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FACULTATEA LIMBI ŞI LITERATURI STRĂINE

THE PARADIGM OF LEARNING THEORIES

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Rezumat

Abilităţile, cunoştinţele şi competenţele intelectuale sunt toate dobândite prin învăţare. Învăţarea este procesul de dobândire a experienţei intelectuale, înţelegerea asimilării informaţiilor, formarea gândirii, sferei afective, voinţei şi, astfel, formarea sistemului de personalitate. Învăţarea a fost abordată în mod diferit de-a lungul timpului de către oamenii de ştiinţă: behavioriştii

definesc învăţarea într-un mod simplist, ca o substituire a stimulilor, realizată intern, prin formarea temporară a legăturilor între diferitele centre nervoase şi considerând ca principalii factori de învăţare imitaţia şi curiozitatea; cognitiviştii văd învăţarea ca acţiuni, operaţii mentale, care se realizează prin interiorizarea acţiunilor reale; constructiviştii definesc învăţarea ca formarea cunoştinţelor prin interacţiunea socială.

Education is always contextualized in a social, economical, political and cultural environment. The main feature of our age is the rapidity and magnitude of change driven by the explosive growth of information and communication technologies. The change is enhanced through learning.

Learning is one of the most complex and fundamental processes of the human activity. G.H. Bower and E.R. Hilgard consider learning as an alteration in the behavior being shaped by the repetitive experiences in certain contexts [1, p. 2]. W. Estes sees learning as „improvement in task performance- i.e. progress measured by speed or reduction of errors, toward meeting some criterion of success" and „adjusting to environmental uncertainties" [2, p. 4- 7]. Л.Б. Ительсон advocates that learning explicates the notion of essence, content, conditions and foundation [12, p. 5].

M. Wang, G. Haertel, H. Walberg have emphasized 228 variables (educational, psychological and social factors) which influence the learning process and have divided them into 6 categories: [9, p. 270]: (1) design and delivery of curriculum and instruction; (2) state and district governance and education; (3) classroom practices; (4) student characteristics; (5) school demographics, culture, climate, policies and practices; (6) home and community educational contexts.

Learning theories explain how people aquire knowledge, organize it and reconstruct new blocks of knowledge and how are these further transformed in skills and competences. There are different classifications that try to explain this phenomenon; E. R.

Hilgard and G. H. Bower consider that theories can be classified into: 1.stimulus-response; 2. cognitive theories [1, p. 10]. R. Iucu and S.E. Bernat classified learning theories into: behaviorist, cognitivist and constructivist. I. Neacșu considers that learning theories can be grouped in: associationism and Pavlovian Conditioning, behaviorism, gestalt theory, psychosocial model, cognitivism, operational and dinamic action model [Apud 5, p. 25].

Behaviorist theories describe the processes, practices and acts through its behaviour [11, pp. 385-386]. The main focus is being made on the personality using behavioral methods. I. Pavlov defined learning as a substitution of stimuli, monitored internally through the formation of short term connections between neural centers; the pivotal factors to the learning process are the reinforcers, imitation and student's curioisity [12, p. 11]. The principles of behaviorism are useful to control the discipline and for to handle classroom management strategies. The behaviorists consider that the new competences are shaped only through practical activities, experiments, drills, projects. But, nowadays, the learning process in the shape of stimulus- response is overcome.

Learning can be: (1.) spontaneous, generated as a consequence of activities that have other genres of purpose, (2.) deliberate (when you set aside time and effort specifically to learn) and (3.) by design or "premeditated" (consciously separates the outside (the lifeworld) from the inside (the extra effort)). The process of learning can be shaped with the help of rewards. Rewards can be material, symbolic, actional, and social in the shape of events or outcomes. They come after a positive reinforcement being a pleasant effect [3, p. 4]. Reinforcements can be positive and negative. A reward may be the remark "You are the best student at English"; but "I like how you have solved the problem in translation," is a positive reinforcement, which is meant to make the student learn the right way to solve a situation. Punishment is not a negative reinforcement; it is targeted to

eliminate the wrong behavior without explaining to the student what is wrong and should be avoided further.

In Classical Conditioning the student associates new stimuli with responses shaping new behaviors triggered by new incentives [3, p. 8]. In Operant Conditioning learning is shaped through consequences and reinforcers which reward a consequence in order to increase the rate of occurrence of the desired response. In order to shape a behavior must be followed six stages: Precontemplation (denial or ignorance of the problem); Contemplation (reflecting on the problem); Preparation (experimentation); Action (direct involvement); Maintenance (sticking to new behavior); Relapse (frustration, failure). The following recommendations are suggetsted for reinforcers:

• Strengthening must be contingent with the behavior it holds. The reinforcers should be administered immediately after the release of the desirable behavior.

• Excessive praise is not recommended for behaviors that exceed the capabilities and abilities of most students in class.

• Students must be aware that reinforcements are consequences of their behavior. By repeated use reinforcements may lose value.

• Inappropriate behavior for the first time should be ignored and there should be used warning signals before applying the penalty.

• Potential changes can be made in the physical environment in order to manage the discipline.

Assessment of learning is generally done through objective examinations: the student must demonstrate that he knows the correct answer. The teacher assumes full responsibility for achieving the learning objectives, creating the environment and reinforcement system to shape the students' assimilation of the new behaviors.

Cognitive theories conclude that human beings are not „programmed animals", which are just responding to external stimuli [4, p. 3]; behavior is a consequence of thought. In the process of learning counts a lot the processing system: sensory memory, short

term and long term memory, encoding, pattern recognition, rehearsal and withdrawal [8, p. 67]. Cognitivism demands the intuitive methods, didactic aids, teaching in conformity with age range and individual peculiarities.

Cognitivism, contrary to behaviorism, seeks to highlight the internal processes of learning. Cognitive theories give a major role to the information processing that takes place between stimulus and response. The student is an active information processing system, receiving stimuli from the environment, sensing perceptions, applying information recognition processes, which is then temporarily stored in the short-term memory, after which the processed information is stored in the long-term memory. Since the student must process the reality rather than acquire new observable behaviors, learning is characterized by a change in the student's mental structures, the formation of synapses- the juncture of two neurons (dendrites of one neuron and axon of another cell body). In the synapse with the help of neurotransmitters are sent the impulses from one neuron to another and here is how learning occurs viewed as a neural activity and tremendous account of "electrical operations" i.e. nervous impulses that are sent every second from different receptors to different sensory areas to be further processed.

The cognitivist approach emphasizes the mental active commitment of students throughout their learning, the information being processed, stored, deleted, restrucured, recalled etc [4, pp. 10-11]. J. Piaget established the develomental ages: sensorimotor intelligence (0-2), preoperational (2-7), concrete operations (7-11), formal operations (11-15) explaining how learning evolves in humans [4, p. 12]. Therefore, the teacher should use teaching strategies to help the student in selecting, decoding, organizing, integrating and accessing the information. The hierarchical classification of R. Gagné's learning refers to eight types of learning in which the upper level is the most complex and relies on the acquisition of the lower ones. The eight types are: 1) learning

signals; 2) learning stimulus – response; 3) learning by chaining; 4) learning through verbal associations; 5) learning by discrimination; 6) learning of notions; 7) learning the rules; 8) solving problems.

The transition is made from understanding learning as a discourse to understanding it as a factor of sustainable intellectual development. Cognitivist perspective on education emphasizes: the student's active role in learning; use of memorization strategies, simple (repetition) or complex (elaboration and organization); the importance of self-learning in learning; understanding the individual differences.

The teacher has the role of facilitating learning by designing and organizing the material, as well as active involvement of students in authentic learning tasks. The use of intuitive methods involves the introduction of concrete elements, which give pupils a good understanding how phenomena occur in reality.

Intuitive methods: demonstration and modeling play a crucial role in the formation of concepts, on the mechanisms of perception and representation. The use of teaching materials as concrete support for learning is closely related to the use of intuitive methods. Teaching in accordance with the adherence to age and psycho-individual peculiarities starts from taking into account the level of development of a child and the characteristics generated by the personality factors.

Marshall's Feedforward designates the set of anticipations that the teacher builds while facilitating the students' learning process. Feedforward is the correlation of feedback but it belongs exclusively to the teacher as an instrument of channeling the didactic discourse towards a certain purpose. Its formative value is brought to light only by a didactic process that focuses on reflection, it is built in such a way that it requires the student to reflect on the information presented to him, but also allows him to express self-reflection on the way he receives and exploits the information.

In order to build a set of useful predictions the appropriate teaching model is the reflexive model, which promotes the development of metacognition. Cognitive organizers and explicit teaching by D. Ausubel proposes a teaching model that opposes meaningful learning to rote learning. Cognitive organizers are tools for organizing knowledge. They can take various forms from conceptual maps, mental scaffolding to speak aloud protocols. The teaching approach starts from the presentation of the organizers, continues with the presentation of the tasks and materials to be taught and completes the strengthening of the cognitive organization.

Constructivist theories define learning as a very sophisticated process of representation and organization of the information shaped by the environment. Social-constructivist theory elucidates the fact that learning is a reflection on the experiences, practices, prediction of the future goals, choice between several variants, socialization, integration and finding the meaning of life. Learning is a process of social mediation in which students build new hierarchy of knowledge based on their interaction with their cultural and social environment.

Constructivism promotes new teaching methods – student – centered investigation, anchored learning, cooperative learning, active learning etc. Cooperative Learning belongs to student – centered teaching i.e. based on active and interactive training strategies. The responsibility for own learning is shared between the teacher and the pupils who become partners in the process of building knowledge. *Constructivism promotes* the importance of social interaction and learning through instructional practices, social and communication skills, discussion or debates, peer learning, divergent thinking, exploration of cognitive, metacognitive and social domains.

Despite differences, behaviorism, cognitivism and constructivism can be found on a series of continuums rather than on tense positions [6]. Learning is varied and it depends on context, content, goals. D. Jonassen believes that learning is not about the

transmission of knowledge but the communcation of ideas by improving the clarity of the message. According to D. Jonassen, "behavioral and cognitive theories concentrate on the individual as the medium of learning; learning is a process of meaning making; learning is a focus on the social nature of the meaning making process; a process of social negotiation; social-dialogical process; a major outcome of learning is our identity formation [6, pp. ix- x]. Therefore the most appropriate educational model in school environments lies between cognitivism and constructivism which does not neglect the behaviorist approach ensuring educational network interconnection.

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BENEFITS OF PEDAGOGICALLY SOUND HOMEWORK

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Rezumat

Scopul acestui articol este de a convinge profesorii de limba engleză ca limbă străină (EFL) că temele pentru acasă sunt într-adevăr benefice, prezentând mai multe exemple de sarcini de înaltă calitate. Argumentul este că nu timpul petrecut pentru pregătirea temelor pentru acasă contează în învăţarea limbilor străine, ci, mai degrabă, tipurile de sarcini - probabil diferite de activităţile tradiţionale, care fac învăţarea mai eficientă.

The purpose of this article is to convince English teachers and teacher trainers that homework is indeed beneficial. The argument here is that it is not the time spent on homework that matters in early foreign-language instruction, but rather the types of homework assignments that make learning more meaningful [2, p. 448]. There is a need for tangible ideas and discussion among teachers concerning homework, especially in countries where English language instruction is limited to two or three lessons a week. Adjusting our attitude about what constitutes productive homework might bring change in the classroom and learners' relationships to homework.