

# Constructivism: shifting the focus from product to process

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# 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?

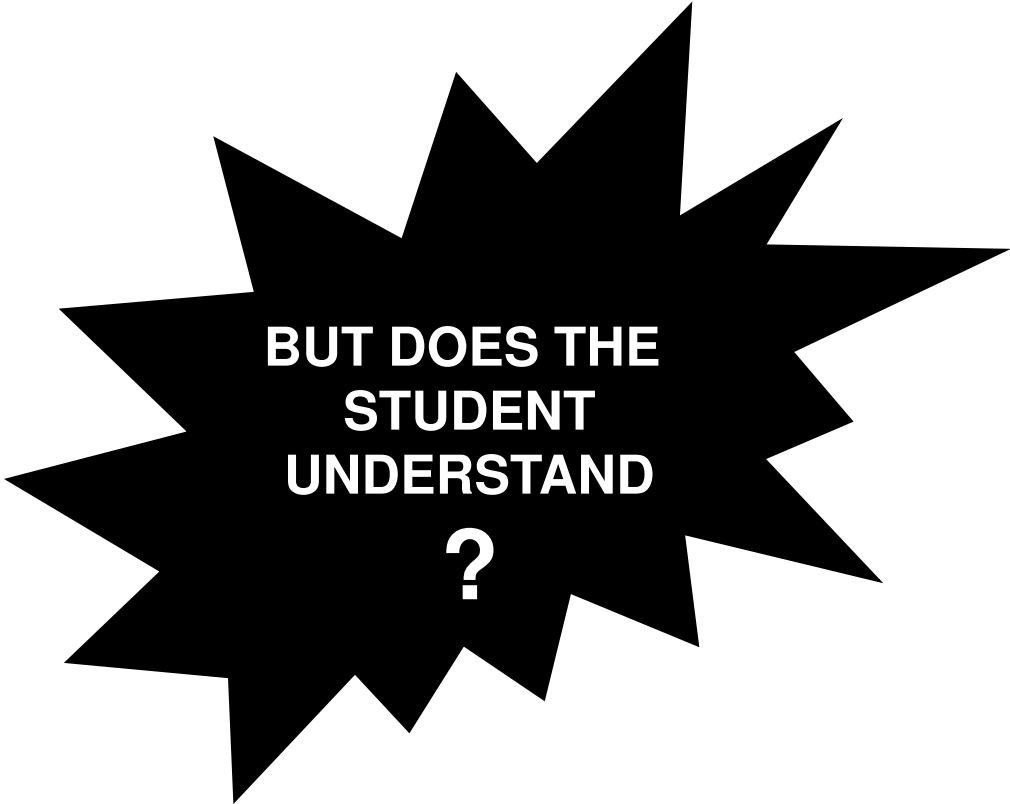
- Traditional belief (Objectivism)?:
  - Emphasis on objectivity (not influenced by personal feelings or opinions; based on “facts”).
    - Facts = observation; what can be observed
  - That knowledge resides in the book/teacher's brain. Therefore, it must be reproduced & memorised; passed on unchanged;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

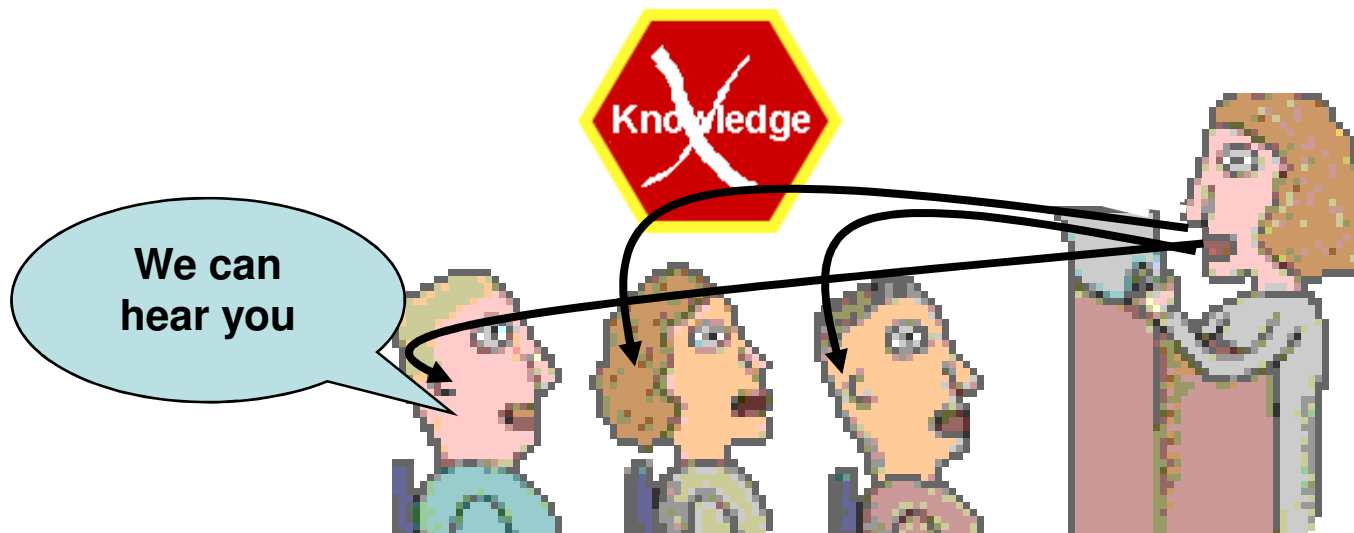
**?**

# 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.

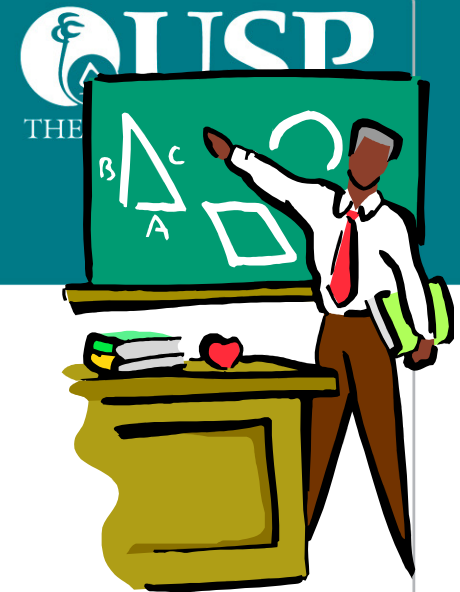
# Constructivism

- 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)

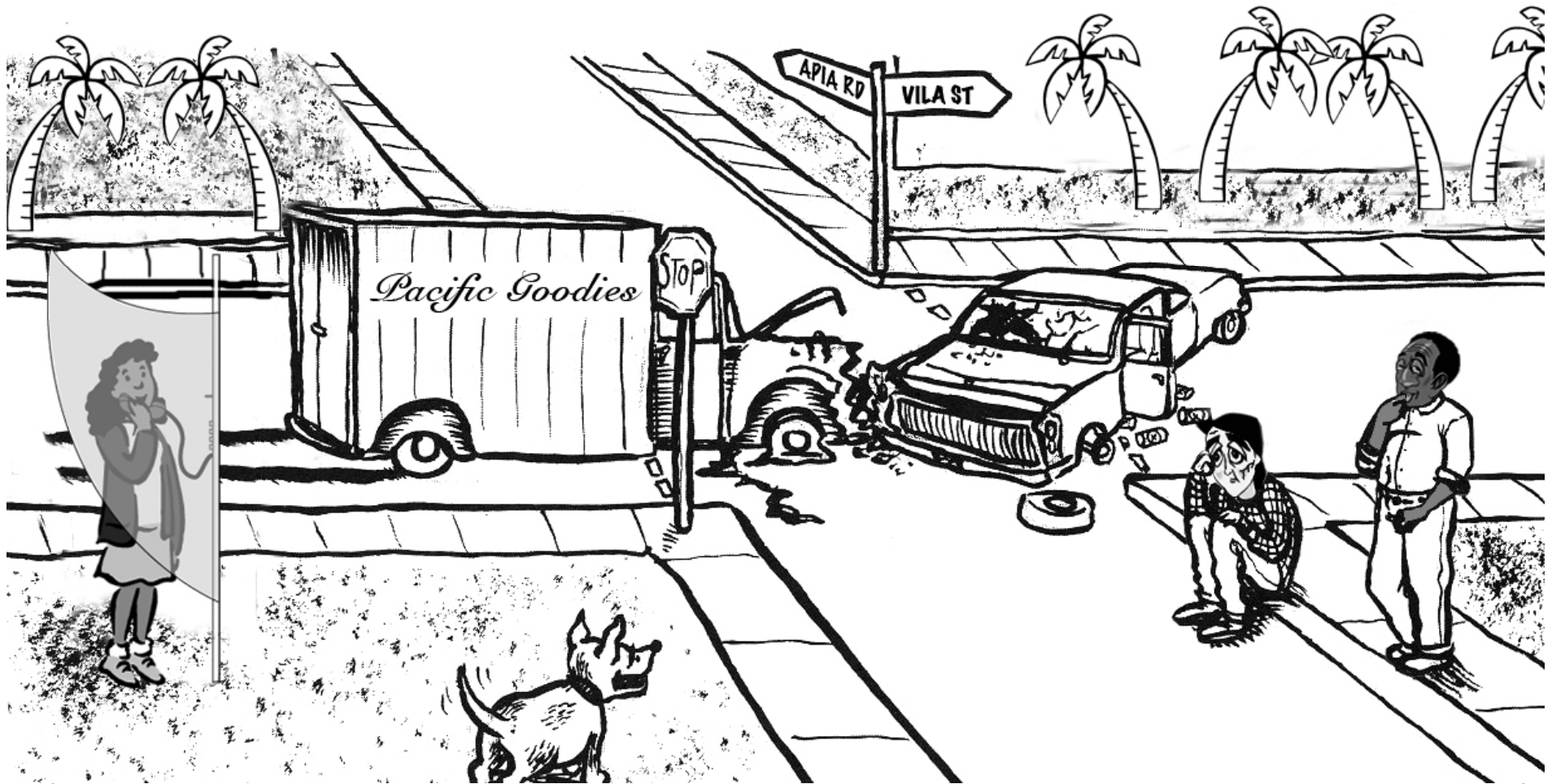


- Teacher facilitates and guides; students construct knowledge in ways that make the best sense to them
- The teacher asks: "Is the answer meaningful?"

# The importance of prior experience:

## Example

# Knowledge: Objective or Subjective



<b>Statement</b>	<b>Observation (Yes or No)</b>
A There is a stop sign on the corner of Apia Road and Vila Street.	
B The truck did not come to a halt at the stop sign.	
C The car is a total write-off.	
D There are beer cans on the road next to the car.	
E The driver of the car has been drinking alcohol.	
F The car's windscreen is smashed.	
G The driver cut his forehead on the broken window.	
H The driver of the car was not wearing a seat belt.	

# 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

## References

1. Brown, T. H. (2005). Beyond constructivism: exploring future learning paradigms. *Education Today*, 2.
2. Martin, D.J. (2003). *Elementary science methods: A constructivist approach*. California: Wadsworth.