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University of Strathclyde
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Response to Smith's reading of our article

We welcome Smith's support for our argument that it is important for teachers to know about coherent accounts of learning which have the potential to influence and inform teachers' accounts of their practice. The explicit aim of our article was to depict teachers' knowledge of such accounts. Because of the very circumscribed aim, we were not, as Smith states in his abstract, considering "applications of learning theory to teaching". While, of course, it is useful to the reader if an article stimulates a range of further ideas and/or helps the reader to make new conceptual connections, the ideas stimulated in the reader are not necessarily accidental omissions by the author(s). We deliberately chose to exclude the literature on the 'complex' relationships between theory and practice since Thomas (1997), Rowlands (1999), and Loughran (2002) are but a few who have rigorously examined that issue. Similarly we would not deny (Maclellan & Soden, 2004, Soden, 2003) that analysing issues involves the variety of interpretative considerations that Smith raises. However, in order to make a contribution to the body of literature, it is necessary both to focus tightly on the issue of concern and to develop that issue within a coherent explanatory framework: ours happened to be a psychological one although others working within different perspectives (such as philosophical, sociological or historical) would doubtless draw on different bodies of literature.

While space constraints prevent us from responding in any detail to each of the assumptions that Smith (tentatively) attributes to us, we would wish to correct any possible misconceptions that might be engendered by Smith's reading of our article. Our position should not be interpreted as espousing that radical constructivism is the account of learning we "want to dominate all our classroom practice". What we did say was that "an appreciation of radical constructivism is desirable" (p119) if only because, as Smith himself acknowledges, "knowing learning theory increases the options". Similarly we did not, and would not want to, suggest that our entire educational system be based on one theory of learning. What we were suggesting was that constructivism was a conceptual tool, and a more powerful one than

behaviourism, and since conceptual tools are what we need to use and develop to enable us to function in the knowledge age (Bereiter, 2002), it would be helpful to take account of constructivism (given the robust body of cognitive research to attest to its veracity) as a means of breaking free from the stranglehold of either one's direct experience or common-sense views on teaching.

We appreciate that Smith took the time to read and respond to our article. While, as has been rehearsed above, it was not our intention to explore the application of constructivism to teaching, it was our intention to explore the idea of constructivism itself and the ideas behind it. As it is the discussion of the ideas themselves, rather than their application that enables knowledge improvement (Bereiter, 2002), we are grateful to Smith and to the editors of Scottish Educational Review for the opportunity to comment on Dr Smith's views.

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