

**I Know I Can!:**  
**Teacher Self-efficacy in the English Language Arts Classroom**

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“Whether you think you can or you think you can't, you're right.” ~ *Henry Ford*

Effective communication in all facets of life—homes, schools, communities, and workplaces—is essential in today’s society. Communication is dependent on the proficient use of the language arts (ELA), a complex integration of reading, writing, listening, speaking, viewing, and visual representing. It is a system through which we learn, build, reflect, and imagine ideas and understandings of the present, past, and future. We use our understanding to appreciate, integrate, and apply what is learned for authentic purposes. Master ELA teachers possess passion for these subjects but passion alone is not enough. Supporting the motivation for the continual professional learning required to maintain high-quality instruction are teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs. Teacher self-efficacy beliefs are a teacher’s “conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated” (Guskey & Passaro, 1994, p. 7). This chapter explores the role of teacher self-efficacy beliefs in English Language Arts instruction.

A variety of empirical studies were found that examined and built upon what was known about ELA teacher and student self-efficacy in educational settings. Bandura’s (1977; 1997) framework served as the conceptual framework for this review of ELA studies. The methodology for selecting the most salient studies to review for this chapter focused on empirical research that built on Bandura’s original framework and that contributed to understandings about the self-efficacy of teachers when teaching English-Language Arts content, as well as the impact upon student self-efficacy for ELA and performance. Seminal studies from the literature were selected as well as recent, relevant research findings. Some additional studies that extended Bandura’s original theoretical work were also included.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1977) introduced the concept of self-efficacy beliefs as an assessment of one's capabilities to attain a desired level of performance in a given endeavor. He proposed that belief in one's abilities was a powerful driver influencing one's motivation to act, the effort one puts forth in the endeavor, persistence in that effort, and resilience in the face of setbacks. Bandura asserted that these beliefs were more powerful than one's actual abilities for the task at hand in influencing people's level of motivation, affective states, and actions. As a consequence, a teacher who did not expect literacy instruction to be successful for certain students would likely put forth less effort in the preparation and delivery of instruction and would likely give up more readily as students struggled, even if she actually possessed teaching strategies that, if applied, would likely assist these students. Self-efficacy beliefs can therefore become self-fulfilling prophecies, validating either beliefs of capability or of incompetence.

The study of teachers' sense of efficacy began in the mid 1970s with the RAND studies of reading instruction among low-income and minority students in Los Angeles (Armor et al., 1976). The RAND researchers, in search of variables that would explain differences in the effectiveness of certain teachers and methods, assessed the extent to which teachers believed they could influence student motivation and performance and whether teachers believed negative environmental factors overwhelmed the impact of their efforts in schools. The researchers found that teacher self-efficacy was positively related to variations in reading achievement among minority students, regardless of the reading curriculum used. Students taught by teachers who believed that they could influence students' motivation and learning showed significantly higher reading achievement than students whose teachers believed that there was little they could do in light of the impediments to learning posed by the environment.

The results of the RAND studies piqued interest in the construct of teacher self-efficacy beliefs. Over the intervening three decades, researchers have repeatedly found teachers' sense of efficacy to be related to teachers' motivation, to the level of challenge in teachers' aspirations, and to the effort they invest in pursuit of their goals (Klassen, Tze, Betts, & Gordon, 2011; Ross, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy, 1998). These, in turn, impact their instructional practices and their behavior in the classroom. Teachers with higher self-efficacy exhibit greater levels of planning and organization in their instruction, more enthusiasm for teaching, and stronger commitment to the profession (Allinder, 1994; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). Teachers with strong self-efficacy are open to new ideas and more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students (Berman, McLaughlin, Bass, Pauly, & Zellman, 1977; Guskey, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988). Teachers with a high sense of instructional efficacy tend to view difficult students as reachable and teachable and regard their learning problems as surmountable by ingenuity and extra effort. They evidence greater persistence in assisting struggling learners (Ashton & Webb, 1986). Teachers with low self-efficacy, on the other hand, are inclined to invoke low student ability as a rationalization for why their students cannot be taught.

Teacher self-efficacy beliefs are also related to important student outcomes. Teachers' self-efficacy predicts students' sense of self-efficacy and motivation (Midgley et al., 1989), as well as achievement outcomes (Anderson, Greene, & Loewen, 1988; Ashton & Webb, 1986; Corkett, Hatt, Benevides, 2011; Moore & Esselman, 1992; Pajares, 1996, Ross, 1992). An ELA instructor who judges herself capable of marshaling the complex set of knowledge and skills required to make instructional decisions based on student needs will likely exert greater effort, persistence, and resilience in the face of challenges. In a recent study, teachers with a higher

sense of self-efficacy were found to provide a more positive classroom environment and to offer more support than did teachers with lower self-efficacy, and their students had stronger literacy skills (Guo, Connor, Yang, Roehrig & Morrison, 2012). The self-efficacy of preservice teachers is also impacted by the classroom environment. Preservice teachers' self-efficacy has been found to be a positive and significant predictor of children's vocabulary gains but only within the context of high quality, emotionally supportive classrooms (Guo, Piasta, Justice, & Kaderavek, 2009).

Bandura (1997) proposed that self-efficacy context specific; therefore, a teacher who felt efficacious in one context may not feel inefficacious in another. Moreover, a teacher's sense of efficacy is not necessarily uniform for all subject matter within a content area, nor across all the different professional tasks that teachers perform. This conception has been borne out in research on teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. In a study at the secondary level, teachers reported different levels of self-efficacy for the different courses and student groups they encountered during the course of the school day (Ross, Cousins, & Gadalla, 1996). Self-efficacy is a domain-specific construct, which means that there can be no all-purpose measure of self-efficacy and Bandura (2006) stated that scales of perceived self-efficacy "must be tailored to the particular domain of functioning that is the object of interest" (p. 308). Consequently self-efficacy for writing is different from self-efficacy for the teaching of writing, but the two areas can inform one another.

### **Teacher Self-Efficacy in the ELA Classroom**

A growing number of scholars are conducting research on the influences of teacher self-efficacy as it relates specifically to language learning and teaching. Among a group of ELA preservice teachers, a positive relationship was found between language self-efficacy and the

frequent use of a range of language-learning strategies in their preservice teaching (Wong, 2005). The self-efficacy beliefs of English teachers were found to differ across a range of English teaching tasks and competencies, revealing that teachers may purposefully select to teach specific components of the ELA curriculum for which they feel greater efficacy, while neglecting areas of the ELA curriculum in which they feel less confident (Hansen, 2006). The strongest area of English teacher self-efficacy across a range of competencies was found to be the study of literature.

Teacher self-efficacy and willingness to innovate are both a cause and an outcome of witnessing improvements in student achievement (Guskey, 1988, 1989), which suggests teacher self-efficacy may impact the learning of diverse students dependent upon teacher perceptions of those students. Timperley and Phillips (2003) found generally low expectations and a low level of self-efficacy among teachers of students from disadvantaged backgrounds. After participating in a six-month intervention in which teachers learned new and more powerful literacy teaching strategies and witnessed improved student outcomes as a result, teacher self-efficacy beliefs increased significantly. The teachers' expectations of both themselves and their students increased regardless of student backgrounds.

### **Self-Efficacy for Writing Instruction**

Both teachers and students today are under considerable pressure to write well, particularly on standardized assessments such as the Scholastic Aptitude Test and other state-level, high-stakes assessments. The National Commission on Writing reported that of the three "R's," writing has become the most neglected in classrooms. Reading and math have also received priority over writing in both research and funding for research (Harris, Graham, Brindle, & Sandmel, 2009). Data from the National Center for Education Statistics (2012)

revealed that less than a third of students in the United States have mastered the skills necessary for proficient or grade-level appropriate writing on the National Assessment of Educational Progress. Most students in the United States have scored at the basic level or below, which denotes only partial mastery of the writing skills needed at each grade. A deteriorating attitude toward writing across the grades has also been reported (Harris, Graham, Friedlander, & Laud, 2013) and research indicates that the majority of teachers report inadequate pre-and inservice preparation in writing instruction and often do not implement evidence –based interventions.

Writing self-efficacy has been linked with writing performance and teacher beliefs about how to teach writing (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007; Graham, Harris, Fink, & MacArthur, 2001). In a study on the influence of self-efficacy beliefs on the teaching of writing, high-self-efficacy teachers differed from low-self-efficacy teachers in classroom writing instruction practices (Graham et al., 2001). Teachers in the highest quintile of self-efficacy reported spending significantly more time on writing each week, taught more writing processes and more grammar, and were more positive in the affect they displayed toward writing. The language and writing self-efficacy of ELA teachers matters when it comes to their teaching practices.

Among preservice teachers, writing self-efficacy has also been linked to self-efficacy for writing instruction. A study of preservice teachers' performance as an ELA teacher found the quality of their teaching performance was related to their writing self-efficacy as well as to the quality of their writing in their graduate studies (Lavelle, 2006). Another study of pre-service teachers who were self-confident as writers were asked to provide their self-perceptions of their confidence as writers and their understanding of written composition processes found that self-efficacy for writing can be increased when pre-service teachers are required to reflect on their

own writing process and approach (Gardner, 2014). Gardner recommended that teacher education courses should be designed to include literacy components.

In light of the impact of self-efficacy on writing instruction, researchers have examined the positive and negative influences on such beliefs. One qualitative study examined the self-efficacy of 21 teachers in a Midwestern school district who ranged from a first-year novice to veteran teachers with as many as 35 years of experience as they implemented a challenging new writing curriculum (Al-Bataineh, Holmes, Jerich, & Williams, 2010). The researchers identified four factors that had a positive impact on teacher self-efficacy and four factors that had a negative impact. These influences were interdependent and could not be viewed in isolation. The results revealed the following factors had a positive influence on teachers' self-efficacy in writing instruction: these teachers had had positive personal writing experiences, the assistance of a mentor or model teachers, opportunities for collaboration, positive teacher attitudes. The factors that had a deleterious influence on self-efficacy beliefs for writing instruction included: insignificant or negative personal writing experiences, insufficient training for teaching writing, absent or inconsistent guidelines for writing, and pressure from within the school environment. The authors concluded that while each teacher approached the teaching of writing with a unique set of experiences, skills, and beliefs, these common eight factors either increased or decreased their self-efficacy. Consequently, these factors influencing teacher confidence and beliefs about their teaching of writing should be considered when school districts choose to implement curricular changes.

In the past two decades, technology has had a dramatic influence on education in general and on the production of writing in particular. In a case study of teacher self-efficacy in three iPad language arts classes, researchers investigated elementary teacher beliefs and attitudes



toward teaching with mobile technology-enhanced instructional practices (Saudelli & Ciampa, 2016). The findings suggested that teacher attitudes toward integrating iPad technology formed a basis of how they approached their pedagogy. Teacher pedagogical knowledge and years of teaching experience strongly influenced their decisions to integrate mobile technology, when compared to technological and content knowledge. These findings suggest that providing professional development opportunities for teachers regarding relevant technology use in the language arts classroom led to more successful technology integration.

Identifying means of fostering teacher writing skills and the skills to teach writing has taken on added urgency. The use of the Writing Workshop, as originated with The National Writing Project (NWP) has received considerable research attention and commentary as an approach to the development of teacher identity (Teachers as Writers) and professional learning in respect of writing instruction. The basic tenants of NWP (as summarized by Andrews, 2008) are:

1. To teach writing, you need to be able to write;
2. Students should respond to each other's writing;
3. The teacher should act as writer alongside the students, and be prepared to undertake the same assignments as the students;
4. There is research about the teaching of writing that needs to be considered and applied, where appropriate, in the classroom;
5. Teachers can be their own researchers in the classroom;
6. The best teacher of writing teachers is another writing teacher; and

7. Various stages of the writing process need to be mapped and practiced: these include pre-writing, drafting, revising, editing, conferencing (see #2 above) and publishing (p. 8).

While the transformational potential of the NWP-type professional development had been confirmed in the literature, Locke (2015) set out to identify which writing workshop features and practices would be positively viewed by teacher-participants in a six-day writing workshop as contributing to increased self-efficacy as writers and teachers of writing. Findings derived from a small group of secondary level, cross-curricular teachers revealed tendencies toward the following workshop features as contributing to learning about writing, from highest to lowest: the use of modeling, the sharing of writing, a presentation about best writing practices, the expectation to offer feedback on writing, guided revision, expository presentations, ranking writing samples, the use of daily scribes and the use of role play. Relatedly, workshop features that impacted the teacher-participants' confidence as writers were rated from highest to lowest as follows: learning more about the writing process, writing a childhood memory, sharing your writing with a group, having teachers share their own "stories" about teaching writing, emphasizing revision, writing a poem or collage, learning more about language/grammar features, writing a position statement, describing a dream environment, and writing a publicity pamphlet with text block.

### **The Impact of Self-efficacy on Student Writing**

Self-efficacy is not only an important construct with regard to teacher motivation and persistence, the self-efficacy of students is related to important outcomes as well. Higher self-efficacy levels among students have been found to relate to many positive outcomes such as setting higher goals, using more effective strategies, being willing to engage in domain-related

activities and to persist when confronted with difficulties, distractions, or obstacles, and to evidencing lower levels of anxiety (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007). Self-efficacy becomes especially critical when domain-related tasks, such as writing, are demanding and motivational conditions are limited.

The use of teacher-student writing conferences within language arts instruction is accepted as an effective strategy for teaching writing as it provides for individual conversation and provides an audience for discussion of ideas. In a qualitative study designed with multiple case studies to investigate the nature of the interaction during teacher-student writing conferences and the relationship between students' self-efficacy beliefs and their participation during writing conferences, Bayraktar (2013) found different patterns in conferences of students with higher and lower self-efficacy as summarized in Table 1.

Table 1.

## Different Patterns in Conferences of Students with Higher and Lower Self-Efficacy

Students with Higher Self-Efficacy	Students with Lower Self-Efficacy
Had mainly student-centered conferences	Had mainly balanced-conferences
Had longer conferences with less interruption	Had shorter conferences with more interruptions
Received more teacher praise	Received less teacher praise
Engaged in more social talk	Engaged in less social talk
Frequently initiated conference talk	Seldom initiated conference talk
Were more active participants during conferences	Were less active participants during conferences

This study uncovered the importance of teachers investigating students' levels of self-efficacy for writing and revealed several details to keep in mind when conferring with students. Teachers need to evidence patience with students as they develop new skills, to reinforce student ownership throughout the conversation about the development of the student's writing skills rather than dominating with teacher-led questions, explanations, or lectures, to provide writing models for students to better understand the writing process, to offer positive feedback, and to use an appropriate strategy or evaluation instrument to aid the student in gaining information about their skill level (Bayraktar, 2013). As teachers better understood students' level of self-efficacy for writing, they were better able to support student development toward increased self-regulation and achievement.

Self-efficacy for writing can be further broken down into various aspects of the writing process. In a study of 697 middle school students, three activities of writing self-efficacy were

examined which are involved in the writing act: self-efficacy for writing ideation (generating ideas), self-efficacy for writing conventions (expressing ideas using written language-related tools), and self-efficacy for writing self-regulation (managing writing decisions and behaviors). Results showed that self-efficacy for writing ideation and self-regulation were more strongly related to liking writing, than self-efficacy for the use of writing conventions. Unsurprisingly, all three factors were higher for students in more advanced ELA classes (Bruning, Dempsey, Kauffman, McKim, & Zumbrunn, 2013).

To examine the effects of writing for digital storytelling on writing self-efficacy, two groups of student writing self-efficacy was compared when the first group created digital stories using Second Life, and the second group created digital stories off-line with Window Movie Maker. The mean change score of writing self-efficacy showed that the Second Life group was significantly higher. The researchers concluded that the activity of writing for digital storytelling in a virtual-reality learning environment was more effective in improving students' writing self-efficacy than digital storytelling off-line (Xu, Park, & Baek, 2011).

### **Cultivating Teacher Self-Efficacy Beliefs**

The well-documented link between teacher self-efficacy beliefs and a range of positive outcomes invites investigation into how these beliefs can be cultivated among ELA teachers. Teacher self-efficacy is determined in part by the individual teacher's judgment of whether their current abilities and strategies are adequate for the teaching task in question. Bandura (1997) proposed that self-efficacy beliefs emanate from four sources: vicarious experiences, social persuasion, physiological and emotional states, and mastery experiences. Each of these is explored below.

**Vicarious experiences.** ELA teachers construct their beliefs in part from watching other educators teach. Teachers entering the field have typically experienced informal apprenticeships of at least 17 years as students. An ELA teacher may attribute the aspiration to become a teacher to a great ELA teacher whom they hoped to emulate. This modeling may continue during teacher preparation, when student teachers observe their cooperating teacher and university instructors. Once they are working in schools, teachers may observe others during professional development session or when observing their colleagues as part of a professional learning community. The degree to which an observer identifies with the model will influence the degree to which the performance of the model impacts the self-efficacy of the observer—when the model performs well, self-efficacy is enhanced; and when the model flounders, self-efficacy beliefs decrease (Bandura, 1997). An ELA teacher who observes a literacy coach successfully model a particular reading strategy may experience an increase in self-efficacy if she views herself as similar to the model. However, if the literacy coach is observed having great difficulty with the modeled lesson, it may diminish the self-efficacy beliefs of the teacher observing the lesson. Interestingly, models who struggle initially but persist and overcome their initial difficulties may provide a stronger boost to the self-efficacy of the observer than a model who performs flawlessly from the start (Schunk, 1987; Schunk & Hanson, 1985, 1989).

**Social persuasion.** Social persuasion involves receiving feedback from others about one's capabilities as a teacher. Self-efficacy is likely to increase when feedback is supportive and to diminish with criticism (Bandura, 1997). During teacher preparation, when the self-efficacy of a prospective ELA teacher is initially being developed, the feedback of supervisors is likely to have a strong impact on self-efficacy beliefs. Once in the field, supervisory or coaching conversations may play a role in either bolstering or undermining a teacher's self-efficacy. The

finding from one study that the support of administrators was not a strong predictor of the self-efficacy beliefs of either novice or career teachers, however, may suggest the traditional supervisory practice of twice-a-year classroom visits with preprinted evaluation forms does not provide enough feedback to shape a teacher's beliefs about his or her professional capability (Tschannen-Moran, & Hoy, 2007).

Teachers may also experience social persuasion during grade-level or departmental meetings, professional learning communities, or during informal conversations in the teachers' lounge. It is in these more informal settings that the role of the collective efficacy of the team may come into play. Collective efficacy is a group belief related to group performance. Collective efficacy beliefs may refer to the beliefs of an entire faculty or to smaller subcultures within the whole, such as departments of specific subject-area teachers. Collective efficacy may have a socializing effect on individuals shaped by the attitudes of other teachers about the task of teaching, the availability of resources, the challenges posed by the environment, and the prospects for student success (Goddard & Goddard, 2001). Individual teacher self-efficacy, collective teacher efficacy, and goals are interrelated such that a change in one dimension can have an impact on the others (Kurz & Knight, 2004). Just as individual teacher self-efficacy impacts student performance, collective efficacy has been shown to affect student achievement at the school level as well (Goddard, Hoy, & Hoy, 2000; Tschannen-Moran & Barr, 2004).

**Physiological and emotional states.** How teachers feel as they anticipate a teaching task also influences self-efficacy beliefs. Positive energy and emotions will contribute to a higher and more robust sense of self-efficacy, while awareness of feelings of nervousness and anxiety will dampen self-efficacy beliefs. Physiological and emotional states may add to the feeling of mastery or incompetence, depending on whether the individual perceives their physiological

response as positive or negative. Passion for the subject-matter has not been studied as a source of self-efficacy but may be a factor for ELA teachers when experienced as a source of positive emotion. Passion has been found to attract and keep teachers in the profession, and to motivate them to search for more effective ways to reach their students and master their craft.

Additionally, an increase in passion has been found to predict increases in teachers' perceptions of student behavior patterns (Carbonneau, Vallerand, Fernet, & Guay, 2008).

**Mastery experiences.** Mastery experiences are considered the most powerful source of self-efficacy. An individual perceives future success to be strongly linked to proficiency in past experiences. Conversely, the perception that one's own performance was a failure may lower self-efficacy beliefs, contributing to an expectation of future poor performance. The self-efficacy beliefs of ELA teachers will likely be raised when they witness improvement in student performances as a result of their teaching. This belief subsequently contributes to optimism that future performances will also be proficient, resulting in greater effort and persistence. Repeated student failures, on the other hand, will likely lower self-efficacy beliefs and decrease motivation and resilience (Guskey, 1988; Ross, 1998; Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

**Self-fulfilling prophecies.** The idea of self-efficacy as a self-fulfilling prophecy is an extension of Bandura's four sources of self-efficacy beliefs. In their model of teacher self-efficacy, Tschannen-Moran, Hoy, & Hoy (1998) depicted a cyclical process in which current self-efficacy beliefs contribute to the level of effort expended in the teaching task, which influences the success of the teaching performance; this in turn reinforces either high or low self-efficacy beliefs, creating a self-reinforcing cycle of success or failure. Teachers cognitively process information about their experience with the teaching task and assess the consequences. These assessments become new inputs of the four sources of self-efficacy information to repeat



the cycle. Once teacher self-efficacy beliefs are established, such beliefs may be resistant to change. Contextual factors such as interpersonal support from colleagues, parents, and members of the community, as well as the availability of resources, play a larger role in the self-efficacy beliefs of novice teachers, whose self-efficacy beliefs are still in flux than in those of career teachers whose self-efficacy beliefs have stabilized (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007). Teachers who begin their careers with strong self-efficacy beliefs tend to build upon the motivation and persistence that those beliefs foster, fueling continued strong self-efficacy beliefs. Conversely, teachers who begin with weak self-efficacy beliefs are likely to engage in reinforcing action of those self-defeating beliefs and to persist in these beliefs of incompetence as well. In this way, self-efficacy becomes both a product and a producer of experiences (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998).

### **Efficacy-bolstering English Language Arts Instructional Interventions**

The research on teacher self-efficacy in general, and on ELA teacher self-efficacy in particular, has significant implications for teacher preparation programs and professional development initiatives for ELA teachers. In addition to concentrating on content and pedagogical skill development, teacher preparation programs would do well to attend to cultivating the self-efficacy beliefs of preservice teachers so that they enter the field with a robust sense of their capabilities. This would mean structuring preparation programs with an eye to the sources of self-efficacy, such as abundant opportunities for the observation of teaching strategies by successful role models and the provision of specific, useful and encouraging feedback on early teaching experiences. The use of video for the purpose of self and peer reflection on teaching has been found to be helpful. Danielowich (2014) found that video-framed learning contexts in which facilitators used scaffolded prompting to “guide teachers’

thinking away from ‘anchors’ that are ‘securing’ their existing thinking” supported change-directed thinking with preservice teachers (p. 285). Moreover, when preservice teachers observed master teachers using best practice strategies in literacy instruction, they cultivated stronger self-efficacy beliefs for being able to implement these methods themselves that was maintained throughout student teaching (Johnson, 2010).

Because mastery experiences are such a powerful source of self-efficacy, it is important to carefully structure early teaching experiences to include gradually increasing levels of complexity and challenge in order to bolster a growing sense of proficiency. These experiences would likely result in greater self-efficacy than the traditional practice of a long period of academic preparation followed by a short, intense period of full-immersion into teaching which many novice teachers find daunting and discouraging. Finally, interpersonal support to find productive means to cope with the emotions attendant in beginning teaching would help support the fledgling self-efficacy beliefs of novice teachers.

An individual’s self-efficacy beliefs are affected by whether that individual believes that the abilities and strategies necessary for a certain task can or cannot be acquired through additional training (Bandura, 1993). Thus, preparation programs may seek to cultivate the conviction among their graduates that the skills they lack can be learned through professional development and practice. In exploring sources of teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs for literacy instruction (TSELI), Tschannen-Moran and Johnson (2011) found that TSELI was significantly related to teachers’ ratings of the perceived quality of university teacher preparation, ratings of the perceived quality of professional development, participation in a children’s literature course, participation in a teachers-as-readers group, as well as participation in a book club. TSELI was

unrelated to teacher characteristics such as the highest educational level achieved, years of teaching experience, and race.

All four sources of self-efficacy are likely to be at play during preservice preparation and professional development initiatives. A study of undergraduate preservice teachers found that although the preservice teachers came to their reading methods class with fairly high self-efficacy scores, they increased their self-efficacy as a result of increasing their knowledge and applying that knowledge in their practicum experiences (Shaw & Dvorak, 2007). The development of self-efficacy beliefs is not a linear progression, however, with new sources of self-efficacy adding to incremental gains in self-efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & McMaster, 2009). As teachers apply new learning, they may experience an “implementation dip” in self-efficacy as they begin to implement a change initiative (Ross, 1994; Stein & Wang, 1988; Hoy & Burke-Spero, 2005; Cantrell, Madden, Rintamaa, Almasi, & Carter, 2015). Self-efficacy beliefs tend to rebound for teachers who successfully implemented the new instructional practices, saw improvements in their students, and continued the process of change.

Meaningful professional development support is essential to ameliorating the implementation dip in self-efficacy beliefs common during the crucial early stages of change (Guskey, 1989; Joyce & Showers, 1988; Stein & Wang, 1988). Professional development programs that aim to support teachers’ ongoing utilization of new knowledge of effective practice need to develop a delivery system characterized by the provision of continued support and follow-up after initial training (Guskey, 1989; Stein & Wang, 1988). In examining the effect of various components of professional development models, Joyce and Showers (1988) found a jump in effect sizes when practice feedback was added to information, theory, and demonstration components within professional development programs. There was a further increase in effect

size when coaching to support the implementation was added. Additionally, in a quasi-experimental study, Tschannen-Moran and McMaster (2009) tested the potency of different sources of self-efficacy beliefs by structuring four professional development formats, presenting the same teaching strategy for beginning readers, with increasing levels of efficacy-relevant input. Results indicated that the professional development format that supported mastery experiences through follow-up coaching had the strongest effect on self-efficacy beliefs for reading instruction as well as for implementation of the new strategy. A substantial proportion of the teachers who participated in formats that included a demonstration with local students and a planning and practice session, but no follow-up coaching, experienced a decrease in their self-efficacy for reading instruction.

The implementation dip can be experienced at different points in career development. In a study that examined the efficacy development of experienced teachers learning to be literacy coaches over a four-year period, the coaches experienced a decrease in their sense of self-efficacy after their first year of participation but gained an increasing sense of competence as the project progressed (Cantrell, et al., 2015). The initial dip in efficacy was attributed to overwhelming and competing responsibilities, while their subsequent increases in efficacy were buoyed by personal growth and student learning.

Coaching is a particularly potent form of individualized professional development that can have a significant impact on teachers' self-efficacy beliefs (Tschannen-Moran & Tschannen-Moran, 2010). Literacy coaching has been found to be effective in improving teachers' literacy instruction. Using qualitative data, Ferguson (2014) found that when literacy coaching was implemented over a three-year period, principals, literacy coaches, and teachers across three elementary schools perceived improved teaching, growth in student achievement, an increase in

professional dialogue in a safe environment, and a commitment to the literacy coach. At the secondary level, Cantrell and Hughes (2008) found that coaching and collaboration were important factors in developing significant improvements in teachers' self-efficacy for content literacy instruction and in teachers' collective teaching efficacy. However, the type of coaching model implemented may play an important role on the impact of teacher efficacy. Shidler (2009) found that of particular importance was the time the coaches spent in the classroom and the specific attention to content and teaching methods. Shidler recommended balancing time between four components of effective coaching: (1) instructing for specific content, (2) modeling techniques and instructional practices, (3) observing teacher practices, and (4) consulting for reflection.

New forms of professional development are afforded through the use of technology. With the proliferation of digital technologies has come the emergence of e-learning in the form of online professional development. Masters programs, workshops, extended professional development, and coaching are all available through online models that often include interactive communication components such as online discussion forums and webcam applications. These models are easily accessible, more convenient, and often less expensive than face-to-face models. Most importantly, online professional development has been found to be effective in enhancing teachers' knowledge and instructional practices. In a study of a series of three online professional development workshops based on a learning-community model, the workshops were found to have had a significant effect on teachers' knowledge and instructional practices in vocabulary, reading comprehension, and writing instruction in the context of fourth grade ELA (Masters, DeKramer, O'Dwyer, Dash, & Russell, 2010). When comparing face-to-face and webcam coaching to improve instruction for struggling readers in another study, webcam

coaching was found to have greater teacher fidelity and efficacy (Vernon-Feagans, Bratsch-Hines, Varghese, Bean, & Hedrick, 2015). Moreover, preservice teachers who received web-based peer feedback on the use of analytic criteria to assess student writing showed significantly greater self-efficacy for using the analytic approach and assessing writing (Dempsey, PytlikZilling, Bruning, 2009).

Although online professional development provides teachers with convenience and accessibility not afforded by face-to-face options, virtual participation requires a level of discipline and motivation not required of physical participation. When first-year, alternatively certified teachers were given the opportunity to engage an online e-coaching component of professional development, those teachers attending six or more sessions reported significant gains in self-efficacy, whereas those who attended five or fewer sessions did not. It may be that policies, incentives, and additional time would encourage participation in e-coaching or other online professional development (Anthony, Gimbert, & Fultz, 2013).

### **Dilemmas and Tensions in ELA Teacher Self-efficacy Research**

Although there is a strong research base on the positive effects of teachers self-efficacy, the study of this construct is not without its dilemmas and tensions. In a challenge to the view that “more is better” when it comes to self-efficacy beliefs, Wheatley (2002) proposed that doubts about one’s efficacy can be beneficial in that uncertainty or doubt is crucial for the teacher reflection that leads to new insights. Wheatley challenged Bandura’s (1997) claim that it is difficult for a person to achieve while fighting self-doubt, proposing instead that teachers would lack the motivation to learn and improve without experiencing doubts about their effectiveness. This disequilibrium and uncertainty may come about from a challenge to teachers’ beliefs about their existing practices. Wheatley suggested that factors such as follow-up

coaching might moderate the debilitating influence that self-efficacy doubts may have on teachers, resulting in improved practice. Gregoire (2003) proposed a model of teacher conceptual change that explicates the mechanisms through which teachers' self efficacy mediates their response to change initiatives. This model suggests that when presented with an instructional reform initiative, they will deem it as either a threat or a challenge based on whether they perceive their practices to be implicated as in need of revision and their perceptions of the resources they have available. Teachers who believe that they are already implementing the reform will assess that they are not implicated in the proposed changes and will process the new content only superficially. Teachers who do feel implicated by the proposed reforms will experience stress and discomfort. Those with low self-efficacy are predicted to respond to the reform initiative as a threat, leading to an avoidance intention and superficial belief change. On the other hand, teachers with high self-efficacy who perceive that they have the resources, time, and support necessary to implement the proposed changes would likely interpret the reform as a challenge and consequently engage in more systematic (and thus effortful) processing of the information presented. If, after careful study, they are persuaded of the veracity of the information presented, they will engage in conceptual change and the resulting changes in practice.

An ongoing puzzle associated with teacher self-efficacy is the accuracy of their self-assessments in terms of external standards of knowledge and skills. Few studies have tackled this issue, but there is evidence that teachers' calibration of the level of their content knowledge is not especially accurate, as they tend to overestimate their knowledge and skills. In a study where researchers asked primary teachers to assess their level of content knowledge of phonics, they found that teachers tended to overestimate their knowledge and skills (Cunningham, Perry,

Stanovich, & Stanovich, 2004). This overestimation of skill level may negatively affect self-efficacy beliefs in the face of evidence that personal knowledge and skills were not as strong as originally believed. Bandura (1997) suggested that a slight overestimation of skills may be beneficial in that it may lead to greater effort and persistence than a lower self-assessment might yield. On the other hand, grossly overestimating one's level of skill may lead to placing the blame for a lack of progress on students or to disengagement from appropriate professional development opportunities. Discerning the most effective means for estimating one's teaching skill is an ongoing dilemma in self-efficacy research and practice.

### **Future Directions for Self-Efficacy Research and ELA Practice**

Although the field has benefited from a robust research base on the self-efficacy of ELA teachers, more needs to be done. Research that examines the role of doubt in the effectiveness of one's professional practice and its relationship to motivation would be useful. In addition, studies that examined the accuracy of teachers' self-assessments of their teaching abilities might shed light on the role of feedback and reflection in fostering teacher growth. One approach in this regard is that several researchers have made use of observers' performance ratings of teachers in relation to self-report data of efficacy beliefs (Saklofske, Michaluk, & Randhawa, 1988; Trentham, Silvern, & Brogdon, 1985). More studies of this kind would be useful.

Although there is a robust research base that ties teacher and student writing experiences to their self-efficacy, more research on interventions targeted at specific dimensions of the writing processes would be useful. Furthermore, we found few studies on teachers' self-efficacy for reading instruction, and this would seem to be particularly relevant as middle and high school teachers are being expected to be prepared to assist their students who experience reading difficulties to access their content areas. No studies at all were found that examined teacher self-



efficacy in relation to the teaching of speaking and visual representations. These would be promising new areas for research.

The impact of technology on students' literacy learning and teachers' efficacy beliefs is also an important direction for future research. Technology can deepen many important aspects of literacy for children in ways not afforded by traditional print. Professional development in technology integration is effective in increasing teachers' self-efficacy for technology integration, yet many school divisions have not met the demand. Online on-demand professional development is becoming increasingly available and may be a valid option. Similarly, literacy coaching has been found to positively affect teachers' self-efficacy for literacy instruction, but the time and expense of preparing and hiring literacy coaches is prohibitive for many school districts. Opportunities for virtual coaching that meets teachers' individual needs may be an affordable option. Future research should focus on the impact of these opportunities for professional development as they become increasingly available on-demand and via mobile devices.

### **Conclusion**

Self-efficacy, the belief in one's abilities to accomplish desired outcomes, powerfully affects people's behavior, motivation, and ultimately, their success or failure (Bandura, 1997). With low self-efficacy, people tend not to expend effort in endeavors they perceive will be futile. Teachers with high self-efficacy tend to devote more classroom time to academic activities, provide all students with the guidance needed to succeed, and affirm academic accomplishments of students. In contrast, teachers with low self-efficacy tend to spend more time on nonacademic pastimes, readily give up on students who exhibit teaching challenges, and criticize students for performance failures (Ashton & Webb, 1986). There is potential for substantial growth if

districts will plan curricular change with the self-efficacy of teachers in mind (Pajares, 1996).

Teacher preparation programs and ongoing professional development for practicing teachers that take seriously the impact of teacher self-efficacy will incorporate demonstrations, feedback, coaching, and monitoring of student progress. In addition to improved instruction, the results are likely to be greater effort and persistence, and a reduction in teacher turnover in the field.

Bolstering the self-efficacy of ELA teachers is likely to contribute to their motivation in pursuit of the goal to develop proficient connoisseurs of the English language.

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