Critical Constructivism

Critical constructivism extends and adjusts constructivism, which opposes positivism and asserts that nothing represents an objective, neutral perspective. Merging constructivist or constructionist views with critical epistemology, developed by the Frankfurt School, critical constructivism encourages critical thinking and criticality in the research process. Based on the understanding that knowledge of the world is an interpretation between people that is crafted in a contextualised space, critical constructivists argue that knowledge is temporally and culturally situated, therefore knowledge and phenomena are socially constructed in a dialogue between culture, institutions, and historical contexts. Critical constructivism maintains that historical, social, cultural, economic, and political contexts construct our perspectives on the world, self, and other. Ontologically critical constructivists seek to understand how socio-historic dynamics influence and shape an object of inquiry, and epistemologically critical constructivists explore how the foundations of knowledge of a given context surround an object of inquiry.
Strongly influenced by the work of Joe Kincheloe, which in turn was developed from Paulo Freire’s critical pedagogy, critical constructivism encourages greater personal and social consciousness, helping to develop freedom of thought that recognises authoritarian tendencies and connects knowledge to power, motivating persons to take constructive action. Critical constructivism theorises the connection between power and knowledge, maintaining that in societies only certain groups and institutions can gain prominence and become sanctioned as proprietors of knowledge, and powerful groups maintain their knowledge construction legitimacy by continuously undermining alternative knowledges. This approach works to dismantle mainstream teaching and research practices that, perhaps unknowingly, are implicit in the reproduction of systems of class, race, cultural, and gender oppression, aiming to encourage reflexivity and the opening of questions through conversation and critical self-reflection. Critical constructivism encourages the establishment of dialogue orientated towards achieving mutual understanding. Critical constructivist thought, which has been adopted in many critical approaches, for example, postcolonial, decolonial and feminist theories, encourages the questioning of dominant systems of knowledge production and the opening-up of a dialogue concerned with critical awareness.
Following Freire, critical constructivists reiterate the notion that knowledge is not a substance that can be deposited like money in a bank and taken out when time for use arrives. Knowledge is constructed in the minds of all people – minds that are formed by the society around them. However, knowledge from some societies is privileged over that of others. Critical constructivism is the practice of searching out alternative discourses and new ways of thinking, while also exposing subjugated knowledge. As such, this practice works to expose elitist assumptions embedded in existing knowledge, questions dominant forms of knowledge production and seeks out non-Western epistemologies so as to include previously excluded and marginalised knowledge in mainstream discourse.

**Essential Reading**


**Recommended Reading**


Questions

How does critical constructivism aim to influence teaching and research?

What is the relationship between critical constructivism and critical theory?

How does critical constructivism contribute to new or alternative knowledge production?

How does critical constructivism facilitate the dissemination of new or alternative knowledge from the South, which is often located outside of mainstream Western discourse?

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