

# Educational Change: Core Assumptions about Active Learning

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**Abstract – Active learning is a kind of approach to education that is based upon the philosophy of the nature of the learning process. The active learning approach to education consists of guiding principles of teaching and learning. The central idea of this approach is that thought process is developed and concepts are constructed as a result of human activity and interaction. Therefore the aim of active learning is to provide the learner, the experiences which help in cognitive growth. The origin of active learning can be traced to mix up of applied psychology known as social cognitive constructivism concept given by the twentieth century educational philosopher John Dewey.**

**Execution of active learning approach needs for a creative, constructivist and pragmatic principles, resulted into a very different organization of the classroom from the traditional and behaviourist principles. So these philosophical assumptions which define the desired outcome of education such as school program system learning processes and multiple aspects of operations and processes have been taken into considerations in this piece of research paper.**

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## INTRODUCTION

Active learning is nothing but an instructional approach to education and teaching- learning process which guided every aspect within and outside the classroom in determining the life goals in long term. Active learning assumptions are derived from a variety of sources such as cognitive psychology, learning theories and educational philosophies. It is closely connected to the social cognitive constructionism but also carry a strong association to pragmatic approaches advocated by American philosopher John Dewey (1859-1952).

## JOHN DEWEY

John Dewey was an American philosopher whose views on education were very influential in the early twentieth century. In his book school and society (1899) he expressed his views developing better society by focusing on curricula school and teaching as organisation. Not only this but he expressed the same concern in his various works included such as schools of tomorrow 1915, and democracy and education 1916, my pedagogic creed 1897 the child and the curriculum 1902 the child and the curriculum 1902 and moral principles in education 1909. In all these works, the views widely discussed on the departure from the dominated traditional approaches to education.

In his works Dewey defines the child centered approach rather than curriculum centered or teacher centered approach. Under the influence of Dewey's approach, a laboratory school was established at the University of Chicago by following the idea as a miniature of society and expressed many concern in experience and education 1938 about the progressive education.

So we can sum up Dewey's influence on active learning in the following beliefs. Firstly students need to do something with knowledge in order to truly learn it. Secondly the curriculum must incorporate such practical aspects which help the learner to act as a productive member of a society. Thirdly learning should be child centred rather than curriculum centered which helps in the cognitive development rather than just memorization of the concepts. Last but not the least Dewey also added the democratic flavour to his views on education so that learner can be prepare and develop sense for future responsibilities as a citizen of country and able to grasp the situation easily. (Maxcy, 2002; Garrison, 1998; Schoen, 2008).

## SOCIAL COGNITIVE CONSTRUCTIVISM

Cognitive constructivism is a branch of psychology deal with the development of thought process in humans. There are various contribution to this area

but the most prominent among the cognitivists, is the work of Piaget on development stages and learning through action. (Piaget 1952; Piaget and Garcia, 1986; Wordsworth, 1996). Piaget's work considered as pivotal work in this area because Piaget focused on the thought processes required when learner engaged in activities and thus associated learning to doing. (Berk, 1997; Schoen, 2008).

Another important research contributing the cognitive constructive theory is the blooms on the thought process of humans and the Bruner' work on the role of schemas on learning. All of these early cognitive constructivists helps in shifting the focus from education to thinking process. They focused in a manner that learner interact with the environment in the development of thinking process and resulted into productive useful and practical solution.

However the most important amongst cognitive constructivist in the development of active learning approaches was Soviet psychologist, Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934), discussed that children can achieve a great when they personally experienced more in terms of learning experiences and also got a feedback from a more experienced learner. He in his work concerning the zone of proximal development asserted that first higher mental functioning develops in collaboration with others before it comes to the individual. Vygotsky's work made an important highlight on instructional planning, social interaction in the classroom, monitoring of learning processes and overall evaluation.

## CONSTITUENTS OF ACTIVE LEARNING

### A Flexible Approach versus Wrapped Curriculum

Active learning refers to flexible way of instructing schooling that is based on the constructive and pragmatic principles. Active learning approaches are different and specific in accordance with the method material processes and procedures. They may or may not be pre-set or pre-planned and fully developed for all aspects of the curriculum. This means that there is a great deal of variation in the implementation of active learning approaches across school sites. However it is also important to note that despite all the variations which may look and function differently, there is a common thread that is similar in active learning environment across the settings.

## CLASS ACTIVITIES

One of the step marks of active learning is that students learn by actively engaged in interacting with the environment. By interacting with the environment, the students construct and develop new and more complex thinking process. This pragmatic and constructive approach to learning contrast with traditional behaviourist approaches where students are passive recipients of information and knowledge. Some are having the views about active learning is

appeared more louder and chaotic due to more student movement. But it is just a fear in the mind of those who do not have belief that active learning is a better approach of learning.

Active learning approaches are the proponents of such a belief that interaction is integral to thought development. Therefore it is common in active learning classroom to see students out of their seats and engaged in activities. Interactive activities are intentionally designed to help out students. This method has its origin to Dewey who encouraged learning by doing. He believed that should should "involve the body, its actions and passions" Garrison 1998. Active learning proponents of today that engagement of the learner is central to higher levels of achievement.

## INSTRUCTIONAL PLANNING AND DESIGNING

Deliberate and careful planning is the most important part of active learning process that involve students in interactive activities such as experimenting discussing interviewing and evaluating. These activities promote cognitive growth. Whole class and small group activities are planned generally depending on the subject area, educational objectives, students need and abilities. There is also a need on the part of the teacher to monitor student activity, provide feedback and redirect them about their doings as it will help students to focus and in further learning. Effective instructional planning is needed to find the ways to meet the needs of the students. This can be frequently done with the help of peer teaching and coaching within or outside the school.

## CURRICULAR REGARDS

From an instructional point of view teachers and administrators are thoughtful that implement on the active learning guidelines, takes handful time. So it is necessary that instructors must be very careful in long term planning to ensure that all the skills and concepts should be covered in time. Constructivists believe that thought processing ability should be over to mastery of the content. So curricula used with active learning approaches can rely on transference or generalizations of mental processes such as problem solving skills and concepts from one context to another.

## PREPARING FOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF ACTIVE LEARNING METHODS

For the implementation of active learning methods in the classroom, teaching materials must be adapted to the type of activities planned, the instructional planning in the classroom shifts from the traditional actions and shifted to greater level of activity. There is a need for additional time and preparation needed such as room arrangements, creating or

adapting the material for students suited to their need. The preparation should have such a nature which facilitates learners in their development, in making decisions, judgements and evaluations for their process.

### **TEACHER IN-CLASS ACTIVITIES**

Teacher in class acts as a more facilitator rather than teacher in charge of full authority of the classroom. In this way teacher facilitates learning. This is necessary because in exercising active learning, learners required various level of support. Typically less mature learners required greater support in the form of more structured learning activities. The key to the successful learning is providing the continuous feedback to the learner about their continuous progress. Therefore monitoring of active learning is more demanding on the part of the teachers than traditional classroom which consists of students sitting quietly working in unison on the same activity.

### **ASSESSMENT**

Evaluation in active learning class is continuous and formative and used as a guideline for the teacher in the planning process of learning activities. Active learning classrooms promotes self regulation by involving learners actively in peer and self assessment. Unlike traditional approaches to education, a test score in active learning program is simply viewed as one of many performance indicators.

### **Common Guiding Principles to Most Active Learning Approaches**

There are many variations can be observed if we will have a look on active learning approaches. But the main idea in spite of all these variations in approaches, to make changes and shapes the classroom instructions. It can be grouped into measure categories that include beliefs about the nature of learning and the role and work of teachers. There are the following common guidelines to the active learning approaches.

- Personal connection to the content lead to the learning at best level.
- Best understanding takes place when learner actively manipulate, use or do something with it.
- There are many variables impact learning such as prior knowledge, motivation and aptitude so on.
- Learning processes are inherently social; people learn only when they interact.

- Learner is the primary agent in the active learning processes, teacher is to facilitate the learning.
- Evaluation is considered as a performance indicator. Teachers continuously provided feedback about the progress and make changes to strategies on the basis of their performances.
- Learning environment plays a very important role so it should be stimulating and allow for active manipulation and implementation.
- Participation in the similar activities do not lead to the same rate of learning as every individual learn at their own pace. So activities should be thought as flexible rather than fixed across students.
- Self evaluation and teacher-student conferences are frequently held to assist learners in self regulating their learning.
- Effective teachers constantly monitor and guide the student learning process by providing timely structure, scaffolding and feedback as needed to help students.

Above mentioned guidelines, not includes every approach to active learning but collectively these principles underlie most of the principles employed in active learning. Some school or programmes emphasize particular principles than others. The strength regarding the commitment to the implementation of active learning among teachers and administrators can be a determining factor for the success of active learning. Evidence proved that where the faculty does not take it genuinely, implementation tends to be weak and superficial. (Schoen, 2010). This highlights the importance of faculties being well trained in core constructive ideas and active learning philosophy prior to implementation.

### **CHALLENGES AND ACTIVE LEARNING IMPLEMENTATIONS**

Though the idea of active learning is widely understood than ever before. Nevertheless this approach is still rarely seen in operation with the use of its core concepts. Why? The reason is admitted that it places numerous and different demands on the professional life of a teachers and administrators than more traditional approaches that fall under the purview of behaviourism. In summing statement active learning requires a great deal in terms of more teacher training programme, professional judgement, continuous learning, cooperation, reflection and flexibility. All of these

are not difficult to achieve but also difficult to maintain over time.

Brooks and Brooks (1999) stated numerous challenges experienced by the teachers when school turns from traditional approaches such as limited professional development opportunities, limited budgets, a culture of traditionalism and a lack of support and understanding for the part of the administrators for the needs of the teachers in implementing active learning. Murphy and Alexander (2007) also pointed out that majority of the teachers did not receive proper training on psychological dimensions of learners and learning process. They discussed that knowledge of a teacher about learner centered principles. It would have important implications for improved educational practices. Hence school faces tremendous challenges but these can be handled if an individual teacher, independently decides to implement active learning strategies with less than full administrative assistance and support.

Some contemporary researches agree that strong social and administrative support is necessary to establish an effective and lasting culture of active learning. Demands increased day by day that school officials should provide teachers with a school culture in which they reasonably and consistently can experience a success story in terms of its implementation. As we aware that teacher commitment to the active learning approach is crucial to the change process. Since without this commitment teachers will face philosophical dualism within themselves. This philosophical dualism can pace faculty into competition rather than creating climate of social support. There is a need of such desirable environment in which faculty and administration deeply understand and embrace common core philosophy of this approach. (Newmann, Wehlage, & Secada, 1995; Deal & Peterson, 1999; Fullan, 2005; Leithwood, Aitken, & Jantzi, 2006).

Another important dimension leading to the sustaining active learning at school level is the provision for on-going teacher and administrator professional development. Recent researches on this topic emphasized the need for meaningful professional growth. Consequently facilitating teacher peer learning and cooperation during school hours by administrative means is recommended as a way to sustain active learning environment at school. Finally, supervision and evaluation methods must be based on core assumptions of active learning rather than on traditional approaches, considering process for teacher planning of student learning and reflecting in real time on relationship between instructional activities and student outcomes. With adequate teacher support, active learning holds much promise for reaching more students and helping them to achieve their potential.

## A STEP TOWARDS AN ACTIVE SCHOOL

Despite the beliefs and attempts that active learning works better, it is quite hard to change the culture of a school for decades. The opposition lies between the teachers own belief and new ideas. Such new ideas require teachers to modify their beliefs, values, expectations, habits, role and power structure. (Sahilberg, 1997). Changes which is required in school organization can be categorized as primary and secondary changes. Primary changes are thought to improve the existing school system by overcoming deficiencies in policies and practices. The aim is to improve the efficiency and effectiveness without disturbing the basic organizational features. Such primary changes are considered as efforts, refining the core features of the organization.

Under the purview of Second order changes, there is a focus to look on the composition of an organization. It involves the documentation of new goals, structures, and roles (Cuban, 1992). There are much challenges find out to put on secondary order changes that will have a essential effect on school culture and structures. It is also asserted by the researches that Small schools have a distinctive school culture that differs from that in larger urban schools. However, the teachers do not have the same requirements as the teachers in larger schools to plan, manage, and formally assess the way their school function. The small school culture was identified by a family-like atmosphere, informal relationships between the staff and the students. In the case of small schools, there lies a flexibility in the school organization and bringing about rapid changes to be easy. But there is on draw back associated with small school that all the policies and practices are made for keeping in mind the larger schools.

As we already stated that the implementation of the new ideas requires a modification in a teacher's ways of thinking and working. These modifications and adjustment must be reflected in the teaching practices employed (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012). Carlgren (1999) discussed that there is a gap exists between the reality of teaching and the expectations directed at the teacher. It can be seen from a wider standpoint as a difference between theory and practice. This might be better expressed as the difference between a teacher's thinking and his or her actions.

The change process is also hit by other obstacles such as, as far as the parents were concerned, it is confronted with parents' doubts regarding progressive educational ideas. These parents were even ready to return to the traditional school culture (Niemi, 2002). It was also noticed that different schools characterised by the distinctness in change process.

A process of change proceeding linearly in rational and systematic fashion represents the trustworthy perspective. Sometimes the process of change may be described as wide-ranging. This is when the teachers select the parts of the alteration that they desire to implement, being directed by their own practical ethics. In such cases the teachers do not actually change the bases of their subjective theory that guides them. These changes may be classified as representing change in accordance with the enactment standpoint (Snyder, Bolin, & Zumwalt, 1992). The process of change from a traditional school culture to a more progressive one can be carried on, inductively, in phases, by means of the experiences that the teachers gained in their working practice and through discussions about them. During the first phase of the change, the teachers introduced study units. During the second phase, the teachers wanted to develop a more activity oriented form of teaching. During the third phase, the teachers extended the school day. The process of change in the culture of school is aptly described by the concepts "reculture," "retime," and "restructure" (Fullan, 1998).

He argued, for change, we need especially to 'reculture', and 'retime' as well as 'restructure' schools. Restructuring is familiar and all it does, to alter the timetable or formal roles. Reculturing is considered as transforms the habits, skills and practices of educators and others towards a greater professional community which focuses on what students are learning and what actions should be taken to improve the situation. Retiming holds the question of how time can be used more resourcefully for both teachers and students. Reculturing and retiming should drive restructuring because we already know that they make a huge difference on learning, although they are very difficult to change. Educational reform, with its complexity, dynamism, and conflicts, is an unending process of change (Fullan, 1993). (Nias, Southworth, and Campbell, 1992) identified the following four sets of conditions that facilitated whole-school educational change:

1. Appropriate institutional values, specifically learning, interdependence, and teamwork, the open expression of professional differences, mutual consideration and support, as well as a willingness to compromise;
2. Presence of organizational structures, especially for professional interaction, communication, joint decision, and policy making
3. Resources, especially teacher commitment, time, people, and materials; and
4. Leadership, both formal and informal. Team effort of the teachers is a very necessary

element for smoothening the curriculum work.

In-service training acquired by the head of the school can also act as a promoter for the transformation of the instructional goals and practices. Among the school level factors facilitating the head teacher's thinking, is the most significant. In setting new educational goals, teachers can also be supported by the school's interest group. In addition, the majority of the parents and members of the community had a positive attitude regarding the pedagogical changes at the school.

However educational change as a process of growth for both teachers as well as students. It is a change in thinking and practice both. It is also termed as a commitment on the part of the teacher to enable the students to become active independent learners, engagement in lifelong learning, and cooperation with various educational stakeholders. These attributes have been advocated as the most fitting for professionals in the post-modern era. The intention is to endow teachers and enable them to influence the direction and development of educational reform (Webb et al., 2004). The implementation of changes in the school system involves the teacher in an active learning process. In particular, the significance of in-service training has been crucial because it motivates the teachers' planning work (Hopkins, 2007). The in-service training sessions offeres the teachers the possibility to sketch new ways of thinking for their own teaching. Moreover, sharing experiences with other teachers has been important. The features of teacher professional development are listed here: – The teachers have actively participated in-service training. If the process of educational change is to succeed, the teacher must have many pedagogical and professional competences. The teacher's professional development extents to meet the change, living with it, and influencing it. Changes require the teacher to be sensitive and ready to anticipate the future. An important teacher quality is being able to perceive societal changes together with their colleagues and to determine changes which could be relevant to their professional development (MoE, 2001).

## **A STEP TOWARDS AN ACTIVE LEARNING**

The central point of departure from the traditional approach is that education is closely related to the totality of culture and human activity. It suggests changing traditional, reproductive learning into actively problem-oriented, holistic, and life-centered learning (Kimonen, 2015). This will briefly scrutinize the process of active learning. The explanatory process here operates the socialization process of outdoor-oriented education. (Kimonen (2015). The philosophical foundation of active learning is the idea that reality is constructed on the

interaction between humans and the environment. Knowledge grows through experience generated by active effort. Knowledge is persistently being revised by new theory that better explains the experience and thus serves as a means for rescheduling experience and evaluating activity (Dewey, 1916).

Therefore, thinking is a way of analyzing and articulating the experience arising from activity, which, in turn, adds to the process of familiarizing to the surrounding world. According to this outlook, reality is best expressed through doing and first-hand experiences, in which case intentional activity can also generate material results when it is united with the performance of work. In teaching situations based on active learning, the individual's relationship with reality consists of three categories. The first category involves feelings related to an authentic human experience and its properties while participating in doing and working within different learning environments. The second category is connected with the first one, and consists mainly of conscious observation as the individual participates in doing and working within and outside the school. The third category combines doing and working with thinking, with the experiences thus obtained in different learning environments gaining a conceptual meaning. The central purpose of the ideal active learning process is to articulate the essence of reality, specifically its physical, intellectual, and cultural worlds.

This view point can be summarised with the help of these essential constituents of active learning process – action, thinking, and knowledge – and their interrelationships. The reality must be connected with goal-oriented doing and working, which, through problem-solving situations, creates knowledge, skills, attitudes, and values. Such contemplative thinking is then used to interpret and evaluate the meanings of the concepts that are linked to human cognitive structure. The process parallelly assists the development of metacognition in the individual, thus contributing to the further organization of reality during a new experience. Functional human beings and their social world are constructed in dialectic interaction, the components of which are internalization, externalization, and the objectivated social world. Society is a human product because of externalization. Objectivation facilitates the process by which society becomes human objective reality. Through internalization, the human being also becomes a social product (Berger, 1967; Berger & Luckmann, 1967). In this process education and society are intimately linked since the basic functions of active learning are to articulate and internalize the essence of reality as well as to affect and transform it.

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