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Órla Ní Ghiollagáin

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Dáta: 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020



OLLSCOIL NA HÉIREANN MÁ NUAD  
THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND  
MAYNOOTH

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**Enhancing my Teaching of Irish-Language Vocabulary through the use of Stories and  
Storytelling**

Órla Ní Ghiollagáin

A Research Dissertation submitted to the Froebel Department of Primary and Early  
Childhood Education, Maynooth University, in fulfilment of the requirements for the degree  
of Master of Education (Research in Practice)

Date: 24<sup>th</sup> September 2020

Supervised by: Dr Liam Mac Amhlaigh



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# Abstract

The purpose of this self-study action research study was to improve my teaching of Irish vocabulary using stories. I felt my teaching lacked energy and did not reflect my values of hard-work, commitment and respect for Irish language and culture. I learned *Gaeilge trí Ghaeilge* easily and without fuss. I truly believe that with the right attitude, hard-work and correct teaching methods, anyone can do the same.

Storytelling has long been used as a method to develop a young child's imagination, engagement and language and that is why I decided to apply it to my teaching of Irish. My research was conducted in a suburban, upper-middle-class, co-educational primary school in Dublin which places a strong emphasis on Irish. The 23 Junior Infant children in my class, their parents and my critical friend all acted as participants in the research, with me and my practice as its focus.

My chosen methodology was self-study action research as it is the only form of research that allows the researcher to put herself at the forefront of the study. I adopted a mixed-methods approach to data-gathering including assessing the children's standard of Irish vocabulary both pre- and post-intervention, sending out a parental questionnaire, daily observations and recording my evolving thoughts, opinions and mindset in my reflective journal. I conducted the research in strict ethical fashion, maintaining validity and reliability at all times. My storytelling intervention was influenced by Blaine Ray's (1998) *Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling* (TPRS) theory. It used a well-known Irish storybook to

teach specific vocabulary. There was a focus on repetition, questioning and creating a home-school link with parental involvement.

The findings revealed an increase in engagement and vocabulary retention following the storytelling intervention. A clear desire to improve their own ability in the Irish language was evident from the parental questionnaires as well as emerging evidence of the effectiveness of using informal Irish throughout the day. I concluded that stories can indeed increase vocabulary retention and facilitate second language acquisition. The findings also highlighted the importance of using informal Irish throughout the day and the value of parental involvement.

I conclude by acknowledging that the most important improvement arose within myself and my practice. I can confidently claim that my teaching of the Irish language aligns with my personal values and I now understand how I can instill joy in my teaching and the children's learning of the Irish language.

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PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
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TPRS	Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and
Storytelling	

SLA	Second Language Acquisition
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# Chapter One – Introduction

## **1.0 Introduction**

This chapter wishes to discuss the focus and aims of this self-study action research project. I will explain the primary reasons for undertaking this particular study by examining and reflecting my own values and self as well as discussing the particular intervention I introduced to my classroom. An overview of the chapters accompanies this chapter which will allow me to structure and navigate my self-study action research journey in a clear and concise manner.

## **1.1 Focus and Aims of the Study**

The aim and purpose of this thesis was to ultimately transform and improve my teaching practice of the Irish language. My main focus was on improving my teaching of Irish in order to spark joy and enthusiasm in my teaching and the children's learning of the language. My primary concern was that children are leaving primary school after 8 years of learning Irish with a significantly low standard and a particularly negative attitude towards the language (Mac Gréil, M, 2007). The language is fast becoming an option for some pupils (O' Brien, Irish Times, 2019) with some opting out of the subject. My concern was that in a few years time, we will see the end of Irish as a compulsory subject as "the survival of minority languages largely depends on public attitudes towards the language" (Darmody, M and Daly, T, 2015: 1).

Having reflected on how I taught Irish throughout my first year teaching, I came to the undeniable conclusion that it was not the most effective, engaging or enjoyable

learning experience for myself as the teacher or the children as the learners. I have a passion and an interest in the teaching of the Irish language and felt I was letting myself and my values down and therefore, placing a clear focus on improving my teaching of Irish for this research study was a easy decision.

Focusing on using stories and storytelling to improve my teaching of Irish was purely based on my experience of using storybooks in the classroom to teach other subjects. I completely agree that “making use of stories in the classroom makes educational sense” (Leicester, 2005: 11) and I believed that using them to teach an additional language could potentially transform my own practice.

There were many aspects of the teaching of Irish I could have chosen to focus on, however, teaching Junior Infants and therefore, a younger age group, I was naturally drawn to Irish vocabulary as that is primarily the basis of the curriculum. It is therefore, why I ultimately narrowed my focus down to improving my teaching of Irish vocabulary using stories and storytelling to do so.

The **three main aims** of this study were as follows;

1. Spark joy and enthusiasm in my teaching and the children’s learning of the Irish language.
2. Develop a storytelling intervention with a focus on the teaching of Irish vocabulary catered for a young class group.
3. Improve and transform my teaching of Irish in order to live more closely in the direction of my values.

Once I had decided on the focus and aims of my research study, I reflected on a variety of questions I sought to answer throughout my research and narrowed it down to three:

1. How can storytelling facilitate second language acquisition?
2. How can I make my teaching of Irish more engaging and interesting?
3. Can I improve the vocabulary retention of my students through storytelling?

These three questions accompanied by my aims were the basis of my study and allowed me to keep a clear structure and approach to my research study.

## **1.2 Research Background**

There were many reasons, both personally and professionally, for undertaking this research study, however, one of the primary reasons was to improve my teaching of Irish to the standard that I knew was effective. Having began this research study in August 2019 and reflected on the values I hold, I was experiencing myself as a “living contradiction” (Whitehead, 1989) as for someone who claims to value hard-work and respect for the Irish language and culture, my teaching of Irish simple did not reflect this. Using the Irish programme “Bua na Cainte” as a full Irish lesson was not an effective or engaging way to teach a language and I believed I was not doing my values or myself any justice and therefore, a change needed to happen and thus, this journey began.

I grew up immersed in Irish culture and the Irish language, having attended both my primary and secondary schooling through the medium of Irish. The Irish language and culture was an important part of my upbringing and having learned it naturally, ‘*Gaeilge trí Ghaeilge*’ and without fuss, the teaching of Irish and the manner in

which it is taught in schools was important and of interest to me. I write in my value statement in August 2019 that “*I struggle to comprehend the negative attitude some have towards our native language and feel the necessity to teach Irish in a fun, interesting and engaging manner in order to spark love and joy towards Irish in the next generation*” (Ní Ghiollagáin, 2019). I was taken aback by the general negative attitudes surrounding Irish in the school I was teaching in, particularly in the older classes and I truly believed that that is down to the way it is being taught in schools. Reflecting on my own teaching, however, prompted me to consider changing my methods of teaching Irish and adopting an intervention I believed in, in the hope of benefitting my teaching, my student’s learning and the wider school community.

### **1.3 Context**

My research study was conducted in a suburban, upper-middle class Primary school in Dublin. It is an expanding, Catholic school that places high value on parental support and engagement and prides itself in placing an important role on the teaching of Irish around the school. My study involved a Junior Infant co-educational class with 23 enthusiastic pupils. A more in-depth discussion of the research participants and research site can be found in Chapter Three.

#### **1.4 Intervention**

My intervention was conducted based on reflecting on the literature of the teaching of Irish and reflecting on my current practice and the elements I wanted to improve. It was inspired by Blaine Ray's (1997) '*Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)*' theory and was based on using stories and storytelling as a tool to teach Irish vocabulary. The key features of the intervention were as follows;

- Focus on repetition
- Focus on questioning
- Daily target vocabulary
- The crucial role of the storyteller
- Home-school link with parental involvement

The intervention itself enabled me to teach Irish in a manner that I was proud of and thus live closer to my values of respecting Irish language and culture and working hard. Having the ability, tools and understanding to reflect on current practice is truly a gift in itself as reflections enable us “to understand our practice and our contexts and the values that inform us, as we seek to improve what we do so as to maximise the learning opportunities for our pupils” (Sullivan et al, 2016: 22). The critical reflection on my practice and values enabled me to create this particular intervention that I have no doubt will maximise the learning opportunities for my pupils. Chapter Three will discuss the intervention in more depth.

#### **1.5 Overview of Chapters**

The following is an overview of the content of each chapter.

**Chapter Two: Literature Review** – the aim of this chapter is to critically review, reflect and critique various literature associated with the teaching of Irish and



storytelling. I will examine key literature associated with second language acquisition and explore the writing of key theorists in that area. Literature associated with storytelling and stories to promote an additional language will also be analyzed. The primary aim of this chapter is to guide me in my current thinking and enable me to reflect on my practice and areas I would like to improve.

**Chapter Three: Methodology** – This chapter discusses the primary methodology and methods I used throughout this research study. I justify my reasons for adopting a self-study action research approach and reflect upon my ontological and epistemological beliefs. My research plan, design and intervention is discussed in detail as well as my methods of data collection.

**Chapter Four: Data Analysis** – This chapter formally presents, carefully analyses and critically reflects on the variety of data gathered while undertaking this research study. I discuss various limitations while conducting the study and reflect upon the next steps.

**Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations** – This final chapter provides a summary of the main findings while discussing how this study has influenced my values and evolving teacher identity. Finally, recommendations and future plans and practice are considered and discussed.

## **1.6 Conclusion**

The primary aim of this chapter was to provide a clear and structured approach to this research study highlighting the primary aims and focus of the study. The background of the research was included to provide a clear rationale and understanding of the chosen topic. The context and intervention was also briefly included. Finally, an overview of the chapters was included in order to provide clear signposting for the reader to navigate their way through the chapters with ease.

I was really looking forward to beginning my action research journey and discovering and exploring additional ways to teach a second language. I hoped that this experience would modify my thinking and practice and allow me to become a better teacher of the Irish language and in turn create a unique and fun learning experience for the children in my class.

# Chapter Two: Literature Review

## **2.0 Introduction**

This literature review seeks to enhance, improve and guide me in my current thinking and research by allowing me to critique, question and review a variety of appropriate papers, literature and research that has been carried out previously around the topic of storytelling and stories in acquiring a second language.

I have divided this literature review into three main sections, each with smaller subheadings, to enable me to have a clear structure and understanding of my findings.

In each section key literature is examined, evaluated and linked to the research topic in question.

## **2.1 Second Language Acquisition**

### **2.1.1 Introduction**

How we acquire a second language is a heavily researched topic that many theorists (Krashen, 1982, Chomsky, 1960) have examined. As my research question is based around how I can improve my teaching of Irish and as Irish is a second language for my participants, I felt it was important to research and critique relevant literature associated with second language acquisition.

### **2.1.2 Krashen's Theory**

Krashen (1982) suggests that we 'acquire' a second language rather than learn it. He argues we acquire our second language the same way we acquired our first language;

naturally, subconsciously and informally. He based his theory around five hypotheses: the acquisition-learning distinction, the natural order hypothesis, the monitor hypothesis, the input hypothesis and finally the affective filter hypothesis. Krashen (1982) argues that the input hypothesis is significant as it “attempts to answer the crucial theoretical question of how we acquire language” (1982: 9). He suggests that there are four parts of the input hypothesis:

1. Acquisition comes first and learning follows. This is significant for language teachers as this highlights the importance for second language learning to be purposeful, authentic and natural.
2. Comprehensible input – He suggests that acquisition takes place when the input is one step ahead of the learners current stage in order to allow them to continue to progress. (  $i + 1$  ). This reveals the importance of ensuring students are being challenged.
3. If communication is successful and the learner receives a message they understand,  $i + 1$  should be provided automatically.
4. Finally, he suggests that fluency emerges over time and can not be taught directly. Once comprehensible input is being provided regularly, the learner will begin to use the language when they are ready and at their own stage of readiness. This is worth noting as it reveals to me as a language teacher that the learners will all acquire the language at different times.

Although Krashen’s theory was strong, Payne (2011) raised the point that it would be difficult to plan lessons for a class of 30 if we needed to ensure that the input provided would be one step ahead of the learners current stage, as undoubtedly all of the pupils are at different stages? This is further highlighted by Larsen-freeman

(2011) who propose that learners acquire L2 at very different rates. Furthermore, Zarfar (2009) argues that Krashen's theory that fluency emerges over time and can not be taught is too difficult to measure or to test as "nowhere does Krashen define "comprehensible input", or tell exactly how to measure the "level of competence" in "sufficient amount" or "right quantities". The vagueness of the terms employed makes his theory all the more nontestable" (Zarfar, 2009: 144).

Krashen's theories are also evident in light of the new Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (2019) being published as it is an integrated curriculum and they argue that "children transfer certain skills and concepts from their first to their second language and to a third language in some instances" (DES, 2019: 8). This theory goes hand in hand with Krashen's theory (1982) that language acquisition is a subconscious process and that we learn our second language the same way we learned our first. In other words, we use the same skills to "pick up" the second language just as we did to informally and naturally acquire our first. These skills are therefore transferable.

Krashen's theories are also questioned in the new PLC as it places an emphasis on "teaching language specific skills and content" (2019: 8) and in contrast to that Krashen suggests that we subconsciously "have a "feel" for correctness. Grammatical sentences "sound" right, or "feel" right, and errors feel wrong, even if we do not consciously know what rule was violated" (1982: 10).

### **2.1.3 Key Principles of Children's Second Language Learning**

#### **Integrated approach**

As I previously stated, the new PLC is an integrated language curriculum suggesting that teachers should actively point out similarities and differences between L1 and L2 as “an explicit instructional focus on integration across languages will enable children to make cross-lingual connections and develop their awareness of how language works” (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012: 36). This points to the need for teachers to make subtle but regular links between the two languages.

#### **Exposure to the language**

Research highlights the need for continuous exposure to L2 (DES, 2019) as “the more exposure the learners have to the L2 the more they will learn and the faster they will learn it” (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012: 51). In comparison to that, Shresta (1998) linked frequent exposure to L2 to promoting fluency which she believes to be far more important than accuracy for communicative purposes. This relates back to Krashen's Monitor Hypothesis theory (1982) and the difference between learning acquisition. Acquisition is responsible for our fluency whereby learning takes on the accuracy role. These findings highlight the importance of using Irish informally throughout the day and ensuring children are taught through the target language for example *Gaeilge trí Ghaeilge*.

#### **Language learning environment**

Creating a comfortable, positive and calm learning environment is crucial to language learning. Krashen (1982) explains how various factors effect our language learning acquisition including classroom anxiety. The more anxious a child feels in a

classroom setting the less likely they would be to speak or use the language they have acquired and as Ellis cited in Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012) states language input is as important as language output. In other words, we must give children opportunities to use the language they have acquired. The PLC furthermore backs that point up when they state “children’s language learning is increased through opportunities to produce language orally throughout the school day” (DES, 2019: 35). This research is significant as it highlights the need for teachers to ensure their classroom is a safe learning environment for all as “establishing a good emotional atmosphere in the classroom depends on both learners and teachers and is crucial for learning to happen” (Dewaele et al, 2017: 677).

## **Interaction with L2**

All the research points in the direction that interaction with L2 should be “meaningful, contextual, enjoyable and playful” (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012; DES, 2019; Ellis, 1999). According Mhic Mhathúna (2015) repetition plays an integral role in allowing learners to acquire a new language. This is significant for me as a teacher to make certain that I repeat words and phrases regularly and ensure I am providing my pupils with regular “opportunities for enjoyable interaction with others” (DES, 2019: 35).

### **2.1.4 Code-Mixing and Code Switching**

As children begin to learn an additional language and their fluency develops they begin to code-mix and code switch between languages. Muysken cited in Kim (2006) defines code-mixing as using two languages in one sentences and reverting back and forth between the two throughout a conversation. There are various factors as to why a child would switch or mix two languages including “when they cannot find proper

words or expressions or when there is no appropriate translation for the language being used” (Kim, 2006: 47).

In regards to the teaching of the Irish language, it is not advised that the teacher themselves reverts to code-mixing or code switching while teaching as immersion and *Gaeilge trí Ghaeilge* is the key recommendation (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012). However, it is accepted that on occasion a teacher may “speak in Irish, add a translation in English if absolutely necessary and translate the word or utterance back into Irish for emphasis” (Mhic Mhathúna, 2004: 74).

### **2.1.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the literature on Krashen’s theory highlighted the importance of comprehensible input and ensuring that I am pitching my lessons one step ahead of the learner’s current stage. The literature also highlighted the need for linkage across L1 and L2, frequent and relevant exposure to L2, a safe and comfortable learning environment and finally meaningful and contextual interaction with L2. Finally, it is important to note the significance of code-mixing and code switching while teaching an additional language. These findings are all crucial as I undertake my action research.



## **2.2 The Teaching of the Irish language in Primary Schools in Ireland**

### **2.2.1 Introduction**

Having reviewed a range of literature associated with how one acquires a second language in the previous section, I would now like to review literature based on how the topic of Irish is taught in schools now versus how it was taught in the past. I would like to evaluate whether or not we are adhering to the theorist's suggestions mentioned in the previous section.

### **2.2.2 The Teaching of Irish in the Past**

The Irish language or *Gaeilge* was “constitutionally designated the ‘first official language’ of the Republic of Ireland” (Hickey and Stenson, 2016: 270), however, the Mercator report (2016) suggests that factors such as the effect of colonization, plantation, suppression, emigration and the famine, all led to a language shift to English. Since the late 19<sup>th</sup> century “primary schools have had a central role in language revitalization” (Harris, 2008) and Irish soon became a core, compulsory subject in both Primary and Secondary schools with the recommended time allocation being “between 3.2 and 5.5 hours per week” (Mac Aogáin cited in Hickey and Stenson, 2016: 4).

Irish would have been taught using a direct teaching approach, just as all other subject were back then, however, with the introduction of the 1999 curriculum and new ideas and theories being put forward about how a second language is best taught, a “communicative approach” was taken. According to Alamri (2018) the communicative approach has led to major changes in how languages are taught and learned with the main aim being communicative competence and “on the learner

fulfilling a communicative need” (DES, 2019: 28). CLT aims to promote the learning of a new language by “infusing the learning environment with new types of activities and materials that are both interactive and authentic” (Alamri, 2018: 1) which similarly applies to Krashen’s (1982) beliefs that language learning should be meaningful, natural and informal.

According to Hickey and Stenson (2016) the Irish language saw significant gains in official status since 1991, however, “results of a national comparative study over a 17 year period show that there has been a long-term decline in pupil success in learning Irish” (Harris, 2008: 49). Factors such as time pressures, curriculum overload, lack of engagement by parents, teacher proficiency in Irish and negative attitudes all play an integral role in this decline (Harris, 2008; Hickey and Stenson, 2016; Hickey and Stenson, 2016). The 1999 curriculum saw a considerable reduction in time allocated for Irish to 3.5 hours per week which according to Stenson and Hickey (2016) led to a vast decline of spoken Irish simply due to lack of exposure to the language.

### **2.2.3 The New Primary Language Curriculum**

The new PLC is an integrated curriculum and is based around the research conducted by Ó Duibhir and Cummins in 2012 which was discussed in the above section. As with the 1999 curriculum, it takes the communicative approach to teaching and places emphasis on the transfer of skills. The main difference between the new language curriculum and the revised 1999 curriculum is that it “integrates English and Irish and includes all children and the language knowledge and experiences that they bring to the classroom” (DES, 2019). According to DES (2019) it focuses on the successes of the 1999 curriculum including increasing emphasis on active learning,

however, makes adaptations in relation to new research such as developing children's digital and critical literacy and problem solving skills.

Years of research has gone into producing this new integrated curriculum. It is a significant step in the right direction for the promotion of the Irish language in schools, however, it is still up for debate whether or not it will be successfully and correctly implemented in schools across the country.

#### **2.2.4 Attitudes towards the Irish Language**

The latest census (2016) shows a slight decrease of 0.7% of the amount of people who answered 'yes' to being able to speak Irish, bringing the total percentage to 39.8%. Perhaps more alarming than that however, is that a mere 1.7% of the population actually use Irish outside of educational purposes in Ireland. In a recent study by Ní Shabhaois (2016), she found that although more than half of adults favoured keeping Irish as a compulsory subject, there was a high proportion of younger respondents who favoured making Irish optional. This research is significant as it reveals the negative attitude the 'future generation' have on the subject and "those whose attitudes are not optimal for second language acquisition will not only tend to seek less input, but they will also have a high or strong Affective Filter" (Krashen, 1982: 31).

In a study by Mac Gréil and Rhatigan (2007), they found that people's attitude towards Irish increased after they left school for various reasons such as wisdom of age, the unattractive way Irish was taught, poor simulation and motivation while in school and finally the failure to see Irish as a living language. These are all

significant findings that point out the necessity for teachers to make Irish “an attractive and worthwhile subject” (2007: 23).

All the literature points in the direction of providing children with an enjoyable and interactive experience of Irish in school so that they will leave with a positive disposition of the subject and an eagerness to continue to speak it outside of school hours.

#### **2.2.5 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the relevant literature has given me a clearer understanding of what is expected of me as a teacher of a second language. It is evident that creating a positive disposition towards the language is the first step in encouraging children to learn it.

### **2.3 Storytelling and Stories as a tool to promote Second Language Acquisition**

#### **2.3.1 Introduction**

There is a vast amount of literature surrounding storytelling and using stories in the classroom. I will be reviewing the literature through the lens of learning a new language. The value of using stories in the classroom and storytelling for vocabulary development will all be explored along with recently developed theories such as *Teaching proficiency through reading and storytelling* (TPRS).

### **2.3.2 Value of Stories in the Classroom**

According to Mhic Mhathúna (2004) stories are a valuable resource to have in the classroom with advantages including personal, social, and intellectual enrichment as well as linguistic development. Erkaya (2005) agrees and believes that stories have multiple teaching aspects and have the power to foster higher-order thinking aspects as well as to “help students to learn the four skills—listening, speaking, reading and writing - more effectively because of the motivational benefit embedded in the stories” (Erkaya, 2005: 1).

Stories are multi-layered and are an accessible method of teaching in-depth topics as it allows the children to grasp multiple meanings depending on their intellectual ability. Leicester (2005) argues that stories can both teach and entertain at the same time. Stories are an enjoyable way to teach a topic as children love listening and reading them and if children are enjoying something learning occurs subconsciously.

Furthermore, stories can be used to “stimulate our imagination and teach us about ourselves, about others, about the world and about the world of values” and therefore, “making use of stories in the classroom makes sound educational sense” (Leicester. 2015: 1). The literature above suggests that using stories in the classroom have multiple advantages and can be used in many ways other than to facilitate language development.

According to Mhic Mhathúna (2004) stories can be used to facilitate second language acquisition and particularly vocabulary development. She argues that while the child is still learning the new language and therefore wouldn't have the necessary vocabulary to understand the meaning of the story “the child can use the clues in the

pictures and the voice and actions of the story-teller to aid comprehension” (Mhic Mathúna, 2004: 10).

Valentini et al (2018) conducted a study based on children’s vocabulary development when they were exposed to them incidentally in stories and concluded that “reading and listening to stories fosters vocabulary development” (Valentini et al, 2018: 10). Interestingly enough, they found that children who listened to the stories read aloud by an adult were more likely to demonstrate knowledge of the new words which is significant to this research as I am working with young children who wouldn’t have the skills to read yet. This study, was, of course, conducted in relation to the participants first language, however, I believe that the same theory could be applied to a second language by placing a bigger emphasis on the storytelling aspect.

### **2.3.3 Value of Storytelling**

According to Newell (1995), there are vast benefits to storytelling in the classroom including “stimulating children’s imagination, promoting understanding of the oral tradition in literature, motivating children to read, extending their vocabulary and introducing them to the values of different cultures” (1995: 424).

Mhic Mhathúna’s (2004) study of storytelling as a vehicle for second language acquisition in a preschool setting proved very successful and supports the studies that “children who have been read to regularly in their preschool years make rapid strides in their reading and language development in school” (Elley, 1989: 176). Krashen (1982) suggests that when children are motivated and are enjoying their learning, they will be more open to comprehensible input and as listening to stories is an

engaging activity for most children it makes sense that they will acquire additional language and information.

Elley (1989) remarks that “those who have observed children listening to an absorbing story have often been impressed with the quality and persistence of their attention” (1989: 176) thus highlighting the point above. Furthermore, Cermak and Craik cited in Elley (1989) agree with all the research above and put forward the theory that children will actually learn at a deeper level, retain more information and process more meaning from an activity such as storytelling than working at contrived exercises.

### **2.3.4 Considerations for using Storytelling to Facilitate SLA**

The literature all points to storytelling being a useful tool for facilitating second language acquisition (SLA) and vocabulary development. However, here are some considerations that the literature deems important to note also.

#### **Types of books**

Dickinson (2001) suggests that the type of book that the storyteller chooses is crucial in impacting children's language learning opportunities. If the motivational aspect of listening to the story is missing and if engagement is low, new vocabulary will simply not be acquired. This falls under Krashen's (1982) *affective filter hypothesis*.

According to Tierney and Dobson (1995) choosing familiar stories in the children's second language such as traditional fairytales is essential for language development so that they can use their prior knowledge of the story to create meaning and understanding. Furthermore, they make the suggestion that the story should be linked to a particular theme or topic that has been completed in the class and that "the language level of the story should match the language level of the pupils and the illustrations should help pupils to understand the story and allow them to pass comment" (Tierney and Dobson, 1995: 2).

They also suggest that choosing a story with an interesting plot will enable the children to anticipate what happens next, make predictions and thus levels of engagements will be higher leading to ample language development. Finally, Tabors cited in Mhic Mhathúna (2004) advises the storyteller to keep the book sessions short to cater for the short attention span of children which is particularly significant for me as a teacher of younger aged children.



Dickinson and Smith cited in Mhic Mhathúna (2004) conducted research into the type of books suitable for younger aged children and found that the most popular books that teachers chose to read to three-year-olds were picturebooks. In contrast to that, however, is the study done by Valentini et al (2018) which suggested that children will acquire a second language faster when provided with the written form of new vocabulary (words on a page) as well as the oral form (storytelling). This piece of research is significant for me moving forward.

### **Teacher's style**

In my opinion, the role of the storyteller is to maximise engagement, create anticipation and excitement and encourage learning. This can simply not occur if the storyteller reads a story in a monosyllabic manner as “children make the greatest gains when adults use cognitively demanding reading styles that stimulate deep processing of information” (Gonzalez et al, 2013: 2).

The study done by Dickinson and Smith cited in Mhic Mhathúna (2004) describe three styles of book reading approaches by teachers; *co-constructive*, *didactic- interactional* or *performance-oriented approaches*. They argue that a co-constructive approach implies teamwork between the storyteller and the listeners and that the focus was on the book's subject and content rather than the language development. A performance-orientated approach centered around discussions before and after the story and focused on children's predictions and connections with the children's lives. Both styles mentioned above, although beneficial and useful fail to put the emphasis on language development. Therefore, Dickinson and Smith, cited in Mhic Mhathúna

(2004), encourage the use of the didactic-interactional approach to storytelling as “the teachers encouraged the children to contribute to the reading of books by chiming in with repeated, familiar phrases” (2004: 25). This approach evidently supports language development and should be the favourable option when using stories to facilitate SLA.

### **Repetition**

According to Gonzalez (2013) repetition and recall of key words during storytelling is crucial in facilitating second language acquisition as “mere repetition of words through generalized use of extratextual questions results in more target word learning” (2013: 3). Furthermore, it is suggested “there should be repetition of key structures to enable pupils to participate”. The amount of new vocabulary and language structures should be limited so that the pupils can remember some of the new language and use it themselves” (Mhic Mathúna, 2004: 13).

Repetition and recall of words and phrases are important as can be seen from above, however, reading the same story many times also holds many benefits for facilitation second language acquisition. Hickey cited in Mhic Mhathúna (2004) argues for the importance of reading the same story frequently so that children could guess the meaning and begin to imitate short utterances and words once they understand the meaning of the story.

Finally, children love predictability and as repeated reading is predictable “it helps children understand what is being said and provides a natural review of words, phrases and grammatical structures” (Mhic Mhathúna, 2004: 26).

### **2.3.5 Teaching Proficiency Through Reading and Storytelling (TPRS)**

“TPR storytelling is a method of teaching young learners by telling stories through gestures, image pictures, drawings, etc as a means of providing comprehensible input” (Kudus, 2016: 51). It is a storytelling technique created in 1988 by Blaine Ray (Ray and Seely, 1997) used to teach a second language and is based on Krashen’s (1982) theories on second language acquisition and Asher’s Total Physical Response. According to Cubukcu (2014) TPR storytelling is an effective technique used to teach an additional language. It follows a sensory and kinesthetic approach to language learning with the teacher focusing on a small set of new vocabulary and attempting to repeat those words as many times throughout the mini lesson and story while keeping it totally comprehensible. The mini story is told by the teacher and should be “a silly tale that grabs students’ attention and is just slightly above their comprehension level” (Cubukcu, 2014: 87). The students may then dramatise the story themselves repeating the key vocabulary. TPR storytelling is a worldwide technique and is deemed successful in teaching a second language and particularly in facilitating vocabulary development hence my keen interest in the technique.

A study conducted by Cubukcu (2014) on the effects of using TPR storytelling on vocabulary development found a significant difference between the group being taught vocabulary through storytelling and the control group who learned the same vocabulary in the text of their books. They concluded “the results show that vocabulary instruction through TPRS has a significant impact on the lexical knowledge level. The TPRS method points out that learners of a foreign language can eventually express themselves fluently and accurately and it presents storytelling as a suitable means for communication” (Cubukcu, 2014: 89).

TPR storytelling is based around Krashen's comprehensible input hypothesis and centers around the idea that in order to acquire new vocabulary there must be meaning associated with it. Kudus (2016) further backs Krashen's theories and particularly his affective filter hypothesis and argues that the teaching design of any additional language to young learners needs to be interesting and enjoyable as "when the children are highly motivated, they will learn maximally" (2016: 50). Kudus (2016) also draws on inspiration from John Dewey and suggests that the TPR storytelling technique incorporates children's needs and interests as well as the idea that children learn by doing. Through TPRS children will become highly motivated, interested and engaged in the story and thus they will subconsciously "acquire" the vocabulary. I agree with Kudus (2016) when she makes the point that as "the learning atmosphere will be enjoyable and relaxing it will subconsciously encourage them to learn English as a Foreign Language" (2016: 51) thus taking Krashen's affective filter hypothesis into question.

The literature surrounding TPR Storytelling suggests it to be a highly successful method of teaching an additional language, however, I would be apprehensive of using the whole process with a group of young children. I certainly, can see many advantages of using the technique, however, I envision myself altering it to suit the needs of my class.

### **2.3.6 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this section of the literature review aimed to focus on why and how using stories and storytelling in the classroom can facilitate second language acquisition. By drawing on the literature I reviewed in previous sections and by

researching and reviewing additional literature I can confidently claim that there are ample benefits and opportunities to teach a second language using stories.

#### **2.4 Overall Conclusion**

In conclusion, it is evident that all the literature agrees that the teaching of a second language must be meaningful, enjoyable and contextual in order for children to have the motivation and engagement to interact with the second language. Moving forward, I believe that I have covered all aspects relevant to my research of second language acquisition, the teaching of Irish in schools today and the benefits of using stories and storytelling in the classroom. I now have a very clear focus as to how I can improve my teaching of the Irish language through the use of storytelling.

## Chapter Three – Methodology

### **3.0 Introduction**

This chapter discusses the primary methodology and methods I used to undertake this research study. A definition and concise rationale of my chosen methodology is explored including the justification of using this approach, in terms of my ontological and epistemological commitments. I also wish to address and discuss the limitations, reliability and validity of this study along with an in-depth exploration of the ethical considerations I ensured to adhere to. Finally, my research plan and design is discussed as well as my methods of data collection.

I viewed this chapter as a planning template that I executed over a few months and used as a source of reflection while writing my findings as it helped me to understand what worked well and what I could have planned better.

### **3.1 Self-Study Action Research Approach**

My chosen methodology was self-study action research. There were many reasons why I chose to undertake this particular approach with the main one being that the focus was on my teaching and how I could improve an aspect of that. Self-study action research was a new term for me. From what I had learned at the beginning self-study action research is merely a way of reflecting on an aspect of my own teaching in the hope of improving it. I was the focus of the research and I was focusing on my own teaching. The primary school students that acted as research participants were facilitators in my research. Through critical reflection, data gathering and dialogues with my critical friend I was able to navigate my way through the various conflicts and problems I encountered along the journey.

The title of my research study entitled “*Enhancing my teaching of Irish Vocabulary through the use of Stories and Storytelling*” was phrased in a specific way that allowed me to put the spotlight on my own teaching of the Irish language rather than on the children’s learning of the language. The children in my class were merely participants in my research and the data that I gathered from them allowed me to reflect on my teaching with the hope of transforming and improving my practice. Self-study action research was the only form of research that looks at the practitioner rather than the participants. I was in control of how I taught the Irish language and I was the only one with the power to change my practice, therefore, reflecting and researching my own teaching seemed like the logical approach to take.

### **3.1.1 What is Self-Study Action Research?**

According to Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) self-study action research is a relatively new term coined by a group of like-minded people who believed it was not enough to focus merely on researching data or participants. In order to bring about real change in practice we must turn the lens onto ourselves and research our own teaching. They claim “self-study research refers to teacher educators researching their practice with the purpose of improving it, making explicit and validating their professional expertise and, at the same time, contributing to the knowledge base of teacher education” (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 508). McNiff (2002) furthermore agrees with this but also highlights the importance of self reflection in researching one’s own practice.

By reflecting on one’s own teaching you are competing against the traditional form of research whereby the researcher reflects on data or on other people. Bassey (1992) refers to this traditional form of research as empirical research. He suggests three

realms of research in education; empirical research, reflective research and creative research. Self-study action research would generally fall under the terms reflective or creative research as creative research is about “the devising of new systems, the development of novel solutions, and the formulation of new ideas, by systematic and critical enquiry” (Bassey, 1992: 5). Self-study aims to bring about change and new ideas rather than just analysing and reflecting on the old way of doing things. It is therefore, why Bassey (1992) views self study action research as those who seek to change and improve. By engaging in self-study action research you are “conducting an enquiry by the self into the self” (McNiff, 2002: 1) and attempting to figure out how and why you teach the way you do.

### **3.1.2 Why I Chose Self-Study Action Research?**

#### **Values**

“Action research begins with values” (McNiff, 2002: 12). Self-study action research was the only form of research whereby the researcher’s values play an integral role. In my opinion, reflecting on one’s own values has the power to bring about change in practice at an accelerating rate as the values that I hold have influenced my actions, thinking and decisions throughout my life. In order to improve an aspect of my own teaching, it makes sense to first turn to the values I hold as “the truth which we need to explore lies not only in the outcomes of actions but in the minds of the actors” (Bassey, 1992: 12).

It is my ontological belief that hard-work and commitment always pays off. It was therefore, why I chose to focus on my teaching of Irish as I felt it was one aspect of my teaching that I could improve. I valued respect for our culture and particularly the



Irish language and had a strong sense of pride and respect for the Irish language and culture, having attended both Primary and Secondary school through the medium of Irish. It is therefore, why I decided to undertake this self-study action research, in order to reflect on my teaching of Irish, an aspect that I was passionate about and an aspect that I valued, so that I could confidently claim that I was “living more fully in the directions of my values” (McNiff, 2010: 12).

### **Self-reflection**

Self-reflection was an essential element of self-study action research as it “offers a way for teachers to step back and reflect on their actions, in the light of their values” (Cain and Harris, 2013: 344). Self-reflection can help us negotiate our teacher identity and thus help us understand why we teach the way we do. I agree with Palmer (2010) when he argues that the way we teach reflects who we are as a person. He believes there are three important sources in teaching; the subject, the students but most importantly the self. Self-study action research begins with the self and works outwards and hence “Good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a “capacity for connectedness” (Palmer, 2010: 3).

### **Collaborative process**

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) argue that the literature all points to the need for self-study action research to be a collaborative process. The importance of having a critical friend is highlighted as “social interactions in self-study have been framed as a way to avoid the pitfalls of individualism and navel-gazing” (Vanassche and

Kelchtermans, 2015: 516). Brookfield (2017) agrees with this point as he believes that although critical reflection is a solo endeavor, it is also a collective enterprise and that through dialogue colleagues can offer multiple perspectives and opinions and help us unearth and check our assumptions regularly.

### **3.1.3 Conclusion**

A self-study approach was the only approach that allowed me to put myself, the teacher, at the forefront of my research. It was the only approach that allowed me to critically reflect on myself and on my teaching with the aim of transforming and improving and it is the only form of research that allowed one to focus on themselves as a teacher but with the help of a community. All of the reasons above prompted me to adopt this approach while conducting my research.

### **3.2 Research Design**

Conducting any form of research requires organisation and a systematic approach.

The approach I chose to take was based on Jack Whitehead's idea (1989) and the four stages as outlined in Mertler (2006): *the planning stage, the acting stage, the developing stage, the reflecting stage*. McNiff and Whitehead (2011) furthermore turned those stages into a list of questions the researcher could ask themselves in order to construct a concrete action plan in their head.

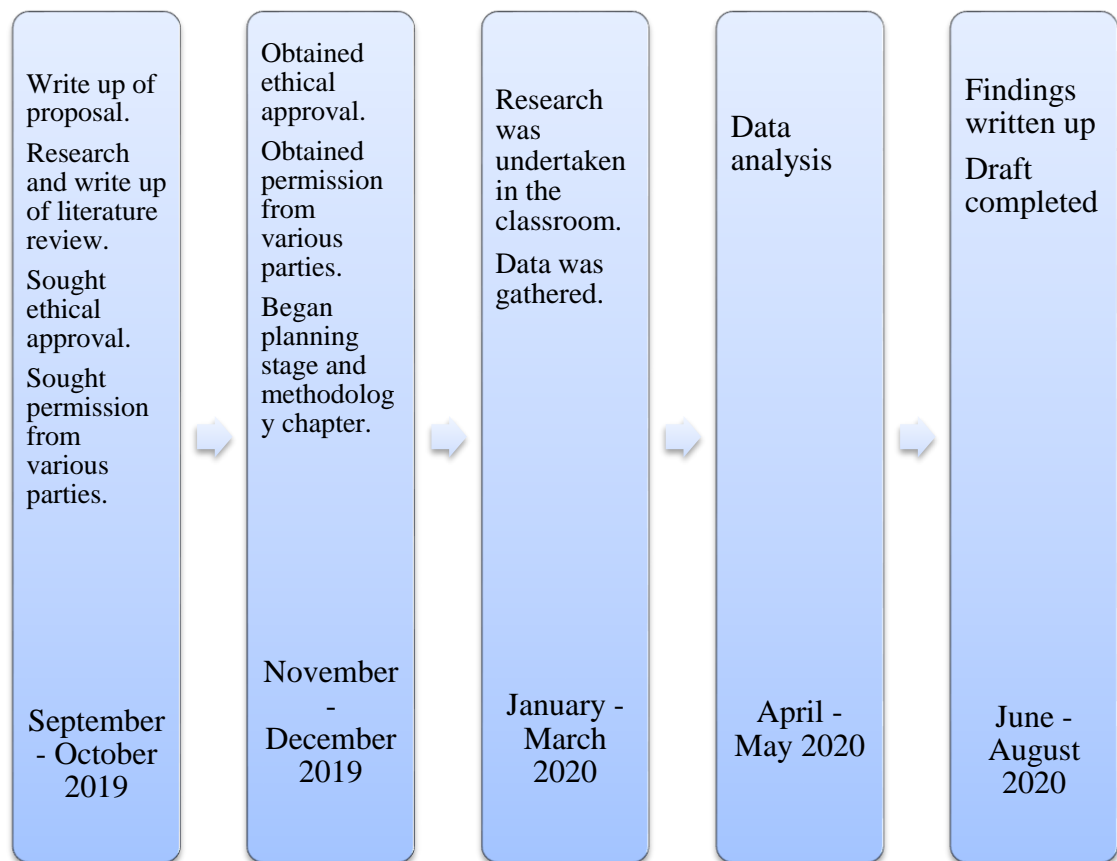
- *What is my concern?*
- *Why am I concerned?*
- *How do I show the situation as it is and as it develops?*
- *What can I do about it? What will I do about it?*
- *How do I test the validity of my claims to knowledge?*

- *How do I check that any conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate?*
- *How do I modify my ideas and practices in light of the evaluation? (McNiff and Whitehead, 2011: 3)*

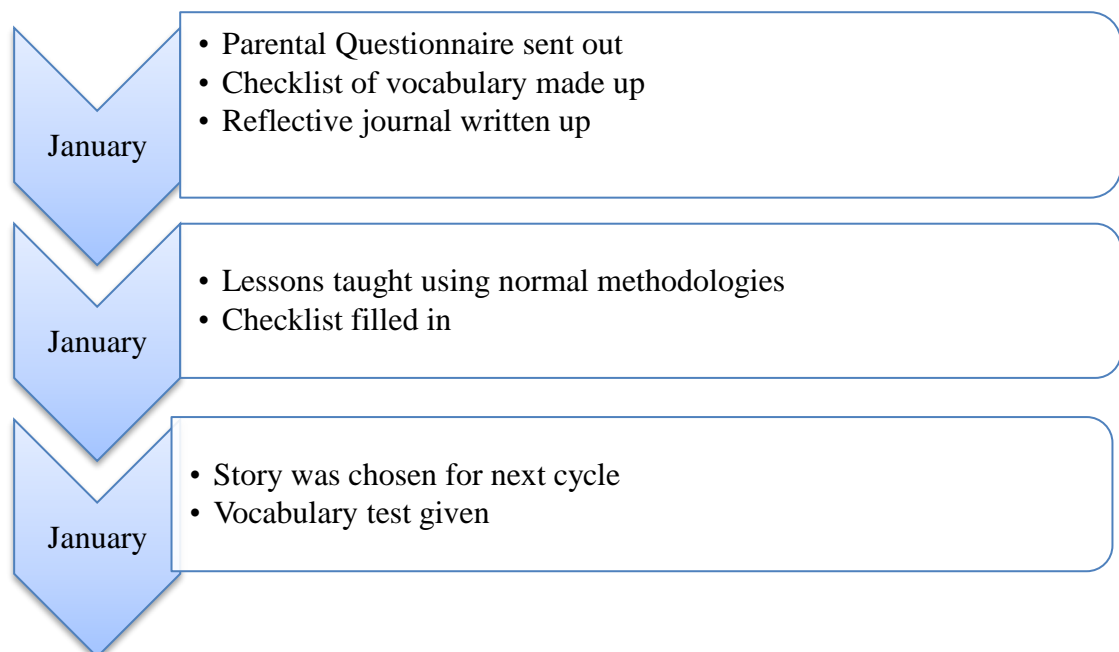
Although having a plan and a direction with action research was crucial, Mertler (2006) highlighted the importance of understanding that action research is not a linear process and that a clearly defined endpoint is not guaranteed. I ensured to avoid constructing a ‘*victory narrative*’ (Maclure cited in Sullivan et al, 2016: 69) whereby I only referred to the positive aspects of my action research journey. I believe I learned just as much from the unexpected outcomes as the positive ones.

### **3.3 Research Plan**

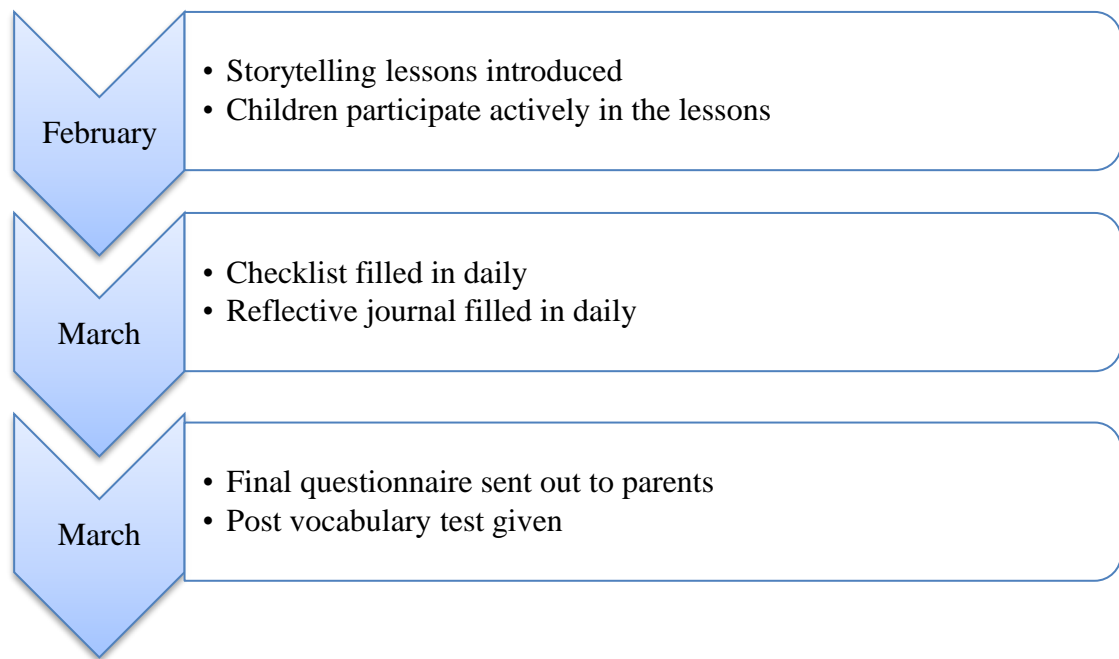
The following diagrams were outlines and schedules of my action research plan I put in place over the months. The use of diagrams allowed me to visually interpret the plan I had in place and the timeframe I had to execute it.



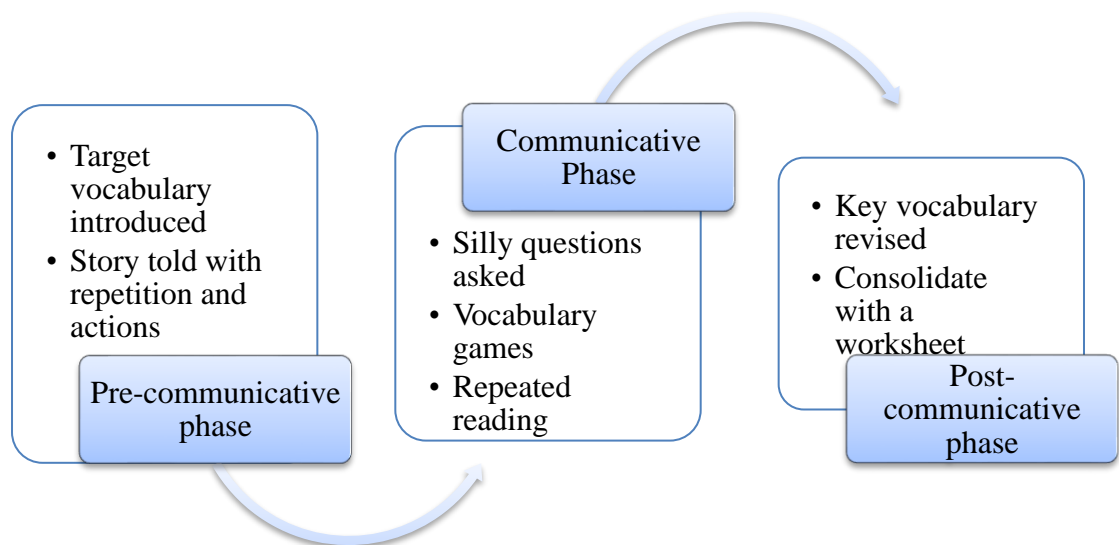
**Figure 1: Schedule Outline**



**Figure 2: Outline of Cycle One**



**Figure 3: Outline of Cycle Two**



**Figure 4: Breakdown of Proposed Storytelling Technique**

### **3.3.2 Research Participants**

My research participants were 23 children in my class. As it was a mixed school, both boys and girls were amongst the participants aged between 4-5 with a range of abilities. The participants were required to engage in a daily Irish lesson, something that is already done, however, the focus in this phase was on storytelling and stories.

A questionnaire was sent out to the parents, making them participants in my research, to gain a broader perspective of the children's backgrounds in the Irish language and their attitudes towards the language before and after implementation.

My critical friend acted as a research participant and a gatekeeper in my research to ensure a non-biased approach was taken. I sought her advice regularly throughout my research study and through dialogue I ensured my research was valid and sound.

### **3.3.3 Research Site**

My research took place in a suburban, upper-middle class primary school. It was an expanding, Catholic-ethos school that placed high value on parental support and engagement. The school had a positive attitude towards the promotion of the Irish language and was constantly seeking new ways to improve the standard of Irish-language teaching in the school. It was an English-medium school but the school had recently been selected to take part in a 'CLIL' initiative (content and language integrated learning).

'CLIL' is an "approach where students learn a subject and a second language at the same time" (Wiseman, 2018). Sixth class will now learn selected subjects through the medium of Irish. I believe this highlighted the positive disposition the school had towards the language and enabled me to conduct my research with ease as I did not

expect there to be a negative attitude surrounding my research. The school used the Irish resource '*bua na cainte*' in all classes and the standard of Irish teaching was very good across all class levels.

### **3.4 Intervention**

My action research approach compelled me to adapt my teaching of the Irish language and to adopt a storytelling approach in attempt to improve my overall teaching. The storytelling approach took planning, consideration, time and research to ensure the lessons were of high quality and I am delighted to report that they were highly successful, engaging and fun to teach. Of course, there is always space for tweaking and improvement, however, I have no doubt I will continue to use this teaching method in future practice.

### **The Lessons**

As can be seen from the Literature Review, I decided to adopt and adapt a popular storytelling technique "*TPRS*" that was developed by Blaine Ray in the late 1980s. Having consulted the literature, I chose a familiar reading approach and used the popular fairytale '*Cinnín Óir agus na Trí Bhéar*' (Goldilocks and the Three Bears) to conduct my research. I developed a weekly vocabulary list targeting various Irish words and verbs that I wanted to emphasis and teach. The word document outlining my plan can be found in appendix 3.2. I used the storybook as the basis of my lessons and read parts of the story to the children each day.

**Week one** focused on questioning and understanding. I pre-taught three to four new vocabulary to the children daily before reading, for example, '*coill*' (forest). As I was

reading I would ask silly questions to emphasise the new word getting the children to respond “*sea or ní hea*” (yes and no) as encouraged in the *TPRS* method such as;

➤ Teacher: “*did Cinnín Óir live in a school?*”

Children: “*Ní hea, ní hea*” (No)

➤ Teacher: “*did Cinnín Óir live in a coill?*”

Children: “*Sea, Sea*” (Yes)

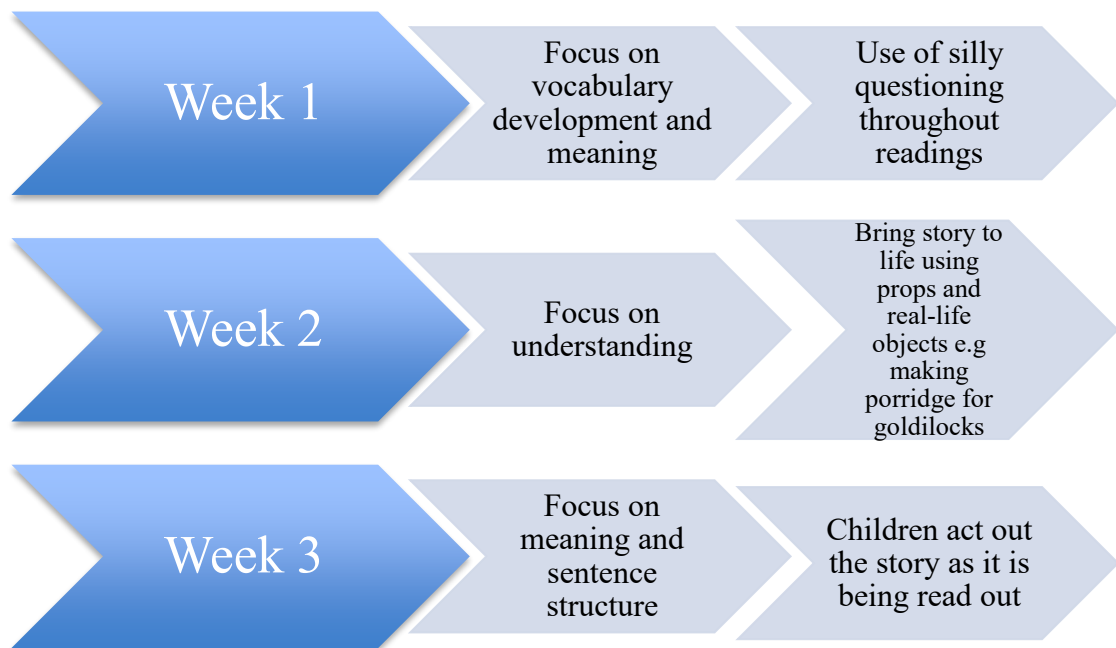
I felt this questioning was a very effective method of assessing engagement and highlighting the particular word I was attempting to teach with emphasis on fun, inclusion and repetition of the word.

**Week two** focused on bringing the story to life; for example I made porridge with the children and I went around the classroom asking the question “*an bhfuil sé go deas?*” (is it nice) with their response either being “*tá sé an-te!*” (It is too hot) or “*tá sé go hálainn*” (it is lovely). This encouraged the children to make their own informative decision and enabled them to understand the story more.

**Week three** focused mainly on the verbs in the story and revision of key vocabulary. I would read the story daily to the children and eventually they began joining in with vocabulary and sentences they knew.

The plan I used definitely requires some adaptation depending on various factors such as the chosen book used, class ability and level of vocabulary. Overall, I was delighted with this method of teaching and found it a lot more enjoyable than teaching using ‘*Bua na Cainte*’, therefore, I can unquestionably see myself using this method for future practice.





**Figure 5: Weekly Focus**

### **3.5 Data Collection**

In this section I wish to address the data collection methods I used to undertake this research. The data I collected was used as evidence to enable me to compare and contrast, reflect on and analyse my findings both pre and post-implementation of my selected intervention. Sullivan et al (2016) suggested we collect data for various of reasons including; to help us identify changes happening in our practice, to demonstrate the progression of our thinking processes and to help us identify if we are living to our values. I adopted a mixed methods approach (both quantitative and qualitative) and ensured to gather data from a range of sources in order to “gather information from a variety of perspectives and also show how our pupils, ourselves and others can have a part in this process” (Sullivan et al, 2016: 79).

#### **3.5.1 A Mixed-Method Approach**

As previously stated, I used both qualitative and quantitative methods to gather data and generate evidence. I believed a mixed-method approach was best suited for my

research as I was working with a group of young children and, as they could not write yet, it would be difficult for me to interpret meaning and emotion from their drawings. Using quantitative methods enabled me to measure changes in their Irish vocabulary over time and make concrete and accurate comparisons between their level of Irish pre and post-implementation.

Furthermore, using qualitative methods such as journaling and observation was particularly “effective in obtaining culturally specific information about the values, opinions, behaviours, and social contexts of particular populations” (Mack et al, 2005:1). Self-study action research placed emphasis on my teaching and my own practice and qualitative data methods allowed me (the researcher) to be an active participant in the process and allowed for multiple perspectives. According to Riemer (2011) qualitative research places more emphasis on the study of the phenomena from the perspective of the insiders and hence why it was important for a self-study approach.

### **3.5.2 Data Collection Tools**

Sullivan et al (2016) suggested gathering data from three different sources, all of which provide multiple perspectives and allowed for triangulation of data. Those sources included;

- Gathering information from oneself - our experiences.
- Gathering information from our students.
- Gathering information from others – critical friends, validation groups etc..

## **Reflective Journal**

Keeping a reflective journal throughout this research process was perhaps be the most important piece of data I generated as “a reflective diary or learning journal can provide data about changes in how you think, about your work and how you go about it. These changes are important because they track the story of one’s learning, which is at the heart of generating theory from practice” (Sullivan et al, 2016: 79).

I used the reflective journal to reflect on each of my Irish lessons. I then used it as a form of meta-reflection throughout the second cycle of my action research to gain a deeper and more comprehensive understanding of why I teach the way I do. It also helped me to keep track of my thinking and allowed me to make an accurate claim to knowledge from the extracts of my learning.

## **Observations and Content Analysis**

Some of the most important data came from an informal conversation with a pupil. It is therefore, why I ensured to make continuous observations on the children’s engagement, comments, behaviours and general attitudes throughout the research process.

## **Pre and Post Vocabulary Assessment**

This was very much a quantitative data collection method that enabled me to analyse any increase in their vocabulary retention following the introduction of my intervention of storytelling and stories. Although it did not allow for any investment of the self in the process, it was still equally important to include as one of my

methods of data collection. It ultimately indicated to me whether or not my intervention of storytelling and stories had indeed improved their Irish vocabulary retention.

### **Parental questionnaire**

A questionnaire was sent out to the parents during the first cycle of my action plan to gather information on the children's prior knowledge, attitudes towards Irish and general family consensus on the topic. Another questionnaire was due to be sent out during the final stage of the action plan to identify any increase in engagement from home and increase in attitude, vocabulary and engagement, however, that was interrupted due the closure of the school which I discuss in the next chapter.

### **3.5.3 How will Ensure Validity?**

It was important to me as a researcher that the data I gathered and the analysis I made on my findings were done in a reliable, sound, ethically correct and rigorous manner. I ensured my research study was of high quality by implementing the following:

- **Critical friend:** my critical friend acted as a gatekeeper in my research. I consulted with her regarding any issues I encountered or any dilemmas I faced. Brookfield (2017) suggested that through dialogue colleagues can offer multiple perspectives and opinions and help us unearth and check our assumptions regularly and believed that “the presence of critical friends is at the heart of the critically reflective process” (Brookfield, 2017: 66).
- **Triangulation:** I ensured to cross check all my data with my critical friend and validation group to show credibility.

- **Ethical guidelines:** I ensured to keep myself fully updated with ethical guidelines and maintained confidentiality at all times.

### **3.6 Ethical Considerations**

Ethical guidelines were in place in order to protect the child and the researcher while conducting the research study. I adhered to all university guidelines and conducted my research in a professional and ethical manner at all times. I believe I conducted my research “within *an ethic of respect* for: the person; knowledge; democratic values; the quality of educational research; and academic freedom” (BERA, 2018). I ensured to take in all and any ethical considerations while conducting this study and carried out the appropriate steps such as:

- **Permissions and consent forms:** I received permission from both the principal and board of management to conduct this research study and had thoroughly explained what it entailed. Following their consent, I approached the children (participants) and their parents and guardians seeking written approval. I also sought consent from a critical friend who was helping me throughout this research study and who was acting as a gatekeeper to ensure a non-biased approach was taken. All of these permission forms and information letters are available in my appendices.
- I ensured all the parents and the children in my class understood what my research entailed. This was done by sending out an information letter to the parents detailing what my research involved. I was mindful that I was working with a group of young children and therefore, ensured to use child-appropriate and child-friendly language while explaining what my research study was prior to implementation.

- **Data storage:** All data that I gathered are stored under lock and key at all times in accordance with my ethical commitments and GDPR legislation. They are available upon request for my supervisor. The data were not shared at any stage unless consent was given. All of this information was clearly outlined in the consent forms sent out to the participants and their guardians. Should this data be published at a later stage, it will only be done so for an educational purpose and if prior consent is given. I ensured to sign and date any pieces of data in the interest of credibility and reliability. I ensured to encrypt all files in a password protected file.
- **Sampling approach:** As I was focused on improving my teaching of Irish-language vocabulary and as Irish is a compulsory subject, the whole class (23 pupils) was involved in my research. The participants were required to engage in a daily Irish lesson, with the focus on storytelling. This sampling approach ensured I had taken a non-biased approach and included all children in the research regardless of their Irish ability.
- **Right of withdrawal and sensitivity:** I was careful to create a safe, comfortable and confidential space throughout this research and always. I ensured the children were aware that they had the freedom to opt in or out of a variety of discussions and that they understood they could opt out of the research at any stage. As my research was purely based around Irish vocabulary, I did not expect the topic to be particularly sensitive, intrusive or stressful. However, any issues or sensitive disclosures would have been dealt with in the strictest confidence while adhering to all ethical guidelines (see BERA 2018 guidelines). I understood that unexpected outcomes or unexpected situations may occur at any stage. I ensured to seek advice from

my supervisor and critical friend at any stage if I was unsure of what the next step may involve. Communication was key.

- **Confidentiality:** I was conscious to observe strict confidentiality at all times and not name the students, their parents or indeed the school the research was taking place in.

### **3.7 Conclusion**

In conclusion, this chapter allowed me to propose a clear and focused action plan and design. It prompted me to consider various elements such as limitations and ethical considerations to this research study and encouraged me to reflect on my chosen methodology of self-study action research.

## Chapter Four – Data Analysis

### **4.0 Introduction**

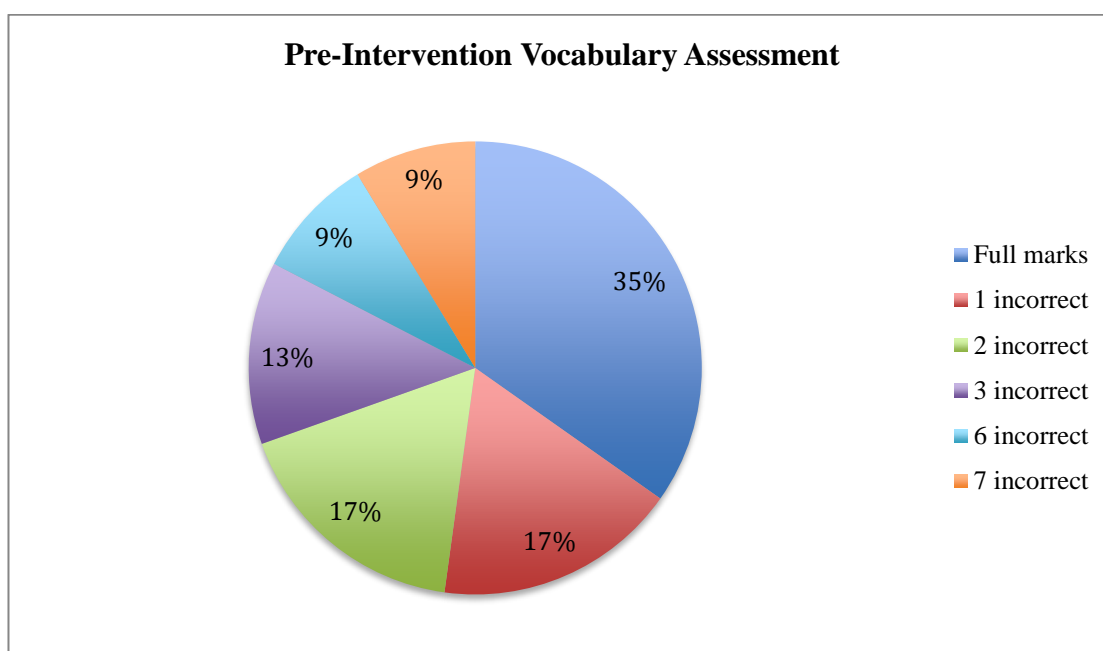
This chapter wishes to formally present, carefully analyse and critically reflect on the variety of data I have gathered while undertaking this research study. I have structured this chapter in a manner that has allowed me to analyse and reflect upon the data and enabled me to come to an accurate conclusion of the learning experience and the shift in thinking and mindset this journey has led me on.

### **4.1 Findings**

In this section of the chapter, I wish to present, critique and analyse my findings in detail. I had two action cycles in place running between January – March 2020; however, due to the closure of the school in early March, my research plan was cut short and therefore, I did not manage to gather the same amount of data post-intervention as I had hoped. This will all be discussed later in this chapter in more depth.



#### 4.1.1 Vocabulary Assessment Pre-Intervention



**Figure 6: Results of the Pre-Intervention Vocabulary Assessment January 2020**

Figure 6 above represents the percentage of results gathered from a vocabulary assessment I undertook with my class in January 2020 prior to any intervention taking place. The assessment was done on a one to one basis and required the child to look at a picture and recall the correct Irish word associated with the picture. As per my methodology chapter, my first action cycle saw me teach my Irish lessons (based on the theme '*sa bhaile*' at home) using the familiar and usual methodologies I had been using since the beginning of the year and therefore, the vocabulary assessment was based off that teaching. A sample template of the vocabulary assessment can be found in Appendix 2.2.

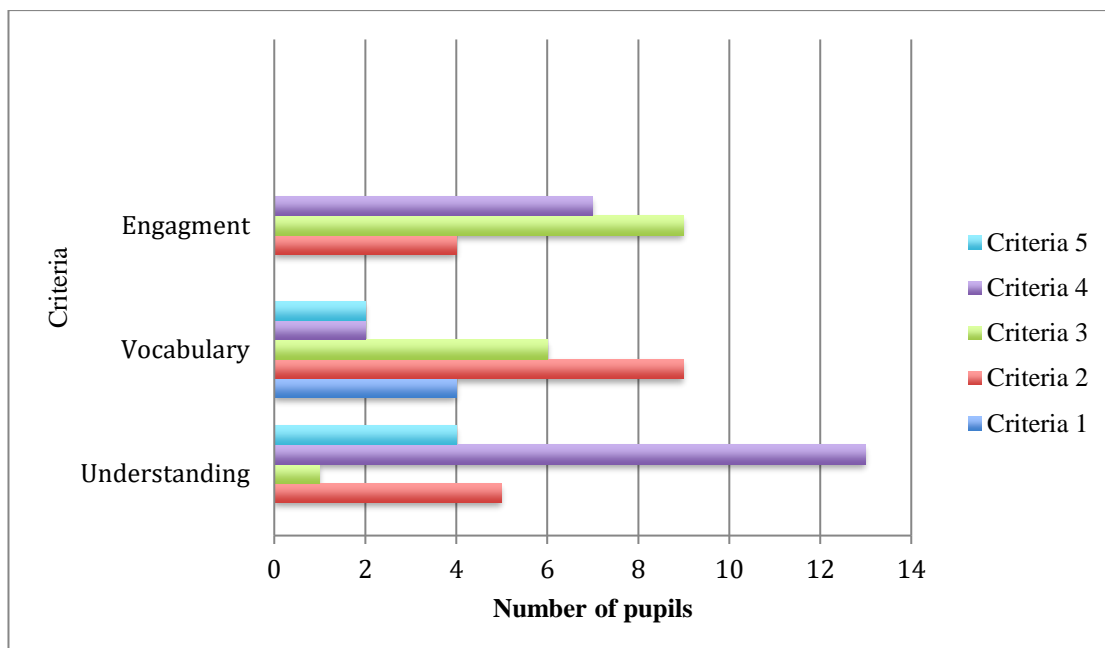
As can be seen from figure 6 above, the 23 individual children performed quite well in the initial assessment with 35% of the class achieving full marks. A mere 4 children out of a total of 23 got 6 or more incorrect with 5/12 being the lowest result.

A high academic ability and a noteworthy engagement with the Irish language was evident from these results.

#### **4.1.2 Sentence Assessment Pre-Intervention**

As part of the Pre-Intervention assessment, I did not believe that a vocabulary assessment alone was sufficient to obtain the information I required to make an accurate analysis on an improvement, if any, of my teaching of Irish. I decided therefore, to expand the assessment to include the formation of sentences using the Irish vocabulary from the original assessment. For example; if they could identify that the picture of the sun was the “*grian*” then I would ask them to put “*grian*” into a sentence using as many Irish words as they knew.

I marked and analysed the sentences using a set criteria focusing on three main aspects; *Understanding, Vocabulary and Engagement*. This criteria can be found in Appendix 3.3, however for the purpose of this section, the criteria was marked from lowest to highest, 1 – 5, e.g 1; low understanding, no Irish vocabulary used and low engagement.



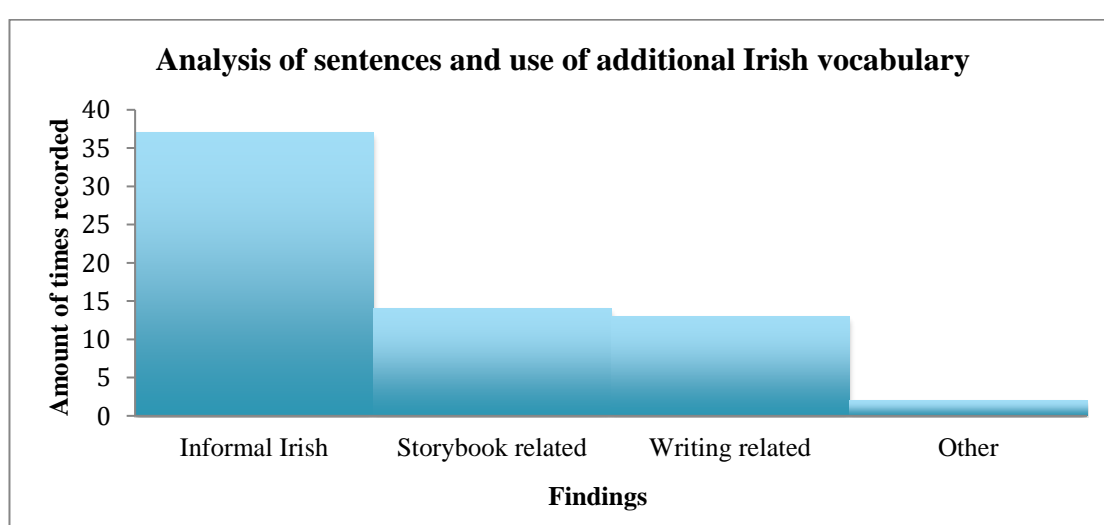
**Figure 7: Results from sentences gathered from Pre-Intervention assessment, marked based on a criteria, January 2020**

By briefly analysing the graph, it is evident that the engagement level was average; indicating that I found a majority of the children getting tired and restless while attempting to form sentences using Irish vocabulary. However, their understanding of the vocabulary was quite high and although they sometimes struggled attempting to use extra Irish vocabulary they managed to put the vocabulary they did know into context and, therefore, into good quality sentences, indicating their understanding of the word. An example of this would be “Santa came down *my simléar*” (chimney).

As the focus of this thesis is on vocabulary development, I wanted to commit to spending additional time analysing the themes emerging from sentences under the vocabulary criteria. My main aim of incorporating the sentence aspect into the assessment was to assess if they could transfer their basic sentence structure knowledge of English into Irish and use as much Irish vocabulary to form these sentences. I analysed these sentences individually and compiled a list of the

additional Irish vocabulary some of the children were using to form their sentences in the hope that I could identify a theme in the range of vocabulary they chose to use.

As can be seen from figure 7 above, the majority of children fell into criteria 2 or above of the vocabulary section meaning they “used **one** or more extra Irish words when constructing **one** or more of the sentences” (see criteria in appendix 3.3). I therefore, had a vast amount of Irish vocabulary to sort into themes.



**Figure 8: Themes emerging from use of additional Irish vocabulary, late January 2020**

Informal Irish refers to various words and phrases I would use daily such as colours and numbers in Irish. For example; the table names are sorted by colours in Irish, therefore, I would often be mentioning ‘*grípa gorm, buí, glas and bándearg*’ (blue, yellow, green and pink groups) throughout the day. It is evident from figure 8 above that those such words stuck with the children, furthermore supporting Krashen’s theory of exposure to a language which I refer to in Chapter Two.

I would have begun reading the chosen storybook for the intervention “*Cinnín Óir agus na trí Bhéar*” (Goldilocks and the Three Bears) informally in late January and therefore, some of the vocabulary tests coincided with that. As can be seen from

figure 8 above, I recorded 14 Irish words that would have fit into the storybook category, highlighting already the significance the storybook had on their vocabulary development.

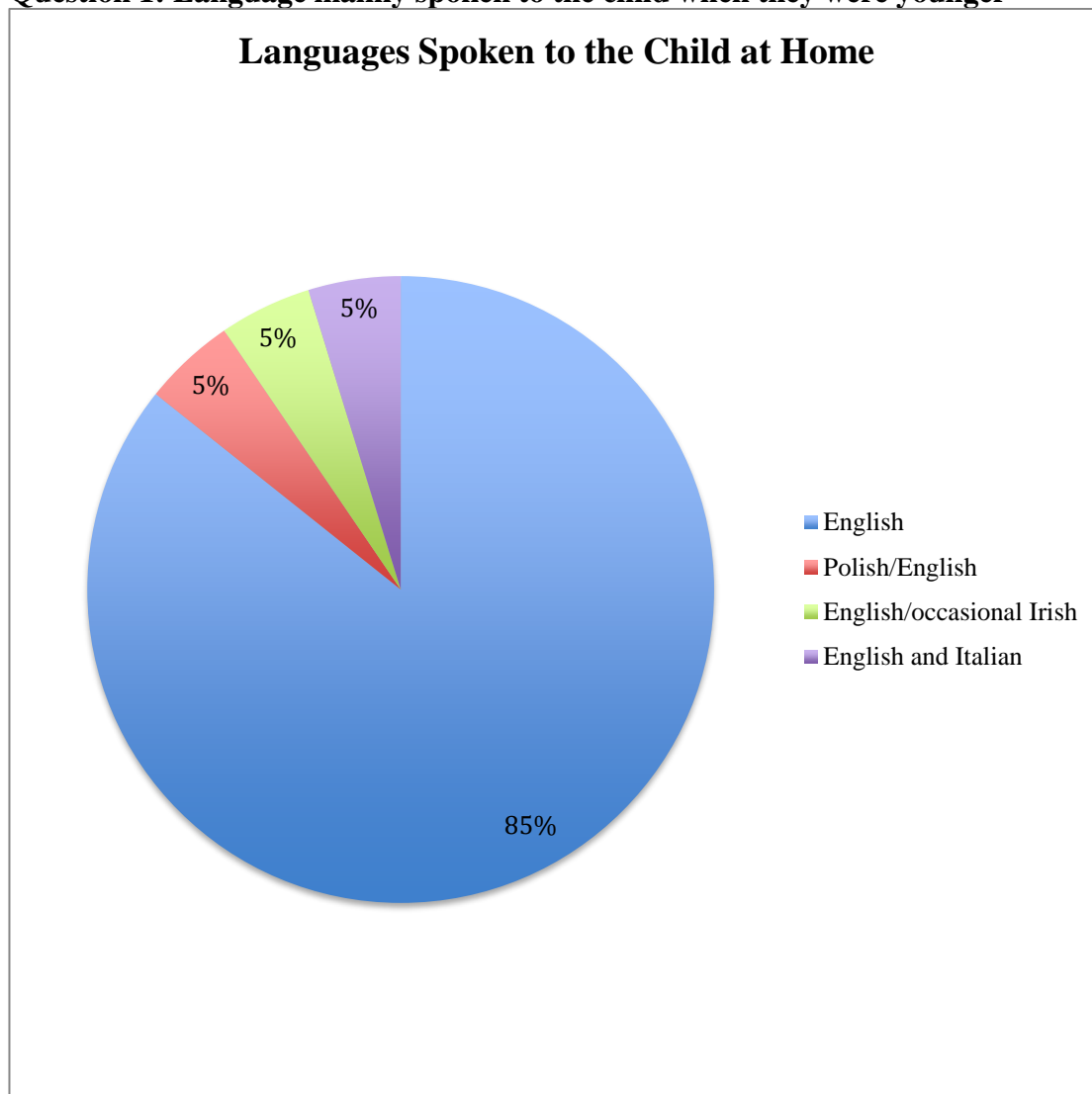
Separate to my research study, I decided I would teach them writing ‘Our News’ in both English and Irish to facilitate the natural transfer of skills as laid out in the new Primary Language Curriculum and as discussed in Chapter Two. About three times a week, we would write one sentence in English and one sentence in Irish, mostly around the topic of the weather together as a class. It is evident from figure 8 that the writing in Irish also had a significant impact on their vocabulary development as I noted 13 Irish words associated with that writing for example; “*the scamall is in the spéir*” (the cloud is in the sky).

Analysing these sentences in detail has given me a deeper insight into the approach my teaching must take in order to maximise learning.

#### **4.1.3 Parental Questionnaires**

A questionnaire was sent out to the parents in late January and some of the questions were based on Hickey’s Parent’s Questionnaire (Hickey cited in Mhic Mhathúna, 2004: 290). I received a total of 21 completed questionnaires out of a possible 23 which I took as a very positive sign the parents were, in fact, engaging with the research. Overall, I found the whole process a very positive experience as it not only gave me an insight into the children’s background in Irish, it also helped the parents understand my research study clearer. The sample questionnaire can be found in the appendix 2.1.

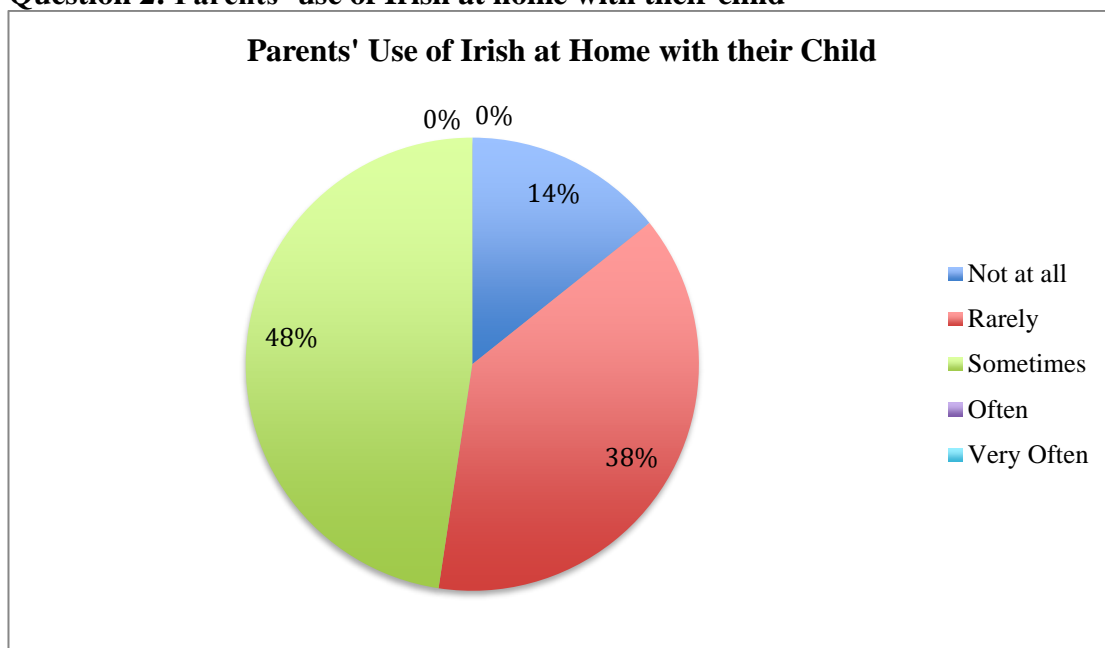
**Question 1: Language mainly spoken to the child when they were younger**



**Figure 9: Languages spoken to the child when they were younger**

As can be seen the vast majority of children in my class were brought up speaking English at home. Two parents reported English and an additional language and one parent reported English as the main language spoken with the occasional Irish vocabulary used, however, admitted that they “both got lazier as time went on” in regards to their use of Irish. Please note that one pupil was brought up speaking French and English, however, never returned the questionnaire. Ethical approval from the pupil was sought and received.

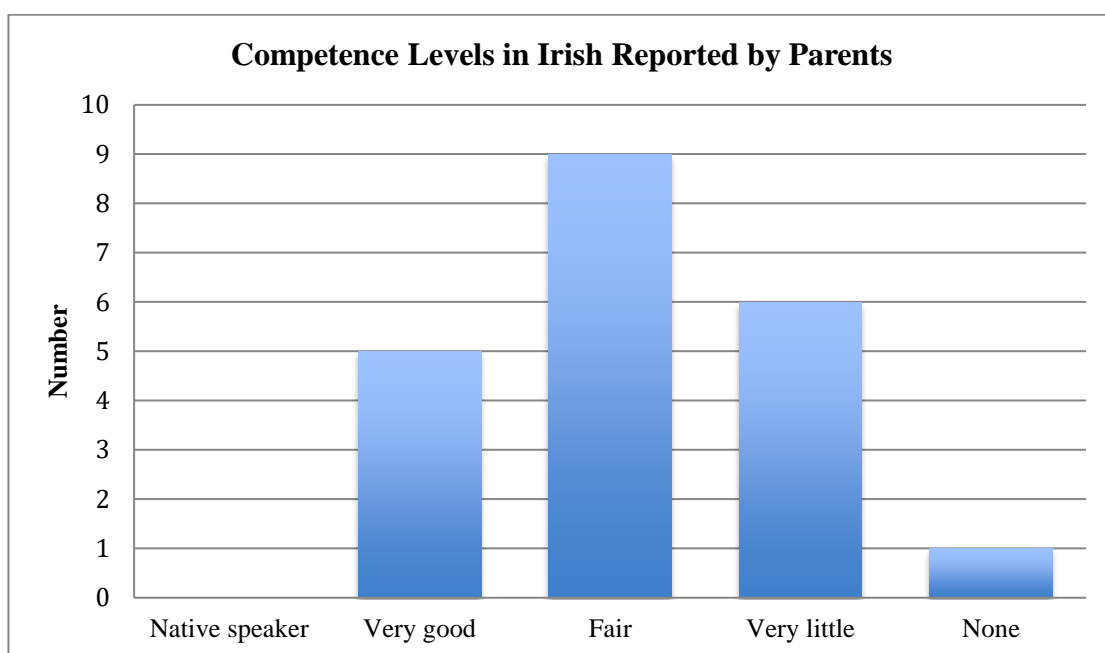
## Question 2: Parents' use of Irish at home with their child



**Figure 10: Parents' use of Irish at home with their child**

As can be seen from the figure above, just over 50% of parents reported rarely or never speaking Irish to their children at home. There are various factors that could be associated with that high number, one of them being their lack of confidence in their level of Irish which I will discuss below. Unfortunately, as discussed in the literature review, exposure and immersion in the Irish language is one of the most beneficial methods of learning a new language and therefore, if it is not being spoken at home the learning becomes less effective.

### Question 3: Parents' Competence Levels in Irish

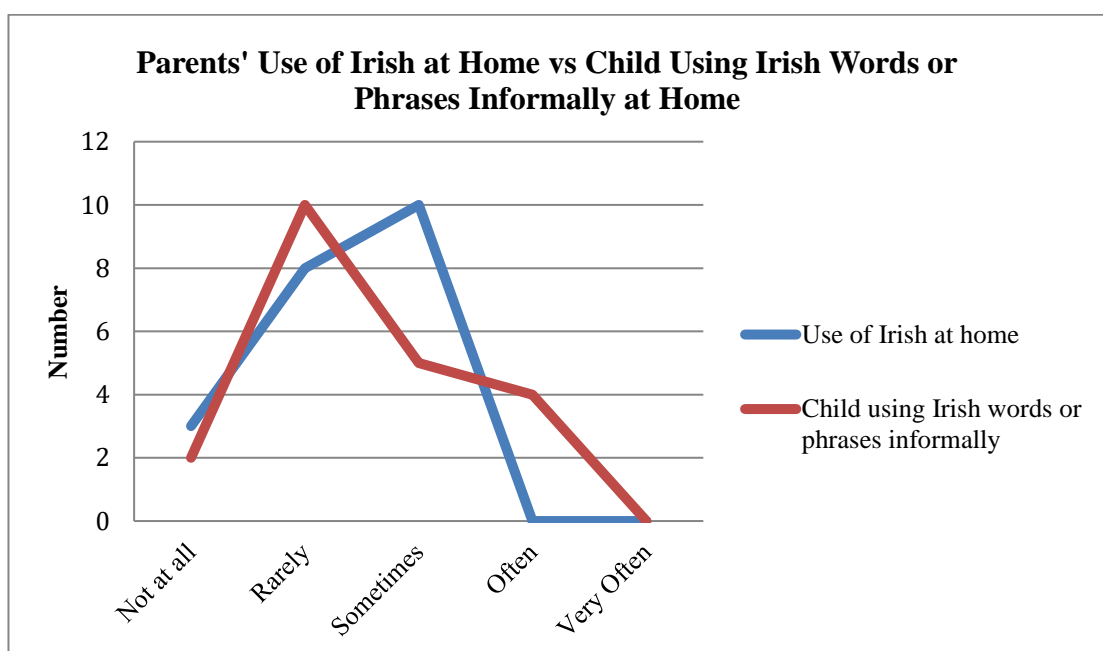


**Figure 11: Competence levels in Irish reported by Parents**

There were no native speakers among the respondents and majority of parents reported either fair or very little levels of competence in Irish. One parent wrote in the comment section that she attended a '*scoil lán gaelach*' (Irish medium school), another reported to receiving "*an 'A' in Leaving Cert Irish*" and a few stated that they can understand it better than they can speak it.



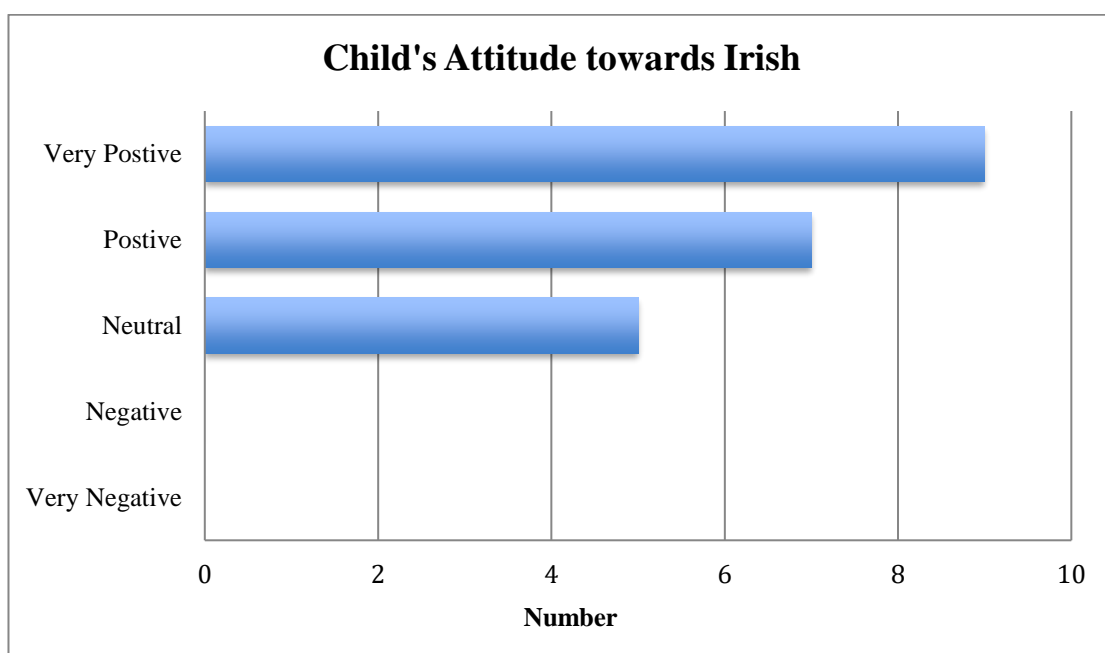
#### Question 4: Child's use of informal Irish at home



**Figure 12: Parents' use of Irish at home VS child using Irish words or phrases informally at home**

I decided to present the graph in this manner as it allowed me to compare it against the parent's use of Irish at home with their child which I reported above. It makes sense that the majority of parents reported that they rarely heard their child using Irish words informally at home as it coincides with the amount of parents reported to rarely or never speaking Irish to their child at home. There is, however, around 9 parents who report to 'sometimes' or 'often' hear their child using Irish words or phrases informally at home which would indicate that they're taking this home from school as they would have had little to no exposure to the language elsewhere.

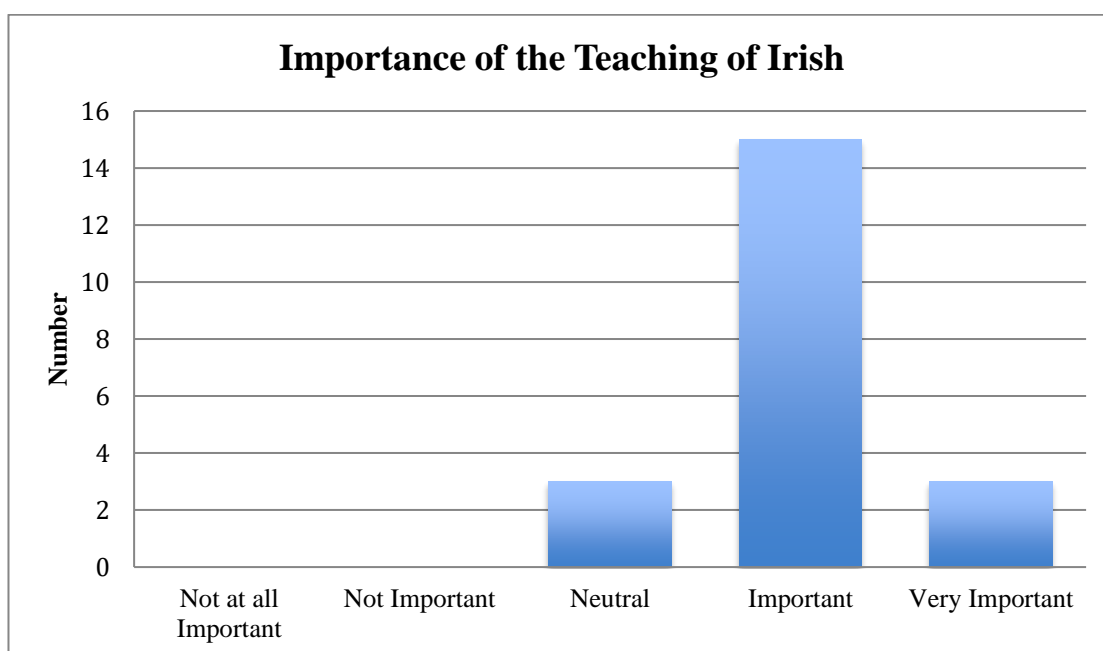
### Question 5: Attitude towards Irish



**Figure 13: Parents' opinion on child's attitude towards Irish**

It is evident from the graph above that the parent's opinions of their child's attitude towards Irish is an overall positive one. As their teacher and from my observations throughout the year, I would have to agree with the results above. For the most part, the children are enthusiastic and eager to learn Irish. However, one parent did report in the additional comments that *"when I try to speak Irish to him he says "stop talking as gaeilge mom" like it's "not cool" or something like that"* (Parent C, February questionnaire).

### Question 6: Importance of the teaching of Irish to them



**Figure 14: Parents' opinions of the importance of the teaching of Irish to them**

This graph highlights the level of support, understanding and enthusiasm I have experienced while conducting this research study in my current research site. It is evident from the graph that the majority of parents are supportive of my topic of the teaching of Irish and value its importance in the curriculum. It is important for me as a researcher never to underestimate the parental support I have received as they play a vital role as participants in this research study as I am working with such a young class.

### Question 7: Irish Children's books at home

5/23 parents reported to having some Irish children's books at home which unfortunately is a low, however, no surprising number. A few parents indicated that they thought it was a good idea and wanted to buy some, however, one parent highlighted the lack of availability and resources in Irish.

### **Question 8: Additional comments**

The additional comments were all of positive experiences or an eagerness to learn more such as; “*we love the magic necklace idea and the integrating of Irish into learning it has really prompted his curiosity and interest*”, “*we will start using Irish more at home*”, “*now that all of children are at home we are using Irish words more often*”. One parent sought advice on how to use Irish more at home highlighting the once again the high engagement level of the parents throughout this research study.

This questionnaire was an indispensable resource to this research study in successfully providing me with such valuable information on each child’s background and their parent’s general attitude towards the language.

#### **4.1.4 Checklists, Observations and Journal Entries**

Throughout the process, I ensured to maintain a reflective journal in which I recorded any minor or major observations in my thought process, in the children’s thought process and particularly my teaching of Irish. I also made a brief checklist in which I ticked off a list of Irish vocabulary if I heard a child speaking it formally/informally throughout the day without a prompt from me as their teacher. Finally, I coded and sorted any findings into themes which will be discussed in greater depth later in this chapter. The checklist can be found in appendix 2.4.

## **Checklist**

I recorded 51 informal prompts throughout the January – February period, however, this is only a small glimpse into the realistic amount which were not recorded due to time pressures and practicality of teaching and remembering to tick the checklist. Although I was impressed with the children’s use of informal Irish, I was more impressed with their ability to code-mix and code-switch (Kim, 2006) between English and Irish despite their limited knowledge of Irish. From my observations I recorded sentences such as; “where is the *buí* (yellow) box”, “there are *cúig* (five) people in the library”, “maybe she is *tinn* (sick), “can I play in the *teach* (house)”.

## **Journal Entry 12/2/20**

*“Had a meeting with one of the parents today. She mentioned informally that her child is really enjoying the storytelling aspect so much that they went out trying to find the book in Irish. They couldn’t find it but they got the English version and they read it everyday and F.S reads the words as Gaeilge. This prompts me to consider sending home small Irish books with the children. I will investigate this more”*  
(Journal Entry recorded 12/2/20).

I wanted to discuss this particular journal entry as it was one of the first moments that I really believed that what I was trying to achieve was effective and becoming a reality. It was also the moment I decided to adapt my intervention to include a storybook for the children to take home with them to teach some new Irish vocabulary to their parents. I will discuss this later in the chapter. If it was not for this conversation with this parent, my research study could have taken a whole different path and I am therefore, extremely grateful that I decided to record and

reflect on it a few days later which furthermore, highlights the importance of keeping a reflected journal.

#### **4.1.5 Post-Intervention**

Due to closure of the school , I only managed to conduct 5/23 post-intervention vocabulary assessments. I felt it was worthwhile to include them and to analyse them as although, it is unethical to attempt to come to any accurate and valid conclusion with such a small minority of the class taken into account, I thought it might give me a brief glimpse and insight into the type of conclusion I would have drawn from this post assessment. The post-intervention assessment was designed and laid out in an identical fashion as the pre-intervention assessment. 2/12 of the pictures needing to be identified in Irish remained the same for comparison purposes, while 10/12 were altered to assess any vocabulary retained from the storytelling intervention. The sample assessment can be found in the appendix 2.3.

The academic ability of all five children with whom I conducted the post-intervention assessment would all be considered average to above average and all would have a very positive attitude and enthusiastic approach to the language. These children were all chosen at random throughout the day before the closure of the school and it is merely an unfortunate coincidence that I did not manage to assess pupils of mixed abilities and variant attitudes.

#### 4.1.5.1 Vocabulary Assessment Post-Intervention

All 5 children received full marks (12/12) in identifying the Irish words. I compared these results to their results in the pre-intervention assessment and found only a slight increase in one child. The results can be found below and initials have been replaced by ‘A,B,C..’ for confidentiality reasons.

Child	Score pre-intervention	Score post-intervention	Increase percentage
Child A	75%	100%	25%
Child B	100%	100%	0%
Child C	100%	100%	0%
Child D	100%	100%	0%
Child E	100%	100%	0%

**Table 1: Comparison results from pre-intervention to post-intervention vocabulary assessment**

The table above highlights the high academic ability of the children, however, it should be noted that the post-intervention words were considered to be a lot trickier and verbs were included.

#### 4.1.5.2 Sentence Assessment Post-Intervention

Similarly, the sentence element took the same approach as the pre-intervention assessment. I analysed all 5 children’s sentences and compared them to their sentences formed in the pre-intervention to assess any changes in their understanding, vocabulary and engagement. I found there to be a significant difference which I will now discuss individually.

**Child A** – Used only Irish words to form 5/12 of her sentences compared to 0/12 in the pre-assessment. The quality of her sentences grew undoubtedly with her producing sentences such as “*tá grian sa spéir*” (the sun is in the sky) in the post-assessment compared to “the *grian* (sun) burnt me” in the pre-assessment.

**Child B**– used only Irish words in 6/12 of his sentences compared with 2/12 in the pre-assessment. He also used 2 or more Irish words in all of his sentences producing high quality sentences such as “*Chonaic mé an teach beag*” (I saw the small house).

**Child C**– had the highest number of Irish words and highest quality sentences in the pre-assessment so I was eager to assess his learning post-assessment. He used only Irish words in 12/12 compared to 7/12 in the pre-assessment. The quality and fullness of his sentences constructed improved greatly. For example, he went from saying “*cófra sa chistin*” (press in kitchen) which is not a complete sentence in Irish to “*chonaic sí trí babhla leite*” (she saw three porridge bowls) which is completed with verbs.

**Child D**– Used only Irish words to form 4/12 of her sentences compared to 0/12 in the original assessment. She used 2 or more Irish words in all 12/12 of her sentences compared to 1/12 on her pre-assessment. It is evident her confidence improved greatly producing high quality sentences such as “*Cínín Óir went ag siúl sa choill*” (Goldilocks went walking in the forest) compared to “I saw a *madra* (dog)” a month previous.

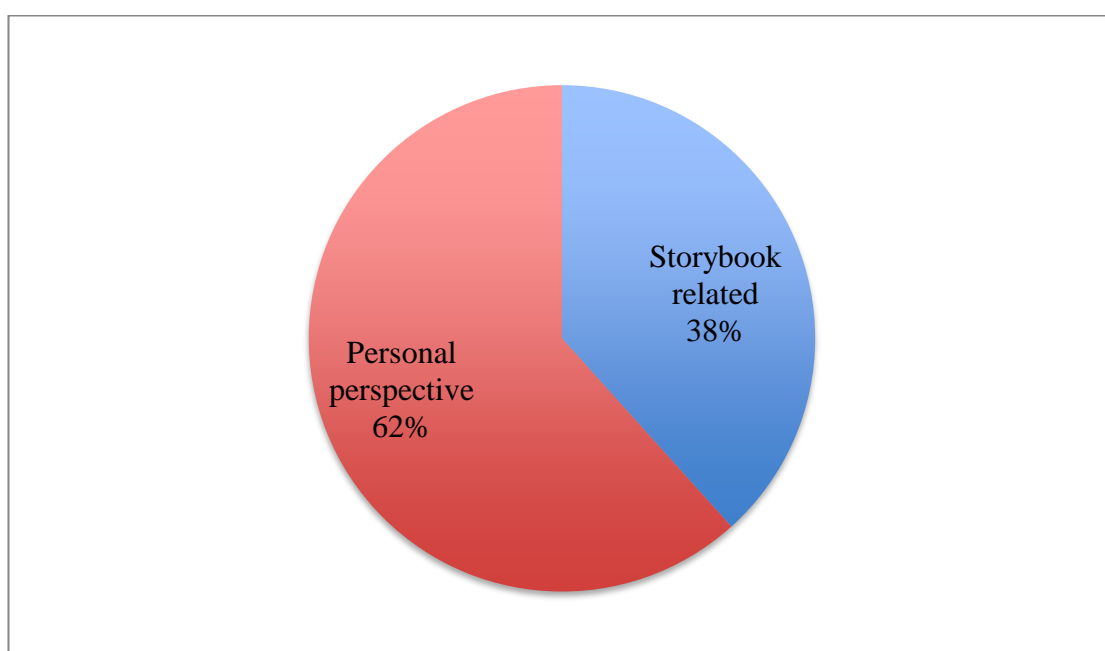
**Child E** – Used only Irish words to form 4/12 compared to 0/12 in the pre-assessment. His sentence quality remained similar to his pre-assessment using high quality sentences such as “I get loads of *grian* (sun) on my *laethanta saoire* (holidays)” to “there were *trí chathaoir* (three chairs) in the *seomra suí* (sitting room)”.



Overall the level of Irish vocabulary they used to form the sentences improved dramatically in all five children.

#### 4.1.5.3 Sentence Analysis

I decided to analyse the sentences they formed in greater depth in the post-intervention to assess how they were forming the sentences. I wanted to analyse whether or not they were learning off the sentences from the storybook I handed out or whether they were able to transfer their knowledge of Irish vocabulary to form new sentences meaningful to their lives.



**Figure 15: Analysis of sentences formed in the post-assessment**

I was extremely happy to observe that the majority of the sentences were formed from a personal perspective rather than learned off. I categorised sentences such as “*D’ith sí trí bhabhla leite*” (she ate three bowls of porridge) as storybook related and sentences such as “*I have no cathaoir briste in my house*” (I have no broken chairs in my house) as a personal perspective. This is a significant finding in my opinion as it

indicated their natural ability to use the vocabulary they had learned and create meaningful sentences.

#### **4.1.6 Conclusion**

This section enabled me to present a factual account of the data I have collected, accompanied and supported by a range of images and graphs. I have analysed the data in detail and come to conclusions in some cases, however, I believe further reflection is needed with regards to some cases which will be done throughout the next few sections of this chapter in order for me to turn the spotlight on myself, my values and my teaching using the data as support.

#### **4.2 Challenges**

In this section, I wish to outline the variety of challenges, barriers and unexpected decisions I encountered while conducting this research study. There has been significant positives and unwavering support and engagement from various parties including my colleagues, my critical friend and, in particular, the participants of this research study; the children and their parents. Without their continued encouragement and valuable advice, it would have been difficult to overcome the challenges.

##### **4.2.1 School Closure**

The unexpected closure of school and suspension of data collection activity has, without a doubt, been the biggest challenge I have had to overcome while undertaking this research study. Due to Covid 19, the government made the decision to close all schools unexpectedly on Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> March 2020, meaning the suspension of cycle two of my research study. Fortunately, I had managed to

complete most of my intervention and was working on formulating post-intervention assessments and post-intervention questionnaires in order to make a comparison with results gathered in January. I was fortunate enough to manage to conduct five one-to-one post-intervention assessments which were analysed above which gave me a small glimpse into the effect the storytelling intervention had on the children's vocabulary development. I also had gathered extensive observations, checklists and journal entries which assisted me greatly.

I stated in my methodology chapter that I understood self-study action research was not a linear process and that I was not attempting to construct a victory narrative. I followed the guidelines and adaptations the university put in place in order to overcome this obstacle. I do believe, however, that this obstacle only assisted me further in deeper reflection with regards to the values I hold and transforming my practice. Rather than focusing solely on the quantitative data and comparison results, I was forced to rely on my observations, journal entries and the "self" to come to a conclusion whether or not my intervention was a success, which, in my opinion, is truly what a self-study approach entails.

#### **4.2.2 Vulnerable Group**

Working with a group of children considered to be a '*vulnerable group*' posed a variety of challenges while collecting data. Firstly, due to the age and ability of the participants with whom I was working, I was limited in my data collection methods as the children could yet not read or write properly. To overcome this challenge, and at the same time to ensure I gathered the data I needed, I decided to conduct my assessments on a one-to-one basis. Although it was time consuming, it gave me the opportunity, as their teacher, to assess each child's ability individually and enabled

me to make detailed observations regarding their engagement and understanding, which in turn informed my teaching and practice.

The children's parents also played a vital role in my research study as a questionnaire was sent out to them to provide me with additional information on the children's backgrounds and general attitudes towards Irish, which furthermore, facilitated me in overcoming this obstacle.

#### **4.2.3 Time Limitations**

In the previous chapter, I laid out a research plan and design that I aimed to follow. Not surprisingly, time restrictions and general day-to-day school life impacted this research plan. I had aimed to complete 2-3 storybooks using the storytelling intervention, however, I only managed to complete one with the class which was the familiar book '*Cinnín Óir agus na Trí Bhéar*' (Goldilocks and the Three Bears). I chose this familiar book as stated in my literature review "choosing familiar stories in the children's second language such as traditional fairytales is essential for language development so that they can use their prior knowledge of the story to create meaning and understanding" (Tierney and Dobson, 1995).

I felt throughout the intervention, that the more time I spent on the storybook, the more the children could get out of it and I therefore, decided not to rush attempting to finish the story and instead I adopted the "*a little and often approach*". This approach supports my research in my literature review where I come to the conclusion that reading the same story many times also holds many benefits for facilitation second-language acquisition. I understand the benefits of repetition more clearly now as I have seen it work in practice first hand. Although, the time

restrictions posed significant challenges with regards to my research plan, I believe it also allowed me to adapt my research plan accordingly which in turn benefitted my study and taught me that ‘less is more’ in some cases.

#### **4.2.4 Children’s Attitude**

At the beginning of the year when I was doing research for this study, I was placing a focus on the children’s attitude towards Irish. The vast majority of research I gathered all pointed in the direction of school children having a negative attitude towards the language and favoured making the language optional (Ni Shabhaois, 2016). This piece of research would support my journal entry dated 17/09/20 in which I overheard a girl in my class say to her friends “*my sister told me to hate Irish from day one*”.

I continue to write “*comments like these are the reason I’m planning to research the teaching of Irish and the attitude around it. Younger children are highly influenced by older children and their thinking*” (Journal Entry, 17/09/20). When I began teaching Irish this year, however, I noticed an immense engagement from my whole class, so much so that they would plead with me to do an Irish lesson. This also supports the data above, where 16/21 parents reported that they felt their child had a positive or very positive attitude towards the language.

This became a small challenge as it contradicted all the information I had gathered in my literature review. I was now forced to alter my research question and consider new angles to take, while also reflecting on the various factors of their positive attitude. I believe, however, I adapted my research focus well and this small obstacle facilitated me to reflect deeper on my own teaching.

#### **4.2.5 Measurable Data**

Throughout the data collection process, I found myself worrying as to how I was going to effectively convey the increase of the children's engagement and enjoyment of the storytelling lessons. It was evident to me as their teacher that their engagement and enjoyment levels had increased, however, I was concerned that I required more concrete evidence. This challenge led me to reflect once again on the purpose of this research study; Was it to effectively measure the children's engagement levels? Or was it to enable me to improve my teaching of Irish? The focus was primarily on myself and my teaching and the children were my research participants acting as facilitators to this research. It reminded me that the data I gathered from them were not being used to test their Irish ability, they were being used to enable me to reflect on my teaching and how I can improve. I therefore, placed a stronger emphasis on my reflective journal to gather data rather than on the children's assessment results.

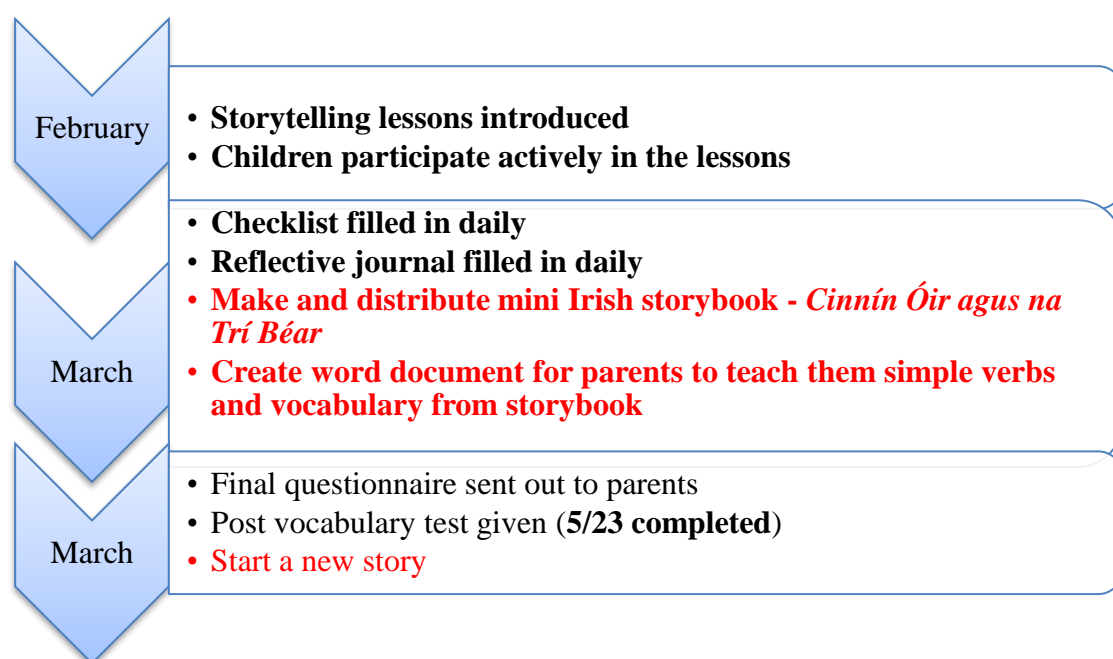
Overall, the various challenges I faced along the way were minor bumps in the journey. All these challenges reminded me what a self-study approach should entail and allowed me to place the focus back on myself and my teaching.

#### **4.3 Implications for Cycle Two**

Due the unexpected suspension of data collection, as referred to above, I had to adjust my research plan and design accordingly. Action Cycle One was fortunately completed in January prior to the closure of the school and the full outline can be found in Chapter Three. Cycle One was designed in a manner that would inform my practice and my thinking for Cycle Two and allow me to adjust or alter specific elements accordingly.

In this section, I wish to discuss the significant implications of the elements of Cycle Two I completed, however, also discuss the implications of my intended goals for Cycle Two that got cut short due to the school closures.

#### 4.3.1 Cycle Two Intended Goals



**Figure 16: Cycle Two Intended Goals**

The figure above indicates my intended goals for Action Cycle Two. Highlighted in **bold** are the actions that were completed prior to school closures. The final three goals, evidently, weren't completed unfortunately. The **red** writing indicates additional goals that were completed due to the implications and data gathered during Cycle One, which I will now discuss.

#### 4.3.2 Individual Irish Storybooks

As I mentioned above, a meeting with a parent sparked the initial inspiration to send out individual Irish storybooks of the story we were covering in school, to each of

the children. I write in my literature review that exposure and interaction with a second language is one of the fastest and most beneficial ways to learn a new language (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012) and I, therefore, realised how important it was that each of the children had their own individual copy of the storybook to enable them to continue their learning and engagement of Irish at home.



**Image 1: Example of the books the children took home**

Although this particular goal was not planned for or intended, I believe it is one of the most important elements of my research study. I am so happy I decided to reflect on the informal conversation I had with one of the parents and record it in my reflective journal as it ultimately led me to this significant decision to send the books home.



### 4.3.3 Parental Involvement

The questionnaire sent out to the parents during Cycle One had significant positive implications for Cycle Two. I learned a lot from the questionnaires, however, I learned in particular the desire and engagement the parents had to be apart of this research study. As I discussed in the first section of this chapter, the majority of parents reported a low level of their own Irish ability, however, a desire to perhaps improve that. One parent wrote “*we are really enjoying watching and hearing F learning Irish as its re-igniting our own forgotten enjoyment of many of the elements of the language*”. (Parent A, questionnaire, February 2020) All of this prompted and encouraged me to attempt to include the parents in the children’s learning as I recalled from my literature review one of the reasons for the decline in the Irish language was the lack of engagement from parents (Harris, 2008; Hickey and Stenson, 2016; Hickey and Stenson, 2016).

I decided, therefore, to send home alongside the storybook (*Cinnín Óir and na Trí Bhéar*) a clear, concise and short word document including the most important vocabulary and verbs used in story to facilitate the parents in their own learning of the language. I included the English meaning and the phonetic spelling of the verbs and vocabulary. This document can be found in the appendix 3.1.

### 4.3.4 Intended Goals

Although I was satisfied with the progress I was making with the research study, there were a few implications from Cycle One that would have impacted Cycle Two, however, I unfortunately never got to complete them such as:

- **Final Parent’s Questionnaire:** Based on the first questionnaire and results gathered, I would have posed a question based on any improvement the

parents noticed in their own Irish and if they noticed any improvement in their child's vocabulary ability.

- **Post Vocabulary Assessment:** I would have completed, compared and analysed 23/23 vocabulary assessments rather than the five I completed.
- **Chosen a new story:** I would have chosen a new story and completed the intervention again to assess whether their engagement, vocabulary and understanding was at the same level in comparison to the first story I chose. I would have chosen a familiar story again such as “*an Fear Sinsir*” (the Gingerbread Man) as I felt the familiar reading element worked well. They were able to use their knowledge of the English version and transfer it to their understanding on the Irish version.

#### **4.3.5 Conclusion**

Overall, I believe all elements from Cycle One had significant impact and implications on Cycle Two of my research study. I believe all aspects, both positive and negative, facilitated me as a teacher and will aid my future practice.

#### **4.4 Summary and Conclusion**

In summary, it is evident from the data I gathered that the storytelling element of my Irish lessons had a significant impact on the children's engagement, understanding and, particularly, their use of vocabulary. Although, the biggest and the most important impact of these lessons was on my teaching of Irish. I completely transformed my methodology and my approach to teaching Irish which, in turn, highlighted hidden values and placed an emphasis on the reflective process. This research journey, however, was unaccompanied by its various challenges and barriers which I had to overcome and it is certainly not a victory narrative. I did not get the chance to complete part of an action cycle which would have played a

significant role in my findings and results. In the next chapter I wish to place the focus on my own reflective journey and the transformation I have felt in my practice as a result of this action research project accompanied by a summary of my main findings.

In conclusion, as I was the focus of this research study, I was in the fortunate position of also being the storyteller. This chapter has allowed me to recount and recall my research journey from my own perspective. Supported by a vast amount of data I believe it enabled me as the storyteller to give an accurate, valid and honest account of the highs, lows, learning and reflection that took place along the way.

## Chapter Five – Conclusions and Recommendations

### 5.0 Introduction

This final chapter wishes to provide a clear and concise summary of the main findings associated with this research study. I wish to discuss how this research has influenced my values and reflect on my evolving teacher identity and the impact this will have on my future practice. Finally, I wish to discuss where I hope this research will lead me in the coming years and any recommendations I may have if I were to complete this research study again.

### 5.1 Summary of Main Findings

Chapter Four allowed me to present, analyse and critique my findings in detail and lay them out in an appropriate manner that enabled me to come to various conclusions. In this section, I wish to draw together a summary of my main findings and discuss how and why I came to these conclusions. As this is a self-study action research, the focus is on my practice, my values and my teaching, therefore, I will also discuss in more detail later in this chapter how these main findings will influence my future practice and the effect it has had on my teacher identity.

When I began this research study at the beginning of the year, I outlined three key questions;

- *How can storytelling facilitate second language acquisition?*
- *How can I make my teaching of Irish more interesting and engaging?*
- *Can I improve the vocabulary retention of my students through storytelling?*

It is important to note that two out of the three questions including the word “I” as this research was primarily based on my teaching of the language and the same

intervention and approach I used in my classroom would require adaptations and flexibility in another classroom.

#### **5.1.1 Finding One: Stories can be used as a Tool to Facilitate SLA**

Based on my research of the literature and my study in the classroom, I can confidently claim that stories can be used as a tool to facilitate second language acquisition as it integrates all the positive elements that language learning should incorporate including being meaningful, contextual, enjoyable and playful (Ó Duibhir and Cummins, 2012). Storytelling has been used to develop a young child's imagination, engagement and language, therefore, in my opinion applying this universal tool to the teaching of Irish makes educational sense.

Throughout my literature review, I discussed the key principles of children's second language learning and found that an integrated approach, exposure to the language, the language learning environment and interaction with the second language were all crucial elements in facilitating second language acquisition. These key principles are embedded in a storytelling approach as familiar stories allow the children to make regular and subtle links between the two languages to aid their comprehension. Storytelling and stories are generally familiar to the children from home and therefore, can be used to create a fun, safe and comfortable classroom environment which in turn aids a natural learning approach to a second language.

### Observation 11/2/20



**Image 2: Image taken during freeplay on the 11th February 2020**

The image above was taken (by me) during a freeplay session the morning of the 11<sup>th</sup> February 2020, around two weeks into the storytelling intervention. I observed a small group of children, completely unprompted and unprovoked, begin acting out “*Cinnín Óir agus na Trí Bhéar*” (Goldilocks and the Three Bears) using the toys in the image. Although they were using primarily using English to navigate their way through the story they were replacing key vocabulary from English to Irish such as “*cathaoir*” (chair) and “*leaba*” (bed). It is evident from the observation above how effective the storytelling technique had been on their daily lives particularly at such an early stage. Their informal play is the exact type of positivity and engagement with the Irish language I had wanted to create when I began this process, therefore, this particular observation plays a vital role in this research study and furthermore, highlights my claim that storytelling and stories can be used to facilitate second language acquisition.

**Journal Entry 25/2/20**

*“One of the parents approached me in yard today claiming that his son is speaking non-stop Irish at home. I agreed with him and suggested that he was picking it up easier than the rest because French is his first language and he replied saying “no, his sister never did that, I think it’s all to do with how you’re teaching it”. I can’t describe how proud I felt as his teacher” (Journal entry recorded 25/2/20).*

It is evident that the journal entry above speaks for itself. The pride and happiness I felt after that conversation is indescribable. As I stated in the previous chapter, I understood this research study would not be a linear process and that I would have many ups and downs throughout the process. This most certainly was a high I will never forget.

This journal entry highlights my emotional response as his teacher, however, also captures the positive and successful effect the storytelling intervention was having on his language learning and furthermore, proves to me that stories can indeed facilitate second language acquisition.

Having reflected on the above observation and journal entry from my reflective journal, I believe it consolidates my claim that storytelling and stories can be used as a tool to facilitate second language learning and primarily answers my first questions of *“how can storytelling and stories facilitate second language acquisition?”*. Stories and storytelling in a classroom can facilitate second language acquisition by teaching children a second language in a fun, unique and approachable manner that is familiar to the children.

### **5.1.2 Finding two: Parental Involvement and Informal Irish is Crucial**

The second question I wished to address at the beginning of this research study was *“how can I make my teaching of Irish more interesting and engaging?”*, a popular question I am sure is at the forefront of every teacher’s mind in regard to at least one of the subjects they teach. From my analysis of the data I collected and general observations, I have found parental involvement and use of informal Irish throughout the day, as well as using the storytelling intervention, to be crucial and essential in establishing interesting and engaging Irish language lessons.

#### **Parental Involvement**

While conducting this research study and reflecting on the various results from the parental questionnaire, the importance of parental involvement and creating a home-school link while teaching a second language was clarified. According to Ó Duibhir and Cummins (2012), immersion and exposure is the fastest way to learn a new language, however, if the language learning is not being reinforced at home it remains debatable as to what effect the teaching is having.

The previous chapter outlines the results from the parental questionnaire, indicating that the majority of the parents believe Irish is important, however, the majority admit to rarely using it at home with their children which correlates with the fact that they rarely hear their children using it at home. This further highlights the importance of exposure and immersion in learning a language.

I explain in the methodology chapter that I sent home individual books with the children alongside a word document containing the Irish vocabulary we were focusing on that week with the English meaning and the phonetic spelling. I received



a tremendous response with this subtle yet effective method of involving the parents in their children's learning. The encouragement from home helped the children with their learning, however, it also highlighted to me as their teacher that I was doing the right thing.

### **Use of Informal Irish**

From analysing the additional Irish words used to form sentences from the vocabulary assessment, I found that the majority of vocabulary used was acquired from my use of informal Irish throughout the day. This is evident and can be seen clearly from figure 8 in Chapter Four. This further highlights to me as a teacher the importance of using Irish informally throughout the day.

Using Irish informally throughout the day is essential in teaching Irish, however, it should always be accompanied by daily formal Irish lessons to further consolidate the Irish vocabulary used informally throughout the day. I found the children were excited and enthusiastic when they understood an Irish word I was using informally and would often try to copy or mimic me. I believe using Irish informally further engages the children with the language and makes them more aware of their ability to code-switch and code-mix.

### **5.1.3 Finding Three: Use of Stories can increase Vocabulary Retention and Sentence Structure in Irish**

My final question; “*Can I improve the vocabulary retention of my students through storytelling?*” is a difficult question to answer as it is based on the results of the post-intervention vocabulary assessment that was undertaken by merely 5/23 pupils due to school closures. However, based on the analysis of the five completed assessments, I could conclude that stories and storytelling does in fact improve the vocabulary retention and sentence structure in Irish with 5/5 children receiving 100% in identifying the vocabulary correctly. More importantly, however, was that the quality of sentences greatly improved with additional Irish words used which was analysed in greater depth in the previous chapter.

### **5.1.4 Conclusion**

In conclusion, the key findings of this research study enabled me to formulate answers to my three key questions I set out to answer at the beginning of the year. That said, the biggest finding, and perhaps the most important, was the personal and professional development this journey took me on which I will now discuss.

## **5.2 Evolving Values and Personal and Professional Development**

In this section, I would like to turn the spotlight on myself, my values and my practice and analyse and reflect upon the changes and evolving thoughts and opinions I have had since starting this process in August 2019. I will refer back to my original value statement that I wrote at the beginning of the year and the various reflections that have contributed to this change.

### 5.2.1 Values

We all live our life according to the values we hold (McNiff, 2010) and, as we grow both personally and professionally, those values become more apparent as they influence our actions, thinking and decisions throughout our lives, whether we are aware of it or not. I never confronted or analysed the values I hold as I simply did not see the need to do so prior to this self-study action research. At the beginning of this process, I was forced to evaluate my values and it was a simpler task than I initially believed as all that was required of me was to reflect on my own practice as “the everyday choices we make when planning lessons, in relation to teaching strategies, resources, assessment tools, all draw on our assumptions and values” (Sullivan et al, 2016: 17).

I explain in my original value statement that I value commitment, hard-work, respect for our culture and, particularly, the Irish language. Fast forward a few months and that is undoubtedly still the case, alongside a few additional extras that have managed to subtly emerge. I will explore these in more detail later.

I also referred to myself as a ‘*living contradiction*’ (Whitehead, 1989) and outlined the areas in which I felt my values were being contradicted by my practice. I would like to revisit these areas and reflect on whether or not I have seen an improvement or transformation in my practice and whether or not “I am living more fully in the directions of my values” (McNiff, 2010: 12).

I wrote in my Value Statement (September 2019) that “*I realise that my values are being denied in my practice when I:*”

- **Use ‘Bua na cainte’ as a lesson rather than a resource** – I am proud to say that I have not used ‘*bua na cainte*’ as a full lesson since beginning this research study. I have learned to use it effectively as a resource and as part of my Irish lessons rather than as the full lesson. I believe I have worked hard in designing and planning my Irish lessons and incorporating various new methodologies such as the storytelling into them. Using ‘*bua na cainte*’ is certainly the easy option to take, however, I am fully committed in taking a longer route and teaching Irish in a fun and engaging manner if it means I am living out my values in my practice.
- **Don’t change my methods of teaching when I know something isn’t working** – Since January, I have completely adapted and transformed the way in which I teach Irish. I was not happy with my teaching of Irish at the beginning of the year and I knew something needed to change. All the research I gathered in my literature review and data I collected from the children contributed and facilitated my adoption of a new approach in my teaching which I am happy with.
- **Am inattentive in my teaching of certain topics and don’t reflect on what I could do to enhance their learning** – This action research has encouraged me to reflect on myself and my practice and has given me the tools to enhance my reflective skills further should I need to.
- **Don’t step outside of my comfort zone to try something new** – Adopting a new approach in how I teach Irish has undoubtedly forced me to step outside my comfort zone and to try something new. Furthermore, completing this

Masters in Education, meeting like-minded people and engaging in the literature and research are all further steps I have taken to step outside of my comfort zone.

### **5.2.2 Evolving Teacher Identity**

Palmer (1997) argues that we teach who we are. In other words, the values we hold influence the way and how in which we teach. Palmer (1997) goes on to argue that we must know ourselves as individuals first in order to understand how we teach and what we teach. He believes a good teacher is not defined by what or how they teach but of who they are and the personal elements of their personality that they bring into the classroom. He states "good teachers join self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a "capacity for connectedness." (Palmer, 1997: 3).

I completely agree with Palmer and this is why I believe my evolving teacher identity has played an integral role throughout this research. Having meta-reflected upon my recent journal entries, it is evident that I was reluctant to try something new in my teaching of Irish purely due to a lack of self-belief and fear of being judged as an NQT (newly qualified teacher).

I am proud of myself for undertaking this research study and transforming the way I teach Irish, as, ultimately, I am the only one that has the power to do so. I am a much more confident and reassured teacher of our native language having completed this research study. I took it upon myself to educate myself on the most effective way to teach an additional language and I believe I am a better teacher for it. My main aim

was to spark joy and enthusiasm in my teaching of Irish and I believe I achieved my goal.

### **5.3 Future Practice and Recommendations**

In this section, I wish to discuss my plans for future practice and the elements of my action research I will continue to use in my classroom next year and in the future. Recommendations will also be considered and reflected upon. I will also review the dissemination of my research and how I might prompt others to adopt a similar approach to teaching Irish.

#### **5.3.1 Future practice**

Although my research in the classroom has formally been conducted, I do not believe my action research journey has ceased. It would be extremely hypocritical of me and completely against the values I hold to revert back to teaching Irish using the original methodologies I used at the beginning of the year. I would be doing myself and my students a disservice if I were to neglect the use my new knowledge and all I have learned in the classroom next year to teach high quality Irish lesson using a storytelling approach.

Having had time to reflect on all aspects of my action research, the following are the elements I plan to adopt in my future practice;

- **Teacher Observations:** throughout the school day, I am constantly, sometimes unconsciously and mostly informally, observing the children in my class; how they interact with each other, how they answer certain questions, how focused or unfocused they are etc. This research study, however, has encouraged me to formally note these observations and write them down throughout the day and date them. I did not understand the benefit

of doing this until I had to sit down and analyse these observations. The amount you can learn about a child solely based on a brief observation is invaluable. When I began to analyse the observations over a few weeks, I began to notice certain trends and themes emerging. The observations undoubtedly facilitated me as their teacher to understand them as a person a lot more. Therefore, I absolutely envision myself noting these teacher observations formally in future practice.

- **Reflective Journal:** I was never the type of person to keep a journal. I always believed that I would remember anything important. Throughout this process, we were encouraged to keep a reflective journal to capture our thoughts arising from lessons or general ideas we had throughout the school day. I must admit, even as I recorded my reflections daily I could not see the benefit of keeping a journal. That said, through meta reflection a few months on, I can clearly understand the benefits of keeping one. Sitting down and reflecting on your own reflections is perhaps one of the most rich and valuable sources of data you can retrieve. I learned a huge amount throughout this process about myself as a teacher and learned how to critique elements of my practice purely based on meta reflection. This element of data collection is undoubtedly something that I am taking forward into the future with me.
- **Assessments:** I found the process of assessing the children one to one with a small and simple vocabulary task helped to their own confidence and understanding of certain vocabulary in Irish. It also gave me the opportunity to assess what they had learned and what had not stuck with them and therefore, alter my teaching accordingly. I would use this strategy in the

future as it clearly indicated to me who was struggling and highlighted the children that required additional support.

- **Storytelling Intervention:** Finally, I can envision myself undoubtedly using the storytelling intervention and the primary basis of this research study in my classroom next year. As I stated previously, the intervention requires adaptation and flexibility depending on the class level and their needs and what works for one class may not work for another. It is suited mostly for younger class groups, however, it would be interesting to adapt it for an older class and reflect on the effectiveness. Adopting the intervention with my class next year will be one of my main priorities and I look forward to hopefully witnessing the positive effect the intervention could potentially have on their learning of Irish.

### 5.3.2 Recommendations

Although the storytelling intervention was successful and effective with *my class* this year, I believe there is always space for tweaking and improving. Not everything went to plan while conducting this action research, however, I always stated at the beginning that I was not interested in creating a victory narrative. Arising from my conclusive findings above, the following are a few comprehensive recommendations for myself and others.

- **Choice of book:** This study has shown the importance of choosing an age-appropriate, suitable and engaging storybook with plenty of repetition to facilitate participation, engagement and recall of target vocabulary. Simple fairytales and familiar readings such as “*Cinnín Óir agus na trí Bhéar*” (Goldilocks and the Three Bears) offer a range of learning opportunities for young children particularly as they can use their prior knowledge of the story



in their first language to create meaning and understanding in their second (Mhic Mhathúna, 2004; Leicester, 2005).

- **Focus on the needs of your class:** One size does *not* fit all, and that has been evident throughout this study and with regard to a teacher's approach to teaching Irish. What works for one class may not work for another. This study was focused on vocabulary development in Irish using a storytelling approach to do so, however, I believe the same intervention can be used to teach many other elements of the language. I therefore, make the recommendation to focus on the needs and improvement of the individual class.
- **Create a home-school link:** the parental involvement and support throughout my research study was invaluable and contributed to the overall success of the intervention. The study itself highlighted the importance of parental involvement and creating that home-school link particularly in relation to Irish in which the literature (Harris, 2008; Hicky and Stenson, 2016) further supports.
- **Do not underestimate the value of using informal Irish throughout the day:** An unexpected finding of this research was the level of acquisition gained due to my use of informal Irish throughout the day. Although my research was primarily on storytelling and vocabulary development, this finding has prompted me to consider increasing my use of informal Irish in the classroom and I would highly recommend others to adopt this approach.

### 5.3.3 Dissemination of my Research

I do not believe the submission of this action research thesis has to be the end of my action research journey. In fact, how I move forward with my teaching and learning

now is key to indicating how impactful and transformative this research has been. I have been the focus of this research the entire duration and therefore, I ultimately have the power to choose what I want to do with it moving forward. Sharing my research and my thoughts and opinions are at the forefront of my mind, as well as reflecting on emerging ideas and bigger questions that have come about directly because of this study.

Academic research deserves to be shared with the world. I believe, there are ample amount of benefits and opportunities that can be gained as a result of sharing my research. Brookfield (2017) argues that through dialogue with others, multiple perspectives and opinions can be offered which in turn can help us unearth and check our assumptions regularly. By sharing my research with my colleagues and others, I can gain additional feedback, information and recommendations that I would otherwise miss.

I am passionate about how Irish is taught in schools and therefore, would willingly share my research on an educational forum or journal in the hope that it would prompt others to consider their approach to teaching Irish and the effectiveness of their teaching at present. I also agree that “the communication of your research through a public forum can secure the endorsement of your ideas by others and thus has the potential to add considerably to the significance of the research” (Sullivan et al, 2016: 127).

Using storytelling to facilitate vocabulary development in Irish was my primary research question, however, as themes and findings began to emerge I found myself

asking bigger questions such as “*the effect of parental involvement in teaching Irish?*” and “*the benefits of informal Irish to facilitate Irish development?*”. These would be a potential areas for further study and investigation which would be of great interest to me.

#### **5.4 Overall Conclusion**

In conclusion, my findings suggest that I did indeed improve my teaching of Irish vocabulary using storytelling and stories to do so. Due to unexpected school closures and thus, uncompleted action cycles, the transformation and improvement did not arise from the vocabulary assessments completed by the children. However, based on my mindset and critical reflection, the transformation and improvement arose from myself and my practice alongside my primary aims being achieved.

One of my aims of this action research study was to “*improve and transform my teaching of Irish in order to live more closely in the direction of my values*”. I can confidently claim that I am living more closely in the direction of my values by working hard and being committed in creating unique, fun and engaging Irish language lessons that caters for all the children in my class, which ultimately reflects my values of respect for the Irish culture and language and commitment and hard-work.

Secondly, I had a vision of “*developing a storytelling intervention with a focus on the teaching of Irish vocabulary catered for a young class group*”. As stated above, I believe there is constant need for improving and tweaking, however, I am very happy overall with how the intervention was carried out. I look forward to adapting it to suit my class next year and reflecting upon the various positive and negative elements of

the intervention. This study has proven to me that there are additional ways to teach a second language and there is most definitely a gap in the market to do so. Therefore, this research study has given me the tools to complete an even bigger project in the future, with the potential of developing a new Irish language programme for schools in line with the new PLC and the findings of this research study.

Finally, my primary aim was to “*spark joy and enthusiasm in my teaching and the children’s learning of the Irish language*”. I can confidently claim that I am more enthusiastic and happier than ever teaching Irish using the storytelling intervention and I believe it is down to the fact that it is an intervention created especially for my class, created by me, their teacher and an intervention I believe in. In one of my final journal entries before the closure of the school I write;

*“The engagement is definitely higher and the elements of TPRS are very effective especially the use of silly questions. It definitely requires more energy but it is more interesting to teach this way and I am definitely enjoying it more. They are so eager and enthusiastic during the Irish lessons now” (Ní Ghiollagáin, journal entry, March 2020).*

I believe the journal entry above reflects in entirety the aims of this research study and the elements of my practice I was attempting to improve.

Although, this thesis ultimately reflects the endpoint to the journey, I have no doubt I will continue to learn, evolve and reflect on all elements of my practice. I am a lot more aware of my surroundings, my thinking and my practice and have no doubt I

will bring forward this learning experience into my teaching next year and beyond. This chapter of my action research journey has come to an end, however, I have not reached the end of my story as “this book is an unfolding story. We authors are in the process of learning about learning communities and action research, and learning through them” (Glenn et al, 2017: 1).

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# Appendix 1: Sample Consent Forms and Letters

## Appendix 1.1: Copy of Parents' Consent Letter



Dear Parent(s),

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University, and am in the process of writing my Master's thesis. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The study is entitled *"how can I use storytelling and stories in my classroom to improve my teaching of Irish vocabulary"*.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by teaching my Irish lessons using a storytelling technique as my primary methodology and the research will be carried out during their designated daily Irish slot. The data will be collected using observations, a daily teacher journal, voice recordings, questionnaires and the pupil's test scores.

The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. Your child will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage.

All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in this project.

If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me at any stage.

Yours faithfully,

Órla Ní Ghiollagáin

## **Information Sheet**

### **Parents and Guardians**

#### **Who is this information sheet for?**

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

#### **What is this Action Research Project about?**

Teachers on the Master of Education degree course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a teacher. This project will involve an analysis of the teacher's own practice. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes and questionnaires. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

#### **What are the research questions?**

- How can storytelling facilitate second language acquisition?
- How can I make my teaching of Irish more engaging and interesting?
- Can I improve the vocabulary retention of my students through storytelling?

#### **What sorts of methods will be used?**

- observations, a daily teacher journal, voice recordings, questionnaires and the pupil's test scores.

#### **Who else will be involved?**

The study will be carried out by me, Órla Ní Ghiollagáin, as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The thesis will be submitted for assessment to the module leader Dr Bernadette Wrynn and will be examined by the Department staff. The external examiners will also access the final thesis.

#### **What are you being asked to do?**

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with my class. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines.

**Contact details: Student: Órla Ní Ghiollagáin**  
[orla.nighiollagain.2015@mumail.ie](mailto:orla.nighiollagain.2015@mumail.ie)

**E:**

## Appendix 1.2: Copy of Parents' Consent Form

### PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in this study. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Parent / Guardian Signature \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Child \_\_\_\_\_

Child's signature: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

### Appendix 1.3: Copy of Childs' Consent Letter



I am trying to find out how children learn new Irish words in primary school. I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch you and listen to you when you are in school and to write down some notes about you.

Would you be ok with that? Pick a box

**Yes**

**No**

I have asked your Mum or Dad or Guardian to talk to you about this. If you have any questions I would be happy to answer them. If you are happy with that could you sign the form that I have sent home?

If you change your mind after we start, that's ok too.

**Appendix 1.4: Copy of Childs' Consent Form**

**Child's assent to participate**

**My parent/guardian has read the information sheet with me and I agree to take part in this research.**

**Name of child (in block capitals):**

\_\_\_\_\_



**Signature:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Date:** \_\_\_\_\_

## Appendix 1.5: Request of Consent of School Principal



14/11/2019

### RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Principal,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study in my Junior Infant class here. I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University, and am in the process of writing my Master's thesis. The study is entitled *"how can I use storytelling and stories in my classroom to improve my teaching of Irish vocabulary"*.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by teaching my Irish lessons using a storytelling technique as my primary methodology and the research will be carried out during their designated daily Irish slot. The data will be collected using observations, a daily teacher journal, voice recordings and the pupils test scores.

The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. The participants will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage. All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at [orla.nighiollagain.2015@mumail.ie](mailto:orla.nighiollagain.2015@mumail.ie).

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form.

Yours faithfully,

Órla Ní Ghiollagáin

Approved by:

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## Appendix 1.6: Request of Consent of Board of Management



14/11/2019

### RE: Permission to Conduct Research Study

Dear Board of Management,

I am writing to request permission to conduct a research study in my Junior Infant class here. I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University, and am in the process of writing my Master's thesis. The study is entitled "*how can I use storytelling and stories in my classroom to improve my teaching of Irish vocabulary*".

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by teaching my Irish lessons using a storytelling technique as my primary methodology and the research will be carried out during their designated daily Irish slot. The data will be collected using observations, a daily teacher journal, voice recordings and the pupils test scores.

The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. The participants will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage. All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Your approval to conduct this study will be greatly appreciated. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at [orla.nighiollagain.2015@mumail.ie](mailto:orla.nighiollagain.2015@mumail.ie).

If you agree, kindly sign below and return the signed form.

Yours faithfully,

Órla Ní Ghiollagáin

Approved by:

---



## Appendix 2: Research Instruments

### Appendix 2.1: Sample Parental Questionnaire

#### Parent Questionnaire

1. First name of child: \_\_\_\_\_

Date of Birth of child: \_\_\_\_\_

2. What languages did you speak to your child when he/she was younger?

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Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

3. Do you use any Irish vocabulary with your child at home now?

(Please tick).

4. How would you rate your own competence in Irish? (specify if possible).

Native speaker ☐ Very good ☐ Fair ☐ Very little ☐ None ☐

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5. Does your child use any Irish words or phrases unprompted and informally throughout the day at home? (Please tick).

Not at all	Rarely	Sometimes	Often	Very often

6. Do you feel your child has a positive attitude towards the language?

Very negative	Negative	Neutral	Positive	Very positive

7. How important is the teaching of Irish to you? (Please tick).

Not at all	Not important	Neutral	Important	Very

8. Do you have any Irish children's books at home? If so, (a) please specify and (b) say what prompted you to buy these particular books?

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9. Any other comment you wish to make in relation to your child's learning of Irish in school?

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Go raibh míle maith agat as an gCeistneoir seo a fhreagairt! ☺







## Appendix 2.2: Sample Pre-Intervention Assessment

### Vocabulary assessment

Child's initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Picture	Identify word?	Sentence?
		
		
		
		
		
		




 shutterstock.com • 54341789		
		
		
 shutterstock.com • 190992233		
		
		
<b>Total:</b>	<b>/12</b>	<b>/12</b>



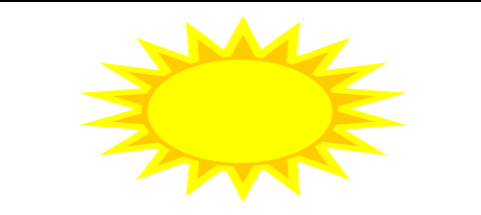



## Appendix 2.3: Sample Post-Intervention Assessment

### Vocabulary assessment

Child's initials: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Picture	Identify word?	Sentence?
 shutterstock.com • 759994681		
		
		
		
		
		

		
		
		
		
		
		
<b>Total:</b>	<b>/12</b>	<b>/12</b>

## Appendix 2.4: Sample Checklist

### January checklist 2020

*Tick given if heard being spoken formally/informally throughout the day without prompt from the teacher*

Teach	
Doras	
Fuinneog	
Simléar	
Díon	
Dathanna	
Grian	
Scamall	
Éan	
Eitleán	
Spéir	
Gairdín	
Bláthanna	
Crann	
Madra	
Luch	
Féar	
Cistin	
Stól	
Bord	
Cathaoir	
Cófra	
Mór	
Beag	
Seomra leaba	
<p>Sentences heard using informal Irish:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Where is the <b>buí</b> box?</li><li>• Can I play in the <b>teach</b>.</li><li>• There <b>cúig</b> people in the library.</li><li>• What's cracker called as Gaeilge.</li><li>• My <b>madra</b> isn't <b>tinn</b> anymore.</li><li>• Maybe she's <b>tinn</b>.</li><li>• Maybe she's on her <b>laethanta saoire</b>.</li></ul>	

## Appendix 3: Miscellaneous

### Appendix 3.1: Vocabulary Document sent home to Parents

#### Cinnín Óir agus na Trí Bhéar

<b>Foclóir</b>	<b>English meaning</b>	<b>Phonetically</b>
Teach beag	Small house	Ch-oc
Cathaoir	Chair	C-aw-h-ee-r
Babhla leite	Bowl of porridge	B-ou-la le-ta
Leaba	Bed	Laa-ba
Coill	Forest	Qu-ill
Cistin	Kitchen	c-i-sh-t-in
Seomra Suí	Sitting room	Sh-oh-mra s-ee
Seomra Leaba	Bedroom	Sh-oh-mra laa-ba
Talamh	Ground	t-all-uv
Te	Hot	t-e
Go - hálainn	Lovely	g-uh h-aw-lin
An-mór	Very big	Aw-n m-or
Mór	Big	M-or
Beag	Small	b-uh-g
Crua	Hard	Cr-oo-a
Cé	Who	c-ay



### Appendix 3.2: Weekly Plan

Phrases taught week by week		
Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Teach beag</li> <li>• Coill bheag</li> <li>• Cathaoir, leite, leaba (An-mhór Mór Beag)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tá an-leite seo an-te, go hálainn.</li> <li>• Tá an-chathaoir seo an-chrua, go hálainn..</li> <li>• Thit sí ar an talamh</li> <li>• Leaba seo go hálainn.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cé a d'ith mo leite?</li> <li>• Cé a shuigh ar mo chathaoir?</li> <li>• Cé a luigh ar mo leaba?</li> <li>• Chonaic sí..</li> <li>• D'ith sí..</li> <li>• Shuigh sí..</li> <li>• Dúisigh sí...</li> </ul>

Vocabulary development week by week		
Week 1	Week 2	Week 3
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Madra</li> <li>• Cat</li> <li>• Luch</li> <li>• Éan</li> <li>• Coill</li> <li>• Siúl</li> <li>• Pláta</li> <li>• Cistin</li> <li>• Leite</li> <li>• Seomra suí</li> <li>• Leaba</li> <li>• Talamh</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Chonaic</li> <li>• Bris</li> <li>• Suí</li> <li>• Ith</li> <li>• Luigh</li> <li>• Dúisigh</li> <li>• Thit</li> <li>• An- te</li> <li>• Go-hálainn</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Revision</li> </ul>

- Week 1 focus on vocabulary development and meaning.
- Week 2 focus on understanding – i.e I read the script and the children act it out.
- Week 3 focus on meaning and sentence structure – the children act it out with prompts from the teacher.

### Appendix 3.3: Assessment of Sentence Formations

Criterion	1	2	3	4	5
<b>Understanding</b>	Does not put Irish word into a coherent sentence indicating lack of understanding and meaning.	Manages to put Irish word into a weak sentence indicating some understanding and meaning. <b>5</b>	Puts Irish word in a good coherent sentence indicating understanding and meaning. <b>1</b>	Puts Irish word in a very good coherent sentence indicating understanding and meaning. <b>13</b>	Puts Irish word in an extremely good coherent sentence indicating understanding and meaning. <b>4</b>
<b>Vocabulary</b>	Uses no extra Irish words when constructing any of the sentences. <b>4</b>	Uses <b>one</b> or more extra Irish words when constructing <b>one</b> or more of the sentences. <b>9</b>	Uses <b>one</b> or more extra Irish words when constructing <b>three</b> or more of the sentences. <b>6</b>	Uses <b>one</b> or more extra Irish words when constructing <b>six or more</b> of the sentences. <b>2</b>	Uses <b>two</b> or more extra Irish words when constructing <b>six or more</b> of the sentences. <b>2</b>
<b>Engagement</b>	No evidence of engagement.	Some small evidence of engagement from the pupil. <b>4</b>	Evidence of engagement from the pupil. <b>9</b>	Evidence of good engagement from the pupil. <b>7</b>	Evidence of clear and excellent engagement from pupil with a want to improve. <b>3</b>

### Appendix 3.4: Ethical Declaration Declaration

'I confirm that to the best of my knowledge this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of undertaking this research.' If any of the conditions of this proposed research change, I confirm that I will re-negotiate ethical clearance with my supervisor.

Órla Ní Ghiollaigáin

*Órla Ní Ghiollaigáin*

Signed: \_\_\_\_\_

Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Date Considered: \_\_\_\_\_ 2/12/19 \_\_\_\_\_

Approved

Approved with recommendations (see below)

Referred back to applicant

Referred to Department Research and Ethics Committee

*

Recommendations:

Signature of supervisor: \_\_\_\_\_

*Brendan J. Murphy*

**Department use only: (only where applicable)**

Date Considered: \_\_\_\_\_ 2/12/19 \_\_\_\_\_

Approved by Froebel Department Research and Ethics committee

Approved with recommendations (see below)

Referred back to applicant (changes to be approved by supervisor)

Referred to Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Subcommittee

*

Recommendations:

Signature of Dept. Ethics Committee Chair: \_\_\_\_\_

*Brendan J. Murphy*

