Learning Theories

Lesson 1
Overview and Behaviourism

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Section Learning Outcomes

At the end of this section on Learning Theories, you will be able to:

1. Define the term 'Learning Theories'
2. Explain the basic concepts of the following learning theories
   a. Behaviourism
   b. Constructivism
   c. Cognitivism
   d. Multiple Intelligences
3. Describe how the above theories might effect your presentation of Fit For Life Lifestyle Management material to any given audience

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Overview

- Learning Theories are attempts at explaining the methods and ways by which people learn.
- It is extremely important for FFL Specialists to have an insight in how people learn as this will assist you in getting your message across to your audience and increase the likelihood of them taking it in and remembering it.

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Popular Theories

- This section will cover 4 popular theories of learning
    - Behaviourism
    - Cognitivism
    - Constructivism
    - Multiple Intelligences

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Learning Theories Spectrum

- In general it can be said that if all learning theories were placed on a spectrum, behaviourism would be at one end, constructivism at the opposite end and all the other theories could be placed on the line between these two

Behaviourism ⟷ **Constructivism**

- Teacher/tutor centred
- Audience/students have a passive role

- Audience /students are active in their own learning
- Teacher/tutor has a facilitation role

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Behaviourism Learning Outcomes

Learning Outcomes:

At the end of this lesson, you will be able to:

1. Describe the concept of behaviourism in learning
2. Explain the terms 'stimulus-response', 'unconditioned stimulus' and operant conditioning
3. Describe sample instances of Behaviourism in practical situations

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Behaviorism

- John B. Watson (1878-1958) is generally regarded as being the founder of the school of behaviourism.
- Behaviourists suggest "we learn by receiving stimuli from our environment that provoke a response." (Rodgers, 1998).
- Early behaviourists were concerned with stimulus-response connections.

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Classical Conditioning

- In one of the best known examples of classical conditioning Ivan Pavlov (1846-1936) caused his dogs to salivate at the sound of a bell.
- The Stimulus was food and the response was salivation
- Pavlov then used a bell as his neutral stimulus. Whenever he gave food to his dogs, he also rang a bell. After a number of repeats of this procedure, he tried the bell on its own.
- The dog had learned to associate the ringing of the bell with the provision of food and began to salivate when the bell was rung
  - Read more and see a video on this experiment

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Conditioned Response

- This learning of the association between bell and food is called a 'conditioned' or 'learned' response
- Thus behaviour is controlled through the pairing of an unconditioned stimulus (food) with a neutral stimulus (bell)

- Simple practical application of this theory in learning happens when good responses , good grades and /or hard work in a classroom situation are rewarded with positive encouragement or a 'Well done!' remark from a tutor or presenter

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Operant Conditioning

- B.F. Skinner circa 1940 expanded behaviourism with his work on operant conditioning. Operant conditioning focuses on a reward system (positive reinforcement) and punishment (negative reinforcement).

- Any behaviour that is followed by pleasant consequences is likely to be repeated, and any behaviour followed by unpleasant consequences is likely to be stopped.

- Behaviourism can be likened to a reward system, which places the teacher/lecturer in an active role and learners in a passive role within the learning environment i.e. all learning is centred around the teacher.

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Jug and Mug Approach

- This type of learning is often referred to as the 'Jug and Mug' approach to learning
  - used to describe a teacher / presenter with the knowledge (Jug) pouring it into the empty mugs (passive students)

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Positive Reinforcement

- **Sample instances**
  - **Positive Reinforcement or Reward:** Responses that are rewarded are likely to be repeated. E.G. Good grades reinforce careful study
  - A "Well Done!" remark or encouragement from a tutor/presenter prompts further interaction from an audience / class
  - A group who have worked hard all day are let home a little early

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Negative Reinforcement

- **Negative Reinforcement:** Responses that allow escape from painful or undesirable situations are likely to be repeated.
  - Being excused from an assignment because of good class interaction or groupwork.
  - Being excused from extra study due to good performance

- **Extinction /non reinforcement:** Responses that are not reinforced are not likely to be repeated.
  - Ignoring student misbehaviour or silly remark should extinguish that behaviour.

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Punishment

- **Punishment:** Responses that bring painful or undesirable consequences will be suppressed.
  - Penalising late attenders by withdrawing privileges (e.g. coffee break) should stop their lateness.

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Application

- The behaviourist approach to presenting a topic may be appropriate where the topic to be covered is complex and it is highly likely that the intended audience has very little or no prior knowledge of the material so group discussion is pointless. (e.g. some areas of anatomy & physiology)

- It may also be suitable where time is limited and the material needs to be covered. Task work and groupwork can be time consuming

- The behaviourist approach in the form of a lecture is well known and adults can be comfortable with it as they are not required to interact with other members of the audience or the presenter.

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Summary

- Uses a 'Reward' system to encourage a desired behaviour (learning)
- Negative reinforcement and punishment used to suppress undesired behaviours (smart comments, lateness etc)
- Teacher centred approach, the audience /students are passive learners not actively involved in own learning (jug and mug)
- Has some benefits when topic is complex or time is short, some adults may also be more comfortable with this approach as it demands less of them

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