

Student Centered Learning Theories

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Educators are constantly trying to find innovative ways to engage students and personalize their learning. There are many learning theories that can be used to help obtain this goal. The most common learning theories are humanism, behaviorism, cognitivism, constructivism, and 21st century skills. Humanism, constructivism, and 21st century skills are three learning theories that best align with my teaching philosophy. First, humanism, constructivism, and 21st century skills will be further discussed, and then I will illustrate how each theory aligns with my teaching philosophy.

The three main learning theories that I plan to implement into my classroom focus on the student as a person. Humanism “aims to promote self-esteem and motivation in order to encourage learners to learn. Students are central to the learning process and learn through active self-discovery rather than response to external stimuli” (Pugsley, 2011, p. 267). Humanism focuses on giving students choice and empowering them. Humanism involves “learning activities that guide, rather than direct the learning” (Pugsley, 2011, p. 267). It is helpful to get students to feel invested in their class work. An effective way to do this is by letting them choose a topic or way of assessment that they prefer. Humanism also focuses on the student as a whole and treating them with mutual respect. Lastly, humanism may involve service project learning where students gain content knowledge by impacting the community and world in a positive manner. This empowers students by providing them a choice on which project they want to do and gives them a sense of accomplishment by positively affecting their community.

Constructivism learning theory is similar to humanism. Constructivism seems to have four focal points that define its main characteristics. The four main characteristics of constructivist learning are “learners construct their own meanings; social interaction plays a key role; authentic learning tasks are crucial for meaningful learning; and, learning is dependent on

existing understanding” (Krahenbuhl, 2016, p. 98). Constructivism is a student-centered theory that exemplifies some of humanism’s characteristics, such as empowering students and giving them choices. Constructivism relies on all four of these characteristics interacting to promote meaningful and lasting learning. Both humanism and constructivism put the student at the center of the learning process.

The third learning theory is a newer and wide spreading theory called 21st Century Skills. 21st Century Skills consist of four main pillars that define the theory. These four pillars are collaboration, critical thinking, creativity, and communication. 21st Century Skills “allow students to adapt and be more responsive as the world around them changes” (Lapek, 2017, p. 25). This is the key feature of 21st Century Skills, as these skills, collaboration, communication, critical thinking, and creativity, are imperative to the success of students in the 21st century. These skills are meant to help students problem solve and prepare them for jobs that do not even exist yet. 21st Century Skills have become more prominent in schools around the country, as the biggest deficiency in youth today is their ability to communicate and work together. The emphasis on 21st Century Skills in today’s curriculum aims to help improve these skills among the young adults in the country today.

There are many characteristics of the learning theories mentioned above that align with my teaching philosophy. My teaching philosophy is centered around the student. I am determined to treat each student with respect, dignity, and empathy. Furthermore, I plan to go beyond my mathematic content standards and teach my students how to be an empathetic, moral, and successful professional in the community they plan to enter someday. Additionally, I plan to create healthy and positive relationships with each and every one of my students. This will create a trustworthy and friendly classroom environment and allow for a positive and safe classroom

where my students can prosper. Lastly, these connections and relationships formed with students will allow for more effective and efficient classroom management. Now, the question still remains about how these different characteristics apply to the learning theories discussed above.

There are many places where I plan to use humanism, constructivism, and 21st century skills in my classroom. I plan to implement humanism in my classroom by empowering my students and letting them have a voice, choice, and the ability to act upon these choices. I aim to provide alternative ways of assessment, opportunities for service learning projects, and allowing students to re-assess or have second chances. I think giving students the opportunity to turn in late work and still get partial credit displays how I am trying to see them as a human and model empathy. Furthermore, students are still being held accountable and will start developing responsibility for their work by utilizing this policy.

I plan to incorporate constructivism in many parts of the classroom. Again, I want to keep the students needs and interests at the center of their learning. This being said, I plan to incorporate times in class where peer tutoring and collaboration can occur. Also, the practicality of each skill we are learning and where it is needed in life is something I will emphasize. In addition, I will incorporate self-learning and letting students develop their own definitions of terms by presenting many examples of a phenomenon in math and allowing them to put their own words to it.

Lastly, 21st Century Skills will be scattered throughout the above-mentioned scenarios. However, I do plan to focus on critical thinking. This skill will be needed almost everyday in my class due to challenging word problems and when students search for projects or alternative assessments that they will choose to complete. Communication, collaboration, and creativity will also be evident in the everyday tasks of my classroom. One will see these skills when students

are working in groups, creating a model of a function, and completing alternative assessments that have authentic application to everyday life. My students will be prepared to be successful in the 21st century.

In conclusion, I plan to implement humanism, constructivism, and 21st century skills into my teaching philosophy and everyday classroom routine. There will be many instances while practicing these learning theories to model empathy, professionalism, and respect. I believe these learning theories provide a great foundation to implement the different qualities I aim to model and teach my students.

References

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