

Inclusive, Human-Centered Learning in a Digital Revolution

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November 28, 2025

My personal philosophy on education has largely been shaped by my years spent in learning support in marginalized communities. I have seen first hand the transformative power and hope that education can provide to people who choose that path despite the struggle and sacrifice they have to endure when they make that choice. Education is a vehicle to provide marginalized communities with opportunity for equity, empowerment and ultimately agency. It is also a space that creates additional community engagement within the social structure, creating systems of support and centering the act of learning as a social and communal act of care. It is, at its core, constructivist. In honoring lived experiences and building upon that knowledge to enhance learning, the community can stay emotionally grounded and engaged with one another. The inclusion of technology in learning can often seem in direct opposition to such a grounded view of learning, but when applied with intention it acts as an enhancer to the learning experience, providing access, inclusion, personalization and self-efficacy. My personal philosophy is to center the agency of learners, build community centered spaces that foster true belonging and connection, provide equitable access, and encourage autonomy through scaffolding, while thoughtfully using technology to enhance human relationality and cognitive development.

Learning is both constructive and social, but in order to be effective it requires both equity for the learners as well as psychological safety in the context of the space. Learners build meaning and understanding by connecting new materials to their own existing, prior knowledge (Harlow et al., 2007). Activation of prior knowledge is a crucial step as it allows the learner to construct new meaning by accommodating knowledge within their existing schema. Oftentimes, this means the learning environment is social and communal, which allows learners to make meaningful connections within the context of their lived, sometimes shared experiences. This

posits dialogue and collaboration as the tools to facilitate depth of understanding. It should be noted that social learning does not automatically mean that learning is equitable; rather, that the learning must be structured with intention to ensure that marginalized learners are heard. This creates an environment where all voices have a space to be heard and allows for a richer and more diverse dialogue to take place. Without that, having a space that is truly safe for all learners, is not possible. Being able to show up in personal authenticity as a learner helps to create psychological safety, and in turn allows learners to engage in intellectual risk taking and true exploration, resulting in a richer educational experience.

The role of a teacher should allow for a minimization of any type of power or posturing dynamic and be based in facilitation of learning rather than subject dominance. Positioning the role of teacher as a guide, a collaborator, or even a co-creator, removes the perception of authority and makes the role a participating member of the social group. This shift in perception allows for an increase in psychological safety with the benefit of improved cognitive engagement from the learning community. As a facilitator, the focus should be on guiding learners to inquiry, reflection and the connection between existing understanding and new content. In this role, information and learning should be scaffolded in a way that creates equitable access, transparency of process and Universal Design for Learning (UDL), as benefits all learners. Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development (ZPD) places specific emphasis on the idea of scaffolding helping learners move from base level understanding to knowledge competence, which ties in well with the core concepts of UDL: multiple ways to access content, multiple ways to demonstrate learning, and multiple ways to stay engaged (Singer & Shapiro, 2025). Assessment should be approached with a lens of authenticity, reflection and growth orientation. This allows for learners to more clearly understand how the new information fits into their

existing knowledge rather than focusing on recall or rote memorization for the sake of passing a traditional test.

Ultimately, my philosophy is rooted in the three C's: Cognitivism, Constructivism, and Connectivism, with the framework firmly rooted in a healthy mix of Critical Theory. From Cognitivism, my framework incorporates the importance of schema activation as a core facilitation of learning. Much like a blueprint, a learner should be able to look at their existing knowledge base and restructure to incorporate new material as needed. The facilitator should understand the importance of memory when thoughtfully engaging in instructional design of scaffolded learning systems. A true cognitive framework would have the internal learning processes centered in a neutral environment, but my philosophy places an emphasis on the emotional context a learner brings to the environment, as well as placing importance on social identity and belonging as activators of cognition. Because my personal philosophy places a strong emphasis on meaning-making and personal experience, I would argue that Constructivism plays a crucial role. Constructivism is founded in collaboration with others and personal experience shaping the learning experience (Driscoll & Burner, 2025). It supports a very hands-on learning approach that embraces the idea that students are centric to their own experience and should be driving learning through inquiry. All of that aligns closely with how I view learning and teaching and what I plan to apply to my own instructional design practice. The piece that constructivism fails to connect, and that I most resonate with, is the inclusion of the impact of structural inequity, specifically to marginalized learners. This is where Critical Theory can step in and address that gap by placing a justice centered lens on the work. Connectivism plays a role in my philosophy as well through the idea that learning is communal and that knowing is often distributed across networks- both human and digital. Learning requires an

understanding of how to navigate digital spaces, which requires digital literacy. However, Connectivism does not place a strong emphasis on healthy boundaries, digital health, or even mindful use of technology; all of which are crucial within the framework of my own philosophy.

Technology in education does not hold a neutral role. It has the ability to expand or restrict access for learners depending on how it is used. The use of technology in learning aligns with my personal philosophy only when it is used to support equity and agency. In order to truly align within a philosophy that embraces Constructivism, technology should enhance the element of human connection through a practice of inquiry and meaning-making, not replace it altogether. In my own framework, technology holds two major roles: equity through access, and learner agency.

When used intentionally, technology has the power to dismantle persistent and system educational barriers for learners, especially when applied through the lens of UDL principles. Multiple means of representation, engagement, and reflection can be significantly enhanced when appropriate technology is leveraged. It allows for the leveling of the playing field for diverse learners who may come with different prior knowledge, language backgrounds or cognitive needs. The impact of UDL combined with technology can be seen in things such as closed captioning on all content or when learning management systems (LMS) maintain structured visual cues for continuity of engagement. Those changes are simple, but make a meaningful impact on access for learners across the board.

Learner agency is a fundamental part of my philosophy, and technology can reinforce it by providing a variety of tools that facilitate planning, reflection, and even self-regulation. Technology allows learners to make the active choices of how, when, and at what pace they want to learn. This directly reinforces UDL principles through an emphasis on engagement and

autonomy (Kennette & Chapman, 2024). Technology such as LMSs allow learners to choose when they want to learn, and can also allow them to choose how they learn by giving choice in medium. It also provides choice in pacing that allows for personal responsibilities or even prior knowledge. When learners have the autonomy to choose for themselves the timing, medium and pacing, they are likely to be more motivated and persistent (Moscato & Pedone, 2024). Offering systems that are designed with intentionality creates a space where technology becomes a vehicle for learner ownership.

The most eye opening aspect of this assignment has been the intersectionality and complexity of interplay between the different learning theories. I walked into this with the core belief that my educational philosophy was firmly based in Connectivism or possibly Critical Theory, but as I continued to read and engage with the materials and discussions with classmates, it became clear that application of theory to real world scenarios was most effective once I removed the rigidity of the belief in a singular theory. Learning does not happen in a vacuum, and adherence to a singular philosophy does not serve educators in a very real, very messy world with complex learners who hold unique histories and prior knowledge.

This analysis demonstrates that meaningful learning is centered in and around learner-centered and equity driven philosophy that emphasises agency, autonomy and thoughtful engagement with technology. Through the primary learning theories of Cognitivism, Connectivism and Constructivism, my own personal understanding of learning and teaching has become more intentional, as well as more committed to equitable outcomes that are learner-centered and create true belonging through instructional design. This framework allows my work to support and honor the complex lives, diverse identities and existing prior knowledge of the communities I serve.

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