

Barry Zimmerman, Development of Self-regulated Learning, Social Learning

**Barry J. Zimmerman: An educator with passion
for developing self-regulation of learning through social learning**

Maria K. DiBenedetto, Ph.D.

Baruch College, The City University of New York

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Abstract

This presentation will discuss how Barry J. Zimmerman's four levels of development for self-regulation (i.e., observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation) is consistent with the way he educates his doctoral students. In the first level, students learn by *observing* the professor as he teaches. Zimmerman, as an educator in the classroom and as an advisor, he modeled the characteristics of a good teacher such as patience, understanding, compassion, dedication to excellence, pride in students' accomplishments, and evidence of scholarship. In the second level, Zimmerman has provided his doctoral students with the opportunity to *emulate* him by creating learning experiences such as assignments in the classroom that helped students work towards their aspirations as scholars and educators. In the *self-control* level, doctoral students are trying to internalize what they have learned - we are working to become self-regulators and this is particularly evident as we began the process of developing and conducting our dissertation research study. In the final stage, as we prepared for our defense, Zimmerman told us, "You are now the expert in *self-regulation*" - and then as we graduate and began our academic careers - he is like the parent who watches from afar, always there for support, questions, advice, or a word of encouragement.

I am very honored to be speaking about Professor Barry Zimmerman, an educator who has had a monumental impact on my life, and I am sure the lives of many. I see Professor Zimmerman as someone who not only has developed a theory of self-regulated learning, but who has exemplified this theory in everything he does. Good educators are ones that show themselves as human beings, are passionate about their work, and who inspire learning in their students (de la Rosa, 2005). In an interview, Professor Zimmerman said he "wished to be remembered as a person who revered our discipline and sought to instill a curiosity and passion for it in my students and readers" (Bembenutty, 2008). Dr. Zimmerman, has not only done this, but much, much more.

Through social learning, Professor Zimmerman has taught me and his students that boundaries can be overcome, thus instilling in us a sense of self-efficacy for our personal and professional goals. Perhaps the best way he has done this is by conducting his professional life by modeling self-regulation and by doing so, has demonstrated excellence as an educator,

mentor, scholar, and human being. I have found that Dr. Zimmerman lives his theory, and by doing so, has guided many doctoral students through the path of developing into budding academics. In particular, Zimmerman's four levels of development into the self-regulated learner, that of: observation, emulation, self-control, and self-regulation (Schunk and Zimmerman, 1997), are consistent with the way he educates his students. His theory applies directly to one's experiences as a doctoral student, someone "young" in the life of academia.

What Does It Mean to Be an Educator?

There is much research dedicated to identifying the characteristics of excellence in teaching and what makes this idea of being an excellent educator such a relevant one in describing Professor Zimmerman, is that it is a term which is defined based on the judgment of students, peers and faculty and it is a judgment about performance (Kreber, 2002). Professor Zimmerman has modeled himself as an educator who is warm and caring, passionate about his research, and committed to his students. When I think about Professor Zimmerman, I think of a teacher who lives his theory, who is his theory.

One of the most important components of self-regulated learning is the concept of self-efficacy. Bandura (1997) has defined self-efficacy as "beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to produce given attainments" (p.3). Dr. Zimmerman has modeled self-efficacy to us and through his encouragement, has set high standards for his students. These standards inspired students to strive to be the best they can be and when a student has someone of Professor Zimmerman's stature behind him or her, something begins to change within them. They too begin to feel self-efficacious. They become motivated to learn, to educate, to conduct research, and to be the best person they can be.

Each time, after my many weekly meetings with Dr. Zimmerman, I left his office feeling very differently from when I first entered. Upon entering his door I often felt unsure, confused, unclear about my studies, personal goals, and research. As I sat in his office, I looked up at Dr. Zimmerman and he patiently, time and again, sat quietly as he let me explain my struggles and confusion. I would talk about being a mother and the difficulty I had in working full-time, parenting and being a doctoral student. How I often felt pulled in so many different directions and how it was impossible for me to make sense of everything around me. During these meetings, Professor Zimmerman would listen to me ramble on, and then very insightfully, he would create in me, an awakening moment: a way of seeing how his research applied to every aspect of my life. This awakening moment helped motivate me; it helped me to feel as if I were capable of accomplishing my goals. That I was capable of being a good mother, a good researcher, and a good person inside, and all at once. Upon leaving his office, I felt excited, enthusiastic, and self-efficacious.

An excellent educator is one who has many different attributes. They not only are knowledgeable about the field, but they help their students feel that they too, are capable of becoming someone who can lead, contribute, and have an impact on the lives of others. They help students recognize the strengths within themselves and that the power of research is in the application to everyday life. Professor Zimmerman is all of the characteristics we think of when we think about an excellent educator. He is warm and caring, supportive and understanding; he listens carefully to what students say and he gently guides them by helping them make the connections between theory and life on their own. He motivates students by helping them to feel self-efficacious, by helping them understand and see that they are gifted in some way, he empowers students by setting high standards and providing direction; he does exactly what he

said he wished he would do, he instills a passion for learning and a curiosity which only grows as we students develop into seasoned scholars who were once children of the theory of self-regulated learning. The levels of development are the steps we take on this path, and Dr. Zimmerman, as our educator, is with us each step of the way as described below.

Zimmerman's Four Levels of Development into the Self-regulated Learner

In the first level: *observation*, students learn vicariously as they observe the professor as he teaches. Professor Zimmerman as an educator in the classroom and as an advisor, has always modeled the characteristics of a good teacher such as patience, understanding, compassion, dedication to excellence, pride in his students' accomplishments, and outstanding scholarship.

In the second level: *emulation*, Professor Zimmerman has provided doctoral students with the opportunity to attempt to be more like him. He created learning experiences such as research assignments in the classroom that help students work towards their aspirations of becoming scholars and educators.

In the *self-control* level, doctoral students try to internalize what they have learned – at this point we worked to become self-regulated on our own, and this is particularly evident as we began the process of developing and conducting our dissertation research studies. Here again, Dr. Zimmerman continued to model for us his never-ending patience and gentle guidance as he directed us on the path to becoming self-regulated scholars.

In the final level of *self-regulation*, especially as we prepared for our defense, Professor Zimmerman gently calmed my fears by telling me (and I am sure others), “You are now the expert in self-regulation” – and then as we graduated and have begun our academic careers – Professor Zimmerman has become like the parent who watches from afar, always there for support, questions, advice, or a word of encouragement. It is because of my deep feelings of

gratitude to a man who inspired me to become all that I can and will be, that I am personally moved in my attempt to articulate the impact of an educator on my life and the lives of others.

Educating Students through Self-regulation of Learning

As indicated above, Professor Zimmerman has educated his students by using his social learning model of development of self-regulation competence. Self-regulation has been defined by Dr. Zimmerman as learners' beliefs about their capability to engage in appropriate actions, thoughts, feelings, and behaviors in order to pursue valuable academic goals, while self-monitoring and self-reflecting on their progress toward goal-completion (Zimmerman, 2000). As doctoral students, we have set for ourselves the goal of earning the doctorate degree, and all of the possible career activities associated with this high level of accomplishment. We must be confident, or self-efficacious in our ability to learn the tools necessary to perform in our courses, as junior researchers, and as defenders of our work. This growing process is embedded in the doctoral program, when you are a student of Professor Zimmerman's.

The development into a self-regulated individual involves four levels: observation, emulative, self-control, and self-regulation (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). Observation is based on Bandura's (1986) social cognitive theory which suggests that through observation, we can learn to do things we would not have been able to do before observing the behavior performed by others. The emulative level is when the learner begins to try the behavior on his or her own, but imitates exactly the way the model or professor has done. The difference between the first two levels is that in the first level the student is observing while in the second level, the student is using motoric, rather than just cognitive processes as he or she tries to imitate the behavior that was observed (Schunk & Zimmerman, 1997). The third level of development into a self-regulated educator involves self-control. At this level the student internalizes what has been

observed but will still be dependent on the professor's model of the behavior. The final level of self-regulation occurs in the student when he or she is able to adapt the behavior as needed independent of the professor, using one's own internal sources to guide behavior. These levels and the ways in which Professor Zimmerman used them are essential to understanding the impact of him as an educator and the role of self-regulated learning for all future students who will attempt to follow in his footsteps.

Level 1: Observation

Observational learning is the first step towards becoming self-regulated. As indicated earlier, this level involves observing a model or in this case, a professor. According to Bandura (1986) models provide us with a great deal of information. For example, by observing a professor we can learn how to construct our classes, how to create assignments, how to lecture, how to present research, how to motivate students, how to inspire and to not just encourage our students to learn, but instill the desire for them to want to learn. Professor Zimmerman was and is an exemplary role model for students. In the classroom, he modeled the way to take reading assignments and relate them to our lives. He frequently asked the students in his classes questions which required us to think about the applications and implications of what we were learning about. As an advisor, he modeled for us the thought patterns involved in evaluating research and in thinking critically. He demonstrated the ways in which research questions are generated and how the pursuit for understanding and knowledge is life-long. Through his kind words he encouraged me and sent me the message that he believed in me and my capabilities to reach my goals. He helped me become self-efficacious and by modeling these behaviors, I learned a great deal about the type of teacher, advisor, mentor and scholar that I am becoming and will continue to want to be.

Level 2: Emulation

The second level involves the emulation or imitation of the modeled behavior. According to Schunk (2001) it is at this level that the learner's performance attempts to become like the model's, but the learner attempts to do so, using his or her own style. Professor Zimmerman encouraged his students to begin this process in a very gentle and reassuring way. He had his students work on research projects as part of classroom assignments and asked students to present their work to their peers. While we did so, he provided kind, constructive feedback, an important process in self-regulation theory. I remember creating a study using his model of self-regulated learning, and as I prepared the presentation for the class, I pictured my professor in my head. I thought about how he makes connections and associations between the research and what happens in the classroom and how he does this in a simple, yet ingenious way. I designed a study which applied self-regulated learning to young children learning to read. When I presented this to my class, I organized myself the way Dr. Zimmerman does, I had handwritten notes, spoke clearly and asked students questions. I wrote down their comments and absorbed everything that was said, just as he does in any professional meeting I have seen him in. As Schunk and Zimmerman (1997) have indicated the source of learning self-regulatory skill competency is primarily social in this level as well. In my mind, I used the model of Professor Zimmerman to guide me in my preparation and presentation of my fictitious research study, a study which was received with excitement from my classmates.

Level 3: Self-control

The third level of self-control is where I see myself truly beginning to grow. It is at this level that the learner begins to act independently of his or her professor. Dr. Zimmerman, always the educator, provided his students with many opportunities to demonstrate themselves as

budding scholars and academics. For example, he provided students with opportunity to review articles submitted for publication in many of the top journals in our field. As I worked on an article and gave him my feedback, he listened carefully to my review and comments, and proudly accepted them. He worked closely with students on the writing process. Coauthoring an article with Dr. Zimmerman is like working side by side with a chief surgeon. He hands you the tools to perform the work, but watches your every move and is there just-in-case you need him. It is a very comforting feeling to have someone like him, watching you as you perform your work, monitoring you, and always available to render assistance on demand in a very caring manner. He takes pride in your work like a father who stands nearby the child learning to ride a bike, and is there just in case the child should lose balance and start to fall. Professor Zimmerman was especially like this to me as I worked on my dissertation proposal and study. Weekly two-three hour meetings were the norm for me. He never rushed me out of his office, never made me feel anything but capable of becoming the scholar I wished to become. As I conducted the study, analyzed the data, wrote my dissertation, page by page, chapter by chapter, I internalized what I had learned from him. I could feel myself beginning to bloom into a self-regulated educator, one who has modeled and learned from the master. In addition, he helped me bridge the link between the theory and my own personal life. As the mother of two young girls, I would frequently discuss with Professor Zimmerman some of the struggles I was having caring for two children close in age, one of whom was a child with special needs, while working full-time and pursuing the doctorate. In his tender way, Professor Zimmerman would help me apply the processes of self-regulated learning in my child rearing, reminding me that I am a model for my girls and that I could teach them in many of the ways he has taught me.

Level 4: Self-regulation

In the fourth level of development into a self-regulated learner, one is adapting and adjusting to the context of the situation. I have seen fellow prodigies of Dr. Zimmerman grow into educators. I have seen this in myself as I teach. My students have consistently ranked me as one of their best teachers and have made comments such as “she is a phenomenal professor” or “I wish every professor was like her, she really cares about her students”. These comments reflect not on me, but on the professor I have modeled myself after. When I conduct research I think about everything Professor Zimmerman taught me, how to frame a research question within the context of self-regulated learning so that we can better understand how learning takes place. When I work with students, I think about how patient and caring he was. I tell my students I value evidence of learning, not the grades. When I am writing, I think about Dr. Zimmerman, and will call upon him, knowing that no matter how busy he is, he will make time for me, answer my questions, guide me, encourage me, listen to me, and above all gently send me the powerful message that I am an intelligent, capable, educator.

Conclusion

An excellent educator is someone who deeply touches the students he teaches. It is difficult to articulate the emotional elements attached to working closely with someone who is dedicated to your success. Someone who is committed to your personal growth, who believes in you, even when you feel frustrated or like giving up. During the seven years of my doctoral studies, I met with Professor Zimmerman on a weekly basis for several years, well before even beginning my dissertation. He helped me to understand the true meaning behind the processes involved in self-regulated learning. He guided me towards an understanding of the wide applicability of a theory and I have come to realize there are no words which can describe the effects one individual can have on another. He provided me with the tools I need, not just to be a

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student and scholar of academic self-regulation, but to be the best I can be, for my colleagues, my students, my children, and myself. Thank you Professor Zimmerman.

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