

TOWARDS SEAMLESS EDUCATION : PEERING BEYOND CONSTRUCTIVISM

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ABSTRACT

Since eons socio-politico-religions as well as knowledge systems have been straining to box and stamp education for their convenience. Most of the times they also wish to harness the latest power of education for their propagation. This paper purports to bring out and plead for the unfathomable and seamless energy of genuine education. The first part of the paper takes up an endoscopy of education leading to unchain it from the reputed paradigm called constructivism. The second part, after breaking the myth of framework, visualises education as a seamless activity - a worthy enterprise for an evolving, boundless, ever ineffable 'man'. The philosophical propositions, ultimately, lead to pragmatic ideas in part three. Thus, the paper has its roots in infinitude of being, its branches in educational thinking and hovers in the praxis of education.

Keywords: *Seamless education, Beyond constructivism, rejoicing unpredictability, non-paradigmatic space, mutual inclusion.*

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INTRODUCTION

There are more things in heaven and earth, Horatio,
Than are dreamt of in your philosophy.

(Hamlet 1:5)

Education has empowered us with an emancipatory courage to proclaim that genuine education is a matrix-free, process-free, ismless, no-goal-seeking engagement like love and life. Even the softest walls of free-size paradigms smother is infinite variety. The wisdom of post post-positivist era offers a pair of a pristine eyes to covet our beloved muse : education. Submission to the hegemony of any paradigm is a perceptual impairment. Driving in a labyrinth with such a malady is not less than fatal for the driver, co-travelers and

pedestrians. The emergent realities compel us to disregard theoretical compulsions. Faithfulness to a seemingly near-perfect principle/therapy gets transformed, after a long practice, into slavery. Paradigmatic blinkers may enhance safety but blinds us to the ever-changing flow, the kaleidoscopic novelties, offered by the flux. Hence, hark the warning siren : Constructivism Ahead. Dead Slow!

1.0 AN ENDOSCOPY OF CONSTRUCTIVIST PARADIGM

A paradigm, like a prism, has a three-dimensional structure which lets in the colourless reality to create a spectrum of appearance. Constructivism as a three-facaded schema primarily gives the following view:

1. Relativist Ontology : realities exist in the form of multiple mental constructions, socially and experientially based, local and specific, dependent for their form and content on the persons who hold them.

2. Subjectivist Epistemology : inquirer and inquired are fused into a single (monistic) entity. Findings are literally the creation of the process of interaction between the two.

3. Hermeneutic, Dialectic Methodology : individual constructions are elicited and refined hermeneutically and compared and contrasted dialectically, with the aim of generating one (or a few) construction on which there is substantial consensus (Smith, 1990:27).

This is an impressive delineation worthy for a sophisticated paradigm. It has apparently convincing tenets to baptize a cognitivist into a new clan. Educators and instructors have rejoiced in declaring themselves as constructivists. The new branding allegedly increases their longevity. From instruction to construction has become an invigorating slogan. That's all. A practicing constructivist, fortunately, is just like a mermaid - heard of but never seen!

1.1 A view from within - a critique of constructivism

1.1.1: Construction by definition is a deliberate and conscious act. It suggests an onus on the person's intention and pre-plan for the contrivance of something. buildings, and likewise, anthills are constructed. The constructors have a sort of blueprint before they start working. The concept

of construction does refute the spontaneity of an act. The a priori orientation of a perceiver vitiates the nature of unfolding-emerging reality. The constructivist paradigm, thus, seems to uphold theory-driven interpretations, and falls back to fallacy inherent in inductivism and empiricism.

1.1.2: The relativist ontology and subjectivist epistemology of this paradigm are wonderfully argued against by Schuon Frithjof (1995). His objection is that relativism sets out to reduce every kind of absoluteness to relativity while making an illogical exception for its own case. Relativism holds that one can ever escape human subjectivity. If that were true, the statement itself would have no objective value; it would fall by its own verdict. Moreover, if we could not break out of subjectivity we would never be able to know what subjectivity is.

1.1.3: The problem of relationship between the constructed knowledge and the constructor (person) is oversighted. The paradigm categorically mentions that the inquirer and the inquired are fused into a single (monistic) entity in the process of knowing. It is understood that the construction is used by the constructor for taking further cognitive and behavioural decisions. This gives rise to the problem of alienation between self and knowledge, which is emphatically voiced by Gellner Ernest (1975 :206): The dehumanizing price (of this outlook) is that our identities, freedom, norms, are no longer underwritten by our vision and comprehension of things. On the contrary we are doomed to suffer from

a tension between cognition (what we believe to be true) and identity (who we sense ourselves to be).

1.1.4: Construction proceeds through the methodology of hermeneutics – wherein interpretations are made by the conscious of the known self. This point was put forth by a pioneering constructivist Paiget Jean (1926). It was Vygotsky (1962:90-91) who smashed down this assumption by this experimentation. He submitted that, “consciousness and control appear only at a late stage in the development of a function, after it has been used and practiced unconsciously and spontaneously”. This is also true about some acquisitions at any stage of life. A person engaged in an intimate or an absorbing situation does not try to learn something out of it. He is just present with his whole being. After the situation is over he finds something added to his being—this addition is not a construction, it is only a happening. Constructed knowledge is a ‘doing’ whereas many value-acquisitions are ‘happenings’. Geertz’s (1973 : 20) axiomatic quote can well be tagged here, “It is not necessary to know everything in order to understand something”.

1.1.5: Constructivism takes a discreet, fragmentary and diminutive view of knowledge and therefore of reality. This objection comes from Smith John K. (1990 : 179), he directly attacks constructivism saying: The problem is that...constructivism reduces knowledge to the level of merely beliefs, opinions and tastes... constructivism is inherently conservative in that it is unable to utilize theoretical knowledge

for emancipation and empowerment. The philosophical hermeneutics of constructivism is unable to advance an objective understanding of distorted communication and ideological distortions”. The second objection is from Smith Huston (1992 : 234-35) : “Multiple views, yes; multiple realities, no. Constructivists who speak of many realities or ‘many worlds’ speak either figuratively or misleadingly. Tinted or ground glasses affect our vision, but no one thinks they create what we see”. Both these objections put constructivism on defense and solicit its followers to revise their beliefs and tastes, to see the whole room and not the fragments.

1.1.6: Not constructiong but choosing a construction is crucial to acting. Even if we concede the process of constructing realities, it does not help us in explaining or understanding human life in its actuality. The basic mismatch is that the constructed reality is cubical in nature; it is an ossified reality, whereas the evolving or emerging reality is a flow of events and their reflections. In real-life situations we do not go by the latest constructions we have performed, but we choose from the multiple constructions available to us and act accordingly. This choice is an existential move which is beyond theories and therefore, obviously, eludes all the paradigms. Existential choice is not a national act which can be explained through so called ultimate and sophisticated models. Hence, it is better to go beyond paradigmatic speculations and start an authentic life. It was Bernstein Richard (1988) who

pleaded for understanding the incommensurability of paradigms with life and reality : This subscribes to what Karl Popper calls the ‘Myth of the Framework’ where we are presumably ‘prisoners caught in the framework of our theories, our expectations, our past experiences, our language’ and are so locked into these frameworks that we cannot communicate with those encased in ‘radically’ different frameworks or paradigms.

2.0 TOWARDS A SEAMLESS EDUCATION

2.1 De-processing Education

‘Education is a process’ has become an archeological truth. Hardly anyone thinks to reflect upon this sacramental assumption. Now it is time to dismantle this myth persisting on teleological pedestal. A process by definition presupposes a purpose. It is the purpose which guides and regulates the architecture of components. In absence of pre-determined purpose, inputs and throughputs cannot be defined or designed. Education per se is tantamount to evolution of a person. Education is merely one of the factors that create a landscape wherein a person learns. It is the person who makes educative efforts meaningful or meaningless. Therefore, assuming some a-priori goals or aims of education is preposterous. Yes, fascists do require specific aims to be fulfilled by the subjects and hence, they utilize education as a process.

Chance is the logos, not design. Evolution is not a clockwork, Unpredictability reins the organic world which in turn rejoices unpredictability. A move to reduce the unpredictable into predictable is a

destructive move, it annihilates the mystery of being. Processed education is detrimental to human unfoldment.

2.2 The Fluid dynamics of Learning

Learning is not a block-building activity (a ‘block-head’ is one who defies learning). Learners create volatile and fluid ideas which have tremendous power to flow across and unify myriad information. The transfer of training becomes impossible if we try to substantiate learning as construction or as some paradigm-specific process. Teachers and teacher-educators need to accept and understand the fluid dynamic of learning as a human activity. Packing concepts and principles into sharply outlined units is relegating learning to the level of storing. Temporal moods, present needs, here and now purposes and motivation integrate themselves in a curious configuration which induces and persists continuous learning events. In fluid dynamics the temporal overpowers the long term.

2.3 Affect : The Mighty Engine of Learning

A learner is in some affective state at any given moment. Affect, sitting on the top of being, guides and controls cognitive currents. Instincts, feelings and emotions rein over intellectual movements. A thought, that emerges at any point of time, is coloured by the affective spray. Most of our decisions are ignited by affective strokes. In these moments we put aside our logical-rational-cognitive back-up and venture for a new/different behaviour. Computers cannot break down their logical circuits and take a ‘risky’ decision. A person learns better in an affect-

positive state rather than in cognition-positive state. The affect operates faster than cognition. Therefore, cognitive objectives are easier to attain, but objectives related to values, attitudes and dispositions are rarely attained through low-powered cognitive learning practice. Emotions, feelings, and the like can neither be constructed nor be show-cased into paradigmatic display.

2.4 Unchaining Learning from Tyranny of ‘ the Common’

Any theory of learning is a set of generalized statements based on common factors derived from common experiences of common people. It is unethical to apply such a theory commonly over all learners. By this argument I am not making a case for individual differences but condemning the mediocratizing motives of a theory which is appropriated for a wider coverage. Learning is a personalized endeavour evolving through the being of a person which is an ever changing affective kaleidoscope. Applying a common theory or explanation of learning is tyrannous to creative souls. Creative people are those who take more risk and learn more.

3.0 TEACHING - LEARNING IN A NON-PARADIGMATIC SPACE

The amorphous idea of seamless education tells us to opt for a de-systemized perspective on education. It has a potential to cop up with undesigned, spontaneous, emergent, mysterious reality we live in. The determinists may sense here an epistemological anarchy of ‘anything goes’, but a

life-lover would readily accept the primacy of psychological over logical; and therefore, feel chary of accepting a sewn and shaped horoscope for pursuing teaching-learning in human situations. From this vantage point a few hints for teachers and teacher-educators can be ventured.

3.1: A teacher should enter into a personal relationship with her students so that both have a proximal and inner view of each other. In such a congenial state genuine interaction becomes possible.

A two-way educative act starts happening when a boundariless human space is throbbing with immense readiness. In this environment, of mutual inclusion, person-oriented education sprouts and unfolds. The learning that has happened at the inner level would guide and give meaning to the learning at the outer/formal level.

3.2: An atmosphere of friendliness, enthusiasm and psychological security should permeate the classroom transactions. Within the ambience of role-free togetherness a pupil is engendered into a person. A person in turn takes a risk to inquire, review or turn down the set patterns of classroom chores. It also possibilitates a freedom to express one’s thoughts and feelings on the topic in the syllabus, and outside it. The unbound capabilities of teacher and students, now, can encompass the clear and the ambiguous; the rational and the irrational; the tangible and the abstract; the perennial and the ephemeral, the historical and the fantastic.

3.3: A teacher is expected to understand the value of affective mode of actions on the learners’ as well

as on her part. Affect toggle the cognitive connections. Use of poetry, stories, anecdotes, movie-clips, pictures etc. awake a 'welcome' mood in the learners. These also carry a thin but strong message which goes home unobstructed. Such hidden bits strengthen the affective operators of the learners to further intensity. The cognitive content, subsequently, could be facilitated by discussion, arguments, opinions and presentations. Teacher and the students navigating with sails bulged by affective winds take a risky voyage leading to undetermined directions but also to undiscovered lands.

Learning should accommodate creative flashes, fantasies, reveries and impulses as knowledge-generating sources. A disregard for such events in education is a fatal methodological error. The pied pipers of constructivism would transform creative children into mentally hypnotized rats, if not shown the magic of fantastic moments.

3.4: The learner should be instigated to formulate and come up with imaginative responses and bold conjectures. Eliciting expected responses is a circular route, it merely reinforces the past and blinds the learners to the present and the future. A teacher must strive to create innumerable waves in the classroom by boosting the learners' impulses to trespass the theoretical-logical interpretations and solutions. In human learning mis-interpretation is a misnomer. Remember the ugly duckling ?

CONCLUSION

A teacher should discourage her students to jump derive formulas, generalizations and final

conclusions. All the practitioners in the field of human development must understand that everything is semi-final. Certainty, convictions, confidence, ultimate truth, goal setting and habit formation are anti educational elements conspiring against fuzzy, hazy and maybe natural life-like learning. To build a bulwark of defense against paradigm and ism-driven education is the Herculean task of present day teachers and teacher educators. At least, let's not fall to the temptation of finalizing, fixing and framing the human reality which is evolving, inexact, uncertain and purposeless. Life and learning are integrated by a way of being called love. Waiving of waves and deparadigm of education can also be supported by J. Krishnamuti's (2000) succinct explanation :

To do something without a motive is love of what one is doing, and in that process thinking is not mechanical; then the brain is in the state of constant learning, not opinionated, not moving from knowledge to knowledge. It is a mind that moves from fact to fact (that is, emerging reality). Therefore, such a mind is capable of ending, and coming to something it does not know, which is freedom from the known.

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