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Fostering Reflective Insight in Graduate Speech-Language Pathology

Students using Lonergan's Generalized Empirical Method

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Abstract

Lonergan's Theory of Cognition was implemented in a graduate course in speech-language pathology. Students were introduced to the **Generalized Empirical Method** as a way to:

- develop reflective practice
- make informed clinical decisions
- increase awareness of critical thinking processes

Bernard Lonergan

Bernard Lonergan, S.J. was a Canadian philosopher who proposed a cognitional theory of mental activities that activate when humans seek to know and understand truth. Lonergan's theory of how humans develop understanding (or the process of knowing) is named the Generalized Empirical Method (GEM).

What is Insight?

Give the next number in the following sequences:

- 5, 15, 25, ...
- 7, 3, -1, ...
- 1, -2, 4, -8,
- 1, 7, 25, (Cronin, 2005)

How did you solve the problem?
What happens when you are thinking?

Application

Introducing students to a model of human understanding, and exploring how we come to understand, can lead to reflective insight about their own decision-making processes. This process can inform their thinking so they may form "unconditioned judgments" (Perry, 2004). Development of critical thinking skills, in which the "thinker" is keenly aware of the process of knowing and how that leads to judgment, can limit bias and result in actions that truly serve the needs of the patient.

Implementation

- Learning activities introduced students "think about their own thinking", and describe how they made a judgment.
- Case studies were used to explore the notion of judgment, bias and knowledge.
- Students were asked to question what they knew as they moved towards developing insight.
- Students wrote reflections on their thought processes as they made judgments related to clinical practice

Fundamentals of GEM – Levels of Cognitional Activities

- **Be attentive – EXPERIENCE – DATA**
- **Be intelligent – UNDERSTAND – QUESTIONS FOR KNOWLEDGE**
- **Be reasonable – JUDGMENT – QUESTIONS FOR REFLECTION**
- **Be responsible – DECIDE – QUESTIONS OF VALUE**

Sample Quotes

"It's a simple concept but complicated to use."

"It gave me a good platform for decision making in all aspects of communication disorders."

"Helpful to go through the questioning process to make decisions and judgments."

"Sometimes you don't have time to use the model."

Action Plan

- Introduce model using more real-world situations
- Build more alternate scenarios into cases
- Explore use with standardized patients
- Introduce pre- and post-critical thinking assessments
- Utilize more readings about the model from other disciplines

Student Insights

30 of 38 students provided written feedback on instruction in GEM.

Content analysis conducted on the data.

Themes emerged:

- Questioning process helpful in making judgments
- Model assisted students in thinking critically
- Components can be hard to understand
- More time was needed on application of principles to really integrate into decision making
- Time consuming for use in clinical practice

References

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