

# Theorists and Techniques: Connecting Education Theories to Lamaze Teaching Techniques

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## ABSTRACT

Should childbirth educators connect education theory to technique? Is there more to learning about theorists than memorizing facts for an assessment? Are childbirth educators uniquely poised to glean wisdom from theorists and enhance their classes with interactive techniques inspiring participant knowledge and empowerment? Yes, yes, and yes. This article will explore how an awareness of education theory can enhance retention of material through interactive learning techniques. Lamaze International childbirth classes already prepare participants for the childbearing year by using positive group dynamics; theory will empower childbirth educators to address education through well-studied avenues. Childbirth educators can provide evidence-based learning techniques in their classes and create true behavioral change.

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*It's not that I mind taking Ed Psych. It's just that I can't picture myself using all these theorists when I'm a teacher.*

—Education major at Washington and  
Jefferson College

## WHY TEACH THEORY?

As a college professor passionately committed to the birth of outstanding educators, I often encounter resistance to learning about theorists. It's as if a practical application of theory eludes my students; childbirth educators may share this hesitancy. I am heart-led to share how the wisdom, beauty, and

inquisitiveness resulting from connecting education theories to teaching techniques can open a vital door not only for our students but also for ourselves. As a childbirth educator since the 1970s, I am committed to translating theory into teaching techniques for childbirth educators.

Should we connect theory to technique? Is there more to learning about theorists than memorizing facts for an assessment? Are childbirth educators uniquely poised to glean wisdom from theorists and enhance their classes with interactive techniques inspiring participant knowledge and empowerment? Yes, yes, and yes. This article will explore how an awareness of education theory can enhance

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retention of material through interactive learning techniques. Lamaze International childbirth classes already prepare participants for the childbearing year by using positive group dynamics; theory will empower childbirth educators to address education through well-studied avenues. Childbirth educators can provide evidence-based learning techniques in their classes and create true behavioral change.

#### **BRINGING THEORY INTO PRACTICE: THEORIST AND CHILDBIRTH EDUCATOR TEACHING TECHNIQUES**

Before we begin a discussion of theorists, please allow me a brief disclaimer. I have dedicated most of my life to teaching adolescents; by serving teens, I have discovered social justice in a way I couldn't understand from my family of origin. A popular children's character once said "Ogres are onions" to explain the reality of superficiality when we first encounter someone. I believe people are onions; we see life through our own lens and only develop empathy for another's experiences through listening with respect and without judgment. Although I love theorists and glean wisdom from their thoughts, I am cognizant of their privileged status. As another of my students said, "These guys are all old, White men." I've made an effort to seek the wisdom of women and people of color; I acknowledge my personal White privilege and commit to seeking truth from all types of people.

I also want to acknowledge the brevity of this article's discussion. It is meant to be an overview. Many theorists have encountered criticism that is beyond the scope of this discussion. Interested learners should access one of the educational psychology texts referenced in the resource list following the article.

#### **EDUCATING WITH GROUPS AND CHILDBIRTH EDUCATOR TEACHING TECHNIQUES**

The concept of social learning permeates most childbirth education curricula; three primary theorists—Bandura, Vygostky, and Brown—look at the rationale behind group work and peer-based learning.

#### ***Albert Bandura: Social Learning Theory and Social Cognitive Theory***

I'll begin with the theorist I value most; Albert Bandura's theories form the foundation of my work with young people. His *social learning theory* (Bandura, 1977) emphasized modeling and observational learning. He described the concept of *enactive learning*, or learning by doing and experiencing the consequences of a person's actions. Unlike operant conditioning, enactive learning expects consequences to provide information rather than strengthen or weaken behavior. *Observational learning* is learning vicariously; our students can learn merely by observing another person learn. Bandura distinguished between the acquisition of knowledge (learning) and the performance based on knowledge (behavior).

Childbirth education teaching techniques based on Bandura's social learning theory include interactive role plays or labor simulations, viewing and then discussing/processing films, and the use of incentives. Presenting positive parenting to young people who have no familial modeling can be enhanced when incentives affect performance. A student may learn, but performance may be delayed until the situation is appropriate or there is an incentive to perform. Preparing for labor by participating in an interactive technique based on the Cascade of Interventions (Amis & Green, 2014) or the Six Healthy Birth Practices (Lamaze) in a childbirth class may inspire learning, but the incentive to perform, translating learning into behavior, occurs during the actual life experience of labor/birth.

*Social cognitive theory* expanded Bandura's explanations of learning by adding factors such as expectations and beliefs to the social influence of modeling (Bandura, 1997, 2001). This theory looks at the ways people develop social, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral skills, with an emphasis on self-motivation (Bandura & Locke, 2003). *Modeling* plays a key role in this theory, as does an emphasis on self-efficacy (if students believe they can reach a goal, they are more likely to achieve it). The effects of the environment (social influences), behavior (achievement outcomes), and personal values (self-influences) create a *triarchic reciprocal causality* (Schunk, Pintrich, & Meese, 2008). All three factors influence each other.

A hesitant woman enters her first Lamaze-prepared childbirth class, accompanied by a partner who appears hostile and suspicious, stating "I don't

know why we need to be here.” A sensitive childbirth educator models positive techniques for releasing tension, demonstrating a calm, mindful affect. She pairs this couple with an enthusiastic woman/partner who revealed prior knowledge of *The Official Lamaze Guide: Giving Birth With Confidence* (Lothian & DeVries, 2010) during an opening ice-breaker of “find out bingo.” Learning begins to take shape as students teach each other.

### **Lev Vygotsky: Sociocultural Theory**

The Russian psychologist Vygotsky believed human learning takes place in cultural settings and cannot be understood away from those settings. His work was based on children, but his primary tenets are applicable to adult learning. The concept of *coconstructed processes* demonstrates the use of shared activities to direct learning. Think of the simple learning task of reading a book to a child. In childbirth class, an educator may create a game where healthy birth practices are broken down in detail on small cards. Each student reads the cards with a partner; the dyads then share their learning with the group. Vygotsky’s concept of the *zone of proximal development* (ZPD) theorizes an area between a child’s current development level and the level of development the child can reach with adult guidance and interaction with peers (Vygotsky, 1978). I believe this translates nicely to adult learning; when small group work enhances understanding and retention of facts, the childbirth educator encourages what Kathleen Berger (2012) named the *magic middle*—the area between what is already known and what the student isn’t ready to learn. Peer interaction can encourage growth in the ZPD and model *scaffolding* (Wood, Bruner, & Ross, 1976). Inspired by Vygotsky, scaffolding compares building a concept or skill to the construction of a house. The childbirth educator provides the framework for learning and gradually builds on it. Introduction of mindfulness in a first class with a simple lesson on centering one’s breathing can build week by week to more advanced relaxation techniques. We create a scaffold of learning leading to self-mastery and self-efficacy.

### **Ann L. Brown: Reciprocal Teaching and Discovery Learning**

Do you recall learning as a passive experience where a lecture was given, students took notes and memorized facts, and were then tested for cognition? Few childbirth educators approach their curriculum in a

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passive way; interactive teaching techniques are solid components of most childbirth classes. In some ways, we have the research of Ann L. Brown to thank for this focus.

Brown was an educational psychologist who looked at Dewey’s *discovery learning* (inquiry-based learning) and decided guided intervention from a teacher was important to student discovery. Brown also discussed the Hawthorne effect (Brown, 1992) as a way of viewing social learning. The Hawthorne effect received its name from the location of the research, not the name of a researcher. In a series of experiments performed between 1924 and 1932 at the Hawthorne Works in Chicago, human subjects were found to change their behavior simply because they were being studied or observed. Drawing on these foundations, Brown encouraged students to design their own learning; teachers were seen as guides. The theory of *reciprocal teaching* allows students to study and then share their learning with their group. Students introduce topics and discuss material they have prepared themselves.

An excellent adaptation of Brown’s theories for childbirth educators deals with peer learning. I’ve trained teen parents as peer educators and mentors since 1995; one of my favorite sayings is “When an adult speaks, the message is heard as a whisper—when a peer teaches, it’s a shout!” Our young parents provide a level of instruction not possible from my team of adult educators. An example dealing with child safety occurred not long ago in group. Our community hosts a county fair every August; it is well attended and offers experiences many of our students are unable to otherwise access because of transportation challenges. One of our peer educators introduced the topic of child safety by noting how unsafe it would be to go on an amusement ride while holding an infant. I wouldn’t have conceptualized this scenario, but student reactions demonstrated its likelihood. Teen parents learned.

Childbirth education for adults can enhance learning by using Brown’s theories as well. Creating a topic jar where students can contribute areas of interest can aid discussion and focus curricula on student needs. I always “stock” my jar with a few vital topics and then ask each student to add something to the jar. Each person submits a paper, even if they

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only write "I don't have a topic"—this ensures no one will feel singled out. We select a topic each class session and divide into groups. I provide resources for further study; after discussion, the group leaders report back to the class and we process their findings.

### EDUCATING FOR COGNITION/LEARNING STYLES AND CHILDBIRTH EDUCATOR TEACHING TECHNIQUES

The study of cognition and learning styles is foundational for any educator, including those certified as childbirth educators. Three theorists and their connection to teaching techniques will be discussed: Piaget, Erikson, and Kolb.

#### *Jean Piaget: Cognitive Development*

There are two aspects of Piaget's well-known theories of cognitive development that are helpful to childbirth educators. First, his concepts of *assimilation* and *accommodation* guide learning by helping students use existing mental systems (called *schemes*) to make sense of new events (assimilation); accommodation occurs when we adjust our thinking to respond to new thinking. An example would be a mother who enters childbirth class with the value of "I want an epidural as soon as possible" and leaves after the series embracing the possibility of her own inner wisdom and strength. By introducing new concepts with respect and empathy, a childbirth educator can build on a learner's preexisting ability to comprehend new ideas and help accommodation change behavior.

Piaget (1954) is also known for his stages of cognitive development (sensorimotor, 0–2 years; preoperational, 2–7 years; concrete operational, 7–11 years; and formal operational, adolescence to adulthood). Childbirth educators typically teach adults, so the assumption of formal operational thought is often made. My work over the last decade with The Arc has shown me a wide variety of learning abilities. An educator cannot assume learners are able to think concretely, nor can we assume the ability to solve abstract problems with logic.

Presenting information at a basic level is not condescending; most newspapers are written at a fifth

grade through the college level, depending on the topic, with sporting events written at the lower levels and political events at higher (Johns & Wheat, 1984). Tailoring handouts to a fifth/sixth-grade reading level and an awareness of the need to explain concepts clearly are ways Piaget's theories can enhance a childbirth class.

#### *Erik Erikson: Psychosocial Development*

I fell in love with Erikson's work on psychosocial development as a young nurse. His theory supported my personal value in each person's worth and the role of education in empowering learners to make positive change in their lives. Most research done on his work has focused on adolescence and the search for identity; because I am also focused on teens, his work is relevant to me. According to Erikson, healthy human beings go through stages as they move through life. Most childbirth educators are aware of Erikson's eight stages of human development, starting with "trust versus mistrust in the first 2 years of life and ending with ego integrity versus despair for adults 65–death (Erikson, 1963, 1980). I confess my current age makes me pause at the final stage; nonetheless, there are implications for a childbirth educator in his theories.

Breastfeeding, responding to an infant's cues, and the realization that an infant's world is formed by interaction with parents or caregivers are all supported by Erikson's views. His work can inspire a childbirth educator to model nurturing, warmth, and responsive parenting. An awareness of which Erikson stage is common for most attendees in childbirth classes (typically intimacy vs. isolation) can inform interactive learning techniques on healthy relationships, values clarification, expectations of partners during labor/birth, and sexuality during pregnancy.

#### *David Kolb: Experiential Learning Styles*

Kolb's experiential learning cycle is often referenced in business. Begun in the 1970s, written in 1984, and updated recently (Kolb, 2014), this learning theory focuses on four stages of learning. A learner moves through Stage 1 (a concrete experience) through Stage 2 (observation of and reflection on the experience), leading to Stage 3 (analysis and conclusions based on the reflection), and ending in Stage 4 (experimentation or testing for the future, with new experiences).

Learners may enter the Kolb experiential learning cycle at any point. Kolb theorized that learners

will best grasp a task if it is experienced at all four modes. One possible example of the cycle as applied to childbirth education could be this sequence:

- Concrete experience—feeling: A Lamaze class includes a guest speaker who has recently given birth. Her partner shares the role of a support person in labor from their experience. After discussion and processing, the class divides into dyads (two people) to create an unscripted role play of their expectations for each other during labor and birth.
- Reflective observation—watching: Viewing a video of women in labor and observing their coping mechanisms, then processing in small groups, is an example of this stage.
- Abstract conceptualization—thinking: A woman and her partner acquire knowledge of labor and the birth process as part of this stage.
- Active experimentation—doing: A childbirth educator guides the class through visualization and mindful breathing with participation key.

### EDUCATING FOR EMPATHIC ADVOCACY AND CHILDBIRTH EDUCATOR TEACHING TECHNIQUES

Childbirth educators are birth advocates and passionate supporters of a woman's right to make informed decisions. The development of empathy through consideration of Maslow and Bronfenbrenner's theories can enhance advocacy. Moral development, as theorized through Kohlberg and Gilligan's work, can frame a childbirth educator's approach to empowering women during the child-bearing year.

#### **Abraham Maslow: Hierarchy of Needs**

Each culture is unique. The development of empathy and an other-directed approach to education involves studying theorists who touch our spirits. Maslow's work seeks to explain the way universal human needs affect our ability to reach our full potential. He created a hierarchy that is often portrayed in a pyramid. The base of the hierarchy forms *basic or physiological needs*; Maslow listed these needs as food, water, sleep, and sex. The next level is *safety needs* and includes nutrition, shelter, and safety. The third level is *love and belonging* (psychological needs). When an individual is cared for physically, the ability to share and interact with others follows. The fourth level is the *esteem* level, when people feel

at peace with their accomplishments. At the top of the pyramid, *self-actualization* occurs. Individuals who self-actualize reach a state of harmony and self-confidence where their full potential is achieved (Maslow, 1968).

Although criticized by some as ethnocentric, Maslow's hierarchy articulates a process of achievement that can be useful for a childbirth educator seeking to develop empathic awareness and advocacy. For example, reaching out to pregnant teens requires the ability to see beyond adolescent masks and defense mechanisms. If a parent of any age is dealing with instability at home, poverty, an unhealthy relationship, or an unsafe situation, learning will be inhibited. Even in a typical class, an educator can help retention by creating a safe place, setting guidelines such as respect and confidentiality, privately referring troubled couples to counseling, and providing snacks or allowing busy students the opportunity to bring their own meal and eat at class. Maslow inspires an educator to see beyond the classroom.

#### **Urie Bronfenbrenner: Ecological Systems Theory**

When I began teaching educational psychology for Washington and Jefferson College, adding attendance at a home visit was one of the first changes we made to the syllabus. Students in the Department of Education accompany social workers from the Teen Outreach I direct as they conduct family visits for educational mentoring; the students then write a reflection piece connecting their experience with education/psychology theorists. Bronfenbrenner is typically selected for analysis. His ecological systems theory is based on the influence of five environmental systems on human development: the micro system, mesosystem, exosystem, macro system, and chronosystem (Bronfenbrenner, 1989).

The microsystem includes those closest to our lives—family, friends, classmates, teachers, neighbors, and all with direct contact. We contribute to this environment by our socialization. The mesosystem involves the relationships between the microsystems. An awareness of the mesosystem can help a teacher connect a student's behavior in class with what's happening in the family. The exosystem includes people and places with which a child has no interaction, yet may influence a child positively or negatively. A person's workplace, tension in a neighborhood, and a family member's illness are examples of the way this system impacts learning.

The overall culture in which a person is born is the macrosystem. This system includes socioeconomic status, ethnicity, race, and national freedom/stability. Finally, the chronosystem defines the transitions in a lifespan. A primary example in a family is divorce; on a global level, the chronosystem would include sociohistorical factors such as war.

Implications from Bronfenbrenner for empathic childbirth educators are twofold: the effect of systems on students in their classes and the long-term challenges faced as they parent. Ultimately, the goal of preparing for birth is the creation of a family to nurture and raise children. An awareness of ecological systems theory can guide curriculum development. If teaching in an area where turmoil exists, assisting learners to develop coping mechanisms can help them parent. Developing a resource list for use after class is one way to use this theory for long-term connection.

### **Lawrence Kohlberg: Theory of Moral Development**

Two well-known theorists looked at human moral development: Lawrence Kohlberg and Carol Gilligan. Kohlberg's work has been criticized for its Western focus and its failure to consider the development of woman's moral compass; we'll discuss his work first and then consider Gilligan's approach.

Kohlberg based his work on Piaget. He presented a classic theoretical case (the Heinz Steals the Drug case) to subjects in his research and observed their moral reasoning. He concluded that moral development progressed through three levels of development, each involving two stages. Level 1, preconventional morality, includes Stage 1 (obedience and punishment) and Stage 2 (individualism and exchange). In Level 1, a person moves from seeing rules as absolute to an awareness of reciprocity as it serves one's personal needs. Level 2 is conventional morality. Stage 3, interpersonal relationships, is based on conformity. People do the right thing because of social expectations and roles. Stage 4, maintaining social order, focuses on maintaining law and order by following a society's rules and respecting authority. Finally, Level 3, postconventional morality, is more abstract. In Stage 5, social contract and individual rights, individuals encounter and react to different values, opinions, and beliefs. The last stage, Stage 6 or universal principles, is based on universal ethics and abstract reasoning as it leads to justice (Kohlberg, 1981).

How would knowledge of Kohlberg's theory enhance a childbirth educator's teaching techniques?

How often does value clarification enter into preparation for childbirth? I can easily name areas where moral reasoning enhances discussion: participants' approach to nonpharmacological comfort measures, the choice of midwife versus obstetrician, selecting breastfeeding in lieu of formula feeding, postpartum division of labor in the family, and choice of parenting style are only a few. An awareness of moral growth can help a childbirth educator respond to these and other areas of debate and opinion. On a practical note, knowledge of human behavior and ethical reactions can enhance an independent childbirth educator's business plan and help create a business of integrity.

### **Carol Gilligan: Theory of Moral Development**

In contrast to Kohlberg, whose subjects were White males, Carol Gilligan theorized a feminist approach to morality. As Kohlberg's research assistant, she was influenced by his work but soon realized women's morality was different. Her seminal work, *In a Different Voice: Psychological Theory and Women's Development* (Gilligan, 1982), examined the way women approach a moral dilemma—whether or not to terminate a pregnancy. Gilligan concluded women used an ethic of care where morality was based on care for others. The ethic of care is not limited to women but is more common among females. Gilligan has argued for psychology to be free from gender hierarchy and gender binary.

Childbirth educators are birth advocates; as such, they are advocates for women's voices. When a childbirth educator empowers a woman to find her inner wisdom, when modeling in class includes assertiveness role play for both women and their partners, and when class participants discuss controversial topics such as circumcision, Gilligan's work can support teaching techniques. At a minimum, childbirth educators are committed to giving women a voice in their pregnancies, labors, and births.

### **EDUCATING CULTURALLY DIVERSE POPULATIONS AND CHILDBIRTH EDUCATOR TEACHING TECHNIQUES**

We live in a culturally diverse world. Expanding beyond the classic theorists explored in an educational psychology textbook increases childbirth educators' knowledge of women outside their personal cultural experience. Pam Wilson, a colleague and friend and the author of *When Sex is the Subject: Attitudes and Answers for Young Children* (Wilson,

1991), describes removing our adult glasses when teaching children. We all see life through our own lens. Exploring multicultural theories can create a childbirth educator–advocate who serves all women.

### **Kimberlé Crenshaw: Theory of Intersectionality**

Crenshaw introduced the theory of intersectionality to feminist theory (Crenshaw, 1989), articulating an older concept and conducting research on the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination (Crenshaw, 1991). Intersectionality theory suggests that patterns of oppression are interrelated and bound together by society. Categories of gender, race, class, ability, sexual orientation, religion, and other identities interplay to contribute to social inequality (Maconis & Gerber, 2011).

Childbirth classes are increasingly culturally diverse; childbirth educators must be prepared to serve all women. The interplay between race, culture, and gender affects a woman's choices, her perception with caregivers, and her access to care.

Teaching techniques need to consider culture. Visual aids should reflect diversity; childbirth educators should be cognizant of the need to present models of varying races, ages, and abilities. Ignoring the needs of people with different abilities, people of color, and women in same-sex relationships marginalizes these participants and creates an unsafe, “us–them” environment. Beyond selecting inclusive videos, posters, and activities, wise childbirth educators will acknowledge the limitations imposed on us by our own culture. Inviting diverse women to provide peer mentoring or speak to a childbirth class can empower all women to make informed decisions. Actively mentoring diverse childbirth educators into positions of leadership within professional organizations can encourage growth for all.

### **Derrick Bell: Critical Race Theory**

Professor Derrick Bell is often credited with being the “father” of critical race theory (CRT; Bell, 1989, 1993). The theory is based on three parts; first, that racism is ordinary, not the exception to society, but the way culture exists on an everyday level. The ordinariness of this concept makes it difficult to address racial justice issues. The second feature of CRT, called *material determinism*, theorizes that eradicating racism is slow because materially and psychically large parts of society have little incentive to remove it. Bell's proposal that *Brown v. Board of Education* resulted more from the self-interest of Whites than

a desire to help Blacks is controversial and thought provoking. The third component of CRT is the social construction thesis. According to this thesis, race is a category society invents and uses when convenient (Delgado & Stefancic, 2006).

Once again, how does this theory affect a childbirth educator's teaching? I believe the field of childbirth education is in need of diverse educators who can provide role modeling for people of color and non-English speaking participants. I am committed to social and racial justice and invite childbirth educators to embrace this work. As with the theory of intersectionality, knowledge of CRT can inspire childbirth educators to seek change.

## **EDUCATING FOR MULTIPLE/EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCES AND CHILDBIRTH EDUCATOR TEACHING TECHNIQUES**

The concept of intelligence beyond standard testing is one that truly matches childbirth education. Two theorists look at learning through this perspective: Gardner and Goldman.

### **Howard Gardner: Theory of Multiple Intelligences**

Howard Gardner was a student of Erikson; Gardner conceptualized the theory of multiple intelligences in his book *Frames of Mind: Theories of Multiple Intelligences* (Gardner, 1983) as eight areas of ability rather than a generalized, broad idea of intelligence. These areas are:

- Visual-linguistic intelligence (verbal skills and sensitivity to sound)
- Logical-mathematical intelligence (ability to think abstractly and perceive logical and numerical patterns)
- Spatial-visual intelligence (ability to think in images and pictures)
- Bodily kinesthetic intelligence (ability to control one's body movements)
- Musical intelligence (pitch, rhythm and timber, and the ability to produce and appreciate music)
- Interpersonal intelligence (ability to detect and respond to moods and motivations of others)
- Intrapersonal intelligence (self-awareness and the ability to be in tune with inner feelings, values, and beliefs)
- Naturalist intelligence (recognizing, appreciating, and categorizing plants, animals, and nature)

In later writings, Gardner added a ninth intelligence: existential intelligence, the ability to consider

**W** For those interested in the juxtaposition of educational psychology and social justice, I recommend Sensoy, O., & DiAngelo, R. (2011). *Is everyone really equal: An introduction to key concepts in social justice education.* New York, NY: Teacher College Press.

Be aware of the unique, beautiful intelligences of your students and draw on their strengths.

deep questions about human existence (Gardner, 2008). Existential intelligence is also referred to as *moral or spiritual intelligence*.

I find Gardner's concepts liberating when preparing lesson plans. The idea of intelligence as more complicated than what is discerned through IQ testing or assessments done in formal schooling appeals to me. A childbirth educator drawing on Gardner's work can explore many avenues for teaching. Playing music as your students enter and using birth art can explore musical intelligence and spatial-visual intelligence. Movement can free students who learn best kinesthetically; encourage exercise and stretching at each class, teach in small segments to encourage a change of pace, and use stations to get students up and active. Working in dyads or small groups reinforces interpersonal and intrapersonal intelligences. Learners who like logical-mathematical exercises will probably enjoy the topics of labor stages, second stage/pushing, and timing contractions. A visual-linguistic learner may love reading scenarios aloud. Consider your class environment. If you can conduct a portion of class outside, do so to empower naturalist learners; if not, provide plants or even a pet to ease tension. Finally, the concept of existential intelligence can lend a rich dimension to student-led discussions surrounding challenging topics such as unexpected outcomes.

Be aware of the unique, beautiful intelligences of your students and draw on their strengths.

***Daniel Goleman: Theory of Emotional Intelligence***

Emotional intelligence deals with feelings—the ability to discern one's own emotions and the emotions of others while differentiating feelings and using them to guide thinking and behavior. While studied by other researchers, Daniel Goleman brought the concept of emotional intelligence to the forefront with his popular book *Emotional Intelligence* (Goleman, 1995). Goleman lists five areas where emotional intelligence matters: self-awareness, self-regulation, internal motivation, empathy, and social skills (Goleman, 2012). Another Goleman work, *Social Intelligence: The New Science of Human Relationships* (Goleman, 2006), examines the way humans are programmed to connect with one another.

Goleman believes emotional and social intelligence are more powerful than other intelligences, particularly when determining leadership.

As with Gardner's work on multiple intelligences, I find Goleman's concepts intrinsically linked with childbirth education, especially when I consider candidates for certification. The ability to recognize our own emotions is crucial to serving others. I've hired childbirth educators who had not given birth and been criticized for the practice, as if only a personal birth experience could enable good teaching. A passionate commitment to birth advocacy is often predicated on personal birth experiences; I know my own first birth in 1976 drew me to Lamaze and fueled a dedication that continues to drive me. Emotional intelligence can help a childbirth educator process birth experiences, however. We each bring our life "baggage" into interaction with students. The ability to filter one's own emotion from a class session can make room for learners' feelings. As educators, it's "not about us."

Childbirth educators are in a unique position to observe relationships as well. Because most childbirth educators are not professional counselors, an educator's emotional intelligence will help when students seek emotional support. Referring to a mental health caregiver can maintain the student-educator dynamic while offering help. This is especially true during postpartum. A skilled educator can recognize signs of postpartum depression and help families seek assistance.

**SUMMARY**

As a young childbirth educator, I created interactive teaching techniques, employed small groups, and made labor stations with no awareness of the links between evidence-based educational theories and my class. I only knew how much my students enjoyed the activities; I gloried in their participation and loved finding ways to keep them engaged. As a more seasoned childbirth educator, I recognize the role theory plays in creating teaching techniques. My focus is unchanged; I remain deeply committed to providing the best education possible. A knowledge of education theory supports my efforts and empowers my curriculum development. I applaud childbirth educators who strive for excellence, develop curricula that are empathic and inclusive, and connect with their students. Thank you for reading and for moving our profession forward in truth.

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