Philosophy of Change

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One thing that instructional designers and learning scientists love to debate is their field's exact nature and definition. The most interesting thing about this debate is that one will likely get different answers for every instructional designer to whom the question is posed. To some extent, I have found the same to be true for their definitions of learning, although almost all subscribe to some aspects of various theories. Exposure to these differing opinions and points of view has helped me develop my learning philosophy. I assert that learning is changing our behavior based on information that we care about and choose to believe. In other words, to learn is to change based on what we decide to be true. Therefore, it is the role of instructional designers to cultivate environments where individuals can decipher between truth and falsehood and recognize the value of adapting to what is true. Such environments are most likely to flourish when rooted in the first principles of instruction and incorporate connectivism to cater to the digital age of information.

To Learn is To Change

Learning has never taken place in a vacuum. It is always in the context of one's relationships, whether with other people, animals, objects, or the environment. This is because learning outside of a relationship would indicate that the learner resides in a disembodied existence with no other energy or matter. Since such an existence is, for lack of a better term, nonexistent, this is a reasonable conclusion. Therefore, a person learning is an individual adapting their behavior as they receive information from something in relation to them because they chose to believe that information and decided it was relevant and worthy of their attention. One well-renowned learning scientist asserted this claim nearly 20 years ago, defining learning "as a persisting change in human performance or performance potential" and that this change

"must come about as a result of the learner's experience and interaction with the world" (Driscoll, 2005). To learn is to change based on what information we decide is true.

This understanding of learning mandates that those responsible for instructing others (including instructional designers, teachers, parents, mentors, employers, etc.) help learners acquire new information, distinguish between true and false information, and understand how that information relates to them in their specific contexts. The learner's role is to decide what is true and worthy of their care for themselves. Instructors can fulfill this mandate best by applying the First Principles of Instruction (Merrill, M. David, 2017) and incorporating connectivism into those principles (Siemens, 2022).

Applying The First Principles of Instruction

The First Principles of Instruction, as outlined by Dr. M. David Merrill, state that instruction is made effective, efficient, and engaging as it is problem-centered, activates existing knowledge, is demonstrated to the learner, is applied by the learner, and is integrated into the learner's world (Merrill, M. David, 2017; Merrill, M. D., 2002). Dr. Merrill also submits that because these principles promote learning, they also promote motivation to learn, as motivation stems from the competence we gain as we learn (Merrill, M. David, 2017). The problem-centered nature of these principles creates a context and reason for the learner to draw upon existing knowledge to apply newly demonstrated information.

Because of this instruction's effectiveness, efficiency, and engagement, it forms the foundation of an environment where learners may critically evaluate information to determine to what extent it is true and decide if it is worth integrating into their world. It is imperative that learners develop and implement this skill before they determine the value of the presented information, as with the advent of the internet, information of all kinds is at the immediate

disposal of anyone with reasonable access. This same advent necessitates incorporating the theory of connectivism into these first principles.

Incorporating Connectivism

The theory of connectivism asserts that "Learning (defined as actionable knowledge) can reside outside of ourselves (within an organization or a database), is focused on connecting specialized information sets, and the connections that enable us to learn more are more important than our current state of knowing" (Siemens, 2022). In other words, the reality of the modern world is that knowledge and information change so rapidly that it is more important for learners to understand how to acquire new information applicable to various contexts wherein they may find themselves rather than build up their own personal storage of knowledge. Information is stored in a literal network of people, and a learning environment must provide conditions that help learners understand how to navigate this network. Personal knowledge is comprised of a network, which feeds into organizations and institutions, which in turn feed back into the network, and then continue to provide learning to individual" (Siemens, 2022).

Conclusion

In conclusion, I affirm that learning is contextual and relational and is, therefore, an adaptation of behavior due to the acquisition of new information in accordance with respective contexts and relationships. Learners must decide for themselves what information is true and worth caring about, and it is the role of instructors to create an environment wherein learners may understand how to access new information, critically evaluate the truthfulness of that information, and determine the relativity of that information to their specific contexts. These environments flourish as instructors provide a problem-centered context where learners may activate already-acquired information, demonstrate new information to learners, and help them

apply that information to the context of the problem. Additionally, these environments should allow the learner to connect to a larger network of information practice, discerning the truthfulness of the information, and determine the value of integrating that information into their world and adapting their behavior accordingly. Put concisely, an instructor must help learners understand how to learn and choose what to learn.

References

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