

Cultivating Our Self-Efficacy as School Librarians

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In recent years I have become very familiar with a term I had not previously pondered: *self-efficacy*. Teacher self-efficacy is the personal belief that one's actions can have a positive impact on students (Coker 2015). It is cultivated through positive experiences, observing others in action, and being mindful of one's social and emotional states (Bandura 2012). I often think of self-efficacy as being synonymous with confidence; confidence in what we as educators do, why we are in the profession, and in knowing we have a purpose. As school librarians, we need to develop high self-efficacy to have a positive impact on our students, both socially and academically.

Digging into Self-Efficacy

Studies have examined classroom teacher self-efficacy and its impact on student achievement, such as those conducted by Robert M. Klassen and Virginia M. C. Tze (2014) and Harsha N. Perera, Celeste Galkins, and Rachel Part (2019). Both studies indicated that higher teacher

self-efficacy led to greater academic achievement among students. Further, Tori L. Shoulders and Melinda Scott Krei linked earning a Master's degree and having more than five years of teaching experience with higher self-efficacy (2015).

As a school library educator and a recent practicing school librarian, I believe that self-efficacy matters greatly for school librarians, though few studies have been conducted directly relating our self-efficacy to student achievement. Studies have shown that school librarians who feel strongly about their leadership skills are more likely to plan collaborative activities with teachers, which typically result in higher student achievement (Ash-Argyle and Shoham 2012, 2014; Cansoy and Parlar 2018). Additionally, unlicensed school librarians tend to have lower self-efficacy when it comes to leadership in their school settings (Ritchie 2011). Schools with full-time, fully certified school librarians have students who perform better on reading assessments (Coker 2015; Lance and Hofschire

2012). The *School Libraries Work!* report details the benefits of school librarians and school libraries and their impact on our communities (Scholastic Library Publishing 2016).

All this research led to my study of school librarians' self-efficacy and the impact it has on student achievement. I surveyed school librarians across the state of Virginia using an instrument designed to assess the self-efficacy levels of classroom teachers (Tschannen-Moran and Woolfolk Hoy 2001). The purpose was to examine if there were differences in elementary, middle, and high school librarians' self-efficacy levels and to see if the self-efficacy levels of school librarians could predict schools' overall pass rates on state standardized reading assessments.

Not surprisingly, the levels of self-efficacy did not differ between elementary, middle, and high school librarians (Thompson, Barthlow, and Paynter 2021). Each participant in the study, regardless of the school at which they worked, had similar levels of self-efficacy, which we can assume is due to similar training and coursework. The results also indicated that there is a predictive, correlational relationship between school librarians' self-efficacy levels and reading scores, meaning that higher levels of self-efficacy lead to higher reading scores. These results are similar to previous research

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indicating that school librarians, in general, have positive impacts on reading scores (Lance, Schwarz, and Rodney 2014; Lance, Rodney, and Hamilton-Pennell 2000; Small, Shanahan, and Stasak 2010) without taking into account the self-efficacy of those librarians.

My study was conducted during the onset of the Coronavirus pandemic. I wonder if this context influenced participants' responses and how they felt about their perceived impact. Recall when you were thrown into a new world of collaborating online, trying to provide reading materials to students who did not have computers or internet access and book checkout was halted, and simply feeling the uncertainty of what your job was going to look like for the rest of the school year. These factors likely influenced school librarians' feelings of self-efficacy during those unprecedented times.

but I was not sure I considered myself a leader, even though I was often put in positions of leadership by means of being "volun-told." I realized throughout my preparatory program, which was during my first years as a school librarian, that I really could make a positive impact and that I was a leader in my school.

My school library preparatory program at Old Dominion University taught me so much and cultivated my self-efficacy. Some of the most memorable assignments and requirements involved authentic experiences, such as being required to attend and present at library conferences, writing a collection development policy, and writing an article for publication. Before my program I was not interested in attending conferences, let alone presenting at one, but I learned that I needed to try new things and to do things occasionally that may

Practicing school librarians can maintain and grow self-efficacy by continuing to learn, immersing themselves in their schools, and becoming an active member of a community of practice. Learning can happen in many ways: attending conferences, reading professional articles and texts, and participating in various professional development opportunities. Immersing ourselves in our schools helps us make contributions to the school community. We become members of leadership teams and essential collaborative partners for our teachers. Having open conversations with others in a community of practice and hearing about what other school librarians do can help us see what we do well and where we can improve. It is so important to remember that we do make a difference and to not get complacent in our jobs.

Reaping the Benefits

I feel my own self-efficacy has grown by leaps and bounds since I started in school librarianship, and it is something that will continue to grow and blossom. I know I make a difference in the lives of my students and school community. Whether working in an elementary school library or teaching future school librarians, I am confident that my self-efficacy ultimately benefits my students.

Because my research brings to light the impact that school librarians' self-efficacy has on students, I want to challenge you, dear reader, to help your students reap the benefits of your own self-efficacy; allow them to have the best of you that you can give them. Know that you make a difference. You are important and what you do is essential to your students. Do not think of self-efficacy as being arrogant or conceited; there is empirical research to support

School librarian preparatory programs need to include opportunities for authentic tasks that promote self-efficacy, such as assignments that build leadership skills, community service projects, collaborations, simulated teaching practice, and quality practicums.

Planting the Seeds of Self-Efficacy

So, how do these results inform school library practice? We need to remain confident in what we do and why we are school librarians to fully support our students. When I realized that I wanted to become a school librarian, I was not 100 percent confident in myself. I knew I was passionate about education and wanted what was best for my students,

be uncomfortable. I found I love attending conferences and since then I have presented at three other conferences, spoken comfortably in front of crowds, and conducted professional development for my school. I have subsequently gained confidence in my writing abilities, and the collection development policy that I wrote during my program has been adapted and adopted as the division collection development policy for my county.

the impact that you as the school librarian believe you can have on your students and your school.

Prepping for the Next Season

As an educator of future school librarians, I want to help cultivate my students' self-efficacy so they know they can make a difference. School librarian preparatory programs need to include opportunities for

authentic tasks that promote self-efficacy, such as assignments that build leadership skills, community service projects, collaborations, simulated teaching practice, and quality practicums. Class projects that result in ready-to-use products such as my collection development policy or a grant-funding application are also useful in building self-efficacy.

For those who are already practicing school librarians, remember to nurture your self-efficacy. Continue to be a lifelong learner and apply your new knowledge to benefit your school community. Attend conferences when you are able, participate in professional development opportunities, and be a leader in your school. Know that you make a difference! Your students will reap the rewards of your self-efficacy!

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