

Summary

There are many ways to build self-confidence; changing beliefs about self-efficacy can be extremely useful. It is difficult to assess whether feelings of self-efficacy have changed without conducting some type of formal research but by using the above techniques, there is a good chance that learners will build their self-confidence. By building the feeling of self-efficacy, learners may begin to take on more (difficult) tasks, may attend the learning centre more frequently and may become more self-confident.

If you want to know more about self-efficacy, try the website cited at ² below or if you want a tutorial, try the power-point presentation cited at ³.

¹ Site for everything you want to know about Self-Efficacy. You can review all these papers online.
<http://www.positivepractices.com/LinkMania/Self-Efficacy.html>

² See the paper by Siegle, D. in 2 above

³ Lane, A. Self-efficacy, self-esteem and performance among students taking research methods.
<http://www.hlst.heacademy.ac.uk/projects/lane.ppt>

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Building Self-Confidence

Your job may involve supporting learners who lack confidence in themselves. This paper describes different aspects of self-confidence and offers ideas for you to help learners to overcome barriers and develop greater belief in their potential as learners.



Self-confidence can be defined simply as "a belief in yourself and your abilities". Researchers use the term "self-efficacy" because self-confidence refers to a general feeling of confidence for all tasks but self-efficacy is generally applied to specific situations and contexts. For example, you might have high self-efficacy for English but low self-efficacy for mathematics, or high self-efficacy for tennis but low self-efficacy for football.

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Because most of the research referred to in this article relates specifically to self-efficacy, this is the term we will use. However, if you are unfamiliar with the concept of self-efficacy, it may be easier to just think of self-efficacy as a very specific form of self-confidence.

What is self-efficacy and why is it so important?

Self-efficacy refers to individuals' judgments about whether they have the capability to perform a particular activity. Put another way, it is an individual's belief about what he or she can and cannot do¹.

There are three good reasons to focus on self-efficacy beliefs:

- evidence has consistently shown that those with high self-efficacy are more likely to attempt (new, novel) tasks, work harder and persist longer after failure³.
- because you can have high self-efficacy beliefs about one task and low self-efficacy beliefs about another, you can tackle self-efficacy on a task-by-task basis.
- most importantly, evidence has shown that tutors can help change learners' self-efficacy beliefs by using certain teaching methods². In other words, *what you do/how you teach* can have an important impact on the self-confidence of your learners.



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Three ways to influence self-efficacy

1 Past performances

Unsurprisingly, improving feelings and beliefs about self-efficacy can be achieved by personally having the experience of performing well. One way to optimise the chances of the learner experiencing success is to consider carefully the tasks set for them.

Tutors should therefore:

- negotiate the task set for learners with the learners
- set manageable but challenging tasks (it is better that the learner fails at a task they consider challenging than pass at an easy one)
- break the task down into small units
- present failure as useful information that gives the learner an example of what NOT to do. In other words, failure should be used as a tool to help learners diagnose what went wrong.

It may be useful to refer to the Learning Principles Toolkit article "Motivating Learners: Helping learners set their goals" for a review of specific techniques.

Remember that self-efficacy is about changing *beliefs* and not just about performing well. Even if a learner "fails", as long as they believe they can succeed in the future, this represents an increase in self-efficacy.

2 Verbal persuasion

Verbal persuasion is often interpreted as positive feedback and in most instances this is true. However, simply giving positive feedback isn't enough; the way the feedback is given is important.

Aspects to consider here include:

- not giving positive feedback when it is not warranted. The learner will only make the same error again. Carefully explain what the error is and give the learner the opportunity to comment and, if possible, correct the error.
- be specific about feedback. "Good Work" is too vague; say precisely what the individual has done well e.g., "You have organised this essay well", "You have structured your sentences well". This will allow the learner to differentiate between the parts of the task they have succeeded on and the parts that need to be improved.

- relating to the previous two points, verbal persuasion can be useful to mix positive feedback with less positive feedback e.g., "You have organised your essay very well but within the organisation, some of the sentences could be clearer".
- "every criticism is a point of rejoicing". It may be useful to point out that when a learner has made an error, as long as they understand why they have made that error, they have learned something new.
- giving a clear example of a correct response whenever an error is noted. For example, if you say that an essay needs better signposts you might write/say "for example, when you start a new paragraph". Help your reader by indicating whether this paragraph is related to the previous paragraph.

3 Vicarious experiences

Evidence has shown that simply watching someone perform a task makes one more confident that you can achieve the same, ie, "if they can do it, so can I". This technique is most useful when demonstrating skill-related tasks, eg, pottery, dance, sports, car maintenance etc. The comparison model should be someone of similar ability. Learners will not improve their self-efficacy beliefs if they consider the model already to be an expert.

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