

ECAD4010 - Researching the Learning: what, how and why am I teaching?

Targets:

	Targets set;	How I feel I have improved this target during the below assignment.
1	To follow the Harvard Referencing Guidance (Use of brackets etc.) and not to become too reliant on text.	I have completed a 'Harvard referencing course' online as well as looking through multiple resources supplied by the university to complete a correct Harvard reference
2	To engage with an appropriate range of literature and to ensure that all literature mentioned within assignment is noted within the referencing list also.	I have this time explored many literature examples from the UWTSD online library by searching key words.
3	To become more critical in your writing, to support your choices/judgements with supportive and counter arguments throughout your response.	I have set aside time to ensure that I have time to look back through my work and see where I be more critical in more work

Question – How does ‘song and rhyme’ improve pupil engagement in a phonics lesson within a foundation learning environment?

Introduction

Throughout this research document, we will aim to identify whether ‘song and rhyme’ improves pupils' engagement in a phonics lesson within a foundation learning environment. More specifically, the aim is to observe three pupils within a nursery group every five minutes over a forty-five minute, SATPIN lesson and identify where they place on the Leuven Scale and conclude whether ‘song and rhyme’ does alter a child’s overall engagement within the phonics session. This work also gives an ideal opportunity to highlight/identify any environmental factors which can affect a child’s engagement and wellbeing within foundation learning. Looking at the class of pupils, there are twenty-one children enrolled within the ‘morning nursery.’ Of the twenty-one enrolled, only seventeen attended school on the day of observation (08/02/2024), out of the seventeen pupils I chose three pupils to observe within a forty-five-minute period over 3 letters. The activity itself is completed weekly, with the letter of the week being the focus. Then every three weeks, the children recap the last three weeks' worth of letters, so the task they completed was in their normal schedule. To mention however, think, pair, share, is a widely used initiative within the classroom, which encourages those who are not strong communicators to speak as they are paired with a strong communicator. This could detour the results given in the observation (See appendix); however, we will talk a little more about how this may affect results later in the work. The environment of the classroom is very bright with plenty of ‘exploring activities’ widely available to the children which for most of the time they are engaged with. The children were aware that it was time to learn and not play. They all demonstrated a good understanding of what was expected of them.

Literature Review

Since the reform of the Welsh Education Curriculum there has been a more focused approach to what was known as 'Foundation phase' (Now known as Foundation Learning). Foundation learning is aimed at three-seven-year-olds, or nursery to year two. It aims to adopt a learning and teaching approach designed to encourage children to become independent thinkers with a positive disposition to learning. (Welsh Government, 2016, P6) The curriculum itself is statutory and allows children to learn through play, and firsthand experiential, looking at Piaget's theory it aligns with the idea that education should be the cornerstone of a child aligning their internal world with the experience of outside, however Vygotsky believed that the child was influenced by the outside world rather than learning about it and gaining experience within it. (Maria Robinson, 2008, P124)

Looking at the Welsh government framework, it aims to follow a more Piaget theory, as its framework handbook says, 'First-hand experiences allow children to develop an understanding of themselves and the world in which they live' (Welsh government, 2016, P5) - Within the Welsh curriculum there is 6 AoLE's (Area's of Learning and Experience), with special attention to cross-circular skills such as literacy-numeracy and digital competence (Welsh government, updated 2024) allowing for multiple wide-range stimuli and scenarios for children to be involved in (ESTYN, 2017) . The Welsh curriculum is known to be 'relevant' to today's world (Professor Donaldson, 2015, P15). Children must be motivated and engaged to learn, according to Newberger (1999) play does require what is known as active engagement but also it needs to be intrinsically motivated, freely chosen. (Maria Robinson, 2008 P151) However we must be aware as teacher of pedagogy in that not all children will react to play or situations with the same engagement (Welsh Government, n.d, p7) this relates to Piaget's as well as the contrasting theory of Vygotsky as 'Depending on previous knowledge and experience a child may or may not want to pursue a particular activity, but may choose a different interest if given the opportunity.' ((Welsh Government, n.d, p7). The child relating itself to the real world outside of school and aligning itself within it becomes more independent and self-aware, and this is where curiosity comes into place.

During my time of observation, the children were learning about 'who am I and where am I' ?' This links to all six of the AoLE's. Science and Technology, Humanities and languages, literacy, and communication. Looking more deeply the main what matters statements used were 'Expressing ourselves through languages is key to communication.' (Welsh government, 2016) - Looking at this task, the children will be working in a group and individually as opposed to in a group split into pairs. Looking at groups, its only humans that are attracted to work in groups (Maria Robinson, 2008, P163) Also in that sense, children seem to thrive better in groups as they learn emotions and how to process their own and others. (Maria Robinson, 2008, P163) This is labelled as a complex task for some of the pupils as they are not confident in working independently. More recently the pupils have been working on 'communication.' looking at their recent traffic light results, most of the children have all improved in conversation and confidence. Think, pair share is a terrific way to build upon skills a child has a baseline in, Vygotsky's theory shows us this. When a group of children are playing together there is a range of different ability groups. And in some cases, this is where a child may develop more. (Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years

(2016) P7). Therefore, the children are adhering to the purposes of the Welsh curriculum, Children, 'can communicate effectively in different forms and settings, using both Welsh and English.' (Donaldson, 2016, P31).

Methodology

The children will have a routine set for the day, of which I have already been a part of so the children won't see me as someone new to the class, instead they will know me already so they are comfortable in confiding in me, which is important when we look at children wellbeing in the Leuven scale, as well as the social attachment theory put in place by John Bowlby where the child at this stage starts to move from the stage where they trust one primary caregiver to the 'multiple' stage. (Bowlby, 1969). A child's wellbeing is at the heart of the school's primary purpose, they also support our children to be 'healthy, confident individuals, ready to lead fulfilling lives as valued members of society' (Welsh government, 2017, n.p).

The observation itself will be completed in the middle of the morning nursery session, the children have had circle time and have brushed their teeth by the time this activity has taken place. They are quite restless and show an eagerness to explore and investigate the area they learn in. The class of twenty-one is usually split into three groups, with seven in each group. However, due to short staffing and poor attendance from the class, they were placed into two groups of seven. Three children within the class do not participate in group activity due to individual learning plans put in place by the school which involves sensory time and one on one time. Within the group three students were observed whilst participating in a phonics session, where the children learnt about the letters 'S, A, T.' The children understand what is expected of them during what is known as a family group.

Testing is not widely used with foundation learning, instead the foundation phase profile has a skills ladder (Welsh Government, 2016, p15) instead we must find a way of measuring how well a child is doing. A notable example is the Leuven scale, throughout this assignment I will be using mostly qualitative data as opposed to quantitative. This is due to the overwhelming amount of literature concluded on foundation learning and early years child development. Furthermore, looking at empirical data, this too will be important to my research as I will be completing a survey of the class as well as looking at cultural artifacts from already carried out research into foundation learning. (Chris Taylor, Mirain Rhys, Sam Waldron, Rhys Davies, Sally Power, Trisha Maynard, Laurence Moore, David Blackaby, and Ian Plewis, 2015, P3) However, I will use the Leuven scale to determine where a child is in engagement and well-being. This is due to its flexibility and focus place on an individual (Ferre Leavers, 2011). An example of the used template is in the appendix (see appendix)

Discussions and findings

For my research to be correct and accurate I must ensure what I am completing and writing about is ethical, according to the Oxford dictionary 'connected with beliefs and principles about what is right and wrong' (Oxford Dictionary, updated 2024). Ethics are strongly associated with morals and

involve embracing moral issues in the context of working with humans (Gregory, 2003). Educational research should follow a strict set of guidelines, as children are not able to advocate for themselves. British Educational Research Association (BERA) set out a strict set of guidelines put in place to protect the safeguarding of the child as well as the researcher. Within this research anonymity is a key importance, as I have not sought direct contact with the parents about using their name and school within the research article I must not. We also have a duty to inform the teacher of any findings if interest (BERA, 2018, P4) As we touched on earlier, I explained that this task is of no unusual nature. However, we have a duty to explain and ensure the potential participants have a good understanding of what is expected of them (BERA, 2018, P5)

When looking at the observations in the appendix, it is clear to see that engagement remained the same or increased across all three pupils who were observed. (See appendix) However, the children struggled to understand the task expected of them was in fact independent. How a child relates to a task explained to them depends on engagement and how they listen to the teacher (Brown, A 2002, P4) An explanation also comes from other children in the class, and this is how sometimes the children can get confused. (Brown, A, 2002, P35). Looking at the additional comments in the appendix of the observation, pupil 1 was easily influenced by their best friend who was sitting next to them. This relates to the ecological systems (Bronfenbrenner, 1979) as the friend is within their close ecological circle, they gain trust as well as (Vygotsky, 1978) and the theory that each child learns from social interactions.

During the Jolly Phonics music the children showed more signs of engagement (Leuven Scale) They were singing the song and also enjoy standing up and joining in on the physical dance moves that were introduced with the music, you could argue that the children were more engaged because they can stand up and dance (Boyd, D Bee, H, 2013 p179). However, looking at intelligence music and linguistic are both examples of multiple intelligence, which should suggest that will grow and develop in the same age bracket and the involvement and engagement will be the same and we could argue the children enjoyed both the music and the moves to go along with it (Gardener, Boyd,D, Bee,H, 2014, p231).

Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, looking into my future within the teaching practice song and rhyme will be a big part of my class lesson plans. By completing this research, it has given me the opportunity to put theory into practice. As a teacher in Wales it is imperative to ensure that I follow the professional standards, one of the biggest of the 5 professional standards (Welsh Government,2016) is pedagogy. Ensuring that you are up to date with ongoing literature and pedagogy is paramount, this ensures that the pupils within your class are given the best education and ensures the best outcomes for the children. In this case making learning phonics fun and engaging as possible for all the children of all levels. This research will help me when I go on BA1 to have a deeper understanding of the individual pupil's reaction to specific stimuli and AoL. As well as pedagogy, as a teacher innovation is a clear opportunity to build on what we already know, using the information

about the children's strengths to make a fun and new lesson is a wonderful way to keep children guessing and engaged with activities and in turn it benefits the child's knowledge and learning.

Furthermore, looking at my research the observation went well, and the research gave myself plenty of qualitative data to place into this piece of work, but there were too many other possibilities within the environment which could have altered the results of the Leuven scale. The fact that the area of classroom is shared with reception means there is multiple more distractions, and the children who are exploring can come into the nursery area with the free opportunity to speak and pull the nursery children's attention. Overall, I am extremely happy with the results and how the research has gone, but I feel to conclude a more certain answer I need to remove the extra environmental factors.

Appendix

1. Describe ONE of the observations you carried out. What did you learn from it?

2. What were the challenges and opportunities of being a non-participant observer in the classroom?

The children see me as a participant, so it was difficult when they sought my help to guide them in a different direction. I also hope that they can still see me to trust in me.

3. In your experience, what were the benefits and limitations of the Leuven Scale as a research tool?

The benefit was how flexible it was and how I could change the schedule to suit my research question. Sometimes it was difficult when the children were fluctuating or in between the five points.

4. What were the main points of learning for you in terms of being a researcher in the classroom?

How children's behaviour changes day on day. The results I would have expected based on their usual behaviour was slightly different to what I observed.

5. What would you do differently if you were to conduct this research again? Why?

I would have shortened the time I observed the task or choose easier letters. I would also remove the secondary idea of physical dance moves to get a more exact answer.

Observational Schedule

Question – How does 'song and rhyme' improve pupil engagement in a phonics lesson within a foundation learning environment?

Name of observer – Lara Curtis

Date of observation – 08.02.2024

Year group observed – Nursery (Morning)

Number of pupils observed vs class present - three/seventeen

Levels of Involvement

1 – Extremely Low – Staring into space, shows no energy and can display no energy

2 – Low - They can be engaged in the activity for short periods but then can be easily distracted.

3 – Moderate – The child is busy with activity at hand but shows slight involvement. They make some progress but show no real interest and can be easily distracted away from the task at hand.

4 – High – The child is always busy with the activity; however, some moments of concentration can seem superficial, and the child has good motivation but can be challenged at times.

5 – Extremely high – Is highly focused and shows lots of encouraging signs to show they are motivated to the task in hand and appealed by it. Cannot be easily distracted by the task they are completing

Each word was completed 3 times. Each task is 5 minutes long.

	Before 'Song and rhyme'									After 'Song and Rhyme'									After adding a 'whiteboard' and mark making opportunity.								
Letter	S			A			T			S			A			T			S			A			T		
Pupil 1	4	4	3	4	4	2	4	3	3	5	5	4	5	4	4	4	5	5	3	4	3	4	4	3	5	5	5
Pupil 2	1	1	2	1	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	2	3	3	3	4	4	3	3	4	4	4	4	4
Pupil 3	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	4	5	5	4	5	4	4	5	5	5	5	5	5	3	2	2	4	4	4

Any Additional Comments

Pupil 1 – Overall engagement for phonics moderate - Sat next to a friend who wants to help by saying into their ear the answer every time the teacher asked a question. Quite shy in one-on-one questioning in the group. Knew the tone before the jolly phonics song started, enjoyed doing the actions as well as the singing, explained her Favourite letter is 'T' because she enjoys the song.

Pupil 2 – Overwhelmed by all the group speaking at the same time. Sat out of the circle as did not want to be touched by peers. Had little engagement in the song as they sat on the carpet with hands over ears. Did not collaborate in group discussions, however worked fantastically independently in the 'mark making.' When attempting shapes and letters found making mistakes fun as they were able to rub it out and start again

Pupil 3 – Engaged from the start of the lesson. Showed great engagement in singing, although slightly distracted by pupils around them who were making mistakes. Was the first child in the group to put their hand up and answer a question. However, they did get upset and frustrated surrounding the letter 'a' as they found it difficult to connect the lines.

Reference List

- Foundation Phase Action Plan. (2016). Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/publications/2018-03/foundation-phase-action-plan.pdf>.

- Wragg, E.C. and Brown, G. (2001). *Explaining in the primary school*. London: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Yr Adran Plant, Addysg, Dysgu Gydol Oes a Sgiliau Department for Children, Education, Lifelong Learning and Skills Learning and Teaching Pedagogy. (n.d.). Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/8f0b360f-f1f6-4bec-b11a-df88168007f9/learning-and-teaching-pedagogy.pdf>.
- Welsh Government (2015). *Foundation Phase Framework Curriculum for Wales*. [online] Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/storage/d5d8e39c-b534-40cb-a3f5-7e2e126d8077/foundation-phase-framework.pdf>.
- Welsh Government (2022). *Curriculum for Wales - Hwb*. [online] hwb.gov.wales. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales>.
- Welsh Government (2023). *Pedagogy - Hwb*. [online] hwb.gov.wales. Available at: <https://hwb.gov.wales/curriculum-for-wales/designing-your-curriculum/pedagogy>.
- Professional Association for Childcare and Early Years (2016). *Supporting Members to Provide the Highest Standards of Care and Learning for Children*. [online] pp.1–17. Available at: [https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Website-files/PACEY%20member%20practice%20guides%20\(PDFs\)/PG28-Theories-of-child-development.pdf](https://www.pacey.org.uk/Pacey/media/Website-files/PACEY%20member%20practice%20guides%20(PDFs)/PG28-Theories-of-child-development.pdf).
- GOV.WALES. (2017). *Curriculum for Wales: overview*. [online] Available at: <https://www.gov.wales/curriculum-wales-overview#:~:text=The%20purpose%20of%20every%20school>.
- Laevers, F. (n.d.). *Encyclopedia on Early Childhood Development 1 @2011 Centre of Excellence for Early Childhood Development Experiential Education: Making Care and Education More Effective Through Well-Being and Involvement*. [online] Available at: https://expertisecentrum.cego.be/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/Laevers_2011_ChildEncyclopedia.pdf.
- Evaluating the Foundation Phase Final Report Ymchwil gymdeithasol social research. (2015). Available at: https://www.gov.wales/sites/default/files/statistics-and-research/2019-07/150514-foundation-phase-final-en_0.pdf.
- Robinson, M. (2008). *Child development 0-8 : a journey through the early years*. Berkshire ; New York: McGraw-Hill Education.
- Boyd, D.G. and Bee, H.L. (2014). *The Developing Child*. 13th ed. Harlow: Pearson.