CC/NUMBER 22
JUNE 2, 1980

This Week's Citation Classic

Kintsch W. *Learning, memory, and conceptual processes.* New York: Wiley, 1970. 498 p. [Univ. Colorado, Boulder, CO]

This textbook describes the general methods and results of traditional verbal learning studies, followed by a discussion of the recent work on memory. Finally, discrimination and concept learning are considered, leading up to modern psycholinguistics. [The *Science Citation Index*® (*SCI*®) and the *Social Sciences Citation Index*® (*SSCI*™) indicate that this book has been cited over 210 times since 1970.]

Walter Kintsch
Department of Psychology
Muenzinger Building
University of Colorado
Boulder, CO 80309

January 8, 1980

"In the mid-1960s every psychology department had a course in 'learning' that started with Pavlovian conditioning, went from there to instrumental conditioning, and eventually wound up with human learning and memory. Indeed, a lot of psychology departments still have that course, but many don't any more. *Learning, Memory, and Conceptual Processes (LMCP)* was the first textbook designed to break with that tradition.

"Many experimental psychologists of my generation share a similarly convoluted course of professional development: we were trained as rat runners or pigeon trainers in graduate school, but in our first years out, we became dissatisfied with an enterprise that had lost its one-time vigor and promise. Something else seemed to be in the air: the gentle, alluring *Vorboten* of the great cognitive thaw disturbed our behaviorist cloisters (in my case, that was a rather beaten up rat lab). I quickly shifted from rats to dogs, raced through a developmental stage called 'verbal learning,' and then finally found what has been my passion ever since: memory and language!

"Thus, with the zeal of the convert, I started teaching my learning class that way at the University of California at Riverside, and, one hot summer, wrote out an outline for a book. The book was finally written in two basements: in a windowless one in the then Stanford psychology department where I spent a year as a visitor, and finally in another one when I moved to Colorado. I enjoyed it: they were two stimulating, exciting years, and I never had to interrupt my research work for the book writing.

"Of course, I was writing a book for a course that did not exist. But I was convinced the time had come for an exclusively human learning, cognitively oriented text. Fortunately, the publisher believed so, too, and we were, of course, both right. Today, the cognitive psychology course is at least as big as the learning course, and there is an entire flood of textbooks in this area.

"But *LMCP* was the first, was the groundbreaker. That is, of course, not the only reason why it gets cited frequently. It is comprehensive, detailed, and quite carefully done: most of the things it says are actually correct. Thus, some people seem to use it like a handbook.

"What I like best about *LMCP* is that it achieves a certain level of integration between the theoretical and the experimental aspects of psychology. I tried very hard to make clear the interplay and interdependence between the two. Experimental psychologists are extremely concerned (and skilled) about experimental methodology, but often quite casual about theoretical explanations. But theories that actually explain something are just as hard to come by as experiments that really demonstrate something.

"A second edition of *LMCP* was published in 1977, under the title *Memory and Cognition.*[1] The title change signifies a certain change in emphasis, and actually about two-thirds of the book was newly written. I think *Memory and Cognition* is an improvement: it is of course much more up-to-date, but it is also more clearly organized, and focused better on the significant issues of our field."

1. **Kintsch W.** *Memory and cognition.* New York: Wiley, 1977. 490 p.