

Evaluation of constructivism and behavioural learning theory



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Learning can be defined formally as the act, process, or experience of gaining knowledge or skills. According to [www. brookes. ac. uk](http://www.brookes.ac.uk) Burns (1995. 99) “ conceives of learning as a relatively permanent change in behaviour, with behaviour including both observable activity and internal processes such as thinking, attitudes and emotion”. It is clear that Burns includes motivation in the definition of learning. Burns (1995) also considers that learning might not manifest itself in observable behaviour until sometime after the educational program has taken place [www. brookes. ac. uk/services/ocsd/2 learntch/theories. html](http://www.brookes.ac.uk/services/ocsd/2_learntch/theories.html).

According to [www. academics. rmu. edu](http://www.academics.rmu.edu) (2009) “ years ago teachers believed that the best way to learn was through repetition, a principle from Behavioural learning theory that dominates educational thinking since the time of Ivan Pavlov”. Today different theories have shown different ways in which learners learn best and how teachers should facilitate learning in the classroom, among of which are:

- Behavioural – Pavlov, Skinner, Watson, Thorndike and Hull
- Cognitivism – notably theorists are Gagne, Bruner
- Constructivism – the key theorists are Vygotsky, Piaget and Bruner
- Social Development Theory – the key theorist is Vygotsky
- Humanism – Maslow, Rogers and Knowles

For the purpose of this assignment, I will be looking at three theories and how they have informed my teaching:

Behaviourist theory- is one of the most well known theories of learning. It stemmed from the work of Pavlov and Skinner in the early 20th century.

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Three basic assumptions characterised this theory: that learning is manifested by a change in behaviour, that the environment shapes behaviour and that the principles of contiguity and reinforcement are central to explaining the learning process.

Pavlov 1890 conducted experiments on the gastric salivation of dogs. His research found that the dogs would salivate at the sound of a bell ringing. These findings suggested that if the dogs were subjected to the mere smell of food (unconditioned stimulus) salivation arose (unconditioned response). He concluded that the sound of a bell ringing (conditioned stimulus) also resulted in salivation (conditioned response). The behaviourist learning theory suggests that we learn by receiving a stimulus that provokes a response. So long the response is reinforced in some ways the response will be repeated.

Skinner (1951) the American psychologist, continued the work of Pavlov and is notorious for having demonstrated that the behaviour of rats and Pigeon could be shaped through the provision of reward in terms of food. (www.ukcle.ac.uk (2009) He extrapolated these animals to humans, arguing that learning is achieved through stimuli and responses. He developed operant conditioning whereby a reward such as food or praise (reinforcement) is given for appropriate response or behaviours. He believed that learning needs to be structured in small steps with regular rewards for the learner. Skinner's approach believes that observable behaviours can be measured as opposed to mental acts, such as thoughts, learning processes or motivation. He further commented " if you can see it happening, then you can measure it and that proves that it exists". He suggested three principles, contiguity, <https://assignbuster.com/evaluation-of-constructivism-and-behavioural-learning-theory/>

repetition, and re-enforcement believing that repetition and reward from achieving the learning outcomes created successful learning. (www. inst. usu. edu 2009)

For behaviourist, learning is a change in behaviour through conditioning –

Classical conditioning by Pavlov and Operant condition by B. F. Skinner and it emphasised reinforcement of behaviour by rewards or punishment. Skinner (1974) believed that behaviour is a function of its consequences. www. brookes. ac. uk/services/ocsd/2. This means that learner will repeat the desired behaviour if positive reinforcement is follows the behaviour. Positive reinforcement or rewards may include verbal reinforcement such as that is great, well done, brilliant, very good, to nodding of head for approval to a well done task. This may progress to given of a reward such as certificate at the end of the course. While a negative reinforcement also strengthen behaviour and refers to a situation when a negative condition is stopped. www. brookes. ac. uk/services/ocsd/2

In contrast to the behavioural perspective, Cognitive psychologist's focus more on the learner as an active participant in the teaching-learning process. This means that students do not just receive information, but create a pattern of what it means to them. Dewey defined learning as “ learning to think”. This means that as a teacher, there is need for reflective teaching and learning from this. Bruner was insisted that learners must be taught how to analyse problems and how to think for themselves in other to become independent learners. What this means is that teaching factual information is

unproductive as learner tends to forget them but rather teaching generalities is efficient as the knowledge can be used over a period of time.

Behaviourists believe that teachers can be more effective if they know what prior knowledge the student already possesses and how information is processed and structured in an individual's memory. (www. academics. rmu. edu 2009) This theory has informed my teaching as I must reflect on my teaching, what I have done well, what did I need to improve on, what do I need to change if I have to teach the topic again.

Constructivism learning theory states that learning is an active process of creating meaning from different experiences. In other words, students will learn best by trying to make sense of something on their own with the teacher as a guide to help them along the way. Constructive theory draws on the developmental work of Piaget (1977) and Kelly (1991). Piaget (1977) asserts that learning occurs by an active construction of meaning, rather than by passive recipience, while Twomey Fosnot (1989) defines constructivism by reference to four principles: learning, in an important way, depends on what we already know; new ideas occur as we adapt and change our old ideas; learning involves inventing ideas rather than mechanically accumulating facts; meaningful learning occurs through rethinking old ideas and coming to new conclusions about new ideas which conflict with our old ideas.

Constructivism views learning as a process in which the learner actively constructs or builds new ideas or concepts based upon current and past knowledge or experience. In other words, " learning involves constructing

one's own knowledge from one's own experiences." Constructivist learning, therefore, is a very personal endeavour, whereby internalized concepts, rules, and general principles may consequently be applied in a practical real-world context. This is also known as social constructivism (accessed internet 06/10) www.wikipedia.org/learning

According to TES, constructivism suggests that learning is more effective when a learner is actively engaged in building their own knowledge rather than passively receiving it from a teacher

Since I have the session on the learning theories, I have become aware of many different theories on how learners learn, and that they learn in different ways. Therefore I have applied differentiations in my approach in order to assist in each learner's progress. Differentiation is an approach to teaching that attempts to ensure that all students learn well, despite their many differences.