

Revisiting the Concept of the Anti-Role-Model for Social Learning Theory in UK Education

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Abstract

The concept of the anti role model has had much less attention than the role model in modern social learning theory. The anti role model differs in that it describes an individual whose negative behaviours influence another peer or relative to practice the opposite behaviours in order to avoid a negative outcome. It may have become a neglected term because it does not exhibit as significantly in promotion based cultures which appear predominant in western liberal societies. However, in the United Kingdom, poorer socioeconomic subsets of students are now having to complete academic study to a higher standard up to the age of 18 and so these less promotion-based, more collectivist portions of society have become a more important concern for the education system. As such the anti role model concept may be reconsidered with regards to practice and research pertaining to these students and their social backgrounds.

Keywords

Social learning theory, role models, Bandura

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I wish to reintroduce the concept of "anti model" (Taleb 2010) and "negative role model" (Lockwood et al. 2002) to describe a social actor who demonstrates negative behaviours to a recipient but in turn motivates opposing broad positive behaviours instead of being a wholly negative influence.

Bandura (1977) tells us that "role models" pass on formal and informal competencies to their recipients. This happens as a result of social and professional interactions throughout life, and can be in the family, social, professional or educational environment. The recipient easily retains and reproduces information and actions from a role model whom they look upon favourably (Jochemsen-van der Leeuw et al. 2013). This also comes from the view of Skinner (1971) that human beings are both a product and a determinant of their environments.

Lockwood et al. (2002) have experimentally described positive role models and negative role models in an education setting - positive ones are identical to the commonly accepted definition of role models, whereas negative ones show negative behaviours and consequences to those behaviours that observers or recipients of those behaviours then take as examples of behaviours to avoid. Individuals and cultures exhibiting 'promotion' (positive) goals were seen to be more influenced by positive role models than counter-influenced by negative ones. However, for individuals or cultures with interdependent/collectivist goals, they were seen to be more influenced by negative role models. Perhaps this is why negative role models have not been focussed on in the literature since Lockwood's work, because western, liberal society is seen to lean towards individualism and positive goal-setting, so positive role models would show the more significant effect.

However, in the UK certainly, there is a new focus in post-16 education to raise levels of English and Mathematics in particular where students have failed previously to reach a minimum standard before the age of 16 (e.g. Smith 2017), as well as keep people studying other subjects of choice up to the age of 18. Since there appears to be a correlation between low academic achievement and socio-economic background (e.g. Ainscow 2016, Ainscow 2005, Crossley 2015) whilst at the same time financially poorer people tend and need to take a more collectivist outlook (e.g. Maisura 2018) then I am proposing here that the concept of anti role model takes on new importance and should be reintroduced into the research agenda for social learning theory. This new extended education, retesting and reteaching of Mathematics and English certainly does appear to be taking place with students from poorer more working-class backgrounds, from the experience of the author over several years, reinforcing this view that anti role model influences might be significant motivators to this new and significant sub-body of students.

This idea was borne out of discussions in a group of trainee teachers (including the current author) from working-class backgrounds, discussing role model influences in social learning theory. They recognised that several of the group observed general behaviours in important family members that made a long-lasting negative impression and motivated a

general resolve to respond positively rather than let bad influences from the role model lead to more bad outcomes for the recipient of those behaviours. Furthermore, this is not mentioned widely in the educational psychology literature. From this, I developed the arguments in this paper to conclude that the anti role model concept in UK Further Education settings is an extension of Bandura's and Lockwood et al.'s theories that bears reintroducing to the research agenda in UK education.

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