Situating Essentials of 'Learning to Live Together' within Pedagogic Practices
A Social-Constructivist Perspective*

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Abstract

'Learning to live together' has emerged as a major theme of educational practices when Delors Commission (1996) report, considered it as one of the four pillars of learning. Delors Commission has considered education as an indispensible asset in its attempt to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice. Against this backdrop, this paper reports a study conducted under the theoretical backdrop of social-constructivism. In the first section, it explores 'essentials' necessary for 'learning to live together'. The paper explains that as one of the significant agency of socialisation (basically secondary socialisation) education should unfold the internal 'humanity'. This goal can be achieved only if the sense of 'togetherness' and 'belongingness' becomes intra-psychic from inter-psychic. The second section of the paper deals with empirical data and analysed pedagogic practices of social science aimed at integrating the essentials of 'learning to live together'. It was found that pedagogic practices based on social constructivism help to raise social issues, clarify social values and enable learners to develop a sense of 'living together'. It is argued in the paper that generating a community of learners engaged in discussing social issues is fundamental to social cohesiveness. Differences need to be highlighted in order to appreciate diversity. Crucial social issues need to be discussed in classroom rather than being brushed under the carpet. It is through conflict and discomfort that resolutions are arrived at.

Delors Commission has considered education as an indispensible asset in its attempt to attain the ideals of peace, freedom and social justice (Delors Commission 1996, p.13). As one of the significant agency of socialisation, education can direct us in a positive direction to achieve these goals by inculcating qualities in children such as: knowledge and understanding of self and others, appreciation of the diversity, awareness and sensitivity towards differences and similarities; interdependence of all humans , empathy and cooperative social behavior in caring and sharing respect for other people; capability of encountering others and resolving conflicts through dialogue and competency in working towards common objectives. In short, education should cherish the individual's basic nature of 'humanity'. This goal can be achieved only if the sense of 'togetherness' and 'belongingness' becomes intra-psychic from inter-psychic.

Education should contribute in creating a learned society; a society where every aspect of life at both individual and social level, offers opportunities for learning and doing, to every individual irrespective of his social background. Given the pluralistic social order marked by aggressive global forces, communal conflicts and vested political interests, it is essential that education produces a critical thinker who can take informed decisions and act with courage and conviction. '...it is vital to prevent social conflict through an education that foster understanding and respect for cultural diversity as well as communication and cooperation between persons of different origins (Dasen 1992, cited in Baveja 2009)'. Our educational processes ought to create a better understanding of other people, mutual understanding among us, and peaceful ways of living. Further, education cannot be satisfied with bringing individuals together by getting them to accept common values shaped in the past. It must also enable the individual to reflect on the question of 'what for' and 'why' to live together. While envisioning the above mentioned role of education, it should be kept in mind that education itself is accused of being the cause of many different forms of social exclusion, and creating knowledge barriers among people. The role of education can only be fulfilled when the educational processes move from learning to know and learning to do, to learning to live together and learning to be. With same spirit UNESCO–APNIEVE (1998), summarised the essential of 'learning to live together' as follows—

"Learning to live together in peace and harmony is a dynamic, holistic and lifelong process through which mutual respect, understanding, caring and sharing, compassion, social responsibility, solidarity, acceptance and tolerance of diversity among individuals and

groups (ethnic, social, cultural, religious, national and regional) are internalised and practiced together to solve problems and to work towards a just and free, peaceful and democratic society." (UNESCO–APNIEVE 1998, pp.4)

SPACE FOR HOPE: SITUATING ESSENTIALS OF 'LEARNING TO LIVE TOGETHER' WITHIN THE PEDAGOGIC PRACTICES

What are the possible ways of nurturing the above mentioned essentials of 'learning to live together'? In the present paper, it is proposed that if we situate the essentials of 'learning to live together' in pedagogic practices, we can nurture and sustain them. There is a need to explore the possible ways of such innovation within school's social science pedagogic practices. We are taking stance that essentials of 'learning to live together' can become essential part of our everyday cognition only if it is seen as essential part of 'pedagogy'. Here, we are looking for such integration in the pedagogic practices of social sciences.

The concept of pedagogy itself provides us the scope of such an integration and inclusion. At times, pedagogy is narrowly equated with 'ways of teaching' but it is a wider and much deeper process. As Davies (1994) puts it— 'It involves a vision (theory, set of beliefs) about society, human nature, knowledge and production, in relation to educational ends'. The term pedagogy is a form of social practice which has the potential to shape the cognitive, affective and moral development of individuals (Daniels 2001). It also specifies relations between its elements; the teacher, the classroom or other context, content, the view of learning and learning about learning (Watkins and Mortimore 1999). For Vygotsky (1987), pedagogy arises and takes shape in particular social circumstances. Pedagogy is not concerned with skills and techniques; instead, it is related to communication, interaction and practices which takes place in a socially organised space in time. Following the socio-cultural perspective of learning, Leach and Moon (1999), used the term 'pedagogic setting' to denote the practice that a teacher creates, enacts and experiences, together with particular groups of learners (p. 267). A theory of pedagogy must encompass all the complex factors that influence the process of teaching and learning. In a pedagogic setting learner is viewed as an active and reflective being. Along with developing teaching-learning processes, pedagogic setting builds self esteem and identity of learners as well as teachers. Seen from this standpoint, pedagogic practices need to take into account a wide range of concerns, such as, a learner situated in socio-cultural setting; learning tasks that engender motivation and understanding; and classroom discourse; and an appreciation of the affective dimensions of learning (p. 269).

An Overview of Prevailing Pedagogic Practices of Social Science

Against this theoretical backdrop, the paper attempts to situate the essentials of 'learning to live together' within pedagogic practices of social science. Before developing such pedagogic setting, an overview of prevailing pedagogic practices in social science is essential. For this purpose, informal interviews with social science teachers along with classroom observations were conducted in various schools (government as well as private). It emerged that the social science teachers in schools were practicing two kinds of teaching approaches. In the first approach, pedagogic practices are based on the transmission approach, where teacher acts as an authority, provides information to learners, students are supposed to store these pieces of information in their minds and present it whenever asked. In the second approach, the teachers were practicing so called 'constructivist teaching practices' in their classrooms. They were conducting some robust activities but these activities failed to serve the constructivist goals. It seemed that the activities were conducted only for the 'sake of conducting activity' and did not serve the actual purpose in the real sense. It was seen during the classroom observation that these activities were focusing only on fun, by conducting some games in the class. Although, 'activity-method' was practiced in the classrooms, but activities were mostly done individually, not in groups. Both kinds of teachers believe that learners were not able to comprehend social processes as they were too young to think about these issues. Whether teachers practice traditional or constructivist approaches, their major concern was to transmit knowledge given in books and somehow enable their learners to score 'good' marks.

Exploring Possibilities: practicing Social Constructivist Pedagogy for Teaching of Social Science

It is evident from the above analysis that prevailing pedagogic practices of social science are limited to teaching course content for securing success in examination or for further career achievement. The prime issue is how to achieve social goals. We decided to establish a pedagogic setting in the school, adopting a socio-cultural approach to learning. Socio-cultural approach to learning explains learning and knowing as a social process, situated in physical as well as socio-cultural context and distributed across person and tools (Vygotsky 1987, Rogoff 1990, Lave and Wenger 1991, Bruner 1996, Brophy 2002). Learning also involves negotiating understanding through dialogue or discourse shared by two or more members of the community who are pursuing shared goals (Brophy 2002). After reviewing the

related literature written on social constructivism, Applefield, Huber and Moallem (2001) summarised the basic tenets of social constructivist perspective as follows— (a) learners construct their own knowledge, participating in authentic activities and internalizing the tools of practices, (b) learners are reflective beings, they can think and reflect on their lived experiences, (c) social interaction/dialogue play a crucial role in learning (cited in Brophy, 2002). A social constructivist perspective focuses on learning as co-construction of knowledge rather than on the acquisition of rote knowledge that exists somewhere outside the learner. It expands the horizons of teaching-learning process and stretches it beyond content and curriculum transaction to establish a sense of community belongingness and togetherness and thus help in sustaining the essentials of 'learning to live together.'

PROCEDURE AND ANALYSIS

Against this theoretical backdrop, activities were designed for setting up community of learners engaged in the process of knowledge construction. It was kept in mind while designing these activities that the knowledge and understanding about society that learners bring to the classroom must be acknowledged. This aspect of activity makes it authentic, similar to real world problems. Learners' engagement in such activities would enable them to reflect critically on social realities and thus enable them to revisit their beliefs which influence social cohesion. The following section presents the analysis of some of the activities that were carried out in social science classes with the above mentioned perspective:

Activity 1

This activity is aimed at discussing the concept of 'Diversity' and 'Discrimination'. The overview of activity is as follows:

- A handout was distributed to the class. In the space provided in the handout, students were asked to mention their name, state, religion, language, food, festivals, dress and some specific cultural practices of their family. Some blank space was also provided so that they could fill any other relevant information about themselves. Once they finished working on their own handout, they were asked to share and discuss the details filled with their neighbours. This helped them to highlight and appreciate the similarities and differences in the content which they had mentioned.
- They were then divided into groups of five and asked to talk for three to five minutes on major forms of diversity.
- The forms of diversity that came up after discussion were written on the blackboard.
- Further discussion was generated around the issues that emerged.

The following forms of diversity came out during classroom discussion—physical appearance (colour, height etc), region, religion, caste, intelligence, social class, gender and language. Keeping in mind these forms of differences, it was discussed whether these forms of differences would enrich our feeling of living together or would create hindrance to it. They had classified these forms in two major categories. In first category, they mentioned region, language, food and dress, which they said contribute to enriching their routine experiences. They said that name, attire, food habits and language help to identify other peoples region, religion and caste. It enriches their experiences by introducing them to the diverse ways of dressing, eating habits and language. Although they said that this is their culture and it does not work as constraint in their interaction with others, yet, during discussion, many stereotypes and prejudices of learners came up. For example:

"*Biharies* eat rice only."

"He eats beef."

These kinds of stereotypes and prejudices are challenges for social cohesion. These points were taken into account and included in the classroom discussion. It is noteworthy, that issues/stereotypes would not have come to the fore if learners' personal social experiences were not discussed in the class.

L (Learner): Sir, he is a *Bihari*.

T (Teacher): Okay. So your friend is from Bihar?

L (laughs): Yes sir. He speaks '*Bihari*' and eats rice.

T: But he is your friend. Are you not accepting him as a friend because he is a *Bihari*?

L: No Sir, he is my friend.

T: If that doesn't influence your relation with him, then where he comes from and what he eats should not make a difference.

In the second category they had put religion, class, caste, intelligence and had told that these forms of differences separate each other. A person from one religion and caste does not want to interact with a person of other religion and caste. A person who belongs to high class and caste hates people of lower class. After discussion, students came to the point that this is not 'diversity' but something else. If this is not diversity then we can not live together. To live together, these are some challenges.

Significant findings that emerged during the discussion that caste and class were significant dimensions of differentiation. This was evident in the fact that most of the learners mentioned their caste and class in the untitled boxes. All the girls of the class mentioned their gender in the same box, along with caste and class, while none of the boys mentioned his gender.

During the class activity, it was observed that a significant category of discrimination i.e., differently-

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Activity 2

Rural Economy

In order to understand whether the everyday classroom transactions and pedagogy provide any scope to integrate the essentials of learning to live together with the concepts taught in the classroom. The following set of hypothetical problems were given to the class and their responses on the same were sought.

The students were divided in groups of four. They were given a reflective exercise where they were supposed to plan economic activities for farmers who had already sown their crops for the season and had finished all tasks related to farming. The students were told that until harvesting, the villagers were facing the problem of seasonal unemployment. While planning the activities, they were guided to keep the following points in mind—

• The task should generate monetary benefits for the farmers.

• All the villagers who are capable and willing to work should be included/ employed in these activities in some way or the other.

• Through these activities some social cause or purpose should also be served. Along with this, the task should provide scope for people to nurture and develop—care, brotherhood and cooperation among each of them.

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abled was missing. Therefore they were given a case that if a person who is 'visually challenged' is admitted to their class, how would he/she feel? How would they behave with them? As soon as this case was put before them their quick response was 'what would he do in our school?'. This response showed that such mindset is a challenge for inclusion. Taking this statement as a vantage point, a further discussion was encouraged. At the end of the discussion, learners themselves started empathising with their imaginary classmate. This activity not only brought out their understanding about social diversity and discrimination but also reflected their stereotypes and prejudice.

The activity made them revisit their stereotype and reflect on their prejudice.

In Activity 2, the students were asked to present their individual ideas about the possible solutions and plan to the problems and suggested plan for farmers. Within the group, learners got the opportunity to not only present their ideas but also to debate whether the plans suggested were feasible and would generate optimum monetary returns. They tried to find the possible solutions to alleviate the problems of seasonal unemployment of farmers.

Students seemed keen and excited to work on the task as this activity provided them with the scope

to work in small groups. Further, they felt that the planning they were doing would be instrumental in providing employment to the unemployed villagers. They seemed to be driven by a sense of positive 'purpose' and saw themselves as thinking-contributing members of the society. They were also expected to present this to the entire class.

The solutions they shared clearly showed the clarity and insightfulness they had in understanding the problem. It is evident that the variety of suggestions and proposed economic activities thought out by the children were not restricted to the examples stated in their textbooks. This shows that while working in groups they go beyond the given information and put their ideas in a constructive way. During the observations, it was found that every group took time to arrive at a consensus. It is significant to note that none of the student showed a tendency to dominate the others while working in groups. Each one gave space to other members of the group to express their ideas. When one child shared his idea, everyone else in the group listened to the idea and commented on it and finally all the group members arrived at consensus regarding the most appropriate activity that they are going to present in the class. It was observed that while planning, they were also focusing on how their activity fulfilled the criteria of social cohesion ('love, goodwill and cooperation).

It is important to note that the children kept in mind the gender, the educational background and social status of people while allocating them work. It can be inferred from this tendency that for them these factors decide the occupational trajectory of an individual. While conducting the discussions it was further probed as to why only women should make toys? Or why only the rich people should finance? Or why only the educated villagers should manage finances and accounts? What are the implications of these for long term planning? This gave them a chance to come out of their comfort zones and think of a possible world that is free of biases and based on the principles of equality, fraternity and brotherhood.

It emerged during the discussion that learners knew that the Panchayat implements the government's plans, such as preparing and repairing roads etc. Along with it, Panchayat also deals with people's personal matters such as land and property disputes, division of property and so forth. The focus of vignette and course content was to provide them with an idea that the Panchayat works as a local government. During the process, the learners raised these significant aspects of Panchayat themselves, showing that they observe and are aware of what goes around them. They may not be direct participants in the process but are aware of these. Taking into account these points, they were asked to

Activity 3

Outline of Activity

- At the beginning of the class, a case vignette (from the book) was given to the class and the learners were asked to read it.
- When they had read it, the following questions were posed to them to generate discussion—
    1. What are the major issues discussed in the Panchayat meeting?
    2. What could be the other issues that can be discussed in the Panchayat?
    3. How does Panchayat arrive at any decision?

These were only guiding questions for the discussion.

give some examples from their own lives where they had heard or seen any matter being addressed by the Panchayat. One student narrated his own experience to the class, which is as follows—

"Last year I went to my village. My uncle fought with my father and separated my family. My father went to the sarpanch and requested him to intervene and divide the property in a fair manner. Then they brought some of their other people along with them and fairly divided the property."

When a learner was narrating the whole experience, he was not just describing a 'case' but also a personal life experience. This made the other learners in the class aware about the functioning and role of the Panchayat. Along with this, they were also able to understand the turmoil a family goes through when people fight and separate. The entire class also learnt as to how his family no more includes his cousins; they have become 'other' for him and his family. This process

of separation made his uncle's family 'other' from his family.

It also emerged during the discussion that Panchayat takes decisions in consensus with all the members of the Panchayat and after listening to the arguments of both the sides. To elaborate it further and make the process of decision-making more explicit, they were asked to highlight/hypothesise how the process of decision-making would take place in a group? The learners came up with the following responses—

"Every person will express his/ her view. While he/she is expressing his/her views, everyone else would listen to her. They may agree or disagree. In case of a disagreement, they will argue it out within the group. Gradually, this process will move further and the group will eventually arrive at a final decision, possibly which suits all or most. In this process everyone's voice(s) will be heard. Each idea is important.

This whole decision making process looks at the welfare of the community as a whole. It is kept in mind that the decision should not harm anyone.

Through this process of reflection, the learners came up with very relevant ideas. They were also made aware of social cohesion and solidarity.

In the case vignette it was shown that all the villagers are present in the Panchayat meeting but during the classroom discussion many students argued as followed—

'But everyone does not go in the Panchayat meeting, only 'big shots' are called and only they discuss during the meetings.'

When probed as to whom do they consider 'influential'? One of the learners said:

L1: Those who have lots of money, land and belong to upper caste.

T: But according to Constitution everyone can participate in a Panchayat meeting.

L2: No Sir, only influential people attend Panchayat, I have seen it.

T: Ok tell me, who puts forth the views of the people who do not attend the Panchayat. ;

(This was followed by a silence in the class)

T: Don't you think that if we have been given a right, then we should go and put forward our point.

The discussion was carried forward by probing further. During the discussion an effort was made that students reflect on these issues critically.

In this activity, it emerged that learners are aware of what is going on in the society. They knew the gaps between what is 'actually' happening and what 'ought to' be happening. They were also open to revisit and challenge their existing notions and construct fresh notions that seemed more appropriate and progressive. It was hoped that in the light of their lived experiences and reality, they would be enabled to think in a positive and critical manner.

What also emerged through the classroom interaction was that the teachers can assume a key role in facilitating the goal of 'learning to live together'. Teachers' role is not only restricted to presenting the concepts but developing an understanding and the skills of critically reflecting on those concepts and connecting them with the real issues; providing space for meaningful engagement and dialogue on social issues. While discussing those concepts she should help students understand the realities of societies by discussing the 'difference' and 'diversity'; there is a possibility to make them responsive human beings who accept multiple perspectives and the people who are seen as 'others'.

Discussion

It is very clear from the above analysis that in such teaching-learning processes, the whole pedagogic practice begins with learners' understanding of society; moves further with critical reflection by problem-posing and

providing space for reconstruction of prior assumptions, beliefs and ideas. Learner's engagement and ownership in classroom pedagogic processes, teachers modeling the culture of inquiry in classroom and importance of communication within the group can be easily seen as the crux of these activities. Rather than relying on teacher's unquestionable authority, students in such pedagogic settings propose and defend their own views. They also respond thoughtfully to views of others. This process leads them to be a member of the 'community of inquiry' (Goss 2004). The whole class benefits from 'sum of cognition' as when the class is divided into groups, a new social context is created, in which students get the opportunity to share individual cognition with their peers and arrive at conclusions based on the sum of those cognitions (Slavin, 1995). Multiple voices are heard within these pedagogic settings which properly address the interpersonal tension of learners. These interpersonal tensions are due to conflicting personal experiences and loyalties. They can be revealed and resolved only if multiple voices in the community are identified and heard

(Werthsch, 1998). A new participant structure emerges in the classroom where power and authority shift from teacher to the students. It has the potential to change the relationship between teacher and learner, between learner and learner and learner and subject matter studied (Wertsch, 1998). Students had developed ways of communicating, reasoning, and providing arguments to defend their ideas as they participate and contribute to the norms and practices of their learning communities. It was found that learners were able to see themselves as question 'posers', decision-makers and participants of democratic discussion where their views and ideas were heard. Evidently, teachers play an important role in clarifying and developing values conducive to 'learning to live together'. It is appropriate to conclude that generating a community of learners' engaged in discussing social issues is fundamental to social cohesiveness. The differences need to be highlighted in order to appreciate diversity. Crucial social issues need to be discussed in classroom rather than being brushed under the carpet. It is through conflict and discomfort that resolutions are arrived at.

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