Personal Learning Theory / Personal Learning Theory Revisited

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Having never sat down to really articulate my personal learning theory before, it was harder than I anticipated to identify exactly my ideas about learning are, and how they inform my teaching. My TPI test results revealed, if anything, that my teaching styles vary, and that I don't have any particularly dominant teaching style. I believe this is a reflection of my belief that a large part of my responsibility as a teacher is to provide a variety of "access routes" to information, making it necessary to vary my teaching style to meet the demands of the various learning styles of the students.

While my teaching styles very, I place significant value on the inclusion of a developmental or constructivist approach in teaching. As an ESL instructor, this is one of the fundamentals of my work. It is necessary, not simply advisable, to ascertain whether or not my students know their ABC's before I begin writing sentences on the board.

With the developmental approach as a foundation, including other teaching perspectives helps to make the information accessible to all. I solicit help from my more advanced students to serve as guides or teachers for some of the students who are only just beginning to understand the material. These students could then be described as learning from an apprenticeship perspective, which serves to build a sense of community and trust

among the students, and nurtures confidence in the students, both "master" and "apprentice."

My TPI test results did reveal that I do not place much value on a transmission perspective. In the age of the Internet, there are so many readily available sources of reliable information that the need for 'expert' teachers is diminished, while the need for reliable pathways for the social transmission of knowledge rises in its place.

December 5, 2010 – Personal Learning Theory Revisited

My personal learning theory has changed significantly since the beginning of this course. I initially had difficulty defining my personal *learning* theory, instead defaulting to a personal *teaching* theory.

In the course of studying a wide range of different theories, I have come to believe that a well balanced theory of learning requires if not an inclusion, then at least an understanding and acknowledgment of many existing theories along with their strengths and weaknesses.

Ausubel's assimilation theory, among others, struck a chord with me. We of course know that it is easier to learn information when it is presented in context, but meaningful

learning theory helped me to understand the importance of storing and retrieving knowledge in context as well. As a teacher it is important to continuously help students to assimilate new knowledge into their "idiosyncratic knowledge frameworks", and ensure that new knowledge is being appropriately reconciled with subsuming concepts (Novak, 1998).

Vygotsky's theories also had a significant impact on my learning theory. The idea that "the structure of conversations becomes the structure of thought" and all learning is inherently social in nature was a revelation (Miller, 2002). Looking through a Vygotskian lens at other social learning theories, particularly distributed cognition, gave me a new appreciation for the value of tools to help develop knowledge. Viewing cognition as a conversation between the internal and external world, other people, and artifacts requires a socially-supportive learning environment, and more collaborative learning activities.

My new personal learning theory requires a shift in my teaching practices to include more collaborative activities, a broader range and application of tools, and more learner-led activities. It is my belief that by incorporating a more constructivist, socially-aware pedagogy, my students will learn more effectively, and be better prepared to apply what they have learned in real-world situations.

Resources

Miller, P.H. (2002). *Theories of Developmental Psychology, 4ᵗʰ Ed.* (pp.367-396;

Vygotsky's Socio-Cultural Approach). New York: Worth

Novak, J. D. (1998). *Learning, Creating, and Using Knowledge: Concept Maps as*

Facilitative Tools in Schools and Corporations (pp. 49-78; ch 5 – Ausubel's

Assimilation Learning Theory). Mahwah, NJ: Erlbaum.