# Strategies for Raising the Self Efficacy of Learners.

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**What is Self Efficacy?**  Albert Bandura (Stanford University) refers to situation specific self-confidence as "self efficacy" which is **the strength of an individual's belief that he or she can successfully perform a given activity or task**. Students can have high self efficacy for tasks in some subject disciplines and low self efficacy for tasks in others. Even within disciplines, a student's self efficacy can vary between tasks such as a student who has a low self efficacy for delivering a speech in English but may have a high self efficacy for creative writing. While we must be aware of this, our prime focus is on those whose self efficacy around much of their learning is low.

Self efficacy determines the effort, persistence and strategy used in accomplishing tasks. While self efficacy begins to form in early childhood, it does not end its development during youth but continues to evolve throughout life as people acquire new skills, experiences, successes and understandings.

According to Bandura there are four major sources of self efficacy.

1. From mastering tasks and activities. Our own successes.
2. From seeing others similar to us succeed through sustained effort raises our belief that we can too.
3. From the encouragement and positive reinforcement of others whom we respect and like.
4. From our own psychological state at the time such as our mood, emotional state, stress levels and so on.

Students with a strong self efficacy:-

- View challenging problems as tasks to be mastered.
- Problem solve strategies to overcome perceived barriers to their learning.
- Develop deeper interest in the activities in which they participate.
- Form a stronger sense of commitment to their interests and activities.
- Recover quickly from setbacks and disappointments.
- Are capable of setting out of school distractions aside and focusing on their school work.

Students with a  poor self efficacy:-

- Avoid challenging tasks.
- Believe that difficult tasks and situations are beyond their capabilities.

- Believe that perceived barriers to their learning are beyond their control to overcome.
- Focus on personal failings and negative outcomes.
- Struggle to leave out of school distractions at the gate and drift off task more frequently.
- Quickly lose confidence in personal abilities.

**Background to this research:-** While a low self efficacy in ones ability to succeed as a student is not new, what has drawn my attention to this topic is the realisation that more of our students at Glenfield College struggle with this problem than I have been aware of previously. This could be because as I advance in my years in the teaching profession, I have become more discerning of the needs of our learners or it could be that there are more of these students proportionately in our school. The truth is probably a bit of both. Most staff however, are of the view that we have a real learning issue to address in raising student self efficacy and acknowledge factors beyond the school gate which may contribute to this.

Glenfield as an area, is one of the lowest socio-economic areas of the North Shore of Auckland (far from it on a national scale) and is seen by some who live elsewhere as being rough and undesirable. Some will take any opportunity to express that view and our students are very aware of this. Their peers from other North Shore schools convey this message frequently, echoing parental prejudices. This urban myth is not imagined as it is repeated time and time again by others with no knowledge of the area at all and was even immortalised in celluloid in the two "Sione's Wedding" movies. When we occasionally hear our own students say as they give up, "we're from Glenfield so it doesn't matter", we know there is a problem.

In the classroom, low self efficacy is most frequently manifested by lack of effort. For a few that can mean obvious disengagement and off task behaviour but while these students are easily identified, of bigger concern are those who are quietly disengaged, who do not attempt tasks nor seek help but simply do nothing. The obviously disengaged can use their off task behaviour to clearly signal to their peers that they do not wish to learn and that failure is to be expected. The quietly disengaged simply don't believe that they can cope with the work.

This research is aimed at finding more strategies proven to raise student self efficacy for us to trial and use with our students at Glenfield College. After sharing our own successes we will be able to clearly identify strategies that work well with our students.

**Presentation of findings:-**

The findings will be presented in the following three categories:-

- Beyond the School Gate.
- About the School.
- In the Classroom.

**Beyond the School Gate:-**

- **Discuss parents educational aspirations for their children with them early in Y9.** Research shows that parents educational aspirations for their children is a strong positive predictor of student self efficacy. Parents who hold high educational aspirations for their child and share these with the child are more likely to have a child with high self efficacy. It would be useful to make sure that all parents are fully aware of their child's achievement to date relative to their peers and what this can mean for future educational pathways and outcomes. In particular, our focus should be on correcting parental aspirations upwards when they have been too low. (Fan and Williams). We should also stress to parents the importance of showing a genuine interest in their child's learning and keeping comments positive and encouraging wherever possible.

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**About the School:-**

- **Positive Role Modelling.** Arrange for speaking visits from successful recent former students or others who come from similar backgrounds and who have done really well. Speakers could address a year level or whole school and where such a person can visit regularly, they could mentor a group of students. Such persons can be excellent as coaches, managers, tutors and so on in extra-curricular activities.

- **Teach goal setting and help set realistic goals, SMART (Specific, Measurable, Achievable, Realistic, Timed) goals. (Nate Regier 2007)** Critical to the setting of these goals is the ongoing monitoring of progress towards them. When students realise that they are achieving their goals, their self efficacy increases. The biggest source of self efficacy is actually the successful or rewarding experiences that students have themselves. The more success they have, the greater their self efficacy hence the importance of engineering success.

- **Mentoring.** Connected to goal setting above, this involves regular meetings with the student to revisit progress against the goals, to discuss strategies for reducing barriers to achieving the goals, to reinforce the message that the student can achieve the goals and even to provide or arrange for subject specific tutoring to close any gaps in areas of weakness. It is vital that the relationship is excellent between the mentor and mentee, thus it often works better if the student chooses their mentor. Mentors could help build the relationship by taking an interest in the student outside the classroom such as by watching them play sport (or similar) occasionally It would be better to meet fortnightly initially and never less frequently than monthly. It is valuable to be able to catch up in passing less formally as often as possible.

- **Expose students with low self efficacy to those with high self efficacy.** This suggests looking carefully at class make-up and looking for a good mix of positive students who get on with their work and others with low self efficacy who struggle to engage. The positive role models can benefit the others.

**In the Classroom:-**

- **Build great relationships with every one of your students**. You might not like each and every student but they had better believe that you do. Acting is a key part of our role. If they don't like you, they won't learn from you.

  Check out the Rita Pierson talk below.

  http://www.ted.com/talks/rita_pierson_every_kid_needs_a_champion.html

- **Make sure that your classroom is "put down" free. Never allow students to put down each other for failures.** Errors must be seen as natural and useful parts of the learning process rather than as evidence of failure. Any focus on failures will lower student self efficacy and they won't try again. By creating a collaborative classroom where students are happy to help each other to learn and mistakes are seen as a necessary step to success, the learning of all students is enhanced.

- **Tell them that they can do it. Your students must believe that you believe that they can complete a task.** This must be genuine and specific. You must believe that they can and must identify the individual's strengths in telling them so. (National Association of School Psychologists. Self Efficacy: Helping Children Believe They Can Succeed) Encouragement is effective in building self efficacy.

- **Challenge negative thoughts.** You must always challenge the "I can't do it" statement but you can also teach students to challenge it in themselves. Use evidence to prove that they can or have in a similar situation. "Yes you can". Remind them of other successes that they have had (Look in Kamar) if there is no recent success in your class. Students can be motivated when other similar peers succeed (if he can do it, so can I ). .

- **Scaffold students into tasks.** Break the task down into its simplest components and make sure that all students understand each step. Take it step by step.

- **Differentiate your tasks so that all students can experience success in their learning.** It is vital that students who find the work difficult and might be prone to giving up, can experience some success even in the simplest smallest way.  Success breeds confidence. For some, you may have to set much simpler tasks than for most to build confidence.

- **Co-construct units of work and tasks with the students.** Ask the students how they would like to approach a topic or unit. Listen carefully to what they say and incorporate their ideas wherever possible. Similarly with tasks, ask the students how they would like to present their research or information and provide choices for them based on their ideas. If students feel some ownership, they are more likely to engage.

- **Recognise small successes with specific praise, one on one, focusing on what has been done well. Celebrate success at every opportunity.** Praise should not be given in front of the class, rather one on one quietly. It should not be generic in nature like "well done" but specific like "I liked the way you clearly showed each step in the process" and so on. Process praise.

- **Give quality feedback.** Focusing on an athlete's technique and praising steps in the process rather than outcomes has been found to be most effective in raising their self efficacy and ultimately performance. (Ampari Escarto and Hose Guzzman 1999). Transference of these findings into the feedback given in our classrooms would be well worth trialling. Praise their strengths, the parts that they did well. Receiving positive feedback on performance has been shown to improve a person's self efficacy for that behaviour.(Jussim, 1989, Weinstein, 2002).

- **Avoid criticism, don't focus on failures, rather always accentuate the positive.** Praise the parts that they got correct no matter how little and then talk about "next time, if you did this part in this way it would be much better…. Try this…."

- **Use groups and peer mentoring.** Carefully chosen and managed groups can help students lacking in confidence to experience success. If such students are matched with peers who can cope with the tasks and who willingly help others to understand and cope, then this can begin to build confidence in learning for those previously lacking confidence. Other students can raise the self efficacy of those who doubt their own ability. Create an environment where this can flourish. Students with low self efficacy are often moved to have a go when they see a peer whom they perceive as similar, succeed (someone who they like and who has struggled).

- **Modelling.** Carefully model the process step by step to show how it is done. Take it slowly and explain thoroughly. This can help students to think, "yeah, I can do that". You can also use other students to model the process. (see above).

- **Use on line, self paced learning software.** Students with low self efficacy in a subject such as Maths have proven that the use of such software where they can try and fail many times but eventually succeed and move on, has raised their self efficacy in the subject. These students slowly gain the confidence that they can do it. Such students can get lost as they fall behind the pace of lessons and the curriculum. Once their self efficacy is raised, they have more chance of succeeding in the class. (Gundy, Liu, Morton, Kline 2006. Yushau 2006)

- **Use of a journal.** This has been shown to work in Maths classrooms but could also work elsewhere. Students are asked to jot down how they how they felt about the task/s and how they approached them. The teacher has the right to read these journals and it is this communication which can give a clue as to why a student might be struggling in this subject. (Gresham, 2007. Salinas, 2004)

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**Of Interest:-**

The Fan and Williams research also found that the nature of a school's engagement with parents can have differing effects on student self efficacy. Where the contact was concerning problems with the students, this led to a reduction in student self efficacy (not the opposite as we might hope) but where the contact was more generic such as for a parent evening and a student's parents usually attended, this had a positive impact on self efficacy. Perhaps we need to re-think contacting parents over the slightest transgression.

The Motivation Equation.   $V \times E = M$.    Value x  Expectation = Motivation.

"Value" refers to the actual value that students place on the matter to be learned. Hence the importance of authentic learning or linking content to the teenagers world wherever possible.

"Expectation" refers to the level of a students expectation to succeed at this. It is really their self efficacy for the task. As teachers you can raise student self efficacy using some of the strategies above.

The higher V and E, the higher student motivation to engage, learn and succeed.

Kathleen Cushman. Minds on Fire. ASCD Journal Jan 2014.