

# Sensory stimulation theory essay sample



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A number of definitions exist for the term “ learning” and these definitions differ in the way they are put forward in different theories. However, the fundamental is the same. Learning refers to the process of increasing ones knowledge through the process of reading and the use of senses. There are several learning theories but one in particular that we will be going over is sensory stimulation theory. INTRODUCTION

Tamez and Surles (2004) described learning as an active process that starts with the learner. ‘ It consists of a relationship between the learner and the environment, their present and past experience, a natural or innate curiosity to know and the social interaction between each of us. They also speak of how these things also play a role in how people learn best. Which sense do people favor when they are learning? Depending on the environment that a person is in, does the sense in which they learn change? LITERATURE REVIEW

In the 1960s and 1970s, learning was usually referred as a change in behavior, that is learning is discussed as the end product of some process. Thus learning was closely associated with change. However this approach to learning has been subjected to some debate and most interestingly from Merriam and Caffarella who raised the following critical questions. Does a person need to perform in order for learning to have happened? Are there other factors that may cause behavior to change? Can the change involved include the potential for change? These queries have triggered a number of reactions among theorists and some have looked to identifying relatively permanent changes in behavior, or rather the potential for change, as a result of experiences. But a number of other theorists have been less

concerned with behavior but rather with changes in the ways in which people understand, or experience, or conceptualize the world around them. They argued that not all changes in behavior resulting from experience involve learning.

The focus for them, is gaining knowledge or ability through the use of experience. An interesting research by Säljö on what adult students understood by learning yield the following responses which shed some more lights from an empirical sense on the above. 1. Learning as a quantitative increase in knowledge. Learning is acquiring information or ‘knowing a lot’. 2. Learning as memorizing. Learning is storing information that can be reproduced. 3. Learning as acquiring facts, skills, and methods that can be retained and used as necessary. 4. Learning as making sense or abstracting meaning. Learning involves relating parts of the subject matter to each other and to the real world. 5. Learning as interpreting and understanding reality in a different way. Learning involves comprehending the world by reinterpreting knowledge. The views are clearly different and the author argued that conceptions 1 to 3 imply a less complex view of learning.

Learning is something external to the learner whereby people go out and buy knowledge. Conceptions 4 and 5 look to the ‘internal’ or personal aspect of learning and learning appears something that one does in order to understand the real world. Learning as a process

The above also leads us to view learning appearing as a process as well as there is a concern with what happens when the learning takes place. Maples and Webster 1980 (quoted in Merriam and Caffarella 1991: 124) posited that learning is ‘a process by which behaviour changes as a result of experience’.

Central to this has been has been the issue of the extent to which people are conscious of what is going on, that is if they are aware that they are engaged in learning. One important contribution is that of Rogers (2003) who set out two contrasting approaches namely the task-conscious or acquisition learning and learning-conscious or formalized learning. The author described acquisition learning as going on all the time. It is ‘concrete, immediate and confined to a specific activity; it is not concerned with general principles’ (Rogers 2003). Formalized learning on the other hand arises from the process of facilitating learning. It is ‘educative learning’ rather than the accumulation of experience. As Rogers (2003: 27) puts it ‘Learning itself is the task. What formalized learning does is to make learning more conscious in order to enhance it’. In fact what is more likely is a mix of acquisition and formalized learning as forming a continuum. This is supported by key theorists such as Kurt Lewin, Chris Argyris and Michael Polanyi. Learning as a process – learning theory

The above discussion on the process subsequently leads to the door of learning theories. There are many different theories of how people learn. Meyers & Freitas (2006) group learning theories into different broad perspectives which are discussed below. Before that let us consider Tamez and Surles (2004) discussion on the theories of learning.

Tamez and Surles (2004) argued that all theories are grounded in one or a combination of rationalism, empiricism or constructivism. Rationalism means that the individual is not influenced by third parties in the decision making process. The individual has his own beliefs and thinking process. That individual would always have a set of principles based on his acquired

knowledge from exposure to the world. Empiricism is a state whereby the higher the level of experience, the more the individual becomes knowledgeable and the better is his ability to make experienced decision. All the decisions taken by the individual have a high level of coherence.

Constructivism stipulates that the individual is exposed to the world and to his inner beliefs and he uses both these knowledge to form his own principles. The individual constructs meaning from the information of experience.” Tamez and Surles (2004) argued that none of these three theories dominate in real life, these are all extremes and in the real world, individual uses a combination of these three theories. The end result is one of learning.

The different broad perspectives are now discussed below and this is believed to give a more complete analysis of learning theories. Sensory stimulation theory

Traditional sensory stimulation theory posits that effective learning occurs when the senses are stimulated. For instance Laird (1985) reported that the vast majority of knowledge held by adults (75%) was learned through seeing and that hearing was the next most effective (about 13%) and the other senses (touch, smell and taste) accounted for 12% of what we know. Thus learning would be enhanced by stimulating the senses, especially the visual sense. Moreover the theory claims that if multi-senses are stimulated, greater learning takes place . Reinforcement theory

Forming part of the behaviourist school of psychology (see Skinner, Laird 1985, Burns 1995), it is believed that behaviour is a function of its consequences. That is if positive ‘ reinforcement’ follows a behaviour, the <https://assignbuster.com/sensory-stimulation-theory-essay-sample/>

learner will repeat the desired behaviour. On the other hand, it is also argued that negative reinforcement may also strengthen a behaviour and refers to a situation when a negative condition is stopped or avoided as a consequence of the behaviour. However Laird (1985) argued that punishment weakens a behaviour because a negative condition is introduced or experienced as a consequence of the behaviour and teaches the individual not to repeat the behaviour which was negatively reinforced. Though it is a fact that punishment is widely used in everyday life, Burns notes that it only works for a short time and often only when the punishing agency is present. The criticism of this approach is that it is rigid and mechanical. Cognitive-Gestalt approaches

This approach emphasises on the importance of experience, meaning, problem-solving and the development of insights (Burns 1995, p 112). Burns notes that this theory has developed the concept that individuals have different needs and concerns at different times, and that they have subjective interpretations in different contexts. Holistic learning theory

The basic premise of this theory rests on that for learning to be effective require activation of ‘ individual personality which consists of many elements... specifically ... the intellect, emotions, the body impulse (or desire), intuition and imagination’ (Laird, 1985, p 121).

Facilitation theory (the humanist approach)

Laird (1985) discussed this theory and ascertained that learning will occur by the educator acting as a facilitator, that is by establishing an atmosphere in which learners feel comfortable to consider new ideas and are not

threatened by external factors. He further characterised this theory by arguing that i) human beings have a natural eagerness to learn ii) there is some resistance to, and unpleasant consequences of, giving up what is currently held to be true and that the most significant learning involves changing one's concept of oneself. Experiential learning

Kolb (in McGill & Beaty, 1995) proposed an experiential learning model which is a four-stage learning process. In fact, the process can begin at any of the stages and is continuous in that there is no limit to the number of cycles you can make in a learning situation. This theory posits that without reflection one would simply continue to repeat our mistakes.

Kolb's research found that people learn in four ways with the likelihood of developing one mode of learning more than another. As shown in the 'experiential learning cycle' model above, learning is i) through concrete experience ii) through observation and reflection iii) through abstract conceptualization iv) through active experimentation. It is worth discussing Kolb's work further. As already discussed, the idea that people learn in different ways has been explored over the last few decades by educational researchers. Kolb, one of the most influential of these, found that individuals begin with their preferred style in the experiential learning cycle. Honey and Mumford (1986 cited in McGill & Beaty 1995 p 177), building on Kolb's work, identified four learning styles i) Activist (enjoys the experience itself), ii) Reflector (spends a great deal of time and effort reflecting iii) Theorist (good at making connections and abstracting ideas from experience) iv) Pragmatist (enjoys the planning stage). There are strengths and weaknesses in each of these styles. Honey and Mumford argue that learning is enhanced when we

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think about our learning style so that we can build on strengths and work towards minimizing weaknesses to improve the quality of learning. Action learning

The ‘father’ of action learning, Revans, has said that there can be no learning without action and no action without learning. McGill & Beaty (1995) described this approach as one that links the world of learning with the world of action through a reflective process within small cooperative learning groups known as ‘action learning sets’. The ‘sets’ meet regularly to work on individual members’ real-life issues with the aim of learning with and from each other. CONCLUSIONS

This short paper has summarized a range of learning theories that can be applied in educational contexts. Teaching and learning activities can be designed and implemented to take principles of learning into account. Also, it is interesting to think about individual differences among learners and to work towards including activities that have variety and interest for all the learners in educational programs.

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