

Assignment 2
The Triadic Theory of Instruction

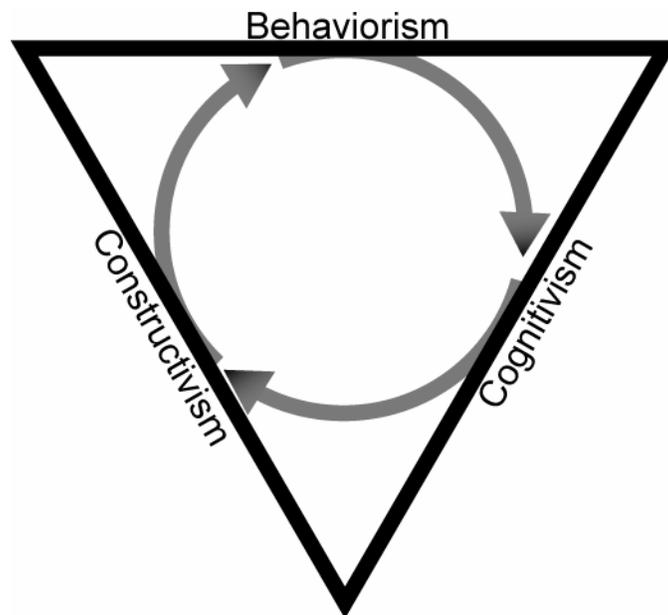
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Theories of Learning

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The Triadic Theory of Instruction

In the twenty-first century, it is commonly accepted that one theory of learning is not superior to another and that a combination of theories may result in enhanced learning (Driscoll, 2005; Zemke, 2002). It appears that the best learning occurs when a variety of learning theories are incorporated into the design of a learning product. At the beginning of the learning, when knowledge is minimal, behavioral methods seem to work best. Toward the middle of the learning once the learners have an understanding of the concepts, cognitive methods work to help the learners build their own personal foundations. Finally, the learning experience ends with constructivist methods in which the learners construct their own applied learning. It is at this point when a true assessment of learning can take place. Figure 1 shows this progression and the iterative nature of this theory.

Figure 1. Iterative Progression of Instruction and Learning



Triadic Theory Framework

Because the Triadic theory is a prescription of how to facilitate learning, it is a theory of instruction, rather than learning. This follows Driscoll's definition of instruction that instruction is "any deliberate arrangement of events to facilitate a learner's acquisition of some goal" (2005, p. 23). More so, the Triadic theory provides guidance for facilitators to help identify an appropriate arrangement of learning events based on the characteristics of the learner.

Conceptual and Theoretical Frameworks

Learning is Evolutionary

Learning tasks (competencies) vary in complexity between themselves and individualistically for learners. Simpler tasks may be learned through behavioral techniques. As competencies become more complex, learning techniques progress to cognitivism and then to constructivism (Sherry, 1998).

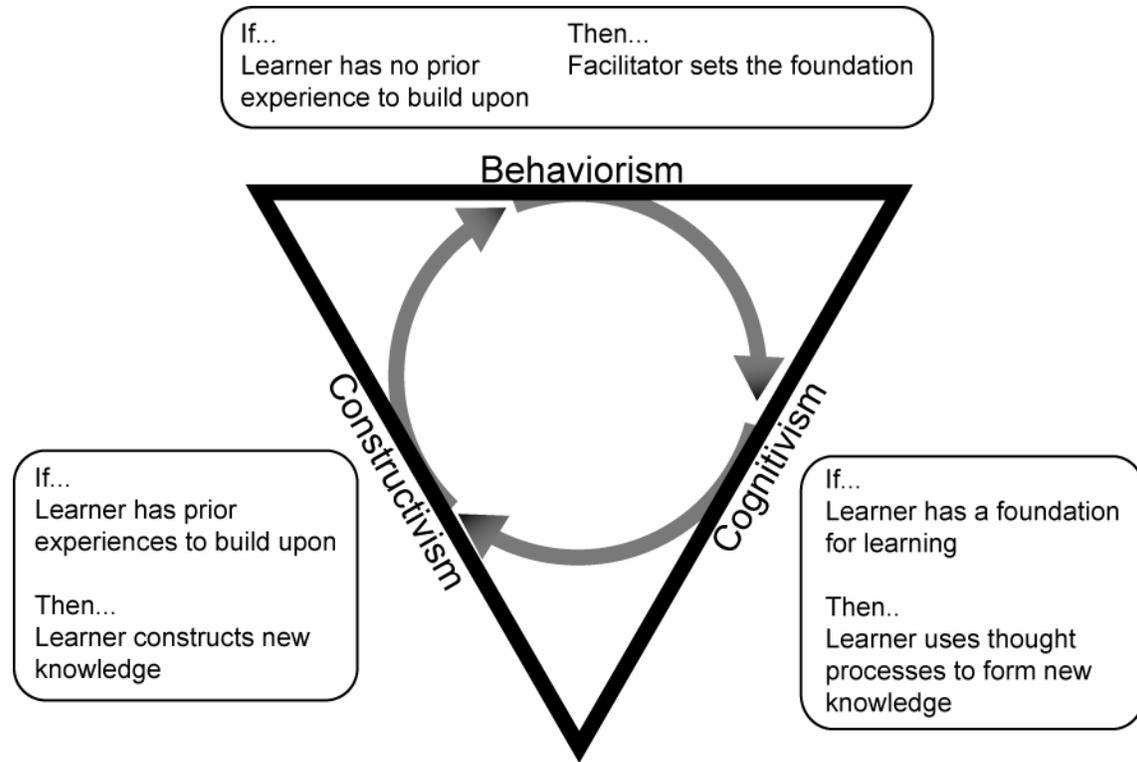
Existing Learner Competencies Influence Learning Method

One arrangement of learning events may not always be appropriate for all learners, or even the same learner. Often within groups of learners, existing competencies will differ in the group. Some may be novices when others may have some experience and yet others may be heavily skilled. Relating back to the concept that learning is evolutionary, the novices may require behavioral techniques to help build the foundation of knowledge. If structured properly, these techniques will act as refresher learning for the more experienced learners in the group. As the novices progress, the group will eventually evolve to a concluding set of equal competencies that are learned through constructivist techniques.

Operational Framework

An analysis of the learner's existing competencies will guide the arrangement of learning events to a solution that is most appropriate for instruction and learning. Figure 2 illustrates the type of If/Then decisions that are useful for determining the initial learning techniques.

Figure 2. Operational Framework of the Triadic Theory



A Review of My Fair Lady

The idea of combining the three major theories of learning has been looked at by other researchers in the field. Glenzer (2005) identified that Lerner & Lowe's 1956 *My Fair Lady* stage play is an illustrative example of an evolutionary process of learning. Recalling the major storyline of the play, the objective (a behaviorist technique) is to train Eliza, a street vendor with a heavy Cockney dialect and accent, to speak with a proper London dialect and accent.

The primary character, Professor Henry Higgins, implements a variety of teaching and learning techniques that progress from behaviorism through constructivism. Through a variety of drills and practices, the professor eventually gets Eliza to speak non-context relevant phrases in proper London dialect and accent. Glenzer mentions that, as a linguist, the professor "... (a) identifies the learner's entry skills, (b) specifies the behaviour to be learned, and (c) programmes the instruction in small steps" (2005, p. 102), each of these being behaviorist techniques.

From the cognitivist perspective, Glenzer identifies that Eliza made the conscious choice to let the professor instruct her. The fact that Eliza made this choice represents cognition, or thought on behalf of the learner. Even through the challenges that Eliza faces, she endures due to her own determination. Eventually, the professor takes Eliza out of his home (a controlled environment) and places her in an actual environment where proper language is necessary. In this new environment, Eliza uses her memory to repeat the phrases she learned. Her visit to this real environment advances her learning through observation of other proper ladies; her ultimate objective.

Finally, Glenzer discusses the constructivist techniques visible with Eliza. She references Vygotsky's law of genetic development and Phillips' societal rules and criteria. As Eliza connected her former language knowledge to the new knowledge, she "became a lady as her self-awareness and mastery led to higher cognitive functions" (Glenzer, 2005, p. 104). Also, the instructional strategy that the professor employed facilitated Eliza's learning process by providing the goals for Eliza. "to *do* what a lady does, to *act* like a lady, to *be* a lady" (p. 104). This strategy is situational and provides a context for Eliza to relate to.

A Study of Learning Continuums

Another researcher, Sherry (1998), conducted a study based on the premise of a behaviorist-cognitive-constructivist continuum of learning. She identified that learning computer related competencies are often a struggle and sought to explore an instructional design that integrated the three major theories of learning.

With a sample of learners who were to become multimedia authors, Sherry conducted this study. The sample included six learners classified as novices and eleven learners classified with advanced skills. The variety within the sample was important to evaluate the affects of this type of integrated learning for a variety of learners within a learning group.

The first phase of the study used behavioral techniques for the instruction. “Deliberately controlled events and conditions of instruction were employed” (Sherry, 1998, p. 2). The second phase transitioned to cognitive techniques for the instruction. Because the learners had a foundational knowledge of verbal information about multimedia authoring, they could now be introduced to ways of processing this knowledge, questioning the knowledge, and explaining the knowledge. The third phase naturally incorporated constructivist techniques. The learners, with verbal and intellectual knowledge and skills, now were able to choose how they were going to create a multimedia project as a way to construct additional competencies. A fourth phase of learning was included that focused on the learners reflecting on their complete experience (on their continuum of learning through various theories).

Sherry concluded that there were some issues that faced the eleven advanced learners because the instruction had to also accommodate the six novice learners. However, overall, all learners appreciated the flexibility of the instruction. (1998)

Concluding Remarks

The idea of mixing theories of learning into instruction is not a new one. The field could benefit from a well-structured theory of instruction that provides guidance for practitioners on how to implement the appropriate theory into instructional and curriculum designs. The Triadic theory is one attempt at providing this structure. By analyzing the learner, the correct initial learning techniques can be implemented to support the most complete learning by the learner.

References

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