

Theories of early education



Throughout history, our knowledge of child's development is constantly changing. As they learn more about the mind of a child, they learn more about the ways in which they learn, and grow. As teachers, it is so important to be up to date, and knowledgeable of these theories and theorists, their strategies and their success. They do this to keep ourselves informed for ourselves, but, most importantly, for our students. It is crucial to a child's development that they, as educators, are providing them with the best theories of child development and that if there are any obstacles presented to a child on their road to success, that they implement the best theories and practices in order to ensure that they succeed. By having the knowledge of these theories, they can hope to quickly identify any issues in the process of learning and quickly aid a student in finding their best way of learning.

With that being said, This will take the time to talk about Constructivism and Social Constructivism and the impact that Jean Piaget and Lev Vygotsky had on those theories. Upon researching constructivism, they have learned that the implementation of it in the early childhood classroom was so important, specifically, the practice of using discovery based learning approaches. This is something that was transformative to the area of early education, and is something that is being put into effect every day in the classroom, in some way. Throughout this paper, they will discuss constructivism as a whole, along with the influence that Piaget and Vygotsky had on the development of the theory, whether it was a shared, general idea, or differing opinions.

Before they can truly get into a discussion about constructivism, they must first know exactly what it is. The book defines constructivism as “ a theory of knowledge and learning that posits that children actively engage with their

world – people, experiences, and materials – and build their beliefs and knowledge through interaction and internal processes.” (Follari, 2019, Page 105) So what exactly does this mean? It means that people learn through developing their own understanding of something through experiences that they have had first hand. This is done so with an exploration of materials, inner process of reasoning, and interaction with peers. (Follari, 2019, Page 106) As they are developing new information, they then make sense of that information by interpreting it through events that they have already experienced.

The role of the teacher during this time is to help the children think deeper about what they are experiences and encourage a relationship to knowledge they may already know. In the book, they describe this as constructivism scaffolding, which is “ where the teacher acts as a guide and a facilitator of students’ thinking, and activities within appropriately challenging learning experiences.” (Follari, 2019, Page 108) With this practice, they are able to give children enough support to encourage thinking, but not enough that they are dependent on them for the answer. They’re able to construct ideas on their own and become independent thinkers through this process. This theory also includes the strategy of modeling, which is when “ the teacher either thinks aloud about or acts out how she would approach a problem.” (Windschitl, 1999, page 753) This helps to give the children a clear understanding of what is going to be discussed in the lesson, or what is expected of them. This incorporates several different methods but one example is thinking out loud. So many times it can seem like the teachers may have the answers right away but by thinking out loud, teachers are able

to show students that they need to work through a problem, or situation, and not attempt to execute it immediately without properly thinking about it first. In young children, specifically, they are so eager to do anything. It is an important lesson to teach them to sit back, reflect, and then act on what they may be doing, or answering. This will also help to generate new ideas when they allow themselves the time to reflect on a question, rather than immediately answering what they think may be right and they are able to pull ideas from past experiences that they may have had to help contribute to the answer, like the strategy earlier.

Along with the Constructivism theory, there is also the Social Constructivism theory. Although, this does stem from the general roots of Constructivism, it has major differences. An article, written by Cynthia Vinney, defines Social Constructivism as “ asserts that all meaning is socially created. Social constructs might be so ingrained that they *feel* natural, but they are not. Instead, they are an invention of a given society and thus do not accurately reflect reality.” Unlike Constructivism that is based primarily on the development through past experiences being shared with new experiences, Social Constructivism presents the question of what is truly experienced, or what has been merely a result of a shared experience? (Vinney 2019) Social Constructivism primarily focuses on the idea that children are able to learn, and grow, more successfully if they are aided by an adult, rather than simply learning on their own. Unlike Constructivism, this does not exclusively mean they are using scaffolding as freely. In result of this, it is common for the lessons to be based on knowledge from a source, such as a book, instead of acquiring knowledge through experiences.

Now that we've talked about the different theories that were presented, it's time to take a look at the people who had an impact on the theories. At the root of it all, John Dewey is often seen as the founder to the exploration of the theory of constructivism. Although, it was not called that at the time, he "believed that education should emerge from the child's own unfolding development and interests rather than rigidly imposed upon the child by the teacher." (Follari, 2019, Page 49) This included the strategies of experience with authentic materials and learning based on problem-solving activities, and many other strategies that influenced the theory of constructivism as we know it. (Follari, 2019, Page 49) Through his belief, we start to see similarities with Jean Piaget. Adding onto the constructivism theory, the book defines the theory influenced by Piaget's beliefs as cognitive-developmental perspective and states that "knowledge is an individual construct built through maturation and new experiences that confirm or challenge the learner's existing knowledge." (Follari, 2019, Page 109)

As they can very clearly see, Piaget beliefs were towards the side of constructivism. Through his exploration of constructivism, he started to develop theories that as children grow, they also go through distinct stages. These include: sensorimotor, preoperational, concrete operational, and formal operational. These stages have been a foundation to several practices and theories that they have since seen in education. (Follari, 2019, Page 109) Another major topic in the discussion of constructivism is the idea of cognitive conflict, which is defined by a theory "in which the individual child realizes discrepancies between existing beliefs and new information that presents a different perspective." This then resulted in Piaget developing his

theories assimilation and accommodation. Assimilation is using prior knowledge when dealing with a new experience, but accommodation happens when they may not be able to use the prior knowledge they have, so they then adjust to, or change, the experience they are having. (Follari, 2019, Page 57)

While Piaget was developing his theories on constructivism, a man named Lev Vygotsky was also developing his thoughts on the theory itself. Although, they both shared an interest in this theory, their thoughts were very different. As we just learned, Piaget believed that knowledge was experience based. Vygotsky, however, believed that “knowledge is socially co-constructed then internalized, as opposed to being independently constructed within the individual, working solely with materials” as stated in the textbook. (Follari, 2019, Page 110) Vygotsky had the belief that children, or truly anyone, learned better by having shared experiences with someone that is knowledgeable, or experienced. When this is implemented in the classroom setting, they are introduced to children that are engaging in activities, or discussions, that will then direct them to step out of the comfort zone that is their current knowledge. (Follari, 2019, Page 110) This is also a strategy that is experienced through one of the key concepts of social constructivism, called child’s zone of proximal development, where children are given challenging activities while working with expert help. (Follari, 2019, Page 110) Throughout learning about childhood development, both of these practices and theories have been implemented into modern learning theories, such as the Social Learning theory, that integrates examples of both theorists’ beliefs.

In general, teachers need a framework for growth in their classroom and that is where education theories come into play. They help to give teachers a better understanding of what they, as educators, are trying to achieve and steps that can be taken in order to achieve that, even if they may not side with all of the beliefs. Educational theories are so important due to the fact that not everyone learns the same. Although, they may have overarching theories that seem to work better than others, that may not work on all students. Having access to the educational theories they have ensures that educators are able to provide their students with the best education.

Incorporating different theories of learning into a classroom will also help to excite the students to the idea of learning, and exploring new ways of perceiving knowledge. A child that has never been exposed, purposefully, to a constructivism way of teaching before may be intrigued by the practice of having more freedom to explore thoughts by themselves, without the aid of a teacher to stimulate their answer. Implementing the constructivism theory into a classroom would create a more imaginative, interactive classroom with children that are willing to take it upon themselves to find the answer to the question, instead of seeking the help of an expert who may know the answer already, along with instilling confidence in the children.

How might they deal with a child that is misinformed through prior knowledge? “ Remember that guiding principles of best practices call for teachers to balance child directed and teacher guided activities.” (Follari, 2019, Page 114) There may be times where they need to incorporate practices that they think is best to help a child develop outside of the framework of the original theory. Every child is a different learner, and they

will always have children that may not be able to learn, and retain a theory, like other students can. In general though, a constructivism classroom is a setting that children are able to interact with the environment around them, use their own solutions to problem-solve, and work alongside their peers in group activities. It is an environment that is accepting of hands-on work, curiosity and teamwork.

In Social Constructivism, they begin to see a difference in the role that is the teacher. In an article, written by Joseph Mills, he states “ the teacher sees knowledge construction not only as something that happens in the individual, but as something which is fostered in the social situation.” In a social constructivism classroom, teachers must also be ready to be an expert for their students. In this setting, children would turn to a teacher, or a textbook, to develop the answer, instead of using prior knowledge to hypothesize what the answer may be, like an a constructivism classroom. In this practice, they still see the encouragement of group work amongst peers, but through this they are given guidelines for these interactions. A teacher may establish groups to help children learn to work as a whole, but then she may give instructions to each member of the group, telling every individual to accomplish a certain task to help the group work together to complete the task. This method is able to give children a sense of responsibility, as well as a sense of independence.

Through this, It is quite obvious that Constructivism and Social Constructivism are very different practices, but are the foundation for many theories that they now use in the education field to this day and they are so important to know for early education in particular. They are able to provide <https://assignbuster.com/theories-of-early-education/>

us with the framework to develop even more successful practices and theories beyond them. In early education, information is ever changing, due to the research of child development being an ongoing topic of discussion. By being educated in these theories, and the theorists that provided us with their practices, they are able to better ourselves as educators and supply ourselves with a vast knowledge of child development. One of the best things an educator can do is be educated about their children to help them succeed. (Mills, J. (2007) page 5)

RESOURCES:

- Windschitl, M. (1999). The challenges of sustaining a constructivist classroom culture. *Phi Delta Kappan*, June, 751-755.
- Mills, J. (2007). Constructivism in Early Childhood Education. *Perspectives In Learning*, 8 (2). Retrieved from <http://csuepress.columbusstate.edu/pil/>