

Definition and Implication of Social Constructionism Paradigm in School Health

Fatemeh Zarei¹; Mohammad Kamali^{2,*}

¹Cancer Research Center, Cancer Institute of Iran, Emam Khomeini Hospital, Tehran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, IR Iran

²Rehabilitation Basic Sciences Department, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, IR Iran

*Corresponding author: Mohammad Kamali, Rehabilitation Basic Sciences Department, School of Rehabilitation Sciences, Iran University of Medical Sciences, Tehran, IR Iran. Tel: +98-2122221577, Fax: +98-2122220946, E-mail: kamali.mo@iums.ac.ir

Received: January 25, 2015; **Accepted:** May 19, 2015

Keywords: Constructionism; Education; School Health Services

Dear Editor,

All social and cultural events are meaningful phenomena. Therefore, for structural perception of a phenomenon all the relations between constitutive elements of the phenomenon must be taken into consideration. In other words, social constructionism emphasizes the importance of culture and context in understanding what occurs in society and it highlights constructing knowledge based upon this understanding (1, 2).

Social constructionism is a theory of knowledge in sociology and communication theory that examines the development of mutually constructed understandings of the world. It assumes that understanding, significance, and meaning are developed not separately within an individual, but in coordination with other human beings (3). A major focus of social constructionism is to uncover the ways in which individuals and groups participate in the construction of their perceived social reality. It involves looking at the ways social phenomena are created, institutionalized, known, and made into tradition by humans. In social constructionism, a social construct is a familiar and simple concept that may be understood in each culture differently.

Understanding an educational setting in a constructivism approach is complex. By looking at schools, we learn about the elements that are put together to form a meaningful entity called "school". Despite the different forms of grouping in school constructs as learning units, curricula, teachers, students, and equipment and facilities, what is constant all the time is the school itself that preserves its meaning. Hence, the relation between constructs on the whole creates a meaningful educational context.

Any phenomena must be understood as whole in its context. A whole cannot be decomposed from socio-

cultural context. On the other hand, all constructivists started with the insight that socio-cultural events are meaningful phenomena. Thus, for constructional understanding of the school, all the inter-element relations within a school including human resources, equipment, management styles, and organizational cultures are emphasized (4). It is in understanding these intra-structural relations that a school preserves its meaning. Based on this argument, "health in school" is comprehensible in the context. In other words, school health is revealed by the composition of parts of a construct.

Constructivism is recommended for exploring every social and cultural phenomenon. In other words, cultural elements are just formed by structural models and they are meaningless and examining the relations, similarities, and differences can only give meaning to them. Therefore, according to "Institutionalization" (5) principle, a combination of health cannot be isolated from management methods, school environments, educational approaches, facilities, educational materials, and teachers' insight. In this regard, understanding health is only possible within the social totality context and in relation to parts and elements that constitute the educational context.

Hence, a healthy behavior as using health snacks among students at school is not understood in an equal and similar context because of complexity of socio-cultural constructs in power relations. This means that the combination of socio-cultural constructs in power relations in customs, beliefs, norms, values, and insights give meaning to a behavior. Therefore, understanding the reasons and factors that affect the formation of healthy behavior and non-healthy behavior at school is possible by taking into account the relations between elements of the school environment. So, the tools intervening creation of insight and healthy behavior at

school are based on understanding organizational culture, norms and values hidden in a school.

Table 1. Institutionalization for Having Health Snacks at School

School's Construct	Applied Example
Teacher	The teacher uses health snacks
Curriculum	Within the training, examples are about using health snacks.
Environment	The school offers a health snack buffet.
Management	Selling food items like soda, chips, and candies at school buffets is prohibited.
Parents	Health snacks provided by the parents will be awarded.
Meaning system	Having a healthy lifestyle
Value	Healthy eating is precious
Power relations	Student-teacher health, educational relationship Parents-students' health, educational relationship Parents-teacher, health educational relationship

Numerous approaches exist before the creation of a culture and transforming this behavior in its correct form. Thus, a behavior must be transformed into a correct behavior using behavior transformation models based on elements of behavior including cognitive, observational, and mental-emotional elements. Furthermore, taking into account meta-cognitive factors based on intra-contextual elements within a structure are also essential. In order to define the subject, we use an example. Consuming health snacks at school is regarded as a healthy behavior. Therefore, conducting educational programs for promoting the culture of eating health snacks among students require this program to penetrate into all the elements of an educational structure. See Table 1 for more details.

Therefore, a healthy behavior is formed within the social context, so planning for the promotion of health at schools is more effective when the social totality of a phenomenon is also considered. In addition, from the perspective of behavioral psychology, approaches for discovering the constitutive elements are not only possible through quantitative and laboratory approaches,

but they are also possible through understanding social and cultural infrastructures based on open and deep inquisitive approaches.

Authors' Contributions

Study concept and design: Fatemeh Zarei. Drafting of the manuscript: Fatemeh Zarei. Critical revision of the manuscript for important intellectual content: Mohammad Kamali.

References

1. Derry SJ. *A Fish called peer learning: Searching for common themes*. O'Donnell AM, King A editors. ; 1999.
2. Deschesnes M, Martin C, Hill AJ. Comprehensive approaches to school health promotion: how to achieve broader implementation? *Health Promot Int*. 2003;18(4):387-96.
3. McMahon M, editor. Social constructivism and the World Wide Web-A paradigm for learning.; ASCILITE conference. Perth, Australia..1997;
4. Peter LB, Thomas L, editors. The Social Construction of Reality: A Treatise in the Sociology of Knowledge.; ASCILITE Conference..1967; Perth, Australia.
5. Zucker IG. The Role of Institutionalization in Cultural Persistence. *American Sociological Review*. 1977;42(5):726.