

*“It is generally argued that one way of effective Social Studies lessons aimed to develop critically minded citizens for a knowledge-based economy is to motivate students to construct their own learning into a meaningful enjoyable experience.”*  
*Discuss this statement with reference to your own teaching practice experience so far.*

At the back of our mind whenever we teach social studies, we always have a theory upon which the lesson is based. One theoretical foundation that helps to develop critical minded citizens for a knowledge-based economy and motivate students to construct their own learning into a meaningful enjoyable experience is constructivism.

Jean Piaget was a Swiss philosopher, natural scientist and developmental psychologist, well known for his work studying children, his theory of cognitive development and for his epistemological view called "genetic epistemology." He was one of the founders of Constructivism. Vygotsky (1978) is the major theorist among the social constructionists.

The differences among constructivists make it very complex to settle on a single definition for constructivism. As Molenda (1991) argued "*constructivism comes in different strengths...from weak to moderate to extreme*". Constructivism is a philosophy of education in which children learn by doing and making in a public, guided, collaborative process including feedback from peers, not just from teachers. They explore and discover instead of being force fed information. (<http://wiki.laptop.org/go/Constructivism>). According to Ryder constructivism is a philosophical position that views knowledge as the outcome of experience mediated by one's own prior knowledge and the experience of others. There are different characteristics of constructivism.

Constructivism is the breakaway from the traditional approach. The traditional approach was an information based lesson. This means that you have the teacher on one side and the students on the other side. Here the students are considered as passive listeners. In other words lessons where teacher based. On the other hand, constructivism approach is learner centered. It is based on

searching for knowledge. It is an active approach. The teacher is there only to guide, facilitate and the learners are invited to look for knowledge themselves. Here lessons are more students centered.

In fact, one of the main characteristics is that the teacher acts as a guide to students while the students set their own goals and "teach themselves". According to Vygotsky, teachers should use scaffolding during their lessons to help the students build their knowledge. This means that students learn by doing. This was also mentioned by Aristotle "*The things we need to learn before we can do them, we learn by doing.*" (According to John M. Berardi). This shows that the students are active learners.

Constructivism tends to change the traditional goals of education and the different approaches through which teaching is prepared. In fact an example of this is teaching a social studies lesson through ICT. Another way to make teaching more motivating is to prepare the required resources. Constructivism emphasizes on alternative assessment methods: exploration of open-ended questions, doing research and assessment by students' portfolios. It also emphasize on the fact that students' should use their abilities in order to solve real-life and practical problems. Learners should work in group in order to learn from each other which is known also as collaborative learning. (Huitt, 2003). Constructivism focus on learning through posing problems, exploring possible answers and developing products and presentations.

Advocates of a constructivist approach suggest that educators first consider the knowledge and experiences students bring with them to the learning task. The school curriculum should then be built so that the students can expand and develop this knowledge and experience by connecting them to new learning (Huitt, 2003). In fact Jaworski (1993) argues that "coming to know" is a process of adaptation based on and constantly modified by a learner's experience of the world.

Through constructivism students will become self-regulated. This means that students will be able to direct, negotiate and construct their own learning. They will also become self-mediated. Students become their own medium of learning. This means that students take responsible of his/her own learning. The teacher is

there only to facilitate. Therefore the student is the subject him/herself. Another result of constructivism is that the students become self-aware. Self-awareness becomes possible because of self-reflection.

There are three main types of constructivism; these are Radical Constructivism, Social Constructivism and Cognitive Constructivism. Radical Constructivism represents the most extreme form of constructivism, emphasizing the internal nature of knowledge. It emphasizes the fact that while a reality external to the individual may exist, the true nature of this reality is unknowable. As Piaget (1977) mentions knowledge becomes the subjective construction of the individual. It is constructed through self-organization, reflective abstraction and deduction. The teacher who base her/his lessons on radical constructivism is concerned with whether or not students' understandings are coherent and valid given the artifacts and sources with which they have engaged (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).

Social Constructivism emphasize that reality exists, but is not knowable to the individual. Knowledge is constructed through the use of language in social negotiation and consensus and social interaction. It emphasizes social interaction as the source of knowledge rather than individual cognizing. Students learn when they are collaborating, when they react and relate to each other. The other type of constructivism is cognitive constructivism. These believe that reality exists and is knowable to the individual. Knowledge is constructed through direct encoding of the environment, abstraction and induction. This focus on the type of social studies that is built upon the knowledge of specific facts, dates, people and places (Doolittle & Hicks, 2003).

This constructivist theory could be easily linked with social studies practical activities. Constructivism could help students to be more motivated during social studies and therefore could be more interested. This could be done through different strategies such as discussions, asking questions in order to bring out what they know, through group work and role plays. In fact in one of my lessons which was based on "Agents of Socialisation – Friends and Mass Media" I divided the students into a group of five and asked them to discuss what will they do if they become aware that they are being influenced badly from their peers. Afterwards

we discuss it together as a whole class and through different questions I did they were interested in the subject. Apart from this I also used several different strategies so that social studies could be restructured and more innovative. To make these strategies more lively several resources were used such as ICT, PowerPoint presentations and videos. Through the use of technology, social studies could be more effective, since the fact that nowadays students pass their time using more internet and computer. Another resource that I used were flash cards, charts and pictures with important concepts so that students will remember more. In fact in one of the lessons which was on the "Agents of Socialisation" I used a lot of flashcards such as "Agents of Socialisation", "Friends", and "Mass Media". In order to get hold of the students' attention I also made use of pictures. This could help more those students who use a lot of visual learning.

For social studies lessons to be based on constructivism, teachers should act as a guide to the students. Teachers should ask questions and pose problems continually and give time for the students to reflect before giving the answer. For example in one of my lessons when we spoke on the agents of socialisation I asked the students, "Who influence us after the parents and the teachers?" They answer "the friends and the media". Then this answer is followed by another question, "in what way they influence us and why?" They were given the opportunity to join up in groups and work together. Through group work they come out with different answers. Therefore, this shows that it was them who bring forward the lesson; I was only there to guide them to the objectives and aims of the lesson. Through these questions and group work students become self-regulated, since they were able to construct their own learning. (see Appendix A). It is also important to link lessons so that the students understand more. To do this I used brainstorming. Questions were asked to see if they remember what we did last week.

Students should be asked about practical problems and then they must solve them in their way. For example during the lesson focused on the agents of socialisation, I asked this question, "what could we do if our friends influence us badly?", then I left it open to discussion (see Appendix A). I let them interact with each other and they come out with solutions. This shows that I based the lesson mostly on social constructivism. Through interaction students are

collaborating, reacting and relating to each other. Through open-ended questions and group works I could assess their knowledge and skills, and give feedback during the lesson so that they will know what they are doing right and what they are doing wrong. Feedback is very important in order to motivate the student even during social studies lessons. I questioned open questions even when we spoke on the mass media. Through them both positive and negative feedback was given. I asked about the media to make sure if they knew what the media was and through questions such as "What is mass media?" and "What is communication?" they end up giving the right answers. After discussions I attach a flash card on the whiteboard with the main points of the discussion.

A social studies lesson can also be developed through a role play and therefore it could be based on social constructivism. In fact when we discuss the mass media I made two role plays one about a program which influences badly the people and another one which influences the people in the right way. Then I divided the class into two groups and assigned one play to each group. The groups were to read, choose the character and interpret the play in their way and afterwards they discuss if both situations happen these days. By role taking the students were able to understand more what is the influence of the media on us, since they put themselves in the situation. This was based on a social constructivist approach, because I let the students interpret in their way the play and afterwards discuss it and come out with a conclusion of their own.

It is important that social studies lesson will be student centered. I did this when for example I ask a question and they answer in a right way but different from which I thought. Then I will let them discuss what they believe, and the lesson will immediately vary a bit. This shows that the students are the centre.

To sum up, social studies could vary a lot in order to keep students motivated and the importance of social studies will not decrease. One approach through which social studies could be taught on is constructivism. It focuses on the students as the centre. They are seen as fulfilled vessels ready to bring out what they know and our role as teachers should be to facilitate them.

## Appendix A

Titlu : L-Aġenti tas-Socjalizzazzjoni (Hbieb u Mass Media)

Sotto-titlu:

- Se nitkellmu fuq żewġ aġenti oħra, l-ħbieb u l-Mass Media. Il-ħbieb huma l-aġenti oriġinali tas-socjalizzazzjoni.

Klassi : Form 2

Ħin : 40-45 minuta.

Data: 24-28 ta' Novembru, 2008

Riżorsi : - Flashcards,

- stampi,
- whiteboard,
- board marker

Attivitajiet : - Brainstorming,

- mistoqsijiet,
- jimlew il-karta tat-taħriġ d-dar.

L-għan tal-lezzjoni : -Jifhmu li m'hemmx biss il-familja u l-għalliema bħala aġenti tas-socjalizzazzjoni imma wkoll il-ħbieb u l-mass media fost oħrajn.

- Jifhmu li l-ħbieb jinfluwenzawna wkoll
- Aġent ieħor li jinfluwenzana ħafna huwa l-mass media.
- Jitgħallmu x'inhuma l-effetti ta' dawn l-aġenti.

Ħiliet: - ngħinhom jiżviluppaw il-mod ta' kif josservaw

- ngħinhom jiżviluppaw il-mod ta' kif jaħsbu
- ngħinhom jiżviluppaw il-mod ta' kif jiddiskutu u jibnu l-argumenti

Assesjar: Karta ta' taħriġ

L-iżvilupp tal-lezzjoni :

<b>Proċess</b>	<b>F'xiex fikkonsisti</b>	<b>Ħin</b>
<u>Introduzzjoni</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Recall ta' dak li għamilna biex nurihom li l-affarijiet ikomplu ma xulxin,</li><li>○ X'inhom socjalizzazzjoni?</li><li>○ X'nitgħallmu?</li></ul>	3 minuti

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Soċjalizzazzjoni primarja</li> <li>○ Soċjalizzazzjoni sekondarja</li> <li>○ L-aġenti tas-soċjalizzazzjoni- ġenituri u għalliema</li> </ul>	
<u>L-aġenti tas-soċjalizzazzjoni (ħbieb u mass media)</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ X'jissejġhu dawk li jgħaddulna t-tagħlim?</li> <li>○ L-aġenti tas-soċjalizzazzjoni</li> <li>□ Inwaħħal flash card b'aġenti tas-soċjalizzazzjoni.</li>   <li>□ Nistaqsihom:</li> <li>□ Min jinfluwenzana wara l-ġenituri u l-għalliema?</li> <li>○ Ħbieb</li> <li>○ Mass Media</li>   <li>□ Meta jgħiduhom nwaħħal stampa ta' kull waħda minnhom.</li> <li>□ Ngħidilhom li dawk huma wkoll l-aġenti tas-soċjalizzazzjoni</li> <li>□ Nistaqsihom għaliex jissejġhu l-aġenti tas-soċjalizzazzjoni?</li> <li>□ Għax jitrażmettulna dak li aħna nitgħallmu.</li> </ul>	8 minuti
<u>X'jitrażmettu l-ħbieb?</u>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Nistaqsihom:</li> <li>□ X'nitgħallmu mill-ħbieb ?</li> <li>○ Imġieba</li> <li>○ Valuri</li> <li>○ Attitudni</li> <li>○ Identità</li>   <li>□ Naqsamhom fi gruppi u nistaqsihom:</li> </ul>	14-il minuta

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Jekk il-ħbieb jinfluwenzawkom ħażin x'tagħmlu?</li> <li>○ Ma nibqgħux ħbieb magħhom</li> <li>○ Ngħidu lil xi ħadd akbar minnha biex jgħinna u jgħin lil dawk li qegħdin jinfluwenzawna ħażin</li>   <li>□ Wara x'ħin ikunu tkellmuha fil-grupp tagħhom ngħidilhom biex naqbd u l-punti li kitbu u niddiskutuha ma xulxin</li> <li>□ Nistaqsi:</li> <li>□ Għaliex taħsbu hekk ?</li> <li>□ X'nistgħu naghmlu biex ma jibqgħux jinfluwenzawna ħażin ?</li> </ul>	
<p><u>Il-mass media-</u>  <u>X'nitgħallmu mill-Mass</u>  <u>Media u kif qegħda</u>  <u>tinfluwenzana?</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ X'inh i-mass i-media?</li> <li>○ Mezz ta' komunikazzjoni</li> <li>○ Xi f'fisser komunikazzjoni?</li> <li>○ Relazzjoni bejn persuni bil-kliem (verbali) jew bil-ġesti, mossi, espressjonijiet tal-wiċċ, tpingija (non-verbali).</li>   <li>□ Semmi xi mezz ta' komunikazzjoni?</li> <li>○ TV</li> <li>○ Lingwa</li> <li>○ L-imġieba</li> <li>○ Radju</li> <li>○ Internet</li> <li>○ Gazzetta</li> <li>□ Dawn għandhom effett kbir fuq is-soċjetà u fuq il-ħajja tal-bniedem.</li> </ul>	<p>15- il minuti</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Nistaqsi:</li> <li>□ Permezz ta' dawn id-dinja għadda tidher kbira?</li> <li>○ Permezz ta' dawn id-dinja saret qisha raħal żgħir. Dak li jiġri 'l bogħod insiru nafu bih fi ffit ħin.</li> <li>□ Nistaqsi x'tissejjaħ din?</li> <li>○ Globalizzazzjoni.</li>   <li>□ Bħal kull haġa oħra fid-dinja, dawn il-mezzi jinfluwenzawna skond l-użu li nagħmlu minnhom.</li> <li>□ Naqsamhom f'żewġ gruppi u nagħti role play lil kull grupp. Waħda mir-role play hija play fejn il-mass media tinfluwenza lil bnedmin b'mod tajjeb u l-play l-oħra tinfluwenzana b'mod ħazin</li> <li>□ Nagħtihom ffit ħin biex jagħzlu l-karattru li jridhu jinterpretaw.</li> <li>□ Wara joħroġu jagħmlu l-plays</li> <li>□ Nistaqsihom taħsbu li dawn it-tnejn jistgħu ssejjaħ fid-dinja ta' illum</li> <li>□ Din il-mistoqsija nipprova noħroġ minnha diskussjoni</li> <li>□ Nistaqsi: Kif jinfluwenzawna dawn il-mezzi?</li> <li>□ Dawn huma xi punti li jistgħu joħroġu mid-diskussjoni</li> <li>○ Jinfurmawna b'dak li qed jiġri madwarna.</li> <li>○ Jedukaw. L-edukazzjoni sħiħa mhix</li> </ul>	
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	<p>akkwistata biss fuq il-bank ta' l-iskola imma wkoll minn dak li naraw, naqraw u nisimgħu fuq il-media u fil-ħajja ta' kuljum,</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Joffru divertiment.</li> <li>○ Jgħallmuna kemm affarijiet tajba kif ukoll affarijiet anqas tajba. Jgħallmuna n-normi, il-valuri u d-drawwiet ta' soċjetà partikolari. Dan il-proċess huwa msejjaħ proċess ta' soċjalizzazzjoni.</li> <li>○ Ċerti programmi ma jagħtux kas tal-valuri u dawn jagħmlu ħafna ħsara lis-soċjetà.</li> <li>□ Ngħidilhom li wieħed lanqas għandu jibla' kull ma jara u jisma' fuq il-mass media. Aħna għandna nħaddmu moħħna, nanalizzaw u noħorġu bl-opinjoni tagħna.</li> </ul>	
<p><u>Konkluzjoni</u></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>□ Nistaqsihom x'fehmu illum</li> <li>□ Fuq liema aġenti tkellimna llum</li> <li>○ Hbieb u mass media</li>   <li>□ X'nitgħallmu minn dawn ?</li> <li>○ Imġieba</li> <li>○ Valuri</li> <li>○ Attitudni</li> <li>○ Identità</li>   <li>□ X'inhom mass media ?</li> <li>○ Mezz ta' komunikazzjoni</li> </ul>	<p>5 minuti</p>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>□ Semmuli xi mezz ta' komunikazzjoni?<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>○ Television, Internet, radio</li></ul></li> <li>□ Inqassam karta tat-taħriġ li tikkonsisti f'mistoqsijiet miftuħa, imla l-vojt u jwaħħlu stampa</li></ul>	
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