

Reflective Essay

The Capstone Project I am submitting for consideration is titled “The Impact of Special Education Professional Development on New, Intermediate, and Veteran General Education Teachers’ Self-Efficacy Regarding Instructing Students with Disabilities and Implementation of Accommodations.” This study I conducted during the Spring semester of 2023 is for Dr. Limon’s EDES 6611 Special Education Master’s Professional Project class. Students were asked to develop a study that attempts to answer research questions that we as Special Education educators think are important to explore.

The topic of my research first came about when I had conversations with my colleagues. As a Resource Program Specialist (RSP), I provide services for our students with disabilities (SWDs) through a co-teaching model. One of my former co-teachers commented on not feeling prepared with implementing accommodations. This first-year teacher even shared with me that her teacher preparation program only had one class addressing students with special needs to further emphasize her point of feeling unprepared. When talking to my Resource Department colleagues, everyone had a commentary regarding how SWDs assignments are accommodated. This led me to question if this was a challenge only first-year teachers endured, or if this was across the board despite years of teaching experience. Nonetheless, I wanted to find a way for our school to better support our general education teachers with effectively implementing accommodations. One solution I formulated was through the use of professional development (PD) since PDs are held weekly at my school site. These wonderings gave me a foundation of topics to start investigating and constructing my research questions.

One momentous assignment that led me to finalize my research questions/thesis was the annotated bibliography assignment for Dr. Limon’s class during the Fall semester. My original

thesis only centered on accommodations, however, I found ways to further expand my research questions after going through the research process. Using the online databases from the Hannon Library's website, I collected a variety of research that explores general education teachers' self-efficacy (confidence) in instructing SWDs, differences among new and experienced teachers, and studies that incorporated the use of PD. Using the 20 peer-reviewed articles I collected, I was able to identify five themes and identify gaps. This led me to revise my research questions to include general education teachers' self-efficacy in teaching SWDs, in addition to confidence and knowledge in accommodation implementation. My original two research questions turned into three after completing the annotated bibliography and literature review.

The tool that was most invaluable to my research was the EBSCOhost database. Using the EBSCOhost database allowed me to access a variety of research by easily searching and adjusting keywords related to my study. Moreover, the most helpful aspect of the database was the ability to filter certain areas. For instance, I was able to check off the "Peer Reviewed" box to make sure I was only looking at reliable and trustworthy sources (i.e. academic journals, books, etc.). Something else that helped me was referring to the cite tool to help me format my citations in APA style.

One challenge I encountered during the research process was having moments where I felt like I reached a dead end. However, to mitigate those moments I resorted to other strategies. One was adjusting the keywords in the search bars on EBSCOhost, as suggested by an LMU librarian during a Library Instruction presentation. Thinking of other synonymous words helped me discover more literature in the databases. Another strategy I used was utilizing google scholar as an additional database. One issue I did encounter with Google Scholar though was not being able to access certain research without paying. However, as the librarian suggested, I was able to

adjust the settings so Google Scholar showed access links through LMU's online library. This ensured that the literature I encountered remained accessible.

Overall, this Capstone Project allowed me to explore and research a specific topic I care about. The library resources and presentation were a vital part of making my study come to life. I gained exposure to the process a researcher undergoes when conducting a study and thus has reaffirmed my interest in academic research.