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Theory and Practice Education Settings

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Outline:

1. *Why we use theory in the modern classroom discussion.*
  - Understand how kids learn and grow
  - Different systems in classroom
  - Where students are coming from and where they are going
2. *Personal thoughts of how a student learns or gains new knowledge.*
  - Learn by those around you
  - Scaffolding
  - Hands on activities/teachers not holding you back
3. *Theorist support of how a student learns or gains new knowledge.*
  - Vygotsky, Bruner
4. *Personal thoughts on the role of the student in a classroom.*
  - Learners/explorers
  - Equally important as the teacher
5. *Theorist support on the role of the student in a classroom.*
  - Bruner, Montessori (a little)
6. *Personal thoughts on the role of the teacher in the classroom.*
  - Food, sleep, safety
  - Operant conditioning
  - Knowing your students different types of smart
7. *Theorist support of the role of the teacher in the classroom.*
  - Maslow, Skinner, & Gardner
8. *Personal thoughts on classroom culture.*
  - Students work together
  - Different parts of their development.
9. *Theorist support on classroom culture.*
  - Vygotsky, Erikson
10. *Personal thoughts on classroom management.*
  - Hard then relax
  - Operant conditioning
11. *Theorist support on classroom management.*
  - Skinner, Gardner
12. *How theory will impact your future classroom.*
  - Clear confusion
  - Calming/reassurance
  - New ideas

There have been many theorists that have affected and shaped education as we know it. Many were psychologists that studied children and how they learn, grow, and interact with society. Specifically, in the classroom, what would you be doing as a teacher if you did not use the theories that these men and women created to better help us understand our students? We use the theories in the modern classroom, so we can try different systems of learning. Sometimes our students are not going to pick up on material as quickly as we would like them to. We study these theories, so we can adapt to our students learning, and growing levels. Another reason we study and use theory in our modern classrooms is, so we know where our students are coming from depending on what age and/or stage of life they are at. Theory explains why a child is acting the way he or she is in your classroom. For an example, according to James Maslow and his hierarchy of needs, you can't move on to learning new things until you have food and shelter and feel safe. Without theory, we may still be questioning why kids aren't listening or learning in the classroom.

I believe that students are going to learn lots of the information they gain through their peers in and out of the classroom. Students pick up on both positive and negative behaviors that are around them daily. Children are always copying the older models of people that are in their lives, thus why an older sibling, parent, or coach has so much influence as children grow up. Kids are naturally curious and will have that desire to learn already instilled inside of them. I think scaffolding goes hand in hand to with these statements. Scaffolding is where there is a more knowledgeable other that pulls up a less knowledgeable other. Sometimes you know a child can accomplish something if they just had a little help. This is what being a teacher is all about, getting students at the beginning of the years and pulling them up to the next grade level by teaching, playing, reading, writing, being physically active, and so on. This leads me to my last point of students will be able to learn best through the hands-on activities that they engage in. I can't think of one time that I learned more on a topic from reading an article than I have from doing an activity where I got to manipulate and explore materials. I'm sure we can still all recall something from elementary school that we did because it was a hands-on learning activity. I believe that hands on activities can help you learn more even if you don't necessarily enjoy the topic.

When looking at scaffolding, I have learned that Lev Vygotsky is the one who thinks this is a great way to help student gain new information. He uses what's called the Zone of Proximal development. This is "the distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers." (Litzler, 2018). I know that the more knowledgeable other (the teacher) can pull up the less knowledgeable other (the student) through the various activities and conversations that they have

each day. Think about how many times you have engaged with a child and asked them questions that lead them to the right answer. Vygotsky is the man who created this theory that I strongly believe in. Along with Vygotsky, there is a man named Jerome Bruner who was a theorist that believed in constructivism. He says that we should be very hands on to be great learners. He says “any subject can be taught effectively in some intellectually honest form to any child at any stage of development” (McIntosh, 2018). This backs up my ideas in reasoning for wanting students to have the role of actively learning with those around them. You are able to teach students anything no matter what age or stage they are at in life. You may have to get creative to do this, but it can be done.

If there was no school, kids would be exploring the world around them every day wanting to learn more and accomplish more. Think about a child before him or her goes to school, they are constantly observing and looking at new things in their environment. Teacher and student are equally important; however, the teacher is still the more knowledgeable other and the student can constantly be accessing more knowledge and learning from real life experiences and from the teacher (that sets those experiences up). An example of this would be studying leaves and their characteristics. The teacher would plan and support the lesson plan of going outside and collecting leaves and making graphs and charts with the students. The students roll in the classroom is equally as important as the teachers because if there is no one to ask the questions and learn, then the teacher is not going to be very helpful. Lastly, I want to explain the importance of having students roll in the classroom to be picking what they want to learn about. This sounds like it could be a lot of work, but this can actually be one of the most beneficial things to incorporate into your classroom. This wouldn't work for every subject in school, but I believe that with any subject, students should have a time throughout the school year to do a project based off of what they want to learn. They will still follow/meet the schools standards. The students will get to pick so they will be most interested in this topic. Another idea for this would be to give the students a choice on topics that you have already picked out ahead of time. This way you know what kind of information is out there on the topic and it still gives students a sense of freedom and choice.

As I have found in my research, Jerome Bruner was a constructivist who knew children learned best through hands on experiences. I can clearly see this through the three learning modes he established. Enactive, iconic, and symbolic are all stages at which a person is learning and gaining new knowledge. In all three of these stages you are using your hands and eyes to manipulate and learn new things about the world around you. Going back to Vygotsky, we can remember that he stated the more knowledgeable other will be able to teach and grow you in the classroom. Something I love is that the “more knowledgeable other” doesn't always have to be the teacher, it can be a peer that understands the topic very clearly and is able to help his/her

classmate with the task at hand. I also want to look at Maria Montessori. She was a theorist who developed a type of school that allows children to pick and choose what they want to learn and how they want to learn it. I think that doing this in a public-school classroom with state standards is nearly impossible. However, I do think she has a point that should be made and looked at in each classroom. "Montessori realized that children seemed to learn better when they engaged all of their senses." (Pierce, 2018). This is where I would want to capitalize on this idea in my classroom. I think using this method of giving students some choice and having lessons include an activity for each of our 5 senses would really engage the students into learning more and more.

I believe that as a teacher we have many responsibilities and roles in the classroom. We even have roles outside of the classroom that are reflecting on how we are modeling in the classroom. Teachers have to realize that if their students are sleep deprived and/or hungry, they aren't going to be able to teach them. Without food, water, and shelter, students aren't able to listen and learn like other kids who do have these basic needs fulfilled. All of this to say, teachers should make sure that if their students are starving that they get something to eat. Not only is this the right thing to do, it's the only way that student will be able to process information and learn new ideas that you are teaching. Another role of the teacher in the classroom is that they are the ones who are conditioning their students. They should exhibit operate conditioning to their students for various different reasons. As the teacher, you will see which reason is best for your specific classroom. An example of this would be for your students to get work done in a timely manner, you have conditioned them positively by adding extra free reading time at the end of the day. Positive and negative conditioning can be done in a classroom by the teacher. Lastly and maybe the most important role of the teacher in the classroom is for him or her to recognize that students are different types of smart and that they all won't learn something the same way. The teacher should be providing different ways for their students to learn the information at hand.

James Maslow created a hierarchy of needs template that the educational world looks at and uses today in regards to our students. This 5 step model is a depiction of human needs no matter what age or race that you are. (Hinson, 2018). This is helpful to teachers as we have about twenty five young kids that walk into our door each day. We need to know if they have been fed or not, slept or not and if they feel safe or not. This is all apart of the first and second tier of needs. According to Maslow, if we want our kids to learn, the first steps are going to need to be taken care of first. Operate conditioning was thought up by B.F. Skinner. This man was a psychologist that we can use in the educational world because of his work with operate conditioning. You probably use this on a daily basis without even knowing it if you have kids around you. Skinner tells us that operate conditioning is "a learning process in which the strength of a behavior in an individual is conditioned by reinforcement or punishment" (Skinner).

An example of this would be, letting your students have a sticker of their choice if they get a 90% or higher on their next math facts quiz. The positive reinforcement is you as the teacher giving them something as a result of the quiz grade that you expected/wanted. Lastly, we can look at Howard Gardner and his contributions to helping teachers understand their role in the classroom is to also find students multiple intellects. Students can have more than one intelligence as they can be “smart” in different areas of life. Gardner said, “It’s not how smart you are, it’s how you are smart”. This is explaining how each person is a different kind of smart, and that as teachers, it is good to know that about each of your students so you know how they will best be intrigued and taught.

A classroom culture should be very positive. You will not find that the students are quiet all of the time. They should be working in groups or partners to find answers. This is a huge part of how they learn and grow as individuals. Students can learn not only the information that the teacher wants them to know, but this will allow them to learn how to work with other people and solve problems without an adult always solving it for them. To get to this place of trust that students truly are working on their work and are on task will come as the teacher as great classroom management skills. Another huge part of the classroom culture is being able to understand that each student is at different parts of their development. There are children out there that will come be apart of my classroom that have gone through more events in their 6 years than I will go through in my whole life. This pertains to classroom culture because I as the teacher need to remember this in times when I may want to get upset at a student or another student is having trouble working in groups. There is a reason for all of those situations and in my classroom, the culture will be understanding and grace showing. We will solve our problems by talking things out as a class or small group. Lastly, I will hold my class to a high standard. This accountability will radiate throughout the classroom and the students remind each other what the end goal is. We will set goals that are long term and short terms, so the students always have something to strive for and that also gives them something to do better than. No matter what “level” you are at, you can always be held to a high standard.

Erik Erikson helps to frame my understanding of classroom culture. He created the eight stages of psychosocial development. This is the movement of 8 different challenges/crisis that you have to go through as you grow up. "Erikson believed that identity was constantly changing, and that it was constantly being influenced by the people we associate with and the things we go through" (Lee, 2018). This quote helps me to understand that I will not always know what my students are going through, so to have a classroom culture that shows grace and understanding is going to help each student as they are individually making their way through life’s crisis and challenges.

There is no possible way to teach effectively if you don’t have great classroom management skills. There is a lot that goes into planning every day procedures that you as the teacher must think about so when you are giving instruction and/or time for exploration, the students will be able to gain knowledge to the best of their ability. The teacher must start the year stricter so the

students by the middle and end of the year already know how to act when they are in class. Listening and following procedures will be second nature to a class that has had no wiggle room from the very beginning. The students will have trained themselves (by your procedures and help) to be great listeners, helpers, and leaders in the classroom. This falls under operant conditioning if you as the teacher are positively or negatively reinforcing behavior that is happening within your classroom. You will be able to do fun and exciting things if you have good classroom management. The kids will be able to handle more activities that other classes with no classroom management don't get to experience. Even in young grades, I think classroom management expectations can and should be set pretty high. The students will be thankful for these "rules" in the end because they will have gotten to do more exciting things through their learning year. Something I want to hold my students at is the ability to know when I need their attention and when they have the free time and ability to talk. An example would be in the beginning of the day I will start the day in the same routine each day, they should be able to tell when I need them to be quiet and when they have the time to talk to their fellow classmates based off of every previous day's routine (or unless otherwise stated). The ability for my students to read social cues is important to their overall success in relating and listening to others.

B.F. Skinner shows us once again a way that you can have great classroom management skills. I do not believe you should rely on operant conditioning for all things relating to classroom management, however, this helps greatly when you are teaching procedures and asking students to do high level work and thinking. Howard Gardner is another theorist that helps me with my classroom management thinking. As previously stated, Gardner says that everyone is a different type of smart. With this in mind, I will have a classroom that is quite noisy at times and I may not like that, but Gardner taught me that some students are "interpersonal smart" which means they are smart by talking and exploring with others (Baker, 2018).

Theory will impact my future classroom greatly. Most of the things that we think or say about education have been introduced by a theorist at one point in time. It is great to see how theories develop and change over time as well. I am excited to see how my classroom is effected each and every day by theory and the men and women who have done immense amounts of work in the field of education and psychology to help us better understand our students. Theory will be able to help me when I am worn down and confused as a teacher because a student just isn't understanding what I am trying to teach. Theory will explain that he or she isn't able to learn until they feel they are safe. According to Howard Gardner, maybe I need to look at a student's intelligence and figure out how they best learn and what their multiple intelligences are. Theory will be able to give me new ideas and explanations on how my classroom is being ran.

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