

# Leadership in education research paper

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The constructivist approach to education has once again become a topic of debate as educators worldwide seek to develop a teaching model better suited to meet the needs of the modern student. Constructivism in education has been argued since John Dewey in 1938, being pushed aside in favour of the traditional models currently utilized (Cleveland-Innes and Garrison 114). This study will assess the initial impact of the philosophy and how this model has the potential to influence modern method. With a focus on leadership in the educational system, this analysis will examine the role of Principal in the school and produce evidence as to whether or not the traditional model is sufficient in order to meet the needs of the modern era.

In the end, this study will have examined past effort, modern method and future potential with the clear goal of assessing the best overall approach to education and the necessary qualities of leadership that belong with the position of Principal.

## **Problem**

The traditional methods of education no longer have the capacity to reach every student or meet every need. There is a building recognition that there must be an effort to develop a better model of education.

## **Hypothesis**

When compared with the traditional educational model currently in place, the constructivist approach to education is better able to address the growing pressures of a modern age. Alongside this facet must be the further evolution of the role of Principal and the associated leadership factors that lend themselves to a successful educational environment.

## Literature Review

Cleveland-Innes and Garrison (114) illustrate that scholars as far removed as Socrates could be considered a constructivist because of the simple fact that he believed in the acquisition of knowledge through dialogue. In a modern era that emphasizes communication technology that allows instantaneous access to records and data once deemed rare, the need to acquire knowledge through the mechanism of civil discourse is vital. With the aid of technology the traditional models of both distance centred and teacher centred education have begun to undergo a rapid evolution (Cleveland-Innes and Garrison 109). Emerging technologies have given rise to the argument that the traditional models and the constructivist approach are on a convergent path, which will in the end serve to build on both systems to the benefit of the student.

The act of self-assessment is an innate facet of the constructivist approach to education (Cleveland-Innes and Garrison 119). With modern tools available that serve to radically enhance the ability of the student to accumulate information and data on any subject, the role of the traditional educational system does not have the depth to credibly address the amount of potential available. Alongside the base element of critical discourse is the constructivist view that encourages a consistent and unending stream of questions (Cleveland-Innes and Garrison 85). The ability to adapt and adjust theory in relation to newly acquired information is a critical aspect of modern education that has long been at odds with the traditional establishment's ability to consider new approaches.

It is the confluence of trends in educational theory, innovative technology

and historical underpinnings that serve to bolster the emerging avenues of learning such as online and distance learning (Cleveland-Innes and Garrison 126). With each new instrument added to the educator's abilities, the constructivist approach incorporates an innovative manner in which to put that talent to use. This inherent aspect of the constructivist approach translates into a system that can be applied to an entire educational system on every level (Shapiro 348). With recognition of the approach as a viable tool, the philosophy can be beneficially applied to a classroom, school or entire district with every potential for success.

Shapiro (349) utilizes the results of the Eight-Year Study in education to underscore the need for an adaptable and progressive program. Results of the study illustrated that students exposed to progressive ideals were better suited in many scenarios, a base foundation for building on the approach. Educational constructivist theory aligns itself closely with its sociological counterpart in that teachers often shift their subject matter in accordance with surrounding events (Shapiro 350). Traditional systems lack the flexibility to effectively incorporate emerging and innovative techniques.

Intrinsic to the very nature of the constructivist approach is the recognition that learning is a continuous process that grows over time and according to experience (Shapiro 350). This facet is a critical component that must be considered as new educational methodology is developed. With so very many emerging influences there is a real need to not only recognize the potential, but be able to credibly master the element and prepare for the next innovation. A rigid infrastructure is incapable of sustaining such a continuous influx of unanticipated material (Shapiro 351). The inherent

capability of the constructivist approach to add to the individual instructors instruments is the overall strongest point of the approach. With the ‘ courage to be constructivist’ as described by Shapiro (351), an educator, institution or nation can benefit from the application of the progressive principles held dear to the constructivist view. The traditional, or passive, approach to education is not able to incorporate the multi-faceted elements of a modern age (Shapiro 339). With this recognition, the traditional models have begun to shift, subsequently implementing many of the progressive views held by the constructivist camp.

Typical of the student perception of the comparison between the traditional learning model and the constructivist approach is the view that teaching without a lecture incorporates the element of equality in the group; further enabling discussion on many levels (Shapiro 95). Conversely, the traditional lecture style provides little room for student input, holding that the majority of the knowledge will be handed down from the educator. The more inclusive the grouping style, the more likely the positive environment will promote an open and beneficial learning experience. Shapiro (126) illustrates the positives and negatives of the competing approaches with the Ms’ Geocaris case study. Seeking to teach employing the traditional model created a series of social and educational conundrums that Ms Geocaris’s lesson plan could not accommodate.

With a lack of classroom dynamics understanding, the potential to reach several students was missed in Ms Geocaris’s class. This system, traditionally used throughout the American educational system sees the students as individuals and refuses to recognize the interaction that occurs between

them, thereby creating an active society. The constructivist approach incorporates the social aspect into the teaching regime, thereby recognizing the shortcomings of the weaker students and creating a means by which to strengthen their resolve (Shapiro 126).

Education on every level relies on reliable leadership (Mcewan-Adkins 2).

While many argue that a Principals main function is to facilitate student learning, the ability to do that effectively rests on many leadership factors. Mcewan-Adkins (2) identifies five separate areas of leadership that include technical, educational, human, symbolic and cultural aspects that must be successfully addressed to achieve a positive environment. Leadership qualities that been found to be vital to a Principal include:

- A strong a determined commitment to the academic goals.
- Unfailing drive to create an environment featuring high expectations and lofty goals.
- The ability to lead is prominent and beyond question.
- An effective leader regularly consults with those on staff in order to make the most informed decision possible.
- Implementing positive ethical policies, instils a sense of order and discipline in the entire organization.
- Effective leaders do not waste resources, instead harbouring each asset until the proper moment.

The combination of the qualities found in the list above will result in a well-balanced and insightful educational program (Mcewan-Adkins 3). However, the ability to move forward and institute positive policy rests on the capacity to identify the detrimental aspects of current leadership models. It is a lack

of skills and training that are to blame for the fundamental inability to move forward in any scenario (Mcewan-Adkins 3). This lack of supplemental training can be argued to be a lack of insight from the educational system, the school board or national regulatory entities. It is the duty of the leader, educator or Principal to find a way to overcome the barriers and create a beneficial classroom environment. Necessary to the position of leadership is an innate vision that rests on a foundation of knowledge (Mcewan-Adkins 3). Effective educational leadership will be founded on the ability to utilize the lessons at hand and pass them on to the student population. This single facet requires each and every educator and potential leader to be confident in their abilities and continuously take academic risks to increase their knowledge base.

Alongside every person's commitment to the educational methodology must be the determination to put in the long, often unpaid hours that are required of every instructor (Mcewan-Adkins 3). This work will be rewarded through the efforts of the students that stand to benefit from the exposure.

Demonstrating a consistent willingness to incorporate new information and adapt, an instructional leader will thrive on change and use that ability to empower those around them (Mcewan-Adkins 4). Very similar in nature to constructivist philosophy, there is knowledge and power to be gained through discussion.

Within every facet of the educational world, the recognition that a dynamic form of leadership is necessary in order to thrive is driving a substantial wave of change (Collier 21). Even traditionally segregated institutions that have strict standards are beginning to embrace the need to expand the role

of Principal-ship and leadership in general to incorporate more than the rigid approach of recent generations. In every instance an educational leader encounters finance and budget issues, property management and risk pitfalls as well as the myriad of legal policies that must be continuously adhered to (Collier 21). It is no longer possible for a leader to be effective and not be in a state of constant learning and adaptation.

## **Personal Reflection**

My own experience lets me identify very closely with the evidence presented in this study. The more traditional approaches to teaching are not nearly as effective for me on a personal level as those in which I have been active participant in the discussion. Alongside the feeling of the reception of knowledge that the traditional lecture model produces is the very real feeling of not having had all my concerns addressed. Or in other cases, the lecture veers away from an aspect of the subject matter that I feel would have been illuminating to explore.

Leadership plays a very important role in education. Lacking a good grasp of the ability to communicate and guide the student body, I have experienced the loss of potential in the classroom. I feel that a good teacher and leader will reach out and include the students, not seek to position themselves above and hand down knowledge from ‘on high’.

## **In conclusion**

This study has presented evidence on the efficacy of the constructivist approach alongside the value of leadership in the educational field with several interesting results. Current studies agree that the modern era of



teaching must incorporate the often fast paced world of technology. With unparalleled access to tools of communication and databases once restricted to very few, the ability to enhance the learning method is immense on every level. The ability to incorporate the constructivist approach will aid teachers, students and entire institutions in their quest to credibly utilize the emerging opportunities.

The ability for teachers, students and institutions to incorporate positive elements of the modern era rests on the presence of good leadership. No longer can a Principal or teacher rest, thinking that every academic avenue has been explored. Technology has opened the horizons of possibility wider than ever before. A leader must not only be determined and confident, they must take academic risks accordingly. In this world of fast paced decisions, the lack of good leader could well take away fundamental opportunity.

In the end, the best educational method will be created from the discourse of both the professor and the student in the presence of an ethical and responsible leadership, each working toward the same lofty goal, better education.

## **Works cited**

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