

DID YOU SAY... SENSE OF SELF-EFFICACY?

How to develop it as a new teacher

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A DEFINITION

The sense of self-efficacy (SSE), or feeling of self-efficacy, is the ensemble of judgments and beliefs that people have regarding their competencies, resources, and ability to successfully complete a particular task or achieve a performance (Bandura, 1986). It refers only to the representation which they have of it, not the true competency of individuals. Accordingly, people with identical levels of competency may achieve different performances when accomplishing a similar task, due to variations in how they see their own efficacy.

According to Bandura, individuals' SSE is the most determining influential factor governing human actions: influencing the way people feel, think, motivate themselves, and behave. Therefore, SSE has an impact on the choice of activities taken on, the environment we evolve in, the amount of effort expended towards activities, our perseverance in completing them, and the types of thoughts and emotions experienced when faced with a difficult situation. In brief, personal SSE has a direct influence on how activities are performed by individuals.

WHAT IS IT USED FOR?

Since individuals' SSE is closely related to their motivation and performance, it makes it a prime concept to examine further when studying the teaching profession. In fact, according to scholarly literature, teachers who have a greater SSE, not only demonstrate higher levels of motivation, engagement, and well-being in their jobs, but also have a tendency to perform better when faced with difficult or problem situations. They make better choices when selecting activities that are a challenge to achieve with their students, take more risks, manage their efforts more efficiently, and deal with anxiety-inducing and stressful situations more skillfully. Therefore, we all should have an interest in properly understanding the mechanisms that foster an increase in teachers' beliefs in their own efficacy and strategies that allow them to maintain those beliefs!

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HOW ABOUT IF WE EXPLAINED IT IN SIMPLE TERMS...

An individual's SSE can be modulated by four sources: previous experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological states (Bandura, 1977). Here is an example that shows how these sources can operate on one's SSE.

Jodie, a new vocational education teacher in the Protection and development of wildlife habitats programme, feels that she is good at motivating her students, through her personal energy and her repartee. What's more, with respect to the sources of her SSE, she is convinced that she is a good teacher because:

- she has many years' experience as a wildlife officer and she has completed numerous courses in education (previous experiences);
- she has had the opportunity to observe her colleague, Maria, who has a similar background to hers, and see that she has achieved a certain level of success in teaching. So, she feels that she will be a successful teacher as well (vicarious experiences);
- she has received positive comments from students about her teaching as well as praise from an academic adviser regarding the work she has done at her vocational training centre (VTC) (verbal persuasions);
- she has a good feeling when she is teaching, which she finds to be a stimulating type of stress and a reason to believe that she was meant to be a teacher (physiological states).

In summary, Jodie has an elevated SSE in her role as a teacher because she feels that her competencies, her personal abilities, and her resources allow her to successfully complete her professional teaching tasks.

WHAT IF I WANTED TO INTEGRATE IT INTO MY PRACTICE...

How can teachers develop their SSE? Here are four strategies that were based on interviews with vocational education teachers:

Mobilizing Resources: Several strategies for developing one's SSE involve the capacity to mobilize the available resources. For many new teachers, seeking out support from their teaching colleagues was found to be a strategy that had a considerable effect on their SSE. Some sought out other teachers in order to get their advice and feedback regarding various aspects of their teaching practice. Others asked colleagues to observe them teaching so they could benefit from their feedback. Other teachers mentioned the importance of seeking out various resource people at their vocational training centre, whether it be an academic advisor, members of management, a special education teacher, a social worker or even the support staff. Other ways include learning from the experience of more accomplished colleagues through observation to get a dose of inspiration on a daily basis, or at specific times. Lastly, teachers mentioned that mobilizing their former professional network allowed them to get timely support from "experts in the field" when they have more specific questions, such as when they want to find out about specific equipment used in industry or current standards that are used in the field.

Professional Development: Teachers also spoke about the importance of ensuring their ongoing proficiency training, on the educational and disciplinary levels. Thus, training and self-directed training allow some to remain close to the trade taught and to keep their knowledge up to date. For others, being part of strategic groups that allowed them to "keep a finger on the pulse of the trade", such as being a member on the board of directors of a company or trade association, was a successful strategy. Additionally, keeping abreast of changes and new things in their field of expertise allowed them to provide better service to their students, notably by guaranteeing quality training and by putting potential employers and graduating students in contact with each other.

Teaching Duties: Several of the strategies used refer directly to actions (initiatives, interventions, habits) implemented in their teaching. For many, efficacy is closely related to the time invested preparing and planning their classes. This planning period allows to anticipate difficulties or unexpected events they may encounter, and to think up solutions before teaching. It is also a method of ensuring good flow and continuity of the teaching-learning process. The frequent use of formative evaluations is also a successful strategy. In addition to validating the efficacy of the teaching and learning methods used, it enables one to obtain crucial information about the students' needs, thereby orienting future teaching actions, eliminating wasted time, and facilitating the planning of upcoming teaching. Lastly, establishing and maintaining good relationships with students is a strategy which allows teachers to find out more about their learners. They are therefore better able to guide them, to understand their challenges, and to give them the help and support they need.

Attitudes and Well-Being: Many teachers strive to adopt positive attitudes or behaviours related to their well-being, with the goal of being more efficient in their professional lives. Some expressed the importance of approaching their tasks with a positive attitude. Getting involved, helping out, and contributing to the life of their vocational training centre is another suggested strategy. Involvement allows them to feel useful, valued, and important, which for some represents a measure of their efficacy. For others, giving 100% in their work every day was a way of feeling highly efficient; in addition to having the satisfaction of always giving their best, they also optimize the use of their time spent at work. Others' efficacy at work depends on their well-being outside of their work life. To that effect, some teachers mention that practicing a sport or having a hobby they particularly enjoy has a positive effect on their efficacy at work, by allowing them to sustain a sufficient level of energy to teach and to maintain a proper balance between their personal and professional lives.

TO FIND OUT MORE

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