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Support of student self-efficacy in the public school classroom

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Support of Student Self-Efficacy in the

Public School Classroom


Action Thesis Submitted in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
For the Degree of Master of Arts in Education

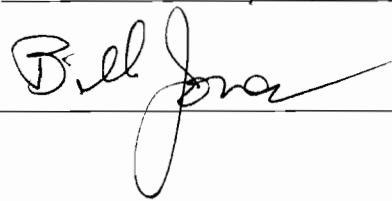
California State University at Monterey Bay
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Abstract

This action thesis project is submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the Master of Arts in Education degree at California State University, Monterey Bay. This project is “Support of Student Self-Efficacy in the Public School Classroom.”

This action research project is an analysis of my practice as a classroom teacher with the focus being on the support of self-efficacy of students in the elementary school classroom setting. The daily analysis of my practice in the elementary classroom revealed to me what I was doing to support student self-efficacy during lessons. The analysis also focused on the development of classroom management that reinforced student willingness to try academic tasks.

The two-hour language arts lesson that was analyzed on a daily basis revealed to me that the language that a teacher uses in the classroom can enable students to focus and try to perform academic tasks. This action research project made me aware of the impact that a classroom teacher can have on encouraging students to be active learners.

The Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold resulted from the findings of this action research project. *The Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* is supported by scholarly studies. *The Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* is presently in use in elementary classrooms in this area. The findings of this study suggest that the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* supports student self-efficacy.

Table of Contents

Support of Student Self-Efficacy in the	i
Public School Classroom	i
Chapter 1	1
Overview of Problem and Purpose	1
Research Question	2
Personal History	2
Definition of Terms.....	3
Parameters of Study	4
Overview of Project	4
Chapter 2: Literature Review.....	6
Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures.....	10
Procedures in Detail.....	10
Setting	11
Participants.....	11
Data Collection	12
Data Analysis	13
Chapter 4.....	14
Results.....	14
An Active Learner claims their power to learn.....	15
An Active Learner calms down inside.....	16
You are the future	17
An Active Learner opens their mind.....	19

An Active Learner sits up straight	20
An Active Learner tries to do the learning task:	21
An Active Learner knows it is their responsibility to learn:	21
Go Active Learners	23
Discussion	27
Chapter 5	29
Discussion & Action Plan	29
Appendices	32
References	33

Chapter 1

This action thesis is created for the use of teachers or anyone who may have an interest in self-efficacy in their work setting. “Self-efficacy is rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by ones actions” (Pajares & Bandura, 2006, p.3). “Self-efficacy refers to the confidence of a person in their capabilities to complete a given task successfully” (Narciss, 2004, p.4). Analysis of my practice is focused on the support of self-efficacy in the public school classroom. “Self-efficacy is widely acknowledged as one of the most important developments in the history of psychology. Today, it is simply not possible to explain phenomena such as human motivation, learning, self-regulation and accomplishment without discussing the role played by self-efficacy beliefs” (Pajares, 2006, p.ix). There are many current studies that indicate that self-efficacy plays a role in student success. A Korean study notes that self-efficacy in students “fluctuated significantly around examinations” (Bong, 2005, p.1) and an international study found self-efficacy to have an impact on children’s “academic self-regulatory efficacy” (Pastorelli, 2001, p.12). Self-efficacy is important to consider in the academic setting because it is another way to support student success.

Overview of Problem and Purpose

The purpose of this action research project was for me to analyze my teaching practice in terms of the support of student self-efficacy in the public school classroom. I wanted to assess my support of this important psychological construct within my daily practice. This action research project gave me the opportunity to scrutinize and evaluate my daily practice and improve it as the project progressed.

Research Question

My overall research question was as follows: How did my teaching support student self-efficacy? Within this main question, I focused more specifically on what ways my practice supported student self-efficacy through the following mechanisms:

- Lev Vygotsky's language mediation (Gredler & Shields, 2008).
- Feedback opportunities (Narciss, 2004).
- Teacher expectations (Rubie-Davis, 2006).
- Goal setting (Page-Voth, 1999).
- Support of student culture (Gillard, Moore & Lemieux, 2008).

Since self-efficacy is "rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by ones actions" (Pajares & Bandura, 2006, p.3), how does my practice support student self-efficacy in the public school classroom?

Personal History

In my eleven years as a classroom teacher, nineteen years as a music teacher in Salinas, California, eleven of which were at Hartnell College as a staff instructor, many years of business experience in banking, thirty years co-owner of a family business in Seaside, California and a parent of two grown children, I have always been interested in human potential. My interest in human potential has grown over time. My service in the elementary classroom in the public school setting has made me aware students respond to positive reinforcement. A particular incident that brought the issue of student self-efficacy to my attention was the following comment written by a student of mine a few years back: "I thought I wasn't going to be a wonderful person then my teacher told me I am the future. I believed her and felt better for myself." This made me feel like the

experience that this student had within my classroom was a positive one. I wanted to continue to cultivate a practice that would allow other students to have a similar experience. I wanted to extend the experience to all of my students.

Definition of Terms

Self-efficacy: In this study the changes were focused on student's being willing to try academic tasks in an elementary classroom. "Self-efficacy is rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by ones actions" (Pajares & Bandura, 2006, p.3). "Self-efficacy refers to the confidence of a person in their capabilities to complete a given task successfully" (Narciss, 2004, p.4).

Feedback opportunities: When a teacher gives students feedback on their work it allows them to see what they need to do to either maintain their effort or to redirect their efforts in terms of academic performance. "The term *informative tutoring feedback* (ITF) refers to feedback types providing strategically useful information that guides the learner toward successful task completion" (Narciss, 2004, p.3).

Goal setting: Goal setting is when a desired outcome is outlined and modeled for students. Goal setting is an important strategy in elementary classroom settings. When behavior and performance goals are set, students have a scaffold that suggests a course of academic action that may lead them to increased academic performance. Academic performance in the classroom is "a goal directed activity" "Specific goals" (p.3) that allow students to learn with "a directional function" (Page-Voth, 1999, p.4) assist in student academic performance (Page-Voth, 1999).

Active Learner: An active learner is a student that is practicing strands of the Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold, and who is taking an active role in their

learning during lessons. Active Learner was a term that came to my attention in the de Haan study which was a study about action learning (de Haan, 2006). This study was a study about adult learning but the term could be applied to learning action in an elementary classroom.

Parameters of Study

The *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* that emerged during this action research project resulted in the development and design of a helpful classroom tool created to support student's self-efficacy. Its design supports specific classroom behaviors that allow students to focus and attempt the many academic tasks that they face every day in their elementary classroom. The use of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* is supported by the work of Lev Vygotsky. Vygotsky viewed the teacher as "the agent that guides the child's thinking" (Gredler & Shields, p. 89). The daily use of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* at the beginning and during the day's lessons provides students with a set of behaviors that guide their efforts in their academic tasks. New teachers that are just learning how to manage their classrooms may find the use of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* helpful to their practice. Experienced teachers may find it helpful in that it is a slightly different approach than they may have been using, (Gredler & Shields, 2008; Narciss, 2004; Page-Voth, 1999; Rubie-Davis, 2006).

Overview of Project

Chapter one includes statement of purpose, introduction to the issue, overview of the problem and purpose, research question, personal history, and definition of terms. Chapter two is the literature review that aligns the study, its

problem, purpose and research question within the academic literature. The third chapter explains the qualitative research design that was used for this action research project. The fourth chapter reveals the results and findings of this study. The fifth chapter presents my plan for future action of the use of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold*.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

In this section, I will be reviewing the literature that informs my research question how did my teaching support student self-efficacy? I will look first at the literature that identifies and defines self-efficacy. I will then discuss the literature that explains Vygotsky's perspective of the teacher in the classroom. In addition, I will discuss research that pertains to feedback opportunities, teacher expectations and goal setting. Finally, I will conclude with research that pertains to student culture.

“Self-efficacy is widely acknowledged as one of the most important developments in the history of psychology. Today it is simply not possible to explain phenomena such as human motivation, learning, self regulation and accomplishment without discussing the role played by self-efficacy beliefs” (Pajares, 2006, p.ix). Self-efficacy is rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by ones actions” (Pajares & Bandura, 2006, p.3). Research indicates that the impact that self-efficacy has on student performance is significant. Self-efficacy is a psychological construct that everyone has and that every one is effected by. It is an internal process that is directed from within the mind (Pastorelli, 2001; Scholz, Guitierrez, Sud, & Schwarzer, 2002). What might assist connection with individual self-efficacy? Can student self-efficacy be supported in the elementary classroom?

“Vygotsky viewed the teacher as the model from who the child internalizes ways of thinking.” He viewed the teacher as “the agent that guides the child's thinking” (Gredler & Shields,2008, p.89). The teacher is the mediator of the classroom setting and uses “simple signs that manage and control one's thinking on cognitive tasks” (p.51).

There are different academic mechanisms that can assist children in their thinking. One of these academic mechanisms feedback.

In a study of the relationship between teacher feedback and student self-efficacy and performance, it was found that students with low self-efficacy do not benefit from the feedback as much as students with medium or higher self-efficacy. The outcome of this study was the findings that informative tutoring feedback could benefit student progress depending on their level of self-efficacy (Narciss, 2004).

Feedback during the course of instruction may or may not benefit student self-efficacy. Feedback is still an important academic mechanism that may offer some support to student self-efficacy.

Teacher expectations is another academic mechanism that provides guidance to students in their academic tasks. That student self-perception in academic areas “appeared to change over the year in relation to teachers’ expectations” is important and has implications for practicing teachers as well as for preservice teacher education programs (Rubie-Davies, 2006). According to research, teacher expectations are important to students.

Goal setting is an academic mechanism that helps strengthen student learning experiences. “Establishing goals that specify what will be included in a composition can have a salutatory effect on these students’ writing” (Page-Voth, 1999, p.15). Goal setting is an important strategy for an educator to use to help students incorporate into their learning. When a student is given a specific goal to accomplish, it helps them to see what they need to do to succeed that goal. Goal setting helps them set into motion the action they need to take as an active participant in their learning. Goal setting can be used to

increase student's productivity (Page-Voth, 1999). When students experience increased productivity, their self-efficacy may increase because "whatever factors serve as guides and motivators, they are rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by ones actions" (Pajares & Bandura, 2006, p.3).

Student culture is important to student self-efficacy. Student culture may mediate the way that the classroom is run. The culture of a student and their family has a direct effect on how they respond to academic elements presented in the classroom setting. Educators must be culturally aware of their students. It is important for an educator to be aware of "the importance of respecting and researching parent' beliefs and preferences and the need to shape the curriculum and teaching based on family values and view points" (Gillard, Moore & Lemieux, 2008, p.7). Vygotsky's perspective emphasizes that "the development of the child's thinking depends on his mastery of the social means of thinking, that is, on his mastery of speech....The child lacks the basic tools of thinking in the print language of the culture" (Gredler & Shields, p. 120). Students with non-standard English or another home language base face a particular challenge in the public school classroom. The educator in this setting must be aware of student culture and the importance of the support of that culture.

The literature that supports this study emphasizes Bandura's and Pajare's definition of self-efficacy, Vygotsky's language mediation, feedback opportunities, teacher expectations, goal setting and support of student culture. I choose this plan of action because my classroom is where I can make a difference for students. I want to determine if my practice supports the important psychological construct self-efficacy. I would like to analyze and evaluate my work in terms of continued improvement. It is also

important for me to endeavor to add a study that might provide insight for other educators who have an interest in self-efficacy.

Chapter 3: Methodology and Procedures

This was a qualitative teacher action research project. The research question that was analyzed was, how did my teaching support student self-efficacy in my elementary classroom? This study was a self-study of my teaching practice at a rural elementary school.

Procedures in Detail

My basic teaching for the language arts block began at 9:00 a.m. every morning. Students would line up to enter my classroom. I would greet them at the door and ask them to come into the classroom. They would be directed by me to get out their Open Court text books and work books. The scripted, mandated lesson was followed on a daily and weekly basis as I was following a pacing guide. I adhered strictly to the pacing guide. Lessons are periodically monitored by the administration of my school. The daily language arts lessons have a vocabulary section, a comprehension component and a writing component. Most lessons took five to seven days to complete.

I alternate between direct instruction to the whole group of students to creating opportunities for peer exchange between students. There were times in my teaching that the students were doing the listening to the instruction and other times the classroom was buzzing with student peer exchanges during the language arts lesson. My teaching incorporates opportunities for visual learners to illustrate their favorite part of stories that were read by drawing a picture of it as well as writing several sentences about it. I also monitor student progress during lessons by walking around the entire room. I also monitor peer exchange to encourage students to work on the topic that was being taught. I

paused to look at student work and give students feedback during the language arts lesson.

What began to be different for me during the instruction of this language arts block during this action research project is that I started to use mediated language to guide student performance.

Setting

This study took place at a rural elementary school. This school serves students from kindergarten to sixth grade. There are over six hundred students at this school. This school has been in existence for over fifty years. It has changed in demographics over time. The demographic configuration of the school is approximately 1% African American, 2% Asian, 2% Filipino, 76% Hispanic or Latino, 1% Pacific Islander, 19% White (not Hispanic) 67% economically disadvantaged, 47% English learners and 5% students with disabilities. There are about thirty three teachers with full credentials.

Participants

The participants of this study were my 4th grade students. The class that I taught for this action research project was a combination class of 3rd and 4th grade students. The flow of the classroom day is one that entails students leaving my classroom at 9:00 a.m. The third grade homeroom students leave my classroom and go to 3rd grade teachers for their reading block. Fourteen students remain from the homeroom group and an additional fifteen students come to my classroom for reading instruction. The total number of students in the two hour reading block is twenty nine. It is my instruction of these twenty nine fourth grade students during this language block that I studied. Twenty three of these students were English language learners. Seventy-nine percent of my

reading class was English language learners. Twenty-one percent were English only students.

Data Collection

I created my action research data from my two-hour block of teaching the above students. I recorded as much of what I said and did during this block of instruction that I could remember every day. The notes were made at the end of the instruction when I had time to enter them. They were printed out from the classroom computer and brought to my personal computer to be transcribed into observations in the evening. These daily journals resulted in one hundred fourteen pages of observations about my daily practice. These daily journal entries were coded into categories. The different categories were analyzed in regard to self-efficacy. They include:

- Feedback opportunities,
- Teacher expectations;
- Goal setting.

Student work was examined with respect to the student efforts to complete tasks. What this means is that, if students attempted to complete their class work, their attempts to complete the work was analyzed in terms of self-efficacy and not assessed quantitatively. This study was a reflection of my practice in the classroom and support of student self-efficacy in my practice. Students' classroom behaviors that were observed were:

- Students' attempts to accomplish a task or try including
- Students' responses to teacher questions,
- Students' interactions during peer exchange,

- Students' body language in the classroom as they were attempting different academic tasks.

Data Analysis

Thematic data analysis was used in this study. The analysis was primarily focused on my practice. I started to process my observation notes during my brief breaks from teaching. I would then take the notes home and transcribe them into action research observations. The notes were then coded and then analyzed for commonalities which will be examined in the findings.

Chapter 4: Results

In the beginning of this study, I did not often see students come into class prepared to learn. Self-efficacy is a person's self-belief based on actual skill of performance. I wondered if I could support student self-efficacy in a way that might motivate student effort during lessons. I often saw students come into class unfocused and scattered. Many times they were unable to focus their minds into their work. The one area of my teaching that I have freedom in is in my management of the classroom. The Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold that is discussed in the results section was applied to this area of my practice.

The use of the Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold was developed over the course of this project. My conceptual framework for organizing this information was to identify the mediated language with the mechanisms identified in the research question "How does my teaching support student self-efficacy?" *The Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* follows:

- *An Active Learner sits up straight.*
- *An Active Learner calms down inside.*
- *An Active Learner opens up their mind.*
- *An Active Learner claims their power to learn.*
- *An Active Learner tries to do the learning task.*
- *An Active Learner knows that it is their responsibility to learn.*
- *Go Active Learners!*
- *You are the future!*

My conceptual concept for organizing this information was to align the observations with the mechanisms in the research question “How did my teaching support student self-efficacy?” The mechanisms that were part of this conceptual concept were:

- Vygotsky’s language mediation
- Feedback opportunities
- Teacher expectations
- Goal setting
- Support of student culture

When this action research project began on November 9, 2007, I was faced with the task of making my notes on my practice after I had taught a block of Language Arts to a group of twenty-seven learners. What I observed in my practice was that I was becoming aware of what I said to students before we began our mandated scripted lessons. As I observed students and how they worked, I tried to become aware of how I supported their self-efficacy. As I considered self-efficacy in the classroom, I tried to picture in my mind what it would be like to be a young learner. Would I have a strong sense of who I was or what I could do? I thought that a young person might like to experience their own sense of self. One thing I thought of is that personal power comes from becoming aware of it in the first place.

An Active Learner claims their power to learn

How could I set a goal that would challenge and motivate students? My first recorded use of claiming personal power began on November 9, 2007. I started to say this to students before they began their work with me. *Let’s claim our personal power.* During the course of this study there were twenty-five references to students claiming

their power. Claiming personal power was mentioned as important to students. This use of language falls into the area of teacher expectations. The teacher expects students to become aware of themselves in their learning process. It is the individual's effort to become aware of themselves in their learning process that will enable them to move forward in terms of personal academic growth.

Students liked to grab a handful of air, pretending that it was their personal power. They liked to bring it down to their center or stomach area and put it inside of themselves. For example, on one occasion, I observed a student, not prompted by me, grab a handful of personal power, tuck it into his center and start to write furiously. Another comment made by a student was that they liked to claim their power on paper. Claiming personal power was a way for students to take action in their learning. The action seemed to help them to be willing to try different academic tasks. It appeared to assist them in connecting with their own effort. I began to use this theme each day as we began our work.

An Active Learner calms down inside

An Active Learner calms down inside began to be used with students on November 9, 2007. When I was considering how unfocused students were when they entered the classroom, I thought that this might help them to be able to be more focused for their lessons. Establishing being calm as a goal for students can have a positive effect on student effort during lessons.

This strand of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* was referred to nineteen times during this action research project. The way that I would model this action would be to take a calming breath, by breathing in and then breathing out and bringing

the calm breath down to my stomach area, where I had just put my personal power.

Students would copy my example and then we would begin our work.

When students would practice calming down in the classroom after claiming their power to learn, the faces of the students would be quiet and focused looking and their ability to listen to directions seemed to be improved. Sometimes when the class would become unfocused, we would use this as a technique to calm the class and refocus ourselves. I would see students use this calm-breath technique in line when they were getting ready to come back to class. It appeared to be of assistance to students in terms of gaining scholarly focus for academic work. A comment made by a student such as “I try my best and calm down,” indicate that calming down was helpful to student focus and attempting to try academic tasks. I also observed a calm, quiet classroom as students worked on various academic tasks. Other comments such as “I calm down inside” and “Everybody was quiet so I can focus” are indicators that calming down was useful to student effort.

You are the future

Everyday of the study I would enter the classroom and reflect on what I might continue to do to support student self-efficacy. One thing that I know as an educator is that students are the future and that is an important fact. I thought that it would be an important thing for them to realize. On November 16, 2007 I added *You Are the Future* to what we said together before we began to use our mandated scripted lessons. This part of the *Active Learner Language Mediation* is essentially feedback and goal setting. I wanted students to know that they in fact, were the future and responsible for carrying the world

forward to the next generation. I also wanted my students to set that saying in their minds as a goal everyday.

The motivational words, “*You Are the Future!*” is a form of language mediation that guides students to integrate this important concept into their thoughts. It is important for students to know that their work in the classroom serves a meaningful purpose. Several comments made to me by students over the course of this study were, “I know that I am the future and it really matters what I do. Also, I know I am important to life.” Another student comment was, “I focus because I know I am the future and I am important to life. Also it is more quiet and it helps me learn,” and another comment made was “I focus on There were now three parts to the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* being used daily in my practice. Students seemed to have improved their academic efforts. I noticed that overall, students appeared to be more on task during the lessons.

As the days progressed in this action research project, I kept reflecting on my observations from each lesson. I wondered what else I could add to what we were doing on a daily basis that would add to building student self-efficacy. When I saw students enter my classroom I would observe many of them with sleepy faces. Some times they would be yawning and rubbing their eyes and often they would have an expression of unfocused thinking. As I thought about my work with students it occurred to me that visualizing opening up their beautiful minds might be a good mental action. This strand of the language mediation was goal setting. It was the teacher’s goal to have students open their minds to the different learning tasks that they needed to try and do.

An Active Learner opens their mind

On December 7, 2007 I started to add the theme *An Active Learner Opens Their Mind*. There were sixteen references to this during the course of this action research project. A comment made by a student that made me aware that this might be supportive of student effort was “One thing that helped me learn was opening my mind.” Another comment that indicated that this might be helpful to student learning was “The thing I liked best was to calm down and open my mind.” There were now four working *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* parts in use on a daily basis.

- *An Active Learner claims their power to learn.*
- *An Active Learner calms down inside.*
- *An Active Learner opens their mind.*
- *You are the future!*

Everyday before we began our scripted Open Court language arts lesson, we would repeat the above phrases. Then we would begin our lesson. For me, this created an intensity, from the necessity to observe all of my language arts students with objectivity and clarity of purpose. How was I supporting their self-efficacy? Were the four statements that we were making on a daily basis prior to our district mandated language arts lesson sufficient to make a difference in student performance?

As students entered my classroom, I began to notice, they looked forward to using the Active Learner language mediation before the lesson started. They appeared ready to try the learning task. Their books were open to the correct page and they were either ready to read or write as directed by me.

An Active Learner sits up straight

There were still students that had classroom focus issues. A number of students were in the habit of propping their heads in their hands and lying on top of their desks. It seemed difficult for them to focus and try the academic tasks that we were working on, specifically the Open Court Language Arts scripted mandated lesson. I was observing these behaviors on a daily basis. As I reflected on my practice and support of student self-efficacy in the classroom, I thought that adding *sitting up straight* would be beneficial to students.

Sitting up straight is part of teacher feedback. On December 13, 2007, this theme was added to what we were saying on a daily basis before we started our lessons. This theme was referred to fourteen times in my observations notes. *Sitting up straight* was described and modeled by the teacher. Backs were to be straight and feet were to be under the student's own desk. Student's eyes and faces were to be looking toward the front of the room where the teaching would be coming from. Hands were not to be supporting heads and students were not to be lying on top of their desks.

Five parts to the *Active Learner Language Mediation Scaffold* were now used on a daily basis with students. So far what was developed and being used on a daily basis was:

- *An Active Learner claims their power to learn.*
- *An Active Learner calms down inside.*
- *An Active Learner opens their mind.*
- *An Active Learner sits up straight.*
- *You are the future!*

As I followed my research notes, I discovered that this *Active Learner Language Mediation* was being used on a daily basis. This language was being used before regular lessons began and it fell into the region of teacher management. More importantly, I noticed that students were not lying on their desks as often and they would remember to not prop their heads with their hands. They appeared to be more alert over all and if on occasion students forgot these behaviors, I could say to them, “Please be an Active Learner” and they would remember to sit up straight and try to focus.

Students gave me feedback on the use of this theme by telling me that using this theme helped them to sit up straight and work faster. A student told me that sitting up straight helped them to focus.

The *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* continued to be used with students through April of 2008. The Active Learner Scaffold was used in this form with students through April of 2008. I was finding the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* was helpful to me in working with students in the classroom. I could monitor student work in progress and if a student were unfocused, I would quietly remind them to be an *Active Learner*. This usually was enough to help them to refocus their academic efforts. There were students in my class that responded neutrally to the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold*. Some of them would have difficulty focusing even with this teaching tool. I would have to consider some other alternative to assist these students in their work.

***An Active Learner tries to do the learning task and
An Active Learner knows it is their responsibility to learn:***

My reflections continued to lead me to thinking about self-efficacy and supporting it during my teaching. I wondered what else I might do to enable students to

have a connection with their own academic effort. Part of building self-efficacy is based on outcomes of performed tasks. I wondered what else could be added to the *Active Learner mediation* that would assist this. Connecting to self and personal effort is a skill that takes time to become aware of. One beginning part of learning this skill is to become aware that trying to do something helps you to learn how to do the attempted task (Gredler, & Shields, 2008).

My reflections on my teaching practice also led me to consider that young students need to be aware of their own responsibility to learn and it is also important to try and do different learning tasks. These two important concepts were added to the scaffold between April 7th and April 11th. These additional *Active Learner Mediated Language* concepts were added to the scaffold between April 7th and April 11th. They were as follows:

- *An Active Learner tries to do the learning task.*
- *An Active Learner knows that it is their responsibility to learn!*

These *Active Learner Mediated Language* concepts were added late in the action research project. These both fell into the region of language mediation. “A major role of speech is that it contributes to the semantic and systemic construction of the child’s thinking (Gredler & Shields, 2008). With only one more month of school, I continued to observe student effort and see if I could observe student’s behaviors that were self-efficacious in nature. There was one indicator of self-efficacious behavior that was reflected in a substitute teacher’s note left for me. Her note to me was that my plans for her were very detailed. She also said that “This is a wonderful class and I will be happy to substitute again if you ever need a substitute teacher.” There was also another note left

for me from another substitute teacher. It said, “The day went by so quickly. No problems. We had a great time. Loved being in your classroom.” This reflects to me that the students were able to perform in a satisfactory way for these teachers, even in my absence, demonstrating that the behavior came from themselves.

I also became more explicit in my language with the students in my class; the students in my class became more explicit in their performance in class. This means that that what I observed is that they calmed down, sat up straight, tried to do the learning task and in general seemed to demonstrate a more focused effort in their academic work. My reflection also allows me to see that explicit and purposeful language can help students to connect with the self-efficacy process which is language in part and skill in part.

Go Active Learners

As I continued to reflect on what I observed students doing during my lessons, I wondered if there was anything else that might strengthen their willingness to try to do the various academic tasks that they were asked to do. One more concept that I thought would help student effort was, *Go Active Learners!* I thought of the many times I would see students sitting in a way that would indicate to me that they were thinking of doing something other than what we were working on in class. A student might be gazing out of the window, shuffling a small piece of paper on the top of their desk, or mindlessly tapping their pencil on their desk. It was my intention to motivate students to be active in their learning efforts and *Go Active Learners!* was a motivational call to personal action for students. This part of the language mediation was a goal set by the teacher. The teacher wanted students to be motivated to actively learn. It was a simple, direct way to inspire academic action.

The *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* was now being used every day before the scripted mandated language arts lesson. The scaffold was:

- *An Active Learner sits up straight.*
- *An Active Learner calms down inside.*
- *An Active Learner opens up their mind.*
- *An Active Learner claims their power to learn.*
- *An Active Learner tries to do the learning task.*
- *An Active Learner knows that it is their responsibility to learn.*
- *Go Active Learners!*
- *You are the future!*

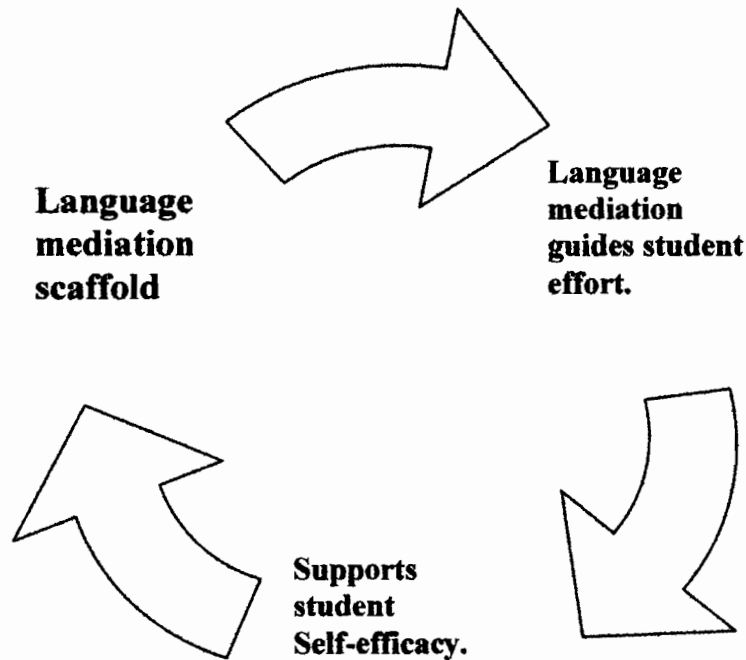
One comment that a student made about being an *Active Learner* is that they liked being able to focus and they knew they were the future and stated “I am important to life.” Another comment that a student made to me was that they liked being an *Active Learner* because they thought that they could do almost anything. The school year was over June 6th, 2008.

My observations from my journal notes indicated to me that most students were more engaged in trying to complete academic tasks. They were either engaged in peer exchange, or trying to complete various academic tasks independently. Students with a neutral response to the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* would struggle with their work and I would try and assist them using other teaching strategies. Feedback from parents indicated to me that the mediated language was supportive of the diverse cultures that were present in my class. Parents approved of the language and thought that it gave their children positive guidance in their classroom behaviors. Different parents would

come to me and ask for a copy of the student print out of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold*.

My daily reflections on my teaching practice and student effort in this language arts block made me aware that these themes may assist students to become aware of positive classroom behavior. What I observed from my research journals is that there appeared to be a connection from the mediated language, to the metacognitive process, to self-efficacy and back to the mediated language. Below I provide a graphic illustration of this process. What I observed over the course of the action research project was that the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* led students to attempt different academic tasks. The student attempt to try different tasks helped them to grow in various academic skills that we were practicing. There appeared to be a connection between the use of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* to the attempt and to students thinking of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* without being prompted by me. I observed a student grabbing a hand full of personal power and centering himself quietly and then he began to furiously write. He had made a metacognitive, higher level thinking connection with the *Active Learner Claims Their Power to Learn* and motivating himself to begin his academic writing. The use of the theme provided the student with the metacognitive association that he made for himself and his claiming of his power to learn. After claiming his power to learn, he tried to perform a writing task. I observed this student working this way later in the academic day. We were not using the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* in our work at that time. I saw the potential for this language to be helpful to learners in elementary classrooms.

What I observed during the course of this action research project is that the language guided students to more on-task performance. Their personal behaviors were more scholarly and their mindset appeared to be more focused in academic tasks. The following chart shows the loop from language mediation to student effort and the finally support of student self-efficacy.



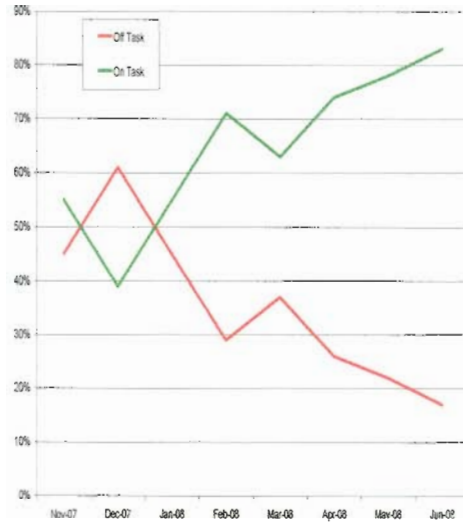
There is a loop from the scaffold to the student attempt to the connection with self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is supported positively depending upon the psychological matrix of the individual student. The language of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* is constructed in a way that positively influences support student self-efficacy.

Discussion

The analysis of the daily observations would indicate that the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* offers support to on-task behavior in the classroom. What the mediated language appears to support is the growth of students ability to have a set of academic behaviors that guide them to more productive academic effort and is supportive of them in their academic journey through the school system. The *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* and subsequent development of the *Active Learner mediated language* that resulted from this action research project suggest that these are helpful tools in setting a scholarly mindset for students. The *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* suggests a support of self-efficacy. Analysis of my observation journals reveals that my practice appears to support student self-efficacy. The month's that fall short of positive on- task behavior were either at the beginning of the study before the Active Learner language had been used for any length of time or was before a significant school break or right after a long academic break. The following chart shows the analysis of my journal notes as follows:

On Task Behaviors

Over the course of the action research project I saw on task behavior start at about 50% and by the end of the study on task behavior occurred around 80% of the time. On-task behavior was defined by students attempting to do their academic work.



Chapter 5

Discussion & Action Plan

My overall research question was as follows: How did my teaching support student self-efficacy? Within this main question, I focused more specifically on what ways my practice supported student self-efficacy through the following mechanisms:

- Lev Vygotsky's language mediation. (Gredler & Shields, 2008).
- Feedback opportunities (Narciss, 2004).
- Teacher expectations (Rubie-Davis, 2006).
- Goal setting (Page-Voth, 1999).
- Support of student culture (Gillard, Moore & Lemieux, 2008).

Since self-efficacy is “rooted in the core belief that one has the power to effect changes by ones actions” (Pajares & Bandura, 2006, p.3), how did my practice support student self-efficacy in the public school classroom?

The original purpose of this action research project was to analyze my teaching practice in terms of the support of student self-efficacy in the public school classroom. My intention was to find a way to guide students to a stronger sense of self-efficacy. The incident which occurred so long ago in which a student communicated that knowing he was the future made him believe in himself, pointed me in the direction of student self-efficacy. This made me aware that I wanted as many students as possible to have a positive learning experience in my classroom.

The *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold* that resulted from this action research project appears to be a helpful tool in assisting students to set a scholarly mindset for their academic work. It is a strand of management that may be incorporated

into a teacher's teaching practice. Several of my colleagues inquired about some of the student growth that students had experienced under my instruction. I mentioned that I was using the Active Learner language and I thought that it might have helped students to be more focused in their academic efforts. I suggested that they mention to parents that the student was learning in an Active Learning classroom.

I think that observing students become more aware of their own learning process should be enough of an indicator for me to realize that this action research project has given me some valuable insights to student learning. As I consider additional implications of the scaffold I realize that the different themes fall into different areas of metacognitive processing. An Active learner sits up straight is a physical action that students take. An Active Learner calms down inside is affective in nature. It is internal and quiet. An Active Learner opens their mind is a cognitive mental act. An Active Learner tries to do the learning task is also cognitive in nature. The use of language guides the students to various physical and mental acts (Gredler & Shields, 2008). The use of the language guides the students to make the metacognitive connections that support a student's "self-efficacy beliefs" (Pajares, 2006).

During the course of the study I received parent feedback that indicated to me that parent's from diverse cultural backgrounds approved of the language of the Active Learner Themes. I found the language supportive of student learning and effort. It was simple and students could understand what they were expected to do as a learner.

Further action on my part will result in the use of a power point presentation that I will present to my Elkhorn School colleagues when the administration can schedule its presentation. I will also turn into my district office a copy of my thesis and a copy of the

Power Point presentation. I will make myself available to share this information with any educator in my district that would be interested in seeing it. I will further extend my willingness to share this project with the CSUMB credential program, should it be of interest to them in the training of new teachers.

This action research project adds to the body of studies that examine self-efficacy. The Active Learner Scaffold and Active Learner Themes are promising tools for educators. As promising as the scaffold appears to be, there are limitations that this action research project must address. One is that the time of the project was limited to slightly over one semester of an academic school year. A long length of time in the research phase would have provided more information to the research project. Another limitation that this study must address is that I have had a lifetime interest in self-efficacy. My own interest in self-efficacy through out my lifetime may have influenced the way that I interpreted this study.

I find myself asking more questions about the use of this *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold*. Further research on the support of self-efficacy in the elementary school classroom would require a more expanded time frame in spite of the *Active Learner Mediated Language Scaffold's* educational promise. Further academic research and analysis of its use would have to be done to determine its value in a quantitative study.

Appendix

On Task and Off Task Behaviors During the course of the study

11/9/2007	5 on task behaviors	4 off task behaviors	On task = 55%	Off task = 45%
12/2/2007	5 on task behaviors	8 off task behaviors	On task =39%	Off task = 61%
1/14/2008	18 on task behaviors	15 off task behaviors	On task =55%	Off task = 45%
2/1/2008	10 on task behaviors	4 off task behaviors	On task =71%	Off task = 29%
3/3/2008	5 on task behaviors	3 off task behaviors	On task =63%	Off task = 37%
4/1/2008	14 on task behaviors	5 off task behaviors	On task = 74%	Off task = 26%
5/1/2008	7 on task behaviors	2 off task behaviors	On task = 78%	Off task = 22%
6/4/2008	10 on task behaviors	2 off task behaviors	On task = 83%	Off task = 17%

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