Chapter 15

Realizing Their Potential, Shaping Their Greatness: Using Self-Efficacy in a Graduate Reading Program to Shape K–6 Student Success

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ABSTRACT

Research literature in public education often categorizes self-efficacy in order for practitioners of K-12 academic settings to understand how to relate to students. They often view self-efficacy in students’ perception, intrinsic motivation and behavior in academic settings. This chapter utilizes the research literature from public education as a bridge to discover the importance of self-actualization of efficacy in developing reading specialists. Too often, students in public education who have been referred to a reading specialist due to struggles with reading, low academic performance or a high dropout risk are missing a level of self-efficacy. In that same context, the authors in this study looked to a specific program which prepares teachers of those students and incorporated rigorous self-efficacy scales to inform and shape practice. This chapter asserts that teachers are paramount in the successful development of an at-risk learner. This chapter provides empirical research centered around two core programs, undergraduate and graduate with specialization in urban education and reading.

INTRODUCTION

Self-efficacy, effective learning skills and resilience in retention and student success are critical as a focus for higher education institutions and specialized programs. Bandura (1977) informs us that self-efficacy relies heavily on one’s own belief about themselves and how to truly walk in your own belief toward personal attainment. This chapter highlights a regional state university’s graduate and undergraduate reading program and identifies the use of self-efficacy to develop and inform pedagogical practices. Within this graduate program, the candidates are serving in public schools in an instructional capacity. The graduate coursework and design centers around preparation for reading specialists and enhanced reading pedagogy for high need learners. The demographic region is closely tied to rural, urban and high poverty K-12 student populations. Moreover, the demographic region includes many underfunded schools and many marginalized and overlooked students.

In this chapter, we classify students as those in the K-12 public and private education system. The term pre-service teacher candidate or reading candidate is used when referring to undergraduate and graduate students within our program. While this chapter focuses mainly on graduate students, we feel it is necessary to highlight the researchers bridge the undergraduate teacher preparation in conjunction with the goals and outcomes that are desired for all students in the program. The goal of this chapter is to delineate an approach to using self-efficacy with graduate and undergraduate students who are studying to be reading specialists. The goal is to so help them understand themselves and their own beliefs prior to shaping and cultivating knowledge in public school classrooms.

The coursework and design of the program center on preparing future teachers and master educators in specialized reading areas. The experiences shared come from the collective work to build self-efficacy in future teachers and the efforts to understand the role teachers’ play in the outcomes of K-6th grade students. The research emphasis is twofold. Primarily, the research addresses the notion of teacher preparation in reading which is critical to students served in the elementary school setting. Secondly, the research extends the role of teacher preparation to address the needs of the K-12 students they will serve. By teaching self-efficacy through reflection, our undergraduate and graduate reading program candidates will be more likely to have positive and impactful interactions with their students. They will also be less prone to making assumptions and generalizations, having implicit biases, and to making negative judgments about their students.

BACKGROUND: OUR STUDENTS, OUR STORY

The University. The heritage of our institution was founded on the premise of providing equal education for women regardless of their race or class. We began as a female seminary, with roots stemming from a rich and deep Cherokee tribal tradition. Our institution has provided public education in northeastern Oklahoma since 1909. Our historical accounts trace back to the 1800’s when women traditionally were not formally educated. The institutional historian, Dr. Brad Agnew, shares this history in his book, Roots of the Cherokee. The institution records the history on the webpage in the following account:

In 1846, Norland State University was founded as the Cherokee National Female Seminary. This historic link to the Cherokee Nation and Indian Territory make Norland the oldest institution of higher learning in the state. The original Seminary was built in Park Hill south of Tahlequah and destroyed by fire on