Constructivism and the Pedagogy of Education for Peace

A Reflection on School Education Curriculum Reform (NCF–2005)

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Abstract

This paper has been developed against the backdrop of National Curriculum Framework – 2005, which envisages major paradigm shift from behaviourist approach to learning to constructivist approach that lays stress on the personal experiences of learner in the process of knowledge construction. The role of teacher in this approach has shifted from the transmitter of knowledge to facilitator of knowledge. The NCF – 2005 also emphasises on education for peace, not as a part of value education as traditionally been integrated in schools, but, as an independent value in itself. The paper highlights the implication of this paradigm shift in the approach towards learning for promoting the culture of peace as, both, the constructivist approach and peace education are associated with the humanistic philosophy which is dedicated to developing more mature and self-directed learner – a pre-requisite for living together. To develop a culture of peace, the pedagogy of education needs to be broad, diverse and oriented towards lifelong learning. Active listening, problem-solving, and conflict resolution skills help in inculcating feeling of living together, which are also basic to the constructivist way to learning. Therefore, the epistimological shift suggested in the NCF – 2005 provides greater opportunity to promote the culture of peace than ever before.

Peace has been one of the most desired necessities of human life since time immemorial. Since the advent of organised society human beings have strived for it, and are even more united today in their quest for peace, harmony and a better quality of life. A strong need is being felt by educationists, philosophers, scientists and political leaders to rejuvenate the human values, which may bring long lasting peace on this planet. The insistence of Delor's

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report (1996) on *Learning to live together* as the central pillar of education is the indication that education must be geared to promote a culture of peace, tolerance, democratic values, human rights and duties among students. The National Curriculum Framework – 2005, strongly advocates education for peace at all levels of schools.

Peace, however is an elusive concept having different interpretations in different cultures as well as different connotations for the spheres in which peaceful processes are applied. It ranges from inner pace to outer peace. Consequently, the interpretation of peace ranges from absence of war, and society without structural violence to liberation from exploitation and injustice of any kind, ecological balance and conservation and peace of mind, etc. Education for pace therefore includes a variety of issues like human rights education, environmental education, international education, conflict resolution education and development education, etc.

A review of programmes on education for peace in different countries indicates that they differ considerably in terms of ideology, objectives, emphasis, curricula, content and practices, etc. for instance, in Australia, education for peace focuses on challenging ethnocentrism, cultural chauvinism and violence and promoting cultural diversity, nuclear disarmament, and conflict resolution (Burns, 1985, Lawson and Hutchinson, 1992). While in Japan it targets issues of nuclear disarmament, militarism and the nature of responsibility for acts of violence performed in the past (Murakami, 1992). In South America, education for peace addresses structural violence, human rights and economic inequality (Garcia, 1984; Rivera, 1978) and in the United States, it is often concerned with prejudice, violence and environmental issues (Harris, 1996, Stomfay-Satitz, 1993).

In India education for peace programmes have traditionally been concerned with promoting certain core values. Mahatma Gandhi envisaged a non-violent society, which would be free from exploitation of any kind, and can be achieved through the instrument of education. In Gandhian concept of peace-truth, non-violence, self-suffering and means and end relationships are important. The educational policies of the country lay stress on combative role of education in eliminating obscurantism, religious fanaticism, violence, superstition and fatalism, and promote some core values such as India's common cultural heritage, egalitarianism, democracy, secularism, equality of sexes, observance of small family norms and inculcation of scientific temper, etc. Peace and living together have been integral part of Indian way of living and manifested in its Constitution through various articles. It firmly believes that inculcation of certain values among younger generation would help them to exist in the dynamic socio-cultural fabric with peace, harmony and prosperity. This is the reason why all commissions and committees on education in India, like, the Radha Krishnan Commission (1948-49), Mudaliar Commission (1952-53), Sri Prakash Commission (1959), Kothari Commission (1964-66), Sampurnanad Commission (1961), Rammurti Committee (1992) and Chavan

Committtee (1999), etc. make important recommendations for incorporation of value education at all levels of education. Consequently, the National Curriculum Frameworks of 1975, 1988 and 2000 had adopted a value-oriented approach to integration of peace concerns in education.

A major shift in this approach is witnessed in the National Curriculum Framework – 2005, which considers that *value education is subsumed in Education for pace, but is not identical with it.* The National Focus Group on Peace Education constituted in the context of NCF–2005 in its Position Paper on *Education for Peace* says, *"Peace is a contextually appropriate and peda-gogically gainful point of coherence for values. Peace concretises the purpose of values and motivates their internalisation. Without such a framework, the integration of values into the learning process remains a non-starter. Education for peace is, thus, the ideal strategy for contextualsing and operationalsing value education" (p.1).* While accepting the traditional approach of integration of various peace related values and concern in school curricula, it further adds, that, education for peace must be a concern that permeates the entire school life – curriculum, co-curriculum, classroom environment, school management, teacher pupil relationship, teaching-learning processes, and the entire range of school activities. Clearly the NCF – 2005 is more vocal and direct towards the need of promoting peace through education than the earlier curriculum reform attempts where the concept of peace was subsumed in value education and therefore peace was considered one of the five core values that were promoted through education

The Constructivist pedagogy and NCF – 2005

Besides the thrust on education for peace instead of value education, the NCF (2005) can also be distinguished from earlier frameworks in the epistemological approach adopted for education of learners. The earlier behaviourist approach to learning has been replaced by the thrust on constructivist based learning. The constructivist epistemology is based on the premise that learning does not involve discovering the reality, but constructing the reality.

According to the constructivist theory, knowledge is being actively constructed by the individual and learning is an adoptive process based on the experiences of individual (Mayer, 1992: Hendry, 1996, 1996). Therefore, learning is not mere absorption of knowledge and learner is no longer controlled respondent to stimuli as in the behaviourist approach (Jonassen, 1999: Perkins, 1991a) but is considered as 'already a scientist' (Solomon, 1994, p. 16) who actively constructs learning while trying to make sense of the world through his own experiences, goals, curiosities and beliefs. Knowledge according to constructivist epistemology cannot be transferred intact from one individual to another and therefore, learning and teaching cannot be synonymous: we can teach, even well, without having students learning. What can be the better example of it than the present school system in the country where in spite of all teaching-learning at

schools the learning outcomes of students both at the cognitive and psycho-emotional levels are cause of concern? The mushrooming growth of coaching centres, rising number of failure in examinations and alarming levels of stress among students manifested in the form of suicide, violence against others, and other disruptive activities are indication of the inability of our education system to relate the school knowledge to real life experiences and adapt to the needs of various demanding situations.

A basic premise of constructivism is that individuals live in their own world of personal and subjective experiences and built new knowledge on the basis of their previous experiences, rather than new knowledge being imposed from outside. The role of teacher, therefore, undergoes a major transformation from

TABLE 1

Changing Epistemology of Learning

Learning	*Traditional (Behaviourist)* Learning is a change in behaviour brought out through selective reinforcement of response. It is a product and external entity.	*Constructivist* Learning is a process of subjective construction of knowledge based on personal experience of learner.
Knowledge	Passed on, transmitted, reproducible, and linear.	Reciprocally developed co-constructed, builds on prior- knowledge, spiral.
Pedagogy	Teacher centred • Evaluation & assessment of set knowledge • Practising, listening, reproducing • All students do the same tasks	• Learner centred cooperative and experiential • Doing, stating, theorising • Range of possible responses • Tasks vary among students
Motivation	• Extrinsic, grade focus	• Intrinsic, Learning focus
Teacher	• Imparter of knowledge • Asks questions • Explains concepts • Superior to learners	• Facilitator, guide • Raises questions • Facilitates students theorising • A learner among learners
Learners	• are objects that learn • Passive listeners • Rarely ask questions beyond seeking clarification of instructions	• Co-inquires • Active partners in learning • Raise questions

the imparter of knowledge to facilitator of conditions, which will help learner in the process of knowledge construction. This changing concept of knowledge, learner, and teacher has been presented in Table 1.

Clearly a major shift can be seen in the concept of learner from constructivist perspective. She/he is not a passive recipient of information rather she/he can manipulate, interpret and make sense of her/his environment using experiences. In this way she/he can construct an understanding to help her/him achieve her/his goals (Duffy and Kirkley 2004) The constructivist based pedagogical models include collaborative learning techniques, discussion forums, and jurisprudential models to clarify concepts and facilitate learning.

According to the constructivist approach, the instruction centres on the experiences of learners. Meaningful understanding occurs when students develop effective ways to resolve problems; therefore, instructional contents cannot be specified. The constructivist teacher, therefore, cannot be effective by just following the teaching method that relies heavily on breaking content into smaller components of observable and achievable behaviours, which are measurable immediately after the instruction. Instead, the constructivist teacher assumes that every learner has a unique perspective, so the notion of the 'average' learner is rejected (Bednar et al, 1992). It provides a major shift from all learners learning the same things' to 'different learners learning different things'. Pre-specified content and objectives are not congruent with the constructivist view, instead, the

objectives emerge and are realised through learner's search for authentic tasks via critical thinking, reflection, and problem-solving approach. Therefore, the teacher must confront students with information and experiences that challenge their misconceptions and offer opportunities for this reflective process and augment their metacognitive capabilities. In such a situation learners are more likely to view the problem with a greater sense of ownership. According to Cey (2001), authentic learning occurs when instruction is designed to facilitate, stimulate, and recreate real life complexities and occurrences. The guiding principles of constructivism are:

- Posing problems of emerging relevance to students.
- Structuring learning around primary concepts.
- Seeking and valuing students' points of view.
- Adapting curriculum to address students' suppositions.
- Assessing learning in the context of teaching.

This process, therefore, is very effective in negotiating conflicts and finding solutions acceptable to the conflicting parties.

The NCF – 2005 provides wide scope for utilisation of the personal experiences of learners in day-to-day school activities. Expressing concern over lack of opportunities for students in the present system to share their personal experiences, the NCF (2005) strongly recommends "*the curriculum must enable children to find their voices, nurture their curiosity to do things, to ask question and to pursue investigations, sharing and*

integrating their experiences with school knowledge rather than their ability to reproduce external knowledge (p.13)". It motivates schools to "*provide opportunities to students to question, enquire, debate, reflect and arrive at concepts to create new ideas (p.18)".* These are the important steps of value clarification and conflict resolution process also, which help in removing apprehensions, mistrust and doubts about others and encourages living together. Active listening, critical thinking, problem-solving and conflict resolution are the skills emphasised in the context of education for peace, which are also the thrust of constructivist way of learning and promoted in NCF – 2005. It strongly feels that "*schools must be marked by the values of equality, social justice and respect for diversity, as well as of the dignity and rights of children*" (p.81).

Expressing concern over the neglect of child's local context in the present school practices the NCF (2005) recommends "*we emphasise the significance of conceptualising education or situating learning in the child's world, and of making the boundary between the school and its natural and social environment porous. This is not only because the local environment and child's own experiences are the best entry points into the study of disciplines of knowledge, but more so because the aim of knowledge is to connect with the world" (p.30).*

A central strategy for constructivism is the creation and encouragement of collaborative learning environment, which provides opportunities to learner to develop, share, compare and understand multiple perspectives of an issue. Conscious efforts are made by the teacher under constructivist approach to cultivate non-threatening learning environment (Watt and Bentley, 1987) that facilitates students' knowledge construction process. Teachers in this situation are required to display respect and care for students' learning and students knowledge construction process is facilitated by encouraging them to discuss, explain and evaluate their ideas and procedures. The NCF – 2005 provides opportunities for such learning experiences to learners – right from the pre-primary stage to higher secondary stage. It lays stress on problem-solving, dramatisation and role-play, etc, which remain under explored strategies of teaching in the present system. It recommends *"in order making the process of learning participative, there is a need to shift from mere imparting of information to debate and discussion. This approach to learning will keep both the learner and the teacher alive to social realities" (p. 54).*

Triangular Relationship between NCF – 2005, Constructivism and Pedagogy of Peace Education

Education for peace is fundamentally dynamic, interdisciplinary, and multicultural in nature and aims at developing knowledge, skills and attitudes needed to achieve and sustain global culture of peace. Promoting the culture of peace calls for developing skills among learners for active listening, problem-solving, and conflict resolution. These skills need to be developed early in learners and nurtured continuously. The personal experiences of learners, therefore, have to be honoured and treated as a base for dialogue and new

learning. It is essential to note at this point, that, when we talk about peace we expect at least three basic conditions – communication, cooperation, and confidence – the process of making these three conditions work is peace building. Therefore, peace is like the bridge that facilitates the process of communication and helps in developing closer relationship between people. Education for peace does not teach students what to think, but rather how to think critically. In the process, its holistic and participatory approach draws more from the constructivist than traditional curriculum designs. It aims not to reproduce but to transform, and is a continuous process dedicated to the enormous task of improving the spiritual, as well as material quality of life of people. Both constructivism and Peace education are associated with the humanistic philosophy, which is dedicated to developing more mature and self-directed learner who is conscious of his/her rights as well as the rights of others and his/her duty towards others, and emphasises lifelong learning. The promotion of culture of peace calls for a transformation of motivational orientations of students from competition and conflict to cooperation and mutual understanding (Unfortunately the whole ethos of our existing educational institutions is more geared towards competition which encourages a win lose orientation to conflict and a strong motivation to win which fuels conflict). In such cooperative orientation, the sense of interdependent communality of interest, mutual understanding, tolerance, cooperative conflict management and resolution are encouraged through effective communication, problem-solving, and negotiating behaviour. All these pedagogies help in knowledge construction; development of deeper understanding and insight into the problem and have been emphasised in NCF. Education for peace represents a humanising process whereby individuals overcome their violent instincts. It teaches respect for life and living together, it helps to develop among students a positive self-image, sense of dignity and self worth, sense of responsibility for self and others, and a capacity to trust others.

The learning process in education for peace is understood primarily as experiential and activity-based rather than by rote memorisation or by repetitive conditioning. We shall be very clear in our minds that we cannot indoctrinate peace. The learning models for peace are logically built on the assumption of human nature, i.e. learners are sentient beings that actively participate in the learning experience; they also learn through reflecting cases, reading and examples (J.Synott, 2005). To put it precisely they learn, both by, practical engagement and interaction, as well as also, by processes of reflection and abstraction. Clearly the existing teaching-learning strategies followed in our schools which reduce learners to passive listeners and emphasise rote memorisation do not fit into the pedagogy of peace education, instead, constructivism where there is strong emphasis on behavioural skills, such as, conflict resolution (Carter, 2000; Chetkon-Yanoov,2003), dialogue (Freier and Sharl,1987) and participatory

processes that are central to learning experiences, is more appropriate for promoting peace. The National Curriculum Framework – 2005 promises ideal situation for practising these pedagogies which are directed towards developing an independent, mature and reflective learner by providing opportunities to learners to question, debate, reflect, and arrive at concepts or create new ideas. The guiding principles for curriculum development of NCF are:

● Connecting knowledge to life outside schools;
● Ensuring that learning is shifted away from rote methods;
● Enriching the curriculum to provide for overall development of children rather than remain textbook centric;
● Making examination more flexible and integrated with classroom life; and nurturing an overriding identity informed by caring concerns within the democratic polity of the country.

These principles provide ample scope and opportunity for schools and teachers to design curricula to give greater ownership to learners in their process of learning.

Clearly a triangular relationship can be established between constructivism; education for peace and NCF – 2005. With emphasis on learner centreed, learner directed, collaborative, supported with teacher scaffolding and authentic tasks it provides suitable opportunity to promote culture of peace and tolerance amongst students than ever before. Though promoting peace is very complex and difficult task, especially, in the present local and global scenario where violation of human rights, violence, intolerance, and fundamentalism is increasing day-by-day and has become an order of the day, nevertheless it does not discourage the efforts to enable learners to process various information rationally and act as responsible citizens of the State than being carried away by emotions and narrow caste, class, regional, and religious orientations. National Curriculum Framework – 2005 expects developing such mature learners through constructivist learning strategies.

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