

INSIGHT LEARNING

THE INSIGHT LEARNING THEORY

The theory of learning by insight is the contribution of *Gestalt Psychologists*. Gestalt is a term derived from the German word 'gestalten', has no English equivalent. The nearest English translation of Gestalt is '**configuration**' or an 'organised whole' or the 'totality of a situation'. *Wolfgang Kohler, Max Wertheimer, Kurt Koffka* etc. were the prominent Gestalt Psychologists. They believe that "***The whole is more important than its parts***".

Dissatisfied with the behaviourist approach of learning, the cognitivists tried to see learning as a more deliberate and conscious effort of the individual rather than a mere product of *habit formation* or a machine-like *stimulus-response connection*. According to them the learner does not merely respond to a stimulus, but definitely process what he receives or perceives. Thus learning is a purposive, explorative and creative activity instead of trial and error.

It is a theory regarding 'perception'. Gestaltists consider learning as the development of **insight**, which is primarily concerned with the nature of perception. ***Perception is a process by which an organism interprets and organizes sensation to produce a meaningful experience of the world.*** It is the ultimate experience of the world and typically involves further processing of sensory input.

While learning, the learner always perceives the situation as a whole and after seeing and evaluating the different relationships takes the proper decision intelligently. Gestalt psychology used the term '**insight**' to describe the perception of the whole situation by the learner and his intelligence in responding to the proper relationships. **Insight refers the sudden flash in the mind about the solution of the problem.**

Kohler conducted many experiments with his chimpanzee "Sulthan" to describe the term "**insight**". These experiments are the illustration of Learning by Insight.



KOHLER'S EXPERIMENTS

1. In one experiment, Kohler put the chimpanzee, “Sulthan” inside a cage and a banana was hung from the roof of a cage. A box was placed inside the cage. The chimpanzee tried to reach the banana by jumping but could not succeed. Suddenly he got an idea and used the box as a jumping platform by placing it just below the hanging banana.

2. In another experiment Kohler made this problem complicated that two or three boxes were required to reach the banana.



3. In a more complicated experiment, a banana was kept far outside the cage and two sticks – one larger than the other – were kept inside the box. When failed to reach the banana by one stick, with a sudden bright idea the chimpanzee tried to reach the banana by joining the two sticks.

These experiments demonstrated the role of intelligence and cognitive abilities in higher learning and problem solving situations.

STEPS IN INSIGHT LEARNING:

1. Identifying the problem: The learner recognizes the presence of an intervening obstacle on his way to the goal.

2. Understanding the Problem: The learner observes the problematic situation, analyse it and perceive the relation between the goal and the obstacles.

3. Incubation of Ideas: After analyzing the total situation he reaches in conclusions by means of hesitation, pause, concentrated attention etc.

4. Trail of Mode of Response: The learner makes initial efforts in the form of a simple trial and error mechanism.

5. Sustained Attention: The learner maintains frequently recurrent attention to the goal and motivation.

6. Insight Development: In a certain moment there is a sudden perception of the relationship in the total situation and the organism directly performs the required acts.

7. Steady Repetition of Adaptive Behaviour: After getting an insightful solution, the individual tries to implement it in another situation.

8. Comprehension of Ability: The learner reaches the ability to understand the relevant parts of the situation and overlooking the irrelevant ones.

GESTALT LAWS OF LEARNING:

There are four important laws regarding insight learning. They are as follows:

1. The Law of Similarity:

The law of *similarity* states that “when there are different sets of objects on view then they are perceived as groups rather than individual objects”. This law leads us to link together parts of the visual field that are similar in color, lightness, texture, shape, or any other quality.

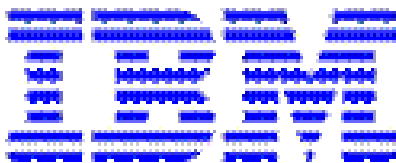
2. The Law of Proximity:

The law of *proximity* states that “objects which are close together are likely to be seen as a group”. For example, look at the following line.

III II III I

You are likely to perceive this as four separate groups, comprising three, two, four and one members respectively, rather than to view it as a line of ten I s. This doesn't only apply to visual perception, think for example of music, perceived as a melody rather than a procession of single notes.

3. Law of Closure:



According to the law of *closure*, we prefer complete forms to incomplete forms.

When the outline of an object is left unfinished, as long as the gap is less than half the total circumference then

the object is identified and perceived as whole rather than as a different shape. Thus, in the

drawing below, we mentally close the gaps and perceive it as **I B M**. This tendency allows us to perceive whole objects from incomplete and imperfect forms.

4. *The Law of Continuity:*



The law states that “we link individual elements of a configuration so that they form continuous pattern that makes sense to us”. That is, we tend to perceive the components of a perceptual field as smoothly flowing rather than discontinuous forms.

EDUCATIONAL IMPLICATIONS OF GESTALT THEORY

1. ***From Whole to Parts:*** The teacher should present the subject matter as a whole to facilitate insight learning.
2. ***Integrated Approach:*** While planning curriculum, gestalt principles should be given due consideration. A particular subject should not be treated as the mere collection of isolated facts. It should be closely integrated into a whole.
3. ***Importance of Motivation:*** the teacher should arouse the child’s curiosity, interest and motivation. He should gain full attention of the whole class before teaching.
4. ***Emphasis on Understanding:*** It has made learning an intelligent task requiring mental abilities than a stimulus - response association. So the learner must be given opportunities for using his mental abilities.
5. ***Problem Solving Approach:*** This theory emphasis that as the learner is able to solve problems by his insight, meaningful learning, learning by understanding, reasoning, etc. must be encouraged in the school.
6. ***Checking of Previous Experiences:*** As insight depends upon the previous experiences of the learner, the teacher must check the previous experiences of the child and relate them with the new learning situation.
7. ***Goal Orientation:*** As learning is a purposeful and goal oriented task, the learner has to be well acquainted with these objectives. He should be fully familiar with the goals and purposes of every task.