My Learning Philosophy

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Introduction

My philosophy of learning begins with a simple truth: learning is not a product of teaching but an evolving process shaped by curiosity, experience, and reflection. As a surgical technology educator and program director, I have seen that deep understanding arises when learners are invited to explore, connect, and apply knowledge in authentic contexts. Learning flourishes when curiosity and imagination intersect with structure and community. In my classrooms, labs, and professional development spaces, I strive to create conditions where inquiry drives learning and reflection transforms experience into growth. This mindset forms the foundation of both my educational practice and my innovation plan, the Surgical Technology Educators Program (STEP), a constructivist model designed to guide clinical experts into confident, reflective educators.

Beliefs About Learning

Learning is an active and collaborative process through which individuals construct new understanding from their experiences and interactions. Constructivist approaches empower learners to think critically, apply knowledge in context, and adapt to complex challenges. In surgical technology, this means that learners, whether students or novice educators, build stronger judgment and problem-solving skills when they connect new theoretical concepts to real-world clinical experiences. Effective learning environments must be learner-centered, knowledge-centered, assessment-centered, and community-centered. Learners should feel safe to explore new ideas, take intellectual risks, and view mistakes as opportunities for growth. Constructivist learning also values reflection, allowing individuals to internalize lessons and reframe understanding through practice.

Beliefs About the Relationship Between Teaching and Learning

Teaching and learning exist in a symbiotic relationship. Teaching is most effective when it is grounded in authentic learning experiences that inspire curiosity and autonomy. The educator's role is not to deliver knowledge but to design conditions where knowledge can be discovered, debated, and constructed collaboratively. Incorporating technology and simulation in modern education fosters hands-on engagement and reflective learning, aligning perfectly with constructivist principles. This belief drives my STEP program, which moves beyond policy training to emphasize experiential learning for educators. Through reflection, mentorship, and authentic problem-solving, participants construct their own understanding of effective teaching practices while becoming part of a collaborative professional community.

Beliefs About Myself as a Learner

I view myself as a lifelong learner who thrives on curiosity, experimentation, and self-reflection. As I transitioned from surgical technologist to educator, I learned that growth stems from continuous reflection on both successes and failures. Effective professional learning depends on metacognitive awareness and intentional practice. This perspective influences my mentoring approach: I encourage educators to use reflection journals, peer discussions, and formative feedback to monitor their growth. By modeling active learning and vulnerability, I position myself not as an authority figure but as a co-learner alongside my faculty.

Learning Philosophy vs. Teaching Philosophy

A teaching philosophy explains how we instruct; a learning philosophy focuses on how learners construct knowledge and understanding. This distinction reframes education from teacher-centered to learner-centered practice, emphasizing choice, ownership, and reflection. In surgical technology education, this shift is crucial because new instructors often rely on the same didactic methods they experienced as students. The STEP program challenges that pattern by promoting inquiry-driven, reflective teaching methods grounded in constructivism and supported by peer collaboration. When educators experience learning as participants in such environments, they are better prepared to replicate those conditions for their students.

Theoretical Alignment: Constructivism as Foundation

My philosophy of learning is rooted in constructivism and informed by connectivist principles. Constructivism asserts that learners actively build understanding through experience and social interaction. Connectivism expands on this idea by recognizing that knowledge is distributed across networks of people and technology. Through the STEP program, I apply both theories by encouraging educators to collaborate, engage with digital platforms, and co-create knowledge. Simulation-based learning, digital collaboration tools, and mentoring networks empower faculty to grow within dynamic, connected learning systems. Learning in the digital age requires embracing curiosity, play, and experimentation within structured environments that nurture innovation.

Applying Theory: The STEP Program

Modern research on learning underscores four essential characteristics of effective learning environments: learner-centeredness, knowledge depth, continuous assessment, and community. These principles are reflected throughout the STEP program: participants identify personal goals, engage in concept-based workshops, reflect on their progress, and collaborate in professional learning communities. This model transforms theory into practice by empowering surgical technology educators to take ownership of their professional development while fostering collegial support and accountability. Through reflective dialogue and authentic experiences, educators transition from content experts to learning facilitators, mirroring the same process they are expected to cultivate in their students.

Learning as Change Agency

My learning philosophy positions me not only as an educator but as a change agent. Constructivism changes the learner; connectivism changes the system. By applying both, I use the STEP program to build a network of reflective, adaptive educators who lead with curiosity and collaboration. Professional identity and adaptability in education thrive when continuous learning and mentorship are embedded within institutional culture. Through this lens, the STEP program becomes more than training, it is a catalyst for sustained growth, institutional improvement, and transformative leadership in surgical technology education.

Conclusion

My constructivist learning philosophy reflects both my personal values and professional mission: to empower educators to think critically, reflect deeply, and design environments that inspire transformation. Learning is most powerful when it is personal, purposeful, and participatory. Through the STEP program, I strive to model this philosophy by creating significant learning experiences that begin with curiosity, grow through collaboration, and endure through reflection.

Annotated Bibliography

Ashwood, N. (2023). Teaching professionalism during and post-pandemic to develop adaptive expertise in higher education. *Medical Teacher*, 45(9), 1032–1038.

Ashwood examines how educators adapted their teaching practices during and after the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of reflective learning and adaptability in professional education. This article supports the idea that educators must continually evolve their teaching approaches in response to changing environments, a concept central to my STEP program. Ashwood's findings reinforce the role of mentorship and continuous learning in developing professional identity, validating the constructivist belief that reflection and adaptability are essential components of growth for both educators and students.

Daodu, M., Elegbede, C., & Adedotun, O. (2024). *Effectiveness of constructivism theory of learning as a 21st-century method of teaching*. Journal of Advanced Psychology, 6(2), 1–11.

This study explores the effectiveness of constructivist learning approaches in modern education, highlighting their impact on critical thinking, creativity, and student engagement. The authors emphasize active participation and the integration of real-world applications in learning, which directly aligns with the design of the STEP program. Their conclusions affirm that constructivism encourages learners to take ownership of their educational journey, making this source a strong theoretical foundation for the learner-centered principles guiding my teaching philosophy.

Harapnuik, D. (2016). A learning philosophy. http://www.harapnuik.org/?page_id=95

Harapnuik presents a reflective exploration of learning as a process that prioritizes curiosity, ownership, and voice over traditional teaching hierarchies. His philosophy serves as a conceptual model for shifting from teacher-centered to learner-centered approaches. This framework deeply influences the foundation of the STEP program, emphasizing environments where educators and students co-construct knowledge through authentic, reflective practice.

Saarsar, P. (2024). Exploring the constructivist approach in education: Theory, practice, and implications. International Journal of Research and Analytical Reviews.

Saarsar provides an updated discussion of constructivist theory and its practical implications in contemporary classrooms. The author outlines how constructivist teaching encourages collaboration, problem-solving, and inquiry-based learning. This work underscores the necessity of designing meaningful learning environments that promote exploration and autonomy, key values that underpin both my educational philosophy and the implementation of the STEP professional development model for surgical technology educators.

Shahrezaei, A., et al. (2024). The impact of surgical simulation and training technologies on surgical education: A review. *BMC Medical Education*, 24(1), 62.

This review examines the influence of simulation and emerging digital technologies on surgical education, emphasizing experiential learning as a driver of skill mastery and confidence. The findings support the integration of digital and hands-on learning modalities, validating my belief that reflective practice and technological fluency enhance educator development. The article also supports the STEP program's focus on simulation-based and collaborative training for new educators transitioning from clinical roles into academia.

Thomas, D., & Brown, J. S. (2011). *A new culture of learning: Cultivating the imagination for a world of constant change.* CreateSpace.

Thomas and Brown explore how learning can thrive in environments defined by change and digital connectivity. Their book emphasizes curiosity, creativity, and collaboration as key components of meaningful learning in the 21st century. These ideas align seamlessly with my constructivist philosophy and the STEP model, which fosters imaginative problem-solving and lifelong learning through reflective practice and shared community experiences.

Yan, Y., et al. (2025). Challenges and opportunities to advance surgical education: The future of professional training. *Surgical Education*, 12(1), 55–68.

Yan and colleagues discuss current trends and challenges in surgical education, focusing on the evolution of faculty development and mentorship. The article highlights the importance of structured professional learning communities to sustain quality in teaching and training. This research reinforces the rationale behind my STEP program, which aims to build collaborative, reflective networks of surgical technology educators dedicated to continuous growth and improvement.