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## Response to “Sources of Internal Self-Regulation with a Focus on Language Learning”

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In an attempt to understand the relationship between dynamic self-regulation and active self-regulation, this response follows the models used in Kawai, Oxford, and Iran-Nejad's (2000) article pertaining to active self-regulation with an eye to seeing where the dynamic self-regulation fits in. The authors claim that dynamic self-regulation is a prerequisite for active self-regulation. The response takes issue with that claim, suggesting that dynamic self-regulation is more a catalyst for effective active self-regulation. The difference becomes important in relation to the questions of whether dynamic self-regulation is, in fact, the primary driver in academic achievement and if, in turn, it can be learned. Reference to a recent study answers both questions positively.

I have been familiar with the work of Iran-Nejad and his colleagues on sources of self-regulation for many years. I knew, therefore, at the outset that I would be in general agreement with the direction of the target article entitled “Sources of Internal Self-Regulation with a Focus on Language Learning,” by Kawai, Oxford, and Iran-Nejad (2000, this issue). The overriding thesis concerning the complexities of self-regulation with the concomitant assumption that active self-regulation fails to explain the whole story of successful academic achievement provides a compelling case. As a matter of fact, my own research supports the basic finding, originally reported in Iran-Nejad and Chissom (1992), that dynamic self-regulation, not active self-regulation, serves as the primary driver in academic achievement (Schapiro and Livingston, 2000). The findings further demonstrate the impressive extent to which dynamic self-regulation correlates with and is responsible for student academic success. What is more, the study suggests

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that a substantial number of students can develop dynamic self-regulation characteristics when encouraged by an instructive and nurturing environment. The exact relationship of active and dynamic self-regulation remains, however, somewhat unresolved in my mind.

In this commentary, therefore, I should like to address first the article's early discussion of strategic, active self-regulation in the learning of language in order to identify the presence of dynamic self-regulation and, perhaps, convey a better understanding of the role dynamic control plays in self-regulation as a whole. Specifically, in this article, as well as in earlier papers, the authors take the position at the outset that dynamic self-regulation is an "essential prerequisite for active self-regulation." I would question whether the case has been made for the "prerequisite" relationship. As a reasonable alternative, dynamic self-regulation may be viewed as an effective catalyst for the engagement of active self-regulation. Its role could be to stimulate the active strategies and keep them from being tied to imperatives and strict compliance associated with perfunctory study skills alone.

In their discussion of memory as part of the information processing theory, the authors speak of "focal attention strategies and strategies for judging the relative importance of what is being held in the sensory register" (2000, p. 46). These strategies clearly demand intention and effort. Random stimuli that receive no processing never make it into one's long term memory. If they should find a place in memory by nature of their uniqueness, stimuli would unlikely be recalled without some hook for finding them. In short, long term memory involves not just rehearsal but conceptual processing. It is in the area of conceptual processing that dynamic self-regulation plays a significant role; that role affects the desire, the curiosity, the willingness to make connections, the persistent struggle to find a place in memory for that which is thought to be significant. Surely in the context of nonnative language learning, even the most gifted student who appears to be functioning in an effortless manner has in mind a construct through which the new sounds and idioms are processed. Dynamic self-regulation is not, I believe, anything similar to the automatic processing attributed by the authors to Anderson (1987). That automatic processing appears in the end to be "effortless, unconscious, and 'mindless'" (Kawai et al., 2000, p. 47), requiring no exertion on the part of the learner. It is important to realize that dynamic self-regulation operates with a broad lens, but a lens no less.

Similarly, active self-regulation as it emerges in the novice-to-expert paradigm divides good learners from poor learners on the basis of quality and quantity of learning strategies. What is omitted here is the important recognition of the questions unique to the discipline studied and an understanding of the unique methodology used in the discipline for answering those questions. Attention to those elements determines who is the expert and who is

the novice. Experts have a framework within which they see all relevant materials. It is not just external knowledge that is being processed but an internal conceptualization of that knowledge. It is that internal lens, again, that drives the strategic activities and brings success and full understanding.

What never becomes “automatic” is the conceptual analysis part of thinking, the basic search for meaning. Learning a nonnative language involves both the use of sounds, words and idioms, and the construction of meaning as well. The suggestion that thinking ever could be nothing but reactive and external in a learning situation belies the concept of thinking itself.

I agree with the authors that constructivism as a psychological or social cognitive theory is, at the least, on the right track. Placing learning within control of the students, including their interactions, their responses, and their unique interpretations, affirms the notion that all learning takes place in the head of the learner. Recognition that each person embellishes the input to make it palatable or reasonable to learn goes a long way toward accepting that nothing is truly passive about learning. Even the “self-talk” that advances understanding demands a thinking process. The strategies that constructivism posits include techniques that promote what the authors note as “deep processing” (Oxford and Ehrman, 1995). Surely the “deep processing” has an element of the dynamic in it. Its reliance upon incidental insights or inspirations suggests something more internally driven, more appropriately identified with the dynamic thrust in self-regulation.

Clearly then, dynamic self-regulation appears on hand in the deeper functions of active self-regulation. Yet a problem remains for the reader: Just what is this dynamic self-regulation — really? In the active mode, students become selective; they process information; they focus on what they are trying to learn; and they decide what is worth learning and what is not. They conceptualize; they improvise; and they do everything they can to make meaning. What then is left to make dynamic self-regulation the true driver, the predictor of success?

Iran-Nejad’s use of the biofunctional model as the basis for the distinction between the two sources of self-regulation helps in defining internal control. Multiple subsystems are fine as long as they can be viewed as functional in a purposeful way. To what degree, then, is dynamic self-regulation open to volition? Iran-Nejad assures us that awareness is as essential to the operation of the dynamic as the active. What differs is the character of the awareness. The distinction between awareness in the two self-regulations stems from the non-focal dynamic source compared to the active focal source.

What is it, then, that makes one student choose behavior reflective of dynamic self-regulation and others not? Anyone who has been in education over the years knows well that some students need a great deal of help in meeting the very challenges that the dynamic offers. Originally I asked the

question whether it was correct to see the dynamic as a “prerequisite for active self-regulation.” If by prerequisite is meant a natural phenomenon, one inherited in the genetic system, the student without it would be out of luck. Consequently, the issue becomes, “Can dynamic self-regulation be brought under control insofar as it can be taught? Can one become more dynamic at will?” If, indeed, dynamic self-regulation should be a prerequisite, then, as noted above, a whole population may be found wanting. If, on the other hand, dynamic self-regulation can be nurtured, maybe even developed, it might then be seen as a sought-after essential aide or stimulus to effective active self-regulation. In the role of catalyst it brings to learning the benefits of enthusiasm, curiosity, risk-taking, and persistence — all internal drivers, all of great importance in helping students conceptualize and solve problems. Because, as the authors point out, “no authentic communication takes place without context” (p. 56), students need to stay the course long enough to know the elation of capturing meaning. It is the dynamic self-regulation that promises this measure of satisfaction through persistence.

In the interest of lending some light on the question of teachability in regard to dynamic self-regulation, I conducted a recent study involving 330 students who took a course in critical thinking called “Methods of Inquiry.” Using insights from both cognitive psychology and philosophy and providing a safe, monitored environment for careful self-assessment, the semester academic course served as the intervention. To assess any changes, a pre- and post-course inventory designed by Iran-Nejad (Dynamic and Active Learning Inventory — DALI) was administered to the students. Students were then divided into quadrants based upon the mean scores of high and low dynamic and active self-regulation. The study results support the conclusions first, that high dynamic students secure higher grade point averages and secondly, that students can change their self-regulation patterns from low dynamic to high dynamic (Schapiro and Livingston, 2000).

True, those students who began as high dynamic, whether active self-regulators or not, remained stable (90%) from the beginning of the semester to the end, suggesting that the internal mechanisms were well in place. The story of the low active, low dynamic students provides an interesting contrast. Of those students, only 33% maintained their original low active, low dynamic quadrant status while 48% moved into a high dynamic quadrant. Of those students who were high active, low dynamic at the start, 50% were classified high dynamic at the course end. The finding that low active, low dynamic students can improve active and/or dynamic self-regulation is encouraging as students who are low in both active and dynamic characteristics tend to have the lowest grade point averages, as noted above.

Kawai et al.’s conclusion regarding the interaction of active and dynamic forms of self-regulation acknowledges the importance of self-regulation in all

its forms. Focus and contextualization, whatever their sources, remain essential to academic achievement; authentic communication remains a primary means for attaining true understanding. By emphasizing the interaction of multiple approaches to self-regulation, the authors have successfully employed the active/dynamic model to improve our appreciation of the complexities faced by those who choose to tackle a nonnative language or any similar challenge in a serious search for meaning.

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