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Building Self-Efficacy as a First Year Primary Montessori Teacher

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Building Self-Efficacy as a First Year Primary Montessori Teacher

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Abstract

The purpose of this paper is to increase the self-efficacy of a first-year teacher, with a focus on increasing the subject's comfort with the autonomy required of the position. The subject teaches in a Montessori classroom of preschool aged children (designed for 3-6 year olds, serving 3 year olds) at a young school in an urban environment. This was done through interventions that focused on factors of vicarious experience and social persuasion, as informed by Albert Bandura's research. Data was collected through surveys that measured self-efficacy, satisfaction with life and job satisfaction, and through daily physical, mental, and emotional scales. Written reflection was evaluated through charting positive, neutral, and negative language. Interventions resulted in a significant increase in self-efficacy, with the influence of social persuasion having the largest impact on all factors. Future research might consider collective efficacy's connection to social persuasion, and how a novice teacher's sensitivity to social persuasion and vicarious experience may shift towards other factors that influence efficacy, with greater work experience.

Keywords: self-efficacy, novice teacher, teacher efficacy, social persuasion, vicarious experience, satisfaction with life, job satisfaction, education, early child education, early child development.

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Early in my first year as a primary Montessori teacher, I began to recognize

patterns of anxiety, stress, insecurity, and confusion. During my Association Montessori

Internationale (AMI) primary (serving 3-6 year olds) teacher training and practice

teaching, I had felt cautiously confident, working hard to learn the theories and practices

necessary to successfully implement this thoughtful method of education. I had received

positive feedback from the teachers, mentors, and observers of my work, but in practice, I

had to confront the reality that this direct support was no longer consistently present. I

was left to assess my capabilities and make decisions of my own within an increasingly

inconsistent environment that challenged me in unpredictable ways.

In her writings, Dr. Maria Montessori explores the idea of the prepared adult, one

who works to shed themselves of biases, preconceptions, selfish interest, and the

emotions of their personal life to better observe and serve the needs of the children. This

work is a constant process throughout the career of a teacher, but I had not considered

that it would also relate to my feelings about my ability to do my job. Clouded by

insecurity and anxiety, I realized that my confidence and positivity needed to be high and

consistent to be productive and successful at this delicate work. In considering and

researching this concept, I connected my feelings directly to the idea of self-efficacy, a

social-behavioral learning theory that describes the belief an individual holds in their

ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. In the position of a teacher,

this belief relates to the myriad of multifaceted tasks that make up the daily and

overarching experience of guiding children's education.

When I consider my efficacy levels, what stands out to me most is the isolation

and autonomy inherent in teaching, particularly at the preschool level in a Montessori

environment. While I know that I have a wealth of knowledge and skills at my disposal, one can never be fully prepared to be the lead guide in an environment with many unpredictable factors. Though teacher training deeply explores practices and theories and practice teaching offers a taste of the real experience, each environment, school culture, and group of children is unique and evolving. Without experience or a consistent source of feedback about the many independent choices I am making in the classroom, it is difficult to know how to successfully apply my knowledge. Often the work can involve trial and error, particularly in creating classroom culture and handling behavioral issues. Ultimately, I have recognized that the inherent autonomy that this job requires caused me discomfort and anxiety. In isolation, I find it difficult to accurately judge my success, to confidently make decisions about my practices, and to rid myself of the preconceptions and emotions that hinder the work of guiding children. In researching self-efficacy, I discovered extensive research relating directly to the problems I am facing, particularly concerning the work of teachers and lack of confidence when it comes to autonomy.

My aim in this action research project is to discover the best ways to build self-efficacy as a first-year teacher, specifically as it relates to my autonomy confidence. My setting is a primary level classroom in a young, urban Montessori school where I am the lead guide. My environment is a new class of sixteen three-year-olds, with one associate guide assisting me. In striving towards the self-aware and self-reflective practices of a Montessori guide, it is essential to look at my approach and consider routines to support and encourage constant and evolving growth and adaptation. I look towards building the tools of self-efficacy as a routine that will serve my success as a teacher in support of a long career.

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Theoretical Framework

Social learning theorist Albert Bandura (1997) explained self-efficacy as "belief

in one's capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to produce

given attainments" (as cited in Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Self-efficacy theory

explores the origin of self-efficacy beliefs, considering how these beliefs develop,

function, and can be cultivated for personal and collective change (Bandura, 2011). It is

important to note that self-efficacy describes self-perception of competence rather than

actual level of competence. It is possible to possess the abilities to successfully complete

a task or do a job, without believing that these abilities are present; lack of belief renders

these capacities ineffective. Self-efficacy impacts the effort enacted to pursue a goal, the

ability to persevere and adapt to obstacles, and to what extent control is exercised over

events (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Self-efficacy beliefs relate to a specific task,

aspect of performance, or intellectual awareness. In Bandura's exploration of self-

efficacy as it relates specifically to teachers, he suggested that efficacy may be most

malleable early in a teaching career, and that building efficacy in the first years can be

critical to the long-term development of efficacy (Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Factors that Affect Self-Efficacy

Bandura described four sources of self-efficacy beliefs: mastery experiences,

vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and physiological and emotional states. Mastery

experiences are moments in which success comes as a result of real action, as a task is

mastered through personal abilities and power. Bandura attested that mastery experiences

are the most powerful factors to support self-efficacy. Perception of performance success

increases efficacy beliefs; perception of performance failure decreases efficacy beliefs

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(Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Resilient and lasting efficacy requires experience in

overcoming obstacles through perseverance, and the awareness that overcoming failure is

informative, not demoralizing (Bandura, 2011).

Vicarious experiences are those in which someone else is observed modeling the

skill or ability in question. The degree to which the observer identifies with the model can

adjust the effects of the experience (Bandura 1977). When the observer identifies with the

model, and the model experiences success, the observer's efficacy is increased. When the

observer identifies with the model, and the model experiences failure, the observer's

efficacy is decreased (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Vicarious experiences can also

come from hearing stories and reading literature about a particular topic or skill the

reader is hoping to build (Bandura, 2011).

Social persuasion comes from one's environment and can include performance

feedback from a supervisor or colleague, conversations in the teaching community, or

insights taken in from the media. Bandura attested that social persuasion may be limited

in it's impact, but it can contribute to success by driving an individual to initiate a new

practice or strategy, tackle a task, or work with perseverance to achieve goals (as cited in

Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Continuing education and professional development

opportunities fall under this category. Gaining knowledge and experience regarding

specific tools towards success can support self-efficacy beliefs, However, any new skills

or insights gained may not have an affect on self-efficacy until they are put into practice

and done so with success. The concept of social persuasion extends to the school

community as a whole. Collective efficacy is powerful; negative conversations among

teachers breed lower efficacy, while teachers working together to address learning,

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behavioral problems, and motivation builds higher efficacy (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Psychological and emotional states can influence efficacy by affecting one's judgment of self-efficacy beliefs. Efficacy can be strengthened by decreasing anxiety and depression, increasing physical strength and stamina, and aligning one's awareness of physical and emotional states with reality. The physical and emotional reactions to and interpretations of events can affect efficacy beliefs; it is important to be in control of one's emotional and physical reactivity. When one is present to experience moderate emotional and physical stimulation through work, capabilities can sharpen and improve by focusing attention and energy to the task at hand. Extreme emotional or physical response, whether positive or negative, can impair functioning and interfere with effective use of abilities and skills. Bandura attested that for physiological states to have an effect on efficacy, they must be attended to.

Bandura was the first to explore and define self-efficacy, and his theories have been an overarching reference for researchers of efficacy ever since. He offered a guidepost for the variety of factors that can impact self-efficacy, defining specific categories of experience.

Review of Literature

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal. Albert Bandura (2011) asserted that this belief concerns a specific task, area of knowledge, or performance, and it acts to shape the behaviors and strategies that one employs to achieve a particular outcome. Self-efficacy beliefs shape thought patterns and practices and are most malleable early in the process of learning a new skill set or

topic (Hoy & Spero, 2005). In the role of teacher, it is critical to be able to persist in the face of challenges, recover from setbacks, and expend maximum effort to accomplish goals (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In the teaching profession, experiences can vary with regard to school environment and expectations, resources, and parent community. Building self-efficacy is essential in supporting a teacher's ability to thrive and adapt within a changing environment that provides unexpected challenges (Bandura, 2011). Encouraging positive self-efficacy is an active process, thus it is important to examine and explore strategies that might be effective. I began this process through researching areas and characteristics of efficacy that had previously been explored, specifically as it relates to teachers. I aimed to discover what factors can most impact positive self-efficacy in teachers, and how self-efficacy can impact the lives the individual, their students, and the greater school community.

Effects of Teacher Self-efficacy on Students

Research regarding teacher efficacy has found the theory to be a challenge that directly impacts many facets of teachers' lives, individually and collectively, as well as student outcomes (Bandura, 2011; Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2011; Guo et al., 2011; Guo et al., 2010; Hoy & Spero, 2005). Teacher efficacy has immense motivational power; the individual's level of efficacy impacts the degree of effort they invest in a teaching situation and the persistence put forth in the face of adversity (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Tschannen-Moran and Hoy (2001) found that teacher efficacy influences teachers' classroom behaviors, specifically noting that highly efficacious teachers were less likely to be critical of an incorrect student, and more likely to persist in supporting a child who is struggling. Teacher efficacy positively

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correlated with instructional experimentation and high levels of organization, fairness, enthusiasm, and clarity (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Guskey, 1988; Stein and Wang, 1988). Research has suggested that self-efficacy can influence student achievement, attitude, and growth directly (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2011). This discovery confirms the work of Dembo and Gibson (1985) in an earlier study that showed similar differences in behavior between high and low efficacy teachers, involving organization, instruction, and teacher feedback provided to students experiencing difficulty (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). Ashton et al. (1983) discovered that highly efficacious teachers additionally maintained high academic standards, had clear expectations, focused on academic instruction and maintained the productive behavior of students. Additionally, in a high school sample, teaching efficacy was positively related to an accepting climate that encouraged student initiative and was focused on meeting the needs of individual students. Researchers also found evidence that high efficacy teachers are less likely to appear angered or threatened by students' misbehavior (Ashton et al., 1983).

Highly efficacious teachers have also been found to attribute the challenges encountered in the classroom to their teaching methods, rather than students' faults (Guo et al., 2010). This awareness directly acted to encourage and inspire stronger academic achievement and participation among students (Guo et al., 2010). Particularly in classrooms that offer emotional support to students, teacher efficacy proved to be a significant predictor of children's development of print awareness and vocabulary knowledge in early childhood education and beyond (Gibson & Dembo, 1985; Goddard et al., 2001; Guo et al., 2010). High levels of efficacy within lower quality classroom environments without emotional support may depress student performance. Guo et al.

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(2010) hypothesized that efficacious teachers place high expectations on themselves and their student body, which may translate as oppressive in an environment lacking in emotional support for students.

Stress and Burnout

Teacher stress and levels of burnout have been directly related to self-efficacy; teachers with low teacher-efficacy are likely more vulnerable to job stress experience that leads to burnout (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Stress is a product of teacher coping mechanisms, patterns of belief and behavior, and environmental influences (Verešová & Malá, 2011). Extensive stressors paired with these factors can lead to burnout, which is characterized by emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and the reduction of personal success (Maslach, 1996). Stress can occur cognitively, emotionally, physically and socially (Verešová & Malá, 2011). Emotional stress is the principal aspect of teacher burnout (Maslach, 1996). A study of proactive coping, stress and self-efficacy of teachers revealed that self-efficacy positively and directly relates to an individual's capacity for active, reflective and preventive coping, as well as emotional support seeking and strategic planning (Verešová & Malá, 2011). The higher the teacher's level of efficacy, the lower the cognitive, emotional, physical, and social stress (Verešová & Malá, 2011). The more proactive the teacher, the lower the stress (Verešová & Malá, 2011). A proactive teacher is one who is responsible for their own results and persistently works to meet goals and anticipate future requirements, which can ultimately lead to self-development (Verešová & Malá, 2011). They do so by accumulating resources and honing skills to avoid sources of burnout (Verešová & Malá, 2011). Proactivity is positively related to teacher efficacy and positive student outcomes, dynamic teachers

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acting as a source of motivation for his or her students. (Verešová & Malá 2011)

Optimistic belief in one's competence to approach daily challenges can motivate an

individual to engage in constructive coping (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). This optimism

leads to successful adaptation, which in turn minimizes burnout (Schwarzer & Hallum,

2008).

Job Satisfaction

Moè et al. (2010) discovered that positive affect, or the extent to which one

experiences positive moods, and self-efficacy mediate the relationship between effective

teaching and job satisfaction. Even if a teacher possesses the ideal practices and skills

necessary to teach effectively, their sense of job satisfaction may be negative if their

positive effect and self-efficacy are lacking (Moè et al., 2010). The more one uses what

should be effective methods without positive student results, the more detrimental to

one's perceived self-efficacy (Moè et al., 2010). Some teachers are capable of performing

the tasks required of their job but are dissatisfied by the results, no matter how much they

improve their practices, resulting in low efficacy (Moè et al., 2010). Efficacy and positive

effect must improve in tandem with the building of effective routines and practices to

grow job satisfaction (Moè et al., 2010). Vallerand et al (2003) observed that an

autonomy-supportive social environment where control is limited encourages a

productive and passionate outcome from the teacher population (as cited in Moè et al.,

2010).

Building Efficacy Through Social Persuasion and Vicarious Experience

Mastery experiences are opportunities for the individual to successfully and

independently complete a job-related task and experience its intended outcome

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(Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). In the effort to build efficacy, mastery experiences are often believed to have the greatest impact on self-belief. However, many studies show that teachers with more years of experience, and thus more opportunities for mastery, do not have significantly higher efficacy (Brown & Gibson, 1982; Guo et al., 2011; Skaalvik &Skaalvik, 2007). Indeed, many researchers have recorded a scale in which efficacy appears lowest in the early years of teaching, rises toward the middle of the teaching career, and tapers again towards the end. (Dembo & Gibson, 1985; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Klassen & Chiu, 2011; Moè et al., 2010).

Hoy and Spero (2005) made an important discovery about the impact of teacher efficacy in their study of teachers with a range of experience, from novice to late in career teachers. In a data tool (Hoy & Spero, 2005) that required the teachers to assess their own teaching activities and skills, perspectives improved and held with experience. This contrasted with Hoy & Spero's (2005) findings about self-efficacy, which revealed efficacy rising through teacher preparation and novice years, and declining with greater experience. Similarly, Moè et al.'s (2010) stated that tools and capabilities as a teacher are not enough; belief that these strategies and skills can be effective is essential in building efficacy and ultimately leading to teacher success. Teaching goes beyond method and structure, and often novice teachers underestimate the complexities required of the profession (Hoy & Spero, 2005). Often teachers beginning their careers possess an unrealistic optimism (Weinstein, 1988) that leads to discrepancy in their understanding of professional efficacy (Hoy & Spero, 2005). As Dembo and Gibson (1985) attested, "teachers develop feelings of inadequacy when they realize they do not have the knowledge or skills to deal with situations they face" (p. 178). Once established, efficacy

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beliefs, whether positive or negative, can often be resistant to change (Bandura, 2011; Hoy & Spero, 2005; Moè et al., 2010).

In a study conducted among primary school teachers in China, mastery experiences were not the most influential source of teacher efficacy, but rather social persuasion arose as the strongest predictor of positive self-efficacy (Hoi et al., 2017). Hoi et al. (2017) suggest that this result was a reflection upon the role of the preschool teacher; as this work calls the instructor to address multiple subjects in one class, it is difficult to focus efficacious thoughts on a specific task. Mastery experiences are difficult to obtain in an impactful way when there is a variety of subjects and demands in the classroom environment rather than a single subject to address (Hoi et al., 2017). Mastery experiences are related to particular events, while social persuasion addresses overall attitudes, behaviors, and beliefs (Hoi et al., 2017).

Much early teacher socialization and integration into school communities occurred informally and came from contact with experienced teachers, who displayed lower self-efficacy and may then have had a negative influence on the efficacy of novice teachers, which often correlated to lack of satisfaction in support and preparation (Hoy & Spero, 2005; Hargreaves, 1972 as cited in Dembo & Gibson, 1985). Self-efficacy faded without positive reinforcement, vicarious experiences, social persuasion and when there was a tendency for isolation (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001; Hoy & Spero, 2005). Young teachers required opportunities for success and encouragement to neutralize the stress of the job (Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008), which was unavoidable but may have subsided by boosting self-efficacy to minimize the negative results of stress (Klassen & Chiu, 2011). In a negative community, lower efficacy resulted as teachers dwelled on and

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rehashed challenges and difficulties; when teachers worked to address motivation,

behavior, and learning issues, higher efficacy resulted (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Indeed, several studies have found that teacher efficacy has a significant positive

correlation to collective efficacy, which is increased through social persuasion (Goddard

& Goddard, 2001; Guo et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). Teacher efficacy

has been found to vary among schools, supporting the theory that the specific culture and

environment of each school can impact the individuals who are employed there. Further

evidence suggests that this cultural variation is a result of collective efficacy; individual

teacher efficacy is higher in schools with greater collective efficacy (Goddard &

Goddard, 2011). Additional factors include school climate, sense of community, positive

feedback from performance, and collaboration, which are all examples of social

persuasion. Low-efficacy can spread throughout a community creating a cycle of self-

defeat and disappointment, but establishing a cohesive culture can reverse this

(Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001).

Guo et al. (2011) delved deeper into considering and explaining this phenomenon

in their study of pre-school teachers. Guo et al. explored the discovery that teachers' self-

efficacy was significantly related to two dimensions of teachers' sense of community:

perception of staff collaboration and their decision-making ability. This discovery led the

researchers to consider the fact that pre-school teachers might be supported best by an

environment that allows for the connection and influence of other teachers while offering

opportunities for autonomy (Guo et al., 2011). Decision-making is an important factor in

building efficacy (Guo et al., 2011; Tschannen-Moren & Hoy, 2001); increasing

autonomy by offering teachers a greater sense of control within the professional life

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builds self-belief and results in teachers who work with greater imperative and resilience.

This sense of control relates to decision-making ability, not influence or the ability to

persuade. Perceived ability to participate and contribute to decision-making discussions

builds efficacy. Similarly, collaboration creates opportunities to share in practices and

pedagogy, and offer one another support and validation, all while building efficacy.

Children's engagement positively associates with teachers' self-efficacy, only for those

who perceive their experience to include high levels of collaboration. As teachers work to

improve skills and understanding of their work, they are better equipped to engage

children positively and gain mastery experiences, which in turn build efficacy in a

cyclical path. Collaboration and social persuasion boost self-efficacy, which in turn

creates better student outcomes (Guo et al., 2011).

Observation can offer opportunities for the influence of social persuasion and

vicarious experience upon efficacy. In being observed by a supervisor, an opportunity

arises for the task-specific feedback that can result in positive social persuasion towards

more effective teaching. Through observation of their own, teachers can witness

exchanges and experiences that can positively inspire behaviors and practices to model in

one's classroom, a factor of vicarious experience (Schwarzer and Hallum, 2008). The

vicarious experience offers opportunities for cognitive self-modeling, which prepares for

future teaching and use of techniques, and symbolic modeling, which offers examples of

methods in practice (Bautista, 2011). Such variety, not only in factors to influence self-

efficacy but also within the factors themselves, has more of an impact on the increase of

self-efficacy, as these various nuances support specific aspects of a given task.

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Conclusion

For a novice teacher, building efficacy is an essential pursuit in the early stages of their career, particularly in seeking out opportunities for verbal persuasion, vicarious experiences, and collaboration. Unfortunately, there have been few studies about the best ways to build efficacy in early childhood educators on an individual level, though much exploration has occurred regarding its importance and relationship to collective efficacy. While mastery experiences can be insightful in the teaching profession and may encourage increased self-belief, they are few and far between for a young teacher. Furthermore, for a preschool or early childhood educator, the task of engaging young children in a variety of subjects depletes the influence of mastery, as one experiences such a range of ever-changing undertakings in a day. In truth, the broader supports of social persuasion and vicarious experience serve to build stronger efficacy in such an environment, and collaborative engagement supports both of these pursuits.

Methodology

When considering my research, I looked specifically into studies that referenced self-efficacy, particularly in relation to teachers. While I discovered many studies that used ideas and methodology to measure the impact of efficacy on teacher experiences and student outcomes, I was not able to find any research in which specific tools were used to build efficacy.

I considered Bandura's (1996) four factors to influence self-efficacy, as well as research specific to the efficacy of teachers. Though Bandura (1996) considered mastery experiences the most impactful factor, such experiences cannot be intentionally orchestrated. Additionally, research has suggested that the efficacy beliefs of teachers

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increase in the first 5 years of teaching, then decrease and plateau through the remainder

of a teaching career (Dembo & Gibson, 1985). This suggests that perhaps mastery is not

as powerful to build longevity in efficacy beliefs. I chose to focus my intervention instead

on vicarious experience and social persuasion for this reason. Additionally, both

influences create opportunities to connect with others, thus creating opportunities for

collaboration and possible increase of collective efficacy. I decided not to intervene with

regard to physical and emotional states because adjusting and considering these elements

would be very personal, and though the process would likely inspire efficacy beliefs, I

did not believe that the data collected would be particularly generalizable.

To increase vicarious experience, I observed in two other classrooms at my

school, once in week 2 of my intervention, and again in week 5. Both were environments

with more experienced teachers whom I identified with as models. I observed for the full

day, took notes throughout, and completed journaling about my experience. Additionally,

I created a schedule of readings to support vicarious experience through Dr. Montessori's

(1966, 2007, 2010) theoretical literature, as well as writings from other Montessori

professionals (see Appendix A). These readings were specific to my personal experiences

and considered topics specific to the Montessori method such as preparation of the adult,

normalization, and grace and courtesy. I completed readings each week, choosing two per

week to give myself time to consider and reflect upon the content. I completed one every

Sunday night, reflecting again on Mondays and Tuesdays, then completed the second on

Wednesday, reflecting again on Thursdays and Fridays.

To affect social persuasion, I scheduled twice-weekly conversations with a

mentor to offer specific support that related directly to my day-to-day experience in the

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classroom. This offered specific feedback, encouragement, and insights into new practices and skills from a more experienced Montessori teacher. I preceded each conversation by creating a list of specific questions and topics, and took notes throughout the meeting. Additionally, a mentor employed by my school observed me during week 1 of the intervention and again in week 6. She offered specific performance feedback, support, and connection. In inviting her to observe at the beginning and at the end, I aimed to create an opportunity to reflect on and compare personal beliefs across the span of the intervention. I also attempted to create opportunities for collective efficacy building by inviting colleagues to gather for a more in depth conversation about teaching practices and behavior management. Throughout these interventions, I completed journaling that called me to answer specific questions (see Appendix B).

To track shifts in efficacy beliefs, I used a Teacher's Sense of Efficacy Scale developed based on Bandura's writings by Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001 (see Appendix C). The items on the scale called for reflection regarding my feelings about my decision-making, efficacy to influence school resources, instructional efficacy, disciplinary efficacy, efficacy to enlist parent involvement, efficacy to create a positive school climate and efficacy to enlist community involvement. Bandura (1997) found that in order to be useful, measures of teacher efficacy needed to relate to teachers' assessments of their capabilities across a wide spectrum of topics and tasks they are asked to perform (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2001). I completed this scale in week 1, week 4, and week 7 of my intervention. I did the same with a Satisfaction With Life Scale (see Appendix D) developed by Diener, E., Emmons, R. A., Griffin, S., & Larson, R. J., and a Job Satisfaction Survey (see Appendix E) that I created. These exercises were meant to

assess how self-efficacy in my work extends to my experience in my broader life. I also

took physical, mental, and emotional scales (Appendix F) daily to track how my

physiological state impacts feelings of efficacy. I chose to do so in the mornings before

my day with the children began, because I find that through the day I am entirely focused

on the children. Then, at the end of the day, I experience the need to reflect on and

process my day and do not feel capable of accurately judging those states.

Analysis of Data

I will begin my data analysis by presenting the results of the following data

collection tools and interventions: daily physical, mental and emotional scale (PME

scale), weekly readings, weekly journaling, mentorship conversations and observation. I

will then examine the data collected from the Job Satisfaction, Satisfaction with Life, and

Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy surveys I completed in weeks 1, 4, and 7 and consider

ways in which interventions may have impacted results. To examine the results of the

daily PME scales, I took the scores in all three factors and calculated the average of each
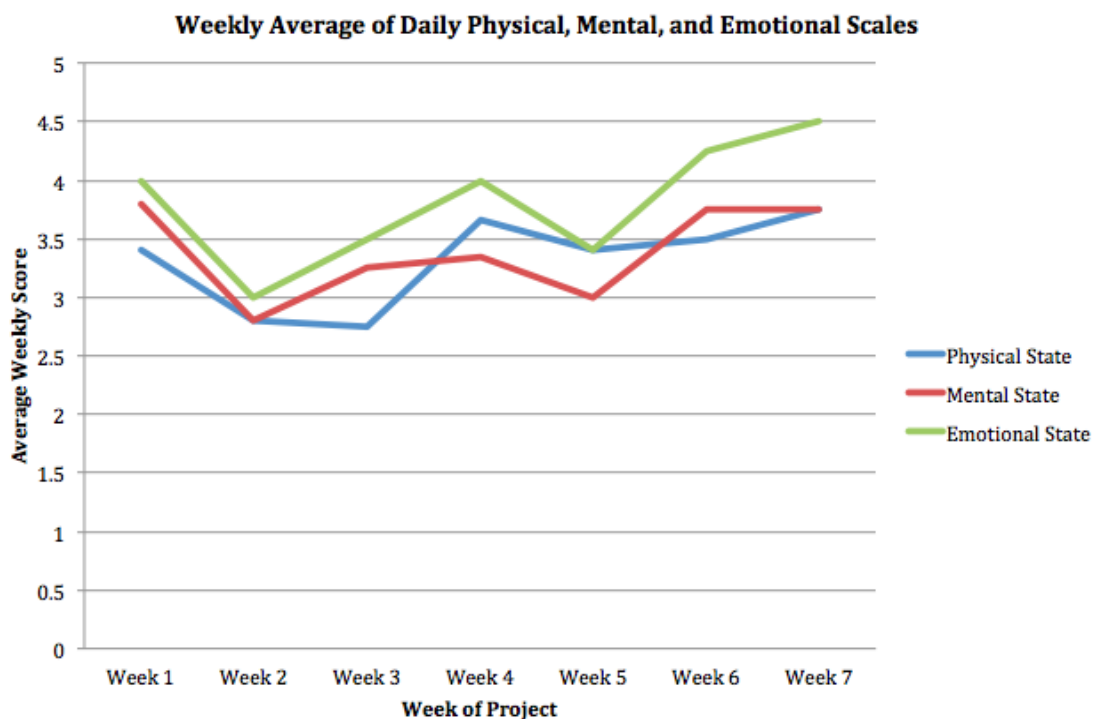
per week, generating the below figure.

Figure 1. Weekly Average of Daily Physical, Mental and Emotional Scales.

Overall, all three factors maintained a similar path across the research period.

Independently, this data tool could simply represent the reality of the unpredictability

inherent in the experience of a teacher. I hypothesized that when considered in relation to

interventions of observation, mentorship meetings, weekly journaling, and weekly

readings, important connections would emerge.

To explore this pattern more closely, I examined my journaling to see how weekly

reflections might reveal a deeper understanding of my experience across the research

period. In reading over my writings, I noticed several words repeated and began to isolate

and categorize these words into positive or negative feeling. I then edited these words to

the ten in each category that appeared most frequently. The positive words repeated most

were confident, productive, optimistic, supported, connected, progress, ready, know,

peaceful, and better. The negative words repeated most were isolated, uncertain/unsure,

unsuccessful, lacking, disconnected, struggle, unprepared, anxious, regret, and behavior. I

tallied the number of each word written per week, then totaled the number of positive and

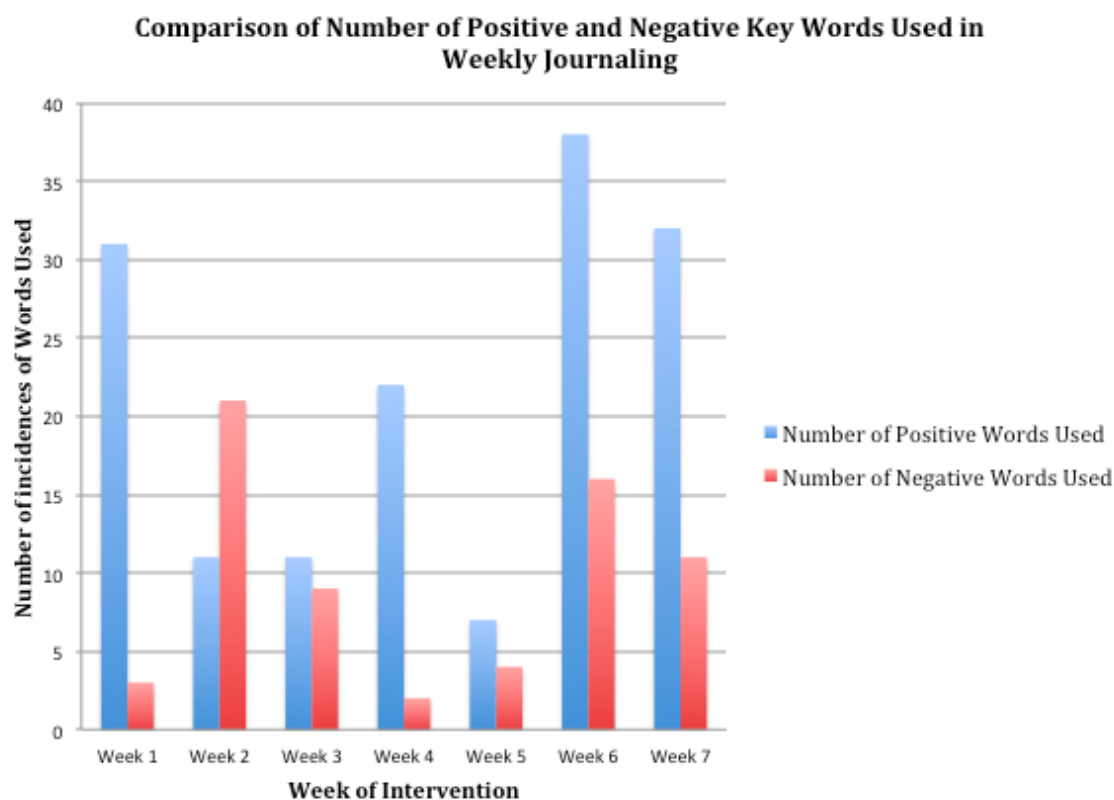negative words per week to create the following figure.

Figure 2. Comparison of Number of Positive and Negative Key Words
Used in Weekly Journaling

The trend of positive and negative language relates closely to the weekly averages I

recorded on the PME scales. The highest trending weeks on the PME scales are week 1,

6, and 7, which are the three highest weeks for incidences of positive words. Week 2 was

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the lowest trending week on the PME scale, and is the only week in which incidences of

negative language were higher than those of positive.

In considering and relating these tools and interventions, it is important to

consider the timeline. While these data tools offer information about my feelings and

experiences and how they shifted across the weeks, I sought to understand the

implications of these trends as they relate to direct interventions. The chart below shows

the occurrences of mentor conversations, observations in other classrooms, and

observations from mentors per week.

Week of Intervention	Number of Mentor Conversation	Number of Observation in Another Class	Number of Days Observed and Evaluated
Week 1	2	-	2
Week 2	2	1	-
Week 3	2	-	-
Week 4	1	-	-
Week 5	2	1	-
Week 6	2	-	1
Week 7	2	-	-

Figure 3. Schedule of Weekly Interventions

Mentorship: Conversations and Observations

I engaged in conversation with Mentor B twice weekly, except for week 4, which

was only three days long; we spoke once in week 4. Of thirteen mentorship

conversations, my emotional scale the following day rose by one point on seven

occasions. On three occasions, my mental scale rose by one point the following day. On

one occasion, both rose by one point. Two of the conversations occurred on Fridays,

when no scale was taken the following day. My physical scale did not appear impacted in

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any consistent or meaningful way the day after a mentorship conversation. The highest

score on the PME scale for any day of intervention was physical 4, mental 5, and

emotional 5. This occurred twice in the data, both on days following a conversation with

Mentor B.

In addition, in week 1 I was observed by Mentor A on Monday and Mentor B on

Friday, and both observations were followed by an in-depth and specific discussion about

my strengths and deficits as a teacher, my classroom practices and routines, and specific

children's observed needs and development. In week 6, Mentor A observed again on

Thursday, and we met for my yearly review regarding the same topics previously

discussed in week 1. The most direct, in-person, specific interaction and feedback with

both mentors occurred in week 1 and week 6. The PME scale and graph of positive and

negative words both indicate that this kind of direct and physically present mentorship

yields positive effects in my feeling around my work. The day after both instances of

Mentor A observing, the PME scales were scored 4, 4, and 5 respectively. The day

Mentor B observed was a Friday, and no scales were taken the following day, but it is

interesting to note that the day of the observation, the PME scales were scored 4, 5, and 5

respectively.

In my journaling during week 1, I was extremely positive and often referred to the

input I was receiving. I wrote, "The feedback from my mentors has given me a clear idea

of what needs my immediate attention, and I feel more confident moving forward

productively." The rest of my journaling from the first week describes a further increase

in confidence simply from positive comments from my mentors, who both complimented

my encouraging and calm demeanor, the beauty of my classroom, and the high

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engagement of the children. In week 6, my conversation with Mentor A following her observation circled back to the feedback from our week 1 meeting, acknowledging progress, suggesting alternatives to changes made, and encouraging setting new goals. In the middle of week 6 I wrote:

> My consistency in behavior gives me clarity and I sense more trust from the children. When I am consistent in moments of chaos, they pass quickly and productivity naturally arises. When I react too quickly or in extreme or emotional ways, things tend to escalate.

This self-aware language and sense of progress is a strong theme in the last two weeks of journaling, especially around themes from mentorship meetings. This suggests that the social persuasion of specific feedback has a strong impact on my positive feelings around work and the tasks it requires.

Observations in Other Primary Classes

In an effort to increase self-efficacy through vicarious experience, I scheduled two full-day observations in two classrooms at my school. The first was at the beginning of week 2, and the second was at the beginning of week 5. I decided to focus my attention on classroom routines and overall practices, while leaving myself open to inspiration. After the mentorship and support of week 1, week 2 shows a decline in PME scales and use of positive and language. The graph below shows the PME scales as they shift specifically within week 2.

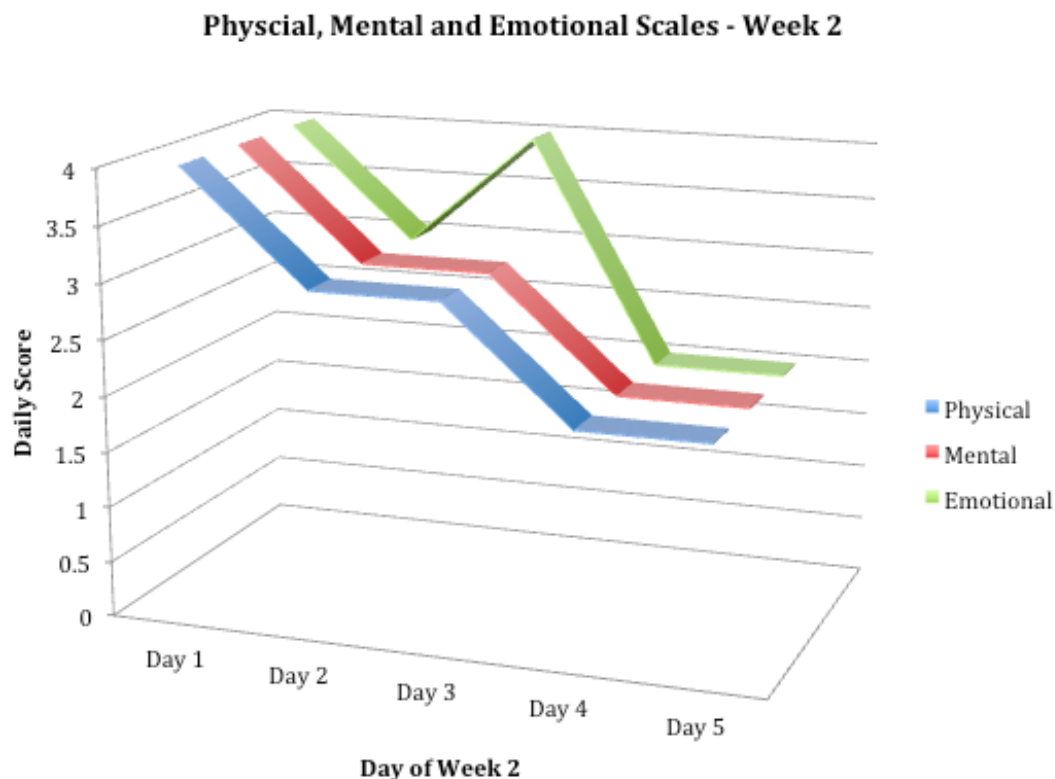BUILDING SELF-EFFICACY AS A FIRST YEAR PRIMARY MONTESSORI
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Figure 4. Physical, Mental and Emotional Scales – Week 2

While the week began with feeling of optimism and motivation, these feeling declined

throughout, as evidenced by the use of positive and negative words in my journaling. It is

the only week during research in which use of negative language vastly outweighed use

of positive language, though it was interestingly not the lowest week for positive

language. The specific language of the journaling from week 2 reveals themes of

isolation and insecurity. I wrote that I am not feeling the same connection and support I

had felt the previous week. I use the words "uncertain" and "anxious" several times. I

noted that I am "lacking the lightness, flexibility, and patience that I felt last week," and

that I can feel my state impacting the environment for the children. My reflections are

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mired in negativity, with regard to my behavior, attitude and practices, particularly in comparing myself to the teacher I observed. At the end of week 2, my PME scales scored 2 for all factors. On Friday of week 2, I wrote, "At the end of each day I recognize all the ways I did not act and react effectively and appropriately. At the beginning of each day I feel disconnected and have trouble recognizing how to adjust towards better practices." It should be noted that the spike in my emotional scale on day 3 is following a mentorship conversation the previous evening.

In the two weeks between my first and second observation, weeks 3 and 4, the PME scale increased, as seen in the graph below.
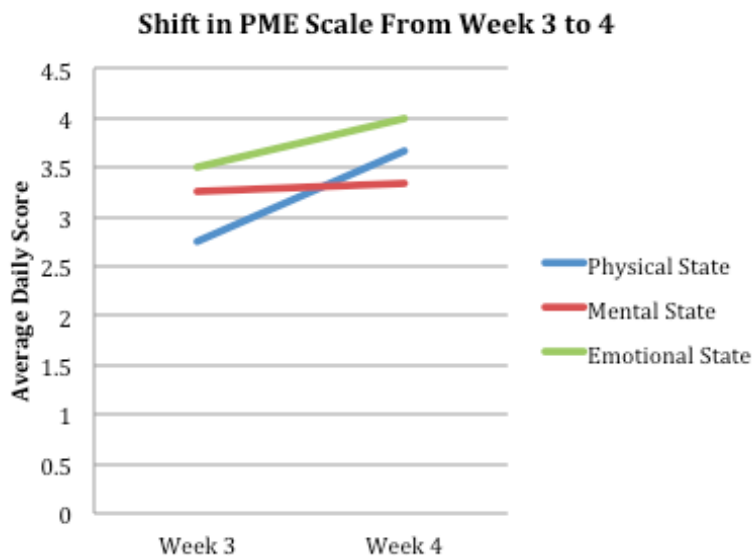

Figure 5. Shift in PME Scale From Week 3 to 4

The language used in week 4 was the lowest instance of negative language in any week, and was the fourth highest in use of positive language. Following my Monday observation that week, there is at first a similar decline in PME as with my previous observation in week 2, but the week itself reveals very different trends.

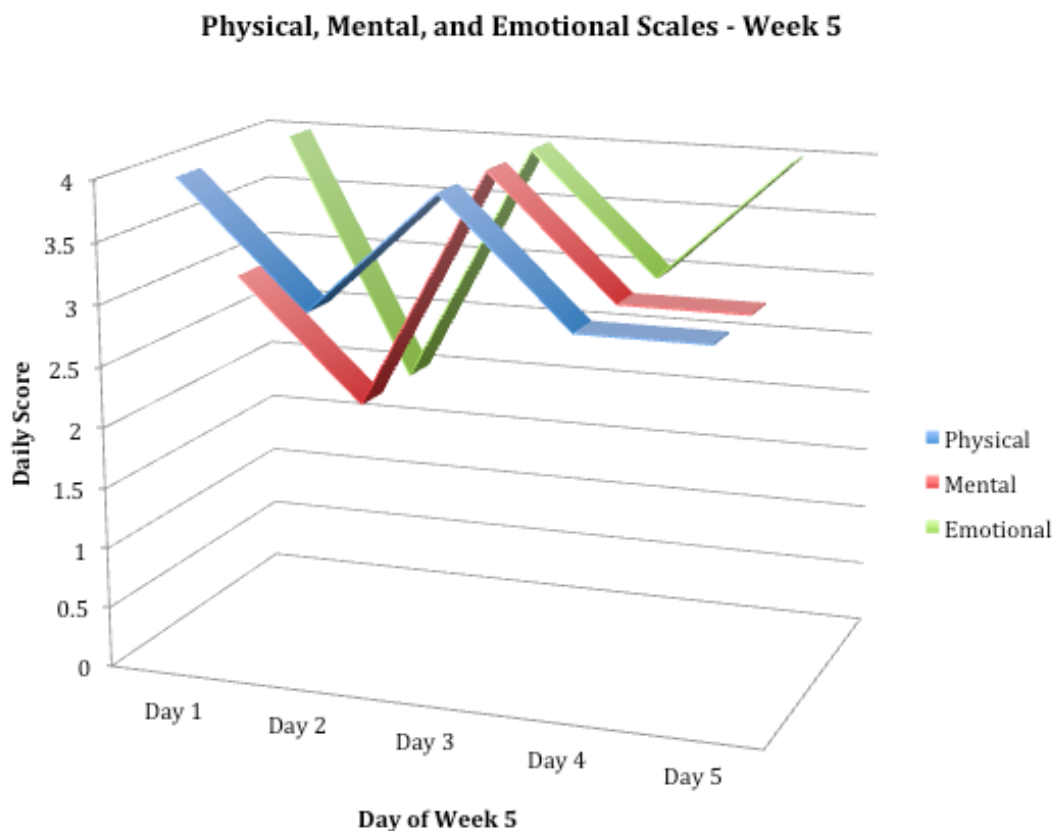BUILDING SELF-EFFICACY AS A FIRST YEAR PRIMARY MONTESSORI TEACHER

Figure 6. Physical, Mental, and Emotional Scales – Week 5

While these factors initially declined, they rose again by day 3, and plateaued a bit by the end of the week. I also noted that week 5 shows not only extremely low use of positive language, but also an even lower use of negative language; I used 7 positive words and only 4 negative words, from my list of the ten most-used in reach category. This suggests a use of more neutral language in my writings. In reviewing my journals, the themes that emerge are largely around traits I observed and admired about the lead guide, but with less of a sense of negative comparison. I write about feeling connected and confident in my knowledge. Though I express some regrets about my shortcomings in comparison, I also write about specific ways I can manifest better practices and behaviors.

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Weekly Readings

Before beginning my research, I hypothesized that weekly readings (See Appendix A) would be a strong source of vicarious experience and social persuasion. I anticipated that reading about specific examples of practices, Montessori theory, and unique paths of development would inspire reflection and productivity. To explore the impact of this intervention, my mid-week journaling included the prompt: "What themes am I noticing this week? What themes do I want to talk to my mentor about? Has the reading of the week played any part?" (See Appendix B).

Upon reviewing my journaling I did not note any consistent pattern of reference to the readings. My journaling was largely regarding experiences specific to my classroom, insights from mentor conversations, and themes that I did not relate directly to the readings. Most notably, in week 4 I referenced my reading from Dr. Montessori (2010) about her theories of normalization, or the path of development by which a child naturally becomes a unified and capable being. I wrote about this topic a few times that particular week, reminding myself of this process and the idea that it is "natural. I must meet the child where he or she is." This particularly related to my experiences, and was an outlier among the other weeks' readings. The only other direct reference made was during week 6 in reference to a lecture I read about the Montessori practice of grace and courtesy lessons (McDonell, n.d., see Appendix A). I lamented my insecurity around this topic, but wrote with regret about my uncertainty as how to move forward and improve.

Job Satisfaction and Satisfaction with Life Scales

At the beginning of my research, I completed a Satisfaction with Life Scale (Appendix D) and a Job Satisfaction Scale (Appendix E) to measure my existing feelings

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towards work and life. I completed these same surveys in the middle of the fourth week of my intervention, and then again at the end of the seventh and final week. Figure 7 below shows the results.
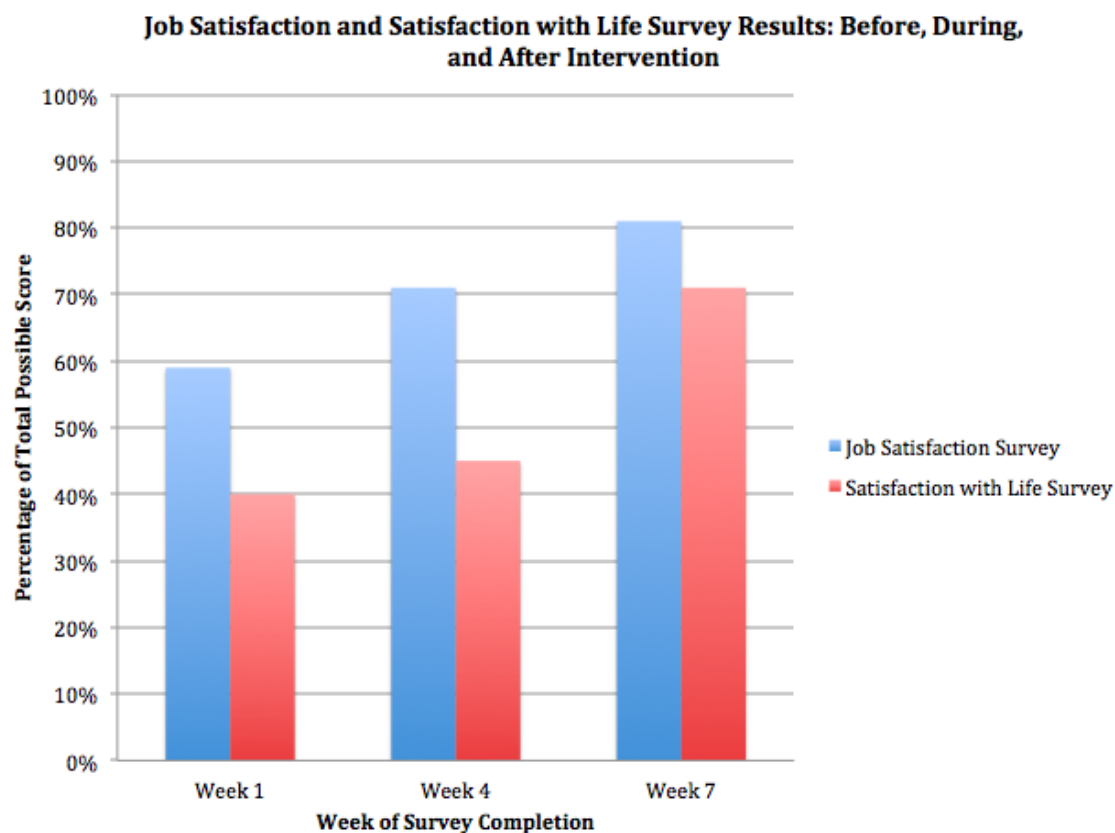

Figure 7. Job Satisfaction and Satisfaction with Life Survey Results: Before, During, and After Intervention.

To generate this table, I totaled my points for both surveys and calculated the percentage with relation to the total points possible for each question. For example, seven is the highest possible score for each of the five questions in the Satisfaction with Life Scale, so the best possible score would be 35. I equated this score to 100% satisfaction with life. It is clear in this data that my satisfaction increased across both factors throughout my

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intervention, particularly from Week 4 to Week 7. Job satisfaction increased 12% in the

first half of intervention and 11% in the second, demonstrating a consistent increase.

Satisfaction with life rose only 6% in the first half of intervention, but surged another

25% in the second half.

These overall gains suggest that my interventions had a positive impact on my

feelings towards my job and life as a whole. It is interesting to note that the more

significant improvement occurred in the second half of intervention. My PME scales

reflect a similarly more positive second half of intervention. This is particularly notable

when comparing my first observation in another classroom, which occurred in the first

half of intervention, and my second observation, which occurred in the second half of

intervention. Research about vicarious experience seems to suggest that the results of

vicarious experience through observation relate directly to the degree to which the

individual identified with the person they are observing. Upon reflection and in reading

my notes, I do not perceive any feeling of identifying with one teacher I observed more

than the other. In considering other possible reasons for a more positive second half of

intervention, I looked towards the data from my self-efficacy scale, and how it might

reveal particular influences.

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

I completed the Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale (Appendix C) before

intervention, in the middle of week 4, and at the end of week 7. In an effort to gain

additional perspectives about my self-efficacy, I examined the Teacher's Sense of

Efficacy Scale (TSES) after intervention and separated the 24 questions into 6 categories,

relating the content of the questions to themes I recognized. These are the categories,

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with number of related questions in parentheses: Overall Culture of Classroom

Environment (6), Managing and Supporting Challenging Students (7), Parent

Relationships (1), Creative Thinking (4), Evaluating Outcomes and Initiating Changes

(4), Encouraging Student Confidence and Independence (2). Figure 3 below shows the

results.

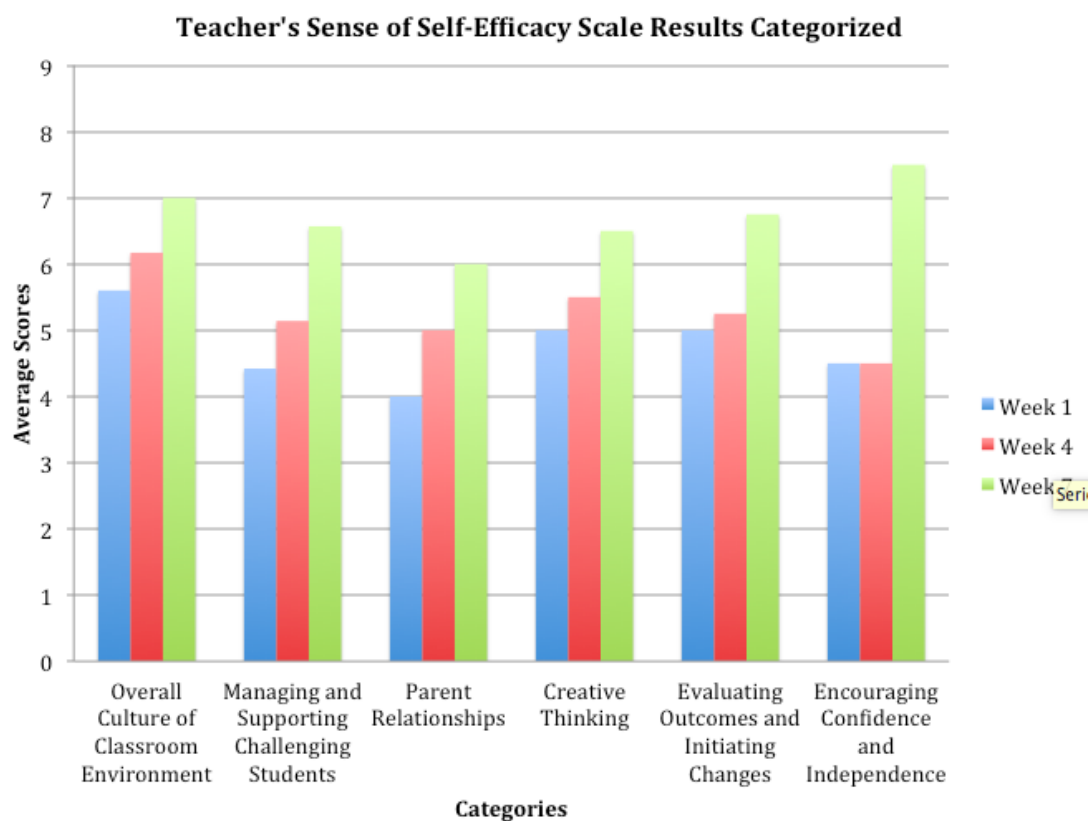*Figure 8.* Teachers' Sense of Self-Efficacy Scale Results Categorized

The highest increases of efficacy are in managing and supporting challenging students,

evaluating outcomes and initiating changes, and encouraging student confidence and

independence. It is notable that these are the areas I was inspired to explore based on the

input of my mentors and observations. Parent relationships had the lowest score, and

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remained so throughout. It was not a particular focus, and remains an area I struggle to grow efficacy.

The area of "Encouraging Confidence and Independence" shows the most noticeable growth. This topic relates directly to my notes from meetings with mentors from week 1. Both Mentor A and B noticed that the structure of my transitions was taking too long, causing the children to be distracted, lose focus, and have trouble engaging in work. I had felt that I was encouraging confidence and independence by giving them the time and space to do things like change their shoes themselves, go to the bathroom, and choose their place at the lunch table. My mentors both suggested that because they are young it would benefit the children to be actively supported through transitions and connected to specific work through direction. In doing so I recognized children going through days more successfully and purposefully. In my final week I wrote, "In giving the children more limitations, I am actually supporting independence, freedom, and a sense of internal discipline. I witness them expressing joy when given direction and structure."

Interestingly, the topic of encouraging confidence and independence is also one I wrote about in my journaling following my first observation in week 1. This was immediately following the conversations with both mentors that had called this issue to my attention. I was advised to change a practice in my classroom, and then right away went in to observe another teacher who was extremely adept at handling this issue. Instead of reacting to the experience with feeling of inspiration, my journaling reflects self-doubt and insecurity.

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The weeks following this observation inspired positivity, as reflected in my positive language, higher PTE and the increases in my job and life satisfaction scales and TSES scale in week 4. Between week 2 and week 4, I continued to reflect and write about themes of building independence, but I also discussed and wrote about supporting individual students' needs and continuing to observe and adapt practices as needed. These ideas relate directly to the two other topics that increased most significantly on the TSES: managing and supporting challenging students and evaluating outcomes and initiating changes. This suggests that because I focused on specific topics within my intervention, those particular areas grew notably, though overall self-efficacy continued to increase in all areas as well.

Discussion

Implications of Results

The data collected reflects that my interventions had a direct and considerable impact of my sense of efficacy. The most impactful interventions appear to be observations from experienced teachers with specific feedback and regular mentorship conversations, which relate to the influence of social persuasion. These interventions had immediate and lasting impact, not only on my feelings of efficacy, but also in my teaching practices. In turn, successful results in my practices reinforced and supported my feelings of efficacy. Observation and readings relate to the influence of vicarious experience. Both interventions offered new perspectives, but also caused conflicts. Where self-doubt arose as a result of vicarious experience, my interventions of social persuasion corrected and allowed me to use the knowledge I had gained to inform better practices rather than cause insecurity.

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A significant factor that led me to research this topic is a sense of insecurity around the autonomy inherent in the lead teacher position. In week 2 when my optimism and excitement waned, as reflected in the data, I knew that it was a direct response to the absence of the support I had experienced in week 1. This confirms my suspicion that autonomy is a big challenge for me in this work, largely because of a lack of confidence. It is evident that mentorship and connection to more experienced teachers can provide a substantial aid to this challenge, and have lasting results.

Possible Limitations

Completing this research while working as a full-time teacher in my first year was extremely challenging. It was difficult to dedicate time and energy to my interventions, while attempting to maintain order in my classroom routines and practices. While my self-efficacy has increased in many areas, I recognize that in some ways I could have utilized certain interventions more effectively. With regard to the weekly readings, I largely completed those in the evenings from home after a long and tiring day. While I consistently completed the readings, I could have more actively engaged with them and applied the topics to my experiences in a more meaningful way.

After completing my data collection and intervention, I reflected and have to acknowledge that these interventions were made possible through the effort and contributions of many in my school community. My administrators made the time in the school schedule for me to complete full-day observations, calling in a substitute to support in my classroom on those days. The two teachers in whose classrooms I observed graciously welcomed me. Mentor A, who is a member of my school community, made time in her schedule to observe and meet with me twice more than she would typically in

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a school year. Mentor B made herself available for twice weekly conversations, and travelled to observe and meet with me. All of this occurred because I requested it in reference to an action research project that was a course requirement. In moving forward with ways to continue and implement processes to build self-efficacy, I must acknowledge that these interventions require active participants outside of myself and may not be entirely feasible to sustain.

Effects on Personal Practice

All of these discoveries revealed a great deal about how I can continue to build self-efficacy over time. I know it will be important to build structures of social persuasion that are reliable and positive. I have also discovered that though vicarious experience offers new perspectives and ideas, I can often be self-critical in negatively comparing myself to the teachers I observe. It will be important to temper this conflict with reflection, either independently through reading and journaling, or through conversations with mentors and colleagues. In my interventions, this helped me to take what I had admired in the other teacher and utilize it to influence my choices and practices in my own classroom. As I move forward in my career, I also believe that other forms of influence on self-efficacy will come into play in a bigger way. I hypothesize that I will be able to rely a bit less on the influence of others, and gain more from my own mastery experiences. Even in the weeks following the ending of my official intervention period, I noticed moments of success that I would describe as mastery experiences and felt the impact on my confidence and sense of efficacy. In those moments, I recognized the cyclical nature of self-efficacy and it's continuing influence.

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Future Action Research

In the future, I aim to engage in building self-efficacy not only as a personal practice, but also as a collective practice. I have seen efficacy and a sense of connection lacking in my school community. Though I have not worked in any other school setting in my career, I can imagine that it is a common problem. I have witnessed colleagues avoiding contact with others, largely to devote all of their time and energy outside of direct work with the children to lesson plans, material making, and parent and inter-office communication. When I reached out to colleagues to attempt a gathering to connect during my intervention, I received a single response.

I experienced the process of building self-efficacy to require engagement with others, and I derived great satisfaction from the experience, in addition to increased efficacy. Though the research process was demanding, it ultimately was well worth the effort and time. I aim to encourage, support and compel my school community in creating opportunities for individual and collective efficacy growth in several ways. Firstly, I will share my findings with my heads of school and colleagues and encourage some small but important changes in school routines to create opportunities for efficacy-building practices. I will suggest and support the implementation of regular and routine observations in other classrooms by all members of the teaching staff, perhaps in 20-minute increments on a rotating schedule. I hypothesize that this will result in a greater overall sense of connectedness, and will create opportunities to share practices and ideas. I will suggest and support a system of mentorship be established among the teachers. While our assistant head of school is available for mentorship, there is not a clear sense of consistency, which can often create a sense of isolation. In addition, I think it might be

helpful for teachers who are less experienced or new to the school to be paired with more experienced teachers, to collaborate and meet weekly or bi-weekly to connect, share and issues or concerns, and exchange ideas. I would also like to suggest that a meeting time is created outside of the weekly staff meeting that is particularly dedicated to discussion and collaboration. Perhaps it could occur once a month and could be led by a lead teacher who guides the meeting with ideas and topics gathered from the teaching staff.

While I recognize the importance of self-efficacy as an active practice, I know that it can be a challenging one to implement alone with all of the responsibilities and demands already present in the teaching profession. I would like to discover ways to build structures within the community that are present and reliable, to encourage and support the growth of the individual and the collective community.

Conclusion

Ultimately, I have come to realize that it is important to consider self-efficacy in an active way as an integral part of my teaching practices. While I knew I needed daily, weekly, and monthly routines for lesson planning and classroom organization, this research has revealed the importance of similar routines for building self-efficacy. While the job itself can be enormously time consuming and takes a lot of emotional, mental, and physical bandwidth, making the space to consider self-efficacy is worthwhile and important in creating career longevity and life satisfaction. Going forward, I will work to consider my personal state and sense of self-efficacy by building a routine that is as subject to adaptation as my classroom practices.

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Appendix A

Week	Reading
Week 1	The Spiritual Preparation of the Adult," Joosten "The Spiritual Preparation of the Teacher," *The Secret of Childhood*, Montessori
Week 2	"The Teacher's Preparation," *The Absorbent Mind,* pp. 287-298*,* Montessori
Week 3	"Discipline and the Teacher," *The Absorbent Mind*, pp. 273-286, Montessori
Week 4	"The Child's Contribution to Society – Normalisation," *The Absorbent Mind*, pp. 210-216, Montessori
Week 5	"Two Different Kinds of Work," "The Guiding Instincts," "The Child as Teacher," "The Rights of the Child," *The Secret of Childhood*, pp. 190-209, Montessori
Week 6	"Grace and Courtesy for the Primary Child: Theoretical Foundations," McDonell
Week 7	"Observations on Prejudices," *The Discovery of the Child*, pp. 165-174, Montessori

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Appendix B

Reflection and Journaling

Beginning of the week:

- What outcomes do I seek this week? How would I define success in these

  outcomes? What means or actions will be required to accomplish these goals?

Mid-week:

- What themes am I noticing this week? What themes do I want to talk to my

  mentor about? Has the reading of the week played any part?

End of the week:

- Were the goals of the week met/was progress made? Were any changes made or

  felt following mentor conversations and readings?

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Appendix C

Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale

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Appendix D

Satisfaction With Life Scale

The Satisfaction with Life Scale

By Ed Diener, Ph.D.

DIRECTIONS: Below are five statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using
the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by placing the appropriate
number in the line preceding that item. Please be open and honest in your responding.

1 = Strongly Disagree
2 = Disagree
3 = Slightly Disagree
4 = Neither Agree or Disagree
5 = Slightly Agree
6 = Agree
7 = Strongly Agree

_____1. In most ways my life is close to my ideal.

_____2. The conditions of my life are excellent.

_____3. I am satisfied with life.

_____4. So far I have gotten the important things I want in life.

_____5. If I could live my life over, I would change almost nothing.

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Appendix E

Job Satisfaction Scale

	JOB SATISFACTION SURVEY	
	PLEASE CIRCLE THE ONE NUMBER FOR EACH QUESTION THAT COMES CLOSEST TO REFLECTING YOUR OPINION ABOUT IT.	Disagree very much Disagree moderately Disagree slightly Agree slightly Agree moderately Agree very much
1	I understand and feel confident in the requirements of my job that are imposed by the school culture.	1 2 3 4 5 6
2	I understand and feel confident in the requirements of my job that are inherent in the role.	1 2 3 4 5 6
3	I see the choices I am making positively influencing the experience of my coworker.	1 2 3 4 5 6
4	I see the choices I am making positively influencing the experience of the children in my class.	1 2 3 4 5 6
5	I have strong communication with my coworker. I communicate my needs and feel heard by her.	1 2 3 4 5 6
6	I have strong communication with my supervisors. I communicate my needs and feel heard by them.	1 2 3 4 5 6

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7	I feel like my job has meaning and impact.	1 2 3 4 5 6
8	I feel appreciated in the work I do.	1 2 3 4 5 6
9	I enjoy the work I do.	1 2 3 4 5 6
10	I am able to manage the requirements of my job within the time I am allowed. I do not take work home inappropriately.	1 2 3 4 5 6
11	I feel a sense of pride in my job.	1 2 3 4 5 6

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Appendix F

Physical, Mental, and Emotional Scales

Physical Scale:

1 – I am exhausted, very physically unwell or in pain.

2 – I am tired and feeling slow/struggling.

3 – I am not at my best, but I don't feel bad.

4 – I am fairly rested, and physically sound.

5 – I am full of energy and feel at a physical prime.

Mental Scale:

1 – I am mentally unable to complete the tasks required of my job.

2 – I am foggy and struggling with memory recall, communication, and decision-making.
I don't feel confident or positive.

3 – I am not feeling extremely prepared or positive, but I am not feeling negative. I am
progressing and decision making at a mediocre level.

4 – I am fairly mentally sound and feeling positive. I am giving strong presentations. It
may take a pause to make the best decisions in unexpected events.

5 – I am mentally rested, feeling positive, able to think on my feet and make quick and
successful decisions. I am giving strong presentations and am present to the
unpredictability of the classroom, able to adapt my plans as needed.

Emotional Scale:

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1 – I feel out of control. I am unable to regulate my emotions or control how they affect

my ability to do my job with neutrality and positivity.

2 – I am emotionally worn. My feelings lean towards frustration, sadness, loneliness, and

negativity.

3 – I am not feeling happy or excited, but I am not feeling angry or sad.

4 – I am feeling positive, but not at my best. I am able to control and regulate my

emotions and reactions. I am feeling optimistic.

5 – I am emotionally sound. I feel positive, confident, peaceful and in control. My

feelings lean towards joy and excitement.