

Constructivism and the Myth of Instructive Interaction

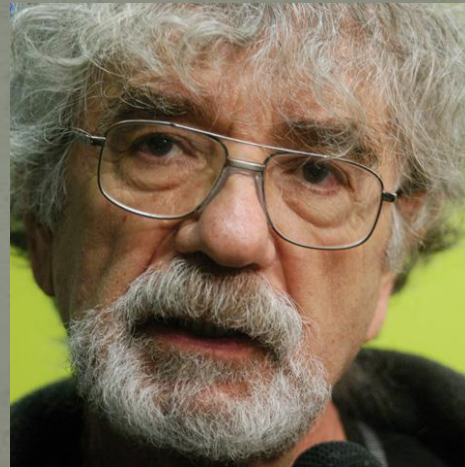
Jonathan D. Raskin / TLC Presentation / October 2011

Constructivism

- Many different varieties
 - Personal Constructivism (Personal Construct Theory)
 - Radical Constructivism
 - Social Constructionism
- Many different theorists
 - George Kelly (Personal Constructivism)
 - Ernst von Glasersfeld (Radical Constructivism)
 - Kenneth Gergen (Social Constructionism)

Radical Constructivism

- Major Theorists: Ernst von Glasersfeld (left) and Humberto Maturana (right)



Radical Constructivism

- Glaserfeld offers two basic constructivist premises:
 - knowledge is not passively received, but actively constructed by people
 - the purpose of human constructions is adaptive, not representational
- Said another way, people are active meaning-makers who organize their experiential world for the sake of survival rather than to represent ontological reality.

Radical Constructivism

- People as informationally *closed systems*
 - People only know the world indirectly
 - Outside information never gets inside and vice versa
- What is outside causes *perturbations* within the closed system, which in turn works to maintain or regain homeostasis
- It is the person's internal structure, rather than external forces per se, that determines how a person responds (e.g., press on eyeball)

Countering Solipsism

- Solipsism need not result
- Kelly spoke of *sociality*
 - We construe others construction processes
 - Based on our understandings, we adopt a role in relation to the other person
- Glasersfeld spoke of *intersubjective reality*
 - We ascribe the same active construal processes to others as we do to ourselves
 - Structures how we coordinate our actions; we come to believe others view things as we do, even though we can never know this for certain
 - Our accounts seem more viable when others confirm them

Constructivist Model of Learning

- Stresses the structure of the knower and how that structure helps to form personal experience
- Perturbations that lead to reorganization
 - However, we can never know what action will perturb
 - Also can't know how student will reorganize in response to being perturbed
- Myth of “instructive interaction” (Maturana)
 - It is not possible to directly instruct another person's system to respond in specific ways
 - Challenges idea that teachers can dictate student understandings

Constructivist Model of Learning

- Teaching as an effort to generate perturbations within students that lead to internal reorganization
 - However, we can never know what action will perturb
 - Also can't know how student will reorganize in response to being perturbed
- Myth of instructive interaction also means that one size does not fit all
 - Many methods for many students
 - Teaching as creative

What About “Right” Answers?

- Doesn't do away with right answers; just recognizes that what is correct is always correct within a particular system of understanding
- When we evaluate student learning, we make judgments about the extent to which our construal of student actions confirms *our* understanding of *their* understanding
- Answering questions correctly on a test is one way students and instructors coordinate their actions in a manner that lets the instructor conclude that students are construing the material similarly to how they are, though we can never know for certain this is the case

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