

Analysis of Cognitivist Learning Methods

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“Cognitively oriented explanations of learning encompass ... a common focus on internal mental processes that are under the learner’s control” (Merriam, Caffarella, & Baumgartner, 2007, p. 287). Social cognitivism “which combines elements from both behaviorist and cognitivist orientations, posits that people learn from observing others” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 287). The objectives of this paper are to consider specific aspects of four approaches to adult development, Piaget’s and Perry’s contributions regarding cognitive development, Piaget’s cognitivist thinking versus Vygotsky’s social cognitivist thinking, and their impact in instructional design.

Four approaches to adult development are biological, psychological, sociocultural, and integrative. “The biological perspective acknowledges the role of nature in our development” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 299). One specific area associated with the biological perspective is brain plasticity. Bee and Bjorkland (2004) and Timiras (2003) have found, “although we lose brain cells or neurons through the aging process, the remaining neurons increase their connections with each other. This plasticity of the brain allows the aging brain to maintain much of its function” (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 304). The psychological approach “focuses on the individual’s *internal* process of development” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 305). One of the models within the psychological perspective is James Fowler’s theory of faith development. Fowler “suggests that spirituality is a basic aspect of human existence that develops in predictable ways... Fowler does not define faith through any particular religion but describes it as a particular way of relating to the universal and creating meaning” (Karesh, 2013). “The sociocultural perspective ... acknowledges how the social world in which we live influences our development” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 312). Within this perspective is how “the timing of life

events affect development” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 312). Neugarten (1976) “suggests that ‘every society is age-graded, and every society has a system of social expectations regarding age-appropriate behavior’” (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 313). The integrative perspective combines two or more of the above perspectives (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 319). Perun and Bielby (1980) “view adulthood as ‘consisting of a large number of temporal progressions – sequences of experiences or internal changes, each of which follow some timetable’” (as cited in Merriam et al., 2007, p. 321).

Piaget and Perry are two of the most well-known researchers in the area of cognitive development. Piaget focused on childhood cognitive development while Perry focused on lifelong cognitive development. “In Piaget’s work, each position is conceptualized as hierarchical and sequential and moves from relatively simple thinking patterns to highly complex ways of perceiving and evaluating knowledge” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 330). “Perry places as much emphasis on the transitions between each position as on the positions themselves” (Merriam et al., 2007, p. 330).

As a social cognitivist, “Vygotsky states cognitive development stems from social interactions from guided learning within the zone of proximal development as children and their partners co-construct knowledge. In contrast, Piaget maintains that cognitive development stems largely from independent explorations in which children construct knowledge of their own” (McLeod, 2014). Regarding the impact of cognitive learning theory, “Instructional Design expanded its scope of practice to include solutions that focus on the learner in the design process” (Oleyar-Reynolds, 2018). Regarding the impact of social cognitive learning theory on instructional design, “Collaborative learning groups and the use of peer review are widely used...” (Oleyar-Reynolds, 2018).

## References

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