

Using Social Learning Theory in Your Classroom

Yes, there was a reason you took that psychology course in college! Theories of learning can give you useful suggestions about how to ensure that students learn.

Social learning theory is largely the work of psychologist Albert Bandura, who believed not only that people's behaviours are shaped by their environment, but that memory, thinking and attention can help people store experiences which they can use to influence their behaviour.

Bandura believed that four processes are necessary for social learning to take place:

- *Attention*: a learner must be attentive to experiences, and be rested and focused.
- *Retention*: a learner must remember behaviour that resulted in positive reinforcement.
- *Reproduction*: a learner can recall behaviours and reproduce them himself.
- *Motivation*: the learner *wants* to reproduce behaviours which will enhance learning, and has the self-confidence to do so.

You can use this information to the advantage of the students in your class, both as an aid to learning new skills, and as a way to help students behave in ways that enhance learning.

As a teacher, you can:

- *Be a model of appropriate behaviours*

You hold a position of influence, and your students respect you. Exhibit the sort of behaviour you would like your students to show. You want them to be courteous? You are courteous. You would like them to read for pleasure? You read for pleasure.

- *Be a model for problem solving*

Think aloud. Discuss strategies. Model the thinking process. Show students how to reason out the meaning of a new word, or how to decide which answer is right.

- *Encourage social learning*

Let students model each other's appropriate behaviour. Let students help each other. Encourage students who have mastered a skill to help others to learn it.

- *Talk about behaviour*

Tell them what you expect of them. Let them practice it. Remind them often, give them feedback, and praise them when they do well.

What you are doing is describing and modelling the behaviours you want your students to exhibit, and helping them to retain the information through reminders and constant practice. Positive feedback helps motivate them to continue the behaviour.