
Four cognitive skills for successful learning

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Cognition is “the mental action or process of acquiring knowledge and understanding through thought, experience, and the senses. It encompasses processes such as knowledge, attention, memory and working memory, judgement and evaluation, reasoning and ‘computation’, problem solving and decision making, comprehension and production of language”. Human cognition is conscious and unconscious, concrete or abstract, as well as intuitive (like knowledge of a language) and conceptual (like a model of a language). Cognitive processes use existing knowledge and generate new knowledge.

Apart from that a human being knows nothing, or cannot do anything, that he has not learned. Therefore, all cognitive skills must be taught, of which the following cognitive skills are the most important:

1. Concentration:

Paying attention must be distinguished from concentration. As paying attention is a body function that’s why it does not need to be taught. However, paying attention as such is a function that is quite useless for the act of learning, because it is only a fleeting occurrence. Attention usually shifts very quickly from one object or one thing to the next.

2. Perception:

The terms processing and perception are often used interchangeably. Before one can learn anything, perception must take place, i.e. one has to become aware of it through one of the senses. Usually one has to hear or see it. Afterwards, one has to interpret whatever one has seen or heard. In fact, perception means interpretation.

3. Memory:

A variety of memory problems are evidenced in the learning disabled. Some major categories of memory functions wherein these problems lie are:

Receptive memory: This refers to the ability to note the physical features of a given stimulus to be able to recognize it at a later time. The learner who has receptive processing difficulties invariably fails to recognize visual or auditory stimuli such as the shapes or sounds associated with the letters of the alphabet, the number system, etc.

Sequential memory: This refers to the ability to recall stimuli in their order of observation or presentation. Many dyslexics have poor visual sequential memory. Naturally this will affect their ability to read and spell correctly. After all, every word consists of letters in a specific sequence. In order to read one has to perceive the letters in sequence, and also remember what word is represented by that sequence of letters. By simply changing the sequence of the letters in name, it can become mean or amen.

Rote memory: This refers to the ability to learn certain information as a habit pattern. The child who has problems in this area is unable to recall easily those responses which should have been automatic, such as the alphabet, the number system, multiplication tables, spelling rules, grammatical rules, etc.

Short-term memory: Short-term memory lasts from a few seconds to a minute; the exact amount of time may vary somewhat. When you are trying to recall a telephone number that was heard a few seconds earlier, the name of a person who has just been introduced, or the substance of the remarks just made by a teacher in class, you are calling on short-term memory. You need this kind of memory to retain ideas and thoughts when writing a letter, since you must be able to keep the last sentence in mind as you compose the next. You also need this kind of memory when you work on problems.

4. Logical thinking:

Specialists state that,logical thinking is not a magical process, but a learned mental process. It is the process in which one uses reasoning consistently to come to a conclusion. Problems or situations that involve logical thinking call for structure, for relationships between facts, and for chains of reasoning that make sense.

It has been proved that specific training in logical thinking processes can make people smarter. Logical thinking allows a child to reject quick and easy answers, such as I don't know or this is too difficult, by empowering him to search deeper into his thinking processes and understand better the methods used to arrive at a solution.

It should be noted that there is nothing that any human being knows, or can do, that he has not learned. This of course excludes natural body functions, such as breathing,as well as the reflexes, for example the involuntary closing of the eye when an object approaches it.