

## How Mirror Neurons Impact Learning

Learning is a big part of child development and how children learn things is dependent on a variety of factors. Much of the time, observational learning contributes to how children learn information and behaviors. This type of social learning can be greatly influential because of the role that mirror neurons play in learning. Providing children with positive environments is key in helping them learn new skills and appropriate behaviors.

A lot of learning happens indirectly through what is called observational learning. This type of social learning happens when children watch and imitate others. Psychologist Albert Bandura originated what is now called the Social Cognitive Theory that encompasses social learning. This type of learning connects traditional learning theories to a cognitive approach and emphasizes how mental factors are involved. This is a great source of learning and can be seen in all stages of development.

In a nutshell, Bandura stated that children learn certain information and behaviors by observing and then mimicking others. Within this process, attention, memory, and motivation are key. And while mirror neurons are responsible for our ability to mimic others, there is some thought that happens before a child imitates someone. This is called the mediational process. During this, the child unknowingly evaluates the type of consequences that are linked to a behavior they are observing. Therefore, they are more likely to imitate if there is a positive reinforcement linked to a behavior. This is called vicarious reinforcement.

Since martial arts is taught in a group format, it is important for classes to be divided up in a way that is most beneficial for children and learning. While most martial arts schools divide their classes up based on rank, the SKILLZ program takes a child development approach and separates the classes by stage of development that includes all rank levels. This gives children the ability to observe peers that are at higher levels of achievement. By doing this, they will begin to mimic the more advanced moves and, therefore, learn by simply observing.

The modeling and mirror of movement that happens within classes separated this way is a massive learning tool and the instructors are a huge part of this process. SKILLZ instructors are high-energy, motivational forces in class. Therefore, children pay attention and learn more. And since skills that are taught are reviewed throughout a single testing cycle, students increase their memory of skills. Students are then rewarded with high fives, belt stripes, and new ranks, so other students are motivated to receive those same positive reinforcements. All of this boosts their social learning, according to Bandura's theory, and mimicking these behaviors begins to happen.

Social learning, with the help of mirror neurons, is a great source of knowledge for children. The continuous interaction between cognitive, behavioral, and environmental influences is vital in this process. Being intentional about the type of environments that children are exposed to is important so that learning new information and the development of positive behaviors happens.