Teacher Efficacy Is a Brain State

Session handout · Mentors, coaches, and school leaders | Caroline Miller, EdD

Efficacy is a belief, not a skill

Teacher efficacy is a teacher's belief in their capability to influence student learning. It is task-specific: a confident teacher can still have low efficacy for one task, such as leading discussion. "She lacks confidence" describes a personality; "low efficacy for discussion" is a plan.

Where efficacy comes from, and a move for each source (Bandura, 1977; 1997; Strong evidence). The moves are my interpretation.

Source, in order of power	What it means	A move to try Monday
1 · Mastery experiences	Succeeding at something hard. Nothing else on this list is close.	**Engineer one win.** Narrow the goal until success is near-certain, then name what happened.
2 · Vicarious experiences	Watching someone like you succeed. "Like you" is the phrase that matters.	**Pair on purpose.** Match them with someone close enough in experience to be evidence about them.
3 · Verbal persuasion	Works only when the source is credible about that task.	**Say what you saw.** Description, not verdict (Tool 1).
4 · Physiological and emotional state	Depletion is infrastructure, not a wellness topic.	**Ask before you stretch.** "What is your load like right now?" before any goal.

A 2025 meta-analysis of 115 studies found that interventions raised teacher self-efficacy overall (g = 0.47). For pre-service teachers, interventions built only on mastery experiences worked best (g = 0.62) (Täschner et al., 2025).

Tool 1 · Say what you saw

MY INTERPRETATION grounded in Strong evidence. Across 607 effect sizes, feedback helped on average (d = 0.41), but over a third of feedback interventions made performance worse. Feedback helped less as attention moved away from the task and toward the person (Kluger & DeNisi, 1996).

The rule: description, not verdict. Then one question.

Instead of	Try
"Great lesson."	"You asked the question, then waited four seconds."
"You're a natural."	"Three students built on each other's answers."
"That felt a little flat."	"What were you noticing when you stepped in?"

Write your own: one thing you observed this week, said as description.

What I saw	The one question I'll ask

Tool 2 · FGEM goal setting

MY FRAMEWORK The Faculty Growth & Efficacy Model (FGEM) is my framework, informed by my dissertation research (Dengler, 2023).

Diagnose first: environment, then beliefs, then practice. The most common mistake is starting with practice.

Domain	The teacher's question	Your moves
Environment	"Is it safe?"	Clarify that mentoring is not evaluation. Reduce threat and comparison.
Beliefs	"Can I do this?"	Normalize struggle. Name progress out loud.
Practice	"What am I trying?"	Co-design narrow goals. Observe for specific evidence.

The goal stem. The first blank is the move. The second is the purpose. Most goal sheets only ask for the first.

How might I _____ in order to _____ ?

FGEM domain to start with	My goal	What I'll observe for

Tool 3 · Return on Purpose (ROP) audit

MY INTERPRETATION We are not adding anything. We are asking whether the time we already use is doing the work.

List the recurring meetings, check-ins, and PD blocks you lead, then ask three questions of each.

Recurring time block	1 · Increases teacher belief in their capacity to grow?	2 · Directly influences instructional practice?	3 · Improves clarity, safety, or support?	Yes count	Decision
	Yes · No	Yes · No	Yes · No		
	Yes · No	Yes · No	Yes · No		

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Score: 2 to 3 yes = protect it · 1 = reframe it · 0 = redesign it

Mentoring by career stage

MY INTERPRETATION Equity does not mean identical time. One piece has direct support: efficacy often rises during teacher preparation and dips in the first year of teaching (Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005).

	Novice · Years 1–3	Mid-career · Years 4–12	Veteran · Years 13+
The risk	"I'm not cut out for this."	"Why push further?"	"Nothing really changes."
Your moves	Normalize struggle, frequent check-ins, narrow goals	Stretch goals, peer observation, leadership paths	Ask "What problem do you want to solve?" More autonomy
The goal	Stabilize efficacy before challenge	Prevent the quiet plateau	Challenge that matches their skill

Mentoring or coaching? It isn't a hierarchy. It's a choice about what's needed now.

	Mentoring	Coaching
The question	Who is this person becoming?	What is this person improving?
Time frame	Months to years	Weeks to one cycle
Focus	Identity, belonging, career	A nameable skill
FGEM domain	Beliefs and environment	Practice, once beliefs are stable

Coaching has strong causal evidence: across 60 studies, it improved instruction by 0.49 SD and student achievement by 0.18 SD. Larger programs got a fraction of the effect of smaller ones (Kraft, Blazar & Hogan, 2018).

Key sources

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