

How will learner's engagement be affected if I link learning to real life?

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Rationale

Current educational research suggests the best way of learning is authentic learning, inquiry based learning and experiential learning. These approaches focus on learning by doing: working out real life problems and finding solutions. This research has emerged from the work of John Dewey (1859-1952) Jean Piaget (1896-1980) and Lev Vygotsky (1896-1934). John Dewey role in progressive education emphasised the need to learn by doing. He was a pragmatist that believed that children learn when they interact with their environments and actively are involved in the school curriculum.

The work of Jean Piaget (1986-1980) developed the constructivist approach that acknowledges learning is an active, constructive process. Learners are developing knowledge rather than acquiring it. Social Constructivism is built on the work of Piaget. Piaget saw a child as a 'lone scientist' (Pritchard, 2009:p30).

Vygotsky developed the social constructivist theory. The theory places importance on the social interaction between the learner and others, and that importance is given to language in the process of intellectual development. It is through this dialogue that ideas are acknowledged, shared and progressed (Pritchard, 2009)

What consolidates these theories is their intention to provide a guide to good teaching practice that will lead to growth in the knowledge of learners (Sotto, 1994).

Curriculum for Excellence (2017) calls for learners to be active in their learning, and to understand the importance of the skills they are developing to be successful in the twenty first century. As part of the wider achievement in schools, our role as teachers is to equip young people with skills, experiences and knowledge required to be successful in learning, life and work.

As part of my professional enquiry, I want to find out if linking coursework to real life experiences will have an effect on young people's engagement in the classroom.

Aim

To find out how learners engagement will be affected if I link learning to real life situations during a drama lesson.

Methodology

The enquiry was carried out over a three week period with a mixed ability S1 drama class consisting of 19 pupils. I decided to primarily focus on using qualitative data because I felt my research question lends itself to the collection of this data. I used a questionnaire to compare the results before and after the intervention took place. The questionnaire was 4 questions aimed at finding out pupils' attitudes about drama and the skills they think the subject can provide for life outside of school. The intervention I used was a forum theatre workshop. Forum theatre is when a scene is acted out usually indicating some kind of oppression, and is shown twice. During the replay, any member of the audience ('spect-actor') is allowed to shout 'Stop!' step forward and take the place of one of the oppressed characters, showing how they could change the situation to enable a different outcome. Pupils were given different real life scenarios to act out for example a bad job interview, a bullying scene, and in this way they were to change the situation to a more positive outcome.

I also used observation. Observation entails watching and systematically documenting what you see and hear occurring wherever you are conducting your research (Mertler, 2009). I simply recorded field notes before the intervention in class and during the intervention to compare results. I also used exit passes during the intervention. This is a short formative way of assessing pupils learning.

Findings

The questionnaire revealed that pupils' attitude towards drama remained unchanged despite the intervention. All 19 pupils stated they enjoyed drama. In response to question 2: What skills do you learn in drama? The 3 most popular answers before and after the intervention were Confidence, Communication skills and Working with others. In response to question 3: Do you think you can apply the skills you have learned in drama outside the classroom? Everyone stated yes before and after the intervention. However there was a noticeable difference in pupils' response to the final question. In response to question 4: How do you think drama can prepare you for life outside of school? Before the intervention the most popular answer was developing confidence and communication skills. The least popular answer was helping to get a job. When this was mentioned it related to becoming an actor. However after the intervention, pupils stated that drama helps to build confidence and communication skills to help with interviews and jobs.

Through observation, I did not notice a change in engagement levels because of the intervention. My pupils were responsive to class discussion and engaged in the work before and during the intervention. This could be because drama is a social subject, pupils are used to working in groups, discussing and performing real life situations. However, the comments pupils made before the intervention were about contributing their ideas to create a storyline

for a performance. During the intervention pupils comments were about finding solutions to real life problems.

The exit passes showed pupils' comments were clearly linked to what we had learned about in class and pupils were naturally starting to make connections with life and work outside the classroom. For example 'it can help you prepare for a job when your older' 'we done forum theatre we used real life situations which we could use if we were at a job interview or being warehouse staff. '

Conclusion

In conclusion, I did not find that pupils engaged any differently to the intervention during class. However, I did find that the intervention I used was very useful to make the connection between the skills pupils learn in drama and how it can prepare pupils for life and work.

Implications for Future Practice

There was many factors that contributed to the credibility and validity of my research project, such as using a small scale body of research with a small number of pupils in S1. Furthermore I only collected qualitative data. In the future, I would conduct my research with different year groups and adopt a triangulation approach to collect data. Despite this, I did find this professional enquiry very useful to improve my own practice. The findings from my research, although questionable, demonstrated that I can engage and enhance pupils learning in the classroom through interventions such as forum theatre to develop the young workforce.

Bibliography

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