Self-Efficacy: A Necessary Social Skills Curricula Component

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Abstract
The development of self-efficacy must be a major area of concern in our education planning for all students. Self-efficacy plays a significant role in the development of social skills. Areas such as motivation, self-knowledge, modeling and observational learning are factors that support the development of self-efficacy. This manuscript will examine the role of self-efficacy in social skill development and factors that hinder the development of efficacy in children.

Keywords: self efficacy, social skill, curricula, motivation, observational learning

INTRODUCTION
The development of self is a lifelong process; however, increasing personal growth in self-efficacy during early development sustains throughout the life span. Daily we use and rely on our self-efficacy. The more self-efficacious one is, the more successfully one can endure the demands of living (Bandura, 1986). The concept of self-efficacy, addressed within the social cognitive theory (Bandura), needs to be included in our educational curriculum with all children. The purpose of this paper is to explore self-efficacy and the educational factors that lead to its development. It is my belief that one of the major foundations of learning is self-efficacy. If the development of self-efficacy is a priority in education, then the educational experience will be more relevant to the child.

SELF-EFFICACY
Self-efficacy must have a role in the development of the whole child. Based on the work of Bandura (1986) we know that self-efficacy is the power to produce an effect (Guralnik, 1984) and being efficacious is having the power to produce a desired effect (Guralnik). The development of self-efficacy and the depth of this development create an awareness of one’s self that is accessed throughout an individual’s lifetime (Gorrell, 1990).

The dependency on one’s self-efficacy is of particular interest; in that, adults access their supply of self-efficacy that was acquired in early childhood. A person may need to access his/her self-efficacy to varying degrees, depending upon particular needs that arise in given situations. Therefore, “a strong sense of self-efficacy enables people to make the most of their capabilities” (Bandura, 1986). The emphasis on self-efficacy needs continued and heightened priority in the education of children; if self-efficacy is something that is truly needed throughout one’s lifetime. Gorrell (1990) states research on students’ self-efficacy ratings improve following success and decrease after experiencing failure and that self-efficacy is related to achievement. When examining self-efficacy, Bandura (1986) identified the following factors that hinder the development of self-efficacy: (a) overestimating capabilities; (b) lack of necessary equipment, resources, finances; (c) physical or social restraints; (d) faulty self-knowledge; and (e) self-doubt.

The factors that hinder the development of self-efficacy should serve as guidelines in developing curricular lessons that specifically address each factor and incorporate social skill exercises to help reinforce the expansion of self-efficacy in each student. Efficacy Education. Because self-efficacy is directly connected to performance and success (Bandura, 1986), I believe the importance of self-efficacy cannot be overlooked in the educational development of children. The personal need for self-efficacy continues throughout life. The current method for incorporating lessons in our classroom is the generation of curriculum. The design of the curriculum addresses skills and tasks that are determined beneficial for the students to learn. Social skills training, motivation and self-knowledge, and modeling and observational learning are areas believed to help the development of self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986, 1977, 1971).

In the area of special education, various programs offer some type of social skills training during the school day. Social skills can be a deficient area for some students with disabilities (Wise, Bundy, Bundy, & Wise, 1991). Students with disabilities typically do not receive proper skills training that can aid in becoming more self-efficacious. This deficit area can be addressed through designing specific instructional goals that emphasis targeted elements of self-efficacy during social skills training. Curriculum goals should be established to assist students in the deficit area of social skills. One method for meeting the demands of
this goal is social skills training (Kolb & Stuart, 2005).

Social Skills Training
One of the literary foundations of social skills training comes from the basis of social cognitive theory (Scheier & Botvin, 1988). “Social cognitive theory examines the transformation mechanism in terms of conception-matching processes whereby symbolic representations are translated into appropriate courses of action” (Bandura, 1986, p. 390). The components of various social skills training programs often include the areas of problem solving, self-determination and transition (Cummings & Haggerty, 1997).

Transition. The more self-efficacy an individual possesses, the more able they are to transition smoothly from one life stage to the next (Scheier & Botvin, 1998; Bandura, 1986). Transition involves the ability to move from one level or stage to the next. Possessing certain abilities and knowledge and applying them effectively in various situations involves the generalization of information and skills to the necessary level or stage a person may enter, whether this is a new job, a different school, or social setting.

“Judgments of personal efficacy are distinguished from response-outcome expectations. Perceived self-efficacy is a judgment of one’s capability to accomplish a certain level of performance; whereas an outcome expectation is a judgment of the likely consequence such behavior will produce. An outcome is the consequence of an act, not the act itself” (Bandura, 1986).

The perception on one’s self-efficacy is a greater indicator of performance in varied areas of transition and cognitive skills (Scheier & Botvin, 1998). Consequently, “people tend to avoid tasks and situations they believe exceed their capabilities, but they undertake and perform assuredly activities they judge themselves capable of handling” (p. 393). Correctly perceiving one’s abilities and then designing a course of action are skills that require attention. Students need the skills to reflect and amend their behavior and apply problem solving strategies to assist in the areas of transition in their lives (Kolb & Stuart, 2005; Phelps & Hanley-Maxwell, 1997).

Problem Solving. The importance of a strong developed self-efficacy is the ability to problem solve. The perception of one’s self-efficacy contributes more to the success of a problem than the actual ability one possesses to solve a problem (Bandura, 1986). Positive experiences help create confidence (Coleman, Wheeler, & Webber, 1993). Problem solving skills are essential; these skills must be taught to students, included in their educational experience, and addressed in the curriculum (Coleman et al.; Ogilvy, 1994; Kolb, & Stuart, 2005).

Self-Determination. The basic premise of becoming more self-efficacious is when individuals are able to exercise some control over events that effect their lives. This is closely related to the term in commonly used special education known as self-determination. Self-efficacy simply means to have power within ones’ self and produce a desired effect (Guralnik, 1984). Similarly, determination is having the power to act on a decision definitely and firmly (Guralnik). In other words, self-determination is the capacity to have free choice of one’s actions (Sands & Doll, 1996). The connection between self-efficacy and self-determination is evident in the similar meanings within the definition of those terms. Self-efficacy and self-determination both focus on producing desired outcomes by an individual. Although an individual’s skills, abilities and knowledge are important, emphasis is placed on the perception of how an individual can have impact on his/her environment. Moreover, a combination of high self-efficacy and ability enable a greater level of competent functioning.

The promotion of choice of action is directly related to self-determination. “Self-determination includes both the attitudes that lead people to define goals for themselves and their ability to initiate actions to achieve those goals” (Wall & Dattilo, 1995, p. 278). It is important to accurately appraise one’s abilities to help achieve a greater degree of success (Bandura, 1986). Merely providing the social skills training in not enough to ensure generalization of certain skills and increase in the development of self-efficacy. Individuals need to gain knowledge of individual capabilities is an important step in functioning more appropriately and confidently in daily tasks (Bandura).

Motivation and Self-knowledge
Bandura suggests that motivation and self-knowledge are two areas that play an important role in self-efficacy (1986). He also emphasizes how individuals judge their capabilities and perceive their ability as a direct connection with their motivation and self-knowledge. Therefore, addressing areas of motivation and exploring concepts of self-knowledge should be included in the educational curricula (Dev, 1997; Cordova & Lepper, 1996).

Motivation. An individual’s thought patterns are shaped by self-efficacy (Bandura, 1986). Persons with strong perceived self-efficacy “are inclined to attribute their failures to insufficient effort, whereas those of comparable skills with lower perceived self-efficacy ascribe their failures to deficient ability” (p. 395). This argument is also supported in the literature regarding motivational theories that address
extrinsic and intrinsic motivation. Students with more intrinsic motivation typically attribute failure to a lack of effort or preparation on their part (Dev, 1997). Students who rely heavily on external factors for motivational reinforcement attribute failure to something beyond their control (Dev). The belief that the failure experienced was beyond their control provides little if no reason for students to attempt to gain control over the situation or initiate change.

So, even if the skills or knowledge of various steps to solving a problem, making decisions or asserting oneself are memorized, the effort or willingness to apply this knowledge is circumvented by the lack of intrinsic attribution to the problem. Students may feel future tasks are similar to past experiences and simply beyond their control and not attempt the new task (Kolb, 2008). The question of - Why bother to try? - may be thought, stated, believed and reinforced again. This trap of "faulty self judgment" (Bandura, 1986, p. 398) can be overcome by gaining greater awareness of self-knowledge.

**Self-knowledge.** According to Bandura (1986) self-knowledge is derived in the following ways: performance attainment, verbal and social persuasion, physiological states and vicarious experiences. Performance standards provide the greatest source of information for efficacy. Knowledge gained from performance that is derived from the mastery of experiences and repeated successes is called "enactive attainment" by Bandura (p. 399). Enactive attainment is useful in determining correct behavior through a symbolization process (Bandura, 1986).

The next source for gaining information on self-efficacy is verbal persuasion. Verbal persuasion is used to reinforce the belief that one possesses certain skills and abilities through oral communication. This seems similar to the theory behind positive affirmations. The use of verbal persuasion can unfortunately have an opposite, negative effect on an individual when told repeatedly how inadequate he is or that she will never be able to do a particular task correctly. Deriving information via the physiological state is accomplished through judging one’s capabilities based on somatic and emotional arousal (Bandura). People analyze their physical state such as body aches, muscle tension, fatigue and increased heart rate as signs when involved in physically demanding or possibly fearful activities. Finally, vicarious experience is learning from the experiences of others and comparing individual capabilities with other’s skills to appraise personal self-efficacy. Vicarious learning and the instructional techniques that incorporate modeling strategies for learning are both factors that create greater knowledge of oneself and experiences (Kolb, 2003).

Modeling influences that convey effective coping strategies can boost the self-efficacy of individuals (Bandura, 1986). Although first hand experiences provide knowledge to the learner, the influence of modeling can enhance perceived self-efficacy almost as significantly (Bandura). Some experiences may be too dangerous or life-threatening and the knowledge and experience of others can be adequate in providing the necessary information for individuals to be more successful in a given situation (Bandura).

**Modeling and Observational Learning**

Bandura (1971) realized there are numerous benefits from observing others and that modeling desired behaviors is another strategy that aids in learning. A person does not actually have to experience an event or situation to learn about that experience. Certainly, experiential learning is one method that has proven effective in teaching certain lessons. Some lessons and activities are not safe to repeat or have someone experience; therefore, the benefits of modeling are understood (Erwin, 1994; Ogilvy, 1994; Wise et al., 1991; Gresham & Elliot, 1984). “People draw on the judgments and problem-solving skills modeled and taught by others” (Bandura, 1986, p. 464).

An example of this is to learn that a stove burner can be very hot when in operation; one does not need to touch the hot burner to learn that a severe burn could result from having contact with the element. The actual experience of touching the burner would be a valuable learning experience and most likely prevent a person from touching it purposely again. However, the need to experience such a harmful situation is not usually necessary for a human being to learn something new or gain an understanding of a behavior or incident. Observing what can happen and drawing conclusions from the modeling and experiences of others can also provide the same knowledge to the learner (Bandura, 1986; Erwin, 1994; Ogilvy, 1994; Gresham & Elliot, 1984). “It is well documented that exposure to successful models raises individuals’ beliefs that they also can perform the modeled behavior” (Gorrell, 1990, p. 78). Individuals have learned new skills from observation, modeling and role-playing to gain information rather than actually going through the learning experiences first hand (Kolb & Griffith, 2009).

Bandura’s work and research provides support that modeling is an effective technique for teaching individual’s certain skills and lessons. “Life is too short and errors are too costly to acquire such diagnostic knowledge through trial-and-error experiences alone” (Bandura, 1986). Observational learning can then be effective in the teaching of problem solving skills coupled with self-efficacy. The benefits of modeling and observational learning are enhanced when motivation and self-knowledge are addressed in social skills training programs.
CONCLUSION
Because of the data showing the need for self-efficacy, greater emphasis should be placed on incorporating lessons and activities in our educational programming for students (Bandura, 1986; Gorrell, 1990). Self-efficacy must be addressed with our students. Activities and lessons should be designed to enhance and further develop feelings, thoughts, and personal perceptions of one’s self-efficacy. The earlier the development of self-efficacy is addressed; the longer the student will have to access the lifelong benefits of self-efficacy.

Many of the principles of the social cognitive theory should be considered in curricular programs. If a teacher is knowledgeable about identifiable factors that contribute to self-efficacy, then recognizing necessary components in curriculum programs that incorporate the principles of the social cognitive theory that build self-efficacy will hopefully be an easier task.

On a final note, the following questions have arisen in the developmental process of this paper: (a) Why isn’t their greater emphasis on self-efficacy in our educational programs and curriculum? (b) How much self-efficacy is needed and at what level is enough obtained? and (c) What are the most effective ways to build self-efficacy?

With all things considered, self-efficacy education must take a greater priority in our educational process for all children. The literary support in this paper provides evidence for practitioners to validate the inclusion of self-efficacy into educational social skills curricula for students. Additionally, I would propose that the educational priority not only be with children but continue with adult instruction (Collet-Klingenberg & Kolb, in press). The development of self-efficacy is a lifelong endeavor and the more self-efficacy one has the better able that person can endure the challenges that life will present.

REFERENCES


