

Believe To Achieve

"Achieving something is as simple as a thought"

Dennis Mitchell (Olympic track and field athlete)

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As I watched the 1992 Summer Olympics on TV, I carefully observed each athlete's pre-performance routine and subsequent execution. In particular, I listened closely to each athlete's post-performance self-reflective belief statements made to the press. My purpose was to compare and contrast the belief statements of both Olympic athletes and high school students with learning disabilities. Since I recently completed research on belief systems of high school students with learning disabilities, I wanted to examine the similarities and differences between the two groups. Comparatively, Olympic athletes and students with LD are similar in (a) the pressures they experience, but dissimilar in (b) the belief statements made about their performance, and (c) the coping techniques used.

"Many LD teachers have witnessed first-hand the negative impact ineffective belief statements have on student's academic performance"

First, both Olympic athletes and students with LD experience a lot of pressure. For the athlete, pressures include representing his/her country, performing flawlessly at one moment in time, competing against the best athletes in the world, and attempting to win a gold medal. For the student, pressures include representing his/her best self at school, performing academic and social tasks effectively, competing against the best students in all classes, and passing all classes.

Second, both athletes and students make belief statements about their performance results. The Olympic athlete uses effective belief statements such as "I was successful because I trained all my life for this moment" or "I kept saying to myself, 'I can win' 'I can win'" or "I was successful because I believed in

myself."

Struggling students, by contrast, frequently make ineffective belief statements such as "I'm going to fail that math test, so why should I try!" "I hate science" or "I believe I'll never be smart in school." Many LD teachers have witnessed first-hand the negative impact ineffective belief statements have on a student's academic performance. As the students often turn the statements into prophecy by performing poorly on academic tasks.

Third, both athletes and students must effectively cope with the pressures they experience. The athlete copes with performance pressures by using several techniques, such as, visual imagery, positive self-talk, and deep breathing to ensure effective performance results. For example, the gymnast pictures herself completing a flawless floor exercise and earning a perfect score of "10". The platform diver tells himself that he will be successful in performing a back triple reverse somersault off the high diving platform. The track and field runner takes several deep breaths to help her relax before the race begins. All three coping techniques enhance the athlete's effective belief system.

By comparison, students with learning disabilities rarely have self-motivating techniques or belief strategies to use when faced with school-related pressures. As LD teachers know from experience, many students, when faced with a difficult assignment, may choose to do part of it, but not hand it in or do none of it. Over time, either choice will result in ineffective academic results for the student which

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reinforces his/her ineffective belief system. Just as Olympic athletes are trained by their coaches to make positive belief statements and taught effective coping strategies, teachers must take an active role in listening for, understanding, and teaching students' how to change ineffective beliefs.

In this article the definition of beliefs will be discussed along with a teacher/student script that explains some of the ways a teacher can help students understand identify and change their ineffective beliefs. Finally, a student journal and calendar will be given for the student to monitor his belief statements while in the classroom.

Definition of Beliefs

The construct of beliefs is viewed by many educators as an important new focus of study in efforts to understand students' school achievement. A belief is defined as a summarizing statement or thought created by individuals about themselves in relationship to the environment surrounding them. Beliefs can be based on thoughts about past, present, and ongoing events and one's ability to cope with such events. Beliefs are based on personal needs that may produce action(s) and results that address those needs. Figure 1 provides a review of those needs. Therefore, an effective belief would likely lead to behaviors that fulfill one's needs, whereas an ineffective belief would likely lead to behaviors that fall short of meeting one's needs.

The following dialogue illustrates methods a teacher can use to enable a student to: (a) analyze a problem they have experienced; (b) analyze the belief underlying their behavior during the problem experience; (c) determine whether the belief is effective or ineffective; (d) if it is ineffective, create a plan of action for changing the ineffective belief; and (e) redesign a new belief system. See Figure 2 for the definition of

Figure 1

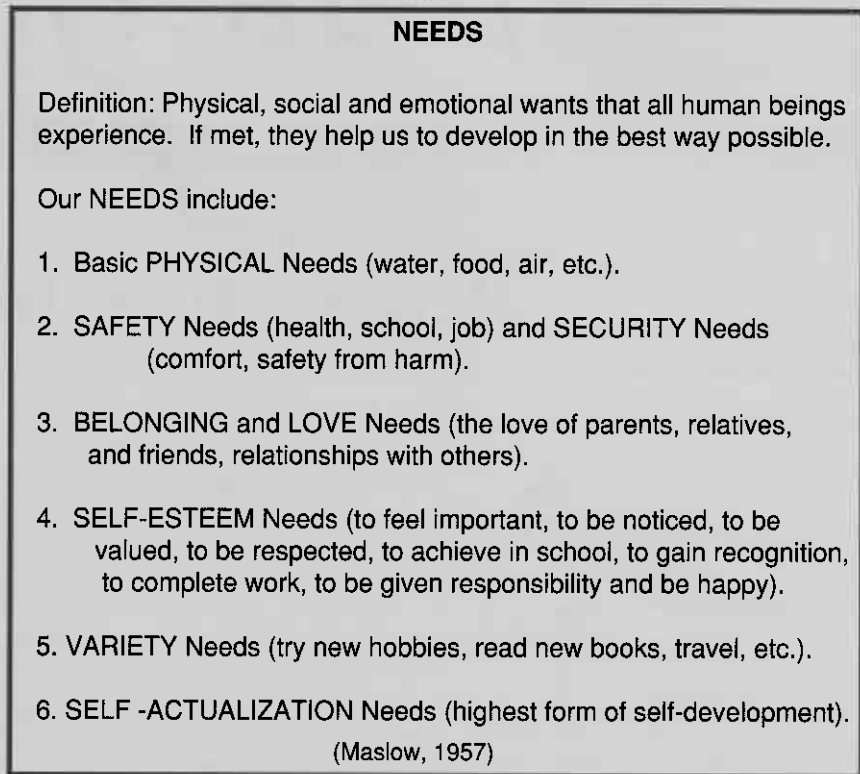
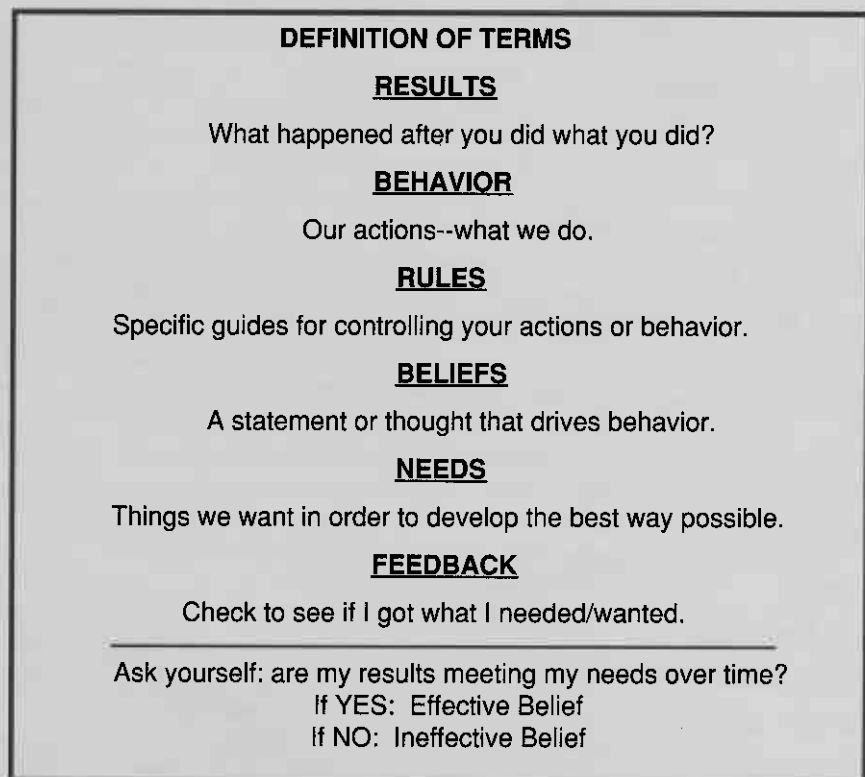


Figure 2



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terms used in the following dialogue.

TEACHER/STUDENT EFFECTIVE BELIEF AWARENESS GUIDE

In this script, "S" represents the student's responses and "T" represents the teacher's responses.

S. "I hate math."

T. "Please tell me one or two specific reasons why you hate math."

S. "First, I hate math because I got an F. Second, I hate math because I am embarrassed to flunk when others pass."

T. "Let's take a step-by-step approach to solve this problem."

S. "O.K."

(Results)

T. "First, you told me your RESULTS, or what happened: You got an F in math. Is that right?"

S. "Yes."

(Behavior)

T. "Now, tell me what you did or didn't do to get an F in math."

S. "I didn't do my homework."

T. "Anything else?"

S. "Yes, I didn't study for the tests."

T. "Let's see, you didn't do your homework, and you didn't study for the math tests. Is that correct?"

S. "Yes."

(Rules)

T. "What rule do you think you were following? To help you figure out the rule, let me give you the definition of a rule. A rule is a specific guide for

controlling your actions or behavior. We use an IF...THEN sentence to describe the rule. For example, IF I like baseball, then I will play baseball. If I dislike frog legs, then I won't eat frog legs. Do you understand what a rule is?"

S. "I think so."

T. "Let's use your results and behavior to see if we can identify the rule you might be following. First, you told me you got an F in math. Then, you told me you did not do two things, your homework or study for tests. So what rule do you think you were following? Remember you must say your rule with an IF ... THEN statement."

S. "Alright. IF I'm not in the mood to do math, then I don't do my assigned work."

T. "That sounds like the rule you have been following. Next, let's identify your belief."

(Belief)

S. "I'm ready."

T. "A belief is a statement that drives or determines your behavior. It starts with I believe... For example, I believe baseball is fun. I believe frogs taste bad. What do you think your belief was?"

S. "I believe....I let my moods control me. Because when I'm not in the mood to do math, I do something else, and it never gets done."

T. "Well, I wonder what your needs are. Shall we take a look and see?"

S. "Yes."

(Needs)

T. "Needs are physical, social, and emotional wants that all human beings must have in order to develop

in the best way possible. Lets determine some of the things you want.

S. "Well, I want to have money, a nice car, and lots of friends."

T. "What do you need to achieve all your needs?"

S. "I guess I need to get a good job."

T. "What are the requirements for a job that pays well?"

S. "Most jobs require graduation and good grades."

T. "So what would be one of your needs?"

S. "Well, I need to **achieve in school** because I want to graduate and eventually get a good job."

T. "O.K. I understand that your specific need is to achieve in school."

S. "Yes."

(Feedback)

T. "I see. Now I have one more step for you. Let's check to see if your results are meeting your needs over time. This is called feedback. If your results are meeting your needs, then you have an **effective** belief. An **effective** belief means that you are getting what you want or need. If your results are **not** meeting your needs or getting you what you want, then you have an **ineffective** belief. Let's check. O.K. Your results were an F in math. Your needs were to achieve in school and graduate. Are your results meeting your needs?"

S. "No."

T. "Feedback is a way for you to check and see if you got what you wanted or needed. You did not get what you wanted, so you have an ineffective belief. In order to change

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an ineffective belief, we must go back through each of the six parts and change each part except your needs. Then, you test your new effective belief, and see if it will work for you (i.e., get you the results you want and need over time).”

The student journal and calendar below can be used to assist teachers and students in understanding the impact of ineffective belief statements. The students can fill out the journal and calendars of a daily or weekly basis depending on an individual need.

They can then do a self-analysis to determine the need for any changes in their belief statements. The happy faces can be used in the elementary grades and positive or negative signs with secondary students. The teacher can also use these tools for feedback and evaluation of student progress or the need for further input.

Summary

In this article, a comparison of belief systems between Olympic athletes and students with learning disabilities was used to highlight the importance of making effective belief statements. Furthermore, the definition of beliefs was presented as

a summarizing statement developed by individuals about themselves corresponding to their environmental surroundings. Beliefs may be based on (a) thoughts about past, present, and ongoing events, (b) one’s ability to cope with those events, (c) personal needs which may produce action(s) and results that address those needs. Beliefs may be of two types: (1) effective beliefs likely to lead to behaviors that fulfill one’s needs and (2) ineffective beliefs likely to lead to behaviors that do **NOT** fulfill one’s needs. Using effective belief statements can lead to success both in the classroom and on the playing field.



MY EFFECTIVE BELIEFS



Write down your EFFECTIVE belief statements that you say for each day of the week. Note the number of EFFECTIVE belief statements. At the end of the week, count the total number of effective beliefs you had for the week.

Monday: _____
(effective belief statement)

Tuesday: _____
(effective belief statement)

Wednesday: _____
(effective belief statement)

Thursday: _____
(effective belief statement)

Friday: _____
(effective belief statement)

Monday	Tuesday	Wednesday	Thursday	Friday	Weekly Total
_____	_____	_____	_____	_____	_____

Do this every day for one month. See if you can list more effective belief statements.

Share the result with your teacher!!

The charts on pages 4 & 5 have been developed by Barbara Duchardt
These charts may be reproduced



MY SUCCESSFUL JOURNAL



List one school success: _____
(successful result)

Compare your successful result to your unsuccessful result.

Write one or two of your own BEHAVIORS that caused your success.

(1) _____
(successful behavior)

(2) _____
(successful behavior)

Compare your successful behavior to your unsuccessful behavior.

Write one or two reasons why you BELIEVE you were successful:

(1) _____
(successful belief)

(2) _____
(successful belief)

Compare your successful belief(s) to your unsuccessful belief(s).

Using the NEEDS LIST write down one need that you met for yourself:

(physical, safety/security, love, self-esteem, variety, self-actual.

Compare the needs you met with the needs you did NOT meet.

**I want to be sure to KEEP MY SUCCESSFUL BELIEF because it got me what I needed.

√ Show the journal to your teacher! Tell him/her about your success.



MY UNSUCCESSFUL JOURNAL



List one school problem: _____
(unsuccessful result)

Compare your unsuccessful result to your successful result.

Write one or two of your own BEHAVIORS that caused the problem.

(1) _____
(unsuccessful behavior)

(2) _____
(unsuccessful behavior)

Compare your unsuccessful behavior to your successful behavior.

Write one or two reasons why you BELIEVE you were unsuccessful:

(1) _____
(unsuccessful belief)

(2) _____
(unsuccessful belief)

Compare your unsuccessful belief(s) to your successful belief(s).

Using the NEEDS LIST write down one need that you did NOT for yourself:

(physical, safety/security, love, self-esteem, variety, self-actual.

Compare the needs you did NOT meet with the needs you did meet.

**I want to CHANGE MY UNSUCCESSFUL BELIEF because it did not get me what I needed. The next time I will _____

(Write a successful behavior)

√ Show the journal to your teacher! Tell him/her about your success.

Index for Volume IV, Issues 1-6

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Lead Article-Strategic Math Series: Part One. Cecil D. Mercer, University of Florida. Examining Components of Effective Math Instruction.

Classroom Tip- Musical Helping Verbs. Ann Randolph and Betty O'Neal, Charlotte, North Carolina. Jingle verb song. Lee Dorman class, Chesterfield, Virginia. Two techniques for learning the helping verbs.

SIM Spotlight-Karen Jacobs and Diane Miller, Wichita, Kansas. A "race Track" visual to motivate students as they are learning the *Sentence Writing Strategy*.

Index for Vol. III, Issues 1-6. Summary of the content presented in Volume III of Strategram.

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Vol. 5: Issue number 1. Published six times per year by The University of Kansas Institute for Research in Learning Disabilities, Dole Human Development Center-Room 3061, Lawrence, Kansas, 66045-2342. Subscription rate: \$13 per year. No part of this publication may be reproduced without written permission from the publisher, unless otherwise stated.

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For Classroom Strategy Instruction/ A Visual Organizer

Nell Cornwell, Pinewood Elementary School, De Ridder, Louisiana, organized and visually displayed the parts of a complete simple sentence using a paper plate, neon paper, and pipe cleaners. She wrote the terms on one side and the definition of the terms on the opposite side of both the paper plate and neon slips of paper (See example below). She used this every day during the Describe and Model stages of instruction. In addition the students could make their own visual organizer. Nell has worked with behavior disordered and autistic children for twenty years.

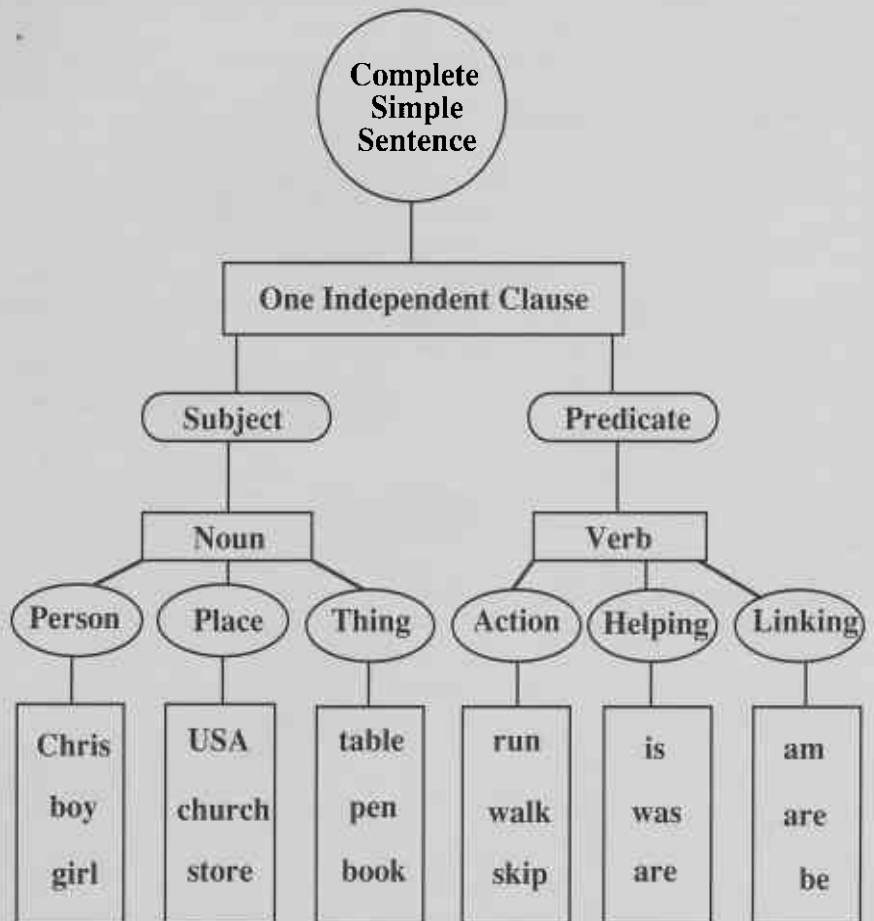


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