SOLEM

Solem (support and observe language and communication in kindergarten children) : an observation tool for teachers

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OVERVIEW OF THE PROJECT

• Project sponsor (FWB) identifies two needs:
  -> to support language development in 4-years-children (second grade of kindergarten)
  -> to develop an observation tool to facilitate concertation between kindergarten teachers and PMS (psychological and social staff in school)

• FWB Belgian context in the kindergartens:
  • High ratio of children/teacher (16/1) in classes
  • The teacher receive a 3 year training with little knowlegde on language development in children or learning support

→ Creation of Solem, an observation tool by a SLT team

  aims to fine-tune teachers’ observations to better identify the needs of the children and to provide adapted supporting strategies.
A tool based on 5 steps:

• **Step 1:** **observation of the group to identify the interaction profile** of each child by answering the following two questions
  
  • Does the child speak a lot?
  • Is it engaged in the classroom activities?

→ Make a portrait of the classroom 
  (each child gets a colour profile)

• **Step 2:** **observation of** each child in proposed activities suggested situations for each colour profile 
  (→ get more information)
KEY COMPONENTS

- **Step 3:** detail of **observations**
  (answering specific questions)

- **Step 4:** determination of the **level of support**
  - **cercle:** to provide a rich language environment
    (no need of specific support)
  - **square:** more conscious and frequent use of supportive strategies
    (some difficulties in language or communication)
  - **triangle:** more intensive and specific support needed
    (children may present significant difficulties in language)

- **Step 5:** **support** the child language choosing some **strategies**
  (whole-classe strategies, strategies for a group of children or specific strategies for some children)
MAIN ASSESTS

• Focus on observation as a way to determine the child profile and to support its language capacities

• New knowledge on language development
  « there are things I would never have thought to observe »

• light on « invisible » children (silent and quiet)

• Focus on content of the interaction (eg. participation) and how the child feels in class and not on the formal aspects of the language (eg. pronunciation)

• Auto-assessment tool (revision of the strategies)
OUTCOMES / Observation

- **Valid tool:**

  Significant correlations between children (n= 219) individually assessed by a SLT and by their teacher (n= 22) using SOLEM.

- The **Support profile** (cercle (41%) , square (29%) , triangle (30%)) corresponded effectively to the individual language assessment of the child made by a SLT.

- **Teachers’ feedback:**
  - They found SOLEM interesting but they did not recognize their own role in language support, especially with children with developmental language disorders.
    
    *I don’t need to do, the child is already treated by a SLT*
  
  - At a loss with multilingual children.
    
    *Anyway, s/he doesn’t understand*
SOLEM is effective but
- the teacher could be reluctant to use it (not their role)
- they don't always reach alone Step 5 to think about their use of strategies

→ support the implementation process (*What is the best way to do it?*)

and the role of teacher (*How could we change their representations?*)