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Novice teachers' perceptions of school climate and self-efficacy

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ABSTRACT

The importance of self-efficacy and the school climate and their interrelationship according to teacher profiles were analysed to better support the adaptation and professional development of novice teachers during the first year of teaching. First year novice teachers ($N = 112$) completed questionnaires about their perception of the school climate and self-efficacy. Novice teachers who work with kindergarten or elementary school students at schools with less than 250 students had the highest level of self-efficacy beliefs and the most positive perception of the school climate, while novice teachers working at comprehensive schools with over 500 students or at vocational schools had lower self-efficacy beliefs. The findings confirm that a supportive school climate positively influences novice teachers' beliefs regarding self-efficacy.

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1. Introduction

The first years of teaching are an important phase in a teacher's professional growth because the classroom experiences of novice teachers may either encourage or inhibit a lasting commitment to effective teaching (Ginns, Heirdsfield, Atweh, & Watters, 2001). The dropout rate of novice teachers is problematically high worldwide (Hong, 2010). For example, nearly half of American novice teachers leave the teaching profession within the first five years (Duffield, 2006). The need for support for novice teachers during their first year(s) of work is recognised worldwide and many countries have implemented induction programmes (Britton, Pine, Pimm, & Raizen, 2003). International studies have indicated that the school culture, support systems and developmental opportunities play important roles in the development of novice teachers (Bickmore & Bickmore, 2010; Kagan, 1992; Kardos & Johnson, 2010; Tickle, 2000). Mentoring is critical during the induction period, supporting socialisation in the school context as well as the professional development of novice teachers (Feiman-Nemser, 2003; Wang & Odell, 2002).

In Estonia, an induction programme for beginning teachers was implemented in 2004 and has been studied from various aspects in order to evaluate its effectiveness. Results have shown that the implementation of mentoring depends on the school context and the attitudes of school leaders towards mentoring (Eisenschmidt, 2006). Feeling valued as a colleague and belonging to an organisation is important for novice teachers but sometimes the mentor is the only connection the novice teacher has in a school (Löfström & Eisenschmidt, 2009). In spite of support programmes, such as mentoring, research still showed that the reasons given by novice teachers for leaving the profession include a lack of support, stressful working

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conditions and low self-efficacy (Eisenschmidt et al., 2010). However, personal factors such as self-efficacy appear to have an impact on the professional development of novice teachers. Poom-Valickis (2007) found self-efficacy beliefs of novice *class* teachers higher than those of novice *subject* teachers.

Research about the induction programme has revealed that, in addition to support systems (i.e., mentoring, novice teachers' group meetings and self-reflection), contextual factors and novice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs influence the degree to which an induction programme supports their professional development. However, less research has been carried out on how various school features (i.e., school size, school type/level) create and influence the school climate and how this climate is related to novice teachers' self-efficacy beliefs. Hence, the researchers were interested in studying a more profound relationship between school climate and self-efficacy according to certain school types and teachers' profiles.

2. School climate

Van Houtte (2005) explains that *school climate* refers to the common beliefs and shared experiences between colleagues and school authorities. It also reflects a school's psychological ambience and its physical features. School size, school type (including the age of students) and location (i.e., rural or urban school) shape the context of a particular school which, together with the school climate, create the students' learning climate as well as the teachers' working climate. Previous research has shown many examples of how a school climate influences teachers' professional development and work. A positive school climate has been associated with higher job satisfaction (Taylor & Tashakkori, 1995), with higher teacher commitment (Hoy, 1990) and with better educational and psychological results for students and teachers (Freiberg, 1998). In addition, teachers' opportunities for continuous academic and social growth also affect the attitudes of school authorities towards creating a positive school climate. A positive school climate also promotes the sense of belonging, which in turn helps to create a school spirit and cohesiveness (Howard, Howell, & Brainard, 1987). A supportive atmosphere among the school staff promotes not only feelings of trust (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Manning & Saddlemire, 1996), concern and respect (Manning & Saddlemire, 1996), but also promotes shared beliefs, responsibility and values (Ciani, Summers, & Easter, 2008; Hord & Sommers, 2008) as well as encouraging cooperation that fosters a professional learning community (Lunenburg, 2010). A supportive and positive school climate is crucial, especially for novice teachers who need guidance and assistance during the initial years of their professional career in order to become confident teachers (Flores & Day, 2006; Lam & Yan, 2011; Yost, 2006).

3. Self-efficacy

Self-efficacy is a personal and subjective belief about one's ability to achieve desired goals. Social forces play an important role in shaping perceptions of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1977). Teachers with a higher sense of self-efficacy exhibit a greater enthusiasm for teaching and are open to new ideas and more willing to experiment with new methods in order to better meet the needs of their students. These teachers have a greater commitment to teaching and are more likely to remain in the teaching profession (Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2001; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy, & Hoy, 1998; Wheatley, 2002). Efficacy is not only an individual phenomenon: positive feelings about "the quality of their working life" and "planning in a team" are examples of factors that interact positively with a teacher's sense of efficacy (Pitkäniemi, 2002).

Efficacy may become more evident in novice teachers as they are socialised into the teaching profession (Tschannen-Moran et al., 1998). There are several studies confirming the importance of self-efficacy in a teacher's professional effectiveness, development (Poom-Valickis, 2007) and decision-making (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Guskey & Passaro, 1994; Welch, 1995). Self-efficacy plays an important role in instructional strategies (Gibson & Dembo, 1984) and in classroom management (Gibson & Dembo, 1984; Pajares, 1992) and is an essential predictor of teacher effort and persistence (Bandura, 1986; Emmer & Hickman, 1991). Research by Flores (2005) shows that during the first 2 years of working in the profession, novice teachers' perceptions and teaching practices change in the classroom as well as at the personal and school levels and can have an impact on self-efficacy. Experienced teachers have a significantly greater efficacy than pre-service and novice teachers (Putman, 2012; Tschannen-Moran & Woolfolk Hoy, 2007). Bruinsma and Jansen (2010) found a relationship between negative teaching experiences during pre-service and a teacher's decision to leave the profession, as well as between positive teaching experiences and higher self-efficacy. Research shows that teachers feel less effective when teaching students in vocational classes (Raudenbush, Rowan, & Cheong, 1992).

Several studies have confirmed that a supportive school climate positively affects teachers' self-efficacy, promotes personal wellbeing and has a long-term positive effect on student learning (Ciani et al., 2008; Hoy & Woolfolk, 1993). Support, from both colleagues and administrators, affects a teacher's self-efficacy significantly (Barnett, 1999; Sutton & Fall, 1995). The importance of informal contact and interaction with experienced teachers within the same working climate has also been highlighted (Bryk & Schneider, 2002; Fenwick, 2011; Flores & Day, 2006; Rimm-Kaufman & Sawyer, 2004). It is therefore probable that novice teachers who lack experience may be in need of a supportive school climate in order to increase their self-efficacy beliefs.

4. Research questions and methodology

4.1. Research questions

The purpose of the study was to examine the self-efficacy of novice teachers and its relationships with the school climate.

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