

## Reflective Professional Development Journals for Constructivist Evaluation of Teacher Learning and Reactions

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### Abstract

Limited in scope, this paper deliberately foregrounds the evaluation stage of a suggested 5-month constructivist professional development (PD) programme for Algerian novice middle school English teachers (N=14) who were willingly involved in the whole process of its planning, implementation and evaluation and whose needs, preferences and reflections were valued. Evaluating this programme, assessment rubrics, classroom observation notes, project presentations and professional development journals (PDJs) were analysed. Precisely, amongst these constructivist evaluative tools, this study aimed to explore the participants' post-programme learning and reactions through a qualitative content analysis of their reflective PDJs. The revelations of this evaluative analysis about the participants' learning and reactions would inevitably assess the value of this constructivist programme as well as its effectiveness and help make decisions for its improvement. Additionally, this analysis would significantly confirm the usefulness of PDJs as effective constructivist reflective tools for teachers' conceptual and practical development. After being collected, repeatedly read and qualitatively content-analysed, the participants' coded PDJs (N=14) disclosed themes (N=6) and sub-themes (N=14) reflecting an amalgam of their learning and reactions. This cognitive and affective analysis of the participants' reflections revealed signs of constructions of different ELT- and PD-related concepts, correction of some misconceptions together with traces of satisfaction, self-confidence and willpower. In the light of this study, the researcher strongly recommends PDJs for teachers to self/peer-assess and develop their teaching concepts and practice, and for programme facilitators to uncover and, therefore, meet teachers' individual cognitive and affective needs.

**Keywords:** Constructivist evaluation, professional development, reflection, reflective journals

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## I. Introduction

Evaluation of teacher education (TE) and professional development (PD) programmes is unquestionably necessary to assess their value (Guskey, 2000) as well as their effectiveness and to help make decisions for their improvement (Brown, 1995). Given its importance, the current study purposefully spotlights the evaluation stage of a suggested original 5-month constructivist PD programme for Algerian novice middle school teachers of English who were involved in the whole process of its planning, implementation and evaluation and whose needs, preferences and reflections were valued. Since this programme was constructivist from head to toe, as it adopted the main constructivist tenets of an effective PD (Borg, 2015), the use of constructivist (alternative rather than traditional) assessment tools (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Santrock, 2011) was more than relevant. Thus, in the evaluation stage, instead of the traditional pencil-paper tests, assessment rubrics, classroom observation notes, project presentations and professional development journals (PDJs) were employed and analysed.

Due to scope limitation, this paper aims to reveal about the participants' post-programme learning and reactions (Guskey, 2000) through a qualitative content analysis (Griffiee, 2012) of their reflective PDJs. Original in an Algerian PD programme, the analysis of participants' reflections (PDJs) would significantly provide rich insider sources and self/peer-assessment outcomes for improving PD programmes and developing teachers' concepts and practice in a safe evaluative learning context. Accordingly, this paper aims to investigate this research question: *What would a post-programme qualitative content analysis of EFL novice teachers' reflective PDJs reveal about their learning and reactions?*

## 2. Theoretical Foundations

### 2.1 Constructivist Professional Development

Borg (2015), though implicitly, suggests a set of constructivist characteristics for English language teachers' PD and admits their occurrence in English teaching arenas. Wearing a constructivist lens to scrutinise Borg's (2015) proposals discloses the following PD's features. First, teachers are knowledge generators who engage in enquiry-based experiences to build up new understandings from within (Von Glasersfeld, 2002) or as a result of collaboration with other peers (Vygotsky, 1978). Second, as individuals, they are responsible for the construction of their own interpretations of knowledge through reflection on their experiential acts (Dewey, 1900; Piaget, 1964). Third, their needs, prior knowledge and experience are valued as they represent the foundation for further constructions (Piaget, 1964) and determine the degree of the required scaffolding and support. Finally, constructing from and reflecting on their beliefs and experience, those teachers are provided opportunities to interact using authentic materials in relevant contexts (Vygotsky, 1986, as cited in Johnson, 2009). Other suggested strategies that have the potential to adopt and promote constructivist principles abound in the literature on effective PD (e.g. Burns & Richards, 2009; Richards & Farrell, 2005; Richards & Lockhart, 1996); most important of which are approaches to *reflective practice*.

### 2.2 Reflection and Reflective Practice

*Reflective practice* is to view teacher learning as a process of a critical examination of teaching experiences through which teachers can better understand their own practices and routines (Richards & Farrell, 2005). A reflective act is an ongoing online and offline process of "shuttling

back and forth between thinking and action” (Jay, 2003, p.12). Henceforth, different reflective practices would logically take place in different periods of time: past, present and future. Following this timeline, *reflection-on-action* (Shön, 1983) involves an action followed by thoughts. In other words, it refers to a post-action pause and an offline activity to think about what went well (past), what didn't (past) and what changes could be brought about for the betterment of (future) actions (Jay, 2003). *Reflection-in-action* is another Shön's (1983) coinage that refers to an online and a while-acting process of rational examination and analysis of what is happening (present). These two types of reflection can be well grasped in teaching-learning contexts. Teachers can think critically on their actions after a class, a whole school day or a year to improve their teaching acts and therefore upgrade their learner learning. They may also react during action using alternative techniques to restore learners' motivation or to figure out a solution to an unexpected learning obstacle. It is worth noting that in addition to schools and classrooms, TE and PD arenas can also be fruitful loci for *reflective practice*, a lens to assess teachers' learning and reactions during and post-programme evaluation.

### **2.3 Constructivist Professional Development Evaluation**

Evaluation is the cornerstone of constructivist PD programmes, as it is a thoughtful, focused and intentional process whereby pertinent information is collected and analysed by means of appropriate methods and techniques to assess the value of such programmes (Guskey, 2000). Among other evaluative levels, Kirkpatrick (1988, as cited in Richards & Farrell, 2005) and Guskey (2000) propose that during the process of evaluation, participants' reactions and their learning after a PD experience have to be assessed. Guskey (2000) further explains that participants' *reactions and learning* can be assessed by means of a combination of, but not limited to, *rating-scale items, open-ended questions, oral or/and written reflections*. Focussing on the latter, this study spotlights the participants' written reflections on their learning (cognition) and reactions (feelings and attitudes) through a qualitative content analysis of their PDJs.

### **2.4 Professional Development Journals (PDJs)**

Journal writing is one of the invaluable reflective ways for a teacher to develop professionally. *Teaching journal* (Richards & Farrell, 2005), *PDJ* (Scales, 2008) or *teacher journal* (Griffiee, 2012) can be interchangeably employed in the literature. Because the concern of this paper is teacher development, opting for PDJ as a unifying concept is more than relevant. PDJ stands for whatever script or any other electronic written form in and through which, particularly, teachers keep records of their continuous reflections, evaluations as well as the confronted issues and the witnessed events and incidents. Precisely, teachers use PDJs to describe and reflect on teaching and learning, including their actions and reactions during, for or after learning planning, preparation and delivery (Scales, 2008). PDJs take several forms that range from a single sheet of paper or a bond of sheets in a folder to notebooks or e-files on a computer. Although a PDJ is subjective (i.e., by and for the teacher), this subjectivity can be shared with or even assessed by a peer, a group of peers or any other facilitator, as it provides diverse themes to discuss and a chance for practitioner-practitioner conversations.

PDJs, among others, can be effective constructivist tools of assessing what learners (teachers) have internalized and learnt (Brooks & Brooks, 1993; Santrock, 2011). Henceforth, interchangeably employed, diaries or journals/PDJs are likely to mean the ongoing process of

reflective writings for intentional enhancement of learning (Moon, 2006). In this paper, the deliberate analysis of the participants' reflections (PDJs) is premised on these assumptions: (1) during the process of reconstructing and interpreting their teaching-learning events, teachers will make sense of what they experienced (Johnson, 2009), and (2) writing about the process of how an event unfolds will inevitably disclose new insights about the event itself (Richards & Farrell, 2005).

Given their supreme importance, these tools have also been used as instruments for data collection in diverse research projects (Griffie, 2012) such as TE programmes (Dörnyei, 2007). Albeit different in purpose and terminology, teacher reflective writings or *narrative accounts* (Johnson, 2009) were used to assess Turkish prospective teachers' achievement (Akar, 2003), to self-assess learning and reactions (Brock, Yu & Wong, as cited in Richards & Farrell, 2005, p.20) and to follow up teachers during a teacher development programme in Namibia (O'Sullivan, 2004).

### 3. Methodology

#### 3.1 Participants

In this study, the participants (N=14) were novice middle-school teachers of English holding BA degrees (1999 -2001). Although almost all of them were over 35 years old, they had an English teaching experience of less than 5 years, for they were recently recruited as full-time teachers after working as temporary substitutes for years.

Adopting a constructivist *emic* approach, the four-year experienced middle-school English inspector (researcher) was another participant in this study. This enquiry is a normal event in inspectors' calendar, as abiding by the recommendations of the Algerian Ministry of National Education (MNE), conducting research and testing innovative ideas are among other inspector's duties and rights. It is worthy of note that when necessary, English inspectors are allowed to design weekly PD programmes (mainly on Tuesdays) that very often target neophytes.

#### 3.2 Research Context: A Succinct Description of the Programme

The participants willingly and collaboratively worked with the researcher (facilitator) during planning (Jan–Feb 2016), implementation (March-May 2016) and evaluation (June 2016) events of a weekly 5-month-constructivist programme, aiming at improving their ELT-concepts and practice of *lesson planning, presentation, classroom management and assessment* and at encouraging them to use some effective strategies for their PD such as *peer observation* and *reflective practice* using PDJs. With these aims in mind, this conceptual and practical programme provided a constructivist learning environment in which participants with the facilitator's assistance worked individually and collaboratively to solve authentic problems, study class-related cases, conduct and present projects, practise micro-teaching and peer observation (full description of the programme is beyond the scope of this paper).

#### 3.3 Data collection Procedures

Among other constructivist evaluation materials, participants' PDJs (N=14) were collected at the end of the suggested programme, coded using this pattern (e.g. TBF: T/teacher & BF/ initials of the participants' real names) to ethically protect their identities, and then thoroughly and

repetitively read and deeply analysed. Note that although the participants initially had briefings about the rationale for and the way to use PDJs, they were given freedom to record their reflections about their learning and reactions according to their preferences, so the use of graphic organisers was one additional option.

### **3.4 Data analysis procedures**

Under the umbrella of diaries (Dörnyei, 2007; Griffiee, 2012) that can be qualitatively content-analysed, the participants' reflections through their PDJs were coded and analysed in accordance with the most recurring *themes* (Griffiee, 2012) or *patterns* (Brown, 2005) in line with the predetermined categories of *learning* and *reactions*. Needless to add that the researcher's interpretations were backed up by carefully selected participants' quotes to get a solid account of evidence (Brown, 2005). It is worth noting that it was so tough to delimit their reflections into exact corresponding categories because of the diversity of their constructivist idiosyncratic interpretations (constructed realities) of the encountered reality (the programme). Besides, due to the difficulty of foregrounding their *learning* and *reactions* as separate categories, a blended presentation was opted for.

## **4. Results and Discussion**

The initial *cognitive and affective analysis* (Akar, 2003) of the teachers' reflective products revealed that well nigh all of them plumped for following a comparative style to describe and reflect on their past and present experiences as two critical periods in the ongoing development of their professional career. This comparison merely represents their teaching experience before and after their participation in the suggested constructivist programme, which would inevitably imply some signs of change. Bearing in mind categorisation difficulty due to the nature of constructivist personal interpretations, the qualitatively selected themes (N=6) and sub-themes (N=14) reflecting the participants' blend of learning and reactions were as follows (See Appendix A). Note that since this analysis is qualitative, there was no need for quantitative ranking intentions; the attached table in Appendix A was employed only to help identify and foreground the emerged themes and sub-themes and to signpost this qualitative analysis.

### **4.1 Participants' Comparative Reflections**

Well nigh all participants avowed and acknowledged that this more or less short experience of teaching English was beneficial for them, for it was an opportunity to test their intuitive trial-and-error actions. However, the programme caused them Piagetian *disequilibrium* (Piaget, 1964) because it was another reality by means of which they could reflect on the realities they previously constructed about English teaching and learning; for them, it was a mirror to realize that some of their *planning, presentation, classroom management and assessment* practices were not adequate.

#### **4.1.1 Participants' Pre-Programme Assessment of their Teaching Experience**

"The teacher of yesterday and the teacher of today" (TBM) and "before training and after" (TBS) are two quotes to clarify the participants' pre-and post-programme reflections. Before this constructivist experience, some teachers revealed that they used to work without any rationale, thinking that it is enough to blindly follow the syllabus, plan lessons and test learners in a mechanical cyclic manner. In line with this thought, one of the teachers (TRK) reported: "I used to teach and follow the syllabus, test and do exams to my learners. [It] seemed enough for me."

Another highlighted that “I’ve been teaching English since 2008... [But] I had no idea about the rationale. Why am I doing this now ... and not another activity” (TBF). Others confessed that most of their work was unorganized, done at random. This confession is a striking example: “Before this training, I used to work at random ... there were no specific objectives” (THF). The hallmark of the participants’ reflections on past experiences is that some teachers were not sure of their practice and were in need of being guided and judged to be satisfied. “I was working and cannot judge my work.... I was never satisfied about my work.” (TMF) and “Maybe I was doing something right, but...” (TBF) can be suitable excerpts.

#### **4.1.2 Participants’ Post-Programme Construction of Self-Confidence**

The teachers’ reflections before and after their participation in the suggested constructivist programme depict a positive affective change in their self-confidence. Expressions like “I was afraid” (TBS), “I was terrified” (TBM) or even “before, I was lost... I was nervous and not confident” (TYH) were included in their PDJs to describe their stress and anxiety, doubting their abilities to perform well. These pre-programme feelings were also marked by wondering and self-questioning: one teacher (TMH) wrote “Am I able to do this?” Another participant avowed that she was afraid of standing in front of her learners with their open eyes gazing at her. Worse was this teacher’s confession: “I was about to leave the profession” (TRK). Conversely, as they reported, due to the programme, they became surer and began to trust their work with their learners. “Now, I feel better, I am better, I am more confident” (TBS) or “I am proud of myself and my learners” (TMF) were some of the participants’ positive signs of *affective shift*.

#### **4.1.3 Participants’ Post-Programme Construction of Willpower**

Remarkable were their commitment and the will to do better in their classes, implying that the programme is not an end but just a means among others to improve their practice. This teacher, for instance, seemed much determined to implement what she learnt for the benefits of her learners as she put: “I will apply some successful techniques and tips that work” (TCA). Another committed practitioner said: “We have to be deeply engaged to make our teaching getting better” (TBM). “All what we have to do now is to be creative and involved,” said (TMK). Accordingly, this analysis mirrors the participants’ motivation and engagement to implement what they have already constructed in their classes due to their self-confidence.

#### **4.2 Correction of Misconceptions**

Abiding by Piagetian constructivism, the internal structure of the human mind and the external world of experience are in a constant dynamic activity of *assimilation* and *accommodation* where previous constructs may be modified and corrected due to contact with a new different concept or experience to regain *equilibrium* (Piaget, 1964). Scrutinising the teachers’ reflections disclosed that due to the encounter with ideas and experience other than what they used to believe and live, they were able to correct some wrong conceptualisations related to teaching, learning and learning environment. For instance, this teacher used to believe that *classroom management* has to do with authority and keeping discipline per se, that a good teacher should be authoritarian and the only source of knowledge, and should play the role of the teacher rather than being just herself. Her words were as under:

... I was dominated by the image of a good teacher, the authority, as one who is able to maintain discipline. The teacher... who can leave the classroom door open because pupils are working quietly... a pool of knowledge untouchable as a person... a different person in classroom than in private. Now I am not of that sort. (TOI)

As a solution for controlling her class, another teacher averred that she learnt that keeping discipline begins by establishing rules early during the first day of teacher-learner contact; before, she used to shout a lot thinking that this can make her learners silent. She voiced:

I start with establishing rules in my class. I tell my pupils about what they are allowed to do ... and ... mustn't do (contract of September). Today I speak in low voice. Everybody is silent in order to hear me... I will never shout. (TBF)

Another teacher clearly stated that she was tough because she used to respond to her learners' wrong answers, saying "no... as if they committed a crime. Instead ... I use ... try again, not far, justify your answer, why" (TMH). Another teacher acknowledged being unfair to her learners by providing complicated written tasks, texts and examples. Reflecting on her way of teaching writing, she said:

Before, I found difficulties in teaching writing. I used to blame my learners for their weak products. In fact, I did not lead them and teach them how to do. But now I am teaching writing with confidence. My learners are able to produce a piece of writing because I provided them with a model. (TMF)

(TMF) also explicated that she had "so many misunderstandings about teaching, but after this period [PDP], things became clearer than before" One of her corrected misconceptions follows: "It seemed to me difficult to teach using games, but I was wrong. I learnt that it is easy to learn English in an enthusiastic way" (TMF).

### ***4.3 Participants' ELT Conceptual Constructions***

Understanding of concepts implies the ability to explain how and why they function the way they do (Von Glasersfeld, 2002). In line with this constructivist postulate, although the participants' subjective interpretations released some light on their understanding of the already presented ELT concepts, some selected *idiosyncratic* conceptual constructions were worthy to analyse.

#### ***4.3.1 The Concept of Lesson Planning***

One of the teachers explicated that "the aims of the lesson or a sequence (a series of lessons) should be SMART (Scales, 2008), which means specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-bound" (THF). Additionally, she showed her awareness of the importance of planning before class begins, stating that "The teacher should plan his lesson before coming to classroom in order to avoid confusion, poor performance; to be well organised and more confident" (THF).

### 4.3.2 The Concept of Classroom Management

Most teachers conceptualized that *classroom management* is the sine qua non of a successful lesson (Scrivener, 2005) and the responsibility of the teacher. Aware of its importance, a teacher wrote that “classroom management is one of the secrets of the lesson success” (THF) or “a half success of the teacher” (TGN). Also, the participants interpreted this concept differently. For instance, (TGN) associated *classroom management* with *time management, keeping discipline, teacher roles* and *interaction patterns*. (THF) understood it as time and space management and teacher roles. Whereas (TMF) highlighted that a successful classroom management is based mainly on teacher-learner relationship and communication:

One of the things that we rarely discuss is human connection and relationship. We should think of how to take our learners from where they are to what they need to be. It will never happen if we don't understand them, their needs to have a relationship, to make them trust us. (TMF)

Additionally, teachers grasped that problems of *misbehaviour* are a result of boredom, routine and teacher-learner distance; hence, they conceptualized that it is their own role to create a motivating learning environment and be closer to their learners' needs and problems. To keep discipline, a teacher suggested these solutions: “rewarding learners to motivate them and using tutorial sessions to solve some of their problems” (TCA). This teacher found that the key for this problematic situation is in providing “a motivating learning atmosphere that helps them to be motivated using supports that connect to real-life situations” (TGN).

### 4.3.3 The Concept of Assessment and Related Concepts

Casting light on their understanding of the concept assessment, its types (i.e. *diagnostic, formative and summative*) and the rationale for its use in an ELT classroom, (TOI), (TGN) and (THF) respectively voiced:

Assessment: T collects evidence concerning his work. Learners' problems should be detected and solved through asking questions, observing, listening and testing. (TOI)

Collecting evidence about Ss' progress to find out ... what Ss have learnt in the lesson and what I am going to teach next... it can be all the time... it can be formal in tests and exams and informal during classroom activities... through it I can assess Ss' language and language skills. (TGN)

[*Diagnostic assessment*] is to make decisions about their [learners'] level at the beginning of a year, term or a lesson. [*Formative assessment*] can be during the sessions to provide T/L with feedback showing progress and to spot the learners' problems. [*Summative assessment*] is formal, individual and marked. (THF)

Highlighting the primordial role of using *peer-correction* to make learners responsible and autonomous, learning from their peer mistakes, this teacher (TYH) wrote: “The peer correction of the home work ... made my pupils aware of the mistakes of their class mates and of the hard task that the teacher is doing.” The definitional interpretations of the two concepts, ICQ and CCQ, as well as their uses were also demystified. The following is a selected quotation:

CCQ or concept checking question [is used] to assess learners' understanding of the target language [e.g. the future]; I test them by the end of the lesson to know whether they grasped the new TL or not. ICQ or instruction checking question is used in place of the expression (have you understood?). It is a kind of assessment through questions about what the instruction is about. (TOI)

#### ***4.3.4 The Concept of Reflective Practice through PDJs***

Some teachers preferred to pinpoint the benefits they got from using PDJs as useful reflective documents to develop their reflective practice. They voiced:

The journal has an effective role which is improving the status of teaching and learning. As a professional activity, it focuses on how teachers can improve pupils' learning. (TCA) PDJ raises my self-confidence. It helps me to discover myself and weaknesses. Writing my professional progress helps me to build myself. It gives me answers to my questions; where was I? And where Am I? (TMK)

Writing reflections about my teaching helped me a lot to become the teacher I always wanted to be. Of course I am still on my way, but now I know the direction. (TOI)

#### ***4.4 Participants' Constructivist Mindset***

Wearing a constructivist hat, contemporary TE and PD designs view teachers as active, thinking and decision-making learners "whose actions are influenced by their unobservable cognitive (and affective) dimension of teaching" (Borg, 2011, p. 218). Being "unobservable", "teacher cognition ...what teachers know, believe and think" (Borg, 2003, p.81) is hard to access unless indirect strategies such as visual symbols (e.g. drawing), a teaching material (e.g. lesson plan) or any stimulating proxies are used (See Birello, 2011). Therefore, the participants' reflections would serve as indirect strategy to explore their mindset through their written verbalization and externalization of their internalized thoughts (Johnson, 2009). Maybe the participants' reiteration of these phrases such as "I constructed", "I learnt", "I've learnt", "I built", "I recognized" as well as their use of dictums and metaphoric images can be conceived of as evidence of the construction of a constructivist mindset on teaching and learning.

##### ***4.4.1 Teachers as lifelong learners***

Under the umbrella of constructivist epistemology, teachers are regarded as learners (Farrell & Jacobs, 2010; Johnson, 2009) who continuously learn and scaffold others' learning, and their loci of activity are thought of as "learning communities" (Clarke & Hollingsworth, 2002, p.949). In spite of their idiosyncratic constructions, some teachers' beliefs seem to align with these proposals. As an example, this teacher voiced: "I learnt that the teacher is an old learner... classroom is a micro society" (TGN). "I constructed that a teacher is a person who is learning and teaching all his life", said (TBM). Maybe in indirect metaphoric style, this participant appears to say that along their continuous growth and development, teachers constantly learn. She put it thus:

I learnt that [teacher] professional development is like a seed which springs forth in spring... You must have constant sunlight, constant water and constant nutrition for constant growth. (TBS)

##### ***4.4.2 Teachers as self-directed and co- learners***

Referring to Vygotsky's (1978) thoughts of ZPD, the zone between *independent performance* and *aided-joint performance* in which the development of the former is fully determined by the latter (van der Veer & Valsiner, 1991), these participants demonstrated their understanding of being dependent on peer's collaborative assistance to understand and do is just one of the means that leads to independent thinking and idiosyncratic decision-making through continuous comparative reflections. They grasped that although dependence on other peers is crucial to share and discuss diverse ideas and beliefs, it is not an end in itself but rather a tool, leading to independence, for learning is "understood as a self-regulating process of resolving inner cognitive conflicts that often become apparent through concrete experience, collaborative discourse, and reflection" (Brooks & Brooks, 1993, p. vii). In summary, four excerpts are selected as under:

The training days were fruitful for us ... we share many ideas, many experiences; different ones through open debate. Maybe my lesson plan is not the same with my colleagues... I share mine and I take what is necessary and different... I recognized my way and style of thinking. (TBM)

I changed my philosophy to make my learners understand and learn English... I watched some [Y]ouTube conferences; I attended lessons with my colleagues to find answers to my questions. I took what I noticed and experienced it with my learners... to see their reactions. I found it useful to use games and grouping learners. (TMF)

The difference is that now I work with reflection in, on and for action. The rationale became a nature/something natural and I am 'contaminating' my colleagues, I know now that I should. (TOI)

Meetings and different contacts with my colleagues gave me ideas about new strategies to present a successful lesson and to assess my learners correctly. (TMK)

#### **4.4.3 Teachers as facilitators of learner-centered learning**

Teaching and learning are not synonymous; how best we teach does not necessarily make others learn, that's why all foci are on the learner being the centre of learning. The teacher's role is just to scaffold the process of his/her cognitive development through modelling, coaching in an authentic problem-solving learning environment (Jonassen, 1999). Yet, without a closer safe contact with this learner to understand his/her characteristics and needs, the teacher cannot achieve the ultimate goal, learning. This contemporary constructivist discourse is conceptualized and adopted by these participants. Highlighting the importance of using learner-related authentic materials, a teacher advanced: "The successful lesson is that what is touched by learner's skin, feelings and hands" (THF). This participant seems aware of her role as an educator, a facilitator whose way of teaching is learner-governed, as she averred:

What I believe in is that every teacher is an educator. Every child needs a champion, a hero, and the teacher educator can be this hero... to be a good teacher is to love what you teach and who you teach. If the child cannot learn the way we teach, maybe we should teach the way he/she learns. Every child needs a coach, why won't be our learner's coach. (TMF)

Emphasizing the primordial role of teacher-learner rapport, fuelled by an encouraging discursive exchange to furnish a tolerant just learning environment, another view goes as under:

I built some ideas: I have to build talents rather than criticising them... To encourage my learners to reach their goal, I have to be sensitive and attentive... I have to plant justice and tolerance between my pupils to keep the channel of communication always open... be advisor, helper... (TBM)

Asking about whether her "...preparation, planning and control can guarantee that [her] learners will learn" and whether she can control her learners' learning, (TCA) conceptualized that:

Pupils' learning should be eventual outcome of all my efforts... It's not me who is going to make [them] learn. The pupils have to do it themselves. I should orient them and put them on the road... Getting curious not furious about my learners will help me in preparing my best year. (TCA)

#### ***4.5 Participants' Reflections on Praxis***

Since writing about and reflecting on a teaching event, teachers will make sense of what they experienced in their classrooms (Johnson, 2009), the participants' PDJs also included some *narrative accounts* (Johnson, 2009) coupled with reflective thoughts about their or other witnessed *in vivo* classroom practices (Richards & Lockhart, 1996). Diverse actions and reactions about their (un) successful lessons, problems faced or even their feedback on the inspector's (researcher's) visits were analysed. The following are selected accounts of the participants' self- and peer-assessment of some scenes of their classroom practice.

##### ***4.5.1 Self-assessment of teaching acts***

Throughout her narrative account, this teacher (TMF) appeared to be satisfied after being able to support and motivate her slow beginner learners. Additionally, she raised the issue of heterogeneous learner achievement during summative assessment. Puzzled about her pupils' poor results in the written test, she wrote: "I thought the test was easy and we practiced a lot... I noticed that they did well in oral test, but the written test was difficult for them." Conscious of this dilemma, she added that "I tried to answer my learners' needs to make them develop."

What follows are three samples of the teachers' feedback on the inspector's (the researcher's) observations of their classes. Self-assessing the presented lesson, this teacher was fully conscious that her lesson was "70% successful" because "some pupils were disconnected" (THF). Conversely, she positively reflected on the inspector's satisfaction (constructive feedback). Giving examples of her strong points, she advanced that "the inspector was satisfied about the use of materials [the map of Algeria with colourful slips of paper to describe the weather forecast] and the use of ICQ and CCQ" (THF). In spite of her fear (*lesson syndrome*) of the visit, this participant joyfully accepted the inspector's constructive feedback, a mirror to her areas for improvement. Reflecting on this experience she pointed out:

The inspector visited me on May 5<sup>th</sup> 2016. I was so afraid. I had the 3<sup>rd</sup> year class. He showed me the right way to prepare a writing lesson. He told me also that pupils always need a demo [demonstration] before starting any step or task. (TBN)

Unlike the former, (TYH) revealed her enthusiasm for being visited by the inspector because she wanted to be assessed, as she said: “I was very happy because I wanted to know where I am.” She found the observation an opportunity for signposting her areas for improvement albeit dissatisfied about her performance. The focal point in her reflective narrative is the adequate use of some concepts dealt with during the programme such as *reflection on and for action*, *advice* and *areas for improvement* instead of the pejorative term, *weaknesses*, and her initiative to better exploit the given feedback in her future classes. Highlighting some concepts in her reflection, she voiced:

I was not satisfied of my work, but at least I discovered my *areas for improvement*. In the *debate*, he [the inspector] *reflected on my actions* and gave me some *advice*. After the debate, I *reflected for my actions* and I *brought change* to my *lesson plan* and to the *support* [it was a long boring text]. It was really a successful lesson [the modified one]. At that moment, I wished ...my inspector was again present in my classroom. (TYH) (Researcher’s emphasis)

Delving into her reflections on a peer-observation event, as she invited her colleagues to attend a lesson she presented herself disclosed the participant’s awareness of the key elements of a successful lesson. Chief among them are the following: learner engagement and interaction, accurate use of learning for objective achievement. Satisfied with her performance she put it thus:

I was really happy and satisfied because my pupils were fully engaged with me... my colleagues appreciated my way of presenting the lesson ... and the way of preparing my learning sequence ... the way they [learners] interacted... They thanked me and my pupils. At that moment, I realized that I have reached my objective. (TBF)

#### **4.5.2 Peer-assessment of teaching acts**

Contrary to former analyses, this scrutiny targets the teachers’ reflections as observers of their peers in action. Among the four teachers who reflected on their peer-observation acts, (TOI) is selected. The striking point about her (TOI) narrative is her analytic style, the outcome of which is the concluding *take-away tips*. Reflecting on a text-based grammar lesson, she grasped that the text itself should be read silently by learners; that throughout the comprehending process, the teacher should guide and assess learners’ understanding of the text via goal-oriented tasks and carefully chosen questions; that explaining and demonstrating what to do are keys for lesson or task success. Here is an excerpt of her thoughts:

Pupils should read the text themselves. The teacher should not read for them, but through activities, the teacher will ensure their understanding... the teacher explains the instruction through doing the first question as an example and helps them to form correct sentences... and at the same time she asks some questions to guide and ensure their understanding. (TOI)

#### **4.6. Participants’ Opinions about the Inspector (Researcher)**

(Social) constructivist underpinnings do favour a learning environment where mutual respect, trust and empathy should be fostered among all learning parties. Collaborative-cooperative rather than superior-inferior spirit should haunt facilitator-participant relationship. In such democratic scene, the facilitator can be considered as the powder keg’s igniter of motivational learning. The

in-depth analysis of the participants' PDJs disclosed their satisfaction with the work of the facilitator (the researcher), his motivating character and dialogic methodology. They revealed that the facilitator or leader provided them with new concepts and techniques, changed their philosophy and approach and raised their self-confidence to progress in their performance. (TFS) subscribed to this view: "We have learned from our distinguished leader the best instructions and the best ways." Closer to this thought, (TBF) avowed that "He [the facilitator] gave us many techniques that lead to progress." Following similar positive reactions of commitment and self-confidence, (TYH) put it thus: "The leader changed my attitudes towards teaching. My aim today is not to become a good teacher but a professional one." (TMF) corroborated this reaction:

I became happier when the inspector [the researcher] remembered me... really he raised my confidence and trust on myself... after his compliments [constructive feedback], I became self-confident and tried to do my best in my work (TMF)

### 5. Implications and Recommendations

The qualitative content analysis of the participants' reflections (PDJs) revealed some promising idiosyncratic signs of constructivist learning and positive reactions. In terms of constructivist learning, the participants, though with different interpretations, constructed new concepts (e.g. SMART Objectives, ICQ, CCQ, assessment and reflection) and corrected some misconceptions (e.g. unsupported writing tasks, games' ineffectiveness, authoritative teacher and discipline) about English teaching/learning together with other conceptual constructions about themselves as reflective self-directed and co-learners who can learn individually from their self-assessment or collaboratively from their peer-assessment of their teaching acts. Their positive reactions were also flagged up in their PDJs, as they expressed their satisfaction about the motivating facilitator, their learning and the constructivist techniques that raised their self-confidence and willpower to boost their English teaching practice.

Since data from diaries or journals/PDJs of a meager number of individuals (14 teachers) in a given context (Algerian PD evaluation) can be generalized to other people within other settings through the *theory* they create, confirm or disconfirm (Griffiee, 2012), the researcher suggests that if well exploited, PDJs can be fruitful constructivist evaluative tools of TE and PD programmes. Instead of using pencil-paper tests with their high *affective filter*, teachers through reflections are more likely to deliberately and willingly reveal about their learning and reactions in a safe learning environment, a means to improve future programmes and meet teachers' idiosyncratic affective and cognitive needs.

For better use of reflective PDJs as constructivist self- and peer-assessment tools in schools and TE and PD loci, the researcher recommends that first and foremost both facilitators (be they inspectors or mentors) and teachers should construct the concepts of *constructivism*, *reflection on and in action*, *reflective practice* and *PDJ* in addition to the rationale for using them. Besides, they should see some preliminary how-to-do models and hands-on practice for writing, categorising and analysing their reflections. Otherwise, it would be odd and an intellectual dictatorship to expect sound reflective practice from teachers who have never learnt about and practised reflection nor used PDJs.

## 6. Conclusion

The cognitive and affective analysis of the participants' PDJs revealed signs of their construction of different ELT- and PD-related concepts, correction of some of their misconceptions together with traces of their satisfaction, self-confidence and willpower. This qualitative study, thus, confirms that the correct use and analysis of PDJs as reflective tools for evaluating teacher education and professional development programmes would inevitably provide teachers themselves with rich safe opportunities to self/peer-assess and develop their teaching concepts and practice and would help facilitators to detect teachers' learning and reactions in order to meet their individual cognitive and affective needs in future programmes.

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**Appendix A.** A Summary of the 14 Most Frequent sub-themes about Participants' Learning and Reactions

Participants' learning and reactions		Frequencies		PDJs Total	
Themes	Sub-themes	*F	%	**N	%
Comparative Reflections	Pre-programme Experience	12	85.72	14	100
	Construction of Self-Confidence	7	50		
	Construction of Willpower	10	71.43		
Correction of Misconceptions	Lesson Delivery & Management	7	50		
ELT Conceptual Constructions	Lesson Planning	12	85.72		
	Classroom Manag	14	100		
	Assessment	9	64.29		
	Reflective practice	8	57.14		
Constructivist Mindset	Lifelong learning	10	71.43		
	Self-directed and Co-learning	10	71.43		
	Facilitators of Learning	11	78.57		
Reflections on Praxis	Self-assessment of teaching acts	6	42.86		
	Peer-assessment of teaching acts	4	28.57		
Opinions about the Inspector (Researcher)	Methodology & Character	8	57.14		

\* Frequency of sub-themes across PDJs. \*\* Number of the analysed PDJs