

Running head: CAPS

A running head should be like the above example.

Practical Constructionism

Practical Constructionism

Melody J. Buckner

Northern Arizona University

Hong/ETC 567/Spring 2005

Abstract

This paper takes a look at the idea of constructionism through the eyes of several different people. The first person is Seymour Papert with his viewpoint of taking time to wrap your brain around the problem, relax, learn and then solve it. The second person is Edith Ackermann with her idea that one needs to both "dive in" and "step out" of a situation in order to gain a deeper understanding of what they have learned. The third person is Gregory Gargarian with his thoughts about freedom in restriction with regard to learning and design. The last person is Alan Shaw with his view on the evolution of society based on how they interact with each other.

Very concise and informative abstract. Excellent!

Practical Constructionism

The ideas of constructionism springboards off of Jean Piaget's constructivist theory that knowledge is not just transmitted by verbal instruction, but actively constructed in the learner's mind. Constructionism takes Piaget's theory a step further and suggests that the learner will benefit from actively engaging in making an artifact, reflecting upon it and then sharing it with others. Constructionism is constantly changing as researchers explore this theory of learning and strategy for education. Each one of the following topics looks at constructionism from a different point of view, yet they all contribute in helping to define and practice this theory and strategy. (It is nice to trace the root of constructionism)

Take Time, Relax and Learn

Do learners actively construction knowledge out of their experiences and do they become more actively engaged when working on a meaningful product? Most definitely! In Malcolm Knowles book, *The Adult Learner*, he states two ideas about this subject. The first idea is that an adults' prior experience can both help and hinder the learning process and outcome. (Move the period to the end of right bracket.) (Knowles, p. 151) (The page number is only used when a direct citation is longer than eight words.) The second idea is that adults seem to learn best when new information is present in a real life context. (Knowles, p. 152) In my experience of teaching adults computer technology, both of these ideas are evident. If a student comes into the class with a negative experience on the computer in their past, there is a definite barrier to overcome before that student can open their mind to learning. Now if that same student is highly motivated to learn the computer because they have a specific task to accomplish then the barrier becomes

just a small hurdle. This same process happens in Papert's obsession with learning the names of flowers.

He also brings out some other good ideas about active learning. The first is that "children are taught more about numbers and grammar than about thinking" (Kafai & Resnick, 1996, p. 11). This is apparent with many adults learners. They want to be lead by the hand instead of figuring it out themselves. Secondly, spend more time with the problem, relax get to know the problem before rushing into the solution. We have been programmed into to making a list, do the item, check it off and go on to the next item. We rarely sit back and cogitate the problem. We are missing out on a great learning experience and a better solution in rushing through the list. So it is better to take time, play with the idea, relax along the way and learn something new in the process. (The above discussion is very engaging.)

Diving in and Stepping Out

What does Ackermann mean when she states that without connections people cannot grow, yet without separation they cannot relate? (Kafai, Resnick, 1996, p. 32) We each dive into situations or are sometimes pushed into them. Once there we immerse ourselves, experiencing the situation, learning from it and even solving issues that help us to grow. However, for us to truly learn and grow from the experience we need to step out of the situation and take some time to assess what has happened. Only then do we really encompass the total learning experience.

When my son was 5 months old he underwent a surgical procedure on his head at Children's Hospital in LA. At the time we were total immersed in the fear, pain and anxieties that accompany this type of situation. We learned quite a bit during the process of his surgery and recovery, but later when the trauma had past we were able to reflect upon the whole experience.

It was then that we saw all the true lessons we learned from having gone through that situation. To this day we still hold on to those revelations that were an outcome of this ordeal. (Good reflection here)

My favorite quote from this reading was that Chinese saying, "The fish is the only one who does not know that he swims" (Kafai, Resnick, 1996, p. 28) It is funny how when we are immersed in a situation we don't even know we are learning from the experience.

Freedom in Restrictions

Ah, the joys of freedom in that fenced in pasture (I like this picture!) ! I agree with Gargarian and his idea that there is freedom in restrictions. Without rules or guidelines there would be chaos. Without limitations we would be paralyzed with fear about which way to go or what to chose. It happens to me every time I go down the cereal aisle at Wal-Mart. There are too many choices, so I end up creating my own limitations, no nuts, no wheat and it must have a great toy inside! We thrive in situations where we are given rules or guidelines to follow (at least within reason).

Gargarian states, "Within a restricted collection of choices, a designer can explore possible choices using trial and error or algorithmic methods" (Kafai, Resnick, 1996, p. 132) He goes on to site an architectural example. My undergraduate degree is in architecture and I see his point. If you create a beautiful design, but don't follow the laws of physics the building will not stand. You also learn while designing by the trial and error approach. When traveling down the design road you bumping into the restrictions and they keep on course in order to produce an external and sharable artifact.

a major undertaking. In looking at Shaw's five types of social constructions I could see that this village operated in all five. They had developed many friendships to maintain this social setting. I imagine the events that surround this event must consume their lives. The shared artifact is the production itself, which is a main undertaking. The shared social goals and projects must be overwhelming to pull off this event. The whole world comes to this village for a year to see this play. And lastly the shared cultural norms and traditions are evident all over the village. From the shops, to the way they dress, to even the carving in the park, this is one community that pulled together and has created a social setting that is unique and thriving. I see this community learning through the years how to cooperate with each other and create something for the whole world to witness. By the way, this play was first performed in 1634! (Very nicely interwoven personal experience and Shaw's perspectives. A question to challenge yourself: What are the negative side of social settings in learning?)

In conclusion, I found these reading very interesting and mind provoking. They all took the theory of constructionism and looked at it from a different perspective. They applied it in different situations and made the theory practical.(I agree.)

References

Kafai, Yasmin, & Resnick, Mitchel (1996) *Constructionism in Practice: designing, thinking, and learning in a digital world*. Mahwah, New Jersey: Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, Inc.

(Kafai, Y., & Resnick, M. (1996). Constructionism in practice: Designing, ...

Do you notice the differences?)

Knowles, Malcolm, Holton, Elwood & Swanson, Richard (1998) *The Adult Learner, Fifth*

Edition. Woburn, Maine: Butterworth-Heinemann.

Spell out the last names only.

Melody,

You did an excellent job to address all aspects of this assignment. Your understanding of the theory is clearly presented interwoven with your personal learning experience. Strong skills in the organization and transition. The use of APA is closely but still inconsistent. I offered some comments and suggestions for your to think more about the discussion topics and I hope to see the improvement in the use of APA in your next paper.

Peer review:	5/5
Content:	5/5
Organization:	3/3
Mechanics:	1/1
Timeliness:	.5/1
Total:	14.5/15