

Teacher Self-efficacy and the Supervision of Marginal Teachers

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Introduction

Along with school accountability and adequately yearly progress for all students, the *2001 No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) calls for a “highly qualified teacher” in each classroom. This directive in national policy highlights the value educational reformers and policy makers placed on having knowledgeable and effective teachers in every classroom. No one would argue the necessity for “highly qualified teachers.” Coleman and Jenck’s study revealed that the quality of teaching varies among individual teachers and teachers can positively or negatively influence student achievement. This influence continues to affect the student after he or she has left the teacher’s classroom (Marzano, Pickering, & Pollock, 2001). Besides high-stakes standardized tests, classroom teachers must prepare students for the 21st Century global marketplace which includes emerging technologies and undiscovered job opportunities. Knowing this, to what extent can educational leaders support teachers who do not have a positive impact on student achievement so that the vision of NCLB is realized? This report applies a theory from the field of cognitive psychology to the supervision of marginal teachers in order to improve both teacher and student performance.

School administrators are tasked with a variety of responsibilities, including the supervision of teachers. This involves establishing a professional working and learning environment, supporting teacher professional growth, as well as providing resources and direction to ensure these efforts impact student academic performance (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). Principals supervise teachers who have a variety of teaching styles, preparation and work experience, and personalities. Supervising master teachers who experience success in the classroom is one thing; however, addressing the needs of marginal teachers is another. Teachers deemed to be marginal can include both new teachers who are overwhelmed with a profession they once perceived more

optimistically and veteran teachers who are frustrated with the changes in education and society. These teachers may not meet the definition of “highly qualified” based on observed performance in the classroom and the academic achievements of their students.

If marginal teachers are ones that have lowered their expectations of students, put less effort into planning and implementing effective lessons, or become complacent or overwhelmed when faced with one of the many challenges that accompany the teaching profession, building level leaders can use research on self-efficacy to identify strategies that can help those teachers. Research has shown that teachers with stronger self-efficacy set high goals and show increased effort, persistence and resilience (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). In addition, the collective efficacy of the organization can have a positive influence on individuals, as well as the group. If school administrators understand the four sources that contribute to improving self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997), they can use these when supervising marginal teachers in order to improve classroom instruction and ultimately student learning.

The Origins of Teacher Self-efficacy Theory

In order for school administrators to positively influence their teachers’ individual and collective self-efficacy, they must first understand the theory and how it relates to teaching. “Teacher efficacy is the teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998, p. 22). A teacher’s self-efficacy beliefs depend on the extent to which the teacher perceives his or her capacity to influence student performance, even unmotivated or struggling learners (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Teacher self-efficacy theory has derived

from two dominant theoretical frames – Rotter’s social learning theory and Bandura’s social cognitive theory. Rotter’s theory focuses on an individual’s perception of internal and external control. The concepts of this theory were integrated into educational research conducted in 1976 by the Rand Corporation. The Rand Corporation added two new prompts to their study on the success of a variety of reading programs. These prompts addressed the participants’ beliefs in a teacher’s influence on student motivation and performance. The term teacher efficacy was used to describe the extent that teachers believed their abilities influenced student learning rather than external factors beyond their control. The prompts were added in a second study and results showed that student achievement was positively influenced by those teachers with higher self-efficacy. These studies catapulted additional research based on Rotter’s social learning theory. Instruments such as Teacher Locus of Control and the Webb Scale were used to study teachers’ beliefs in personal or external control over student learning (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Sources of Self-Efficacy

The work of cognitive psychologist, Albert Bandura, contributed to the study of teacher efficacy when he addressed the concept of self-efficacy in 1977. Bandura coined the term “reciprocal determinism” which emphasizes the relationship between cognition, behavior and the environment. He expanded on Rotter’s work by arguing that an individual’s expectations about the outcome of situations are heavily influenced by whether or not that person thinks he or she will succeed at the task. Bandura’s self-efficacy theory states that self-efficacy beliefs focus on how a person judges his or her capabilities to accomplish the goals of a task at a determined level of performance and in a specific situation (Bandura, 1997). Because self-efficacy is contextual, it differs from self-confidence or self-esteem which are personality traits or general beliefs one has about him or herself. Furthermore, the concept deals with perception of one’s capabilities rather than actual level of ability (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Self-efficacy theory became widely tested in varied disciplines and settings, including education.

In his work, Bandura (1997) identified four sources that contribute to self-efficacy – mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological persuasion. Mastery experiences have been determined to have the greatest impact on self-efficacy. Successful authentic mastery experiences help cultivate the beliefs an individual has about his or her performance. This has been determined to have more power than learning new knowledge or skills which may increase competence but not alter perception (Pajares, 2002). Furthermore, self-efficacy increases when success is attributed to factors within the individual’s control rather than luck or the influence of others (Bandura, 1993; Pintrich & Schunk, 1996, as cited by Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Vicarious experiences are ones in which the individual observes others and makes comparisons. This source of self-efficacy development is beneficial for someone experiencing a novel task or when a person is uncertain about his or her own abilities. These experiences can occur when people seek out role models who have the skills and talents necessary to successfully perform a given task or when they measure themselves against the performance of another accomplishing the task (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, n.d.). This source is powerful when the observer believes he or she has attributes similar to the person who is modeling and the act is successful. However, the effects can be negative if the model experiences failure unless the observer judges himself as superior.

When verbal persuasion is used to develop self-efficacy, the persuader must be careful to provide relevant feedback, as well as ensure the goal of the task is attainable. Although less powerful than mastery experiences, verbal persuasion can provide a boost to help someone increase his or her effort or perseverance. Self-affirming statements also enhance self-efficacy beliefs. It has also been noted that negative verbal persuasion can have a more powerful effect on self-efficacy than positive persuasion has on improving self-efficacy (Pajares, 2002).

Psychological arousal refers to emotional

states, such as anxiety or excitement, that an individual experiences as he or she contemplates the task at hand. Emotional reactions provide cognitive cues in regards to the person's perception of upcoming success or failure. Because self-efficacy can be influenced by psychological states and perceptions can be altered, it is helpful to reduce stress levels and counteract negative feelings when confronting a task (Bandura, 1997).

Although these four sources are cited by researchers to be the leading sources of self-efficacy, an additional factor is recognized by many in the field as critical to the development of self-efficacy. Self reflection is process allows individuals to make sense of their experiences, explore their self-beliefs, assess the situation and adjust thinking and behavior accordingly (Bandura, 1986, as cited in Pajares, 2002).

Self-efficacy Theory Applied to Teaching

Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, and Hoy (1998) have proposed an integrated model of teacher self-efficacy that considers both Rotter and Bandura's contributions. This model includes analysis of both the teaching task and the context in which this task exists. In other words, both internal and external factors can influence a teacher's perception of his or her capacity to accomplish a given undertaking. Judgments are made regarding both competence and contingency. Because teacher self-efficacy is a cognitive process, the process of performance, reflection and assessment repeats itself. As efficacy increases, so does effort and persistence. The result is positive appraisal of performance and increased efficacy. However, this cycle can be negative in nature if lower self-efficacy leads to less effort, persistence, and resilience (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

Several studies have demonstrated the effects of increased teacher sense of efficacy. Teachers with higher self-efficacy have a positive effect in shaping students' attitudes toward school and their teacher, as well as the material they learn (Rose & Medway, 1981, as cited by Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). In addition, they are less likely to criticize a student for an incorrect response (Ashton & Webb, 1986, as cited by Tschannen-

Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998), more likely to persist with a student who has been unsuccessful in the learning situation (Gibson & Dembo, 1984, as cited by Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998), and less likely to refer students to special education classes (Meijer & Foster, 1988, as cited by Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teachers with a higher sense of self-efficacy are more likely to commit themselves to professional development and experiment with innovative teaching strategies (Berman et al., 1977; Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988, as cited by Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). They are more enthusiastic about teaching in general.

Much of the research in teacher self-efficacy has focused on pre-service and novice teachers. These studies have shown that efficacy may be more impressionable early in learning (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998) and many teachers with low self-efficacy leave the profession in the first five years (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002). This research is particularly important with the high attrition rate among new teachers since higher self-efficacy has shown increased persistence and resilience when faced with challenges.

However, one must consider that experienced teachers who are faced with changes in education due to the policies such as NCLB, emerging technologies, and globalization, may experience lower self-efficacy due to limited mastery and vicarious experiences in these areas, as well as the stress and frustration that can often accompany change. Earlier in their careers, these teachers had settled into established routines that stabilized their sense of personal efficacy in areas such as classroom instruction, management, and assessment. Rapid changes in technology and society, as well as an educational system that is not static, have called for experienced teachers to reappraise their capabilities (Bandura, 2002). Therefore, it is important for principals to acknowledge that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy are more willing to try new teaching strategies in order to address the needs of their students (Guskey, 1988, Stein & Wang, 1988, as cited by Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002) when addressing the needs of experienced educators who are considered marginal.

In addition to personal self-efficacy, there has also been research on collective efficacy which demonstrates shared beliefs in the capacity to accomplish common goals by a group of individuals (Bandura, 1997). When group members use their personal capabilities for the best use collectively, individual efficacy beliefs increase. A variety of stakeholders are invested in the organization and influence the climate. Studies have shown that increased perceptions of personal efficacy contribute to the group's collective efficacy (Bandura, 2002).

The Supervision of Marginal Teachers: From Theory to Practice

The supervision of all teachers is one of the instructional leader's most important responsibilities. How the instructional leader assumes the role of supervisor and evaluator is critical to the enhancement of teaching and learning in the school building. A leader who assumes the role of a coach or mentor, for example, can dramatically support an educator in identifying specific strengths and weaknesses. Research confirms this theory by documenting how skill development programs that use feedback and coaching are much more successful than similar programs that do not include coaching (Joyce & Showers, 1983). The inclusion of coaching elements is even more critical when instructional leaders are working with marginal teachers.

Marginal teachers can be identified by observing classroom performance and disaggregating assessment data. Signs of low self-efficacy among these teachers may include "minimal effort, helplessness, and passive teaching" (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008). "Any experience or training a supervisor provides that helps teachers succeed in the day-to-day tasks of teaching will give the teachers a foundation for developing an increased sense of efficacy" (DiPaola & Hoy, 2008, p. 110). When developing an action plan with a marginal teacher, the administrator should include content specific experiences that encompass each of the four sources of self-efficacy development. Tasks should be achievable, and experiences should provide opportunities for success (DiPaola & Hoy,

2008).

There are many important characteristics of successful professional development programs that should be included in the supervision of marginal teachers. Work conducted in the mid 1970s began to investigate components of school evaluation reports. This research indicated that most evaluative programs included the involvement of all stakeholders, an emphasis on demonstrations, a linkage of activities, and teacher self-initiated and self-direction activities (Lawrence, 1974). Subsequent studies in more recent years have expanded what is now included in professional development activities. Newer research indicates that there is more emphasis on the principles of adult learning, long range planning and development, attention to the research on change, and an emphasis on follow-up support (Glickman, Gordon, & Ross-Gordon, 2004, p. 373). Instructional leaders need to be cognizant of these new components of professional development to ensure that supervisory strategies are using the most current and researched plans to assist teachers.

There are specific strategies that educational leaders should utilize when working especially with marginal teachers. In the same way supervisors ask teachers to differentiate instruction, these instructional leaders must differentiate their supervision, evaluation, and support of marginal teachers. The range of experience that marginal teachers have in the classroom also dictates the need for differentiated supervision that takes into account their history in schools. Marginal teachers also do not often possess the skill sets that more effective teachers have at their disposal which additionally documents the need for specific professional development plans. It is important to remember, though, that even though the differentiated supervision can be entirely appropriate to use for teachers who are identified as being less successful in the classroom they need to also be offered and provided the same legal and procedural safeguards that are afforded to all staff members.

Open and honest communication between all stakeholders is the cornerstone to any evaluation and supervision process. This should begin at the pre-conference when the administrator and teacher initially meet to define the goals and timeline for

the observation. Although it is important for the school leader to listen to the teacher describe his or her learning objectives and goals, it is also the supervisor's responsibility to inform the teacher of any major concerns regarding instruction. The teacher should also be responsible for listening to his or her administrator explain what instruments and procedures will be used to evaluate his or her teaching. A successful pre-conference will set the stage for an effective and constructive learning experience for everyone.

The observation itself can be a very anxious and stressful time for any teacher. This is compounded when the teacher understands from the pre-conference that there may be some instructional or management concerns at the onset from his or her supervisor. One of the critical aspects here is to adhere to the understandings of the pre-conference and follow through with the intended goals for the observation (Glickman et al., 2004). Another important thing for the observer to be mindful of is how important it is to keep interpretations separate from descriptions. "Interpretation should follow description (Glickman et al., 2004). The objective data that is compiled from this observation will then serve as discussion points at the subsequent post-observation conference.

The post-observation conference is conducted in order to discuss the data that was collected during the observation. This is also the appropriate setting for embarking on potentially difficult conversations about improvements in instruction. It is important at this time for supervisors to have data to support decisions that influenced a decision to proceed with instructional changes. It is equally important for supervisors to also present materials that will support the efforts and self-efficacy of the marginal teacher. These materials can include articles, books, videos, or other items that may help the teacher to learn from research-proven strategies. These materials are important; however, the most important responsibility of the evaluator is to provide the time, trust, and follow-up to ensure that the teacher has a realistic opportunity to demonstrate improvement. This hands-on support is not only a responsible practice for instructional leaders but it is also often a legal requirement before considering dismissal or

denying continuing contract status.

This observation process presents a valuable opportunity for improvement not only in teaching and learning but potentially in the teacher's development of greater self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a belief that can be coached. It can be developed in individuals who believe that they have the resources in place to perform a specific skill well. The supervisor's responsibility, therefore, is to ensure that these resources are available and that steps toward improvement and professional development are also celebrated during this process.

The Educational Leader's Influence on Collective Efficacy

The role of the instructional leader is as varied as it is important to the development of collective efficacy in school settings. Instructional leaders are charged with the responsibility to foster and inspire a sense of collective efficacy. This responsibility is an ambitious addition to the inherent complicated challenges facing educational leaders; however, leaders who can influence a positive sense of collective efficacy can draw upon this asset in managing other tasks.

Due to the fact that schools are an open social system, an instructional leader possesses many unique challenges in fostering a sense of collective efficacy. In settings where teachers "collectively perceive students as capable learners, and themselves as capable, these same teachers seem more likely to persevere and foster students' academic gains" (Rosenholtz, 1989, p. 2). Teachers do not automatically perceive themselves as "capable instructors" or their students as "capable learners." This is often the result of carefully fostered structures and policies in the school that are carefully constructed by the school's educational leader. The communal group context by which teaching is generally practiced lends itself to the opportunity for collective efficacy (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). This group context is both a blessing and a burden for instructional leaders.

Research indicates that there is a strong correlation between individual teacher self-efficacy and collective efficacy. Research conducted in 2001 by Goddard and Goddard examined this relationship

and found that teacher efficacy is a predictor of between-school variance of collective efficacy (p. 17). This research tends to predict that collective efficacy more likely occurs in schools where individual teachers possess strong self-efficacy. Earlier research by Bandura (1993, 1997) also suggests that, when aggregated, teachers' efficacy perceptions represent an emergent organizational construct that he labeled as collective efficacy. This sense of collective efficacy appears to translate to even greater achievement gains than compared to more individualized perceptions of teacher self-efficacy. Therefore, instructional leaders must strive to create this collective sense of efficacy in their school setting and community.

How instructional leaders create a culture in the school that promotes collective efficacy is as challenging as it can be rewarding. The first priority for these leaders is to create a climate of trust among all stakeholders. Without a foundation of trust in place, any aspiration for a sense of collective efficacy is a distant dream. The timeline for the building of trust varies and is influenced by a number of factors. For example, in settings where previous administrators have disappointed staff members and fostered a hostile working environment, new educational leaders face obstacles they must dissipate before they begin building a collaborative working environment. Leaders who inherit a more productive and collegial school setting, however, can more easily and quickly build trust and collective efficacy. In addition to factoring in the climate of the social organization, it is important to also consider the interpersonal skills of instructional leaders.

Complications and Objections

Very little research has shown a positive relationship between principal support and teachers' sense of self-efficacy (Shaughnessy, 2004). Because many teachers are isolated from others when they enter the classroom and face their students, they often rely more on their own judgments rather than support from colleagues and administrators (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2002). However, educational reform has mandated more collaboration and less autonomy in the school

setting. The role of administrators as educational leaders has become stronger. Principals are more visible in classrooms and involved in supporting the professional growth plans of individual teachers. Efforts to increase self-efficacy can be hampered by additional variables such as student demographics, budget cuts, and outside pressures. Therefore, the need for additional research in this area will strengthen supervisory practice and reduce the number of teachers who do not meet the standards associated with "highly qualified."

Conclusion

The research into teacher self-efficacy is based on over three decades of work that offers a fairly robust line of research. Educational leaders are just now recognizing the power and potential that teacher self-efficacy can play in the improvement of teaching and learning. This relatively untapped phenomenon represents a wonderful opportunity for instructional leaders to harness in an era of increased accountability. The passage of the *2001 No Child Left Behind Act* (NCLB) called for a "highly qualified teacher" in every classroom.

Instructional leaders who recognize the power of teacher self-efficacy and facilitate programs that help develop and cultivate these self-efficacy beliefs can ensure that these highly qualified teachers are also highly motivated, persistent, and resilient teachers. The goal of the NCLB legislation was to protect all children and ensure that all classrooms delivered first-rate instruction. Promoting teacher self-efficacy is a step in making this goal a reality.

School administrators tackle a myriad of responsibilities and roles that can overwhelm even the most qualified leader. This fact alone documents the need for teachers to become leaders in the classroom and shoulder some of these responsibilities. In order for these teachers to become capable leaders, they must be equipped with the technical and interpersonal skills required to assume these responsibilities. Instructional leaders who foster a climate and culture that recognizes excellence and promotes a sense of individual empowerment in their school setting can

promote this type of self-directed leadership. Teachers with a sense of self-efficacy further promote a positive culture in the building that translates to increased academic achievement.

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