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

A thesis presented in partial fulfilment of the requirements

for the degree of

Doctor of Philosophy

in Education at

Massey University,

Palmerston North, New Zealand

by

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1994

## 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.

## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This thesis was completed under the supervision of Associate Professor James Chapman and Dr. Alison St George of the Department of Educational Psychology at Massey University, Palmerston North, New Zealand. Their expertise as researchers and the independent academic rigour which they expected of work under their supervision, provided both a challenge and the incentive for me to complete this study.

Robyn, Donovan and Safka willingly gave encouragement, and I appreciate with love their sacrificial support. Their beliefs in my efficacy to complete this project, no matter how difficult the task seemed at times, spurred me on.

I am indebted to the contribution made by the participants in the study. The tasks were complex, time-consuming and challenging. Associate teachers and final year primary student teachers were particularly supportive and responsive in contributing responses on the various research tasks. I appreciate their willingness to participate in this study and I continue to be impressed by their commitment and enthusiasm as members of the teaching profession.

My colleagues in teacher education across New Zealand gave much valuable professional encouragement and insightful criticism. Finally, I acknowledge with thanks the funding provided through the Research Committee of the Palmerston North College of Education which enabled me to undertake the initial literature searching, instrument piloting, and some of the field work.

## TABLE OF CONTENTS

Abstract	(ii)
Acknowledgements	(iv)
Table of Contents	(v)
List of Tables	(x)
List of Figures	(xiii)
 Chapter 1: Introduction	 1
 Chapter 2: Review of Literature	 14
Self-Efficacy	14
The Utility of Self-Efficacy to Explain Behaviour	14
Self-Efficacy and Motivation	19
Rotter's Locus of Control	19
Bandura's Self-Efficacy and Outcome Expectations	20
Dimensions of Self-Efficacy	21
 Teacher Efficacy	 22
Dimensions of Teacher Efficacy	22
Teacher Efficacy: A Global or Two-Dimensional Construct?	24
Limitations in the Measurement of Efficacy	26
Sources of Student Teachers' Efficacy During Student Teaching	29
Performance accomplishments	29
Vicarious experiences	29
Verbal persuasion	30
Emotional arousal	30
Teachers' and Student Teachers' Beliefs About Efficacy	30
Teacher efficacy, job satisfaction and commitment	30
Teacher efficacy and teaching competence	31
Teacher efficacy, gender, grade level and pupil ability	32
Teacher efficacy and children's learning	32
Teacher efficacy and innovation	33
Student teachers' efficacy and susceptibility to change	33
Teacher efficacy, classroom management and teacher manageability	34

Orientations Toward the Control of Pupils	36
Self-Esteem as Teachers	41
Summary	45
Research Hypotheses	50
Chapter 3: Methodology	54
Participants	54
Student Teachers	55
Associate Teachers	57
Selection of the Block of Student Teaching Practice	60
Procedure	61
Consent	61
Coding and Confidentiality	62
Randomisation of Items	62
Administering the Questionnaires	63
Feedback to Participants	63
The Tasks	64
A. Measures of Efficacy	64
Rand Efficacy Items	64
Teacher Efficacy Scale	65
Vignettes: Self-Efficacy as Teachers and Efficacy About Others as Teachers	65
Task difficulty	66
Strength of efficacy	66
Innovativeness	66
Generality of efficacy	67

B.	Measure of Teacher Orientations Toward Children	67
	Orientations toward children	67
	High autonomy orientation [HA]	67
	Moderate autonomy orientation [MA]	67
	Moderate control orientation [MC]	68
	High control orientation [HC]	68
C.	Measure of Self-Esteem as Teachers	68
	Self-esteem as teachers	68
	Development of the Vignettes	69
	Summary	71
	Chapter 4: Results	72
	Efficacy	72
	RAND Efficacy Items	72
	Teacher Efficacy Scale [TES]	76
	Teacher Efficacy Vignettes	79
	Generality of Efficacy	80
	a. Generality: global efficacy	80
	b. Generality: self-efficacy as teachers	83
	c. Generality: efficacy about others as teachers	86
	Scope of Influence	88
	a. Scope of influence: global efficacy	88
	b. Scope of influence: self-efficacy as teachers	92
	c. Scope of influence: efficacy about others as teachers	98
	Summary: Student Teachers' and Associate Teachers' Efficacy	103
	Hypothesis 1	103
	RAND efficacy items	103
	Teacher Efficacy Scale	103
	Teacher efficacy vignettes	104
	Hypothesis 2	106
	RAND efficacy items	106
	Teacher Efficacy Scale	107
	Teacher efficacy vignettes	107



What Relationships Exist Between the Measures of Efficacy?	108
Orientations Toward Children	110
Orientations Toward the Control of Children	110
a. Overall orientations	110
b. Scope of influence: orientations toward children	115
Summary: Student Teachers' and Associate Teachers'	
Orientations Toward Children	126
Hypothesis 3	126
a. Overall orientations	126
b. Orientations and scope of influence	126
Hypothesis 4	127
a. Overall orientations	127
b. Orientations and scope of influence	127
What Relationships Exist Between Orientations Toward Children, and Efficacy?	128
Orientations and teaching efficacy	128
Orientations and personal teaching efficacy	129
Orientations and self-efficacy as teachers	129
Orientations and efficacy about others	130
Self-Esteem as Teachers	131
Self-Esteem as Teachers Scale	131
Summary: Student Teachers' and Associate Teachers' Self-Esteem as Teachers	132
Hypothesis 5	132
Hypothesis 6	132
What Relationships Exist Between Self-Esteem as Teachers, Efficacy and Orientations?	132
Self-esteem as teachers and teaching efficacy	132
Self-esteem as teachers and personal teaching efficacy	132
Self-esteem as teachers and self-efficacy as teachers	133
Self-esteem as teachers and efficacy about others	133
Self-esteem as teachers and orientations	133

Chapter 5: Discussion	134
How do final year primary student teachers compare with their associate teachers on perceptions of efficacy, orientations toward children, and self-esteem as teachers?	135
Personal Teaching Efficacy and Teaching Efficacy	135
Self-Efficacy as Teachers and Efficacy About Others as Teachers	136
Orientations Toward Children	140
Self-Esteem as Teachers	143
What effect does student teaching practice have on primary student teachers' and associate teachers' perceptions of efficacy, orientations toward children, and self-esteem as teachers?	144
Efficacy as Teachers	145
Orientations Toward Children	148
Self-Esteem as Teachers	150
Further Considerations	151
Conclusion	155
Appendixes	
Appendix A: Questionnaires	158
Appendix B: Instrumentation	176
B-1 Adapted Version of Teacher Efficacy Scale	177
B-2 Individual and Group-Based Vignettes	178
B-3 Orientations Toward Children: Individual and Group-Based Vignettes	179
B-4 Self-Esteem as Teachers Scale	186
Bibliography	187

## LIST OF TABLES

Table 1	<i>Description of the Final Year Primary Student Teacher Intake and Participants by Gender, Age, Ethnicity and Subject Specialism.</i>	56
Table 2	<i>Description of Associate Teachers who Responded on the Initial Questionnaire, and the Participant Group by Gender, Age, Ethnicity, Role Designation and Qualification.</i>	59
Table 3	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) of RAND Scores for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	75
Table 4	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) of Teacher Efficacy Scale [TES] Scores for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	78
Table 5	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Generality of Global Efficacy (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	82
Table 6	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Generality of Self-Efficacy as Teachers (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	85
Table 7	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Generality of Efficacy About Others as Teachers (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	87

Table 8	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Global Generality of Efficacy (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes about Individual Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	90
Table 9	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Global Generality of Efficacy (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes about Groups of Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	91
Table 10	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Generality of Self-Efficacy (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes about Individual Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	94
Table 11	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Generality of Self-Efficacy (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes about Groups of Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	97
Table 12	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Generality of Efficacy About Others as Teachers (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes about Individual Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	100
Table 13	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) for Generality of Efficacy About Others as Teachers (z-Scores) on Teacher Efficacy Vignettes about Groups of Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	102
Table 14	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) on Orientations Toward Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	114

Table 15	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) on Orientations Toward Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers on Vignettes About Individual Children</i>	120
Table 16	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) on Orientations Toward Children for Associate Teachers and Student Teachers on Vignettes About Groups of Children</i>	125
Table 17	<i>Summary of Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) with Means (<u>M</u>) and Standard Deviations (SD) on Self-esteem as Teachers f or Associate Teachers and Student Teachers</i>	131

## LIST OF FIGURES

<i>Figure 1.</i>	Interaction between group (associate teacher, student teacher) and mean scores for RAND (RAND 1, RAND 2).	73
<i>Figure 2.</i>	Interaction between time (pre, post) and mean scores for RAND (RAND 1, RAND 2).	74
<i>Figure 3.</i>	Interaction between group (associate teacher, student teacher), mean scores on the Teacher Efficacy Scale (TES 1: personal teaching efficacy, TES 2: teaching efficacy), and time (pre, post).	77
<i>Figure 4.</i>	Interaction between group (associate teacher, student teacher) and generality of global efficacy (task difficulty, strength of efficacy, innovativeness) mean z scores on teacher efficacy vignettes.	81
<i>Figure 5.</i>	Interaction between group (associate teacher, student teacher), and generality of self-efficacy (task difficulty, strength of efficacy, innovativeness) mean z scores on teacher efficacy vignettes.	84
<i>Figure 6.</i>	Interaction between group (associate teacher, student teacher), and generality of global efficacy (task difficulty, strength of efficacy, innovativeness) mean z scores on teacher efficacy vignettes about individual children.	89
<i>Figure 7.</i>	Interaction between group (associate teacher, student teacher) and generality of self-efficacy (task difficulty, strength of efficacy, innovativeness) mean z scores on teacher efficacy vignettes about individual children.	93
<i>Figure 8.</i>	Interaction between group (associate teacher, student teacher) and generality of self-efficacy (task difficulty, strength of efficacy, innovativeness) mean z scores on teacher efficacy vignettes about groups of children.	95

<i>Figure 9.</i>	Interaction between group (associate teacher, student teacher), generality of efficacy about others as teachers (task difficulty, strength of efficacy, innovativeness) mean $z$ scores on teacher efficacy vignettes about individual children, and time (pre, post).	99
<i>Figure 10.</i>	Orientations toward children mean scores and the interaction between time (pre, post) and group (associate teacher, student teacher).	111
<i>Figure 11.</i>	Interaction between orientations toward children (high autonomy, moderate autonomy, moderate control, high control), and group (associate teacher, student teacher).	112
<i>Figure 12.</i>	Interaction between orientations toward children (high autonomy, moderate autonomy, moderate control, high control), and time (pre, post).	113
<i>Figure 13.</i>	Orientations toward children and the interaction between time (pre, post), and group (associate teacher, student teacher) on vignettes about individual children.	116
<i>Figure 14.</i>	Interaction between orientations toward children (high autonomy, moderate autonomy, moderate control, high control), and group (associate teacher, student teacher) on vignettes about individual children.	117
<i>Figure 15.</i>	Interaction between orientations toward children (high autonomy, moderate autonomy, moderate control, high control), and time (pre, post) on vignettes about individual children.	118
<i>Figure 16.</i>	Interaction between orientations toward children (high autonomy, moderate autonomy, moderate control, high control), time (pre, post), and group (associate teacher, student teacher) on vignettes about individual children.	119
<i>Figure 17.</i>	Orientations toward children and the interaction between time (pre, post), and group (associate teacher, student teacher) on vignettes about groups of children.	121

- Figure 18.* Interaction between orientations toward children (high autonomy, moderate autonomy, moderate control, high control), and group (associate teacher, student teacher) on vignettes about groups of children. 122
- Figure 19.* Interaction between orientations toward children (high autonomy, moderate autonomy, moderate control, high control), and time (pre, post) on vignettes about groups of children. 123
- Figure 20.* Interaction between orientations toward children (high autonomy, moderate autonomy, moderate control, high control), time (pre, post), and group (associate teacher, student teacher) on vignettes about groups of children. 124