

**Establishing Teaching Efficacy through a Preservice Teacher Reading Program**

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### **Introduction/Need for Research**

General literacy and content literacy are essential skills needed by life-long learners (Park & Osborne, 2007), the very type of learner agricultural education seeks to develop (Doerfort, 2011). Research has shown that teacher modeling of reading increases student motivation to read (Gambell, 1996); however, a majority of preservice teachers may not display enthusiasm for the enjoyment of reading (Applegate & Applegate, 2004). Park, van der Mandele, and Welch (2010) found that agriscience teachers associated a lack of reading skills in students with less success in future careers and life in general.

Book clubs for teachers have been successfully used in professional development for active teachers (Morgan, 2008; Selway, 2003) and in preservice teacher preparation (Hall, 2009; Kooy, 2006). In Kooy's (2006) study, preservice teachers were able to reflect on and find ways to extend their teaching knowledge and identity with peers. Hall (2009) reported similar results with a preservice teacher book club, but noted that many of the participants believed they would not be able to put newly-discovered pedagogical techniques into use. The authors sought to utilize a voluntary book club for preservice agricultural education students to help them improve pedagogical techniques and self-efficacy.

### **Theoretical Framework**

This study was guided by Duncan and Biddle's (1974) model of classroom teaching. Specifically, the authors examined the role of presage variables in preservice teachers' self-efficacy. Duncan and Biddle (1974) viewed presage variables as part of a larger model of classroom teaching, and suggested that these variables had an effect on teacher efficacy in an actual classroom. Defined as the "characteristics of teachers that may be examined for their effects on the teaching process" (Duncan & Biddle, 1974, p. 39), presage variables consist of teacher formative experiences, teacher-training experiences, and teacher properties. Teacher formative experiences, which included factors such as age, gender, and social class, and teacher properties, which included the individual personality traits of a preservice teacher, are less open to influence than teacher-training experiences, which have greater potential to be controlled or manipulated by teacher educators as they occur during the teacher preparation period. Voluntary participation in a departmental book club during the summer, and subsequent reflection on the material read, was considered to be a teacher-training experience.

### **Purpose/Methodology**

The purpose of this study was to determine the impact of a summer book club on University of Arkansas agricultural education preservice teachers' teaching self-efficacy. Objectives included 1) to describe preservice teachers' teaching self-efficacy before participating in the book club; 2) to describe preservice teachers' teaching self-efficacy after participating in the book club; and 3) to determine the difference in preservice teachers' teaching self-efficacy scores before and after participating in the book club. The population consisted of preservice teachers at the University of Arkansas; a census sample was used ( $n = 37$ ). This experimental research followed a single group, pretest-posttest design. The treatment was participation in a summer book club, which included reading *Teach Like a PIRATE* (Burgess, 2012) and completing a pretest and posttest. The selected book focuses on empowering teachers to use their passion and tap into their creativity to construct learning experiences that are highly impactful for students (Burgess, 2012), and has been utilized for numerous other teacher-based book clubs, including the National

Association for Agricultural Education's Virtual Book Club (NAAE, 2015). Preservice teachers were given a free copy of the book asked to independently read it during the summer 2015 term. Tschannen-Moran and Hoy's (2001) Teachers' Sense of Efficacy Scale was administered before students received their book and again after they read the book; a copy of the posttest was attached in a sealed envelope to the inside back cover of the book with instructions to open only after the book was completed. Internal consistency of the instrument's three constructs, *efficacy in student engagement*, *efficacy in instructional practices*, and *efficacy in classroom management*, were calculated *post hoc* on the pretest and were found to be .92, .93, and .94, respectively. Because this study's population consisted of preservice teachers at [University] and a census sample was conducted, descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were deemed appropriate in describing the impact of the book club on students' teaching self-efficacy. We caution against the generalization of these findings to other populations.

### **Findings**

Sixteen of the 37 enrolled agricultural education preservice teachers volunteered to participate in the summer book club, leading to a participation rate of 43%. Nine of the participants completed the program, leading to a response rate of 24.3%. Mean pretest scores on participants' teaching self-efficacy for student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management were 6.11 ( $SD = 1.28$ ), 6.20 ( $SD = 1.17$ ), and 6.50 ( $SD = 1.40$ ), respectively. Posttest scores for each area of self-efficacy were 7.03 ( $SD = 0.92$ ), 7.41 ( $SD = 0.99$ ), and 7.14 ( $SD = 1.16$ ), respectively. Students' mean score in student engagement self-efficacy increased by .92, their mean instructional strategies self-efficacy score increased by 1.21, and their mean classroom management self-efficacy score increased by 0.64.

### **Conclusions/Recommendations**

Preservice teachers participating in the complete book club intervention experienced increases in mean self-efficacy scores in the areas of student engagement, instructional strategies, and classroom management. These findings support previous studies that identify book clubs as positive experiences for pre-service teachers (Hall, 2009; Kooy, 2006) and suggest book clubs may be sources of positive teacher experiences that can later influence their behaviors in the classroom (Dunkin & Biddle, 1974). However, almost half of the preservice teachers enrolled in the University of Arkansas' agricultural education program refrained from participating. Further, seven participants were unable or chose not to complete the book. This high rate of attrition was to be expected according to previous literature, as Applegate and Applegate (2004) found a lack of enthusiasm for reading among the majority of preservice teachers. Because previous research has shown that modeling reading increases student motivation to read, we recommend future book club endeavors include some interaction that displays the leader reading along with the participants. Additionally, we recommend qualitative inquiry be conducted to determine the reasons preservice teachers drop from program-based book clubs.

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