Teacher Efficacy in Reading Tutoring in Limited Resource Environments

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By

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This Master's Research Project has been approved

For the Department of Teacher Education

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Abstract

The present study explores the efficacy of reading tutors after completing reading strategy instruction to be used during an intensive summer school reading program. Research indicates the importance of teacher efficacy for success in the classroom. Teacher efficacy is a teacher's belief or confidence in his or her own abilities to teach and achieve desired student outcomes. This study was designed to determine whether a tutor's efficacy at the beginning of a summer reading program affects student learning outcomes at the end of the program.

Summer school reading tutors completed a survey to determine their self-perceptions before, during, and after an intensive reading summer school program to gain insights into their levels of efficacy as compared to student outcomes following the summer reading program.

The findings indicate that students made educational gains regardless of teacher efficacy prior to the start of the program. Reading tutors experienced increase efficacy once they recognized their student's successes were directly related to the strategies used. These results support existing research that indicates with an increased number of mastery experiences, teachers gain confidence and experience increased efficacy (Bandura, 1994). Possible directions for further research are discussed.

Table of Contents

"Teacher efficacy is a simple idea with significant implications. A teacher's efficacy belief is a judgment of his or her capabilities to bring about desired outcomes of student engagement and learning, even among those students who may be difficult or unmotivated" (Tschannen-Morgan & Hoy, 2001, p. 735.)

With the increased demands on teachers to have students perform well on state-mandated tests, teacher efficacy is of upmost importance. Teacher efficacy is a term used to describe how teachers think about themselves and their teaching abilities. This paper explores the relationship between teacher efficacy and student outcomes following reading instruction. This paper explores the relationship between tutors' opinions regarding training in reading strategies and learner outcomes. The hypothesis is that teacher efficacy is directly related to the effectiveness of the tutoring and improved reading achievement for students.

For the purposes of this paper, the terms 'teacher' and 'tutor' and the terms 'student' and 'learner' will be used interchangeably.

Review of Literature

Research on self-efficacy began as early as the 1970s. Albert Bandura suggested that "expectations of personal efficacy determine whether coping behavior will be initiated, how much effort will be expended, and how long it will be sustained in the face of obstacles and aversive experiences. Persistence in activities that are subjectively threatening but in fact relatively safe produces, through experiences of mastery, further enhancement of self-efficacy and corresponding reductions in defensive behavior" (Bandura, 1977, p. 191). Bandura divides self-efficacy into two areas; one being expectations about one's ability to implement a new technique and two, the expectations about the outcomes of the techniques on the learners.

Bandura indicates that for many individuals, the thought of future success is a motivator of behaviors. When an individual believes the outcome of an action is going to be positive or a beneficial one, the individual will be more willing to complete the task.

Further research by Bandura in 1997 looked at the topic of teacher efficacy and in 1997, indicated the existence of four critical factors or components of self-efficacy; mastery experience, vicarious experience, social persuasion, and affective states. The more abundant or frequent the mastery experiences in a particular circumstance, the higher the self-efficacy will be for that situation. Vicarious experiences refer to experiences that one hears about often from individuals that are experiencing the success, leading an individual to want to experience the success on his/her own. Social persuasion comes through professional development, workshops, or in-service activities that a group or individual attends to strengthen confidence. Affective states refer to how well a group can deal with crises that arise and provide an indication of how well the group can stand strong and continue to function at its current capacity (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000). These four areas are critical when examining teacher self-efficacy.

Moran and Hoy (2001) have researched extensively in the area of teacher efficacy. They have gone beyond the relationship of efficacy as related to teacher and student outcomes and looked at the type of teacher efficacy measurement tools available to researchers. They state that one generic tool is not sufficient because teacher efficacy is both context-and subject-specific. A teacher may have high efficacy in teaching science to gifted students, but have low efficacy when it comes to teaching reading in an after school program (Moran & Hoy, 2001). Moran and Hoy developed a measure that assesses a wide range of areas that are important to teaching. Moran and Hoy along with eight graduate students from the Ohio State University, created the Ohio State Teacher Efficacy Scale (OSTES), a scale based on Bandura's scale, but with an

expanded list of teacher capabilities. The research team compiled a nine-point scale that starts with a response rating of one to indicate 'nothing' up to a rating of nine to indicate 'a great deal' (Moran & Hoy, 2001). This tool is encouraging because it is more detailed in its scope of what is being measured.

In 2000, Goddard conducted a study with Moran and Hoy using the *OSTES* assessing teacher efficacy in the subject areas of reading and math. Using the *OSTES* efficacy rating scale in a multi-school district, the authors found that collective teacher efficacy was positively associated with differences between schools in student-level achievement in both reading and mathematics (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy).

Collier reports that researchers believe teachers' personal beliefs can significantly influence the teaching style used in the classroom. Teacher efficacy is quite possibly the most important factor related to teacher and student performance (Collier, 2005). Collier states that through the act of caring, teachers develop a high sense of teacher efficacy. A teacher first extends a caring relationship to the students through a sincere desire to meet the students' educational and emotional needs. Second, students must accept the caring gesture and appreciation. When the teacher sees the students are appreciative of the caring teacher, it is a major source of motivation and satisfaction that raises teacher efficacy (Collier, 2005). "The act of caring and being cared for forms a loop that provides needed support to enhance student growth, development and performance while refueling teachers with experiences of gratification and appreciation, increasing satisfaction with teaching and commitment to teaching as a profession" (Collier, 2005, p.358). Caring teachers and caring students are required to boost teacher efficacy.

"Efficacy affects the effort [teachers] invest in teaching, the goals they set, and their level of aspiration. Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organization" (Allinder, 1994: Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001, p. 783). Teachers with high levels of efficacy have enough confidence in their own teaching strategies to work with low-achieving learners that may be either difficult to work with, unmotivated to learn, or struggling to learn the concepts at the same pace as the typical peer. Teachers with low efficacy may feel they do not have what it takes to help a learner succeed.

A teacher's self-efficacy can vary depending on the subject being addressed and the type of students he/she is working with at the time. A teacher may be very confident in his/her ability to teach math to boys, but may lose that confidence when teaching language arts to a classroom full of girls.

Haverback and Parault (2008) compared the efficacy of pre-service reading teachers involved in a tutoring program at an elementary school compared to classmates that participated only in the required coursework at the university. The results showed no significant differences in the two groups. An interesting question would be how the efficacy of these groups would change after the first year of teaching reading as inservice teachers. The authors state that by third grade it is extremely important that teacher efficacy is increased with regard to the teaching of reading because it is a critical point in the education of students with regard to reading. The authors point out the experience pre-service teachers' gain from field experiences and other out-of-class experiences with students is critical for mastery experiences and leads to higher efficacy in teaching.

Purpose of the Study

During the summer of 2009, the Helen M. Robinson Center for Reading provided a two-week summer school program for a local school district focused on intensive remedial reading instruction. The tutors were composed of pre-service teachers, college students majoring in areas other than education, and community members. The tutors were surveyed following the summer school program and asked how confident they were in using strategies taught during the training, -before, during, and after the summer school session.

The results of this study are significant to future trainers as the results indicate that if a trainee leaves a training lacking confidence to implement new strategies, later, when they attempt to implement the strategies with a learner, the results are not be as impressive as those for a trainee who leaves the training confident and able to implement new strategies confidently with high expectations for the learner. This research examines the relationship between teacher confidence and learner success.

Method

The purpose of the reading strategy instruction was to prepare tutors for a two-week summer school program designed to improve students' reading skills. The program targeted third grade students who failed the third grade Ohio Achievement Test both in the fall and spring of the current academic year. Students determined by the school district to be at risk of failing the Ohio Achievement Tests in future years were also encouraged to attend the program as space allowed.

Tutor Training and Intervention Program

The reading summer program was designed to improve reading skills and provide a fun approach to reading tutoring. According to the director of the program, the tutors used the Supplemental Guide for Reading Instruction (Ballatore, Garrett, Krezmien, More, Linan-Thompson, Stone, & Wanzek, 2005), as well as other materials for lower grade, struggling readers (Salzman, J., personal communication, 2010).

Tutors were required to take part in a six-hour training using multi-sensory approaches for reading instruction. The training was led by an Ohio University reading professor supported by two Helen M. Robinson Center for Reading tutoring coordinators. The training lasted for six continuous hours at Ohio University, Athens, Ohio. The training prepared tutors to work with small groups of second, third, and fourth grade students from rural Appalachian schools. Two students aged seven and ten, attended the training as models to demonstrate the new reading strategies that were to be used during the two-week summer school reading program.

During the two-week summer sessions, students requiring specific reading interventions in word attack and phonics were provided remediation using methods based on the Orton-Gillingham (Bloom & Traub, 2000) methodology. Summer school sessions were two and a half hours long, five days a week, for two weeks. Each day, the students took part in a large group opening ceremony that included phonics songs and stories read aloud to the entire group. Following the opening, students would break apart into their predetermined small groups. Each reading tutor instructed three to five students. One facilitator at the summer school program engaged the students in outside, active games that reinforced the reading skills addressed each day. Following a closing program that included more songs, students were sent home with a sack

lunch each day provided by a local free meals program. The intention of the program was to improve the students' reading skills, and to make learning enjoyable for students that struggle in reading. The program was held at a local elementary school.

Participants

> **Students**.

A local school district provided the staff at the Helen M. Robinson Center for Reading with a list of potential participant names with contact information. The staff contacted the parents of the recommended participants to schedule a time for pretesting. The staff of the Helen M. Robinson Center for Reading went to the local elementary schools and completed assessments on the identified students in order to create small groups of students with similar ability. Assessments were also provided at local libraries for students who required assessments at times outside of the school day. From the recommended list of fifty-one students, twenty-four attended on a regular basis during the two week program.

> **Tutors.**

The tutors were recruited from the volunteer tutors who serve the Helen M. Robinson Center for Reading. Eight of the ten tutors were pre-service teachers with a concentration in language arts. The two remaining tutors were members of the community that provided special expertise in the area of reading education, but were not licensed teachers.

Instruments

> Surveys were used to collect perceptions of self-efficacy from the summer school

program tutors. Consent forms were sent electronically to each reading tutor describing the intent

of the research and their rights regarding participation in the research project. Once the tutors granted consent by clicking on a link within the consent form, they were taken to a new page that contained the thirteen-question survey. The results of the surveys were compiled electronically and anonymously.

Procedures

Following the summer school program, ten reading tutors were presented with a survey to assess their perceptions of self-efficacy for tutoring students in reading before, during, and after the summer school program. Survey questions asked how they felt about the training provided by the university reading faculty and if they felt they needed more hands-on practice before being matched with a small group of students. Tutors were also asked how/if they combined the new reading strategies presented during the training with their own preexisting strategies for teaching reading. Tutors were asked to indicate what evidence indicated to them that the new strategies were successful during the summer school program. In the following section, tutors' responses are addressed in detail.

Results

The data for this study was collected using an online survey completed by summer reading tutors. All results of the survey were anonymous. The purpose of this research was to explore the relationship between tutors' perceptions of the training and their learners' outcomes. Responses were received from all ten of the reading tutors who participated in the summer reading tutor training and tutoring sessions.

Preparation

When the tutors were asked if they felt sufficiently prepared by the training they received for the summer school tutoring program, the responses were split. Half of the tutors (n = 5) indicated they felt the training sufficiently prepared them for the summer reading program. One tutor strongly agreed the training sufficiently prepared him/her for the summer program. Four disagreed, indicating they did not feel the training sufficiently prepared them for the summer program. Overall, sixty percent of the tutors felt they were sufficiently prepared by the training they received in advance of the summer reading program.

Another question asked tutors to rate the following statement, "After I completed the training, I felt that I needed more training before being placed with students." In the previous question, sixty percent of the tutors indicated they felt sufficiently prepared by the training, however, sixty percent indicated felt a need for additional training before being placed with a group of students.

One tutor responded by saying,

While I agree that I had much more to learn after receiving my initial training through the center, I felt that I was provided with sufficient tools to begin working with my learner. The center notified me of the specific areas in which my learner needed particular assistance and provided me with maybe half a dozen exercises to work on with him. The center is also filled with resources and trainers are available to answer question and provided suggestions when asked.

Tutors were asked if they felt confident with their instructional methods toward the end of the summer tutoring program. Seventy percent of the respondents strongly agreed that they

felt confident with their instructional methods toward the end of the summer program. Thirty percent of the respondents indicated that they strongly agreed they felt confident with their instructional methods toward the end of the tutoring program. One hundred percent of the tutors were confident working with the instructional methods presented to them during training, once they had worked with the new strategies during the summer reading program.

Figures 1 through 8 present teachers' ratings of confidence as measured by each survey question.

Figure 1

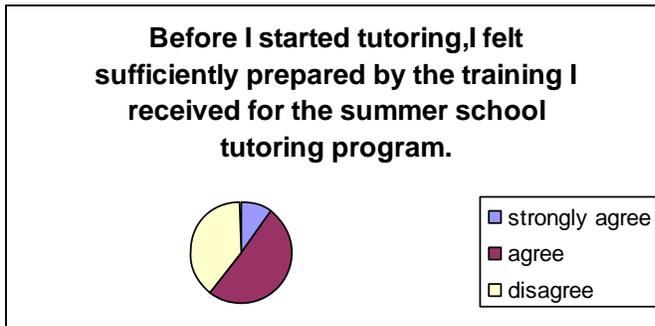*Perceptions of Preparation Before Tutoring*

Before I started tutoring,I felt sufficiently prepared by the training I received for the summer school tutoring program.

- strongly agree
- agree
- disagree

Figure 2

Benefits of having Actual Models During Training

During the training, seeing the strategies demonstrated on actual children was beneficial.

- strongly agree
- agree
- disagree
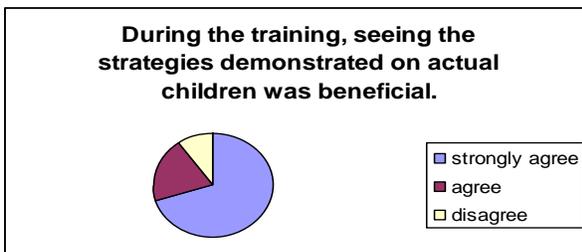
Figure 3

Post-Training Perceptions of Need for Additional Training

After I completed the training, I felt that I needed more training before being placed with students.

- strongly agree
- agree
- strongly disagree

Figure 4

Confidence on First Day of Tutoring

On the first day of tutoring I felt confident about my abilities to tutor a group of students.

- agree
- disagree
- no response

Figure 5

Ability to Apply Tutoring Strategies

During the two weeks of tutoring, I was able to apply the strategies taught in training to my tutoring sessions.

- strongly agree
- agree
- strongly disagree
- no response

Figure 6

Integration of New Reading Strategies

I combined my own teaching strategies with those presented in the training to create my lesson plans for the tutoring sessions.

- ☐ strongly agree
- ☐ agree
- ☐ no response
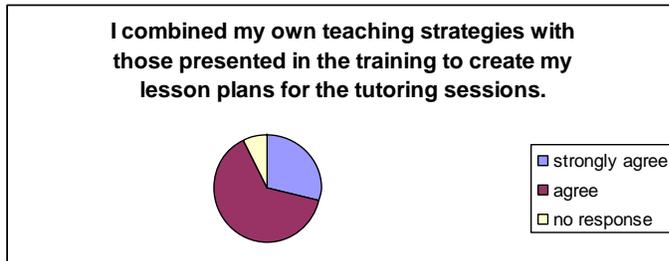
Figure 7

Confidence with Instruction at End of Summer Tutoring Program

Toward the end of the tutoring program, I felt confident with my instructional methods.

- ☐ strongly agree
- ☐ agree
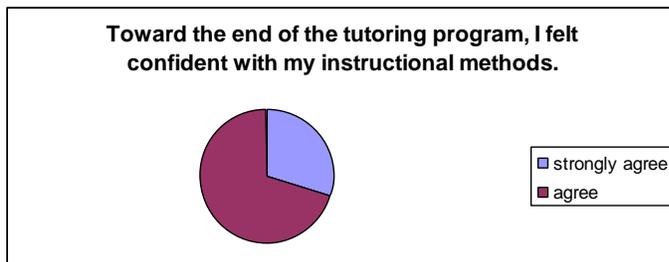
Figure 8

Perceived Connection Between Training and Student Learning

I saw evidence that the skills I learned in the training improved the reading abilities of the students in my group.

- ☐ strongly agree
- ☐ agree
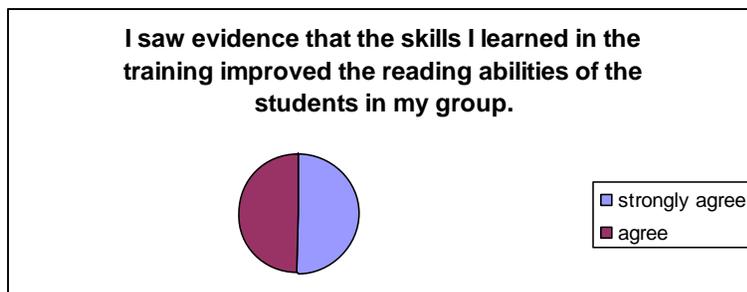
The findings indicate that students made educational gains regardless of the efficacy of the teachers prior to the start of the program. Once the reading tutors saw successes that were a direct result of the reading strategies they implemented with their students, tutor efficacy increased. The results of this study support existing research that indicates with an increased number of mastery experiences, teachers gain confidence and increased efficacy.

Further Study

Further studies are needed to explore the relationship between pre-service reading teachers that participate in one-on-one reading tutoring and pre-service teachers that only participate in the required college coursework. Bandura (1994) stated that efficacy beliefs result from mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological arousal. He suggests that mastery experiences are the most effective way to create a high sense of efficacy. One of the ways to promote high levels of teacher efficacy is through mastery experiences, so the question is whether pre-service teachers with extra experience with learners would develop into efficacious teachers sooner than their counterparts that don't have those mastery experiences.

Future research would benefit from pretest and post-test surveys given to the tutors directly following training and directly following the close of the summer reading program to assess actual changes in their confidence. Researchers could compare teacher efficacy ratings with actual student achievement during the reading program. Additional research might explore the direct relationship between actual student achievement, as measured by assessment of improved reading ability, and measured levels of tutor efficacy.

Conclusion

In all, a great deal of research supports the idea that teacher efficacy effects the outcomes of student learning in the classroom and in a tutoring environment. The research points toward the notion that a tutor that is more confident following a training session will be more likely to implement the new strategies in a classroom situation. Mastery experiences are also very important components of teacher efficacy. When a teacher experiences student success, even when the teacher is not confident in using a particular teaching strategy, the success builds self-confidence and increases teacher efficacy. High levels of teacher efficacy and positive student learning outcomes are two major spokes on the wheel of success in education.

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