Social Learning Theory

General principles of social learning theory

1. People can learn by observing the behavior of others and the outcomes of those behaviors.

2. Learning can occur without a change in behavior. Behaviorists say that learning has to be represented by a permanent change in behavior, in contrast social learning theorists say that because people can learn through observation alone, their learning may not necessarily be shown in their performance. Learning may or may not result in a behavior change.

3. Cognition plays a role in learning. Over the last 30 years social learning theory has become increasingly cognitive in its interpretation of human learning. Awareness and expectations of future reinforcements or punishments can have a major effect on the behaviors that people exhibit.

4. Social learning theory can be considered a bridge or a transition between behaviorist learning theories and cognitive learning theories.

How the environment reinforces and punishes modeling:

People are often reinforced by modeling the behavior of others. Social Learning theorist Bandura suggested that the environment also reinforces modeling. This is in several possible ways:

1, The observer is reinforced by the model. For example a student who changes dress to fit in with a certain group of students has a strong likelihood of being accepted and thus reinforced by that group.

2. The observer is reinforced by a third person. The observer might be modeling the actions of someone else, for example, an outstanding class leader or student. The teacher notices this and compliments and praises the observer for modeling such behavior thus reinforcing that behavior.

3. The imitated behavior itself leads to reinforcing consequences. Many behaviors that we learn from others produce satisfying or reinforcing results.

4. Consequences of the model's behavior affect the observers behavior vicariously. This is known as vicarious reinforcement. This is where in the model is reinforced for a response and then the observer shows an increase in that same response. Bandura illustrated this by having students watch a film of a model hitting a inflated clown doll. One group of children saw the model being praised for such action. Without being reinforced, the group of children began to also hit the doll .

Contemporary social learning perspective of reinforcement and punishment:

1. Contemporary theory proposes that both reinforcement and punishment have indirect effects on learning. They are not the sole or main cause.

2. Reinforcement and punishment influence the extent to which an individual exhibits a behavior that has been learned.

3. The expectation of reinforcement influences cognitive processes that promote learning. Therefore attention pays a critical role in learning. And attention is influenced by the expectation of reinforcement. An example would be, where the teacher tells a group of students that what they will study next is not on the test. Students will not pay attention, because they do not expect to know the information for a test.

Cognitive factors in social learning:

Social learning theory has cognitive factors as well as behaviorist factors (actually operant factors).

1. Learning without performance: Bandura makes a distinction between learning through observation and the actual imitation of what has been learned.

2. Cognitive processing during learning: Social learning theorists contend that attention is a critical factor in learning.

3. Expectations: As a result of being reinforced, people form expectations about the consequences that future behaviors are likely to bring. They expect certain behaviors to bring reinforcements and others to bring punishment. The learner needs to be aware however, of the response reinforcements and response punishment. Reinforcement increases a response only when the learner is aware of that connection.

4. Reciprocal causation: Bandura proposed that behavior can influence both the environment and the person. In fact each of these three variables, the person, the behavior, and the environment can have an influence on each other.

5. Modeling: There are different types of models. There is the live model, and actual person demonstrating the behavior. There can also be a symbolic model, which can be a person or action portrayed in some other medium, , such as television, videotape, computer programs.

Behaviors that can be learned through modeling:

Many behaviors can be learned, at least partly, through modeling. Examples that can be cited are, students can watch parents read, students can watch the demonstrations of mathematics problems, or seen someone acting bravely and a fearful situation. Aggression can be learned through models. Much research indicate that children become more aggressive when they observed aggressive or violent models. Moral thinking and moral behavior are influenced by observation and modeling. This includes moral judgments regarding right and wrong which can in part, develop through modeling.

Conditions necessary for effective modeling to occur:

Bandura mentions four conditions that are necessary before an individual can successfully model the behavior of someone else:

1. Attention: the person must first pay attention to the model.

2. Retention: the observer must be able to remember the behavior that has been observed. One way of increasing this is using the technique of rehearsal.

3. Motor reproduction: the third condition is the ability to replicate the behavior that the model has just demonstrated. This means that the observer has to be able to replicate the action, which could be a problem with a learner who is not ready developmentally to replicate the action. For example, little children have difficulty doing complex physical motion.

4. Motivation: the final necessary ingredient for modeling to occur is motivation, learners must want to demonstrate what they have learned. Remember that since these

four conditions vary among individuals, different people will reproduce the same behavior differently. Modeling increases the frequency of similar behaviors. For example a student might see a friend excel in basketball and he tries to excel in football because he is not tall enough for basketball.

Educational implications of social learning theory:
Social learning theory has numerous implications for classroom use.

1. Students often learn a great deal simply by observing other people.

2. Describing the consequences of behavior is can effectively increase the appropriate behaviors and decrease inappropriate ones. This can involve discussing with learners about the rewards and consequences of various behaviors.

3. Modeling provides an alternative to shaping for teaching new behaviors. Instead of using shaping, which is operant conditioning, modeling can provide a faster, more efficient means for teaching new behavior. To promote effective modeling a teacher must make sure that the four essential conditions exist; attention, retention , motor reproduction, and motivation.

4. Teachers and parents must model appropriate behaviors and take care that they do not model inappropriate behaviors.

5. Teachers should expose students to a variety of other models. This technique is especially important to break down traditional stereotypes.

6. Students must believe that they are capable of accomplishing school tasks. Thus it is very important to develop a sense of self-efficacy for students. Teachers can promote such self-efficacy by having students receive confidence-building messages, watch others be successful, and experience success on their own. .

7. Teachers should help students set realistic expectations for their academic accomplishments. In general in my class that means making sure that expectations are not set too low. I want to realistically challenge my students. However, sometimes the task is beyond a student's ability, example would be the cancer group.

8. Self-regulation techniques provide an effective method for improving student behavior.

Learned Helplessness

Martin Seligman expanded the conditioning research done by Pavlov in his own experiments with dogs. Seligman and Maier conducted a series of experiments to test the effect of conditioning on the behavior of dogs in certain situations of control.

The researchers divided the subjects into two groups   the "Escape" group and the "Yoked" group. The dogs were placed in a testing unit strapped into a rubberized, cloth hammock through which their legs could hang. Electrodes, to be used in delivering an electric shock, were attached to the dogs hind feet. On either side of the dog's neck were panels which the dog could press by turning its head. The Escape group went through escape training in which they received shocks through the electrodes on their feet. The dog could escape, or end each shock by pressing one of the nearby panels with its head. The Yoked group went through a similar training with one major difference in their condition. For this group, the termination of the shocks was uncontrollable by the dogs. They would continue until the programmed duration of the shock had ended, regardless of whether the dog had pressed one of the panels.

The testing part of the experiment took place 24 hours after the dogs had completed their respective trainings. In this stage, the dogs were exposed to a conditioned-unconditioned stimuli pair to test their responses. Each dog was tested in a two-way shuttle bow with two compartments separated by a shoulder-height barrier. An electric shock, administered through the grated floor, was the unconditioned stimulus and was paired with the conditioned stimulus, extinguishing the lights illuminating the boxes. The escape from the shock in this stage was jumping over the barrier into the other side of the box. Trials in this avoidance training were done with both the Escape group and the Yoked group, and latency between the presentation of the conditioned stimulus, the lights, and the dog's appropriate reaction of jumping over the barrier was measured.

The results of this experiment were very interesting. Seligman and Maier found that the dogs in the Escape group, who were exposed to the escape training in which they had control over the termination of the shock, learned to press the panels to end the flow of electricity. The amount of time it took the dogs to press the panel after the shock began decreased throughout the trials. The dogs in the Yoked group showed learning reflected in behavior as well; however, they learned that pressing the panels had no effect on the

shocks, so the panel-pressing of the Yoked group decreased and soon stopped altogether as the trials proceeded. The effect of this training was reflected strongly in the dogs' behavior in the avoidance training in the shuttle boxes. The Escape group and the Normal group showed similar mean latencies for barrier jumping, though there was a higher percentage of dogs in the Normal group than in the Escape group (12.5% as opposed to 0%) who failed altogether to escape the shock on at least 10 of the trial. The Yoked group, however, produced results significantly different from those of the other two groups. The dogs in the Yoked group displayed a significantly higher mean latency for barrier jumping as well as a higher percentage of dogs who failed to escape the shocks altogether (75%).

What does all this mean? Well, it seems that the behavior of the dogs during the avoidance training was based on their learning in the escape training stage of the experiment. The dogs in the Escape group learned that they had control over the shocks; therefore, in the avoidance training, most of the dogs quickly learned to jump the barrier to avoid the shock. The dogs in the Yoked group, however, seemed to have learned from the escape training, in which they had no control, that there was nothing they could do about the shocks; therefore, the vast majority of them did not attempt to escape the shock by jumping the barrier. They had learned that the termination of the shock was independent of their responding.

Seligman and Maier termed the phenomenon they observed in the dogs in the Yoked group **"learned helplessness"**: the dogs failed to escape the shock because they had learned previously, in the escape training, that they were helpless to do anything about the shocks. Therefore, they assumed that the same was true and exhibited the same passivity in the avoidance training even though they truly did have some control in the situation.

Seligman has expanded his famous theory of helplessness into the realm of human behavior. The premise is very similar in application to people: helplessness is a "psychological state that frequently results when events are uncontrollable". It occurs when we feel there is no response to a situation we can make to change the course of events. Seligman relates his theory of helplessness to the concept of behavior in response to rewards and punishments. He posits that our "voluntary responses" are those that are affected and changed by rewards and punishments.

What this means is that we will perform an action more frequently if we are rewarded for doing it and less frequently if we are punished. However, when the reward or punishment we receive is independent of our actions, we become confused, loose the motivation to perform or avoid performing a behavior, and often become passive in the situation. This occurrence can be seen in Seligman and Maier's dog experiments. Studies have also been done on humans to test this theory.