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SOCIAL LEARNING THEORY - FROM "BOBO DOLL" TO ONLINE TEACHING

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Abstract: This paper examines education`s challenges in the 21st century in conjunction to socialand pedagogical issues that influence teaching methodology, as well as the extent to which successful learning theories can still be applied ad litteram in a world where science itself needsto adapt. During the coronavirus pandemic, necessary choices were made about how to sustainthe education system when society faced school closures, coupled with an economic and apublic health crisis. Switching courses online was, at the time, therefore a logical choice. In this context, students behavioral shaping has become not only a challenge, but alsoan increasingly difficult goal to achieve. Moreover, Albert Bandura's theory of social learning seemed to reach its limits when the environment that was supposed to mediate the acquisition of new behaviors has become a virtual one, devoid of social interaction, thus widowing the theory of its very essence. The conclusions of the paper will highlight how a theory of learning survived an exceptional situation making those who put it into practice - teachers and students alike - to broaden their own horizons as new conjunctures, ideas and knowledge emerged.

Keyword: social learning theory, online teaching

Teachers need to acknowledge that they do not teach static subjects, and the recent pandemic shock that humanity has gone through has demonstrated this. Teachers know that one of their most important tasks is to give students guidance in order to be better people, not just to try to pass on knowledge to them.

From this point of view, the understanding of learning theories can help many teachers, especially the beginner ones, to connect with students who are behaving inappropriately or have learning difficulties. Every teacher has this kind of students - those who make it difficult to teach in class, who talk all the time, who bully other children, or who are simply lazier. Practical applications of social learning theory can directly address the behavioral and learning problems of some students, helping them to improve not only their school performance, but also their behavior as a student. Albert Bandura's theory of social learning emphasizes the importance of observing and shaping behavior, stating that people acquire attitudes by observing others, imitating what they see.

The theory of social learning was demonstrated through a group of tests conducted between 1961 and 1963, which were brought together under the name of the "Bobo Doll" experiment. The tests involved studying the behavior of some children after they saw how an adult assaults a doll in various ways. However, the most important element of the experiment was to observe how the children behaved after seeing the adult rewarded, punished or ignored for the physical abuse of the Bobo doll.

These tests helped Bandura demonstrate how children's behavior can be influenced by learning from the behavior of others, and from this perspective, Bandura concluded that aggression is learned through a process called behavioral modeling. Specifically, the individual himself does not inherit these violent tendencies, but also appropriates them.Children learn to react (sometimes even violently), in most cases, by observing others, either personally or through the environment, the media or, more recently, social networks.

Relating to models and imitating the observable behavior of the model is a form of learning present from an early age, being later encountered in various contexts of everyday life. In the childhood cycle (3-10/11 years), the models are significantly represented by adults (parents, family members, and teachers). Starting with pre-adolescence (11-14/15 years), and later in adolescence (14/15-18/19 years), family models go into the background, being replaced by the same age group (classmates, friends), which gives them specific rules, benchmarks and opinions. Often, teenagers choose models from the most present stars in everyday life (sports,

music or media). Models can be real, but also symbolic (words, ideas, behavioral acts that are socially valued, images or events with a certain cultural impact).

The four elements of the theory of social learning (attention, retention, reproduction and motivation) are then detailed by the same Albert Bandura in social cognitive theory, which starts from the idea that people learn from other people. Thus, the initial theory expands by adding personal or cognitive factors, behavior itself and the environment, as factors combinedto determine learning and behavior.

During the pandemic`s limitations, learning and development were disrupted for millions of students. Our public education system has not been built or prepared to deal with such a situation, lacking the structures to support effective online teaching and learning and to provide that safety net that many children have had at school.

Although the exact impact is not yet known, statistics show that children's school performance deteriorated during the pandemic, along with their regress in acquiring other developmental skills. The pandemic also exacerbated the gaps and, given the different ways in which the crisis has widened existing socio-economic disparities and how these disparities have affected learning outcomes, educational inequities have also been found to have increased significantly[1].

Research on online learning and teaching has shown that they are effective only if students have constant access to the internet and computers and if teachers receive training and targeted support for online learning. Therefore, in this sudden shift to distance learning, both teachers and students had to manage another difference in education: the „digital divide". This new phenomenon led to the conclusion that distance education during the pandemic made teaching and learning more difficult, while behavioral modeling, in turn, suffered[2].

A number of skills often referred to as socio-emotional or non-cognitive skills - including creativity, tolerance, perseverance, empathy, self-control and time management - have been neglected in education policy, as one is to think of social learning as a theory and the other is to really incorporate it into your classroom, especially when it comes to a virtual classroom. For this theory to succeed in the classroom, empathy and care are essential, and attention, retention, reproduction, and motivation must find a suitable ground on which to grow.

[1] https://snspa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Policy-note-educatie_final.pdf, p. 4 - 6

[2] https://snspa.ro/wp-content/uploads/2020/04/Policy-note-educatie_final.pdf, p. 9 - 13

Nevertheless, how do you convey empathy through a computer screen, how do you go „through the glass" to break the barrier of a microphone that the child may say does not work or a video camera that similarly does not return the image of the student? Can we talk about attention here? Can you hope for retention? Finally yet importantly, inadequate online attendance tracking systems have left teachers in the dark about a key component of education: students' learning time. Even the best-trained teacher, when it comes to online instruction, will not be effective if his students are not online and do not follow the lesson.

Albert Bandura is also the one who could give us an answer, over time, saying that often „the content of most textbooks is perishable, but self-directing tools work well over time". In this context, we can also talk about the teacher`s learning community, which suggests that the emphasis is not only on student learning, but also on vocational learning in the context of a cohesive group, which focuses on collective knowledge and growth. In essence, the vocational learning community implies that what colleagues do together, outside of the classroom, is extremely important in supporting what they do inside them to promote student learning as well as to improve their development. It is a cultural way of working oriented towards and for building the capacity for continuous and sustainable learning.

So what lessons have teachers learned about providing online courses while successfully applying learning theories? From my own experience, I could say that the main lesson is about adaptability and flexibility. Nobody says that the methods used in online teaching can no longer be used when returning to class. Teachers can and should continue to act as a coach for students, who can learn directly from the experience of adults.

Let us take the example of the inverted class[3], a method that embodies the theory of social learning and has been used in some places in online teaching during the pandemic, especially during modern language teaching classes, which either involves watching video recorded lessons, either home readings. Upon returning to class, in the next class in physical format, students have to apply what they did at home, observing the behavior and actions of other classmates during learning and activities, hearing praise and encouragement for their work. Teachers can incorporate this model, whether we are talking about teaching online or at school, by recording themselves while teaching a particular lesson, so that students can watch that video in class, either assigning it as a homework. For teachers who choose this model,

[3] https://edict.ro/de-ce-clasa-inversata/

things can get quite interesting because they need to be available to answer any questions students may have.

Another handy way to put social learning theory into practice, whether it's online or classroom teaching, is peer coaching, a type of supportive relationship in which two people with equal status actively participate in helping each other resolving tasks or problems. Students connected to each other can observe and learn, helping each other throughout the lesson. In order to establish an efficient peer coaching, it is important for the teacher to know the level of all his students, in order to see who would be suitable to train whom.

Simulations and games are two other methods that can successfully put into practice the theory of social learning, both in the classroom and in online teaching. The class, whether virtual or physical, can be transformed into one in which interactivity is increased, in which competition appears as a notion and makes the lesson more interesting and attractive. However, as a peculiarity of the pandemic, is that it made the students feel too comfortable, often even lazy, uninvolved, all this leading to an atrophy of creativity, the spirit of competition, regardless of the rewards offered. On the other hand, the pandemic has exacerbated the limitations of standardized testing, which rewards a limited set of skills, which reduces the applicability and effectiveness of these practices.

In conclusion, the „Bobo Doll" experiment, beyond the demonstrative emphasis on the negative side (aggression), helped us to remember what unites us as social beings. Not the ability to imitate, or to act aggressively, but the ability to learn from each other, to auto evaluate ourselves and to progress.

The COVID-19 pandemic has overwhelmed the functioning and outcomes of education systems. Students saw their normal learning and development interrupted and disrupted, while teachers faced challenges that not only put them in a position to reinvent their profession, but also led them to reimagine their education system.

Today, the world is more multicultural and more socially integrated than at any other time in history, and the convergence of people and culture offers many new opportunities for learning and development through education. It is a context in which everyone should be considered a learner, not just students, but also teachers, school managers, parents and communities.

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