OLLSCOIL NA hÉIREANN MÁ NUAD

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND MAYNOOTH

OLLSCOIL NA HÉIREANN MÁ NUAD

THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND
MAYNOOTH

**Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education
M.Ed (Research in Practice)
(2020– 2021)**

**Enhancing Social and Emotional Learning Through Social Skills Groups: A Primary
School Perspective**

Grace Dillon

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

Date: 24/09/21

Supervised by: Dr. Suzanne O'Keefe

Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

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.

Signed: Grace Dillon

Date: 23.09.21

Grace Dillon

ABSTRACT

Mental health issues among children have been on the rise over the past few years, however, the pandemic has accelerated this issue. The Irish Medical Journal (2021) presented figures obtained from the three public Paediatric Emergency Departments in the greater Dublin region. The stark figures highlight mental health presentations by children aged five to fifteen increased by 52.4% during July and August last year, 2020, compared to the corresponding period for 2019. However, statistics also show that we have inadequate services deal with such numbers. As of July 2021, the Freedom of Information Act (2014) obtained figures from The Child and Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS), which highlighted that 2,559 children were currently awaiting an appointment in their services. 251 children had been waiting for more than 12 months. This particular statistic struck me as earlier in 2021 I was seeking help for a child in my class, however I was advised by another professional that only severe cases where children were harming themselves were being cared for at the moment. It is not the under-resources services at fault. It is our lack of resources as a nation to help, that leads to a need for a serious review of our systems.

With a particular focus on the social and emotional development of the children in my class, using a self-study approach within an action research framework, I reflected on my practice with an aim to live closer to my values in the classroom. I aimed to improve the social and emotional learning in my classroom. As an intervention, I set up child-led social skills groups. These are groups carried out in a small group setting over six weeks. Through collaboration with the children I began to see my values of voice, care and respect being realised. The self-study action research process has enhanced my awareness and understanding of the social emotional experience of some of the children in my care and improved my personal and professional development. The research findings have also highlighted that the children feel more valued, heard and seen within the class now. In this study the children acted as co-researchers, making this a collaborative study.

The research study was interrupted due to school closures from January to March imposed by Covid-19. However, as a contingency plan, we took the groups online and cycle one was completed through an online platform. The intervention of social skills groups facilitated the enhancement of social and emotional learning in my classroom. It also emphasised the importance of child voice, autonomy and agency within their learning. This intervention allowed the children to take ownership over their own learning through identifying their own needs.

Thematic Analysis revealed prior assumptions which I had when choosing which children to be part of the groups, it highlighted the importance of child voice within their learning along with the need for autonomy and agency for the children in their learning experiences. These findings enlightened me towards new ways of thinking and planning. It led to a transformation in my teaching, guiding me towards a pedagogy of valuing child voice, agency and autonomy throughout my lessons. It also led to a transformation in my thinking about my assumptions while choosing participants for a social skills group. I hope that this study had made a difference to a child somewhere in my care and across the wider school community.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This has been a collaborative project with many people that I would like to thank.

Firstly, I would like to thank my supervisor Dr. Suzanne O'Keefe for her support throughout this process. Suzanne has guided me throughout this process. I would like to thank her for all her recommendations, corrections and time.

I would also like to extend my gratitude to my school for supporting me throughout this process. My principal, fellow teachers and critical friends have been always there for me throughout, they have advised, critiqued and supported me where possible. I am very grateful for the children in my class, they were co-participants in this research. The children loved being part of the process and I equally enjoyed having them act as co-researchers. The children in my class made this research special to me.

Finally, I would like to thank my friends and family for all of their support throughout this project. I especially want to thank my mother, Bridget, father, Brendan and my boyfriend Jamie for their endless support throughout this process. Thank you for listening to all of my concerns and worries. Thank you for always being there.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

LIST OF TABLES

LIST OF FIGURES

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

For the purposes of this study, the following terms were interpreted as:

Social and emotional development: The development of social skills, coping skills, relationships, emotional regulation and mental health.

Co-Participant: The pupils involved in this study are referred to as co-participants as their contributions are considered to carry equal weight to those of the researcher

Agency: The participants had agency over their actions, thoughts and topics which they would like to explore.

Autonomy: The right to participate in decision making and choice regarding the children's own learning and self.

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

Within this chapter I explore an account of the reflective journey I embarked on to enhance the Social and Emotional teaching and learning in my classroom. I introduce my values, the research context and background. I also present a short synopsis of the research intervention. Finally, I give an overview of each of the chapters in this study.

Adopting a self-study approach, I have consulted with students, parents, colleagues, my tutor, lecturers, and the literature to explore my own practice and how it could be enhanced to support the children in my classroom. Within this process I was invited to explore my ontological and epistemological values. I noted that my values of voice, care and respect were not always 'lived out' in the classroom, as Whitehead has stated, I found myself a 'living contradiction' (1989) in the classroom. For several years, I have found myself on a strict daily timetable, racing from subject to subject, getting things covered in order to complete curriculum objectives. While reading Geert Kelchterman's literature on Professional Self-Understanding in Practice: Narrating, Navigating and Negotiating (2018), I could fully relate to the topic on Self-Understanding Between Agency and Structure. The example of 'rushing from subject to subject' shows a time where agency, policy and curricula influence and 'took over' my teaching to inform how I conducted myself. A teacher can sometimes get caught up in the 'busyness' of school life and thus find themselves a 'living contradiction' as I found myself. In this rush, I had lost sight of what I valued about teaching. This daily rush was limiting dialogue in the classroom, as class discussion was cut short in order to move on, and rebuked the values which I held close. As a result of my concerns, my research question came to life: How can I enhance the teaching and learning of social and emotional learning in my classroom? I approached the question by engaging with the McNiff and Whitehead (2010:9) question, 'how do I improve what I am doing?'. The aim of my study was to improve my methods of teaching around social and emotional learning by exploring and changing my practice of teaching. To investigate my concerns further, I participated in a self-study reflective practice that included my own considerations as well as the considerations of others (Beauchamp, 2015). My other aim included living closer to my values, changing a 'living contradiction' to a living confirmation.

1.1 My Values

This study is grounded in upon my values of voice, care, and respect. Having studied the philosophies of Friedrich Froebel this year, who emphasises the importance of the child at the centre of teaching and learning, my philosophy of education and ontological and epistemological values were, unknown to myself, strongly linked with Froebel's principles.

In order to interrogate my values further I examined my values using McDonagh's two of the four P's, professional, personal, pedagogical and political (McDonagh et al., 2019).

1.2 Personal Lens- the path to becoming a better teacher

Firstly, I examined my values through a Personal lens. I looked at my path to becoming a teacher and also life events which may have shaped my being. Before choosing to be a teacher I was torn between teaching and nursing, caring for people and looking after people was always something that I have wanted to do. Hence why, when I have a class my biggest priority is that the children have a safe environment where they feel listened to and respected. I have taken a huge interest in mental health and well-being in the past few years due to a family member dying by suicide. He was always someone that struggled to find coping tools within difficult situations from a young age. Since this tragic event I have been working with mental health charities yearly and have tried to be more aware of people's daily struggles. Kelchtermans (2005) states 'The emotional reactions of individual teachers to their work are intimately connected to the view that they have of themselves and others.' By examining my values through a personal lens it has led me to my own understanding of my values. My personal values have been a huge motivation to my research.

1.3 Professional lens- My observations within the classroom

I also explored my values through a professional lens. As a teacher of 5th class, for the last two years, I was concerned with the number of children across the senior classes presenting with social and emotional difficulties. I had observed a lack of social and emotional skills adequate to deal with the preadolescent world around them. Along with this Covid-19 interrupted the children's social and emotional growth within the school context. For many children school is safe place for them offering them routine. How was this going to affect them? I often asked myself during the year 'Is there anything else I can do?', 'Is there something new I could try?' As this was a major concern for me, it has shaped my research question: How can I enhance the social and emotional learning in my classroom?

1.2 Research background and Context

Ireland has the fourth-highest teen suicide rate in the EU (United Nations Children's Fund, 2017). The Royal College of Surgeons in Ireland (RCSI) reports that 'One in three young people are likely to have experienced a mental disorder by the time they are thirteen years old.'
By twenty-four years old that number will have risen to one in two.
An Irish Barnardos report (2018) showed that nearly 2,700 children were waiting to be seen by Child Adolescent Mental Health Services (CAMHS) with over 400 children waiting longer than a year. It is crucial that those who seek to promote high academic standards and those who seek to promote mental, emotional and social health realise that they are on the same side and that social and emotional education can support academic learning (Weare, 2000). Schools play a crucial role in the promotion of wellbeing in children through a range of activities and approaches to support their academic, physical, mental, emotional, social and spiritual development (Department of Education and Skills, 2018; Fazel et al., 2014; Johnson, 2014; Herzig, 2012; World Health Organisation, 2001). The Department of Education and Skills aims to ensure that the experience of children and young people from the early years and throughout their primary and post-primary education will be one that enhances, promotes, values and nurtures their wellbeing (DES, 2018). The vision of the Department under their new framework (Well-Being Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023) aims to ensure by 2023 'Ireland will be recognised as a leader' in the area of wellbeing. (DES, 2018: 5).

1.3 The Intervention: Social Skills Groups

I created an action research plan to enhance the social and emotional learning in my classroom, which I implemented over two six-week periods. This was a cyclical plan with review, reflection, and adaptations to the process throughout. I explored the concept of child led social skills groups over these cycles. Primary and secondary sources of data were employed such as questionnaires, interviews, and diary entries on our sessions. I recorded observations from colleagues, conversations with my critical friends who provided different perspectives on my intervention. Taking this data, my own observations, and my reflective journal entries, I reviewed each cycle according to recommendations and critiques. The data from both cycles of research were analysed, presented, and compared with the literature to support the development of my personal living theory of education. The data revealed many interesting findings of prior assumptions, the power of child voice and the use of agency in the classroom. These findings will be discussed further in chapters four, findings and five, conclusions.

1.4 Overview of Chapters

Chapter One, Introduction, introduces my concerns about my practice, the education system and children's well-being within my classroom and beyond. Within this chapter, my values in education and learning, of voice, care and respect upon which this project is based, are outlined. Current statistics on children's mental health and well-being are discussed, along with a brief overview on current frameworks and policies to promote well-being in schools. It concludes with a brief synopsis of the research design for this study.

Chapter Two, Literature Review, provides the theory that informs my action research study. This chapter establishes a background of current issues in society and education that are negatively impacting on teaching and children. It identifies the importance of social and emotional learning skills in the classroom. I explore the need for a review of Social, Personal and Health Education, along with how I could develop social and emotional skills in my classroom. I also explore the theme of student voice in this chapter and explore how this can be merged into the research.

Chapter Three, Methodology chapter, outlines my research design noting my rationale for the researchand describing my classroom intervention in full detail. It explores ontological and epistemological views noting that my understanding of knowledge is socially constructed. I explain my reasons for choosing qualitative research. I justify my reasons for selectingthe action research paradigm for my research. I outline the important elements underpinning action research such as critical reflection, collaboration and self-study. I then focus on data collection and tools. The chapter finishes by acknowledging my ethicalguidelines for the study.

Chapter Four demonstrates my data analysis in the form of an integrated narrative that explores how small, child-led, social skills groups can be integrated into the classroom. This chapter initially discusses the three main findings that emerged from this action research study: the importance of voice, assumptions within the selection process for a SSG and the autonomy and self-awareness of the child. Guided by the research question, 'can the introduction of social skills groups in my classroom enhance the children's social and emotional learning?', this chapter explores the themes of autonomy, child agency, voice of assumptions. Through the methods of co-participant interviews, observations, journal entries, reflections and critical friends, this chapter outlines my main findings.

Chapter Five documents my conclusions and the summary of my findings. I identify the significance of the study for my own practice and for the wider educational field. I note the limitations, along with the 'messiness' and challenges I was faced with during this project.

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

The literature review begins by exploring the term social and emotional learning (SEL). The literature on the need to review SEL in schools today is then explored, focusing on Pre Covid-19 and Covid-19 statistics from Ireland. The review then discusses the importance of social and emotional learning. It argues that social and emotional learning is just as important as academic learning. Following this, studies and methods are then explored based on effective ways to teach social and emotional learning in the classroom. Finally, the literature is explored around Action Based Research and how it can be used within this intervention.

2.2 What is social and emotional intelligence?

The term 'Social and Emotional Learning' (SEL) has been around since the late nineties (Jones-Schenk 2019). Social and emotional intelligence is a widely used concept but, how it is understood and defined varies in different contexts. This is due in large part to language and differences in the terminology used within this area. Many studies use the terms 'social and emotional well-being' (BelongTo, 2016) and 'mental health well-being' (Better Outcomes Brighter Futures,2014), which are all under the same umbrella of 'social and emotional intelligence'. The NICE (National Institute for Health and Care Excellence, 2016) definition highlights the need for a 'sense of purpose' while Better Outcomes Brighter Futures (2014) and Belong to (2016) focus more on 'coping' and being 'optimistic'. However, all of the above mention the relationships with communities and others as being key to social and emotional well-being.

Daniel Goleman is popularly credited with coining the phrase "emotional intelligence", with the favoured term in the UK being emotional literacy (Qualter, Gardner and Whitely, 2007). Goleman (1998) broke the concept into five main features, which included self-awareness, motivation, self-regulation, empathy, and adeptness in relationships. These main features show a similar comparison to the themes above.

While reviewing the literature on this I found an interesting article by Jonathan Cohen, a Professor in Education and Psychology (2001). This article breaks down the grand terms and describes the essence of social and emotional intelligence. Cohen (2001) states that 'Social and emotional competence measures the ability to understand, process, manage, and express the social and emotional aspects of our lives.' Cohen then breaks down this statement to simpler

terms meaning that this is the ability to 'read ourselves and others'.

Although the terms are varied, they all have similar comparisons and themes, SEL in education refers to integrating skills, competencies and attitudes that allow an individual to understand and manage their emotions in an effective way allowing one to develop healthy social relationships and make well informed ethical decisions. (CASEL 2018)

2.3 Why is there a need to review social and emotional intelligence development among children today?

From professional observations, there is a gap between policy and practice in SEL in education. My research question and concern, surrounding the social and emotional development in my classroom led me to investigate if this was a wider concern on a national and worldwide level. Along with this Covid-19 interrupted the children's social and emotional growth within the school context. For many children school is safe place for them offering them routine. I looked towards several studies for answers.

One of the most recent studies which I reviewed focuses on statistics observed among children in the midst of the pandemic. The Irish Medical Journal (IMJ) in 2021 presented figures obtained from the three public paediatric Emergency Departments in the greater Dublin region. The stark figures highlighted mental health presentations by children aged 5 to 15 increased by 52.4% during July and August last year, 2020, compared to the corresponding period for 2019. Studies such as this one by the IMJ, demonstrated to me that my observations were not just on a classroom level, but also a national level.

UNICEF's most recent report card published in 2020 uses pre-COVID-19 data and features a league table according to children's mental and physical health and academic and social skillset. Ireland scores the 6th highest in relation to academic scores out of 38 OCED countries. However, the statistic which is most alarming shows Ireland is 26th place in the survey of 38 OECD countries when it comes to the mental wellbeing of children, with the Netherlands, Cyprus, and Spain taking the top three spots. This would make one consider what we are lacking and how we could strengthen this statistic. Some more key findings from this report include 'More than six in 100,000 Irish adolescents aged 15-19 die by suicide' and 'On life satisfaction, children in Ireland rated themselves as having one of the lowest rates in the OECD/EU (72%).' The figures

presented in this report card were pre Covid-19 data, leading one to wonder what the post Covid-19 Report Card would illustrate.

Although this data is comparable and gives us an indication of our current rankings a question needs to be asked around the theory of the findings. It brings forth the debate between using objective and subjective measures. Using subjective measures is seen as increasingly important in order to develop a true understanding of child well-being. (Statham, & Chase, 2007: 5) In the literature now, despite some international reports focusing heavily on objective indicators as a practicality, using both objective and subjective measure is widely accepted as the best way to get a holistic view of child well-being. (Hanafin & Brooks, 2005)

The Irish Health Behaviour of School Aged Children (HBSC) survey collects information relating to young people's health and well-being, health behaviours and social context. The HBSC survey carried out in 2020 included questions informed by young people themselves. Ireland was the first country to do this, emphasising the importance of the value of voice. The findings of this data had similarities with the UNICEF report card above regard mental health and well-being. Irish 15-year olds ranked within the bottom 2 countries for life satisfaction. Another interesting finding was that life satisfaction has significantly reduced in all age groups of Irish children since 2014.

A study with similar findings in the Irish context, the Mental Health Commission Annual Report (2010: 42-4) reported increases in admissions of children to both child and adult mental health services. Also, in Ireland, in the report on the State of the Nation's Children (2010) reference is made to suicide, which "accounted for 23.1% of all deaths of children aged 10-17". (2010: 42-4)

Although social and emotional development has always been a factor of teaching it has now come to the forefront more now than ever due to high levels of screen time, social media and the worldwide pandemic Covid-19. Each report above shows worrying figures for parents, educators, policy makers, children, and all of those working with children. Each statistic builds an argument for the need for an extensive review of social and emotional development among young people today.

2.4 Why teach Social and Emotional Learning (SEL) in schools?

Social and emotional learning is thought today in schools through various forms. It is in built into school values, discussions in the classroom, Social Personal and Health (SPHE) lessons, English lessons, books, movies and real-life everyday experiences. Many studies such as Carruth's (2016) in North Carolina, highlight many advantages of teaching Social and Emotional intelligence in schools. The potential impacts of SEL on primary school education are numerous states Carruth. Firstly, studies are showing students who have participated in SEL perform better academically (CASEL, 2015; Elias, 2013; Goleman, 2008; Shields, 2011; Weissberg & Cascarino, 2013). A meta-analysis of studies on social and emotional learning in schools in America found that implementing social and emotional learning in schools has led to an 11-percentile gain in academic performance (Durlak et al., 2011) because of the self-management skills fostered, such as focus and motivation (Goleman, 2008) and the ability to persevere (Durlak et al., 2011) encouraged by SEL programs.

Secondly Carruth (2016) indicates that, teaching SEL in schools can help to promote social justice among students (Elias, 2013). Students in primary schools come from a variety of different and often contrasting socio-economic and family backgrounds. It is expected for students to overcome whatever obstacles they face and achieve success and failure to do so indicates a flawed individual. Elias (2013) speaks to the injustice of this belief in saying 'Blaming the victim' is an attribution that those who do not overcome these obstacles lack the capacity. Using SEL in schools to teach students interpersonal and intrapersonal skills may help to empower students from underprivileged backgrounds with the tools they need to find success. Lastly, incorporating SEL in schools improves the experience of school for students. A recent study on the effects of implementing SEL in schools found that, students receiving lessons in social and emotional skills improved in every measure of positive behaviour, such as classroom behaviour, attendance, and their thoughts towards school, were less likely to engage in anti-social behaviour. Among these students there was also a drop in the number who were depressed, anxious, and alienated (Goleman, 2008: 8) These findings illustrate how SEL programming can positively affect the climate of a school. Research shows that perception of school atmosphere and community and student performance are directly linked, the more positive a student views the climate of their school, the better that student will perform (Freedman & Jensen, 2007).

As stated in the manual Well-being in Primary Schools manual 'Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion. (2015) 'It is vital that those who seek to promote high academic standards and those who seek to promote mental, emotional and social health realise that they are on the same side,

and that social and affective education can support academic learning, not simply take time away from it. There is overwhelming evidence that students learn more effectively, including their academic subjects, if they are happy in their work, believe in themselves, their teachers and feel school is supporting them' (Weare, 2000).

Jonathan Cohen (2001) also makes the significant point that 'over the course of the last two decades, educators and researchers have discovered that high quality social emotional learning (SEL) programs improve students' academic performance, their adaptive social emotional behaviour, and peer relations; they put a brake on drug problems, high-risk sexual behaviour, aggression, and other forms of antisocial and maladaptive behaviour (Consortium on the School-Based Promotion of Social Competence, 1994; Durlak, 1996; Institute of Medicine, 1994; Weissberg & Greenberg, 1998).

Carol Dweck (2017), an American psychologist, believes in two mindsets; 'growth' and 'fixed' mindsets. Within her book, (Mindset; Changing The Way You Think To Fulfil Your Potential 2017), Dweck discusses human motivation. Dweck highlights the advantages of the Growth mindset and the advantages of this mindset for example, perseverance, resilience, open to challenge, effort levels. Social and emotional learning leads to the fostering of a growth mindset by teaching the tools of perseverance, resilience and challenge. Dweck's book also points to the language we use daily in promoting these skills and mindset. She focuses on changing our wording of things such as from 'yet' to 'not yet'.

All of the above literature points to the important benefits if including SEL learning into our day to day teachings in school, formally and informally. They lead us to the conclusion that SEL learning improves their chances academically and in social capacities in life.

2.5 What programs and initiatives are in place to support Social and Emotional development in Primary schools?

As mentioned above, Social and Emotional Learning is happening today in schools. There are many policies in place to support the teaching and learning of SEL. There are also many programs in place to aid SEL learning through Social, Personal and Health education (SPHE), such as Friends for Life, Weaving Well Being, Web Wise, Stay Safe and a Relationships and Sexuality program. Many of these programs are mandatory in our schools to teach and aim to develop well-rounded educated children.

SPHE is a curricular subject in schools which targets SEL education. The SPHE curriculum (1999) includes lessons to target social personal and health education. SPHE was launched as part of primary school curriculum in 1999 in response to various initiatives which emerged as a way to deal with emerging social and health issues. The SPHE curriculum was intended to provide a coherent framework for social, personal and health education. The SPHE curriculum (1999) is divided into 3 strands:

1. The strand 'Myself' is concerned with the personal development of the individual child and his/her health and well-being.
2. 'Myself and others' focuses on developing a sense of care and respect for other people and the facility for relating to and communicating effectively with others.
3. 'Myself and the wider world' enables children to explore the various communities in which they live.

These 3 strands include various topics at different class levels. As I am a 5th class teacher I looked into the 5th and 6th class curriculum topics in particular. The various topics include personal safety, sexual education, puberty, media education, developing citizenship, taking care of themselves, self-identity and self-awareness.

Although there is huge positives to be found within the implementation of this program it is also important to highlight that only 30 minutes is allocated to the teaching of SPHE a week within the Irish Primary Curriculum. When one reviews the topics above and the paramount of importance that these hold it a flaw of the curriculum to allocate such little time to such an important subject.

Currently there is a framework called Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice 2018-2023 by the Department of Education and Skills. (2019) This framework outlines how the school has a key role in the well-being of a child. It outlines the current structures and programs in place at the moment to promote well-being in the Irish Primary School including Aistear (2009) and the SPHE curriculum. Due to the situation that we find ourselves in with Covid-19

this framework has outdated itself as schools and education systems have had to resort to distance learning and teaching children who are largely isolated for a period of time, we have also had to think of new ideas on teaching due to social distancing. In line with best practice at the time (2018), NEPS encouraged schools to adopt a whole school, continuum of support approach to provide for children and young people's wellbeing needs (DES & NEPS, 2007, 2010a, 2010b). This involves three levels: Support for All, Support for Some and Support for Few. However, due to Covid-19 children's needs have changed and we have had to adapt this framework to suit our current climate.

Another important document in this study is the 'Well-being in Primary Schools resources manual 'Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion'(2015), this has been collaborated on by four bodies including the HSE, NEPS, DES and the Department of Health. In this manual it discusses and outlines the various programs available in Primary Schools to promote well-being and mental health. For example, Friends for Life (2013), Walk Tall Program (1996), RSE program (2020). This report also discusses the role of the teacher in a children's mental health promotion 'The My World Survey (Dooley and Fitzgerald, 2012) found that the presence of one supportive adult in a young person's life is critically important to their wellbeing, sense of connectedness, self-confidence and ability to cope with difficulties. Over 70% reported that they receive support from one adult in their lives. Teachers are sometimes that "one good adult" acting as a powerful protective force in a child's life.' This statement in the manual correlates with Nodding's Care theory (2004) of the relationship between the educator and the student.

As I alluded to above, in the Irish primary curriculum SPHE is allocated 30 minutes per week. To put this in context, 'Roll call' is allocated 50 minutes and Religion is allocated 2.5 hours a week. Although the SPHE curriculum manual states that SPHE should be integrated with other subjects many of the programs and initiatives which are rolled out across primary schools are stand-alone programs. For Example, the Friends for Life Program recommends that each session is allocated 2-2.5 hours a session run over 10 sessions. This contradiction made me think of Kelchterman's piece on Professional Self-Understanding in Practice: Narrating, Navigating and Negotiating. (2018) This is particularly relevant to this section as it highlights the debates between a teacher's judgement and agency, structure, policy and the curriculum.

Although there are many programs, policies and even a specific amount of time put aside to teaching SEL, the reports regarding today's children mental and social well-being cause for a call for a review of these programs. Having implemented these programs in my classroom over the years it still led me to my observations of children lacking in 'coping skills' and emotional and

social intelligence. It has led me to think of what other initiatives and ideas can I carry out in my classroom which may be more effective or more appropriate to my classroom.

2.6 What can I do in my classroom that will effectively teach Social and Emotional Learning?

While reviewing the literature on how to enhance the SEL in my classroom I kept my values to the core when choosing the studies and literature which I reviewed. I kept my classroom and the children within the classroom in mind throughout, trying to think of a mode of teaching and learning which would be a good 'fit' for thus intervention. SEL, Circle Time, Social Skills Groups and Professor Laura Lundy's literature on the Voice of the child, in conjunction with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, (UNCRC) (1992), are areas which I have explored further.

Circle time was initially introduced into Ireland in the early 1990s by its main advocate Jenny Mosley. Mosley posed the question: "But where exactly did Circle Time originate?" and suggested that "this is an impossible question to answer" (Mosley, 1996: 70). Some observers (e.g. Lang, 1998) cited the example of the North American Indians who sat in circles with a feather or pipe to regulate contributions as a way of explaining its origins. Lang also (1998) outlined the development of various models of circle time in the USA, the Scandinavian countries, the Netherlands, Italy and the UK. Lang recognized Froebel as a leading influence on the development of circle time in Northern Europe. Ballard, based in the USA, wrote one of the first guides to circle time in which he described it as "a curriculum of affective growth and human relations skill development" (Ballard, 1975: 1). There are many similarities between Mosley and Ballard's guides to Circle Time, citing similar aims and guiding frameworks for it to be carried out. In both models, the circle time is structured to allow for listening and responding, reference is made to a "talking ticket" (Ballard) or "speaking object" (Mosley) which controls much of the participation. There are also common rules such as 'no puts downs' and 'turn taking". Common aims of promotion of self-esteem and social interaction are also highlighted in both models. The idea of the voice of the student is also a common theme in both models.

Ground rules for Circle Time Meetings

 The following rules are taken from Quality Circle Time:

- To signal if they wish to speak

 - Not to use any put-downs towards each other

- Not to interrupt when someone else is talking

- That a child has the right to say 'Pass' in a round if she does not wish to speak

 - Children who pass in the initial round will, at the end of the round, be allowed to signal if they'd like a second chance

- Not to name anyone in the circle in a negative way. Instead, they must say, for example, 'Someone hit me' or 'Some people are ganging up on me.'

(Mosley, 1996: 35)

While aiming to deepen my understanding of Circle Time I read *Quality Circle Time in Action (Molsey,1999).* The author suggests Circle Time is ideally ran with 6-12 participants. The framework for circle time class meetings in the Mosley Model is as follows: - Introductory Phase - Middle Phase or Open Forum - Closing Phase. (Mosley, 1996: 99 – 102) In the introductory phase, the emphasis is on setting the scene and relaxing the participants through games and ice breakers. The middle phase places particular emphasis on hearing children's voices. A 'speaking object' is passed around the circle, where the children can speak or pass if they wish to do so. Here, a theme may be explored by children through discussion, or the teacher may present a problem which children then try to solve. In the closing phase there is an emphasis on restoring a calm and peaceful atmosphere. This gives the group an opportunity to reflect on the learning which has taken place.

Social Skills Groups (SSG) are another area which I explored within this literature review. These are groups mostly ran by a Resource Team in school. The National Educational and Psychological Service (NEPS) have a guide on how to set up Social Skills Groups. (2015) SSG take place in a school setting, with the purpose of the groups being 'to teach and develop social and behavioural skills that may be absent or ineffectively used'. It is suggested that the groups are ran with 4-6 participants. Usually, SSG's are for children who teachers felt are 'negatively affected by feeling different in some way' or children 'who find it difficult to make and keep friends, who attract attention by use of negative processes and behaviours and who do not know how to ask for help'. (NEPS, 2015) This is unlike Mosley's Circle Time as these groups include all children with the a similar aim to aid social interactions and promote self-esteem. SSG's also follow similar suggested rules to Mosley's Circle Time, including; Confidentiality within the group of what's discussed within the group, only one person to talk at any one time, no eating or drinking and treat others with respect.

While I was reviewing the literature based on the benefits and challenges of SSG most of it is in reference to children with Autism or Asperger's. I found limited material based on SSG for a child without a special educational need. Although, these groups are used widely across our Irish

school system I was surprised by the lack of research surrounding the benefits and challenges to SSG's.

Finally, I explored the topic of 'student voice' in action research, as student voice is a value which I wanted to be at the heart of this intervention. In the early 1990s, a number of educators and social critics noted the exclusion of student voices from conversations about learning, teaching, and schooling, called for a rethinking of this exclusion. Many educators and researchers began advocating for students as co-creators of research. Professor Laura Lundy's Research (2007) on the Voice of the Child states the importance of student voice and discusses it as a right of the students to heard and seen within research. 'The importance of the voice of the child within educational context has become an educational issue' as stated by Dr. Maurice Harmon. In an article wrote recently by Dr. Harmon, Meaningfully Capturing the voice of children in research: Applying the Lundy Model of Participation in the Classroom, (2020) he explores how one can apply the Lundy Model of Participation (2007) into classroom research. Dr. Harmon raises the question 'While much of the research is focused on adults' interpretations of what the child says, it raises the question: where and how is the voice of the child explored and represented in their own right?'. Lundy's model (2007) demonstrates, through using a rights-based approach ground in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) that children can be active participants in the decision-making processes on topics that are relevant to their lives. Children should be active participants and co-researchers within educational research. The Lundy Model of Participation was developed by academic Laura Lundy, Professor of international children's rights at the School of Education at the Queen's University of Belfast. The Model is composed of four components which can be considered to ensure that Article 12 of the UNCRC is achieved within this research; space, voice, audience and influence.

Figure 1. Lundy's Model of Participation 2007

In relation to Space; The Lundy Model of Participation begins with creating a safe and inclusive space for children to express their views. This space is a pre-requisite for children to express their authentic views, without fear of rebuke and reprisal (Lundy, 2007). This is not just a physical space, but a space for voice to be heard and appreciated and not just in a tokenistic way. The second component is Voice; developing opportunities for conversations with young people in education has increased as a result of the interest in the study of young people's social practices, and the impact of their engagement with their culture on their relationships with themselves and the world (Lundy, 2007). Next Lundy speaks about Audience as a component: emphasising that voice is not enough and that children have a right to an audience and that those hearing their voice should have some ability to effect change (Lundy, 2007). The final component is Influence; The challenge is to be open to be influenced by what children have to say and to ensure children feel they can influence the world around them.

Alison Cook-Sather, another advocate for student voice describes the benefits of including student voice within research. 'The stepping back and analysing this student describes leads to deeper learning (Bain & Zimmerman, 2009) through fostering the development of meta-cognitive awareness, and it contributes to self-authorship (Baxter Magolda, 2009) because students become

not only more aware but also more active in and responsible for their learning (Cook-Sather, 2011)

Alison Cook-Sather and Prof. Laura Lundy are two of many advocates for student voice to be heard within research. Both theorists have stated the many positives that can be observed from integrating student voice into research. Cook-Sather, just like Lundy notes recommendations for academic developers when integrating student voice into research. Along with this Cook-Sather states some of the challenges towards student voice within research such as; relinquishing control over pedagogical planning, re-thinking time investments, meeting professional requirements and gaining access to students. However, reviewing the literature, it is evident that the opportunities far outweigh the challenges in this case, as well as assuming that it is a right of the child to be active participants within the decision making regarding their lives.

Having critiqued the literature on Circle Time, Social Skills Groups and Lundy's Model of Participation, I hope to merge these together to enhance the social and emotional learning and teaching in my classroom. As Circle Time and SSG are not widely used within my school I look forward to trialling these initiatives out in my classroom. Lundy's Model of Participation is also very important as I would like to my classes thoughts and opinions at each stage of the research, including them as co-researchers in this study.

2.7 Why choose Action Based Research?

Literature such as 'The Learning Communities in Educational Partnerships: Action Research as Transformation' by Máirín Glenn, Mary Roche, Caitriona McDonagh, Bernie Sullivan, has helped to improve my knowledge of Self Action Research Study. It has helped deepen my understanding around me as a practitioner and my own learning. The authors highlight the importance of self-evaluation and self-reflection. Having reflected and reviewed my practices I am intrigued to carry out action based research in my classroom within a structured reflective approach.

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) describe Self Study Action Research as 'Apart from contributing to the improvement of teacher educators' own practices, self-study researchers also seek to make explicit and validate their professional expertise with the explicit intent of advancing the public knowledge base of teacher education.' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans 2015: 509) As stated here, the type of research which I wish to carry out will be with the hope of enriching the teaching and learning in my classroom. It will also help to understand myself more

as a professional and hopefully, influence me to live closer to my values. Having carried out research in my classroom I also hope that this may influence teaching and learning on a wider basis, for example among my class level or school. The aim of this type of research, as pointed out by Vanassche and Kelchtermaans is to improve on one's own practices with the hope of this benefiting others.

Jean Mc Niff's 'Action Research for Professional Development (2002)' prompts key questions and considerations. As discussed in her text 'action research is something people do in order to improve the quality of life for themselves and for others. It is a way of working that begins with individuals asking themselves, 'How do I improve what I am doing for your sake?' The intention is that one person becomes self-evaluative in order to work better for others with whom they are in company.' However it is important to remember as highlighted by Roche (2007) that you are not carrying out this research to try to demonstrate a cause and effect relationship between you and other people's actions. 'You are not saying, 'I brought about improvement' or 'I made that happen'. You are saying, 'I can show that certain changes took place as I changed my practice, particularly in myself, and different relationships evolved.'

Jack Whitehead and Jean McNiff compiled an extremely useful guide to Action Research, You and Your Action Research Project (2009). Within this guide the authors breakdown the key ideas on Action Research and the significant features which are found in Action Research. Whitehead and McNiff (2010) suggest that Action Research has three main purposes;

1. creating new knowledge and making claims to knowledge
2. testing the validity of knowledge claims
3. generating new theory.

As outlined in this text, all research aims to find out something that is unknown, and in relation to that of Self Study Action I, the researcher, will be hoping to deepen my understanding or make a claim to new knowledge after carrying out my action research.

The most significant contrast in this type of research which I have found is putting 'I' at the centre of the research. This lead me to think of John Dewey's view on education. Dewey an influential figure in experiential education, viewed a person's ability to understand and make use of their own experiences as the ultimate aim of education. He built a strong argument for experiential education by defining two categories of experience; primary and secondary. Primary experience refers to one's initial interaction with something in the physical world. This interaction is usually messy but creates a foundation for knowledge. Secondary experience, or reflective experience, is the process of refining through reflection on the primary experience. The secondary experience creates meaning from the sensory data collected in the primary experience

(Hunt, 1981). Dewey believed that in order to gain knowledge, primary and secondary experiences must be had. This emphasis on reflection of experience is one of the core principles of experiential education. Although Dewey was discussing children's learning in schools, the primary and secondary experiences and reflection remind me of the process of Action Research. Jack Whitehead's paper on living theory (1989) suggests that the researcher reflects on their teaching through a different lens. Whitehead videotaped a lesson he carried out in the classroom and saw himself as a 'living contradiction' in relation to his educational values. Within this reflection comes the practitioner's aim to seek to change this and see their values in a living form in the classroom as Whitehead implies. Whitehead's ideas on 'living contradictions' have caused me to reflect on my own practice and have given me a renewed sense of purpose in my day to day approach to school life.

Finally, I explored a book on '**A Guide to Practitioner Research in Education**' (Menter et.al, 2011). Within this book the authors discuss the term Practitioner Research, meaning a person undertaking the research are both practising and research, often these people are 'teacher researchers. They state that this type of research is most often carried out in research settings. In this type of research, the researcher is thought to carry out their research in three ways, enquiring, systematically and finally, sharing their outcomes. The authors suggest that this type of research seeks to improve self-reflection, improve teaching and learning in the practitioner's classroom and possibly beyond, open door for further qualifications and greatly enhances ones continued professional development.

All of the above literature inform my understanding of Self Action Research Study. Whitehead's concept of a 'living contradiction' brought to light the concerns I had in my classroom while reflecting of my values and myself as a 'living contradiction'. Glenn et.al and Jean McNiff's explanation on Self Action Research Study then ensured that I as the researcher was researching myself in this project. Whitehead and McNiff's road map then pointed me in the right direction emphasising the steps which are usually taken in Action Based Research. To conclude, the texts I have reviewed show the purpose for this type of research in and out of the classroom, for the practitioner, the children and the wider community.

2.8 Conclusion

Social and Emotional Learning is key to helping today's children. The statistics which I referred to in this review regarding children's mental health are stark. A worrying factor to consider is that many of these statistics are pre-Covid-19. However, as a teacher and educator I can see that

in my classroom the children are struggling with regulating their emotions and dealing with problematic situations. I find myself in the classroom as a 'living contradiction', (1989) as Jack Whitehead referred to, as my educational vales are that of care, respect and voice, however, I like many find myself 'swept up' the daily life in school and not making time for those worthwhile discussions, reflective times or giving tools to children to deal with those 'minor problems' which arise during the day. Having reviewed the relevant literature across social and emotional learning the value and benefits of carrying out this research in my classroom are extremely positive.

CHAPTER THREE: METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

My Methodology chapter describes the research process adopted by this study. It will focus specifically on the theoretical underpinnings of this research, such as research paradigm, validity, reliability, ethical considerations, research design, data collection instruments and data analysis. A multimethod approach is adopted to better understand the research and to assist within the data analysis phase. These research tools include observation, interviewing, discussion and questionnaires. Using these methods, I hope to hold student voice as an integral part of this research, while examining the impact of social skills groups on the teaching and learning within the classroom and beyond. Within this research I aim to recognise myself as the subject of enquiry as I am aim to enhance social and emotional learning within my classroom.

3.2 Research rationale

The catalyst for my research project was the result of self-study and ongoing critical reflection. I realised that I was not living out my ontological values in my practice. I found myself a 'living contradiction' in my day to day practice. Although I value care and respect I found myself allowing the 'busyness' of school life take over. Instead of taking the time to have the important conversations or even check in with the children, I found myself under the pressure of a looming curriculum. Along with this reflection I also observed the children lacking in 'coping skills' and social and emotional intelligence. My aim was to design a research project that allowed me to integrate a new method into my practice while working with smaller group sizes than previously before.

3.3 Action Research Paradigm

Action research is born out of values with a focus on social justice and democratic practice (Brydon-Miller 2003; Whitehead 1989). Theory is developed as a result of data grounded in the action taken during the research leading towards positive social change (Bassey 1990; Brydon-Miller et al., 2003:15; Kemmis 2010:420). Action research entails the researcher trying to improve their own practice. It is unique to each researcher as it focuses on the researchers set of values, norms and assumptions for doing things (Sullivan, Glenn, Roche & McDonagh, 2016:25). Action research is strongly influenced by our values and our values influence our behaviour and methodological choices (Pollard & Anderson 2008; Cohen et al. 2018). Action research is a cyclical process, where each step informs the next. McNiff and Whitehead (2010)

note that the cyclical process is not always linear and involves what Mellor (2001) describes as a series of 'messy' approaches that can provide strengths and tests for the researcher.

An action research approach was adopted in this study as it requires research into oneself and one's practice (McNiff, 2002). There are a number of models of action research, however they all contain similar elements; creating new knowledge and making claims to knowledge, testing the validity of knowledge, claims and generating new theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2009). The methodology of action research allows the researcher to develop their own "living educational theory of practice" displaying their educational influence in their own learning and the learning of others – 'how do I improve what I am doing?' (McNiff & Whitehead 2010:9).

3.3.1 Critical Reflection

Action research centres around reflection, reflection in action and reflection on action. To become a critically reflective practitioner, Hooks (2010: 10) proposes that we must be "open at all times, and we must be willing to acknowledge what we do not know". Through critical reflection of one's practice, we may come to comprehend how we can improve our work, and in doing so enhance the teaching and learning in our setting. The intention for my research involves reflecting on my practice to identify how I apply my values through my teaching and what action I can take to allow me to live closer to these values.

It is important that it is not at a superficial level, instead based in the theoretical framework of people like Moon (2004) or Brookfield (2017). The goal of the critically reflective teacher is to gain higher awareness of his or her own teaching from as many perspectives as possible. For this purpose, Stephen Brookfield has developed the four lenses in the Brookfield model of reflection. These can be used by teachers in the process of critical reflection. This concerns the following four lenses, or perspectives:
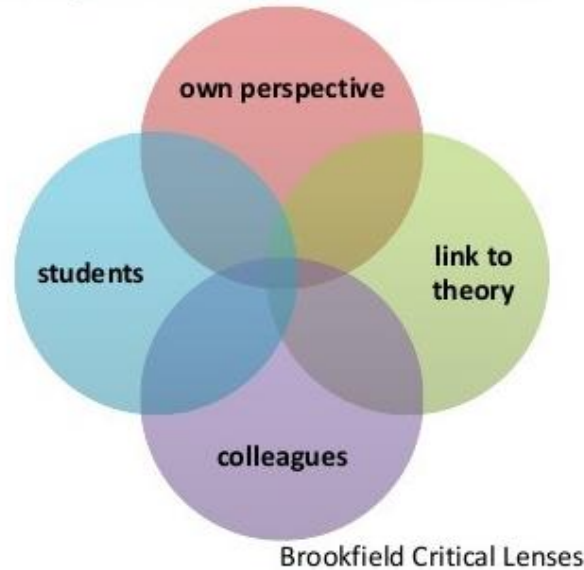
deepening reflection

Brookfield Critical Lenses

Figure 2. Brookfield's Critical Lenses 1995

Brookfield's (1995) lenses can heavily influence reflections. The use four different lenses ensures triangulation of the reflections and data collected.

3.3.2 Qualitative Research

My Research question is based on my teaching and developing the social and emotional intelligence in my class. I wanted to gather data that displayed the children's thoughts, voice and actions. This was not something that could be measured with percentages or charts. Quantitative Research is based on testing and numbers. Quantitative research design is focused on testing, numerical data, generalisations, use of set variables and identifying methodical patterns of connections (Cohen et al., 2018). This is not a method of research which would convey social and emotional intelligence development. Qualitative research design by contrast places more emphasis on subjectivity and uses a verbal descriptive approach to study commonalities of smaller groups (Cohen et al., 2018). Using Qualitative data collection allowed me to capture the data which conveyed student voice, other teacher's voices, my reflections and the development of the research in my classroom.

3.4   Ethical Issues in Data Collection

3.4.1 Informed consent and assent

After being granted ethical approval of my research proposal from the University, I sent a letter to my Board of Management and Principal seeking permission to carry out my research project. An information sheet was sent to parents outlining the details of this research project. I then asked for a written signature to allow their child to partake in the research. Next, I asked that the parents/guardians discuss this research with the children and included my contact details so that the parents could contact me with any queries about the project.

To gain assent from the children I explained to the children what I planned to do and what their participation would mean. I ensured that they were aware that all participants have the right to withdraw from the research during the program. As the children are 5th class I asked for their signature if they gave their permission to be involved in the program. Consent was continually sought throughout the process, for example, when conducting interviews and questionnaires. This also ensured that the children and parents were informed participants at each stage. The participants and guardians were made aware that they were entitled to cease participation at any time during the research process in accordance with Maynooth University's Research Ethics Policy. In such case their data would be disposed of and would not be used in the study.

3.4.2 Data Storage

All data collected is consistent with General Data Protection Regulations and the New Data Protection Bill 2018. The data that I have kept will be stored on a USB key and also in a locked box. This is to ensure that my data is kept safe and secure and cannot be accessed by anyone whom is not permitted. Any other data such as questionnaires, lesson plans, notes and a reflective journal will be kept in a locked filing cabinet to ensure confidentiality. 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. My findings will be published as part of my thesis, however all names, locations, interviews and data findings will remain anonymous.

3.4.3 Principled sensitivity

I was very aware that my research topic engaged with children's emotions and personal situations and had potential to cause emotional distress for children. Throughout this program I ensured to prepare my lessons so that I would foresee any sensitive topics and think about these in relation to my class. If a child made a compromising disclosure to me where their safety was at risk I was ready to act in accordance with the Child Safe Guarding policy in the school and was ready to report any disclosures to the Designated Liaison officer in my school immediately.

3.4.4 Power Dynamics

As outlined in the *Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children (Dept. of children and youth affairs, 2012)* power relationships can be an ethical issue when it comes to carrying out research with children. Morrow and Richards (1996) cite the disparities in power and status between adults and children as the greatest ethical challenge for researchers working with children. As I was carrying out research with my class I thought that this may become an issue as the children may give answers and opinions which they feel I would agree with rather than their honest views. I ensured that the children were aware that there were no 'wrong answers'. All answers and opinions were accepted. I ensured to continue to refocus the lens of this research back onto me, so that the children knew that the research was to do with me as a teacher. I constantly adjusted my viewpoint from that of the parents of the children, the children and my colleagues to get a better understanding of any power dynamics at play.

3.4.5 Validity and Reliability

Validity of the data was ensured through the use of critical friends, a validation groups, the children, observations and through the use of Brookfield lens. The function of a validation group and critical friends sought to minimise potential bias of the researcher. It also sought to ensure that I was operating within my values of care and respect. Triangulation was also achieved using a variety of data collection instruments such as questionnaires, interviews, my reflective journal and observations. Instruments and questioning used were cognitively and developmentally appropriate (Cohen et al., 2011). The use of qualitative data is criticised as being likely biased. Chesworth (2018) discusses the accuracy of qualitative methods, questioning the possibility of ever revealing a true representation of children's lives. However, the mixture of critical friends, a

validation group and variety of data collection instruments ensured minimisation of bias and sought to reveal an overall picture of children's experience through different lenses.

3.5   Research Design

3.5.1 Research Site

This research was carried out in a Primary School Setting. This is a mixed Primary School with approx. 700 students in the Greater Dublin area. The children come from a mix of socio-economic backgrounds.

3.5.2 Research Participants

I carried out this research with a small group from my class, 5th class. I created a Social Group based on mixed ability grouping. I chose three girls and three boys to be part of the group to ensure gender balance. I also chose children who are lacking in social skills and children who have competent social skills to create the group. The research is based on my findings with my specific group during this moment in time. The gatekeepers include the Board of Management, the principal and the children's parents/guardians. Their role in the sampling is to mediate access to children and adhere to the rights of the child as noted by the United Nations (1989). Other participants include critical friends and my colleagues as a validation group for the purpose of rigour and validation of research.

Overview of the Research Design of this Study:

Cycle 1	• Ethical Approval from Maynooth University Ethics Committee • Consent and assent • Individual Child Interview • Group Interview (Social Skills Session) • Parent Interview
Cycle 2	• Social Skills Sessions for 40 minutes per week (6 sessions) • Pupil Journals provided • Ongoing reflections and conferencing with co-participants • Frequent meetings with Critical friends and Validation Groups
Cycle 3	• Group Interview reflecting on the Group (Social Skills Session) • Individual Interviews with children and parents • Data Analysis • Analysing the data with Critical friends and Validation Groups

Table 1. Overview of the Research Cycles

3.6 Action Research Cycles

3.6.1 Action Research Cycle One

Cycle One of the action research cycle involves gaining consent and assent from all of the relevant gate keepers. In this Cycle I also began setting up the Social Skills Group with children from my class. I chose a mixed ability, gender balanced grouping. I identified children whom I thought would benefit from the group and I also identified children who had competent social skills to ensure mixed abilities. After gaining consent and assent from the children and their parents I began interviews with the children in the group. I used a survey to structure the interview with questions with 'I struggle with..', 'I am good at..' etc. I scribed the answers from each child and stored the answers as data. I also carried out interviews with the children's parents an informal manner through dialogue. I asked their permission to write down parts of the conversation for data. I also carried out a group interview with the children as part of the first Social Skills Small Group. We discussed what we would like to achieve out of the group sessions and I allowed the session to become more child led.

3.6.2 Action Research Cycle Two

Cycle Two of the action research involves one small group social skills session per week. The session consisted of a warm up activity 'My happy moment of the week'. Using Mosley's (1999) Circle Time approach the children took a turn to share their happy moment and were invited to pass. The main part of the lessons included stimulus such as stories, the children's own thoughts and feelings and discussions led based on these. In some situations we came across scenarios which the children would encounter in day to day life, and acted out and discussed good ways to deal with these situations and not so helpful ways. We also developed a system called red and green thoughts and discussed what red thoughts we may have and how we can turn them into green thoughts e.g. 'I can't do it' > 'I can't do it yet'. This incorporates Carol Dweck's Growth Mindset initiative. At the end of each session I gave the children 5 minutes to reflect on the session in their journals. I met with critical friends frequently throughout along with the validation group. This ongoing reflection of action influenced my future planning for the group.

3.6.3 Action Research Cycle Three

Cycle Three of the action research cycle consisted of a review session with the small group. We looked at our journals from our sessions and discussed what we learned and our thoughts on the group. I also carried out individual interviews with the children where we discussed the children initial surveys and completely one similar. I also had a meeting with the children's parents and asked their thoughts and opinions on the groups and if they had observed any changes in their children's attitude or behaviours. After compiling this data I met with my validation group and shared my findings with them. I asked for their opinions and reflections on the findings and the process. I then complied all of my findings and began validating my data before writing my summary research article.

Research Plan and Time Frame:

September and October 2020	The research topic was identified. Reflective journaling began.
November 2020	Critical engagement with relevant literature occurred.
December 2020	Ethical approval from the college and permission from the Board of Management to conduct my research in the school was granted.
January 2021 11th-15th	Consent from parents, my critical friend and members of my validation group and assent from the children in my class was sought.
February – Mid April 2021	The above action research cycle was implemented over an 8-week period.
End of April 2021	Data were gathered, analysed and interpreted. A review of the cycle took place including feedback from the children, my critical friend and validation group.

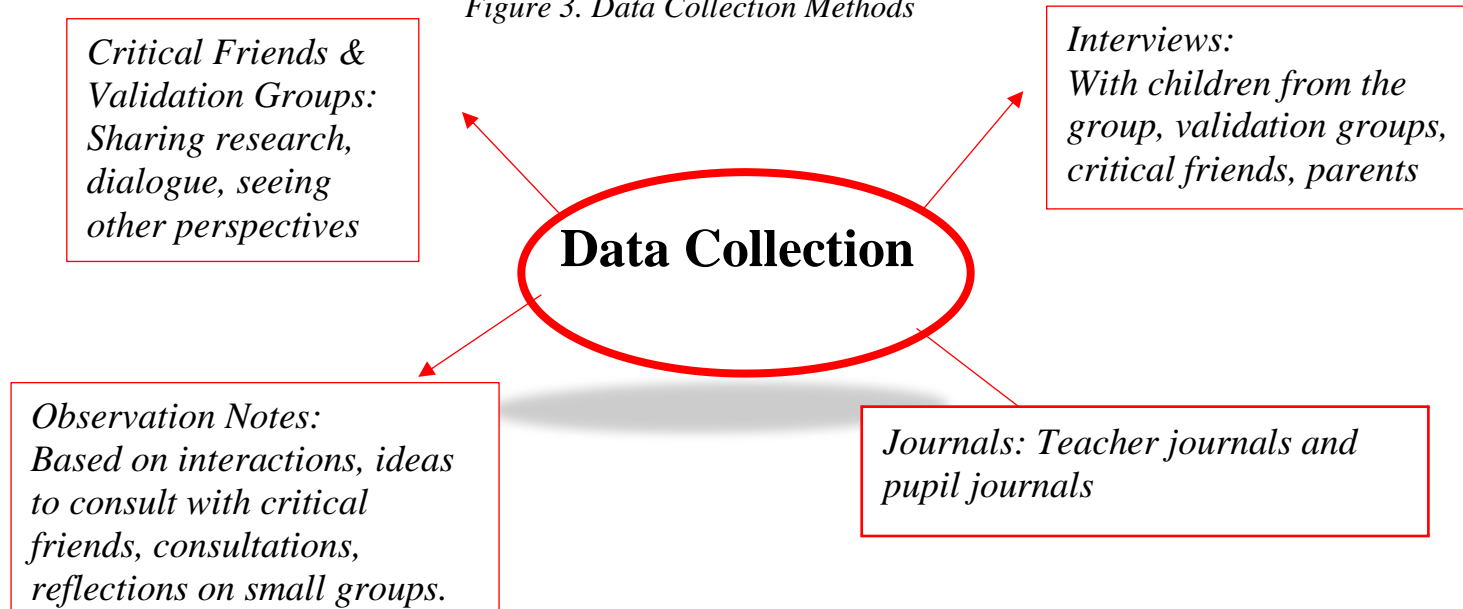|	
May 2021	The data and findings were finalised.
June 2021	The findings were compiled, and a summary research article was drawn up. Results were presented to School Audience.
July 2021	The self-study action research thesis was written.
August 2021	Draft Copy of Thesis Submitted
September 2021	The self-study action research final copy was submitted.

Table 2. Research Plan and Timeframe

The timeframe outlined above was subject to change throughout the process as upon reflection and due to Covid-19, changes occurred in the direction of my work and time scales. Action research does not follow a clear linear trajectory, it is a cyclical process with practitioners often engaging in several cycles of research and is often described as 'messy' in its nature (Sullivan et al., 2016).

3.7 Data Collection Instruments

A multimodal approach based on the Mosaic Approach (Clark & Moss, 2001 cited in Rouvali & Riga, 2019) was implemented in this study. The use of different methods allowed me to reflect on and build a bigger picture, ensuring triangulation. It also ensured that I avoided reliance on one type of data collection method.

The data method collections that I will use are:

Figure 3. Data Collection Methods

Critical Friends & Validation Groups: Sharing research, dialogue, seeing other perspectives

Interviews: With children from the group, validation groups, critical friends, parents

Data Collection

Observation Notes: Based on interactions, ideas to consult with critical friends, consultations, reflections on small groups.

Journals: Teacher journals and pupil journals

3.7.1 Interviews

As I set up a Social Skills group within my class I conducted interviews with the children before and after the research study. These interviews were 5-10 minutes in length. The questions were open ended and allowed the children to steer the conversation based on their participation in the group. Capturing the opinions of the coparticipants before intervention began was of the utmost importance to the design of this study as it ensures even distribution of power, encouraging democracy as we provide rationale for our actions and seek feedback providing credibility (Brookfield, 2017). This again allowed me to seek triangulation and gain the views of co-participants to inform this study. I also conducted interviews with some of the children's parents in the group to see if they had noted a change in attitudes, behaviours and development of social skills. I scribed the questions and answers from each interview. I also conducted interviews with my validation groups and critical friends. This was in the form of dialogue, discussing the research and findings and gaining perspectives from others.

3.7.2 Journals

Sullivan 35 et al. (2016) explain how standing back from a situation and thinking deeply about our actions might highlight patterns within our practice. In doing so we may become cognizant of the values we hold that we may not have been aware of previously. Journal entries were recorded daily based on interactions, conversations and events that had taken place at school. Reflective journal entries combined with class observations and other data collection instruments were used to form the basis for interviews with co-participants and their parents as well as for conferencing with co-participants or meetings with my validation group. Gibbs (1988) Reflective Cycle was used alongside journal entries to support the process of meta-reflection, reflection on reflection. I used Pupil journals in my research also. At the end of each group session I gave the children five minutes to reflect on the group session. I have used these journals, within consent from the children, as an instrument of data collection. According to Rouvali and Riga (2019), the use of such tools is a motivating way to enable children to become part of the decision-making process and increase meaningful participation. These samples were used as the basis for conferencing, discussion as well as lesson plans as I sought to listen to and interpret their voices and opinions.

3.7.3 Critical Friend and the Validation Group

Action research requires dialogue and engagement with others, sharing opinions and seeing other perspectives. By opening ourselves to the views of others we may be illuminated towards new actions and understandings (McNiff, 2002). The validation group consisted of teachers within my class level and my Principal. My critical friends were my two 5th class co-teachers in my school. These people agreed to be part of the group as they were particularly interested in using this idea in the school and in their classrooms. I met with both weekly across each cycle to share observations and ideas and gain their feedback noting observations of any changes or significance in co-participant emotions or behaviours across cycles. Each meeting, conversation and sharing of idea informed lesson planning and objectives for the social skills groups and highlighted times when my values were manifesting in my practice.

3.7.4 Observation Notes

McNiff (2016) notes that all research starts with observing what is happening and systematically record notes about the observations. Observations can be used to record interactions, conversations and behaviours in a more naturalistic approach (McAteer 2013). Observations allow the researcher to become aware of everyday behaviour that might be normally overlooked (Cooper and Schindler 2001:374 cited in Cohen et al. 2018). Semi-structured observations are aimed to gather data with a particular issue in mind. The observations will be for the purpose of hypothesis-generating rather than testing (Cohen et al., 2018:543). I used semi-structured observations to make note of children's comments, behaviours and interactions throughout our small groups. I also used observation notes to record changes in children's behaviours and the development of social skills while observing the children in day to day situations. I recorded these notes in my teacher diary and my reflective journal.

'On yard I have noticed that Child C has become much more positive while playing games. I praised him for this and he told me he was trying his best to change his red thoughts to green thoughts, something we had discussed in the group. I think there was two of us feeling very proud in that moment. It's the little things!'
Reflective Journal 19/05/21

3.7.5 Group Interview

I met with co-participants as a group to collect their final feedback from the sessions. The structure of the interview followed that of Jenny Mosley's (1996) Circle Time (Lundy et al., 2011). This would provide opportunity for all members to speak using a speaking object or the opportunity to pass. Co-participants would be asked their opinions on different activities, how they felt during these times and how other children might experience them. The children were asked their opinion on this type of group, what they thought worked well and what they would change. Cohen et al. (2011) claim advantages of group interviews lie in their ability to address the issue of power imbalance between adults and children, they claim the environment is more comfortable and less unnatural or intimidating than individual interviews and provide the opportunity for children to build upon or extend each other's ideas.

3.7.6 Data Storage

All data that I collected was consistent with the General Data Protection Regulations and the New Data Protection Bill 2018. In line with university guidelines, only data for the purpose of the research study was collected and processed. Data were recorded clearly and accurately. As recommended by Sullivan et al. (2016), all data were signed, labelled and dated. In line with university and GDPR Guidelines, electronic data were secured using password protection. Any other data such as questionnaires, lesson plans, notes and a reflective journal were kept in a locked filing cabinet to ensure confidentiality. The data captured was only 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. My findings will be published as part of my thesis, however all names, locations, interviews and data findings will remain anonymous.

3.8 Data Analysis

With the research objectives of enhancing social and emotional learning in the classroom in mind, artefacts, interview transcripts, observations, journal entries and questionnaire data were organised and explored for patterns, themes and regularities (Cohen et al., 2011). Qualitative data analysis is selected, organised and interpreted by the researcher and as such has been criticised as being too subjective, susceptible to researcher bias and not a true representation of participants'

worlds (Cohen et al., 2011). Transcriptions were created as soon as possible after interviews, my goal was to ensure I depicted the conversation correctly. I ensured to add the tone of voice, pauses and inflections throughout the interview. Following my interpretation of the data I then communicated my analysis of the data back to co-participants to ensure accurate representation of their voices as opposed to an adult interpretation of their lives. (Lundy et al., 2011).

3.8.1 Thematic Analysis

Thematic analysis is a flexible method of identifying patterns within and across data (Clarke & Braun, 2017). Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data from my research journal, observations notes, transcripts, and validation group meetings. Discussing my emerging findings with a critical friend was essential to ensure that my analysis made a relevant, supported argument to answer my research question (Braun & Clarke, 2006). With the aid of my supervisor, I used the Braun and Clarke (2006) six-phase format of thematic analysis. I began by acquainting myself with the journals, surveys and questionnaires. I used the analytic process of coding to record common identifiers appearing in my findings. I colour-coded the data refined the codes by completing further repetitions of the codes to create categories. This then allowed me to look for themes within the categories.. I reviewed the themes and collaborated with my critical friend and validation group to define the themes such as use of perspective, identifying common connections, expression of feelings, behaviours and attitude.

3.9 Conclusion

This chapter outlined the aims of this action research study. It provides a description of the research paradigm, the research site and participants with whom this study takes place. An outline of the research plan, data collection instruments and ethical considerations are also provided. Attempts to minimise potential bias are described in the validity and reliability section. This research paradigm was selected along with the instruments to help promote social and emotional learning within a small group. They were also selected with the hope of enriching my understanding, self-reflection and enhancing my practice.

CHAPTER FOUR: FINDINGS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter discusses the three findings that emerged from this action research study: the importance of voice, assumptions within the selection process for a SSG and the autonomy and self-awareness of the child. Guided by the research question, 'can the introduction of social skills groups in my classroom enhance the children's social and emotional learning?' this chapter explores the themes of autonomy, child agency, voice of assumptions. Through the methods of co-participant interviews, observations, journal entries, reflections and critical friends, this chapter outlines my main findings under three themes.

4.2 Agency and Autonomy

> *'I liked that we got to talk about things that we'd like to improve on.'* – Child C's
> feedback on the SSG, Cycle One (22/03/21)

The themes of agency and autonomy were at the forefront of the children's learning and experiences of our Social Skills Groups. The children had the opportunity to make the sessions child-led, as Lundy's model on participation (2013) was used to design this intervention. They were child-led as the children highlighted what they would like to improve on or discuss more during these sessions. My personal reflections revealed that the children demonstrated self-awareness when given the opportunity to identify topics which they would like to improve on. Their ability to self-identify challenges and improvements which they would like to make surprised me each time as they individually chose topics for our focus sessions.

'I wasn't sure how asking the children to identify weaknesses and challenges was going to go. However, each child thought of something different which they would like to improve on and a reason for their choice. As the average age of the children in the group was eleven years old, I was really impressed by their self-awareness. It made me wonder if I had under estimated their ability to be involved within their own goal setting previously.'
Reflective Journal wrote after Session One, Cycle One. (09/02/21)

The topics that the children self-identified as areas which they would like to discuss more or improve on were, Active Listening, Friendships, Cursing, Changing Red to Green thoughts (as

previously discussed in class) and controlling anger. Previously, I had noted in much of the literature and through National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) recommendations (2015) SSG's were led by the teacher, with the teacher choosing the children in the group and the goals for the group. As outlined by the NEPS guidelines for setting up a SSG (2015) 'assumption for inclusion in the group is therefore that these children have not, for whatever reason, had the opportunity to learn or apply the targeted social skills effectively.' The following are potential participants of a social skills group according to the NEPS guidelines; 'Children who the teachers think are negatively affected by feeling different in some way, who find it difficult to make and keep friends, who attract attention by use of negative processes and behaviours such as attention seeking behaviours, calling out inappropriately, inappropriate social contacts and those exhibiting difficulties with basic social skills and children who are not asking for help when needed because they do not know how to effectively seek help from adults and other children.' (NEPS, Page 3,2015) While reading through these recommendations I noted it is the teacher who chooses who should be in the group, and also identifies why and what goal the children should work towards. In a paper published by the Disability Quarterly Services (2011), they discuss the idea behind most research involving the perspectives of the teacher and the parents and not of the child. Burton Blatt (1981) wrote, "A person is defined by the stories he tells about himself as well as by the stories that are told about him." The paper suggests that too often, stories are told about people with disabilities, the emphasis is on the voice of the professional, not the voice of the person. This could be contrasted with the voice of the child in the circumstances of goal setting within SSG, the voice of the teacher or professional being held to higher importance. Although I am aware that many children may not be able to demonstrate such self-awareness, I believe that giving children autonomy and choice over what they would like to discuss or improve on allows for collaborative, child led learning. Why must we decide what they children need to learn or improve on, when, while given the chance the children have shown the awareness and capability themselves? This links in with educational theorist Gert Biesta's (2009) views on education, along with Nel Nodding's (2003) views on the voice of the child.

4.2 Voice of the Child

As stated above, voice was a major theme which emerged from my data analysis. As the children were coming from a class of thirty children, the Small Groups were a welcome addition to their lives. In the children's feedback the feelings of being heard, valued and listened to were strong. I

ensured that the children's voice was heard throughout this intervention, through including them from start to finish. I found that the children enjoyed being part of the process, collaborating and tweaking the groups for future children and often asking me about college and the study. I tried to focus on the children as being active participants and co-researchers in the research. 'If the children feel that their voice has influence and is respected, it will promote a culture where their voice is appreciated, in accordance with their age and maturity.' (Harmon, 2018: 31).

> *'Some people can say the answers but might be nervous to say them in front of the whole class.'* – Child B, Google Forms, Feedback at the end of Cycle 1, (*22/03/21*)

> *'I got to talk more and say my ideas'* Child F, Google Forms, Feedback at the end of Cycle 2, (11/05/21)

> *'it's easier to speak up'* Child A, feedback at the end of Session 2, Cycle 1 (9/2/21)

> *'I'm not afraid of other's opinions'* Child B, feedback at the end of Session 2, Cycle 1 (9/2/21)

> *'It's easier to chat and to get to speak'* Child C, feedback at the end of Session 2, Cycle 1 (9/2/21)

As I reflected, many of the children in the groups were shy and as a result did not feel comfortable speaking in front of the class. However, their confidence grew in a small group setting which then in turn led to them joining whole class discussions more often.
At a preadolescent age, children are often self-conscious and worried about what others thought, which is evident in Child B's feedback, however the groups gave them a safe space to explore ideas. The children enjoyed getting to have more dialogue with each other and a space to share their ideas. As we have a class of thirty children, the children do not always get the opportunity to share their ideas and opinions, however in a small group setting this allows for more dialogue and their voice to be valued and listened to. Professor Laura Lundy's studies (2013) were instrumental to implementation of these groups within the classroom. I chose the model she presented as I believed that it would allow me to live closer to my values of care, respect and the voice of a child, as an educational practitioner. I also chose this model as I thought it would capture the children's voice in a meaningful way within this research. Lundy's model

demonstrates, through using a rights-based approach ground in Article 12 of the UNCRC (1989) that children can be active participants in the decision-making processes on topics that are relevant to their lives.

'Parties shall assure to the child who is capable of forming his or her own views the right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child, the views of the child being given due weight in accordance with the age and maturity of the child.'
(UNCRC, 1992: 7)

Throughout the process I made my own observations and reflections in my reflective journal, one such entry was a direct comment on student voice.

'The other thing which I have been reflecting on today is that of student voice. I have really enjoyed letting the children shape these sessions. I have enjoyed listening to their needs and I felt like they valued the sessions when they could see themselves in them'
Reflective Journal (10/2/21)

4.3 Assumptions when creating Social Skills Groups

My own assumptions and bias when choosing the participants for a SSG was another theme which emerged, mostly through my own meta-reflections and conversations with others. As Cycle One did not go as planned due to the move to online learning after Christmas, I asked the children to volunteer for the Small groups. A contrast to the original plan being me identifying the children to participate in the groups. I asked the children to volunteer instead, as it would be based on who would be willing to come online for an extra class a week and children who had access to technology to allow them to be available for these sessions. I had four students sign up for the sessions, three girls and a boy. I was firstly slightly surprised over the students who had signed up as these were children who I would not have chosen. They were not children who I perceived to experiencing emotional or social needs. However, throughout the sessions as I stated in my reflective diary, these were children who were shy and lacking in self-confidence.

'Starting out I wouldn't have chosen the kids that are in the group based on 'needs' for a SSG, however due to the groups going online I formed a group with the children who volunteered. This has been very interesting as it has given me a new realisation. The kids that are in the group are

mostly shy and quiet. However, they are becoming more comfortable and confident in speaking within a small group.

Reflective Journal 9/02/21

As I observed and reflected on the sessions throughout, I noted that these children's emotional and social learning was being enhanced through these sessions. This was really interesting to me, as although they were not the children who were obvious to me as personnel for the groups, they had gained a lot from them. It made me reflect on the fact that although some people appear to be more in need, most of us are, in some way or another. It also prompted me to reflect on the dynamics of the choosing a group. Had I assumptions and bias based on gender? The males within the class were more obviously candidates rather than the females, as they were the people to act out, however the females were quieter, better behaved but may have been internalising their problems. This observation and reflection prompted me to study the literature around gender-based behaviours. A study completed in Australia, by the Australian Institute of Family Studies (2012), involving almost 10,000 children from birth to nine years of age examined the differences and similarities between the behaviours of male and female children. The study found that between the age of two and three, the boys displayed a higher rate of behavioural problems than the girls. Boys were around 10% more likely to show what we call "externalising behaviours" such as destructiveness and aggressiveness. Girls, on the other hand, were more likely to have "internalising problems" such as anxiety. Girls were also more likely to have higher scores on measures of "competence" such as following rules or caregiving behaviours. This study made me reflect on my own classroom. It made me think of the phrase 'those who shout loudest get heard'. This finding would alter the way I manage and think about the different genders in my classroom into the future.

'While reflecting on today's session I was happy that my selection process did not go to plan. I wouldn't have prioritised the children who volunteered for the groups to be part of a SSG, however, I can really see the value in the group for these kids. It made me think of the quieter kids in the class, just because they are quieter and don't seem to have many obvious needs, they sometimes slip through a teacher's radar. However, I already feel this group would really help with a child's self-confidence and self-esteem.'

Reflective Journal 23/02/21

This has led to me to a finding which I did not foresee. Reflecting on bias and assumptions has been a learning curve for me. As discussed under the theme of Autonomy and Self-Awareness, had Cycle One went as planned I would have chosen the participants to be part if this intervention, however the 'messiness' (Schon, 1983) as often discussed in Action Research has led me to a new finding. I would reconsider the selection process for a SSG. I would even argue that all children should be afforded the opportunity to be part of the groups, not just those who are most apparent in need.

4.4 Conclusion

Throughout this study I have tried to ensure that the voice of the children was at the centre of the process, as I felt that they were of age to be active participants in each process of the study. My findings contributed to an abundance of new learning around my own assumptions and bias, the importance of the voice of the child and the ability of a child to be involved in given a chance to have autonomy over their learning. Although these are just three of my main findings, I have also been left with a number of questions too, as previously advised by the NEARI group (Network for Educational Action Research Ireland). Analysing the data made me question gender bias in the classroom and the rights and voice of all children in their learning.

CHAPTER FIVE: CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The experience of conducting Self-Study Action Research has influenced me in many ways. I begin this final chapter by describing the messiness of the process of Action Research. Following this, I discuss the summary and findings of this Action Research Project. Finally, I discuss some of the limitations of this study.

5.1. Messiness and Challenges

Schön's "messes" (Schön, 1983: 82) of Action Research refers not to chaos, but issues that Mellor (2015) describes as 'difficult to deal with'. This finally made sense to me as I navigated my way through the Action Research Journey. My plan to carry out two cycles of child-led Social skills groups over six weeks, was altered due to school closures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. Luckily, I had sought consent and assent from the parents and children to carry out these sessions online as a contingency plan. Again, as discussed in my findings, this changed the make-up of the children who participated in the groups. Usually, SSG's were for children who teachers felt are 'negatively affected by feeling different in some way' or children 'who find it difficult to make and keep friends, who attract attention by use of negative processes and behaviours and who do not know how to ask for help'. (NEPS, 2015). However, with the sessions taking place online, I decided to alter the selection process and ask the children to volunteer to be part of the group. I decided to do this as many children would not have access to devices and for some, online learning was not something they were engaging with regularly with the absence of a routine and a setting to promote learning. This modified the course of my research, however, it was through these "messes" (Schön, 1983), that I found out most, learning which I had never predicted to take place.

Going off plan was a big challenge for me, as I had formed a plan had would have liked to stick to it. Sullivan et al. (2016) had identified the difficulties and complications of the journey of Action Research but I was still unprepared. As I had wrote in my Reflective Journal:

'While reflecting on today's session I was happy that my selection process did not go to plan.' Reflective Journal (23/02/21)

The change in plan had actually caused me to live closer to my values on reflection, as student voice had an even bigger part to play within the research. As Laidlaw (2009) experienced, it is in

the turning of the mess into a positive that makes the risk of Action Research worth taking (Dadds & Hart, 2001). The willingness to take a risk and be wrong leads to an evolution of practice which becomes a continual learning process (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003; McNiff & Whitehead, 2011: 35)

5.2. Summary and Findings

This study asked the question, how can I enhance the social and emotional teaching and learning in my classroom? In order to improve my practice, trying to live closer to my values of respect, care and voice, I planned out my research intervention. This intervention lead to unpredicted findings. I undertook this research out of concern for the social emotional well-being of many of the children in my class, I believed that in order for them to earn they had to feel happy and safe in school. Reflecting on my values of respect, care and voice, I became aware of how I was a 'living contradiction'. The vast curriculum that needed to be covered, along with everyday school life took precedent over taking the time to listen and give voice to the children in my class. I resolved to creating child-led SSG in my classroom for everyone. I sought to give all of the children a space to develop socially and emotionally. I believe that this was particularly important as the children are at a pre-adolescent age living through a global pandemic. I believe that I have developed a living theory of practice that values respect for all, a caring, nurturing relationship along with giving the children voice and agency over themselves and their learning in school. The progress of my practice can be observed in the final chapters of this study, along with the unexpected outcomes of this study. I experienced a transformation in my own thinking and demonstrated my learning of the importance of child voice and how it is often overlooked within studies and in the classroom.

 I developed SSG groups in the classroom, giving the children agency over what they would like to discuss within these groups. I maintain that these positive experiences held by me, the researcher and the children, as co-researchers, led to positive relationship development, where the children felt valued. I wanted to create an experience where the children felt valued, listened to and heard, which I believe I did so through feedback from the children, critical friends and my validation group.

Through the development of child-led SSG in my classroom I have fulfilled my objectives of supporting the children's social and emotional development and enhancing my own understanding and knowledge. This study has had a transformative influence on my practice as a whole. I have learned to reflect on and evaluate my practice and to examine different lenses as

recommended by Brookfield (1995) as Hooks says (2010: 10) "we must be willing to acknowledge what we do not know". The action research process of self-reflection, both in and on my practice (Schön, 1983), alerted me to the importance of the voice of the children in research and within their own learning experiences. The changes to my practice have led to an improvement in my practice but also an improvement for my pupils in terms of social and emotional teaching and learning, along with feeling heard and valued. I believe the findings of this study have significance for the wider school community as well as learning support and resource hour allocation. I also believe my findings hold significance for the future design and development of SSG on a wider school community level, along with a national level.

5.3. Limitations

There was a limitation of resources regarding carrying out small group sessions while being a classroom teacher. Additional teacher support in the classroom would allow me to take the groups to a different room and allow for a safe, undisturbed setting. These groups could also be done in a classroom setting, however, additional teacher support is needed to attend to the rest of the class.

Covid-19 also served as a limitation to this process. This meant that the project did not go as planned. However, this limitation turned into an advantage. It became a blessing in disguise, as I now have new findings that I would not have had if we did not have to turn to online platforms. It has made me completely rethink the selection criteria and process for Social Skills Groups in the future which I believe is a fairer process for all of the children.

CHAPTER 6: REFERENCES

Australian Institute of Family Studies. (2012) The Longitudinal Study of Australian Children Annual statistical report.

Biesta, G. (2009). Good Education in an Age of Measurement: On the need to reconnect with the question of purpose in education. Educational Assessment, Evaluation and Accountability, 21 (1), 33-46.

BelongTo.org (2016) 'Mental, Emotional and Physical Health'

Brookfield, S. (2017) Becoming a critically reflective teacher. Second edition. San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.

Braun, V. & Clarke, V. (2006). Using Thematic Analysis in Psychology. Qualitative Research in Psychology, 3 (2), 77-101.

Brydon-Miller, M. (2003) Why Action Research? Action Research, 1(1), 9-28. London: Sage Publications.

Cohen, J., (2001) The Social Emotional Education of Young Children, Chapter 1 Social and Emotional Education: Core concepts and practices

Chesworth, L. (2018). Embracing uncertainty in research with young children. International Journal of Qualitative Studies in Education, 31 (9), 851-862

Cohen, L., Manion, L. and Morrison, K. (2018) Research Methods in Education. 8th Ed. London: Routledge.

Collins, B. (2011) Empowering Children Through Circle Time: An Illumination of Practice

Cook-Sather, A & Felten, P. (2011) Students as co-creators of teaching approaches, course design, and curricula: implications for academic developers.

Cook-Sather, A. (2015) Sound, Presence, and Power: "Student Voice" in Educational Research and Reform

Clarke, V. & Braun, V. (2013) Teaching thematic analysis: Overcoming challenges and developing strategies for effective learning. The Psychologist, 26(2), 120-123.

CYPSC (2017) Social and Emotional Well-being

DCYA (2014-2020) 'Better Outcomes, Brighter Futures: The National Policy Framework for Children & Young People.' Government Publications: Dublin. (2014)

DCYA (2014) 'State of the Nation's Children: Ireland 2014'. Dublin: Government Publications.

Department of Education and Skills (2018) Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Action: 2018-2023 [Online].

Available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Policy-Reports/wellbeing-policystatement-and-framework-for-practice-2018%E2%80%932023.pdf (Accessed 20th November 2020).

 Department of Education and Skills (2018a) Circular 0042/2018 – Best Practices for Primary Schools in the use of Programmes/ or External Facilitators in Promoting Wellbeing Consistent with The Department of Education and Skills' Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice [Online].
Available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Circulars-and-Forms/ActiveCirculars/cl0042_2018.pdf (accessed 30th October 2020).

Department of Education and Skills (2009) Social, Personal and Health Education (SPHE) in Primary School. Inspectorate Evaluation Studies [Online]. Available at: https://www.education.ie/en/Publications/Inspection-ReportsPublications/Evaluation-ReportsGuidelines/insp_sphe_in_the_primary_school_09_pdf.pdf (Accessed 30th October 2020)

Dept. of Children and youth affairs, (2012) Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children.

Dillon, G. (2020/2021) Reflective Journal

Disability Quarterly Services. (2011) Whose "Voice" is it Anyway?: Giving Voice and Qualitative Research Involving Individuals that Type to Communicate.

Durlak, J.A., Weissberg, R.P., Dymnicki, A.B., Taylor, R.D., & Schellinger, K.B. (2011)The Impact of enhancing students' social and emotional learning: A Meta-analysis of school based universal interventions. Child Development, 82(1), 405-432.

Elias, M.J. (2013) The character of schools, the character of individuals, and the character of society: Creating educational policy to reflect this inextricable interconnection. KEDI Journal of Educational Policy, 141-149

Goleman, D. (2008). Secret of success. Greater Good, 5(1), 8-9.
Gibbs, P. (2011) The Pedagogy of Compassion at the Heart of Higher Education. London: Springer International Publishing.

Hanafin, J. & Lynch, A. (2002). Peripheral Voices: Parental involvement, social class, and educational disadvantage. British Journal of Sociology of Education, 23 (1), 35-49.

Harmon, M. (2020) Meaningfully Capturing the voice of children in research: Applying the Lundy Model of Participation in the Classroom. Children's Research Digest Volume 6, Issue 2.

HBSC, (2020) The Irish Health Behaviour of School Aged Children

Hooks, B. (2010). Teaching Critical Thinking: Practical Thinking. London: Routledge.

HSE, NEPS, DES and the Department of Health. (2013) Guidelines for Mental Health Promotion

Jones-Schenk, J. (2019) Social and Emotional Learning: Why Does it Matter? The Journal of Continuing Education in Nursing, 50 (2), 57 - 58.

Kelchtermans, G., (2018) Professional Self-Understanding in Practice: Narrating, Navigating and Negotiating: Mapping Challenged and Innovations

Kemmis, S. (2010) What is to be done? The place of action research. Educational Action Research, 18(4), 417 - 427.

Lundy, L. (2013) 'Voice' is not enough: conceptualising Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child'.

Lundy, L., McEvoy, L. & Byrne, B. (2011). Working with young children as co-researchers: An approach informed by the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child. Early Education and Development, 22 (5), 714-736.

Maynooth University (2016) Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy [Online]. Available at: https://www-maynoothuniversityie.jproxy.nuim.ie/sites/default/files/assets/document/Maynooth%20Universit y% 20Research%20Ethics%20Policy%20June%202016_2.pdf (Accessed 30th September 2018).

McAteer, M. (2003) Action Research in Education. London: Sage Publications.

McDonagh, C. Sullivan, B., M. Glenn, M. Roche (2019) Enhancing Practice through Classroom Research: A Teacher's Guide to Professional Development, 2nd Edition

McDonagh, C. Sullivan, B., M. Glenn, M. Roche (2017) Learning Communities in Educational Partnerships: Action Research as Transformation

McNiff, J. (2002) Action Research for Professional Development, Concise Advice for New Action Researchers. 3rd ed.

McNiff, J. (2016) You and Your Action Research Project (4 th ed.). New York: Routledge.

McNiff, J.(2009) Writing an action Research Report [Online]. Available at: http://www.jeanmcniff.com/ar-booklet.asp (Accessed 12th November 2018).

McNiff, J., and Whitehead, J. (2010) You and Your Action Research Project (3rd ed.).

Mental Health Commission Annual Report. (2010) The State of the Nation's Children

Menter, I.,Elliot, D., Hulme, M., Lewin, J., Lowden, K., (2011)A Guide to Practitioner Research in Education

Mosley, J (1999) Quality Circle Time in Action

Moon, J, (2004) A Handbook of Reflective and Experiential Learning

National Educational Psychological Service. (2015) Setting Up a Social Skills Training Group.

Noddings, N. (2003). Happiness in Schools and Classrooms. Happiness and Education. Cambridge, United Kingdom; Cambridge University Press. 240-261.

NICE.org.uk (2016) Social and Emotional Wellbeing for Children and Young People

Pollard, A and Anderson, J.(2008) Reflective teaching. London: Continuum International Pub. Group.

Roffey, S., (2006) Circle Time for Emotional Literacy

Rouvali, A. & Riga, V. (2019). Redefining the importance of children's voices in personal social emotional development curriculum using the Mosaic Approach. International Journal of Primary, Elementary and Early Years Education, 47 (8), 998-1013.

Schön, D, A. (1983). The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In-Action. London: Temple Smith

Statham, J. and Chase, E. (2010) 'Childhood Wellbeing: A brief overview', Loughborough: Childhood Wellbeing Research Centre.

Sullivan, B., M. Glenn, M. Roche and C. McDonagh (2016), Introduction to Critical Reflection and Action for Teacher Researchers, London: Routledge

UNICEF's Report Card Series (2020)

United Nations (2010). United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child [online]. Available at: https://www.gov.ie/en/publication/a1481d-united-nations-convention-on-therights-of-the-child/ (accessed April 19 2021).

White, M., (2009) Magic Circle self-esteem for everyone in circle time

Whitehead, J. & McNiff, J. (2006). Action Research Living Theory. Sage Publishing Limited: London.

Whitehead, J. (1989) Creating a living educational theory from questions of the kind, "How do I improve my practice?", Cambridge Journal of Education, 19 (1), 41 - 52.

CHAPTER 7: APPENDICES

Maynooth University
National University
of Ireland Maynooth

Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas,
Ollscoil Mhá Nuad
**Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary
and Early Childhood Education**

St Finian's Primary School,

Newcastle-Lyons,

Co. Dublin

10.10.20

To the Board of Management,

As you may be aware, I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. With this in mind, I now wish to seek the permission of the Board of Management to carry out some of my research in my classroom.

I would be grateful for this permission and your support. I am the focus of my research and I aim to evaluate, reflect on and hopefully, improve my practice.

The research I am hoping to carry out will meet the objectives of the SPHE curriculum in Fifth Class. I am aiming to carry out some research in fostering social and emotional development in my classroom. I believe this research will have many benefits including professional development and benefit the students within my class.

My data collection methods may include some or all of the following: audio records, observations, lesson plans, lesson evaluations, interviews, questionnaires, my personal reflective journal entries. I will seek the permission of the children, parents and any other participants in the next step of ethical approval.

I guarantee strict confidentiality of all information. I will keep all information regarding the school and participants anonymous. I will be carrying out my research in accordance with the Ethical Guidance from the University and adhering to strict GDPR guidelines.

Your Sincerely,

Grace Dillon

**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 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 is the research question?

How can I promote social and emotional learning in a 5th class primary school setting?

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observation, Reflective Journal, Questionnaires, Interviews, lesson plans, examples of pupil's work etc.

Who else will be involved?

The study will be carried out by me, the class teacher 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: **E:** grace.dillon.2021@mumail.ie

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

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 my teaching of social and emotional learning in the classroom.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the small group settings by setting up small Social Skills Groups.

The data will be collected using observations, a daily teacher journal, questionnaires and interviews. The children will be asked their opinions through discussing how they find the Social Skills Group and/if they have found it beneficial to their learning.

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

All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.
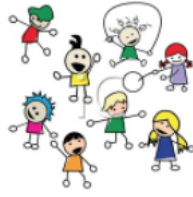
I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in this project.

If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at grace.dillon.2021@mumail.ie

Yours faithfully,

Grace Dillon.

Child's name _____

I am going to set up a Social Skills Groups. I would like to see if this will help improve our social and emotional skills, for example giving us tools to deal with challenging situations or emotions. I would like to work with you and gather your opinions and thoughts when we are in school and to write down some notes about our lessons.

Would you be ok with that? Pick a box   Yes   No

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

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

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: _____

Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Declaration by Researcher

This declaration must be signed by the applicant(s)

I acknowledge(s) and agree that:

a) It is my sole responsibility and obligation to comply with all Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.

b) I will comply with Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.

c) That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy.

d) That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy.

e) That the research will not commence until ethical approval has been granted by the Research and Ethics committee in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Signature of Student:

Date: