**I KNOW I CAN**

*Teacher confidence in oneself helps students succeed*

“...Individuals who perceive themselves as highly efficacious will activate sufficient effort, which, if well executed, will produce successful outcomes.” — Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998

Just like the children’s story, *The Little Engine That Could*, teachers’ belief that they can make a difference for students is one of the most powerful determinants in predicting teacher behavior and student success.

Hypothetical schools A and B serve low-income, minority children. Teachers in each school have similar years of experience and academic preparation. Both work in old buildings with the same instructional materials. School A’s teachers are upbeat. In School A, most teachers feel confident in their knowledge about reading and believe that if they work hard enough, and smart enough, students will learn. School B’s teachers are frustrated, feel stressed, and believe that if parents would be more supportive and students more motivated, reading achievement would be higher.

Test scores at each school reflect the teachers’ beliefs. School A’s scores are higher than scores at School B.

School A teachers have personal efficacy, the belief that they have knowledge and skills about teaching reading, and outcome efficacy, the conviction that when they use their skills, students achieve (Soodak & Podell, 1985). Teachers in School B have low efficacy and, as a result, are more prone to blame others for poor student achievement, to feel less positive about teaching, and to feel more stress. Efficacy studies transcend race, income levels, subject matter and students’ ages. Efficacy is related to variations in reading achievement. It is a predictor of group perseverance on special projects. It correlates with higher math achievement, science learning, language skills, teachers’ willingness to implement innovation, positive teacher-administrator relationships, constructive parent-teacher relations, and reductions in teacher stress (Tschannen-Moran, Hoy & Hoy, 1998).

**HOW PRESENTERS INFLUENCE EFFICACY**

Unlike self-esteem, efficacy is related to specific areas, such as teaching math, or working with middle school kids, or doing certain types of tasks such as getting things organized. Efficacy changes over time as we gain information and experiences.

Teachers develop personal and outcome efficacy differently. Personal efficacy stems from self-assessment of teaching skills, and it influences the effort teachers expend working with students. P.E. is achieved by professional development (Garmston & Wellman, 1999) — learning about subject matter, pedagogy, students, and self.

Outcome efficacy stems from assessing teaching results. O.E. influences teachers to...
modify instruction. O.E. is achieved by organizational development (Garmston & Wellman, 1999), creating learning communities in which teachers collaborate to improve instruction. Four presentation approaches contribute to efficacy.

1. STRUCTURE

In School A, seminar settings maximize teachers’ ability to see and talk with one another. In School B, sessions are held in the school library where islands of books protrude into the room, blocking teachers’ visual access to one another.

School A seminars and faculty meetings have frequent pauses for teachers to process information. They use cooperative learning tools like clock partners so teachers can process information with others. School B presents information from “experts.”

In School A, sessions start with opportunities to activate and explore prior knowledge about the topic. Workshop outcomes are explicitly described. Presenters are often other teachers. As presenters, they reveal their own thinking by talking aloud when modeling a task. Teachers reflect with each other about their thinking as they practice tasks and receive specific feedback. Thus, School A is providing “enacted mastery experiences,” an essential foundation for building personal efficacy.

In School B, teachers rarely reveal and explore their own knowledge. While structuring is important for efficacy, it becomes more potent when presenters teach about it.

2. REFLECT

In School B, the term efficacy is probably not used. In contrast, School A teachers talk about it, can describe it to parents as a goal for students, and can explain its importance and how teachers and parents can promote it.

“What have I done today that made a difference for kids?” School B teachers believe they are too busy for reflection.

While reflecting on efficacy is important, mediation is more effective.

3. MEDIATE

To mediate is to shine a flashlight of consciousness on experiences. Mediated experiences can be internal — thoughts, feelings, intentions, decisions, or self-assessments. Analyzing external data like student behaviors, writing samples, or parent responses can also be mediated. School A teachers ask mediational questions of one another: “How did you know to select that approach?” or “How will you know your students are successful?”

Presenters in School A are heard to ask similar questions in workshops: “How does that choice reflect your beliefs about how students learn?” and “As you prepare for the next exercise, what can you remind yourself of to be most effective?” Such questions encourage self-direction, self-monitoring, and self-modification — essential building blocks for self-directed learning and efficacy.

But buyer beware: In the current press to support new and veteran teachers, a variety of practices (including some national programs) are called coaching, but in fact are not mediative, focusing on behaviors rather than decisions. They make judgments or give advice. While useful for other purposes, these practices do not help teachers strengthen their capacity for self-directed learning (Costa & Garmston, 1994). Extensive research confirms that cognitively coached teachers, in contrast with control groups, make significant increases in efficacy.

4. MONITOR

As my friend Art Costa says, “What is inspected is expected.” Monitoring what is important keeps consciousness and energy directed toward improvement. The best monitoring is self-monitoring as it leads most directly to helping teachers own their decisions, behaviors, and the relationship with results. The result is a conviction that we are, to some degree, in charge of our environment, our choices for children, and our responses to the results we get. School A teachers, in fact, are not smarter or better than teachers in School B. They work harder and persevere through disappointments and frustrations because they believe their work can overcome almost any obstacle to student learning.

What we are conscious of, we can direct and control.

REFERENCES


