Learning Theories to Implement in My Classroom

Courtney Kessler

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Carl Friedrich Gauss once said, “It is not knowledge, but the act of learning, not possession but the act of getting there, which grants the greatest enjoyment.” In order for students to have the best chance at achieving their utmost success, a teacher must be able to facilitate a positive learning environment. To do so, a great teacher must have excellent classroom management skills, but more specifically, a consistent use of learning theories. The three learning theories that will be discussed in this essay are humanism, behaviorism, and constructivism.

Dr. Li Zhou defines humanistic learning as “a personal growth experience, characterized with intensification of creativity, subjectivity, and self-awareness; self-initiation, self-motivation, and self-learning; as well as personal, emotional, and intuitive forms of knowledge construction” (2007). Looking deeper into Dr. Zhou’s definition, the humanistic learning theory requires that a teacher builds relationships with his or her students. Without some type of relationship, a teacher does not know how to motivate each student and therefore is not able to best educate his or her students. One classroom practice of the humanistic learning theory is self-reflection (Zhou, 2007). This practice gives “students the chance to construct their personal understandings of the theory at both perceptual and conceptual levels” (Zhou, 2007). Another humanistic practice is incorporating computer technology such as online chat rooms (Zhou, 2007). Online chat rooms allow students to promote self-directed learning (Zhou, 2007), which is a key component in the humanistic learning theory.

Behaviorism is a learning theory that focuses solely on observable and measurable behaviors (Behaviorism, n, 2016) and “operates on a principle of ‘stimulus-response’” (Behaviorism, L, 2016). Behaviorism is a rule based learning theory and if a student breaks the rules, this results in a consequence, either a reward or a punishment. The behaviorists believe that “punishment decreases the likelihood that the antecedent behavior will happen again” and that reinforcement increases the likelihood (Behaviorism, L, 2016). If the behaviorist theory is effective, the student experiences a change in behavior (Behaviorism, L, 2016). In other words, if a behavior is results in some type of reward, the behavior will continue. But, if a behavior results in some type of punishment, the idea is that the behavior will not continue. In a behavioristic classroom, punishments are the only way to deter unwanted behaviors.

In her article *Forming Future-Teacher Students Using Constructivist Theory in E-Learning Effectively*, Mihaela Stefan defines the constructivist learning theory as “instruction through focusing processes needed for understanding on student’s individuality and the role of the group in learning, on strategies of teaching through research, on making better use of real-life situations and contexts, on the new roles of the teacher” (2014). The constructivist approach allows the student to “construct their own understanding and knowledge of the world, through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences” (Questioning, 2016). In the classroom setting, the constructivist approach encourages students to use active techniques such as real-world problem solving (Questioning, 2016) and assess how the activity is aiding them in a better understanding (Questioning, 2016). Constructivism ultimately helps to teach students how to facilitate their own learning (Questioning, 2016). “The student who is learning creates learning situations together with the teacher” (Stefan, 2014). Stefan goes on to say that constructivism is a learning theory that encourages student independence from the teacher but at a gradual pace (2014).

Humanism is the main learning theory that I plan to implement in my future classroom. As a future educator, I am a strong believer in relationships. Carl Jung said it best when he said, “One looks back with appreciation to the brilliant teachers, but with gratitude to those who touched our human feelings. The curriculum is so much necessary raw material, but warmth is the vital element for the growing plant and for the soul of the child.” Ensuring that I have some type of relationship with each of my students will allow me to help students achieve personal and emotional growth.

I personally believe that behaviorism is an important learning theory but it cannot be the only implemented theory used in a classroom. All classrooms must have policies and procedures. Therefore, if a student does not follow a procedure, I believe that he or she should have a consequence. In contrast, I do not believe that everything in my classroom should be rewarded or punished. As a class, my students and I will decide a set of policies and fair consequences. Since the class will aid in deciding the punishments, if a policy or procedure is not followed, I can assure that the student agreed to the consequence.

Constructivism is very important for a student’s individual academic growth. A student must understand how he or she learns best. To do so, a student must experience the world on his or her own (Questioning, 2016). I understand that it is my responsibility to educate my future students but I also do not want to be a teacher that spoon feeds my students the content. The constructivist approach encourages the students to think on a deeper level without the teacher just giving the answers. In my classroom, I aim to facilitate higher order thinking and I believe that the constructivist learning theory will play a large role in motivating my future students to think critically.

Ultimately, in order for a classroom to function properly, the teacher must implement a variety of learning theories. I personally believe that humanism, behaviorism, and constructivism are the most important learning theories to incorporate into an educational setting. It is crucial to build relationships with your students in order to motivate them to achieve their highest potential, to create and follow policies and procedures with agreeable consequences, and to encourage students to think critically on their own.

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