



CONSTRUCTIVIST LEARNING THEORY IN LITERATURE TEACHING

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ABSTRACT

The purpose of this study is to acknowledge Constructivist Learning Theory as an approach in literature teaching and other allied disciplines. It presented varied standpoints on literature and literature teaching and the benefits of utilizing and integrating Constructivism in class. It made-use of the qualitative research approaches as it presented differing viewpoints from varied sources so as to orchestrate the researchers' arguments. Basing from the varied information presented in terms of using constructivism as a strategy and approach in literature teaching, it is concluded that Constructivism is an approach where teachers can use and will pave way for students to utilize their schema and connect it to their existing knowledge in order to form a new knowledge. It is therefore recommended to teachers of literature to try it out in their classes in order to determine its applicability, usefulness and benefits.

KEYWORDS: Constructivist learning theory, literature teaching, schema, traditional classroom

INTRODUCTION

In order for students to learn worthwhile values and skills necessary for their existence, studying and engaging into literature could be an interesting avenue for them. Reading, studying and analyzing different literary pieces such as novels, drama, short



stories, poems, epics and other types of literature help them to connect to the real world where they live in and at the same time see life at a wider perspective. Hence, literature teaching and other allied subjects need a careful plan for instruction to fully develop the skills and potentials of learners (Lasaten, 2008).

Constructivist teaching is grounded on the belief that learning occurs as students are actively involved in a process of meaning and knowledge construction as opposed to passively receiving information. Learners are the makers of meaning and knowledge. Constructivist teaching fosters critical thinking, and creates motivated and independent learners. Thus, this study presented and discussed information on Constructivism which are very beneficial to both literature teachers and learners as they could be exposed to a classroom setting that caters a friendly and democratic learning. The students will further be benefitted from this study by giving them the chance to be the center of the teaching-learning process, instead of the teacher, which is the conventional scenario in a traditional approach in the teaching of short stories, poems, drama and among others. Being exposed to said approach will develop their skills and abilities and their experiences are highly valued that lead to the development of their full potentials. Through this study, students and teachers alike could improve their interaction in class, particularly in the learning of the different genres.

Moreover, for literature teachers, it will redound a lot in evaluating their past works and approaches and align them towards a new direction for better literature teaching performance. The findings may likewise provide teachers the solution on the problem of classroom interaction of students in literature teaching. This could also offer them learning insights to further improve their instruction so that their students may find the teaching and learning process more interesting, meaningful, thought-provoking, challenging, interactive and student-centered.

School administrators and curriculum planners are likewise recipients of this paper. Writing down this paper will be useful to the school administrators and curriculum planners. Through this, it is hoped that English language and literature programs will be better equipped to provide a meaningful experience to all students by considering such information when making curricular, pedagogical, or other program decisions.



A lot of studies and researches on literature have been truly undertaken to provide solutions and innovations in literature teaching. It is in this context that the Constructivist Theory of Learning is hereby acknowledged and argued by the researchers to deepen and further enrich it and at the same time to provide innovations in teaching literature. Several great thinkers have expounded on this theory due to its ever-broadening learning principles that challenge learners' higher order and critical thinking.

RESEARCH METHODS

Generally, this paper argues the imperativeness of Constructivist Learning Theory as an approach in the teaching of literature and other allied disciplines in the new normal. It made use of the descriptive-qualitative approach in order to process the data.

As stated by researcharticles.com (2020) and Kumar (2011) using this design in a certain study necessarily answers questions such as what, who, where, and when. Arguments to these interrogations do not essentially provide first hand experiments, or observations, hence, the researchers discussed this paper based from their schema and readings. Additionally, they gathered supplementary data from secondary sources like internet, books and periodicals and among others which may further enrich the study.

DISCUSSION

Several great thinkers have expounded their thoughts about literature. They are discussed accordingly.

On Literature

Literature is defined as written works which deal with themes of permanent and universal interest characterized by creativity and grace of expression such as poetry, fiction and essay, etc; distinguished from works of scientific, technical or journalistic nature.



Moreover, literature can be penned as an expression of the emotions, thoughts, beliefs, aspirations, dreams and goals of humanity in general and of man in particular. Many can say that it is life itself for they can mirror in it. In many ways, it can teach us the unknown and undiscovered things about ourselves, what Saint Augustine many centuries ago called “the dark corners of the heart.” And according to Thomas Moore, literature means “to appreciate life” and “to make us see beauty.”

Widdowson (1975), as cited by Lazar (1983) and Lasaten (2012) stated that literature is an authentic material because it exposes students to a source of unmodified language as the skills acquired by them in terms of dealing challenging situations can be used outside the four walls of the classroom. Further, they emphasized that literature encourages interaction and expands language awareness. Texts in a certain literary piece are often very rich depending on how the reader deciphers it or give meanings to it which could be a premise for classroom discussions where they share diverse feelings and opinions and at the same time make learners examine sophisticated or non-standard examples which oftentimes are present in literary texts.

On a note, literature educates the totality of a person. Through the introspection of necessary values embedded in a literary text, educators can encourage and motivate students to develop worthwhile attitudes towards them. These attitudes are truly embodiment of how they should behave and live as a whole being in their respective families and communities. And finally, literature is worth rousing. In many parts if not all parts of the world, literature has a special chamber be it in their writings or in their respective cultures. And because of this, people can feel the real essence of having been able to fully enrich their potentials by having achieved and understand a piece of respected culture and literature. Indeed, literature is more than those that can be found on books.

Why Literature?

A variety of reasons why the study of literature is of great importance. They are the following 1. Literature expresses our emotions, beliefs, aspirations and sentiments; 2. It replicates the ideologies and philosophies of human’s life; 3. It informs, entertains and



educates; 4. It allows one to discover someone's soul and grow through the exposure to the beliefs, attitudes, values, customs, mores and traditions of the people around the world; 5. It enables the reader to appreciate literary masterpieces and value the meaning of life; 6. It allows us to understand literary trends and techniques; 7. It gives the distinctive qualities of literary works and ideas peculiar to a certain group of people or nation; 8. It makes us realize the universality of events in human life which we need to understand and accept; 9. It enables students to understand the values of other peoples of the world.

In addition, there are several theories concerning literature, these are: 1. *It is initiative*. It is believed in the study of literary background that writers follow the examples and other authors before they arrive at their own original works; 2. *It is representative*. Any literary work is a substitute for reality; 3. *It is appreciative*. Literature gives us a bigger view of life; 4. *It is symbolic*. Literature is scattered in other meanings.

Furthermore, subjects and standards are also present in reading and studying literature. There are varied topics or ideas that could be subjects of what people write. These could be based on their concepts and observations about people, places, history, objects, events or occasions, experiments, actions and experiences. Anything which attracts or inspires writers can be subjects of literature. The following criteria or standards according to Ornos et. al (2004) are suggested and used by a world literary critic to evaluate a literary piece. *Artistry* is a quality of literature which appeals to our sense of beauty; *Intellectual beauty* states that literary pieces must stimulate thought. These should enrich our mental life by making us realize fundamental truths about life and human nature; *Suggestiveness*. This is a quality relevant to the emotional power of literature to make us feel deeply and stimulate our feelings and imagination. It should give and induce visions above and beyond the plane of ordinary life and understanding; *Spiritual value*. A literary work must elevate the spirit by bringing out moral values which make us better persons. The capacity to inspire is part of the spiritual value of literature; *Permanence*. A great literary work endures and can be read over and over again as such reading gives fresh delights and new insights to avid readers. It opens new worlds of meaning and experience and its appeal is lasting; *Universality*. A great literary work is timeless and timely. It is forever relevant, it appeals to one and all, anytime, anywhere because it deals with elemental feelings, fundamental



truths, and universal conditions; *Style*. Just like someone who want to be unique, a piece of literature needs to have a distinction. It is the peculiar way in which a writer sees life, forms his ideas and expresses them. Great works are marked as much by their memorable substance as by their distinctive style. It should suit content. These above information are truly interesting and these are just but some of the reasons why the present researchers were encouraged to pen down this study. And to make literature teaching more engaging, a certain approach such as Constructivism must be acknowledged.

Literature in the academe

Literature instruction has long been at the center of the curriculum of every school. It continues to be the focus of instruction in most English classrooms because it is considered as the framework of human development. Indeed, literature cannot just be simply taken for granted in the educational system for it plays a vital role in the preservation of individuals' heritage and culture including the traditions and values they represent. It can be considered as one of the shaping influences of life which places the individual above all creations.

In his famous work, *Literary Taste: How to Form It*, Bennett (2006: 43) explicated the exquisiteness and worth of literature:

Literature, instead of being an accessory, is the fundamental sine qua non of compatible living. The aim of literary study is not to amuse the hours of leisure, it is to amuse oneself, it is to be alive to intensify one's capacity for pleasure, for sympathy, and for comprehension. It is not to affect one hour but twenty-four hours. It is to change utterly one's relations with the world. An understanding appreciation of literature means an understanding of appreciation of the world, and it means nothing else. Not isolated and unconnected parts of life, but all of life, brought together and correlated in a synthetic map. It is well to remind individuals that literature is first and last means of life and that the enterprise of forming one's literary taste is an enterprise of learning how best to use this means of life.



Additionally, literature is a record of best man's thoughts necessary for human development. It helps individuals grow both personally and intellectually (Roberts 1991) and (Lasaten, 2008). It also provides an objective base for knowledge and understanding that links people with the broader cultural, philosophic and religious world of which they are a part.

In line with these thoughts, Baraceros (2001) stressed that students exposed to literature view the world and life with a wider perspective. Literature enables them to develop an outlook on the events and happenings occurring locally and globally; thereby, giving them understanding and control. Thus, literature is a means that facilitates mature sensibility and compassion for understanding among humans with different cultures, philosophies and religions.

Because of these, literature aims to stimulate and stir the readers' imagination so that they, too, can figure out things that will make them create or produce novel experiences to improve their lives. Simultaneously, the readers will find many ways to express their thoughts and feelings about the selection, either for their own personal or social satisfaction. They can show their appreciation of the literary piece through body language and techniques, like interpreting the story orally, dramatizing the selection, writing something about the selection or presenting the selection through graphics.

Ibsen (1990) and Lasaten (2008) also asserted that meeting the literary text in the right way will give the learners emotional and personal experiences and a room for reflection. In addition, the learners can discover via the text important things about themselves that develop deeper insights into human experiences. Thus, learners will realize that literature has relevance to their lives and goals.

Aside from these, reading literature is not only an affective process but also a cognitive one. As a cognitive stimulus, literature encourages an analysis of words, structures, discourse patterns, content and interpretation. By reading a work of fiction, the learners will discover how literary effects are created through language, and they will see the author's conscious handling of words to convey a message. Therefore, a piece of literary work can provide a valuable analytical experience of generative value (Rosenblatt 1985).



Another objective of teaching literature is to enable students to recognize human dreams and struggles in different places and times that they would never otherwise know. According to Nadera(2002), providing students the perception to appreciate the beauty of order and arrangement will help them discover the conditions and struggles of different people from all walks of life and of all living things around the world. They will be given a clear picture of the past so they can bridge it with the new one. Furthermore, through their imaginative journey, students can form greater aspirations and draw inspiration from human existence.

In a larger sense, the teaching of literary texts provides students comparative basis to see worthiness in the aims of all people. Through cumulative experience in learning, literature shapes students' goals and values by clarifying their own identities, both positively, through the acceptance of the desirable and admirable in human beings, and negatively through the rejection of the sinister (Roberts 1991) as cited by (Lasaten, 2008). Thus, teaching of literary texts helps the students shape their judgments through the comparison of the good and the bad.

These are the few reasons why literature has a place in the educational curriculum aside from its being unique and worth-studying. That is why; teachers and officials in the educational system are expected to be on the alert for new methods and strategies in teaching. Teachers of literature, in particular, are expected to use innovative strategies in teaching literature such as Constructivism. Hence, this article.

Constructivist Learning Theory

Constructivist theory as an approach to learning is basically a belief that schema is not really a thing that can be simply given by the teacher at the front of the room to students in their desks. It is a knowledge which is built and initiated by learners through an active, mental process of cognition; learners have the sense of building and creating meaning and knowledge. Constructivism draws on the developmental work of Piaget (1977) and Kelly (1991). Fosnot (1989) describes constructivism specifying four principles: learning, in an important way, depends on what we already know; new ideas occur as we adapt and change our old ideas; learning involves inventing ideas rather than mechanically



accumulating facts; meaningful learning occurs through rethinking old ideas and coming to new conclusions about new ideas which conflict with our old ideas. A productive, constructivist classroom, then, consists of learner-centered, active instruction. In such a classroom, the teacher provides students with experiences that allow them to synthesize, predict, manipulate objects, pose questions, research, investigate, imagine, and discover. Using this approach, the teacher's role is to facilitate this process.

Furthermore, Piaget (1977) avowed that learning occurs by an active construction of meaning, rather than by passively receiving information. He explains that when we, as students, are seeing an experience or an instance that conflicts with our current way of thinking, a state of uncertainty or imbalance is formed. We must then modify our thinking to restore equilibrium or balance. To do this, we make sense of the new information by associating it with what we already know, that is, by attempting to connect it into our existing knowledge. When we are unable to do this, we accommodate the new information to our old way of thinking by restructuring our present knowledge to a higher level of thinking.

In the same way as Kelly's theory of personal constructs (Kelly, 1991). He proposes that we look at the world through mental constructs or patterns which we make. We develop ways of constructing or understanding the world based on our respective encounters as well as our experiences. When we meet a new experience, we attempt to fit these patterns over the new experience. For example, when we see a pedestrian lane, we are supposed to stop. The point is that we create our own ways of seeing the world in which we live; the world does not create them for us. Constructivist beliefs have recently been applied to teaching and learning in the classroom. Moreover, constructivism is truly a philosophy of learning through which a learner experiences phenomena because he or she interprets that experience based on what he/she already knows, reasons about that experience, and then reflects on it to make a meaning of it (Forcier & Descy; Jonassen, Peck, & Wilson,(1999); Sprague & Dede, (1999); Wilson, (1996).



To truly learn, one must make sense of his or her own experiences, as learning cannot be imparted by another- rather it must be experienced. The student is able to produce his or her own knowledge based on information from external sources, rather than being the recipient of information from his or her teacher (Forcier & Descy, 1999). In terms of learning with technology, Jonassen, Peck, and Wilson (1999) stated that "constructivists believe that knowledge cannot be simply transmitted by the teacher to the student, that teaching is not simply a process of imparting knowledge, because the learner cannot know what the teacher knows and at the same time, what the teacher knows cannot be transferred to the learner".

As a learner, students need to construct their own learning: that they learn by taking in information from the world and construct their own meaning from the experience, rather than having someone else tell them the information (Sprague & Dede, 1999). By teaching students with this holistic approach, teachers can facilitate learning in a cooperative environment. Rather than standing at the front of the classroom and giving out information, students have to seek out their own information in order to solve a problem in a "realistic context that is appealing and meaningful to students" (Grabinger and Dunlap, 1995).

Not only is the substance of what is being learned important, but so is the method through which it is being learned. Authentic learning that "engages in scientific discourse and problem solving" (Savery & Duffy, 1998) has been shown to stimulate the learner, thereby engaging him or her in the actual learning process.

On the other hand, a lot of educational sectors in the world are giving emphasis on testing, however, testing should not be the goal of education. The principal goal of education should be to "engage students in meaningful learning" (Jonassen, et al, 1999). This is further strengthened by a lot of researches which clearly shows that constructivism in the classroom is a successful method of learning for students. According to Sprague and Dede (1999), following a constructivist model is an effective method of integrating technology into the curriculum. Provided that the lesson is an authentic, problem-based activity, technology is a viable tool to help students solve problems. If the teacher can



comprehend with the computer and the technology that are being used inside the class through a constructivist application, the learner wonders and he/she starts to ask the questions why a certain thing exists and the like rather than simply answering them.

The Constructivist Classroom

Gray (n.d.) asserted that constructivist teacher and a constructivist classroom exhibit a number of discernible qualities markedly different from a traditional or direct instruction classroom. He argued that as a constructive teacher, he/she is able to artistically integrate ongoing experiences in the classroom into the negotiation and construction of lessons either in groups or in pairs. As a democratic classroom, the activities are most interesting and student centered, and the students are empowered by a teacher who operates as a guide, supervisor and arbiter. Smith (1993) contends that Constructivist classrooms must be organized so that learners are immersed in experiences within which they may engage in meaning-making inquiry, action, imagination, invention, interaction, hypothesizing and personal reflection. As teachers, they need to recognize how people use their own experiences, prior knowledge and perceptions, as well as their physical and relational surroundings to construct knowledge and connotation. The goal is to produce a democratic classroom environment that provides meaningful learning experiences for self-directed students.

This standpoint of learning presents an alternative view of what is regarded as knowledge, suggesting that there may be many ways of interpreting or understanding the world (Fosnot, 1996). No longer is the teacher seen as an expert, who knows the answers to the questions she or he has constructed, while the students are asked to identify their teacher's constructions rather than to construct their own meanings. Moreover, in a constructivist classroom, students are encouraged to use their previous and present experiences to help them form and reform understandings. This can be related to a personal response approach to literature, a constructive approach that was coined by Rosenblatt (1978). He further contends for a personal and constructive response to literature wherein students' personal experiences and discernments are taken to the reading task so that when



they contact with that text, the realities and understandings which the students construct are their own thinking.



Figure 1. The traditional vs. the Constructivist classroom

Image taken from: https://prezi.com/4mdmsz019sq_/classrooms-traditional-vs-constructivist/

In an experiment conducted by Villanueva (2016), it was surprisingly notable that the favorable gain scores of the experimental group over the control group means that the employment of constructivist activities affected students' construction of knowledge and the extent of their participation in class. Thus, careful selection of activities should be observed. This finding substantiates that the activities are learner-controlled and they can help learners to form multiple perspectives and metacognition, which Vygotsky (1978) asserted as results of collaboration and social interaction. Moreover, it can be deduced from the data that the activities emphasize apprenticeship, which encourage self-analysis-regulation, reflection and awareness among learners. This result also conforms to the claim of Williams and Burden (1997) about the need to empower students to think and construct knowledge for themselves, as the main aim of constructivist teaching. The activities also support knowledge collaboration, facilitate knowledge construction and encourage previous knowledge constructions, adhere to Bruner's theory (1986) and emphasize the importance of previous experiences in the construction of knowledge. Furthermore, the activities included are authentic. All these indicate that the activities evaluated exhibit constructivist perspectives. Thus, they are suitable to the attainment of the objectives of the materials



and they promote interaction between and among students, which is necessary in the construction of new concepts.

In addition, a reader-response approach to literature discards the idea that all students should essentially come to the same understanding of a text of literature, that single understanding can be from the teacher, from their classmates or their own. A reader-response approach allows students to discover different interpretations, the teacher's own interpretation being only one possible interpretation in the classroom (Zemelman, Daniels, & Hyde, 1993). Sheridan (1993) stated that in a usual classroom, an invisible and imposing, at times, impenetrable, barrier between student and teacher exists through power and practice. In a constructivist classroom, by contrast, the teacher and the student need to share responsibility and decision making and of course demonstrate mutual respect. The independent and interactive process of a constructivist setting allows students to be active and autonomous learners. Thus, through the integration of constructivist strategies, teachers and students as well become more participative, active, engaging and eventually effective. They are able to promote proper and ideal communication inside the corners of the classroom and create flexibility among them so that the needs of all students can be met. Ultimately, both students and teachers will be benefitted in this kind of learning atmosphere.

CONCLUSION

Based from the arguments made and presented by the researchers, it is concluded that through the Constructivist Approach, it could cater the needs of today's new normal classroom in coping with the new trends of teaching specifically that we are still in the era of the pandemic, which is to promote active classroom interaction and facilitating individual differences among learners. However, in this paper it did not in any way utilize or integrate Constructivism as an approach in teaching. There was no experiment conducted as a means of trying out the latter as an intervention and this delimits this paper.



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