

Personal Statement on Learning and Instruction

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I believe we, as human beings, are agents and we can choose to act or to be acted upon (2 Nephi 2:14, 26 Book of Mormon). My personal teaching/learning philosophy comes from a combination of multiple learning theories and my Christian background. In my practice, I define basic learning as the ability to recall the information and/or know the steps to apply the information. What we do with the knowledge is more of an individual choice. We can choose to let knowledge become part of who we are, how we act and what we do. I call deep learning, the act of allowing knowledge to have a personal impact of our being and identity. Basic and deep learning are built upon each other. Basic learning can help create a platform for deep learning to happen. And deep learning can help basic learning dig deeper roots in the mind of the learner.

The theories I base my personal statement on learning are cognitivism, constructivism, situated learning, and narrative. I don't believe that all our learning can or should be summarized in only one theory. Humans and human lives are complex. As humans we are unique individuals with very personal experiences. One learner is not like the other. Yet we, humans, live in a social environment and belong to many different communities. We are a part of a whole. I see learning both as an individual as well as a social matter. Both individual and social learning affects each other. In school we learn in a social environment but at the end we are graded as individuals. In life we become part of a community, yet we learn also to discover our individual voice.

Just like we are part of a social world. We as individual humans are also a compound of a physical body, soul, and mind (1 Thess. 5:23 King James Version). Cognitive theory can help educators and/or instructors enhance the learning experience of basic learning which helps understand how our brains and physical body learns and retains information. Understanding how our body and brain functions can change how instructors present the lesson or instruction to more effectively facilitate the learners experience to process the information. Parts of Constructivism theory is part of the transition between basic and deep learning. Situated learning theory gives a realistic view on learning as it happens in the day-to-day life experiences and it's part of deep learning since it views knowledge as part of the identity of the participant. Narrative learning has methods that can help learners have a more human experience in learning.

Cognitive Learning

Part of the cognitive learning theory explores the idea that our minds work as an information processor. Cognitivism assumes we have a short-term/working memory and a long-term memory (Scholarpedia). Cognitivism sees learning as a process of transferring information (Krathwohl, 2002) from outside into the memory of the learner.

As part of the process of transferring, Cognitivism helps us understand that remembering/learning new information takes much more effort and space in our working memory than building upon old information does (Bransford, Brown, & Cocking, 1999). This understanding can help educators decide how much new information they give learners at a time to be effective for the learner to process. Cognitivism can open our understanding on how our bodies and mind learn and process information, which is not all but a part of learning that also needs consideration.

Constructivism

Our bodies and mind play a good role in learning, but constructivism helps us see that there is more to learning. Humans are more than just an information processor (Driscoll, 2005). Driscoll says that instead of empty vessels waiting to be filled we are rather active organisms seeking meaning. Jonaseen (1991) claims that according to constructivists, thinking is grounded in perception of physical and social experiences, which can only be comprehended by the mind. Constructivism incorporates the idea that each learner can construct knowledge, meaning, or even reality based on their own unique individual experiences, understanding, and capabilities.

Constructivism gives the learner ownership of their learning (Driscoll, 2005). That ownership could let learners be part of determining their learning journey. Instructors can also benefit from understanding that the learner's views and interpretation of the information can be different than the instructor or other learners. This information can help instructors be more aware of how the learner's views and past experiences could impact their learning.

According to Vygotsky (1978) the relationship between learning and development, is an upward spiral: as we learn, we develop, and in doing so we expand our Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) which increases our ability to learn and develop more. Vygotsky also introduces the social aspect that we, by ourselves, have limitations but with the right help and guidance from those capable, we can overcome those limitations and expand our ZPD. That brings in the social aspect of constructivism. We need each other. We learn and develop more as a social group than as individuals. Instructors can create an environment for learners to increase their ZPD. Current limitations with the right help are only that— "current" limitations. Learners and instructors can benefit from a new perspective to see the potential and not the immediate capabilities and limitations of learners.

Situated Learning

As I stated before, we are part of a social world. We live in neighborhoods, belong to communities, cultures, countries, etc. We are not alone in this world and our lives overlap. Situated learning theory tabs in this understanding that learning is part of our day-to-day life. Learning not only happens in the classroom. According to Lave & Wenger (1991), we all belong to communities of practice. Situated learning helps us realize that by generalizing and recontextualizing learning in formalized settings, we might miss the human experience of learning. Situated learning values identity. Learning is no longer something we only do, but something we become. Learning can change our identity as an individual who belongs in a community of practice.

Situated learning also decenters mastery (Lave & Wenger, 1991). There is no specific person who has all the knowledge of a community of practice. Every person of the community holds part of the knowledge. Situated learning sees learning as a social phenomenon and identity formation. Instructors who are aware of the learner's community of practice can have help learners see how the information they learned can help them in their journey to become a full participant in their community of practice.

Making this connection between the information and their identity in their community of practice can have an impact not only on the learner but also on the community.

Narrative Learning

Narrative learning asserts that when we reflect on the experience and while we are formulating a cohering story, we learn more about what we learn. As we reflect and try to put into words what we experience, it gives us time to remember, reflect, make connections, and create meaning of what we experienced. Clark and Rossiter (2008) said "Before we can teach anything, it must first make sense to us in some way, but putting our understanding in words that make sense to someone else--in other words, narrating it--further our own understanding of the subject."

Narrative seems to be something that could enhance any learning theory. I believe humans relate and remember information better if they understand how that information fits on their narrative and/or how it can enhance it. The learner can be the main character in their narrative or supportive characters in the narratives of others. The three modes of narrative learning Clark and Rossiter (2008) present are writing learnings journals, concept-focused autobiographical writing, and instructional case studies. I personally think that narrative does enhance learning because it personalizes the learning. The two first modes allow the learner, or character in the narrative, to analyze their learning and even add meaning to their learning and to their own story.

Conclusion

Learners are agents who have physical bodies with strengths and limitations, a spirit and a mind constructed of diverse life experiences and believes. Learners can expand their ZPD with their knowledge already build and can expand it even more with the help others can provide. Learners are part of a social world, and they can benefit if we create a sociocultural learning environment for them to develop and learn. Helping learners see they are part of a community and narrative can give them a sense of belonging and a curiosity to find and build their identity. Creating connections and meaning from their learning experience through narrative can help learners remember better the lesson learned.

Instructors are facilitators and can help create a safe space where learners can obtain knowledge, reflect on what was learned, and choose how the knowledge will impact their lives.

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