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ABSTRACT

This paper introduces the subjectivist teaching/learning paradigm (STP), which uses students' social and cultural enculturation processes to structure affect-laden constructivist learning experiences focused in the subject area being taught. STP uses powerful learning experiences to promote two goals: enculturation into the subject area and student empowerment. STP techniques for practical teaching mirror the effective processes of enculturation by which students learn the skills, understandings, and attitudes of their own sociocultural groups. STP lessons concentrate real life subjective experiences into a learning area. STP helps students learn to choose what to learn and how to learn it, offering them an increasing variety of learning experiences. It develops student empowerment by continually reinforcing successful self-directed learning through affect structuring, covert directives, and self-cuing coping strategies. Surface purposes begin with three affect structuring techniques (emotional anchor, motivator, and cognitive direction), which utilize the positive subject experiences of affect, self-selection, and motivation. The paper illustrates surface purposes within a workshop at the University of the South Pacific, Fiji, in which students practiced expressing their disapproval of nuclear testing in the Pacific. Six workshop activities are described, highlighting their setting, surface purpose, and hidden pedagogic purpose. (Contains 24 references.) (SM)

CONSTRUCTIVIST PEDAGOGY AND STUDENT-CENTERED LEARNING: THE SUBJECTIVIST PARADIGM

Tony Bastick

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Constructivist Pedagogy and Student-Centred Learning: The Subjectivist Paradigm

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Introduction

This paper introduces The Subjectivist Teaching/learning Paradigm (STP).

Cognitive psychology has paid little attention to feeling, attitudes and emotion. Yet these culturally determined affective concomitants of cognition play a powerful role in the construction of knowledge. Lectures are, for example, expected to engender self-confidence, interest and a questioning attitude of critical evaluation as 'multiplying factors' for student learning. However, there is no generally accepted pedagogic theory to guide lecturers in structuring practical activities that use such affective multiplying factors for the enhancement of constructivist learning. STP uses students' natural social and cultural enculturation processes to structure affect laden constructivist learning experiences - such as needs-driven social communication - that are focused in the subject area being taught.

STP uses these powerful learning experiences, with humanistic intent, to promote its two aims of (i) Enculturation into the subject area and (ii) Student empowerment. In this paper, these two aims are operationally defined. Subjectivist teaching and assessment methods are given with practical illustrative examples. The pedagogic theory is given for structuring and assessing subject-based practical activities that use affective multiplying factors for the enhancement of constructive learning.

Constructivism is a philosophy that is currently popular with educationalists but it is a philosophy without an accepted pedagogy (Huinker & Madison, 1995; Hwang, 1996; Roblyer, 1996; Savery & Duffy, 1995; Willis, 1995) . One reason for this is that constructivism, stemming from Piaget through Bruner to von Glasersfeld, emphasises cognitivist considerations and gives less consideration to the affect associated with social constructivist learning or with radical constructivist learning (Bruner, 1960, 1966; Drescher, 1991; Garrison, 1993; Glasersfeld, 1996; London, 1988; Quartz & Sejnowski, 1996; Sigel & Cocking, 1977; Wadsworth, 1971). Yet educators know that affect associated with learning is a powerful multiplying factor and so they manage their teaching to promote motivation, interest, involvement and enjoyment (Beebe & Ivy, 1994; Boekaerts, 1988; Sylwester, 1994).

The Subjectivist Teaching/learning Paradigm (STP) focuses on the subjective experience of the learner. Subjectivist teaching recognises the indivisibility of cognition and affect in all experiences and so structures both the affective and cognitive aspects of constructivist learning experiences to optimise each student's understanding. STP covertly choreographs the motivation, intention, curiosity, confusion and the energy of the learning experience, as well as the associated cognitive content that students experience, and associates these cognitive-affective attributes with successful constructivist learning of the subject content. The dual aims of STP are (i) Enculturation into the content area and (ii) Student empowerment.

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Enculturation into the content area, the first aim of STP, can be understood by comparing traditional knowledge transmission in say, Mathematics, with the teaching of a religion (Bishop, 1991; Tishman, 1993). In teaching religion, not only are the facts and processes taught but affect is utilised to shape appropriate beliefs, attitudes and values which the students are expected to demonstrate as part of their life-styles. In contrast, for traditional knowledge transmission of Mathematics only the facts and processes are to be remembered. Affect is not traditionally utilised to imbue the student with appropriate values intrinsic to the study of Mathematics. Conversely, a teacher following the Enculturation model, as is used in Subjectivist teaching, would teach their subject with expectations of a believer teaching their religion.

STP techniques for practical teaching mirror the effective processes of enculturation by which students learn the skills, understandings and attitudes of their own socio-cultural groups (Aidman, 1994; Guild, 1994; Jacobson, 1996; Soldier, 1985). An STP lesson is the concentration of 'real life' subjective experiences focused on a learning area. For example, the subjectivist teacher will design an empowering game, a theme or application as a 'surface purpose'. Surface purposes can range from simple skill-building games to complex need-consuming affect-laden communicative activities that build into complete sessions. The teaching techniques that surface purposes utilise are appropriate enculturation processes such as peer pressure, social recognition, compliance with authority, shared experience, establishing role identity, in-group bonding, out-group competition, etc. The 'surface purpose' creates or utilises students' intrinsic needs and purposes. It distracts attention from the teacher's pedagogic purpose, which is for the students to learn at the limit of their abilities. Surface purposes use affect-structuring techniques to enhance student empowerment.

The second aim of STP, student empowerment, means here autonomous and self-directed learning. STP aims for students to increasingly be able to choose what to learn and how to learn it. Students are given an increasingly wide variety of learning experiences. On the bases of their experiences they are taught to recognise and build on their talents by increasing their ability to select learning areas and learning methods that produce quality outcomes. STP develops student empowerment by continually reinforcing successful self-directed learning through the three techniques of (i) affect-structuring, (ii) covert directives and (iii) self-cuing coping strategies. STP reinforces self-directed learning by designing activities which optimise opportunities for student success at the limit of their abilities - the pedagogic purpose - while using covert guidance that allows students to initiate strategies and attribute their feelings of success to their 'autonomous' self-directed learning. That is, students feel responsible for their own success. Due to time limitations only the first technique, (i) affect-structuring, is now described.

Surface purposes start with three affect-structuring techniques: an emotional anchor, motivator and cognitive direction. These three techniques utilise positive subjective experiences of affect, self-selection and motivation. These positive subjective experiences are linked with the activity, and their resulting feelings of success, so that students 'own' the activity and naturally attribute their success to their own efforts.

The emotional anchor sets and captures the students' feelings for the duration of the activity. So, whatever these students choose to think or do will be related to the activity. Hence, the emotional anchor ensures the relevance of all learning states during the activity - from on-task concentration to a mulling regression. The three-fold purpose of the motivator is to (i) imply that the students can be successful at the surface purpose, (ii) link their feelings of involvement to the activity so that they own the activity and (iii) give them an entrance to the activity so they can start doing it. The cognitive direction describes the scenario, suggests an appropriate organisation, and sources information and other resources for the activity. The cognitive direction situates the surface purpose within information related to the emotional anchor. It directs the students' awareness to information that is relevant to the activity. Hence, students will be able

to judge which information is relevant and can be used, and which information is peripheral and may be ignored. It also guides their organisation of the tasks involved in the surface purpose - social bench-marking of standards, role responsibilities, etc.

Application of Subjectivism - learning and practising an argument register in French

Surface purposes are now illustrated by a half-day 'Speak French Workshop' given for a mixed age and ability range at the University of the South Pacific (Boufoy-Bastick, 1996). The surface purpose of the workshop was for the students to express their disapproval of nuclear testing in the Pacific. The pedagogic purpose was to learn and practise an argument register in French. The students felt very strongly about this issue and were demonstrating against the French nuclear testing programme in the capital of Fiji. Hence, the workshop used as an emotional anchor a 5-minute video clip of a nuclear test on one of their Pacific 'paradise' islands. The motivator was a concatenated news clip of a US general and a Pacific dignitary expressing their views. This was mixed with video of some of the better students, who were at the workshop, also expressing their views. The cognitive direction was a sudden stark silent black and white 'still' of the mushroom cloud that cut into, and ending, a video view of the actual explosion. Overlaid were the words POUR OU CONTRE (for or against).

The pedagogic organisation then consisted of encouraging individual contributions, practising them and bringing each individual's practised contributions together in groups of successively smaller size ending with a presentation to the whole class - so that individual practised contributions received valued recognition from the whole class. This was achieved using six smaller surface purposes - journalists and party officials preparing for a live TV debate where one party is 'for' and the other party 'against'. The last one of these, the ballot, was for confirming the students' success.

Following are short descriptions of the six activities noting their setting, surface purpose rationale and the hidden pedagogic purpose:

1st activity: Headline that article.

Setting: A small group of journalists working in the news office.

Surface purpose rational: as investigative journalists, students need to be able to find a suitable headline for a news article. When the group has decided on a headline they put it on the editor's desk (the teacher's overhead projector).

Pedagogic purpose: (i) practise reading French for understanding to the self-defined criterion of agreeing a one-line summary (the headline), (ii) practise and learn relevant vocabulary.

2nd activity: List arguments for and against.

Setting: A small group of potential spokespeople (ministers) working as political researchers in the party's research office.

Surface purpose rationale: As official party spokespeople, students must be able to give arguments for their party and be aware of what questions journalists may ask against them.

Pedagogic purpose: Further practice of skills introduced in activity one.

3rd activity: Choosing your argument.

Setting: party central office. Each party member chooses an argument with which they feel comfortable and agrees, with the party leader, to be the official party spokesperson for this argument.

Surface purpose: Party leader agrees who should be the official party spokesperson for the various arguments. Each spokesperson must choose an argument that he or she can repeat in the TV debate and about which they can answer journalist's questions.

Pedagogic purpose: To focus the students on some smaller content area in which they can achieve high mastery level.

4th activity: Interviewing the whistle-blowers.

Setting: Journalists have a tip-off to go to a warehouse and to a hotel room for inside information.

Surface purpose: An anonymous party defector is willing to 'spill the beans' and divulge confidential information at the last moment before the debate. This may enable investigative journalists to expose the official spokespeople during the live TV debate - if they ask the right questions.

Pedagogic purpose: The whistle-blowers (and, if necessary, their aids) are chosen as reasonably competent speakers so that the students can, by phrasing their written argument as a question, both practise and hear French relevant to increasing their mastery of their chosen content.

5th activity: The live TV debate.

Setting: A TV studio, with a presenter/compare (the teacher), an expert panel of the two party leaders and their aids who will call their official spokespeople, in front of an audience of investigative journalists.

Surface purpose: (i) as spokespeople - to convince the TV viewing public of their party's point of view; for or against nuclear testing in the Pacific. (ii) as investigative journalists - to represent the viewing public by asking searching questions of the official spokespeople, possibly exposing any hidden agenda.

Pedagogic purpose: to experience the success of demonstrating competence at a high level of mastery.

Final activity: the ballot.

Setting: French polling station where everyone casts their secret vote for or against nuclear testing in the Pacific.

Surface purpose: to resolve what is the public's opinion.

Pedagogic purpose: Throughout this lesson it has been necessary for the students to support arguments to which they are opposed. This ballot resolves any frustration by firstly allowing students to vote for their true opinion and secondly, as the outcome will most certainly be in their favour, it rewards them for their participation in the lesson by giving them the result they all want - to express their disapproval of nuclear testing in the Pacific - which fulfils the surface purpose of the workshop.

Subjectivist teaching may be evaluated using student feedback from the lesson. Feedback from transmission lessons is evaluated by weighing the likes and dislikes. In contrast, the success of a Subjectivist lesson is evaluated by a content analysis of what is referred to - not just whether it is liked or disliked. The feedback should confirm that the pedagogic processes were invisible to the students. That is, the students should only refer to liking or disliking the surface purposes.

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