

Self-Effectiveness: Where the Sneakers Hit the Hallways

~ by Dennis Brown

The **self effective** individual views life events as caused by his/her own behavior much more than by luck or by circumstances. The self effective individual wants to create his or her own future and knows that thoughts become values, motivation, and the efforts of success. A self effective student knows that he or she controls what is learned because of a desire to apply effort and achieve success. As an effective individual I will:

- manage and be responsible for my own life,
- assess my assets and needs,
- give thought to the goals and purposes that I want to achieve...in school and later.

What experiences, knowledge, skills, and certificates will be needed for success?

- ask, "How much do I care about the goal choices,"
- know or find the strategies and resources needed to achieve my goals,
- self evaluate my progress and my behaviors...and ask "what am I doing to achieve my goals?"
- ask for help and remain responsible for my own life. I am the "can-do kid!"
- not do self-defeating behavior: drugs, irresponsible sex, always TV instead of homework, etc.

Purpose, goals, hope: I need to remember:

- Part of life is being better at some things than other things;
- I need to have goals that I can achieve in a short time;
- I have a bright future so I need big and small goals;
- I need to have goals that I can achieve with a longer and harder effort;
- It is important that I don't always choose to eat something just because it's fun;
- It is important that I don't always choose to play instead of work;
- It is important that I don't always choose to spend instead of save;
- Goals are reached by working, saving, and keeping my eyes on the prize.
- It is important to find a balance between work and fun, TV and books, friends and family, saving and spending, service to others, getting what I want now and getting what I will want later.

To be more self effective I must:

- be rested and adequately nourished,
- feel safe, respected and accepted by adults and peers,
- be goal directed with confidence and commitment,
- be able to manage time: have the "will and the skill for the drill" or "I want to have it,"
- want success and value knowledge, skills and positive experiences as the tools of success,
- see value in the task, challenge/opportunity,

- feel adequately confident and hopeful to succeed with the task, challenge/opportunity,
- be autonomous and not so emotionally trashed by other people's problems that I miss class or can't be in class physically, emotionally and intellectually to get an education.

Messages of autonomy: the student sees that:

- I am not on earth as "something" that belongs to someone else. I'm not here to fulfill some else's dreams;
- I care about my friends and my family, but they don't own me;
- It's important that I can accept responsibility for my own life;
- Friends are important, but I need to be responsible for my own life;
- If my friends start doing things that I don't believe in and I know are wrong for me, then I accept responsibility for my life by finding new friends.

My family is important to me, and I should do all that I can for my family. All families have good times and hard times. Some family problems can be very difficult for a long time. Problems may consist of money, health, alcohol/drug abuse, death or a lot of fighting and possible divorce. Because I care about my family, I do care about these things. But what if there is nothing that I, as a child, can do about the problem that is hurting my family? Should I be so involved in the family problem that I cannot carry the responsibilities of my own life...such as studying, learning and getting passing grades? If I allow myself to be emotionally trashed by my family's problems then I cannot go forward with the responsibilities of my own life, and my failures will become one more problem for my family. It will help to remember these messages to own myself:

- It is upsetting to me that my family is having problems, but I did not cause those problems;
- I can't control or solve those problems because I am a kid and not a banker, lawyer, marriage counselor etc.;
- These problems are not my fault;
- I have a right to be a kid and I need to be my own person;
- I have a need to be a student and to be present physically, mentally and emotionally for my education;
- My family, friends, or teachers cannot carry my responsibilities or always rescue me;
- If I can't meet the responsibilities of my own life, then I am just one more problem for my parents.

The self-directed student can organize and manage ideas and information in support of choices, goals, and strategies. The motivation to be self-directing comes with awareness of the benefits of personal control. The bargain that a self-directive person makes with life is, "I will direct my ideas and efforts toward accomplishment. I will not be defeated by difficulties or discouragement." Self effective begins with the desire to be self-directing.

Self effectiveness (or self efficacy) is trusting my ability to plan and take actions that will be successful with a goal, challenge or opportunity that I value enough to invest time, effort and ego. Self efficacy is my judgment of my ability to be successful with a specific challenge or goal. Self efficacy also asks **IF** I even care...how many whacks it takes to get a golf ball into a hole or if I can catch fish that I could buy (cleaned) for the cost of a fishing license. Self efficacy influences the goals I set for myself, the effort I make, and how long I persist in the face of obstacles. Do I feel hopeful or defeated? Academic achievement is driven or limited by what I think I have achieved in the past and could now achieve in a specific piece of a curriculum challenge. Efficacy is the self-effective power of a person to achieve **HIS** or **HER** goal. Self-efficacy starts as an evaluation of a potential challenge (and its value) plus self-evaluation of the willingness to give the effort and persistence to overcome obstacles and achieve the goal. Self-efficacy is challenged by the difficulty of a task, a lack of knowledge or skill, and feelings of confidence and/or inadequacy. Students with low self-efficacy will not attempt a given task or will quit early.

Self-evaluations (of potential effectiveness or ineptness) are based on level of desire for the goal, related past success, failures, frustrations and fears. A person's sense of empowerment comes with knowledge, skills, strategies, tools, time, encouragement and help in a friendly and respectful environment. Bullying and harassment are a cancer that cripples or kills student self confidence.

Self efficacy is context-specific self-assessment of competence to perform a specific task. Self-efficacy is a conviction that action will produce the desired results. Self-efficacy may develop as a natural human response to the challenges of life, but the confidence that determined effort will yield good results can also be taught. Self esteem develops with self evaluations that are generalized into a self concept as either a worthwhile person who is lovable and valuable or something less than that. Conditional self esteem means I am worthwhile **if** I win. Difficult self esteem depends upon perfection as the standard of success.

Self efficacy statements are: I am confident that I can write an essay without spelling errors. I am confident that I can solve that math problem. A self-concept statement is: "I'm (not) a good student."

Self effectiveness begins as a sense of responsibility to myself, my needs and goals for today and for my future. Personal freedom, successes and happiness come with willingness to accept responsibility for my own life. To live without goals and effort is a decision to always be a dependent and immature child. A life without commitments to a purpose drifts into "whatever" and "who cares" circumstances. This can create a neglected and difficult life. Wanting self effectiveness means that I want to accept responsibility for my life, treat myself with respect and build a worthwhile life. Purposeful living is to use my powers to set and achieve goals by getting adequate sleep, managing my time, working and saving money, studying, building a career or a business, having a nice home, friends and a love relationship that can build and keep a family. There will never be a better time for me to start a goal directed habit of living than right

now! I can still spend some time goofing off, watching TV or hanging out with friends, but I will not drift.

I do realize that my self-effectiveness is built with knowledge, skills, and the success of a high school diploma. If it is not my goal to graduate in the top half of my class and go to a four-year college, I can be VERY SUCCESSFUL with MY goals and plans. I need skills in math, reading, writing, technology, carpentry, and the other lessons teachers provide to empower me as a capable adult. Everything that I learn or can do empowers me as an effective person--the "can-do kid" and then a "capable adult."

I do realize that to live a purposeful and productive life requires me to be self-disciplined. This means that I first dream my dreams and then manage my own behaviors over time to empower myself and fulfill my dreams. I must discipline myself to do today what I will wish tomorrow that I had done. If I have had the habits of living without a purpose, then I must set realistic goals that give me purpose, hope and motivation. If I am drifting through life without goals or self-discipline, and if I keep doing what I've always done (drifting), I will get what I've always gotten: the helpless failures of a child who is not becoming a capable and independent adult.

Teachers Can Help Kids Build Self Effective Values, Skills and Habits

Adult advocates for kids must see potential--not just problems in a child--and then really care. Change the label. If the kid is framed as "Failure" then relabel the kid as "Mr. Great Potential." Think often with discouraged kids about the bargain they make in goal-setting. "Why spend time in study of what you see as not interesting?" Because you will be eligible to play ball next week... because you could graduate this May 17...and it's easy to miss a little TV or telephone time."

Education builds self-effectiveness. Some students are not aware of the empowering value of their education. To help these kids want their education, a teacher must **first have influence of trust, respect and positive regard with the child.** Three strategies can help build such a relationship:

- 1) Never discipline the child without use of **the "split message"** to say "I respect you, but I don't respect the words that I just heard you use, and I will need to hold you accountable. You are okay, but that language is not okay."
- 2) Make it a point to give the child positive regard with **the 4 Hs**, and this means that you give the child a "Hi, High five, Handshake or Hug when you see him or her.
- 3) Give the child two minutes of your time every school day for two weeks. During this **"two for ten"** time don't talk shop; just get better acquainted on a personal basis. If you are comfortable doing so, share a story about a temporary failure or setback that you have had and how you got past it to succeed. Listen for and try to learn the student's interests and "island of strengths."

Be clear about consequences of drifting through life by asking: "What future will a person have who drifts without goals or who lacks the self-discipline to go after success with goals? I want you to imagine a 30-year-old person (of your gender) who never had

real goals or never took them seriously enough to find any success.” Do not name a real person, please, but describe what life would be like for such a drifter.

Logical conclusion: Not to care about becoming a person who is empowered with knowledge, skills and success experiences as a self effective director and disciplinarian of one’s own life is to want to be a dependent and helpless child forever.

Be clear about the self promises of a self-effective person.

As a capable and effective person I will:

- Set goals and write them down to be accomplished tomorrow, next week, and in the next two months;
- Make lists of daily tasks to assure that I do today what I’ll wish that I had done in the future. I must keep promises to myself and do my daily tasks before I get with friends (in person, by phone or Internet) or with the TV or video games. Otherwise I’m kidding myself about my plans and goals;
- Evaluate my progress, efforts and use of time. Am I doing what is best for me and my future?
- Seek help without giving up responsibility for my life;
- Not be defeated or discouraged by short-term failures, setbacks or social comparisons;
- Exercise and eat (mostly) healthy food, get enough sleep, and not use cigarettes, alcohol or drugs.

Coach students toward hope

Don’t let a child make a general self assessment of defeat: “I can never learn math.” “Oh no, that is not true. Let’s look in your portfolio of progress and see... well, you know this and this and this. At this point I think you know all of your basic math facts except for (this) and (this).” Such an approach reframes the problem from despair into the more hopeful realities of specific successes and challenges. **This puts brackets around what has not yet been learned and disallows generalized despair.**

Give powerful messages of hope:

- Winners are just former losers who didn’t quit.
- Effort is the only tuition this school wants from students.
- When the going gets tough, the tough keep going.
- “Success is not permanent. Failure is never final. Set realistic goals and keep trying.” (wall or desk sign)
- Judgment is knowing what to do next; skill is knowing how to do it; effectiveness (efficacy) is doing it.
- A vision of hope may be for only a minute, but it is the essential minute for success.

A student may be discouraged and not trying because he or she can’t compete for good grades or class rank. Give the student this message: “iForget competing for grade point

average, and just compete against the realities of life to become a capable and effective person. Think like and act like the 'can-do kid' that you are becoming. That is what matters today and will matter after high school is over. At your ten-year graduation class reunion you will not care about your grade point average, class rank, or who was most popular or important. You will care only that you did graduate and have empowered yourself with knowledge, skills, and abilities to establish yourself with a career, a nice home and car, a decent income, self control, self pride and hope."

Why "sell" curriculum to a captive audience who should want to learn? Seeing value in the task, goal or opportunity is the basis for wanting to learn--real motivation. Failing students who are unmotivated does not make a teacher effective. A tough criterion for effective teaching is: "I have taught only after the student has learned." If I want to be as effective in teaching as possible, then I want to teach all of my students all of the time. I will need to do some sales work on the value of my curriculum to empower students as more self-capable and effective. First I need to reevaluate the value of my curriculum into "essential learnings," "nice to know," and "enrichment."

Identify the essential learnings in your curriculum. What do you believe every child must learn and what aspect of No Child Left Behind do you need to teach to every child? **Then ask yourself and clearly know why it is essential for every child to know this material.** For example if you are a secondary social studies teacher, maybe you could access some information about the citizenship test that a foreigner must pass to become an American citizen. Is content related to a citizenship test "essential learning" for our eleventh grade citizens? **Effective teachers can sell kids on the value of curriculum--especially the identified "essential learnings."**

When kids can't measure up, they give up--especially on someone else's goals for them. The goal must belong to the child, and the child must be able to make progress toward the goal. If we want all kids to be goal oriented, hopeful, motivated and making good efforts, then the system needs to be flexible and offer more than one approach to goal possibilities.

Establish a "fail-safe option" of hope. If a student is failing your class on the regular grading system and will lose eligibility to participate in activities, the he/she can pursue a "fail safe" option. This brings the child to your list of "essential learnings" with hope that progress on them will restore a passing grade and eligibility to participate in the activity. Without such a "safety net of hope" students give up, and motivation in school drains right out of them. Then, hopeless, the student quits trying and is just warehoused in school.

Goals must be realistic to the child. If a student is 18 years old and has the credits of a first semester sophomore, it may be unrealistic to pursue a traditional program and then graduate. If honest discussion shows that the student feels no hope for a diploma in a traditional program, then the goal must change...to a G.E.D. (general educational development) or to an alternative school program that accepts both traditional credits and

G.E.D. credits. “This you can do.” “**Can do**” is always more valuable than pipe dreams and “didn’t do.”

A child must think that the effort is worth the outcome. Help the child “see” and “feel” the benefits of success with a goal. “Let’s see, your class will graduate on May 17th. They will put on caps and gowns and come up to the school to be honored, to walk across the stage and get the diploma and then go home to celebrate with their family. Where do you want to be? What will high school graduation do for you? **You can** be there to graduate with your class. Let’s identify the steps that you can start taking today so you can walk across the stage to get your diploma on May 17.”

The steps, like the goal, must be realistic and practical. The discouraged child must feel hopeful about realistic goals, the steps and the effort involved. A discouraged child may need a cheerleader for his/her success. If that is not present at home, then it must be provided in the school. Alternative school teachers already know these things, but *can-do* alternatives could become a bigger part of every school.

When the student is pursuing the wrong goal(s), reframe it. “You have become a real power in this school. I don’t respect the problems that you have caused for our principal and your teachers. But the prank that you pulled shows your ability to be bold, creative, and smart. You were able to plan and do a sophisticated strategy. These are the abilities of a “can-do kid!” You can be a successful student and citizen if you set goals and use your abilities to go after what is good for you and for the school. We must also assure that a student does not see his/her role options as: “clown, bully” or “flunky, dunce.” Where these are the real choices, “flunky, dunce” will never be the preferred choice.

The child must feel empowered in his or her own life. If the student won’t talk and won’t consider hopeful goals, then let him/her sit in your chair and switch roles. “I am wondering about my ability as a teacher, because I have this student (say the child’s name) who is not learning and not trying. I hate to watch him fail; and when he is not successful in learning, I am not successful in teaching so I feel like I have failed too. I wish I could help him find motivation and hope.” This changes the relationship from “fixing a broken child” to the teacher and student becoming partners in problem-solving. These words could only come from a very effective and self-confident teacher.

Working Toward Student Self-Direction and Personal Efficacy as Educational Goals

Learning in schools is usually controlled by adults. Students rarely make decisions about their education. To educate students as thoughtful and responsible citizens, teaching must support some independence, empowerment and student effort. Educators cannot hope for students to become self-directed, motivated learners AND ALSO BE passive consumers of the teachers’ plans and goals. It won’t work.

Effective teaching gives students some control of their own learning; essentially, they direct their own learning processes. When students (just like all of us) are working on

goals they have set for themselves, they are more motivated and achieve more than when working on goals that were set by the teacher. Engaged and effective learning is characteristic of students who feel responsible for their own education. Students need the ability to be self-directed in making choices, planning goals, taking actions and assessing progress. This is more than just showing a little effort on someone else's plans and objectives. Self-directed students feel responsible for their own lives. Behaviors are determined more by the choices of self-directed efforts than an individual's life situation. Educators can support student self-direction and personal effectiveness by giving students some opportunities to take control of their own learning. Giving students self-direction means that we provide opportunities for the student to make decisions and solve problems on their own without being told what to do. We help them to become confident in their abilities to succeed. An effective English teacher had a "requirement" that during the semester each student find a novel or short story that he or she really enjoyed reading and then give a short talk to the class about the story and why he or she liked it. This is pressure (to find your own way in appreciation of reading) with the support of choice, adequate time and coaching.

Successful business men and women make plans, set specific goals, and find strategies that work. There are strategies that all effective doers and learners use: (1) talk yourself through the problem; (2) ask what you know and what you need to find out; (3) identify the main concepts; (4) connect existing pieces of knowledge; and (5) draw conclusions. The SQR3 (survey, question, read, review, recite) supports this approach. It is important to identify the goal or challenge and plan strategies to solve it. Good problem solvers and creators spend time thinking about all aspects of the problem and about strategies to solve that problem.

Self-directed students see their success as a result of their own abilities and efforts; not as "dumb luck." Self-confidence and a feeling of being in control are important. Can-do people realize that their thoughts control actions, and they can positively influence their beliefs, motivations, and performance. Students do better when they feel confidence in themselves. Bullying and harassment cripple or kill these essential school and life skills.

In some situations, students may require extra guidance from teachers in order to self-direct their learning. **Guidance includes helping students develop an awareness of their beliefs about their abilities and about their role in choosing to learn or not to learn.** Self-regulation assumes that students can do self-evaluation of their own learning. This can give the student choices in how he or she decides to "show what you know." The self-control of evaluation can also support the feeling that... "maybe I can do this learning experience and be successful. How much time do I get to succeed?"

As students commit to more ownership of their learning, we must inform parents about the value of personal efficacy (self effectiveness), student self-direction and implications for teaching and learning. Teachers give students opportunities to share control of learning through understanding and mastering specific strategies. Teachers provide students with opportunities to set goals and assess progress with the support of the teacher, peers and parents.

Teachers design instruction for students to:

- Set goals for the improvement of their own learning on a weekly basis and/or nine week quarters. Students set goals, design strategies and identify indicators of success. Students engage in reflective thinking to self-assess progress and time-on-task (effort). Reflect on their own performance by planning, monitoring, and evaluating progress.
- Become co-investigators and investors (of effort) in their own education.
- Ask better questions: As students read, listen and discuss, they may ask, “Do I understand completely? Can I picture or summarize what I am hearing/reading? What am I missing in content, meaning or connections? What can I do? What help do I need?”
- Create a “plan-think-do” portfolio (outline) of progress and success to help “think about thinking.”
- Coordinate long-range curricular planning (students, teachers and parents) together.
- Develop personal efficacy by identifying, valuing, and utilizing dispositions and habits of mind such as:
 - showing how thought affects actions such as believing in one’s ability to succeed; persisting; accepting responsibility for personal actions (plans, efforts, persistence and results);
 - overcoming impulsiveness and fostering deliberateness; becoming more open to others’ ideas; listening; cooperating; and believing in the necessity for precision and clarity of thought.
- Become problem posers, not always relying on the teacher. By sharing some control, teachers empower students to pose problems for themselves and the class to consider in thinking journals, during collaborative problem solving, or as part of their performance assessment.
- Communicate with their parents or guardians to demonstrate the learners’ successes and goals with student-led parent/student conferences.

Teachers will need professional development time to research, implement, and evaluate the above instructional strategies. Administrators and teachers incorporate a coaching model of supervision for the improvement of instruction and for evaluation, thereby encouraging the development of staff’s own personal improvement plans, with post observational conferencing that can be described as a mutually enhancing learning process. Administrators meet with students, teachers, and parents to discuss how to reach the goals of self-regulation, and efficacy in the school at large.

CHALLENGES: In traditional classrooms the teacher is seen as the information giver; knowledge flows from teacher to the student. This supports the flawed idea that, “I taught (dispersed information) but the student did not learn the information. It’s the student’s fault--end of story.” In contrast, the methods used in a collaborative classroom emphasize shared knowledge and decision making. The teacher has the knowledge of content, skills, and instruction, but values the contribution students can make. *Facilitated learning requires teachers to share power by giving students choices in setting goals,*

activities, time on task, and evaluations. This may not be the approach within the self-effectiveness nor the comfort zone of the traditional teacher. Those teachers could have difficulty learning how to share control of instruction with students. Teachers are taught to make the decisions in the classroom. Helping students make their own decisions will conflict with some teachers' learned experiences as well as their feelings about being in charge. The reorientation towards a student-owned classroom requires not only a cognitive but an affective reorientation as well. Some teachers did not have this experience as students in K-12 or college classrooms. Finding time to plan collaborative instruction is also a challenge.

The No Child Left Behind mandates have hurt the self-efficacy, confidence and enthusiasm of some teachers who may feel controlled, angry, invalidated, and less confident. N.C.L.B. has not been "sold" to educators any more than the value of most curriculum has been "sold" to most students. The more paranoid and controlling a building administrator is about N.C.L.B. accountability; the more likely some teachers may feel that their credibility, respect and self-empowerment has been stolen. The only answer to this dilemma is strong, positive and supportive administrative leadership. Administrators have sometimes told teachers that parents are not keeping their best children at home; they send us the best they have. The present generation of teachers are the best educated with research and technology in the history of the profession. We need to trust them as much as possible. N.C.L.B. accountability? Effective educational leadership may give teachers gentle pressure with a lot of support.

Students who rely on teachers to give them the comfort of direction and information will need to start asking themselves, "What do I want to learn? How can I prove that I have learned? What can I do before I ask for help?"

Efficacy and self-direction are supported when students are allowed to choose some of their goals, strategies and evaluation processes. When it supports "student buy-in to learning" consider allowing students to form small groups based upon preference for the work of several learning tasks. Positive and functional group interaction will support hopeful self-talk and build confidence with social interaction. Group whining or bullying support negative self-talk and the self concept of defeat. Personal efficacy means taking control of one's destiny.

We can help students develop an awareness of their own thinking and learning processes. We can help them to self-evaluate the effectiveness of the strategies they use in reaching the goals they have set.

Self effectiveness Planning and Discussion Chart

Coaching for Efficacy

Goal

Strategies

My assets/resources (Help)

My needs/deficits

My level of desire 1-10

My level of confidence 1-10 Confidence is based in...

My level of 1-10 doubt (starting the task) Doubts are based in...

My level of 1-10 discouragement /frustration during the task

Difficulties/Progress

Messages of hope

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