

Chapter 7

When 1 + 1 Did Not Equal 2: A Practitioner's Reflective Vignette

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ABSTRACT

In this reflective narrative vignette, the author shares the struggles of a first-year teacher. She highlights the importance of strong, collaborative, and supportive mentors. Sharing several helpful hints she learned in the field, the struggling first-year teacher, now academic coach, shares her story to inspire other educators to preserve and to make meaningful classroom experiences for students. This work focuses on elementary math instruction and points to both mentoring and instructional strategies that may be used to support student learning in the classroom.

INTRODUCTION

Teacher efficacy refers to a teacher's belief in their own ability to positively impact students' learning and academic outcomes. It encompasses their confidence in instructional strategies, classroom management skills, and overall effectiveness as an educator. It is a fundamental component of teaching and has a great impact on students (Valente, Veiga-Branco, Rebelo, Lourenço, & Cristovão, 2020). Teacher efficacy is a psychological construct, rooted in social cognitive theory, which posits that individuals' beliefs in their capabilities influence their behavior and, consequently, their outcomes. In the context of education, teacher efficacy represents teachers' judgments about their competence to engage, instruct, and motivate

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-6684-8551-4.ch007

students effectively. These beliefs are derived from their own teaching experiences, observations of successful instructional practices, and feedback received from colleagues, students, and parents.

Bandura (1977) proposed four sources that shape individuals' self-perceptions of efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and affective states. Applied to teachers, mastery experiences reflect their past successes or failures in facilitating student learning, while vicarious experiences involve observing and modeling effective teaching practices. Social persuasion refers to feedback and encouragement received from others, such as colleagues or supervisors, while physiological and affective states encompass the emotional and physical states that influence teachers' perceptions of their efficacy. Those with a strong sense of efficacy approach tasks with a sense of anticipatory accomplishment and do not interpret difficulties as insurmountable setbacks, but rather as obstacles to overcome (Bandura, 1994).

Academic coaches are part of the mentoring system. Roles and placements of academic coaches vary by school. Some coaches are school based while others serve teachers in multiple schools. Academic coaches partner with classroom teachers to discuss student data, plan for instruction, and provide resources through a mutually respectful and judgment free relationship (Professional Learning and Community Education, 2021). The importance of quality mentoring cannot be overlooked when building teacher efficacy in school settings (Zugelder, 2019; Davis, 2009). To effectively pair novice teacher and supporting mentor and academic coach, administrators must intentionally partner educators based on each novice teacher's individual background, needs, and school context (Grossman & Davis, 2012). Without effective mentors for new teachers and academic coaches for all teachers, teachers may quickly find themselves overloaded and under supported by the demands of ever-changing curriculum and administrations.

It may be worrisome that without mentoring and coaching, teacher attrition may rise and create further problems at the district and state level. "High attrition means many schools have large numbers of inexperienced, unsupported teachers—teachers who struggle to provide the level of instruction they hope to provide. Districts must spend scarce funds on recruitment and replacement costs" (Moore, 2016, p. 60). Current estimates about teacher retention suggest that up to 50% of teachers leave the teaching profession within the first three years of their career (Breux & Wong, 2003; Ingersoll & Strong, 2011; National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). This statistic is a direct call for systematic rebuilding and supports for teachers.

While many variations of the roles of teaching mentors and academic coaching exist, coaches must help teachers do the following:

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