

# Teachers' Self-efficacy Beliefs, Delay of Gratification, and Self-Regulation

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### Abstract

Teachers educate children in a way that potentially leads these learners to become active agents in constructing a better world. The present study examined teacher candidates' beliefs about the characteristics of self-regulated teacher. Specifically, teacher candidates ( $N = 71$ ) described the characteristics of a teacher with high teacher's self-efficacy beliefs and indicated how teachers can enhance willingness to delay gratification among their students. The most frequently listed characteristics of a teacher with high teacher self-efficacy beliefs were a) possessing self-efficacy beliefs, b) the ability to engage in self-motivation, and c) to be a self-regulated teacher. They three most frequently cited ways by which teachers could help their students to delay gratification were: a) helping the students to reward themselves, b) helping the students to think about long-term goals, and c) helping the students to consider the positive self-consequences of their actions.

## Teachers' Self-efficacy Beliefs, Delay of Gratification, and Self-Regulation

Teachers educate children in a way that potentially leads these learners to become active agents in constructing a better world. The present study examined teacher candidates' beliefs about the characteristics of self-regulated teacher. Specifically, teacher candidates described the characteristics of a teacher with high teacher's self-efficacy beliefs and indicated how teachers can enhance willingness to delay gratification among their students.

### *Teachers' Self-efficacy Beliefs*

The multiple tasks that teachers have, including enhancing their students' motivation, maintaining effective classroom management, grading student work, and preparing lesson plans, require intense task-focus and enactment of goals. Studies examining teachers' effectiveness suggest that self-regulation is an essential determinant of teachers' efficacy (Dembo, 2001; Randi, 2004). *Self-regulation of learning* refers to the processes that maintain the cognition, motivation, and behavior necessary to achieve intentional goals (Zimmerman, 2000). Effective self-regulated learners set appropriate goals, use effective learning strategies, monitor their academic progress, and self-reflect on their outcomes. Appropriate execution of self-regulation depends on the teachers' perception of personal agency—that is, their sense of self and capability beliefs (Bandura, 1997; Pajares, 1996; Zimmerman, 2000). *Teachers' self-efficacy* refers to “their beliefs in their ability to have a positive effect on student learning” (Ashton, 1985, p. 142). Recent work has revealed that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs is a significant factor that influences teachers' positive attitudes toward helping their students, their level of satisfaction, and their desire to motivate their students (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001).

Researchers have posited that teachers' self-efficacy beliefs are judgments of their capability to influence desired outcomes related to students' performance, behavior, and motivation in the classroom (Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk, 2001). Likewise, Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) stated

that teachers' beliefs in their capability "to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplishing a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 233). Evidence indicates that teachers with a high sense of self-efficacy beliefs engage in a high level of planning and organization (Allinder, 1994). Their high self-efficacy scores are related to their level of professional commitment for elementary and middle schools (Coladarci, 1992; Milner & Woolfolk Hoy, 2002).

### *Delay of Gratification*

Teaching effectiveness would also depend on their ability to enhance their students' willingness to engage in self-regulation of learning. Recently a component of self-regulation has been identified (Bembenutty and Karabenick, 2004). According to Bembenutty and Karabenick, 2004, delay of gratification is an important individual characteristic that teachers can promote among their students. Bembenutty and Chen (2005) proposed that teachers should engage in willingness to delay gratification themselves in order to enhance the learning experience of their students and to increase teaching effectiveness.

Bembenutty and Chen (2005) examined the predictive utility of self-regulation of learning, academic delay of gratification, and motivational beliefs of teaching efficacy and academic performance among preservice teachers. They found that preservice teachers' motivational beliefs and self-regulatory tendencies were significantly and positively related. Further, the results revealed that academic self-regulation and academic delay of gratification significantly predicted preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Academic self-regulation also significantly predicted academic delay of gratification. However, it is unknown how teacher enhance their students' willingness to delay gratification.

### *Self-regulation of Learning*

This study is conducted under the theoretical frame of Zimmerman's self-regulation of learning. According to Zimmerman (2000), self-regulation of learning is a key factor that impacts learners' motivation to achieve. Similarly, Bandura (1997) had proposed that in order to attain vital goals, individuals need to influence and control their environment. From the social cognitive perspective, all individuals in some way attempt to self-regulate their actions and manage their behaviors purposefully to attain goals

(Zimmerman, 2000). Much like their own students, teachers need to engage in self-directed learning processes by using cognitive resources to attain teaching objectives and the academic achievement of their students. Aligned with Zimmerman's (2000) proposition, the distinguishing factor between effective and non-effective teachers during could be the degree to which they activate their self-regulatory processes, their level of self-efficacy beliefs, and how they promote the self-efficacy and the ability to delay gratification among their students.

### *Aim of the Study*

To date, however, limited research has examined teacher candidates' beliefs about the characteristics of self-efficacious teacher. This study was designed to examine those characteristics from the teacher candidates' perspective. Further, to date, research has not been conducted to examine teacher candidates' beliefs about how teachers could enhance their students willingness to delay gratification. In general learners' self-regulatory characteristics have been investigated, however, the present research sought to understand the teacher candidates beliefs about how teachers could promote self-regulatory strategies among learners, and specifically, delay of gratification.

Based on the theoretical concepts and empirical findings discussed above, the investigator derived the following three research questions:

1. What teacher candidates believe are the characteristics of a teacher with high teacher self-efficacy beliefs?
2. What are the ways in which teacher candidates believe that teachers could enhance willingness to delay gratification among their students?
3. How confident are teacher candidates to describe a self-efficacious teacher and the teachers' role to promote delay of gratification among their students?

### **Method**

#### *Participants and Procedure*

Participants in this study were 71 secondary education teacher candidates enrolled in a required educational psychology course while they were pursuing an initial teaching certification at an urban college in New York. The administration of the instruments took place during regular instruction in the classroom.

### *Measures*

*Teachers Characteristics.* Teacher candidates responded to the following question: “List four characteristics of a teacher with high teacher self-efficacy beliefs.” The question intended to assess the teacher candidates’ beliefs about the major characteristics of an efficacious teacher. The concept of teachers’ self-efficacy has been discussed in the course before the administration of the question.

*Delay of Gratification.* Teacher candidates responded to the following question: “List four ways in which teachers can enhance willingness to delay gratification among high school students with low motivation to do their homework.” The question intended to assess teacher candidates’ understanding of the concept of delay of gratification and how it could be applied in the classroom. The concept of delay of gratification has been discussed in the course before the administration of the question.

*Teacher Candidates Self-efficacy Beliefs.* Before responding the two previous aforementioned questions, teacher candidates rated their confident level to accurately responding each of the two questions; one rating per question. Specifically, the question was: “How confident are you that you can answer this particular question correctly?” Teacher candidates responded to the question by using a Likert scale ranging from “not confident” (= 1) to “very confident” (= 7).

### *Data Analysis*

First, the answer of the teacher candidates was code by two experts in self-regulation of learning and motivation. The interrater reliability was 92% agreement. Differences were resolved in discussion between the two raters. Frequency and percentages were calculated. Second, Pearson correlation coefficient was calculated to examine the relationship between the teacher confidence for answering correct Question 1 and Questions 2.

## **Results**

### *Questions 1.*

The most frequently listed characteristics of a teacher with high teacher self-efficacy beliefs were a) possessing self-efficacy beliefs (by 49 of the students), b) the ability to engage in self-motivation (by 24 of the students), and c) to be a self-regulated

teacher (by 20 of the students). Other major characteristics were: having high self-esteem, setting appropriate goals, using learning strategies, having organizational skills, engaging in self-monitoring and environmental structure, caring and respecting the students, and knowing their content area material.

*Question 2.*

They three most frequently cited ways by which teachers could help their students to delay gratification were: a) helping the students to reward themselves, b) helping the students to think about long-term goals, and c) helping the students to consider the positive self-consequences of their actions. Other major characteristics were teacher focusing on student self-regulation, helping the students to set academic goals and structuring their environment, helping the student to focus on intrinsic motivation and the utility value of the academic tasks, promoting the students' self-efficacy beliefs, helping the students to engage in self-reinforcement, providing verbal praise and by challenging the students.

*Question 3*

The correlation between teacher candidates' belief about their confident to correctly answering Question 1 and Question 2 was .54,  $p < .01$ . Teacher candidates were moderately confident on their ability to successfully answer the questions.

### **Discussion**

The present study examined teachers' candidates' beliefs about the characteristics of a self-regulated teacher. Specifically, teacher candidates described the characteristics of a teacher with high self-efficacy beliefs. Teacher candidates also suggested ways by which teachers can enhance willingness to delay gratification among high school students. Teacher candidates considered that a teacher with high self-efficacy beliefs has multiple characteristics important for teaching. They consider that an efficacious teacher needs to have high self-efficacy beliefs and engage in self-regulation. Second, they believe that teacher can promote delay of gratification among their students. They provided a variety of ways in which that could happen, specifically by reinforcing the students. Third, teacher candidates were moderately confident about their capability to respond to those two questions.

Consistent with Bandura's (1997) social cognitive theory, teachers who had high sense of efficacy beliefs about their capabilities to motivate and communicate well with their students can be effective teachers and could promote delay of gratification. In agreement with Zimmerman's (2000) work, teachers with a high sense of efficacy also could strategically selected ways to approach teaching by helping their students to set goals and engage in effective planning, self-monitoring, and self-evaluation of their own academic progress.

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**Table 1**  
**Teacher Candidates' Beliefs about the Major Characteristics of an Efficacious Teacher and How Teachers Could Enhance Willingness to Delay Gratification among Their Students.**

<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Question 1: What teacher candidates believe are the characteristics of a teacher with high teacher self-efficacy beliefs?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">                     Possessing self-efficacy beliefs                      Engaging in self-motivation                      Engaging self-regulated teacher                      Having high self-esteem                      Setting appropriate goals                      Using learning strategies                      Having organizational skills                      Engaging in self-monitoring                      Engaging in environmental structure                      Caring for and respecting the students                      Knowing their content area material                 </p>
<p style="text-align: center;"><b>Question 2: What are the ways in which teacher candidates believe that teachers could enhance willingness to delay gratification among their students?</b></p> <p style="text-align: center;">                     Helping the students to reward themselves                      Helping the students to think about long-term goals                      Helping the students to consider the positive self-consequences of their actions.                      Focusing on student self-regulation                      Helping the students to set academic goals                      Helping the students to structure their environment                      Helping the student to focus on intrinsic motivation                      Helping the students to understand the utility value of the academic tasks                      Promoting the students' self-efficacy beliefs                      Helping the students to engage in self-reinforcement                      Providing verbal praise                      Challenging the students                 </p>