

Educational Theory for Childbirth Educators:

Applying Key Concepts of Educational Psychology within the Childbirth Education Classroom

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Abstract: In this article, core concepts of teaching theory and educational psychology are reviewed to assist in childbirth educator development. In particular, foundational aspects of educational theory will be covered, including the role of social relationships as motivation in learning, the relationship between intelligence and learning styles, key competencies for educators, and basic principles of assessment. The article ends with instructions for writing a Teaching Philosophy Statement, which is a helpful exercise that allows the educator to clarify priorities for the classroom, to outline effective teaching strategies, and to highlight ongoing professional development goals.

Keywords: childbirth education, prenatal education, educational theory, learning, motivation

As childbirth educators, you do not give a pop quiz at the start of class to check if your students did the reading, and you do not assign a project at the end of the course to confirm your students learned the material. Instead, you have the responsibility of ensuring that your students are fully prepared for the real-life exam they will face in the delivery room. As a subject matter expert in childbirth, you have important knowledge to share with your students. Just as important as the knowledge you have is how you will share it. An understanding of both educational theory and educational psychology will help you to understand your students' motivations for learning, and the key principles of

the learning process. Excellent teaching requires far more knowledge and skill than just excellent doing – master teachers must not only be subject matter experts, but also people matter experts.

In this article, several core concepts of teaching theory will be reviewed. In particular, foundational aspects of educational theory will be covered, including the role of social relationships such as motivation in learning, the relationship between intelligence and learning styles, key competencies for educators, and basic principles of assessment.

Social Relationships as Motivation in Learning

While students come to a childbirth class to learn about and prepare for their impending childbirth, they come for more than just information. Students preparing for childbirth could gather information through a variety of sources – they could browse websites, buy books, and watch videos. When students choose to come to a class, they are choosing a class because they want to learn within the context of a social relationship.

In fact, social relationships can be a primary motivation for learning. People have a need for social connection and the experience of secure connection, love, and respect with other individuals, or a *need for relatedness* (Deci and Ryan, 1992). Teaching strategies which support affiliation can increase student motivation for learning tasks. Group-based activities (debates, cooperative learning tasks, educational games, etc.) can all support learning and affiliation simultaneously. When students come to a childbirth education class, they are seeking relationships with an expert who can make them feel more comfortable and with peers who are going through the same experience. The relationships fostered within the classroom and the ways in which instructors nurture connections, both with students and among students, will facilitate learning outcomes.

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Understanding Intelligence and Learning Styles

Effective teaching requires instructors to know their students. Personality characteristics and learning styles will affect student performance in the classroom. As instructors, flexibility in teaching styles may facilitate mastery on the part of every student. With each method of teaching, instructors will facilitate the natural learning styles of some students and challenge other students to stretch and reach for new learning abilities. Instructors are also challenged to stretch their natural preferences and to continually learn more about teaching.

Gardner's Theory of Multiple Intelligences. Howard Gardner (1993, 1999) proposed that there are eight different intelligences, which are relatively independent of one another: linguistic, logical-mathematical, spatial, musical, bodily-kinesthetic, interpersonal, intrapersonal, and naturalist. When teachers offer material in multiple modes, they facilitate learning for students across learning styles. For instance, group work will stimulate learning for students with strong interpersonal intelligence, while self-reflection will be useful for the student with intrapersonal learning preferences. Different styles within the childbirth education classroom can be incorporated for all learners. For instance, readings, tactical experiences, and practical exercises can promote learning. It would be redundant to teach every piece of information in every style, but instructors should strive to include every type throughout the course. Using multiple modes of presentation not only facilitates learning for different types of learners, it also maintains novelty and student interest.

Jungian Personality Types. Carl Jung proposed four dimensions of personality: introversion/ extroversion, intuition/sensation, thinking/feeling, and judging/perceiving, and these are often assessed in counseling settings for career guidance, personal development, and interpersonal relationships (Briggs-Meyer, 1980). The Jungian personality types also have implications for the classroom, as different types of learners approach new information in characteristic ways. For instance, feeling individuals look at the whole and attempt to identify similarities, whereas thinking individuals look at the parts and attempt to characterize differences. Judging individuals prefer learning in a chronological and sequential manner, while perceiving individuals prefer learning in a less structured format. Shindler and Yang (2003) developed the Paragon Learning Styles Inventory, which applies understanding of Jungian personality styles within the learner context. Shindler and Yang suggested that understanding of personality type can be useful both for teachers and for learners. Teachers who know their students will be

able to adapt to their unique needs, and teachers who know themselves will be more capable of identifying those areas where they must adapt. Likewise, students who are armed with self-knowledge will be more aware of their own learning strengths and weaknesses and therefore will be better able to adjust to each teacher and classroom which they encounter.

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Educator Competencies

Just as it is helpful to consider learning preferences for students, it can be helpful to consider self-competency as an instructor. The Professional and Organizational Development Network (POD-Network, retrieved 2013), an organization specifically focused on professional development for faculty members in higher education institutions, outlined a model of faculty development which can be helpful for educators. In particular, POD-Network (2013) identified three primary domains for educators: the faculty member as teacher (which encompasses ongoing training and development with regard to the skill of teaching itself), the faculty member as a scholar and professional (which refers to ongoing development of skills within the area of subject matter expertise, including contribution to the profession, potentially via research or service activities), and the faculty member as a person (which highlights the need for educators to live according to best practice principles such as ethics and self-care, in order to serve as good role models for their students). Childbirth educators should continue to develop teaching skills, remain current in knowledge of research and best practices within the areas of prenatal care, childbirth and delivery, and post-natal care, and also practice any practical skills taught in the classroom, such as time-management, stress management, regular exercise, and self-care.

Another model of educator competency which may be relevant for childbirth educators is the Responsibilities and Competencies for Health Educators Model, developed by the American Journal of Health Studies (n.d.). This model outlines ten responsibilities and key competencies within each area of responsibility. For example, Responsibility I (Assessing Individual and Community Needs for Health Education) includes Competency D: Determine factors that influence learning and develop and sub-competencies to (1) Assess individual learning styles, (2) assess individual literacy, and (3) assess the learning environment. Other responsibilities address areas related to subject matter expertise and evaluation of program effectiveness.

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Walker (2008) proposed a research-based model of effective teacher characteristics. Walker developed his model by analyzing fifteen years of student writing about the teachers who had the greatest impact on their lives. By identifying recurring themes, he concluded that effective teachers share positive social characteristics. It is worth noting that his model primarily reflects the attitude and personality the educator brings to the classroom – the subject matter expertise is the baseline expectation, and it is the warmth and personality of the educator that helps students to truly connect within the classroom.

Assessing Student Learning: Bloom's Taxonomy

Bloom's Taxonomy is a theoretical framework for understanding how to effectively assess student learning (Overbaugh & Schultz, n.d.). Bloom, Engelhart, Furst, Hill, and Krathwohl, D.R. (1956) identified three primary domains of learning: specifically cognitive learning (also called mental skills or knowledge); affective learning (which addresses growth with regard to feelings and emotions, within the area of attitude and self); and psychomotor learning (which includes manual and physical abilities, often referred to as skills). Bloom et al.'s primary focus was to identify and categorize the levels of knowledge acquisition within the cognitive domain. These categories, moving from the most basic level of knowledge to the most complex, were knowledge, comprehension, application, analysis, synthesis, and

evaluation. Generally speaking, learners have to master each category before they can move to the next. Assessment verbs are often associated with each category, and learning goals are often set using those learning assessment verbs. Since Bloom, several revisions have been proposed that expand on his original work, although Bloom's Taxonomy remains the predominant model for assessing student learning (Overbaugh & Schultz, n.d.). One revision, proposed by Anderson and Krathwohl (2001), included translating the cognitive levels into cognitive actions and proposing that evaluation comes before creation of new ideas. (See Table 1 for definitions of each level and example verbs, for both Bloom's original model and Anderson's revised Bloom's Taxonomy).

When preparing content for a childbirth education program, it can be helpful to think about Bloom's Taxonomy. The model can help determine the level of importance of each item, how much time should spend on that item in class, and how to best teach the content. For instance, there may be basic information that is sufficient to teach at the knowledge level, such as quickly reviewing lists of resources in the area or providing basic information about anatomical parts. Some information that students need to use or apply during the childbirth process will require students to learn at a higher level of mastery – and so for these skills, more time and practical experience of the skills should be incorporated. For other information, students will need to be able to evaluate a variety of resources to make the decision that best fits their needs. As an example, with regard to making personal

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Table 1.

Cognitive Level, Bloom	Cognitive Level, Revised Bloom	Definition	Sample Assessment Verbs
Knowledge (Lowest Level)	Remembering	Remember or recall previous information.	Arrange, define, describe, list, label, recognize, recall
Comprehension	Understanding	Explain ideas or concepts, fully grasp the information.	Classify, describe, discuss, explain, report
Application	Applying	Use the information in a new way; apply to actual situations.	Choose, demonstrate, illustrate, interpret
Analysis	Analyzing	Break information into components, distinguish among parts, and understand relationship among parts;	Appraise, compare, contrast, differentiate, distinguish
Synthesis	Evaluating	SYNTHESIS: Rearrange components into a new whole. EVALUATING: Justify and support a decision.	SYNTHESIS: Arrange, compose, formulate, generate, summarize, synthesize EVALUATING: Argue, defend, judge, select, support
Evaluation	Creating (Previously Synthesis)	EVALUATION: Make judgments based on internal evidence or external criteria. CREATING: Create a new product or point of view.	EVALUATION: Conclude, defend, evaluate, interpret, predict, support, value CREATING: Construct, create, design, formulate, write

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decisions around the birthing room environment, writing a birth plan, and making choices around health decisions such as cord blood banking, breastfeeding, and circumcision, instructors will want to ensure that students have mastered all of the levels of information so that they are able to evaluate the available materials and make choices that best fit their family. Likewise, if teaching other childbirth educators to support their continuing education, Bloom's Taxonomy can provide support in content development through the use of appropriate assessment verbs to determine the level of mastery needed for each topic area.

Childbirth Education for Educators

It may also be helpful for childbirth educators to review the available literature about the field of childbirth education itself. Most of the research literature focused on childbirth addresses best practices within the prenatal environment, childbirth, and postnatal care, rather than the practice of childbirth education itself. Still, the literature in this area can support childbirth educators in considering a variety of philosophical perspectives about childbirth education. Reidmann (2008) reviewed the history of childbirth education, including the primary content and methods of childbirth education, and discussed how to successfully support special needs groups with adapted childbirth education. Wilkerson (2000) outlined the limitations of a behaviorist learning model, which has dominated childbirth education, and provided insight into creating a more supportive learning environment that promotes women's ways of knowing.

A Teaching Philosophy Statement: Who Are You in Your Classroom?

Following review of basic concepts of teaching philosophy, educational psychology, and self-reflection can promote professional development. It is helpful to clarify classroom priorities and to outline effective strategies. One helpful exercise is to write a Teaching Philosophy Statement. For anyone engaged in teaching, it is helpful to deliberately consider why you teach, how you want to teach, and what you want your students to learn. This is also a good exercise to help identify knowledge gaps and to prioritize professional development as an educator.

Essentially, a Teaching Philosophy Statement is a statement which succinctly describes feelings and beliefs about the educational process, including both beliefs about teach-

ing and beliefs about learning. Practically, the document should be between two and four pages. It should express your personal beliefs and feelings about teaching and learning by reflecting on theories and principals of education and educational psychology to support your views. Key components within a Teaching Philosophy Statement include an introduction, the purpose or aims of education, the image of the learner, the value of curriculum, the role of the teacher, the preferred pedagogy(ies), the preferred type of student-teacher relationships, the classroom climate, and a summary and conclusion. There is no right or wrong way to write a Teaching Philosophy Statement. The best Teaching Philosophy Statement is one which is a clear expression of who you are in your classroom, what you believe, and how you teach.

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