

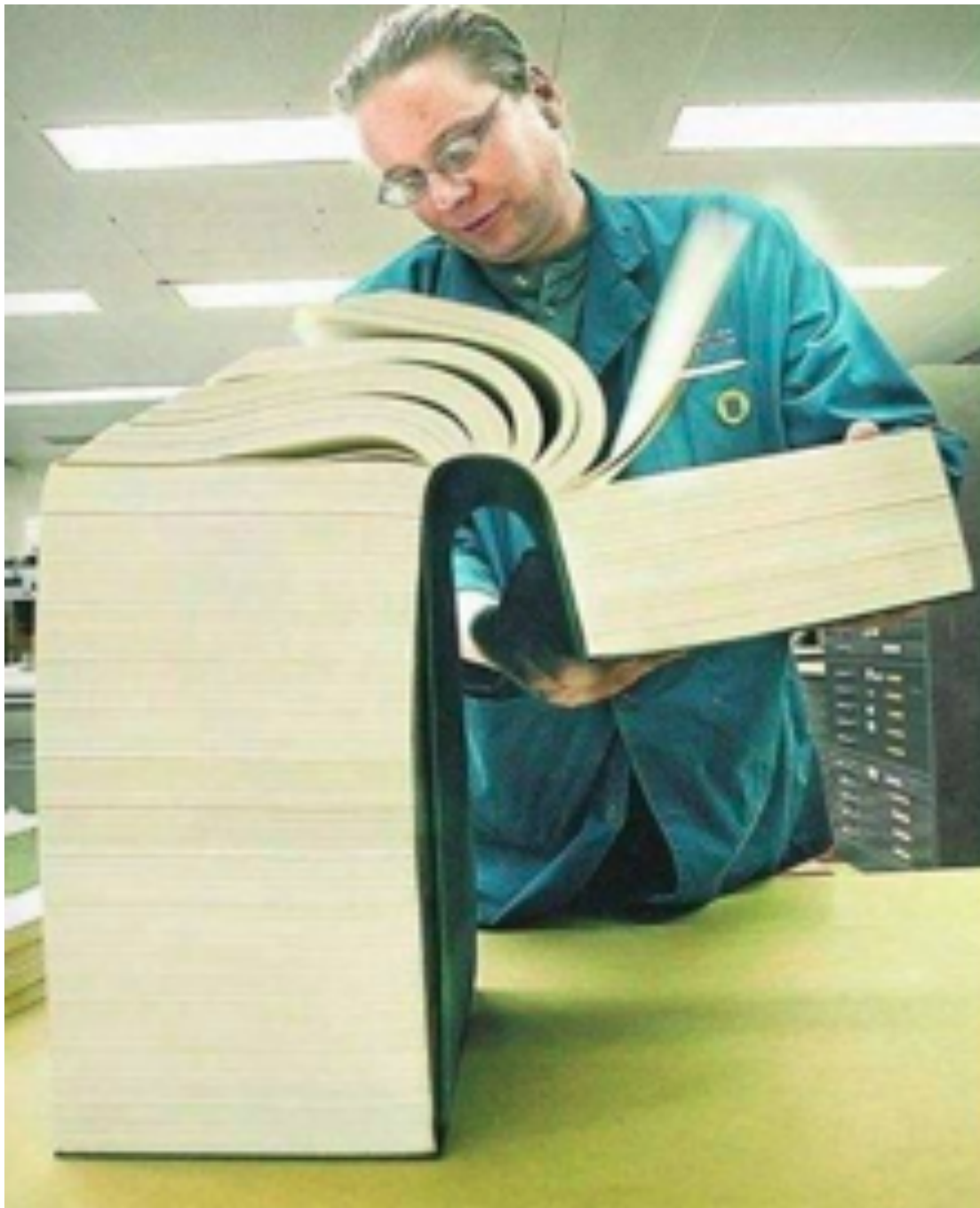
Constructivism

- a teaching & learning theory

with Dr. Richard J
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**Stop-Press:
*The Idiot's Guide
To Constructivism*
has just arrived
in bookstores**

What is Constructivism?

Constructivism is a theory about knowing (epistemology), reflecting worldview assumptions. It places the learner at the centre, focusing upon learning through experience rather than learning through passively-received instruction.

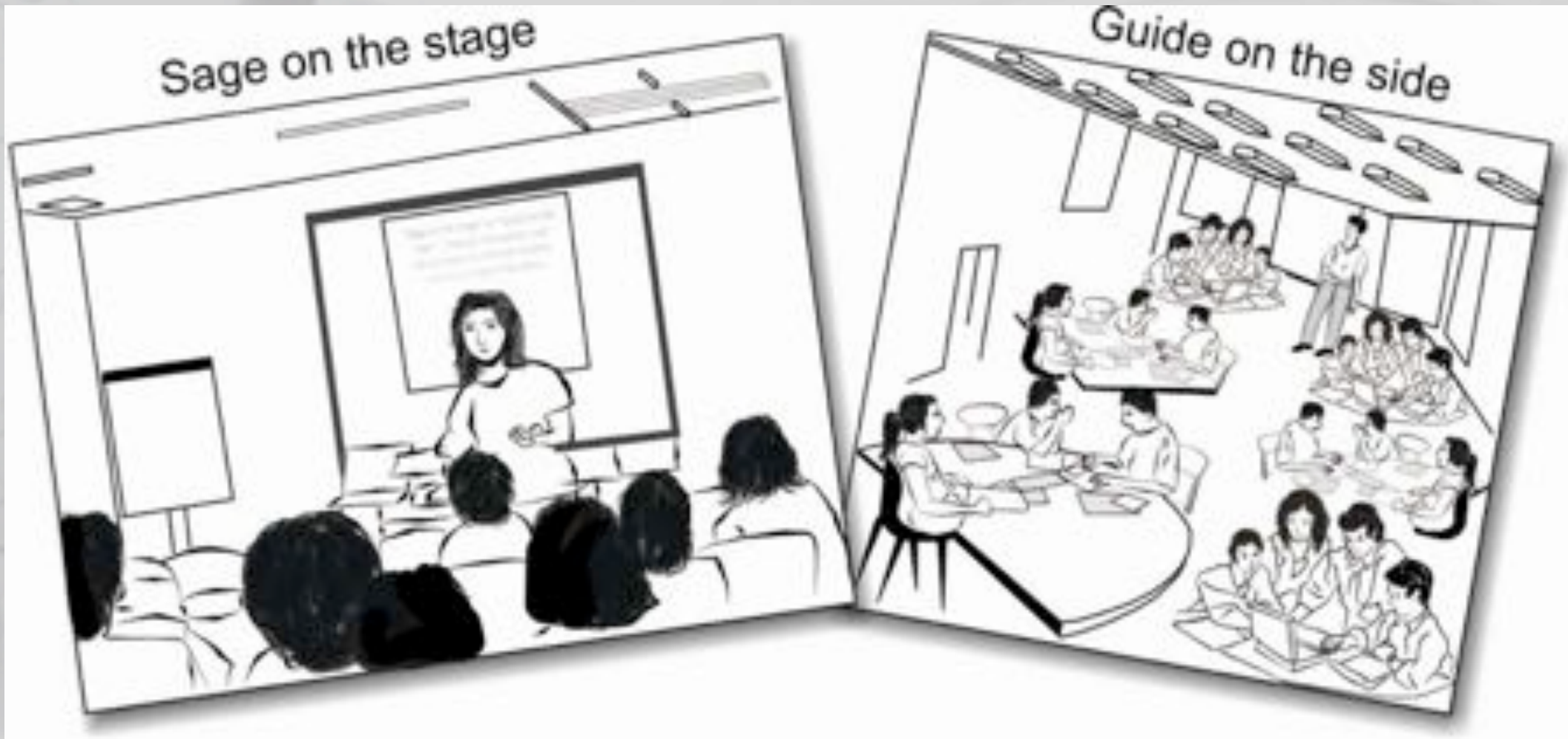
Constructivist learning is not just informing students about new information, but it's a culturally responsive process of engaging with the world wherein new knowledge is created through the active participation of the learner.

Constructivism does not assume that the child is a blank slate (behaviourism). Constructivism contends that a child is situated, and learns best when teaching and learning recognise that situatedness.

Constructivism is a “catch-all” phrase for the default ideology that lies behind much contemporary pedagogy.



Constructivism modifies the role of the teacher from emphasising the “sage on the stage” to emphasising the “guide on the side.”



Example of Constructivist Pedagogy

- Groups of students in a science class are discussing a problem in physics. Though the teacher knows the "answer" to the problem, she focuses on helping students restate their questions in useful ways. She prompts each student to reflect on and examine his or her current knowledge.
- When one of the students comes up with the relevant concept, the teacher seizes upon it, and indicates to the group that this might be a fruitful avenue for them to explore. They design and perform relevant experiments.
- Afterward, the students and teacher talk about what they have learned, and how their observations and experiments helped (or did not help) them to better understand the concept. [WNET, 2004]

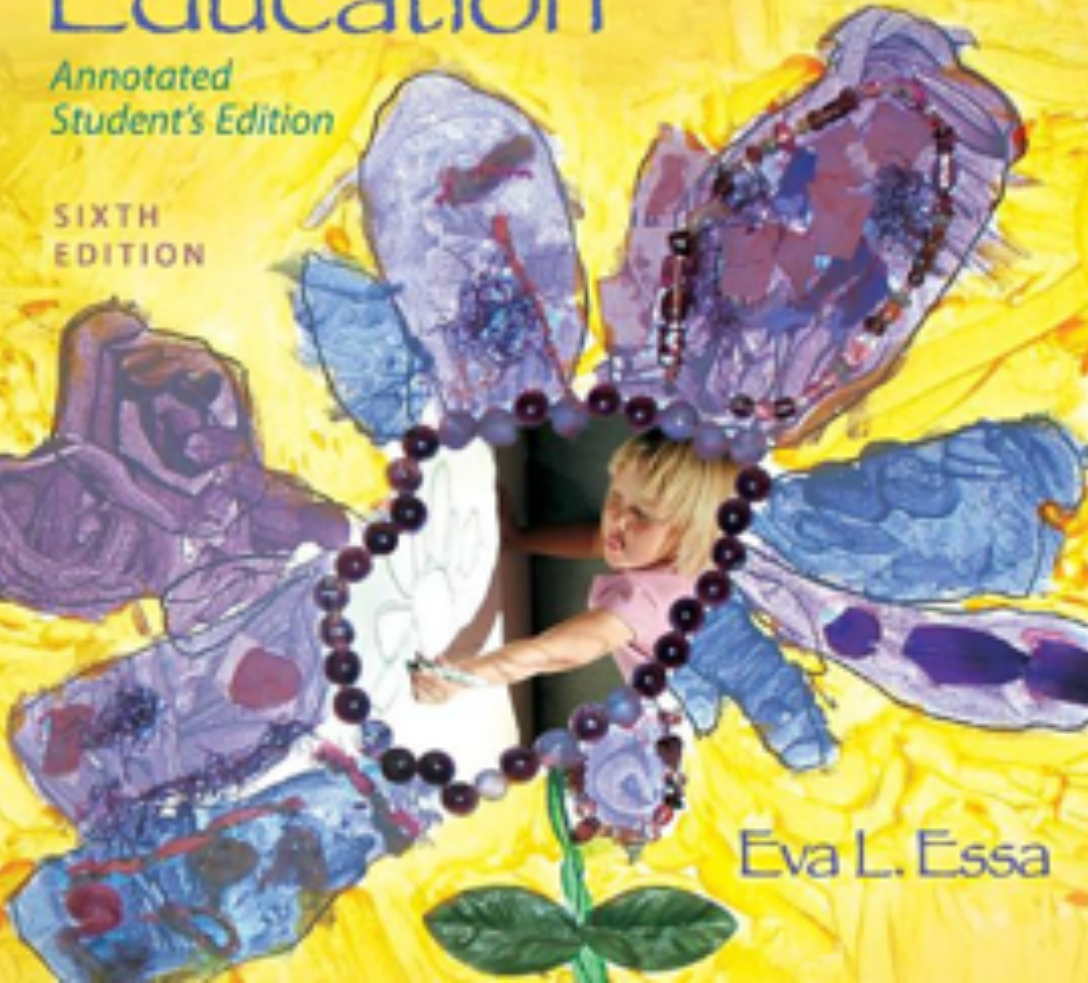


Note that, compared to direct instruction, constructivist collaborative learning requires its own set of classroom management strategies.

Early Childhood Education

Annotated
Student's Edition

SIXTH
EDITION



Constructivist Principles

The students, rather than content, are the centre of good pedagogy – meaning-makers in an otherwise meaningless world.

(Postman & Weingartner, *Teaching as a Subversive Activity*)



Education is a journey of self-discovery in which truth and reality are dynamic, internal, subjective concepts, mediated by culture and experience.

For example, reader response theory (Rosenblatt, Iser etc.,) reflects a constructivist approach where meaning in literature is found more in the

experiences or constructions of the reader than in the intentions of the author. “Readers must separate a literary work from its creator, thus liberating the text from interpretive tyranny.”

Traditional Classroom

Curriculum begins with the parts of the whole. Emphasizes basic skills.

Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.

Materials are primarily textbooks and workbooks.

Learning is based on repetition.

Teachers disseminate information to students; students are recipients of knowledge.

Teacher's role is directive, rooted in authority.

Assessment is through testing, correct answers.

Knowledge is seen as inert.

Students work primarily alone.

Constructivist Classroom

Curriculum emphasizes big concepts, beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts.

Pursuit of student questions and interests is valued.

Materials include primary sources of material and manipulative materials.

Learning is interactive, building on what the student already knows.

Teachers have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge.

Teacher's role is interactive, rooted in negotiation.

Assessment includes student works, observations, and points of view, as well as tests. Process is as important as product.

Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever changing with our experiences.

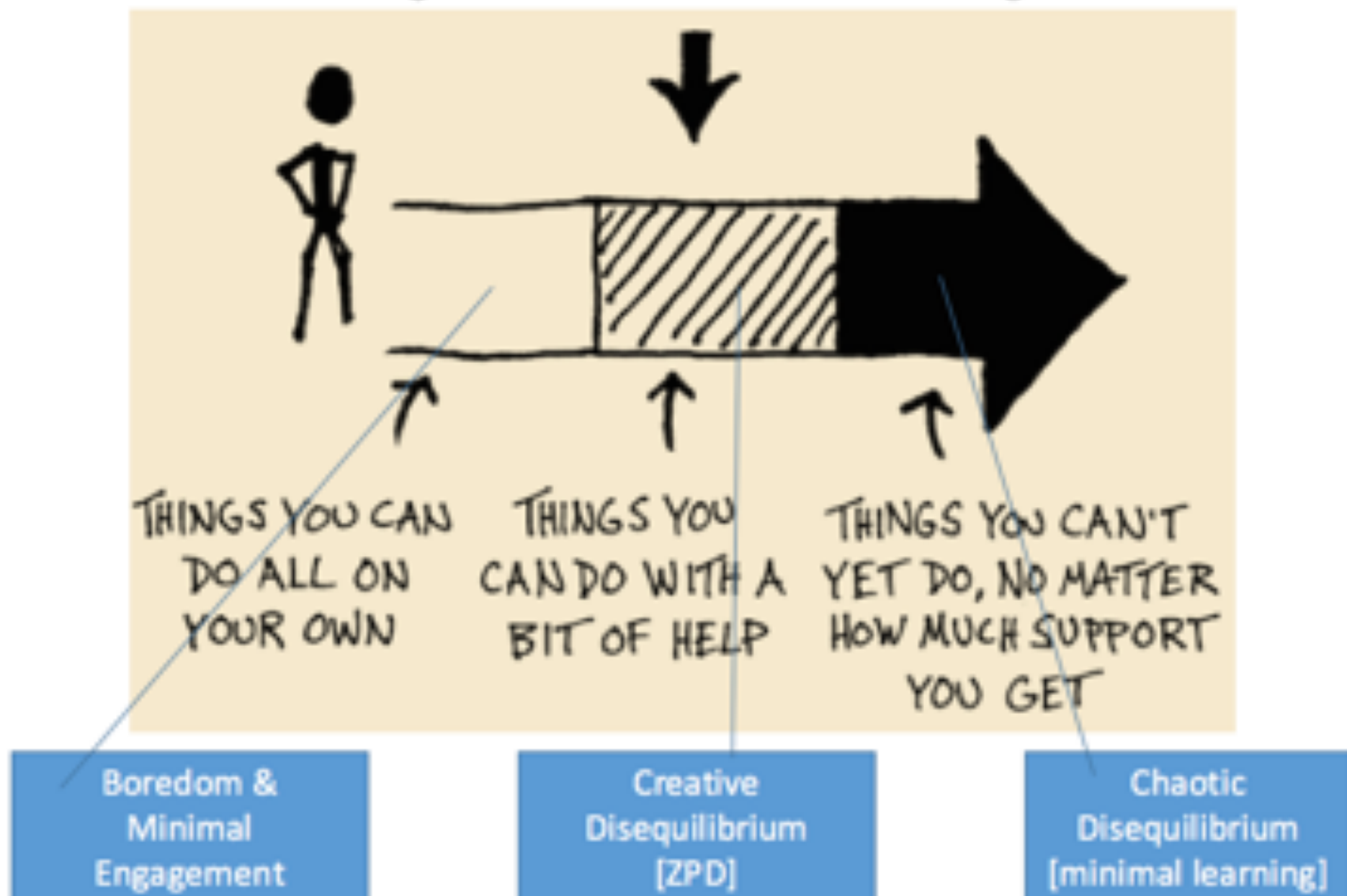
Students work primarily in groups.

Key People	Associated Insights
Jean Piaget (1896-1980)	Hierarchy of experience-based cognitive development
Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934)	Importance of relationships in learning (Zone of Proximal Development)
Ernst von Glasersfeld (1917-2010)	Radical Constructivism and relativist epistemologies (we have no way of knowing what objective reality might be)
John Dewey (1859-1952)	Experiential, child-centred learning where reality is (1) relative, and (2) internally-derived (3) self-verified
Jerome Bruner (1915-)	Learning is a non-neutral, constructed process, building upon prior knowledge & experience
Richard Rorty (1931-2007)	Pragmatic Constructivist

In constructivism, rote learning, memorization, and standardised tests are de-emphasised

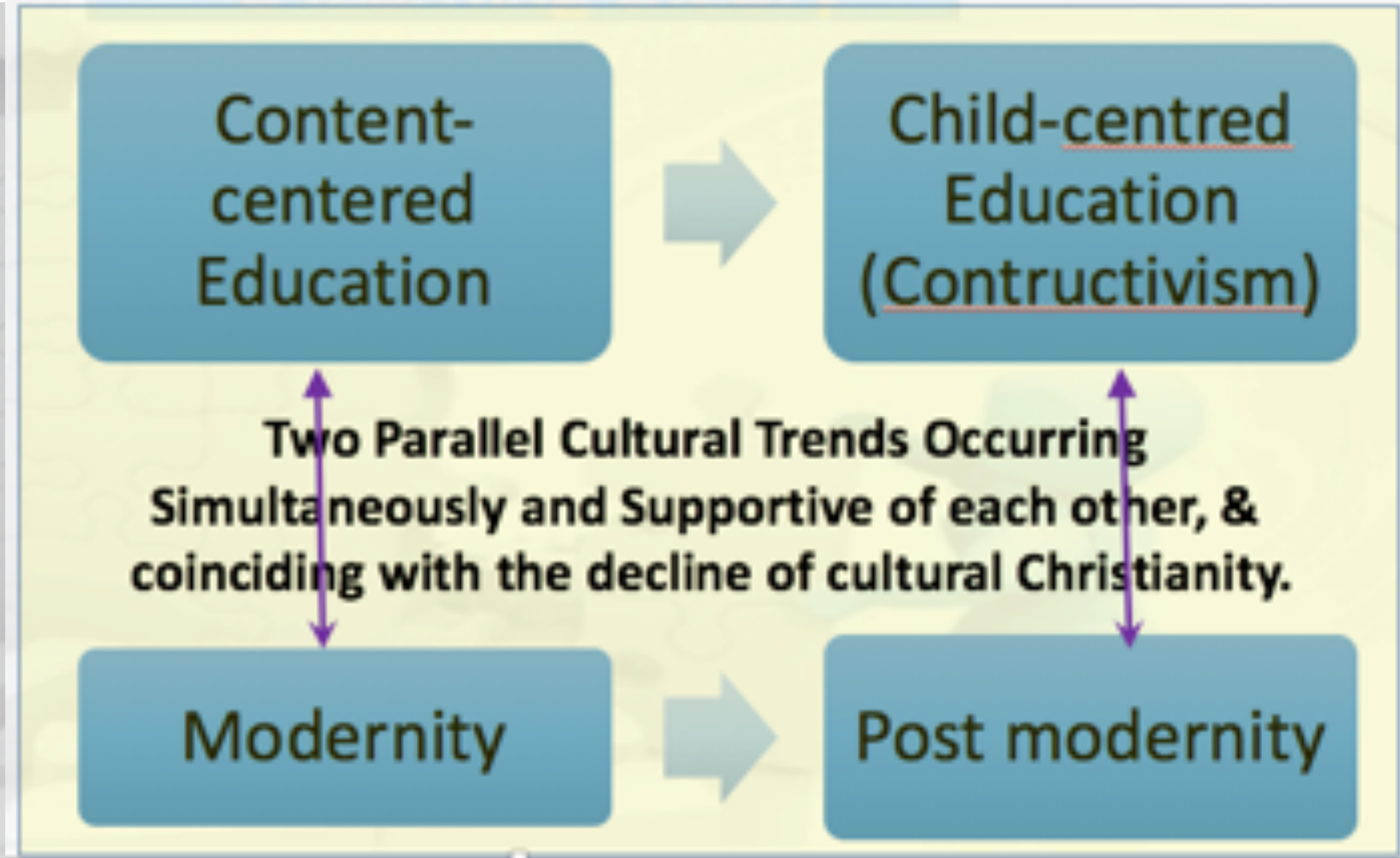
Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development

Focusing on Relational & Collaborative Learning



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Constructivism developed into the favoured paradigm in the late 20th century, and has become the assumed and ideologically fundamentalist position in contemporary western education – and increasingly in eastern education as well.



There is no neutrality.

- For secularist constructivists, their starting point is human wisdom and the relativistic uncertainty (truthlessness) of observation and culturally-bound understanding.
- For Christians, our starting point is the authority of God and his Word over all of life. There exists an ordered, divine, truth-filled reality independent of our (in)capacity to fully plumb its depths. Christian educators don't spend all our time looking at the Son, but rather we look at everything else in the light that the Son provides

THEREFORE, Christians have an external, revealed perspective from which to evaluate secular beliefs such as constructivism, discerning truth from error, eschewing that which is wrong, and appropriating that which is consistent with God's way of understanding reality.

This is what Paul did in Athens (Acts 17) at least twice when he discerned some valid insights in the Greeks' pagan philosophy, and reflected these insights into his proclamation of the gospel of Christ in his sermon on the Areopagus.

A Constructivist View of Truth

- Uncertain
- Personal
- Relational
- Variable

We no longer feel ourselves to be guests in someone else's home and therefore obliged to make our behavior conform with a set of preexisting cosmic rules. It is our creation now. We make the rules. We establish the parameters of reality. We create the world. And because we do, we no longer feel beholden to outside forces. We no longer have to justify our behavior, for we are the architects of the universe. We are responsible for nothing outside ourselves, for we are the kingdom, the power, and the glory forever. [Rifkin, 1983]

A Christian View of Truth

- Finitely knowable
- Revealed
- Propositional
- Relational

“I am the way, the truth, and the life. No-one comes to the Father but through me” [Jesus, Luke:14:6].

When Luke introduces his gospel, he tells Theophilus that he is writing, “that *you may know the certainty* of the things that you have been taught (Luke: 1:4). After his resurrection, Jesus “presented himself [to his disciples] and gave *many convincing proofs* that he was alive” (Acts 1:3). ...My point is that we can talk about faith and truth, about believing and knowing. [Carson, *Christ & Culture Revisited*, 2008, p.108]

A product of Constructivist Education's Relativism : Uncertainty, Absurdity, Hopelessness

We can describe constructivism and its postmodern cousin as “the social commitment to treat all ideas and people as equally right, except for those people who disagree with this view of tolerance.”

[Carson, *The Intolerance of Tolerance*, (2012), p.98]

For secularist constructivists, their starting point is human wisdom, intolerant tolerance, and the relativistic uncertainty (truthlessness) of observation and culturally-bound understanding.

A product of Constructivist Education's Relativism : Uncertainty, Absurdity, Hopelessness

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Richard Rorty, one of the most prominent postmodern/constructivist philosophers of the 20th century, said on the subject of education:

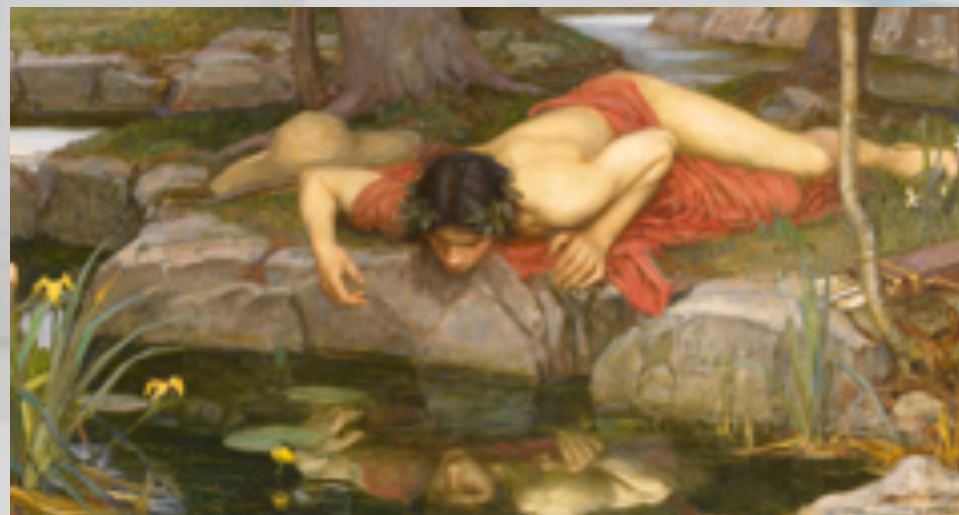
“I, like most Americans who teach humanities or social science in colleges and universities ... try to arrange things so that students who enter as bigoted, homophobic, religious fundamentalists will leave college with views more like our own ... The fundamentalist parents of our fundamentalist students think that the entire ‘American liberal establishment’ is engaged in a conspiracy. The parents have a point ... We do our best to convince these students of the benefits of secularization... We are going to go right on trying to discredit you in the eyes of your children, trying to strip your fundamentalist religious community of dignity, trying to make your views seem silly rather than discussable. We are not so inclusivist as to tolerate intolerance such as yours.”

Richard Rorty (2000), “*Universality and Truth*,” in *Rorty and His Critics*, pp. 21-22.,

Replace “fundamentalist” with “Christian” and you will comprehend the full import of what Rorty is saying, and thus the sobering validity of Carson’s critique.

The Christian Educator in the Light of Mainstream Constructivism

Constructivist Ideas We Affirm	Constructivist Ideas We Reject
Discovery Learning – unwrapping God’s mystery parcel.	Jettisoning of God & constructivism’s incipient narcissism (now fed by facebook & social media)
Variety of Pedagogical Techniques	Reticence to evaluate using any form of standardised testing
Authentic Assessment	Truth emanating from internal, individual definition
Situated Cognition	Student as a meaning-maker
	Indecisiveness & microaggression



Echo & Narcissus, Waterhouse, 1903

Foundations of Christian Education, enabling Discerning Responsiveness in a Constructivist Educational World

God-centred, Child-focussed, Wisdom-imparting, Discerning-enabled, Culture-engaging

Unwrapping God's Mystery Parcel (van Brummelen)

Truth exists, and is revealed in God's three-fold Word

Bringing every thought into subjection to Jesus Christ, celebrating His lordship over all

The significance of being made in God's image with the universality of all humans as God-seekers

Highlighting the creativity & stewardship authority of the Cultural Mandate (Genesis 1)

Creation-Fall-Redemption-Renewal-Fulfilment metanarrative

Classroom management is not just a matter of behaviour, but of the heart

Reject the postmodern intrusion of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism

Celebrate the legitimacy of both forming and informing (cf J. K. A. Smith)

Authentic Assessment (formative and summative, real-world related)

Situated Cognition (as seen in the cultural distinctiveness of the 4 gospels)

Equipping students with on-ramps into the current culture as gospel's shalom-bearers

Equipping students with on-ramps into the current constructivist culture as gospel's shalom-bearers - an example

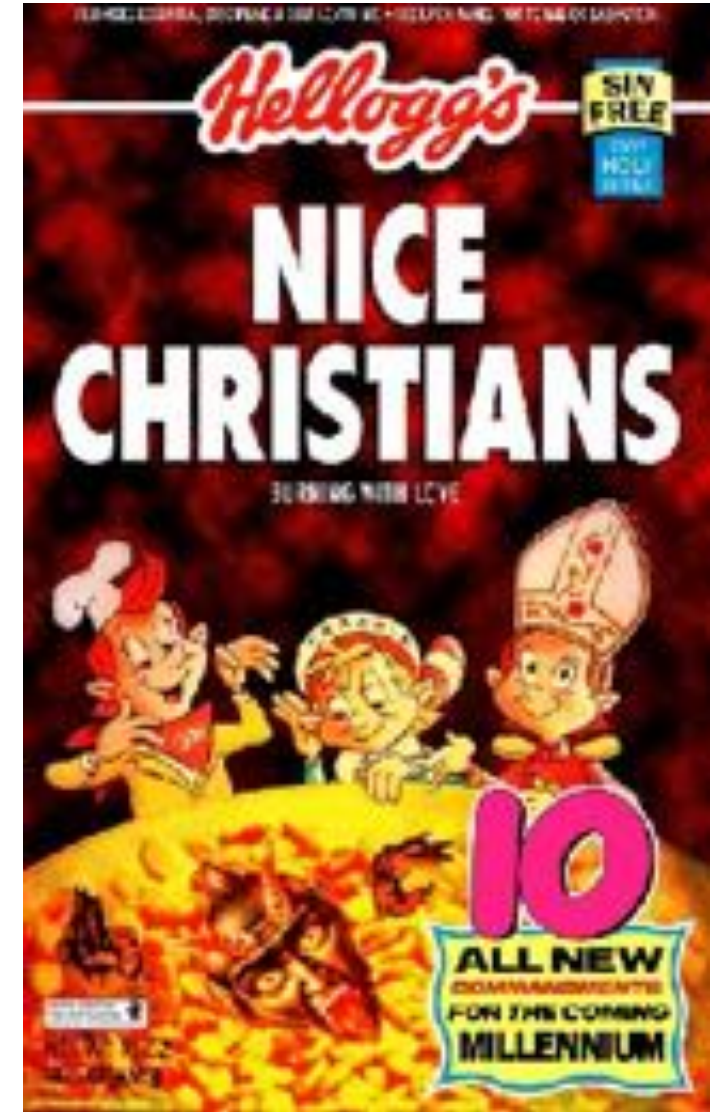


Equipping students with on-ramps into the current constructivist culture as gospel's shalom-bearers - an example

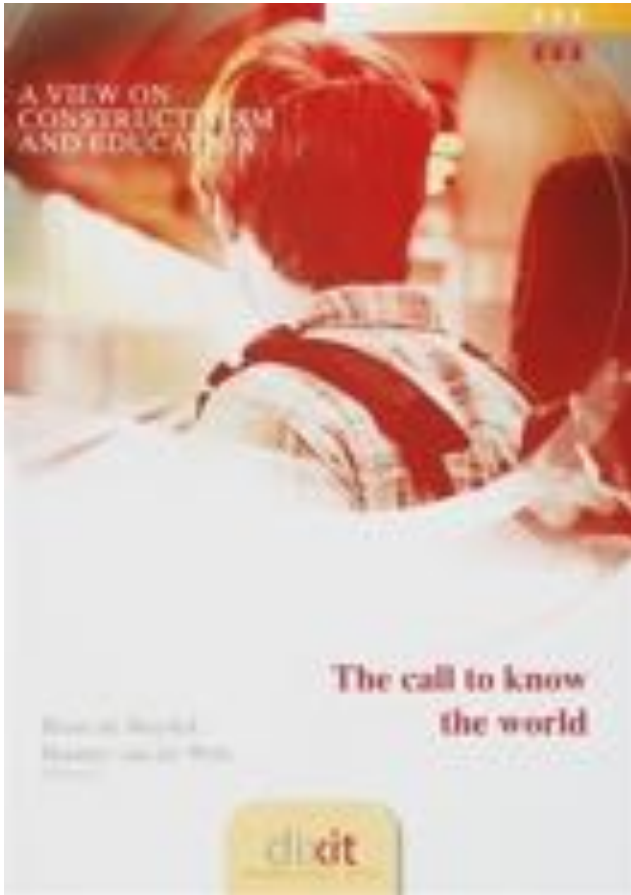


The Creed of Moralistic Therapeutic Deism (MTD)

1. A God exists who created and orders the world and watches over human life on earth.
2. God wants people to be good, nice, and fair to each other, as taught in the Bible and by most world religions.
3. The central goal of life is to be happy and to feel good about one- self.
4. God does not need to be particularly involved in one's life except when he is needed to resolve a problem.
5. Good people go to heaven when they die.



Conclusion



“Our objection to constructivism is not that it views human beings as constructing knowledge, but that it denies a reality outside of us with inherent order and meaning. . . . Human knowledge is, indeed, a human construction but, contrary to constructivism, one [resulting from] human interaction between humans who have a common inherent structure that includes the faculties of reason, imagination, faith, and intuition. **The construction of knowledge must provide insight that is the result of a faithful response to a given and already ordered reality.** [So] learners have to be guided towards a systematic observation of created reality, of the world in which they live. They then have to be assisted to think critically and creatively in ways that will add to their existing body of knowledge. . . . Constructivists are right that learning must be primarily an experience—but such experience must include challenging our knowledge of ourselves, our motivations, striking at times the innermost core of our being. **The learning experience should ultimately be a meeting, a communion with God.** Through His grace, we may gain true knowledge of our competencies and learn meaningfully from that, but not without the reminder of our fallibility in cognition and affection.”

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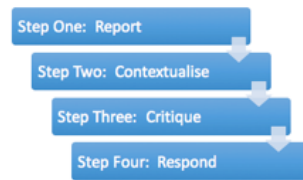
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A Mindset for Evaluating the World Around Us

© Richard Edlin, May 2016

Whether we are looking at a movie, a cultural ceremony or characteristic, a newly published book, a report card layout, a curriculum model or proposal, or even a blueprint for the construction of new school, retail, or home buildings, as Christians we want to develop a biblically authentic understanding of, and response to, these events/activities. The pattern or mindset below may be of assistance in providing a platform for this transformational thinking. It is not a set of rules but it is a useful approach for considering things in an authentically Christian manner. The mindset reflects a Creation-Fall-Redemption-Renewal-Fulfilment perspective that some may be familiar with.



Step One: Report

- What is actually involved – generate a dispassionate and systematic report of the resource/activity. As far as possible, you should withhold judgment at this stage.

Step Two: Contextualise

- How did it come about? Explore and explain the cultural/historical milieu in which the resource/activity is located.
- Who/what are the main components or participants?
- Where is the resource in a spatial and historical sense

Step Three: Critique (& Provide Examples)

- Identify the key worldview characteristics that were or are important in the resource/activity¹:
 - Where is the resource coming from in a religious sense?
 - What challenge, problem or area is the resource seeking to address?
 - What beliefs about life and purpose are implicit in the resource?
 - What solutions or meaning and purpose are offered in the resource?
 - What is the intended outcome as a result of exposure to the resource.
- Critique the resource/article and its embedded worldview from a biblically authentic worldview perspective (Remembering that all truth is God's truth wherever it may be found, you may be able to discern both areas of agreement/strengths and disagreement/weaknesses)
- Ensure that your critique is based on a biblical worldview and not just the public worldview of your own cultural/historical time and place
- Verify that your response is aligned with your pre-identified and biblically-shaped (outcome) priorities (Phil 1:9-11)

Step Four: Respond

- Respond to the resource/article by identifying how we as Christians should live in response to the resource/article
- Remember the Romans 14 principle:
 - be prepared to vigorously argue your position from a Christian worldview perspective, which should reflect a biblically-shaped understanding of the issues involved;
 - remember that, as in all disputable matters, this must be done with humility which recognises the frailty of our own position (reformed critical realism);
 - knowing how to respond is not completed until we action our response in our lives.

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