

**The Impact of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on  
Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement**

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### **Abstract**

This literature review explores the potential impact of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) on teacher efficacy and student achievement. Research conducted to date, focusing on increasing teacher efficacy and student achievement, has produced mixed results. Teachers continue to think, emote, and behave in unhelpful ways. REBT appears to provide a supportive framework for increasing teacher efficacy and potentially student achievement. School counselors can play a vital role in the dissemination of REBT through professional development. Research findings and theoretical implications are discussed.

## **The Impact of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy on Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement**

School systems have implemented numerous initiatives (U.S. General Accounting Office, 2000), standards and strategies (Strong, Silver, Perini, 2001), and practices (NCREL, 2004) with the goal of effecting change in student outcome and achievement at the school level. Despite exhaustive research and interventions, however, achievement has been relatively stagnant over the past 30 years (Leschly, 2003). The U.S. Department of Commerce (USDOC, 1971-2007) compiled data confirming the completion rate for high school has lingered around 85-88% since the 1970s. Additionally, data collected by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (USDHHS, 1993-2007) indicates a consistent increase in mental health related issues for all ages. Despite these bleak findings, theoretical frameworks and empirical research suggests educators do have the potential to increase student outcome and promote mental health.

Knowledge of cognitive science and human development is integral for educators in empowering students to achieve (NICHD 2005/2006; NCATE, 2006). Awareness of the teaching process and teaching standards alone is inadequate without addressing the thoughts, beliefs, and action tendencies of teachers that influence their classroom performance (Gatbonton, 2008). Several researchers suggest that teacher efficacy has a significant positive relationship to achievement of students (Ashton, Webb, & Doda, 1983; Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977). Ashton (1985) defined teacher efficacy as teachers' "beliefs in their ability to have a positive effect on student learning" (p. 142). Bandura (1997) suggests these beliefs impact teachers' thoughts,

emotions, behaviors, degree of tolerance for frustration, and exertion when performing in the classroom. Teachers attributing their failures to external factors are less likely to experience strong emotions, thus reacting in more helpful ways while exhibiting high levels of efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Inversely, teachers have the potential to appraise personal attributes as flawed based upon their perceived meaning of classroom situations. When this occurs, intense emotions such as depression, anxiety, and stress may be present, leading to disparaging behaviors and low efficacy. In addition to evaluating their efficacy, teachers often rate themselves as a whole and create unwarranted trouble for themselves and others (Ellis, 2005). Despite these unhelpful emotions many teachers experience, school systems have made little effort to provide teachers with mental health support as a way to foster their sense of efficacy. A mental health intervention for teachers would provide a humanistic component frequently absent in current attempts to increase efficacy beliefs. Teacher efficacy appears to have the capacity for momentous impact on student outcome, however, strategies for developing and maintaining these beliefs have largely been ignored.

While teacher efficacy appears to be directly linked to student achievement, findings from several experimental studies suggest that Rational Emotive Education (REE), a derivative of Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) developed by Albert Ellis (1962), is effective in increasing student achievement (DiGiuseppe & Kassinove, 1976; Omizo, Cubberly, & Omizo, 1985). Yet, because there is no empirical evidence of the utility of REE or REBT towards teacher efficacy, it is impossible to determine their overall impact on student achievement. Notwithstanding, research in this area appears

to have vitality and may identify additional strategies and interventions that have the potential to significantly impact teachers, students, and society.

At the school-level, teachers and student support staff members, including school counselors and school psychologists, have implemented REE curriculum for students in elementary grades with success (Donegan & Rust, 1998; Knauss, 2001; Vernon, 2004). It is conceivable then, that school counselors could mend the gap between the theory and practice of REBT for teachers as well. As a result, students may be indirectly impacted by this teacher intervention. Knowledge and understanding of REBTs influence on teacher efficacy and student achievement appears essential as school counselors strive to impact all students through comprehensive strengths-based counseling programs (Galassi, Griffin, & Akos, 2008). Therefore, the purpose of this review is to investigate the potential relationships between teacher efficacy, student achievement, and REBT. An exploration of the theoretical underpinnings of teacher efficacy and REBT specifically, may offer insight into the viability and potential impact REBT may have on teacher and student performance. A theoretical integration of this nature may support or reject the direction of current research and practice for counselor educators, educational researchers, and school counselors, while encouraging additional avenues for study.

A literature search was conducted with the goal of compiling the most pertinent research, data, empirical studies, journal articles, and theoretical frameworks encompassing student achievement, teacher efficacy, and potentially effective strategies for increasing both. Databases searched include ERIC, PsycINFO, PsycARTICLES, NC LIVE, and Academic Search Premier. Google and Google Scholar

served as valuable search engines in this process. Numerous REBT-focused books on theory and practice were also examined for relevant information. Key words used included: student achievement, student outcomes, teacher training programs, professional development and teachers, efficacy, teacher efficacy, teachers' sense of efficacy, teacher stress, Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy, REBT, Rational Emotive Education, and REE. The findings from the above sources were scrutinized and included in this review.

### **Teacher Efficacy**

In 1977, Albert Bandura, introduced efficacy expectation as a vital component of behavior change and learning theory. Bandura (1977, p. 193) defined efficacy expectation, synonymous with self efficacy, as “the conviction that one can successfully execute the behavior required to produce the outcomes.” Self-efficacy is largely determined through four sources of information, including personal experiences, witnessing other’s experiences, societal influence, and physiological reactions in various situations. Self-efficacy is thought to impact behavioral choices, effort and persistence, and cognitive and emotive responses (Bandura, 1986).

Over the past few decades, educational researchers have pushed teacher efficacy to the forefront as an extension to Bandura’s theory of self-efficacy. Teacher efficacy is comprised of teaching efficacy and personal efficacy (Ashton, Webb, and Doda,1983). These constructs are defined as a teachers' beliefs about the connections between teaching and learning (teaching efficacy) and their efficiency as a teacher (personal efficacy) respectively. Through experience and training, teachers develop beliefs in their own ability to create desired outcomes.

Researchers have linked many variables to increases or decreases in teacher efficacy. Huang, Lui, and Shiomi (2007) found a significant positive correlation between teacher efficacy and self esteem. The data suggested that as teachers acquire experience, teacher self efficacy and teacher self esteem increases. DiFabio & Palazzeschi (2008) found a significant positive relationship between teacher efficacy and emotional intelligence. Emotional intelligence is defined as “the capacity to process emotional information accurately and efficiently, including the capacity to perceive, assimilate, understand, and manage emotion” (Mayer, Salovey, & Caruso in Mayer & Cobb, 2000, p. 165). The findings suggest that emotional intelligence is linked to teacher self efficacy in managing classroom behavior, engaging students, and implementing useful teaching interventions.

Ross and Bruce (2007) explored professional development and its impact on teacher efficacy. Designed to increase teacher efficacy, professional development appeared to produce change in teachers' beliefs about their ability to manage classroom behaviors. Other changes in efficacy beliefs were not significant. Ross and Bruce (2007) concluded that professional development, although important in the advancement of educational endeavors, lacks utility in impacting teacher efficacy.

Researchers have recently explored teacher efficacy in relation to student achievement. Some investigators suggest that teacher efficacy and student achievement have a direct positive correlation (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2004; Ross, 1998). Ross and Bruce (2007) contend that teachers with high efficacy are more likely to increase student achievement. Henson (2001) purports that academic

achievement increases and students are more successful when their teacher has high efficacy beliefs.

Low self efficacy has the potential to impede the ability of teachers to function optimally in classroom and educational settings. Pintrich and Schunk (1996) suggest that a teacher's belief that he or she is unable to manage classroom behaviors is likely to lead to avoiding classroom management techniques. The teacher will often "give in" to unruly students because the task of managing the class is seen as exceeding their competence, thus perpetuating further lack of efficacy in classroom management. It is conceivable that this cycle is applicable to various other aspects of teaching, including working with low functioning students, communicating with teachers and parents, and lesson plan development and delivery.

The impact of teacher efficacy on student achievement appears obvious and well supported. Poulou (2007) found that personality traits, self-perceptions, and drive influence teacher efficacy. Educational researchers, however, have devoted little effort and resources to exploring these factors and their true impact on teacher efficacy.

### **Student Achievement**

Leschly (2003) considers student achievement an educational outcome largely measured by standardized tests. While each state determines the measures used to obtain student achievement, the United States, as a whole, lacks uniformity and consistency (Grissmer, Flanagan, Kawata, & Williamson, 2000). This incongruence creates difficulty in exploring and comparing student achievement and effective interventions across the nation. Research findings, however, suggests that teachers can increase student achievement through perseverance (Ross & Bruce, 2007) , effectively



managing their classroom (Woolfolk, Rosoff, & Hoy, 1990), paying close attention to at-risk students (Ashton, et. al, 1983; Ross & Bruce, 2007), attempting difficult new ideas (Ross, 1998), and increasing student efficacy (Ashton et. al, 1983). Strong, Silver, and Perini (2001) claim that teachers can incorporate rigor, thought, diversity, and authenticity in the classroom as a way to increase student achievement. A report by the United States Department of Education (1998), stated some school systems are focusing on reading programs to help students learn to read as a way to increase student achievement. The United States General Accounting Office (2000) reported the use of school-community interventions aimed to increase student achievement. Some school systems, for example, are offering students with part-time jobs classroom instruction after school and on weekends to accommodate their schedules. Yet, Darling-Hammond (2000) suggests that teacher training and certification is the best indicator of student achievement.

While researchers offer many suggestions, strategies, and initiatives, their investigations have found inconclusive results. Teacher efficacy however, consistently appears to have a positive relationship with student achievement. Findings from several studies suggest this strong correlation (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1998; Ross, 1992; Watson, 1992). Ross (1992), for example, found student achievement to increase when the classroom teacher maintained greater efficacy as compared to other classrooms and teachers. It is concluded that student achievement will rise when teachers increase their efficacy beliefs. The key then, to increasing student achievement, is utilizing an intervention that will increase teacher efficacy beliefs.

## **Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy**

Albert Ellis developed Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy (REBT) in the mid-1950s based on the premise that humans disturb themselves, not by what happens but through their thoughts about what happens (Ellis & Harper, 1975). Ellis posited that humans have an inborn tendency or predisposition to think irrationally by placing demands on themselves, others, and life. Demands are statements of rigidity and often include the words “should,” “must,” and “ought.” Evaluations including “I can’t stand it,” “It’s awful,” and “They are terrible,” most often accompany these demands. As a result, unhelpful negative emotions including anxiety, anger, depression, shame, and guilt emerge frequently, leading to negative behavioral consequences (Dryden, 2003). Rational beliefs are a more helpful alternative to irrational thought. Rational beliefs include preferential statements such as “I prefer things go my way but they don’t have to” or “I would like for him to do what I say, but if he doesn’t, it’s not the end of the world.” Because of their logical manner and negation of the irrational, these thoughts lead to helpful negative emotions (concern, bother, or frustration) that elicit more helpful behavioral consequences.

Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy implores many humanistic qualities in its philosophy of emotion and life. These include: (a) constructivism, (b) self-actualization, (c) long-range enjoyment of life, (d) unconditional acceptance, and (e) existential choice (Ellis, 1996). As a result of REBT’s humanistic stance, many techniques and tools have been developed to foster rational thoughts, explore emotions, and encourage helpful behaviors. Ellis’ ABC model is a popular and useful aid used by many to address and challenge irrational beliefs. Other emotive, cognitive, and behavioral strategies

including, role play, in vivo desensitization, imagery, laddering, and shame attacking exercises are useful within a REBT framework in effecting change in thought and behavioral patterns (Ellis & McLaren, 1998). A comprehensive body of literature spanning 60 years supports the usefulness and value of the REBT system of therapy (David, Szentagotai, Eva, & Macavei, 2005; Haaga & Davison, 1989).

Between 1970 and 1974, William Knaus (2001) developed Rational Emotive Education (REE), an educational program designed for classroom delivery, aimed to help children develop optimally through the promotion of rational thinking and helpful behaviors. REE consists of a series of lessons designed to educate and create awareness of the connections between thoughts, emotions, and behaviors.

Much has been written on REE and its application and benefit towards children in the classroom. Related research suggests that REE has excellent potential in providing students with a framework from which to explore their thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in classroom settings (Trip, Vernon, & McMahon, 2007). While tailored to teach students the connections between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors, REE largely ignores the importance of teacher influence and modeling rational thinking and self-helping behaviors (Vernon, 2004). Researchers have conducted only a few studies related to the impact of REBT on classroom teachers. Research findings related to teacher efficacy suggest however, that REBT is a viable method for increasing teacher efficacy.

### **Potential Effect of REBT on Teacher Efficacy and Student Achievement**

To date, few researchers have addressed the influence of professional development on teacher efficacy. Of the studies conducted, the primary focus of the professional development for teachers entails practical solutions including

communication skills (Fritz, Miller-Heyl, Kreutzer, & MacPhee, 1995) and peer coaching (Edwards, Green, Lyons, Rogers, & Swords, 1998). This type of professional development neglects to address teachers' core beliefs that influence their emotion and behavior (Ellis and Dryden, 1997). While this type of professional development offers support to teachers, irrational beliefs are maintained, leading to unhealthy negative emotions and unproductive behaviors. For teachers, efficacy beliefs are a way of rating their perceived success at a task. Because teachers are human, and humans are genetically predisposed to think irrationally, they will often rate themselves as a whole, conditional of their success (Ellis, 2005). Thus a teacher who has a high sense of efficacy in a certain task is likely to have a high self esteem when involved in the task, while the same teacher maintaining a low sense of efficacy for a different task will then likely present a low self esteem when involved in that task. Findings by Huang, Lui, & Shiomi (2007) suggest this relationship is present between teacher efficacy and self esteem. Self-esteem decreases when people base their self worth on an activity, such as teaching, and then negatively evaluate their performance as a teacher (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). REBT supports these findings, while suggesting teachers accept themselves unconditionally, as humans who sometime fail and succeed at teaching related tasks. This failure does not translate to who they are as a teacher or person. The philosophical framework of REBT also supports unconditional other acceptance (UOA) and unconditional life acceptance (ULA), (Ellis & MacLaren, 1998). These humanistic tenets of REBT appear useful in helping teachers form preferential, accepting philosophies of themselves, their students, and life.

A study conducted by Singh and Stoloff (2008) demonstrated the irrational beliefs that many teachers maintain. While the authors suggest that teachers' participating in their study maintained personality traits exemplary of effective teachers, the inverse is presumed under the theoretical framework of REBT. An overwhelming majority of the participants held strong, rigid beliefs regarding communication, respect, sensitivity towards students, and teacher inquisitiveness. REBT postulates that these strong, rigid beliefs held by teachers lead to unhealthy negative cognitive, emotional, and behavioral consequences (Dryden, DiGiuseppe, & Neenan, 2003). These unhealthy negative consequences have the potential to directly interfere with teachers' ability to effectively teach. Student achievement will decrease if teachers are well-trained in classroom instruction, yet have emotional disturbances that impede their delivery.

Recent findings by Di Fabio and Palazzeschi (2008) suggest the intrapersonal and adaptability dimensions of emotional intelligence are linked to teacher self-efficacy. Teachers who have difficulty understanding how they feel and trouble adapting to problem situations appear to have lower self-efficacy. Additionally, teachers with lower self efficacy may have difficulty identifying how they feel and adapting to problem situations. This concept has the capacity to become self-fulfilling and cyclical in nature. Without appropriate intervention teachers may continue to reindoctrinate themselves with unhelpful thoughts leading to unproductive teaching and low student achievement. REBT, however, appears to address these dimensions of emotional intelligence and associated concerns. Scientific and logical processes for exploring and controlling emotions are provided with this framework while promoting a flexible orientation to adverse events (Ellis, 1971).

While professional development aimed at increasing teacher efficacy continues to focus on concrete intervention including peer mentoring (Dole & Donaldson, 2006), Internet navigation (Charalambous & Ioannou, 2008), and curriculum instruction (Martin, McCaughtry, Hodges-Kulinna, & Cothran, 2008), teachers continue to struggle with self actualization, unmanaged thoughts, unhealthy negative emotions and acceptance. These internal conflicts negatively impact student achievement. Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy appears to be a viable intervention for helping teachers achieve their potential in the classroom and in life while living happier in the process. Through professional development focused on the philosophy of REBT, teachers may be able to further equip students to reach their potential socially, emotionally, and academically.

### **Discussion**

Rational Emotive Behavioral Therapy appears to be a viable means to increasing teacher efficacy and thus increasing student achievement. The findings of this literature review suggest student achievement can be impacted both directly and indirectly. Research findings suggest that an REBT intervention, to address unhelpful thoughts and emotions teachers are likely to experience in and out of the classroom, has the potential to increase student achievement. If teachers' thoughts are rational and realistically grounded, effective instruction is likely to occur. Additionally, teachers would be more accepting and tolerant of their students as fallible humans and less likely to give up when educating academically challenged students. If teachers apply the philosophical framework of REBT in their life and classroom, they will model rational thought, emotion, and behavior. This notion is congruent with social learning theory and exemplified by the infamous Bobo doll experiment (Bandura, Ross, & Ross, 1961) in

which children exposed to an aggressive adult behaved in aggressive ways similar to those of the model. Additionally, when presented with a nonaggressive adult, children responded with more composed behaviors. The influence of teachers' classroom behavior appears to be just as powerful. Ellis (1975) contends that children will adapt and incorporate a new healthier emotional philosophy if provided with training and modeling. When students witness their teacher consistently emoting and behaving in self-helpful ways, they are highly likely to demonstrate comparable reactions in similar situations.

The findings of this literature review suggest that REBT is a viable and comprehensive teacher intervention that has the potential to promote emotional health and self realization at a societal and individual level (Ellis, 1996). At a societal level, students would be intentionally and consistently exposed to rational thought and self-helping behaviors at the onset of the school experience. This exposure would encourage the formation of highly successful behavior patterns and lead to responsible enjoyment of life as growth and development occurs. Teachers would provide them with a solid foundation of emotional understanding. As a result, students would no longer reindoctrinate themselves with faulty assumptions and irrational thought. Students would learn at an early age to think logically and scientifically about their thoughts and emotions. In turn, children would grow up prepared to face the challenges that lie ahead of them in a rational and self-helping manner. As a result, it is conceivable to think that society as a whole would benefit from exposure to Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy.

Other possible outcomes for providing REBT based training and professional development to teacher include the following: (a) reductions in teacher stress and

burnout, (b) decreases in teacher truancy and turnover, (c) decreases in inappropriate behaviors at school by students, (d) reductions in school violence among students, (e) less retention across grade levels, (f) development of more productive relationships with students' parents, (g) higher level thinking at an earlier age, (h) more innovative ideas and teaching strategies implemented by teachers, and (i) and increases in collaborative efforts among teachers.

### **Limitations**

Several limitations of this literature review are worth noting. There is much research and literature on teacher efficacy and its effects on student achievement. Additionally, the review found promising results of student achievement when REE was applied to students. This review, however, failed to find research on the effects of an REBT-based teacher intervention aimed at increasing teacher efficacy and/or student achievement. As such, the contents of this literature review are comprised only of concepts and ideas that appear to be worth investigating. Currently, these ideas lack data to support their utility and effectiveness.

Furthermore, an attempt to be comprehensive and objective in the research and writing process was made in the present review. The research and literature compiled on the variables discussed within this review were presented accurately while exploring the implications of the concepts and ideas shared. Notwithstanding these efforts, there remains the potential for bias. Nevertheless, this review is thought to shed light on a viable intervention that has the potential to change the present direction of education and mental health.



## Recommendations

As a result of this investigation and review of the literature, several recommendations are encouraged. First, qualitative research may be useful in the field of education, in schools and classrooms, to better understand the effects of irrational thought and unhealthy negative emotions on the experiences of teachers and students. The use of focus groups may be helpful in collecting data on teachers' thoughts and emotions. Classroom observations would allow researchers to assess the helpful and unhelpful behaviors of teachers and students. Students could also be interviewed as a way to gather their perceptions of teachers' classroom behaviors and emotions.

Second, quantitative research may be viable in collecting data on teachers' efficacy beliefs and irrational beliefs. A large scale study utilizing survey research would provide insight on the influence of these two variables. Gathering data on these two constructs would be useful in the development and presentation of interventions.

A third recommendation involves the standardization of classroom instruments to regularly assess students' academic growth and achievement. Of the numerous instruments available to assess student growth and achievement, few, if any, can be administered consistently by classroom teachers. This lack of ease of instrumentation prevents classroom teachers from objectively assessing their students' academic progress.

Another recommendation for further study may be the development of an instrument used to assess classroom and/or student emotional wellness. This would be a useful measure for acquiring base-line data prior to an intervention such as the one described within this review. Data compiled from an instrument focused on the

frequency, intensity, and duration of emotions and behaviors elicited from classroom participants, including teachers and students, would be very powerful in addressing specific problem areas during the intervention.

A final recommendation, based on the findings of this review, is for school counselors to play a vital role in the development and delivery of an REBT-based intervention for teachers aimed at increasing teacher efficacy and student achievement. School counselors have received training in counseling theory and approaches and are likely very familiar with the concepts and philosophy presented. A collaborative effort by the school counselors, along with classroom teachers and other student support staff members may be the most effective intervention delivery mode. A team approach would encourage stakeholders from all disciplines within the school to take an active role in the implementation of the cognitive, emotional, and behavioral techniques presented. Utilizing a team-oriented, strength-based approach such as REBT, counselors can provide teachers with tools and self-helping skills aimed at reducing and preventing problems (Galassi, Griffin, & Akos, 2008). School counselor's ability to create a sense of mattering among teachers through REBT in-services may further decrease stress while increasing collaborative school communities, thus fostering academic achievement among students (Dixon & Tucker, 2008). These recommendations, in isolation or in conjunction, could have a profound effect on the mental health of teachers and students, as well as educational and societal reform.

This literature review demonstrated the potential influence Rational Emotive Behavior Therapy can have on teacher self efficacy and student achievement. The breadth and depth of the impact REBT can have on teachers, children, and society

appears to stretch far beyond the classroom, however. Professional development and training of teachers in REBT appears to be a viable alternative to past and present ventures to increase teacher and student performance. It is hoped that this review will lead to further investigations of REBT, teacher efficacy, and student achievement.

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### **Biographical Statement**

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