

Question: What happens when you use "More Knowledgeable Others" in pairs?

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Rationale

For the purpose of this enquiry I intend to investigate and measure how introducing “More Knowledgeable Other” (MKO) pairings impacts taught writing using talk as a catalyst.

The Curriculum for Excellence values and highlights the importance of social interactions in relation to learning and teaching. Scottish Executive . (2007). Building the Curriculum 2 states: *“planning the careful development of literacy and numeracy skills supported by a strong and continuing emphasis on oral language and development.”*

Concurrently, Vygotsky; a 20th century theorist promoted the use of “More Knowledgeable Other” (MKO) which suggests peers can help to scaffold one and others learning and understanding through social interaction and collaborative dialogue, at the point of Zone of Proximal development (ZPD), a “highly abled” child may be able to support and scaffold the learning of a child in need of support, in the hope they will become independent. Vygotsky, (1978).

Talk is of great importance when learning to write. Fisher, Myhill, Jones and Larkin (2010), suggest using talk in the classroom may be a beneficial tool that will impact positively on the writing experience. Using talk to develop writing may also generate motivation from children as they are being given the opportunity to explore ideas with their peers, to develop and extend their thoughts.

Aims

The aim of this enquiry is to examine what happens when introducing “More Knowledgeable Other” (MKO) pairings during taught writing lessons. It also provides an opportunity to evaluate the progress of the children in need of support within the classroom setting when working alongside a “highly abled” child. Throughout the intervention children will work in mixed ability pairs to talk, plan and write. The achievement of these aims will demonstrate the extent to which children have engaged with their taught writing lesson when working with a MKO.

Methodology

The methodological design was that of action based research, Wilson (2013). In this study I set out to measure; what impact there is on taught writing lessons when children work in MKO pairings.

Selection of Participants

For this enquiry purposeful sampling was used to gather participants which consisted of three pairs of children of mixed ability and gender. The participants of the study were a Primary 1 class in a school, in Scotland. A class of 25 children, (17 boys: 8 girls). Only three pairings were used to collect data, so it was manageable. Despite using a sample to collect data, the whole class participated in the study intervention. Every child will remain anonymous for the duration of the enquiry when recording/analysing data, by using an appropriate pseudonym.

Pairing		
1	CHILD 1A	CHILD 1B
2	CHILD 2A	CHILD 2B
3	CHILD 3A	CHILD 3B

BERA (2011):

“The Association requires researchers to comply with Articles 3 and 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Article 3 requires that in all actions concerning children, the best interests of the child must be the primary consideration. Article 12 (UNCRC) requires that children who are capable of forming their own views should be granted the right to express their views freely in all matters affecting them, commensurate with their age and maturity. Children should therefore be facilitated to give fully informed consent.”

In order to comply with the guidelines, all tasks were carried out within normal classroom practice and met the needs of every individual in the class. The children were aware of the purpose of the intervention, to which they gave verbal consent.

Data Collection

A thematic approach was selected to analyse the qualitative data, as proposed by Grbich (2007).

Enquiry Method	Measurement
Teacher Observation	Pupil activity, discussion and interactions during taught lesson
Informal Discussion	The children were be able to engage in discussion before/during and after the intervention about: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What they have done/are doing and why? • How they feel about sharing their ideas with a partner? • How they feel about working on their own? • How do they feel about working with a partner?
Pieces of written work (prior to, during and post intervention)	Teacher marking/assessment of finished work based on genre targets, learning intentions and success criteria.
Questionnaire	Attitudes about working during taught writing lessons prior to, during and post intervention.

Questionnaire

Questions	Yes ☺	Sometimes ☹	Never ☹
1) Do you enjoy working on your own?			
2) Do you like working with a partner?			
3) Do you like sharing ideas with your peers?			

Findings

The data collection used provided different findings:

Observation/Discussions

The observation and discussions were the best form of data collection for this intervention, as it provided opportunities to listen and to engage in meaningful discussion with peers. The children used their listening and talking skills to discuss their writing which helped with planning and generation of ideas for the children who require support. Pair 2 were the most consistent in their paired task, through talk child 2a and b were able to extend their thinking and raise questions about what they are doing and why. Pairs 1 and 3 were able to discuss their writing but were less cooperative, the MKO (Child 1a) took control of the discussion and told child 1b what to do rather than supporting them. Pair 3 didn't work well together and this caused their interactions to be negative. Additionally, talk provided an opportunity to gather responses from the children in relation to their views about working with a partner and on their own. I recorded both, individual and paired conversations.

Taught writing work

When marking the children's work there were some noticeable changes. Pair 1 there was not a huge difference in their work prior to, during or post intervention, the significance of their MKO pairing was the talk and planning prior to writing. Pair 2, worked well together, child 2b became more independent at "having a go" throughout the intervention to try on their own or ask their peer for support rather than always asking the teacher. Child 2b normally requires a lot of support due to a lack of confidence. Pair 3 turned this experience into a competition of who could do better, rather than supporting one and other, which although sometimes work was untidy, both children were more eager to meet the learning intentions and success criteria.

Questionnaire

Questionnaire results are highlighted in the grid below. Only the 6 children from the sample pairings answers have been recorded. The results show a change in attitude towards different types of working during taught writing lessons. The information gathered from the questionnaires didn't provide any real insight to the impact of MKO pairings.

	Pre Intervention			During Intervention			Post intervention		
	Y	S	N	Y	S	N	Y	S	N
Do you enjoy working on your own?	4	1	1	3	3	0	3	2	1
Do you like working with a partner?	4	2	0	3	3	0	2	4	0
Do you like sharing your ideas with your peers?	5	0	1	3	1	2	3	3	0

Conclusions

This enquiry has provided a basis for future research which was beneficial in providing an enhanced understanding on the impact of “More Knowledgeable Others” working in pairs during Taught Writing lessons.

This enquiry highlighted both positives and negatives of mixed ability pairings, some children were too reliant on their “More Knowledgeable Other” whereas others were encouraged to be more independent.

Notably the scale and size of this research project is small and as such, there are some limitations and some of the data collection may be subjective, due to the nature of qualitative data.

Although there was some positive interactions and discussion which led to an improvement on one of the pairings, it is important to consider the compatibility of some pairings and how that may affect their work and interaction.

Implications for Future Practice

The enquiry conducted demonstrated some positive to mixed ability pairings, and as such I aim to continue this type of interaction during taught writing lessons.

I will however only use it at particular parts of the lesson; direct teaching where the children have “time to talk” about what they are writing about and why, using the learning intentions and success criteria set by the genre targets; during planning time; and finally after writing to discuss their work and how it meets the learning intentions and success criteria, through effective questioning.

I will also continue to differentiate tasks and model positive interactions and talk during these learning and teaching opportunities.

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