Personal Education Philosophy

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Introduction

Learning theory is important for the master’s prepared nurse to understand and utilize in practice. Using learning theory is particularly important for nursing educators. The utilization of learning theory helps nursing educators to more effectively teach those they are working with. By understanding and utilizing learning theory, nurse educators recognize how their students or clients learn and can tailor the learning experience for better educational outcomes (Billings & Halstead, 2009).

Developing one’s personal educational philosophy is important for nursing educators. The development of a personal philosophy will set the tone and influence how the educator facilitates the learning process. My personal educational philosophy includes a mix of many learning theories at this time. I have identified three main learning theories, which are constructivism, transformational learning, and humanistic learning as the beginning core foundation of my nursing educational philosophy. The following theories have helped me construct the groundwork for my learning/teaching philosophy.

Constructivism Learning Theory

One of the learning theories I have included in my personal educational philosophy is the constructivist learning theory. The basic premise of constructivist leaning is that learning is a process of constructing meaning (Baumgartner, Caffarella, & Merriam, 2007). Constructivist learning theory describes how knowledge is constructed from a person’s experience (Baumgartner et al, 2007). The learner lives an experience and processes or discusses the experiences both internally and externally to create meaning or knowledge (Baumgartner et al, 2007).
Constructivist learning theory explains that leaning is an internal cognitive activity and that learning is a progressive adaptation between current knowledge and experiences and new knowledge and experiences (Baumgartner et al, 2007). Teaching from the constructivist perspective includes providing “experiences that induce cognitive conflict and hence encourage learners to develop new knowledge schemes that are better adapted to experience” (Asoko, Driver, Leach, Mortimer, & Scott, 1994, p. 6). The construction of knowledge is gained from the exploration of issues, reflection, and reevaluation (Baumgartner et al, 2007). Social constructivism is when the learner interacts with others, and the meaning of an experience is negotiated or determined through discussion or other social activities (Baumgartner et al, 2007).

Constructivism has both benefits and difficulties. Some of the benefits of constructivism are that the learner is actively involved rather than passively given information. Another benefit is the teacher can be a learning guide more so than the dispenser of knowledge, engaging the learner and creating more academic accountability for the learner. The activities are student centered and interactive instead of solely information centered. Students are more independent and responsible for their own learning while a teacher facilitates the class (Billings & Halstead, 2009).

There are disadvantages to constructivist learning and teaching as well. One of the biggest disadvantages is the lack of structure that may lead to students becoming frustrated or confused. Some students need a highly structured classroom or learning setting. Evaluation or grading is often more difficult due to the more personalized coursework. The constructivist teaching approach may also require a reduction of information covered in class as the depth and meaning of subjects covered is more intense (Billings & Halstead, 2009).
I believe constructivist learning is appropriate for nursing education. Constructivist learning will help students obtain and sharpen critical thinking skills that are needed for success in the nursing profession. Through the internal and external processing of information, students are able to make connections and sense of the information they obtain. The exploration of issues, reflection, and reevaluation of knowledge described earlier will help students to make meaningful connections through critical thinking processes (Billings & Halstead, 2009). The students will understand why an issue is important to know instead of having facts memorized with no practical application understanding.

I envision using the constructivist learning theory in my career as a nursing educator. The idea of creating a learner/teacher partnership with the educator as a guide more so than an authority figure dispensing information is appealing to me as an educator. By using reflection and collaboration as tools, the students will explore nursing concepts and understand why the nursing information is important to know and how the information is utilized. I plan on using problem-based learning such as case studies and journaling so that students may reflect on their own learning and construct meaning of the information.

Constructivist learning is an effective and progressive style for nursing educators and I will incorporate the constructivist learning theory into my own nursing education practice.

**Transformational Learning Theory**

Another learning theory I have assimilated into my personal educational philosophy is the transformational learning theory. Transformational learning is about changing what we know or believe to be true. The change in transformational learning is a dramatic and fundamental change in the way we view ourselves and how we view the world (Baumgartner et al, 2007). When transformational learning occurs, there is a change in consciousness. Transformational learning
is the result of critical reflection or reflective learning and self-reflection (Baumgartner et al, 2007).

Transformative learning theory addresses the educator’s challenge of changing the way a learner views the world. According to McGonigal’s article (2005) “The (transformation) theory describes the conditions and processes necessary for students to make the most significant kind of knowledge transformation: paradigm shift” (McGonigal, 2005). Once the learner has an experience, the learner goes through critical reflection and transforms their way of thinking or understanding which results in personal growth (Baumgartner et al, 2007).

Mezirow’s psycho-critical approach explains that once a learner is faced with a disorienting dilemma where old thinking patterns or understanding and responses are ineffective, the learner must have a transformation in thought processes to create an effective response pattern or way of thinking. Knowledge and thought processes transform by incorporating new knowledge and creating new ways of viewing and responding to a disorienting dilemma (Baumgartner et al, 2007). Transformational learning involves the learning being self-reflective and self-critical and being more open to the perspective and thoughts of others. Transformational learning is most effective when the learner is open to new ideas (Baumgartner et al, 2007).

Transformational learning has benefits for both the student and the educator. One benefit of transformational learning is the learner transforms their thinking and understanding of a subject. Knowledge cannot simply be unloaded on students. Students must recognize limitations on their current knowledge and perspective and go through a true transformation of their existing knowledge (McGonigal, 2005). Learning is more permanent and meaningful. Students must learn to look at their view and beliefs critically instead of just memorizing facts in a classroom.
Another benefit is that a learning partnership is created between students and educators, which may result in a more interactive learning environment.

The transformational learning theory has a few difficulties. One difficulty is that the educator must challenge the learner’s views or beliefs for critical reflection. The educator must be careful to balance both challenging the learner’s original views and supporting a transformational change (McGonigal, 2005). Transformational learning can be an emotionally charged experience, leading some students to grieve or reject the learning as they are forced to reconsider and reevaluate their current assumptions (McGonigal, 2005). Baumgartner (2007) states that the overreliance on rational thinking is another disadvantage to transformational learning.

I have included the transformational learning theory into my personal educational philosophy and believe that it is an appropriate theory to apply to nursing education. The transformation of knowledge and ways of viewing the world are important in nursing education. I believe the application of this theory, especially in a clinical setting is appropriate. Learners must change old ways of thinking to more fully learn and appreciate the new knowledge. The transformative learning theory facilitates a change in the fundamental views and knowledge of the learner. Students who experience transformational learning will not only have knowledge, but they will develop critical self-analysis (Baumgartner et al, 2007).

When an event challenges current beliefs, the learner will be able to critically examine if their old patterns of coping or thinking are adequate, and if new ways of thinking are more appropriate. Through transformative learning students will be more open to other ways of thinking and contributing to others learning. Critical thinking skills are sharpened and
information sharing through critical discourse helps the learner and those around them evolve as learners (McGonigal, 2007).

As a nursing educator, I would facilitate transformational learning for my students. I would first identify current assumptions students have. Transformational learning would be incorporated into my classes by providing case studies, role-playing, simulation, and reflective journaling to encourage critical analysis of student’s beliefs. Critical reflection and critical discourse to create opportunities to reflect on other student’s beliefs through classroom discussion, online discussion boards, and group activities would be encouraged.

Transformational learning fosters intellectual openness and provides a channel for personal educational growth that is necessary for those in the nursing profession. Transformational learning theory is an appropriate theory to use in nursing education.

**Humanistic Learning Theory**

Another theory I have adopted into my personal educational philosophy is the humanistic learning theory. The humanism learning approach places value on worth, honesty, respect, caring, dignity, integrity, and self-development (Billings & Halstead, 2009). The humanism theory focuses on motivating the learner to develop their human potential and progress toward self-actualization. Humanism learning is more effective when the focus is on a small group or individuals (Billings & Halstead, 2009). Humanism is an approach designed to encourage self-directed learning from the student. The student learns and acquires knowledge for personal growth and not solely for passing a class (Baumgartner et al, 2007).

The educator can promote humanistic learning by promoting the student’s sense of responsibility, respect, and cooperation. The educator can also facilitate humanistic learning by creating a safe and relaxed environment so the learner will be free from fear and more open to
learning. Another way educators can encourage the development of humanistic qualities is by modeling the caring and respectful behaviors themselves (Billings & Halstead, 2009).

The humanistic learning theory supports “Students are responsible for their own learning and determine their own needs, goals, and objectives and conducted self-evaluations” (Billings & Halstead, 2009, p. 211). Learners are actively participants in the learning process and use reflections and introspection to grow as a student (Baumgartner et al, 2007).

Benefits of the humanistic learning approach include the educations focus on caring, respect, honesty, rights of others, and accepting responsibility for self-development. The students and educators can also use earlier life and learning experiences to enhance the learning environment. Students are an active participant in all aspects of learning and develop a personal drive to learn (Billings & Halstead, 2009).

A drawback of the humanistic learning approach is that the educator is still responsible to ensure that the other domains of learning are being addressed such as cognitive, affective, and psychomotor learning (Billings & Halstead, 2009). Another challenge to humanistic learning is that the educator must identify if the student is clinically competent and mastering the content of the class, even though humanism is based on the student’s self-evaluation and self-direction (Billings & Halstead, 2009).

I believe the humanistic learning theory is appropriate for nursing education because of the emphasis on respect, caring, self-development, and learner responsibility. Nursing is a profession built on those ethical and moral qualities. Learners who have developed the passion to learn because of an internal drive will be better equipped to develop as a nurse when they are no longer in classes that demand progress. Humanistic learning also develops critical thinking and evaluation skills, which are imperative for a nurse to cultivate.
I envision myself utilizing the humanistic learning theory in a number of ways. I plan to create a safe and relaxed learning environment to try and limit fear and apprehension of students. One method I would use to do this is to have students get to know their fellow students and also get to know myself so a relationship of trust might be built. My goal is to create a partnership between educator and student.

Another method I will utilize is modeling the qualities of respect, caring, integrity, openness to new ideas, and responsibility for my learning and teaching. I will engage students in learning whenever appropriate so the students feel engaged and in control of their education. An example of engaging students in the learning process is discussions where students can draw on previous experiences to enhance the moments of learning. I plan on utilizing outside resources to cover class material so students can explore and direct their own learning instead of only using classroom lectures to cover all material in class. Discussion boards and case studies are a few examples on how I plan on accomplishing out of class learning.

The humanistic learning theory is an appropriate theory to utilize in nursing education. With careful application, students will be able to develop the skills and qualities necessary to become a competent nurse who takes responsibility for their own development and learning.

**Conclusion**

As a nurse educator I have begun to develop my personal education philosophy. Though I plan on including many different learning theories into my practice as an educator, the foundation of my personal philosophy include the constructivist, transformational, and humanistic learning theories. These learning theories will help me to guide my students to develop knowledge. The learning theories will also help me gain the skills necessary to become a successful nurse educator.
References


