



## Study of Social constructivism and its Implications for Teaching

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**Abstract :** Social constructivism emphasises that all cognitive functions including learning are dependent on interactions with others (e.g. teachers, peers, and parents). Therefore learning is critically dependent on the qualities of a collaborative process within an educational community, which is situation specific and context bound (Eggen and Kauchak, 1999; McInerney and McInerney, 2002; Schunk, 2012). However learning must also be seen as more than the assimilation of new knowledge by the individual, but also as the process by which learners are integrated into a knowledge community.

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**Key Words :** Social constructivism, socio-cultural theory etc.

**Introduction :** According to social constructivism nothing is learnt from scratch; instead it is related to existing knowledge with new information being integrated into and expanding the existing network of understanding. The successful learner is therefore one who embeds new ideas within old and for whom understanding expands to encompass the new experience. Therefore, a social constructivistic learner's view of the world will always be subjective, as each individual will interpret experience via a different pre-existing framework of understanding and will develop their own unique view of the world.

### **Social constructivism :**

Social constructivism in its modern form has been in existence for approximately 40 years. Strictly speaking while it is thought of as a learning theory, with roots in cognitive constructivism (Piaget, 1950) and sociocultural theory (Vygotsky, 1978) it is more correctly an epistemology or philosophical explanation about the nature of learning (Hyslop-Margison and Strobel, 2008).

The nature of knowledge in social constructivism



According to social constructivism, knowledge is a human product, which is socially and culturally constructed in an active manner and not something which can be discovered ( Geary, 1995; Gredler, 1997; Ernest, 1999 ). Knowledge is therefore neither tied to the external world nor wholly to the working of the mind, but it exists as the outcomes of mental contradictions that result from ones interactions with other people in the environment (Schunk, 2012). Social constructivism focus on social nature of cognition, and suggests approaches that

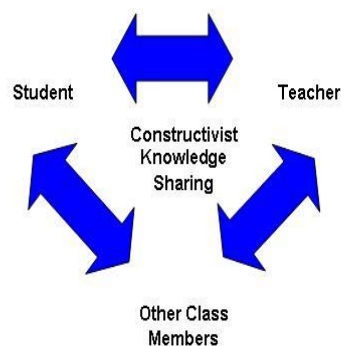
- Gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they search for patterns, raise their own questions, and construct their own models;
- Facilitates a community of learners to engage in activity, discourse, and reflection;
- Encourages students to take on more ownership of the ideas, and to pursue autonomy, mutual reciprocity of social relations, and empowerment to be the goals.

### ***The nature of learning in social constructivism***

Social constructivism maintains that learning is based on real life adaptive problem solving which takes place in a social manner through shared experience and discussion with others such that new ideas are matched against existing knowledge and the learner adapts rules to make sense of the world. Social constructivism places the focus on the learner as part of a social group, and learning as something that emerges from group interaction processes, not as something which takes place within the individual. Learning is seen as an active socially engaged process, not one of a passive development in response to external forces (McMahon, 1997; Derry, 1999 ). To the social constructivist, to learn is to see the meaning or significance in a social experience or concept. Therefore social constructivism acknowledges the uniqueness and complexity of the individual learner and values, utilizes and rewards it as an integral part of the learning process (Wertsch 1997).

### ***The nature of reality in social constructivism***

Social constructivists believe that reality is constructed not discovered through human activity, so that societies together invent the properties of the world (Kukla, 2000). According to social constructivists, the process of sharing individual perspectives, or collaborative





elaboration (Meter & Stevens, 2000), results in learners constructing understanding together that wouldn't be possible alone (Greeno et al., 1996). Social constructivism maintains that while it is possible for people to have shared meanings which are negotiated through discussion, it also acknowledges that no two people will have exactly the same discussions with exactly the same people. To this extent social constructivism allows that multiple realities exist.

### ***The nature of motivation in social constructivism***

In social constructivism the motivation of the learner is regarded as having both intrinsic and extrinsic roots. The intrinsic motivation is created through curiosity about the world and the extrinsic motivation is provided by the rewards which can be accessed through the knowledge.

### **Implications for Teaching**

Collaborative learning methods require learners to develop teamwork skills and to see individual learning as essentially related to the success of group learning. The optimal size for group learning is four or five people. Since the average section size is ten to fifteen people, collaborative learning methods often require GSIs to break students into smaller groups, although discussion sections are essentially collaborative learning environments. For instance, in group investigations, students may be split into groups that are then required to choose and research a topic from a limited area. They are then held responsible for researching the topic and presenting their findings to the class. More generally, collaborative learning should be seen as a process of peer interaction that is mediated and structured by the teacher. Discussion can be promoted by the presentation of specific concepts, problems, or scenarios; it is guided by means of effectively directed questions, the introduction and clarification of concepts and information, and references to previously learned material

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