Constructivism is a theory of learning based on the idea that knowledge is constructed by the knower based on mental activity. Learners are considered to be active organisms seeking meaning. Constructions of meaning may initially bear little relationship to reality (as in the naive theories of children), but will become increasing more complex, differentiated and realistic as time goes on.

It is impossible to discuss constructivism without contrasting it with its opposite, objectivism. Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy and Perry (1991) state the philosophy of objectivism as follows:

Objectivism is a view of the nature of knowledge and what it means to know something. In this view, the mind is an instantiation of a computer, manipulating symbols in the same way....These symbols acquire meaning when an external and independent reality is "mapped" onto them in our interactions in the world. Knowledge, therefore is some entity existing independent of the mind of individuals, and is transferred "inside". Cognition is the rule-based manipulation of these symbols...this school of thought believes that the external world is mind independent (i.e., the same for everyone) and we can say things about it that are objectively, absolutely and unconditionally true or false....Consistent with this view of knowledge, the goal of instruction, from both the behavioral and cognitive information processing perspectives, is to communicate or transfer knowledge to learners in the most efficient, effective manner possible. Knowledge can be completely characterized using the techniques of semantic analysis (or its second cousin, task analysis). One key to efficiency and effectiveness is simplification and regularization: thought is atomistic in that it can be completely broken down into simple building blocks, which form the basis of instruction. (p. 91)

Jonassen (1991) talks about constructivism as follows:

Constructivism, founded on Kantian beliefs, claims that reality is constructed by the knower based upon mental activity. Humans are perceivers and interpreters who construct their own reality through engaging in those mental activities...thinking is grounded in perception of physical and social experiences, which can only be comprehended by the mind. What the mind produces are mental models that explain to the knower what he or she has perceived.... We all conceive of the external reality somewhat differently, based on our unique set of experiences with the world and our beliefs about them. (p. 10)
Bednar, et al (1991) elaborate further:

...the learner is building an internal representation of knowledge, a personal interpretation of experience. This representation is constantly open to change, its structure and linkages forming the foundation to which other knowledge structures are appended. Learning is an active process in which meaning is developed on the basis of experience....Conceptual growth comes from the sharing of multiple perspectives and simultaneous changing of our internal representations in response to those perspectives as well as through cumulative experience.

Consistent with this view of knowledge, learning must be situated in a rich context, reflective of real world contexts, for this constructive process to occur and transfer to environments beyond the school (p. 91-2).

Further readings from the web:

- Piaget