Learning Theories Paper

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This research paper introduces three educational learning theories which if incorporated correctly by educators, will foster the appropriate development for students to reach their full potential in the educational setting, and provide an opportunity for the future. The three theories discussed in this paper include humanism, constructivism, and behaviorism. In addition to an overview of the theories, examples of how to appropriately incorporate strategies into the classroom to reflect each learning theory will be rationalized. Incorporating each learning theory in the classroom and school setting will assist in the care for each student as a whole person, and help educators to connect with students with several different learning abilities and backgrounds.

Educational Learning Theories

Humanism

According to Santrock of Educational Psychology (2018), the humanism theory emphasizes students' capacity for personal growth, freedom to choose their destiny, and positive empathetic questioning (p. 424). This type of growth and freedom is reflected by students' ability to learn and achieve in the classroom. To reach the levels of learning suggested by the humanism theory, the basic needs of students need to be met. The basic needs which need to be met for students to have the possibility to succeed in the classroom include physiological (hunger, thirst, sleep), safety (ensuring survival), love/belongingness (security, affection, attention), esteem (feeling good about oneself), and self-actualization (realization about one's potential). As a future educator, the humanistic needs listed may be out of my control when students are not in my classroom, however, while students are in my classroom I would like to provide an environment where these needs are met for my students. This way, students have the greatest opportunity to grow and reach their full potential.

To foster this type of flourishing and meet the basic needs of my students I will offer my students choice, focus on professional student/teacher relationships, and provide the opportunity for mindfulness activities. As the humanism learning theory is focused around student-centered learning, offering students a voice and choice in their education will be crucial to support my students. Professionals at Western Governors University (2020) explain that the teacher's role when offering students choice is to offer students self-evaluation opportunities and help students evaluate what they are excited to learn more about (paras. 11-17). The main idea I would like to incorporate would be to foster student engagement so students can make learning decisions of their own.

I would also like to place focus on professional student/teacher relationships. To do so, I will provide a safe, consistent, and welcoming environment for students. I hope that if students feel secure with myself and their peers around them, they will feel comfortable taking risks to learn and ask for assistance when needed. A few examples of how I would incorporate this environment into my classroom include providing an appropriate time for "get to know each other" activities, foster class discussion, provide snacks on hand for students in need, and model and assure the esteem of students whenever possible.

An additional concept to help students flourish in the classroom regarding the humanism learning theory is to provide mindfulness activities for students. This could look different from time to time in the classroom depending on the mood of the students, but ideally, this type of activity would be short and effective so content time is not interrupted. A few examples of mindfulness activities are taking a deep breath before class starts, having students hold up a number one to five on their hand of how they are doing that day, or sharing a daily retrospective

introduction. Mindfulness activities will help students acknowledge how they are feeling and hopefully let go of what they may be holding on to from the day.

Constructivism

Constructivism compares to humanism in that it is focused on student-centered learning. However, constructivism is focused more upon how teachers serve as facilitators and guides for student growth through discovery. Santrock (2018) demonstrates the two types of constructivist theories which include the cognitive constructivist and the social constructivist (p.40-41). The cognitive constructivist, supported by educational pioneer Piaget, focuses on how students construct their knowledge by transforming, organizing, and reorganizing previous knowledge through schemas, assimilation, accommodation, organization, and equilibration. The social constructivist, supported by educational pioneer Vygotsky, shifts the focus from the metacognition of the individual to the construction of knowledge through social interaction (p. 55-56). Both constructivist theories support teachers as facilitators but differ in the strategies and situations students should be placed in to grow.

To foster an environment that appropriately appreciates the needs of the constructivism theory, it will be important to offer examples of how classroom practices can be put into place for both types of constructivists. To facilitate learning through the eyes of a cognitive constructivist, it will be important to provide students with organizational tools and the opportunity to incorporate these tools into their learning. A few cognitive constructivist tools include essay templates, organizational charts, KWL charts, and Venn Diagrams. These compare and contrast tools offer students the ability to organize and visualize content information which intern, will assist in moving this information into longer-term memory.

Because the social constructivist emphasizes the social context of learning, to facilitate learning through a social constructivist approach I will offer many opportunities for students to learn along with me (as the educator) or through discovery with their classmates. A few examples to provide this type of social learning include holding debates in class, providing opportunities for turn and talks with classmates, research discovery in groups, and writing case studies with classmates. To foster the social constructivist approach to the greatest extent, it will be important to teach the more-skilled learners in the classroom how to scaffold for the below/meeting proficiency students, rather than offering up their answers.

Behaviorism

According to Santrock of Educational Psychology (2018), behaviorism differs from both previously listed theories in that behaviorism justifies the behaviors of students, both verbal and nonverbal, by observable experiences rather than mental processes such as thoughts, feelings, and emotions (p. 217). Behaviorism does not discredit the thoughts, feelings, or emotions all humans feel, but rather explains that because these mental processes are not directly observed, they cannot and should not be used to explain student behavior. A behaviorist would observe one event associated with another event as to why a student chooses to make one decision over another. The behaviorism learning theory helps explain both classical and operant conditioning.

To incorporate effective strategies of behaviorism in my classroom, Melissa Standridge of the Department of Educational Psychology and Instructional Technology from the University of Georgia offers a plethora of examples. Standridge (2002) offers examples of both negative and positive reinforcement I would like to incorporate into my classroom. Regarding negative reinforcement in the classroom, two strategies for teachers include making the final exam optional if students receive a B or higher in the course or dropping the lowest quiz grade if

students submit all quizzes on time (paras. 12-14). Although negative reinforcement may possess a negative connotation, it stems from the taking away of a negative stimulus if students meet a specific goal set by the educator.

Positive reinforcement is just the opposite of negative reinforcement. When a teacher's goal or student set goal is met, then the educator offers an additional positive stimulus for students. Two examples of positive reinforcement include selecting students for a special project if they excel in classroom work or praising students' ability to their parents (paras. 12-14). Each of these examples addresses an additional positive stimulus added which will hopefully motivate students to continue to take risks to learn and excel in the content. Both negative and positive reinforcement will be effective with some students over others, so, it is crucial to build a professional student/teacher relationship for students to discuss with the educator what stimulus is more encouraging for them.

Conclusion

This research paper explained in depth three educational research theories including humanism, constructivism, and behaviorism. In addition to providing an overview of the theories, classroom examples were also stated so educators can effectively incorporate these three theories into a classroom setting. A deep understanding of these theories and how to incorporate them is crucial for educators to care about the whole student and respect the developmental process and stage students are in. If educators are not fostering developmentally appropriate learning environment, students will not reach their full potential within their years of schooling up to the end of high-school. Educational leaders should consider implementing the strategies listed underneath each learning theory to provide a sustainable culture within a school, and within each classroom in said school.

<u>References</u>

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