

Defining My Educational Philosophy

Epistemological Beliefs:

I would like to start out by stating that no one person learns in the same manner, as far as learning theories go, as someone else. My own personal epistemological belief is that people learn through empiricism. You will learn either by performing a certain task or action, or by watching what someone else has done. In other words, you learn by experiences, directly or indirectly. As you know, teachers try to convey information in different ways. A lot of people learn or absorb information better through visualization. On the other hand, others might comprehend better using audio aids.

Another epistemological belief is rationalism. Rationalism is the notion that as humans, we are born with all the knowledge we will need to live and strive in any environment. People must discover or reveal this knowledge through structured learning. I happen to not agree with this belief.

How People Learn:

As I stated above, I feel people learn through experience, either by performing tasks directly, or through watching someone else. I think the correct learning theory to choose will definitely depend on what topic or information you are trying to convey. I personally feel that both behaviorism and cognitivism are used in all teaching in some form or another. I feel you really can't use one without the other. These are three basic instructional learning concepts or theories: Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism deals with using stimuli to achieve wanted outcomes. These stimuli can be used in a positive or negative manner. Schools and in general parenting have seemed to move away from the negative stimuli to positive reinforcement. People are acknowledged when they do something correct, and not criticized from doing something wrong. I think a mixture of both would probably lead to the best result. Many times this method is used in early stages of learning, such as learning to cook something for the first time or performing a new task for the first time. Also, the military has used this type of "learning" for decades. You can also see examples of this in most sports.

Cognitivism

Cognitivism is based on explaining the reasoning behind what one teaches, and not just teaching people to memorize information. Cognitive learning is used a lot in math, science, technical fields, and engineering environments. Professors teach concepts in class and then those concepts are applied in lab activities and projects. The labs and projects allow the students to use their minds freely, but with guidelines to point everyone in one general direction.

Constructivism

Constructivism identifies the means in which skills will be learned and applied. This simply means that one will be given the proper material in order to perform a given task. This task will actually be learned when it is applied in a real world situation. In this form of learning, one is given the information and tools to learn, but ultimately it is up to the individual to comprehend and understand the information that they were provided or exposed to. This is a fairly new teaching concept or theory. However, more and more teachers and professors are using this method in their classrooms.

How Instructors Facilitate Learning:

Much of learning is placed on the pupil, whereas in reality, an instructor should focus more on how best to convey the information. The following things can help you decide the proper teaching method:

- Ask general questions, possibly in an examination form, at the beginning of class to get a feel for what information the students have been exposed to.
- Ask what exactly they hope to get out of the class.
- Get the individuals to tell something about themselves. Get to know their experiences.
- Choose and follow an instructional learning theory that best fits the needs of your audience.
- Clearly define the objectives of the class
- Clearly state how you will evaluate their assignments and tests.
- Always grade and return assignments in a timely manner, so the students will have some meaningful feedback.

Summary:

With any epistemological belief there will be pros and cons. Most instructors will probably choose the epistemological belief that they were exposed to. The next step is determining which learning theory would best suit your audience. Sometimes two or more theories might be the way to go. If you plan teaching in phases, then each phase possibly could be taught with a different learning theory. The most basic theories are behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. The first two theories have been around for decades, but only recently have people begun to really use and incorporate constructivism.

No matter which epistemological belief one adheres to or the learning theory one follows, the main thing is to have clearly defined objectives and clearly state how you plan to achieve those objectives. Know your audience and try to use a mixture of audio aids, visual aids, and clearly explained solutions to assignments to try to ensure successful comprehension. Feedback from written evaluations would be a good way to determine if your teaching methods are effective.