Concept: Self-efficacy – belief in ability to do well

Brief overview of concept:

Academic self-efficacy is a learner's (student or staff)belief in their ability to do well in a particular skill, which includes studying, and performing academic tasks. Learners who feel a sense of self-efficacy tend to engage in learning behaviours and strategies that improve the impact of their learning (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020). These activities include setting effective and achievable goals, devising and monitoring the effectiveness of learning strategies, and mediating the social, physical and interpersonal environments around them to be conducive to learning (i.e. they are more able to regulate their learning effectively for themselves). Self-efficacy is integral to many models of self-regulation (Panadero, 2017), in fact effective self-regulation itself relies on the learner having a sense of self-efficacy (Zimmerman and Kitsantas, 2007).

Bandura's (1986) model of self-regulated learning (as the product of individual and personal processes, and the learning environment), places self-efficacy within the personal processes factor (perceptions of ability and self-motivation). Zimmerman's 3-phase model of self-regulation (Zimmerman, 2000) places self-efficacy in the 'Forethought' phase, where the learner plans their learning strategy following analysis of a task and establishment of goals. In the 3-stage cognitive-metacognitive-motivational models of self-regulation, self-efficacy features in all 3 stages. Self-efficacy is a key output of metacognition (evaluation of the effectiveness of a learning strategy), it is intrinsically linked to motivation, and builds confidence in cognitive strategies. The expectations of self-efficacy lead to changes in behaviour, and the expectation of the outcomes of the learning activity (as proposed by Bandura (1977; Figure 1). However, this is also a bi-directional process, and the outcomes of an activity, can build further outcome expectations, which then can change behaviour, and lead to changes in self-efficacy expectations for the learner.
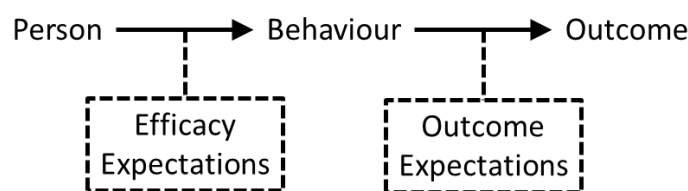

Figure 1: The difference between efficacy expectations and outcome expectations (Bandura, 1977). Expectations of efficacy determine the behaviour of the individual. The expectations of the outcome determine the result of that behaviour.

There are many factors which impact an individual's sense of self-efficacy, and their motivation to succeed (Schunk & DiBenedetto, 2020): (i) Prior experiences of mastery of the skill/activity, and therefore their belief that they can repeat that success; (ii) Vicarious experiences, whereby learners have observed others succeeding, and can relate their own competence to that of other individuals; (iii) Persuasive suggestions from others that they have the capabilities to be successful; (iv) A positive psychological or emotional state that gives a positive outlook. Therefore, as an extension of an individual's belief in their capabilities, self-efficacy is strongly linked to motivation and a growth mindset for learning. The challenge, therefore, is in creating learning environments that facilitate leaners' self-efficacy development' assessment and feedback can play a key role in this.

Building self-efficacy through assessment.

Self-efficacy is fundamental to a learner's sense of 'agency' within the learning process - their sense of control over the process and the outcome of the learning they are undertaking. Assessment design needs to consider how best to support students in building confidence in their skills and potential, and feedback needs to provide an achievable road-map for improvement that supports students in developing positive perceptions of self-efficacy. In this regard, self-efficacy is a key factor impacting learner's engagement with assessment and feedback. Learners engage with feedback, and can develop their assessment literacy, if they feel that they will improve and develop positively from the assessment, and its feedback. These beliefs underpin key aspects of the EAT framework which emphasizes the importance of equity (equal access to assessment and equal opportunities to do well)agency (control over one's learning), and transparency (making the requirements of assessment accessible). . Promoting student assessment literacy through active engagement with students is promoted throughout the three dimensions of the framework to support student feelings of ownership, belonging and control over their assessment environment(s). In exploring the EAT Frameworks three core dimensions and 12 sub-dimensions it is possible to see how self-regulation, engagement and ownership play out to support the development of student confidence in their abilities attain the standards required.

Dimensions, such as AL1 (Making what is good explicit) so students are clear about expectations of assessment); AL2 is about clarifying the assessment journey for students so they are clear how tasks fit together, again allowing self-ownership of the process. AL3 is about clarifying roles and expectations within assessment. AL4 is about exposing what it is to be, think, and act within a discipline. Self-ownership and authorship is also evident in AF4 in looking at how activities can support students in learning what quality is for themselves. AF 1 and 2 are very much about providing focused and early feedback to help scaffold a learner's journey through assessment and to check what is known and not known. AD1 is about walking students through regulation processes and engaging them with marking and moderating work linking back to AF4.

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