

Critical thinking on learning

[Education](#), [Learning](#)



Classical conditioning is a concept brought forth by Ivan Pavlov, a Russian physiologist. In classical conditioning, an animal or person learns through the means of associating one stimulus to a given stimulus. There is presence of an unconditional stimulus, which triggers a specific response. For instance, if an individual smells a favorite dish, he or she may get angry (Illeris, 2009). If the smell of this food is then associated with the ringing of a bell, an individual may still get angry even without the smell of the food as he or she conditions their mind to associate the scent with the ringing bell. The ringing of the bell is the conditioned stimulus.

Classical conditioning enables an individual to learn quickly by means of association (Illeris, 2009). The mind takes little effort in identifying a given stimulus as long as the learned conditioned stimulus is present. The disadvantage with this theory is that the mind seems to erase the conditioned stimulus if not sustained. A skill learned through this theory therefore requires consistent training or it may eventually be lost. This is what is referred to as extinction.

Operant conditioning, a theory pioneered by Burrhus Frederic Skinner and which was based on Edward Thorndike experiments, asserts that human or animal behavior is learned through repeated actions. The more an individual does a specific activity, the more and better that particular individual develops in it. Those behavior or activities that are seldom repeated are soon forgotten. According to this theory, all human behavior is acquired and learned.

Operant conditioning like classical conditioning also depends on repeated practice and both rely on conditioned stimuli. If negative reinforcement is

introduced, a change of behavior occurs. Operant conditioning also relies on continued reinforcement. If for instance a certain reward for working hard in an organization is withdrawn, then the behavior of working hard may die out.

Cognitive learning involves acquisition of knowledge by cognitive or mental processes (Illeris, 2009). It involves learning by watching, listening, touching, reading, analyzing and recalling information. It is solely dependent on the various human senses.

Since cognitive learning does not depend on any incentive, it enables an individual to learn, acquire and retain information for longer period of time than other forms of learning. In the two previous theories, the individual is compelled to learn through an incentive but in cognitive learning, the individual learns through will and thus can acquire more and better knowledge.

Classical Conditioning though is the most interesting in the manner in which an unrelated stimulus can be used to arouse similar reactions as to that of an unconditional and natural stimulus.

Illeris, K. (2009). Contemporary Theories of Learning: Learning Theorists In Their Own

Words. London: Taylor & Francis.