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Teaching and Learning Summative Essay

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According to Schunk (2008), a theory is “a scientifically acceptable set of principles offered to explain a phenomenon” (p. 3). “Theories provide frameworks for interpreting environmental observations and serve as bridges between research and education” (Suppes as cited in Schunk, 2008, p. 3). As Suppes stated, educators can use theories about teaching and learning to bridge research and the practice of education. Theory provides a firm foundation for educators to stand upon as they interact with students and attempt to create an educationally favorable atmosphere for all involved in the teaching and learning processes.

I believe the best type of teacher has a solid understanding of the various aspects that influence teaching and learning. For a teacher to be successful, I believe it is important for him/her to understand how his/her students learn. Having a working knowledge of behavioral and cognitive theories of learning can help a teacher better understand how learning occurs and how different students achieve success in different ways.

Schunk (2008) identified six critical issues in the study of learning. I believe it is essential for teachers to understand these issues and how they affect learning. These six issues are, “Which processes affect learning? What is the role of memory? What is the role of motivation? How does transfer occur? Which processes are involved in self-regulation? and What are the implications for instruction?” (Schunk, 2008, p. 16). Applying these six questions to each theory of learning can help a teacher better understand the theory and how to relate a particular theory to practice.

Teachers need to have an understanding of theory because this understanding can help them better serve and educate their students. Behavioral theories view learning as “a change in the rate, frequency of occurrence, or form of behavior or response, which occurs primarily as a function of environmental factors” (Schunk, 2008, p.16). Behavioral theories stress the role of the environment in learning and how stimuli are arranged and responses are reinforced (Schunk, 2008). If a teacher understands these aspects of the behavioral theories, he/she might use this knowledge as he/she designs his/her classroom or educational environment and the type of feedback he/she gives his/her students. Cognitive theories, on the other hand, “stress the acquisition of knowledge and skills, the formation of mental structures, and the processing of information and beliefs” (Schunk, 2008, p.16). Cognitive theories stress the role of learners’ thoughts, beliefs, attitudes and values. Therefore, a teacher might use aspects cognitive theories in the classroom when he/she considers students’ thought processes while writing lesson plans or designs opportunities for students to rehearse, transform, code, store, or retrieve information.

The more a teacher knows about the various ways students learn, the more ways he/she can reach the students on a personal level in order to ensure that learning occurs. Understanding ways to improve instruction and how students take in knowledge and information is critical for a teacher. For example, understanding the concept of learning modalities can help a teacher create an educational environment conducive to all four modalities in order to better meet the needs of all students (Powell, n.d.). Using humor in the classroom is another example of how an instructor might apply his/her knowledge about a theory or concept regarding teaching and learning. According to Kher, Molstad, and Donahue (1999), “Appropriate and timely humor in the college classroom can foster mutual openness and respect and contribute to overall teaching effectiveness” (¶ 1).

I use my knowledge about teaching and learning in the classroom and as I interact with students outside the classroom. From the ways I arrange my classroom to the way I format our classroom discussions and dialogue, I use theory as a framework for my educational practice. I believe there is strong value in understanding theory because it helps me understand my students and how they learn. It also helps me have a better understanding of myself and my personal preferences and styles. Being aware of my preferences is important so I do not always teach to my style or comfort level. I need to branch out and teach in ways that will effectively help my students learn. Understanding theory helps me to do this.

I believe that theory and practice complement one another. Therefore, having a solid understanding of theory can help complement an educator’s practice. Educational practice can also influence theory. I believe as we work and perform our everyday calling, we can learn from our students, colleagues, and the environment. What we learn might trigger a new thought or discovery, which might lead to a new research topic. This research could possibly lead to the formulation of a new theory.

I do believe there is value in studying teaching and learning theories. Studying these theories provides a strong foundation and framework for educational practice. This foundation helps to better serve students and teachers throughout the learning process. Knowledge of theories helps teachers to better understand how to serve their students and themselves. The continued study and application of theories can also open the door to the discovery of new ideas and theories about teaching and learning. I believe that learning is a lifelong process. In order for one to effectively do his/her job as a teacher, it is critical to understand how learning occurs and how to serve and educate students.

References

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