

CONSTRUCTIVISM: AND IT’S APPLICATION IN TEACHING SOCIAL STUDIES AT SECONDARY SCHOOL LEVEL

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ABSTRACT

Education is an important aspect of social, economic, political and cultural life of an individual. Thus fruitful learning cannot be achieved in isolation. The students of secondary level are very smart and always thirst for some new ways of learning. Teaching means not merely transfer of information to students. Instead of this the students themselves must construct and reconstruct learning/knowledge on the basis of their previous knowledge. General belief about social science curriculum is, it is boring and non-utility subject than natural sciences and social science subjects are text centered and theoretical in nature. . But unfortunately many of the social science teacher’s follows old traditional methods like lecture method, memorization of facts and incidents etc. Therefore the objective of present study is to provide an intense look into constructivist theory and its need in teaching social studies at secondary level. Because social studies subject is equally important like other sciences. Hence the teaching learning approach in social science needs to be revitalized. Constructivism is a dynamic approach and that could be applied in a classroom by the teacher to make social studies teaching and learning more effective. The study therefore concluded that teachers need to reflect on their practice in order to apply these ideas to their work and the constructivist teacher’s role is work like a facilitator in the teaching learning process and encourage the students to construct the knowledge themselves.

Keywords: Constructivism, non-utility, curriculum, dynamic approach.

Introduction

Man is a social being by his inherent nature. He is bound to seek social adjustment and coordination with his environmental surroundings. Education as a helpful instrument for adjustment and better living of human beings. Social studies is one of the important part in secondary school curriculum. It mainly deals with man and his interaction with fellow beings, his

surroundings and environment. It draws its subject matter and learning experience from various disciplines of social science such as history, geography, economics, civics. The main aim of teaching social studies is development of intelligent person as well as developing capabilities to solve his day to day problems and making every child a responsible citizen of our democratic country. This is why the subject social studies have been included as a compulsory subject in school curriculum at all levels. How they are able to solve the problems? It is possible only when they have higher order and reflective thinking generates ideas and knowledge that can be applied in our real life situation with a view to solve our day to day problems. Constructivism is an approach to teaching and learning. Students learn by fitting new information together with what they already know. Constructivism suggests that children’s construct knowledge from their past experience. By keeping this in view the present paper provides insight how constructivist approach fruitful in teaching social studies.

Concept of social studies

Social studies is a study related to the society or social fabric in which on lives. All that what exists at present in one’s society including its past and prediction about its future can thus make a subject matter of social studies. It is the subject or source of knowledge that helps in providing information about all essentials related to human society with regard to its organization and working during different periods. Social studies draws subject material from social sciences and few other disciplines. But it is not mere aggregation and collection of the discrete material and unrelated topics from different social science discipline. The Encyclopedia of educational research provides clear conception in regard as follows: One should not think that social studies is mere a combination or arithmetic total of History, Civics, and Geography. Of course this subject derives a lot from these but only such events of the past only those features of earth’s surface and those ideas of social organizations are taken, which have a clear traceable and remarkable relation with the present and daily life-(Harris 1960:1296)

In this way in its true concept social studies should not be treated as a mere collection or aggregate of the subjects but we should regard it as a close and appropriate integration of the material and learning experiences of these discipline helpful in the attainment of the stipulated objectives of teaching of social studies.

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Origin of the term constructivism

The term appears to be Russian in origin (Konstruktivizm).

According to the Oxford Dictionary of difficult words (200:95): “Constructivism is a style or movement in art in which assorted mechanical objects are combined into abstract mobile structural forms. The movement originated in Russia in the 1920s and has influenced many aspects of modern architecture and design.”

The chambers dictionary (1995:366) defines constructivism as

“A non representational style of art, especially sculpture and architecture using man made industrial materials and process such as twisting and welding” and also as “non- realistic style in stage sets, using steps, platforms, etc(also constructivism)”

The new Encyclopedia Britannica (1985) elaborates

“Constructivism, Russian artistic and architectural movement that was first influenced by Cubism and Futurism and is generally considered to have been initiated in 1913 with the ‘painting reliefs’- abstract geometric constructions- of Vladimir Tatlin. Antoine Pevsner and Naum Galeo joined Tatlin and his followers in Moscow and upon publication of their jointly written Realistic manifesto in 1920 they became the spokesmen of the movement. It is from the manifesto that the name constructivism was derived, one of the directives was ‘to construct’ art. Because of their admiration for machines and technology, Functionalism and modern industrial materials such as plastic steel and glass, they were also called artist- engineers”.

Thus the term ‘constructivism’ seems to have originated in the field of art and architecture. However, over the years, it has exerted a lot of influence in various fields of knowledge and learning the basic connotation of the term remains –“to construct.”

Constructivism is a unique learning theory and it is associated with cognitive psychology. These approaches mainly focus on ability of learner to construct the knowledge themselves.

Some of the theories associated with constructivism are: John Dewey, Vygotsky, Jean Piaget, Jerome Bruner, Seymour Papert, and Mitchell Resnick. The main belief of constructivism is that all humans have the ability to construct knowledge in their own minds through the process of discovery and problem solving. Learning according to constructivists is a question of motivating an individual to attach new meaning to past cognitive expression. In constructivism individuals create or construct their own new understanding o knowledge through the interconnection of what they already know and believe and the ideas events and activities with which they come in contact. This

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approach gives importance to acquisition of knowledge through involvement instead of imitation or repetition. Learning activities in constructivist settings are characterized by active engagement, inquire, problem solving and collaboration with others.

Teacher plays the role of guide, facilitator and co explorer. He should encourage the learner through question, challenges. Correct answers and single interpretations are deemphasized. Constructivist teaching is based on the belief that learning occurs as learners are actively involved in the process of knowledge construction as opposed to passively receiving information. In this approach the makers of knowledge are learners. Dewey rightly said that learning opportunity should be given to individuals to link present content to their previous experiences and knowledge then only the education will be effective.

Piaget’s constructivist suggests that we learn by expanding our knowledge by experiences which are generated through play from infancy to adulthood which are necessary for learning. According to constructivism children are not a blank sheet so knowledge cannot be imparted without child’s involvement .Therefore children learn better when they are allowed to construct knowledge based on experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences.

According to Audrey Gray the characteristics of constructivist classrooms are

- Learners active involvement
- Democratic environment
- Student centered interactive activity
- Teachers role is only a facilitator and facilitates the process of learning
- Students are more autonomous and encouraged to be more responsible

Role of Teacher

In the constructivist class room the role of teacher is facilitate discussion. Hence the role of teacher is only guiding the students by asking some thought provoking questions. David Jonassen identified three major roles for facilitator to support students in constructivist learning environment;

- Modeling
- Coaching
- Scaffolding

Modeling- Jonassen describes modeling as the most commonly used instructional technology.

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There are two types of modeling, behavioral modeling of the overt performance and cognitive modeling of the covert cognitive processes.

Coaching –For Jonassen the role of coach is complex and inexact. She acknowledges that a good coach motivates learners, analyzes their performance, provides feedback and provides proper advice.

Scaffolding-It is more systematic approach to supporting the learner, focusing on the task, the environment, the teacher and learner. Scaffolding provides temporary frameworks to support learning and students performance beyond their capacities.

Educational implications of constructivist learning

Constructivism strongly believes in the activities. Teacher is a guide and facilitator of learning activity student becomes active participants. Brooks and Brooks (1993) summarize a large segment of the literature on descriptions of ‘constructivist teachers’. They conceive of constructivist teachers as someone who will:

- Encourage and accept student autonomy and initiatives
- Use a wide variety of materials including raw data, primary sources, and encourage students to use them
- Inquire about students understanding of concept before his own understanding of those concepts
- Encourage students to engage in dialogue with the teacher and with one another
- Encourage student inquiry by asking thoughtful, open ended questions and encourage students to ask questions to each other and seek elaboration of students initial responses
- Engage students in experiences that show contradictions to initial understanding and then encourage discussion
- Provide time for students to construct relationships and create metaphors
- Assess students understanding through application and performance of open structured tasks

Constructivism and social studies teaching

Social studies deal about human relationships.NCF 2005 states that social studies includes wide range of content drawn from different descriptions like history ,geography, political science,

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economics , sociology , anthropology. Knowledge of social studies is the base for just and peaceful society. It also states that there is a general belief that no much career options for those students specializing in social sciences.

Earlier fundamental purpose of teaching social science is to educate the students on how to become effective citizens. But now the aim is changed. So the method of teaching social studies to be revitalized by adopting new technique which foster creativity and critical thinking power. The nature has provided each child a tremendous energy. They possess curiosity and wish to know things for themselves. Students are interested even in the study of social science. Because of defective method students lost interest. Hence there is necessity to adopt new technique. Most of the progressive thinkers and progressive countries adopted constructivist approach. They believed that activity is an important instrument of education. Children are active by nature Constructivism is a powerful derives roused in children. The hands and minds are ever ready to do new things. If he does not get the opportunity to construct, then it begins to destroy. So always a good method of teaching must provide numerous opportunities of participation, they should aim at developing the capacity of clear thinking, should expand student’s interest. There are some innovative and cooperative teaching strategies like think pair share, round robin, buzz, gallery walk, zigsaw method etc. These techniques give more importance to constructivist learning. There is new model of teaching that is 5E .This model was developed by Roger Bybee, basically it was developed for science teaching but it has great utility in social teaching. Most of the teachers still following traditional method. In this regard the teacher could be given necessary training then only the constructivist approach will be effective.

Hence in every teacher education centers proper training to be given to every student teachers about how to use constructivist approach in classroom. Teacher educators also must adopt constructivist method in the class. So the student teachers can get clear picture of constructivist approach and it will be more useful in their teaching career.

Conclusion

Constructivist approach allows a different perspective on education. In this process learner are very active and even the evaluation is done in different way which measure the knowledge as well as skill throughout the process of learning. This approach challenges the traditional method which was given prominence to memorization of fact. Constructivist approach plays a crucial role if

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social science teacher use it effectively. The role of teacher is also gets changes and even classroom take the shape of learning community. A key aspect of this would be to start presenting material in a fashion that shows the complexity and multiple perspectives of real world situations. To apply this in class room teacher must well versed in theory and understand its implications.

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