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Academic self-efficacy in ALL: Capacity-building through self-belief

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Academic Language and Learning (ALL) Advisers are very often in the position of building students' confidence in their ability to study; indeed, this may even be a core business of what we do. This role can be clarified through a clear understanding of what academic self-efficacy is and how to develop it. This article reviews the literature on academic self-efficacy before giving clear and concrete suggestions for how these insights may be applied to the practice of ALL Advisers. This is a step towards articulating the approach of the ALL "community of practice".

Key Words: ALL, academic support, self-efficacy, skill development, modelling, feedback.

1. Introduction

> The power of a theory is ultimately judged by the power of the methods it yields to effect changes. Self-efficacy theory provides explicit guidelines on how to enable people to exercise some influence over how they live their lives. A theory that can be readily used to enhance human efficacy has much greater social utility than theories that provide correlates of perceived control but have little to say about how to foster desired changes. (Bandura, 1997, p. 10)

It is almost a given that the role of educators is to not only help develop skills and knowledge, but to improve students' belief in their ability to perform academic tasks. In particular, Academic Language and Learning (ALL) Advisers regularly encounter students who lack confidence, and much of our work is focussed towards encouraging, supporting and developing students' own beliefs in their academic ability. This is something that a natural educator does instinctively, so research and theory can be drawn on to help articulate the diverse approaches of ALL practice. This is a way of reflecting on, stepping back from, and "defamiliarising" our practice as ALL Advisers (O'Regan, 2005).

This article was conceived in the context of a curriculum review of a Foundation Course at an Australian University. Foundation Courses seek to provide both an alternative pathway to, as well as academic preparation for, university study. Such courses are designed for those who have lost contact with formal education, and for more recent school-leavers who wish to develop their chances of entrance and success at a tertiary institution. For the non-traditional (especially mature-aged) students in particular, it has often been claimed that the Foundation Course builds their confidence as students, and helps them develop the non-material resources to succeed at university. However, this claim should not be accepted uncritically. What do we mean by this "confidence"? What does it look like? What does the literature have to say about it? How would we measure it? Most importantly for ALL Advisers, how can we assist students to develop this essential attribute?

The first issue to resolve is one of nomenclature. “Self-confidence” and “self-esteem” are the lay terms that immediately come to mind, but “self-esteem” may be too broad to be useful. In a literature review of around 200 articles which used “objective measures” of self-esteem, researchers could not support causal relationships between self-esteem and performance (Baumeister et al., 2005, p. 73). In fact, high self- esteem can be positively harmful, in that it can lead to some destructive behaviours, such as bullying (Baumeister et al., 2005, p. 77). Therefore, these popular notions of self-worth have limited value.

In contrast, the more nuanced notion of self-concept is more useful. Self-concept is an omnibus trait: it describes a person’s perception of their whole self in various domains; it also includes a strong affective component and encourages normative comparisons (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003). This is particularly relevant for ALL Advisers who encounter students in a state of anxiety, uncertainty or apprehension. However, self-concept is relatively stable and past-oriented, whereas self efficacy is malleable and future oriented: it is particularly more amenable to change as it relates to specific academic tasks (Bong & Skaalvik, 2003, p. 33). This suggests that academic self-efficacy might be a better focus for ALL Advisers, since our aim is to improve performance in the future and empower students to attain their academic goals. Furthermore, a study by Pajares, Johnson and Miller (1999) found that writing self-concept and writing apprehension were relatively nonsignificant predictors of performance, whereas self-efficacy had much more direct effects (p. 55).

Therefore the focus of this article will be on articulating ALL practice in terms of academic self-efficacy development in both 1:1 and group-learning contexts. It takes its lead from Margolis and MacCabe (2006), although rather than providing guidance to teachers in general, it is directed towards the work of ALL Advisers, who face unique opportunities and challenges within the tertiary learning environment. It begins with a brief overview of theories of self-efficacy from Social Psychology before narrowing its focus to academic self-efficacy, and the various aspects of it that are relevant to ALL Advisers, including: the domain-specific nature of academic self-efficacy; sources of self-efficacy; and the importance of self-regulated learning. This leads into a discussion of the implications of these theories for the practice of ALL Advisers, and ways of reflecting on ALL practice in the light of self-efficacy theory.

2. Self-efficacy in the psychology literature

The chief proponent of self-efficacy is Albert Bandura, whose *Self-Efficacy: The Exercise of Control* (1997) has been described as his “magnum opus”, “more than the sum of its parts”, and “destined to become a classic of the psychological literature … a stellar contribution to the field … one of the most significant books of the last 50 years” (Lightsey, 1999, p. 163-5). A synthesis of over 1800 studies and papers, *Self-Efficacy* is the culmination of decades of work leading to a unifying theory of behavioural change from a social psychological perspective (Bandura, 1977, 1982, 1986, 1993). Bandura’s is a theory of human agency: a theory to empower and motivate people to attain their goals in all fields of life. This has immediate appeal to educators who are inclined to see humans as “proactive, aspiring organisms” who can take control over their own lives (Bandura, 1997, p. vii).

According to Bandura, “*Perceived self-efficacy refers to beliefs in one’s capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments*” (Bandura, 1997, p. 3, emphasis in original). Self-efficacy is one component of Social Cognitive Theory, a learning theory which identifies determinants governing thought, motivation, and human action. Self-efficacy beliefs are mediated through a variety of processes (cognitive, motivational, affective, and selective) which translate them into specific actions or behaviours (Bandura, 1997, p. 116). Therefore, it is not as if self-efficacy acts independently, or in a vacuum, to influence peoples’ lives, decisions, and behaviour; nonetheless, it does seem to be particularly amenable to influence. Four sources of influence on self-efficacy include: enactive mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion, and physiological and affective states (Bandura, 1997, p. 79). These sources of self-efficacy are worthy of particular attention, since they are the primary way in which students’ achievements may be enhanced.

Although Bandura's theory of self-efficacy is strongly supported by research and clearly leads to positive outcomes for individuals, we must still be aware of cultural exclusiveness. Some may feel that self-efficacy theory has an overly Western, individualistic bias (for example, see Gegas, 1989, p. 311). This is an important consideration for ALL Advisers who work with international students: cultural and ideological dominance should always be resisted. Bandura does acknowledge the important role of culture, but argues that "in cross-cultural analyses, efficacy beliefs contribute to the productivity of members of both collectivistic and individualistic cultures" (Bandura, 1997, p. 32). It is just the outcomes and modes of operation that differ: interventions designed to improve self-efficacy can help all students as long as they take account of cultural background as well as individual experiences (Lightsey, 1990, p. 162).

Broadly, then, self-efficacy is useful to both explain and improve performance and wellbeing within the lives of individuals. However, these lives are comprised of a variety of areas, and since self-efficacy is a domain-specific trait, it is necessary to narrow our focus towards academic self-efficacy in relation to ALL practice.

3. Academic self-efficacy in ALL practice

According to Bandura (1997), the role of self-efficacy in the cognitive functioning of students becomes even more important in an information-rich world where individuals need to become empowered for lifelong learning (pp. 212-214). Claims for the primacy of self-efficacy have been supported by a host of research. In particular, meta-analyses of research on self-efficacy serve to underline its influence. Meta-analyses use statistical measures and strict criteria of validity and reliability to synthesise a number of studies into one overall set of findings, and are therefore an excellent gauge of the state of knowledge in a field at a given time. In 1991, a meta-analysis of 39 studies between 1977 and 1988 found that higher self-efficacy can lead to higher academic performance and persistence (Multon, Brown, & Lent, 1991, p. 34). More recently, Robbins et al. (2004) conducted a meta-analysis of 109 articles with the explicit aim of bringing together educational and psychological literature to explore the educational persistence and motivational theory models of academic achievement. The main finding was that the nine broad constructs of psychosocial and study skills factors all had a strong relationship with retention, and a weaker but still significant relationship with performance measured as GPA; academic self-efficacy was the best predictor for both outcomes (Robbins et al., 2004, pp. 274-5).

There is little doubt that academic self-efficacy is central to success in a range of performance areas. Higher academic self-efficacy is strongly associated with improved performance, retention, and persistence in the face of adversity (among other benefits). Elias and MacDonald (2007, p. 2520) cite nine separate studies supporting this contention, and Schunk (2003) provides a similarly thorough summary of research along these lines. These are obviously desirable outcomes for students, and for institutions in an environment of Quality Assurance and Key Performance Indicators (pp. 165-8).

Given the above-identified importance of self-efficacy for student performance, a somewhat alarming pattern for educators is the well-documented decrease in academic self-efficacy over a student's educational lifespan. A longitudinal study of 412 children from 1988 to 2004 found a "progressive decline as students advance through the educational system" (Caprara et al., 2008, p. 530). This is a finding which has been reinforced by other researchers as well (see, for example, Schunk & Pajares, 2002, p. 8; Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007, p. 115). This is potentially as demoralising as the finding that through their tertiary career most students demonstrate a decline in their deep approach to learning (Zeegers, 2002, p. 75). Nonetheless, we must be very wary of framing our activities in terms of "lack" that requires remediation (Stirling & Percy, 2005).

Rather than seeking remediation, it is possible to include academic self-efficacy within an academic literacies approach. In their seminal article, Lea and Street (1998) suggested that attention to student learning should focus on academic development within an entire social and institutional context, taking into account relationships with other students, teachers and the

institution. This fits nicely with Social Cognitive Theory, which puts emphasis on individual cognitive processes as well as the social and cultural context in which learning takes place. This is also a way of stepping back from the practice of packaging skills for speed and efficiency and critically reflecting on the role of the learning adviser, as recommended by Crozier (2005).

It is essential to note that emphasising Bandura's notion of self-efficacy is not to imply that Learning Advisers are currently only engaged in skills development or remedial activities. Of course we must continue to resist top-down pressures which cast our activities as remedial through the "pathologisation of difference" (Stirling & Percy, 2005, p. 183). Recommending a focus on academic self-efficacy should not construct students as having "problems" and being in "need" of "services" (Stevenson & Kokkin, 2007, p. 183). Rather, the aim of this approach is twofold: firstly, it is to incorporate the insights from a rich body of Social and Educational Psychology literature to help inform one aspect of what we do. Secondly, and more importantly, it is to help empower students to inhabit a social role as agents (not just subjects) within the institutional discourses of tertiary education. When building student's capacity to negotiate these subjectivities, several aspects of self-efficacy need to be considered.

3.1. The domain-specificity of academic self-efficacy

Crucially, self-efficacy is not an omnibus trait: it relates to specific domains of functioning (Bandura, 1997, p. 36). This means that it should not be observed as a global or holistic trait like self-esteem or self-concept: Elias (2000) reinforces the importance of this when undertaking research (p. 1). This is particularly important because, according to Robbins (2004), academic self-efficacy is the best choice out of a range of psychosocial factors that predict the college outcomes of performance and persistence across a wide range of studies, due to its narrower focus and closer relevance (p. 275).

It is not the theory as such, but the application to practice which interests ALL practitioners. Educators working in academic support and development are familiar with restrictions in time and resources which militate against a "slower" approach to learning (Crozier, 2005). One response to this could be Caprara et al.'s (2008) process of breaking academic skills down into units which can be addressed separately. These include: to plan and organise academic activities (e.g. "How well can you organise your school work?"), to structure environments conducive to learning (e.g. "How well can you arrange a place to study without distractions?"), and self-motivation to do school work (e.g. "How well can you study when there are other interesting things to do?") (p. 527). Focussing on specific tasks makes student development more manageable and realistic.

Crucially, the above approach is not just a way of justifying economic rationalism or budgetary restrictions, and it is not just "making do" with the short time for one-on-one consultation that we have. Self-efficacy theory suggests that it is more effective to focus on specific academic areas, and reinforces our experience-based knowledge that students are best served by focussing on specific areas for improvement. This does not provide a "remedy" to a specific problem: it empowers students to find strategies to succeed and to persist in the face of difficulties.

3.2. Sources of self-efficacy

For educators who are concerned with improving students' self-efficacy, the most crucial aspect of Bandura's theory is concerned with the four sources of efficacy (Bandura, 1997). Firstly, enactive mastery experiences give students the opportunity to prove to themselves that they are able to undertake a task. This is the most immediate, effective, and enduring source of self-efficacy, but it is potentially also the most difficult to attain, for it requires a student to attempt and complete a task in the first place. Secondly, students are able to derive self-efficacy from vicarious sources: essentially, observing others (especially peers) perform a task is evidence that the task can be completed with the appropriate application and effort. This is what we know as "modelling". Thirdly, verbal persuasion can have positive effects on a student's self-efficacy: the role of positive feedback is already well-known, but explicitly seeing it as an source of self-efficacy helps to refine feedback approaches. Finally, students derive a sense of self-efficacy from physiological and affective states that are aroused when confronted with a given task or

performance situation. Examples of the latter could be stress, anxiety, or excitement, any of which could have positive or negative effects.

To begin with, students will have a set of self-efficacy beliefs based on their past performance: in some contexts at least, one might be able to assume a set amount of academic experience prior to admission and enrolment in a tertiary education institution (Elias & MacDonald, 2007, p. 2521). However, this is a false assumption which is based on discourses of "ability" and "lack". In fact, all students face challenges in negotiating the transition to a tertiary education environment.

Therefore, the key to developing new tertiary students' self-efficacy is to give them relevant experiences to bolster their sense of belief in their ability. In a study conducted by Pajares, Johnson, & Usher (2007), perceived mastery experiences had the greatest influence on writing self-efficacy beliefs (p. 114). For these authors, educators should focus on the development of specific skills over a more general drive towards self-enhancement: authentic mastery experiences are what is needed, not an inflated sense of self-worth based on affirmations and self-assertion (p. 115). This may involve simply emphasising past achievements wherever they are to be found. However, there is a vicious cycle here: if students do not complete a task in the first place, they will have difficulty doing so in the future.

This is where the other sources of self-efficacy may play a role. Vicarious sources of self-efficacy are useful to encourage students to attempt an unfamiliar task. Although vicarious experience was not significant for Pajares, Johnson & Usher (2007), modelling is an essential component of Bandura's Social Cognitive Theory as well as intuitive teaching and learning. Several points are important in modelling**.** Firstly, peer models are the most useful in that behaviours will be seen as socially appropriate and leading to similar results (Schunk, 2003, p. 163). This has been reinforced by Adams (2004), who found that international students' self-efficacy for oral presentations was markedly increased by having a peer (i.e. another international student) model the task rather than an expert, such as the teacher. This can be difficult for ALL Advisers, since it is often unusual for a student to view one as a peer, although it does reinforce the importance of developing rapport.

Even if there is a gap to bridge between teacher and student, self-efficacy issues can still be addressed by cognitive modelling (Schunk, 2003, p. 162). Cognitive modelling involves not just showing how something is done, but talking the subject through the process, and explaining what is being done. Arguably, this could make ALL Advisers better models than peers, since a peer may be less able to articulate the processes they are undertaking to produce a given result. These methods of developing self-efficacy can complement the "default mode" of providing feedback.

In the words of Margolis and McCabe (2006), we may need to focus on "what to do" as much as on "what to say" (p. 220). Indeed, we are very experienced in providing feedback: it is one of the main teaching strategies that we employ every day, and it also has wider currency within the institution. We know the strength of constructive feedback, the importance of couching negative feedback within positive feedback, and the need to encourage students to attempt tasks, at the very least. Although these are familiar activities to us, they may take on a new significance if we view them as a path to improving academic self-efficacy, as we shall see later.

The final source of self-efficacy includes physiological and affective factors. ALL advisers are very familiar with encountering stressed, anxious or apprehensive students. We are often forced to operate within a remedial model whereby faculty staff fail a student's assignment and send them to a Learning Adviser to be "fixed", and to have their lack of knowledge filled by someone with expertise in the area. Subjection to this remedial model produces profound feelings of disappointment, frustration and self-worthlessness, which may in fact reinforce the emotional problems which contributed to academic difficulties in the first place. As with verbal persuasion, the link to self-efficacy needs to be made apparent: for instance, Zajacova et al. (2005) found that increased levels of self-efficacy not only improved performance, but helped to moderate stress among adult learners. An ALL adviser's role here is limited: often, the best we

can do is encourage students to focus on undertaking the given task in order to develop their self-efficacy in order to reduce the doubt and anxieties they are experiencing.

3.3. Self-efficacy and self-regulated learning

Since self-efficacy theory is strongly based in motivational theories of human behaviour, it has a close relationship with ideas of self-regulated learning. According to Zimmerman (2000, p. 87), self-efficacy beliefs can produce a sense of agency through goal-setting, self-monitoring, self-evaluation and strategy use. This is a logical connection, because academic self-efficacy is an inherently goal-oriented trait, and is particularly predictive of performance when those goals are specific, proximal, and of appropriate difficulty, whilst still being attainable (Schunk, 1990, p. 74). Caprara et al. (2008) found a very important role for self-regulatory self-efficacy for younger students, leading to lesser declines in self-efficacy through the students' educational career, higher achievement, and better retention (p. 532). This goal-setting and monitoring towards the achievement of goals is usually foregrounded within faculties and the curriculum design process.

However, self-regulated learning is crucial for academic support and development interventions as well. ALL advisers are in a position to work with students to build their capacity in setting their own goals, monitoring their progress, assessing their own performance and developing strategies to overcome learning difficulties. Self-regulatory self-efficacy may be developed through attending to the sources of self-efficacy above, or through some of the specific strategies and suggestions outlined below.

4. Implications for ALL Advisers

4.1. Empowering students: Capacity-building

ALL Advisers are in a special position with regard to student learning as we can work with students, often individually, to attend to processes of learning that are not addressed within Faculties, where the focus is so often on content. To borrow a metaphor from Development Studies, we are involved in capacity-building: rather than immediately assisting students with the task at hand, we are building students' capacity to work independently and take full responsibility for their learning. In this way, "student development" might be a preferable term to "academic support". Rather than argue semantics, however, we should focus on strategies to develop academic self-efficacy as a means to achieving academic goals.

This focus on capacity-building through self-efficacy is particularly important for ALL advisers, because it may be particularly useful for students who are not reaching their full potential (Multon et al., 1991, p. 35). Elias and Loomis (2002) also note the importance of self-efficacy for academic advisers (p. 1696), and it is quite possible that this should be a major focus of our work: "if self-efficacy beliefs are major mediators of behaviour and behaviour change, then counselling interventions designed to change behaviour are useful to the degree that they increase the self-efficacy beliefs related to the behaviour in question" (Pajares & Miller, 1994, p. 201). Of course, we need to remain critical of the terms of discussion (such as counselling) as they are based in a different national context 15 years ago, but the principle remains the same.

However, as with many student development programs, we face an inherent problem. Help-seeking behaviour of the type that would encourage a student to come to an Academic Adviser in the first place requires a certain amount of independence and a realistic assessment of performance. If a student fails to internalise their performance results then they are likely to fall through the gaps when they need the intervention the most (Truxillo et al., 2008, p. 914). In Truxillo we also face the remedial model, as in Klassen at al.'s (2008) recommendations to assist remediation (p. 929). The challenge for a reflective ALL practice is to attend to self-efficacy whilst continuing to resist deficit and remedial models.

However, this challenge is much larger than we have space for. At this point it is useful to summarise what we can learn from the insights of self-efficacy theory to provide better support to students in an ALL environment. In general, Schunk's (2003) advice to develop academic

self-efficacy includes: having students "experience learning and success"; "provide encouraging feedback"; "develop students' goal-setting and self-evaluation skills", and "provide instruction on effective learning strategies" (p. 169). These general points can be supplemented with more specific advice and strategies.

4.2. Supplementing skill development with self-efficacy development

One of the greatest insights of self-efficacy theory has direct relevance to ALL Advisers and the work we do. In improving students' performance in a variety of areas (such as results or grades, retention, study satisfaction), we often focus on developing academic skills in a variety of areas: these are the kinds of "shortcuts" we often employ, which Crozier (2005) refers to. However, considering motivational factors sheds new light on this goal. Robbins et al. (2004) suggest that we consider the combinations of study skills with social and motivational factors (p. 276). Indeed, Bandura (1997) goes so far as to say that "Perceived self-efficacy … is a better predictor of performance than skills alone" (p. 216). Schunk (2003) concurs, arguing that learning and motivation will be better served by interventions which address self-efficacy as well as literacy skills (p. 162). This is not a paradigm shift, however: we must not assume that a focus on skills should be completely replaced by a focus on self-efficacy. For instance, we should continue to focus on skill development, since skills still have a direct influence on performance and accurate skill assessment is still an essential aspect of self-regulated learning (Multon 1991, p. 36).

This shift of focus involves realising that while skills are still important, academic self-efficacy is a mediator of skills: that is, academic skills are particularly important if the student sees them as relevant and believes that using them will produce a desired outcome. This shift in focus is articulated in a recent research paper investigating the role of self-regulatory skills and academic self-efficacy in procrastination of undergraduate students (Klassen et al., 2008). This paper argues that traditionally procrastination has been seen as being due to a lack of skills in self-regulation. However, the research indicated that self-efficacy to use self-regulatory skills and strategies is actually more powerful in addressing procrastination. The authors conclude that assistance with assignments is not enough: the goal should also be to improve students' confidence that employing specific strategies will help them meet their goals (Klassen et al., 2008, p. 928).

The above insight has the potential to transform how we (and others) see our practice. Of course we should continue to focus on developing academic skills within our students, for it is these skills which will directly enable students to complete academic tasks successfully. However, we also need to address students' self-efficacy to perform these skills: if they possess the skills but not the confidence to use them it is unlikely that they will achieve the success that we envision for them. To develop this self-efficacy it is necessary to draw explicitly on the sources of self-efficacy as outlined in the literature.

4.3. Drawing on the sources of self-efficacy

4.3.1. Enactive mastery experiences

Self-efficacy theory sees a very important role in prior achievements and performance for increasing self-efficacy. It is in seeing tasks through to completion and having a sense of achievement that self-efficacy is most strongly developed: by being given opportunities to be successful, students' academic self-efficacy will benefit (Elias, 2000, p. 3). In an ALL context, having students undertake tasks is the best way to increase their self-efficacy: this reinforces what we know about active, student-centred learning. However, opportunities to allow students to see tasks through to completion are rare, but this may be achieved by effective goal-setting.

According to Schunk (2003), effective goal-setting means establishing goals that are specific, proximal and of moderate difficulty (p. 163). Therefore, they should not be general: for instance, it is better to focus on one element of essay-writing (such as planning or analysing a question) rather than the whole process at once. Secondly, goals should be proximal rather than distal: they should be achievable by the student with the resources currently at hand. For

example, with a resubmitted assignment (which inevitably falls into a remedial model) we should focus on the most immediate, pressing requirement rather than attempting to push the student to rectify every possible weakness in the piece. Finally, goals should be of moderate difficulty: if they are too easy to achieve then students are not likely to feel a sense of achievement and their self-efficacy is unlikely to improve; on the other hand, if the tasks are too difficult, students may not complete them and this could actually lead to a reduction in self-efficacy. This is a developmental process which is not easy to undertake in a short space of time: tasks of moderate challenge requiring moderate effort can appeal to learners' self-evaluative impulses (Margolis & McCabe, 2006, p. 219). By gradually increasing expectations but keeping them realistic, self- efficacy can be enhanced (Elias, 2000, p. 4).

These enactive mastery experiences should be undertaken within a general framework of self-regulated learning: it is important to have students periodically assess their progress in skill acquisition (Schunk, 2003, p. 165). This can be done by stressing past achievements and using strategies to encourage students to see how far they have come: learning logs are one potential strategy for this, if given a student-centred focus (Babcock, 2007). This can inspire confidence in students' abilities to regulate their own learning and thereby increase self-efficacy for using academic skills as well as for taking control of their own learning environment. This is the essence of "capacity-building".

4.3.2. Vicarious sources of self-efficacy: Modelling

As outlined above, cognitive modelling is the best approach for drawing on vicarious sources of self-efficacy (Schunk, 2003, p. 162). This means not only demonstrating academic tasks and skills, but articulating the processes being demonstrated. For example, if one is assisting a student with web-based research, obviously the least effective approach is to do it for them, and the best approach is to have them do it for themselves (enactive mastery). However, a middle road is to demonstrate processes such as identifying search terms, selecting and navigating to databases, conducting searches and evaluating the findings. Articulating and "talking through" the process will enhance the student's self-efficacy for doing it themselves.

Since peer models are demonstrably more effective, the Adviser can emphasise how they do this for their own research, and not be afraid of making errors or mistakes, or reaching dead ends. This peer modelling approach emphasises coping models (dealing with adversity, overcoming difficulties) which are far more effective than mastery models (being able to do something perfectly from the outset) (Schunk & Pajares, 2002, p. 16). A student is more likely to try a difficult task if an apparent "expert" can demonstrate that there are difficulties associated with the task and that with persistence and belief in one's own abilities these difficulties can be overcome.

4.3.3. Verbal persuasion: Feedback

Providing and mediating feedback is a core business for ALL advisers: either we provide feedback on a student's work, or we help to interpret and clarify feedback given by faculty staff. It is natural for us to provide encouraging feedback, but developing feedback strategies to explicitly support the development of academic self-efficacy is a more focussed, research-led way to provide academic support. This confirms our intuitive practice and gives us a stronger basis for what we do. A basic piece of advice is to frame writing feedback on gains rather than shortfalls, emphasising "how far students have come rather than how far they have yet to travel" (Pajares, Johnson, & Usher, 2007, p. 116).

Another common method for framing feedback is to focus on effort rather than natural ability as a path to success, which increases persistence and achievement (Weiner, 1979, as cited in Schunk, 1990, p. 79). However, it is important to realise that this approach does not work equally well for students at all levels of ability. Schunk and Pajares (2002) suggest that effort feedback ("You've worked hard at this") should be supplemented by ability feedback ("You are good at this because you've worked so hard") as academic self-efficacy and task familiarity increases (p. 16). Therefore, students operating at a higher level may also benefit from having their success attributed to ability acquired through effort.

Indeed, different conceptions of ability itself should be taken into account when framing feedback. Entity views of ability see ability as a fixed entity within a student – either they have the ability or they don't – whereas incremental views of ability see ability as something that can be acquired, developed and built upon through effort and persistence. Schunk (1990) found that students who believed that skills are acquirable maintained higher self-efficacy and performed better overall (p. 80). Pajares and Miller (1994) agree that we should, at all costs, avoid fixed-entity views of ability (p. 201).

Ultimately, these specific suggestions may only be reinforcing our common practice and the natural and intuitive methods of teaching which most of us already employ. Indeed, some readers may not find many revelations in what has been discussed so far. However, a research-led and reflective approach to academic support confirms for us that this is best practice, and furthermore helps us understand why and how it contributes to increased performance through the development of self-efficacy. Explorations of self-efficacy are also a viable path for future empirical research.

4.4. Specific strategies for developing self-efficacy

Rather than trailing off from the high ground of theory, it is useful to synthesis these insights from the literature into a list of concrete suggestions for how to improve students' self-efficacy through ALL practice. Again, this is not to didactically tell ALL Advisers what they should be doing, but to provide grounds for critical reflection and perhaps some introductory advice for those new to the field. Margolis and McCabe (2006) separate these suggestions into two areas: "what to do" involves drawing on enactive mastery experiences and vicarious sources of self-efficacy, and "what to say" suggests how to use verbal persuasion through feedback. Based on what we know about the sources of self-efficacy, we should emphasise the "what to do" first and foremost. These recommendations may be further adapted to the ALL context in the following ways:

4.4.1. What to do

- Plan moderately challenging tasks: set tasks to support students' learning which demand some effort but are still realistic and attainable;
- Use peer models: where possible, draw in the experiences of other students to an academic support situation, and develop rapport with students by demonstrating that academic tasks do present difficulties that can be overcome;
- Teach specific learning strategies: breaking goals and tasks down into sub-tasks will provide discrete, proximal goals which are more realistic and achievable;
- Capitalise on student choice and interest: drawing on students' motivations will help them attain the enactive mastery experiences they need because they can see intrinsic reasons for undertaking specific tasks.

4.4.2. What to say

- Reinforce effort and correct strategy use: effort-based feedback will convince struggling students that they have not wasted their time and that achieving discrete, focussed goals through strategy use will produce incremental increases in ability;
- Encourage students to try: developing the potential for achieving enactive mastery experiences (no matter how small initially) will slowly but surely build students' self-efficacy towards task achievement;
- Stress recent successes: drawing on experiences of mastery or success will convince students that they have reached goals in the past and can do so again through effort and persistence;
- Give frequent, focussed, task-specific feedback: verbal persuasion is more effective when it is precisely relevant to the task at hand and intervenes in a timely manner in order to enhance students' self-efficacy gradually;

- Stress functional attribution statements: students need to understand that success is due to controllable factors such as effort and persistence, and that failures are not due to permanent characteristics, but are due to temporary, inadequate effort outputs that can be rectified.

5. Conclusions

The need for developing students' self-efficacy in an ALL context is essential for improving academic outcomes. This does not replace a focus on skill development, but complements it by giving students the self-belief that the skills they have (or are developing) are relevant and practical, and are likely to produce positive outcomes. These insights may well be only confirming what we intuitively know about good learning and academic support, but an explicit approach helps us to understand how effective support operates and why specific strategies enhance academic self-efficacy. Ultimately, a focus on active learning and actually undertaking tasks needs to be reinforced by a self-belief that by so doing, students can achieve their academic goals: ALL Advisers have a crucial role in this kind of capacity-building.

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