

# Learning and adaptation from a semiotic perspective

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**Abstract.** This paper discusses the relation between learning and adaptation, arguing that the current state of the art in semiotics suggests a continuity between the two. An overview of the relevant theories in this regard, as considered in semiotics, reveals an embodied and environmental account of learning, where language plays an important but nevertheless limited role. Learning and adaptation are seen as inseparable cases of semiotic modelling. Such a construal of these opens up new pathways towards a non-dualist philosophy and theory of education.

**Keywords:** learning; adaptation; evolution; exaptation; scaffolding; semiotics

## 1. Introduction: Studying learning in relation to adaptation

Recent research in semiotics, which is reviewed below, has tended to emphasize the need for a reconceptualization of *learning* in relation to *adaptation*. More generally, the need for such an investigation stemmed from contemporary views, critical of modern dualist philosophy which contrasts learning to adaptation. In the classic, Enlightenment view, learning was construed as specifically human. More precisely, starting with early empiricism, rationalism and, particularly, contractualism,