ACTION RESEARCH: EFFECTS OF SELF-EFFICACY TRAINING ON LOW ACHIEVING FRESHMEN

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ABSTRACT
This action research project investigated the effects of self-efficacy training on low achieving high school freshman who were considered to be at risk for academic failure. Six students participated in psycho-educational group counseling sessions for forty-five minutes weekly over the course of a nine-week reporting period. Findings indicated significant gains on all six domains of the Piers Harris 2 from pretest to posttest. Additionally, follow up interviews reflecting on the intervention indicated that students would indeed continue with the sessions and were more confident about their academic capabilities as a result of the experience.

The purpose of this article is to describe an action research investigation conducted through collaboration among university faculty members and a teacher in a rural school district in the southeastern United States. The high school teacher was struggling with motivation issues for those students in her class who were considered to be at risk for academic failure. For several semesters, the university worked closely with this school district by providing professional development opportunities and strategy instruction for all of the teachers of exceptional and “at risk” students. For one teacher involved in these professional development opportunities, questions still remained about how she could facilitate an encouraging environment for academic success fueled by the students' own motivation to learn.

Because of her desire to systematically facilitate change in her classroom, the teacher worked in conjunction with a local university to implement an action research project in
her classroom. Action research is defined as a systematic, reflective, collaborative, process that examines school environment for the purpose of planning, implementing, and evaluating change (Mills, 2007). This type of research incorporates theory, practice, and meaningful, concurrent application of results. Action research is an approach to instructional improvement by which educators themselves methodically investigate classroom problems, examine solutions to such problems, reflect upon their practice, and make subsequent changes based upon the results.

Classroom teachers often face challenges regarding their exchanges with students. Oftentimes, it is not easy for teachers to transform their instructional practices, when the innovation to do so is passed from the administration down. Consequently, this collaboration stemmed from questions arising from conversations between the investigators concerning the “what ifs” of improved self-efficacy in this particular classroom. Would they be more successful with more confidence? What strategies could be used to increase their motivation and improve self-efficacy? This article shares the collaborative effort between individuals in higher education and those at a local secondary school to seek answers to those questions. Therefore, the purpose of this article is to describe an action research investigation that created psycho-educational groups to focus on the issues of adolescents entering the eleventh grade who were at risk for academic failure based on previous grades in courses and End of Course examinations. This study is informed by action research and was guided by the following inquiry question: Would a student’s efficacy belief system be of particular significance in influencing achievement behavior?

**Literature Review**

Academic self-efficacy has been defined as one’s perceived ability to implement a series of steps to attain designated types of educational performances (Klassen, 2010; Alfassi, 2003; Bandura, 1982). The defined perceptions associated with self-efficacy affect student goals, level of interest in academic pursuits, and student overall academic accomplishments (Klassen, 2010). An increased sense of self-efficacy for students leads to greater effort and determination when confronting situations and improves the resilience students put forth in the face of difficult circumstances. As a result, perceived self-efficacy beliefs are important indicators of the level of accomplishment that students might accomplish (Bandura, 2006; Bandura et al., 1997, Pajares, 1996). Therefore, self-efficacy plays an important role in setting the course of intellectual development and functions as a significant contributor to academic achievement.

While success and mastery improve self-efficacy, failure certainly lowers self-efficacy. When students continuously fail at a task, behaviors such as quitting and avoidance will usually occur when the original task is encountered again (Bandura et al., 1996, 2006). Bandura (1981, 1997, & 2006) alleged that performance of specific objectives is the most powerful source of efficacy evaluation, since they provide the most genuine evidence of mastery. Therefore, it is critical to identify and design authentic interventions to modify self-efficacy attitudes when they are incorrect and incapacitating to students (Bandura, 2006). Self-efficacy research appears to have a solid theoretical foundation; however, not
much data was found regarding specific programs that address how to facilitate changes in the internal state of the individual to enhance self-efficacy. The purpose of this project is to evaluate an effort to implement a program that addresses the internal beliefs of the individual as pertains to academic success and collect data that may suggest a change has occurred or demonstrate a need for change.

In addition, students who are considered to be at risk oftentimes believe that they will not succeed regardless of their efforts (Margolis & McCabe, 2004). The term “students at risk” generally refer to several groups of students who have experienced difficulties and/or failure as learners. Our concern is with students who are at high risk for dropping out of school without benefit of diploma or graduation. Research on the courses of dropping out of school has focused on both the individual and the school or institutional level. At the individual level demographic factors, family background and the school experiences of the dropout population are emphasized (Martin & Marsh, 2006). The institutional analysis identifies the characteristics and conditions in schools that promote or reduce the number of dropouts. While schools cannot do much about the demographic and social characteristics of their students, they can impact on the students’ decision to remain or leave school. Indeed research illustrates that school policies and practices have important implications for the number of student dropouts (Lessard, Fortin, Marcotte, Potvin, & Royer, 2009).

**BACKGROUND**

Each year, high schools across the globe encounter a population with a history of failing grades and a general lack of success associated with school. Students who have repeatedly experienced failure in school may develop a mindset of failure and worthlessness (Plunkett, Henry, Houlberg, Sands, & Abarca-Mortensen, 2008). Many of these students seem to function on the basis that it is easier on their ego to say, “I don’t want to try,” rather than, “I tried and failed again.” Often a “cool-dude” façade is developed as a defense mechanism, and behavioral concerns such as attendance and discipline referrals are combined with failing grades. These are the students “at-risk” of dropping out of school.

Many “at-risk” students have accumulated a multitude of negative school experiences through the years and by the time they reach high school, are at risk of achieving little more than “seat time.” All youth are potentially at risk of not achieving their potential; however, for the purpose of this study, “at-risk” students are defined as students who are juniors and are not experiencing success in school as evidenced by a history of failing grades and an inability to pass standardized state testing in English and mathematics. These are the students that are at risk of contributing to the dropout statistics.

The history of repeated failures in the classroom and social situations has led to a loss of confidence and self-worth that could hinder dropouts from becoming contributing members of society (Parker, Bindl, & Strauss, 2010). The unemployment rate for dropouts is four times higher than that of graduates and seventy-five percent of the prison population is comprised of individuals who have dropped out of school. Many dropouts
have children, and the cycles of their own lives are often repeated. The cycles involve lives of deprivation, failure, and low self-concept.

Self-concept is defined as the various attributions and evaluations that one assigns to oneself. One of the most durable beliefs in education is that self-concept influences behavior, intentions, and aspiration (Fong & Yuen, 2009). It is generally accepted that the more positive self-concepts are associated with higher levels of performance in school and since schooling is a major event in a child’s life, it is also assumed that the school experience exerts significant influences on self-concept. Self-concept theory has been researched for four decades and education has adopted curricula, classroom management practices, and many other educational decisions based on its implications.

Much of the self-concept research yields the notion that individuals seek to maintain their self-beliefs by resisting changes to beliefs that have been re-indoctrinated from their experiences over long periods of time (Fong & Yuen, 2009). It also suggests that individuals naturally seek to enhance their self-beliefs; however, this leads to conflicting goals of self-consistency and self-enhancement and may lead people to tenaciously hold on to negative self-evaluations while struggling to create more favorable ones.

Although self-concept is thought of in the educational realm as a producer and product of experience, and changes in self-concept are believed to precede meaningful changes in behavior, there has been little research that clearly demonstrated an effective intervention for changing student self-concept. Most interventions have targeted at a more global self-concept and have not addressed its multiform nature. More recently, theorists have begun to address self-concept as a collection of beliefs about oneself that is even arranged in some sort of hierarchical structure, but most of the studies still refer to self-concept as a unitary entity (Fong & Yuen, 2009).

There is an increasing body of evidence that provides support for the value of self-efficacy training in promoting academic achievement (Ray & Elliott, 2006; Pajares & Miller, 1997; Schunk & Swartz, 1999). Research findings have given practitioners a direct link between increased self-efficacy and increased academic achievement. Moreover, research in this area has provided educators with beginning instructional practices for increasing self-efficacy. Although self-efficacy research has made noteworthy contributions to our understanding of the relationship between self-efficacy and academic mastery, it has done little to inform specific school strategy instruction in this area (Pajares & Miller, 1995). Over a decade ago, Pajares (1996) suggested designing interventions which allow students to experience academic success through authentic mastery experiences. Little research has been conducted in this area detailing the results of specific strategies that have been suggested to improve the self-efficacy of struggling students.

For the purpose of this research, it is thought that narrowing the sphere of self-concept may help to more clearly produce conditions under which self-concept as a learner may be enhanced. Since self-concept is considered to be an internal state of an individual, although environmental conditions have contributed to the internal state, targeting environmental
variables may serve a preventative measure, but it doesn’t deal with the condition that is already present and resistant to change in many high school juniors. The “baggage” that these students bring with them to their new learning environment may serve as a good target to initiate change. Since self-concept is regarded as a composite of beliefs, and individuals’ beliefs about their ability to perform certain tasks yield a student’s self-efficacy, the point of intervention for this study will be students’ self-efficacy.

Since self-efficacy beliefs are often viewed as requisite judgments necessary to the creation of an individual’s self-concept beliefs, and findings have consistently shown that self-concept is related to motivation constructs, three different measurements were used. They assessed the self-concept, self-efficacy, and intrinsic goal orientation of the subjects both prior to and after the intervention. The measurements were not to be used for predictive purposes, but to indicate any significant change in self-beliefs that could possibly be related to the intervention. The goal of this project was to evaluate an intervention for ultimately changing behaviors in low-achieving juniors, resulting in more positive academic experiences that may prevent these individuals from dropping out of school.

Research suggests a need for counseling as an intervention with “at-risk” students (Akos & Galassi, 2004a, 2004b; Barber & Olsen, 2004; Akos & Milson, 2007; Kaylor & Sherman, 2009). Providing supports that will increase students’ self-efficacy and value may be key factors in increasing the chances of these students completing school. With No Child Left Behind (2001) and the resulting standards associated with it, it was important to identify supports and services that were effective in negating ingrained harmful self-beliefs and forming more positive self-concepts which may yield a decrease in the attrition rate of these students.

PARTICIPANTS
The student participants in this study were students enrolled in a high school Curriculum Assistance class taught by one of the investigators. This class was created to support students who have previously failed either the English or mathematics End of Course (EOC) test administered by the state during a previous semester. The purpose of the course was to provide remedial support for those students in either academic area, and hopefully, allow them to play “catch up” during the following semester. Students may qualify for the course more than one time, as the criteria, as stated above, was failure on a state administered EOC examination.

The students were enrolled in a southeastern, rural high school with a total enrollment of approximately 970 students. The students (N=6), who were entering the eleventh grade for the first time, were assigned to curriculum assistance, and therefore, were selected for the psycho-educational group counseling sessions. The eleventh grade Curriculum Assistance course was chosen, because these students were the closest to graduating but yet, there was still time for some remediation. The students in the sample ranged in age from sixteen to seventeen and had a history of experiencing failure in various content areas as indicated on their transcripts and grades earned during their ninth and tenth grade years.
Participants enrolled in Curriculum Assistance were placed into a counseling group to increase motivation. The students (N=6) received the structured group counseling sessions during a designated intervention period. Participants were assigned to the group solely on the basis of scores from the HSAP and participation in the exceptional children’s program. The group consisted of six males and five of the six students in the group participate in the exceptional children’s program. These were the only considerations used to form the group.

PROCEDURE
The psycho-educational counseling group formed for this action research investigation was designed to provide educational and support components as an intervention for low-achieving high school juniors who were considered to be at risk of dropping out of school. The researchers developed this counseling program on the basis of research that suggests the need for programs addressing the self-efficacy and motivational needs of “at risk” students. Structured group sessions were conducted once per week for forty-five minutes for nine consecutive weeks. Each group session was led by the Curriculum Assistance teacher who also served as the at-risk coordinator. Each session began with welcoming remarks, rule reminders, and an overview of goals and objectives of the sessions. Participants were encouraged to participate by contributing to the topic and maintaining respect for themselves and their peer group members. Specific goals and session objectives for all sessions were based on information obtained from self-efficacy research, and session one guidelines are included in Appendix A. Finally, three interview questions were given to the participants and the counselor upon the completion of each session.

MEASURES
Because the researchers were interested in determining the impact of the program on students’ self-efficacy and their perceptions about the program and its impact, we determined that we would need to collect data not only quantitatively but also qualitatively, as the results and implications would determine the continuation of the group counseling sessions for the following nine week period. This approach was appropriate for this investigation, as the investigators were examining program effects and the participants’ perceptions of their experience (McMillan & Schumacher, 2005). One of the measures used was to evaluate the effectiveness of the program in terms of any gains throughout the intervention with the students. The measurement used was The Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale 2nd Edition, and it served as both a pre/post test for the research project. The purpose for selecting this measurement was to determine if addressing the self-efficacy issue has any impact on the individual’s self-concept. The Piers-Harris 2 is a 60 item, self-report questionnaire designed to assess quantitatively how children and adolescents between the ages of 7 and 18 years feel about themselves. Items on the scale use dichotomous "yes" or "no" responses. The items focus on conscious self-perceptions, rather than attempting to infer how they feel about themselves based on their behaviors or attributions of others. The scale yields a general measure of the respondents overall self-concept (Total-TOT), but also includes six domain scales. The domain scales are: behavioral adjustment (BEH), intellectual and school status (INT), physical appearance
and attributes (PHY), freedom from anxiety, (FRE), popularity (POP), and happiness and satisfaction (HAP). *The Piers-Harris Scale* was developed to use in a variety of settings such as research, educational, and clinical and it has a number of uses. The primary purpose of the Pier-Harris 2 is to provide a quantitative research instrument to evaluate alternative intervention strategies and as an individual or group screening device which helps to identify individuals that may be in need of more in depth psychological evaluation. The Piers-Harris 2 also includes two scales which are sensitive to validity concerns and that assess the validity of the responses: Inconsistent Responding (INC) and Response Bias (RES).

The data from the evaluations were compared to note any differences in student responses prior to group participation and after structured group participation. By using a scale that measured self-concept and six different domain scales, the data would yield useful information for the teacher and researchers to further include such counseling programs as a regular component of instruction for students enrolled in Curriculum Assistance. It was important to the investigators to be able to use the yielded data to determine instructional modifications that would change current programming and improve the students’ overall school experiences in the future. For instance, based on the results, would it be appropriate to implement the counseling sessions in the future? Should the sessions be used in certain grade levels or in all Curriculum Assistance classes? Should we use this intervention with those students who do not qualify for Curriculum Assistance but have failed one or more courses?

The second measure was an exit interview conducted upon the completion of each session, which we all felt was needed to assess attitudes about participation throughout the nine-week period. The interview questions included: (a) What did you (the student) learn from the session? (b) What did you (the facilitator) learn from the session? (c) Would you like to participate in the topic session again? (d) Do you feel that participation in this session influenced your beliefs about your academic capabilities? The intention of these questions was to understand perceptions of learning and perceptions of value (good/bad) in the professional context of counseling and reflection.

**Findings**

Measure 1. A Paired Samples T Test was used to measure the means, standard deviations, and significance illustrating group differences in *Pier-Harris Total Self-Concept 2nd Edition* scores before and after intervention. The results are presented in Table 1. The Total Overall domain indicated significant differences between pretest and posttest. Similarly, all six domains indicated a significant difference between pretest and posttest. The Happiness Domain indicated the largest significance out of all of the domains. The Happiness domain yielded the highest significance scores. The results of that domain could be interpreted by interjecting their acceptance of being a part of the study and the attention of being a part of the counseling intervention.
TRENDS

The following trends supporting the experimental intervention were evident: (1) Improvements in Piers-Harris 2 total scores were lower for the pretest (mean=46.67) than for the posttest overall (mean = 49.00) Overall results for the total domain (i.e., TOT) increased from 47.67 (sd=7.97) on the pretest to 49.00 (sd=6.70) on the posttest. The difference between the two means is statistically significant at the .05 level (t=-1.06, df=5,p=.337). The mean BEH score increased from 48.83 (sd=4.96) on the pretest to 51.00 (sd=5.92) on the posttest. The difference between the two means is statistically significant at the .05 level (t=-1.52, df=5,p=.189). The mean INT score increased from 46.50 (sd=5.43) on the pretest to 47.67 (sd=5.09) on the posttest. The difference between the two means is statistically significant at the .05 level (t=-1.23, df=5,p=.272). The mean PHY score increased from 48.83 (sd=9.79) on the pretest to 49.50 (sd=8.83) on the posttest. The difference between the two means is statistically significant at the .05 level (t=-2.193, df=5,p=.08). The mean FRE score increased from 44.17 (sd=10.25) on the pretest to 47.33 (sd=10.15) on the posttest. The difference between the two means is statistically significant at the .05 level (t=-1.00, df=5,p=.36).

<table>
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<tr>
<th>Performance Dimensions</th>
<th>Experimental (N=6)</th>
<th>Pretest</th>
<th>Posttest</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>Significance</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>Total(TOT)</strong></td>
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<td>.337</td>
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<td></td>
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<td><strong>Physical Appearance and Attributes(PHY)</strong></td>
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<td></td>
<td>SD</td>
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Table 1: Means, Standard Deviations, and Significance Scores for Paired Samples Test for Piers-Harris 2

Measure 2. Qualitative data from the students and counselor interview questions were summarized into tables by week and by question and inspected for patterns. Interpretive
summaries were constructed for the three interview questions. Results yielded rich information to guide future sessions for these participants and future groups. This measure further delved into the background behind the scores of the Piers Harris 2. Because of the student “buy in,” we were able to determine that their motivation was indeed a factor of the success of the group sessions and why we would continue.

**Reflection**

The purpose of this research was to determine if the intervention of didactically-designed group sessions would impact the self-efficacy beliefs pertaining to the academic achievement of junior students who were considered to be “at-risk”. Baseline data were collected in the form of pretests using the Piers-Harris 2. Then, the posttest data were collected nine weeks later using the same measurement.

The quantitative data were collected to obtain empirical data to document any significant differences that may have occurred in the treatment group that could possibly be attributed to the intervention. A measure of the students’ overall self-concept (Total-TOT) score was taken along with the scores from the six domain scales which are the following: behavioral adjustment (BEH), intellectual and school status (INT), physical appearance and attributes (PHY), freedom from anxiety (FRE), popularity (POP), and happiness and satisfaction (HAP) using *The Piers-Harris Children’s Self-Concept Scale 2nd Edition*. A slight increase in mean differences was observable in all seven measurements; self-concept, behavioral adjustment, intellectual and school status, physical appearance and attributes, freedom from anxiety, popularity, and happiness and satisfaction.

Conversely, qualitative data were collected to gain an understanding about the motivation and learning of all of the participants included in the counseling sessions. Consistent sessions and reflection were often cited as the reason for their success and involvement in the group. Students understood that their sessions were goal-oriented and wanted to continue with the topics of each session. All of the participants would continue to be involved with these session efforts.

The Curriculum Assistance teacher indicated that the participants’ primary learning came from being involved in the group sessions and reflecting in a timely manner. She explained that being involved in the sessions allowed her to see first-hand “what works for her as she facilitates groups and what motivates the students.” She also reported that feedback from the participants’ other classroom teachers has been positive since the formation of this group.

**Action Plan**

The findings of this action research project have solidified the school’s idea of continuation of the group sessions. The sessions were developed in response to the need of the instructor of the students to understand what, if anything, could be done to improve the students’ self-efficacy which would hopefully improve achievement. While we have results of the Piers Harris 2 and the interview questions that suggest the group sessions were effective, we do not have any data to suggest improved academic achievement as a result of
participation. It is our hope that there will be academic improvement on mandated, formalized testing at the end of the year with continued progress in the students’ self-efficacy. We have determined that students enrolled in Curriculum Assistance in both tenth and eleventh grades will participate in future group sessions focused on improving self-efficacy.

It seems that one of the obstacles to a more positive self-efficacy may be a student's academic behavior that seems to be habitual. Another obstacle that appears to effect academic progress surfaces from the lack of control experienced with systemic issues. The more a student believes he or she is powerless in creating change in family and educational systems, the more apathetic he or she is towards academic progress. Challenging the rules of typical behavior appears crucial to initiating situation reappraisal and self-efficacy change. The chicken-or-egg question is certainly relevant to self-efficacy research – the issue of whether more positive self-beliefs are responsible for increased academic achievement or whether successful academic performances are responsible for more positive self-beliefs.

REFERENCES


Appendix A: Overview of Information and Activities Presented in Sessions

Session One

Session Goals and Objectives
Goal: Increase self-awareness of present self-concept
Objectives:
- To develop an awareness and explore various domains of self-concept
- To explore the history of past school experiences and develop an awareness of the relationship to present performance

Goal: Develop an understanding of individual uniqueness and crucial factors for success
Objectives:
- To develop an awareness of the different strengths and needs of people in general
- To develop an awareness of how two factors, self-efficacy and determination, impact success

Session Overview and Time Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Topic</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>(1) Present rules</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(2) Review goals for group</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(3) Review goals for session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>(4) Administer self-concept assessment and process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>(5) Administer Celebrity Quiz and process</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>(6) Summarize and process session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Session Content

(1) Present Rules:
There are several reasons to spend extra time going over the rules and allowing for participant input. First, setting clear expectations reduces anxiety and increases participation. Second, asking for participant input is empowering and is a very important element with this population. Third, this allows for discussion that begins the process of establishing trust.

Introduce leader’s rules for group:

1. Keep information shared in the group confidential – this means anything talked about during the group should not be discussed outside of the group with either participants or nonparticipants. The only time this rule should be broken is if a student’s safety is in jeopardy – suicidal statements, reports of abuse, or threats to others. However, you need to be aware that confidentiality cannot be guaranteed in group situations.

2. Speak one at a time – if someone else is talking you should be listening. Do not interrupt others. If you think you might forget what you wanted to say if you have to wait, then bring a pencil and paper to class to jot down any thoughts that are sparked that you want to share at a later time when you wouldn’t be interrupting.

3. Show respect for others – If someone has an opinion in which you do not agree, please show respect and do not argue about differing opinions. They are entitled to theirs, just as you are to yours. You are welcome to share your opinion as long as
you are not interrupting or criticizing someone else. Do not attack each other
verbally or physically. Always show respect for the opinions and feelings of others.

4. **Actively participate in the group sessions** – There is no pressure to talk but you are
couraged to contribute in order to gain the most from the group and support
each other.

- Ask for member input of any special considerations they would like to have
  incorporated into the ground rules
- Post an abbreviated version of the group rules

(2) **Review goals for group:**
The goals of the group have been discussed individually during the screening process.
However, the point of an overall review is to insure that everyone understands the purpose
of the group and is in agreement to work together to accomplish the goals. Maintaining a
sense of purpose throughout the sessions is very important, since this population
sometimes has difficulty understanding the relevance of what is being asked of them.

**Goals for Group:**
1. To find out how each of us views ourselves and how we might have come to draw
   these conclusions
2. To clarify what our individual strengths and needs are now
3. To determine where we would like to be in the future and what it will take to get us
   there
4. To learn how our beliefs about ourselves might get in our way and what to do about
   them
5. To learn to set realistic short-term goals that lead to our long-term goals
6. To learn how our beliefs can influence our behaviors and how behaviors can
   sometimes serve as “roadblocks” for getting what we want or where we want to be
- Ask for participant feedback and agreement to the group goals

(3) **Review session goals:**
It is important that students know what to expect to reduce any anxiety in beginning
sessions. It is equally important not to assume that students will incidentally learn what
they are supposed to in the session. Tell the students what you expect them to get and why.

**Goals:**
1. To learn about how we view ourselves
2. To explore past experiences that may have led to our views
3. To determine our strengths and needs and discover our uniqueness
4. To find two important factors that contribute to success

- Why is it important to know about how we see ourselves now? Ask for student
  response –

  Deduce: If we are looking to make changes within ourselves for the future, then we
  need to know where we are before we can decide where we are going?
(4) Administer self-concept assessment:
Self-concept will be assessed using a self-report, rating scale, The Piers Harris Self-concept Scale 2. Rating scales are composed of a set of statements in which the student can express the degree of agreement or disagreement. Scores for specific domains can be assessed along with a measure of global self-concept. The two most important considerations in administering this type of assessment are: 1) the student may lack confidence but may not be aware of their own perceptions, 2) accuracy may be decreased by the awareness that some responses are more socially acceptable than others.

* Note: This assessment will be used as a pre- and post-test

- Before administering – Stress to students that there is not a right or wrong answer and how honestly they respond to the questions is important if they truly want to learn about themselves. Ask them not to respond in terms of “shoulds” or “want-to-be’s.” Remind students that they don’t have to share anything they don’t want to about the results.

(5) Celebrity Quiz:
The purpose of this activity is to take a look at famous people who have not always experienced success, particularly in school, and yet have created what most people would consider very successful lives.

Allow students several minutes to take the quiz independently and let them know it doesn’t matter if they get them all correct or do not complete the quiz because we will be going over the answers shortly.

- Process Questions:
  1. Would you consider these people successful?
  2. What personal characteristics do you think helped to make them successful? (lead to personal characteristics of determination and believing in one’s self)
  3. Do you have these characteristics now? Why or why not?
  4. It is possible for you to have these characteristics in the future? Why or why not?

- Show the quote that illustrates the number of unsuccessful attempts Thomas Edison made before creating the light bulb and share his perspective. Emphasize that with every mistake you learn something new that helps you to be successful when you try again. Post the quote on the wall.

(6) Process Session:
- Elicit from participants a summary of this session:
  1. Awareness of self-concept
  2. Discovered strengths and needs
  3. How we might have gained our perceptions
  4. No two people are alike
  5. Two characteristics crucial for success
  6. Mistakes are for learning not assessing our abilities
  7. Attaining goals is a process

- Determine how what we learned today might be useful in the future
Session Two

Session Goals and Objectives
Goal: Examine personal and economic aspirations, process of achieving, and projected “roadblocks”
Objectives:
• To foster exploration and clarify long-range goals, in terms of career, housing, and family
• To develop an awareness of the process involved in obtaining future goals and explore factors that could prevent success

Goal: Dispute the validity of perceived, self-set limitations and their effects
Objectives:
• To examine the difference between self-set limitations and those in which he has no control
• To foster exploration and clarify present self-set limitations
• To explain the relationship of self-set limitations and behavior
• To develop an understanding of how once useful coping mechanisms become patterns of behavior and learn ways to modify behavior

Session Overview and Time Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(1) Review previous session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2) Review goals for session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>(3) Design a vision of the future</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>(4) Determine path to attain vision</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>22</td>
<td>(5) Self-set limitations – Yellow Rope Activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>(6) Process activity</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>(7) Summarize and process session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Session Content
(1) Review last week:
Last week we learned that we all have special qualities and no two personalities are exactly alike. Some of our abilities are inherited, but our perceptions of our abilities are learned through our experiences. We also learned that what we believe we can do and our determination to do it, is what can make the difference in whether or not we accomplish our goals. Making mistakes are what help us to learn and without the courage to be imperfect we will not accomplish many of our goals. (Allow opportunity for participant feedback)

(2) Review session goals:
Goals:
1. Determine where you would like to be 10 years from now
   a. Career
   b. Family
   c. Lifestyle
2. Determine what steps it would take between now and then to get where you want to be
3. Explore any barriers that might prevent you from getting there
4. Develop an awareness of any barriers we might place on ourselves
5. Discuss how these perceptions may have been useful to us in the past and learn ways to alter these perceptions and modify our behavior

(3) Complete handout and discuss goals for the future:
The participant will need to consider actual abilities and personal values while developing these goals. They need to be realistic future goals. To become rich and live in a mansion may not be a realistic goal, even though it could qualify as a dream that has a possibility but not probability of coming true.

(4) Discuss what path or steps it might take to reach these goals:
- What will it take to obtain a job in your career of choice?
- What obligations will you have to meet to support your family and lifestyle vision?
- Will your job support your family and lifestyle vision?

(5) Yellow Rope Activity:
Materials Needed:
- Long belt with multiple holes and seven 2-foot long yellow ropes attached
- Seven 6 by 8 index cards, with holes punched in top and 7 paper clips to use in attaching cards to belt
- Seven blindfolds
- Four 8 ½ by 11 sheets of paper

Directions:
1. The group needs to determine four long-term goals and then write them on the 8½ by 11 sheets of paper and place one of them in each corner of the room.
2. Then have the group determine any thoughts, feelings, or behaviors that might prevent them from reaching any of the goals (Leader can provide examples, i.e. – fear of failure). Record them on the index cards and attach one of them to each of the yellow ropes.
3. Solicit a volunteer to wear the belt (make sure the belt is large enough and has multiple holes so it can be adjusted to various sizes so as not to embarrass anyone or limit who could volunteer). Make sure they know it is low-risk – you do not have to say anything unless you want to.
4. Have the other participants take the end of one of the yellow ropes around the member wearing the belt and stand so the rope is taut.
5. Blindfold the person wearing the belt (make sure being blindfolded is not an issue).
6. Place the group in the center of the room and direct the rope-holders to lead the person in the center to collect each of the four goals. The person in the center needs to pick up the piece of paper.
7. The task is to collect all four goals and return to the center of the room.
8. The people holding the ropes want you to succeed, you can talk or whatever you need to do, and since you are blindfolded they will use the ropes to guide you.
9. After the group has returned to the center of the room, remove the blindfold and place the blindfolds over all of the rope-holders’ eyes, (again insuring that this is not an issue with any of them).
10. The task is the same – the person in the center needs to collect the four goals and return to the center of the room. You can once again talk or whatever you need to do to accomplish the goal.

11. Once activity is complete, remove blindfolds and return to seats to process.

(6) Process Activity:

- What was the purpose of the yellow ropes the first time? -- Needed them to guide you to accomplish goal
- What was the purpose of the yellow ropes the second time? -- Limitations to accomplish goal
- Your directions were to do whatever -- Why don’t you think anyone thought of removing the belt the second time?
- Your opinion of what you could do was formed when you were limited by sight the first time and needed the help of the others. When your ability increased, you still held on to those thoughts, feelings, and behaviors you had learned.
- Many times our past experiences lead us to conclude beliefs about ourselves that we hold on to and we become overly concerned with trying to avoid mistakes, or decide the matter is hopeless and just coast along with our “don’t care attitudes.” If we continue to hold on to those yellow ropes, then we can continue to blame our failures on those holding the ropes. It is very easy for us to focus on what we can’t do, what won’t work, what is wrong, and how useless it would be to try because something terrible could result if we tried and failed. Can you think of a situation in your past you could apply to this? How about your future? (Allow for think time, however, the leader could give an example first if no response, and then ask again).
- What are some advantages to giving up?
  - Don’t have to worry about failing
  - Don’t have to worry about making mistakes
  - Don’t have to worry about whether you could really do it or not
- What is the price for giving up?
  - Miss out on the joy of success
  - Miss out on a chance to learn from mistakes
  - Miss out on a chance to discover true abilities and limitations
  - Miss out on opportunities to feel worthwhile

(7) Process Session:

- Elicit from participants a summary of this session:
  1. Decided where we see ourselves in the future and what steps we need to take to get there
  2. Discovered barriers to achieving future goals and how we place some of the barriers on ourselves for various reasons
  3. Become aware that some of our beliefs about ourselves may have been accurate and useful in the past. But now that we have more abilities and know how important it is to have determination to increase our abilities, holding on to past beliefs only serves as a way to avoid taking risks, learning, and growing.
- Determine how what we learned today might be useful in the future
Session Three

Session Goals and Objectives

Goal: Gain an awareness of self-talk and its impact on self-concept

Objectives:
- To develop an understanding of the definition of self-talk
- To discover personal self-talk in specific academic and social situations
- To explore the differences in positive, negative, and coping self-talk
- To develop an understanding of how negative self-talk impacts self-concept and self-efficacy
- To learn to modify negative self-talk into a more positive or coping self-talk

Session Overview and Time Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(1)  Review previous sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>(2)  Review goals for session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15</td>
<td>(3)  Define self-talk and types</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>25</td>
<td>(4)  What's your self-talk, effects &amp; ways to modify</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>(5)  Summarize and process session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Session Content:

(1) Review Previous Sessions:
In the last two sessions, we’ve learned how we view ourselves – our strengths in certain areas and areas that could use a little work. We also realize that no two people are alike, even identical twins. Believing in our abilities, having determination, and taking risks are characteristics that foster growth in our development and may also allow us to be successful in whatever we choose. Giving up easily does not get us what we want and sometimes the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors we’ve learned from our past experiences are no longer useful to us, but changing them now takes a conscious effort. Today we will focus on changing some of our thought patterns that continue to discourage our efforts. (Allow opportunity for participant feedback)

(2) Review Session Goals:
Goals:
1. Define “what is self-talk?”
2. Discover some of our own self-talk
3. Explore the differences in positive, negative, and coping messages
4. Determine ways to modify our messages to ourselves

(3) What is self-talk?
(Check for understanding and allow time for participant feedback)
Illustrate by drawing a diagram of the relationship between thoughts, feelings and behaviors on the board. Give examples. Ask for examples and feedback from participants.

(4) Discovering personal self-talk, types and effects:
Activity directions:
- Give each member a handout that has specific situations they may have encountered in past academic situations. Ask each of them to record discouraging thoughts (negative self-talk) they might have had before, during, or after the event.
• Discuss as a large group what affects the thought had on their feelings and behaviors.
• Then have them select a partner and share their thoughts recorded on the handout. One person is to share a thought and the other person is to suggest a more positive or coping self-talk that would fit the situation.
• Have participants return as whole group and discuss what affects replacing the negative self-talk with a more positive self-talk might have on their feelings and behaviors.

(5) Process Session:
• Elicit from participants a summary of this session
  1. Aware of self-talk and its affects
  2. Aware of relationship between thoughts, feelings, and behaviors
  3. Discovered negative self-talk and how it might be changed to encourage instead of discourage
  4. When you’re not sure how to change self-talk -- think of what you would say to a friend
• Determine how what we learned today might be useful in the future
• Deduce -- Self-monitoring and changing these thought patterns may be helpful in attaining future goals.

Session Four

Session Goals and Objectives

Goal: Increase ability to set and achieve realistic, proximal goals
Objectives:
• To determine how to set and achieve personal, proximal goals
• To foster exploration of alternative strategies and coping self-talk and develop an understanding of the impact on perseverance toward achieving proximal goals

Session Overview and Time Estimates

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Topic</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>(1) Review previous sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(2) Review session goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>(3) What is a short-term goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>(4) Set two realistic short-term goals and evaluate (realistic)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>(5) Explore “what ifs” and strategies to foster perseverance</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>(6) Summarize and process session</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

Session Content

(1) Review previous sessions:
We have been learning about things that are in our power to change that may have a significant impact on our long-term goals. The big question is -- “Is it within our power to change the thoughts, feelings, and behaviors of others?” (Pause for discussion)

We have been developing plans to change the only thing we do have control of - ourselves. We have looked at; where we are now, where we want to be in the future, and steps needed to get there. In the process, we have learned that our past behaviors
have not led us in the direction we want to go and some changes are needed to get us going in the right direction. Last week, we learned how our thoughts influence our feelings and behaviors. We learned how we could monitor and modify those negative thoughts. Today we will continue to address negative self-talk and develop some alternative strategies to encourage our progress toward some short-term goals. (Allow opportunity for participant feedback)

(2) Review Session Goals:
Goals:
1. Define "what is a short-term goal?"
2. Set short-term academic goals
3. Determine whether they are realistic or not
4. Develop self-talk and strategies that help to attain goals

(3) What is a short-term goal?
(Check for understanding and allow participant feedback)

(4) Determine two short-term academic goals:
Discuss goals and determine if they are realistic for that individual or not

(5) Determine “What ifs?” and develop alternative strategies and modify self-talk:
Tell students: the terms “roadblocks” and “barriers” are often used to describe things that present obstacles and can be difficult to overcome. Today we are going to use the word “hurdles” to create an image of jumping over obstacles. With a little thought behind our goals and the process of accomplishing them, reaching our goals will be easier.

- Have participants select a partner to explore any hurdles that could arise that would prohibit them from making progress toward their academic goals.
- Have them brainstorm alternate strategies that might help them to overcome any anticipated hurdles.
- Have them speculate and modify any negative thoughts they might encounter during the process of attaining their goals especially if hurdles do arise.
- Have group reconvene to their seats for discussion.

Discussion:
- Discuss any situations and ideas they had for developing an alternative strategy
- Discuss any negative self-talk they might anticipate and how they modified the self-talk
- Ask how attaining their goal might change how they think of themselves? (wait for responses) - how might your feelings and behaviors change? (wait for responses)
- Ask how they might react in these same areas if they thought they failed at achieving their goal? (wait for responses)
- Remind them that what they have considered to be failures in the past could simply be a hurdle. In the past, you probably ran into a hurdle and interpreted it as a lack in your ability, and that made you think you were not good enough to accomplish the goal and you gave up. Then you thought of yourself as stupid or worthless, felt angry, sad, or depressed and never tried again. Who likes to
feel those feelings about themselves, anyway? (allow time for participants to respond)
• There is “no telling” what you are capable of if you learn from your failures, don’t accept it as a measure of your ability, don’t compare yourself to others, and simply develop a new strategy based on what you have learned.
• One strategy you could use is to break your goal down into smaller goals. For example: If you set a goal to write a rough draft for English, you might want to break it into three goals. The first would be to write an opening paragraph. Once you’ve accomplished that goal, set a goal to write the body (or 500 words). The third goal would be to write a concluding paragraph. Anytime you feel overwhelmed by a task or goal it is always a good idea to break it down into smaller steps. If you feel overwhelmed or doubt your ability to accomplish the goal, what do you think would be the end results? (wait for responses) If you break it down and accomplish the first goals, how do you think you would feel about tackling the next goal? (wait for responses)
• It is also helpful to take time to check in with yourself to monitor the progress you are making toward your goals. It’s not only attaining the goal that is important, it is very important to note the progress you are making toward your goals. Change is a Process! And patience with yourself is crucial. You can’t jump from participating once in a gymnastics class to competing in the Olympics. Always take note of the point from which you started.

(6) Process Session:
• Elicit summary of session from participants
  1. Learned “what is a short-term goal”
  2. How to set realistic goals
  3. How to develop alternate strategies for accomplishing goals
  4. Ways to modify self-talk to encourage instead of discourage
• Determine how what they learned today might be useful in the future

Session Five

Session Goals and Objectives
Goal: Increase positive interaction with authority figures
Objectives:
• To develop an understanding of teachers, counselors, administrators, and parents as individuals
• To develop an awareness of the similarities between those in authority and oneself
• To establish responses to demands and frustrations of those in authority that yield more positive consequences

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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Minutes</th>
<th>Topics</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>(1) Review previous sessions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>(2) Review goals for session</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>(3) “True Colors” Rating Scale</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20</td>
<td>(4) Productive responses to authority</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>(5) Summarize and process session</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Session Content

(1) Review Previous Sessions:
Last week we set some short-term goals. I'd like to take a little time for each of us to share thoughts with regard to progress toward our goals. (wait for self-reports of progress)

Did any of you run into any hurdles? What were they and how did you handle them? (wait for responses)

Did you notice any negative thoughts? What was the situation and thought? What did you do about it? (wait for responses)

Sometimes not only what we say to ourselves determines the outcome of a situation, but what we say aloud to others has an effect, especially those in authority. Today we'll take a look at that issue.

(2) Review Session Goals:
Goals:
1. Awareness of personality characteristics of self
2. Awareness of personality characteristics of teachers
3. Awareness of how the two can interact
4. Develop strategies to interact that help you get what you want

(3) True Colors Inventory:
- Have students complete inventory and discuss results
- Share the results from completed inventories of known teachers
- Compare and contrast the results
- Discuss any interactions that may result in conflict from differing personality characteristics

(4) Productive Response to Authority:
Sometimes how we respond to teachers, administrators, counselors, and parents prevents us from getting our needs met.

It is easy for most of us to respond impulsively (before considering consequences) to someone that is telling us what to do. Sometimes they even tell us how we should think and feel. We already know from previous sessions that we have the power to resist their demands. We say it's our life and they cannot make the decisions.

When we disagree with a person in authority about an issue and begin to argue our point, do we really understand their perspective? Do they understand ours? What are the responses and consequences we usually get? (wait for response)

Activity:
- Ask students for examples of conflicts they might have experienced or witnessed between a teacher and a student
- Ask for volunteers to role play some of the situations
- Discuss the outcome of the situation for the student
• Elicit suggestions for how the situation might have been handled differently and how that might change the outcome
  
  Ideas:
  - postpone judgment
  - seek to understand their perspective
  - communicate your perspective when emotions have calmed down
  - respond by doing as requested and discuss issue at a later time

• Ask for volunteers to role play same situations before, but with a different response

• Discuss the outcome of the situation for the student

(5) Process Session:
• Elicit summary of session from participants
  1. Gained an awareness of personality characteristics
  2. Gained an awareness of the similarities and differences of personality characteristics in ourselves and teachers
  3. Learned how to respond differently when personality clashes occurred in order to get more positive consequences
• Determine how what they learned today might be useful in the future

Biographical note:

Dr. Polly Haselden is an assistant professor of education at Francis Marion University, South Carolina. She teaches graduate courses in special education and research and, throughout her career, has worked with exceptional and students who are considered to be “at risk”.

Dr. Marla Sanders is an assistant professor of education at Francis Marion University. She teaches undergraduate courses in educational foundations and graduate courses in research.

Mrs. Lindsay Sturkie is a graduate assistant for the education department at Francis Marion University and is currently in the M.Ed. program. She has taught third grade and math and reading remediation courses for grades six, seven, and eight.