



Efficacy

The Missing Link to Student Success

Dr. Diane Charles writes that when principals and teachers collaborate to develop teacher and collective teacher efficacies as part of a growth plan, students are more likely to learn.

The expectation that teachers can meet the needs of all students in classrooms is real. Teachers must have a can-do belief, or a sense of efficacy, that they can achieve the desired outcomes with all students to be successful. Research correlates teacher self-efficacy (TSE) and collective teacher efficacy (CTE) to student achievement. Yet, the development of this can-do attitude or set of beliefs is rarely a focus of professional learning activities focused on building capacity in schools.

Understanding the role that efficacy plays in moving student achievement forward is perhaps best personified by Hattie's (2016) finding that collective teacher efficacy has the highest effect size on student learning – an astonishing 1.57 effect size. In other words, students in schools where teachers believe collectively that they can meet the needs of all learners experience almost four times the growth in a year over schools where this sense

of collective efficacy is not present.

Psychologist Albert Bandura (1997) suggests four ways to develop efficacy. The first is mastery experience. For teachers, mastery experience occurs when they successfully accomplish a given task or goal with students. The sense that, *"I've done it before and I can do it again"* embodies mastery experience.

The second way to develop either TSE or CTE occurs through vicarious experience. When teachers see others experiencing success in reaching the desired outcomes with students they too begin to believe that they can do the same thing. *"If they can do it, then so can I"* is the essence here. Whereas mastery experience may occur in isolation, vicarious experience necessitates the need for teachers to see others in action.

The third way of building efficacy also relies on the role of others to influence individual or collective beliefs. Verbal persuasion builds efficacy when a trusted person, be it another teacher or administrator,

tells a teacher or staff they believe they have the skills needed to achieve the desired outcome. Verbal persuasion goes beyond blanket statements such as, *"You can do it,"* to more specifics like, *"I have seen you do A with (student or group of students) and as such I believe that you can do B."* Trust is an integral in using verbal persuasion to develop TSE and CTE. Merely saying, "you can do it" without the authentic knowledge of what "it" is, or the context in which "it" must occur will not develop efficacy.

Affective or physiological states is the last area of consideration when looking at efficacy development. Consider the example of runners' high – the feeling that one may get merely by having a great run. This is a personal feeling, and is fully dependent upon the context of a particular run on a particular day. Runners often reflect on the conditions that lead to this positive feeling, and what was lacking when that sense of euphoria did not occur. For efficacy, identifying the feelings one has when something goes well versus how one feels when things do not go well, and then finding ways to either build on the positive **or** overcome the negative is key. Preventing a bad experience from defining a teacher's sense of efficacy in working with students is paramount.

In this time of change in BC, it is essential that school teams work together to develop the understanding of the role TSE and CTE plays in students success. Professional Learning Communities (PLC) are one avenue that may provide the structure needed to explore efficacy development. Effective PLCs use a plan-do-study-act cycle for school improvement. A focus on efficacy requires staff to scan current practice, developing

Preventing a bad experience from defining a teacher's sense of efficacy in working with students is paramount.

a hunch as to what may or may not be going on, collect data, plan interventions and monitor/evaluate success. There are some excellent tools (*see box below*) available to support PLCs in this work. One such tool is Donohoo's (2017) *Collective Efficacy Tool*, a rating scale that will help to collect baseline data on CTE feelings. This data will help identify areas of focus for staff. Fullan and Quinn's (2016) *Coherence Tool* will help to guide group discussions and align practices within schools, keeping the work on the goal of improving efficacy.

Once the construct of efficacy and its effect on teacher success is developed, and school teams have focused collective group, a second iteration of the plan-do-study act cycle may focus on TSE. As such, I recommend Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy's *Teachers' Sense of Self Efficacy* (2001) as a means of measuring personal efficacy growth over time. Some teachers, and indeed principals, may need a more individualized approach to determine what may be influencing their ability to work in an efficacious manner with all students. Efficacy is context dependent (Bandura, 1997). Without an ability to look at personal factors, teachers may not

be able to identify potential barriers preventing the development of a "can-do" attitude.

There may be those that believe that an overt focus on TSE or CTE using rating scales such as suggested above may just be a veiled attempt to evaluate teacher effectiveness, violating the collective agreements. Moving schools to a focus on building CTE and TSE does not come without its ethical challenges and considerations. At a basic level, and consistent with working in a unionized environment, teachers as well as principals are governed by the code of ethics of their respective organizations (BCTF, 2016; BCPVPA, n.d.), as well as the professional responsibilities established through the TRB (Ministry of Education, 2016). As such, principals and teachers alike must remember to address issues related to efficacy in accordance with the ethical guidelines set out in these governing documents. There are also codes of conduct for teachers and principals set out in the *School Act*, as well as through administrative procedures of school districts. Further, both principals and teachers must follow the language of the collective agreement. Confusing altruism

with ethics when working to develop efficacy is possible; however, these governing documents provide a safety net to monitor principal and teacher behavior along the way.

It would be unethical for a principal to contravene the language of the collective agreement, particularly around issues related to evaluation of teacher competence, under the guise of addressing efficacy concerns. It would also be unethical for principals to negate their fiduciary responsibility of due diligence regarding teacher performance issues or student protection when these concerns may also be related to efficacy issues. An ethical consideration would be for principals to work with teachers to develop TSE and CTE as part of a growth or improvement plan in addition to any other outcomes of either a teacher evaluation or investigation.

Brown et al., (2017), in their study of the state of professional learning in BC, state the "need for ... supportive and positive relationship between (and among) teachers and administrators and/or district-level personnel in cultivating quality professional learning" (p. 8). Hattie's 2016 finding that Collective Teacher Efficacy has the greatest impact of student learning must be a focus in this move towards quality professional learning.

In this time of change, we must build on the collective strengths within and between schools and districts, so that all students can learn at high levels because they have teachers that believe ... **they can teach them.** 

Dr. Diane Charles is Principal, Cinnabar Valley Elementary in Nanaimo-Ladysmith. She can be reached at diane.charles@sd68.bc.ca

Know More

- The Enabling Conditions for Collective Teacher Efficacy Questionnaire (Donohoo, 2017) <http://bit.ly/2DKT6YM>
- Coherence Assessment Tool (Fullan & Quinn, 2016) <http://bit.ly/2BbcfjK>
- Teachers Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001) <http://bit.ly/2mRoVif>
- References for this article will be found online at <http://bit.ly/1Vp7gzp>