Chapter 3
How Mentorship, Critical Thinking, and Self-Efficacy Impact Pre-Service Teachers and Teacher Educators in P-12 and Higher Education

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ABSTRACT
This chapter researches the impact of mentorship, critical thinking, and self-efficacy and each of their influences on pre-service teachers and teacher educators in both the P-12 system and in higher education. This work delves into why each of those aspects—having a mentor, understanding critical thinking and its various strategies, and focusing on having a high level of self-efficacy and teacher efficacy—are critical for a successful educator in both a school district and a university setting.

INTRODUCTION
No matter who the educator is, no matter what subject one teaches, and no matter how long they have studied their field of expertise, almost every teacher has a few things in common. First, they each tend to be lifelong learners with a love for understanding and discovering new things. Second, an instructor’s number one goal is almost always to help students succeed and to help students better themselves, whether it is by understanding calculus or learning how to properly frost a cake. And lastly, the educator’s love for learning means they never truly stop being in school, whether it is as the student or as the teacher.

However, knowledge and learning come in a multitude of forms, well beyond the necessary courses and diplomas that line the curriculum vitae of a P-12 teacher or of a faculty member at a four-year university. Knowledge and learning do come from the classes and degrees earned by the teacher, but
they also come from having experience with teaching, through mentorship from a more experienced instructor, from reading books on the subject such as this one, by understanding critical thinking, and via self-efficacy and its sub-branch of teacher efficacy. These aspects of becoming a better teacher and one who can help create greater student success in the classroom are the reasons educators go into the field of academia and strive to never stop learning, whether it is from a mentor teacher, from research read in a book or discovered at a conference, or discussed via colleagues both in and out of the office.

This work delves into a deeper understanding of pre-service teachers and teacher educators, as well as their needs for mentorship, critical thinking strategies, and the impact self-efficacy has on their pedagogical and andragogical practices. Whether it is learning how to teach as a pre-service teacher who is wrapping up his or her teaching credential program, a doctoral candidate or novice professor just beginning to dip his or her toe in higher education, or it is as an experienced teacher who has now chosen to educate other teachers on how to teach as a teacher educator or mentor, the literature on mentorship proves how invaluable it is for all educators to have someone who can guide them on becoming a more successful and stronger teacher. Similarly, the literature discussed in this chapter highlights the importance of critical thinking and understanding critical thinking strategies to improve one’s pedagogical practices, as well as the need for a strong sense of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy, which stems from Bandura’s (1986) social cognitive theory, studies the educational psychology of one’s belief in his or her ability to succeed at a particular task influencing one’s actual success at the said task. Thus, self-efficacy is based on the idea that one who has the belief that he or she can succeed is far more likely to succeed at the given task, while one who has the belief that he or she cannot or will not succeed at the said task is far more likely to prove themselves correct and not succeed. In fact, according to Ryan (2016), in “Is Writing a Perception Problem? Self-Efficacy and Student Success in First-Year Composition,” research on self-efficacy and student success in an introductory college composition course showed statistical significance between the variables of a student’s self-apprehensiveness, a student’s self-assessed level of preparation for college level English, and a student’s perception of his or her prior composition teacher’s effectiveness. This chapter goes past the idea of the teacher’s belief in their ability to be successful, but also to the research of teacher efficacy, which studies how the teacher’s own belief in his or her student’s success can influence the student’s actual success in either a positive or negative manner. Thus, teacher efficacy shows the influence the instructor has on the student’s success. By better understanding this concept of self-efficacy, teacher efficacy, and each of their impact on student success, the educator is better prepared to help their student – be it a student in P-12, higher education, a student teacher, or a novice professor – be the most successful they can be.

MENTORSHIP

Mentorship: we have all heard about it and we have likely had a discussion about it at some point in our lives. In nearly every field, people talk about the need for finding a mentor: someone who has experience in the subject, area, or field he or she is interested in, and has already been where the newcomer currently is and thus oftentimes has wisdom or advice to share. Mentorship is often identified as a critical aspect for success in any field. In fact, Fletcher and Mullen (2012) discuss in The SAGE Handbook of Mentoring and Coaching in Education that “the purposes and uses of mentoring have greatly shifted in the currently policy context. Mandated mentoring and voluntary mentoring each have merits and valuable goals and, where thoughtfully facilitated, can even be implemented simultaneously” (p. 12).
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