

Ainm / Name: Racheal Govan

Bliain / Year group: 2nd

Uimhir mhic léinn / Student number: 15556757

Ábhar / Subject: EDF684

Léachtóir / Teagascóir: _____

Lecturer / Tutor: Dr. Bernadette Wrynn

Spríoclá / Due date : 21/08/2020

Teideal an tionscadail / Assignment title: How can utilise meaningful partnerships with parents as a tool to engender social justice within my Early Year's setting?

Líon na bhfocal / Word Count:: 18,002

Líon leathanach / Number of pages: 105

Aon ábhar eile sa tionscadal / Any other material in the assignment:

Dearbhaím gur mise amháin / mise mar bhall grúpa (cuir ciorcal timpeall na rogha a bhaineann leis an tionscadal thuas) a rinne an saothar seo. Aithním go soiléir aon chabhair a fuair mé ó aon duine eile, baill fhoirne nó gaol clainne san áireamh. Mo chuid scríbhneoireachta féin atá sa tionscadal seo ach amháin nuair a úsáidtear ábhar ar bith as foinsí eile. Tugtar aitheantas do na foinsí seo sna fo-nótaí nó sna tagairtí.

Dearbhaím go bhfuil treoirínte an choláiste do thionscadail léite agam agus go dtuigim iad. Tá cóip den tionscadal coinnithe agam dom féin.

I confirm that I alone / I as part of a group (please circle whichever applies in the case of the above assignment) produced this project. I clearly acknowledge any help I received from any other person, staff members or relatives included. This project is my own composition except for material of any kind taken from other sources. These sources are acknowledged in the footnotes or references.

I confirm that I have read and understand the Department assignment guidelines. I have also retained a copy of the assignment for myself.

Síniú / Signature: Racheal Govan

Dáta / Date 25/09/2020





OLLSCOIL NA HÉIREANN MÁ NUAD

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND
MAYNOOTH

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

M.Ed. (Research in Practice)
2019 - 2020

How can I utilise meaningful partnerships with parents as a
tool to engender social justice within my Early Years
Setting?

Racheal Govan

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: 25/09/2020

Supervised by: Annaïck Farrell

Declaration of Authenticity

“Plagiarism involves an attempt to use an element of another person’s work, without appropriate acknowledgement in order to gain academic credit. It may include the unacknowledged verbatim reproduction of material, unsanctioned collusion, but is not limited to these matters; it may also include the unacknowledged adoption of an argumentative structure, or the unacknowledged use of a source or of research materials, including computer code or elements of mathematical formulae in an inappropriate manner.”

Maynooth University Plagiarism Policy

I hereby declare that this project, which I now submit in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Education (Research in Practice) is entirely my own work; that I have exercised reasonable care to ensure that the work is original and does not to the best of my knowledge breach any law of copyright, and has not been taken from the work of others save to the extent that such work has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Signed: _____ Racheal Govan _____

Date: _____ 25/09/2020 _____



Abstract

“How can I utilise meaningful partnerships with parents as a tool to engender social justice within my Early Years Setting?”

The influence Early Childhood Education has transformed dramatically over the last ten years with the introduction of ECCE programme (DYCA, 2016). As a result of this, it is paramount that we as Early Years’ teachers recognise the changing platform, we have now been afforded, that now 98% of children in Ireland are exposed to Early Year’s education (DCYA, 2016). This platform I had recognised afforded me as a teacher the opportunity to support parents’ journey becoming their children’s “primary educators” as they begin their educational journey in a hope to combat the social injustice which occurs on educational platforms (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937 and Bordieu, 1997). I felt this was important as Ireland’s constitution recognises a child’s parents’ as their primary educators of their children (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937). The aim of this research was to support the sense of recognition for the role parents play in their children’s early year’s education and to empower them within their role. I utilised research previously conducted from the field to inform my plan to carry out the research.

I identified my current beliefs and biases on this topic were teased out throughout this research. My current level of practice with parental

involvement was assessed through qualitative and quantitative research. A triangulation of data was acquired through sample groupings of reflections of practice, questionnaires, consultations with the children meetings and other teachers. The current cultures of the families, the teachers and myself were explored and our levels of expectations regarding “meaningful parental partnership”. The objectives of meaningful parental partnership is to develop a more enriched curriculum for the children and improve professional relationships and further empower parents within their current roles. Through research cycles undertaken it was also identified what beliefs the children held regarding their parents’ involvement in their education.

This study addressed issues that arose in the development of meaningful parental partnership and the implemented strategies to develop these partnerships. It also provided future suggestions of implementation to enhance current parental partnerships. It also increases the knowledge of the benefits of meaningful partnership for both the children and their parent. Finally, it aided with the adaptation of values through knowledge and combat social injustice on an educational platform.



Acknowledgements

There were numerous people which have supported and influenced my journey in this Master's programme and I would like to take this opportunity to extend my heartfelt thanks to them.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Annaïck Farrell for the huge support throughout this research and the Master's programme. I feel some of my adaptations of practice is a direct result of the knowledge which I have acquired throughout our supervisor's meetings. In times when I felt I was not capable you reminded me of my strengths. Secondly, all of the lecturers in the Frobel Department in Maynooth University, they have given my guidance and inspiration to equip me with the tools necessary in becoming a leader and advocate of the Early Years' sector. Furthermore, I would like to give a special thanks to my course co-ordinator Dr. Bernadette Wynne. Bernadette has offered me professional guidance, support and strategies to support me within my current role throughout the entire Masters and I am very grateful for the knowledge which I have obtained.

Finally, I would like to thank my entire team, two managers Samantha O' Regan and Tanya Kavanagh. Without them, I would not have gotten through this Masters. I would also like to extend my gratitude to my critical friend and colleague Caroline Reid

to guiding me in seeking further clarity in different areas of the research. I would lastly, like to extend my gratitude to my family and friends for encouraging me to apply for the Master's programme. Also, my mam and younger brother Nigel, for their continuous belief in me and continually pushing me to strive to do my best.

Table of Contents

Cover Page..... i

Title Page..... ii

Declarations..... iii

Abstract..... iv

Acknowledgements.....v

Table of Contents vi

Table of Contents vii

Table of Contents viii

Appendices ix

Tables and Figures x

Abbreviations xi

Chapter 1 Introduction..... 1

 1 Induction 1

 1.1 Research Proposal Title 1

 1.2 Background of Research 1

 1.3 Research Site 2

 1.4 Ethical Considerations3-4

 1.5 Literature Review4- 6

 1.6 Research Question & Objectives6-7

 1.7 Research Methodology 7-8

 1.9 Schedule..... 8-9

Chapter 2 Literature Review 12

 2.1 Literature Review 12-13

2.2 International Influences	13-22
2.3 National Influences	22-27
2.4 Parental Partnership.....	27-30
Chapter 3 Methodology	31
3.1 Prep/ Reconnaissance	31
3.2 Action Research	31-33
3.3 Parental Attitudes	34
3.4 Conclusion.....	34-35
3.5 Methodology.....	35-48
Chapter 4 Action Research Cycles	49
4.1 Induction	49-50
4.2 Cycle 1	50
Table 4.1	51-53
Table 4.2	53
4.3 Informal Staff Interviews	54- 55
Table 4.4	56
Table 4.5	56
4.6 Adaptation of Parental Involvement & Reflective Considerations	57-59
Table 4.7.....	60
Table 4.8	60
Chapter 5 Conclusion & Recommendations.....	61
5.1 Introduction	61- 62
5.2 Summary of Key Findings	62-67
5.3 Limitations	67- 68

5.4 Conclusion & Recommendations	69
5.5 Recommendations	69- 70
Reference List	71-82
Appendices	83- 87



Appendices

- Information letter for Participant
- Information letter for Child
- Information Sheet Parents and Guardians
- Child assent

Tables and Figures

- 3.5.1 – Gibb’s Reflective Cycle
- 4.1 – Cycle 1
- 4.2 – Current Practise of Parental Involvement
- 4.4 – Cycle 2
- 4.5 – Table of Cycle 2
- 4.7 – Intervention
- 4.8 – Deprivation Index Profile of Institutions 2017/2018

Abbreviations

- MKO – More Knowledgeable Other
- ZPD – Zone of Proximal Development
- ECCE – Early Childhood Care and Education Scheme

Chapter 1 Introduction

Proposal and Values Statement

Introduction

1.1 Research Proposal Title

How can I utilise meaningful partnerships with parents as a tool to engender social justice within my Early Years Setting?

1.2 Background to Research

One of my core values which I have always held on a personal level is the importance of continuously engaging with improving oneself. I believe this has led me to selecting a Masters which engages with a self-study action research. However, upon reflection I have also identified other values and some of which I have developed only very recently. One such value would be the importance of feelings and emotion having true representation in self-study action research. I believe this brings authenticity and a real life feel to research conducted on yourself in your chosen area. I was recently exposed to



Jenny Moon's model (2004) of reflection and, prior to this, I did not believe emotion had a place in academic writing. Through engaging with Jenny Moon's model (2004) I found my self-reflection to delve into another level which I have not reached before which delivered me to deeper levels of understanding. I also believe in Social Justice and Bourdieu's (1997) ideologies surrounding that inspired me to choose this topic. On a global platform, 2020 has been a year of change and social justice has finally become more relevant than ever and has largest movement in history (Muschert et al, 2020). As I educate young children, I have been afforded the opportunity to be a part of that movement and support how young minds are influenced, even if it is on a small scale.

1.3 Research Site

The educational service I currently work in was the chosen research site and is based in a disadvantaged, inner-city locality. There is a mixed cohort of both boys and girls in the class for the age of 2.5 years to 5.5 years, our class size is up to 21 children and we have three pre-school teachers and myself, who work in the facility. This service has been running just over a year now and is based within a

community centre. The four teachers who work there all have very alternative backgrounds, from ethnicity to socio background.

1.4 Ethical Considerations

Throughout this research all ethical issues will be considered and managed sensitively in accordance with GDPR legislation (May, 2018). I will also adhere to both the company's policies and University's Safeguarding Children policies and Data Protection Guidelines (GDPR, 2018 and Maynooth University, 2020). I will ensure permission will be sought from all cohorts of this research. At this point, I anticipate that the cohorts for this research will be the children, colleagues, parent's, other Master's students (who may act as validators or advisors throughout my action research) and finally, my critical friend who has completed their degree in Early Years Education with me and manages an Early Year's setting, thereby offering a deeper understanding of the research. Letters of explanation, permission and invitations will all be attached. I will also verbally explain to each cohort to ensure there is an understanding of

what the research is and the information which may need to be gathered. I will reemphasise that the research is based on my practise and my approach to this topic and that they are not being assessed at any point. I will also ask the parents to further explain it to the children in their home environment, where perhaps they may feel more at ease and may gain a deeper understanding of what will be happening. This is to ensure as best as I possibly can, that I have acquired their consent as they are the most vulnerable cohort given their stage of understanding. I will advise all cohorts that if they wish to withdraw from this research at any point they are entitled to do so and they are also entitled to have a copy of the finished documents or any particular parts which they were involved in.

1.5 Literature Review

I think it is paramount to dissect the areas which underpin the topic and the method in which you intend to engage with to identify what literature may inform and support your research. I intend to break it down into subsections and focus on varied literature for each of these. The first area I will focus on is the reflective models/model, followed by leadership in my practise, children, team attitudes and parents with a primary focus on the development of partnership within the Early Years. I intend on reviewing literature from both a national and

international level to support the rigor of findings throughout this research.

My current thinking on action research has adapted since the commencement of my Masters' programme. I had looked at action research as a way in which I could change something as opposed to what I could learn about myself to support adaptation. As Biesta (2019) suggests, educational research should not only solve problems but should create them as well to gain knowledge. Through reflecting on Gibb's model (1988) of action-research and furthermore being exposed to Jenny Moon's (2004) model of reflection, I believe it has supported me in engaging in a deeper thought process. I have now arrived at the idea of self-study action research as purposeful research with the intent to improve something which researches "your own practise". Also, that emotion and feelings are important to identify what stages of your professional/reflective journey you are going through in order to support development. I believe action research will deepen my understanding of this topic by identifying what is actually happening within my setting and further researching the literature surrounding parental partnership, social justice and reflection as a researcher. I believe the selection both of these models will support my research as I feel that Bortons' (1970) framework, although quite simplistic and easy to follow, may produce less meaningful reflections throughout the action research as this does not necessarily consider feelings or evaluation.

My understanding of social justice began to deepen when I was first exposed to Bourdieu's work (1997). He considered it "symbolic violence" and an "unspoken agreement" between societal class to be kept within the social class into which you are born. Considering international influences, regarding the development of parental partnership, the literature on the research conducted by Pengreen (2015), could be insightful. I found this research to be also very transferable to an Irish context so would certainly be useful for this research.

1.6 Research Question & Objectives

How do I plan to explore social justice within the Early Years' context in which I am based? I plan to obtain this information through observations, in both formal and informal meetings with children, parents and the team. I also intend to conduct an anonymous parental questionnaire which contains open-ended questions that can also be delivered to the classroom anonymously, helping to encourage truthful responses. Firstly, I hope to identify if the children and families within my service who feel that they are being subjected to "symbolic violence" Bourdieu (1997) or if there is an issue of social justice. I also hope to gain a deeper understanding from a lived/real

world perspective and not just a theoretical ideology of what this “symbolic violence” looks like in real life. If it is identified the children and parents are experiencing this social injustice within my service, that it identifies how they are feeling subjected to this. I hope this also identifies means in which my practises can support improvements in this area. Thus, to further influence my team’s practices as director can potentially support change to improve conditions within the social dynamics our children experience in relation to Early Year’s education. I hope through the experiences I have during this research and the literature I cover that it enables me to adhere more closely to my values and provide the children in my care with unbiased, educational experiences.

1.7 Research Methodology

The methodology which I have selected is to conduct a self-study action research. I chose this form of research because I wanted to identify what I adapt my practise to support social justice within Early Years’ education. I also wanted the research to be specific to the context in which I am based and see what can be changed within my own practise. I have currently chosen both Gibb’s (1988) and Jenny Moon’s models of reflection and action research. The reason I selected these was I felt other models such as Borton’s (1970), were

too simplistic and could potentially lose authenticity and resonance, with the exclusion of the all too important emotional aspects of the researcher.

My research participants will be the parents of the children within the setting, the children, the other teachers. The collection of data I will need to require a baseline to identify what their current attitudes are regarding education for their children. I will also have a critical friend (as previously mentioned) and following discussions within the Master's class, I believe we will also critically assess each other's work to validate it's quality. I am utilising a triangulation of cohorts to support the rigor and validation of my work. I will conduct my research over a ten-week cycle, utilising observations, questionnaire and formal and informal conversations with all cohorts. I will also be writing a journal to track my own personal journey through this research. From the data gathered I will then be able to pull themes from the different methods which I have chosen. I will analyse my work by involving all my cohorts to potentially engage in conversations or support me with what potential questions which I may include in the questionnaires.

1.8 Schedule

I will conduct my research within one of my preschool rooms after the Christmas period as I feel that the children will be well settled in

and I will have also developed so of a relationship with the parents prior to beginning this research, which may be slightly sensitive to them. Currently, I believe it is doable within the timeframe, with the resources available to me. However, I feel as director of both of the services quite often my support is required in either of the centres so if their a teacher out sick or if a child may need additional support it could perhaps infringe on my research schedule. As I am director, I am in a fortunate position that I have the workplace's support. However, I am conscious that people may give me the answers they "think" I want to hear and not their truthful option given my position, so that is something which I need to be conscious of for the duration of the research. I intend on spending the first month gathering the information from all cohorts, the second engaging in further readings and processing information. Finally, the last two weeks I intend on arriving at an outcome of the research.

Inevitably this intended scheduling of the third cycle was interrupted given the current global pandemic of the COVID 19 virus. This interrupted my third cycle which I was about to commence and was unable to do so thus resulted in this self-study action research only containing two cycles as due to series of unfortunate chain of events in response to COVID 19 I had limited access to the participants in my action research. As a result of this I worked off the information I had already acquired from the first two cycles which I had engaged with and analysed my findings from that and developed recommendations based on them findings.

1.9 Values Statement

Reflecting on my current values, I feel I value social justice of social for people confined within class systems. This I believe it is in response to the societal expectation placed on children to achieve or underachieve based on their backgrounds. I feel this is a value of mine given the context in which both of my services are situated. As I feel sometimes my cohort of children given where they are from may be undervalued by society and that really disappoints me as I know their strengths and abilities. Paired with the fact it is evident on a National level the low societal expectation of academic achievement among children from disadvantaged background as they still only account for 10% of the National student body in third level (Higher Education Authority, 2019). I also value the importance of the role of the parent as their child's primary educator and recognise how fundamental their partnership is when it comes to educating their children holistically and supporting them as their primary educators. This value is supported by our National Constitution which in Article 41 deems the parent as the child's "primary educator" (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937). Also, after I was exposed to the research of Margaret Whalley (2017), whose focus was on the benefits which both the child and their family reaps from this meaningful partnership really made me believe in the value of their fundamental partnership.

I see my values being lived out in my practice when I engage meaningfully with children in my setting. This is further extended when I see them beginning to recognise their own strengths and celebrating them. This I believe will combat the societal expectation which is already placed on them prior to even commencing their education. These meaningful conversations which I have with parents once their barriers are taken down, actually supports them and they begin to trust me, and we begin to work collegially. They begin to believe that they have the ability to support their children's educational journey even if they may have dropped out of school themselves and recognising learning is not merely academic based.

However, I have also realised that my values are not always carried out in my practise. An example of times in which they are being denied in my practice is when I make judgement of a child's behaviour given their background. When I do not value some of the parent's input in their child's life when I do not know if it will be beneficial for their child in the long run, potentially given the parent's background that I may be aware of. When a child's behaviour sometimes gets too hard to manage and support and I consider giving up and not to continue to try break through the barriers with them and show them the respect they deserve as I potentially believe the work I do within the service may be counter acted in the home environment. I believe at these times my practises are a living contradiction of my values, as I do value respect, partnership with parents and recognising the strengths a child brings to our setting.

Chapter 2 A Review of the Literature

Literature Review

2.1 Literature Review

This thesis is based on the question, “How will I adapt my practice to further empower parents of children in my setting in supporting their children’s education”. For this research I will be reviewing a variety of literature to further inform and enlighten my thinking on this topic. To critically review the literature, I intend on breaking the material down into five sub-sections, so as to enable me to understand and deploy the knowledge as relevant for each of these sections. I also believe the dividing of literature will further enable me to zone in and identify aspects that will really enhance my personal practise in both research and daily practises. The sections I have focused on are as follows, International influences in this area, followed by National influences in this area, then Parental Partnership, literature on Action Research/ Self-Study Action Research and Attitudes of Parental Involvement in Children’s Education. I will be critically reviewing literature from national and international contexts to support my findings and enhance my practise throughout this thesis. I feel the consideration of international resources is paramount to this research

given the youthfulness of the Early Years' sector in Ireland; it is very important to consider practises on an international basis of the sector from a more mature context. Once these international sources have been reviewed, I can then endeavour to put them into the Irish Early Year's educational context and identify if they are or if aspects of them can aid with the transformation of my practice.

2.2 International Influences

When I first considered international influences and literature which I felt would further support the development of my practise in supporting parental involvement in their childrens' education, I immediately thought of Pierre Bourdieu (1997). Bourdieu is a French theorist whose research I was initially introduced to in my first year of my Master's programme. The reason his research initially came to mind was that the service I am conducting my research on is in a disadvantaged area; the disparity and tension between social status and societal expectation was a recurring/ central theme throughout his research. Coming from a disadvantaged background himself, Bordieu's experience of growing up in France and battling expectations of failure and a system designed to exclude rather than nurture him, I suspect that there could be much in the way of shared lived-experience between him and many of the parents from my setting. While I agree with much of how Bordieu

viewed and experienced a systemic force of society working against him, I also feel it important to tread carefully with some concepts and phrases of his such as the 'symbolic violence' (1997). This is because, reflecting on Bourdieu's academic journey and triumphs, I felt that some of his philosophies, were somewhat extreme comparing social status to wording such as "violence". However, it also certainly encapsulated and underpinned some of my values and the end goals for academic success in which I hope my practise could support attainment, long term. Bourdieu's theory (1997) considered how children's educational levels and achievements academically were as a result of the societal value and 'cultural capital' which was placed on them. He went on to suggest that the cultural capital which a person considers they have, can impede on their level of involvement in certain situations (Bourdieu, 1997). An example of his theory in practise would be if a child is from a disadvantaged area, they may be more able to navigate around social scuffles in a playground because they have learned how to develop skills in mediation and conflict resolution from a younger age. However, placed in a classroom dynamic the same child may not be able to navigate as smoothly because this is not the "cultural capital", or living experiences they were previously exposed to (Bourdieu, 1997). His theory goes on to consider the societal recognition of the differences between classes and societal expectations based on these differences as "symbolic violence", a term he coined to describe this dynamic (Bourdieu, 1997). This term suggested social classing to be nearly inhumane (Bourdieu,

1997). He believed that societal expectation aided with the continuation and maintaining of people within their social classes; social mobility via educational attainment was not an objective of the social system (Bourdieu, 1997). He believed if you were from a disadvantaged area it would render things extremely difficult for someone to reach to a higher-class level (Bourdieu, 1997). He believed that in order to obtain or to be accepted into a higher-class level you had to transform and act not like the class you were previously associated with. Within my daily context of working with families and children from considered disadvantaged areas, this is a hope I do not have for them and goes against my values. Although I do agree with his underpinning philosophies, I see the value of the “cultural capital” the children and parents bring to my setting, still arriving to the service each day even if a parent may be going through a drug treatment theory. I do not want to feel through my practise they have to change to be good educators to their children, I currently value their input I hope that my adaptable of practise will merely support them to ask for support. I also hope by adapting my practise that unlike Bourdieu theory (1997), the parent’s do not change who they are but that I can support them in believing in their abilities as their children’s primary educators (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937). Brinker, Ortega and Weitz (2013) also referred to this term suggested by Bourdieu (1997) in education and used the term “social structure”. I do believe that his philosophies do certainly hold good points and his values a truly evident in his philosophies. However, to critique this social theory by social

categorisation I would not be considered it as inhumane as physical violence acts as suggested by the term (Bourdieu, 1997). I believe that his philosophy was very much informed by his life experiences. Bourdieu was very open of his under privileged background, how he had to “change” himself to “fit into” a different societal level in university. I believe his thinking was somewhat extreme to make a comparison of “violence” as perhaps it was due to his own personal life journey. Perhaps the feelings in relation to what he had to overcome to get into university, coming from a disadvantaged background, presented with more rawness of emotion in his theory, hence the theory being a big extreme (Bourdieu, 1997). However, my interpretation of his theory, coming from a middle class background with educated parents, is one in which I question how I can truly understand the hardships he (and others) went through? Social classing is also implemented as a means of support, example DES schools are given more funding to support families in disadvantaged areas and the level of the DES school would depend on the social status of the location (DES, 2019). If the “symbolic violence”, was lifted and disadvantaged areas were no longer considered any different to other areas, the needed supports could go? Bourdieu’s (1997) research and thinking lead me onto consider the research of Nel Noddings (2005), her philosophy of whether happiness should be considered in education”? If the parents I am working with from a disadvantaged area that are potentially feeling “symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1997) against them, should their happiness and their children’s happiness be the most important

consideration in education, or should it be higher achievements to try to break the status quo? Or given the typical academic expectations of under achievement from this area, is it not more important for the teacher to focus on the achievements academically and leave the “happiness” part to the parents in the home environment and not to “waste time” with in it schools (journal.ie, 11/11/19)? A report which also supported my value of parental involvement in their child’s education was by Borgonovi and Aboucaor et al, (2012). This report suggested that “extensive international research shows that children do better when their parents are actively involved with their education” (Borgonovi and Aboucaor et al, 2012). These findings prior to engagement in my self-study action research has already highlighted that the avenue of self-transformation that I am going down is one which will hopefully have positive impacts on both the parents and the children’s lives in my setting. On an international level another reading which I found very interesting and informative was from Bronfenbrenner and Morris (2006), they referred to a child’s learning and development to be “located in family and community contexts”. They believed through supporting a child/children to recognise the role that their families’ and communities play in their lives’, but also the impact and role they play in their families’ and communities’, what they bring to society (Lee, 2001). I had always considered the impact that the adult had on the child in their life but had failed to consider the impact the child has on their parents. This is something which is a fundamental key to supporting the parents through my practise is

recognising that the children have also had a massive impact on their parent's life and if their living conditions are not of a high standard, they could need even more support. It is important for this self-study action research to fully recognise the importance of the learning that occurs outside of the classroom dynamic and how I can show the parents' that, that learning is as invaluable to their child as the learning which is conducted within a class room setting. This study really made me question, "how do I, as an Early Years' teacher, adapt my practise to show the parents how valuable the life lessons they teach to their child are"? This could maybe begin to build their confidence in how they can also support the classroom thought learning. Through my research of literature not only at a Master's level but over the years and own personal experiences, I have begun to form my ideologies around parents and children and educational settings. I do believe that as an Early Year's educator it is paramount to recognise the importance of the linkage between the family, the child and the educational setting, this is also supported by Smyth (2018). These bonds developed between the families, children and their educational setting is fundamental in supporting the holistic growth of their child/children and the parent's the support as their child's primary, life-long educators. Greene (2012), who is renowned for her teaching philosophies throughout the years, questioned "Should education be seeking social change"? Greene's philosophies' I was only introduced to this year but found her thoughts to be so powerful and ignited instant reflection on your position as a teacher and how you teach. Greene

(2018) queried, can societal change occur through education? Who is education intended to benefit? Should it go unquestioned (Greene, 2012)? I thought this very important as a teacher to always question, who are the beneficiaries of our work?

On an international level regarding parental involvement I have also considered the research and practice from other various sources. One of which was conducted by Pengreen (2015), this research I have previously reviewed considering “parental partnership”, however I had not went as deep to consider their level of involvement in their children’s education. I feel this research considering I will be reviewing it from an alternative angle could certainly further develop my current approach in engaging parental involvement. This research which Pengreen (2015) conducted strongly suggested that parental involvement in their children’s learning was proven to support and improve outcomes for both families and their children. This study (PICL, 2015) which was conducted over a 30 year time span, certainly provides support in identifying strategies for developing this level of involvement from parents I aspire to achieve with the parents through my practise. The research also suggested approaches which I could coordinate into my daily practise, to enhance my practise in supporting the level of parental involvement in my service (PICL, 2015). It further suggested that one’s practise could directly aid with the adaptation of the culture within the service, so effectively it becomes ingrained into the day to day practises (PICL, 2015). Considering my current context, I do feel the cultural context of Ireland’s Early Years’ sector and

England's is of a similar context. As a result of this I do apprehend that the practises suggested by this studying which was conducted in England could certainly be adapted to be practised within the Irish Early Years' educational context. This is certainly something which I value very much and a toolkit to utilise to enhance my practise. However, as the busiest of operating a service, and assisting with day to day challenges can take over, it is quite often hard to also ensure your practises are always in line with your values and beliefs. Jack Whitehead suggested the theme for this as "living contradiction" (Whitehead, 2018). Although Whitehead (2018) mainly considered primary educators, a lot of his philosophies I found to be extremely applicable to my sector's context and they really resonated with me as an educator. His philosophy suggested that teachers should not blame the imperfections of one's day to day practises, however recognised the pressures that occur that can impede on living up to their values fully. Although through carrying out a reflection recently I did use Moon's model (2018), this really resonated with me of the guilt I feel daily in not being able to fix every problem in the sometimes dysfunctional families. I felt Moon's reflective model shifted reflection from descriptive to more meaningful and insightful reflections, which brought me to question, "why am I feeling this way"? (Moon, 2018). Moon's model (2018) rather than placed the issue on the exterior factors such as sectoral pressures brought them back to me. What can I do in the present to combat the issues I am having, I felt it gave me back power and autonomy. Moon's theory (2018), is slightly

contradictory to the Kelthermans (1993) philosophy of how we can be bound by curricular constraints, his theory, I felt as a teacher rendered me more helpless than focusing on what I can do now. Throughout this research I will also be considering my ontology and epistemology views throughout this research and identify what has formed by ideologies and beliefs surrounding my current practices and investigate current paradigms (Pernecky, 2016). Whitehead (2018) research has also helped me to understand the reality of the ideology that “teachers cannot fix everything” and considering the dynamic of my where my research is being conducted, I think this is a really important lesson to hold. Margy Whalley (2017) Director of Research in Pengreen also conducted research on parental partnerships which aimed to enable educators in supporting parents to highlight and identify the learning that actually occurs in the home environment. The findings from this research is one of the reasons parental partnership became so important in my practise and why I believe it requires continual enhancement, hence my decision for the theme of this research. This direction I indeed to research, although I know will be challenging to initially, will support within my service and would certainly be an ultimate goal to focus on the holistic education of the children within my service in all aspects of their lives. However, I feel this piece of research by Whalley (2017) may be currently a little heavy for my current practice as it is not yet at this stage of focusing outside the realm of the service and my current practise, however I do feel I may draw from aspects of her findings to support the introduction of meaningful interactions and

inclusion within the service. Perhaps even acquiring some of Whalley's books and putting them in my staff library may place a seed to broaden the vision of what can be obtained to my wider team as culture is quiet often infectious and my team can also empower me. Within Whalley's (2017) pieces, it is evident the value she placed in parental partnership and the importance of their involvement in their children's education and that is certainly a strong basis to start from. Given the cultural, educational background of UK's Early Years' sector, it is of a similar culture to Ireland's Early Years' sector, so I believe as they are similar cultures it may be easier to translate the ethos in comparison to Reggio (Malaguzzi, 1993) for example and the context is not as similar as our neighbouring country England (Thornton, 2014 and Gallagher and Arnold, 2017). When considering Reggio's philosophies, I did love the philosophies of the children being evident within all aspects of the community's environment (Malaguzzi, 1993). The partnership of between the parents and Early Years' educators is ingrained in the philosophies of this approach, however the amount of off contact time the teachers have daily is unfortunately not something that is afforded as much to teachers in the Early Years' sector in Ireland. As a result of this it does render it more challenging for me and my team to have this time to engage with effective planning for parental engagement. I do think I could certainly draw aspects from this pedagogical approach, however I do not feel it could be fully translated into an Irish educational context yet.

2.3 National Influences

When considering national literature regarding parental involvement the literature I reviewed was varied to ensure rigour in my findings and on a national level I found more tailored literature specific to my sector. This was certainly beneficial to support my practise within my current context. On a national level I firstly reviewed our national curriculum framework for Early Years from (0-6 years) “Aistear” (NCCA, 2009) and then “Siolta” (CECDE, 2006) our national quality standards framework for Early Years. I also reviewed the AistearSiolta practice guide (NCCA, 2015), which is a practice guide that supports reflection of current practises and offers strategies to support educators. The AistearSiolta practice guide was an amalgamation of both the Aistear and Siolta documents (NCCA, 2015). I found the guide to be easier to use as someone who maybe first introduced to Aistear (2009) and Siolta (2006). Between the two documents mentioned above, it is very apparent there will be similarities and cross references between the two, so as it is amalgamated into one document it is now much more user friendly and informative I found personally. I found this to be the case as you did not have to go to theme in Aistear (NCCA, 2009) and then try to identify what standard may support it in Siolta (CECDE, 2006), it is already there in the guide for you. It offers ample advice on

how to develop “meaningful parental involvement”, through environment, representation of families and pedagogical practises. This to me was important to review as I feel on a national level it is important to be informed of literature that was specifically developed for the sector I am currently conducting a self-study action research in. It is also important as it does not require me to try to translate it from another cultural context into mine; it was developed in the context of Early Years education for the children of Ireland. As an Early Years’ educator, these recommendations suggested by the literature mentioned above, I would certainly work as tools going forward and I have previously utilised them to support my practice in the past and have found them extremely useful. With that in mind, it is also important for me to consider that a lot of the content of both Aistear (2009) and Siolta (2006), given the youthfulness of the Early Year’s sector in Ireland, that a lot of the information was based on the research conducted in other countries like New Zealand. However, these documents were only being developed in 2006 and 2009 meaning that this does not hold the informed knowledge of experience of the research I reviewed from Pengreen (2015) as this research was conducted over a 30 year period. However, if one looks at Standard three in Siolta (CECDE, 2006), it holds similarity to Reggio’s triad of three equal partners (Malguzzi, 1993), which asserts that without equal value delivered to all three stakeholders, the children, the teachers and families it will fail to deliver quality education. Thus, both piece highlighting the important on a national and international level that the

triangulation of equal value being held for all stakeholders i.e. parents, is fundamental in the development of the delivery of quality education to children. Again, even if we look at the two documents and review the similarities again of how the child is viewed in these documents as an individual which should be respected and have representation of their communities, their identities within our services (Malaguzzi, 1993 and CECDE, 2006). However, upon reflection of both Aistear (2009) and Síolta (2006), I do feel that for existing families within the services they do not provide strategies to increase the current level of parental involvement. It recognises that the parent is the primary educator within their child's life but fail to devise means in which they can become involved in their education if it does not commence from inception. Documentation of learning and representation of families is certainly encouraged which could perhaps adapt current practises and encourage involvement when learning is made visible (NCCA, 2009 and CEDCE, 2006). However, I feel a further step is required to obtain meaningful partnership advice on how to develop a curriculum collegially or for parents to be afforded the opportunity to engage in the teaching methods of teaching and become involved. Methods on how to adapt current moral and beliefs is not as evident in either of these documents. Why is it not suggested that parents are included prior to the school year commencing to identify collegially who their children learn best with and what they want their children to learn? On another national level, in accordance with O'Toole (2017), parental groupings in research linking to education quite often refer to parents

as one homogenous group. This is something which I had never considered before and now when I read research, it is very evident. This is something which I will need to be very conscious of during my research and to ensure I read widely to support rigour in my findings.

Staying on a national level, constant review of both Tusla (2018) and Pobal (2017) documentation is mandatory for an early years' manager. Upon reviewing a recent inspection document which Tusla (2018) released, I was certainly be critical of it. The reason for this is that it still failed to emphasis or recognise parental partnership within childcare services as something that is paramount and is imperative as suggested by Reggio (Malaguzzi, 1993) and Siolta (CEDCE, 2006) to develop a quality curriculum to develop the holistic child. Although I do recognise in recent years that there has been a slight adaptation in the inspectorate's expectations and concerns regarding educational environments, however, the focus seems to still be more directed to the aesthetics, documentation and administration of required documents (Tusla, 2018). How administration should ever trump quality implementations of curricular approaches is something extremely hard for me as a teacher to digest. Even up to my most recent inspection by Tusla in October 2019, there was not one question asking about how are the parents as the primary educators (Bunreacht nah Eireann, 1937), are included in their children's education. Surely, some of the reason why I am seven years in the sector and have only begun to develop the parental partnership over the last two years is because it was not something

valued at a sectoral level. If the body inspecting the sector does not deem meaningful parental involvement in their children's education as an important factor in Early Years' education, how will it ever be valued on a sectoral level? Pobal (2017), has since September 2017 supported parents in accessing childcare through funding, enabling parents who may not have previously been able to access childcare services due to financial reasons. However, although there will be a slight increase in childcare funding in September 2018 (Pobal, 2018), they have not enhanced the support of partnership for parents within the services they are using. With the new launch of the National Childcare Scheme 2019, parents now have to make the full application themselves online (Pobal, 2019). This is something I have already had to do for some of the parents in my service as they do not have access to computers. Therefore, is this new scheme further disabling parents like mine within my service when they are already a vulnerable cohort of society?

2.4 Parental Partnership

On an international level regarding "parental partnership", there was ample literature available which I had to condense down to select which literature was relevant to the research. The first thing that stood out for me was the United Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child (UNCRC, 2010). If we consider Article 18 of the United

Nations Convention on the Rights of a Child regarding parental involvement; it states, “have the primary responsibility for the upbringing and development of the child” (UNCRC, 2010, Pg. 18). The upbringing of a child is not only in a school environment; it is also in a home environment. As the old African proverb states, “it takes a village to raise a child”. How can I ensure my current practise is not cutting “the village” out? Reviewing international research published, I came across a curricular approach which was implemented in New Zealand called Te Whaiki (Ministry of Education, 2019). The Te Whaiki approach originally was developed to supported disadvantaged communities and the Maori (New Zealand’s native community) to integrate into education and socially conform (Ministry of Education, 2019). However, although Te Whariki stemmed from New Zealand which is slightly culturally different to Ireland, I did find it is helpful in developing strategies to develop partnership between parents and educators. I believe this may have been as a result of it’s development was to support the disadvantaged families and empower them, this was a very helpful read for me especially considering the context of parents from disadvantaged areas who are the cohort in which I will be engaging with (Ministry of Education, NZ, 2019). When I looked to Hornby’s research (2011), it supported my exploration of the nature of partnership with parents and was very in formative as a book and quite easy to adapt strategies into the Irish context.

When considering legislation on a national level, I found ample literature which could be reviewed and I did find it challenging to condense down. I began with looking at article 41 of the Irish Constitution, it emphasises the rights of parents as the primary “natural”, educators to their children (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937). Article 42 also considers legislation surrounding the family of the child (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937). This includes legislation which, legally binds us as educators to ensure there is parental involvement in their children’s education. How if this is a constitutional right of a parent to be actively involved as their children’s ‘primary educator’, is Tusla, as the Early Years’ regulator, not looking for their involvement in inspections? This right exists and it is not just a guideline for better practise, but requires that we are obliged, legally, to support the primary educators the parents, in their role they have in their children’s lives, to empower them in supporting their children’s lifelong educational journey. This is something which within nationally we require further development at a national level. All of these documents I found informative, although the Irish Constitution (Bunreacht na hEireann,1937) is a little heavier to translate into practise and for a practitioner of in the infancy of their studies, may prove difficult to comprehend. The expectation delivered by the UNCRC is very much an easy read and simplifies their articles to for greater comprehension of the expectations requested (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937 and UNCRC, 2010).

Considering various theorists like Vygotsky (Vygotsky, 1978) and Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), they consider the “more knowledge other” or also referred to as the ‘MKO’ and the outer communities when it comes to the education of children within the Early Years’ context. Vygotsky (1978) looks at the ‘MKO’ as the person which scaffolds the learning of another to enable them to reach their “zone of proximal development” also known as the ‘ZPD’.

However, Vygotsky (1978) emphasised that it is not always the teacher, who assists in scaffolding; it could be another more knowledgeable child or perhaps a parent. It is important for us to recognise all of the stakeholders and potential educators in a child’s life as an educator and enable them to provide how they can best support for their children. This theory I believe could be utilised as a great tool to highlight to parents the importance of the role they play as an educator or as Vygotsky considered the ‘MKO’ (Vygotsky, 1978), that they. in fact, scaffold their children’s learning to an equal extent to formal teachers. If we consider Bronfenbrenner (Bronfenbrenner, 1979), one must consider the exterior factors of a child’s life, their outer communities and how in turn all of these effect the child. What can we do to support a child’s outer circles and their parents as they are extremely influential in how the child will develop? In reviewing both of their theories although dated, are extremely relevant to current day practises and I believe would certainly aid with the development of current practises within my setting. (Cited in Pound, 2005).

If one was to consider international curriculums, like Te Whairiki (Ministry of Education, 1996) or the Reggio approach (Malaguzzi, 1993), looking at the practises regarding parental partnership, it is really formative in bridging the gap between home and classroom. The value they place in for the families and communities of the children is exceptional (Ministry of Education, 1996 & Malaguzzi, 1993), however the question is can we directly translate this partnership in the Irish context or does it require adaptation and if so how? As I have been fortunate enough to have lived in New Zealand and visited Italy on numerous occasions, it is certainly evident that the pace of life definitely differs. Which leaves me to question, how does one translate this ethos of a slower paced life into the business of a city centre Early Years' setting in Ireland (Thornton, 2014)? Or perhaps is the pace where Irish Early Year's education has been going wrong?

Chapter 3 Research Methodology of the Study

Action Research

Prep/ Reconnaissance 3.1

When considering a starting point for this self-study action research, there were several aspects to consider of how I would conduct such research. There were also several aspects which influenced my choices and ethical considerations which I had to consider prior to commencing my research. The first consideration which I had was whether the design of the research would answer my research question. Cottrell and Mc Kenzie considered this as pinnacle consideration to consider prior to commencing the research (2005). Cottrell and Mc Kenzie also considered the values which the researcher held on the topic to be teased out prior to conducting the research (2005). Prior to commencing my action research I began to engage with a reflective journal and through this reflective journal social justice, along with happiness and belonging along with others,

emerged as core values of mine. Social justice within education is a strong value which I have always held, however, engaging with the Master's programme and the exposure to Bourdieu delivered me to hold a deeper value on this topic. I began to realise the real-life implications this injustice had on people's lives. I wanted to identify how within my setting through this research could I identify how I could become an agent of change to combat this injustice through education.

Once, I had identified 'social justice in Early Years education' as one of my core values, I began to consider how could I research this topic within my current context. Given both my Early Years services are based in 'concerned' disadvantaged areas I knew this topic of research was visible to conduct in these contexts. I then had to select what centre I would carry out the research in prior to commencing my research. I selected a centre that was my newer centre, my justification behind this was I wanted to create this inclusive, collegial educational environment within a culture that had not been quite developed yet given the setting was only established recently. I intended on doing this as a sample centre to the following year bring back the research to the other established Early Years centre to follow up with the other location once this research was finished. This research in this locality was also more visible for me as it was a new establishment as director was committing more of my time to this location, which would afford me more time for

observations and building the foundations to develop parental partnership.

The sample of students I selected were the group of preschool children based in the setting. I felt it was important to offer the opportunity for all families of the preschool to be afforded the opportunity to participate in the research if they wish to do so. I felt this was important for two reasons, firstly as one of my aims was to create an inclusive culture, therefore if I had commenced this research and only offered half of the class the opportunity to engage with this research it would have been contradictory to my core values.

Secondly, if all of the class had agreed to engage with the research the sample size would have still be of a manageable size for me to work with. I was also aware that given the research by Hanafin and Lynch regarding the parental involvement in their children's education for disadvantaged areas was not high (2002). As a result of this I felt I needed to offer it to the entire class this opportunity to ensure that even if only half gave permission, I would have a big enough sample group to work with. In accordance to Chow and Wang sample sizes are an important factor to consider when designing your research plan as they play an important role in assuring validity, accuracy, reliability and integrity of the intended research (2003).

The design which I selected was a self-study action research model as the research was based on me and my practises and how I could adapt my current practise to bring about change.

Loughran et al, highlighted that the nature of self-development which

occurs when conducting self-study action research (2007). I selected a more cyclical approach in how I would conduct the research utilising Gibb's (1998) reflective cycle and Moon's (2008) reflective model to support me with fluidity and direction throughout the research by followed their models. To ensure it considered not only the current practices but identify the emotions which became evident throughout the research also. Finally, I also selected a variation of methods for acquiring and analysing my data. I engaged with various methods such as observations, informal dialogs, interview, questionnaires to acquire an amalgamation of both qualitative and quantitative findings to support the validity and integrity of my research. This was paramount given the vulnerability of the cohort in my research to ensure I was obtaining their input into the research. Bamberger highlighted the advantages of utilising both quantitative and qualitative methods in data collection as the qualitative data provided the revision of the data collection, whereas the quantitative may provide a more logical statistic explanation (2000).

Action Research 3.2

When conducting self-study action research in the Early Years there are various research models which you could consider to support your action research. Upon reviewing a few possible options, I had to

consider of my current practise and what I felt the best model was to utilise for my practise. Prior to engaging in my Master's course I had never reviewed current emotions during research to hold any academic grounding until I was introduced to the Jennifer Moon Model (2008). Through this model I was able to make the shift into a more meaningful reflection which aided me in obtaining a more authentic outcome. I knew as a teacher I was emotionally attached to my work, however I was completely unaware this held any academic merit. Brookfield (2017) also recognised this and it was what he considered "emotional spillage", that can occur to teachers during times of reflection and research. As the self-study action research model is so personal to your practise, I personally believe to me this model and philosophy was fundamental for my self-study action research. When undergoing self-study action research, critiquing one's own practise, when engaging with that reflective model, I felt it was beneficial. I felt as it supported me in identifying what my issues currently were and through using the model to develop strategies for overcoming them. The teacher identity theories' such as Kelchtermans (1993) was certainly a consideration I would hold, however I just felt that the reflective model was less empowering for me conducting a self-study action research thesis as I will be assessing my own practice, not the sectorial pressures. Kemmis & Mc Taggart model (2005) was a research approach I reviewed as well as Gibb's model (1988). I felt Kemmis & Mc Taggart model (2005) was broken down into what I felt were manageable steps on how to

conduct action research and delivered methods to support both my own practise or that of my team's in conducting reflection. I also felt the simplistic model of Gibb's cyclical reflection and identifying feelings as an important cohort of reflective research I felt really suited my self-study action research which I will be conducting. I anticipate using a combination of both of these reflective models' during my self-study action research. However, I also researched and considering other models like Kolb (1984), I found the model to be a little bit of a heavier model to understand and furthermore I did not feel it was as directive as the Kemmis & McTaggart's model (2005), nor did it emphasise the importance of the researcher's feelings during reflections. Other literature which may also supported my self-study action research was Babbie (2010), this research although it was based on "research methods for social care", I was certainly able to extract some information which I believe would support my self-study action research. When reviewing literature on my research topic as it was regarding parental partnership, I did seem to be able find more action research literature for social care as opposed to childcare. Finally, when conducting the actual action research, as a researcher with limited experience, I believed it was important to find literature to support the research part. There were a few pieces of literature which I found informative to support the action research. Bell and Waters (2014) were one of these, although this literature just covered general research and was not specialised practically into the area of childcare I did find it supported my research. As the research would

be considered small-scale research which I will be conducting I found Denscombe (2010), helpful to support my focus area of research to ensure I stayed focused on the task. Interpreting Qualitative data can be difficult as an inexperienced researcher as I have to identify how I can use this data collected. Silverman's literature certainly aided me with how I can interpret these findings through this literature (2014). Another researcher which I consider to support reflection and research was Roche (2018) as I felt her work came from an Irish perspective with an educational background and having conducted self-study action research and it supported my current journey.

3.3 Parental Attitudes

Considering parental attitudes, a study by Cohen (1990), suggested that factors will affect and contribute to the parent's maternal attitudes and levels of involvement. I found this reading to be informative to me to support me in the measurement of control over the factors that affect the parents. Especially considering the variables which I am aware of for the some of the cohort of parents and children which I am engaging with being in temporary accommodation. Prior to this research, I had only reflected on the immediate environment to as factors that could impede on the

meaningful partnership and never really gave much thought to the exterior factors. So, this reading highlighted this for me how paramount it is for me to develop these meaningful partnerships with the parents to see if any of the pressures for the home and can there be supports developed together.

3.4 Conclusion

To conclude, I critically reviewed literature for my proposed self-study action research thesis. I have broken down the literature into five sub-sections and focus on the literature for each of these. The first section I was focused on was international influences in this area, followed by national influences in this area, then parental partnership, literature on action research and attitudes of parental involvement in children's education. I have reviewed literature from national and international level which I hope will support my findings throughout this thesis. I have also considered practises based on an international basis of the Early Years' sector in a more matured context, to further support the rigger of this thesis. Upon reflection of the literature I have reviewed, I have certainly found aspects of it to have enlightened prior ideologies of how to go about self-study action research and developing my practises to empower parents' level of

parental involvement in their children's Early Years' educations. Having that said, there were also some aspects of the reading in which not all of the information was applicable or would not translate into my current context. I also came across some findings that perhaps once this research is finished, I could certainly use as follow on steps to revisit. However, the literature which I have reviewed has certainly aided me with new ideologies and strategies in which I can utilise in the development of my practise in "empowering parental involvement in their children's education".

3.5 Methodology

This chapter will also identify the methodologies in which I intend on utilising to accumulate and gather the data obtained from the research I intend to conduct on my own practise within my Early Year's educational environment. The research paradigms which I have selected and intend on using will be discussed and it will also be explained as to why I have selected them, as well as the two action research models which was chosen for the purpose of this research. The tools selected and avenues in which I intend on obtaining the data will be identified as well as the cohorts I intend on engaging with to acquire my data on my own practice. Ethical considerations and limitations will also be considered in this chapter, given the age group

I am currently working with and my current position as director. The research I intend on utilising will be both quantitative and qualitative techniques to obtain more accurate findings and more rigger to the research and my findings. I will also consider my current ontological and epistemological views to consider what may be currently informing my current practises as a starting point.

The primary reason for this self-study action research is to identify my current practises and how I currently support or do not support the current level of parental involvement from my current practises and support. From this I also wish to identify how I can further enhance my practised to change and improve my practises to further development parental partnership in their children's Early Years' education.

Considering quantitative research, it would be considered to emphasises on the measurements or the statistics of the data gathered (Babbie, 2010). This differs from qualitative research which is the methods used to gather the data e.g. surveys, interviews etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). Although for this self-study action research, I do anticipate that qualitative will certainly be more informative for this type of research, I do however also feel it is important for quantitative research to also be a part of the study to add rigger (Morgan, 2013). Bell and Waters (2014) would consider it to be important when investigating a question, that deep consideration goes into what type of research method is chosen, to support one's research to obtain the

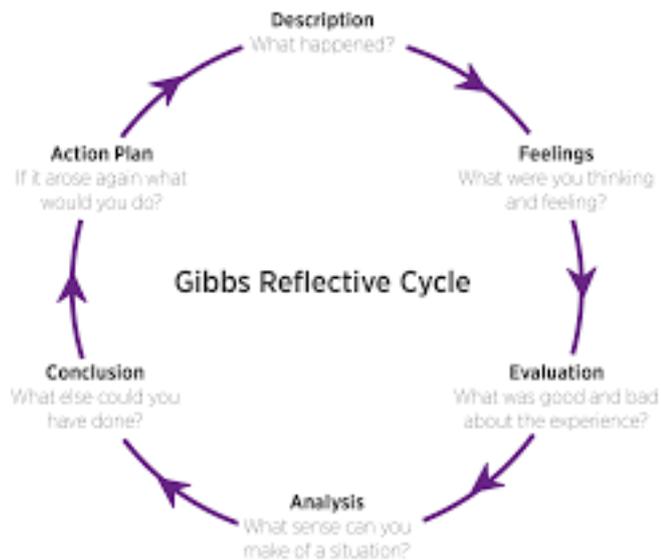
most authentic findings. Prior to this research I had also not held high academic value on emotion and feelings attached to research I will also be considering this throughout this self-study action research (Donche et al., 2015).

In accordance to Kuhn (1962), believed research paradigms contribute to supporting change and transition as it affords educators and researchers the opportunity to adjust and adapt their ways of thinking. Kuhn (1962) went on to identify this theory as a 'paradigm shifts' which was said to have changed and transformed current thinking in educators. Bassey (1990), believed various thoughts/beliefs underpin researchers thinking and ideas, which marries up with the ideologies of educators' having informed ontological and epistemological practises in their teachings as per Willis (2007). There are many varied paradigms a researcher can engage with; some of these paradigms are created through varied methods which allow for a combined research approach, concluding ultimately in more informed outcomes (Creswell, 1994; Tashakkori & Teddlie, 1998). This combined method approach enables educators to interpret their understanding and realities that support the accuracy of the information which they have gathered. The paradigm which guides me is asking questions, - noting my observations and critical reflections all of which are based on my practise. I will be engaging five different cohorts parents, other teachers, children in the service and my critical friend and my reflective journal to seek the information I require. I anticipate gathering this information through

several varied mediums to try to further support the rigour in my research and for the any information I can gather with anonymity to try to counter any bias, if possible, given my position as director.

For my self-study action research, the models I anticipate using is both a combination of Gibbs reflective model (1988) and Jennifer Moon's (1999) respective models of reflection. The reason for selecting these models is that, for me, I feel they are one of the more simplified and direct approaches which could even be used by people that are not familiar with reflection or self-study action research. I also think although slightly contrasting for me the Gibbs model provides you with precise direction to keep your self- study action research on course, whereas Moon's model of reflection provided for me further in depth self-reflection throughout the process (Gibb's 1988 and Moon 1999). For these reasons, I feel it would be extremely suitable and complimentary to the self-study action research topic which I have selected. The Gibbs reflective model not only reflects on current practices but provides supports through acting and planning to develop one's future practices. This model I can be use individually and also collegially with my team when reflecting on the outcomes of each cycle (Gibb's, 1988). Gibbs (1988) provided the step by step structure for me to guide me through my research and supported fluid the continuation in my second cycle of my research. I also believe that Gibbs model in particular will aid both my teams' and my own practices going forth, not only in the realm of parental partnership but other areas also. As it is so user friendly it could very simplistically

slot into regular practises and become a part of the ‘norm’, when reflecting on current practises or want to plan a change in current practises (Gibb, 1988).



When reflecting on other models, for example in comparison to Kolb’s (1984) action research model there are variations, for example Kolb’s first step of the cycle is “doing” as opposite to describing like (Gibbs, 1988). So therefore Gibb’s (1988), for me provided me with more of a sense of being able to immediately start something and not to have to do something or have a lot of experience of it prior to starting as Kolb’s (1984) requires. Another example, the Kemmis & Mc Taggart (2005) model, does afford the researcher observation as their initial step, prior of reflection prior to planning. However, for me this step of sole observation as recommended in this model, does not provide to me the rigger of all cohorts opinions’ on my practise involving parents’ in their children’s education, so for me this model is not as best suited as the Gibb’s (1988) or Moon Model (1999). These comparisons to the other models presented me with

information that given my thesis question, to enable me to identify accurate philosophies on my current practices which would be of more benefit to my research to follow the Gibb's (1988) and Moon (1999) models to further support my future planning to implement change within my current practises. In accordance to O'Connor and Diggins (2002), they believed reflective action research was a continuous learning cycle that enables educators to stop, think and further develop in certain aspects of their current practices. Gibb's (1988) reflective model is cyclical and allows for me to revisit and further develop on this I may have already visited to identify the enhancement of practise which may have occurred. Tomal (2010) also viewed this as a process to aid and support researchers with resolving problems and improving their current practices. During this research I anticipate in conducting to two cycles of data gathering. During the first cycle I want to gather the data on my current practises to establish a baseline for me so I know where in not only my opinion but also based on the feedback of the other stakeholders to identify the starting point for my practise. Which sampling methods are used is an important consideration and depends on the thesis question, who are the participants, who are your cohorts and how suitable they will be for them. In my question, "How will I adapt my practice to further empower parents of children in my setting in supporting their children's education", there will be various cohorts involved. The cohorts who I anticipate engaging in this self-study action research are the parents of the children within my educational setting, the

children themselves and my team of teachers within one of my centres and external cohorts would be both my critical friend and college colleagues. I have selected for my critical friend as a separate person from my college colleagues as I am the only Early Years educator on my college course, so my critical friend had previously been on my degree programme and has Early Years' experience. So, I felt perhaps she may further assist me in both critiquing my practise and writing and aid with devising a plan to move my practise forward to further include all parents in ways in which would be visible in an Early Years' setting. I selected the other cohorts because as previously mentioned it is essential it to identify the parent's current views on my current practise firstly and secondly their own visions of what parental partnership is to them. This data gathered could guide and support to transform my current practices and through that aid me with supporting the adaptation of the service culture to develop into a fully inclusive setting. In this research I anticipate in using 'Purposive sampling' which is sampling based on the relevant participants or cohorts to the researcher's question (Roberts, 2004). Once I have finished my first cycle, I will have gathered data to identify what my current practise is. I will have a meeting with my work colleagues to communicate to them the outcomes and discuss based on the outcomes what potential adaptations I could make to my current practise based on the feedback to improve my practise; I will also do this with my critical friend. In order to obtain the most authentic opinions from the children about my practises with their parents'

inclusion, I will get another teacher to do a small focus group with them. By doing this, I aim to try to eliminate the biases the children may display being there to potential please me. Again, once that data has been gathered, I will get the same teacher to go back and ask the children for suggestions to improve my current practise. Finally once I have spoken to all of the other cohorts I will arrange a group meeting with the parents involved in the research and ask them based on the feedback gathered and based on their vision of “parental involvement”, what would they like to see changed. I will phrase it as ‘practises of the services’, so that they may give me more actuate feedback then if they thought they were openly critiquing my work. The information I gather from that meeting will still support the adaptation of my practise. Once all the information is gathered, I will implement recommendations from all stakeholders into my practise and after four weeks, repeat the same questioning again and identify if any of the responses have changed or improved. The reason behind my choice to investigate the inclusivity and support of parental involvement in my practice was primarily because of the research carried out by Whalley (2017). Whalley’s (2017) research was also based in a disadvantaged area and identified the importance and enhanced level of education recieved by children when there was meaningful parental partnership upheld in their educational setting (Whalley, 2017). The national Early Years curriculum framework and quality framework Aistear and Siolta (NCCA, 2009 and CEDCE, 2006) would also support Whalley (2017) findings.

When considering research, there are many tools which one can use, however, it is paramount that there is either or both a triangulation of methods used and various cohorts to ensure the validity and rigour of the data gathered. In accordance to O'Donoghue et. al (2003) a triangulation uncovers and brings to light a more accurate and meaningful research study, by utilising multiple cohorts which deliver more detailed opinions on the findings (O'Donoghue & Punch, 2003; Altrichter et. al, 1996). Tools which could be utilised during a self-study action research would be the likes of interviews for all stakeholders i.e. parents, children and staff, however ensuring the questions are open ended and comprehensible by whatever cohort it is intended for and observations to name but a few. It is also very important for a researcher to seek a colleague or a critical friend within a similar sector to review your questions prior to delivering them. This would support the further development of the questions, for various reasons. One it would ensure that by asking the intended questions your colleague can look at them and see if you can actually obtain the information you are looking for from the questions you have asked. It would also help to ensure that they are relevant to your research question and can be understood by the intended cohort to gather the data which you wish to obtain. This would aid with the validity and rigour of the study. It is important to accumulate information by different methods. This is important as information delivered directly may vary and carry biases due to the content and information being obtained on a face-to-face dialogue as opposed to

the information gathered via some anonymous methods. Again, this is another avenue which I intend to use to support accuracy of information obtained. Open ended questions were developed to avert biased answers but Denscombe (2010) believed that people are influenced by details such as age and gender of the researcher. This is something which I had not considered. As I am receiving slightly alternative information, do perceptions of me, as young female influence the participants in a way that a middle-aged man in conducting the exact same research would not experience? If this is the case it will have to be something, I am conscious of when analysing my data and think of how I can test comparisons. I have decided when I have gathered all my data and am analysing what was gathered, the questionnaires which I will have given to the selected cohorts, their data will be displayed in a table format. Through focus groups with the children I anticipate I will be able to pull common themes and display of graph. During the general meeting with both the team and parents, I will pull the recurring themes related to “the level of involvement with parents” and these will be discussed to identify the methods I hope to coordinate into my new practises based on the findings.

Ethical considerations must always be considered during self-study action research which is involving other cohorts. Various ethical issues can quite often arise and in my case one ethical consideration I had to consider was the language which I will use both in explaining the research and in the development of the

questionnaire methods to try to ensure that all cohorts are fully able to understand and comprehend the questions which are being addressed to them. In my services case the cohort of both the teachers, children and parents are extremely diverse. Although Irish is the majority in all the cohorts in this research which will be based within my setting, there are some families and teachers who do not speak English as their primary tongue. I will have to be mindful about ensuring that they can read and understand the questions they are being asked and also identify if they have the ability to write answers anonymously on the questionnaire sheet or will I have to exhaust another avenue.

Another area which I must consider is the age group of one of the cohorts which I want to be involved in my research the children, can they truly understand the information they are giving me? Another big consideration I have to consider is, the parent's relationship with education. The service I am conducting the research in is in a disadvantaged area. Research by Murphy (2010) suggested that based on the experiences the parents had in their academic journey can infringe on their level of involvement in their children's education.

In this research there are also a few other limitations and ethical considerations which I anticipate could occur throughout this self-study action research. The first one I envision could potential happen is cohorts providing me with information which they believe will satisfy me and answer how they believe I may want the question answered. The measures I am going to implement to try to avoid this limitation of inaccurate information are firstly to have a general

meeting with parents and educators to explain to them that the purpose of this study is for me to grow as an educator and the only way that will occur is if I obtain honest feedback. I will also make an anonymous feedback box based outside the classroom so that questionnaires can be delivered anonymously there and any other further remarks also at any time by both the other teachers and parents about my practise. I work with preschool children so the age range will be a big factor I need to be sensitive about. Examples of this would be when seeking permission to ask them in a medium that is easier for them to interrupt and also ask their parents' permission as well. It is really hard to ensure that the children I am working with for the research on my practise fully understand the permission they are giving me. To try to combat this potentially sensitive strategy, I will also ask the children verbally prior to beginning any research session so that if a child chooses to withdraw permission on the day that they understand that it is okay to do so. As the research is not based on how I support a certain behaviour with children I am in more of a fortunate position to make sure the times when I do conduct my research with the children the time will be a relaxed time through the day and not a high pressure time for a child i.e. a transitional time, that may present other pressures for the children. Consent is a major issue which requires close consideration as working with children when we can obtain their permission, we need to ensure it is sought. In accordance with Bell (2010) and Roberts-Holmes (2011), it is believed obtaining consent was one avenue to try to protect all

stakeholders which will be engaging in the research, such as parents, teachers and children etc. Confidentiality of data is paramount and needs to be kept on a need to know basis; - information should only ever be discussed sensitively and in relevance to the research context. It is of paramount importance to consider that when one is conducting qualitative research studies, ethics needs to be considered at all times, as there is a high level of direct contact with everyone involved and sensitive personal information may be gathered , however this must be managed ethically (Silverman, 2014). Finally, the rights of the child and participatory cohorts should be upheld at all times. There will be numerous limitations regarding this research given the nature of it. Limitations vary depending on the position one you currently hold in accordance to Zevin (2013). The first constraint which I anticipate is to allocate time for all stakeholders involved and time from my own schedule as I have two services and being a part-time student, this does not afford for much additional time. Therefore, it was important to ensure time was used effectively, that the time that was suitable for others to participate that I was also available. Another limitation could be perhaps the level of participation, to permit me to actually get accurate findings, a high level of participation is mandatory given the number of children I have in the morning session. Also, my research may not be considered important by all parties and they may not perceive my research as high priority to them personally at all. Permission was another constraint, if families or children do not want to be involved. Firstly, I will seek to

gain permission to do interviews with the varied cohorts and distribute questionnaires to parents etc. Finally, another constraint I may face will be potentially the attitudes of staff or parents, some may feel “things were fine the way they are” and why change something that works okay? (Bell & Waters, 2014).

To summarise this methodology chapter, highlighted the intended plan which I anticipate I will engage with to conduct my research if all runs smoothly. It also emphasised the importance of considering the means of which data is accumulated. This chapter also demonstrates the benefits for an educator to engage with research and reflection of current practise within their educational context. This plan which I have highlighted will be explained in greater details, along with any challenges which may occur in the following chapter “Action Research Cycles”. It will identify the benefits the research conducted brought to my service after its findings and how the journey of research has affected me as an educator and informed my future practises as an educator.

Chapter 4 Findings and Discussion of Data

Action research cycles

4.1 Introduction

This chapter will highlight the action research cycles which were used to gather data that was accumulate from the research conducted within my Early Year's environment. This data informed the further steps which could be employed to further develop my current practises in engaging parental partnership within their childrens' education. The first cycle using Gibb's reflection model (1988), focused on identifying what the current attitudes held within my Early Year's organisation from the children, teachers and parents. I used quantitative research, to put emphasises on the measurements or statistics of the data that is gathered (Babbie, 2010). I also engaged with qualitative research methods which were questionnaires and interviews, etc. (Denzin & Lincoln, 1994). This supported me to draw out the paradigms which I felt emerged throughout the cycles (Johnson & Larry, 2010). The response I noted differed from all stakeholders depending on the cohorts questioned, which I believe could be due to the subjectivity of

life experiences. The responses seemed to be coming from different outlooks, e.g. teachers more a theoretical opinion, parents from more of an emotional stance and children from an identity perspective. There was full participation from the teachers and fourteen of the children, however, although parents were happy to allow their children to engage with the study, only ten parents participated in the feedback themselves. This I found challenging due to the dept of engagement with the children about their parent/parents, but I was not also including their parent in the research, which was only half of the dialogical picture I had hoped for was being captured. As I felt the participation was a lot more sparse than I had previously imagined through the questionnaires, in accordance to Murphy (2010), this could be expected from parents participating with classroom involvement depending on the educational experiences they had previously had. As a result of this, I had to exhaust other avenues to acquire findings by conducting informal interviews and more generalised discussion. This was to ease it more, that although they were informed it was research it was then not as daunting for the participants. Consent was obtained from children, educators and parents to use data and they were advised that withdrawal was permitted at any point throughout the research. Below is a table listing and identifying current level of participated regarding my current practise.

4.2 Outlining Cycle One. Table 4.1

Aim	Sample	Method
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying current levels of parental engagement in their children's Early Year's education within my service. 	<p>14 children</p> <p>10 parents</p> <p>4 Teachers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Inform interviews and informal conversations with teachers/ focus groups and anonymous questionnaires Anonymous questionnaires and informal conversations for parents and group discussions
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Identifying what meaningful partnership means to all the different cohorts in my service 	<p>1 Student</p> <p>Teacher</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Informal conversations with children, asking them how they would like to see their parents are involved in the setting and what they thought about me as a teacher
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> What does parental involved in 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Observations of parental engagements and children's engagement My reflective journal

children's

education mean to

the children?

•

Feedback from

teachers was

gathered around

my practise

involving parental

partnership in

their children's

education.

•

Gathering the

children's

opinions and

ideas on how they

feel their parents

could be involved

in our service.

•

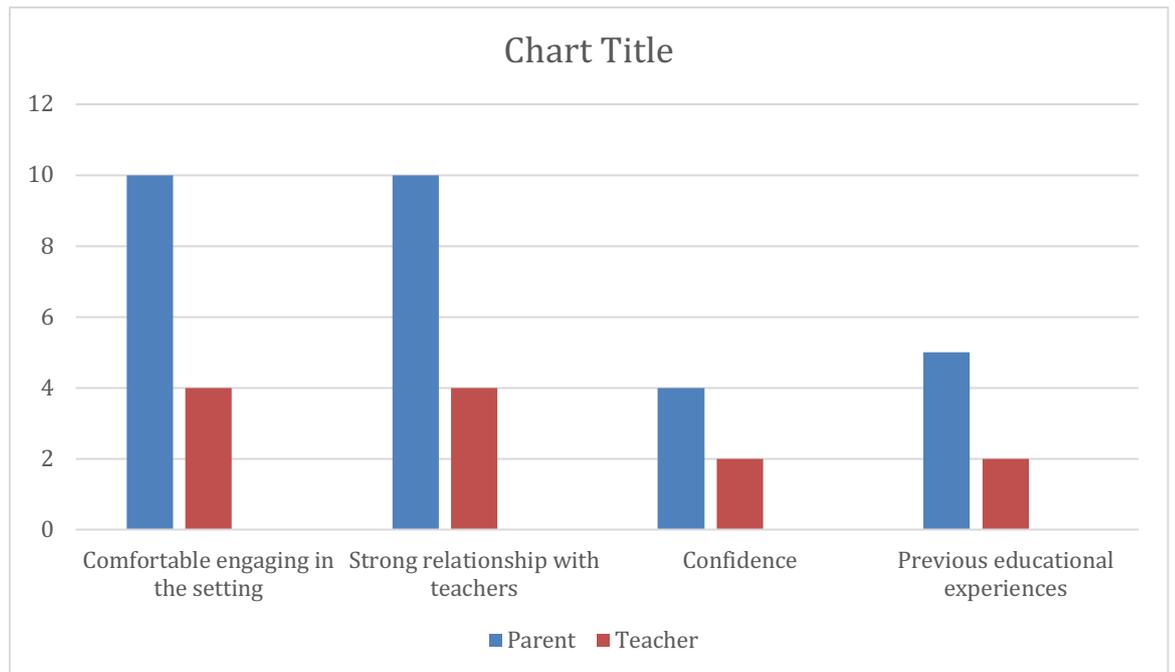
Identified and

sought feedback

<p>from the parents about identify current levels of partnership in the setting and how my practise was in relation to that</p>		
---	--	--

Table 4.2

This table displays the feedback from the parental and teacher questionnaires, as questions were quite similar. (10 parents and 4 teachers engaged in this study).



Current Practises of Parental Involvement

4.3 Informal Staff Interview

I engaged with the teachers on an individual basis and as part of a focus group. I wanted to identify a baseline of data of my current level of parental engagement on a direct or indirect compacity. In (Appendix 1), to enable me to identify my teachers' current philosophies surrounding parental partnership in the Early Years, we had an informal discussion in our focus group. There were varied opinions on the importance of the level of participation with the parent should have in their children's education in the Early Years.

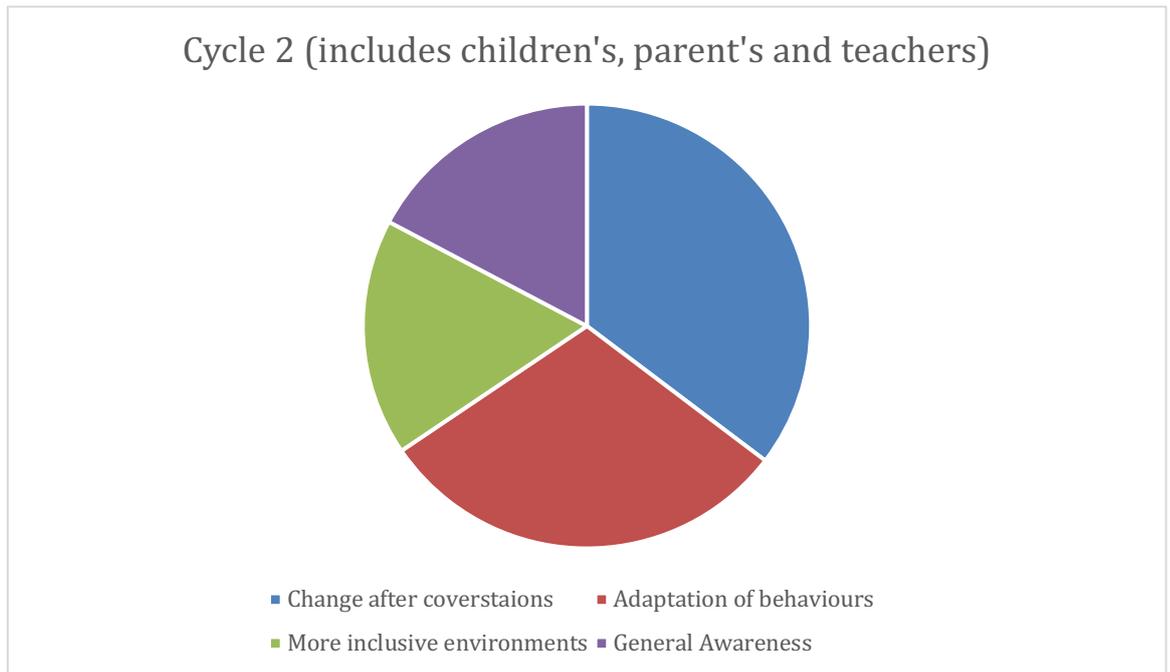
Based on some teachers' previous experiences and confidence impacted the level of parental partnership they were comfortable with, thus the level they felt was acceptable. As my passion in education is engaging families, I knew my vision may vary to that of my team's. I felt that it was paramount for me to identify their views on this prior to engaging in the questionnaire as if within the questionnaire they advised me that the parental partnership was of a high standard, I needed to be informed of what a "high standard" looked like to them.

The vast majority of the teachers supported the importance that parental partnership held and advocated change in current practice to uphold it. The view of these meaningful partnerships is supported by NCCA (2009) and CECDE (2006) and Whalley (2010), in the value held for meaningful partnership with parents to support optimal curriculum development and to support the "primary educators" of the children in their role. However, one teacher stated that the parents "did not have the time to develop this" and that "we were too busy, we could not support it realistically". This identified an area, I had come to the realisation that me holding a value myself was not enough, if I wanted to engender this practise within my service. When acquiring the opinions of my practise from the other teachers I had to ensure that there was also options for feedback anonymously. The reason I felt this alternative option was paramount to the research, was to support rigor in my findings as in accordance to research carried out by Kirkwood and Ralston (2009). In the article the review

the philosophies of Fletcher (1989) and Wanous (1989), who highlights the inauthentic communication that occur in dialogue format in organisational context.

Within cycle one through the different avenues of research which I exhausted, it enabled me to identify a few aspects as seen in (table 4.2). One aspect was establishing a baseline of what parental partnership currently looked like within the context and in comparison, to the AistearSíolta toolkit (NCCA, 2015), was it that of a quality standard. My finding was that in the opinion of the parents and teachers it was in the range of a quality service, however when I compared it to the recommendations of the AistearSíolta Toolkit (NCCA, 2015), I had areas such as true representation of backgrounds within the classroom to further develop.

Table 4.4



4.5 Cycle 2 table

Aim	Sample	Method
Revisiting feedback from Parents	15 children	Informal dialogue
Gathering feedback from the children	4 teachers	Observations
Feedback from teachers	10 parents	Reflective journal
	1 student teacher	

4.6 Adaptation of Parental Involvement and Reflective Considerations

The question of “what is the role of a parent in their child’s education”, was a question which prompted throughout this research. It struck me, that the as a teacher one may be afforded opportunity of a year, possibly two to have an impact on a child’s learning, however a child’s parents are a part of their lifelong educational journey.

Engaging with this cycle, I began regularly reflecting. Through these reflections having educated in both affluent and disadvantaged backgrounds themes began to emerge of the variations of the expectations placed on children from affluent backgrounds and disadvantaged backgrounds. The grounding of the daily dialogue from the parents of affluent background was very academically based and from the parents from disadvantaged background was more behavioural based. These reflections highlighted the parental expectation of children from affluent backgrounds was to “perform” and children from disadvantaged backgrounds to “conform”. These reflections were supported by the findings of Bourdieu (1997) theory of “symbolic violence”, the unspoken societal agreement of the expectation which is placed on a person based on their socio-background. This was further echoed in the expectation on national level in the research conducted by The Higher Education Authority (2019) that only 10% of the national third level student body accounted for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. These

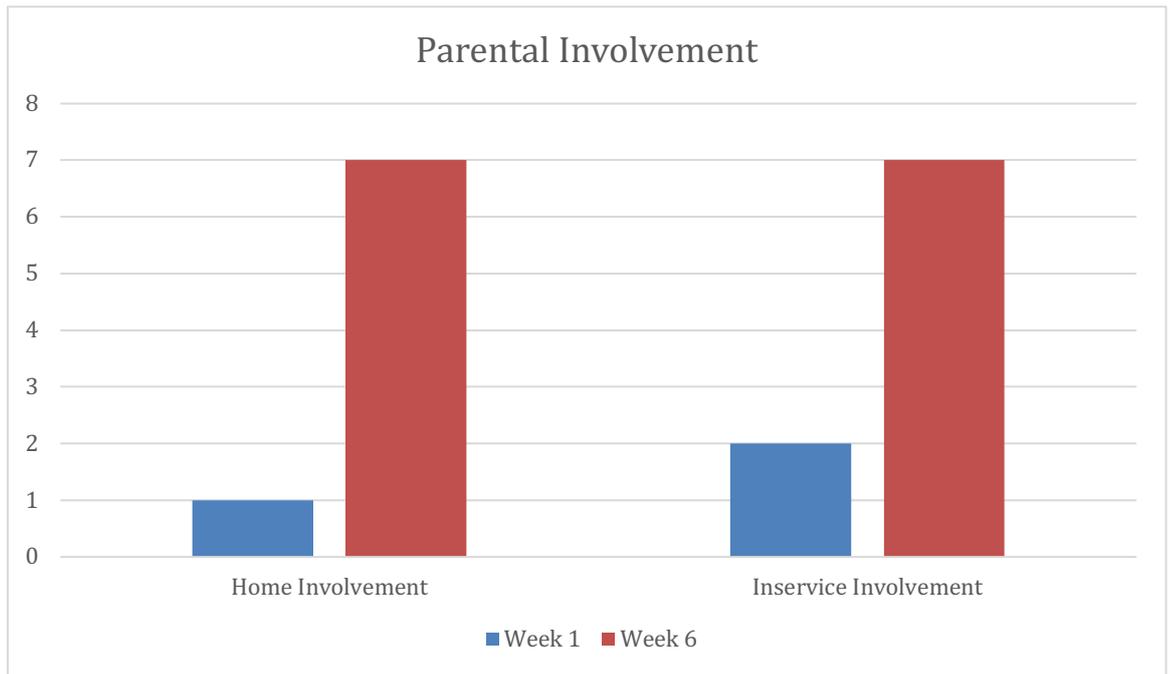
findings highlighted that although Bourdieu (1997) research was conducted in a French context, was the Irish context really any different? This led me to feel a moral obligation and a teacher to identify methods through research to bridge this social injustice within my context for the children within my setting.

The research intervention that formed was to establish methods to identifying how I could begin to bridge the class system gaps within my Early Year's context. According to Harris and Goodall (2007), the level of parental engagement is heavily linked to socio-economic status, it is also linked with the parents experience of education. This research also highlighted that "parents of certain social groups are less likely to engage with the school" (Pg. 5, Harris & Goodall, 2007). These findings led me to question why did parents from disadvantaged socio-status' not engage in with their children's education? Through engaging in methods of formal and informal dialogues with the cohort of parents in my research it was identified that "they did not have confidence in themselves" given their academic achievements and experiences to be a support to their children's education. It became evident with this cohort that they did not see themselves as one of the main educators in their child's life.

The two interventions which I developed through the research was to adapt the parents' self-image as an educator and to support their confidence within our classroom context. The first intervention was the adaptation of dialogue and highlighted evidence of learning, on a daily basis I would ask parents how the children developed

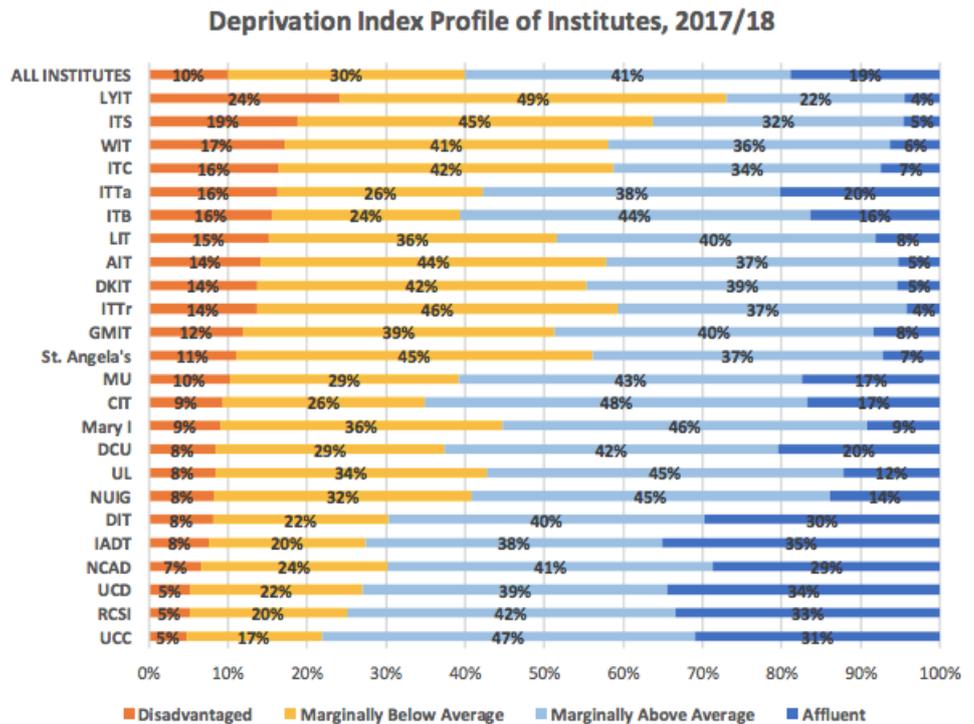
different skills at home. If they read a certain book at home to their child I would acquire a copy for the service, so their child would see the material their parent was using at home we also valued within an educational setting. We also encouraged anything that was made in the home environment to bring into our setting and we would hang it up on our walls, like the work they do in our classroom to show that this home learning is as valued as the learning that occurs within the Pre-school context. This also began to adapt the image the parent had of their own ability and the image their child had of them as an educator. The second intervention was bringing the parents into our classroom, we would invite parents to come into the class room to either read a story or even to come in to play a game with the children. After this activity I would highlight to the parent the learning outcomes that had occurred. This was to support the parents confidence in their ability as an educator and for their child to begin to visualise them within this role. If we consider Aistear the National Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2009), the theme of parental partnership is evident throughout all the standards.

Table 4.7:



50% increase in involvement both home and in-service after intervention

Table 4.8:



(Higher Education Authority, (2019))

Chapter 5 Conclusions and Recommendations

Conclusion

5.1 – Introduction

Within this research study, I proposed to firstly identify my current level of parental partnership within my Early Years' context. I aimed to identify my starting point of my practise. I then obtain feedback from the parents, teachers and children of their current experiences and if they were or have previously been subject to social injustice within the context of the Early Years. Through identifying my current practise in a stance of promoting and empowering parents as the child's primary educator (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937), I was able to identify areas in which I could further develop on. Also, through identifying parents' attitudes as their position in regards to educating their children, I was able to identify the gap that needed to be bridged. Once the research which was highlighted through my reflective journal, through formal and informal dialogue, observations and questionnaires, it enabled the

recognising the current blocks. One which was identified was the need for adaptation of the dialogue we have with parents on a daily basis to entice a deeper level of involvement, i.e. let them know about the interests their children displayed within our setting and how we had intended on supporting them and involved them to co-construct their learning experiences both within the Early Years setting and the home environment. Other strategies identified were to adapt attitudes and promote more meaningful experiences and to push my practice beyond a tokenistic approach and that if I did not have the time to promote the practice as I work in two centres that I would delegate it. Finally, to be in tune with the child's voice to deliver an inclusive service within their eyes.

5.2 Summary of key findings

There were various key findings, from the different cohorts. The themes identified from the children was the importance of the representation of their home within our context. This finding I considered extremely important as some of the children were homeless and how did we support their current living situation through our education both through the resources within the room and the how I thought. In accordance with Bourdieu (1997) he considered that educational systems were biased towards the affluent, was that happening within my context from the lack of representation of all the cohorts background and families was I indirectly supporting

“symbolic violence” (Bourdieu, 1997)? It became evident the impact of the lack of knowledge and understanding surrounding the children’s and their families’ real day to day life was a blocker for me to engage in and support meaningful parental partnership. The expectation of the ‘play’ opportunities I believed these children had in their home environment was very different to their lived realities. This lack of knowledge of the children’s home lives was something which was extremely apparent throughout this study. As parental partnership and social justice is something which I value, I initially anticipated for it to be naturally ingrained into my services. However, as it is a part of my daily dialogue, I had just presumed the same values would be held by my team collectively. As a director this is certainly something which has highlighted to me, how as a teacher working as a team, we need to be tuned into one another to work collegially. Considering Whitehead (2018), teachers can enact a “living contradiction” of their values if there is systematic pressure to conform to the “status quo”, even if you do not truly value it. This has highlighted to me as a teacher as I did not speak my truth that other teachers did not necessarily understand the “why”, behind things we have done. I recognised that I am just completing my master’s now that all the knowledge I have accumulated over my degree and masters I had just presumed that this was a shared knowledge that everyone had awareness around this, however I was wrong. The other teachers did not have knowledge surrounding the “why” of valuing meaningful parental partnership was something, that benefits for the

children of their parents being actively involved in their early education (Whally, 2017). This is something I learned in the second year of my degree course and some of the teacher are only starting their degree so why did I put that expectation on them? However, the majority of the teachers did agree that meaningful parental partnership was mandatory when supporting the children's educational needs. This is the view is supported by NCCA (2009) and CECDE (2006) and Whalley (2017), encouraging meaningful partnership to support children's learning experiences. The Irish Constitution recognises the parents as the children's "primary educators", (Bunreacht na hEireann, 1937) this is in this country's legislation and should be supported and valued by all educators. Having teachers which fully understand what could potentially be provided in terms of learning experiences with meaningful parental partnership, is beneficial for the all stakeholders (Penn Green, 2017).

Time in order to develop relationships seemed to be one of the challenges. Going back to Moon (2000), I recall in previous setting I was on occasion treated with a lack of respect from certain cohorts of parents and this memory created a vulnerability within my own idea of myself and sometimes shy away from meaningfully developing partnership with the parents as I was afraid they may reject my philosophies. This feeling I believe could have been a direct result of the parents not feeling valued in the setting. Research from Hornby (2011) stated that meaningful partnership can aid with the development strategies for conveying higher levels of education. This

supported what I was observing when observing the rooms which upheld these practices.

It was also observed that the majority of children wanted their families to be involved in their education, even if it was through representation and play. The team was felt on a unanimous level that the children required more meaningful partnership to enhance their educational experiences. Developed partnerships, increase quality communication amongst all stakeholders, thus enabling educators to provide better care for the children, Hornby, (2011).

Collaborating with the children around the parental partnership and the identifying means in which they would like to for us to develop it in, was enlightening. It provided the me with the knowledge of how we can approach this. Furthermore, as a team could provide more enriched curricular experiences for the children in our setting. Ensuring the child's voice is evident through liaising with the children gave them a sense of belonging and identity as they were involved in the process. This collaboration is supported and our Aistear Siolta toolkit (NCCA, 2015). Their research emphasises the importance of inclusion, identity and belonging and representation of each child as an individual. This sense of belonging was identified through the collection of the children's opinions. This sense of belonging was also important to combat the "symbolic violence" as Boudieux (1997) had referred to. It was evident when adaption practices occur, transitions became more smoother for the children, as the relationships between educator and parents became more

meaningful. Providing questionnaires with open- ended questions delivered opportunities for the children voice to be recognised and to explore and enabled working relationships to reach a fuller potential (Hornby, 2011 and Whalley, 2017).

Involving the parents in this study, provided an insight into their opinion on the current level of parental partnership and what identifying what “partnership” meant to them. It was recognised that the parents, that is, all those who partook in the feedback, were interested in being active agents in their children’s learning, but some just did not know how to go about it. Most parents were primarily focused on their children’s academic achievements and were seeking learning syllabuses for the year to know at the end of each term what level of knowledge their child should have acquired. When conducting questionnaires with the children it became obvious that not all children perceive their parents as their educator but more as a Role Model to look up to. This in turn would highlight the value a child puts on their parent as someone to aspire to and as educators it is important to recognise and nourish parents in their role. Aistear (NCCA-2009) recognises the importance of this role and the value of partnership between the educator and the parents. Affording opportunities for the development of partnership both formally and informally is a necessity.

Considering the children’s opinions on the value they hold for their parents it is important to establish their parents as also the more knowledgeable other (Vygotsky,1937) to support the learning the children obtained from their parents. The importance held for

establishing early healthy educational relationships between the child and their parent is imperative for their future educational journey in life. In an Early Years Setting this journey begins with us so we have a job to set the foundation for the following tiers of education that come after us.

It was evident in the smoother transitions after a partnership was developed that the developed partnership supported children and parents. It was highlighted that more open dialogue had occurred in home environments which supported a breakdown in barriers between the home and crèche environments. The parents began to come in and ask questions and feel comfort in asking for advice even if it was for behavioural support as one parent described “felt we were there for them too”. This emphasised the importance of the role educators play in ensuring children feel valued in their home environment and feel that their family is valued within their educational environments. These experiences provide informative experiences for both children and educators alike.

5.3 – Limitations

During this self-study action research there were various limitations which were encountered. Firstly, was the level of engagement I had hoped for the entire class however some did not engage. This was important to me as I was not only a researcher but also worked within this setting and set out to make an informed change, I wanted for everyone's voice to be heard. I also felt that some of the parents who did not engage were parents, who may benefit from the research outcomes the most. Also, with the parent there was one third less of parents than children participating and there were also no fathers who engaged in this research, so it was hard to pull accurate findings taking that into consideration. This was a small-scale research study, it limited the possibility of utilising a larger sample of cohorts, thus not delivering the more informed findings of a larger- scale study. Given I am director of this Early Years setting, with that role there were some limitations, time restraints were one of the most major limitations, in reference to permitting enough time once data is obtained to analyse it. Using questionnaires to acquire information from parents and teachers, proved challenging as I was then anonymously returned, I could not follow up on an individual level with the considerations some participants had. Finally, a massive global pandemic happened just as I was nearly completed my second cycle of research which I felt left me in a completely in the 'unknown' regarding data and did I have

enough and what if I needed to recheck things. This threw us into an online learning platform and with all the added pressures a global pandemic brings, it was singularly challenging and difficult to complete the write up and analysis. Limitations aside, this research provides me with an insight into the gauging the current level of parental partnership and potential avenues of how we can empower them within the context of the Early Years setting. It also gave me insight as to how I could go about change and given I did not reach to a completion leave which I had intend, it would certainly be an area which I intend on further pursuing research on when current limitations are lifted. Perhaps even engage both of my centres in it to see if the level of involvement varies centre to centre.

5.4 - Conclusion and Recommendations

In this research at the start it was evident that the level of parental partnership varied pending on their confidence in themselves and based on their previous educational experiences. Commencing at the start of the research although halfway through their children's academic year it was originally perceived the 'interest' was not there from the majority of the parents to be involved in their children's education.

However, it became very evident the parents just did not feel they had a right to be involved in their children's formal education or classroom learning. Furthermore, nor did they believe they played a vital role in their child's lifelong education. As a result of this, it was highlighted that it was necessary to conduct reflection on a regular basis to support the collaboration working together to improve current practice. I was actual surprised when I discovered the volume of parents that were afraid they could not teach their children the right way and they did not feel they "had the right to be involved in their children's formal education". There was an initial reflection from my own experience that the onus was on the parents to get involved. However, after our group meeting it was identified that we (the teachers) were not providing or meeting the levels of partnership which we should and how we could adapt the vision parents had of themselves. Yet, as we began to break down the barriers and develop the partnership through the research cycles, parents which were engaging in the research began to realise the value of the daily simplistic learning they were supporting their children with. Their engagements with their child which the parents once only deemed as "play", now understand the educational benefits to 'counting the stairs together' or singing 'nursery rhymes'. From one reflection from my reflective diary I recalled one parent telling me that they felt their "child was learning from them". This I felt was some a huge step the realisation that they 'the parents' will always have partial ownership of their child's learning.

5.5 – Recommendations

This research has suggested that although the teachers did recognise the value of parental partnership, the setting still struggled to develop meaningful partnerships. I feel that to aid with the adaptation of this culture regular in-service training would be required to provide the teachers with the confidence and strategies to support the development of meaningful parental partnership. I will look to international counterpart from the team I used work with when I worked in Australia to perhaps host an online conference for my team to discuss how it is enacted over there. I feel this would be beneficial as it can be challenging to enact change unless teams can see the benefitted outcomes. By being afforded the opportunity to engage with a service who encompasses it, I believe will support the transition, along with my research findings to a more inclusive service that champions parental partnership and the value it brings.

Regarding; the findings which were suggested, in their feedback the parents offered a lot of valid suggestions of what they wanted to see of their children and how they perceived partnership. I believe sessions where parents and teachers attend collaboratively will aid with the further development of parental partnership. Creating these opportunities to support the parents in their role as primary educator to

their children is important to aid with the experiences we provide within our setting.

Finally, I believe holding a parental night prior to the school year commencing will start to break the barriers down. I would recommend perhaps even inviting in a parent from our previous year to speak to the new cohort of parents as it may be more relatable for the parents to gain the understanding. Also, speaking to the parents about how they educate their children everyday so they can recognise it. Organising parental evenings throughout the year with expert speakers to come in to speak about parenthood and how hard it can be also. Recognising where the parents are at and meeting them there and not placing an expectation on them. Having things like a snack table so it is not evident if there is not lunch sent in that day so elevating some of the stigma. Have true representation of the children's background within our services in the imagery and resources, so they feel a part of the community. Affording them opportunity to be a part of their child's education is a necessity.

List of References

References

- Altrichter et. al, (1996): *Triangulation*. Edinburgh Napier University. Edinburgh.
- Babbie. E (2010): *Research Methods for Social Work*. BROOKS/COLE. USA.
- Bassey (1990) cited in: Wellington. J. (2000): *Educational Research Contemporary Issues and Practical Approaches*. Bloomsbury. New York.
- Beista, G (2019): *British Educational Research Journal Vol. 45, No. 1, February 2019*. BETA. UK.
- Bell. J (2010): *Doing Your Research Project*. Open University Press. New York.
- Bell. J & Waters. S, (2014): *DOING YOUR RESEARCH PROJECT*. Open University Press. New York.
- Borton, T. (1970): *Reach, touch, and teach: student concerns and process education*. Mc Graw-Hill. USA.
- Bourdieu, P. (1997): *Pierre Bourdieu and Cultural Theory Critical Investigations*: SAGE. London.

- Bud, Glenn, W., Kristen, M. & Muschert (2020): *Agenda for Social Justice Solution For 2020*. USA.
- Bunreacht na hEireann (1937): *Article 41*. Dublin
- Bunreacht na hEireann 1937 *Article 42*. Dublin
- Bronfenbrenner, U. (1979). *The ecology of human development: experiments by nature and design*. Cambridge, Mass, Harvard University Press.
- Centre for Early Childhood Development and Education. 2006. *Siolta: The National Quality Framework for Early Childhood Education*. CECDE. Dublin.
- Creswell. J. W. (1994): *Qualitative Inquiry & Research Design*. SAGE. USA.
- Denscombe. M (2010): *The Good Research Guide: For Small-scale Research Projects*. McGraw-Hill Companies, Incorporated. UK.
- Denzin. K. N. & Lincoln. S. Y. (1994): *The SAGE Handbook of Qualitative Research*. SAGE. USA.
- Gibbs, G (1988): *Learning by Doing: A Guide to Teaching and Learning Methods*. Further Education Unit. Great Britain.
- GDPR (2018): Oireathas na hEireann. Dublin
- Gallagher. T and Arnold. C, (2017): *Working with Children Aged 0-3 and Their Families*. Taylor & Francis. England.

- Hornby, G. (2011): *Parental Involvement in Childhood Education: Building Effective School-Family Partnerships*. Springer. New Zealand.
- <http://www.pobal.ie/betterstart/>, assessed 11/11/17
- <http://www.pobal.ie/betterstart/>, assessed 11/11/19
- <http://www.pengreen.org/http://www.pengreen.org/>, assessed 28/10/17
- <http://www.pengreen.org/https://www.pengreen.org/>, assessed 19/09/19
- <http://www.pengreen.org/http://www.pengreen.org/>, assessed 28/10/19
- <http://www.tulsa.ie/>, assessed 3/11/17
- <http://www.tulsa.ie/>, assessed 3/11/19
- Kemmis & Mc Taggart (2005). *Action Research Model*. Retrieved 1/11/19 from https://www.google.ie/search?q=Kemmis+%26+Mc+Taggart+2005&source=lnms&tbm=isch&sa=X&ved=0ahUKEwiViKDkveXZAhXFJMAKHdk_CqsQ_AUICigB&biw=1292&bih=653#imgrc=dEWGL4jTWuUhXM:
- Kemmis & Mc Taggart (2005): *The Handbook of Social Work Research Methods*. SAGE. USA.
- Kolb. D. A. (1984): *Experiential Learning Experience As The Source OF Learning And Development*. FT Press. USA.

- Kuhn (1962) cited in: Gattei. S. (2016): *Linguistic Turn*. Routledge. USA.
- O'Connor. A. & Diggins. C. (2002): *On Reflection: Reflective Practice for Early Childhood Educators*. SAGE. USA.
- Malaguzzi, L. (1993): *The Hundred Languages of Children*. Praeger. USA.
- Moon, J (2004): *Reflection in Learning & Professional Development*. RoutledgeFalmer. New York
- Ministry of Education [Online] available at:
<https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early.../Te-Whariki-1996.pdf>, assessed on 1st December 2017
- Ministry of Education [Online] available at:
<https://www.education.govt.nz/assets/Documents/Early.../Te-Whariki-1996.pdf>, assessed on 1st November 2018
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2015). *Aistear Siolta Practice Guide*. Retrieved 20/03/2018 from www.aistearsiolta.ie
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2015). *Aistear Siolta Practice Guide*. Retrieved 20/10/2019 from www.aistearsiolta.ie
- National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA). 2009. *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework*. Dublin. NCCA.

- O'Connor. A. & Diggins. C. (2002): *On Reflection: Reflective Practice for Early Childhood Educators*. SAGE. USA.
- O'Donoghue. T. & Punch. K. (2003): *Qualitative Educational Research in Action*. RoutledgeFalmer. London.
- O'Toole, L. Hayes, N. and Halpenny, A. (2019). *Animating systems: The ecological value of considering Bronfenbrenner's bio-ecological model of development*. In Barnett, R. and Jackson, N. (Eds.), *Learning Ecologies: Sightings, possibilities, and emerging practices*. London: Routledge.
- O'Toole, L., Kiely, J., McGillacuddy, D., O'Brien, E. Z. and O'Keeffe, C. (2019): *Parental Involvement, Engagement and Partnership in their Children's Education during the Primary School Years*. Dublin: NCCA and NPC
- Pound. L. (2005): *How Children Learn: From Montessori to Vygotsky*. Step Forward: London.
- Roberts-Holmes. G. (2011): *Doing Your Early Years Research Project*. SAGE. USA.
- Silverman. D. (2014): *INTERPRETING QUALITATIVE DATA*. SAGE. London.
- Tashakkori. A. & Teddlie. C. (1998): *Mixed Methodology Combining Qualitative and Quantitative Approaches*. Sage. USA.

- Thornton. L, (2014): *Bringing the Reggio Approach to your Early Years Practice*. Routledge: USA.
- Tomal. D. R. (2010): *Action Research for Educators*. Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, Inc. New York.
- United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC). 1989. Article 18.
- Vygotsky, L. S. (1978). *Mind in society: The development of higher psychological processes* Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press.
- Whalley. M, (2017): *Involving Parents in their Children's Learning*. SAGE. London.

Appendices

Appendix 1



**Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-
Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on how I will adapt my practice to further empower parents of children in my setting in supporting their children's education and whether this leads to adaptation of my practise of a change in the learning environment in which we have created.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the preschool setting and with parents.

The data will be collected using observations, student grades, a daily teacher journal and the pupils test scores. The children will be asked their opinions through discussing "how we can get their parents more involved in their learning and education in our setting".

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.

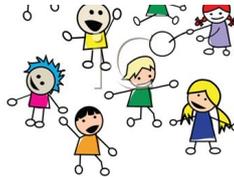
All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department 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 by email at racheal.govan.2016@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,
Racheal Govan

Appendix 2



Child's name

I am trying to find out how to improve my practice to support your parents' in being involved in your education. I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch you and listen to you when you are in preschool 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.

Are you 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 3



**Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-
Oideachas
Ollscoil Má Nuad**

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 _____

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

Date: _____

Name of Child _____

Child's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 4



**Maynooth University Froebel
Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-
Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

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 in the Master of Education 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 student teacher. This project will involve an analysis of the teacher's own practice. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes, questionnaires, etc. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What are the research questions?

- "How will I adapt my practice to further empower parents of children in my setting, in supporting their children's education".

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observation, Reflective Journal, Questionnaires, formal meetings, informal conversations, etc.

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by me Racheal Govan 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 the preschool 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: 0871842892

Student: Racheal Govan

E: racheal.govan.2016@mumail.ie

Appendix 5



Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-
Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.

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 6



**Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath-
Oideachas
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.**

Declaration by Researcher

This declaration must be signed by the applicant(s)

I acknowledge(s) and agree that:

- a) It is my sole responsibility and obligation to comply with all Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.
- b) I will comply with Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.
- c) That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy.
- d) That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy.
- e) That the research will not commence until ethical approval has been granted by the Research and Ethics committee in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Signature of Student: Racheal Govan

Date: 22/11/19

Appendix 7



**Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary
and Early Childhood Education**

**Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad**

21.11.19

To whom it may concern,

Racheal Govan is a student on the Master of Education programme in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University. She will be conducting research for her thesis in Footprints Early Years Ltd as part of the programme. This research is reviewed and overseen by the Froebel Department and due diligence is carried out to ensure the protection of participants and guardians involved in the research. Should you have any concerns, you are welcome to contact her tutor, Annaick Farrell, with details below.

Sincerely,

Annaick Farrell

Assistant Lecturer

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Annaick.farrell@mu.ie

(01)4747413