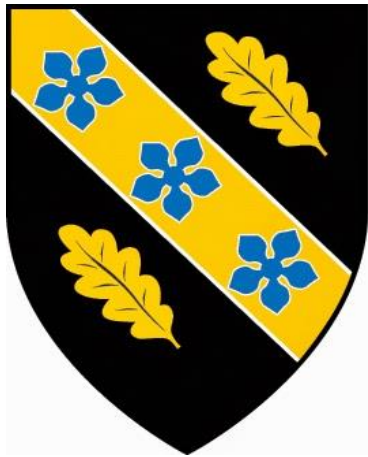




PRIFYSGOL CYMRU

Y Drindod Dewi Sant

UNIVERSITY OF WALES

Trinity Saint David

Student Name: Lauren Buckley

Student Number: 1707395

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Principles of Learning and Teaching.

There are many different theoretical approaches connecting learning and development. Within this assignment I will focus on three specific theories of learning, linking them to School A's practices and policies to provide evidence of how they impact education today. I will examine Skinner's Behaviorist theory (1957), Piaget's Constructivist theory (1936) and Vygotsky's Social Constructivist theory (1962) and compare and contrast their views on cognitive development.

Jean Piaget was a developmental psychologist who shaped the constructivist theory. He believed that learning is an active process which requires the individual to develop their knowledge through experience rather than passive teaching methods. McLeod (2018) states that children 'construct an understanding of the world around them, then experience discrepancies between what they already know and what they discover in their environment'. Development can be accelerated by providing the child with opportunities to seek new knowledge, explore their surroundings and experience new situations. He proposed that all human's experience three specific stages; assimilation, accommodation and equilibration. These processes enable the child to activate prior knowledge, learn new schema and through the process equilibration form a new balanced view of the world around them. According to Kyriacou (1986, p.38)

Piaget sees those experiences which involve a balance of accommodation as being the ones which have the best educational significance for the learner. It is thus the teacher's task to get his 'cognitive matching' right for each pupil.

Piaget was intrigued with long term memory and how children develop and gain knowledge which alters their perspective of the world. He analysed children's behaviour and conducted observations which 'reinforced his idea that children's minds aren't miniature adult brains, but that development and intelligence are gained in stages' (Anastasia, 2018). The 'readiness' of the child to apply new schemas to existing knowledge will depend on the stage in which they currently hold. During each of these stages an individual's cognitive complexity would

alter drastically with the aid of social interaction and biological maturation (Anastasia, 2018). Unlike Skinner, Piaget also highlighted that not all children will conquer all four stages due to unavoidable circumstances. How does this influence education? Piaget's theory has provided educational settings with effective teaching methods which should be implemented into the curriculum to enhance cognitive development.

Firstly, for effective development the teacher is expected to direct their teaching at the level of every child's cognitive ability Kyriacou (1986, p.46). School A's Equal Opportunities Policy aims to apply this in their teaching practices by providing their lower ability pupils differentiated tasks. Equal Opportunities Policy (2014) states it 'is a planned intervention by the teacher with the intention of maximising the achievements of pupils based on their differing individual needs'. Stevens (2014) notes that failure to deliver may result in the child becoming disengaged in the subject or activity. Secondly, he saw learning as an active process. Schools should encourage their pupils to explore new schemas, activate prior knowledge, construct new knowledge and improve styles of learning to best suit the individual. Finally, he emphasized that the curriculum should be constructed in a chronological order to allow the individual to build on previous knowledge Kyriacou (1986). School A implement a peer and self-assessment process whereby pupils can highlight areas of improvement by providing constructive criticism. This process requires the pupil to apply these improvements independently and develop critical thinking skills. In fact, the Welsh Government (2011) states that schools should 'teach clearly structured lessons or sequences of work so that all learners understand and meet the intended learning objective'. Piaget and Vygotsky were both constructivists with very different views on how language enhances cognitive development. Piaget 'saw language as a secondary action' whereas Vygotsky 'argued the social interaction is crucial to development. This social interaction provides language opportunities and language is the founder of thought'. Vygotsky's theory is often utilised within school A. Evidence collaborated during classroom observations have shown that pupils learn more effectively through interaction. Working with a more knowledgeable peer or small group can often encourage the learner to become more involved in the task.

Lev Vygotsky's theory of Social Constructivism emphasized that knowledge is constructed and enhanced through social interaction which has a fundamental impact on cognitive development. His theory was based around the concept of Zones of Proximal Development (ZPD). Vygotsky 'presupposes an interaction on a task between a more competent and a less competent person becomes independently proficient at what initially a jointly accomplished task' (Chaiklin, 2003, p.41) therefore allowing the individual to form understandings which independently would not be achievable. School A provide different types of learning framework to scaffold learning and aid progression. Knott and Sobel (2014) notes that differentiated tasks have become a necessity now that schools are expected to promote inclusive education. Within School A there are a diverse range of pupils from more able and talented to those with additional learning needs. Differentiation closes the gap within education. It provides scaffolding to ensure that the school maintain high quality teaching and ensure all children of all abilities can access the curriculum. 'These methods when skilfully implemented actually reduce the need for extensive differentiation as they ensure that, from the start, almost all students understand the concepts, information and skills being taught' (Westwood, 2016).

Just like Piaget, Vygotsky saw learning as an active process whereby the child seeks new understandings and adapts prior knowledge. An example of this would be where pupils are expected to perform a series of instructions in order to achieve a new concept i.e. in a science lesson, they produce a method, apparatus guide, practical task, a table of results/graph to enable them to complete their conclusion to form new understanding. Vygotsky perceived cognitive development as a continuous process where all children would develop knowledge at their own pace if provided with social and cultural stimulation (McLoed, 2018).

Another element to Vygotsky's theory was the More Knowledgeable Other (MKO) which relates to someone who has a higher understanding or knowledge in a particular area or subject. The teacher, Learning Support Assistant or peers working with the pupil qualify as the MKO (McLoed, 2018). School A have implemented independent learning weeks to engage

their pupils to work with their peers to reach their potential. The teachers facilitate the learning and provide the scaffolding tools to enable the children to complete the tasks set.

Behaviorist Skinner has played a huge role in shaping our understanding of how children learn and develop. Skinner is regarded as the founder of the theory of Operant Conditioning. He saw learning as a passive process where the learner responds to its environment or stimuli. Skinner believed that all humans were born with a blank canvas of knowledge which could be guided and influenced by the environment with the assistance of positive and negative reinforcements. 'Reinforcements continue to be important, of course long after an organism has learnt how to do something, long after it has acquired behaviour. They are necessary to maintain the behaviour in strength (Skinner, 1968, p.30). School A recognise the importance of reinforcements and use them consistently to strengthen or weaken behaviours. 'Teaching is expediting of learning. Students learn without teaching, but the teacher arranges conditions under which they learn more rapidly and effectively (Palmer and Cooper, 2001, p.58).

(Welsh Government, 2010) states 'the main aim for the teachers is to secure improvement regarding pupils behaviour and learning'. School A apply various incentives to encourage learning and development. They recognise that 'positive discipline allows the pupils to make excellent progress and to be successful'. Positive and negative reinforcements enable the school to shape the cognitive functions of their pupils so that they achieve their full potential and display positive behaviours. Skinner's theory suggests 'that when previous behaviours have been awarded, children are likely to repeat those behaviours'. Behaviour can be nurtured, influenced and sustained if the school provide the appropriate positive reinforcements to encourage and motivate the child. However, according to McLeod (2017):

Behaviourism only provides a partial account of human behaviour, that which can be objectively viewed. Important factors like emotions, expectations, high-level motivation are not considered or explained.

School A would argue against Skinner's theory. Failure to acknowledge additional needs could result in the child underachieving or becoming disengaged. Donaldson (2015) states 'Schools need to care for children and young people's physical and emotional needs and help them to

take responsibility for their own lives'. Therefore, the child's well-being must be the central focus during any learning process.

The idea of inclusive education does not coincide with all three theories of cognitive development. Skinner fails to consider factors like physical or cognitive disabilities which can often affect the child's development whereas Vygotsky highlights the importance of social interaction whilst considering unavoidable circumstances for instance additional learning needs. Although Piaget follows most of the same ideas as Vygotsky, he fails to identify that children can accelerate their learning and development through interaction. School A's teaching staff provide all their pupils with some form of support whether it be differentiated tasks or merely providing them information. My educational setting has applied behaviorism, constructivism and social constructivism within their practices and policies to enhance progression, attainment, manage behaviour and attendance. A study by Freund (1990, p.125) provides evidence of both Piaget's and Vygotsky's principles whereby a child was instructed to perform a task independently and repeat with a more knowledgeable other. The evidence showed that 'being guided through learning within the Zones of Proximal Development led to greater understanding' in comparison to Piaget's theory of working alone (McLeod, 2018). The Welsh Government (2011) reinforces schools should 'employ appropriate teaching strategies which develop all learner's capacity to work collaboratively and independently'. Learning Support Assistants should provide hints, prompts and differentiated work to scaffold learning with the aim to close the gap within education.

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