

Encyclopedia of the
SOCIAL and
CULTURAL
FOUNDATIONS
of **EDUCATION**

Volumes

1-3

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Los Angeles • London • New Delhi • Singapore • Washington DC

A SAGE Reference Publication

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55 City Road
London EC1Y 1SP
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Mathura Road, New Delhi 110 044
India

SAGE Publications Asia-Pacific Pte. Ltd.
33 Pekin Street #02-01
Far East Square
Singapore 048763

Printed in the United States of America.

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Encyclopedia of the social and cultural foundations of education / editor, Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr.
p. cm.

“A SAGE Reference Publication.”

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-1-4129-0678-4 (cloth)

1. Education—Encyclopedias. 2. Education—Sociological aspects. I. Provenzo, Eugene F., Jr.

LB17.E53 2009

370.3—dc22 2008022452

This book is printed on acid-free paper.

08 09 10 11 12 10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1

<i>Publisher:</i>	Rolf A. Janke
<i>Acquisitions Editor:</i>	Diane McDaniel
<i>Assistant to the Publisher:</i>	Michele Thompson
<i>Developmental Editor:</i>	Diana E. Axelsen
<i>Reference Systems Manager:</i>	Leticia Gutierrez
<i>Production Editor:</i>	Kate Schroeder
<i>Copy Editors:</i>	Liann Lech, Jamie Robinson
<i>Typesetter:</i>	C&M Digitals (P) Ltd.
<i>Proofreader:</i>	Penny Sippel
<i>Indexer:</i>	Julie Grayson
<i>Cover Designer:</i>	Michelle Lee Kenny
<i>Marketing Manager:</i>	Amberlyn Erzinger

Southerners came to believe that there was no reason that the South could not write and manufacture its own textbooks. The need for the South to manufacture its own textbooks became increasingly significant as the sectional conflict grew. Yet despite the passage of numerous resolutions and the organization of various committees at the Southern commercial conventions, little progress was made by the South prior to the Civil War in developing its own textbook industry.

With the advent of the Civil War, the South could no longer avoid the problem of manufacturing and producing its own textbooks. Various states throughout the Confederacy put forward legislation to promote the adoption of Southern texts and to eliminate any Northern materials from use in the education of their children. Georgia, for example, established a textbook competition to encourage the creation of a spelling book that could be used in the “common schools” throughout the Confederacy.

Within a relatively short period of time, numerous Southern texts were written and manufactured. A careful examination of these works shows them to be highly dependent upon Northern textbooks for much of their material. Typically, they were poorly printed and relatively brief in their content. It is unfair in many respects to use them as examples of what the South could potentially produce, since the priorities imposed by the war, as well as the shortage of materials necessary to manufacture books, precluded the production of higher quality works.

Lessons of the Conflict

The content of the Confederate textbooks can provide us with important insights into the South’s perception of the North. While heroes of Southern origin such as George Washington figure prominently in Confederate texts, there is no mention of New Englanders such as Joseph Warren and John Adams. In works such as Marinda Branson Moore’s *First Dixie Reader* (1863), comparisons are made between the life of the Black slave laborer and the free White laborer in the North that clearly suggest that the conditions of life are superior for the Black worker.

Both the North and the South were acutely aware of a textbook’s potential to establish the values and

norms of the children who read it. The conflict over textbooks in the years prior to the Civil War, and the eventual creation of distinctively Southern textbooks during the Civil War, was a reflection of the two profoundly different cultures that had emerged in the North and the South by the time of the Civil War.

Following the Civil War, there was a conscious attempt on the part of the North to develop textbooks by authors who were acceptable to the South. While the Civil War had removed the issue of slavery and abolition from American textbooks, it also forced Northern textbook authors and publishers to take into account the distinctiveness of the South as a region, its economy, geography, and traditional culture. In doing so, the textbooks published after the Civil War began to reflect not simply the regional interests and needs of the North but also those of the South, and of a previously divided nation intent upon reuniting itself and developing a more unified national consciousness.

Eugene F. Provenzo, Jr.

See also Catechisms; Curriculum Challenges in Schools; Textbooks, History of

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CONSTRUCTIVISM

In education, constructivism refers to theories of knowledge and learning. These theories state that knowledge is constructed rather than received from an

objective world or external reality. For example, knowledge does not exist in a book but rather is produced by the reader in the process of reading. In day-to-day practice, however, constructivism is much more complicated; philosophers, psychologists, sociologists, scientists, and educators approach and understand this “simple” theory of knowledge and learning quite differently. Thus, constructivism perhaps is understood best as an academic construct or metaphor that describes many different ways of thinking about learning and knowledge acquisition, as summarized in this entry.

Theoretical Background

Constructivism does not have a clear beginning: No single person or movement appears responsible for developing or laying the foundation for modern-day constructivist theories. The seeds of constructivist approaches, though, regularly are traced to Giovanni Battista Vico, Paul Goodman, Jean-Jacques Rousseau, Immanuel Kant, John Dewey, and Lev Vygotsky. While these early thinkers did not label themselves as “constructivists,” their key ideas have constructivist elements.

Constructivism primarily is a synthesis of ideas from philosophy, sociology, psychology, and education. For instance, the philosophy of poststructuralists such as Jacques Derrida, Michel Foucault, and Roland Barthes ushered in postmodernism and its skeptical attitude toward objectivity. In sociology, works like Berger’s and Luckmann’s further support the idea that knowledge is constructed, not given. But it was psychology—Jean Piaget and Vygotsky and later Jerome Bruner and Ernst von Glasersfeld—that shaped early constructivism.

Constructivism describes a theory of both knowing and learning. Even so, certain fields focus more intently on “knowing” (e.g., philosophy and sociology), whereas others focus more on “learning” (e.g., psychology and education). As a theory of knowing, constructivism is based on the idea that knowledge does not exist in an objective world, outside of the “knower.” Instead, knowledge is constructed by people. This epistemology is often understood in relation or opposition to objectivism. While any nonconstructivist

epistemology is labeled objectivist, objectivism holds that the purpose of the mind or knowledge is to mirror the “objective” real world. But, based on findings in science, philosophy, sociology, math, and psychology, constructivists now hold that knowledge does not exist independently of a knower; rather, it is constructed individually or socially.

Constructivism as a theory of learning, or psychological constructivism, emerged from the work of cognitive psychologists such as Piaget, Vygotsky, and Bruner. With the rise of cultural psychology, two perspectives became dominant: individual constructivism and social constructivism. While these two schools of thought differ, perhaps as ends of a continuum (i.e., one focuses on the construction of meaning inside a person and the other focuses on the construction of meaning among people), others have argued that all learners construct meaning socially as well as individually.

Individual or cognitive constructivism initially evolved from Piaget’s work, specifically on genetic epistemology. Cognitive constructivism developed as a reaction to behaviorist and information-processing theories of learning. It conceptualizes learning as the result of constructing meaning based on an individual’s experience and prior knowledge.

Social constructivism grew from the work of individual constructivists as well as Vygotsky and others who took a social and cultural perspective of knowledge creation. Pure social constructivists believe that learning occurs via the construction of meaning in social interaction, within cultures, and through language. To confuse matters, in the sociology of knowledge, the philosophy of science, and the history of science, social constructivism denotes a field of study that focuses primarily on the social construction of science and scientific facts.

Implications for Education

In education, constructivism emerged formally as a theory of knowledge and a theory of learning during the 1980s with the works of Bruner and von Glasersfeld, which attracted the attention of educators during the early 1990s. While labeling oneself as a constructivist is now in vogue and the idea that knowledge is constructed is accepted widely, the emergence of construc-

tivist learning theories and the constructivist pedagogies that followed created a major paradigm shift in education. Thus, greater emphasis has been placed on the learner's prior experience rather than the teacher's and on the active construction of knowledge rather than the passive receipt of information.

As a theory of learning, constructivism focuses on the implications of "constructing knowledge" for learning. Typically approaching constructivism from a psychological or cultural perspective, educators emphasize the role of learners rather than that of knowledge. Generally, educators are interested in implications of constructivist theories for practice and learning (and to a lesser degree of knowing) rather than their ontological or metaphysical implications.

While constructivism is not a theory of teaching, constructivists argue that pedagogy should be based in theories of learning to ensure that teaching always centers on student learning. Recently, constructivist theories of learning have sparked reforms in teaching practices, suggesting that learning environments focus directly on students, the importance of context, authentic problems and tasks, discovery learning, student's prior knowledge, group projects and discussion, student choice, and authentic assessment.

Explicit strategies or approaches to learning also have been identified that support individual and social learning: Anchored instruction, situated learning, and cognitive apprenticeship are just a few different approaches to teaching and learning that draw from constructivist theories. Anchored instruction involves lodging instruction in an authentic problem-based story, case study, or situation in which students generate and test possible problem solutions. Situated learning emphasizes learning through social interaction and collaboration in authentic contexts. And cognitive apprenticeship, like traditional apprenticeship, relies on pairing a guide or an expert with a learner in an authentic study but focuses on making thinking explicit.

Despite the implications, adopting a constructivist theory of learning does not preclude teacher-centered approaches to teaching and learning, because both knowledge and learning are the result of construction regardless of the teaching approach. In education from a constructivist perspective, teachers are encouraged to become student centered because constructivism is

first and foremost a theory of learning and knowledge acquisition, and the primary learner is the student.

Patrick R. Lowenthal and Rodney Muth

See also Active Learning; Cooperative Learning; Critical Thinking; Philosophy of Education; Sociology of Education

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CONTEXT IN EDUCATION

Human thoughts, meanings, interpretations, and understandings are basically formulated and negotiated through activity that is influenced by environmental conditions. Understanding and explaining the ways in which environmental conditions influence humans engaged in individual and collective activity within and among institutions is a major problem of educational theoreticians, researchers, and practitioners. A common perception of environment is that humans act on it rather than interact with it. However, active humans and active environments act on each other. *Context* is a