

Hobbs, R. & Frost, R. (2003). Illuminating constructivism: Structure, discourse, and subjectivity in a middle school classroom. *Reading Research Quarterly*, 37, 278-308.

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Summary: A close investigation was made of language arts activities in a seventh grade civics classroom over an eight week period. Emphasis was placed on the difference in learning involved in constructivist and non-constructivist type lessons.

Assumptions:

- Constructivism is defined as a discourse that situates learning in an authentic context.
- Constructivism can be seen through student interactions and classroom discussions.
- The classroom relationships, discursive storylines, and student histories all affect the way in which constructivism develops in classrooms.

Findings:

- After observing 85 language activities, the researcher found 36 to be constructivist in nature.
- Students struggled to understand the meaning of interdisciplinary learning in a constructivist environment, often asking what subject they were currently learning.
- Students' positions in the classroom hierarchy affected (both positively and negatively) the constructivist environment.
- "Thirthing" (the process of changing binary relationships, such as yes/no answers) to multiple answers opens new opportunities for learning and thinking.

Conclusions:

- Different power and knowledge relationships were opened and built through the constructivist process as students shared and negotiated power relationships.
- Students perceive boundaries to their subject matter and struggle with the lack of disciplinary boundaries inherent to constructivist pedagogy.

Suggestions for Teachers:

- Be patient with students' struggles with multiple answers and interdisciplinary work.

Suggestions for Literacy Leaders:

- Support and advocate for interdisciplinary scheduling and teaching.