

Practitioner Enquiry

What happens when I introduce plenary activity in the classroom?

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Rationale

The research group decided on Assessment is for Learning (AfL) as the broad focus for research and chose plenary activity as the aspect of teaching and learning to be explored in more depth. The group agreed that plenary activity was always part of daily lessons but felt the pupils' responses and assessment information gathered during the plenary was often rushed and not utilised effectively. Gipps, Hargreaves and McCallum (2015) highlight that the plenary session facilitates discussion which allows the teacher to quickly gauge the pupils' understanding of the learning intentions and identify areas where further clarification is necessary. The research group wanted to investigate how observing pupils during the plenary session and gathering pupil responses would influence teaching and learning. A 'Twitter' board was chosen for this particular study to engage the pupils.

Aim

The aim of this Practitioner Enquiry was to investigate what impact plenary activity had on teaching and learning within a primary 7 class.

This enquiry aims to assess how using plenary activities to evaluate pupils learning impacts on subsequent planning and teaching.

Methodology

Mathematics was chosen as the curricular area to base the research on. Evidence was gathered across ten lessons during a 3 week period during which the children were learning about fractions, percentages and decimals. All lessons were whole class lessons which involved direct teaching and differentiated group and independent tasks.

At the end of each lesson the pupils were asked to write a 'tweet' on the class 'Twitter' board. The children were asked to use the Learning Intention and Success Criteria for each lesson to as a focus for their self-evaluation. Pupils were asked to comment on whether they felt they had achieved the L.I. and S.C. and what they had enjoyed or found helpful during the lesson. Hattie (2009) argues that teachers must assess their own teaching against their pupils' progress. He suggests that teachers are "agents of change" and that self-evaluation and conversing with pupils about their learning is essential for progression. In light of this, responses were collated at the end of the lesson and future teaching and learning was planned/amended, taking into account the pupil's understanding and preferences for learning. Any pupils who identified areas for clarification received additional support at the start of the next lesson. Data was also gathered through photographs of the pupils' work, observations

during lessons and pupils' responses to questioning during direct teaching to inform the next stages of learning and teaching.

Findings

During each of the ten lessons the pupils were observed working both independently and collaboratively. Questioning was also used to assess the pupils understanding of what they were learning and their ability to explain their verbal and written responses. Other evidence to support the children's 'tweets' was collated in the form of photographs and the children's written work. Particular attention was paid to the pupils' written work to assess whether their self-evaluation of their learning was coherent with the accuracy of their work. It was clear from the responses from children requiring additional support that it was challenging for them to pinpoint what they found difficult and write a comment that reflected the work they had produced. Pupils within the additional support group frequently wrote responses that were vague but positive, yet their work was inaccurate or not completed. Some of the responses from the pupils in this group included:

- * Child A - I could do the fractions.
- * Child B -I met my Learning Intention.
- * Child C - I am getting good at decimals.

Due to the vague nature of the comments from the children requiring additional support and the lack coherence between their comments and their work, elements of the lessons were repeated to identify what they had found difficult.

The pupils who were able to work more independently were able to provide more detailed comments that demonstrated what they had learned. Comments included:

- *Child A - "I can now do decimal fractions easily and quickly. I have met my LI and I can do fractions!!"
- * Child B - "I have learned how to write hundredths as decimal fractions."
- * Child C "I can successfully find a fraction of a number; I need more of a challenge."

These comments assisted future planning as I was able to identify specific areas of the concepts we had been covering and adapt my future lessons to address any misconceptions or to include particular games or parts of the lesson that the pupils had enjoyed.

Conclusion

The results of the enquiry showed that dedicating time to the plenary and incorporating opportunities for the pupils to evaluate their work and pupil voice was very helpful in progressing the pupils learning and engaging them. It also enabled more responsive planning specific areas could be identified that needed to be repeated or taught differently to help the pupils develop a better understanding. However, it was very clear that the pupils who require additional support found it difficult to provide accurate or detailed responses.

Implications for Future Practice

Using a dedicated plenary activity in the form of the 'Twitter' board was effective in highlighting most pupils' level of understanding and what they engaged well with. This really made planning more responsive to the needs and interests of the pupils. However, in future the tweet cards should be more structured for the pupils who find maths challenging as these children found it difficult to pinpoint the areas that challenged them as they were having difficulty understanding the concept as a whole. One possible way to overcome this barrier would be to adapt the 'tweet' card to include a more structured response. The children may benefit from 'traffic lighting' or rating a child friendly success criteria. This would provide some support to help these pupils identify what they are finding challenging and may prevent them writing comments that are not linked to their learning and the work they have produced.

Bibliography

Gipps C., Hargreaves E. and McCallum B. (2016) What makes a Good Primary School Teacher: Routledge p.132 – 133

Hattie J. (2009) Visible Learning for Teachers. Retrieved from <https://visible-learning.org/category/videos/>