**Constructivism: General Learning Theory**

Constructivism Theory is based on observation (learning philosophy) and scientific study about how people learn (teaching philosophy). The assertion is that the experiences enable people to construct the knowledge of the world around them.

**Key Features of Constructivism**

* Learner-centeredness
* Environment awareness

According to Jonassen and Land (2002), context, construction and collaboration are the basis of the constructivist learning.

Constructivism has two branches, **CognitiveConstuctivism**and **SocialConstuctivism**, and emphasizes learner differences,integration of linguistic, psychological, and sociological paradigms.

It is not without criticism as critics believe that it advocates tyranny of majority and lacks evaluation process.

**Principles of Constructivism**

**Key Principles**

* Learning must be started with the issues around which learners are actively trying to construct meaning.
* The learning process focuses on primary concepts, not isolated facts.
* Construction of the knowledge, and not the memorization, is encouraged.
* Learners must be provided with information on the quality of their learning.

Vygotsky has been the key figure who supported Constructivism and introduced his famous theory of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which explained the distance between learners’ existing developmental state and their potential development.

**John Dewey’s Notion of Experiential Education**

John Dewey, father of experiential education (1930) has been generally recognized as the most renowned and influential American philosopher of education. He propagated that students’ actual life experiences play important role in developing the overall understanding of the world, and traditional educational approach is primarily concerned with only imparting knowledge. John Dewey’s notion of experiential education proposed:

* Acknowledging individual differences
* Serves a social purpose
* Supports progressive education
* Theory of Experience

In addition to the notion’s main features, continuity and interaction are two cornerstones of the experiential education as claimed by John Dewy.Experience and reflective thinking also contributes in the experiential education with emphasis on ‘continual reorganization, reconstruction and transformation of experience’ determining effective experience, reflective thinking, learner as explorer, and the perception of relationships in problematical situations, democracy, and education.

**Fredrick’s Schematic Account of Memory Demonstrate [Remembering]**

Sir Frederick Bartlett proposed the theory of ‘Reconstructive Memory and Schema.’ He started off with publishing *Remembering* in 1932, in which he gave an account of his experiments he conducted by following casual data collection methods and recording their anecdotes. Bartlett believed that cognition–perceiving, remembering, and thinking–involvesschema. Assimilation and accommodation also contribute in the thinking processes. Repeated reproduction and serial reproduction are the two methods suggested by Bartlett with regard to remembering. His idea of schemas was revisited by Elizabeth Loftus (psychologist), and she claimed when we reconstruct memories, we change them by incorporating new information which we learn after the incident. Later on, the original part of the memory can neither be determined nor retrieved. She also asserted that eyewitnesses are unreliable.

**Jean Piaget and Constructivism**

Researchers have been trying to analyze the theory of constructivism in the light of Jean Piaget’s contributions, and believe that Piaget’s concept of cognitive constructivism refers to a cognitive stage where one’s understanding of any new experience is influenced by his/her existing knowledge of a particular experience. The theory relies greatly on schemes, processes of assimilation, and accommodation. It asserts that knowledge is constructed through learner’s participation and not just transmitted. According to Piaget,“What remains is construction as such, and one sees no ground why it should be unreasonable to think it is ultimate nature of reality to be in continual construction instead of consisting of an accumulation of ready-made structures” (Piaget, 1970, pp. 57-58).

**Piaget’s Key Concepts of Adaptation and Disequilibration**

Piaget emphasized the stages of intellectual development as foundation of acquisition of cognitive content. According to Piaget, reasoning and logic are the essence of intelligence. He proposed the concept of equilibrium based on adaptation which can be achieved by maintaining a balance between assimilation and accommodation.

The following four key elements that lead to disequilibrium were proposed by Piaget:

* **Emotions** which create feelings that excite and motivate learning
* **Experience** which exposes children to a variety of stimuli
* **Natural maturation** that enables learning through physical growth of mental structures
* **Social interaction** with parents, other children, and eventually teachers which enables both stimulation and feedback

**Bruner’s Idea of Scaffolding and Discovery Learning**

Influenced by Vygotsky’s theory of social constructivism, Jerome S. Bruner, psychologist of the twentieth century, proposed Theory of Scaffolding in 1976. The theory is considered to be an influential contribution in the field of education because it proposed scaffolding as vital for all types of learning. It enables a learner to overcome fears and focus on acquiring knowledge.

According to Bruner, the goal of education should be directed to *learning to learn;* therefore, teachers should design curriculum which facilitate rot learning, problem-solving, and learning through discovery. He introduced Discovery Learning Theory (1961) with the following three stages known as stages of ‘Representation’:

* **Enactive:** representation of knowledge through actions
* **Iconic:** the visual summarization of images
* **Symbolic representation:** the use of words and other symbols to describe experiences

**Bruner on Teaching Influencing Learning**

Jerome Bruner made major contributions in the field of education. He emphasized the concepts of involving learners in the cognitive as well as the constructive processes for meaningful learning. Moreover, learners should be provided with the appropriate assistance where needed. In his interview, Bruner explains that a learner must be encouraged to ‘learn to make a leap,’ and explore ‘possibility.’ Instead of being a passive receiver, a learner must learn to question, as intelligence exists in the world of possibilities.Some of his contributions include:

* The modes of representation
* The importance of teaching and learning ‘optimal structure,’
* The spiral curriculum,
* Learning through the acts of discovery

**Bandura’s Socio-Cognitive Model of Human Behavior [Self-Efficacy]**

Albert Bandura introduced Social Cognitive Theory which proposed the integration of behaviors, cognitions, and the environment for interaction. The theory advocates that people are not merely concerned with responding or behaving in a specific manner but also seek explanation for information around them. This is what he called a process of self-organizing, self-regulating and self-reflecting. Bandura (1995) proposed the concept of self-efficacy which according to him ‘refers to beliefs in one's capabilities to organize and execute the courses of action required to manage prospective situations.’He suggested three scales to measure self-efficacy:

* Self-efficacy magnitude
* Self-efficacy strength
* Generality of self-efficacy

**Understanding Self-Efficacy**

Bandura’s Self-efficacy theory enables learners to develop the understanding of one’s capabilities and the factors responsible for it. It explains that high self-efficacy motivates learners to undertake a specific task whereas low efficacy demotivates learners.

Parents, peers, and infact the overall supportive environment can play a positive role in enhancing high self-efficacy.

The concept of self-efficacy has been explainedin the below mentioned video link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=HnACsrdGZAI>

**David Ausubel’s Subsumption Theory**

David Ausubel (an American Psychologist) proposed Subsumption Theory for the understanding of learning’s subsumption process. In this process, new information is related to the existing one in the cognition. It consists of meaningful reception of information, four processes for meaningful learning, and advance organizers.

**The Four Key Principles of Subsumption Theory**

1. Learners should be presented with the most general concepts first, and then their analysis.
2. The instructional materials should include new, as well as previously acquired information. Comparisons between new and old concepts are crucial.
3. Existing cognitive structures should not be developed, but merely reorganized within the learners’ memory.
4. The role of the instructor is to bridge the gap between what’s already known and what is about to be learned.

**Metacognition and Script Theory**

According to John Flavellan, an American developmental psychologist (1979, 1987), metacognition consists of metacognitive knowledge and metacognitive experiences or regulation. Metacognition takes into account; thinking of higher order by involving processes of learning task, monitoring comprehension, and evaluating progress of task completion.

Roger Schankand Robert P. Abelson introduced *The Script Theory,* according to which events are understood in terms of scripts, plans and other knowledge structures as well as relevant previous experiences. He proposed the idea of Conceptual Dependency (CD) which is the collection of symbols that are used to represent knowledge. CD model has been widely used for natural language input for computers and different computer programs.

**KRASHEN’S INPUT HYPOTHESIS (MONITOR MODEL)**

**General Theory–Five Hypotheses and Factors**

Stephen Krashen, a linguist and professor emeritus at University of Southern California, is known for his theories of language acquisition and development. He introduced his famous second language acquisition theory which has been considered as one of the most influential theories in the fields of second language research and teaching since the 1980s. Krashen explained his hypothesis as:

* ‘Acquisition requires meaningful interaction in the target language, natural communication, in which speakers are concerned not with the form of their utterances but with the messages, they are conveying and understanding.’
* ‘Language acquisition does not require extensive use of conscious grammatical rules, and does not require tedious drill.’
* ‘... ‘Comprehensible input’ is the crucial and necessary ingredient for the acquisition of language. The best methods are therefore those that supply ‘comprehensible input’ in low anxiety situations, containing messages that students really want to hear. These methods do not force early production in the second language, but allow students to produce when they are ‘ready,’ recognizing that improvement comes from supplying communicative and comprehensible input, and not from forcing, and correcting production.’

Krashen proposed the idea of comprehensible input, that learners acquire a knowledge which is easy to comprehend and is slightly advanced than the existing level of understanding. The focus of the hypothesis is on the acquisition and not the learning.

The **internal factors** of the hypothesis are: Age, Personality, Motivation (intrinsic), Experience, Cognition, and Native Language.The **external factors** include: Culture and status, Motivation (extrinsic), Access to native Speaker, Curriculum and Instructions.

**The Natural Approach and SLA**

The concept of Natural Approach was developed by one of Krashen’s associates, Tracy Terrell (Krashen& Terrell, 1983). Ironically the term ‘natural’ here implies that there can be unnatural methods of learning a language which according to Krashenand Terrell are grammar and audio-lingual (listen-and-drill activities in classroom) methods. Since it is a natural process, it is considered to be effortless where learning takes place with ease. The teachers are expected to provide learners with comprehensible input and stimulating activities for the meaningful learning. The environment should also be facilitating by not forcing a learner to act during the silent period.

**Acquisition vs. Learning Hypothesis**

Krashen was the first one to establish the distinction between acquisition and learning. According to the distinction, the‘acquired system,’ or‘acquisition’ is the product of a subconscious process andthe ‘learned system,’or ‘learning’ is the product of formal instruction.

*Language acquisition* refers to subconscious learning and involves intuition. *Language learning* focuseson the language in its written form, and itsobjective is to understand the structure and rules of the language.The form is of greater importance than communication.

The distinction attracted criticism by different researchers. Among them, McLaughlin (1987, p. 56) argued that Krashen’s term lacked precision and is not clear. However, Gregg (1984) believed that some rules can be acquired through learning.

**The Natural Order Hypothesis and the Input Hypothesis**

The natural order hypothesis refers to the notion that there is a natural order of acquisition process. The grammatical structure follows a set sequence which is predictable. The order of acquisition in the first language is often different from the second languages. It argues that explicit instructions for learning and the learning process itself cannot change the natural order.

Krashen’s theory of Input Hypothesis advocates that the acquisition of second language is highly dependent on the learner’s comprehension of the input.He suggested the following techniques for comprehensible input:

* Use expression and body language
* Provide thinking time
* Pauses between phrases
* Shorter sentences
* Stress high frequency words
* Repeat/review vocabulary
* Repeat/restate for understanding
* Be supportive

**The Monitor Hypothesis and the Affective Filter Hypothesis**

Krashen’s Monitor Hypothesis claims that the conscious language-learning monitors the output. According to the hypothesis, learning acts as an editor or monitor in the process of language production by applying the rules consciously and minimizing the errors.

Monitor hypothesis is also divided into three types of ways to use it.

* Monitor over-users
* Monitor under-users
* The optimal monitor users

Conditions to apply to the monitor hypothesis:

* Time
* Focus on form
* Knowledge of rule

According to affective filter hypothesis, a ‘filter’ can affect how well we acquire comprehensible input. ‘Filter’ can be:

* Motivation
* Attitude
* Self-confidence
* Anxiety

The concept of comprehensible input and affective filter hypothesis is explained by Stephen Krashen himself in the below mentioned video link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=JAK5dKWKdSQ>

**Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) and Criticism**

Krashen and Terrell’s Natural Approach paved the way for the emergence of Communicative Language Teaching (CLT) approach. CLT was formed on the basis of the Input hypothesis and the communicative competence; and has been widely used in the language classroom since 1980s. It focuses on the functional aspect of the language which is communication. Dell Hymes supported CLT by proposing that for effective development of communicative competence, learners should be exposed to real-life situations.

Communicative Competence is defined as the ability to interpret and enact appropriate social behaviors, and it requires the active involvement of the learner in the production of the target language (Canaleand Swain 1980; Celce-Murcia et al. 1995; Hymes1972).

**Criticism**

According to Stern (1992), CLT has become more successful in ESL (English as a second language) settings, but failed to show successful results in EFL (English as a foreign language) contexts. Some CLT proponents, e.g. Littlewoodeven proposed to treat it as an umbrella term which the opponents of CLT considered the renaming of the existing old approaches and nothing new or revolutionary. CLT focuses more on developing fluency while accuracy is neglected. It does overburden teachers as it demands developing of functional syllabus for effective classroom activities.

**SOCIO-CULTURAL THEORY**

**Vygotsky and M.A.K. Halliday**

The Socio-cultural theory is a psychological and sociological theory developed by Lev Vygotsky, a Russian psychologist, in 1934. The theory claims that society and culture play an important role in developing one’s personality. It asserts that society supports and acts as a device for intellectual adaptation of innateness, a child is born with.

**Socio-cultural Theory**

Vygotsky believed that learning takes place at two levels:

* through interaction with others
* integrated into the individual’s mental structure

The famous concept of Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) introduced by Vygotsky forms the basis of socio-cultural theory according to which a learner is provided with the social interaction as assistance in the zone to support learning.

M.A.K. Halliday, a British linguist, developed the concept of Systemic Functional linguistics in 1960. It claims that language is a resource for making meaning. The systemic functional linguistics is based on three levels; namely, meaning (semantics), sound (phonology), and wording or *lexico-grammar* (syntax, morphology, and lexis). Halliday (1978) also introduced the *ideational, interpersonal,*and*textual* as basis for language metafunctions.

**Characteristics of Systemic Functional Linguistics**

* Language use is functional.
* Its function is to make meanings.
* These meanings are influenced by the social and cultural context in which they are exchanged.
* The process of using language is a semiotic in nature, i.e., a process of making meaning by choosing.

**Acculturation Model and Steps in Acculturation**

Acculturation Model was introduced by John Schumann, an American linguist (1986), who claimed that the extent of contact between L2 and L2 speaker affects the success of SLA. Social and psychological factors are key components of acculturation process. According to Brown (1980), the stages of acculturation in the target language are Euphoria, Culture-shock, Cultural stress, Gradual recovery, and Full-recovery. Language shock, culture shock, culture stress, motivation, and ego permeability are the factors that are responsible for creating psychological distance as claimed by Ushioda (1993).

Domination of high culture causing low self-esteem among L2 learners and lack of explanation about the internal processes of SLA are the major points of the criticism of Acculturation Model.

**Situated Learning and Language Socialization**

Inspired by the works of Vygotsky and Dewey, Jean Lave and Etienne Wenger introduced the theory of Situated Learning as an instructional approach in the early 1990s. The theory laid down great emphasis on the learning as a social process and encouraged to maximize social interaction for the purpose of meaningful learning.They proposed Legitimate Peripheral Participation,Peripherality, Full Participation, and Community of Practice as key factors of Situated Learning theory.

Elinor Ochs and Bambi Schieffelin proposed that language acquisition and culture acquisition were interdependent and that the interaction of the two processes needed to be studied toward the better understanding of both.This makes socialization a process ‘into and through’ language and discourse. Practices and communicative competence in addition to face-to-face and cultural historical approach are considered the theoretical foundations of language socialization.