

What happens when Random Questioning Techniques are used within the classroom?

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Rationale

The concept of 'random questioning' is a pedagogical approach that is becoming more and more popular within classroom practice today. This concept was one of many techniques introduced as a method of formative assessment by Black and William in 2010, in an attempt to raise standards as a national priority (Black & William 2010).

This enquiry group decided that it wanted to research the impact that random questioning had on a class of mixed abilities to see if it yielded positive results. A common observation was made that only some pupils would regularly contribute answers in class and not all pupils were fully engaged throughout the lesson – something also seen in many other academic research including Black & William. As random questioning was something that was observed regularly during placements, the probationers decided that they wanted to see the true effects of this practice for themselves within their own classrooms. Moreover, the kind of responses that can be seen from using random questioning can also be used as an indicator, showing understanding and knowledge on the material being questioned (Tienken, Goldberg & Dirocco 2009).

Aims

The aim of this enquiry was to investigate the impact the use of random questioning had on the participation of pupils within a classroom. The success of the enquiry would be based on whether or not random questioning had helped pupils to engage more within a lesson through a controlled means. Specific aspects would be broken down into aims to see precisely which areas of pupil participation had been affected and those that had not.

The breakdown included:

- How pupil's confidence improved when answering questions within the classroom.
- The detail and quality of answer provided by the pupil.
- Whether or not pupils would continue to answer without the use of random questioning.

Methodology

The enquiry would be completed with a Secondary stage two class containing 20 pupils with a large range of abilities ranging from level 2D through to 3S - recorded in line with the Curriculum For Excellence's benchmarks (Scottish Qualifications Authority).

Even though random questioning would be implemented throughout the whole period, in order to keep the results consistent, the random questioning utilised in the starter activity would be the only area where results would be recorded. Each starter lasted for approximately ten-fifteen minutes; this was slightly longer than normal but was adapted for the purpose of the enquiry. The focus of each starter was centred on music literacy, covering fundamental concepts, which all students should have an awareness of by this stage in second year. Before posing the questions, students were advised that they would be given several seconds to think about the answer for each question before an answer was sought. This ensured that all pupils were given ample time to consider their answers (Tobin,1987).

The makeup of the enquiry was specifically broken down into 3 blocks. The reason for this was to give a sufficient amount of time for pupils to build confidence and to see whether the questioning technique was having a noticeable impact with pupils.

Week1: this week was used as a control week where pupils were subjected to random questioning without being given prior warning or any additional aides such as thinking time.

Weeks 2 and 3: During these lessons the class were told before starting the activity that all pupils in the class would have to answer a question during the starter and that once they had provided an answer they would not have to answer again during that activity. This gave pupils a choice about when they would volunteer an answer to a question. The purpose for this was to give pupils an opportunity to develop their confidence in answering in front of the class, while also affording them ample opportunity to answer questions that they were comfortable with. To ensure that all pupils got an equal chance at answering one question type, several questions of the same nature were asked consecutively. When pupils who were highlighted for seldom answering in class volunteered an answer they were given priority, in an attempt to build confidence and capitalise on their willingness to participate.

Weeks 4 and 5: During the fourth and fifth weeks, the format of the questioning was changed to feature a completely randomised method. The topic of music literacy was still being focused on, with most pupils demonstrating that they had developed their understanding of the concepts more thoroughly, to tackle this, the questions became increasingly more complex in line with the learning. All of the student's names were placed into a random name generator and it was explained to them that instead of them having the choice to answer the questions whenever they wanted to, they would be required to answer the question whenever their name was selected randomly.

Finally, the students were then asked to pick which method they preferred and give a reason why. After reviewing the feedback, individual pupils were asked specifically to elaborate on their answers.

Findings

Findings were recorded as witnessed and tallied up at the end of each period so that accurate information was held from each session.

Week 1: The first week in the enquiry showed that there were only a small number of pupils (20%) who were willing to contribute an answer to the majority of questions. 45% of pupils offered an answer to at least one question during the activity, and 35% of pupils offered no answers to any of the questions.

Week 2 and 3: This week introduced the idea of all pupils answering a question, but at a time of their own choosing. Immediately there was an increase in willingness for pupils to participate in most questions (70%) with 30% of pupils still not contributing to the activity. When asked why the pupils were more willing to answer earlier on in the activity, the general consensus was that the pupils were more likely to know the answer but felt more comfortable and confident answering when there were still a larger number of pupils who hadn't already contributed.

Week 4 and 5: In the weeks where the random name generator was introduced, pupils were in two states of mind. 60% said that they were noticeably more on edge when performing the activity, 25% said that they were fine and didn't notice the difference and 15% said that they did not want to participate and seemed to lose interest in the activity.

Conclusions

Due to the nature of the question types many of the answers fell under a binary yes/no answer. This meant that recording the information from each period was accurate however, elaborations on specific practices and events had to be recorded after the lesson took place meaning that some information recorded was not noted immediately.

It was also concluded that many students were more enthusiastic about answering in the early stages of the activity instead of waiting until the number of students became reduced meaning there were fewer students left to answer questions.

The conclusions also suggest that even though using random questioning helped pupils awareness, when looking at S2 literacy in a musical context where there is still a development of understanding taking place, the process may need to be slightly altered in its delivery to suit the learner rather than just the implementation of the practice.

The implementation of random questioning was concluded to be a useful tool to use in the classroom where appropriate. However at times, it became a time consuming task where it meant that the lesson was not as fluid as it may normally be due to the additional tasks that need to be completed. Some pupils also experienced some frustration at not being able to answer as regularly as they would have liked to, which impacted on their learning in negative ways. The most revealing deduction that came from the results found that secondary students clearly favour having an element of choice in their learning environments and did not like having choice taken away from them with the use of random generators.

Implications for Future Practice

I will continue to use random questioning in the classroom with various year groups, not just with Broad General Education classes, but only where its implementation does not affect learning experiences in negative ways. Situations where I would use this technique include the informal assessment of curricular knowledge and in situations where assessing the understanding of a concept within a class.

Bibliography

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