

Alternatively Certified Teachers: Efficacy Beliefs and Ideology

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Abstract

The Teaching Fellows (TF) program in New York City was designed to attract individuals interested in an alternative certification program in teaching. The present investigation represents the first two waves of an ongoing investigation of TF in a graduate elementary education program. The TF begin the program during the summer by participating in two education courses and a field experience. In the fall, they are placed as full-time teachers in low performing schools. For the next two years, the TF teach full-time during the day and take two masters level education courses in the afternoon or evenings. Upon completion of their final college course and the end of their obligation to the TF program, the TF were given a survey that focused on many aspects of their experience. Survey results indicate that approximately 29 percent of TF intend to leave their current teaching position at the end of their contractual obligation. This report focuses on how the TF perceptions of the schools' socioeconomic status, the perception of support received from fellow teachers and the principals within the schools, the beliefs they hold about the efficacy of their teaching practices and their beliefs about pupil control in a classroom setting impact on their plan to remain teaching in their current setting. Pearson product-moment correlations revealed that socioeconomic status, administrative support and feelings of general teaching efficacy all correlated with the TF long-term goal of continuing to teach in their present setting. Utilizing a stepwise regression analysis, feelings of general teaching efficacy were found to significantly predict the TF plan to remain teaching in their current school. Findings from this investigation point to the need to build in more support for the TF in order to keep them in the positions they have been trained for.

Purpose and Hypotheses

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, this task is even more daunting. Teacher shortages in urban schools have created a need for alternative certification programs. The Teaching Fellows (TF) program in New York City (NYC) was developed as a response to this need. Because of their unique background, TF come to teaching with a myriad of expectations, beliefs, hopes and prior knowledge, however most TF have not been involved in teaching or teacher training. These individuals will construct their teaching beliefs, practices and knowledge concurrently with obtaining a classroom placement and a master's degree in education. Therefore, due to the uniqueness of their experience and the large investment of resources into the TF program, an analysis of their goals, perceptions and beliefs upon graduation is indicated.

A teacher's belief that they have the ability to promote student learning has been termed teacher efficacy. Teacher efficacy has been associated with many educational variables including classroom management strategies, ratings of teachers' competence and innovative teaching strategies. Experiences of mastery during the early years of teaching can be influential on the development of teacher efficacy. Satisfying and successful teaching experiences contribute to the expectation of future successful teaching, while unsatisfying and or

unsuccessful teaching experiences can lead to the belief that future teaching experiences will also result in failure. A teachers' sense of mastery may be influenced by other variables outside the immediate classroom such as how supported they feel by school administrators, fellow teachers and parents. The beliefs that teachers develop as a result of these experiences will impact on many things including the teachers' classroom practices, their interactions with students and whether or not they choose to continue teaching.

The current investigation examines teacher efficacy in NYC TF from an ecological perspective. The influence of socioeconomic status (SES), support, and pupil control on the TF efficacy beliefs and decision to remain teaching in their current NYC school will be investigated.

Based on a review of the literature, the following hypotheses will guide the investigation:

- 1). TF who perceive their schools as higher in SES and support will display humanistic pupil control ideology and will possess a strong sense of personal teaching efficacy.
- 2). TF who perceive their schools as lower in SES and support will display custodial pupil control ideology and lower general teaching efficacy beliefs.
- 3). Perceptions of SES, support, teaching efficacy and pupil control ideology will predict the TF long-term plans to remain teaching at their current NYC school.

Methods

Participants

The participants in the investigation are all NYC TF. The TF program was initiated in the spring of 2000 to attract individuals who were interested in changing careers and entering the teaching profession. TF come into the program with various backgrounds and degrees, however, they do not have degrees in education. The NYC TF program is highly desirable and competitive. In 2003, the NYC Department of Education reported that they received 200,000 applications for the program and accepted only 2,700 individuals. Those individuals accepted into the program interview for positions at various low performing schools around NYC. Once the TF has a job offer from a school, they are placed at the cooperating college that is closest to that school. TF engage in a six week pre-service training program that entails two college courses and a student teaching experience during summer school. In addition, the TF must take and pass the state mandated tests and seminars that apply to their certification. In September, the TF are placed in a classroom as a full teacher and continue to take two college courses a semester in order to complete their Masters' degree within their contractual obligation of two years. After the two years, the TF graduates with a Master of Art in Teaching (MAT) degree from an elementary education department at a public college and will be free from their obligation to the NYC Department of Education.

Instrument and Procedure

Upon completion of the last course in the MAT program, TF were asked to participate in a research program entitled the New York City Teaching Fellows Exit Investigation; designed to garner insight into their experiences as a participant in the NYC TF program. Those who consented were given a 52 item survey to complete that consisted of both Likert scale and free response format. The survey gathered a variety of information including background information such as why they entered the teaching profession, their plans for continuing to teach

in NYC, their impressions of the instruction and the support they received from the college, their schools and their mentors, instructional information, their pupil control ideology and their beliefs about the efficacy of their teaching. Some individuals completed the survey in their classroom; others received the survey at home and were asked to mail it back. The aggregated data from the first two cohorts of TF have resulted in 68 returned surveys, a 57 percent response rate.

Variables

Teacher Self-Efficacy. Teacher self-efficacy, teachers' confidence in their ability to promote student learning, is measured in this investigation with the short form of the Teacher Efficacy Scale created by Gibson and Dembo (1984). Teacher efficacy is measured with 15 items, utilizing a five point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree) and produces two independent dimensions – general teaching efficacy (GTE) and personal teaching efficacy (PTE) (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990). GTE reflects attitudes toward education and the power to reach difficult children, while PTE indicates the teacher's personal ability to teach. Investigations into teacher efficacy have found that teachers high in efficacy had friendly relationships with students. Teachers low in efficacy were distrustful of students and used more discipline to control students. Items from this scale were added and averaged to determine an overall GTE and PTE score.

Pupil Control Ideology. A teacher's control ideology affects the classroom environment. Control ideology is defined as the amounts of control teachers assume they should exercise in order to manage students in the classroom. It is investigated in the present study with the Pupil Control Ideology (PCI) (Willower, Eidell, & Hoy, 1973) checklist, which consists of nine items and is measured utilizing a five point Likert scale (1 strongly disagree, 2 disagree, 3 undecided, 4 agree, 5 strongly agree) that sorts teachers into two groups – custodial and humanistic. The teacher that falls into the custodial range of responses possesses more authoritarian characteristics, while the teacher that falls into the humanitarian range of responses possesses more authoritative characteristics. Items from this scale were added and averaged to determine an overall PCI score.

Socioeconomic Status (SES). One item where TF were asked to rank their perception of the SES was of their present school placement. Score was based on a five point scale of 1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = moderate, 4 = high, 5 = very high.

Administrative Support. One item where TF were asked to rank their perception of the support they received from their principal at their present school placement. Score was based on a five point scale of 1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = moderate, 4 = high, 5 = very high.

Peer Support. One item where TF were asked to rank their perception of the support they received from their fellow teachers at their present school placement. Score was based on a five point scale of 1 = very low, 2 = low, 3 = moderate, 4 = high, 5 = very high.

Long Term Goals. One item on which the TF were asked to indicate yes or no was their intention to remain in their current teaching position past their contractual obligation.

Results

Medians were computed for the group of TF along the dimensions of the five variables under examination (see Table 1). Perception of school SES, administrative support and peer support were measured along a five point Likert scale with one being the lowest and five the highest. The median score obtained for SES (2.00) indicates that the TF believe that they have

been placed in lower SES schools. In fact, 16% indicated they believed their schools were very low SES, 43% perceive the SES as low, 36% indicated that it was moderate, 3% believe their schools are at the high end of the SES spectrum and 2% believe their schools to be very high SES. The median score obtained for administrative support (3.00) indicates that the TF perceive a moderate amount of support from the school administration. Fifteen percent believe they have a very low level of support, 21% indicated they received a low amount of support, 32% believe they get a moderate amount of support, 19% rated their support level as high and another 13% rated their support level as very high. The median score obtained for peer support (3.00) indicates that the TF perceive a moderate amount of support from their fellow teachers. Three percent believe they have a very low level of support, 12% indicated they received a low amount of support, 36% believe they get a moderate amount of support, 31% rated their support level as high and another 18% 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 median of pupil control ideology (2.61) indicates that the TF 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 (3.00) indicates that the TF as a group are undecided as to the impact they will have on students because of the influences of the home environment. However, the median for personal teaching efficacy (3.56) indicates that the TF 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 TF perceived SES of the school was positively related to the perception of the support they received from the administration and their peers at the school, and negatively correlated to the pupil control ideology and the feelings of general teaching efficacy. General teaching efficacy was also negatively correlated with perception of school administration support and peer support and positively correlated with pupil control ideology. Personal teaching efficacy was positively correlated with administrative support and negatively correlated with general teaching efficacy.

A stepwise regression analysis was utilized in the prediction of the TF plan to stay in their current teaching position. Only one variable proved significant in the prediction, general teaching efficacy ($t = 2.69, p < .01$).

Discussion

This study reports findings on data from the first two cohorts of TF at a NYC public college. An important finding is that when the TF perceived the SES of the school to be low, they also perceived school support (both administrative and peer) to be low and vice versa, when they perceive SES to be high they also perceived more support from within the school. 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. Additionally, the idea that the TF general teaching efficacy was predictive of their decision to remain in their current teaching position is very important. Those TF who feel they can not reach those difficult students and overcome the environmental influences will be the teachers who leave their positions.

Twenty-nine percent of TF in this investigation intend to leave their current position. The findings of this study indicate a need to build in more support for the TF in their school settings from parents, administration and teachers in an effort to counter the effect of the environmental stressors and maintain the ideal of their ability to reach those difficult students. As the goal of the TF 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 training and support in the school placements and the design of the academic program that prepares the TF for their initial teaching experience.

Positive indications from these findings are the inclination on the part of the TF to treat their students in a humanistic, encouraging way as indicated by the median score on the pupil control scale. Additionally, it is noted that the TF, despite their alternative training, expressed feelings of competence in their personal teaching efficacy as indicated by the median score on the PTE scale. The challenge for teacher educators of both alternative and traditional certification programs is to build support for these positive beliefs into the education and training so that these attitudes and beliefs turn into classroom realities.

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Table 1
Medians, Standard Deviations, and Correlations Matrix

Variable	(Mdn)	LTGoals	SES	AdSup	PeerSup	Control	GTE	PTE
<u>LTGoals</u> (Long-term Goals)		-						
<u>SES</u> (Socioeconomic Status)	(2.00)	-.27*	-					
<u>Ad Sup</u> (Administrative Support)	(3.00)	-.29*	.49**	-				
<u>Peer Sup</u> (Support From Other Teachers)	(3.00)	-.00	.41**	.54**	-			
<u>Control</u> (Pupil Control Ideology)	(2.61)	.19	-.32**	-.18	.05	-		
<u>GTE</u> (General Teaching Efficacy)	(3.00)	.33**	-.25*	-.37**	-.15	.57**	-	
<u>PTE</u> (Personal Teaching Efficacy)	(3.56)	-.09	.22	.28*	.18	-.12	-.27*	-

* $p < .05$; ** $p < .01$.

Table 2
Stepwise Regression Analysis Predicting Teaching Fellows' Plan to Continue Teaching in NYC

Variable	B	SE B	Beta	t
General Teaching Efficacy	.243	.09	.323	2.69**

N = 68. ** < .01.

Variables excluded from model: School SES, School Administrative Support, School Peer Support, Pupil Control, and Personal Teaching Efficacy.