Practitioner Enquiry

What happens when a structure is introduced to pupil-led discussion within the classroom?

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Group 1H

Rationale

The use of talk is an important element of education as a whole and helps pupils to think and learn from their surroundings and others (Pay, 2016). Pupils’ ability to understand and articulate their answers is a continuous challenge for Business Management as a subject. Two of the main capacities of Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) are to help pupils develop into Confident Individuals and Effective Contributors. Encouraging discussion in the classroom is a way to help pupils build their communication skills, as well as allowing them to begin sharing their opinion and state their thoughts on a matter (The Scottish Government, 2008). It is important that teachers are using a variety of strategies to engage learners and incorporating simple pupil-led discussion tasks should allow pupils the opportunity to develop their knowledge and skills simultaneously. The overall purpose of this study is to investigate the impact pupil-led discussion had on the pupils within the class.

Aims

The aim of this study is to investigate the impact of general pupil-led discussion and the impact of having a basic structure to stimulate the pupil-led discussion in the classroom.

Methodology

The enquiry was carried out in a secondary school located in North Lanarkshire over a four-week period. The class studied by the researcher was a S3 Business Management class. Six pupils were selected by the researcher as the focus for this study based on their previous participation level in class discussion – two pupils with very low participation, two with mediocre participation and two with high levels of participation. It is important that the teacher structures lessons and uses scaffolding techniques to ensure learning amongst peers is successful (Blatchford, Kutnick, Baines & Galton., 2003). As the enquiry is based around pupil-led discussion, predominately qualitative research methods were used.

Classroom Materials

A variety of materials were used within the classroom to help promote the discussion amongst pupils. Firstly, the pupils were introduced to a three-step structure which they were to follow as best they could when having discussions:
1. Respond to the question or previous statements
2. Contribute with your thoughts or answer
3. Continue the discussion or ask a follow up question

The researcher also incorporated materials for classroom tasks to stimulate discussion (see appendix 1 and 2). This was influenced by Vygotsky's research on the method of scaffolding in order to give support to the pupils while encourage dialogue between peers (Pritchard, 2014).

Reflective Diary

The researcher kept a reflective diary throughout the four-week study in order to evaluate the progress of the methods and materials being used during each lesson. It is argued that a reflective diary enables the writer to learn four important aspects about themselves and their teaching: what they know; what they feel; what and how they do it; and why they do it (Yinger and Clark, 1981). By using these four areas as a focus for reflection it enabled the researcher to ensure the study was making progress and that the pupils were benefitting from the methods adopted during each lesson.

Checklist

A checklist was used to record the number of times pupils contributed to the discussion tasks. The first checklist was used to monitor an unstructured discussion that the pupils were encouraged to continue amongst themselves. The second checklist was used to monitor a discussion task where pupils followed the basic three-step structure when contributing. These checklists could then be compared and analysed by the researcher to determine the effect of using a structure to encourage pupil-led discussion.

Exit Passes

Pupils completed exit passes at the end of the lesson during three key-stages of the study: after the first introduction of discussion; half way through the study; and the final lesson of the study. The exit passes were an opportunity for the pupils to reflect on the impact pupil-led discussion had on them personally when in the class.

Findings

The overall results from this study show a positive relationship between the use of pupil-led discussion and level of pupil engagement and participation during these lessons.

Classroom Materials

Appendix 3 shows the completion of the worksheet from Pupil 1 used to stimulate discussion. This task was used during week 3 of the study and can be seen to be fully completed in all areas. Pupil 1 completed this sheet without the support of an ASN assistant, which they usually require for written tasks. This displays an increase in participation from Pupil 1 by using peer discussion when completing the worksheet.

Checklist

Checklist 1 (appendix 4) shows the contribution of the six pupils during the initial unstructured discussion. Pupil 5 and 6 show the highest levels of contribution, as they are mainly the individuals who will give answers in class. Pupils 1-4 show little to no contribution during the unstructured discussion. Checklist 2 (appendix 5) was then used during the second week of the study after pupils
were introduced to the three-step structure to use when having pupil-led discussions during a lesson. Each of the 6 pupils gained a tally mark every time they used the individual steps of the structure when contributing to the discussion. The result shows a vast increase in the contribution of pupils 1-4; particularly pupils 1 and 2 who will often sit back during lessons and let others answer or contribute.

**Exit Passes**

Pupils were asked to complete an exit pass after the first week of introducing pupil-led discussion, where they were encouraged to reflect on how they felt the discussion tasks impacted their learning (appendix 6). Pupils then completed the same exit pass at the end of the four-week study, where the reflections were more in-depth and positive towards the impact the discussion was having on their learning (appendix 7).

**Reflective Diary**

After week 1 of the study, the researcher was able to gauge the general participation levels of pupils in the class when having a pupil-led discussion. The reflective diary then shows the progression of pupil participation, while also actively discussing the next steps for following lessons. Appendix 8 shows excerpts from the reflective diary with comments on the participation of pupil's and next steps for the study. The findings suggest that pupils were able to have a natural discussion when working in smaller groups using the structure, perhaps because the pressure of having the whole class listening was removed.

**Conclusion**

Overall, the main findings of this study suggest that pupil’s engagement and participation increases when given a structure to follow for a pupil-led discussion. The findings were consistent over the four methods of data collected. However, it is important to highlight that adapted methods of pupil-led discussion had to be incorporated into the study – e.g. discussions held in smaller groups to encourage pupils to talk to each other instead of the teacher.

The continuation of including pupil-led discussion in lessons will be key for the development of pupils in order to increase their confidence when talking with the whole class. Due to the short period for the research to be carried out it was not able to clearly indicate whether pupil confidence had increased indefinitely when having pupil-led discussion.

**Implications for Future Research**

The findings from this study have showed the positive impact pupil-led discussion can have on the participation levels of pupils when given a basic structure to follow. However, the limitations include the small scale of the study – a larger group of pupils ranging across different year groups and subjects could have provided a greater comparison of participation between all pupils. If the study were to be carried out on a larger scale it could have included more pupils within the school or even compared the pupil progress with those in another school in the local authority.
Bibliography


Appendix

Appendix 1 – Classroom Material

This worksheet was given to pupils to fill out individually and then use as an aid for

You have 5 minutes to fill out the table below with the relevant information on internal and external stakeholder.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>INTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>EXTERNAL STAKEHOLDERS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Stakeholder</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>-------------</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

You will now go into your groups and have a pupil-led discussion on the impact and effect of stakeholder in an organisation — this will enable you to complete any missing areas you have.

Remember the discussion structure:

1. Acknowledge the previous comment/answer
2. Give your answer or thoughts
3. Continue the discussion or ask a follow up question
pupil-led discussion in groups of 6.

Appendix 2 – Classroom Material

This worksheet was given to smaller groups of pupils, 3-4 pupils per group. They then had a discussion amongst their group and each person took on the role of the scribe for an organisation.

**Discussion Task**
In your groups discuss the aims and objectives of the following businesses:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Organisation</th>
<th>Notes of Objectives</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>McDonalds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Apple</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Lanarkshire Council</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Social Bite</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Remember to be**

**Structure to help you:**
- Acknowledge
- Agree/Disagree
- Give your own opinion
- Continue

Appendix 3 – Classroom Material (pupil work)

This shows the completion of pupil 1’s worksheet that was used during the pupil-led group discussion.
Appendix 4 – Checklist

This checklist displays the number of times each of the focus pupils contributed to the pupil-led discussion, which was carried out with no structure and pupils were simply encouraged to talk about a given topic.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil</th>
<th>Unstructured discussion - number of times each pupil contributed to discussion</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KT - Pupil 1</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KO - Pupil 2</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LW - Pupil 3</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJ - Pupil 4</td>
<td>✔ ✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM - Pupil 5</td>
<td>✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM - Pupil 6</td>
<td>✔ ✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Appendix 5 – Checklist

This checklist captured the number of times each of the focus pupils contributed to the pupil-led discussion using all stages of the three-step structure in their response.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Pupil</th>
<th>Each time pupil contributed to discussion using the three-step structure - whole class discussion.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>KT - Pupil 1</td>
<td>✔ ✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>KO - Pupil 2</td>
<td>✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>LW - Pupil 3</td>
<td>✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>SJ - Pupil 4</td>
<td>✔ ✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>IM - Pupil 5</td>
<td>✔ ✔ ✔ ✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>EM - Pupil 6</td>
<td>✔ ✔ ✔</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Appendix 6 – Exit passes after week one

Appendix 7 – Exit passes after week four

Appendix 8 – Reflective Diary

Week one excerpts:

“Pupils had to be encouraged to ask another pupil if they could continue the examples”

“Pupils definitely seemed reluctant to interact with one another”
“...when pupils were asked to give an example ALL pupils contributed to class discussion – despite this being led mostly by the class teacher”

Week two excerpts:

“Pupils did follow the structure each time a person spoke ... however, still required a high level of teacher intervention to remind pupils to acknowledge the previous person”

“I also found the pupils were giving their answer to me as the teacher, when I really want to encourage them to speak to each other”

Week three excerpts:

“The small groups definitely worked better and got more of a natural discussion flowing, however next time groups need to be selected even more specifically to try and encourage all pupils to participate and feel confident when talking”

Week four excerpts:

“Discussion is working more effectively when working in smaller groups, as focus is taken away from whole class ... perhaps these are the smaller steps that need to be taken to give pupils the confidence in their answers and opinions”

“All pupils now giving at least one structured response when having pupil-led discussion in small groups ... pupils also speaking directly to each other when giving answers and listening”