Components of Self-Regulation

OVERVIEW

For many students, school becomes an increasingly negative experience as they advance in grade. As a result, they often have difficulty seeing academic tasks as relevant, interesting, and engaging and lack the self-discipline necessary to succeed in school. They feel disengaged and do not demonstrate a high level of effort, set academic goals, consider strategies to accomplish tasks, or monitor their performance and progress. In addition, disengaged students are less likely to take responsibility for the consequences of their academic choices; they avoid exerting and maintaining willpower, especially if doing so is experienced as unpleasant, and they have difficulty managing attention (Hidi & Harackiewicz, 2000).

Students who exhibit these negative characteristics are said to have problems with academic self-regulation—that is, they have problems exerting self-control and maintaining self-discipline when engaging in school tasks (Zimmerman, 2008). In contrast, students with academically self-regulated attitudes and behaviors can study or perform a challenging or repetitive school task, even when there is something else that they enjoy doing more (Blair, 2002).

Students who are academically self-regulated can carry out three particular academic tasks especially well:

- Setting academic goals and relevant performance standards
- Creating strategies to attain goals and maintain the performance standards they have set
Monitoring their actions to make sure they are acting consistently with their goals and performance standards and adjusting their academic behavior based on this information (Bandura, 1997; Carver & Scheier, 1982; Hoeksma, Oosterlaan, & Schipper, 2004)

The three essential components of academic self-regulation—planning, problem solving, and self-evaluation—usually occur in a specific sequence (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2002; Zimmerman, 2008).

**Planning**

Academically self-regulated students take time to plan. They think about their academic goals and consider whether the goals are relevant, valuable, interesting, and achievable. Once they set a goal, these students are motivated to achieve the goal and act autonomously to do so. They exert effort, feel confident, and expect to succeed. They are also engaged while learning and persist at tasks until they are completed (Bandura, 1997; Urdan & Midgely, 2001). Academically self-regulated youth view the goal as a target or destination, can use the goal to prioritize tasks, and can decide where to direct their attention. They know how to use time frames to schedule and pace their academic activities (Bandura & Cervone, 1986).

**Problem Solving**

Students who are academically self-regulated understand and use problem-solving strategies. They select strategies to achieve their goals, sequence the strategies selected, set standards to gauge the quality of their performance, manage their attention, and monitor the degree to which they are acting in accordance with their standards and making progress in achieving their goals. If they become frustrated along the way, these students work to overcome the problem. They do not procrastinate and are aware of discrepancies among their actions, goals, and performance standards. When discrepancies are noted, academically self-regulated learners use this information to adjust their efforts and strategies. In addition, they try to take advantage of the help available and use routines and structure to help get their work done.

**Self-Evaluation**

Academically self-regulated learners engage in self-evaluation. They compare the results of their efforts with their intentions, attach meaning to the outcome, and think about whether they have acted according to their own standards or principles. When pleased with the results, these youth experience positive emotions that further enhance their academic motivation. When they are not happy with the results, they often become distressed but, when they do, they can use that feeling as motivation to improve.
1.1 Assessment of Academic Self-Regulation Skills

Tell the student that you want her to be a “scientist” and to collect “data” about how she actually does in setting academic goals, selecting strategies, and monitoring her schoolwork. Provide a copy of and review the Academic Self-Regulation Checklist (in the appendix and on the CD) and ask the student to indicate how often she had the thought or took the action described in the checklist, based on her actions and attitudes during the past month of school.

1.2 Comparison and Self-Assessment

To help a student become more aware of his own attributes pertaining to academic self-regulation and have a set of words to facilitate self-description in this regard, present the following two vignettes. The first describes a teenager with poor academic self-regulation skills; the second is about a teen with well-developed skills. Depending on the student’s level of intellectual and academic competence, you can read the vignettes aloud or ask the student to read them to himself.

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Vignette A: Sam

Sam is 15. He is very bright and yet very bored by school. He loves robotics. He sees school as irrelevant to his interests. Sam’s only academic goal is to get through the school day as quickly and painlessly as possible. He doesn’t take pride in how he does at school, although he gets upset when other students, who he feels are not as smart as he is, get on the honor roll when he does not.

Although Sam finishes most of his schoolwork, he does not check it to be sure that he followed the instructions or did the work accurately. Similarly, he does not pay careful attention when he writes down his homework assignments, nor does he plan a time to do the work. He usually does his homework at the last minute and often hands it in either incomplete or with errors.

Sam’s mother tells him over and over that he has to care more about school, that it is important, and that he should try harder. She doesn’t ask him how he would like to do things differently, and she criticizes him for not “owning up” to his bad study habits and for not trying to do some of the things his teacher suggests that he do to improve. Frustrated, she sent Sam to an after-school program where, again, the teacher told Sam what he needs to do to “improve.” When Sam mentions his interest in robotics to the after-school teacher and asks to do something with robotics as part of the program, the teacher says that he is too far behind...
with his regular work and that all his time has to be spent on catching up. Sam doesn’t feel interested in the material the teacher presents and, just like in his regular classes, he tunes the teacher out.

**Vignette B: Suzanne**

Suzanne is 12. She is a serious student who wants to do the right thing at school all the time. In class, she keeps her desk so neat and organized that the teacher uses it as an example of how other children should keep their desks.

Suzanne has strong values. She has the goal of doing her work well but hates feeling competitive. She is critical of students who brag about being on the honor roll, especially to other students who are not on it. She tries to keep track of her progress and not get discouraged when she “messes up.” Instead, she sits down with her parents and tries to strategize and think about what she could do differently. Once she has a plan, Suzanne tries to pay attention to whether she is keeping to it. If she sees that she is not, she tries to figure out what went wrong.

Using the assignment book provided by the school, Suzanne carefully writes down the homework, and, before leaving school, checks to see that she has all the material she needs to complete the work. At home, she does her work at the same time and place each day, checking off each task as it’s completed so that she can see what’s done and what she has left to do. She also plans when to start assignments that are due in a few weeks so that she doesn’t feel rushed.

After the vignettes have been read, administer the questions on the **Comparison and Self-Assessment Questionnaire** (Figure 1). These questions require the student to make a comparison between himself and the students portrayed in the vignettes—that is, to see in what ways he is like Sam or Suzanne. Use the student’s answers to help him understand his level of academic self-regulation skills.

### 1.3 Understanding Self-Regulated Learning

To continue helping the student increase self-awareness about the qualities and components of academic self-regulation, assist her student in completing the list of questions on Figure 2, the **Are You a Self-Regulated Learner?** handout (Cleary & Zimmerman, 2002), then discuss.

### 1.4 Understanding Academic Self-Regulation Tasks

Have the student read or ask the student to listen as you read the following case reports. Tell him to imagine that he is a “shrink” who is trying to understand how two clients, Andy and Olga, are feeling. Ask the student how he
FIGURE 1  Comparison and Self-Assessment Questionnaire

First, write a short description of how Sam or Suzanne acts or feels in relation to each characteristic. Next decide whether you think you are more like Sam or more like Suzanne.

**Interest in schoolwork**

Sam: __________________________________________________________________________________

Suzanne: ______________________________________________________________________________

I am more like □ Sam  □ Suzanne

**Level of effort**

Sam: __________________________________________________________________________________

Suzanne: ______________________________________________________________________________

I am more like □ Sam  □ Suzanne

**Reason for trying (wants to, or is forced to?)**

Sam: __________________________________________________________________________________

Suzanne: ______________________________________________________________________________

I am more like □ Sam  □ Suzanne

**Desire to be successful at school**

Sam: __________________________________________________________________________________

Suzanne: ______________________________________________________________________________

I am more like □ Sam  □ Suzanne

**Ability to keep track of what he or she needs to do**

Sam: __________________________________________________________________________________

Suzanne: ______________________________________________________________________________

I am more like □ Sam  □ Suzanne

**Desire to please teachers and parents**

Sam: __________________________________________________________________________________

Suzanne: ______________________________________________________________________________

I am more like □ Sam  □ Suzanne

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FIGURE 1.2  Are You a Self-Regulated Learner?

Answer the following questions yes or no.

Do you . . .

1. Have a plan before you begin to do your schoolwork (what you will do, when you will start, where you will work, in what order you will do your work)? □ Yes □ No

2. Set a goal before you start working? □ Yes □ No

3. Visualize your goal and imagine how you might tell whether you are acting in the way that you want to act (that you are keeping to your standards)? □ Yes □ No

4. Create priorities (put your tasks in an order) and a schedule to do your work? □ Yes □ No

5. Think out specific strategies or ways to achieve your goals? □ Yes □ No

6. Expect to do well before you start doing your work? □ Yes □ No

7. Feel interested in the work? □ Yes □ No

8. Think the work is important or relevant? □ Yes □ No

9. Feel motivated to put forth as much effort as you can? □ Yes □ No

10. Feel able to stay focused while working? □ Yes □ No

11. Keep track of whether you are paying attention while you work? □ Yes □ No

12. Notice whether you are making progress toward being as successful at schoolwork as you want to be? □ Yes □ No

13. Try to figure out what you would do differently to help yourself improve? □ Yes □ No

14. See a relationship between how hard you work, your strategies, and how you actually do? □ Yes □ No

15. Self-correct and adjust your effort, revise your strategies, or ask for help if you see you are not doing as well as you want to do? □ Yes □ No

16. Give yourself a reward (for example, a compliment) or punishment (feel ashamed or self-critical) when you finish your work, depending on how you think you did? □ Yes □ No

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would “counsel” them about the benefits of the three academic self-regulation tasks: setting goals, keeping track of what they have to do, and evaluating their performance to see whether they are accomplishing their goals.

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**Case Report A: Andy**

Andy feels that he is like a song he once heard called “Nowhere Man.” He has trouble paying attention at school, is almost always bored, and never finishes his work. As a result, he never hands anything in on time and is failing all of his classes. He has no confidence that he will ever be successful or will be able to get a job when he is older. When he thinks about success, Andy’s heart starts to race and he feels very tired. Lately, even outside of school, he does not feel like doing anything. When a friend challenged him to a computer game, he quit when he started losing and then felt bad about doing that. His global studies teacher, a former police officer, seems to be an extra-good guy and has offered to sit down with Andy to figure out what he could do to make things better. So far, Andy has made excuses about why he can’t meet with his global studies teacher.

**Questions**

1. Why does Andy feel like the “Nowhere Man”?
2. Does Andy have a clear goal?
3. Does Andy expect to succeed?
4. What are the feelings Andy seems to be experiencing, and how do these feelings seem to affect the chance that he will, in fact, become a “Nowhere Man”?
5. Does Andy seem able to plan, use strategies, self-evaluate, and seek help?
6. What do you think you might say to Andy to help him have hope so that he could be a “Somewhere Man”?

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**Case Report B: Olga**

Olga was born in Russia and adopted when she was five years old by a family in the United States. She was always curious about Russia and, in particular, was fascinated by Russian skaters, especially after watching a Russian skater on television win the gold medal at the Olympics. Olga had never skated and wondered whether she would be good at it. She asked her mother to take her skating. Her mother was happy about that because she worried that Olga was too quiet and did not often ask for things that she wanted. Olga had never had a special hobby and was shy around other children, in part, because she was very self-conscious about her accent. She usually spent her time outside of school alone.
Olga’s mother took her to the ice rink. After watching the other people skate, some with the help of a skating instructor, Olga timidly and awkwardly tried. Her mother noticed how anxious and stiff Olga was. She was surprised, therefore, when Olga asked to come back next week for a lesson. Olga’s mother told her that she thought it was a great idea and asked Olga to tell her more about why she wanted lessons. Olga explained that she kept thinking about how graceful the Russian Olympic skater was on television and said that she wanted to be like her.

Olga took a lesson, and, at the suggestion of the instructor, made a plan to take a series of lessons and set a goal. She and the instructor agreed to develop a skating routine that Olga would demonstrate in six months at a local skating show. It was open to young skaters at all skill levels.

Questions
1. How do you think the fact that Olga grew up in Russia affected her desire to ice skate?
2. How do you think that seeing the Russian Olympian skater affected Olga’s wish to be a good skater?
3. Do you think Olga’s interest in skating makes it very likely she will be a good skater?
4. How do you think Olga’s shyness and self-consciousness might affect her chances of being successful at the upcoming skating show?
5. Do you think Olga needs an instructor, or do you think she should have—at least for a while—tried to skate on her own?
6. Do you think that having a routine and a goal makes it more likely that Olga will be successful?