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A constructive approach to learning and teaching in Nursing Education.

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Everyone belongs to and identifies with a society - no man is an island. Bearing this in mind makes me view the world through a social constructivist lens. Social constructivism (SC) is a pedagogic theory championed by Lev Vygotsky in the late 19th century (Vygotsky, 1978). Applying the theory to teaching and learning in the 21st century cannot be more paramount.

Amineh and Asl (2015) reviewed SC as a constructive process in which learners are supported to build on an internal illustration of knowledge and a personal interpretation of experience. Kalina and Powell (2009) recommend that a social constructivist teaching method is a tool for an effective classroom. In Nursing, the application of SC has proven to be a valuable educational strategy promoting peer mentoring and peer learning (Andersen and Watkins, 2018). SC teaching methods have improved service-learning programmes in nursing education Mthembu and Mtshali (2013) and a successful educational framework for stimulation teaching within nurse education (Humphreys, 2013). Abualhaija (2019) sums up that adopting SC as an epistemological approach to teaching promotes student-centered learning.

Historically, there was an acknowledgment that different versions and discourses exist around the Nursing curriculum. Three discourses were analysed by Karseth (2004). The disciplinary discourse suggests that the purpose of nursing education is to become a knowledgeable professional trained in the core content of the academic discipline. The employability discourse focuses on employment-related transferable skills and the usefulness of knowledge and finally, the normative practical discourse is centered on nursing education targeting moral and ethical tasks that build on the commitment to humanity, mercy, and renunciation (Karseth (2004).

However, amidst all the discourses, it is paramount that nurse educators reflect on how they teach and collaborate with the students as well as evaluate the elements such as power, resources, organisational and socio-cultural factors that constitute quality nursing education in today's health care practice (Barr and Dowding (2022).

In today's academic world, learners make sense of the world and create and recreate meaning. However, the meaning they create depends on the level, brand, and quality of knowledge they have gained from different events, interactions, and engagements in their immediate and larger society or environment (Bronfenbrenner, 1994). These concepts simply support that no one is a custodian of knowledge; knowledge is co-constructed, and the environment plays a huge role in determining the type of knowledge we gain.

Now, let me dive a bit into the Ecological Systems theory developed by Urie Bronfenbrenner in the early 20th century. His work shed light on the complexities that exist in the environment in which each person lives. Bronfenbrenner used five ecological systems: the microsystem, the mesosystem, the exosystem, the macrosystem, and the chronosystem. All five contribute to human development (Bronfenbrenner, 1979). In simple terms, he proposes that people interact with their immediate and larger environments. This means that the environment is, directly and indirectly, considered a key mechanism of how we develop and make sense of the world.

Now, in academia, I believe the combination of these theories is synergistic, and it is quintessential to cautiously apply the theories to teaching and learning in Higher Education. That said, it will take a collaborative effort from both students and lecturers and of course the teaching philosophy and organisational policies of universities.

Lecturers should seek to create both learner-friendly and learning-enhancing environments. Lecturers should listen to their learners, create an interactive learning space and expose learners to different opportunities to collectively connect with learning. A learner-friendly environment is organised, relaxed, well-ventilated, and has the right lecture room temperature (at least 21 degrees Celcius). According to Kim et al. (2020), when an indoor temperature decreased to 17 °C, students' learning performance decreased by about 9.9%. Finally, lecturers should blend academic kindness and academic rigour to make learning fun and fair for all learners.

A learning-enhancing environment frowns at didactic teaching but makes available a variety of teaching resources and uses a wide range of teaching approaches such as debate, group work, role-play and workshops to promote students' abilities to build their knowledge,

construct new meaning and gain knowledge from one another within the academic environment.

Students, on the other hand, will need to develop a question-asking and question-answering culture. They should think outside the box- not stereotype or only learn about what exists within their immediate environment, culture, and beliefs. Everyone belongs to a society, but students should be aware of the larger environment that can also contribute to their learning. By doing so, students construct new meanings, master new knowledge and unlearn out-of-date knowledge.

Let me sum up my discussion by quoting the words of Vygotsky to students

“ It is through others that we become ourselves.”- Lev S. Vygotsky

And re-echo the words of John Dewey to lecturers:

“The school must be "a genuine form of active community life, instead of a place set apart in which to learn lessons."-John Dewey

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