

Chapter 2

Constructivism

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ABSTRACT

In this chapter, there is a philosophical analysis of constructivism, which is the product of postmodern understanding and is the most debated educational trend of the last period. In the first section, constructivism is analyzed in the light of ontological and epistemological foundations, and its relation with the subjectivist understanding of science is revealed. In the second part, the possibilities offered by constructivism in terms of educational practice are discussed. The focus of the study is to identify the intersections of all discourses on constructivism and to explain them based on these intersections. In order to bring the discussion to a philosophical ground, the authors believe that addressing the issue in an epistemological and ontological context will provide the philosophical essence of constructivist theory.

INTRODUCTION

Constructivism is a term frequently discussed in the field of recent educational science and has marked the primary and secondary curricula of countries such as America, New Zealand, Israel, Canada, Switzerland, Australia (Matthews, 1993). This term, which leads to radical debates among education scientists, is presented different types of theories such as a learning theory, an educational theory, a scientific ethical and political theory, a worldview, a philosophical theory (Bentley, 1988; Matthews, 1993). When it is considered as pure learning theory, there are many types of constructivism like cognitive, social, radical and cybernetic constructivism (Jonassen, 1991; Phillips & Soltis, 2005). In this respect, it is often difficult to reveal its clarity and to define its limits. Therefore, it becomes difficult to present the subject as a whole.

In this study, it will be discussed constructivism which has marked the 21st century despite these difficulties. The focus of our study will be to identify the intersections of all discourses on constructivism and to explain them based on these intersections. In order to bring the discussion to a philosophical ground, addressing the issue in an epistemological and ontological context will provide the philosophical essence of constructivist theory.

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PHILOSOPHICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM: A BRIEF HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

Philosophical constructivism is an approach that tries to reveal the ontological and epistemological foundations of constructivist learning theories and tries to ground them philosophically. In terms of philosophers who try to ground constructivism philosophically, constructivism is, in some way, associated with such philosophers as Socrates, Aristotle, J. Locke, Berkeley, Kant, Nietzsche, Dewey, Thomas Kuhn and Wittgenstein. They explain that constructivism is a long-standing view and that its development has evolved. Matthews, one of the critics of constructivism, described this as “old wine in new bottles” (Matthews, 1995).

It is possible to say that the views of philosophers such as Socrates, who says nothing I know is nothing, Aristotle, who establishes a relationship between sensation and knowledge, Locke who says that what we know is actually our ideals, Berkeley who says that existence is to be perceived, Kant who says that ontological reality cannot be known, all knowledge is a certain perspective. Nietzsche, who argues that modern knowledge tries to kill emotions with an emphasis on objectivity, Wittgenstein, who emphasize language in knowledge and identify the boundary of language with the boundary of knowledge, form the basis of philosophical constructivism. But philosophical constructivism is undoubtedly more complex and eclectic. Therefore, it cannot be reduced to the thought of any of the above-mentioned thinkers.

PHILOSOPHICAL CONSTRUCTIVISM: BASIC ASSERTIONS

Philosophical constructivism, which is an eclectic character, has some basic arguments that are based on the historical assertions mentioned above, and these arguments also are related to the ontological and epistemological foundations of constructivist learning theories.

- a.** Ontological reality is structured by individual consciousness. There is no ontological reality that can be known out of cognition, culture and language. So reality is relative.

According to philosophers of philosophical constructivism, reality has a more complex structure than we perceive. Reality is created by us and is not given to us. Both information about reality and our thoughts about the outside world are influenced by the interaction of our experiences with the outside world. According to Fluery (1998), constructivism is characterized by two philosophical principles. First, the information is effectively configured by the subject’s cognition. Second, the function of knowledge is the regulation of the experienced world, not the discovery of ontological reality.

Social forms such as established schemes, assumptions, concepts, language and culture determine our experience. In this case, all our experiences are under the influence of mental schemes, cultural structures, linguistic structures and concepts. We see what we see with a mental-cultural-linguistic spectacle (Gendlin, 1991). This effect cannot be completely controlled, so we are always surprised by the constantly changing image of reality (Frye, 1983). Direct contact with reality is impossible. This thought goes back to the famous German philosopher Immanuel Kant. He emphasizes that some of his categories affect our perception. This perspective of Kant has had a great impact in the field of human sciences and has been defended in the process by thinkers like Dilthey and Rickman (Dilthey, 1986; Rickman, 2000).

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