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Declaration

I certify that this research, submitted for the degree of Master of Education, Maynooth University, is entirely my own work, has not been taken from the work of others and has not been submitted in any other university. The work of others, to an extent, has been cited and acknowledged within the text of my work.

Student: Katie Quirke

Date: 21/09/2021

Abstract

The purpose of this self-study action research project is to establish how I can improve my teaching of Wellbeing in my Senior Infant classroom. Wellbeing is an area that is evolving in the education sector, for instance, by 2023, all primary schools must have a Wellbeing Promotion Process (Department of Education 2018). Wellbeing is also present in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020). However, the need for wellbeing education became strikingly evident in my classroom as a result of the Covid-19 Pandemic and school closures as children struggled to address their emotions from this time. It became clear to me that the time to improve my wellbeing education skills was now.

Throughout two action research cycles, I compared programme-based wellbeing education to teacher-led wellbeing education. These six-week cycles took place in my Senior Infant classroom, located in a DEIS, co-educational school in County Dublin. The intervention displayed benefits and downfalls to both approaches to wellbeing education.

After analysing all data, the findings demonstrated that following a programme, but tailoring it to meet the needs and experiences of the pupils in the class, was the best type of practice for me in my setting. Following a programme ensures consistency when considering a whole-school approach to wellbeing education. However, it is essential that the teacher is confident in adapting these lessons to acknowledge arising circumstances in the class that may not be covered in the course, such as bereavement, or response to a global pandemic.

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Remembering my Aunt and Godmother, Mary Hughes, who supported me and my own wellbeing throughout the writing of this thesis. I miss our shared times, and wish we could celebrate this milestone together.

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Glossary of Terms

DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
GOI	Government of Ireland
INTO	Irish National Teachers' Organisation
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SESE	Social Environmental and Scientific Education
SPHE	Social, Personal and Health Education

Chapter One: Introduction

This thesis describes in detail the process of planning and completing two action research cycles in my Senior Infant classroom. It acknowledges the skills and knowledge, as well as the challenges, that arose throughout the self-study action research process. The writings in this thesis demonstrate my learning journey, as I turned to self-reflection and dialogue with colleagues and a critical friend to examine my practice. After examining the data gathered from both action research cycles, I considered the implications of my findings and potential effects that they may have on the wider Educational sector. This chapter will introduce key components of the study and discuss the topics of later chapters in the thesis.

1.1 Focus and Aims of the Study

The focus of this self-study action research project was to identify how I could improve my teaching of wellbeing in my Senior Infant class. Undertaking research on this area entailed identifying my values and identifying the performance gap between my practice and these same values. I noted that my values were greatly grounded in ensuring that children were able to express their emotions. When I engaged in reflection based on my practice before the intervention, I realised that I had not been addressing these ontological values in my teaching. I tended to adhere to programmes and pre-written lessons as opposed to following the voice of the child and addressing their needs in lessons. To live to my values, I knew that the aim of this project had to be related to educating children on their emotions and wellbeing, as well as providing opportunities to have a voice in their classroom. This student voice would support me in tailoring wellbeing lessons to their specific needs.

1.1.1 Values Statement

It became evident quite early on in the critical reflection process that I had not been actively practicing as a teacher with my values in mind. I had a tendency to adhere to plans and teacher manuals as opposed to altering them to suit my unique class. The difference between my values and practice were striking, and subsequently resulted in experiencing a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 2000: 93). It became clear to me that in order to support my pupils in the area of wellbeing, I must first recognise and address the gap between my strong ontological values and my practice as a Senior Infant teacher. I used literature to support me in understanding my values, and how I could address them in my practice. I examined policies and practices in Ireland and internationally, which also prepared me for the intervention. The findings from the literature review are evident in Chapter 2, and the action undertaken is described in Chapter 3.

1.1.2 Wellbeing in the Irish Primary School

Wellbeing is an area that is greatly evolving in the Education sector globally. The Department of Education and Skills have responded to this by publishing a Wellbeing Policy Statement, which states that all Irish primary schools must have a Wellbeing Promotion Process implemented by 2023 (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). In addition, the area of wellbeing has been included as a key competency in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020).

1.1.3 Programmes Versus Self-Made Lessons

As mentioned, the Department of Education and Skills (2018) have deemed it compulsory for all schools, by 2023, to have implemented Wellbeing Promotion Process. This process includes using a wellbeing programme at every class level. Upon reading this, I came to realise that following a programme rigidly, without tailoring lessons, goes against my caring, ontological values. Using lessons that are not tailored to the needs of the class may not allow children to engage and benefit as much as possible. While I acknowledge that the Department of Education (2018) want every class to engage in a wellbeing programme, the use of a set course does not allow for addressing unique circumstances that may arise in each classroom. After revisiting this thought several times in my reflective journal, I felt it was a fitting area of research for both me and my class. I decided that my intervention would comprise of two action research cycles, which would explore the use of programme-based wellbeing education in comparison to teacher-led wellbeing education.

1.2 Research Background, Context and Intervention

1.2.1 Background of the Researcher

I commenced this learning journey in my second year of teaching as a Primary School Teacher. At the beginning of my studies, I had never taught a full school year on-site. During my first year of teaching, when I was completing the Droichead probationary period, schools closed in March due to the outbreak of the Coronavirus. Like all other teachers at this time, I taught my class online. Starting my second year of teaching, I felt ill-equipped to cater for the emotional responses that my students may have as a result of the global pandemic. It was in the first term of this year that I realised that I had not, in my initial teacher education, studied the area of wellbeing in any great detail. I was nervous to approach the topic, as I know that there can be sensitivities attached to doing so.

After researching the topic briefly and locating programmes written for the Irish primary classroom, I felt confident that I could deliver wellbeing lessons by following the teacher manuals of the programmes. However, upon identification and evaluation of my values, I noted that by solely following these programmes, I was practicing against my values, as I was not considering the needs of the children in my class. The students in my Senior Infant class needed more support than a set of pre-made lessons, because they had all encountered different emotional experiences in their lifetime. For instance, no programme had a lesson based on the Covid-19 pandemic, yet it was, and still is, such a crucial area to be explored with pupils.

1.2.2 Research Setting

This self-study action research project was based in my Senior Infant classroom. This classroom was set in a DEIS, co-educational school in County Dublin. There were two streams of Senior Infant classes at the time that this research took place, in the midst of the Covid-19 pandemic. This global pandemic impacted on the data collection of this self-study action research project, as schools were closed for some time during the academic year. This school closure delayed the acquisition of parental/guardian and participant consent to partake in the study, and in turn, delayed the commencement of the study. In response to this, I shortened the action research cycles from ten weeks to six weeks and began action research cycle one upon return to school in March 2021.

1.2.3 Research Participants

My whole Senior Infant class were the participants of this self-study action research project. The participants included boys and girls aged between five and seven years old, with less than 20 children in the class. My critical friend, a primary school teacher working in a DEIS school located in County Dublin, also acted as an active participant in this research project. This critical friend understood my setting well and provided worthwhile insights, as their place of work was very similar to mine.

1.2.4 Ethical Considerations

I applied for and was granted ethical permission from Maynooth University and the Board of Management of my workplace. I issued plain language letters to parents and guardians of participants, as well as explaining the research to the participants and acquiring forms of assent from them. All data gathered was accessible only to me, my supervisor, the course leader and external examiners. Confidentiality and anonymity were guaranteed to all parents and guardians of the participants and the participants themselves. Children are anonymised by being referred to as pseudonym ‘Child A-Z’. The critical friend is not identified in this thesis.

1.2.5 Methodology

The paradigm employed for this study was self-study action research, due to the link between this paradigm and my values. Both qualitative and quantitative data were gathered. The research project comprised of two six-week action research cycles that took place from March 2021 to June 2021, with a one-week break between both cycles to analyse the data collected from action research cycle one. This data helped to inform the methodologies that would be used in action research cycle two. The tools used in this project included reflective journaling, dialogue, engagement with a critical friend, surveys and written tasks.

1.3 Potential Contribution of the Study

Examining my research question, 'How can I improve my teaching of Wellbeing in my Senior Infant class?' resulted in understanding of the benefits and downfalls of programme-based wellbeing education and teacher-led wellbeing education alike. It has led me to knowing that programmes are best implemented in the classroom when they are tailored to the needs of the pupils. By teaching lessons from programmes that I have reviewed and altered appropriately to the class, I am meeting my ontological values in my practice. I prioritise making lessons relatable and understandable to the children and ensure that the pupil voice is heard.

1.4 Format of the Study

Chapter one outlines the focus and aims of the study and introduces key concepts of the self-study action research project, such as values and rationale. It notes important elements of the research, such as the background of the researcher, the research setting, participants and ethical considerations.

The next chapter, chapter two, is a literature review that defines the concept of values and explains the research methodology chosen. It considers the flexibility of the term wellbeing and reviews this topic in the context of the education sector, as well as current policies and practices in Ireland and internationally. Scotland and Australia are examined in detail as these regions provide concepts to consider, as Ireland emerges as a country beginning to practice wellbeing education as a core curriculum area of the primary sector.

After review of this literature, the thesis details the intervention that took place. Chapter three offers insight into three research paradigms of interest, with an emphasis on the paradigm that I chose for this study, and my reasons for choosing it. It details the data collection tools that I chose and how I employed them throughout the research. The chapter also outlines the ethical considerations of undertaking an action research project in a Senior Infant classroom, and explains the precautions made.

The data collected throughout action research cycle one and two are analysed in chapter four. This chapter describes how I synthesised the data into four specific themes and gives theoretical detail of this process. The four arising themes included lesson structure, emotional intelligence, exploration of personal experience and reinforcement of transferrable skills.

The final chapter, chapter five, provides analysis of my research and findings. This leads to my claim to knowledge and discussion on the significance of my research. It

considers future directions for my findings across the areas of my personal practice, my workplace and the wider educational field. The limitations of my research are also explained.

While this self-study action research project is greatly grounded in my values, practice, reflection and dialogue, it was greatly enhanced by the exploration of theories and writings of others. Literature supported me in aligning my actions with my values and helped me to fully understand methodologies that supported me in developing my intervention. The findings from my reading throughout this self-study action research project are evident in the next chapter, the literature review.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This literature review outlines specific areas of consideration in relation to this self-study action research project. It firstly examines the concept of values and how they may influence teachers and their practice. Following values, the selected research method, action research, is explored. The literature review then aims to provide insight into current literature on the area of wellbeing. It considers implementation of wellbeing education in the setting of the Irish primary school, with particular emphasis placed on practice in the infant classroom. Related methodologies such as mindfulness and integration are considered. The international practices examined at the end of this chapter demonstrate how other regions carry out their wellbeing practice, and how they compare with the envisioned plans and policies for Irish wellbeing education. The literature in this chapter helped to inform the researcher in advance of action research cycles one and two.

2.2 Research Approach

2.2.1 Values

'Education is never neutral or value-free – we all have ideas about it' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 13). Values should be at the core of educational practice. The Teaching Council outline the values 'respect, care, integrity and trust' as an integral part of the Code of Professional Conduct (Teaching Council, 2016: 4). Teachers are expected, in their practice, to demonstrate and model these values, which mark the common ground between practitioners and ensure consistency throughout the educational sector.

However, in terms of teacher identification, it is important that the practicing teacher looks beyond the values outlined by the Teaching Council and considers their own ideas about, and feelings towards, education. As the practitioner identifies their own values as a

teacher, it helps them to realise if their set of values is compatible with their actions in the classroom (Pollard, 2019). Pollard (2019) refers to Hargreaves (1998) when he states that it is not just the values of the teacher that are of importance, but how the teacher feels they are able to practice to these same values. I experienced a 'living contradiction' upon realisation that my practice did not align with my values (Whitehead, 2000: 93).

Following programmes and plans rigidly went against my strong ontological values, caring about the students to have freedom of expression about their emotions and personal experiences. This self-study action research project led me to tailoring my wellbeing lessons to suit the needs of the class. I used my identified values to help review the findings of my research and assess if the collected data reflected if I was practicing through my values (McDonagh et al., 2020).

2.2.2 Self-Study Action Research

As addressed in the values section, self-study action research provides invaluable insight of practice to the researcher by using values to inform their judgement and evaluate their work (McDonagh et al., 2020). This adds depth and supports the study when being reviewed by others (McDonagh et al., 2020).

Action research entails 'taking action (action) in order to find out what is not known (research) and in doing so, to cause improvements' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 135). It may be described as a research style that allows one to evaluate their actions as a practitioner with the consideration of evidence gathered and the critical judgement of others (Pring, 2000). This form of research is enhanced by awareness of values. Both action research and the identification of values require reflection, as 'being professional and developing professionally involve constantly monitoring one's practice and questioning oneself'

(McDonagh et al., 2020: 13). This research approach strives to enable the practitioner to live to their values throughout their actions and working life.

2.3 Wellbeing in the Education Sector

There is no single accepted definition of wellbeing. Wellbeing proves difficult to define due to its elusive dimension. Fitzgerald et al. (2016), Soutter (2011), Cassidy (2018) and Dodge et al. (2012) have acknowledged the challenge of same, outlining that whilst wellbeing is a steadily growing area of concern, it is a frequently used term that often lacks clarity in its definition. Mashford-Scott (2012) argue that the term 'wellbeing' differs in meaning, depending on the context and discipline that it is used in, making it a flexible term.

The World Health Organisation (WHO) has been highly cited source across Irish educational documents when referring to wellbeing. The WHO regard wellbeing as a 'positive rather than neutral state', if viewing wellbeing as a 'resource for everyday life' (Health Knowledge, 2017). The definition that the Department of Education (DES) chose to abide for the purpose of the Wellbeing Policy Statement is

> 'Wellbeing is present when a person realises their potential, is resilient in dealing with the normal stresses of their life, takes care of their physical wellbeing and has a sense of purpose, connection and belonging to a wider community. It is a fluid way of being and needs nurturing throughout life' (WHO 2001, cited in Department of Education and Skills, 2019: 10).

The consistent development of wellbeing equips one to increase their resilience and ability to respond appropriately to any pressures one may encounter, enabling confidence and success throughout their lives (World Health Organisation 2004, Department of Children and Youth Affairs 2014, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment 2009). This same resilience signifies the importance of recognition of strengths and supports that are unique to the individual, as opposed to resisting renouncement (Erasmus, 2019). The ability and confidence to strive for achievement is greatly embedded in wellbeing. Maslow (1943)

regards the desire of reaching potential and awareness of capability as a need, labelling to this as self-actualisation. The position of self-actualisation in the hierarchy of needs is subject to interpretation, however, as Manning-Morton (2014) questions the order in which Maslow presents needs (Appendix A). Manning-Morton notes that Maslow places 'physical needs at the bottom and self-actualisation at the top', placing mind over body, which may not be fitting in all circumstances (Manning-Morton, 2014: 24).

The primary school is an environment that holds significant power in the area of wellbeing, as external protective and risk factors exist in the fostering of same, indicative that community input can greatly influence the wellbeing of an individual (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014; Department of Education and Skills, 2015). The Department of Education and Skills et al. (2015) refer to 'culture, ethos and environment' as contributors in the development of wellbeing (Department of Education and Skills, 2015 :9). More specifically, relationships, community engagement, positive climate and available support can enrich wellbeing growth, whilst bullying, academic underperformance and unfair discipline can inhibit same (National Educational Psychological Service, 2015).

In addition, aspects such as physical health and spirituality, too, have been cited by Barry and Friedli (2008) as conceptualising factors of wellbeing. Cassidy (2018) notes that wellbeing cannot flourish, nor exist, in isolation; community involvement is crucial to the development of wellbeing. The Department of Children and Youth Affairs (DCYA) note that 'policies and actions formulated in non-healthcare sectors have a significant impact on people's health and wellbeing' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014:4). This is indicative that the wellbeing documents produced by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment) will be of benefit to primary school students (Appendix B).

2.3.1 Wellbeing in the Irish Primary School

> 'Schools are not just places where students acquire academic skills; they also help students become more resilient in the face of adversity, feel more connected with the people around them, and aim higher in their aspirations for their future. Not least, schools are the first place where children experience society in all its facets, and those experiences can have a profound influence on students' attitudes and behaviour in life.' (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, 2017)

On average, a primary school-going child in Ireland attends school for almost 28 hours per week. It is widely noted that schools are in a unique position to enhance wellbeing and aid students in development in same (NEPS, 2015). The external protective factors and risk factors that one encounters may greatly influence development of wellbeing. It is important that the school combats this by ensuring the availability of 'wellbeing protective factors' such as 'positive relationships with peers and teachers', 'a sense of belonging' and 'opportunities for social and emotional learning' (Department of Education and Skills, 2019: 12). The Department of Education reinforces the undeniable links between the duties of the school in fostering the development of the child, and the external protective factors of wellbeing, citing 'culture and environment' and 'relationships and partnerships' in their guidance to schools undertaking 'whole school approaches to wellbeing promotion' (Department of Education and Skills, 2018: 2).

The Education Act also refers to the school's responsibility to promote 'social and personal development and provide health education' (Government of Ireland, 1998: 13). This act also denotes the importance of consultation with parents, not giving the school whole responsibility for the development of the child, as they are regarded as the primary educators of the child. The familial link is valued as a 'partnership' which must be nurtured (Department of Education and Skills, 2019: 17). Síolta (2010) and the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) (2015) reiterate same as they reference the home as central for wellbeing development and support.

With regards to school-based wellbeing support, the Department of Education and Skills (2018) have noted the obligation of all schools to engage in a Wellbeing Promotion Process by 2023, which may be supported by the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice document, revised in 2019. This was the only supplementary information specifically produced to support Circular 0042/2018, giving limited guidance to educators in the selection of external facilitators or choice of programmes. This 'best practice' circular gives boards of management and school communities freedom to select resources that suit best the needs of their settings (Department of Education and Skills, 2018: 1). The circular utilises non-obligatory terms such as 'should', 'can be', 'most likely', 'advised', 'consider' (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). This allows for a development of a unique plan to each school, enabling them to base their wellbeing support on the needs of the students. However, this may, in turn, result in wellbeing promotion processes with varying quality from school to school.

The Department of Education and Skills omit the desired level of education required for primary school practitioners, whom they regard the 'best placed professional to work sensitively and consistently with students' (Department of Education and Skills, 2018: 2). The Department of Education highlight the class teacher as the principal influential role within the school setting, though the title is conditional to practitioner engaging in continual professional development in relation to wellbeing education (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). The training of the teacher is pivotal when considering and fulfilling the State's duty of ensuring 'to the maximum extent possible the survival and development of the child' (Children's Rights Alliance, 2010: 10). The Department of Youth and Children's Affairs (2014), too, acknowledge those 'working with or caring for children' as holding the capacity to influence the promotion of wellbeing in their lives (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014: 51).

Temple and Emmett (2013) regard the appropriate education of the practitioner essential in ensuring that children are provided with the support they need for their wellbeing to develop, noting that updates to initial teacher education courses are required. Similar to the belief of the Department of Education and Skills (2018), they write that the educator must be aware of how their relationship with the pupil can foster a comfortable confidence in allowing the child to explore and discover their own self within the school environment. However, Temple and Emmett (2013) find that this teacher-pupil relationship is dependent upon two elements; the wellbeing and support available to the teacher and appropriate education in the area of supporting the wellbeing of the child. Teacher wellbeing is not an area that is regarded as a contributor in the fostering of wellbeing documentation by the Department of Education.

The primary school acts as an appropriate setting to enable children to learn about their wellbeing, and this will be acted upon across all schools by 2023 by means of the 'Wellbeing Promotion Process' (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework notes that wellbeing will be promoted in-class 'through engagement, motivation, choice and agency in the learning experience' (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020: 22). Schools are advised on best practice in documents such as 'Circular 0042/2018' and the 'Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice' but are enabled to customise their own plan to adhere to the voice of the 'child/young person, teacher and parent' (Department of Education and Skills, 2018: 23). This includes the uptake of continuing professional development by practicing teachers, with opportunities provided, but not compulsory (Department of Education and Skills, 2018).

2.3.2 Wellbeing and Student Voice in Early Childhood Education

'The foundations of good mental health and wellbeing are laid down in the very early years of a child's life' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014: 54). Early childhood may be considered the time from birth to the age of six (Síolta, 2010). Early years, however, includes children from 'prenatal development to eight years of age' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2014: 11). Junior and Senior Infant classes in Ireland educate children aged between 4 and 6 years, on average. The early years education within these classes are enriched by Aistear, the Early Childhood Curriculum Framework. This framework lists wellbeing as one of four specifically chosen themes to support the child in their journey of learning and overall development. It is crucial to note that this framework views wellbeing as two distinct areas, the psychological and physical, with the aims of the theme further dividing into social development, creativity, spirituality and positive mental health (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009). Froebel regards play as a tool to facilitate the child understanding themselves through reflection. Like the Aistear framework, Froebel also notes play as a mechanism to link the psychological and physical worlds of the child, making 'the 'outer' inner and the 'inner' outer' (Tovey, 2013: 16).

Aistear, with regards to the theme of wellbeing, is seen to aid the young child in developing resilience; a crucial element of wellbeing, as highlighted by the Department of Youth and Child Affairs (2014) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2020). Children are prompted in their engagement with the Aistear framework to explore and communicate their feelings, make decisions and reflect on their experiences (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009).

Mashford-Scott (2012) puts forward the argument that there is not enough access to children's perspectives of wellbeing in the early years. In the Wellbeing Policy Statement, student voice is listed in the 'relationships and partnerships' and 'culture and enviornment'

key areas of wellbeing promotion (Department of Education and Skills, 2019: 21). However, the policy itself does not demonstrate data that represents the voice of the school-going child in the same way that it uses educational theories such as 'Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Model of Human Development' (Department of Education and Skills, 2019: 11). Instead, it encourages listening to the student voice at school-level.

Manning-Morton (2014) interpreted the findings of the National Children's Bureau's (NCB) wellbeing project. She cited the 'key domains' of children's wellbeing as 'physical well-being', 'mental health, emotional and social well-being', 'cognitive and language development and school performance' and 'beliefs' (Fauth and Thompson, 2009: 4). This is one of few studies that has given young children a voice on the topic of wellbeing. Within this project, both adults (parents and practitioners) and young children were asked to discuss and identify 'factors and aspects' of wellbeing (Manning-Morton, 2014: 18). The adult group was an observed conversation between both parents and educators. Whilst values were similar, discrepancies arose, for instance, parents discussed personal instances that the child may encounter, such as bereavement, while practitioners focused on the child becoming enabled to share viewpoints (Manning-Morton, 2014).

The children's target group presented a condensed version of the adult findings, 'Relationships', 'Friends', 'Play / Interests', 'Playing Outdoors (Physical Environment)', 'Psychological Environment', 'Food' (Manning Morton, 2014: 20). Children identified negative connotations as well as those that enhance their wellbeing; for instance, 'Mummy shouting' and disagreement with friends were seen to inhibit positive development (Manning Morton, 2014: 20). The discrepancies between the adult and child focus groups suggest that the voice of the child would provide new insights to policymakers, particularly in the development of documents that impact on the development of the child.

Manning-Morton identifies issue with the study undertaken by the National Children's Bureau and deems there to be lack of clarity. In her justification, she notes that physical wellbeing may be assumed to represent physical health, whereas in the area of early years, children may need to become familiar with the workings and functions of their bodies (Manning-Morton, 2014).

It is evident that there is a lack of student-voice in the documents issued by the Department of Education in the area of wellbeing. In contrast, in the New Primary Language Curriculum, it is evident that there is children's presence in the compiling of the document (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2018). For instance, in the 'Support Material for Teachers: Writing' supplementary document, samples of children's writing at each key stage are visible, such as 'a discussion on sport' (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2018: 36) (Appendix C). The Aistear Framework also provides evidence of the child's voice, as it displays samples of young children's work, as evident throughout the Well-being document (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009) (Appendix D).

2.4 Curricular Practice

2.4.1 Current Curricular Practice in Ireland

At present, there is no obligation for a whole-school approach towards wellbeing until 2023 (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). The current Social, Personal and Health Education (S.P.H.E.) and Physical Education (P.E.) curricula date back to 1999; but are the only published curricular documents to cite the inclusion of wellbeing within the school environment. This is due to change, as the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework has indicated that wellbeing will be one of three curricular areas to have a minimum time allocation on a weekly basis, while all other curricular areas will have a monthly allocation.

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) regard interactions and engagements within the home, school and community as key competencies in enabling the child to develop throughout their schooling years (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009). The wellbeing of the child is seen to be greatly impacted by engagement with classmates, family and the wider community (Oireachtas, 2012). The school may foster development of social and personal skills to enable the friendships and engagements of the child to flourish. However, until 2023, the only obligatory references to wellbeing within curricular documents are those cited within the S.P.H.E. curriculum and the P.E. curriculum. Wellbeing is evident only as an element of the strand unit 'taking care of my body' in the current S.P.H.E. curriculum from third class to sixth class (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 37). With regards to physical education, the curriculum merely mentions wellbeing in stating that 'through a diverse range of experiences providing regular, challenging physical activity, the balanced and harmonious development and general well-being of the child is fostered' (Government of Ireland, 1999b: 2). Wellbeing is not explored in any strands or strand units throughout this document. The Department of Education and Skills (2018) now acknowledge the relationship between wellbeing and physical health, in citing that the use of a wellbeing programme must include physical education curricula. This is consolidated in the Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice as school practitioners are to be confident in comprehension of the 'link between physical activity and wellbeing' (Department of Education, 2019: 40).

The Growing Up in Ireland survey acknowledges the development of the child across changing climates within their community, particularly social, economic and cultural areas (Institute of Public Health in Ireland and the Centre for Effective Studies, 2016). Going forward, this will be addressed in the curriculum as the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (2020), in Draft Primary Curriculum Framework, acknowledge present fast-

paced change in diversity, school and technology that has influenced the primary school in recent years. However, at present, no strands or strand units have been outlined for the wellbeing component of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020).

2.4.2 Wellbeing Programmes

At present, wellbeing is addressed within Social, Personal and Health Education curriculum in the primary school. The current curriculum, published in 1999, addresses wellbeing within the strand 'Myself', aiding schools to promote wellbeing, provide 'critical information' regarding same, and enable the child to maintain their wellbeing at present and in the future (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 7). This same document notes the benefits of a 'positive school climate and atmosphere', crediting it for supporting the wellbeing of all students of the school (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 15). The Department of Education have acted on the importance of this area by making the 'Wellbeing Promotion Process' compulsory across all primary schools by 2023 (Department of Education and Skills, 2018).

This process includes the employment of an appropriate wellbeing programme in primary schools. Circular 0042/2018, a key notice to all primary schools regarding wellbeing, offers support in selection of wellbeing based programmes (Department of Education and Skills, 2018). Programmes are seen as a supplementary undertaking to enhance the overall school wellbeing promotion. The home-school link is acknowledged as a priority in the identification of an appropriate programme, a relationship that has been deemed as pivotal by the Government of Ireland (1998), Síolta (2010) and the Department of Education et al. (2015).

It is the duty of the school management to determine, by 2023, a programme best suited to the school based upon the criteria provided by the Department of Education and Skills. The programmes that are eligible for use in primary schools must contribute to the whole school wellbeing promotion process and address the S.P.H.E. and P.E. curricula. The programme must be sustainable and enable the child to be a lifelong learner in the area of wellbeing. The lessons and resources must be applicable to specific class levels, with effective learning outcomes. The content, approaches and outcomes must be evidence-based and support the practitioner in educating students in a safe manner. Finally, the programme must not place responsibility on pupils for the 'responsibility for the wellbeing of their peers' (Department of Education and Skills, 2018: 6).

At present, there are two emerging titles for infant classes in the Irish book publishing market; 'My Wellbeing Diary', published by Folens (2020), and 'Welcome to Well-Being', a programme developed by Fiona Forman (2021), published by Outside the Box. These programmes adhere to the guidelines from the Department of Education and provide a wealth of methodologies and activities to enable the child to grow their wellbeing skills and knowledge in a level-appropriate way. The titles are evaluated later, in the methodologies chapter. However, it is not just the programmes that contribute to the Wellbeing Promotion Process. It can be greatly enriched by other practices outside of the wellbeing lesson by activities such as mindfulness. This approach will be explored in the next section.

2.5 Mindfulness

Mindfulness is a practice that has been associated with the enhancement of wellbeing. Some of the characteristics of wellbeing, captured in the Wellbeing Framework, namely awareness and 'fluid way of being', link greatly to the purpose and outcomes achieved by practicing mindfulness (Department of Education, 2019: 10).

Like wellbeing, mindfulness proves to be a concept that is not easily defined, and adjustable dependent on the desired purpose or outcome of the writer. Jon Kabat-Zinn identifies mindfulness as a certain awareness, being present and openhearted. He describes it as a basic but powerful tool for the mind, one that can be simple to adapt to, but must be practiced in order to master. Kabat-Zinn continues to examine mindfulness, noting that it can be considered both short-term and long-term (Kabat-Zinn, 2015). Srinivasan encapsulates mindfulness as a 'way of being', referring, like Kabat-Zinn, to being present in the given moment, strengthened by 'daily and consistent practice' (Srinivasan, 2014:14). Srinivasan (2014), too, deems mindfulness as a way to connect with one's inner wellbeing. It is Albrecht (2018) who appears to have the most distinct and transparent viewing of mindfulness, referring to it as two terms. It is firstly a 'state, trait or way of being', and secondly, a means of establishing a 'mindful state' (Albrecht, 2018: 490).

The Mindfulness in Schools project, linked to the Oxford Mindfulness Centre and inspired by Jon Kabat-Zinn, describes mindfulness to be an undertaking that develops skill and awareness within the mind, to aid us to develop resilience and appropriate response to ongoings. It has been found to be a stress-reducing activity, endorsed by the National Institute of Clinical Excellence in the United Kingdom (Mindfulness in Schools Project, 2020). Mindfulness within the school has been linked to wellbeing and mental health, coping

and managing at times of distress, and enabling the child to appreciate and achieve ongoings in their lives. Srinivasan (2014) also related mindfulness to building of resilience.

One limitation to implementing mindfulness practice within the school setting is the lack of risk assessment. Oxford Mindfulness Centre acknowledge the lack of scientific support in identifying the potential risks in practicing mindfulness with children (Oxford Mindfulness Centre, 2016). Albrecht (2018) outlines that while there is evidence of adverse effects of wellbeing on adults, there is very little research to support the potential risks of mindfulness in the primary school setting. One of the few studies relating to this, as discovered by Albrecht (2018) was Arthurson's (2015) discovery that some children, aged between 12 and 13, encountered emotions that were difficult to comprehend and process after engaging in mindfulness practice (Albrecht, 2018). Ashworth et al. (2019) and de Bruin et al. (2013) also note the lack of child-based study in the area of mindfulness, stating that the vast majority of studies linked to mindfulness have comprised of adult sampling.

In response to this lack of appropriate evidence, Ashworth et al. (2019) undertook studies based upon children from 7 to 10 years of age, and their responses to engaging in mindfulness practice and relaxation techniques in their English primary schools. For this study at least 5 minutes per school day were to be utilised to allow students to engage in 'mindfulness practices or relaxation'. Similar to the Mindfulness in Schools Project, their mindfulness practices were based upon the findings of Jon Kabat-Zinn. The relaxation intervention was based on focused breathing and muscle relaxation. Both of these interventions were assessed by means of a mood-based questionnaire. Those involved in the study were also required to commit to eight lessons based on 'Strategies for Safety and Wellbeing' each lasting 40 minutes, to be employed over one term (Ashworth et al., 2019: 5). This was assessed by means of a questionnaire about how to seek help. Focus groups were established for both parts of this study, with discussions including experience in engaging

with interventions, thoughts on the influence of the interventions and suggestions on how to better interventions.

It is evident that student voice was valued in this intervention, as pupils responded to the mindfulness practices by completing a questionnaire and engagement in discussion based on the intervention. This informed my action research cycles as the presence of the student voice and their expression of emotion aligns well with my ontological values.

de Bruin et al. (2013) undertook a study based on the effectiveness of mindfulness practice with children in the Netherlands. The study titled 'The Meaning of Mindfulness in Children' revealed that while there are readily available assessments to prove the efficiency or inefficiency of mindfulness for adults, there is a lack of documentation to assess the same in children. For this study, the Dutch CAMM (Child and Adolescent Mindfulness Measure) and self-reflections were utilised to assess the effects of mindfulness on the research participants. Participants of category one were aged 10 and above, and those in category two were aged between 13-16. The findings from this study proved that mindfulness did engage both categories in 'present-moment non-judgmental awareness' (de Bruin et al., 2013: 427).

However, discrepancy between the categories were evident, finding that those from category one displayed a tendency to relate mindfulness to aiding suppression or avoidance of thoughts and feelings whilst those of category two link mindfulness to resolving distraction or attention-span difficulties (de Bruin et al., 2013). This finding displays that the meaning of mindfulness is flexible and unique to the groups or individual practicing it, which challenges the suitability of this practice for a whole-class activity. Manning-Morton (2014), too, found the concept of wellbeing to change based on the context of use. The study did not provide provision for dealing with emotions evoked from engaging in mindfulness, nor the potential risks associated with undertaking this research. This informed my research as I

deemed it important to identify and prepare provision for dealing with the associated risks to participants by engaging in my studies.

Mindfulness presents outcomes that are identified as elements of wellbeing, such as the strengthening of resilience and coping skills. It is noteworthy that there are risks involved in engagement with mindfulness, such as those identified in the study of de Bruin et al. (2013). As there is very little data regarding the engagement of early years children with mindfulness, I feel that research on mindfulness in my setting may be of value to my practice and that of other infant teachers.

2.6 Integration

Language and literacy have been regarded as areas that aid exploration and development of wellbeing. It has been recorded that children who enjoy and think positively regarding reading tend to have higher wellbeing scores as opposed to those who do not enjoy reading or hold negative connotations around the area of reading (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018). They noticed a 'steady increase in mean mental wellbeing scores as one progresses from one literacy quartile to the next' (Clark and Teravainen-Goff, 2018: 4).

Smith and Ellis write that reading can provide a break for the mind, which may also be described as an escape from reality for a desired period (Smith and Ellis, 2018). In this piece they refer to young children, noting that reading can aid them in understanding and finding their place in the world, that others encounter similar difficulties and emotion, and support in development of empathy. However, it is pivotal for the adult to aid in ensuring that children engage in reading books that support appropriate emotional literacy. They regard the power of literacy as strong enough to influence the patterns of thought of an adult. Therefore, as children have not yet developed their own patterns of thinking, the importance of choosing and scaffolding fitting books is greatly heightened.

Dialogue based upon the text, too, proves as an efficient way of integrating wellbeing practice to language and literacy sessions. This oral language practice aids in lesson participation and enhances wellbeing by aiding the child to socialise in expression of their views and enables them to view themselves as part of the school community (Smith and Ellis, 2018, cited in Thorburn, 2018).

2.7 International Policy and Practice

Cassidy (2018) highlights Scotland, Australia, Canada, Japan and Finland as countries who have approached studying wellbeing education in schools. For the purpose of this literature review, the policy and practice in Ireland will be compared and contrasted to those of Scotland and Australia. It is evident that countries who have been utilising a wellbeing policy for a substantial period of time have a more specific approach to staff education, measurement of achievement and a more uniform implementation than the envisioned plan for wellbeing education in Ireland.

The Government of Scotland have established a nationwide school policy in the area of health and wellbeing within their school settings. They note that this topic is not a designated class or timetabled area; but is integrated into six categories that are addressed in the school, throughout planning and practice. The areas include ‘mental, emotional, social and physical wellbeing’, ‘planning for choices and changes’, ‘physical education’, ‘physical activity and sport’, ‘food and health’, ‘substance misuse’ and ‘relationships, sexual health and parenthood’ (Government of Scotland, 2020). This six-area approach proves more refined than pathway that the Irish educational system is planning, which emphasises the importance of teaching wellbeing based on the needs of the school, as opposed to addressing specific categories. This approach appears more discreet in implementation than the allocated wellbeing time as suggested in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (National Council

for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020). However, the specific six areas to be addressed ensure consistency from school to school.

In addition, practitioners are encouraged and supported to undertake training through the Scottish Mental Health First Aid training programme, to aid teachers in addressing and responding to mental health in a professional and appropriate mannerism. This, again, proves more specific than reference to continual professional development by the Department of Education, Ireland, who encourage schools to provide opportunity to develop staff knowledge, but do not recommend any specific courses.

Australia, like the Irish Draft Primary Curriculum Framework, explore wellbeing as a standalone area. The 'Australian Student Wellbeing Framework' was launched in 2018 (Australian Government Department of Education, 2018). It is evident that this approach strives to enable students to develop resilience and independence. This framework inspects wellbeing under five 'key elements', namely leadership, inclusion, student voice, partnerships and support (Australian Government Department of Education, 2018). Effective practices for each of the aforementioned key elements are clearly outlined in the Australian Student Wellbeing Framework rationale, with the core message of the framework being that the wellbeing is promoted, and safety and positive relationships are supported, so as to ensure that the child can flourish in their setting and achieve their potential.

The resources aligned with this framework prove more accessible than those currently practiced in Ireland and are aptly suited to the modern-day school and student, as technology has been integrated. The 'Student Wellbeing Hub' has been developed to support 'professional learning', 'curriculum-aligned resources' and 'school wellbeing check tool' (Australian Government Department of Education, 2018). This differs greatly to the current availability of S.P.H.E. resources in Ireland, which are not solely based on wellbeing. The

Student Wellbeing Hub allows the student themselves to acquire 'information, advice and games' from this online tool (Australian Government Department of Education, 2018). Parents and guardians are also offered support and resources through the facility of the Student Wellbeing Hub and are enabled to contribute to their specific school community through this online portal. The Department of Education in Ireland are yet to establish a portal to engage parents and guardians with schools in this way.

2.8 Conclusion

Reviewing international practices has supported me in identifying approaches to wellbeing education that I may not have otherwise considered. An example of this may be outlining a small number of specific elements of wellbeing that I wished to address with my class and ensuring consistency in these areas. The inclusion of parents and guardians in the wellbeing education process was also a learning that I observed from Manning-Morton's (2014) interpretation of the National Children's Bureau's (NCB) wellbeing project and the actions of the Australian Government of Education. Sending home poetry and wellbeing exercises ensured that the parents and guardians played their role as the primary educator of the child.

Chapter Three: Methodologies

3.1 Introduction

As wellbeing steadily becomes a growing area of interest within the Education sector, I found it difficult to identify what methodologies would best to use to ensure that I engage in this topic satisfactorily in my practice, particularly in my setting of the Senior Infant classroom. In chapter two, I discussed the vision of the Department of Education, that by 2023 all primary schools will have a wellbeing promotion plan implemented across all class levels. As I began my research in my second year of teaching, I had very little experience in teaching the area of wellbeing in any class level. This topic is evident only as an element of the strand unit 'taking care of my body' in the current S.P.H.E. curriculum from third class to sixth class (Government of Ireland, 1999a: 37). However, this is due to change significantly, as wellbeing has now been cited as a 'key competency' in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020: 7). In light of the changes arising in both curriculum and policy with regards to wellbeing, I deemed it worthwhile to focus my research on identifying the practices that work best for me, in educating my Senior Infant class on the area of wellbeing.

I selected the paradigm of action research to delve into my practices across my work and relate these to my values. I made use of critical friends and methods such as reflection-on-practice and reflection-in-practice to gather and analyse data. To collect data from my research participants, I used qualitative and quantitative collection tools. These tools were specifically chosen to reap the most meaningful data possible from the young participants, my Senior Infant students. Engaging in an action research project with such young children posed difficulties, such as explaining the research and rationale in simple language that they

would understand. The area of wellbeing can also be a sensitive topic and evoke a lot of emotions, meaning provision had to be put in place to avoid any risk to participants.

3.1.1 Research Site

The research site for the purpose of this study is a school with a DEIS status, located in County Dublin. It is a co-educational school, with classes from Junior Infants to Fifth Class. I am a Senior Infant teacher, with a class of less than 20 pupils. The class has access to a Special Needs Assistant.

3.1.2 Research Participants

The participants of this study were my whole Senior Infant class. The children were encouraged to contribute to the study throughout the process, as collaborative research partners. They were also told the outcomes of the study. I also engaged with a critical friend, another primary school teacher, who is teaching in a school of a similar nature, a DEIS 1 school in County Dublin.

3.2 Research Paradigm

3.2.1 Selection of Research Paradigm

A research paradigm may be defined as ‘a network of coherent ideas about the nature of the world and of the functions of researchers which, adhered to by a group of researchers, conditions the patterns of their thinking and underpins their research actions’ (Bassey, 1990: 13). As outlined in chapter two, literature review, values are greatly interlinked with selection of a research paradigm. McDonagh et al. (2020) also acknowledge this overlap by regarding the values system as an influential factor in selection of educational research paradigm.

Values are meaningful and purposeful concepts that encourage hope for the future in the areas of 'love, freedom, justice, compassion, courage, care and democracy' (Huxtable and Whitehead, 2018: 25). These same values influence practitioners and their actions in the workplace. It was important to me, as researcher, to ensure that my autonomy as a professional was benefitting from carrying out this study. By selecting a paradigm that aligned well with my values, it was hoped that I would be confident in the new knowledge I would acquire in the course of this research. This knowledge would then better my practice, as it was unique to me and my setting.

At the time of selection of the appropriate paradigm, I referred to literature. McDonagh et al. (2020) posed questions, inspired by Kivunja and Kuyini (2017, cited in McDonagh et al., 2020), that prompted my choice. 'Where am I placed as a professional within in the paradigm?', 'Does it allow me to think professionally, act and reflect on my practice?', 'Can it help me contribute to the knowledge base of the teaching profession?' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 124).

After reviewing three paradigms, namely positivist, interpretive and action research, it became evident which of these would best suit my values and area of research. The above questions cited by McDonagh et al. (2020) supported me in identifying the best suited paradigm. The positivist paradigm may be employed for the purpose of seeking clarity, testing pre-existing theories, and is typically rooted in quantitative data (Bassey, 1990). This paradigm was not practice-related enough to ensure that I would be living to my ontological values. The interpretative approach differs from positivist, as it is based upon qualitative data, focusing on interpretations and sense-making of occurrences (Bassey, 1990). It has proven particularly insightful for those in the history and anthropology sector (Bassey, 1990; Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995).

However, the paradigm that aligned best with my area of research and values was action research. Action research is a unique research approach, whereby the aim of the research is to enhance practice. The researcher is the practitioner themselves. This paradigm may generate new theory, as opposed to confirming the value of prior findings. This aligned with my ontological values, desiring to adjust my practice to meet the unique needs of my class.

3.2.2 Action Research

Action research differs from the positive and interpretive paradigms greatly, as it does not endorse the use of 'observers trying to describe the phenomena of their surroundings' (Bassey, 1990: 38). McNiff and Whitehead (2005) deem action research to be a learning process in which a practitioner can explore and assess their professional performance and create their own theories based upon reflection of values, habits and experiences. It has been cited as bridging 'the gap between research and practice' (Cohen et al., 2000: 227). Action research is a cyclical process, as the practice of the practitioner continually develops as knowledge grows. The cyclical process is outlined in Figure 1.

Figure 1: The cyclical process of the action research cycle (Carr & Kemmis 1986; Whitehead & McNiff, 2006)

While this paradigm is personal to the practitioner and their practice, it does encourage collaborative engagement throughout the research process. I engaged in conversation with a critical friend throughout the action research project, which supported me in identifying any discrepancies between my practice and values. McDonagh et al. (2020) credit the critical friend for enhancing understanding and creating meaning from findings. This element of action research also enables the practitioner to develop deeper knowledge on their action as a practitioner, as they are engaging in the study, as opposed to having research done 'on them' (Glenn et al., 2017: 30).

As mentioned, this form of research may be employed to improve practices or to create new theories. In the instance of my study, the desired outcome was to improve upon my own practice in the area of wellbeing within my Senior Infant classroom. However, I also created a living theory from this process. Theory and practice are interlinked, as they

continually influence each other, as outlined in Figure 2. Action research aids the practitioner in realising the relationship between theory and practice and viewing practice not as a 'praxis' but an area that can be enhanced by new knowledge (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005: 4). Glenn et al. (2017) understand action research to be the generation of data and evidence, indisputably linked to the values of the practitioner, that when validated; creates a new theory of knowledge.

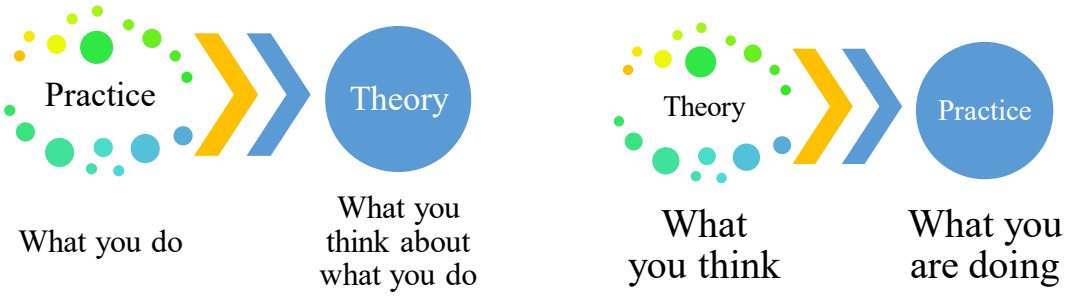

Figure 2: The links between theory and practice (McNiff & Whitehead 2005)

Action research, as a paradigm has been defined as 'critical', 'reflective', 'accountable', 'self-evaluating' and 'participatory' (Zuber-Skerritt, 1996, cited in Cohen et al., 2000: 228). These elements addressed the desired elements that I wanted to include in my research and supported my selection of this pathway. I value greatly the student voice and feedback from my colleagues and critical friend. This approach to research also promised to allow my findings to be represented in a meaningful and personal way, encouraging reflection and self-evaluation.

Cohen et al. (2000) define action research as a cycle of identifying an issue, preparing and implementing the intervention, then evaluating the findings from same. It is a form of professional development that is enhanced by engagement in reflective practice. Participants are encouraged to partake in this form of research, which is unique to every action researcher.

3.2.3 Self-Study

Self-study is a deeply personal style of researching, whereby the individual strives to improve upon both their practice and understanding of same, whilst ensuring that they are acting to meet their values. McDonagh et al. (2020) regard self-study as an efficient form of continuing professional development and deem it highly beneficial for practitioners. The findings of self-study research do not lay with the researcher alone; but are shared with other sources for validation purposes.

Ferguson (1996) refers to Ebbutt's concept of a 'performance gap', whereby there may be discrepancies between one's values and implemented practice. This is a concept that may be experienced in varying ways, dependent on the practitioner. The performance gap is most easily identified when examined under the frame of self-study. The link between practice and values becomes very clear under this lens, as 'practice is always purposeful and therefore value-laden' (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011: 27).

Dadds and Hart (2001) highlight that practitioner research is greatly valuable and note the contributing factors to ensuring quality in this area, which are applicable to self-study research. The practitioner must be willing to 'consider, critique and adapt' their actions and 'recognise their own personal and professional strengths' (Dadds & Hart, 2001: 158). It is noteworthy that, while engagement with a critical friend can help in analysing data, others may view findings from alternate perspectives. It may be argued that 'there is no end to this systemic reflection' that is the cyclical process of self-study action research (Pollard, 2019: 77).

3.2.4 Living Theory

Advocated by Whitehead (2019), living theory enables the researcher to generate their own theory of knowledge, as opposed to following the teachings dictated in traditional theories. This theory encourages a personal form of research, greatly rooted in the values and experiences of the researcher.

Whitehead opposes the idea that abstract generalisations outlined in traditional theories across the disciplines of education are applicable to all practitioners. Instead, he encourages enabling the practitioner to develop their own 'living-educational-theories' (Whitehead 2015, cited in McDonagh, 2020: 77). For instance, the concept of a living contradiction, like the aforementioned performance gap concept, insinuates that one may be neglecting their values when engaged in practice. It is from this concept that living theory evolves. Living theory enables the practitioner to develop their own explanation to outline of 'their educational influences in their own learning, in the learning of others and in the learnings of the social formations', grounded in the researcher's own values (Whitehead, 2014: 00:00:24). These theories are declared by Whitehead to be 'not generalisable but relatable' (Whitehead, 2014: 00:02:04). The generation of this living theory links well to self-study research, which can also be shared for other practitioners to both validate and relate to.

3.3 Reflection

Glenn et al. (2017) refer to the questioning of assumptions as a foundation of undertaking action research. bell hooks (2010) outlines critical thinking as questioning information, conclusions and points of view. Critical reflection is pivotal to the practitioner for the purpose of understanding power and hegemony; areas that Brookfield (2017) has identified that teachers typically associate as ideologic matters. Viewing the concept of power in a critical manner may entail the professional analysing their understanding of 'the way power

dynamics operate in classrooms, programs, and schools and about the justifiable exercise of teacher power' (Brookfield, 2017: 9). Hegemony, under a critical perspective, entails identifying the 'process whereby ideas, structures and actions that benefit a small minority in power are viewed by the majority of people as wholly natural, preordained, and working for their own good' (Brookfield, 2017: 16).

Brookfield endorses four specific lenses that aid in the unravelling of these same assumptions within the education sector, namely 'students' eyes', 'colleagues' perceptions', 'personal experiences' and 'theory and research' (Brookfield, 2017: 7). These lenses were considered in the collection of data for the purpose of this study.

With regards to the personal lens, Schön identified two forms of reflection that are beneficial to those who may be encountering conflict between their practice and values. He named these reflective actions as 'reflection-on-action' and 'reflection-in-action' (Schön, 1983, cited in Pollard, 2019: 84). Both forms were explored throughout this self-study action research project, as they supported me in retaining focus on my values when engaged in wellbeing education with my class.

3.3.1 Reflection-in-Action

Reflection-in-action requires the teacher to take 'immediate action' and reflect upon their practice in the moment (Schön, 1983, cited in Pollard, 2019: 84). It may be an instance that happens 'in your mind as you respond events in your practice', as opposed to writing the reflection (McDonagh et al., 2020: 66). These instinctive occurrences prove interesting to examine, as it makes clear the thoughts that come to the mind of the teacher, and what values are prioritised in that given moment. Taking short notes on these reflections, where time allows, allows for a deeper reflection afterwards. Reflection on these written pieces will aid the practitioner in identifying where practice and values coincide, or not.

3.3.2 Reflection-on-Action

Reflection-on-action looks back and analyses actions taken at an earlier point. It is not as immediate as the responses that arise from reflection-in-action, but makes the practitioner consider what they did, how they did it, and why they did it. It allows for a deeper form of reflection and enables the practitioner to describe in detail their action. This enables them to identify if they did, or did not, act in a way that aligns with their values.

Schön suggests a blend of reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action in outlining the reflective framework; 'they observe, reflect, describe and reflect again' (Schön 1983, cited in McDonagh et al., 2020: 66). This outline gives a coherent view of the observation about the practice and allows the practitioner to consider, why was this specific action observed? Why did this action occur? What can be learned from this action? Reflection-on-action may be best fulfilled when completed through the medium of the reflective journal, which will be explored later in this chapter, in the discussion of data collection tools.

3.3.3 Meta-Reflection

To allow for a deeper form of understanding upon my practice, I engaged in meta-reflective practice. Meta-reflection allows the practitioner to review their prior reflections in a new light. With regards to my practice, this action evoked a sense of self-understanding as a teacher, as I realised that the actions I take are often influenced by other experiences and conditions. Meta-reflection allowed me to examine some of these external factors, as I considered that 'teachers don't have control over a number of working conditions', conditions that can greatly 'determine their practice' and 'the kind of person they can be in that practice' (Kelchtermans, 2018: 234).

3.4 Data Collection

3.4.1 Mixed Research

Both qualitative and quantitative data were used in this study, however, the majority of the findings were qualitative. Qualitative data is word-based and may aid in capturing 'the specificity of a particular situation' (Cohen et al., 2000: 248). The continuous nature of qualitative data allowed for meaningful comparison from the beginning to the end of each action research cycle.

Quantitative data is objective and focusses on numbers and figures (Kennedy & Montgomery, 2018). The quantitative data used in this research was sourced solely from surveys with the pupils in my class. Surveys proved the most efficient form of gathering quantitative data as the students could be supported by use of pictures to enable them to respond, as evident in Appendix E.

3.4.2 Data Collection Tools

I was both the action researcher and monitor for this study. I reflected on my practice both during and after it had happened. I also observed the action and responses of the students in my class during wellbeing education. External observers were not involved in this study. The collection of this data supported me in identifying what approaches and methodologies I could consider best practice when teaching wellbeing in my infant classroom. The data also displayed changes both within my thinking about my practice, and my actions. The data collected demonstrated times that I was meeting my values in my practice, and when I was not. It also supported me by means of credibility to my claim to new knowledge.

This new knowledge outlines the unique information that I now know about my practice, that was not evident to me in advance of conducting the research. The data collection process commenced in August 2020, when I identified my educational values. This

action of identifying my values directed my research in helping me select my area of research. It also helped me realise what research paradigm would help me both fulfil my values and acquire data that would support my research question. The data gathered in advance of the action research cycles led me to selecting self-study action research, as it promised to support me in becoming an active researching practitioner, enabled to critically reflect upon my own practice, and improve upon my actions in response to my findings.

I gathered data on my own practice by means of reflective journaling. Field notes were used to take note of action either in the moment, or very soon after it has occurred, and later written and reflected upon in coherently (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). Data was gathered from the participating children in my class, too, by means of dialogue, surveys and written tasks. In addition, data was gathered from dialogue with my critical friend and my colleague who also taught Senior Infants.

The data collected for this action research was both qualitative and quantitative data. The data collection tools for data from participants, as mentioned, were dialogue, survey and written tasks. The findings from these tools, as well as my reflective journal entries, demonstrated a clear outline of how the interventions used influenced my practice when teaching wellbeing in my infant classroom. These data collection tools will now be outlined in further detail.

3.4.3 Reflective Journal

From September 2020, I began reflective practice by means of reflective journaling, noting my habits and responses to happenings in the classroom. The data collected throughout this period supports evolution in my thoughts and practices, demonstrating growth of new knowledge and where I may have practiced towards and against my values.

Writing in my reflective journal was a daily practice and has supported me in not only identifying practice that could be improved, but in acknowledging the positives in my practice. The entries within this journal include criticality, questioning my thinking and how I have come to think in this way (McNiff & Whitehead, 2005). I intentionally focused on my practice with regards to wellbeing. This is not to say that entries were solely based on wellbeing lessons, but throughout the school day, too. To keep my journal entries meaningful and relevant to my research, I used the following focus questions:

- 'What have I done?
- What have I learned?
- What is the significance of the learning?
- How will the learning generate new ideas?'

(McNiff & Whitehead, 2005: 72)

3.4.4 Dialogue

Dialogue played a significant part of data collection in this research project. It enabled me, in my role as a teacher, to listen and learn from the children in my setting. I used this data collection tool to support my ontological value of encouraging student voice. Burbules (1993) considers dialogue as a mechanism to discover new information and gain clear comprehension on this new knowledge. The learnings I gathered from in-class dialogue supported me in developing wellbeing lessons that were tailored to the learners in my setting throughout action research cycle two.

3.4.5 Critical Friend

Dialogue can also be an opportunity to 'reshape our own ideas in response to what we had heard and understood from others' (Glenn et al., 2017: 17). I noted this outcome of dialogue best when engaged in dialogue with my critical friend. The critical friend may be employed as a support to validating new claims to knowledge, as they aid in 'clarifying your thinking, developing understanding and generating the new questions you need to be a critical thinker' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 52). My critical friend is a primary school teacher, teaching in a similar setting; a DEIS co-educational school in County Dublin. My critical friend offered new insights and supported me in considering alternating perspectives in response to my reflections, experiences and findings.

3.4.6 Survey

Surveys were the only quantitative form of research in this study, a method that demonstrates the conditions in a specific instance (Cohen, 2018). I used pictorial surveys due to my setting being a Senior Infant classroom (Appendix E). I displayed the survey on the interactive whiteboard, explained each image in the pictorial survey, and demonstrated to the children how to respond with their desired answer. This data collection instrument proved most useful when researching which methodology was preferred by students in action research cycle two. The findings from this particular survey are demonstrated in chapter four, findings.

3.4.7 Written Tasks

Written tasks were an important data collection tool in action research cycle one. The responses children wrote at the end of the wellbeing lessons helped to demonstrate their understanding on the topic covered. An example of this is evident in the next chapter,

demonstrating a comparison of a child's work, when they had a good understanding of the lesson topic, and when they did not.

3.5 Research Design

The aim of this research was to develop the practitioner's understanding of wellbeing, and subsequently, enhance the practice related to this topic within the infant classroom. Throughout this research I strived to critically examine my practice. I did this though engaging with my critical friend and writing in my reflective journal. These conversations and journal entries supporting me in identifying the link between my practice to my values. The research took place throughout two action research cycles, one that examined my practice when following a wellbeing progamme with set lessons, and the other examined my practice when using self-made wellbeing lessons. I used the findings gathered from action research cycle one to inform my choices and approaches in action research cycle two. Upon completion of both action research cycles, I analysed and categorised my data. I compared the cycles and noted any significant findings that came to light.

3.5.1 Research Plan Timeframe

Date	Research Plan
August 2020	Values were considered and identified Value statement completed
September 2020	Proposal for action research project completed Research on selected topic completed Research completed on Wellbeing Promotion Process and available wellbeing programmes in Ireland (Department of Education and Skills, 2018) Reflective practice based on practice began
October 2020	Reviewed research and literature relating to wellbeing Began writing literature review
November 2020	Draft of literature review completed First draft of ethics form for Ethics Committee completed
December 2020	Met with supervisor to discuss literature review, ethics application and methodologies chapter Redraft and submission of ethics application form completed
	Winter Break 23rd December 2020 to 5th January 2021
January 2021	Ethical permission granted from Maynooth University Ethical permission sought & granted from Board of Management (Appendix F) Consent from parents/guardians of students, students and critical friend sought and granted
February 2021	Delay in commencement of Action Research Cycle 1 due to nationwide school closures related to the Coronavirus outbreak
March 2021	Return to school and commencement of Action Research Cycle 1: Programme 'Welcome to Well-being: Meet Mo and Ko' (Forman, 2021) used in Senior Infant class
	Spring Break 29th of March to 12th of April 2021
April 2021	Completion of Action Research Cycle 1 Data from Action Research Cycle 1 gathered, interpreted and analysed Met with critical friend to discuss findings from Action Research Cycle 1 Researched methodologies and resources for use in Action Research Cycle 2
	School Closure 3rd of May to 7th of May 2021
May 2021	Action Research Cycle 2 commenced Engaged in discussion with fellow Senior Infant teacher Agreed to share wellbeing lessons with other Senior Infant class
June 2021	Completion of Action Research Cycle 2 Gathering, interpretation and analysation of data gathered in Action Research Cycle 2 Meeting with critical friend Review of Action Research Cycle 2 Presentation with college peers, outlining my study and findings to date
July 2021	Analyse and categorise findings from Action Research Cycles 1 and 2 Present findings to public for critique Write-up of action research project
August 2021	Publish thesis findings Share findings with colleagues in the workplace at beginning of new academic year

Table 1: Research Plan Timeframe

3.5.2 Action Research Plan

The Department of Education outlined in Circular 0042/2018 that schools must engage within a 'Wellbeing Promotion Process' by 2023, including adapting to a wellbeing programme suited to the school (Department of Education and Skills, 2018: 1). The Department of Education provided a checklist to support the selection of programmes. In advance of the action research cycles it was important that I considered these elements outlined by the Department of Education, as it was part of my rationale for this research to prepare myself and my practice for this 'Wellbeing Promotion Process' (Department of Education and Skills, 2018: 1).

I identified two programmes that are available for infant classes and meet the criteria set out by the Department of Education. Outside the Box publishers had a programme named 'Welcome to Wellbeing', which is an infant-level programme linked to 'Weaving Wellbeing', aimed at older classes (Forman, 2021). Folens publishers also have a programme named 'My Wellbeing Diary' (Folens, 2021). Upon evaluation of both titles, I chose to use 'Welcome to Wellbeing' programme, written by Fiona Forman (2021). I contacted the author and discussed my research and values with her. This conversation confirmed to me that 'Welcome to Wellbeing' was the best suited programme to my Senior Infant class. I chose to use the Junior Infant title with my class, as it was their first time exploring the concept of wellbeing in school. After deciding upon the appropriate title to use for action research cycle one, I was confident that action research cycle one could commence.

Date	Action Plan
Week One **1st March**	Engage in dialogue with students regarding the area of wellbeing, i.e. talking about feelings • 'What makes us feel good?' • 'What can we do if we do not feel happy?' • 'Is it good to talk about our feelings?', etc. Engage in the introductory lessons to pilot material of Senior Infants Weaving Wellbeing programme – 'Welcome to Well-Being (A) – Good to Be Me with Mo and Ko' (Fiona Forman, 2021). Lesson Topic: It's good to be me Task: Draw 3 good things, colour image of characters
Week Two **8th March**	Engagement in Welcome to Well-Being (A) programme Lesson Topic: All feelings are OK Task: Identify and draw feeling at present
Week Three **15th March**	Engagement in Welcome to Well-Being (A) programme Lesson Topic: Big Feelings Task: Colour image of characters engaging in slide breathing skill, identify a time of big feelings
Week Four **22nd March**	Engagement in Welcome to Well-Being (A) programme Lesson Topic: Happiness Task: Draw happy memories, draw 2 ways to spread happiness
Week Five **12th April**	Engagement in Welcome to Well-Being (A) programme Lesson Topic: Calmness Task: Draw 3-2-1… Listen images to support skill development, calm colouring
Week Six **19th April**	Engagement in Welcome to Well-Being (A) programme Lesson Topic: Sadness Task: Identify a time of sadness, identify ways to deal with sadness

Table 2: Action Plan Timeframe, Action Research Cycle One

Date	Action Plan
Week One **10th May**	Engagement in practitioner-made lesson Lesson Topic: Covid-19 Task: Reflection with peers
Week Two **17th May**	Engagement in practitioner-made lesson Lesson Topic: Sadness and loss Task: Reflective drawing
Week Three **24th May**	Engagement in practitioner-made lesson Lesson Topic: Gratefulness Task: Whole-class discussion
Week Four **31st May**	Engagement in practitioner-made lesson Lesson Topic: Pride Task: Designing a pride badge
Week Five **7th June**	Engagement in practitioner-made lesson Lesson Topic: Anger Task: Sharing with other Senior Infant class via video call
Week Six **14th June**	Engagement in practitioner-made lesson Lesson Topic: Happiness Task: Sharing with other Senior Infant class via video call

Table 3: Action Plan Timeframe, Action Research Cycle Two

3.6 Data Analysis

3.6.1 Validation Process for Claims of New Knowledge

Validity is greatly grounded in two specific areas, credibility and reliability (Shipman, 2014). Credibility relates to the authentic voice being portrayed within the data represented. In this study, the credibility of the research is greatly related to student feedback, and notations that demonstrate that practice has improved. Reliability refers to how relevant the data gathered was, considering if this same data accurately reflects upon the reality being researched.

Habermas (1976, cited in Sullivan et al. 2016) voices theory on social validity, outlining that validation may be achieved by means of dialogue with others. The validity of this specific action research project was acquired by means of public critique, critical friends and triangulation. I engaged in dialogue with my critical friend both during data collection and during analysis of the data. Our discussions included the area of reflection and often prompted meta-reflection. I discussed the self-made wellbeing lesson plans with my colleague, who also taught Senior Infants and used the lesson plans with her class.

3.6.2 Public Critique

Public critique entails inviting external voices to consider the data and findings collected throughout the action research project. This may be carried out by means of discussion with a critical friend or engaging in the triangulation process. In the instance of this study, both of these examples were used to validate the findings. In addition, I presented my research and findings to my peers in June by means of a college presentation. I received feedback based on this and answered questions on my research. These endeavors supported me in validating my new claim to knowledge.

3.6.3 Triangulation

'Getting other perspectives on qualitative data so as to show its credibility by cross-checking data is called triangulation' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 107). Cohen et al. (2000) claim triangulation to be useful in the explanation of human behaviour, enriching the data found as the findings have been considered by from more than one perspective. Dialogue with my critical friend and engaging in meta-reflection were elements of the triangulation process in this study.

3.7 Ethical Considerations

The ethical values of the Teaching Council were evident in process and analysis of this action research project, displaying 'respect, care, integrity and trust' (Teaching Council, 2016: 3). In addition, the ethical code of Maynooth University was followed. Further adherence to ethical considerations are outlined in the coming sections.

3.7.1 Informed Consent

My research demonstrates full informed consent from all participants, and parents/guardians of students. Ethical permission was granted from Maynooth University, and the Board of Management from the school that I am practicing in.

Plain language letters and permission forms were issued to the parents and guardians of all students in my class (Appendix G). The purpose and rationale for the research were clearly outlined. Parents and guardians were made aware that participation in the study was voluntary and that they may withdraw their consent to engage at any time. It was outlined that all participants would remain anonymous throughout the study and that data would be shared only with the researcher, supervisor of the study, course leader and external examiner of Maynooth University.

3.7.2 Child Assent

As the class was Senior Infants, assent was acquired from the students in the class by means of dialogue and a coloured tick-the-box response sheet (Appendix H). I explained the study in a simple language to the children and explained that I would share the findings with them at the end of the data collection. I allowed the children to ask questions about the research, and then displayed the coloured tick-the-box response sheet on the interactive whiteboard. I modelled the completion of the response sheet both in accepting and declining participation in the study. The children were then given the response sheets and completed them independently.

3.7.3 Data Storage

Data gathered was securely maintained and accessible to the researcher, supervisor, course leader and external examiners. It was signed and dated to ensure credibility and reliability. Data that included names of people or sites were available only to the researcher and were secure both during and after the action research project.

Data storage was in compliance with General Data Protection Regulations, New Data Protection Bill 2018 and Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy. All physical data was stored in a data archive in accordance with these data protection policies. All data that was stored digitally was encrypted and files were password protected.

3.7.4 Confidentiality and Anonymity

Confidentiality and anonymity, as guaranteed to all participants and parents/guardians of participants, were at the core of all practice related to the action research project. Confidentiality, in the context of this research project, ensured that in no way would the data gathered be connected to the participants. All responses were stored securely and were accessible only to the researcher, supervisor, course leader and external examiners, as outlined in the informational letter to parents/guardians of participants and the board of management of the research site. The only exception to this would have been if I had identified a child protection risk. However, this concern did not arise in the course of the research.

'The essence of anonymity is that information provided by participants should in no way reveal their identity' (Cohen et al., 2000: 61). Anonymity was assured to participants and it was outlined that no individual will be identifiable from the information used in this thesis. No written tasks had names or identifying marks on them.

3.7.5 Principled Sensitivity

Participants and parents/guardians were assured that data will be collected in a sensitive and non-stressful manner. They were informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time, without reason. There was no envisioned harm from engagement with the study. Students were informed of the structure of all lessons and invited to share their feelings on same. The methodologies used were selected to enhance the wellbeing and emotional intelligence of the child.

3.8 Conclusion

This chapter outlined in detail the rationale in selection of research paradigm, self-study action research, defining same with reference to appropriate literature. Literature is also used to outline the tools, qualitative and quantitative, employed throughout this action research project. The use of reflective journal, dialogue, critical friend, surveys and written tasks ensured that the action research project was fulfilled in a way that met my values, making allowance for the voices of the students and others. The timeframe of action research cycles one and two were explored. The analysis and validation of data collected in these cycles were explained, as well as the ethical considerations of the project. The elements in this chapter greatly influenced on the data collected, which are explored in the next chapter, findings.

Chapter Four: Findings

4.1 Introduction

This chapter analyses the data gathered from action research cycle one and two from this self-study project. This study is based upon discovering best practice approaches when teaching the area of wellbeing in the infant classroom. It also takes into consideration the influence of the Covid-19 pandemic, which was ongoing at the time the research took place.

I gathered data from students through questionnaire, discussions and activity sheets. I sourced further data by engaging in reflection-in-action and reflection-on-action. My reflective journal serves as a data source for these forms of data collection. I analysed the data by means of discussion with a critical friend and triangulation, as discussed in chapter three, methodologies. In this chapter, I will detail the identification of themes that came to light after analysing the findings. The findings will be discussed under their designated theme. These identified themes are as follows;

- Lesson Structure
- Emotional Intelligence
- Exploration of Personal Experience
- Reinforcement of Transferrable Skills

Later in the chapter, the process of validating my findings will be outlined, enabling me to make a claim to new knowledge. I will also explore my proposition to share my new knowledge with those working both in my school and in the wider Education sector.

4.2 Data Categorisation

Both action research cycles took place over six-week periods. I briefly analysed the data after each cycle by engaging in discussion with my critical friend and comparing and contrasting the collected data. I also reflected on this process in my reflective journal. Upon the completion of both action research cycles, I undertook a full data analysis. This process commenced with the categorisation of the findings.

I followed the structure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006) to support myself in separating my data into the aforementioned themes (see section 4.1). This entailed familiarising myself with the gathered data. I printed all data, read and highlighted points of significance. I noted some initial codes. These codes were comprised of reemerging topics and key areas that surfaced throughout both action research cycles. After transcribing all of the relevant data into codes, I began to group them into emerging themes. I reviewed each themes and then made some slight changes. I had a total of five themes, lesson structure, emotional intelligence, exploration of personal experience, reinforcing transferrable skills and teacher adaptations. However, upon reflection of this, it was clear that there were a lot of concepts that teacher adaptations shared with other themes, particularly the codes that fell under the theme of lesson structure. In response to this, I chose to merge the teacher adaptation codes with the other four themes. I then finalised the codes and themes, as evident in Table 4.

Code	Theme
Consistency	Lesson Structure
Engagement	
Enthusiasm	
Familiarity	
Identifiable Activities	
Listening	
Methodologies	
Resources	
Response	
Emotional Acceptance	Emotional Intelligence
Outbursts	
Physical Aggression	
Recognition of Emotion	
Reflections	
Responsive Action	
Appropriate Timing	Exploration of Personal Experience
Comfort in Environment	
Communication Skills	
Covid-19	
Current Issues and Difficulties	
Expression	
New Emotions	
Peer Support	
Security	
Themes	
Diagrams / Images / Visuals	Reinforcing Transferrable Skills
Dialogue	
Home-School Link	
Support	

Table 4: Codes and Associated Themes

After analysing the data gathered, the five identified themes became very evident. These themes spoke greatly to the core purpose of the action research study, identifying best practice when teaching the area of wellbeing in the infant classroom. These themes also related to my values as an educator, and also supported identifying times when I may have been encountering a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 2000: 93). For instance, I believe to have encountered a striking living contradiction at the beginning of my research, when I taught wellbeing education to my class in a rigid, to-the-book, matter. This went against my ontological values of teaching to the unique needs of the children, as I began the process

being very aware that I did not think believe that a set programme could address the differing supports needed by my pupils.

I will further explore how my values aligned, or failed to align, with my practice and findings from this self-study action research project throughout the rest of this chapter. The findings will now be explored in further detail, in their appropriate theme.

4.3 Lesson Structure

My research title, 'How can I improve my teaching of Wellbeing in my Senior Infant class?' is very specific to the class level. Before I commenced my action research cycles, I was aware that my Senior Infant class worked best with consistency in the classroom. Wong and Wong (2009: 52) define consistency, in the context of teaching and learning, as 'dependable, reliable and predictable'. I became aware of the benefits of consistency in my infant classroom from the pupils' response to the visual timetable in class, and engagement in dialogue about the plan for each day. For example, they spoke daily about 'Aistear time' being at the end of each day, as well as reminding me after each lesson to move the arrow on the timetable. For this reason, across both cycle one and two, I set a designated day and time for wellbeing education.

It became apparent throughout mid-action research cycle one, the programme-based intervention, that the children had become acquainted with the structure of the wellbeing lessons. The engagement levels of the children increased as they became more familiar with the structure of the wellbeing lessons. They began to elaborate in their contributions to whole-class discussions. The children also spoke to one another, anticipating the song that would be played at the end of the lesson, as they recalled the song from the prior lesson. I discussed this finding with my critical friend, as evident in the following extract.

Katie: *The children are far more vocal and active in the lessons now. Once they see the characters from the programme they really get into the zone.*

Critical Friend: *That's probably because they're more used to it now, they know what the structure is and what to expect.*

Katie: *That's very true, some of them mention that they're looking forward to the song at the end.*

(Reflective Journal, 15 March 2021)

However, this set-structure to each wellbeing lesson in the programme posed difficulty in action research cycle two. Children found it hard to understand that the wellbeing lessons were of a different layout to that of the programme they had engaged in. Child D, in the following dialogue extract, did not recognise that meditation was going to be a new activity, as they assumed that we would commence the wellbeing lesson with a body scan, as per the wellbeing programme. It was then that I realised that, as per my educational values, it would be best practice to be consistent and tell the pupils about the change in wellbeing education, and what they should expect from the new format of lessons.

Katie: *Boys and girls, to start our wellbeing lesson today we are going to do some meditation.*

Child C: *What about the body scan?*

Child D: *Close your eyes and sit straight, put your hands on your belly.*

(Reflective Journal, 20 May 2021)

Through the lens of a self-study practitioner, action research cycle two allowed me to acknowledge and make use of the elements of the wellbeing programme that worked well with my class, and also enabled me to explore new methodologies and approaches in wellbeing education. I challenged myself to identify methodologies that would help to structure worthwhile, successful wellbeing lessons, unique to my class.

Mindfulness was a well-received opening activity in the teacher-made wellbeing lessons that were used in action research cycle two. This activity gave students opportunity to reflect and relax. Mindfulness was also employed throughout the school day, though was not rigidly part of the class timetable. It was useful as a transition tool, particularly if the class group needed to calm down after a lively lesson. Black and Fernando (2014) noted the benefits that teachers recognised after using mindfulness techniques with their students, 'improvements in classroom behavior (e.g., self-control, engagement, empathy) after only 5 weeks of a mindfulness intervention administered thrice weekly for 15 min' (Black and Fernando, 2014 cited in Brock and Curby, 2016: 223). Students in my class acknowledged feeling 'relaxed' and 'calm' after mindfulness sessions.

Picture books were often used to support the exploration of emotions. The level of engagement in this approach varied greatly. The length of the story often impacted on the responses given by the pupils, as it was clear that if the story was too long, the children struggled to concentrate. It was also noted that the children engaged better with stories that were read aloud by the teacher, as opposed to videos of read-alouds. Asking questions and discussing pictures in the books supported children in focusing on the story and learnings from same. However, the use of picture books, though effective at times, made the structure of the wellbeing education lesson strikingly similar to that of the ethics and religious Goodness Me, Goodness You lessons that we had been covering in class (Education and

Training Board & National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2018). The cross-curricular links helped to reinforce the learnings from wellbeing lessons.

The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework credits the arts in their power to 'engage, inspire and enrich all children' (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020: 13). In action research cycle two, drama became an area in which children could explore emotions in a fun way, enabling them to collaborate and discuss their reactions to emotion-based scenarios. It also contributed to the children's emotional intelligence, another arising theme in the findings from this research. The children actively responded to one another's emotions as well as portraying their own through facial expression and voice. I wrote about the engagement of the children in my reflective journal.

> It's very interesting to watch – the children who were less confident in whole-class discussion are participating really well in the drama scenarios. They aren't just using facial emotions, they are speaking, though some have to be prompted, but that is to be expected. Asking what they are thinking is a great one to get them talking.
> (Reflective Journal, 25 May 2021)

Adding a technological element to the teacher-led lessons, feeding back to the other Senior Infant class via video call, brought about a sense of excitement and enthusiasm. It gave a goal to the children as they focused well throughout the lesson to be able to share their thoughts and responses with the children next-door. The students put thought into their written responses and related same back to personal experiences, where possible, in the hopes of being able to discuss this with their peers.

After engaging in action research cycle two, creating unique lessons and trialing varying methodologies, I decided to follow my value of student voice and ask the children, through questionnaire, which methodology was their favourite. As can be seen in figure 3, the children most enjoyed the video call element of the wellbeing lessons. This was evident from

their enthusiasm and excitement when engaging in the video calls, as well as their focus and ability to stay on-task.

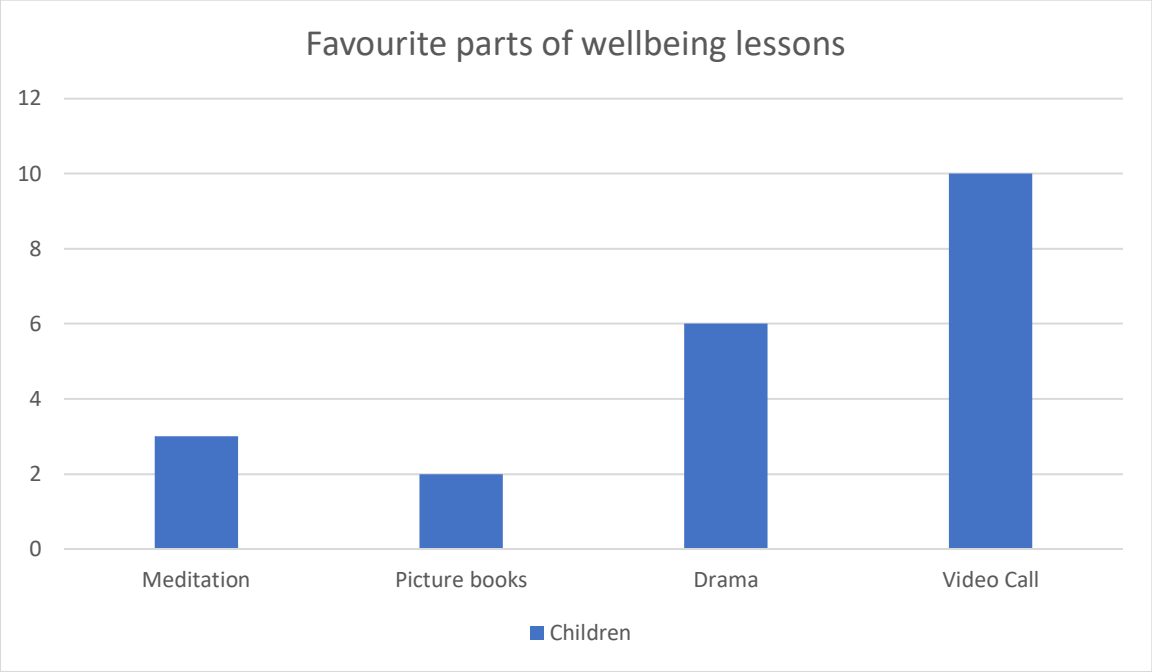

Figure 3: Results from questionnaire, favourite parts of wellbeing lessons (based on action research cycle two)

4.4 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence is an important element in wellbeing education. Forman describes emotional intelligence as 'the concept of understanding and labelling emotions' (Forman, 2021: 11). It was evident in my Senior Infant classroom that all pupils had varying levels of emotional intelligence. I gathered this information by observing their responses to emotional encounters and asking them to reflect upon same. The following dialogue extract demonstrates one of several dialogues based on identifying encountered emotions, where the child succeeded in identifying the emotion that caused their action.

Katie:	*Why did you scream and throw your pencil Child A?*
Child A:	*Because I didn't get a go at the game.*
Katie:	*How did you feel when you didn't get a turn?*
Child A:	*I don't know.*
Katie:	*Can you point to the feeling?*
Child A:	*(points to red zone of regulation)*
Katie:	*What feeling did you have from the red zone?*
Child A:	*Anger.*

(Reflective Journal, 31 March 2021)

On another occasion, during a wellbeing lesson in action research cycle one, children were asked to identify how they were feeling. In response, Child A circled the word 'anger' and drew an angry face, identifying again, how they felt at that time (see figure 4). This response demonstrated their growth in ability to identify their emotion at the time, as opposed to reflecting upon the emotion after action.

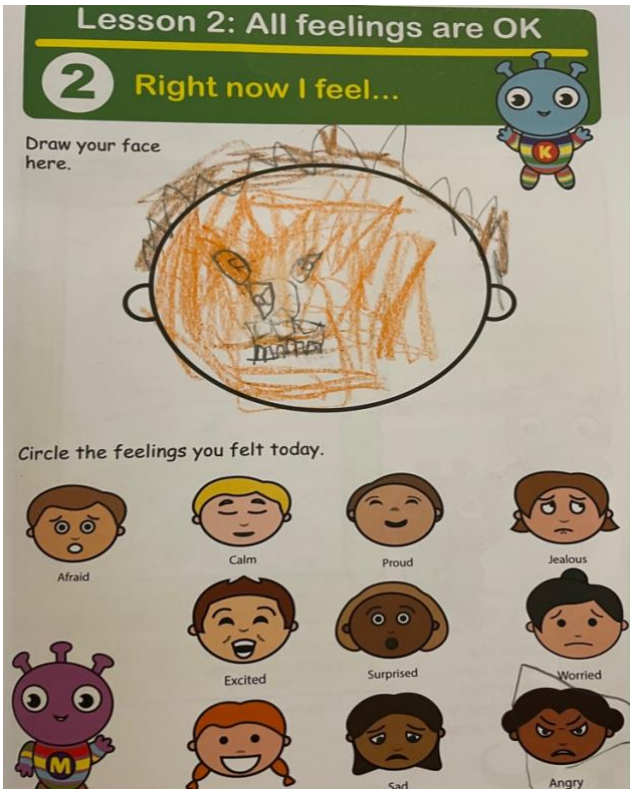

Figure 4: Child A's response to 'Right now I feel…' task

In contrast, the below dialogue outlines the dialogue between teacher and child, where the child struggles to verbally identify the emotion that they endured. However, they do discreetly identify their emotion by taking action and walking to the cool-down corner. The cool-down corner is a designated quiet corner with a chair, books and fidget toys.

Katie:	*Why did you take the play-doh from Child Y?*
Child B:	*I don't know.*
Katie:	*Do you want to point to the zone that you were in?*
Child B:	*(shouts) No.*
Katie:	*Were you in the blue zone, feeling a little sad, maybe?*
Child B:	*(shouts) No.*
Katie:	*Do you think that you need to go to the cool-down corner for a little while?*
Child B	*(no verbal response, walks to cool-down corner)*

(Reflective Journal, 13 April 2021)

Acceptance of all emotions was a challenge at the beginning of this action research project. When engaged in class discussion, I explored this area, as evident below.

Katie:	*Are all feelings ok?*
Child D:	*Yes!*
Child E:	*No! It's not ok to be angry.*
Katie:	*Does everybody think it's not ok to be angry?*
Child F:	*It's bad to be angry.*
Katie:	*Well, what if I told you that all feelings are ok, and that it is ok to feel angry, would you believe me?*
Child F:	*No, it's bad to be angry.*
Katie:	*It's ok to be angry, but it is never ok to hurt somebody because you are angry.*

(Reflective Journal, 29 March 2021)

This learning, that all feelings are ok, was reinforced by exploration of story through characters Mo and Ko, discussion, and enhanced by the use of music. The song associated with this lesson was titled 'The Feelings Song' and explored an array of feelings (Miss Molly, 2018). The lyrics note that one may laugh and cry in the same day, as feelings come and go. This particular song was noticeably effective as it was often recited by the children during their lunch times and on yard. After this lesson, I began to ask children how they were feeling, and if it was ok to have that feeling. Most children began to accept all emotions as being alright, and recognised that feelings were temporary. They began to address with one another that it was not a bad thing to encounter a range of emotions.

The use of characters, namely 'Mo' and 'Ko' in action research cycle one grasped the attention of the children (Forman, 2021). They were excited to hear of their adventures and the challenges that would be posed to the class. The characters also supported the emotional intelligence of the child. The students demonstrated greater empathy and understanding of emotion when discussing circumstances related to Mo and Ko, than when discussing the emotions in relation to the zones of regulation in teacher-led lessons (Kuypers, 2021). However, it is important that the child learns to relate their emotional intelligence to their

own lives. For this reason, I encouraged greatly the exploration of personal experience, which is detailed in the next section.

4.5 Exploration of Personal Experience

While it was convenient to follow a set-course of wellbeing lessons when completing a wellbeing programme in action research cycle one, sticking rigidly to the plan was not always what the class needed at the time. The topics covered within the course in action research cycle one did not always align with happenings in the Senior Infant classroom, or the wider world. For instance, the programme could not account for the impact of Covid-19 on the children in my classroom.

Selecting the topics to be covered in action research cycle two was a difficult task. It was hard to choose what specific areas to prioritise, and the plans often changed. If I felt a topic wasn't as well-received and understood as I would have liked, I either created another lesson on it, or revised the topic at the start of the next wellbeing lesson. The needs of the class were constantly changing, too. Challenges posed to the children in my class included bereavement, emotional regulation, and lack of sleep. These issues impacted greatly upon their wellbeing. I felt that I was constantly editing both my lesson plans and my fortnightly plans to facilitate wellbeing lessons that would be as tailored to my class as possible.

However, this changed when I began to share the wellbeing lessons with the other Senior Infant teacher in my school (my co-teacher). She believed that our class had similar emotional and wellbeing challenges and reckoned that it would be of benefit to her students to engage in the lessons that I was making. As a result of this, I prepared my wellbeing lessons a week in advance, so that my co-teacher would have an opportunity to review the lesson before teaching. When planning, I also found it worthwhile to link my wellbeing lessons to other curricular areas, as evident in Figure 5, to reinforce learnings and look at the

topic from other points of view. While not every child may be influenced to speak of their personal experience in the wellbeing lesson, they may do so in another curricular lesson linked to that same area.

Figure 5: Sample of thematic curricular planning around a chosen concept, gratitude, covered in teacher-led wellbeing education.

The teacher-student relationship was pivotal in enabling children to explore their personal experiences with wellbeing and their perspectives on same. As the class teacher, I learned a lot about these children by listening to their responses and contributions throughout wellbeing lessons. Brock and Curby (2016) support the importance of the teacher-student relationship in their studies. When referring to the findings of Pianta, La Paro, et al. (2008), they state that the emotional support that the teacher provides to their class has a rippling effect upon 'providing a positive climate, minimizing negative interactions, sensitively responding to children's social and academic needs, and acknowledging children's perspectives' (Pianta, La Paro, et al., 2008 cited in Brock and Curby, 2016: 211).

Listening to the children greatly supported the selection of areas to explore in action research cycle two. Discussing anger in action research cycle one resulted in children

recalling events that caused other emotions, such as sadness and grief. It was a lesson that highlighted the importance of allowing the child to express their thoughts and emotions with regards to significant personal experiences that they have endured. For instance, Child G stated in the anger lesson, '*I was angry when my Mammy died*'. This was a statement that posed difficulty for peers to understand and respond to. This was also an area that I had not anticipated exploring in this lesson. It was evident that the class needed to learn about grief to understand how this child may be feeling. The child also needed an opportunity to speak about her loss, and this flagged the importance of tailoring lessons to suit the individual class. I ensured that I spoke to this child privately about her grief and anger towards the loss of her mother, but also added it to my plans for exploring wellbeing through practitioner-led lessons.

To address the area of loss and grief, I planned a lesson that was similar in structure to the prior teacher-made wellbeing lesson. I did this as I felt it best for the children to follow a structure that they were familiar with when exploring such a sensitive topic, particularly when one of these children had encountered a significant loss in their life. The core of this lesson was exploring the picture book 'What's the Matter, Marlo?' written by Andrew Arnold (2021). This picture book demonstrates empathy, anger, grief, sadness and loss. It also outlines the role of friends and how they can support one another at the time of loss, particularly when, like Child G, the child experiences a range of emotions other than sadness 'I realised that Marlo wasn't just mad, he was sad, too' (Arnold, 2021: 29).

In whole-class discussion, children spoke of when they encountered loss in their lives, such as the loss of toys and pets, while some related the story and topic of loss back to the title 'Where are you, Blue Kangaroo?' as explored in a prior teacher-made Goodness Me, Goodness You lesson. This link demonstrated the development of emotional intelligence, as referred to in the last section.

An interesting observance that prevailed in written tasks in response to wellbeing lessons was that typically, students responded with drawings of recollections of personal experiences when they were exploring an emotion that they had encountered, as opposed to illegible images, if they did not fully understand the concept, or had not felt that emotion. Examples of this are evident in figures 6 and 7. Child H used a clear drawing to demonstrate a time when they were sad. However, when asked to draw a time that they encountered pride, Child H did not draw a clear image.

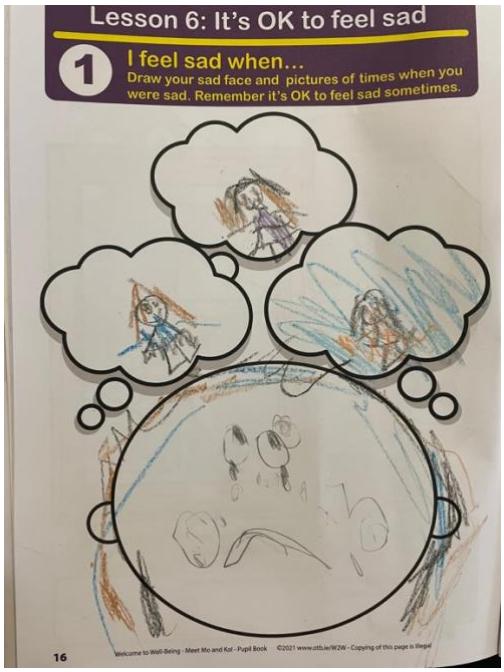

Figure 6: Clear drawing to demonstrate when Child H encountered the emotion of sadness

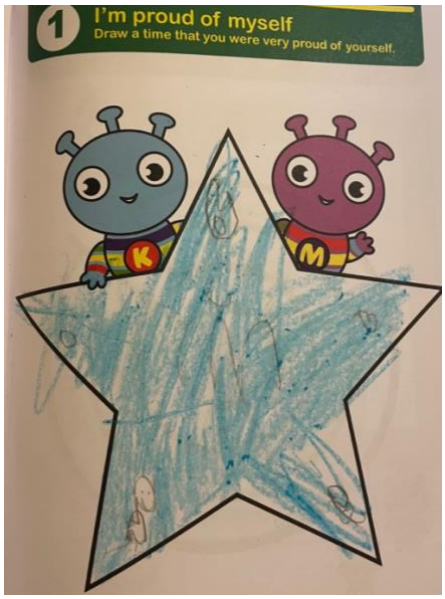

Figure 7: Unclear drawing to demonstrate when Child J encountered pride

4.6 Reinforcement of Transferrable Skills

The draft framework for the new primary school curriculum notes the importance of developing resilience (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020). It notes that at the core of fostering the wellbeing of the child, is their 'ability to be as physically, socially, emotionally and spiritually healthy as they can be', including the development of coping skills (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020: 8).

Researching best practice when teaching wellbeing education in the infant classroom entailed trialing skill development tools and encouraging self-efficacy. Self-efficacy is a key concept in developing wellbeing. It may be defined as 'the belief a person has in their ability to master their environment and deal with challenges' (Forman, 2021: 11).

The 'Zones of Regulation' were employed to support the child in their emotional intelligence (Kuypers, 2021). The visual element of the zones of regulation, four base colours, meant that children could indicate without words what type of emotion they were encountering (Appendix I). This supported children if they became overwhelmed by their feelings and could not express what they were experiencing. For instance, Child L began to cry and

scream to an extent that was beyond their normal expression of emotion. They walked with me to the display of the zones of regulation. If the child had not pointed to the zone, I would have assumed that they were in the red zone, specifically, angry. However, this child pointed to the blue zone. Again, I assumed wrongly in thinking that the child was feeling sad. This shows that there are flaws in the use of the zones of regulation. It later surfaced that the child was extremely tired, another blue zone emotion.

The wellbeing programme employed in action research cycle one brought the children through another range of skills to support them in their wellbeing journey. Three of the most effective skills included the Mindful Body Scan, Slide Breathing and 3,2,1… Listen.
Slide breathing was a skill that my class responded well to. It was typically used when they were encountering overwhelming emotions and needed support to calm down. It is a simple breathing technique that enables the child to focus on taking control of their body. I reflected on the use of slide breathing in an extract from my reflective journal below.

> Child A had an emotional outburst this morning, as he wanted to go with the SNA and a peer to the sensory room (in the special education class). He isn't allowed to go there because of the current Covid restrictions, and because he does not have a diagnosis on the autism spectrum. He screamed and pushed his chair to the ground. I tried to guide him to the display of the zones of regulations that we had covered earlier this week, but he did not want to move. He was screaming loudly. I held up the display of the Mo and Ko slide breathing and instructed him on this breathing technique. He responded right away by breathing deeply and it helped to calm him down. Afterwards he walked with me and pointed to the red zone of regulation. I asked him if he was feeling angry, to which he said yes.
> (Reflective Journal, 7 April 2021)

3, 2, 1… Listen is a technique that enables the child to relax, and again, calm down, in a stressful situation. It focusses on the senses, asking children to think about three things that they can see, two things they can touch, and one thing they can hear. It then asks the child to close their eyes and listen to their breathing. This particular method was mentioned to me by a parent of Child H, as they often got upset at home if they did not win the game on their

console. As the child was completing wellbeing homework each week, the parent was familiar with the method and used it to support them in calming their child down. As a practitioner I wondered if there were too many steps in this method, and discussed same with my critical friend, as per the below dialogue extract.

Katie: *The 3, 2, 1… Listen skill seems like a lot. We covered it today. The kids couldn't remember what 3, 2, or 1 stood for.*
Critical Friend: *It's their senses though. If you got them to point to their eyes, fingers and ears, that might help.*
Katie: *That would probably help a lot, it's much easier when there's an action.*
Critical Friend: *Just practice it a bit more in class, they'll remember it eventually.*
(Reflective Journal, 20 April 2021)

4.7 Conclusion

The findings from this self-study action research project demonstrate the importance of the teacher-student relationship in the wellbeing education of primary school-going children. The most significant data acquired in the study arose from in-class dialogue, where students shared their thoughts and experiences. This supported me, in action research cycle two, in responding to the needs of the children by selecting topics that were of significance to the students.

Creating lessons that will be interactive, relatable and suitable for the class has been beneficial to me as a practitioner. I have learned to be resourceful and have discovered new sources for support materials that I may not have otherwise encountered. However, it is a very time-costly undertaking. I'm not sure if my colleagues would consider this task worthwhile, or if they would consider their time better used elsewhere. I don't think it is feasible to expect other practitioners to do this every time they teach the area of Wellbeing. (Reflective Journal, 22 June 2021)

This action research project enabled me to teach wellbeing education in line with my ontological values. At the beginning of action research cycle two, however, it seemed that I

had too much freedom in creating unique lessons for my pupils. I tried to ensure that every element of the lesson both matched my values and the needs of the students, which resulted in a significant amount of time editing the lessons. Upon reflection of this, I realise the value of using programmes as a base for wellbeing education. This ensures that the resources are suited to the class level of the pupils, but the teacher can still make slight adjustments, to align with their values and prioritise certain elements of the lesson.

While I highlight certain methodologies and practices, it is to be noted that they were greatly influenced by my values. This study supported me in recognising how greatly I value student voice and supporting all learners, though there were times that my practice did not demonstrate this. By engaging in this research project and becoming a reflective practitioner, I have seen changes in my actions and approaches, becoming increasingly open to changing my habitual practice.

Chapter Five: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This self-study action research project helped me, as a teacher of a Senior Infant class, to identify how best to teach wellbeing education. The process of developing my knowledge involved identifying my values and reflecting upon my practice to identify if I was living to my values. These values and reflections led to the choice of paradigm and methodologies employed throughout the study. The selected paradigm, self-study action research, helped me to evolve as an action researcher. This made me increasingly aware of my practice across all curricular areas, not just in wellbeing education. It made me conscious of being informed on current policies and curious about international practices in the setting of the primary school. I have emerged from this self-study action research project with lifelong skillsets in the areas of self-study, action research, reviewing of literature and engagement with public critique. I have become increasingly confident in involving others in my reflective processes and see the value in sharing my findings with both my colleagues and the wider educational sector.

This chapter will provide an overview of my research and findings, pinpointing significant points to consider. It will then outline my claim to knowledge. The significance of this research and the future directions to my practice, my workplace and the wider educational sector will be discussed. The limitations of this study will also be reviewed. Finally, I conclude by sharing my claim to new knowledge.

5.2 Overview of Research

This learning journey commenced by researching the concept of values and identifying mine as a practitioner. I realised my strong ontological values and how I appreciate the student voice and teacher-student relationship. The identification of these values assisted in the selection of a research paradigm. I compared and contrasted the positivist, interpretive and

action research approaches, finding that action research aligned best with my values. This paradigm allowed me to make appropriate changes in my practice based upon my reflections and respond appropriately to my findings. I engaged with literature on the topics of values, self-study action research and wellbeing. I found that wellbeing was a concept that was hard to define as it has an elusive dimension. In response to this, I had to alter my research style and focus on the topic from an educator's point of view, studying the area with primary schools in mind. I also read about methodologies such as mindfulness and integration in relation to wellbeing education. I took time to consider the similarities and differences in the approaches to wellbeing education across Ireland, Scotland and Australia. The knowledge that I acquired from this literature review informed my action research cycles.

Action research cycle one commenced in March 2021, after acquiring informed consent from Maynooth University, the board of management in my setting, the parents and guardians of participants and the participants themselves. It was intended for this action research cycle to commence in February 2021, however, due to the coronavirus pandemic, schools were closed at this time and all teaching and learning took place online.
After the initial six-week cycle, a programme-based intervention, I took one week to analyse briefly the findings, and discuss them with my critical friend. I used this data to inform the next six-week cycle, action research cycle two, an intervention based on practitioner-made lessons. At the end of action research cycle two, I again analysed briefly my findings, engaged in dialogue with my critical friend. In June 2021, I shared my research and data with my college peers by means of online presentation. This was a reaffirming activity as my peers showed interest and asked questions about the intervention that I had researched and implemented in my classroom.

Upon completion of both action research cycles, I gathered my data and categorised it into codes, then themes, by using the structure outlined by Braun and Clarke (2006). Initially, I had five themes; lesson structure, emotional intelligence, exploration of personal experience, reinforcing transferrable skills and teacher adaptations. However, I felt that the codes evident in the theme of teacher adaptations were best placed amongst the other four themes, to avoid repetition. The final four themes included lesson structure, emotional intelligence, exploration of personal experience and reinforcing transferrable skills. The findings are discussed in the next section, overview of findings.

5.3 Overview of Findings

The project entailed a cyclical process, whereby action research cycle one, a six-week cycle, influenced greatly the actions employed in action research cycle two. The influence of action research cycle one on action research cycle two is demonstrated in figure 8.

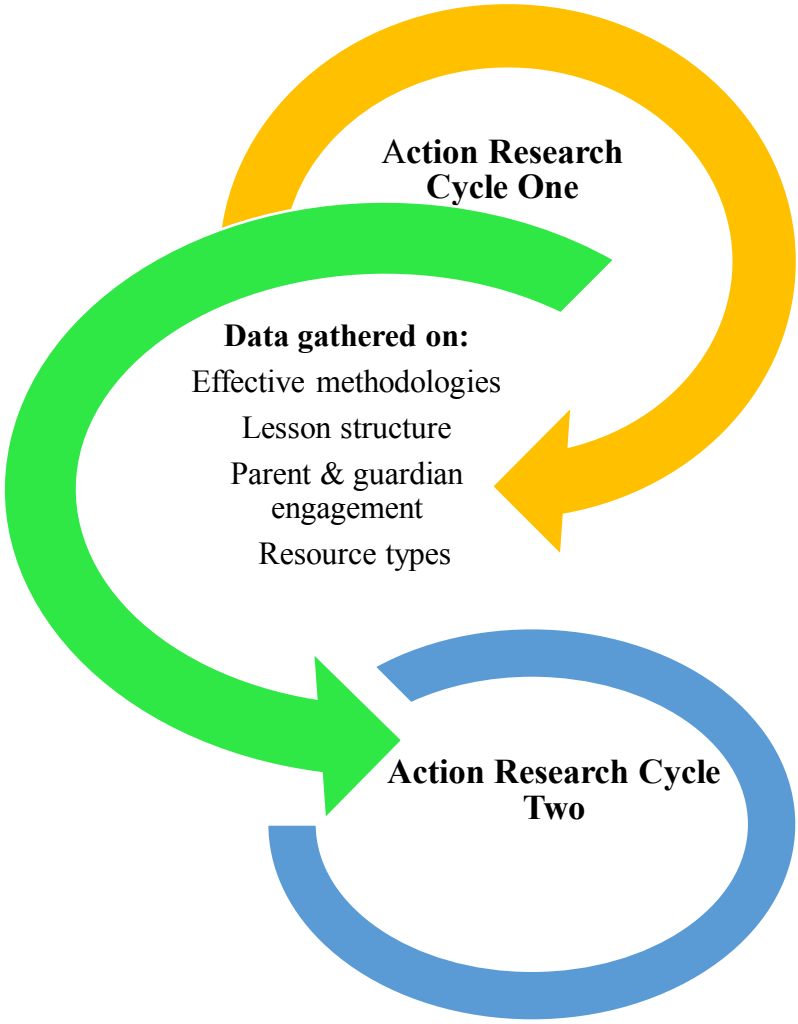

Figure 8: The influence action research cycle one had on action research cycle two

Upon completion of the full intervention, I analysed my data across four different themes, meaning that I gained new knowledge in each of the specific areas. I will now outline the learnings I gathered from each area.

5.3.1 Lesson Structure

The study investigated the impact of using programme-based and teacher-led wellbeing lessons in my Senior Infant classroom. It was evident from the engagement levels of the children that they respond best to lessons that follow a similar schedule. I noted that the more familiar the structure of the lesson was, the more vocal that the children were. This became evident when transitioning from action research cycle one to action research cycle two, as the format of the lessons altered, and the children became less responsive to tasks and activities. It is important to note however, that not all wellbeing lessons can be structured similarly, as the topic and the selected methodologies can greatly influence the plan and flow of the session.

Using an array of methodologies to suit the theme of the lesson was beneficial. I explored methodologies such as mindfulness, read-alouds and sing-along songs. However, the most gripping approach was the use of video calling to the other Senior Infant class. Students were extremely attentive during wellbeing lessons that had this element, as they were eager to share their thoughts and views with friends from the other class. This vocalisation supported their emotional intelligence, which is explored in the next section.

5.3.2 Emotional Intelligence

Emotional intelligence entails understanding emotions and being able to label them appropriately. This was an issue in my class before the intervention took place, as emotional outbursts were plentiful, whilst speaking of emotions was scarce. Using simple tasks such as circling emotions in an activity sheet allowed me, as practitioner, to observe the knowledge that the children had in identifying emotions. It was difficult to support the child in using language to express large emotions both throughout and after the intervention. I turned to the Zones of Regulation to support the students as they were able to point to the emotional zone

that they were feeling (Kuypers, 2021). This did not support full understanding of the child's exact feelings in that given moment, however, as there are four emotions under each zone of emotion. I am hopeful that with more exposure and experience with wellbeing education and development of emotional intelligence, that these pupils will become increasingly confident in voicing their emotions when encountering an outburst.

5.3.3 Exploration of Personal Experience

As noted in prior sections, children vocalised their views most when they were fully engaged in wellbeing lessons. When the children shared their personal experiences in the area of wellbeing and emotions, it supported me, as teacher and researcher to understand their emotional intelligence and the support that they required. Responding to story read-alouds and video conferences were prime opportunities for children to consider the emotions that covered in the lesson, and to respond with personal experiences, if they had encountered this. However, at times, students shared personal events that were not fitting for the whole class to hear at this time. This highlighted to me the sensitivity that comes with wellbeing education and made me realise how vital teacher education in this area is.

5.3.4 Reinforcement of Transferrable Skills

Emotional intelligence development meant that children became more aware of their emotions and their responses to same. Reflection was a pivotal skill that children developed throughout the intervention, as they became increasingly conscious of how they reacted to emotions. It was interesting to observe children grasp coping skills at varying paces, which reminded me that as a practitioner, I must be patient, as students have extremely differing wellbeing experiences.

5.4 Significance of the Research and Future Directions

5.4.1 Workplace

Collaborative practice is of significant benefit to all practitioners involved, as all participants gain new insight and perspectives from one another. This was evident in my collaboration with the other Senior Infant teacher in my setting. The findings from my research project may be of value to my workplace and colleagues as it is a developing school setting. At present, we do not have policy or guidance on the area of wellbeing. Though this action research project is focused on the infant classroom, there are elements that could be adjusted to suit any class level. The literature review includes a lot of guidance on the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework and Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020; Department of Education and Skills, 2019).

5.4.2 Wider Educational Fields

I believe my findings on best practice will be of use to those in the wider education sector too, as it outlines methodologies and skill developments that can be tailored to suit their individual learners. It is important to note that the themes explored in action research cycle two may not be of value to other practitioners, as it was tailored to meet the needs of the children in my class. This study is also limited as it is based in an infant classroom only and may not be as adaptable to more senior classes as other studies may be.

5.4.3 Teacher Education

Introducing wellbeing education to the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework is a most welcome venture (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2020). From my experience, wellbeing education is essential to the children in primary school, particularly

after experiencing a global pandemic. Wellbeing education becoming a curricular area will ensure that all children have the opportunity to develop their emotional intelligence. It will also support the children in progressing their skills and knowledge in this area from year to year.

The sensitivity that came to light throughout this intervention was striking and has made me passionate about teacher education in the area of wellbeing. The unpredictable conversations that can arise throughout these lessons need to be dealt with in a professional and considerate manner, which requires the teacher to be prepared to respond to same.

Unlike other curricular areas, there is no scale to notate what level of wellbeing a child is at. As explored in the literature review, wellbeing is a flexible term. It is experienced by every individual in a different way, meaning children learn the skills associated with it at different paces. This is evident in my findings, as bereavement and the impact of isolation influenced some children in my class more than others.

It is noteworthy that wellbeing education can integrate well amongst many other subject areas, as it involves both mental and physical health. Providing education to teachers on this area and encouraging cross-curricular integration can enhance greatly the wellbeing experience that the children receive in schools. For instance, walking and cycling are valuable and worthwhile wellbeing activities that students may enjoy.

To respond to the sensitivities and to ensure that all needs are catered for in preparation for wellbeing education as a curricular area, in-service is important for all teachers to undertake. This will ensure consistency and quality in the implication of wellbeing lessons. I have taken it upon myself to share my findings with my colleagues. However, my experience is limited to the time and students that I completed the intervention with. Wellbeing education is a diverse area of study and it is important that there are courses made available to student teachers and practicing teachers alike.

5.5 Limitations of the Research

5.5.1 Covid-19 Pandemic

Due to the Covid-19 Pandemic, schools were delayed in re-opening after the winter break. This limited the amount of time remaining in the academic year that could be used for action research cycles. I responded to this by choosing to make my action research cycles last six-weeks each. However, if the school closures had not occurred, it would have been preferable to make each cycle ten weeks long, allowing for completion of the wellbeing programme used in action research cycle one.

5.5.2 Time Constraints

As outlined in chapter two, literature review, wellbeing at present is only evident in the S.P.H.E. curriculum for third class and above (Government of Ireland, 1999a). It was difficult to place wellbeing education into the class timetable, especially at times that the whole school were completing S.P.H.E. courses such as Stay Safe. Another area of consideration was the length of the infant day. As my students were Senior Infants, they were in school for 4 hours and 40 minutes per day. Integrating wellbeing into the short school day every week, with many being withdrawn for additional support, posed a challenge, particularly at times of testing literacy and numeracy.

5.6 Dissemination of the Research

5.6.1 Dissemination of the research in the workplace

I intend on sharing my self-study action research project with my colleagues upon return to school in the new academic year. It is my vision to establish a wellbeing committee, whereby as a staff, we can prepare our school Wellbeing Promotion Process in advance of 2023 (Department of Education and Skills, 2019). I am also using my learnings to support the

development of a Care Team in my school, which will support my colleagues in responding to wellbeing needs of pupils.

5.6.2 Dissemination of the research in the wider educational sector

Having shared my research action project and findings with my college peers by means of online presentation, I am confident in sharing my research with the wider educational sector. I hope to compose an article on my research and submit it to the Irish National Teachers' Organisation (INTO) magazine, InTouch, for publication. In time, I hope to use my experience from this study to support education centres in preparing in-service training for practicing teachers.

5.7 My Claim to Knowledge

After analysing my findings from both action research cycles, I came to my claim to knowledge. I noticed both benefits and downfalls to programme-based wellbeing education and teacher-led wellbeing education. These are outlined in Table 5.

Programme-based wellbeing education		**Teacher-led wellbeing education**	
Benefits	Downfalls	Benefits	Downfalls
• Characters bring lessons to life • Continuity from year to year • Ensure consistent standard is achieved	• Not unique to the class • Prescribed schedule • Response activities are pre-set in book	• Active lessons • Collaborative with other classes • Allows for revisiting of lessons • Allows for adjustment to fit into thematic planning	• Teacher knowledge on wellbeing may vary • Time consuming to plan • May vary in quality of lessons and resources, depending on practitioner

Table 5: The Benefits and Downfalls of Programme-Based Wellbeing Education and Teacher-Led Wellbeing Education

It is from the action of comparing and contrasting the data evident in Table 5 that I came to the realisation that best practice for me, in my setting, in the area of wellbeing education entails the use of programmes as a base to the education. However, to ensure this practice links to my values, it is pivotal that elements of teacher adaptations are evident in the implementation of the programme. In doing so, this adheres to my ontological values of meeting the needs of the children in my class.

The study highlighted the benefits of engaging in dialogue with critical friends and colleagues to acquire differing perspectives to differing circumstances. In addition, I intend on engaging in reflection-in-action, reflection-on-action and meta-reflection throughout the rest of my career, to avoid experiencing a 'living contradiction', as I did in September 2020 (Whitehead, 2000: 93). I have also gained confidence in my ability to adapt to the ever-changing elements of the classroom. In the instance of school closure and online learning, like that of the Covid-19 school closures, I hope to use wellbeing education as a way of strengthening the teacher-student relationship and support my pupils.

The learnings that I have gained from this venture have greatly impacted my identity as a teacher. This journey has aided me in abiding by my core ontological values and encouraged me to act upon them. The knowledge that I have gained will not only influence my practice in the area of wellbeing, as I now realise that teacher adaptations to programmes can be beneficial across the curriculum. I intend on working as a flexible practitioner, less bound to plans and manuals as I was at the commencement of this self-study action research project. I am passionate about wellbeing education and look forward to it becoming a curricular area. I hope to use my experience to support other teachers in implementing wellbeing education that suits their unique classes, reminding them that programmes can, and should be, tailored and adjusted to enhance the learning experience of the child.

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List of Appendices

Appendix A: Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

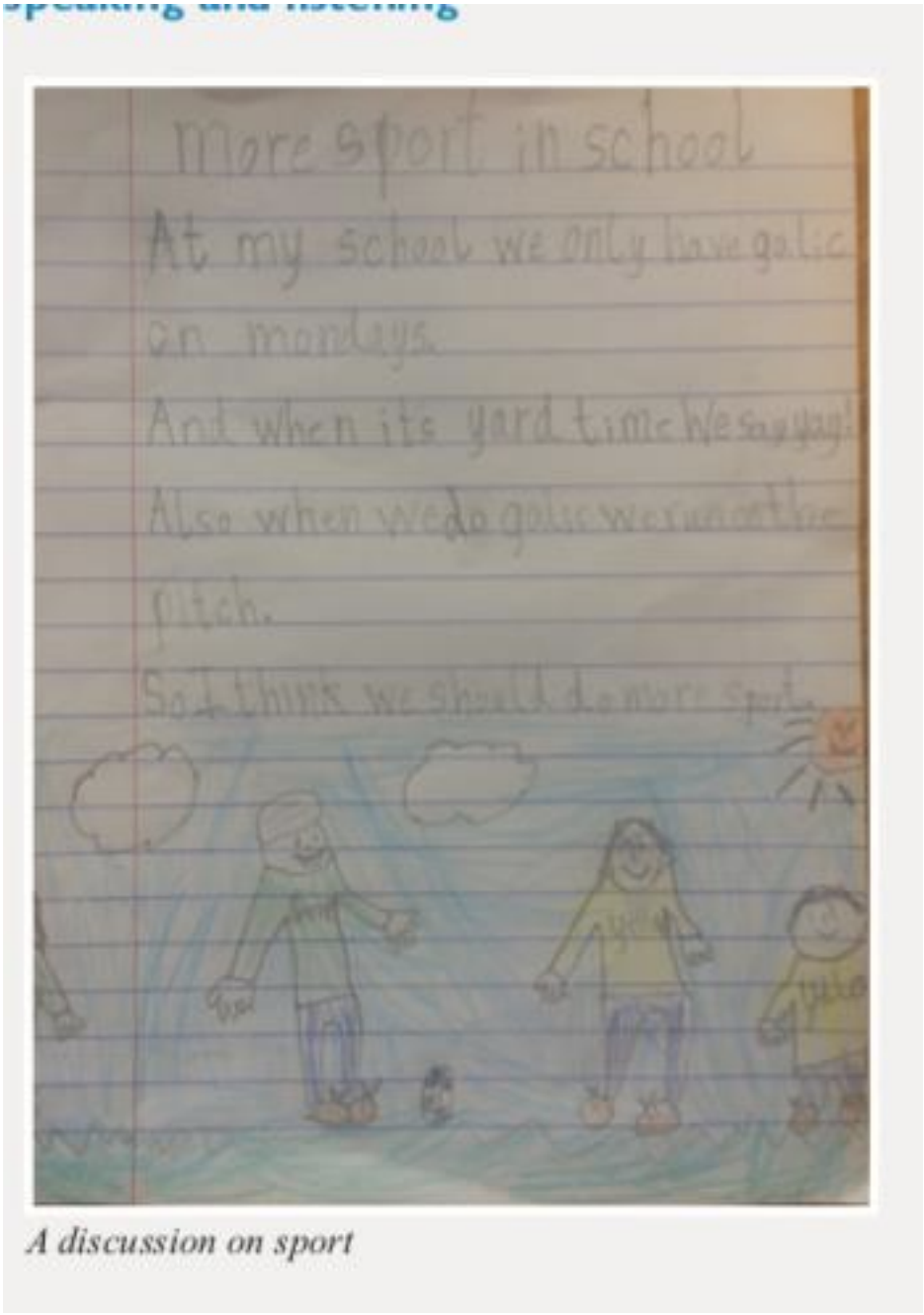
(McLeod, 2020)

Appendix B: Wellbeing documents produced by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) and the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA)

List of wellbeing documents made by non-healthcare sectors:

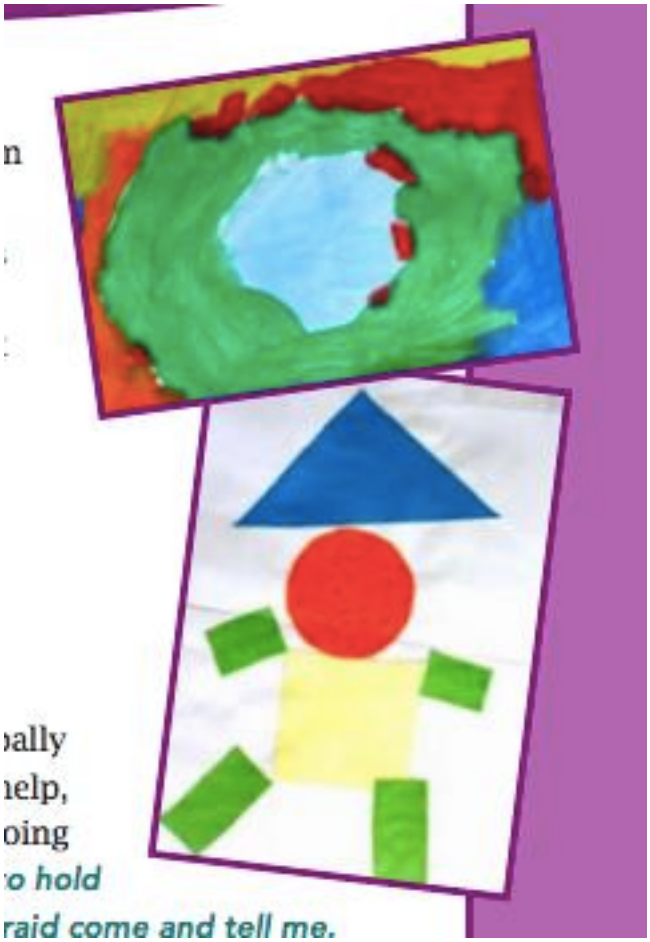
- Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Department of Education and Skills, 2019)
- Best practice guidance for primary schools in the use of programmes and/or external facilitators in promoting wellbeing consistent with the Department of Education and Skills' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Department of Education and Skills, 2018)

Appendix C: Samples of Children's Writing in 'Support Material for Teachers: Writing', Supplementary Document to the New Primary Language Curriculum (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2018: 2)



A discussion on sport

Appendix D: Samples of young children's work in Aistear, as evident throughout the Well-being document



(National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, 2009: 21)

Appendix E: Pictorial survey used in study

My favourite part of Wellbeing lessons

Put a tick ✓ beside your favourite part of wellbeing lessons

Meditation ☐

Picture books ☐

Drama ☐

Video Call ☐

Appendix F: Letter seeking ethical permission from Board of Management of research setting

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

29/1/21

Dear Members of the Board of Management,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing an action research project. The focus of my research is based on my teaching of wellbeing and how I can improve this using different teaching methodologies to make wellbeing a comfortable and approachable topic for the children.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom and online by using different teaching methodologies. The first will be exploring wellbeing through the medium of characters and stories, using Fiona Forman's programme 'Welcome to Well-Being'. Outside the Box publishers have kindly offered to supply the children's resource books, teacher manual and any additional resources free of charge to facilitate this study. Other methodologies may include dialogue regarding feelings and emotions, and mindfulness.

The data will be collected using observations, a daily teacher journal, surveys and the pupils reflections. The children will be asked their opinions on how different activities, such as mindfulness or stories, make them feel. Simple, picture-based surveys may also be used.

The children's names and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. Parents/guardians will be asked for consent via Aladdin to allow their child to participate in the research process and parents/guardians will be able to withdraw their consent for their child's participation at any stage. Children will also be asked for their consent to participate in this research and they too will be allowed to withdraw from the research process at any stage should they wish to do so.

All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. Data collected will be adequate, relevant and not excessive. Data will be stored securely, using measure such as secure computer networks; ensuring that data is stored on secure premises; the use of password protection and data encryption; avoiding portable data storage devices such as laptops and USB sticks. The college 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 to give me permission to conduct this research in the school. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at katie.quirke.2021@mumail.ie or by phone, (087) 7868037.

Warmest Regards,

Katie Quirke

Appendix G: Plain language letters and permission forms issued to the parents and guardians

Plain language form

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 wellbeing, and how best to implement it in the infant classroom.
In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by discussing wellbeing, feelings and engaging in activities linked to wellbeing, such as mindfulness.
The data will be collected using observations, a daily teacher journal, surveys and the pupils reflections. The children will be asked their opinions on how different activities, such as mindfulness or stories, make them feel. Simple, picture-based surveys may also be used in class.
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. Physical data will be stored in a data archive. All data that is stored digitally will be encrypted and files will be password protected.
For the purpose of this research, data gathered will be accessible only to the researcher, research supervisor, course leader and an external examiner. The guidelines of Maynooth University will be followed throughout the course of this research.
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 katie.quirke.2021@mumail.ie
Yours faithfully,

……...
KATIE QUIRKE

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 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 and questionnaires. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

What are the research questions?

- How can I develop my understanding of wellbeing as a primary school teacher?
- How can I integrate wellbeing across the curriculum to enhance my delivery of wellbeing?
- How can I ensure that I am engaging in practice that is meaningful and suited to my values?

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observation, Reflective Journal, Survey, Dialogue

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

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

Contact details: Student: Katie Quirke **Email:** katie.quirke.2021@mumail.ie

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas Ollscoil

Mhá 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: _____

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.

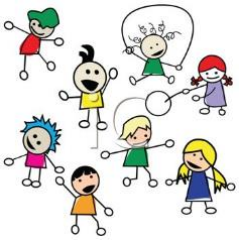
Name of child (in block capitals):

_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix H: Children's assent form



Child's name: _____ Date: _____

Teacher asked me to help her with her study.

We will be talking and writing about our feelings.

I can stop being part of the study if I want to.

I will talk about it at home.

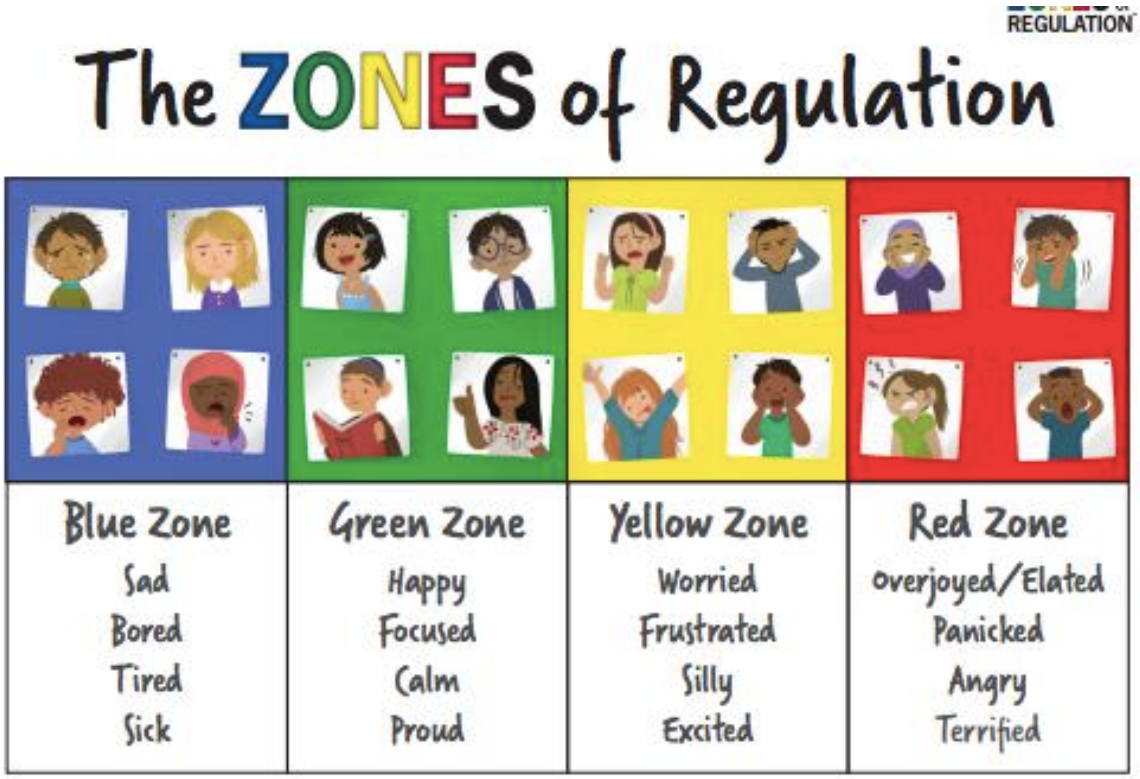
I would like to take part.

☐

I would not like to take part.

☐

Appendix I: Zones of Regulation



(Think Social Publishing, 2021: 1)