

## Support Notes

### Encouraging Music Learning Through Adaptive Constructionism ISME 2018, July, Baku Azerbaijan

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#### Personal Road to Constructivist Thinking As a BIG IDEA

Strong Belief in Developing a Philosophy for Music Teaching and Learning  
Opportunities for Creative Thinking in Music  
Assessing Creative Music Aptitude  
Technology as a Tool for Music Learning

#### Constructivists Believe:

...that what we take to be objective knowledge and truth is the result of perspective ... knowledge and truth are created, not discovered by mind. (Schwandt, 236)

...in the pluralistic and plastic character of reality—pluralistic in the sense that reality is expressible in a variety of symbol language systems; plastic in the sense that reality is stretched and shaped to fit purposeful act of intentional human agents. . (Schwandt, 236)

Contrary to common-sense, there is no unique ‘real world’ that preexists and is independent of human mental activity and human symbolic language” (Bruner, 1986, p.95)

...what we take to be self-evident kinds (e.g., man, woman, truth, self) are actually the product of complicated discursive practices. (Schwandt, 236)

...the terms by which the world is understood are social artifacts, products of historically situated interchanges among people (Gergen, 1985, p. 267)

Two important notions orbit around the simple idea of constructed knowledge. The first is that **learners construct new understandings using what they already know...**

The second notion is that **learning is active rather than passive**. Learners confront their understanding in light of what they encounter in the new learning situation. (Hoover, 1996, online journal)

#### Importance For Teaching

**Constructivism is, first and foremost, a theory about knowledge and learning and not necessarily a theory about teaching practice.** This is critical because often a short observation of a teacher might not reveal whether a constructivist approach is at the heart of a teacher’s overarching philosophy. Scott (2006)

**Although constructivism is not a theory of teaching, it suggests taking a radically different approach to instruction from that used in most schools.** Teachers who base their practice on constructivism reject the

notions that meaning can be passed on to learners via symbols or transmission, that learners can incorporate exact copies of teachers' understanding for their own use, that whole concepts can be broken down into discrete sub-skills, and that concepts can be taught out of context. In contrast, **a constructivist view of learning suggests an approach to teaching that gives learners the opportunity for concrete, contextually meaningful experience through which they can search for patterns, raise their own questions, and construct their own models, concepts, and strategies.** The classroom is seen as a minisociety, a community of learners engaged in activity, discourse, and reflection. (Fosnot, 1996, p. ix)

The argument is often made that simply "learning-by-doing" is not enough for constructivist learning to occur. **It must go deeper by encouraging the learner to link the new with the old by using collaborative communities and engaging in questioning and problem-solving techniques. There is also the strong belief that learning experiences, particularly in music, should be presented in "authentic" and holistic ways, have the possibility of multiple outcomes, and be structured with ample opportunity for teachers to offer guidance ("scaffold" learning).** (Wiggins, Blair, Ruthmann, & Shively, 2006, pp. 85-86)

### **Constructionist Views Support Important Foundation for Current "Hot" Topics in Music Teaching and Learning**

Critical Pedagogy (Abrahams, 2005)  
(teachers teach students, students teach teachers)

Contemporary/Progressive Pedagogy

"Contemporary/Improviser/Composer/Performer" Paradigm vs "Performative/Interpretative"

Student Inclusion and Diversity for People and Music  
Democratic Learning

Situated Cognition

Collaborative Learning

Community Engagement

Teacher Reflection

Student-Centered Learning

Informal and Formal Learning

Student Voice

Student Agency

Technology and the "Maker Movement"

When students are given space to explore freely, to work democratically, they will create (from one of *their* musical worlds) a context about which they are familiar, conversant, or curious. We might refer to context as a workable space, a landscape for exploring the curiosities of a given genre. Context, thus, may take the form of a popular tradition like progressive rock, a contemporary brass ensemble, or the reimagining of 1930s swing music. The materials that students choose to explore will represent a world that is theirs, a world they understand, a world that defines who they are. (Allsup, 2003, p. 35)

### **Strengths**

- Children seem to enjoy learning by being actively involved
- Music learning is seen in a more demonstrated way
- Teachers seem successful with strategies that encourage thoughtful student involvement
- Constructivism gives students a sense of ownership of ideas and a sense of participation in project design and assessment—in this way more democratic
- Students see school work as more authentic and more rooted in real work expectations
- Students are motivated to create because of what they sense is a safer and less threatening environment
- Constructivism promotes social and communication skills as students learn to negotiate with others

### **Weaknesses**

- Is this approach elitist? (Delpit, 1996) Some argue that this theory and other “progressive” approaches work best in more privileged backgrounds where the likelihood of better materials, teachers, and home environments abound
- Children may emerge from constructivist units of study missing key knowledge if teachers are not thoughtful about individual assessment
- Teacher educators may find constructivism difficult to teach a novice teacher because of the lack of good models in the young teacher’s experience
- The theory is not well understood by parents, administrators, and other stakeholders who expect and perhaps demand a more direct approach
- There appears to be little “hard evidence” that children learn more in the long run; there are major difficulties in the measurement of constructivist teaching

### **Adaptive Constructivism Webster, 2011**

- May not always be about constructivist approaches: much in our profession that can be established effectively with top-down approaches
- But there is much room for encouraging the application of this knowledge in constructivist ways
- Students must learn to think in an about sound in ways that end in independent thinking
- For those learning topics that do not involve sound (e.g. ways to practice, work musically with others, deal with parents, administrators) similar principles of constructive engagement apply
- Less emphasis on covering large amounts in ineffective ways and more emphasis on covering smaller amounts more effectively

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