

Introduction to Self-Efficacy

Overview

Self-Efficacy is the belief in one’s ability to succeed in achieving an outcome or reaching a goal.^{i,xi} This belief, specific to a task or an area of knowledge or performance, shapes the behaviors and strategies that help one pursue their goal.ⁱ High self-efficacy reflects confidence in the ability to exert control over one’s own motivation, behavior, and environment and allows students to become advocates for their own needs and supports. Decades of research show that self-efficacy is a valid predictor of students’ motivation and learning.ⁱⁱ Students with high levels of self-efficacy participate more in class, work harder, persist longer, and have fewer adverse emotional reactions when encountering difficulties than students with lower self-efficacy.ⁱⁱ High self-efficacy can also motivate students to use specific learning strategies and to engage in self-directed learning.ⁱⁱⁱ

Why This Matters: Self-efficacy is an important skill that can boost student achievement and emotional health and wellbeing.

Better Goals: Students who are confident that they have sufficient control over their environments that allow them to accomplish certain tasks are more likely to set challenging goals and commit themselves to achieving them.^{iv} Perceived self-efficacy toward a particular task is a better predictor of success than actual ability.^v In a study of math effort, regardless of ability level, students with high self-efficacy completed more problems correctly and reworked more of the ones they missed.^v

Motivation to Succeed: Self-efficacy affects how much effort students put forth and how long they persevere when tasks are challenging^{vi} because students with high self-efficacy understand that they, more than other people or circumstances, determine outcomes and future results. For 9th and 10th grade students, academic self-efficacy predicted final course grades and the types of goals that students set for themselves.^{vii}



Figure 1. Model of Self-Efficacyⁱ

Openness to Risk: Strong self-efficacy leads students to take chances in their work, exploring topics and subjects that are new to them since students who are confident in their abilities to perform and to react to challenges are less worried about failure.^{vi} This extends beyond class, as students with high self-efficacy are more likely to consider a variety of career options as worth pursuing. Once a path is chosen, they also tend to prepare more and show persistence in pursuing their goals.^{viii}

Sample questions we asked students in the CORE Spring 2014 SEL Pilot:

How confident are you about the following at school:

- I can earn an A in my classes
- I can do well on all my tests, even when they’re difficult
- I can master the hardest topics in my classes
- I can meet all the learning goals my teachers se

Differentiating Between Self-Esteem, Self-Efficacy, and Growth Mindset ^{ix,x,xii}			
	Self-Esteem	Self-Efficacy	Growth Mindset
Definition	Refers to a person's more <u>general sense of self-worth</u> .	Refers to a person's <u>belief that she can do what's necessary to successfully achieve a specific goal</u> or task.	Refers to the belief that one's <u>abilities can change over time</u> as a result of effort, perseverance, and practice.
What does this answer?	Who am I? What is my worth?	Can I do this?	Can I grow in this area?
Example	"I am a competent person and a good learner..."	"...and I have confidence that I can master linear equations;"	"although I haven't mastered it yet, I know that I can get better at it if I study hard, try new strategies, and seek out help."
Relationship to Self-Efficacy	High self-efficacy and a growth mindset across various goals can contribute to overall positive self-worth (i.e., self-esteem).	Having high self-efficacy with a growth mindset can help a student navigate setbacks successfully because they continue to have the confidence that they can <i>ultimately</i> achieve their goal (self-efficacy) by increasing their effort and abilities (growth mindset).	

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