Introduction

The rapid pace of change in recent years has created more awareness of the need to ensure that learning and applications of pedagogy within an educational system produce individuals who can be more effective in a changing environment.

The construct of learning is complex. The presence of popular definitions of learning coupled with the lack of universal acceptance of one definition is instructive. The absence of unanimity promotes variations in theoretical perspectives. As a consequence, current educational practice is informed by several learning theories, each reflecting a specific emphasis. Among the major theories in Special Education are the Constructivist, the Cognitive Psychological, Information Processing, psycholinguistic, Humanist, Macro level, Ecological Systems, and Behaviorist.

Theories of learning and related concepts reflect diversity, a trait that is becoming increasingly prominent in classrooms at all levels in the educational systems of developed and developing countries. The major challenge to educators facilitating persons with special needs in the new millennium is to use the relevant theoretical frames, the strengths of our diverse clientele, and the opportunities provided by the changing society to construct and implement an approach to practice that will benefit the global village.
Overall Objectives of this KAM

When you have completed this KAM, you will be able to:

1. Outline and understand the meaning of human learning.

2. Identify, define, and critically discuss theories of learning focusing on the work of at least one theorist from a minimum of three major categories.

3. Select an aspect of special needs and provide an analysis of the issues that promote quality learning, anchoring your critical examination in the text and suppositions of the relevant theory and empirical research.

4. Illustrate through practice or a proposal for practice the connections between the theoretical frame of human learning and the realities of a professional setting of choice.

In planning your work align objectives 1 and 2 to the Breadth component of the KAM, objective 3 to the Depth component, and objective 4 to the Application component.

The Breadth Component

EDUC 8511: Theories and Principles of Human Learning and the Human Side of Exceptionality (5cr)

The purpose of the KAM 5 Breadth component is to foster your understanding of theoretical frames that support your approaches to practice in learning environments. Consequently, you need to evaluate critically traditional and contemporary theories in light of persons with special needs. Remember that the focus of the Breadth component of KAM 5 is theoretical. There are several possible starting points. For example, you might begin by exploring the field of psychology but with an awareness that the information you seek is not restricted to that discipline. You could examine your assumptions about how and why you think, learn, and behave. You might then search the
literature for relevant theories. For example, you might examine the topics "learning styles" and "Universal Design" to explore personal answers.

Build on your personal reflections to satisfy the requirements of the KAM Breadth component. Some of the questions that follow should help you to continue the process.

1. In what positive and negative ways does the concept of psychometric intelligence impact on persons with and without special needs?

2. What components of the major learning theories (e.g., neurophysiological, cognitive-developmental and those listed earlier are relevant to your current professional practice? Why?

3. Would your professional practice benefit from facets of the learning theories that you consider irrelevant? How?

4. What changes are evident in the scope of recent research on learning theory?

5. How do you rationalize the increased emphasis on neurophysiological explanations of learning in recent years?

5. What, if any, advances in motivational theory in the business or sports sectors might be applicable to the educational setting?

Demonstration of Competence

Using the learning resources chosen, write a scholarly paper that demonstrates an understanding of the theories of learning, intelligence, or motivation as they relate to special education. The emphasis of the paper is not on summarizing the content of various theories but on a critical assessment of them including comparisons, contrasts, evaluations, and syntheses of different theories, assumptions, concepts, ideas, and elements encountered during the literature search and review. The expected length of the
paper for the Breadth component is approximately 30 double-spaced pages, plus references.

Learning Resources

A bibliography of possible references for this KAM can be found at the Walden Library site accessed through the faculty or student personal start page/campuscruiser. Once in the Walden Library site, click on Get KAM Research Help and look for the appropriate program or KAM. The Resources links will take you to general references that will provide an overview of the field or key thinkers. The Bibliography link will take you to a list of possible writings. The books and authors listed here are meant only to provide examples of the kind of literature you should be accessing. You can compile your own bibliographic references using this list as a starting point. If you have difficulty compiling a bibliography or choosing relevant readings, consult with your faculty mentor or KAM assessor and the Walden librarians.

Thesaurus terms:

Active learning schemata
Adult learning
Advanced organizers
Applied Behavior Analysis
Associative learning
Cognitive styles
Constructivism
Correctional education
Developmental delays
Encoding learning
Educational disadvantaged
Experiential learning
Facilitated Instruction
High-risk students
Inclusive schools
Multisensory learning
Perceptual development
Regular and special education relationship
Response to Intervention
Task analysis
Transfer of training
Universal Design

Depth Component

EDUC 8521: Educators as Facilitators of Inclusive Learning in Varied Educational Environments (5 cr)

The aim of the Depth component is for you to analyze comprehensively the educational approaches and support systems that will enhance your professional practice. Use the theories and concepts examined in the Breadth component as the basis for planning your work in this section. Reflect on your professional practice and determine a rationale for your best practices, support systems, and major obstacles. Make reference to the professional literature and establish how your own practice and support systems can be either enriched or remedied.
Ask yourself questions. For example, as an educator of hearing-impaired children, what are the issues relating to bilingual education in both inclusive and segregated settings? What are the connections between these issues and neurobiological theories of learning?

Major areas of study in this component include, but are not limited to, learning styles, gender issues, inclusion, Universal Design, one or any combination of special needs categories (e.g., Deafness, Visual Impairment, Learning disabilities, Giftedness, Autism, Traumatic Brain Injury, Attention Deficit Disorder, Orthopedic Impairment, Multiple disabilities, or Other Health Impairment), motivation theory, brain-based learning, Response to Intervention and traditional and nontraditional assessment.

Remember that there is no limit to the age group in this component. The following ideas suggest possible ways of thinking about your Depth component.

1. What pedagogical strategies are best suited to help middle school learners who are experiencing reading difficulties acquire basic reading skills and critical thinking skills?
2. In what ways can the link between research findings and practice in the area of special needs be strengthened?
3. How can best practice be enhanced or compromised by institutional and political realities?
4. How might special educators in both developed and developing countries differ in their views on the relevance of specific theories and concepts (e.g., artificial intelligence) to their practice?
5. What is the impact of technology on best practice for persons with special needs.
Demonstration of Competence

1. Create an annotated bibliography of at least 15 sources published during the last 5 years that relate specifically to the Depth component of this KAM. Empirically based sources are the priority. The annotated bibliography should include at least two recent doctoral dissertations in your area of research. This is an excellent opportunity for you to gain familiarity with the scope and designs of dissertations in your field. Each annotation must include a summary with an analysis of the article, book, or chapter contents. The bibliography must be arranged in alphabetical order.

2. Write a scholarly doctoral-level paper demonstrating your higher-level thinking skills and your understanding of theories of learning, intelligence, motivation, and exceptionality in a context that is of professional interest to you. Use the literature read for this KAM as reference materials. However, do not repeat the material presented in the annotated bibliography verbatim. The expected length of this paper is approximately 25-30 double-spaced typed pages.

Learning Resources

Learning resources for the Depth component of this KAM relate primarily to the role of educators as facilitators of learning for persons with diverse learning styles and needs in the context of social change. Because the Depth section is so individualized, it is difficult to offer reading recommendations. Both books and articles can be used, although current research is more likely to be found in journal articles. You are encouraged to review a wide range of sources for this assignment but focus particularly on dissertations and journal articles in selecting the sources that will ultimately comprise your bibliographic list.
Consult your faculty mentor or KAM assessor and the Walden library staff for further assistance in identifying sources in your literature search.

Application Component

EDUC 8531: Educational Practice Grounded in Principles of Learning, Diversity and Inclusion (5 cr)

The purpose of the Application component is to apply an appropriate theory or theories to an actual teaching/learning situation. Your paper should reflect your ability to utilize the content learned in the Breadth and Depth components to foster change in a special education context. You have an opportunity in this section to integrate theory and practice.

To demonstrate mastery of the Application component, you must complete a project in consultation with your assessor. Your role in the project must be highlighted. Some ideas are:

1. Design a project that effectively applies a theory explored in the first two components in a special education context.
2. Conduct or evaluate action research on an existing curriculum, program, or teaching strategy in which persons with special needs are involved.
3. Prepare a training manual or design a workshop for educators working with children with special needs in inclusive settings but who are not special educators. Identify clearly the aims and specific strategies as well as evaluation methods.
4. Plan and implement a case study that evaluates an institution or program undergoing change. Investigate the roles of individuals and policies in the process.
5. In your professional practice, identify an area that you would like to enrich and
write an appropriate plan for submission to your supervisor.

*Demonstration of Competence*

The Application component of the KAM gives you the opportunity to put the
theories and research pertaining to social change/societal development into practice.
Think in terms of developing a project that addresses change in your setting. Your final
demonstration should include both the project and reflective commentary on it, where
you show how it is informed by the theories and research studied in the earlier
components of this KAM. The Application is considered equivalent to 4-quarter credit
hours of graduate work in a traditional program.

*Learning Resources*

The resources you will use in this component are very specific to your particular
project. If a theory or research paper is the foundation of the project, be sure to reference it.
If you have difficulty compiling a bibliography or choosing relevant readings, consult with
your faculty mentor or KAM assessor and the Walden librarians.