

Constructivism is basically a theory -- based on observation and scientific study -- about how people learn. By questioning themselves and their strategies, students in the constructivist classroom ideally become "expert learners." This gives them ever-broadening tools to keep learning. With a well-planned classroom environment, the students learn HOW TO LEARN. You might look at it as a spiral. When they continuously reflect on their experiences, students find their ideas gaining in complexity and power, and they develop increasingly strong abilities to integrate new information. One of the teacher's main roles becomes to encourage this learning and reflection process. For example, 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. The constructivist teacher provides tools such as problem-solving and inquiry-based learning activities with which students formulate and test their ideas, draw conclusions and inferences, and pool and convey their knowledge in a collaborative learning environment. In the most general sense, it usually means encouraging students to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving) to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing. 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. Contrary to criticisms by some (conservative/traditional) educators, constructivism does not dismiss the active role of the teacher or the value of expert knowledge. Constructivism transforms the student from a passive recipient of information to an active participant in the learning process. Always guided by the teacher, students construct their knowledge actively rather than just mechanically ingesting knowledge from the teacher or the textbook. In any case, we are active creators of our own knowledge.