

## **A View into the Constructivist Classroom and the application of Folktales**

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### **Abstract**

The objective of the present paper is to focus on the need and ways of appropriating constructivism in the teaching and learning process. Our present education system highlights on preparing students for highly competitive tests and ignores the importance of fostering creative thinking skills, ethical and cultural values in our students. In the traditional approach the teacher is a central figure who emphasizes on memorization and is usually sole provider of information and instructions. This is followed by most of the best and mediocre Indian educational institutes. This paper sketches the need of including folktales comprehensively in curriculum through constructivist pedagogy. The paper also brings forward the important aspects such as integration of values, morality, decision making, heritage and culture which are very necessary to groom a person into a good human being. Classroom application of constructivism through folktales supports the theory of learning which build a strong foundation for students and teachers as well.

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A theory which is constructed on observation and scientific study of learning patterns of people is called constructivism. Basically people learn and construct their understanding of world through their experiences. Anything new experienced by us is reconciled with our former perceptions and ideas. If we find something relevant in the new information, we keep it and discard the irrelevant part. So, one can say that we are the creator of our knowledge. Constructivist theory encourages students to use experiments and real-world problem solving methods and similar techniques to collect the knowledge and later on reflect on them as to what extent their understanding is changing. In this case the teachers should understand the students' previous perceptions and guide them accordingly. Students are encouraged to assess how the activity is helping them to gain understanding. Students can also become expert learner by questioning themselves and their methods.

In the constructivist classroom, there is a shift from the teacher to the students. Now the classroom is not a place where the teacher fills the knowledge into the minds of passive

students. In the constructivist model, the students are required to be actively involved in their own process of learning. The teacher functions more as a facilitator who directs, intervenes, prompts, and helps students develop and assess their understanding. Therefore, one of the biggest tasks of the teacher is to ask good questions. Students become engaged by applying their existing knowledge and real-world experience. They not only learn to hypothesize but also test their theories, and ultimately deriving conclusions from their finding.

In the constructivist classroom, both teacher and students think of knowledge not as mere facts to be memorized, but as a constantly changing view of the world we live in and the ability to creatively browse, investigate, study and explore that view.

In traditional classroom fixed curriculum is followed strictly where as in constructive classroom, weightage is given to student's questions and inquisitiveness is highly appreciated. Textbooks and workbooks are main source of materials in traditional classrooms. In constructivist classrooms primary sources and other extended reading materials are used. Learning is interactive, building on what the student already knows. Teachers have a dialogue with students, helping students construct their own knowledge. Accommodation and assimilation are the two key concepts within the constructivism learning theory. Based on the experience, they produce knowledge and form meaning. With assimilation an individual gets ready to incorporate new experiences into the old experiences. This enables the individual to develop new outlooks, rethink what were once misunderstandings, and evaluate what is important, finally improving their perceptions. Accommodation, on the other hand, is restructuring the world and new experiences into the mental faculty already present.

W. B. Yeats rightly said "Education is not the filling of a pail, but the lightning of the fire." Good education holds a powerful place in the lives of people because it is only education with which one can equip himself or herself with the right skills to face the adversities of life. Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson (1999) stated in their study on constructivism that many teachers have a strong desire for students to be active participants in their own learning. These teachers do not like their students to become passive listeners. Students, who are involved and become active participants in learning, are the one who discover and make sense of the world.

Literature is the main source of providing worthwhile values and skills necessary for living a good and meaningful life. Therefore, teaching literature needs a careful structured planning and instruction to develop the potentials of students.

- With storytelling activities students are transformed from being passive recipients of information to active learners and participants in the class which is a basic necessity of constructivist classroom. In this way students construct their knowledge actively and interestingly than just mechanically digesting the ideas from the teachers and literary texts.
- Story telling specially folktales are a rich source of interactive process that enables the students to imagine and think creatively. It also enhances language development and inspires love of reading.
- Some of the stories are weaved in the way that learners expand their understanding and correlate their current knowledge with the contents of the story.
- In a constructive classroom social interactions are useful in the observational study of the story and students draw meaningful and creative conclusions.

In the context of present day, there are a lot of evidences that story and folktales activities are helpful in honing the language skills of the students and at the same time encourage the learners for further reading eventually develop the love for reading literature. The authors like Block, 1997; Fisher & Terry, 1990; Hamilton & Weiss, 1991; Livo & Rietz, 1986; Peck, 1989; Pike, Compain, & Mumper, 1997; Roney, 1989; Alparaque (1988), addressed the value of storytelling and stressed that it is related with the development of language appreciation. They also emphasized the power of storytelling to hold attention.

Storytelling activities facilitate an educational base for authentic language construction. For example, children from different cultural background have opportunities to build their experiential base and understanding with the help of different stories. Thus, storytelling provides a vehicle for developing cross-cultural understanding as children from different backgrounds are encouraged to share their experiences and stories from home.

Children also increase their balance and their ability to communicate effectively with listeners through storytelling activities (Peck, 1989). Many of the skills can be implemented by the students specially those which are related with respecting themselves and others. This is a necessity today for succeeding in the world, particularly as our global community becomes smaller.

According to Hennings(2000), oral retelling significantly improves children's comprehension, their sense of story structure, and the language complexity of original stories they dictate" (p. 196). Listening and then telling these stories to others make children familiar with the idea of story; for example, they learn that a story has a beginning, middle, and an

end. Teachers have the power to mould the students into the intentions of the characters and in such ways they can demonstrate the motives, ethics and myriad of sentiments as well as philosophies effectively.

According to Kauchak & Eggen, 1998, p. 9 students learn to identify heroes and villains and not only this, with little practice and time, they also create their own characters. In this way they learn to be more creative and productive. This method allows students to use higher order thinking. They are metacognitively aware of their own learning. These developing storytellers are playing a central role “in creating or constructing new knowledge”.

The objective of this observational study is to analyze different aspects of story telling and its importance with special reference to folk tales and to examine the magnitude to which students carry out the principles of constructivism as described by Kauchak and Eggen (1998):

1. Learners construct their own understanding rather than having it delivered or transmitted to them.
2. New learning depends on prior understanding.
3. Learning is enhanced by social interaction.
4. Authentic learning tasks promote meaningful learning. (p. 9)

Looking into the philosophy of constructivism, Folktales can be used in a variety of ways to help children:

### **Develop stronger reading skills and communication skills**

The folktales attract the young readers’ attention quickly and readers immediately start responding. They practice memory skills by listening stories and sometimes they color the characters with a personal touch. In this process characters get unique interpretation and a different version of the story could come out as a creative surprise. It also enhances and reinforces the student’s basic listening, grammar and vocabulary. Folktales are explored as a vehicle for expanding children's oral language and developing their literacy proficiency. Folktales offer an unlimited opportunity for nurturing a more authentic awareness and respect for diverse language and cultural backgrounds.

### **Bridges the cultural gap and Life lessons**

Diversity is the main element of folktales. When children experience stories from different cultures, they can discover valuable insights about another culture’s values, beliefs,

history, practices and customs. Having imbibed diverse cultural traditions, they not only widen their view of the world, they may also start appreciating of their own country's heritage.

Folktales are full of morals; they contain moral messages and themes. These moral messages create a foundation because they are living documents of important life lessons.

### **Understanding of the literary aspects of the narrated text**

The appreciation of a short story and poems will greatly increase as students grasp the tools, which an author uses in telling one. These tools include the elements of a story namely: setting, characters, plot, point of view and theme respectively and the elements of poetry such as: rhythm, rhyme, figures of speech, stanza form, symbols, subject matter, theme, persona and mood. Folk tales, short stories and poems therefore, are means of communicating creative experiences (Villanueva, 2011). Reading folktales also help children to develop the critical reading skills of phonics, fluency, vocabulary and comprehension needed to meet the requirements of literary efficiency.

### **Folktales are sources of entertainment for human**

Folktales are structured on a certain pattern so that they are easy to remember and share. They pass from one generation to another through oral tradition and enjoyed by all generation to come. While these folktales are not only highly entertaining, they also play an important role in passing along ethical values or moral traits. As folktales were passed down over generations they reinforce expectations about how to live a meaningful life. Folktales weave character traits like caring, resourcefulness, trust or courage into the fabric of the stories. In all the countries folktales are often used to share a common history, to strengthen cultural values or emphasize important tr Constructivist theory supports the idea that students make and create their views and perceptions; they see the world with their eyes instead of depending on other's information.

Narrating a folk tale in classroom is an invitation to different background to come together and analyze the situations, images, characters, beliefs and knowledge in drawing the conclusions. Story telling specially the folk tales allow the students to imbibe values, morality, decision making, heritage and culture which are very necessary to groom a person into a good human being. Classroom application of constructivism through folktales supports the theory of learning which build a strong foundation for students and teachers as well.

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