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Title:

What does it matter what I think? Challenging teacher-child relationships, perceptions, power, and prophecy

Department

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Abstract

This study explored Head Start teachers’ mental representations of their relationship with a challenging child. The study describes teacher self reflections about a targeted challenging relationship with a student collected from reflective writing journals. The journals were completed by teachers as a structured reflective writing intervention focused on improving teacher well-being and effectiveness among Head Start teachers. The primary research project considered the efficacy of a reflective writing intervention on improving teacher-child interactions and teacher wellbeing. The current study focuses on the attitudes expressed within the teachers’ reflections in regards to the challenging relationship. This study utilizes interpretive analysis methods to unpack the themes embedded within the teachers’ writing. The initial analysis revealed teacher mental representations characterized by three emerging themes: 1) teachers engaging in self reflection and positive goal setting, engaged; 2) teachers restating vocabulary and expressing how “it would be good if”, avoidant; and 3) teachers focusing on the challenging child’s problems or disinterest in improvement, blaming.

This study describes the way that teachers reflect on challenging relationships with students and the themes that emerge when their thoughts are carefully considered. Research asserts the power of teachers’ mental representations to influence their interactions with students and their overall wellbeing. Mental representations, or internal working models, are influence teachers perceptions of interactions and guide their reactions. This study seeks to paint the picture of the challenging teacher-child relationship with the brush strokes of a group of Head Start teachers efforts to improve. The stories of their most challenging relationships and how they perceive them are relevant at a time when teacher efficacy and retention are necessary for progress in early childhood education. These findings and their implications contribute to a timely discussion about the importance of considering how teachers internalize challenging relationships in an effort to support their wellbeing and teacher efficacy.

Citation