



Culver Teaching & Learning Model

Philosophy

Constructivism is the view that young people are actively involved in constructing the worlds of meaning they inhabit. Based upon extensive research in cognitive and developmental psychology, constructivism has significant implications for all aspects of curriculum. The central question of any curriculum should be this: What do we want our students to understand? No reform – no change in schedule, technology, assessment or methodology should be considered which can't be shown to improve student understanding. Because understanding is built by the student, not the teacher, new learning depends heavily on what is already understood. New knowledge is built into and onto current knowledge.

Pedagogy

The implications of constructivism for teaching methodology and assessment practice are profound and ramified. Recognizing that students are active meaning makers and that they sometimes create misconceptions which are remarkably resistant to change, teachers must focus on creating classroom environments where understanding grows and on developing assessment instruments that help them to diagnose misunderstandings and foster new understandings. In addition to traditional pedagogies such as lecture-discussion, teachers ought to embrace a variety of classroom methods that call upon students to actively engage in the construction of meaning, both individually and collaboratively, e.g. Harkness discussions, laboratory investigations, ensemble performances, group presentations, and so on.

Assessment

A comprehensive system of assessment should provide students with both formative (to support performance) and summative (to measure performance) feedback that is focused on explicit course goals. All assessments, whether formative or summative, should provide students with clear and detailed feedback from which they can deepen understanding and sharpen self-evaluation. Critical thinking – the capacity to reflect critically on what we know and how we have come to know it – is necessary for deep understanding in any discipline. Critical thinking depends upon dispositions to clear and deliberate thinking that must be carefully cultivated. To this end, assessments should be modeled on the kinds of meaningful tasks that professionals engage in everyday. Foundational skills and basic content knowledge are vital to success on such authentic tasks, and should be assessed accordingly.

Grading

To cultivate higher-order cross-disciplinary thinking skills such as interpretation and analysis, and to foster critical thinking dispositions such as inquisitiveness and open-mindedness, persistence and flexibility, honesty and fair-mindedness, students should be given feedback on both their authentic performances – i.e. assessments that provide evidence that central learning goals have been met – and their learning processes. Performance grades capture achievement (on tests, lab reports, projects, papers – in speeches, plays, concerts, recitals) relative to universal standards, while Process grades record the development of attitude, disposition, effort, and mindset relative to individuated standards. Performance grades measure the fruits of learning, while Process grades register the habits-of-mind of the learner.