Constructivism: shifting the focus from product to process

Lecture 3: Mon 25th Jun 2012

EDG11 Professional Standards
Postgraduate Certificate in Teaching
Tonga Institute of Education

Vilimaka Foliaki
Institute of Education
The University of the South Pacific
‘Atele
Objectives

• Understand what constructivism is:
  – Essence and focus
• Aware of your own theories of learning/teaching:
  – Essence and focus
• Understand that constructivism is a theory!
• Understand the implications of learning theories to teaching and everyday life.
Just a theory: a reaction to experience

• What is a theory?
  – A **well-substantiated** explanation for a phenomenon;
  – Is it a fact?
  – Can it change?

• Why theories?
  – Help us explain, predict & live – sense of security/certainty;
  – Provides motivation for action.
  – Can’t effectively change action without changing beliefs (theories).
  – Beliefs empower people, more chances these will be actioned, more chances of success.
What's your beliefs about how learning occurs?

• Traditional belief (Objectivism)?:
  – Emphasis on objectivity (not influenced by personal feelings or opinions; based on “facts”).
    • Facts = observation; what can be observed
  – That knowledge resides in the book/teacher’s brain. Therefore, it must be reproduced & memorised; passed on unchanged;

• Teaching = talking/speaking/lecturing
• Learning = listening?, memorising?
Traditional theories about teaching & learning

• Teaching strategy - Teacher talks, student listens and ‘learns’; lecture type

• Teachers ask: “Is the answer right?”
BUT DOES THE STUDENT UNDERSTAND?
Constructivism: the essence

1. During learning, the ONLY tools available to a student are his/her senses (e.g. sight, hearing, feel, taste, smell)

2. Learning is the result of an individual using his/her prior experiences to interpret new experiences
   - We see the world through the lenses of our prior experiences (prior learning, culture, up-bringing, etc)

3. Knowledge is subjective.
Constructivism

- Just because learners are listening doesn’t mean they are learning!
- In constructivism: the learner is an active constructor of knowledge; the teacher is a facilitator of learners’ construction of knowledge.
Constructivism

- The learner interprets new experiences using what he already knows about those experiences (prior experience/knowledge)

- Teacher facilitates and guides; students construct knowledge in ways that make the best sense to them

- The teacher asks: “Is the answer meaningful?”
The importance of prior experience: Example
Knowledge: Objective or Subjective
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Statement</th>
<th>Observation (Yes or No)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>A  There is a stop sign on the corner of Apia Road and Vila Street.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>B  The truck did not come to a halt at the stop sign.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C  The car is a total write-off.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>D  There are beer cans on the road next to the car.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E  The driver of the car has been drinking alcohol.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>F  The car’s windscreen is smashed.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>G  The driver cut his forehead on the broken window.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>H  The driver of the car was not wearing a seat belt.</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Constructivism

- If answer is meaningful and workable = right
- Embraces diversity of ideas –promotes free-diverse thinking
- Prior experience is important: can either:
  - enhance learning, OR
  - prevent meaningful understanding.
- Rich bank of prior experiences is good for learning.
- Expose students/children to a diversity of experiences:
  - Family members, TV, newspapers, toys, books, videos, etc
Reflection helps

- make a connection between elements of our prior knowledge (assimilation and accommodation, Piaget)

- Make us aware of what we already know; make new meaning out of existing knowledge

- expand understanding
Collaboration

- Helps us listen to other points of view
- Allows us to understand how things make sense to other people
- Helps us appreciate/tolerate differences