

Cognitive Learning Theory ^[1]

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Using Thinking to Learn

The Cognitive Learning Theory explains why the brain is the most incredible network of information processing and interpretation in the body as we learn things. This theory can be divided into two specific theories: the Social Cognitive Theory (SCT), and the Cognitive Behavioral Theory (CBT).

When we say the word “learning”, we usually mean “to think using the brain”. This basic concept of learning is the main viewpoint in the Cognitive Learning Theory (CLT). The theory has been used to explain mental processes as they are influenced by both intrinsic and extrinsic factors, which eventually bring about learning in an individual.

Cognitive Learning Theory implies that the different processes concerning learning can be explained by analyzing the mental processes first. It posits that with effective cognitive processes, learning is easier and new information can be stored in the memory for a long time. On the other hand, ineffective cognitive processes result to learning difficulties that can be seen anytime during the lifetime of an individual.

A. Social Cognitive Theory

In the Social Cognitive Theory, we are considering 3 variables:

- behavioral factors
- environmental factors (extrinsic)
- personal factors (intrinsic)

These 3 variables in Social Cognitive Theory are said to be interrelated with each other, causing learning to occur. An individual’s personal experience can converge with the behavioral determinants and the environmental factors.

Social Cognitive Theory

Social Cognitive Theory Illustration (Pajares, 2002)

In the person-environment interaction, human beliefs, ideas and cognitive competencies are modified by external factors such as a supportive parent, stressful environment or a hot

climate. In the person-behavior interaction, the cognitive processes of a person affect his behavior; likewise, performance of such behavior can modify the way he thinks. Lastly, the environment-behavior interaction, external factors can alter the way you display the behavior. Also, your behavior can affect and modify your environment. This model clearly implies that for effective and positive learning to occur an individual should have positive personal characteristics, exhibit appropriate behavior and stay in a supportive environment.

In addition, Social Cognitive Theory states that new experiences are to be evaluated by the learner by means of analyzing his past experiences with the same determinants. Learning, therefore, is a result of a thorough evaluation of the present experience versus the past.

Basic Concepts

Social Cognitive Theory includes several basic concepts that can manifest not only in adults but also in infants, children and adolescents.

1. **Observational Learning**

learning from other people by means of observing them is an effective way of gaining knowledge and altering behavior.

2. **Reproduction**

the process wherein there is an aim to effectively increase the repeating of a behavior by means of putting the individual in a comfortable environment with readily accessible materials to motivate him to retain the new knowledge and behavior learned and practice them.

3. **Self-efficacy**

the course wherein the learner improves his newly learned knowledge or behavior by putting it into practice.

4. **Emotional coping**

good coping mechanisms against stressful environment and negative personal characteristics can lead to effective learning, especially in adults.

5. **Self-regulatory capability**

ability to control behavior even within an unfavorable environment.

B. Cognitive Behavioral Theory

Cognitive Behavioral Theory describes the role of cognition (knowing) to determining and predicting the behavioral pattern of an individual. This theory was developed by Aaron Beck.

The Cognitive Behavioral Theory says that individuals tend to form self-concepts that affect the behavior they display. These concepts can be positive or negative and can be affected by a person's environment.

The Cognitive Triad

Cognitive Behavioral Theory further explains human behavior and learning using the cognitive triad. This triad includes negative thoughts about:

1. The self (i.e., I am rubbish)
2. The world/environment (i.e., the world is irrational)
3. The future (i.e., my future is doomed)

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