

OPTIMISING TIME IN THE PRIMARY SCHOOL DAY LINKING PHYSICAL EDUCATION WITH READING

Introduction

Physical education is a powerful subject to engage children in a love of learning across other areas of the wider curriculum. Providing an opportunity where children can enjoy movement whilst enhancing their reading skills offers a fruitful learning experience.

To make lessons both meaningful and memorable for children, a constructivist approach recognises learners' prior understanding and knowledge based on their own experience. Allowing them to communicate and collaborate to share their knowledge and understanding and to co-construct new knowledge and meaning with the teacher as the facilitator encourages learners to construct meaning and knowledge that is relevant for them. The learner engages in the world so that they are involved in their own learning and development. Constructivism originates from the work of Jean Piaget (1973) and his research on cognitive development in children.

The constructivist approach has been explored by a number of researchers. Rovegno and Dolly (2006) argue that there is not a single form of constructivism, but a collection of theories that offer learning perspectives. Kirk (2020), however, shows there is a common principle in the adaptations of constructivism suggested by a number of researchers, such as Rovegno and Dolly, 2006; Chen and Rovegno, 2006; Rovegno, 1998; Singleton, 2009; and Light, 1998. The principle is constructivism is centred on children, being involved in a process of active learning, making sense of and assimilating knowledge through discovery, engagement and reflection.

This article shares an example of the translation of theory to practice. It offers a simple example of how the constructivist approach can be used in Early Years to enhance the physical education experience, whilst providing an additional opportunity for pupils to practise reading skills, further enriched by the use of technology.

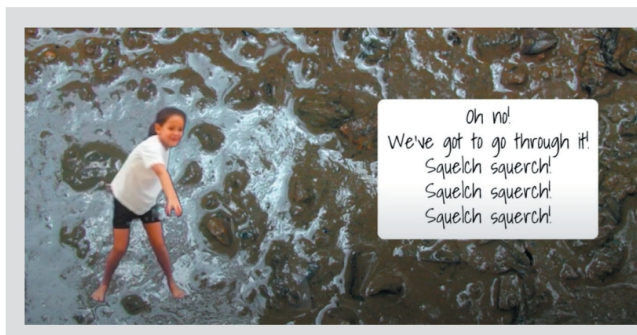
Lesson study

Michael Rosen's *We're Going on a Bear Hunt* (1989) offers a good example of a book that allows this type of learning experience. I would like to share the outcomes of how this was put into practice in an infant school in Hampshire and how green screen technology was used to further create an enriching experience for the children.

Lesson 1

Children were put into a space and given the instruction that they had the freedom to move as they wished with actions that matched the words of the book as it was read to them. They were told to imagine being in the spaces as they moved through them. This recognises that learning which is contextual is powerful and that children learn when they are connected to what they already know and believe, not through isolated learning points that are separate from the rest of their lives.

Questioning elicited their recall of places they had been to and allowed them to create meaning based on their own experiences, such as where the grass had been "long and wavy", where the mud had been "squelchy" and the snow "swirling and whirling." Children could draw on personal experiences of this movement and physically demonstrate their understanding of how their bodies would move in these contexts.





In the second half of the lesson, children worked in small groups and each group was assigned a different part of the book. The task was to construct their own movements to fit the words of the story. In collaborating, they were practising their ideas and developing their fundamental movement skills as they showed each other their ideas. Social interaction is key to learning.

Social constructivism originated from Lev Vygotsky (1978): using conversation, interaction and group applications helps students to acquire and retain their knowledge. Knowledge is seen to develop as a social construct produced through the inter-connectedness between the social context and the individual. Kirk and Macdonald (1998) suggested that learning occurs within any collective in which “a community of practice exists and... its activities... have a significant influence on what is learned and how learning takes place” (p. 380). Social interactions and involvement in community and society are seen as established pedagogical goals that enhance learning (Cothran and Ennis, 1999; Ennis, 1999, 2000; Fernandez-Balboa, 1997a, b; Mosston, 1966). Mosston and Ashworth (1994) argue that, among a variety of teaching styles, the reciprocal teaching style promotes natural learning situations and opportunities for students to socialise among peers and actively engage in learning through problem-solving. Cothran and Ennis (1999) explain that “educational engagement is not an isolated construct” (p. 234) and that students’ emotional and personal connections to their peers are a fundamental component of student engagement in physical education.

At the end of this first lesson, each group had the opportunity to apply their leadership skills by demonstrating their ideas and teaching the rest of the class their part in the story. The rest of the class copied their movements so that all children’s ideas had been merged to form the complete story. This was recorded on an iPad to capture the learning and allow the children the opportunity to watch themselves and find what they liked about their learning and any areas to improve.

Lesson 2

Children began the lesson by watching their performance from lesson 1. Questioning elicited an understanding of what children liked about the movements they had created and any

ideas for refinements. They were invited to offer suggestions for their own sections and also for the other groups’ sections. The children were then able to practise so they felt confident in performing the whole story to the class. Each group had a chance to perform the whole story to the rest of the class.

At the end of the lesson, children were picked to be filmed in front of a green screen; the clips were developed using green screen software to create imagery to bring the story alive.

Lesson 3

During an active brain break later in the week, children were shown the story on the whiteboard and asked to copy the actions. The exhilaration of seeing the movements they had created on the whiteboard with the background imagery was very exciting for them.

Behaviour during and after the lesson was noted as exceptional. All of the children were on task and peer-conferencing showed that their attitudes to learning were positive, motivated and with high self-efficacy.

Giving children the opportunity to construct their own learning makes for enriching and memorable learning experiences. Seeking out opportunities to link physical activity with other areas of the curriculum not only makes learning more exciting for children, it also makes efficient use of time to combine learning across different subjects. This is essential in primary schools where time is of the essence.

The use of green screen technology to create learning resources featuring themselves makes pupils feel valued and was fully engaging and enriching for them. Integrating digital technology into PE can help to provide for optimal learning, especially when it is part of a reflexive, collaborative process that fully embraces the children as determinants of their own learning. This type of learning experience activates children’s minds to help them to become excited about education which, in turn, optimises motivation. ■

Vanessa King [afPE member]

Vanessa King is a former primary teacher and a primary PE consultant.

REFERENCES

- Azzarito, L. & Ennis, C. D. (2003). A sense of connection: Toward social constructivist physical education. *Sport, Education and Society*, 8(2), 179-197.
- Cothran, D. J. & Ennis, C. D. (1999). Alone in a crowd: Meeting students’ needs for relevance and connection in urban high school physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 18(2), 234-247.
- Chen, W. & Rovegno, I. (2000). Examination of expert and novice teachers’ constructivist-oriented teaching practices using a movement approach to elementary physical education. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 71(4), 357-372.
- Ennis, C. D. (1999). Communicating the value of active, healthy lifestyles to urban students. *Quest*, 51(2), 164-169.
- Ennis, C. D. (2000). Canaries in the coal mine: Responding to disengaged students using theme-based curricula. *Quest*, 52(2), 119-130.
- Fernández-Balboa, J. M. (1997). Knowledge base in physical education teacher education: A proposal for a new era. *Quest*, 49(2), 161-181.
- Fernandez-Balboa, J. M. (1997). Physical education teacher preparation in the postmodern era: Toward a critical pedagogy. *Critical postmodernism in human movement, physical education, and sport*, 121-138.
- Kirk, D. & Macdonald, D. (1998). Situated learning in physical education. *Journal of Teaching in Physical Education*, 17(3), 376-387.
- Kirk, D. & Houssin, E. (2020). Constructivist, Situated and Activity Theory Approaches to Movement Learning. *Learning Movements: New Perspectives of Movement Education*.
- Light, R. (2008). Complex learning theory—its epistemology and its assumptions about learning: implications for physical education. *Journal of teaching in physical education*, 27(1), 21-37.
- Mosston, M. & Ashworth, S. (2002). Teaching physical education. Mosston, M. & Ashworth, S. (1966). Teaching physical education (Columbus, OH, Merrill). Mosston, M. & Ashworth, S. (1986) *Teaching Physical Education* ed. 3.
- Piaget, J. (1973). To understand is to invent: The future of education. New York: Grossman.
- Rosen, M., & Oxenbury, H. (1989). *We’re going on a bear hunt*. London: Walker.
- Rovegno, I. & Dolly, J. P. (2006). 3.4 Constructivist perspectives on learning. *Handbook of physical education*, 242.
- Rovegno, I. & Dolly, J. P. (2006). 3.4 Constructivist perspectives on learning. *Handbook of physical education*, 242.
- Rovegno, I. (1998). The development of in-service teachers’ knowledge of a constructivist approach to physical education: Teaching beyond activities. *Research Quarterly for Exercise and Sport*, 69(2), 147-162.
- Singleton, E. (2009). From command to constructivism: Canadian secondary school physical education curriculum and teaching games for understanding. *Curriculum Inquiry*, 39(2), 321-342.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.