



Constructivist Theory Overview

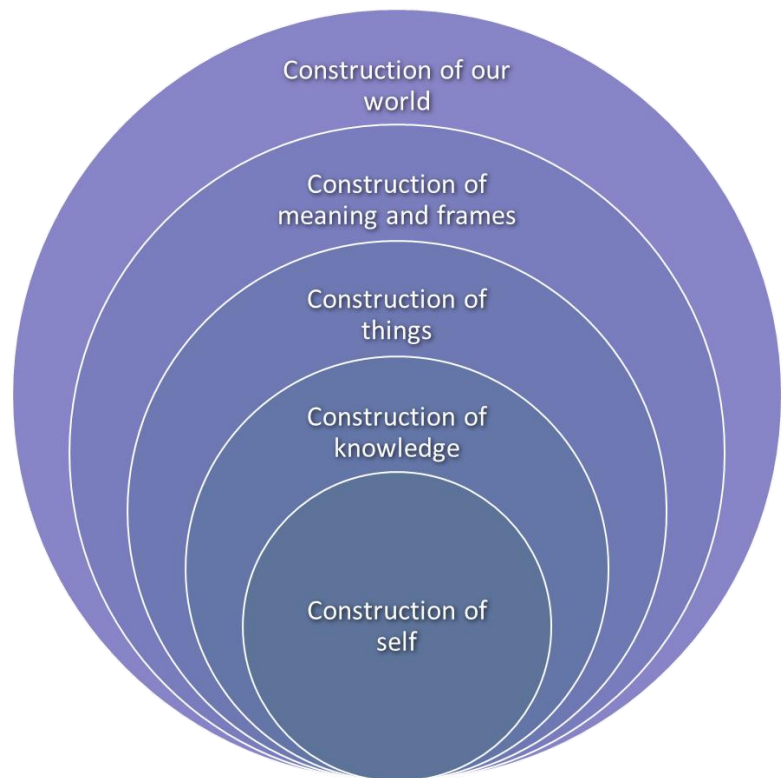
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Uploaded June 6, 2023

Constructivist theory is grounded in the work of Piaget (1952), Vygotsky (1978), and Bruner (1996) who defined learning as the active construction of knowledge and meaning. In the original formulation (Piaget, 1952) this construction was a purely cognitive process within the minds of individual learners. Vygotsky (1978) and Bruner (1996) expanded constructivist theory to address the constructive interaction between—and across—individual minds and their social context including peers, more knowledgeable others, tools, languages, and history. Constructivist theory not only sees learning as a generative process, but also sees knowledge as constructed as opposed to discovered or acquired. Constructivist educators and researchers today generally define learning as the individual, collaborative, and collective construction of knowledge.

There are five principles of the constructivist theory (McLeod, 2019). The first principle in constructivist learning theory states that knowledge is constructed - rather than passively grasped. This implies that what a person learns today can influence whatever he decides to learn tomorrow. The second principle stresses on the fact that learning is an active process and not a passive one. The third principle stresses that knowledge is socially constructed. This implies that community plays a core role in learning. Furthermore, the knowledge that is constructed is distributed across multiple minds. The fourth principle emphasizes the personal nature of knowledge and stresses that several people in a group would each have different interpretations of a shared concept that was learned. The fifth principle stresses that learning exists in and between human minds. The learners are able to make connections between their background and new information received. In this process, they are constructing mental representations that facilitate learning and developing autonomy over learning (Wilson, Solas, & Guthrie-Dixon, 2016). Through this constant interaction between learners and others, learners and the environment, new knowledge is constructed and new meanings are added to the existing knowledge.



As constructivist theory continues to develop, that which is constructed has expanded beyond simply construction of knowledge (Donaldson & Bucy, 2016). Learning involves construction of self, knowledge, things, meaning, frames, and our world.

Constructivist Theory - Learning Activity Design Principles

- Engage students in constructing knowledge (and meaning).
- Help students develop skills in differentiating information and knowledge.



- Develop learner confidence in their own authority to construct knowledge, while also problematizing the dominant idea that knowledge is “acquired.”
- Engage learners in collaborative construction of knowledge.

References

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