

Madeleine Fink

Dr. Tufte

EDU 421

12 Oct 2020

### Learning Theories Paper

In the field of education, there are different theories for how students best learn. Three such learning theories are (Social) Constructivism, Behaviorism, and Humanism. Each learning theory has its own philosophy and best practices for teaching. Each teacher has their own philosophy of teaching and uses these different learning theories in order to best help the students in their classroom to learn. Though my own classroom will be a blend of all different learning theories, I will be using Constructivism, Behaviorism and Humanism most frequently. In the subsequent paragraphs, I will provide brief insights into each of the three learning theories and afterwards I will discuss how I will apply these learning theories into my own future English classroom.

Constructivism is the idea that people construct their own understanding and knowledge through experiencing things and reflecting on them. In this way, students are able to create connections from prior knowledge to future learning. John Piaget is a key proponent of constructivism. In a reference to Ackerman's article in "Integrating the Constructionist Learning Theory with Computational Thinking Classroom Activities", the authors discuss Piaget and Papert's ideas of constructivism to create a new definition of constructivism for educators: that knowledge is actively constructed by the student in their interaction with the world (Ackerman, 1). Ackerman concludes that educators must fuel the constructivist process by using hands-on learning, which is a key idea of Piaget. Ackerman also restates Papert's belief of students able to

project their inner feelings and ideas out into the world as another key component of constructivism. Students communicating their ideas with each other and with the world around them is so important for them to continue to construct their understanding (Csizmadia, etc., 43). A subcategory of Constructivism is Social Constructivism. Social Constructivism uses the same principles of Constructivism but expands upon the idea that learning is social. Learners can surpass developmental stages and readiness through collaboration, inquiry, and modeling. Students learn best from each other and being able to communicate their ideas with each other and with the community. Lev Vygotsky is a key proponent of Social Constructivism (Yilmaz, 2). PBLs are a common staple found in this theory due to students working collaboratively and constructing their own projects thus taking charge of how they learn the material through hands-on learning.

Historically, behaviorism was the sole learning theory in education. Behaviorism is about shaping behavior through positive and negative reinforcement. It is “a teacher-centered instructional framework” and this framework shapes every aspect in the classroom, especially curriculum and instruction (Yilmaz, 1). Behaviorism is mostly preoccupied with visible or measurable teacher and student behaviors “through a stimulus-response framework” (Yilmaz, 1). Overall, behaviorism is a clear establishment of rules (or expectations) which students and teachers must follow.

Humanism learning theory is based off of the idea that each student is an individual with their own preferences for learning. Humanism preserves the dignity of each student. The goal for humanism is to develop an intrinsic motivation within each student. Another key part of humanistic learning theory is collaborative decision making in things like expectations for the classroom. In the humanism classroom, mistakes are viewed as valuable learning tools. Students

are encouraged and challenged to strive for mindfulness and thoughtful reflection of who the student is and who they want to become. John Dewey is a key figure who promotes humanism in education. Dewey identifies education as part of living and growth (Chatelier, 86). Dewey believed in the individual, and in order for that individual to grow, they need an education which treats them as different individuals rather than blank slates with no personalities of their own. Humanism is a student-centered approach to education which accounts for differences in individuals.

In my own classroom, I will be using all learning theories at certain points in my teaching, but I will focus my approach on Constructivism, Behaviorism and Humanism learning theories. I will be using Constructivism when I have students put concepts that we are learning in their own words. Beyond this, I will be applying this theory when I ask students to create inferences based on prior knowledge. It is important to connect students' prior knowledge to what they are learning today, and then to connect what they are learning today to what they will be learning in English or other subjects tomorrow. Connecting lessons together and constantly reviewing prior knowledge creates a solid foundation for students to build upon to reach a deeper understanding of the knowledge which then helps them reach the next level of learning. Some of this review will be led by myself, but I also want students to be able to review both by themselves and in groups. It is important to me that students work in groups frequently to help each other form knowledge and to be able to challenge each other. As a teacher, I am only one person with one set of prior knowledge. My students have different experiences and knowledge to bring in order to help each other learn. I will be using social constructivism in the classroom if not daily in some way, then at least often. I also hope to incorporate a PBL or two.

Behaviorism is a learning theory that I will be using in my classroom management plan. Though I want to incorporate some of the humanistic choice theory principles, I also understand that there is room in the classroom for behaviorism. I hope to teach either middle schoolers, ninth graders, or tenth graders. While I would love to help students to be more intrinsically motivated, I also believe that students can benefit from extrinsic motivation. Rewards and punishment sounds like a bad thing, but some students need extrinsic motivators. I have seen this done well in some of my Practicum experiences as well as my personal school experience. I would like to use positive reinforcement through things like little positive notes or stickers. Maybe a small prize bin which students can pick something from for truly exceptional behavior. I do not want to have to rely on this system, but it could act as encouragement for some students. After all, students want to be treated with respect like adults do (and they should be treated with respect), but they are also still kids who like getting candy or a sticker sometimes which can help students to be excited and exhibit enthusiasm in the classroom. If students can be excited, then it can also transfer into their motivation for learning.

Humanism is another learning theory which I will be using frequently in my own classroom. I believe it is critical that teachers get to know their students as individuals. If you as an educator have a positive, professional relationship with a student, you can help them to achieve more than they ever would have before. In my classroom, I want each student to feel welcomed and respected for the individual they are. One other key component in my classroom is helping students to be mindful of who they are and who they want to become. I will have students in my classroom frequently use writing journals. One of these activities within their writing journals which we will work on throughout the year is self-reflection and goal-setting. I think this mindful reflection of where they are in their learning and in their lives now, and where

they want to be in the future is critical for the development of the whole person (which I believe in very strongly).

I will be using Constructivism, Behaviorism, and Humanistic learning theories frequently in my classroom through different means. All of these theories put into practice will be blended together in order to help my students to develop not only as readers and writers, but as people. Depending on the individual students I have in my classroom, I may need to shift emphasis of one theory over another, but overall these are the three theories I can picture myself utilizing to better help students learn and grow.

## Works Cited

- Çakir, Hasan, and Ağâh Tugrul Korucu. "The Effect of Dynamic Web Technologies on Student Academic Achievement in Problem-Based Collaborative Learning Environment". *Malaysian Online Journal of Educational Technology*, vol. 6, no. 1, 2018, pp. 92- 108.
- Chatlier, Stephen. "Towards a renewed flourishing of humanistic education?" *Discourse: Studies in the Cultural Politics of Education*, vol. 36, no. 1, 2015, pp. 81-94.
- Csizmadia, Andrew, Bernhard Standl, and Jane Waite. "Integrating the Constructionist Learning Theory with Computational Thinking Classroom Activities". *Informatics in Education*, vol. 18, no. 1, 2019, pp. 41-67.
- Yilmaz, Kayla. "The Cognitive Perspective on Learning: Its Theoretical Underpinnings and Implications for Classroom Practices". *Clearing House: A Journal of Educational Strategies, Issues and Ideas*, vol. 84, no. 5, 2011, pp. 204-212.