

What happens when random questioning techniques are used in the classroom?

Stefanie Ward

Group 3C

Rationale

Practitioner enquiry is a process for education practitioners to develop a more in-depth understanding of any issue or concept that could inform their practice in the classroom and the practice of other teachers (Coleman, 2007). Through discussion with probationer colleagues from both the primary and secondary sector, it was apparent that a common interest in Assessment for Learning (AifL) was shared. This was something we recognised as being a key factor in the learning and teaching in the classroom despite the level, ability or subject of teaching. From an in depth discussion with the group of probationer colleagues, we firstly thought about what we all regularly observe in our classroom. It quickly became apparent that we all shared the same recurring issues in our classrooms:

- Often the same children offered to answer questions
- Often the same children actively participated in discussions
- Often the same children can offer their answers quickly
- Some children were not fully engaged
- Some children lacked confidence in voicing the opinions or answers
- Some children lose motivation in answering questions as the quickest children are often selected first.

This can make it difficult for the teacher to assess the children's understanding and progress the learning further. William and Leahy (2015) suggested that selecting the child willing to answer the question does not assess the understanding of the whole class. The children willing to give an answer generally are confident they have the correct answer or response. Therefore, for this practitioner enquiry, we decided to focus on one area of AifL and investigate the effect of introducing a random questioning technique in to the classroom. The technique used is selecting a random lollipop stick from a jar, with each stick having a pupil's name on it.

Aim

The aim of this practitioner enquiry is to promote pupil participation for all, encouraging and providing the opportunity for the pupils who do not regularly offer answers to the teacher's questions or participate in class discussions. This practitioner enquiry will also serve an additional aim of endorsing whole class engagement, which in turn would enhance pupil's achievement and learning.

Methodology

Research for the enquiry was collected over four weeks during Social Studies lessons. To begin this enquiry pupils were observed as normal (using the hand up approach) for the first week. During this observation information was collected on the level of participation and

engagement. This created a collection of information to later assess any change of introducing random questioning techniques. For the next three weeks, lollipop sticks for random pupil selection was implemented. The enquiry was conducted at the same time every week and on the same subject 'social studies'. The children's names were on the lollipop sticks which allowed random selection to be used. Children were made aware that any child could be asked to answer a question or contribute to the discussion at any time. Prior to selecting a random lollipop stick, pupils were all asked a question and encouraged to think of an answer; thinking time was given before selecting a lollipop stick. The methods used for gathering evidence was observations of pupil activity by the class teacher, active listening during pupil activity, questioning in the classroom and carrying out professional reading to inform practice. Observation notes were gathered throughout the enquiry, compiled and analysed at the end. These could be used to make comparisons between before enquiry implementation and after.

A simple questionnaire was given to the class after the few weeks of implementing the lollipop sticks as a random question technique. It was given to the whole class and although all comments were considered, the sample group's comments were only used for this enquiry. A sample group of children were selected prior to the beginning of the enquiry. The children were of mixed ability and had a range of confidence regarding answering questions willingly in the classroom environment.

Findings

Prior to implementing the use of lollipop sticks as a tool for random questioning, the class were observed, and it was noted that a select number of pupils were not engaging and not offering answers to the teacher's questions. These pupils would sometimes begin to find distractions or misbehave as they were disengaged in the learning and would require prompting by the teacher to contribute to the class discussion or offer answers. After introducing the lollipop sticks as a questioning tool the findings portrayed enhanced engagement from the selected pupils. However, some of the selected students were still less willing to contribute than other children. This may be because they lack confidence, needed more thinking time or simply did not know the answer. In order to ensure there was engagement from all, the teacher would ask a question, ask everyone to think of an answer and then select a pupil using the lollipop sticks. When children were given sufficient wait time before random selection, most could provide some response, evidencing their engagement in the lesson and allowing for assessment of all children's learning. It was also found that some children became frustrated with the approach being used solely (no hands up approach allowed). Pupils who were confident answering out became slightly disheartened if their name was not chosen as often as they would have liked to contribute in lessons and in turn, they became less engaged than before.

Comments from the questionnaire varied. When asked how did the lollipop sticks make you feel, a collection of answers were gathered: pupil A stated 'Being picked to answer a question I didn't know made me feel nervous', whereas pupil D claimed 'I found the lollipop sticks exciting' and pupil E said 'I sometimes liked being picked'. Other comments showed no negative or positive impact.

Conclusions

From an analysis of the data collected it was concluded that using random question techniques, at times, can be beneficial in the classroom and encourage pupil engagement in the learning during lessons. However, it can also be noted that it is not the only approach that should be used as it is more time consuming and can quickly become mundane for the pupils. It can still be valuable using hands up or other questioning tools to enhance teaching and learning and allow an assessment of children's learning. A variety of questioning strategies and approaches would be the most beneficial in the classroom.

Implications for Future Practice

Following this enquiry, I have found using random questioning techniques as an effective approach of AifL. . By conducting research around this area and carrying out professional reading, I have been able to inform my own practice, regarding AifL and specifically questioning techniques. To develop my practise further I may repeat this enquiry again sometime in the future; however I would look at this approach with some slight changes to further develop my research. The changes would be: changing the area of curriculum and changing the time of the lesson ie, applying the no hands up approach in the morning rather than the afternoon. It would be interesting to see if these changes would see different results.

I recognise the importance in professional development and will use my skills gained during the enquiry process to inform my future practice.

References

Coleman, A. (2007). 'Leaders as Researchers' in Educational Management Administration Leadership 35 (4) 479-497.

William, D. & Leahy, S. (2015). Embedding Formative Assessment: Practical Techniques for K-12 Classrooms. U.S.A: Learning Sciences International