

Learning Theories

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Every person is unique. This uniqueness carries into the classrooms, both in the students, the aids, the administration, and the teacher. Every class has its own dynamic and each teacher has a way of working with this class dynamic. With the teacher's uniqueness, they will never do anything exactly like another, but there can be similar ways in their teaching style which can be expressed in learning theories. Learning theories are general different ways in which a teacher uses to help a student not only retain knowledge, but ways in which a student is acquiring and processing the knowledge.

One learning theory is Humanism. This theory focuses on human freedom, dignity, and potential. Another key aspect of humanism is studying the whole person, not just in part. Each person is unique, so their learning should be too. This theory was developed as a response to behaviorism, that a person's influence is more than manipulated situations to encourage good behavior. A large part of this theory is trying to get the student to be motivated intrinsically; the student takes the initiative to discover and to learn. Students can also set the pace for their own learning (Pugsley, 2011, 2). Under this umbrella of Humanism also lies Choice Theory. This theory goes to show that most all behavior is chosen and the only behavior we can control is our own. This lies in making choices in the present moment. One cannot control external factors, but one can control and choose how one looks and respond at a situation. Some of the roots of Choice Theory in the classroom are the teacher being a lead-manager not a boss manager, quality work, supportive environments, and self-evaluation.

Another theory is Cognitivism. This theory builds off of the idea that humans are rational beings and therefore require active participation in rational thought. Cognitivism builds off of previous knowledge and students are encouraged to engage in this new knowledge. Like humanism, the teacher is more of a facilitator; a teacher is there to facilitate a learning

environment while allowing students to discover knowledge. Cognitivism is really concerned about what is going on inside the students' heads and how they are retaining information.

A rather new theory to the education field that is being deeply imbedded into our education system is 21st Century Skills. There are essentially seven "C's" key components to the 21st Century Skills which are: communication, collaboration, creativity, critical thinking, computing, character, and cultural/global awareness. These are all that are very important for our students to be choice ready.

Each learning theory has different elements, but they all do overlap at some points. I believe the most common theme in the Humanism, Cognitivism, and 21st Century Skills learning theories is the emphasis on the teacher being a guide while having a more student-centered learning approach. That is a core reason I chose these three theories, because I believe in a student-centered learning environment.

Directly relating to Humanism and the choice theory, in my classroom, I would implement having choice and having my students take control over their learning. The traditional classroom setting is where the teacher lectures for the hour and the students have homework to bring back the next day. Usually the assignments would have consisted of problems from a book or worksheet to do. Worksheets are not inherently bad, but there are other more engaging ways of learning and assessing knowledge. A way I want to make more assignments engaging is giving them more projects that may involve more interdisciplinary plans. For example, each student reporting on a Mathematician. The students would be given a choice of how they would like to do the assignment. Some of the choices could include a paper, a presentation, an impersonation or story, video, etc. They would not only be allowed to pick someone who interests them, but they are able to express their knowledge according to their learning style. This

is interdisciplinary project being it brings in communication, English skills, mathematics and history. Humanism does not refer to only how a student is looked at academically but how they are looked at as a person and forming them as a person. The idea of choices can be on the side of classroom management. An example of this is when a student is acting out during class and has not listened to any warnings, a way of giving them power and choice, is to ask them to express if they know what they did wrong and why then to ask them what they think is an appropriate reparation. The last thing I wanted to address directly within this theory is the emphasis on self-evaluation. One practical way I would like to do this in my math classroom is to do an exit slip. Instead of being graded normal, it would be graded on completion and students, as they leave, put it in the folder of “I totally get it,” “I am kind of confused,” and “I feel pretty lost.” This way it is an evaluation where they give themselves a rating but I am also able to see where they are at quickly and we are able to move forward at their pace.

Cognitivism is focused more on the brain and in a math classroom, material is always building off of one another so it is vital that my students are able to recall important information when needed. I plan to do this by using a lot of questions during the days when I am lecturing and having them be the leaders of the conversation. For example, I love the idea of a 360 degree classroom that when we learn a new concept, the students all have a section of the board and are working through a problem individually but collaboration is encouraged. I, as the teacher, can directly see ways of guidance to help get them not only to the right answer, but see where they are getting lost. Also, in cognitivism theory, the idea of chunking information and relating it to the real world. This can be done in acronyms, silly sayings, images of something wacky in the real world, etc.

The 21st Century Theory is one where I see it being greatly effective in the mathematics classroom. The flipped classroom is something I am greatly interested in. This allows for that collaboration and communication time during class. Critical thinking is a huge part of math and problem solving and as a teacher, it is important for me to learn how to ask good questions and to help guide students to the write answer without blatantly giving it to them. Creativity is something that is often lacking in the mathematics classroom but I would encourage this with the project I have mentioned earlier with the Mathematician or different projects such as taking photos of real life geometric shapes and definitions and then creating something to show what they discovered.

All in all, learning theories can be very related and overlap, but they all have unique elements and characteristics. Humanism, Cognitivism, and 21st Century Skills are theories that I plan to use in my future classroom.

References

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