



POSITIVE REFLECTION AND ACADEMIC SELF-EFFICACY

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INTRODUCTION

According to the NIH (2017), one in three teenagers suffers from anxiety. One source of this anxiety is school. Overachievement culture in education can lead to maladaptive attribution: students view failures as a personal shortcomings and successes as a products of innate ability (Dweck, 2006). This leads to low self-esteem and little sense of agency at school.

Academic self-efficacy (ASE) refers to students' beliefs about their capacity to perform academically (Bandura, 1977).

- ASE beliefs are a key actor in students' self-actualization.
- Therefore, teachers must prioritize fostering positive ASE beliefs.

Four sources of ASE (Bandura, 1977):

- Physiological state: subjects' responses to stressors in the environment.
- Verbal persuasion: another person attempts to convince the subject that they can or cannot perform a task.
- Vicarious experience: watching others perform a task.
- Performance accomplishments: Repeated attempts at a task. Most potent source of ASE.

Challenges for teachers:

- ASE is influenced by peer groups, family relationships, previous experiences at school, racial identity, and gender (Usher and Pajares, 2006).
- By comparison, teacher ability to influence ASE is limited. The development of ASE beliefs is a cyclical process, so timing and design of interventions must be precise and can easily misalign within the cycle.

Effective methods for teachers:

- Provide routine opportunities for performance accomplishments.
- Encourage adaptive attribution of performance accomplishments through reflection.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this study was to investigate one way in which teachers might be able to encourage positive ASE belief systems. The researcher used a quick-writing intervention designed to foster positive ASE beliefs in students.

Research questions:

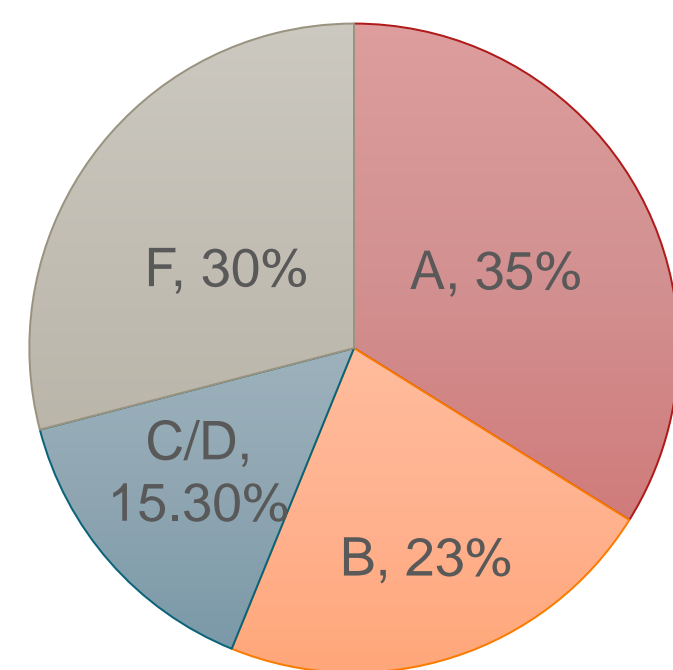
- Does engaging in quick writes about prior academic experiences affect students' ASE?
- Does the nature of these reflections mediate these effects?

METHODS

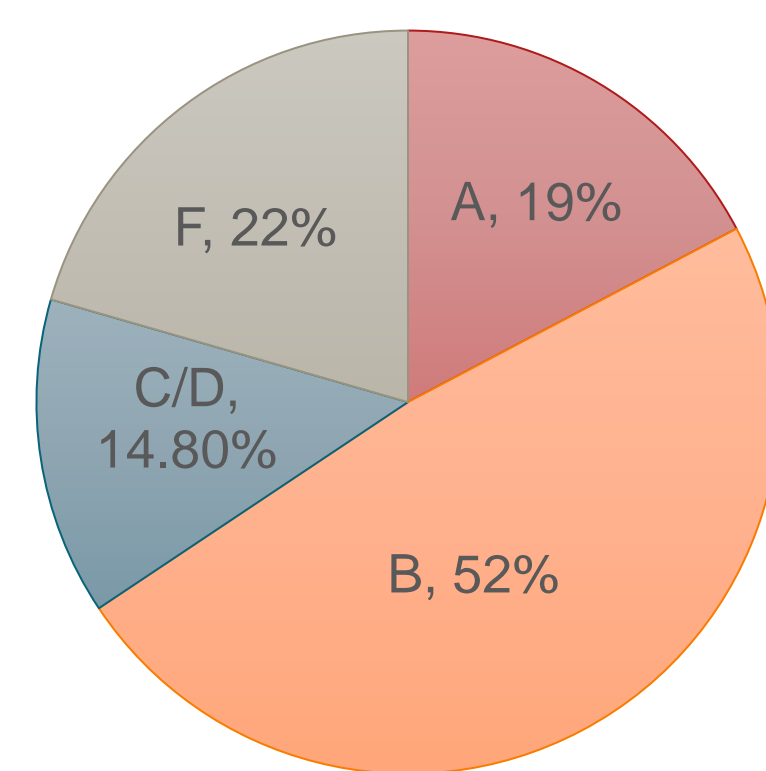
Participants

- Urban high schoolers in the Southwestern US.
- Control group comprised of researcher's 1st and 3rd periods; experimental group was researcher's 7th period class.
- Control group was higher achieving.
- Control group average grade: C
- Experimental group average grade: C-

1st semester grades – control group



1st semester grades – experimental group



Instruments

- Survey: academic self-efficacy scale survey the day before the intervention began, and the day after the intervention period ended.
- 12 subscales for dimensions of the academic experience. There were 2-7 questions per subscale.
- Reliability was low across all subscales.

Procedures

- Control and experimental groups met for 50 minutes each day.
- Control group periods were at the beginning of the day; experimental group met during the last period of the day.

Intervention

- Experimental group was given daily quick-writing prompts with a 6-minute time limit.
- Prompts were constructed based on the survey.

RESULTS

- Regardless of whether students reflected on successful or unsuccessful academic experiences, their ASE was not significantly affected by the quick-writing intervention.
- Reliability coefficients for all 12 of the subscales on the measure were low.
- The experimental group did not outperform the control group on the post-test.
- There were no significant changes in either group from pre- to post-test.

DISCUSSION

- The survey proved to be an unreliable measure of these students' ASE. This could have resulted from survey fatigue, inattentiveness, or confusion due to the high number of negatively worded questions on the measure.
- This study did not control for race, socioeconomic status, gender, or peer group type. All of these have been proven to potentially influence students' ASE. Thus, the intervention was relatively ineffectual by comparison.
- If students' beliefs about their ability to succeed in school do not match their previous experiences in school, reflection in quick-writes cannot serve as an adequate reenactment of performance accomplishments.
 - In this study, a majority of students' reflections were positive. However, the experimental group was relatively low-achieving. Therefore, this miscalibration may have rendered the intervention ineffective.
- Feelings of overwhelm can have a detrimental impact on the development of positive ASE beliefs. Throughout the semester, students reported an increasing sense of academic overwhelm in anecdotal settings. This could have compensated for any growth in ASE that the students might have exhibited.
- A large percentage of the experimental group reported, in an informal check-in exit ticket, that they simply do not enjoy English class. This may have led to a low level of engagement with the quick writes.

Limitations

- For logistical purposes, the control and experimental groupings needed to be contained within class periods. The researcher teaches three sections of honors English, the split between control and experimental groups was uneven. Thus, the experimental group was disproportionately small.
- Students in the experimental group were generally fatigued by the time they met for class during the last period of the day.
- Groups were relatively homogenous – white, middle class.
- Short data collection period – 20 intervention days.

Implications and recommendations

- QW's could be useful for other things, but reflection is not a pathway to fostering positive ASE beliefs.
- Try more direct approaches, such as repeated opportunities for performance accomplishments, rather than having the mediating factor of writing and reflection.