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Case 4
Theories of Learning

Initial Response

Upon first glancing at the materials and content of case 4, I am surprised to find what this program has been fairly selective with, and that is an abstract explanation of theory. There has of course been mention of specific pedagogical, philosophical and developmental theories, but for some reason this instant sticks-out in my mind. Perhaps it has something to do with the case preamble explaining that part of understanding how we teach comes from understanding theory and practice live in the classroom. Though as I read through these materials, I am not so surprised to find that an explicit explanation of how they live in the classroom is not offered. Like many of the other cases in this book, and certainly with this program by-in-large, the true understanding comes from within each individual, and personally, I am fine with that. One thing I did notice as I read through the materials, was that like many other cases and suggestions on philosophy, pedagogy or theory, there are some things I agree with, some I don't, and others I honestly don't care much to fully delve into.

The first article titled "Better Read than Dead" was especially relevant to me this week as I have become more and more comfortable in my field experience. As I begin to notice the routine and nuances of my partner teachers' style, I found myself in a conversation with her on reading and writing. Being in a Humanities class and as an English Teacher by trade, my partner teacher fully believes in the value and necessity of reading and writing, and frequently comments on the dissolving aptitude for such activities displayed by students. As part of her own personal crusade against this problem, my partner teacher insists that her classes read at least 10 minutes at the beginning of each class, even when she is teaching social studies or there is a trip planned to go down to the library. While concepts like classroom management, conditions of learning, and textual quotes from "Among Schoolchildren" float through my brain, I feel like I am beginning to bring together what I already think I know about teaching theories and what I am reading on the pages in front of me.

Considered Response

Today's presentation on Theories of Learning was, as I expected it to be, kind of dry and boring. While I understand the necessity to introduce some of the more popular theories and to explain them in some depth, I think it could have been presented in a far more interesting way. I'm not trying to be critical of the group so much as I am simply stating that I think it would have been more entertaining if it wasn't so PowerPoint and note / definition based. Explaining any theory can be by nature boring, but as inquiry based learning suggests, there is usually a more engaging way to present material. That being said, maybe at this relatively early stage in the semester it is to be expected that such an approach was taken, especially considering the subject matter.

What I especially enjoyed about today's presentation on theories of learning was the way in which specific attention was paid to the theories of Cognitive Development and Constructivism; namely the section on how to aid cognitive learning and the strategies for applying Constructivism in the classroom. With respect to aiding cognitive learning, I really

liked the transferring of the theoretical into practical application – specifically the instruction on having the attention of the class, making sure to separate important from the unimportant, to present material in clear way, and to focus more on the deeper meaning of issues and meaning rather than insisting on the regurgitation of knowledge and information. I also found it helpful to review Piaget's Stages of Development, and through them come to better understand the way in which the cognitive theory really comes to life. By labeling specific stages of development (*which can be dangerous*) I found it as an insightful commentary on the way our interpretation of the world around us evolves as we grow older. Moreover, it also speaks to one way in which we as beginning teachers can start to make sense out of the sometimes nonsensical actions of our students.

I can also see how Cognitive theory shares commonalities with Constructivism. Specifically, both theories in my opinion, offer a lot to the notion of the value of the learners experience with knowledge – how they go about obtaining it, and how learning is influenced by one's own perception of the world. More so, that the value of learning resides within those who are actually doing the learning, and as such can be shaped to reflect that person's needs. Perhaps it even makes them more inclined to value the experiences of others. Again, similarly to the information on aiding cognitive thinking, I really enjoyed the practical application of Constructivism in the classroom through the activation, reflection, collaboration, inquiry, and evolution of knowledge. Like Vygotsky, I too believe that social interaction comes before development, and as such should be seen as an important component of both our learning environments and the way we approach students and learning. While I find myself aligning with several elements of Constructivism, I must acknowledge that I believe with respect to education, as with any other societal faction, there is never a single theory or answer for all of its complexities. As social institutions, I think we need to be aware of how societal inequities and historical forms of oppression can become engrained if we simply allow social constructivism alone to define and control how we teach and how we set up or classroom.