

K-12: Constructivism Is a Big Fat Con

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Public schools are so jam-packed with fake pedagogies; it's hard to pick a champion. Certainly, [Sight-words](#) would seem to be the poison pill without equal. But that program's greatest impact occurs in the first few years; its destructive force is plainly visible to the public; and if our community leaders, newspapers, and education officials would do their job, they could stop the thing in no time flat.

Constructivism, while not quite so dramatically evil, is more widespread, more hidden, and more insidious. It now appears in every grade from kindergarten to college. It is used in every subject. So one can say that [Constructivism](#), in total havoc caused, is on a par with Sight-words.

My goal is to show that Constructivism, despite dominating and indeed destroying our school culture, is a flimsy bit of nothing. It pretends to be pedagogical imperatives sent down from heaven. In fact, Constructivism is nothing more than a truism (i.e., when you learn something for yourself, you *really* know it). Similarly, Piaget, a French biologist, opined that children don't know new information until they have recreated it in their own brains. Where else? On these threadbare beginnings, professors of education spun an amazing technicolor dream coat.

The basic trick was to pretend that the learning process can happen in only one way: all or nothing. Children, we were told, must *create their own new knowledge*. They must? Or they do? Everything gets murky even at the outset. The Education Establishment implies two separate things: children acquire new knowledge by constructing it, and this is really the only way it can happen. So, of course, every schoolroom must be 100% Constructivist.

But wait a minute. What does it mean to create or construct new knowledge? You see information in a book – for example, Paris is the capital of France. This knowledge may be new for you, but it's hardly new for the world. So what has the child created?

Furthermore, can we make a useful distinction between the child reading something in a book and the History Channel informing the child, or a teacher telling the child? The child announces: "Paris is the capital of France." Is this knowledge more deeply learned in one scenario over the other?

Yes, according to the [Constructivist vision](#). There is a weird sort of pedagogical imperialism here. Individual students must, by looking at various source materials, generate new facts. The student does all the work. If someone else tells you the fact, it doesn't count. But stop and think for yourself how many thousands of times somebody has given you information (for example, where the nearest bank is). Apparently, you

don't truly know where the bank is because you haven't learned it in the approved manner. That is the exact point at which sophistry obliterates common sense.

Now let's cut to the chase. Why did the Education Establishment confect and [promote this little bit of nothing](#)? Can you guess?

The deeper purpose of Constructivism is to discredit anything the student acquires from someone else. Constructivist theory stigmatizes knowledge learned from parents, from friends, from school, from teachers. None of those is an approved conduit for new knowledge.

So we arrive at the dark heart of this gimmick: discrediting the role of teachers and teaching. Everywhere there is elaborate emphasis on students being engaged in their own learning. We are told that teachers are now facilitators. They are by decree "guides at a student's side." But they are – and this is the tragic fraud – no longer allowed to be teachers. By this illogical jiu-jitsu, the Education Establishment decimates intellectual activity throughout the school.

So here you see *reductio ad absurdum* in action. The adult, the mature person, the only educated person in the room, is no longer allowed to speak. This sophistry is breathtaking in its comical audacity.

Let's look at what typically happens. Children are told to do their own research, to find their own facts – in effect, to function as adult researchers. Indeed, college students are often expected to do just this. But what about the third-grader or the sixth-grader?

Children, with little foundational knowledge, have no idea how to judge the importance of new information. What is France? What is a capital? The idea of France having a capital means little to ignorant children. That's why they're in school. They desperately need [skilled teachers and direct instruction](#).

The proper approach is to teach more facts than in the past, and to teach them more efficiently. Instead, our perverse Education Establishment has managed to impose a moratorium on teaching altogether.

In practice, the essence of Constructivism is that children must organize, motivate, and supervise themselves. Predictably, children tend to feel [abandoned and frustrated](#).

Constructivism is bossy. It claims that you have to construct all knowledge for yourself. Only that is real knowledge; everything else is illegitimate and inauthentic. A second claim is that teachers serve no useful function in this construction. So if a teacher mentions that the South Pole is located in Antarctica, students should apparently pretend they didn't hear it. That information, gained illegally as it was, cannot be allowed in the modern constructivist classroom.

But once this new fact is in your mind, where do we see any proof of its inferiority? If you didn't know where the South Pole is, you do now. You have been taught!

There may be times when a person struggles with something and finally has an epiphany. You could say, hey, that's a Constructivist victory. Typically, however, one learns hundreds of facts about, for example, the American Revolution. You can't have an epiphany for each of those facts. The whole process is going to be cumbersome and slow.

If a good teacher tells you information in the most coherent way, that will be top speed for most people most of the time.

Trump and DeVos seem to be focused mainly on financial administrative options. Hopefully, they will be successful. Phony theories and methods, such as Constructivism, are a different set of problems. These are often buried deeper and cause more damage.

The key to fixing K-12 is to eliminate all the bad ideas – i.e., [drain the educational swamp](#).