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# Preservice Teachers' Help-Seeking Tendencies and Self-Regulation of Learning

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### Abstract

The present study examined the associations between preservice teachers' help seeking tendencies, homework beliefs and behavior, and their individual characteristics such as academic delay of gratification, self-esteem, and self-handicap behavior ( $N = 63$ ). The results indicated that preservice teachers who have a positive attitude toward help seeking are those who report high homework self-efficacy beliefs and high homework intrinsic interest. A preference for seeking help from peers appears to be inversely related to their homework intrinsic interest. Preservice teacher with a positive attitude toward help seeking are those who prefer to delay gratification, have high self-esteem, and low tendency to engage in a self-handicap behavior. Educational implications are discussed.

## Preservice Teachers' Help-Seeking Tendencies and Self-Regulation of Learning

Successful learners are those who engage in self-regulation of learning by using learning strategies to secure task completion. They exercise behavioral control not only to choose or plan valuable academic tasks, but also to maintain motivation and intention in the light of distracting alternatives (Zimmerman, 1998). Self-regulation of learning is a process that required students to get proactively involved in their personal, behavioral, motivational, and cognitive learning endeavors in order to accomplish important and valuable academic goals (Zimmerman, 1998). One of those identified learning strategies that learners use is help-seeking (Karabenick, 1998; Newman, 1994; Pintrich et al., 1993). *Help seeking* refers to the strategic self-regulatory ways in which learners obtain information from formal and informal sources in order to adapt and to secure knowledge acquisition and task completion (Karabenick, 1998). Learners seek help from teachers (i.e., formal help seeking) and from peers (i.e., informal help seeking). Learners have different attitude toward help seeking; some students consider help seeking to be a threat to their selves and esteems and other avoid seeking help even when they need it. Similarly, some students seek help to secure task completion and to be autonomous.

Researchers have examined help seeking tendencies among elementary school children, middle and high school students, and college students (Karabenick, 1998). However, preservice teachers' tendencies and preferences for help seeking have not been investigated, yet. If help seeking is an important individual difference and a learning strategy, then, teacher candidates should be using them as well. Teacher candidates, during their

preparation training, need to seek help from their educators, supervisors, and cooperative teachers. Preservice teachers need also self-regulation of learning (Dembo, 2001; Randi, 2004) to secure a successful learning experience and an effective preparation for their practice.

As Newman (1994) has stated, “Help seeking is a volitional strategy that can protect one’s intention to learn when one is faced with “competing action tendencies” such a giving in to distractions or giving up.” Help seeking, therefore is related to delay of gratification. In an academic context, Bembenutty and Karabenick (1998) defined *delay of gratification* as learners’ intentions to postpone immediate available rewards in order to obtain larger rewards temporally distant. Delay of gratification is important for self-regulation of learning because, for example, alternatives to academic goals are attractive, in part, because they offer immediate gratification, in contrast to rewards for academic goals (e.g., grades, degrees) that are temporally remote. Delay of gratification is associated with students’ use of learning strategies such as help seeking (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 1998).

Help seeking should be also associated with students’ self-esteem because if the students feel that by, for example, asking questions in class it would threat their self-esteem, they would not seek help. *Self-esteem* refers to “one’s perceived sense of self-worth, or whether one accepts and respects oneself (Schunk, 2004). Likewise, helps seeking should be associated with students’ self-handicapping tendencies. *Self-handicapping* refers to learners’ tendencies to engage in activities that would detract them from accomplishing important academic tasks (Urda & Midgley, 2001).

. As a learning strategy, help seeking would be significantly useful during homework completion. Thus, successful teacher candidates would be those

who use help seeking during homework completion in order to learn and to complete their tasks.

In summary, the present study have the following three objectives: 1) to examine the association between the different help seeking tendencies, 2) to examine the association between the help seeking tendencies and preservice teachers' beliefs about their homework during their teaching training, and 3) to examine the association between preservice teachers' help seeking tendencies and their individual characteristics such as delay of gratification, self-esteem, and self-handicap.

## **Method**

### **Participants and Procedure**

Participants in this study were 63 secondary education preservice teachers enrolled in a classroom management course required during their graduate educational program at an urban college in New York. Most of students possess provisional teaching certification and were working on obtaining a permanent certification. The administration of the instruments took place during regular instruction in the classroom.

### **Measures**

*Help Seeking Scales.* Preservice teachers responded to an instrument developed by Karabenick (2003), which assessed their 1) *instrumental help seeking*, 2) *expedient help seeking*, 3) *threat help seeking*, 4) *avoidance help seeking*, 5) *formal help seeking*, and 6) *informal help seeking*. A sample item from the instrumental help seeking scale was: "If I were having trouble understanding the material in this class I would ask someone who could help me understand the general ideas." Rating scale options ranged from 1 =

*strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Internal consistency reliability of these scales ranged from .60 to .90 (see Appendix A).

***Homework Scales.*** Preservice teachers also responded to an instrument developed by the researcher to assess their 1) *homework self-efficacy* beliefs for successfully learning and completing the tasks assigned to them in the course, 2) *homework intrinsic interest*, 3) *homework outcome expectancy*, and 4) *homework self-regulation*. A sample item from the academic self-efficacy scale was: "I am sure that I can do the homework assignments for this course." Rating scale options ranged from 1 = *strongly disagree* to 7 = *strongly agree*. Internal consistency reliability of these scales ranged from .60 to .90.

***Individual Characteristics (Academic Delay of Gratification, Self-Esteem, and Self-Handicapping).*** To assess delay of gratification, preservice teachers responded to the Delay of Gratification Scale (Bembenutty & Karabenick, 1998; see Appendix B). To assess self-esteem, preservice teachers responded to the Rosenberg (1968) well know scale. To assess self-handicap, preservice teachers responded to the Self-Handicapping Scale (Midgley et al., 1998). Rating scale options ranged from 1 = *never* to 7 = *always*. Internal consistency reliability, as estimated by Cronbach alpha, was .70 to .91.

## **Results**

### ***Correlation between Help Seeking Scales***

As Table 1 shows, instrumental help seeking was inversely related to avoidance help seeking ( $r = -.31, p < .05$ ). However, help seeking threat

was positively associated with avoidance help seeking. Formal help seeking was negatively associated with informal help seeking ( $r = -.25, p < .01$ ).

### ***Correlation between Help Seeking Scales and Homework Scales***

Instrumental help seeking was positively related to homework self-efficacy ( $r = -.26, p < .05$ ). Formal help seeking was positively associated to homework intrinsic interest. However, informal help seeking was negatively associated with homework intrinsic interest.

### ***Correlations between Help Seeking and Preservice Teachers' Individual Characteristics***

Instrumental help seeking was positively related to academic delay of gratification ( $r = .28, p < .05$ ) and to self-esteem ( $r = .27, p < .05$ ). However, expedient help seeking was inversely related to academic delay of gratification ( $r = -.29, p < .05$ ) and to self-esteem ( $r = -.29, p < .05$ ), but positively related to self-handicapping ( $r = .37, p < .05$ ). Help seeking threat was positively related to self-handicapping ( $r = .35, p < .05$ ). Avoidance help seeking was negatively related to self-esteem ( $r = -.32, p < .05$ ) and positively related to self-handicapping ( $r = .45, p < .05$ ). Informal help seeking was negatively associated with self-handicapping ( $r = -.29, p < .01$ ).

## **Discussion**

The present findings support the notion that preservice teachers, like elementary, secondary, and college students, do perceive help seeking in different ways. These results indicate that preservice who seek help in order to master the tasks and to get knowledge are also those who reported seeking more help from their instructor. These results suggest that these preservice teachers tend not to avoid help seeking and do not feel threatened by asking for help if they do have an expedient attitude toward help seeking and if they

perceive help seeking instrumentally to achieve difficult tasks. Preservice teachers who prefer seek help from peers tend to not seek help from their instructor.

Preservice teachers who view help seeking as an instrument to master important tasks also reported having high homework self-efficacy. Preservice teachers with high homework intrinsic interest reported that they seek help from their instructor; and their homework intrinsic interest is inversely related to help seeking from peers.

Preservice teachers who view help seeking as an instrument for mastering tasks also reported high preference for delaying gratification for the sake of accomplishing long term academic goals. They also reported having a high level of self-esteem about themselves. However, preservice teachers who seek help to quickly get answers without fully understanding the tasks reported that they do not prefer to delay gratification and also reported having a low level of self-esteem while reporting a significant high level of a self-handicapping behavior. Students who feel that help seeking would be a threat to themselves, reported an avoidance attitude toward help seeking. A preference for help seeking from their peers is associated with reporting high level of self-handicap behavior.

In summary, preservice teachers who have a positive attitude toward help seeking are those who report high homework self-efficacy and high homework intrinsic interest. On the other hand, a preference for help seeking from peers appears to be inversely related to their homework intrinsic interest. Further, preservice teacher with a positive attitude toward help seeking are those who tend to delay gratification, have high self-esteem, and low tendency to engage in a self-handicap behavior.



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## **Appendix A**

### **HOMEWORK INTRINSIC INTEREST**

1. Doing homework for this class is fun.
2. I find doing homework for this class enjoyable.
3. I like to do homework for this class.
4. I like challenging homework in this class.
5. Doing my homework is interesting.

### **HOMEWORK OUTCOME EXPECTANCY**

6. Doing homework for this class is beneficial for my future teaching career.
7. Doing homework for this class would enhance my teaching skills.
8. Doing homework for this class would prepare me for the future teaching job.

### **HOMEWORK SELF-EFFICACY BELIEFS**

9. I am confident that I can successfully complete the homework for this class.
10. I am sure I can master the material contained in the homework for this class.
11. I can do the homework for this class.
12. I believe that I have the skills to complete the homework for this class.
13. I believe that I can learn the material included in the homework.
14. If I have problem with my homework, I can ask the instructor for assistance.
15. If I have problem with my homework, I can find ways to understand it.

### **HOMEWORK SELF-REGULATION**

16. I check my homework as I go along.
17. While doing my homework, I take a break from my work when I get frustrated.
18. I make sure I understand one part before I go on to the next part of the homework.
19. I find ways to do my homework fun.
20. I review my homework for errors.
21. I keep going when I get stuck with my homework.
22. I keep working on my homework even when I do not feel like it.
23. I keep a record of my homework completed.
24. I set goals before start working n my homework.
25. I monitor my progress as I am working on the homework.

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Rating scale options ranged from 1 = *Strongly Disagree* to 7 = *Strongly Agree*. Internal consistency reliability of these scales ranged from .60 to .90.

## Appendix B

### ACTIVITY REFERENCES

This part of the survey concerns ten situations that students sometimes face when studying for this SEYS examination and engaging in other activities. Here are a series of choices between two alternative courses of action (A and B).

After you have read a pair of statements, indicate which course of action you would be more likely to choose and the strength of that choice. Do this by placing an **X** in front of the alternative that reflects your choice.

Please read each of the statements carefully, and relate each statement to this SEYS course. It is important that your responses reflect your likely choice. That is, tell us what you would actually do under the conditions described in the statements.

***Which of the following would you choose to do?***

1. A. Go to your favorite movies and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
 B. Postpone going to the movies until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

***Choose One***

*Definitely choose A*     *Probably choose A*     *Probably choose B*     *Definitely choose B*

***Which of the following would you choose to do?***

2. A. Hang out with your friends and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
 B. Postpone hanging out with your friends until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

***Choose One***

*Definitely choose A*     *Probably choose A*     *Probably choose B*     *Definitely choose B*

***Which of the following would you choose to do?***

3. A. Go partying with your friends and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
 B. Postpone partying with friends until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

***Choose One***

*Definitely choose A*     *Probably choose A*     *Probably choose B*     *Definitely choose B*

***Which of the following would you choose to do?***

4. A. Listen to your favorite music and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
 B. Postpone the music until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

***Choose One***

*Definitely choose A*     *Probably choose A*     *Probably choose B*     *Definitely choose B*

***Which of the following would you choose to do?***

5. A. Watch your favorite programs on television and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
 B. Postpone television watching until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

**APPENDIX B (Continuation)**

**Choose One**

\_\_\_ *Definitely choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose B*    \_\_\_ *Definitely choose B*

**Which of the following would you choose to do?**

6.    A. Spend time surfing the internet and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
      B. Postpone surfing the internet until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

**Choose One**

\_\_\_ *Definitely choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose B*    \_\_\_ *Definitely choose B*

**Which of the following would you choose to do?**

7.    A. Spend time talking to friends on the telephone and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
      B. Postpone phone calls with friends until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

**Choose One**

\_\_\_ *Definitely choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose B*    \_\_\_ *Definitely choose B*

**Which of the following would you choose to do?**

- 8    A. Spend time playing computer games and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
      B. Postpone playing computer games until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

**Choose One**

\_\_\_ *Definitely choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose B*    \_\_\_ *Definitely choose B*

**Which of the following would you choose to do?**

9.    A. Spend time playing recreational sports and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
      B. Postpone playing recreational sports until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

**Choose One**

\_\_\_ *Definitely choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose B*    \_\_\_ *Definitely choose B*

**Which of the following would you choose to do?**

10.    A. Spend time shopping for new things and then cram for the SEYS 221 midterm exam. **OR**  
      B. Postpone shopping until after you have taken the SEYS 221 midterm exam.

**Choose One**

\_\_\_ *Definitely choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose A*    \_\_\_ *Probably choose B*    \_\_\_ *Definitely choose B*

**Descriptive Characteristics and Pearson Correlation Coefficients between Helps-seeking, Homework, and Preservice Teachers' Individual Characteristics**

Help-Seeking Scales	Help-Seeking Correlations						<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
	Instrumental	Expedient	Threat	Avoidance	Formal	Informal		
<b>Instrumental</b>	----						5.78	1.14
<b>Expedient</b>	.08	----					1.70	.95
<b>Threat</b>	-.11	-.09	----				1.65	1.21
<b>Avoidance</b>	<b>-.31*</b>	.19	<b>.33**</b>	----			1.55	1.00
<b>Formal</b>	-.02	.06	-.08	-.02	----		4.80	1.58
<b>Informal</b>	.14	-.04	.03	-.18	<b>-.25*</b>	----	4.60	1.62
<b>Homework Scales</b>								
<b>Homework Intrinsic Interest</b>	.00	-.19	-.04	-.10	<b>.22*</b>	<b>-.26*</b>	3.95	1.75
<b>Homework Outcome Expectancy</b>	.10	-.08	.20	.04	.11	.07	6.29	1.08
<b>Homework Self-efficacy</b>	<b>.26*</b>	.13	-.07	-.03	-.03	-.02	6.42	.54
<b>Homework Self-regulation</b>	.25	-.14	-.17	-.21	.17	-.13	5.21	1.03
<b>Individual Characteristics</b>								
<b>Academic Delay of Gratification</b>	<b>.28*</b>	<b>-.29*</b>	-.03	.04	.17	-.07	3.72	.45
<b>Self-esteem</b>	<b>.27*</b>	<b>-.29*</b>	-.08	<b>-.32*</b>	.03	.10	6.12	.83
<b>Self-Handicapping</b>	-.15	<b>.37**</b>	<b>.35**</b>	<b>.45**</b>	.17	<b>-.29*</b>	1.57	.59

Note. \*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level. \* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level.