**ACS Constructivist Approach**: *Rich Environment forActive Learning*

ACS takes a constructivist approach to therapy based on the principles of ITI, Integrative Therapeutic Instruction developed by Clinical Director Ken Rabac.   ACS stresses client self-direction by combining three theory bases:

 **AUTONOMY      SELF-DETERMINATION     SELF REGULATION**.

Each of these theory bases has been verified by long, painstaking scholarly research that indicates that each approach contributes to optimal client success.

These approaches and the matrix of specific topics presented at ACS are delivered in a casual friendly atmosphere and a ***constructivist*** environment. Review the following material on Constructivism and then move on to the discussion topics to be addressed in your table group.

| CONSTRUCTIVISM |
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Constructivist Theory and REALs

There are three basic characteristics common to constructivist theory:

1.**Knowledge is not a product to be accumulated but an active process in which the learner attempts to make sense out of the world.**

2.People conditionalize their knowledge in personal ways . . (Gurney, 1989 in Grabinger, 1996, p. 669). That is, they acquire knowledge in **forms that enable them to use that knowledge later** (Bransford et al., 1990, in Grabinger, p. 669).

3.The construction of knowledge is based on the collaboration and social negotiation of meaning. Common understandings and shared meanings are developed through **interaction among peers and teachers.** (Grabinger, 1996, pp. 669-670)

> **Topic**:  What does it mean to suggest that knowledge is an active process? What kind of knowledge encountered at ACS regarding substance abuse can be used later? How do peers, counselors and others influence the meaning you derive from counseling?  Who else do you rely on?

Honebein (1996) summarizes "seven goals" of constructivist, learner-centered environments:

- Provide experience with the knowledge construction process [student responsibility for learning].
- Provide experience in and appreciation for multiple perspectives [viewpoints and problem-solving].
- Embed learning in realistic and relevant contexts [authentic learning tasks].
- Encourage ownership and voice in the learning process [student centered with teacher as consultant].
- Embed learning in social experience [encourage collaboration].
- Encourage the use of multiple modes of representation [different mediums].
- Encourage self-awareness of the knowledge construction process [reflection]. (pp. 11-12)
- Although a course can be learner-centered, **this does not insure that students will automatically have the motivation, responsibility, attitudes, or skills to be self-regulating and active learners**. "Rich environments for active learning" or REALs are constructivist based and designed to encourage student responsibility and motivation (Dunlap & Grabinger, 1996a, p. 228). Grabinger & Dunlap (1996) review the elements of REALs.

[REALs] encourage student responsibility, decision making, and intentional learning in an atmosphere of collaboration among students and teachers;
- promote study and investigation within meaningful, authentic, and information-rich contexts; and
- utilize participation in activities that promote high-level thinking processes, including problem solving, experimentation, original creations, discussion, and examination of topics from multiple perspectives (p. 212).

Exploratory/Discovery and Resource-Based Learning

**Exploratory learning, or discovery learning, is "a learning situation in which the principal content of what is to be learned is not given but must be independently discerned by the learner"** (Houston, 1995, p. 86). More generally, " . . . discovery learning can be applied to any learning environment in which the student is actively involved in problem solving" (Bruner, 1961; (Duffy & Cunningham, 1996, pp. 182). The terms 'discovery'

and 'exploratory' have sometimes been used to mean discovery of **"prespecified knowledge"** (Duffy & Bednar, 1992; Duffy & Cunningham, 1996). This interpretation negates, in part or in whole, the constructivist premise that knowledge is built or developed by the learner rather than having prespecified knowledge transmitted to and received by the learner. However, Duffy & Cunningham offer a more apt explanation.

An alternative view of discovery is to think of it in terms of **"invention,"** a personal construction, rather than as a discovery of what exists. From this perspective, we take as the goal of instruction not the acquisition of a specific, well-defined bit of content but rather the ability to learn in a content domain (p. 182).

Neither constructivist theory nor exploratory learning excludes the review and revision of one's understanding in the context of a wider learning community. Rather, they "require the **testing and revision** of the knowledge being built" (Duffy & Bednar, 1992, p. 129).

While engaged in this exploratory and resource-based environment, students need guidance in their research, information synthesizing, and knowledge building. Two methods, ( are ) **scaffolding and coaching**… Scaffolding is designed to get students through more complex tasks with just as much support as they need, but no more. . . . Scaffolding is the support given to students as they carry out a task. . . . Coaching provides focused help at critical times and only as much help as is needed (Collins et al., 1996, pp. 8-9).

> Topic:
> The information here is scholarly but informative, how do some of these concepts explain what happens at SCS? What do you think of the idea of creating your own knowledge, based on your own life and understanding with coaching and scaffolding from ACS?