

Chapter 49

Self-Efficacy and the Future Selves Construct: Strategies in Support of Adult Learners' Academic Performance

Vincent Stokes

DePaul University, USA

ABSTRACT

This chapter assesses and evaluates whether or not positive interfaces between adult learners and their instructors and academic advisors affect their learning experience and the concept of their possible positive future selves. This chapter promotes the importance of strategies that support self-efficacy and the future selves construct, and raises awareness of the impact this concept can have on undergraduate adult learners' academic and personal success. In addition, this chapter focuses on an in-depth perspective from the undergraduate adult learner as to whether or not they believe they were supported by educators with regards to developing or strengthening self-efficacy and the future selves construct, and whether or not they believed these factors impacted their academic performance. The aim is to enhance the abilities of instructors and contribute ideas to full and part-time faculty members by sharing strategies to enhance teaching efforts that positively impact learning for the undergraduate adult learner.

INTRODUCTION

Any student pursuing a higher education, especially adult students taking extra effort to attain and pursue an education, want to experience academic success to develop the best future possible self (or self-image) that they can. That is why all of the time, effort and money is spent to pursue a higher education. This chapter assesses and evaluates the experiences of undergraduate adult students to determine how self-efficacy and the “future selves construct” (Leondari, 2007, pp. 17-26) impacted their academic performance based on their perspectives. Personal information and feedback from adult learners is analyzed to assess whether or not they feel that the promotion of self-efficacy and a concept of their possible

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positive “future selves” (Leondari, 2007, pp. 17-26) are effective for their learning. In addition, it assesses whether undergraduate adult learners feel that educators focus on these psychological aspects to impact their learning, performance and academic success.

The emotional challenges and needs of adult learners in higher education are also assessed. Adult learners experience emotional cultural demands in relation to the collegiate setting. Overall, the focus in this area is on adult theories, life experiences, and teaching strategies that develop meaningful instruction in higher education settings from the vast knowledge base of adult academia.

When educators focus on encouraging and supporting self-directed learning and a future image of one’s self, the impact on learning can be critical. It is critical to actively promote self-efficacy and the “future selves construct” (Leondari, 2007, pp. 17-26) by using encouraging and motivating speech. Some learners have never had anyone to positively reinforce their ability to learn and to succeed.

Based on my experience as an adult student and a visiting faculty member at DePaul University, I have become aware of a need for promoting self-efficacy and the future selves construct. This is confirmed by Bandura’s definition. “Perceived self-efficacy is defined as people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives. Self-efficacy beliefs determine how people feel, think, motivate themselves and behave. Such beliefs produce these diverse effects through four major processes. They include cognitive, motivational, affective and selection processes” (Bandura, 1994, p.77). My personal considerations of the importance of the future selves construct is stated in the words of Rossiter, introduced by Hazel Markus and Paula Nurius (1986): “...possible selves refer to the future-oriented components of the self-concept. Possible selves are an individual’s conceptions of future selves, including the selves that are ideal and hoped for, as well as those possible selves that one fears or dreads” (Rossiter, 2007, p.5). Self-concept is an idea of the self constructed from the beliefs one holds about oneself and the responses of others. These beliefs can be nurtured by the facilitators of learning as part of a humanist education approach, which also considers the key principles of adult learning (Knowles, 1980).

I have experienced learning without these components and it leaves much to be desired from the learner’s standpoint. These components, crucial in my opinion, enhance the level of student participation, confidence, and motivation, and it also impacts academic success. The educator’s enthusiasm, empathy and personal experiences are contributing factors towards helping the adult learner realize options that they may have never considered possible for themselves. More importantly, it helps the adult educator create a safe, comfortable learning environment.

I actively promote self-efficacy and the future selves construct in my current practice by using encouraging and motivating speech. Some learners have never had anyone positively reinforce their ability to learn and to succeed. In my teaching experiences, some of my students have reported to me and to staff members that their interactions with me as an adult educator have been the source of new positive possible selves. Also, as a result, I have personally witnessed their level of improvement or growth with self-efficacy. This is evidenced by changes in their speech, words of power, and testaments to how they use what they’ve learned in all areas of their life. This component also entails the learner’s mindset regarding the fixed mindset and the growth mindset, and how the educator can play a role in helping to cultivate the learner’s mindset towards growth to enhance the learner’s chances for success.

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