Validity

In considering validity we ask ourselves if what we are measuring is a valid means of telling us about what we are trying to find out. You might say that measuring how fast a child is growing is not really a valid measure of their educational attainment. This is called *face validity.* On the face of it, is it reasonable that this is a valid measure for our purposes? There are other kinds of validity.

Internal validity is important to experiments or for intervention programme evaluation. We need to know if, for example, the programme of reading intervention is actually responsible for the outcome that the child can read more fluently or if there are other possible explanations, for example, that they got new spectacles at the same time, or their reading skills have not improve at all because they were away from school with sickness during the intervention period.

External validity or *generalizability* is the extent to which, for example, other children having the same reading intervention would make similar progress, or if the programme could be carried out in another setting, for example, at home.

Reliability is also linked to validity. What you are doing needs to be reliable to be valid. For example, a maths test in which children always got full marks would be reliable but not a valid means of distinguishing between the maths achievement of different children. Unreliability may also be due to external factors, for example, measuring a child's attainment when they are suffering from hay fever.