

# Theories and principles for planning and enabling learning

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Theories and principles for planning and enabling learning  
In this assignment I will identify and discuss the significance of relevant theories and principles of learning and communication. I will then select and critically analyse the impact of two of these principles or theories on the planning and delivery of teaching in my own learning. Finally, I will reflect on the impact of these insights on my own practice and professional development.

There are many different theories and principles which have been developed to help us understand how effective learning, communication and curriculum design underpin and enable practitioners to develop high quality inclusive practice. When researching this subject I asked the question, why is it important for me to have theoretical knowledge to underpin my teaching skills  
In this assignment I will explain how learning theories address the issue of how and why students learn. For, finding the answer to these questions is the key to successful teaching  
Theory 1  
Whilst researching this assignment I learnt about teaching techniques that provide intrinsic and extrinsic motivation. Reece and Walker (1994) have argued that??? A less able student who is highly motivated can achieve greater success than the more intelligent student who is not motivated??? This has made me reflect on the factors affecting how my students learn. Many students have barriers to learning, resulting in lack of motivation. This is demonstrated by the following signs; Poor attendance, lateness, learners not participating in lessons and disruptive behaviour. Motivation is a key factor in successful learning, one of the main challenges that many teachers face today is to make their students want to learn.

To maximise motivation it is necessary to consider the concepts related to motivation. Abraham Maslow, in 1943 published a paper presenting his hierarchy of Basic Human Needs. Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (often represented as a pyramid with five levels of needs) is a motivational theory in psychology that argues that while people aim to meet basic needs, they seek to meet successively higher needs in the form of a hierarchy.

The needs at the bottom of the pyramid are of the greatest importance, and a need at the top would only be important to an individual if their lower needs were satisfied. Maslow (1970) stated that "The lower a need is in the hierarchy, the greater is its strength because when a lower-level need is activated (as in the case of extreme hunger or fear for one's physical safety), people will stop trying to satisfy a higher-level need (such as esteem or self-actualization) and focus on satisfying the currently active lower-level need." I agree with Maslow's theory that to motivate learners, the five needs as shown in the diagram must be met. As a teacher, when curriculum and lesson planning I take a number of factors into consideration in order to satisfy the needs of my learners. If I can help my students feel good about themselves then they will learn more effectively. Physically provide adequate breaks for students and ensure learners are familiar with location of toilet facilities.

I enable the learners to be comfortable by providing adequate numbers of chairs and tables to facilitate a spacious learning environment. I am always alert to heating and ventilation requirements and have moved learners to warmer/cooler classrooms when necessary. Safety It is important that I make

the learning environment physically and psychologically safe. This achieved by maintaining student confidentiality and privacy as necessary, treating all students fairly and following health and safety rules within the classroom.

Love/belonging This can be translated as helping the learner to feel accepted.

I aim to show my students that I take an interest in them and that they belong in my classroom. Techniques such as verbal praise and providing speedy feedback on assignments show learners they are making progress.

I promote interaction between students by providing a range of group activities to encourage inclusion. Esteem I aim, in my lesson and curriculum planning to arrange learning experiences so that all students can gain at least a degree of esteem. This is achieved by encouraging independence of learning. This can be achieved by providing material sources familiar to the learner; this can be as simple as referencing New Look or Glastonbury festival. Providing appropriate praise e. g. 'that's an interesting answer' gives the learners social approval.

I always welcome ideas and aim to treat students with dignity, avoiding sarcasm or ridicule. Self-actualisation When delivering lessons I am always enthusiastic and supportive. I encourage projects and plans and whenever possible try to ensure that group ideas and plans are achieved.

I promote optimism by displaying positive attitudes about the future, e. g. course progression or job prospects. While a useful guide for generally understanding why students behave, the way that they do and in

determining how learning may be affected by physiological or safety deficiencies.

Maslow's theory has its share of criticisms, there seem to be various exceptions that frequently occur. For example, some people often risk their own safety to rescue others from danger. We can find many examples of people who exhibited aspects of self-actualisation who were far from having their lower needs taken care of. For example Van Gogh lived in poverty for many years. However, I agree with Maslow, in that for students to be motivated their sense of belonging, esteem and self-actualisation needs must be nourished by the provision of effective learning activities. In today's learning environment it is argued that each person has a particular style of learning which best suits them.

A learning style is a student's consistent way of responding to and using stimuli in the context of learning. Keefe (1979) defines learning styles as the "Composite of characteristic cognitive, affective, and physiological factors that serve as relatively stable indicators of how a learner perceives, interacts with, and responds to the learning environment." Therefore as students learn in different ways or styles, only a wide variety of activities will ensure that teachers play to the relative strengths and preferences of every student at least some of the time. The learning styles theory explains that by paying close attention to students' learning styles: by diagnosing them and encouraging students to reflect on them and then by designing teaching and learning activities around the results of them, students will become more

motivated to learn by knowing more about their own strengths and weaknesses as learners.

In turn, if teachers can respond to individuals' strengths and weaknesses, then retention and achievement in their course are likely to rise. If students become more independent in their learning as a result of knowing their strengths and weaknesses, the students can then develop more effective learning strategies which they can use outside formal contact time. Although there are a variety of learning styles, I use the VARK learning style with my learners at the beginning of their course. The VARK (Visual, Aural, Read/Write, and Kinesthetic) learning style inventory was created by Neil Fleming of Lincoln University in New Zealand.

The VARK learning style uses the three main sensory receivers: Visual, Auditory, and Kinesthetic (movement) to determine the dominant learning style. I have found this model to be the most popular model with my learners due to its simplicity. Other learning styles questionnaires such as The Honey and Mumford Learning Styles Questionnaire have proved less successful with my learners due to the length of the questionnaire (80 statements).

Learners use all three styles to receive and learn new information and experiences. However, according to the VARK theory, one or two of these receiving styles is normally dominant. This dominant style defines the best way for a person to learn new information by filtering what is to be learned. In planning my lessons I must ensure I present information using all three styles. This allows all learners the opportunity to become involved, no matter

what their preferred style may be. For example to integrate the auditory style into the learning environment I always include a selection of auditory activities into lessons, such as brainstorming.

I always encourage auditory learners to verbalise the questions I ask as this helps understanding. I leave plenty of time to debrief activities; this encourages learners to make connections of what they have learned and how it applies to their situation. Visual learners like to learn through written language, such as reading and writing tasks or charts, demonstrations, videos, and other visual materials. To integrate this style into the learning environment I use graphs, charts, illustrations, or other visual aids, as well as leaving blank spaces in handouts for note taking. I also encourage questions to help the learners stay alert in auditory environments, also emphasising key points to cue when to take notes. Kinaesthetic learners do best while touching and moving, they typically use colour highlighters and take notes by drawing pictures, diagrams, or doodling.

To integrate this style into the learning environment I use activities that get the learners up and moving. This includes playing music, when appropriate, during activities. I, also use colored markers to emphasize key points on flipcharts or white boards, as well as providing highlighters, coloured pens and/or pencils.

When planning lessons I always include reference to the different learning activities to ensure I cover all styles in each session this necessitates using a good mix of teaching methods in each lesson. Planning to include the

minimum core which defines the knowledge, understanding and personal skills in literacy, language, numeracy and information and communication technologies (ICT), is another method of increasing inclusion. This method of including all learning styles not only plays into the students' strengths but also develops their weaknesses, for example encouraging kinesthetic learners to complete auditory activities. Critics of learning styles have noted that what has not been established is that matching the instructional style to individual learning strength improves students learning abilities. For example, one study (Constantinidou and Baker, 2002), found that visual presentation through the use of pictures was advantageous for all learners, irrespective of a style preference for visual images. Indeed, it was especially advantageous for those with a strong preference for verbal processing. Some psychologists and neuroscientists have questioned the scientific basis for and the theories on which they are based.

Writing in the Times Educational Supplement Magazine (29 July 2007), Susan Greenfield said that " from a neuroscientific point of view the learning styles approach to teaching is nonsense". However, I agree with Coffield (2004), who argued that: Knowledge of ones learning styles can be used to increase self-awareness about their strengths and weaknesses as learners. In other words, all the advantages claimed for metacognition (being aware of ones own thought and learning processes) can be gained by encouraging learners to become knowledgeable about their own learning and that of others. Geoff Petty (1998) acknowledged that Teachers tend to teach exclusively in the way they like to learn, which will not suit some of their



students???. My own learning style would be categorised according to Honey and Mumford (1982) as Pragmatist. Pragmatists, seek and try out new ideas, are down to earth, enjoy problem solving and decision making, and are quickly bored with long discussions. On reflection this style of teaching will not suit all learners and a more inclusive technique is required. In planning and delivering both lessons and curriculum I use a range of inclusive activities and resources to promote and maintain an inclusive learning environment and include all learning styles. Planning for differentiation using extension activities and encouraging learners to choose their preferred method of learning, where possible also leads to inclusive learning within my classroom.

It is also a legal requirement to encourage the participation of all learners, by supporting equality and diversity. South Devon College is committed to offering educational opportunities to a wide range of students. Achieving a two way flow of communication the classroom is necessary for learning to succeed. However in practice there are a number of barriers to the ways in which I communicate with learners. I have reflected that on occasion the level of work has been inappropriate to the ability of the learner.

This has resulted in lack of motivation. I have rectified this by examining previous students work and observing other teachers working within the group. Another common error has been my initial usage of industry jargon, again, easily rectified by producing a glossary and by encouraging learners to ask questions if they do not understand. I have worked hard to minimise environmental factors such as noisy or cold classrooms as this is another

common barrier to communication. As a teacher of customer service, I am well aware of paralanguage, and am experienced in what my learners and my own body language says about both their motivation and how effective my own communication is to them. I feel I have created a positive learning culture in my classroom by always encouraging open communication channels such as the asking of questions at any point during the lesson as well as including computer based methods of feedback such as surveys, blogs and forums.

I have also instigated a questions handout, where learners can write down any questions they may have and we have a group discussion at the end of the lesson to answer queries and questions. A useful theory when examining classroom communication has been Transactional Analysis. This studies the interactions of behavior between teachers and students. Harris (1967) suggests three stages of development called ego-states. These ego-states are called Child, Parent, and Adult. In order for teachers to be successful in transactional analysis, they need to remain in the Adult ego-state and be able to recognize the ego-state of students around them. I have recognised that disruptive behavior may occur when students are in a Child ego-state and it is important teach students to behave in an Adult ego-state, as this state is the most productive for inclusive practice. Conclusion Educational theories underpin our teaching practice through grounding our actions and assisting us to evaluate our outcomes.

As educationalists, the theories help us to reflect upon our teaching approach and to understand why our approach did or did not work. As a

result of writing this assignment I have reflected upon the impact of the Transactional Analysis theory and am keen to ensure I remain in the adult state and not to revert to the parent state when dealing with behaviour issues. I have noted that I subconsciously use a number of theoretical approaches in my teaching practices, Behaviourist, Cognativist and Humanist, but I will now actively test out other theories and principles to support and enhance my teaching practice. ReferencesCoffield, F.

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