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Constructivism was devised by George Siemens and Stephen Downes as a response to what they saw as an increase in both the role of technology and the volume of information available in the information ecosystem. It builds on concepts from many disciplines, including neuroscience, cognitive science, chaos theory, and network theory. Fundamentally, it posits that the ability to learn and form new connections between facts, ideas, and information sources is more important than the accumulation of knowledge.

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This formation of connections generates a pattern of relationships, or network, at the neural and conceptual levels. This learning occurs in dynamic spaces, where the content and outcome of repeated lessons may not be identical.

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Connectivist principles include meaning-making (which is described as the interaction between thinking and emotion), a teleology of learning (that is, that learning has a goal or application, and is not just an abstract transfer of facts), that learning is a process of connecting nodes or information sources into a network, and that instead of transferring knowledge, we create it. Other principles of Connectivism are listed on our handout.

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Siemens categorized the role of the educator into four metaphors, each relating to an aspect of knowledge creation under the Connectivist model -- The educator as Master Artist, guiding students in a group task; Educator as Network Administrator, guiding students in connecting with each other; Educator as Concierge, helping students to find the resources they seek; and Educator as Curator, showing students around the domain of his or her knowledge.

Connectivism certainly has its critics, most of whom have a hard time seeing Connectivism as a cohesive and separate theory of learning. These concerns are listed in the handout, and you can find the papers which criticize Connectivism, most notably Verhagen and Kop, in the links at the bottom.

Included in the handout is a guide to making a Connectivist-inspired lesson plan. The example makes use of the "Roaring Twenties" and F. Scott Fitzgerald's "The Great Gatsby". The educator is directed to have students explore social content creation and to integrate events in the book with meaning in their own lives.