Social Cognitive Theory: Assignment #1 Case Study #2

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Introduction

In review of Case Study #2, I write from the standpoint of Bandura’s social cognitive theory. Through the constructs of that theory, I present Ms. Marotta’s strengths and weaknesses in a review of her lesson. Throughout these explanations, I explain the appropriateness of read-alouds in the classroom, state why the students did not take notes during the lesson, and the theoretical applications of note-taking in general. My conclusion includes mention of problems I foresee along with their solutions in a classroom where social cognitivism is the norm.

Case Study #2 features Ms. Marotta, a teacher education major who spends two hours each morning observing and assisting in a middle school geography class. Her supervising teacher, Mr. Koehn, has asked her to prepare a lesson about climate.

The following from Bandura (1994) will serve as an overall statement I will make before launching into listing strengths, and especially weaknesses of a student teacher: “The task of creating learning environments conducive to the development of cognitive skills rests heavily on the talents and self-efficacy of teachers. Those who have a high sense of efficacy about their teaching capabilities can motivate their students and enhance their cognitive development.” In the real world, since Ms. Marotta is not even an in-service teacher yet, her sense of self-efficacy is still developing and the following strengths and weaknesses will serve as learning tools for her to build up that self-efficacy as a motivating teacher.

Strengths and Weaknesses: Textbook Reading

While Ms. Marotta interacts with her students, she leads them through reading of their geography textbook chapter, in a sort of round-robin style. For middle school students in a social cognitive learning environment, being led through chapter readings may be wasting valuable class time that would be better served in a more active involvement of social interactions.
addition, teacher-led reading has the inherent message to students: you are not a capable enough reader to do it alone. In a social cognitive setting, reading can be accomplished by students on their own as homework by using self-set goals.

Social cognitive theory contends that students who are allowed to set their own goals and experience mastery of those goals raise their self-efficacy and enhance their learning (Schunk, 2004, p.109). The goal-setting process could be accomplished at the beginning of the unit, using simple math for number of pages that need reading divided by the number of days before it is due (a teacher-established due date). Students will become self-regulated learners and evaluate their progress and learning throughout the reading by completing measurable assessments after pre-set chapter sections.

In middle school, practice tests, note-taking, or a set of questions for each section can be used to monitor progress. Ms. Marotta would need to correct and make comments on the practice tests, notes, and questions in a quick enough turn-around to get them back to the students in order that the students can monitor their reading progress and use them as their own learning tools. One of the best sources for building self-efficacy is setting goals, working toward each goal in small steps, receiving feedback, working through problems, and being persistent and motivated to accomplish goals. This is a reciprocal process involving the teacher and the student.

A social cognitive concept demonstrated by Ms. Marotta is the use of text books in her lesson for vicarious learning (the capability of people to learn from others). Students of geography don’t have to go out and climb a mountain, for example, to measure temperature changes on the way up. They can learn about it from others in a textbook about climate. Likewise, they can learn all the basic concepts, including related experiences, of climate by
reading about it from others who know it. Speakers, web sites, videos and audios (CD, DVD, VHS, cassette tapes, streamed from on-line), field trips, 2-D visuals (posters, journals, books, magazines), and other teacher-planned input can all contribute to a well-planned unit of study that offers many opportunities for vicarious learning.

Strengths and Weaknesses: Class Discussion

To begin her interactive discussion with the students, Ms. Marotta asks a leading question about air conditioning that more or less dangles in the classroom without connectivity. She has not established footing yet, for the students or herself, in terms of direction of thought. She rethinks her focus and begins to talk about yesterday’s lesson, perhaps to establish footing through a review process during which everyone would begin to process their thoughts along the same line. Although her method is not as skillful as it might be, it is strength in her lesson to involve students in their learning through question and answer. A tenet of social cognitive theory is that people are able to learn by observing others (vicarious capability), and by participating and performing the behavior themselves. In addition, a key construct of social cognitive theory is that people have the ability to self-reflect. During a discussion, students can weigh their own learning against what they hear from others.

Responding to her prompt about what happened in the last lesson, the students recount mainly in one-word answers. To the loss of her students’ benefit, she does not encourage them to elaborate. For instance, when three students answered “temperature”, “wind”, and “climate”, she said, “Okay, On Friday, Mr. Koehn described several different things that effect climate. Who can tell me what they are?” She would better serve their review time by encouraging her students to express themselves further by elaboration, with her assistance and praise. This would accomplish two purposes.
One, since modeled behavior has a functional value that influences modeling by observers (Schunk, p. 101) other students would answer in a more complete form once their peers were encouraged to do so. And, two, since attention is good at this point, rehearsal and retention, subprocesses of observational learning, can be activated by students’ relating new information to what they have already stored about climate in their schemata, and hearing again what they already know.

Another skill she did not demonstrate very well during discussion time was the ability to make connections between herself (environment) and her students. She was encouraging but did not show that her students’ behavior had much of an impact on her behavior. In order to contribute to the triad which explains how behavior impacts environment, she would have to summarize her students’ responses, rephrase questions, and make overall summaries and connections to the reading and lessons to show that listening to their responses made an impact on the discussion.

Strengths and Weaknesses: Reading Aloud

Reading aloud in a whole-group situation is not a good choice based on social cognitive theory. It noticeably compares readers to each other and puts students in tiers of ability. The behavior of the less fluent reader is negatively affected by his own poor skills. The behavior of the other students listening to an incompetent model is negatively affected, as well, as they begin to lose attention.

When Ms. Marotta asks Kevin to read the next section in the text, she was not thinking in terms of the reciprocal nature of classroom dynamics. Kevin is not a competent model for reading. Although he may be similar in reading ability to a few of his peers, his reading aloud is a waste of class time in this case. Further, he is not motivated, especially in the whole-group
situation to read aloud. Kevin knows he is not a fluent reader and his self-efficacy will diminish since he can not perform at the level of reading he knows that most students possess. His classmates also know that he is not a good reading model and their attention might wane, or their behavior changes to empathy for Kevin rather than listening for Polar Region information from Kevin’s reading. Bandura (1994) said, “Successful efficacy builders do more than convey positive appraisals. In addition to raising people’s beliefs in their capabilities, they structure situations for them in ways that bring success and avoid placing people in situations prematurely where they are likely to fail often. They measure success in terms of self-improvement rather than by triumphs over others.” On top of damage done to Kevin in terms of self-efficacy building, the meaning of the actual reading was diminished.

With some quick thinking, though, she could have eased out of this situation with little harm done. When Kevin started reading, Ms. Marotta, realizing her mistake, could have encouraged him often, and after a few sentences, passed on the reading to another reader whose skills are just fair, and then another reader whose reading skills are good, encouraging each. Kevin would not feel that his effort was cut short or replaced by a better reader. Then, Ms. Marotta could have moved on. However, the content of the reading would be compromised no matter what at that point.

Strengths and Weaknesses: Note-Taking

Her model for writing notes, Jackson, was chosen for his handwriting skills. He is motivated and probably does have neat writing since most students know their strengths and weaknesses. Whether or not he is good model for note-taking behavior is never established. If he was a good one, students might benefit by watching what he opted to write down. However, a better solution would be for everyone to take notes themselves. Bandura suggests (Stone, 1998) that humans’
symbolizing capability, the formation of symbols and words, helps us give meaning to experiences.

Ms. Marotta is wise to require note-taking. Students can be taught that note-taking is a skill that can help them organize their thoughts, relate information from the book and class to themselves, assist in self-regulation of their reading goals, and have great study tools for tests. Students are likely to see the value in good notes once they make the connection between their notes and what they are required to know for discussions, test, and projects.

The students did not take notes in Ms. Marotta’s class because they simply were not told to do so. In terms of self-regulation, it would better serve students to be motivated to take notes on their own for the purposes of personal learning rather than because they were told to do so. Note-taking became a reactionary process, directed by Mr. Koehn or Ms. Marotta, who for this instance, forgot to tell them to do so. They did not make the connection that note-taking is a self-regulating skill and has a purpose for their own learning.

Conclusion

Attention is a key factor in observational learning. Because this is an important factor and in a middle school classroom probably isn’t the easiest thing to gain since students are more tuned into peers, this might be a problem for a new teacher. However, once the overall feeling of the classroom is established as a place where students are their own agents in the learning process, students will have a personal stake in attentive behavior since their own learning depends on it.

Some skills such as question and answer discussions and note-taking might not be very well-developed by middle school. A solution is to incorporate discussion and note-taking
strategy into the daily lessons. At the beginning of the year, students might be prompted much during discussion, with lots of modeling of well-developed answers, or provided with an outline of the chapter to be read and annotated. By mid-year, less prompts are needed in discussions and only the main ideas are provided for note-taking. By the last quarter, students should have developed the skills necessary to participate with strong ideas well-stated at discussion time and to take neat, organized, well-developed notes. Both are skills of a self-regulated learner who values learning and who can organize information in a beneficial way.

Ms. Marotta’s weaknesses, negatively impacting the lesson, are basically of two sorts in term of social cognitive theory: the failure to allow students to be part of the teaching through the skillful use of observational learning, and the failure to allow students the opportunity to be their own agents in learning. In the body of this paper I presented solutions such as allowing and encouraging students to participate fully in the reading discussion thereby teaching and learning from each other, and, further, affecting the teacher’s leading questions, and having students set goals to accomplish the text reading on their own.

One last point to make is that Ms. Marotta herself is developing instructional self-efficacy through observation of Mr. Koehn, mastering her own goals of learning, and experiencing first-hand the role of teacher.

Bibliography