

RUNNING HEAD: Principles of Empowerment

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Abstract

Tim Foley, a former NFL star and now a successful businessman and motivational speaker, proposes that success is developed and maintained by “positive expectations combined with informed well-focused enthusiastic effort.” How can a simple statement and belief system successfully direct the paths of people towards success? What evidence is there to support the statement is true or that this is possible? Educators have seen that self-efficacy, high expectations, critical thinking, and goal-setting can direct their student’s potential despite intellectual ability. Can similar beliefs affect other’s abilities to be successful? This paper proposes that this statement is both valid and teachable.

Principles of Empowerment

Is there a connection between personal positive outlook and the ability to successfully survive physically, emotionally, and socially? Can a person with a spiritual perspective recover more quickly following illnesses and operations than those without faith? Can an applicant with outstanding job qualifications be ignored in favor of an applicant with lesser qualifications but perhaps a better ability to manipulate the interview session? It seems very difficult to think about all the issues involved, but there does seem to be a connection between expectations, goal-setting, optimism, and critical thinking. Tim Foley, former NFL star and now a successful businessman and motivational speaker, stated that high success is developed and maintained by “positive expectations combined with informed well-focused enthusiastic effort”. The purpose of this paper is to address each component of this statement in an attempt to verify its authenticity as well as suggest methods teachers can use to address each component.

Let us begin by defining each component of Tim Foley’s statement. Positive expectations can be read as optimism. Optimism can be defined as "the inclination to anticipate the best possible outcome for actions or events" (Huitt, 1996b). Informed could be thought of as possessing knowledge or the ability to access and process necessary knowledge. Well-focused might be considered as setting goals as well as possessing the integrity and responsibility to attack and work out these goals. Finally, enthusiastic effort might be considered as an ability to tolerate difficulty, be aware of emotional and physical aspects of one's effort, and persevering until the end result is accomplished. These are critical elements that need to be incorporated into the educational system for the Information Age where autonomy, optimism, personal goal-setting,

tolerance for change and difficulty, and having the ability to be well-informed are required survival tools (Huitt, 1997).

How do all of the components of Tim Foley's paradigm compliment and work together? Each of the components of his statement is essential. Positive expectations are a key to any successful educator's classroom. Positive expectations involve the self-fulfilling prophecy, the power of which cannot be denied. If students feel that they are capable of meeting expectations and of succeeding, then they will. This is a value promoted by the Secretary's Commission on Achieving Necessary Skills (1991) in their report on attributes of success for the workforce of tomorrow.

Direct instruction is a way for educators to develop a student's concept of being able to meet expectations. Using direct instruction, teachers provide the information that will be necessary for students to succeed, especially using scripted lessons (Gunter & Reed, 1997). Teaching scripts are a way for teachers to increase the academic information they give before asking students to perform tasks that require that information. This builds student successful interaction with academic information, teachers, and their own self-esteem.

A positive expectation also contains the element of optimism. Huitt (1996) spoke of optimism as positively and functionally being related to academic, social, and economic success. Optimism is a strong motivator. It is very rare that a successful person gets there by accident. Even people who play the lottery have to be motivated and optimistic to spend their dollars. These people know the odds and usually feel doubtful that they will win, but they have just enough optimism and motivation to give it a try. Students must be optimistic and motivated as

they progress through life where governmental aid is decreasing, world markets are ever stronger, and there is global competition for employment (Huitt, 1995).

Optimism and the ability to have positive expectations are difficult for some students and teachers. Past experiences, early childhood experiences, heredity, cultural paradigms, and socioeconomic conditions all affect our ability to be optimistic or develop this character trait (Huitt, 1998). Franken (1994) emphasized the importance of self-concept in the development of motivation and optimism. He stated “there is a great deal of research which shows that self-concept is, perhaps, the basis for all motivated behavior. It is the self-concept that gives rise to possible selves, and it is possible selves that create the motivation for behavior” (p. 443). This statement parallels Tim Foley’s statement that completely focuses on self-efficacy, positive expectations, and optimism.

There are ways to determine your level of optimism. The Attributional Style Questionnaire (ASQ) was developed by Seligman (1990). Students can take this questionnaire and learn about their strengths and weaknesses. From this knowledge, the teacher and student can reflect on past experiences, set goals, and build self-esteem through a non-threatening, yet challenging learning environment. Teachers want students to develop independence, not passivity in the learning process, because this characteristic is too crucial to the Information Age. Rogers (1969) designed facilitative teaching to focus on this characteristic. He proposed a teaching strategy to help students use both rational thinking and emotional awareness to examine personal behavior patterns and to clarify and actualize their values.

The second principle in Tim Foley’s statement is the idea of being informed. Being informed has several components. A person must have knowledge to be informed, but knowledge

is not the only factor. Some of the most successful people are not the ones who are the most knowledgeable, but rather the ones who think creatively and can access and process information with good automaticity (Sternberg, 1994). Intelligence, which can be defined as a general ability to perform cognitive tasks, learn from experience, and adapt to the environment, is another key to bring well informed (Huitt, 1996a). Teaching students to be informed involves teaching these students to use analytical, creative, and practical abilities of intelligence (Sternberg). Students can be asked to solve familiar problems by using strategies that manipulate the variables involved, try to solve new problems that require them to think about the variable in a new way, and to try to solve problems that apply what they already know to new and every day contexts. Sternberg also provides an adaptive behavior checklist that lists abilities and competencies that teachers can emphasize during the teaching/learning process (see Huitt, 1996a)

The element of Foley's statement "well-focused" emphasizes goal setting. Goal setting gives attention to good thinking and critical thinking as an important element of life success (Thomas & Smoot, 1994). Possessing critical thinking skills will help one develop appropriate and workable goals for the Information Age. Goals, especially goals instigated by the individual, are the most meaningful way to implement change and perseverance, thereby systematically focusing on the task at hand. According to Huitt's Transactional Model of the Teaching/Learning Process, output is the most important element to focus on when seeking specific student outcomes (McIlrath & Huitt, 1995). Output is all-important because it directs one's attention for everything else involved in the process of attacking a task. Once a person, such as Tim Foley, knows what he wishes to accomplish, he then sets goals in that direction and continues until the goals have been met. Educators must emphasize the importance of the academic tasks they expect students to

master. Educators can verify this importance by giving real-life examples of how the knowledge is used and by inviting community visitors to talk with students about necessary skills for various jobs.

Finally, Foley mentioned an enthusiastic effort. There is an old saying, “Nothing great was every accomplished without enthusiasm!” This is true, whether you play the lottery, run for Congress, or tackle algebra for the first time. Enthusiasm may not always be a vital part of success, but it does help one tolerate difficulties that arise and provides humor for inevitable mistakes that we all make. For example, enthusiasm may not be necessary to make an “A” in a class that lacks interest for a student, but it will make the experience more enjoyable. Enthusiasm is closely connected with optimism as well as self-esteem. People with enthusiasm often have vision, which is important for communities and nations as well as educational systems that provide their foundation (Hiebert & Hiebert, 1993). Teachers can impact student’s enthusiasm by modeling, by using humor in the classroom, by smiling, by being optimistic, by reinforcing learning positively, and by focusing on affective as well s cognitive aspects of learning.

Certainly, Tim Foley’s mission statement is true. There are powerful concepts and research behind each of the principles of his statement. Optimism and enthusiasm will help a person tolerate difficulty, persevere, and conquer the debilitating effect of depression when things do not work out as planned. Optimism connected with informed intelligence perfectly compliments each other. Being informed is the ability to assess and analyze information for creative use, which is a key to the Information Age. However, unless one expects that things will work out well, one is not inclined to use the information one has or to seek additional information. Finally, being well-focused ties the other principles together. When one knows where

he/she is going, the individual is more likely to get there. Then possessing enthusiasm, optimism, and information will virtually ensure that the goals are met.

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