

Synthesis-Identity Essay 2: History and Philosophy of Education

Even though this essay is called, “Synthesis-Identity of History and Philosophy of Education”, my discussion focuses more on the identity than the synthesis and on the philosophical more than the historical part of education. This approach allows me to continue to build upon my first essay in two ways: a) from the three epistemologies I presented in the first essay—i.e. professional, scientific, and educational, I concentrate on the epistemologies of education in this essay and b) I continue to use the components of Activity Theory; however in this essay I use it as a framework for describing the components of my philosophy of education.

In my first essay I addressed the idea that personal responses of what “knowledge is” reflect people’s beliefs about how the mind acquires knowledge about the world. Based on this idea I am arguing that my philosophy of education is based upon my philosophy of learning, which at the same time is informed by my philosophy of knowledge. While my philosophy of knowledge is epistemological in nature, my philosophy of learning is a psychological one (Noddings, 2007).

The organization of this essay is as follows: I first address my philosophy of knowledge, continue with my philosophy of learning, and based upon that I concentrate on my philosophy of education. Finally I expand my discussion on my philosophy of education by framing it in terms of the six main components of Activity Theory: subject, object, tools, rules, community, and the division of labor (see Figure 1).

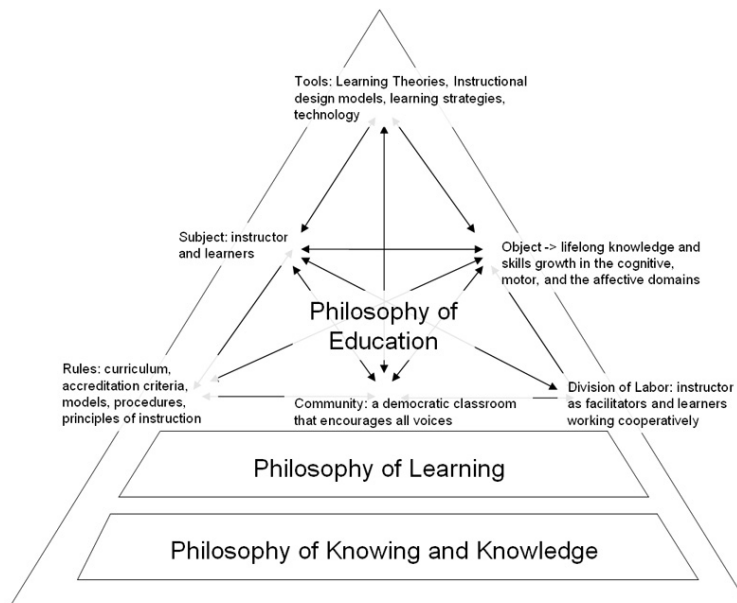


Figure 1: Philosophy of Education

Philosophy of Knowledge

My philosophy of knowledge, namely my epistemology, is oriented towards pragmatism and Dewey's ideas about knowing and knowledge. Under this epistemological view, knowledge is conceived as a body of information and skills applied to a process of inquiry in which experience takes a key role; experience that is connected to prior knowledge. This experience at the same time is intended, social, cultural, and with an emphasis on personal meaning and social interaction (Noddings, 2007).

Philosophy of Learning

My philosophy of learning is informed by the pragmatism view and can be defined as a social lifelong process that may occur intentionally and incidentally in formal instructional settings and through experience (Driscoll, 1994). Therefore, in my philosophy the two main sources of knowledge are experience and reason. While the experiential part of learning is informed by the constructivist perspective, the reasoning

part is informed by the cognitive perspective. The basic premise of the constructivist perspective as well as the basic tenet of cognitive psychology is that knowledge is not the result of passive reception, but constructed by the learner (Noddings, 2007).

Consequently, in practice, these two perspectives are not mutually exclusive, but complement each other to accommodate changes in context, content, and learners.

Constructivism has been described as a philosophy, an epistemology, a cognitive position, or a pedagogical orientation (Noddings, 2007). However, I refer to it as a perspective that has multiple roots in psychology and philosophy (Driscoll, 1994). Constructivism is not a single theory, but a set of approaches that have the common assumption that knowledge is constructed by learners as they attempt to make sense of their experiences (Driscoll).

In contrast, the cognitive perspective assumes that the mind possesses a structure consisting of components for processing information and procedures for using such components. While the processing of information may involve of storing, retrieving, transforming, and using, the cognitive components for processing information are referred to as sensory memory, short term memory, and long term memory. From this perspective, the learner is viewed as the processor of information. Learning occurs when information is input from the environment, processed and stored in memory, and output in the form of some learned capability (Driscoll, 1994).

As I mentioned above, these two perspectives are the ones that inform my philosophy of learning the most, and therefore my educational views. The type of perspective that I may adopt will then depend on the particular situation, considering the

culture, the context, the content and the learner. I expand more on this idea in the following section.

Philosophy of Education

My philosophy of education has the main tenet that practice should be informed by theory. My main goal is to focus on learners' growth in the cognitive and motor, and affective domains when applicable. To be able to accomplish this, I situate my educational practice as an activity system encompassing the subject, object, tools, rules, community, and the division of labor. The *subjects* in my activity system of education are my students as learners and me as the instructor. Together, we have the common goal or *object* of lifelong knowledge and skills growth in the cognitive, motor, and the affective domains (Harding, 2008).

The *rules* that guide my practice are of two types: external rules imposed by the content and the formal learning environment; and my personal rules. The most common external rule takes the form of the pre-established curriculum that I will need to convey to my learners. Other external rules may also include educational standards, specified plans of study, and accreditation criteria. My personal rules take the form of models and theories of learning. In particular, my instruction is guided by one general model, followed by specific procedures, and meeting certain principles of instruction. The model that guides my instructional design is informed by the How People Learn framework (HPL). This framework assumes that effective learning environments are composed of a balance between learning activities that are knowledge-centered, learner-centered, community-centered and formative and summative assessment-centered

(Bransford, Vye and Bateman, 2004). Through this model I expect my learners to develop their own competence.

With the lens of the HPL framework, I then follow specific methods used to analyze, design, plan, and prepare for the instruction. The methods I usually use are Smith and Ragan's (2005) instructional development processes for analyzing the context and the learner, along with of Wiggins and McTighe's (1999) backward design process for analyzing and designing the content and the instructional materials. Finally, as a formative assessment of my instructional design I make sure that my learning materials meet the 5 Star Instructional Design Rating based on Merrill's first principles of instruction (Merrill, 2001). The first principles of instruction suggests that instruction should be composed of tasks being presented in the context of real-world problems that consider prior knowledge, and demonstrate what is to be learned. Merrill argues that learners should have opportunity to practice and apply the new knowledge or skill and at the same time should be provided with techniques that integrate and transfer those skills into their everyday life.

During the design of the instruction as well as during the implementation I use some *tools* to mediate the activity of educating my learners. These *tools* may range from what I call "soft tools" to "hard tools". I define soft tools as the models and theories of instruction as well as learning strategies. In the analysis phase of the instructional design process, tools that aid my understanding of the content and of the learner are: Bloom's taxonomy levels of learning (Langford, 1991), Perry's model of intellectual development (Culver and Hackos, 1982) and perhaps Women's Ways of Knowing (Hogsett, 1993). In the design phase, I aid my learning materials with models of instruction. Instructional

design models are prescribing methods of instruction that help to attain desired changes in learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes linking learning theory and educational practice. For example tools that help in my pedagogy are Gagne's nine events of instruction (Gagne, 1985), Kolb Model for classroom activities (Svinicki and Dixon, 1987) and the four-component instructional design (4C/ID) model (van Merriënboer, Clark, and de Croock 2002) focused on complex learning. Other tools that mediate my practice are what I have called the hard tools. Hard tools are those devices and technology such as physical models, computer software, instrumentation, etc. In the same way we select different learning theories, instructional design models, and philosophical approaches to address specific learning needs, we also have to identify how technology could be used to meet and/or support those needs.

My immediate *community* is composed of my learners and me because we share the same common goal of educational growth. In order to share and maintain this sense of community, the use of liberative pedagogies helps me to collectively create a democratic classroom that encourages all voices (Riley, 2003). These liberative pedagogies consist of techniques that involve students' active participation and engagement and their taking responsibility for their own education, all of which are characteristics of lifelong learning. Other techniques central to liberative pedagogies that may develop students' senses of social justice within our learning community and the broader community are the discussion of issues related ethics, policy, race, class, gender, and culture.

The last component of my activity system is the *division of labor*. On the vertical dimension, my role as instructor is more as a facilitator; on the horizontal axis, the division of labor includes teamwork development. Effective division of labor in

cooperative teams could be implemented by means pedagogies of engagement (Smith, Sheppard, Johnson and Johnson, 2005). To promote effective cooperative learning I, as instructor, should facilitate positive interdependence, encourage face-to-face promotive interaction, give individual accountability, teach teamwork skills, and monitor group processing (Smith et al.).

In conclusion, through this essay I have discussed how my philosophy of knowledge and learning influence, inform, and guide my philosophy of education. Consequently, by linking theory and practice through reconciling and relating different theories, instructional design processes, models, instructional strategies, and pedagogies I shape and enhance my educational practice for attaining my goal. My goal and my challenge as educator is lifelong learning: learning in the form of desired changes in learners' knowledge, skills, and attitudes in the cognitive, motor, and affective domains.

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