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## **An Introduction to Learning Styles and Methods**

### **Introduction**

Throughout the ages learning has always been important. From newborn to elderly learning forms an integral part of everyday life. Learning techniques have changed over the years, early man relied heavily on visual stimulation to learn and this is still the basis of learning today in early childhood.

Learning is knowledge acquired through study and visual stimulation.  
Good teaching, role models and determination are all factors, which influence learning.

### **Models of learning**

Teachers in the past thought everyone ought to learn the same way.

In the Victorian era it was very stern, one sided and involved a lot of humiliation, as poorer pupils were treated as second-class citizens. There was a lot of caning, shouting and being made to stand in a corner to name a few. This went on for years and many of them went to work as servants for the rich. Many thought this was their way of life forever.

Today most of this has changed, we (the students/pupils) still sit in a classroom and learn from the teacher, but the teacher can also learn from us, as we all have different experiences of life however long or short.

This is all thanks to a new way of learning from psychologists who have become renowned for their work and ideas of what motivated people to learn.

Ivan Pavlov (1849-1936) was born in Russia and studied medicine, receiving a degree in 1893.

Pavlov believed that the environment controlled behaviour. He researched many ways of classical conditioning, as it was called, and found that learning is strengthened by repetition, and being in an environment with a lot of stimuli we respond to these as a process of learning. Babkin, Boris P, Pavlov A biography, Chicago: University of Chicago press

When I started school this was done by my teacher constantly repeating everyday the ABC. By repetition I learned it and now I can recite it automatically. The same was done with the times table a few years later.

Today I do this in college, when I am in class I take out my notepad and take notes while the teacher is talking, I don't need to be told to do this, I do it automatically.

Pavlov concluded that thinking might become less with the more we learn, as we will do them automatically is true for me and many others.

Burrhus Skinner (1904-1990) agreed with Pavlov, but he concluded that all behaviour was a result of either positive or negative reinforcement.

My mum told me that when I was a baby I used to sit in my baby recliner and play with my teddy. When I dropped it on the floor I was upset that it was gone and started to cry. She picked it up, smiled and gave it back to me, and carried on watching television. After dropping it a few times I learned that my mum would give me attention and this was good, so next I did it on purpose. Dropping my teddy had become a reinforcement. The outcome of dropping my teddy felt nice because I got attention.

Another theory built on Pavlov and Skinner was by a man named Albert Bandura (1925-), he added that role models played an important part in learning.

In infancy your role model would be your mother, father, brother or sister. In your early and later childhood it could be your teachers or your friends you made at school. In your adolescence it could be your peers or a famous pop star. In adulthood it could be your family, friends, your husband or partner or even your work colleagues.

If you don't have a role model as you grow up you would feel neglected, lonely, feel like your not good at anything. You might be an underachiever at school and feel that life is not worth living as you would have low self-esteem and feel unprotected.

He stressed that people imitate and copy other people. If being polite and friendly helps us to get accepted into a particular group, and we want to belong to that group, then we may try to imitate the polite and friendly behaviour that we have seen others act out. Hayes Nicky (1998) [A first course in Psychology](#). Nelson Harrop

Jean Piaget (1896-1980) studied cognitive development skills, which looks at the development of thinking skills.

He studied his own children from being babies to test his theory that children progress through stages.

Stage one is the sensorimotor stage; this is where the baby learns to use their senses and muscles. The baby will slowly develop their own motor actions, first they will co-ordinate lip and tongue movement, then they will reach out and grasp things and eventually they will crawl to an object to grasp it.

Stage two is the pre-operations stage. In this stage they can use words and communicate with others but they don't understand what they are saying. They are egocentric and cannot see another person's perspective or point of view. They will speak to other children when they play, but they don't listen or watch for their reactions.

The third stage is the concrete operations stage. Children can solve logical puzzles and they have the ability to think things through. They have practical thinking, but they still might not be able to explain their ideas using language.

The final stage is the formal operations stage. At this stage they are analytical and have original thought. They are able to reason and work things out.

Piaget believed that cognitive development was due to a combination of environmental and genetic influences.

Experts in genetics generally agree that this is true, that while people may be born with differences, the environment can and does have a major effect.

Anyone can develop if they have the opportunity. Moonie Neil (2000) Advanced Health and Social Care. Heinemann, Oxford, England

## **Motivation**

My reason for coming to college is to train to be a nurse. Ever since school I have wanted to do this, in my 4<sup>th</sup> year of high school I picked Human Biology as one of my subjects, which I thoroughly enjoyed and found very interesting, I couldn't wait for Monday's and Wednesday's as it was the only subject that got my attention. When I finished school it was the best grade I got, everything else was a grade 3 or below.

My thoughts of going to college and university seemed far away, this wasn't because I thought I couldn't do it if I tried, I probably could have, but for the last 2 years at school my parents were going through a bad time and I felt a bit downhearted, not concentrating in other subjects and I just couldn't be bothered.

I have had a few jobs since leaving school. I did my YTS at a hairdressers, I have worked in a cafe, in a bar, done bookkeeping and worked in marketing, and all the while thinking one day I will be a nurse.

I have recently got married to a wonderful man who is very supportive of what I am doing. His mum is a sister, and is a nurse practitioner in a local doctors surgery. He said it was tough when he was growing up as his mum was going through university and there was only his Dads wages coming in, but it was worth it in the end.

Every time I get downhearted, thinking, why am I putting myself through this, he turns around and says to me that I am doing this because its what iv'e always wanted to do. He tells me that I can get through college because I am not stupid and I should stop putting myself down, and when iv'e done this I can be proud of myself and so will he and our 2 children.

My family is my motivation, although I am doing this for myself as its what ive always wanted to do, but after all the learning and hard work I will be an equal provider for our family.

A popular view of motivation was by Abraham Maslow (1908-1970). Maslow considered that people have certain needs with self-actualisation at the peak of his hierarchy of human motivations. This is shown as a pyramid with 5 levels with the most basic needs at the bottom. The first level is physiological, needing food, water and shelter. The second level is safety, needing to feel secure and without danger. The third level is social, the need to be accepted. The forth level is self-esteem, to have confidence and respect from others. At the peak of the pyramid is self-actualisation; this is the need to develop your potential to the full and being totally satisfied.

The needs of each level must be met before you can move on to the next level. But with so many issues in people's lives the vast majority never get to self-actualisation. Maslow considered less than 1% of the population to be self-actualised, but he believed that all human beings possess a need to reach this state.

I have a need to reach this state and I will.

We were given a questionnaire in class about types and styles of learning by Honey and Mumford. There were four definitions, Activists, who like new experiences and will try anything once. Theorists, who think problems through step-by-step and analysing ideas. Reflectors, who are cautious and thoughtful. Pragmatists, who are keen to try out new ideas and techniques to see if they work.

We were asked to read the definitions and pick which one we thought we were, then do the questionnaire to find out which one we really were.

I thought I was an Activist and after doing the questionnaire I was and it was rated a very strong preference, with Pragmatist being a high moderate, Reflector being a low moderate and a Theorist being a low preference.

Honey and Mumford recommend that you work on your weakest style first then move on to the others to develop a balance in your learning style.

So part of my action plan for the year is to practice using 'What' 'Why' 'When' and 'How' questions to get to the heart of a problem. Not to accept what people say at face value? <http://www.ex.ac.uk/jobsurfing/learning-from-experience/unit1-6.htm>

### **Personal Learning Targets**

I have found psychology very interesting in this access course.

I have learned that like me, everyone else in this class is striving for their self-actualisation, and for me to reach achieve my goal, of reaching my full potential will take a lot of determination and hard work. Also I will need motivation from my family and friends, and if all of us in this group motivate each other, there is no reason why we shouldn't reach the top of Maslow's pyramid.

**Conclusion**

All of the learning styles we have looked at have a similar basis.

We learn from experience, developing each step will enforce the next and that it is a lifelong experience.

But we can all find a learning style that suits us best and which helps us to learn to the best of our ability.