

The Relationship Between Experiential Learning and Teacher Efficacy in Student-Teacher Candidates: The *Text Talk* Project

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ABSTRACT

This article describes a study in which teacher candidates' teacher self-efficacy was examined while using the *Text Talk* program and the Gradual Release of Responsibility format during their clinical experience in literacy. Data analysis indicates that teachers reported a statistically significant increase in their self-efficacy as a result of their experience. Themes from an open-ended survey included that teacher candidates reported that they felt prepared to support students, benefited from classroom-based professional support, hands-on experience teaching students, and grew in their use of literacy strategies.

NAPDS NINE ESSENTIALS (2nd Edition) ADDRESSED IN THIS ARTICLE:

1. A professional development school (PDS) is a learning community guided by a comprehensive, articulated mission that is broader than the goals of any single partner, and that aims to advance equity, antiracism, and social justice within and among schools, colleges/universities, and their respective community and professional partners.
2. A PDS embraces the preparation of educators through clinical practice.
3. A PDS is a context for continuous professional learning and leading for all participants, guided by need and a spirit and practice of inquiry.
5. A PDS is a community that engages in collaborative research and participates in the public sharing of results in a variety of outlets.
7. A PDS is built upon shared, sustainable governance structures that promote collaboration, foster reflection, and honor and value all participants' voices.

Introduction

Every teacher varies in their spoken languages, amount of training, and years of experience; however, they are still expected to teach a rich mosaic of diverse learners in the classroom. Many components go into a teacher's being successful in a classroom, one of which is teacher self-efficacy (TSE). TSE embodies teachers' confidence in their roles as educators and has been associated with professional performance and student success (Hoy, 2000; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Tracz & Gibson, 1986). TSE begins developing in earlier stages of professional development, with field support and experience being related to the level of confidence a teacher has (Gold, 1985; Rupp & Becker, 2021). There are high rates of job burnout with teachers, which suggests the current standard of training is inconsistently meeting their needs (Fives et al., 2007). It brings to question if there is a more effective methodology to consider in teacher-preparation programs that would better meet the needs of future teachers.

TSE has been characterized as the confidence a teacher has in the ability to promote students' learning in a classroom (Hoy, 2000). Teachers' levels of confidence are related to their openness in implementing new methods of teaching that better meet the needs of their students by attending more to individual versus group needs, using different forms of criticism, and persisting during difficult situations (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988). Teachers who have lower levels of TSE engage in educational dialogue with students the least (Muhonen et al., 2021), whereas higher TSE has been linked to an increase in student motivation and academic achievement, specifically in reading, language, and mathematical achievement (Mojavezi & Tamiz, 2012; Tracz & Gibson, 1986).

While some teachers have reported gaining TSE through their experience as student-teachers, others have reported a decrease in TSE during this same period of professional development (Hoy, 2000; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1990). These findings suggest the time they serve as student-teachers is a powerful stage in professional development. Some student-teachers have reported feeling that they lacked the necessary understanding of how to meet the needs of all learners in the classroom and needed additional support (Stites et al, 2018). First-year teachers who had less field experience during training reported a lack of preparedness (Kee, 2011). These findings show that there is a deficit in experiences gained through teacher preparation programs.

Access to support as well as the type of support received are strong determinants in student-teachers developing TSE (Rupp & Becker, 2021). Supporting the specific needs of student-teachers by allowing them to take an active role in lesson planning and encouraging reflections on performance were found to increase TSE (Rupp & Becker, 2021). Feeling that a lesson implementation was successful also helped student-teachers build confidence (Rupp & Becker, 2021).

While a higher level of guidance during student-teaching has been linked to an increase in TSE, a lack of sufficient support has been found to lead to burnout (Fives et al., 2007). It is estimated that 41% of teachers leave the profession after five years due to such circumstances as burnout (Ingersoll et al., 2014). Teacher burnout has been found to start as early as student-teaching (Gold, 1985). Burnout has been linked to poor academic performance and motivation in students, as well as teachers feeling incompetent in managing classroom behavior (Madigan & Kim, 2021; Malinen & Savolainen, 2016). Prior findings have demonstrated the needs of teachers are being inconsistently met; therefore, it is crucial to explore new methods of supporting instructors during early stages of professional development to buffer the negative effects seen in this population.

Current Study

The current study examined the initial student-teaching experience of student-teacher candidates. A non-traditional model was followed that had student-teacher candidates split their time between being in a lecture and working hands-on with students in an effort to increase TSE. The study defines TSE as teachers' confidence in their abilities to promote and encourage students' learning and engagement in the classroom.

An adaptation of the gradual release of responsibility (GRR) model was used. The GRR model is a framework that was designed to provide the necessary level of support in the steps towards independence (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). Traditionally, this model follows these steps: focus lesson, guided instruction, collaboration, and independence (Pearson & Gallagher, 1983). The adaptation consisted of student-teacher candidates learning about a lesson, observing the lesson being done by a teacher, collaborating on the lesson with another student-teacher candidate, and implementing the lesson. The last two steps were not sequential since the student-teacher candidates continued doing both throughout the study.

The student-teacher candidates were supported through a GRR in using the *Text Talk* program. Dr. Isabel Beck and Margaret McKeown (2001) designed the read aloud program *Text Talk* to teach higher-level thinking and advanced vocabulary to students in K-3 classes. *Text Talk* is not the focal point for this research and is only meant to serve as a guide to gradually teach student-teacher candidates to build confidence and expand their knowledge of teaching methods. A predeveloped program was utilized since student-teacher candidates were still enrolled in academic courses and lacked the necessary foundation for independent lesson development.

Student-teacher candidates worked as partners to have an additional support system while implementing *Text Talk* lessons. The partners were assigned one English only and one English learner student. This study defines English only as English being the child's primary language, and English learner as English being the second language spoken and in acquisition. Working with students from differing backgrounds gave the student-teacher candidates the opportunity to learn to differentiate lessons to meet the needs of a variety of learners. The current study has the potential to greatly contribute in advancing the field by offering a new approach in training student-teacher candidates. It is predicted that guiding student-teacher candidates in using *Text Talk* through an adapted model of the GRR will promote an increase in TSE.

Method

Participants

The sample was student-teacher candidates in a teaching credential program at California Lutheran University (CLU). Participants were enrolled in a 15-week course related to literacy and language in diverse classrooms that was taught by the researcher during terms in 2014, 2015, 2016, or 2018. This course is part of a professional development program where student-teacher candidates typically split their time between being in a lecture and observing a classroom at a professional development school. There were 85 participants over four non-consecutive years. There were 22 participants in 2014, 35 participants in 2015, 13 participants in 2016, and 15 participants in 2018. Participants from one course are pictured in Figure 1. There is no demographic information available.

Figure 1

Student-teacher candidates participating in the Text Talk Project

**Materials**

Participants were given *Text Talk* materials. There were four books administered: *A Pocket for Corduroy*, *Harry the Dirty Dog*, *The Scarecrow's Hat*, and *Sheila Rae, the Brave*. Each book came with the corresponding read aloud and vocabulary activities created by *Text Talk* that are developmentally appropriate for the assigned age group (Beck & McKeown, 2001).

Measures

Student-teacher candidates completed the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (TSES; long form). This measure was designed to examine areas of difficulty that teachers face in the classroom (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). This measure uses a 9-point scale, rating how much the respondent feels that they can do as a teacher. The scale ranged from 1 (*nothing*) to 9 (*a great deal*). There are 24 questions, with three moderately identified subscales: student engagement (8 items), efficacy in instructional strategies (8 items), and efficacy in classroom management (8 items; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Participants were administered an open-ended questionnaire *Text Talk* Post Survey that was designed by the researcher. This was developed to obtain personal reflections that the TSES could not capture. The survey asked the following:

1. How has the *Text Talk* project empowered your confidence in teaching?
2. What was the value of having the *Text Talk* project as part of your reading methods class?

Procedures

Approval was obtained from the Institutional Review Board and renewed for subsequent years. The researcher obtained approval from Flory Academy of Sciences and Technology

(FAST) for the research to be done at the school site. CLU and FAST had a pre-existing relationship that allowed student-teacher candidates to observe in classrooms as part of their program. The current study permitted the student-teacher candidates to get hands-on experience working with students in a kindergarten classroom at FAST under the supervision of the teacher and researcher. The study consisted of six sessions, each lasting two hours and fifty minutes. The session dates and times were predetermined in the course schedule. The student-teacher candidates were given an informed consent, which outlined that participation was voluntary and would not affect their grade.

During session one, student-teacher candidates completed the TSES. This was followed by watching a video on *Text Talk*, then reviewing the *Text Talk* curriculum with the researcher (see Figure 2). During session two, participants observed the teacher reading a book aloud while engaging students in the vocabulary and comprehension lesson that was provided by *Text Talk*. After this session, the student-teacher candidates were asked to write a one-page report on their observational reflections.

Figure 2

Participants reviewing Text Talk Project materials



During sessions, three through six, student-teacher candidates worked as partners with their assigned English only and English learner students (see Figure 3). The partners used the following books for the corresponding session: *A Pocket for Corduroy* (session three), *Harry the Dirty Dog* (session four), *The Scarecrow's Hat* (session five), and *Sheila Rae, the Brave* (session six). In each session, the partners started by meeting to discuss lesson planning. They were asked to discuss and respond to the pre-reflection questions of:

1. How can I be of help to you during your *Text Talk* activity?
2. What specifically do you wish me to look for in your *Text Talk* activity?

3. What are your objectives and expectations for the *Text Talk* activity?

Based on their responses, the partners decided how to divide the lessons and the type of support they needed throughout the activities. During the lessons, the partners took turns doing a read aloud and completing the vocabulary and comprehension lessons for that book. After completion of these sessions, the partners met again to discuss and respond to post-reflection questions of:

1. How do you think the lesson went?
2. How does this compare with what you expected would happen?
3. Would you like me to share what I observed?

At the end of sessions, the student-teacher candidates were asked to write a reflection on their *Text Talk* activity. After participation was complete, student-teacher candidates completed the TSES for a second time and *Text Talk* Post Survey.

Figure 3

Student-teachers engaged in paired Text Talk instruction



Data Analysis

The pre- and post- TSES results were analyzed using Microsoft Excel. Participants were excluded from analysis if a pre- and post- TSES was not completed. Five participants did not complete a post-survey and one post-survey was completed by an unidentified participant, bringing the adjusted sample to 79. A paired *t*-test was done on overall scores on the TSES to analyze the change of TSE across the span of the study. Results were considered significant if the *p*-value was less than .05. Prior research has found that the TSES subscales are weakly associated with smaller samples and groups of student-teachers; therefore, the subscales were not considered for further analysis (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk-Hoy, 2001).

A thematic analysis was done on the *Text Talk* Post Survey. Since the survey was open-ended, the purpose of doing the content analysis was to identify recurring themes in the data.

Due to having a smaller sample size and shorter responses, the data were manually analyzed and coded for themes.

Results

The results from the *t*-test on the pre- and post- TSES showed that TSE significantly increased by the end of the project ($M=6.24$ to $M=7.70$), with a *p*-value that was less than .05.

The analysis of the *Text Talk* Post Survey uncovered feedback that encompasses TSE. The following themes were identified in the data: *Supporting students*, *professional support*, *hands-on experience*, and *strategy growth*. *Supporting students* consisted of how the student-teacher candidates felt the study benefited their approach to meeting the needs of students. *Professional support* was the positive impact of having support from partners, the teacher, and researcher. *Hands-on experience* was the value of having the opportunity to work with students. *Strategy growth* was the new skills that were acquired. The data and themes are consistent with the findings from the TSES. Examples from themes can be found in Table 1.

Table 1

Themes from *Text Talk* Survey Data

Theme	Data
Supporting Students	<p>“Allowed me to work with 2 very different students...This allowed me to think of how to best accommodate each student.”</p> <p>“Has made me consider differentiation, since the students I worked with were at varying levels.”</p>
Professional Support	<p>“I was able to work with someone who helped scaffold my lesson part and vice versa.”</p> <p>“The value of a partner was tremendous because we offered feedback and suggestions to one another for improving future lessons.”</p> <p>“Watching an experienced teacher complete a “Text Talk” with a whole group demonstrated the value of the program. Being supported by (the researcher) was completely priceless.”</p>
Hands-on Experience	<p>“My first kinder teaching experience with this and it really showed me that they weren’t all that scary.</p> <p>“Put into practice what we had discussed in class, which was incredibly valuable, and it really helped to solidify my learning.”</p>
Strategy Growth	<p>“Helped build my confidence with redirecting students and keeping them engaged in lessons.”</p> <p>“Helped me to learn how to reflect on my lessons.”</p> <p>“I learned strategies to better prepare myself for each lesson.”</p>

Discussion

The findings of this study support the hypothesis that the student-teacher candidates would experience an increase in TSE by the end of the project. The results of the TSES showed that there was a significant increase in TSE. This outcome was expected since the study built off of prior research that found supporting the specific needs of student-teachers, allowing the space

to plan lessons, and encouraging reflections on lessons led to an increase in TSE (Rupp & Becker, 2021).

The student-teacher candidates shared positive experiences in the *Text Talk* Post Survey. The *Text Talk* Post Survey themes were consistent with the TSES results and further supported prior research on factors associated with higher TSE. Within the theme of *supporting students*, student-teacher candidates discussed growth in being able to better meet the specific needs of students, an area that has previously been linked to higher TSE (Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988). The *professional support* theme detailed the value of having support in the field, which is a critical piece in TSE (Rupp & Becker, 2021). Student-teacher candidates reported an appreciation within the theme of *hands-on experience* for being able to work with a small group of diverse students, and for some, this was their first time doing so. Experience in the field is an important factor in teacher preparedness (Stites et al, 2018). Within *strategy growth*, there was an increase in the ability to manage a classroom and reflect on lessons, areas linked to higher TSE (Rupp & Becker, 2021; Malinen & Savolainen, 2016).

The results show that the project was successful in increasing student-teacher candidate TSE through the adapted GRR model. These findings are impactful and a possible area for additional focus for teacher preparation programs. The time as a student-teacher candidate has been shown to be a sensitive period in professional development and utilizing new methods of training early on could potentially help buffer the negative outcomes pertaining to TSE in teachers.

Limitations and Next Steps

Although there was a significant increase in TSE in student-teacher candidates, there are several limitations. One major limitation was that no comparison group was utilized; therefore, it cannot be determined which part of the study promoted the increase in TSE. An additional limitation is that TSE was solely measured through self-reporting. Questions in the *Text Talk* Post Survey were leading and suggested a positive experience was expected, which could have contributed to responses in favor of this approach.

Another limitation is that the sample size was small. The participants were recruited using convenience sampling since they were enrolled in a course taught by the researcher. Since the data were collected across four non-consecutive years, there is no way to rule out temporal effects or differences in sample groups. The sample was also gathered from a private institution with higher tuition costs, suggesting limitations in SES groups. Additionally, there is no demographic information available for participants, which makes generalizability challenging.

The findings of this study were promising, but further research is needed. To determine what increased self-efficacy, it is recommended to consider using control groups in future studies. Measuring student achievement should also be considered to determine if the observed increase of TSE has an impact on academic success. Research should aim to expand on this study in other grade levels to determine effectiveness at other developmental stages. Open-ended questions with neutral terminology should also be used in future studies to gauge the full range of experiences.

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