

What happens when the reporter role is introduced at the end of a group task?

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3H

Rationale

Group work is an approach adopted in many schools across Scotland. However, research shows that group work is not always successful within the classroom. Cassidy (2010) explains that many teachers find that the majority of pupils do not take part and ‘allow’ others to take the lead and complete tasks, resulting in low level behaviour, low engagement levels and does not guarantee learning for all. Increasingly over the last few years, many schools in Scotland have used cooperative learning, a researched approach to teaching and learning which has received positive research results in USA and Canada (Cassidy 2010), as a tool to ensure the engagement of all learners. According to Johnson and Johnson (1994) the effectiveness of cooperative group work lies in engaging all learners through individual accountability. This requires every member of the group to fulfil a group role and be responsible for an aspect of the learning. Cassidy (2010) states that when children work in cooperative groups, it enhances learning, promotes achievement, engages children effectively and creates an enthusiasm for learning.

However this research does not correlate with my experiences in schools. Often, when pupils are assigned their group roles all they are concerned with is carrying out their role and do not participate in the learning or work together to achieve the group goal. After engaging in professional dialogue with colleagues, it became evident that this was a common experience shared by all. William (2016) explains that this problem arises if teachers give out the reporter role at the beginning of the lesson, as this does not create individual accountability. He states that when group members know they are not required to speak on behalf of the group, their focus, their attention and concentration will dip. If everybody in the group knows that they may be called on to be the reporter for the group, they’re collectively responsible and individually accountable and should work harder. Therefore, I have decided to carry out an investigation to explore whether this theory works in practice so that I can adapt my group work lessons to ensure high quality learning and participation for all learners.

Aims

The aim of this enquiry was to explore what impact introducing the reporter at the end of cooperative groups sessions had on the participation of learners.

Methodology

The enquiry was conducted over a period of four weeks with a composite three/four primary class. The class had several group work sessions prior to the beginning of the enquiry to allow them time to become familiar with working cooperatively with one another. Five cooperative groups were formed with 4 pupils in each group. The groups were of mixed ability and gender. The cooperative group work sessions took place within the context of the class’ Health and Wellbeing topic. The reporter role was introduced at the beginning of lesson one and two, then at the end of the third and fourth lesson in order to gauge a

comparison of the learners' behaviour and participation. The other roles were: time keeper, resources manager, scribe and air traffic controller. The pupils were made aware that as well as carrying out their assigned role, they were all required to participate in the main task. Evidence was collected through observations of all pupils which were recorded in a table (Figure 1), photographs and interviews with each group.

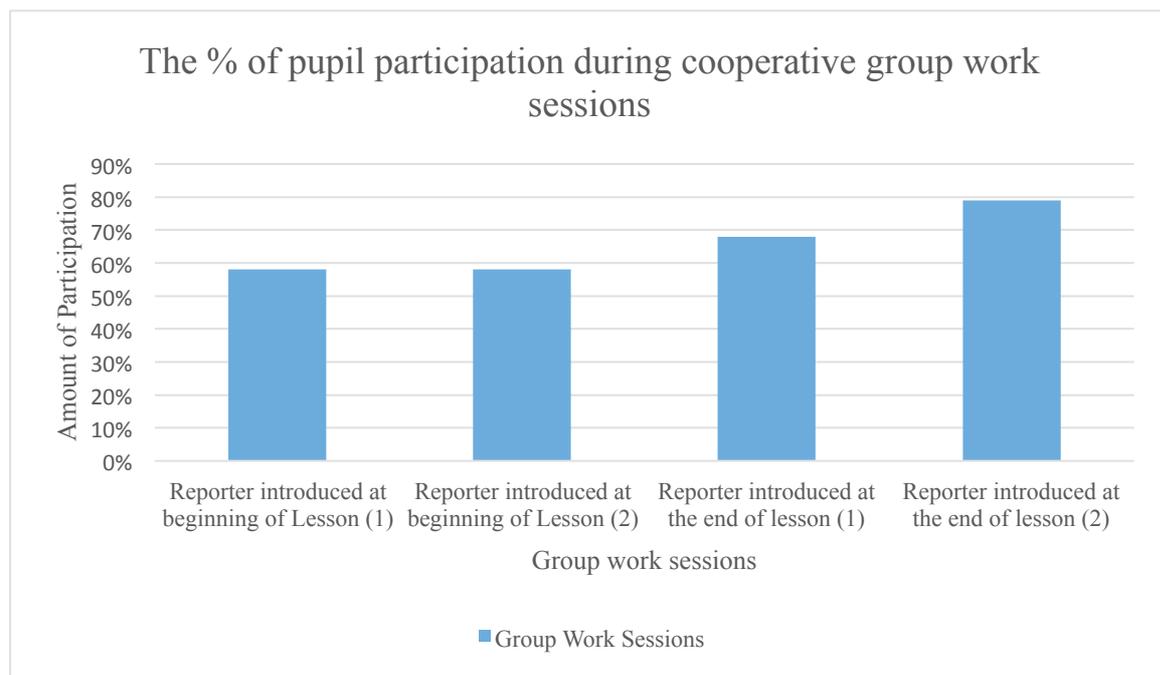
Figure 1 (Sample of table used)

Pupil names	Reporter introduced at the beginning of the lesson (lesson 1)	Reporter introduced at the beginning of the lesson (lesson 2)	Reporter introduced at the end of the lesson (lesson 1)	Reporter introduced at the end of the lesson (lesson 2)
Child 1				
Child 2				

P - Participating

NP – not participating

Findings



Analysis of the results revealed that introducing the reporter role at the end of the lesson, instead of the beginning, had some impact on the participation and engagement of pupils. The results convey that more pupils were motivated to participate when the reporter role was assigned after the completion of the task. However it was only a small percentage. When exploring the numbers, it became apparent that 4 more pupils made valuable contributions after the intervention was introduced. Through observations of the class, it became evident that the intervention had little impact on the participation of those few individuals who regularly disengage or who often do not contribute in group tasks, the pupils who usually work hard and complete tasks to the best of their ability continued to do so.

However through observation, it was evident that introducing the reporter role at the end of the lesson did have other significant benefits: encouraged high quality dialogue between team members, encouraged the development of team working skills, developed social skills, and increased pupils' self-esteem and confidence. During the interviews one pupil voiced "it was better having the reporter at the end because it made the group help each other with every body's task, not just their own because we wanted our group to be the best". Another child stated "because we had worked together as a team, it made me more confident in talking about it to the class". The pupils who did not make valuable contributions to the task were still able to fulfil the role as the reporter, however they simply read the groups notes to the class instead of using their gained knowledge.

Conclusions

Introducing the reporter role at the end of cooperative group sessions has a positive impact onto the participation and engagement of most pupils. It also encourages dialogue with team members, the development of team work and social skills and increases pupil self-esteem and confidence. This evidence concurs with the research conducted by Craigen and Ward (2006) who identified cooperative learning as a means of confidence building. While Cassidy (2010) found that it develops skills in engaging with others and developing the ability to feel safe, confident and willing to share their ideas. However, introducing the reporter role at the end had no significant impact onto those individuals that would normally lack engagement in group tasks.

Implications for Future Practice

Having seen the benefits of introducing the reporter role at the end of group work sessions, such as the development of team working skills, developed social skills, and increased pupils' self-esteem and confidence, I will ensure that I always structure cooperative learning in this way. The results from the enquiry raise the question of what other approaches can be implemented in order to motivate and engage all learners to participate in group work activities. Therefore, I will continue to research this further to ensure I am delivering effective and worthwhile learning experiences for all children.

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