

Week Two Reflection: Learning Theory

As I may have mentioned in a previous post or reflection, I recently moved out of the classroom and into the office. So much of my “classroom” references will be me waxing nostalgic about being a teacher “in the trenches”. After reviewing the information presented regarding the learning theories of Behaviorism, Cognitivist, Constructivism, and Experiential Learning I have to say that at least some small element of each theory is present in my classroom. Overall, I believe my classroom to be more Constructivist than the others because that is the theory that my Urban Teacher Education Program pushed us toward as young teacher candidates. I’d say that, after spending the past decade actually putting these theories into practice, that emphasis on Constructivism is beginning to morph into a more Experiential Learning Theory learning environment.

Much like our Power Point for class this week shows one theory leading to another, my classroom has evolved. While my classroom exhibits some characteristics of each theory, it is clear that experience as a teacher has carried me from Behaviorism toward Experiential Learning Theory.

Behaviorism is present in some of the routine classroom management-type of activities in which my students engage. Coming into class and working on the question of the day shared with them via a goodle.doc. Yes, the question is often a review of the previous day’s concepts or discussions and perhaps that lends itself to the Cognitivist framework. But it is a first part of

every class, every day, for a set 5 points. And that immediate reward for rote behavior is usually enough to get the students through that task which allows me to take attendance and get organized while students transition into my class.

Cognitivism is prevalent throughout many of my classes as well. Some time in nearly every class is devoted to “memory game” type activities. We play our fair share of “Kahoot It” games on our Chromebooks that rely solely on a student’s ability to quickly recall specific facts. These daily reviews often culminate in a weekly or end-of-unit “Jeopardy-style” game where students then have to recall information from current and previous units. Sometimes the review games, both daily and longer term, are created or “constructed” by the students themselves with a nod to the Constructivist theory.

Constructivism is probably the most prevalent framework within which my students interact with learning. Again, technology allows us to do collaborative presentations on Google Slides or record small group sessions and then share with the class. My classes, to an outsider or a more teacher-centered educator probably often looked chaotic but I never stopped moving around the room. I encouraged discussion and debate and stories and tangents as long as students were engaging each other in the learning process and moving toward the learning objective I had established. I realize now that, more and more I have become more interested in that process than whether the students arrive at my predetermined outcomes. I believe I

have unknowingly moved what I have always thought to be a Constructivist classroom toward the realm of Experiential Learning.

Experiential Learning Theory in my classroom may not exist in its truest form. I cannot provide concrete examples of the “six propositions” cited by Kolb & Kolb (2005). But there are hints of ELT in my once confidently Constructivist approach. There is a definite focus on the journey rather than the destination. In fact, I often discuss that with my students. They like to point out that often what I write on the board for the day’s activity gets quickly derailed by class discussion. But it in those discussions that I find the most actual learning occurs. The students can remember the stories told during those discussions and can recall them in great detail much later in the course.

Many of those tangential discussions revolve around their own experiences and the lens through which they see the world. Many of times the talk turns to big picture world problems and it amazes me the depth of knowledge that today’s 8th and 9th graders are capable of demonstrating. They are infinitely worldlier than I was at their age and that experience and the passion it ignites opens the door to some amazing learning opportunities. And the best part is, students don’t know their learning. They think all we did talk.

Wow, I just realized how much I may miss being in the classroom. I guess I’ll just have to continue my learning theory evolution when “teaching” my teaching staff. They may not know what hit them.