

THEORIES IN TEACHING

A distinction can be made between theories of learning and theories of teaching. While theories of learning deal with the ways in which an organism learns, theories of teaching deal with the ways in which a person influences an organism to learn. Presumably, the learning theory subscribed to by a teacher will influence his theory of teaching.

Teachers who hold stimulus response (S-R) learning theories see teaching essentially as the control of learning by the management of reward. The teacher and learner must know the characteristics of a good performance in order that practice may be appropriately arranged. Errors must be diagnosed so that they will not be repeated. The teacher is not primarily concerned with the internal states of the organism, but instead with structuring the situations so that reward will operate to strengthen desired responses.

While the learner should be interested, problem-oriented and attentive, the best way to obtain these conditions is to manipulate the learning situation so that the learner accepts the problems posed because of the rewards involved. Attention is maintained and appropriate stimulus-response connections are strengthened through the precise application of rewards toward the goals set by the teacher. A teacher's role is to cause appropriate S-R bonds to be built up in the learner's behavior repertoire. Stimulus-response educators are not primarily concerned with what the learner does outside of the classroom setting.

The human organism can, of course, learn without being taught. In college and graduate school the aversive pattern survives in the now almost universal system of "assign and test". The teacher does not teach, he simply holds the student responsible for learning. The student must read books, study tests, perform experiments, and attend lectures, and he is responsible for doing so in the sense that, if he does not correctly report what he has seen, heard, or read, he will suffer aversive consequences. A test which proves too easy will be made harder because the teacher is afraid of weakening the threat under which his students are working. In many online college classes it is common for the students to never even see or speak to their instructor, except when it is exam time.

While humans do learn on their own, teaching is vitally important as a culture is no stronger than its capacity to transmit itself. It must impart an accumulation of skills, knowledge, and social and ethical practices to its new members. It is dangerous to suggest that it is beneath his dignity to learn what others already know, that there is something ignoble about not thinking in "original" ways. It is also dangerous to forego teaching important facts and principles in order to give the student a chance to discover them for himself.

While stimulus-response teaching theories are primarily based on studies of animals and children, Carl Rogers derived his theory of teaching from studies of adults. He says the

pedagogical teaching method makes sense in an unchanging environment, but “If there is one truth about modern man, it is that he lie in an environment which is *continually changing*.” Therefore the aim of education must be the facilitation of learning, and Rogers defines the role of the teacher as that of a *facilitator of learning*. There is a critical element to the relationship between the facilitator and the learner, which is dependent on the teachers possessing three attitudinal qualities: (1) realness or genuineness (2) nonpossessive caring, prizing, trust, and respect, and (3) empathic understanding and sensitive and accurate listening.

Malcolm Knowles provides the following guidelines for adult education that concern the conditions of learning and the principles of teaching. He begins with condition of learning, *The learners feel a need to learn*. For this the teacher must expose students to the possibility of self-fulfillment, stimulate an interest; each student must be helped toward clarifying their own aspirations for improvement. The teacher helps each student diagnose the gap between his aspiration and this present level of performance; then helps the student identify the life problems they experience because of the gaps in their personal equipment.

An auto technician seeking to supplement his income may benefit from a course in ASE certification, the same goes for the computer technology teacher and a C++ course. Someone who is unsure of his intellect in upper class social situations may benefit from a course in classical literature or world history. We all have problems and many times education can help solve them, it is the teachers job to illustrate this point and create a need.

The second condition of learning is, *The learning environment is characterized by physical comfort, mutual trust and respect, mutual helpfulness, freedom of expression, and acceptance of differences*. The teacher should provide physical conditions that are comfortable (as to seating, smoking, temperature, ventilation, lighting, etc) and conducive to interaction, with preferably no person sitting *behind* another person. The teacher accepts each student as a person of worth and respects her/his feelings and ideas, and seek to build relationships of mutual trust and helpfulness among the students by encouraging cooperative activities and refraining from inducing competitiveness and judgementalness. The teacher should expose his own feelings and contributes his resources as a *colearner* in the spirit of mutual inquiry.

The learners perceive the goals of learning experience to be their goals. The teacher involves the students in a mutual process of formulating learning objectives in which the needs of the students, of the institution, of the teacher, of the subject matter, and of the society are taken into account. The students should be encouraged to discuss what *they* want to get out of the class (within reason) in the beginning, and the teacher should work to help them fulfill that goal.

The learners accept a share of the responsibility for planning and operating a learning experience, and therefore have a feeling of commitment toward it. The teacher shares her thinking about options available in the designing of learning experiences and the selection of materials and methods and involves the students in deciding among these options jointly. There can be an open class discussion where each student gets to give his or her opinion and then the subject can be put to a vote. Or for individual assignments the student can be given much leeway in choosing their topics they wish to research or report on, provided they meet the academic standards of the teacher.

The learners participate actively in the learning process. The teacher helps the students to organize themselves (project groups, learning-teaching-teams, independent study, etc.) to share responsibility in the process of mutual inquiry. The students should feel like they are an integral part of the process and are needed in some capacity. This is the meaning of the term "Let the class do the work!" The aim should be increased participation.

The learning process is related to and makes use of the experience of the learners. The teacher helps the students exploit their own experiences as resources for learning through the use of such techniques as discussion, role playing, case method, etc. The teacher should also present his own experiences as a resource for his students. Open group discussion should be encouraged as well as questions from the students.

The teacher should help the students apply new learning to their experience, and thus make the learning more meaningful and integrated. A photography teacher who is teaching how to take long exposures would help his students retain what they are taught if he assigns them a project photographing night scenes in low light. A philosophy teacher teaching ethics could ask his students to assess their everyday decisions according to a certain ethical theory, thus helping his students to actually use their knowledge in everyday life.

The learners have a sense of progress toward their goals. The teacher involves the students in developing mutually acceptable criteria and methods for measuring progress toward the learning objectives. Grades are one way of measuring progress; also obtaining a certain level of proficiency at some skill is a way to judge progress, such as typing at a certain WPM rate. It is important for the students to feel they are advancing in some way and not just wasting their time.

The teacher should also help the student develop and apply procedures for self-evaluation according to these criteria. Once the student leaves the classroom setting they need a way of evaluating themselves in their continuing (lifelong) education.