

My interest in self directed learning education essay

[Education](#)



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

Introduction

This study has come from my career-long reflection and action in relation to understanding the most important question for me as a teacher-educator, which is " How do I facilitate teacher-development?" This question has come into greater focus for me over the last ten years since working as a teacher-educator in a range of situations outside the UK, in contexts where I have, in equal parts, been dissatisfied with my own practice and excited by the diverse (and sometimes unusual) contexts in which teachers work; my dissatisfaction stems from my feelings of whether the work I have engaged with has any lasting value and my excitement by the chance to learn from the ingenuity and resourcefulness of the teachers I have worked with.

My Interest in Self-Directed Learning

Self-directed professional development for teachers is described as the professional development which arises from the teachers' own initiative, i. e. it is established and initiated internally (Van Eekelen et al., 2006). Brookfield (2010: 85) claims that a self-directed approach to learning can be the foundation for " critical practice". Exponents of self-directed learning (Brockett and Hiemstra, 1991) call for more research to critically examine how self-directed learning can be applied, especially in contexts outside the US where much of the discussion about self-direction emanates. I have been interested in self-directed learning since the mid 1980s as I made the transition from adult basic education, particularly literacy and life skills for Deaf adults with severe and profound learning difficulties, into teacher-education, in both community and institutional contexts. I came across the

notion of self-directed learning and Knowles' advocacy for andragogical methods for adult learners. The discussions about 'empowerment' and 'autonomy' in relation to these approaches had a definite appeal for me, but I was intrigued how far empowerment and autonomy were truly a part of my experiences with adult learners, the teacher-education courses and workshops I facilitated, and also courses where I was a learner myself. In particular, in my work as a teacher-educator I began to question my ability to work with teachers in ways which were 'empowering' according to the literature I was reading, and which would generate the 'autonomous learner' or 'reflective practitioner' – there seemed to be a gap between the role and expectations of myself as a teacher-educator and the expectations and perceptions about learning of the people I worked with.

Researching Self-Directed Learning

My interest in researching self-direction emanates from a number of sources – academic, practical and personal. First, relating to Brockett and Hiemstra's (op. cit.) call for additional examinations of self-directed learning, I believe it is essential to expose and to continue questioning the use of self-directed learning in adult education. In this light, Caffarella and O'Donnell (1987) reviewed the research literature on self-direction and identified five strands for continued study: verification studies; how to facilitate self-directed learning; the nature of the individual learner; the nature of the philosophical position of self-direction, and policy issues relating to how to include self-direction as an approach in adult education. For the last ten years much has been written about theories, principles, models and applications for practice which argue the desirability of self-directed learning. There is also a

<https://assignbuster.com/my-interest-in-self-directed-learning-education-essay/>

significant critique of these ideas, but many practitioners ignore this, enabling self-direction to become what Brookfield (1986: 96) calls " an academic orthodoxy". This orthodoxy must be questioned. Furthermore, relating to research methodology, several writers (Candy, 1991; Brookfield, 1984; Boud and Griffin, 1987; Kerka, 1991) have criticised self-directed learning research for its reliance on psychological perspectives and empirical/positivist studies which have " inhibited the emergence of valuable research findings with respect to self-direction in learning" (Candy, 1991: 437). While recognising the need for research of all types to provide a holistic view, they argue that reliance on one approach to research may both miss the possible richness and result in bias. They recommend the use of interpretive methodologies which allow the personal and social dimensions of self-directed learning to be investigated (op. cit.). Second, in Pakistan, where there is limited funding for education (Memon, 2007; Government of Pakistan, 2004) there is consequently pressure on schools to find ways of doing more with less money, a situation which may make self-direction an attractive option for teachers' CPD. So, my research aims to explore this underpinning assumption - can self-direction be a viable option for teachers' CPD in Pakistan? Third, adult learners' perspectives on self-directed learning need to be further investigated (Boud and Griffin, 1987; Candy, 1991). While it is promoted in the literature, my own experiences working in Pakistan suggest that teachers' previous learning experiences do not dispose them to being self-directed, at least in some learning contexts. conceptual and contextual problems have in inhibiting teachers' disposition towards capacity for development. The question for me then is whether a

self-directed approach to teachers' continuing professional development in Pakistan is an approach which teachers' may perceive as meeting their professional development needs.

My Interest in Researching Self-Directed Learning in Pakistan

As a UK trained professional working with teachers in Pakistan, I feel I should be open to change and transformation on a personal level and use my research to enhance my knowledge and understanding in order to improve my practice as a teacher-educator in this context (Loughran, 2006). As a practitioner-researcher I want to promote self-awareness in a process of change.

Teachers as Learners in Pakistan

I came to Pakistan as a teacher-educator in a voluntary capacity with an international charity in 2003. At this point I began to experience the extreme diversity of contexts in which teachers can work and constantly compared the experiences I was having in Pakistan with the work I used to undertake in the UK in relation to my guiding question: " How do I facilitate teacher development?" My experience of attempting to facilitate self-direction in the UK stood in stark contrast to my experience of employing the same approaches in Pakistan where I am often requested to ' teach' rather than ' facilitate'. This experience has added another dimension to my personal search into self-directed learning. Although I have worked closely with teachers in Pakistan over many years, I still feel that I have only limited knowledge of, and insight into, their perceptions of their situation and their intentions for professional development activities. Over the last 3 - 4 years I

<https://assignbuster.com/my-interest-in-self-directed-learning-education-essay/>

have been searching for possible explanations for this limit to my understanding, but one common theme seems to be how I am perceived as a teacher-educator.

Teachers' Education in Pakistan

Researching into constraints on teacher development, Mohammad (2004) refers to society in Pakistan as being "...characterised by hierarchical structures in which respect is unidirectional: for example, from weak to strong, from poor to rich, from student to teacher, and from teacher to head teacher" (op. cit. 2004: 102). In a later study of an in-service teacher training course where the researchers partnered the teachers in their workplaces after the course had been completed to investigate the teachers' implementation of what they had learned, Mohammad and Harlech-Jones (2008) discuss how the schools where the teachers were working employed approaches to teaching that reflect the wider social expectations stated by Mohammad (2004) - that is, unidirectionality of authority and respect. They describe how students are expected to follow teachers passively, while teachers are compelled to follow the instructions of their school heads and other professional seniors, usually suppressing their individual potential. External bodies impose curricula and set textbooks and teachers are expected to follow prescriptions without any deviations to prepare students for examinations. They explain how the quality of teaching is usually evaluated according to teachers' ability to follow transmission practices. Questioning authority is considered to be disrespectful. Similarly, teachers evaluate their own teaching from the external perspectives of their students' success and behaviour. For example, school principals expect silence in the

<https://assignbuster.com/my-interest-in-self-directed-learning-education-essay/>

classroom and the sight of students busily writing in their notebooks is regarded as evidence of good teaching, without reference to any other indicators of successful outcomes. Self-evidently, teaching practices such as these do not encourage teachers to be active, creative, or innovative in the classroom. My own experience of teachers who appear more comfortable with didactic approaches and limited expectation for peer interaction, and where teacher-education institutions promote 'top-down' methods and approaches even when they are advocating more creative and innovative ideas and methods, is also illustrated by Davies and Iqbal (1997: 254) in their case study of a co-educational teacher training college in Pakistan where they recorded teaching methods that were predominantly lecture-based with rote learning of the textbook in preparation for examination. Hence there was no evidence of the encouragement of an investigative or research-based teacher training culture which would generate the 'autonomous learner' or 'reflective practitioner' (Davies and Iqbal, 1997: 262). What they discuss in their study is that knowledge is regarded as something that emanates from the textbook or the trainer rather than as something that is constructed by teachers themselves in the light of their personal backgrounds, emerging needs, experiences, and interactions with contexts and other professionals. This is reflected in a wider review of the literature on teacher education in Pakistan illustrating how teacher-education appears to be heavily influenced by the theories and assumptions that underpin the transmission paradigm of teacher development, discussing teaching in terms of an individually-centred, culturally and socially neutral activity aiming at the transmission of knowledge (Takbir, 2011; Siddiqui,

2010; Rizvi and Elliott, 2007; Ashraf et al., 2005; ICG, 2004; Mohammad, 2004; Siddiqui, 2007; Government of Punjab, 1999; Davies and Iqbal, 1997; Kanu, 1996; Farooq, 1994). Such a ' technical paradigm' as this (Levine, 2006; Lewin and Stuart, 2003) considers the teacher therefore as a technician whose job it is to be equipped with the necessary knowledge and skills required to fulfil the teaching task (Cochran-Smith and Fires, 2001; Valli, 1990).

Teachers' CPD in Pakistan

The available literature on teacher continuing education in Pakistan mainly consists of various conference reports, national surveys, national education policy documents, position papers, working documents, commission reports, Five Year Plans, books, edited books, monographs, and other nationally and regionally applicable reform documents, including project evaluation reports or impact studies, published research, government-sponsored and independent studies, and reports on donor funded programmes. The literature was reviewed to identify dominant popular narratives of teachers' continuing education in Pakistan. The perception is widely shared that in-service teacher education programmes offered at most of the public sector institutions are rigid, textbook-based and examination-focused. The dominant pedagogy used in these programmes is ' chalk-and-talk' and memorisation (Elaine, 2005; Rough, Malik and Farooq, 1991; Warwick and Reimers, 1991; World Population Foundation, 2009). The motivation for teachers to undertake courses is mainly earning a certificate/degree or diploma because of the benefits attached to it in terms of increase in salary and prospects for promotion. Teacher education programmes therefore do

<https://assignbuster.com/my-interest-in-self-directed-learning-education-essay/>

not emphasise the need for such personal and professional competencies and qualities a good or an effective teacher embodies (e. g. reflection on teaching).

Self-Direction as an Approach for Teachers' CPD

There are studies which explore factors that are significant for teachers to take-up an innovation or adopt a change from their CPD (Hardman et al., 2008; Van Eekelen et al., 2006; Chambers, 2001; Harland and Kinder, 1997) which recognise self-directed learning as one such factor. Discussion by Brockett and Hiemstra (1997) and others on self-direction in relation to how learners can "...become expert without formal training" (Gibbons, et al., 1980: 44) has resonance for me, as a teacher-educator who has worked in Pakistan for a number of years in a range of institutions and contexts, as I have needed to search for approaches that facilitate teachers' finding their own solutions to practical problems they face in their daily work contexts - contexts where they can be working in isolation and with little organisational support. Ascertaining whether self-directed learning is a meaningful approach to teachers' development in Pakistan provides the foundation for this research study because the answers can help to develop a deeper understanding about teachers' perceptions of self-direction and also about the kinds of teacher-educator roles needed to facilitate self-direction in this context where expectations about how teachers' continuing professional development is supposed to happen relies on[1]teacher-centred/ didactic approaches and where there is a focus on ensuring compliance with administrative procedures.

Why Study Self-Directed Teachers' Professional Development?

I find that the questions: 'What do you want to learn?' and 'How can I help you learn?' are two questions worth asking the teachers I work with (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005). This is because the answers to these questions might help me to reflect the voices of teachers with whom I work and help me to become a more reflective and critical facilitator of self-direction (Brookfield, 1995, 1998, 2005; Pollard, 1997, 2002a, 2002b). This process will extend my knowledge and understanding of how professional learning takes place among the teachers I work with and consequently I would be able to facilitate teacher-education courses which are better adjusted to personal needs and human conditions (Morin, 2000: 49). It will enable me to enquire into self-directed CPD; the teachers' perceptions and my role in facilitating self-directed learning.

Myself as a Practitioner-Researcher

In order to explore my central question: "How do I facilitate teachers' self-directed CPD in Pakistan?" I am taking a dual role of teacher-educator and researcher for the duration of the study (Coghlan and Brannick, 2005). According to Coghlan and Brannick, choosing a research topic from one's own organisation not only solves a practical problem, but also entails the expectation that the research will make a useful contribution to the organisation.

My Purpose for this Study

I would like to explore democratic approaches and more egalitarian power relations in my interactions with the teachers with whom I work. I believe <https://assignbuster.com/my-interest-in-self-directed-learning-education-essay/>

that research into teacher self-directed learning where I work would give me more insight and a deeper understanding of how to achieve this in the process of teacher professional development in Pakistan. Using this experience to engage in this PhD study gives me an opportunity to examine my beliefs and values about teacher education and investigate more deeply how I can develop my own practice and investigate an approach to teacher education which allows teachers to control their own professional development and which incorporates the uniqueness of their own context and practice.

Aims of the Research

Through my research study I explore the advantages, difficulties and compromises of self-direction as an approach to teachers' professional development for teachers working in an urban school in Lahore, Pakistan. I explore the practical application of an approach to teaching and learning which is discussed in the literature about self-directed learning but not used specifically as an approach for teachers' professional development. The knowledge gained from this research will shed light on how teachers I work with in Pakistan might learn in a self-directed environment.

Outline of the Research

Through this research, I will enquire into how teachers' self-directed CPD can be facilitated. I am focusing on my own role as facilitator in promoting and supporting teachers' self-directed professional development and how this approach is perceived by the teachers. I will investigate how self-direction is enabled and constrained by social and cultural influences (e. g.

organisational culture, power relations between participants and between participants and myself as facilitator, participants' expectations of learning, as well as cross-cultural influences). I will also investigate teachers' perceptions of the approach. The focus of my enquiry is a CPD course which I am facilitating with a group of 25 female teachers who work in three separate branches of one school (a pre-school, a middle school and senior school where students study for International 'O' levels and 'A' levels); these branches are independently located in well-populated urban centres in the city. Some of the teachers are new to teaching whilst others have been working in the school for over ten years. They are involved in teaching a range of subjects for students aged 4 years to 16 years. The teachers have access to CPD opportunities at intervals in each academic session (usually between terms) which are either organised by the school management (internally arranged) or independently sought by the teachers with teacher development/ training providers (independent providers, colleges and universities). The teachers self-selected to take part in the course.

Theoretical Framework/ Methodology

Since I am aiming to interpret perceptions (both my own and those of the research participants), an interpretive approach is appropriate for my study. An interpretive approach, (Lather, 1992; Robottom and Hart, 1993), provides me with the opportunity for discerning reasoning behind actions (Borg et al., 1993; LeCompte and Goetz, 1982). I am aiming to discover what the participants' experience of self-direction mean to them as well as my own experience of facilitating self-direction, and consequently to collect the data of these perceptions in a way which is, as far as possible, open-ended and

<https://assignbuster.com/my-interest-in-self-directed-learning-education-essay/>

descriptive. The research is designed as a case study of the facilitation of self-directed teacher CPD in one area of Pakistan. Working as practitioner-researcher I have sought the cooperation of teacher-participants in exploring perceptions about self-direction as an approach to CPD. As a practitioner-researcher I am able to (1) pay attention to the detail and complexity of the processes involved in facilitating a self-directed approach to CPD; (2) Get a sense of the feelings and experiences of teacher-participants engaged in self-directed professional development; (3) Develop an understanding of the factors which facilitate self-direction and those which impede it; (4) incorporate my own reflections on my actions; (5) locate myself within the narrative account of facilitating a self-directed approach.

Significance of the Research

The significance derives from the central research question which is addressed by this study: How do teachers.....? The distinctiveness of the study lies in its original contribution to knowledge concerning the facilitation of self-directed teacher professional development in Pakistan. Perspectives on the interdependence of teachers' biographical and experiential dimensions and continuing professional development have never been studied in a Pakistani school setting. The findings gained from this study can provide different and wider perspectives on teacher development in Pakistan, particularly the empowerment of the teachers' role in their learning and development in a context where formal, structured courses seem to be widely held as standard practice for teacher development. It is anticipated that this study can generate impact also, raising awareness of those involved in CPD that professional development is multi-dimensional and inter-

dependent with teachers and their classroom contexts. This study has implications for the professional growth of teachers, teacher motivation, and the leadership and administration of schools.