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Media and Information
Literacy processes

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Empowering teachers to teach critical reading in online contexts: Experiences that support teacher self-efficacy

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Mastery experiences are a key to building teacher self-efficacy.

Why teacher self-efficacy matters?

One pivotal characteristic of proficient teachers is their sense of capability in supporting their students' learning; in other words, they have high teacher self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Specifically, pre-service teachers and beginning teachers need support in bolstering their confidence in teaching (Mok *et al.*, 2023). Nevertheless, even more experienced teachers may occasionally feel insecure when confronted with new teaching demands. Given the rapid development of technology, one area that is in constant change is the requirements for reading (Leu *et al.*, 2013). Therefore, it is crucial to enhance teacher's confidence in developing their reading instruction, enabling them to effectively address, for example, the new critical reading demands of online contexts (e.g., distinguishing accurate information from inaccurate information).

What is self-efficacy?

Self-efficacy refers to beliefs about one's capability to successfully perform a specific task (Bandura, 1997). As self-efficacy is situation-specific, it can vary across and within different domains, such as reading and math. In terms of reading, a person may consider himself or herself a good reader of books but not a good at reading online. Importantly, learners with high self-efficacy are more willing to participate in learning activities, are more persistent, and

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show higher interest in the learning task (Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2016). Consequently, self-efficacy has been shown to have desirable effects on learning, motivation, and academic performance (Honicke and Broadbent, 2016; Schunk and DiBenedetto, 2016).

What is teacher self-efficacy?

Teacher self-efficacy refers to teachers' beliefs about their ability to influence students' learning (Guskey and Passaro, 1994), even those who struggle or are unmotivated (Tschanen-Moran and Hoy, 2001). Overall, it seems that the higher teachers' sense of self-efficacy is, the more open they are to new ideas, the more willing they are to try new methods and the more engaged they are in professional learning activities (e.g., Runhaar, 2010). Teacher self-efficacy is usually understood as a subject-specific construct, that is, a teacher's self-efficacy may be high while teaching, for instance, mathematics, but low while teaching reading (Cakiroglu, 2008). Further, teachers can have a high sense of self-efficacy when teaching reading comprehension but feel less confident when teaching critical reading in an unpredictable online landscape.

Experiences that support teacher self-efficacy

According to Bandura (1997), it is possible to foster self-efficacy through four sources. These sources are: 1) mastery experiences, 2) vicarious experiences, 3) social or verbal persuasion, and 4) physiological and emotional states.

Mastery experiences (i.e., interpretations of past experiences), are the most important source of self-efficacy because they provide direct evidence that one can complete the task successfully. Conversely, *vicarious experiences*, which refer to learning from the achievements of others, offer indirect evidence that an individual can also accomplish the task successfully. Vicarious experiences are particularly beneficial if one can observe the success of a peer. Teacher educators can offer opportunities for mastery and vicarious experiences by having pre-service teachers co-plan critical reading activities, apply the plan in the classroom, observe each other's teaching, and develop their plans based on their observations. However, it is not only teaching performance per se that is the basis for the development of self-efficacy but rather the reflection and interpretation of one's teaching (Kulju and Mäkinen, 2023; Mok *et al.*, 2023). Importantly, to ensure that pre-service teachers can achieve mastery and vicarious experiences, teacher educators need to offer the latest scientific knowledge about critical reading and a range of tools that pre-service teachers can apply when teaching reading in online environments.

Verbal persuasion, the third source of self-efficacy, refers to constructive feedback and encouragement by others, such as teacher educators, supervising teachers, and peers (Mok *et al.*, 2023). Finally, *as physiological and emotional states* (e.g., anxiety or bodily arousal) are related to self-efficacy, emotional support reducing the stress when providing feedback is essential, particularly at the beginning of teachers' careers (Hascher and Hagenauer, 2016).

Practical tips for teacher education

- Keep in mind that teacher self-efficacy is subject-specific or even task-specific.
- Immerse pre-service teachers in a scientific understanding of critical reading in online contexts and related pedagogical approaches.
- Provide opportunities for pre-service teachers to practice and apply what they have learned about teaching critical reading.
- Offer pre-service teachers constructive feedback (on lesson plans and actual teaching) and opportunities to reflect on their experiences.
- Allow pre-service teachers to learn from one another's success.

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