

How do children become successful learners?

[Family](#), [Children](#)



Introduction

There are many aspects to how children become successful learners. Many ideas need to be considered when answering a question such as this. These include different learning theories such as behaviourist theory, humanist theory and constructionist theory along with this there will be different theorists that also need to be taken into account, these are Pavlov, Rogers, Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky, these theorists all look at how children learn in different ways. Social and emotional aspects of learning (SEAL) is also an important part of how children become successful learners. Also how play can help children learn. Finally what needs to be considered are the barriers of which children come across when learning.

There is not a universal way to describe what learning is; many people describe it in different ways. One way in which it has been described is “ Learning is an enduring change in the mechanisms of behaviour involving specific stimuli and/ or responses that result from prior experience with similar stimuli and responses.” M. Domjan, 1998, pg 13.

Behaviourists believe that children learn by changing their behaviour.

Behaviourist learning theory is based upon changes in behaviour.

Behaviourists believe that people start off with a clean slate and then behaviour is learnt through positive and negative reinforcement. “ Learning is therefore defined as a change in behaviour in the learner. Lots of (early) behaviourist work was done with animals (e. g. Pavlov’s dogs) and generalized to humans.” Learning theories knowledgebase, accessed 15/3/11. Pavlov’s theory was classical conditioning. He believed that you

learn by a conditioned response. He did an experiment with a dog in which he used an unconditioned stimulus, which in this case was food, this produced an unconditioned response which was salivation; he used a condition stimulus which was a bell to achieve the response of salivation. He eventually found that the food was not necessary to achieve the response that was wanted and that just using the stimulus alone gave the conditioned response. Therefore if children are given the right negative and positive reinforcement at the right time they can become successful learners.

The humanistic theory looks at the natural desire that everybody wants to learn. They believe that learners need to be able to control what they are learning for it to be self-learning. They believe that “ the teacher relinquishes a great deal of authority and becomes a facilitator.” Atherton J S (2011) – accessed 15/3/11. Rogers is one of the theorists associated with the humanistic theory. Rogers believes that learning can be divided into two categories. He believed that there is the learning of useless information that is easily forgotten as it has no meaning. He says “ education becomes the futile attempt to learn material that has no personal meaning. Such learning involves the mind only. It is learning that takes place from the neck up and does not involve feelings or personal meanings; it has no relevance for the whole person.” C, Rogers, 1983, pg 19. The other is significant and meaningful learning. If a child is interested in what they learn they are more likely to learn. This is because they are going to be listening to what is being taught. Also if a teacher is more of a facilitator the child is learning what they want to learn and having the achievement of accomplishing a task for themselves. If what they are learning is personal to them they are more

likely to want to learn the information. Thus ensuring the child is becoming successful in their learning.

Another theory on how children become successful learners is constructionist theory. This is split into two categories the first being cognitive constructionist. Piaget believed in fixed stages of development whereas Bruner believed in similar stages but these were flexible. Piaget's stages consisted of sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operations and formal operations. The first stage is from birth to age two. At this stage children cannot see other people's viewpoints. Piaget has split the first stage into six sub stages these are simple reflexes, first habits and primary circular reactions, secondary circular reactions, coordination of secondary circular reactions, tertiary circular reactions, novelty, and curiosity; and internalization of schemes. The first sub stage is from birth to one month, a baby uses reflexes such as sucking and rooting. The next sub stage is first habits and primary circular. This continues from the first stage and finishes at around four months. This is where a child tries to do an action they had previously done by accident. For example a child sucking their thumb, a baby puts their thumb in their mouth for the first time by accident and will come to learn how to do it again. The third stage is secondary circular reactions, this happens until the baby is eight months. A baby will start to look further than themselves, becoming aware of objects for example. An example of this is when they shake a rattle and continue to do so for the sake of doing it because they can. The next sub stage is until twelve months. They are starting to do things intentionally now rather than by accident. The fifth sub stage is from twelve month until a child is eighteen months old. A

child is now starting to try out new things to see what different results they can achieve. Finally in the last of this stages sub stage Piaget says that they are now starting to have symbolic thinking. The next stage after a child is two is preoperational and this stage continues until a child is seven. “ The child is not yet able to conceptualize abstractly and needs concrete physical situations. Objects are classified in simple ways, especially by important features.” Learning Theories Knowledgebase 17/3/11. The next stage is concrete operations this stage is from the age of seven to eleven. At this stage a child can now start to think logically. The final of Piaget’s stages is the formal operations this stage finishes at eleven. Children can now have hypothetical reasoning and has now got the ability to have abstract thinking. Piaget says these are fixed, however not all children are the same therefore this cannot be as simple as what Piaget is saying. Children develop at different times and also children learn at different paces. Children have different learning experiences therefore they will learn different things and in different ways. Piaget believes that a child learns by doing, therefore while a child is in a lesson it is essential that they get to do the task rather than just having a text book as they will not learn as they are not doing anything to help them learn.

The second part to constructionist theory is social constructionist theory. Vygotsky is a theorist who looks at this. Vygotsky developed a theory on zone of proximal development. Vygotsky explained this as “ the child is able to copy a series of actions which surpass his or her own capacities, but only within limits. By means of copying, the child is able to perform much better when together with and guided by adults than when left alone, and can do so

with understanding and independently. The difference between the level of solved tasks that can be performed with adult guidance and help and the level of independently solved tasks is the zone of proximal development.” Vygotsky, 1983, pg 117. Vygotsky said that there is a difference between what a child can do by themselves and what they can do with someone as a facilitator. He said that “ each child, in any domain, has an actual developmental level, which can be assessed by testing him or her individually, and an immediate potential for development within that domain.” Luis C. Moll (1990) pg, 156. Vygotsky suggested that it is not just the teachers who are able to be the facilitator it is also a person’s peers. Vygotsky is saying that a child may not be able to reach the goal that has been set but with a little help the child can become successful in the task that has been given. If this happens they will then next time not need the help that they needed the first time around as they have already learnt the new skills that they needed for that task.

When looking at successful learners you need to look at children’s social and emotional needs. There has been a new initiative from 2005 in primary schools and 2007 in secondary schools. SEAL is described as “ a comprehensive, whole-school approach to promoting the social and emotional skills that underpin effective learning, positive behaviour, regular attendance, staff effectiveness and the emotional health and well-being of all who learn and work in schools” (DCSF, 2007, p. 4). Ensuring that children’s social and emotional needs are met can help with a child’s learning. SEAL helps promote social skills as well as emotional skills these are “ Social and emotional skills are the skills of making positive relationships with other

people, of understanding and managing ourselves and our own emotions, thoughts, and behaviours, and understanding and responding to the emotions and behaviour of others, in ways that are in the best long-term interest of ourselves and others.” nationalstrategies. standards. dcsf. gov. uk accessed 20/3/11.

SEAL is important for children as a child who is socially and emotionally competent is a happier child within them self. If a child is happier they are going to learn more as they are not going to be pre-occupied with other things that may be on their mind as they will be able to cope with emotional aspects of their life. The lessons could also make the child calmer which means they can avoid conflict within normal lesson helping them and others to learn more as they will not have the distractions.

The SEAL programme is based upon Goleman’s five- fold categorisations. These are self awareness, Managing feelings, Motivation, social skills and Empathy. The first of his categorisations is self-awareness this is where a person values them self and can describe their thoughts feelings and beliefs. Also the person can talk about their own strength and weaknesses. If a child knows this, this can help them to learn. They can understand what their weaknesses are and can build upon this. They know what strengths they can use to build learn about their own weaknesses. Also managing feelings can help someone learn if a person knows their own feelings they can learn to control this and become a calmer learner. It can stop a child from becoming frustrated when trying to learn a new skill and instead work through what they need to do. Motivation is also a key part in a child’s learning. This is “

Working towards goals, and being more persistent, resilient and optimistic. When we can set ourselves goals, work out effective strategies for reaching those goals, and respond effectively to setbacks and difficulties, we can approach learning situations in a positive way and maximise our ability to achieve our potential.” Department for education and skills, 2007- accessed 20/3/11. If a child can set them self a goal they will be able to achieve a lot more as they have something to aim for. Children will be able to learn better if they have an achievable goal for them self. Social skills is another of Goleman’s categorisations, this is where a child has the efficient skills to communicate with people. This can make successful learners as having these skills can reduce negative feelings and also stop children having distraction while in a learning environment. Also having interaction with other people can improve a way a person learns as they are a happier people and will want to learn more. Finally his last categorisation is empathy; this is where people can understand other people’s thoughts and feelings. This helps with a child’s learning as it helps children to learn about cultural diversity. The SEAL programme has improved children’s learning. “ The SEAL pilot programme has demonstrated, in Ofsted’s view, that schools can make a positive difference to the development of social, emotional and behavioural skills. In the schools where the programme was most successful, it had begun to influence attitudes to learning as well as aspects of behaviour” www. teachingexpertise. com accessed 20/3/11.

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