

KS2 girls (Years 3-5) who rarely speak in class and group discussions

ELP Case study at Lady Margaret Primary School

Spiral of inquiry in a school KS2 girls (Years 3-5) who rarely speak in class and group discussions.

School/ context

Lady Margaret Primary School has been developing oracy throughout the curriculum for several years. Teachers are now more skilled at eliciting full sentence responses from many children within their classes and developing talk between pupils. However, there are several classes where the girls participate less than boys during discussions and we wished to develop pupil agency to look at ways to improve this.

Key points: (summary of the project)

- To identify two girls in each year group (years 3-5) who participate little in class/group discussions.
- To observe these children in class and then ask them what they find difficult about participating in these opportunities.
- Discuss with teachers the children's views and try out a limited number of strategies throughout all lessons.
- Discuss with teachers any effects they have noticed (if at all)
- Reflect with the children on whether they have participated more and why/why not.
- Share findings with SLT and school staff and implement successful strategies, considering both teachers' and childrens' views.

Purpose

The school recognised the significance of improving pupil participation for the individual pupils, their self-esteem and self-confidence and for the whole class. More participation would enable learning experiences to be richer and to enable these pupils to feel more confident about sharing their views.

The school sought to understand why participation was difficult for these pupils, by observing them in class and listening to their views. The school then put strategies into place to ensure a more positive climate, which would enable them to participate in partner, table and class talk.

What were your reasons for doing this work?

While the school has implemented several oracy strategies which are having a positive effect on many pupils, the strategies did not seem to be effective for a small group of children within each class. We wished to encourage these children to reflect on why this may be the case and implement strategies that they themselves identified would support them more effectively.

Who were you targeting?

Class teachers were asked to identify two girls in each class in the year groups 3 – 5 who spoke rarely in the classroom. This included reluctance to participate in partner talk and lack of participation in group or class discussions.

What were your success criteria?

- The children would feel more confident with sharing their views.
- The children would participate more frequently in group and class discussions.

Developing a hunch

Observing the pupils in the classroom, it was evident that they found speaking with partners and in front of the class difficult. While some of the pupils did listen to instructions and began their tasks immediately, when given opportunities to talk in partners, they appeared disengaged and reluctant to share their views. Their partners told them their views, but they seemed disinterested and did not respond. None of the girls spoke voluntarily within the lessons observed.

Reflecting on student experience – pupil voice

When speaking with the girls within a small group, several were very vocal and showed confidence in expressing their own opinions. All the children said that they felt nervous to speak in front of the class for differing reasons. Two mentioned that they were unhappy with their partners who either ignored them or spoke over them, while others said that they felt uncomfortable with "tracking" - when all the other children turn to look at them while speaking. One individual pinpointed a moment when she was laughed at in front of the class and this affected her confidence, and another referred to feeling that she may be "judged" when she is speaking, while several felt that they might get into trouble if they did not know the answer.

The group felt they could express their ideas with more confidence in art and creative subjects (possibly because these answers cannot be right or wrong and this would be worth probing in another spiral). Another area to consider would be how to continue to build the positive culture of error within classrooms where all answers are valued and ensuring that all children feel safe enough to express their views.

One member of the group was able to articulate her views very well and told another girl "Why would we laugh at you we are a supportive school – we have rights!"

Capitalising on this positive, we moved on to discuss what the girls felt would help them to participate more in class discussions. They came up with these key ideas:

- using whiteboards more frequently to note ideas down and "show me" to share answers.
- using quizzes/who wants to be a millionaire/multiple choice type questions/more opportunities to work in table groups with supportive partners.
- Not being tracked when speaking (this made them feel more under pressure)

Reviewing opportunities to talk within classrooms

Class teachers were asked to apply these three points to their classrooms, letting the children know that this is what they were doing. Teachers were also asked to speak to the children who expressed concerns with their partners and provide them with an alternative.

Strategies implemented

- using whiteboards more frequently to note ideas down and "show me" to share answers.
- using quizzes/who wants to be a millionaire/multiple choice type questions/more opportunities to work in table groups with supportive partners.
- not being tracked when speaking (this made them feel more under pressure)

New Learning: discussion with teachers.

Teachers reported that all the children had improved their participation.

- In Year 3, the consistent use of whiteboards in maths lessons in particular, has shown a noticeable change with them eagerly holding their boards up wanting to share in 'show me' moments. The children have also responded well to recaps being mostly multiple choice.
- In Year 4, one of the children, when reflecting on her learning said that her biggest achievement this year was answering more questions in class, the other child is now participating in whole class discussions more.
- In Year 5, writing ideas on whiteboards, in preparation for talk has resulted in pupils volunteering answers and ideas more frequently.

New Learning: discussion with pupils

All pupils except for two, reported that they felt more confident expressing their views in class. Some referred to the questions being easier to answer, which may indicate that teachers were thinking more carefully about which questions to ask these particular pupils. Others referred to the social aspects of the classroom culture – one reported that she felt happier to express herself because her friends are now on her table and one reported parental advice that she should imagine no-one is there when she is speaking (this was the child who was concerned about judgement in the first discussion). All the children that reported they participated more often in class discussions valued the opportunity to write their ideas on their whiteboards first.

The children that felt less confident reported that this was because they are currently taught by several teachers and reported that it is more difficult to speak in front of the class. When I asked if there was a particular teacher they did feel comfortable with and could speak in front of, they referred to a HLTA that has previously taught them. It can never be overstated that the relationship between pupil and teacher is key to maximising confidence and learning.

What has been the impact on pupils?

- Increase in confidence for the majority of pupils in the group
- Increasing participation in table and class discussions

What has been the impact on teaching/ leadership?

- So far, the teachers that have implemented these strategies will continue to do so.
- Findings to be discussed with SLT and with staff.
- Ask teachers to identify in September the children that participate less and use the strategies implemented consistently.

Thoughts for future work:

Raising self-esteem and confidence by finding particular strengths of these pupils - would this have an effect on developing confidence and participation?

How have you shared your learning with others?

- Shared findings with teachers that took part in this study.
- Plan in CPD for whole staff focusing on these strategies plus how to develop positive connections with and experiences for this group of children.

Research and references

- The Leuven Scale Observation Sheet
- Article: Rizwan, R. and Williams, A.R. (2015) 'Only the wind hears you...' The experiences of Pakistani girls in a primary school: An Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis. Educational & Child Psychology, 32 (2). ISSN 0267-1611
- <https://www.teachingenglish.org.uk/professional-development/teachers/kno...>
- <https://www.innerdrive.co.uk/blog/motivate-students-to-participate/>
- https://americanenglish.state.gov/files/ae/resource_files/60_3_pg24-29.pdf

For more information contact Rosalyn Bartholomew rbartholomew@ladymargaret.ealing.sch.uk

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