

	Targets	How I have applied this
Target 1	Reinforce the question/title in the intro to help clarify the content from the start.	Referenced my investigation topic within the introduction, and throughout the assignment to further promote clarity in my points.
Target 2	Provide counter arguments as well as progressive arguments.	Applied my own opinions to research, and create debate within my writing by collecting and referencing a range of opinions.

How do mixed ability groupings influence the well-being of pupils in foundation learning settings?

Throughout this assignment I will be exploring the relationship between mixed ability groupings and pupil well-being, based on observations conducted using the Leuven Scale within a year 2 class. The observations will be focused on three pupils within a mixed ability group 8 of while they complete a task focused on well-being after being read a story that links to their task. In accordance with the Leuven Scale for Well-being, indicators of well-being categorised from 'extremely low' to 'extremely high' include participation, posture and confidence (Laevens 2011). Therefore, displays of these behaviours within the groups will play a critical role in my observational findings. I will also discuss the relevance of the classroom environment, particularly how it creates opportunities for collaborative learning, and the potential implications of this on pupils within mixed ability groups. Using both qualitative and quantitative data produced from observation, and making connections to relevant literature, I will be able to identify whether there is a relationship between heterogeneous groupings within the classroom environment and the well-being of pupils.

Literature Review:

The Curriculum for Wales Foundation Phase Framework recognises that schools have a responsibility to overcome social and environmental obstacles surrounding inclusion, and ensuring that all children have the opportunity to reach their full potential (Welsh Government 2015). The framework outlines the importance of learners working alongside their peers wherever possible, as an entitlement for all, encouraging social development and well-being. Therefore, it could be suggested that the use of heterogeneous groupings within the foundation learning environment has great potential to positively influence pupil well-being, as it is an optimal opportunity for inclusivity within their learning environment (Welsh Government 2015). Additional findings also suggest that ability groupings within primary schools can have implications on child psychosocial well-being and friendships, as it can greatly impact how they construct their childhood experiences through peer interactions and relationships (McGillicuddy 2021). Age-related social environments children are exposed to such as these can have an impact on their well-being, in terms of how well basic psychological needs are met and the extent of support of eudaimonic well-being (Ryan and Deci 2001). Consequently, heterogeneous groupings could be perceived as a good opportunity to facilitate higher levels of pupil well-being within foundation learning environments, as they can encourage self-growth and development through the consolidation of learning with peers. This aligns with Vygotsky's sociocultural theory of cognitive development, which highlights the role of social interaction and cultural context in shaping students' thought processes (Alkhudiry 2022).

Furthermore, In 2021, The Guardian reported of negative behavioural outcomes for pupils placed into low ability groups from a young age, stressing the importance of monitoring those pupils as their well-being may be jeopardised (Weale 2021). This conveys the idea that set ability groups can have a negative impact on pupil well-being, an observation which is supported further in additional research. For example, it has been suggested that within set ability groups pupils are more likely to form friendships with similar ability peers, which can promote peer hierarchy, and ultimately lead to status allocation within the educational environment (McGillicuddy 2021). An investigation into ability grouping in the UK in 2022 found that pupils in lower ability groups are more likely to have negative behavioural outcomes and emotional problems, suggesting damaging effects on their well-being, which could be a consequence of social comparison theory (Papachristou et al 2022). When applied to this context, social comparison theory suggests that pupils evaluate themselves by comparison to their peers which may inspire feelings of inferiority and be detrimental to pupil self-image (Suls, Collins & Wheeler 2019). This implies that the use of set ability groupings in the foundation learning environment could inspire poor well-being in pupils, as they can introduce a hierarchical structure to the environment which is damaging to how pupils view themselves.

The foundation learning environment should provide optimal opportunities for personal and social development. This is recognised in one of the areas of learning outlined by the Welsh Government, whereby personal and social development, well-being and cultural diversity is identified as the core of foundation learning (Welsh Government 2008). These ideas can be fostered through the use of collaborative learning, where pupils are encouraged to exchange skills and knowledge through shared experiences, and develop an understanding of their abilities (Liang et al 2022). Therefore, collaborative learning could help in establishing a positive learning environment in encouraging success for all, rather than promoting comparison and competition, through the idea that everyone has a strength or something that they can add (Laal & Ghodsi 2012). Rather than through mixed ability grouping, collaborative learning could be utilised within set ability groupings to enhance a positive learning environment. The use of set ability groupings in collaborative learning can allow the teacher within the learning environment to tailor their teaching methods and explanations, to ensure that needs of all pupils within their homogeneous groups are being met (Bolick & Rogowsky 2016).

Methodology:

To obtain my qualitative research, I will conduct an observation within a foundation learning environment, using the Leuven Scale to assist me in developing an understanding of the dynamic between mixed ability groupings and pupil well-being. This can be identified as a naturalistic observation study, as I will be observing the behaviour of pupils within their typical learning environment without interfering (**Mestre 2012**). However, a potential drawback of this observation style could be that in certain situations it can be difficult to observe specific behaviours, in this case indicators of well-being, due to how rare they are or if they cannot be easily observed (**Bornstein & Cheah 2005**).

The Leuven Scale is a five-point rating system that assesses the well-being and engagement of children, which provides an observational framework for practitioners through highlighting behaviours that can be observed within the learning environment (**Laevers 2011**). Using the Leuven Scale in my research may be beneficial as it will provide me with a

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framework for my observations, ensuring a level of consistency in my observation across different activities within the foundation learning environment (**Laevers 2011**). However, it can be argued that a framework such as the Leuven Scale can introduce subjectivity to the observation, as what one person may perceive as high levels of well-being another may interpret as moderate. One way I will mitigate the risk of subjectivity in my observation is through the use of detailed observation sheets, which will provide me with a clear outline of the scale in the areas that I'm observing, potentially reducing errors in interpretations.

When conducting my observation I will be using an observation schedule, **shown in appendix 1**. The observation schedule was curated using elements of the Leuven Scale of well-being, aiming to assess the well-being of pupils from indicators such as confidence and positive emotions. I will be observing how well three pupils in a mixed ability group engage with an activity sheet following a story that discusses worries and why it's important for those worries to be shared. When selecting which pupils to observe I will ensure that they are all of different abilities, high, medium or low, through prior discussion with the class teacher. This will provide a clearer outline of how mixed ability groups can impact the well-being of pupils of different abilities, and how they interact with each other. Factors such as how well the three sample pupils are able to clearly communicate their ideas, and how comfortable they look within the mixed ability a will assist me in gaining an understanding of their level of well-being in accordance with the Leuven Scale, **as seen in appendix 2**.

Discussion and findings:

While conducting research regarding children it is important that ethical considerations are made in order to mitigate any potential risks. **The British Educational Research Association (2018)** specifies the necessity of protecting all participants from any risks that may have any negative repercussions, which includes the safety of environments and obtaining relevant informed consent from participants. However, in certain contexts the need for parental consent may not be applicable. For example, I will not be obtaining parental consent as the observational research will be conducted in their own learning environment, and activities observed will be designed by the class teacher. Additionally, compliance with legal frameworks like the **Data Protection Act (DPA) (2018)** should also be considered by researchers. The DPA outlines how personal data should be used and handled, to ensure that privacy rights are upheld and reduce risk of harm. The UK **Government's guidelines for data sharing (2018)**, a reflection of the DPA, puts emphasis on the importance of anonymity in working with vulnerable groups such as children. In my research I will observe data protection guidelines by keeping the school setting anonymous and identifying sample pupils as Pupil A, B and C. By following legal and ethical frameworks such as these, researchers can assure that they are safeguarding the well-being and protection of children participating in their studies.

Using the completed observation schedule, as seen in appendix 1, comparisons are able to be made between the three pupils. Notably, Pupil A, the highest ability pupil, displayed the most consistent indicators of extremely high well-being throughout the activity. They were very self-assured, and this carried through in their support of others by taking the role of the teacher in this setting. The pupil often made use of the learning environment, using displays around the room for support when needed for themselves and the rest of the group. Their level of well-being remained consistently high throughout the activity, and they clearly took pleasure in assisting others learning.

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Furthermore, Pupil B's level of well-being started at moderate as the group were introduced to the book and task, but once the group began discussion their level of well-being increased to high. While the pupil was not as confident as Pupil A, Pupil B made an effort to assist others and work with peers to complete tasks. Often, the pupil was able to communicate their ideas clearly and displayed positive emotions within the group consistently.

In addition, Pupil C was operating at a high-level of well-being when the book and activity was first introduced, however this declined to low after they interpreted teacher instruction as negative. It is possible that Pupil C may benefit from different types of instruction rather than verbally, perhaps the use of a WAGOLL (what a good one looks like) so that they have a clear understanding of expectations. At times, Pupil C was able to communicate their ideas but eye contact while doing so was a struggle for them. They also struggled to complete their tasks without support from others but others within the group were happy to support them, especially pupil A.

Overall, this observation has provided valuable insight into the relationship between mixed ability grouping and pupil well-being. These findings suggest how some pupils' well-being benefit from these learning environments within foundation learning in terms of confidence and collaboration, but the results also stress the importance of making sure that the needs of all pupils are met within the mixed ability group.

Conclusion:

In conclusion, it is possible to suggest that there is an overall positive relationship between mixed ability groupings and pupil well-being within the foundation learning environment. From the use of relevant literature observational findings it can be proposed pupil well-being is improved through collaboration, which can be enhanced by using mixed ability groups, which promotes self-esteem and positive relationships (**Liang et al 2022**). Therefore highlighting the importance of collaboration to enforce an effective learning environment within foundation learning (**Laal & Ghodsi 2012**). The use of relevant research and observations has created a progressive argument in advocacy for inclusivity and collaboration in teaching and learning practices. Upon reflection, it may have been beneficial to observe pupils when completing work within set ability groups, which would have allowed me to make comparisons and potentially validate research. Originally, this was something I was hoping to see within the classroom but there was no opportunity to do so over the period of my observational opportunities. The Professional Standards for Teaching and Leadership, highlight the importance of teachers refining their pedagogical practices to create an effective learning environment (**Welsh Government 2017**). My research has emphasised the importance of assessment and differentiation in my future professional practice. This is something I will achieve by using both formative and summative assessment, to ensure that the needs of all learners are being met (**Bolick & Rogowsky 2016**). I will further make sure these needs are met through differentiation of explanations within the learning environment.

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Appendix:

1. Completed observation schedule

Observation schedule

Name of observer: Millie Brace

Date: 8/2/24

Time: 9:30, first activity of the day

How do mixed ability groupings influence the well-being of pupils in foundation learning settings?

Section A

Context:

Year Group: Year 2

Number of pupils in a group: 6

Lesson: Part of 'well-being week'

Objectives: To work collaboratively to complete a well-being activity sheet

Ability of pupil... A: High

B: Moderate

C: Low

Section B

Level of well-being:

	Extremely Low			Low			Moderate			High			Extremely High		
Phase	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3	1	2	3
Pupil A															
Pupil B															
Pupil C															

Section C

Did the pupil display..?	A					B					C				
Scale	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Self Confidence															
Clear communication of ideas															
Maintained eye contact															
Participation															
Positive emotions															
Support of others															

Linkert Scale: 1 = Always, 2 = Often, 3 = Sometimes, 4 = Rarely, 5 = Never

Section D

Additional Notes:

Pupil A	Pupil B	Pupil C
Very confident & self-assured Used support displays around room Took role of teacher in group MKO? Took pleasure in helping others Happy facial expression Smiled & laughed often	Just got on with it Engaged well in group discussion Happy to collaborate and support where they could, asked others for help when needed Work with others to problem solve	Engaged well with story, excited to talk about it when the group was reading it. Needed extra support to engage with activity Perceived teacher instruction as being shouted at, was upset for the rest activity & at lunch Crying and took a while to communicate why

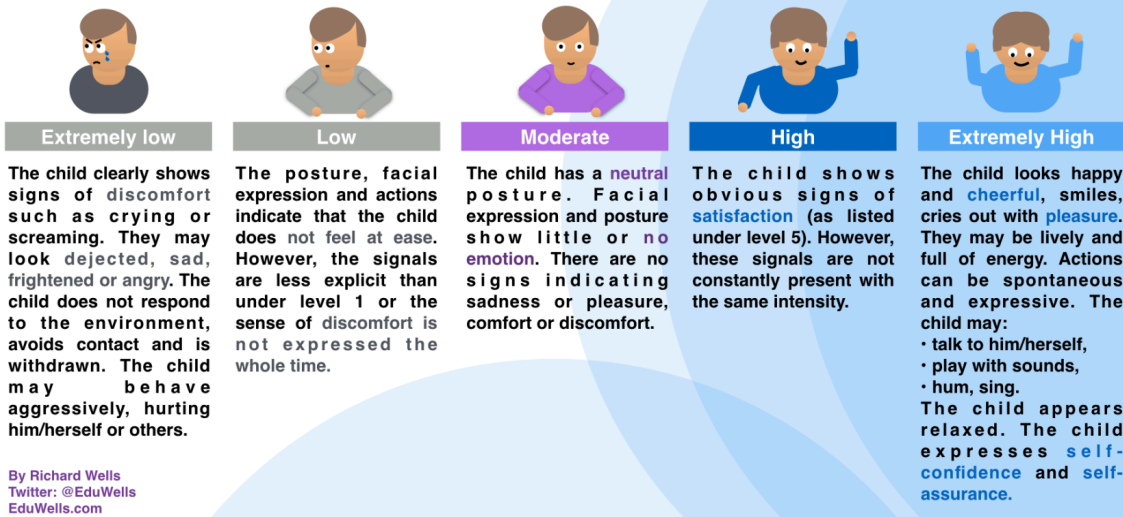
2. Leuven Scale of well-being

The Leuven Scale for Well-being (in learning)

It's time for an honest observation of your students

Based on: <http://www.plymouth.gov.uk/documents-ldtoolkit/leuven.pdf>

Let's hope teachers are designing and evaluating classroom activities with an aim that every learner might reach a state of **flow**.



Source: Wells, R. "The Leuven Scale for Well-being (in learning)" EduWells.com.

Available at: <https://eduwells.com/2015/02/28/can-ipads-help-achieve-a-state-of-flow/>

Professional Reflections:

One observation I carried out was of a whole class welsh lesson. The teacher used drilling techniques such as getting pupils to repeat phrases, and creating actions to go with them to help them remember.

Just being and observer was helpful as I was able to develop my knowledge and understanding of the impact of mixed ability groups on pupils in their typical learning environment, using their typical support, teaching and learning styles.

However, a negative of this was in some cases I was missing contextual knowledge of activities, for example one element of a Welsh lesson I observed the pupils consolidated previous learning through a game. This could potentially impact my observational findings as factors including pupil absence could have impacted their behaviour and cause them to behave differently.

I found elements of my using the Leuven Scale beneficial, particularly in giving the foundations for a more structured observational schedule. However, I believe a big limitation of this scale is its opportunity for subjectivity. For example, the responses to the scale can vary from personal biases and perceptions. Additionally, it can be argued that the scale does not capture the full scale of factors that may be impacting or causing pupil behaviours. Does a pupil having a bad morning overall suggest that they have poor well-being?

One main point of learning for me as a researcher in the classroom was my understanding of mixed ability grouping. Through my classroom research experience I was able to see the actual dynamic of pupils within their mixed ability groups, and make connections to the impact on their well-being using relevant literature. An additional point of learning was classroom management. My observational research allowed me to see what techniques are used by different educators, and how to promote a positive environment in foundation learning.

If I were to conduct this research again I would make additional observations of pupils when they are in set ability groups. This would allow me to make more comparisons in my research findings, contributing to my overall conclusion of the extent of the impact of mixed ability groupings on pupil well-being.

An additional method of research I could have used in pupil voice, to develop my understanding of how to promote a positive learning environment from the pupils point of view. This could be beneficial as I would be able to directly understand student experiences and perspectives. Additionally, I may be able to apply their experiences and opinions to research from relevant literature to increase or even decrease its validation and create further discussion. However, a potential limitation of pupil voice could be biases, such as pupils feeling the need to give what they perceive as socially desirable responses, leading to over or under exaggerations of both positive and negative experiences.