

Learning Theories Paper

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Christina Caticchio

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One of the most popular learning theories is Constructivism. In an academic article, Reg Dennick writes, “The theory proposes that meaning and understanding are built up in a process that depends on the existing knowledge foundations and cognitive operations of each individual and the learning activities they engage in.” (Dennick, 2012, p.618). In other words, students learn by adding knowledge to their existing knowledge. This theory teaches that to be an effective teacher, the teacher first has to know where the students are at and what they already know so they can plan lessons that build on that existing knowledge.

Dennick also writes, “Ascertaining, activating and acknowledging prior learning enables the teacher to begin the process of relating to learners by demonstrating empathy and respect, an important attribute of Humanistic learning theory...” (Dennick, 2012, p. 619). Constructivism relates to another one of the popular learning theories, the Humanistic learning theory. This theory strongly emphasizes the relationship between the teacher and the student; Dennick writes, “...teachers should become “facilitators” of learning rather than didactic transmitters of information.”(Dennick, 2012, p. 622).

Constructivism and Humanism share many qualities and are two complimentary learning theories that would be taught well together. Constructivism focuses on learning what the student already knows so the teacher can tailor their lessons to build off existing knowledge. In a similar vein, Humanism focuses on the relationship between the student and the teacher, and working with the student to facilitate learning as opposed to the teacher lecturing at the students.

Constructivism has two aspects to study, a social theory and a cognitive theory. The cognitivist learning theory includes the premise that students learn by adding knowledge on to existing knowledge, but goes further to state that knowledge is organized in to schemas. Students

learn by reorganizing new information into the schemas they already have. In an academic article on Cognitivism, Kaya Yimaz writes, "...Cognitivism is a relatively recent learning theory...as opposed to behaviorist orientation's emphasis on behavior, the cognitive school focuses on meaning and semantics. The primary emphasis is placed on how knowledge is acquired, processed, stored, retrieved, and activated by the learner..."(Yimaz, 2011, p.205).

I chose these three learning theories to research because they all work well together and would be great to combine in a future classroom. Constructivism is student focused and focuses on what the students already know to make sure they get a complete understanding before moving on to the next topic. This seems like the only logical place to start when teaching students, but the theory as to why it works is very interesting to me. Getting the students to take an active role in their learning is especially effective for learning, and is a great option for classes like History that are usually seated.

Cognitivism is an idea that I have always been interested in, even if I did not have a name for it until now. In high school I took a class on memory devices and different ways to order your thinking. We learned a lot about schemas and how to group your memories, which I found particularly effective for me. I've tried to teach other people what I learned but I did not have the tools to explain it thoroughly, and what I have found from researching this paper is that Cognitivism is the theory I've been searching to teach. The schemas that adjust and reorganize to accommodate the new information we learn are like the groups I was taught to organize memories into.

Humanism, to me, is perhaps the most important of the learning theories. I think that the importance of a relationship between a teacher and student cannot be overstated. Having a relationship with your students and getting to know them individually is the basis of having a

good classroom. Constructivism is based on the premise that the teacher knows their students and knows where they are at, but a teacher can only know that if they get to know their students-practicing a humanistic learning theory in their classroom.

I am also taking another class this semester, called the History of Western Education. In this class the overarching theme we are discussing is “why do we need an education?”. Over and over again we come to the conclusion that we, as humans, need an education to fulfill our nature as rational humans. Thinking of education as a fulfillment of our nature and that each student has an inherent right to that education completely changed how I view teaching. Suddenly teaching is not just a job but vocation. The humanistic learning theory focuses on students’ human dignity and how to teach them with respect to it.

I chose these three learning theories because they fit the best with my personal teaching philosophy. I view teaching as a vocation and the ability to teach as a privilege, and through teaching I want to give back to the community. The humanistic learning theory matches the closest to how I want to teach someday, focusing on the student as an individual with an inherent human dignity and it is my job to teach them to reach their fullest potential. I liked the other two theories because I think they make the most sense. Constructivism states that teachers should start where the students are at and to then build on what they know. Cognitivism teaches students how to organize their thoughts for maximum retention, so they can move to the next step in fulfilling their human nature.

References

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