



The Case of the Decomposing Constructivist

Dr. Drummond, now in her eighth year as an associate professor, could almost feel the energy seeping out of her overheated classroom but she did not know how to regain the momentum she had for the lesson only moments before. So she continued lecturing the class of drowsy students on the constructivist theory of educational reform. She justified the decision to herself because she had fallen behind in her syllabus. It was all the students' fault; they kept getting her off track with their questions. And sure enough Richard, that glib young man who loved to hear himself talk, raised his hand. At first she tried not noticing her student; but Richard started waving his arm and saying, "Excuse me. Dr. Drummond. Excuse me. There's a question here." By then the class was thoroughly distracted by the antics. Some of the students covered their snickers and smiles with their hands. Sensing she was losing control of the classroom, she acknowledged the student, who, with exaggerated deference asked his question.

"Dr. Drummond, why do you suppose that some people don't practice what they teach. Oh! Excuse me. I mean to say 'what they preach'?"

"I have no idea, Richard. That's a question for your minister, not for your professor."

"With all due respect, Professor, I'm not sure I understand your answer. My minister is a good woman. She does practice what she preaches."

"Well not all of them do," replied the Dr. Drummond.

"Which ones don't," asked Richard. "Are you saying that maybe some priests and ministers are hypocrites because their lives are often secret scandals?"

"I'm not saying anything about priests or about your minister either."

"But you do agree that we are always hearing about major scandals...sexual improprieties, embezzlement, and a general lack of upholding basic ethical values?"

There then ensued a fifteen minute digression, characterized by a series of illogical and uninformed questions, accusations, and expressions of personal opinion. Other students in the class joined in. Then suddenly, as the class period drew to an end, Richard brought their exchange to an abrupt close by saying, "Thank you Dr. Drummond, I found our conversation really helpful. But I can see by the clock that we have to go to our next class now."

The next day Dr. Drummond called her colleague and mentor, a professor in another department, to make an appointment.



“Deconstructing Constructivist” Discussion Questions:

1. You are the chair and are visiting Dr. Drummond’s class for purposes of faculty evaluation. How do you size up Dr. Drummond’s difficulties and what advice would you give?
2. Because you are the department chair, are there considerations which make developmental evaluation more challenging?
3. If you are serving as a mentor to a faculty colleague, should you or should you not participate in formal evaluations of that colleague, e.g. for tenure or promotion.
4. Questions for peer visitation and teaching evaluation:
 - When should peer visitations occur?
 - How do you prepare to visit a colleagues class?
 - What do you pay attention to when visiting?
 - How do you debrief?
 - How does class visitation info relate to student course evaluation information?
 - How does student learning outcomes assessment relate to teaching evaluation?
 - Are some courses more difficult to teach than others? How is that factored in?