



SOCIAL CONSTRUCTIVISM IN CLASSROOM

KoyelPalit

Assistant Teacher in English, Mundumalapara Junior High School, Nakashipara, Nadia.

Introduction

'Constructivism' as an educational theory, talks about how human beings 'construct' their knowledge and how learning occurs. The Constructivist perspective on the nature of learning can be seen as a part of long tradition of educational thought, but in its modern form, it deals with the social perspective – how people make sense of their experience. Jean Piaget was one of the cognitive psychologists who had a great influence on the theory of constructivism. Piaget's fundamental insight was that individuals construct their own understanding, learning is a constructivist process. Vygotsky's theory is very similar to Piaget's assumption about how children learn, but Vygotsky places more emphasis on the social context of learning.

Concept of Constructivism

Fundamentally constructivism says that people construct their own understanding and knowledge about the world through experiencing things and reflecting on those experiences. The learners construct meaning for themselves. In recent decades, constructivist theorists have extended the traditional focus on individual learning to address collaborative and social dimensions of learning.

Constructivism as a Learning Theory

Constructivism shifts emphasis from teaching to learning process. Its major aspects are mentioned below.

1. Learning is an active process.
2. Knowledge is constructed from and shaped by experience.
3. Learning is the personal interpretation of the world.
4. Emphasizes problem-solving and understanding.
5. Uses authentic tasks, experiences, setting, setting, assesments.
6. Content presented holistically- not in separate smaller parts.

Social Constructivism of Vygotsky

Social constructivism is a theory developed by psychologist Lev Vygotsky(1896-1934). It is called 'social constructivism' because he emphasized the critical importance of culture as well as language development and the importance of the social context for socio-cultural development. Vygotsky's view had a socio-historical dimension that knowledge of a person living in a human community will be a large extent derives from social interaction, through which aspects of the culture are acquired. Social constructivism argues that all meaningful learning is a process of personal meaning-making through the individual's cultural knowledge and understanding.

Basic Themes and Principles of Vygotsky's Theory

Social Interaction

social interaction is one of the major aspects in Vygotsky's theoretical framework, as it plays a fundamental role in the development of cognition. According to Vygotsky "Every function in the child's cultural development appears twice; first, on the social level, and later on the individual level; first between people(inter psychological) and then inside the child(intra psychological)." In other words, higher mental processes appear first between people as they are co-constructed during shared activities.

Zone of Proximal Development (Zpd)

Vygotsky introduced the concept of ZPD in his theory of social constructivism. Zone of proximal development is defined as an area where the child cannot solve a problem alone but can be successful under adult guidance or in collaboration with more advanced peer. The concept of ZPD highlights two issues:-

1. Meaningful learning only takes place when teaching is placed beyond what is currently known and understood, but 'within reach' of existing knowledge and understanding.
2. Different learners, although apparently having same starting points, may differ in how far they can 'reach' beyond existing knowledge and understanding to learn new material.



Teaching targeted on a learner’s ZPD can bring further learning, so it is useful for a teacher to know about the learners ZPD in social context, as opined Vygotsky.

Assisted Learning and Scaffolding

Scaffolding means support for learning and problem-solving. This is the principle of setting a learner a task that is currently beyond their experience, but within their ZPD, and their providing support – modeling, guidance, hints, so that the learner can achieve with support.

In Vygotsky’s thinking, what is achieved first on the inter-personal level can become assimilated into the Zone of Actual Development(ZAD), becoming internalized, so that it can then be achieved unaided. The teacher’s role is to offer support, and then gradually fade this as the learner masters the task, until the ZAD has shifted and so as the ZPD around it.

Language Development

Vygotsky thought that language is a primary form of interaction through which adults transmit to the child the rich body of knowledge that assists in the culture.

Vygotskian Concept of Constructivist Classroom

The following are the basic features of Vygotskian classroom:-

1. Learning and development is a social and collaborative activity.
2. ZPD can serve as a guide for lesson-planning.
3. Learning in school should occur in a meaningful context.
4. Out of school experience should be related to the child’s in-school experience.

Vygotskian Concept of Constructivist Differs Significantly From Traditional Classroom

Paradigm	Traditional classroom	Constructivist classroom
1.Approach	Begins with parts of the whole, emphasizes basic skills.	Begins with the whole, then expanding to parts.
2.Knowledge	Inert	Dynamic, changes with experience.
3.Teacher	Directive and authoritative	Interacts, negotiates with learners
4.TLM	Textbooks and workbooks	Primary sources, manipulative materials
5.Assesment	Test and correct answers. Product is more important than process.	Student participation, works, observatios, points-of-view, tests. Process is more important.

Vygotskian Concept of Constructivist Teacher

Constructivism encourages teachers to provide for each learner’s –

1. Preferred learning style.
2. Rate of learning.
3. Personal interaction with other learners .



Moreover, a constructivist teacher has to guide and create a suitable context for learning to do the following –

1. Provide multiple modes of representation and perspectives.
2. Create new understanding via coaching, moderating, suggesting.
3. Testing to be integrated with the task, not a separate activity.
4. Use errors to promote understanding.

Vygotskian Concept of Constructivist Learner

The constructivist process helps the learners-

1. To develop own goals and assessments.
2. To create new understanding, attitude, skills.
3. To reflect on learning.
4. To collaborate among fellow learners.
5. To appreciate different perspectives.
6. To pursue personal interests and purposes.
7. To develop life-long learning.

Instructional Strategy in Social Constructivism

Constructivism as an instructional strategy-sss

1. Involves collaboration between teacher, learner and community.
2. Features active, challenging, authentic and multidisciplinary tasks.
3. Focuses on knowledge construction, not reproduction.
4. Uses scaffolding as an effective form of teaching.
5. Targets both the level of actual and potential development.
6. Uses authentic tasks.
7. Provides for meaningful, problem-based thinking.
8. Uses telecommunication tools.
9. Uses 'simulation' to make learning meaning.

Conclusion

The social constructivist theory, developed by Lev Vygotsky is more effective way for the child to learn. His theory is constructed through the interaction of internal (cognitive) and external (environmental and social) factors. Vygotsky's theory emphasizes the role in development of co-operative dialogues between children and the more knowledgeable members of the society. This is in contrast to Piaget's theory where the young child was seen as a little scientist, inventing knowledge for himself unaided. The perspective of Piaget's theory goes beyond the consideration of the 'content' of thinking and relates to the 'form' of thinking available. Vygotsky's socio-cultural perspective suggested more advanced form of thinking that is culturally mediated.

References

1. Taber, Keith.S;(2001) "Constructivism as Educational Theory: Contingency in Learning and Optimally guided Instruction" in Educational Theory, ed. By JalehHassaskhah.Nova , Science Publishers, pp-39-61.
2. Mangal, S.K ;(2013) Advanced Educational Psychology Phi Learning Pvt. Ltd., Delhi, 2 nd ed. Pp.-82-95.
3. Chauhan , S.S,(1988) Advanced Educational PsychologyVikas Publishing House Pvt.Ltd. pp. 88-93.
4. Woolfolk, Anita (2005) Educational Psychology, Pearson Education Pvt. Ltd. Indian branch 482 F.I.E Patparganj, Delhi, India.
5. Weibell, C.J. (2011), Principles of Learning, Retrieved July 4, 2011 from [http://www. Principles of learning. Wordpress.com](http://www.Principlesoflearning.wordpress.com)
6. Lutz, S. &Huilt, W. (2004) "connecting cognitive development and constructivism: Implications from theory for instruction and assessment", in Construvtivism in the Human Sciences, vol. 9(1), pp.67-90.
7. Giesen, Janet,(2004) "constructivism : A Holistic Approach to Teaching and Learning".
8. Kim, Daniel.H, (1993) "The Link between Individual and Organizational Learning", pub. In fall, Oct 15, 1993.
9. Husen, T. &Postlethwaite, T.N. (eds) (1989) The International Encyclopedia of Education, supplement vol.1, Oxford/ Newyork: Pergaman Press, pp.162-163.