

Teacher Efficacy Issues in the Practice of Novice Teachers

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This preliminary study provides a snap shot of the novice teachers' perceptions of their self-efficacy and how it relates to their pedagogy at the beginning of their ongoing professional development training. Oral and written expressions about their pedagogy provide substantive insight to their thoughts and actions regarding teacher efficacy. The novices express a less than confident position regarding their teaching experiences, and portray themselves challenged by discipline issues that over shadow instruction. This position is confounded by supplemental evidence about their perspective, as measured on select teacher efficacy items, which indicate they are confident in reaching and teaching even the difficult student. On the scales, the novice teachers express confidence in their teaching efficacy, while oral and written expressions convey something else. The study suggests further investigation on the novice teachers "self" confidence at different times to note consistency patterns, or growth as it relates to teacher-efficacy attributes.

Novice teachers face many challenges during the early years of their teaching career. Among the more recent is the national comprehensive teacher qualification standards embedded in the "No Child Left Behind Act" (Government, 2002). The standards require public school teachers to hold at least a bachelor's degree, hold licensure in the area of teaching, and show competence in subject knowledge and teaching skills. The latter standard is the focus of this preliminary inquiry. The successful acquisition of subject knowledge is a direct link to securing the teaching license. Pre-service teaching assignments attached to a number of content knowledge courses provide the basic teaching and pedagogical experiences before new teachers start a teaching career. Yet, new teachers are likely to face a number of challenges in meeting the expectations embedded in *show competence in teaching skills*. It is evident from research on teaching and learning that "teachers need expertise in both subject matter content and in teaching" (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999), but it seems logical that new teachers are better able to develop pedagogical expertise after spending some time in their teaching career. Therefore the novice is challenged with balancing theory with practice acquired through experience, and since practice improves with experience, the affective capability may not develop at the same pace as the cognitive capability. The transition from learning about teaching theory, to a brief

teaching internship prepares individuals to teach, but the “mastery” of teaching and instructional effectiveness is likely to occur several years into the teaching practice.

A number of studies on different aspects of teacher efficacy provide the broader lens through which one might understand issues faced by novice teachers regarding their level of self-confidence as they strive to be effective teachers. Gibson and Dembo (1984) found that teachers who demonstrate a high sense of teacher self-efficacy devote more class time on academic activities and focus less on discipline as a prerequisite to student learning. Teachers with strong personal efficacy attributes were able to reach students having difficulty and create mastery experiences to bring them along. Bandura (1993, p. 117) describes how the attribute—self-inspired—affects teacher efficacy, “Teachers’ beliefs in their personal efficacy to motivate and promote learning affect the types of learning environments they create and the level of academic progress their students achieve.” He found efficacious teachers felt self-empowered to create learning environments that allowed them to motivate and promote student learning. The point here is that teachers with a strong sense of self-belief in their own abilities to motivate or reach students spend more time on instruction and less time on discipline. The link between self-efficacy and the pedagogy of novice teachers draw attention to how they relate to perceptions of instruction and class management. A larger study out of which this one evolved is underway to more fully investigate the behavior patterns of novice teachers over time in terms of what they say, and what they say they do that align to teacher efficacy practices. This study inquires into the reliance on “self” confidence by asking the question: do novice teachers perceive themselves to be self-empowered to create learning environments that allow them to motivate and promote student learning?

The theoretical framework for the inquiry on the perceptions of novice teachers is grounded in research on teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1993; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Pajares, 2002a, 2002b; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) commonly associated with attributes of quality teachers. Although the concept of teacher efficacy is evolving, Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy describe it as the extent to which teachers believe they can control the reinforcement of their own initiated actions; that is whether reinforcement of self-motivated actions lay within an individual or external to the individual:

Teachers who concur that the influence of the environment overwhelms a teacher’s ability to have an impact on a student’s learning exhibit a belief that reinforcement of their teaching efforts lies outside their control or is external to them. Teachers who express confidence in their ability to teach difficult or unmotivated students evidence a belief that reinforcement of

teaching activities lies within the teacher's control or is internal.
(p.784)

While it is possible to profile an efficacious "novice" teacher, it should be noted that, the efficacy attribute is linked to "self" confidence or an innate ability to reinforce self initiated actions. Based on social cognitive theory (Bandura, 1994) self-efficacy is defined as a "people's beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives". The emphasis is on the beliefs and judgments one makes rather than the skills one possesses. Teacher self-efficacy is the realization of one's self-judgments and capabilities to create and organize instruction that motivate student learning.

The Taxonomy Of Educational Objectives (Bloom, Masia, & Krathwohl, 1964; Clark, 1999) provides the framework to understand the learning pattern of novice teachers and allows for an explanation of the uneven development of knowledge, affective, and psychomotor abilities and skills. In the practical life of new teachers, these traits may not develop at the same pace or complement one another due to minimum or inexperience with diverse learning styles and little exposure to various teaching contexts. In fact, an acquired teaching license may be a good indicator of minimum teaching abilities, but the full cognitive and affective abilities of novice teachers evolve through regular and ongoing teaching experiences. In theory, novice teachers may "know" what to do but their affective abilities in terms of teacher-student interactions, and being able to balance what they value about teaching may pose challenges for them on the job. Additional research "to examine how teachers talked about their instructional practices, which changes teachers chose to make in their classroom practices, and how teachers characterized those changes" (Michele Foster & Peele, 2000) is part of the current trend to improve teacher learning. Foster and Peele found that "teachers need multiple opportunities to observe good practice, to talk about teaching among themselves and with expert practitioners, to learn to observe students carefully, to experiment with strategies and techniques and assess their impact, and to make and learn from their mistakes." Pedagogical experiences that contribute to the development of meaningful patterns about teaching, valuing and organizing information, retrieving information, and knowing when to use the information take place over time in diverse classroom settings.

In addition, measures of the teacher efficacy construct are useful to summarize teacher profiles on that trait. The Rand researchers (Armor et al., 1976) and the Gibson and Dembo studies on the teacher efficacy construct provide the supplemental theoretical framework for the applied measurements of teacher self-efficacy. The studies are grounded in social

learning theory (Rotter, 1966) particularly the book *Generalized Expectancies of Internal Versus External Control of Reinforcement*. The notion is that individual personality is the interaction of the person and the environment, and the extent of control over each “determines whether or not the person gets reinforced in life... and one’s behavior can be predicted across situations ” (Mearns, 2000; Rotter, 1966). The locus of control construct was further developed, by the Rand researchers, into two generic measures of teacher efficacy. These are useful tools to measure the extent novice teachers are confident about self-judgments rather than being dependent upon external reinforcements. Details about the measure of teacher efficacy are explained in the data collection section.

The ongoing professional training of novice teachers takes place in the Learning through Teaching in an After-School Pedagogical Laboratory [L-TAPL](M. Foster, Lewis, & Onafowora, 2003). The vision for L-TAPL is modeled on the “new science of learning” with emphasis on “teacher learning ... and the opportunities teachers need to change their practices” (Bransford et al., 1999). This approach allows teachers to learn how to monitor their own teaching, observe good teacher-student interactions, and adapt instructional strategies that work. Such pedagogical skills are becoming increasingly important in maintaining quality teachers in general and even more critical for novice teachers. The process involved in recording and demonstrating self-monitoring of instruction and efficacy are today routine since (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 1993) “many teachers conduct some type of action research such as journaling teaching experiences, conducting classroom studies, and participating in oral inquiry processes” (as cited in Bransford et. al., 1999, ch8, p.2).

Data Collection

L-TAPL is a professional development program that provides ongoing opportunities for novice teachers to observe a master teacher teaching primarily African American students across different grade levels; as well as interact with, and learn from other teachers. The lab operates a daily schedule two hours after-school for students in grades 1-4 led by a master teacher and, with novice teachers off to the side observing the class. After the children leave, the master and novice teachers group to discuss teaching strategies, teacher-student interactions, and novice concerns. The pedagogical lab environment allows novice teachers to experience on individual levels unique learning and teaching interjections. There are opportunities to observe a master teacher, and adapt strategies to use on their own students. Overtime those experiences provide insight to possible shifts in the novice teacher’s confidence from being a teacher constrained by a discipline focus to placing greater attention on instruction and a more flexible pedagogy.

Twenty-five novice teachers volunteered to participate in L-TAPL from the school district, of which approximately 70% came from

two host schools. The program went into operation two weeks after the regular school session, and ended two weeks before the school year ended. In this study, preliminary data are collected from the 25 novice teachers during the first week of their professional development training to address the question: do novice teachers perceive themselves to be self-empowered to create learning environments that allow them to motivate and promote student learning?

Due to the theoretical framework for the study, a mixed methods approach of qualitative inquiry, supplemented by quantitative analysis is appropriate. Although data collection involved minimal sustained observation of novice teachers teaching and teacher-student interactions, ample data on the novices' perceptions of their self-confidence were collected and all were exposed to the same sets of questions as prompts in group discussions and on the questionnaire.

Qualitative data sources include ethnographic data, such as written responses to open-ended questions, and transcripts from focus group discussions. Open-ended questions (prompts) on the questionnaire include: Describe some of the challenges you have faced in your teaching? Explain why you wish to participate in this program and what you hope to gain from participating in it. Identify and discuss one thing you did not do well and that if improved would influence your students' learning the most. Two key questions used during the focus group discussions include: What are your general impressions for today? What is different here [L-TAPL] from your classroom?

Quantitative data sources include analyzing two teacher efficacy items on a Likert scale at the bottom of the teacher questionnaire. The scale ranged from 1 to 5 (where 1 = strongly disagree, 2 = disagree, 3 = neither disagree nor agree, 4 = agree, and 5 = strongly agree; and negative items are coded in the reverse). The resulting descriptive analysis contributes to the novice profile, and the summary of novice perspective supplements the qualitative commentaries. The Rand items, mentioned earlier, and explanations (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001) that follow are used to measure and interpret the teacher's perceptions of reliance on self-judgments. Item 1: "*When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.*" According to the researchers, the teacher who agrees with this statement feels external influences (such as the home environment) can stifle their efforts to reach and shape student learning. As a result, they feel constrained by the belief of being over powered by external forces and, therefore, settle with putting forth less self-effort towards motivating students. Item 2: "*If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.*" In this instance, the teacher believes in self-empowerment and

the resulting actions demonstrate enhanced effort, or the willingness to go the extra mile to make it happen.

Discussion on Study of Novice Teachers

The novice teachers work with predominately African American and Latino students who are members of diverse family units, and live in working-class or low economic communities. The backgrounds of the novice teachers were complex and similar to the backgrounds of their students. One teacher remembers learning as a child to value an education from a single mother on welfare who eventually attended community college and earned an Associate degree in nursing. Another teacher raised by a widowed mother, in a housing project, plagued by drugs and violence, was able to stay focused and pursue an education. On the other hand, fewer teachers indicate they grew up in more stable environments of mid- to upper-class neighborhoods with excellent schools.

When prompted to explain why they wish to participate in L-TAPL the novices gave various reasons. One teacher from the more stable environment enrolled to gain “insight on how to cope with students who face challenges that seem hard for me to solve in class.” Another novice “I want to gain the experience so I can improve as a teacher.” A third novice articulates how important it is to teach a culturally relevant pedagogy as suggested by the comment: “I hope to gain a pedagogy especially relevant to teaching African American children”. The novices agree that the discussion sessions are helpful: “very rarely are there opportunities for teachers to really talk about those similarities and things ---what you’re seeing with Calvin.” These teachers come to the lab for support as one special education teacher remarks: “I’m just soaking it up today. I’m pretty wiped out and things are going kind of rough so I’m just trying to get inspired.” This teacher had an encounter with a difficult student and “felt, not stupid but ill equipped to do my job, all of a sudden...”

The challenges faced by the novice teachers point overwhelming to class management issues that include discipline and handling difficult students. “...some of the behavior, and you guys, we used to talk about this a lot, when I first started here. But some of the behavior is so disruptive, you just take the whole class down, the whole class.” Several novices affirm with simple comments “absolutely,” another novice said “that’s exactly what happened in my class.” At this stage in their professional development many novices seem to focus outside themselves for answers: “...we’re being failed by the system because I think they should come through and find something better for those kids to do. They should not have the power to disrupt the whole class....But we’re still stuck with the problem.” These expressions indicate low self-confidence in class management capabilities and the expectation that the “system” alone should do something about it.

The novices reflect on the one thing each does not do well and that if improved would positively influence students' learning the most. Feelings of not being a good teacher and not being able to understand the cause is common among novices and might stem from affective abilities that are developing more slowly than cognitive abilities. One teacher captured the feelings of many: "I must not be a good teacher because, you. You know, I'm not reaching them in the way I want to. Because I've taught them and we've gone over it and yet when they take the test—you know, it's like even when I teach to the test, they still don't do it. So, I'm doing something wrong." Another teacher shares a similar concern that points to an affective capability issue: "My room is always noisy, but it's noisy with arguing and fussing and people who are unhappy with each other. If it were noisier with something constructive going on, then that would probably be okay with me. I don't need absolute silence in my classroom, but many times when I ask for quiet, I just need the bothering and fighting with each other to stop. And, so frequently quiet becomes the only alternative to (them) fussing with each other." Yet, another novice summarizes the feelings of being an ineffective teacher: "I need to let go and be more flexible. I need to let go of the control. That's a huge thing. Let go of the control so it will be a less repressive environment...I need to open my mind to other ways and methods."

Novice A and Novice B illustrate a contrast in self-confidence and disposition to teaching. Novice B gives a very complex profile of the students she teaches and in doing so masks her confidence by focusing on the perceived limitation of the students, "Most of my students were raised in a non-traditional household, where most live with their mother, grandmother, aunt or uncle. Most of my students are below grade average according to [state standardized test scores] *sic*. Eighty percent of my students have very low self-esteem and feel that they cannot accomplish things without help....Most of my children have low self-esteem and no self-confidence." Furthermore, Novice B refers to the parents as contributing to her problem "some of the challenges that I have faced in my teaching are not having enough parental or home support..." Novice A demonstrates a more purposeful take-charge approach to solving complex student issues as noted by her comments: "I understand that many of the [disruptive students'] misbehavior has to do with lack of the math and reading skills needed to perform at or above grade level. This is the main reason why I do not teach grades 3 and up. The most important thing that I learned was that I wanted to teach children at the lower grades in order to be a part of the foundation of their learning..." Novice A models a disposition similar to the master teacher—that is being able to judge her capability to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, and dealing with the source of student problems.

A measure on the teacher efficacy issues for the typical novice teacher provides insight to whether Novice A, or Novice B demonstrate the typical disposition regarding the inquiry about novice teachers being self-empowered to create learning environments that allow them to motivate and promote student learning. A description of the 25 novices reveals their ethnic composition is African American (80%), Euro Americans (16%) and Asian (4%). They hold provisional licenses and their experiences include a combination of pre-service teaching, teaching assistance, and no more than five years in-service teaching.

Two measures of the novices' disposition on teacher self-efficacy statements were obtained using the Rand items as numbers 13 and 14 on the bottom of the teacher questionnaire. Item 13: "*When it comes right down to it, a teacher really can't do much because most of a student's motivation and performance depends on his or her home environment.*" Eighty percent (N = 25) of the novices disagreed (coded score = 4) with this statement indicating they believe themselves to be self-empowered and therefore confident in being able to reach even the difficult student. Item 14: "*If I really try hard, I can get through to even the most difficult or unmotivated students.*" The novices were somewhat consistent in their responses to both statements with seventy-six percent (N = 25) in agreement (score = 4) with item 14. Again, the novice teachers lean more toward the belief of being self-empowered on the scale, but the reality of their actions as teachers illustrated in the substantive oral and written comments convey gaps between their cognitive and affective capabilities that should not be ignored.

Findings and Further Inquiry

The cohort of novice teachers witness to the need for ongoing "teacher learning" that enable them to observe good teaching practices, and interact with other teachers. They chose to participate in L-TAPL to learn from a master teacher how-to enhance their teaching and pedagogical skills. The novices enjoy the support of their peers in addressing issues and solving problems, as reminded by the novice who commented: "very rarely are there opportunities for teachers to really talk about those similarities." They aspire to be efficacious teachers, and the teacher-learning that takes place in L-TAPL provides an environment for them to see and experience how-to bridge the gap between their cognitive and affective capabilities. During the earlier stage of professional training the novices do not show consistency in being self-empowered to create learning environments that allow them to motivate and promote student learning. This is evident by the issues they focus on in their oral and written expressions, namely, discipline and minimal administrative support rather than instruction and positive student interactions.

The self-confidence of novice teachers is more obscure when they select responses to statements on an agreement scale, but the nature

of their confidence is clearer in oral and written expressions. Novice A represents the typical outcome measured on the scales in terms of being self-confident and willing to reach even the difficult student. On the other hand, Novice B represents the expressions of individuals under more flexible data collection conditions. Under the latter condition novices are able to freely express themselves and thereby disclose a clearer picture of what they believe and their actions regarding teacher self-efficacy. Also, measures of teacher efficacy are important since they convey information in a score that typifies the cohort and the extent of variability in the response patterns. In addition, the findings are limited to the cohort, therefore a random sample or quasi-experimental design and larger number of novice teachers would be worthwhile to consider in future studies to tease out the nature of the apparent inconsistencies between open-ended and focus group responses, and selected responses on a scale. Finally, the findings from this study will inform a larger study designed to more fully investigate the learning patterns of novice teachers over time and capture their evolving self-confidence and capabilities at being efficacious teachers.

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