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Community College Faculty Self-Efficacy in Student Centered Teaching

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Keywords: faculty, community college, self-efficacy, student-centered teaching

Abstract: The purpose of this study was to investigate if faculty self-efficacy beliefs impacted their choice of teaching methods in the classroom. Self-efficacy beliefs help to explain teacher instructional activities and their orientation toward the education process. Findings have implications for higher education as the strategies faculty use in the classroom are linked to student success.

Faculty members sense of self-efficacy impacts the choices they make when selecting teaching methods for the classroom. McClenney and Peterson (2006), claimed the key to student success was "the strategies faculty use in the classroom to engage students in the learning process. And the more community colleges understand about how faculty use class time and about the education practices they employ, the more they can support strategies that are highly effective in promoting student learning and success (pg. 27)." Community college enrollment has dramatically increased with the demographics of students growing more diverse (Boggs, 2003). At the same time, funding for community colleges has decreased, which has forced community college to reduce faculty development and hire more adjunct faculty who may have expertise in their subject area, but are unlikely to have teaching expertise (Murray, 2010). This convergence of increased enrollment and greater student diversity requires faculty who possess the confidence and ability to use student centered techniques

Self Efficacy

Bandura's (1997, 2012) Social Cognitive Theory describes self-efficacy as the ability of individuals to influence their environment through their selection of behaviors. The educator's degree of self-efficacy plays a major role in decisions about the types of methodology they will use in the classroom.

Consequently, as individuals use their agentic capacity to engage in chose behaviors, they construct an environment that enables them to be successful in what they do. Bandura (1997, 2012) emphasized that self-efficacy beliefs are not static; in other words they can change depending on the difficulty of the task, environmental changes, the individual encounters with failure, or for other reasons. How the individual responds to failure or setbacks is important. According to Bandura, some individuals give up when they encounter obstacles, while others push through the difficulty and ultimately succeed. The former tends to lower self-efficacy beliefs while the latter serves to strengthen them. Those with higher self-efficacy persist longer and set higher performance goals. Most studies of teacher self-efficacy have focused on the primary and secondary school settings. Leslie (2011), however, explored self-efficacy of faculty in a higher education context, specifically regarding their use of discussion teaching methods.

Teacher Selection of Methodology

This study investigated if faculty self-efficacy beliefs impacted their choice of teaching methods in the classroom. Schunk & Pajares (2005) claimed that self-efficacy helped to explain teacher instructional activities and their orientation toward the education process. Faculty decisions about the types of teaching methodologies they use in the classroom may not be

adequate to meet the needs of students. Schuetz (2002) conducted a national survey of 100 community colleges with 1,500 respondents (424 part-time, and 1,062 full time faculty). His study revealed that both groups used an average of 43 percent of their class time lecturing with only 15 percent of the time spent on class discussion. In another survey, McClenney & Peterson (2006) surveyed 3,500 faculty teaching in community and technical colleges in 21 states. They found that 98 percent of adjunct faculty used lecture methods as their primary means of teaching with 31 percent of the same faculty spending over 51 percent of the class time lecturing. In 2009, Christensen analyzed data from the Community College Survey of Student Engagement conducted in 2006. He found that faculty used lecture as their primary means of teaching 33 to 90 percent of the time. Furthermore, he said, "Most disheartening is the fact that almost two-thirds of community college students report that memorization of materials is a large feature of their classroom experience (p. 34). "

McClenney & Peterson (2006) pointed out that how faculty engage students is critical to student learning and their persistence in attaining academic goals. Consequently, they contend that community colleges need to understand the effects of faculty teaching efforts and intentionally address issues of designing and implementing educational experience that "make student engagement inescapable (p.27)."

Christensen (2008) stated that even though some community colleges recognized faculty deficiencies in their choice of teaching methods "few community colleges have an orientation program for new faculty and rarely explain effective teaching methodologies, how to create a syllabus, and the policies of the colleges to new instructors (p. 33)." Keim & Biletzky (1999) found that faculty development programs had a positive effect on faculty choices in classroom methodologies. "Faculty who had participated in professional development were more likely to use small group discussions, demonstrations, and activities promoting critical thinking (p. 727)." Since there is no research that examines community college faculty self-efficacy beliefs about the use of student-centered methodology, data needs to be collected to determine what those beliefs are, and if they impact method selection.

Purpose

The purpose of this study was to increase understanding about community college faculty self-efficacy beliefs regarding their capability to use an assortment of student centered teaching methods within complex classroom environments. The intent was to provide actionable information to community college administrators so they can make informed decisions about allocating resources for faculty development. Next, this study was intended to provide faculty developers with insights about faculty beliefs pertaining to the use of student centered teaching methods. Faculty developers may be able to use this information to strengthen the transfer of learning from teaching method workshops to the classroom. Finally, faculty may find the information useful as they reflect on way to improve how they engage their students.

Methodology

A mixed methods sequential exploratory research design used two data collection and analysis components: quantitative and qualitative. In the first phase, a Likert type survey instrument generated data that informed the development of interview questions for the second phase. The second phase used semi-structured interviews that provided richness and depth to the quantitative data.

Design

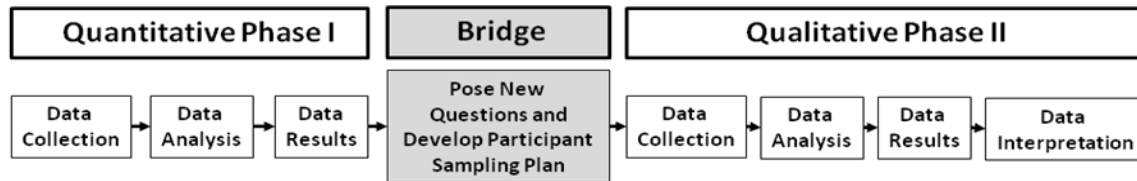


Figure 1.2. Sequential explanatory design: Participant selection model. Adapted from *Designing and Conducting Mixed Methods Research* by J.W. Creswell and V. Plano Clark, 2007, p. 73. Copyright by Sage Publications, Thousand Oaks, CA.

Population

The population for this research included full time and adjunct faculty at four Kansas public community colleges to include: a suburban single campus, a rural small single campus, a rural medium campus, and a rural medium multi-campus.

Sample

Respondents to the survey were asked to volunteer to be interviewed at their respective campus. Volunteers were purposefully selected to provide a diverse mix of gender and subjects taught.

Instrumentation

Dellinger's (2008) research provided a psychometrically sound and valid measurement scale, the Teacher Efficacy Beliefs Scale-Self (TEB S-S) to measure faculty self-efficacy beliefs. The Faculty Self-Efficacy Beliefs Scale (FSE BS) (Leslie, 2011) adapted for higher education faculty, had a Cronbach's alpha of .96. The 30 question Likert scale FSE BS was adapted for use in this research and contained four open-ended questions.

Procedures

Surveys were administered through internal email at each community college with a link provided in the email to Axio at the researchers' institution.

Findings

A total of 1351 surveys were sent, and 157 were returned for a response rate of 12%. There were no significant differences between the independent variable gender and subject taught, and the dependent variable, the question scores on the FSEBS.

Analysis of the four open ended survey questions revealed the following:

Question One- Tell us more about what you believe about your current teaching methods and classroom practice.

Faculty varied widely in describing their teaching behavior with some claiming they support active learning, stress thinking and concept development, encourage students to take ownership of learning, and encourage creativity. Others mentioned using a great deal of lecture, being a bit old school, and finding it difficult to get students to buy into active learning, and feeling that their teaching methods were out of sync with the students. Others had more negative comments, stating that students needed to be entertained, that those who do not thrive in an active classroom should not be in college, and that they were constrained in their teaching by the institution and content requirements of the course. Most described being satisfied or fairly

satisfied with their teaching performance although one faculty member described "having a long way to go before I get to where I want to be." Student centered learning activities mentioned were extensive and several described using a variety of teaching strategies.

Question Two- Tell us more about your professional development as it pertains to teaching in the classroom revealed three general categories of responses: self-development, experience, and education and training. The rural community college had a noticeable lack of self-development opportunities as well as opportunities in industry (experience). Lack of institutional resources both monetary and in release time were mentioned as well as a lack of institutional training. Adjuncts described issues with balancing their work life and part time teaching. Most personal development centered on content area as opposed to teacher development.

Question Three - If you teach in blended learning or online environments, what are your thoughts about your teaching methods? Faculty had a mixture of positive and negative thoughts about blended or online learning with all four colleges having a similar ratio of 4:1; negative comments more prevalent than positive. Positive statements included flexibility; negative included difficulty to engage students, lack of student motivation and participation.

There was extreme variance among colleges in the amount of educational opportunities they provided faculty. Those who had the benefit of adequate training expressed more confidence in their online teaching methods.

Question Four - What kind of technology or social media do you use in your current teaching methods? As in the answer to faculty opportunity for development, this question elicited a wide range of responses related to institutional resources with some faculty having access to a wide variety of learning management tools, publisher supported technology and use of Smart technology. Others were limited to Blackboard with one institution unable to use Blackboard, except for online testing. For those with greater technical options, some saw their institutions as using blended learning as a cost savings option without the proper understanding of how technology best supports learning.

The open-ended comments in the survey findings were consistent with the themes that emerged in the interviews.

Qualitative

Theme One

In the qualitative interviews, those interviewed expressed satisfaction with their teaching skills. However, what they considered important teaching skills and good teaching varied considerably, but fell into three general categories. The first group focused on care and creating a safe environment where students felt at ease and they expressed a desire to meet the needs of diverse students. Student success stood out as a top priority with one interviewee describing herself as a "chaser" who followed students carefully to make sure they completed tasks. Another advocated being patient with students, and not expecting too much too soon. They believed the teacher should help students get excited about the subject being taught. If they judged they had failed at this task, they accepted blame and wanted to be better teachers. Often, poor student evaluations and classroom conflict led them to this conclusion and they described being upset when students didn't like them. One individual taped her class to observe her behavior and discovered she talked in a "teacher voice" to students which could be considered condescending. Another researched conflict management as he felt this was an area of weakness.

The second group incorporated elements of the first and third group. Their concern for students manifested itself in their wishes to create a critically reflective classroom where students

could develop a passion and excitement for the subject. Modeling critical thinking, challenging students views in a respectful manner and opening students minds to new perspectives were their priorities. One expressed the opinion that students were unable to remember content, but would perhaps remember ways of thinking. Another, however, stated she wanted to shift students focus "from grades to really learning something." This group described constantly trying new techniques as "different groups react differently to learning strategies- you've got to be flexible and ready to move onto something else." This need to continuously improve techniques characterized this group.

The third group described a real concern with content. Good teachers to this group were subject matter experts and their focus was on personal knowledge development. They measured their effectiveness based on how current they were in their field as one individual stated, "If we can't show them and train them how to use it here – the employer is not going to want to re-train them all over again." This group tended to teach competencies and viewed good teaching as connecting class content to the real world. Their teaching focus was "hands on" but one sequenced 1) talk 2) test 3) lecture 4) hand on as his preferred methodology. This individual claimed he was not overly innovative in teaching as he spent so much time keeping current with technology.

Theme Two

The attitudes faculty held about good teaching impacted choices they made in the classroom, but also their faculty development choices.

But the more important factor that impacted their faculty development was institutional support.

One of the more dramatic findings appeared in how different the four community colleges were in offering and supporting formal faculty development opportunities. Faculty financial support for conferences, and travel abroad existed at one school, while a range of modest support to no support existed at the other community colleges. The same imbalance existed with in-house faculty development. The financial health of the community college played a part, but attitude of senior administration also impacted both the frequency and nature of on-campus faculty development offerings. This was especially true when faculty spoke of faculty development for online teaching. Concerns about their ability to teach online was a source of self-efficacy for many.

Faculty spoke of development in two tracks: teaching and their subject content. Most faculty development focused on subject matter content. Learning how to improve teaching was problematic due to time constraints and lack of opportunities and resources. Several spoke of themselves as constantly learning about their content area but struggled to describe how they improved their teaching. Online sites and webinars were mentioned as well as learning from fellow teachers. Faculty expressed a desire to meet more often with fellow faculty members; adjuncts especially mentioned a sense of isolation.

Discussion

Faculty's views on self-efficacy are linked to their beliefs about how a good teacher behaves. While grouped into three overlapping categories, each faculty member interviewed was unique. Faculty members tended to view themselves positively in the areas they considered important to good teaching, but did not mention many of the survey items that dealt with student centered teaching

Faculty tended to spend their limited time and resources on getting better at what they were already good at—usually subject matter content. Frequently blaming administration for

conditions such as bureaucratic reporting procedures, poor inservices, lack of resources for improving teaching, faculty expressed frustration. . If institutions want faculty to use student-centered methods, they must first make faculty aware of their existence and importance. Without clear leadership and direction from higher administration this situation is unlikely to change.

The implications of this study should be useful in increasing the understanding of faculty self-efficacy in community colleges. Community college administrators may find the results of the study useful as they make decisions about allocating limited resources, especially in the area of faculty development. Faculty developers may find uses for this study as they design ways to present interactive teaching methods to faculty members (Burnstad, 2002). They may also increase their insight into how faculty decide to use their newly acquired interactive teaching skills. The latter is important in that faculty developers can collaborate with faculty in the application of skills, experience success with those skills, and continue to use them in their classrooms. Ultimately, students are the beneficiaries of improved faculty teaching methods. Based on their experiences in the classroom, students may elect to continue their education, achieve their academic goals, and perhaps transfer to four-year institutions.

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