

New recruits adapting to military life essay

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New Recruits Adapting to Military Life Among the most basic of human activities, learning is as crucial as breathing. Learning is the process through which we become the human beings we are, the process by which we internalize the external world and through which we construct our experiences of that world.

Research into human learning has gathered pace over the past century, although much of it is of a more practical than fundamental nature. Even so, recent developments in the practice of helping people learn do not always refer back to some of the earlier research into the learning processes. The work explores some of the more basic theories of learning and discusses some contemporary practices and relates them back to the theory. The paper will also give much attention to the experience of the learner. It has become a key feature of much contemporary thinking about adult learning, and it also allows focusing on one major dimension of learning missing from the other types.

While retaining the term 'experiential learning', the paper will focus much more deliberately on experience in the first part of this work, and what matters is not that this may be a new orthodoxy, but whether it provides genuine insights into understanding how new recruits learn. The scope of military service in the US, in terms of the age of conscripted recruits and the long duration of service, provides the rationale for a recruit training. New recruits have yet to define their world outlook. In essence, the army is a hierarchical framework within which it is possible, and necessary, to educate. Yet, it should be noted that the goal and the methods employed are orientation, not indoctrination. As a total framework, the military denies

conscripts a great deal of the liberties and rights that new recruits enjoyed as civilians. The army determines for them what they will wear, what they will eat, where they will live, what they will do, and when they will do it.

Furthermore, they are forced to bear a great burden on their own shoulders. As guardian of the values of a free democratic state, recruit training has a responsibility and a commitment to extend to its young soldiers the opportunity to cope with a variety of subjects other than military proficiency and to ensure that they will not become entirely detached from the civil and social reality of which they are a part. It is here that educational activities focusing on the soldier as a human being become relevant.

The technological advances of the twentieth century have changed methods of battle and the character of weaponry beyond recognition - increasing the autonomy of individual units and the degree of decision-making demanded of the individual soldier. These changes have presented a vital need to ensure the quality of the soldier as a human being, endowed with a personality that strives toward independent thinking. The human composition of the military community - soldiers, commanders, and reservists - create incentive for the recruit training to find a "vehicle" for optimal transmission of educational messages. Because the commander constitutes an influential role model for his soldiers, the recruit training has focused on development of a variety of methods and materials geared for his use, as the individual responsible not only for the military training of the soldiers but also for instilling in them motivation and certain behavioral values. Young recruits inducted into the army arrive with a previous background. When young recruits come into the army, they are not coming

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from a separate system. If they had not been exposed to this type of education, it would be a sign of deep trouble. Most have been exposed previously and accept these values as true.

There is a sense in which we take for granted the idea of experience; it is self-evident that there is a world out there and that during our conscious life we apprehend it in some way. Our experiences are, therefore, something that we take for granted and perhaps it is this that has sometimes prevented us from recognizing that we actually use the term in a number of different ways. Examine an ordinary dictionary (Collins Dictionary, 1979) and we find a multitude of meanings: ? something direct; ? a feeling; ? knowledge; ? an impact of an external phenomenon; ? life history; ? an emotional moment. Dating back to the beginning of this century psychologists have been keenly interested in learning – an important player in the area of psychology called behaviorism. Many different views of learning have been proposed by the behaviorists.

From the 1930s to the late 1960s, behavior theorists developed global theories of learning; that is, theories that attempted to explain all aspects of the learning process. Although this approach provided much information about learning, more contemporary theorists investigate and describe specific aspects of the learning process. Behaviorism is a school of psychology that emphasizes the role of experience in governing human behavior. According to behaviorists, we possess instinctual motives, but the important determinants of our behavior are learned.

Acquired drives typically motivate us; our actions in response to these motives are also learned through our interaction with the environment. For example, by inculcating the response to commands and training the recruit to act unhesitatingly in the face of real combat situations is behaviouristic method. One main goal of the behaviorist is the delineation of the laws governing learning - a concern that has dominated academic psychology for generations. For much of this century, behaviorists have proposed global explanations of learning; that is, a single view that could explain the learning of all behaviors. Let's next briefly examine four major global learning theories. 1. Hull-Spence Learning Theory. The Hull-Spence learning theory was based on the assumption that an intense internal arousal, drive or D, automatically motivates behavior.

Hull (1943) proposed that drive could be either unconditioned or acquired. Deprivation, for example, is one unconditioned source of drive. According to Hull, in order for an animal or person to survive, their internal biological systems must operate effectively. A deficit in these internal systems threatens survival, and represents one antecedent condition which motivates an adjustment to restore the biological systems to normal. 2. The Development of Habit Strength. What determines which behavior is elicited when an animal is aroused? In Hull's view, drive motivates behavior, but each specific instrumental action depends on the environment - or, environmental events direct behavior.

But which behavior does a specific stimulus elicit? Hull thought that when an animal or human is motivated, the environmental cue automatically elicits a response; the response with the strongest innate habit strength to that

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stimulus will occur. If that response reduces the drive state, the bond between the stimulus and response is strengthened; thus, in Hull's view, habit strength is increased as the result of drive reduction. Further, Hull proposed that as behavior produces drive reduction, the habit strength increases. 3. The Influence of Incentive Motivation. In 1943, Hull suggested that the value of reward influenced the strength of the bond; a more valuable reward produced greater drive reduction and, therefore, a stronger habit.

Once the habit was established, the likelihood of behavior depended on the animal's drive level, but not value of reward. However, various studies showed that the value of the reinforcer has an important influence on motivation level. For example, Crespi (1942) found that shifts in reward magnitude (increases or decreases) produced a rapid change in rats' runway performance for food. If reward magnitude influenced only learning level, as Hull has suggested, the animal's change in runway speed should have been gradual.

The rapid shift in the rats' behavior indicates that reward magnitude influenced their motivation; the use of higher reward magnitude increased the rats' motivation level and a decreased reward magnitude lowered motivation. 4. The Influence of Punishment. How did Guthrie (1938) explain the effect of punishment on behavior? When effective, punishment decreases the likelihood that the punished behavior will be repeated. However, in Guthrie's view, punishment, like reward, changes the stimulus context, but its behavioral effect is a decrease rather than an increase in the preceding behavior.

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To explain this opposite effect, Guthrie assumed that punishment functions like a stimulus rather than a reward; that is, punishment is an unconditioned stimulus capable of eliciting a number of responses, such as crying, pouting, or fleeing. If the response elicited by punishment terminates the adversity, it will become conditioned to the stimulus context in which punishment occurred. When this stimulus circumstance is encountered again, the conditioned response will be elicited. If this anticipatory response is effective, punishment will not occur. However, if the response which terminates punishment does not prevent punishment, person will not be able to avoid but only escape punishment.

Recruit training trains soldiers to obey orders and educates them to stand up and protest when circumstances call for such. Recruits are encouraged to “express themselves,” while at the same time emphasizing “adherence to mission” as a primary objective. While one can understand how this operates during training, how does it work, in practice, in a genuine military engagement? When an individual must sacrifice himself, he thinks about country, family, and so forth. It is believed, while instilling such values as “follow me” and “love of country” during routine time, that in the crux of a crucial moment, the element of shame and responsibility to peers is the dominant element.

One gains this element of shame out of solidarity and belief in those values. In the hour of battle, one has only concerns about the small group: “What will they (my comrades) say about me, afterwards?” Or, “What will my commander or my subordinates think of me?” (Engestrom, 1990: 44) In terms of educational practice, this has entailed a view of adult learning as

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essentially self-planned or self-directed. This means that all learning is individual. Educationally, it also means that individual learners should have control of-should be able to plan or direct-their own learning. There are, consequently, many variations on the concept of experience, and we suggest some of them below:

- ? Primary experience.

This is an experience by any, or all, of the senses of aspects of the social context within which the experience occurs.

- ? Secondary experience.

This is a mediated experience having little or nothing to do with the social context within which the experience occurs, such as a video presentation or even a theoretical discussion.

- ? Actual experience. This is an experience that occurs at the present time.
- ? Recalled experience. This is the process of recalling memories of previous actual experiences.
- ? Real experience. This is an experience of the actual context.
- ? Artificial experience.

This is a created form of experience, highlighting some aspects of other real or actual experiences. Miller and Boud (1996: 8-10) also neatly summarize the underlying tenets of experiential learning thus:

- ? Experience is the foundation of, and stimulus for, learning.
- ? Learners actively construct their own experience.
- ? Learning is holistic.

- ? Learning is socially and culturally constructed.
- ? Learning is influenced by the socio-economic context within which it occurs (Brookfield 1986). Skills learning is usually associated with such activities as training for a manual occupation, or the acquisition of a high level of physical fitness through training. But some learning in preparation for manual tasks should

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certainly not be described as non-reflective. Thus this term has to be further restricted to the learning of simple, short procedures, such as those that somebody on an assembly line might be taught. Naturally enough, learning pre-consciously can accompany this. Memorization is probably the most commonly accepted understanding of learning.

When adults have recruit training, they may feel that this is the most important type of learning. They may try to memorize what their instructor says, or what some scholar has written, in order to reproduce it in an examination. The authority (the trainer) speaks and every word of wisdom must be learnt and memorized. Memorization can also occur as a result of past successful acts.

Memories are stored away and form the basis of planning future actions. Thus, memorization also relates to direct action experiences. Since this is one of the most common forms of learning, it is hardly surprising that emotions and attitudes and so on are acquired pre-consciously at this time (Shuell 1993). Contemplation is a common form of learning, one that behaviourist definitions of learning do not allow for. It is an intellectual approach to learning, because it involves pure thought. Contemplation is the process of thinking about an experience and reaching a conclusion about it without necessarily referring to a wider social reality (Griffin, 2003: 60). Contemplation can involve not only meditation but also the reasoning processes of the philosopher or theorist, the activities of the pure mathematician, or even the thought processes of everyday life.

What distinguishes contemplative learning from the process of thinking itself is the fact that in the former case a conclusion is reached. All forms of experiential learning can be behavioural, action-based, cognitive or social. All of these can also occur simultaneously, since experience itself has many dimensions. In other words, experiential learning is a much more comprehensive theory of learning and, not surprisingly, it has become something of a new orthodoxy. Sociologically, the significant thing about any response to experience is that while the actual learning process is individual, no one is totally individuated. Everyone lives in a society, but only some forms of learning have an outcome that might immediately affect the external world whereas others result in society remaining completely unaltered. The more education has expected non-reflective responses to learning situations, the more it has been both culturally and socially reproductive. Since the external situation is socially constructed, it is increasingly necessary to recognize the significance of power and control in the processes of learning.

Operant conditioning involves learning a link between a response and its consequences - a contingency. It is sometimes called instrumental or Skinnerian conditioning. A technical definition is " an increase in the rate of a response as a result of a contingent reinforcer." Here are some major concepts and principles associated with operant conditioning. Shaping is a useful method of rapidly training a response.

It is defined as a progressive narrowing of the definition of a reinforced response. For instance, consider stand, march, and respond to orders in an unquestioning manner. There are several types of reinforcer, which is a <https://assignbuster.com/new-recruits-adapting-to-military-life-essay/>

stimulus that increases the rate of a response it follows. Reinforcers may be primary or conditioned. The former are innately reinforcing (e. g., food and water) and the latter become reinforcers through being paired with primary reinforcers (e. g.

, money) (Bruner, 2004). Operant conditioning is widespread in new recruits. People need to learn a lot of contingencies to behave adaptively, as mentioned. On concurrent schedules, people show large departures from matching, and some subjects respond only on one manipulandum.

Human performance may be inflexible and insensitive to changes in the contingencies. People can verbalize the contingencies and entertain different hypotheses about what they are and continue to act on them. People often think a ratio requirement is operating, for example, even if one is not. A human in a cubicle pressing a button for occasional rewards is not a very useful way to study operant conditioning. Theories of learning are diverse, but the following common features distinguish the learning theory approach from the psychoanalytic approach (Case, 1993): 1. Learning theories originated with laboratory studies of learning, primarily in animals, rather than with clinical studies of psychopathology. 2. Learning theories focus mainly on observable environmental stimuli and observable responses by the organism, rather than inferred mental events.

3. Learning theories attempt to explain most behavioral change at most ages with a single set of principles, rather than invoking a theory of development per se. 4. Learning theories emphasize environmental rather than biological and intrapsychic causes of psychopathology. People

are not born to be soldiers; out of necessity, they must be trained to become such. Ultimately, the role of education in the recruit training is to help its soldiers reach a state of readiness to fulfill their missions, which will be enhanced by an appreciation of and identification with their role as soldiers, thus prompting them to act out of motivation and a sense of their own self-worth. Thus, skills are very important in military life, and it is a very adaptive characteristic of humans and other species that they can be acquired.

Much everyday human learning involves skill acquisition and improvement. Schools teach many basic ones such as doing arithmetic, more complex ones such as reading, and “ abstract thinking skills” such as reasoning. Industries train employees in such skills as adeptly using new technology, performing the tasks of new jobs, and dealing with customers. The military trains skills such as basic weapon use, battlefield planning, logistics, and so on.

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