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An Investigation of English Teacher Efficacy Beliefs: Subject-Specificity, Subject-Congruency, and Associated Factors.

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2005
An Investigation of English Teacher Efficacy Beliefs: Subject-Specificity, Subject-Congruency, and Associated Factors.
ABSTRACT

Self-efficacy beliefs have a pervasive influence on human endeavours. Teaching is an occupation where efficacy beliefs will, in large part, shape teachers' performances and potentials to initiate new and exciting challenges for learners in their classrooms. Teacher efficacy has been associated with student motivation, teachers' adoptions of innovations, ratings of teachers' competence, and teachers' classroom management strategies. However, such findings are usually based on global measures of teacher efficacy, rather than on subject-specific teaching competencies.

A specialist subject teacher's sense of efficacy is not necessarily uniform across the many subject-specific tasks teachers are asked to perform. Specialist subject teachers are likely to exhibit differences in task-specific efficacy beliefs across a range of subject competencies, depending on differences in levels of enactive teaching experience, and opportunities to have engaged in successful teaching performance experiences.

An English Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire (ETEQ) was developed to assess English teacher efficacy beliefs. The English Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire was informed by Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy and Hoy's (1998) proposed integrated model. The ETEQ also included personal teaching efficacy (PTE) and general teaching efficacy (GTE) items from the Gibson and Dembo (1984) scale and the Riggs and Enochs (1990) scale.

A pilot study was conducted to test the English Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire. The pilot factor analysis generated a robust and meaningful English Teacher Efficacy Scale comprising four subscales that represented distinct domains of English. Self-efficacy data were gathered from a sample (n = 126) of secondary English teachers (pre-service n = 47 and practising n = 79) across the range of subject tasks and competencies identified by the New Zealand national English Curriculum.

Results from a multivariate analysis of variance (MANOVA) with repeated measures revealed differences between secondary English teachers' efficacy beliefs across a
range of competencies, with English teachers displaying greater levels of positive efficacy towards more traditional subject tasks and competencies than towards more non-traditional newer subject tasks and competencies.

Analyses of variance also revealed that English teachers with an academic qualification in Literature, in contrast to some other related discipline, such as Media Studies or Drama, held more positive efficacy beliefs for teaching English. Results also showed that English teacher efficacy becomes more positive with increasing levels of teaching experience and increasing amounts of professional teacher development.

A comparison between practising teacher efficacy and pre-service teacher efficacy for teaching English found that practising teachers held more positive efficacy beliefs across the full range of competencies represented by the ETEQ. Such a finding suggests that Bandura's (1986) four sources of efficacy information -- mastery experiences, peer modelling, vicarious experiences and physiological and emotional states -- become more potent sources of efficacy information for practising teachers.

Multivariate analyses also suggested that teacher efficacy can be associated to a slight extent with student achievement levels, with teachers displaying greater levels of positive efficacy when working with students at higher achievement levels.

The findings of the present study indicate that teacher efficacy is associated with teachers having appropriate core subject content knowledge (academic qualifications), pedagogical knowledge gained through training and practical teaching experience, professional (pre-service and in-service) development opportunities so that teachers can be upskilled and updated. Such findings have important implications for teacher education, and for teaching and learning in general.
DEDICATION

Dedicated to my awesome mum, Jose, whose tenacity to squeeze the last drop of juice out of life, and not go “gently into that good night” was utterly inspiring. To my Dad, whose whole life was an example of the transformative power of education. To my husband and life companion, Paul, and my three children, Polly, Jasmine and Leif, who all are such wonderful teachers, and such very fine human beings. To Myah and Ella, my two beautiful granddaughters; may they always laugh, dance, and dream as they do now. And to all English teachers who continue, often against all odds, to believe in the liberating power of language and the passion of learning and teaching; for they are also the “dreamers of dreams”.

\[\textit{And we are the dreamers of dreams}\\\textit{Yet we are the movers and shakers}\\\textit{Of the world forever, it seems.}\\\textit{Arthur O Shaugnessy}\]
ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

My many thanks to all the English teachers who so willingly and graciously participated in this research, and clearly care so much about what they do.

Thanks to my supervisors, Professor James Chapman and Professor Bill Tunmer. Their sagacity, expertise, academic rigour and guidance were of the highest quality. Most of all I thank them both for the personal and professional beliefs they have always had in me. Such beliefs serve to nurture self-efficacy, and even adults need that! Thanks also to Professor Dick Harker for his statistical guidance and support.

Thanks to all the student teachers that I have had the privilege of teaching in the Graduate Diploma of Secondary Teaching programme. I never fail to be delighted year after year, at the voluminous dollops of creative energy, zany humour, love of language, and deep human warmth, that beginning teachers of English bring to my classes. And especially to Dan, whose words to me were a salutary reminder of the impact a teacher can have on a student:

How do you begin to describe
One
Whose effect is profound,
Life-changing?
When the rhetoric rings over empty space
And the songs have all been sung,
Your lesson remains.

And lastly, thanks to all the school students in my English classes over many years who daily reminded me what a truly noble profession teaching is. And most importantly, reminded me how strangely quirky and colourful life is, and not to take ourselves too seriously, but to endlessly celebrate the sense of humanity that should be the central nexus of every learning classroom.
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