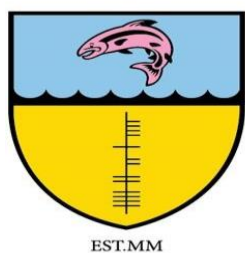


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How can reflective practices and critical evaluation help with Junior Cycle students?

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How can reflective practices and critical evaluation help with Junior Cycle students?

Darragh Kiernan

**Dissertation submitted in partial fulfilment of the award of Professional Master of
Education in Primary.**

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Abstract

With an emphasis on junior cycle students' academic achievement, personal development, and general involvement in the learning process, this thesis investigates the effects of reflective practices and critical evaluation on these learners. Through reflective practices, students routinely reflect on their own methods and learning experiences, which deepens their grasp of the subject matter and increases their self-awareness. By encouraging students to evaluate their work and comments critically, critical assessment helps them recognise their strengths and places for growth. The results imply that pupils lack a conceptual knowledge of reflective behaviours and critical evaluation. In the Junior Cycle classroom, students might be using reflective practices and critical evaluation, but they may not be aware of it.

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Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This independent study research project was completed as part of the requirements for the Post-Primary Master of Education at Hibernia College in Dublin. The researcher set about this research investigating into how reflective practices can help with critical evaluation for Junior Cycle students. This chapter aims to discuss the origin of the dissertation, the background information and describe the layout chosen for this dissertation.

1.2 Origin of Dissertation

The idea for this dissertation came from the researcher's experience in using reflective practices in order to properly critically evaluate their lessons while on teaching practice. The researcher completed their undergraduate degree in History and Economics, which focused on many themes in both subjects. The research found they had not successfully used reflective practices to critically evaluate their work until they were in their Professional Masters of Education programme. This gave the researcher a desire to convey how important reflective practices and critical evaluation can be for students in the Junior Cycle.

1.3 Background to the Project

The use of reflective practice in the classroom has been ever present for many years in the Junior Cycle classroom. The dissertation researcher, however, does not believe that the reflective methods they were taught in the Junior Cycle were effective. However, with the new Junior Cycle that was completed in 2022 reflective practices have become more present in the classroom.

This dissertation looks to ask the question of why is reflection important? Reed and Canning (2011), argue that the practices have to be thought about, tested, considered, and delivered in practice. The key to reflective practice is for it to be delivered in the classroom. 'The kind of knowledge-base that is being developed through reflective approaches, is much more comprehensive because it is directly turned into what workers know about the work.' (Smith, 1993) In this project the benefits of reflective approaches will be examined. As

discussed by Mathew et al (2017), the first step towards reflective practice is to gather information and analyse the data and that is what this dissertation aims to do. Brookfield (1995) maintains the importance of collaboration with peers increases the probability of successful reflection. 'Reflection can help guide educators through the challenging times they may experience in their careers.' (Machost and Stains, 2023). The data for this research project will be gathered using a sample pool of Junior Cycle students and a paper questionnaire.

1.4 Rationale

This study aims to address the Junior Cycle views on reflective practices and critical evaluation. The researcher aims to convey to the Junior Cycle students how useful reflective practices can be for their critical evaluation as the research had not been shown this when they were a Junior Cycle student. This dissertation aims to question have the Junior Cycle students been taught reflective practices? Do they understand the importance of reflection? What reflective practices do they implement, if any? In what ways can reflective practices be useful for Junior Cycle students?

1.5 Dissertation layout

In Chapter One, the researcher identified the origin of the dissertation, the background of the research and the rationale for the chosen topic. In Chapter Two, the dissertation will look to discuss the previous research concerning the use of reflective practices to engage critical evaluation skills in the Junior Cycle classroom. Chapter Two will also aim to reflect on past reflective practices and critical evaluation and how these skills have developed in education over many years. In Chapter Three, the researcher aims to evaluate the methodology utilised in the research project, examining the approach taken to understand reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom. This chapter will examine the methodology used in the research, the data collection, and any ethical issues that may arise. In Chapter Four, the researcher explores the results from the research question which include: the lack of reflective practices in the Junior Cycle classroom, the lack of critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom, the training and support for teacher's implementing these methods in their Junior Cycle classroom, positives and challenges to using reflective practices for critical evaluation. In Chapter Five, findings of the author are expanded upon in more detail. The participants' relationship to the field of critical assessment and reflective practices. We'll also

look into the difficulties teachers have had integrating critical evaluation and reflective methods into their Junior Cycle classes. In Chapter Six, the conclusions of the study are presented. The author presents the information learned and how this can be applied in practice.

1.6 Conclusion

This research project will open up the topic of reflective practice and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom. It will show the students' view of reflective practices and critical evaluation, if they benefit from these practices or not. This project aims to understand the Junior Cycle students' perspective on these practices through quantitative research.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

Reflective practices have gained prominence in educational settings as a way to enhance students' critical thinking and evaluation skills (Boud, Keogh, and Walker, 1985). This literature review explores the intersection of reflective practices and the development of critical evaluation skills among Junior Cycle students. The Junior Cycle, often spanning the middle years of secondary education, is a crucial period for students to cultivate critical thinking abilities. By examining existing research, theories, and practical approaches, this literature review aims to shed light on how reflective practices can effectively contribute to this development process. Deeper comprehension, critical thinking, and self-directed learning are now prioritised in the educational system, and students who possess reflective abilities can enhance these learning outcomes.

This literature review will bring reflective practices and critical evaluation together by discussing reflective practices in education, critical evaluation in Junior Cycle education, the intersection of reflective practices and critical evaluation, strategies for implementing reflective practices, challenges and considerations while implementing reflective practices and critical evaluation, recommendations, and the best practice for implementing these skills in the Junior Cycle classroom.

2.2 Reflective Practices in Education

Reflective practice is an approach used by educators to analyse and think critically about their professional practice with the intention to better understand and improve their practice. Reflective practice is thoughtful, action-oriented and often, a collaborative effort. Educators use reflective practice to plan, evaluate their strengths and challenges, make decisions and adapt instead of create change. Self-reflection, critical reflection and collaborative inquiry are all important elements of reflective practice (College of ECE, 2017). Like educators, students in a Junior Cycle classroom can engage in reflective practices to focus on their self-evaluation, reflection and critical evaluation skills. This can help them to understand their strengths and

weaknesses in that subject, helping them to understand which aspects they need to work on. Reflective practices encompass a range of activities that encourage students to contemplate their learning experiences (Dewey, 1933). These practices can take various forms, including journals, self-assessments, peer feedback, and structured reflective exercises (Kilb, 1984; Moon, 1999). Theoretical foundations for reflective learning, as proposed by Dewey and Schön, emphasise the importance of reflection in deepening understanding and improving decision-making (Dewey; Schön, 1983). Junior cycle students understanding and engaging in reflective practices, this can help them for the future of their educational career as well as their professional career. Dewey believed that our experiences shape us, and when reflective practice is part of learning, meaning and relevancy is created, which initiates growth and change (Dewey, 1933). If students do not engage in reflective practices this could damage their learning, growth and change.

2.3 Critical Evaluation in Junior Cycle Education

Critical thinking means reviewing the ideas produced, making a tentative decision about what action will best solve the problem or what belief about the issue is most reasonable, and then evaluating and refining the solution or belief (Ruggiero, 2012). Students in a Junior Cycle classroom need to harness critical thinking skills to be able to evaluate their work critically. Critical evaluation involves the ability to assess information, ideas, and arguments objectively and analytically (Ennis, 1987). Critical evaluation promotes higher-order thinking skills such as analysis, synthesis, and assessment (Bloom, 1956). These skills go beyond rote memorization and encourage students to engage in deep cognitive processing (Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001). Critical evaluation equips students with the ability to identify problems, gather relevant information, and assess potential solutions (McGregor & David, 2017). This problem-solving skill is essential for Junior Cycle students.

Students today are inundated with information from a variety of sources due to this digital age. Critical evaluation helps discern credible, reliable information from misinformation and biased content (Koltay, 2011). As discussed by Ennis (1989), critical evaluation encourages independent thinking and decision making, it encourages students to question assumptions, consider alternative viewpoints, and form their own opinions. Paul and Elder (2006) argue that the ability to critically evaluate information is fundamental for informed decision making in various aspects of life, from academic choices to career decisions and personal matters. This

conveys just how important critical evaluation can be in the Junior Cycle, but also in the student's life as a whole. Critical evaluation skills give the students the opportunity and knowledge to be able to present their thoughts clearly and persuasively. They can analyse and evaluate arguments and present their ideas coherently (Brookfield, 2012). As conveyed by Biggs and Tang (2011), research suggests that critical evaluation is integral to deep learning. Students are more likely to learn and retain information when they critically engage with the material, which is an essential ability for the Junior Cycle course. In the context of Junior Cycle education, fostering critical evaluation skills is essential for preparing students to navigate a complex and information-rich world. The curriculum typically emphasises the development of skills such as problem-solving, critical reading, and evidence-based reasoning (NCAA, 2015).

2.4 The Intersection of Reflective Practices and Critical Evaluation

Theoretical frameworks, such as those proposed by Hatton and Smith (1995) and Mezirow (1990), suggest that reflective practices promote metacognition and self-awareness, which are essential components of critical evaluation. Reflective practices encourage metacognition which enables students to think about their thinking process (Schön, 1983). Mezirow (1990) argues that this helps the student to become more self-aware which is essential for critical evaluation as it allows individuals to analyse their thought patterns and biases. Hatton and Smith (1995) support Mezirow's argument as they state that through reflective practices students can critically examine their assumptions and beliefs which is a fundamental aspect in the intersection of reflective practice and critical evaluation. Another aspect of students' progress is students using reflective practices in the Junior Cycle is the focus on evidence-based thinking. Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) convey this as they argue that reflective practices often require individuals to provide evidence to support their reflections. This reinforces the importance of evidence-based thinking, a critical aspect of evaluating information and making informed judgments. This shows that the intersection of reflective practices and critical evaluation is crucial to a Junior Cycle students' development. Students need to bring reflective practices and critical evaluation skills together to help them progress through the information-rich course. Students who engage in reflective practices tend to become more critical of their own assumptions and beliefs, which, in turn, fosters a more analytical mindset.

Contextual analysis is essential for critical evaluation as it provides a broader understanding (Boud et al., 1985). This conveys that if students intersect their reflective practice with critical evaluation, they can improve their analysis skills. Another way Junior Cycle students can intersect their reflective practice and critical evaluation is true discussion and collaboration with their fellow peers and mentors. Engaging in reflective discussions with peers or mentors allows individuals to hear different perspectives and challenge their thinking (Brookfield, 2012). Collaborative reflection and discussion can help Junior Cycle students refine their evaluation skills.

2.5 Strategies for Implementing Reflective Practices

Practical strategies for integrating reflective practices into Junior Cycle education include journaling, peer review, and structured discussions (Moon, 1999). The first strategy to look at is the implementation of journaling and writing reflections. Moon (1999) believes teachers should encourage students to maintain reflective journals where they would record their thoughts, reactions, and insights about their learning experiences in the classroom. This can be a great way for students to reflect and critically evaluate the content they are covering and also provide feedback to the teacher on how the students are receiving the information. Hatton and Smith (1995) argue that while implementing this technique teachers should provide prompts or questions to guide the student's reflections and critical evaluations. Another strategy to focus on is peer review reflection. Encourage students to engage in peer review activities where they critically evaluate each other's work and provide constructive feedback (Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). For this strategy to be successful, teachers must first teach their students how to give effective feedback like focusing on strengths and improvements. Junior Cycle students may engage more in peer review strategies rather than journal and writing reflections as this strategy is oral rather than written which students may prefer.

To continue with these strategies, allow us to discuss structured discussion as a way of reflecting in the Junior Cycle classroom. Biggs and Tang (2011) discuss after completing an activity instruct the students to engage in debriefing sessions or group discussion where the students will work together to reflect on or critically evaluate their experiences and outcomes with that activity. The teacher must provide a structured framework that will encourage critical evaluation from the students. In this technological age, students can also utilise technology platforms to integrate reflective practices (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). Technology

platforms or digital tools, such as blogs, e-portfolios, or discussion forms, can facilitate reflection and peer interaction (Nicol & MacFarlane-Dick, 2006). All of these approaches enable students to articulate their thoughts, evaluate their work, and engage in meaningful dialogues about their learning experiences.

2.6 Challenges and Considerations

While implementing reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom brings benefits to the students, there are challenges and considerations examine when attempting to implement reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom. Challenges in implementing reflective practices may include resistance from students or teachers, time constraints, and the need for clear guidance (Brockbank & McGill, 2007). Cultural and contextual factors also influence the effectiveness of these practices.

Schön (1983) argues that resistance to change can come from students or teachers feeling comfortable with the traditional reflective ways and this could lead to them resisting or not engaging in the new reflective and critical evaluation practices. To consider and combat this challenge, Brockbank and McGill (2007) believe that the educational system must provide professional development, training and clear communication conveying the benefits to implementing reflective practices in the Junior Cycle classroom.

Another challenge facing reflective practices being implemented in the classroom is the belief that reflective practices can be time consuming. Teachers and students may feel as though reflective practices are time consuming and might interfere with covering the curriculum (Yeo & Lovat, 2019). Hansen (2016) makes an argument to combat this problem in which they argue that the integration of reflective practices into the curriculum strategically, balancing them with content would help this challenge. To add to the challenges, assessment and evaluation of reflective practices and critical evaluation can prove difficult. Assessing and evaluating reflective practices and critical evaluation skills can be complex (Kember et al., 2002). Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick (2006) offer a solution to this challenge by making the point that teachers need to develop clear assessment criteria for the reflective tasks they issue to the Junior Cycle students and provide them with formative feedback to help them improve and succeed in reflective and critical evaluation tasks.

Another aspect to focus on so the Junior Cycle students get the best they can from reflective practice, is the guidance and training of teachers. Hatton and Smith (1995) argue that teachers need to be well-trained for them to be able to implement reflective practices and critical evaluation effectively. Brookfield (2012) states quite clearly that the way to fight this challenge is simply to provide teachers with professional development and resources for them to be able to implement reflective practices in the classroom.

2.7 Recommendations and Best Practices

To maximise the effectiveness of reflective practices in nurturing critical evaluation skills, educators should provide clear guidance, create supportive learning environments, and align reflective activities with curriculum objectives (Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Moon, 2001). Henderson (2012) agrees with this and argues that teachers must clearly define the learning objectives and outcomes of the reflective practice and critical evaluation activities that they set out for their Junior Cycle students to get the most out of these activities. Biggs and Tang (2011) further support this as they state that students must fully understand the reasoning of the reflective practices which can be achieved by the teacher clearly laying out the learning outcomes and objectives of the reflective activities. Gibbs (1988) proposes using models such as Gibbs' Reflective Cycle or questions and prompts to provide students with a structure for their reflective activities. In order to facilitate peer learning, have serious conversations and group projects. (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). With group discussions, students may engage and progress at a more successful rate when they are in their reflective group discussion. A great recommendation by Hansen (2016) is to create a safe and supportive learning environment where students feel comfortable sharing their reflections. This is very important for Junior Cycle students as the safer they feel the more willing they will be to openly engage in reflective discussions.

For reflective practice to be successful Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick argue that constructive and timely feedback is needed to keep students engaged and interested in the future reflective and critical evaluation activities. Before beginning the reflection exercises, go over with the students the evaluation rules, due dates, and expectations in order to keep them engaged. These recommendations and best practices are very beneficial when implementing reflection and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom, however, continued research

is needed to identify the most effective methods for incorporating reflective practices into Junior Cycle education.

2.8 Thesis' Objective

The objective of this thesis is to improve "Reflective Practices and Critical Evaluation in the Junior Cycle Classroom" by offering a thorough examination of realistic implementation techniques for reflective practices in an educational context. It will investigate how reflective practices might be successfully incorporated into regular teaching approaches to help junior cycle students develop a more analytical and reflective mentality. Case studies and actual data demonstrating the effects of these techniques on learning outcomes, critical thinking abilities, and student involvement will also be included in the research. The study will provide insightful analysis and practical suggestions for teachers who want to foster a culture of reflection and evaluation in their classrooms by connecting academic frameworks with real-world implementations.

2.9 Conclusion

Reflective practices offer substantial promise for cultivating critical evaluation skills among Junior Cycle students. By promoting metacognition, self-awareness, and engagement with learning experiences, these practices contribute to the development of students who can critically assess information and ideas. In the dynamic landscape of the junior cycle curriculum, reflective and critical evaluation skills are necessary for the Junior Cycle student to excel. From this research two questions have rose and that is:

1. Do students understand what reflective practices are?
2. Do students understand what critical evaluation is?

Chapter Three: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter will outline the methodology adopted to quantitatively evaluate the impact of reflective activities on the critical assessment skills of Junior Cycle pupils. The purpose of the study is to find out how well reflective practices can help Junior Cycle pupils develop their critical assessment abilities. The layout of this chapter will look as follows: Section 3.2 outlines the research objectives and the approach adopted. Section 3.3 presents the purpose of the research. Section 3.4 discusses the participants. Section 3.5 describes the questionnaires, and 3.6 discusses ethical issues that arise in the research. Section 3.7 discusses the study's limitations, and section 3.8 summarises this chapter. This is an important study due to the fact that reflective practices have gained prominence in educational settings as a way to enhance students' critical thinking and evaluation skills (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985). The integration of relevant references substantiates the methodological choices and provides a theoretical foundation for the study. The theoretical framework guiding this research is rooted in educational theories emphasising the importance of reflection in learning and cognitive development (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1987).

3.2 Paradigm and Methodology

The study's objective is to grasp the students' perspectives on reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom. This one case study took place at a DEIS post-primary institution. The participants will be made up of a mixed ability pool of Junior Cycle students.

Every methodology used in social and educational research is underpinned by a set of philosophical concepts. These ideas are commonly referred to as paradigms. A research paradigm was described as a pattern, structure, framework, and system of scientific and academic ideas, beliefs, and assumptions (Olsen, Lodwick, and Dunlop, 1992). A positivist paradigm holds that science provides us with the complete ideal of knowledge (Cohen, Manion, and Morrison, 2007). By presuming that reality is wholly independent of the individual, the

researcher is able to conduct their examination objectively without influencing the outcomes. Positivism also suggests that the researcher should have no emotional ties to the participants in the study (Blaxter, Hughes, and Tight, 2010). The positivist perspective is easily associated with a quantitative approach. This makes it possible for the researcher to obtain quantitative information that can be analysed to look for trends in behaviour and thought. Clarity is the goal of the positive research paradigm. The goal of this material is to provide a strong foundation of information on reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom. In contrast, an interpretive paradigm concedes that objectivity is unachievable. The interpretive paradigm is in favour of a qualitative approach where the researcher makes meaning of the data in order to comprehend the topic at hand more deeply and comprehensively. This paradigm states that the participant and the researcher are mutually influential. Therefore, reflectivity is crucial to qualitative research (Morrison and Scott, 2007).

3.3 Research Design - Quantitative Research

One of the most important aspects of the research process known as quantitative research is the collection and analysis of numerical data. In the fields of psychology, sociology, and business, it is widely utilised to investigate social phenomena and human behaviour. Utilising structured instruments such as surveys, this research technique gathers data for statistical analysis. One of the main advantages of quantitative research is its capacity to yield statistically significant results that may be expanded to a broader population. This is particularly useful when trying to determine the causes and effects of multiple elements. Another advantage of quantitative research is its ability to evaluate and quantify complex phenomena such as actions, attitudes, and views. For example, when studying the effects of a new teaching approach on student learning outcomes, researchers may employ quantitative methods to measure shifts in test scores. Additionally, precise data that can be compared across different groups and time periods can be obtained through standardised exams and other quantitative measurements.

However, quantitative research is also very limited. One limitation is the potential to promote reductionism, which is the oversimplification of reality through the reduction of complicated processes to numerical data. Understanding complex processes by the simple sum of its components may result in the complex interaction between them becoming overlooked. The possibility of overlooking contextual information that could affect the relationships between the variables is another disadvantage. Researchers need to carefully examine the

limitations of quantitative research and complement it with various research approaches in order to gain a deeper understanding of social phenomena. To sum up, quantitative research is a useful method for acquiring data for the study of social phenomena and human behaviour. Its ability to yield statistically significant results and quantify complex components makes it a useful tool in many fields. But in order to fully comprehend social phenomena, researchers must also be conscious of its limitations and use additional research techniques. Transparency and objectivity must thus be given first importance throughout the inquiry, and it is the responsibility of the documentary researcher. The initial exploratory study recommended that a number of subjects may be looked into to find out more information about reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom.

3.4 Data Collection

Survey research uses statistically accurate population characteristics measurement techniques like scientific sampling and questionnaire design. It provides estimates from a sample that broadly represent the population. Respondents must be “randomly” sampled from a pool of 60 Junior Cycle students, meaning that every member of the population has a known chance of being selected for the survey, as required by survey research. There are reliable methods like random sampling from a pool of 60 Junior Cycle students that ensure a scientific sample that was used in this research.

Paper surveys were used to gather information regarding the views of twenty Junior Cycle students on reflective practices and critical evaluation. The paper survey requested a pool of sixty students from all different types of abilities and cultural backgrounds to participate because twenty replies were required for the study. Before the participating pupils could access the paper survey, the principal, the student’s parents, and the student themselves had to consent to participate. After that, students were given the paper survey; but, since it was meant to be anonymous, they were not required to disclose any personal information. To participate in the survey, one had to be enrolled in one of the following three years: first, second, or third. To determine the results, twenty paper surveys were completed and then examined.

To conduct this online survey, fifty students were selected at random, with the aim to receive forty responses. A key factor needed to complete this study was that the participants

came from a iPad friendly school where the students had access to iPads and Wi-Fi to complete the online survey. The focus was on secondary level education as the topic of interest was reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom. It was made apparent that students are free to decline any engagement in study-related activities without explanation or thought. Surveys will focus on Junior Cycle students, using students from each year in the Junior Cycle, and students from different backgrounds, different genders and different abilities. Given there was a particular focus, the previous inclusion criteria were selected.

3.5 Data Analysis

Statistics can be used to analyse quantitative data (Watson, Revenga, and Kura, 2006). Data can be characterised using percentages, spread, and central tendency (mode, median, mean, range and standard deviation). Data analysis on the sample allows for the drawing of conclusions about the population. One kind of analysis that is frequently employed in analysis is inferential statistics. The researcher analysed the surveys using the following steps:

- Data preparation: The researcher cleans and gets the data ready for analysis in the first step. Verifying that there are no errors, outliers, or missing data is part of making any necessary adjustments.
- The research finds descriptive statistics, including means, frequencies, percentages, and standard deviations, at the following stage. This facilitates information gathering and provides a wide picture of the dispersion of responses.
- After computing descriptive statistics, researchers utilised inferential statistics to assess hypotheses and make generalisations about the population.

- **Data visualisation:** The researcher employed data visualisation tools, such as histograms, bar charts, and scatterplots, to help in the interpretation of the data and the sharing of the results with others.
- **Interpretation:** After conducting a data analysis, the researcher interpreted their findings and drawn conclusions. This required taking into account the limitations of the study, the validity of the data as well as the implications of the findings for theory and practice.

Investigating Junior Cycle students opinions and knowledge of reflective practices and critical evaluation was the aim of this study. These conclusions were drawn from the paper survey that was used for the study. To find the weight of each response, the results underwent statistical analysis.

3.6 Rigour

Study rigour refers to the extent of the validity, accuracy, and quality of the study methodology and its conclusions. It speaks to the degree of dependability, credibility, and trustworthiness of the research methods and findings. Research rigour is important because it ensures that the conclusions are reliable and useful for practice, developing policies, and making decisions. The survey was developed using trustworthy and established methods for assessing Junior Cycle opinions on reflective practices and critical evaluation in their classroom. To make sure the questions on the survey were clear to the intended audience, the questionnaire was put through a pilot test. In light of the pilot study's findings, any modifications that needed to be made before the official questionnaire was distributed, were made. The data analysis results, which were provided precisely and with clarity, incorporated any study limits, such as potential biases or confounding variables. Ethical considerations were taken into account during the study's execution, such as securing informed consent from several parties and ensuring participant anonymity. To demonstrate rigour in completing a survey on research, one needed to have a solid comprehension of the design, methodology, and data analysis in addition to a critical reflection on the limitations and implications of the study on reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom.

3.7 Ethical Issues

It is essential to take ethics into account when conducting research. According to Denscombe (2010), ethical considerations are concerned with doing what is suitable for the participants as well as for the project. Consequently, obtaining ethical permission is crucial. The school received a research information sheet with the research aims listed on it. The principal of the school that the research took place in received a consent form for the study to take place in the school. Before filling out the survey, parents of students as well as students themselves received an information and consent form. This study employed the concept of "Informed Consent" at every stage. Because the gatekeepers signed the consent papers, the participants were exempt from having to provide their names, so the surveys remained anonymous. When analysing questionnaire responses, it is crucial to remain unbiased (Bell, 1999). Protecting the confidentiality of the Junior Cycle students was of great importance.

Investigating evaluation and reflective behaviours in junior cycle classrooms ultimately aims to inform and enhance teaching strategies. One of (BERA, 2018) principles is that research should aim to have a positive impact on educational practices and policies. The thesis's conclusions ought to provide useful information that may be used to improve instruction and learning. This is consistent with BERA's focus on conducting research that will actually help educational environments. Reflective practices in the junior cycle classroom necessitate that both teachers and students engage in honest self-assessment and critique. This process must respect the dignity, rights, and welfare of all participants. The thesis should ensure that any reflective and evaluative practices do not expose students to harm or undue stress, aligning with BERA's emphasis on ethical considerations.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter justifies the research methods employed and provides a detailed explanation of the design choice made for the study. The researcher carefully researched and planned each stage of the approach. Furthermore, the investigator acknowledged the limits of the study and provided an ethical framework. The theoretical foundations and empirical support for reflective practices and critical evaluation have been well-established in the literature. Drawing from the works of Dewey (1933), Schön (1987), Brookfield (1995), and Fook

(2016), among others, this research is grounded in the rich tradition of educational theory and practice.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1. Introduction

This chapter presents the findings of the study on ‘Reflective Practices and Critical Evaluation in the Junior Cycle Classroom’, based on the responses of the surveyed students. The objective is to investigate how students understand, perceive, and engage in reflective practices and critical evaluation within the context of the Junior Cycle of education. Through the analysis of survey data, this chapter seeks to uncover trends, patterns, and insights that contribute to the understanding of the current landscape of reflective practices and critical evaluation in Junior Cycle classrooms. Students were not explained what critical evaluation was before the surveys as the researcher wanted to get their uninfluenced perspective on critical evaluation.

4.2. Understanding of Reflective Practices

The first question in the survey focused on students' understanding and awareness of reflective practice. When students were asked if they understood the term reflective practice. As shown below in figure 4.1, the results show that only 5 (25%) indicated that they understood what reflective practice meant, while the majority of students surveyed, 15 students (75%), stated that they did not understand what reflective practice meant.

FIGURE 4.1 - Do you understand the term ‘reflective practice’?

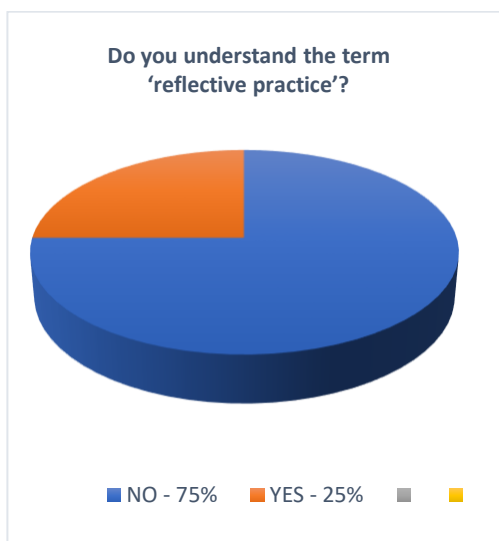
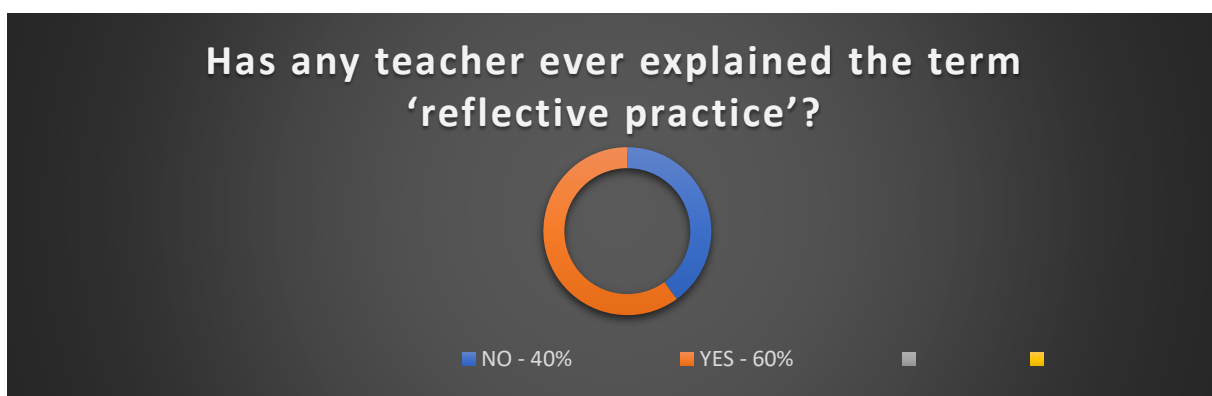


FIGURE 4.2 - Has any teacher ever explained the term 'reflective practice'?



When the students were asked if any teacher had explained the term reflective practice to them, indicated in Figure 4.2, 8 students (40%) showed that they had never been given an explanation for reflective practice, while 12 students (60%) replied that they had received an explanation in some capacity. These findings suggest a significant gap in students' understanding of reflective practice, despite some efforts from teachers to explain reflective practice. Given that many students overlap classes or years, it's intriguing to wonder where the understanding and explanation have fallen between the cracks. The difference in the percentage of children who comprehend the phrase and those who have had it taught points to possible difficulties in explaining and integrating the idea into the Junior Cycle curriculum.

4.3. Utilisation of Reflective Practices

The next set of questions on the survey aimed to query students' utilisation of reflective practices in the Junior Cycle Classroom. When asked about using reflective practices in the classroom the students responded that only 7 students (35%) had previously used reflective practices in the Junior Cycle classroom, the majority 13 students (65%) stating they had not engaged in reflective practices in the Junior Cycle classroom, represented in figure 4.3 as the first yes and no columns.

FIGURE 4.4 - Have you ever used reflective practices in your Junior cycle classroom?

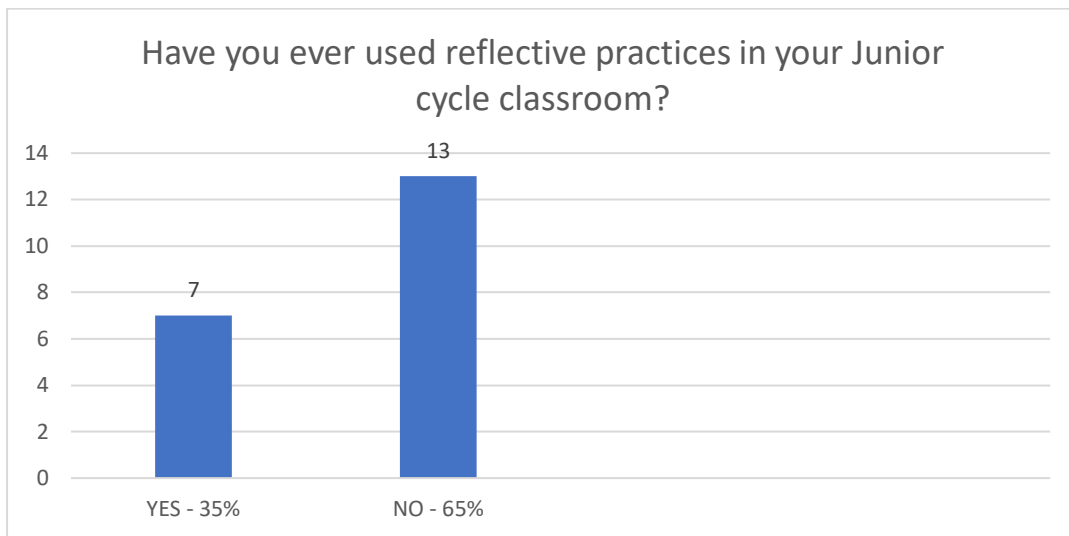
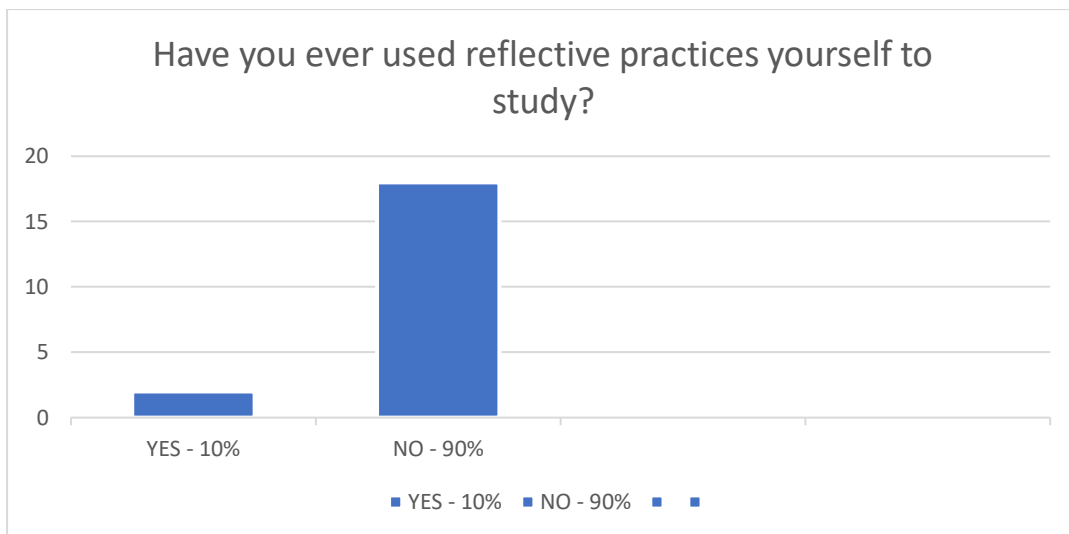


FIGURE 4.4 - Have you ever used reflective practices yourself to study?



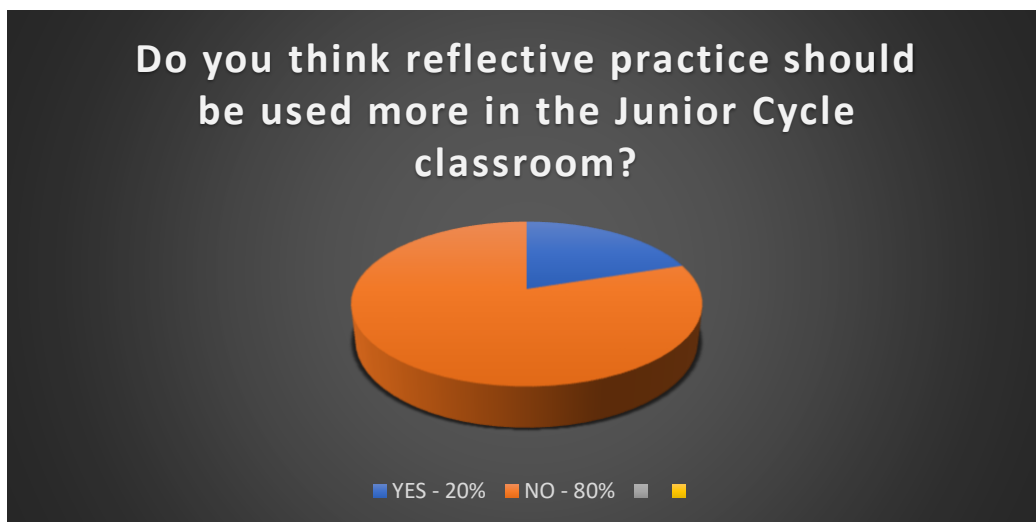
The fourth question looks at the students using reflective practices on their own, represented in figure 4.4 in the last two yes and no columns. Just two students (10%) said they had ever used reflective practices for their own studies; the other ninety percent said they had never included reflective practices into their personal study routines. According to these results, there is a big difference between how important reflective practices are thought to be and how they are really used in Junior Cycle classrooms. Even though reflective practices have the

potential to improve learning outcomes and foster metacognitive growth, most students don't seem to be as exposed to or engaged with them as they may be. Students could be using reflective practices but they just do not understand that they are using them due to the first figure showing that many of the students do not understand what reflective practices entail.

4.4 Perceptions of Reflective Practice

The survey also sought to gauge students' perceptions of the role of reflective practice in the Junior Cycle classroom. Responses to the survey question "Do you think reflective practice should be used more in the Junior Cycle classroom?" in Figure 4.5 provided insight into the general perceptions of reflective practices in the context of education. Four respondents said they were in favour of incorporating reflective techniques more widely, while sixteen respondents disagreed with this idea.

FIGURE 4.5 - Do you think reflective practice should be used more in the Junior Cycle classroom?



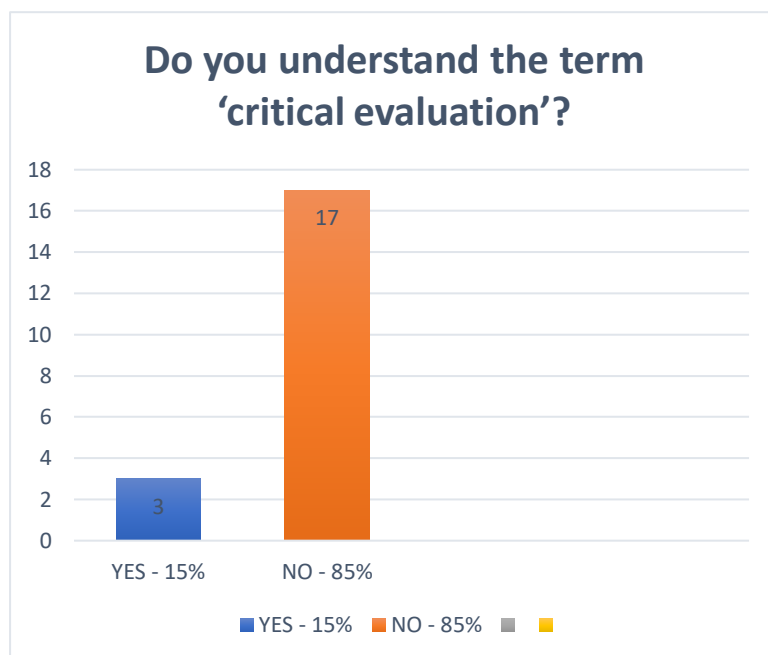
According to the poll results, there is a notable trend among respondents—80% are against and only 20% are in favour of more reflective practice in Junior Cycle classrooms. This significant discrepancy suggests that there is a general lack of confidence or contentment with the effectiveness or applicability of reflective practice at this school level. It could also show that the students do not understand the term reflective practice. The prevailing perspective

raises possible doubts regarding its applicability, significance, or incorporation into the existing curriculum. These results underline the need for additional research into the precise causes of this resistance as well as an assessment of the state of the art reflective practices to determine how they are viewed and whether any modifications or enhancements could potentially mitigate this unfavourable opinion.

4.5 Understanding of Critical Evaluation

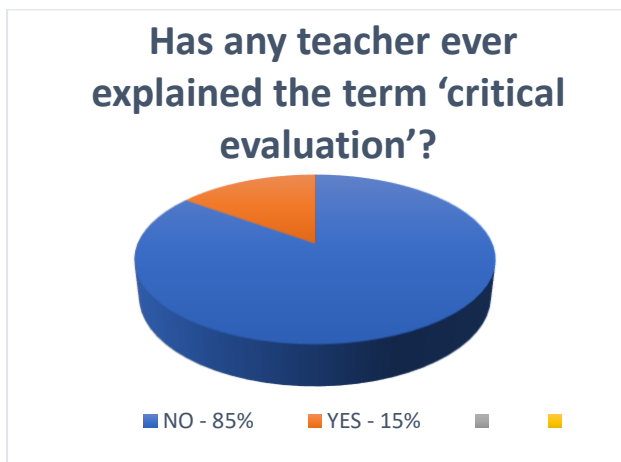
The next set of questions in the survey focus on Critical Evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom. Students were asked the following two questions: Do you understand the term 'critical evaluation'?, and has any teacher ever explained the term 'critical evaluation'? The survey responses, that will be shown below in Figure 4.5, provide insightful information on how the students themselves perceive the concept of "critical evaluation".

FIGURE 4.6 - Do you understand the term 'critical evaluation'?



Of the respondents for Question 6, the majority (85%) said they did not know what the phrase "critical evaluation" meant. This result raises the possibility that a sizable fraction of Junior Cycle students may not fully understand the meaning of critical evaluation. Students' unfamiliarity with this idea raises questions about their capacity to interact critically with academic content and form informed choices in a variety of situations.

FIGURE 4.7 - Has any teacher ever explained the term 'critical evaluation'?

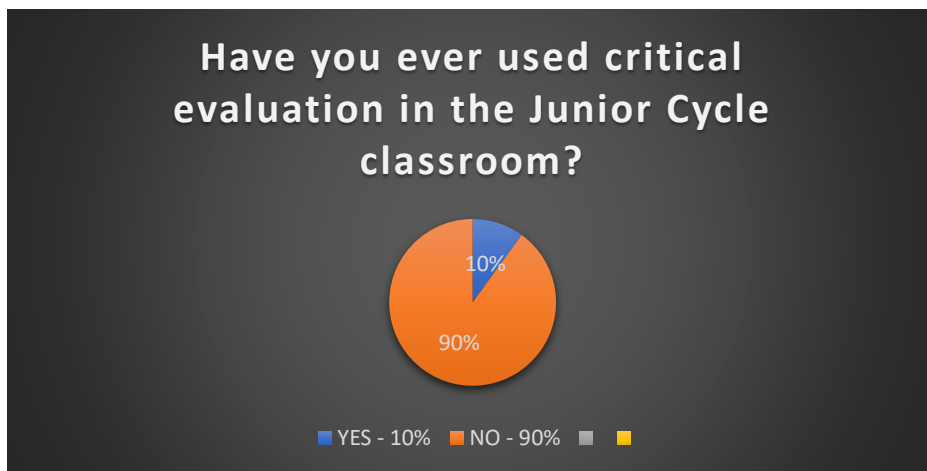


Furthermore, for Question 7 the data indicates that a significant proportion of students (17 out of 20) did not claim that their teachers had provided an explanation of the term "critical evaluation." It seems that Junior Cycle classrooms are not providing enough explicit training on critical evaluation skills, despite the fact that these abilities are crucial for promoting analytical thinking and well-informed decision-making. The students may be engaging in reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior cycle classroom. However, they may not understand these key terms so they are unaware that they are engaging in reflective practices or critical evaluation.

4.6 Utilisation of Critical Evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom

The question on the survey that was posed to Junior Cycle students in this section was: Have you ever used critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom?

FIGURE 4.8 - Have you ever used critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom?

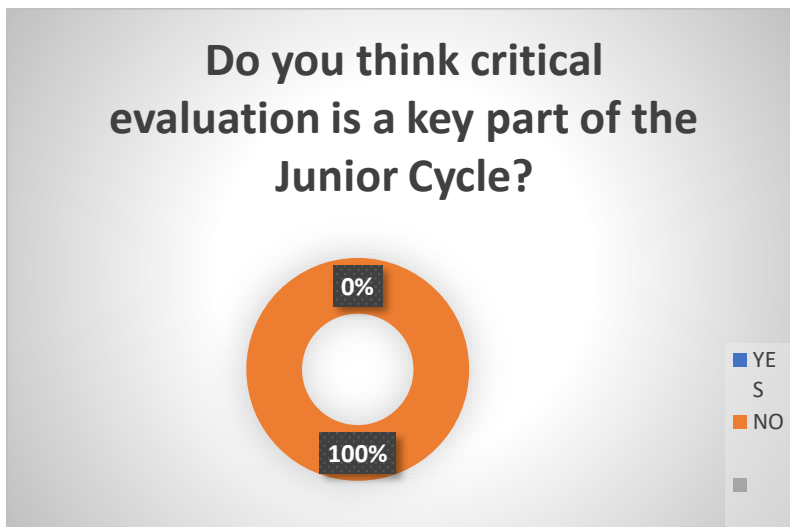


Only two (10%) out of the twenty respondents indicated they had employed critical assessment in a Junior Cycle classroom. This result raises the possibility that junior cycle students may not be applying their critical assessment abilities to their full potential. It also suggest that students may not understand the key term critical evaluation. The low rate of reported use suggests that there may be a deficit in the opportunities that students have in their academic coursework for critical analysis, synthesis, and assessment of knowledge.

4.7 Student perception of critical evaluation

The students were asked if they think critical evaluation plays a key role in the Junior Cycle curriculum. The results for Q9 were quite surprising as you can see in Figure 4.7 below.

FIGURE 4.9 - Do you think critical evaluation is a key part of the Junior Cycle?

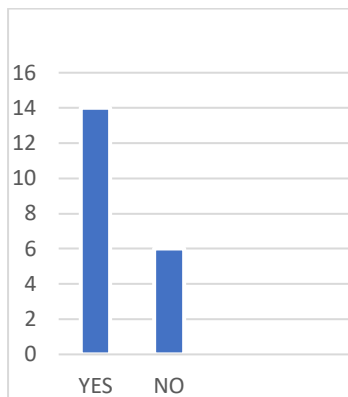


Remarkably, not a single respondent expressed the opinion that critical evaluation is an essential component of the Junior Cycle curriculum. This data points to a widespread belief among students that critical evaluation is not given enough weight or emphasis in their educational experiences. The lack of affirmative answers suggests that there may be a discrepancy between the Junior Cycle curriculum's inclusion of critical evaluation abilities and the way they are viewed.

4.8 Willingness to learn about Reflective Practices and Critical Evaluation

The final question the students answered on the survey was would they be open to learning more about reflective practices and critical evaluation. As Figure 4.10 illustrates, the responses to this question were quite positive.

FIGURE 4.10 - Would you be open to learning more about reflective practices and critical evaluation?



Of the 20 respondents, a significant proportion (70%) said they would be interested in learning more about critical evaluation and reflective methods. According to this research, junior cycle students have a good attitude towards interacting with these ideas and appear receptive to expanding their knowledge of reflective practices and critical evaluation techniques. The high percentage of yes answers highlights a chance for teachers to take advantage of students' excitement and incorporate critical evaluation and reflective activities into the curriculum.

4.9 Conclusion

The investigation of critical evaluation and reflective practices in Junior Cycle classrooms has shown a number of significant findings that highlight the significance of these ideas in promoting academic achievement and overall student development. An examination of Junior Cycle students' survey responses has yielded important insights into how they perceive, use, and comprehend reflective practices and critical evaluation in the context of education. The results from this chapter will be discussed in the next chapter.

Chapter Five: Discussion

5.1 Introduction

This study aimed to explore reflective practices and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom. The research aims to focus on the students' perspective and understanding of what reflective practices and critical evaluation are. As seen at the end of chapter two the two research questions that arose were:

3. Do students understand what reflective practices are?
4. Do students understand what critical evaluation is?

This chapter will address the key topics that arose from the research, and it will draw comparisons and differences between the literature covered in chapter two. The main findings from this thesis is that many students do not understand the key terms reflective practice or critical evaluation. It is possible that the students are engaging in reflective practices and critical evaluation, but do not understand these terms so they do not know they are engaging in these key terms while doing activities in the Junior Cycle classroom.

5.2 Reflective Practices

The theoretical underpinnings and real-world uses of reflective practices in education are described in the literature review chapter. It highlights the value of reflective practice and how it supports professional development, critical thinking, and self-evaluation for both teachers and students. It is said that reflective activities are deliberate, goal-oriented, and frequently necessitate cooperation. Critical reflection, collaborative research, and self-reflection are important components (College of ECE, 2017).

The literature review also emphasises journaling, peer review, and organised conversations as ways to incorporate reflective practices in Junior Cycle classrooms (Moon, 1999; Hatton and Smith, 1995; Nicol and MacFarlane-Dick, 2006; Biggs and Tang, 2011). The importance of reflective practice in promoting deeper knowledge and meaningful learning

experiences is supported by the theoretical contributions of Dewey and Schön (Dewey, 1933; Schön, 1983).

The chapter on findings indicates a notable discrepancy between the theoretical significance of reflective activities and their practical application in Junior Cycle classrooms. According to survey results, 60% of students have never had a teacher properly explain the concept of "reflective practice," and the majority of students (75%) do not grasp it. This knowledge gap points to difficulties in successfully incorporating reflective practices into the curriculum. Teachers may not explain the definition of reflective practices but could be including it in class plans.

Even with the possible advantages, only 35% of students believe they have employed reflective practices in the classroom, and only 10% think they have included them in their own study regimens, according to the research. Additionally, there is disagreement among students about the value of reflective activities; just 20% of them think they should be applied more frequently, while the majority show reluctance or ambiguity. This could be down to the students not knowing the possible benefits that can come with using reflective practices.

The disparity between proponents and opponents of this concept highlights the divergent views on the value and relevance of reflective activities in Junior Cycle classrooms. The affirmative responses suggest that the potential benefits of reflective practices in enhancing learning opportunities and promoting students' overall development are understood. Advocates for increased use may argue that students' development of critical thinking, metacognition, and self-awareness abilities depends on their participation in reflective activities.

However, the vast majority of negative responses point to a lack of clarity or opposition to the growing application of reflective methods in Junior Cycle classrooms. These opinions may stem from a number of factors, including the belief that the curriculum has time constraints, concerns about how practicable it would be to integrate reflective practices into the way that teaching is currently done, or a lack of awareness regarding the potential benefits

of reflective practices in raising student outcomes. Dewey believed that our experiences shape us, and when reflective practice is part of learning, meaning and relevancy is created, which initiates growth and change (Dewey, 1933).

The differing views regarding the use of reflective practices underscore the necessity for additional research and dialogue with Junior Cycle students. It could be necessary to clarify common misconceptions and concerns regarding reflective practices while simultaneously providing evidence of their efficacy in improving learning outcomes in order to encourage a wider acceptance and integration of these practices in Junior Cycle classrooms.

To effectively encourage the Junior Cycle curriculum to incorporate reflective practices, educators and educational policymakers need to keep taking part in informed discussions, research, and professional development opportunities. By doing this, educators may make the most of reflective techniques to create a lively, engaging classroom where students are motivated to participate actively in their own learning.

5.3 Critical Evaluation

The literature review chapter on critical evaluation explores the concept as a crucial component of critical thinking, emphasising the importance of assessing information, ideas, and arguments objectively (Ennis, 1987). It discusses how critical evaluation promotes higher-order thinking skills, including analysis, synthesis, and assessment (Bloom, 1956; Anderson & Krathwohl, 2001), and is essential for problem-solving and informed decision-making in the Junior Cycle (McGregor & David, 2017; Paul & Elder, 2006).

The chapter also emphasises how important it is for students to be able to critically assess information, particularly in the digital age when misinformation exists (Koltay, 2011). As it promotes in-depth learning and information retention, critical assessment is associated with improved academic achievement (Biggs & Tang, 2011; Brookfield, 2012). Time restrictions, resistance to change, and the difficulty of evaluating reflective and critical assessment abilities are some of the obstacles to putting these techniques into practice

(Brockbank & McGill, 2007; Yeo & Lovat, 2019; Kember et al., 2002). Teachers' professional development and effective communication of the advantages to students and educators are key components of the solutions (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Brookfield, 2012).

The survey results, which are shown in the findings chapter, show that a sizable majority of Junior Cycle pupils do not comprehend or apply critical assessment. In particular, 85% of students said that teachers had not sufficiently described the term "critical evaluation," and 85% of students did not grasp it. This suggests a deficiency in both education and understanding. Students could be engaging in critical evaluation but do not know that they are, they do not necessarily need to authors that discuss critical evaluation once they are engaging in critical evaluation.

There may not be many opportunities for students to practise critical assessment because just 10% of them reported utilising it in the classroom. Additionally, none of the students thought that critical assessment was an important part of their curriculum, indicating a perceived gap between the objectives of the curriculum and the learning experiences of the students. Students were not explained what critical evaluation was before the surveys as the researcher wanted to get their uninfluenced perspective on critical evaluation. Students' inadequate understanding of critical evaluation and their inability to use it successfully in their academic efforts may be caused by teachers' lack of instructional support.

The findings emphasise the need for targeted interventions to enhance junior cycle curriculum students' understanding of critical assessment and instructional support for it. Including specific training on critical assessment in class planning should be a top focus for educators. To do this, they ought to employ techniques that promote active involvement with the subject matter and cater to the variety of learning preferences of their pupils.

It is imperative that educators have access to chances for professional development in order to enhance their own understanding of critical evaluation and learn practical teaching abilities. Additionally, cooperation between curriculum developers, educational policymakers,

and educators is essential to ensure that critical assessment skills are successfully addressed and integrated into the Junior Cycle curriculum.

The findings highlight the need of giving junior cycle teachers additional chances to assist pupils in honing their critical evaluation skills. Instructors should try to incorporate assignments and tasks that require students to think critically and analyse information across a range of subject areas. By providing students with opportunities to exercise critical assessment skills in projects that are contextually relevant, teachers may encourage the development of higher-order thinking skills and provide them with the tools they need for both academic achievement and lifelong learning. Many of the children could have participated in critical assessment in their Junior Cycle classroom without recognising it because many of them do not grasp what critical evaluation is.

Collaboration among educators inside and across topic areas can also support the integration of critical evaluation skills into the Junior Cycle curriculum. By aligning assessment protocols and instructional goals with the promotion of inquiry and critical thinking, educators can create a coherent learning environment that prioritises the development of critical analytical skills.

The findings in the literature review demonstrate how crucial it is to highlight and increase awareness of the importance of critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle curriculum. Children should be taught the importance of critical assessment skills in the development of analytical thinking, reasoned decision-making, and intellectual independence by educators and politicians who oversee education. By emphasising the role of critical evaluation within the educational community, teachers can cultivate a culture that prioritises the development of critical analytical abilities as fundamental aspects of the Junior Cycle curriculum.

It is advisable for curriculum developers to investigate methods of integrating critical evaluation skills into courses and educational opportunities that currently exist. Teachers can create a cohesive and comprehensive curriculum that fosters the development of critical

thinking abilities in Junior Cycle students by include opportunities for pupils to engage in critical assessment, synthesis, and analysis in a range of subject areas.

5.4 Recommendations

Targeted professional development programmes must improve teachers' comprehension and capacity to teach reflective practices and critical evaluation in order to close the gaps found in the study. The main goal of these programmes ought to be to provide teachers with the instruments and methods they need to successfully incorporate these practices into their instruction. A variety of subjects could be covered in training sessions, such as the theoretical underpinnings of critical assessment and reflective practice, useful strategies for integrating these abilities into regular lectures, and approaches for evaluating students' progress in these domains. Schools can guarantee that teachers are not only aware of the significance of these abilities but also confident in their ability to teach them successfully by offering them opportunities for rigorous professional development (Hatton & Smith, 1995; Brookfield, 2012).

In order to guarantee that students consistently practice and apply these abilities, it is imperative to develop and integrate explicit critical assessment and reflective practice activities throughout a range of courses. Teachers and curriculum creators should collaborate closely to provide activities that encourage review and critical thinking. This can entail adding critical discussion starters, peer review sessions, and reflective journaling to class plans. Students can interact with these practices on a regular basis and in a range of circumstances when they are integrated into the curriculum, which can serve to emphasise their significance and relevance (Biggs & Tang, 2011). Curriculum frameworks should also provide precise goals and expectations for critical evaluation and reflective activities, guaranteeing that these abilities are methodically reinforced throughout the Junior Cycle.

Raising students' understanding of the advantages of critical evaluation and reflective activities is essential to developing a student body that is more motivated and involved. Precise

instruction on the significance and real-world uses of these abilities can aid pupils in seeing their worth which could help with their well-being. Teachers should use techniques like interactive exercises, group discussions, and projects that ask students to use these abilities in real-world situations to promote active student participation in critical evaluation exercises. These activities can be made more enticing and approachable by customising them to be more engaging and pertinent to students' interests. For example, today's tech-savvy pupils may relate better to reflection exercises and critical evaluations conducted through digital platforms and technology. Through encouraging a culture of reflection and critical thinking, teachers can assist students in realising the importance of these abilities on a deeper level.

5.5 Conclusion

In conclusion, the literature emphasises the theoretical and practical importance of reflective practices in education; yet, the results show that junior cycle students have difficulties comprehending and applying these activities. To fully realise the potential of reflective practices in building critical thinking and self-evaluation abilities, it is imperative to address these gaps through focused training, curricular modifications, and improved techniques for student participation. Secondly, critical evaluation research shows a substantial gap in students' comprehension and use of these skills in the Junior Cycle classroom, literature highlights the critical evaluation's vital role in developing higher-order thinking skills and informed decision-making. To completely understand the potential of critical assessment in building a well-rounded and critically engaged student body, it is imperative to address these gaps through enhanced teacher preparation, curriculum integration, and increased student participation. Teachers should be given time to provide workshops explaining reflective practice and critical evaluation. Since these aspects might improve students' well-being, this could be done during well-being weeks.

Chapter Six: Conclusion

6.1 Introduction

The purpose of the research for this thesis was to investigate how junior cycle students were affected by reflective practices and critical evaluation. The results show a sizable understanding gap among students, which has an impact on how these techniques are applied and viewed in educational contexts (Moon, 2004). A primary discovery of this research is that most Junior Cycle students lack an understanding of what "critical evaluation" and "reflective practice" mean. It was discovered that many students are, in fact, inadvertently participating in these processes through a variety of classroom activities, despite their lack of express comprehension. The necessity for educators to more successfully close the gap between theory and practice is highlighted by this discrepancy between terminologies and practice (Boud, Keogh, & Walker, 1985).

6.2 Implications for Educators

In order to create a learning environment where students not only use reflective practice and critical evaluation, but also comprehend and value it, educators are essential. The results imply that curriculum should include explicit teaching of these ideas for teachers. By doing this, students can improve their capacity to apply these abilities more purposefully and successfully by increasing their awareness of the cognitive processes they are involved in (Schon, 1983).

6.3 Enhancing Reflective Practices

Students that engage in reflective practice analyse their learning experiences critically, pinpoint their areas of strength and growth, and create learning objectives for the future. Teachers should offer structured chances for reflection in order to improve this practice. This can involve things like self-evaluation tasks, group discussions, and reflective journals. Students can have a better understanding of how reflection enhances their learning by being given regular opportunity to practise it and by being explicitly taught the notion of reflection (Gibbs, 1988). Including reflective practice in the assessment procedure can further emphasise how important it is. For

example, students can be required to write a reflection on their learning experience, obstacles they faced, and solutions they came up with after finishing a project or assignment. This helps students internalise the importance of reflection in their academic and personal growth while also reinforcing the reflective process (Kolb, 1984).

6.4 Fostering Critical Evaluation

Critical evaluation entails data analysis, assumption testing, and well-reasoned decision-making. Teachers should promote an inquiry-based and inquisitive classroom atmosphere in order to support critical evaluation. Open-ended questions, discussions, and problem-solving exercises that demand students to weigh several viewpoints and provide evidence for their conclusions are effective tools for fostering critical evaluation (Brookfield, 2017). Teachers should also set an example for critical evaluation by thinking aloud in class and breaking down difficult topics. Giving students feedback that highlights the value of critical thinking abilities might also assist them in realising the significance of this exercise. For instance, comments on assignments should address the calibre of the arguments and supporting data in addition to the accuracy of the answers.

6.5 Bridging the Terminology Gap

Closing the language gap is crucial because students frequently participate in critical evaluation and reflective practices without realising it. This can be accomplished by teachers employing the phrases "critical evaluation" and "reflective practice" repeatedly in the classroom and elaborating on their applicability in various situations. Students can acquire a vocabulary for talking about their learning processes by being introduced to these ideas early in the Junior Cycle (Mezirow, 1990). Metacognition-focused workshops or lessons might also be helpful. By making the implicit explicit, these sessions can aid students in understanding how they learn and think. By breaking down the jargon associated with these concepts, students will be better able to identify when they are applying critical assessment and reflective practices, which will lead to more deliberate and proficient use of them.

6.6 Conclusion

In conclusion, the research highlights a critical disconnect between the practice and understanding of reflective practices and critical evaluation among Junior Cycle students. While many students are unknowingly engaging in these practices, their lack of explicit understanding hinders their ability to fully leverage these skills for their academic and personal development. To address this, educators must take proactive steps to integrate explicit instruction on these concepts into the curriculum, model reflective and critical thinking, and provide structured opportunities for students to practice and reflect on these skills. By doing so, students can develop a more profound and conscious appreciation of reflective practices and critical evaluation, ultimately enhancing their learning outcomes and preparing them for future academic and life challenges. The findings of this thesis underscore the importance of not only teaching reflective practices and critical evaluation but also ensuring that students understand and value these processes. This dual approach will help students become more autonomous, thoughtful, and capable learners, equipped with the skills necessary to navigate the complexities of the modern world.

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Appendices

Appendix A- Survey

Y – YES N – NO

1. Do you understand the term ‘reflective practice’?
Y/N
2. Has any teacher ever explained the term ‘reflective practice’?
Y/N
3. Have you ever used reflective practices in your Junior cycle classroom?
Y/N
4. Have you ever used reflective practices yourself to study?
Y/N
5. Do you think reflective practice should be used more in the Junior Cycle classroom?
Y/N
6. Do you understand the term ‘critical evaluation’?
Y/N
7. Has any teacher ever explained the term ‘critical evaluation’?
Y/N
8. Have you ever used critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom?
Y/N

9. Do you think critical evaluation is a key part of the Junior Cycle?

Y/N

10. Would you be open to learning more about reflective practices and critical evaluation?

Y/N

Appendix B – Consent Form

Informed Consent

This online survey is being distributed in support of a research project by Darragh Kiernan as part of their Masters of Education Degree. This survey will take approximately 15 minutes and is focused on reflection and critical evaluation in the Junior Cycle classroom.

Name of student:

Signed by Parent/Guardian:

Print name of Parent/Guardian:

Date: / /

Appendix C – Principal’s Letter

Principal’s Letter



03/12/2023

Dear Principal,

I am writing to you in relation to a research study I will be undertaking in fulfilment of my Professional Master’s in Education degree. I would like to provide you with information about my study and seek your consent to conduct research with Junior Cycle students.

My research based on reflective practices in education, critical evaluation in Junior Cycle education, the intersection of reflective practices and critical evaluation, strategies for implementing reflective practices, challenges and considerations while implementing reflective practices and critical evaluation, and recommendations and the best practice for implementing these skills in the Junior Cycle classroom.

To address these areas, I propose to distribute survey questionnaires to a mixture of Junior Cycle students. These survey questionnaire will consists of ten to fifteen questions, mostly

requiring a yes/no answer. With your and the student's written consent, survey questionnaires will be distributed.

The paper surveys will be anonymous and the students will not be asked for any identifiable data. All data collected will be stored securely for three years. Participants also have the right to withdraw their consent without negative consequences during the data collection phase and up to one month after data collection.

If you have any questions or queries, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Darragh Kiernan

Researcher

Tel:

Email:

Researcher's signature:

Principal's signature:

Date:

Appendix D – Research Information Sheet

Research Information Sheet for Participants

Dear participant,

I am writing to you in relation to a research study I will be undertaking in fulfilment of my Professional Master's in Education degree. I would like to provide you with information about my study and seek your consent to conduct research, which would involve you to complete a survey questionnaire.

My research is based around the area of reflection and critical evaluation in Junior Cycle. The objectives of my research are to identify the Junior Cycle student's perspective on reflective practices in education, critical evaluation in Junior Cycle education, the intersection of reflective practices and critical evaluation, strategies for implementing reflective practices, challenges and considerations while implementing reflective practices and critical evaluation, and recommendations and the best practice for implementing these skills in the Junior Cycle classroom.

The survey will consist of ten to fifteen questions, mostly requiring a yes/no answer.

All data collected will be stored securely and will be anonymous. No participant will be asked for any identifiable information, for example, name or address. The data will be stored for three years. You also have the right to withdraw your consent without negative consequences during the data collection phase and up to one month after data collection.

I am writing to you to gain your informed consent that you are willing to take part in this survey.

Thank you for your time.

Regards,

Darragh Kiernan

Researcher