

Learning Theories Paper

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## Introduction

Two very common learning theories applied in the classroom are cognitivism and humanism. These two often seen as opposing theories, but, if applied together, instruction can often reach an entire class of students with their preferred learning style. Using cognitive learning theory and choice theory, my classroom will become an effective, friendly, collaborative, and respectful place for learning.

## Cognitive Learning Theory

The fundamental idea behind the cognitivist idea of education is to focus on the processes behind learning, focusing more on actual cognition than behaviors of students. This is placed in juxtaposition to behaviorism; the teacher should focus on how students actively process information rather than passively adapt to their situation and surroundings. Paas emphasizes a primary goal as optimizing “learning of complex cognitive tasks by transforming contemporary scientific knowledge on the manner in which cognitive structures and processes are organized (i.e., cognitive architecture) into guidelines for instructional design”. This is a large, technical quote, so we will unpack it. Through cognitivism, teachers must use scientific information on how the brain processes and encodes information to understand what helps 90% of students. If a teacher can implement instructional strategies that greatly help most of a class, then student performance and retention should overall improve. These processes, i.e. moving things from short-term memory storage to long-term memory storage, are really the priorities of teaching, so optimizing these should help move the class towards its goal.

## Humanism and Choice Theory

Unlike cognitivism, humanism focuses on the differences between each student and how differentiating can benefit the individual. This is often illustrated by giving choices in the classroom, fostering a student's desire to learn, and focusing on personal satisfaction and learning instead of grading. Another core idea of humanism is the importance of a non-threatening environment; students will tend to learn best, feel more engaged, and tend to prefer if they are comfortable in the educational setting. This Choice Theory is often seen as effective when given a class of very mixed-ability students. The common application of this differentiation, however, is grouping them by their different ability range; now, supplying the class with choices of different learning modalities, assignments, and assessments can be more beneficial and allow them to "pick" their own groups (Platt). If students are forcibly grouped and not given a choice, they often will develop negative feelings on the subject, teacher, or even themselves. This idea can be applied to much of the classroom using choice theory. If students are given choices in their education and feel that their voice matters, then they will become more motivated to learn the material presented to them.

## Reflection

I plan to relate these two ideas to create an effective, friendly, collaborative, and respectful place for learning. If cognitive learning theory is to reach 90% of students and humanism is to emphasize differentiating for the other 10%, then, in theory, they should be able to adequately instruct every student in their preferred method. There are many cognitive strategies that can be applied to a classroom: presenting things with multiple modalities, encouraging annotations, encouraging specific note taking strategies, asking students to

paraphrase or reiterate things, encouraging daily work, etcetera (Cognitive). I believe that keeping a well-run class room, emphasizing procedures and expectations from day one, will provide rigidity and consistency for students that may not have it in many places in their lives. And by rigidity, I do not mean inflexibility; my rigidity should come from consistent expectations, yet I should be flexible in my assessments, assignments, instruction, and compassion.

This flexibility previously mentioned will come from my choice theory and humanistic strategies. I think a great way to create a humanistic classroom is to create a safe and comfortable environment. I can do this by encouraging students regularly in their work, keeping snacks in the room, allowing students to go to the bathroom or get a drink, or offering choices (Western). I can give students important choices in ways they are assessed, certain rules for the classroom, due dates for weekly assignments, or even if they would prefer smaller daily assignments over weekly assignments.

### Conclusion

My teaching philosophy revolves around giving students a friendly and open environment that is still conducive to learning. I believe that students will respond best to having the rigidity of procedures and expectations that are set on day one, and also having the flexibility of what those procedures are. I should be able to use note-taking strategies, presenting in multiple modalities, and other strategies to appeal to most of the class; I should then focus on differentiation to help the rest of the class.

## References

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