

Philosophy

The design and development of Moodle is guided by a particular philosophy of learning, a way of thinking that you may see referred to in shorthand as a "*social constructionist pedagogy*". (Some of you scientists may already be thinking "soft education mumbo jumbo" and reaching for your mouse, but please read on - this is useful for every subject area!)

This page tries to explain in simple terms what that phrase means by unpacking **four main concepts** behind it. Note that each of these is summarising one view of an immense amount of diverse research so these definitions may seem thin if you have read about these before.

If these concepts are completely new to you then it is likely that these ideas will be hard to understand at first - all I can recommend is that you read it carefully, while thinking about your own experiences of trying to learn something.

1. Constructivism

This point of view maintains that people actively **construct** new knowledge as they interact with their environment.

Everything you read, see, hear, feel, and touch is tested against your prior knowledge and if it is viable within your mental world, may form new knowledge you carry with you. Knowledge is strengthened if you can use it successfully in your wider environment. You are not just a memory bank passively absorbing information, nor can knowledge be "transmitted" to you just by reading something or listening to someone.

This is not to say you can't learn anything from reading a web page or watching a lecture, obviously you can, it's just pointing out that there is more interpretation going on than a transfer of information from one brain to another.

2. Constructionism

Constructionism asserts that learning is particularly effective when constructing something for others to experience. This can be anything from a spoken sentence or an internet posting, to more complex artifacts like a painting, a house or a software package.

For example, you might read this page several times and still forget it by tomorrow - but if you were to try and explain these ideas to someone else in your own words, or produce a slideshow that explained these concepts, then I can guarantee you'd have a better understanding that is more integrated into your own ideas. This is why people take notes during lectures, even if they never read the notes again.

3. Social Constructivism

This extends the above ideas into a social group constructing things for one

another, collaboratively creating a small culture of shared artifacts with shared meanings. When one is immersed within a culture like this, one is learning all the time about how to be a part of that culture, on many levels.

A very simple example is an object like a cup. The object can be used for many things, but its shape does suggest some "knowledge" about carrying liquids. A more complex example is an online course - not only do the "shapes" of the software tools indicate certain things about the way online courses should work, but the activities and texts produced within the group as a whole will help shape how each person behaves within that group.

4. Connected and Separate

This idea looks deeper into the motivations of individuals within a discussion. **Separate** behaviour is when someone tries to remain 'objective' and 'factual', and tends to defend their own ideas using logic to find holes in their opponent's ideas. **Connected** behaviour is a more empathic approach that accepts subjectivity, trying to listen and ask questions in an effort to understand the other point of view. **Constructed** behaviour is when a person is sensitive to both of these approaches and is able to choose either of them as appropriate to the current situation.

In general, a healthy amount of connected behaviour within a learning community is a very powerful stimulant for learning, not only bringing people closer together but promoting deeper reflection and re-examination of their existing beliefs.

Once you are thinking about all these issues, it helps you to focus on the experiences that would be best for learning from the learner's point of view, rather than just publishing and assessing the information you think they need to know. It can also help you realise how each participant in a course can be a teacher as well as a learner. Your job as a 'teacher' can change from being 'the source of knowledge' to being an influencer and role model of class culture, connecting with students in a personal way that addresses their own learning needs, and moderating discussions and activities in a way that collectively leads students towards the learning goals of the class.

Obviously Moodle doesn't force this style of behaviour, but this is what it is best at supporting. In future, as the technical infrastructure of Moodle stabilises, further improvements in pedagogical support will be a major direction for Moodle development.