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# The Evaluation of an After–School Self–Efficacy Program for Middle–Schoolers

Atia D. Mark, EdD

## Problem

Despite curriculum development designed to improve self–efficacy, most middle–schoolers are still perceived to have low self–efficacy (Nova Scotia Education and Early Childhood Development, 2015). Students' self–efficacy beliefs positively relate to academic success (Hwang, Choi, Lee, Culver, & Hutchison, 2016; Ker, 2016; Mann, 2013; Lucio, Hunt, & Bornovalova, 2012).

A private after–school mentorship (ASM) program in Eastern Canada provides an innovative curriculum to increase self–efficacy in middle–school students. However, it was never formally evaluated.

## Purpose

The purpose of this mixed–methods study was to provide curriculum writers, school administrators, and policy makers with a scientific assessment of a model curriculum intended to increase self–efficacy in middle–school students.

## Significance

Specific benefits gained through the increased understanding of curriculum innovation designed to improve self–efficacy include

1. Targeted efforts to address low self–efficacy.
2. Preparing students for academic success in a global economy.
3. Guided efforts of instructional developers who aim to deliver essential skills for improved learning.
4. A formal evaluation report to key program stakeholders on the outcomes of ASMs self–efficacy curriculum.

## Social Change

The implications for positive social change involve the further understanding of how self–efficacy curricula can help students become fully functioning, self assured individuals who approach new challenges as tasks to master and not as an undesirable undertaking to avoid (Lee, Lee, & Bong 2014).

## Conceptual Framework

Bandura's (2006) **self–efficacy** concept holds that treatment influences can alter the strength of self–efficacy. Self–efficacy is an individual's belief to achieve a particular outcome, based on one's abilities. Four key elements include

1. Verbal persuasion
2. Modeling of tasks
3. Overcoming negative emotions
4. Mastery experience

## Relevant Scholarship

The formal evaluation of curricula designed to improve self–efficacy is necessary (Fernández-Díaz et al., 2017; Hushman & Marley, 2015; Winnaar et al., 2015) to provide a clear judgement on its value to program stakeholders (Worthen et al., 1996).

Self–efficacy curricula have successfully

1. Motivated students to complete homework and improved learning outcomes in schools (Tas, Sungur-Vural & Öztekin, 2014).
2. Provided students with coping strategies to deal with risky situations and manage their emotions in times of anxiety (Soni, 2015).
3. Shown to be important to the social learning environment (Howardson & Behrend, 2015).
4. Positively linked to peer and family support among middle–schoolers (Martinez et al., 2017).

## Research Questions

**RQ1:** Quantitative: What are participants' mean, mode, and median self–efficacy scores before and after 10–weeks of participation in ASM using the *Children's Hope Scale*?

**RQ2:** Qualitative Interview: From the perspective of the lead teacher–mentor, what changes in students' self–efficacy, if any, are apparent?

**RQ3:** Qualitative Interview: From the perspective of adult–caregivers, what changes in children's self–efficacy, if any, are apparent?

## Participants

**Convenience Sample:** Participants included 7 adult–caregivers, the lead teacher–mentor, and 10 middle–school students. The sample was drawn from a target population of primary stakeholders, namely, the 10 student participants registered for the Winter 2017 session.

## Procedures

Students responded to a 6–item *Children's Hope Scale* (CHS; Synder et al., 1997) survey before and after 10 weeks of program participation.

Semi–structured interviews with the lead teacher–mentor and 7 adult–caregivers occurred once in 3rd week and once in the 9th and 10th week. The 13–item interview protocols were aligned with the conceptual framework.

## Analysis

Descriptive statistics were computed: mean, median, and mode self–efficacy scores from the CHS. The small sample size did not allow for inferential statistics analysis.

The qualitative analysis of interview transcripts was guided by *a priori* codes (based on the conceptual framework) and emergent codes. Themes and patterns were thus identified (LeCompte & Preissle, 1993).

## Findings

The comparison of self–efficacy scores from the CHS before and after program participation did not show remarkable differences. However, an upward shift in CHS scores after 10–weeks of program participation bolstered the qualitative findings.

Qualitative findings included

1. Regular quality feedback delivered in a manner that has personal meaning to children (Chapman & Campbell, 2016, p. 22–23).
2. Modeled standards during program sessions.
3. Positive self–talks to overcome negative emotions.
4. Public speaking training that supported mastery experience.

## Interpretation

Consistent with Bandura's (2006) theory, the findings suggest **ASMs curriculum and instructional design beneficial** to improving self–efficacy among middle–school students. There is educational merit to the caring relationships formed among the lead teacher–mentor, students, adult–caregivers, and their community.

## Limitation

Interviewee bias may have caused participants to answer questions according to what they thought the interviewer wanted to hear or interviewees may have felt uncomfortable expressing themselves to a stranger regarding their personal experiences.

The trustworthiness of interview data could have been improved by allowing interviewees to summarize their thoughts at the end of the interview (Alshenqeeti, 2014).

## Recommendations

Recommendations for future educational research and practice include

1. Consider ASM as part of a school–based curriculum to increase program availability to all children.
2. Consider peer–on–peer mentoring as a means of ensuring program sustainability.
3. Implement a continuous evaluation system that includes all primary stakeholders.

## Acknowledgements

**Committee:** Steve Wells, Chair; Gloria Jacobs, Member; Michael Brunn, URR Member