Challenge Makes Us Stronger; Don't Undersell Your Kids' Abilities at School

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Overview

- Introduction
- Diagnosis & IPRC
- Myths of ability
- Paradigm shift: change in the environment vs. change in the individual
- How social cognition theory and self-efficacy can help
- Tya's story
- What next?

Introduction & background

- About me…

From Diagnosis to IPRC

- Typically, the 'formal' identification occurs in the school Board after a student is struggling
- Once diagnosis of LD is made, the student is usually 'formally identified' through IPRC
- This identification guarantees an IEP – and the school Board formally recognizes specific learning needs
- Interventions and resource support may begin before or after diagnosis and IPRC
- How a family and a student approach the acceptance of an LD diagnosis and identification is key

The myth of ability

- Learning Disabilities are one of the most commonly misunderstood diagnoses made
- Even many people who have been diagnosed don't fully understand their potential
- In order to be diagnosed with a LD, students must have average or above-average intelligence
- This begs the question – how can we close the gap between achievement and potential?
- Without closing this gap, 25-40% of students with a LD will not finish high school
- However, there is no reason why an LD student cannot go to university (or anywhere else)

The reality

- By definition, any 'disability' makes tasks more difficult – thus, we must prepare our students & children for this
- Even if educational environments are accommodating, there will be times when things are tough – and being prepared is huge
- Bandura's social cognition theory suggests how we prepare for and view these challenges will in many cases determine their outcome
- Success is more internally driven (through self-efficacy) than externally

Setting goals is important

- LD students should always set a goal of achieving grade-level performance – as we know that this is possible
- If the end goal is grade-level performance, setting smaller incremental goals (mastery experience) to achieve this is important
- A key goal should always relate to how a student approaches and deals with difficult academic tasks
- A common mistake is for students/parents to attempt to make work easier for LD students – this is actually counterproductive the end goal of working at grade level
- Accommodations may indeed make the work feel easier – but it's not a bad thing for students to struggle – as this build self efficacy and perseverance (key predictors of long term success)

Change the environment or work to adapt

- We as parents can be angry and fight a system that is difficult for our kids, our we can use these experiences to help them grow

- Although at times it's tough to believe, teachers do want LD students to succeed, and do want to help them

- If you need to advocate for your child, be sure they don't know it happened – or have them do it (kids learn a lot from how their parents talk about schools and teachers) – and social cognitive theory suggests this will reduce their self efficacy

- You will not always be able to advocate for your son/daughter – how will they fair when this time comes? (do they have the practice and self efficacy to cope on their own?)

The paradigm shift: The toughest, but most important step
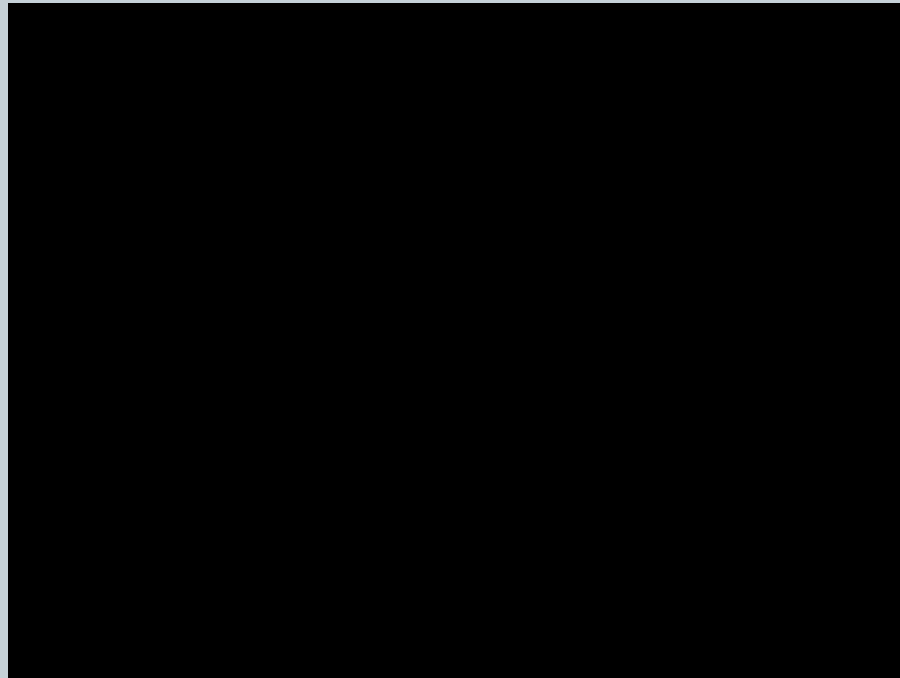
What can we learn about framing challenges from Randy Pausch?

The paradigm shift: The toughest, but most important step

"The brick walls are there for a reason. The brick walls are not there to keep us out. The brick walls are there to give us a chance to show how badly we want something. Because the brick walls are there to stop the people who don't want it badly enough. They're there to stop the other people."
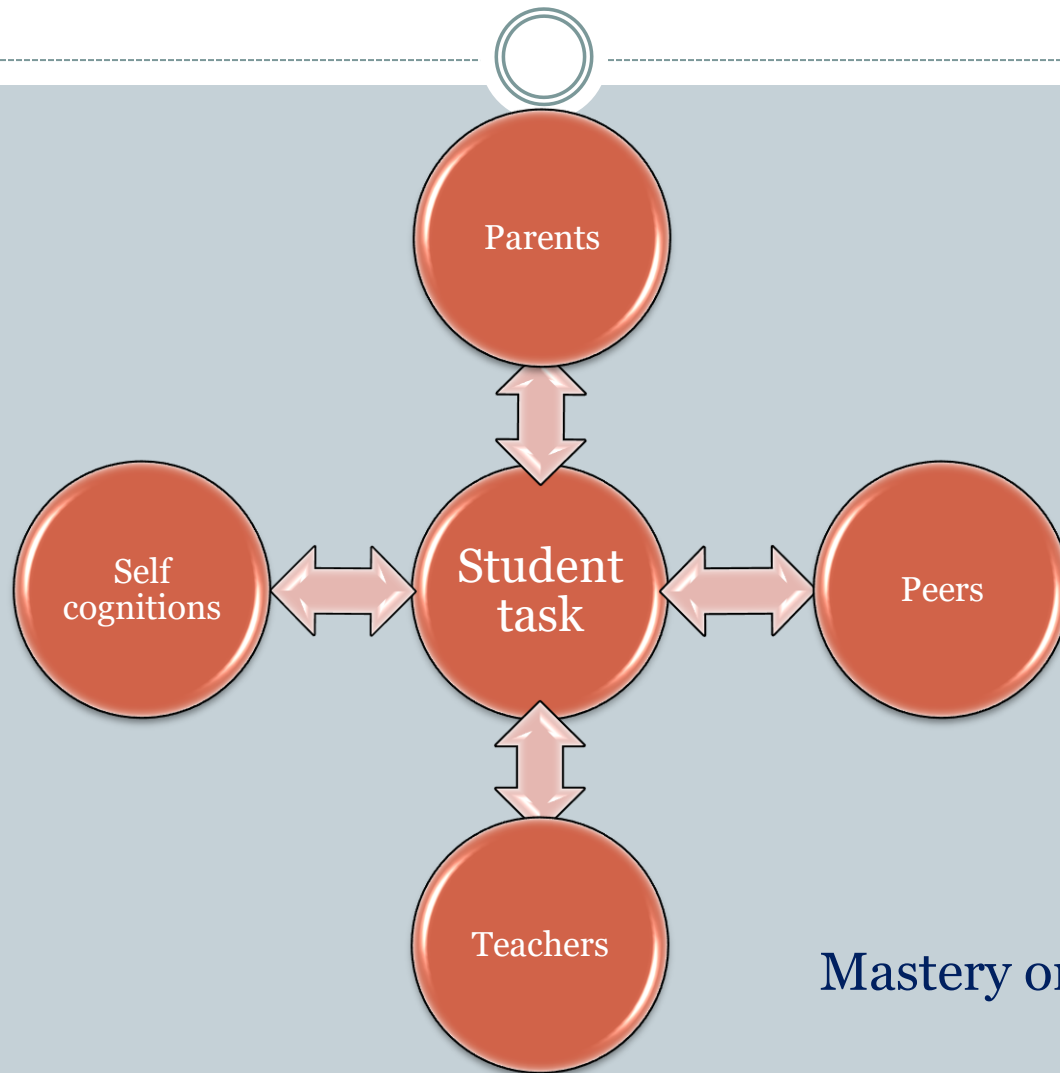— Randy Pausch, *The Last Lecture*
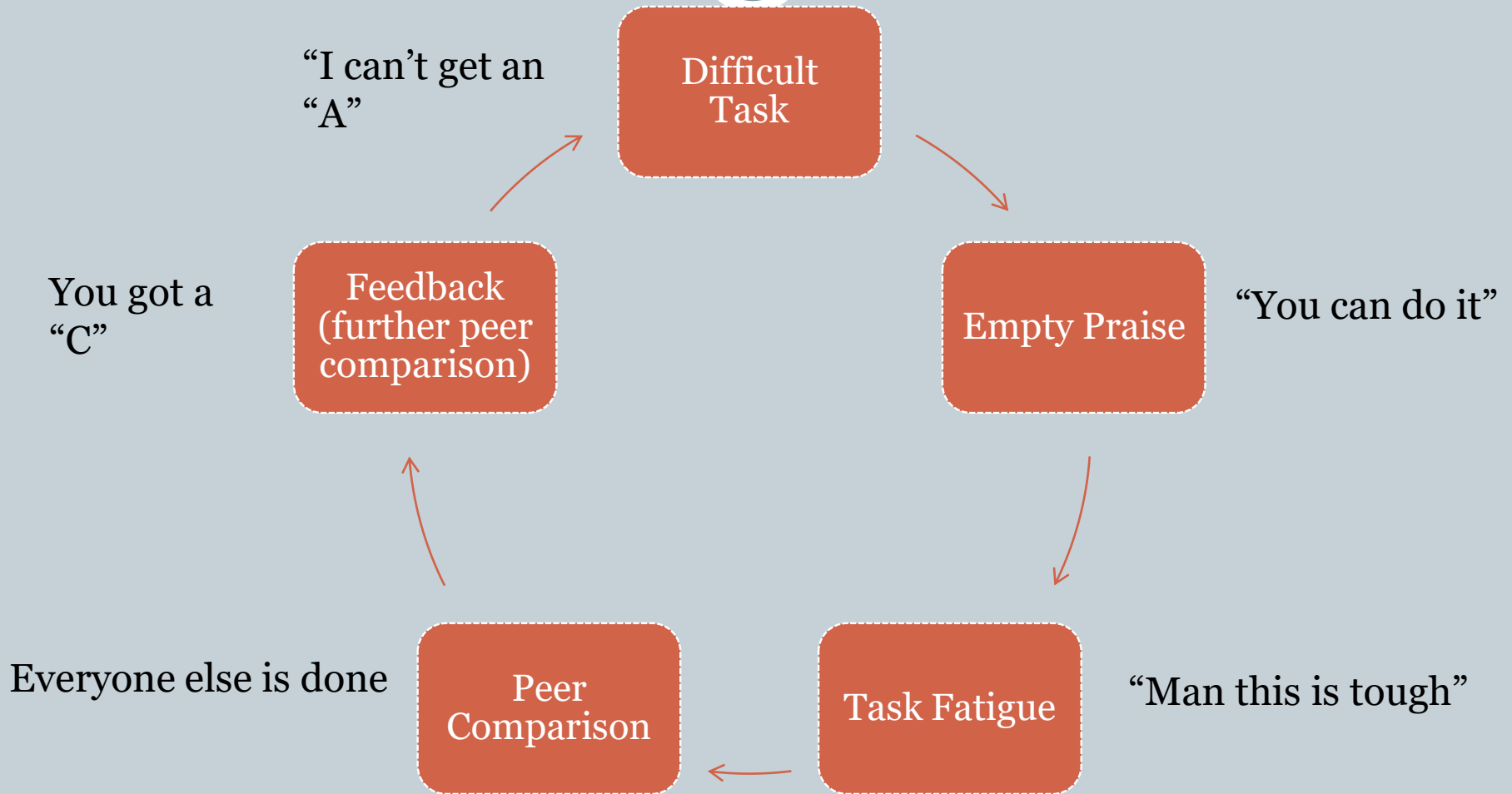
Change in the environment vs. change in self efficacy

- Self efficacy is the one thing you can manage…
- Bandura's theory of self efficacy suggests that our confidence and attitude towards a difficult task leads us to either view it as an exciting challenge – or avoid it thinking we will fail
- Further, how we respond to this in our environment will cause a reciprocal relationship – causing others to assume we will fail (further deepening the cycle)
- Thus, the environmental conditions are less important than one's self efficacy towards the task (locus of control is within the individual)
- Self-efficacy is different from blind 'confidence' – as it is experience based

Reciprocal Determinism (feedback)

Parents

Self cognitions

Student task

Peers

Teachers

Mastery or avoidance?

Filling the gaps...

"I can't get an "A"

Difficult Task

"You got a "C"

Feedback (further peer comparison)

"You can do it"

Empty Praise

Everyone else is done

Peer Comparison

Task Fatigue

"Man this is tough"

Filling the gaps by diluting the task...

"I can do it if things are made easier for me"

Difficult Task

"Let's make this easier by giving you something else"

Dilution of the task

Feedback (further peer comparison)

You got a "A"

Task Fatigue

"That was easy"

Peer Comparison

"Everyone else is doing something different, I guess I can't do that"
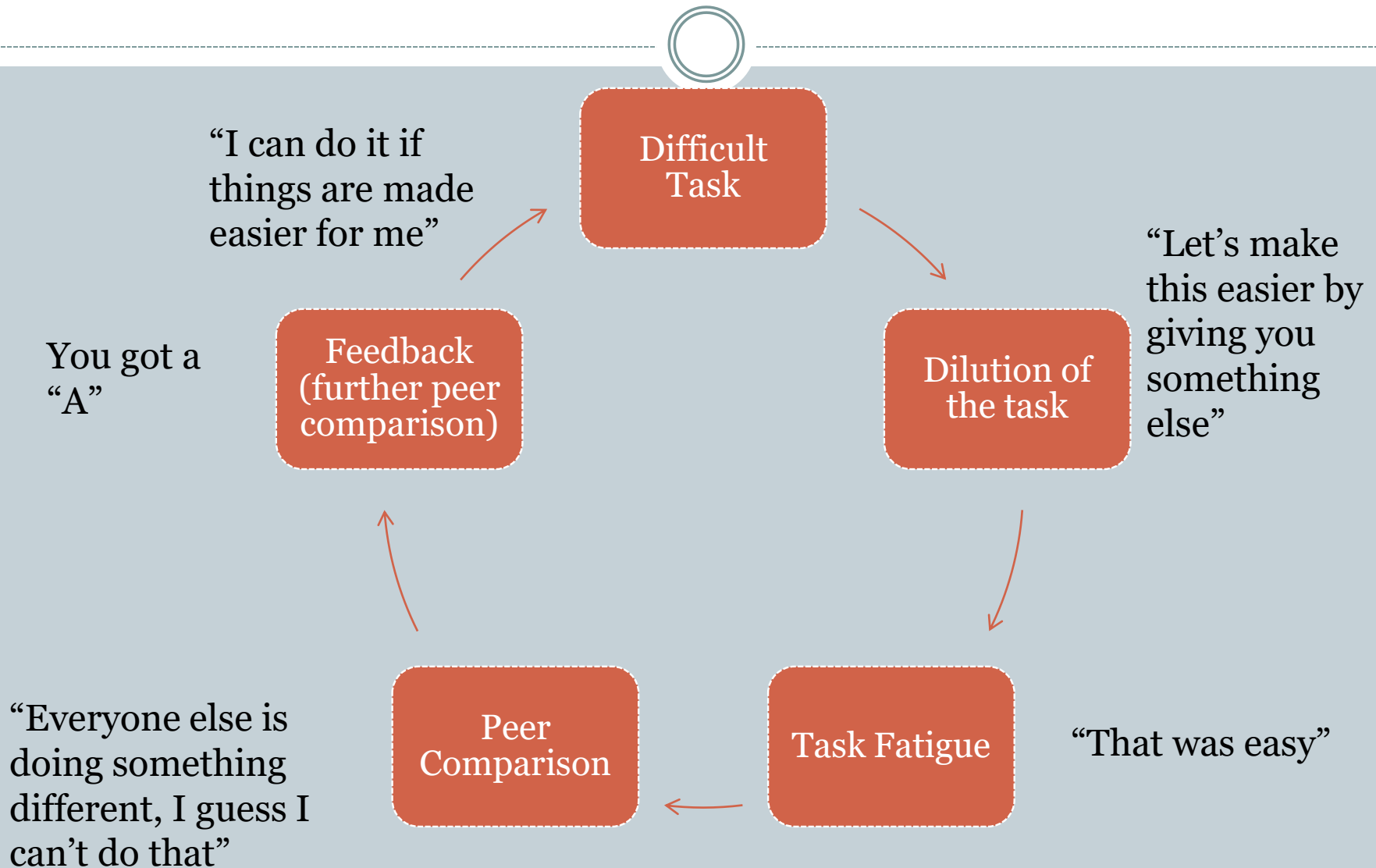
Filling the gaps with perseverance...

"Effort paid off. Maybe I can do better next time."

Difficult Task

Realistic Praise

"This may be hard, but effort will pay off"

You got a "B"

Feedback (further peer comparison)

Task Fatigue

"This is hard, but I knew it would be"

"Everyone else is done, but I am progressing"

Peer Comparison
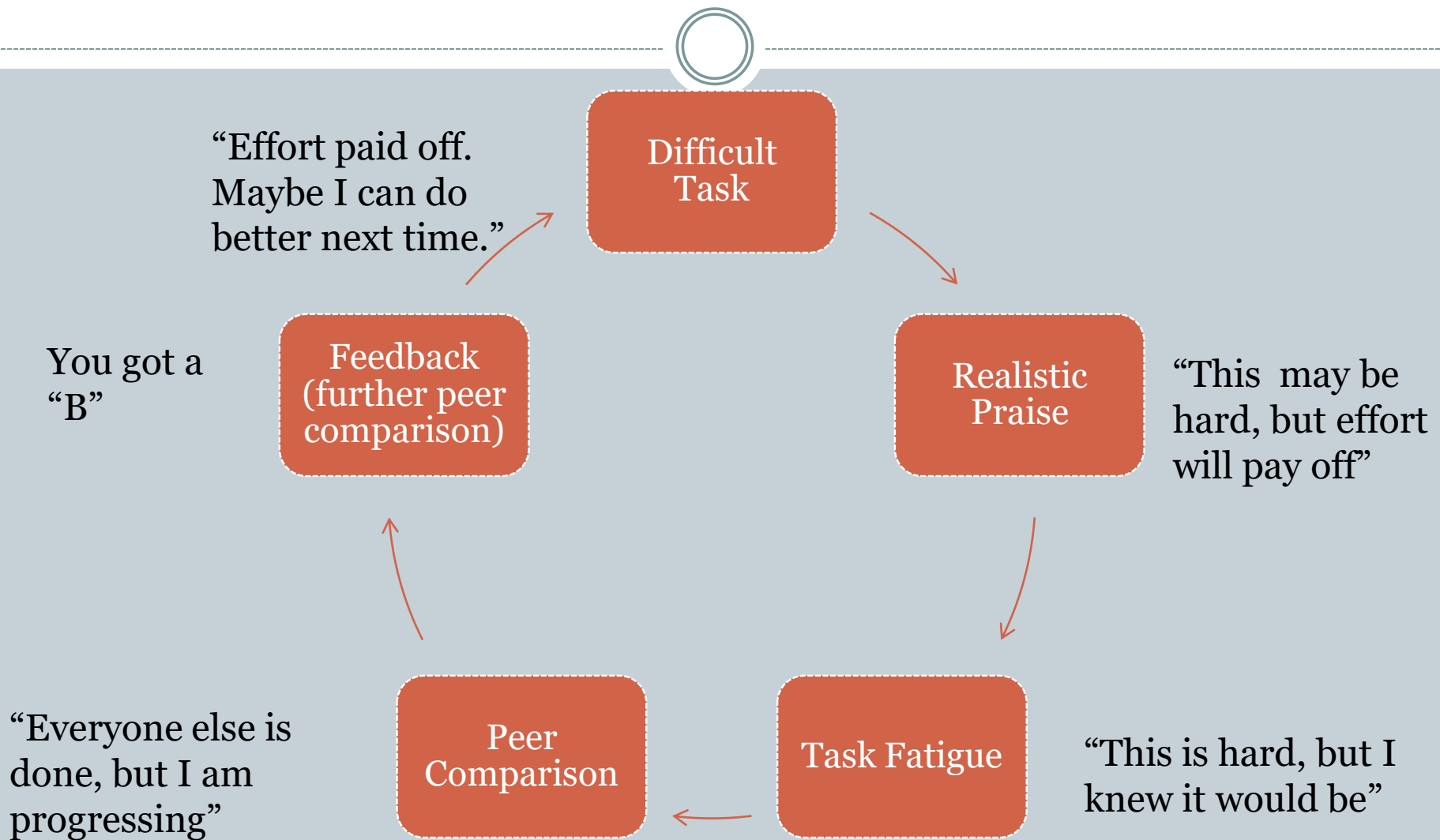
Next steps

- Social cognition theory would suggest we need to create many small 'successes' to provide feedback consistent with mastery – thus changing social cognitions
- Try to find out ahead of time what is going to be taught (and pre-teach)
- Reflect and brainstorm on "what do I do when I don't understand something" – make a clear plan
- Try your best to normalize and not makes things easier – instead develop realistic accommodations that are more transferable
- Have the 'end goal' in sight – what will this look like in high school
- Model and praise effort and perseverance - knowing that things are not going to be easy
- Be honest about praise – humans don't value praise when it's inconsistent with other environmental feedback

T's story....

- In Grade 6, I was T's resource teacher and processed her IPRC. The following year in Grade 7, I was her math teacher.
- At the time, she struggled academically and defined herself as "not good in math", but didn't give up easily, and never complained
- She surrounded herself with supportive peers and learned how to figure things without much support from teachers
- Her parents never fought to make things easier for her, but supported her journey

T now..

- T graduated from Centennial CVI with both the Spartan Award for leadership and the Valentenuzzi award for contributions to the community

- She also received scholarships that covered her first year of university and is studying International Development at U of G

- What worked for T?

Shift your focus

- Teach students to self accommodate and persevere (two skills they will need more than anything)

- Praise effort and perseverance rather than achievement (this will come, but it is slower)

- Be strategic – focus efforts on math, science and language. Pre-teach whenever possible (this will take work).

- Connect with supportive peers to help with organization and work ethic (this is a tool, not a crutch)

Thank you

Questions?