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# **Teacher Efficacy, Orientations Toward Children and Self-Esteem: The Effects of Student Teaching Practice**

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## ABSTRACT

Student teachers are said to have an unrealistic optimism, and a sense of idealism that often exceeds that of their supervisors. As a valued component in teacher education programmes, student teaching practice challenges student teachers to assess their capabilities and to build esteem as teachers. Across student teaching practice, student teachers' teaching efficacy is said to decline while personal teaching efficacy increases, and their orientations toward children become more controlling and less autonomous. However, such findings are usually based on global measures rather than situationally-specific tasks, exclude important dimensions identified in social learning theory, and often underestimate or overlook the importance of associate teachers' perceptions.

Student teachers' ( $n = 50$ ) and their associate teachers' ( $n = 50$ ) perceptions of efficacy (self-efficacy as teachers, and personal teaching efficacy; efficacy about others as teachers, and teaching efficacy), control versus autonomous orientations toward children, and self-esteem as teachers were measured before and after a final student teaching practice. Data were gathered using traditional measures of teacher efficacy (RAND Teacher Efficacy items, and Teacher Efficacy Scale [TES]), as well as specially prepared vignettes, and a form of Rosenberg's Self-Esteem Scale adapted for teachers. These vignettes incorporate dimensions of task difficulty, strength of efficacy, and generality of efficacy (Bandura, 1989), as well as efficacy for innovativeness. Also, these vignettes accommodate the scope of influence dimension (Guskey, 1988) and measure both efficacy and orientations toward children.

Results from analyses of variance with repeated measures disconfirm the claim that student teachers have an unrealistic optimism or idealism that exceeds that of associate teachers. Rather, overall efficacy on all three measures revealed that student teachers' perceptions were significantly lower than those of associate teachers. There were no significant differences between student teachers and associate teachers on teaching efficacy [TES], or on efficacy about others as teachers on vignettes about individuals or groups. Personal teaching efficacy did not differ between student teachers and associate teachers on either the TES or RAND measures. However, the situationally-specific vignettes revealed that student teachers were less confident with both groups and individual children, and perceived tasks involving groups as being significantly more difficult to deal with than did associate teachers. Given the relative inexperience

and developmental status of student teachers, these results suggest a sense of realism rather than idealism about self as teachers.

Across student teaching practice, teaching efficacy remained unchanged. Personal teaching efficacy did not vary on the RAND items, but consistent with other research, student teachers' personal teaching efficacy increased on the Teacher Efficacy Scale. Vignette responses indicated that student teaching practice had no significant effect on student teachers' and associate teachers' self-efficacy as teachers, or efficacy of others as teachers on either task difficulty, strength of efficacy, or innovativeness. However, after completing student teaching practice, both student teachers and associate teachers perceived tasks about individuals to be more difficult for others as teachers to deal with, while associate teachers were also not as optimistic about the innovativeness of others as teachers in dealing with these problems about individual children.

Compared with student teachers, associate teachers reported significantly stronger preferences for both high control and high autonomy orientations toward children. Student teachers also expressed significantly stronger preferences for both moderate autonomy and control orientations toward children, when compared with associate teachers. Across student teaching practice, student teachers' preferences became less autonomous but, contrary to the literature, they did not necessarily become correspondingly more controlling.

Student teachers' self-esteem as teachers was significantly lower than that reported by associate teachers. No significant changes occurred across student teaching practice, indicating that the impact of such experiences may be more apparent than real.

In discussing these findings, it is apparent that the conventional wisdom which proposes that student teaching practice makes a difference in the way that student teachers perceive their ability to cope, their confidence in themselves as teachers, their capability and willingness to be innovative, how they relate to children, and their self-esteem as teachers, may not be as first seems. The findings of this present study indicate that situationally-specific measures which account for several dimensions of efficacy as well as the scope of influence factor, have a utility in research about student teachers. Also, the present study affirms the importance of accounting for both student teachers' and associate teachers' perceptions when considering the effects of student teaching practice. It may well be that current teacher education practices in matching student teachers with associate teachers, and the nature of tasks undertaken on student teaching practice may need to be revisited in the light of these findings.

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