

9

ALBERT BANDURA

LEARNING THROUGH OBSERVATION

LEARNING OUTCOMES

Having read this chapter you should be able to:

- understand the life and work of Albert Bandura
- recognise his contribution to the development of social learning theory
- compare his work with that of other learning theorists
- recognise how his work can be applied in practice.

KEY WORDS

Bobo doll; self-regulation; modelling; social learning theory; self-efficacy; social cognitive theory; vicarious reinforcement; vicarious punishment; identification

INTRODUCTION

In their 2002 study of twentieth-century psychologists, Haggbloom et al. ranked Albert Bandura as the fourth most eminent psychologist of the twentieth century, behind Sigmund Freud, Jean Piaget and B.F. Skinner (Haggbloom et al., 2002). This is not surprising given his contributions as a major force in contemporary psychology (Ferrari, 2010) through a long and illustrious career which has spanned over half a century.

Bandura's early work, which centred on understanding aggression in children, formed the precursor to his most famous experimental work, a series of studies using a **Bobo doll** to ascertain how children learn aggressive behaviours through imitation. Through this work Bandura and his colleagues advanced theories on social learning, first developed at the Yale Institute of Human Relations in the 1930s (Ferrari, 2010), and to this day he is considered a leading proponent of this theory.

His early work was influenced by the behaviourist tradition; however, his later studies into personality development saw his theories drawing from a more cognitive perspective as he began to acknowledge that there was more to personality than the influence of the environment. He began to study **self-regulation** as a part of personality development, considering how people managed their own behaviour. For him, the idea that all behaviour could be modified through the use of rewards and sanctions as suggested by behaviourist traditions was too simplistic, and he began to question how children learned through a process of observation rather than through the direct experience of being rewarded for a behaviour.

His work on self-regulation resulted in a therapy technique referred to as **self-control therapy**, which has proved successful in helping people with various problems such as smoking, overeating and study habits. Bandura later developed a **modelling** therapy which was designed to help people with various psychological disorders deal with their problems through observation and modelling techniques.

Bandura's work has had an enormous impact in the field of psychology, specifically in the areas of **social learning theory** and in personality theory and therapy. Boeree suggests that this in part may be due to 'his straightforward behaviourist style [which] makes good sense to people', and that 'his action-orientated, problem-solving approach likewise appeals to those who want to get things done' (2006: 8).

Throughout his career he sought to explore how **self-efficacy** and self-regulation can support people in various aspects of their lives and utilised advances in technology to show the effect of media and culture on the development of self-efficacy, with his most recent work examining how cultural tools can be used to shape individual consciousness (Ferrari, 2010). This ability to respond to advances in technology has ensured that his work continues to have currency in a fast-paced world.

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ALBERT BANDURA, THE PERSON

Albert Bandura was born in the town of Mundare in Northern Alberta, Canada, in December 1925. He was the youngest of six children to parents who were Eastern European immigrants; his parents were family orientated, but also placed a lot of emphasis on the importance of education, which Bandura (2006) suggests was because of the education they themselves missed.

His early experience of education was in a small, but successful, elementary and high school, in his hometown of Mundare. The school had only two teachers and limited educational resources, meaning the pupils became responsible for their own education. As Bandura recalled:

We had to take charge of our own learning. Self-directed learning was an essential means of academic self-development, not a theoretical abstraction. The paucity of educational resources turned out to be an enabling factor that has served me well rather than an insurmountable, handicapping one. The content of courses is perishable but self-regulatory skills have lasting functional value whatever the pursuit might be. (2006: 45)

During school vacations his parents encouraged him to seek paid work which helped to fund him through college; he worked in a furniture manufacturing factory as well as spending one summer after high school 'filling holes on the Alaskan highway in Yukon' (Boeree, 2006 [1998]: 3). This work enabled him to meet people from all walks of life, something which he had been somewhat sheltered from previously in his small hometown. Reflecting on this experience, Bandura (2006) observed that it provided him with a uniquely broad perspective on life.

On leaving high school, he enrolled at the University of British Columbia in Vancouver, a decision he put down to the search for warmer climes. Ironically his choice of psychology as a course was by chance, since the classmates he car-shared with had courses with early starts. Leafing through course leaflets as he waited for an English class to start he noted that the introductory psychology course ran early enough to fill the time as he awaited his next class. Thus, he commenced a course which was the start of his future profession (Bandura, 2006).

After graduating with his Bachelor's degree in psychology in 1949, he sought to further his education in this field. On asking where he might find the 'stone tablets' of psychology, he was advised by his academic advisor to seek a position at the University of Iowa where some of the leading figures in social psychology, including Kenneth Spence and Kurt Lewin, were building on Clark Hull's theoretical and experimental analyses of learning (Ferrari, 2010). While at Iowa, Bandura became heavily influenced by Neal Miller and John Dollard's studies of modelling and imitation, an area of study he later built upon in his own work.

He received his Master's degree from the University of Iowa in 1951, followed by a PhD in clinical psychology in 1952, and was then recruited by Robert Sears to

join the psychology department at Stanford University, a position which he still held at the time of writing.

Bandura's early work centred on identifying the reasons for aggression in children. This included field studies of social learning which were undertaken in collaboration with his first doctoral student, Richard Walters. Their findings revealed that modelling influences could help to explain aggression in children, even those from advantaged backgrounds, and led to their first published work, *Adolescent Aggression*, in 1959. This work was unconventional as it did not simply focus on individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds and led to further research into the determinants and mechanisms of observational learning (Pajares, 2004). Bandura continued his work into aggression with his now famous Bobo doll experiments, collaborative work undertaken with Walters, and Dorrie and Sheila Ross which resulted in a second book, *Social Learning and Personality Development*, published in 1963.

Despite initially being given only a year's appointment at Stanford University, as an acting instructor (Pajares, 2004), Bandura was made a full professor in 1964 and from then continued to focus his research on aspects of social modelling and how it relates to human motivation, thought and action. Additionally, a further major area of research which Bandura contributed to is that of self-regulation in children. Collaborating with Walter Mischel, he sought to establish how children develop the ability to self-regulate their behaviour, leading to a theory that views people as 'self-regulatory and self-reflective beings who create and do not merely react to environmental influences' (Ferrari, 2010: 108) – this was in stark contrast to the behaviourist theories which were still prevalent at the time.

Pajares (2004) observes that Bandura's research interests varied widely, and as such he was often pursuing several lines of enquiry concurrently. His academic career saw him elected Fellow of the American Psychological Society in 1964, and Fellow at the Centre for Advanced Studies in the Behavioural Sciences between 1969 and 1970, and he was awarded an endowed chair by Stanford in 1974, becoming the David Starr Jordan Professor of Social Sciences. He developed a number of theories, including a **social cognitive theory** of human functioning in the mid-1980s, and published numerous books and articles. In a career that spanned almost six decades it is not surprising that Bandura received accolades which include the Distinguished Scientific Contribution Award of the American Psychological Association, the William James Award of the American Psychological Society for outstanding achievements in psychological science and the Distinguished Scientist Award of the Society of Behavioural Medicine. He also received honorary degrees and awards from the University of Athens and the University of Catama, and a lifetime achievement award from the Western Psychological Society.

Alongside his commitment to research, Albert Bandura was a family man, who was married for fifty-nine years to Virginia Varns. He had two children, Mary, a clinical psychologist, and Carol, the director of a clinic for adolescent children of migrant workers and the neglected poor; he also had twin grandchildren. He credited his late wife and children with ensuring that he had a good work–life balance, stating:

We hiked the Bay Area ridge trails, camped amidst the stately redwoods, worked in grass-roots conservation movements, explored the regional culinary shrines, cheered the melodious operatic divas and philharmonias, applauded the baroqueers at the Carmel Bach festivals, sampled the noble grape in the bucolic Napa Valley, and explored the grandeur of the High Sierras. (Bandura, 2006: 53)

Reflecting on his life at the age of eighty, Bandura observed 'I am reminded of the saying that it is not the miles travelled but the amount of tread remaining that is important. When I last checked, I still have too much tread left to gear down or conclude this engaging odyssey' (2006: 72). He continued to teach and research at Stanford University until his retirement in 2010. He passed away peacefully at home eleven years later at the age of 95.

THE THEORY

Bandura is most well-known for his work on *social learning theory*, expressing that – according to the social learning view – 'man [*sic*] is neither driven by inner forces nor buffeted helplessly by environmental influences' (1971: 2); rather he believed behaviour can best be explained by 'continuous reciprocal interaction between behaviour and its controlling conditions' (1971: 2). Bandura was writing in response to the behavioural theories of the time which posited that behaviour was a direct response to the consequences experienced as a result of a particular behaviour, for example through rewards and sanctions. Bandura stated:

I found this behavioristic theorizing discordant with the obvious social reality that much of what we learn is through the power of social modeling. I could not imagine a culture in which its language; mores; familial customs and practices; occupational competencies; and educational, religious, and political practices were gradually shaped in each new member by rewarding and punishing consequences of their trial-and-error performances. (2006: 55)

For Bandura, learning was more complex than the simple application of rewards and sanctions, and through his experimental work he concluded that learning behaviour occurred on a vicarious basis, as a result of individuals observing the behaviour of others and the subsequent consequences (Bandura, 1971). He theorised that since humans have 'superior cognitive capacity' (1971: 2) they are able to internalise what they have observed symbolically, and then later use this information to make decisions based on these internal representations. It is for this reason that Bandura later referred to his theory as social cognitive theory, which he explained is a more fitting appellation:

... the social portion of the title acknowledges the social origins of much human thought and action; the cognitive portion recognizes the influential contribution of cognitive processes to human motivation, affect and action. (2006: 65)

In applying his work to learning in children Bandura was interested in how behaviours are learned. He did not accept that children simply learned a behaviour through being rewarded or punished, as the theory of operant conditioning suggested. He questioned how children learned new behaviours when they had not been personally rewarded for that behaviour. He suggested instead that children learned through observational learning – the child did not have to be rewarded personally for the behaviour, it was enough to see someone else being rewarded for the child to imitate it, either immediately or at a later date.

Bandura's first large-scale research project, undertaken with his first doctoral student, Richard Walters, was the study of family influence in hyper-aggressive behaviour in boys who lived in advantaged neighbourhoods, not normally associated with antisocial behaviour (Bandura, 2006). The study revealed that 'parental modelling of aggressive orientations played a prominent role in the familial transmission of aggression' (2006: 56). This then led to subsequent experimental research into the determinants and mechanisms that governed modelling.

Arguably, the most well-known of this experimental research, which led to the advancement of Bandura's theory regarding observational learning, originated from studies undertaken in collaboration with Dorothea Ross and Sheila Ross in 1961. In their now famous studies Bandura, Ross and Ross created various scenarios with a Bobo doll, a large inflatable egg-shaped clown which was weighted in the bottom so that it bounced back up once hit. Kindergarten children witnessed adults acting physically and verbally aggressively towards the Bobo doll, with various iterations of the experiment being carried out with different levels of aggression exacted on the Bobo doll and utilising different tools such as mallets and dart guns. Having witnessed the adults interacting with the Bobo doll the children were subsequently left in the room with the Bobo dolls and a variety of toys, including aggressive and non-aggressive toys. The children were then observed as they interacted with the objects in the room.

The observers were initially looking specifically at the aggressive responses made by the children, including aggressive behaviours which directly imitated the adults they had observed, aggressive behaviours that were similar to the adults and aggressive behaviours that were entirely different from those of the adults. Their findings showed that the children not only copied physical and verbal aggression, but also developed their own forms of aggressive behaviour based on what they had seen; for example they would hit toys other than the Bobo doll with the mallet. They also developed non-imitative forms of aggressive behaviour, for example gun play and use of aggressive vocabulary not previously seen and heard in the adults. Bandura proposed that this demonstrated that modelling did not just produce response mimicry as traditionalists in the field of operant conditioning suggested, but that once a guiding principle had been established, then new versions of the behaviour were generated which went beyond that which had been seen and heard (Bandura, 2006).

Variables were introduced into the study, including the levels of aggression observed by the children, the gender of the children and the gender of the aggressor.

Subsequently, Bandura et al. (1961) went on to introduce other variables to their experiments, including rewarding and punishing the models, rewarding the children for imitating a behaviour, and even introducing a video of a model acting aggressively towards a live clown when critics suggested that Bobo dolls were meant to be hit (Boeree, 2006 [1998]).

Their observations showed that:

- Children who observed the aggressive models made far more imitative aggressive responses than those who were in the non-aggressive or control groups.
- There was more partial and non-imitative aggression among those children who had observed aggressive behaviour, although the difference for non-imitative aggression was small.
- The girls in the aggressive model conditions also showed more physical aggressive responses if the model was male but more verbal aggressive responses if the model was female (however, the exception to this general pattern was the observation of how often they punched Bobo, and in this case the effects of gender were reversed).
- Boys were more likely to imitate same-sex models than girls. The evidence for girls imitating same-sex models is not strong.
- Boys imitated more physically aggressive acts than girls. There was little difference in the verbal aggression between boys and girls.

(McCloud, 2014)

Nevertheless, while the experimental work demonstrated some selectivity in imitating the behaviour of others based on certain attributes, as indicated by McCloud (2014), Bandura observed that subjects rarely adopted all of the attributes of their preferred models. Rather, various features of the observed models were combined to construct new versions of a behaviour, which he referred to as selective modelling (Bandura, 2006).

Furthermore, Bandura et al. concluded that 'observation of cues produced by the behaviour of others is one effective means of eliciting certain forms of responses for which the original probability is very low or zero' (1961: 580), determining that children only needed to see a behaviour in order to imitate it, and did not, as previous theories suggested, have to be offered incentives to do this. However, there were also factors which could influence the success of observational learning, such as the attractiveness of the model to the observer, whether the model received rewards or punishments for their actions (which Bandura referred to as **vicarious reinforcement** and **vicarious punishment**), and whether or not the observer had the capabilities to carry out the action at that specific moment in time.

Bandura concluded that for observational learning to be successful four separate processes need to occur (see Figure 9.1). In the first instance, the individual needs to *observe* the model and pay attention to what is happening around them.

UNDERSTANDING AND USING EDUCATIONAL THEORIES

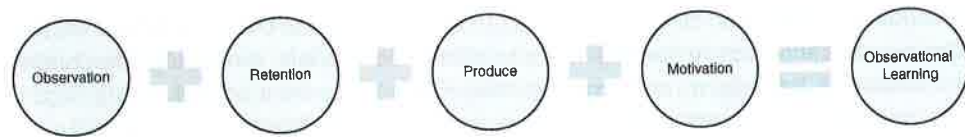


Figure 9.1 Bandura's four-step observational learning processes

The experimental work showed that children are more likely to pay attention to a model they are attracted to or identify with, for example someone of the same gender. The second is *retention*, since once observed the observer must be able to retain what they have seen so as to repeat it later. The observer needs to be able to structure, or code, the information in a way in which it can be easily retrieved. The observer then needs to be able to *produce* the action, which requires the observer to be mentally or physically capable of reproducing what they have observed. This stage is the most complex of the processes, since it is highly likely that the observer may not yet have perfected the skills needed to reproduce the action in its entirety. The final process is *motivation*: the observer must have a reason for wanting to perform the action, and motivations might include past reinforcement, promised reinforcement or vicarious reinforcement. Equally, motivation might well be in the form of a punishment, although Bandura, like behaviourists, would have argued that reinforcement is always more effective than punishment when encouraging certain behaviours (Boeree, 2006 [1998]).

The motivations as identified by Bandura show similarities with the behaviourist tradition, not surprisingly given that both behaviourism and social learning theory are theories built on the experiences of children. However, he expanded on traditional behaviourism by suggesting that there was a more complex relationship between the environment, behaviour and personal factors, and then drew on the cognitive abilities of children, 'acknowledging that children's abilities to listen, remember and abstract general rules from complete sets of observed behaviour affect their imitation and learning' (Berk, 1991: 15). In this respect children did not need the immediate reinforcement or punishment which behaviourism proposed.

Developing this thinking Bandura later went on to examine self-regulation in children, suggesting that people were self-regulatory and self-reflective beings who were not just reactive to environmental influences (Pajares, 2004). This then resulted in another strand to his social learning theory, which saw him identify how individuals controlled their own behaviour via three steps:

- Self-observation – looking at our own behaviour and monitoring it.
- Judgement – comparing ourselves with a standard; this might be a fixed standard or one that the individual creates for themselves. Judgement can then be comparing the self with others or with a personal goal.

- Self-response – this is in response to the standard set at the judgement step and would be a rewarding or punishing response depending on how far standards were met. Responses might range from feelings of pride or shame, through to more physical rewards; for example, treating or denying oneself.

Bandura saw self-regulation as being closely linked to self-esteem or self-efficacy, an important concept in psychology (Boeree, 2006 [1998]). A person who consistently meets the standards they set themselves will have high self-esteem, whereas those who fail to meet their own standards will suffer from low self-esteem. Bandura identified some of the dangers of low self-esteem as being compensation, inactivity and escape (Boeree, 2006 [1998]) and this will be discussed further in the next sections.

LINKS WITH OTHER THEORISTS

Comparisons can be made between the work of Bandura and Skinner since Bandura's early career was very much influenced by the operant conditioning theory put forward by Skinner (Ferrari, 2010). Both Skinner and Bandura were interested in how environmental stimuli could influence behaviour in children; however, while Skinner theorised that the environment was solely responsible for behaviour through reinforcement, Bandura developed this theory by suggesting that the child does not have to be personally reinforced for the behaviour to be imitated. He instead posited that behaviour was learned through observation and was not immediate; the child could internalise what they had observed and reproduce it at a later date.

Bandura's work, then, highlighted the importance of environmental influence on a child's cognitive development and behaviour, which resonates with the work of Lev Vygotsky, who was a social constructivist. Both Bandura and Vygotsky emphasised the importance of language construction in the development of human consciousness, which allows the individual to take control of the social potential of their environments. Additionally, both Vygotsky and Bandura developed theories on self-regulation and self-mastery with an emphasis on how 'people take charge of their own behaviour' (Ferrari, 2010: 110), although Bandura was more interested in how a person's self-belief could influence personal agency.

His early years at Iowa meant that he was directly exposed to some of the most influential theorists of the time in the fields of behavioural and social learning theories; these included Clark Hull, Kenneth Spence and Kurt Lewin. Later at Stanford he was influenced by Robert Sears, who was researching familial antecedents of social behaviour and identificatory learning, which inspired the aforementioned collaborative work with Richard Walters studying antisocial behaviour in boys. It was this work which saw him reject the ideas put forward by Clark Hull, who suggested that if

parents used aggression to punish their children it would reduce that behaviour. Bandura and Walters found that aggressive forms of punishment were more likely to result in further aggression.

Bandura's theory of observational learning suggested that a child identifies with the person they are modelling. The idea of **identification** has some parallels with Freud's Oedipus complex since both rely on the internalisation or adoption of another person's behaviour. However, Freud theorised that the child would **only** identify with the parent of the same gender as them, whereas Bandura suggested that identification could occur with a much wider field of potential models.

Bandura's work on self-regulation had parallels with the work of humanist thinkers, such as Maslow and Rogers. More recently both Guy Claxton and Carol Dweck developed self-theories which harmonise with Bandura's work. Bandura (1977) saw self-efficacy as the means by which a person can execute a course of action in order to deal with a prospective situation, which in simple terms relates to the confidence someone has in their own ability to succeed in a given situation. This has similarities with Dweck, who theorised that those with positive self-efficacy are able to approach tasks with confidence and persistence (Aubrey and Riley, 2019). Similarly, Claxton's Building Learning Power endorsed the four Rs of resilience, reflectiveness, resourcefulness and reciprocity, which too reflects the view that our own personal beliefs in our ability will influence how comprehensible and controllable we view the world.

CRITIQUING THE THEORY

Bandura's experimental work with the Bobo dolls received criticism for its unethical nature, with a suggestion that the children were manipulated to behave in an aggressive manner. The sample of children used in the study were all from Stanford Nursery, which critics suggest created a bias towards the white upper-middle class. Hart and Kritsonis (2006) point out that an overview of the sample was never acknowledged in the documentation of the work, and instead sweeping statements were made about lower socio-economic communities. Additionally, because the work was carried out under laboratory conditions, critics suggest that this was not representative of a 'real-life' situation, and as such it would be wrong to assume that this behaviour would be repeated under normal conditions. A further suggestion in relation to the Bobo doll experiments is that the children's motivation to show aggression to the doll came from wanting to please the adult rather than a display of aggressive tendencies (Gauntlett, 2005; Ferguson, 2010).

Critics of social learning theory argue that the theory is too simplistic in its nature to fully explain the complexities of human behaviour and learning, and while it can be used to explain some behaviours it does not explain how thoughts and feelings are learned. Bandura responded to this criticism when he renamed social learning theory as social cognitive theory, acknowledging that individuals are able to apply

cognitive processes to their decision making: for example they may observe violent behaviour, but they are able to make the decision as to whether or not to replicate that behaviour. Bandura stated that modelling is not a simple case of mimicry, but that through using abstraction individuals are able to 'generate new versions of the behaviour that go beyond what they have seen and heard' (2006: 56). He responded to a further criticism of modelling which suggests that it is antithetical to creativity. Here he pointed out that individuals will respond differently to observing the different models and will in fact amalgamate what they have observed, thereby producing new and individual behaviours.

Finally, McLeod (2016) observes that social learning theory cannot fully explain all behaviour, particularly in cases where there is no apparent role model in a person's life to account for a specific behaviour. Likewise, social learning theory does not account for maturation and development stages over the lifetime of an individual in which personality and motivation are likely to have changed and developed.

APPLYING SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY TO PRACTICE

Bandura's theory of social learning is highly applicable in the classroom and can be incorporated into daily routine relatively seamlessly. He identified through his Bobo doll experiments that children's learning is influenced by observation, with children modelling people around them, stating that:

Most of the behaviors that people display are learned either deliberately or inadvertently through the influence of example. (Bandura, 1971: 5)

Arguably, key influences – and role models – for children are the people they come into contact with on a daily basis through schools and early years settings. Bashir et al. observe that 'teachers have long-lasting impacts on the lives of their students, and the greatest teachers inspire their pupils to greatness' (2014: 9). The notion of the teacher being a positive role model for the children in their care is reflected in the Teachers' Standards for England (Department for Education, 2011: 10), which state that teachers must 'demonstrate consistently the positive attitudes, values and behaviour which are expected of pupils'. These standards must be met by all newly qualified teachers and are also used as a basis for teacher appraisal, setting out the professional roles and responsibilities of the classroom teacher. Children will look to the adults around them for cues as to how to behave appropriately, so as a role model it is essential that teachers demonstrate professional behaviours at all times, for example in the manner in which they interact with colleagues, parents and pupils. Additionally, as stated in the Standards, 'teachers must have proper and professional regard for the ethos, policies and practices of the school in which they teach and maintain high standards in their own attendance and punctuality' (2011: 10).

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It is imperative that school staff lead by example in order that pupils might themselves be encouraged to respect the ethos and policies of the school setting.

The influence of peers should not be overlooked when considering role models in settings, and children will model those peers they hold in esteem such as older peers or siblings, according to social learning theory. Teachers and educational practitioners can capitalise on this using Bandura's ideas around vicarious reinforcement and punishment; for example, rewarding those pupils who are demonstrating a desired behaviour is likely to result in other children imitating that behaviour with the anticipation that they too will receive said reward. Conversely, if children see others being punished for a behaviour, then they are less likely to copy that behaviour themselves for fear of receiving similar reprisals.

McDonald (2016) observes that:

Several research studies, spanning nearly 15 years, have illustrated the significant role that peers play not only in forming supportive networks, but also in enhancing learning and personal development.

To this end, it can be seen that a more formal application of peer role models is being used in educational settings to support young people. In recognition of the important role peers can play in supporting learning, formal peer-mentoring programmes have been seen to prevent the escalation of issues for young people and to bolster the efforts of school principals and teachers to identify and respond to bullying incidents (Cowie and Smith, 2010). In addition, Stader and Gagnepain (2000) identified that peer-mentoring schemes enhanced the climate in schools and reduced incidences of pupil drop-out. Houlston et al. explain that 'Peer support involves school programmes which train and use students themselves to help others learn and develop emotionally, socially or academically' (2009: 328). While many of the advantages of peer-mentoring appear to be in respect of the pastoral benefits of peer support, studies have also shown improvement in attainment for pupils involved in peer-mentoring schemes. The Mentoring and Befriending Foundation (MBF) worked with schools during 2009–10 to monitor peer-mentoring schemes and found that:

- 80.6% of mentees improved their attainment compared to 78% of the control group of non-mentees.
- The average mentee improved their attainment by 14.2% compared to the average non-mentee's improvement of 11.9%.

Additionally, schemes had advantages for the mentors where:

- 68.8% of peer mentors improved their attainment compared to 58.0% of the control group of non-mentors.

(MBF, 2010: 12)

One school principal involved with peer-mentoring schemes suggested that the success of the scheme may well be attributed to the fact that ‘some students benefit by hearing positive messages about performance and conduct, not from parents and teachers, but from other students whose experiences give them some wisdom and credibility’ (MBF, 2010: 9). It can be seen then that social learning theory can be applied to the support which both peers and practitioners can offer to support learning in settings.

Following his work on observational learning Bandura turned his attention to self-efficacy, which he defined as ‘people’s beliefs about their capabilities to produce designated levels of performance that exercise influence over events that affect their lives’ (1994: 2). Bandura identified that those with positive self-efficacy have high confidence in their abilities, while those with low self-efficacy doubt their capabilities. Table 9.1 illustrates the contrasting characteristics between those who exhibit positive and low self-efficacy.

Bandura identified the school as having a key role to play in supporting children in the development of cognitive competences and posited that as they master cognitive skills they begin to develop a sense of their intellectual efficacy (Bandura, 1994). He advised that this can be reinforced through factors such as:

... peer modeling of cognitive skills, social comparison with the performances of other students, motivational enhancement through goals and positive incentives, and teachers’ interpretations of children’s successes and failures in ways that reflect favorably or unfavorably on their ability also affect children’s judgments of their intellectual efficacy. (Bandura, 1994: 11)

Table 9.1 Contrast between positive and low self-efficacy

Characteristics of those with positive self-efficacy	Characteristics of those with low self-efficacy
Approach difficult tasks as challenges to be mastered.	Shy away from tasks they view as personal threats.
Set challenging goals and maintain a strong commitment to them.	Have low aspirations and weak commitment to the goals they choose to pursue.
Heighten or sustain their efforts in the face of failures or setbacks.	Dwell on personal deficiencies, obstacles they will encounter, and all kinds of adverse outcomes, rather than concentrating on how to perform successfully.
Attribute failure to insufficient effort or deficient knowledge and skills which are acquirable.	Slacken their efforts and give up quickly in the face of difficulties.
Approach threatening situations with the assurance that they can exercise control over them.	Fall easy victim to stress and depression.
	Are slow to recover their sense of efficacy following failures or setbacks.

(Adapted from Weibell, 2011)

UNDERSTANDING AND USING EDUCATIONAL THEORIES

The role of the teacher in supporting children in the development of self-efficacy cannot then be understated, and Bandura (1994) identified four main sources of influence for supporting self-efficacy development (see Figure 9.2).

The first of these sources is *mastery*, which advocates that success supports self-efficacy while failure undermines it – the practitioner can then ensure that work is matched to allow pupils the appropriate level of challenge, but which allows for success to be achieved. Settings will often achieve this through the use of ability groups and sets or ensuring that work is suitably scaffolded to maximise success rate.

The second source identified by Bandura (1994) was through the *vicarious experiences* provided by role models. If pupils see peers achieving success on an activity it is likely that they will gain the confidence to try this for themselves; alternatively failure by peers is likely to act as a deterrent. Using his earlier findings, he also suggested that vicarious experience was particularly powerful if the learner could identify with the model – if they could do so they would be more confident of their own success. This also strengthens some of the theory behind ability grouping and sets in classrooms, as well as the aforementioned application of peer-mentoring.

Thirdly, Bandura (1994) saw *social persuasion* as a means by which a person's belief in themselves might be strengthened. He suggested that if an individual is persuaded by others that they can achieve something they are more likely to increase their efforts and persevere than if they doubt themselves or dwell on personal deficiencies.

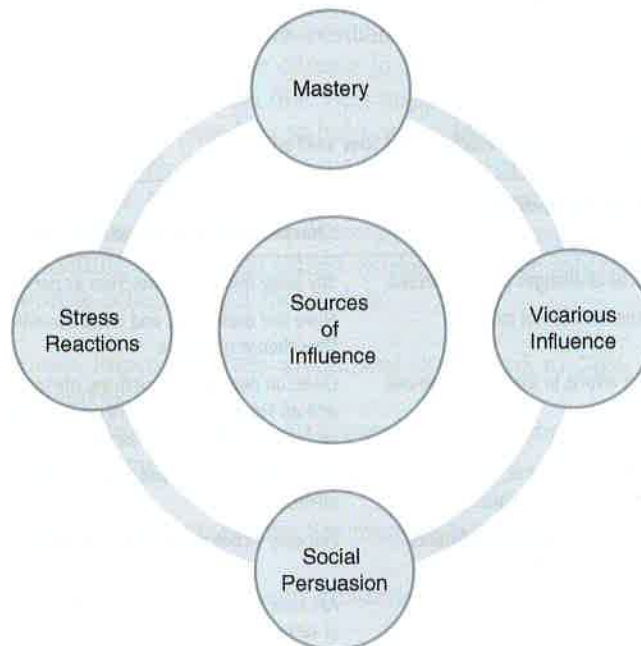


Figure 9.2 Bandura's sources of influence

Sewell and St George (2000), however, believe that this is one of the least effective means by which a teacher raises self-efficacy, suggesting that 'unrealistic boosts in efficacy via persuasion are quickly deflated by failure, especially if it happens after hearing: "Come on, you can do it"' (2000: 60). Nonetheless, Bandura would dismiss this criticism, suggesting that people who are successful efficacy builders are more likely to create situations which allow success to be achieved, and will measure success in self-improvement rather than through competition with others. For the classroom teacher, then, the use of social persuasion should be employed with caution, building on their knowledge of individual pupils.

Finally, Bandura identified an individual's physiological and emotional *stress reactions* as informing their self-efficacy – this might include trembling, sweating or 'butterflies in the stomach' (Sewell and St George, 2000). Sewell and St George (2000) identify these as the most subtle of processes and which might be open to interpretation; for example, as Bandura suggested, 'it is not the sheer intensity of emotional and physical reactions that is important but rather how they are perceived and interpreted' (1994: 3). Bandura observed that for a person with high self-efficacy the physical signs of anxiety may act as an energising facilitator of performance, whereas those with low self-efficacy may find the physical reactions a debilitating force (Bandura, 1994).

It can be seen, then, that social learning theory is highly relevant to classroom situations, whether this is through the use of modelling to achieve a desired behaviour, or through supporting pupils in the development of self-efficacy in order to impact on both attainment and the development of life skills.

OVERVIEW OF APPLICATION: SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY IN THE CLASSROOM

Following are some suggestions as to how Bandura's theory of social learning can be applied in the classroom.

- Seek opportunities to use vicarious reinforcement to modify behaviours, for example if a child is seeking attention through inappropriate behaviour, reward those around them who are displaying appropriate behaviour. This sends a strong message as to how the attention they desire can be gained.
- Employ a range of strategies; social learning theory posits that people learn through observation, modelling and cognition. Ensure that opportunities are presented for learners to observe appropriate behaviours and give them time to process this before providing opportunities to practise this for themselves.

(Continued)

- Utilise a flipped classroom approach, provide learners with material such as instructional videos prior to the lesson and then use the lesson time to allow learners to replicate what has been learned.
- Encourage peer learning by allowing peers to teach peers. By pairing a more experienced student with one who is less experienced behaviour can be modelled and motivation increases as students learn from each other.
- Encourage the development of self-efficacy through the use of targeted praise and feedback; it is important that the learner knows why they are being praised. Not only does this raise self-esteem but it also increases the likelihood of a behaviour reoccurring.
- Set goals and provide feedback. Encourage students to set their own goals which fall out of their comfort zone and are sufficient to stretch their abilities. Reward accomplishments when goals are reached and support failures. Self-efficacy is gained when a learner can accept failure and learn from it.
- Provide genuine and honest feedback. Learners will become complacent and delusional if all of their efforts are praised; only praise when it is deserved.

SUMMARY

With a career which has spanned six decades Albert Bandura is considered to have been one of the most influential psychologists of all time (Haggbloom et al., 2002). Bandura continued to make contributions to the field of psychology until he retired in 2010; however as this chapter shows he is best known for the influential work undertaken in the field of social learning theory, specifically observational learning, motivation and personality development. At a time when the prevalent theories included the behaviour theories of B.F. Skinner and the psychoanalytical theories of Sigmund Freud, Bandura set out to demonstrate how children's behaviour was influenced by the people around them, showing a correlation between learning theory and cognitive approaches.

His experimental work with Bobo dolls saw a shift from behaviourism to cognitive psychology as he demonstrated how learning did not necessarily result in an immediate change in behaviour, and children could internalise what they had observed and use this at a later date. He was also one of the first theorists to explore the importance of motivation in the development and learning of young children (Gray and MacBlain, 2015).

Bandura's work opened up much debate on the impact of television violence in the 1970s, with him warning that 'children and adults acquire attitudes, emotional responses, and new styles of conduct through filmed and televised modelling' (1977: 2). This is a debate which has continued to rage as technology has developed, and with a growing market for violent and aggressive video games, resulting in high-profile

copycat cases such as the Columbine High School shootings, his social learning theory continues to have relevance to the present day.

Bandura dedicated a lifetime of work to understanding human motivation: his later work on self-efficacy was hugely influential in supporting people with phobias and has also successfully helped people to overcome post-traumatic stress disorders through developing a sense of control. His final research continued to examine human motivation, particularly in respect of how people can exercise control over their own motivation and behaviour.

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

Bobo doll

An inflatable blow-up character, weighted at the bottom, which bounces back when hit.

Identification

Identifying with, and imitating, a specific individual with characters the observer deems desirable.

Modelling

A process whereby learning occurs through observing and imitating the actions of others. Bandura proposed that individuals are more likely to model those people they can identify with, such as people of the same gender, or people they look up to as role models.

Self-efficacy

The confidence an individual has in themselves to produce a desired result.

Self-regulation

The ability a person has to regulate their own behaviour, emotion and thought responses in particular situations.

Social cognitive theory

The name which Bandura later gave to his own social learning theory which takes account of the thought processes which he theorised were key to learning.

Social learning theory

A theory first advanced by academics at the Yale Institute of Human Relations in the 1930s, but which was popularised by the work of Bandura, Ross and Ross in

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the 1960s through their Bobo doll experiments. The theory proposes that behaviours are learned through observing and imitation.

Vicarious punishment

A learning process advanced by social learning theory in which undesirable behaviour is avoided through observing others being punished for that behaviour. An observer is unlikely to repeat a behaviour if they see someone else being punished.

Vicarious reinforcement

A learning process advanced by social learning theory in which a behaviour is learned through observing others being rewarded for that behaviour. An observer is likely to repeat a behaviour in anticipation of being rewarded.

FURTHER READING

Allan, J. (2017) *An Analysis of Albert Bandura's Aggression: A Social Learning Analysis*. London: Macat International.

A critical analysis of Bandura's social learning theory most specifically related to his 1973 study into aggressive behaviour. The text is directed at students and provides a model of the analytical skills required to develop a critical understanding of Bandura's work.

Bandura, A. (ed). (2021 [1971]) *Psychological Modelling: Conflicting Theories*. Abingdon: Routledge.

A review of some of the major theories of modelling behaviour, including an essay from Bandura himself, in which he sets out some of the controversial issues in the field of observational learning and reviews research findings.

Bandura, A., Ross, D., Ross, S. and Webb, D. (eds) (2013) *Psychology Classics All Psychology Students Should Read: The Bobo doll experiment*. Available from www.all-about-psychology.com/the-bobo-doll-experiment.html [accessed 12 October 2021].

A full account of the Bobo doll experiment with bonus material 'Transmission of Aggression Through Imitation of Aggressive Models' which built on Bandura's earlier work.

Evans, R.I. (1989) *Albert Bandura, The Man and His Ideas: A dialogue*. Santa Barbara, CA: Praeger.

A dialogue with Albert Bandura tracing his early work on modelling and subsequent theories and ideas on aggression, moral development and self-efficacy.

Kumpulainen, K. (2001) *Classroom Interaction and Social Learning: From theory to practice*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.

A case study approach to examining how social interactions in the classroom can lead to meaningful learning experiences for pupils.

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