

Learning and Learning Styles

FOCUS QUESTIONS

1. What are the key principles of behavioral learning theories?
2. What role does socialization play in learning?
3. What are the key principles of cognitive learning theories?
4. What is the constructivist view of learning?
5. How do learning styles influence learning?
6. What are multiple intelligences?

The third basis of the curriculum is the nature of learning and learning styles. An understanding of how human beings learn is obviously of central importance for curriculum leaders. Learning theorists and researchers have not arrived at a universally accepted, precise definition of *learning*; however, most agree that learning is a change in an individual's knowledge or behavior that results from experience (Mazur, 1997; Slavin, 2003; Woolfolk, 2005). It is generally acknowledged that there are two families of learning theories—*behavioral* and *cognitive*—and that many subgroups exist within these two families. At the very least, curriculum leaders should understand the distinguishing features of each family because each defines the curriculum differently, and each leads to or supports different instructional strategies. In addition, curricula and teaching practices are usually based on both families of theories to allow for the diverse needs of learners or different types of knowledge to be learned.

BEHAVIORAL LEARNING THEORIES

Behavioral learning theories emphasize observable changes in behavior that result from stimulus-response (S-R) associations made by the learner. Thinking is part of an S-R sequence that begins and ends outside the individual learner, and learning is the product of design rather than accident. Learning is a conditioning process by which a person acquires a new response, and motivation is the urge to act, which results from a stimulus. Behavior is directed by stimuli from the environment, and a person selects one response instead of another because of the particular combination of prior conditioning and physiological drives operating at the moment of action. A person does not have to want to learn something in order to learn it. People can learn anything of which they are capable if they are willing to go through the pattern of activity necessary for conditioning to take place.