

College of Education Graduate Students Examine the Advantages of Integrating Research-Based
Instructional Theories into Every Day Classroom Instruction

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Publication Date – October 15, 2014

Introduction

During the writer's careers as educators, we have had the wonderful opportunity to answer many thought provoking questions of both undergraduate and graduate students. The exciting part of teaching at the university level is the challenging questions that come from inquisitive students. During lectures and class discussions, students often bring up controversial issues on a great many of subjects. Multiple questions have always kept us *on our toes*; it has been challenging to answer these well-thought-out questions. Students inevitably realize that the more we delve into controversial issues and detailed content, more questions invariably arise. This process is one exciting aspect of the teaching process.

Analytical Discussion

One controversial topic is the *practical use of theories*. Although some students want *right answers* and to know which theories we recommend for effective teaching, in reality, public school teachers and university professors all know that when it comes to theories, there are no completely right learning theories for all classrooms and all students on any level of instruction. That realization is the exciting part about studying and analyzing theories in depth.

Students often ask, "Why do we have theories? Why do we use them at all? At the most basic level, a theory is an orderly, integrated set of statements that describes, explains, and predicts behavior. Theories are directly influenced by cultural values and give meaning to what we see. When a researcher investigates and collects information through observation, he needs a clear idea of what information is important to collect. He needs a clear lens in which to look through. Valid theories are verified by research and serve as a sound basis for practical action. When knowledge precedes action, coherent plans replace floundering and groping attempts at solutions.

In the field of child development, there are multiple theories with different ideas about what children need, need to know, and how they develop physically, socially, emotionally, and academically. Investigators do not always agree on the meaning of what they see. As yet, no single theory has been able to explain all behaviors of children. The existence of multiple theories propels the advancement of knowledge; researchers are trying continually to support, contradict and integrate these diverse points of view.

With the above information in mind, students in a Human Learning graduate course were asked to answer the following question on a piece of paper: **What are some advantages of classroom teachers using theories that can be applied to class learning?** Student comments showed a solid grasp on not only the purpose of using theories, yet also how to apply theories to classroom instruction. The following are their comments and reflections based on their instruction in class about the subject of theories and how theories affect teaching and learning.

Graduate Students Responses

Student 1 - The advantage that I see as an educator, relative to theoretical flux, is the well-researched, manufactured options that one can use to explain the outcomes of both effective learning environments and ineffective ones as well. When a teacher has theories (empirical and philosophical) as a resource for learning and then efficiently implements their principles successfully, everyone who is part of the experience wins. The use of a theory, whether it is one or many combined, is a pathway to guide teachers in effective instruction and assessment of learning outcomes.

Student 2 - According to a lot of textbooks that write about theories, there are four advantages. Theories allow us to summarize the results of many research studies and integrate numerous principles of learning. They provide starting points for conducting new research.

Theories help us make sense of and explain research findings. Finally, theories give us ideas about how humans learn and afford us the opportunity to create learning environments that are beneficial to all types of learning styles.

Student 3 - Theories often have experience and experience is usually a key component. Theories allow more learning for the teacher. Just like in textbooks, theories tell us why certain factors are important or even exist. Theories are built upon theories which allow more theories to be brought up and/or made. Theories also help explain to students how concepts are learned. Theories allow teachers to base some of their strategies and theories to help students become successful in the learning process.

Student 4 - There are many advantages of using theories as related to learning. Theories help educators to examine what has been done in the past. We can then take this information and apply it to our teaching as it is relevant in today's time. As educators, we take bits and pieces of different theories to form our own theories. This allows us to teach the whole child. Using theories helps us to educate the child in the best possible way for each individual child. Theories also help us to move forward and formulate new ideas. Education is constantly changing. Without these past and present theories, we could not move forward as a society.

Student 5 - Textbooks explain that there are four advantages of Theories. The first is that it allows us to summarize results of research studies and integrate numerous principles of learning. For instance, in one article I read cited a study using groups in the project (LLTC.) Once the results were summarized, the outcome supported **the theory that web-based video learning can be a valuable effective tool for learning.**

Student 6 - Theories are educator's explanations for learning. Theories are a combination of different learning techniques compiled into data to provide future educators with

knowledge of how to teach students. Theories have a beginning but basically do not have an end. There is always new research and new information on old and new theories. Although a theory may have been derived many centuries ago does not mean that it will not be effective today; however, there will always be new information to add to make the theory more helpful. I know that in my personal life as a teacher and a mother, I do not only use one theory but I combine a multitude of theories. There are certain parts of theories that I find useful and some that I do not, but in order to be the best mother and teacher, I feel that I can dissect them and use them accordingly.

Student 6 - One of the biggest advantages in using theories in learning is that the theories are always changing. Often times, there are multiple theories dealing with the same idea, and these different theories are often polar opposites of each other. What this allows educators to do is to use multiple theories, to teach about the many personalities and learning styles that are in their classrooms. And because there is a broad spectrum of theories to choose from, this allows the educators to apply different theories as the student populations change within their classroom every year.

Student 7 - Theories come from research-based studies on how learning occurs. They provide information about the mechanisms involved in learning. Theories focus on the underlying issues in learning, observable behaviors, and thought processes. Theories tell us what factors are important and why they are important. There are several advantages to using theories to study the learning process. When using theories, one is able to review results of research studies and incorporate various principles of learning strategies. Theories can also be the starting point for new research in learning. Theories explain research findings and assist teachers in understanding the research involved in learning. Since theories give teachers insight to the

underlying variables of learning, they can help in designing and providing rich learning environments in our classrooms. The richer the learning environment is, the greater the success the teacher will have in facilitating learning to his/her students. I feel it is important for us as teachers to learn these theories to be able to apply them to their classrooms.

Student 8 - Many people often wonder how or why learning occurs. Theories provide explanations for learning. There are multiple advantages to using theories as related to learning. Some studies a combined amount of learning principles at the same time while compiling research results for effective usage. New research always needs a starting point and theories provide the questions that begin any research study. Theories also help explain the findings. Repeated research studies are conducted over a period and sometimes end with conflicting results. These results however show that not all theories are going to be as effective *in all situations*. Theories also lead to teachers designing more effective learning environments, classroom management, and instructional practices that allow learning to occur. Theories are the foundation for implementing effective learning practices.

Student 9 - The advantages of theories are the basis of all studies. Teachers must start somewhere with the planning of their lessons. If they have a good theory to go off of they can too branch out and conduct more research themselves over the subject/topic they are planning to teach. Researchers observe many of the same factors affecting learning time and time again. In contrast, theories of learning continue to evolve in time. This is why there are always new ways to improve teaching and different ways to approach learning. Theories are at the heart of classroom teaching and learning. They are also a starting point for conducting new research. We can all learn from theories in ways that help broaden our own study, resulting in more effective planning and classroom instruction.

Student 10 - I see theories as being a starting place for what an educator wants to accomplish with his or her students. Although theories are typically proven time and time again, they still leave room for the educator to try new teaching strategies and branch off of what the theory states. Theories provide a solid base for where to begin in teaching a lesson and what methods has shown success in a research study. Theories allow educators a way to try and understand why and how a certain student may have difficulties. With the basic understanding of the purposes for theories, an educator can arrive at a clear understanding of how a student learns as an individual as well as a member of an entire group.

Student 11 - Using theories gives the teacher a historical background to start with. Theories can show the teacher what has worked or has not worked in the past. We know that history repeats itself; using past theories can help with understanding present theories. Theories allow us to summarize results from past studies. They provide starting points for conducting new research. Theories help to explain research findings arriving at conclusions for specific ways to teach students resulting in more learner outcomes.

Student 12 - Theories provide us “new” teachers with a place to begin. Theories summarize the results of many research studies so teachers are able to see what has worked in the past and use this to our advantage. As our book says, I think we can use some theories to help us design learning environments and instructional strategies that facilitate human learning to the greatest possible degree. I think this should be our ultimate goal as teachers.

Concluding Remarks

College of Education graduate school students usually have experience teaching in the public schools. Because of their teaching with diverse students, they find it interesting to

integrate historical learning theorists' theories not only into their planning for lessons, they integrate multiple theories into their classroom management plans.

In this writing, it should be apparent now that theories make educators think and continually re-evaluate their lesson planning and instructional strategies. New points of view resulting in theories question our commonly held theories. New emerging theories and plans of action are implemented because of new theories (even those old theories that are recycled with a slightly different twist).

Theories definitely have their place in our world. Research, resulting in theories, should not govern everything we do in life; there is a time that **common sense** and gut instinct should override theories. However, *the open-minded and eclectic individual considers them all!*

Suggested Readings

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