

What happens when I use positive reinforcement in the classroom?

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Rationale

According to Witzel and Mercer, 2003, "The area of behaviour interventions in classrooms receives more attention than many other aspects of schooling" (p. 89). Many teaching programmes and schools provide strategies for managing behaviour (Yost and Mosca, 2002). In modern day classrooms, discipline can sometimes be seen as more important than the actual learning, where valuable time is spent dealing with students and their behaviour (Witzel and Mercer, 2003). To insure good behaviour is continuous, positive reinforcement is needed. (Miltenberger, 2008).

In relation to current Scottish policy, the two main policies supporting positive reinforcement in the classroom is that of the Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) and Getting it Right for Every Child (GIRFEC). Both highlight the need for developing good relationships and positive behaviour in the classroom to promote the right environment for effective learning and teaching. Children need to feel included, respected, safe and secure in the classroom where their achievements and contributions are valued, meaning they are more likely to develop resilience and positive self-esteem.

During this enquiry I will look at children's use of Gaelic and their level of fluency. The intention is that by the end of this enquiry period the children will be using Gaelic continually in the classroom without need of reinforcement and that their level of fluency in the language will have developed, and be at a higher level than before.

Aims

This enquiry explored behaviour modification by using rewards and positive reinforcement to encourage positive, observable behaviour in the pupils. By using positive reinforcement to develop, increase and encourage the use of their Gaelic skills within the classroom.

Methodology

The enquiry was conducted by reflecting on the behaviour points the children were gaining and by taking time to have constructive conversations with fellow colleagues about the

enquiry being undertaken. Pupil voice was one of the main ways of ensuring positive reinforcement and the behaviour system was working.

The need to change the previous behaviour system was clear as the children's use of Gaelic within the classroom was very low, and after a conversation held with the deputy head teacher about this, an agreement was made that a new system would have to be put in place in light of this. The children were involved in the decision making of what new behaviour system would put in place. It was crucial they understood what was expected of them, why this change was happening and what ideas they had in order of encouraging each other and themselves to speak Gaelic and deepen their language fluency in the classroom.

Conversations with other Gaelic medium teachers were beneficial to allow sharing the methods they used in their own class to promote speaking Gaelic through positive reinforcement. Upon reflection and discussion, the conclusion was that the children would have to receive a new behaviour system which they would not have come across from other classes.

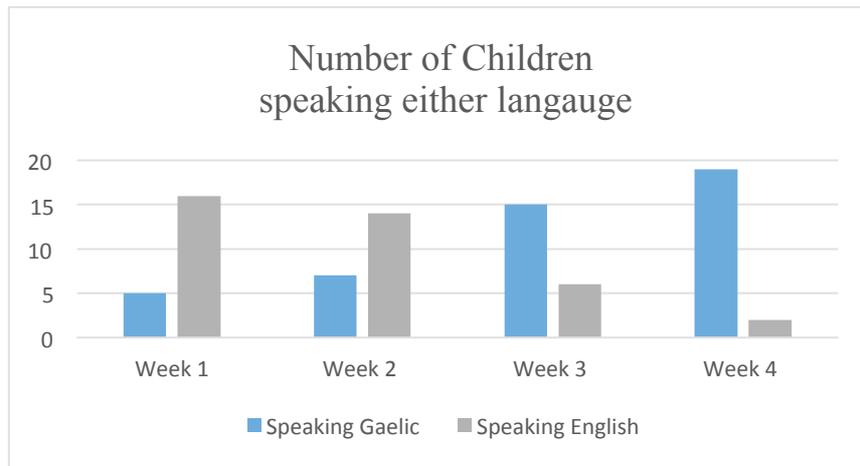
The data collected was the children's use of Gaelic in the classroom and their Gaelic fluency. Once both sets of data were collected, they were compared to the data collected at the start of the enquiry. The data at the end of the enquiry included responses from the children, about how they felt the new behaviour points system had worked. Furthermore, conversations with both the deputy head and fellow colleagues were followed up with, comparing how the class's behaviour and Gaelic had been at the start compared to the end of the enquiry.

The data was collected through the 'Dojo' behaviour system where points can be given and taken away. Every day, children would have a card which had a column for Gaelic and English. Every child in the class would be classed as a 'spy', meaning when they came into class that morning they would have a name of another child written on the back of their card. They would have the responsibility of recording and observing that child for the day for their use of Gaelic in class. Points would be given if their use of Gaelic was a lot higher than English. The amount of points depended on how much the child had spoken Gaelic in the class that day. No one knew who had who in the class, meaning every child felt the need to try their hardest at speaking Gaelic as anyone in the class could be watching them.

Findings

The results of the data collected showing the number of times students spoke either language across the weeks are reported in Chart 1.

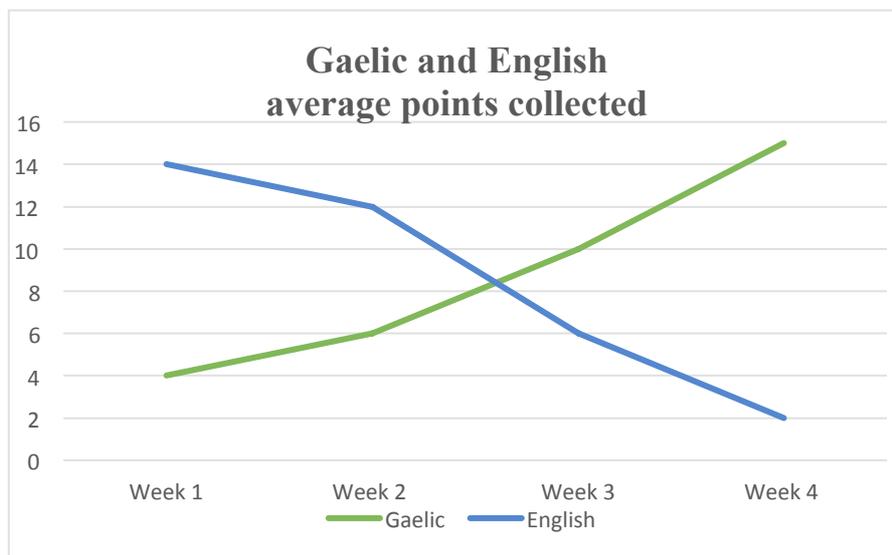
Chart 1



According to Chart 1 above, the number of children using Gaelic continually in class increased across the weeks while English decreased.

The results of the data collected showing the average points of how many times the Children used either language is shown in Chart 2.

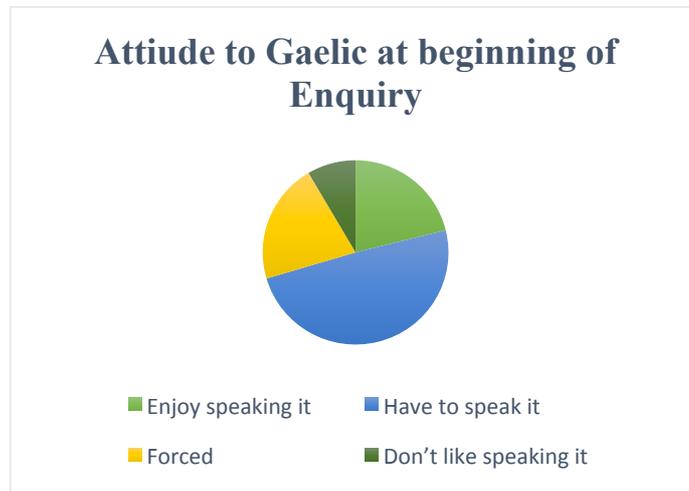
Chart 2



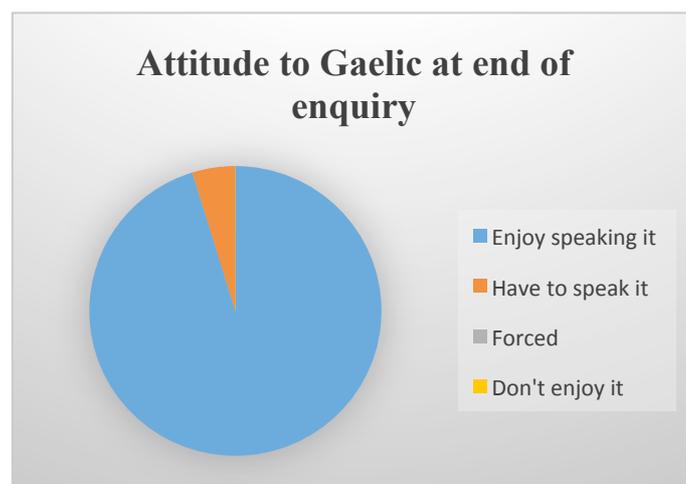
According to Chart 2, the number of points gained near the end of the enquiry for speaking Gaelic during the day equalled the number of times English was spoken at the start.

The following pie charts show the responses gathered from the pupils before the enquiry and after the enquiry, having been questioned about their thoughts of speaking Gaelic in the classroom.

Pie Chart 1



Pie Chart 2



Comparison of Pre and Post Data show that the children's use of Gaelic and their fluency within the classroom has improved greatly, where the need for continuous reinforcement is no longer needed for some. Their attitude towards using the language has too improved, as is clear by both pie charts. They no longer see the language as 'need to' bases, but more as a 'want to' which was the aim of the enquiry.

Conclusions

This enquiry wanted to determine what would happen when positive reinforcement was used within a classroom. The findings show clearly that the children's use of Gaelic, fluency and attitude have improved. Although some children still need continuous reinforcement in using Gaelic, the other children in the class help each other to make sure everyone is making the effort to speak Gaelic in class. This proves positive reinforcement works as the children's skills have developed and their attitude to using the Gaelic language in class has improved through this enquiry.

However the limitations which arose during the enquiry were that of time and long term effects. The amount of time we had to implement something in class which would have a positive affect was challenging at times. Ensuring this positive outcome has long term benefits will be a necessity if the children are to continue to view positive reinforcement as beneficial.

Implications for Future Practice

I have learnt that positive reinforcement does work, and the benefit it has for our classrooms is invaluable. It means teachers can focus on the core element being, the children's learning. Pupil voice is an invaluable tool needed in all classrooms and schools, as what pupils have to say can be extremely useful and encouraging to any teacher.

As a result of this study I will continue to use positive reinforcement. Learning and pupil voice is always at the heart of my classroom environment. No amount of success is good enough, and as teachers we should be continually striving to better ourselves and our practice to support all our learners' needs and personalities.

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