

Unit 6+17- Learning Theories

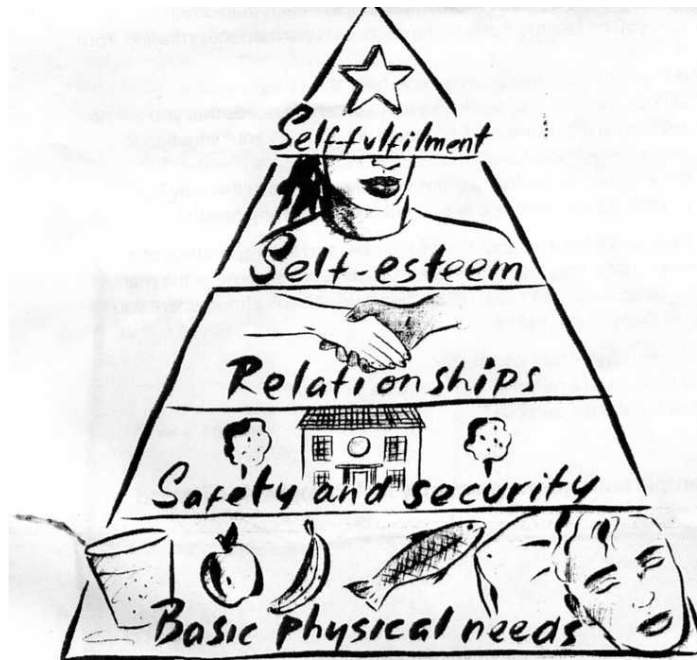
In this task I am going to explore the factors that can influence the way people learn. Learning is a difficult word to give a definition to as it can be used in many different contexts. However, most people take the word 'learning' to mean acquiring new knowledge or skills. Some types of learning can result in a permanent change in behaviour or cause us to act in a certain way. In this task I am going to explore some theories on why this happens.

There are many different theories on how we learn and what affects our learning. Four of these famous theories are the reinforcement theory, a humanist approach, experimental learning and a Cognitive- Gestalt approach. In this task I am going to explore three of these theories in some detail, these theories are the reinforcement theory, the humanist approach and experimental learning.

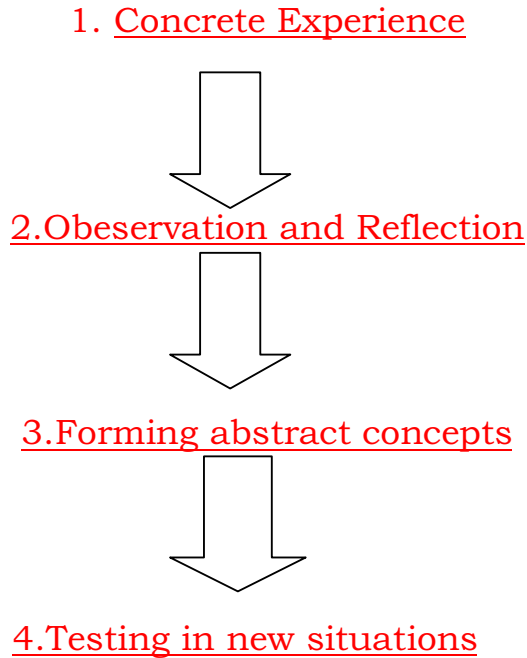
The reinforcement theory, also known as behaviourism, is largely based on the work of Skinner and Ivan Pavlov, who were two scientists well known for their studies and work in animal behaviour. Behaviourists believe that environment is essential in shaping behaviour. The reinforcement theory is all based upon a person's reaction to an event (stimuli). Skinner believes that we need reinforcement to keep us interested and complex learning requires a series of small, progressive steps. This theory is possibly the most common and is practiced often as the behaviour of the learner can be monitored and easily assessed. I have learnt in this environment before when I attended school as my good behaviour was always praised.

Another famous learning theory is a humanist approach, which was developed by a group of Americans in the 1950's. A famous psychologist who supported this theory was Abraham Maslow. Maslow built a triangle based on our different needs; Maslow believed that in order to have a healthy, happy life you need to fulfil every section of the triangle in order to move up to the next level. At the bottom of the triangle are our basic physical needs, which involves our needs for food, water, and oxygen. Without these basic substances our bodies cannot survive and we are unable to progress to the next level of the triangle. Once our physical needs are taken care of we can concentrate on our safety and security needs, which involves our basic needs of feeling safe and secure. The third stage of Maslow's triangle is love and

belonging needs, this is important as we all feel the need for affection without love and affection we are often subject to loneliness and social anxieties. Once we have the first three stages of Maslow's triangle covered we can move up to the fourth level of the triangle, which is, our esteem needs. Maslow has two noted two versions of esteem, which are a lower, and a higher one; the lower one involves the need for respect towards others, the need of status, fame and dignity. The higher form of esteem is one involving self-respect, including feelings such as confidence, achievement and freedom. The final stage of Maslow's triangle is self-actualisation and once you have this covered Maslow believes that you will be leading a happy, healthy life.



Another famous learning theory is experimental learning. Experimental learning is based upon the theory that we learn from our experiences and mistakes. A great supporter of this is David Kolb who created a famous diagram out of four elements: concrete experience, observation and reflection, the formation of abstract concepts and testing in new situations. He represented these in the famous experiential learning circle.



Kalv argues that this circle can be approached at anyone of the four points and the learning circle should be treated as a continues cycle, however, some people suggest that the cycle should begin when a person carries out a particular action and sees the consequences of this action, the second step is to understand these effects. The third step is to understand the general principle behind this instance, when this has happened you can then begin to test this in new situations. This type of learning best mirrors reflective practice.

There are many other factors that can affect a persons learning, these factors can be external or internal. External factors are things that are taking place around us, such as noise and what our friends are doing. Internal factors are things such as hunger and thirst. These factors can have a positive or a negative effect on our learning. Positive influences can include things such as a calm, peaceful atmosphere, however, negative influences such as hunger can cause a great lack of concentration so we do not learn to the best of our ability.

In conclusion, I believe that all learning theories have a good theory behind them and all of them work, depending on the type of situation you are in. I believe that Maslow's learning theory has worked best for me in the past as I strongly believe that you have to have all the pieces of the triangle in place to give your best. I

also feel I know the reinforcement theory quite well as this type of learning was used through my school years. During the next two years we will be focusing on the experimental learning theory in order to get the most out of our work experience, as I stated earlier, it is best used in reflective practice. I don't feel I've used this type of learning as perhaps I have done the others and look forward to trying it.