Self-Regulating Academic Learning and Achievement: The Emergence of a Social Cognitive Perspective

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For three decades, social cognitive researchers have studied children's development of self-regulation as an achievement of socialization processes. I recount historically the emergence of a social cognitive perspective on self-regulation and identify its unique features. Two essential characteristics of students' self-regulated academic learning have been identified— their use of strategies and perceptions of self-efficacy. A social cognitive model of academic self-regulated learning is proposed that integrates triadic determinants of self-regulated learning (personal, behavioral, and environmental) on the basis of a strategic control loop. When students monitor their responding and attribute outcomes to their strategies, their learning becomes self-regulated, and they display increased self-efficacy, greater intrinsic motivation, and higher academic achievement.

KEY WORDS: self-regulation; achievement; social cognition.

INTRODUCTION

The forces of change have confronted American educators with an increasingly difficult challenge: Advances in technology are transforming the economic base of our society from industrial goods to information. In this age of information, a person's knowledge and skill have become the primary source of good jobs, self-confidence, and social prestige. The quickening pace

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of technological change places more demands on citizens to assume greater responsibility for learning new competencies. There is a growing pedagogical need to understand how students develop the capability and motivation to regulate their own learning.

Approximately three decades ago, social cognitive researchers began to study various components of self-regulation such as response inhibition (e.g., Walters et al., 1963; Walters and Parke, 1964), adoption of self-regulatory standards (e.g., Bandura et al., 1967; Bandura and Kupers, 1964; Mischel and Liebert, 1966), delay of gratification (Mischel, 1961; Bandura and Mischel, 1965), and rule induction and use (e.g., Bandura and Harris, 1966; Bandura and McDonald, 1963). This research has led to the development of a unique triadic view of human self-regulation, involving personal, behavioral, and environmental dimensions. This perspective has proven to be useful to researchers interested in diverse aspects of self-regulated functioning, such as motivation (e.g., Bandura and Cervone, 1983, 1986), physical health control (e.g., asthma, obesity, smoking, heart disease, and diabetes) (e.g., Bandura, 1986a; Clark and Zimmerman, 1990; O'Leary, 1985), mental health improvement (e.g., phobias, sleep disorders, stress management) (e.g., Bandura et al., 1982; Rosenthal and Downs, 1985; Rosenthal and Steffek, 1990), acquisition of physical skills (e.g., strength, sports, and tool use) (e.g., Bandura and Cervone, 1983, 1986), career choice and development (Betz and Hackett, 1986), complex decision-making and organizational functioning (Bandura, 1988a; Bandura and Wood, 1989; Wood and Bandura, 1989a, 1989b), and academic success (e.g., studying and test preparation and performance) (e.g., Schunk, 1984; Zimmerman and Martinez-Pons, 1986, 1988).

In the present article, I describe historically the emergence of a social cognitive perspective on self-regulation and identify unique features of the approach, delineate the essential characteristics of self-regulated academic learning, and, finally, propose a social cognitive model to explain self-regulated academic learning and achievement.

HISTORICAL OVERVIEW OF RESEARCH ON SELF-REGULATION PROCESSES

From the inception of the theory, social cognitive researchers have viewed self-regulation as an achievement of socialization processes (Bandura and Walters, 1963). Initial interest in this topic focused on self-control, which was defined as "the ability to control one's own actions in the absence of immediate external constraints" (Thoresen and Mahoney, 1974, p. 2). It was

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2Prior to his 1986 text, Bandura referred to his view as social learning theory.