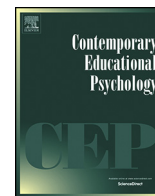




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Beginning teachers' efficacy and emotional exhaustion: Latent changes, reciprocity, and the influence of professional knowledge



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ABSTRACT

Although much research focuses on teacher self-efficacy, on burnout, and their interrelation, there is a scarcity of studies investigating change in these variables, particularly regarding how such change can be predicted. To address this gap, we specify latent change score models of teacher self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion, using a sample of beginning teachers in Germany. Additionally, we investigate whether professional knowledge gained during teacher education can predict change in these variables. Overall, our results reveal an increase of emotional exhaustion and a smaller increase of teacher self-efficacy during the first year of beginning teachers' induction. The results suggest that prior emotional exhaustion predicts change in teacher efficacy. Professional knowledge was shown to buffer the increase of emotional exhaustion, but did not have a positive effect on professional teacher self-efficacy.

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1. Introduction

Entering teaching is a major life transition (Klusmann, Kunter, Voss, & Baumert, 2012; Tynjälä & Heikkinen, 2011). As research indicates in programs worldwide, in the transition phase, beginning teachers learn to utilize their theoretical knowledge in a practical context, and seem to struggle with this transition (e.g., Friedman, 2000; Klusmann et al., 2012; Stokking, Leenders, De Jong, & Van Tartwijk, 2003; Veenman, 1984). Associated with this transition are a number of potentially negative phenomena, including reality shock (Friedman, 2000) and high attrition rates, where up to 50% of beginning teachers leave the profession within the first five years (Ingersoll, 2012). The high attrition rates of beginning teachers are associated with high financial costs for further recruiting, as well as disruptions of program continuity and planning, all of which impact on school effectiveness (Hong, 2010).

From a research perspective, the first year of actual teaching is a particularly interesting time, when the teacher candidates have completed their university studies and have gained some professional knowledge, but are now faced with the reality, and the increased demands, of an actual classroom. Tynjälä and Heikkinen (2011) have identified perceived inadequate skills, related

decreased self-efficacy and increased stress, and the necessity of learning at work, among others, as common challenges related to the transition from pre-service to teaching. Thus, it is of major importance to investigate the professional experiences of beginning teachers during their transition to professional teachers. Further, it is important to identify resources that could help beginning teachers to manage these challenges and ensure a less demanding transition.

The present study focuses on emotional exhaustion as a major component of burnout (e.g. Cropanzano, Rupp, & Byrne, 2003), and on teacher self-efficacy as an important resource for teachers that protects against the negative effects of job strain (e.g., Schwarzer & Hallum, 2008). Research indicates that there is still a need to investigate individual differences in developments (that is, increases, decreases or stabilizations) in strain within the teaching career, as job stress does not lead to strain or emotional exhaustion for everyone (Carson, Plemmons, Templin, & Weiss, 2011). Additionally, it is still necessary to investigate the development of teacher self-efficacy (Pas, Bradshaw, & Hershfeldt, 2012), as well as the relationship of self-efficacy to burnout (Hultell, Melin, & Gustavsson, 2013). Further, it is of major importance to identify other potential protecting variables, such as professional knowledge (Klusmann et al., 2012).

Finding a protective buffering effect of professional knowledge on emotional exhaustion, or positive effects of professional knowledge on self-efficacy, would be of major importance for teacher education. Although it is difficult to directly influence self-efficacy and the perceived strain of beginning teachers prior to actual

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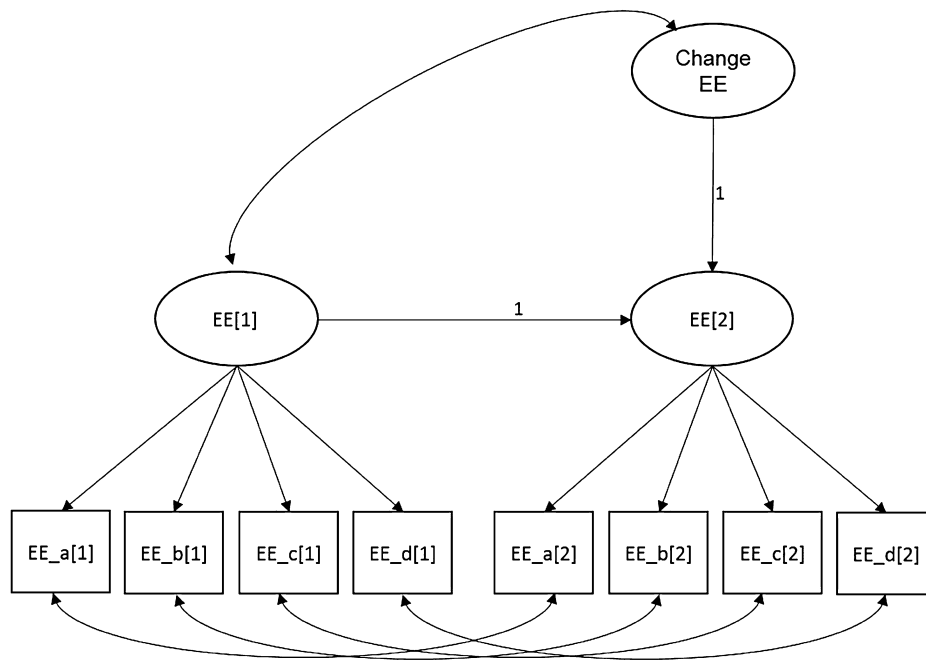


Fig. 1. The latent difference score model of emotional exhaustion. EE = Emotional exhaustion; EE_a, EE_b, EE_c, EE_d = Manifest variables of emotional exhaustion; [1] = at Time Wave 1; [2] = at Time Wave 2.

practical experiences, knowledge, such as teaching processes and behaviors, can be imparted to candidate teachers during their studies, before they face practical experience (Terhart et al., 2012).

In this study we follow the evidence on the situation of young teachers and investigate the interplay between emotional exhaustion, teacher self-efficacy, and professional knowledge. Subsequently, we apply latent change models. First we investigate the within-person changes of emotional exhaustion and teacher self-efficacy (see Fig. 1). Second, we investigate individual differences (between-person differences in change;

see Fig. 2) by (a) analyzing the prediction of change in one variable through the other, as well as the interrelation of change in both variables and (b) analyzing whether differences in change can be predicted by professional knowledge.

1.1. Changes in beginning teachers' emotional exhaustion

Teacher attrition rates, particularly for beginning teachers, are an issue worldwide (Jalongo & Heider, 2006; Organisation for

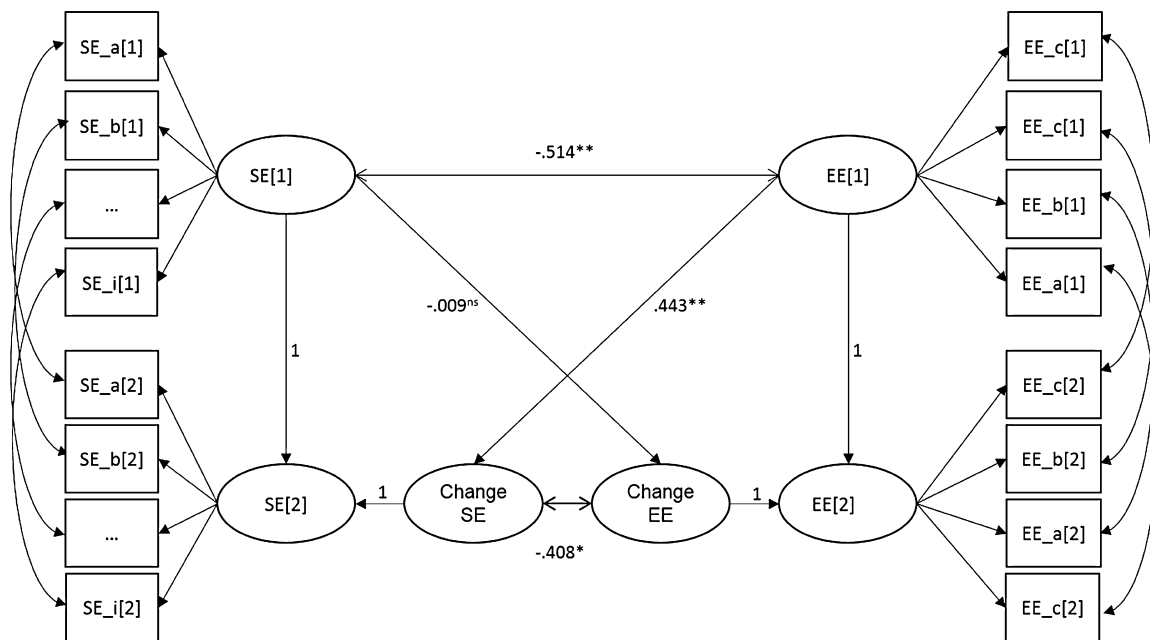


Fig. 2. The bivariate latent difference score model of teacher self-efficacy and emotional exhaustion, including standardized path coefficients of the structural model. SE = Teacher self-efficacy; EE = Emotional exhaustion; SE_a, SE_b, SE_i = Manifest variables of teacher self-efficacy; EE_a, EE_b, EE_c, EE_d = Manifest variables of emotional exhaustion; [1] = at Time Wave 1; [2] = at Time Wave 2.

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