

Relations between the development of future time perspective in three life domains, investment in learning, and academic achievement

Thea Peetsma*, Ineke van der Veen

Faculty of Social and Behavioural Sciences, University of Amsterdam, P.O. Box 94208, 1090 GE Amsterdam, The Netherlands

Received 8 December 2009; revised 15 July 2010; accepted 9 August 2010

Abstract

Relations between the development of future time perspectives in three life domains (i.e., school and professional career, social relations, and leisure time) and changes in students' investment in learning and academic achievement were examined in this study. Participants were 584 students in the first and 584 in the second year of the lower vocational education in the Netherlands who completed self-report measures at four different time points during a school year. The data were analysed using multivariate latent growth curve modelling. Future time perspective influenced the development of academic achievement via the growth of investment in learning. Long-term time perspective in leisure time had a negative effect on the development of investment in learning, whereas the effects of the long-term time perspective in school and professional career, as well as in social relations, were positive.

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Keywords: Future time perspective; Motivation; Academic achievement; Secondary education; Investment in learning

1. Introduction

Some students foresee the consequences of their behaviour for their future and their appraisal of future goals makes them put effort into the attainment of their future goals, as Nuttin and Lens (1985) state. For other students, the future hardly influences their behaviour. They live mainly in the present. The time dimension of goals has been considered for a long time a motivator or motivational determinant in addition to learning motivators, such as students' goal orientations, self-efficacy, and affections or emotions (Peetsma, Hascher, Van der Veen, & Roede, 2005). Time perspective¹ is conceptualized differently by different researchers (Seijts, 1998), but time perspective, especially in school and professional career, has proved in general to be a good predictor of students'

learning behaviour and academic achievement (Husman & Lens, 1999; Lens, Simons, & Dewitte, 2001; Peetsma, 2000). Nevertheless, time perspective in other life domains also seems to predict students' learning behaviour either positively or negatively (Peetsma, 2000). Development of future time perspective in different life domains and their effects on students' investment in learning and academic achievement have rarely been studied longitudinally, whereas a decrease in school motivation from the beginning of secondary education is a well-known phenomenon in educational research. This decrease has been found in different types of school and in various countries (Peetsma et al., 2005). Especially for students from the lowest track of secondary education, motivation for school is often quite low, and the percentage of early school leavers is about three times higher than in higher secondary school tracks (Dutch Inspectorate of Education, 2005). Better understanding of both the interrelations between and development of these students' future time perspective in different life domains, on the one hand, and the development of their investment in learning and academic achievement, on the other, could help prevent severe decrease

* Corresponding author. Tel.: +31 20 5251340.

E-mail addresses: T.T.D.Peetsma@uva.nl (T. Peetsma), H.vanderveen@uva.nl (I. van der Veen).

¹ (Future) time perspective, and (future) time orientation are usually used interchangeably in the literature.

in their investment in learning. This seems to be important as interventions based on Future Time Perspective theory have been fruitful (Peetsma & Van der Veen, 2009).

1.1. *The conceptualization of future time perspective*

Future time perspective is generally described as a representation or conceptualization of a particular life domain in terms of time. Lens (1986) defined this time perspective as a cognitive–motivational concept. It is characterized by “extension” and “valence” (see, e.g., Gjesme, 1996; Husman & Lens, 1999). *Extension* indicates the degree of remoteness of the representation in time. For students, “the time after finishing school” and “the current school year” seems to be meaningful terms in time. The *valence* of the future time perspective indicates the value ascribed to a life domain in the future. The appreciation expressed by a person with respect to a certain life domain in the future plays an essential role in defining the concept of future time perspective as a motivational variable.

Defined like this, future time perspective is mainly a cognitive construct and it is often used like this. Zimbardo and Boyd (1999) regarded time perspective as cognitive in nature, although situationally determined. They see time perspective as a global perspective to the future and the present—the latter being distinguished to present hedonistic and present fatalistic perspective. According to Zimbardo and Boyd (1999), the time perspective construct is at the basis of achievement, goal-setting, risk-taking, and other behaviours. Nurmi (1989) described future time orientation in terms of three basic processes, namely motivation, planning and evaluation. Motivation refers here to what interests people have in the future, planning refers to how people plan the realization of their interests, and evaluation refers to the extent to which people expect their interests to be realized. Finally, Husman (1998) defined future time perspective as a kind of instrumentality for reaching a goal in the future.

Peetsma (1985, 2000) included an affective component in the concept of time perspective. She conceptualized time perspective in terms of three components (i.e., affect, cognition, and behavioural intention) aimed at a certain life domain. *Cognition* consists of ideas or expectations with regard to the future, and of knowledge of social realities. *Affect* is conceived of as an expression of feeling or general affect towards a particular life domain in the future, whereas the targeted behaviour in the future as *behavioural intention*. Defined like this, time perspective represents something broader than mere instrumentality, which is mainly cognitive in nature; time perspective taps the degree to which students value a goal or life domain in the present or in the future, intend to reach a goal in a certain life domain, and have specific feelings and emotions toward the goal or life domain. Indeed, time perspective in the life domain school and professional career has proved to be a better predictor of school investment than perceived instrumentality operationalized as perceived usefulness and necessity of school for the future (Peetsma, 1992). By combining affect, cognition, and behavioural intentions, time perspective represents students’ internalization of and determination to reach valued goals in the present or in the future. Indeed, in a recent

study, combining future time perspective with self-determination theory (Deci & Ryan, 2000) future time perspective was found to be positively associated with identified regulation (De Bilde, Vansteenkiste, & Lens, 2011).

This conceptualization of time perspective by Peetsma (1985, 2000) allows also the differentiation between life domains. In a validity study of the questionnaire for time perspectives (Peetsma, 1985) the following four life domains were found to be important in the time perspectives of students in the first years of secondary education: (a) school and professional career, (b) personal development, (c) social relations, and (d) leisure (or free) time.

Time perspective is a perception of time rather than the actual physical passage of time (Gjesme, 1996; Husman, 1998). However, the capacity to ascribe high value to long-term goals by people with a long-term time perspective (i.e., the value aspect of time perspective as a motivational variable; De Volder & Lens, 1982) seemed to have effect only in the case of intermediate distances to a goal and not for long-term goals (e.g., 10–20 years from now) or for very short-term ones, like one week from now (Zhang, Karabenick, Maruno, & Lauermann, 2011).

1.2. *Time perspective and learning behaviour*

The time dimension is important for learning motivation because learning usually consists of successive steps which have implications for the future; it is a contingent path of tasks (Raynor & Entin, 1983). In motivation research, motivators like time perspective are differentiated from the resulting motivated learning behaviour. Learning behaviour, as well as academic achievement, is supposed to be positively influenced by motivators or motivational determinants. An example of learning behaviour is personal investment in school (Maehr & Braskamp, 1986). The school investment concept as used by Roede (1989) in motivation studies in the Netherlands included the onset of learning behaviour and the intensity and persistence of the behaviour. Therefore, school investment (or investment in learning) can be seen as a component of self-regulated learning (Zimmerman, 2000). Bembenutty and Karabenick (2004) embedded future time perspective within a self-regulated learning framework. In their view, future time perspective is a component of students’ toolkits for learning to complete academic tasks over time.

1.3. *Time perspective in different life domains and learning behaviour*

Different explanations have been offered for the well-known decline in motivation, investment in learning, and academic achievement in secondary school, starting after the transition from primary school. These explanations are not mutually exclusive. Development of time perspective in different life domains has been associated to the development of learning behaviour. In a cross-sectional study shifts were found in the relevance of life domains of students from all tracks of secondary education (Peetsma, 1997). Students’ time perspective in school and professional career became less

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