

Title of Session: Constructivism: Project Based Learning in the Classroom

Moderator: BJ Berquist

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BJB2: while we wait to see if Elizabeth will be able to join us, can you each please give a short description of where you are and what you teach or hope to teach?

RaeR: David- teach me a little lingo--what does (brb) mean?

BJB2: brb=be right back

RaeR: thanks

DouglasRM: Doug Moore, pre-service teacher university of Houston, Texas

CathyAB: I'm a student (along with Doug) at U. of Houston, social studies

RaeR: Adjunct prof in an MATESOL program.

ChristinW2: I am a pre-service teacher that UH. I want to teach Math 4-8

ChristinW2: Hi Doug, Hi Cathy!

CathyAB: Hey Christine, hellow from U of H!

TaraU: I am a business teacher in Northern Wisconsin

BJB2: whoa, that's a mouthful, Rae...what is MATESOL, please

DouglasRM: hello!!

RaeR: I'm in Washington DC--Masters in Teaching English to Speaker of other languages

BJB2: welcome, everyone to this month's constructivism discussion

BJB2: one thing that I would have appreciated during the last discussion is a definition of constructivism

DavidWe: I'm David Weksler and I'm in New Jersey and I went to a Dewey-inspired elementary school

BJB2: does anyone have a definition they can share?

ChristinW2: I could take a guess?

CathyAB: I always think of it as student-centered/driven learning.

ChristinW2: does it have to do with building, like construction?

ChristinW2: So we are building...

EmilyW joined the room.

BJB2: hi, Emily. Welcome. We are working on a definition of constructivism

EmilyW: ok

CathyAB: A student is building their own knowledge, instead of the teacher doing it for them.

DouglasRM: ooooh, good one, Cathy

BJB2: so what do they need teachers for?

DouglasRM: to guide them...

CathyAB: Thanks, you always have my back, Doug!

DouglasRM: to help keep the students on task

DavidWe . o O (Guide on the side)

CathyAB: Facilitate the learning process?

TaraU: Make sure standards are being met

DavidWe . o O (ouch!)

DavidWe nods to Tara

BJB2: learning is an active process in which learners construct new ideas or concepts based upon their current/past knowledge. The learner selects and transforms information, constructs hypotheses, and makes decisions, relying on a cognitive structure to do so. Cognitive structure (i.e., schema, mental models) provides meaning and organization to experiences and allows the individual to "go beyond the information given".

DavidWe thanks BJ for that one

BJB2: actually, it doesn't say anything more than the definition you all came up with!

CathyAB: Well, your definition was a little more impressive...

ChristinW2: I'll say

DavidWe: That quote is from Jerome Bruner, I believe

BJB2: it's not 'my' definition...it's J. Bruner's Constructivist Theory

CathyAB: But I actually "constructed" my own definition...

DavidWe smiles

BJB2 smiles and cheers for Cathy and everyone else who helped with that construction

DavidWe: I like these three points:

BJB2: what three points, David?

DavidWe: 1. Instruction must be concerned with the experiences and contexts that make the student willing and able to learn (readiness).

DavidWe: 2. Instructions must be structured so that it can be easily grasped by the student (spiral organization)

DavidWe: 3. Instruction should be designed to facilitate extrapolation and or fill in the gaps (going beyond the information given).

RaeR: A theory of learning and knowing that holds that learning is an active process of knowledge construction in which learners build on prior knowledge and experience to shape meaning and construct new knowledge. (Lambert & Walker, 1995.)

RaeR: www.nifl.gov/lincs/collections/eff/eff_glossary.html

RaeR: Theory suggesting that students learn by constructing their own knowledge, especially through hands-on exploration. It emphasizes that the context in which an idea is presented, as well as student attitude and behavior, affects learning. Students learn by incorporating new information into what they already know.

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RaeR: www.ncrel.org/sdrs/areas/misc/glossary.htm

RaeR: Readiness is more of a key than we may give credit for

TaraU: The school district I am in just created a charter school for K-12 that is completely project based

DouglasRM: how is it working, Tara?

CathyAB: Sounds exciting, Tara

TaraU: Students are given a list of standards that follow the states guidelines and from there on out they create their own learning

DouglasRM: pretty cool!

CathyAB: How much guidance do they have?

TaraU: For example, to get a phy ed credit, one student is riding his bike to school every day for a month

TaraU: Each teacher is assigned about 10 students and the students must record all hours of their day and report to the teacher daily

BJB2: I think one thing to remember about constructivism is that it is, by definition an individualized program...

RaeR: That really is constructing one's own knowledge!

BJB2: which is great for the diverse learners in each class

BJB2: The task of the instructor is to translate information to be learned into a format appropriate to the learner's current state of understanding.

RaeR: I think that students together can also construct knowledge.

TaraU: Some are getting math credits by figuring out probability of getting a black jack
.....

CathyAB: So a student tells the teacher what he wants to learn/do and then the teacher and he work out ways to accomplish the objective?

TaraU: That's right Cathy

TaraU: There is a huge wait list to get into this school

ChristinW2: How do they gauge how much the student learns?

TaraU: The students love it

RaeR: scaffolding the information so that learners of varying levels of knowledge and readiness is always a challenge.

CathyAB: Boy, that would really scare a lot of traditional educators!

TaraU: This is the first year of the school, so ????

DavidWe: What students know and what they can do with that knowledge is often a good way to gauge it.

TaraU: They will still have to take all of the standardized tests

ChristinW2: oh. Are they fully prepared for Standardized tests?

RaeR: sounds like a very progressive approach

TaraU: They seem to be

ChristinW2: sounds pretty cool!

TaraU: When you walk into the school, it is very quite and orderly. All students are on task

BJB2: . o O (don't let all the people who teach to the test hear you!)

TaraU: Many computer projects

ChristinW2: Do you get in the school by recommendation only?

TaraU: Have any of you tried a project based approach in a regular classroom setting? Maybe for a Unit or two?

ChristinW2: no, I'm not a teacher.

CathyAB: I would imagine you have to be a high level, mature performer to get into that school

TaraU: No, Christina, first come first serve

TaraU: They are not all high achieving

BJB2: one of the most effective ways to do a unit is to use a webquest...a REAL webquest that has H.O.T.S.

DavidWe: What does that mean, Tara?

TaraU: Some were potential high school dropouts, and this saved them from doing so

DavidWe . o O (Higher Order Thinking Skills == H.O.T. S)

BJB2 nods to David

DavidWe smiles

BJB2: www.webquest.org

CathyAB: I'd like to know more about H.O.T.S

BJB2: that is the homepage of Bernie Dodge's WebQuests

ChristinW2: So this school is student driven...the students have to be motivated enough to learn?

BJB2 . o O (Bernie is the father of WebQuests)

ChristinW2: by themselves

DouglasRM: this all sounds great, it would be cool if we had something like that here

BJB2: I think any teacher can do it, Doug...

BJB2: but it's really a lot of work!

RaeR: Blooms created a "Blooms Taxonomy" that walks through the order.

DavidWe . o O (teaching IS a lot of work)

BJB2: thanks, Rae

DouglasRM: it does seem like a lot of work, but worthwhile work as well.

BJB2: oh, absolutely! I don't mean to be negative...

CathyAB: And it's never boring!

DavidWe smiles at Cathy

BJB2: it's a great way to encourage teamwork and collaboration too

ChristinW2: and a great way to prepare people for the work force!

ChristinW2: obtaining people skills

ChristinW2: working together

BJB2 nods

CathyAB: I'm in a really good observation experience now where the teacher I watch really does a lot of group, hands on projects. The kids really take off and build their own knowledge. It's really exciting to see...

BJB2: can you give us an example, Cathy?

CathyAB: Yes, recently her 7th grade Texas history class was studying Texas annexation into the union. The students were put into groups, one named Mexico, one named Texas, etc., They had to put together a newspaper expressing the views of each country regarding annexation. It was amazing how much they learned through their work.

DavidWe: Sounds like a great project.

DouglasRM: that does sound like fun

DavidWe nods

DavidWe: I would even do that project

ChristinW2: they are going beyond the textbook

DavidWe agrees with Christine

ChristinW2: putting into practice what they are or have learned

BridgetM: taking on another's perspective is tough. Great idea

CathyAB: They drew maps, put cartoons in their papers and wanted, all inherent to that time period..

BridgetM: how much time?

CathyAB: And they were so excited about their finished projects!

ChristinW2: I could see why, that is great engaging project

CathyAB: Four day project, one day of teacher/student discussion over the structure and requirements, the next three days of working in class collaboratively

TaraU: Being a business teacher, I try to engage students in project based learning often. Not to hard to do since a lot of what I teach is very hands-on

BJB2: can you give us an example of a lesson you would do, Tara?

TaraU: Yep

TaraU: Yep

BJB2 thinks business would be a great cross curricular topic

DavidWe agrees

BJB2: budgeting, clothing manufacturing, ..what else?

BridgetM: I did a bread baking project w/ 1st graders

CathyAB: You must have a lot of patience!

BridgetM: they raised money for school playground

TaraU: In personal money management, we learn about buying a car, renting an apt, balancing a checkbook, etc. I take students to a car dealership and the salesmen go from there!!!

RaeR: yes, setting little stores etc. is a great way to learn math.

BJB2: oh, fun, Bridget. A great henny penny experience

TaraU: It is all set up ahead of time of course

BridgetM: It turned into a big writing project also

BJB2: wonderful, Tara. A real life experience is sometimes a bit shocking

ChristinW2: I could use the mathematics- money project in my future classroom

BJB2 . o O (I get shocked every day!)

DouglasRM: I think I saw a videotaped lesson about a bread baking project not too long ago.

TaraU: Lots to do with credit reports, writing a will, etc.

ChristinW2: Doug can you explain a little bit about it?

RaeR: talk about money projects--that could bring in the "dough"

TaraU: The kids are so motivated because they actually see relevance in their lives

CathyAB: That was bad Rae!

BJB2 chuckles

DavidWe smiles

BJB2: we have to cut Rae a break...this is Friday evening, you know!

DavidWe is glad that Rae can make even those jokes on Friday evening

CathyAB: Seriously, it's really neat when kids learn relevant stuff...

BridgetM: My kids were called the BreadHeads

BJB2 nods...it's neat for us all, because the kids are turned on to learning

BJB2: not the twisted pretzels, Bridget? I think I'll use that one

DouglasRM: kids separated into groups with ingredients, they were each in charge of putting something in. at the end the students escorted their dough down to the caf, and when the lunch ladies were finished, they had a class party. it was pretty young children, I think they were learning about cooperation.

RaeR: I'm really interested in all of these projects. Our preservice teachers feel overwhelmed when they start and I think that this contextualized learning brings such real life meaning to the kids.

BridgetM: grin

CathyAB: Yeah Doug, I saw that too, but I can't remember where...

BJB2: you could also integrate learning about where all the ingredients come from and how they get to the grocery shelves

RaeR: great idea

CathyAB: Great minds thinking alike!

RaeR: that could be an interesting geography lesson

BridgetM: here's a free simple one for little kids - Most major newspapers have a donate to school subscriptions. My k students had a newspaper route in the school.

DouglasRM: great minds, indeed!

CathyAB: Can you tell us more, Bridget?

BridgetM: they had to record deliveries on a checklist. Lots of staff got to know them

BridgetM: and kids. it was great for them to walk to the bus. they were celebrities

RaeR: they could choose countries and track the weather from the newspapers, young children could "read" ads as a way to learn numbers, find letters and sounds, and simple math

CathyAB: Lots of ownership and self-esteem in a project like that!

BridgetM: right - so much to learn!

BridgetM: we did titles, authors, .. and we had our own class newspaper

BridgetM: that was very hard

ChristinW2: for kindergarteners?

BridgetM: special ed - no less

ChristinW2: that sounds like a tremendous amount of work!

ChristinW2: But a great learning experience

CathyAB: Pat yourself on the back, Bridget!

BridgetM: parent volunteer was wonderful

TaraU: Speaking of special ed, project based learning is wonderful for them

BridgetM: we put out one paper / month based on field trip

BridgetM: it's funny what happens when you ask for help

ChristinW2: did the paper go to every class in the school or just faculty and staff?

TaraU: Lower elementary sounds like a lot of work!!!

RaeR: The paper would make great "authentic" reading

TaraU: I am used to the juniors and seniors who can already read and write

BridgetM: just the family and the libraries

BridgetM: I put key questions on each page

BridgetM: they shared papers with staff, 1st, 2nd and 3rd classes

CathyAB: Sorry guys, I've got to run... Thanks to all ----See you Monday Doug, bye Christine!

DouglasRM: adios. Cathy

BJB2: thanks for joining the discussion, Cathy

BridgetM: Very funny when they went to 4th. They were asking the 4th graders the questions

TaraU: Have a good night! Thanks for all the useful ideas and insights

BJB2: what a great boost for your kids' self esteem, Bridget!

BJB2: Great job, everyone...collaboration

BJB2 . o O (one of the C words in the theme of Festival 2005)

BJB2: Thank you all for your contributions to the discussion

ChristinW2: Once again I learned so much!

DouglasRM: me too!

ChristinW2: Thank you, everyone

ChristinW2: good night! thanks again!

DouglasRM: night...

BJB2 waves goodnight