

Review one of the 4 main learning theories summarised by Carlile and Jordan (2005) – It Works In Practice But Will It Work In Theory

Social Constructivism

Key Aspects

With Social Constructivism the group is more important than the individual learner. The Russian psychologist Vygotsky showed the importance of others in assisting with learning and demonstrated that without communication there can be no thought. Vygotsky thought that learners interacted with each other through the Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD). The Zone of Proximal Development is what the student can learn without the intervention of the teacher. When the teacher intervenes they provide scaffolding or support which allows the student to progress to a higher level. As the student progresses the scaffolding is removed to allow the student become independent

Implications for practise in Industry

Social Constructivism promotes working and learning within a team which in turn facilitates the transfer of learning from the training room to the office. Encouraging students to collaborate with each other within the training environment promotes peer learning which in turn increases self esteem and confidence for when they return to their working environment. Encouraging peer learning ensures that students will continue to draw on peer knowledge when they return to their work environment thus reducing any reliance on the trainer. Trainers are not always immediately available when issues arise. When a trainer becomes involved they are satisfied that the student has already discussed the issue with colleagues and the trainer becomes the last resort. Encouraging research and discussion within the group increases the long term retention of knowledge. Students find out for themselves develop their understanding and retain information. The use of peer assessment during training means that the students develop criteria for making judgements and can evaluate themselves when they are back in the work place.

Influences on own professional practise

Of all the learning theories Social Constructivism is the one which appeals to me the most and the one that I can see the practical use of within my own training environment. Until now when teaching subjects like product knowledge which can be quite technical I've always used slides or handouts and delivered the module as a lecture. I can see now the value of allowing students to research a topic and teach each other. Researching means that they need to find out information. They become familiar with where the information is located. This encourages the practise of using learning material when they return to the office. Also I have noticed in the past that certain modules were difficult for students to understand. As Carlile mentions in the paper "group work facilitates meaning in both parties in a way that you as a teacher may not perceive". Observing how students explain a particular topic can help me as a teacher understand where they are finding difficulty and encourage me to review how the topic could be taught in the future.

Another area where I feel that I can change my current practise using social constructivism is the area of assessment. Currently I have created assessments to assess knowledge and skill where the learner must work by themselves with the option of using notes and guides. Now I'm thinking of introducing scenario type assessments where discussion and research must be completed and where the answer is subject to peer review. I feel this will encourage learners to continue to draw on group knowledge when they return to the work place and facilitate the application of the knowledge and skill that they have acquired.