

Educational Pedagogy and Tutoring: Reflection Question I

Philosophers of education have discussed three very broad approaches to teaching. The most common is “traditional education,” which places the teacher at the center of the classroom. He or she delivers information to the students and the students learn by memorizing and digesting what the teacher has said. Children are “blank slates” waiting to be written upon by their teachers.¹ “Romantic” education presents a dramatic contrast. Romantic educators believe children, when given freedom and respect, can figure out an independent path through learning that will be right for them. Children will thrive in rich learning environments that provide them with the tools they need to pursue their own paths. Constructivist/progressive education is based on the work of Jean Piaget and others who have documented developmental differences in the way individuals make sense of the world. Children learn best through their own explorations. New knowledge emerges as they either shape new information to fit old understandings or change old understandings to match new information. Teachers observe children’s engagement and help them learn more by asking questions and presenting new information in an ongoing conversation.



In the best of classrooms, all three broad approaches may co-exist. What about in tutoring?

As your tutoring unfolds over the course of the year, we can think about how an awareness of these approaches strengthens your tutoring. To start gaining a better understanding of each approach:

Please think about your own experience with school. Try to identify one experience for each educational approach and explain why it is best understood according that approach.

¹ Interestingly, the term “blank slate” is credited to John Locke (1698) in his famous book, *An Essay Concerning Human Understanding*. However, when Locke used the term it was in the service of creating a more equitable society. He opposed doctrines such as “the divine right of kings” that assumed knowledge and ability was inborn, and that an individual’s place in society was rightfully determined at birth. Rather than being confined by the existing political structure of society, individuals were “blank slates.” They had infinite ability to learn. Given the chance to do so created the opportunity to move beyond the circumstances of their birth. In recent decades, the term “blank slate” takes on a different significance. It differentiates historical views of children from modern observations of the myriad assumptions and developmentally based cognitive patterns that children bring to learning. According to progressive educators, they are not “blank slates,” and if teachers do not consider what they bring to lessons, the lessons may be lost.