



Life Long Learning and Constructivism

Sunil Kalekar & Yogesh Patil

Adhyapak Mahavidyalaya,

Aranyeshwar, Pune

Introduction:

Life long learning is defined as all learning activity undertaken throughout life with the aim to improve knowledge, skills and competence, within a personal, social, civic and/ or employment related perspective. Therefore lifelong education involves:

1. Acquiring and updating all kinds of abilities, interests, knowledge and qualifications.
2. Valuing all forms of learning
3. Partnership working
4. Insight into the demand for learning
5. Adequate resourcing
6. Facilitating access to learning opportunities
7. Creating a learning culture
8. Striving for excellence

If examined carefully, we come to know that life long learning talks about learning that is individual centered, self directed, and based on the experiences of the individual. To learn something in informal or out of school settings, the learner has to have his own motivation, urge to learn. He has to develop / choose his own methods and strategies of learning. The individual is responsible for his own learning. Hence Life long learning has a close linking with constructivism.

Constructivism:

Definition: “Post – structuralist psychological theory that considers learning as an interpretive, recursive, building process by active learners interacting with the physical and social world (Fosnot’s). “Constructivist teaching can be defined as any deliberate thoughtful educational activity that is designed to facilitate students’ active understanding (Henderson). Constructivist educators believe that “The act of teaching can not be distinguished from the act of learning. Teachers using the constructivist approach emphasize big concepts, student questions, active learning and collaboration. It seeks to connect theory to practice, views students as thinkers, creator and constructor. Integral to constructivist theory of learning is creative problem solving. The constructivism is not an accumulation or memorizing the information, but rather it is about thinking and analysis. The structuralism is about the comprehension and practice, rather than feedback. The constructivism is about the active learning. It is not a process of learning upon passive receipt of the ready-made information from someone else (Narrated by: Ozdemis 2002).The individual assimilates and actively responds to the external stimulus.

Several learning designs are developed using constructivist approach. Constructivist learning design was developed by George W. Gagnon. Jr. and Michelle Collay.

In this model, teachers implement a number of steps in their teaching structure. They:

- **develop** a situation for students to explain
- select a process for **groupings** of materials and students
- build a **bridge** between what students already know and what the teachers want them to learn
- anticipate **questions** to ask and answer without giving away an explanation
- encourage students to **exhibit** a record of their thinking by sharing it with others, and
- Solicit students' **reflections** about their learning.



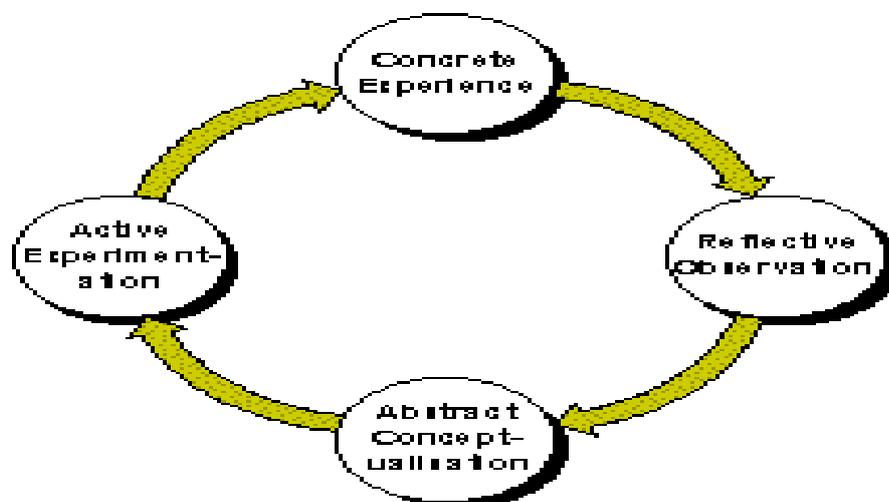
Experiential Learning:

It is the process of making meaning from direct experience. Simply put, Experiential Learning is learning from experience. The experience can be staged or left

open. Aristotle once said, "For the things we have to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing them." David Kolb helped to popularize the idea of experiential learning drawing heavily on the work of John Dewey, Kurt Lewin and Jean Piaget. His work on experiential learning has contributed greatly to expanding the philosophy of experiential education

The teacher's role here is very important. He guides and directs the process for better learning of students. But when we talk about adult learning that takes place in informal learning settings, the individual himself can take up the role of teacher and streamline his learning process.

1. Learning situations are not to be developed but do exist in our professional or social life. An individual has to identify these situations as learning situations. Usual life experiences; positive or negative should be approached by an individual as a situation from which we can learn something
2. An individual has to group, analyze, categorize the objects, people, and experiences thereof.
3. Connections between what we already know (Past experiences) and what these new learning situations teach us should be established by the individual. New experiences should be tested in the light of past experiences.
4. Pondering as to how these new experiences can help me to better my social, family or professional life should be done by the individual himself. What should be modified; my knowledge, skills, attitudes, habits or the situations themselves should be decided by the individual and act accordingly.
5. Reflections on own learning should be done.



[Kolb \(1984\)](#) provides one of the most useful (but contestable) descriptive models available of the adult learning process, inspired by the work of [Kurt Lewin](#).

This suggests that there are four stages in learning which follow from each other:

Concrete Experience is followed by **Reflection** on that experience on a personal basis. This may then be followed by the derivation of general rules describing the experience, or the application of known theories to it (**Abstract Conceptualization**), and hence to the construction of ways of modifying the next occurrence of the experience (**Active Experimentation**), leading in turn to the next **Concrete Experience**. All this may happen in a flash, or over days, weeks or months, depending on the topic, and there may be a "wheels within wheels" process at the same time. Thus an individual learns through experiences, experimentation and through reflections. An individual while going through an experience combines his past experience with the new and creates his own knowledge. This process of making your own concepts, percepts, views, meanings etc is not one step process but is a complex and multistage process.

Life long education therefore has to incorporate two ideologies constructivism and experiential learning. The principles of constructivism and experiential learning should be interwoven to achieve the goals of life long learning.

Constructivist principles to follow in life long learning:

- I. It takes time to learn:** Learning is not instantaneous. For significant learning we need to revisit ideas, ponder them, try them out, play with them and use them. This cannot happen in 5-10 minutes.
- II. Learning is an active process in which the learner uses sensory input and constructs meaning out of it:** Learners need to do something, because learning involves the learners engaging with the world.
- III. People learn to learn as they learn:** Learning consists both of constructing meaning and constructing systems of meaning. Each meaning we construct makes us better able to give meaning to other sensations which can fit a similar pattern.

- IV. **The crucial action of constructing meaning is mental:** It happens in the mind. We need to provide activities which engage the mind as well as the hands.
- V. **Learning involves language:** The language we use influences learning. People talk to themselves as they learn, and language and learning are inextricably intertwined.
- VI. **Learning is a social activity:** Our learning is intimately associated with our connection with other human beings, our teachers, our peers, our family. Conversations, interaction with others and collaborations are an integral aspect of learning.
- VII. **Learning is contextual:** We do not learn isolated facts and theories in some abstract ethereal land of the mind separate from rest of our lives. We learn in relationship to what else we know, what we believe, our prejudices and our fears.
- VIII. **One needs knowledge to learn:** It is not possible to assimilate new knowledge without having some structure developed from previous knowledge to build on. The more we know the more we can learn.
- IX. **Learning is not the passive acceptance of knowledge which exists "out there".** Learning involves the learner engaging with the world and extracting meaning from his/her experiences
- X. **Motivation is a key component in learning.** Not only is the case that motivation helps learning, it is essential for learning.

Life long learning in professional field and implications of constructivist principles:

Day by day economic, legal, social, political, technological pressures at workplace are increasing. When we lead our life as a professional, we go through new experiences every day. The expectations of the employer or the profession from us are continuously changing. There is an increased competition, Highly motivated staff that has more knowledge and up to date skills are required by the professions. There is always a felt need of improving individual and organizational performance. Job requirements are changing. At our workplace, while facing these challenges, the individual should not feel uncomfortable rather he should be ready to take up

challenges. How can we ? Is the usual question asked by everyone in an organization. Following constructivist principles both by the management and the staff will help us to find the solutions. The organization must keep in mind that to achieve desired goals and improve productivity of the organization the staff has to be motivated. This motivation should be provided in some or the other form. The staff should not wait for the motivation from the management but should become self motivated to learn new things. As a competent person in my workplace I need to update myself with new knowledge and skills. Once this realization is rooted in the individual he will start looking at new experiences in different light. New orientations, workshops, trainings in special fields will not become burden for them. Organizations play a role of providing these learning facilities to the staff. Sufficient time should be given to learn new tasks. Employee should be allowed to come together and work in collaborative groups so that they get to learn from each other through interactions. Language of trainings or orientations should be well understood by all. Where ever possible staff should be given hands on experiences to practice the skills. The role organization should be supportive and facilitating rather than evaluative and punishing.

Websites:

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<http://online.sfsu.edu/~foreman/itec800/finalprojects/eitankaplan/pages/home.htm>

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[http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_\(learning_theory\)](http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Constructivism_(learning_theory))