EDU 421: Learning Theories Paper

Marirose Tan

University of Mary

Dr. Brenda Werner

Fall 2016

Learning Theories

Effective teachers should use learning theories in their classrooms in order to optimize learning. However, they should discover which of them work with their teaching styles. In a school classroom, so many learning theories can be used. Three of these are the following: behaviorism, humanism, and constructivism. One might possibly ask, “Why focus on these three?” In order to answer this, one must first understand each of these learning theories, then see how they relate to a teaching philosophy, and see how they may be used in a future classroom.

First of the mentioned learning theories is behaviorism. According to John Santrock, he writes, “Behaviorism is the view that behavior should be explained by observable experiences, not by mental processes.” (Santrock, 2011, p. 218) This is mainly focused on behaviors and how they affect learning. It is because the principles behind this particular theory that most educators use the grading system. It is the theory by which extrinsic reward and punishment is generally used. These extrinsic factors can the motivators that are used in conditioning. Conditioning is a psychological action of using extrinsic motivators to gain a response without thinking. These motivators, like the grade system, can affect a desired behavior that can aid the student in learning.

Second is humanism. “Humanist approaches emphasize the importance of allowing the student time to develop control over his or her behavior.” (Borich, 2014, p. 105) Unlike behaviorism, this is more focused on the student as a whole not just the behavior. This is the theory that is mainly behind intrinsic motivation. Intrinsic motivation is like internal interest that help to engage someone in a certain behavior, especially for learning. Students are more likely to take responsibility for their own learning through a humanist approach. They can see that learning is for their own benefit.

Lastly, constructivism has qualities of both. Constructivism is, as the name implies, focuses on constructed learning. The student is very hands-on with the content and owns his learning because he “constructed it,” so to speak. (Borich, 2014, p. 19) Real world examples are generally found in this approach. One type that is very common is the social constructivism approach. Social constructivism has an “emphasis on collaboration with others to produce knowledge and understanding.” (Santrock, 2011, p. 219) It tends more toward a group work setting. Given this, it seems to be more aligned with humanism. It uses the intrinsic motivator of teamwork: “I do not want to let my classmates down” mentality. There is also the factor that group work is an important skill for students to learn. Because the work is also graded, the behaviorism extrinsic motivator is also there.

Connection to a Teaching Philosophy

With this understanding of the learning theories, one can be more able to see how they are connected to a teaching philosophy. These three learning theories seem to make up most of what I am aiming for in my own personal teaching philosophy. With constructivism, I understand the importance of having my students having a hands-on approach to content. They need to own their learning in order for them to truly understand it well. I will strive to do this through differentiated instruction, especially with collaboration found in social constructivism. They will learn to do group work effectively and practice their social skills. They will need these skills in their future classrooms.

With humanism, I understand that it is important to move my students toward motivating themselves internally. They will not always have an extrinsic reward or punishment throughout life. This is beneficial in their growth in knowledge of self. In order to do this, I will strive to put my lessons into their quality world. I will give them a chance to explore their own interests so that they can grow in knowledge because they take responsibility for their learning. Taking responsibility for choices made is an important life skill.

With behaviorism, I understand that not all of my students are self-motivating and take responsibility. Therefore, in my classroom, I will be using rules, procedures, and consequences. It is beneficial for students that I keep in mind that classroom management is conducive to student learning. It aids in creating an optimal learning environment. Also, I will be using a grading system. This is to be used not only as a behavioristic approach but also as an accountability system. It holds my students’ standards of learning high and shows me whether or not they are grasping the content of the lesson.

Of the three mentioned, one can see that my main focus is on humanism. I grew up with this learning theory and feel that it is the best one that I can personally use for the benefit of my students. Looking at all three of these learning theories, however, one can see how they can fit into my teaching philosophy. As a future educator, I will strive to implement these into my classroom. They will inform my teaching style.

References

Borich, G. D. (2014). *Effective teaching methods: Research-Based practice* (8th ed.). Upper Saddle River, NJ: Pearson Education, Inc.

Santrock, John W. (2011). *Educational Psychology,* (5th ed.) New York, NY: McGraw Hill Companies, Inc.