EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF DIALOGIC STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN A RELIGIOUS EDUCATION CLASSROOM: A CASE STUDY

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The value of dialogic education in the classroom has been recognised in many research studies in recent years (Alexander 2012), yet empirical research set in a religious education class remains relatively few and far between. This paper evaluates the utility of classroom dialogues between an expert teacher and pupils during a secondary school religious education lesson. We present a case study based on video-taped lessons and pre and post interviews of the teacher to illustrate the use of dialogue as a pedagogic tool. We examine how the teacher, who has undergone a course on dialogic teaching, attempts to facilitate dialogues to foster teacher-student and student-student interactions. We explore the nature of dialogues to ascertain whether they enhance critical thinking in students and consider the differing extent to which the teacher highlights for students the educational value of dialogue, and the extent to which he attempts to guide students’ own effective use of talk for learning. Also, there is a focus on the difficulties inherent in managing a classroom where the teacher adopts several frameworks/plans which are analysed to show how dialogic processes are scaffolded.

The evidence casts light on: the teacher's behaviours during dialogues, perceived strengths and challenges of using dialogues, and the impact on student learning. It supports the theory that dialogic activity design can enable students to have more epistemic agency as they have opportunities to participate spontaneously in class discussions by fully expressing their ideas without inhibition. It is suggested that to support instant formative feedback and effective interactions among students, several layers of interpretation by the teacher are needed, but once implemented successfully they can transform the learning environment, resulting in critical instruction. In examining the dialogic processes in this case study, we demonstrate the complexity involved in lesson planning that faces teachers as they implement an activity. We suggest that successful implementation of dialogic strategies requires that teachers have a good understanding of how these strategies and lesson plan work together in creating an environment in which dialogues can thrive and reasoning be developed.

The findings of this paper will contribute to the symposium's exploration of the effectiveness of CPD in dialogic education in improving teachers understanding and practice in relation to classroom dialogue.