

Targed/Target 1	Read through your work to ensure that all your ideas are expressed clearly or get someone else to read it and give you feedback.
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ECAD4010 Cycle 1 Professional and Pedagogic

Studies: Researching the Learning: what, how and why am I teaching? (ECAD4010-C).

Introduction

This assignment will be discussing the benefits and limitations of the observation research tool the 'Leuven scale' and the effectiveness within a foundation phase classroom, upholding confidentiality with ethical considerations throughout. Within the classroom, I observed a small group of three children engaging in guided reading within an indoor environment. The purpose of the observation was to observe the engagement levels of the children when engaging in guided reading using the Leuven scale research tool. These children were between 4-6 years old.

An enabling environment is best suited for foundation phase children while promoting a comforting, homely environment (Beckley 2012). Beckley continues to state that the physical learning environment with exposure to language with signs and rhymes, an area dedicated for quiet interaction, sensory area, reading area, role play area and recourses both noisy and quiet are all key for child development within a foundation phase environment. In addition to this, Early Education (n.d) states that there are three fundamental areas which make a foundation phase learning environment. Firstly, play and exploring, which requires engagement from the child for them to participate in learning to build upon prior knowledge or to have a new understanding of an area of learning. Secondly, active learning, which requires motivation from the child to continue participating while concentrating to enjoy the learning. Thirdly, creative and critical thinking, which requires the child to think independently using independent ideas, sharing with others, and connecting ideas to develop an understanding on the area of learning.

Literature Review

An effective learning environment is evident through the level involvement/engagement of a child during learning (Laevens 2011), this meaning that the higher the engagement levels from the learner the more effective the learning environment is. Focusing on my observation of guided reading, this is where a small group of children are guided and supported to read by their teacher for around 20-minute intervals (Graham and Kelly 2015).

Lindon (2012) stated that according to theorist Vygotsky, to support a child's development within learning, a more knowledgeable other, such as a teacher, should step in and guide the child within their zone of proximal development. The zone of proximal development is a zone focused on what a child can achieve solely and what they can achieve with efficient support from a more knowledgeable other to reach their maximum potential. The Victoria State Government (2023) agrees with Lindon as they state that Vygotsky argued that the finest learning was due to a more knowledgeable others' support. Shanahan on Literacy (2009) disagrees with The Victoria State Government as they believe that there is a limitation with guided reading which is that the reading levels all slightly overlap one another. The limitation to this is when the teacher must spend a large amount of time matching books with the children when neighboring levels are almost identical. Therefore, Shanahan on Literacy believes a teacher should use mixed-level groups for guided reading sessions to allow more time to be spent with the children reading. Moreover, Oxford University Press (n.d) appear to agree with Shanahan on Literacy in the limitations of guided reading and report that independent reading is the most influential aspect of a child's development with literacy and language. This may suggest that a child should spend more time independently reading than guided reading. Carroll and Breadmore (2021) believe that the pedagogy of reading, especially guided reading, is one that supports teaching principles well. Carroll and Breadmore continue to state that a teacher can apply different intervention for each child in the groups who may all be at slightly differing levels of reading and each child could learn from one another. On the other hand, Carroll and Breadmore acknowledge that there is a divide in research on the effectiveness of guided reading, which they report being mostly due to the teaching quality provided.

The Welsh Government (2022) appear to agree with Leavers as they believe that the environment for a child plays a key role for children to gain reading skills early. This environment must encourage children to read with happiness and support their imagination, which will naturally and positively affect the purposes for learning. The Welsh Government (2023) states that the key focus on teaching pedagogy should be learner-centered, meaning that the teacher should understand and be adaptable to every child's different learning needs. It is vital for teachers to develop secure and healthy relationships with each learner by supporting their individual progression by building upon the 12 pedagogical principles. The Welsh Government (2021) states that the importance of every school's focus should be to promote each learner to achieve the four purposes and that the school's curriculum should be based upon this.

Methodology

Laevers (2011) believes that using the Leuven scale as an observation tool to measure a child's involvement level is beneficial to both a teacher and the child involved. Due to the recorded measurements of the observation shown on the Leuven scale, it clearly provides an opportunity for appropriate intervention from the teacher. On the other hand, MacRae and Jones (2023) appear to disagree with Leavers and suggest that there are limitations with the Leuven scale. They continue to state that the Leuven scale may suggest that children who appear on the lower end of the scale for engagement are then subjected to unnecessary intervention. MacRae and Jones argue that this does not fit in with good pedagogy as it focuses on old practice that refines a child in certain developmental categories. The Welsh Government (2021) appeared to have moved away from this type of categorization by introducing 5 progression steps, which support a wider range of views on a child's development.

I believe that a limitation from my research with the Leuven scale was that it did not include the environmental factors within the measurements of engagement levels, which affected the recorded data. An advantage of the Leuven scale is that in such a busy environment it is easy to record the data requiring minimal effort to do so. The Leuven scale also provides a simple and easy read to review the evidence recorded, providing clear results to the reader.

During my planning for the observation, I researched the Leuven scale and was able to understand this to complete a personalised observation schedule (see observation schedule in appendix 1). The Welsh Assembly Government (2008) report that when completing a planned observation, the observer should be prepared and understand what they are observing and which method of measurement they will be using for the observation. This allowed my observation schedule to use and apply the Leuven scale to record my research. While planning my research, I focused on what my research question would be ensuring to uphold ethical considerations while thinking of my research question. I understood the purpose of my research and ensured my question could be answered with my research methods (Walker and Solvason 2014).

Discussion and Findings

Confidentiality is important when completing research, due to the Welsh Government (2021) legislation of General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR). During my research, every child, teacher, and school had the right to access any personal data that is held regarding them, refuse for their data to be collected and shared, for the data collected to be disposed of appropriately and to file a complaint to the Information Commissioner's Office (ICO). Therefore, for my research I decided to keep all information regarding any child, teacher, or school

anonymous. In my opinion, this personal data would not have impacted any part of my research and findings and would not have affected the results.

During the planning and conduction of my research, ethical considerations were at the forefront of my research. First, my observation schedule was to observe 3 different learners engagement levels when participating in guided reading, over a 15-minute period and recording the evidence after every five minutes. It was evident that there was a limitation with this recording time as the children were finished reading after 10 minutes. As an ethical consideration I did not attempt to keep the children another 5 minutes to fit with my research scale. Palmer n.d state that children are not able to provide consent but can provide assent, this can change frequently with a child and therefore it would have been unethical to keep them involved in my research after the child wanted to leave. This meant that the child withdrew assent and had a right to leave following article 12 respect the views of the child of the children's rights convention (UNICEF 1990).

Better Evaluation (2022) states that the nonparticipant observation method could cause the participant to feel uncomfortable and could cause them to act differently due to the unusual presence of the observer. I understand this may have been unethical during my qualitative research. During the research, the learners' needs were a priority, and all learners should be made to feel comfortable (David and Resnik 2020). If an individual is acting out of the ordinary, it could be due to them feeling uncomfortable. Therefore, when conducting my research if a child was acting out of the ordinary due to my presence it could have been unethical which might have resulted in unreliable research, as the child may not have been able to engage as they normally would have under usual circumstances. This is an example of bad pedagogy. As the observer I could have recorded the child's engagement levels in the lower scale as it would appear that they were not engaging to their expected level due to the conditions in the surrounding environment, this may be considered unethical with unreliable research (MacRae and Jones 2023).

The research was conducted in an indoor environment of a school's dinner hall. The participants were taken in and sat at dinner tables to complete their guided reading, the environment surrounding was loud and busy, involving the surrounding environment with other children from groups running around and shouting along with the dinner staff continuing to set up the rest of the dinner tables. According to Given (2008), the environment of the research may cause difficulties to the findings if the environment is affecting the participants. This environment may have caused limitations to my research as Kumon (2011) report that a reading environment should be quiet with comfortable chairs to allow the reader to relax and engage in which the participants of my observation were not able to do.

Observation is key in understanding the development and learning needs of children, both important for professional practice and responsive pedagogy. This means by observing children, the teacher can support each child's learning and development. Birth to 5 matters n.d state that observation is required to gather evidence; this allows the teacher to monitor what children are capable of and what they can understand. This is good pedagogical practice for a teacher as it supports the teacher with the pedagogical principle number 5, being able to set new work for that child from developing and strengthening previous knowledge to ensure the child is reaching their maximum capabilities. A teacher will achieve this principle due to observing their previous engagement and progression and continuing to assess this. (The Welsh Government 2023).

Conclusion and recommendations

To conclude, there are evidently both advantages and limitations with the use of the Leuven scale as a research tool. I believe that the limitations outweigh the advantages if the researcher is to uphold their pedagogical principles when researching learners. Therefore, for my future research I would consider a different research tool to conduct future research to ensure that all factors of the learning environment are considered within the research.

The key ideas set out in my introduction on what makes a good learning environment for foundation phased children have been identified throughout this assignment. It is evident that if any of these ideas are not met in the learning environment it will have a knock-on effect to the learning and causes clear limitations in a child's engagement levels when completing guided reading.

A strength in my research was the use of my adaptable observation schedule and the ability to change my research question, the importance of being able to change my question was key to my research due to the frequently changing environment within a school setting (Walker and Solvason 2014). A clear limitation to my research was to record my data using the Leuven scale over a 15-minute period. I followed a guide from CLND Testing & Therapy (2023) on how long a child can remain engaged for but did not consider any other factors of the child's learning and development and the surrounding environment. This affected my research as the children left 5 minutes before I planned to finish my recordings. The impact of this causes my research to be limited due to my poor planning.

As my personal development, I will apply my understanding that every child has different learning needs and will all have different engagement levels. This may be due to any additional learning needs or may be due to the surrounding environment of where the research is conducted (Mahone and Schneider 2012).

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Appendix

Appendix 1 – Copy of guided reading observation schedule

Limited
method

~~guided~~ reading
generalise

AM
Thursday 28th

Observation Schedule:

Observer: Lauren Ridings

Context: Observing by measuring engagement using the leuven scale of four foundation aged children participating in ~~reading~~ ^{Reading}

- 1 - Extremely low engagement levels. Pupil has no focus or eye contact on activity and appears to find activity monotonous and is absent throughout activity.
- 2 - Low engagement level. Pupil sometimes engaged, but times on no engagement in activity in activity but often disrupts activity.
- 3 - Moderate engagement levels. Pupil mostly remains engaged with the activity at a mediocre level without highly involving with the activity due to being easily distracted.
- 4 - High engagement level. Pupil engages well during activity experiencing points of heightened engagement. The pupil does not get distracted easily.
- 5 - Extremely high engagement level. The pupil remains extremely engaged throughout activity while participating greatly with the activity. The pupil remains fixed on activity while being energetic and determined for most of the activity.

Time:	Pupil 1	Pupil 2	Pupil 3	Pupil 4
5 Minutes After Starting ACTIVITY	2	3	1	2
10 Minutes After Starting ACTIVITY	1	4	2	2
15 Minutes After Starting ACTIVITY	Left	Left	Left	2

Back

ALN

Reassurance Provided

Any further comments:

- 1) - in hall where other children were playing + dinner tables being set up.
- Teacher distracted with other children
- 2) - Another child shouting
- 3) - Pupil 1 shouting at teacher won't read

✓ Observation = easier to complete luvent scale
- Distance with child (non participant observation) isolates

Appendix 2 – Original blank observation schedule

Observation Schedule

Observation Schedule:

Observer: Lauren Ridings

Context: Observing by measuring engagement using the Leuven scale of four foundation aged children participating in block building.

1 - Extremely low engagement levels. Pupil has no focus or eye contact on activity and appears to find activity monotonous and is absent throughout activity.

2 – Low engagement level. Pupil sometimes engaged, but times on no engagement in activity in activity but often disrupts activity.

3 – Moderate engagement levels. Pupil mostly remains engaged with the activity at a mediocre level without highly involving with the activity due to being easily distracted.

4 – High engagement level. Pupil engages well during activity experiencing points of heightened engagement. The pupil does not get distracted easily.

5 – Extremely high engagement level. The pupil remains extremely engaged throughout activity while participating greatly with the activity. The pupil remains fixed on activity while being energetic and determined for most of the activity.

Time:	Pupil 1	Pupil 2	Pupil 3	Pupil 4
5 Minutes After Starting ACTIVITY				
10 Minutes After Starting ACTIVITY				
15 Minutes After Starting ACTIVITY				

Any further comments:

Appendix 3 – Professional reflection

Adfyfrio Proffesiynol - Professional Reflection

Roedd y Dyddiau Ymchwil yn caniatáu i ti ddechrau wneud cysylltiadau rhwng damcaniaeth ac arfer. Defnyddia'r templed hwn i fyfrio ar dy brofiad fel ymchwilydd.

The Research Days allowed you to start making connections between theory and practice. Use this template to reflect on your experience as a researcher.

1. Disgrifia UN o'r arsylwadau a gyflawnwyd gennyt. Beth wnest ti ei ddysgu ohono?

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

I carried out a non-participant observation using the Leuven scale research tool to measure engagement levels with learners when completing guided reading.

I learnt that the Leuven scale is a quick and easy research tool to use but has a limitation that does not consider other factors that could effect engagement levels with learners.

2. Beth oedd yr heriau a'r cyfleoedd o fod yn sylwedydd nad oedd yn cymryd rhan (*non-participant observer*) yn yr ystafell ddosbarth?

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

The opportunities were that I was able to document all findings without being distracted by the participants. A challenge was that I stood out to the learners and it was evident to them that I was observing them, this could affect my research as they are not acting as they normally would (David and Resnik 2020).

3. Yn dy brofiad di, beth oedd manteision a chyfyngiadau'r Raddfa Leuven fel offeryn ymchwil?

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

The benifits of the Leuven scale are that is is easy to record data and provides a clear scale with clear results for the reader and researcher to reflect upon. The limitations were that engagement levels are not soely based on the 5 levels from the Leuven scale, but the scale does not consider this and therefore could be considered unethical to be grouping children unfairly.

4. Beth oedd prif bwyntiau dysgu i ti o ran bod yn ymchwilydd yn yr ystafell ddosbarth?

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

The meain learning points as a researcher were understanding the importance of ethical considerations to all involved within my research. My hypothesis on my research was not a reality and this meant I had to make a choice. The choise was to finish conducting my research by asking the children to continue reading or to be ethical and allow them to leave when they stated that they did not want to continue.

5. Beth fyddet ti'n ei wneud yn wahanol pe bae ti'n cynnal yr ymchwil hon eto? Pam?

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

I would change my time of recording from 15 minutes to 9 miutes. It was evident that 5 minutes was far too long with a lot changing inbetween the 5 minute intervals which was not able to be recorded using the Leuven scale.

6. Trafoda unrhyw ddulliau eraill o ymchwil y gallet eu defnyddio yn yr ystafell ddosbarth i wella dy ymarfer. Beth yw'r pethau positif a negyddol?

Discuss any other methods of research you could use in the classroom to improve your practice. What are the positives and negatives?

For my future research, I would consider using participant observation research to improve my practise. I believe the positives with this research method is that I will not be able to isolate myself from the participants and cause unnatural behaviours when learning (Jorgensen 1989). I believe that a negative factor of using this research method is that there could be a potential to miss vital observation from participants if I was to be an active participant in the activity.