

My Educational Philosophy

This assignment serves as a means to become a more effective designer of instruction by helping us develop a better understanding of teaching and learning philosophies. First, I will examine the key factors associated with the epistemologies of empiricism and rationalism. I will follow that by providing a statement of my personal epistemological beliefs and how they relate to learning theories. After addressing the theories related to the origins of knowledge, I will compare the major factors associated with the learning theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Next, I will discuss my thoughts on the learning process and conclude with suggestions on ways instructors can enhance learning.

Empiricism and Rationalism

Before examining the learning theories mentioned above, we must first understand the epistemologies that are the foundation for those theories. As theories of knowledge, epistemologies address the issues of what knowledge is and how it is acquired. Empiricism is a theory of knowledge founded on the concept that knowledge comes solely from experience. Empiricism stresses the relationship between those experiences and sensory perception. It is the experiences of touch, taste, sound, sight, and smell that result in an individual gaining knowledge. According to empiricism, people are born without preconceptions or knowledge about their surroundings until they experience something firsthand. Contrary to empiricism, rationalism proposes that a person is born with innate knowledge and only needs to develop that knowledge through deductive reasoning. Rationalism is not founded on the concept of sensory perception but on reasoning and discovering what is already in the mind instead.

My Epistemological Beliefs

When examining my own epistemological beliefs, I would have to say they tend to be strongly in favor of empiricism and the scientific approach that coincides. Perhaps typical of the engineer stereotype, I approach situations logically. I believe in things that can be seen, reproduced, and proven. The rationalist idea that we are born with all knowledge and only need to discover it within ourselves does not correlate with what I know about genetics and the human mind. As we grow from infancy through adulthood, we are constantly gathering input from our senses and learning about our environment. It always amazes me to watch a young child discover and revel in his surroundings. It is through these observations that we learn and grow. An example I would use to support empiricism is that of a young child touching something that is hot. A parent can tell a child not to touch something because it is hot and will hurt, but until the child experiences the sensation of touching the hot object, the child does not know and understand what hot means. One may be able to use reasoning to associate “hot” with “bad”, but one does not know or understand what it means. It is this type of stimulus and

response that I believe is so important to our learning and why I side with empiricism over rationalism.

Key Factors Associated with Behaviorism, Cognitivism, and Constructivism

Now that theories of knowledge have been addressed, we can move forward to the discussion of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism. Since these theories are founded upon either of the epistemologies previously addressed, one would expect there to be significant differences in philosophies.

Behaviorism

Behaviorism states that learning occurs through the repetition of stimulus and response. When the proper response is provided to a given stimulus, the person is given positive reinforcement to support the learning process. Behaviorism is founded upon empiricism. This foundation is supported by the belief that stimuli and responses in relation to environmental conditions are critical to learning. Memory is typically not addressed by behaviorism. Instead, the use of a skill reinforces the behavior whereas nonuse results in a person forgetting the habit. In general, behaviorism seems to be about recalling facts such as historical information or mathematical certainties. Rote memorization is often attributed toward the behaviorist approach in teaching as emphasis is not on understanding but on providing the correct response instead.

Cognitivism

Although cognitivism is founded upon empiricism, it differs from behaviorism because it stresses more complex processes such as problem solving, concept formulation, and information processing. Instead of focusing on the correct exchange of stimulus and response, cognitivism examines learning in the sense of mental abilities. Learners are viewed as active participants in the learning process as they acquire knowledge through an internal process of coding and structuring information. The environment does play a role in cognitivism, but emphasis is also placed on an individual's thoughts, beliefs, and values as they affect the learning process. Memory is prominent in cognitivism as learning results when information is organized in memory and is applied to different contexts. Cognitivism is seen in later levels of education once students have progressed from basic factual information gathering to the reasoning, problem solving, and application stages of education.

Constructivism

Constructivism is the only learning theory discussed in this assignment that is based upon the rationalistic epistemology that we are born with all knowledge and only need to discover that knowledge. Constructivism states that the mind filters input from the world and produces its own reality based upon this process. In more general terms, what we know of the world stems from our own interpretations of our experiences. As a result of this concept, teachers must try to understand a student's learning style and create

appropriate activities that appeal to that style. Memory plays a different role in the constructivist view as experiences are not structured into knowledge as other theories propose. Instead, this knowledge is constantly changing to provide learners with the means to gain situational understanding. Constructivism is easily applied to situations where a learner is able to modify previous experiences to correct for misinformation or misunderstandings.

How People Learn

I think people learn primarily through a mix of a behaviorism and cognitivism. When reflecting upon my education, I realize that elementary school was comprised primarily of a behaviorist approach to learning. Concepts such as the alphabet, numbers, reading, writing, arithmetic, and speech were all based upon the exchange of stimulus and response and were supported with positive reinforcement. As I began to study more complex subjects in math, science, and language arts, the learning process evolved from providing the correct response to problem solving and interpreting the information I was provided. I began to think more on my own instead of relying on rote memorization. Throughout this process I believe the environment played a critical role in my education. As some individuals learn better visually, so may others be auditory learners. The environment in which we learned plays a role in the entire experience and provides a background for us to later apply our knowledge. This is not to be confused with the constructivist theory of interpretation but to emphasize the importance of the experience and environment to the overall learning process instead.

How Instructors Can Enhance Learning

First and foremost, I think instructors should prepare their students by explaining the goals and expectations of the course at the beginning. It is unrealistic to expect an instructor to tailor the approach on a case-by-case basis. However, if the instructor provides this information, then students can actively approach the course in a manner best suited for them. As mentioned earlier, some students learn better by sight and others by sound. Instructors should keep this in mind and provide information in multiple formats to reach the widest audience possible. In addition to basic instruction, I think many students understand a concept best by applying it during the learning process. Instructors should provide examples and information that may be relative to the application of the knowledge in the real world. Concepts are often left within the learning environment and not applied to real world circumstances that may relate better to the student. My final recommendation for instructors is to do their best to create a positive learning environment where questions are encouraged and discussion of topics is welcome. If students feel comfortable in their environment, I believe they are more likely to actively participate and seek clarification to gain a better understanding.

Summarization

By discussing the epistemologies of empiricism and rationalism as well as the learning theories of behaviorism, cognitivism, and constructivism, I believe I have gained a better understanding of my educational philosophy. I realize that I believe more in personal experiences and the role the environment plays in the learning process. I see my approach to instructional design as being a mix of behaviorism and cognitivism, and I have identified areas that I believe are important in the learning process. I hope to move forward with this understanding and these concepts of improvement and become a better designer of instruction.