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No two students are alike, and the way every person learns will vary. Our brains are all unique, and our experiences all contribute to the[different ways we learn](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/tennessee/what-type-learner-are-you2001.html). Psychologists have spent countless hours performing tests to better understand how students learn.

Current and aspiring teachers need tobe educated to be prepared for teaching students every day, and an important part of teacher education is understanding different ways of learning. There are many solidified learning theories that teachers can learn from as they prepare to help students in the classroom. Teachers who understand learning theories can use different techniques in their classrooms to cater to different kinds of learning. This can help all students find success in learning.

There are[five main educational learning theories](https://oer.galileo.usg.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1000&context=education-textbooks) that educators can utilize to help them enhance their classrooms and make them better learning environments for all students.

**What are the Five Main Educational Learning Theories?**

**Cognitive Learning Theory**

[Cognitive learning theory](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/what-is-cognitive-learning2003.html)looks at the way people think. Mental processes are an important part in understanding how we learn. The cognitive theory understands that learners can be influenced by both internal and external elements.

Plato and Descartes are two of the first philosophers that focused on cognition and how we as human beings think. Many other researchers looked deeper into the idea of how we think, spurring more research. Jean Piaget is a highly important figure in the field of cognitive psychology, and his work focuses on environments and internal structures and how they impact learning.

Cognitive theory has developed over time, breaking off into sub-theories that focus on unique elements of learning and understanding. At the most basic level, the cognitive theory suggests that internal thoughts and external forces are both an important part of the cognitive process. And as students understand how their thinking impacts their learning and behavior, they are able to have more control over it.

Cognitive learning theory impacts students because their understanding of their thought process can help them learn. Teachers can give students opportunities to ask questions, to fail, and think out loud. These strategies can help students understand how their thought process works, and utilize this knowledge to construct better learning opportunities.

**Behaviorism Learning Theory**

[Behaviorism learning theory](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/what-behavioral-learning-theory2005.html) is the idea that how a student behaves is based on their interaction with their environment. It suggests that behaviors are influenced and learned from external forces rather than internal forces.

Psychologists have been developing the idea of behaviorism since the 19th century. Behavioral learning theory is the basis for psychology that can be observed and quantified. Positive reinforcement is a popular element of behaviorism—classical conditioning observed in Pavlov’s dog experiments suggests that behaviors are directly motivated by the reward that can be obtained.

Teachers in a classroom can utilize positive reinforcement to help students better learn a concept. Students who receive positive reinforcement are more likely to retain information moving forward, a direct result of the behaviorism theory.

**Constructivism Learning Theory**

[Constructivism learning theory](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/what-constructivism2005.html) is based on the idea that students actually create their own learning based on their previous experiences. Students take what they’re being taught and add it to their previous knowledge and experiences, creating a reality that’s unique to  them. This learning theory focuses on learning as an active process, which is personal and individual for each student.

Teachers can utilize constructivism to help understand that each student will bring their own past to the classroom every day. Teachers in constructivist classrooms act as more of a guide to helping students create their own learning and understanding. They help them create their own process and reality based on their own past. This is crucial to helping many kinds of students take their own experiences and include them in their learning.

**Humanism Learning Theory**

[Humanism](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/what-humanistic-learning-theory-education2007.html) is very closely related to constructivism. Humanism directly focuses on the idea of self-actualization. Everyone functions under a hierarchy of needs. Self-actualization is at the top of the hierarchy of needs—it’s the brief moments where a person feels all of their needs are met and that they’re the best possible version of themselves. Everyone is striving for this, and learning environments can either move toward meeting needs or away from meeting needs.

Teachers can create classroom environments that help students get closer to their self-actualization. Educators can help fulfill students’ emotional and physical needs, giving them a safe and comfortable place to learn, plenty of food, and the support they need to succeed. This kind of environment is the most conducive to helping students learn.

**Connectivism Learning Theory**

[Connectivism](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/connectivism-learning-theory2105.html) is one of the newest educational learning theories. It focuses on the idea that people learn and grow when they form connections. This can be connections with each other or connections with their roles and obligations in their lives. Hobbies, goals, and people can all be connections that influence learning.

Teachers can utilize connectivism in their classrooms to help students make connections to things that excite them, helping them learn. Teachers can use digital media to make good, positive connections to learning. They can help create connections and relationships with their students and with their peer groups to help students feel motivated about learning.

**What are Additional Learning Theories?**

While these five learning theories are the main educational learning theories for teachers who want to support their students’ learning, there are additional theories they may want to understand. Some may work as good supplemental theories for teachers to bolster their educational support with a new approach.

**Transformative Learning Theory**

[Transformative learning theory](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/what-transformative-learning-theory2007.html) is a great approach for adult education and young adult learning. Also referred to as transformation learning, transformative learning theory focuses on the idea that learners can adjust their thinking based on new information.

This learning theory was founded by Jack Mezirow, who discovered it after doing studies on adult women who went back to school. His initial research found that adults don’t apply their old understanding to new situations and that having a new perspective helped them gain a new understanding of things as they change. Mezirow also believed that students had important teaching and learning opportunities connected to their past experiences and that critical reflection and review could lead to a transformation of their understanding.

This approach works well for adult students, as children don’t have the same kind of transformation with their learning experiences—and with life experience. Adult students could draw on childhood experiences and transforming those beliefs and understandings using critical reflection, leading them to an understanding of what they should believe and understand as adults.

Overall, the theory states that our worldview is changed the more we learn, which helps us grasp new concepts and ideas. By getting new information that helps evaluate past ideas, students are able to make a dramatic educational shift beyond standard learning. Teachers can employ this learning theory by encouraging their students to learn new perspectives while questioning their assumptions and open the floor for discourse to cement their new train of thought.

**Social Learning Theory**

Using[social learning theory](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/guide-social-learning-theory-education2005.html) can be a valuable tool for dealing with difficult students who like to disrupt the classroom and cause trouble. This theory focuses on the concept of children learning from observing others by acting on or not acting on what they see exhibited by their classmates. For example, they may see a classmate politely asking for a treat and getting one, or maybe they hear another classmate talking about something new they’ve learned, which teaches the student something new even if it’s not something they try themselves.

This learning theory was founded by Albert Bandura. He conducted an experiment called the Bobo doll experiment in the early ’60s, during which he studied children’s behavior after they watched an adult act aggressively with a doll-like toy. He noted how the children reacted when the adult got rewarded, punished, or suffered no consequences after they attacked the doll. Bandura wrote about his findings in 1977, detailing social learning theory and how it affected the behavioral development of students.

There are four elements to social learning theory:

* Attention, which calls upon different or unique lessons or activities to help children focus.
* Retention, focusing on how the student will internalize information and recall it later on.
* Reproduction, drawing on previously learned behavior and when it’s appropriate to use it.
* Motivation, which can extend from seeing other classmates being rewarded or punished for their actions.

By using social modeling based on these elements, teachers have a very powerful tool in their arsenal that can effectively guide their students to be more active in their learning, pay more attention, and channel their energy into their schooling.

**Experiential Learning Theory**

[Experiential learning theory](https://www.wgu.edu/blog/experiential-learning-theory2006.html) focuses on learning by doing. Using this theory, students are encouraged to learn through experiences that can help them retain information and recall facts.

Experiential learning theory, or ELT, was identified by David Kolb in 1984. Though his influence came from other theorists such as John Dewey, Kurt Lewin, and Jean Piaget, Kolb was able to identify four stages of ELT. The first two stages, concrete learning and reflective observation, focus on grasping an experience. The latter two, abstract conceptualization and active experimentation are about transforming an experience. To Kolb, effective learning is seen as the learner goes through the cycle of experiential learning theory. Students can enter the cycle in any way and at any point.

Some examples of this form of learning include taking students to the zoo to learn about animals instead of just reading about them or growing a garden to learn about photosynthesis instead of watching a video about it. By creating environments where students can learn and experience at the same time, teachers offer students the opportunity to immediately apply their knowledge and get real-world experiences. This approach also encourages teamwork and is shown to improve motivation.

**How to Apply Learning Theories in Teaching**

Teachers can create specific strategies and techniques to apply these learning theories in their classrooms. Teachers need to first focus on getting a [well-rounded education](https://www.wgu.edu/online-teaching-degrees.html) to learn about all kinds of techniques for teaching and classroom management. Teachers need to understand learning theories to be prepared to utilize them in their classrooms.

An understanding of learning theories helps teachers connect to all different kinds of students. Teachers can focus on different learning styles to reach different students, creating teaching that focuses directly on student needs and aptitudes.

# Reinforcement Theory of Motivation

Reinforcement theory of motivation was proposed by BF Skinner and his associates. It states that individual’s behaviour is a function of its consequences. It is based on “law of effect”, i.e, individual’s behaviour with positive consequences tends to be repeated, but individual’s behaviour with negative consequences tends not to be repeated.

Reinforcement theory of motivation overlooks the internal state of individual, i.e., the inner feelings and drives of individuals are ignored by Skinner. This theory focuses totally on what happens to an individual when he takes some action. Thus, according to Skinner, the external environment of the organization must be designed effectively and positively so as to motivate the employee. This theory is a strong tool for analyzing controlling mechanism for individual’s behaviour. However, it does not focus on the causes of individual’s behaviour.

The managers use the following methods for controlling the behaviour of the employees:

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| https://www.managementstudyguide.com/images/tick.gif | **Positive Reinforcement-** This implies giving a positive response when an individual shows positive and required behaviour. For example - Immediately praising an employee for coming early for job. This will increase probability of outstanding behaviour occurring again. Reward is a positive reinforce, but not necessarily. If and only if the employees’ behaviour improves, reward can said to be a positive reinforcer. Positive reinforcement stimulates occurrence of a behaviour. It must be noted that more spontaneous is the giving of reward, the greater reinforcement value it has. |
| https://www.managementstudyguide.com/images/tick.gif | **Negative Reinforcement-** This implies rewarding an employee by removing negative / undesirable consequences. Both positive and negative reinforcement can be used for increasing desirable / required behaviour. |
| https://www.managementstudyguide.com/images/tick.gif | **Punishment-** It implies removing positive consequences so as to lower the probability of repeating undesirable behaviour in future. In other words, punishment means applying undesirable consequence for showing undesirable behaviour. For instance - Suspending an employee for breaking the organizational rules. Punishment can be equalized by positive reinforcement from alternative source. |
| https://www.managementstudyguide.com/images/tick.gif | **Extinction-** It implies absence of reinforcements. In other words, extinction implies lowering the probability of undesired behaviour by removing reward for that kind of behaviour. For instance - if an employee no longer receives praise and admiration for his good work, he may feel that his behaviour is generating no fruitful consequence. Extinction may unintentionally lower desirable behaviour. |

**Implications of Reinforcement Theory**

Reinforcement theory explains in detail how an individual learns behaviour. Managers who are making attempt to motivate the employees must ensure that they do not reward all employees simultaneously. They must tell the employees what they are not doing correct. They must tell the employees how they can achieve positive reinforcement.

**What is the meaning of reinforcement theory?**

**Reinforcement Theory** of motivation aims at achieving the desired level of motivation among the employees by **means of reinforcement**, punishment and extinction. **Reinforcement** approach, which can be both positive and negative, is used to **reinforce** the desired behavior.

**What are the 3 basic elements of reinforcement theory?**

**Reinforcement theory** has **three primary** mechanisms behind it: selective exposure, selective perception, and selective retention.

**What are the 4 types of reinforcement?**

There are **four types of reinforcement**: positive, negative, punishment, and extinction.

**Reinforcement theory** of motivation was proposed by BF **Skinner** and his associates. It states that individual's behaviour is a function of its consequences. ... Thus, according to **Skinner**, the external environment of the organization must be designed effectively and positively so as to motivate the employee.

**What are the 2 types of reinforcement?**

There are **two types of reinforcement**, known as positive **reinforcement** and negative **reinforcement**; positive is whereby a reward is offered on expression of the wanted behaviour and negative is taking away an undesirable element in the persons environment whenever the desired behaviour is achieved.

**What is the main idea behind reinforcement theory?**

**Reinforcement theory** proposes that you can change someone's behavior by using **reinforcement**, punishment, and extinction. Rewards are used to reinforce the behavior you want and punishments are used to prevent the behavior you do not want. Extinction is a means to stop someone from performing a learned behavior.

**What are the key principles of reinforcement theory?**

**Reinforcement** theorists see behavior as being environmentally controlled. Rather than internal thoughts or desires, the **theory** is that behaviors are controlled by reinforcers—any consequence that, when immediately following a response, increases the probability that the behavior will be repeated.