RUNNING HEAD: MY PERSONAL THEORY OF LEARNING AND INSTRUCTION

My Personal Theory of Learning and Instruction

Sarah Komendat

Educational Foundations

Buffalo State College

EDF 503, Spring 2010

Dr. James Gold

**Introduction**

**My purpose as an educator is to create a passionate learning environment that is inviting to all students. I bring to the classroom my positive outlook, trustworthiness, and creativity by providing encouragement to student success, by being a passionate teacher, and by integrating creativity with the core curriculum. The experiences that I have lived through during graduate school have greatly influenced my overall view of education. Howard Gardner’s eight Multiple Intelligences have made quite an impact about how I evaluate my variety of classroom activities. My greatest passions about teaching are now enhancing creativity in students, implementing activities in the classroom that involve the multiple intelligences, and creating an effective behavior management system.**

**With strengths come weaknesses. There are always some attributes in oneself that can be improved. Behavior management is one of the skills I know I need to hone in on and develop. I learn about my strengths and weaknesses through self-reflection and evaluation. Journaling and discussions with colleagues help me to see my teaching through different angles. I have learned how to reflect and build my own understanding about what my classroom should look like, feel like, and sound like. Reflection and evaluation are quite important skills teachers must own since it they are such valuable tools. If one cannot reflect on their mistakes or self-evaluate their teaching styles, one cannot be a good teacher.**

**Creativity**

**Creativity is a necessary component to a happy and successful life. Without creativity, life becomes so monotonous that one can lose the meaning of life. Creativity helps us solve our problems and think. Giving students the power to be creative can also boost their self-worth and in turn, make them better people. As a future teacher, I plan to make creativity a great focus in my classroom. Activities that involve creativity will be involved in everyday lessons, whether they are general problem-solving activities or integrated creativity with the core curriculum subjects.**

**Teachers need to start within themselves to make a highly creative environment. We must give ourselves the ability to grow our creativity in order to most effectively nurture students’ creativity. Effective teachers have confidence in their creativity and understand the importance of helping students find their creativity. Fleith (2000) stated that “the creation of enhancing, harmonious and meaningful environment can contribute to the development of creative potential” (p. 148). Teachers must create an open, inviting, and safe environment for students to feel free to express themselves. Sternberg and Williams (as cited in Fleith, 2000), outlined these necessary components for a creative environment: “allowing time for creative thinking; rewarding creative ideas and products; encouraging sensible risks; allowing mistakes; imagining other viewpoints; exploring the environment; questioning assumptions” (p. 148). When teachers make room for these components of creative environment a whole new world of creativity can open up for students.**

**Creative Problem-Solving skills are unbelievably valuable skills that students can take with them and use for many situations throughout their entire life. They are so important that there may/should be standards and curriculum for Creative Problem-Solving in the future. Creative Problem-Solving is a process in which a person develops a goal wish or challenge, defines the problem, generates ideas, and formulates a solution to the problem (Miller, Vehar, &Firestien, 2001). The tactics involved when defining the problem and generating ideas teaches students to become better convergent and divergent thinkers. When generating ideas, students learn how to seek wild and unusual ideas, build on other ideas, defer judgment, and creating a high quantity of ideas (Miller, Vehar & Firestien, 2001). These skills will be helpful when generating ideas for many other life skills as well. Deferring judgment can be hard for students, but when they do develop that skill they become overall better people. The growth of this skill of Problem-Solving is so helpful to individuals since it can be used to solve posed fifth grade such as energy consumption and several health issues. It can be helpful later in life when students need to Problem-Solve for their future job issues and company problems. One can also use Creative Problem-Solving for such problems as how to lose weight and figure out an exercise routine. The applications and uses are endless. Creative Problem-Solving should be taught to elementary students and applied to core curriculum subjects. The integration to the core curriculum may also make some typically dry subjects more fun for students. When posed the problem: “how to let an egg drop to the ground without breaking”, students may come up with some fun ideas and have a good time, while still learning a lot about science, physics, and teamwork.**

**One thing teachers need to be aware of is making sure that they do not “squelch” creativity. Sometimes, teachers set-up a negative environment that hinders creativity with sayings such as: “that’s a waste of time”, “stay on my good side”, “let’s not bother”, “walk, don’t run”, “you’re not ready for this yet”, etc. (Davis, 2004). These kinds of statements turn students away from feeling safe to take risks or turn in good ideas. Educators need to make sure that they are always encouraging creative risk taking and openness, since we never know where something great might start.**

**Multiple Intelligences**

**All eight of Howard Gardner’s Multiple Intelligences should be eminent in the classroom. Many researchers have proven that children learn in many different ways, therefore, we need to cater to all students’ needs. In many classrooms these days, if a student exceeds kinesthetically, yet is an average reader and mathematician, they are considered an average student. A good teacher would be able to figure out this child’s kinesthetic strengths and create instruction around sports and dance. Integrating this child’s intelligence into learning would help him learn better and make him more confident in school. In turn, his grades would increase.**

**Several schools operate on the basis of the Multiple Intelligences Theory. One school that does this is the L. Fuller Elementary School in Gloucester, Massachusetts. Their curriculum centers on involving all of the multiple intelligences within learning activities. They also take extra special care to figure out each student’s strengths within the multiple intelligences and cater to those strengths. The students that attend the school truly feel that they are gaining a lot of knowledge. One of the boys at the school claimed, “Multiple Intelligences help us find what we’re good at” (Hamilton & Gardner, 1995).**

**Exampling all of the Multiple Intelligences can help teachers and students to get a good idea about other peoples’ interests. When a student who struggles with the musical intelligence works with a peer that finds the musical intelligence to be a strength of theirs, the struggling student may gain a new appreciation for that intelligence and those that are good at it. If we learn what it is like to step into another’s shoes of different intelligence, we can gain an understanding for how every person in this world has a strength, and that sometimes we just need to find it since it may be different from the standard, worldly perceived logical intelligence.**

**Snowman, McCown, and Biehler (2009) noted that “it is a mistake to think that every lesson has to be designed to involve all eight intelligences. But with little a little thought, many lessons can be designed to include two or three” (p. 118). At the beginning of the school year, teachers should give students questionnaires and take the time to get to know their students so that they can figure out what multiple intelligences are within the classroom. With this knowledge, the teacher can develop their lessons to incorporate two to three intelligences to each lesson, making learning more meaningful for the students.**

**Behavior Management**

**Behavior management is an important skill that all teachers need. It is also one of the hardest skills to obtain since it takes time and the ability to learn from mistakes. First year teachers are encouraged to see what works for veteran teachers and do their research about good behavior plans.**

**When new teachers start their first year of teacher, they can do all the research in the world to prepare themselves for behaviors that they may encounter, but the best way to learn about handling trouble behaviors is experience. Our experiences shape us as people and as a future teacher when I am asked about how I would handle certain behavior situations I think back to similar experiences for my answer, not what I read in a textbook. The best way to feel more comfortable about dealing with behavioral issues is to get out there and observe or become a substitute teacher, learn by doing.**

**The authoritative approach to managing one’s classroom is the best for students since it pushes students to “eventually regulate their own behavior” (Snowman, McCown, & Biehler, 2009, p. 443). Snowman, McCown, and Biehler (2009) stated that by explaining the rationale for classroom rule sand adjusting those rules as students demonstrate the ability to govern themselves appropriately, authoritative teachers hope to convince students that adopting the teacher’s norms for classroom behavior as their own will lead to the achievement of valued academic goals” (p. 443). Ultimately, teachers are preparing students for their entrance to the “real-world” and teaching them to have control over themselves from an early age can equip students with the amazing skill of self-control, essential to an emotionally healthy life.**

**In order to obtain respect in the classroom, teachers need to exhibit a pattern of “withitness”. Jacob Kounin (1970) felt that teachers need to show students that they know “what is going on in the classroom”, keep up with the fads, and know when trouble is beginning. If teachers are able to be “with it” in the classroom, Kounin said then they will know when trouble is starting and can “nip it in the bud” (Snowman, McCown, and Biehler, 2009, p. 444). Being “with it” in the classroom is important because it lets students know that you see eye to eye with them on their level. It is also helpful to stop problem behaviors early so that things do not escalate out of control.**

**When teachers want to avoid problems from confusion, they should result to creating a structured routine to the day. Classrooms that involve a set schedule to the day avoid problem behaviors from students that feel overwhelmed by not knowing their schedule. Routines are particularly useful for students with special needs, especially those with autism spectrum disorders. Students that have autism benefit greatly from having a routine schedule so they can their mind prepared for the day’s subjects and know what they will be doing.**

**A very simple way to keep problem behaviors from happening is to keep students occupied and engaged. Most often, problem behaviors are a result of boredom. Doing fun and engaging activities in the classroom keeps students from thinking about causing trouble. The best kinds of activities to keep children engaged are projects and performances, since if students finish early on other assignments they can usually jump right into working on an on-going project.**

**Many teachers say that the first day of school sets the tone for the entire rest of the year. In preparing for one’s first day, Snowman, McCown, and Biehler (2009) suggest that teachers**

**Show you are confident and prepared the first day of class; think ahead about how you plan to handle classroom routine, and explain basic procedures the first few minutes of the first day, establish class rules, call attention to them, and explain why they are necessary; begin class work the first day with an instructional activity that is clearly stated and can be completed quickly and successfully; give clear instructions, hold students accountable for carrying them out, and provide frequent feedback; and be professional but pleasant, and try to establish a businesslike but supportive classroom atmosphere. (p. 451-453)**

**Starting the year off with a great first day by using the tips above can start a great relationship with students. It is important to plan ahead and be ready so that the confidence for success can be apparent to one’s students. Using the advice outlined above, one can limit any panic or fear when setting reasonable guidelines for classroom behavior since students will know right off the bat what behavior is expected of them and the consequences if the rules are broken.**

**B. F. Skinner’s approach of Operant Conditioning is a very effective tool for rewarding good behaviors and weaning out bad behaviors by using reinforcements, timeouts, or extinction. Snowman, McCown, and Biehler (2009) stated that if a student exhibits good behaviors and the teacher wants to keep that going, they can reinforce the behavior by rewarding them with praise or a good grade (positive reinforcement) or by taking away something bad like homework (negative reinforcement). They also said that if there is a bad behavior to be eliminated, the teacher could either remove the student from the situation (time out) or ignore the problem behavior until it does not happen anymore (extinction). Punishment (yelling or ridiculing) is most often ineffective and can sometimes be harmful to the student (p. 223).**

**All of these strategies and ideas about behavior management are things that a future teacher may want to give some time to and try in my future classroom. Overall, however, one of the best ways to regulate students’ behavior is to educate them about the importance about avoiding violence and bullying. Knowledge is powerful and if one does their best to let students know how to avoid violence and how to make good choices, one may encourage students to always do the right thing and help others.**

**Conclusion**

Creativity, the Multiple Intelligences, and the interest to improve my methods of behavior management are the factors that shape the teacher that I am today. As the students that I work with grow, so does myself, placing an influence on the components of my philosophy to grow and change from time to time. As a future teacher of my own classroom, I plan to incorporate much of what I have learned from my graduate school experiences into my everyday classroom routines.

References

Davis, G. A. (2004). Creativity is forever. Dubuque, IA: Kendall / Hunt Publishing Company.

Fleith, D. S. (2000). Teacher and student perceptions of creativity in the classroom environment. *Roeper Review, 22*(3), 148.

Miller, B., Vehar, J., Firestien, R. (2001). Facilitation: a door to creative leadership. Williamsville, NY: Innovation Resources, Inc.

Snowman, J., McCown, R., & Biehler, R. (2009). Psychology applied to teaching, 12th ed. Boston, MA: Houghton Mifflin Company.

Hamilton, S. & Gardner, H. (1995). *How are kids smart?: multiple intelligences in the classroom: teachers version.* [VHS]. Available from the Butler Library at Buffalo State College.