

Learning Theories and Philosophy

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There are many exceptional learning theories that exist today, most of which have been extensively researched and built upon. Some learning theories better cater to a teacher's philosophy and teaching style more than others. It is important for educators to research learning theories and develop personal philosophies. Three learning theories that are of significant interest to me are Humanism, Cognitivism, and 21st Century Skills.

Humanism

According to Lesley Pugsley (2001), Senior Lecturer in Medical Education at Cardiff University, Humanism is very student centered and involves the teacher promoting "experiential learning" in which the students set "the pace and direction of their learning" (p. 267). Self-esteem, motivation, and active self-discovery are key components of Humanism in a positive classroom environment where the teacher is present to guide rather than direct (Pugsley, 2001, p. 267). In a Humanistic based classroom, students' needs, emotions, and perceptions are heavily weighted, and students realize the need to learn (Pugsley, 2001, p. 267).

One classroom practice that reflects Humanism is giving students choice, such as in summative assessments. Students may be given choices on exit slips, projects, and writing topics, to name a few. Giving students choice in their educations may help make them more accountable and invested in their learning. Another classroom practice that reflects Humanism is allowing students to go to the bathroom while preserving human dignity. For instance, some educators require students to wear a bright yellow construction zone vest to the bathroom, which embarrassingly broadcasts to the rest of the school where the student is heading.

In sum, Humanism is very student centered in which the educator acts as a guide in the learning process. Humanism takes into account each individual person and promotes

preservation of human dignity and student accountability for one's own learning in a positive classroom environment.

Cognitivism

A second learning theory that interests me is Cognitivism. Pugsley (2001) explains that Cognitivism elaborates on “students and their ability to engage with and actively organize knowledge” (p. 267). Key components of Cognitivism are learning styles, which are students preferred and strongest methods of transferring information from their short term memory to their long term memory and making connections to personal experiences (Pugsley, 2001, p. 267). In addition, Pugsley (2001) elaborates that “knowledge is a process rather than a product and learners are encouraged to be active participants in all teaching events” (p. 267). By viewing knowledge as a process, students can learn to apply what they already know to new information and situations.

A classroom practice that would be of Cognitivist nature is an educator tapping into multiple learning preferences and styles when designing a lesson. Knowing the class and all the different learning preferences can greatly aid an educator in really keying in on the most common learning styles while also trying to incorporate some of the least common learning styles. Another classroom practice that follows Cognitivist views is integrating subjects to help students make connections across the curriculum. Integrating subject areas provides students with opportunities to take what they know and apply it elsewhere, which enables students to make more meaningful and authentic connections.

In conclusion, Cognitivism views students as active learners in which students apply their knowledge to newly learned content to reinforce and reorganize their knowledge. Cognitivism

emphasizes keying in on learning styles, which helps students process information more efficiently.

21st Century Skills

According to author Juliana Lapek (2017), 21st Century Skills “are a broad set of knowledge, skills, work habits, and character traits that many people believe are necessary for success in a technological world” (p. 25). The modern world is constantly changing as new jobs are being created and new technology is being invented. The four main 21st Century Skills are communication, creativity, critical thinking, and collaboration, also known as “the 4 C’s.” (Lapek, 2017, p. 25). Implementing 21st Century Skills into schools offers many opportunities for more authentic learning and developing more career ready students.

One highly discussed method of implementing 21st Century Skills in the classroom is through Project Based Learning (PBL). PBL dramatically veers away from the age old method of the teacher lecturing and the students passively listening. PBL provides opportunities for students to explore and discover through authentic interactions with their peers and potentially, community members. Another method of implementing 21st Century Skills is by incorporating more student use of technology. Fortunately, many professionals are recognizing the need for students to develop skills in technology so that they are better able to adapt in the technologically advanced world they are being raised in.

To close, the theory on 21st Century Skills is that students need to learn skills and obtain knowledge in technology so as to better able to adapt and learn in today’s every-changing society. The four main skills that professionals are elaborating on are communication, critical thinking, collaboration, and creativity, all of which are essential to develop in school so as to prepare more technological and career ready students.

As a pre-service teacher, I am eager to design a curriculum that is less lecture and teacher based and more student and active learning based. Especially in a world that is so rapidly changing, I will constantly be learning right alongside my students. To provide more authentic, real world learning opportunities for my students, I must allow my students to explore and discover their interests through active learning opportunities.

From a Humanistic approach, I am eager to find ways to allow as much student choice as possible. My belief is that allowing students to explore their interests will provide students with more opportunities to play a very critical and active role in their learning. Students will have opportunities to explore their own learning preferences through a guided curriculum. In a guided curriculum, my role as an educator will be to facilitate learning through exploration and discovery.

In addition, my goal as an educator is to foster a classroom with a community feel in which students are constantly collaborating, thinking, and engaging in authentic learning experiences. Students' needs, emotions, and thoughts will be greatly valued, and students will have endless opportunities to be heard and noticed so that students understand that they are an essential part of the classroom.

From a Cognitivist view, an essential to the classroom will be students discovering and learning from their own learning styles. Coupled with real world applications, students will consistently be learning new information, applying the information, revisiting knowledge, and transferring knowledge as they make connections based on other subject areas and personal experiences. My hope is to provide students with information that they are constantly using and referring back to.

Lastly, when considering 21st Century Skills, I am looking forward to creating a very authentic business education curriculum that requires technology, communication, collaboration, creativity, and critical thinking, among other 21st Century Skills. My overall goal as a business education teacher is to develop more career ready and tech savvy individuals who possess key 21st Century Skills. In order to do so, my future classroom will be designed such that students are actively learning and collaborating with peers in a guided curriculum that promotes going out on a limb and discovering new ideas.

While there are many exceptional learning theories, three of my personal favorites are Humanistic, Cognitivism, and 21st Century Skills. It is important to me as a pre-service teacher that I be thinking about a classroom that is more student centered with emphasis on developing more career ready students who are capable of navigating the fast changing world around them.

References

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