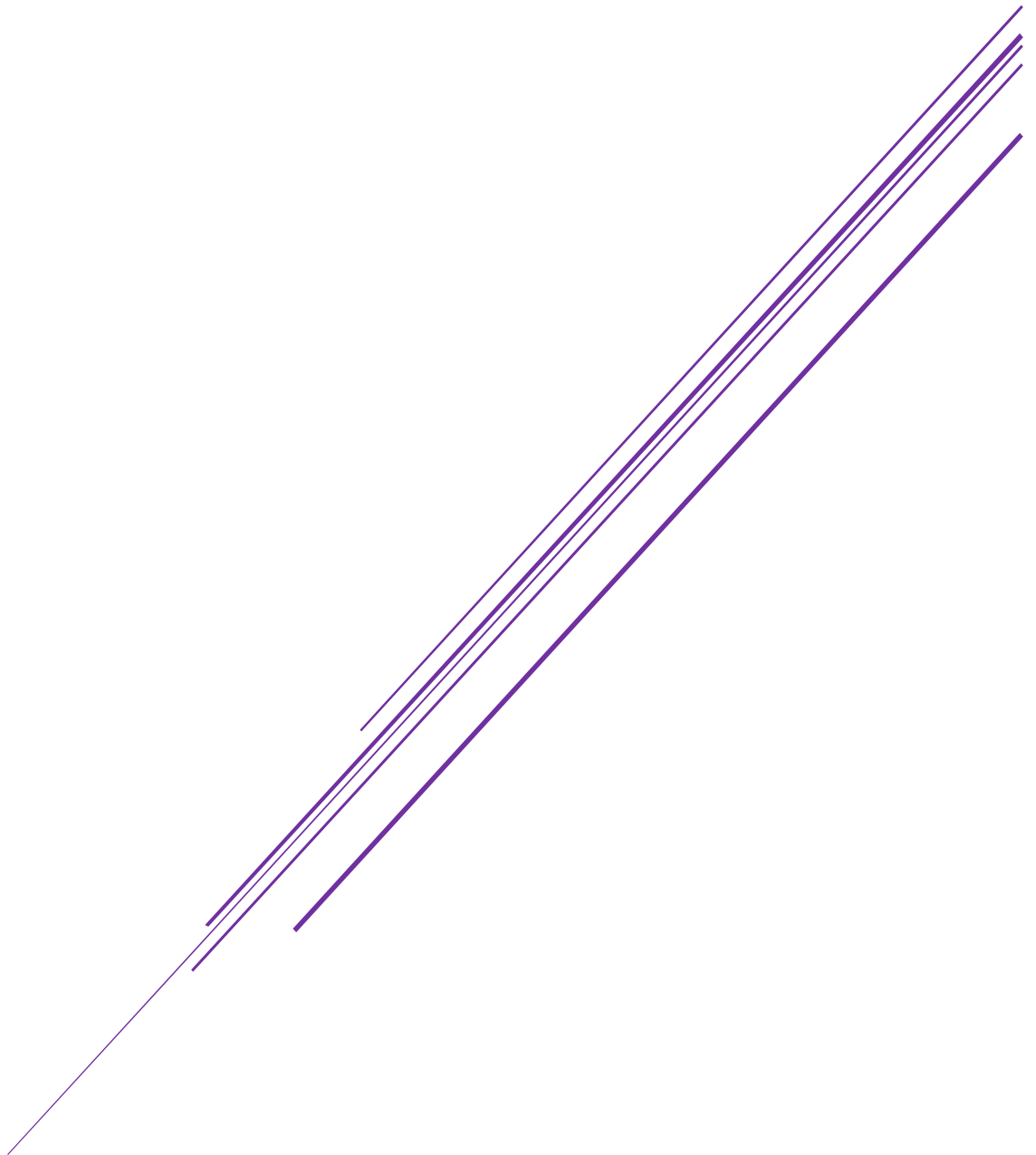


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The Principles of Learning and Teaching.



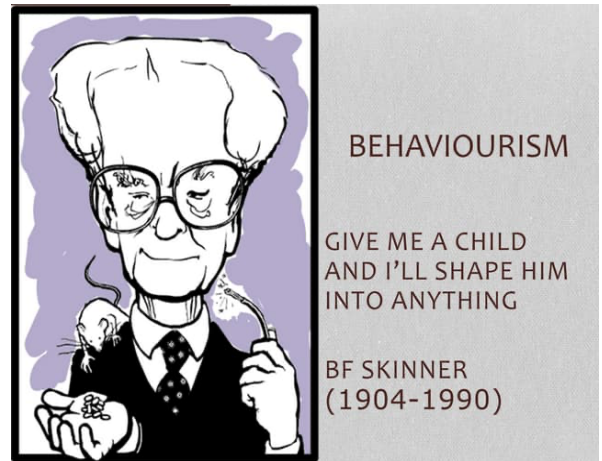
Hannah Morgan
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Behaving with Behaviourism

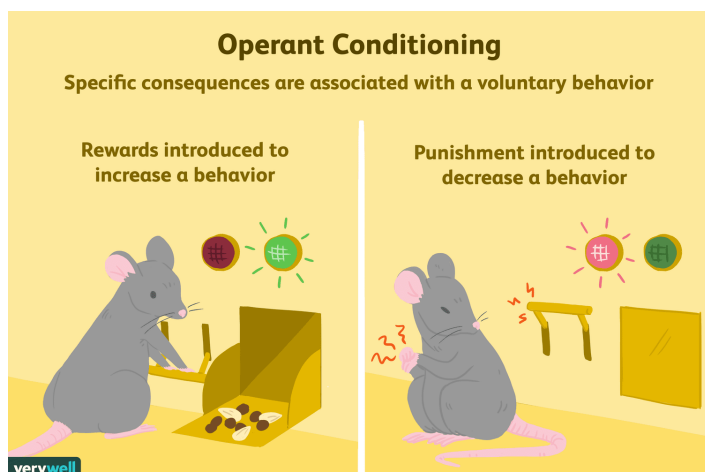
Classrooms can be wild, unpredictable, and sometimes overwhelming! Not just for the children but for us as educators too. Challenging behaviours come in all sorts of forms, and we are continuously adapting methods to deal with them, but where do these methods stem from? Theorists before us came up with the three major theories of Learning, Behaviourism, constructivism, and social constructivism. Today we are going to learn all about BF Skinner known as ‘the father of behaviourism’ and how we can use them in classrooms today.



(The Royal Academy, 2015).

What is Behaviourism?

So, before we learn about Skinner’s theories, we need to understand what exactly Behaviourism is. Behaviourism looks at the environmental and external factors that influence behaviour. In 1913 John B Watson patented Classical Behaviourism which would see behaviour as a subject matter in its own right but by 1930 Watson’s behaviourism proved inadequate. (Moore, 2011. P.449). Watson was inspired by earlier thinkers such as Ivan Pavlov, who including Skinner both paved the way for behaviourism to be the most well-known of all approaches to learning and become the most common perspective used in education as it seems functional and scientific. (Jarvis et.al, 2003, P.24). Skinner defined his own branch of behaviourism called operant conditioning.



(Seong, 2023.)

Operant Conditioning.

Skinner believed that behaviours followed by positive consequences are likely to be repeated and those that are followed by negative consequences are less likely. (McLeod, 2023).

To test his theories he created Skinner’s box, a device he would use to reinforce animals’ behaviours positively and

negatively. The box delivers positive reinforcement such as food or a punishment such as noise. (Nickerson, 2023.)

“Skinner was said to be more interested in ‘how’ consequences of actions affected people’s behaviour rather than why.” (Cherry, 2023). The same can be said for us educators in the classroom setting, some reinforcers may work, and others may fail but we still strive to find how to promote positive behaviour, so what can operant conditioning look like in our schools?

Operant Conditioning in Classrooms.

You’re probably thinking how Skinner’s box and Operant conditioning can possibly be used in our schools? It would be highly unethical to reward with food or punish with noise, so how does it work?

Skinner claimed that all control is exerted by environments, so our task is to design effective and better environments rather than better pupils. (1971, P.77).



Reinforcement:

There are two types of reinforcement we can use in education, Positive and Negative.

Some positive reinforcers we might see can include “Computer Time, Praise, First choice of books, Stickers” (Twinkl, 2023). However, it’s important to remember not to reward after negative behaviours as this may help to enforce said behaviours.

Negative Reinforcers involve avoiding something unpleasant if behaviour has been positive. We all have some tasks and activities in class that our students would rather avoid so in order to reinforce acceptable behaviour it can be seen as a reward to the child to not have to undertake said tasks. Some examples can include removing silence rules, skipping extra work, having homework breaks, and even removing a seating plan. (Baker, 2023).

Punishment

So now we know some ways to reinforce good behaviour, how do we go about discouraging disruptive behaviour? Our children are very different to the animals used in skinner's box and not all children will benefit or react to the same punishments. Operant Researchers such as Skinner have found that "Gentle forms of punishment are effective in reducing disruptive behaviour" (Schlinger, 2021).

The first type of Punishment can be referred to as 'Positive Punishment' however this is not adding something pleasant it is the act of adding something that will result in an unpleasant consequence. (Pietrangelo, 2020). This could include adding extra homework, a time out or even as simple as a telling off.

Finally, we can use 'Negative Punishment' which is the opposite of Positive Punishment and is the act of taking something pleasant away from the student. Some classroom examples can include Time out, Withholding Attention, revoke privileges/rewards. (Cherry, 2023).



YOUR TURN.

Now we've delved into the world of Skinner and his operant conditioning, why not give it a try in your classrooms and see if you can create effective environments and reinforce behaviours!

But Remember – Every student is different and Operant Conditioning may not work on every child.

Keep Reading to learn all about a Constructivist's approach to theories of learning...

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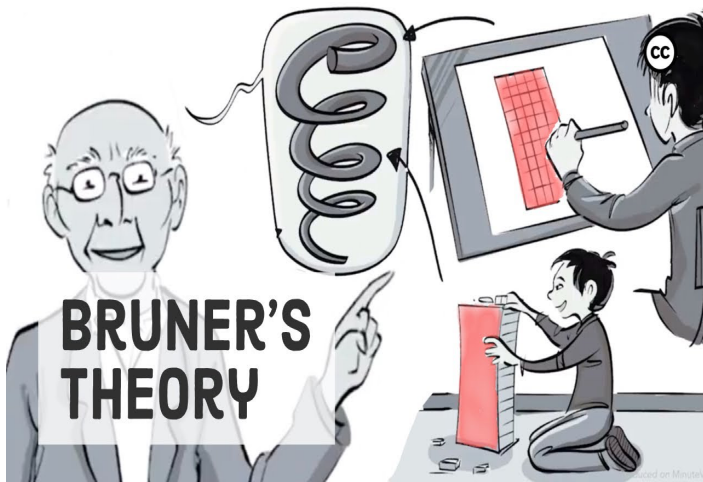
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Curious about Cognitive Development



(Koblin, 2021.)

From looking at behaviourism and Skinner's theories, perhaps you may not think that manipulating and reinforcing behaviours is enough to help your class.

Of course, we know in modern times that no one theory can work for every setting and it's a mix of things that we find may work. Let's take a look at constructivism and how we can use it today!

What is Constructivism?

Constructivism is the notion of learners establishing their understanding actively through experiences, rather than passively learning they experience the world reflecting on experiences and building knowledge to their pre-existing ideas. (Main, 2021).

Which leads us into Cognitive Development, which again in our modern schools is something we are not strangers too. Although theorist Piaget may be the most influential contributor to constructivism being called grand theorist of cognitive development approaches (Pound, 2011, P.72), Today we will be looking at Bruner's theories and how he patented scaffolding which is essential in schools today!

Jerome Bruner

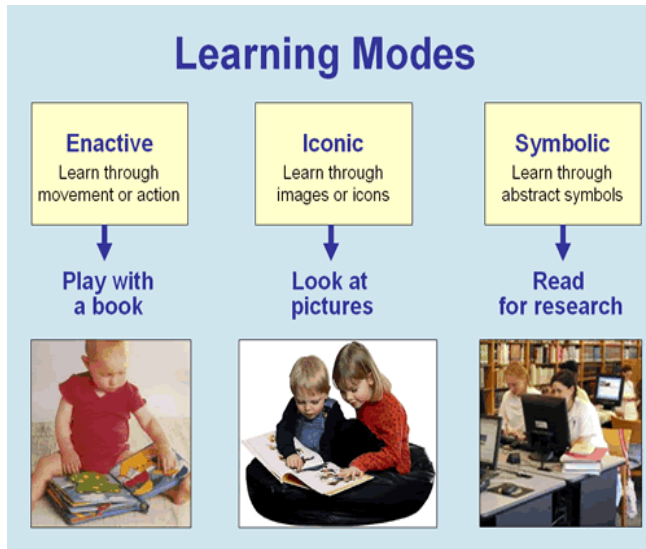
Bruner was a great help to launch cognitive approaches in psychology, in his 1960's book he brought cognitive approaches into education suggesting that depending on their age ideas should be communicated to learners using actions, icons or symbols. (Greenfield, P.M, 2016).



(Main, P. 2023).

Bruner's Big Three

Bruner's theories had three main concepts, Intellectual development, Act of Learning and Discovery and of course The spiral curriculum. Let's take a closer look at each of these concepts.



(Edufocus, 2012)

Intellectual Development

Bruner presented three ways in which a child develops:

Enactive – Action based learning from Birth to aged one years old. Learns through touching, feeling, and manipulating.

Iconic – Vision based learning from ages one to six years old. Learns through pictures, videos, and diagrams.

Symbolic- Language and Auditory based learning from ages 7 and onwards. Starts to develop the capacity to think in abstract terms and interpret symbols and words. (Blakemore and Frith, 2005).

This is something that we can recognize while looking at our classes in our own schools and recognizing how early-stage teaching differs from older learners.

"It is effective when faced with new material to follow a progression from enactive to iconic to symbolic representation; this holds true even for adult learners." (Mcleod, 2023).

Act of Learning and Discovery.

Again, Bruner involved three simultaneous processes, Acquisition, Transformation and Evaluation. Let's have a closer look at each one!

Jerome Bruner's Theory of Learning

- Acquisition
- Transformation
- Evaluation

(Lambert, 2006).

Acquisition – The learner is introduced to new information, which may differ from previous knowledge but can add details or refine specific processes that may have not been discussed in the past.

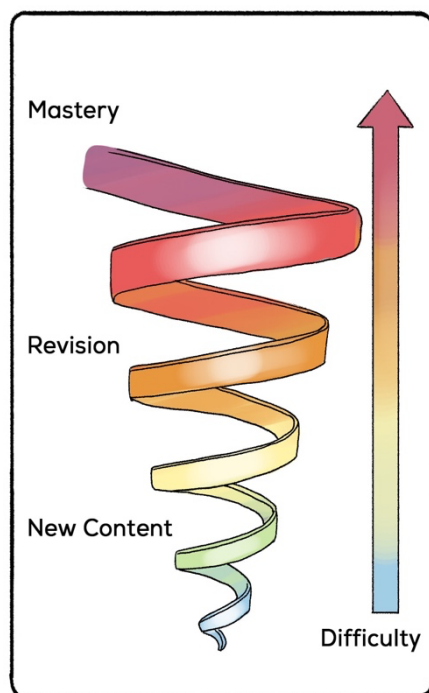
Transformation – The learner manipulates their prior Knowledge to fit new situations so that learners can adapt how some facts and scenarios can fit within a new setting.

Evaluation – The learner judges whether the new information is accurate, and Teachers are important tools in helping the learner determine if the new knowledge fits a task. (Stapleton and Stefaniak, 2019, P.5).

So, you are probably thinking, great a lot of information but why does it matter? Well, it matters as Bruner proposing the processes of learning has led to the initiative of letting learners explore, actively engage and many more opportunities for hands on experiences and has proved to capture the learner's attention and promote critical thinking. (Main, P. 2023).

Spirals and Scaffolds

Yes, the spiral curriculum that anyone working in education has heard of was brought to us by Bruner.

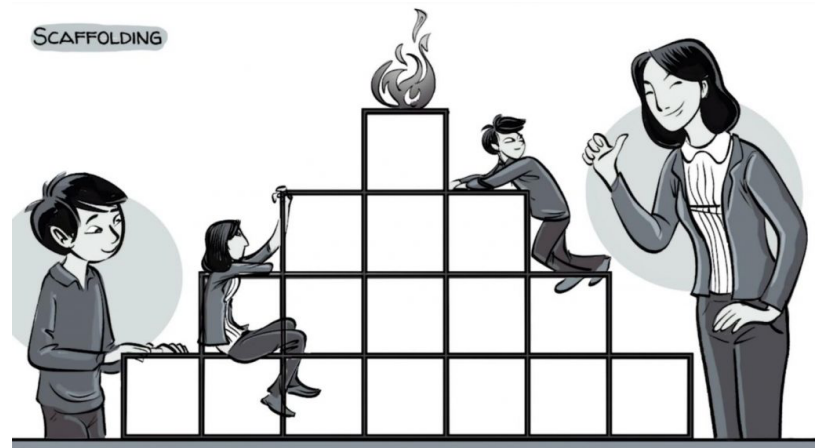


The spiral curriculum is where the same subject matter will be taught at various levels throughout the years. First touching on basic principles but advancing and adding details as the learner grows through their school life. (Practical Psychology, 2020).

The effectiveness of the spiral curriculum is unmatched as when engaged with topics repeatedly, students rebuild on prior knowledge over time. (Blakemore and Frith, 2005).

(Practical Psychology, 2020).

Scaffolding, again a term that some of us may be familiar with in our schools today. It becomes apparent how important Bruner's work impacted us; due to the fact we still use them today!



(Koblin, J. 2021).

"A special type of support given by a teacher to a student when performing a task that the latter might otherwise not be able to accomplish." (Margolis, 2020, P.18).

However, Bosanquet et al describe scaffolding as a very special type of support that can be broken down into three steps:

- Step one – The pupil does the parts of set task that they can. The adult provides structured help for what the student finds difficult.
- Step Two – The pupil attempts the difficult part using the strategies given by the adult.
- Step Three – The pupil can carry out the entire task completely by themselves competently and confidently.

(2021, P.43).

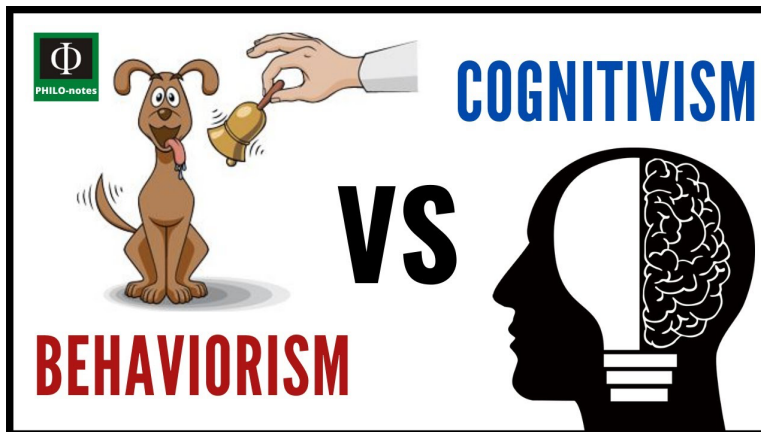
Bruner's theories may not be behaviour based; however, his theories are still substantial and influential on today's education.

Now we have learnt all about Bruner's Constructivist Cognitive approaches, Let's take a closer look at Bruner and Skinner together in depth...

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Skinner Vs. Bruner



(PHILO-notes, 2020).

We've looked at Skinner and Bruner in depth and learned about their contributions to learning theories today but how do they differ?

Let's compare theories and see what similarities and differences we can find!

Skinner

Previously we learned about Skinner's behaviourist approaches and his operant conditioning. Let's recap what we know about Skinner and look at the positives and negatives to his approach.

- Looks at environmental and external factors that have an important role in influencing behaviour.
- Believed behaviour could be predicted and controlled by manipulating the environment.
- Following research with rats and pigeons in the 'Skinner box' he coined the term Operant Conditioning.
- Operant Conditioning is a method of learning where rewards and punishments are used for behaviour.

(Blakemore and Frith, 2005).

PROS:

- Learning can be broken down into key aspects, where the teacher can identify and reinforce good habits whilst preventing developing incorrect habits. (Gonzi and Pugsley, 2018).
- Proven to be effective and reliable at facilitating learning that involves recalling facts, defining and illustrating concepts, applying explanations and performing specified instructions. (Ertmer and Newby, 2013, P.43).

- Teachers are able to manage classroom behaviour with operant conditioning and provides a clear and objective way of measuring students performance and progress. (National University, N.D).

CONS:

- Skinner would not admit any characteristics of the person, He excluded consciousness, physiology, character, and motivation, which he saw as nothing but social constructs, invented for the purpose of the control and prediction of behaviour. (Blunden, 2010).
- Limited and Rigid theory, failing to consider personal agency.
- does not account for other types of learning that occur without the use of reinforcement and punishment. Learners can adapt behaviour when new information is introduced, even if that behaviour was established through reinforcement.

(Cherry, 2022).

Bruner

Now let's recap Bruner's theories and outline the positives and negatives before we compare the two!

- Sees the learner as an active participant – empathising the importance of active schemata in guided learning.
- Bruner believes the learner should discern themselves the subject content, discovering links between facts concepts and theories rather than simply being told.
- Patented Intellectual Development involving three stages enactive, iconic, symbolic, and created the spiral curriculum.
- Educations aim should be to create autonomous learners.

(Mcleod, 2023).

PROS:

- Bruner's method frees up classroom time, a more passive form of learning, and promotes active learning, which contributes to students' creativity and problem-solving skills. (Costello, 2017).

- Subjects that can be considered as challenging for example maths, can be taught to younger students, as long as the teacher facilitates learning experiences that are interesting and manageable. (Conkbayir and Pascal, 2014).
- Bruner created a better understanding of the links between behaviours and age, emphasising on mental structures.

CONS:

- Major criticism of Bruner's theories is that they cannot be observed directly.
- Theories are specific due to which it has certain limitations such as learners not willing to be vocal of experiences, or not being able to reach intellectual development according to the three stages of representation.
- Many researchers consider the stages of intellectual development to be inaccurate, Different learners having different abilities may lead to theory not being applicable for all.

(Education Summary, N.D).

(Kurt, 2023).

Spot the Differences

BEHAVIORISM	Behaviorism focuses on the individual's interactions with the environment.
COGNITIVISM	Cognitivism focuses on the mental processes of the brain, thinking of the learner as a data processor.

So now that we've identified and discussed both Skinner and Bruner's ideologies and theories, let's discuss how they differ and compare against each other.

- Bruner emphasises discovery learning aligning with person centred approaches encouraging learners to actively engage whereas Skinner

promotes programmed instruction and structured approaches to learning. (Mack, 2016).

- For Bruner, the biggest problem with behaviourism is that it denied the capacity of human reason. However, Skinner believes conditioning could help people to learn or be trained. (Conway, 2007).

Let's Evaluate –

- To conclude both Skinner and Bruner made important contributions to the education world.
- Skinner's operant conditioning is still used today in schools; however, we can understand that behaviour and learning are much more complex than reinforcing behaviours.
- Bruner's theories allow for more person-centred learning which we see mostly in our schools today.

Keep reading for strategies and resources that we use in schools today that link to Bruner and Skinner!

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Putting it into Action.



(Swaiths, 2022).

Now that we are filled with the knowledge of learning theories and their founding fathers, Let's take a look at how they can be used in practice.

I will be taking examples from my own school setting and hopefully you can learn tips and tricks and understand how the theories are linked to today!

Behaviourism.

Positive reinforcement entails offering rewards or incentives to strengthen desired behaviours encouraging students to repeat these behaviours and achieve their goals. (National University, N.D). In my school setting we use Positive reinforcement by:

- Stickers or reward charts – A pupil receives a sticker or adds to a reward chart for good behaviours or work.
- Praise – Verbal or Written praise for good behaviours that we would like to be repeated.
- Extra Play time/ equipment – An extra five minutes of play for good whole class behaviour or the opportunity to use fun equipment and/or the use of our outdoor wooded play area.

Negative reinforcement is removing unpleasant stimulus after good behaviour to increase its frequency this helps to promote students' motivation and persistence. (National University, N.D). This can look like:

- Homework free – If behaviour or marks have been exceptionally good, our school will remove the homework for that week for a well-deserved break.
- Choice of Assembly – Our school has themed assembly's every morning, if behaviour has been specifically good, a pupil may choose whether or not to stay in class or go to the assembly. This is extra beneficial for the children who find assembly daunting and anxiety ending.

- Skip extra tasks – most of the time in my school we have the main task and then extra for those who finish in time, removing the extra task gives a better incentive for all to finish the main task.

Punishment helps for behaviours to be less likely to be repeated, we can either add unpleasant stimulus called positive punishment or we can subtract a pleasant stimulus called negative. (Nebel, 2023). Here are some examples of what they can look like in my educational setting.

Positive Punishment	Negative Punishment
Verbal warnings, Telling offs, Scolding.	Taking time off play, lunch, or breaks.
Adding extra work or extra time to lessons.	Revoking privileges to nice activity's, computer time or free time
	Revoking wards or points acquired through stickers/rewards.

As you can see, we use operant conditioning almost as instinct in our schools, but we also understand that controlling and reinforcing behaviours isn't enough to promote the best learning, Let's take a look at how we use Cognitivism too.

Cognitivism

Discovery learning is a theory developed by Bruner that transformed the approach to the learning process by emphasizing experimental learning and active engagement. (Main, P). Let's take a look at some examples of how we use discovery learning in our schools.

- **Missions** – In our school setting we set time for 'missions' where the students can choose a mission from creativity, mathematics or language and work independently to solve the mission promoting independence.
- **Problem Solving Games** – In teams' pupils are tasked with problem solving tasks, such as sorting blocks or rope games to use their problem-solving skills and discover working in a team.

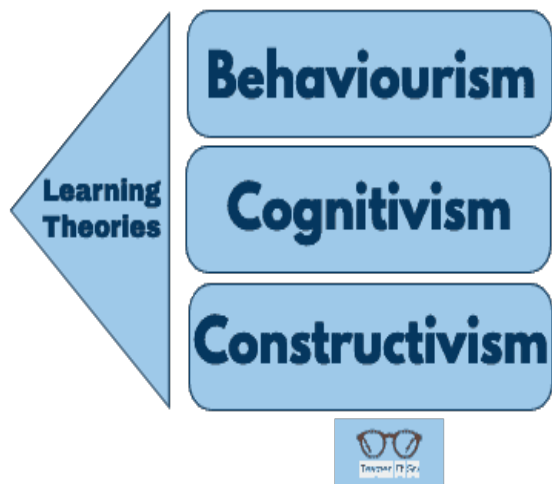
- **Forest use** – Our school is lucky to have a forest setting where we can partake in outdoor learning and let the children discover and learn through engagement with the outdoors.

Intellectual Development represents child development in three ways, Enactive where the Child learns touching, feeling, or manipulating, Iconic where they learn through pictures, videos, and diagrams, Finally Symbolic where the child develops the capacity to think in abstract terms, and interpret symbols and words. (Blakemore and Firth, 2005).

This is displayed in all schools as looking through the early year’s methods of learning through blocks and messy play then moving on to pictures and finally at KS2 developing the capacity to deal with terms and words.

This leads us on to scaffolding, which takes intellectual development into account for how we learn about things at what age. This is seen when we cover a subject in greater detail over each term or school year.

“Teacher scaffolding is a key instructional strategy throughout the entire program from beginning to end.” (Tedick and Lyster, 2020).



Conclusion.

In conclusion we can see how both theorists have made significant contributions to the educational world today, However I think we can see the importance of a behaviourist, cognitivist, and constructivist approach all together to create the perfect possible environment for learning!

(Loveless, 2023).

So next time you’re in class and automatically go about your day, see if you can spot how many links to theories you use without even realising it!

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