



CONSTRUCTIVIST APPROACH AND TEACHERS' ROLE

KARANDE SHAHAJI RAJARAM

Assistant Professor
Annasaheb Awate College, Manchar,
Tal. Ambegaon, Dist. Pune.
(MS) INDIA

ABSTRACT

Constructivism is basically a theory about how a learner learns. It proposes that learners construct their own knowledge through experiencing things and reflecting on them. Constructivist teaching is based on the belief that learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge. Constructivism is somewhat related trend in education that can play a dynamic role in the relationship between how teachers teach and how learners learn. The teacher needs to encourage the students and supports them to restructure knowledge. The present research paper focuses the theory of constructivist approach and the role of a teacher.

Key words: Constructivism, process of meaning and knowledge, dynamic role, to restructure knowledge.

INTRODUCTION

Constructivism is basically a theory about how a learner learns. It proposes that learners construct their own knowledge through experiencing things and reflecting on them. Constructivism is somewhat related trend in education that can play a dynamic role in the relationship between how teachers teach and how learners learn. In constructivist theory, it is assumed that learners have to construct their own knowledge—individually and collectively.

Constructivist teaching is based on the belief that learning occurs as learners are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge. It argues that human beings construct their own knowledge through the interaction of previous knowledge, new knowledge and beliefs with which they come in contact. So the theory believes that the learners are the active

KARANDE SHAHAJI RAJARAM

1P a g e



creators of their own knowledge. The teacher needs to encourage the students and supports them to restructure knowledge.

Jean Piaget is called the exponent of the theory of constructivism who has called the systems of knowledge as 'schema'. Application of constructivism is derived from the works of development psychologists Jean Piaget (1973), Russian Psychologist Vygotsky (1978), French Philosopher Jacques Rousseau as well as theories of childhood development and education John Dewey. The work of John Dewey and Vygotsky had blended with John Piaget's development psychology into the broad approach of constructivism in 1980.

The constructivist revolution has brought new conceptions of learning and teaching. The catchword "Constructivism" applied both to learning theory and epistemology. The constructivist revolution offers a new vision of the learner as an active sense-maker and suggests new methods of instruction. The constructivist approach allows the learners to have more control over their own learning, to think critically and to work collaboratively.

The Constructivist Approach focuses on ideas as the evidence of knowledge occurs only within humans who construct their own reality... It relies on the concept of a learner-centered learning environment. (Gruender, D. C., 1996)

Constructivism can only be understood through ontology and epistemology. Ontology refers to the issues concerning the nature of being and seeks to answer the questions. What is being? What is the nature of reality? Is there a reality? Idealism, a branch of ontology, views reality as something that can only exist in ideas or ideals. Plato stated that perfect, unchanging, universal ideas compose reality but that the visible, external world of object is just a shadow of these ideas.

Epistemology, the second philosophical root of constructivism pertains to the origin, foundation, limits and validity of knowledge. Epistemology deals with the transmission of knowledge. Central questions of epistemology are: What is knowledge? Where does the knowledge come from? How much does the knower contribute to the knowing process?

Major contributors in constructivism felt that the teacher is a very vital part of the theory. A teacher who follows constructivist approach sets up the problems and monitors students' exploration, gives proper direction to students' inquiry and way of thinking, also promotes new patterns of thinking. (Brooks and Brooks, 1993).

KARANDE SHAHAJI RAJARAM

2P a g e



The purpose of the constructivist teacher should be to make the learners think of their own. A constructivist teacher and classroom differ from a traditional classroom in a number of ways. The learners are interactive and student-centered; and the teacher facilitates a process of learning in which students are encouraged to be responsible and autonomous. Negotiation is an important aspect of a constructivist classroom. It unites teachers and students in a common purpose. This means that a teacher may even have to act as a co-learner along with the students.

In the classroom, the constructivist view of learning can point towards a number of different teaching practices. In the most general sense, it usually means encouraging students to use active techniques (experiments, real-world problem solving) to create more knowledge and then to reflect on and talk about what they are doing and how their understanding is changing. The quality of a constructivist class is its interactive nature.

In constructivist approach the student's role is of utmost importance. The student has to be an active learner. The skills required for the effective user of a language largely depend on how far the student uses the language. The constructivist teacher makes the learners to express their own words and makes them to reflect continuously on experiences they have received.

Constructivist classrooms are structured so that learners are immersed in experiences within which they may engage in meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination, invention, interaction, hypothesizing and have personal reflections. Teachers need to recognize how students use their own experiences, prior knowledge and perceptions, as well as their physical and interpersonal environments to construct knowledge and meaning. The goal is to produce a democratic classroom environment that provides meaningful learning experiences for autonomous learners.

A crucially important aspect of a teacher's job is watching, listening, and asking questions of students in order to learn about them and about how they learn so that teachers may be more helpful to students. The teachers therefore, have to be at the back seat and should allow the learners to go ahead. The teachers need to follow entirely different approach towards the errors that the students might commit. The errors are the milestones in learning while the students are empowered to construct something of their own the mistakes need to be addressed differently.

In the constructivist classroom, the teacher's role is to prompt and facilitate discussion. Thus, the teacher's main focus should be on guiding students by asking questions that will lead them to develop their own conclusions on the subject. Parker J. Palmer (1997) suggests that good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an

KARANDE SHAHAJI RAJARAM

3P a g e



integral and undivided self, they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a capacity for connectedness”.

Constructivist teachers encourage students to constantly assess how the activity is helping them to gain understanding. By questioning themselves and their strategies, students in the constructivist classroom ideally become “expert learners”. This gives them ever-broadening tools to keep learning. With a well-planned classroom environment, the students learn HOW TO LEARN.

The following points show the role of a Constructivist Teacher-

- Allow children to ask questions that require them to relate what they are learning in school to things happening outside.
- Encourage and accept student’s autonomy and initiative.
- Encourage intelligent guessing.
- Provide opportunities to question, inquire debate, reflect and arrive at concepts or create new ideas.
- Encourage children to answer in their own words and from their own experiences.
- Encourage students to engage in dialogue with the teacher and with one another.
- Provide time for students to construct relationships and create metaphors.
- Use a wide variety of materials, including raw data, primary sources and interactive materials and encourage students to use them.
- Engage students in experiences that show contradictions to initial understandings and then encourage discussion.
- Encourage students’ inquiry by asking thoughtful, open-ended questions and encourage students to ask questions to each other and seek elaboration of students’ initial responses.
- Assess students’ understandings through application and performance of open tasks. (Dangwal, 2011)

CONCLUSION:

The present study throws light on constructivism. In formal teaching-learning process, constructivist teacher is expected to be familiar with various pedagogic approaches, like use of maxim, methods of teaching as well as various ways which leads to active participation of learners in constructing knowledge. The challenging role of the teachers is that the teacher has to be smart and intelligent. He should be a learner, researcher and a very effective partner in all newly designed activities in the classroom.

KARANDE SHAHAJI RAJARAM

4P a g e



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