

Assignment: Essay

"The Role of Constructivism in Enhancing Reflective Teaching Practice in Early Childhood Education Settings in the UK and the US"

Keywords: Constructivism Theory; Reflective Practice; Teaching; Learning; Early Education; Childhood

Introduction

The term "reflection" originates from the Latin term "reflectere," which means "to bend back," and is often translated as "to think, meditate, or ponder" (Valli, 1997). If an instructor teaches in a nursery school, secondary school, higher education, detention, healthcare ward, fire department practice yard, or any of the numerous other settings in which people develop and refine their abilities, expertise, and comprehension, the reflective process deals with the everyday tasks, difficulties, and wins of the educator's day-to-day job (Bengtsson, 1995). These concepts are at the heart of what instructors across the lifelong learning sector have in similar - their everyday methods of learning and instructing irrespective of the field's variety.

Similarly, constructivism is a school of thought within the field of education that places a premium on students taking an active part in developing their knowledge and worldview. In accordance with this idea (Bada and Olusegun, 2015), individuals actively participate in their surroundings, make sense of incoming information in light of existing skills and expertise, and proactively generate meaning via neural mechanisms. In order to better comprehend how children acquire knowledge, establish relationships, and expand upon prior knowledge, instructors may include constructivist ideas in reflective practice. Teachers may better discover tactics that encourage student participation, analysis, and creative thinking in preschoolers by reflecting on their practices via a constructivist perspective. Teachers are urged to think about improving student engagement and

teamwork in the classroom via a reflective practice consistent with constructivism (Fernando and Marikar, 2017).

The purpose of this paper is to examine how constructivism in conjunction with reflective practice might be used to improve instruction and student outcomes in UK and US preschools. This article explores how educators improve their teaching practices, deal with difficulties, and rejoice in victories via creative thinking, mindfulness practices, and introspection by digging into the notion of reflective practice and its relevance in their everyday life. The article also seeks to discover helpful ideas that might guide and improve the process of reflective instruction in the early years of schooling by inclining towards the constructivism theory. This project's ultimate goal is to examine reflective practice's ramifications in light of the constructivism theory for both educators and students in its setting of the UK- and US-based early childhood education.

Literature Review

Constructivism in education is predicated on the idea that learning occurs when the student has an active role in constructing meaning (Mazzoni and Benvenuti, 2015). The primary idea behind the constructivist pedagogical framework is that learning occurs as a consequence of students' own "mental construction." Learning occurs when new information is integrated with prior knowledge. According to constructivists, students' prior knowledge, prior attitudes, and the situation in which they are learning all play a role in the learning process. The psychological theory of constructivism explains how students can learn. This has obvious implications for the classroom. According to this notion (Bada and Olusegun, 2015), humans create their own knowledge and meaning as they go along. Piaget's idea of Constructivist learning has been a central tenet of many movements for change in the instruction field and has had far-reaching effects on educational theories and pedagogical practices. Research backing constructivist pedagogical approaches has been uneven, with some studies praising the approach and others finding the opposite true.

Concepts and models that give foundations for comprehending and taking part in the procedure of reflection have influenced reflective practice. John Dewey, David Kolb,

Donald Schon, Rolfe, et al., and Jenny Moon will all play a role in this conversation as their works related to the area of reflective thinking will be critically analysed and evaluated. Thinker and philosopher John Dewey argued that reflecting is crucial for acquiring knowledge through experience. Dewey argued that in order to draw significance from one's life events, reflection should be a dynamic and continuing activity (Dewey, 1933). His research set the groundwork for the concept that reflective thinking should be intentional and transformational, leading to increased comprehension and the establishment of meaningful links across theory and practice for both the learner and the instructor.

David Kolb's concept of experiential learning expands on the work of John Dewey by suggesting a four-stage cycle of acquiring knowledge via practice (Kolb, 1984): personal experience, introspective observation, theoretical abstraction, and practical application. Kolb's paradigm highlights the necessity of linking experience with thought and behaviour by emphasising the recurrent character of reflection. It offers a model for comprehending the way people gain insight into their encounters through a never-ending cycle of feedback. The terms "reflection-in-action" and "reflection-on-action" were first proposed by Donald Schon in his framework of reflective activity (Schon, 1983). He stressed the need for individuals to learn to reflect critically in order to deal with unpredictable and complicated circumstances. The need for self-reflection in professional work was emphasised by Schon's research, which also argued for constant improvement via study and change.

A reflective approach called the "What? So What? Now What" was suggested by Rolfe et al. (2001). Model of "So What?" This framework helps people investigate the particulars of an event, reflect on what they have learned from that analysis, and plan their next steps accordingly. It offers a methodical framework for introspection that aids in consolidating knowledge and its implementation in practice. Jenny Moon has written extensively on the value of introspective reflection in education (Moon, 1999). In order to further one's education and career, she stresses the vital importance of critical reflection. Moon's work highlights the importance of introspection to growth, self-control, and awareness.

Together, these scholars have made significant strides in developing the field of philosophical reflection and its relationship to constructivism. They have helped individuals engage in reflection in a variety of academic settings by incorporating constructivist concepts into their reflective activities. Their findings stress the need to question one's preconceived notions and the power of constructivist ideas in forming one's worldview. They also stress the need for reflection in assisting teachers in understanding the dynamics of authority and control in the classroom. Professionals may increase their understanding of introspective work in the context of constructivist concepts and learn about its advantages for improved instruction and learning in early childhood education by critically examining what they have contributed to the area.

Application of Constructivism in Conjunction with Reflective Teaching in Early Childhood Education

Educators are some of the most vocal advocates for applying Donald Schön's notion of reflective thinking to the improvement of professional practice. Acknowledging a problem—having a query in mind, being perplexed by an event, or being cognizant of a challenge—is the first step in the process of introspection (Dewey, 1960; Schön, 1983). Therefore, it is often thought that the first step in the act of reflection is the recognition of a challenge in connection to a specific area of one's activity with the purpose of discovering a remedy. My argument is that we need to give greater thought to the idea of problem identification via reflection. This is specifically important when working through the principles of constructivism.

Teachers have been vocal in their support for using Donald Schön's theories to enhance their teaching after realizing the value of reflective thinking. The first step in the reflective process is to become aware of a difficulty, whether a query, a confusing experience, or a known obstacle (Dewey, 1960; Schön, 1983). In a constructivist framework, it is all the more important to consider the reflective process of issue identification seriously. Learners in a constructivist classroom actively create their knowledge in response to problems they identify and attempt to solve. Therefore, educators may successfully connect their practices with constructivist concepts and

foster valuable educational experiences among pupils by further identifying problems via introspection. Teachers of early childhood may better promote student involvement, analytical thinking, and the development of actual knowledge by identifying areas where constructivist techniques can be implemented by determining the problem.

A multitude of concerns might be considered while reflecting on one's profession. Educators often remark on such topics as lesson plans, student progress, and performance. In addition to these more 'public' foci of inquiry, the equally important but frequently overlooked meditation on the role of the ego in teacher-student relationships should not be overlooked. The 'private curriculum' that is intrinsic to every educator is articulated by Hamachek (1995). It is doubtful that bias-related problems will be brought to light if introspection starts and ends with the recognition of harmful circumstances. The technique of reflection, I argue, is incomplete without first engaging in some degree of own-awareness and own-observation in order to disclose the fundamental characteristics of the self, just as it requires specific focus to bring into conscious thought the effect of different parts of oneself on one's ideas, feelings, and behaviours.

In terms of pedagogical approaches, reflective practice pushes teachers to evaluate the efficacy of their own practices. It causes them to think about their relationships with learners, their methods of instruction, and the quality of their lessons as a whole (York-Barr et al., 2005). Instructors may better fulfill the requirements of their pupils by reflecting on their own practice, trying out new strategies, and modifying the way they teach. Evaluation from both pupils and fellow educators may help teachers expand their horizons and improve their methods (Wlodarsky, 2020). The use of self-reflection in teaching is also crucial. Teachers may examine the subject matter, progression, and delivery to see whether it fits students' preferences and requirements as they grow. They are able to judge how well various strategies and tools encourage participation, curiosity, and discovery (Wlodarsky, 2020). Teachers may use reflective practice to evaluate the content's applicability and diversity in light of students' backgrounds, encounters, and viewpoints (York-Barr et al., 2005).

In order to improve their evaluation processes, teachers may benefit from engaging in self-reflection (York-Barr et al., 2005). They might think about whether the tests align

with their educational goals, are suitable for the children's ages, and offer a full picture of their abilities. Teachers may improve their curriculum, student assistance, and learning possibilities by evaluating assessment results and feedback (Chak, 2006). Generally, preschool and kindergarten teachers benefit from becoming reflective practitioners when reflective thinking is integrated into teaching practices, curriculum creation, and evaluation. As a result, they are more likely to participate in a never-ending process of introspection, assessment, and development (Chak, 2006). Teachers in the UK may better support the all-around growth of the children they teach by critically examining their own methods of instruction.

Analysis

The similarities and contrasts between the classroom settings and techniques in the United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) may be better understood by comparing the two countries' implementations of reflective instruction in preschool education. Even while both nations recognise the value of reflective learning, there are differences in how it is implemented and affects classroom instruction. The Early Years Foundation Stage (EYFS) structure is one example of an official standards and system for educators in the United Kingdom that incorporates reflective practice (Pascal, Bertram, and Rouse, 2019). It highlights the need of introspection in facilitating successful education. U.S. states concerning early childhood educational institutions may place varying amounts of focus on reflective learning (Durden, Escalante, and Blitch, 2015). In the United Kingdom, teacher education programs often include the practice of reflection as a central part, with the ultimate goal of developing reflective practitioners from the very beginning. Instructors in the UK are often encouraged to participate in continuous reflective practice as a means of improving their teaching via participation in professional development programs (Cummins, 2022). Various teacher training and development programmes in the United States place varying amounts of importance on self-reflection.

The UK and the US have different cultures and levels of support for reflective thinking. In the United Kingdom, teachers have many possibilities for academic debate and the

exchange of ideas because to the country's robust culture of cooperation and evaluation. Mentorship and group assessments are common ways in which schools promote reflective practice (Cummins, 2022). Reflective instruction might not be regarded as systemically ingrained in every educational contexts in the United States, despite the fact that it is given prominence by certain schools and districts. Reflective practice is affected by the evaluation and reporting systems in both the United Kingdom and the United States. Evaluation methods in the UK are generally in line with the concepts of reflective behavior, with an emphasis on both holistic growth and formative evaluation. In the United States, teachers may feel more pressure to focus on test preparation because of standards and monitoring systems (Warren, 2018). Reflective instruction in preschool instruction is affected by social and environmental variables as well (Clipa and Boghean, 2015). Generally speaking, reflective practice techniques may be better coordinated and disseminated in the United Kingdom due to the country's more tightly controlled educational system (Marginson, 2018). Because of the federal government's lack of control over public schools in the United States, individual states and school districts may take different approaches to adopting and implementing reflective practice (Warren, 2018; Valli, 1997).

Evaluation

The goal of reflective practice training for educators is to help educators become more effective in their teaching. According to Lisle (2006), reflective instruction in the classroom is "learning-in-practice." Authors that have studied reflective learning concur that it can revolutionise classroom instruction and how students engage (Johansson, Sandberg, and Vuorinen 2007; Kavaliauskiené et al., 2007). In order to determine the efficacy of teacher training, it is crucial to evaluate the outcomes in the form of reflective behaviour. The nature of learning and instruction is investigated in reflective practice-based approaches to teacher development. It also employs situationally relevant methods in the same settings where actual teaching is being done (Esteve, 2004). What occurs in class may be used as fodder for introspection and the development of a more

nuanced understanding of a teacher's position. As a result, standards in the field should rise. In the end, this kind of training begins with hands-on classroom experience.

The potential for improving classroom teaching and pupil retention is bolstered by incorporating constructivist ideas into self-reflection education for teachers (Driscoll, 2000). When teachers engage in reflective thinking informed by constructivist concepts, they can better evaluate and adjust their teaching strategies to fit the needs of their students better. There is great potential for improving teacher and student learning via reflection as an educational strategy (Belvis et al., 2013). Students' academic performance would improve if this method were employed to teach them the basics. Teacher training programs that emphasize reflective practice have been shown to improve classroom climate and boost teacher and student participation. These changes have also impacted the math education cycle or department. Consequently, there has been an increase in demand for teachers to rethink their personal methods and adapt their instruction and course materials accordingly (Chak, 2006).

Engaging in the practice of reflection within a constructivist model allows teachers to assess how well they encourage active learning and student's ability to create their knowledge. Teachers may evaluate the efficacy of their teaching strategies by reflecting on whether or not they motivate pupils to build their comprehension, work together to solve issues, and make connections between previously learned material and new ideas (Belvis et al., 2013). Teachers are prompted to think about how they may help students build their knowledge of a topic via guided exploration and investigation by engaging in contemplative activities within the framework of constructivism. An unexpected outcome has been shown at the school level, where students report having an easier time learning arithmetic and higher academic success overall. Based on the findings of this research, Belvis et al. (2013) propose that teachers should include reflective teaching in their math and other subject lessons to assist students in strengthening their weaker skills. However, the researchers acknowledge that other factors, such as a greater time investment and a more active engagement of the teacher researcher, may have affected these results.

In addition, reflective practice within the constructivist framework enables educators to modify the instructional strategies they use to cater to their pupils' specific requirements and interests. According to Johansson, Sandberg, and Vuorinen (2007), educators who reflect on their teaching techniques have the opportunity to make improvements that will enhance individualised educational experiences and provide support for the individual learning journeys of their pupils. This is consistent with the constructivist idea that students actively develop their own understanding by incorporating experiences and points of view that are unique to them.

Implications

One of the most influential pedagogical theories is called constructivism. It has far-reaching effects on how educators train and practice their craft. Success in our attempts to transform education for all children requires that we center our attempts on the pupils themselves. Bednar, Cunningham, Duffy, and Perry (1992) propose several implications of constructivist theory for instructional developers, including determining targets for learning from real-life assignments with distinct goals and centering lessons on the concept development method. According to von Glasersfeld (1995), learning is not a simple response to stimulus phenomena but rather a process that calls for self-control and forming abstract mental models.

Constructivism may be understood via various lenses, with some interpretations sharing key similarities while others offer striking contrasts. The primary idea behind the constructivist pedagogical framework is that learning occurs as a consequence of students' own "mental construction." Driscoll (2000) argues that constructivist learning fosters students' rational and philosophical growth. The core idea within the theory of constructivism in education is the significance of events, or links to the surrounding environment, in teaching students. According to the constructivist learning theory, people create information and build meaning from their lived experiences. In the constructivist view of learning, accommodation, and assimilation are central to knowledge production. The process of assimilation leads to the formation of new

perspectives, reconsidering previously held misconceptions, and reevaluating what is most significant. On the other hand, accommodation entails relevant new information about the environment and fresh perspectives into preexisting knowledge and understanding. Every person has a mental model of how the world works.

Metacognitive processes, including reflection, let people draw links between their encounters and the information they have built from scratch (Driscoll, 2000). People may continually improve their knowledge and instruction by reflecting on their past acts, ideas, and beliefs (Moon, 2008). By engaging in reflective thought, teachers may evaluate the efficacy of their lessons, pinpoint weak spots, and plot out their professional development (Brookfield, 1995). The need to incorporate constructivism and reflective teaching approaches into preschool instruction, where development is continual (Chak, 2006), cannot be overstated. Teachers of young children may assess the effectiveness of constructivist teaching methods by participating in thoughtful reflection. They can reflect on the efficacy of the learning activities they provide and tailor their methods to meet the requirements and interests of each kid.

In addition, according to Driscoll (2000), reflection connects the constructivist concepts of tolerance and integration. Teachers can rethink their pedagogical stance and strategy in the classroom thanks to the reflective learning process (Schön, 1983). Teachers can better meet the requirements of their students and the shifting educational environment as they incorporate new information and adjust their conceptual frameworks. According to Moon (2008), reflection is a collection of competencies and the cultivation of critical perspectives. When students provide critiques of their events, Brookfield (1995) argues that they are engaging in reflective thinking. Professionals who employ instinct, knowledge, and creativity while also being reflective are described by Schön (1983). Arguably this demonstrates the importance of seeing introspection as an emotional reaction that accompanies and enhances our rational understanding of a topic. It allows us to reflect on our actions and plan for the future.

Reflection may be defined as a method for encouraging people with the greatest direct stake in a matter to take stock of what they currently know and explore how their understanding might be enhanced. This might entail learning more about the situation,

which could then lead to improvements in behavior or social interactions. In the midst of transformation, introspection is equally vital. It gives us a chance to reflect on our lives and the world around us, examine alternative paths, and adjust to novel concepts and shifting obligations, duties, and interpersonal bonds. To better control how we interpret the world, we may use the framework provided by introspection (Chak, 2006).

Conclusion

In conclusion, constructivism and reflective instructional methodology are inextricably linked, with reflection as a driving force behind ongoing development and progress. The constructivist ideas of cognition as "mental construction" may be better implemented in preschool instruction via reflection, which allows teachers to assess their practices critically, include fresh viewpoints, and fine-tune their teaching methods. Teachers may provide preschoolers with deeper educational experiences by incorporating these elements into their classrooms. By continually commenting on the content being taught, its execution, and inclusivity, teachers can more accurately fulfill the requirements of children at all stages of progress.

The United Kingdom and the United States place a premium on reflective practice, but how it is used and supported varies greatly across the two countries. Educators in the United Kingdom are encouraged to work together and think critically, with the latter typically included into professional norms and guidelines. In comparison, there seems to be some inconsistency in the US regarding the importance placed on reflective practice depending on the setting, and the country may encounter difficulties owing to standard assessment and reporting systems. Despite research highlighting the potential advantages of reflective practice in enhancing the way students learn, there is a dearth of thorough assessment of training outcomes in educational settings. Teacher training program evaluations may provide light on the efficacy of reflective practice and guide developments in the field.

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