

Theories and principles of enabling learning



Reece and Walker (2008) State that learning is about change and can either be intentional or unintentional. Within an educational establishment learning is intentional and will be delivered using ??? sensory input??? (Petty, 2004, p. 141) in a variety of ways taking in to consideration the learners themselves and an appropriate delivery mechanism, which would fall into either the psychomotor, cognitive or affective domain.

The subject matter may pre-determine the domain used, but this may also be reinforced by using additional domains as required. Consequently the psychomotor domain would be used to ??? do??? things, the cognitive domain would promote the knowledge of the subject, and the affective domain would focus on the attitudes required. Indeed it can be argued that in any given scenario there will be an expectation to use more than one domain, if not all three. ??? One way of answering this question is to consider the skills in Bloom??™s taxonomy??? (Petty, 2004, p. 8), where he suggests that the more difficult the task the more domains are used, Petty (2004).

The theories of learning can generally be sub divided into the behaviourist, humanist and cognitive domains. Reece and Walker (2008) are clearly of the opinion that each can be linked to deep and surface learning, when the concept of learning is linked to motivation. Furthermore Curzon (2007) states that surface learning is extrinsically motivated whilst deep learning is intrinsically motivated. These theories will also fall into the pedagogical and andragogical models of learning, although there is in actual fact little difference between the two, (Conner on line)A behaviourist approach which was initially developed to provide a means of self analysis of mental processes (this was generally termed introspection), was further developed

by Pavlov and Watson when they developed an observable process which focused on the use of stimuli and response. (Glassman on line). This approach could be best suited to learning in a formalised pedagogic classroom environment where there is regular and appropriate feedback to the class; this is supported by Reece and Walker when they say that ??? we learn by receiving a stimulus that provokes a response. So long as the response is reinforced in some way that response will be repeated??? (Reece and Walker, 2008, p. 81).

In other words we are providing recognition for a task that has been completed; we are therefore providing ongoing feedback. The behaviourist approach is centred on the tutor and is tutor led and controlled throughout; it relies on a structure or curriculum to be effective and is generally associated with students learning in a passive style. In a contrasting viewpoint when teaching andragogically a tutor might be pre disposed to use a cognitive delivery style particularly when the students concerned are able to identify the benefits of learning to their own situation.

Knowles (1981, cited in Reece and Walker, 2008, p. 58) supports the use of the individual??™s mental processes such as thinking, knowing, memory and problem solving. It is supported by Dewey, Bruner and Ausubel. Indeed Ausubel (cited in Curzon, 2007, p. 101), states that ??? progressive differentiation??? should be used which will initially allow the students to begin their learning together, but then diverge on to individual learning paths depending on their own ability with the support and direction of their tutor. This approach is further supported by Locke (1690, cited in Curzon 2007, p.

434) where he promotes ??? the blank slate??? arguing that ??? the knowledge we possess results from our senses???, in other words our desire to learn. Bandura (1977) goes further when he explains that ??? People learn through observing others??™ behaviour, attitudes, and outcomes of those behaviours???. Vygotsky??™s (Learning-Theories on line) Social Development Theory expands on this approach when he moves away from the tutor transmitting information to the student. He promotes the theory that students should take an active participation in their own learning. This is supported by the Constructivism theory of learning which states that ??? learning is an active, contextualised process of constructing knowledge rather than acquiring it??? (Learning-Theories on line). In other words the student builds on their existing knowledge. This style of delivery is very much focused on input and participation from the student with a mix of active and passive teaching techniques from the tutor.

The delivery has a requirement for a curriculum, but this can be moulded in line with the abilities of the students as it is very pupil orientated. A humanist approach to teaching is very pupil centred and would allow the students to take control of their own learning so that they each assimilate knowledge at a level and pace that meets their own learning and emotional requirements. This approach does not lend itself to establishments that are measured on student retention and achievement within a given timeframe, but is more suited to distance learning and ??? roll on roll off??? course delivery that does not have the same administrative and logistical expectations. However the work of both Maslow and his Hierarchy of Need (cited in Curzon, 2007, p. 114) and Kolb??™s Experiential Learning Cycle

(cited in Petty, 2004, p. 147) should not be dismissed as being irrelevant because they belong to the Humanist school of thought.

Indeed they both offer clear arguments that support students when either the behaviourist or cognitive theory of teaching is used. Bandura (1977) explains that his social learning theory provides the link between behaviourist and cognitive practice that is a reciprocal and continuous interaction, as there must be a degree of overlap, substitution or deletion of any of the theories above to allow for a flexible learning experience. A brief resume of these learning styles is attached at appendix 12. Any learning experience needs to take in to account the needs of the learner, the tutor, the teaching establishment and the requirements of any awarding bodies. In addition the style of communication used throughout the learning process must be the most effective way possible. This may be in a formalised approach such as a lecture, or less formally using the internet or new technology such as Moodle (Appendix 13), VLE or Mobile learning. Indeed in any one lesson it could be expected to use a combination of communication styles that cater for the differentiated needs of the students as well as the requirements of the lesson being taught.

The focus should be on including the student in the learning process and not alienating them from it. The tutor therefore needs to be clear in what they are trying to communicate, to whom and how. Eric Berne's[™] transactional analysis promotes the use of three alter ego's[™] which, when being used^{???} you must choose the right approach to fit the student and the situation^{???} (Petty, 2004, p. 115).