

Current Issues and Themes in Education

A Handbook for Practitioners

Edited By:
Suhailah Hussien



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Chapter 1

CONSTRUCTIVISM: A CRITICAL OVERVIEW

S. A. Shahab

CONSTRUCTIVISM: AN INITIAL CHARACTERISATION

Currently, it appears that there is no viable alternative to some form of constructivism in epistemology, especially with respect to so-called knowledge of the external world. What else could knowledge be but constructed? But although virtually all of us are constructivists, we do not all place equal emphasis upon the fact that our knowledge is a product of human labour. (We cannot deny that there are special difficulties with respect to knowledge of our own “inner” states, where constructivism might run into trouble. But, if we defiantly cling to constructivism, we run the risk of plunging into the abyss of relativism or even solipsism. The skeptical philosopher might feel motivated to re-examine why it is he or she has faith in constructivism.)

Like religion, constructivism is omnipresent but often is paid only lip-service; thus, the recent encyclopedic volume edited by Dancy and Sosa (1992), gives it only three passing references. And again like religion, constructivism comes in many forms, some of which are more fundamentalist than others -- which, of course, makes it difficult to give even a cursory introductory