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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 ones' 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

presumed goal of improving the likelihood of the interviewee receiving a job offer. The assumption underlying this research stream, namely that these behaviors lead to interview success, is rarely tested. Similar points were made earlier by Sackett, Burris, and Ryan (1989). They stated that frequency data, such as number of head nods or number of assertive behaviors are at best instrumental outcomes. Gleaned from studies in which the intervention was designed to increase such behaviors, they convey little or no information about whether the interviewee will receive a favorable hiring decision, the ultimate outcome. Moreover, Sackett et al. (1989) found that many of the targeted behaviors were based on intuitive appeal rather than empirical support—"more evidence supporting these foci would be desireable" (p. 178).

The present field experiment assessed the effectiveness of training Native North Americans in VSG to increase their self-efficacy for performing effectively in a selection interview. Effectiveness was defined as receiving a favorable hiring decision from Caucasian managers. Social cognitive theory and Gist and Mitchell's (1992) review suggest that self-efficacy is likely to be the primary mechanism through which training can affect both interview behavior and the likelihood of receiving a job offer. Therefore, the following hypotheses were tested: First, the self-efficacy of participants who receive training in VSG is significantly higher than those in the control group. Second, there is a significant positive correlation between self-efficacy and one's performance in a selection interview. The third hypothesis was that participants, who are trained in VSG, receive evaluations from "mainstream" Caucasian North American interviewers that are significantly higher than participants in a control group.

2. Method

2.1. Sample

The benefits of VSG training for performing effectively in a selection interview were explained to 15 Elders in Northern Ontario. They decided that the training in VSG was best suited to youths who were about to enter the workforce. Two high schools were targeted for the program. A counselor from one school and a guidance teacher from the second school agreed to co-facilitate the training program with the second author and a research assistant. Both the counselor and the guidance teacher were Native North Americans. In total, sixty-six Native North Americans participated in this study. Thirty-five participants were in the training condition and 31 were in the control group.

The mean age of the participants was 16.42 years ($SD = 1.8$ years), the majority of whom were male (65%). The mean grade in school completed was 9.4 ($SD = 0.86$). Most of the participants (88.1%) had held a paying unskilled job in the past; participants did not differ significantly between groups on this factor ($F_{1,66} = .049$, $p > .05$). All participants lived on the same reservation. Data collected on the employment status of the parents of the participants indicated that they too had worked in only unskilled jobs (e.g., waitress, laborer).

2.2. Measures

2.2.1. Self-efficacy

Job interview self-efficacy was measured using a 6-item, 5-point Likert type scale developed by Saks and McCarthy (2004). Participants were asked to indicate how confident they were that they could successfully complete a series of interview behaviors. Sample

items include: "Impress interviewers during an employment interview" and "Convince interviewers to make me a job offer." Cronbach's α coefficient for the measure of self-efficacy before and after training was .84 and .82, respectively. Self-efficacy measures were collected on the first and the last day of training for both groups.

2.2.2. Interviewee performance

A simulation was used to compare the performance of the participants in the training and control groups to known standards under uniform conditions. The interview was for a job in a retail organization. A retail organization was selected as it is among the viable choices for people in Northern Ontario.

To ensure that the interview questions in this study represented of the type of questions that interviewees are asked, a survey of possible questions was administered to human resource managers. Local employers were also surveyed to obtain a sample of questions that represented what participants could realistically expect in job interviews in their community. This resulted in six questions (e.g., "Tell me about a time when you helped someone in need;" "Do you work well with others? If yes, please provide us with an example"). Finally, participants were asked to respond to a scenario wherein they were expected to serve a customer who did not speak their language (e.g., French). They were asked to provide a detailed, step-by-step explanation of how they would handle the situation.

Because there is no difference in rating accuracy of live versus videotaped performance (Lifson, 1953; Ryan, Daum, Bauman, Grisez, & Mattimore, 1995), the interviews were videotaped. To enhance the external validity of the interview for North American business, three male Caucasian managers, blind to conditions, and unaware of the training program, rated each interviewee's responses independently using a seven-point Likert-type scale. These interviewers had 2–3 years experience hiring employees in their respective fields. They did not receive interview training from the present authors as we wanted to assess the performance of the trainees in 'real world' conditions, with all of the potential biases and misinterpretations that can occur in employment interviews. As Sackett et al. (1989) noted, a key issue of an interviewee training program is generalizability. The improvement in interview behavior (e.g., head nodding) exhibited by an individual, they said, has limited meaning for an individual who must go into an unstandardized environment and speak with an interviewer.

2.3. Procedure

2.3.1. Pilot test

After a review of the self-efficacy, verbal self-guidance, and interview training literatures, a workshop was designed and presented to the counselor and guidance teacher. They reviewed the proposed training program in terms of its alignment with the values and traditions of Native North Americans. For example, the 'Five Grandfathers,' namely respect, honesty, truth, humility, and love were included in one or more modules. Module 2, for example, focused on self-promotion. Self-promotion was integrated with the value of truth which is one of the "Five Grandfathers."

The pilot program consisted of five modules, each lasting 4 h. Nineteen participants met once per week for 5 weeks. Although participants provided positive feedback regarding the content of the training, there were a number of unanticipated logistical difficulties. Participants were sometimes unable to attend one or more workshops because they needed to take the town school bus home, since alternate transportation was not available to them. Only

three participants were able to attend every module. Upon completion of the pilot study, the program was revised to fit into the regular class schedule. This required shortening the length of each module to 1.5 h, and conducting one session a day for 5 consecutive days.

2.3.2. Training

Because the program was conducted in the classroom, it was no longer possible to randomly assign participants to conditions. Instead, classrooms were randomly assigned to either the training or the control group. Participants were told that the program was designed to improve job interview skills. On the first day, facilitators and participants discussed what they planned to learn during the program, and how they intended to apply the material to their job search. They were then introduced to the concept of VSG, and given instruction on how VSG would be used during each training session. Each day of the program, they focused on learned skills relevant to performance in a selection interview; they then practiced these skills using VSG to increase their self-efficacy.

On the second day, the training session focused on self-promotion skills (Howard & Ferris, 1996). Because, Native North Americans value humility (LaFrombroise & Rowe, 1983), many are reluctant to 'sell' themselves in an employment context. For this reason, the importance of self-promotion in an interview was explained and practiced using VSG in role plays. The trainers modeled VSG (e.g., "I can do this…") on self-promotion, and then the students did likewise.

On the third day, based on the interview literature (Garrett, 1999; Sackett et al., 1989), the trainers explained the importance of body language, eye contact, and appropriate dress, as well as how to anticipate and respond to interview questions. Again, they used VSG to increase their self-efficacy with respect to exhibiting appropriate non-verbal behavior, and giving appropriate answers to questions (e.g., "I can enter the room in a confident manner. I can smile and firmly shake the interviewer's hand. After being welcomed to sit down, all I have to do is to take a seat… ").

On day 4, participants invited a panel of Native North American role models to attend the class. The panel included a store owner, a fireman, a teacher, a construction worker, a youth worker, and a counselor. Consistent with Bandura's (1986) recommendations these models were selected because of their similarity to the interviewees socially, culturally, and economically. The panel discussed their personal challenges and experiences with respect to interviewing for jobs. VSG was used to persuade each participant that "I can do this."

On day 5, participants reviewed the material to which they had been exposed, revisited their initial goals, and practiced their interview skills in additional role plays. Again, they were taught to use VSG during each role-play.

The rationale for combining variables into one treatment package was provided by Azrin (1977). The assumption underlying training in self-management is that the treatment package should "include as many component procedures as seem necessary to obtain, ideally, total treatment success" (Azrin, 1977, p. 144). All the participants were videotaped within a week following this training program.

3. Results

The data were tested regarding assumptions underlying ANOVA. There was homogeneity of variance, and both measures of self-efficacy and interview performance were normally distributed.

3.1. Inter-rater reliability

The same three interviewers rated all 66 participants. The overall ratings for each candidate was the sum total of the interviewers' responses for each interview question. Inter-rater reliability, .81, was assessed by calculating the intraclass correlation coefficient for the 6-interview questions using an ANOVA model. In addition, the decision to hire was assessed by the response to the question "Would you hire this candidate for the retail position?" Inter-rater reliability for this item was .84.

3.2. Self-efficacy and interview performance

Cronbach's α coefficient for the measure of self-efficacy before and after training was .84 and .82, respectively. The test retest reliability was .31 ($p < .001$). Consistent with the recommendation of Arvey and Cole (1989), training was evaluated using analysis of variance (ANOVA) since the correlation between the pretest and posttest was low. ANOVA revealed that the posttraining self-efficacy of those in the training group ($x = 3.5$; $SD = .67$) was significantly higher than that of the control group ($x = 3.0$; $SD = .46$), ($F_{1,66} = 16.9$, $p < .001$). Thus, hypothesis 1 was supported. The effect size, .45, was measured using Eta squared.

Self-efficacy for selection interview performance, measured after the training was completed, correlated significantly with a person's interview performance ($r = .36$, $p < .01$). Thus hypothesis 2 was accepted.

Since interview performance and self-efficacy were correlated, self-efficacy was used as a covariate in the analysis of the effectiveness of training on interview performance. Consistent with hypothesis 3, ANCOVA revealed a significant difference ($F_{1,66} = 96.12$, $p < .001$) between interviewee performance of the participants in the training ($x = 4.49$, $SD = .60$) and those in the control group ($x = 3.17$, $SD = .43$). The effect size was .50.

A χ^2 test on the interviewer's response to the final question regarding "the decision to hire" also supported hypothesis 3. A hiring offer was made more frequently to people in the training than to those in the control group ($X^2 = 22.5$, $p < .001$). In the training condition, 82% of the participants received a favorable hiring decision, while only 12% of those in the control condition received a positive response.

4. Discussion

The current research found that Aboriginal youth who were trained in VSG had higher self-efficacy than the participants in the control group regarding their interview performance. They also performed better in the selection interview as judged by managers. The cost-benefit of this training technique is therefore noteworthy. The increase in self-efficacy to obtain and actually receive a favorable hiring decision occurred as a result of 7.5 h of training spaced over 5 consecutive days. This is comparable to the training times in the three previous studies on VSG in organizational contexts (Brown, 2003; Brown & Latham, 2006; Millman & Latham, 2001).

There are important theoretical and practical implications from this research. The present study is heuristic in that it is among the first to show that an intervention developed in clinical psychology, namely VSG or functional self-talk, is not only applicable to organizational settings (e.g., Millman & Latham, 2001) it is applicable for Native North American youth who

wish to perform effectively in an interview. Examining the applicability of psychological variables for different cultural populations is important not only for the generalizability of a construct, but for taking into account the ethnic diversity in the North American workforce. As globalization becomes increasingly a reality, the ability to find training methods that are relevant to myriad populations simultaneously grows in importance.

The limitations of the present study include the use of a quasi-experimental design, the relatively small sample size, and the lack of knowledge of actual employment. The latter measure is not available because many of these people are transient and do not have fixed mailing or email addresses. Of the 66 people who participated in this study, longitudinal data were available on 27 ten months later. Of the 15 people found who were from the training group, all had obtained work. This is in contrast with the 12 people in the control group where only six had found employment. The self-efficacy of these individuals measured at the end of training, predicted employment 10 months later ($r = .52$, $p < .01$).

The present research results should be viewed in conjunction with Brown (2003), Brown and Latham (2006), and Millman and Latham (2001). Taken together, these studies suggest that there are multiple benefits from pursuing training in VSG for increasing self-efficacy regarding myriad organizationally relevant dependent variables.

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