Second Career Teachers: Perceptions of Self-Efficacy in the First Year of Teaching

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Abstract

Background: In Singapore, one in four in the teaching profession is a second career teacher. Unlike the past, individuals considering teaching today have more career options. On average, since 2008, 35% of the newly recruited teachers have at least one year of working experience. The Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) is looking to attract more second career professionals to join the teaching profession.

Aim: To examine second career teachers’ perception of their self-efficacy in the first year of teaching in a school in Singapore.

Sample: The five second career teachers reported in this paper were involved in a larger study that examined how new teachers, both first and second career teachers, were socialised into teaching in Singapore and their perceptions of their self-efficacy in the first year of teaching.

Method: The data are collected primarily through interviews. The teachers are also asked to plot their self-efficacy over a period of eleven months. The analysis of the data is performed using thematic analysis.

Conclusion: The findings suggest that their perceptions of their self-efficacy are influenced by the academic performance of their students, particularly if they have not expected their students to do as well as they have done. Their perceptions of their self-efficacy are also influenced by their perceptions of how they performed in comparison to the more experienced teachers teaching the same subject in the same level. They are found to rate their self-efficacy more favourably when their classes outperformed their experienced colleagues’. Their perceptions of how well they do in relation to other new teachers also have an effect on their sense of self-efficacy. Gaining the respect and approval of their students also improve how they perceive their self-efficacy.

Keywords: second career teachers, first year of teaching, self-efficacy
Introduction

Compared to previously, we are now seeing more second career teachers in the teaching profession and often, these second career teachers come to teaching with a repertoire of “personal and professional experiences which make them qualitatively different from the younger, less experienced, individuals who select teaching as their first profession” (Novak & Knowles, 1992, p. 3). These include an articulate sense of agency, “the ability to incorporate very specialised, practical, and real world knowledge into their instruction... interpersonal skills such as patience... teaming and management and organisational skills” (Slayer, 2003, pp. 20-21).

Some of these second career teachers have always wanted to teach. They may be discouraged from joining the profession previously because of “negative parental and societal attitudes, market forces, and/or financial obligations” (Crow, Levine, & Nager, 1990, p. 204). But they never give up their dream of becoming a teacher. Crow et al. (1990) described these second career teachers as the homecomers. They are also those who have never seriously considered teaching, and only contemplated doing so because of some critical events such as the birth of a child or reasons which include dissatisfaction with their previous jobs, need for greater stability and security and changing perspectives on life (Anthony & Ord, 2008; Priyadharshini & Robinson-Pant, 2003). Crow et al. (1990) described these second career teachers as the converted.

Because of their age and prior working experience, they are considered new to the school, but not new to the profession (Mayotte, 2003). They are also often assumed to have no or little difficulty making the transition into the role of a teacher (Freidus, 1994; Madfes, 1989). Research, however, suggests otherwise. According to Madfes (1990), a “person who has already been successful in one career and who starts a teaching career at mid-life feels as vulnerable and as inexperienced as a 22-year-old who is beginning his first job” (p. 27). They may be good at what they were doing previously but in teaching, they are novice (Johnson, 2004; Mayotte, 2003).

In their study which traced the struggles of a second career new teacher, Bullough Jr and Knowles (1990) found that one of the factors which worked against the second career teacher’s smooth transition into the teaching profession was his own “very limited understanding of teaching” (p. 109), the consequence of the fact that he had never planned to be a teacher. The lack of a “sense of mission” (Chester & Beaudin, 1996, p. 251), according to Chester and Beaudin (1996), may also explain why some of these second career teachers experience a decline in self-efficacy during the first year of teaching.

A search of the extant literature suggests that there are few studies which examined the self-efficacy of second career teachers. Research suggests that teachers with a strong sense of self-efficacy are more willing to experiment with new approaches and strategies for teaching, and employ management practices that enhance student autonomy (Onafowora, 2004). They are also more likely to provide special assistance to struggling students, and persevere in their efforts to reach out to the academically weak and/or at-risk students (Ross, 1998). Their commitment to stay in the profession, according to Darling-Hammond, Chung, & Frelow (2002), is also correlated to their perceptions of their self-efficacy which appear to develop in the early years of teaching.
(Bandura, 1997).

For some of these second career teachers, teaching may be their second, if not third or fourth career. They may have their reasons for leaving their previous career teaching, but if they can decide to leave their previous career for teaching, it is not entirely implausible that they may choose to walk away from teaching if they perceive themselves to be not good at it. The findings presented in this paper are part of a larger study whose purposes include ascertaining second career teachers’ perceptions of their self-efficacy in the first year of teaching in a school in Singapore. In the next part of the paper, I review the literature that informed the study. I then provide the context of the study, following which I provide a brief description of the participants involved in the study, and describe how the data were collected and analysed before I discuss the findings. Thereafter, I conclude with a discussion on the implications of the findings and the limitations of the study.

**Teachers’ Self-Efficacy**

Bandura (1997) defined self-efficacy as “beliefs in one’s capacity to organise and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments” (p.3). Teachers’ self-efficacy refers, then, to “teacher’s belief in his or her capability to organise and execute courses of action required to successfully accomplish a specific teaching task in a particular context” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p.233).

Some of the findings suggest that, teachers’ self-efficacy increases during teacher preparation and student teaching, and falls during first year of teaching (Rushton, 2000; Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005). The decline of self-efficacy among first year teachers, according to Chester and Beaudin (1996), may not be all-embracing. Chester and Beaudin’s (1996) findings are particularly interesting when juxtaposed with research which suggests that teachers in high performing schools have a stronger sense of efficacy compared to their fellow teachers in middle or low performing schools (Chong et al, 2010), for the teachers that participated in Chester and Beaudin’s (1996) study came from schools with challenging contexts. Some research also suggests that teachers experience greater efficacy teaching high performing students than middle or low performing students (Raudenbush, Rowan & Cheong, 1992). It indicates as well that teachers’ sense of self-efficacy varies from subject to subject; they may feel more effective teaching mathematics than language arts (Bandura, 1997). Their sense of efficacy may also depend on the kind of students they deal with. They may feel more competent working with students who are better-behaved.

In their study, Chester and Beaudin (1996) established that new teachers, in particular, experience greater sense of self-efficacy if their supervisor observes them multiple times, and gives them frequent feedback on their performance. This corroborates Bandura’s (1997) view that verbal persuasion, which takes the form of specific feedback about a teacher’s performance and ‘pep talks’ influences self-efficacy. According to Bandura (1986), the effectiveness of persuasion depends on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the persuader.

Although verbal persuasion can convince one to attempt new strategies and try hard to succeed, exhortations to work harder can also exacerbate low self efficacy, especially if the individual does not have the required skills to perform well on a
particular task (Gist & Mitchell, 1992). In some cases, the individual may adopt “the self-protective strategy of concluding that under the particular set of circumstances achieving the hoped-for results was impossible” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 230).

Chester and Beaudin (1996) pointed out in their study that besides “the timing and frequency of feedback, the focus of the feedback is also an important aspect of the findings regarding supervisor observations” (Chester & Beaudin, 1996, p. 252). New teachers, in particular, appreciate feedback that aims at validating their effectiveness or improving their instructional practices. The absence of such feedback, according to Chester (1992), may engender in them feelings of anxiety and uncertainty, and this may have a negative influence on their self-efficacy (Bandura, 1997).

Being told they have put up a credible performance as a teacher, or rewarded with the perception that they have been accomplished in their teaching has the effect of boosting teachers’ self-efficacy, especially if this “success is achieved on difficult tasks with little assistance or when success is achieved early in learning with few setbacks” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 229). Bandura (1997) described these as mastery experiences, and they wield the greatest influence on new teachers’ sense of self-efficacy (Mulholland & Wallace, 2001). Besides mastery experiences, teachers’ sense of efficacy may also be boosted by vicarious experience of watching other teachers teach, particularly those who are considered effective teachers (Tschannen-Moran & Hoy, 2007).

Research suggests that experienced teachers spend little time analyzing the task they are asked to perform, particularly if they have performed the task many times before, and they are successful in carrying it out (Ross, 1998; Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998). Inexperienced or new teachers, in contrast, are likely to spend more time analyzing the same task, and relying more heavily “on vicarious experience (what they believe other teachers could do) to gauge their own likely success, that is, their self-efficacy in the given situation” (Tschannen-Moran, Woolfolk Hoy & Hoy, 1998, p. 234). Greater sense of self-efficacy leads to the investment of more effort and persistence, which rewards better performance, and consequently greater self-efficacy (Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005).

Lower efficacy, conversely, leads to the investment of less effort, which results in poorer outcomes, and consequently lower self-efficacy.

Inherently, it is new teachers’ perceptions of their competence rather than their actual level of competence that influence how much effort they are willing to put in, how long they are prepared to persist in the face of obstacles, and how resilient they are in dealing with setbacks. That explains why this study focuses on new teachers’ perceptions of their self-efficacy. In the next section, I describe briefly the context of the study.

**Context of the Study**

In Singapore, one in four in the teaching profession is a second career teacher (Lam, 2011). Unlike the past, individuals considering teaching today have more career options. On average, since 2008, 35% of the newly recruited teachers have at least one year of working experience (Cheow & Ng, 2011). The Singapore Ministry of Education (MOE) is looking to attract more second career professionals to join the teaching profession. According to MOE, second career teachers inject a “greater diversity of
experiences and perspectives” (Ministry of Education, 2009a, para. 7), and this helps to enhance the learning experience of the students. They are also more likely, according to MOE, to stay in the job longer (Lam, 2011). The number of second career teachers is likely to grow as the Ministry plans to expand its teaching force to 33,000 by 2015. Yet, there are hardly any studies conducted on new teachers in Singapore, be it first or second career teachers (Chong & Goh, 2007; Farrell, 2003), which is essential because they may not bring with them similar qualities and strengths to teaching, and for this reason, they may not face the same challenges (Bendixen-Noe & Redick, 1995; Novak & Knowles, 1992). Moreover, the early years of teaching experience have some bearing on new teachers’ long term performance in the classroom and their decision to stay in the profession (Johnson & Birkeland, 2003).

Participants of the Study

The five second career teachers reported in this paper were involved in a larger study that examined how new teachers, both first and second career teachers, were socialised into teaching in Singapore and their perceptions of their self-efficacy in the first year of teaching. They were teachers in the same secondary school, and they were previously enrolled in the Post-graduate in Diploma² (Secondary) Programme at the National Institute of Education (NIE), the country’s only teacher education institute, for their pre-service education. Out of the five, two had about two years of working experience. One had worked for about five years before becoming a teacher. The other two had ten or more years of working experience. All of them did their practicum in the same school. Table 1 provides an overview of the profile of the teachers involved in the study.

Table 1
An Overview of the Second Career Teachers

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Names</th>
<th>Qualifications (Degree)</th>
<th>Working Experience</th>
<th>Practicum Grade</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Yu Ping</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Recruitment Consultant (1.5 years)</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Kok Siang</td>
<td>Building</td>
<td>Condominium Manager (8 months)</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Personal Banker (1.5 years)</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Hairon</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>Sales and Venue Manager (5 years)</td>
<td>Pass</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Yong Jie</td>
<td>Engineering</td>
<td>Insurance agent (10 years)</td>
<td>Pass with Credit</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Aisha</td>
<td>Arts</td>
<td>Production Manager (15 years)</td>
<td>Pass with Credit</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Data Collection

The primary means of data collection was through interviews. The findings reported in this paper were culled mainly from data collected from semi-structured interviews with (1) the second career teachers (2) and their Reporting Officers³. The second career teachers were interviewed once a month. In all, they were each interviewed six times over a period of six months. Their reporting officers were interviewed once towards the end of the study. The interviews were audio-taped and transcribed verbatim. Each interview lasted between 30 minutes to an hour. One of the strengths of interviews is that they are highly focused on the phenomenon being studied (Yin,
They are also insightful and provide perceived causal inferences (Yin, 2003). However, because they are based on recall, inaccuracies could arise. The interview questions were first pilot tested with a second year teacher who was not involved in the actual study before they were administered. During the interviews, the participants were encouraged to elaborate on what they said.

The teachers were asked to plot their perceived self-efficacy beginning with the first month of teaching over a period of eleven months. The idea was borrowed from Bubb’s work (2007) on induction of new teachers where she got the new teachers to plot their feelings of positiveness during the school year. The other reason why they were asked to plot their perceived self-efficacy over a period of time was because the literature suggests that self-efficacy changes over time and it is most malleable in the early stages of learning (Woolfolk Hoy & Spero, 2005). Before they plotted the graph, the teachers were given the same explanation as to what self-efficacy means. After which, they were given some time to plot the graph and interviewed on the reasons for plotting the graph as they had done.

Data Analysis

In analysing the data, vertical analysis was first performed; each of the respondents’ interviews was analysed separately using thematic analysis. Notes and comments were also made next to the data that struck as “interesting, potentially relevant, or important” (Merriam, 2009, p.178) to the study. Comparative or horizontal analysis, which is otherwise also known as cross-case analysis was then performed. In performing cross-case analysis, similarities as well as differences between and among the responses were identified. After the analysis of the data had been completed, they were shared with the participants of the study. It is a way of ensuring the trustworthiness of the findings. According to Lincoln and Guba (1985), member checks are “the most crucial technique for establishing credibility” (p.314) in a qualitative study.

Findings

Figure 1. Yu Ping’s Self-Efficacy

Acceptable level

Month
Yu Ping began with a self-efficacy which she perceived to be above what she considered acceptable level. The reason, according to her, was because she was doing well in her previous career as a recruitment consultant. And also, although she had some difficulty managing the students, particularly those from the tail end of the Express class and the Normal Academic (NA) classes during practicum, it was easier for her, she reasoned, to win over the lower secondary students whom she was teaching compared to the upper secondary students whom she took during practicum.

However, she found her self-efficacy going downhill in the subsequent months, although they were still above what she perceived as acceptable level. Despite having a co-teacher for both her Science and Maths classes, it was not as smooth going, according to Yu Ping, as she thought it would be. The Head of Department (HOD) for Science who was one of her reporting officers observed her Science lessons and told her, she said, that she needed to improve on her classroom management. By the seventh month of teaching, which coincided with the beginning of a new semester, her perceived self-efficacy had gone down to what she considered an acceptable level.

According to Yu Ping, it was in part because there was no more co-teaching. She was dealing with not more than 15 students, particularly in her Maths class, she said, when she co-taught with another teacher. For her, she is better, she said, in talking to students on a one to one basis. Her perceived self-efficacy continued to slide and it was below what she considered acceptable level by the eighth month of her teaching. She was taking the best Express class for Science and she was pressured, to some extent, she said, to make sure that her class performed the best. However, there were some tests in which her class did not come out top. She also had a lot of issues, she said, with her NA Maths class. It got so bad, she said, that they would not greet her and it was because she was not firm with them at the beginning. She was too concerned, she said, at that time to be “well-liked by students” that she decided against punishing them even though she knew they deserved to be punished. Most of them also did badly in Maths.

Figure 2. Kok Siang’s Self-Efficacy
Kok Siang’s perceived self-efficacy lay below what he considered acceptable level in the first two months of teaching. According to Kok Siang, it was because he was “sceptical” of himself. Despite getting “good feedback” he said, from NIE supervisor during practicum, he only managed to secure a pass instead of a pass with credit for his practicum. As the months went by, he was “more confident” of himself, partly because there were one or two occasions whereby other teachers came up to him and asked him what he did which made the students listen to him and not them. This affirmed, he said, his ability.

Compared to his contract teaching days, he had a much reduced teaching load, which all first year teachers were entitled to, and this allowed him, he said, more time to reflect and plan better lessons. By the third month, his self-efficacy reached what he considered acceptable level, and it continued in an upward trend before it fell in the sixth month of his teaching, although it was still at an acceptable level. The reason for the descent, according to Kok Siang, was partly because he was taking on a new subject Principles of Accounts (POA) and he was not sure, he said, whether he was “able to pull it off”. The other reason was because he was now made the co-form teacher of an upper secondary NT class. He was previously a co-form teacher of a secondary one class. It was easier, he said, to manage a secondary one class than a secondary three class. There were more disciplinary issues, he said, to contend with in the NT classes.

Despite his initial reservations, Kok Siang felt that he “did a pretty good job” in the teaching of POA. His classes were doing well, according to him, and sometimes they were even scoring better than the classes taught by his co-teacher. The Subject Head for POA who observed his classes, also mentioned to him, he said, that she thought “they looked interested and motivated” in his classes. That explained why his self-efficacy was on the rise again in the latter months.

*Figure 3. Hairon’s Self-Efficacy*
Hairon began with a self-efficacy which he perceived to be below what he considered acceptable level and though it showed a consistent upward trend, it was only in his eighth month of teaching that it reached what he considered an acceptable level. One reason why he placed his self-efficacy below what he considered acceptable level, particularly in the first month of teaching was because he had decided that he would just teach and not have any relationship with the students although he would very much prefer, he said, “to bond with them”. He had this idea, he said, from the numerous discussions he had with his classmates in NIE. Some of his classmates arrived at the conclusion that “what counts at the end of the day are still grades”. He agreed but realised that “it is necessary to build bond with the students” and “a lot of students” like him “for the fact” that he built bonds with them.

His students were motivated, he said, to do well for his subjects which they did. His perceived self-efficacy remained below what he considered an acceptable level even when he was appointed Discipline Head (DH) of the secondary one level in his seventh month of teaching. “There were a lot of administrative things to attend to”, and he was still trying to find a balance between classroom teaching which he sees as his “bread and butter” and his responsibility as DH. His self-efficacy, according to him, climbed past the acceptable level in the eighth month when he interacted more with the students in the capacity of DH.

He felt “a strong of satisfaction” that he was able to help the students. And it continued to move beyond the acceptable level partly because his classes, he said, were doing well, particularly his History classes. In fact, he had more passes in his classes than those taught by more experienced teachers. The other reason, according to him, was that he had students not from his classes coming to him and asking him whether he could teach them because they heard he was a good teacher.

![Figure 4. Yong Jie’s Self-Efficacy](image-url)
He had done “not too badly”, he said, for his practicum and partly because of that, he was raring to go, Yong Jie said, when the new term started. That explained why he considered his self-efficacy, he said, to be at an acceptable level in the first month of teaching and because “everything was going smoothly in the first two months”, his self-efficacy, according to him, went beyond what he considered an acceptable level in the second month. However, it dipped in the subsequent months and it fell below what he considered acceptable in the fourth month.

It hit him “quite hard”, he said, that he was not managing his teaching, marking and administrative responsibilities as well as he thought he would be. He was also struggling, he said, to complete the setting of the examination papers before the deadline. He felt worse, he said, when he looked around and saw that other first year teachers like Hairon and Yu Ping were “doing fine”, unlike him. And although he was told how he should mark the compositions submitted for examinations, he decided, he said, “to mark it the way I think it should be”, which was word for word and giving very detailed feedback. But because of the number of scripts that he had to mark and the amount of time that he was given, he found himself, he said, “struggling to complete the marking” and in the end, he decided he should “just do what I was told”.

Yong Jie’s self-efficacy, according to him, climbed back to what he considered an acceptable level by the seventh month of his teaching. That was when he was made the form teacher of what he described as “a challenging class”. On average, he had, he said, five absentees in his class every day and he spent all his free time, he said, calling the parents. According to Yong Jie, he enjoyed a close relationship with his class. He tried, as far as possible, he said, to “go that extra mile” to understand them and they reciprocated, he said, what he had done for them. They also made an effort, he said, to do their work and behave well, particularly in his class. The fact that it was not an easy class to manage, and yet he was able to get most of them to cooperate with him explained why his self-efficacy, he said, continued its advance in the subsequent months.

**Figure 5. Aisha’s Self-Efficacy**
Aisha’s perceived self-efficacy was below what she considered acceptable level in the first two months of her teaching. The reason, according to Aisha, was because she “was not so sure” how she would perform, she said, as a full-fledged teacher. Although she did relatively well for her practicum, it was too short a period of time, she said, to give her a good idea of how she would fare as a full-fledged teacher. Moreover, during practicum, she was not able, she said, to assess her students’ understanding as scrupulously as she would like to, given the constraint of time. This also contributed to her uncertainty of how she would fare as a full-fledged teacher.

But as she taught, she felt more effective because she observed that her students paid attention in her class and they also scored good results for her subject. By the third month of her teaching, her self-efficacy reached what she considered acceptable level and it continued to step up. There was a slight increase in the seventh month of teaching. The reason was because she had more time to reflect and plan her lessons during the semester break so that when the new term began, she was more confident, she said, of her delivery of her lessons. At that time, she was also juggling responsibilities. She was made the form teacher of an upper secondary NA class and teacher-in-charge of a performing arts group. Despite having to juggle a few responsibilities at the same time, she was “not doing too badly”, she thought. The performing arts group that she was in charge of won a bronze in the Singapore Youth Festival. She had a good relationship with her form class as well. Those were the reason, she said, that explained why her self-efficacy was on the rise.

**Discussion and Implications of the Findings**

Yong Jie’s self-efficacy, according to the findings, was bolstered by the close relationship he shared with his class which he perceived as “very challenging”. He knew they were not easy to deal with, yet he managed to win them over. The fact that he achieved this on his own, the findings suggest, further boosted his self-efficacy. Teachers are predisposed to perceive themselves as effective, according to Tschannen-Moran et al (1998), when they experience success with difficult tasks which they achieve with little assistance. One of the reasons why Yong Jie had few problems negotiating his relationships with his students is probably because he had already developed the know-how of negotiating relationships with other people during his previous career as an insurance agent.

When he was an insurance agent, he would try to conduct background research on his clients before he spoke to them. Likewise, now that he is a teacher, he would try to find out more about his students’ background before he talked to them. When negotiating the relationships with his students, he drew on the same approaches that he used to negotiate his relationships with his clients when he was an insurance agent. For Yong Jie, it was not a conscious decision on his part, according to him, to draw on the same approaches that he used to negotiate his relationships with his clients to negotiate his relationships with his students. He was not aware, he said, that he was using the same approaches and one reason could be that they had become a part of him, so much so that he did not even realise he was adapting what he learnt previously to what he was doing now.

This seems to contradict Mayotte’s argument that second career teachers need to be able to see the connections between what they have learned and developed through their previous careers and what
they do in the classrooms, if they are to successfully adapt the knowledge and skills they developed to teaching. Yu Ping’s struggle with negotiating her relationships with her students, conversely, caused her self-efficacy to plummet. While Yong Jie responded with empathy when his students interrupted his lessons and refused to give him their full cooperation, Yu Ping confronted her students when they behaved similarly. Since both of them, as with many other new teachers, perceived gaining the respect and approval of students as an indication that they had done not too badly as a new teacher, it was not surprising whether they gained the respect and approval of their students would impinge on how they perceived their self-efficacy.

For Yu Ping, the knowledge and skills which she developed in her previous career, instead of helping her, may have worked against her. As a recruitment consultant, Yu Ping liaised with companies and worked with applicants on a one-to-one basis so that they would be selected. The nature of her job, as she understood it, was to keep both parties happy so that she could get the deal done and take a cut of the commission, which meant she had to spend a lot of time talking to companies and applicants. Because of her prior experience, Yu Ping fared better at interacting with students on a one-to-one basis. She had problems, she said, talking to the whole class at any one point in time.

The findings also suggest that new teachers’ sense of self-efficacy was also influenced by the academic performance of their students, particularly if they had not expected their students to do as well as they had done. Kok Siang attributed the increase in their self-efficacy to the better-than-expected performance of his students in Principles of Accounts (POA). It was Kok Siang’s first attempt at teaching POA. Yu Ping, likewise, attributed the waning in her self-efficacy to the efficacy to her students’ underperformance in her subject. Although the class that she taught was the best in the level, they were not performing, in terms of test scores, as well as the other class which was ranked second.

The teachers’ perceptions of their self-efficacy were also contributed in part by how their students and colleagues perceived them. Kok Siang’s self-efficacy was also bolstered after he had other teachers coming up to him and asking him what he had done which made the students listen to him and not them. These corroborate with Bandura’s (1997) observation that verbal persuasion, such as feedback, influences self-efficacy. The effectiveness of persuasion, according to Bandura, hinges on the credibility, trustworthiness, and expertise of the persuader. The persuaders in Kok Siang’s circumstance were his colleagues. Given that gaining the respect of students and acceptance of colleagues are important to new teachers in particular, students and colleagues make effective persuaders (Schempp, Sparkes & Templin, 1993).

The teachers’ sense of self-efficacy was also influenced by their perceptions of how they performed in comparison to the more experienced teachers teaching the same subject in the same level. They are found to rate their self-efficacy more favourably when their classes outperformed their experienced colleagues’. Hairon, for example, explained that one of the reasons why his self-efficacy posted a good performance was because his History classes scored more passes than those taught by the more experienced teachers. Kok Siang, similarly, expressed more confidence in how he was doing as a teacher when his POA classes performed better than the classes taught by his co-teacher who, according
to him, had years of experience. This was probably because the new teachers perceived themselves as less effective teachers than their more experienced colleagues. Consequently, when their students performed better, they experienced an increase in their self-efficacy.

Their perceptions of how well they do in relation to other new teachers had an effect on their sense of self-efficacy as well. Yong Jie, for instance, reported experiencing a decline in his self-efficacy when he perceived other first-year teachers like Hairon and Yu Ping as coping better him. Yu Ping, however, perceived herself trailing other first-year teachers in terms of her performance as a beginning teacher, and that played a part in explaining why she perceived herself as less self-effective as the months went by.

It is apparent from the findings that the teachers’ perceptions of their self-efficacy were based on what they believed to influence their self-efficacy at that particular point in time; it might be the performance of the students at one instance and how their colleagues positioned them at another. It is also apparent from the findings that the new teachers’ sense of efficacy varied from subject to subject, and it is aligned with what the literature suggests (Bandura, 1997; Raudenbush, Rowan & Cheong, 1992). Yong Jie, for example, experienced greater efficacy teaching Mathematics than English Language.

With the exception of Yu Ping who perceived her self-efficacy above acceptable level at the beginning, the rest of the teachers embarked on their first year of teaching with a sense of self-efficacy that was below or at what they positioned as acceptable level. She reasoned that since she had done well in her previous career, she had what it takes to do well in teaching. In some way, she was like the second career teacher in Bullough Jr and Knowles’ (1990) study; both had “very limited understanding of teaching” (p.109) which worked against their smooth transition into the profession. Also, while the rest of the teachers posted a unanimous improvement in their self-efficacy thereafter, Yu Ping recorded a persistent dip in hers. Interestingly, most of the teachers’ reported improvement in their self-efficacy came either in their third month of teaching, which was after one term or eighth month of teaching, which was after one semester.

One of the implications of the findings is that they corroborate what previous research has found, which is, in spite of their prior working experience, second career teachers may find it challenging, although to varying degrees, to make the transition into the role of a teacher. The findings suggest that there is some convergence of influences that affect how new teachers’ perceive their self-efficacy. Their relationship with their students, for one, shapes how they perceive their self-efficacy. The academic performance of their students in the subject they teach as well as their confidence in teaching the subject also have some bearing on their perceptions of their self-efficacy. Their ability to manage a few responsibilities simultaneously and their colleagues’ affirmation also have an influence on their self-efficacy.

When it comes to the design and provision of support to second career teachers, schools may want to consider placing more emphasis on helping second career teachers negotiate their relationships with students, building up their content knowledge and pedagogical skills. In assigning responsibilities to these new teachers, schools may also want to exercise care that, while some of them may come into teaching with an articulate sense of agency and management and organisational skills, the findings have suggested that not all are able to transfer and adapt what they have learnt previously to what they are doing now. For this reason, they are probably
going to benefit from support that helps them make the connections between what they have learned and developed through their previous careers and what they do in the classrooms as Mayotte (2003) has suggested, particularly who have very few years of working experience.

The other implication of the findings is that having prior working experience does not always make one an ideal candidate for teaching. The Ministry may want to consider finding out more from the second career applicants, the exact nature of what they were doing in their previous profession, and not assume that those engaged in the professions which require substantial communication skills, for example, would make good teachers when assessing their suitability for the teaching profession. The findings suggest that second career teachers have a propensity to draw on knowledge and skills which they acquired in their previous profession.

**Limitations of the Study**

When I embarked on this study, the second career teachers were in their sixth month of teaching. To some extent, their responses during the interviews were based on recall since I only asked them to plot the graph that documented their self-efficacy in the eleventh month of their teaching. The eventual graph that they provided me was based, for that reason, almost entirely on recall, which is fallible. This is one limitation of the study. The other limitation is that much of what I know was drawn exclusively from my interviews with them although I tried to triangulate what they told me by speaking to their Reporting Officers. Although interviews are good for “probing of views and opinions where it is desirable” (Gray, 2005, p. 217), observations are far better when it comes to examining the extent to which their “perceptions, claims and expressed perspectives are consistent with or borne out by their practice” (Hawkey, 1998, p. 657).

**Conclusion**

Although first career teachers make up the majority of the profession, we are seeing more second career teachers entering the profession compared to previously. While this study may be at best a research in progress, given its small scale and exploratory nature, it is nonetheless a step taken to initiate further dialogues on second career teachers. For the teaching profession in Singapore, this may be a significant first step.

**Notes**

1. The Ministry of Education, Singapore, defines a second career teacher as someone who has at least a year’s working experience before he or she becomes a teacher.
2. NIE offers three initial teacher preparation programme, one of which is Post-graduate in Diploma (Secondary) Programme. It is a one year programme for graduate teachers.
3. Reporting Officers are often Heads of the Department.
4. Students in Singapore go through either four to five years of secondary education, depending on the course they are enrolled in at the end of their primary education. The NA Course is a four-year course leading to the GCE ‘N’ level examination, and students who do well go on to do another additional year which leads to the GCE ‘O’ level examination.
5. The new teachers in this secondary school often co-teach classes with another teacher during the first six months of their teaching. The reason, according to the Principal, is to provide them with the opportunity to learn from someone more experienced in teaching the subject.
6. There are 4 grades given for practicum: fail, pass, pass with credit, and distinction. The final grade awarded to student teacher is a decision taken jointly by school and NIE supervisor.

7. Contract teachers are untrained teachers. They have been accepted by the Ministry of Education to teach but because NIE can only accommodate a certain number of students for each academic year, they are sent to teach in schools first. On average, they spend between three months to a year in the school before they go to NIE.

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