

THEORETICAL ISSUES THAT INFLUENCE TEACHING AND LEARNING PRACTICE

One of the most important activities that humans engage in is learning. It has not only been associated with the institution of education, but from thousands of years, the mankind has been learning. In the context of education, learning forms the core of it and from several years the psychologists have been working to understand the concept of learning, information of its occurrence and its influence by teaching. Till now various theories of learning have been developed over the years and many psychologists have added their perceptions of the process of learning (Evan, R., 2009). That is why; a clear definition of learning has not emerged yet. Hermann Ebbinghaus started the first modern psychological study of learning, wherein he published the study of memory in 1885. Other studies of learning were carried out by Edward L. Thorndike, Ivan Pavlov, Albert Bandura, John Flavell, Lev Vygotsky and many others. With so many theories and approaches to learning, it has often been difficult to understand the similarities and differences. These different types of learning can be explained by various theories that provide with different views on the complex process of learning. Hence, these different approaches and theories of learning are applicable in the classroom because they address different elements of classroom learning (Beilin, H. and Pufall, P., 2013).

Teaching and learning practice is often a complicated process because of the relationship between educational practices and theories of learning. People may think that learning and instructional practices of learning should be based on one best approach to learning, but it is not an easy approach. This is due to the fact that educational institutions are mostly based on the philosophical beliefs rather than on theoretical understanding of learning and empirical studies (Robert, M., 2004). It is also important to note that most of the schools and educational institutions are developed in accordance with different cultural beliefs and communities that follow the nature of children, beliefs about the world and the core of authority. Thus, different schools have different approaches of learning; however they often follow the morals of philosophical nature. Moreover different educational institutes have instructional programs based on theories of learning, but it often goes unnoticed and unrecognized (Evan, R., 2009).

Moreover, these theoretical and philosophical differences are often difficult to deal with, which also results in difficult relationship of theory and practices in the process of learning.

For instance, the education system of United States was dominated by the factory model of schooling, which is based on the production and management practiced during the industrial revolution. However, such a model stands in sharp contrast to the educational models of social reform, discovery and freedom. These differing perspectives are found in the modern discussions of instructional practice and education today. In fact, different models of classrooms have emerged from various philosophical perspectives (Wise, S., 2013).

Students working in groups often emerge from the perspective that knowledge is created by every student and learning takes place by working together in a social environment on different tasks. In this way, theory and practice do go hand- in- hand; however it is not clear that which one of them comes first (Beilin, H. and Pufall, P., 2013). Hence, from this reality it can also be pointed out that the relationship of theory and practice is a two- way process. It is often believed that scientific theories lead to knowledge and that theories of learning result in the development of educational practices however, scientific methods do not necessarily operate in such a manner (Malara, N., 2010). In the context of natural and social sciences, ideas emerge from observation, questioning the concepts and solving practical problems. Thus, teaching practice should find educational practices that emerge from the development of appropriate theory of learning (Well Spring Counseling, 2015).

Another theoretical issue in the educational process is that it is crucial to realize the importance of student more than the teacher in determining the process of learning. This however does not imply that teacher does not hold any importance, but it only means that the perceptions of student, his/ her knowledge and beliefs are important in determining if their learning is in accordance with the instructional goals of the teacher. Therefore, the process of teaching and learning should engage the student instead of engaging the teacher (Well Spring Counseling, 2015). The present concepts of teaching and learning have identified that students are proactive participants in the process of learning, which is why instructional interventions that appear similar to the teacher may have different results for students. Thus, the teachers should be able to understand that their perspectives are different from that of the students, and they should view the instructional design from the perspective of the student. Only then, the theoretical approach of teaching and learning can become an efficient practice (Malara, N., 2010).

Furthermore, the fact that there are different notions and concepts of learning has complicated the relationship of learning theories and educational practices. Most of the present theories

are not capable of explain learning or applying the process of learning in different situations. These theories are often limited in their research and have neglected various aspects and situations wherein learning takes place. Scholars that have provided with different approaches of learning have either ignored various situations or simply denied them. Thus, they have completely denied the fact that other theories might be relevant to different settings, which resulted in the formation of a learning approach that deal with all the situations and produces a complete learning process (Bruner, J., 2004). Thus, almost all the educational institutions have included different learning approaches that provide functioning in different settings of the teaching- learning process. Different theories of learning can explain different examples such as, being afraid in math class, learning to tie a rope, learning to cook by observing one's mother and explain the causes of French revolution (Montie et al., 2009). Hence, it can be clearly identified that different theories of learning are good to explain and understand a particular situation, but they are not competent enough to understand and explain all the situations together. Therefore, the teachers should consider the learning of a student and analyze that how learning has taken place and what kind of evidence has been taken to validate the occurrence of learning. This process is helpful to understand the learning in students while evaluating the usefulness of different theories. It is because the students do not always learn from the processes identified by the teacher, because when the teacher takes a quiz it is difficult to identify if the student has actually understood the topic, or simply memorized the facts (Montie et al., 2009).

The various theories of learning that have developed overtime have based their presumptions on the process of learning and how it takes place. However, they are satisfactory in explaining particular situations only, thus they have limited approach of learning process. These theories are useful in the preparation of teaching designs and instructional resources, but actual learning can only be determined by the mental, physical and social learning activities of a classroom, in which a student engages. The learning in a classroom involves different process such as, emotional, social, participatory and cognitive, which should be taken into account by the theories of learning. As most of the schools today believe that the goal of education is to develop the capacities of students to think for themselves and understand the content (Robert, M., 2004).

Further, the concepts of teaching acknowledge that teachers have a central role in educational processes as they are the decision makers, which are influenced by their knowledge and beliefs. Therefore the education for teachers should be based on the fact that they should be

aware of the complexity that the process of teaching goes through. And in order to ensure that learning in students takes place, the teacher should not limit them into pedagogical knowledge only, but enhance their ability in discursive and interactive patterns of teaching (Bruner, J., 2004). The different complicated situation taking place in a classroom requires the teachers to make continues decisions, which does not only include the solutions of various problems, but also their identification. Hence, teaching can both be a problem solving activity and problem making activity. The teachers have to involve implicit knowledge while making decisions because of continues process of decision making. Therefore, it is very important for the teachers to recognize these decisions and control the classroom, while analyzing their actions and reflecting on the circumstances that produced them. Moreover, in order to analyze the learning process within the student and their power of decision making, the teachers should constantly engage in reflective practices (Robert, M., 2004). It helps the teachers to become to engage in critical scrutiny, so that they are aware of what they are exactly doing. It should be noted here that awareness is the by- product of reflective practice. A reflective practice is also important in the context that the decisions made by teachers are often bound by their conceptions, beliefs and cultures. The mismatch between actual beliefs and beliefs- in- practice can be reduced by engaging in reflective process (Montie et al., 2009).

Furthermore, psychological theories of learning have helped and influenced the teaching and learning practices in the classroom because they tend to validate the existing teaching practices and helps in self- affirmation. It helps to manipulate the concepts and develop them into reflective practices, which furthermore helps with the process of problem solving in a classroom (Montie et al., 2009). A theoretical understanding of teaching helps the teacher to recognize, evaluate and deal with different problems and challenges through a logical, focussed and effective manner. The theories of learning also supports shared discourse and communication for teachers who want to engage in scholarship of teaching. It helps to share the expertise and best practices of teaching. Moreover, they also help in justification of the teaching practices, which are very important to know while acting as decision makers in the educational processes (Beilin, H. and Pufall, P., 2013). However, as mentioned earlier, the teaching practice and the relationship of theory and educational practices is not easy and it is not advisable to rely completely on various approaches of learning process. In spite of these theories dominating the educational settings and providing with years of help and support, are not competent enough to deal with a situation using a single learning theory. That is why;

there has also been a move from psychological theories to philosophy and sociology that help to examine the process of learning as a social and moral activity that cannot be separated from value, purpose and context (Evan, R., 2009).

Hence, various theoretical issues surround the practice of teaching and learning today. With the awareness of society and educational processes, new challenges and problems have been identified in the traditional methods of teaching. This essay produces the fact that teaching and learning practice is often a complicated process because of the relationship between educational practices and theories of learning (Beilin, H. and Pufall, P., 2013). And different schools have different approaches of learning; however they often follow the morals of philosophical nature. Thus, teaching practice should find educational practices that emerge from the development of appropriate theory of learning. It is also important to shift the focus point from teacher to student because the educational and learning process should be developed in a way that engages students and not teachers. In a classroom, it is also important to recognize if the learning has actually takes place, because it is often difficult to conclude if the student has actually learnt or only memorized the concepts. Further, the role of teachers is also very important because they are the decision makers. However, decisions can simply be an outcome of personal opinions, views, perceptions and cultures of the teachers, which is why it is important to engage in reflective practices (Well Spring Counseling, 2015).

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