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Revised Theory of Learning

People are born into this world ready to learn. At a young age, we learn new concepts and make sense of these concepts through understanding. Learning is exploring the world around us in many different ways, we take new content and ideas and connect them to our prior understandings on a topic. Learning is also forming initial ideas from new content we have been exposed to. Whether our initial understandings are correct or incorrect is not the essential element in the learning process. As adults, we know learning and understanding takes time. We are constantly learning, as well as understanding new ideas, and for us who have made incorrect initial understandings we are able to change our minds about what we thought we knew. Teachers spend a lot of time considering their own 'science of teaching'. They should first examine how their students learn and what kinds of pedagogical elements can best support the varying learning styles in a classroom. Teachers (both in a classroom and in the real world) must be facilitators who provide opportunities for students to learn.

As a teacher, it is important to create a classroom that is learner centered. Learning is fostered through interest, risk taking and inquiry. The support for learning and understanding are in place in this type of environment. I ask myself if my classroom is learner centered everyday as I step into the school building. 26 second graders enter the classroom each day, all from different backgrounds and with their own experiences; ready to learn. Student centered learning, whether formal or informal, should be owned and driven by the learner, using exploration and investigation, rather than seeing teachers as the 'keepers of content.'

When exploring various theories of learning and ways in which individuals learn, it comes down to the fact that everyone learns differently. While some have categorized it into three distinct learning styles--auditory, visual, and kinesthetic--cognitive specialist Dan Willingham (2009) asserts that teaching to these learning styles does not necessarily increase student success. He does acknowledge, however, that personalization is the key to student growth and learning. In this way, providing students with a student-centered learning experience will provide them with the opportunity to engage in a variety of tasks and work in a style that suits them.

Learning occurs through observation. Reinforcement is one of the most important stages for observational learning. Student motivation to learn may drop and positive and negative reinforcement will have little effect on the student if the reinforcement does not match the individual student's needs. Sometimes it is difficult for the teacher to see what may be causing the lack of motivation because students' basic needs might not be getting met. This takes time through building relationships and trust with students.

Learning takes time once students are engaged. Extended time on a concept and proper scaffolding by a teacher/mentor and technology lead to the cementation of new concepts. True learning can only occur when students are engaged in the process. In order for students to acquire meaningful skills and information, they must first be interested or invested in the outcome. This is one of the reasons that education experts have promoted the inclusion of choice in the classroom. Even when an outside force may be driving the content (state standards, etc.), looking for places throughout a unit to allow for voice and choice can increase student engagement and ownership, leading to more success in learning.

The classroom should be a place to celebrate and support all learners. By having a student centered classroom you are saying a 'learning' classroom. It may look different for each student but all learning will take time, engagement, effort and interest for all involved.

References

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Willingham, D. T. (2009). *Why don't students like school?: A cognitive scientist answers questions about how the mind works and what it means for the classroom*. San Francisco, CA: Jossey-Bass.