I have a really difficult time assessing learning theories and trying to determine the most effective in regards to learning. For me, no theory is completely correct or completely incorrect because they are all developed by human beings studying human beings. We cannot be completely objective in our observances nor in our behaviors while being observed. I think that is the most important thing about all learning that has come from this study I’ve been involved with. Nothing is guaranteed to work for every student, every time, in every subject/grade/school. I believe Maslow’s theory of hierarchy of needs greatly influences student learning regardless of what method we employ for teaching. As living beings, survival and safety are hard-wired as the number one priority in every moment of existence or there risks being no existence. If students are hungry, scared, sick, tired, or have other basic survival needs unmet, they will not be focused or motivated on the material being taught. I worked with one student where I couldn’t begin the day’s work until she had breakfast (and sometimes a nap) or she would be combative and non-compliant in her behavior. So she would come into the room to a bowl of cereal waiting and if she fell asleep I let her sleep for a while, then we would have much more productive times than if I had pushed the curriculum first. I have always leaned towards Gardner’s multiple intelligence theories for almost two decades now believing that in every unit there are opportunities to present materials and experiences that play to each MI’s strengths thereby giving those who gravitate to that MI a chance to excel and helping those with different dominant MIs an occasion to experience and stretch in that realm.

In my opinion, I think that the most effective theory in regards to learning is not one theory at all but a compilation of parts of theories that:

* Work with how the brain functions
* Address the needs, interests, and abilities of the students being taught
* Inspires the teacher’s self-confidence
* Creates optimism within the teacher to teach his/her students
* Results in successful, engaging experiences as shown through anecdotal and formal assessments

In other words, each person who takes on the role of teacher needs to understand how the brain receives, stores, and retrieves information while believing they can create activities that will positively support that process. They need to be know that every student is an individual and as such that every experience will work differently for each student but that all students can be reached. That self-confidence will be supported through reflections and assessments that will prove growth and highlight areas of extraordinary success while pinpoint areas that need support to be fully realized. In learning, there are two important elements: the teacher and the student. Both need to believe in the activity of learning and in the potential for success or the learning will be handicapped by negative thinking. Therefore, if I believe my students can learn but they don’t share that believe then I need to find ways to change that viewpoint by disguising learning experiences in ways that trigger positive associations and allow for learning to begin. Building on that foundation will help turn the student self-concept to being more receptive to the learning at hand. I need to keep myself from being tied to one theory and instead look at learning theory as a buffet of ideas to be drawn from to create a meal unique to me and my students.

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