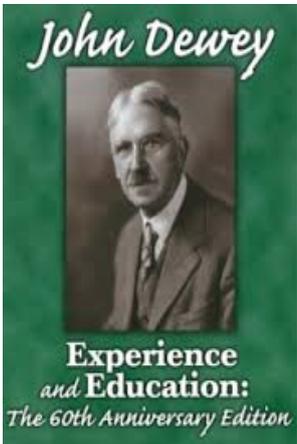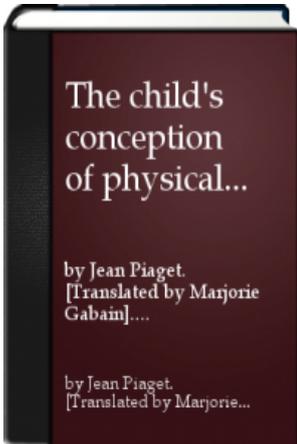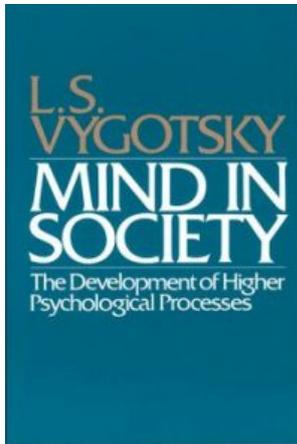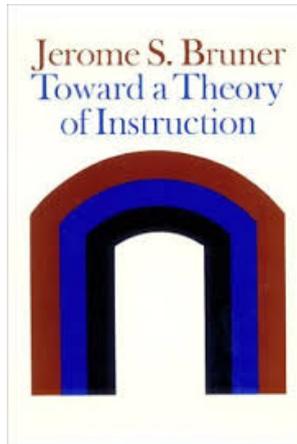▶

Constructivism

Above: John Abbott discusses the theory of constructivism in learning

Constructivism as a learning theory

Constructivism is a learning theory that involves creating meaning from experiences and from reflections on those experiences. It is based on the learner being active in constructing their own understanding, not being a passive recipient of information. Group-work and project based investigative learning can be seen as examples of a constructivist approach to education.Constructivism is a large area in learning theory so this article only provides a starting point for further research.

Theorists commonly associated with constructivism are Bruner and Dewey, as well as Piaget and Vygotsky who are considered to be the originators of cognitive-constructivism and social constructivism. These two strands, and the differences between them, are key to understanding a constructivist approach to teaching and learning.

JOHN DEWEY	JEAN PIAGET	LEV VYGOTSKY	JEROME BRUNER
John Dewey / Experience and Education: The 60th Anniversary Edition	The child's conception of physical... by Jean Piaget. [Translated by Marjorie Gabain].... by Jean Piaget. [Translated by Marjorie...]	L.S. VYGOTSKY MIND IN SOCIETY The Development of Higher Psychological Processes	Jerome S. Bruner Toward a Theory of Instruction

Constructivism and teaching practice

The table below is from WNetEducation from their excellent workshop on understanding how contructivism relates to teaching practice:

Traditional Classroom	Constructivist Classroom
Curriculum begins with the parts of the whole. Emphasizes basic skills.	Curriculum emphasizes big concepts, beginning with the whole and expanding to include the parts.
Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.	Pursuit of student questions and interests is valued.
Materials are primarily textbooks and workbooks.	Materials include primary sources of material and manipulative materials.
Learning is based on repetition.	Learning is interactive, building on what the student already knows.
Teachers disseminate information to students; students are recipients of knowledge.	Teachers have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge.
Teacher's role is directive, rooted in authority.	Teacher's role is interactive, rooted in negotiation.
Assessment is through testing, correct answers.	Assessment includes student works, observations, and points of view, as well as tests. Process is as important as product.
Knowledge is seen as inert.	Knowledge is seen as dynamic, ever changing with our experiences.
Students work primarily alone.	Students work primarily in groups.

Constructivist teaching approaches

An interesting video from Hoston University by Susie Gronset explores constructivist teaching approaches:

Now, explore the resources below which will help you examine using constructivism in your teaching.

Applying constructivist design principles in online learning
Martha Schwer and Jennifer Lewis define the role of cognition and learning to help you determine the most appropriate design strategies for your online learners.

Constructivism and social networks
This link by Alex Gonzalez explores the impact of a social networking technology, *Edmodo*, on social constructivist approaches to teaching.

Vygotsky's Zone of Proximal Development
It is important to understand and use the term 'zone of proximal development', or ZPD as it is known, correctly:

Bruner's Spiral Curriculum
Taken from Smith, M.K. (2002) *Jerome S. Bruner and the process of education*, the encyclopedia of informal education. http://infed.org/mobi/jerome-bruner-and-the-process-of-education/ Retrieved: 05/03/2016
Click for the full article...

Jerome Bruner and the process of education

Jerome Bruner and the process of education. Jerome Bruner has made a profound contribution to our appreciation of the process of education and to the development of curriculum theory. We explore his work and draw out some important lessons for informal educators and those concerned with the practice of lifelong learning.

contents: introduction · jerome s. bruner – his life · the process of education · the culture of education · conclusion · further reading and references · links

> It is surely the case that schooling is only one small part of how a culture inducts the young into its canonical ways. Indeed, schooling may even be at odds with a culture's other ways of inducting the young into the requirements of communal living…. What has become increasingly clear… is that education is not just about conventional school matters like curriculum or standards or testing. What we resolve to do in school only makes sense when considered in the broader context of what the society intends to accomplish through its educational investment in the young. How one conceives of education, we have finally come to recognize, is a function of how one conceives of culture and its aims, professed and otherwise.(Jerome S. Bruner 1996: ix-x)

Further resources
This resource by Craig Rusbult is 'a links-page that combines executive summaries of essential ideas (for busy people with lots to do and not enough time) and links to pages exploring the ideas in more depth'.
http://www.asa3.org/ASA/education/teach/active.htm
Sydney University have a wealth of interesting constructivist resources and links:

Constructivist theory

Berkley University provides an excellent definition of cognitive-constructivism:

Learning Theory Research: Cognitive-Constructivism

University College Dublin looks at contructivism in action, assessment and the

roles of the teacher and learner:

Constructivism and Social Constructivism in the Classroom