

**Psychological Approaches to Learner centered curriculum in Kerala**

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Key terms: Behaviorism, Constructivism, Critical pedagogy, curriculum

25 November 2010

### **Abstract**

The major curricular innovations that have taken place in Kerala secondary education system in recent years is so revolutionary. This paper examines the basic psychological theories of the learner centered curriculum of school education in the state of Kerala. Initially the curriculum was based on the principles of behaviorism. The curriculum then revised in the light of social constructivism, and further incorporated the principles of Critical pedagogy. The Curriculum at this stage is designated as Issue based curriculum, where social issues are the backbone. Eight social issues were identified and curriculum was developed in a critical approach to social issues relevant in a global setup.

## **Psychological Approaches to Learner centered curriculum in Kerala**

### **Introduction**

Approaches to education have been a debatable issue since time immemorial as education invites everybody's attention. Kerala, the most literate state in the southernmost part of Indian union, is well known for various experiments and achievements in education, health, standard of living, etc. in par with the international standards. The total literacy drive for achieving adult total literacy held in 1991 was a great success and which laid a mass awareness towards educational developments in the state. The present curriculum of the state, took its origin by the District Primary Education Programme (DPEP), as a part of universal primary education. Though the DPEP, actually meant for four out of fourteen districts of the state, the programme was implemented in all the districts. The Sarva Siksha Abhiyan (SSA), universal elementary education programme at national level, was also successfully implemented in the state. This programme was actually aimed to elementary level (upto eighth standard), but the reforms under SSA was not confined to elementary level in the state. The curricular reforms such as learner centred, constructivist, and issue based were originated as a result of a continuous revival process.

### **1. BEHAVIOURISM IN EDUCATION**

Behaviorism was developed by B.F. Skinner and this school of thought assumes that the learning process takes place through conditioning. Behaviorism techniques have used in education for a long time to encourage behavior that is desirable and to discourage behavior that is not desirable. Behaviorism techniques used in education are contracts (concentrate on behavior change), consequence, reinforcement, and extinction and behavior modification.

Behaviorism was the traditional approach used in our educational system and which gives more importance to chalk and talk behavior of the teacher and emphasis on the importance of the teacher and also the product or outcome. In the evaluation system conventional written, term-end examination system was prevalent. Behaviorism is about measuring information in and information out. We may as well be a machine and in any case it does not matter really what actually happens in the brain. Consciousness does not come in to it. It is about stimulation and response, repetition, reinforcement and conditioning. It is about a systematic conveyor belt of application of successful strategies of learning according to repeated out comes like a scientific experiment produces repeated out comes. In a teaching situation neo-behaviorism means getting the right new information in as successfully as possible, measured by outcomes and maintaining these outputs. Reinforcement should be immediate. According to traditional behaviorist approach learning is a change in behavior brought out through selective reinforcement of response. The main characteristics of behaviorism are :It is a product and external entity.

- Knowledge Passed on, transmitted and reproducible
- Linear Pedagogy Teacher centered
- Evaluation & assessment of set knowledge
- Practicing, listening, reproducing
- All students do the same tasks
- Motivation Extrinsic
- grade focus
- Teacher

Imparter of knowledge

Asks questions

xplains concepts

uperior to learners

- Learners are objects that learn

The curriculum, of the state followed behaviorist principles for a long period of time.

## 2. CONSTRUCTIVISM IN EDUCATION

Constructivist pedagogy was incorporated in the Kerala curriculum since 1997. The traditional education was exclusively based on examination and mechanical ways of instruction. Hence the school education in Kerala was in a state of inertia. Also, the challenges of the time like globalization, decentralized development, information technology, consumerism, lopsidedness in the value system etc helped in the creation of this inertia. This demands innovations in the curriculum. Consequent on the revised curriculum of primary classes, for the programme of DPEP, the State Council of Educational Research and Training (SCERT), Kerala developed a secondary school curriculum for implementation from 2002 onwards. The curricular revision has considered the child-centered, activity based pedagogy introduced in primary classes. Such changes have to be continued with appropriate changes warranted by the developmental status of learners, in successive stages up to plus two. The revised curriculum was prepared in accordance with the frame work approved by the government of Kerala. In science education, learner-centered process-oriented approach was introduced in the place of the teacher-centered content-oriented approach. Piaget, Bruner and Vygotsky are main proponents of constructivism. Major ideas of constructivism in Education are,

- Emphasis on learning rather than instruction.
- Learning is considered as a process
- Experiences of learners as the basis of learning
- Language has a key role in learning
- Priority to 'how to learn' than 'what to learn.'
- Nurtures the learners instinctive curiosity
- Encourages the spirit of enquiry.
- Mental models of learners taken in to consideration.
- Accepts the role of exploring and experiencing in learning.
- Importance to learning context
- Supports co-operative learning.
- Encourages communication among pupils and with teachers.
- Encourages learning through life situations.
- Strong foundation of cognitive theories.
- Performance is given importance in evaluation.
- Provides opportunity for the creation of ideas and concepts.
- Continuous and comprehensive evaluation.

- Teachers role as facilitator, co-learner, stage-setter, friend, guide and democratic leader

In the Kerala curriculum context more emphasis was given to the principles of social constructivism proposed by Vygotsky.

### **3. Issue Based Curriculum and Critical Pedagogy.**

Kerala Curriculum Framework (KCF) 2007, draws upon National Curriculum Framework (NCF) 2005, introduced the concept of issue based approach, from the academic year 2008-2009. KCF 2007 was prepared after holding discussions with academics, organizations of teachers, students, non-governmental organizations and the general public. The issue based approach aims at social reformations should provide opportunities to work for social justice, to generate better citizen, to promote a naturalistic spirit, etc. The problems are learned in such a way that the local issues should be analyzed in a global context. Critical pedagogy and issue based approach has recently in practice in the state of Kerala.

#### **What is critical pedagogy?**

Critical pedagogy is a teaching approach which attempts to help students question and challenge domination, and the beliefs and practices that dominate them. It tries to help students become critically conscious. Ideological and cultural freedom is the motto of this philosophy and the concepts of learning according to this philosophy are based on three aspects. The fundamental goal of critical pedagogy was to place social and political critiques of everyday life at the centre of the curriculum They are why children learn? What children learn? And how they learn? The critical question here is whose future, story, and interests do the school represent. Critical pedagogy argues that school practices are need to be informed by a public philosophy that addresses how to

construct ideological and institutional conditions in which they lived experience of empowerment for the vast majority of students becomes the defining future of schooling. Critical pedagogy takes as a central concern the issue of power in the teaching and learning context. It focuses on how and in whose interests knowledge is produced and 'passed on' and view the ideal aims of education as emancipatory.

Critical pedagogy attempts to:

1. Create new forms of knowledge through its emphasis on breaking down disciplines and creating interdisciplinary knowledge.
2. Raise questions about the relationships between the margins and centres of power in schools and is concerned about how to provide a way of reading history as part of a larger project of reclaiming power and identity, particularly as these are shaped around the categories, of race, gender, class and ethnicity.
3. Reject the distinction between high and popular culture so as to make curriculum knowledge responsive to the everyday knowledge that constitutes peoples lived histories differently.
4. Illuminate the primacy of the ethical in defining the language that teachers and others use to produce particular cultural practices.

### **Issue Based Approach**

The NCF 2005 heralds a paradigm shift in school education. It seeks to affect a break from the existing syllabi and pedagogic practices. In the making of curriculum NCF suggested the following five principles.



- Connecting knowledge of life outside the school.
- Ensuring that learning is shifted away from rote method.
- Enriching the curriculum to provide for over all development of children rather than remain textbook centric.
- Making examination more flexible and integrated into classroom life and,
- Nurturing an over-siding identity informed by caring concern within the democratic policy of the country.

The KCF, 2007 draws upon NCF 2005, conceptually and pedagogically, reflected in the following statement: "when the objectives of education of Kerala are determined, independence, sovereignty, secularism and democracy of India are to be kept in view. The concepts of work oriented human values and high sense of aesthetics are to be achieved through this. Sense of security and responsibility shall be reflected in all walks of life. Each child shall acquire the idea that his welfare is closely connected with that of his family and society" (KCF, 2.4).

The KCF 2007 is actually a refinement of the prevailing system, and explores new possibilities. The main change is that in that in the previous system the textbooks were prepared on the basis of contents conceived in the syllabus, while in the new system of textbooks are prepared on the basis of issue based content. Constructivist and critical pedagogy, issue based approach in textbooks and continuous and cumulative evaluation. Except, the second, the other two were already prevailing in Kerala since 1997.

An innovative aspect of the KCF is its issue based approach for the preparation of syllabi and text books. The issues are identified for the preparation of text books are as follows:-

- Absence of a vision of universal humanism.
- Lack of human resource development
- Lack of understanding of the specificities of cultural identity and its need to develop freely.
- Inability to see agriculture as a part of culture.
- Lack of scientific approach to health and public health.
- Lack of due consideration towards marginalised groups.
- Lack of scientific management of land and water.
- Lack of eco-friendly industrialization and urbanization that issues are posed in a negative manner, has been a point of criticism.

### **Criticism to Issue based Approach**

The approach, though fascinating in ideology, practicing is not so promising. Predetermining issues is as against the postulates of critical pedagogy. Practice without reflection and imposing the practice without adequate philosophical interventions are the major criticisms to issue based approach to curriculum in practice in the state of Kerala

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