Investigating the relationship between dialogic interaction and written argumentation in A Level History.

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Signature........................................................................................................
Abstract

There has been considerable research into the teaching and learning of argumentation (e.g. Andrews, 2009; Sadler, 2004), focusing on strategies designed to help students to structure their written arguments. My study, however, focuses on the process of argumentation because I want to help sixth form students, aged 16-19 years old, improve the written argument in their A level History essays.

The methodological approach followed was an adapted form of Design-based research, which incorporated an exploratory study, teacher trials and three case studies as part of the iterative design process. A classroom intervention was devised underpinned by design principles based in persuasive argumentation (Kuhn, 2005) and dialogic talk (Wegerif, 2012), derived from an extensive literature review, and the findings of the exploratory study.

The exploratory study involved interviews with History education academics and examiners as well as classroom observations and semi-structured interviews conducted in collaboration with the teachers and students of four secondary History departments. Observations were taken of the teacher trials of the prototype intervention, whereas the data gathered from the case studies included pre and post intervention essays, audio and video recordings of the developed intervention in action, post intervention student interviews and questionnaires as well.

In Case study 1 and 2, AS and A2 students’ post-intervention causation essays, when measured for argumentation, showed improvement but those whose written arguments improved the most were those students who had engaged in interactions rich in dialogic talk (Wegerif, 2012). The findings from Case study 3, which involved the integration of documentary evidence into AS History essays, were unexpected. Students found the integration of source-based evidence difficult not only during the course of the spoken argumentation but also in their written responses. Further development of the intervention is necessary to help students handle source material effectively in both the spoken and written forms of argument.
Table of Contents

Abstract ........................................................................................................................................... 2

Acknowledgements .......................................................................................................................... 16

Chapter 1 – Introduction .................................................................................................................. 17
  1.1 Background ............................................................................................................................... 17
  1.2 The Investigation ....................................................................................................................... 22
  1.3 Chapters and Contents ............................................................................................................... 25
  1.4 Summary of Chapter 1 ............................................................................................................. 27

Chapter 2 – Literature Review ......................................................................................................... 30
  2.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 30
    2.1.1 Defining argument and argumentation ............................................................................... 31
    2.1.2 Aspects of argumentation not covered in the thesis ......................................................... 33
  2.2 The Links Between Speaking and Writing Argument ............................................................... 35
  2.3 Arguing to Learn and Learning to Argue .................................................................................. 40
  2.4 Dialogue and Interaction in the Classroom .............................................................................. 44
  2.5 The Nature of History .............................................................................................................. 49
  2.6 History Concepts and Argumentation ...................................................................................... 53
    2.6.1 Links between arguing and thinking in History at A level .............................................. 56
    2.6.2 Links between speaking and writing History argument at A level ................................ 58
  2.7 History Argumentation and Dialogic Interaction ...................................................................... 61
  2.8 Towards a Theoretical Framework – Design Framework 1 ...................................................... 64
  2.9 Summary of Chapter 2 ............................................................................................................. 71

Chapter 3 – Methodology ................................................................................................................ 72
  3.1 Introduction ............................................................................................................................... 72
  3.2 Pragmatism – A Philosophical Imperative ............................................................................... 74
  3.3 Methodological Choice ............................................................................................................. 76
  3.4 What is Design-Based Research (DBR)? .................................................................................. 76
    3.4.1 Situated classroom context ............................................................................................... 78
    3.4.2 The development of theory .............................................................................................. 79
3.4.3 Iterative development of an ‘intervention’ ........................................... 79
3.4.4 DBR is a collaborative process.............................................................. 80
3.4.5 Dissemination of the research findings for others ......................... 80
3.4.6 Advantages and disadvantages of DBR .............................................. 81
3.4.7 Adapting the research process into a three-year PhD model........... 82

3.5 Methods – Exploratory Study ............................................................... 85
3.5.1 Literature review................................................................................. 85
3.5.2 Interviews............................................................................................ 87
    3.5.2.1 Advantages and disadvantages of the method. .............................. 87
    3.5.2.2 How the method was used......................................................... 87
3.5.3 Observations....................................................................................... 89
    3.5.3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of the method. .............................. 89
    3.5.3.2 How the method was used......................................................... 89

3.6 Data Collection Effort – Exploratory Study ............................................. 90
3.7 Data Analysis ......................................................................................... 91
    3.7.1 Exploratory fieldwork. .................................................................... 91
3.8 Summary of Chapter 3 .......................................................................... 93

Chapter 4 – Iteration 1: The Exploratory Study ........................................... 94

4.1 Introduction ............................................................................................. 94
4.2 The exploratory study........................................................ ..................... 95
    4.2.1 Stage 1 – Examiners and History education academics .................. 95
    4.2.2 Stage 2 – A level History teachers and students ............................ 96
4.3 Stage 1 – Consultation. ........................................................................ 97
    4.3.1 Examiners. ...................................................................................... 98
    4.3.2 History education academics......................................................... 99
    4.3.3 Conclusions from Stage 1. ............................................................. 101
4.4 Stage 2 – Fieldwork In Schools............................................................. 101
    4.4.1 The schools.................................................................................... 102
    4.4.2 Ethics. ............................................................................................ 104
    4.4.3 The methods I used and the ethical implications ......................... 105
Chapter 4 – Data Collection

4.4.3.1 Observations ................................................................. 107
4.4.3.2 Semi-structured interviews ............................................. 109

4.5 Teacher and Student Interviews .............................................. 110
4.5.1 Teacher interviews ............................................................ 110
4.5.2 Student interviews ............................................................ 111

4.6 Analysis ................................................................................. 113
4.6.1 Data analysis process – observations ................................. 113
4.6.2 Data analysis process – thematic analysis .............................. 113
4.6.3 Reflexive analysis ............................................................. 114

4.7 Findings ................................................................................. 116
4.7.1 Observations ...................................................................... 116
4.7.2 Semi-structured interviews .................................................. 119

4.8 Discussion .............................................................................. 119
4.8.1 Evidence of links between oral and written argumentation .... 119
4.8.2 Evidence of persuasive argumentation .................................. 121
4.8.3 Evidence of dialogic interaction ............................................. 121
4.8.4 Evidence of reflection .......................................................... 122
4.8.5 Teacher and student perceptions of History argument .......... 123
4.8.6 Designing the intervention .................................................. 124

4.9 Considerations ....................................................................... 125
4.10 Summary of Chapter 4 .......................................................... 126

Chapter 5 – Designing the Intervention ......................................... 128

5.1 Introduction ............................................................................ 128
5.2 Return to the Literature .......................................................... 129
5.2.1 Interventions promoting History argument at A level ........... 129
5.2.2 Interventions that promote ‘dialogic interaction’ ................... 131
5.2.3 Incorporating other forms of technology .............................. 133

5.3 Theoretical Underpinnings – Design Framework 2 ................. 136
5.4 The Vehicle for the Interaction ............................................... 140
5.5 Designing the Prototype Intervention ...................................... 141
### Chapter 7 – Iteration 3: Case Study Research

#### 7.2 Case Study Research

- 7.2.1 Types of case study research
- 7.2.2 Advantages and disadvantages of case study research
- 7.2.3 Case study research and this study

#### 7.3 Methods of Data Gathering

- 7.3.1 Semi-structured interviews
- 7.3.2 Classroom observations
- 7.3.3 Questionnaires
  - 7.3.3.1 Advantages and disadvantages of the method
  - 7.3.3.2 How the method was used
- 7.3.4 Pre- and post-intervention essays
  - 7.3.4.1 Advantages and disadvantages of the method

#### 7.4 Case Studies – Data Analysis

- 7.4.1 Measuring written history argument
- 7.4.2 How to determine dialogic interaction?
- 7.4.3 Whose voice?

#### 7.5 Summary of Case Studies in the Research Process

#### 7.6 Summary of Chapter 7

---

### Chapter 8 – Iteration 3: Case Study 1

#### 8.1 Introduction

#### 8.2 Background

#### 8.3 The Case Study

- 8.3.1 The school
- 8.3.2 Participants
- 8.3.3 Procedure
- 8.3.4 Data collection

#### 8.4 Forms of Data Analysis

- 8.4.1 Written argument
- 8.4.2 Dialogic interaction
- 8.4.3 Student questionnaires

---

7
9.5.2 Written argumentation ................................................................. 232
9.5.3 Post-intervention and post-essay student interviews ............... 235

9.6 Discussion ......................................................................................... 237
9.6.1 Was dialogic interaction instantiated? ........................................... 237
9.6.2 Does argument as persuasion stop the ‘winning and losing’ discourse? ........................................................................... 238
9.6.3 Does engaging in blogging offer the opportunity to reflect dialogically? ........................................................................... 242
9.6.4 Can the intervention be used to improve A2 History argument? .. 245
9.6.5 How does difference of opinion impact on the argumentative process? ........................................................................... 248

9.7 Summary of Case Study Findings .................................................. 249

9.8 Towards Design Framework 5 ......................................................... 250

9.9 Summary of Chapter 9 ..................................................................... 251

Chapter 10 – Iteration 4: Case Study 3 .................................................. 252

10.1 Introduction .................................................................................... 252
10.2 Background .................................................................................... 252

10.3 The Case Study ................................................................................ 256
10.3.1 School ....................................................................................... 256
10.3.2 Participants ................................................................................ 256
10.3.3 Procedure .................................................................................. 256
10.3.4 Data collection .......................................................................... 259

10.4 Data Analysis .................................................................................. 259
10.4.1 Dialogic interaction. ................................................................. 259
10.4.2 Written argumentation ................................................................ 260
10.4.3 Post-intervention and post-essay student interviews ............... 260

10.5 Findings ......................................................................................... 261
10.5.1 Dialogic interaction. ................................................................. 261
10.5.2 Written argumentation ............................................................... 262
10.5.3 Written argumentation and dialogic interaction? .................... 263
Table of Figures and Tables

Chapter 1 – Introduction................................................................. 17
  Table 1.1.  Assessment objectives (AOs)........................................... 18
  Figure 1.1.  The research process.................................................... 29

Chapter 2 – Literature Review.......................................................... 30
  Table 2.1.  Key texts on argumentation ........................................... 34
  Table 2.2.  Types of dialogue .......................................................... 46
  Table 2.3.  The range of literature associated with History and argumentation.... 50
  Table 2.4.  Design Framework 1....................................................... 69

Chapter 3 – Methodology ................................................................ 72
  Figure 3.1.  Research activities within three-year PhD study ..................... 84
  Table 3.1.  Exploratory study - methods used and data collection effort .......... 90

Chapter 4 – Iteration 1: The Exploratory Study .................................. 94
  Table 4.1  Design Framework 1.......................................................... 95
  Table 4.2.  Data gathering distribution .............................................. 107
  Table 4.3.  Interview distribution........................................................ 111

Chapter 5 – Designing the Intervention ............................................ 128
  Table 5.1.  Developing theory from fieldwork findings ............................... 137
  Table 5.2.  The classroom intervention................................................ 144
  Figure 5.1.  The 7 stages of the ‘prototype’ classroom intervention ................. 155

Chapter 6 – Iteration 2: Expert Practitioner Trials ............................... 157
  Table 6.1.  Developments to Design Framework 2 .................................. 167

Chapter 7 – Case Study Methodology ............................................... 170
  Table 7.1.  Data collection effort during case studies................................ 184

Chapter 8 – Iteration 3: Case Study 1 ............................................... 186
  Table 8.1.  Developments to Design Framework 2 .................................. 188
  Table 8.2.  Types of argumentation ................................................... 195
  Table 8.3.  Pre- and post-intervention essay marks..................................... 197
  Table 8.4.  Developing Design Framework 4 from Case study1 findings .......... 209
  Figure 8.1.  Showing the diagrammatic form of the revised intervention ............ 216

Chapter 9 – Iteration 4: Case Study 2 ............................................... 218
  Table 9.1.  Design framework and adaptations to the intervention .................. 220
  Table 9.2.  Types of argumentation ................................................... 230
Table 9.3. Links between difference and impact on argumentation .......................... 231
Table 9.4. School HM: Pre- and post-intervention essay marks .............................. 233
Table 9.5. Links between length, interaction and improvement in argument .......... 235

Chapter 10 – Iteration 4: Case Study 3 ................................................................. 252
Table 10.1 From DF 3 to DF 4 and the changes to the intervention ....................... 253
Table 10.2. Form of argument table ...................................................................... 261
Table 10.3 ‘Difference’ and impact on argumentation ........................................... 262
Table 10.4. Essay grades by AS mark scheme and by adapted TAP ....................... 263
Table 10.5. Links between length, interaction and improvement in argument ........ 264

Chapter 11 – Discussion ....................................................................................... 276
Table 11.1. Findings from Iteration 4 used to develop Design Framework 5 ......... 285
Table 11.2. School GV: Pre- and post-intervention essay marks – Case Study 1 ...... 293
Table 11.3. School HM: Pre- and post-intervention essay marks – Case Study 2 ...... 294
Table 11.4. School ES: Pre- and post-intervention essay marks – Case Study 3 ...... 295
Table 11.5. Links between length, interaction and improvement in argument – CS2 298
Table 11.6. Links between length, interaction and improvement in argument – CS3 299

Chapter 12 – Conclusion ...................................................................................... 308
Figure 12.1. The developed intervention showing the next stages ....................... 314
Table 12.1 Design Framework 5 ............................................................................. 323
# Table of Appendices

<p>| Appendix 1 – Certificate of Ethical Research | 327 |
| Appendix 2 – Example of Toulmin’s Model of Argument | 333 |
| Appendix 3 – Interview Questions for teachers | 334 |
| Appendix 4 – Interview Questions for 6th formers | 336 |
| Appendix 5 – Criteria for marking GCE History | 338 |
| Appendix 6 – Email exchange with Exam Board Administrator | 341 |
| Appendix 7 – Email Exchange asking PGCE tutors for possible contacts | 344 |
| Appendix 8 – Example of email sent to ten schools | 346 |
| Appendix 9 – Generic Parental Consent Letter | 347 |
| Appendix 10 – Individual Consent Form | 348 |
| Appendix 11 – Teacher Responses Raw Data | 350 |
| Appendix 12 – Year 12 Student Response Raw Data | 354 |
| Appendix 13 – Example of categories and supporting data | 356 |
| Appendix 14 – Findings of Semi-structured Interviews | 358 |
| Appendix 15 – Felton and Herko’s workshop | 377 |
| Appendix 16 – Initial Power Point Presentation to support Intervention | 378 |
| Appendix 17 – Power Point Presentation – Law Lesson | 382 |
| Appendix 18 – Power Point Presentation – History Lesson | 385 |
| Appendix 19 – A2 Question and Mark scheme | 388 |
| Appendix 20 – Levels of TAP from Erduran, Simon and Osborne | 393 |
| Appendix 21 – Developing Adapted TAP | 394 |
| Appendix 22 – Assessing argument by considering the form of counter-argumentation | 397 |
| Appendix 23 – Indicators of dialogic interaction | 400 |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Appendix 24</th>
<th>Power Point Presentation – Case Study 1</th>
<th>401</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 25</td>
<td>AS Questions and Mark Scheme for Louis XIV</td>
<td>405</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 26</td>
<td>Example of essay reduced argumentational clusters</td>
<td>408</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 27</td>
<td>Wegerif and Mercer (1997) Types of talk</td>
<td>409</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 28</td>
<td>Questions for the Questionnaire</td>
<td>410</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 29</td>
<td>Student questionnaire answers</td>
<td>412</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 30</td>
<td>Example of changes in written argument – Adapted Tap</td>
<td>421</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 31</td>
<td>Student Post Intervention Interview Questions</td>
<td>424</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 32</td>
<td>Post-intervention student interviews</td>
<td>425</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 33</td>
<td>Extract from interaction – Group 4</td>
<td>429</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 34</td>
<td>Extract from interaction – Group 2</td>
<td>431</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 35</td>
<td>Essays and Plans of Group 2</td>
<td>433</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 36</td>
<td>Power Point Presentation School HM Year 13</td>
<td>445</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 37</td>
<td>A2 Mark Scheme for Stalin essay</td>
<td>449</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 38</td>
<td>First blog plan</td>
<td>455</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 39</td>
<td>Blog plan + comments</td>
<td>456</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 40</td>
<td>Part of the Pre-Intervention Scheme of work - School ES Year 12</td>
<td>458</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 41</td>
<td>Example of Lesson Plan ES Year 12 Intervention</td>
<td>459</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 42</td>
<td>Power Point Presentation School ES Year 12</td>
<td>460</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Appendix 43</td>
<td>AS Mark Scheme - Henry VIII and Cardinal Wolsey</td>
<td>465</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>