

A critical analysis and evaluation of the observation research tool, the Leuven scale

How does incorporating music into lessons affect the engagement of learners.

<u>Targets</u>	Target 1- Try to support your key messages with research	Target 2- use more relevant material	Target 3- reference all your sources within both text and reference list
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Introduction

For this assignment I observed my class participating in lessons that each incorporated music into them. My aim for these observations was to find out if bringing in music to other lessons like maths or phonics would positively affect the learner's engagement or negatively influence it. The class I was placed in was reception in a school that is in my area. From that class, I randomly selected three children to be the focus of my observations. To help me keep track of these, I used this observation schedule, see Figure1, that utilised the Leuven scale. The three children that were chosen were one girl and two boys, they sat in the middle, to the left and to the right of the teacher respectively. The environment of the classroom is incredibly important for the success of all the children. At this stage of development, it is important that the children can explore and figure things out for themselves, "Through exploration of their environment, children begin to develop a sense of belonging and an appreciation of the world around them." Government Wales p.g.10 (2022). This is the same for indoor learning and outdoor learning. In this essay I will talk about a multitude of things under multiple different subtitles being, literature review, methodology, my discussion and findings and finally my conclusion and recommendations.

Literature Review

In this part of my essay, I am going to go over what others may think about the use of music and compare these views. At the end I will also give my own personal view on the subject. During this task the children were learning to count to ten in Welsh using a song, by doing this the lesson had involved number eight of the twelve pedagogical principles, 'ranges within and across Areas' Government Wales (2023), it incorporated three of the six area of learnings those being expressive arts, LLC and Mathematics. According to government Wales (2015) many of the outcomes they placed in the previous curriculum had the children listening to songs and rhymes and having them engage and attempt to join in with these songs. This was to

have the children improve on their oracy skills. In the curriculum for Wales there are the four purposes, using music in lessons allows for the children to try and strive to be, for example being 'enterprising, creative contributors, ready to play a full part in life and work' Government Wales (2017), music is an incredible tool to help drive creativity in children. 'Instruments and symbols are mere creative media, which stimulate imagination, divergent thinking, and efforts to try creating something new.' Lau (2004), in this book they explain how Japan use music in school to improve creativity, they say it doesn't matter what kind of instruments or music you use if it is being used it will encourage children to try new things. The use of music can also help the children's cognitive development by using Lev Vygotskys "MKOs" or better known as the more knowledgeable others, an MKO doesn't have to be an adult or teacher it can also be a peer however in this instance it will be the teacher. The MKO however does not work without the zone of proximal development, this part of his theory was defined as

"The distance between the actual developmental level as determined by independent problem solving and the level of potential development as determined through problem-solving under adult guidance, or in collaboration with more capable peers" (Vygotsky, 1978, p. 86, cited in simply psychology 2024), in other words there are zones, the first being things the learner can do on their own, then what they can do with help and things cannot do. The learners want to be in the second zone, the MKO is the person who will aid them in the second zone. That is what the teacher is doing in the lesson I was observing.

Methodology

The tool that I used to complete my observations was the Leuven scale. The Leuven scale can be used to measure both engagement and well-being, I used it to measure the engagement of the children when a song is being used to help teach a subject. I chose to measure engagement as I found it was going to make it easier for me to stay as a non-participant than if I were to measure well-being. This method of observation ensured that all my notes were easier to keep track of, having a number coordinated scale allowed me to see the differences in the engagement with ease. Peill. (2022) explained the usefulness of the scale as, 'It is used as an observational scale from 1–5, that allows early years practitioners to quantify the degree to which a child is involved in a self-chosen activity.'

Level	1	2	3	4	5
Engagement	Extremely Low <i>the child shows hardly any activity</i>	Low <i>the child shows some degree of activity which is often interrupted</i>	Moderate <i>the child is busy the whole time, but without real concentration</i>	High <i>there are clear signs of involvement, but these are not always present to their full extent</i>	Extremely High <i>during the observation of learning the child is continually engaged in the activity and completely absorbed in it</i>
Examples	No concentration: staring, daydreaming; An absent, passive attitude; No goal-oriented activity, aimless actions, not producing anything; No signs of exploration and interest; Not taking anything in, no mental activity	Limited concentration; looks away during the activity, fiddles, dreams; Is easily distracted; Action only leads to limited results.	Routine actions, attention is superficial; Is not absorbed in the activity, activities are short lived; Limited motivation, no real dedication, does not feel challenged; The child does not gain deep-level experiences; Does not use his/her capabilities to full extent; The activity does not address the child's imagination.	The child is engaged in the activity without interruption; Most of the time there is real concentration, but during some brief moments the attention is more superficial; The child feels challenged, there is a certain degree of motivation; The child's capabilities and its imagination to a certain extent are addressed in the activity.	Is absolutely focussed, concentrated without interruption; Is highly motivated, feels strongly appealed by the activity; Even strong stimuli cannot distract him/her; Is alert, has attention for details, shows precision; Its mental activity and experience are intense; The child constantly addresses all its capabilities: imagination and mental capacity are in top gear; Obviously enjoys being engrossed in the activity

Figure 3. Description and example of the Leuven Scale (2020)

In this article Peill explored how engagement related to early years pedagogy using the Leuven scale may be a proficient way to find the quality of a learning environment. According to OECD (2004) the EXE-theory could be the most productive way to assess the quality of many education settings, it focuses on two dimensions those being the as for mentioned well-being and engagement or as they said in their study 'involvement'. They go on to say,

'Involvement, a key word in the EXE conception of curriculum, is not linked to specific types of behaviour or to specific levels of development.' OCED (2004). To my knowledge they explain that observing engagement and well-being are just as proficient a gauge for development as standardised testing and could even be more inclusive as not all children do their best work in tests.

Discussion and findings.

While undergoing observations I had to ensure that I adhered to the ethical guidelines for educational research. There are seven of these guidelines, for example number one, 'Individuals should be treated fairly' BERA (2018), this is just part of the first guideline, however this one resonated with me as I felt the most strongly about this part of the guideline. Every person deserves to be treated fairly and making sure I don't show any favouritism to any of the children. This also meant that I couldn't make any of the children participate, that would be a violation of number 3 which is, 'Participants in research may be actively or passively involved in such processes as observations.' BERA (2018). This then ties into consent and assent, 'BERA's principles

of consent apply to children and young people as well as adults.' BERA (2018). The organisation also sees that the UNCRC are subscribed to. Since all the participants are underage that means they are not able to give their consent, that means you must get their assent. Assent means, 'they should be involved in the process if they are able to "assent" by having a study explained to them and/or by reading a simple form about the study.' UCLA (2016). This meant I had to make sure to explain to the children what my research was about and how I was going to be going about it, while also explaining to them that I wouldn't use any of their names during my write up on the subject. After explaining the research process to the children, it is then important to get the consent of the teacher. This is also called informed consent, according to the university of Oxford (2021) informed consent gives the participants to willingly participate with all the information about what it means to take part in said research being given to them. Informed consent has two distinct stages, University of Oxford (2021) states that the first stage is about giving information and then stage two is all about acquiring the consent from the participant.

(See Figure2. For completed Observation Schedule)

The task that I observed was a Welsh lesson in which the students were learning how to count to 10 in Welsh using a song/rhyme. As I only observed one lesson, I decided it was a better option to take notes more frequently than if I were to observe a different lesson. I took down notes at approximately 40 second intervals. The three children were sat in three different parts of the mat, child one was sat in the front left, child two was sat in the middle and child three was sat in the front right. From observing child one I found that they were never engaged with the task at hand, they were laying down on their stomach looking around the room but never at the teacher they were far more interested in trying to look and see what others were doing and once they saw others were more engaged, he went back to lying down. Using the Leuven scale, I placed child one at a constant 1, refer to methodology and figure 3 for an example of the Leuven scale. This meant that the child was never really engaged with the task that was given, they weren't taking in anything and showed no signs of eventually being interested in the task. Compared to child 1, child 2 who was sat in the middle of the class looked to be fully engaged with the task, I placed her at a 4/5 throughout my observations, they seemed to constantly be engaged with the task at hand giving their full attention to the lesson, they copied all the actions the teacher was doing and attempted to sing the song along with the teacher. However, towards the end they did slow down and went from a five to a three. Then child number three who was sat near the front right, from my observations I found that they were moderately engaged with the lesson, they were playing along with the song but wasn't fully concentrated. This child was sat near his friend which could have been a factor to why their engagement was so low. Again, like child number two, child number three had a decline in engagement towards the end of the lesson. One thing I did fail to consider during my observation is how short the part of the lesson I was observing, I could try and see if the class teacher would have done a few more lessons that used songs that I could have also observed. One other aspect I didn't fully consider is how difficult it has been to find credible research on the subject I decided to research, I could have done a bit more research before I fully decided on my research question.

Conclusion

After all my observations and research, it seems to me that using music to help teach different lessons can be a very useful tool, however it is not something that suits every child. Some children like child two found it much easier to engage with the lesson than child one, so as useful as it maybe it cannot be the only tool you use while teaching to ensure that all the children can be as engaged as possible as often as possible. It did also show me the environment some children are in can play a massive factor in the level of engagement, for example the fact child three was sat with their friends placed another outside source of distractions. I don't fully believe that my observations were a fully accurate method for my research, I believe that having the chance to see a few more lessons that incorporated music would help me to have a better understanding of my question and to have a fairer observation. The Leuven scale was a helpful tool, as I mentioned before in my essay the numerical way that the scale allows you to quantify the engagement of the children means it is far easier to read and understand than if I were to just jot down random notes. However, I would mention that it doesn't fully account for children with special educational needs, for example ADHD a child with ADHD may find it harder to engage with any lesson and that wouldn't be their fault, but the scale doesn't take that into account.

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Appendix

Figure 1.

Observation Schedule

Research Question- How does incorporating music into lessons affect the engagement of learners.
Name of observer- Alex Jenkins
Date- 13/14.02.24

Context
Year Group- Reception
Lesson- Welsh- counting to ten using a song.

Leuven Scale	Extremely Low 1	Low 2	Moderate 3	High 4	Extremely High 5
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	40 seconds	1.20 minutes	2 minutes	2.40 Minutes	3 Minutes
Child 1					
Child 2					
Child 3					

Additional Comments	Child 1	Child 2	Child 3

Figure 2.

Observation Schedule

Research Question- How does incorporating music into lessons affect the engagement of learners.
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	40 seconds	1.20 minutes	2 minutes	2.40 Minutes	3 Minutes
Child 1	1	1	1	1	1
Child 2	5	4	5	5	3
Child 3	3	2	3	2	2

Additional Comments	Child 1 Is lying on the floor not paying attention. Is not interacting with anyone just looking around	Child 2 Seems to be happy singing, doesn't seem to be as engaged as it goes on.	Child 3 Is slightly engaged with the lesson, is also slightly talking to friends
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Figure3.

Level	1	2	3	4	5
Engagement	Extremely Low <i>the child shows hardly any activity</i>	Low <i>the child shows some degree of activity which is often interrupted</i>	Moderate <i>the child is busy the whole time, but without real concentration</i>	High <i>there are clear signs of involvement, but these are not always present to their full extent</i>	Extremely High <i>during the observation of learning the child is continually engaged in the activity and completely absorbed in it</i>
Examples	No concentration: staring, daydreaming; An absent, passive attitude; No goal-oriented activity, aimless actions, not producing anything; No signs of exploration and interest; Not taking anything in, no mental activity	Limited concentration; looks away during the activity, fiddles, dreams; Is easily distracted; Action only leads to limited results.	Routine actions, attention is superficial; Is not absorbed in the activity, activities are short lived; Limited motivation, no real dedication, does not feel challenged; The child does not gain deep-level experiences; Does not use his/her capabilities to full extent; The activity does not address the child's imagination.	The child is engaged in the activity without interruption; Most of the time there is real concentration, but during some brief moments the attention is more superficial; The child feels challenged, there is a certain degree of motivation; The child's capabilities and its imagination to a certain extent are addressed in the activity.	Is absolutely focussed, concentrated without interruption; Is highly motivated, feels strongly appealed by the activity; Even strong stimuli cannot distract him/her; Is alert, has attention for details, shows precision; Its mental activity and experience are intense; The child constantly addresses all its capabilities: imagination and mental capacity are in top gear; Obviously enjoys being engrossed in the activity