

OPPORTUNITIES TO BUILD SELF-EFFICACY IN STUDENT THROUGH
RELATIONSHIPS IN THE ACADEMIC SPACE

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Abstract

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Under the Supervision of Tom LoGuidice, PhD

Albert Bandura, a leading researcher and thought leader in the field of self-efficacy, states it is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt. At the time of this study, the question arose are there opportunities to build self-efficacy in students through relationships in the academic space. What is known about the concept of self-efficacy in educational spaces? Can we intentionally use this space and the traditional relationships that form as a result, to build efficacy in students? Are there identifiable and replicable behaviors, mindsets or rhetoric which that can be taught, simulated, or created in order to positively influence self-efficacy in students? What role does peer relationships play in building student efficacy? Can we bring awareness to those working with students and provide guidance on how to positively impact efficacy? As a result of this research, this paper seeks answers to these questions to inform practitioners working with students in educational spaces. The impact of heightening self-efficacy for students and contributing to practitioner mindsets around self- efficacy can help create more productive learning environments.

Key Terms

Self-efficacy
Albert Bandura

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Chapter One: Introduction

Albert Bandura, a leading researcher and thought leader in the field of self-efficacy, states it is difficult to achieve much while fighting self-doubt. At the time of this study, the question arose are there opportunities to build self-efficacy in students through relationships in the academic space. What is known about the concept of self-efficacy in educational spaces? Can we intentionally use this space and the traditional relationships that form as a result, to build efficacy in students? Are there identifiable and replicable behaviors, mindsets or rhetoric which that can be taught, simulated, or created in order to positively influence self-efficacy in students? What role does peer relationships play in building student efficacy? Can we bring awareness to those working with students and provide guidance on how to positively impact efficacy? As a result of this research, this paper seeks answers to these questions to inform practitioners working with students in educational spaces. The impact of heightening self-efficacy for students and contributing to practitioner mindsets around self- efficacy can help create more productive learning environments.

Statement of the Problem

What are the opportunities to build student efficacy in the scholastic environment?

Definition of Terms

Perceived self-efficacy is defined by Albert Bandura as an individual's beliefs about their capabilities to produce desired effects. (1994) In contrast to perceived self-

efficacy, self-efficacy is belief in ones capabilities to organize and execute the course of action required to manage prospective situations (Pajares 1996).

Delimitations of Research

Literature regarding self-efficacy was collected over a seventy five day period using resources from Karmann Library at University of Wisconsin-Platteville and Learning Support Services Library at University of Wisconsin-Madison. The search engines provided by EBSCOHOST were used. Google Scholar and ERIC were also consulted. The key search terms were “self-efficacy” and “academic achievement”.

Method of Approach

A thorough review of literature relating to research, studies, and anecdotal evidence of the impact of relationships in the educational space and its impact on self-efficacy. The findings were summarized, synthesized, and recommendations were made.

Chapter Two: Review of Related Literature

Exploring the Concept of Self-Efficacy and Self-Efficacy Beliefs

A literature review was conducted to synthesize what has been written about self-efficacy and self-efficacy beliefs in educational spaces. This chapter is a report on the literature related to the concept of self-efficacy and provides examples of how it's processed in the educational space. The research is analyzed to bring forth the relationships at play in each study and the potential each relationship has to impact efficacy. These relationships include coaches, teachers and peers. Much research has been done to analyze the varying factors that influence academic achievement from a social and academic lens focus. It's important to continue this work, including exploring self-efficacy, to more closely align the social and academic disciplines of education. The result would provide substantial, practical research to assist educators, counselors, advisors, and educational professionals in forming research based practices for cultivating student efficacy. This chapter begins with summarizing Albert Bandura's research on the concept of self-efficacy.

Perceived self-efficacy is one's beliefs about their own capacity to produce an effect in their lives. Self-efficacy determines how people feel, think, self-motivate, and behave (Bandura 1994). Self-efficacy is a multidimensional construct that is fundamental to the social-cognitive approach and conceptualizes individuals as being agentic, purposeful, proactive, self-evaluative and self-regulatory (Bandura 1989). The concept of self-efficacy speaks to the level of control and capacity one believes they have over a specified task.

To clearly separate the seemingly similar nature of self-esteem from self efficacy, one should recognize self-efficacy is task focused. Self-esteem depicts how one feels about their entire self as a whole person, self-efficacy speaks more to the beliefs one has about their ability or capacity to perform a certain task. One may have low self-esteem but high self-efficacy in their ability to cook. When self-efficacy is high theorist assert that expectations increase as well as energies and task persistence (Bandura 1991). Having high self-efficacy does not translate into being exceptional in the said skill, nor does high self-efficacy as a cook mean the practitioner is a “good” cook. It simply means the person is confident in their ability to cook. Self-efficacy study teaches that unless one is able to believe in their ability to execute a task they will not commence a challenge or persevere through difficult times. Individuals often rely on their personal sense of efficacy when dealing with perplexing situations and tend to avoid task and goals they perceive to be beyond their reach and abilities (Bandura 1997). Self-efficacy beliefs in the educational space are important because they speak to the students beliefs about their capacity to achieve, specifically in the academic environment.

Efficacy beliefs also influence an individual’s thought patterns and emotional reactions. People with low self-efficacy may believe or interpret situations as more robust than they really are. The perceived impossibility fosters stress, depression, and a restricted vision of how best to solve a problem. Those emotions can interfere with the successful completion of the said task that actually could have been accomplished had their self-efficacy been higher.

On the other hand, high self-efficacy helps create feelings of serenity and capability when approaching a new difficult task or activity (Pajares 1996). Bandura also

asserts that self-efficacy is an important element in exercising emotional control and personal agency (Bandura 1986). People with high efficacy approach task as something to be mastered and not a threat to avoid (Bandura 1994). The next section takes a closer look at the sources of self-efficacy and what sources influence self-efficacy beliefs.

Bandura's research list four main sources of efficacy: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences through social models, social persuasion, and the lessening of stress reactions by modifying negative emotional tendencies and mis-interpretations of their physical state (Bandura 1994). Mastery experiences occur when one accomplishes positive experiences and positive results while executing a task. Mastery experiences are the result of successfully completing a task which procures positive feelings for the performer toward the task. Bandura affirms this as the most powerful and effective way to create a sturdy sense of efficacy; failure undermines efficacy while success can firmly establish efficacy (Bandura 1994). A student completing a successful internship before applying to work at a company can be viewed as a "mastery experience" to raise self-efficacy in this area. In simpler terms shooting a basketball and making it once increases one's self-efficacy.

Vicarious experiences serve as a source for efficacy when one sees another succeed through consistent effort in a comparable activity. This is commonly known as modeling but Bandura (1994) adds that the more similar the model is to the observer the stronger influence the experience has on the efficacy of the observer. To continue the basketball example, the observer may think, "I am tall; I see tall people shooting the ball and succeeding. I should be able to shoot the ball well too." These types of experiences are enhanced when models or mentors offer guidance to the observer. If the advice

offered by the model produces positive results the stronger the impact on efficacy. Consider a female intern from a small rural area taken under the wing of a successful female professor who comes from a similar background and demographic. The professor has the potential to greatly influence the intern's efficacy by acting as a vicarious source for the intern. The more similarities the intern sees in the professor the stronger the influence over the intern's efficacy in academia.

The third source discussed by Bandura, social persuasion, can strengthen one's efficacy beliefs through verbal encouragement. This encouragement helps to muster greater efforts and combat self-doubt even though complications may arise. When students operate in an environment where they are verbally acknowledged and praised, the social persuasion by the instructor helps to affirm and contribute to their efficacy. The positive nature of the nurturing environment allows students to feel as though they can complete a task that is particularly challenging. Consider a fan shooting a half court shot, an understandably insurmountable task. The roar of the crowd in favor of the shooter makes them feel capable. Understanding that self-efficacy is task specific as opposed to self-esteem that refers to esteem of the entire person, the verbal persuasion should be directed towards specific behaviors. "You did a great job making that half-court shot" would be more effective for efficacy than a simple, "nice shot." Additionally, the chanting of the shooter's name would be more effective than a plea or request to shoot the ball.

The reduction of stress reactions to difficult situations is the fourth source of efficacy (Bandura 1997). Reduction of stress helps build efficacy by lessening the urgency, seriousness, and perception of the situation. This provides the performer with an

alternate, different perspective on how to view the daunting task. In turn this can build efficacy by highlighting the opportunity as opposed to the perceived potential failure. Typically if a team reaches a championship the coach's rhetoric circles around the urgency of this particular game, increasing the stress of the players. This final source of efficacy suggests the coach should treat the game as a typical game to lessen the stress and increase the efficacy. Statements such as "it's just another game, we've played 100 of these to get here, this is just one more game" are more helpful.

These four sources of efficacy -- mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and the reduction of stress reactions--, offered by Bandura are not presented as being limited to a particular setting, he speaks of them in a relative nature. One can assume that these sources can be found and cultivated in any setting including educational spaces. Bandura stated the following in regards to schools cultivating self-efficacy:

During the crucial formative period of children's lives, the school functions as the primary setting for the cultivation and social validation of cognitive competencies. School is the place where children develop the cognitive competencies and acquire the knowledge and problem-solving skills essential for participating effectively in the larger society. Here their knowledge and thinking skills are continually tested, evaluated, and socially compared. As children master cognitive skills, they develop a growing sense of their intellectual efficacy. Many social factors, apart from the formal instruction, such as peer modeling of cognitive skills, social comparison with the performances of other students, motivational enhancement through goals and positive incentives, and teacher's

interpretations of children's successes and failures in ways that reflect favorably or unfavorably on their ability also affect children's judgments of their intellectual efficacy. (Bandura 1994 p. 13)

Bandura's description of the scholastic environments influence and role in cultivating self-efficacy mentions several social and relational sources that influence efficacy including peers and teachers. Bandura speaks of the perceived interpretation by the student as favorable or unfavorable will affect the child's efficacy. Peers and teachers are both traditional part of the scholastic environment and are co-dependent on each other for successful efficacy. Coaches, counselors, social workers, teachers and peers are all traditional roles and relationships that are part of the scholastic landscape for students, how can these relationships be used as conduits to cultivate efficacy. How can we use these relationships more intentionally to build efficacy in students. The next section takes a closer look at the research surrounding the influence of peers, teachers, coaches, and others relational roles in the scholastic environment and how these relationships can and do affect student efficacy.

Opportunities for coaches, teachers and peers to effect efficacy.

The scholastic environment can be a stressful space for students. Bandura (1997) talks about lessening stress reactions as a source for how to improve self-efficacy. Stressful situations create emotional excitement, which intern affects a person's perceived self-efficacy in coping with situations (Bandura & Adams 1997) Stress, anxiety, worry and fear all destructively affect self-efficacy and can lead to a self-fulfilling prophecy of failure or helplessness to perform the feared task (Pajeres

2002). Can teachers or other members of the scholastic space assist with reducing those stress reactions for students and what effect does it have on efficacy?

A study was conducted in 2005 on 111 adolescents to measure the impact of a self-efficacy intervention in helping adolescents cope with sports-competition loss. Researchers Brown, Malouff and Schutte assigned participants of the team to either a self-efficacy intervention group or a control group. The intervention group was asked to apply one of six thoughts related to a source of self-efficacy for themselves. An example of a source item the participants were asked to focus on is ‘think of something you did really good in the game’ or “think of how you will feel when you win your next game” (Brown, Malouff & Schutte 2005). Essentially they were asked to focus on what Bandura would consider a mastery experience or how they predict they will feel after a mastery experience. All team members were tested using the Positive Affect scale to measure the change and effect of the efficacy intervention. The intervention group scored higher on the Positive Affect scale compared to the control group (Brown, Malouff & Schutte 2005). The Positive Affect scale of PANAS has been shown to be a useful measure of changes in affect (Watson et al. 1998).

At the end of the study the control groups Positive Affect scores were 35.54 pre-competition and 30.03 post-competition. The intervention group’s scores were 33.68 pre-competition and 32.08 post-competition. The control group’s scores were significantly lowered after a loss compared to the intervention group whose scores were more stable even after the loss. (Brown, Malouff & Schutte 2005). The Positive Affect scale is a 10 question self-report tool.

The results of this study lead to the suggestion that when reminded to focus on a positive experiences and emotions, even after a unfavorable outcome such as a loss in sports, one's positivity and efficacy can remain sure, compared to a group who is not reminded of a mastery experience. This would explain why intuitively, we look to comfort ourselves after losses with positive thoughts of the future or past. If we can learn to consciously do this in educational spaces we could help our students recover faster after experiencing negative emotions and focus their energy on completing the next task. In this scenario, the members of the research team acted as the efficacy protectors and builders, but this role could be fulfilled thorough the coaching staff, parent volunteers, or other team members. If the coaching staff were training to include those intervention steps of pointing students towards a mastery experience after a loss students could reap the benefits on their efficacy, just as the students did who participated in the Brown, Malouff & Schutte (2005) study.

In the sport competition-loss study, (Brown et al. 2005), self-efficacy interventions were proven to help students move from a negative head-space to a positive-head space, these interventions can be viewed as an example of a social persuasion source and a stress reduction source. Family, teachers and friends are all common relational roles in a student's life and educational space, if those relationships can be used intentionally as intervention sources to increase efficacy the student would be better positioned for success.

Yarahmadi conducted a study in 2012 that examined the relationship between perceptions of support from family, teachers, and friends and self-efficacy. The study also examined these variables for its relationship with academic achievement. In the

study participants were given quizzes to test their perceived support from parents, teachers and friends. The quiz was comprised of twelve statements related to each area of support. Questions were asked about emotional support and informational support. Sample questions were not provided in the study summary. Students also took a self-efficacy questionnaire to investigate their efficacy beliefs. Grade point averages were used as a measure for academic achievement.

Yarahmadi (2012) found that perceived social support was the most significant factor in predicting academic achievement at a rate of 12.5% of total variance. Self-efficacy beliefs were also shown to have a positive influence, but perceived social support from family was the most significant variable in this study (Yarahmadi 2012). This study supports Bandura's (1994) assertion that the interpretation of reactions of others as favorable or unfavorable affect the student's judgment about their own efficacy.

In addition to family and teachers playing a role in the efficacy of students, peers and friends also have a role. Peer pressure among high school students is often cited as one of the reasons why youth engage in irresponsible behaviors. The research of Kiran-Esen supports this notion. Kiran-Esen (2012) conducted an analysis of peer pressure and self-efficacy expectation among young adolescent. Using the Self-Efficacy Expectations Scale for Adolescents (SEES-A) developed by Muris (2001), Kiran-Esen surveyed five hundreds and forty six high school aged youth. The SEES-A instrument measures three dimensions of efficacy expectations; academic, social and emotional. Peer Pressure was measured using a scale Kiran-Esen (2003) developed called the Peer Pressure Scale or PPS. Kiran-Esen found that as the perception of peer pressure increased in the students, general and academic self-efficacy decreased (Kiran-Esen 2012).

While Kiran-Esen (2012) found negative correlations between peer pressure and self-efficacy, it's worth mentioning that peer pressure can also be used as a positive force. Traditionally when we think of peer pressure we usually associate peer pressure with negative connotations and actions, but there are also examples of programs and spaces created for youth that uses positive peer pressure as a driver to motivate. Peer mentoring programs, pre-college programs, and spaces like Boys and Girls Clubs are all meant to galvanize the power of peers in social networks to motivate the entire group to push towards a positive goal.

The common thread in Kiran- Esen (2012), Brown et al. (2005) and Yarahmadi (2012) is the dependence students have on the feedback received from the relationships in the scholastic space to help define their efficacy. While this paper focuses on student efficacy, it is worth mentioning that there is also much research on teacher efficacy and how it effects the learning environment. Woolfolk of Stanford University has published many works on this topic. In a paper entitled *What do Teachers Need to Know About Self-Efficacy*, Woolfolk (2004) asserts that there are three types of efficacy judgments at play in schools, student, teacher and collective. Teacher efficacy is influenced by their personal sense of efficacy and the collective sense of efficacy in the schools. Woolfolk (2004) points to conversations in teachers lounges as a place to find the state of the collective about their efficacy. Woolfolk warns that novice teachers, who are still developing their own sense of efficacy for teaching, can be highly susceptible to conversations around teaching and learning. Think of Bandura's (1997) third and fourth sources of efficacy, social persuasion and reduction of stress reactions. The environment created in spaces where teachers collectively gather to debrief and relieve frustrations can

either be a space for positive social persuasion and successfully reduces stress reactions for teachers, or a breeding ground for negativity that seals and confirms self-doubt.

Woolfolk (2004) also notes that authentic efficacy for teachers, does not equal comfort or ease when teaching. Denying a person the struggle in learning a task may be robbing them of an authentic mastery experience.

Teachers that are aware of the efficacy judgments around them can recognize when efficacy is being influenced and move towards self-regulating when their efficacy is being harmed or stunted. Woolfolk (2004) suggest that teachers find and help create supportive environments that are realistic about problems but emphasize strengths in students and in teachers. Woolfolk states three intuitive beliefs and knowledge that gets in the way of molding efficacy; self-efficacy is confidence- which is a personality characteristic so it can't be changed, make task easy so students can "experience success" , and equality is equity- different task for different students is impractical and unfair. These three things are often the thoughts and undercurrent beliefs of teachers who are skeptical of their potential influence on efficacy in students or themselves.

Summary

The review of the aforementioned studies and literature suggest that the traditional relationships in the student space, such as relationships with teachers, peers, and coaches all affect student efficacy. These relationships can serve as sources to build student efficacy. The joining of this information is helpful for those working with students in academic spaces as it can assist in knowing the sources for efficacy and how they can positively affect efficacy and coach students to positively affect their peers' efficacy.

Thus far the literature has emerged the following main points.

- Self- Efficacy beliefs refers to the level of capacity one believes they have to complete and manage a said task.
- Bandura (1994) provides four sources of self-efficacy:
 - Mastery experiences
 - Vicarious experiences
 - Social persuasion
 - Successful reduction of stress reactions in difficult situations
- Students are dependent on feedback they receive from coaches, teachers, peers and parent to define their own sense of efficacy.
- When students are pointed towards a mastery experience, their efficacy can remain stable despite a loss
- Higher levels of perceived peer pressure negatively affects efficacy
- Strong support from parents and other social networks positively affect efficacy

The next section will focus on conclusions and recommendations based on the findings.

Chapter Three: Conclusions and Recommendations

The studies and literature has revealed that self-efficacy beliefs in students are dependent on the feedback they receive from those who share spaces with them, such as peers, teacher, coaches and parents. Based on these findings it is recommend that staff working with students become more conscious of the feedback they give to students and use these three steps to ensure they seize the opportunity to build efficacy; reflect/remind, relate, and reassure.

When introducing a challenging task to students, ask them to reflect on something they overcame despite being overwhelmed when starting the task. Professionals can also ask students to imagine how great it will feel to overcome and conquer their goals. If you know of a situation the student has mastered, you also have the option of reminding the student of their previous victory. The next step is to relate, find a model to point the student towards who embodies the desired behavior or characteristic you're trying to cultivate in the student. The student should be able to draw similarities between themselves and the model. Perhaps an older sibling who is doing well or a celebrity who overcame similar circumstances. The final step is the reassure, use social persuasion to reassure the student that's it okay to take risk. The professional's language should speak to the specific behavior desired to build the efficacy in, statements like "you can get through the first chapter of this book by the end of week, if you read a few pages a day" this reassures the student and provides some guidance on how to complete the task.

When coaching peers on how to be a positive source of efficacy for each other, they too and can use the same three steps. Instead of using peer pressure for negative behaviors or to talk about the challenges ahead, guide the student's conversations towards

reflecting on the positive results of the challenge and the opportunities they have to learn, grow and overcome. Ask the students if they can think of any models or relatable examples of the success they seek, and challenge them to reassure each other instead of heckling one another and highlighting the possibility for failure. Implementing these things into the culture of your scholastic environment can help build efficacy in students and promote a healthier learning environment.

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