

## Efficacy of teachers in a number of selected schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa

I. Rangraje, A. van der Merwe\* and G. Urbani

Faculty of Education, Umlazi Campus, University of KwaZulu Natal, P O Box X10, Isipingo, 4110 South Africa  
andrevdmerwe@webmail.co.za

J.L. van der Walt

Faculty of Education Sciences, North-West University, Potchefstroom Campus

\* To whom correspondence should be addressed

The construct "teacher efficacy" has become sufficiently sophisticated for it to be used as the theoretical base for an empirical survey. A survey of teacher efficacy in a number of selected schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa revealed that teachers perceived school context effects as preventing them from functioning efficaciously, that although the general teaching efficacy (GTE) beliefs of the teachers in the sample were strong, they were mostly negative, in the sense that the respondents tended to blame the environment and others for teachers' non-achievement, their personal teaching efficacy (PTE) beliefs were not as strong as could be expected, and their GTE and PTE beliefs did not allow them to perform the tasks normally expected of teachers efficiently. Recommendations to improve the situation are made.

### Introduction

Twenty-five years ago researchers from the RAND organisation added two items to an already extensive questionnaire. They obtained powerful results, and the concept of teacher efficacy was born. The construct of teacher efficacy is now in its third decade, and is ready to be put to work, even as researchers explore and clarify its identity, say Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk and Hoy (1998:202; 239).

Despite the conceptual confusion that still exists about certain aspects of teacher efficacy (TE), the construct was put to work for determining TE in the socio-politically volatile conditions of KwaZulu-Natal in 2001 (*cf.* De Bruin, 2002). According to Lethoko, Heystek and Maree (2001:311) education in this province (as elsewhere in South Africa) is still in a state of turmoil because of the political and social instability of the past (*cf.* Herselman & Hay, 2002:239; Steyn, 1999:357). The poor results that schools have been producing and the inferior quality of education have raised concerns regarding the attitude of teachers towards their profession (Popkewitz, 1987:131; Sallis, 1988 2; Steyn & Van Wyk, 1999:37). In Ashton and Webb's opinion (1986:2), teaching has become an imperiled profession because it deprives so many good teachers of their motivation and sense of professional self-esteem.

If the performance of teachers is to be improved, it is necessary to promote their efficacy. Promoting their efficacy means developing them professionally, helping them to reflect on their performance and to make them accountable for their actions. It makes good sense to focus on the promotion of efficacy in teachers if they are to bring about a positive change in the education of their students, according to Selaledi (1999:266-270).

### Conceptual framework

#### Definition of Teacher Efficacy

Rangraje (2002:18; 40) mentions the following definitions of (teacher) efficacy:

- Efficacy is the individual's perceived expectancy of obtaining valued outcomes through personal effort.
- The construct of teachers' sense of efficacy refers to the situation-specific expectation that teachers have of helping learners learn.
- Teacher efficacy is the variable that accounts for individual differences in teaching effectiveness.
- Efficacy pertains to personal effectiveness, a feeling that one can control events and produce outcomes.
- Efficacy refers to teachers' belief that they can produce an outcome by successfully performing necessary behaviours.
- Efficacy is the extent to which teachers believe that they can affect student learning.

In their extensive work on teacher efficacy: its meaning and measure,

Tschannen-Moran *et al.* (1998) mention the following:

- The extent to which the teacher believes he or she has the capacity to affect student performance.
- The extent to which teachers believe that they can control the reinforcement of their actions, that is whether control of reinforcement lies within themselves or in the environment.
- Teacher efficacy can be conceptualized as teachers' beliefs that factors under their control ultimately have greater impact on the results of teaching than do factors in the environment or in the student-factors beyond the influence of teachers (teacher locus of control, or: responsibility for student achievement definition, used by researchers that followed the Rotter definition).
- The teachers' belief or conviction that they can influence how well students learn, even those who may be difficult or unmotivated.
- Teacher efficacy is a type of self-efficacy — a cognitive process in which people construct beliefs about their capacity to perform at a given level of attainment (Bandura, 1993:118-132).
- Perceived self-efficacy are beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments. Self-efficacy is a future-oriented belief about the level of competence a person expects he or she will display in a given situation.
- Teacher efficacy is the teacher's belief in his or her capability to organize and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context.

The first three definitions in the second group are based on whether teachers believe that the control of the teaching-learning situation lies within themselves or in the environment. The fourth definition is based on teachers' self-belief about their own capacity. The fifth and following definitions view efficacy through a psychological lens (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:203).

An amended Rotter-RAND locus of control/responsibility for self and learner achievement definition was accepted as the theoretical starting point for the project reported in this article:

TE refers to the extent to which teachers in a number of selected schools in KwaZulu-Natal believe that they can control the reinforcement of their actions, that is whether control of reinforcement lies within themselves or in the environment.

In the rest of this section, some of the theoretical aspects of this definition are examined, followed by a brief description of the research design, a discussion of the findings and a number of recommendations.

#### Theoretical aspects of TE

##### *Theoretical construct*

Teacher efficacy is a construct (Ashton & Webb, 1986:3; Rangraje,

2002:40), and as such it is relatively difficult to measure (Wiersma, 1986:292; Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:203). A narrow as possible conceptualization of the construct should be maintained. If this is not done, peripheral aspects such as teacher creativity, accountability, staying power, teachers' stress, implementation of innovation, student achievement, self-concept, self-worth, self-esteem, and job satisfaction eventually all become part of the construct, in the process detracting from teacher efficacy as a powerful construct in its own right. On the other hand, as much of the construct as possible should be captured in a research instrument.

#### *Self-efficacy and TE*

Self-efficacy (according to the Fuller *et al.* (1982), Segiovanni *et al.* (1993) and Bandura (1997) definitions) has to do with self-perception of competence rather than actual level of competence. This is an important distinction, because people regularly overestimate or underestimate their actual abilities, and these estimations may have consequences for the courses of action they choose to pursue or the effort they exert in those pursuits. Over- or underestimating capabilities may also influence how well people use the skills they possess. In most cases, slightly overestimating one's actual capabilities has the most positive effect on performance (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:211).

The perception that a performance has been successful raises efficacy beliefs, which contributes to the expectation that performance will be proficient in the future (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:211). Teachers with a strong sense of efficacy are open to new ideas and more willing to experiment with new methods to better meet the needs of their students. They also tend to exhibit greater levels of planning and organisation. Efficacy influences teachers' persistence when things do not go smoothly and their resilience in the face of setbacks. Greater efficacy enables teachers to be less critical of students when they make errors, to work longer with a student who is struggling, and to be less inclined to refer a difficult student to special education. Teachers with a higher sense of efficacy exhibit greater enthusiasm for teaching, have greater commitment to teaching, and are more likely to stay in teaching. At the school level, higher teacher efficacy is related to the health of the organizational climate (Rangraje, 2002:93 ff.), an orderly and positive school atmosphere, more classroom-based decision making and the strength of the collective efficacy (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:223).

#### *General Teaching Efficacy (GTE)*

Teachers' beliefs about the power of external factors compared to the personal influence of teachers and schools have since the RAND studies (1976) been labeled general teaching efficacy (GTE) (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:204). A teacher with strong negative GTE beliefs indicates that environmental factors overwhelm any power that teachers can exert in schools. These teachers exhibit a belief that reinforcement of their teaching efforts lies outside their control, is external to them. This assessment extends beyond the individual capabilities of the particular teacher to teachers in general. Factors such as conflict, violence or substance abuse in the home or community, the value placed on education at home, the social and economic realities of class, race and gender, and the physiological, emotional, and cognitive needs of a particular child all have a very real impact on a student's motivation and performance in school.

GTE is a measure of optimism/pessimism about the abilities of teachers in general to cope with adverse circumstances such as an un-supportive home environment or unmotivated students. GTE gauges the potential of teachers in general to be successful in spite of various external constraints (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:231). The GTE scale is a negative scale when it taps teachers' tendencies to blame the home and the students for student failure, and does not tap positive influences in the environment.

GTE reflects only a partial analysis of the teaching task, focusing on the external constraints that might impede teaching. GTE reflects a teacher's sense of the difficulty of the teaching task, of the constraints in the environment or context that can undermine a teachers'

efforts (*cf.* Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:232).

Although this factor of teacher efficacy is often called GTE, another label, such as 'external influences' or 'external control' would have been more accurate. GTE or external control reflects an external orientation ('Teachers can't').

#### *Personal Teaching Efficacy (PTE)*

PTE refers to an internal orientation of the teacher ('I can'). Teachers who express confidence in their ability to teach difficult or unmotivated students evidence a belief that reinforcement of teaching activities lies within the teacher's control, or is internal (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:204; Rangraje, 2002:67-72).

Teachers who believe that control is internal, indicate confidence in their abilities as teachers to overcome factors that could make learning difficult for a student. These teachers are making a statement about the efficacy of their own teaching, reflecting confidence that they have adequate training or experience to develop strategies for overcoming obstacles to student learning (*cf.* Dembo & Gibson, 1985: 569; Imants, Van Putten & Leijh, 1994:9; Allinder, 1994:86-87). These teachers may well have experienced past success in boosting students' achievement. PTE has to do with one's own feelings of competence as a teacher.

#### *The difference between GTE and PTE*

Selaledi (1999:266), Allinder (1994:86), Ashton and Webb (1986:3), Imants *et al.* (1994:9), and Dembo and Gibson (1985:175) distinguish between GTE and PTE as two distinct and independent dimensions of teachers' sense of efficacy. The difference between GTE and PTE is not so much personal versus general teaching efficacy, but rather refers to an internal-external dichotomy. Internal and external dimensions seem to be separate dimensions of teacher efficacy, not opposite ends of the same continuum. The internal factor appears to represent perceptions of personal influence, power and impact in teaching and learning situations. The external factor, on the other hand, relates to perceptions of the influence, power, and impact of elements that lie outside the classroom, and hence, may be beyond the direct control of individual teachers (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:224). Although GTE and PTE are portrayed as two different concepts of teacher efficacy, they in fact compliment each other. Just as confidence and a positive attitude are important determinants of the quality of teacher performance, so is a conducive organizational climate.

#### *The effects of GTE and PTE on teachers' professional success*

Research has shown that both GTE and PTE have a substantial impact on student achievement (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:205). Teachers who score high on both PTE and positive GTE beliefs would be active and assured in their responses to students, and these teachers would persist longer, provide a greater academic focus in the classroom, and exhibit different types of feedback than teachers who have lower expectations of their ability to influence student learning.

Conversely, teachers who scored low on PTE and high on negative GTE beliefs were expected to give up readily if they did not get results (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:213). Significantly higher levels of student achievement, as measured by the Ontario Assessment Instrument Pool, were found for teachers with higher PTE and positive GTE beliefs, although the relationship with PTE beliefs was stronger (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:215).

#### *Effects of the environment/context on TE*

Teachers who felt that their principals were sufficiently influential with their superiors within the district, had higher PTE. Principals who used their leadership to provide resources for teachers, to buffer them from disruptive factors, and allowed teachers flexibility over classroom affairs, created a context that allowed efficacy to develop. Schools where student disorder was kept to a minimum were schools in which teachers felt a greater sense of efficacy. When the principal of a school modelled appropriate behaviour and provided rewards contingent on performance, both PTE and positive GTE beliefs were

higher. When a principal displays a balanced and flexible concern, for both the needs of the individual members of his or her staff and the goals of the school, a happy atmosphere prevails (Seyfarth, 1996:14). The principal's ability to inspire a common sense of purpose among teachers was tied to more positive GTE beliefs (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:220).

Teachers' participation in the decisions that affect their work lives also bears on teachers' sense of efficacy. The greater freedom teachers felt to make decisions affecting their own classrooms, the greater was their positive GTE. Teachers who felt they had a greater influence on school-based decision-making and perceived fewer impediments to teaching had a stronger sense of PTE. Good management practices, for example classroom management and school management have a direct bearing on the quality of teaching and learning. Receiving positive feedback on teacher performance, collaboration with other teachers, parental involvement in the school, and schoolwide co-ordination of student behaviour are factors significantly associated with teacher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:221).

#### *School context effects*

Teachers do not feel equally efficacious for all teaching situations. Teacher efficacy is context specific. Teachers feel efficacious for teaching particular subjects to certain students in specific settings, and they can be expected to feel more or less efficacious under different circumstances. Even from one class period to another, teachers' levels of efficacy may change. Therefore, in making an efficacy judgment, a consideration of the teaching task and its context is required (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:228). In making judgements about efficacy, teachers have to assess what is required of them in the teaching-learning situation. Considerations include such factors as the students' abilities and motivation (Hoy & Miskel, 1996:253), appropriate instructional strategies, management issues, the availability and quality of instructional materials, access to technology, and the physical condition of the teaching space, to name only a few (*cf.* Rangraje, 2002:5; 6; 19; 20; 25). Contextual factors include the leadership of the principal, the climate of the school, and the supportiveness of other teachers (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:231). Both self-perception of teaching competence (including an assessment of internal resources and constraints) and beliefs about the task requirements in a particular teaching situation (including an assessment of resources and constraints external to the teacher) contribute to teacher efficacy and to the consequences that stem from efficacy beliefs.

#### **Statement of research problem and purpose of empirical survey**

The project reported in this article centred on the following question: What is the status of teacher efficacy in terms of school context, general teaching efficacy (GTE) and personal teacher efficacy (PTE), and with regard to a number of tasks that teachers are usually expected to perform?

The purpose of the study was not only to find answers to this question but also to make recommendations for improving teacher efficacy.

#### **The research design**

##### **The research instrument**

Bandura (1997) points out that teachers' sense of efficacy is not necessarily uniform across the many different types of tasks teachers are asked to perform. In response to this, an original 31-item instrument was constructed which could probe the following aspects of teacher efficacy: efficacy to influence decision making (items 3, 8, 9, 10, 12, 14, 18, 26), efficacy to influence school resources (15), instructional efficacy (6,7,8, 12, 16, 18, 20, 21, 23, 24, 25, 27, 28, 30, 31), disciplinary efficacy (4, 17, 25, 28, 29, 31), efficacy to enlist parental involvement (4, 5), efficacy to enlist community involvement (10, 11, 19), and efficacy to create a positive school climate (1, 2, 5, 7, 8, 12, 17, 22, 23, 24, 29, 30).

The instrument was also constructed for the purpose of making findings with regard to GTE, PTE, and the impact of school level ef-

fects. School level variables, such as climate of the school, behaviour of the principal, sense of school community, and decision making structures, all seem to influence efficacy (Tschannen-Moran *et al.*, 1998:220). In other words, the aim was to discover whether the respondents had an internal ('I can') orientation or an external ('Teachers can't because of environmental or contextual constraints') orientation.

Because of the socio-political conditions prevailing in Kwa-Zulu-Natal, the project focused on PTE, GTE and school context effects. In more stable conditions, it would have been appropriate to follow Tschannen-Moran *et al.*'s (1998:233) advice to do an examination also of the specific teaching task of teachers and its context. Despite the narrower focus of this survey, efforts were made to provide a multifaceted picture of teachers' efficacy without being too specific in any one of the areas of teacher efficacy. An effort was made to make assessments of teachers' competences across a wide range of activities and tasks that they had to perform.

Each item was measured on a three-point Likert-type scale (agree, disagree, uncertain). Some of the formulations were negative in order to increase the reliability of the instrument. This necessitated, however, that care had to be taken when deciding whether responses were intended as negative or positive (*cf.* item 14: those who agreed with this statement, actually meant to make a negative statement about school management.)

#### **Validity and reliability**

The instrument was subjected to a test of construct validity (*cf.* Jaeger, 1988:326-327). The draft questionnaire was submitted separately and independently to the other three researchers (*cf.* Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:99). After some changes, they all agreed that the instrument measured the construct teacher efficacy and that valid inferences could be made from its application with regard to GTE, PTE, school context effects, and the different tasks that teachers were normally expected to perform. This was a form of expert or face validity. They also agreed that the empirical procedures were based on a theory about what teacher efficacy entailed. They were satisfied that on the basis of this theory a researcher would be able to distinguish between, for instance, respondents with positive or negative GTE beliefs and/or respondents strong/weak on PTE beliefs (*cf.* Borg, Gall & Gall, 1993:122).

Several procedures were also followed to ensure the reliability of the instrument. Firstly, a number of smaller changes were made on the basis of a pilot study. The pilot study is the main survey in miniature, says Jaeger (1988:323). Secondly, use was made of interrater reliability: the independent ratings or judgements of the four researchers involved in the project were largely congruent (Dane, 1990:253). The researchers also agreed on internal consistency reliability, i.e. item consistency and consistency of test administration and scoring (Borg *et al.*, 1993:127, 129; Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:99). Thirdly, reliability was increased by developing an instrument with many items (Borg *et al.*, 1993:126).

#### **Sampling**

The ideal target population for this study (*cf.* Babbie, 1992:107; De Vos, 1998:190) would have been all the teachers in South Africa (N = approximately 350 000) (Steyn & Combrinck, 2002:2). For feasibility reasons, the actual population was limited to the teachers in public primary and secondary schools in the Durban Central District in KwaZulu-Natal, one of the provinces of South Africa (N = approximately 350 000). From the 134 schools in the District, 35 had to be eliminated on the grounds of inaccessibility, either because they could not be readily reached by the researchers (situated in deep rural areas, long distances away, untraversable roads, adverse weather conditions) or were not regarded as safe for researchers to visit. This left a final total of 99 schools (N = 2 475). Through a process of random sampling, 10 schools were selected from this group (sampling fraction: 10/99). The actual sample consisted of 280 teacher-respondents.

Questionnaires were taken to all the schools and, with the assistance of the principals, were distributed among all the teachers at those

**Table 1** Frequency distributions for all items

Number	Statement	Agree	Disagree	Uncertain
1	My salary is adequate for my basic needs.	84	60	6
2	Teaching is a secure job.	52	77	21
3	My principal often asks my opinion on professional matters	70	67	13
4	Parents should have more say in the running of schools.	136	8	6
5	I enjoy a healthy relationship with parents.	122	8	20
6	I have taught only subjects which I am qualified for.	102	48	0
7	The environment in which I work is conducive to healthy work performance.	52	77	21
8	My principal endeavours to develop the capacity of his/her staff on a continuous basis.	38	86	26
9	I am well informed of management decisions.	51	71	28
10	I am coping well with the changes in education.	46	79	25
11	Unsavory media reports often bring the teaching profession into disrepute.	136	8	6
12	In the teaching profession, there is so much uncertainty.	79	39	32
13	I spend most of my time assisting weaker students.	56	85	9
14	The management structure at my school is bureaucratic by nature.	61	43	46
15	The lack of resources at school is frustrating.	119	26	5
16	Staff reductions have led to an increased workload for teachers.	132	12	6
17	Personal conflicts with colleagues are a common occurrence at school.	72	61	17
18	My duties and responsibilities as a teacher are clearly defined.	38	95	17
19	The community appreciates my efforts at school.	35	53	62
20	I sometimes take a huge load of work home.	130	18	2
21	I am required to perform extra-curricular activities after school hours.	103	31	16
22	I trust my colleagues.	141	6	3
23	My work as a teacher helps me to realise my full potential.	38	86	26
24	Teaching is a rewarding task.	51	71	28
25	I become annoyed with students who display a poor attitude to their work.	46	79	25
26	At school, I feel that my views count.	79	39	32
27	I become annoyed when students fail to answer simple questions.	56	85	9
28	My attitude towards my students is dependent on their behaviour.	84	60	6
29	Due to the disharmony amongst staff members, I prefer to keep to myself.	102	48	0
30	I derive immense pleasure from my work.	28	101	21
31	The large number of students in my class places me under severe pressure.	118	26	6

schools. 150 questionnaires were returned. Whilst not optimal, this 54% return (sampling fraction: 15/28) was regarded as adequate for making valid inferences about the 10 schools in the final sample (*cf.* Leedy & Ormrod, 2001:221). The researchers did not feel confident enough to generalize their findings to the teachers attached to all the 134 schools in the District or to all the teachers in South Africa. (The elimination of the 35 inaccessible schools could have led to a systematic sampling error in the sense that the reasons for eliminating the schools from the sample could have been the very reasons for low teacher efficacy in those schools.)

## Findings

### School context effects

The findings in Table 1 were firstly analysed to discover the various school context effects or conditions in which these teachers worked.

*Student or class effects:* Although the majority of the respondents were expected to teach subjects for which they were qualified, 32% of them taught subjects which they were not qualified to teach (item 6). Nearly the same percentage (37%) spent most of their time assisting weaker students (13). By far the majority of the respondents (more than 79%) felt frustrated by the lack of teaching resources (15). An even greater percentage of them (86%) took a huge work load home from time to time (20). More than 47% of the respondents disagreed that teaching was a rewarding task, and more than 18% were uncertain about how to respond to the statement that teaching was a rewarding task (24). More than 52% of them stated that they became annoyed by learners who displayed a poor attitude towards their work, and more than 16% were uncertain about how to respond to this item (25). More than 56% of them became annoyed when learners failed to answer simple questions (27). The responses to items 25 and 27 corresponded with the fact that 56% of the respondents felt that their own attitude depended on the behaviour of their students (28), and that 67% of them did not derive immense pleasure from their work as teachers (30). Large clas-

ses seemed to contribute to the displeasure of more than 78% of the respondents (31).

*School-level effects:* Whilst most respondents agreed that their salaries were adequate, a significant percentage of them (44%) disagreed or were uncertain about how to respond to this statement (1). More than 51% of them felt that teaching was an insecure profession, and 14% were uncertain about how to respond to this item (2). The majority of the respondents (53%) stated that their principals did not consult them about professional matters, or were uncertain whether they were in fact consulted (3). More than 57% felt that the principal did not endeavour to develop the capacity of his or her staff on a continuous basis (8), and more than 47% opined that they were not well informed about management decisions (9). Nearly 41% felt that the management structures at their schools were bureaucratic by nature (14). More than 40% felt that their views did not count or were uncertain about this (26). More than 63% opined that their duties and responsibilities as teachers were not clearly defined (18).

More than 52% admitted that they were not coping well with the changes in education, and more than 16% were uncertain about how to respond to this item (10). More than 52% felt that there was much uncertainty in the teaching profession (12). The majority (88%) agreed that staff reductions had led to an increase in their work load (16). More than 68% were expected to be involved in extra-curricular activities at school (21). Personal conflict was a common occurrence, 48% of the respondents felt (17), and 68% stated that they preferred to keep to themselves because of disharmony amongst staff members (29). Despite this, the majority (94%) said that they trusted their colleagues (22).

Nearly all of the respondents (90%) agreed that media reports often placed the teaching profession in a bad light (11). More than 74% said that their work as a teacher did not help them realise their full potential or were uncertain about how to respond to this item (23), and 66% disagreed that teaching was a rewarding task or were un-

certain about this (24).

More than 90% felt that parents had to have more say in the running of the school (4). More than 81% had good relations with the parents of the learners (5). Despite this, more than 76% of the respondents felt that the community did not appreciate their efforts at school, or were uncertain whether their efforts were appreciated (19).

More than 51% felt that the environment in which they worked was not conducive to healthy work performance, and 14% were uncertain about how to respond to this item (7).

**General teaching efficacy, and personal teaching efficacy**

*General teaching efficacy (teacher efficacy determined by the environment)*

The findings reported in Table 1 showed that there were certain conditions in schools about which teachers could do very little, such as class sizes, extra-curricular activities, parents' non-involvement or staff reductions. However, the findings revealed that this was a group of respondents with relatively strong negative GTE beliefs, in other words they tended to depend on (or to blame) the environment for their own and for student (non-)achievement.

Negative GTE beliefs can be deduced from the fact that 67 (plus 13 who were uncertain) of the respondents felt that they were not asked by the principal for their opinion (item 3). The same applies in the case of the 61 (plus 32 uncertain) respondents who felt that their views did not count (26). 95 (plus 17 uncertain) felt that their duties and responsibilities were not clearly defined (18).

136 of the respondents wished parents to have a stronger say in the running of the school (4). 71 of the respondents (plus 28 uncertain) stated that they were not well-informed about management decisions (9). 79 (plus 25 uncertain) of them admitted that they were not coping well with changes in the environment (10).

119 of the respondents felt frustrated by the lack of teaching resources (15).

72 reported about personal conflicts (17), and 102 said that they preferred to keep to themselves because of disharmony amongst staff members (29).

130 reported that they sometimes took huge work loads home (20). 101 (plus 21 uncertain) felt that their work was not pleasurable (30), 86 (plus 26 uncertain) that they could realize their full potential in the teaching profession (23), and 71 (plus 28 uncertain) that teaching was not a rewarding task (24). 56 felt annoyed at students not doing their work (25), or failed to answer simple questions (56 respondents) (27). 84 respondents stated that their own attitude depended on learner behaviour (28).

*Personal teaching efficacy (teacher confident that he/she has the ability to overcome factors that could make learning difficult for students)*

On the other hand, a number of the respondents, though mostly a minority, displayed a degree of confidence that they had the ability to overcome the factors that would make teaching a difficult profession. For instance:

122 of the respondents stated that they enjoyed healthy relationships with their learners' parents (5). 48 were teaching subjects for which they were not qualified (6). (Unfortunately, it could not be established whether they were in the process of qualifying themselves for this by means of in-service training, and/or whether they were teaching the subjects voluntarily.) 130 of the teachers took heavy work loads home (20). (It could not be established whether they did this voluntarily or not.) The majority of them (141) trusted their colleagues (22), despite the conflict and disharmonious conditions in the schools. 48 refused to withdraw within themselves because of these conditions (29). 79 of them felt that their views counted (26), and 85 did not become annoyed when students failed to answer simple questions (27). 28 still succeeded in deriving immense pleasure from their work as teachers (30) and 26 were not deterred by large classes (31).

Table 2 shows that the 'negative' plus 'uncertain' responses were

(in some cases, far) more than the 'positive' ones with regard to each of the tasks that teachers are normally expected to perform.

**Table 2** Efficacy in terms of types of tasks teachers have to perform (as measured by research instrument items)

Task	Positive responses (%)	Negative responses (%)	Uncertain about response (%)	Negative plus uncertain (%)
Efficacy to influence decision-making	38.91	42.83	18.25	61.08
Efficacy to influence school resources	17.33	79.33	3.33	82.66
Instructional efficacy	29.41	59.77	10.71	70.48
Disciplinary efficacy	31.33	62.00	6.66	68.66
Efficacy to enlist parental involvement	43.33	48.00	8.66	56.66
Efficacy to enlist community involvement	19.77	59.55	20.66	80.21
Efficacy to create a positive school climate	41.88	45.83	12.27	58.10

**Discussion of the findings**

Table 1 reveals that in some instances a majority and, in others, a significant number of the respondents, depended on the environment for their efficacy or blamed the teaching context for their inefficacy. Efficacious teachers would have taken proactive steps to avoid this state of affairs. For example, they would not have waited for the principal to ask their professional opinion but would have offered their opinion at opportune moments. The same applies for teacher attitude: a teacher with strong PTE beliefs would not base his or her attitude towards the profession on learner behaviour.

Teachers who scored high on both positive GTE and PTE would be active and assured in their responses to students; these teachers would persist longer, provide a greater academic focus in the classroom, and exhibit different types of feedback than teachers who had lower expectations of their ability to influence student learning. Since the respondents in this study did not score high on PTE but seemed to have relatively strong negative GTE beliefs, such outcomes cannot be expected from them. On the contrary, they can be expected to give up readily if they do not get results.

Since respondents scored relatively low on PTE and relatively high on negative GTE, they would as a group — generally speaking — tend to seek the locus of control in their environment, externally. High positive scores on GTE in a properly functioning system are normally associated with acceptable teacher and student achievements. Unfortunately, this project showed that the system in the Durban Central Circuit, at least in these 10 schools, was not yet functioning at optimal levels (*cf.* insecurity, top down management, weak communication, disharmony and conflict, staff reductions, heavy work loads, and so on).

Responses to some of the items in the research instrument revealed the presence of some strong PTE beliefs, which can — in the case of those respondents — lead to certain desirable outcomes.

As far as the findings in Table 2 are concerned, previous research leads one to expect efficacious teachers to respond positively with respect to each of the normal tasks of a teacher. The fact that the majority of the responses in this survey with respect to all the tasks were either negative or uncertain indicates that the respondents did not perceive themselves to be efficacious in any of the normal tasks that teachers are expected to perform.

**Recommendations**

The following is recommended for the purpose of strengthening both the PTE and positive GTE beliefs of this group of teachers, in the process enabling them to cope better with their environment and with the tasks that teachers are expected to perform:

1. *Reinforcement of PTE beliefs:* Staff development is essential for this purpose. The personal and self-development of the teachers should receive pertinent attention. Teachers should take responsibility for their own and their students' (non-)performance. The locus of control should be moved to within themselves. Proactive professional development programmes should be designed to extend the personal strengths of the teachers. Reinforcement of PTE beliefs will also lead to the strengthening of positive GTE beliefs. In other words, once a teacher starts believing in herself, she would be inclined to meet the challenges in the environment head-on, and to perform well despite adverse conditions.
2. *Reinforcement, through self-development, of PTE and positive GTE:* Teachers should not wait to be personally and professionally developed. The astute teacher does not wait for an outside body to help him or her grow, but is always on the lookout for opportunities for growth. Opportunities such as self-study to increase one's knowledge and insight, in-service courses, subject committee meetings, courses in time management, and even good advice from superiors and experienced colleagues can make valuable contributions to a teacher's efficacy in the classroom.
3. *Strengthening, through improved contextual conditions, of GTE and positive PTE beliefs:* The survey showed that the environment in which the teachers worked in 2001 was not conducive to effective teaching and learning, especially in terms of GTE beliefs. It is the duty of the education authorities and managers to improve conditions so that more effective teaching can take place. The environment must be conducive to efficacy in the six tasks normally expected of teachers to perform. More conducive conditions will also help teachers to develop and maintain positive attitudes within the school context. In other words, it will help to strengthen their GTE and positive PTE beliefs. This can be done by, *inter alia*, creating better channels of communication between the various stakeholder groups, by supporting innovation, by constructing systems to evaluate changes and by democratising the school workplace. Contextual aspects that need specific attention with regard to the school workplace are: increases in job satisfaction, the reduction of stress in the workplace, reductions in the teaching workload, democratisation of the workplace (with special attention to decision-making), introduction of appropriate reward structures and incentives, an improved teacher appraisal policy, improvement of the behaviour of students, increased involvement of parents and the community, improvements in school and classroom climate including the introduction of smaller classes, attention to school safety and security — to mention only a few.
4. *Self-improvement of contextual conditions:* Again, teachers should not wait for the authorities and their superiors to improve the general conditions. For the purpose of strengthening their own PTE and positive GTE beliefs, they should undertake initiatives designed to improve their environment. Such initiatives should have the potential for improving education by reducing teacher isolation, conflict, disharmony and general uncertainty.

## Conclusion

This project revealed that the construct 'teacher efficacy' has become sufficiently sophisticated, despite some persistent conceptual confusion, to be used as the theoretical base for an empirical survey. A survey of teacher efficacy in a number of selected schools in the KwaZulu-Natal province of South Africa in 2001 revealed that (a) the education system was not yet functioning at optimal levels as far as these schools were concerned, (b) that school context effects were such that teachers felt themselves unable to function efficiently, (c) that, although the general teaching efficacy (GTE) beliefs of the tea-

chers in the sample were strong, they were mostly negative in that the respondents tended to blame the environment and others for non-achievement, (d) that their personal teaching efficacy (PTE) beliefs were not as strong as could be expected, and (e) that their GTE and PTE beliefs did not allow them to perform the tasks normally expected of teachers efficiently. A number of recommendations are made to strengthen the PTE and more positive GTE beliefs of the teachers for purposes of optimal achievement in the schools.

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