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It is important to study learning because of the multiple avenues through which knowledge is obtained. By this I mean that because people gather knowledge and/or reason in different ways, we must become experts on all of those strategies in order to effectively convey information. We have to pay attention to all of the senses used while learning occurs. We should focus on the individual learner rather than the group. We need to ask ourselves who this person is, what they need to end up knowing, where their experiences came from, when the "gap" opened for them, why they need to know this information, and finally, how will we go about teaching it. I like the idea of beginning with the learner and the objective. From there we can look at information about them and their background. Then we hope to be able to deduce when they became lost, so to say. After that we are able to explain why they need to know the information, by relating it to real-world events and perhaps to their own experiences. In the end we have a better idea of the best way to transfer the information to the individual. Of course, this can all happen and then not necessarily go the way we planned. When that happens, we adapt the method and try again.

When thinking about what learning is and why we need to study it I am drawn to my own experiences in teaching. At one school we used a method labeled Project Child. Basically, it was an idea used to pass along knowledge to students. All teachers were trained and equipped to use the Project Child model of teaching. At the time, I was overwhelmed with all of the rules and stipulations of this model and ended up resenting it for it's long hours of planning and preparation. However, it worked. Plain and simple. The model worked for almost every child since it was geared toward every individual child...hence the long hours of preparation.

Let me explain. Each class session was ninety minutes long and within those ninety minutes there was a half hour of direct instruction followed by about an hour of station time. I taught math while the other two teachers in my cluster taught writing/social studies/science and of course the ever so popular ninety minute reading block that is mandated by many states. Anyway, each station catered to a different method of learning. The computer station offered self-guided practice through interactive websites, games or activities that I prepared. Exploration station was conducted individually or with a partner at the table, and it was all about exploring the process behind a certain math topic. Challenge station was usually the place to play a review game or work on the challenges from the other stations. Textbook station changed every once in awhile. Sometimes it was geared toward math vocabulary, sometimes it was direct questions from the textbook and other times it was simply writing a poem or story using the math topic accordingly. Construction station consisted of making something to model the math topic of the week. Finally, Teacher station was direct instruction in small groups, usually geared toward intervention and basic math skills.

Now, as someone would read that, it might sound like a lot going on at one time, and let me tell you, sometimes it was! Each station was self propelled with a task card and materials. I rarely needed to be up and about the room, which was helpful as I was the director of the teacher

station. The important thing to take from that explanation is that children, in this case, learn in so many different ways. I think that if they are exposed to all of those modes of instruction they will find the one that works for them. The cool thing about the stations is that they all dealt with the same math topic. If we were converting factions to decimals that day, all of the stations had to do with converting fractions to decimals. Each day every student was able to complete, or almost complete, all the different stations, therefore reinforcing the topic being taught and hopefully digging into that specific way that each child gains and retains knowledge.

So, this is what I think about when I think about why it is important to study learning. After getting to know my students, I was able to create stations based on their interests and modes of learning. Further, the tests and assessments that I gave were directly related to the station work that the students had done. I felt that by relating the test questions to their own experiences was a valuable way for them to remember the information. I guess I was studying learning, even though I never thought about it in that way.

Moving forward, I'm sure I will touch on those memories from time to time because they seem so relevant to the idea of learning and why it needs to be studied. The whole process of the project child method allowed me to become aware of the different ways that each of my students was learning. It was evident when a student excelled at the construction station, but needed more time at textbook station. More often than not, this was the case. It led me not to ignore textbook work, as direct computation is important, but to enhance the experience at textbook station to make it more relevant to the real world, and to the student's lives. Making the instruction meaningful helped students to understand the information more easily.

Overall, the three theories of learning fit nicely into the project child model. Behaviorism assumes that knowledge is gained by the conditioning of one's behavior. This loosely relates to the station work in that students were rewarded for completing their stations with "tickets", used later for "buying" certain privileges, such as lunch with a teacher. Just as many would guess, this mode of learning did not work for all students. Some students did not care about the rewards. From what I understand, Cognitivism says that knowledge is brain based and built upon from prior knowledge. Further, it is enhanced through higher order thinking. The stations that my students worked through were based on the direct instruction given that day, or the day prior. Constructivism comes into play because each station was self-guided, so students had the opportunity to think for themselves without the teacher telling them yes or no, what the next step should be. I have a feeling that I'm going to want to take a little bit from each theory in the end!

Finally, bringing my thoughts full circle, I want to mention that all of the student's senses were utilized through these stations. Even smell and taste when the station used food or even the smell of the plastic task folders, construction paper, markers. However, auditory, visual and tactile were most often the modes of sensory perception being used at the stations.

Ultimately, we study learning so that we know the best way to teach, or give instruction. We study learning to find the most effective way to achieve a goal. If the goal is not being achieved, we have to know where the process went wrong and how to fix it. So, by studying learning we can figure out where the process lacks and how to improve it, based on the audience, or individual. I believe that by beginning with questions we can figure out the most effective mode of instruction, therefore guaranteeing, or hopefully guaranteeing, successful learning.