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Level : First year

Module : SHS

Course :Three / Learning Theories

Lesson 1 : Learning

Definition: Learning is a conscious act thanks to which human beings can be separated from other creatures on earth. Without learning people would not be able to know their names, their parents and children would not even know where they came from.

A/ Meaning of Learning

Learning is a continuous process lasting from a person’s birth to his/her end of life on this surface of the globe. It is an aware change in behaviour as a result to what one has experienced, and this may appear in the way a person thinks, acts and feels (Hilgard and Bewer, 1975).

Many of us think of learning as the process of only acquiring facts in schools. However, many kinds of learning may take place at all times and places, although our discussion is basically on school learning.

B/ Three Laws of Learning

On the basis of research findings, Thorendike (1932) formulated three laws that govern learning.

1. The laws of effect

A pupil gains learning with the teacher’s attention and recognition. For example, the behaviour of raising one’s hand is to be satisfying and repeated if it is recognized and encouraged by the teacher. Thus, the pupil is less likely to repeat such behaviour if the teacher does not recognize it. This, too, shows how learning occurs.

1. The law of readiness

The individual learns where he / she is ready or prepared to engage in certain behaviour with an opportunity. This will be pleasing and satisfying. Therefore, readiness in important in learning. However, if a person is denied the chance to engage in behaviour for which he / she is prepared, this will result in frustration and annoyance. Third, if a person is not ready and is forced to engage in certain behaviour, the end will be annoying.

1. The law of exercise

The more a skill or body of information is practiced the more it will be mastered, applied and retained in memory. Indeed, ‘‘Practice makes perfect’’ as it is often said. For example, it was common for Algerian pupils to memorize multiplication tables in primary schools. This practice applies the law of exercise.

In the next lecture, we shall learn in details, the learning theories and how they can be applied to teaching practice.

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Lesson 2 Theories of Learning

Introduction

The previous lecture discussed the meaning of learning and the principles or laws of learning. Now, the learners will talk about some of the main theories which have contributed towards an understanding of human learning. They have provided us with various models, approaches, tools and techniques to bring about effective teaching and learning. These are the main theories of learning: Behaviourism, cognitivism and constructivism.

Activity:

Before starting this lecture, could you give your own view of how learning takes place?

I/ Behavioural Learning Theories (Behaviourism)

Definition

Behaviourism is a theory of animal and human learning that only focuses on objectively behaviours and discounts mental activities. Behaviour theorists define learning as nothing more than the acquisition of new bahaviour. The behavioural views of learning is based on a model of a stimulus and response(S-R). According to it learning occurs on the basis of association made between the stimulus and the response.

Discussion on Behaviourism

Experiments by behaviourists identify conditioning as a universal learning process. There are two different types of conditioning.

1. Classic conditioning occurs when neutral reflex responds to a stimulus. Ivan Pavlov, a Russian physiologist developed his learning theory known as classical conditioning. Pavlov observed that dogs salivate (respond) when they see food (stimulus). In other words, animals and people will produce a specific response whenever there is a certain stimulus.
2. Behavioural or operant conditioning occurs when a response to a stimulus is reinforced. Basically, operant conditioning takes place if a reward or reinforcement follows the response to a stimulus, then the response is more and more profitable in the future.

How behaviourism benefits learning: This theory is simple to understand. It relies only on observable behaviour and describes several universal laws of behaviour. Its positive and negative reinforcement techniques can be very effective both in animals, and in treatments for human’s antisocial behaviour. Behaviourism is often obvious by teachers, who reward or punish student’s behaviour.

Lesson 3 II/ Social Learning Theory (Cognitivism)

Definition

Social learning, also called observational or imitation learning theory, occurs when an observer’s behaviour changes after viewing the behaviour of a model.

Albert Bandura (1973), a social physiologist encouraged learners to learn by observation. The theory states that the child learns as he / she interacts and observes others. Social learning is possible by factors like attention, memory, motor skills and reinforcement. Students can learn from teachers about cleanliness, self-discipline and organization.

Guiding principles of social learning

The principles behind observational learning, or social learning theory are:

* If the model possesses characteristics such as talent, power, intelligence, good look, or popularity the observer finds them attractive or desirable and thus will imitate them.
* The observer reacts to the ways the model is treated and mimic the model’s behaviour. If the model’s behaviour is rewarded, the observer is more likely to reproduce the rewarded behaviour. But the model is punished, the observer is less likely to reproduce the same behaviour.

III/ Constructivism

Definition

Constructivism is a concept that appeared after the decline of behaviourism that made the rise of cognitivism in a reconceptualization of pedagogy in education.

The term constructivism refers to Piaget’s views as ‘‘constructivist’’ (Gruber & Vouche, 1977). Constructivism is a learning theory which states that learning is an active process. The learner constructs knowledge of his understanding of the experiences in the world he lives in. Knowledge as an outside phenomenon is transferred from its external reality to an internal reality of the learner. He engages in a process of constructing personal interpretations of his experiences when generating his own ‘rules’ and ‘mental models’. The constructions are the results of unlimited examinations, questioning and analyses of tasks and experiences of the external reality or social environment. Learning is then filtered through a process of social negotiation or distributed cognition (Brown, A. L., Ash, D. , Rutherford, M. , Nakagowa, K. , Gordon, A. And Compione, J.C. 1995). So no individual can afford not to establish fit and share meaning with the consensual domain of the social environment.

Guiding Principles of Constructivism

Learning is a search for meaning. While actively trying to construct meaning, students require understanding wholes as well as parts. And parts must be understood in the context of wholes. Therefore, the learning focuses on primary concepts not isolated facts, i.e student develop knowledge and build their own understanding not through the passive reception of information.

In order to teach well. We must understand the mental models that students use to perceive the world and the assumptions they make to support those models. The purpose of learning is for an individual to construct his or her own meaning, not must memorize the ‘right’ answers and repeat someone else’s meaning.

Knowledge acquisition occurs through dialogue. Understanding is facilitated by exchanges that occur through social interaction, through questioning and explaining, challenging and offering timely support and feedback. The concept of learning communities is believed to be the ideal learning culture for group construction (Brown, 1994 ; Brown and Compione, 1994). These communities help group members to learn by supporting one another through respectful listening and encouragement. The aim is to engender a spirit and culture of openness, exploration and a shared commitment to learning.

How constructivism can be applied in learning

Curriculum: Constructivism calls for the elimination of a standardized curriculum. Instead, it promotes using curricula customized to the students’ prior knowledge. Also, it emphasizes hands-on problem solving.

Instruction: Under the theory of constructivism, teacher should focus on connections between facts and fostering new understanding in pupils. They have to tailor their teaching strategies to students’ responses and encourage students to analyze, interpret, and predict information. They should also rely on open-ended questions and promote extensive dialogue among students.

Since education is inherently interdisciplinary, the only valuable way to ensure learning is to make the assessment part of the learning process, ensuring it provides students with information on the quality of their learning.

Activity: You have here received broad information about learning and learning theories. Explain how learning has many vews.