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Professional and Pedagogic Studies: Researching
the Learning: what, how and why am I teaching?

Research Question:

***What are the perceptions of Year 4 children and their parents on the use of
Class Charts as a rewards system?***

Aim, focus and purpose of the research

The aim of this essay is to find out the perceptions and opinions of Year 4 children and their parents on the use of Class Charts as a rewards system. I would like to find out if the use of Class Charts has an impact on learner mood and motivation, whether this is as a result of themselves or another learner receiving the points (positive or negative) in the classroom.

Class Charts is a digital platform designed to track students' behaviour and academic progress, while also providing a framework for implementing rewards and incentives (Class Charts, 2024). This essay delves specifically into the use of Class Charts in a primary school classroom, its impact on behaviour and motivation, supported by relevant literature, and evaluates both its positive and negative aspects. The system aims to aid class teachers in managing the classroom environment through behaviour management strategies (Class Charts, 2024).

The reason for this specific area of focus in my research is as a result of classroom and behaviour management being an ongoing target for myself throughout both Professional Teaching Experience One and Professional Teaching Experience Two. I had not come across Class Charts before my current placement, therefore, I was interested in finding out how and if the parents and children thought the reward system had a positive or negative impact on the learners motivation and behaviour.

In line with BERA (2018), I will not be naming the school, staff, learners or parents to protect their identity and maintain complete anonymity. However, I will provide some context for the setting in which the research took place, still adhering to these guidelines.

The primary school setting has almost 700 children on roll across 23 classes and is located in a town considered to be an area of high deprivation and relatively high crime rates, including instances of anti-social behaviour and criminal damage. The research specifically took place in one of the three Year 4 classrooms consisting of 32 pupils, 6 learners of which are considered to have addition learning needs or behavioural needs.

**“What are the perceptions of Year 4 children and their parents on the use of
Class Charts as a rewards system?”**

Overview of relevant Literature

According to Chen (2023), implementing reward systems in classroom environments can offer various benefits, providing a positive and effective learning experiences for children. These systems, which can involve tangible rewards such as certificates, school supplies and stickers, or intangible ones including verbal praise, positive feedback and providing additional responsibilities, play a pivotal role in boosting learner behaviour and motivation (Morgan, 2008).

Studies by Cameron and Pierce (1994) indicates that rewards can have a positive impact on intrinsic motivation with children when used carefully and correctly. They suggest when learners begin to understand that their efforts will be acknowledged by an adult, they are more likely to actively participate and strive for high quality outcomes for themselves. Therefore, this supports the idea that such rewards systems increase motivation in learners, which is essential for maintaining high levels of engagement with children by maintaining their interest in various academic experiences.

However, Deci, Koestner and Ryan (1999) argue that a possible limitation of such reward systems has the potential to compromise intrinsic motivation in learners. They found that rewards can sometimes have a reverse effect on learners' intrinsic motivation, specifically when rewards are viewed as more important than the experience itself, thus overshadowing or undermining the value of the learning. For example, primary school learners who are constantly rewarded for completing work to high standards may become dependent on reward incentives, rather than developing a genuine interest and enjoyment in learning they are participating in. This idea is supported through research carried out by Warneken and Tomasello (2008), as they further found that using rewards excessively can negatively impact children's intrinsic motivation and interest in the learning experiences provided for them.

In addition, Lemos and Veríssimo (2014) further supports Warneken and Tomasello's (2008) findings, as they also explain that when rewards are given out to learners too often, this can cause the loss of value in meaningful experiences which leads to

children becoming less motivated by them. Consequently, this notion of reward habituation requires teaching professionals to continually improve and differentiate the types of rewards they use to successfully maintain their impact, which could possibly be unsustainable in the long term.

On the other hand, contrasting research has indicated that rewards can also positively impact classroom behaviour. For example, Allday *et al.* (2013) states that well-utilised reward systems can be influential in reducing disruptive and distracting behaviour. They explain that by ensuring teachers establish clear expectations and consistently reward positive actions, children are more likely to portray desirable behaviours, thus resulting in a calmer and more focused classroom to learn in. Therefore, this supports the idea that implementation of diverse reward systems in classroom environments can have positive effect on learner behaviour.

To challenge this view, reward systems may result in short-term compliance, rather than having a long-term impact on a child's behavioural outcomes. Kohn (1999) disagrees with Allday *et al.*'s (2013) view, by stating that younger learners may focus more on earning rewards rather than understanding and enjoying the deep-rooted value of positive behaviour and effort. This short-term attitude towards achieving the rewards as the priority means children may not practice desired behaviours through genuine desire to do so, disregarding the importance of this. Therefore, this would make it unlikely that these learners will maintain the positive behaviours demonstrated once the rewards are removed or received.

To further argue, Hagger and Hamilton (2019) states that rewards can improve learners' self-esteem and confidence, indicating that reward systems can also have a positive impact on social and emotional development within learners. Hattie and Timperley (2007) agree with Hagger and Hamilton (2019) by explaining adults who acknowledge children's efforts, helps builds their confidence and provides them with the courage to face new challenges in further academic activities and learning experiences. This positive reinforcement supports learners to develop a strong sense of self-assurance and belief in their own abilities, which are vital to nurture emotional well-being and development.

To summarise this section, the literature review seems to portray that while reward systems can successfully enhance motivation and behaviour in primary school

classrooms, they can also present limitations such as undermining intrinsic motivation, promoting short-term compliance and leading to reward habituation. Teaching professionals and educators must consider these limitations to ensure there is balance with reward styles and systems with strategies that foster intrinsic motivation and long-term development in learners.

As a result of the findings, as the researcher I aimed to carry out my own enquiry with various possible outcomes in mind. I developed my understanding that there could be a range of outcomes in my own study, ranging from being able to recognise and identify increased learner motivation as a result of Class Charts use, or even noticing that this may have no effect on learner behaviour and motivation at all. Thus, this prior research allowed me to gain a deeper understanding of the benefits and limitations of using reward systems in the classroom, however also reminding me that every child and classroom environment is different and that I should carry out my case study with an open mind, without bias or fixed expectations.

Explanation of Case Study

Case study research can be defined as a detailed investigation of a specific situation or event in an authentic setting or environment. Simmons (2009) supports this by stating the main objective of case study research is to gain a thorough understanding of a specific subject, like a thesis, policy, or to look at how a system works. Thomas (2017) further agrees by adding case studies involve the analysis of individuals, periods, decisions, events, projects, policies, institutions, or other systems, using one or more methods.

Using a case study approach in research serves several purposes, making it highly valuable in various situations and contexts. One purpose of using a case study approach for enquiry is to provide a detailed and coherent understanding of a specific circumstance or experience. According to Yin (2014), case studies encourage researchers to explore the complexities and subtleties of real-life scenarios that other methods may fail to consider.

A benefit of using a case study approach for research is that they offer a detailed exploration of a variety of scenarios in their real-life context, which allows the researcher to obtain a thorough understanding of the situation under enquiry (Yin,

2014). Furthermore, another strength of using a case study approach is due to the flexibility it gives you to carry out the research. For example, it allows for the use of a variety of data collection methods, such as questionnaires, interviews, observations and document analysis, which provides the opportunity for the researcher to have a more holistic view of the enquiry findings (Baxter and Jack, 2008). This approach is useful when it's hard to separate the event from its context, helping the researcher understand it more deeply.

However, it can be argued that there are some limitations to using a case study approach for research. Flyvbjerg (2006) indicates one of the main problems with using case study research is that findings gathered from a small sample of population or single investigation may not be relevant to other settings or groups of people.

For example, information or data gathered from case studies may only be relevant to specific contexts and settings where the research was initially carried out, thus limiting their reliability in supporting wider practices or environments. Furthermore, a case study carried out in one school setting may not accurately reflect the ideas of other learners, educational professionals or outcomes in other schools (Yin, 2014).

A further limitation is to consider the researchers' personal opinions and interpretations regarding the focus of a case study which would impact the validity of their findings (Simons, 2009 and Stake, 2006). For example, this unconscious bias is often derived from the researchers' own personal beliefs or expectations, which as a result, may influence how data is interpreted and examined (Gerring, 2007). To add to this, researchers may have personal preferences for a certain teaching method or reward system to use in the classroom, which may unintentionally cause bias in research and the results.

The participants in this research project consists of 6 year 4 children from the class that I am currently teaching in. These children will be selected at random using a random sampling method. Learners from whom I do not receive consent and assent from, will not be included in the sample to avoid any ethical errors.

Research Methods

For the purposes of this enquiry, I decided to carry out three different types of research methods to support myself in addressing the proposed research question. Before

carrying out the research methods, I had to ensure that I had obtained consent from the learners' parents by sending out a consent letter (see Appendix A), along with an information sheet outlining the research project (see Appendix B), and also assent from the randomly selected participants (this was verbally obtained from learners) to ensure ethical guidelines were followed carefully.

Obtaining assent from children and consent from parents for a research enquiry ensures that children, considered to be vulnerable participants, understand and agree to their involvement, which ultimately respects their autonomy and independent choice (Cotrim *et al.* 2021). Parental consent is just as important, ensuring that care givers are well-informed about the research and can approve their child's participation. These processes go hand in hand and protects the learners' well-being, ensures transparency and clarity, and allows the researcher to adhere to ethical standards outlined by BERA (2018), fostering trust and integrity throughout the process of conducting the research.

The first method I used was a semi-structured group interview, consisting of 6 participants from the selected year 4 class (see Appendix C). These participants were chosen through random sampling to participate by retrieving their names from a jar (the jar only contained the names of learners who had parental consent confirmed. If selected, assent was then obtained by asking the learner if they would be comfortable to and would like to take part in the study). This interview was scheduled to take place during the end of a lesson pre-agreed by myself and the class teacher where Class Charts was used throughout. The participants were asked 5 open, loosely structured questions, where they were able to respond freely with their own thoughts and opinions. These questions and responses were noted

According to Adams (2015), a strength of using a semi-structured group interview as a research method is that it offers flexibility for both participants and the researcher, allowing adaptation of questions in response to participants' answers, and as a result, enhances the depth and strength of the information gathered. In addition, Kitzinger (1994) adds that conducting this in a group setting encourages discussion and natural conversation amongst learners, underpinning the exploration of various viewpoints and opinions. Therefore, this supports the potential to uncover deeper insights from learner perspectives, which is sometimes not revealed in single participant interviews.

In contrast, research by Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) indicates that group dynamics in semi-structured interviews can often present as a limitation to the method of research. They suggest that individual participants can be more likely to dominate discussions, therefore limiting the responses from quieter participants and affecting the variety of perspectives and opinions shared throughout. As a result of this, the validity of the data collected may be affected, as it may not fully represent the potential range of viewpoints within the group. Also, Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2018) further explain that children may feel nervous and may not be clear in their responses. To mitigate this, I ensured to build a positive and strong rapport with the learners before conducting research to ensure they felt safe and comfortable during the data collections periods.

Furthermore, interviews or discussions carried out in a group setting can create a feeling of social pressures that may influence participants to agree with other participants' thoughts and opinions, leading to obscured and unreliable data collection (Bryant and Charmaz, 2007). Therefore, it can be argued that semi-structured interviews may present problems for validity of information or data gathered.

The second research method I used was a live non-participation observation, where I made notes whilst observing the same 6 participants chosen for the semi-structured interview (see Appendix E). Macfarlan (2022) defines a non-participation observation as when the researcher watches selected participants with their knowledge, however, does not actively engage at any point during the observation.

Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, (2018) supports the use of non-participant observation in educational settings as they explain the research method provides the opportunity for unbiased data collection due to researchers remaining neutral and stepping back, minimising influence over participants. Furthermore, Denscombe (2017) supports this but adds that it also allows for participants to be observed engaging in natural, real-life classroom interactions and contexts, thus representing genuine, authentic scenarios.

Additionally, it is further acknowledged by Simons (2009) that non-participant observation allows for a more in-depth understanding of the environment in which the research is being undertaken, helping the researcher depict and interpret behaviours of participants clearly. The benefits outlined and supported by literature above

indicates that non-participant observation is a valuable tool for achieving insightful, reliable data in educational research when executed correctly by the researcher.

Despite the strengths linked to non-participant observations, it can be argued that there are also limitations to using this research method.

Firstly, non-participant observation can sometimes result in insufficient understanding of children's reactions to scenarios such as the use of reward systems because the researcher is not directly engaging with the participants (Bryman, 2016). This limited interaction with participants means that the researcher may only observe and interpret behaviours shown externally. For example, a researcher may notice behaviours such as a child's excitement and happiness when accessing a reward, or disappointment when not chosen all without gaining a deeper understanding regarding the internal thoughts and feelings behind these reactions (Cohen, Manion, & Morrison, 2018).

In addition, McCambridge, Witton and Elbourne (2014) identifies the Hawthorne effect as another limitation of using non-participant observations. They state that this poses increased challenge in observing young learners, as their awareness of being watched can result in a change in their natural behaviour, therefore affecting the authenticity and validity of the data collected.

Children might consciously behave more positively (or in some cases more negatively) when they know they are being observed by an adult, which can unfortunately negatively impact and skew the research findings (Peresa, 2024). This change in behaviour means the information gathered by the researcher does not truly represent the natural responses and effectiveness of educational interventions such as reward systems. Therefore, researchers may draw inaccurate conclusions and ideas about participants genuine responses and behaviours.

Finally, the third research method I used was a questionnaire using open ended questions to the parents of the children in the year 4 class to gather their thoughts and opinions on the use of Class Charts regarding their child's motivation. Originally, I had planned to create a digital questionnaire, however due to a variety of reasons I changed this to a paper questionnaire (see Appendix D).

To summarise this section, using a variety of different research methods offered a well-rounded view of the effects of Class Charts as a reward system on the thoughts,

opinions and motivation of Year 4 children. Although literature outlined some limitations to these methods, such as potential biases and the Hawthorne effect, these methods provided valuable insights for my study. Finally, ensuring adherence to ethical standards outlined by BERA (2018) through obtaining consent from parents and assent from children, also maintained the research's integrity and reliability.

Data Presentation and Analysis Methods

To report the data collected for this research enquiry, I will use a form of qualitative analysis. Creswell (2014) explains that qualitative analysis contextualises non-numeric data such as different forms of text (in this case observation notes, questionnaire feedback and group interview responses) to identify various patterns, and meanings. Flick (2018) outlines the value of this data analysis method, as they state it supports deep understanding into participants' perspectives, experiences, and views, providing detailed descriptions which is sometimes difficult to gain with quantitative data.

The type of qualitative analysis method I will use is thematic analysis. According to Braun and Clarke (2021), This method is most useful for its ability to explore participants' experiences and ideas in depth. They further acknowledge that thematic analysis offers adaptability across a variety of data collected, such as group interviews, and observational data, thus it seems logical to use this data analysis method to present the findings of this research.

However, it is argued by Silverman (2016) that qualitative data analysis methods are of an interpretive nature, therefore has the potential to be subjective and deliver potential bias from the researcher, which as a result can determine how data is interpreted and how conclusions are drawn. Tracy (2010) supports this, by explaining maintaining thoroughness and clarity in qualitative research practices can be difficult to continuously attain.

To ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the data carried out, I ensured I used multiple data sources. For example, observation notes, feedback from questionnaires and feedback from group interview was used. The strengths of data triangulation are outlined by Patton (2002), who explains this method ensures that findings have the

opportunity to be consistent and credible across different research methods, therefore reducing the risk of bias or lack of evidence by only using one source for research.

To conclude this section, thematic analysis is used in this study to examine learners' responses and perspectives using a variety of data such as observation notes, questionnaires, and group interviews. While qualitative methods can introduce interpretive subjectivity, implementing data triangulation, as recommended by Patton (2002), strengthens credibility by implementing consistency across a range of methods. Therefore, this approach enhances the credibility of the research findings, supporting a detailed understanding and evaluation of participants' experiences.

Ethical Considerations

Before conducting the research for this assignment, an ethics form was filled out by the researcher to ensure that ethical guidelines and considerations would be followed in line with the university's expectations, but also with BERA (2018). In addition to this, the researcher also read and made notes regarding BERA's ethical guidelines to ensure full understanding of ethical practices when carrying out research. Furthermore, according to American Psychological Association (2017), ethics forms ensure the researcher works to protect the rights and well-being of any participants involved in the study. This includes protecting a person's confidentiality and anonymity (BERA, 2018).

Additionally, some of the participants in this study were under the age of 18 and therefore assent and consent from their care givers was required before conducting research methods. A consent letter was sent home to guardians, along with an information sheet outlining the intentions and processes of the intended research. If consent was obtained from their parents, learners were then approached to take part in the research.

Six names were randomly pulled out of a jar to ensure fairness, then these learners were briefed on the project, first being given the details of the case study and how they would take part. To avoid powerplay, it was made clear at this point that they did not have to take part if they didn't want to, without any negative consequences. It was also explained that they can also choose to withdraw at any point during the research enquiry. To avoid learners feeling worried about telling myself they wanted to withdraw,

we agreed an area of the classroom they could move themselves to at any point to indicate their wish to withdraw. Parents were also sent a questionnaire asking for their views and opinions on the use of Class Charts, however only 6 parents responded.

To maintain anonymity of the learners taking part in the research, I referred to them all anonymously on data e.g. 'Child A, Child B, Child C' etc. This ensured they could not be identified by anyone other than myself as the researcher, continuing to adhere to BERA (2018).

Analysis of Results/Discussion

Upon analysing the results of the research carried out in the year 4 class, it is clear that there is positive favour towards the use of Class Charts in encouraging motivation, however it has also indicated that the use of Class Charts is not enough to trigger motivation and engagement in academic experiences for a small representation of learners.

The responses gathered during the semi-structured group interview (see Appendix C) regarding the Class Charts system has provided useful insight of pupil motivations, revealing both positive impacts on learner motivation and mood, but also has indicated a lack of impact on some learners.

Some participants, such as Child A and Child B, express enthusiasm for Class Charts, finding it enjoyable and motivating to earn positives through their efforts in lessons, suggesting a strong impact on motivation and a preference for using Class Charts. This aligns with the principles of extrinsic motivation, where external rewards (such as point systems) provide incentive for positive behaviours in the classroom (Nickerson, 2023). Furthermore, participants reflecting on experiences with earning points or rewards, such as Child A and Child B's examples of receiving house points for consistent and positive efforts, suggests Class Charts effectively reinforces desired behaviours through tangible rewards (outlined by Morgan, 2008), whilst reinforcing the theory of operant conditioning (McLeod, 2024).

However, Child F's comment about turning negative points into a game suggests a potential downside where the system may inadvertently encourage unintended behaviours or undermine its positive reinforcement goals. This response from a

participant underpins the importance of aligning reward systems with motivational strategies to encourage sustained positive behaviours from pupils in the classroom.

To summarise the findings from this data, while Class Charts effectively motivates some pupils through external rewards and feedback, careful attention to fairness, consistency and sustaining positive behaviours is crucial to maximise its impact on motivation in the classroom.

The live non-participant observation carried out by the researcher provided further insight into how the Class Charts as a reward system influences pupil motivation and behaviour. The responses from participants reveal varying levels of engagement and reactions towards the system as an incentive.

Child A and Child E demonstrated strong intrinsic motivation, showing excitement about earning house points and demonstrating persistence in their work even after receiving positive reinforcement. Their eagerness to earn more points and discuss further rewards indicates a drive to succeed (as outlined by Cameron and Pierce, 1994 regarding intrinsic motivation). Interestingly, Child F's behaviour provides a different perspective. Although initially engaged after understanding the criteria for earning house points, Child F actively participates and adjusts their behaviour based on the teacher's attention. This suggests the learners may only make the effort when the teacher is watching, rather than to gain the point for their own confidence and self-motivation.

In contrast, Child D's responses throughout the observation suggests a lack of interest and motivation for the reward system. Despite reminders from the teacher about potential rewards for positive behaviour, Child D continues to remain disengaged, expressing reluctance to participate in tasks, and shows minimal reaction to both positive and negative points when awarded. This lack of interest suggests that rewards like house points may not effectively motivate Child D, which indicates that not all children will respond to strategies of rewards in the same way (Chen, 2023).

Furthermore, Child C's disappointment at not receiving a house point despite their efforts indicates that there is a potential problem with the use of Class Charts. For example, the teacher outlined the expectations to gain a house point at the beginning of the session, however, this learner was not immediately rewarded their point like

other participants. Therefore, this suggests the potential danger of negatively impacting this learners' confidence and wellbeing if the system is not used effectively to support learner motivation and behaviour (British Psychological Society, 2015).

Questionnaires were sent out to parents of 32 children, however only 6 parents responded. Although the feedback from this data was overwhelmingly positive towards the use of Class Charts and its impact on motivating their child in the classroom, I feel as though this information cannot be confidently used for this research due to the small sample size, which may not effectively and accurately represent the perspectives and viewpoints of the parent population in the classroom.

The findings suggest that reward systems such as class charts has a positive impact on learner motivation within the classroom, however it also suggests that such reward systems are not as impactful for others. Summarising the data outlined above, there are also some possible limitations towards using Class Charts ineffectively, thus having a negative impact on learner motivation.

Conclusion

The use of a non-participant observation, questionnaire and a semi-structured group interview allowed me to use multiple methods to conduct my research. As suggested by Patton (2002), using a variety of methods reduced the potential for bias and increased consistency and depth of understanding for the researcher. This supports the idea that using these methods solidifies the credibility of the findings, maintaining the reliability and validity of the research study.

As I used a thematic analysis approach to deepen my understanding of the research outcomes, the findings were able to be generalised by using the various methods of data collection. To conclude the findings, it is apparent that Class Charts does have an impact on learner motivation within my classroom context, however, it does not have the same impact and effect on all learners. This leads me to challenge the effectiveness of the system on learner motivation and behaviour across the school and in wider settings if this was the observations and conclusions I came to in just one classroom alone.

Referring back to the research question: 'What are the perceptions of Year 4 children and their parents on the use of Class Charts as a rewards system?', I can conclude I

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have answered this question through carrying out a variety of data collection methods and presenting my findings for this assignment. However, it would have been more beneficial if a larger sample of parents has responded to support this area of enquiry.

By carrying out this research project, I have been able to link this enquiry to some of the professional teaching standards on the Professional Learning Passport. For example, engaging with this assignment has encouraged me to carry out wider research and analyse research findings, but also improve my understanding and knowledge of managing the learning environment within the classroom (outlined by Welsh Government, 2019). This has allowed me to develop my researching skills, as well as develop my teaching practice.

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