

My teaching philosophy has developed through numerous experiences, personal reflection and working with children in various settings, along with interactions with professors, teachers, colleagues and others working within learning and education environments. In addition, professional readings and study have also contributed to what I believe is important in education. Jean Piaget and Howard Gardner, two theorists whose work I have studied, have not only made huge impacts on education but have also greatly influenced my teaching philosophy.

I was first introduced to Jean Piaget’s Stage Theory during my Early Childhood Education diploma studies. Piaget’s Stage Theory of Cognitive Development outlines four distinct stages of mental development through which children move. He identified that the way children think is different than the way adults think. He did not mean that children were less intelligent than adults but rather, children simply think differently (Cherry, 2017). I was immediately drawn to learn more about Piaget due to the fact that his theories and views on children’s development were constructed through extensive observations of children. As I began working with children I found I was witnessing the same behaviors of which Piaget wrote.

The majority of my experience to-date has been working in early childhood environments where most children operate within Piaget’s second stage, which he identified as the Preoperational Stage. Children at this stage are concrete thinkers who tend to be egocentric and often struggle to see things from other people’s point of view. According to Piaget, the development of language is one of the major identifiers of this stage (Jardine, 2006, p. 54-58). Piaget believed that children take on active roles in their learning process and “act like little scientists as they perform experiments, make observations, and learn about the world” (Cherry, 2017). I have observed how Piaget’s theory has influenced the early childhood environments in which I have worked. These spaces have been configured in a way to provide a wide variety of interactive activities that allow the children to learn through pretend play, experimentation and problem solving. For example, a kitchen play area

provides numerous learning opportunities. At a daycare where I was employed, the children loved playing in the kitchen centre imitating what they had observed adults do. What started initially as imaginative play became an opportunity for the children to add to their existing understanding and schema of cooking. After observing the children’s enjoyment of this pretend play, I decided that we would bake real cookies. We worked together talking about what kinds of cookies they liked, decided on a recipe, discussed the necessary ingredients and the kitchen materials needed. The children were actively involved in the entire process, learned the importance of proper quantity of ingredients and took turns learning how to measure these ingredients properly. It was interesting to observe the change in kitchen play after baking the real cookies as many children then began to use the play measuring cups to imitate the measuring we had done together. According to Piaget, not all children have the same schema or move through the stages at the same time (McLeod, 2015). I observed this with one little boy who greatly enjoyed the cooking and took his turn measuring but did not seem to understand, or care, why measuring ingredients is important. Following the hands-on cooking activity, he continued to enjoy playing in the kitchen centre but continued to be disinterested in the play measuring cups. As Piaget suggested, this disinterest may just mean that the child was not ready to assimilate the new learning into his cooking schema. I have witnessed many other examples of the effectiveness of discovery learning and supporting the developing interests of children at the Preoperational stage. It is exciting to observe children assimilate and accommodate new information into their existing schemas and to develop new schemas. Therefore, I know that if I am teaching children in this stage in the future, that I will model my classroom based upon Piaget’s theory. I believe these teaching techniques are important for students at any age or stage in their cognitive development and am anxious to experience and learn more about how this can be incorporated into classroom environments of older children in other stages of cognitive development.

Another theorist who supports the importance of teaching in a variety of ways to provide varied learning experiences for children is Howard Gardner. Gardner’s theory of Multiple Intelligences identifies that human beings have a range of intelligences and that strength (or weaknesses) in one intelligence does not predict strength (or weakness) in any other intelligences. Gardner initially listed seven intelligences and later added an eighth. However, he says that there may be more. His eight most commonly identified intelligences are: linguistic, logical-mathematical, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, spatial, interpersonal, intrapersonal and naturalist (Strauss, 2013). Although Gardner’s theory was not intended for education purposes, it has been widely accepted by educators and became a part of Saskatchewan curriculum and a significant role in lesson planning. It is important to note that Gardner’s identified multiple intelligences are not to be confused with a child’s learning style. Rather, these intelligences can guide teachers to develop a variety of learning opportunities and activities that will enhance and strengthen a child’s use of the different areas of intelligence.

I believe that “one size does not fit all” when it comes to learning. Every child has different experiences, existing schema, interests and intelligences. I believe it is my role as a future educator to provide varied learning and to act as a facilitator of student learning rather than adopting a traditional instructional method. Both Piaget and Gardner’s theories have influenced my philosophy and support that these strategies are some of the best teaching practices. I know, from previous experiences, that it is a challenge to pluralize one’s teaching but have also seen the rewards of challenging students to use a multiple number of intelligences in a variety of learning environments. This became particularly evident to me when I used a “Project Approach” while working with a group of daycare children of varying ages and stages of cognitive development. The project approach uses a variety of teaching strategies to guide children through real-world topics. This child centered, interactive methodology motivates students to be actively involved in their own

learning. This group of children had a wide variety of interests that included animals and machines so I chose farming as the theme of the project. As a group, the children shared any and all ideas of what they knew about farms, farmers, farm machinery, animals and where food comes from. After sharing what they knew, we created a list of what they wanted to know. This list allowed me to develop a variety of activities that would be of interest and would allow the children to learn about real world farming. The activities included: touching, tasting, smelling and identifying various grain samples and learning what food they are used for, making tractors out of cardboard boxes, attending a real life farmer's market and creating their own farmer's market centre. The project culminated with a bus trip to my family farm where the children had an opportunity to sit in large machinery, pet and play with a goat, observe a calf being bottle-fed, sit on a horse and ride on a hay wagon along a pasture and through a cattle herd. I have never answered so many questions, witnessed so much learning or seen such excitement within a learning project before! This successful project supported the theories of both Piaget and Gardner and is the reason why these theorists have been so influential in the development of my current teaching philosophy. Allowing student input, giving choices and planning interactive learning opportunities is so important but also presents challenges. It requires more teacher preparation time to develop and often more class time for the students to discover material than a traditional teacher led approach. However, I will need to find a way to successfully balance these challenges, as I strongly believe the results in student learning make this a priority.

My philosophy of education is a combination of what I have experienced to-date. One's teaching philosophy is “a work in progress” and will never be fully complete. As a future teacher, I know that my current philosophy will change and grow with every teaching experience and interaction with students and other educators. Every experience, whether good or bad, will have an equally important impact on my philosophy and will contribute to the type of teacher I will become.

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