

# Concepts of Learning in Educational Psychology

## Categories

- Characteristics of the learner and individual differences among learners (abilities, personality, attitudes and motivation)
- Different kinds of learning
- The learning process
- Outcomes of learning

Cf. Ausubel, Novak and Hanesian (1978); Travers (1979); Cronbach (1977); Gage and Berliner (1979)

## Learner characteristics

- 1) The influence of age and maturity on mental development and learning
- 2) The effects of heredity and environment on abilities and achievements
- 3) Specific aptitudes for particular learning tasks, e.g. musical aptitude, manual dexterity, and of course also language learning aptitude
- 4) The influence of home and community on motivations and attitudes that impel learners to attend to learning tasks, and the degree to which the learners are prepared to persevere with it

(Stern, H.H. 1983: 309)

## What is being learnt (3 major psychological categories)

### 1. Conceptual and verbal learning:

- information
- knowledge
- ideas
- concepts
- systems of thought

## 2. Skill learning:

Acquisition of sensomotoric processes, e.g. sewing, drawing, writing, playing a musical instrument, or acquiring a new movement combination as in tennis; habitually performed acts, such as social habits, as greeting or leave taking, using eating implements etc.; and biologically useful techniques, such as learning how to learn, or problem solving

☺ Teaching pronunciation may be teaching a sensomotoric skill, or it may be accompanied by a phonological explanation and lead to conceptual understanding!

(Stern, H.H. 1983: 310)

Affective and social learning refers to the acquisition of emotional conduct and expression, interests, social attitudes, and values: a) affective predispositions; b) learning process accompanied by emotional reactions; c) the entire learning experience may lead to a fixed constellation of likes and dislikes directed towards the whole language in question or features of that language, languages in general, the people speaking the language, and so on. (Stern, H.H. 1983: 310)

## 3. The how of learning:

1. Time-scale: 'early' vs. 'later' learning; 'first' vs. 'second' learning or 'unlearning'
2. Degree of awareness or volitional control on the part of the learner: more or less unconscious; often also referred to as ...
  - a) 'blind', 'latent' or 'incidental' learning; cf. The distinction introduced by Krashen (1978) between language learning and acquisition;
  - b) intent or deliberate learning: 'rote' or 'mechanical' vs. insightful, meaningful, or cognitive learning, referring to the degree of conceptual understanding of the learner task by the learner;
  - c) sudden restructuring, single trial, once-and-for all learning, and gradual learning (practice, repetition, memorization, shaping, stamping-in) indicate not only different speeds of learning but also different mental processes involved;
  - d) self-directed learning (selfinstruction, discovery learning, learning by trial and error) vs. other-directed learning (learning from a teacher, receptive learning, following a model or identifying with it, learning by imitation or suggestion);
  - e) conditions of practice: a) to what extent is practice helpful to learning? b) how much practice is needed, and how should it be arranged? c) application or transfer of learning in the classroom to real-life situations (e.g. Cronbach 1977): the importance to be attributed to 'drill' or other forms of practice; the nature of the practice tasks; the degree of intensity of practice; the techniques which would be helpful to transfer classroom learning to genuine communication;
  - f) and the needs of assessing the outcome of learning: tests of achievement and proficiency.

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