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Relevance and applicability of various theories of learning for different kinds of learning situations

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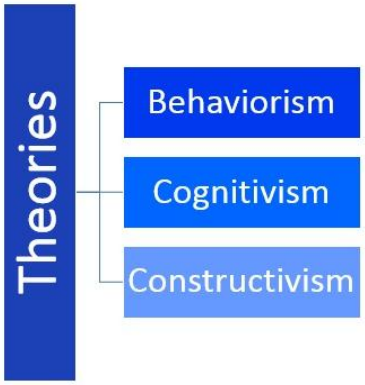
Introduction : Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created. It may occur consciously as part of formal education, training, study, or experience. It may also occur without conscious awareness through personal experience. People learn all the time, from everything around them. However, some situations and circumstances are more conducive to learning than others. There are strategies and methods to help ensure that the learning we wish to encourage does happen.

Learning Theories:



Learning theories are an organized set of principles explaining how individuals acquire, retain, and recall knowledge. By studying and knowing the different learning theories, we can better understand how learning occurs. The principles of the theories can be used as guidelines to help select instructional tools, techniques and strategies that promote learning.

Three learning theories:

- Behaviorism
- Cognitive Information Processing (Cognitivism)
- Constructivism

Behaviorism

Behaviorism stems from the work of B.F. Skinner and the concept of operant conditioning. Behaviorism theorists believe that knowledge exists independently and outside of people. They view the learner as a blank slate who must be provided the experience. Behaviorists believe that

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learning actually occurs when new behaviors or changes in behaviors are acquired through associations between stimuli and responses. Thus, association leads to a change in behavior.

learning process : The learning process is based on objectively observable changes in behavior. Behavior theorists define learning simply as the acquisition of a new behavior or change in behavior. The theory is that learning begins when a cue or stimulus from the environment is presented and the learner reacts to the stimulus with some type of response. Consequences that reinforce the desired behavior are arranged to follow the desired behavior (e.g. study for a test and get a good grade). The new behavioral pattern can be repeated so it becomes automatic. The change in behavior of the learner signifies that learning has occurred. Teachers use Behaviorism when they reward or punish student behaviors. Examples and applications of behaviorist learning theory:

- Repetitive practice
- Drill / Rote work
- Bonus points (providing an incentive to do more)
- Participation points (providing an incentive to participate)
- Verbal Reinforcement (saying “good job”)
- Establishing Rules

Cognitive information processing : Cognitive information processing is based on the thought process behind the behavior. The theory is based on the idea that humans process the information they receive, rather than merely responding to stimuli (i.e. that think about what is happening). The changes in behavior are observed, but only as an indicator to what is going on in the learner’s head. The learner’s mind is like a mirror from which new knowledge and skills will be reflected. Cognitive information processing is used when the learner plays an active role in seeking ways to understand and process information that he or she receives and relate it to what is already known and stored within memory. Cognitive learning theories are credited to Jean Piaget.

Cognitive learning theorists believe learning occurs through internal processing of information. Unlike behaviorism, cognitive information processing is governed by an internal process rather than by external circumstance. The cognitive approach to learning theory pays more attention to

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what goes on inside the learner's head and focuses on mental processes rather than observable behavior. Changes in behavior are observed, and used as indicators as to what is happening inside the learner's mind. Learning involves the reorganization of experiences, either by attaining new insights or changing old ones. Thus, learning is a change in knowledge which is stored in memory, and not just a change in behavior. Examples and applications of cognitive learning theory:

- Classifying or chunking information
- Linking Concepts (associate new content with something known)
- Providing Structure (organizing your lecture in efficient and meaningful ways)
- Real world examples
- Discussions
- Problem solving
- Analogies
- Imagery / providing pictures

Constructivism : Constructivism is based on the premise that we all construct our own perspective of the world, based on individual experiences and internal knowledge. Learning is based on how the individual interprets and creates the meaning of his or her experiences. Knowledge is constructed by the learner and since everyone has different set of experiences and perceptions, learning is unique and different for each person.

Learning Process

Constructivist theorists believe that learning is a process where individuals construct new ideas or concepts based on prior knowledge and/or experience. Each of us generates our own mental models, which we use to make sense of our experiences. We resolve conflicts between ideas and reflect on theoretical explanations. Learning, therefore, is simply the process of adjusting our mental models to accommodate our new experiences.

This theory is used to focus on preparing people to problem solve. Therefore, to be successful, the learner needs a significant base of knowledge upon which to interpret and create ideas. Additionally, with Constructivism, outcomes are not always predictable because learners are

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constructing their own knowledge. Thus Constructivism does not work when the results always need to be consistent. Examples and applications constructivism:

- Case studies
- Research Projects
- Problem based learning
- Brainstorming
- Collaborative learning / group work

Collaborative learning / group work Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created. It may occur consciously as part of formal education, training, study, or experience. It may also occur without conscious awareness through personal experience. People learn all the time, from everything around them. However, some situations and circumstances are more conducive to learning than others. There are strategies and methods to help ensure that the learning we wish to encourage does happen.

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