

Short Response Paper: My Learning Style

I believe in the humanist philosophy on learning. No one knows better than me what my needs are and what I want my life to mean. People can give advice, but do they know me well when they do so? There are many variables and motivations involved in following other people's advice so it is important to trust my own instincts. I will make mistakes but they will be my own mistakes and it will be less confusing and more accurate to learn from actions that I decide upon. I have one life and it is best that I do not live someone else's vision or buy into someone else's untested ideas. That said I do need a series of coaches as I progress and traverse life's terrain.

Life and learning are not a series of precisely defined circumstances, instead what we face is fluid and sometimes unpredictable and measured flexibility is par for the course. It would not be useful for me to have a teacher who feeds me information or knowledge as he or she sees it. A learning process of this kind would in fact be a deterrent to my professional and academic development because I would not be putting myself in the center of the process. I need a teacher who can be a motivating coach, point out when I am off track, and provide supportive and corrective comments to support my learning. In turn, it is important for me to work effectively with other learners, contribute to collective knowledge construction by sharing what I have learned, and to both give and receive support so that we can learn as a team.

I feel that trust between learners and teacher is essential to constructing adequate knowledge. Mayes (2006) explains "individuals will learn more effectively through cooperative group activity" (p. 18). Mayes also points out that knowledge need only be organized in a form that matches the conceptual state of the individual learner and learning will occur inevitably (2006). In the past I have had resources to learn from, but did not always have the framework or mindset in place to fully take advantage of those resources and opportunities.

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Mayes goes on to explain that when it comes to the actual methods of learning, creating opportunities to stretch the learner beyond his or her comfort zone can be advantageous. He acknowledges that this is constructivist (2006). I feel that constructivism is humanism in applied form. For me, constructivism adds the benefit of allowing multiple avenues of knowledge creation, which is advantageous over the didactic method of teacher-centered learning. Collins and Berge (1996) agree that distance education advocates the necessary adaptation of instructional roles from didactic lecturing to constructivist-based facilitation. The teacher's role changes. Mayes (2006) explains that a teacher should provide a map of what is to be learned, to denote the boundaries of the topic to be studied, and to make clear the relevance to the course and to wider body of knowledge.

I feel that if I know how what I am studying relates to my overall studies and to my life, that I am that much more motivated to learn it. The best teacher is one that provides the big picture scaffolding that the learner can depend on and use to build his or her own knowledge (Anderson, 2004). Morrison (2007) further explains that deep learning is the ultimate goal of higher education. He notes that "deep learning and the holistic thinking associated with it mean being organized around goals of personal knowledge construction rather than simply those of task performance" (p. 108) and that "the shift from a focus on activities and content to cognitive processes is critical" (p.111). I take this to mean that learning how to learn and how to build knowledge independently by utilizing a variety of trust-worthy information sources is what it means to be truly educated.

The main responsibility of learning is mine. Anderson (2004) points out that while a learner can interact with other online learners in class, a learner can also interact with people in his or her own personal life including family, friends, or coworkers. Simonson, Schlosser, and

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Hanson (1999) point out “feelings of empathy and belonging promote students’ motivation to learn, influencing learning favorably” (p. 68). I have not interacted very much with other online students, which may be a weakness in my learning style that I need to correct. It has been neutralized in this class by the teacher writing brief notes that point out the useful student posts in discussion conferences. Indeed Collins and Berge (1996) have said, since participants may have difficulty coping with discussions that last over time, it would be useful if the teacher flags the best student contributions in online conferences. That said, the more I interact with content and with other learners, the more I will know which students have the best ideas. Within a few weeks I will know which posts in an online learning forum are worth reading closely.

Another weakness that I have, which is magnified in the online environment is that I may not necessarily finish all of my readings according to schedule. In face-to-face classes, it can be possible to learn by simply listening to the lecture, and while homework is necessary, its on time completion is not as essential as it is with online learning. In the humanist and constructivist tradition, the teacher’s role is no longer to feed predigested information to the learner. It is the learner’s responsibility to utilize learning guidance provided by the teacher to construct knowledge. In this atmosphere, it is essential that I complete my work on time for two reasons. First is the interaction with other learners and teacher around the same schedule for the same topic so that we may help each other. Second is to have built each layer of knowledge on time so that I can be efficient and effective in using what I have learned to build additional layers of knowledge. Since I do not have the luxury of passive learning and I am responsible for my own learning, I must be disciplined enough to manage my learning in the online environment. This is an important transition and it is important for me to continue to remember to complete my

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readings, ask useful questions, and find my own answers with help from others in order to learn deeply.

The main strength of the online environment for me is the many opportunities that exist for formative assessment. I can get timely feedback and adjust my studying accordingly. Gunn and Harper (2007) explain that self-discipline and frequent self-testing to monitor progress are formative assessments that exist in preparation for summative assessments. Another strength of the online learning environment for me is communication features like email and electronic discussion conferences that become channels for dissemination of important information (2007). I can reach my teacher quickly and get my questions answered within 24-48 hours. Since I am not only studying but also managing my studies, it is essential that I receive timely and accurate feedback and guidance. I am able to utilize opportunities for nearly real-time interaction well in the online learning environment that I currently use. Assessment and feedback are important components in learning. Anderson (2004) points out that the challenge of online learning is to provide high quantity assessment while maintaining student interest and commitment. Simonson et al. (1999) say flatly “feedback is a necessary part of a distance learning system” (p. 69).

In summary, I believe in the humanist approach to learning as it manifests itself in the constructivist way of learning. It is a more challenging way to learn, and one that is affected by personal weaknesses and strengths that one should be aware of in order to succeed. This learner-centered way of learning is best suited for distance education in the information age.

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