

Laura Ritchie (2015) *Fostering Self-efficacy in Higher Education Students*, London: Palgrave (ISBN 978-1-137-46377-7 [Pbk], 159pp)

This book is clearly structured and has a well presented sequence of arguments and is, for the most part, easily accessible and digestible to the individual with no previous knowledge of what self-efficacy is about. It also presents a very good rationale for the use of self-efficacy in the academic context and provides a great framework for teaching, learning and assessment practice. The first chapter overviews the teaching environment in HE and presents case studies of innovative practice. The author recognises the challenge presented by learning environments and advocates adapting to approaches, such as enquiry-led and problem-based learning. An example of the growing trends highlighted is the use of technology but this, she argues, can engender a false sense of innovation with the exhortation that students should shape the use of technology rather than the other way round (e.g. Twitter can be followed blindly rather than critically). At the centre of self-efficacy is mastery rather than the "tray" approach often fostered in HE; the teacher serves up the food on the tray, the student takes it away and later digests it. This didactic approach militates against the mastery experiences, implicit in a self-efficacy approach, and leaves the tutor as a spectator after delivering the tuition. She argues that tutors have a vital role in giving students structure and guidance for their learning with the student as producer and the academic as collaborator.

The concepts that Albert Bandura used to explain the origins and development of self-efficacy beliefs within an individual (and there are four pre-determinants: mastery experiences, verbal persuasion, vicarious

experiences and physical signals) are then highlighted. These are competently outlined and demonstrate how individual self-efficacy beliefs can be cultivated within an education context. Examples are provided that help contextualise the process. Strong and positive points emerge from this chapter including emphasis on the role of personal beliefs. This is at the heart of self-efficacy and a positive change in beliefs for students has adaptive behavioural consequences for the process and products of academic performance.

The chapter also highlights the literature and provides evidence of the scholarly underpinning of the construct with emphasis on the fact that the selection is inevitably limited. Literature missed in the overview includes large meta-analyses and major reviews conducted over a few decades, e.g. Multon et al. (1991), Robbins et al. (2004), Valentine et al. (2004), Chemers et al. (2001). Nevertheless, the chapter still provides practical and positive emphases on nurturing self-efficacy beliefs and clear understanding that it has empirical foundations and scholarly underpinning.

The second chapter attempts to embrace the challenge of recognising and applying the difference identified by Schunk (1996) in self-efficacy for learning and self-efficacy for performance. In the literature the distinction between these is not well enough developed from the measurement perspective. This section may be a dry read for some but the author succeeds in showing that differentiation between tuition for learning and tuition for assessment performance should be considered by tutors. Given the many assessment tasks in HE, this is certainly a much larger task than this book embraces. What also has to be confronted is the problem of individuality in mass education as self-efficacy is essentially

a construct that focuses on individuals, although an earlier writer (Gecas, 1989) highlighted the possibility of collective efficacy. The author also discusses the issue of subject specific versus general self-efficacy but the discussion on this is limited (see Pajares, 1996 on the value of general self-efficacy).

In the next chapter the issue of modes of communication and their influence on self-efficacy is addressed and is extremely useful for the teacher. Particularly interesting sections focus on non-verbal communication in issues such as tone, inflection, gestures, eye contact, sitting, standing, moving around, smiling etc. We know from student feedback that students do not like lecturers reading off slides or even give the impression that they are doing this. This chapter will help tutors consider the impact of their communication on students in a whole variety of scenarios including lecturers, seminars, one-to-one situations and even in recorded messages. Feedback is considered in its various forms and the spirit of the section is the recognition of the individuality of students. The section will heighten tutors' awareness of small modes of communication that can make a big difference to the effectiveness of communication; the impression left here, and overall from the book, is that self-efficacy should pervade the whole of communication and is a lifetime commitment and certainly not the fad of the moment.

In the next chapter the author develops the argument in the context of the classroom where the emphasis is on process. Previously the author had stressed that self-efficacy beliefs are subject specific and are malleable rather than fixed. The teacher can provide a proper framework for nurturance of beliefs whilst recognising that self-

efficacy beliefs also need to be reinforced. Illustrations and case studies are used to demonstrate how teachers can leave room for students to find solutions and solve problems other than through the didactic method; examples are used from music, astronomy and surgery. Furthermore the author makes good use of Bandura's concept of modelling (vicarious experiences and vicarious reinforcement) to strengthen the process of learning. This can be through holding up case study models, through simulated operations in surgery or through teacher modelling and peer modelling. Learning through observation of others who are exemplars is presented as part of the self-efficacy toolkit.

In previous chapters the author had highlighted the four elements Bandura proposed that are implicated in the development of self-efficacy beliefs (mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, verbal persuasion and physical signals). She also introduced the triple processes in the operationalisation of self-efficacy labelled as personal, environmental and behavioural. However, as the construct has evolved over the decades, new points of emphasis have been added and the author takes account of these, including: motivation, initiative, effort, persistence, goal setting and self-regulation. The latter point is expanded in the fifth chapter of the book, entitled, 'Developing mastery experiences', and refers to how those who teach and study can "engage with effective, productive learning that leads to successful results" (p. 85). A list of approaches and behaviours are presented that encapsulate self-regulation and these are clustered under the three broad headings, Planning, Monitoring and Regulation. What this demonstrates clearly is that self-efficacy is not a set of passive beliefs, but represents a behavioural approach that is systematic and goal

oriented. The triple process highlighted very much demonstrates something central to self-efficacy: personal agency and personal control. Tutors are challenged to provide, not only achievable tasks but also scaffolding and safety nets as self-regulation processes are woven into the learning cycle.

The penultimate chapter, 'Self-efficacy in practice: outcomes and attainments', focuses on goal setting for students and setting sub-goals to make progress toward ultimate goals in incremental and attainable steps.

The tutor is encouraged to provide structured opportunities for this to happen. The author presents an example from the University of Chichester where students are given the opportunity to build up toward their dissertation project in a series of small literature reviews leading toward the culmination of the final, large scale work. However, being an experienced realist she adds that adding interim tasks is only sustainable when it does not impact the workload of the tutor. As previously noted, tied to the development of self-efficacy beliefs is the impact of feedback that reinforces strong beliefs and sound practice. The author explores an alternative or complementary way to accomplish this through peer feedback on tasks linked to agreed criteria. This, she argues, can be done in small groups, through blogs and though an online discussion forum.

Overall this book presents a commendable overview of where HE is currently at in terms of educational principles and practice and also advocates good practice with compelling rationale. In addition the author presents challenges that shatter complacency but, as a true educationalist, she offers case studies with commentary and discussion on practical and realistic ways to optimise progress. Moreover, it is most commendable that she has wedded the self-

efficacy construct to the processes of teaching, learning and assessment as there is probably no better construct around that provides such a comprehensive framework to nurture adaptive beliefs and behaviours both for students and academics. In terms of the treatment of self-efficacy, there is scope for wider understanding and applications of the construct and there is much in the empirical literature, including recent studies that will lead the reader beyond the scope of this book. However, this is a very good place to start and the book could help to lead the academic into transformative practice with a toolkit focused on unlocking the practicalities needed to turn blue skies thinking into the rhythm, regulation and routine of daily work practice. The final chapter, in effect, points to the need to weave self-efficacy principles and practice into the fabric of teaching, learning and assessment. This is a long term and enduring challenge, but responding to this will mark a shift that will provide the framework for transformative learning, lifelong learning and lifewide learning. The book is commended as a very good read for tutors and you may well discover that you are already following many of the recommendations without the self-efficacy language!

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References

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