Validity of Self-Efficacy as a Predictor of Writing Performance

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This exploratory field study examined Bandura's (1977) self-efficacy model to determine how well efficacy expectations predicted writing performance, and whether cognitive (deep processing) and affective (anxiety) variables were related to efficacy expectations. Other variables assessed with respect to efficacy and writing performance were race, sex, an English entrance exam (ACT) score, and locus of control. Subjects were college freshmen enrolled in introductory writing courses. The major findings were that (a) efficacy expectations predicted writing on phase 1 (beginning of writing course) data, but not phase 2 (end of course); (b) depth of processing, locus of control, and anxiety were related in varying degrees to amount of efficacy and to the accuracy of efficacy predictions of writing; (c) subjects significantly overestimated their writing performance, the discrepancy being even larger at phase 2. These results provide partial support for the construct validity of self-efficacy and suggest that cognitive and affective variables influence efficacy.

Self-efficacy theory (Bandura, 1977) stresses the influence of personal expectations on subsequent performance. Bandura maintains that expectations of personal competence greatly affect one's behavior. He has classified these expectations as "efficacy expectations," the conviction that one can perform the behaviors required to obtain desired outcomes, and "outcome expectations," the belief that certain behaviors will produce desired outcomes.

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Since its appearance in 1977, self-efficacy theory has been successfully used to interpret and change behavior in a variety of situations, such as studies of snake phobics (Bandura & Adams, 1977), agoraphobics (Bandura, Adams, Hardy, & Howells, 1980), smoking and weight control studies (Chambliss & Murray, 1979a, 1979b), and programs to modify nonassertive behavior (Kazdin, 1979). The utility of the theory in these situations seems to suggest that efficacy does affect behavior. Bandura (1977) has demonstrated that efficacy 'expectations act as accurate predictors of subsequent behavior. For example, he found a very high congruence between snake phobics' efficacy expectations and their subsequent approach behaviors. Further, several authors have concluded that efficacy expectations are a very useful construct for understanding and treating psychological disorders (Bandura, 1977; Kendall & Korgeski, 1979; Rimm & Masters, 1979).

The literature suggests that efficacy expectations can be utilized in all types of behavioral situations. For example, efficacy expectations might provide a useful model for diagnosis and treatment in the classroom. Lalonde (1980) reported that a measure of the academic self-efficacy of secondary school students was a good predictor of grade point average and postsecondary school formal education plans. Harmon (1980) has suggested that self-efficacy theory be combined with behavioral analysis of student performance to facilitate an improved instructional technology.

The need for a psychological theory in the academic area of students' writing performance has been noted by some investigators of writing (Denman, 1975, 1978; Goodman, 1976; Rinderer, 1979), who call for studies of the influence of self-concept and expectations on writing behavior. Self-efficacy theory, particularly efficacy expectations, might be an extremely useful psychological model for understanding writing. Furthermore, if it could be demonstrated that self-efficacy accurately explains writing behavior, then Bandura's theory would receive additional validation. Therefore, a major purpose of this study was construct validation of self-efficacy theory in an academic setting. It is a basic goal of this research to demonstrate that efficacy expectations predict college students' writing.

Furthermore, we believe that certain factors may moderate the efficacy-writing relationship. Maddux et al. (1981) found that outcome expectations influenced efficacy expectations such that individuals who knew what behaviors would result in desired outcomes also possessed greater positive efficacy expectations than individuals who had poor outcome expectations. Chambliss and Murray (1979a, 1979b) reported an interaction between Rotter's (1966) locus of control, which Bandura (1977) regards as conceptually synonymous with outcome expectations, and