the professionals who have signed strict confidentiality agreements. If you'd ever like us to delete your files, just let us know.

Following the completion of this study, the researcher contacted www.rev.com to delete their copies of interview transcriptions.

Permission. Permission was granted to use and adapt the second of two 8-question interview protocols developed by Miller in her 2010 dissertation *The Impact of Intrusive Advising on Academic Self Efficacy Beliefs in First-Year Students in Higher Education*.

Interview reliability and validity. The validity of the semi-structured interview protocol was ensured with the triangulation of data collection and questions asked. Through triangulation, the data sources were examined to build a coherent justification for emerging themes. If themes converged through several perspectives of participants, the interview contributed to the validity of the study (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

Data Collection

Data collection was performed in Kane's Extension School, which holds classes from 1:30 to 5:30 p.m. on Monday through Friday. Data collection was performed specifically during the students' 30-minute advisory period from 2:25 to 2:55 p.m. The advisory period occurs every school day.

Survey. Data collection took place using individual paper copies for each student. To collect data, the researcher provided the survey to all students in attendance over the course of three days. The first day, all 12 consenting students who were present completed the survey. The following day, all consenting students who were absent the previous day completed the survey. Two months later when 10 more students were enrolled in the program, the researcher administered the survey one last time. All 10 of the newly enrolled students consented to participate. The quantitative surveys gave participants an opportunity to anonymously scale their responses relative to their own academic self-efficacy, relevant academic experiences, and meaningful organizational factors. The scaled-response design of the survey aided the researcher in gathering descriptive data from a large percentage of students enrolled in Kane's Extension School.

Interview. To collect the descriptive data, the researcher conducted 15-minute, semi-structured interviews with a voice-recording device with student volunteers. The interviews took place one week after students took the survey. The interview involved an interactive process and used open-ended questions to encourage insight and elaboration (Moustakas, 1994). The interview began with a social conversation, and the interviewer thereby created a comfortable environment for open, honest responses (Chowdhury & Shahabuddin, 2007; Moustakas, 1994). All of the interviews consisted of the same 10 questions and took place over two consecutive weeks during the advisory period. The purpose of the interview was to gather information by engaging in a conversation focused on questions relevant to the experiential and organizational factors of AEPs. The semi-structured interview format ensured that all participants were offered an opportunity to respond to the same 10 questions, while also allowing the researcher to probe further based on responses. The open-ended nature of each question allowed for both similar and varied responses from students. The use of an interview offered insights that had not emerged from the initial survey into the organizational and experiential factors that have played a role in the students' developing level of self-efficacy.

Similar studies using grounded theory methodology have used semi-structured interviews to collect reliable data (Gofen, 2009; Thompson, 2008). There was minimal control over the participants' responses, and, as a result, respondents were able to open up and express themselves on their own terms (Bernard, 1994). Semi-structured interviews are most effective when the number of interview opportunities is limited (Bernard, 1994).

Data Analysis

Quantitative data analysis was conducted to determine the relationship between self-efficacy and experiential and/or organizational factors. To determine if a relationship exists between self-efficacy and experiential and/or organizational factors, averages were calculated based on the amount of time that students have been enrolled in Kane's Extension School. These averages were compared based on student age and length of time the student has been enrolled in the program. These averages aided the researcher in determining if self-efficacy levels peak based on age and/or enrollment length. Averages were also calculated based on the independent variables of each experiential and organizational factor. The researcher compared self-efficacy levels relative to student opinions on the level of importance and/or impact of each factor.

In addition to averages, graphs have been compiled to display the relationship between each factor and self-efficacy. The graphs and trend lines display the relationship between the independent and dependent variables studied. The closer the marks are to the trend line, the stronger the relationship between variables.

Finally, the Spearman's correlation coefficient was calculated to determine if a relationship exists between each factor and self-efficacy, as well as if a relationship exists among the factors. The Spearman's correlation coefficient determined the strength of the potential relationship between variables. The experiential factors analyzed are prior learning experiences, sense of belonging, teacher pedagogy, and involvement in extracurricular activities. The organizational factors analyzed are class size, time of day, scheduling, and leadership.

Respondent Reliability and Validity

The quantitative method and intersection of descriptive data is valid and reliable. The scaled, quantitative survey and semi-structured interview questions offer findings when common responses emerge and bring awareness to unique responses to further the development of future studies. The strategy used to establish reliability is triangulation. Triangulation suggests that collecting data from multiple sources aids practitioners in clarifying meaning in terms of how problems are perceived (Stringer, 2014).

Denzin (1978) and Patton (1990) identified four types of triangulation used in establishing reliability in this study, namely method triangulation, source triangulation, theory triangulation, and analyst triangulation. Method triangulation was used in this study, as the researcher verified the consistency of findings generated by the variety of data collection methods. Additionally, points where data diverged between quantitative and qualitative provided insight into the variations of student experiences having led to current self-efficacy levels. The triangulation of sources established reliability because the quantitative survey was conducted in a large-group setting, and the qualitative interview was carried out privately with the researcher and respondent. Theoretical perspectives were used to examine and interpret the data. Finally, the researcher used analyst triangulation by comparing findings to existing studies of alternative education and self-efficacy.

The researcher used respondent validation by returning the qualitative data to participants to determine whether the interpretations were plausible. Respondent validation is a strategy employed in qualitative research to ensure internal validity. Each of the interview participants were provided with a copy of the transcription and asked to

review it to determine accuracy. The participants were asked to confirm that the transcription was an accurate portrayal of their interview and to ensure that the researcher had not misinterpreted any of the participants' responses (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). Respondent validation is the single most important method that can be used to rule out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants say and their perspective on what is going on. Furthermore, this type of validation is key in identifying research bias and misunderstandings of what is being observed (Maxwell, 2005).

Role of the Researcher

The researcher is a teacher in Kane School District and has previously in Kane's Extension School during the 2015-2016 school year. The researcher has not, however, taught any of the potential participants. The initial meeting between the researcher and the potential participants was the first time both parties had met. Prior to collecting data, the researcher explained the study without biasing the potential participants (Greenbank, 2003)

During quantitative data collection, the researcher played a neutral role. The participants completed the survey independent of the researcher as if she was not there (Patton, 2002). During the supplemental data collection, the researcher was part of the instrument (Denzin & Lincoln, 2003). Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the intention to keep the interviews as consistent as possible. The collected data was handled and analyzed appropriately per the described research design (Punch, 1998).

Ethical Considerations

Quantitative studies require researchers to communicate the purpose of the study accurately, obtain permission, and protect anonymity (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). The

researcher described the purpose of the study to participants before the survey. The communication was in both written and verbal formats. The researcher obtained two kinds of permission. Firstly, written permission was obtained from the superintendent of Kane School District to allow the researcher to conduct research on the students. Secondly, before conducting the survey, permission was obtained from each participant over the age of 18 years old and from the guardians of each participant younger than 18 years old. Anonymity was protected as the survey was collected anonymously.

To avoid deceptive practices, the researcher used the semi-structured interview to keep conversation on track and focused on the research questions at hand. The researcher respected the study population, including, but not limited to, the participants and staff, and aimed to uphold the integrity of Kane School District. Respect was exhibited by ensuring proper utilization of the time spent collecting data during school hours. Additionally, acknowledging the social stigma that comes when a student is identified as "alternative", the researcher further ensured confidentially by creating a pseudonym for the name of the research site and numbered participants from 1 to 22.

This research proposal was submitted to an Institutional Review Board (IRB) to ensure that human rights would not be violated and protect the researcher against any potential legal implications if behavior were to be perceived as unethical. Approval was granted.

Summary

This chapter provided an overview of the design of the research methodology. The quantitative research approach was intersected with a secondary method of collecting descriptive data from interviews. The triangulated data gathered from literature, surveys,

and interviews allowed for the validation of the data, enabling a more comprehensive understanding of the self-efficacy of AESs.

Chapter 4

Results

The purpose of this study was to understand the self-efficacy of alternative education students (AESs) and to determine what experiences and organizational factors are relevant to self-efficacy. A quantitative research approach with an intersecting secondary method involved collecting quantitative data through surveys and descriptive data from follow-up interviews. Survey and interview data were collected from students enrolled in Kane School District's Extension School to determine levels of self-efficacy and the potential impact of experiential and organizational factors on academic performance. The experiential factors analyzed are prior learning experiences, sense of belonging, teacher pedagogy, and involvement in extracurricular activities. The organizational factors analyzed are class size, time of day, scheduling, and leadership. Through an analysis of survey results and additional descriptive data, the researcher obtained an understanding of AESs based on constructivist learning and organizational theories.

To strengthen the quantitative findings, the researcher performed concurrent triangulation. The researcher explored the experiential and organizational factors of alternative education programs (AEPs) through interviews, which would offer data to strengthen the findings of the quantitative study (Creswell et al, 2003).

The study used four research questions that would direct the researcher in understanding the self-efficacy of AESs relative to constructivist learning and organizational theories. The research questions are as follows:

1. What are the general perceived self-efficacy levels of alternative education students in Kane School District?
2. What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and experiential factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District?
3. What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and organizational factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District?
4. To what extent are experiential and organizational factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District related?

This chapter describes the participant sample and setting for data collection. Additionally, the chapter discusses how and what data was collected and describes how the data was analyzed. The chapter also explains the results of the study while addressing each research question specific to emerging and unique themes. Finally, this chapter provides evidence of trustworthiness specific to credibility strategies, transferability strategies, dependability strategies, and consistency strategies discussed in Chapter 3.

Participant Sample and Setting

The researcher initially intended to collect data for this study during the 2017-2018 academic school year in the Kane School District. However, data collection did not occur until the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic school year. Because of this change, participant sampling was altered. During the 2017-2018 school year, there were 29 potential participants, all of whom were students enrolled in Kane's Extension School. At the beginning of the 2018-2019 academic school year, 14 students were enrolled. Leadership personnel at Kane informed the researcher that enrollment typically increases

over the first few months of the school year. The researcher collected survey data from 12 of the potential 14 participants during the first month of school. Two months later, the researcher collected survey data from 10 newly enrolled students.

Given this shift in data collection plan based on enrollment status, 10 of the 22 participants had 2 months of experience in Kane's Extension School to reflect upon, while 12 of the 22 participants had between 2 and 12 months of experience. This difference of experience is a positive change because it would offer varied perspectives on the data set specific to time enrolled.

After analyzing quantitative data, the researcher discussed experiential and organizational factors further using a semi-structured interview protocol. The researcher interviewed 8 volunteering participants to clarify and strengthen quantitative findings. The students who volunteered to be interviewed are identified in Table 1 with an asterisk.

Data Collection

The number of potential participants for this study consisted of students enrolled in Kane School District's Extension School (n=24). At the time of this study, the number of potential participants was 24 students presently enrolled. Of the 24 students, 22 students gave consent to participate. Of the 22 participants, 18 students were 18 years or older and in 12^{th} grade, 4 students were under the age of 18 and in 11^{th} grade, 12 were male, 10 were female, 12 had been enrolled between 2-12 months, and 10 had been enrolled for ≤2 months at the time of data collection. Table 1 offers a breakdown of specific information for each of the 22 participants.

Table 1

Participant Demographics

Student	Age	Grade	Gender	Enrolled	Student	Age	Grade	Gender	Enrolled
1*	17	11	F	3-7 months	12	18	12	F	0-2 months
2*	17	11	F	0-2 months	13	18	12	M	3-7 months
3	17	11	M	3-7 months	14	18	12	M	3-7 months
4*	17	11	M	3-7 months	15*	18	12	M	8-12 months
5	18	12	F	3-7 months	16	18	12	M	8-12 months
6	18	12	F	3-7 months	17	18	12	M	8-12 months
7*	18	12	F	8-12 months	18*	18	12	M	0-2 months
8*	18	12	F	8-12 months	19	18	12	M	0-2 months
9*	18	12	F	0-2 months	20	18	12	M	0-2 months
10	18	12	F	0-2 months	21	18	12	M	0-2 months
11	18	12	F	0-2 months	22	18	12	M	0-2 months

Note. Asterisk next to number denotes interview participant

Survey data collection occurred during the advisory period of Kane School District's Extension School. The researcher spoke with all students about the study and their potential participation. Consent forms were provided, and content was discussed with all students. All students took the forms home with them, and those giving consent brought them back the following day. Students under the age of 18 had consent forms

signed by guardians and assent forms signed by themselves. At the time of the initial meeting, 14 students were enrolled in Kane's Extension School. The following day, 12 of the 14 enrolled students participated in the survey. Over the course of two months, 10 more students enrolled in the Extension Program. A second meeting between the researcher and students occurred to offer participation to the newly enrolled students. All 10 students participated. Data from all students was recorded on paper copies of the survey. The researcher then transferred the results into SPSS for data analysis.

The number of potential participants for the follow-up interviews after the quantitative analysis consisted of the 22 students surveyed. Of the 22 potential participants, interviews were conducted with 8 students. Of the 8 interviewees, 5 were 18-years-old and in 12th grade, 3 were 17-years-old and in 11th grade, 3 were male, 5 were female, 3 had been enrolled for 0-2 months, 2 had been enrolled for 3-7 months, and 3 had been enrolled for 8-12 months (Table 1).

The researcher interviewed the 8 participants using a semi-structured interview protocol. Each interview lasted an average of 12 minutes in duration. Interviews were conducted in a one-on-one format in Kane High School's conference room. Interviews were recorded on the researcher's personal device and transferred to www.rev.com for transcription.

Data Analysis

A variety of analysis methods were used to explore the quantitative data. The researcher calculated the average self-efficacy levels of students based on time enrolled in Kane's Extension School (0-2 months, 3-7 months, and 8-12 months). These ranges were randomly chosen by the researcher. In order to check the validity of the chosen

categorical ranges, the researcher shifted enrollment categories three additional times and continued to find self-efficacy levels went from moderate, to high, and back to moderate. The first of the additional categorical ranges explored was 0-3 months, 4-8 months, and 9-12 months. The second of the additional categorical ranges was 0-4 months, 5-9 months, and 10-12 months. The final of the additional categorical ranges was 0-5 months, 6-8 months, and 9-12 months.

Additionally, scatter diagrams were used as an early step in determining if the variables of self-efficacy levels and each experiential and organizational factor was associated or not. Scatter diagrams were useful in exploring associations of variables during the preliminary stages of data analysis (Leon-Guerrero & Frankfort-Nachmias, 2015). While the visuals allowed the research to determine an apparent relationship, the trend line formed is not a perfect form of analysis on its own (Leon-Guerrero & Frankfort-Nachmias, 2015). To strengthen the analysis, the Spearman's correlation coefficient was used to determine the strength of the relationship between self-efficacy levels and experiential and organizational factors.

After the quantitative data was analyzed, interview responses were explored to support survey findings and determine unique themes that may have emerged. Interview responses were analyzed using first and second cycle coding techniques. Once data was organized through second cycle coding (i.e. pattern coding), the interview results were grouped into smaller categories or themes (Saldaña, 2016). These themes helped to drive the analysis of the supplemental findings. The supplemental data analysis underwent multiple processes. These processes, the phases of data analysis, as described by Green (2007), are data cleaning, data reduction, data transformation, data correlation, data

comparison, and data analysis for inquiry. The first and second cycle coding techniques aided in cleaning and reduce the amount of data used. The data was then transformed organizationally into a meaningful analysis, which allowed the researcher to correlate, compare, and analyze findings for inquiry.

Additionally, the researcher improved the quality of the inferences using supplemental data to support the quantitative findings. The analysis across survey and interview themes is referred to as "meta-inferences" (Creswell & Plano Clark, 2011). While findings were drawn separately, meta-inferences aided in bringing common themes to light. The interview results supported and solidified the quantitative findings. Additionally, coding aided in uncovering themes not previously identified by the researcher as potential factors in the academic performance of AESs.

Quantitative Results

Self-efficacy levels. The general perceived self-efficacy levels of AESs in Kane School District were determined with an adapted version of the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) survey (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). The standard scoring procedure for the GSE is to total the responses and determine an individual's self-efficacy level within the range of 10 to 40. The average self-efficacy score of the 22 participants was 31.1. Of the 22 participants, 9 scored below average, and 13 scored above the average. The average self-efficacy score of students enrolled for 0-2 months was 30.1. The average self-efficacy score of students enrolled for 3-7 months was 34.0. The average self-efficacy score of students enrolled for 8-12 months was 29.0 (Table 3). The two non-respondents in this study were 18 years old and had also been enrolled for 8-12 months.

The absence of their responses may alter the self-efficacy of participants ≥18 enrolled for 8-12 months. Non-respondent potential participation is denoted with an asterisk.

Table 2

Self-Efficacy Score and Frequency

Self-Efficacy Level	Score	No. of Students
Low	10-20	1
Moderate	21-30	7
High	31-40	14

Table 3

Student Self-Efficacy Levels Based on Age and Enrollment

	Enrolled 0-2 months	Enrolled 3-7 months	Enrolled 8-12 months	All
Self-efficacy level of all 22 participants	30.1	34.0	29.0*	31.1
Self-efficacy level of participants <18	34	33.7	N/A	33.8
Self-efficacy level of participants ≥18	29.7	34.3	29.0*	30.5
Self-efficacy level of 8 interview participants	33.0	34.0	25.3	28.9

Note. Asterisk next to self-efficacy level denotes nonrespondent classification.

The survey results show that self-efficacy increases then decreases as time enrolled in Kane's Extension School increases over time. This trend is also apparent when analyzing the average self-efficacy scores of participants under the age of 18, participants of 18 years, and interview participants (Table 3).

Experiential factors. The relationship between student self-efficacy and experiential factors was determined by comparing the sum of survey questions 1 through 10 in comparison to individual responses to survey questions 11 through 14. When determining the relationship between self-efficacy and experiential factors, Likert response values (1-5) of the experiential factors were compared to the general self-efficacy values to determine if a relationship exists. The researcher calculated the average value for each experiential factor and the average self-efficacy of students who were below, equal to, or above average (Table 4). The findings suggest that the self-efficacy of students increased as experiential factors increased above average. The greatest increase of self-efficacy was related to the level the students' sense of belonging. As students feel more connected to their school, their self-efficacy level increases. Additionally, as students perceive teachers with a positive pedagogy, their self-efficacy level increases. This finding applies to both extracurricular activities and student prior knowledge, which represents a significant but smaller percentage increase of self-efficacy.

Table 4

Factors and Self-Efficacy Averages

	Factor Average	Average Self-Efficacy Level
Experiential Factors		
Prior Knowledge	≤ 4.1	30.5
	> 4.1	32.1
Sense of Belonging	≤ 3.6	27.3
	> 3.6	34.3
Teacher Pedagogy	≤ 3.8	28
	> 3.8	33.2
Extracurricular	≤ 3.0	29.6
	> 3.0	33.2
Organizational Factors		
Class Size	≤ 4.1	31.3
	> 4.1	30.9
Time of Day	≤ 3.8	30.5
	> 3.8	31.4
Flexible Schedule	≤ 4.1	28.3
	> 4.1	34.4
Leadership	≤ 4.4	28.4
	> 4.4	32.9

In addition to comparing averages and percentage changes, the researcher created visual representations of trend lines to compare self-efficacy and experiential factors. The independent variable level of agreement with the statement made in the survey (scored from 1-5 and displayed on the x-axis) and the dependent variable self-efficacy (scored from 10-40 and displayed on the y-axis) were compared. As the points in the scatter plot were closer to the trend line, a stronger relationship existed between self-efficacy and the specific experiential factor. The relationship appeared to be strongest between self-efficacy and sense of belonging (Figure 3), followed by pedagogy (Figure 4), extracurricular activities (Figure 5), and prior knowledge (Figure 2). The strength of the relationship, as displayed by the plots compared to the trend line (Figures 2 through 5), are consistent with the percentage increase of student self-efficacy relative to experiential factor averages (Table 4).

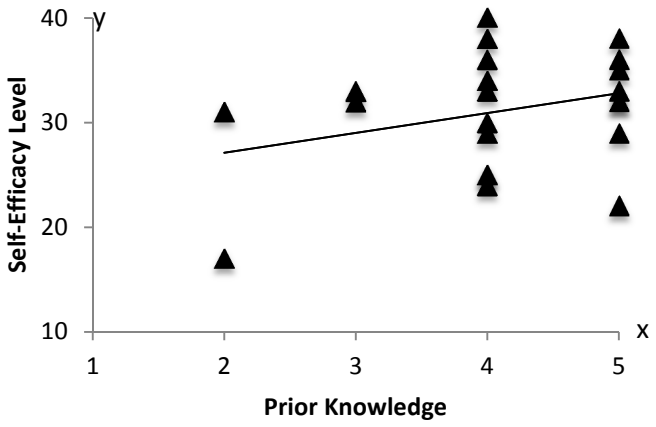

*Figure 2.*Relationship Between Prior Knowledge and Self-Efficacy

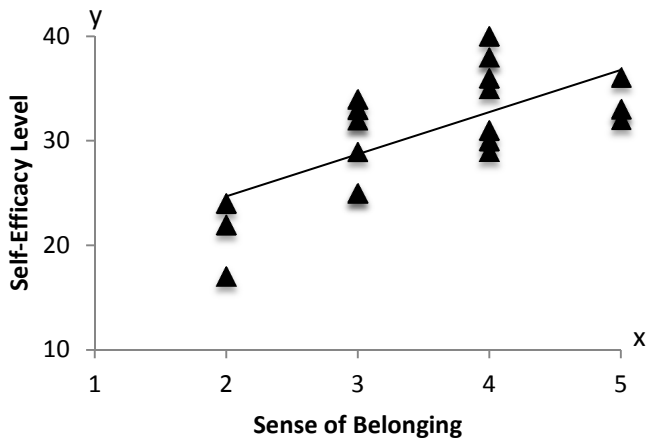

Figure 3.Relationship Between Sense of Belonging and Self-Efficacy

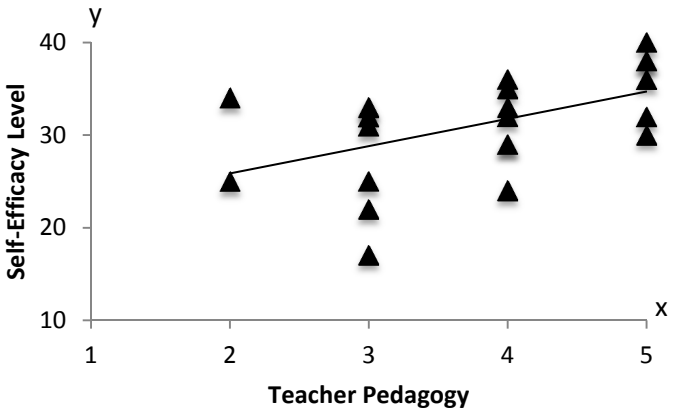

Figure 4.Relationship Between Teacher Pedagogy and Self-Efficacy

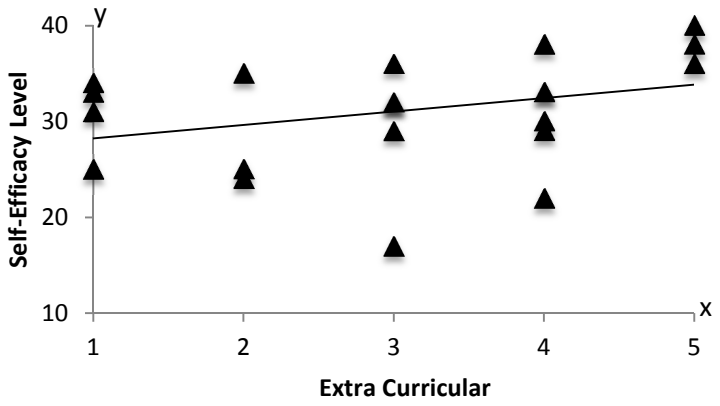

Figure 5.Relationship Between Extracurricular Activities and Self-Efficacy

The researcher then calculated Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to further explore the relationship between self-efficacy and experiential factors. While the graphs provide a visual representation of the association between self-efficacy and each experiential factor, Spearman's correlation coefficient provides measure of the strength of the relationship between the variables (Table 5).

Spearman's correlation coefficients, with respect to the four studied experiential factors, suggests that a positive relationship exists between self-efficacy and sense of belonging (EF2) (62%) and pedagogy (EF3) (48.4%), while weaker relationships exist between self-efficacy and prior knowledge (EF1) (20.6%) and extracurricular activities (EF4) (37.1%). Both Spearman's rank correlation coefficients (Table 5) and calculated averages (Table 4) show that, as students experience positive pedagogy and/or experience an increase in their sense of belonging, their self-efficacy increases.

Table 5

Spearman's Correlation Coefficient

			EF1	EF2	EF3	EF4	OF1	OF2	OF3	OF4
		SE Level	Prior Knowledge	Sense of Belonging	Teacher Ped	Extra curricular	Class Size	Time of Day	Flexible Schedule	Leader
	SE Level	1	.206	.620	.484	.371	.000	.294	.463	.414
EF1	Prior Knowledge		1	.388	.343	.318	-.065	-.047	.036	-.108
EF2	Sense of Belonging			1	.546	.251	.258	.316	.262	.205
EF3	Teacher Ped				1	.677	-.097	.340	.374	.390
EF4	Extra curricular					1	-.336	.085	.409	.075
OF1	Class Size						1	.236	.052	.261
OF2	Time of Day							1	.597	.506
OF3	Flexible Schedule								1	.496
OF4	Leader									1

Organizational factors. The relationship between student self-efficacy and organizational factors was determined when comparing the sum of survey questions 1 through 10 in comparison to individual responses of survey questions 15 through 18. When determining the relationship between self-efficacy and organizational factors, the Likert response values (1-5) of the organizational factors were compared to the general self-efficacy values to determine if a relationship exists. The researcher calculated the average value for each organizational factor and the average self-efficacy of students

below, equal to, and above average (Table 4). The self-efficacy of students increased as organizational factors were above average for 3 of the 4 factors. The greatest increase in self-efficacy was related to the importance of flexible scheduling and leadership practices. As student scheduling needs are met, their self-efficacy increases. Additionally, as students experience positive leadership, their self-efficacy increases. This trend applies to time of day in Kane's Extension School, but with a smaller percentage increase of self-efficacy.

In addition to calculating averages, the researcher created visual representations of trend lines to compare self-efficacy and organizational factors. The independent variable the level in which the participant agreed or disagreed with the statement made in the survey (scored from 1-5 and displayed on the x-axis) and the dependent variable self-efficacy (scored from 10-40 and displayed on the y-axis) were compared. As the points in the scatter plot are closer to the trend line, a stronger relationship exists between self-efficacy and the specific organizational factor. The relationship appears to be strongest between self-efficacy and leadership (Figure 9), followed by flexible scheduling (Figure 8), class size (Figure 6), and time of day (Figure 7). The strength of the relationship, as displayed by the plots compared to the trend line (Figures 6 through 9), are similar to the percentage increase of student self-efficacy relative to experiential factor averages (Table 4). The graphs show that the strongest relationships exist between self-efficacy and both leadership and flexible scheduling. Those two factors are those with the greatest percentage increase of student self-efficacy in terms of factor importance.

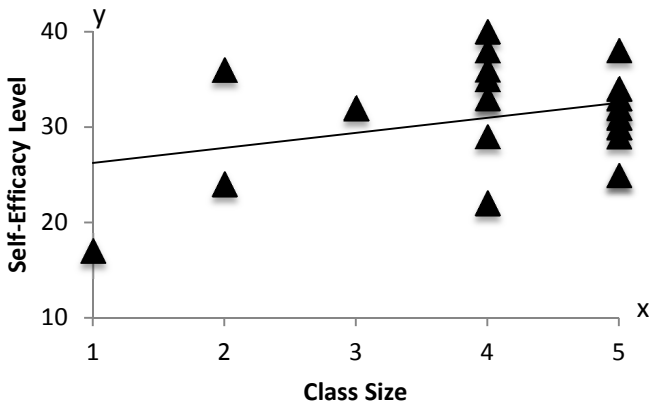

Figure 6.Relationship Between Class Size and Self-Efficacy

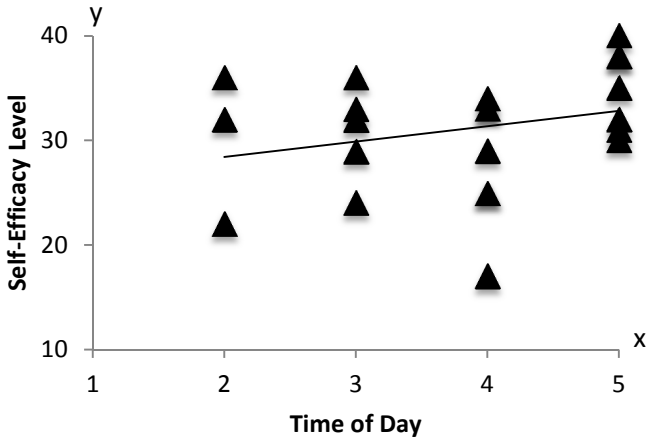

Figure 7.Relationship Between Time of Day and Self-Efficacy

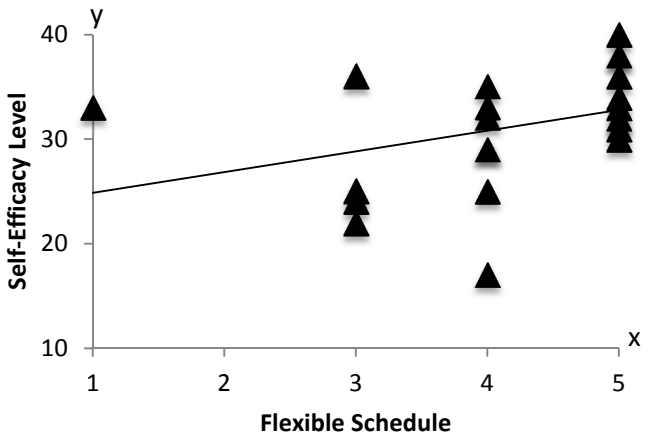

*Figure 8.*Relationship Between Flexible Schedule and Self-Efficacy

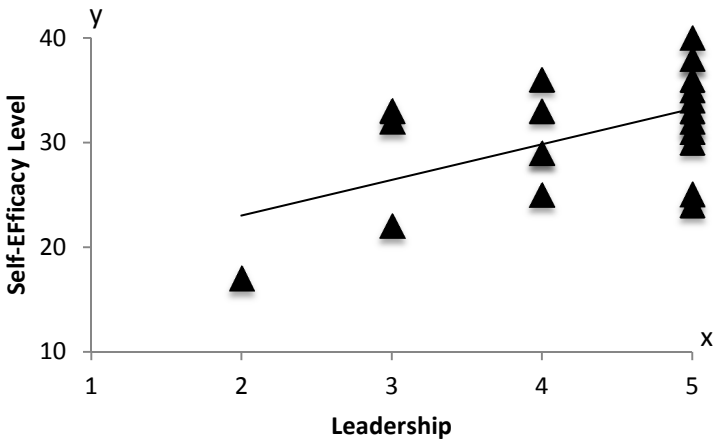

*Figure 9.*Relationship Between Leadership and Self-Efficacy

The researcher calculated Spearman's rank correlation coefficient to further explore the relationship between self-efficacy and organizational factors (Table 5). Spearman's correlation coefficients, in terms of to the four studied organizational factors, show that a relationship exists between self-efficacy and flexible scheduling (OF3) (46.3%), while a weaker relationship is apparent between self-efficacy and leadership (OF4) (41.4%) and time of day (OF2) (29.4%). Spearman's correlation coefficient shows no relationship between self-efficacy and class size (OF1) (0.0%). Both Spearman's correlation coefficients (Table 5) and calculated averages (Table 4) show that, as programs become more flexible, student self-efficacy increases. Additionally, Spearman's correlation coefficient shows that there is a weak relationship between class size and improved student self-efficacy, though calculated averages show that, as the importance of class size increases, student self-efficacy decreases.

Comparing factors. As well as the analysis of self-efficacy and individual experiential and organizational factors, a further analysis was conducted to determine if a relationship exists between any of the 8 factors themselves. Spearman's rank correlation coefficient (Table 5) shows the strength of the relationships between each of the factors.

The strongest relationship to emerge was that between the experiential factors of teacher pedagogy (EF3) involvement in extracurricular activities (EF4) with Spearman's correlation coefficient of 67.7%. This finding suggests a positive association between students who strongly agreed that their teachers make learning interesting and being involved in extracurricular activities. A positive relationship also emerged between pedagogy (EF3) and students' sense of belonging (EF2) with a Spearman's correlation coefficient of 54.6%. This finding suggests an association between students who strongly

agreed that their teachers make learning interesting and feeling that they belong to their school.

Organizational factors were also explored using survey responses. Based on Spearman's correlation coefficient, a relationship emerged between scheduling options (OF3) and time of day (OF2) with a coefficient of 59.7%. This association shows that students who value the flexible scheduling options of Kane's Extension School also value the time of day during which school is held. A relationship also emerged between time of day (OF2) and leadership (OF4) with a coefficient of 50.6%. This association suggest that the students find value in the time of day that school is held also value the leadership present during the alternative school day.

The time of day of Kane's Extension School occurs is not strongly associated with an increase in student self-efficacy (Table 5 and Figure 7), though it is valued as an important organizational factor relative to other factors. Participants mentioned a positive association between the time of day during which school is held with flexible scheduling and positive leadership interactions.

Supplemental Data

To support the quantitative results, interview responses further extended and supported the discussion of which experiential and organizational factors played a role in a positive academic experience in Kane's AEP.

Experiential factors. Interviewee responses highlighted the importance of pedagogy in student academic success, as found in the quantitative data analysis. The interviews also highlighted other teacher behaviors that students found to be meaningful. Students identified empathy from their teachers. Furthermore, students reported that their

alternative education teachers practiced student and teacher collaboration on a daily basis (Table 6).

As a result of the experiences of AESs at Kane School District, students reported an increase in attendance and improvements in their grades. Further, students stated that they felt more confident at school and experienced less distractions when enrolled in an alternative program. This lack of distractions was reportedly due to smaller class sizes. Each of the reported experiences may lead to an increased sense of belonging, which quantitatively was shown to have the most significant influence on students' self-efficacy.

Organizational factors. Interviewee responses also highlighted the importance of scheduling options in academic success. Students enjoy being enrolled in classes necessary for graduation, while still having the option to attend only 2 or 3 days a week. Additionally, students enjoy the elective classes in which they are able to enroll during the Extension School. Interviewees also highlighted the opportunity to practice individual coping mechanisms while at school (Table 6). Students feel comfortable listening to music and drawing while working on academic assignments.

Table 6

Interview Themes

Emergent Theme	Interviewee Responses
Teacher Behavior	• Pedagogy • Empathy • Collaboration
Student Behavior	• Increased Attendance • Improvement in Grades • Fewer Distractions
Program Organization	• Scheduling Options • Class Size • Opportunity for Individual Coping Mechanisms

Evidence of Trustworthiness

To establish the credibility of the data collection, triangulation was established. Concurrent triangulation was achieved through the use of interviews to support quantitative data findings (Creswell et al., 2003). Method triangulation was used as the researcher compared the consistency of findings generated by the survey and interview responses. Additionally, points where new ideas emerged from interview data provided insight into student experiences and organizational factors that should be explored further (Denzin, 1978 & Patton, 1990). The triangulation of sources ensured reliability due to the survey being conducted in a large-group setting and the interview being conducted privately with the researcher and the participant. Furthermore theoretical perspectives are used in order to examine and interpret the data. Analyst triangulation is conducted by comparing findings to existing literature on alternative education and self-efficacy independently (Denzin, 1978; Patton, 1990).

While the researcher did not survey and interview individuals from multiple sources, in this case multiple alternative education settings, interview participants did belong to a subgroup based on length of time enrolled in Kane's Extension School.

Survey. The researcher used a number of strategies to encourage a high response rate among participants. Firstly, the researcher met with the potential participants as a whole group a week before conducting the survey. This meeting informed participants of the purpose of the study and described how their feedback would be used. Due to the late enrollment of students, this meeting occurred a second time during the advisory period in order to invite additional participants. Secondly, the researcher was considerate of the participants' time and made it clear how many questions there were and how long the survey would take to complete. Finally, the researcher ensured that the questions were appropriate and easy to interpret and understand for participants (Fowler, 2014; Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

An internal threat to the validity of this study was the non-response bias if not all 24 potential participants chose to participate. The researcher planned to contact a few non-respondents within a week of the survey given to determine if their responses differed substantially from those of the respondents (Baruch & Holtom, 2008; Fowler, 2014, Creswell & Creswell, 2014). The researcher was unable to contact the 2 non-respondents because those participants did not give consent. The researcher was, however, provided with the demographics of the 2 non-respondents: they were both 18-year-old males in 12th grade who had been enrolled for 8-12 months. These students' demographics were identical to 3 of the survey participants and 1 interview participant. When analyzing both quantitative and supplemental data involving the identical

participants, the researcher made note of the potential discrepancies if the 2 non-respondents had participated.

Another internal threat to the validity of this study was history. The history was related to unanticipated events that could have taken place during the time of data collection (Creswell & Creswell, 2014). Additionally, an unanticipated event may have led to changes in research outcomes (Creswell & Creswell, 2014; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). An example of this change is if the leadership personnel changed over the course of the study. The subjects' feelings about how leadership impacts their successes may have shifted from "agree" to "strongly disagree", or vice versa. While the leadership personnel in Kane's Extension School did not change over the course of this study, an unanticipated event that did occur was the time of enrollment of 10 of the 22 participants. Time enrolled in the program may have had an impact on participant responses. Some students responded to the survey questions after having been enrolled in Kane's Extension School for 2 months, while others responded after having been enrolled for 3-12 months. To check the potential of this threat, the researcher compared the organizational leadership factors based on student length of enrollment. Students enrolled for both 0-2 and 3-7 months scored leadership a 4.4 (out of 5). Students enrolled for 8-12 months scored leadership a 4.2. Both scores are higher than the average of the other experiential or organizational factor analyzed in this study. This finding shows that, while those enrolled for a longer period of time (8-12 months) scored leadership slightly lower than those enrolled for a shorter period of time, they still scored the factor higher than the other factors being examined.

Another internal threat to validity was maturation. The maturation of the participants (ages ranging from 17-18 years old) may have altered their opinions of the experiential and organizational factors being studied. Varied responses between survey answers may have been due to the increasing maturity levels of the students rather than the factors being studied (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011). While this threat did exist, the collection of data occurred over a two-month period, during which participants' maturity levels were not expected to alter significantly specific to the content of this study (Creswell & Creswell, 2014).

A further external threat to the validity of this experiment was the small sample size of the population studied (N=24 at maximum). Even if the researcher had received 100% participation from the population, this sample size does not allow for findings to be generalized to other populations. Readers are cautioned, and results should be interpreted with care (Howell, 1995; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Ryan et al., 2002).

Time was the final external threat to the validity of this study. The results found in this research were time-bound, meaning that the researcher cannot generalize the results to past or future groups (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Ryan et al., 2002). To address external threats, the researcher recommends replicating the study at a later time in order to determine if the same results occurred and if the findings could be generalized to a wider population of AESs (Eriksson & Kovalainen, 2008; Lincoln & Guba, 1985).

Interview. An external threat to the validity of this study was volunteer bias. Volunteer bias may occur when the participants of a research project are different in some ways from the general population (Wiederman, 1999; Wallin, 1949). To ensure that the researcher was not sampling only a subset of the population, the researcher compared

the demographic information of the interview participants. The interview participants represented each age, grade, gender, and length of enrollment subset.

In addition, the researcher performed member checking to increase the trustworthiness of the follow-up interviews. Member checking occurred when interviews had been transcribed the week after being conducted. This strategy was the single most important method in ruling out the possibility of misinterpreting the meaning of what participants said and perceived. This method is also an important way of identifying the researcher's own bias and misunderstanding of what was observed (Maxwell, 2005). Interview participants confirmed that the transcription was an accurate portrayal of their interview responses. Additionally, member checking confirmed that neither the researcher nor transcriber misinterpreted responses (Maxwell, 2005; Merriam, 2009). The consistency of using semi-structured interviews was imperative in ensuring the trustworthiness of the study.

Summary

Data collection and analysis allowed specific themes to emerge in terms of experiential and organizational factors related to student self-efficacy. The four research questions were answered through a combination of quantitative and supplemental data.

What are the general perceived self-efficacy levels of alternative education students in Kane School District? Student self-efficacy levels peak when they are enrolled for 3-7 months. Self-efficacy levels decline when they are enrolled for 8-12 months. Further, students under the age of 18 have higher levels of student self-efficacy than those over 18.

What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and experiential factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District? Self-efficacy levels increased as effective pedagogy and a positive sense of belonging increased. Supplemental data extended teacher behavior by identifying the value of teacher empathy and student-teacher collaboration. Additionally, students who felt that they belonged at the school were characterized by increased attendance and confidence.

What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and organizational factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District? Flexible scheduling positively influenced student self-efficacy. Additionally, a relationship was found between self-efficacy and leadership personnel. Self-efficacy increased as the presence of the flexible schedule and positive leadership personnel increased. Supplemental data supported the need for flexible scheduling as students reportedly valued attending school less than 5 days a week and enjoy elective classes.

To what extent are the experiential and organizational factors of the alternative education program in Kane School District related? A relationship exists between pedagogy and student sense of belonging. When teachers make learning interesting, students feel included in the school community. Students discussed these ideas in their interview responses by discussing the value of teacher empathy and student-teacher collaboration. A unique relationship emerged between pedagogy and involvement in extracurricular activities. This finding suggests that, when alternative education teachers make learning interesting, students enjoy being involved in extracurricular activities. The supplemental data findings did not mention extracurricular activities.

Considering these findings, the following chapter discusses the findings by confirming and extending knowledge found in existing literature. Additionally, the findings are interpreted in the specific context of this study. Recommendations are made for future research, policy development, and leadership practices. Finally, the implications and significance of findings described throughout the study are addressed. The researcher describes the potential impact of positive change at appropriate educational leadership levels.

Chapter 5

Discussion, Recommendations and Conclusions

The purpose of this study was to establish an understanding of the self-efficacy of alternative education students (AESs) relative to the experiential and organizational factors of alternative education programs (AEPs). The study was conducted in the Kane School District (pseudonym), focusing on their AEP. Data collection and analysis highlighted self-efficacy levels based on time enrolled in the AEP. This analysis also highlighted particular experiential and organizational factors that led to increased student self-efficacy. This chapter will provide an interpretation and discussion of the study, recommendations about policy development, leadership practices, and future research as a result of the findings. Additionally, this chapter addresses the implications of the significance of the findings and the potential impact for positive change in the Kane School District.

Research Problem

The importance of the high school diploma is a social justice issue. The pay gap between individuals who do and do not hold a high school diploma or equivalent is prevalent in today's society (NCES, 2015). The median earnings of young adults with a high school diploma (30,500 USD) and young adults with a bachelor's degree (50,000 USD) were 22 and 100 percent higher respectively than those of young adults without a high school diploma (25,000 USD) (NCES, 2017). In addition to the socioeconomic benefits of earning a high school diploma, states could save in annual crime costs if high school male graduation rates increased by 5 percentage points (McClatchy, 2013). The impact of education on crime reduction builds upon research that links lower levels of

educational attainment with higher rates of arrests and incarceration (Eby, 2013). Additionally, the more schooling people have the better their health is likely to be (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007). More education is consistently associated with lower death rates, while less education leads to higher levels of risky health behaviors such as smoking, being overweight, or having a low level of physical activity (Freudenberg & Ruglis, 2007; Thrane, 2006).

In addition to the socioeconomic, crime and health-related importance of a high school diploma, it is important for school districts to create a space for students to enhance their self-efficacy. A high level of self-efficacy is coupled with enhanced resilience, increased positive self-image, and pro-social behavior, such as being helpful and selfless (Diekstra, 2008; O'Conner et al., 2017). Additionally, high self-efficacy also leads to a reduction in violence and improved grades and test scores at school (Diekstra, 2008; O'Conner et al., 2017; Price, Biehl, Solomon, & Weir, 2014).

Finally, in today's data-driven educational environment, it is estimated that 1 of every 3 students will graduate (Thornburgh, 2006). School leaders must look for effective strategies that can be implemented to aid in keeping all students engaged in school and on track to graduate.

School districts play a role in closing the socioeconomic gap and enhancing student self-efficacy by creating a learning environment appropriate for all students. With an understanding of the self-efficacy of AESs, this study may make valuable contributions in advancing policies, research, and identifying influential leadership practices. Policy, research, and leadership advancements may lead to best practices relative to organizational and experiential standards in AEPs.

Methodology

This study employed a quantitative research design and semi-structured interviews to support quantitative results. The quantitative data collection was performed using an adapted version of the Generalized Self-Efficacy Scale (GSES) survey along with eight researcher-created questions related to the conceptual framework. The GSES is a ten-item survey that assesses the strength of an individual's belief in their ability to respond to novel or difficult situations and deal with relevant obstacles or setbacks (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). In addition to the items on the GSES, the researcher-created questions allowed for an analysis of the relationship between self-efficacy and experiential and organizational factors quantitatively. The survey was distributed to consenting students enrolled in Kane School District's Extension School. All students enrolled in Kane's Extension School (n=24) were recruited to participate in the study. Of the 24 potential participants, 22 gave consent to participate and the 2 non-respondents were considered in data analysis. Through surveys, the researcher obtained a numerical description of opinions of the population studied (Creswell, 2014). The first 10 questions of the survey analyzed student self-efficacy on a scale of 10-40. The subsequent 8 questions of the survey collected student opinions of the level to which they agreed with a statement on a continuous scale from 1-5, relative to experiential and organizational factors. The use of the survey provided the researcher with a more comprehensive understanding of self-efficacy relative to experiential and organizational factors.

To support the quantitative findings, the researcher collected supplemental data through semi-structured interviews with 8 of the students that had completed the survey. Interviews were transcribed and coded to deepen the understanding of experiential and

organizational factors explored in the survey. The following discussion includes an independent analysis of student self-efficacy relative to time enrolled in Kane's Extension School, along with an understanding of which experiential and organizational factors relate to both student self-efficacy and other studied factors.

Research Questions

The study surrounded four research questions that aimed to uncover the self-efficacy levels of alternative education students independent of and relative to constructivist learning and organizational theories. The research questions are

1. What are the general perceived self-efficacy levels of alternative education students in Kane School District?
2. What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and experiential factors of alternative education students in Kane School District?
3. What is the relationship between student self-efficacy levels and organizational factors of alternative education students in Kane School District?
4. To what extent are experiential and organizational factors of alternative education programs associated?

Major Findings

As a result of the data analysis process, the following major findings emerged:

1. Self-efficacy levels peak when students have been enrolled in Kane School District's alternative education program for 3-7 months. Self-efficacy levels decline, however, when students have been enrolled for 8-12 months. Further,

students under the age of 18 have higher self-efficacy levels than those over the age of 18.

2. Self-efficacy levels increased as effective teacher pedagogy and a positive student sense of belonging increased. Supplemental data extends teacher behavior by identifying the value of teacher empathy and student-teacher collaboration. Additionally, students who feel as though they belong to their school also experience increased attendance and increased confidence.
3. Self-efficacy levels increased with the increased presence of a flexible schedule and instructional leadership practices. Supplemental data supported the need for flexible scheduling as students reportedly appreciate the possibility of attending school less than 5 days a week, and enjoy the elective classes they are able to enroll in.
4. A relationship exists between teacher pedagogy and student sense of belonging. As teachers make learning interesting, students feel included in their school community.

Discussion

The findings of this study confirmed and/or extended various key concepts described in the literature review. Interpretation of findings confirmed importance of both a student's sense of belonging and teacher behavior in the academic success of alternative education students. Quantitative analysis furthered this idea by displaying the positive relationship between a student's sense of belonging and teacher behavior with that of student self-efficacy levels. Findings also confirmed the presence of flexible scheduling

in alternative education programs. This study furthered prior research by displaying that as students experience a flexible schedule, their self-efficacy levels increase.

Additionally, this study confirmed the impact of leadership practices on student experiences. The supplemental data gave reason to believe that Kane's Extension Program leader is an instructional leader, and recommendations were made to extend that leadership practice to transformational leadership practices as well.

Finally, positive associations among studied factors emerged independent of self-efficacy levels. Relationships exist between teacher pedagogy and both extra curricular activities and student sense of belonging. Relationships also exist between time of day and both flexible scheduling and leadership practices. These associations give insight to ways in which alternative education programs can positively impact multiple experiential and organizational factors at a time.

Self-efficacy levels of alternative education students. In interviewing students who had been enrolled in Kane School District's AEP for 0-12 months, it was found that student self-efficacy were highest when students were enrolled for 3-7 months. Specific to experiential factors, it was found that, when positive pedagogy and a student's sense of belonging increased, students' self-efficacy also increased. Additionally, as programs become more flexible organizationally, student self-efficacy levels also had the opportunity to increase. An analysis of the self-efficacy of AESs was necessary in understanding why and how a particular subgroup of students performs academically. In previously collected data from approximately 18,000 people, the average self-efficacy of high school students under the age of 18 was 29.6 (of 40), while the average of adults of 18 years and older was 29.4 (Schwarzer & Jersualem, 1995). The average self-efficacy

level of Kane's AESs under the age of 18 was 30.6, while the average of students 18 years and older was 33.8. The combined average of all participants in this study was 31.1.

The score range of the survey was from 10-40. Responses were categories as low self-efficacy (10-20), moderate self-efficacy (21-30), and high self-efficacy (31-40) (Table 2). These categories were chosen based on previous studies of the evaluation of self-efficacy using Schwarzer & Jerusalem's GSES instrument (Pant, 2016; Rambod et al., 2018; Singh, 2019; Waraporn mongkholkul et al., 2018). Reported levels show that the average Extension School student has a high level of self-efficacy (Table 3). Having a high level of self-efficacy means individuals are more likely to view difficult tasks as something that can be overcome (Bandura, 1997). Additionally, individuals with a high level of self-efficacy remain optimistic and confident when in challenging situations (Bandura, 1997). Conversely, individuals with a low level of self-efficacy do not believe they have control over difficult situations and cannot manage potential threats (Bandura, 1997).

According to existing literature, 57% of students enrolled in AEPs have experienced chronic academic failures (Carver, Leis, & Tice, 2010; Lehr, Tan, & Ysseldyke, 2009). These statistics suggest that alternative students are entering programs as a result of their limited academic success. The self-efficacy of the participants of this study, however, are particularly high. These students' self-efficacy is an indicator of their own judgments of their capability to organize and execute a course of action to attain a designated goal (Bandura 1977; Bandura 1997). For the purpose of this study, the research problem focused around students earning a high school diploma. While the participants may not have been academically successful in the past, they now have an

increased confidence and feel that they will complete high school as a result of being enrolled in Kane's Extension School.

The researcher analyzed the collected data by exploring self-efficacy based on time enrolled in Kane's Extension School. It was found that students enrolled for 3-7 months had a high level of self-efficacy (34.0), compared to a moderate level of self-efficacy of those enrolled for 2 months or less (30.1), or over 8 months (29.0). This change in self-efficacy levels follows a parabolic trend as levels begin at a moderate level, increase to a high level, then decrease again to a moderate level. The 3 enrollment categories (0 to 2 months, 3 to 7, and 8 to 12 months) were arbitrarily chosen by the researcher. In order to check the validity of the chosen categorical ranges, the researcher shifted enrollment categories three additional times and continued to find self-efficacy levels went from moderate, to high, and back to moderate.

It is possible that the parabolic nature of self-efficacy levels based on enrollment are due to the students' modification of their behavior and participation in the study. Observer effects may explain that participants of studies may perform better knowing they are being studied (Frey, 2018). Some of the students who have been enrolled for 3 to 7 months may be experiencing this effect, and therefore their self-efficacy levels are skewed.

Experiential factors related to self-efficacy levels. According to existing literature, some of the most influential factors that impact student experiences in AEPs are students' prior knowledge, sense of belonging, pedagogy, and involvement in extracurricular activities. These four factors were analyzed alongside student self-efficacy to more accurately understand their potential relationships. As a result of the quantitative

findings, which were supported with supplemental data, the most influential experiential influences on self-efficacy are sense of belonging and pedagogy.

An analysis was performed to more accurately understand what experiential factors lead to AESs' high self-efficacy. It was found that, when students feel more connected to their school (factor: sense of belonging), their self-efficacy increases. Additionally, when students are taught by teachers with empathy and collaborative practices (factor: teacher pedagogy), their self-efficacy also increases.

Student sense of belonging. According to existing literature, students who attend AEPs report that teacher support and individualized attention are some of the most positive elements of these programs (Lange & Sletten, 2002; Hamden, 2016; Quinn et al., 2006). Furthermore, students in AEPs report feeling welcomed and embraced by teachers and staff. This sense of welcoming contributes to a sense of acceptance, trust, and belonging (Hansen, 1998; Raywid, 1994; Swaminathan, 2004). Cultivating a sense of community and a safe space contributes to a sense of commitment, integration, and alliances among students and faculty (Raywid, 1994; Swaminathan, 2004). The sense of belonging cultivated in AEPs aids in improving student attendance (Carver, Lewis, & Tice, 2010; Lehr, Tan, & Tsseldyke, 2009). In addition to the quantitative data showing that sense of belonging positively increases student self-efficacy, supplemental data suggests that AESs have increased attendance since being enrolled in an AEP. As students feel included in their school, they attend more often and are more likely to reach their academic goals.

Teacher behavior. According to existing literature, positive student-teacher relationships formed in AEPs are among the top factors that influence student learning (May & Copeland, 1998). Teachers' willingness to enter into the alternative education route shows their flexibility to function under uncertain and/or inconsistent students and schedules. A previous study of alternative education teachers found that alternative education teachers appeared to have an adequate understanding of their students' home, school and social life struggles. Furthermore, faculty members seemed to be well equipped to deal with students' disruptive behaviors (Ahn & Simpson, 2013). The current study supports existing findings by providing insight into teacher practices that students find value in, namely that they are empathetic to students' needs.

While existing literature has shown the value of teacher behavior in academic success, the quantitative data findings of this study extend that idea by showing that teacher behavior directly impacts students' self-efficacy (May & Copeland, 1998; Ahn & Simpson, 2013). This connection emphasizes teaching styles of those working in Kane's Extension School. Students value their teachers' positive behaviors, which are related to self-efficacy. As a result, Kane's students have high self-efficacy. Retaining these teachers is key in creating an environment that cultivates high student self-efficacy.

Organizational factors related to self-efficacy levels. According to existing literature, some of the most influential organizational factors in student learning in AEPs are class size, the time of during which school is held, scheduling options, and leadership practices (Bush, 2015; Leithwood & Levin, 2010; Means, 2015). These four factors were analyzed alongside student self-efficacy levels to more accurately understand potential relationships. As a result of the quantitative findings, which was further supported with

supplemental data, the most influential organizational factors on self-efficacy are flexible scheduling and leadership practices.

Flexible scheduling. This study found that, when class schedules were more flexible, student self-efficacy increased. Supplemental data supported this idea by describing classes in two ways, namely fluid and small. Students reported they were placed in classes necessary for graduation, though they also had the option to reorganize their day to maximize time spent on tasks. Students stated that they felt as though their time was valued and that their needs were met on an individual basis. Students enrolled in Kane's Extension School had a schedule specific to their own needs. The supplemental data shows that students have an "opportunity to use individual coping mechanisms" as they are provided with the time and space at Kane to use coping strategies. Reported coping strategies included listening to music and drawing. This idea connects to a previous study, which notes that AESs value the flexibility of their time inside the classroom (Morrissette, 2011). Interview participants expanded on this idea by explaining they are provided with the time and space in class to practice individual coping mechanisms. Reported examples are listening to music and drawing. Supplemental data also provided insight into the decreased distractions and supportive peer relationships inside the classroom. A safe and encouraging space contributes to partnerships between students and faculty (Raywid, 1994; Swaminathan, 2004).

Leadership practices. The quantitative data also shows a relationship between leadership and self-efficacy. Both survey averages and Spearman's correlation coefficient show that Kane's AESs are experiencing positive leadership practices, which has resulted in their self-efficacy increasing. Participants scored leadership highest on average

compared to the other factors (Table 4). Spearman's correlation coefficient also identified leadership as the second most influential factor relative to a student's self-efficacy (Table 5). While the quantitative data emphasized the importance of leadership in a broad sense, the supplemental data provided a space for students to speak of their alternative education teachers and alternative education leaders. As a result of the combined data, it appears that the AELs in Kane's Extension School are instructional leaders. Instructional leaders are constantly developing their own best practices and focusing on the effective management of resources and people through recruiting, hiring, and training others (Fullan, 2011; Stronge et al., 2008).

Association of experiential and organizational factors. An analysis was performed to more comprehensively understand the relationship between experiential and organizational factors. The relationships that emerged provided a lens through which the research was able to examine the improvement of each factor and how it may also positively improve others. If the amount of resources available in an AEP are limited due to the number of learners, it may be necessary to change one factor at a time while influencing other factors.

Teacher behavior and extracurricular activities. A relationship emerged between the experiential factors of teacher behavior and involvement in extracurricular activities. If the number of extracurricular activities for AESs is limited in school, teachers may find a way to guide students to other forms of non-academic activities.

Teacher behavior and sense of belonging. A relationship also exists between teacher behavior and students' sense of belonging. When students experience positive teacher behavior, they feel connected to their school. Organizational theory values the

idea of all stakeholders establishing goals within an organization (Bolman & Deal, 1991; Bush, 2015). The inclusion of students, teachers, and leaders in the discussion of understanding and developing the structure, culture, and context of AEPs is key in the long-term sustainability of the program.

Time of school day and flexible scheduling options. A relationship exists between time of day and flexible scheduling. Kane's Extension School occurs after traditional school hours. Therefore, the schedules are flexible and specific to facility and personnel availability. As participants found value in the time of day that they attend school, they also found value in varied scheduling.

Time of school day and leadership practices. A relationship also exists between time of day and leadership practices. Participants who found value in alternative time of day that they attended school, also found that the leadership of their program was effective. The positive relationship that students create with their school leaders may be due to the number of students enrolled during Kane's Extension School. Leadership personnel have the opportunity to create a relationship with students due to the limited number enrolled in the program.

Limitations

A key limitation of this study relates to the sample size of the studied population (N=24 at maximum). The researcher received consent from 22 of the 24 potential participants. This sample size does not allow for findings to be generalized to other populations. Readers are cautioned, and results should be interpreted with care (Howell, 1995; Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Ryan et al., 2002).

Time also limited the findings of this study. As the school year progressed, more students enrolled in Kane's Extension School. This study does not account for the experiences and opinions of the students after the surveys and interviews had been conducted. Since the research was time-bound, results cannot be generalized to past or future circumstances (Ihantola & Kihn, 2011; Ryan et al., 2002).

Recommendations

The findings of this research offer implications for future policy, practice, and research. While the sample size of this study is too small to generalize to larger populations when the findings are coupled with those of existing literature, recommendations can be made.

Policy. The New Jersey Department of Education (NJDOE) is currently part of the *Building Teacher Leadership Capacity to Support Beginning Teachers* grant, which is overseen by the Office of Professional Development. The grant aims to support and retain teachers through best practices and adequate resources (NJDOE, 2019). A gap in this state-level practice is that the state does not explicitly prepare and support alternative education teachers with the grant. Best practices and resources in AEPS differ from those provided to traditional education programs (Raywid, 1994).

Develop alternative education teacher certification requirements. The findings of this study emphasize the necessity for empathetic and collaborative teachers in AEPs. Empathetic and collaborative teachers must have the opportunity for development and support, similarly to their traditional education colleagues. Specific to this study, previously explored literature, quantitative findings, and supplemental data give value to teacher behavior and its impact on the self-efficacy levels of AESs.

As a result of the importance of teacher behavior in student success, alternative education teachers must be prepared to meet the needs of their student population. Teachers of AEPs are certified to teach in traditional education programs but may not have experience with an alternative education population (Zimmerman, 2003). Due to a lack of training, an additional course or series of seminars on the types of AEPs, their population, and the resources available would enhance the practices of alternative education teachers. This complement to teacher preparation would help develop best practices specific to the experiences of AESs.

Practice. In order to continue to create meaningful experiences leading to high levels of self-efficacy for the alternative population in Kane School District, there needs to be an increase in leadership networking and teacher professional development opportunities,

Create a network of alternative education leaders. The results of this study highlight the importance of instructional leaders at Kane's Extension School. Participants reported that leaders are focused on individual student learning. Curricular offerings and flexible scheduling are organized to meet students' academic needs (Fullan, 2011; Stronge et al, 2008). While the leadership of Kane's Extension School values the individual needs of students and uses their resources accordingly, leaders may strengthen their programs by also practicing transformational leadership. Transformational leaders expand their focus from an instructional to a whole-program vision (Shields, 2013). The current high school program of the Kane School District is described in the following statement:

> Academic rigor, student activities, and parent involvement are embedded in the educational program at Kane High School. Students can choose from over 200 courses, including 18 Advanced Placement courses. Our program also offers a complete honors program in the four core subjects and world language. Unique to the study of world languages, Kane High School has a computer lab dedicated to speaking and listening and offers courses in American Sign Language (OCHS, 2018).

This description suggests that Kane's educational programs offer an academically rigorous variety of courses. Because Kane's AEP is a Type I AEP, it contributes to the traditional program descried above (Raywid, 1994). While Kane's Extension School population has previously been enrolled in Kane's traditional program, they are now completing their academic requirements in an alternative setting. Within the program of studies catalog, the Extension School is described with the following statement:

> Kane High School has developed an alternative high school program that runs from 1:30-5:30pm for selected students. Juniors and seniors that may have credit, attendance or behavioral issues may be considered for this program. Placement is determined by the high school administration (OCHS, 2018).

The descriptions of Kane's general education program of studies and Extension School are independent of one another. Transformational leadership practices are required to formulate a strong, shared vision among Extension School students, staff, and community members. Students, staff, and community members should be actively involved in the decision-making process of the experiences and organizational practices of Kane's AEP. Transformational leaders should incorporate stakeholders into the

mission of the organization by creating a vision and climate necessary for change (Leithwood, 1992).

To reinforce the instructional leadership practices exhibited by leaders and encourage the development of transformational practices, a network of alternative education leaders should be formed. In New Jersey, a mentorship program already exists for aspiring and current principals. Part of the requirements to obtain a principal certification is a mentorship meeting between an aspiring leader and existing principal at least once a month (NJDOE, 2015). This mentorship provides guidance and support and opens the doors to expanding the leader's network. A gap in state-level mentorship policy is the absence of an alternative education mentorship program. In a school district, there are typically multiple regular education leaders, but there is likely to only be one alternative education leader. It is recommended that each county create a formal network of alternative education leaders. This support system would aid in continuing the development of effective alternative education leaders. Strong principal networks influence school culture. Teacher networks allow leaders build trust with one another, support collaborative learning, foster collective responsibility, and have a significant impact (Neale & Cone, 2013).

Provide professional development opportunities for alternative education teachers. The findings of this research may provide guidelines of teacher behavior that increase the self-efficacy of AESs at Kane School District through experiences and organizational factors. In addition to recommending policy changes to train alternative education teachers through the addition of a course or series of seminars, offering support in the form of mentorship and professional development focused on their behavior would

directly increase student self-efficacy. Academic engagement and positive relationships formed in these programs are among the most important factors in influencing student learning (May & Copeland, 1998). It is recommended that the Kane School District create a mentorship program among Extension School staff to increase the professional development opportunities specific to the needs of its teachers. Mentorship and administrative support are effective methods in retaining teachers (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

In terms of professional development, Educational Leadership Magazine's March 2018 issue recently released *The Empathetic School* (Tomlinson & Murphy, 2018). Providing Kane's Extension School should provide teachers with an opportunity to read the article and reflect upon how it relates to their own practice. Teachers may discuss strategies used to reach their AESs and create a wish list of resources that they may need to continue to develop their own personal empathy.

Research. It is recommended that follow-up research studies occur as a result of this study. By continuing to research alternative education programs with respect to organizational theory, school districts can continue to develop programs that are specific to the needs of their student population.

Follow-up research is recommended to track the development of teacher behavior as a result of a mentorship program and professional development opportunities. This study should be performed in-district and over the course of 1, 2, 5, or 10 years. The data collection each year should track the level of support that teachers experience and understand the level of empathetic and collaborative practices that teacher exhibit.

Future research should also explore alternative education teachers' and administrators' perception of the self-efficacy of alternative education students. In addition, future research studies may explore how alternative education programs are perceived from students enrolled in traditional education programs. An understanding of how others perceive alternative programs and the students who enroll in the programs may shed light on outside support or challenges alternative students receive.

The literature review describes the population enrolling in alternative education programs. Future researcher is recommended to understand student self-efficacy related to why they enrolled in an alternative education program.

Implications

The successful completion of high school continues to be critical in closing the socioeconomic gap of young adults (Lehr et al., 2009; Lehr & Lange, 2003). Policy makers need to develop policies and encourage practices more inclusive of alternative education teachers and leaders. This study offers three levels of implications for practice. Firstly, it is recommended that the Kane School District create a mentorship program for their alternative education staff. The participating students reported positive experiences with their teachers. As a result, it is critical to retain these teachers to foster academic success for future AESs. Mentorship positively impacts teacher retention (Cochran-Smith et al., 2011; Smith & Ingersoll, 2004).

Secondly, it is recommended that Kane provide an opportunity for professional development specific to the alternative education staff. The first professional development opportunity should involve teacher empathy. Future professional development opportunities may also be driven by student and teacher needs.

Finally, the results of this study lead the researcher to recommend networking opportunities among local alternative education leaders. Student self-efficacy increases with an increase of flexibility in class schedule. If alternative education leaders have a forum to meet quarterly, they can share how they use the flexibility of their own program's schedules to meet the needs of their students, thereby continuing to improve the flexibility of options for their students. There are 17 school districts in the county in which Kane School District resides. It is recommended the leaders of the alternative programs across the county meet on a rotating basis. A county-wide committee may be formed with volunteering leaders to organize agendas and provide guiding themes for each meeting. At the discretion of the committee, each leader can present on a particular theme.

Conclusion

This study leads to an understanding of the self-efficacy levels of alternative education students relative to experiential and organizational factors. Findings uncovered what experiential and organizational factors lead to particularly high levels of student self-efficacy. Students reported that teacher pedagogy, leadership practices, and scheduling options were among the most important experiential and organizational factors to ensure academic success. With an understanding of how teachers and leaders can create educational experiences and organize educational programs that positively impact student self-efficacy levels, students are set up to succeed in reaching an academic goal of graduating from high school.

It is the responsibility of transformational school leaders to create an environment that encourages the continuous positive development of programs and students.

Alternative education leaders can create impactful experiences through the development of teacher behavior. Professional development surrounding empathy and teacher practices directly impact student experiences. Alternative education leaders can also organize educational programs in a flexible way that increases the likelihood that students will graduate from high school. Flexible scheduling options and solutions to organizational struggles can be addressed through networking opportunities with other alternative education leaders.

In light of the development of statewide definitions of alternative education programs, the findings of this study give importance to the continual professional development of alternative education teachers and leaders. In addition to the recommendations described, the long-term development of alternative education teacher and leadership certifications needs to be researched further. The development of alternative education certificates would be supplemental to the traditional teacher and leadership certifications and could be obtained through the completion of an additional set of courses available in teacher education and school leadership programs.

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Appendix A

Survey Protocol

Survey Part 1: Self-Efficacy
Please answer the following questions using a scale from 1 to 4.

1 (Not at all true)
2 (Barely true)
3 (Moderately true)
4 (Exactly true)

1. I can always manage to solve difficult problems in school if I try hard enough.
   1 2 3 4

2. If someone opposes me in school, I can find means and ways to get what I want.
   1 2 3 4

3. It is easy for me to stick to my aims and accomplish my goals in school.
   1 2 3 4

4. I am confident that I could deal efficiently with unexpected events in school.
   1 2 3 4

5. Thanks to my resourcefulness, I know how to handle unforeseen situations in school.
   1 2 3 4

6. I can solve most problems in school if I invest the necessary effort.
   1 2 3 4

7. I can remain calm when facing difficulties in school because I can rely on my coping abilities.
   1 2 3 4

8. When I am confronted with a problem in school, I can usually find several solutions.
   1 2 3 4

9. If I am in a bind in school, I can usually think of something to do.
   1 2 3 4

10. No matter what comes my way in school, I'm usually able to handle it.
    1 2 3 4

Survey Part 2: Experiential Factors
Please answer the following questions using a scale from 1 to 4.

1 (Strongly disagree)
2 (Disagree)
3 (Neither agree nor disagree)
4 (Agree)
5 (Strongly agree)

11. I use previously learned information in school.

1 2 3 4 5

12. I feel I belong to my school.

1 2 3 4 5

13. My teachers make learning interesting.

1 2 3 4 5

14. I enjoy being involved in extracurricular activities.

1 2 3 4 5

Survey Part 3: Organizational Factors
Please answer the following questions using a scale from 1 to 4.

1 (Strongly disagree)
2 (Disagree)
3 (Neither agree nor disagree)
4 (Agree)
5 (Strongly agree)

15. I learn better with fewer kids in my class.

1 2 3 4 5

16. I learn better in the afternoon.

1 2 3 4 5

17. My class schedule is flexible.

1 2 3 4 5

18. My principal is a good leader.

1 2 3 4 5

Appendix B

Interview Protocol

1. What was your day-to-day experience like at school before coming to Extension School?

2. How did you do academically before coming to Extension School?
    a. Were you satisfied with your performance?
    b. Why or why not?

3. How did things go for you last marking period in Extension School?
    a. Did your academic performance meet the expectations you had set for yourself?
    b. Why or why not?

4. Can you describe something that helps your performance in school?

5. Can you describe something that hurts your performance in school?

6. How do your experiences in your classes differ from the end of the year to the beginning of the year?

7. What seems to affect your beliefs that you will or will not succeed in school?

8. Can you complete the sentence: I feel confident as a learner when _____.

9. Can you complete the sentence: I do not feel confident as a learner when _____.

10. Rate your current confidence in your ability to earn your high school diploma in Kane School District on a scale from 1 to 4. (1: Not confident at all; 4: Very confident)
    a. Can you help me understand your rating?