Breaking the negative cycle:
The formation of self-efficacy beliefs in the arts. A focus on professional experience in pre-service teacher education

Susanne Garvis
Danielle Twigg
Donna Pendergast
Griffith University

ACCORDING TO THE NATIONAL Education and the Arts Statement (Ministerial Council on Education, Employment, Training and Youth Affairs, 2007), all children and young people should have a high-quality arts education. To achieve this teachers require a high level of skill and training, and the belief that they are self-efficacious in the teaching of arts education (Andrews, 2004). This points to the role of pre-service teacher education to develop the capability to teach arts education. This study utilises Bandura's (1997) model of self-efficacy beliefs. Novice early childhood teachers were invited to reflect on their professional practice experience during pre-service teacher education to provide insights into how this has contributed to the formation of their self-efficacy beliefs in the arts. Findings confirm that novice teachers develop beliefs about arts education during professional experience that shape their future beliefs towards teaching arts in the early years. These beliefs are likely to be negative, thereby contributing to the formation of negative emotional association and low self-efficacy beliefs for teaching arts. Furthermore, three main themes emerged from the data about the impact of professional experience: 1) supervising teacher practice (vicarious experience); 2) supervising teacher feedback (verbal persuasion); and 3) the profile of arts as a subject experienced by the respondent (vicarious experience). The implications of these findings are considered in terms of pre-service teacher education and ongoing professional learning for teachers.

Introduction

In Queensland, Australia, the arts is a compulsory learning area in the curriculum comprised of five areas of application: dance, drama, music, media and visual arts. According to the *National Education and the Arts Statement* (Ministerial Council for Education, Employment and Youth Affairs (MCEETYA), 2007), all children and young people, irrespective of their location, socio economic status or ability should have equal opportunities to participate in arts-rich schooling systems (MCEETYA, 2007).

Early childhood teachers are responsible for the delivery of integrated arts education as part of the core curriculum in the early years and hence pre-service teacher education has an important role in preparing graduates to teach in this learning area. In pre-service education programs it is expected that early childhood teachers gain skills and capabilities to teach the arts. Insufficient teacher training in music and the arts is

known to impact negatively on teacher perceptions of their confidence and competence to teach their curriculum areas (Bartel, Cameron, Wiggins & Wiggins, 2004). The teaching of the arts is also influenced by life experience, personal experience and perceptions of confidence (Robinson, 2001).

Recent national inquiries have reported that the standard of arts teaching in Australia is inadequate (Department of Education, Science and Training (DEST), 2005; DEST, 2008). In 2005, the *National Review of School Music Education* (DEST, 2005) raised a number of questions in relation to the preparation generalist teachers received in music during pre-service teacher education. The review highlighted a decline in the number of hours allocated for generalist primary pre-service education courses (Pascoe et al., 2005) noting that pre-service teachers did not have adequate time to enhance their teaching skills in music. Similar findings were revealed in *First We See: The National Review of Visual Education*, highlighting the decline of visual art education in

teacher education (Department of Education, Science and Training, 2008). Together these reviews highlight the decline in status and support for music and visual arts that is typical of most teacher education programs. The reports call for improvement in pre-service teacher training and for ongoing professional learning.

Theoretical context

Self-efficacy is defined as 'beliefs in one's capabilities to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments' (Bandura, 1997, p. 3). The construct of teacher self-efficacy is grounded within self-efficacy theory, emphasising that people can exercise influence over what they do (Bandura, 2006). A teacher's beliefs system about the arts will therefore determine the quality of arts education in the classroom. Teacher self-efficacy beliefs for arts education are created through social influences and feedback, particularly from those deemed to be significant and respected (Bandura, 1997). In the case of pre-service teacher education, this might be the teachers that serve as mentors to pre-service teachers during professional practice. Self-efficacy develops over time and through personal and vicarious experiences (Bandura, 1997). Beliefs are created through decisions influencing actions, attitudes, emotions and thoughts. Thus, self-efficacy acts as a motivational construct, determining the actual amount of effort that an individual will bring to the task of teaching as they assess their ability to perform the teaching task successfully (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001).

Self-efficacy is important for perseverance. In education, for example, teacher self-efficacy has been related to a number of desirable teacher practices, including: greater commitment to teaching (Coladarci, 1992); greater levels of planning and organisation (Allinder, 1994); decreased teacher burnout (Browuers & Tomic, 2000); and utilisation of a wider variety of teaching material with the desire to search for a new teaching formulae and the use of innovative teaching methods (Ghaith & Yaghi, 1997; Wertheim & Leyser, 2002). However, in a recent study by Garvis and Pendergast (2010) which investigated early childhood teacher self-efficacy beliefs with respect to teaching arts education, it was revealed that on a 9 point Likert scale respondents had highest self-efficacy to teach English (6.81) and maths (6.81), followed by a large gap to visual arts (4.86), music (4.39), dance (4.21) and drama (4.19) and media (3.98). This reveals that early years teachers did not have a high self-efficacy belief in the area of teaching the arts.

In an interview with Woolfolk Hoy, Shaughnessy (2004) notes that if teachers seek to help students increase their academic and self-regulatory self-efficacy, they should first attend to the sources underlying their own beliefs. Teacher self-efficacy beliefs are influenced by four sources: 1) mastery experiences; 2) vicarious experiences (modelling); 3) verbal persuasion; and 4) emotional arousal (Bandura, 1997). These may happen simultaneously or in isolation. Mastery experience is considered to be the strongest source to develop self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). When an experience (or performance) is perceived to be successful, self-efficacy is raised. When the performance is perceived to be a failure, self-efficacy beliefs are lowered. The level of emotional arousal (either excitement or anxiety), adds to the feelings of mastering a task. Vicarious experiences are associated with the modelling of a task. If the observer can identify the skills needed to complete the task, teacher self-efficacy can be enhanced. The final source, verbal persuasion, consists of discussions around the task being performed. The potency of verbal persuasion depends on the credibility, trustworthiness and expertise of the persuader (Bandura, 1997).

In arts education, previous research has explored the influence of specific knowledge and skills on teacher self-efficacy. Research by Temmerman (1997) and Bartel & Cameron (2002) for example shows that a perceived lack of competency to teach the specific knowledge and skills required in music is a significant internal factor affecting teachers' perceptions of their musical ability. Furthermore, in a comparison between one New Zealand and one Canadian generalist teacher, self-efficacy towards music, levels of competency and self-efficacy clearly influenced curriculum (Bartel et al., 2004), with few teachers able to show an understanding of students' musical thinking. These two teachers were also unable to make judgements 'about the value or importance of the consequences of an action for the arts' (Bartel et al., 2004, p. 88). These results suggest teacher self-efficacy strongly influences the way arts education is taught in classrooms.

This study contributes to gaining some understanding of the role of professional practice during pre-service teacher education in developing teacher self-efficacy beliefs that contribute to forming the capabilities of novice teachers. In particular, we look at the influence of supervising teachers as sources of arts education self-efficacy informants on the beliefs of beginning early childhood teachers.

Focus of the study

This study focuses on sources of arts education self-efficacy information received by pre-service teachers during their professional experience and how these sources of self-efficacy information have influenced their own arts education practices as novice teachers. This study focuses on the following two questions:

1. What sources of arts education self-efficacy information do novice teachers report from their pre-service professional experience?
2. How are these sources of self-efficacy information likely to influence their arts education practices as novice teachers?

The participants

For purposes of this study, novice teachers are defined as teachers in the first three years of their career since graduating from a teacher education institution. Using convenience sampling, novice teachers working in early childhood education from both private and public schools in Queensland, Australia were invited to complete a questionnaire on teacher self-efficacy in relation to arts education. Participants answered a 'call for participants email' sent though the Beginning Teachers Association to all early childhood beginning teachers. Participants were current members of this organisation and still within the first three years since graduation. Participants represented different schools regions across the state of Queensland. Twenty-one out of 60 questionnaires were returned from participants providing a response rate of 35%. The sample is non-representative and non-generalisable.

Instrument

The online survey consisted of 10 open questions designed to elicit descriptions of novice teacher's experiences with arts education as part of the professional experience component of their teacher education program. During this time, the then pre-service teachers were supervised by teacher(s) with a minimum of three years teaching experience, as required by the professional experience guidelines. Participants were asked to rank their recalled experience during this time period as having a positive or negative valence. The use of valence reveals the emotional value attributed to the professional experience, directly connecting with emotional arousal identified by Bandura (1997) as contributing to the formation of self-efficacy beliefs.

Participants were assured that the survey was anonymous. They were sent an online survey to complete that did not ask for any identifying characteristics. Participants could complete the survey outside of school hours.

Analysis

Results were analysed using content analysis to locate key themes that were common across novice early childhood teacher's perceived experiences of professional experience during teacher education. Content analysis is 'a research technique for making replicable and valid inferences from texts to the context of their use' (Krippendorff, 2004, p. 18). An adapted version of Cavana, Delahaye and Sekaran's (2001, p. 171) 15 stages of content analysis (based within the constant comparative method) was used as a guide to identify key themes and meanings. Coding for 'manifest content' (Wallen & Fraenkel, 2001) was used, acknowledging what was directly written in the online survey rather than what might be implied or interpreted.

Findings

The respondent novice early childhood educators almost exclusively recounted negative valence experiences that had occurred during the professional experience component of their pre-service teacher education program. These experiences were shaped by either supervising teacher practices (a form of modelling), or supervising teacher feedback (verbal persuasion). The respondents also talked about the tensions they saw between the arts and other subjects, showing links to vicarious experience and emotional arousal (contextual influences). Tensions were shown by supervising teachers, with the curriculum being overcrowded and a greater focus placed on the teaching of literacy and numeracy. This appeared to create negative teacher self-efficacy beliefs for teachers about the arts in school.

Three main themes emerged from the content analysis:

1. Supervising teacher practice (vicarious experience).
2. Supervising teacher feedback (verbal persuasion).
3. The profile of arts as a subject experienced by the respondent (vicarious experience).

Each theme is now discussed.

Supervising teacher practice

The first theme confirmed vicarious experience as a source of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Vicarious experiences (also known as modelling) allow participants to personally experience arts education teaching practices. However, experiences recounted by respondents typically revealed a lack of mastery experience by their supervising teachers, that is, the supervising teachers did not model suitable arts education practice to the pre-service teacher leading instead to negative valence vicarious experiences rather than the desirable positive vicarious experience.

One novice early childhood teacher recounted a negative experience she had during a professional experience with a supervising teacher in a kindergarten. She felt disheartened that arts practices were not being modelled within this particular setting:

[O]ne of the saddest moments of my practical teaching was when I was studying my Grad (sic) Diploma and I was at a well-regarded kindergarten. I was there for two weeks and basically the same activities were set out. I questioned the director as to why some children were not getting involved in the art activities and she told me that 'this lot are not very creative!' This went against all my beliefs about early childhood education and I felt very sorry for those children. (Beginning Teacher, B)

Another novice teacher also commented on the lack of quality arts education she experienced during her professional experience:

I did little arts work on practical experience. If I did it was art and the activities were always related to the unit I was teaching at the time. Very restricted though. (Beginning Teacher, A)

The absence of arts education was reportedly common amongst the novice early childhood teachers who completed the survey. Thirteen respondents (62%) recalled that they had not seen any form of arts education in the early years during their professional experience:

I never saw it used on any teaching prac (sic). (Beginning Teacher, C)

Many of my prac (sic) teachers did not do the arts. (Beginning Teacher, J)

These findings reveal that the respondents did not experience positive valence modelling during teacher professional practice components of their pre-service teacher education that would lead to positive teacher self-efficacy for their future teaching of the arts. Without adequate opportunities for positive vicarious experiences, pre-service teachers may need to draw on other sources of efficacy to develop perceived capabilities towards teaching the arts.

Supervising teacher feedback

Some respondents recounted hearing negative comments (negative verbal persuasion) from their supervising teacher with respect to the teaching of arts education. The respondents who described these experiences concluded that the teacher did not value the arts, which influenced the beginning teacher's values in relation to the teaching of the arts in early childhood classrooms. For example, one novice teacher described a negative experience with a Year 1/2 classroom teacher:

On my first prac (sic) at a public state school I was involved in art groups that consisted of all of things that I had avoided in my work in early childhood centres. Stencilled outlines of horses that children had to collage over, bubble blowing painting …

where was the freedom of expression in that? When doing a maths lesson in subtraction for a Year 1 and 2 composite class I sang ten green bottles with the class. The children sang along happily but my supervising teacher told me to keep the noise down so as not to disturb the children next door. (Beginning Teacher, F)

Another respondent described the negativity from their mentor teacher when they incorporated arts in their lessons:

My teacher thought the arts weren't as important. When I started teaching them, I got in trouble. (Beginning Teacher, I)

Verbal persuasion appears to influence the self-efficacy of the participants during their professional practice experience. The verbal feedback of supervising mentor teachers appeared to shape current understandings about the arts in the early years classroom.

The profile of arts as a subject

Typically, early childhood teachers do not have formal training in the arts (Eisner, 1988; Eisner & Day, 2004) in pre-service education programs, but are encouraged to 'integrate' arts into the core curricular areas. Respondents in this study provided recounts of the place of arts in the curriculum during their professional practice experience while enrolled as pre-service teachers. The now novice teachers suggested that this lack of exposure to the arts as part of the curriculum impacted upon their current beliefs and may potentially have an impact on their future practice. One respondent suggested that some teachers de-intellectualised the arts, making it a 'fun' subject:

Many teachers allow students to develop this 'bludge' mentality by not valuing the arts themselves. It is a difficult battle to reform students' opinions. (Beginning Teacher, L)

One respondent recounted poor pre-service teacher education leading to inadequate teaching of the arts in schools. Subsequently, the teacher suggested generalist teachers only teach certain subject areas:

I don't think teachers that have been around a long time see the benefit of it or have the training or ability to implement it. They just teach reading, writing and maths. (Beginning Teacher, M)

The portrayal of the arts would lead the supervising teacher to model the teaching of the arts with certain characteristics. The pre-service teacher would see this negative modelling and may also start to develop negative beliefs about the arts.

Discussion

The recounts from the 21 respondents of this study reveal that most experienced negative valence professional practice of arts education during their pre-service teacher education program of study. These experiences were based on professional experience in classrooms under the guidance of mentor supervising teachers during pre-service teacher education programs. Participants recounted the negativity towards the arts while on practical experience and experiences during this time are confirmed as developing teacher self-efficacy beliefs. The study also reveals that arts education in the classrooms in which these respondents, as students, undertook their professional learning, did not incorporate arts in a positive way.

These findings provide an interesting starting point for analysis in the investigation of the beliefs of novice early childhood teachers on their pre-service teacher education. It appears that supervising teacher practices, supervising teacher feedback and the profile of the arts as a subject contribute to a teacher's self-efficacy. The previous discussion, which focuses on beginning early childhood teachers' perceptions of their arts education experiences in their pre-service teacher education professional experience, provides an interesting insight into sources of self-efficacy information about the teaching of arts education.

Without positive experiences created through Bandura's (1997) proposed sources for developing efficacy (mastery experience, vicarious experience, verbal persuasion and emotional arousal), novice early childhood teachers may feel they have little capability when teaching the arts in their own classroom. In the long-term, these experiences may contribute to lower teacher self-efficacy for the arts, creating a cyclical problem of failure for arts education in early childhood.

From this study, a major concern of teacher educators appears to be helping pre-service teachers understand the importance of arts education in the early years and to critique experiences while on professional practice experience. Based on the data collected, it appears that respondents remember the negative events with arts education. This could suggest that since these events were remembered, they are held as possible sources of efficacy for the beginning teacher.

From this research, two issues are raised: (1) teacher education and (2) professional development. Firstly, how do universities control how supervising teachers demonstrate quality arts education practices? If a mentor supervising teacher's self-efficacy for the arts is low, how can they be equipped to model and critique suitable arts practice in the classroom? Their lack of teaching in the arts will affect the beginning teacher they are supervising, possibly creating low teacher self-efficacy for the novice teacher in a continual cycle of failure. As Bandura (1997) suggests, giving teachers a sense of efficacy is critical if they are going to even attempt the task.

The second issue raised is ensuring professional development opportunities in arts education for early childhood teachers. To improve teacher self-efficacy for the arts in early childhood, greater support for teachers in the field is needed. Support is required in the form of professional development for early childhood teachers who are working in schools and early childhood centres. Through ongoing professional development, early childhood teachers can begin to value the arts in their decisions about implementing curriculum.

In conclusion, current practices in arts education courses in early childhood teacher education programs must be reviewed if teachers are expected to learn skills that they can use in the classroom. Closer links must be made with mentor supervising teachers. This study points ot the need for further research in arts education in the early years. For example, what are the current influences on teacher self-efficacy for early childhood teachers in schools? Can professional development and community involvement improve arts education in schools? Can a generalist teacher have strong teacher self-efficacy beliefs for all key learning areas? Such research would provide teacher educators, and schools, as well as policy-makers, with evidence of crucial periods in time where novice early childhood teachers require greater support. This would allow teacher self-efficacy for arts education to be supported throughout the beginning phase of teaching, when self-efficacy beliefs are developed and often consolidated for the future teaching of the individual educator.

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