

## Chapter 18

# Levels of Self-Efficacy among Harassed Teachers

**Isabel Cantón**

*University of León, Spain*

**Consuelo Morán**

*University of León, Spain*

### ABSTRACT

*The aim of this study was to examine the differences among harassed teachers and un-harassed ones, regarding coping strategies, self-efficacy, and locus of control. Participants were 255 teachers (163 women and 92 men) who completed a set of three questionnaires, the Mobbing Perceived Questionnaire, a battery of control expectancies, and the Brief COPE to assess, respectively, mobbing perceived at work, self-efficacy, locus of control, and coping strategies. The results showed differences in self-efficacy, locus of control, and use of coping strategies depending on the teachers' degree of mobbing perceived. The authors believe that the efforts for preventing mobbing made by educational organizations must be intensified, as they not only affect teachers' quality of life but also the quality of the educational system, furthermore new technologies can have a relevant role on this side by making available all information on those phenomena.*

### INTRODUCTION

Since the beginning of the 21st century, the European educational system has had to take up the challenge of changes in the student population, which has increased in both numbers and diversity. Education professionals have been trying to

adapt to the needs of students who speak different languages and who come from different backgrounds, some of whom are at risk of becoming excluded from the educational system, and many with special needs (Wertheim & Leyser, 2002).

In Spain, in the last twenty years, we have had seven mutually contradictory educational laws. None of which has been completely developed against the backdrop of the old dichotomy of two

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cultures, or philosophical-ideological substratum upholding the idea of education based on legislation. Rules and regulations and different practices which are mutually incompatible if not integrated: *educare* for students who are *tabula rasa* and *educere* for those who already have knowledge and need it to be brought out: reproduce or transform, liberate or repress, rousseauists or scholastics: pedagogical optimists or pessimists (Cantón & Perisset, 2009).

The rational-positivist or technical rationality intellectual current is based on reason and on a degree of pedagogical pessimism, and proposes stable teaching routines that are difficult to change, based on expert language, on effort and on the instilling of traditional, compact and safe moral values, with some eschewing of pedagogy. In teaching centres, it takes the form of a dense, highly structured curriculum, drilling, knowledgeable teachers perhaps lacking in pedagogical competence, and high levels of strict discipline, where the consequences of violence are noticed early on and nipped in the bud.

Opposed to this is practical rationality, typical of the nineties, based on facts, on pedagogical optimism taken to the extreme, on play learning and impregnation, upheld by the theories of German Romanticism of the 19th century and the Rousseau's concept of the *Noble Savage*. Children are naturally good, it is society, and the school itself that pervert them with their teachings, so the important thing is change, innovation – education cannot be systemized. With it, there appeared what has come to be called specific pedagogical language, the curriculum has to be negotiated with the students and adapted to their interests, with greater stress on lay values and large doses of moral relativism (Ayuso, 2005). In schools, it appears as permissiveness, a variable curriculum, negotiation, teacher-mediators, multicultural and pluralist values that are unstable, diffuse, and contingent; criticism and social examination of the values of the teachers; students with low or no discipline and difficulties in tackling disruptive

conduct. An example of this tendency may be seen in the final provisions of the Spanish Education Act of March 2006: “*collective decisions made by students in the third year of compulsory secondary education and above regarding class attendance shall not be considered as irregular conduct and shall not be punished....*”

Classroom violence is the direct result of the adoption by governments and society of practical rationalism as guidelines for a sort of relativist overregulation of education, at both school and social level. But it is also the fruit of society's upholding and applauding such practices, which translate into confrontations between two sectors that in theory are working to the same end: teachers and parents, the former adopting a threatening posture towards the latter regarding permissiveness towards their children and the latter giving up the battle as lost and seeking release from teaching into administration or retirement. A third sector, in which we find ourselves, also has a great deal of responsibility in this topic: the experts, who, ensconced in their academic ghettos, take no part in, have no relationship with and contribute no solutions from their research to current social affairs, which they do not get involved in but merely contemplate from their ivory towers. Violent students must obviously take their part of the blame for clinging onto social, legal, and educational extremes.

In this context of change, the study of a teacher's efficiency becomes relevant in psycho-educational research.

From Bandura's Social Cognitive theory (1977, 1997), a teacher's perceived efficacy may be defined as their consideration of their capability of integrating social, cognitive and behavioural skills in order to organize and carry out the actions necessary to achieve the desired results. Perceived self-efficacy affects thoughts, emotions and behaviour, stimulating people to make substantial efforts to achieve their aims, persisting in the face of adversity and always seeking to keep control over the relevant events affecting their lives.

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