


The Pedagogical Beliefs of Pre-Service and In-Service Teachers: Professional Role and Teaching Personality

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ABSTRACT

The Teacher Self Inventory is an instrument for measuring aspects of teachers' beliefs and self-perceptions. Using this instrument, the perceptions and beliefs of elementary classroom teachers and pre-service (undergraduate) teachers were assessed. In addition, semi-structured interviews were conducted with volunteers from both the in-service and pre-service groups. The main goal of this mixed-methods study was to explore various dimensions of teachers' beliefs and also to compare practicing (in-service) elementary classroom teachers' responses and reflections to those of pre-service teachers. The results indicate several trends in teacher beliefs and several points of comparison between in-service teachers and pre-service teachers. A discussion concludes with implications for teaching and suggestions for further research.

KEYWORDS

Professional Development, Professional Identity, Teacher Authority, Teacher Cognition, Teacher Personality, Teacher Role, Teacher Self Inventory (TSI), Teachers' Thinking

Beginning in the 1980s and continuing through the latter part of the 20th Century, cognitive psychology exerted a marked influence on educational research in several areas, including research on teachers' thinking (Clark & Peterson, 1986; Koziol & Burns, 1986; Leinhardt & Greeno, 1986; Shavelson & Stern, 1981). Corresponding with psychology's general focus on information processing, the emphasis in this early research was on exploring the basic mechanisms and character of teachers' thinking. Questions such as the following were typical in this research environment: How do teachers plan? What cognitive processing occurs before, during, and after teaching? What mechanisms are in play as teachers combine pedagogical knowledge with subject area knowledge to design learning environments? How do teachers think about themselves as professionals and how do they negotiate the complexity of roles they must perform in the classroom? What is the nature of teachers' beliefs about teaching (and about themselves as teachers), how are these beliefs formed, and how do beliefs manifest in the lives of teachers? It was in the latter context that the Teacher Self Inventory (TSI) was

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initially developed as one means of assessing teachers' cognitions and beliefs regarding their own professional roles and their own teaching personalities (McLaughlin, 1989).

In that a teacher's daily routine includes a great deal of inference-making, interpretation of events and behavior, and rapid decision making, there is general agreement that investigation of teachers' thinking can yield useful insights (Rubie-Davies, 2015; Lunn, Walker, & Mascadri, 2015). While much of the research on teaching focuses upon the effectiveness of specific behaviors and techniques, the cognitive processing that underlies these overt activities represents an equally rich and promising research environment (Buel & Beck, 2015).

Much of the recent research on teachers' thinking has – appropriately – adopted an applied focus, with investigations focused on teachers' cognitive characteristics as they relate to specific pedagogical outcomes (Anwar, 2014; Beijgaard, Meijer, & Verloop, 2004; Burns, Edwards, & Freeman, 2015; Fives & Gill, 2015; Kubanyiova & Feryok, 2015; Pajares, 1992). For example, teacher thinking has been explored as it relates to classroom performance (DiKiCi, 2014; Zhu, 2013), teacher motivation and job satisfaction (Demir, 2016; Kumazawa, 2013; Lakateb, 2016; Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2014), thinking in specific subject areas (Francis, Rapacki, & Eker, 2015; Maggioni, Fox, & Alexander, 2015), and burnout (Skaalvik & Skaalvik, 2010). Other research has focused on variables that influence the formation of teachers' beliefs and self-perceptions (Bol, Nunnery, O'Connell, & Stephenson, 1998; Brady & Woolfson, 2008; de Vries & van de Grift, 2013; Joseph, 2010; Miller & Shifflet, 2016). Some additional current research has been mostly descriptive of elements comprising teachers' thinking and decision-making (Čavojová, & Jurkovič, 2017; Chen, McCray, Adams, & Leow, 2013; Denzine, Cooney, & McKenzie, 2005; Erdamar & Alpan, 2013). A large proportion of contemporary studies have occurred with convenience samples of pre-service teachers; they are therefore more reflective of teachers' self-perceptions and beliefs at the outset of their teaching careers and should be cautiously generalized to groups of more experienced professionals.

An underlying assumption in current research is that teachers' beliefs “influence educational choices and teaching practices, and potentially determine when, why, and how teachers interact with students. From a situated perspective, certain beliefs are related to teaching dispositions that promote superior motivation and learning outcomes for students” (Hoffman & Seidel, 2015, p. 106). Measures of teachers' self-perceptions focus heavily on the self-efficacy construct (Hoffman & Seidel, 2015), which is just one of several constructs represented in the TSI. Beyond self-efficacy, there has been little attention to other aspects of teachers' perceptions of their own professional roles and teaching personalities.

The present study represents an attempt to expand the findings of existing research on teachers' thinking by quantifying and describing specific elements of teachers' self-perceptions using the Teacher Self Inventory as part of a mixed methods investigation. Further, this study builds upon recent investigations of changes in teachers' beliefs and self-perceptions over time (de Vries, Jansen, & van de Grift, 2013; Lamote, & Engels, 2010; McLaughlin, 2017). While McLaughlin (2017) was a longitudinal examination of changes over time, this study examines differences among teachers at different points in their career development (i.e., pre-service and in-service teachers).

The TSI was originally developed to assess specific research-based elements of teachers' beliefs (McLaughlin, 1989) and therefore represents a promising method for the quantitative analysis of relevant and comprehensive data on teachers' beliefs. For the current study, follow-up interviews were then used to expand upon the quantitative findings to provide narrative clarification of the elements of teachers' beliefs and self-perceptions. This implementation of an explanatory and sequential mixed methods design (Creswell & Guetterman, 2019) will hopefully contribute to the formation of a more integrative grounded theory of teacher self-perceptions and their relationship to teaching practices (Olafson, Grandy, & Owens, 2015).

The following research questions were addressed in this study:

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