

Constructivist theory



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CONSTRUCTIVIST THEORYI??™VE BASED THIS ON HOW IT IS USED IN EDUCATION.

Interest in constructivist education has been sweeping the country and while teachers across the nation are implementing this approach, it is still far from common. In brief, constructivist education appeals to children??™s interests, engages them in experimentation with phenomena of the physical world and fosters cooperation between teacher and child,(student) and among children (DeVries & Kohlberg, 1987/1990). The most valued assessments of children??™s knowledge are found in their work rather than in tests. The constructivist teacher is a mentor who takes a cooperative attitude in relation to children and uses natural and logical consequences as alternatives to authoritarian discipline. The two most central conceptions underlying constructivist education are; 1)Children construct knowledge.

2)Children cannot become autonomous intellectually or morally in authoritarian relations with adults. Let??™s take No 1) A child??™s subjective experience must be taken into account in all educational efforts because the child is understood as the active constructor of knowledge, personality and morality. This comes from Jean Piaget??™s theory that children construct these characteristics. (for example, Piaget, 1932/1965; 1936/1952; 1929/1960) Shows that children have many ideas that are not taught to them. A three-year-olds often use their intelligence to reason that their shadows go inside themselves when they cannot see them.

Five-year-olds often believe their shadows are under their beds or covers at night time. (DeVries, 1986; Piaget, 1929/1960) Even 9- year-olds do not

believe that shadows are transitory. Rather, they are convinced that unseen shadows are still there somewhere (DeVries, 1986). No one ever taught these ideas. These are the product of thinking about courses that are not easily observed. No amount of direct teaching of any facts can convince the child otherwise because these are beliefs about non-observables that cannot be disproven. If a teacher requires children holding such beliefs to verbalize the correct answers would short-circuit the constructive process. This may make the child learn that, what adults say makes no sense and that adults want them to parrot what is meaningless to the child.

This could make the child lose confidence in his or her own thinking and take on a passive Intel lectured attitude. To go back children construct their knowledge about shadows over a long period from age two through adolescence. Correct ideas about shadows are the result of logical deductions of the time which allows the child to correct erroneous ideas. This does not mean the teacher can do nothing to promote knowledge about shadows.

Constructivist teachers do not simply wait till the child is "ready". They may give the children many experiences in which they experiment with making shadows; this will test their ideas and develop reasoning power and confidence in the power of their reasoning. The biggest question a teacher can ask is; WHAT DO YOU THINK WILL HAPPEN IF?!. To produce a disequilibrium " a contradiction between what children expect and what actually happens. Teachers can facilitate discussions in which children invariably have differing ideas about shadows phenomena and this encounter further disequilibria.

This in time will take them down the path of scientific truth, from a constructivist perspective; such reasoning leads children to become more intelligent. Constructing knowledge, refers to both to the content of knowledge (for example, properties of objects or relative values of numbers) and to the structure of knowledge (example, the understanding of relationships such as transitivity, seriation and correspondence)

Constructivists take the view that it is through active reasoning that both content and structure are constructed simultaneously, they are also constructing knowledge about their own competencies and in competencies, the reliability of others and how to relate to others. No 2) Piaget's (1932/1965) research and theory convinces constructivist educators that a particular type of adult-child relationship is necessary for children's optimal development and learning. Piaget proposed a conception of two types of morality, heteronomous and autonomous and two parallel types of adult-child relations, coercive and cooperative, that differ in their effects on children's learning and development. Heteronomous morality is a morality of obedience in which the individual simply accepts and follows rules given by others. Autonomous morality is following moral rules with a feeling of personal necessity, conviction and commitment.

Piaget defined the heteronomous or coercive relationship as one in which the child is regulated by the adult who gives ready-made rules and instructions for behaviour. In this relationship, the adult uses the power of authority to control and instruct the child and the child's reason for behaviour is outside his or her own reasoning and system of personal interests and values. In contrast, the autonomous or cooperative relationship is one in

which the adult builds on a foundation of mutual affection to encourage the child's self-regulation and the construction process of moral rules and values that guide behaviours. Constructivist educators take the view that autonomous morality results from self-regulation as children deal with social, moral and intellectual problems in their lives and find out what happens when they take certain actions. Self-regulation is therefore considered to be necessary for optimal development and learning. Heteronomous, coercive control by adults results in intellectual passivity when children submit mindlessly to adults. Thus, according to Piaget (1932/1965): If he (the child) is intellectually passive, he will not know how to be free ethically. Conversely, if his ethics consist exclusively in submission to adult authority and if the only exchanges that make up the life of the class are those that bind each student individually to a master holding all power, he will not know how to be intellectually active.

(p. 107)