IMPACT OF TEACHER PREPARATION UPON TEACHER SELF EFFICACY

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Abstract

A cohort of students in a teacher preparation program completed questionnaires measuring their feelings of teacher self efficacy at three points in the program. Results suggest that pre-service teachers' feelings of self efficacy do improve as a result of their participation in such programs.

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Impact of Teacher Preparation upon Teacher Self -Efficacy

Dilemma

When I was growing up, grandmother always told us, "You can do anything you believe you can do." Fortunately, I believed her. As it turns out, grandmother was not only right, she was profound.

Years ago, as a high school English teacher, I learned that the easier and more accessible I made success seem, the harder my students were willing to work to find that success, and that a prerequisite to this success was the personal belief they could succeed. I also learned that when students first came to my class, most had very little faith in their ability to succeed in high school English, and that their eventual success was strongly influenced by my efforts to change that perception. My goal was not for my students to believe simply that they could succeed in my class, but that they could succeed in any English class, write any paper, and read any book. English self efficacy had become part of my curriculum.

While perceived academic self efficacy is very important for students, perceived instructional efficacy is as important for teachers. Both are important for students who will become teachers. Teacher self efficacy exists when teachers believe they can successfully perform tasks associated with teaching (Chambers & Hardy, 2005).

Woolfolk (2008) defines teacher self efficacy as a "teacher's belief that he or she can reach even difficult students to help them learn" (p. 361). Bandura (1993) suggests that what teachers do and say in their classrooms is regulated and defined by the perception teachers have of themselves as individuals and of their personal and pedagogical abilities. He suggests that "Teachers' beliefs in their ability to motivate and

promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve" (p. 117). Though two primary influences on the self efficacy of practicing teachers are student success and peer validation, the variables influencing teacher self efficacy are many and contextual. For instance, secondary teachers often suffer from low self efficacy because of doubt regarding pedagogical skills, and elementary teachers sometimes suffer from low self efficacy because of their weak content knowledge (Bencze & Upton, 2006).

Teacher self efficacy has been found to positively influence classroom management, teaching, and learning (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). Woolfolk found teacher self efficacy to be one teacher characteristic that correlates well with student achievement. Anderson, Greene, and Loewen (1998) found that students of efficacious teachers tend to outperform students of other teachers on achievement tests. Watson (1991) observed the same trend in a variety of ethnic and geographical contexts. Teachers with high self efficacy tend to be more innovative and reflective (Allinder, 1994). Self-efficacious teachers are less likely to give up on struggling students and less likely to be critical of student mistakes (Gibson & Dembo, 1984). They are more likely to support placing poor, low performing students in regular education setting and less likely to refer students for special education (Meijer & Foster, 1998).

Teacher efficacy is also associated with teacher persistence and retention. Teachers with high sense of self efficacy work harder and persist longer when students are hard to teach (Woolfolk, 2008). They are also less likely to leave the profession prematurely (Fives, Hamman, & Oliverez, 2005). As a classroom teacher for over 30 years, I saw many young teachers come and go. Even though all these teachers were

college graduates ostensibly possessing all the requisite knowledge and skills, they were not all able to use them effectively in the classroom, especially under adverse conditions such as is created by disruptive students or reluctant/resistant learners. The ones who struggled the most and left teaching the fastest never really seemed to be convinced they could influence student behavior or teach students who did not come to school "ready to learn." They also never seemed to think of themselves as teachers. They lacked what Bandura calls "teacher self efficacy."

This is predictable. First, many new teachers complete programs of teacher preparation that are configured to filter out undesirable candidates and defined, therefore, by failure rather than success. Much of the feedback these new teachers receive has been negative, pointing out their errors and deficiencies. Also, beginning teachers are often assigned the least desirable courses and the most challenging students. These things contribute to weak perceptions of efficacy when these new teachers enter the classroom. Then, the inevitable failures and frustration that follow result in the rapid deterioration of any confidence they may have managed bring with them.

Relative comparisons of performance influence feelings of self efficacy (Bandura, 1993). To build and maintain feelings of self efficacy, like students, teachers must enjoy success. However, teacher performance has traditionally been measured by the success of their students. Student achievement as measured by standardized tests has increasingly been used not only to demonstrate student learning, but also to quantify and compare the efficacy of teachers to other teachers. Teachers whose students do well on these exams enjoy regular reinforcement of their (self) efficacy, while teachers whose students do poorly suffer an equally regular erosion of theirs. Teachers of the most challenging

students in the most challenging environments, even given greater effort and better pedagogy, are consistently deprived of the reinforcement needed to maintain feelings of efficacy.

Given that the initial success of any teacher may be in some measure defined by their perceived self efficacy, and that those first experiences seem to set the tone for professional growth, it seems that teacher preparation programs should be designed and administered in such a way that the "teachers in training" develop strong feelings of teacher self efficacy and maintain these feelings throughout their preparation program and into their first teaching assignment. To that end, as was the case in my high school English class, even if students leave our classrooms with prodigious content knowledge and pedagogical skills, we must still find ways to make being a successful teacher seem a doable thing.

Purpose

Bandura (1993) suggests that efficacy may be most malleable early in learning. This study tests the assumption that a teacher preparation program designed to make extensive use of authentic teaching experiences in field environments can build feelings of teacher self efficacy along with pedagogical knowledge and skills.

The researcher teaches professional education courses leading to certification to teach in grades 8-12. My colleagues and I prepare and deliver what we believe to be an appropriate teacher preparation curriculum and provide activities and extensive field based teaching opportunities with the goal of building a combination of competence and self confidence (efficacy). Though we are saddled with institutional and state mandated deficit models of performance measurement and reporting, we are consistently looking

for ways to convince students they will be able to make a difference to even the most reluctant and challenging students. Our goal is not only to graduate students who pass all the tests and jump through all the hoops, but skilled teachers who believe they can teach any child successfully in any school.

The purpose of this study is to learn the extent to which our pre-service teachers' sense of teaching related self efficacy changes as they participate in the courses and field experiences that comprise our program of preparation. This is the first of a two part study. Part 1 will describe any changes in professional self efficacy that occur between program entry and student teaching, and Part 2 will describe changes resulting from student teaching and describe our students' perceived self efficacy as they exit our program. If we are doing our jobs well, our students will grow in "perceived teacher self efficacy" throughout the program and will enter the classroom with not only a strong foundation in pedagogy and the subject they teach, but also a resilient belief in their ability to be effective, successful teachers whose students will learn.

Methods

The pre-service teacher preparation program studied is composed of 2 blocks of instruction and field experience prior to student teaching for those seeking secondary and middle school certification, and 3 blocks prior to student teaching for those seeking elementary certification. The first block consists of Educational Psychology and Human Diversity and 50+ hours of field observation, tutoring, and teacher assistance. The second block consists of Planning and Assessment and Classroom Management and another 50+ hours of similar field experience, but also includes some formal teaching experiences.

The third block, required only for elementary certification is the Reading block, consists of Developmental Reading, Diagnosis and Correction, and another 50+ hours of observation and teaching.

To learn the extent to which our teacher preparation program influences the teacher self efficacy of pre-service teacher candidates, a cohort of approximately 50 elementary and 20 secondary pre-service teachers was measured for perceived teacher self efficacy at several points in their teacher preparation program. Participants completed a self efficacy questionnaire/inventory on three occasions: twice during regular pre-service classes and at a required meeting just prior to beginning student teaching. These occasions were defined as *pre-course* (students beginning the first block of pre-service course and field work), *mid-course* (students completing the first block of instruction and field work), and *post-course* (students having completed both pre-service instructional blocks and preliminary field experiences). Due to many factors, the sample and the number of participants completing the instrument varied somewhat from session to session.

The primary instrument is a program specific teacher self efficacy inventory created by the author (See Appendix A). Like much other research methods in the area of teacher self efficacy, the instrument is qualitative self-report and based on Bandura's (1977, 1993, 1997) theory of self efficacy. Like those used in most contemporary teacher self efficacy research, the items on the inventory are contextual and task specific (Pajares, 1996; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). The primary instrument is organized as a descriptive rubric with 15 items. Each item was designed to address a program defined core teacher competency. The response choices ranged in four Likert-like steps from a
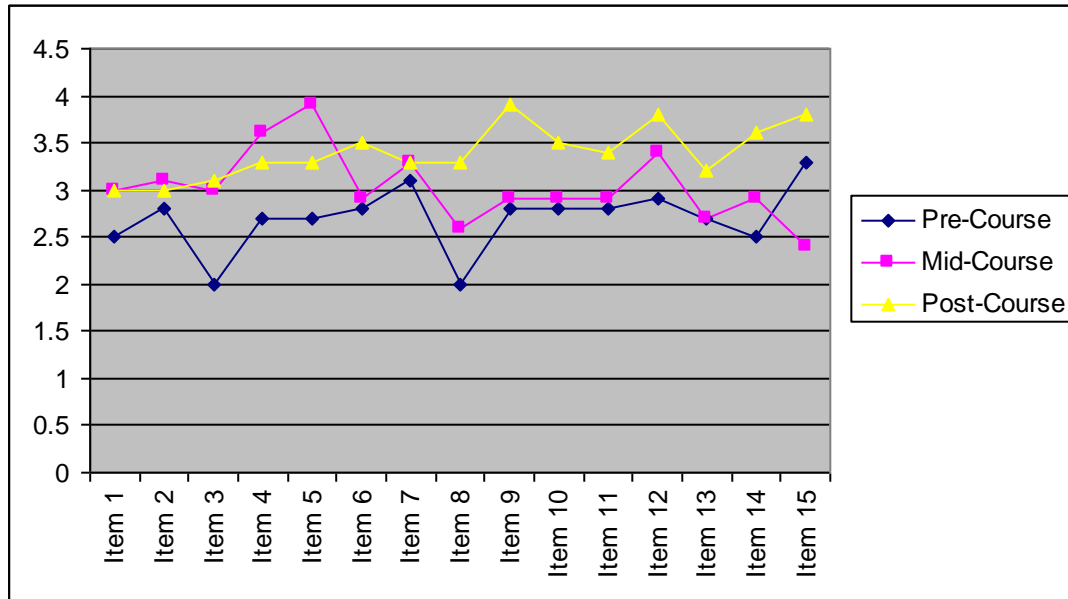
weak feeling of efficacy (a =1) to a very strong feeling of efficacy (d = 4). For the purpose of comparison, a mean response was computed for each item.

Competencies addressed were content knowledge, ability to construct and maintain a positive learning environment, ability to design effective instruction, ability to motivate students, ability to develop and maintain strong, positive teacher-student relationships, ability to develop and maintain strong, positive relationships with fellow teachers and co-workers, ability to apply technology effectively as a teaching learning tool, ability to assess students effectively, ability to meet the needs and address the realities of diversity in the classroom, ability to perform non-teaching duties and responsibilities commonly assigned to teachers, ability to behave in a professional manner, knowledge of law affecting teachers and schools, ability to meet the needs of students with special needs, and the ability to design and align instruction to meet district and state standards. A final, capstone item asked students to describe their overall perceived ability to perform the function of classroom teacher.

Results

Figure 1 provides a graphical representation of the results.

Figure 1

Overall, the teacher candidates' teacher self efficacy appears to have improved as they progressed through the program, peaking as they entered student teaching. See Table 1 for an item by item analysis including a brief description of each item and mean scores of each measurement:

Table 1: Summary of Mean Scores by Item

Item Description	Pre-course	Mid-course	Post-course
Item 1. Respondents were asked to describe *content knowledge* related feelings of teacher self efficacy.	2.5	3.0	3.0
Item 2. Respondents described the degree to which they believed they could establish a *positive learning environment*.	2.8	3.1	3.0
Item 3. Students were asked to describe the degree to which they felt capable of planning effective instruction.	2.0	3.0	3.1

Item 4. Students were asked to describe the degree to which they believed they could motivate students.	2.7	3.6	3.3
Item 5. Students were asked to describe the degree to which they felt able to initiate and maintain positive relationships with students.	2.7	3.9	3.3
Item 6. Students were asked to describe the degree to which they believed they could develop positive, professional relationships with colleagues.	2.8	2.9	3.5
Item 7. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed they could use technology effectively as a teaching tool.	3.1	3.3	3.3
Item 8. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed they could design and use assessment to inform instruction.	2.0	2.6	3.3
Item 9. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed they could respond appropriately to personal biases related to diversity.	2.8	2.9	3.9
Item 10. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed they live up to culture expectations for the public behavior of teacher and perform the traditional extracurricular duties of teachers.	2.8	2.9	3.5
Item 11. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed they could demonstrate professional behavior.	2.8	2.9	3.4
Item 12. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed they understood laws and other conventions related to the teaching profession.	2.9	3.4	3.8
Item 13. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed they could effectively teach students with special needs.	2.7	2.7	3.2
Item 14. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed they could meet and apply standards relating to teaching.	2.5	2.9	3.6
Item 15. Students were asked to describe the extent to which they believed their students would learn as a result of their efforts.	3.3	2.4	3.8

Discussion

The teacher preparation program that forms the context for this study was purposefully designed to promote the growth of teaching specific knowledge, skills, and dispositions. It was gratifying to learn that the professional self efficacy of participants appears to be growing almost linearly as they progress through the program. Bandura (1993) suggests that in order for feelings of self efficacy to persist, those feelings must be

developed early in a goal quest or the adoption of a skill set. Pearson and Moomaw (2005) define teacher empowerment in much the same way Bandura defines teacher self efficacy. In a study involving 300 Florida teachers, Pearson and Moomaw (2005) found that teacher empowerment (self efficacy) was closely related to job satisfaction and professionalism. Accordingly, candidates who develop strong feelings of teacher efficacy early in their pre-service professional education are better prepared to retain those feelings and the advantages they bring through the inevitable set-backs and failures that beset most all beginning teachers. The alternative is often early departure from the profession or weak teachers who easily give up on students and themselves. Therefore, one goal of teacher preparation programs should be to build those feelings of efficacy, while tempering those feelings with the realities of classroom teaching. I believe the findings of this study suggest that is happening with the teacher candidates involved in this study. Early successes and failures with students in their field placements are constantly shaping and defining their feelings of self efficacy, and though the path is not linear, the participants' teacher self efficacy appears to be growing.

In addition to providing candidates with the knowledge, skills, and dispositions necessary for success as a teacher, each stage in the teacher preparation program described in this report also exposes the pre-service candidate to real classroom with real students. Throughout, their feelings of efficacy are challenged by students, by mentors teachers and professors, and by their own self-doubt. Without systematic social support, adequate resources, and structured success, many new teachers will enter the profession believing that some students are beyond their ability to teach and that any efforts they may make to change would be fruitless (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002).

Anomalies in the findings. An assumption made by the researcher was that the participants' sense of teacher efficacy would grow in a linear manner as they progressed through the program. Though that occurred in most cases, there were some exceptions. The first exception of note was when the mid-course scores significantly exceeded the post-course scores on items 4 and 5. Items 4 and 5 addressed motivating students and building positive student teacher relationships. It may be that early confidence born of theoretical knowledge and observation of expert mentor teachers was tempered by later increased exposure to students and actual teaching experiences, and that this is reflected in the post-course scores. Another very significant anomaly was found in item 15. Item 15 asked respondents to describe the degree to which the believed they could become exemplary teachers. It was intended provide as summary description of their teacher self efficacy. However, as it turned out, the pre-course score was meaningfully higher than the mid-course score. Like the previous exception, this may reflect early optimism that was tempered by practical experience. However, in this case, the candidates' teacher self efficacy seems to have recovered prior to the post-course assessment, possibly due to successes related to increasing opportunities to actually teach in the later stages of the program. Care needs to be taken to insure early student successes when placed in authentic teaching contexts, as these will significantly influence candidates' future teacher self efficacy (Bandura, 1999).

Implications. The results suggest that teacher preparation programs such as the one studied might influence the growth of teacher self efficacy in its teacher candidates. To that end, it seems prudent that steps be taken to focus more of the energy devoted to developing coursework and field experiences within such programs to developing the

social support and structured success that leads research has shown to encourage self efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Meaningful field experiences seem essential. Though field experience is becoming an increasingly important component of teacher education programs, many still limit this to a single 13-14 week placement (Pilard, 1992). Teacher candidates need real teaching successes in order to build strong feelings of teacher efficacy, and the earlier students can begin enjoying these successes, the more resilient their self efficacy will become. Successes build feelings of self efficacy; failures lower them. Building a false sense of self efficacy by simply encouraging students or telling them they will be good teachers without providing them opportunities for authentic success in real teaching situations is a recipe for failure (Bandura, 1977).

Further, though teacher preparation programs traditionally offer coursework that provides pre-service candidates with the knowledge and skills needed to succeed as classroom teachers, many do not address critical dispositions that define a teacher's performance in a classroom. Teacher self efficacy is more than a frame of mind; from it emerges many of the most critical dispositions that guide teaching behaviors and separate exemplary teachers from the rest. Part two of this study will continue to follow the same cohort of teacher candidates and describe their teacher self efficacy at the conclusion of their student teaching at the end of their first year of full time classroom teaching.

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Appendix A: Teacher Efficacy Inventory

Please respond to each item by circling the letter before the statement that most accurately describes the way you feel.

1. Content Knowledge
   a. I don't yet have adequate knowledge about the subject(s) I will teach to be an effective teacher.
   b. I have adequate knowledge about the subject(s) I will teach, but I am not sure I understand some aspects of my subject well enough to teach it effectively.
   c. I know and understand my subject(s) well enough to teach effectively.
   d. I know and understand the subject(s) I will teach well enough to serve as a resource for other teachers.

2. Positive Learning Environment
   a. I am not sure I understand what a positive learning environment is.
   b. I know what a positive learning environment is, but I am not sure I know how to create one in my classroom.
   c. I know what a positive learning environment is and am positive that I can create one in my classroom.
   d. I am confident of my ability to create a positive learning environment in my classroom and feel that my methods might be used as a model for others.

3. Instructional Design.
   a. I do not know how to plan instructional activities.
   b. I have some good ideas about instructional activities but have not considered how they may influence my students' learning.
   c. I know enough about instructional design to plan instructional activities that I am confident will result in student learning.
   d. I know enough about instructional design to plan instructional activities that will result in student learning and serve as models for other teachers.

4. Motivating Students.
   a. I don't understand motivation or know how to motivate students.
   b. I am aware of the factors that influence motivation, but I am not sure I can use that knowledge to motivate students.
   c. I understand the psychology of motivation and believe I can use it to motivate my students.
   d. I fully understand the psychology of motivation and am willing to help other teachers find ways to motivate their students.

5. Student-teacher Relationships.
   a. I am not sure what the relationship between students and teachers should be.
   b. I think I understand the kind of relationship that should exist between students and teachers, but I don't know what to do to establish that relationship with my students.

    c. I understand the kind of relationship that should exist between students and teachers and am confident that I can establish that relationship with my students.

    d. I believe I could help other teachers improve their relationships with their students.

6. Collegial Relationships.
    a. I am not sure I understand the kind of relationship I should have with other teachers.
    b. I am relatively sure I understand the kind of relationship I should have with other teachers, but don't feel confident that I can establish that relationship right away.
    c. I understand the kind of relationship I should have with other teachers and am comfortable with the prospect of doing that.
    d. I am excited about establishing collegial relationships with fellow teachers and intend to be proactive in creating a supportive, collaborative atmosphere and a professional learning community in my school.

7. Technology.
    a. I have never been good with computers and other electronic teaching aides and don't think I will use them in my classroom.
    b. I know enough about computers and other electronic teaching aides to get by.
    c. I am confident that I can use computers and other electronic teaching aides to increase student learning in my classroom.
    d. I intend to fully integrate computers and other electronic teaching aides into my instructional strategies, and am willing to share my knowledge and skills with fellow teachers.

8. Assessment
    a. I think I know how to write a test, but am not sure I understand other forms of assessment or how to use assessment to inform instruction.
    b. I am familiar with a range of assessment methods, but am not sure I understand how to use them to inform instruction.
    c. I understand and can effectively use a range of assessment methods to inform and guide my instructional planning.
    d. I intend to use a range of assessment methods to meet the diverse needs of my students and am willing to help others develop these skills.

9. Diversity
    a. I am not yet aware of how my own prejudices and biases might influence my teaching.
    b. I am aware of the kinds of prejudices and biases that influence teachers and students, but am not confident in my ability to appropriately respond to them as a teacher.
    c. I am aware of my own prejudices and biases and believe I can moderate their influence on my behavior as a teacher; however, I am not sure how I should

respond to the prejudices and biases of my students, their parents, and fellow educators.

    d. I am confident that I can identify and respond effectively to my own biases and prejudices and stand as a model for the behavior of others.

10. Extracurricular Duties and Public Behavior.
    a. I am not aware that our society has special expectations governing the public behavior of teachers or the kinds of things teachers are asked to do in addition to their teaching assignments.
    b. I am aware that teachers are expected to act in certain ways, even outside the school, and that they always have duties in addition to teaching.
    c. I can modify my public behavior to reflect society's expectations for teachers and accept the necessity for extra duties.
    d. I can be a model of appropriate public teacher behavior and will appreciate the opportunity to serve my school and students in any way I can.

11. Professional Behavior.
    a. I am not sure I know how teachers should act, talk, and dress in school, but am willing to learn.
    b. I know how teachers should act, talk, and dress in school, but am not sure I can fully conform.
    c. I always act, talk, and dress professionally at school and whenever I perform in any capacity as a teacher.
    d. My professional behavior and appearance are exemplary and might be used as a model for other teachers.

12. Law Governing the Behavior of Teachers.
    a. I don't know anything about the laws influencing the behavior of teachers.
    b. I know some laws exist that govern some aspects of teaching, but am not clear on any specifics.
    c. I understand enough about the laws influencing the behavior of teachers to get by.
    d. I know and understand the laws influencing the behavior of teachers and can apply that knowledge effectively to protect myself, my students, and my community.

13. Special Needs
    a. I don't know how to recognize students with special needs or how I should respond to those students.
    b. I understand that certain students have special needs and that I should do something different to help meet those needs, but am not sure how to do that.
    c. I understand how to identify students with special needs and am familiar with strategies that might be used to meet many of those needs.
    d. Addressing the individual needs of my students is an integral part of my instructional planning and the way I craft relationships with my students.

14. Standards
    a. I don't know what standards are.
    b. I am familiar with the state standards in my teaching field, but am unsure how I can use them guide my instructional planning.
    c. I am familiar with local, state, and national standards in my teaching field and sometimes refer to them in my lesson planning.
    d. I purposefully craft my lessons and align my curriculum so that my students will be able to meet local, state, and national standards.

15. Self Perception
    a. Even if I take the courses, I'm not convinced I can really learn to teach. (I have taken the courses, but I don't feel I have learned to teach.)
    b. I can learn how to be a teacher, but I am afraid my students will not learn much. (I have learned to teach, but I am afraid my students are not learning.)
    c. I believe I can learn how to teach, and that some of my students will learn. (I have learned to teach and can prove that some of my students are learning.)
    d. I will learn to be an exemplary teacher, and I know that most of my students will learn. (I have learned to be an exemplary teacher and can prove that most of my students are learning.)