SOCIAL LEARNING THEORIES

Learning through observation, interaction, and shared experiences.

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A Behaviorist + Cognitive Hybrid Model

Observation
A stimulus is given attention and/or observed. This can be in real-time, reflection, predictive, or imagined.

Internalization
Initial meaning is created in the mind of the observer.

Imitation
Some form of imitation of that behavior--in part or its entirety--occurs. This reproduction deepens internalization and elicits evaluation by imitator.

Feedback
Feedback loop: ongoing motivation is decided by reflection and perceived relative 'success' (e.g., the effects) of the behavior.

Definition: Social learning theory is a behavioral theory that posits that new behaviors can be learned by observing and imitating others.
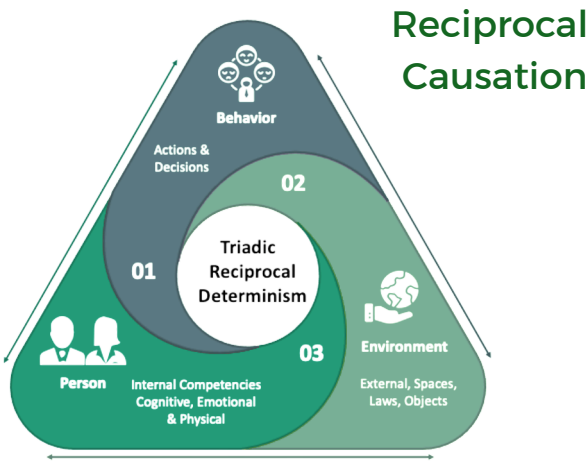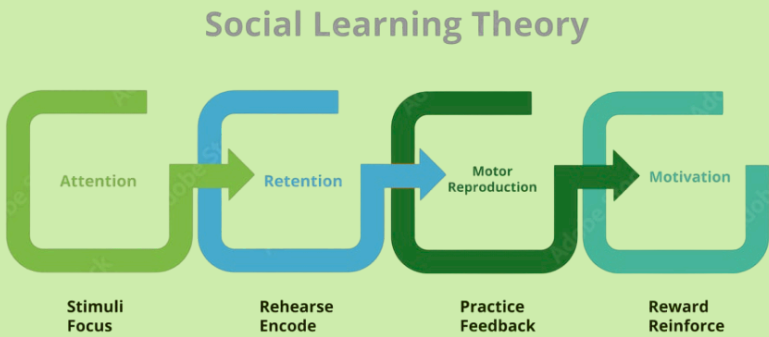
WHAT IS SOCIAL LEARNING?

- People learn by observing others' behaviors and outcomes.
- Learning occurs in social contexts and can happen without direct performance.
- Cognitive processes, attention, and motivation shape what is learned.

KEY PRINCIPLES

- Learning occurs by observing others and the consequences of their actions.
- Learners can acquire behaviors without performing them immediately.
- Learners are influenced by observing others' rewards and consequences.
- Learning reflects reciprocal interaction among person, behavior, and environment.
- Cognitive processes shape how learners interpret and integrate observed behaviors.
- Social interaction and collaboration strengthen learning.

Reciprocal Causation

Behavior
Actions & Decisions

02

Triadic Reciprocal Determinism

01

03

Person
Internal Competencies
Cognitive, Emotional & Physical

Environment
External, Spaces, Laws, Objects

FOUR PROCESSES

Social Learning Theory

Attention → Retention → Motor Reproduction → Motivation

Stimuli Focus | Rehearse Encode | Practice Feedback | Reward Reinforce

- Attention – Focusing on a model's behavior.
- Retention – Encoding and storing the observed behavior.
- Reproduction – Practicing or reenacting what was learned.
- Motivation – Reinforcement increases the likelihood of imitation.

KEY CONCEPTS

Observation Processes

Attention — Focusing on key aspects of the modeled behavior.
Retention — Remembering what was observed.
Reproduction — Translating memory into action.

Motivation & Reinforcement

Motivation — Having a reason or incentive to imitate.
Vicarious Reinforcement — Learning from others' rewards or consequences.

Personal Factors

Modeling — Demonstrating a behavior for learners to observe.
Imitation — Reproducing the behavior that was observed.
Self-efficacy — Belief in one's ability to perform the behavior.
Self-regulation — Monitoring and managing one's actions and emotions.

EXAMPLE

Modeling Positive Social Interaction

- Teacher demonstrates the difference between harmful and helpful behaviors.
- Students observe how positive actions lead to encouragement and connection.
- Learners rehearse the desired behaviors with peer partners.
- Teacher offers prompts and feedback as students refine their responses.
- Gradually, students internalize the behavior and regulate their own choices.

INSTRUCTIONAL IMPLICATIONS

- Demonstrate behaviors, thinking steps, or processes explicitly.
- Use peer modeling and highlight effective performances.
- Provide vicarious reinforcement (praise, examples, recognition).
- Encourage collaborative problems and shared meaning-making.
- Support self-efficacy with achievable tasks and encouragement.
- Teach self-regulation through reflection and monitoring prompts.
- Build interaction-rich environments for shared exploration.

Applying Social Learning Theory in the Classroom

Peer Tutoring Programs | Peer Review and Feedback
Cooperative Learning Groups | Collaborative Technology
Classroom Role-Playing | Real-Life Case Studies
Interactive Demonstrations | Classroom Management
Use of Educational Videos | Gamified Learning Activities

"Most human learning is achieved through observing others." — Albert Bandura