

The is the only way to  
comprehend  
behaviour.



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The first theory I will examine is Behaviourism.

Behaviourism is the idea that all behaviour is the result of our environmental surroundings. Hence things that occurred in the environment leading up to the behaviour are what instigated it. Our behaviour is a response to the stimulus which the environment provides. For example picking up a hot pan, and then dropping it straightaway. Dropping the pan was the response whereas the heat of the pan was the stimulus. The behaviourist B. F Skinner (1948) established the term 'operant conditioning'.

Skinner stated that we don't have such a thing as a mind however it is more dynamic to study observable behaviour instead of internal mental events. Skinner's ideas stated that classical conditioning was too basic to be a thorough explanation of complex human behaviour. He therefore argued that looking at the causes of an action and its consequences is the only way to comprehend behaviour. He named this methodology operant conditioning. Operant conditioning is a process that tries to modify behaviour through reinforcement which Skinner built from Thorndike's law of effect (1905).

Through operant conditioning, an individual makes an association between a particular behaviour and a consequence however reinforcement comes in two forms: positive and negative. Positive reinforces are favorable events/outcomes that are given to the individual after the desired behavior. Skinner's application of the ideas of operant conditioning to education led to the development of programmed learning. This presents information in a series of very small 'frames' (single facts at a time), followed by a memory

test. Positive feedback is given when the answer is correct therefore the student can move to the next frame.

If the answer is wrong then the frame is repeated. This proposed to Skinner that teachers could be completely replaced by 'teaching computers'. Many students see this as a benefit. Relating to my own personal experience where operant conditioning was used was within my primary school where my teacher used positive and negative reinforcement to reward and encourage myself as well as my peers for good behavior and punish bad behavior. For example one specific way my teacher would incorporate operant conditioning was using the sticker system.

She would award stickers to those students who behaved and acted in the manner which was expected. At the end of the week those who had a certain number of stickers would receive a treat from the trolley. Eventually myself and the rest of my class mates realized that when we voluntarily showed good academic performance and completed all tasks which were assigned to us, it would result us to earn more stickers and give us the opportunity to go to the treat trolley. Overtime I grasped the idea that by performing a desired behavior, the consequences would be pleasant. Another example is when I completed my GCSE's and achieved excellent grades and my parents rewarded me with a phone. Due to this I did the same for my A levels and tried my very best to please my parents as I knew they would reward me for this. This benefited me as it motivated me to study harder and due to this my performance improved. Another theorist, Ivan Pavlov (1927) used 'conditioning' to achieve a predictable response from a stimulus.

He conducted an experiment with dogs, showing how classical conditioning takes place. Pavlov taught the dogs to salivate to the sound of the bell by pairing the bell with the food each time it was presented. As predicted the dog eventually started to respond by salivating to the sound of the bell without the food being present. The behaviour which was learnt was an outcome of a sequence of events experienced, instead of a conscious thought process. He came up with what is now known as 'classical conditioning'.

Within training, conditioning can be used to develop repetitive actions for instance fastening your seatbelt whilst looking in the mirror before driving. John B Watson (1913) added to Pavlov's approach as he applied it to human beings. Watson studied an 11 month old infant baby named Albert. The purpose of the study was to condition baby Albert so that he becomes frightened of a white rat by combining the white rat with a really loud noise (UCS). According to Watson and Rayner (1920) at the start, baby Albert did not show any fear when he was presented with the rat.

However as soon as the rat was continuously combined with the loud noise (UCS), it prompted fear, due to this Albert developed a fear of white rats. The implications of Watson's research proposed that classical conditioning could result in some phobias in humans. I believe classical conditioning is still effective, especially within a classroom environment. I know this from past experience at my primary school where the teacher conditioned us to behave. Before conditioning when the teacher would ask us to quiet down, there would be no response so she would clap 3 times, yet still there was no reaction to this.

But when she started to clap 3 times whilst telling us to keep quite we would see this and eventually there would be silence. After conditioning our teacher would only have to clap 3 times and we would see this and immediately pay attention to her. We associated the clap with her wanting us to be silent and created the response of stopping everything we were doing and focusing on her. I was conditioned at a young age which made it easier for me to understand it as I grew. For example at secondary school I was conditioned to the sound of the bell. As the bell would ring I would know it is time for lunch so I would leave. The second time the bell would ring I would know lunch is over so I would start heading back to lesson. This was a predictable response.

Classical Conditioning has therefore provided us with a better understanding of human behavior. Prior to the experiments done on the dogs, we could not actually be sure of how certain stimuli influenced our behavior. However Pavlov's work allowed us to understand that by applying neutral and unconditioned stimulus continuously, it would result a conditioned response. This response is unlike a natural response because it displays that animals and humans can come to associate several stimuli with each other, in anticipation of a future event. Distress, hatred and love towards particular subjects are created through conditioning. For example an English teacher with her/his faulty technique of teaching and incorrect behavior within the classroom may be not accepted by students. The students begin to dislike English because of the teacher's behavior.

On the other hand the thoughtful treatment and good method my math's teacher used brought desirable impacts upon me. I began to like the subject which I once found boring because of my teacher's character. Operant

conditioning has several beneficial applications to schools, which are easy to apply and easy for teachers as well as students to understand. For example certificates, tokens, stickers, and awards, detentions, suspensions and complaints to parents. Tactics like these are used by practically most schools in the world therefore signifying behaviorism has had a tremendous impact on education globally. This is a scientific process of analyzing behavior, highlighting the use of objective measuring technique as well as measurable results. This shows that in theory, it should be able to be applied to large numbers of children in an unbiased way. One key criticism of behaviorist theories is that they do not take other approaches into consideration for example the cognitive approach.

By disregarding the fact that our thought processes can influence our behavior, behaviorism does not provide a full explanation of human behavior as it is only brief. In addition to this, behaviorism is a deterministic theory as students have no choice about whether or not their behavior was changed using these approaches. To some extent this creates a discouraging view of humans as creatures that only systematically respond to stimuli, raising ethical questions of consent too. In essence behaviorist theories of learning stress the significance of the assertiveness of the teacher, and the passive participant who isn't given much of a choice other than to react in a predetermined way. In contrast cognitive theories focus with the role of the active mind in processing learning opportunities and developing.

Cognitive psychology is the scientific study of mental processes. It believes that human behaviour can only be understood by analysing our thought processes such as attention, solving problems, memory etc. The concepts

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and research of cognitive psychology have already been applied to educational psychology. For instance within child development psychologists such as Vygotsky, Bruner and Piaget have studied thoroughly how a child begins to see the world around them.

They did this by observing both exceptional child development and learning difficulties such as dyslexia. One well-known theorist named Jean Piaget was the first to see that children think differently to adults. Before this, children were simply just seen as less developed versions of adults; however Piaget showed that they thought in a completely different way to adults. He came up with the idea of schemas, how they were formed and the methods by which they altered. Another key idea discovered was that we develop in stages.

Piaget's ideas have been vastly influential in education however a theorist known as Bruner further developed his ideas and came up with something called 'discovery learning'. He stated that children make their own versions of reality. Consequently education system should help them discover their own meanings. Thus schools should stimulate the discovery of relationships so what a teacher could do is present information not in its final form but in a form where the child is required to organise it themselves (Bruner, 1961). I still use strategies such as mind maps at Uni to develop my schema to help process information. Using mind maps is a way of graphically organizing my thoughts. As a child within primary school I was able to construct my own schemas and arrange my own understanding about the world.

I interpreted the world differently compared to others however my teachers helped develop my schema. For me this theory had useful applications as it allowed me to develop teaching methods such as problem based learning which benefited me as I grew older and went into secondary school.

However I was yet a child and was self-discovering, I had misconceptions which were not being corrected which showed there was minimal teacher involvement.

Furthermore Ausubel would see Bruner's ideas as being too time-consuming to be used very frequently. I would agree with him as I would not be pleased to have to 'discovery learn' all the material for my A levels. It may be convenient for younger children, though by the age we were at secondary school we require abstract, complex information. Lev Vygotsky's key idea is that several theories undervalued the idea of culture and the social environment on what a child learns.

He came up with something called zone of proximal development (ZPD) to show us how individuals could help us learn new things. The difference between what children can achieve independently in problem solving and what they can achieve with the assistance of an adult can be defined as the ZPD (Butterworth & Harris 1994). An example of this was as a child when I could not complete a jigsaw puzzle by myself however after the interaction with my mother I was able to complete it. This shows that the adults who are more knowledgeable than the student are identified as more knowledgeable others. Vygotsky theory can be applied to a classroom setting as my teachers at school were MKOs this is because they supported me and my peers, by



demonstrating accurate strategies, questioning us which tended to simplify the problem as well as encouraged correct ideas.

This was very beneficial as study has shown that children learn effectively in environments where adults can successfully deliver scaffolding. Students can also be MKO this can be done by them working in groups of mixed ability. However there are complications with group work as there are more chances for children to be off-task, and children who do not participate.

Overall cognitive approach has beneficial applications to education, for example schools try to boost children to reflect of their own mental processing, in order to develop 'metacognition'. However the behaviourist approach would criticise this approach's use of models and focus on unobservable thought processes, instead of behaviour. Behaviourists would argue that thought processes could not be measured accurately.

Moreover unlike the behaviourist approach this approach is reductionist as it stresses mainly on the cognitive aspects of development, and pay no attention to the influence that biological factors may have on development