



4.6 Teaching and learning concepts: instructionist

A mid-sized Swiss city has a theatre with its own symphony orchestra. As part of its winter programme, the theatre presents a series of concerts along with screenings of films with scores by Arthur Honegger, in honour of the internationally famous Swiss composer. The theatre's director, who had written her doctoral dissertation on Honegger's film music, gave a lecture introducing the first evening in the series. Not unnaturally, the lecture was packed with facts and details from the composer's life and highlighted certain aspects of his musical approach to the moving image.

It is unlikely that many of those who attended the event would have said that they did so in order to learn something, had anyone asked. Even the director might have had trouble reconciling her understanding of her own role with the idea that her purpose that evening was to teach people something with her lecture. Yet one has to assume that she wanted to disseminate and increase knowledge about Arthur Honegger among the guests at the event. And in fact, a learning situation did exist for most of the people who listened to the lecture. This illustrates the fact that neither teaching nor learning are always intentional, i.e. conscious and premeditated.

In the (fictive) example described here, the concept of teaching and learning at issue is one informed by the theory of instructionism. Instructionism is based on an assumption that learning is receptive, i.e. is absorbed passively. It unfolds in a linear manner, systematically, one step building on the last, in a direction corresponding with the view of the person teaching. Learning content is understood as a closed knowledge cluster, or parts of one, which experts possess, prepare, and transmit to learners.