

Learning Philosophy

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Education is a culmination of moving parts. It is a giant that never rests, a machine that never slows and a planet that never ceases to spin. A teacher now in the fourth year at a high school, I have developed a view of education that is vastly different than the pedagogy I constructed when still working on my teaching credential. Now an educator *and* a student, I better understand both roles, and how their interaction shapes a classroom, for better or worse. This interaction is the foundation of my new pedagogy, my teaching (and learning) philosophy that, much like education itself, is continuing to change, adapt and grow in relation to the society around it. My philosophy, in short, is that education requires respect, understanding and freedom. Learning, a subset of this philosophy, requires the same principles, but also includes one more: drive.

On any level I believe that education requires respect, understanding and freedom, though my personal philosophy applies more so to the high school level than the college level. Still, the first of my philosophical tenets can be applied to either. Respect is paramount in the classroom, and a classroom cannot function without it, no matter how driven the student or knowledgeable the educator. Respect allows students to feel safe to learn and ask questions, a fundamental part of learning. It allows them to make mistakes without fear of retribution, and it allows a learner to trust an educator (and the material). Likewise, respect keeps students from tarnishing the classroom atmosphere and helps students to manage themselves. In the high school level, it would be difficult to imagine a class of students learning if they were constantly arguing with a teacher, disobeying classroom rules and interfering with a lesson. A mutual street of respect allows the classroom to be managed easier and pushes students to enjoy class and the material covered, if only to show the educator that they are on the same team.

Together with respect comes understanding. Educators need to understand their students in order to teach them effectively. Students in the high school level easily bore of the same material, and it is the job of the educator to understand this and to adapt, making a lesson more engaging for more students. Likewise, students at the college level should not be coloring or working on simple homework assignments; the college educator should understand why their students are there. This is also where the use of technology applies most directly to my learning philosophy. Educators need to understand the wants and needs of their students, and it is imperative that technology plays a role (as students both *want* and *need* to learn using technology). To best prepare students for life after high school educators need to introduce them to new technology and guide them in its use. There are very few who don't have technology as a large part of their life today, and it would be foolish to imagine a student as being adequately ready for the rigors of life without understanding the (professional and casual) use of technology. It is also important that educators understand themselves and recognize that technology is part of our world. For some educators this might be taking a look at their own understanding of technology and expanding it, and for others it may mean understanding that technology is a tool, not a solution. Technology can be used to model learning, as multimedia for presentations, through the use of games or learning tools, or to allow students to access or submit work. For those with disabilities that interfere with learning, technology can be used to help them access the curriculum (Boyle and Kennedy, 2019). For both the learner and the educator, understanding themselves, each other and the world around them develops the best education possible, especially when this involves technology.

Finally, “freedom” is an important part of my educational philosophy. Many educators view learning as linear. They create an assignment or teach a lesson and assume that students will follow along, and those that don’t are *bad* or *incompetent* students. The truth is that students learn and explain their understanding in many ways. They may do poorly on tests but excellent on papers, or terribly on note taking but wonderfully on assessments. It is the job of the educator to allow for learning freedom in the classroom and to not stagnate the learning environment by subjecting students to one form of learning. This is why I view my philosophy of learning to be eclectic rather than just behavioral, cognitivist or constructivist – there are many ways that students learn, and by limiting teaching methods educators limit opportunities for learning.

My learning theory involves behaviorism in some ways. My learning philosophy focuses on the needs of students and freedom in the classroom, and this means that there will sometimes be lessons that use behaviorism. For instance, my classroom often involves quizzes that test student knowledge of vocabulary or incidents in a text. This assessment plan utilizes the “drill and kill” way of teaching, and for low-level academic knowledge this works well. However, this way of learning is not how I primarily address learning as it does not make the students more independent learners, and it only has limited applications.

My teaching philosophy focuses mostly on the cognitive and constructionist theories of learning. A large part of learning is low-level information acquisition, but it is never limited to this. Knowledge grows and is applied, often differently, as a student learns more. Addressing my tenets of freedom and understanding (and cognitivism), I have students work on concept-maps and other learning tools that explain how concepts are related. These allow for freedom in the

learner, allow for the educator to better understand what their students know, and how it is related (Reiser and Dempsey, 2018). Additionally, my tenet of respect allows for constructionism, where students work together, develop ideas and learn (individually and together), something that couldn't occur without students respecting themselves, each other and the classroom itself. Neither of these learning theories are used alone, but in conjunction to allow students the best opportunity to learn, in a way that works best for them.

References

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