

## Constructivist Approach and Its Potential and Limitation of Culture of Religion and Ethics Course

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### ÖZET

#### Yapılandırmacı Yaklaşım ve Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersinde İmkân ve Sınırlılıkları

Küreselleşen dünyada yaşanan gelişmeler, bilgi ve bilginin doğası ile ilgili ortaya atılan bilimsel kuramlar, eğitim ve öğretimde öğrenene ve öğretene yüklenen rol ve değerler, eğitimde bir paradigma değişimini gerektirmiş ve bu çerçevede eğitim öğretim alanında yeni kuramlar uygulanmaya başlanmıştır. Yapılandırmacılık yaklaşımı da benimsenen son kuramlar arasındadır. Ancak bu kuramın her ders için uygun olup olmadığı sorusu hala güncelliğini korumaktadır. Bu makalede yapılandırmacı yaklaşımın ne olduğu ve bir öğretimin nasıl yapılandırılması gerektiği üzerinde durulmuş ve yaklaşımın din dersinin doğasına uygun olup olmadığı tartışılarak bir değerlendirme yapılmıştır.

#### Anahtar Kelimeler:

Din eğitimi, Eğitim, Yapılandırmacılık, Din eğitiminde Yapılandırmacılık Yaklaşımı

#### A. Constructivist Approach

The approach whose most common usage is constructivism.<sup>1</sup> This approach has not appeared and obtained approval at once, on the contrary it has been influenced by the previous philosophies and taken on shape in course of time. It represents a transition from educational approaches based on behaviorist theory to that based on cognitive theory. Its historical origins are the Kantian philosophy, the 18. century Italian philosopher Giambatista

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<sup>1</sup> For detailed discussions about other terms used for the approach, please see. Nurettin Şimşek, *Yapılandırmacı Öğrenme ve Öğretme Eleştirel Bir Yaklaşım*, [www.ebuonline.com](http://www.ebuonline.com), p. 133-134.

Vico and the 20. century thinkers such as Dewey, Montessori, Piaget, Bruner, Kelly and Vyotsky.<sup>2</sup> Socrates is regarded as the pioneer of the approach since he argued that teachers and learners should ask questions one another to interpret and construct their innate knowledge.<sup>3</sup>

Ernst von Glasersfeld<sup>4</sup> regards the 18. century philosopher Giambattista Vico as one of the pioneers of the approaches. For Vico, to know is the learner's explanation on how to know.<sup>5</sup> Vico developed his philosophy by saying that "human brain can only know what it has constructed." in 1710. One of the topics dealt by Vico is the fact that the God is the artist of the nature and humans are the God of their creation. Vico states that to know refers to knowing how to do something. He explains it as follows: "God can know the reality of the world because the God know how and what the things he created. However, wise man can know what to do."<sup>6</sup>

Educationally the constructivist approach is based on the following assumption developed by Wittrock and employed by Ausubel: "The most significant factor influencing learning is the learners' current knowledge base".<sup>7</sup> Therefore, the constructivist approach attempts to provide the students with new knowledge using their prior knowledge, learning and with construct their own knowledge.<sup>8</sup>

Although when the constructivist approach was first proposed, it was perceived as a learning theory, now it is also viewed as teaching theory, instruction theory, thinking theory, personal knowledge theory, scientific knowledge theory and curriculum development theory.<sup>9</sup>

<sup>2</sup> For detailed information on historical development of the approach, please see David Hawkins, "Constructivism: Some History", *The Content of Science: A Constructivist Approach to its Teaching and Learning*, The Falmer Press, London 1994, p. 9.; Özben Özdemir, Müşerref Ülker, Müjde Uyguç, Pınar Huyugüzel, Bülent Çavaş, Teoman Kesercioğlu, "Fen Öğretiminde İnşacı Yaklaşım ve Kavram Haritalarının Kullanımının Öğrenci Başarılarına Olan Etkileri", [http://www.fedu.metu.edu.tr/ufbmek-5/b\\_kitabi/PDF/Fen/Bildiri/t84d.pdf](http://www.fedu.metu.edu.tr/ufbmek-5/b_kitabi/PDF/Fen/Bildiri/t84d.pdf), p. 1.; Mehmet Gürol, Erdoğan Tezci, "Oluşturmacı Öğretim Tasarımı ve Yaratıcılık", *The Turkish Online Journal of Educational Technology - TOJET*, 2003,(2):1, p. 2.

<sup>3</sup> For detailed information on early representatives of the approach, please see. Richard Evanoff, "A Constructivist Approach to Intercultural Ethics" *Eubios Journal of Asian and International Bioethics* 8, 1998, p. 85.; Charalambos Vrasidas, "Constructivism Versus Objectivism: Implications for Interaction, Course Design, and Evaluation in Distance Education", *International Journal of Educational Telecommunications*, p. 7.; David Hawkins, "Constructivism: Some History", *The Content of Science: A Constructivist Approach to its Teaching and Learning*, p. 10-11.; Eda Erdem, Program Geliştirmede Yapılandırmacılık Yaklaşımı, Hacettepe University Social Science Enstitute (Unpublished MA thesis), Ankara, 2001, p. 2.

<sup>4</sup> Glasersfelds is regarded as the pioneer of radical constructivism. For detailed information his approach and work, please see, Ernst von Glasersfeld, "Thirty Years Radical Constructivism" *Constructivist Foundations* 2005, (1):1, p. 9.

<sup>5</sup> Erdem, *Program Geliştirmede Yapılandırmacılık Yaklaşımı*, p. 2.

<sup>6</sup> Ernst von Glasersfeld, *Cognition, Construction of Knowledge and Teaching*, p. 2.

<sup>7</sup> Haluk Özden, "Fen Öğretiminde Öğrenme teorileri ve Teknoloji Destekli Yapılandırmacı Öğrenme", *TOJET*, 2004, (3): 1, p. 6.

<sup>8</sup> Özden, "Fen Öğretiminde Öğrenme teorileri ve Teknoloji Destekli Yapılandırmacı Öğrenme", p. 6.

<sup>9</sup> Özden, "Fen Öğretiminde Öğrenme Teorileri ve Teknoloji Destekli Yapılandırmacı (Constructivist) Öğrenme", p. 14.



The ultimate aim of the approach is not to provide information about the world, but to provide information about the world itself. Therefore, information is not a static object, but an object constructed by individuals through their own experiences. The constructivist approach emphasizes the reality in learning and argues for arrangements involving learner, teacher and specialists in learning society.<sup>10</sup> In this way, the dynamic nature of the construction focuses and being argued that knowledge constructed is not static, instead it is continuously constructed through the individual experiences. Thus, learning is a continuous process that cannot be completed.

The constructivist approach was initially established as a theory on how learners learn knowledge. Later, it turned into an approach to how learners construct the knowledge.<sup>11</sup> It is stated that learning is a mental process and it occurs when prior knowledge is connected to new knowledge.<sup>12</sup> Accordingly, in the constructivist approach to learning, prior knowledge of learners has great significance, since learners employ these prior knowledge to reconstruct the knowledge. Therefore, individuals in the process of knowledge construction attempt to construct a sense about knowledge and to be the owner of the knowledge they have constructed.<sup>13</sup> The major focus of the constructivist approach is learners' prior knowledge. Without prior knowledge, new knowledge is hard to be constructed. Making connections between prior knowledge and new knowledge not only increases the productivity and efficiency of education but also provides, active participation of learners. Basic idea of the constructivist approach to learning is that prior knowledge affects interpretation of the new knowledge and that when prior knowledge is employed in problem-solving it leads to efficient learning.<sup>14</sup>

According to the constructivist approach to learning, learning is influenced by learners' attitudes, beliefs and prior knowledge. Learners are provided with the attitudes which to be efficient problem-solvers, to define these problems and to evaluate them. Also it is expected from learners to use and interpret of these attitudes for solving problems.<sup>15</sup> In the

<sup>10</sup> Wana Daphne Lin Hsiao, "CSCL Theories: Constructivism Theory", <http://www.edb.utexas.edu/csclstudent/Dhsiao/theories.html#construct>.

<sup>11</sup> Ali Ersoy, "İlköğretim Bilgisayar Dersindeki Sınıf Yerleşim Düzeni ve Öğretmen Rolünün Yapılandırmacı Öğrenmeye Göre Değerlendirilmesi", *TOJET*, 2005, 4 (4): 1; yapılandırmacılığın doğuşu ve gelişimi hakkında bkz. Michael J. Mahoney, "What is Constructivism and Why is it Growing?", <http://constructingworlds.googlepages.com/what>.

<sup>12</sup> Ercan Akpınar, Ömer Ergin, "Yapılandırmacı Kuramda Fen Öğretmeninin Rolü", <http://ilkogretim-online.org.tr>, p. 55.

<sup>13</sup> Ersoy, "İlköğretim Bilgisayar Dersindeki Sınıf Yerleşim Düzeni ve Öğretmen Rolünün Yapılandırmacı Öğrenmeye Göre Değerlendirilmesi", p. 2.

<sup>14</sup> Bünyamin Yurdakul, "Yapılandırmacılık", *Eğitimde Yeni Yönelimler*, PegemA yay., Ankara 2005, p. 49.

<sup>15</sup> Dimitrios Thanasoulas, "Constructivist Learning", <http://www3.telus.net/linguisticsissues/constructivist.html>. ; Kritzenberger, Huberta& Winkler, Thomas&



constructivist approach, learners are regarded as inevitable part of knowledge construction process since the learners themselves construct the knowledge. The major premise of the constructivist approach can be stated as follows: learners react to new situations employing their current understanding. Learning is an active operation in which learners connect their prior knowledge to new knowledge to develop senses.<sup>16</sup> As seen, the major focus of this premise is the prior knowledge of learners and active nature of the knowledge construction process.

In general, the theory of constructivist learning attempts to answer the following questions: how does knowledge place in our mind?, How do we process knowledge in our mind?, What happens when our prior knowledge is in conflict it the new knowledge?.<sup>17</sup> The aim of such a learning is not to help learners to achieve predetermined goals but to provide learners with the opportunities to make mentally sense of knowledge.<sup>18</sup>

The constructivist approach to learning has two major assumptions. Firstly, learners acquire new knowledge using their prior knowledge. Their mind is not tabula rasa. Learners bring experience and knowledge to learning environment that affect their later learnings. Secondly, learning is not a passive process but an active one. If learners take part in the learning process they may make necessary modifications for coherence and compare their prior knowledge with new knowledge and organize their knowledge.<sup>19</sup>

Some of the major assumptions of the constructivist approach to learning are as follows<sup>20</sup>:

- Learning is an active process in which learners acquire knowledge and construct the meaning of it.
- The major characteristic of understanding is its being mental.
- Learning involves language.
- Learning is a social activity. Learning is related to one's relationships with other people, teachers, friends and family.
- Learning is contextual. Learning cannot be separated from learners' everyday life.
- For learning, knowledge is needed.

Herczeg, Michael, "Collaborative and Constructive Learning of Elementary School Children in Experiential Learning Spaces along the Virtuality Continuum", Stuttgart: B. G. Teubner 2002, p.3.

<sup>16</sup> M. Gail Jones&Laura Brader-Araje, "The Impact of Constructivism on Education: Language, Discourse, and Meaning", *American Cominication Journal*, 2002, 5 (3): p. 3.

<sup>17</sup> Özden, "Fen Öğretiminde Öğrenme Teorileri ve Teknoloji Destekli Yapılandırma (Constructivist) Öğrenme", p. 7.

<sup>18</sup> Hasan Şaşan, "Yapılandırma Öğrenme", *Yaşadıkça Eğitim*, Num. 74-75, 2002, p. 50.

<sup>19</sup> Bkz. Wesley A. Hoover, "The Practice Implications of Constructivism", *Southwest Educational Development Laboratory(Sedletter)*, Volume IX, Number 3, 1996, p.1; Barbara Jaworski, "Constructivism and Teaching - The socio-cultural context", <http://www.grout.demon.co.uk/Barbara/chreods.htm>.

<sup>20</sup> George E. Hein, "Constructivist Learning Theory", *CECA (International Committee of Museum Educators) Conference Jerusalem Israel*, Lesley College. Massachusetts USA 1991, s. 1.; Füsün Kesal, *an Investigation on Constructivist Classroom Characteristics in ELT Methodology II Courses*, A thesis submitted to The graduate school of Social Sciences of Middle East Technical University, Ankara 2003, p. 2.



- Learning does not take place immediately, rather it requires time.
- Motivation is an important element in learning process.

From the point of these principles and assumptions, it can be stated that the constructivist approach has the following three basic points:<sup>21</sup>

- Exploring, interpreting and analysing the knowledge
- Improving the process of thinking and knowledge
- Consolidation of prior experience with novice one

Thus, the constructivist approach to learning basically focuses on the knowledge construction process of learners. In this process individuals' personal characteristics as well as environmental influences play significant roles. According to the constructivist approach to learning, learners construct knowledge as a result of these interactions in a continuous manner. Therefore, each new interaction has impacts on learning of individuals leading to reconstruction of knowledge.

#### **A. Constructivist learning-teaching process**

The constructivist approach can be adopted to account for how experiences are constructed through interactive discussions and problem-solving activities in small groups. Therefore, it can be employed to increase the efficiency of learning and to analyse why learning occurs in courses.<sup>22</sup>

The constructivist approach attaches importance to interaction between learners and content in the learning process and the attempts of learners to make sense of this interaction rather than to the content of the curriculum. Learning experiences are organized based on the context in which individuals learn instead of predetermined subject matters.<sup>23</sup>

In a constructivist classroom, learners discuss their understanding with teacher and peers leading to critical thinking as a dominant feature of their learning instead of leading to memorization.<sup>24</sup>

In a constructivist classroom setting, the role of learners is not to take the knowledge provided, but to reproduce and explore the knowledge. The role of teachers is to provide the ways to access knowledge, guide the learners in the process of learning and search for knowledge together with learners.<sup>25</sup>

In a constructivist classroom setting, teachers search for the ways to be used by learners to understand the concepts and provide them with the

<sup>21</sup> Şaşan, "Yapılandırmacı Öğrenme", p. 49.

<sup>22</sup> Tobin&Tippins, "Constructivism as a Referent for Teaching and Learning", Kenneth Tobin, (ed), *The Practice of Constructivism in Science Education*, Lawrence Erlbaum Associates, New Jersey, 1993, p. 7.

<sup>23</sup> Şaşan, "Yapılandırmacı Öğrenme", p. 51.

<sup>24</sup> Lolita Jonane, "Finding Possibilities to Improve Science Education in High School and Gymnasium", *Journal of Baltic Science Education*, No. 1 (7), 200, p. 65.

<sup>25</sup> Hanife Akar, "Oluşturmacı Öğretim Etkinliklerinin Sınıf Yönetimi Dersi'nde Kullanılması: Bir Eylem Araştırması", Sabancı University, İyi Örnekler Konferansı, 2004, p. 4.



opportunities to organize learning, acquire new knowledge, ask questions and promote their exploration.<sup>26</sup>

In order to see the differences between traditional classroom settings and constructivist classroom settings the following points should be taken into consideration:<sup>27</sup>

Traditional Classrooms	Constructivist Classrooms
Curriculum is presented part to whole, with emphasis on basic skills.	Curriculum is presented whole to part with emphasis on big concepts.
Strict adherence to fixed curriculum is highly valued.	Pursuit of student questions is highly valued.
Curricular activities rely heavily on textbooks and workbooks.	Curricular activities rely heavily on primary sources of data and manipulative materials
Students are viewed as "blank slates" onto which information is etched by the teacher.	Students are viewed as thinkers with emerging theories about the world
Teachers generally behave in a didactic manner, disseminating information to students.	Teachers generally behave in an interactive manner, mediating the environment for students.
Teachers seek the correct answer to validate student learning.	Teachers seek the students' points of view in order to understand students' present conceptions for use in subsequent lessons
Assessment of student learning is viewed as separate from teaching and occurs almost entirely through testing.	Assessment of student learning is interwoven with teaching and occurs through teacher observations of students at work and through student exhibitions and portfolios
Students primarily work alone.	Students primarily work in groups.

Traditionally learning is considered to be a imitative activity in which learners acquire knowledge through imitation, repetition and tests they take. However, constructivist learning practices helps learners to comprehend, reconstruct or transform the new knowledge.<sup>28</sup>

Therefore, the following principles should be implemented in order to create a constructivist classroom setting:<sup>29</sup>

- In order for teachers to employ the principles of the constructivist approach to learning, their preservice and inservice training programs should be based on these principles.
- Minimal use of standardized tests in assessment of learners and making the assessment meaningful for learners.

<sup>26</sup> For detailed proses of education in constructivist approach See. Mike Watts, "Constructivism, Re-constructivism and Task-orientated Problem-solving", *The Content of Science: A Constructivist Approach to its Teaching and Learning*, p. 54. ; Glanville, Ranulph, "Construction and Design", *Constructivist Foundations* 2006, (1):3, p. 104; Brooks & Brooks, *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*, p. IX.; Delialioğlu Ömer & Yıldırım, Zahide, "Students' Perceptions on Effective Dimensions of Interactive Learning in a Blended Learning Environment" *Educational Technology Society*, 10 (2), p. 134.

<sup>27</sup> Brooks & Brooks, *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*, p.17.

<sup>28</sup> Brooks & Brooks, *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*, p. 15.

<sup>29</sup> Brooks & Brooks, *The Case for Constructivist Classrooms*, p. 120.



- Rather than focusing on textbooks and workbooks, those sources that improve the professionalism of teachers should be focused.
- Elimination of traditional grade system and documents
- Adopting group-oriented education in personal growth principles instead of school-oriented education.
- Organizing yearly meetings with school board members and school administrators

## **B. Suitability of the Constructivist Approach for Culture of Religion and Ethic Courses**

Although curriculum for all levels of schools have been developed in accordance with the constructivist approach to learning and the ministry of national education has endorsed this practice, the suitability of the approach for the nature of some courses is still subject to debates. The suitability of the approach for the nature of religion courses is also subject to debates. Those who argue that the constructivist approach is not appropriate for religion course<sup>30</sup> emphasizes the philosophical basis of the approach and epistemic value of the knowledge concluding that such an approach is impossible for religion courses.<sup>31</sup>

Opponents of the constructivist approach in regard to religion course basically points out two aspects of the approach: First point is the assumptions of the constructivist approach about how knowledge is created and about its acceptability for the religious principles. In other words, the constructivist approach states that individuals construct their own knowledge leading to relativity in the process of knowledge construction that is in conflict with religious assumptions. Secondly, those belonging to religion cannot accept the idea that there is no religious basic assumptions shared by everyone independent of interpretation and experiences. The other point is that since religious assumptions are based on holy sources they have totally distinct characteristics.<sup>32</sup>

Similar objections also expressed in regard to the use of the constructivist approach for Christianity since the approach rejects dogmas, beliefs and reality.<sup>33</sup>

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For detailed discussion about constructivist approach in religious education please see. Recep Kaymakcan, "Türkiye'de Din Eğitiminde Çoğulculuk ve Yapılandırıcılık: Yeni Ortaöğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Programı Bağlamında Bir Değerlendirme", *Kuram ve Uygulamada Eğitim Bilimleri / Educational Sciences: Theory & Practice* 7 (1) 2007, p. 177-210.

For detailed discussion about constructivist approach in religious education please see. Muhittin Okumuşlar, *Yapılandırıcılık Yaklaşımı ve Din Eğitimi*, Yediveren Kitap, Konya 2008, p. 74.

<sup>32</sup> Kaymakcan, "Türkiye'de Din Eğitiminde Çoğulculuk ve Yapılandırıcılık: Yeni Ortaöğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Programı Bağlamında Bir Değerlendirme", p.184.

<sup>33</sup> Hans Mendel (Hg), "Konstruktivismus, pädagogischer Konstruktivismus, konstruktivishe Religionpädagogik", *Konstruktivistische Religionspädagogik*, LIT Verlag Münster, 2005, p. 23.



However, for those dealing with the object and subject of education, the most important point is not objective realities but how to learn these realities. For instance, in the traditions of Christianity and Jewish the father of belief is regarded as Hz. İbrahim. In the education of religion, such an assumption cannot be seen as a dogma to be learnt. Educator should also deal with the understanding of learners such an assumption. Similarly, which difficulties and potentials exists in regard to understanding it, how such a theological assumption can be taught through which texts and which learning approaches etc. should be considered.<sup>34</sup>

Since the constructivist approach is also a theory of learning, it deals with how knowledge is constructed in mind instead of the epistemic value of the knowledge. According to the constructivist approach, in religion courses, those religious assumption that cannot be modified should be delivered depending on individuals' perception styles and level of knowledge. Learners should be assisted in constructing the knowledge in their mind to achieve their potentials.<sup>35</sup>

In the constructivist approach, the learners' knowledge is analogous to wall. Each knowledge is a brick in the wall and each part of knowledge is related to one another. Therefore, teachers bring the bricks and provide the learners to put bricks together to have the wall.<sup>36</sup> Therefore, the feature of the constructivist approach as a theory of learning is emphasized. Thus, the constructivist approach deals with the knowledge construction process in human minds rather than the epistemic value of knowledge.

The major focus of the constructivist approach is the fact that learning occurs based on prior knowledge of individuals and that learning of new knowledge is influenced by individuals' own experience as well as their everyday experiences that should be organized in an appropriate learning setting.

Grimmit states that the following points should be taken into consideration by learners to produce efficient learning in religion courses adopting a constructivist approach.<sup>37</sup>

- Dealing with research and reflection promoting the interactions between thinking and experience
- Making connections between their own experiences, interests, needs, questions, beliefs and the subject matter content
- Constructing their own meanings, achieving their own outcomes and defining how to achieve these outcomes.

<sup>34</sup> Mendel, "Konstruktivismus, pädagogischer Konstruktivismus, konstruktivshe Religionpädagogik", p. 24.

<sup>35</sup> Okumuşlar, *Yapılandırmacılık Yaklaşımı ve Din Eğitimi*, p. 78.

<sup>36</sup> Yurdakul, *Yapılandırmacı Öğrenme Yaklaşımının Öğrenenlerin Problem Çözme Becerilerine, Bilişötesi Farkındalık ve Derse Yönelik Tutum Düzeylerine Etkisi ile Öğrenme Sürecine Katkıları*, Hacettepe University, Social Science Institute (Unpublished Ph.D. thesis), Ankara 2004, p. 22.

<sup>37</sup> Michael Grimmit, "Constructivist Pedagogies of Religious Education Project: Re-Thinking Knowledge, Teaching and Learning in Religious Education", (Ed) Michael Grimmit, *Pedagogies of Religious Education*, Great Woking, Essex, England, p. 215-216.



- Interacting with other students' and teacher's ideas and challenging their interventions providing answers to them
- Problem-solving in a cooperative manner
- Presenting their own ideas, judgements, beliefs and knowledge critically and the opposition between them and alternatives
- Interpreting the words representing individual interests and distinct cultural, religious, political and social groups. Reinterpreting the meanings of these words and producing new meanings accounting for individual interest and values of other groups through deconstructivist approach

Grimmit states that a pedagogical strategy with three phases should be followed to employ the constructivist approach in religion courses:

- *Preparatoring pedagogical constructivism(PPC)*: At this phase, learners are encouraged to reflect on their own experiences and make research to prepare them to meet the religious content. Teachers contribute to students' attempts to make research through asking questions involving group-oriented activities.
- *Direct pedagogical constructivism(DPC)*: At this phase, students should come across religious content without any explanation and information. It motivates them to construct their own meanings and employ observations, formulate their own hypothesis and to present these to the group. Teachers and students should contribute to this phase by asking questions and interventions.
- *Supplementary pedagogical constructivism(SPC)*: At the third phase of the strategy, complementary or additional religious information should be provided to assist the learners' attempts to make their knowledge more sophisticated and more comprehensive leading to alternative perspectives. Therefore, learners continue to employ their own interpretations in regard to knowledge given by teachers and to be in an interpretive process to critically comment on new knowledge. The contribution of teachers to this phase is to provide knowledge.

Grimmit points out that these three-phase constructivist learning strategy includes three major assumptions of the constructivist approach to learning. These major constructivist principles are as follows:<sup>38</sup>

- Religious content should be delivered in a dynamic relationship which is both critical and reflective.
- Teachers should relate the constructions of learners with religious content.
- Learning should begin by current knowledge of learners and encouraging the interpretation of learners. Then, both teacher and learners should deal with alternative contextual interpretation of the knowledge. Finally, each interpretation should be assessed to have outcomes.

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<sup>38</sup> Grimmit, , "Constructivist Pedagogies of Religious Education Project: Re-Thinking Knowledge, Teaching and Learning in Religious Education", p. 217.



One of the major principles of the constructivist approach is the fact that learners construct the knowledge themselves. However, the principle of construction of knowledge by learner him/herself is not should understand to find everything in the begining. Significant emphasis of constructivist approach is that giving an importance to learner's prior knowledge and providing special process which learner can be dynamic and also developing these knowledge with his/her experience rather than providing traditional knowledges. The constructivist approach does not ignore the basic focus of the behaviorist approach, namely behavior acquisition but it states that behavior should also be constructed by learners themselves. In religion courses, the ultimate aim is to contribute to training of individuals who think critically, construct their own rights, make decisions independently through adopting student-centered approach and active student participation.<sup>39</sup>

Religion courses are active and interactive processes in which learners discover knowledge and knowledge sources and construct the knowledge. Such a process-oriented instruction may increase active participation of learners, their skills and awareness.<sup>40</sup>

Activity is repeatedly emphasized by the constructivist approach as a key for learning.

Using activities in the delivery of subject matter content refers to create a classroom setting which is suitable for promoting active participation of learners, providing the students with opportunities to express themselves and to construct knowledge, guiding the student work, assisting their search for knowledge sources, encouraging critical thinking and independent decision-making process.

Thus, the religion courses should be delivered following the constructivist approach and students should be given opportunities to construct their own knowledge.

In regard to the use of the constructivist approach in religion courses, Dan White proposed the models of 5E and 7E<sup>41</sup> as well as other model.

Dan White states that in Australia, both the Catechetical and the curriculum approaches are employed in religious education but the educational aspect is not emphasized.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, he developed the model of DEEP to use in religious education. The key terms of the model are as follows: Discernment, Enrichment, Engagement and Participation.

For him, the framework of DEEP provides the teachers with options in regard to more succesful choices and more appropriate evaluations in terms of teaching strategies in religion courses.

<sup>39</sup> İlköğretim Din Kültürü ve Ahlak Bilgisi Dersi Öğretim Programı ve Kılavuzu, p. 9.

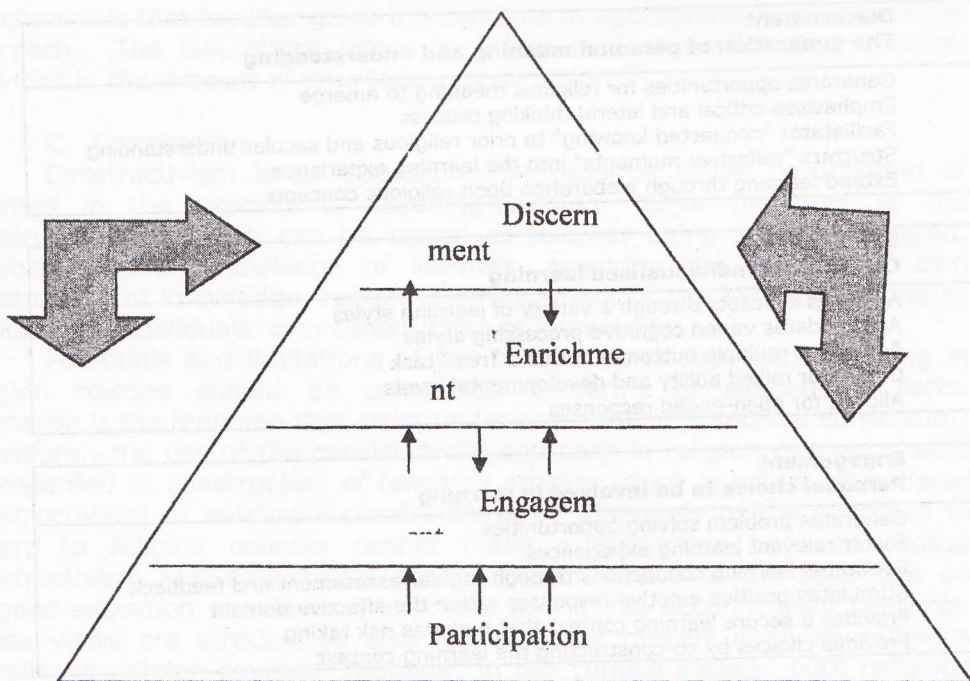
<sup>40</sup> Okumuşlar, Yapılandırmacılık ve Din Eğitimi, p. 72.

<sup>41</sup> For detailed information about models of 5E ve 7E please see. Özden, "Fen Öğretiminde Öğrenme Teorileri ve Teknoloji Destekli Yapılandırmacı (Constructivist) Öğrenme", p. 9.

<sup>42</sup> Dan White, *Pedagogy-The Missing Link in Religious Education: Implications of Brain-based Learning Theory for the Development of a Pedagogical Framework for Religious Education*, <http://dlibrary.acu.edu.au/~digitaltheses/public/adf-acuvp60>, p. İii.



White has formulated the phases of the model as follows:<sup>43</sup>



<sup>43</sup> White, *Pedagogy-The Missing Link in Religious Education: Implications of Brain-based Learning Theory for the Development of a Pedagogical Framework for Religious Education*, p.187.



This model principles is that:

<b>Discernment</b> <b>The generation of personal meaning and understanding</b>
Generates opportunities for religious meaning to emerge Emphasises critical and lateral thinking process Faciliatates "connected knowing" to prior religious and secular understanding Structurers "reflective moments" into the learning experience Extend learning through elaboration upon religious concepts
<b>Enrichment</b> <b>Catering for individualised laerning</b>
Accesses concepts through a variety of learning styles Accommodates varied cognitive processing styles Addresses multiple outcomes within a "rich" task Caters for mixed ability and developmental levels Allow a for open-ended responses
<b>Engagement</b> <b>Personal choise to be involved in learning</b>
Generates problem solving opportunities Foster relevant learning experiences Facilitates learning connections through regular assessment and feedback Stimulates positive emotive responses within the affective domain Provides a secure learning context that nurtures risk taking Provides choices by co-constructing the learning context
<b>Participation</b> <b>The communal dimension of learning</b>
Values the "shared wisdom" of the community Functions within structured collaborative learning teams Incorporates the "to,with,by" instructional process Encourages individual and group accountability Ensures efficient time management, pacing and neural recovery

For White, spiritual needs constitutes the basic feature of the DEEP framework. This model focuses on the connection between the God and human beings and its power. This model entails a dynamic interaction between teacher and learners as a searching and learning individuals together. In this framework, religion courses are regarded as entertaining activities rather than being an academic task or interest.<sup>44</sup>

Finally, White suggest that a different model in religious education. This model have four phases and determinated to explain learning spiritual features. Also this model, to display for teacher matters that should give an importance in construction process. White's four-phase model for religion courses states that the first two phases involve that learners' knowledge and understanding subject by own feeling and insigt. The third phase that called

<sup>44</sup> White, *Pedagogy-The Missing Link in Religious Education: Implications of Brain-based Learning Theory for the Development of a Pedagogical Framework for Religious Education*, p. 205.



enrichment is that teacher gives the contents in appropriate to constructivist approach. The last phase refers to active student participation through activities in the process of knowledge construction.<sup>45</sup>

### C. Conclusion

Constructivism is an approach that requires active participation of learners in the process of teaching-learning. Major premises of the constructivist approach can be stated as follows: being student-centered, emphasizing prior knowledge of learners, requiring the individuals' own construction of knowledge, requiring arrangement of the learning setting to facilitate the individuals' own construction of knowledge.

Potentials and limitations of the constructivist approach for using in religion courses should be considered in terms of educational facts. Education is the fenomen that strict us for some aspect. (such as curriculum) Therefore, the use of the constructivist approach in religion courses should be regarded as *construction of teaching process* which is called *educational constructivisim* or *moderate constructivisim*.<sup>46</sup> Opponets of the approach in regard to religion courses cannot make a distinction between radical constructivism and educational constructivism. Views of the scientists on religous education should be interpreted taking into account their contexts. These views are directed to their plural social models implying religious plurality in religion courses. However, in the Turkish society, both *religious plurality* and *plurality in religion* should be taken into consideration. Thus, instead of following these views without any adaptation to our social facts, our social patterns and social realities should be taken into account before implementing these views.

In this regard the use of the constructivist approach for religion courses should be considered focusing on the policies about the national education, religious patterns, history of education etc. Otherwise, there are potential problems in regard to the epistemic value of knowledge.

In conclusion, constructivism in terms of religion courses refers to interpretation of current knowledge and making addition to it but not totally new production of knowledge. Furthermore, in the constructivist approach the construction of newly added knowledge to prior knowledge within the process of education is very significant. Assumption stating that there is no objective knowledge is a part of radical constructivism that cannot be

<sup>45</sup> For detailed information about the DEEP model, please see White, *Pedagogy-The Missing Link in Religious Education: Implications of Brain-based Learning Theory for the Development of a Pedagogical Framework for Religious Education*; Okumuşlar, *Yapılandırıcılık Yaklaşımı ve Din Eğitimi*, p. 134-137.

<sup>46</sup> For detailed information radical constructivism, please see Keneth Tobin&Deborah Tippins, "The Construction of Knowledge: ARadical Constructivist Viev", *The Practice of Constructivism in Science Education*, p. 40.; Dewey I. Dykstra, "Against Realist Instruction: Superficial Success Masking Catastrophic Failure and an Alternative", *Constructivist Foundations* 2005, (1): 1, p. 55; Glasersfeld, "An Exposition of Constructivism: Why Some Like it Radical", *National Council of Teachers of Mathematics*, 1990, <http://www.univie.ac.at/Constructivism/EnvG/>, p. 40.



accepted in the context of education. Thus, the type of constructivism suitable for religion courses is educational or moderate constructivism.