

512: Learning Theories

Thought Paper #3

Glaserfeld and Constructivist Teaching

Discussion of Glaserfeld's quotes,

“to assess the truth of your knowledge you would have to know what you come to know before you come to know it...” and “it appears that knowledge is not a transferable commodity and communication not a conveyance” (p. 48).”

Kimberly Cook

Constructionists view learning as a search for meaning or creation of mental states. This involves individual learners creating knowledge through interaction with their own individual environment. That is, the learner's knowledge and meaning is developed through integrating new information with their own unique experiences, beliefs and opinions. This epistemology has particular roles for both learners and teachers.

The role of the learner in the Constructivist theory, involves the learner building a mental connection between what is being learned, and their own life experiences. That is, the learner takes on a more active role in their learning. The learner consciously reflects upon information that is presented, and from assimilating the information and his or her own experiences and belief systems, a 'truth' is established. This mental connection involves higher order thought processing, through reflection and abstraction of what fits within the learner's realm. The constructivism paradigm, therefore, is individualistic. That is, one's 'truth' or mental state may be different from another's but both are considered to be truth. Glasersfeld emphasizes this idea by stating, "rightness must be seen as the fit with an order one has established oneself (p. 47)."

The role of the teacher involves creating situations that are relevant to the learner and his or her real world. Learners must have the opportunity to make a connection with personal relevance to the material presented, thus inquiry and open ended learning are preferred models. The process, or how a student has come about an idea or reflection, is also a focus of the teacher. Therefore, mistakes are encouraged as part of the learning. Glasersfeld emphasizes that children are unlikely to change their knowledge of what is right unless he or she experiences failure (p.46). Teachers are unable to transfer this knowledge without students being able to make internalized connections.

Through Constructivism, the teacher and student learn together to create meaningful knowledge that is relevant to each individual.

Von Glasersfeld, E. (2008). Learning as a Constructive Activity. *AntiMatters*, 2(3), 33-49.