

Perspectives on Learning and Teaching in Higher Education

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Learning in Higher Education

- 'We learn when we engage with other people's beliefs' (Jarvis, Holford & Griffin, 2003, p76)
- 'Our perspectives on learning matter: what we think about learning influences where we recognize learning' (Wenger, 2009, p214)
- 'Learning without thought is labour lost; thought without learning is perilous' (Confucius)

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Learning in Higher Education?

- What would it mean to shift from an individual to a social approach to understanding learning in higher education?
- How can we examine our own cultures and ways of being?
- How can we stand outside of our 'histories, circumstances and fields to examine our epistemological and ontological assumptions'?
- Why are these important questions to ask when considering 'internationalisation of the curriculum'?

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Perspectives on Learning

- **Behaviourism** – learning is linear; learner is a passive recipient of 'knowledge' or skills; all behaviour is learned, can be 'unlearned' and other ways of behaving developed; makes use of reward and punishment; lesson planning, learning goals, teacher control
- **Constructivism** – learners are active; knowledge is constructed by learners from their experiences; educator facilitates learning through activities; learner still seen in isolation

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Perspectives on Learning

- **Social constructionism (co—constructivism)** – learner is active and learns through collaborative participation with others; 'social learning'; educator – learner interaction; educator an 'expert learner' who participates in dialogue to contribute experience
- **Cultural and critical discourse** – similar to critical theory; learning can only be understood within a broader cultural context; certain knowledges are privileged – and therefore connected to power; role of the educator is to facilitate learner transformation through learning – 'critical pedagogy' e.g. Freire, Giroux

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Perspectives on Learning

- **Confucianism** – 'Chinese conceptualisations of learning' – *ren*, the highest purpose of human life which one learns to develop. Learning is linked to society and the commonwealth of which one is a part. 'Learning virtues'. Learning through discussion but after one has acquired 'knowledge'

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Traditional Liberal

- A greater awareness of self through cultivating an identity which is independent, rational, autonomous, coherent and which has a sense of social responsibility
- Disciplined study, engagement in rational argument, acquisition of universal and timeless knowledge
- Education for its own sake – knowledge for what it is rather than what it does

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Traditional Liberal

- Promotes the development of broader generic capacities and thinking skills
- Students acquire disciplinary knowledge, develop logical and critical thinking skills
- Needs, interests, motivations and capacities of students assumed – do not figure in the pedagogical space
- Mastery of discipline – knowledge communicated via lectures
- Disciplinary/pedagogical authority vested in the teacher

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Psychologised

- Psychological versions of learner/teacher continue to dominate higher education
- 'We teach in order to facilitate learning' – isolates educational work from the contested social and philosophical space in which it occurs
- Learners have qualities – personality, intelligence, learning styles, learning preferences, learning behaviours
- Presented as stable characteristics rather than mediated by social, cultural, historical contexts

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Behaviourism

- Learning defined as a change in behaviour – which is observable
- Learning defined in terms of competencies to be acquired – permeates higher education discourse – aims, objectives, learning outcomes
- Successful teaching measured by matching outcomes with objectives

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Humanistic Psychology

- Valuing the learner's experience
- Learner-centred education
- Holistic self – cognitive and emotional dimensions of learning given equal weight
- Teacher is a facilitator – 'expertise' rather than 'expert'
- Emphasis on teacher/learner relationship
- Learner is 'trusted' – core conditions of genuineness, being transparent and non-judgmental crucial
- Learners involved fully

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Constructivism

- Learners construct their own cognitive maps, cognitive structures as a result of their experience
- Didactic lecture of limited value
- Teachers begin with where students are and provide experiences to extend and deepen understanding – experiential learning
- 'Deep' and 'surface' learning

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Social Constructionism

- Learning is a social – and cultural - activity
- Learners participate in a community of practice with its social networks, roles and relationships
- Knowledge is not decontextualised, abstract or general
- Learning is collaborative – teacher as facilitator

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Performative Understandings

- Neoliberalism?
- Contribution of education to national economic performance
- 'Employability' of graduates
- University needs to attract the 'best students in the global marketplace'
- Teaching performance more public – data gathered on performance scrutinised e.g. teaching evaluations, employment outcomes, student retention
- Teachers need familiarity with new technologies, flexible in adapting to teaching across cultures, global perspective on their work

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Cultural and Critical

- Teaching from a critical perspective means asking questions relating to authority and control over what counts as knowledge, how it is organised and transmitted, who has access to it, whose interests are served by the system
- Role of the teacher is to 'disturb' students' current epistemological understandings and interpretations of reality
- Disciplinary cultures, curriculum and teaching practices exclude certain groups not 'typical' of the system e.g. ethnic groups, those disadvantaged in some way
- Teaching strategies are participatory and inclusive characterised by a more democratic and collaborative learning space

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Critical Postmodern

- Relationship between individual and society recognised and celebrated
- Considers the socialisation of people and an understanding of the institutions in which learning often takes place, and their relationships to individuals and cultures

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