

Pupil Control and Teacher Efficacy in a Group of Alternative Certification Teachers
In New York City

Micheline S. Malow-Iroff
Evelyn A. O'Connor
Beverly Milner Bisland

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Abstract

The Teaching Fellows (TF) program in New York City was designed to attract individuals interested in an alternative certification process. The present investigation is an exploratory study of TF in a graduate elementary education program that are placed in teaching positions in low performing schools. TF were sent a survey that focused on many aspects of their experience, but this investigation looks at perceptions of socioeconomic status, the perceived support from school administrators, their pupil control ideology and beliefs about the efficacy of their teaching. Positive findings from the preliminary analysis include the inclination on the part of the TF to treat their students in a humanistic, encouraging way and feelings of competence as expressed in their personal teaching efficacy.

Introduction

Teacher shortages in urban schools create a need for alternative certification programs to facilitate placing motivated career changers into high need schools. The Teaching Fellows (TF) program in New York City (NYC) was developed in response to this need. The purpose of the NYC Teaching Fellows Program is to attract individuals interested in a career change into teaching in the NYC public school system. The Department of Education in New York City commits to provide the financial support for these students to obtain their masters degree in education while the TF commit to teach in a low performing school for the two years that they are enrolled in the program. This is an exploratory study of TF who attend a graduate elementary education program in a public college who are placed in teaching positions in low performing elementary schools throughout NYC.

Prior to full-time placement in a classroom setting, TF must pass the required teaching exams, take six graduate credits in the elementary education department and participate in a summer school student teaching experience. After successful completion of these requirements, TF are placed in their own elementary school classroom as full-time salaried NYC teachers. TF are required to continue working towards the 39 credit Master of Arts in Teaching (MAT) degree to obtain professional teaching certification in New York State. The TF take required method and theory classes, receive supervision from professional consultants hired by the NYC

Department of Education, and are assigned a school mentor to support them within the school setting.

The NYC Department of Education is the largest public school system in the United States. There are approximately 1.1 million students served in 1,200 public schools throughout the five boroughs that comprise NYC (NYC Department of Education, 2003). The TF are placed in schools that have been singled out as being in need of immediate improvement. The alternative certification route of the TF places enormous stress and responsibility on the shoulders of capable individuals, who also happen to be inexperienced newly appointed teachers. As individuals with previous life experience, TF come to teaching with a myriad of expectations, beliefs, hopes and prior knowledge. However, the struggle to manage the steep learning curves in both their teaching positions and college classrooms can sometimes create problems. Indeed, Costigan and Dykman (2003) found that TF often leave teaching because of feelings related to a lack of autonomy and a lack of support from administrators and colleagues. As a result, it is important to document how these characteristics and issues contribute to the experiences of the TF.

“Everything the teacher does, as well as the manner in which he does it, incites the child to respond in some way or other, and each response tends to set the child’s attitude in some way or other” (Dewey, 1960, p.59). This statement by Dewey illustrates the power of teacher characteristics such as personality and beliefs and how they impact on the classroom environment. Teacher’s control ideology is one area that may affect the classroom environment. Control ideology is defined as the amounts of control teachers assume they should exercise to manage students. It is investigated in the present study with the *Pupil Control Ideology* (PCI; Willower, Eidell, & Hoy, 1973). The PCI is a self-report form that sorts teachers into two groups – custodial and humanistic. The custodial teacher is authoritarian, directs student’s behaviors and expects orders to be obeyed without question. The humanitarian teacher is authoritative, seeks positive relations, and exhibits trust and mutual respect for their students. Teacher control ideology has been investigated in previous research by examining the students’ perceptions of the classroom. Lunenburg (1991) utilized the PCI in regard to students’ perceptions and found that students of humanistic teachers reported a challenging and interesting classroom while students of custodial classrooms reported their classes as boring and meaningless. In another investigation (Lunenburg & Schmidt, 1989), humanistic teachers’

control ideology and behavior were significantly related to students' positive attitude toward teachers, a higher degree of satisfaction with school and a higher commitment to schoolwork.

Another teacher characteristic that influences the classroom environment is teacher efficacy. Bandura (1995) defined perceived self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations" (p.2). In school classrooms, the teachers' belief about their teaching ability will affect how they teach and interact with their students. Teacher efficacy is defined as "the extent to which teachers believe their efforts will have a positive effect on student achievement" (Ross, 1995, p. 228). One method to examine teacher efficacy is with the *Teacher Efficacy Scale* created by Gibson and Dembo (1984). The 16 item short form produces two independent factors – general teaching efficacy (GTE) and personal teaching efficacy (PTE) (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990). The GTE factor appears to reflect a general belief about the power of teaching to reach difficult children and may have more in common with teachers' conservative/ liberal attitudes towards education" (Hoy, 2000). The PTE factor is an indicator of the teachers' own self-efficacy. An early investigation into teacher efficacy by Ashton and Webb (1986), which did not break teacher efficacy into two factors, found that teachers high in self-efficacy had warm, friendly relationships with students. Teachers low in self-efficacy were distrustful of students and used more discipline to control their students.

"Because of their legitimate position of authority, teachers hold the most potential power in the classroom for executing leadership" (Schmuck & Schmuck, 1988, p.121). This powerful statement speaks to the unique position teachers find themselves in. Teaching can be a daunting task for individuals who have gone through a thorough preparation prior to stepping into the classroom full-time. For individuals in alternative certification programs who receive little theoretical and practical training prior to full-time employment, this task is even more daunting. These individuals construct teaching beliefs, practices and knowledge concurrently with receiving a classroom placement. Therefore, due to the uniqueness of their experience, an analysis of the TF responses upon graduation is valuable to determine if this alternate route to certification is appropriate and useful. The first group of TF graduated in May 2003 and the graduates were sent a survey to gauge their overall experiences in the field placement classroom and in the college classroom. The survey focuses on several aspects of their overall experience including why they decided to enter the teaching profession, their impressions of the instruction

and support they received from the college and the NYC Department of Education, their plans for staying in the teaching profession in NYC, their pupil control ideology and their beliefs about the efficacy of their teaching.

Method

The subjects in the present investigation are all NYC TF who have graduated with a MAT degree from an elementary education department at a public college. The first cohort of students graduated May 2003. Currently, 29 surveys have been returned, a 39% response rate. The current investigation will report on the results of the TF responses as measured by the survey. The variables considered in this investigation will include the perceived socioeconomic status (SES) of the school they have been placed in, the support they feel they receive from the administration in their school, pupil control ideology and beliefs of teaching efficacy. This preliminary investigation will be looking to understand the relationship between the school variables and the teacher variables in a group of alternative certification teachers. These individuals are in a unique position as they are learning and doing at the same time. Therefore the old model of pre-service teachers and the understanding of their characteristics may not apply. However, based on the review of the literature, two hypotheses will guide this inquiry: 1) Teachers who perceive their schools as being higher in SES and administrative support will have lower pupil control ideology and higher personal teaching efficacy. 2) Teachers who perceive their schools as being lower in SES and administrative support will have higher pupil control ideology and higher general teaching efficacy.

Results

An analysis of the 29 surveys received to date was conducted. Means and standard deviations were computed for the group of TF along the dimensions of the five variables under examination (see Table 1). Perception of school SES and administrative support were measured along a five point Likert scale with one being the lowest and five the highest. The mean score obtained for SES (2.34) indicates that the TF believe that they have been placed in lower SES schools. In fact, 21% indicated they believed their schools were very low SES, 32% perceive the SES as low, 39% indicated that it was moderate, 4% believe their schools are at the high end of the SES spectrum and 4% believe their schools to be very high SES. The mean score obtained for administrative support (3.07) indicates that the TFs perceive a moderate amount of support from the school administration. Fourteen percent believe they have a very low level of support,

17% indicated they received a low amount of support, 35% believe they get a moderate amount of support, 17% rated their support level as high and another 17% rated their support level as very high. Pupil control and teacher efficacy were also measured utilizing a five item Likert scale with a one indicating strongly disagree and five indicating strongly agree. The mean of pupil control ideology (2.60) indicates that the TFs as a group lean toward a more humanistic perspective; electing beliefs on the importance of student involvement, democracy and trust. The mean score for feelings of general teaching efficacy (2.83) indicates that the TFs as a group are undecided as to the impact they will have on students because of the influences of the home environment. However, the mean for personal teaching efficacy (3.60) indicates that the TFs tend to believe they are competent to work on issues regarding student learning and instruction.

Pearson Product Moment correlations were run utilizing the five variables under investigation (See Table 1). Results indicate that the perceived SES of the school by the TF was significantly related to the perception of the support they received from the administration at the school. SES was negatively correlated to pupil control. In addition, GTE was positively related to pupil control and negatively correlated with SES and administrative support.

Discussion

This study reports findings on data from the first cohort of TFs at Queens College on teacher attitudes towards SES, administrative support, classroom control and their own efficacy in the classroom. An important finding is that when the TFs perceived the SES of the school to be low, they also perceived administrative support to be low and vice versa, when they perceive SES to be high they also perceived more support from the administration. The results of the correlational analysis also indicate that both SES and support are negatively correlated with GTE. This indicates that when SES is perceived to be low and administrative support is also believed to be low, teachers are likely to adopt the belief that the home and parenting influences outweigh their own influences and there is nothing they can do about it. Also, GTE and pupil control are highly correlated, reinforcing the fact that the more out of control a teacher feels in the classroom due to home influences, the more they try to control the students. These findings support the second hypothesis. Additionally, pupil control is negatively correlated with SES, which indicates that when the SES is perceived to be low, teachers feel more need to try to control students in the classroom. This finding supports the first part of the first hypothesis.

The findings of this study indicate a need to build in more support for the TFs in their school settings both from parents and from the administration. As the goal of the TFs program is to place teachers in high need low performing schools, it is imperative that they feel supported in their task in order to effectively work with their students. The results of this study will be instrumental in evaluating and improving the level of support in the school placements and the design of the academic program that prepares the TFs for their initial teaching experience. Positive indications from these findings are the inclination on the part of the TFs to treat their students in a humanistic, encouraging way as indicated by the mean score on the pupil control scale. Additionally, it is noted that the TFs, despite their alternative training, expressed feelings of competence in their personal teaching efficacy as indicated by the mean score on the PTE scale. The challenge for teacher educators of both alternative and traditional certification programs is to build supports for these positive beliefs into the education and training so that these attitudes and beliefs turn into classroom realities.

Table 1
Means, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Matrix

<u>Variable</u>	<u>M</u>	<u>SD</u>	<u>SES</u>	<u>Support</u>	<u>Control</u>	<u>GTE</u>	<u>PTE</u>
<u>SES</u> (Socioeconomic Status)	2.34	.98	-				
<u>Support</u> (Administrative Support)	3.07	1.28	.55**	-			
<u>Control</u> (Pupil Control Ideology)	2.60	.47	-.47*	-.18	-		
<u>GTE</u> (General Teaching Efficacy)	2.83	.60	-.54**	-.54**	.49**	-	
<u>PTE</u> (Personal Teaching Efficacy)	3.60	.40	.31	.04	-.02	-.13	-

*p<.05, **p<.01 Note. Range = 1-5

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