

Chapter 3

Learning Approaches and You

ABSTRACT

In this chapter, the authors will outline several learning approaches. Each learning approach will have a base summary followed by the context that the approach can be utilized when working with post-traditional learners. After the initial summaries and takeaways, the authors will delve into a learning approach framework they have designed surrounding social constructivism. Finally, the authors provide several case studies to consider the learned content. Each case study includes prompts for instructors and administrators.

INTRODUCTION

In the preceding chapters, you were provided with overviews of several theories. The overviews included initial takeaways and case studies to help you make sense of the material. We believe this background information will help you feel comfortable enough to add new perspectives to your learning.

To break up the monotony of theory after theory, here are a few of our favorite sayings from instructors and administrators.

If it's not broke, don't fix it.

We've always done it this way.

That's not our department's policy.

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When we say “favorite” we really mean “detrimental to learner success”. Often, our work updating policies or programs is stifled by this logic. While there is merit in consistency and explicitness, there is just as much merit in utilizing theory and new research to support your learners. You may be thinking that you’ve learned more than your fair share of the different theories discussed in the previous chapters. In some ways, you’re right. You could take the first two chapters and immediately start to implement new and revised policies and programs. However, to take your policies and programs to the next level, there is another element that can really serve as the foundation for success in your work. That element is learning frameworks. You will be surprised to know that understanding a few essential learning frameworks, such as the Constructivist and Behaviorist approaches, will maximize the previously discussed theoretical concepts to help you interact with and personalize the learning approaches. These frameworks serve as pathways for you to consider when designing your learning. Each framework’s beliefs are very different and these approaches to learning will dictate where you naturally place your attention when designing activities. Each framework, we will discuss, reveals a different approach to the same problem but is useful when considering both your colleagues’ perspectives, as well as your learners’ perspectives. Understanding your use of each learning framework, allows you to explore other ways people interact with knowledge, check your own assumptions, and create a more cohesive approach to designing policies, procedures, and teaching materials. There’s little doubt that you have a tendency for a framework, whether you have been introduced to it or not. As you continue to read, reflect which of the learning frameworks resonate with you the most then consider how the other frameworks could benefit your approaches to learning and working with colleagues and students.

This chapter overviews the Positivist, Constructivist, Postmodern, Humanistic, and Behaviorist perspectives. Each learning framework will include:

1. A summary of the learning approach,
2. A well-known theory or concept resulting from the approach,
3. Notable theorists and additional references, and
4. Takeaways for instructors and administrators.

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