‘What happens when I introduce a structure for pupil-led discussion in the classroom?’

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Group 1H

Rational

For several years in the past, discussions between pupils and teachers were seen as the best way for pupil progress; however, now pupil-to-pupil discussions are considered more beneficial. (Guidebook for Student-Centre Classroom Discussions, 2008) In the current Broad General Education (BGE), Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) teachers are encouraged to increase pupil-led learning and teaching in their classroom. This teacher approach is seen as a positive way to motivate students to build up a desire to learn and empowers the pupils to think about the subject curriculum on their own. This enables pupils and teachers to take part in the learning process as co-thinkers. (Bradley, 2006) Also by introducing a pupil-centred discussion and questioning approach, it is understood to drive a development in pupil’s literacy skill. By introducing this approach to my class, it is hoped that it will develop pupils’ understanding of having leadership in their learning however these skills can also be transferred throughout the school.

Aims

The aim of this enquiry was to examine what would happen to pupils in a classroom environment when they were given more structure for pupil-led discussions. By implementing this to a class the pupils were observed and evaluated on their participation and engagement, but also the development on the complexity of their discussion and questioning.

Methodology

This practitioner enquiry was carried out with a S1 Technical class over a four-week period. Different aspects of the enquiry were carried out with the one class; however, in both technical subjects Design and Manufacture and Graphic Communication. At the beginning the pupils were introduced to a three-part structure:

• respond to the question;
• contribute with your thoughts;
• continue the discussion or ask a follow up question.

This structure aided the pupils to help enhance their understanding of a classroom discussion but also was used in some of the methodology’s carried out.

Exit Passes

At the end of each lesson in Graphic Communication each pupil would be asked to fill out an “Exit Tweet”. This required them to write down a question relating to what they had learned in that lesson. At the end of the lesson, each pupil was asked to place their question back to front on the Exit Tweet board (Appendix 1) allowing them to take questioning into their own hands. One pupil picked a question, answered it and their fellow pupils would tell them if it
was correct or not. Wrong answers allowed pupils to discuss what the correct answer should have been. That pupil would then select another pupil to pick a new question off the board. While this was being implemented observations on pupils’ participation and engagement were carried out. However, the researcher was also looking for a development in the complexity in their questions and discussions.

Teacher Observations – Toolbox of Questions

The majority of the information collated was through direct observation of pupils when carrying out questioning and discussions. The strategy that the researcher created for Design and Manufacture was a small toolbox that had a variety of questions inside, this was called “Toolbox of Questions” (Appendix 2). At the end of each period, one pupil would be asked to pick another pupil and ask them a question from the toolbox. The pupil asked answered the question which would begin a discussion on their answer. That pupil would then ask someone else a new question and so on. While this was being carried out, three mixed ability pupils participation, confidence, engagement and ability to continue a discussion were all evaluated closely.

Questionnaire

On the last week of the enquiry, the researcher gave each pupil a questionnaire (Appendix 3). This had a range of questions asking them about their progress in different aspect of questioning and discussions. The rational for this was to acquire a better understanding of how the pupils felt rather than only the researcher’s personal professional judgement.

Findings

After evaluating and analysing all of the information gathered in the enquiry, it was evident that after introducing pupil-led discussion and questioning strategies, pupils made progress in several areas. By implementing “Exit Tweets”, pupil engagement and participation increased; however, over the weeks pupils’ questions began to become more complex. In Fig. 1 it is clear that this pupils questions have developed with the first being very basic. However in a four-week period, this pupil succeeded in create a question that is not only more difficult but can aid a discussion as there is more than one answer to be given.
As seen in Fig. 2 after carrying out the “Toolbox of Questions” and evaluating three pupils of mixed ability in Design and Manufacture showed that all pupils over a period of time began to show progress in participation, especially Pupil 1 who started off with no participation.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Weeks</th>
<th>PUPIL 1</th>
<th>PUPIL 2</th>
<th>PUPIL 3</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>No. of times the pupil asked a question.</td>
<td>No. of times the pupils answered a question.</td>
<td>No. of times the pupil put their hand up.</td>
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<tr>
<td>1</td>
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Through carrying out questionnaires with pupils it helped to identify that not only did the researcher see an improvement in participation, but the pupils have also personally seen this in their own learning as well. As seen in Fig. 3, 15 out of 20 pupils believe that they have partaken more in questioning and discussions. Due to also evaluating pupil development in the complexity of their questions the researcher asked “Do you think the questions you create are more difficult now?” As you can see in Fig. 4 pupils in their option thought they have achieved to accomplish this with 13 out of 20 pupils stating “Yes”.

DO YOU THINK YOU TAKE PART MORE IN QUESTIONS AND DISCUSSIONS?

- YES 75%
- SOMETIMES 15%
- NO 10%

DO YOU THINK THE QUESTIONS YOU CREATE ARE MORE DIFFICULT NOW?

- YES 75%
- SOMETIMES 15%
- NO 10%
Conclusions

The aim of this enquiry was to evaluate what would happen when a structure for pupil-led discussion was implemented in the classroom and how this would influence the participation and engagement of the pupils. It is clear from the findings in all three methodologies used pupils have contributed to their learning above and beyond what would have been normally expected. The main highlight from the investigation was witnessing pupils, who would not usually partake in class discussions or ask questions, begin to confidently take part. Although this enquiry was very beneficial for the pupils there was some limitations that arise throughout. Due to being technical teacher, it is required we teach two subjects one period a week this being Design and Manufacture and Graphic Communication. This meant I had to carry out different methodologies in each subject resulting in findings being less consistent than they could have been. Also due to being in a technical environment and not being a literacy based subject, implementing a discussion in the classroom was a challenge at the beginning, however over time this became more natural for the pupils.

Implications for Future Practice

Through conducting this enquiry, I have begun to see a vast improvement in the participation of pupils in asking questions and contributing to class discussions. Due to this increase in participation, I will be continuing to allow pupil take lead in their learning, this will not only help pupil’s progress but will assist the development of their social skills.

After learning and teaching conversation at departmental meetings, fellow colleagues are interested in implementing some of these strategies into their own class which is going to develop pupil participation and engagement throughout the school.

Appendices
Bibliography
