

Corrections to:
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Chapter 1

PSYCHOPEDAGOGICS AND LEARNING: THE
QUESTIONABLE RELEVANCE OF THREE
PSYCHOLOGICAL THEORIES OF LEARNING

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1. INTRODUCTION

By way of setting the stage for the two chapters to follow, one on the psychic life of the child-in-education and the other on the learning child-in-education, the plan is to show why the psychological theories of learning to be found in almost every educational psychology textbook in the United States are not a focus for psychopedagogics. The theories usually found in American educational psychology textbooks are: classical conditioning; operant conditioning; social or imitation learning; cognitive theories (e.g., Ausubel, Bruner); and information processing. Only three of these will be concentrated on, namely, classical conditioning (*stimulus learning*), operant conditions (*response learning*), and information processing (the presumed processes necessary to link *stimulus and response*). Social learning, as developed by Bandura, to a large extent bears the stamp of operant learning and information processing, so it will not be considered. So-called cognitive theories also will not be focused on because no one claims to offer a comprehensive theory.

In considering each of these three theories or models of learning, the model will be presented briefly, the phenomena the theory claims to account for will be viewed phenomenologically, and the model will be evaluated psychopedagogically. Before doing this, a few additional comments are in order.

To fully appreciate psychopedagogics as an autonomous part/perspective of pedagogics, it is helpful to understand why these psychological theories of learning do not appear in the chapter dealing with the way a child learns in a pedagogic as well as in other kinds of situations. One reason is that psychopedagogics is not psychology applied to schooling or to education. Its point of departure is the pedagogical situation (which always involves an

adult guiding or accompanying a child with the aim of helping the child to become an adult) and the categories of psychopedagogics, including its categories of learning, emerge from this situation itself and are not imported to it from the domain of psychology.

In contrast to psychopedagogics, educational psychology in the United States does not start with the child in a pedagogical situation (indeed, a pedagogic perspective virtually is unknown in America). Other than a reference to "learning at school", seldom is any explicit context or situation mentioned. The point of departure is the psychology of the child and more particularly the psychology of learning applied to the child at school. This is precisely why the above-mentioned theories of learning play such a prominent role in the thinking of educational psychologists — they tend to start with and to apply these theories to the school situation.

There is no question that a teacher or educator can profit from knowledge of and insights into how children learn, and yet it is questionable that a study of the psychology of learning is very helpful in this regard (see Sonnens, no date). Still, writers of educational psychology textbooks continually present these theories of learning while assuming, for the most part, without question that they are what a teacher or educator needs to know about how a child learns. But are these theories relevant? Or, if they are relevant, why is it that these theories of learning do not spontaneously suggest themselves when one begins with the pedagogical situation and tries to describe and understand how a child learns in that type of situation? If they do not arise from within the pedagogical situation, if they do not "belong" to it, but are imported from psychology, how can one decide when, how, or even if one can or should use these theories for pedagogical purposes? Psychology cannot provide an answer because this is a pedagogical and not a psychological issue.

Before proceeding to a presentation and evaluation of the three models of learning mentioned above in an attempt to show that psychopedagogics need not and perhaps should not include them as an important focal point, two things need to be done. First, two variations of a widely accepted definition of learning will be critically examined partly because the models to be considered are claimed to be consistent with them and partly because these definitions and the models of learning are founded on the

same unacceptable naturalistic philosophical anthropology (a natural science view of man). Second, a very brief sketch of an aspect of the temporality of conscious life will be presented because it will be used later to add a dimension to the evaluation of these models not ordinarily explicated.

2. WHAT IS LEARNING?

There are two common variations of a definition of learning which are widely accepted in the United States. First, Gagne (1965) states that "Learning is a change in human disposition or capability that persists over a period of time and is not simply ascribable to processes of growth. The kind of change called learning exhibits itself as a change in behavior. . . . Others, e.g., Leffrancis (1965), define learning as 'changes in behavior due to experience'. Second, and even more common, is the definition offered by Gage and Berliner (1984) who say learning is "the process whereby an organism changes its behavior as a result of experience". They then offer a typical elaboration of this definition which, roughly, is as follows: change implies time in the sense that an organism that has learned behaves now in a way different from before; this change is limited to behaviour and does not include, for example, changes in height and other maturational changes (as Gage and Berliner state, "the overt behavior of the organism — pigeon or school-age child, worm or teacher — is always our starting point"); as a result of experience means change resulting from things other than "fatigue, sensory deprivation, drugs, and mechanical forces. . . ."

"After all of the foregoing types of changes (that is, those resulting from physiological, mechanical, and maturational processes) have been excluded from the category of those reflecting learning, what kinds of changes in behavior remain to be included? The answer is that learning results from experience with the environment whereby relationships between stimuli and responses are established" (Gage and Berliner, 1984). Italics added.

In conjunction with my own comments on these variations of a definition of learning, the reader is referred to the criticism of such definitions made by Sonnens twenty years ago (Nel, Sonnens

and Gardner (1965). Among other criticisms, Sonnekus mentions that such definitions are concerned mainly with a change in behaviour with the aim of a better adaptation of the individual to his environment. The terminology has a natural science, biological flavour and is not applied to man as a person, a change in behaviour and adaptation concern peripheral spheres of life and is applicable to a vital-psychic level of a person's behaving but in no sense refers to a spiritual-personal level of behaviour. He also says that instead of a change in behaviour, man himself as a person changes, not as a reaction to stimuli but because of a dynamic, intentional directedness to act on, to change, to create and to discover his world. A person doesn't undergo a change in behaviour but man as a person, the "I", changes. Thus, says Sonnekus, learning concerns much more than merely a change in behaviour.

The emphasis on a change in behaviour is a carry over from behaviourism, and its persistence and general acceptance is rooted in an error of logic. That is, there is no question that a change in behaviour is evidence of learning. However, it does not follow from this that learning is a change in behaviour.

These remarks revolve around the fact that such definitions of learning as those by Gagné and by Gage and Berliner are founded on an unacceptable philosophical anthropology. For example, these definitions do not reflect human intentionality as openness for and directedness to the world, as existentiality, etc. Unfortunately, to pursue this important point would go beyond the scope of this chapter. In this connection, the reader is referred to Sonnekus (no date).

At this point additional inadequacies of these definitions will be indicated. Regarding the definition offered by Gagné, a persistent change in human disposition or capability is not a statement regarding what learning is but rather it is an indication of the effect of having learned. This is a statement about what happened but not how it happened. A positive aspect of the effort by Gagné is that, unlike most definitions, he does not limit the effect of learning to a change in behaviour.

The second variation of the definition noted above, comes closer to being a definition of learning in that it refers to learning as a process by means of which the organism changes its behaviour. However, this definition also falls short because the "pro-

cess" (i.e. learning) remains unspecified. Perhaps it can be said that "experience with the environment whereby relationships between stimuli and responses are established" is learning, but this is no better because again it specifies learning in terms of its results. Also, the term "process" is borrowed from a naturalistic anthropology and carries unacceptable connotations (see Sonnekus, no date). Maybe it is expecting too much for such a general statement to be more specific about what learning is, after all, is it not specifically which the various theories or models of learning provide?

Aside from the natural science language (process, organism) of their definition, the elaboration of this definition provided by Gage and Berliner (1984) is revealing. Of the five main terms in their definition (process, organism, change, behaviour, experience), they elaborate only on the last three and for two of these (behaviour and experience) we are told what they are not. Apparently they believe "process" and "organism" do not require any comment.

Without further consideration of the above variations of a definition of learning, it is concluded that they are inadequate, not only for reasons of the unacceptable philosophical anthropology underlying them but because they are not-specific and they stress what learning accomplishes or results in rather than what it is.

3. THE TEMPORALITY OF CONSCIOUS LIFE

This is an extremely complex topic which, fortunately, can be kept relatively simple for the purpose of this chapter. The temporality of conscious life (of any experiencing) is of critical importance in the present study because the theoretical attitude of most educational psychologists and psychologists, especially those who root themselves in a natural science philosophical anthropology, hinder their understanding of the nature of temporality and, in particular, of any momentary present which essentially contains phases of retentions and anticipations (protentions). Such misunderstanding renders unintelligible the possibility of many taken-for-granted everyday experiences (e.g., experiences of duration, of similarity, of repetition, of change, of identity).

An understanding of the temporal structure of any momentary present which does not include retentions and anticipations as parts of that momentary present is found to lie at the foundation of the classical and the operant conditioning as well as the information processing models of learning to be considered below. Therefore, the main focus will be on trying to describe the essential temporal structure of any moment of awareness (e.g., looking at a physical object, reading a sentence, listening to a conversation) with the aim of showing that there is a nuclear perception, a now, together with retentions and anticipations belonging to it which comprise a momentary present of consciousness.

The attempt will be to correct the notion that only what is objectively or physically present can constitute a momentary present and that retentions and anticipations are not present except as activated memory traces (i.e., as physically or chemically present). What follows is only accessible to phenomenological reflection. Sokolowski (1974) tells us that such "phenomenological reflection alone becomes aware of the manifold of profiles which are experienced but never thematised in nonphenomenological awareness, which considers the identity but overlooks the manifold."

As the "now" of consciousness continually streams forward, the events encountered (e.g., objects) are given in different temporal perspectives such as a "now phase", "a just-elapsed phase", "a coming phase". However, even though consciousness is in flux, there is an abiding, formal temporal structure which consists of a central, primal impression (a now), surrounded by a horizon of retentions (of just having been) and anticipations (not yet). In agreement with Sokolowski, Kvale (1974) points out that "the retentions and protentions are usually not explicitly experienced as such, they are more given in the mode of a 'temporal background' . . ."

What is retained and anticipated (as opposed to specific acts of recollection and expectation) are part of an ongoing experience. The retentions, for example, are continuous with and actually are a part of the present awareness of an experience. What is retained has not dropped from the present, consequently, it cannot be recalled or remembered because in remembering we turn to the past as past but from the present. What is retained, however, is not retained as the "now" that it was. Rather it is retained as

"just having been present" which means it is retained from the now present.

For example, let us say a tone began at phase 1, endured through phases 2 and 3, and ended at phase 4. At phase 1 retained is the silence interrupted by its beginning (phase 1), but that silence, now just past but retained in the present, is a profile of the original silence from the vantage point of phase 1 (the original silence-as-interrupted is what is retained at phase 1). As the temporal structure elapses and phase 2 (an anticipation of phase 1) is now, the silence and phase 1 are retained and still present in their profiles from the vantage point of phase 2. Retained also are the horizons of retentions and anticipations of each of the retained phases, but again as profiles from the now phase. For example, when phase 1 was present, an immediate retention was silence and an immediate anticipation might have been that the tone will continue, change, or in its most basic form, that something will occur (be present in the future). At phase 2, silence is a retention of a retention (a retention of phase 1 which phase is now a retention of phase 2). The open-ended anticipation of phase 1, from the vantage point of phase 2 has become determinate (the tone continues). Finally, at phase 4, the initial silence and phases 1, 2 and 3 are retained in the "now" when the sound stops. Also retained are the retentions and anticipations of each of the preceding phases, again from the vantage point of phase 4. The anticipation of phase 3, say, that the tone will continue has been disconfirmed with a "new" silence. It is "new" because the "old" silence is still retained in the present but as having just been. "Beginning and end", the "identity" of the tone through temporal phases, silence "again", etc. all are possible because the "now" has a thickness or duration constituted by a central impression or now with its horizons of retentions and anticipations belonging to that now which, as a totality, is a momentary present and not just a fleeting, "knife-edged" instant. The inherent unity of consciousness becomes possible because "the unity of the present with the past is thus constituted by retentions, and at the forward end of the perceptual arc the protentions join the present to the future" (Kvale, 1974).

One final point of emphasis regarding a momentary present is that the now and its horizons of anticipations and retentions form a unity such that each of the three "moments" of the momentary