

The Role of Constructivism in Inter/Multi-Disciplinary Studies

Dr. Eftthikar Ahamed B.*

ABSTRACT

This paper attempts to explore the role of constructivism in inter/multi-disciplinary studies – especially in the tertiary educational level. Though a radical re-organization of classrooms with a new attitude to the teaching-learning process has become partially fulfilled, the inevitable moves to foreground the achievement of total educational-dividend of the contemporary generation of students remain still elusive. The present age is an age of inter/multi-disciplinary studies. So, learning should involve social negotiation; knowledge should be relevant to the learner; content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's background knowledge; he should be encouraged to become self-aware; and teachers should switch over from the dictators of classrooms to facilitators or co-learners for a better classroom transaction.

Keywords: *Triangular disharmony, netizen, constructivism, andragogy, discovery learning and collaborative learning.*

One of the principal challenges in the Indian educational structure is that we have a first generation of leaders and educators who decide the education policy and strategy, the second generation of teachers who are accountable for facilitating education for the learners who belong to a third generation. The mantra of morality, unchangeably established value system, nostalgically epitomized gurukula institution, etc. have been providing nutritious oxygen and water for this socially constructed structure for the period of more than 6 decades which placed all the persons around this system safe except the real beneficiaries – the learners!

Though a radical re-organization of classrooms with a new attitude to the teaching-learning process has become partially fulfilled, the inevitable moves to foreground the achievement of total educational-dividend of the contemporary generation of students remain still elusive. The restructuring of this 'triangular disharmony' is a Herculean task which should be seriously taken into consideration without any more delay. Understanding the third generation children is a complex process and needs special efforts on the parts of all concerned.

* Department of English & Comparative Literature, School of Languages & Comparative Literature, Central University of Kerala, Kasaragod - 671316, Ph: 09400577531, e-mail: drbefthikar@gmail.com

Several misconceptions are there about issues related to the new generation which cannot be solved through the already established usual remedial measures. When an informational piece is introduced in a classroom with the wrong assumption that the students should understand the aesthetic and moral aspects like 'virtue should be rewarded and vice should be punished', the teaching fraternity consequentially becomes a laughing stock among the present learners. The above said aspect may have a twisted version of the learners which cannot be properly identified due to the gap of generations. This gap becomes a non-traversable gulf if the educators don't have the habit of updating things.

The new generation children come to classrooms not only for learning, but also for multifarious reasons. The uncontrollable passion for their peer group, the unconquerable response against the parental compulsion, the unfathomable likeness for some members in the teaching-learning space, and the unbeatable infatuation towards sportive and athletic ambience are some of these reasons. The analysis of these reasons, but unfortunately, never takes place in the ethos of Indian teaching discourses.

Learning should involve social negotiation; knowledge should be relevant to the learner; content and skills should be understood within the framework of the learner's background knowledge; he should be encouraged to become self-aware; and teachers should switch over from the dictators of classrooms to facilitators or co-learners for a better classroom transaction. This is a wishful thinking of the present generation which is at the brim of a knowledge explosion process par excellent.

Human beings, who have already experienced the transformation of their status from Regio-National Citizens to Global Netizens (the Dwellers in the Internet World), are in a new-fangled corridor of social negotiations and accommodations. The pattern of the Post-Modern Discourses is becoming polished with an added flavor of this global renovation. Researches in our habits need to be further updated in the area of curriculum of various disciplines by including current advancements in the ICT – Information, Communication and Technology. ICT has enabled life to be timelier and somewhat non-linear by using devices such as computers, and smart phones with a spacious range of inexhaustible anticipation. The wide world of websites unwraps a rainforest of prospective potentialities to overthrow the outdated voices of the traditional approaches by including Inter-disciplinarity as an increasingly imperative source in the modern educational scenario.

The Post-Modern Man, or better, the Post-Man is blessed to voice out his self through the social media, blogging, community rooms, tweeting, etc. where he is enjoying a better status, greater listeners, and, may be, enhanced reception than that of the hegemonized traditional voices. This 'revolution' or 'revaluation' saw constructivism extend as an influential confrontation to behaviorist instructional blueprint methodology and began to lay concrete on the way for a paradigm shift in educational design and practices away from 'traditional' methods toward those based upon 'constructivist' theories of learning.

The expression 'constructivism' refers both to the scheme of learning and nature of knowledge. It denotes the proposal that individuals, through their communication with the surroundings, construct their own knowledge. In constructivist approach it is significant to identify how much the students have learnt as well as the process by which they have learnt. Such a theory of awareness and erudition has noteworthy inference for English Studies. It transforms the dynamics of the conventional classroom by giving power to the student as the originator of the knowledge development while redefining the responsibility of the trainer as a facilitator, rather than getting labeled as the alpha and omega of facts.

Constructivism demands an object-oriented practice which is a vehicle of knowledge construction. Here, experience endows with the movement upon which the intelligence functions. In addition, knowledge building is improved when the understanding is genuine. A teacher can well take advantage of the real world surroundings by developing the responsibilities and exercises based on the experience and ambience of his students.

Piaget, Jerome Bruner, and Dewey are some of the earliest exponents of Constructivistic Ideology. But soon after, they were overpowered by later theorists like Vygotsky, Lave, and Wenger with an added argument of flavoring Constructivism with the element of Social spices. While the former ideologues traveled with the theories of learning through assimilation, accommodation, discovery, and experienced relation of things, the latter were additionally charging them with the influence of cultural and social context. "Communities of Practice" was their motto.

Learning is defined as an active process of constructing knowledge. Knowledge means learner's prior knowledge and/or beliefs in the cultural and social context of learning socially constructed. The instructional devices and strategies must be *Discovery Learning* and *Collaborative Learning*. Discovery Learning includes personal discoveries, experiments, individual activities, or opportunities to explore one's own environment which is appealing to various senses. The Collaborative tools are interactive, collaborative, dialogical or social interaction and openings to discuss what is being studied with varying audience sizes.

Hastening up the large-sized global competition between the demand of increasing learner expectations and the supply of these by the undergraduate institutions, many higher education institutions are on the research path of improving the access by confiscating time, place, and situational barriers in ways that are cost effective. Technology-umpired-knowledge-acquisition is only one of the options that many of the tertiary level institutions have begun to explore as a way to remove these barriers. Until 2000, in India, there was lack of enthusiasm and reluctance in the higher education communities to espouse and integrate technologies. It was primarily due to an inability of the technologies to provide the amount and quality of interpersonal interaction that is considered central to the facilitation of higher order thinking skills (such as that developed in small group discussions, Socratic dialogue, collaborative/cooperative learning,

brainstorming, case studies, problem based learning, etc.). This state of affairs, however, has changed. The brand of dealings that is considered essential and pivotal to many educators can be unremittingly sustained through new communication technologies such as computer mediated conferencing. In certain applications, these technologies are also demonstrating to be cost effective and accessible to learners who are experiencing time, place, or situational barriers while supporting the expansion and enlargement of elevated thinking skills. For these reasons many post-secondary institutions are integrating communication and instructional technologies into their teaching programs.

The implication of constructivism theory in the area of teaching methodology redefines the role of a teacher as one who emphasizes the discovery of learning while the learners are in the learning process. He or she is also one who allows the students actively participate in interaction among *themselves* and between them with a special artistic talent of adjusting the teaching process depending on the abilities of the learners. In short, a teacher becomes one who uses the effective teaching method to generate and develop knowledge among students, unlike the knowledge disseminator.

One of the advantages of this theory is that it provides the learner to translate their own knowledge into multiple perspectives. Students can implement or apply their own knowledge into several situations too. Think of a class room where every single individual is posing his own 'true' idea! Here, the main element is that learning becomes an active process which constructs the knowledge or new concept based on experiences. It constructs knowledge by cognitive structure – a structure including both schematic & mental structure placing the meaning into students' experiences.

In countries like India, a classroom is a loaded collection of dissimilar milieu and diversified behavior of philosophy. Myths, taboos and things one acquires from one's family, friends, teachers, etc. form the average of one's cultural influence. Content is entrenched in culture and it is complicated to divide these two. It is, therefore, compulsory for an educator to make available an impartial and neutral zone where the student can contribute to the ongoing activity through his creativity. In the constructivist classroom, the focus tends to shift from the teacher to the students. The classroom is not a place where the teacher pours knowledge including linguistic skills into some passive students. Undergraduates are to be energetically transported to the arena of learning process. The constructivist teacher sets up tasks and scrutinizes students' progress and evolution, steers the track of students' inquisition and endorse new prototype of thinking. In a constructivist interdisciplinary/multi-disciplinary classroom, students' autonomy and initiative are encouraged; in it students are engaged in language tasks and the class uses raw data, primary sources, physical and interactive materials.

The new concept or the Text in the class room has very little to do with the so called original text and it is primarily an outcome of a very specific mind that can be epitomized as a challenge posed to the integrity of the original author.

Let's praise the Post-Structuralist researcher Roland Barthes for saving us from the clutches of the omniscient author – let's make a sigh of relief for his argument of the Death of the Author for the sake of the birth of the reader! We witness the emergence of such phenomena as fragmentation, transition, and border-crossing in this transformation. We see a new text with a new body, soul and spirit.

Constructivist pedagogy envisages learner as an active sense maker and suggests new methods of instruction. Thus it becomes embellished as andragogy – the method and practice of teaching adult learners – in the tertiary level. It facilitates presentations of materials in a constructivist way and engage students in an explorative learning. It allows the learners to have more control over their own learning to think analytically and critically, and to work collaboratively. A teacher can create constructive learning environment in the classroom by adhering to many simple strategies like presenting new materials in small steps, helping students develop an organization for the skills/sub skills not known to them, providing for intensive and extensive student practice, anticipating and discussing potential difficulties, etc. By the constructivist methods of regulating the difficulty of the material, providing feedback and corrections, increasing student responsibilities, and providing independent practice with examples the inter/multi-disciplinary classrooms can be empowered vibrantly.

Polyphonic voices and multiple interpretations inherent in an individual can be identified smoothly if this method is properly utilized. As the present world is a globe of inter/multi-disciplinarity, the age-old approach for attaining a goal will not be enough to convert an individual competent. Inter/multi-disciplinarity is a license to enter into the diverse realms of knowledge by keeping certain media as beacons.

References

1. Brooks, J. G. and Brooks, M. G. *In Search of Understanding: The Case for Constructivist Classroom*. Association for Supervision and Curriculum Development, Alexandria. 1993. Print.
2. Driscoll, M. *Psychology of Learning for Instruction*. Allyn and Bacon, Boston. 1994. Print.
3. Fosnot, C. T. *Constructivism, Theory, Perspective and Practice* Teachers College Press, New York. 1996. Print.
4. Larochella, N. Bednarz and Garrison, J. Eds. *Constructivism and Education* Cambridge Press, Cambridge. 1998. Print.
5. Spivey, N.N. *The Constructivist Metaphor*, Academic Press, Boston. 1997. Print.