

Watson's Learning Theory

John B. Watson (1878 - 1958) is the father of behaviourism. Watson supported and promoted Pavlovian Classical Conditioning. He rejected the method of introspection. He was more concerned with overt and observable behaviour. He explained behaviour in terms of stimulus and response (S-R). **He was an extreme environmentalist.**

Watson believed that the behaviour could be analysed into reflexes or stimulus response connections. Since birth we have certain stimulus-response connections like sneezing and winking. But new stimulus response connections are acquired by the process of conditioning. Watson adopts two principles to explain learning. They are (i) frequency and (ii) recency. When a child sees an elephant on a number of occasions he learns to remember. The factor that determines learning here is frequency. Generally the students remember the last chapter in any lesson because of recency. Watson tried to demonstrate the role of conditioning in producing as well as eliminating emotional responses such as fear.

Watson's Experiment

Watson (1920) conducted experiment to demonstrate how a phobia might be acquired. He established fear phobia in an 11 month-old boy named, Albert. Albert was permitted to play with a furry white rat, which he enjoyed. Every time when the child approached the rat, a metal bar was hit with hammer“ producing noise. This made Albert to avoid rat. Albert learnt fear with the rat. The noise was an unconditioned stimulus for the unconditioning response of fear.

Educational Implications of Watson's Learning Theory

1. Watson and Pavlov concluded that all types of learning can be explained in terms of process of conditioning. Fears and phobias are result of conditioning. These are to be deconditioned in the teaching-learning process.
2. Watson explained learning as an interaction between man and environment. He overemphasized the importance of environment. The conducive environment to the child should be given in the educational setting.
3. According to Watson, learning is based on frequency and recency. These concepts should be kept in mind while teaching the children.
4. Learning is modification of behaviour through experiment. A vast experiment could be given to the child for the development of knowledge and its formation of behaviour.

John B. Watson (Watsonian Behaviourism)

According to Watson, items or elements of behaviour, such as muscular movements or glandular secretion, became the primary subject matter. Behaviourism concerns behaviour of the whole organism in relation to its environment. Stimulus response complexes can be analyzed into their elementary stimulus and research unit to work out the specific laws of behaviour.

Types of Behaviour

Watson explained four types of behaviour:

- 1) Explicit (overt)- behaviour which can be learned and is overt such as talking, writing, and playing;
- 2) Implicit (covert)- behaviour which can be learned but is covert such as the increased heart rate caused by the sight of a dentist's drill;
- 3) Explicit unlearned behaviour- behaviour which comes naturally and is visible such as grasping, blinking, and sneezing;
- 4) Implicit unlearned behaviour- behaviour, which comes naturally but is not visible such as glandular secretion and circulatory changes.

According to Watson, these categories incorporate everything that a person does, that is, from thinking to blinking. For studying these types of behaviours, Watson Proposed four different methods.

- 1) Observation- observing in either naturalistic or experimentally controlled environment;
- 2) The Conditioned Reflex Method- proposed by Pavlov;
- 3) Testing- refers to behaviour samples and not measurement of "capacity" or "personality"; and
- 4) Verbal reports- another type of overt behaviour

Criticisms of Watsonian Behaviourism

The following two points summarize the major criticism against Watsonian Behaviourism:

- 1) Psychology got restricted by behaviourism since it confined the behaviour solely to the peripheral events of stimulus and response elements. Watsons also ignored physical, central mediation of stimulus and response bonds by relinquishing mental events.
- 2) Watsonian behaviourism resorted to reductionism by assuming that behaviour is reducible to environmental stimuli and observable responses.