How we Created a Shelter of Belonging in a Developing Multicultural Irish Primary School through Participatory Action Research

This thesis is submitted to Dublin City University in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy

by

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Author's Declaration

I hereby certify that this material, which I now submit for assessment on the programme of study leading to the award of Doctor of Philosophy is entirely my own work, and that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original, and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save and to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

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Dedication

I dedicate this work to the school community in which it emerged.

> Perhaps community is a constellation. Each one of us is a different light in the emerging collective brightness. A constellation of light has greater power of illumination than any single light would have on its own.
>
> (O'Donohue, 1998, pp. 366-367)

You are the

> creative architects of a culture in which history is a foundation for the future, current accomplishments are recognized, and children are the center of the universe and tomorrow's promise.
>
> (Deal and Peterson, 2016, p. 35)

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List of Acronyms

AfL	Assessment for Learning
AoL	Assessment of Learning
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
CSP	Classroom Support Plan
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EAL	English as an Additional Language
ECCE	Early Childhood Care and Education
IEP	Individual Education Plan
IPPN	Irish Primary Principals' Network
ITE	Initial Teacher Training
NAPD	National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
NQT	Newly Qualified Teacher
PDST	Professional Development for Teachers
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
SDZ	Strategic Development Zone
SIP	School Improvement Plan
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SSE	School Self Evaluation
SSP	School Support Plan
WSE	Whole School Evaluation

Acknowledgements

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I have been most fortunate to have worked with extremely dedicated colleagues. The generosity of spirit of all has meant that the children in our care are given every opportunity to succeed in a wide range of learning experiences. Their enthusiasm and wholehearted participation is much appreciated, and without which this research would not have been possible.

My sincere gratitude is due to the parents of our school community. It has been such a privilege to have walked alongside them for a short while in their children's educational journey.

I am especially indebted to the children. Watching them grow and learn every day has been an honour. They are capable of amazing things, and I wait in anticipation for their future successes.

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Abstract

How we Created a Shelter of Belonging in a Developing Multicultural Irish Primary School through Participatory Action Research

We are one of a disproportionately small number of schools that educate the majority of students from non-Irish backgrounds. In drawing inspiration from a heritage of Celtic thought, I appreciated that as a new school community we all, albeit in differing ways, experienced that as our old shelter collapsed, we lost what it held and we had to enter into the beginnings of a new shelter of belonging that would slowly build around us (O'Donohue, 1998). This belonging implies a growth, which would afford new experiences.

In this research, I inquired into how we invoked and awakened our shelter of belonging. Hence, I viewed this as a collaborative form of inquiry, in which all involved would have the opportunity to engage in democratic dialogue as co-researchers and co-subjects, influencing our lives and our work through critical participatory action research. A boxset of three related action research narratives, presented chronologically as discrete pieces of work, allows the reader to experience the communicative spaces of this educational journey.

This thesis shows that in an affinity of thought and an openness to exploration, a community of spirit has grown and a shelter of belonging has come alive. Social and professional relationships have been nurtured, in which leadership is valued as a collective activity across members of the community. Resultingly, there is a willingness to take risks, and to be resilient and push boundaries. Essential sustained interaction is facilitated by structures that give sufficient time for effective collaborative planning, reflection, and professional learning to take place. Democratic professional relationships are emerging in dialogue with parents in which our complementary experience and knowledge work to enhance the education of the children in our care. An enactment of O'Donohue's shelter of belonging is seen in our integrity, creativity and receptivity, which has invoked the creation of a forward-thinking, collaborative culture of interdependence in the school.

Bernadette Tobin

Prologue

> So much will have taken place before the beginning: so much that will have made any beginning possible. (Peim, 2018, p. 8)

My interest in learning with and from others in making important decisions about the teaching and learning process stems from the privileged experiences afforded to me in my professional life; with the people with whom I have worked, including the children and their parents. I was fortunate to begin my career as a young teacher in the early 1980s in an extremely progressive and innovative school under a Principal, Áine Lawlor, who would later become the first director the Teaching Council, which was established in 2006. Collaboration was its *modus operandi* at a time when many teachers worked in isolation, closely guarding their ideas for their classrooms. I had the support of my colleagues who were willing to listen to my concerns, to offer advice and to share their experiences to guide me through those first early years. I gradually began to make sense of the methods that I had been taught during my initial teacher training. While this training had provided the theoretical understanding for my practice, it was the sociocultural approaches to teaching and learning in this school that set me on the path to value learning as more than an individual construction, appreciating it to be what each of us believe and then come to understand together. Within a few years I was afforded the promotional opportunity to take up a position in a nearby, newly developing school. From the outset, the Principal recognised that teaching and learning required the expertise and time of others. Staff involvement in decision-making was facilitated through consultation and teamwork, in planned and informal contact. These social structures provided what Priestley et al. (2015) describe as the relational resources (p. 30) for us to work as colleagues on innovatory curriculum and policy development, and to support the induction of newly qualified teachers, as we worked to enhance the progress and achievement of the children in our care. There was also a commitment to promoting effective links with parents, regularly involving them in the life and the work of the school. All of these relationships significantly impacted on our professional agency.

During this time I became the first learning support teacher in the school for children who experienced learning difficulties. This afforded the opportunity for professional

development that had not been available to me as a classroom teacher. It entailed one release day each week to attend a course in the Special Education Department, St. Patrick's College, Drumcondra, Dublin. Engagement on this course presented learning opportunities to develop the understanding and the language to critically engage with issues around reading and language development. Such opportunities were further enhanced as I became a tutor on this course. Subsequently, I became involved in co-devising and co-delivering a programme for newly appointed support teachers in the local Education Centre, in which we shared our practical experiences to support them as they ventured into this area of education, as well as learning from each other in the process. Additionally, the school was also extremely fortunate to be part of a pilot for the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS), which was was later formally established as an executive agency of the Department of Education and Science in September 1999. We had access to educational assessments for our children, and advice on appropriate referral pathways for other services. Importantly though, in working closely with the psychologists, I gained a very early appreciation that in their work with the adults who support the children daily, the teachers and parents, they would be enabled to reach out to more children and be more effective in removing obstacles to learning. It was this type of networking that facilitated how we began to make sense of our practice. I also had the opportunity to set up a special class for children who had been diagnosed with mild general learning difficulties. With the support of the NEPS psychologist, we worked with the parents and teachers devising appropriate programmes of learning for the children that would allow them to work in their mainstream classroom at appropriate times during the school day. All of these experiences enabled me to develop, as Lieberman and Grolnick (1996) suggest, professional confidence, as well as skills of communication, negotiation and accommodation.

A further influential turning point in my career was the introduction of the new *Primary School Curriculum* in 1999. While the revision of the curriculum was the responsibility of the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), the then Department of Education and Science, through the then Primary Curriculum Support Programme (PCSP), was responsible for providing a programme of in-career development for teachers to ensure the changes were disseminated and implemented. This happened

through in-service for whole-school staffs, arrangements for school-based curriculum days, and the provision of curriculum support services. It was the first opportunity for primary school teachers as a whole to engage in professional development, in which the curriculum was disseminated and teachers' thinking about *what* we were doing and *why* was also supported. However, there was a need for strategies and supports at school level to facilitate the implementation of curriculum innovation and change. In our school it was informed by Hargreaves and Hopkins' (1991) model of school development planning, which was introduced to the school by the Deputy Principal as part of her master's research (Gallagher, 2000). She provided us with guidance, which allowed us to be effective in our approach to implementing this systemic change, beginning with the new curriculum for English. At that time, as part of the senior management team, I had the specific instructional leadership and curriculum development role for the English and mathematics curricula in the junior classes of the school. Having been inspired by the Deputy Principal's work, I was undertaking my own master's programme of study. I was introduced to action research as a research methodology. Its potential as a form of research where there is professional intent to intervene to improve practice in line with espoused values interested me. I could see how it would allow for responsiveness to our evolving understanding as we began to implement this new curriculum, while simultaneously involving us in our own educational process. In using action research, I worked with a group of teachers to develop and implement a strategy to improve the teaching of the writing process in the junior classes of our school, as outlined in the *English Language curriculum* (Government of Ireland, 1999). This methodological approach enabled us to change our practice and to accommodate new ideas through collaborative dialogue and reflection. While theory initially informed our practice, we developed our own personal theories of education from practice; we understood and knew what we needed to do but it was in the process that our learning happened. In this way we managed to live out our values for our practice in developing a strategy to improve the teaching of the writing process. This encouraged an inquiring and learning community, which allowed us to develop shared meaning; to ask the *what* and the *why*, not just the *how*, of curricular innovation at classroom level as revised curricula for the other subject areas were introduced. Our experience was further enriched by access to external expertise; we discussed our work, and sought input from staff members of the Special Education

Department, St. Patrick's College, adding to our "discursive resources" (Priestley et al., 2015, pp. 59-84), which played a role in developing agentic capacity in this work.

In 2003, having spent two years working on the implementation of this new curriculum in the infant classroom, I returned to the area of special education in the school. This was a time when real change was happening. In Ireland, many children with special educational needs had been educated separately in special schools or special classes in mainstream schools. However, the ratification by Ireland of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child in 1992 led to changes in policy and legislation that introduced a rights-based perspective regarding provision for young people within the Irish education system. Additionally, the publication in 1993 of the report of the Special Education Review Committee introduced the idea of the continuum of provision for these students in special and mainstream settings. The 1990s had also seen litigation by parents for failure to provide an education for their children, which prompted the State to address the education rights of students with special educational needs. The Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) was signed in 2004, and although not fully enacted, it provided for the education of a child with special educational needs, wherever possible, in an inclusive environment with children who do not have special educational needs, unless to do so would be inconsistent in the best interest of the child or with the effective provision of the children with whom the child is to be educated (ESPSEN, 2004, Section 2). As a result, a number of changes were made to resource allocation throughout the following years, which has now resulted in a revised model of allocation in which special education teaching supports are provided directly to schools based on their educational profiles, offering schools greater autonomy to allocate teaching resources flexibly, based on pupils' needs, without the requirement for a diagnosis of disability (Department of Education and Skills, 2017). I became the co-ordinator of special needs provision in the school, supporting the implementation of our special needs and learning support services. This varied and challenging role involved working closely with the Principal, teaching colleagues, special needs assistants (SNAs), parents, and outside agencies to encourage involvement, professional development and mutual support in seeking to remove barriers to learning and participation in all aspects of the school. We worked on enhancing classroom-based learning for all pupils, endeavouring to prevent and alleviate learning difficulties, and the provision of early intervention and learning

support programmes. This was my understanding of well-being integrated with learning, about which Hargreaves spoke at the Consortium of Institutions for Development and Research in Education in Europe (CIDREE) 2017 Conference; what is essential for some children is good for all children and learning has meaning and purpose. Through our collective learning, practice was changed to accommodate new ideas. This was more than discussing the *what* of how to get things done, but rather it involved questioning and problematising practice in the best interests of the children in our care. I think this was my early appreciation of "inquiry as stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), as my lived practice, although I did not articulate this as so at the time.

In September 2007, I took up a new teaching position. I was working with new colleagues, with new children, and with a new parent body in a newly founded, multicultural school. As colleagues, we each brought not only different experiences but different expectations to school; we had been shaped by our own experiences. I knew the importance of what we would do, in how we would reflect on our practice, generate discussion and act in the best interest of the children and all in our school community. Importantly, I understood how this would impact on future agentic capacity (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 30) in the school, ultimately impacting the children's learning. Indeed, it was throughout the course of my PhD work that I appreciated how we began to realise Cochran-Smith and Lytle's (2009) idea of "inquiry as stance", in which we were constantly engaged in problematising our practice; "questioning the ways knowledge and practice are constructed, evaluated, and used; and assuming that part of the work of practitioners individually and collectively is to participate in educational and social change" (p. 121). For me, this reflects the Celtic tradition of work as "a poetics of growth" (O'Donohue, 1997, p. 162) in which the art of questioning and thinking leads to the arena of possibility and expression that contributes to the creativity and improvement of the larger community. It has encouraged an openness to continual learning and innovation from which our shelter of belonging emerged**.**

Chapter 1 Introduction

1.1 The Educational Policy and Practice Context for the Research

I begin this thesis by bringing the reader on a background journey into what has been described as the first educational policy document in Ireland to set out an integrated approach to improving standards across all the phases of education, from early childhood to the end of the post-primary cycle, as well as focussing on curriculum design and related teacher education issues (Hislop, 2011). Its impact on policies and practices in education in Irish primary schools has relevance for my research. The school, as I refer to it throughout this thesis, had been newly established prior to the introduction of this policy document. Yet, as the reader will see, it did not meet the profile of a traditional Irish school. As there was no roadmap for us, we used experience and what we knew of the latest research to begin to work, within the existing *Primary School Curriculum* (Government of Ireland, 1999), to support a teaching and learning environment in the context of our school community. Much of what was envisioned in the Strategy document was what we were working towards. My research is part of the story of our response to these contextual and systemic demands.

The Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's (OECD) Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) survey in 2009 had shown a decline in reading and mathematics scores, which moved Ireland from being positioned among the above average performing countries to among the average performing countries in reading, and from among the average performing countries to among the below average performing countries in mathematics (Hislop, 2011). The publication of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) marked the beginning of a major national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people in the education system, including those with special and additional educational needs. A broad concept of literacy, which includes the ability to use and understand spoken language, print, writing and digital media, and of numeracy, the ability to use mathematics to solve problems and meet the demands of day-to-day living, was understood (Department of Education and Skills, 2011, p. 8). The areas for action identified in this comprehensive and integrated framework include actions to improve the curriculum, to build the capacity of school leaders, to enhance

teaching skills through the provision of continuing professional development, to strengthen and extend the duration of initial teacher education, and to promote a greater awareness among parents and the community of the importance of literacy and numeracy. Ambitious targets and the necessary actions to achieve the improvements were set out in the Strategy. It was acknowledged that achieving these targets would require sustained effort and focus across the education system, and the commitment of other government departments and bodies supporting families and communities.

Of particular relevance to the context of my research is the action to improve the curriculum. The Strategy recommended that the curriculum for infant classes in primary schools should be revised to reflect the approach of the curriculum framework that had been developed for early childhood education, *Aistear* (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2009a). This would ensure continuity between provision in Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) settings for 3- to 4-year olds and provision in infant classes (4- to 6-year olds). The Strategy recognised that *Aistear* had advanced considerably the thinking underlying the infant stages of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). The balance between adult-led and child-led activities emphasised in *Aistear,* regarding play as a key process underpinning the learning of young children and as a methodology for facilitating learning, was acknowledged as good quality learning experience that provides significant contributions to improving children's acquisition of literacy and numeracy. Hence, the literacy and numeracy aspects of the curriculum for infant classes were to be brought in line with the approaches to teaching and learning advocated in the *Aistear* framework. The contents of subjects other than English, Irish and mathematics would also be revised to ensure consistency with the *Aistear* framework, and to support and facilitate the teaching of subjects, especially the development of language across the curriculum and the integrated teaching of the areas of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE). Priorities were readjusted for primary education by providing more time for the teaching of language and mathematics. Action was to be taken to revise the contents of the English curriculum for primary schools to clarify the learning outcomes to be expected of learners, with explicit and systematic teaching and assessment of key literacy skills. Examples of children's work and learning to demonstrate achievements of the learning outcomes in the English and mathematics curricula would be provided by the NCCA, a statutory body of the Department of Education, to assist teachers in

self-evaluation and formative assessment. Having responsibility for co-ordinating the assessment process in the school, the emphasis in the Strategy, in reference to the guidelines on assessment published by the NCCA in 2007, on combining assessment for learning (AfL) practice with appropriate assessment of learning (AoL) approaches to build an authentic picture of the children as learners, has featured in my work. In Chapter 4, I show how I wanted to support, and learn with and from others, as we worked together to make important decisions about the teaching and learning process as we furthered our understanding of AfL within the *Aistear* framework.

Schools were required to report on the progress children were making to parents, using information from a range of assessment approaches, including the performance on standardised assessment tests to indicate how their child was progressing compared to national norms. Equally important was enabling parents and communities to support children's educational development. The communities in which children and young people live and grow were recognised as having a major role to play in fostering and supporting literacy and numeracy. The reciprocal relationship between parents and the school was underlined in the Strategy; the role of the school in empowering and informing parents in their efforts to support the children's literacy and numeracy would be complemented by what parents can offer to schools in supporting teaching and learning. This also would inform my research work as part of how the school valued parents' engagement in their children's learning. The inquiry in Chapter 5 explores the inclusion of parents and home values in the construction of the teaching and learning environment, while empowering and informing their efforts to support their children's literacy, numeracy and social development.

Responsibility for curricular reform was given to the NCCA. Timelines in the Strategy meant that the NCCA preceded a review of the primary curriculum as a whole with the publication of the new *Primary Language Curriculum* (PLC) (NCCA, 2019), to be followed by a mathematics curriculum. The Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST), the country's largest single support service funded by the Teacher Education Section (TES) of the now Department of Education, had engaged teachers and school leaders in the intervening years in professional learning opportunities to support the implementation of the PLC. At present, the NCCA is reviewing and redeveloping the primary curriculum, which is underpinned by the concept of teachers

in schools as "curriculum makers" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 153). This will see teachers and school leaders using broad learning outcomes in various curricular areas and subjects "alongside the curriculum vision and principles to devise a curriculum that is tailored to, and appropriate for the children in their school community" (NCCA, 2020, p. 4).

To complement the implementation of the Strategy, school self-evaluation (SSE) was formally introduced into the Irish school system in 2012 as a collaborative, reflective process of internal school review, focussed on school improvement. This further developed the existing school development planning process, and focussed it firmly on teaching and learning. In taking ownership of their own development, SSE would empower school communities to identify and affirm good practice, and to identify and act on areas that necessitate improvement. Schools would gather evidence about teaching and learning practices, informed by assessment information, and other forms of evidence such as the views of pupils and their engagement in learning and in school life. Analysis of this evidence and reflection on the findings would help schools to reach conclusions and to make judgements about their strengths and weaknesses. As a result of the SSE process, each school would produce a short school improvement plan (SIP), containing specific and measurable targets to improve outcomes for learners. This would guide the improvement of teaching and learning activities in the school. A summary of the SIP would be made available to the whole-school community, as part of a concise SSE report. The Inspectorate, a division of the Department of Education responsible for the evaluation of primary and post-primary schools and centres for education, provided support to schools as they began to engage with the SSE process. Over a four-year period from 2012, primary schools engaged in SSE and were required to produce three-year improvement plans for numeracy, literacy and one curriculum area. In 2016, the Inspectorate prepared revised guidelines to provide practical support to schools in continuing SSE. These guidelines suggested that schools should continue to use the process to implement national initiatives and to identify and work on aspects of their own teaching and learning practices which require development and improvement. It was recognised that most primary schools would use the process to assist them in introducing and embedding the newly introduced phased-based PLC for English and Irish. While the SSE focus at the time was on teaching and learning, *Looking at Our School 2016: A Quality Framework for Primary Schools* (Department

of Education and Skills, 2016), a unified and coherent set of standards for two dimensions of the work of schools, specifically teaching and learning and leadership and management, was provided to support schools in this process. This quality framework would inform both school self-evaluation and external evaluation for schools, as complementary contributors to school improvement. The teaching and learning dimension of the framework is designed to help schools identify their strengths and areas for development, and enable them to take ownership of their own development and improvement. In this way, the quality framework seeks to embed self-evaluation, reflective practice, and responsiveness to the needs of learners in classrooms, schools, and other settings. Engagement with SSE was amended in 2018-2020 to focus on either one or two curriculum areas or aspects of teaching and learning, rather than the two to four areas required in 2016.

Hence, teachers' professional skills were highlighted as another key area for action in the Strategy, and held particular pertinence for my research work. Recognition was given to the role of the Teaching Council, the professional body for teaching in Ireland, in fostering and improving the quality of teaching generally and in core areas such as literacy and numeracy. The *Policy on the Continuum of Teacher Education* (The Teaching Council, 2011) set out the framework within which all aspects of the teacher education continuum would be integrated, developed, and improved in the years ahead. Subsequently, new, higher standards in entry requirements for initial teacher education (ITE) were introduced, the content of the course was reconfigured and the duration of ITE courses for primary and post-post primary teachers was extended. In the case of primary school teachers, the duration of the Bachelor of Education programme was increased to a four-year programme, an aggregate of one year of which would be school-based. In addition, following a pilot project programme (2013-2016), and clarification from the Department of Education and Skills on the resourcing of *Droichead*, the integrated induction framework for newly qualified teachers (NQTs), proceeded in May 2017. *Cosán* (2016), the national framework for teachers' learning, is now in its development phase. My PhD research has contributed to this development phase of *Cosán* through my participation in a Demonstration Model as one of twelve facilitators working nationally to support teachers in local Education Centres as they explore the framework and develop reflection as key tool in meaningful professional

learning. Chapter 7 will demonstrate how in our school we engage as reflective practitioners in our purposive collaborative teaching and learning activities.

The Strategy also underlined the importance of building the capacity of school leadership to support effective teaching and learning, and in implementing and leading evidence-based SSE. This would be provided by then Department of Education and Skills and Education Centres, in conjunction with the Irish Primary Principals' Network (IPPN) and the National Association of Principals and Deputy Principals (NAPD). Subsequently, the Centre for School Leadership (CSL), founded in September 2014 on a partnership basis between IPPN/NAPD and the Department, represented a new departure and presented a unique opportunity for the development of a coherent continuum of professional development for school leaders. It was the shared objective that the CSL would become a centre of excellence for school leadership. Its responsibility now extends across the continuum of leadership development, commencing with pre-appointment training and supporting the induction of newly appointed principals through to continuous professional development throughout the leader's career.

While it was in this educational context that my research was conducted, it is also important to note that during this time, following the global financial crisis, economic constraints were imposed on Ireland by the Memorandum of Understanding with the European Central Bank, the International Monetary Fund (IMF), and the European Commission (EU). From 2011 until the end of 2013, financial assistance was provided to Ireland. This, of course, impacted on schools in general; financial and personnel resources were seriously reduced. The Government implemented a recruitment and promotion moratorium across the civil and public sector in 2009. School authorities were asked to re-organise and prioritise the appropriate duties for post of responsibility holders in the context of implementing this moratorium. A Public Service Agreement 2010-2014 (Croke Park Agreement) meant additional hours were introduced to provide for a range of essential activities to take place without reducing class contact or tuition time. In addition, Budget 2012 saw a public service-wide review of allowances and premium payments, which also resulted in pay inequality for new entrants in 2011. Reductions in support staff, dis-improvements to pupil-teacher ratios and reduced capitation fees had detrimental effects on the system and on staff morale (Coolahan et

al., 2017, p. xi). However, the 2018 OECD PISA results indicated that Ireland's 15 year-olds performed among the best in reading literacy and significantly higher than the OECD average in mathematics and science (McKeown et al., 2019). Credit for this was attributed by then Minister for Education, Joe McHugh, "to the education initiatives being promoted by the department like the National Strategy on Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life (2011-2020) and how these are adopted by our schools, thanks to the dedication of our teachers" (Department of Education, 2019).

1.2 The School Context

The school had been established in 2007 as part of a plan for Strategic Development Zones (SDZ) introduced in Ireland during the Celtic Tiger years of economic boom to speed up delivery of residential developments, which were in high demand (Planning and Development Act, 2000). The SZD was award-winning in recognition of it being properly planned, balancing living accommodation with infrastructure such as shops, cinema, train station, swimming pool, library, health centres, restaurants, primary and secondary schools, mixed places of worship, and parks, among other facilities. The construction of homes would happen in tandem with such facilities. However, as the economy underwent a dramatic reversal from 2008, hit hard by the global financial crisis, which lasted until 2014, repercussions meant that plans for the area were set aside. This properly planned development, which would balance accommodation with infrastructure as sold to buyers, was stalled. And, although modified, development in the SDZ only recently recommenced in 2017. Our school is a Catholic co-educational primary school which caters for children from Junior Infants to Sixth Class, from 4- to 12-years of age. It is situated on a campus with another school, offering plurality of choice as part of a wider vision for a community that reflects a new, multicultural Ireland. Both schools have had to step up to play an integral role in the development of the community, being the first points of contact for families as they moved into the area.

From the outset it was apparent that the school did not meet the profile of a traditional Irish school, opening with more than 90% of children whose parents were from a non-Irish background; an exceptionally high level of ethnic minority. This has remained consistent; in September 2020, 87% of the student body were from a non-Irish

background. We are one of the disproportionately small number of schools that educate the majority of students from immigrant backgrounds. Our approach to cultural diversity is one of respect and interculturalism, as defined by the intercultural education guidelines for primary schools prepared by the then Department of Education and Science and the NCCA in 2005. From the beginning we believed that "we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other" (NCCA, 2005, p. 3). We acknowledged the importance of parental involvement in the education of their children, but we recognised that the vast majority of our parent body had little, or no experience of primary school education in Ireland. This challenge needed to be continually addressed. In addition, the population of the school has been transient in nature, which has been reflected in a large turnover of pupils in the school as families returned to the home country of the parents, or emigrated to other countries, or were homed elsewhere. This presented challenges in involving parents in school life, particularly in their participation on the Board of Management, although they have become actively involved in the Parents Association and have established a Homework Club. Parents participate in religion programmes and have regularly contributed to such school occasions as Intercultural Days, Christmas concerts, and in Summer Projects. Now with the recommencement of the development of the SDZ, rapid growth has meant that the school is once again in a development phase. In September 2020, there were 416 children enrolled in the school, with a staff of 29 teachers and 11 Special Needs Assistants (SNA). This new phase will bring its own challenges as the demographic of the school is changing too.

In addition, as with all schools, the impact of the promotion moratorium across the civil and public sector in 2009, meant no further appointments of staff to posts of responsibility could be made to support the school in its development. The replacement of holders of posts of responsibility who were on leave of absence and whose posts of responsibility which would normally have been replaced in an acting capacity could not be filled either. It is only in recent years that positions in acting capacity, and appointment of staff to posts of responsibility, have resumed. As a school we prioritised the appropriate duties for post of responsibility holders in the context of implementing this moratorium. Goodwill was shown by members of staff as we worked towards addressing the needs of the school, despite the public service-wide

review of allowances and premium payments, which also resulted in pay inequality for new entrants in 2011, for which there now is ongoing restoration.

1.3 My Place in this Picture

As I live locally, I was aware of this SDZ, and that new schools would be established. However, I had been teaching in a primary school for 23 years. I had been there from its early days in the mid-1980s. I had enjoyed being part of a successful and productive team that strived to develop the school as an inquiring and learning community. One morning in July 2007, I was glancing through the newspaper in a garage waiting room while waiting to collect my car after its annual service. As I turned the pages, the advertisement for teaching positions in a new primary school in the SDZ practically leaped off the pages to meet my eyes. Instantly, I knew this was for me. I had already been fortunate to experience the early days in a new school, and had taken an active part in its development. I believed in learning how to improve educational thought and practice which values others in the community and contributes to an enhanced experience of school, play, work, and life. This would be another such exciting opportunity at this later stage in my career. I decided to apply for a teaching position. In September 2007, the school opened with an enrolment of 59 pupils and 4 teachers, including a Principal, myself as first assistant and two other teachers. As a staff, three of us had over twenty years teaching experience each and one was newly qualified. We hit the ground running, reacting to unexpected issues daily. By March 2008, I had been appointed Deputy Principal. In September 2008, there were 210 pupils enrolled in the school and the staff had increased to 14 teachers and 2 SNAs.

Many of the staff were newly qualified, looking to us for answers that we did not always have. Humour and honesty sustained us in the challenge. However, I had lost my identity. I had decided to move schools to pursue the challenge of being part of a new school community that reflected a new, multicultural Ireland. Now I was unsure of my role as Deputy Principal of this school; there were responsibilities, but the role was not clearly defined for me or for others. This probably was due to the collective mindset where we were all working together to get things done, which was needed at the time and remains very important still. Yet, I had left a school in which I had grown as a professional from the early years of my teaching career, where I had known who I

was, what I was doing and how I was contributing to the school community. This time was difficult for me. It was in the writings of John O' Donohue (1998), an Irish theologian and philosopher who draws on Ireland's rich Celtic spiritual heritage, that I found an explanation of how I felt:

> You are from somewhere else, where you were known, embraced and sheltered. … Something in you knows and, perhaps, remembers that eternal belonging liberates longing into its fullest and most potential creativity. (p. 7)

In his book, *Eternal Echoes: Exploring Our Hunger to Belong,* O' Donohue (1998) writes that this longing to belong is at the core of our soul, and when "your way of belonging is truthful to your nature and your dreams, your heart finds contentment and your soul finds stillness" (p. 6). But he reminds us that there can be no true belonging, without the embrace of loss because belonging "can never be a fixed thing. It is always changing. At its core, belonging is growth" (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 340). This prompted me to question if I was as open to new learning and to the opportunities of the process of learning as I had previously thought. It was the time to work on developing what McNiff (2013) describes as the capacity to:

> live with the uncertainty of not knowing what the next moment will bring … not about moving towards a given 'end' or 'answer', but about taking the next step into an unknown future and working to make it the best it can be. (p. 74)

O'Donohue (1998) advises that such belonging is moving forward with integrity, creativity, flexibility, and a receptivity that allows a hospitality to difference, and in this sense "both individuality and originality enrich self and others"(O' Donohue, 2003, p. 133). Indeed, true community "is an ideal where the full identities of awakened and realized individuals challenge and complement each other" (O'Donohue, 2003, p. 133). In being flexible, open, and challenging, he believes that the shelter in this belonging can empower the community to be "sure of the ground on which you stand" (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 7), as it endures external pressure and confusion. But this community is not produced, rather it is "invoked and awakened" (O'Donohue, 2003, p. 133), otherwise, one would never be able "to honourably rest in the new beginning", but rather would be intruding "on emerging new ground" not having observed "the dignity of painfully earning … passage" (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 340). I knew I could not re-create my experiences in my previous school. Yet, as Deputy Principal, I had

wanted to explore ways of encouraging confidence and efficacy in our ability to learn from one another, to share ideas, to discuss and question practice, to belong to a community that works, lives, and learns together for the good of all.

This opened the way for the conduct of my PhD research, which took place over a seven year period (2013-2020), through the formative years of development in the school. Being a multicultural school presented challenges, which may not present in other schools, and this meant we needed the opportunity to influence our lives and work. I saw this as a collaborative form of inquiry, which would invite others' innovative thinking to be involved as much as mine in the research process, and in how we conducted our work lives as we built a shelter of belonging around us. Being more than simply engaging in discourse with others, this research required an ecological thinking of attentiveness to the way in which we enacted our lives with each other (Carson & Sumara, 2001, p. xx). It called for a living inquiry in critical participatory action research, in which I inquired into myself and with others acting as co-researchers and critical learning partners (McNiff, 2013, p. 23).

While I am interested in learning how to develop and improve our practices in practical situations, the need to understand how to support each other, and how to learn with and from each other has been an important focus too. I wanted to encourage a way of working in which to constantly question not just *how* to get things done, but also to interrogate *why* we do *what* we do and asking, as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) contend, *whose* interests are served by this (p. 121). Although this would not always be comfortable, and while the school was relatively new, I appreciated that learning together in a critical inquiry would make it possible for us to take responsibility for transforming our practice, testing our own assumptions and values in order to transform our understanding of what we do and the way we relate to others, and the situations around us. Thus, action research would allow for a "spontaneous, self-recreating system of enquiry" (Mc Niff, 2013, p. 67), in which we could respond to the situation, to those involved and to our growing understanding or consciousness raising, actively involving us in our own educational process. As McNiff (2017) asserts, we could communicate our ideas "as theories of real-world practice" (p. 18) by explaining *what* we were doing and *why*, with these personal theories evolving as we ourselves changed and developed. And while I would work with groups of teachers on issues that had

been identified of importance to us and to the school, part of the task of the action research would be to open communicative spaces (Habermas, 1996) beyond the immediate participants, to open debate in justifying our views with others in the school and beyond, in what Kemmis et al., (2014b) call "ecologies of practices" (p. v), promoting a collective responsibility for how practices are conducted, and for their consequences.

1.4 Purpose of the Research

While O'Donohue portrays a spiritual reality with insight from a range of ancient beliefs and practices, in my research I set out to inquire into how we invoked and awakened our shelter of belonging in the educational context of a school community. My thesis will show the educational influence in my own learning, in the learning of our teachers, students, parents, and in the learning of wider social formations as we worked towards building our community, while acknowledging the systemic demands outlined earlier in this chapter. In bringing my own values to the research, I acknowledged each person's entitlement to equality of opportunity to realise his or her potential for growth, to be listened to, to speak, to offer opinions, to question and to be happy, but to be responsible for their words and actions towards others. Yet, as researcher and as Deputy Principal, I accepted full responsibility for exerting influence, which I understood to be encouraging others to have confidence in their own learning, to challenge ideas and assumptions, and to challenge me, in an openness in our encounters with each other and those with whom we interact, within and outside of the school community. My research then has always been concerned with praxis, the *why* question, in a "dialectical process of reflection, enlightenment and political struggle" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 144), in which we called something into being that had not existed before, as described in Arendt's concept of natality (1958). Hence, my thesis will show how we uncovered agency in and ownership of our community. It tells of how we seized the opportunity to influence our lives and work; to develop the capacity for a self-reflective understanding that would help us to explain why we could not just repeat what was happening in other schools and to know *what* it was we needed to do and *why*, and to take informed action. It is how, in our plurality, we each came to reveal our own view, which was then developed in communication with others, accommodating their distinctive points of view, and drew on our collective critical

capacity in communicative spaces (Habermas, 1996), from which our shelter of belonging has emerged.

1.5 Overview of the Thesis

Chapter 2 provides a rich description of the formative years of the school in which we began to develop our way of working. A roadmap did not exist for schools like ours. We had to take autonomy from the beginning as we endeavoured to get the things right that that we could control. This took effort, leadership, commitment, and a desire to bring about a safe and supportive environment to encourage a strong sense of connectedness to school for all in the community. This chapter provides the reader with the essential background and a greater understanding of my research inquiries that followed.

In Chapter 3, I consider my educative stance to practice and what this has meant in the conduct of my research in investigating educational influence as we began to build our shelter of belonging in our multicultural school community. In outlining my ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives, I show that my research is located within the critical paradigm. I provide a theoretical understanding of action research as my preferred research methodology, explaining why I was drawn to critical participatory action research to allow for initiative-taking in the web of social relationships that constitute our school community.

The next section of the thesis comprises a boxset of three related action research inquiries, presented chronologically as discrete pieces of work, which the reader can choose to read selectively or as a series. These will allow the reader to experience the communicative spaces (Habermas, 1996) that enabled us to create a shelter of belonging, drawing on our collective critical capacity to transform our understanding of what we do, and the way we relate to others and the situations around us. In each there is critical engagement with the relevant literature; in drawing on the insights of others, we informed our practice. Yet, the reader should see how I offer our "original interpretation or creation" (McNiff, 2017, p. 105) as we developed our own theories from this practice.

Chapter 4 concerns the implementation of *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) in the infant classes in our school. The two approaches to assessment, assessment for learning (AfL) and assessment of learning (AoL) are outlined in this framework. However, while both approaches are important, the focus is on AfL in progressing the children's learning and development. This assessment method reflects sociocultural theory and allows for both child-led and adult-led activities. Here I document an early inquiry as we furthered our understanding of this formative assessment in our day-to-day interactions with children in the infant classrooms.

Chapter 5 acknowledges that parental engagement with children's learning and education is of vital importance. While all types of parents' involvement can have a positive effect, it is actually what parents do with their child at home that has the greatest impact. However, if the engagement of parents in learning is not deeply embedded in the life and thinking of the school, it is unlikely to be as effective (Goodall, 2015, p. 174). This chapter documents an exploration of the inclusion of parents and home values in the construction of the teaching and learning environment. It also illustrates the impact of this inquiry on a school-wide transformative journey in our thinking of how we began to understand and develop whole-school processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities.

Chapter 6 precedes the final action research inquiry. It begins with a discussion of *Cosán,* the national framework for teachers' learning. This emphasises continued professional growth for enhanced professional learning to improve student outcomes, which requires planning, based on ongoing reflection on learning and its impact on practice. While *Cosán* is firmly embedded in and acknowledges the learning that teachers already do, the Teaching Council have been mindful that the framework represents a degree of cultural change for registered teachers and for the education system. Time and space have been needed for a development phase of *Cosán*, conducted through teacher-led research. The final focus of my PhD research is set in the context of this development phase. In this chapter I interrogate relevant literature which informed the conduct of an inquiry into what we can achieve together through collaborative and reflective practice, as understood in *Cosán*, which is detailed in the next chapter.

While there are many ways in which teachers can engage in professional learning and development, as recognised in the *Cosán* framework, Chapter 7 demonstrates our teacher collaboration as a form of professional development. This inquiry is set in the context of existing exploratory work on developing our use of collaborative and co-operative teaching and learning methodologies. In focussing on in-school professional learning opportunities it narrates our engagement in the process of reflection on our learning, and on the impact of that learning for ourselves as professionals, for our practice and for the children's learning.

The relevance and relationship of these inquiries are linked in Chapter 8. Here I show my understanding of a shelter of belonging in the educational context of a school community. It illustrates the educational influence that is dependent on Dewey's (1933, 1944) attitudes of whole-heartedness or single-mindedness, open-mindedness, and intellectual responsibility that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others. Recommendations are made for schools and teachers, and the relevance of this work for national policy is outlined.

Chapter 2 The Backstory

2.1 Introduction

> Aristotle (1980) … made the point that practices such as education occur in the domain of the 'variable', not the domain of the 'eternal', and that we therefore are not in the possession of the kind of certain knowledge that we can have of phenomena and processes that always operate in the same way – such as the movement of heavenly bodies – but operate in the field of actions and consequences, where our knowledge is always provisional because the reality we work in is always changing. (Biesta, 2015, p. 19)

In discussing the praxeology of education, Biesta (2015) contends that we need to "tailor" our existing knowledge to new and ever-evolving practices, which is a matter of judgement (p. 19). As a roadmap had not existed for a school like ours, this meant we needed to modify practices to the suit the context of the school, and to be ready to constantly ask the normative question of *why* we were doing *what* we were doing. While it was acknowledged that teacher professionalism at school level could address pupil achievement, the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) introduced performance management through SSE and SIPs. We strived to strike the balance between the two; acknowledging our accountability while continuing to measure what we valued. In this chapter, I provide a rich description of the school through its formative years in which we began to develop our own way of working. I want to provide the reader with an understanding of the processes in which we began to make sense of our world. This is presented in a manner which shows how these developed, and continue to evolve, as we moved from reacting to issues daily to considered responses as we began to engage in professional dialogue, which encouraged initiative and risk-taking in meaningful development work in our school. This will inform the reader of the necessary background context for my research inquiries with the teachers and children in the classrooms, with the parents, and into what we were achieving though collaborative reflective practice envisioned in *Cosán,* the national framework for teachers' learning, as a shelter of belonging slowly gathered around us.

2.2 The Impact of Cultural Difference on Classroom Interaction

From the beginning, as a school we recognised our part in the development of an intercultural society; our vision was that the school would reflect the best of Irish society, with children and parents from different backgrounds working together with staff. We strived to create and provide a safe, secure and happy environment where values of respect and understanding are promoted. We endeavoured to nurture each child to develop their potential in a setting where they feel valued. We believed that in creating a setting where there is a high level of respect and co-operation between management, staff, parents and pupils, the overall holistic development of each child can be promoted. But we were a monocultural staff with a multicultural school population and none of the staff, despite three of us having worked previously in schools with children from other cultures, were prepared for the cultural differences that affected classroom interaction.

We wanted the children to have a successful and happy experience in school, but we very quickly realised the need to understand cultural influences. We could see that the children's behaviour differed from each other. Actions that were deemed inappropriate in the child's home culture, such as making eye contact with an adult, which did not cause offense to Irish culture, also meant that their behaviour differed from that of the staff. We were not from the same background and the only experience of classroom interaction of many of the staff was that of their own school days. In addition, many of the children could not cope with any form of opposition. They engaged in challenging behaviour when being spoken to for any kind of misbehaviour, whether it was minor or serious in nature, or even if being prompted as a support to their learning. Temper tantrums, disengagement from classwork, stubbornness, refusal to accept and resolve the situation, and opposition were everyday occurrences in classrooms, which had a huge impact on teaching and learning for everyone. Much time was spent by Principal, me as Deputy Principal, and the Assistant Principal in supporting young teachers, while learning how to relate to the situation without causing its further escalation. As a staff we were caught up in "habitual patterns of reacting to challenging behaviours" (McCready & Soloway, 2010, p. 120). We questioned what we were doing. While the first year had been one of survival, during the second year, in which the school had trebled in size, we began to develop a deeper knowledge about the cultural background

of the children. This was informed by intentional learning and information gathering regarding the children in the classrooms. We realised that the children were unsure of expectations; they needed help to learn about taking responsibility for their behaviour and for each other's well-being, and that of the teachers, and to learn the essential skills of listening, negotiating and managing differences. For this to happen we would need to encourage a culture of confidence in learning to support the development of a "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2008), which promotes resilience in the face of difficulty and leads to success in learning. We needed to be mindful of our response and turn challenges into opportunities.

To ensure an educational environment guided by our vision, work began on the development of a Code of Behaviour during the 2008-2009 school year, and was ratified in 2011. During this time, the Assistant Principal co-ordinated a consultation process with teachers, SNAs, Board of Management, parents, and pupils. A whole-school approach to the promotion of positive behaviour was developed. This is based on the *Incredible Years*® programme. While this is a series of interlocking, comprehensive, and developmentally-based programmes targeting parents, teachers and children, a group of staff members received this training, organised by our very forward thinking National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, to support teacher management skills in improving children's social and emotional competence, and reduce behaviour issues. This could be explained as how we began to embrace the "the cultural complexity of the school by "fine-tuning one's experience in and of the world, a process that can be lead [*sic*] by experts who turn teachers' attention back within themselves" (McCready & Soloway, 2010, p. 122). This training targeted teachers' use of effective classroom management strategies for dealing with misbehaviour, promoting positive relationships with difficult students, strengthening social skills in the classroom, and strengthening teachers' collaborative process and positive communication with parents, which was then discussed with the whole staff. Behavioural expectations and approaches to managing misbehaviour were then discussed and agreed with all members of our school community. The children were given the opportunity to discuss what is needed for learning and teaching. They experienced being part of a collective effort to ensure the school could be a good place in which to learn and to teach. In providing the opportunity for them to learn about taking responsibility for their behaviour and for their well-being and that of others, the

children were asked to consider what they should do, and what teachers and parents could do, to make the school a place where everyone feels safe, is able to learn, belongs, is respected and respects others. Our "Golden Rules" were devised based on principles of respect and safety. In creating an atmosphere of respect, tolerance, and consideration for others, positive behaviour and self-discipline were being promoted, recognising and accommodating difference. Consequently, at the beginning of every subsequent school year, the children have been encouraged to discuss and devise classroom rules with their teacher, which are displayed in age-appropriate language and manner, and are revised and reviewed regularly in class. Children who present with behavioural difficulties arising from their special education needs have an individual behaviour plan as part of their Individual Education Plan (IEP), devised in consultation with their parents. Support plans addressing behavioural needs for other children who consistently do not respond to the systems in place are activated in a similar manner. The school staff brought their professional expertise in understanding the links between behaviour and learning, and their experience of what works to help students behave well. Consultation with parents in the development of the Code of Behaviour helped to give them an insight into what teachers need in order to be able to teach effectively. This was also a way to involve parents in reinforcing messages about learning and behaviour that are conducive to a happy school, and to encourage them to have a strong sense of pride in the school and ownership of its work. The idea of positive praise for doing something well was a little difficult for some parents to understand as they questioned the need to praise for something one should have done well in the first place. This would change. Chapter 5 of this thesis discusses the experience of a small group of parents as they engaged with this "growth mindset" (Dweck, 2006) in supporting their children's learning.

Over the years, as the Code of Behaviour has become embedded, it transcends everyday life in the school. Teaching and learning are happening. Instead of senior members of staff being called upon, it is teachers who have become "experts within their own inner domain that then embody the relational presence to meet and greet the ever-changing demands" (McCready & Soleman, 2010, p. 122) of the school. The Code has played a vital role in the children's positive experience of school and their cognitive, social and emotional development. In addition, sport has been viewed as important in the holistic development of the children. The Principal has a keen interests in sport. Some of the

staff had participated at a high level of athletics in Ireland, while others played at a high level in Gaelic Athletic Association (GAA) sports. They capitalised on the children's innate athletic ability. This was not always easy as classroom interactions or issues were often not left behind and would influence behaviour during these extra-curricular activities. Initially, we could see some children would withdraw if they encountered difficulty. Yet, over the years we saw how these activities enhanced the children's self-esteem, their ability to listen to instruction, to work as a team, and also to respect the opposing teams. Of course, there were disappointments for children when they did not succeed like others, but all sporting engagements were acknowledged and valued. This enhanced a sense of connectedness to the school for all children. Whole-school responses have been given to children on their return from the annual Santry sports, events organised by Cuman na mBunscol, to acknowledge their participation and to celebrate their achievements. All of this has supported us in helping children to learn to be happy, to celebrate their strengths, to build their self-belief and to begin to develop problem solving skills. In a sense, we wanted to provide a safe and supportive environment for building life skills, resilience, and a strong sense of connectedness to school, as espoused in the NEPS guidelines for well-being in the primary school, which were jointly published by the Department of Education and Skills and the Department of Health in 2019.

2.3 The Impact of Language on Access to the Curriculum

The area of language impacted greatly on the children's access to the curriculum and progress in literacy, and, to an extent, numeracy. Some children had English as a first language. Others used English although it was not the first language of the home. There were those who only spoke their home language on entry to school, while some children were neither proficient in the language of the home nor in English. The staff was the main native speaker model. The existing provision for children with English as an additional language (EAL), which provided language support teachers to assist schools with additional language support teaching, was an immersion model dependent on models of native language speakers. This did not address our needs. Also, many of our parents did not know how to access the free pre-school year in the ECCE scheme, which was introduced in January 2010. Children started school without this valuable pre-school experience. In addition, much of the parent body was unfamiliar with the

Irish education system. They were anxious that the children were learning, but some were unused to being consulted in their children's education and could misunderstand or read this consultation as a complaint. Yet, the school was not included in the Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools (DEIS) national programme, which is aimed at addressing the educational needs of children and young people from disadvantaged communities. Schools are classified as participating in Band 1 or Band 2 of DEIS; schools in Band 1 have greater concentrations of disadvantage, and are supported specifically by lower pupil-to-teacher ratios. All primary and post-primary schools participating in DEIS receive a range of additional resources including additional staffing, funding, the Early Start pre-school programme, access to literacy and numeracy programmes, and assistance with activities such as school planning. Interventions such as the Home School Community Liaison Scheme (HSCLS) and the School Completion Programme (SCP) are available to DEIS urban primary schools and to DEIS post-primary schools. These resources were unavailable to us. A proposal was put to a Joint Committee on Education and Science in 2010 by the Principal of the school to introduce a scheme under the working title of DEIS Band 3 to be piloted for a limited period of time in the small number schools with a similar demographic. It was envisioned that this would incorporate an Early Start pre-school programme, a Home-School Liaison Officer and a review of EAL provision with a view to implementing a more appropriate system for schools with this profile. Unfortunately, this did not happen. As a school, we had to begin to work on a programmes that would best suit the children in our school. We became the "curriculum makers" (Priestly et al., 2015, p. 153) that is recognised in the *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020), in which the direction for curriculum change means that schools "have the capacity to take account of the particular needs and interests of children, their parents and the wider school community, and the characteristic spirit of the school" (p. 4). But this did not happen overnight. We had to begin by looking at what we thought would make a difference for our school.

2.4 Making a Difference -The Initial Response

As a school, we were required to prepare a School Plan (Education Act, 1998), which would enable the school to control the direction and pace of its own development in a professional way. An important dimension in this process of development planning

would be the collaborative effort and co-operation that takes place between the Principal, the teachers, the Board of Management and the parents of the pupils attending the school. The ultimate goal of school development and change is "an improvement of the quality of teaching and learning in the classroom" (Hargreaves & Hopkins, 1991, p. 17). The experience of this second year had given us a picture of the school and of the changes we needed to make. Work on the Code of Behaviour was the essential first step, but we began to examine teaching and learning in English and in maths. The need to give the children the language to communicate by promoting language in a communicative environment was of paramount importance. We also needed to investigate the language demands of the curriculum, the language used for instruction, and the language the children would use in their learning. As a learning support teacher for a number of years in my previous school, I had been trained in this area. The Assistant Principal also had experience and training in working with children learning English as additional language. I knew I could not re-create my experiences in my previous school. Yet, I had wanted to explore ways of encouraging confidence and efficacy in our ability to learn from one another, to share ideas, and to discuss and question practice. The Principal discussed the possibility of developing a Summer Course for teachers with the staff. Anyone who attended the course, which forms part of the overall Continuous Professional Development (CPD) provision for primary school teachers, would be entitled to Extra Personal Vacation (EPV) leave. Importantly, this would be the opportunity for the whole staff to begin work together on prioritised areas and to have a framework for the new academic year (2009-2010), which would begin to guide classroom practice. This is what I had moved schools to do.

The Assistant Principal and I saw the potential in what Gibbons (2002) maintains that we do not "first "learn" language and the later "use" it" (p. 25), and we could see how the teaching of language could be integrated with the teaching content across the curriculum. We saw the potential in enhancing oral language across the Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) curriculum, while supporting the implementation of the Code of Behaviour. This would help our children to develop communication skills, appropriate ways of interacting and behaving, and to begin to build conflict resolution skills. Drawing on theoretical constructs by Halliday (1978) in relation to the functions of language, and Vygotsky's (1986) theory that an individual's

learning and development occurred first as a social process and subsequently became internalised in an ongoing and dialectical manner, we worked on a framework to promote language in a communicative environment. This was based on the First Steps programme available to DEIS schools in Ireland; we purchased our own copies directly from the publishers. A sample overview of one strand unit of the SPHE curriculum was presented to the staff during the Summer Course, and following discussion, time was given to allow the staff themselves to investigate the potential of different curricular strands in a similar manner. Explicit teaching of the curriculum with the specific spoken language demands was planned for the classroom; the necessary vocabulary and sentence structures were highlighted, the required syntax was noted, and teaching and learning that would involve such strategies as discussion, partner and small group work and oral reports were suggested. Similarly, we investigated how the use of story could be exploited to enhance language through teacher-guided reporting, and in talk and discussion in the junior classes. This Summer Course also provided an opportunity for the staff to agree basic standards in other areas of the English and maths curricula, for review of work done on the draft Code of Behaviour, and to prepare for consultation on this with children and parents in the coming school year. While, we had structured this learning experience for the staff, this was the responsibility we took for doing things for other people for the sake of their future autonomy (Heron, 1996, p. 127). We were at the beginning of learning to work together.

2.4.1 Teacher Induction

Prior to the Teaching Council's introduction of *Droichead*, the integrated professional induction framework for newly qualified teachers (NQT), which includes both school-based and additional professional learning activities to address the needs of teachers as they begin their careers, the Inspectorate conducted visits to the classrooms of all NQTs during their probation year. In the early days of the school, this probationary year entailed a General Inspection, duly notified, which was carried out in the second half of the probationary period; a day long inspection in the teacher's classroom. Pending the transfer of responsibilities to the Teaching Council for establishing procedures for the induction and probation of teachers, adjustments were made to the probationary process for primary school teachers in 2010 in which two unannounced inspection visits were made by the Inspectorate, each lasting half a school day. This was an added pressure

for the young teachers who were learning to teach, while dealing with the aforementioned demands of teaching in our school. Yet, while it was daunting for them, the only pre-conceived ideas they had about the classroom was limited to personal experience of school and periods of teaching practice in the initial training years. They cared about the children, were eager to learn and were willing to undertake the challenges that may not have presented in other schools. Throughout this probationary year, and in preparation for the inspection visits, the more experienced of us made ourselves available to support these young teachers with regard to classroom management issues, and in their teaching and learning, through mentoring and professional conversations to help address challenges. This was laying the foundations for the socialisation processes of future NQTs, as these teachers have become the experienced colleagues with in-depth knowledge of teaching and learning in the school. Some are now on the Professional Support Team (PST) who support school-based induction within *Droichead,* which was introduced in our school in the 2019-2020 academic year.

2.4.1.1 Venturing into Inquiring Together

Arising from this work with NQTs, and as part of my responsibility for assessment practice in the school, I saw the need to explore ways of developing assessment for learning practices (AfL) in our work. By embedding this in a view of teaching and learning of which AfL is an essential part (Assessment Reform Group, 2002), I knew its potential in supporting the children's access to the curriculum, but I was also convinced that its focus on developing learning and assessment skills, where the children's achievement is celebrated, would promote their self-esteem. This would ultimately help them to learn to begin to take responsibility for the classroom and their involvement in other students' learning as well as their own. Strong conditions and an atmosphere conducive to promoting learning would be promoted. One of the young teachers, who had been trained in the United Kingdom (UK) where much emphasis had been placed on Afl, worked closely with me here. I began to see the emergence of co-operative inquiry (Heron, 1996) in our work. This started with a small group of teachers. In line with the NCCA (2007) guidelines on assessment, we discussed how AfL is more than just simply finding out what children know, setting targets, and then later finding out if they met them or not. This helped to frame our work around

developing our understanding of the process of sharing information about learning with the children, and using this information to plan the next steps in our teaching and in the children's learning. It was about rethinking what we were doing. Communicating clear learning intentions, differentiated by context and level of support would allow more inclusivity for all levels of achievement. Providing feedback to children would therefore be central to AfL in the classroom. The success criteria discussed and agreed with pupils prior to undertaking an activity would give them a "framework for formative dialogue" (Clarke, 2005, p. 37) with us and the other children. *Think-pair-share,* a collaborative learning strategy where students initially think individually about an answer to questions, discuss their ideas in pairs, and then share ideas with the class, would be used to explore learning, and to support and enhance their social interaction.

As the work evolved, focussed feedback was provided on the learning intention and on the success criteria. Suggestions were made on how to improve their work as necessary during the lesson. We felt that the positive praise given for what the children accomplished, and the learning strategies used (Clarke, 2008, p. 22) would be important in promoting a positive attitude to their learning. We gradually saw that the children were becoming a little more confident in their learning; they knew when they had been successful, they could verbalise their successes, which gave them immediate and positive gratification. But feedback also helped to determine challenges they experienced, and to decide what the next steps should be. Through extensive modelling, and focussing on how the children were learning, we were beginning to train them to be able to do this for themselves or for each other (Clarke, 2005, p. 7). We introduced self-assessment, as suggested by Clarke (2005), by encouraging the children to stop working in order to check that they had included the success criteria in their work (p. 89). Teachers also introduced *Traffic Light*s as a way of getting the children to rate their understanding and achievement. It took longer for some to be less afraid of making mistakes. Consequently, peer-assessment was very carefully introduced through *Two Stars and a Wish*, where the children, based on the identified success criteria, could give two positive comments about their friend's work, and have one wish for something that could be improved. In trying to inform this practice further, the UK trained member of staff and myself visited a primary school in London in 2012 to investigate their AfL practices. We were provided with the opportunity to discuss our

work with other professionals and to reflect on how we could further support teachers and children, which was subsequently shared with the whole staff.

While this work informed the beginning of experience and expertise for disseminating and supporting others as they began to implement AfL, embedding it in practice would take time as the staff increased. Indeed, in responding to an invitation in the *Intouch* teachers' journal (Lysaght, 2010) to participate in the trial of an assessment for learning audit instrument (AfLAi) (Lysaght & O' Leary, 2013), disaggregated data indicated that further work needed to be done on some area of use of learning intentions, success criteria and self-assessment. However, a later Whole School Evaluation (WSE) by the Inspectorate in November 2015 acknowledged the overall quality of assessment as very good, which indicated a significant strength in the school. The report noted that teachers employed a range of formative assessment strategies, and that while self-assessment and peer review strategies had been introduced, further development in this area would be worthwhile. This is established practice in the school. But we need to continue to work to embed formative assessment, where the children own and monitor their own learning, using success criteria to reflect on and discuss their learning with each other, thus providing every child the opportunity to experience success in meaningful and appropriately challenging learning tasks in what we now can call an inclusive learning environment in the school.

2.5 Working Towards an Understanding of an Inclusive School

The development of inclusive school environments for children with special educational needs has been an important aspect of education policy since the 1990s. This saw a significant increase in the number of teachers and SNAs to support their inclusion. The central role of the mainstream class teachers in identifying and planning for all students was seen as essential to the effective inclusion of the children with special educational needs. In 2003, mainstream primary schools were supported to develop special education support teams, consisting of specialist teachers such as learning support teachers who worked with children with learning difficulties, and resource teachers who had been allocated for additional teaching support for pupils with diagnosed special educational needs (Department of Education and Science, 2003, 2005). These teachers would collaborate with class teachers in the planning and delivery of special education

provision. The publication of *Special Educational Needs: A Continuum of Support, Guidelines for Teachers* (National Educational Psychological Service, 2007) explained that as all children are unique and that because special educational needs can occur on a continuum from mild to severe and from transitory to enduring, a graduated approach to identification and programme planning was recommended. This is a three-stage approach to assessment and intervention, from Classroom Support through to School Support to individualised approaches in School Plus Support, which generally involves external professionals and support services in a more detailed problem solving process to help the child. This was in addition to the provision for children with English as an additional language, which provided language support teachers to assist schools in providing additional language support teaching.

When our school opened in 2007, one teacher worked as a language support teacher to provide for the needs of children who were learning English as an additional language. In the academic year 2008-2009, I became the support teacher for children with both special educational needs and learning difficulties. We quickly realised these disparate roles would not meet the needs of the children in our school. EAL children presented with learning needs other than English language needs, and children presenting with special education and learning needs also had English language needs. By the following academic year, with increasing enrolment figures, we formed our support team. I had been working in the area of learning support and special needs since 1990 and had implemented the staged approach to assessment, identification, and programme planning. I had experience collaborating with teachers and parents. I knew the referral pathways to external professionals and support services for children with enduring and/or severe and complex needs, or whose progress is considered limited despite carefully planned and reviewed interventions. This experience was useful but there was a steep learning curve ahead for all of us. We wanted to involve the parents in the education of their children, but language and cultural difficulties presented unique challenges in collaboratively working toward a comprehensive educational plan of action for the children. Many of the parents were unused to being consulted in these decisions. Some took it as complaint, while others thought that this support provision would be outside of school hours, and the experience of others led them to believe that they would be asked to pay for the service. Cultural difference arose in the acceptance and understanding of special educational needs, or of their child's need for additional

support. This was a different experience for me as I had come from a school where parents were familiar with the education system and expected appropriate support for their children. In addition, the language barrier and parental inexperience with the Irish education system, NEPS, and other support agencies, meant communication was difficult. However, we knew that we needed to invest time with parents to build a gradual trust so the parents could see that we were working in the best interests of the children, and that it was making a difference. We had much support from our NEPS psychologist to support us in our work in the development of this continuum of support. Initially, as a support team we presented this as our provision for children with special educational and English language learning needs. But our role in and our understanding of inclusivity would broaden to supporting teachers in the learning of all children.

2.5.1 Continuum of Support - Classroom Support

As previously explained, the challenges around language in our school were different from other schools and impacted on learning in all subject areas, which resulted in a large number of children who qualified for EAL support. While the exceptional number of EAL children in the school meant additional teachers were allocated to us, we appreciated that the children's capacity to engage in cognitively demanding tasks through the medium of English would depend on the amount of support they receive both in the school and in the home. We acknowledged the right of children to communicate and socialise in the language of their home. Children who had attained some level of literacy in their home language were encouraged to sustain the development of literacy in this language, and this still continues to be the case. We explained to their parents about the importance of the continued enhancement of the children's language and literacy skills in their home language for their affective development, as well as their acquisition of the new language. We had quickly understood the importance of all teachers playing their role in supporting the development of the children's English language proficiency. The importance of the language and literacy orientated classroom had directed our school development planning. Early steps included the CPD in the aforementioned Summer Course to begin to create such a classroom to enable all children communicate with each other and collaborate as they engaged in task-based and other activities. Every lesson needed to become a language lesson. We worked to develop the children's understanding by

linking their learning to meaningful experiences. Assessment information and classroom topics were used to devise language programmes across the areas of listening, speaking, and reading and writing. This also meant differentiated learning experiences to accommodate the needs of all pupils in the class. For those children who did not respond appropriately to the differentiated programmes, a Classroom Support Plan (CSP) was developed in consultation with parents, and still continues to be the case. This involves a problem solving process to identify and address the needs of individual children who "require approaches to learning and/or behaviour within the classroom which are additional to or different from those required by other pupils" (NEPS, 2007, p. 12). The class teacher retains responsibility for interventions at this level. If progress remains satisfactory after a number of reviews, the CSP is discontinued; the strategies which have been helpful may now be a routine part of the approach used with the child. However, if after reviews and adjustments to the CSP it is agreed that the child is not making progress, the School Support process may be initiated.

2.5.2 Continuum of Support - School Support

While the class teacher retains overall responsibility for the pupil's learning, the support teachers are involved at this stage. The allocated support teacher takes the lead in problem solving and in coordinating further assessment, intervention, and review in consultation with the pupil, other staff and parents. Supplementary teaching, in addition to classroom teaching, is then provided. This can happen either in the classroom or in the support room. In the very early years supplementary teaching for infant children who were learning English as an additional learning happened outside of the classroom. Gradual collaborative work meant we could build on the children's experiences in the mainstream class and support room, and supplementary teaching began to take place within the classroom in early morning reception activities. With the introduction of *Aistear*, the early childhood curriculum framework for all children from birth to 6 years in Ireland (2009), we began to further explore play as a methodology and context for language and literacy development. Language targets for infant EAL children are now linked with the *Aistear* topics, and themes, in the classrooms. Support teachers work in the classroom during the play session to help the children to integrate into the learning and social environment of the school, as well as to promote their

language proficiency. Older children who enrol in the school also need the opportunity to reflect on how the language works. In addition to the support they receive from their class teachers, support teachers work with these children to raise awareness about how English is structured through timetabled EAL lessons. Supplementary teaching is also provided for children who present with difficulties with language and learning, including cognitive, emotional and social behavioural difficulties, which prevent their access to the curriculum and participation in school. These additional teaching resources are allocated differentially to pupils in accordance with their levels of learning need, ensuring that students with the greatest levels of need receive the greatest levels of support. Each child with whom a support teacher works has a School Support Plan (SSP), which is developed in consultation with parents.

If a review of a SSP indicates that the pupil's difficulties continue to create a significant barrier to their learning and/or socialisation, then the pupil's needs can be considered at School Support Plus level. Chapter 5 illustrates work with a small group of parents arising from this process of support planning, which ultimately had an influence on the development of whole-school processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities.

2.5.3 Continuum of Support - School Support Plus

Some children who have their needs met through the School Support Plus process may also fall under the terms of the Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs Act (EPSEN) (2004). This group includes pupils with diagnosed special education needs and have their needs and interventions detailed and monitored through an Individual Education Plan (IEP). Likewise, some students are not necessarily covered by the terms of EPSEN, but can benefit from intervention at the level of School Support Plus (NEPS, 2007, p. 32). The process can often lead to more intrusive and individualised assessment and provision for children with emerging special educational or additional needs. It involves external professionals and support services in a more detailed problem solving process to help the pupil. The observations of the child, their parents, the class teacher, the support teacher, the SNA who may be supporting the child's care and safety needs to promote their inclusion in school, and recommendations in professional reports inform the development of this plan. Hence the effectiveness of

interventions to date are considered before embarking on this process.

Very often we needed to advocate for parents with external support agencies; explaining and completing referral forms with them, sometimes facilitating access to assessment and therapy services by co-attending to ensure the parent had access to a familiar person and could understand the process, outcomes, and recommendations, which we would later include in the children's learning programmes, and explaining available resources to the school for the children from the National Council for Special Education (NCSE). Additionally, from December to June of each school year, as co-ordinator of support provision in the school, part of my Deputy Principal duties, I worked with parents of new entrants for the subsequent academic year to support their children's transition from pre-school to primary school. We understood the importance of learning about the child with and from the parent, discussing, where applicable, the professional reports to ensure appropriate provision was in place, liaising with the NCSE, through our designated Special Education Needs Organiser (SENO), and, with parental consent, visiting their pre-school to smooth this important transition. However, it was often in September, when the new school year commenced, that more children with difficulties became apparent; parents were initially unwilling to share this information with us. Information evenings for parents of new infant children, school visits by the children themselves and liaison with pre-schools have become opportunities to help parents to share information with us. In addition, as parents became familiar with the way we worked, through the school experiences of the children of family friends, they sought enrolment in our school. This became particularly true if their child had known special educational needs. A high proportion of children with complex language, learning and behavioural needs enrolled in the school. Much later, some of these same parents would be supported in a similar way with their child's transition to second level school, in the transition programme which had been developed in an action research inquiry by one of our support team as part of a master's programme of study.

Over the years, this continuum-based assessment and intervention process supported us in our assessment, educational planning and intervention for pupils with learning, emotional or behavioural difficulties to support their school and learning experiences. Yet we appreciated that early intervention and prevention need to be prioritised, and we

allocated teaching resources accordingly for this.

2.6 Programmes of Early Intervention and Prevention

We placed a high priority on the enhancement of classroom-based learning and on the prevention of learning difficulties at all levels within the school. To this end, agreed approaches to language development, to reading and writing instruction, and number work were continually developed in order to ensure progression and continuity from class to class. These were informed by training undertaken by the teachers with responsibility for the co-ordination of the English and maths curricula. The Assistant Principal, who has responsibility for the co-ordination of the English curriculum underwent training in Reading Recovery©, an individually designed and individually delivered programme, when it became available through the Professional Development Service for Teachers (PDST) to non-DEIS schools in September 2010. While Mata, the Maths Recovery Programme, still remains available to DEIS schools only, a specially tailored programme Mata Sa Rang (Maths in the Classroom) was also offered to non-DEIS schools, PDST training for which was undertaken by the teacher with responsibility for the co-ordination of the maths curriculum during the 2011-2012 academic year.

From 2009, we had devised programmes that allowed support teachers, classroom teachers and SNAs to work together with small groups of children in the junior classes of the school to target the promotion of language, reading, numeracy, and social and emotional literacy skills. This also promoted collective responsibility in supporting agreed classroom structures and supports intended in the Code of Behaviour to create a positive classroom environment to maximise learning and socialisation, and minimise difficult behaviour. But as a support team we were over-stretched, and we learned that we needed to re-focus on in-class intervention in the very junior classes in the school. The PDST professional development in literacy and maths was a turning point for the school. With the introduction of Lift-off to Literacy (LO2L), a model of in-class support providing station teaching where each station mirrors a segment of a Reading Recovery© lesson in September 2011, and Mata sa Rang in the junior classes of the school in October 2012, the in-class intervention became more focussed. Notable improvements in the children's literacy and maths attainment were made, as well as in

the children's approaches to learning and behaviour in the classroom. These also informed our work in the newly introduced school self-evaluation (SSE) (2011), which would initially focus on the introduction and impact of guided reading, and later on developing mental maths strategies. This work was supported by *Forbairt*, a leadership development programme that was afforded to the Principal and to me as Deputy Principal to work together as a senior leadership team. Importantly, in implementing both initiatives in the classrooms, we quickly realised the importance of allocating specific time not just for planning the teaching and learning activities, but also to share our learning with each other. Practice gradually evolved into not just deciding *how* to get things done, but rather to considering *what* to get done, *why* we do it and for whose benefit, in what has now become our "inquiry of stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009).

2.7 Early Identification: Assessment

While work was already underway in using assessment for learning in the classroom, in those early years we understood the need to develop clear and effective arrangements for the identification of pupils requiring support in terms of their English language proficiency and learning needs. We wanted to develop profiles of the children, gathering and using assessment data through a range of assessment forms and in consultation with the children where possible, their teachers and their parents. In the early days of our school, our NEPS psychologist, afforded professional development opportunities through co-ordinated networking with other schools of a similar demographic who were also in the early stage of development. One such piece of work was the development of a baseline assessment screening tool for our schools. This took a broad and balanced approach to investigating children's early learning development to allow us to support our identification of children learning English as an additional language, children with difficulties, and those at risk of developing difficulties which could impact their learning. Informed by literature and commercially produced diagnostic tests available to the school, tasks were devised around the cognitive prerequisites for reading and number which depend on language development, perceptual development, spatial development, and phonological awareness. Observations on their social emotional development, from both class teachers and the children's parents, were included as part of the assessment. Over the years, the

instrument has evolved. Influenced by our learning from Reading Recovery© and Mata sa Rang, gaps in the assessment task were identified. In addition, professional collaboration with outside agencies whose interventions prompted discussion on the demands of the baseline have led to its further improvement. This baseline assessment continues to be administered by the support team in the early weeks in the first year of school in Junior Infants. In some cases, it has pointed to the need for onward referral for further assessment, which could take a considerable length of time to access and complete. Additionally, as the NEPS psychologist is shared with a number of schools, only a certain number of assessments are conducted yearly, it is important for us to know how to how to intervene appropriately with the children, and to support parents in their understanding of the needs of their children. Information from the baseline assessment directly informs our intervention, either in programmes of intervention in the classroom as discussed earlier, or in supplementary teaching by the support team.

At the time when the school opened, all Irish primary schools were required to administer standardised tests of English and mathematics to their pupils twice during their primary school years, at the end of First Class or beginning of Second Class and at the end of Fourth class or beginning of Fifth class. Initial steps in the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy meant that from 2012 all schools were required to administer standardised testing in English reading and mathematics during the period May/June for all students in Second, Fourth and Sixth classes on an annual basis onwards. From the beginning, we had used standardised tests in all classes from First to Sixth class. However, we were very mindful of their use as the available tests had been normed for an Irish population, which did not include the demographic of our school population. Analysis of results indicated that our bell curve did not depict the normal distribution, which was as expected. This would change over time, but importantly for us, in those early days we developed the practice of analysing data to track trends over time. This allowed us to identify priorities for SSE and School Improvement Plans (SIP), including changes in teaching approaches and methodologies, priorities for staff development, and for the acquisition and deployment of teaching resources, all of which enhanced the literacy and maths attainment of the children. Additionally, the support team began to work with the class teachers to discuss assessment data at individual level to examine each pupil's progress in developing literacy and numeracy skills. While high expectations are set for all pupils,

both verbal and non-verbal reasoning abilities testing have helped assess their potential to learn, allowing us to identify low achieving pupils who may have high underlying ability, and to plan appropriate support and learning experiences in the classroom. This continuous development process has involved the staff in building capacity to respond to the needs of the learners within an inclusive school community.

2.8 Our Vision of the Inclusive School Community

We have now come to understand an inclusive learning environment as an environment of learning for all children, in which every child has the opportunity to experience success in meaningful and appropriately challenging learning tasks and to achieve as high a standard as possible. In responding to the diversity of needs, we have acknowledged the different backgrounds, experiences, interests, academic, social, and emotional strengths that influence the way in which children learn when we plan our approaches to teaching and learning. This is not an easy task and will continue to evolve to meet the needs of the children in the school. As described in the NCSE document, *Delivery for Students with Special Educational Needs* (2014), we understand this approach as the "cohesive, collective, and collaborative action in and by a school community that has been strategically constructed to improve student learning, behaviour and wellbeing, and the conditions that support these" (p. 5). While involving parents in school life has been challenging, and was recognised as an area for development both by ourselves and by the Inspectorate in the WSE, we always valued the importance of strong home-school relationships. Being a non-DEIS school we do not have a Home School Liaison Coordinator (HSCLC) to engage in full-time liaison work between the home, the school, and the community. However, we always recognised the role of parents as the primary educators of their children, and gradually our teacher knowledge and expertise began to complement parent knowledge (Pushor, 2012). We are working now to involve parents more directly in policy development and school activities, as Chapter 5 in this thesis illustrates.

Teacher collaboration was the crucial factor in promoting inclusion and enhancing our capacity to provide this quality learning experience. Chapter 7 discusses our collaborative and reflective practice, as is understood in the C*osán* framework for teachers' learning, as our way of working. We have acknowledged that teachers may

require additional support in adapting their teaching approaches for some pupils whose individual progress, communication, behaviour and interaction with peers are causes for concern (Department of Education and Skills, 2017, p. 12). In recognition of our role in contributing to the professional development of all teachers to build capacity in our school to support students with special or additional educational needs to achieve their potential, as a support team we maintain time for coordinating, planning and reviewing activities to ensure effective and optimal use of supports (Department of Education and Skills, 2017 p. 18). This has established conditions for an inquiring approach to practice. It has ensured flexibility in response to changing, unplanned and exceptional circumstances that have arisen to facilitate prevention strategies and appropriate interventions for pupils who require such support. Mechanisms to collaborate and communicate have been developed. We have learned that the organisation of Transfer of Information meetings at the beginning of each school year allow an exchange of information between classroom teachers and support teachers, facilitating the continuity of progression and approach for all children. Individualised planning meetings arranged with relevant staff and parents of children with special educational and additional needs mean that appropriate programmes of learning can be developed. Mid-year reviews for all children are conducted prior to Parent Teacher Meetings to keep all informed of progress or changes in provision. End of year reviews for all children with class teachers have informed their summative report writing. NEPS group consultations sessions have been used to help teachers explore solutions to issues in supporting children with emerging or persistent learning, social, emotional and/or behavioural difficulties. Our mainstream class teachers have assumed first-line responsibility for ensuring that all students in their class, including those with special or additional educational needs, are provided with a learning programme and environment that enables them to access the curriculum and progress their learning; they are confident of our support in their endeavours. However, it must be noted that this essential sustained interaction has been facilitated by structures across the school timetable that gives sufficient time for this effective collaborative planning, reflection, and professional learning to take place. This is because of the leadership style of the Principal; he is willing to take risks, to be resilient and push boundaries because he sees the bigger picture of doing the right thing.

Guidelines for supporting pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools were introduced by the Department of Education and Skills in 2017. These provide guidance to schools on the use, organisation and deployment of additional teaching resources for pupils with special educational needs in the context of a revised model for allocating special education teaching resources. They outline effective provision for pupils with special educational needs as situated within an inclusive whole-school framework, which emphasises effective teaching and learning for all, and good collaboration and engagement between schools, parents or guardians and pupil. In effect, this has offered schools greater autonomy to allocate teaching resources flexibly, based on pupils' needs, without the requirement for a diagnosis of disability. Special education teaching supports provided to schools now includes those pupils for whom English is an additional language. Effectively much of what is outlined in these guidelines was already in place in the school. The WSE in 2015 affirmed this work being done in the school to bring it to this stage of development.

In more recent times, interagency collaboration between the health and education sectors brought specialised therapists directly into the school for the first time. This Demonstration Project on Early Years Speech and Language Therapy and Occupational Therapy Support, beginning in the autumn of 2018, has been an important initiative for our school. While in its early phase of implementation, it has allowed for the upskilling of all staff in the early identification of speech, language and communication needs, sensory motor, and self-regulation difficulties. Classroom-based learning and prevention programmes have been enriched. Individualised planning and programme development have been enhanced for children with identified needs. Obviously, the Covid-19 pandemic has interrupted this, but the Demonstration Project, in conjunction with the School Inclusion Model (2019), a new model of support for students with special educational and additional care needs as part of an integrated support system, will facilitate the continued support for the school community in engaging the children in meaningful and appropriate learning experiences. While these are unchartered waters in Irish education, it has signalled the early initial stages of what Martin (2016) refers to as a form of mutual professionalism which brings together expertise from a range of professional disciplines and joins their understanding of the child in a holistic way. There is a long road ahead, but the school is now best placed to meet the challenge.

2.9 Conclusion

We endeavoured to get things right that we had control over, taking autonomy from the beginning. This took effort, leadership, commitment, and a desire to bring about a safe and supportive environment for teaching and learning to happen, to build life skills and resilience, and to encourage a strong sense of connectedness to school for all in the community. While the early days were hard, and there could have been a sense of discouragement, I know I found hope and excitement in what we were trying to accomplish. There was always a clear vison for the school that focussed on fostering an ethos that accepts and values diversity within the pupils, staff and parents. This supported a shared sense of responsibility for all pupil learning. In many ways we had pre-empted the strategies and steps to be taken by schools under the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011), and in the approach to supporting the children with special educational needs in mainstream schools in a whole-school inclusive framework, as introduced in 2017. Importantly these cognitive and cultural resources had actively encouraged ecological teacher agency in our work (Priestley et al., 2015).

This chapter has provided the backstory of the context for my research work with the teachers and children in the classrooms, the parents, and our engagement with *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning. This research work has contributed to how we take responsibility for transforming our practice, testing our own assumptions and values in order to enhance our understanding of *what* we do and *why* as a shelter of belonging has gradually gathered around us. The next chapter explains my ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives, which influenced the methodological approach of this research, and why I was drawn to critical participatory action research to allow for initiative-taking in the web of social relationships that constitute our school community.

Chapter 3 Methodology

3.1 Introduction

In this chapter I consider my educative stance to practice and what this has meant in the conduct of my research in investigating educational influence as we began to build our shelter of belonging in our multicultural school community. I present my ontological, epistemological, and axiological perspectives which led me to adopt a pragmatic approach in exploring three major research paradigms, before locating my research within the critical paradigm. I provide a theoretical understanding of action research as my preferred research methodology, explaining why I was drawn to critical participatory action research. Heron's (1996) co-operative inquiry, which was adopted as an initial supportive structure as I introduced action research to the school community, is explored. The data collection methods employed are then outlined. Issues of validity and rigour are discussed. The chapter concludes with the ethical considerations of my research.

3.2 Ontological, Epistemological, and Axiological Positions

> …all research necessarily starts from a person's view of the world, which itself is shaped by the experience one brings to the research process. (Grix, 2002, p. 179)

Ontology is the starting point of all research (Grix, 2002). This, Cohen et al. (2018) explain, concerns the very nature of the social phenomena being investigated; whether social reality is external to individuals or if it is the product of individual consciousness (p. 5). Ontological assumptions, as Scotland (2012) suggests, are what we make in order to believe that something makes sense or is real; or the very essence of the social phenomenon we are investigating is examined. In expressing my ontological position, I consider what I bring to the inquiry, including views of myself and others, and confront the ethical and political issues. My experience of a lived practice in participation with others from an early stage in my teaching career was instrumental in forming my ontological understanding of a social reality as "the way in which individuals and social groups create, modify and interpret the world in which they find themselves" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 6). I understand that I am not a "free-standing 'I', in the company of other free-standing 'I's", on the contrary, we "form a community of 'I's" (McNiff, 2017, p.

41). In other words, as Reason and Bradbury (2008) contend, we are not bounded individuals who experience the world in isolation, but are already participants, part-of rather than apart-from the world (p. 8). Thus, like Heron and Reason (1997), I appreciate that a "reality articulated by any one person is done so within an intersubjective field, a context of both linguistic-cultural and experiential shared meanings"(p. 280). As a practitioner-researcher, I believe in this dialogical relationship. In investigating educational influence in a developing multicultural school community, I drew inspiration from our Celtic heritage and questioned if I was intruding on emerging new ground or observing the dignity of painfully earning passage (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 340). I knew that this would mean negotiation of values and forms of living with others (Mc Niff, 2017, p. 42). I could not re-create my previous experiences. Also, in recognition of the self-determination of each person, I did not want to, nor could I, impose my ideas. Yet, I wanted to explore ways of encouraging confidence and efficacy in our ability to learn from one another, to share ideas, to discuss and question practice, to belong to a community that works, lives, and learns together for the good of all. What I refer to here is the practical knowing of "how to choose and act hierarchically, cooperatively, autonomously - to enhance personal and social fulfillment and that of the eco-networks of which we are a part" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 287). My emancipatory ontology implies an autonomy, balanced with accountability, that creates new possibilities for our ownership of the development of our school community. This social and political reality establishes my process of knowing; my epistemological perspective of how we come to know; "what counts as knowledge and how it is obtained" (Sharp, 2009, p. 5).

If knowledge is co-created in specific contexts of living, "saturated with 'care' and anxiety and … often relates to a desire to sustain a 'world" (Peim, 2018, p. 12), I agree that we can only come to know this world through a "painstaking process of reconstruction, drawing inference from the bits and pieces of knowledge that we have and the ideas that we express" (Peim, 2018, p. 24). In my research, I actively engaged with my participants to create an understanding from a caring relationship with them. I wanted their innovative thinking to be involved as much as mine in the research process, and in how we conduct our work lives. I am conscious of multiple ways of seeing things, hence I appreciate that what I know will be influenced and modified by what others know, and vice versa. Knowledge then can be uncertain, which is

disturbing as it interrupts and questions the status quo. But this uncertainty can also play a role in opening new perspectives by questioning taken-for-granted assumptions, renewing our thinking, providing opportunities for us to accept responsibility for our own learning, and to develop our capacity and efficacy as learners. It is this educational influence that allows us to create our own pedagogy of the unique (Farren, 2006), our personal theories of practice. Thus, my epistemology recognises the sociocultural role in the development of meaning and knowledge. Learning is more than an individual construction. Rather, as Fleer and Richardson (2009) explain, "meaning occurs in the context of participation in the real world" (p. 133); it is not only how peers influence learning, but also on how cultural beliefs and attitudes affect how knowing happens.

Hence, epistemology is axiological; my own professional values are central to my research. I believe in learning how to improve educational thought and practice which values others in the community and contributes to an enhanced experience of school, play, work, and life. I appreciate that each of us brings different values, beliefs, perceptions to what we know and how we know it. My guiding values and principles have always been those of respect and understanding. I acknowledge each person's entitlement to equality of opportunity to realise their potential for growth, to be listened to, to speak, to offer opinions, to question and to be happy, yet to be responsible for their words and actions towards others; to belong to a community that works, lives, and learns together for the good of all. I wanted to honour the "basic right of people to have a say in forms of decision making …which affect their flourishing", including the right to be involved in "the knowledge creation processes that affect their lives" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 288), as we built a shelter of belonging around us.

I acknowledged that each person's unique worldviews are "socially and experientially based, local and specific in nature …, and dependent for their form and content" (Guba & Lincoln, 1998, p. 206) on the individuals or groups involved. It is in our interactions that we make sense of the complex layers of meanings, interpretations, values, and attitudes of our experiences. I wanted to understand this complex world of lived experience (Schwandt, 1998, p. 221), and I believed that this must involve both epistemic and political participation in my research endeavour. This of course had theoretical implications for the conduct of my research.

3.3 Locating my Research

My research emerged from my educative stance to practice. I see our practice as how we learn together. I believe that sharing and utilising collective skills and experiences encourages personal and professional growth, agency, and autonomy. In investigating the educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of our teachers, students and parents as we worked towards building our school community, I understood the importance of participative, educational decision-making in local, but sometimes nationally influenced, problems and issues, and most importantly in the normative questions of *what* to do and *why*. I also knew that I could undertake this type of research because in the few short years the school had been open, the many challenges that had presented had provided opportunities to begin to question what was important about teaching and learning in the school. This was afforded by the Principal who, as well as being concerned with doing things right, always prioritised doing the right thing.

Biesta (2020) advocates a pragmatic approach in the engagement with theory, both at the level of 'object theory' used *in* research and the 'meta-theory' *about* research, which he distinguishes from "a *confessional* approach … where the first step would be to 'sign up' to a particular theory or theoretical 'school' in order then to start doing research" (pp. 8-9). The first judgement is about the issues that need addressing, as it is only then that we can begin to ask which tool might be useful for addressing the issues (Biesta, 2020, p. 9). As a researcher, I am "bound within a net of epistemological and ontological premises which - regardless of the ultimate truth or falsity - become partially self-validating" (Bateson, 1972, p. 314, as cited in Denzin & Lincoln, 2018, p. 19). This net may be termed a paradigm; a way of looking at or researching phenomena, a worldview, a view of what counts as accepted or correct scientific knowledge or ways of working (Kuhn, 1962, p. 23, as cited in Cohen et al., 2018, p. 8). It is the lens through which a researcher looks at the world, sees the world, and interprets and acts within that world (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017). But this does not mean that paradigms drive the research, rather how we pursue the research depends on what the research is about. As Biesta (2020) states, it about connecting our judgments and decisions having identified what question need to be addressed and the problem to be

solved (pp. 7-23). I now explore three fundamental paradigms in educational research; positivism/post-positivism, interpretivism and critical theory to locate my research.

3.4 Positivism / Post-positivism

Although positivism has been a recurring theme in the history of western thought from the Ancient Greeks to the present, it is historically associated with Auguste Comte, whose work clearly exemplifies the positivist attitude, where observation and reason were seen as a means of understanding behaviour; true knowledge is based on experience of senses and can be obtained by observation and experiment (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 10). Positivists, as Mertens (2019) contends, believe one reality exists and that the researcher discovers that reality (p. 15). Hence, the ontological position of positivism is one of realism, a view that objects have an existence independent of the knower (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 5). The positivist epistemology is objective; meaning solely resides in objects, not in the conscience of the researcher and it is the aim of the researcher to obtain this meaning to discover "absolute knowledge about an objective reality" (Scotland, 2012, p. 10). Indeed, Mertens (2019) explains that positivist researchers believe that the social world can be studied in the same way as the natural world (p. 11).

This worldview assumes determinism; events have causes and science proceeds on the belief that these causal links can eventually be uncovered and understood (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 10). In attempting to identify the causes which influence outcomes, verifiable evidence is sought through direct experience and observation; empirical testing, random samples, controlled variables, and control groups (Scotland, 2012). This is a method for studying the social world that is value-free and its goal is to describe the constant relationships between variables (Mertens, 2019, pp. 11-12), giving a firm basis for prediction and generalisation. Thus, methods often generate quantitative data. Positivists claim that "scientific knowledge is utterly objective and that only scientific knowledge is valid, certain and accurate" (Crotty, 1998, p. 29). Its concern for control sees human behaviour as passive, and for instrumental reason, which Cohen et al. (2018) contend "is a serious danger to the more open-ended, creative, humanitarian aspects of social behaviour" (p. 15).

While post-positivism is similar ontologically and epistemologically to positivism, it differs in several ways (Scotland, 2012). Post-positivism represents a modified objectivist's perspective. Cohen et al. (2018) explain that it argues for the continuing existence of an objective reality but adopts a pluralist view of multiple, coexisting realities (p. 17) and post-positive researchers believe in multiple perspectives from participants (Creswell, 2013, p. 24). In early positivist thinking, the researcher and the participants in the study were assumed to be independent; that is, they did not influence each other (Guba & Lincoln, 2005). But, as Mertens (2019) notes, post-positivists recognise that the theories, hypotheses, and background knowledge held by the researcher can have an influence on what is observed (p. 15). Thus, developing numeric measures of observations and studying the behaviour of individuals is paramount for a post-positivist (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 7). Objectivity means that researcher must remain neutral "to prevent values or biases from influencing the work by following prescribed procedures rigorously" (Mertens, 2019, p. 15).

Post-positivists hold a deterministic philosophy but recognise that we cannot be positive about our claims of knowledge when studying the behaviour and actions of humans (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 6). Truth produced by the scientific paradigm, as noted by Popper (1959), is the truth of current tested hypotheses (pp. 415-419). Thus, while not rejecting the value of the scientific method, "their strengths are contingent on their ability to withstand 'severe tests' of their falsifiability and that their discoveries are subject to future falsification in the light of new evidence" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 17). It is for this reason that post-positive researchers state that they do not prove a hypothesis; instead, they indicate a failure to reject the hypothesis (Phillips & Burbules, 2000, pp. 21-22).

I appreciate that positivism/post-positivism have a fundamental role that has produced much of the knowledge necessary for modern industry and production processes, and in terms of education, as one way of providing instrumental knowledge for practice. However, my research is not based on a deterministic philosophy. While I am interested in learning how to develop and improve our practices in functional terms, the need to understand how to support each other, and how to learn with and from each other was an important focus too. I wanted to inquire into how we are developing what McNiff (2013) describes as the "capacity to live with the uncertainty of not knowing

what the next moment will bring … not about moving towards a given 'end' or 'answer' " (p. 74) but learning from our subjective and intersubjective experiences. As an alternative to positivist approaches, interpretivism, which sets aside research for universal statements or causal laws has its central endeavour to understand the subjective world of human experience (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 20), is now explored.

3.5 Interpretivism

Interpretivism emerged as the social scientists began to dislodge the deterministic worldview of human action (McNiff, 2013, p. 48), with the aim being not to provide causal explanation but to "deepen and extend our knowledge of why social life is perceived and experienced in the way that it is" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 90). From an interpretive perspective, as Cohen et al. (2018) explain, the hope of a universal theory gives way to a multifaceted image of human behaviour as varied as the situations and contexts supporting them (p. 20). Thus, as Guba and Guba (1994) posit, the ontological position of interpretivism, is one of relativism, which is the view that reality is subjective and differs from person to person (p. 110). Knowledge and meaningful reality are constructed in and out of interaction between humans and their world and are developed and transmitted in a social context (Crotty, 1998, p. 42). Therefore, the social world can only be understood from the standpoint of individuals who are participating in it (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 20). The assumption of a subjectivist epistemology means that the researcher's own thinking and cognitive processes make meaning of their data (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017), which is informed by their personal experiences of the lived experience of people within their natural settings (Punch, 2014, p. 307). Thus, Cohen et al. (2018) contend that interpretive theory is emergent, being generated from the data; theory follows research rather than preceding it (p. 20).

Emphasis is placed on understanding the individual and their interpretation of the world around them from the "viewpoint of the subject being observed, rather than the viewpoint of the observer" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 33). The interpretivist uses "approaches such as '*verstehen*' ('understanding') and hermeneutic (uncovering and interpreting meaning) in an attempt to see the social world through the eyes of the participants" (Cohen et al, 2018, p. 20). It aims to understand human action, which has meaning in relation to the intention of the individual. People may construct meaning in

different ways (Crotty, 1998, p. 9) but truth is a consensus formed by co-constructors (Pring, 2000). Therefore, knowledge has the trait of being culturally derived and historically situated. Cohen et al. (2018) acknowledge the relative neglect of interpretive research of the "power of external-structural-forces to shape behaviour and events" (p. 24). Social reality, Carr and Kemmis (1986) explain, is not just structured and sustained by the interpretations of individuals, "it also determines the kind of interpretations of reality that are appropriate for a particular group of individuals to possess" (p. 95). However, Scotland (2012) maintains, as participants might not fully understand the forces which are acting on their agency, their explanations of phenomena are incomplete.

I had originally thought I would locate my research within the interpretive paradigm as I believe in a socially constructed reality. I believe that our personal knowing is always set within the context of both linguistic-cultural and experiential shared meaning (Heron, 1996). Epistemologically, I see knowledge developing in a sociocultural process of active co-construction and reconstruction of theory and practice. Indeed, I view research as an inquiry of our lived experience, which involves a continual process of "making current arrangements problematic" (Cochran-Smith &Lytle, 2009, p. 121). Hence, I saw my study as investigating how we could uncover agency in and ownership of our community. Being a multicultural school presented challenges, which may not present in other schools. We needed the opportunity to influence our lives and work; to develop the capacity for a self-reflective understanding that would help us to explain why we could not just repeat what was happening in other schools and to know *what* it is we need to do and *why*, and to take informed action. I saw this as a more collaborative form of inquiry, in which all involved would have the opportunity to engage in democratic dialogue as co-researchers and co-subjects (Heron & Reason, 1997). Such research may better be served by the critical paradigm.

3.6 Critical Paradigm

Critical approaches recognise that people, social groups and societies operate on the basis of 'interests', which are allied to ideologies (Cohen et al., 2018,p. 52). Habermas's (1972) theory of knowledge-constitutive interests offers a useful conceptualisation of approaches in research theory and practice; the technical, practical,

and emancipatory interests. The technical interest which characterises the positivist sciences is to identify causal connections to generate perfect explanations (theories) to, in principle, "*predict* future events based on what is happening currently and, to the extent to which the causes can be manipulated … to *control* future events" (Biesta, 2020, p. 15, emphasis in the original). While the practical interest, in the case of interpretivism, seeks to clarify, understand, and interpret the communications of "speaking and acting subjects" (Habermas, 1974, p. 8). It is interested in the wise and prudent decision-making in practical situations (Kemmis, 2001). The emancipatory interest is in the emancipation of people from "determination by habit, custom, illusion and coercion which sometimes frame and constrain social and educational practice" (Kemmis, 2001, p. 92). Habermas's critical social science is essentially concerned with this emancipatory knowledge (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 136). This subsumes the previous two knowledge-constitutive interests, and goes beyond them (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 53). Habermas argues that "knowledge of the symbolically structured domain of 'communicative action' is not reducible to scientific knowledge" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 135) and suggests that "sociology must understand social facts in their cultural significance and as socially determined" (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 52). Yet, explanation always needs to be embedded in research that aims for understanding, so that we can have 'control' over explanations generated about our actions (Biesta, 2020, p. 18). Carr and Kemmis (1986) explain that Habermas maintains that then this must attempt "to move the 'interpretive' approach beyond its traditional concern with producing uncritical renderings of individuals' self-understandings" (p. 137) to allow the causes of distorted self-understanding to be clarified, explained and eliminated. The encompassing research is concerned with praxis*,* the *why* question*,* which requires an integration of theory and practice as reflective and practical moments "in a dialectical process of reflection, enlightenment and political struggle carried out by groups for the purpose of their own emancipation" (Carr & Kemmis , 1986, p. 144). This will allow people to explain why their situations are frustrating and suggest the required action to eliminate these frustrations (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 136).

Thus, research in the critical paradigm is situated in social justice issues and seeks to address the political, social, and economic issues, which "lead to social oppression, conflict, struggle, and power structures at whatever levels these might occur" (Kivunja & Kuyini, 2017, p. 35). Its ontological position is that of historical realism. Scotland

(2012) clarifies this as reality that "has been shaped by social, political, cultural, economic, ethnic, and gender value …[and are] socially constructed entities that are under constant internal influence" (p.13). In addition, ontological beliefs, Mertens (2019) contends, "emphasizes that that which seems "real" may instead be reified structures that are taken to be real because of historical situations" (p. 31). What counts as worthwhile knowledge, Cohen et al. (2018), p. 52) claim, "is determined by the social and positional power of the advocates of that knowledge" (p. 52). Critical methodology is directed at interrogating values and assumptions, exposing hegemony and injustice, challenging conventional social structures, and engaging in social action (Crotty, 1998, p. 157). In this paradigm a transactional epistemology is assumed, in which the researcher interacts with the participants (Kivunja and Kuyini, 2017), placing, as Mertens (2019) explains, high priority on relationship building with members of the community, building trust, and acknowledging the expertise of community members (p. 245). In providing a voice for these participants, "raising their consciousness, or advancing an agenda for change to improve their lives" (Creswell & Creswell, 2018, p. 10), it asks the axiological question of what is intrinsically worthwhile (Scotland, 2012).

I therefore locate my research within the critical paradigm. To put this in context, I first outline my understanding of the word emancipatory by referring to its etymology; the 'e' in emancipate being the abbreviation of 'ex' implies two related processes of breaking free and breaking up (Rindova et al., 2009). While breaking free suggests the desire to make one's own way in the world, breaking up draws attention to the "striving to imagine and create a better world" (Sarasvathy et al., 2003, p. 155). Hence, I refer to Arendt (1977) who associates action with human freedom, not to be understood as freedom to do whatever we choose to do, "but to call something into being that did not exist before" (p. 151), the concept of natality (Arendt, 1958). It is this capacity to initiate, revealing our uniqueness or subjectivity, that Arendt links with human freedom. This action is never possible in isolation because "men, not Man, live on earth and inhabit the world … Plurality is the condition of human action" (Arendt, 1958, pp. 7-8). This is complemented by Habermas' (1984, 1987a, 1987b) concept of communicative action which Kemmis (2001) describes as privileging "the kind of reflection and discussion (communicative action) we do when we interrupt what we are doing (generally technical or practical action) to explore its nature, dynamic and worth" (p.

93). The communicative space opened by Habermas' communicative action is an intersubjective space; "*the lifeworlds* we inhabit and in which we encounter one another as persons", existing between and beyond individual participants in which "speakers and hearers encounter one another" yet, the agreements they reach do not negate their individual subjectivity (Kemmis, 2008, pp. 128-129). Rather, there is a shared orientation towards mutual understanding and unforced consensus (Kemmis, 2001, p. 100). In terms of my research, Ardentian action would allow space for initiative-taking in the web of social relationships that constitute our school community as we worked to draw a shelter of belonging around us. It would recognise that in our plurality, we could each can reveal our own view, but this could then be developed in communication with others and accommodate their distinctive points of view, drawing on our collective critical capacity in a communicative space. A strongly practical methodology implied by critical theory is action research (Cohen et al., 2018, p. 54), and this has been my preferred strategy of inquiry in my research.

3.7 Action Research

Action research, as Reason and Bradbury (2008) state, is different from traditional academic research because of its different purposes, different relationships, and its different conception of knowledge and its relation to practice. To this end, action research is defined as:

> a participatory process concerned with developing practical knowing in the pursuit of worthwhile human purposes. It seeks to bring together action and reflection, theory and practice, in participation with others, in the pursuit of practical solutions to issues of pressing concern to people, and more generally the flourishing of individual persons and their communities. (p. 4)

This living inquiry aims to link practice and ideas in the service of human flourishing by creating participative "communities of inquiry in which qualities of engagement, curiosity and question posing are brought to bear on significant practical issues" in the lives of people (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 1). In starting from an orientation of change, action research calls for "engagement *with* people, opening new communicative spaces in which dialogue and development can flourish" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 3, emphasis in the original). Consequently, action researchers engage participants in defining problems, planning and doing research, interpreting results, designing actions,

and evaluating outcomes (Bradbury, 2015, p. 2). Hence, as Mc Niff (2013) contends action research acknowledges the self-determination and agency of participants by moving from the researcher's perspective to an equally important focus of making judgements about the improved practice from other participants' perspectives (p. 19). Knowledge then is seen as something we do as "a living process" (Mc Niff, 2013, p. 29). As Reason and Bradbury (2008) suggest, it may be defined as what we have learned in the context of practice and that is "the result of the transformation of our experience in conversation with both self and others that allow us consistently to create useful actions that leave us and co-inquirers stronger" (p. 6). In action research, as McNiff (2017) asserts, people communicate their ideas as theories of real-world practice, and these "personal theories are dynamic, in-the-world theories; they change and develop as people themselves change and develop" (p. 18). Essentially, this eliminates the theory-practice divide as "what is thought, what is represented, what is acted upon, are all intertwined aspects of lived experience and, as such, cannot be discussed or interpreted separately" (Carson & Sumara, 2001, p. xvii). These theories, Elliott (1991) maintains, are not validated independently and then applied to practice; they are validated through practice (p. 69).

Whereas in some forms of research, the researcher does research on other people, in action research, as McNiff (2013) explains, research becomes "an inquiry by the self into the self, with others acting as co-researchers and critical learning partners" (p. 23), placing self-reflection at the heart of action research. In this, Bradbury (2015) maintains, reflexivity is important (p. 1). This means adopting a critical stance on the limitations and enablers on our own and others' participation, which Moore (2004) insists is a particular form of reflection that includes consideration of "one's own historicised responses to situations and events (p. 112); *why* we do *what* we do. As the researcher is part of the situation that they are studying, action research is not value-free. The researcher brings their own values with them and "negotiates values and forms of living with others" (Mc Niff, 2017, p. 42). Indeed, action researchers need to "show their collective intent to live in the direction of the values that inform their work" (McNiff, 2013, p. 36). Undeniably, as Carson and Sumara (2001) state, action research is not merely an activity that one adds towards life; it is not something that is done, but is included in the complexity of the researcher's lived experiences for who "one is becomes completely caught up in what one knows and does" (pp. xvi-xvii).

While action research is characteristically situational being concerned with a current 'problem' in a specific context, it also must contribute to the general body of knowledge. While many practitioners could not claim that their work is generalisable in terms that it can be applied to all like situations, Mc Niff (2017) asserts that they would agree that "it is generalisable in that others can learn with and from stories of practice and adopt or adapt these to their own practices as deemed appropriate" (p. 31).

3.8 Influencing Theory in Action Research

The world of action research is rich and diverse. Reason and Bradbury (2008) view it as a "family of practices of living inquiry that aims, in a great variety of ways, to link practice and ideas in the service of human flourishing" (p. 1). But as often happens, in this 'family of approaches', family members have developed different opinions and interests but are "certainly willing to pull together in the face of criticism or hostility from supposedly 'objective' ways of doing research" (Reason & Bradbury, 2008, p. 7), while celebrating their commitment to contribute to the social good. As a practitioner researcher, I needed to take a critical perspective, in line with my ontological, epistemological, and axiological stances, on the kind of action research best for me and on why I choose to see action research in this way.

McKernan (1996) shows that action research has been influenced by historical and philosophical developments in education and the social sciences; the Science in Education movement of the nineteenth and early twentieth century, experimentalist and progressive educational thought, particularly the work of Dewey, the Group Dynamics movement in psychology and human relations training, post-war reconstructionist curriculum development activity in the United States of America (USA), and the teacher-researcher movement in the UK (p. 8-11). McKernan (1996) reviews theoretical models of the action research process, which he divides into three types: Type 1 theories are referred to as scientific action research; Type 2 are referred to as practical-deliberative action research; and Type 3 models are referred to as critical-emancipatory educational action research, all of which have influenced thinking in action research (pp. 15-27). The choice of type will be determined by the researcher's thinking in the question of what is involved in doing action research.

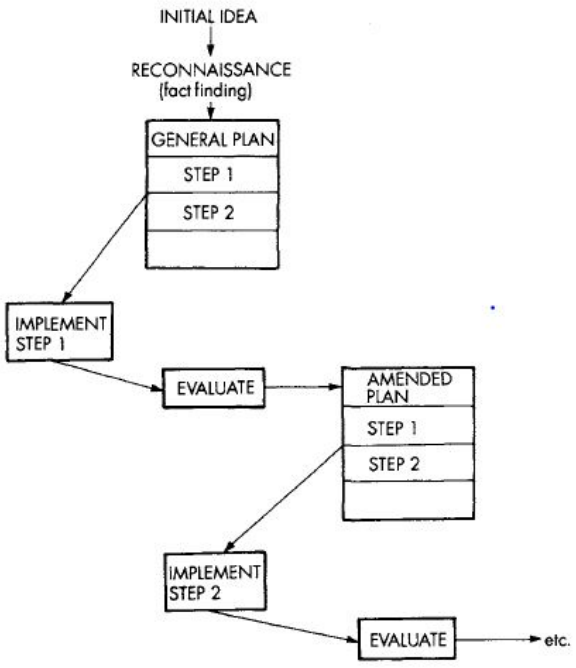
3.8.1 Type 1 Scientific Action Research

The work of Collier as Commissioner of Indian Affairs (1933-1945) in relation to the social and educational context of the Native Americans, as McNiff (2013) explains, might be seen as the first identifiable starting point for action research (p. 56). However, it is the work of Kurt Lewin that is often considered seminal in establishing the credibility of action research. It is recognised that Collier and Lewin "were both aware of the potential for democratic practices for self-determination as well as for social engineering – 're-education' as a way of ensuring compliance and loyalty to the dominant culture" (Mc Niff, 2013, p. 56). Indeed, Lewin (1946; 1948) discussed action research as a form of experimental inquiry, based on the study of groups experiencing problems, arguing that "social problems should serve as the locus of social science research" (McKernan, 1996, p. 9). In his paper, *Action Research and Minority Problem*s, Lewin (1946) was critical of previous social improvement research, stating the importance of clearly understanding that "social research concerns itself with two rather different types of questions, namely the study of general laws of group life and the diagnosis of a specific situation" (p. 36). According to McKernan (1996), of paramount concern to Lewin was the problem of group decision-making about social action, which would not allow practice to drift back to old levels of habit, focussing on group decisions as a means of effecting social and cultural change (p. 17). Science should have a social-help function, and through field experiments individuals could gain the situational practical knowledge to effect social improvements (Lewin, 1946). Thus, he argued for empirical evidence rather than speculation in theory building, an interplay between theory and facts (McKernan, 1996, p. 17). For Lewin (1946), the research for social practice was a form of social management, or social engineering, action research; " a comparative research on the conditions and effects of various forms of social action, and research leading to social action. Research that produces nothing but books will not suffice" (p. 35).

McKernan (1996) understands the important contribution of Lewin because, although not the first to use and write about action research, he developed a model of the action research process which was hailed as an innovation in social inquiry (pp. 9-10). This model, depicted in Figure 3.1, is a series of "spiralling decisions, taken on the basis of repeated cycles of analysis, reconnaissance, problem reconceptualization, planning,

implementation of social action, and evaluation regarding the effectiveness of action" (McKernan, 1996, p. 17), which has informed the development of subsequent models of action research. While Lewin's work was situated in industrial and organisational settings where participative decision-making could enhance productivity, his ideas were soon taken up in educational research in the post-war reconstructionist curriculum development activity in the USA. Here, action research was seen as a way to significantly change and improve curriculum practice because practitioners themselves would use the results of their own research work (McKernan, 1996, p. 10). It was the experimentalist and progressive educational thought, particularly Dewey's (1910; 1929; 1938) inductive scientific method of problem solving that influenced the scientific action research of the post-war re-constructionists such as Hilda Taba and Stephen Corey (Mc Niff, 2013, p. 56).

Figure 3.1: Lewin's Model of Action Research as Interpreted by Kemmis (1980)



(Elliott, 1991, p. 70)

3.8.2 Type 2 Practical-deliberative Action Research

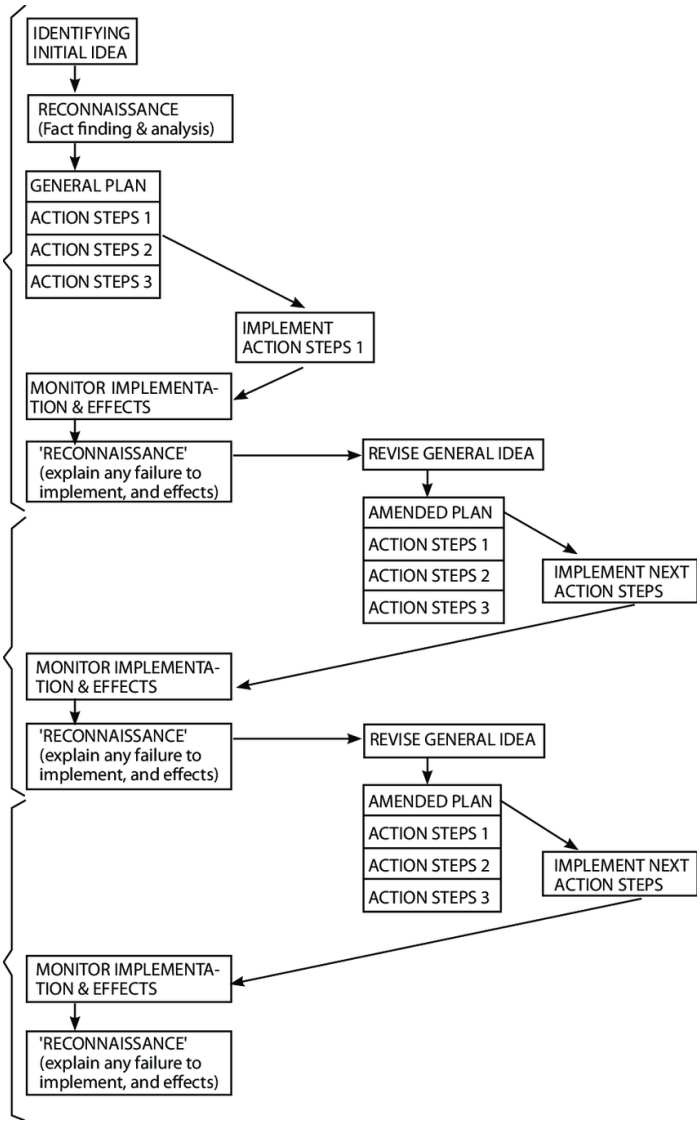
The practical-deliberative process had been receiving attention since the publication of Schwab's (1969) influential paper, *The Practical: A Language for the Curriculum*, as interest turned to the potential for practitioner research as a form of educational and social change, and also in response to the increasing focus on technological control (Mc Niff , 2013, p. 58). McKernan (1996) explains that the practical-deliberative model of action research "trades off some measurement and control for human interpretation, interactive communication, deliberation, negotiation and detailed description" (p. 20), with the goal of understanding practice and solving immediate problems from a moral perspective that action must be taken to put things right. It is connected with process rather than the end products of the inquiry; reflective-deliberation action uncovers spiralling meanings which present themselves in each cycle of the action research process (McKernan, 1996, p. 22) Here it is important to acknowledge the work of Schön (1983) on the concept of the 'reflective practitioner', which itself generated a whole new specialism within the teacher-researcher camp.

Similar trends were evident in the work of Stenhouse (1975) in the UK, in opposition to the development of a curriculum technology which stressed the pre-specification of measurable learning outcomes. This centred on the teacher as researcher as a basis for development, which Stenhouse (1975) viewed to be the "commitment to and the skills to study one's own teaching; the concern to question and to test theory in practice by the use of those skills" (p. 144), and depended on co-operative research by teachers and full-time researchers to support the teachers' work (p. 162). However, McNiff (2013) contends that there was little mention in Stenhouse's time to teachers or to the researchers producing their personal accounts of practices to examine what extent they were evaluating and theorising their practices in relation to their educational values (p. 59). This work was extended by Elliott and his colleagues in the Ford Teaching Project (1973-1976), which involved teachers in collaborative action research into their own practices; its notion of the 'self-monitoring teacher' was based on Stenhouse's ideas of the teacher as a researcher and as an 'extended professional' (Kemmis, 1993, pp. 180-181). Central to Elliott's analysis (1987) is the idea that the action researcher develops an interpretive understanding from working on practical issues of concern, and that theoretical understanding is derived from practical action and discourse (p. 157).

The model of action research devised by Elliott (1991, p. 71), as seen in Figure 3.2, was based on Lewin's model, as interpreted by Kemmis (1980). While Lewin's model was considered as an excelled basis in thinking about what action research involves, Elliott (1991) argued that the general idea should be allowed to shift and that reconnaissance should involve analysis as well as fact finding and recur in the spiral of activities, rather than only at the beginning (p. 70). Although Lewin's model suggests one action step per cycle should be taken, Elliott (1991) contended that it is often necessary to undertake a cluster of steps in every cycle, and that one should not proceed to evaluate the effects of an action until one has monitored the extent to which it had been implemented (pp. 70 -75).

I chose to use Elliott's model as a guide in my master's research dissertation, *An Educational Enquiry into the Implementation of the Approach to Writing Outlined in the English Language Curriculum* (2002). As the then curriculum co-ordinator for English in my previous school, my principal aim in undertaking this inquiry was to work with a group of teachers to develop and implement a strategy to improve the teaching of the writing process in the junior classes of our primary school, as outlined in the *English Language Curriculum* (1999). Elliott's model did allow for a cluster of actions to happen simultaneously, accommodating the complex reality of everyday life in classrooms and schools in this endeavour. I could see that in monitoring and evaluating the implementation of the action steps, we could explain *how* and *why* we did *what* we did; we were encouraged to learn through the generation and testing of our educational theories. We were allowed to live out our values for children's writing in our practice, which became the standards by which we judged this practice. We began to live our own educational theory. This enhanced my understanding of action research, not as a time-bound sequence of steps, but as a lived practice of inquiry in critical engagement with others; a way of living and learning together.

Figure 3.2: A Revised Model of Lewin's Model of Action Research



(Elliott, 1991, p. 71)

For me, this became a way of working in which to constantly question not just how to get things done, but also to interrogate *why* we do *what* we do and *whose* interests are being served, supporting each other to bring about change in line with values that are rational for both personal, social and community transformation. This was an early appreciation of "inquiry as stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009), although I did not articulate this as so, and would lead me to critical-emancipatory action research.

3.8.3 Type 3 Critical-emancipatory Educational Action Research

McKernan (1996) explains critical-emancipatory educational action research as eclectic and synthesising, "choosing to select profound ideas from diverse strands of theoretical and practical interventions in the field, rather than to dismiss whole paradigms and traditions" (p. 31). It rejects the positivist belief in the instrumental role of knowledge in problem-solving, and argues that as critical inquiry it allows practitioners not only to search out the interpretive meanings of their practice, but to organise action to overcome constraints (McKernan, 1996, p. 24), giving them greater autonomy through collective reflection.

An early definition by Kemmis and Mc Taggart (1988) outlines critical action research as:

> a form of collective self- reflective inquiry undertaken by participants in social situations in order to improve the rationality and justice of their own social or educational practices, as well as their understanding of these practices and the situations in which these practices are carried out. (p. 1)

This is based on the original conceptualisation of Lewin (1946) as it emphasises that the research should be undertaken by participants in social practices, involving participants collectively in researching their own situations, while emphasising self-reflection in the light of Lauren Stenhouse's (1975) notion of the teacher as researcher and Schön's (1983) view of the reflective practitioner. McKernan (1996) explains it as perceiving issues in practice as value-laden and moral concerns rather than as purely technical, and also combines Habermas' (1972) practical and emancipatory knowledge-constitutive interests (p. 25). It follows then that participants in critical action research deliberate differently about the situation in which they find themselves, allowing them to develop a critical and self-critical understanding of "the way both particular people and particular settings are shaped and re-shaped discursively, culturally, socially and historically" (Kemmis, 2001, p. 92). In later work, Kemmis (2008) reminds us that this action research is not only concerned with practices as the intentional action of individuals, but also with the ways practices are "socially constructed and 'held in place' in cultural-discursive, social and material-economic fields" (p. 126) that precede and shape the conduct of practice. It aims to be the critical revival of practice which can transform it into praxis, "bringing it under considered critical control, and

enlivening it with a commitment to educational and social values" (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, p. 190). This is what Kemmis (2008) defines as its participatory and collective nature to achieve "historical self-consciousness in and of practice as praxis" (p. 123). In developing self-reflectivity, participants are helped to transform their practices and the conditions under which they practise, so that they may be more rational, more productive and sustainable, and more just and inclusive (Kemmis et al., 2014a, p. 67).

Hence, critical participatory action research implies plurality, where "the 'self' may now be read not as a singular and isolated individual, but a sociality that has it shaped as a 'self' " (Kemmis, 2008, p. 126). Drawing on Habermas (1992), Kemmis (2008) elaborates that critical action research is interested in changing the way participants interact as it is in the changes within the individual (p. 126). Furthermore, it is about changing the aforementioned features of practice that are extra-individual; what Kemmis (2009) terms as the 'practice architectures' that constitute mediating preconditions for practice:

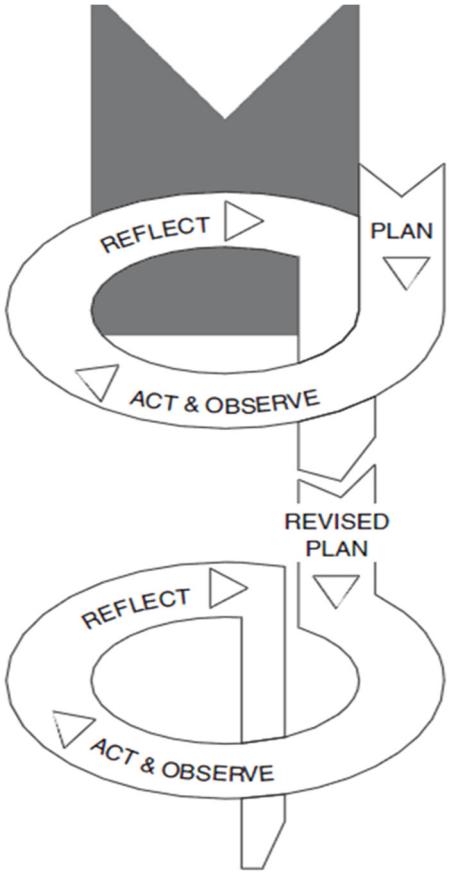
> (1) *cultural-discursive* preconditions, which shape and give content to the 'thinking' and 'saying' that orient and justify practices;
>
> (2) *material–economic* preconditions, which shape and give content to the 'doing' of the practice; and
>
> (3) *social–political* preconditions, which shape and give content to the 'relatings' involved in the practice. (p. 466)

Thus, the notion of opening communicative space (Habermas, 1996) is placed at the heart of critical participatory action research for, as Kemmis (2008) states ,"collective reflection and self-reflection through communicative action aimed at intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding and unforced consensus about what to do"(pp. 135-136). Again, with reference to Habermas (1984, 1987a, 1987b), Kemmis (2008) stresses that this communicative action emphasises the inclusive, collective and transformative nature of its aims to serve and transcend the self-interests of individual participants, not just to perfect or to improve themselves as individuals, "but also in the interests of the historical consequences of their actions" (p. 127). This means collective responsibility for how practices are conducted, and for their consequences. While Kemmis (2008) notes that Habermas (1996) observes that communicative action in

such groups "builds *solidarity* among participants, in turn giving them a sense of *communicative power* and lending *legitimacy* to their emerging agreements, understandings, and decisions" (p.131, emphasis in the original), critical participatory action research initiatives permit a range of different kinds of communicative roles in which the group is not treated as an exclusive whole (Kemmis, 2001, p. 100). Part of the task of the action research project then is to open communicative space beyond the sphere of the immediate participants, to open debate in justifying their views in what Kemmis et al. (2014b) call "ecologies of practices" (p. v).

This critical participatory approach to action research resonated with me. While the school was relatively new, only being established in 2007, I acknowledged that each member of the community has been historically formed by their own and other's actions in the past. Yet, I appreciated that learning together in a critical inquiry would make it possible for us to take responsibility for transforming our practice, testing our own assumptions and values in order to transform our understanding of what we do and the way we relate to others and the situations around us. Kemmis' model of action research (Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000), Figure 3.3, which shows the cursive and systematic process of learning in a self-reflective spiral of planning, acting, observing, reflecting and replanning was not used in my research. Instead, I chose to use Heron's (1996) co-operative inquiry, which Reason (1999) locates as one approach within a whole family of approaches of participative, experiential, emancipatory and action-oriented inquiries (p. 222).

Figure 3.3: Kemmis and McTaggart's Action Research Model



(Kemmis & McTaggart, 2000)

3.9 Heron's Co-operative Inquiry

Heron and Reason (2001) describe co-operative inquiry as working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to:

> (1) understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and
>
> (2) learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better. (p. 179)

Heron (1996) describes this as two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it. Each person is co-subject in the experience

phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases. In the action phases they experiment with new forms of personal or professional practice and in the reflection phases they reflect on their experience critically, learning from their successes and failures, and developing understandings which inform their work in the next action phase. This allowed the necessary political and epistemic participation of my colleagues in researching with them. Heron (1996) outlines the four inquiry stages as:

Stage 1 The first reflection phase the inquirers choose

- The focus or topic of the inquiry and the type of inquiry.
- A launching statement of the inquiry topic.
- A plan of action for the first action phase to explore some aspect of the inquiry topic.
- A method of recording experiences during the first action phase.

Stage 2 The first action phase when the inquirers are

- Exploring in experience and action some aspect of the inquiry topic.
- Applying an integrated range of inquiry skills.
- Keeping records of the experiential data generated.

Stage 3 Full immersion in Stage 2 with great openness to experience; the inquirers may

- Break through into new awareness.
- Lose their way.
- Transcend the inquiry format.

Stage 4 The second reflection phase; the inquirers share data from the action phase and

- Review and modify the inquiry topic in the light of making sense of data about the explored aspect of it.
- Choose a plan for the second action phase to explore the same or a different aspect of the inquiry topic.
- Review the method of recording data used in the first action phase and amend it for use in the second. (pp. 49-50)

Following the four stages of the complete cycle, the inquiry continues through several more cycles, the concluding reflection phase of one cycle being continuous with the launching reflection phase of the next. While the stages of inquiry are outlined, Heron (1996), reminds us that this is "only *a* way" and does not consider that adopting these stages, "explicitly or tacitly, is *the* way to do a co-operative inquiry (p. 49, emphasis in the original). In my research I used these stages as a structure as we began our work together. But as our shelter of belonging gathered around us, I let go of this structure

and trusted in the process of community, which has achieved what Heron (1996) describes as human flourishing, the "mutually enabling balance between autonomy, co-operation and hierarchy" (p. 127).

Heron and Reason (1997) explain co-operative inquiry as involving an "extended epistemology", in which a person "participates in the known, articulates a world, in at least four interdependent ways: experiential, presentational, propositional, and practical" (p. 280). In later work, Heron and Reason (2008) consider experiential knowing as the "experience of my presence in relation with the presence of other persons, living beings, places or things" (p. 367). In the reflective phases of the inquiry, co-inquirers need to be present and open to encounter with each other. In the action phases, the co-inquirers engage in their individual action inquiries but are alerted "to the new dimensions of their world", become intentional about "their participation in what is present" and be alert to when their experiential knowing "reverts to becoming completely tacit" (Heron & Reason, 2008, p. 370). In cycling between the reflection and action phases of the inquiry, presentational knowing is the best way to make sense of experience, allowing our experiential stories relate with the stories of others in way that creates a shared meaning and understanding. But also, as Heron and Reason (2008) underline, this can bring a quality of curiosity to the action phase and allow participants to be open to new experiential knowing (pp. 372-373). Propositional knowing about something is intellectual knowing of ideas and theories. Heron and Reason (2008) explain that propositional sense-making is important in providing the research with focus and clarity in bringing learning from one cycle to the planning of subsequent cycles, and "in producing carefully worded outcomes that can influence social policy and social change" (p. 374). The reflection stages of the inquiry, where co-researchers meet together, are important for the development of practical knowing, in what Heron and Reason (2008) view as knowing how to make decisions about the sequence of what is to happen in the whole phase of inquiry, about what sense co-inquirers have made of the previous action phases, and in the forward planning of the next action phase (p. 376).

Of interest to me, as we began our co-operative inquiry were the three interdependent kinds of skills outcomes, described by Heron and Reason (2008), as (i). new skills of transformative collaborative inquiry, (ii). new individual and co-operative working

skills, and (iii). new skills of regenerating, mainly generating in our case, a culture of competence within our community (p. 377). I turn now to the question of how I monitored and documented this research journey.

3.10 Data Collection Methods

While aware that most research questions can be answered in different ways, I agree with Cohen et al. (2018) who state that selecting instruments for data collection "is a deliberative process in which the key is the application of the notion of *fitness for purpose*" (p. 469, emphasis in the orginal). This is about deciding what you are looking for, where and how you might find it; the research question suggests the kind of data that are useful. As this research aimed to investigate educational influence in our school community as we worked together to develop our shelter of belonging, questioning what was happening for us and *why* we do *wh*at we do, the chosen methods of data collection reflected the nature of this inquiry.

3.10.1 Work-in-Progress Discussions

Group conversations "with a purpose" (Maykut & Morehouse, 1994, p. 104) were employed as a method of data collection, through "supportive work-in-progress discussions" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992, pp. 25-27), which were audio or video recorded, with the permission of those involved. This is one of the most important things that happen in critical participatory action research where participants simply get together and talk about their work and lives in communicative space or "public spheres" (Kemmis et al., 2014a, p. 33). It is in this interrogation of practice, we as participants were allowed to enter a communicative action. This was a space, as Kemmis (2008) suggests, in which we reached an intersubjective agreement about the ideas and language we used as a basis for our mutual understanding in reaching an unforced consensus about what to do about things that mattered to me, my colleagues, the children, and parents in the life of the school. Of essence to this work was the presupposed communicative freedom to allow authentic and genuine talk, in which reputation and status is set aside (Kemmis et al., 2014a, p. 44). While I was Deputy Principal with responsibilities in the areas of teaching and learning, and leadership and

management, I participated as a co-researcher who was learning with and from my colleagues, the parents, and the children throughout.

3.10.2 Audio-visual Methods

The use of visual methods of data collection was informed by the recommendations from an expert panel on guidelines for video research in education, a report edited by Derry (2007). As advised by Hall (2007), given that I was researcher and co-participant in the work-in-progress discussion groups, my capacity to remember what was seen and heard could be quickly overwhelmed by the volume of information encountered, I video recorded, and in one instance, audio recorded these sessions. Hall (2007) further clarified the use of this data collection method, explaining that what can be most important for analysis might not present itself clearly in the sessions but instead might occur to the researcher later, as gaps are filled in field notes and in content logs of audio or video recordings. The opportunity to play back in order to reframe, re-focus, and re-evaluate allowed me to check my impressions against the evidence, to confirm or refine my judgements, "creating a source for information storage and retrieval that supported the identification and analysis of data" (Goldman et al., 2007, p. 15). In my research, I chose to use brief fragments of this video data to provide evidence for my insight into different phenomena at different times in the research. The use of visual methods, as Muir and Mason (2012) concede, has complex repercussions. While anonymity is an obvious issue, the use of video, their storage and presentation in this thesis has been agreed in line with ethical procedures and with the consent of my co-researchers. The audio recorded session of our group conversation at the end of this research has been analysed and stored in the same manner.

3.10.3 Documentary Evidence

Documentary evidence was also collected during the conduct of this research. This included samples of the children's work, curriculum documents, school planning documents, and notes from staff meetings. These are part of the ordinary life of the school but were interrogated for information on relevant issues and concerns guided, as Kemmis et al. (2014a) suggest, by practical experience concerning the question or issue or concern being investigated (p. 184). Photographs were used to record critical

incidents throughout the research work to provide evidence of the children's learning, and in one case, parental engagement in that learning. This document analysis supplemented data from the group conversations, the field notes taken, and my reflective diary writing (Connell et al., 2001).

3.10.4 Reflective Diary Writing

I maintained reflective diary writings on a continuous basis, documenting my learning throughout my research. While not an easy task, it provided a recursive experience of "looking forward" and "casting backward" (Crittenden, 2021), encouraging reflexivity in examining my underlying assumptions, experiences and actions, as my thinking evolved over time. I concur with Mc Niff (2013) who maintains that diaries are valuable sources of data as they illustrate new learning and depict how a person's thoughts and ideas develop over time (p. 108). My reflective writing has an acknowledged role within my analysis and interpretation of data.

3.10.5 Field Notes

While my diary writing recorded my actions and thoughts, as well as provocations that prompted my reflections, I kept simple field notes about events as they unfolded throughout the research period. These, as Kemmis et al. (2014a) explain, were open notes; "what is observed is not classified into previously determined categories" (p. 180), and were used to support my analysis of audio and video data, and photographic evidence. These notes were centred on the issues or concerns at time and proved to be very useful when I decided not to video record sessions while working with a group of parents to avoid undue stress, as seen in the action research inquiry in Chapter 5 of this thesis.

To conclude this section on the data collection methods employed, I refer to McNiff (2017) who explains that while the action piece of action research is about taking action to improve practice, the research piece of action research is about offering descriptions and explanations (theory) for what we do as and when we act (p. 13). Kemmis et al. (2014a) elaborate, explaining the primary purpose of gathering evidence in the 'research' part of action research is "to support self-reflection about our practices, our

understandings of our practices, and the conditions under which we practise, especially collective self-reflection in public spheres" (p. 70). I appreciate the contention that in critical participatory action research while it is not necessary to become a slave to 'data-collection', by contrast, it is necessary to be careful about how I gather, interpret, analyse and interrogate evidence (Kemmis et al., 2014a, p. 70). Triangulation across the aforementioned multiple forms of data, identifying multiple opinions from different co-researchers in meaningful interactions, has allowed me to make sense of the data and to generate evidence. I analysed my data qualitatively, following McNiff's (2013) advice in terms of criteria for what I expected to happen and the standards to show the extent to which happened (p. 111). Implicit in this is how I show the interactive and mutual influence on my thinking and learning, and that of my co-researchers. Hence, as action research is ultimately concerned with the betterment of human situations, with moral and political aspects, I am compelled to ask whether the results of my inquiries are valid (Feldman, 2007).

3.11 Validity and Rigour in my Research

Hammersley's (1992) broad definition of validity, which describes an account as valid or true "if it represents accurately those features of the phenomena that it is intended to describe, explain, or theorise" (p. 69), offers a way to discuss validity in action research. To increase validity in writing this thesis, I have adopted the criteria that Feldman (2007) suggests action research reports should include:

- clear and detailed descriptions of how and why data were collected.
- clear and detailed descriptions of how their narratives were constructed from the data.
- multiple perspectives and exploring other ways to represent the same data and to use them to critique the views that one owns (Feldman, 2003).
- an explanation of why they believe that the actions led to the results. …. In addition, that theory needs to be useful for understanding other situations, and must be subjected to critique. (p. 30)

Thus, while validity in the conventional sense strives to meet such features as controllability, replicability, predictability, observability and objectivity, in naturalistic approaches in which action research is located, as Lincoln and Guba (1985) maintain,

the criteria of credibility, transferability, dependability, and confirmability can affirm its trustworthiness (p. 43). Credibility, as Mertens (2019) explains, asks about the correspondence between the way the participants actually perceive social constructs and the way the researcher portrays their points of view (p. 426). The use of multiple methods and sources of evidence in this inquiry can demonstrate the credibility of the research. The burden of transferability, Mertens (2019) notes, is left to the reader to "determine the degree of similarity between the study site and the receiving context" (p. 283), with responsibility resting with me to provide sufficient information to enable the reader to make such a judgment. Dependability is achieved through a transparent discussion of data collection and analysis, which I use to build an audit trail, walking the reader through my work so that they can understand the path I took and judge the trustworthiness of my outcomes (Maykut and Morehouse, 1994, p. 146). Thus, dependability and confirmability of the study are attested.

In asking how I ensure that the judgments I have made are reasonably fair and accurate, I have been informed by McNiff & Whitehead's (2010) advice in striving to reach intersubjective agreement about the validity of my knowledge claims in a two-part process of personal validation and social validation (pp. 194-195). Personal validation, McNiff (2007) explains is "subjecting the account to the test of commensurability with one's own internal commitment" (p. 320). This demanded constant reflexive questioning, holding myself accountable and interrogating my work to uphold my guiding values and principles of respect and understanding. These are the criteria I used as I considered how I have influenced the thinking and work of others, through the way I think and act, as we built our shelter of belonging in and through our learning. In addition to accounting for my learning in annual peer reviews and formative validation groups, my participation in the CARN conference *Voicing and Valuing: Daring and Doing* in Manchester (2018), and in the *Postgraduate Research Unconference* in the DCU Institute of Education (2020), opened my practice for evaluation though a process of social validation. This culminated in a summative meeting with Dr. Margaret Farren, my PhD supervisor, and Dr. Joan Walton, York St. John University, UK on 2nd September 2021. In this process of social validation a rigorous assessment is conducted in relation to Habermas' (1976) four criteria of comprehensibility, truthfulness, authenticity and appropriateness, explained as follows:

> The speaker must choose a comprehensible expression so that speaker and hearer can understand one another. The speaker must have the intention of communicating a true proposition (or a prepositional content, the existential presuppositions of which are satisfied) so that the hearer can share the knowledge of speaker. The speaker must want to express his intentions truthfully so that the hearer can believe the utterance of the speaker (can trust him). Finally, the speaker must choose an utterance that is right so that the hearer can accept the utterance and speaker and hearer can agree with one another in the utterance with respect to a recognized normative background. Moreover, communicative action can continue undisturbed only as long as participants suppose that the validity claims they reciprocally raise are justified. (pp. 2-3)

In accounting for my learning in these ways, I was helped to strengthen the validity of my knowledge claims, and I benefitted from critical review in moving my learning forward.

However, Mc Niff and Whitehead (2010) contend that my ultimate validation group will be the general public, who show that they find my work useful by reading it and using my ideas to inform their own lives (p. 196). Publication in the peer reviewed *International Journal for Transformative Research* (2017) accounting for how a period of research with a group of parents had a transformative and educational influence on myself and the wider school community, and a subsequent presentation at the CARN conference *Voicing and Valuing: Daring and Doing* (2018), were two such opportunities.

I ensured rigour in this study was assured through adherence to Winter's principles (1989) for the conduct of action research:

1. Reflexivity

Reflexivity refers to the process of making judgements made from one's experience. This Winter (1989) states, insists on modest claims (p. 42). It is how I show that I have reflected on my work with intention of learning and improving.

2. Dialectics

Dialectics is proposed as a method of analysis of a situation into its contradictions (Winter, 1989, p. 55). For me, it was in working with others that we reflected on the significance of numerous interpretations of different situations, recognising

assumptions that we had held, and resolved contradictions for what we wanted in our school community.

3. Collaborative Resource

Winter (1989) explains that to treat all viewpoints as a collaborative resource is to "suspend the convention status hierarchy which (outside the research stance) gives some members authority over others, and some members' viewpoints great credibility than others' " (p. 56). Participants were seen as co-researchers and were both politically and epistemically involved.

4. Risk

Risk is an essential element of any change process. But as Deputy principal, I was conscious that this was my research. While I researched areas that arose from questions that we as a staff considered important, and I valued and sought the opinions of others, new ideas can lead to exposure and prove to be uncomfortable. This meant putting my ideas and those of others, and our familiar routines, at risk of critique in our communicative action. Yet, as Winter (1989) explains, the process was not just one of risk of refutation but of exploring possibilities for transformation (p. 60).

5. Plurality

Within a dialectical, reflexive questioning, collaborative inquiry, plural structures are created. However, Winter (1989) posits that a plural form of research requires a plural form for reporting (p. 62). The thesis is a plural text which accommodates a multiplicity of viewpoints, which are represented in my reflective diary entries, field notes, video and audio recording, photography, and documentary evidence.

6. Theory, Practice, Transformation

While theory initially informed our practice, we developed our own personal theories of education from practice. Theory and practice are two interdependent yet complementary phases of the process*;* "each is necessary to the other for the continued vitality and development of both" (Winter, 1989, p. 67).

3.12 Ethical Considerations

Action research is not only about working with people as co-researchers but, as McNiff and Whitehead (2010) contend, it is also about influencing others to becomes critical in relation to practices and values that are rational and just, and "carry hope for the future of humanity" (p. 74). I needed to be extra-aware of ethical issues in my research. I was guided by DCU's Insider Research Guidelines (Farren, 2016). In the context of my work, which evolved as the inquiry progressed, ethical approval for the conduct of my research was sought from the DCU Research Ethics Committee at two points during my PhD inquiry. Both were approved under the Notification Procedure as a low-risk social research projects, as seen in Appendix A. In taking responsibility for the integrity of my work, I considered questions that Barbour (2014) poses in taking steps to promote a safe and supportive research environment, as follows.

3.12.1 Negotiating Access and Informed Consent

Before undertaking this PhD work, I sought permission from the Board of Management, through the Principal, to conduct the research in the school. As Deputy Principal in the school, I acknowledged Mockler's (2014) understanding of the power dynamics inherent in conducting insider research; I came to the task recognised according to my history and role within the school. I appreciated my responsibility to understand where I was positioned and explored how this might affect the research process and its outcomes (Farren, 2007). While good working relationships existed in the school, I acknowledged each person's right to freedom and self-determination, and I understood informed consent to be a cornerstone to my research practice. Here I refer to Milne's (2005, Article 41, paragraph 26) explanation of the principles of informed consent as based on the premise that "consent is knowledgeable, exercised in a non-coercive situation, and made by competent individuals". I invited interest in research through staffroom discussion and met later with colleagues who expressed an interest to seek their informed consent; to allow them to choose whether to participate in this research, having been informed of issues likely to influence their decisions. To this end, I prepared and distributed ethics documents, including a Plan Language Statement, which detailed the purpose and conduct of my research and outlined the particular requirements of the research participants. This was used to guide discussion with my

colleagues and to answer their questions about the proposed research. A separate Informed Consent Form was provided for those who chose to participate as co-researchers. This was retained by my colleagues, and a copy of each was kept for my own records.

In the case of the early action research work detailed in Chapter 4, a letter outlining the proposed research work was circulated to the parents and guardians of the children in the infant classes. This allocated time for them to ask their own questions about data gathered by teachers to capture teaching and learning as it happened in the classroom, which was used for professional dialogue and development during the course of the action research inquiry. It was explained that any assessment documentation that appears in the final study would only be with the prior consent. Parental consent was thus sought. Similarly, information was provided to the parents in seeking their informed consent for the research detailed in Chapter 5.

In the context of my work, and in the nature of a school which means children transfer each year to the next class, has an annual intake of new entrants, and employs flexibility of personnel in response to the changing needs of the school, I used "process consent" (Munhall, 1988; Thorne, 1998, as cited in Barbour, 2014, p. 90), rather than a procedure that is attended to only at the outset of a project.

3.12.2 Confidentiality and Anonymity

As Groundwater-Smith (2007) contends, in conducting research in my school community, I needed to be accountable for the processes and products of this work and strive to " 'do no harm' " (p. 205). This applied in particular with regard to protocols regarding anonymity or confidentiality. While complying with the General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) and guidelines of DCU, data was stored on the DCU Google Drive. I was conscious of Barbour's (2014) words that there is significantly more to preserving anonymity than conferring pseudonyms and keeping original contact details separately under lock and key (p. 96). In my research, while I did not identify co-researchers by name, anonymity could not be assured. Confidentiality of data was maintained by encouraging others to read my reports to check the accuracy of my perceptions. I understood what Muir and Mason (2012) assert that agreement to videos being stored as data has complex repercussions with regard to researchers' access and

presentation in the academic and wider public domain. To this end excerpts from audio and video recordings, used to provide evidence for my insight into different phenomena, were viewed to ensure their acceptability to the colleagues involved. These are stored on the DCU Google Drive, links for which were provided for the use of the PhD examiners, but do not appear in the final print or soft copy of this thesis. Permission was obtained before any photographic, audio or video evidence, and documentation was used in this final report.

By pursuing transparency in the research process, as Mockler (2014) notes, I refer to the auditability and plausibility of research within the school community, copies of, and extracts from each of the three action research reports were provided for my co-researchers, thus seeking to publish to the village, as well as to the world (Stenhouse, 1981).

3.12.3 Impact on Participants

Barbour (2014) explains the importance of making the benefits and possible risks of participating in the research clear for research participants (pp. 96-98). Involvement in the study entailed research that took place during daily teaching activities and regular "supportive work-in-progress discussions" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992, pp. 25-27). This would, as Groundwater-Smith and Mockler (2007) involve an "opportunity cost" to the school, and the "benefits must be commensurable with the effort and resources expended" (p. 206) . In this case, rather than inviting prescription from outside, it would allow us to formulate and articulate our vision for own practice, with possible transformative outcomes for ourselves and others. Additionally, its "quality of purpose" (Mockler, 2014, p. 150) came from a focus that emanated from our own genuine concerns and has the potential answer systemic needs too. However, in light of Mockler's (2014) further contention that if practitioner inquiry is to "problematise practice", this research work would need to move beyond celebrating what we were doing well and create space to "shed light on the more difficult aspects of work practices" (p. 150). Then we would not only be concerned with solutions for and improving practice, but also with uncovering constraints that may have caused issues in the first place. This may not be comfortable inquiry, and this was an identified potential risk to all. Consequentially, it was particularly important for me to assure

participants that their involvement or non-involvement in the project would not affect their ongoing relationship with me as Deputy Principal of the school. Reassurance of their choice to withdraw from the research study at any point, and that their data would not be subsequently used, was given.

3.12.4 Engagement and Participatory Methods

Barbour (2014) stipulates the one important difference between action research and other forms of research endeavour as the way in which the researcher's role, and that of participants, is perceived (p. 98). I was doing research *with* my colleagues not *on* them. I saw my research participants as co-researchers. Again, I referred here to Mockler (2014) who explains the ethical dimension of quality of evidence relates to the processes used to collect evidence and the processes by which the evidence collected is analysed. While I had proposed the data collection methods employed in my research work, the collaborative and participatory nature of the action research provided a context within we made decisions about the collection of evidence and its meaning.

3.13 Conclusion

This chapter began with a reflection on my ontological, epistemological, and axiological positions, which allowed me to explain my educative stance to practice and research. I showed how I located my research within the critical paradigm. Having provided a theoretical understanding of action research as my preferred research methodology, I explained why I was drawn to critical participatory action research and outlined Heron's (1996) co-operative inquiry, which was adopted as an initial supportive guide. However, as our shelter of belonging gathered around us, I let go of this structure and trusted in the process of community. Nonetheless, my claims to knowledge have been validated through collaboration with others and in my participation in formative and summative validation groups with co-action researchers, and in publication of my work and conference presentations. Rigour too in this study was assured through adherence to Winter's principles (1989) for the conduct of action research. The following chapters show this research journey in our school community, which can be used as a boxset that the reader can choose to read in its totality, or choose to read what interests them.

An Introduction to the Action Research Inquiries

This section of the thesis comprises a boxset of three related action research inquiries, presented chronologically as discrete pieces of work. Each will allow the reader to experience the communicative spaces (Habermas, 1996) that enabled us to create a shelter of belonging, drawing on our collective critical capacity to transform our understanding of what we do, and the way we relate to others and the situations around us. Each of the inquiries tells the story as it has unfolded over time. Illustrative data and their analysis are weaved into the narrative. Thus, in each there is critical engagement with the relevant extant literature at the time. In drawing on the insights of others, we informed our practice. Yet, the reader should see how I offer our "original interpretation and creation" (McNiff, 2017, p. 105) as we developed our own theories from this practice, and how my understanding of a shelter of belonging evolved.

The Strategy for Literacy and Numeracy (2011) recognised that *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) had advanced considerably the thinking underlying the infant stages of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). *Aistear* highlights the importance of understanding the different processes that contribute to children's learning and development, and the types of interactions that promote this, as central to understanding how such learning can best be assessed. The first enquiry documents initial work as we furthered our understanding of formative assessment in our day-to-day interactions with children in the infant classrooms. This was an opportunity to influence our work, rather inviting or following prescription from outside. I knew that I could undertake this type of research because in the early stages of the school's development we had been provided with opportunities for us to begin to develop attitudes of creativity and flexibility in meeting the many challenges that had been presented to us. The necessary "practice architectures"; the cultural-discursive, social-economic, and social-political mediating pre-conditions for practice described by Kemmis (2009) were in their early inception stages. At this point in my research, I appreciated that the shelter of belonging that would allow us to be sure of the ground on which we stood concerning our practice as praxis could not just be produced, but rather evoked and awakened.

Chapter 4 Using Pedagogic Documentation in Formative Assessment in the Infant Classrooms

Initial Steps on our Learning Journey

4.0 Introduction

Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009) in Ireland helps adults to develop a curriculum for the children (from birth to 6 years) in their setting. This has been influenced by developments in understanding of how adults can work with children to promote learning, in particular "sociocultural theories of learning… [which] dominate much thinking in early childhood literature compared to constructivist theories in past decades" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA), 2009b, p. 17). Indeed, the National literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) recognised that *Aistear* had advanced considerably the thinking underlying the infant stages of the *Primary School Curriculum* (Government of Ireland, 1999), and recommended that the curriculum for infant classes in primary schools should be revised to reflect the approach of the *Aistear* curriculum framework. This inquiry was situated the infant classes in a primary school, at the upper age range of early education, during the 2014-2015 academic year.

The NCCA (2009b) explains that *Aistear* offers "flexibility and autonomy as a professional to the adult in deciding on the types of experiences he/she may provide for the children in working towards the various learning goals in a way which motivates and challenges each child" (p. 19). Children's learning and development is described through the four interconnected themes of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking. Each theme has aims and broad learning goals. The themes, aims and learning goals describe the important dispositions, skills, attitudes and values, knowledge and understanding for early childhood. Assessment is part of adults' day-to-day interactions with children. The guidelines present five assessment methods, some in which the children take the lead in making judgements about their own progress as learners, while others are adult-led assessment; a combination of methods to help adult "build richer and more authentic portraits of children as learners" (NCCA, 2009c, p. 80). Two approaches to assessment, Assessment for Learning (Afl) and Assessment of Learning (AoL) are explained as

differing in how the adult uses the information collected. The main purpose of AoL is to inform about children's achievement. In AFL, the adult uses information to help children with the next steps in their learning and development. However, while both approaches are important, the guidelines focus on formative assessment (AfL) across *Aistear*'s four themes. All of this demands a knowledgeable and highly skilled professional who engages in reflective practice in partnership with colleagues.

4.1 The School Context

I work in an Irish co-educational primary school which opened in September 2007 with an enrolment of 59 pupils and 4 teachers, including a Principal, myself as first assistant and two other teachers. By March 2008 I had been appointed Deputy Principal. Within a year, the school had trebled in size. Our school developed rapidly, and at the time of this inquiry had an enrolment of 363 pupils (May, 2015), twenty four teachers, seven Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) and four ancillary staff.

The staff in the school, with only one exception, is Irish and the children, while most have been born in Ireland, come from a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds; the school has a multicultural population and a monocultural staff. However, our approach to cultural diversity is one of interculturalism, as defined by the intercultural guidelines for primary schools, in which we believe that "we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other" (NCCA, 2005, p. 3) But this did not happen overnight. As a new community, we needed to understand how to support each other, and how to learn with and from each other. Many of the staff were newly qualified and looked to us as more experienced teachers for answers that we did not always have. We worked on developing what McNiff (2013) describes as the

> capacity to live with the uncertainty of not knowing what the next moment will bring … not about moving towards a given 'end' or 'answer', but about taking the next step into an unknown future and working to make it the best it can (p. 74).

Opinions, views and experiences were sought and valued in developing practice.

Much of the support team's work has been with classroom teachers to assist in developing effective programmes of instruction, and a classroom climate that is supportive of all children learning at their own level. In addition to providing individual or small group supplementary instruction, support teachers also collaborate with teachers in the infant classrooms (4- to 6-years of age) during the integrated play session, the focus setting of this inquiry. It was in this context that I set out to investigate the educational influence in my own and other's learning as we further our understanding of formative assessment in our day-to-day interactions with children in the infant classrooms. As a critical participatory action research, this offered opportunities to engage with our own professional practice, allowing us to formulate and articulate our vision for the types of interactions that are central to how early learning and development can best be assessed. The Teaching Council (2015) recognises and promotes this collective professional confidence, whereby the profession can increasingly acknowledge the complexity and importance of teaching, and can value its ongoing learning. This chapter documents the initial steps in our learning journey.

4.2 Literature Review

The importance of understanding the different processes that contribute to children's learning and development, and the types of interactions that promote this, is central to understanding how such learning can best be assessed. This brief review of literature explores learning in the early childhood classroom from a sociocultural perspective. It provides an outline of assessment within this framework, referring specifically to pedagogical documentation in formative assessment.

4.2.1 Theoretical Constructs to Early Learning

Two distinct theoretical constructs to the study of learning and development in the early decades of the twentieth century were the cultural/historical theorising of Vygotsky, and Piagetian theorising (Rogoff, 1998). From a Vygotskian perspective, development occurs as children learn general concepts and principles that can be applied to new tasks and problems, whereas from a Piagetian perspective, learning is constrained by development. Edwards (2005) explains that Piaget's theory was "utilized to articulate a

view of early childhood education that provided learning experiences to young children that were considered suitable to their ages and levels of development, while simultaneously enabling them to 'construct' their own learning" (p. 38). The danger here, as Broadhead (2006) suggests, is that practitioners, if relying on an ages and stages view of development, "can cloud their understanding of young children's capabilities and potential and how 'statutory' guidelines are inevitably limited in their capacity for recognising the full extent of a young child's knowledge and understanding" (p. 202).

Vygotsky's theory provides an alternative view in which development itself may be viewed, which contests the Piagetian view that learning should be matched in some manner with the child's level of development. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002), in their study to research effective pedagogy in the UK, explain that while Vygotsky accepted Piaget's theory of the growth of concepts through experiences, he wrote "about the ways in which concepts could be drawn from other people's understanding, which becomes assimilated into our own cognitive structures" (p. 34). Hedges & Cullen (2012) explain that Vygotsky saw learning and development as occurring first as a social process and subsequently became internalised into thought in an ongoing and dialectical manner. As Vygotsky (1986) explains:

> Any function in the child's cultural development appears twice, or on two planes. First it appears on the social plane, and then on the psychological plane. First it appears between people as an interpsychological category, and then within the child as an intrapsychological category. (p. 163)

This learning occurs within the zone of proximal development, "the distance between the actual development 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, pp. 85–86). This is a pedagogy which looks forward (towards tomorrow) in child development, rather than being situated always in the past, and focusses on potential for learning.

Post-Vygotskian scholars have developed and extended Vygotsky's thinking in a range of ways to provide perspectives on transforming knowledge and practice. Of interest to this study is the work of Rogoff (1998, 2003) who elaborates on Vygotsky's seminal work, valuing the diversity of children's cultural experiences. Rogoff et al. (1998)

contest the view of developmental psychology approaches and the notion of the universal or 'typical' child, which positions some children in deficit and suggests looking at "the development of children in the context of their own communities" (pp. 227-228). This requires a sociohistorical approach which assumes that individual development must be understood in, and cannot be separated from, the social context. The importance of the sociohistorical context on the intrapersonal and interpersonal planes of development initially identified by Vygotsky is acknowledged. As Edwards (2005) explains:

> Rogoff's view of development identifies three interacting planes at which development is argued to occur: including the individual child himself/herself; the other people within the community in which he/she lives; and the sociocultural context defining the manner in which these same people engage in the processes of knowledge sharing and production. (p. 39)

Accordingly, Edwards (2005) suggests that "individual development is arguably defined according to the cultural and social contexts in which it occurs; just as the community and its context may be shaped by the interactions of the individuals of which it is comprised" (p. 39).

Rogoff (2003) argues that development can be viewed as a transformation of participation in cultural activities, "a process of people's changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities" (p. 52). Through this transformation, individual roles change and developmental transitions in communities become evident. It is not only the individuals that change but they also change the communities in which they live.

4.2.2 Implications for Practice

Winsler (2003) captures the difficult task for the Vygotskian-inspired early childhood professional as being able:

> to understand what children bring culturally, historically, and linguistically to the classroom, negotiate shared interests, meanings, and goals between teacher and child, engage children in meaningful leading activities, and figure out how best to guide, interact with, and "scaffold" children, both individually and in a group, to mediate and enrich the child's experiences in the classroom. (pp. 256-257)

This raises a number of issues for practice that promotes a more proactive pedagogical approach that "balances child initiation and autonomy with teacher facilitation, mediation, or "scaffolding" of children's development" (Winsler & Carlton, 2003, p. 156). The concept of pedagogy as providing scaffolding for learning has been important for informing instruction in the early years. Saji-Blatchford et al. (2002) explain that scaffolding derives from Vygotsky's notion of the zone of proximal development, "which varies with culture, society, and experience but it must be fostered in joint activity that creates a context for child and expert interaction within a social context" (p. 34). Bruner (1996) elaborates the concept of scaffolding further, from the initial position that teacher and child are in asymmetrical states, with the teacher knowing and understanding more than the child. The teacher not only transfers knowledge, but he / she also needs to understand what the child already knows. Scaffolding is focussed on the tutor's efforts "as they relate contingently to the novice's successes and failures" (Rogoff, 1998, p. 699). However, Rogoff (1998) distinguishes this from the concept of working in the zone of proximal development, which she views as a way of describing an activity in which someone with greater expertise assists another "to participate in socio-cultural activities in a way that exceeds what they could do otherwise" (p. 699) . Learners too make a valuable contribution. Thus, quality interactions are increasingly recognised as central to early years pedagogy. Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) identify this as requiring "both the educator and the child to be simultaneously 'involved' in an 'instructive' process of 'co-construction" (p. 40), with the establishment of sustained shared thinking between educator and child.

4.2.3 Sociocultural Framework for Formative Assessment

Sociocultural approaches to teaching and learning foreground learning as more than an individual construction. Fleer and Richardson (2009) explain that meaning happens in the context of participation in the real world. Cognitive development must be seen, Rogoff (1998) claims, "as a process, as people move *through* understanding rather than

to understanding" (p. 690, emphasis in the original). In later work, Rogoff (2003) further argues that from "the transformation of participation view, evaluation focuses on the process of individuals' participation in and contributions to the ongoing activity rather than on "outcomes" and individuals' possession of knowledge and skills" (p. 279). Thus, from a sociocultural perspective, assessment is embedded into learning as a cultural tool to help children build their ideas and capacities, rather than just to assess what has been learned at one particular moment (McLachlan et al., 2010, p. 133).

However, Fleer (2002) argues, that while "approaches to teaching have moved towards a sociocultural approach, assessment is still situated within a Piagetian framework or, at best, as a 'social influence approach' " (p. 106). The reason, as Basford and Bath (2014) suggest, is in an attempt to demonstrate conformity and accountability as " many national early years curricula attempt to walk the line between recognition of notions of child development, children's agency and what children need to learn for their future educational attainment" (p. 119). In the context of Irish early childhood education, Dunphy (2010) also recognises the dilemma faced by educators at the upper age-range of early education of "how to focus on holistic issues of importance such as self-concept and creativity while at the same time focussing on subject-specific learning such as levels of phonological awareness, or knowledge of numbers" (p. 52). Nevertheless, Moss and Dahlberg (2008) argue for the continuing place for both and other "languages of evaluation and, more broadly, for early childhood work to adopt different perspectives based on different paradigmatic positions" (p. 8).

One such method is pedagogical documentation, as used by the pre-schools of Reggio Emilia in Northern Italy, which should "enable adult and child communicative cooperation, rather than to provide statements about children's progress which feed into the 'discourses of quality in early childhood" (Bath, 2012, p. 190). MacDonald (2007) concludes from her Canadian study, which investigates its potential as a means of formative assessment in literacy instruction, that it may enhance traditional assessment processes by providing further evidence that can be used to contradict or validate standard measures.

4.2.4 Pedagogic Documentation

Buldu (2010) refers to the process of pedagogical documentation as "recording children's learning experiences, analysing children's work products, and sharing these with the children through a documentation panel, that is, a visual representation or archive of children's learning that provokes reflection" (p. 1440). MacDonald (2007) elaborates:

> the "children's story" [is] made up of quotations or phrases of the children's conversation accompanying the photographs, the "learner's story" discussing the children's focus, interests, and learning, and the "teacher's story" interpreting the pedagogical implications of the children's actions and learning. (p. 235)

Hence, pedagogical documentation is mainly about trying to understand what a child is capable of without any predetermined frameworks, expectations or norms (Dahlberg et al., 2013, p. 154).

Pedagogical documentation, as Turner and Wilson (2010) convey, in discussion with thought-leaders from Reggio Emilia, "is not just a technical tool, but an attitude towards teaching and learning … an approach of knowing, making it possible for the adult to be and know together with the child" (pp. 6-7). Further, in sharing documentation with the child, MacDonald (2007) explains that their attention can be drawn to significant examples of their own thinking. Dialogue with students using documentation provides an opportunity for the educator to provide timely feedback to move learning forward and "to enable them [the learners] to develop self-assessment capacity and dispositions" (Carr & Lee, 2012, p. 137)

However, Garrick et al.'s (2010) research in the UK points to the paucity of children's engagement with documentation, and that documentation of children's achievements in many English early childhood settings is predominantly constructed and aimed at adults. Documentation, they found, was not only mostly designed by and for an adult audience but also appeared closer to a final or summative than an ongoing or formative model of assessment. Bath (2012) asserts that we must "create the right context for the pedagogue and child to listen to and learn from each other" in order to achieve a pedagogy which involves children in documentation (p. 196). Carr and Lee (2012) explain that Learning Stories are being used as such an assessment framework in a

response to a socioculturally orientated national curriculum in New Zealand (NZ), which emphasises "learning as a responsive and reciprocal relationships with people, places and things" (Preface).

4.2.5 Learning Stories

Carr (2011) describes Learning Stories as "stories about learning, documented by teachers, often dictated by children and … written by the learners themselves" (p. 260). Although concentrating on individuals, this "provides a richer image of the child as a result of mapping children's learning journeys which includes recording evidence of other children's behaviours and cultural artefacts valued by the community" (Fleer & Richardson, 2009, p. 133).

An early Learning Stories assessment format had been framed around the learning dispositions of well-being, belonging, communication, contribution and exploration (Carr, 2011). Later work on Learning Stories by Carr and Lee (2012) explores "learner outcomes as a mingling and merging of stores of knowledge with stores of disposition, inviting 'split-screen 'or 'dual focus pedagogies … and assessments" (p. xiii), which is useful for the teacher who must also access subject-based knowledge. This concurs with Moss and Dahlberg's (2008) argument for dual languages of evaluation, as discussed earlier.

While Learning Stories "resist deficit positioning. This does not mean they omit guidance for improvement and further achievement" (Carr & Lee, 2012, p. 138). The story, as Carr and Lee (2012) stress, needs to be associated with action of some sort of action and can become "a jointly owned tool for sustained shared thinking about learning" (p. 42). Siraj-Blatchford et al. (2002) define sustained shared thinking as an episode in which two or more individuals work together in an intellectual way "to solve a problem, clarify a concept, evaluate activities, extend a narrative … Both parties must contribute to the thinking, and it must develop and extend" (p. 8). Children are encouraged to be prepared to think about and to display their learning. Teachers are "revisiting and reviewing … conversations with children, in order for children to expand their views about learning in general … and to construct self-stories about being a learner" (Carr, 2011, p. 260). This, Cowie and Carr (2009) explain, "is designed to refer to the past and the present to encourage consideration of where to go next by

providing a space for this to be discussed between children and teachers (and, perhaps, families)" (p.115). Learning Stories are designed, as Cowie and Carr (2009) state, "to reflect and enhance reciprocal and responsive interactions and to develop and support atmospheres of trust and respect" (p. 108) and " support a view of learning as ongoing" (p. 115). However, the use of Learning Stories is not without challenges. Dunphy (2010) understands that busy teachers may "find it easier to manage the less demanding tool of checklists rather than "compiling rich and potentially more useful narrative accounts of children's learning (Learning Stories)" (p.52). Our focus was to inquire into the use of such pedagogic documentation in our day to day interactions with children in the infant classrooms.

4.3 Research Methodology

Action research has been the preferred strategy of inquiry. This is a form of practitioner research where there is professional intent to intervene to improve practice in line with values that are rational and just, and specific to the situation. Kemmis (2009) explains this as the "sayings, doings and relatings" (p. 467) of people in ecologies of practices. My ontological and epistemic stances are situated within this definition. I believe that learning happens within a social context; we *are* in relation to and with others. Knowledge then is shaped by, shared with, and refined through critical dialogue with others.

McNiff (2013) defines action research as a spontaneous, self-recreating system of inquiry, of researching one's practice, where "it is possible to address multiple issues while still maintaining a focus on one, a realisation of Plato's idea of holding together the one and the many" (p. 67). This allows for responsiveness to the situation, to those involved and to their growing understanding or consciousness raising, actively involving them in their own educational process. It is research in partnership with, rather than on, the participants. The participatory element of action research, Carr and Kemmis (1993) argue, "extends beyond mere presence in the exercise to collaborative involvement" and requires "all participants to be partners of communication on equal terms" (p. 238). Each person's opinions and views are sought, valued and considered. The collaborative relationship between the researcher and the participants implies that the researcher's own professional values are central to the investigation. My guiding

principles are respect and understanding. I acknowledge each person's entitlement to equality of opportunity to realise his or her potential for growth, to be listened to, to speak, to offer opinions, to question and to be happy, yet to be responsible for their words and actions towards others; to belong to a community that works, lives and learns together for the good of all. Thus, my ontological and epistemological stances resonate with Heron (1996) as he describes human flourishing as the "mutually enabling balance between autonomy, co-operation and hierarchy" (p. 127). In recognising the self-determination of each person, as we support and learn with and from others in making important decisions about the teaching and learning process, while taking appropriate "responsibility for doing things to and for other people for the sake of their future autonomy" (Heron, 1996, p. 127), I adopted the structure of Heron's (1996) co-operative inquiry.

4.4 Heron's Co-operative Inquiry

Heron and Reason (2001) describe co-operative inquiry as working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to:

> (1) understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and
>
> (2) learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better. (p. 179)

Heron (1996) describes this as two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it. Each person is co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases. In the action phases they experiment with new forms of personal or professional practice and in the reflection phase they reflect on their experience critically, learning from their successes and failures, and developing understandings which inform their work in the next action phase. Thus, both political and epistemic participation are involved. Heron (1996) outlines the inquiry stages as:

Stage 1 The first reflection phase the inquirers choose

- The focus or topic of the inquiry and the type of inquiry.
- A launching statement of the inquiry topic.
- A plan of action for the first action phase to explore some aspect of the inquiry topic.
- A method of recording experiences during the first action phase.

Stage 2 The first action phase when the inquirers are

- Exploring in experience and action some aspect of the inquiry topic.
- Applying an integrated range of inquiry skills.
- Keeping records of the experiential data generated.

Stage 3 Full immersion in Stage 2 with great openness to experience; the inquirers may

- Break through into new awareness.
- Lose their way.
- Transcend the inquiry format.

Stage 4 The second reflection phase; the inquirers share data from the action phase and

- Review and modify the inquiry topic in the light of making sense of data about the explored aspect of it.
- Choose a plan for the second action phase to explore the same or a different aspect of the inquiry topic.
- Review the method of recording data used in the first action phase and amend it for use in the second. (pp. 49-50)

After the four stages of the complete cycle, the inquiry continues through "several more reflection - action - reflection cycles, the concluding reflection phase of one cycle being continuous with the launching reflection phase of the next" (Heron, 1996, p. 50). While the stages of inquiry are outlined, Heron (1996) reminds us that this is "only *a* way". and does not consider that adopting these stages, "explicitly or tacitly, is t*he* way to do a co-operative inquiry" (p. 49, emphasis in the original).

4.5 Methods of Data Collection

Dadds & Hart (2001) write about the importance of methodological inventiveness and the willingness and courage of practitioners "to create inquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care" (p. 169). A combination of qualitative methods was employed. I maintained a research diary on a continuous basis, which contained my personal accounts of progress made throughout the process. It also

reflected my values and recorded personal insights as these impacted on the data and its interpretations.

Data collection methods included the video recording by the researcher of the action research group's "supportive work-in-progress discussions" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992, pp. 25-27). In order to inform this work, and as per school practice, video recording and/or photographing the interaction of adults and children engaged in classroom activities was also involved. Field notes and documentary evidence of the assessment process also formed part of data collection in this study, and supplemented video-based and photographic observation.

As with all teacher research, a letter outlining the proposed research was circulated to the parents of the children in the infant classes so that they are aware of this work from the beginning and to inform their consent to their child appearing in the photographed or videotaped activities for the teacher professional development activities of this project. It was explained that confidentiality could not be assured but that permission would be obtained before any photographic or video evidence would be used in this final thesis document.

By accounting for how my values informed my work and how they become my living standards of judgement, I attempted to validate my claim "to know" against critical feedback. McNiff (2007, p. 320) recognises two forms "first, by subjecting the account to the test of commensurability with one's own internal commitment and, second, by subjecting it to external public critique". This writing of this thesis is one such opportunity.

4.6 Cycle 1

4.6.1 Stage 1 The First Reflection Phase

The practice of four support teachers, including myself, the four class teachers, and Special Needs Assistants (SNAs) in the infant classes of our school was central to this inquiry. While good working relationships existed, I was mindful of each person's right to freedom and self-determination. Having received ethical approval from Dublin City University (DCU) Research Ethics Committee, I met with interested colleagues to seek their informed consent; to allow them to choose whether to participate in the

research project having been informed of issues likely to influence their decisions. The group had previously been introduced to Heron's co-operative inquiry as a form of action research as resting on two participatory principles: epistemic participation and political participation. Epistemic participation means that the propositional knowledge-outcome of the research is grounded by the researchers in their own experiential knowledge. Political participation allows those involved the right to participate fully in designing the research that intends to gather knowledge about them.

Having gained informed consent of the group of teachers and SNAs to work on enhancing existing formative assessment practices, we entered the first reflection phase of the inquiry. I introduced the idea of pedagogic documentation, framed within the pedagogy of the Reggio Emilia approach, as a formative assessment technique. It was agreed that each person would document one interaction with a child or group of children in photographic, video or audio form. At the first work-in-progress discussion we would invite the interpretation of others on the learning the child is demonstrating and on the direction of further learning.

4.6.2 Stages 2 and 3 The Action Phases

The first action phase for teachers and SNAs who were busy in the classroom meant, as Heron (1996) recognised, people had "a different self-directed schedule of doing and recording interactions with the children and keeping records of the experiential data generated" (p. 83). In my own experience, I focussed on how I interacted with one little boy. I became aware of the use of documentation as a powerful tool for making progress towards Individual Education Plan (IEP) goals visible. Video documentation shows the child working at the sand tray with a variety of different coloured shaped links. I can be seen supporting him with both visual and verbal prompts to sort two property collections, but his own emerging learning is evident too; he matches the shapes with the corresponding pictured shapes on the wall and attempts to name them. I could see the potential for regular documenting that would allow observation of "the continuous, dynamic movement of children's growth" (Hanson & Gilkerson, 1999, p. 8), which not only provides a measure of accountability, but would encourage dialogue amongst teachers, parents and children.

4.6.3 Stage 4 The Second Reflection Phase

A work-in-progress discussion on 11th March 2015 allowed us to share data from the first action phases. Pupil-teacher interactions had been documented in many media forms. Documentation opened the possibility for shared reflection on the learning process, as seen in Appendix B.

One of the teachers had audio taped her interaction with a child who had built a toy museum in the Construction Site. Discussion centred on what the child could do already; her ability to use the past tense, to answer questions, and to use language to explain her work to the teacher. We also focussed on the teacher prompts, which sought clarification, restated the child's idea, and involved the use of open questions. It was agreed that future interactions should continue to seek clarification from the child and to model extended sentences to promote further language competence.

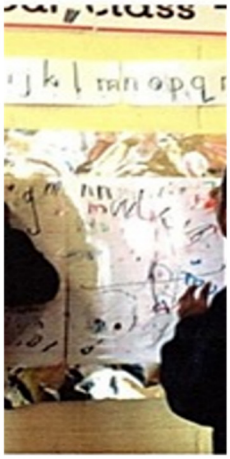
But Kline (2008), in the *Making Learning Visible* project in the United States, insists that revisiting data collected helps acknowledge the relationship between teaching and learning. In revisiting this audio file, the teacher's support of child's participation in learning was revealed. She did not tell the child what to think, rather she elaborated on the intention of the child. The teacher had enabled her to clarify and explain her decision to place a toy in the museum, promoting what Dahlberg et al. (1999) describe as the "discourse of meaning making" (p. 87).

One of the support teachers who had worked in the Australian school system had experience in using Learning Stories. She presented her interaction with one young boy who was in the role of the teacher in Role Play Area (Figure 4.1). Her own deliberate interaction in this child-led activity demonstrated early possibilities of what Siraj Blatchford et al. (2002) identify as "sustained shared thinking" (p. 40) between educator and child. The Learning Story (Figure 4.1) documented not only that he was consolidating his previously learned knowledge of letter formation, but his self-confidence, ability to take turns, to work co-operatively, and to share with others was captured. Claxton and Carr (2004) describe these important attitudes, values and habits in early childhood education "as being *ready*, *willing* and *able* to engage profitably in learning" (p. 87).

This prompted discussion of what we considered important in learning in early childhood education (Appendix B). The difference between the way the content of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999) and *Aistea*r is presented was discussed. The former prioritises the acquisition of a wide range of knowledge and the development of a variety of concepts, skills and attitudes appropriate to children of different ages and stages of development in the primary school (Government of Ireland, 1999, p. 34), whereas *Aistear* defines learning content as dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding
(NCCAa, p. 6). As Dunphy (2008) explains, while skills and knowledge are important, in early years education there are increasing calls "for a wider view of what it is that children are learning in the years from birth to six, and for explicitness about other areas of children's development that are critical for long term success" (p. 22). This was also emphasised in the National Literacy And Numeracy Strategy (2011).

We acknowledged that Learning Stories would help us to look for evidence of learning and development in relation to *Aistear'*s themes of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking. These would be reproduced on the reverse of the Learning Story for the teacher to tick when children demonstrate such learning (Appendix B). This resonated with an Australian study on teacher assessment practice within a sociocultural context, Fleer and Richardson (2009), where a sticker system was used to identify whether children's interactions were working independently, in partnership with a peer, or with the assistance of someone else. However, it was concluded that documenting the children's "movement from an area of significant support to an area of less support could not be demonstrated by using dots or stickers" (Fleer & Richardson, 2009, p. 141). This was to emerge as a concern for us in subsequent work.

Figure 4.1: A Learning Story with Stores of Knowledge and Stores of Dispositions



Observation: "I'm the teacher said [redacted]'. "What are we going to learn today?" I asked. "Our letters" replied [redacted]. He wrote the latter 'w' on the whiteboard. "What letter is that?" I asked. "It's w" replied [redacted]. "We write it like this... down, up, down, up" he said as he wrote the letter on my small white board. I then wrote it incorrectly going up and down many times. "No not like that" said [redacted]. "like this, up, down, up, down, it looks like two teeth". I tried again. "Yes that's it he replied, but we like small letters, that too big. I then wrote it properly. "Excellent, you're the star writer "beamed [redacted], as he pretended to put it outside on show. [redacted] was developing his confidence, self-esteem and consolidating knowledge that he's already learned by re-enacting real life situations.

[redacted] was also developing his writing skills as he wrote on the whiteboards. He worked collaboratively within the group and co-operated with others as he gave up the role of the teacher when another child asked if they could be the teacher and he resumed as 'Ms Amanda' making announcements over the intercom instead. "Can Sasha come to the office please" he said.

What can I do next...

I will help to extend [redacted]' vocabulary associated with imaginary/role-play area of the school e.g. that Ms [redacted] job is the secretary.

Finally, I introduced the idea of documentary panels as a further element of pedagogic documentation. I explained that they differ from display boards because they are explicitly designed to function as a communication tool of learning (Tarini, 1997). One support teacher, again from her Australian experience, explained that existing display boards in the classrooms could be modified to record children's interactions, their work

and teacher comments. It was agreed to try it out. However, this was not without dissention, because of the perceived time commitment and effort involved. Initial understanding of the panels appeared to be that they would allow teachers and children to revise the learning in a unit of work. This was to begin to change as the co-operative inquiry proceeded.

4.7 Cycle 2

4.7.1 Stage 1 The First Reflection Phase

A plan for the second action phase was decided. Learning Stories would be used, referring to *Aistear* themes, aims and learning goals, which would also be referenced in teachers' fortnightly plans. Documentary panels (Our Learning Wall) would be introduced to the classroom.

4.7.2 Stages 2 and 3 The Action Phases

As we attempted to work on developing the positive learning dispositions advocated in *Aistear*, I became aware that Learning Stories, as Carr and Caxton (2002) explain, "prevent attention sliding back onto the mastery of content" (p. 16). The SNA and I had been working with the same little boy on saying the counting words, but with little success. However, when another child joined the activity, he became engaged, saying alternate number words forward to 10. His ability to maintain attention and his knowledge of the alternate numbers is clear, but it is his delight and sense of success that is revealed in video documentation. He exclaimed "*Well done!*" and insisted on viewing the video. I began to appreciate that documentation "seeks to develop new relationships to how we know children and how they know themselves" (Turner & Wilson, 2010, p. 7). An earlier documented learning experience also allowed us to show his learning outcomes "as a mingling and merging of stores of knowledge with stores of disposition" (Carr & Lee, 2012, p. xiii). While playing a game of *Bingo* with the SNA and myself, he communicated verbally and showed an incredible positive outlook and resilience in learning, proclaiming "*No you don't !"* when she incorrectly claimed she had the matching picture. With the adults' assistance, he was participating

in a way that exceeded what he could do otherwise, concurring with Rogoff's (1998) understanding of working in the zone of proximal development.

Aistear describes children's learning and development through four interconnected themes of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking. Each theme has aims and broad learning goals. While focussing on the children's developing dispositions, we found evidence of many of the goals in any one Learning Story. A subsequent conversation with one colleague led to questions around the focus of documentation. This informal discussion showed that some felt overwhelmed by the amount of evidence that can be collected. This would need further discussion:

> *A. wondered if we should just focus on one or two of Aistear's themes in our observations. She was finding evidence of many but was not focussing on any in great detail. Maybe we should decide on a focus***;** *document one learning experience from beginning to end. or focus on one Aistear theme over an extended period of time? Literature would point to this. Look at the Fleer study… Let's discuss this further."(*Reflective Diary, 13th May 2015)

In another example, one SNA working in a Junior Infant classroom illustrated during a subsequent work-in-progress discussion (6th May 2015) how Learning Stories "have the potential advantage that may tell us a lot about what interests the child in the context of everyday routines and activities" (Cullen, 2009, p. 84). While working in the Creative Area, the child had used a butterfly shape cutter in the *Play-Doh* and proceeded to decorate the wings with feathers and used pipe cleaners as antennae. The SNA had noted the child's interest in butterflies, which also emerged the following day in the Construction Site when she built a large model of a butterfly. She proposed to include books and pictures of butterflies in the different play areas to build on this interest. Thus, documenting Learning Stories could deepen our understanding of the child's interests, learning and development needs. It would allow us step back and to listen and to invite the children into the learning process. The likelihood of this happening, Carr (2011) suggests, is enhanced by practitioners who "notice (and document) emerging domains of interest and expertise and who develop opportunities and strategies for listening to the children's ideas" (p. 268).

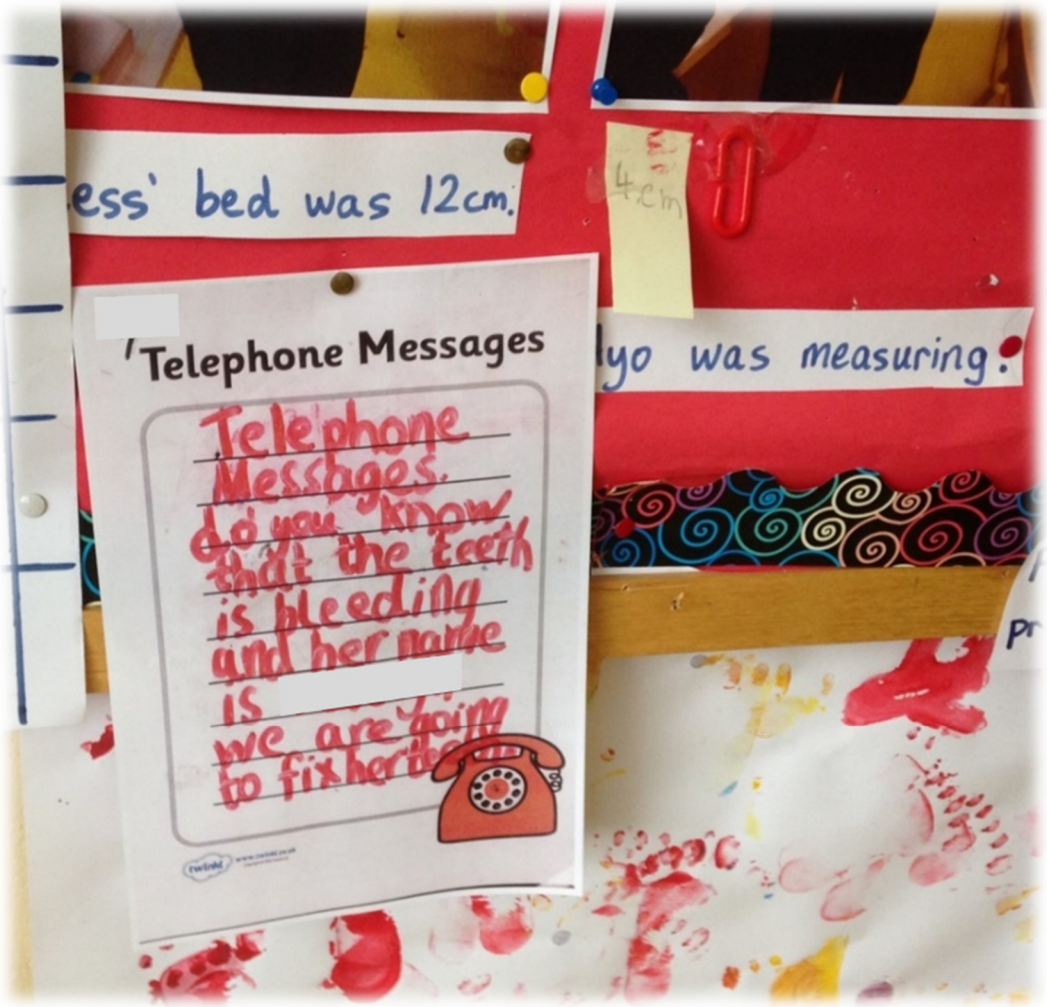
Meanwhile, documentary panels began to emerge in some classrooms, as seen in Figure 4.2 and Figure 4.3. The potential for parents to gain an understanding of their child's learning and to be able to talk about that learning with their child and their child's teacher (MacDonald, 2007) became apparent immediately. One of the SNAs reported this reaction of a parent on viewing the panel:

> *A.'s mother came. I asked her if she would like to see what he is learning, and I drew attention to the Learning Wall. I explained that we were working on colours and syllables. A. clapped the colours for his mother. When she realised that her son was capable of achieving so much, her response was to pick him up, kiss him, swing him around in sheer joy. He allowed her to pick him up and responded to her hugs and kisses… very much what MacDonald spoke about. (*Reflective Diary, 22nd March 2015)

Learning was being made visible, but I could see that we are yet to include any real explanations of what made the action important or significant for the child (Kline, 2008).

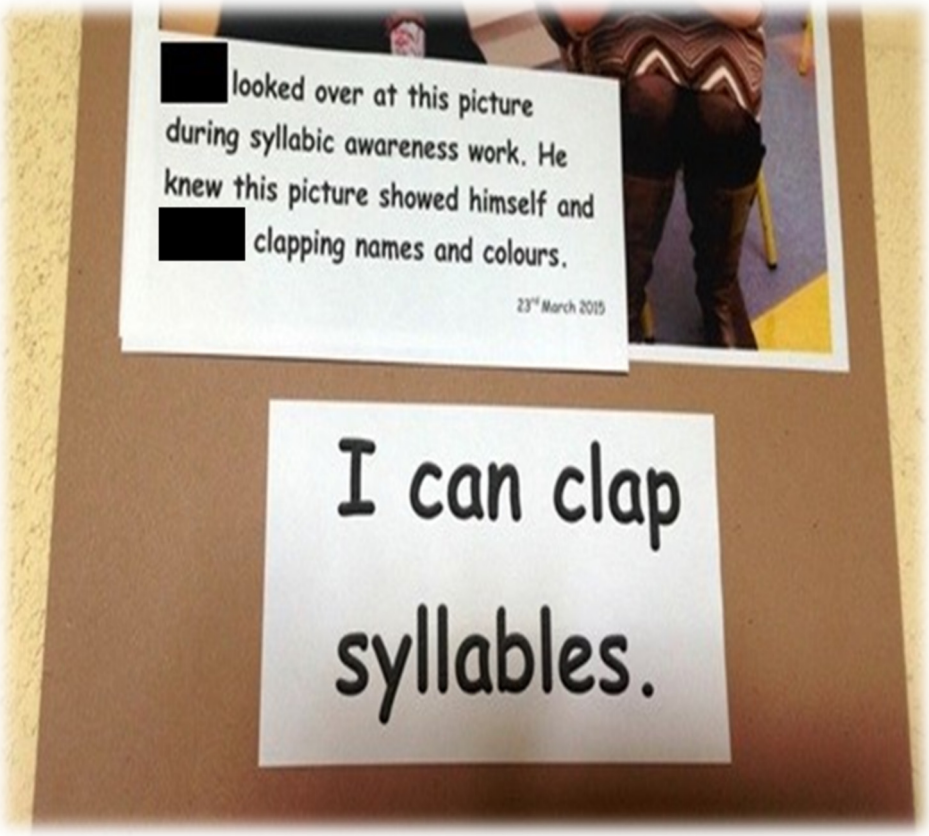
Figure 4.2: Learning Wall Documenting a Learning Disposition

Figure 4.3: Learning Wall Documenting Stores of knowledge



Students' reactions to the Learning Wall were noted by the adults in the rooms "*They can see … they comment on it… and they would remember then that* [they] *had done…*". Some children were adding captions to their own work. The panel displays were also encouraging children to learn from each other. Excitement over work featured in the photograph panels stimulated other children to become interested in the topic. They used it as a reference point to recreate the same activity themselves. In my own classroom, the child referred quite often to the Learning Wall. Figure 4. 4 shows that his learning was being revisited, "supporting the view of learning as ongoing " (Cowie & Carr, 2009, p.115).

Figure 4.4: Learning is Revisited



Documentation, as Turner and Wilson (2010) convey, was becoming an approach of knowing, making it possible for the adult to be and know together with the child. The images of learning were providing "powerful opportunities for multiple interpretations and discussion" (Turner & Wilson, 2010, p. 7). Documentation was enabling demonstration of both the learning and the types of experiences that foster growth in young children to colleagues too. One of the infant teachers had reflected on this when she visited my room, "*Even when I went into the room, you can see what he is doing. You get a sense of what is going on*" (Reflective Diary, 30th April 2015). Opportunity for dialogue had thus been created. Informal discussions contributed to a shared perspective on the children's learning; let us not, as Broadhead (2006) exclaims, "think about watching the children; rather let us talk and think about understanding their learning" (p. 202).

4.7.3 Stage 4 The Second Reflection Phase

Documenting Learning Stories was not an easy task. We decided that the support teacher, the class teacher and the SNA in each classroom would document Learning Stories, each following one child over the week or over a fortnight. We would document critical incidents that highlight one or more of these themes, and a series of Learning Stories over time, for a particular child, could be put together and scanned for what Carr and Caxton (2002) refer to as emerging "learning narratives" to be revisited with the child and parents (p. 22). But we needed to begin to record our "intentional interactions … modelling and use of cultural tools, and child-teacher and child-child … interactions" (Fleer & Richardson, 2009, p. 143), as learning is described as "inextricably distributed across the child, the family and community, the teacher, and the cultural resources available" (Carr & Lee, 2012, p. xiv).

A further idea offered by one support teacher to focus on group learning processes suggested a move towards sociocultural theories of learning and assessment. The immediate response was to query the practicality of separating the children's learning to document individual stories, without creating additional work. Fleer and Richardson's study (2009) also refers to this perceived difficulty of documenting "collective activity, with preference for focussing more on what an individual was doing and gaining from experience" (p. 42). This was left open for further exploration.

4.8 Conclusion

The National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) recognised that *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009) had advanced considerably the thinking underlying the infant stages of the *Primary School Curriculum* (1999). *Aistear* presents learning in four broad and complementary themes of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking. The two approaches to assessment, AfL and AoL are outlined in the guidelines. However, while both approaches are important, the guidelines focus on formative assessment in AfL as part of adults' day-to-day interactions with children to progress their learning and development across *Aistear*'s themes. The assessment methods outlined reflect

sociocultural theory and allows for both child-led and adult-led activities, which was the focus of this action research.

The Teaching Council Draft Framework for Teachers' Learning (2015) highlights that the "quality of student learning depends as much on teachers' learning as on their teaching" (p. 3). Action research is, as McNiff (2013) states:

> a way of researching one's practice and generating personal theories of practice that shows the processes of self-monitoring, evaluation of practice, purposeful action to improve the practice for social benefit, and a commitment to making the process public for moral and social accountability. (p. 4)

In these early steps in our learning journey, we were endeavouring to make the assessment process manageable and practical; "capable of being administered, interpreted and recorded by busy educational practitioners" (Carr & Caxton, 2002, p. 16). We would need the opportunity to further develop our understanding of documentation as assessment, to be given time to become convinced of its value and of its potential to make a difference in terms of pupil learning. Most importantly, we had begun to reflect on what we value in terms of children's learning. Together with the children and parents, as we revisit learning through documentation, we could come to understand learning as "the development of flexible knowledge and dispositions that facilitate effective navigation across settings and tasks" (Nasir et al., 2006, p. 490).

Our documentation focus at this point was on the individual child, although a suggestion had been made to focus on group learning, a possible way forward toward sociocultural assessment practices. Fleer and Richardson's (2009) study shows that staff found that:

> by focusing their assessment on the performance of an individual they found that their judgements were no longer accurate - since what children could do alone could be very different from what the child could do when working with more capable peers or with adult support or mediation. (p. 142)

But this was not for me to decide on my own.

Carr and Lee (2012) understand that documenting incidents over a period of time has the potential to offer "opportunities for children to recognise that they are on a learning journey, and to identify some of the steps on the way" (p. 9), and should include "multiple voices" (p. 137). We appreciated the importance of reciprocity in adult-child interaction. By engaging in pedagogic documentation in our assessment practices, knowledge of what the child can do with assistance had begun to emerge. But, the voice of the adult, both teacher and parent, was only beginning to emerge.

We would need to engage further with documentation during the learning process, otherwise the "tremendous opportunity to actually gain new meanings that could deepen the experience being documented" (Turner and Wilson, 2010, p. 6) would be lost. I found that in discussing the learning episodes as they occurred with the SNA in my classroom that we were beginning to make "statements about what made the action significant for the child" (Kline, 2008, p. 76). This was challenging in the busy classroom. However, by supporting the class teachers to facilitate the children in revisiting the Learning Wall or their Learning Stories, noting their comments and providing opportunities to sustain interest and to learn from each other, we could gain insights that lead to deeper learning experiences for both children and adults.

To conclude, documentation as an assessment practice is an attitude towards teaching and learning (Turner and Wilson, 2010). Even in these early steps, the benefit of documentation for research, reflection, collaboration, and to enhance our professional growth, was evident. While it provides rich descriptions of what students say, do and represent, it would be our collective reflection on and analysis of the evidence which deepens understanding**.** The amount of time needed to engage in new forms of assessment of early learning and development has been raised nationally. We were only on the periphery of socio-cultural assessment practices.

4.9 Epilogue: Beyond the Sphere of the Immediate Research Inquiry

Following this period of research, I had been a little disappointed in how the children's learning during the integrated play session had been reflected in summative end of year report writing in June 2015. Just as Dunphy (2010) recognises, especially when assessing children at the upper age-range of early education, it is difficult getting the balance right in the focus on holistic issues of importance in learning dispositions, while at the same time focussing on subject-specific learning. This was reflected in the summative reports. Further conversations throughout the subsequent academic year about what we wanted to share with parents about their children's learning ensued. To this end, we worked on statements that would guide teachers in their reflection on the children's learning and development in relation to the *Aistear* themes of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking (Appendix C). In commenting on the children across these areas, subject specific attainment could be reported on within the required NCCA report card templates. Additionally, it was decided to share children's portfolios of learning with the parents, which included information from a range of assessment approaches, including their Learning Stories, at the annual parent-teacher meetings. This has evolved over the years. Recently, in September 2020, it was decided to make a booklet per work topic for each child, which could be taken home at the end of the block of work, rather than compiling year-long portfolios to be taken home at the end of the school year (Appendix C).

In revisiting the Learning Wall with the children, noting their comments and providing opportunities to sustain interest and to learn from each other, we have gained insights that lead to deeper learning experiences for both children and adults. The free play session each Friday has provided the opportunity for self-assessment as the children revisit their learning. In reviewing the Learning Story, it is the photograph that prompts discussion with and for the children, as they recall what they were doing and explain what was happening. However, the use of Learning Stories has not been without challenges as classrooms are busy places. Yet, they remain in use in the infant classroom as teachers have noted that they are rich and useful narratives of children's learning. While the suggestion was made to look at group learning processes, the practice has remained to focus on the individual child and the reciprocity in adult-child interaction. This is due to perceived difficulty with photographing group activity, under

General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR), which came into force in May 2018, and the launch of *Children First, National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children* (2017). By engaging in this pedagogic documentation in our assessment practices, knowledge of what the child can do with assistance is emerging, as is the voice of the adult. Each year we have worked to make it more manageable. The practice has evolved that each adult in the room focuses on one child for short periods of time per day. Assessment points have now been identified in the integrated play session, as seen in Appendix C. The Learning Stories now have a checklist included, which allows for focus on both specific skills and learning dispositions at different points in the session, and still include the photograph of each child at play to allow them take ownership of their educational journey.

An Evolving Understanding of a Shelter of Belonging

As I moved to the next focus of my PhD research, my understanding of how a shelter of belonging in the educational context of a school community is invoked and encouraged was deepening. We had always had to meet many challenges and to plan approaches to suit the contextual needs of our school. However, the period of research with the teachers and children in the infant classrooms had allowed me to see the shelter of belonging as a trust in learning as a process. In our documentation we were allowed to step back and to listen and invite the children into the learning process. In noting their comments and providing opportunities to sustain interest and to learn from each other, we could gain insights that lead to deeper learning experiences for both children and adults. This is the "poetics of growth" (O'Donohue, 1997, p. 162), which is central to belonging. I could see it in the receptivity to this different way of being with the children during the integrated play session. It was the openness to new experiences in which each of us could contribute to the others' thinking and learning as we reflected on, and articulated what we valued for children's learning in the early years of primary school education. Moving forward with this integrity takes time and only happens in a hospitality to difference, and in this "sense both individuality and originality enrich self and others"(O' Donohue, 2003, p. 133), as seen in the next chapter.

The publication of *Literacy and Numeracy for Learning and Life* (Department of Education and Skills, 2011) had marked the beginning of a major national strategy to improve literacy and numeracy standards among children and young people in the education system, including those with special and additional educational needs. This stressed the importance of the reciprocal relationship between parents and the school. The next inquiry stems from the value placed by our school on parental engagement in their children's learning, a natural progression from our work in the classroom. It explores the inclusion of parents and home values in the construction of the teaching and learning environment, while empowering and informing their efforts to support their children's literacy, numeracy and social development. It also illustrates the impact of this inquiry on a school-wide transformative journey in our thinking of how we began to understand and develop whole-school processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities.

Chapter 5 Understanding the Direct Involvement of Parents in Policy Development and School Activities

5.1 Introduction

It is acknowledged that parental engagement with children's learning and education is of vital importance. Research finds that differences "in parental involvement have a much bigger impact on achievement than differences associated with the effects of school in the primary age range (Desforges & Abouchaar, 2003). However, there is a tendency to confuse engagement with learning with engagement with the school. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) present a model for the progression from parental involvement with schools, where the school is in control of the relationship and the flow of information, to parental involvement with schooling in which genuine interaction happens between parents and schools, through to parental engagement with children's learning, where the parent chooses to be involved. This non-linear continuum charts "a change in relational agency, with the relationship being between parents and schools, and the object of the relationship being children's learning" (Goodall & Montgomery, 2014, p. 399). While all types of parental involvement can have a positive effect, it is actually what parents do with their child at home that has the greatest impact. However, Goodall (2015) explains that if "the engagement of parents in learning is not at the heart of the teaching and learning policy ... [it] is unlikely to be either as effective as possible or as deeply embedded in the life and thinking of the school as it needs to be in order to be effective" (p. 174). Furthermore, this holistic understanding of parental engagement requires "a knowledge of the parents and families who form part of the school community", in forming a "relationship of trust and respect between families and the school" (Goodall, 2015, p. 175).

My PhD research has sought to investigate educational influences in my own learning, in the learning of our staff, students and parents, and in the learning of wider social formations as we work towards building a school community. Reflecting on sociocultural theories of learning led me to begin to examine the social and cultural aspects of pedagogy by exploring the inclusion of parents and home values in the construction of the teaching and learning environment. This chapter documents an action research study which allowed an exchange of knowledge, values and cultural background experiences between home and school. I endeavour to show how this

began to enhance self-efficacy in the parents' ability to directly affect their children's learning, and how I reflected on my influence and understanding of involving parents of children with additional and diverse learning needs. This chapter also outlines how this work significantly influenced my thinking, and ultimately a whole-school approach, on how we could enter "a community to create with parents a shared landscape" (Pushor, 2012, p. 469), in which there is reciprocity of mutual engagement in the development of whole-school processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities.

5.2 Background to the Research

I work in an Irish, Catholic co-educational primary school which opened in September 2007. The staff in the school, with the exception of two members, is Irish and the children, while most have been born in Ireland, come from a broad range of ethnic and cultural backgrounds; the school has a multicultural population and a mono-cultural staff. An important part of the principal's leadership has been an emphasis on pastoral care and the nurturing of practices to create an affirming and inclusive environment for staff, children and parents alike. In leading for diversity, his leadership can be described an "authentic engagement with self and others, a willingness to take risks, be resilient and push boundaries" (Devine, 2013, pp. 408-409). Leadership is "layered and multiple" (Devine, 2013, p. 409), and central to this leadership is the empowerment of others. This has encouraged involvement, professional development, mutual support and assistance in problem solving, allowing school staff to become involved in the work of the school outside of the classroom.

The centrality of the children's well-being is underlined in our school's mission statement. We have always strived to create and provide a safe, secure and happy environment where values of respect and understanding are promoted. Inclusivity is valued. We are committed to the holistic development of all pupils, preparing them to reach their full potential and to play a full and active role in their community. The majority of the parent body have been born outside of Ireland and are unfamiliar with the Irish education system. Strong home-school relationships are valued. We recognise the role of parents as the primary educators of their children. A Whole School Evaluation (WSE) in November 2015 confirmed that effective communication channels

between home and school have been established. Responses to parent questionnaires administered during the evaluation indicated that parents are happy with the school. While the evaluation acknowledged our school's identified priority to further develop home-school links, a recommendation was made to develop whole-school processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities. This is the context of this particular focus of my research, which was conducted between March and May 2016.

5.3 Research Methodology

Action research has been the preferred strategy of inquiry; a form of practitioner research where there is professional intent to intervene to improve practice in line with values that are rational and just, and specific to the situation. Kemmis (2009) explains this as the "sayings, doings and relatings" (p. 467) of people in ecologies of practices. My ontological and epistemic stances are situated within this definition. I believe that learning happens within a social context; we *are* in relation to and with others. Knowledge then is shaped by, shared with, and refined through critical dialogue with others.

This collaborative relationship also implies that my own professional values are central to any investigation. My guiding principles are respect and understanding. I acknowledge each person's entitlement to equality of opportunity to realise his or her potential for growth, to be listened to, to speak, to offer opinions, to question and to be happy, yet to be responsible for their words and actions towards others; to belong to a community that works, lives and learns together for the good of all. Thus, my ontological and epistemological stances resonate with Heron (1996) as he describes human flourishing as the "mutually enabling balance between autonomy, co-operation and hierarchy" (p. 127). In recognising the self-determination of each person, as we support and learn with and from others, while taking appropriate "responsibility for doing things to and for other people for the sake of their future autonomy" (Heron, 1996, p. 127), I adopted the structure of Heron's (1996) co-operative inquiry.

5.4 Heron's Co-operative Inquiry

Heron and Reason (2001) describe co-operative inquiry as working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to:

> (1) understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and
>
> (2) learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better. (p. 179)

Heron (1996) describes this as two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it. Each person is co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases. In the action phases they experiment with new forms of personal or professional practice and in the reflection phase they reflect on their experience critically, learning from their successes and failures, and developing understandings which inform their work in the next action phase. Thus, both political and epistemic participation are involved. Heron (1996) outlines the inquiry stages as:

Stage 1 The first reflection phase the inquirers choose

- The focus or topic of the inquiry and the type of inquiry.
- A launching statement of the inquiry topic.
- A plan of action for the first action phase to explore some aspect of the inquiry topic.
- A method of recording experiences during the first action phase.

Stage 2 The first action phase when the inquirers are

- Exploring in experience and action some aspect of the inquiry topic.
- Applying an integrated range of inquiry skills.
- Keeping records of the experiential data generated.

Stage 3 Full immersion in Stage 2 with great openness to experience; the inquirers may

- Break through into new awareness.
- Lose their way.
- Transcend the inquiry format.

Stage 4 The second reflection phase; the inquirers share data from the action phase and

- Review and modify the inquiry topic in the light of making sense of data about the explored aspect of it.
- Choose a plan for the second action phase to explore the same or a different aspect of the inquiry topic.
- Review the method of recording data used in the first action phase and amend it for use in the second. (pp. 49-50)

While the stages of inquiry are outlined, Heron (1996) reminds us that this is "only *a* way" and does not consider that adopting these stages, "explicitly or tacitly, is *the* way to do a co-operative inquiry" (p.49, emphasis in the original).

5.5 Methods of Data Collection

Dadds and Hart (2001) write about the importance of methodological inventiveness and the willingness and courage of practitioners "to create inquiry approaches that enable new, valid understandings to develop; understandings that empower practitioners to improve their work for the beneficiaries in their care" (p. 169). In inviting parental participation, I decided not to video record the sessions to avoid undue stress. Field notes were taken during the feedback sessions of the workshops, and in a subsequent group discussion with colleagues (Appendix D). I maintained a research diary on a continuous basis, which contained my personal accounts of progress made throughout the process. It also reflected my values and recorded personal insights as these impacted on the data and its interpretations. As with all teacher research, a letter outlining the proposed research was circulated to the parents. This would inform their consent for the use of comments or ideas shared during the parent workshops. It was explained that such data would only appear in the final study with their prior consent.

By accounting for how my values informed this work and how they become my standards of judgement, I began to develop my own pedagogy, a pedagogy of the unique (Farren, 2006). I attempted to validate my claim "to know" against critical feedback. McNiff (2007) recognises two forms "first, by subjecting the account to the test of commensurability with one's own internal commitment and, second, by subjecting it to external public critique" (p. 320). Publication in the peer reviewed *International Journal for Transformative Research* (2017) accounting this particular a

period of research, and a subsequent presentation at the CARN conference *Voicing and Valuing: Daring and Doing* in Manchester (2018), were two such opportunities.

5.6 Cycle 1

5.6.1 Stage 1 Co-researchers: An Area of Concern

During the 2015-2016 academic year, myself and one Special Needs Assistant (SNA) worked together to provide additional support to a small group of children who presented with additional and diverse learning needs. In collaboration with class teachers and parents, we reviewed and monitored the children's School Support Plans (SSP) and Individual Education Plans (IEP), both formally and informally. The children's positive response to instruction was evident. However, being keenly aware of home and school as the two most prominent loci where social interaction leads to individual development, we wanted to draw more on families' "funds of knowledge" (Moll et al., 1992) in enhancing home and school learning. These parents were already aware of my earlier research work on formative assessment in the infant classrooms (Chapter 4), but I wanted to invite them to work with us to investigate how we could include parent and home values in the teaching and learning environment of the infant classes. Being mindful of the sensitivities involved in bringing a group of parents together whose children present with diverse learning needs, we spoke to each of them individually and invited them to participate. We explained that we would like to help them to support their child's learning, and that we also wanted to create "opportunities for the exchange of ideas ... and foster rich dialogue and collaboration" (Cobb, 2014, p. 51) in this work. They also received a letter outlining what was involved, as referred to earlier.

A series of four parent workshops (Appendix E) based on the early learning skills that underpin literacy, mathematical, and social development were devised by the class teachers, the SNA and myself. These as, Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) explain, were to enable the parents "to know what is expected of their children and offers a context for understanding links between learning tasks and learning goals" (p. 120), enhancing their capacity to support their children's learning. These workshops were held during March and April 2016. While the centrality of the role of the children's class teachers was appreciated, myself and the SNA would co-ordinate the workshops and each class

teacher would each have the opportunity to work at one session. The format of each workshop included an overview of the skill being explored, and an activity would then be introduced and conducted with the parents, which they could take home to work on with the children. We would also encourage the parents to share their own games and rhymes with us. Time would be allocated at the start of each subsequent session for review and sharing of this experience. Of concern to us here was what Reason (1999) describes as a "revisioning of our understanding" of collaboration in planning for and supporting children's learning, as "well as transforming practice" (p. 208). We wanted all members of the group to contribute both to the ideas for our work together, and also to be part of the activity being researched (Reason, 1999).

5.6.2 Stages 2 and 3 Co-subjects Immersed in the Experience

While this programme was initiated by the school, it was not because of a perceived insufficiency of parental engagement. Of the seven children, six parents participated in these workshops. The other parent could not participate in the workshops as she had just commenced employment. One of the six parents attended the first workshop, but was unavailable thereafter as the family was returning home for an extended holiday. She did however attend a final session having returned to Ireland. As Goodall (2015) clarifies, "the most effective instances of parental engagement do not tend to happen in school" (p. 174), we continued to support these parents' engagement with their children's learning through informal contact.

Of the six parents, five were mothers, while the other father and mother took turns to attend. In reflecting on this participation, I concur with Hoover-Dempsey et al. (2005) who suggest that parents' involvement "is motivated by two belief systems: role construction for involvement, and sense of efficacy for helping the child succeed in school" (p. 107) . Throughout the SSP and IEP process, these parents had shared a sense of responsibility for their children's learning, as well as a belief that they should be engaged in supporting this learning, but they sought support to do this.

This work encouraged parent-child interaction through play. The simple games of bingo, pattern work, threading and cutting, and musical emotion word games had been successful in targeting the "parents' knowledge, skills, time, and energy" (Hoover-Dempsey et al., 2005, p. 120). Feedback showed that the parents appreciated that their

involvement was influencing their children. An honest response from one parent, who found that while her child knew how to play the games, he wouldn't always do so, encouraged others to share difficulties they were encountering. One parent explained that her child sometimes found it difficult to take turns with his sibling when playing the games. We could offer parents ideas to promote the child's learning and understanding through positive reinforcement when he /she was making the effort to do the action being worked on. It also offered an opportunity to share the importance of how a "growth mindset" (Dweck 2008) promotes resilience in the face of difficulty, which leads to success in learning. But the parents also began to listen to each other. On one occasion, one parent explained how she used flour, water and food colouring to make a playdoh, which we had explained could be used to promote the fine motor control skills necessary for handwriting. Another parent tried out this suggestion and returned to the group the following week to share her success.

5.6.3 Stage 4 Co-researchers Reflecting on a Transformative Experience

I had worked on a daily basis with the SNA for the previous two years. We trusted each other; our collaboration was safe and provided mutual support and challenge. Being conscious of engaging with the parents and not just giving information, we examined if the activities we planned emanated "from an ethos of the valuing of parents in the educational process" (Goodall, 2015, p. 176). We wanted to acknowledge what they could offer and provide the assistance they needed to support their children's learning. We found that this was a small step towards positive parent-teacher collaboration which began to enhance self-efficacy among parents (Appendix D). Some had been unsure of how to support their child's learning. Now confidence in what they wanted to do was emerging. One parent volunteered to do some gardening with the children; she was interested in horticulture, as was her little boy. We had set out to include parent values. This would allow us to begin to draw upon the knowledge and skills found at home, to re-imagine our work in the SSP and IEP process to be, as Pushor (2011) recommends, centred on the "co-construction of curriculum with parents, children and other family members" (p. 221). Parental feedback at the end of the four workshop sessions showed that that we had in some ways strengthened their beliefs in their ability to directly affect their child's learning.

As a school we acknowledge the right of children to communicate and socialise in the language of their home. Children who have attained some level of literacy in their home language are encouraged to sustain the development of literacy in this language. In the SSP and IEP meetings, we explain to parents how important the continued enhancement of the child's language and literacy skills in the home language is for affective development and acquisition of the new language. In these parent workshops, we had encouraged the parents to share home rhymes, songs and games but some openly stated their preference for using the language of the school at home and asked for written instructions (Appendix F) for each of the activities to help them do so. One parent further explained that her child was "*experiencing difficulties with English and would prefer help with this"* (Field Notes, 15th April 2016) to ensure her progression in learning. This is a valid concern that concurs with Walker and Tedick (2000) who found that in immersion settings parents may have a "heightened desire for information about curricular content, student progress and, above all, a need for reassurance about achievement" (p. 22). The timeframe of this work was too short to actively involve the parents in enhancing first language. However, in learning from this, as a school we revised our introductory booklet for parents new to the school to include advice on the importance of continuing to use the first language of the home.

Some parents became comfortable discussing their children. One parent spoke at length about how she had learned about the importance of learning from mistakes; she has "*learned to change her approach to her*" child. She was beginning to re-evaluate her style of parenting and was "*not getting annoyed*" (Field Notes, 15th April 2016). She wanted to help her child to become "resilient and resourceful and to learn to cope with change and situations in which things go wrong" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA, 2009a, p. 16). Another was becoming quite open about the difficulties she was experiencing with her child at home. After each of the earlier sessions, she had waited until the other parents had left before seeking advice, but now in the final session she spoke about trying out the suggestions. The group had offered reassurance. This openness led to a suggestion that the parents could come and work with the children in the support room. All parents agreed. Photographic evidence of this work would be collected It was explained such data would only appear in the final study with their prior consent.

5.7 Cycle 2

5.7.1 Stage 1 Co-researchers: Further Action Agreed

A plan for a brief second action phase was decided. Each parent would work alongside her own child in the support room over two sessions. The SNA and I would start each session with the parents, and the children would join us a little later. I would direct the activities. Each parent would then repeat the task with her own child, which they could later work on together at home.

5.7.2 Stages 2 and 3 Co-subjects Immersed in the Experience

Two parent-child sessions were conducted on 6th and 13th May 2016. Similar activities to what had been shared with parents in the earlier workshops were introduced; chosen because the children were familiar with them and would not be daunted by what was being asked of them. We were "*anxious that this would be a successful experience for the children and their parents*. *It would be the first time parents would see their children at work in school and vice versa*" (Reflective Diary, 4th May 2016). We wanted the children to welcome parental involvement; invitations from children are "uniquely important because they motivate parental responsiveness to learning needs" (Hoover-Dempsey et al. 2005, p. 110). Most of the children were excited to do this; one hugged his mother and wondered why she was there in his school; others were keen to show what they could do. But some found the situation overwhelming and needed much support from the SNA or myself to participate. No parent became outwardly upset. By week two, they had relaxed.

5.7.3 Stage 4 Co-researchers Reflecting on a Transformative Experience

This time parent feedback centred on the children's learning. The parents saw what the children were doing in school. They showed an understanding of how the children were learning, and drew comparisons to their own school days of where rote learning instead of understanding was valued. We had thus begun to "exchange knowledge, values, and perspectives of [our] different cultural backgrounds" (LaRocque et al., 2011, p. 120). Some identified their children's strengths and difficulties; *she is good at*

maths ... it's language that she finds difficult ... he can say if he is sad (Field Notes, 13th May 2016). They appreciated that learning could be enhanced through play and hands-on experience. Others exchanged ideas on various daily activities they shared with their children, such as cooking and baking, helping with homework, different television programmes that the children enjoyed, and on the *YouTube* videos that encouraged their children's participation in alphabet learning, and in number games and songs. The parent workshops had provided an opportunity to encourage what De Gaetano (2007) underlines as "the parents' potential and capacities to emerge and flourish" (p. 147) around their children's learning and to "value the ways in which parents are already engaged with children's learning" (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011, p. 6).

The parents were quite confident in managing the tasks at home but inquired if further workshops would follow. We sought suggestion for this further work. One parent thought we had done a lot of work on maths and asked if further work could be done around language. Follow-up workshops should reflect this suggestion, and the parent's earlier offer to volunteer her time and expertise to work with the children on the school garden should be accepted if we are to show parents "that their voice matter" (LaRocque et al., 2011, p. 120). I think that we have travelled a little distance on the road to showing parents that "they have something to offer in a dialogical relationship" (Haines Lyon, 2015, p. 39).

5.8 Developing a Pedagogy of the Unique

McNiff (2013) defines action research as a spontaneous, self-recreating system of inquiry (p. 67). It allows for responsiveness to the situation, to those involved and to their growing understanding or consciousness raising, actively involving them in their own educational process. Farren (2006) ascribes this as inspiring thinking towards developing one's own pedagogy of the unique which is characterised in the recognition that each individual has a particular "constellation of values that motivates the inquiry, as well as being situated in a distinctive context within which the inquiry develops and a different context from within which the inquiry is developing" (p. 289). For me, this began with "dialectical critique" and "risk disturbance" (Winter, 1989). In reflecting on sociocultural theories of learning, which underpin my way of being, and my values and belief in what I do, I had begun to examine the social and cultural aspects of pedagogy.

I had understood home and school to be the two most prominent loci where social interaction leads to individual development. I knew that we had established good communication channels to ensure parents are well-informed about the school and their children's progress. However, I questioned my understanding of my role as an educator as "being in a relationship with and working alongside parents" (Pushor, 2012, p. 477).

While responding to diverse learning needs, we strive to ensure that each child is nurtured to develop his or her potential. We cannot do this on our own. Factors that shape educational outcomes for children include school quality but research literature, reviewed by Desfogres and Abouchaar (2003) also points to the importance of the form of " 'at-home good parenting' " (p. 4), which has a significant positive effect on children's achievement and adjustment. We had seen during our SSP and IEP planning and review meetings that these parents wanted to be involved in their children's learning. We had wanted to include parents and home values in the construction of the teaching and learning environment, and to offer the help which would allow them to support their children's learning. As Goodall and Vorhaus (2011) suggest in identifying interventions that are effective in supporting parental involvement, we had some understanding of what the parents were already doing with their children, and how they were "most likely to respond positively to attempts to engage them (further) in their children's learning" (p. 7). However, more importantly, we had learned that the opportunity to walk alongside parents for a short while, and to see teacher knowledge and expertise as complementing parent knowledge (Pushor, 2012) in the education of their children, is where real engagement begins to be realised.

While these workshops are one way of enhancing parental capacity for engagement, we recognised that many parents cannot be in the building. Of concern was how we could support active interest in the children's learning "from the perspective of the home environment" (Hardie & Alcron, 2000, p.110). This prompted me to reflect on my own childhood and the Saturday night viewing of the weekly detective story and on how my mother honed our literal and inferential comprehension skills through her comments and questions. We did not know that she was teaching us, and maybe she did not either, but she did expect that we watched and followed the story line; that we could identify the characters, and predict what would happen and explain why. This for me is

parental engagement with children's learning. We just needed to find and tap their strengths.

Our work focussed on developing a way to work with a group of parents of children with additional and diverse learning needs. This helped us revise our understanding of an effective way to help parents engage with their children's learning on specific goals planned in the SSP and IEP process. However, I began to think that, as Desfogres and Abouchaar (2003) found, "if a difference is to be made for all children ... strategic planning which embeds parental involvement schemes in whole-school development plans" (p. 70) is essential. It must be based on a holistic view of parental engagement, and it must be led by senior leaders (Goodall & Vorhaus, 2011) who encourage involvement and the empowerment of others. This must be based on an ethos of respect and core beliefs of "proactive collaboration", involving sensitivity "to the wide ranging circumstance of all students" and valuing "the contribution that all parents have to make", engendering parent empowerment (Raffaele & Knoff, 1999, p. 452).

5.9 Epilogue: Beyond the Sphere of the Immediate Research Inquiry

As a school, which does not have a Home School Community Liasion Coordinator (HSCL) to engage in full-time liaison work between the home, the school, and the community, we knew that it would be helpful to take time to define what we understand by involving parents more directly in policy development and school activities. We needed to consider the different perspectives, which are shaped by the difference in life experiences and in the attitudes and beliefs held by all in the school community. During the 2016-2017 academic year, we began the process of developing a broader understanding of what is clearly a very complex phenomenon (Appendix G). We defined what the terms *working with parents*, *parental involvement*, *partnerships with parents* and *parental engagement* mean to us as individual teachers, as well as a school. The positive impact of parental involvement on their children's learning was recognised. We acknowledged the influence of parental involvement in shaping the child's self-concept as a learner, and in promoting social and educational aspirations and values. We knew that we involved the parents with the school in information sharing, in partnership with schooling, as well as helping them to engage with their children's learning, albeit being at different points of this continuum with different

activities and with different cohorts of parents. Difficulties and challenges were also noted. The need for clear procedures and expectations around parental involvement with children in the classrooms was considered essential, situated in an understanding of the complexity around the whole issue of parental involvement and participation. It would be essential to be cognisant of cultural differences. Values and norms differ within the whole school community.

During the 2017-2018 school year, a member of the support team began to co-ordinate efforts to encourage parental involvement and engagement (Appendix G). While this work was in its infancy, she undertook Pushor's (2011) recommendation and worked on the co-construction of the curriculum with the parents who managed the Homework Club in the school. Understanding the importance of supporting an active interest in the children's learning from the perspective of the home environment (Hardie & Alcron, 2000), she surveyed parental interests to organise courses for parents, but also to tap into their strengths.

My review of literature prompted an interest in the typology of parental involvement advocated by Joyce Epstein (1992, 1996, 1997, 2010), which outlines six main categories of activities through which schools can engage with parents, families and the community at large. This is focussed engagement, based on a foundation of trust, and links school outcomes with the way the school engages with parents. It recognises that training needs to be provided not only for parents but also for teachers, and that time must be given to planning, communication and consultation. And most importantly, it specifies that this work must be monitored, evaluated and reviewed to ensure its success in achieving mutually beneficial goals. To this end, the Partnership School Ireland Initiative, a joint initiative by the National Parents Council Primary (NPC) and the Irish Primary Principals Network (IPPN) was investigated. However, we had not had enough opportunity to elicit parental views on involvement with schooling and engagement with learning. Being cognisant of cultural differences and experiences, and as part of our 10th year anniversary celebrations, an open evening for parents and teachers in the summer term 2018 was held to explore what we, the community, value in terms of children's learning and education. Our former NEPS psychologist facilitated this discussion. Although only a small number of parents attended, a very useful and informative discussion ensued. As yet, September 2020, a Partnership Team

has not been formed, and plans for which have been further delayed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

A Further Development in my Understanding of a Shelter of Belonging

When the school opened, experienced teachers, newly qualified teachers, SNAs, and the families who came to live in the area and enrolled their children in the school had to enter into the beginnings of a new shelter of belonging that could only slowly build around us. The work with parents reminded me that while we had all lost what we once knew, "the beauty of loss is the room it makes for us to experience and enjoy new things" (O' Donohue, 1998, p. 340). These parents believed in what we were doing with them and for their children. We had learned that the opportunity to walk alongside them for a short while, and to see teacher knowledge and expertise as complementing their parent knowledge (Pushor, 2012) in the education of their children, is where real engagement begins to be realised. We were moving forward with integrity, where "realized individuals could challenge and complement each other" (O'Donohue, 2003, p. 133). This enhanced my understanding of a shelter of belonging as a community and its context being shaped by the interactions of the individuals of which it is comprised (Edwards, 2005). While this was only in its very early stages, I knew that we were working to enter a community, creating with parents what Pushor (2012) describes as a shared landscape; a reciprocity of mutual engagement in the development of whole-school processes to directly involve the parents in policy development and school activities. As a responsive community, we all will need the ability to view presenting challenges as opportunities to enhance the learning outcomes of the children. In cultivating democratic professional relationships in dialogue with parents in which our complementary experience and knowledge work to enhance the education of the children in our care, the learning and professional development of teachers will be important.

Indeed, teachers were acknowledged as a most powerful resource in the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011). The importance of cultivating and sustaining a quality teacher workforce, within a framework of strong school leadership, was underlined. *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning emphasises continued professional growth for enhanced professional learning to improve student outcomes, which requires planning, based on ongoing reflection on learning and its impact on practice. While *Cosán* is firmly embedded in and acknowledges the learning that teachers already do, it represents a degree of cultural change for registered teachers and

for the education system; time and space have been needed for a development phase of *Cosán*, conducted through teacher-led research. As my PhD research has always been concerned with praxis, it culminates in a final inquiry which is set in the context of the development phase of *Cosán.* This demonstrates teacher collaboration as a form of professional development, narrating how our engagement in the process of reflection on our learning impacts on ourselves as professionals, on our practice, and on the children's learning. In informing this inquiry, it is preceded by a chapter which discusses *Cosán* and interrogates the relevant literature on professional learning and reflective practice

Chapter 6 Cultivating Continued Professional Growth for Enhanced Professional Learning

6.1 Introduction

The Teaching Council (2011) states that continuous professional development (CPD) is both a right and a responsibility for all registered teachers, and that it should be based on their identified needs within the school as a learning community (p. 19). This recognises that teaching is a learning profession and needs, as William (2011) advocates, a career-long commitment to the continuous improvement of classroom practice in ways that are likely to improve outcomes for learners. To inform the development of a coherent national framework for teachers' learning, which would be linked to registration, the Teaching Council initiated a comprehensive, multi-layered consultation process exclusively with the teaching profession, to ensure that it is "grounded in the realities of teachers' professional lives and of the Irish education system more broadly" (The Teaching Council, 2016a, p. 2). This process was unique, in that the Teaching Council did not consult on a prepared draft framework but allowed the teaching profession to lead a national conversation on the future of its own learning, enabling the "voice of teachers to shape the language and structures that will keep learning in its rightful place - at the heart of the teaching profession" (2016a, p. 2). Following the publication of the first draft of the framework, a second phase of consultation began. This included a national consultation event for other stakeholders in the profession, written responses from institutions and organisations, teacher and stakeholder online feedback, attendance at workshops in Education Centres across the country and, as an alternative, school or clusters of school were invited to organise their own school-based meetings. The draft framework was revised based on the feedback from this second consultation phase, and the Teaching Council published the *Cosán* framework for teachers' learning, using the Irish word for pathway, reflecting learning an ongoing journey, and "one in which the act of travelling on that journey is more important than the destination" (The Teaching Council, 2016b, p. 2). And, like all journeys, teachers' learning journeys require planning, based on ongoing reflection on learning and its impact on practice. In recognising the complexity of teaching as a craft, *Cosán* is a flexible framework which acknowledges the non-homogeneity of teachers with ongoing professional learning needs and aspirations at different stages of

their careers (Sherrington, 2014, p. 56), "while simultaneously enabling the needs of the students, the school and the system to be met" (The Teaching Council, 2016b, p. 7). Thus, autonomy and choice will ensure that teachers can identify and pursue relevant, high quality, sustained learning opportunities connected to their work in the classroom and their schools. Additionally, *Cosán* recognises the right of teachers to have access to rich and varied learning opportunities; formal and/or informal, personal and/or professional, collaborative and/or individual, and school-based and/or external. These are not mutually exclusive; learning opportunities can be understood through an overlap of these dimensions, and central to which is student learning. Appendix H includes a graphic representation of the key elements of *Cosán.*

Consultation showed that teachers recognise the importance of knowing their practice and acknowledge their responsibility for the impact of their practice. Explicit in the framework, as Cordingley et al. (2005) explain, is that professional development is a "third order activity" in which the emphasis is on the growth of teacher professional learning to enhance student outcomes (p. 17). However, a broad conceptualisation of impact is understood in *Cosán* as not being limited to readily measurable or observable outcomes, as teachers' "judgements, insights and reflections of what constitutes significance and value in relation to their own personal, academic and professional needs and development are equally important" (Powell et al., 2003, p. 399). *Cosán* will create opportunities for teachers to reflect in an evidence-based way, as Cordingley (2014) suggests, about the contribution of professional learning to teachers' individual and collective effectiveness. It will facilitate them to consider the ways in which their learning can benefit their students in terms of motivation, interest, engagement, and enjoyment, as well as its impact on school culture, and the wider school community (The Teaching Council, 2016b, p. 10). Indeed, the long-awaited opportunity for formal acknowledgement and recognition of teachers' learning is thus provided. Through its accreditation role, the Teaching Council will provide reassurance to the profession and to the public that teachers are engaging in quality, life-long learning, whilst also recognising the important role of teachers in assuring the quality of their own learning (The Teaching Council, 2016b, p. 9). In reflecting critically on their teaching and learning, they will be guided by "growth-based" standards to demonstrate a commitment to:

- quality teaching and learning for their students and themselves , and
- continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice, to support that quality teaching and learning in a sustainable way.

(The Teaching Council, 2016b, p. 22)

The Council's policy position (2016b) is "that professional learning should be supported by appropriate structures, resources and processes at national, regional and local level, and that it is the primary responsibility and direct role of the State, in co-operation with the Council, to support high-quality teacher education" (p. 8). Effective school leadership and management in nurturing a culture of professional learning which actively supports teachers' engagement in learning is also highlighted.

While *Cosán* is firmly embedded in and acknowledges the learning that teachers already do, the Council is mindful that the framework represents a degree of cultural change for registered teachers and for the education system. Thus, it has been acknowledged that time and space are needed for a development phase of *Cosán*, conducted through teacher-led research. Questions raised in the consultation phases would be explored by the teaching profession, in partnership with other stakeholders, during this development stage, again offering the "possibilities for involving … teachers in collaborative educational policy making prior to implementation" (Collinson et al., 2009, p. 14). Teachers, groups of teachers or schools who decide to become involved, will apply the framework to see what it could mean for them in their particular school contexts.

The final focus of my PhD work is set in the context of this development phase of *Cosán.* I wanted to inquire into how we engage in the process of reflection on our purposive collaborative teaching and learning activities; on the impact of that learning for ourselves as professionals, for our practice and for the children, while investigating how we can record this in a sustainable way. To this end, I now interrogate the literature. I begin with a brief examination of professionalism and continuous professional development. Then I focus on collaborative professional development, examining its personal, social, and occupational dimensions. The chapter concludes by exploring reflective practice, viewed through the lens of the seminal works of Dewey and Schön, culminating with an interrogation of critically reflective practice.

6.2 Literature Review

6.2.1 Professionalism and Continuous Professional Development

> As professionals, teachers also understand that sustained professional practice rests on their own professional learning. It is the hallmark of the teaching profession that its members continue to learn so they can continue to teach.
> (The Teaching Council 2016b, *Forward*)

In discussing teachers' professional learning, I think it is important firstly to refer briefly to the terms *professional* and *professionalism*. Societal recognition confers "a professional identity that is instantly recognisable and linked to the practices, ethics, codes and core values by which they are defined" (Moloney, 2010, p. 172). Therefore, professionalism implies that these key traits are evident in an individual professional's work. However, professionalism can be seen as dynamic in nature, especially as it relates to meaning in response to changing economic, social and political conditions (Sachs 2003, p. 6) and is probably not possible to definitely define. Regarding the teaching profession, Kennedy (2007) identifies two contrasting models of teacher professionalism in the literature; managerial professionalism, which "values effectiveness, efficiency and compliance with policy" and democratic professionalism, which "holds dear such values as social justice, fairness and equality" (pp. 98-99). Dow et al. (2000, p. 1) argue that the managerial model, which is linked to globalisation and its role in driving economic competition among countries, has been arguably more dominant in reality, resulting in teachers increasingly "expected to follow directives and become complaint operatives". This is defined in terms of accountability, external targets, and performance management, which Biesta (2020) contends undermines the development of more democratic professional practice. In contrast, democratic professionalism, as Biesta (2020) clarifies, highlights the importance of collaboration between teachers and the communities in which they work in:

> … relationships of dialogue, where both can contribute to their particular experience and expertise, acknowledging that the experience and expertise of each of the parties involved … are different and complementary, and that the differing contributions from all are needed in order to transform authoritarian professional relationships into democratic ones. (p. 112)

Kennedy et al. (2012) suggest that the dominant form of professionalism being employed is managerial, with little evidence of the alternative conceptions. Thus, there is a need to rigorously interrogate the concepts of professionalism inherent in CPD policies, as they have the power to influence discourse, which in turn shapes practice (Kennedy, 2007). In the context of the *Cosán* framework for teachers' learning, the Teaching Council (2016c) recognises teachers as having autonomy and responsibility in shaping their own professional development and envisions the teacher "as a reflective practitioner whose key role is to educate", and teachers as members of professional learning communities (p. 4). In stating that professional standards, "as opposed to a purely regulatory approach, are about the whole story of teaching and learning" (The Teaching Council, 2016c, p. 2), the Council has regard to the broader context in which teaching takes place. It is mindful of the right of student voice in matters that affect them, and of the rights of parents and teachers and of their accompanying responsibilities. Thus, central to *Cosán* is the vision that teachers are professionals who are intrinsically motivated to take ownership of their professional development, and as professionals, are trusted, and also committed, to act in the interests of others. *Cosán*, informed by considerations expressed by the members of the teaching profession itself in the earlier consultation phases, now promises to continue to be informed by the profession in its development phase. It has the potential to provide, what McMillan et al. (2016) recommend, a truly holistic approach to teacher CPD in Ireland which should be:

> … mandatory – although rejecting compulsory 'one-size-fits-all' courses – in order to provide a benevolent system-wide tangential (movement) factor; it would promote key school related contingent factors, such as interpersonal relations and empowering school policy, and it would prioritise the fundamental personal motivators of growth, achievement and advancement. (p. 164)

However, as McMillan et al. (2016) recognise, developing "a system of CPD that *privileges* teachers' personal choice, charges schools with providing empowering communities of practice and develops an overarching system of compulsory professional development" (p. 164, emphasis in the original), cannot be achieved without an element of conflict. The ongoing consultation with all stakeholders in this development stage of *Cosán* should highlight and negotiate possible conflicts between

the collective good of the school and the individual teacher's aspirations in engaging in CPD activities, while also addressing the wider purposes of the education system. To this end, it appears that the broad, intrinsic and ethical purpose for teachers' professional learning and development envisioned in *Cosán* is reflected in Day's (1999) comprehensive definition:

> *Professional development consists of all natural learning experiences and those conscious and planned activities which are intended to be of direct or indirect benefit to the individual, group or school, which contribute through these, to the quality of education in the classroom. It is the process by which, alone and with others, teachers review, renew and extend their commitment as change agents to the moral purposes of teaching; and by which they acquire and develop critically the knowledge, skills and emotional intelligence essential to good professional thinking, planning and practice with children, young people and colleagues throughout each phase of their teaching lives*. (p.4, emphasis in the original)

Indeed, *Cosán* recognises the full range of learning experiences that teachers undertake for their own benefit and that of their students. In career-long professional development opportunities, teachers can take personal responsibility and autonomy for sustaining the quality of their professional practice, having regard to their own individual preferences, learning styles, circumstances and school contexts.

Kennedy's (2014) updated analytical framework has identified opportunities for this professional learning, which can be located along a continuum in which the underpinning purposes of particular models of CPD are organised into three broad categories; transmissive, malleable and transformative (p. 693), as seen in Table 6.1. CPD which prepares teachers to implement reforms, as Kennedy (2014) explains, aligns itself with training, as well as the deficit models which attempt to remedy perceived weaknesses in individual teachers; this supports a transmissive view of CPD. Transformative models of CPD are collaborative professional inquiry models that have an element of collaborative problem identification and subsequent activity, which involves inquiring into one's practice and engaging with existing research to understand other practices. The middle category, Kennedy (2014) labels as malleable and is considered as perhaps being the most important as it acknowledges that a particular type or model of CPD can be used for different ends depending on "the intended (or unintended?) purpose(s)"(p. 692). This continuum has been considered to acknowledge

the shift "from a technical-rational-top-down approach to CPD towards a more cultural-individual interactive approach to the professional development of teachers" (Caena, 2011, p. 4). Increasing capacity for professional autonomy is noted as one moves down the framework categories, but Kennedy (2014) argues that "this autonomy is only ever transformative if it is translated into agency; that is, it must be enacted in some way to make a positive change to practice" (p. 693). Although, it is not suggested that all CPD must be transformative; some skills may well be best learned or refreshed through more transmissive approaches to learning (Kennedy, 2014).

Table 6. 1 Spectrum of CPD Models

Purpose of Model	**Examples of models of CPD which may fit within this category**
Transmissive	Training models Deficit models Cascade models
Malleable	Award-bearing models Standards-based models Coaching /mentoring models Community of practice models
Transformative	Collaborative professional inquiry models

Increasing capacity for professional autonomy and teacher agency

(Kennedy, 2014, p. 693)

Cordingley (2014) reports that successive systematic reviews about CPD that works for pupils as well as teachers (Cordingley, 2013; Cordingley et al., 2007; Timperley et al., 2007) reveal that the focus had been too much on CPD done to teachers. This has neglected the importance of work-based, continuing professional learning and development opportunities, yet it is these experiences that contextualise what is offered in CPD events (Cordingley et al., 2014, p. 44). Teachers are considered as important in

supporting and sustaining the development of their own and their colleagues' practice (Cordingley et al. 2005, p. 68). Lowrie (2014) concurs, arguing for the necessity of professional learning to be localised and individualised. This is the premise on which *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning, is based, with teachers striking "an appropriate balance between the enhancement of their own practice as individuals on the one hand, and the creation of a responsive and dynamic community of practice on the other" (The Teaching Council 2016b, p. 12). But also, as Hoban (2002) suggests, this does not mean a wholesale move towards the teacher-centred, context-specific models of CPD, but a better balance between these types of models and the transmission focussed. *Cosán* will allow teachers to select a range of learning activities, which take account of their needs and personal circumstances.

However, as this final focus of my PhD study investigates how teachers make shared sense of practice by reflecting critically together on shared action to enhance practice (McArdle &Coutts, 2010), and how we can record this in a sustainable way, the following review of literature now focuses on purposeful collaborative and reflective professional development within a school community.

6.2.2 Collaborative Professional Development or Collaborative Professionalism?

Collaborative professional development is where there are "specific plans to encourage and enable shared learning and support between at least two teacher colleagues on a sustained basis" (Cordingley et al., 2005, p. 4). Timperley et al. (2007) contend that this represents a synthesis of the older emphasis on community and mutual support and a more current cognitive orientation towards professional learning (p. 203). This deepens commitment to persisting in the face of external obstacles and setbacks "that inevitably accompany changing complex combinations of activities, not least because teachers working together don't want to let each other down" (Cordingley, 2014, p. 45). While Stoll et al. (2012) suggest that no form of collaborative learning outshines others, learning is seen as socially-situated rather than an individual isolated activity. Indeed, Kennedy (2011) contends that it is the centrality of relationships in this process that moves it from a transmissive information-giving activity to a potentially much more transformative process. It is also worthy to note that Kennedy (2011) acknowledges the importance of gaining an understanding of how individual teachers move along the

spectrum from engagement, or co-location, to an engagement which implies genuine collaboration and potentially more transformative practice. This form of professional learning evokes for me what Hargreaves and O'Connor (2018) define as collaborative professionalism, or how people collaborate more professionally, "through rigorous planning, deep and sometimes demanding dialogue, candid but constructive feedback, and continuous collaborative inquiry" (p. 4). In this environment, Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) explain, teachers grow as people and communities, understanding teaching an emotional practice as well as a cognitive and intellectual one. Importantly, it is about working well together in a professional way, not through contrived collegiality (Hargreaves, 1994, p. 195), and will be aware of what Timperley et al. (2007) have acknowledged can happen where the trust, respect and support involved can be marshalled to excuse discriminatory teaching practices, to remove the focus from teacher quality, and/or to justify the continuation of less effective practice than that being promoted by the professional development (p. 203). The value of this sustained and collaborative professional learning is seen in a positive impact on teachers' teaching and learning, their self-esteem and confidence, and their commitment to continuing learning and development, enhancing student learning processes, motivation, and outcomes (Cordingley et al., 2003, p. 8). Together professional learning and development, Fullan and Hargreaves (2016) claim, are indispensable, and "the upward spiral of their mutual interaction is what makes teaching, learning, and schools great" (p. 6). Thus, collaborative professional development in collaborative professionalism has the capacity to support all three of Bell and Gilbert's (1996) dimensions of professional learning: personal, social, and occupational (Fraser et al. 2007; Kennedy, 2011), which are interrelated but will be discussed separately for the purpose of this review.

6.2.3 Personal Dimension of Professional Learning

Hallinger (2018) refers to this as the person-specific context, life experience and personal resources, that act as a prism through which information, problems, opportunities, and situations are filtered and interpreted. This influences teacher attitude and beliefs. In reference to Nespor (1987), Wallace and Priestley (2011) describe these as affective and narrative in nature, and rely on "correspondence with evaluations from the past" (p. 360) but they also play a role in providing sense and

direction to teacher actions (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 37). Thus, teacher beliefs, assumptions, values, and motivations are important considerations for interrogating CPD opportunities. In their reference to Anderson & Helms (2001), McComb and Eather (2017) explain that teachers hold strong beliefs about every element of the teaching process; about their subject area; about the preparation students need to meet specified standards; and the appropriate instructional or pedagogical methods needed in given contexts and for students of varying backgrounds and abilities. These beliefs provide cognitive and affective resources as teachers deal with situations as they enact their practice (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 131); beliefs influence teaching practice. Consequently, for professional development to be effective and transformative in nature, Huber and Hiltmann (2011) suggest that teachers need to be provided with opportunities to confront their beliefs about the teaching and learning process. Professional development that promotes critical reflection will allow teachers to identify and examine the assumptions that shape their practice (Brookfield, 2017, p. viii). Scrutinising the assumptions that frame the decisions teachers make in the classroom allow a greater confidence in the accuracy of those choices, or can prompt teachers to be alert to those assumptions that they might need to reframe (Brookfield, 2002, p. 36). It is an obvious step to work with colleagues in uncovering these assumptions, as Brookfield (2017) contends, as they have walked the same experiential paths (p. 133).

Teacher interest and motivation also need to be addressed in CPD. Timperley et al. (2007) explain that while motivation plays a key role for all learners, as adults, teacher learners are less likely to engage in new learning experiences if they do not see its relevance for their professional lives (p. 12). Teachers must see that professional development will lead to positive change for them and their students. McMillan et al. (2016) also reinforce the idea of teacher preference both to seek out and pursue CPD areas that they value personally and in response to their professional needs, explaining that the top three personal motivation factors for teachers in their study relate to "Herzberg et al.'s (1959) possibility of growth, advancement and achievement" (pp. 157-158). Teachers' perceptions of the type of professional development that can lead to this positive growth, and teaching and learning changes, are well documented as sustained and intensive professional development rather than shorter professional development (Collinson and Cook, 2001; Day and Leith, 2007; Garet et al., 2001).

Evidence of the impact of sustained and collaborative CPD, is offered by Cordingley (2014) as professional learning which is rooted in trying out new approaches and in interrogating practice in dialogue on the evidence from these experiences, thus making a difference to pedagogy, and teacher and student learning. Indeed, Fraser et al. (2007) argue that CPD which is based on collaborative inquiry, and which allows teachers the space within this to reflect on and build their own knowledge about teaching and learning, is most likely to lead to transformative educational practice. Timperley (2015) contrasts this with "a technicist view of leading, teaching or learning" (p. 5) and sees benefit in the development of adaptive expertise, where one is supported to seek opportunities to learn, to be aware of how to construct those opportunities, and to have monitoring systems to ensure any changes in practice are more effective for their student learners (p. 11).

Bolam (2008) explains that findings from a synthesis of 20 research studies conducted in the UK emphasise that the more influence teachers have over their own CPD the more likely they are to consider it effective (p. 162). This underlines the importance of teachers' professionalism and agency as key components of effective professional development. It is essential then, as Timperley et al. (2007) observe, that teachers have room to exercise professional discretion if they are to benefit from the enhanced expertise and resources that are offered in collaborative professional development opportunities (p. 205), which Kennedy (2011) notes as not only impacting on teaching and learning but also encourages teacher commitment and ownership. Thus, as part of a coherent programme of teacher learning, collaborative professional development can be integrated into the life of the school where teachers can identify their own individual needs and begin to address them (Loxley et al., 2007). Coinciding with this is the enhancement of teacher efficacy, the belief that one can make a difference and have an impact, which Sun (2015) adds as a variable that influences teacher engagement in professional learning activities. Thus, teacher autonomy, with the appropriate regulation that recognises teachers as professionals, enables them to achieve agency in their work (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 151). Rather than seeing agency as residing in individuals as property or capacity, Priestley et al. (2015) understand an ecological view of agency and see it as emerging from individual capacity interacting with environing conditions (p. 22). This concept of agency highlights that we always act by means of

our environment rather than simply in the environment (Biesta & Tedder, 2007). This is the social dimension of professional learning.

6.2.4 Social Dimension of Professional Learning

Despite the key role played by personal motivating factors, McMillan et al. (2016) point out that teachers live and work within the wider context of the school, and so "school-related factors that motivate or inhibit engagement in CPD also form an essential part of the picture" (p. 159). Relationships between individuals and groups need to be nurtured. Priestley et al. (2015) contend that the nature and extent of the social and professional relationships within which teachers work are important, explaining that a predominant orientation of the relationships within schools such as hierarchical "relationships that are supplemented by strong horizontal ties" appear to facilitate or be indicative of a collegiate and collaborative school culture (p. 103). King and Stevenson (2017) describes this as organic leadership (King, 2012), investing "in teachers as change-agents through supporting collaborative models of professional development" (p. 657). This adds to the understanding of leadership as a collective activity across members of the organisation, giving "a contextualized and nuanced picture of leadership occurring in the interactions between people" (Preedy, 2016, p. 139).

Additionally, as Daly et al. (2010) suggest that the more consistent and reciprocal the collaborative relationships, the more likely collective, generative discussion and learning ensues. These reciprocal, symmetric relationships seem to generate a collaborative culture in which strong, frequent, and informal teacher relationships can flourish (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 103). And according to Daly et al. (2010), the density or the greater the proportion of social relationships between school staff members, the higher the collaborative learning orientation is present. Although it is noted that while "dense connections in and of themselves appear a necessary, but not sufficient condition", it is "the quality of content and transactions" that appear equally important (Daly et al., 2010, p. 383). Hargreaves and Fullan (2012) refer to this as developing social capital, "the quantity and quality of interactions and social relationships among people" which "gives you access to other peoples' *human capital"*; their individual resources, knowledge, skills training and development (p.90, emphasis in original). Collaborative professional development in collaborative cultures, Hargreaves and

Fullan (2012) contend, will allow the sharing and accumulation of knowledge and ideas, as well as the support that helps teachers to become more effective, increase their confidence, and encourage them to be more open to and actively engage in improvement and change; teachers can "build social capital and therefore *professional capital* in a school's community" (p. 114, emphasis in the original).

However, it must be noted that not all forms of collaboration are valuable. Constructive relationships can, Priestley et al. (2015) remind us, "lose their value if they are simply used to push through predefined and restrictive change agendas; if the collegiality is contrived (Hargreaves, 1994) or if they foster groupthink" (p. 135). Indeed, Gramsci (1971, as cited in Brookfield, 2009, p. 295) spoke about how it leads to an unawareness of hegemonic assumptions at play that protect the status quo which serves the interest of the powerful few. Building collaborative cultures that support collaborative professional learning is a patient development journey (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 119). It takes time because it means a culture that accepts and actively encourages individuality, thrives on diversity and disagreement, promotes a variation of style, strengths, and overall approach, and increases individual as well as collective talent (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016). Thus, contexts must be supportive. Cordingley (2014) reinforces this, highlighting how structured collaboration, which works to enhance both teachers' and pupils' learning involves "teachers taking risks together, thus speeding up the development of trust and increasing confidence and creating a meaningful purpose" (p. 45). This is the collaborative professionalism, which Hargreaves and O' Connor (2015) believe, is about "communities of strong individuals who are committed to helping and learning from each other" as they pursue their challenging work together, in which "everyone gets the big picture. They see it, live, it and create it together" (p. 7). But Timperley (2015) acknowledges that practical difficulties inherent in educational organisations can create barriers for teachers to engage in sustained interaction (p. 38). This will necessitate, as Sherrington (2014) argues, "CPD structures across the school timetable and calendar that gives sufficient time for effective individual and collaborative professional learning to take place" (p. 56). Hence, collaborative professional development, while there are challenges, has the potential to support the social aspects of professional learning if the key conditions of "purpose, focus and relationships" are present (Kennedy, 2011, p. 28).

6.2.5 Occupational Dimension of Professional Learning

Effective professional development focuses on, as McComb and Eather's (2017) review of literature observes, providing opportunities for teachers to learn more about content and pedagogy in relation to their practice. In reference to Garet et al (2001), Opfer and Pedder (2011) note that professional development that focuses on content, gives teachers opportunities for active learning, and is integrated into the daily life the school is more likely to enhance their knowledge and skills. In this respect, context-specific approaches based on sound research, Timperley (2008) asserts, are more effective in promoting effective teaching practices but also in "systematically supporting teachers to translate new practices into locally adapted applications" (p. 10). Fraser et al. (2007) explain this occupational aspect of teacher learning as involving the interplay between theory and practice. Teachers need opportunities to engage with their existing personal theories to understand, discuss and negotiate the meaning of new practice in terms of existing practice and how and why it needs to change (Timperley et al., 2007, p. xxix). This sense-making, Timperley et al.'s (2007) research found, "is a complex process involving interactions between existing cognitive structures (knowledge, beliefs and attitudes)", the situation in which teachers practise, and the CPD messages (p. 198). Without such engagement, it is unlikely that new learning will be adequately integrated with existing theories, but instead new practice will be simply layered on to existing practice (Timperley et al., 2007, p. 199), or new ideas that conflict with their current ideas may simply be rejected (Timperley, 2008, p. 17). Consequently, as McComb and Eather (2017) note, professional development needs to be action-oriented, and provide individual teachers with the opportunity to critically reflect on and self-assess their practice, and to share this learning with colleagues within the school and in the wider educational context.

Teachers need to be given the opportunity to process new information, while monitoring its impact on student learning. This is promoted by a cyclical learning process in which current assumptions are challenged by the demonstration of effective alternative practice, new knowledge and skills are developed, small changes to practice are made, and resulting improvements in student outcomes are observed (Timperley, 2008, p. 18). Of course this is dependent on teachers developing "professional, self-regulatory inquiry skills so that they can collect relevant evidence, use it to inquire into

the effectiveness of their teaching, and make continuing adjustments to their practice" (Timperley, 2008, p. 24) . This action is based on the cognitive process of analysing, critiquing, re-framing, and a revised practice that produces transformative learning (Mezirow, 2000). Ongoing and sustained professional conversations which are supportive, respectful and yet challenge teachers while focussing on teaching and learning (Timperley, 2015, p. 36) are ideally placed to assist this.

CPD might be re-framed as this shared sense-making centred on collaborative action within "a social and intellectual environment in which experience … maybe tested for the purposes of professional sense-making … which depends on the experience of shared values and the attempt to take action together to support these values" (Mc Ardle & Coutts, 2010, p. 206). This would create the dialogic spaces that Liu (2017) contends support critical reflection and transformative learning to improve teaching practice; critically reflective practice (p. 805).

6.2.6 What is Reflective Practice?

In answering the question of what this reflective practice involves, Thompson and Thompson (2018) acknowledge that it would be difficult to improve on the summary of some of the main elements involved provided by Eby (2000):

> Reflection is the ability to think and consider 'experiences, percept[ion]s, ideas [values and beliefs]…with a view to the discovery of new relations or the drawing of conclusions for the guidance of future action'(Quinn, 1998, p. 122). In other words, reflection enables individuals to make sense of their lived experiences through examining such experiences in context. Reflection, although a cornerstone of reflective practice, is not the only skill needed. Reflective practice is more than just a thoughtful practice. It is the process of turning thoughtful practice into a potential learning situation 'which may help to modify and change approaches to practice' (Schober, 1993, p. 324). Reflective practice entails the synthesis of self-awareness, reflection and critical thinking. (p. 52)

Thus, reflection is an ongoing learning process with a combination of hindsight, insight, and foresight in order to make conscious choices about future actions (Barnett & O'Mahoney, 2006). This is more than thoughtful practice but entails self-awareness, reflection and critical thinking in which existing ideas and assumptions are identified

and challenged and alternatives are explored. As Moon (2004) explains, it is characterised by an "increasing ability to frame and reframe internal and external experience" in an open and flexible manner, which requires a "practical ability to manage personal emotional processes in relation to the subject matter of reflection" (p. 100). This will allow the acquisition of knowledge aimed at producing a transformation in the self, or in the personal, social or world situation or any combination of these (Moon, 1999, p. 14).

In exploring the elements of reflection and reflective practice detailed by Eby (2000, p. 52), this section of the literature review is framed by two fundamental schools of thought on reflection, represented by Dewey and Schön.

6.2.7 Dewey's Seminal Work on Reflection

Dewey defines reflection as "active, persistent, and careful consideration of any belief or supposed form of knowledge in the light of the grounds that support it and the further conclusions to which it tends" (1933, p. 118). Four distinct criteria that characterise Dewey's (1938) view of reflective thought are outlined by Rodgers (2002):

1. Reflection is a meaning-making process

In reference to Dewy (1938), Rodgers (2002) describes reflection as a meaning-making process that moves the learner from one experience into the next "with a deeper understanding of its relationships with and connections to other experiences and ideas" (p. 845). It is how we make sense of new experiences based on prior knowledge or meaning gained from past experiences; "the way the knowledge and skills in one situation becomes the instrument of understanding and dealing effectively with the situations that follow" (Dewey, 1938, p. 44). This leads to the drawing out of new knowledge or our own personal theories of practice, until, as Rodgers (2002) explains, we encounter a situation where the theory is no longer useful, at which point, through further reflection, it is either revised, refined, or discarded, and a new theory emerges.

2. Reflection is a systematic, rigorous, disciplined way of thinking, with its roots in scientific inquiry

Reflection is a disciplined way of thinking with its roots in scientific inquiry. A reflective thinker moves deliberately from the data of the experience to formulating a theory in a series of six phases (Dewey, 1916/1944, 1933), which Rodger (2002) collapses into four: (i). presence to an experience, (ii). description of an experience, (iii). analysis of an experience, and (iv). intelligent action or experimentation.

Presence to an experience

There must be an experience upon which to reflect. Dewey (1938) describes an experience as a:

> … transaction taking place between an individual and what, at that time constitutes his environment, whether the latter consists of persons with whom he is talking about some topic or event, the subject being talked about being also a part of the situation; or toys with which he is playing; the book he is reading; … or the materials of an experiment he is performing. (p. 44)

This suggests that the reflective process is initiated when the learner becomes aware of or is concerned with an incident, problem, or event but where the meaning of the experience is not fully established; the "internal experience for the learner is one of disequilibrium and unsettledness" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 850). The learner needs to do something to resolve this perplexity.

Description of an experience

Spontaneous interpretation ensues any experience. But, as Rodgers (2002) explains, to leap to a conclusion at this point could result in an inappropriate action, or even one that could cause harm. Instead, this is where one slows down and takes time to reflect, beginning with the description of the experience as one notes or perceives it, as well as one's personal response to this, pointing "to the important role that commitment to new growth and attitude of open-mindedness play" (Rodgers, 2002 p. 852). In describing the experience, one must ground thinking in evidence, ensuring integrity in the inquiry process (Rodgers, 2002).

Analysis of an experience

This is where meaning is beginning to take shape, where the different explanations and interpretations about what the description suggests are considered. Here the learner brings in others, and other resources, to deepen and broaden understanding (Rodgers, 2002, p. 854); in which a "dialectical, give-and-take relationship" (Rodger, 2020, p. 96) allows the return to the descriptive phase to seek more data, which in turn may point towards different analyses. This could be understood as "a series of intellectual dry runs" through the issue providing "a platform of reason and understanding from which one can take the next step, intelligent action" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 854). Dewey (1904) recognises that teacher professionalism grows out of such a reflective approach to education, and deplores a "willingness … to accept without inquiry or criticism any method or device which seems to promise good results" (p. 152, as cited in Rodgers, 2002, p. 855).

Intelligent action / experimentation

This final phase of reflection is the one that offers the possibility of settledness, a resolution to the disequilibrium (Rodgers, 2002); it makes sense. For Dewey, reflection must lead to action but this action, while not definitive but a hypothesis, is different from routine action because of the preceding thought; it is intelligent action (Rodgers, 2002). This may result in confirmation or negation of the hypothesis, which either brings new problem to the fore, or helps to define and clarify the problem . Nothing for Dewey (1933) "shows the trained thinker better than the use [made of] errors and mistakes" (p. 112-114). In this way, the process of reflection is cyclical.

3. Reflection needs to happen in community, in interaction with others

For Dewey (1916/1944), Rodgers (2002) maintains, merely to think without ever having to express one's thinking is an incomplete act; to have to express ourselves to others can reveal both the strengths and weaknesses in our thoughts. Thompson and Pascal (2011) concur and contend that in developing a reflective understanding of a situation we need to broaden our perceptions to take account of those of involved others. Rodgers (2002) too highlights the benefits of collaborative reflection as the possible affirmation of the value of our experiences, the reaching of alternative

meanings and a broadened understanding, and the provision of support for engagement in the inquiry process.

4. Reflection requires attitudes that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others

Rodgers (2002) notes that Dewey (1933) argues that reflective practice requires particular attitudes and awareness of our attitudes and emotions, and the discipline to harness them and use them to advantage, is part of the work of a good thinker. Whole-heartedness, or "single-mindedness" that indicates a genuine interest, curiosity and enthusiasm is essential. A further attitude is one of open-mindedness or "hospitality" to new ways of seeing and understanding, which Dewey (1933) describes as a willingness to entertain different perspectives, coupled with the acceptance of the "possibility of error even in the beliefs that are dearest to us" (p. 30). As Dimova and Loughran (2006) argue, this means one must be able to listen actively, be prepared to hear contrary ideas and thinking to our own, and be able to admit error in a previously held idea. Rodgers (2002) elaborates that Dewey means that this as "not clinging too tightly to our ideas but releasing the mind to play over and around them"(p. 861). Responsibility for the implications of thinking is next. Dewey (1933) explains that to be intellectually responsible "is to consider the consequence of a projected step; it means to be willing to adopt these consequences when they follow reasonably from any position taken" (p. 32). Tannebaum et al. (2013) add that Dewey sees responsibility as the acknowledgement that actions have repercussions, which need to be strongly considered prior to acting. Being responsible acknowledges that the meaning one acts on is not a disembodied meaning; it does not stand, Rodgers (2002) explains "isolated from our view of the world but grows out of and leads back into it, possibly demanding that our view [and actions] change radically" (p. 862). These attitudes are the essential constituents of what Dewey calls readiness to engage in reflection, for to truly inquire in one's practice in a whole-hearted, open-minded, and responsible way "demands the courage to release not only what one holds dear but the elements of one's very identity" (Rodgers, 2002, p. 863).

6.2.8 Considering Dewey

As Dimova and Loughran (2009) explain, Dewey created a greater sense of valuing practice in ways that went beyond just thinking about practice; the notion of reflection "embodied an educative stance, such that the way knowledge of practice might be developed, enhanced and applied in the practice setting was purposeful and meaningful" (p. 206). Practice can be seen then as more informed. Tannebaum et al. (2013) note that Dewey discussed how reflective thinking and reflective teaching involve pausing to reflect on successes and failures as well as a means for improving practice, understanding "reflective practice as incorporating careful consideration, active decision-making, and persistence toward an unattainable conclusion" (p. 245). Dewey's way of thinking, Hébert (2015) posits, is focussed, careful and methodological thinking; "the final goal is the rational exposition of an issue that results in the alleviation of doubt by way of certainty, or at least, as close to certainty as possible", but notes criticism for its overreliance on "rationalism and adherence to technical rationality" (p. 363). However, Rolfe (2014) disagrees and argues that Dewey was a pragmatic philosopher and a practical educator , and "his notion of *thinking* is intricately connected to *doing* it … reflection is not simply having an experience and then going home to think about it" (p. 1179). Reflection in Dewey's words involves doing "something overtly to bring about the anticipated result, and thereby testing the hypothesis" (Dewey, 1944, p. 115). This Rolfe (2014) considers to be more or less identical to what Schön would later refer to as reflection-in-action or simply as reflective practice, described as "a reflective conversation with the situation" (Schön, 1983, p. 163).

6.2.9 The Reflective Practitioner

Schön's work, Thompson and Pascal (2012) explain, has come to be the established traditional form of reflective practice, which is "critical of misguided attempts to apply engineering-type problem-solving approaches to human relations", which is taking away "the 'artistry' involved in professional practice … by regulating them to the status of unthinking followers of instructions and procedures" which is a far cry from the complexities of actual practice (p. 313). Reflective practice involves moving away from the technical rationality of traditional approaches to learning, which Schön (1983)

considers as emphasising the application of scientific knowledge to practice and is "a view of knowledge that fosters selective inattention to practical competence and professional artistry"(p. vii). Technical rationality fails to recognise how understanding is developed from the integration of theory and practice (Kinsella, 2010). This involves, as Thompson and Pascal (2012) state, "tailoring theoretical and research-based knowledge (what Schön refers to as the 'high ground') to fit the circumstances encountered in specific practice situations ('the swampy lowlands)" (p. 314). Thus, reflective practice is firmly rooted in the realities of practice in which the role of theory, rather than directing action, is that of enhancing everyday interpretations and experiences (Biesta, 2020, p. 13), in order to be able to engage with challenges involved in practice.

Schön (1983) describes reflection in terms of the knowledge gained from a practitioner's own experience, called "knowing-in-action" (p. 54). His approach to reflection focussed on the two distinct aspects of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. Reflection-in-action, Schön (1983) understands more as: "thinking on your feet", "keeping your wits about you", and "learning by doing" (p. 54), suggesting that not only that we can think about doing but that we can think about doing something while doing it. Thus, Schön (1983) indicates that understanding new perspectives or views is not enough; "[r]eflection-in-action necessarily involves experiment" (p, 141). When someone reflects-in-action, Schön (1983) explains, he becomes a researcher in the practice context and "does not separate thinking from doing … Because his experimenting is a kind of action, implementation is built into his inquiry" (p. 68). And as practical knowledge, the know-how acquired through experience, merely guides people in their actions, and aids them in selecting the best means to achieve a desired end (Schön, 1983, p. 33). Reflection allows for critiquing and questioning of the repetitive experiences of routine actions in which a practitioner "can surface and criticize the tacit understandings that have grown up around the repetitive experiences of a specialized practice, and can make new sense of the situations of uncertainty or uniqueness" (Schön, 1983, p. 61). Practitioners, Rolfe (2014) suggests, become their own theorists and researchers by generating theories and testing them out on-the-spot in practice. In this way, Schön (1983) explains, the practitioner is "not dependent on the categories of established theory and technique, but constructs a new theory of the

unique case … because it is not bound by the dichotomies of Technical Rationality"(pp. 68-69).

On the other hand, reflection-on-action is similar to Dewey's notion of reflection as a deliberative act, 'the systematic and deliberate thinking back over one's actions … [professionals] who are thoughtful about their work' (Russell & Munby, 1992, p. 3). This, Thompson and Pascal (2012) explain, involves taking the opportunity to draw on the professional knowledge base more explicitly, which can be used to develop our understanding further and to test and develop the knowledge.

6.2.10 Considering Schön

While Schön's work has inspired many models of reflection and categories of reflective practice, Finlay (2008) notes that Moon (1999) considers Schön's pivotal concept of reflection-in-action as unachievable, with Ekebergh (2006) arguing that it is "not possible to distance oneself completely from the lived situation in order to achieve self-reflection, which a reflective attitude requires" (p. 334). In this respect, van Manen (2015) offers a vision of reflection that is entwined with pedagogy, contending that temporal dimensions of the practical context in which reflection occurs is complicated and that it is "this active contemporaneous type of reflection that is probably the most challenging dimension of teaching; as it is "reflection" in the very moment of acting that seems to be a puzzling phenomenon (van Manen, 1991, 1992)" (p. 50). The acknowledgment that the active practice of teaching is too busy to be truly reflective, as van Manen (2015) asserts, does not mean that teaching "is condemned to Dewey's warning of blind impulsivity or routine habit" (p. 51) for "pedagogical reality is often beset with Kairos moments" (p. 53); "a transformative moment of chance depending on our ability and willingness to seize the opportunity that is offered within it" (Murchadha, 2013, as cited in van Manen, 2015, p. 52). And although immediate acting does not consist of distancing, van Manen (2015) explains that this is a phenomenology of tactful action, in "a reflexive dialogue between the I and the self" where the "I monitors, as it were, what the self does while doing it" (p. 58). In earlier work, van Manen (1995) clarifies this tact as practical knowledge that becomes real in the very act of teaching: as "immediate and thoughtful pedagogical action, tact is *in its very practice* a kind of knowing, an active confidence" (p. 45, emphasis in the original).

Ideally, Thompson and Thompson (2018) suggest, Schön's reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action should inter-connect (p. 11). In reflecting-on-action, we should refer back to what was going through our mind during the actual practice moment, while the next time we are engaged in such practice, our reflection should draw on previous reflection-on-action. This ensures that practice is informed by theory, and theory is informed and tested by practice (Thompson & Thompson, 2018, p. 11).

Usher et al (1997) find Schön's account and methodology unreflexive (as cited in Finlay 2008, p. 4). Yet, Rolfe (2011) comments that "if the practitioner who reflects on action is a reflective practitioner, then the one who reflects in action is a reflexive practitioner" (p. 163), meaning that reflection-in-action is reflexive, the practitioner being self-aware, while reflection-on-action is reflective, the practitioner is thoughtful. However, Thompson and Thompson (2018) contend that reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action need to be both thoughtful and self-aware, understanding "reflexive practice to be a dimension of reflective practice" (p. 15). Moore (2004) concurs that reflexivity is a particular form of reflection that considers one's own historicised responses to situations and events (p. 112). In a later text, Moore (2012) further explains that while "the reflective discourse tends to focus on the practice *per se*, the reflexive practitioner discourse is more inclined to focus on the practitioner and the wider personal and general social context" (p. 125). However, Finlay (2008) notes that the demand for more thoughtful reflexive and critical reflective practice has tended to generate more models or typologies, "which, if used blindly or unthinkingly, can render practice more mechanical and externally subscribed" (p. 10), which is the very anthesis of Schön's notion of professional artistry.

Other criticisms levelled at Schön include Boud and Walker (1998) who argue that Schön's analysis ignores critical features of the context of reflection. His focus on the individual, and, Thompson and Pascal (2012) note, the "neglect of the significance of language, meaning and narrative" does not address the discursive or dialogic dimension at the centre of Schön's idea of a "reflective conversation with the situation" (p. 317). This predominant but not exclusive focus on the individual means that sufficient attention is not given to wider social and organisational factors, and neglects the emotional dimensions of such matters (Thompson & Thompson, 2018, p. 14). Little

attention is paid to the need for critical reflection and to an understanding of the key role of power relations (Thompson & Thompson, 2018, p.14)

6.2.11 Critically Reflective Practice

Sociology teaches, as Thompson and Pascal (2012, p. 322) acknowledge, that what happens at an individual level in terms of rationale, assumptions and values is dependent on the broader social contexts and the discourse within it (p. 322). Thus, there is a need to see "personal reflection as not only an interpersonal matter, but also as part of the broader context of cultural formations and structural relations" (Thompson and Pascal, 2011 p. 17). This critical approach to reflection is explained by Thompson and Thompson (2018) as going beyond atomism; the practitioner is self- aware, but is also socially and politically aware (p. 23). Essentially, critically reflective practice has depth and breadth. From the point of view of depth, Thompson and Pascal (2012) indicate that it does not take situations at face value but "helps practitioners move beyond taken-for-granted assumptions that may well be informed by prejudice and discriminatory discourses", and enables the identification of "any ideological basis to our practice" (p. 321). However, the breath of critically reflective practice adopts a wider social lens. Fook and Akseland (2007) acknowledge this as confronting more culturally embedded ideas, which can be " a 'double-edged sword' or a "potent way of confronting 'sticking points' or previously unresolvable dilemmas" (p. 521). Resistance, anxiety and misunderstanding arising from questioning established assumptions may limited its effectiveness. Yet, in another way, it can also help "to 'co-construct' a new empowering narrative …. to replace a self-limiting or disempowering narrative" (Thompson and Pascal, 2012, p. 317). In addition, for Fook and Askeland (2007), a culture of critical reflection "privileges concrete experience, and the innate ability of the person, as sources of knowledge" (p. 527), and their model assumes that knowledge is at least partly created through interaction and dialogue in a social and political context. Personal and emotional experience is therefore as important as cognitive abilities and behaviours since the whole person is the research instrument; "they must collect and process knowledge so as to act in a meaningful way in their particular context" (Fook & Askeland, 2007, p. 527).

Critically reflective practice will, Brookfield (2017) contends, lead us to focus on two kinds of assumptions "assumptions about power dynamics and what constitutes a justifiable exercise or abuse of power" and "assumptions that seem common sense and serve us well but that actually work against our best interests" (p. ix). Brookfield (2017) believes that the way we become aware of the assumptions that shape our practice is by garnering an increased awareness of our actions from as many different vantage points as possible, and proposes four lenses that can be engaged by teachers in a process of critical reflection (p. vii). Taken together "they throw our assumptive clusters into sharp relief by providing multiple perspectives on what we think and do" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 62). The first of these lenses is the lens of the students' eyes through which teachers can understand the different ways the students view their practice. Brookfield (2017) contends that this can open "productive disturbing insights" (p. 65), as actions and assumptions may be revealed that confirm or challenge existing power relations in the classroom (Brookfield, 1995, p. 30). The second lens is that of colleagues' perceptions. For Brookfield (2017), the presence of critical friends is at the heart of critically reflective practice; teaching colleagues are the best critical friends (p. 66). They can highlight hidden habits in teaching practice in that they "affirm that our problems are not idiosyncratic blemishes that we need to keep but shared dilemmas" and can support us to decide which of our responses are valid and which may need to be re-examined (Brookfield, 2017, p. 68). The third is the lens of personal experience, which Brookfield (2017) acknowledges that of the four lenses of critical reflection, this is the lens that gets the least respect and yet "accounts of personal experience, intertwined with pedagogy, typically move us more than summaries of findings in a research study" (p. 69). People recognise aspects of their experiences in the stories others tell. By interrogating these personal experiences, teachers can reveal aspects of their pedagogy that may need adjustment or strengthening. The final lens that fosters critically reflective practice is contained in theory. Brookfield (2017) expounds that finding "a theorist who makes explicit something you've been sensing or who states publicly what you've suspected but felt unable to express" (p. 73) is affirming, but he recognises that theory that upsets settled worldviews is important because it combats groupthink that sometimes emerges in collegial reflection groups. All teachers have access to all these lenses, though the degree to which they can use a particular one, which Brookfield (2017) acknowledges, depends on external conditions (p. 77).

In his earlier work Brookfield (1995) notes three types of related cultures that can militate against critical reflection; the cultures of silence, individualism, and secrecy. Fook and Askeland (2007) explain the culture of silence as referring to the assumption that "teaching is a private activity", which can mean that there is lack of open talk about the experience, the difficulties and the meaning of teaching (p. 528). The culture of individualism "works against collaborative activities and assumes that all can be solved through the heroic efforts of individuals", while the culture of secrecy "works against self-disclosure, and punishes mistakes or short-comings" (Fook & Askeland, 2007, p. 528). The notion of the argument culture is posited by Tannen (2013) who explains this as "taking a warlike stance to accomplish something that is not literally a war...that opposition leads to truth" (p. 179). Fook and Askeland (2007) describe this as an adversarial way of knowing, in which the dominant side settles the differences, and which militates against understanding differences to arrive at a consensus; this stance does not acknowledge critical reflection that "relies on being open to consciously or unconsciously disclosing to others what is not understood in order to learn from it" (p. 528). However, Brookfield (2016) warns about the dark side to critical reflective practice too, in which people and their perception of the world can be controlled through the use of language to get people to agree to things that will end up harming them. Trust and support must be hand-in-hand with responsibility if reflective practice is to be encouraged in the workplace (Dimova & Loughran, 2009) .

6.3 Conclusion

This chapter began with a discussion of *Cosán,* the national framework for teachers' learning. This flexible framework emphasises the growth of teacher professional learning for enhanced student outcomes, which requires planning, based on ongoing reflection on learning and its impact on practice. While *Cosán* is firmly embedded in and acknowledges the learning that teachers already do, the Teaching Council has been mindful that the framework represents a degree of cultural change for registered teachers and for the education system. As this focus of my PhD work inquired into how we engage in the process of reflection on our purposive collaborative teaching and learning activities, as espoused in *Cosán*, I interrogated relevant literature on professional development and reflective practice. My review began by briefly discussing professionalism and continuous professional development. Focus then

turned to collaborative professional development, examining its personal, social, and occupational dimensions. I concluded this chapter by exploring reflective practice, viewed through the lens of the seminal works of Dewey and Schön, and culminated with an interrogation of critical reflective practice. This informed the conduct of an inquiry in which I inquired into how we engage in the process of reflection and on the impact of that learning for ourselves as professionals, for our practice and for the children, and ultimately for the school community. Learning together is central to my understanding of our evolving shelter of belonging. The next chapter narrates this final action research inquiry.

Chapter 7 Collaborative and Reflective Practice as Understood in *Cosán*, the Framework for Teachers' Learning

7.1 Introduction

My PhD research has always been concerned with praxis, which I consider to be central to how we observed, as O'Donohue (1998) describes, the dignity of painfully earning passage (p. 340) in working to develop a shelter of belonging in our school community, while also responding to system level demands. This chapter demonstrates teacher collaboration as a form of professional learning and development. It is set in the development phase of *Cosán*, the framework for teachers' learning, as we engaged in the process of reflection during existing exploratory work on collaborative teaching and learning methodologies to allow the children to take a more active role in their learning. As this chapter unfolds, my own informed personal theory of reflection is revealed, and I explicate how engagement in the process of reflection on our learning impacts on ourselves as professionals, on our practice, and on the children's learning.

7.2 The School Context

I am Deputy Principal of a large Catholic primary school in a Strategic Development Zone (SZD), which opened in September 2007. The school was part of a wider vision for a community that reflected a new, multicultural Ireland and as an inclusive school we welcomed families from all over the globe who were making their home in the area and choosing our school to educate their children. The multicultural nature of the school is reflected in the fact that more than 87% (September 2020) of the pupils' parents were born outside of Ireland. Our approach to cultural diversity is one of respect and interculturalism in that we believe that "we all become personally enriched by coming in contact with and experiencing other cultures, and that people of different cultures can and should be able to engage with each other and learn from each other" (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2005, p. 3). After the global economic downturn development plans for the area were set aside, and the school, and the neighbouring school, played an integral role in the development of the community.

Being a multicultural school has presented challenges, which may not present in other schools. The area of language impacts greatly on the children's access to the curriculum and progress in literacy and, to some extent, numeracy. Some children have English as a first language, others use English although it is not the first language of the home, others only speak their home language on entry to school, some children are neither proficient in the language of the home nor in English, and the staff is the main native speaker model. Much of the provision for English as Additional Language (EAL) learners in other school contexts has not been sufficient for the little-known particular context of our school. Additionally, many of the parents are unfamiliar with the Irish education system. Different cultural approaches have also presented different issues with behaviour management, which often stemmed from difficulties coping when problems or opposition presented. In meeting these diverse needs, we have had to engage as "both as learners and as teachers", through the development of collaborative practices which allowed us … "to struggle with the uncertainties that accompany each role" (Darling-Hammond & McLaughlin (1995, p. 81). My PhD work has sought to investigate educational influence in this developing multicultural school community. I have drawn inspiration from Ireland's heritage of Celtic thought of a "shelter of belonging" that would only gather itself slowly around us (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 340).

Following discussion and consultation between teachers, Special Needs Assistants (SNAs), Board of Management, parents and pupils, a whole school approach to the promotion of positive behaviour, based on the *Incredible Years*® programme, which promotes emotional, social, and academic competences, was developed. Leadership and management structured ongoing collaboration so that we could have "shared access to students and share responsibilities for designing their work" (Darling-Hammond and McLaughlin, 1995, p. 86). All teachers have played their role in supporting the children's language learning, every lesson is a language lesson. Whole-school approaches to literacy and maths have been developed. A support team was formed, well in advance of the introduction of the introduction of the guidelines for supporting pupils with special educational needs in mainstream primary schools (Department of Education and Skills, 2017), to support learning for all, including children with special educational needs, and those for whom English is an additional language, within an inclusive whole-school framework. Initiatives such as *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (2009), a focus of an earlier piece of my PhD work, detailed in

Chapter 4, Lift Off to Literacy, and Mata sa Rang have allowed the support team to work in the classroom alongside the classroom teachers and SNAs. Professional development opportunities were afforded in the early years of the school, under the direction of our National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, with other schools of a similar demographic who were also in the early stage of development. This allowed us to begin to explore issues of shared concern and to learn with and from each other, which proved to be a "source of efficacy and confidence in the process of adopting new practices" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p. 17). The recent economic upturn has resulted in the revitalisation of the construction industry, and this has meant that earlier plans, although revised, for the SDZ are now proceeding (2018). The school is in a new stage of development with this rapid growth in the area, which will bring new challenges.

A Whole School Evaluation (WSE) in 2015 affirmed the work being done in the school to bring it to this stage of development. The recommendations of the Inspectorate were in areas previously identified by the school itself as areas for development. One recommendation made in the WSE report was that a wider range of collaborative teaching methodologies should be further explored to allow pupils take a more active role in their learning. It is in the subsequent work undertaken to implement this recommendation that I sited the final focus of my PhD work.

7.3 Developing Collaborative and Co-operative Learning Strategies in the Classroom

As a school, we aim to give every child the opportunity to experience success in meaningful and appropriately challenging learning tasks and to achieve as high a standard as possible. We wanted to develop a whole-school, clearly planned approach to implement collaborative teaching methodologies in allowing the children to take a more active role in their learning. While the mainstream class teachers have first-line responsibility for ensuring that all children in their class, including those with special and additional educational needs, are provided with a learning programme and environment that enables them to access the curriculum and progress their learning, we understand that teacher collaboration is a crucial factor in promoting inclusion and enhancing our capacity to provide this quality learning experience. The support team

had been working with different class teachers and their classes in designated weekly sessions, over five to six weeks, to investigate and develop this instructional approach. While there is a core team of teachers who work to meet the needs of pupils with special and/or additional needs, the role of individual members of the support team can be altered to allow flexibility in response to changing needs of the school. However, one support teacher co-ordinated this work throughout the time.

From the beginning, we defined collaboration as happening when the children worked *in* pairs or groups, with co-operative learning being "the instructional use of small groups in which students work together to maximise their own and each other's learning" (Johnson & Johnson, 1999, p. 73). The learning outcome we valued for the children was that they would learn to interact interdependently as a group through the assigned, complementary roles of *Manager*, *Reporter*, *Recorder,* and *Supporter*. The children needed to "take joint responsibility for undertaking and contributing to the group activity" (Baines, Blatchford and Kutnick, 2017, p. 15). While the work was topic-based, typically in the curricular areas of Social, Environmental and Scientific Education (SESE), the development of research skills was not a focus. Resources and comprehension-type tasks were provided to guide the children in gathering information and to support their understanding of the topic. Discrete teaching of identified research skills happened in different curricular areas, at other times in the school day throughout the school week. Reid et al.'s (2002) model for managing small group learning, originally adapted from Barnes (1975), was adopted, and is detailed in a later section of this chapter. This work began during the 2016-2017 school year and was ongoing when I conducted this final piece of my PhD research, the focus of which was to explore how "we capture evidence about what makes a difference and reinforce the importance of teachers' collective contributions to each other's and pupils' learning" (Cordingley, 2014, p. 46), as advocated in the *Cosán* framework for teachers' learning and professional development.

7.4 Research Methodology

The form of educational research most closely linked to reflection and reflexivity in education is action research (Moore, 2012, p. 127). It is a form of practitioner research where there is professional intent to intervene to improve practice in line with values that are rational and just, and specific to the situation. Kemmis (2009) explains this as the "sayings, doings and relatings" (p. 467) of people in ecologies of practices. My ontological and epistemic stances are situated within this definition. I believe that learning happens within a social context; we *are* in relation to and with others; knowers can only be known when known by other knowers (Heron & Reason, 1997). This "presupposes participation, through meeting and dialogue, in a culture of shared art and shared language, shared values, norms and beliefs" (Heron & Reason, 1997, p. 280). Action research then has been the preferred strategy of inquiry.

This collaborative relationship also implies that my own professional values are central to any investigation. My guiding principles are respect and understanding. I acknowledge each person's entitlement to equality of opportunity to realise his or her potential for growth, to be listened to, to speak, to offer opinions, to question and to be happy yet to be responsible for their words and actions towards others; to belong to a community that works, lives, and learns together for the good of all. In recognising the self-determination of each person, as we support and learn with and from others, while taking appropriate "responsibility for doing things to and for other people for the sake of their future autonomy" (Heron, 1996, p. 127), I adopted the structure of Heron's (1996) co-operative inquiry. This was to evolve during this study, which was conducted over the course of a year from June 2018-May 2019.

7.5 Heron's Co-operative Inquiry

Heron and Reason (2001) describe co-operative inquiry as working with other people who have similar concerns and interests to:

> (1) understand your world, make sense of your life and develop new and creative ways of looking at things; and
>
> (2) learn how to act to change things you may want to change and find out how to do things better. (p. 179)

Heron (1996) describes this as two or more people researching a topic through their own experience of it, using a series of cycles in which they move between this experience and reflecting together on it . Each person is co-subject in the experience phases and co-researcher in the reflection phases. In the action phases they experiment with new forms of personal or professional practice and in the reflection phase they reflect on their experience critically, learning from their successes and failures, and developing understandings which inform their work in the next action phase. Thus, both political and epistemic participation are involved. Heron (1996) outlines the inquiry stages as:

Stage 1 The first reflection phase the inquirers choose

- The focus or topic of the inquiry and the type of inquiry.
- A launching statement of the inquiry topic.
- A plan of action for the first action phase to explore some aspect of the inquiry topic.
- A method of recording experiences during the first action phase.

Stage 2 The first action phase when the inquirers are

- Exploring in experience and action some aspect of the inquiry topic.
- Applying an integrated range of inquiry skills.
- Keeping records of the experiential data generated.

Stage 3 Full immersion in Stage 2 with great openness to experience; the inquirers may

- Break through into new awareness.
- Lose their way.
- Transcend the inquiry format.

Stage 4 The second reflection phase; the inquirers share data from the action phase and

- Review and modify the inquiry topic in the light of making sense of data about the explored aspect of it.
- Choose a plan for the second action phase to explore the same or a different aspect of the inquiry topic.
- Review the method of recording data used in the first action phase and amend it for use in the second. (pp. 49-50)

While the stages of inquiry are outlined, Heron reminds us that this is "only *a* way" and does not consider that adopting these stages, "explicitly or tacitly, is *the* way to do a co-operative inquiry" (p. 49, emphasis in the original).

7.6 Methods of Data Collection

A combination of qualitative methods was employed. I maintained a research diary on a continuous basis, which contained my personal accounts of progress made throughout the process. It also reflected my values and recorded personal insights as these impacted on the data and its interpretations. Other data collection methods included the video and audio recording by the researcher of the action research group's "supportive work-in-progress discussions" (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1992, pp. 25-27), which have become the way we as a school staff "routinely explore problems, issues or difference of practice together in order to improve or transform" what we are doing (Hargreaves & O' Connor, 2018, p. 6). Documentary evidence from the support team's work in developing co-operative teaching and learning strategies in the classroom also forms part of data collection in this research, and supplements video- and audio-based observation.

As with all teacher research, ethical approval was sought and obtained from the DCU Ethics Research Committee, along with the approval from the school to conduct this piece of research. As Deputy Principal, with shared responsibility for learning and teaching in the school, including the development of individuals and staff teams, my own professional values are central to my work and to any research I undertake. While *Cosán* had been discussed at staff level with Teaching Council input, allowing us to align our learning with this framework and to consider possible future involvement in the development process, each person's right to freedom and self-determination was acknowledged. In line with ethical research practice, a Plain Language Statement guided discussion to highlight issues likely to influence the decision of those interested in participating in this research. The informed consent of the members of the support team who wished to participate in this study was subsequently obtained.

7.7 Stage 1 The First Reflection Phase

As part of our existing exploratory work on developing our use of collaborative teaching and learning methodologies, the support team members involved in the classroom-based work meet at the end of a block of work to discuss their learning and to plan subsequent learning experiences. It was at such a review meeting (16th June 2018) that I had the opportunity to introduce the focus of the inquiry as aiming to

investigate teacher collaboration as a form of professional development. I explained how this could allow us to begin to examine what engagement with *Cosán* might look like for us, exploring how we engage in the process of reflection on our learning, and on the impact of that learning for ourselves as professionals, for our practice and for the learners, while investigating how we can record this in a sustainable way.

To inform this work, I facilitated a further session (19th June 2018) on reflection and on the different models of reflection (Appendix I) that had been presented during a Teaching Council Shared Learning Day (May 2018), during which I was interviewed as part of a vox pop media segment on my view of professional learning. A review of relevant literature also informed this session. Teachers could see the potential of Johns' Model of Reflection for reflection-on-action after a block of work in the classroom. There are two related processes in this model; looking in and then looking outwards. This used seminal work by Carper (1978), an approach to nursing knowledge, as the basis for exploring the knowledge of aesthetics, personal knowing, ethics, empirics, and encouraging the reflective practitioner to explore how this has changed and improved their practice. Reflexivity as a way of knowing was added to account from insight feedback (Johns, 1995). While Johns (2017) notes that he initially used Carper's (1978) ways of knowing, it became apparent that practitioners struggled to frame their learning within these (p. 60). A pragmatic model was developed in which given cues were related to the different kinds of knowing. This is intended as "a heuristic, a means to an end towards gaining insight", for reflection approached superficially loses its vitality (Johns, 2017, p. xviii). It was clear that we were addressing some of these insights in our reflective practice. A decision was made to use an adapted version of John's questions to frame refection-on-action (Appendix J).

It was also planned to use a weekly simple one-page reflection document, as we have for other curriculum areas where team teaching is involved, whereby teachers note down reflections or actions taken, which could inform all teachers on supports that may need to be provided in the event of any teacher's absence. This was prompted by one teacher's experience of teaching in an Australian school in the United Arab Emirates (UAE). Video evidence explains how the conversation that ensued "was jointly rather than unilaterally managed" (Robinson et al., 2014 p. 265), where there was "a genuine

search for common ground that enables decisions and resolutions that serve the interests" of all.

This work would be conducted in the 2018-2019 academic year as part of the support team's role in supporting the learning of all children in the school. The work would focus on developing the children's co-operative working and presentation skills, initially in the Fifth Classes and later with younger children in the Second Classes. While I would not work in the classrooms, which was different from the two previous action research inquiries in my PhD work, I would be co-researcher in the reflection-on-action sessions at that the end of the six-week blocks of work.

In October 2018, I was invited to participate in a joint Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) / Teaching Council webinar on *Reflective* Teaching*, Reflective Learning: Continuing the Conversation* (2019). Preparation for this proved pivotal in moving my learning forward and it influenced the nature and process of this inquiry.

7.8 Stages 2 and 3 The First Action Phase and Full Immersion Stage

7.8.1 In the Classroom

The support team began working in the two Fifth Classes in November 2018. Experience and prior learning informed the teaching and learning activities. The learning objectives detailed that the children would work co-operatively in a small group and work on developing presentation skills. Each support teacher prepared resources for particular topic and subtopics, which involved a list of questions to help the children to structure their projects. The following plan was put in place (Appendix K).

Session 1 Engagement

The class teachers introduced the roles of *Manager*, *Supporter*, *Recorder*, and *Reporter* to the children prior to the six-week block of work. During this first weekly session , the engagement week, the children were helped to understand what they are expected to learn in collaborative and co-operative small group work. A video of the teachers working in this way was used to support this learning. The success criteria for these

four roles, and for effective group work, were developed with the children. The topic, Presidents of Ireland, was also introduced. The children worked in their groups, discussing their roles and the prepared questions on their allocated president. During this stage, each teacher's main role was to engage the children's motivation as "they need to understand why they are examining this particular topic, text, information or material" (Reid et al., 2002, p. 42). While reflection comes at the end of the Reid et al.'s teaching and learning cycle, prior work had seen the importance of allowing the children to reflect weekly on each learning session. The *Reporter* shared a group reflection on what they had learned about working as a group in that session. Prior to session two, the class teachers revised the success criteria for the roles, promoted group work strategies, and taught skills of skimming and scanning to help the children to select the main ideas, and the children were advised how they would present their work at the end of the six-week block of work, the format for which would be oral, written, or visual, using Prezi presentations.

Session 2 Exploration stage

During the exploration stage, the children explored their roles. Each child was provided with a card detailing the responsibilities of their role and applied this to their task. Students would be given the opportunity to experience different roles on a weekly basis. Reid et al. (2002) explain this stage as the opportunity for the children "to make an initial examination of new information or ideas … to make mistakes or not fully understand new concepts" (p. 42). Each teacher's role was to identify areas of need that may need to be addressed in the teaching and learning cycle, through careful observation and listening. The *Reporter* again shared the group reflection on what they had learned about working as a group during that session. Prior to sessions three and four, the transformation stage, class teachers taught the success criteria for making presentations.

Sessions 3 and 4 Transformation stage

The children worked on gathering information for the presentations. The teachers were guiding, teaching, and monitoring the children as they worked, providing additional information and feedback as appropriate, focussing on information that leads to the desired outcomes of the learning activity of co-operative small group work (Reid et al, 2002, p. 43). Again, the *Reporter* shared group reflection on what they had learned

about working as group during those sessions. Additional time was provided throughout the intervening week for the children to finalise their presentations and to practise the skills necessary to present in front of their peers.

Session 5 Presentation

During this session, the children were required to present their work. Reid et al. (2002) explain that presentation "of work outcomes provides a degree of tension and gives a sense of purpose to group work", where the children, in explaining move "from receiving information towards understanding it, and exercising control over it" (p. 44). These presentations were recorded, which were viewed and discussed by children in the intervening week to aid their reflections during the reflection stage.

Session 6 Reflection

This is the final stage in the teaching and learning cycle. Here the children needed to "make clear to themselves what it is that they have learned" and "gain a deeper understanding of both the content and the learning process that they have worked with" (Reid et al., 2002, p. 46). At this stage, the children were given the opportunity to discuss and reflect on this learning experience. This informed the class teachers' and support team's reflection-on-action.

7.8.2 Preparing to Continue the Conversation on Reflective Teaching and Reflective Learning

In preparation for my participation in the Junior Cycle for Teachers (JCT) / Teaching Council webinar, I revisited the June 2018 meeting in which the models of reflection were introduced. In addition to this, the Teaching Council had provided questions to frame my thinking in preparation for the webinar. Preparation work entailed my own reflection on my reflective practice, on this aspect of my PhD study, and on my review of the literature. The webinar was recorded on 5th December 2018 and was first broadcast on 16th January 2019.

7.9 Stage 4 The Second Reflection Phase

7.9.1 Revisiting an Earlier Profession Conversation

In revisiting the June 2018 meeting as we discussed the various models of reflection, I was confronted with what Robinson et al. (2014) describe as an open-to-learning conversation with "respect for self and other, valid information, and internal commitment" (p. 265). I noted elements of Timperley's (2015) adaptive expertise in the conversation as the support team showed a moral imperative in improving outcomes for the children, took agency for development of their knowledge and skills, and were aware of their existing assumptions and when they might be helpful or unhelpful (p. 7). In this way the professional conversation became metacognitive, as we reflected on practice.

Reflective practice

Initial thoughts on reflection correspond with Eby's (2000) concept of reflection as enabling "individuals to make sense of their lived experiences" in the "process of turning thoughtful practice into a potential learning situation" (p. 52). It was described as "*looking at what we have done and saying what was good, what was not good and what do we need to change*". Time taken to reflect was deemed important. Reflection would consider the children and teachers themselves, highlighting that the reflective teacher, as Rogers (2002) explains, "does not merely seek solutions, nor does he or she do things the same way every day without an awareness of both the source and the impact of his or her actions" (p. 849).

As the professional conversation continued, the concept of reflection was probed more deeply. It was acknowledged that Schön's "reflection-in-action" is part of what we intuitively do as teachers while immersed in an activity, concurring with van Manen's (2015) idea of pedagogical tact; while they are involved in teaching "teachers "thinkingly act" and often do things with immediate insight" (p. 51). The was illustrated by one teacher as she describes her action when she noticed a child in need of further clarification to become more engaged in co-operative work. It underlines her "capacity to walk around a problem while you are right in the middle of it, to think about what you are doing even as you are improvising it" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012,

p. 98), and demonstrates her understanding of the importance of helping the child to appreciate accountability to the others in the group, which Johnson and Johnson (2018) contend as being key to ensuring that all group members are strengthened by learning co-operatively. Another teacher described this reflection-in-action as "*so, so important but we don't remember it"… "because it up here but then we forget*", referencing tacit knowledge. Indeed, the connection between reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action, as advocated by Thompson and Thompson (2018, p. 11), in responding appropriately to the learning needs of the children was aptly described in her reference to what she does during team-teaching maths lessons, when she notes observations in the maths folder, and how she could draw on it this the next time she engaged with the children in subsequent a teaching session. This reflective practice, Thompson and Thompson (2018) posit, refers to thinking that helps us make sense of our practice; "what is required of us, how best to respond" (p. 18) and "allows us to integrate the two sets of reflection and thus provide a basis for 'cutting our cloth' … to facilitate the integration of theory and practice" (p. 11); the relationship between knowledge that informs practice and "professional artistry" (Schön, 1983, p. vii) that is involved in using such knowledge in practice.

Reflexivity

The in-depth discussion of Johns' Model allowed the personal and social dimensions of professional learning to emerge. The importance of "knowing of self" (Johns, 1995, p. 229), arose in this professional conversation. The element of emotion in the model promoted acknowledgment of a lack of consideration to " the perception of the self's feelings" (Johns, 1995, p. 229) but recognised its importance, as one teacher stated "*as a practitioner … if you are being reflective … you should always tune in with yourself …* [and ask] *Is there something going on with me and that's why this is happening?* But it was appreciated that while we consider the children, we never consider our feelings in reflection, except as one teacher explains in terms of managing stress in the teaching and learning experience "*I think we think of our own feelings in can it be manageable? 'Cos if it is not manageable it's stressful, otherwise its fine. Can I do this? Do I have enough time? Have I enough resources?".* This refers to teachers' self-efficacy or beliefs in their ability in handling the challenges related to their professional activity, which plays a key role in influencing important academic outcomes and well-being (Barni et al., 2019). The higher the level of efficacy means, Millan et al. (2016)

advise, that teachers consider that they have the required knowledge, skills and capacities to work in a way that leads to desired goals. This prompted further talk on our teacher deficit model of thinking about practice, possibly because we are always "*striving to be better … you know there is room … for improvement"*. However, one teacher pointed out that this is because of early educational experience where " *You wouldn't have been told if you are doing it right... it was only pointed out something you were doing wrong*", concurring with Pajares (1992, as cited in Priestley et al., 2015, p. 43), who suggests teacher beliefs are formed through their early life experience, in particular in their own schooling. Nevertheless, Priestley et al.'s (2015) own research suggests that teacher beliefs are more malleable, and "we should not forget the 'drivers' of the particular contexts" (p. 58) in which teachers work. This was broached by the same teacher whose experience of collective work allowed her to consider and refine instructional practice, and heighten her cultural and intellectual sensitivity to the children, which resulted in an enhanced sense of sense of teacher efficacy:

> *I think it is good when you are working with other teachers because you get their point of view as well ... Do you ever think for years you are doing something the same way and you think there is nothing wrong with it ... you think it's the best ? And then someone comes at you with a question, and you are going oh my God I've being doing that wrong … that must have made that child feel terrible … Having other people to work with makes you think …*

In addition to appreciating that peers can highlight hidden habits in teaching practices, this teacher understands how social capital, "the quantity and quality of interaction and social relationships among people affects their access to knowledge and information" (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 90), is enhanced by accessing other people's human capital. For me, this has always meant extending my networks, both internal and external to the school, where interdependence exists and I can seek advice and exchange ideas, in reflecting on my work. And in this context, where the teachers are supporting children to develop co-operative learning skills, it is a realisation of ambition for the child, to which Peacock (2014) aspires, "reflected in ambition for the teacher" (p. 52).

7.10 My Informed Personal Theory of Reflection

I understand that my personal theory of reflection has been shaped by my earlier career experience of being part of school communities where time was made available to allow us to learn together. It meant that we did not simply apply theory to practice, but rather theory was tested in line with practical experience to make conscious decisions about possible future actions, the 'artistry' which involved in professional practice (Schön, 1983, p. vii). Together we developed our own theories of practice. Thus, while it can be an individual practice, reflection is essentially for me a social process. This requires attitudes, as Dewey (1933, 1944) maintains, that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others. Dimova and Loughran (2009) explain this as being enticed and engaged by thinking, and interest "is maintained and ideas are sought in ways in which an enthusiasm and desire for knowing is enacted" (p. 206).

I agree with Dewey (1933) that reflection is a disciplined way of thinking. It is the careful consideration and re-organisation of knowledge and emotional orientations to achieve further insights (Moon, 2004, pp. 101-102) that needs to be built into practice. Participation in a master's degree programme in the early 2000s introduced action research as a way of inquiring into my practice, which became for me "a critical integration of, rather than a division between, research and practice" (Cochran-Smith, 2012, p. 104). This is not mechanised and routine reflection but a way of working that allowed me to adopt an inquiring stance, a critical habit of mind "where every site of professional practice becomes a potential site of inquiry", and which involves "a continual process of making current arrangements problematic (Cochran- Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 121). Reflection, then, is not only about making practice work more smoothly. A dimension of reflective practice understanding is reflexive practice. My understanding of reflexivity is that "*we question why we do what we do" … "to ensure that our actions are consistent with our values*" (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018). I refer here to the wider purposes of education, as well as deliberating about what to get done, where we ask *why* we do *what* we do, asking, as Cochran-Smith and Lytle (2009) contend, *who* decides and *whose* interests are served by this (p. 121). This critical reflection is about questioning assumptions that we hold about how the world works (Brookfield, 2009). For me, this is where we may begin to become aware of the limitations of our assumptions and "whether or not following the assumptions leads to

the intended consequences" (Brookfield, 2009, pp. 295-296) and are "*open to the perspective of others and consider alternatives*" (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018). Opportunities for learning are thus generated. This requires the necessary attitudes, as Dewey (1933, 1944) maintains, that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others. And yet, it must also be critically aware of hegemonic assumptions that actually only serve the interest of those who wish to preserve the status quo (Brookfield, 2009).

A critical approach to professional practice is an important part of promoting creativity and preventing stagnation (Thompson and Pascal, 2012). But for me it also allows for an intelligent response to the innovations, initiatives directed at the school (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016, p. 21) as "*I think the busier we are, the more innovations and initiatives directed at the school, the clearer we need to be on* ***why*** *we do what we d*o" (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018). However, I acknowledge that this is not easy. Above all it requires that "working cultures and procedures … are supportive of critically reflective practice" (Thompson and Pascal, 2012, p. 320), where it is safe to challenge old ideas and new ones (Fook & Akseland, 2007) and where errors are welcomed as learning opportunities. Supportive structures must be in place. Time is needed for reflection-on-action, if we are to become more reflexive and, in turn, can reflect-in-action more effectively (Hargreaves & Fullan, 2012, p. 168). Support should be tailored to the varying levels of knowledge and experience of teachers involved if teachers are to understand and work in the complex teaching environment.

This period of reflection, and the engagement with external others in the webinar, allowed me to see that critical reflective practice was already happening with the group of teachers in my study. I could see that our professional conversation around the models of reflection was reflective, reflexive and critical, and highlighted autonomy and self-determination of those involved. This group of teachers already work in "**a dialogical team context** that enables them to hear the alternative perspectives so vital for reflective practice" (Finlay, 2008, p. 17, emphasis in the original). There is trust and openness in the conversation, where the element of challenge still means confidence in asking questions, seeking clarification and alert to all points of view. As a teacher-researcher, I take the responsibility for the quality of outcome, particularly in terms of

the balance of critical and celebratory stances taken in relation to practitioner research (Groundwater-Smith & Mockler, 2007). I began to ask myself if:

> *… my actions are consistent with my espoused value base. I value inclusivity; everyone has the right to be heard, offer opinion, to be listened to, but how well do I accept opposition? Do I have to be the one with the know-how* ?
> (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018).

As espoused in the *Cosán* framework for teachers' learning there is no "one size fits all" model for reflection on learning, and teachers are encouraged to develop approaches that work best for them. Even though our professional dialogue has allowed reflection on reflection (June 2018), I questioned if I had imposed a mechanistic structure on what was already happening for these teachers. In looking further than the group of teachers involved in the study, I could see that we:

> *engage in professional development activities across all the dimensions of teacher learning outlined in Cosán. We identify our professional development needs, supporting newly qualified teachers in this, although currently we are yet to be formally part of Droichead, the national induction programme.*
> (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018)

However, we are only active agents of our own work because of "the interaction of individual 'capacity' with environing conditions" (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 22) , which have "*encouraged a questioning mindset as we developed responses to presenting challenges*" (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018), which may not present in other schools, while still addressing mandatory systemic needs. This has led to a shared sense of responsibility and mutual accountability which has helped us to become "*confident and have the self-belief to question, discuss and defend practice in a deliberate sustained way*" (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018). We are working to establish "a culture of collaborative professionalism in which teachers develop and grow day by day through feedback and joint work" (Fullan & Hargreaves, 2016, p. 21). Our teachers are making things happen by focussing on the wider questions, that go beyond just making practice work more smoothly, "*by acknowledging challenges and difficulties, by constantly asking why we do the things we do*" *and being* "*concerned with the wider picture and purposes and consequences of education*" (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018). Current assumptions about teaching and learning, and schooling are open to critique and can be transformed (Crochran-Smith and Lytle, 2009, p. 155).

Once again drawing inspiration from Ireland's heritage of Celtic thought (O' Donoghue, 1998), I considered "*if instead of intruding on the new ground of our community, we have observed the dignity of painfully earning passage and the shelter of belonging has gathered itself around us*" (Reflective Diary, 3rd December 2018). I had always questioned how I would know when we got there. This reflective experience has allowed me time to reframe my thoughts. I now know that it is the sense of work as a "poetics of growth" (O' Donoghue, 1997, p. 162) or the learning within the school that has created a sense of belonging. But this is only talk until it enters practice. Consequently, as a teacher-researcher, I let go of the structure of Heron's co-operative inquiry and trusted in this process of community, which has achieved what Heron (1996) describes as human flourishing, the "mutually enabling balance between autonomy, co-operation and hierarchy" (p. 127).

7.11 Reflection From the Classroom

The Teaching Council (2016b, p. 22) envisages that teachers' learning journeys will be guided by standards that will facilitate them, as individuals or collectively, in reflecting critically on their teaching and learning and the relationship between them. As learning professionals, the *Cosán* standards mean that teachers demonstrate a commitment to:

- quality teaching and learning for their students and themselves, and
- continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice, to support that quality teaching and learning in a sustainable way.

(The Teaching Council, 2016b, p. 22)

These standards are set to a high level so that teachers can interpret and apply them flexibly in their own unique contexts in identifying areas for further learning, planning for their learning, celebrating their learning experiences and accomplishments, and demonstrating ongoing commitment as learning professionals. I used these standards to analyse and discuss reflections from the classroom. It must be noted that while these reflections are those of the support team, the class teachers involved are part of ongoing conversations as part of this process of "inquiry as stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) in the school.

7.11.1 Quality Learning for Children

The support team's reflection-on-action documentation in December 2018 (Appendix L) showed the impact on the learning of the children. Their feedback showed that group work, as Baines et al. (2017) suggest, can be very exciting, fun, rewarding and motivating (p. 17). The children reported that they "love doing things in a group". The experience had been "fun and very informative"; they had learned "lots about the president including who was the first female president of Ireland". The work done by the class teachers in teaching skills of skimming and scanning had had the desired impact on the children as they "weren't highlighting everything like we have seen before".

The support teachers agreed that the children had worked co-operatively in the groups but found that strong characters in each class "meant that the roles were even more important and had to be constantly revised as each session went on as a reminder to the children to undertake their own role". This was particularly true of the *Manager* "as several students were over powering and took on traits of the manager role when it wasn't their turn". However, it was noted that the children with additional needs enjoyed the *Manager's* role "as they felt they didn't need to do as much writing or reporting and they liked this". It was "[g]ood for their confidence". This concurred with Baines et al. (2017) as they were "sufficiently challenged without them having to take on too much" (p. 34).

Working with children in the younger Second Classes, meant adapting the content structure of each lesson, which was deemed successful, but co-operative working and developing presentation skills remained the focus (Appendix K). A support team audio recorded session, 22nd March 2019, at the end of this block of work, and in which I participated, shows that when discussing if the children had worked co-operatively, there was agreement that each group was different, *"…it's the mix, isn't it? Whoever is in the group".* Some children worked effectively, while it was clear in other groups that children "dominated the interaction and work" (Baines et al., 2017, p. 24). One teacher explained that she :

> *found sometimes that … the children who are naturally bossy did kinda just naturally take that role and then you do have some kids that maybe are not … weren't as involved in the project … they naturally sit back, and the other kids naturally take over … even though there was defined roles*.

But having several teachers in the room meant that when this was noticed, the children could be supported through prompts or reminders of their roles. Also, it was deemed to be effective when "*two of them had the same role"* or when the role of the *Supporter* was used to help children who may have difficulty with literacy skills to be "sufficiently comfortable to contribute to the task" (Baines et al., 2017, p. 24).

Teachers' reports on the children's own oral reflections at the end of the block of work suggested that they were developing an understanding of what they are expected to learn in undertaking these roles. The role of the *Manage*r was very popular, although it was reported that one group of children thought it was difficult because "*it was hard to decide who does what when everyone wants the same jo*b", while another group thought it was "*hard to sort out the arguing and fighting*". Other children did not find this role difficult and described it as "*easy 'cos my group was good at taking turns … I liked being kind to everyone*" and "*my group didn't fight, so it was very easy*". The role of the *Supporter* was reported as favoured by the children because, "*they get to walk around*" and "*liked moving around and getting different things*", but it was also noted that the children thought "*there were lots of thing to collect, it was a very busy job*". While some children reflected that the work of the *Recorder* is difficult because it is "*hard to keep up with the writing*" and "*my hand got very tired*", another child reportedly liked this role, saying "*I like writing, so I liked the job*". Similarly, in reflecting on the role of the *Reporter*, the children explained that they enjoyed it because they "*liked talking out loud to the class*" and "*liked standing up and looking at the audience*", while others explained that it "*was hard to feel confident" … "sometimes I got nervous*".

The children had been helped to devise their own success criteria for teamwork. When reflecting on these, they described liking teamwork because they like "*reading and learning interesting things*" and that they "*got to learn other people's thoughts and ideas*". But they also acknowledged that it is difficult when "*everyone wasn't listening when they should be"*. One teacher commented that their reflections were "*very*

honest" and "*insightful",* and showed that they understood, "*they got the core"* of co-operative work. She noted but also explained that because the children reflect weekly, they have no problem … "*they are mad for it*". Foundations were being laid for the children to become actively involved in beginning to monitor and assess their own and others' learning.

7.11.2 Teacher Learning Demonstrating Professional Growth

During this meeting, 22nd March 2019, teachers noted the how effective the adapted structure of each session (Appendix K) had been for the younger children, and this was considered as ideal for older "*more challenging classes*" where necessary. Minor adaptions to allow the children more easily record the answers to the questions to complete their projects were suggested. But more importantly, considerations to ensure equitable access for all children means that less information, and more "*middle ground"* information should be provided in future work as "*it has to be so basic ... like the information ... so that everyone in the group could do it".* Also, when reflecting on the management of small group work, the organisation of children in their groups, ready to start, "*which does, unfortunately*, *fall to the class teacher to do that",* made a difference to the ever-present time constraints in the classroom. One teacher elaborated:

> *... at the end there is always reflection, and you don't want to be rushed each week where time for the children's reflections was being cut short ... you don't want to be cutting that part as that's where we really learn and that's when they learn as well*.

A suggestion was made that the classroom daily schedule could detail when small group work is happening, and that time could be allocated so that the children would be prepared and ready, and the children would "*have it in their head and they're focussed then*". It could be said that the teachers were revising their knowledge or understanding in new ways, which Timperley (2015) describes as actionable knowledge and without which classroom practice is unlikely to change (p. 54).

In terms of planning for group work, the teachers focussed on their own interactions with the children and were "motivated to take the risk to examine their own practice in

the interests of improving student outcomes" (Timperley, 2015, p. 26). It was noted that prior knowledge of the children is essential in assigning roles, as reflected in one teacher's comment, "… *in hindsight … I didn't really know those children … so it would have been good to meet up with [class teacher] beforehand and maybe pre-plan those roles"*. Another teacher agreed, explaining that " *You do kinda panic when you have all the roles and you're just like [saying] here you haven't done this yet and … you don't really put too much thought into it"*, concurring with literature that "roles must be used and selected with care" (Baines et al., 2017, p. 49). It was suggested that if the roles were also documented on their project folders, the children would know the timing of their turn to undertake a particular role in advance of the work. One teacher felt that this would be "*good for them to be thinking about their role ... they get the Reporter [card] ... and they're looking at ...they are kind of in the zone" ... to get them into the mindset of their role*". However, while it was recognised here that teachers are central to setting up and supporting effective group work and its development, Baines et al. (2017) contend that defining characteristic of group work " is that *the balance of ownership and control of the work shifts towards the pupils themselves*" (p. 14, emphasis in the original). Teachers acknowledged that the allocation of a specific place for each group's materials and project work allowed for this, as one teacher reflects, "… *they didn't have to ask teachers. You want them to be as responsible for their own role as much as possible. I think it kind of made them feel that extra responsibility"*.

It was agreed that the younger children were not shy in presenting their work, "*which is good, starting them at that age*", then they can learn that "*this is what you do*", as part of showing learning. While the success criteria were taught to the children, and they could relate them to the teachers prior to presenting, one teacher remarked that "*they don't do it"*. However, they could reflect after each presentation, using the success criteria to make one positive comment about it. While it had been specified that children would present one picture and one piece of information, some could do this others could not. But the question also arose about the clarity of this task for the children. One teacher commented that it "*wasn't very clear like whether… were they supposed to read out the question and the answer or just the answer from the information … some of them were kind of picking a random piece a sentence from the middle of the information"*. The teachers displayed a trust "that their views would be

respected and that others would take the time to listen and understand" (Timperley, 2015, p. 24), and they worked together solve this identified issue.

Time was clearly an issue in this session in the classroom. And, while the class teachers had worked on these skills outside of these weekly sessions, other school commitments at this time of the year had impacted on this. The possibility of extending the time of this session for presentation work was discussed, and it was agreed that this could be implemented in further such sessions. Value is placed on the children developing presentation skills and, as one teacher commented, "*if that is something we want them to be working on, we need to put more emphasis on it*". This epitomises what McArdle and Coutts (2010) refer to as shared sense-making within "a social and intellectual environment … which depends on the experience of shared values and the attempt to take action together to support these values" (p. 206) .

A Follow-Through Inspection in 2018 had acknowledged that as this collaborative and co-operative way of working had been developed, it should be used more systematically and consistently in all settings and across a wider range of curricular areas. In looking forward to this future work, I prompted discussion on the application of small group work outside of project-type work. Its potential for use in maths, particularly with the older classes "*especially something [in] like measures, ... capacity ... shapes*…", where there would be an "*end result*" and "*its practical*", was considered appropriate. Likewise, in English, the possibility of working on writing genres was mentioned as applicable to small group working. One support teacher acknowledged that "*You want it to be become kinda second nature to them… . to have these skills",* while another confirmed it as "a *more organised approach to group work when they have to do anything together*". It was decided that possible curricular areas and activities could be suggested and communicated to the class teachers, and it was suggested that we could "*leave it open to the teachers and say, you know, we are available and is anybody interested in us coming in"* to work in the classroom for short period of time if they wanted to employ group work as part of any particular lesson. To embed this practice in the classroom, it was decided that the immediate next step would be to share our learning by holding sessions for the teachers in their class bands of lower, middle, and senior classes. And as the co-ordinating teacher had documented this work as the process evolved, it would not be difficult to upload files

to our Google Drive to include the timetable of the six weekly sessions, the role templates, posters, sample of resources, advice on preparation work for suitable topics, weekly reflective questions, and reflection-on-action prompts for the end of the block of work. This would also include the documented teacher reflections on the process throughout. In this way the relevant "aspects may be shared … to inform and support professional conversations with others" (Teaching Council, 2016b, p.20).

While the support team had used the question from Johns' Model of Refection during the early work with the Fifth Classes (November – December 2018), it had proven too difficult. They were applying a mechanistic structure on their reflection work, which had been done in a more organic way heretofore, as one teacher explained: that after "*the Fifth Class session, we were like it's just hard to answer that. So basically, we were what are the questions … coming up all the time"*. Consequently, during the meeting, 22nd March 2019, the professional conversation had been framed by reflecting on what went well, changes that could be made, difficulties encountered, and the children's reflections on the experience. Recording reflection-in action was considered difficult because of the busyness of the classroom, but the teachers were "*doing it orally*" in a natural way as was suggested by a teacher who said, "*honestly when we looked at this it made me so aware that we are reflecting all the time.* I agree but I could also see that they were engaging in an intentional process of critical, reflexive reflection. While not necessarily using the language of the John's Model of reflection, in a respectful way these teachers brought "different knowledge and perspectives to bear on topics and … model[ed] intellectual inquiry by asking questions, seeking to understand differences" (Brookfield, 2017, p. 3). They now assume "that part of the work of practitioners individually and collectively is to participate in educational and social change" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 121).

7.12 Conclusion

This particular focus of my PhD work is set in the context of the development phase of *Cosán,* the national framework for teachers' learning. I wanted to inquire into how we engage in the process of reflection on our purposive collaborative teaching and learning activities; on the impact of that learning for ourselves as professionals, for our practice and for the children, while investigating how we can record this in a sustainable way. In

this I appreciated that student learning is strongly influenced by what and how teachers teach, and that teaching is a complex activity that is influenced not only by the wider educational system and curricular demands but by teacher beliefs and assumptions, and values about what knowledge or content is important, how students learn, and how best to teach. As teachers, we must see that engaging in professional learning and development will lead to positive change for ourselves and our students. However, as teachers, we do not learn about the curricular content and pedagogy and then learn how to implement this, but rather we "develop this knowledge through a mix of theory, practice, and finding out how students respond in a particular context" (Timperley, 2015, p. 12). While there are many ways in which teachers can engage in professional learning and development, and this is recognised in the *Cosán* framework, this study has focussed on in-school professional learning opportunities to allow teachers to take agency and responsibility for their own learning and become "aware of how to construct those opportunities, and have monitoring systems to ensure any changes in practice are more effective for their student learners" (Timperley, 2015, p. 11). The nature and extent of the social and professional relationships within which teachers work are important. I consider that relationships in our school, "supplemented by strong horizontal ties" (Priestley et al., 2015, p.103), have facilitated a collegiate and collaborative culture. This organic leadership (King, 2012) has facilitated the necessary commitment to a culture which encourages this professional inquiring stance to practice, allowing us to problematise or question practice. In this way we take ownership of our practice, developing collective responsibility for making a difference, and are motivated to take the risk to examine practice in the interests of improving outcomes for our learners. The exploration of issues of shared concern and the ensuing learning with and from each other has proven to be a "source of efficacy and confidence in the process of adopting new practices" (Darling-Hammond et al., 2017, p.18, in reference to Lieberman & Wood, 2002).

I now appreciate that the educational influence in our school community has improved educational thought and practice which values others in the community and contributes to an enhanced experience of school, work and life for all. I consider that this collaborative professional learning we experience exemplifies Hargreaves and O'Connor's (2018) collaborative professionalism of "exercising good judgement, being committed to improvement, sharing and deepening expertise" as teachers who "work

together rather than only talk, share and reflect together" (p. 4), learning with and from the children. This has offered improved knowledge, skills and competencies which impacts on the quality of teaching and learning. It has supported a critical stance that allows the teachers to consider their practice in a new light and demonstrate a commitment to professional growth for enhanced practice, as espoused in the *Cosán* framework. Professional conversations have been instrumental in this and have allowed us to "flexibly integrate support and expectations to improve in ways that ensure the participants feel respected, can learn, and are motivated to change" (Timperley, 2015, p. 10) and to engage in critical reflective practice. We have identified an appropriate and sustainable mechanism for recording our learning through our Google Drive. However, it must be noted that essential sustained interaction has been facilitated by structures across the school timetable that gives sufficient time for effective collaborative planning, reflection, and professional learning to take place. Through *Cosán*, the Teaching Council (2016b) is seeking to foster a culture of "powerful professional learning" that is based on teachers' active engagement in their own learning, for their benefit and that of their students (p. 3). I know this as the "poetics of growth" (O' Donohue, 1997, p. 162). This is the learning that has contributed to the building of a shelter of belonging in our school community, which is central to my contribution to knowledge and is elucidated in the final chapter of this thesis.

Chapter 8 Conclusion

8.1 Introduction

In the 1990s and early 2000s, Irish society saw significant changes which brought growth in ethnic and cultural diversity. Our school, when it opened in 2007, was unique in that it was part of a wider vision for a community that reflected a new, multicultural Ireland. As an inclusive school, we have welcomed families from all over the globe who made their home in the area and chose our school to educate their children. In addition, over the years, we have had a relatively young staff as newly qualified teachers, others had changed career paths and were relatively new to teaching, while three of us, the Principal, myself as Deputy Principal and the Assistant Principal, had come from long careers in more established schools. In drawing inspiration from Ireland's rich spiritual heritage, I could appreciate that all of us, albeit in differing ways, experienced that as our old shelter collapsed, we lost what it held and we had to enter into the beginnings of a new shelter of belonging that would slowly build around us (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 340). Although loss certainly brings pain and there is difficulty in the unpredictable transition, O'Donohue (1998) reminds us that loss is the "sister of discovery"; the beauty of loss is the room it makes for us to experience and enjoy new things (p. 340). Implicit in this new belonging for O' Donohue (1998) is growth. It is moving forward with integrity, creativity, flexibility, and a receptivity that allows a hospitality to difference, and in this sense "individuality and originality enrich self and others" (O' Donohue, 2003, p. 133). Belonging then is open and challenging but it can free us from traps of obsession. The shelter of this belonging can empower the community to be sure of the ground on which it stands (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 7), as it endures external pressure and confusion. Indeed, true community, O'Donohue (2003) suggests "is an ideal where the full identities of awakened and realized individuals challenge and complement each other" (p. 133). While O' Donohue (1998) portrays a spiritual reality with insight from a range of ancient beliefs and practices, my thesis investigated what he terms as how we observed the dignity of painfully earning passage (p. 340) as we developed a shelter of belonging in the educational context of a school community, while also responding to system level demands.

8.2 My Research Work

I located my research within the critical paradigm. It was concerned with praxis, the *why* question, which required an integration of theory and practice as reflective and practical moments "in a dialectical process of reflection, enlightenment and political struggle carried out by groups for the purpose of their own emancipation" (Carr & Kemmis,1986, p. 144). By that, I mean what Arendt (1958) associates as human freedom in the concept of natality; the capacity to reveal our uniqueness or subjectivity in initiating something that did not exist before. Hence, my research investigated how we could uncover agency in and ownership of our community. We needed the opportunity to influence our lives and work; to develop the capacity for a self-reflective understanding that would help us to explain *why* we could not just repeat what was happening in other schools and to know *what* it is we needed to do and *why*, and to take informed action. This called for a living inquiry in action research.

This thesis comprised a boxset of three related action research narratives which have allowed the reader to experience our educational journey as one which opened new perspectives by questioning taken-for-granted assumptions; renewing our thinking, providing opportunities for us to accept responsibility for our own learning, and developing our capacity and efficacy as learners. It was this educational influence that allowed us to create our own pedagogy of the unique (Farren, 2006), our personal theories of practice. In the first narrative, as we engaged with *Aistear: the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework (2009)*, we focussed on assessment for learning (AfL). I have shown how we worked in the early stages of its implementation to enhance our understanding of formative assessment as part of our day-to-day interactions with children to progress their learning. The second narrative detailed the exploration of the inclusion of parents and home values in the construction of the teaching and learning environment. This was a small step towards positive parent-teacher collaboration which allowed an exchange of knowledge, values, and cultural background experiences. In addition, the reader can see how this work impacted on whole-school thinking about how we could begin to develop processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities. The final narrative, set in the context of the development phase of *Cosán,* the national framework for teachers'

learning, was an inquiry into our reflective practice, as ongoing collaborative professionalism integral to the creation of a shelter of belonging.

Rigour in this research was assured through adherence to Winter's principles (1989) for the conduct of action research. The principle of reflexivity is seen throughout this thesis as my thinking evolved over time in examining underlying assumptions, experiences and actions. Dialectic critique is illustrated in our inquiry with a group parents of children with special and/or additional learning needs. We recognised our existing assumptions and resolved contradictions. In working through the Individual Education Plan (IEP) process we knew these parents wanted to help their children and we set about doing this. It was in our discussion and reflection that we learned how our teacher knowledge was complemented by their parent knowledge. We knew the kinds of activities that would promote the necessary underlying skills to support the children's learning, but this expertise was enhanced by their knowledge of their children. The parents too began to see that they had something to offer in this dialogical relationship. They knew what interested their children and they could adapt our suggestions to suit what worked in their homes. Yet, the impact of this work became school-wide. Our assumptions of parental involvement were challenged. As a school we had identified the further development of home-school links as a priority, which was also recognised in the Whole School Evaluation in 2015, but the recommendation was made to develop whole-school processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities. We had been doing quite a lot, but we had a narrow concept of what this meant, which was based on previous experience in other schools. We had thought that parental involvement required parents to be on the ground in the school, which it can do, but we gradually came to our own understanding of this complex phenomenon. Whole-staff discussion and reflection helped us to develop a deeper understanding of what it means for us to work with parents; what partnership with parents means. This clarified parental involvement with school, with schooling, and most importantly, it emphasised the importance of parental engagement with children's learning. This has impacted on how we are now working to involve parents in policy development and school activities.

In conducting this research, I have considered, as McNiff (2013) suggests, how it has worked for a social order in which people care about one another "in safety and

kindness, where they are free to exercise their unlimited capacities for curiosity, creativity and attachment, in equal measure, in whatever way is right for them" (p. 176). I wanted to honour epistemic and political participation in this inquiry process. I acknowledged what Reason and Bradbury (2008) assert that researching with people means that they are engaged as full persons and that the inquiry is based directly on their understanding (p. 9). As well as producing knowledge that was useful to us, I recognised how it could empower a shared competence that acknowledged our own capability in constructing and using our knowledge (Freire, 1970). This reflects Winter's principle of collaborative resource.

However, as Deputy Principal, I was conscious that this was my research. While the research areas arose from questions that we as a staff considered important and I valued and sought the opinions of others, this meant putting my ideas and those of others, and our familiar routines, at risk of critique in our communicative action. I recall a robust conversation about the use of documentary panels to make learning visible in the classrooms, an idea I had introduced from my research of literature, which debated if this was additional work, but the safe communicative space we had created had facilitated this, and documentary panels continue to be used to this day. Winter (1989) explains the process is not just one of risk of refutation but of exploring possibilities for transformation (p. 60). An example of such transformation is revealed during the inquiry into our reflective, professional learning. I had been focussed on how we could use John's Model of Reflection, thinking that this would provide a structure for how we could show and revisit our learning. However, it was through the reflective process and work with the Teaching Council that I explicated my own understanding of professional learning and reflective practice as a way of being, rather than an *add-on,* which is not mechanised and routine. This period of reflection, and the engagement with external others, allowed me to see that critical reflective practice was already happening with the group of teachers in my study. I could see that our professional conversation around the models of reflection was reflective, reflexive, critical, and highlighted the autonomy and self-determination of those involved. Trust and openness in this conversation, with the element of challenge, revealed that we were comfortable in asking questions, seeking clarification and were alert to all points of view. In looking further than the group of teachers involved in the study, I could see that as a school we were already engaging in the professional development activities envisioned in *Cosán,* the

framework for teachers' learning. While theory informed our practice, our communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987a, 1987b) has helped us to develop our own theories of education from practice, which the reader can read in the multiplicity of viewpoints in the plural text of this thesis. My work has been guided by principles of respect and understanding. I recognise each person's entitlement to equality of opportunity to realise their potential for growth, to be listened to, to speak, to offer opinions, to question and to be happy, yet to be responsible for his or her words and actions towards others; to belong to a community that works, lives, and learns together for the good of all. I see this as reflected in O'Donohue's understanding of a shelter of belonging. I now show my emerging understanding of this in the educational context of our school community.

8.3 My Understanding of a Shelter of Belonging in our School Community

O' Donohue (1998) explains how an affinity of thought between people and an openness to exploration allows a community of spirt to grow, and a belonging begins to come alive between them (p. 371). I understand that for this to happen, social and professional relationships need to be nurtured. A high level of intensity and reciprocity in the nature and quality of these relationships has evolved within our school. This has been made possible through the authentic leadership of the Principal in genuine engagement with himself and others. He has a willingness to take risks and to be resilient and push boundaries because he can balance immediate policy pressure in light of the bigger picture of doing the right thing (Priestley et al., 2015, p. 132). Thus, while formal leadership is valued, it is supported by strong ties throughout the school community. This values leadership as a collective activity happening in interactions between people across the school community (Preedy, 2016). Strong, reciprocal relationships allow for the recognition of talents, interests and expertise, and has resulted in our communicative action (Habermas, 1984, 1987a, 1987b) in a collaborative culture where informal teacher relationships have flourished. The significance of these relationships for teacher agency in exerting professional judgement and discretion in their work is acknowledged. Equality of consideration is given to difference in creating conditions for collegiality, which is also extended to the SNAs as paraprofessionals in the classroom. Opportunities are provided for staff to engage as autonomous agents in learning that benefits themselves and their students. Integrity is seen in how we support

and learn with and from each other, taking appropriate responsibility for doing things for and with others for the sake of their future autonomy (Heron, 1996, p. 127). All views are valued in this dialogic relationship. But there is an implicit trust that we work towards identified goals, with a clear focus on the purpose and process. Essential sustained interaction is facilitated by structures across the school timetable that gives sufficient time for effective collaborative planning, reflection, and professional learning to take place. Central to all of this is the vision of a high level of respect and co-operation between management, staff, parents, and pupils. We are working to enter a community, creating with parents what Pushor (2012) describes as a shared landscape in which there is reciprocity of mutual engagement in the development of whole school processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities. A democratic professional relationship (Biesta, 2020, p. 114) is emerging in this dialogue in which the differing, but complementary knowledge of parents and teachers work to enhance the education of the children in our care. In all of this, I see the enactment of O' Donohue's shelter of belonging in our integrity, creativity and receptivity, which has invoked the creation of a forward-thinking, collaborative culture of interdependence in the school.

Trust and openness have emerged which permit the element of challenge; we are comfortable in asking questions, seeking clarification and are alert to all points of view. This has required what Dewey (1933, 1994) describes as the necessary attitudes of whole-heartedness or single-mindedness, open-mindedness, and intellectual responsibility that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others. In this way, collaborative professionalism has emerged in which there is commitment to helping and learning from each other, and from the children and their parents, as we engage in challenging work together in which "everyone gets the big picture. They see it, live it, and create it together" (Hargreaves & O' Connor, 2015, p. 7). We are mutually accountable in making things happen by focussing on wider questions that go beyond just making practice work more smoothly; acknowledging challenges and difficulties, constantly asking *why* we do the things we do, and being concerned with the wider picture and purposes and consequences of education. This has not always been comfortable but there is a moral imperative in our collective responsibility for making a difference for the learning of all. In this way we take ownership and develop collective responsibility for making a difference. We are motivated to take the risk to

examine our practice in the interests of improving the learning experiences and outcomes for the children.

Underpinning all of this is reflective practice. This is not mechanised and routine reflection but a way of working that has allowed us to adopt an "inquiry as stance", a critical habit of mind "where every site of professional practice becomes a potential site of inquiry", and which involves " a continual process of making current arrangements problematic" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009, p. 121). I consider this to be growth and learning, which is not only about making practice work more smoothly, rather, in building our shelter of belonging, it has, as O'Donohue (1998) notes, "liberated us from traps of falsity and obsession" (p. xxii). In ensuring that our actions are consistent with our values, we ask *why* we do *what* we do, *who* decides and indeed *whose* interests are served by this. This requires a critical awareness or a self-awareness in terms of existing assumptions and whether they might be helpful or not. In being hospitable to difference within the school community, we had also been encouraged to also ask *why not* and to look outside in co-ordinated networking, under the direction of our National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) psychologist, with other schools of a similar demographic. This allowed us to begin to explore issues of shared concern and to learn with and from each other. Additionally, staff have engaged in off-site training and have conducted further academic studies, all of which have impacted on practice in the school community. But in problematising practice we do not simply apply theory to practice, instead we use it to support our thinking in line with practical experience to make conscious decisions about possible future actions, the 'artistry' which is involved in professional practice (Schön, 1983, p. vii). Together we develop our own theories of practice.

This has been, as Rogoff (2003) describes, "a process of people's changing participation in the sociocultural activities of their communities" (p. 52). Sustainability is assured because through this transformation, individual roles have changed and developmental transitions in the community have become evident; guidance may have been needed in early days, now we are all co-researchers in our inquiring stance to practice. It is not only individuals that have changed and developed, they also have changed the community in which we now live. While this belonging has, as O'Donohue (1998) says, empowered us to be sure of the ground on which we stand,

there is an understanding that this continually calls for a disposition of growth. We are a community who has developed and maintained a vision which ensures proactivity in facing presenting challenges. We know that we must maintain our critical focus and remain graciously receptive to the constant of change.

8.4 Recommendations

Being characteristically situational, this action research concerned a specific context, in which the internal conditions, management structure and supports allowed teachers to work together to reflect on practice, leading to learning and improvement. It is about our school through its formative years as we observed the dignity of earning passage in building our shelter of belonging. Reflexivity in action research insists on modest claims from judgements made from this personal experience, but these have been validated through collaboration with other teachers, and in my own participation in both formative and summative validation sessions with co-action researchers. The knowledge it has created can be defined as what we have learned together in communicative action while working towards intersubjective agreement, mutual understanding, and unforced consensus about *what* to do and *why*. It is my responsibility to share this with others who, in being mindful of their own contexts, may consider its findings and recommendations useful in their practice.

8.4.1 Relevance for Schools and Teachers

This educative stance to practice depends on Dewey's (1933, 1944) attitudes of whole-heartedness or single-mindedness, open-mindedness, and intellectual responsibility that value the personal and intellectual growth of oneself and of others. I now show what this means from my learning, which has come from my research over many years. I can suggest the following:

- Essential to this is an openness to change and the ability to view presenting challenges as learning resources and opportunities for new beginnings. This means taking the necessary social and political action of deliberating about *what* to get done, *who* decides and *whose* interests are served: asking not only w*hat*, but *how* and *why*, and for *whom*.

- A balance of support and high expectations is necessary. Strong school leadership and management in nurturing a culture of professional learning which actively supports staff engagement is emphasised. While formal leadership is acknowledged, a teacher leadership across the school and occurring in the interactions between people holds great importance. Building this leadership capacity is key. This is more than just leading innovations; it is a way that inclusive relationships of trust, challenge, equity, support, and mutual respect are cultivated. This will facilitate the necessary commitment to professional "inquiry as stance" (Cochran-Smith & Lytle, 2009) to practice.

- While there is most definitely value in informal conversations with colleagues, ongoing and sustained professional conversations which are supportive, respectful and yet challenging, while focussing on teaching and learning, are essential. These are successful if they can take place over an extended period of time in a process of inquiry that challenges current assumptions, allows decisions to be made, and systematic action to be taken, while monitoring its effectiveness on practice.

- This work needs to be embedded in teachers' daily work; it cannot be regarded as an *add-on.* It must be grounded in the questions that are of concern to those involved, while also addressing school and systemic needs. This is the premise of *Cosán*, which suggests that teachers strike "an appropriate balance between the enhancement of their own practice as individuals on the one hand, and the creation of a responsive and dynamic community of practice on the other" (The Teaching Council, 2016b, p. 12).

- To ensure sustainability, the community needs to cultivate collaborative inquiry, individual and co-operative working skills, and build competence in their own adaptive expertise in learning and using shared professional judgement from *on-the-job* experience to generate knowledge for action; to generate theory from practice. This knowledge is developed by and with teachers and SNAs in their engagement with each other, with the children and their parents, and with external knowledge and expertise.

- A culture that is supportive of critically reflective practice where it is safe to challenge old ideas and new ones, and where errors are welcomed as learning

opportunities is essential. In this way, staff are motivated to take the risk to examine their practice and develop collective responsibility for making a difference in their learning, and in interests of improving student learning. This ownership of practice will celebrate successes but will also problematise practice in a constant endeavour to improve.

- Most importantly, a responsive dynamic community of practice requires a creative use of time for effective collaborative planning, reflection, and professional learning to take place in dialogic or communicative action. Structures are needed that give sufficient time for effective individual and collaborative professional learning to take place. This also needs to be supportive of networking outside of the school.

8.4.2 Relevance for Policy

To support the implementation of the National Literacy and Numeracy Strategy (2011) and School Self-Evaluation (SSE), *Looking at our School* 2016, the quality framework for both primary and post-primary schools, was provided by Department of Education and Skills (2016). This framework continues to provide standards to help assess how good practice is and, very importantly, to point the way towards improvement where needed. It acknowledges that maintaining and improving the quality of learning in schools is a constant challenge in a rapidly changing world. Recognition of the central role of teachers in any effort to improve learning is given. There is an acceptance that where schools reflect on the quality of their work and plan for how it can be improved, students learn better. In providing a set of standards describing 'effective practice' and 'highly effective practice', the framework helps schools to identify their strengths and areas for development. This allows schools to take ownership of their own development and improvement. Two of the statements of highly effective practice (Department of Education and Skills, 2016) indicate that:

> The principal and other leaders in the school **ensure that professional development is firmly based on action research and is adapted to the identified needs of the school**. They **maximise opportunities to develop teachers' capacity and competence** to improve teaching and learning.

> The principal and other leaders in the school support and **encourage** the active participation of teachers in professional networks **to improve pupil learning**. (p. 23, emphasis in the original)

Thus, this quality framework views schools as dynamic learning organisations, where teachers are enabled to work individually and collectively to build their professional capacity in order to support continuous improvement in teaching and learning. Indeed, the framework views "career-long professional development as central to the teacher's work and firmly situates reflection and collaboration at its heart" (Department of Education, 2016, p. 7). This is my understanding of the "poetics of growth" (O' Donohue, 1997, p. 162) in our shelter of belonging; being supported in taking responsibility for our professional learning and growth through ongoing reflection, and in an inquiring stance to practice. This does not just happen, time is needed.

The Teaching Council (2011) too states that continuous professional development (CPD) is both a right and a responsibility for all registered teachers, and that it should be based on their "identified needs within the school as a learning community" (p. 19). *Cosán*, the national framework for teachers' learning, uses the Irish word for pathway to explain that the learning is a journey, "and one in which the act of travelling on that journey is more important than the destination" (The Teaching Council, 2016b, p. 2). It is a flexible framework which recognises the many ways in which teachers learn, in their different contexts, as their personal and professional circumstances change. It stresses that autonomy and choice will ensure that teachers can identify and pursue relevant, high quality, sustained learning opportunities which are connected to their work in the classroom and their schools**.** Additionally, *Cosán* recognises the right of teachers to have access to rich and varied learning opportunities, which can be formal and/or informal, personal and/or professional, collaborative and/or individual, and school-based and/or external**.** And last, but by no means least, it too recognises that collaborative, meaningful reflection can enhance teachers' professional learning, in turn enhancing students' learning.

This PhD work has enabled me to contribute to the development phase of *Cosán* through my participation in the Demonstration Model. I am one of twelve facilitators nationally working to support teachers in local Education Centres as they explore the *Cosán* framework and develop reflection as key tool in meaningful professional

learning. Implementation challenges and systemic considerations, in particular finding time for this have been raised in both the consultation and development phases of *Cosán.* However, lessons can be learned from the *Framework for Junior Cycle* (Department of Education and Skills, 2015), at second level education, which recognises that teachers need professional time to engage in a range of professional collaborative activities to support its implementation. A proportion of this time allows for collaboration with teaching colleagues to support teaching, learning, and assessment. Time now needs to be given to primary schools. Staff meetings, and Croke Park hours, as part the Public Service Agreement (2010-2014) which provide for an additional 36 hours per school year at primary level, are already ways in which this happens. But these are *add-ons*. Teachers' commitment is essential to this way of working. Thus, more autonomy and creativity could be given in the use of time during the school day at primary level.

I also see this as including support services in promoting the shelter of belonging in communities who learn together. In fact, in a recent Teaching Council webinar, *Re-imagining on the cusp – what next for education post-Covid?* (June, 2021), Ciara O'Donnell, the director of the Professional Development Service for Teachers in Ireland (PDST), acknowledged the culture of teacher professionalism in their learning that was evident during the Covid-19 pandemic. There was recognition that this professional learning had not been identified for teachers but rather arose from professional ownership; this learning was not only something teachers knew they *should* do, but rather it was what they *wanted* to do**.** O'Donnell stated that schools now need to say what they want to learn and what they want to do. This must be allowed to translate into practice. In this way the potential for continued professional growth for enhanced professional practice to support quality teaching and learning can create a shelter of belonging for the whole school community.

8.5 Final Thought

In an affinity of thought between people and an openness to exploration, a community of spirit grows, and a belonging begins to come alive. This completes something in us (O'Donohue, 1998, p. 365). In the shelter of belonging of a community we each are open to encounter with one another. This recognises that in our plurality, we can each

reveal our own view, but this can then be developed in communication with others and also accommodate their distinctive points of view. Drawing on collective critical capacity in communicative spaces, each person's stories relate with the stories of others in a way that creates a shared meaning and understanding. This is "how we grow, it is where we learn to see who we are, what our needs are, and the unsuspecting effect our thinking and presence have on other lives" (O' Donohue, 1998, p. 371). I now can I say that I know who I am, what I am doing, and how I have contributed to our school community.

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Appendix A: Ethical Considerations

Ollscoil Chathair Bhaile Átha Cliath
Dublin City University

Dr Margaret Farren
School of Education Studies

19th January 2015

REC Reference: **DCUREC/2014/244**

Proposal Title: **Investigating educational influence in a new and developing intercultural school community**

Applicant(s): **Dr Margaret Farren; Ms. Bernadette Tobin**

Dear Margaret,

This research proposal qualifies under our Notification Procedure, as a low risk social research project. Therefore, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this research proposal.

Materials used to recruit participants should state that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee. Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Dónal O'Mathúna

DCU Research & Innovation

Dr Dónal O'Mathúna
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

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Ms Bernadette Tobin

School of STEM Education, Innovation and Global Studies

16 January 2018

REC Reference: **DCUREC/2017/198**

Proposal Title: **Investigating Teacher Collaboration as a Form of Professional Development**

Applicant(s): Ms Bernadette Tobin, Dr Margaret Farren

Dear Bernadette,

This research proposal qualifies under our Notification Procedure, as a low risk social research project. Therefore, the DCU Research Ethics Committee approves this project.

Materials used to recruit participants should state that ethical approval for this project has been obtained from the Dublin City University Research Ethics Committee.

Should substantial modifications to the research protocol be required at a later stage, a further amendment submission should be made to the REC.

Yours sincerely,

Donal O' Gorman

Dr Dónal O'Gorman
Chairperson
DCU Research Ethics Committee

DCU Research & Innovation

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Appendix B: Field Notes for Work-in-Progress Discussion

Field Notes Work-in-Progress Discussion

11th May 2015

Sharing the Data

1. **Interaction between Teacher and Child**
   - Discussion centres on what the child can do. It is agreed that she can answer questions. She can explain what she has built.
   - In moving her learning forward, the teacher clarifies what the child says and extends her sentences. The teacher also models sentences to extend language.

2. **Photographs**
   - One teacher shows photographic documentation of children with the questions she used to encourage them to explain their learning (p. 217).

3. **A Learning Story Template**

   - One of the support teachers who had worked in the Australian school system had experience in using Learning Stories. She presents her interaction with one young boy who was in the role of the teacher in Role Play Area. The Learning Story documents his use of previously learned knowledge of letter formation, but also his self-confidence, ability to take turns, to work co-operatively, and to share with others was captured.

   - This prompts discussion of what we consider important in learning in early childhood education.

4. **Important learning in early childhood education**

   - The difference between the way the content of the *Primary School Curriculum* and *Aistea*r is presented is discussed. It is agreed that the Curriculum's priority is on a wide range of knowledge and the development of a variety of concepts, skills and attitudes. Whereas we can see that *Aistear* views learning content as dispositions, values and attitudes, skills, knowledge, and understanding .

   - We look at the Aistear theme of *Well-being*. Reading from *Aistear: Principles and Themes*, we see that the aim here is to help children be strong psychologically and socially, to be healthy and fit, to be creative and spiritual, and to have a positive outlook on learning and life. We know that we would see this learning in the children's communication, in their organisation skills, and in their role play. The importance of emphasising to the children not to be afraid of making mistakes, and of learning from

mistakes is noted. It is agreed that Learning Stories could be a way to help us to look for evidence of learning and development in relation to *Aistear's* themes of well-being, identity and belonging, communicating, and exploring and thinking.

5. Making Learning Visible

- I introduce the idea of documentary panels as a further element of pedagogic documentation, explaining that they differ from display boards because they are designed to make learning visible.

- Class teachers are emphatic that they do not want additional work. They question how much additional work is involved, and how the display boards already in use differ. Again from her Australian experience, one support teacher explains that existing display boards in the classrooms could be modified to record children's interactions, their work and teacher comments

- Initial understanding of the panels appears to be that they would allow teachers and children to revise the learning in a unit of work.

6. Plan going forward to Cycle 2

- It was decided to create a template similar to the one A. had used, with the 4 themes of Aistear and their corresponding goals on the reverse to be ticked off as the children display this learning (pp. 218-219).
- Documentary panels, or as we would call them *Our Learning Wall*, would be trialled.
- The decision was taken by class teachers to change their fortnightly plans to include the four themes of Aistear

Next Work-in-Progress Discussion 06/05/2015

P.:	It's an aeroplane. That is the path to walk on.
Teacher:	Why did you build this ?
J. :	'Cos we wanted to build it.
Teacher:	Why did you put this piece on top?
J.:	'Cos that one [indicating to block below] is the seat. This one is the boot. This one is to drive.
Teacher:	Oh the steering wheel?
P. :	Yes, the steering wheel !

Learning Opportunity:

Extend vocabulary : pilot , wings, aisle, passengers, pilot

Open questions: Who will go on this plane? Where will they go?

Aistear learning story for :

Date

[Photograph here]

Observation

What can I do next?

Themes	Aims	Goals					
		1	2	3	4	5	6
Well-Being	l. Children will be strong psychologically and socially.						
	2.Children will be as healthy and fit as can be.						
	3.Children will be creative and spiritual.						
	4.Children will have positive outlooks on learning and life.						
Exploring and thinking	l. Children will learn about and make sense of the world.						
	2.Children will develop and use skills and strategies for observing, questioning, investigating, understanding, negotiating and problem solving and come to see themselves as explorers and thinkers.						
	3.Children will explore ways to represent ideas, feelings, thoughts, objects, and actions through symbols.						
	4.Children will have positive attitudes towards learning and develop dispositions like curiosity, playfulness, perseverance, confidence, resourcefulness, and risk-taking.						
Communication	l. Children will use non-verbal communication skills.						
	2.Children will use language.						
	3.Children will broaden their understanding of the world by making sense of experiences through language.						
	4.Children will express themselves creatively and imaginatively.						
Identity and belonging	1. Children will have strong self- identities, and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals and their own life stories.						
	2.Children will have a sense of group identity where links with their family and community are acknowledged and extended.						
	3.Children will be able to express their rights and show an understanding and regard for the identity, rights and views of others.						
	4.Children will see themselves as capable learners.						

Appendix C: Beyond the Sphere of the Immediate Inquiry

Suggestions for Junior Infant Report Writing

WELL-BEING

Focus is on developing as a person psychological and physical well-being.
Psychological well-being:

- Be flexible and having a positive outlook on learning is crucial
- Resilient
- Coping with change
- Coping when things go wrong
- Independence

Sample behaviours:

- X is capable of long periods of concentration during activities.
- X can sustain attention for an extended period of time.
- X will keep trying when faced with a problem or a puzzle.
- X enjoys the challenge of problem solving activities.
- X is happy to accept a challenge and will work with determination to overcome it.
- X can prefer others to lead the problem solving.
- X shows much persistence and determination in his/her work.
- X is happy to ask for help if she/he needs it.
- X is beginning to come and ask for help now if she/needs it.
- X is very self-reliant in problem solving.
- X is beginning to show more independence in his/her play and creative activities.
- X is very independent in the classroom and is very self-sufficient in his/her selection of resources and equipment.
- X's self-confidence has grown throughout the year.
- X can lack confidence when attempting a challenge independently but has
- more confidence when working with a friend.
- X has produced some lovely collaborative pieces when working with a friend and this is beginning to give him the independence to attempt more on his own.
- X is beginning to gain the confidence to work with greater independence.
- X can tend to become frustrated quickly when facing a challenge or problem and needs support to develop more resilience in more challenging/problem solving situations.
- X seizes a challenge –responding with excitement and determination.
- X is very self-motivated. He/she works always to give his/her best.
- X is often easily distracted and quickly changes activity. He/she moves around the classroom from one activity to the next during free play time.
- X tends to change activity or focus quite quickly and needs adult support to maintain concentration and focus to complete a task or activity.

IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Focus here is developing a positive sense of who they are and feeling that they are valued and respected. It is also about having a secure relationship with others:

- Have the confidence to voice their views and opinions, to make choices
- Understand the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour
- Interact, work co-operatively and help others
- Be responsible
- See themselves as capable learners

Sample behaviours:

- X is happy to follow a friend's lead in group activity.
- X is happy to work with others.
- X is happy to share his/her play with others.
- X is flexible in her/his play- happy to negotiate the turn of events according to the ideas of her/his friends.
- X plays fairly and kindly with care and regard for other's feelings and ideas.
- X gains a huge sense of pride from doing his best.
- X shows such delight at sharing his ideas.
- X often has lovely things to say about other's work. Likewise he loves hearing when others praise his achievements.
- X loves to share his achievements with his peers and with the adults he/works with.
- X is happy to listen to and learn from other children.
- X is able to follow rules when playing a game as part of a group.

COMMUNICATING

Focus here is about children sharing their experiences, thought, ideas and feelings with others with growing confidence and competence in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes**.** Children also learn to interpret what others are sharing with them. This involves giving, receiving and making sense of information through:

- Non-verbal communication
- Talking
- Listening
- Thinking
- Understanding
- Reading and writing

Sample behaviours:

Non-Verbal communication

- X understand and use non-verbal communication rules, such as turn-taking and making eye contact.

Speaking

- X is able to engage adults and other children in simple conversation.
- X is beginning to engage adults and other children in simple conversation.
- X is able to communicate his basic needs.
- X is learning how to communicate his basic needs using visual aids.
- X is able to express how he is feeling.
- X is learning how to express his feelings using visual aids.
- X can use language to / X is learning to using use language for ..... giving and receiving information, asking questions, requesting, refusing, expressing feelings.

Listening

- X is able to listen carefully to others.
- X is learning to listen to others.
- With the support of an adult, X is able to listen to others.
- X is able to maintain his attention for a sustained period of time.
- X is beginning to maintain his attention.
- With the support of an adult, X is able to maintain his attention for short periods of time.

Understanding

- X is beginning to understand some simple instructions.
- X is able to follow simple instructions with a visual cue.
- With the support of an adult, X is able to understand simple instructions.
- X is increasingly able to follow instructions.
- X is now able to follow most instructions given.

Reading

- X listens to and joins in with stories and poems.
- X shows an interest in illustrations and print in books and print in the environment.
- X enjoys looking at books.
- X handles books and printed materials with interest.
- X is asking questions about printed words, signs and messages.
- X is beginning to understand that print is different to pictures.
- X can sequence pictures to tell a simple story.
- X is learning to sequence pictures to tell a simple story.
- X looks for and uses information from pictures.
- X is beginning to recognise some high frequency words in text.
- X is learning to identify letters by name and sound.

Writing

- X is telling stories in pictures.
- X is talking about his/her drawings and/or “writing”.
- X is telling adults what he/she wants written.
- X is imitating the act of writing when he/she sees others write.
- X is experimenting with all kinds of marks (their idea of handwriting).
- X is copying print from the environment.
- X is writing his /her own name.

EXPLORING AND THINKING

The theme of Exploring and Thinking is about children making sense of the things, places and people in their world by interacting with others, playing, investigating, questioning, and forming, testing and refining ideas.

- X uses the role play/workshop area with much imagination- building amazing creations from everyday objects.
- X is happy to talk about his play with an adult and involve them in the activity.
- X engages in lots of self-talk during his/her play which demonstrates his complex problem solving skills/vivid imagination.
- X enjoys role play activities where he/she draws on familiar experiences from school and home and has particularly enjoyed ...
- X is using play material and toys to learn about measuring height, weight, length, and volume, ... money etc.
- X is beginning to use everyday language related to money.
- X notices simple shapes and pattern in the environment.

Plus your own information on number e.g.:

- Says the number words in order to 10
- Knows that numbers identify how many objects in a set
- Shows an interest in numerals in the environment
- Recognises numerals of personal significance
- Recognises numerals 1-5 / 1-10
- Counts objects to 5/10, saying one number name for each object
- Is beginning to use the vocabulary involved in simple adding tasks

Sources : Twinkl Reading Recovery© Mata sa Rang

Suggestions for Senior Infant Report Writing

WELL-BEING

Focus is on developing as a person psychological and physical well-being

Psychological well-being:

- Be flexible and having a positive outlook on learning is crucial
- Resilient
- Coping with change
- Coping when things go wrong
- Independence

Sample behaviours:

- X is capable of long periods of concentration during activities.
- X can sustain attention for an extended period of time.
- X will keep trying when faced with a problem or a puzzle.
- X enjoys the challenge of problem solving activities.
- X is happy to accept a challenge and will work with determination to overcome it.
- X can prefer others to lead the problem solving.
- X shows much persistence and determination in his/her work.
- X is happy to ask for help if she/he needs it.
- X is beginning to come and ask for help now if she/needs it.
- X is very self-reliant in problem solving.
- X is beginning to show more independence in his/her play and creative activities.
- X is very independent in the classroom and is very self-sufficient in his/her selection of resources and equipment.
- X's self-confidence has grown throughout the year.
- X can lack confidence when attempting a challenge independently but has more confidence when working with a friend.
- X has produced some lovely collaborative pieces when working with a friend and this is beginning to give him the independence to attempt more on his own.
- X is beginning to gain the confidence to work with greater independence.
- X can tend to become frustrated quickly when facing a challenge or problem and needs support to develop more resilience in more challenging/problem solving situations.
- X seizes a challenge –responding with excitement and determination.
- X is very self-motivated. He/she works always to give his/her best.
- X is often easily distracted and quickly changes activity. She moves around the classroom from one activity to the next during free play time.
- X tends to change activity or focus quite quickly and needs adult support to maintain concentration and focus to complete a task or activity.

IDENTITY AND BELONGING

Focus here is developing a positive sense of who they are and feeling that they are valued and respected. It is also about having a secure relationship with others:

- Have the confidence to voice their views and opinions, to make choices
- Understand the rules and boundaries of acceptable behaviour
- Interact, work co-operatively and help others
- Be responsible
- See themselves as capable learners

Sample behaviours:

- X is happy to follow a friend's lead in group activity.
- X is happy to work with others.
- X is happy to share his/her play with others.
- X is flexible in her/his play- happy to negotiate the turn of events according to the ideas of her/his friends.
- X plays fairly and kindly with care and regard for other's feelings and ideas.
- X gains a huge sense of pride from doing his best.
- X shows such delight at sharing his ideas.
- X often has lovely things to say about other's work. Likewise he loves hearing when others praise his achievements.
- X loves to share his achievements with his peers and with the adults he/works with
- X is happy to listen to and learn from other children.
- X is able to follow rules when playing a game as part of a group.

COMMUNICATING

Focus here is about children sharing their experiences, thought, ideas and feelings with others with growing confidence and competence in a variety of ways and for a variety of purposes**.** Children also learn to interpret what others are sharing with them. This involves giving, receiving and making sense of information through:

- Non-verbal communication
- Talking
- Listening
- Thinking
- Understanding
- Reading and writing

Sample behaviours:

Non-Verbal communication

- X understand and use non-verbal communication rules, such as turn-taking and making eye contact.

Speaking

- X is able to engage adults and other children in simple conversation.
- X is beginning to engage adults and other children in simple conversation.
- X is able to communicate his basic needs.
- X is learning how to communicate his basic needs using visual aids.
- X is able to express how he is feeling.
- X is learning how to express his feelings using visual aids.
- X can use language to / X is learning to using use language for giving and receiving information, asking questions, requesting, refusing, expressing feelings.

Listening

- X is able to listen carefully to others.
- X is learning to listen to others.
- With the support of an adult, X is able to listen to others.
- X is able to maintain his attention for a sustained period of time.
- X is beginning to maintain his attention.
- With the support of an adult, X is able to maintain his attention for short periods of time.

Understanding

- X is beginning to understand some simple instructions.
- X is able to follow simple instructions with a visual cue.
- With the support of an adult, X is able to understand simple instructions.
- X is increasingly able to follow instructions.
- X is now able to follow most instructions given.

Reading

- X listens to and joins in with stories and poems.
- X shows an interest in illustrations and print in books and print in the environment.
- X enjoys looking at books.
- X handles books and printed materials with interest.
- X enjoys browsing through books.
- X is asking questions about printed words, signs and messages.
- X understands that print is different to pictures.
- X understands that English is read from left to right.
- *X* is beginning to understand that English is read from left to right.
- X can sequence pictures to tell a simple story.
- X is learning to sequence pictures to tell a simple story.
- X can search for and use information from picture.
- X can identify *(some/most/all)* letters by name and sound.
- X can read and write (*a few/some/many)* high frequency words.
- X is confident to attempt to read new books.
- X uses appropriate pace and expression when reading showing understanding of text.

Writing

- X is telling stories in pictures.
- X is talking about his/her drawings and/or "writing" .
- X is "reading" the story that he/she "wrote".
- X is telling adults what he/she wants written.
- X is imitating the act of writing when he/she sees others write.
- X is experimenting with all kinds of marks (their idea of handwriting).
- X is copying print from the environment.
- X is writing his /her own name.
- X can write (*a few/some/most/all)* letters accurately.
- X *(is beginning to/can)* use letters as a means to write words.
- X can read and write (*a few/some/many)* high frequency words.

EXPLORING AND THINKING

The theme of Exploring and Thinking is about children making sense of the things, places and people in their world by interacting with others, playing, investigating, questioning, and forming, testing and refining ideas.

- X uses the role play/workshop area with much imagination- building amazing creations from everyday objects.
- X is happy to talk about his play with an adult and involve them in the activity.
- X engages in lots of self-talk during his/her play which demonstrates his complex problem solving skills/vivid imagination.
- X enjoys role play activities where he/she draws on familiar experiences from school and home and has particularly enjoyed.
- X is using play material and toys to learn about measuring height, weight, length, and volume,.... money.
- X is beginning to use everyday language related to money.
- X notices simple shapes and pattern in the environment.

Sources: Twinkl Reading Recovery©

MATHS

Pattern

- Can recognise, create and describe patterns
- Can recognise regular dice patterns to 6
- Can make finger patterns automatically 5-10in different ways
- Can show understanding of number bonds to 5 /to10 by saying which number goes with another number to make 5/10 without difficulty

Sorting

- Can sort objects in a set by colour, size and shape and talk about how they sorted them, using relevant mathematical language of comparison e.g. bigger than / is the same as / is different to

Number/ addition and subtraction

- Can easily identify numerals 1-10 / 1-20
- Can say which number comes after and before a number within the range 1-10 / 1-20
- Can put a set of 10 numerals in order starting with the smallest number (+ crossing the decibel e.g. 7-16)
- Knows that numerals/ number identify how many objects are in a set
- Shows an interest in numerals in the environment
- Can count the number of objects (1-20) in a set saying one number name for each object
- Can find the total number of items in 2 groups by counting all of them
- Is beginning to use the vocabulary involved in simple adding and taking away tasks.
- Can count on from the large number when adding a small amount
- Can use another mental strategy to add 2 numbers together instead of the count-by-one strategy

Source: Mata sa Rang

Aistear Meeting 09/09/2020

In attendance at the meeting : Redacted

To begin 21/09/20 at 11.00 am

1.Topics – an integrated approach

Junior Infants	**Senior Infants**
The Kitchen	School
Santa's Workshop	Santa's Workshop
Shopping	The Restaurant
School	The Supermarket
The Doctor	The Vet
The Farm*	The Travel Agency

Ways to introduce the topic: story, video (YouTube/Twinkl/ppt, poems, songs)

***Topic: The Farm**

- Teachers found this difficult to set up / source materials
- May use easier stations e.g. Small World, Construction etc
- May change to alternative topic e.g. The Beach, Planting/Gardening

2.Organisation of Play Areas

Typical Area will include:

Sand / Water
Construction
Small world
Creative Area
Role Play
Games with rules

Junior Infants will be gradually introduced to the areas and the rota for play.

3.Grouping Arrangements

- Children will remain in their pods during Aistear
- Support teacher will work with the group with the greatest need
- Class teacher will work with the other children ensuring all children work with the teacher at least once per week.
- Teacher / Support / SNA will need a timetable to decide who is working with particular children

4.The Integrated Play Session

Planning stage

Children will remain seated in their pods during planning

One child will be appointed as the Reporter

Refer the children to the play rota

Ask the reporter the following questions: (gradually introduced) to provide the opportunity to use the future tense:

- Where will you play today? — We will play in the ….area
- Who will you be today? — I will be the …
- What will you do / build today? — I will build / make / paint .

The reporter will ask each child the focus question(s). Encourage active listening by all. At a later point the teacher may check if the children are listening actively by asking questions on the Reporter's report.

Assessment point

Teacher may choose to ask the Reporter to report here to the class (future tense)

Observation on the Reporter as communicator:

- Characteristic of a good listener/speaker; stands still, looks at his/her audience, speaks clearly, waits for response/answers question appropriately
- Can he/she repeat / use sentence structure, has appropriate vocabulary, appropriate use of tenses

Role of Adults during Play

Modelling, observing, talking, play, questioning, demonstration, promote tidying/cleaning

Assessment Point

See template for assessment / pack for each topic.

Where practicable, a daily observation for a child is completed by each adult in the room

Assessment pack to be sent home after each topic

Teacher to keep sample copy of early/middle/top group in class

Learning story across different areas

Use checklist on template:

- 1 observation in each area
- Aim for 3 observations / learning stories in each topic
- Use the reporter as the person to do the learning story on

After Play

- Take time to train the children in expectations regarding tidying/cleaning
- Responsibility is given to the children for tidying up
- Mindful tidy up is encouraged

Feedback (using the past tense)

Children are seated (after tidying up). Teacher calls on the Reporters to report on their group's play using the past tense of the previously used questions

Move on as questions become more independent

Assessment point

Observation of the Reporter as communicator

Characteristic of a good listener/speaker

Can he/she repeat/use sentence structure, has appropriate vocabulary, tense, pronouns

5.Friday Planning Day

- Children engage in free play.
- Aistear activities for each subject are highlighted in class teacher's planning notes.
- Use NCCA Aistear planning template.
- Support teachers: Highlight/add on to main Aistear planning template as appropriate.
- Agreed targets for children on Support Plans are addressed by the adult.

Dispositions:

Teachers will work on discrete teaching of each disposition

Integrated Play Activity Assessment

Name:

Date:

Author:

	Reporting Checklist
	Eye Contact
	Clear Voice
	Repeated correct sentence structure
	Good Listening

Photo

Observation

Wellbeing	Show positivity and flexibility		Is independent			
Identity and Belonging	Confident		Works co-operatively		Understands and follows the rules	
Communicating	Engaging in 2 way conversation		Questioning		Requesting Information	
			Expresses feeling/ choice			
Exploring and Thinking	Demonstrates imagination during activities					

Appendix D: Field Notes for Parent Workshops

Field Notes Parent Workshops

Workshops 1: 4th March 2016 B. Tobin and the Special Needs Assistant

- The parents want to support their children's learning. They are engaging readily in the activities. They are very appreciative of our time and for the games and materials for use at home.

- Some parents are more confident than others and speak out more, but in general they are inclined to listen to what we are saying.

Workshops 2 and 3 11th March 2016 8th April 2016
Class Teachers and Special Needs Assistant

- Parents had used the games at home:
    - a very honest response from one parent about difficulty in engaging her child; he knew how to play but declined
    - another reports that her children disliked sharing the games with his sibling

- They like the materials provided.

- Teachers can see that the parents are beginning to ask more questions.

- This work has provided important contact time for the parents. One parent has begun to discuss concerns privately each week after the workshops.

Workshop 4 : 15th April 2016 B. Tobin and the Special Needs Assistant

- In feedback on managing the activities with the children, the opportunity arose to talk about Carol Dweck's work on positive reinforcement and praising effort. This is very different to my own school days where praise was limited to achievement. Parents discuss similar experiences with us.

- A follow-up from the previous week's work on motor control leads to one parent asking about letter formation. In showing the pre-writing patterns, the parents can immediately see how the movement in the patterns link to different letters.

- The parents are very open in their preference to use the language of the school at home. They ask for written instructions for the activities to do this. One parent expresses her concern that her child is "*experiencing difficulties with English and would prefer help with this."* This is an interesting point. What does the literature say about this? What can we do?

- There is a noticeable change in how learning is viewed; playful activities are seen as important. One parent sees the importance of learning from mistakes; she has "*learned to change her approach to her*" child and is "*not getting annoyed*".

- A confidence in what they can do to support learning is emerging. When asked how we could we involve parents in the school, gardening work with the children is one suggestion. Could we tap into the interests and strengths of parent body?

- Parental interaction is noticeable. Some had been unsure but their self-efficacy is enhancing. They share tips on how to make play doh. One parent whom I had met after each workshop to discuss concerns now discusses concerns openly. They reassure each other.

- This openness leads to a suggestion that the parents could come and work with the children in the support room. The parents express interest, and agree to photographic evidence of this work, which would not be used in my thesis without their prior consent.

Field Notes on the Parent-Child Sessions in Group Discussion with Colleagues

13th May 2016

- This experience has allowed the parents to see how we work with the children and how they respond.

- They see how different this is to their own school days; the emphasis is on understanding rather than just rote learning.

- The parents are now talking about the children's learning. There is an openness in their discussions. Some identify their children's strengths and difficulties: *she is good at maths... it's language that she finds difficult ... he can say if he is sad.*

- In this short time, we can see that the parents appreciate that learning can be enhanced through play and in "hands-on" experiences. They are exchanging ideas on the various daily activities they share with their children; cooking and baking, helping with homework, different television programmes that the children enjoy, *YouTube* videos that encourage their children's participation in alphabet learning, and in number games and songs. This has been one way to value the ways they already engage with their children's learning.

- Little has happened in terms of sharing games and stories in the language of the home. Parents openly prefer to work in the language of the school. Further workshops on language have been requested. Maybe revisit the introductory booklet for parents to encourage continued use of first language of the child?

- This work is a step forward for both the parents and for us. They have been encouraged in the role they already play in their children's learning. We are learning from their parent knowledge while sharing our teacher knowledge and what we know about their children.

- We need to find a way to tap into their knowledge, interest and talents. These can be used in our programmes of learning, as in the gardening suggestion, but also to begin to involve the parents more directly in school activities and policy development.

Appendix E: PowerPoint Presentations for Parent Workshops

Parent Workshop 1

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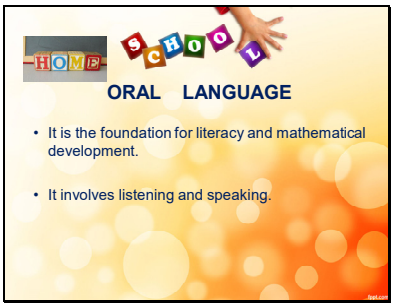

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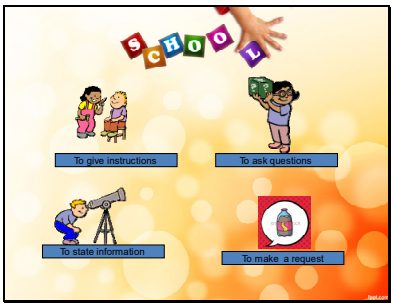

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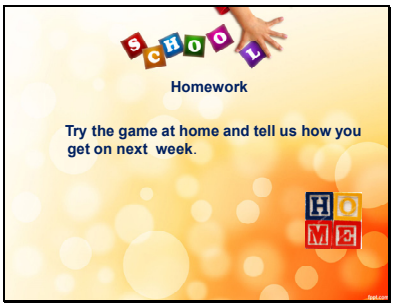

Parent Workshop 2

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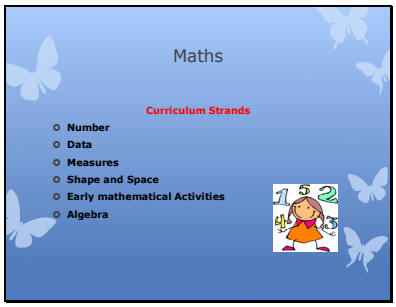

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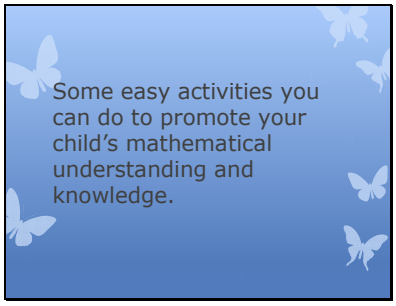

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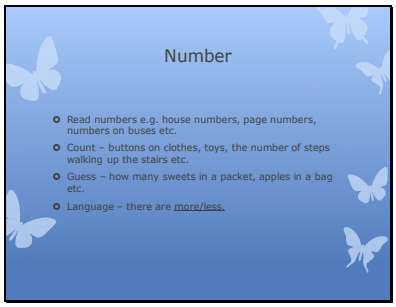

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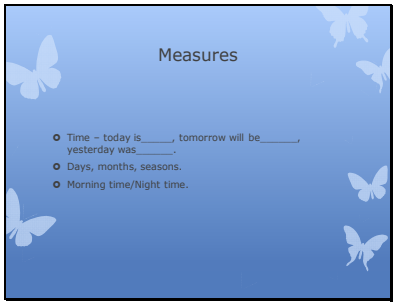

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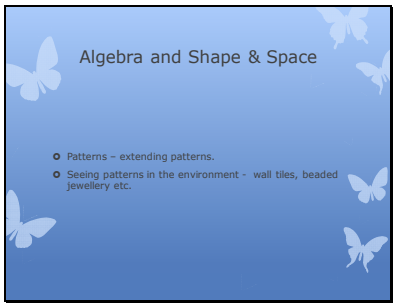

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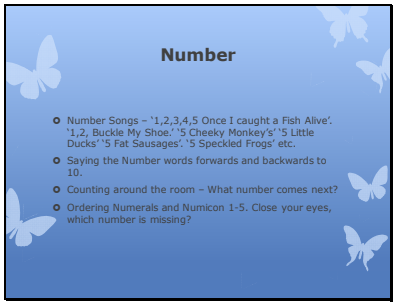

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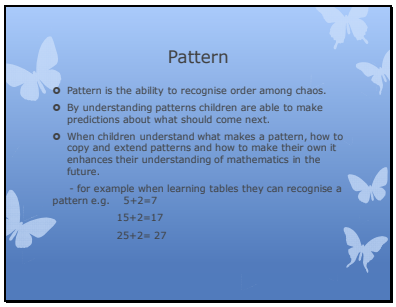

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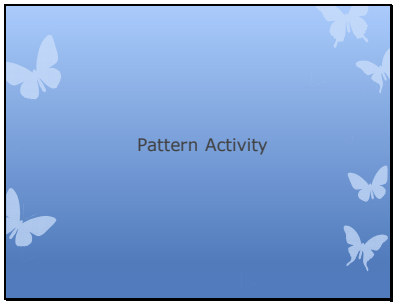

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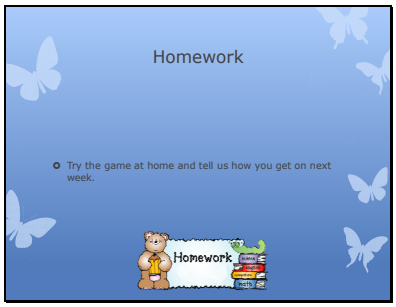

Parent Workshop 3

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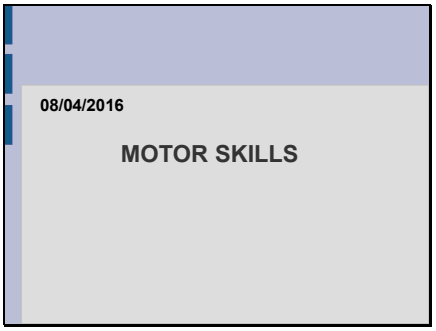

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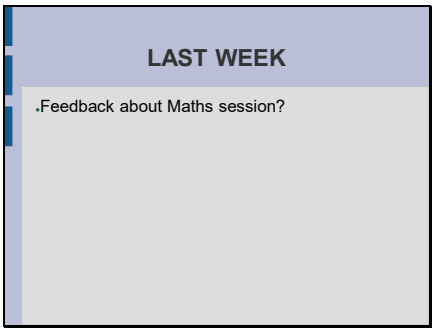

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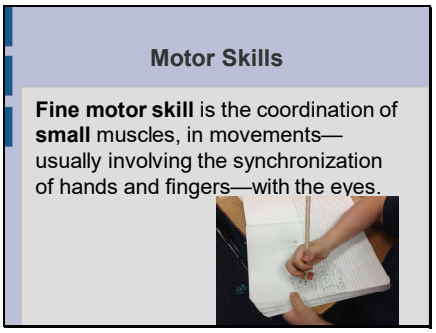

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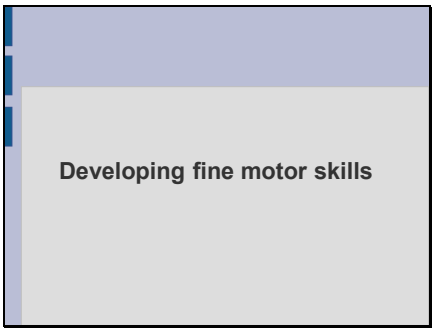

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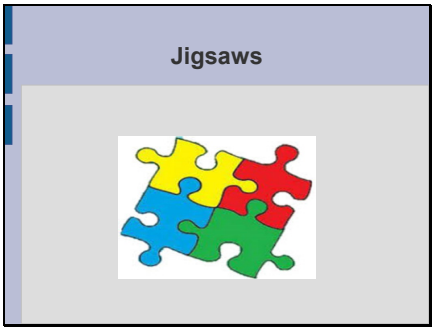

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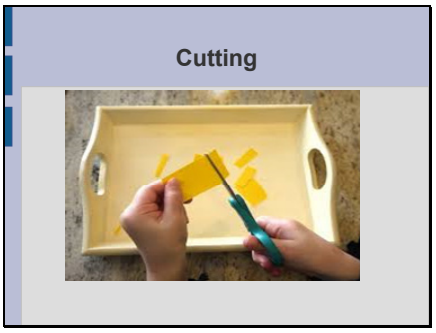

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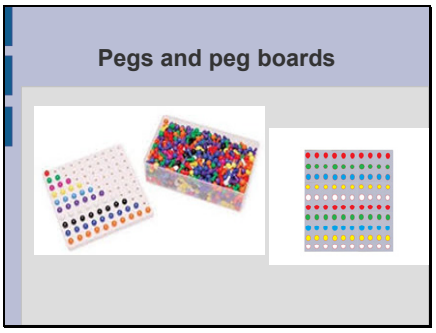

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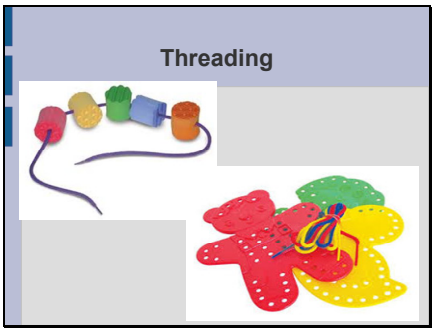

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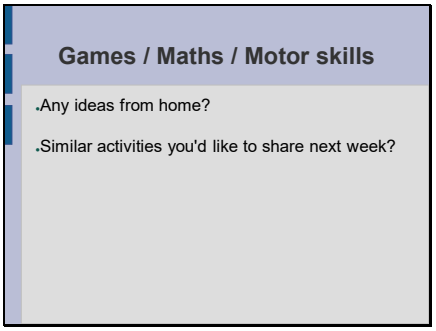

Parent Workshop 4

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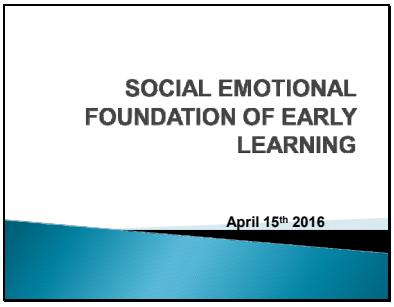

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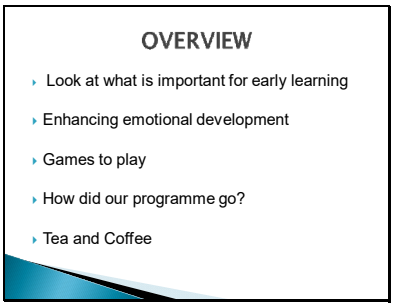

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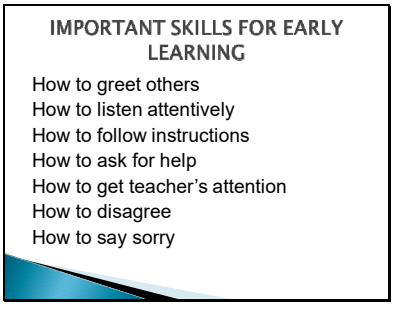

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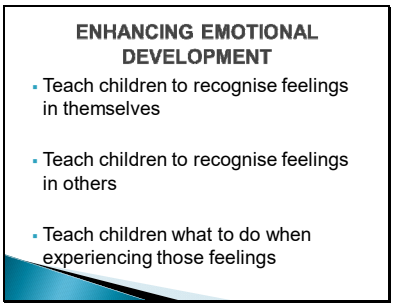

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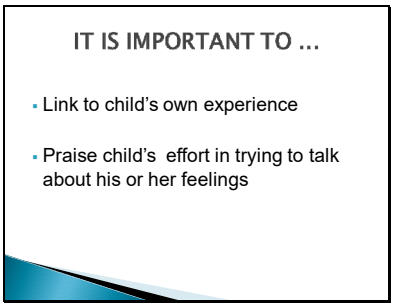

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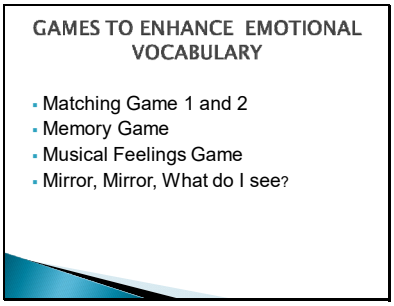

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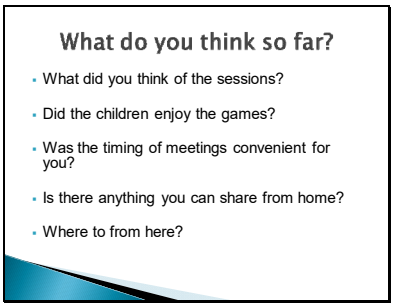

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Appendix F: Requested Instructions for Activities

COPYING AND EXTENDING PATTERNS

Topic: The Weather

Have the children say and clap the weather words: **sun, snowflake, raindrops**

Look at the pattern and ask:

What comes first?

What comes next?

What comes after?

What would come next?

All say the pattern together.

Copying the pattern

Use the same questions from above:

What comes first?

What comes next?

What comes after?

Check the pattern.

Extending the pattern

Use the same question from above:

What would come next?

Check the pattern.

When the pattern is checked, tidy up. Ask the child to **sort** the pictures:

Put the snowflakes into the box for the snowflakes... the suns into the box for the suns... the raindrops into the box for the rain drops.

NUMBER WORK

Saying the Number Words Forward

- Clap and tap while saying the number words 1-10.
- Start from different start points.
- Say alternative numbers (take turns with child saying numbers).
- Saying and pointing to the numerals on the number track.
- Ask what comes after?

Sequencing numerals

- Missing numbers
- Sequencing numerals

Numicon Work

Ask

- How many holes do you see?
- Where does this go?
- Match the numeral to the Numicon.
- How many red animals?
- Put them in the pattern for _.
- Take __ animals.

Parents

- Ask your child to find one card at a time, starting with 1 (help where necessary).
- Check the numerals are in the right order.
- How many red pegs do you have?
- Let the child put one at a time along the numerals and tell you how many he/she has.
- Give your child the green pegs out of the box and ask how many (give one at a time).
- Tidy up. Say: **Put the number cards back into the packet and put the pegs back into the box.**

BINGO

1. Place the Bingo card in front of the child.

2. Ask the child to lay out the counters along the top of the card.

3. Check the child can recognise the items on the bingo card.
   Say "Point to the _____."

4. Pick up one picture.
   Say "Who has the _____ ?"
   The child says **"I have the _____.**

5. At times ask, **"Do you have the ____?"** especially when the child does not have that picture. The child is encouraged to say, **"I don't have the ____."**

6. When the child covers all the pictures on the card he/she says **"Bingo!"**

LACING CARDS

Working with a shape and a thread

Language that can be used:

- Push the thread into the hole.
- Turn the card over, pull the thread through.
- Push it into the next hole.
- Turn the card over, pull the thread through.

Appendix G: A Developing Understanding of Working with Parents

INVOLVING PARENTS MORE DIRECTLY IN THE DEVELOPMENT OF WHOLE-SCHOOL PROCESSES, POLICY DEVELOPMENT AND SCHOOL ACTIVITIES

The following questions, based on extant literature, were used to prompt discussion and reflection at whole-staff level from January – March 2017.

Notes from Staff Meeting 19th January 2017

1. **The attitudes of the principal and management, school culture, arrangements in place for a variety of circumstances can have a huge influence in shaping parental involvement.**

   Reflect on the structures we have in the following (or other) circumstances. What do they say about our school?:

   - A child's absenteeism over 20 days
   - A family where a bereavement has occurred
   - A parent who is not satisfied with how an incident was handled in the yard or classroom
   - Issues around parking

Discussion outcome

The school is a safe, caring and trusting environment. We care about the children and their families.

- Immediate response
- NEPS in the case of bereavement
- Good relationships with parents
- We are flexible and open but we also have the necessary structures are in place. Where possible, we ask parents to make an appointment to see the teacher. The infant day often facilitates more informal meetings with parents
- Time is given to work out what is in the child's interest.
- Processes are in place:
  Absenteeism:
  We may have to report when a child has missed 20 days but this would be discussed with parents.
  We also acknowledge that our families do make return visit to their home for lengthy periods of time.
  Other times we may have to call in the Education Welfare Officer (EWO) for frequent absenteeism.

2. **Parents are seen by teachers and present themselves in a variety of roles:**

   - **Advocates**
   - **Teacher bashers**
   - **Consumers**
   - **Collaborators**
   - **Partners**
   - **Supporters**
   - **Problems**
   - **Solutions**
     (Hallgarten 2000, Hanafin & Lynch 2002)

Which of the roles best represent your experience of parent-teacher engagement?

Discussion Outcome

Parents are seen as

Supporters

- Language and different educational experience can be an issue for the parents.
- There is a difference from the earlier school years. Halloween was not celebrated in the early days of the school but a trust has grown and children are permitted to participate in such activities.

Consumers / Collaborators / Partners / Solutions

- Attendance is higher at the parent teacher meetings in more recent years
- Support planning meetings provide the opportunity to work with parents as collaborators and partners in recent years

However, later in the staff meeting in discussing other items on the agenda other roles for parents emerged:

Problems:

- Don't collect their children on time.

Consumers

- Wall of Fame needs to be changed / updated before Intercultural Day.

Notes from Staff Meeting 9th February 2017

> The fundamental question ... is whether parents should be included as part of the life of a school because it is convenient or useful to have them there, or whether they are there "by right, so much a part of the action that it is impossible to exclude them." Benson (1999, p. 48)

- Does parental involvement matter?
- Does it make a difference in relation to student outcomes?
- Are there ways that parental involvement is seen as problematic?

Outcomes of the discussion

- There was recognition of the positive impact of parental involvement on their children's learning; not just academic learning but also on the social emotional development of the child.

- Difficulties/ challenges noted
    - the need for clear procedures and expectations for parental involvement with children in the classrooms
    - complexity around the whole issue of parental involvement, participation and involvement; need to be cognisant of cultural differences; values and norms differ
    - question if there is a need for training for both teachers and parents

Notes from Staff Meeting 9th March 2017

Bernie Tobin explained the confusing terminology pertaining to educators' relationships with parents and family members of the children we work with:

- Involvement
  Parents are involved to serve the school's agenda by doing the things that educators ask or expect them to do. While knowledge, voice and decision-making continue to rest with the educators**.**

- Partnerships
  Accepting each other has much to learn from each other.

- Participation
  Have a part in, have a right to included

- Engagement
  The person's engagement is an integral and essential part of the process, brought into the act because of care and commitment. It is enabling parents to take their place alongside along-side educators in the schooling of their children.

We acknowledged that parental engagement with children's learning and education is of vital importance.

Goodall and Montgomery (2014) present a model for the progression from parental involvement with schools, where the school is in control of the relationship and the flow of information, to parental involvement with schooling in which genuine interaction happens between parents and schools, through to parental engagement with children's learning, where the parent chooses to be involved. This model was used to examine current practice in the school. It was recognised that we were at different points on this continuum with different parents as the children and parents moved through the school.

Information from this will help to prioritise areas for development as we work on whole-school processes to directly involve parents in policy development and school activities.

References

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Hanafin, J., & Lynch, A. (2002). Peripheral Voices: Parental involvement, social class, and educational disadvantage*, British Journal of Sociology of Education, 23*(1), 35-49. https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/0142569012010284

Developing a home-school link 2017/2018

Homework Club

- Parents involved in running the homework club looked for guidance from the school to put an organised structure and curriculum in place.
- I met with members of the homework club and they informed me of the difficulties they have been facing while running the homework club and the areas where they needed the most help.
- We co-constructed the curriculum for the homework club and arranged timetables.
- Toys and activities were bought to facilitate these timetables.
- These activities and toys were given appropriate storage to ensure they were maintained.
- I spoke to the volunteers regarding the discipline issues that were arising in homework club. We decided that the schools discipline procedures would also be implemented in the homework club. A *Rainbow Gauge* was provided, and the parents were trained in its usage.
- Effort was made to make the Homework Club room more attractive. Round tables, chairs and couches were provided
- Effort was made to attract more volunteers to the homework club.

Parents' Interest Groups

- After speaking to two home school liaison officers, a letter was sent to each parent to see what courses or classes they would most like to avail of.
- The majority of parents who returned forms chose fitness classes.
- A fitness instructor was contacted and fitness classes on a Monday morning for 5 weeks ran very successfully. They are asked that these classes continue after Easter holidays.
- The interest notes contained a section where parents could add other ideas for classes or courses they would like to participate in. Parenting courses were mentioned by several.

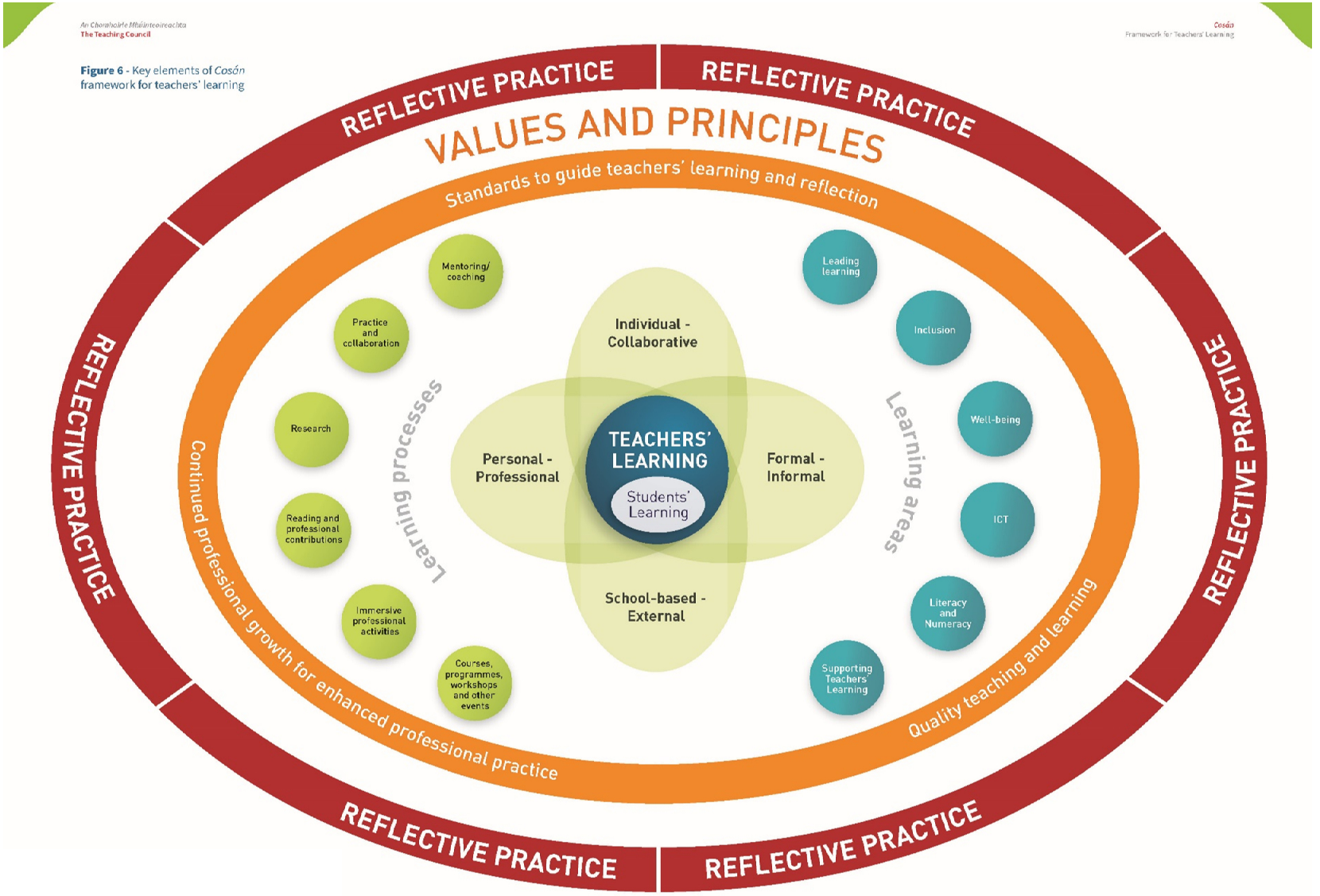
Parenting Courses

- I spoke to the NPC who advised me on several parenting courses they provide.
- A list of these accompanied by a brief synopsis of the course were sent to parents. The course that was chosen by most parents was *Supporting Parents to support their children's mental health and wellbeing.* A date and time for this is currently being arranged.
- As there have been issues in the school regarding social media a talk for both parents and their children is being held on the 25th of April. The children's talk will run during school hours and the parents talk that night.

- As part of our 10th year anniversary celebrations we have asked our former NEPS psychologist to speak to our parents and staff and lead a discussion about education and what it means to us.
  We hope that this talk will be the beginning of the parents involvement in policy planning, in particular the homework policy.
- Bernie Tobin and I are meeting the psychologist on the 20th of March to discuss this open evening further.

Appendix H: Cosán, the Framework for Teachers' Learning

Figure 6 - Key elements of *Cosán* framework for teachers' learning



The Teaching Council (2016b, p. 32)

Appendix I: Models of Reflection

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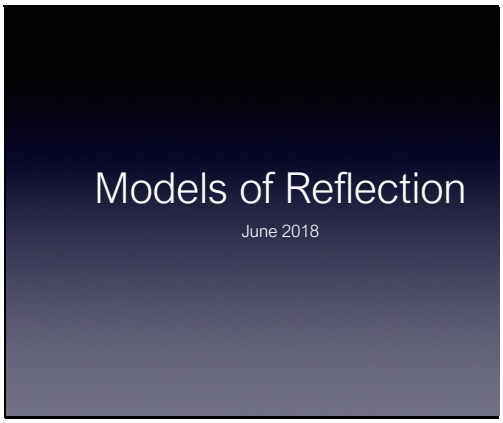

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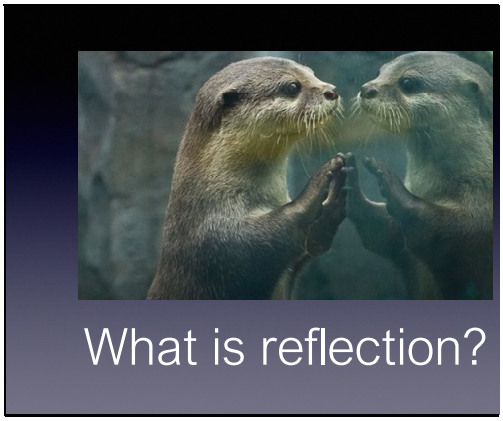

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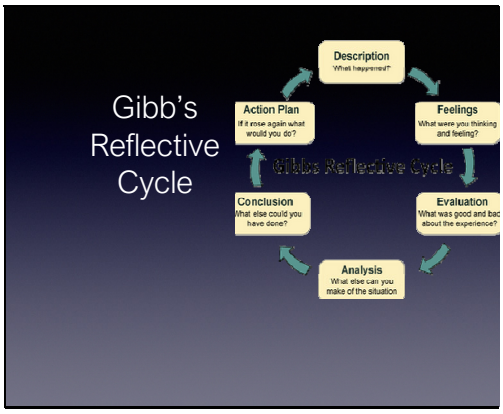

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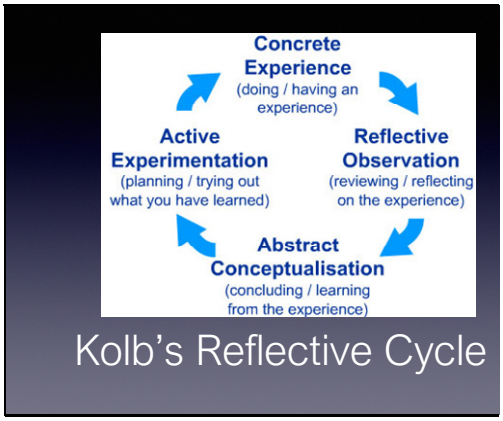

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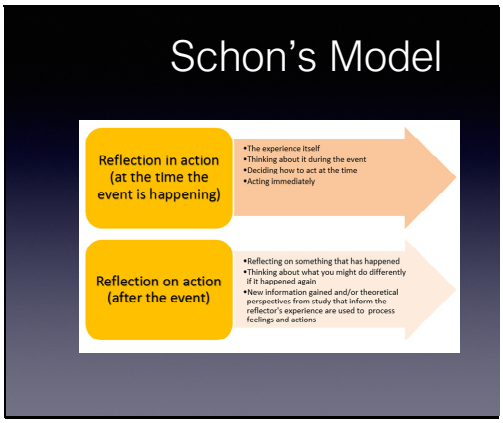

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Johns' Model

Johns used Barbara Carper's patterns of knowing in his model (Carper 1978) which includes the following:

- aethetics (the art of what we do)
- personal (self awareness)
- ethics (moral knowledge)
- empirics (scientific knowledge)

Johns' model also adds:

- reflexivity (how does it connect with previous experiences)

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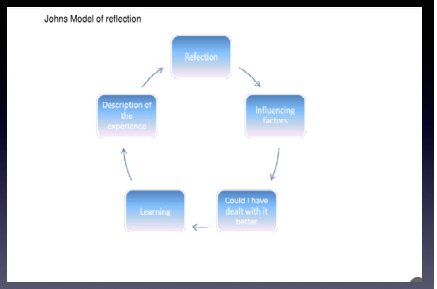

Johns' Model

Slide 9

Aesthetics: the art of what we do

- Focus on a description of an experience that seems significant in some way
- What particular issues seem significant to pay attention to?
- How were others feeling and why did they feel that way?
- What was I trying to achieve and did I respond effectively?
- What were the consequences of my actions on others and myself?

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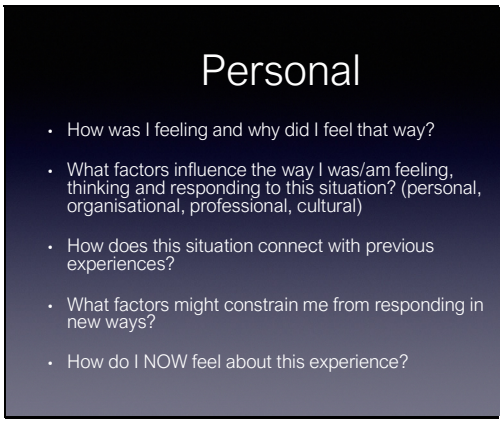

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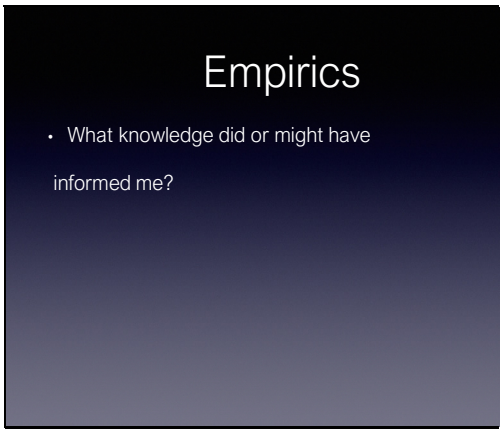

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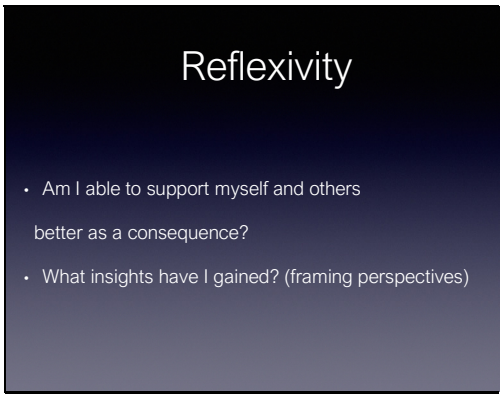

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Appendix J: An Adapted Version of Johns' Model of Reflection

Using a Selection of Questions from John's Model of Reflection

Composed June 2018 by SET team

Aesthetics; the art of what we do.

1. What particular issues seem significant to pay attention to?
2. What went well, and didn't go well?
3. What was I trying o achieve and did I respond effectively?
4. What were the consequences of my actions on others and myself?

Personal;

1. What factors influence the way I was/am feeling, thinking and responding to this situation? (personal, organisational, professional, cultural)
2. How do I NOW feel about this experience?

Empirics;

1. What knowledge did or might have informed me? (Use at the beginning, during and after the process)

Reflexivity;

1. Am I able to support myself and others better as a consequence?
2. What else could I have done?
3. What insights have I gained?
4. What will I do next/ next time?

Ethics;

1. To what extent did I act for the best and in tune with my values?

❖ Highlighted questions were added by set team

Appendix K: Plans for Collaborative and Co-operative Work

(5th class) Revised Timetable of activities and in class preparation

November 2018 5th Class

Before week 1 (in class)

- Class teacher will introduce the roles to the class.
- SET Team will receive list of the groups that each child has been assigned to.

Engagement Stage Week 1; 16th November

1. Remind children of the meaning of collaborative and co-operative learning and the purpose for undertaking these tasks.
2. Discuss the previously taught roles and their meanings with the whole class group.
3. Teacher recording when each teacher has a role; stop and start the recording as necessary for discussion of roles and how they are being utilised.
4. Success criteria of working in a group; do as a whole-class group
5. Inform the class of the general topic (Presidents of Ireland) and their sub topic.
6. Let the children know that today they will be deciding as a group what is it they want to find out under their topic.
7. Put into their small groups and discuss roles and topic- start discussing questions.
8. Reporter; what went well, didn't go well, what did you learn about working in group etc.
9. *The teacher's main role at this stage is to engage students curiosity in the problem or dilemma, to help students understand why they are exploring a particular topic, text, information or material, and to help them understand what they are expected to learn or achieve.*

Before week 2 (in class)

- Revise roles.
- Promote group work strategies.
- Promote skimming and scanning skills.
- Complete and revise success criteria.
- There are 6 groups in each class there will be 3 written presentations, 2 oral and one Visual presentation (www.Prezi.com).
- The children should also be told at this stage how they will be presenting their project- oral, written or visual.

Exploration Stage Week 2; 23rd November

1. Sitting in small groups
2. The children will be given their role; each child will be given a card detailing the responsibilities of their role which corresponds to the large classroom poster for that role. Students will change roles on a weekly basis.
3. Give out relevant resources and IT.
4. Reporter; what went well, didn't go well, what did you learn about working in group etc.
5. *The teacher role in this stage is to be a careful observer, listener and learner; to identify areas of need and reflect on how they will be addressed in the sequence of the teaching/learning cycle.*

Before Week 3 and 4 (in class)

- Discuss what is needed for oral and written presentations; working the room, eye contact, the use or props etc.
- Practise/discuss the success criteria for the presentations. Success criteria will also be handed out after initial discussion.

Transformation Stage Week 3 and Week 4; Nov 30th and 7th of December

1. The children will be given their roles for this week.
2. Each group will continue to assemble their information and resources in preparation for their presentation in week 5. Success criteria for presentation should also be given out here
3. Reporter; what went well, didn't go well, what did you learn about working in group etc.
4. *The teacher's role at this stage is active; it involves guiding, teaching and monitoring the student's leaning, providing additional information and correcting any misconceptions in response to individual and group needs.*

Before Week 5 (in class)

- Allow the children some time to finalise their presentation and practise the skills necessary to present in front of their peers.

Presentation Stage Week 5; 14th December

1. *The presentation stage is when ideas are presented to an interested and critical audience.*
2. Reporter; what went well, didn't go well, what did you learn about working in group etc.
3. Each group given time to present their projects
4. The children's presentations must be recorded.

Reflection Stage Week 6;

- Class teacher will show the class their before and after recordings (during class time).
- They will discuss the recording (during class time).
- The children will be give given an opportunity to orally discuss/evaluate with their groups what went well/didn't go so well, what they would do next time, what they liked about it etc.
- The groups will report back to the teachers what they discussed.
- The children will fill out a multiple choice reflection sheet.
- The class teachers and support team involved will meet to discuss the process and to make changes and improvements where necessary.

Timetable of Activities and in Class Preparation for 2nd Class

January 2019

Before week 1 (in class)

- Class teachers will designate a group to each student.
- The students will practise getting into these groups in preparation for when the SET team arrives.
- Class teachers can tell the class that they will be doing a project on Dublin.

Engagement Stage Week 1; 1st of February

1. The children will be sitting in their groups for collaborative studies.
2. We will discuss with the children the importance of being able to work in a team (examples of sport, our staff, playing games outside etc).
3. We will introduce the 4 roles to the children and go through each one in detail allowing for the children to give examples etc.
4. Success criteria of working in a group; ask the children to come up with the important factors of working in a group. Record these on a A2 sheet to be displayed in the classroom so it can be referenced to during the course of the 4 weeks.
5. Inform the class of the general topic (Dublin) and each group's sub topic.
6. In their groups, allow the children to discuss their topic to see if they already know anything about that topic. Assign a reporter to each group. Must use their GROUP VOICE (only one person speaks at a time)
7. Reporter; what did you learn about working in group etc.
8. *The teacher's main role at this stage is to engage students curiosity in the problem or dilemma, to help students understand why they are exploring a particular topic, text, information or material, and to help them understand what they are expected to learn or achieve.*

Before week 2 (in class)

- Revise roles.
- Show each group where their materials and project will be stored.
- Promote group work strategies (PDSP Pg8-14).
- Complete and revise success criteria.
- Revise meaning of the GROUP VOICE.

Exploration Stage Week 2; 8th February

1. Sitting in small groups
2. The children will be given their role; each child will be given a card detailing the responsibilities of their role, which corresponds to the large classroom poster for that role. Students will change roles on a weekly basis.
3. Go through all the roles again.
4. Go through the success criteria that the class came up with last week.

5. Explain how the children's project will work; each group will be given several pictures with corresponding information. They must decide what information matches what picture. **The children (the supporter) cannot access their materials (glue and paper) until they have matched the pictures and information correctly together.**
6. Once the children have tidied away the materials at the teachers' request, the groups must discuss the questions below so that the reporter will be able to report back to the class.
7. Reporter; what went well, didn't go well, what did you learn about working in group etc.
8. *The teacher role in this stage is to be a careful observer, listener and learner; to identify areas of need and reflect on how they will be addressed in the sequence of the teaching/learning cycle.*

Before Week 3 (in class)

- Revise roles.
- Revise success criteria.
- Revise meaning of the GROUP VOICE.

Transformation Stage Week 3; 15th of February

1. The children will be given their roles for this week.
2. To continue the project the children will have to do some research of their assembled work.
3. For each picture/piece of information there will be 4 *Here* questions given. The children in each group will have to find the information and answer the questions. These can then be added to their project work. Short/one word answers will suffice. Recorders this week will have a lot of writing so they will have to be supported by the other members of their group
4. Once the children have tidied away the materials at the teachers' request, the groups must discuss the questions below so that the reporter will be able to report back to the class.
5. Reporter; what went well, didn't go well, what did you learn about working in group etc.
6. *The teacher's role at this stage is active; it involves guiding, teaching and monitoring the student's leaning, providing additional information and correcting any misconceptions in response to individual and group needs.*

Before Week 4 (in class)

- Allow the children some time to finish their projects if they haven't been completed.

Transformation Stage Week 4; 1st March

1. The children will be given their roles for this week.
2. We will discuss the presentation that will happen next week.
3. The class will make Success Criteria for presentation. They will discuss it first in their small groups and then as a whole group. We will document their thoughts on what makes a successful presentation.
4. The children will then be asked to each pick **ONE** piece of information they will tell the class about the project next week.
5. Once the children have tidied away the materials at the teachers' request, the groups must discuss the questions below so that the reporter will be able to report back to the class.
6. Reporter; what went well, didn't go well, what did you learn about working in group etc.

Before Week 5 (in class)

- Allow the children to practise their presentation using the success criteria.
- Revise the success criteria as a whole class.

Presentation and Reflection Stage Week 5; 8th March

1. *The presentation stage is when ideas are presented to an interested and critical audience.*
2. Revise Oral Presentation Success Criteria.
3. Each group will be given a chance to present their project to the class- 2 pieces of information per child.
4. After each presentation we will ask their peers for one piece of information they learned and one piece of positive feedback about the presentation (making reference to the success criteria).
5. Once all the projects are completed, we will do a whole class refection with the SET teachers taking notes.
6. The class teachers may want to record the presentations to show the children at a later time/ before they do their next oral presentation in class.
7. We will meet the class teachers at a time convenient to them to get their feedback and reflection.

Appendix L: Reflection-on-Action

Support Team's Reflections December 2018 (5th Class)

- Hard time of year to get project completed
- Groups worked very well together.
- The teachers had done work on skimming and scanning before we started the project work and you could see the impact of this. They weren't highlighting everything like we have seen before.
- A lot of very strong characters in each class meant that the roles were even more important but had to be constantly revised as each session went on as a reminder to the children to undertake their own role. Managers especially as several students were over powering and took on traits of the manager role when it wasn't their turn.
- Less able students really enjoyed the manager role as they felt they didn't need to do as much writing or reporting and they liked this- good for their confidence.
- We chose not to have an IT presentation group. Although we would love to incorporate more IT into these sessions, we found that one teacher had to spend their whole time with this one group and that's not possible with such a large and demanding class.
- Need to think of other ways to incorporate IT. Could one of the roles include googling facts or information the group lacks?
- Reflection model; hard to answer the questions after each week, any reflections came under the same heading; *Aesthetics*; what went well and what didn't go well, our response to this. Also *Empirics*; What knowledge did or might have informed me at the beginning, during and at the end of each session.

- Feedback from the children;
  - Love doing things in a group
  - It was fun and very informative.
  - Hard to get everything finished on time
  - Learned to work faster.
  - Learned lots about the president including who was the first female president of Ireland