



# The effect of training in verbal self-guidance on the self-efficacy and performance of Native North Americans in the selection interview

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## Abstract

Native North Americans ( $n = 35$ ) received training in verbal self-guidance (VSG) designed to increase self-efficacy in a selection interview. At the end of the training program, the trainees who acquired skills in VSG had higher self-efficacy than the participants in the control group ( $n = 31$ ) regarding their interview performance. They also performed better in the selection interview as judged by managers who were blind to the experimental conditions.

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## 1. Introduction

Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory provides a framework for designing training programs that increase a trainee's self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a task specific cognitive appraisal with generative properties. It refers to the extent to which people believe that they can cause, bring about, or make something happen. Bandura has found that it is not so much one's ability that propels or holds back performance as much as it is one's belief or appraisal

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(self-efficacy) of one's ability. Tannenbaum, Mathieu, Salas, and Cannon-Bowers (1991) concluded that high self-efficacy is essential for the transfer of training to the job. Similarly, Gist and Mitchell (1992) argued that self-efficacy is an intervening variable in a training intervention that brings about a relatively permanent change in a trainee's behavior. Consequently, Salas and Cannon-Bowers (2001, p. 479) concluded that further research is required to assess the effectiveness of "training targeted at raising self-efficacy."

Among the ways social cognitive theory specifies that self-efficacy can be increased is persuasion from a significant other. Both Aronson's (1999) self-persuasion theory as well as Bandura's social cognitive theory state that among the most powerful sources of persuasion is one's self. Self-persuasion theory explains how changes in the beliefs and attitudes induced by direct persuasion from others are often small and short-lived, relative to those that stem from one-self. Self-persuasion is effective because it comes from someone that most people believe to be credible and trustworthy, namely themselves. Social cognitive theory states that inner speech is a primary vehicle for thought and self-direction. When people encounter difficulty regarding goal attainment, they engage in self-enabling or self-debilitating self-talk. If they construe their "failures as presenting surmountable challenges, they redouble their efforts, but they drive themselves to despondence if they read their failures as indicators of personal deficiencies" (Bandura, 2001, p. 5). Through repeated affirmations, self-efficacy, Bandura argued, increases as people develop confidence in their ability to control their thought processes positively regarding their subsequent performance.

Meichenbaum (1977) developed a methodology for teaching clients verbal self-guidance (VSG) for increasing their functional self-talk. In brief, the training involves (1) observing a clinician model the task, (2) then performing the task while verbally instructing oneself overtly, and (3) performing the task while verbally instructing oneself covertly. The methodology has been shown to increase the IQ of children (Meichenbaum & Goodman, 1971), the creativity of college students (Meichenbaum, 1975) as well as the self-efficacy of children in an academic setting (Schunk & Rice, 1984).

Meichenbaum's methods seem particularly appropriate for individuals who have been socialized differently from those who conduct job interviews. The employment challenges for people who live in North America who have not been inculcated in Euro-American values are great (Fitzgerald & Betz, 1994). Consequently, Palmer, Campion, and Green (1999) advocated specialized training interventions for people who interview for jobs who have not been socialized with these values. In Canada, Native North American people are 2.5 times more likely to be unemployed than the general population (Harvey, Reil, & Siu, 1999). Cultural factors that may impede the ability of Native North Americans to secure a favorable hiring decision from Caucasian interviewers are the tendency to speak softly and at a slower rate, failing to address the interviewer by name, a delayed response to interview questions, and less non-verbal encouragement (e.g., head nodding) of the interviewer relative to middle-class Caucasians (Garrett, 1999; Sanders, 1987).

Environmental factors that impede the access of Native North Americans to employment include racial discrimination, ethnic occupational stereotyping, poverty, and limited education (Cohn, 1997). These variables can inhibit the development of self-efficacy crucial for career success. They can do so by not only restricting access to job experiences whereby interests and abilities can be discovered and developed (enactive mastery), but by restricting access to career relevant role models (Hackett & Betz, 1981).

Palmer et al. (1999) found that at best the extant literature focuses on improving some set of interviewee behaviors such as head nodding, and the quality of one's voice with the

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