

Learning Theories: An Analysis and Reflection from an Aspiring Teacher

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Of the many learning theories in education, two that have been discussed in class this semester stood out to me the most. The emphases of humanism and choice theory relate most to my philosophy of teaching. As explained by Huitt (2009):

[Humanism] is in contrast to the beliefs of operant conditioning theorists who believe that all behavior is the result of the application of consequences or to the beliefs of cognitive psychologists who hold that the discovery of concepts or processing of information is a primary factor in human learning.

The emphases of the humanism and choice theory support the love and logic style of classroom management I plan to incorporate into my teaching. After explaining each of the theories, I will address how I will implement each in my future classroom.

A key foundation of humanism is that it preserves the inherent dignity of each student (Tuft, 2020). According to Radu (2018), “Humanists share a theory according to which the mind has the power to discern the essential characteristics of the world and human nature” (p. 18). The power of the mind can be engaged by focusing on intrinsic motivations for students to make good decisions. Humanism is founded on tradition that promotes a “harmonious and balanced personality” (Radu, 2018, p. 18). One of the main goals of the humanist model is for students to achieve self-actualization (Radu, 2018, p. 19). This self-actualization requires a sort of mindfulness and thoughtful reflection from the student.

William Glasser’s Choice Theory is a specific type of humanism in which teachers practice supporting, encouraging, listening, accepting, trusting, respecting, and negotiating differences with their students (WGI, 2010). Providing support, encouragement, and respect helps create a positive learning environment that in turn builds trust. Establishing these

foundational concepts of choice theory early helps teachers not only understand why students behave the way they do, but also how they can help the students succeed based on that knowledge (Goguen, 2017). In choice theory, the five basic needs of the student are defined as survival, love and belonging, power, freedom, and fun. The most important of these from a teacher's standpoint is love and belonging, which connects perfectly to the concept of a love and logic classroom.

Practicing humanism in my classroom will start on the first day of class. In order to show students that I recognize their inherent dignity, I must first show them respect. Building upon the foundation of respect and trust, the relationships that I form with my students will help me to understand how to encourage them through intrinsic motivation more than extrinsic motivation. I also plan to engage the students in metacognition or thinking about their own thinking. One way I would implement this would be through daily bell-ringer assignments that help the students get into the right mindset for the class period. This will help students form a habit of mindfulness and thoughtful reflection that will ultimately help them achieve the self-actualization for which humanism strives. I think thoughtful reflection is often forgotten in math classes, so I will make a point of including it in my teaching as it is an important factor for self-improvement.

All of the caring habits of teachers practicing choice theory as outlined in WGI (2009) resonated with how I plan to teach. Of the seven, listening will be a main part of my teaching because I believe that truly listening to students shows respect while also gaining respect and trust from the students. I also want to develop strong relationships with my students, which will not be possible unless I show that I care about them and that I support them in their learning experience. I hope to create a safe and supportive learning environment in my love and logic classroom that will satisfy my students' need for love and belonging.

Humanism and Glasser's Choice Theory embody the aspects of teaching theories I hope to put into practice as a teacher. Humanism as a whole emphasizes the importance of balance and self-actualization, which is founded in recognizing one's own inherent dignity and focusing on intrinsic motivations for good decisions. Glasser's Choice Theory, which is under the umbrella of humanism more specifically addresses the five basic needs of students. Encouraging, supporting, accepting, trusting, and respecting students all fall under the concept of choice theory. Through practicing all these habits, I hope to guide my students to be the best they can be, in mathematics and as growing individuals.

## References

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