

P7: THE USE OF MULTI MEDIA TO HELP YEAR 3/4 STUDENTS UNDERSTAND THE EVALUATION AND EDITING OF THEIR OWN WORK

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Aim

To investigate how using multi media could improve students' evaluation and editing techniques and give them a greater understanding of why they need to evaluate and edit their work.

This research was carried out over two weeks during the Spring term 2004.

Background

I am a class teacher of a mixed year 3/4 class of 28 children at The Cape Primary School. The Cape is an inner city school in Smethwick with the majority of children from a Muslim background. There is also a high number of EAL children (children with English as an additional language) and we are also seeing a growing number of refugee children. I am very involved in the use of technology within education, and was fascinated to see if using different technology would affect the children's evaluation and editing of their work.

In the term before we had worked on story writing and descriptions, and I found that the children were very poor at evaluating their own or others' work; they relied more on how long the piece of writing was to judge how good it was rather than the content.

The research

This term we were working on story settings in our writing lessons. Although the whole class completed the same work, I tried to focus on a group of pupils who had been particularly poor at evaluation and editing in the previous term. We began our work by looking at a collection of alien planets, and discussing them as a class. The children then went away to work in groups to write as many good descriptive words as they could think of. This writing was done on a large sheet of paper with the children taking it in turns to write with felt pens. We then shared this work, and tried to pick out some of the more exciting and interesting words. In the next lesson we reviewed the pictures of aliens' worlds along with our collections of words and the children had to then begin thinking about which world they were going to choose for their story setting. They then had to start thinking of appropriate adjectives and discussing with a partner which ones they would use and why. The children shared some of their ideas with the whole class and then began work on their writing of story settings.

Some of the less able, many of whom are EAL children, worked in pairs and used a piece of software that enables teachers or pupils to fill in a word grid to assist writing to complete their story settings. A classroom assistant initially collected their adjectives to describe their new worlds and then helped them to set up their grids. They then worked independently on the computer to begin writing their story settings. I observed three pairs working and was interested to see how automatically evaluation and editing was taking place, with comments such as 'you've missed 'the' and 'out' there' and 'no that word is not exciting enough, use this one instead, it makes it feel colder'. The classroom assistant who usually works with these children also noticed how the children were constantly going back and rereading what they had written so far, something which she did not see them do as frequently when working with pen and paper.

As I had expected, all six of the focus group of children finished writing their story settings very quickly and brought it over for marking, and all of the children stumbled over reading their own work. These children I then sent to work on the computer to write it up on a basic word processor package that can 'speak' what is written, using the word reader to keep checking that it made sense. As I had hoped they then became engrossed in constantly listening on headphones to what had been typed and either shaking their head with dissatisfaction, or nodding approvingly and carrying on. As other higher ability children finished their work, I showed the focus group children how to record their story setting using a sound recorder. They became very fussy about getting it just right, and it was interesting to note how they were orally editing their work. For example a student who had written 'there were a enormous glass circle' changed it when they had heard the sound recorder play their words back to, 'there was an enormous glass circle'

In the next lesson we shared the work that had been produced, looking at the grid work on the interactive whiteboard, listening to and reading the word-processed work on the whiteboard, and listening to the work that had been recorded using the sound recorder. The children were much more interested by the work when it was produced in different formats, either reading documents produced from the word-bank grid, reading and listening to word processed documents, reading scanned work or listening to recorded work. There were a lot more contributions for evaluation than usual, and also lots more praise for each others work. The skill that I noticed had dramatically improved when we were sharing completed work was the listening. Hearing another child's words coming through the speakers had the majority of the children hanging on every word, and this then led to a discussion on tone of voice and how work could be made better if you made your voice more interesting, provoked by the robotic voice used on the word processing software.

Outcomes

I discovered a number of things; the focus group of children had picked up on the idea of independently evaluating and editing their work, and had begun to understand that if it did not make sense to them it would not make sense to others. They could also take a lot more pride in their work as to them it looked a lot better and they had more confidence in knowing that it said what they wanted it to say. Before, I had got the impression that they did have some good ideas and thoughts but as soon as they had recorded them on paper they would bring it to me to 'sort it out' for them. Using this particular word processing tool which 'speaks', they were able to have a lot more control over the editing and evaluation process and so they understood the purpose of it a lot better. I was also impressed at the impact that recording children's work had on listening skills, and therefore evaluation. I was very pleased with the outcome of this research and the findings that it revealed.

Other outcomes

I have since used digital photos and the sound recorder to enable the children to produce power points of a visit to 'The Oak House', a Tudor museum. Again the evaluation and editing skills were much improved, with critical comments being given by partners of members of a group.

I feel that the children are now much more aware of the idea of an audience reading and listening to their work, and so are now working much harder to make it say exactly what they want. They are also becoming a lot more interested in editing their work, especially when using a widely used adult word processor, because of the spell check and the grammar highlighter. They may not know how to change it correctly, but at least are becoming more aware of what they are writing and how it is being read. It would appear that the grammar and spell checkers indicated accuracy in the 'mechanics' of writing and that this enabled higher level editing where the focus shifted to composition.

I thoroughly enjoyed my time as a researcher and it has sparked off many more ideas for research. I would try and be a lot more adventurous in my collection of data, perhaps trying to use a video to record evidence and also try and use an extra person to record observations whilst I am teaching. As a teacher you can only observe so much but I am convinced there is a lot of unobserved learning going on as the children use multimedia.