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EFFECT OF REFLECTIVE JOURNAL KEEPING ON THE PERFORMANCE OF PRE-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN CREATIVE ACTIVITIES IN KIKUYU SUB-COUNTY, KENYA

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ABSTRACT

There is a shift from the traditional support of education achievement in terms of excellence in knowledge for growing, thriving and surviving to creativity propelled learning. This raises the status of Creative Arts as a school subject for preschool children. Using a quasi-experimental design, out of 34 public preschools in Kikuyu Sub-County, Kenya, five were randomly selected to use in establishing the effect of pre-school teachers' use of journal keeping as an element of reflective teaching on preschool children's academic performance in Creative Arts. An intervention on how to keep and use journaling for teaching was given to the 13 preschool teachers in this sub-county. After the intervention, it was found that the mean score of pre-school children performance in creative activities whose teachers kept journals was significantly higher than the mean score of pre-school children whose teachers did not keep journals. The control group had a pretest mean score of 39.22 and a posttest means score of 47.95 while the experimental group had a pretest mean score of 26.22 and a posttest mean score of 74.19. The only different major thing done by the experimental group of teachers was that they keenly kept journals which allowed them to get concerned about their children as individuals to be attended to uniquely. It was recommended that journal keeping as an element of reflective teaching may be integrated in the daily classroom pedagogy to improve children performance in Creative Activities.

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INTRODUCTION

Reflective teaching has been established as a factor in teacher's practice that enables management of children's experiences in the classroom to enhance desired learning. Darling-Hammond (2006) sums up reflective teaching as learning from teaching and learning for teaching. Coulson and Harvey (2013) perceive reflective teaching as a process of linking theory and practice, making it an action of teacher's repositioning in the teaching profession to address the various classroom dynamics. This requires the teacher to analyze the classroom practice to have what best promotes learning (Marbina *et al*, 2010). Thus, reflective teaching emerges as a necessary skill in teacher training. Brookfield (1995) identified ways of accessing data for reflection as children's evaluation

of the teacher; peer evaluation and personal comments in journals. Knowledge gained through these three lenses of reflecting provides teachers with motivation as they communicate to their children and solve their problems (Schon, 1983). Findings from a study done at an elementary school in Ontario, Canada by Wubbels, Brekelmans and Hoymayer (1992) found that when teachers did a self-report of their actions during teaching, it correlated well with their espoused ideas. This study did not show whether the use of reflective journaling by pre-school teachers would help to improve children's academic performance in developing nations like Kenya. According to a study done to examine the influence of preschool teachers' reflective teaching on children's academic performance in Molo District, Kenya by Gatumu, Thumbi and Muriithi (2014), it was found that the mean scores of children whose teachers used reflective teaching was higher, while it was observed that the performance was poorer in classes where teachers did not use it. A similar study done by Mutiso (2014) in Machakos found

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that reflective teaching impacts positively on children's Science performance. This happens because reflective teaching facilitates teachers to better understand learning environment (Brookfield, 2002). Pollard and Tann (1993), highlight that reflective teaching supports a move from routine actions characterized by common sense thinking to reflective action emerging from professional thinking. Thus, reflective teaching becomes a step towards teacher's desired professional development. Reflective journal keeping featured in the studies by Gatumu, *et al* (2014) and Mutiso (2014) and this is why this study sought to find out if its use significantly affects the performance of Creative Activities by preschool children in Kikuyu Sub-County, Kenya. Upon enquiring at the Office of the Sub-County Director of Education, there were no records of the performance of Creative Activities in pre-schools at Kikuyu Sub-County. However, there is a general but hidden disinterest by pre-school teachers in this Sub-County to teach Creative Activities, as majority of them tend to focus on teaching Language and Number Work Activities which are seen to be more important when children join primary schools. This is largely justified by parents who feel that the academic performance of their children in terms of mastery of knowledge, high grades at the end of primary education which will secure their children slots in good government school is of utmost importance. Secondly, the primary school teachers blame poor academic performance in lower primary levels (Standards one to three) on the pre-school teachers. There are instances where poor academic performers at lower primary are demoted back to the pre-school class for the pre-school teachers to 'teach them better'. Therefore, pre-school teachers are under a lot of pressure to ensure that children can read beyond 5 (five) letter words and do simple multiplication and division (as well as addition and subtraction) by the time they are joining primary school.

The government of Kenya has given pre-school children the good will that is required for the learning of Creative Activities. The Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD) has developed an Early Years Education Curriculum Design for Creative Activities for four and five year age children (Republic of Kenya, 2017; Republic of Kenya, 2008). For the two age levels, there is a detailed guideline on how and what the pre-school teachers should teach during the Creative Activities lesson as it is in the interest of the government that pre-school children get the best quality education (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The government has trained Quality Assurance and Standards Officers to supervise the delivery of the syllabus. However, questions abound on the effectiveness of the Quality Assurance and Standards practices in ensuring that pre-school children are well taught in all learning activities including Creative Activities. This is because the introduction of free primary education created a latent problem of over enrollment in public pre-schools (Republic of Kenya, 2013). When children are admitted to a public pre-school, they are guaranteed admission into Grade One in the same school (Republic of Kenya, 2013). The major concern is whether these Grade One children have acquired those Creative Activities oriented life skills they need for growth, development and survival as they leave preschool life. According to Otunga, Odero and Barasa (2011), the teacher's choice of methods of teaching influences the children's mastery of content. They argue that children whose teachers engage poor methods of teaching are left unsatisfied and their academic performance is affected. This is further strengthened

by Kafu (2010) who states that poor methods employed by teachers discourage promotion of the children thinking ability. In Kenya, pre-school teachers are not trained to teach using reflective journaling as a teaching technique. Reflective journal keeping requires the teacher to write a daily record of the teaching and learning experiences (Pollard and Tann, 1993). This includes what the teacher did and did not do while in class and the outcomes of the actions forming the basis of later reflection (Fraenkel and Wallen, 1996). According to Farrel (2008), keeping a reflective journal helps the teachers to become more effective as they analyze the internal and external factors that affect teaching and learning. According to Rainer (2004), keeping a reflective journal record helps a teacher to remember what happened in the class and use this information to determine whether the objectives for that lesson were achieved or not. Whereas there are challenges in the teaching of Creative Activities in pre-schools in Kikuyu Sub-County, the study sought to examine the effect of the use of reflective journaling in teaching by pre-school teachers. The study aimed at examining the effect of journal keeping as an element of reflective teaching on the performance of pre-school children in Creative Activities in Kikuyu Sub-County, Kiambu County. It focused on establishing whether there is a significant difference in children's performance when taught by teachers who keep journals for reflective purposes and those whose teachers who do not keep journals. To establish the effect of journal keeping on the performance of Creative Activities by pre-school children, the research null hypothesis was: journal keeping will not significantly improve the performance of pre-school children in Creative Activities.

MATERIALS AND METHODOS

According to information available from the Office of the Sub-County Director of Education, Kikuyu, there are 34 public pre-schools in Kikuyu-Sub County that are attached to government sponsored primary schools. All the pre-schools in Kikuyu Sub-County are moderately endowed with teaching/learning materials and the setting is mainly sub-urban environments. For this study, 13 pre-school teachers and 178 pre-school children were randomly selected. All the children were in Pre-Unit class, between 5 and 6 years old and of mixed gender. According to Egle (2004), at this age, children's hand muscles movement are more developed to do Creative Activities. Also, these children could ask questions and give their teachers feedback about their classroom experiences. One school of 30 children was used for pilot study. Data from this school was used to ascertain the validity and reliability of the research instruments (questionnaire, achievement test, documentary analysis form and observation schedule). The study employed a quasi-experimental research design where pre-schools that participated were selected and assigned to two groups, the experimental group (Group I) and the control group (Group II). A pre-test was administered to the children in the two groups. The test was about coloring, joining the dots and identifying colors. The researchers assumed that the preschool teachers did not have any prior training on journal keeping. A training module addressing meaning and the importance of reflective journaling and how to use aspects of reflective journal keeping was used on teachers from the experimental group (Group I). The experimental group of teachers was trained on what to observe in a lesson and how to record it. It was made clear that it required effort and time and that the focus of the record was to be on how children interact with one another and with materials provided for learning (Jennifer Moon, 1999). It was

made clear to them that the goal of reflective journal was to help them think more critically about their teaching and keep track of classroom activities and record the impact of class activities on children’s mastery and comprehension (Heichel and Miller, 1993). They were exposed to how to review their reflective journal entries to acquire personal growth and professional development, meaning that they were able to assess the quality of children’s comprehension and mastery of materials as well as children’s effective response to content (Hubb and Brand, 2005). According to Thompson and Pascal (2012) when well done it enhanced more reflective thinking leading to being effective in the classroom. The preschool children from the two groups were taught Creative Activities for two weeks. The researchers supervised the teaching during this time to ensure uniform contact time with their teachers. The teachers in the experimental group had the added advantage of journaling for the two weeks. These journals were accessed by the two researchers through use of a documentary analysis form with a feature of describing what was recorded by the teachers. This allowed the researchers to provide feedback to the teachers regarding how they interacted with their journals. At the end of the two weeks, a post test was given to the two groups and their results were compared using t test to determine whether there was a significant difference in the children’s mean scores.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1: shows the performance of pre-school children in Creative Activities for the control group.

Table 1. Pre-School Children Performance in Creative Activities in classes whose teachers did not keep Journals

	Mean	N
Control group pre-test	39.22	37
Control group post-test	47.95	37

From the results, there was not much improvement in the performance of preschool children in Creative Activities between the pre-test and the post-test. Several factors may have led to these results. According to a study done by Otunga, *et al* (2011) a teacher’s choice of methods of teaching influences the learner’s mastery of content. Since there was no change in the teaching methodology by teachers while teaching Creative Activities in the control group, it was highly unlikely that there would be a significant improvement in the performance of the children. From observation it was noted that their lessons ended with a summary of the key highlights which were in some cases raised in the following lesson. There was no record of a persona interaction experience to refer to. The experiences taking place during the lesson were mainly taken for granted and were hardly used towards any professional development. For the experimental group, the results of the pre-test that was conducted before the intervention and the post-test after the intervention are shown in Table 4.2.

Table 2. Pre-School Children Performance in Creative Activities in classes whose teachers kept reflective Journals

	Mean	N
Experimental group pre-test	26.22	37
Experimental group post-test	74.19	37

The experimental group had a pre-test mean score of 26.22 and after the intervention a mean score of 74.19. The tremendous improvement of the experimental group can be attributed to the use of reflective journal keeping in the teaching of Creative Activities. This outcome agrees with a study done by Farrell (2008), which indicates that keeping a reflective journal helps teachers to become more effective as they analyze the internal and external factors that affected teaching and learning. For instance, from the reflective journals, one of the teachers improved on how to explain the correct use of different colors after realizing that the children were using the wrong colors for different items. Also, during the pre-test, some children had used color green on the ‘tree trunk’ but after being taken outside the classroom to observe a tree, they improved on their choice of colours during the post-test. To establish how strongly the post-test and the pre-test are different from each other in the mean scores, the average performances before and after introducing journal keeping were analysed using paired sample t-test. The results are shown in Table 4.3.

Table 3. Analysis of Paired Samples T-Test for Reflective Journal keeping for the Experimental Group

Average difference in performance	95% confidence interval	p-value
47.973	[38.957 56.989]	<0.0001

From Table 4.3, there is an indication that there is a statistically significant improvement in the performance of preschool children in Creative Activities, after the teachers used reflective journal keeping. When (p <0.0001), there is a 95% confidence level with the actual difference in performance of between 39 and 57 marks. Reflective journaling tended to feature as a key factor towards children’s differences in mean scores in Creative Activities as Woolfolk (2013) and Eggen Kauchak (1994) argue that the nature of teacher’s input in a classroom interaction enhances children’s mastery and comprehension of the content. After training the experimental group, teachers disclosed that they were very intentional and determined to be more effective. Also, they were careful to act on what they had noted in their reflective journals for purposes of the next Creative Activities lesson. Some of the comments in the reflective journals were ‘*lesson plan not prepared*’, ‘*materials for creative activity like paint and papers not bought*’ and ‘*children want more time to draw and colour*’. These comments guided teachers in their lesson planning and organization of instructional materials activities for the children to use. Again, there was a renewed alertness towards their actions in class while teaching Creative Activities. For instance, it was observed that teachers paid attention to all the children individually.

In two schools, withdrawn children were treated uniquely in the way their teachers changed their seating positions to be closer to the teacher’s desk. It was also noticed that teachers were now making constant reference to the objectives for Creative Activities as it outlined in the syllabus. This agrees with Rainer (2004) who states that keeping a reflective journal helps a teacher to remember what happened in the class and use this information to determine whether the objectives for that lesson were achieved or not. The classroom environment tended to be marked by a caring attitude of the teacher who made effort to facilitate learning (Smidt, 2003). The researchers observed that the children started to appear excited by Creative Activities lessons because they were expecting to

draw, paint and colour, activities they enjoyed doing as the teacher was personal to each one of them. There was a notable improvement on the classroom control by the teachers as the children became more attentive and active during the Creative Activities lesson. All these aspects might have contributed to the notable significant improvement of the performance of pre-school children in Creative Activities in classes where the teachers practised reflective journal keeping. This renewed awareness of what and why they were doing, resulting to greater motivation to teach Creative Activities coupled with the eagerness of the pre-school children to learn Creative Activities might have contributed to the significant improvement of their performance.

Conclusions

The mere task of keeping reflective journals ended up strengthening teacher's skills of class control and management needed for producing a conducive learning environment characterized by children's high level of attention, interest, participation, positive attitude, key variables for optimal results. Through Journal keeping, the teacher's level of innovativeness and intrinsic motivation were put into test as they demanded alertness, self-confidence, independence, maturity and responsibility, qualities of personal and professional development associated with being a facilitator and guide in children's learning. When all these are put together, children's mean scores in Creative Activities tended to improve for better. From the study, it was evident that the pre-school children in classes whose teachers used journal keeping which is an element of reflective teaching to teach Creative Activities improved tremendously in creativity skills. The curriculum for the pre-school teacher training colleges may need to be revised to include training the teachers on how to teach using reflective teaching with much emphasis on journal keeping. This can be done by the County Governments in their training pre-service programmes for their teachers. The researchers also recommend that the teachers that are already certified should be taken through in-service training programmes on the use of journal keeping as a teaching tool. This will help to enhance preschool teachers' effectiveness while teaching Creative Activities and hence improve the performance of the children. The 47 County Governments in Kenya can effectively undertake this recommendation as they are in-charge of preschool teachers' professional development (Republic of Kenya, 2013).

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