CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH: A NEW WAY OF LEARNING

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ABSTRACT

Education is considered as a third eye of man and is a vast and dynamic process which keeps on changing according to situation, timing, place and conditions. It keeps on moving life long and making the journey of education more comprehensive for learners. Over the years there are many approaches to teaching and learning but the current focus is on constructivist approach to teaching and learning which is gaining a lot of attention in education system now a days. Time has come to effectively explore our educational system and examine the core unit of the whole enterprise, the textbook, the classroom, a setting that is often dominated by teacher talk and student listening. So, for fulfilling the aim of child-centered education, constructivism works efficiently for achieving this aim at hand.

“Constructivism is the view that emphasis the active role of the learner in building understanding and making sense of information”

The most amazing contribution of constructivism is a focus on student-centered learning. A teaching and learning environment dominated by the constructivist approach is different from a teaching and learning environment dominated by the traditional approach. Constructivism has emerged as one of the greatest influences on the practice of education in the last twenty-five years. The present paper is a conceptual paper focusing on the need and importance of constructivist approach in teaching and learning, which provides sufficient light on the learning design required for successful implementation of constructivism in teaching-learning process.

KEYWORDS: Constructivism, Teaching, Learning.

INTRODUCTION

A significant obstacle of our education is that teachers simply transfer knowledge to their students rather student should themselves create it in their own minds. We think that students learn something themselves and some facts are made learnt to them. But in psychology and philosophy some thinkers are of view that child construct their own knowledge and skills themselves. An American psychologist thinks that a person develops knowledge through participation in social activities. Piaget, Dreyer, Posner, Nobeak etc. also thinks the same thing. In psychology this type of thinking is known by the name Constructivist Learning or Constructivism. This constructivist view of learning considers the learner as an active agent in the process of knowledge acquisition. Now, a system where learner receive all information as ready from the teacher is considered inadequate, but instead, it is necessary to pass a system where the learners are active in their educational environment, configure the old information in mind with the new information, and use this information in order to produce new information. Because of this necessity, many countries change their traditional education system and adopt the constructivist learning approach and they organized their institutions of education accordingly. Due to the situations discussed, in the researches and discussions about the education, the constructivisms, now, more and more, used in remarkable way (Cunningham and Duffy, 1996).

Constructivism’s success may be due to the problems or frustrations that educators faced with behaviorist educational practices. In 1960s behaviorism came in to educational field through psychology with an air of authority that is startling. The famous framework was prepared that if the teachers provided the correct medium or format) and Adapt (remix, transform, and build upon the material) under the Attribution-NonCommercial terms.

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Constructivism is a very complex approach for different educators and teachers in has different meanings, as a work at hand they modify its meaning in their own experience (Bereiter, 1994). The meaning of constructivism varies to one's perspective and position. Within educational contexts there are philosophical meaning of constructivism, as well as personal constructivism as described by Piaget (1967), Social constructivism outlined by Vygotsky (1978), Racial constructivism advocated by Von Glasersfeld (1995), Constructivist epistemologies and educational constructivism (Mathews, 1998). Social Constructivism and educational constructivism have had the greatest impact on instruction and curriculum design because they seem to be the most conducive to integration into current educational approaches.

Defining Constructivism:

• “Constructivism is not a theory about teaching …it is a theory about knowledge and learning …the theory defines knowledge as temporary, development, socially and culturally mediated, and thus, non-objective.” (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p.vii)

• “The central principles of this approach are that learners can only make sense of new situations in terms of their existing understanding. Learning involves an active process in which learners construct meaning by linking new ideas with their existing knowledge.”(Naylor & Keogh, 1999, p.93)

• “Constructivist Learning is a process in which individual construct their own knowledge through meaningful interactions with the world.” (Good & Brophy)

One of the common threads of constructivism that run across all these definitions is the idea that development of understanding requires the learner actively engage in meaning-making. In contrast to behaviorism, constructivists argue that “knowledge is not passively received but built up by the cognizing subject”(Von Glasersfeld, 1995). Thus, constructivists shift the focus from knowledge as a product to knowing as a process.

Types of Constructivism

Constructivism builds on knowledge previously gained by the learner and furthers learning by constructing learning through interior mental processes. Constructivism is a very complex approach for different educators and teachers in has different meanings, as a work at hand they modify its meaning in their own terms but to take of formally constructivism can be safely classified in to two types, i.e., Cognitive Constructivism and Social Constructivism.

• Cognitive Constructivism: In cognitive constructivism, ideas are constructed in individuals through a personal process. Cognitive constructivism deals with how an individual construct his understanding of the world around him, based on their values, beliefs, prior knowledge, self-control or identity. This form of constructivism is profounded by Piaget.

• Social Constructivism: Where ideas are constructed through interaction with the teacher and other students. Public bodies of knowledge are social.
Conceptually both the forms of constructivism are different but ultimately form overall constructivism or constructed learning elements for students to easily grasp the meaning for the student.

**Characteristics of Constructivism**

As the school of psychology, constructivist approach has its features which basically provides light on the framework of this approach, these characteristics of constructivist learning helps the teacher to create the similar kind of learning environment for the learner to flourish his new knowledge in relation to the knowledge base he already has. The following are the characteristics of constructivism:

- Constructivism emphasis the active role of the learner in the teaching-learning situation.
- Learner's autonomy and initiative is accepted and encouraged in this approach.
- Learning involves a process of mental construction.
- Rich and complex environment is required for mental processes to work on.
- Constructivism supports co-operative learning.
- Learning is based on active prior understanding.
- Learner's natural curiosity is nurtured.

Tam (2000) lists the following four basic characteristics of constructivist learning environment, which must be considered when implementing constructivist approach in education:

1) Knowledge will be shared between teachers and students.
2) Teachers and Students will share authority.
3) The teacher's role is one of a facilitator or guide.
4) Learning groups will consist of small numbers of heterogeneous students.

**Features of Constructivist Education**

Children learn best when they construct their own personal understanding based on active interaction with their environment. An individual's own knowledge, attitude and learning experiences shape one's unique perspective about the process of education in turn influences one's decisions as an administrator, a manager or policy maker in adulthood. In constructivist educational environment learners are active and collective work is done. The basic features of constructivist education is as under:

In the constructivist learning environment, debates, and activities for the interests and needs of learners, a certain uncertainty and collaboration to provide creative thinking are organized for the learners (Taylor, Fraser and Fisher, 1997). In such an environment, students are motivated and directed to solving the problem with collaborative work. While doing these works, students' experiences are taken into account (Rice and Wilson, 1999). In the constructivist learning environment, the technology is used at the highest level. In the technology-assisted classrooms, project-based training, methods and techniques based on the collaborative work are used in order to make learners active (Means and Olson, 1995). In terms of these aspects, the constructivist approach proposes radical changes in teaching and learning environment unlike the traditional educational approach. In an environment, in a relaxed manner without being under any pressure, using students' past experiences and ideas acquired by a variety of sources, working on real-life problems by doing researches and interrogations, continuing teaching outside of the classroom, and where students are responsible for their own learning, it is seen that these learning approaches have a positive influence on students' academic achievement (Tenenbaum, Naidu, Jegede and Austin, 2001, Maypole and Davies, 2001). All of these in mind, in an educational environment dominated by constructivist learning, learning will be realized in a high level of efficiency and durability (Tapşınar, 2012). In the constructivist approach, in place of product-oriented learning, focusing on the process of learning by exhibiting, project work, portfolio, scoring key diagnostic tree, checklists, performance evaluation, self-assessment, alternative assessment tools such as peer reviews should be used. Here, which is evaluated is not the product of learning but the learning process and that students continue learning throughout the assessment and evaluation studies. Considering all of this information, it can be concluded that the constructivist learning approach which use a different view in learning activities, have an important contribution on the academic achievement of students and on the durability of the informations learned.

**Principles of Constructivist Classroom**

- **Principle of Activity**: Students themselves are inquirer, explorer so they remain active in the teaching-learning process. They set their goals and even means of their assessment.
- **Principle of Construction**: In constructivist approach learning is a constructive process. Students construct their new knowledge on their experiences and knowledge.
- **Principle of Collaboration**: They learn through collaborative efforts and also in co-operation with each other. It helps them to explore new knowledge in an easy way.
- **Principle of Conversation**: Through conversation among students and teacher or between student –student they construct their new knowledge.
- **Principle of Complexity**: In Constructivist classroom such a situations, environment, skills, content and tasks are employed which are relevant, authentic realistic and represents the natural complexities of the real world environment.
- **Principle of Reflection**: The process of learning through self reflection enables them to become master of their own learning and helps in self-analytical, self regulation, self-awareness.

Also there are many psychologists how have suggested some more principles of constructivist learning as Driscoll(2000) has given following principles for designing learning in constructivism:

1) Embed learning in complex, realistic and relevant environment.
2) Provide a social negotiation as an integral part of learning.
3) Support multiple perspectives and the use of multiple modes of representation.
4) Encourage ownership in learning.
5) Nurture self-awareness of the knowledge construction process.

**Relevance and Implications of Constructivist Approach in Teaching-Learning Process**

Constructivism allows teachers to take instructional approaches that are congruent with the current research on learning. Taking learning as an active process, keeping students previous knowledge into consideration, building on preconceptions and eliciting conflicting conflict, teachers can design instruction that goes
Beyond rote learning to meaningful learning that is more likely to lead to deeper, longer lasting understandings. The influence of constructivism in education today can be seen in a variety of curricula as well as instructional practices. Relevance on need of constructivism in education can be make clear through following points:

- This is active form of learning as students learn more, enjoy more and are actively involved in the process.
- This is helps in transfer of learning, the students organize and create new knowledge based on prior one.
- Through constructivist approach social skills of students are enhanced, as the work in also done in groups and in co-operative manner.
- Development of communication skills in child through active participation in the learning activities.
- Students natural curiosity in also nurtured through this approach, they learn to ask questions and solve their curiosity.
- Many of the opportunities are provided to the students for ownership, responsibilities lies in hands of the learners.
- In this approach to teaching and learning, teacher feels less burdened as students remain more active.
- Development of higher order intellectual abilities which helps the learner to develop the skill of evaluation, abstract thinking, reasoning etc.
- It encourages and accept student autonomy and initiative.
- Encouragement to students to construct relations and create metaphors.

Considering all the above significance of constructivism we can say that it as a teaching-learning approach or philosophy that is focused on laying utmost responsibilities on students shoulders and encourage them to construct or discover his own knowledge from things available in the existing environment.

CONCLUSION

Constructivism in education emerged after the behaviorist movement loses its importance. The constructivist focuses on individual and his capabilities in constructing new knowledge from the present environment. In Constructivist approach, the work of planning and development of the learning experiences is mutually shared and negotiated. The teacher and students together make decisions about content, activities and approaches associated with teaching-learning process to be carried out in the classroom or outside the classroom in other learning environments (Woolfolk, 2004). Finally, Constructivism's greatest contributions to education may be through the shift in emphasis from knowledge as a product to knowing as a process. This legacy of constructivism will likely prove to be a lasting and meaningful shift in the structure of schooling.

REFERENCES