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Catherine L Polydore, *Eastern Illinois University*



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Kamau Oginga Siwatu, *Texas Tech University*

Catherine L. Polydore, *Eastern Illinois University*

Tehia V. Starker, *University of North Carolina at Charlotte*

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Prospective Elementary School Teachers'

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Kamau Oginga Siwatu

Catherine L. Polydore

Tehia V. Starker

Abstract

In this study, the authors examined prospective elementary school teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy beliefs. The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale was administered to a sample of 104 preservice teachers enrolled in a teacher education program located at a large Midwestern university. These results suggested that prospective elementary school teachers felt more confident in their ability to use a variety of teaching and instructional methods, communicate with parents, and develop positive, trusting relationships with students. The sample of preservice teachers, however, were less confident in their ability to communicate with English Language Learners, minimize the effects of the cultural mismatch, and teach students about their cultures' contributions to science and math. The implications of these findings for both research and the preparation of culturally responsive teachers are discussed.

Key Terms: *Preservice Teachers; Self-efficacy; Culturally Responsive Teaching; Teacher Preparation*

Many teacher education programs throughout the nation have turned their attention towards preparing tomorrow's teachers for a classroom that is reflective of the cultural and linguistic diversity that the often-cited student demographic data highlight (Hodgkinson, 2002; Sleeter, 2001; Villegas & Lucas, 2002). While some programs have been successful in preparing preservice teachers for diversity, several researchers have concerns over the ability of existing teacher education programs to adequately prepare teachers for a classroom that is culturally and linguistically diverse (Gay & Howard, 2000; Ladson-Billings, 2000). These concerns are warranted as student teachers and novice teachers repeatedly report that they were ill-prepared to teach students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds (Knoblauch & Hoy, 2008; Ladson-Billings, 2000; Ruston, 2000).

In addition to research evidence documenting preservice and novice teachers' preparation to teach in educational settings that are culturally and linguistically diverse,

researchers suggest that many prospective teachers have low feelings of self-efficacy in their ability to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse learning environments and execute the practices of culturally responsive teaching (Siwatu, 2007; Taylor & Sobel, 2001). Given self-efficacy beliefs ability to predict an individual's behavior (Bandura, 1997), examining preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in the context of diversity may provide researchers an opportunity to forecast the behavior of beginning teachers when placed into a culturally and linguistically diverse classroom. In an attempt to add to the existing literature, the purpose of this study was to examine the nature of prospective elementary school teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy (CRTSE) beliefs. This study was designed to answer the following research question: How confident are preservice teachers in their ability to execute the practices of culturally responsive teaching? In this context, culturally responsive teaching is defined as, "using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2000, p. 29).

Theoretical Framework

During the past 25 years, the educational research community has witnessed the growing popularity of teacher self-efficacy research (Labone, 2004). According to Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, and Hoy (1998) teacher self-efficacy is, "a teacher's belief in her or his ability to organize and execute the courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context" (p. 117). Implied in this definition is that self-efficacy beliefs are situation specific and can be expected to change as the context varies. With Tschannen-Moran et al.'s (1998) definition of teacher self-efficacy in mind, researchers began to examine teacher self-efficacy beliefs within various curricular areas such as math and science (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001). Unfortunately, despite the changing demographics of today's school children, very few studies have examined preservice and inservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs in the context of teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and executing multicultural teaching practices (e.g., Rushton, 2000; Tucker, Porter, Reinke, Herman, Ivery, Mack, & Jackson, 2005). In light of the scarcity of research examining teacher self-efficacy in the context of diversity, in the following section these researchers examine several studies that have focused on preservice and inservice teachers' self-efficacy to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse educational settings and execute various multicultural teaching practices.

A common theme in teacher self-efficacy research is that contextual variables such as school and students' SES status, class size, and administrative support can potentially influence the development of teachers' self-efficacy (Goddard, Hoy, & Woolfolk Hoy, 2000; Knobloch & Whittington, 2002; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk, & Hoy, 1998). In the context of teaching in urban schools, which primarily serve students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds, several studies have examined the influence that school related variables (e.g., a student's SES status, class size) have on the development of teachers' self-efficacy (Chester, 1991; Chester & Beaudin, 1996; Goddard & Goddard, 2001; Lee, 2002). In light of the

challenges of teaching in culturally and linguistically diverse learning environments, it is important that the faculty believe in their collective ability to help students succeed. Bandura (1997) referred to this as collective efficacy. In the context of schools and teaching, Goddard and Goddard (2001) defined collective efficacy as, “the perceptions of teachers in a school that the faculty as a whole can organize and execute the courses of action required to have a positive effect on students” (p. 809).

Goddard and Goddard (2001) sought to examine whether teachers’ sense of collective efficacy would predict individual self-efficacy beliefs. In their study, a sample of 452 teachers from a large urban school district located in the Midwest were administered a 5-item personal teaching efficacy subscale from Gibson and Dembo’s (1984) Teacher Efficacy Scale. To assess teachers’ perceptions of collective efficacy, these researchers used a 21-item collective efficacy measure developed by Goddard, Hoy, and Woolfolk (2000). Goddard and Goddard found a significant positive relationship between teachers’ sense of collective efficacy and self-efficacy beliefs. This relationship suggests that teacher self-efficacy beliefs increase as their sense in the collective ability of the faculty to have a positive effect on students increase. Results from a multiple regression analysis revealed that collective efficacy was a significant predictor of teachers’ self-efficacy. These findings in general support Bandura’s (1997) assertion that social influences can shape the development of an individual’s self-efficacy beliefs. Goddard and Goddard’s (2001) findings suggest that in urban schools where collective efficacy is high, teachers are more likely to think that they too can be successful teaching culturally and linguistically diverse students. In another study examining the development of teachers’ self-efficacy beliefs, Lee (2002) conducted a case study of Beverley, an African-American middle school teacher. Beverley was assigned to a school where 65% of the students were African-American and half of the student body was eligible to receive free or reduced lunches. The purpose of the case study was to explore the factors that influenced the development of Beverley’s confidence to teach. Stemming from the interview it was clear that school contextual variables played an influential role in the development of Beverley’s teaching self-efficacy. Beverley cited the frequency of feedback from administrators and faculty, working in teams, and the constant support she received from school administrators and peers as positive influences on her self-efficacy to teach.

In both of the studies cited above, the researchers remind us about the important role of school contextual variables and its influence on the development of teachers’ self-efficacy to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse learning environments. Unfortunately, these well designed studies did not reveal how self-efficacious teachers were in their ability to execute specific multicultural teaching practices. In recent years, two instruments have been introduced that provide an assessment of teachers’ self-efficacy to execute various multicultural teaching practices, including those practices labeled “culturally responsive” (Guyton & Wesche, 2005; Siwatu, 2007).

The Multicultural Efficacy Scale. Guyton and Wesche (2005) developed the 35-item *Multicultural Efficacy Scale*, which was designed using Bennett, Niggle, and Stage’s (1990) four

dimensions of multicultural teacher education. According to Bennett et al. (1990), these four dimensions include: knowledge, understanding, attitude, and skill. Using these dimensions, Guyton and Wesche (2005) developed an instrument containing three subscales. An examination of the subscales suggests that despite the name of the instrument, it not only measures self-efficacy beliefs but also respondents' experiences with diversity and attitudes about diversity. The first subscale, *Experiences with Diversity*, measures the extent in which the respondent interacted with people different from themselves (e.g., "As a child, I played with people different from me"). For each of the seven statements, respondents are asked to rate the frequency of their experiences using a 4-point Likert scale, ranging from 1 (never) to 4 (frequently). The second subscale, *Attitudes about Diversity*, contains seven items. Using a scale ranging from 1 (disagree strongly) to 4 (agree strongly), respondents are asked to rate their level of agreement about issues such as the need to adapt lesson plans to reflect the cultures represented in the classroom and whether children should be taught by teachers who share the same ethnic and cultural background as the student. The third subscale, *Efficacy with Diversity*, consists of 20 items designed to assess respondents' self-efficacy to execute a variety of multicultural teaching practices (e.g., "I can identify ways in which various groups contribute to our pluralistic society"). Teachers must rate their perceived ability to execute each task by using a 4-point Likert scale: 1 (I do not believe I could do this very well), 2 (I could probably do this if I had to, but it would be difficult for me.), 3 (I believe that I could do this reasonably well, if I had time to prepare), and 4 (I am quite confident that this would be easy for me to do).

The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale. Stemming from increased efforts to prepare culturally responsive teachers, Siwatu (2007) believed that existing teacher self-efficacy measures were insufficient in assessing preservice and inservice teachers' culturally responsive teaching self-efficacy beliefs. As a result, Siwatu designed the 40-item, *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale*. The scale was designed to assess teachers' self-efficacy to execute practices of culturally responsive teaching. The items included in the scale reflect each of the 29 *Culturally Responsive Teaching Competencies*. These competencies describe the practices (e.g., knowledge and skills) of successful teachers of students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds and whose pedagogical approach is culturally responsive (Siwatu, 2007). In light of the growing theoretical concerns surrounding existing teacher self-efficacy measures, the design of this scale was guided by Bandura's (2006) guidelines for constructing self-efficacy scales. Using these guidelines, Siwatu developed the scale so that it contained items in which the difficulty of the task varied. According to Bandura (2006), self-efficacy scales should contain a variety of items that vary in their degree of difficulty (magnitude). Varying the level of difficulty would avoid ceiling effects and shed light on the types of tasks that individuals are confident in their ability to execute (Bandura, 2006). Therefore, the Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale contains teaching practices on both sides of the easy-difficult continuum.

The "easy" side of the continuum reflects skills related to general teaching practices (e.g., "I am able to use a variety of teaching methods"). The "difficult" side of the continuum reflects the skills that reflect the more culturally sensitive and responsive teaching practices

(e.g., “I am able to implement strategies to minimize the effects of the mismatch between my students’ home culture and the school culture”). Qualitative studies have found that culturally responsive teaching consists of general teaching practices and culturally sensitive, equitable, and responsive teaching practices (Foster, 1994; Ladson-Billings, 1994). Thus, the self-efficacy instrument reflects an integration of these varied practices. Another feature of the *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* is that respondents are asked to rate their level of confidence to execute each task using a scale ranging from 0 (no confidence at all) to 100 (completely confident). This method of measuring self-efficacy beliefs is different than Guyton and Wesche’s (2005) scale, in which participants were asked to respond using a 4-point Likert scale. Guyton and Wesche’s decision to use a 4-point Likert scale is not consistent with Bandura’s (2006) guidelines for constructing self-efficacy scales. Bandura (1997) believed that one of the downfalls of using Likert scales that contain a few steps is that the scales were less reliable because they do not have the ability to differentiate between individuals who respond the same. Bandura (1997) contends, “Including too few steps loses differentiating information because people who use the same response category would differ if immediate steps were included” (p. 44).

Although the development of the *Multicultural Efficacy Scale* (Guyton & Wesche, 2005) and the *Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale* (Siwatu, 2007) and their contents differ, their introduction to the research community is likely to spur more research in this area of teacher self-efficacy. Teacher preparation in the era of No Child Left Behind cannot afford to ignore preservice teachers’ self-efficacy to teach in culturally and linguistically diverse learning environments and to execute specific teaching practices that are believed to be effective when teaching students from culturally and linguistically diverse backgrounds.

Methods

Participants

The data for this study were drawn from a population of prospective elementary school teachers enrolled in a teacher education program located in the Midwest. Of the total sample ($N = 104$), 97 (93%) were female and 7 (7%) were male. Participants were asked to indicate their race/ethnicity: 100 (96%) indicated that they were White and 4 (4%) were non-white (e.g., Native Hawaiian, Asian-American and African-American). The sample of preservice teachers had a mean age of 20.22 ($SD = 1.52$) and consisted of 24 (23%) freshmen, 25 (24%) sophomores, 43 (42%) juniors, and 12 (11%) seniors. Participants in this study completed about two courses ($M = 2.26$, $SD = 1.18$) that addressed diversity in the classroom. Some of the reported courses dealt exclusively with the topic of cultural diversity whereas for others the coverage was minimal (e.g., a chapter on the topic). In addition to their coursework, preservice teachers in this study participated in about one practicum ($M = 1.48$, $SD = .88$). When queried about their practicum experiences, 94 (91%) and 63 (61%) participants indicated that they interacted with culturally and linguistically diverse students, respectively. When asked where they would like to teach once they graduate, 91 (87%) said public school. Forty-seven (45%) of

the participants preferred to teach in a suburban or urban city whereas 55 (52%) had aspirations of teaching in a small town/rural setting.

Measures

Academic and Demographic Background Questionnaire. The purpose of the Academic and Demographic Background questionnaire was to obtain information from preservice teachers' academic and demographic backgrounds. Included in the questionnaire were items eliciting information from preservice teachers pertaining to their racial background, major, coursework, number of practica completed, feelings of preparedness, and experience in multicultural settings.

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale. The Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Scale (Siwatu, 2007) consists of 40 items in which participants were asked to rate how confident they were in their ability to engage in specific culturally responsive teaching practices (e.g., "I am able to identify the diverse needs of my students.") by indicating a degree of confidence ranging from 0 (no confidence at all) to 100 (completely confident). Responses to each item were summed and divided by the total number of items to generate a CRTSE strength index. This index, which may range from 0 (low self-efficacy beliefs) to 100 (high self-efficacy beliefs), is a quantitative indicator of the strength of each preservice teacher's CRTSE beliefs. Internal reliability for the 40-item measure was .96, as estimated by Cronbach's alpha.

Results

The sample of preservice teachers' self-efficacy strength indexes ranged from 11.13 to 100.00 with a mean of 78.87 ($SD = 13.06$). While the means and ranges of the CRTSE strength indexes are helpful in assessing the strength of these prospective elementary school teachers' self-efficacy beliefs, these scores may also be misleading. Since culturally responsive teaching is multifaceted, the researchers believed that more weight should be placed on the item-specific means rather than the strength index.

Item-specific means were used to examine the nature of prospective elementary school teachers' CRTSE beliefs. The means and standard deviations for each of the 40 items are presented in Table 1. Preservice teachers were most self-efficacious in their ability to use a variety of teaching and instructional methods (e.g., cooperative learning activities) that incorporates students' interests into the teaching-learning process. Prospective elementary school teachers were also more confident in their ability to develop positive, trusting student-teacher relationships, and helping students feel like important members of the classroom. These prospective teachers also believed highly in their ability to communicate with parents regarding their child's academic progress and to structure parent conferences that were not intimidating for parents.

The item-specific means suggests that preservice teachers' CRTSE beliefs were less self-efficacious in their ability to greet and praise English Language Learners using a phrase in the students' native language. The sample was also less confident in their ability to design and implement interventions that would minimize the effects of the mismatch between students' culture and the school culture. These prospective teachers were less self-efficacious in their ability to teach students about their (the students) cultures' contributions to science and how math has historically been used by other cultural groups.

Discussion

The focal objective of this study was to examine the nature of prospective elementary school teachers' CRTSE beliefs. At this juncture, it is important to note that these prospective teachers' self-efficacy beliefs reflect their *perception* of competence rather than their actual level of competence (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). These results of this study bring to light the types of tasks that these prospective elementary school teachers were confident in their ability to execute. The findings suggest that preservice teachers were more self-efficacious in their ability to develop personal relationships and use a variety of teaching strategies when working with culturally and linguistically diverse students. A closer examination of the findings suggest that preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs were highest for successfully completing tasks that may come more naturally such as building a sense of trust, developing personal relationships with students, and making students feel important. In addition, preservice teachers were most confident in their ability to execute tasks that may be more commonly discussed in their teacher preparation courses (e.g., using students' interests in the teaching-learning process, and using cooperative learning groups).

Noticeably missing from the list of tasks and skills in which preservice teachers were highly self-efficacious was the integration of culture into the teaching-learning process and communicating with English Language Learners. Given the nature of preservice teachers' CRTSE beliefs, they may be less likely to implement the more critical and essential aspects of culturally responsive teaching once they enter the classroom. This assertion is substantiated by theory and research examining the predictive nature of self-efficacy beliefs (Bandura, 1997).

The researchers were left to wonder why preservice teachers believed less in their ability to integrate students' culture into the teaching-learning process and to communicate with English Language Learners. Answering this question required the researchers to revisit the theory undergirding self-efficacy, and the role that mastery and vicarious experiences play in the formation of self-efficacy beliefs. One explanation for the above findings may be that preservice teachers in this study lacked meaningful and prolonged experiences with culturally and linguistically diverse students and had limited opportunities to observe culturally responsive teachers in action. To accommodate for this lack of both mastery and vicarious experience, teacher education programs have turned to the use of practica and field experiences. When designed to reach its maximum effectiveness, these experiences should provide preservice teachers with opportunities to observe and execute the practices of

culturally responsive teaching. These opportunities may provide preservice teachers with the mastery and vicarious experience needed to develop their self-efficacy. As past research has shown, field experiences constitute self-efficacy building activities, in which preservice teachers may be provided the opportunity to execute a wide range of teaching tasks and observe competent models (Cannon & Scharmann, 1996; Parameswaran, 1998).

This study may serve as a springboard for developing self-efficacy-building interventions. In designing self-efficacy-building interventions, both teacher educators and researchers should place more weight on the item-specific means rather than preservice teachers' global (total) score. Interventions based on the results of this study may include providing preservice teachers with opportunities to gain mastery and vicarious experience in (1) greeting and praising English Language Learners using phrases from their native language, (2) designing and implementing interventions that would minimize the effects of the mismatch between students' culture and the school culture and (3) teaching students about their (the students) cultures' contributions to science and how math has historically been used by other cultural groups.

The present study exposed preservice teachers' self-efficacy to engage in the practices of culturally responsive teaching, however, several limitations should be considered in the interpretation and generalization of these findings. First, this study was non-experimental and therefore no causal conclusions can be drawn. Secondly, data collected from this study for the most part, reflect the beliefs of preservice teachers in the Midwest, therefore, the findings may not generalize well to other areas and regions within the United States. Third, this study assessed preservice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs using a self-report measure. Tschannen-Moran et al. (1998) have suggested that more qualitative research be conducted in an attempt to deepen the field's insights about the construct. In spite of these limitations, the findings of this study deepen our understanding of preservice teachers' beliefs about their self-efficacy to engage in the practices of culturally responsive teaching.

The researchers' task for future inquiries is to develop a program of research that draws from the strengths of qualitative and quantitative methodological approaches, which may deepen the field's understanding of the development of CRTSE beliefs and the factors that influence its formation. Quantitative research questions may examine how CRTSE beliefs differ among teachers at various stages of development (e.g., preservice, novice, and experienced teachers). Qualitative research questions may explore the factors (e.g., types of mastery and vicarious experiences) that influence the development of CRTSE beliefs.

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Table 1

Prospective Elementary School Teachers' Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Beliefs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
1. Help students feel like important members of the classroom	94.86	7.40
2. Develop a personal relationship with my students	94.16	6.54
3. Build a sense of trust in my students	92.37	9.66
4. Use a variety of teaching methods	91.57	8.87
5. Use the interests of my students to make learning meaningful for them	91.53	8.71
6. Implement cooperative learning activities for those students who like to work in groups	91.27	10.05
7. Help students to develop positive relationships with their classmates	90.77	9.30
8. Structure parent-teacher conferences so that the meeting is not intimidating for parents	90.38	9.60
9. Obtain information about my students' academic weaknesses	90.34	8.01
10. Communicate with parents regarding their child's educational progress	90.26	10.29
11. Design instruction that matches my students' developmental needs	89.87	10.06
12. Design a classroom environment using displays that reflects a variety of cultures	89.75	10.23
13. Revise instructional material to include a better representation of cultural groups	85.58	12.74
14. Adapt instruction to meet the needs of my students	85.07	10.36

Table 1 (continued)

Prospective Elementary School Teachers' Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Beliefs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
15. Identify ways that standardized tests may be biased towards culturally diverse students	84.96	13.62
16. Use examples that are familiar to students from diverse cultural backgrounds	84.44	12.61
17. Use a learning preference inventory to gather data about how my students like to learn	84.41	14.06
18. Determine whether my students feel comfortable competing with other students	84.07	11.43
19. Obtain information about my students' home life	83.87	13.25
20. Identify ways that the school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) is different from my students' home culture	82.92	11.63
21. Identify ways how students communicate at home may differ from the school norms	82.50	11.32
22. Identify ways that standardized tests may be biased towards linguistically diverse students	81.69	14.80
23. Obtain information regarding my students' academic interests	89.52	9.12
24. Use my students' prior knowledge to help them make sense of new information	89.36	9.96
25. Determine whether my students like to work alone or in a group	89.26	9.84
26. Explain new concepts using examples that are taken from my students' everyday lives	88.93	9.47
27. Obtain information about my students' academic strengths	87.87	8.97
28. Assess student learning using various types of assessments	87.74	10.39

Table 1 (continued)

Prospective Elementary School Teachers' Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Beliefs

Culturally Responsive Teaching Self-Efficacy Beliefs	<i>M</i>	<i>SD</i>
29. Establish positive home-school relations	87.74	11.21
30. Model classroom tasks to enhance English Language Learners' understanding	87.68	13.40
31. Obtain information about my students' cultural background	86.52	10.99
32. Develop a community of learners when my class consists of students from diverse backgrounds	86.13	11.11
33. Critically examine the curriculum to determine whether it reinforces negative cultural stereotypes	86.02	12.14
34. Use my students' cultural background to help make learning meaningful	85.63	11.72
35. Communicate with the parents of English Language Learners regarding their child's achievement	80.05	18.11
36. Design a lesson that shows how other cultural groups have made use of mathematics	79.85	17.24
37. Identify ways that the school culture (e.g., values, norms, and practices) is different from my students' home cultures	79.00	14.73
38. Teach students about their cultures' contributions to science	77.84	17.96
39. Praise English Language Learners for their accomplishments using a phrase in their native language	72.70	23.64
40. Greet English Language Learners with a phrase in their native language	71.71	24.04

Author Information: **Kamau Oginga Siwatu** is an Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology in the Department of Educational Psychology and Leadership at Texas Tech University.

Catherine L. Polydore is an Assistant Professor of Educational Psychology in the Department of Counseling and Student Development at Eastern Illinois University. **Tehia V. Starker** is an Assistant Professor of Elementary Education in the Department of Reading and Elementary Education at the University of North Carolina at Charlotte.