

TEACHING EFFICACY BELIEFS OF PRE SERVICE TEACHERS

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ABSTRACT

Teaching Efficacy Beliefs could be an important element in bolstering teaching enthusiasm and sustaining the sense of professional commitment to the teaching profession. The following article attempts to provide a general view regarding the teaching efficacy beliefs of pre service teachers.

INTRODUCTION

Initial studies into the composition of teacher efficacy beliefs construct, focused on the practices, experiences and performance of in-service teachers and measured personal teaching efficacy (PTE)* as well as general teaching efficacy (GTE)* as they relate to teaching as an operative concept in the analysis of both teachers' and learners' capabilities (Ashton & Webb, 1986; Bandura, 1986, 1997; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 2000; Pajares, 1996; Woolfolk & Hoy, 1990, 1998).

Nevertheless, there are indications that the sense of teaching efficacy beliefs is highest during the training or pre service education years (Riggs & Enochs, 1990). Bandura (1977, 1986, 1997) postulated that efficacy beliefs would be most malleable (easily influenced / trained) in the early stages of learning and training. Thus, it is suggested that in the process of enhancing and consolidating teachers' sense of efficacy beliefs, especially the personal teaching efficacy, teacher training institutions have important and significant role to play.

EFFICACY BELIEFS OF PRE SERVICE TESL TEACHERS

Ashton (1984) asserted that a teacher education programme that aims to develop teacher efficacy beliefs, should make an effort to develop teachers that are highly motivated and have the assured confidence for effective classroom performance. In this aspect, Ashton believed that teacher training programme designed to foster teaching efficacy beliefs must include exposure to authentic as well as context-based teaching experience and situations so as

*PTE : Teacher's beliefs of whether or not he/she personally has the skills and capabilities to teach and promote learning in the classroom.

*GTE : A sense of whether or not a teacher's impact or ability to promote learning is limited by factor (s) outside his/her control.

to enable the trainees to develop the practical skills, human relationship and group rapport, all essential elements of teaching efficacy, teaching confidence and teaching motivation, as Ashton stated:

In order for teacher efficacy to be more than simply an ideology that teachers can articulate, a teacher education programme designed to foster teacher efficacy must include training experiences enabling pre service students to develop the human relations skills essential for establishing and maintaining trusting relations with and encouraging autonomy in students (p. 30).

Ashton's (1984) opinion is shared by Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk and Hoy (1998). They too suggested that teacher training programmes need to give pre service teachers more opportunities to conduct teaching practice that includes instructing and managing students in a variety of contexts as well as levels of complexity and challenges so as to provide pre service teachers with the necessary authentic teaching experience and skills. A mentor-mentee relationship with guidance from experienced teacher should help to promote positive teaching efficacy beliefs among prospective teachers. Similarly, performance analysis such as encouraging and supportive comments from experienced teachers will have a positive and significant effect on the development of efficacy beliefs. A good mentor-mentee structure could also provide prospective teachers more opportunities to observe and learn (vicarious experience) and to compare teaching strategies of experienced teachers so that a realistic standard of achievement could be developed.

The mentor-mentee perspective is also suggested by Clifford and Green (2004) who viewed the mentor-protégé (their label) relationships as a significant factor in pre service teacher education. They pointed out the positive rapport of a good mentor-protégé relationship can foster pre service teachers' development of teaching competence and self-efficacy beliefs. Vygotsky's mediated learning serves as the developmental framework for mentor-protégé relationship, protégé teacher efficacy level, pre service teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, roles of mentors, and the empathy element as it relates to relationship building.

Ross (2003) in reviewing various strategies to enhance teachers' beliefs in their teaching abilities concluded that teachers who believed that they are more effective set more challenging goals for themselves and their students, are accountable for students' achievement, and have high persistence level when encountered problems or challenges. The article suggests that teacher efficacy beliefs has direct effect on the students' overall school performance and achievement level.

EFFICACY BELIEF CONSTRUCTS OF PRE SERVICE TESL TEACHERS

In examining the transitional stages of teacher efficacy beliefs in a teacher training programme, Martin (1989) conducted interval studies with pre service teachers at the beginning of their final year at college, and into their first year of their formal classroom teaching. Results indicated that there are transitional stages of teaching efficacy, that a high sense of teacher efficacy beliefs begins early in teacher education or training programme, but decrease in intensity and perception as pre service teachers progress through their training and into the early years of classroom teaching. In a related study, Broussard, Book and Byars (1988), compared first year pre service teachers and final year pre service teachers with experienced in-service teachers with regards to their perception on teaching efficacy beliefs level. It was found that as teaching experience increased, the sense of teaching efficacy beliefs became less significant.

Spector (2004) found that personal efficacy beliefs among undergraduate pre service teachers increased linearly over a four year teacher education programme, culminating in their first year formal classroom teaching. Spector also discovered that general efficacy beliefs increased linearly for the initial three years, but declined subsequently after teachers started formal teaching. Similar trend of developmental changes of personal and general efficacy beliefs were also observed by Dembo and Gibson (1985) and Woolfolk and Hoy (1990).

In a study into pre service teachers' feelings of readiness to teach, Housego (2002) found that one of the most important prerequisites of successful teaching is confidence in one's own abilities and competence to teach. Housego equated the pre service teachers' acquisition of confidence to teach as indication that the teacher has achieved the readiness to teach and a high level of personal teaching efficacy beliefs. Therefore, she suggested that the important goal for pre service education is to present programmes which are designed to enhance and foster pre service teachers' sense of teaching efficacy beliefs. In a follow-up study, Housego also discovered that self-efficacy beliefs and feelings of readiness to teach, increased for pre service teachers after the first and second terms of a three-term revised secondary teacher education programme, and there were no significant differences by gender or subjects' area of study.

Enochs, Riggs and Shroyer's (1995) and Woolfolk and Hoy's (1990) investigation of pre service teachers' efficacy beliefs revealed that the two factors of general efficacy and personal efficacy were related to their beliefs about maintaining positive control of as well as rapport with students. In another study, Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) examined changes in the perception of pre service teachers about teaching efficacy by using the Gibson and Dembo's Teacher Efficacy Scale. The findings indicated that pre service teachers remained optimistic about their personal ability to motivate students to learn (personal efficacy), but were less confident in overcoming influences of non-school or non-academic factors

(general efficacy). In addition, they discovered that pre service teachers tend to increase their sense of personal efficacy beliefs as a result of successful completion of their teaching practice. Hoy and Woolfolk (1993) subsequently noticed that teachers' sense of personal efficacy is more positive in schools where colleagues and administrators have high expectations for students achievement, and where teachers receive relevant and regular assistance from their principals or fellow teachers in solving problems and facing challenges

Saklofske, Michayluk, Randhawa and Ross (2001) and Woolfolk and Hoy (1990) agreed that undergraduate pre service teachers with low sense of teacher efficacy beliefs, were more likely to favour a more firm and regimental style of control and management in the classroom. In comparison, pre service teachers who score high on both general and personal teaching efficacy beliefs were more humanistic in their classroom control approach. They also noted that when pre service teachers were engaged in teaching practice, efficacy beliefs, again was noted to have significant impact on their behavior. Trainees with higher personal teaching efficacy beliefs were rated higher on their teaching performance, classroom control, and questioning techniques by their supervisors.

Huey and Gorrell (2003) explored the differences in teaching efficacy among Korean pre service early childhood and primary teachers starting their first training term and those in their final term before graduating as qualified teachers. Results indicated that pre service teachers became more efficacious regarding their personal teaching efficacy beliefs during their training years, but less positive about general teaching efficacy beliefs throughout their pre service education years.

Lin and Gorrell (2001) conducted a study to compare efficacy beliefs of pre service teachers in Taiwan who were at the beginning of early childhood teacher preparation programmes with those who were near the end of their preparation programmes. The results indicated that successful teacher preparation programme correlates with high sense of teacher efficacy. However, data analysis found no significant difference in mean scores in efficacy beliefs for both groups, but the results did suggest the two groups may have some conceptual differences. They suggested the idea of constructing and integrating teacher efficacy with social and cultural perspectives, in addition to the traditional efficacy construct and findings of Ashton and Webb (1986); Gibson and Dembo (1984); Rich, Lev and Fischer (2000); and Woolfolk and Hoy (1990), which suggested two dimensional construct. The study by Lin and Gorrell discovered more than two efficacy dimensions, such as cultural background, family and society support as well as personal convictions including even religious beliefs.

THE NEED TO LOOK AT TEACHING EFFICACY BELIEFS OF PRE SERVICE TEACHERS

The interest in looking at pre service teachers' teaching efficacy is due in part to the suggestion forwarded by Bandura that efficacy beliefs would be easily constructed in early stages of learning or training, and that once these efficacy beliefs are established, they are quite permanent and resistant to change (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk & Hoy, 1998). Another reason is that the construct appears to have long-term implications which include aspects of interest to teacher education in general such as job satisfaction and length of a career in teaching. There are evidence to suggest that teacher training assignments and teaching practice have different influences on personal and general teaching efficacy of pre service teachers. General teaching efficacy (GTE) beliefs are more likely to change when prospective teachers are exposed to vicarious learning experience and the many training tasks or assignments (Watters & Ginns, 2001). Personal teaching efficacy (PTE) beliefs, on the other hand are strongly influenced by mastery learning, such as teaching practice experiences (Housego, 2002; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). It was also noted that at the same time, during teaching practice, general efficacy beliefs level would decline (Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993; Spector, 2004). The assumption is that realities and authentic classroom teaching experience had made pre service teachers realize the many demands and challenges faced by teachers, and that teaching theories do not always cater for these classrooms and instructional problems. Subsequently, Weinstein (2005) noted that pre service teachers do not usually understand the rationale and objectives of teaching practice. They often assumed teaching practice or practicum as another course requirement to fulfil, without focusing on the many responsibilities and challenges faced by teachers. They too are unsure of classroom interaction and rapport with students, some being too friendly, while some are overly strict and authoritative. As a result, they are disappointed when their perceived performance did not match the intended outcome during practicum. This causes disillusion and stifle their efficacy and enthusiasm to teach.

CONCLUSION

There are evidence to support the notion that it is necessary to take into consideration the efficacy beliefs element in the teacher training environment, as evident through the review of various related literature, findings, and suggestions that promote fostering a stronger sense of teaching efficacy beliefs among pre service teachers. In retrospect, efficacy beliefs can assist pre service teachers in general and pre service TESL teachers in the following aspects:

- i. create more opportunities for self-reflective context-based in class teaching practice; as a mean to gain mastery or enactive experience

- ii. analysis of the complex task of teaching, whereby the demanding task is studied in detail, holistically as well as in separate individual segments for better understanding and application
- iii. establish a mentor-mentee structure, for effective relationship, guidance and support from experienced and master teachers
- iv. have more vicarious experiences, such as watching experienced teachers teach as well as to sit in and observe as many lessons as possible
- v. performance feedback and words of encouragement in the early stages that stress on the positive achievement of pre service teachers as well as positive attributes such as effort, hard work and persistence will have positive effect on the enhancement of high personal efficacy beliefs.
- vi. assigning pre service teachers on practicum to smaller classes and more capable pupils can help to foster general teaching efficacy and confidence
- vii. collaborative teaching and peer support during the initial teaching practice, coupled with appropriate staff and school support can help inexperienced teachers to review and correct inappropriate teaching methods and teaching weaknesses, thus fostering personal teaching effectiveness
- viii. self evaluation and reflection on achievement, performance, strengths and limitations.

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