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Brief 1: Personal Learning Theory

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Review of the literature provided for module 1, allowed me to think about the learning theories summarized in chapter one of Harasim's *Learning Theory and Online Technologies* (2012) in light of my personal experiences and observations, rather than simply comparing and contrasting the summaries of common theories. Initially I had difficulty deciding how to approach the idea of choosing an epistemology- a "philosophy of knowledge or how we come to learn"- and I focused more on how I had been taught (Harasim, 2012, p. 5). Given the construct of existing schools of epistemological thought, discussed in the Harasim text as objectivist versus constructivist, I am unable to choose.

Since I have not done extensive research and experimented for myself, I have a limited fund of personal knowledge and experience that leads me to think that different types of knowledge and understanding are reached in differing ways. I assume that not all people learn or teach in the same way. Through imperfect transmission and reception even them most didactic instructional setting is in itself a constructivist experience – while some students learn to teach and learn by rote, as designed and intended, others questions and design new ways to teach themselves and others based on an instinctive or even physiological rejection of that instructional style. Moreover, despite behaviorist instructional objectives, some students construct or create their own meanings and understandings and surpass their instructors and add to the body of thought and knowledge shared with the world.

I personally reject the idea that knowledge is finite, I am convinced that the universe is neither finite nor static and that the nature of perception adds to the body of possible knowledge through observation and research. If one human, or even all humans

collectively, could know all there was to know about one's self and the physical universe his knowledge would be incomplete until he understood the perspectives and constructed understanding of every other existing individual on the same topics and conversed on every topic and came to complete consensus with all other persons in existence. After that, of course, the person would have to be able to understand the same body of knowledge in light of the possible future consequences for each individual, creature, atom, quark, and the impact of alternative physical and mental states. That being said, I am willing and able to accept that $1 + 1 = 2$. While there may be other ways to look at that equation, express it mathematically, say it in other languages, write it in varying fonts, etc. that the concept it represents is exactly what it is mutually agreed to be by the majority of mankind, rather than a scent, a person, or anything else. There is, in my opinion, no limit to what there is to know or the way in which it can be known, however there is a limit to an individual's time and ability to perceive/experience/observe and comprehend. Moreover, limitations in perception, motivation, and opportunity necessarily limit knowledge for each individual.

That statement begs the questions: "Is learning performing by doing or is learning the processing of information? Does learning make meaning by doing?" (Edens, 2012). As discussed by Harasim, those questions are currently and constantly under debate. When parents insist that children cannot be studying with their iPod going, the TV on, and chatting on Facebook they are challenging the child's epistemological understanding of how they learn. Parents tend to believe that since the child is more likely to be interested in the media-rich surroundings the motivation to learn and the ability to make connections among instruction, prior learning, and new understandings is limited. Being a parent, I agree. However, I am also biased by my personal preference to be completely alone with music playing gently in the background in order to complete assignments and solitary silence for initial instruction. The child, however, may be fully confident that she can make above 70% on the assignment while enjoying the other various tasks and ultimately pass the unit test.

How do we know when we know anything? If the child is accurately completing the assignment (meeting the objectives set by the instructor) are they learning? Has the

child learned if he is then unable to recall (as measured by the initial objective) one week later and never able to apply the "knowledge" in any other context? For example, have I learned to tie my shoes if I have only ever successfully completed the task once? Have I learned how to tie my shoes if I can accurately explain the process, can write an essay on the history of shoe-tying, can compare and contrast various methods of completing the task, can evaluate my performance and other's performances, and can posit new ways to fulfill the same objective but have only ever completed the task once and then with only 70% when compared with ideal performance? On the other hand, have I learned how to tie my shoes when I can consistently tie any string or lace of significant length in a manner that is recognizable as "tied" in the culturally typical manner of shoe tying? I believe all of the above demonstrate/describe learning and that the only difference among them is the objective of instruction. In any of the above listed situations, the evidence of learning could be considered sufficient, excellent, incomplete, or inappropriate depending primarily on the objective of instruction and the design of the assessment that is used to measure "learning" or understanding.

So, "Is teaching training for a new behavior? Is teaching transmission of information to learners, or is it facilitating activity whereby learners make meaning? How is educating different from training?" (Edens, 2012). Beyond the pithy quotes on education and learning that are available on the internet, what is the connection between teaching and learning? Can everything be taught? What about the things that are discovered, both objects and ideas? In that instance, did the information previously exist unobserved, and discovery is simply the ability to perceive existing phenomena (which seems very objectivist/behaviorist except for the fact that the idea of things waiting to be discovered rather than created seems pre-Cartesian) or is each understanding new knowledge?

When something is taught, in any manner, what is the objective? It seems to me, that if the goal of instruction is to be able to identify persons who can regurgitate knowledge in large recognizable chunks then the goal of that instruction is behaviorist or cognitive, depending on the subject matter. If the end result of every instructional experience is to take a multiple choice test, fill in the blank, or write 500 words and leads to the default response to "educational/instructional stimuli" of writing or completing a text/survey,

filling in blanks, and writing sentences that begin with capital letters and end with periods then teaching is behaviorist/cognitive. I believe there are many teachers who teach that way and I feel certain that "pay for performance" will encourage that style to come back in vogue. However, I also believe that the behavioral/cognitive-theory style of teaching and learning is highly effective for drilling basic facts (like basic math, spelling, basic language, etc.). Even didactic direct instruction may be the most effective method for teaching certain subjects or certain people. The topics I suggested previously are so fundamental to the societal construct and modern instructional content, that while they may be completely flawed, exploring or exposing those flaws early in the process of "education" (which I define as the process of imparting cultural or social schema and development/reinforcement of the social construct) is destructive and damages the entire process of education and may be harmful to the individual.

Although Behaviorist and Cognitive Learning theories were the dominant learning theories in the past, Constructivist learning theory and Online Collaborative Learning Theory form the core of current and developing knowledge about learning and teaching. While there is a range of opinion and research on the theories expounded by Piaget, Vygotsky, Dewey, and Bruner, I wonder how this theory is any different from a learner who was once an apprentice becoming a journeyman or master? Given the earlier example of learning to tie your shoes, if a person is taught by demonstration, inquiry, or lecture and then invents a new self-tying lace which learning theory is proven true? Or is this simply an example of transfer of learning?

When I taught myself to crochet by reading books on the subject, watching YouTube videos, and completing skill-building/training exercises, was I truly self-taught constructing meaning by acquiring informational resources or was I learning in a totally didactic and cognitivist manner? Would the answer to that question change if I imperfectly mimicked the method and for it to be more useful? Would I then have created/constructed new knowledge/understanding? If I taped my experiments and instruction on my new method am I building an Online Learning Community? If I blog and wiki and develop or contribute to forums am I now a member of an Online Collaborative Community? I would argue yes to all questions, just as I would say that I

have described formal and informal learning and instruction as the learning experience moves from an individual and resources to a wiki and forum. I truly believe the online learning concept and theory are the future of education for a new generation of learners and instructional objectives. My learning style and MSLQ, as supported by my personal experience of completing a degree online supports that finding, although scoring was problematic (please see FAQ post).

My learning maps, which follow in this document/thread, indicate both my vision of a web of learning and instruction that is functionally defined by instructional objective (as indicated by levels of Bloom's Taxonomy as summarized at http://www.nwlink.com/~donclark/hrd/bloom.html) and were designed at http://bubbl.us. Additionally I have created a learning network that indicates my belief that my learning is dynamic: formal and informal and didactic, directly instructed and collaboratively built in union with family, friends, coworkers, professors, and the global online community. As I am the product of private, public, home-school, online, and face-to-face instruction, I have attempted to illustrate that background as well.