

Assignment Cover Sheet

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Dáta / Date: 15/09/2021

Thesis Title Page



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

Title:

How can I, as a Froebelian Teacher, practice Active and Experiential Learning in an Irish-Language Early Immersion Education (*Luath-Tumoideachas*) Setting?

Name of Student:

Aisling Connaughton

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

Date: 24/09/2021

Supervised by: Dr. Liam Mac Amhlaigh

Abstract

The purpose of this Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research (SSEPR) Project (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021) was to identify how I can improve and adapt my practice in language instruction in order to align my practice with my Froebelian values. This research project took place in an Irish-Language early-immersion, or *tumoideachas*, setting. It was undertaken in response to the identification of a ‘living-contradiction’ (Whitehead, 2011) within my own practice and in order to navigate and create my own ‘living-educational-theory’ (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021) of language instruction.

This SSEPR project was grounded in action-research methodologies and is an account of both my professional and personal learning journeys. This thesis documents an adaptation of my language teaching methodologies through critically reflective practice, and the examination of my assumptions and values.

The intervention for this research project, called *Fiontar Froebelach*, was designed following the identification of my ontological values of the importance of life-long and active learning, compassion and understanding, and my epistemological belief that all learners are knowledge creators. *Fiontar Froebelach* involved using active and experiential approaches to language learning in a Junior Infant Classroom. Through incorporating a thematic approach to teaching, providing opportunities for the students to play with their language and engaging with nature and outdoor learning, the aim of the study was to evaluate if the children’s understandings of their roles as language learners was affected.

In addition to the children in the class who volunteered to take part in this SSEPR, this research encompassed engagement from many secondary partners in order to add to the reliability and validity of the research. Such secondary partners included: A Learning Partner, Critical Friends and Critical Observers.

Through vigorous data collection and a thematic analysis, a number of findings emerged in relation to my learning and the learning of the students. The intervention proved effective in enhancing the students' perceptions of themselves as language learners, in these circumstances. It also proved to be effective in the adaptation of my practice and contributed to the development of my own 'living-educational-theory' (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021) of language development. This study has the potential to contribute to the field of practitioner-based early-immersion education research and towards the enhancement of my own practice, along with the policies and practices in my school.

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I would like to acknowledge all of the assistance and guidance that was afforded to me from the Froebel Department of Education including lecturers and colleagues.

I would like to thank all of the children, their parents and all participants in this study who volunteered their time in order to contribute to this research project. Thank you to the Board of Management and the Principal of the school for allowing me to conduct this research within my classroom. The support and guidance from the whole school community has been invaluable and much appreciated. Go raibh míle maith agaibh uilig.

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Gabhaim buíochas ó chroí le gach éinne a bhí páirteach sa taighde seo – na rannpháirtithe agus na daoine a chabhraigh liom an taighde seo a thabhairt chun críche.

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Signed: Aisling Connaughton

Date: 15/09/2021

Table of Contents

Thesis Title Page.....	ii
Abstract.....	iii
Acknowledgements.....	v
Declaration of Authenticity	vi
Table of Contents	vii
List of Tables and Figures	xiii
List of Appendices	xvi
List of Abbreviations and Acronyms.....	xvii
Translations	xviii
Chapter 1: Introduction	1
1.1. Introduction to Study.....	1
1.2. Focus and Aims of Study	1
1.3. Values-based Self Study Action Research/SSEPR.....	2
1.4. Research Context, Background, and Intervention.....	3
1.5. Potential Contribution of the Study.....	4
1.5.1. <i>Potential Contribution of the Study for Me, as the Researcher:</i>	4
1.5.2. <i>Potential Contribution of the Study for Students:</i>	5
1.5.3. <i>Potential Contribution of the Study for the Wider Education Context:</i>	5
1.6. Thesis Overview.....	5
1.7. Conclusion to Introduction Chapter	6

Chapter 2: Literature Review	8
2.1. Introduction to Literature Review	8
2.2. Action Research	8
2.2.1. <i>Examining Action Research</i>	9
2.2.2. <i>Introduction to Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research (SSEPR)</i>	10
2.2.3. <i>Critically Reflective Practice in SSEPR</i>	12
2.2.4. <i>Examining Values in SSEPR</i>	13
2.2.5. <i>Praxis and Living Educational Theory</i>	14
2.2.6. <i>Building my Self-Understanding through SSEPR</i>	15
2.2.7. <i>Fluidity of Self-Understanding and Praxis</i>	17
2.2.8. <i>My Self-Understanding/Identity as a Froebelian Teacher</i>	18
2.2.9. <i>SSEPR in Partnership with Others</i>	20
2.2.10. <i>Educational Research in Tumoideachas</i>	21
2.3. Tumoideachas (Early Immersion Education)	23
2.3.1. <i>Introduction to Tumoideachas</i>	24
2.3.2. <i>A Brief History of Tumoideachas in Ireland</i>	25
2.3.3. <i>Tumoideachas Policies of the School and the Department of Education</i>	25
2.3.4. <i>International Perspectives</i>	26
2.3.5. <i>Strategies for Tumoideachas</i>	31
2.4. Active and Experiential Learning	36
2.4.1. <i>Introduction to Active and Experiential Learning</i>	36
2.4.2. <i>Definition of Active and Experiential Learning</i>	36
2.4.3. <i>Theorists promoting Active and Experiential Learning</i>	38
2.4.4. <i>Active and Experiential Learning in Tumoideachas</i>	40
2.5. Conclusion to Literature Review	43

Chapter 3: Research Methods	44
3.1. Introduction to Methodology Chapter	44
3.2. Research Methodologies	46
3.2.1. <i>Qualitative Research</i>	47
3.2.2. <i>Looking at my Values</i>	49
3.2.3. <i>Fiontar Froebelach</i>	50
3.2.4. <i>Autoethnography/ Reflection as a part of SSEPR</i>	51
3.2.5. <i>Narrative Enquiry: Children as Co-Researchers</i>	52
3.2.6. <i>Assisting Secondary Partners</i>	53
3.3. Research Design	55
3.3.1. <i>My Research Intervention</i>	55
3.3.2. <i>Research Sample</i>	56
3.3.4. <i>Planned Research Cycles</i>	59
3.4. Data Collection Instruments	60
3.4.1. <i>Data Collection Instruments</i>	60
3.4.2. <i>Primary Data Collection</i>	61
3.4.3. <i>Secondary Data Collection – Dialogue with Assisting Secondary Partners</i>	66
3.4.4. <i>Data Collection Schedule</i>	68
3.4.5. <i>Validity and Judgement – Triangulation</i>	68
3.5. Ethical Considerations	72
3.5.1. <i>Recruitment and Co-Participants</i>	72
3.5.2. <i>Informed Consent and Assent</i>	73
3.5.3. <i>Vulnerability</i>	74
3.5.4. <i>Power Dynamics</i>	75
3.5.5. <i>Sensitivity</i>	75

3.5.6. Covid-19.....	76
3.5.7. Process of Ethical Approval.....	77
3.5.8. Adherence to Guidelines	78
3.5.9. Ethical Data Collection and Storage	78
3.6. Conclusion to Methodology Chapter	80
Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion.....	81
4.1. Introduction to Findings and Discussion Chapter.....	81
4.2. Data Analysis Process – Rationale.....	82
4.3.: Thematic Analysis of Findings	86
4.3.1. The Impact of the Intervention on my Learners	87
4.3.2. Theme 2: The Impact of the Intervention on my Self-Understanding as a Language Teacher.....	93
4.4. Unexpected Findings of the Research.....	97
4.4.1. Post-Lockdown Views of Education.....	98
4.4.2. Examining my Self-Understanding as a Teacher through Reflections	98
4.4.3. Collaborative Learning and Problem Solving improved within the Classroom	100
4.5. Conclusion to Findings and Discussion Chapter	101
Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations.....	102
5.1. Introduction to Conclusion and Recommendations Chapter	102
5.2. Summary of Main Findings	102
5.3. Challenges of this SSEPR	104
5.3.1. The Need for more Practitioner-Led Research in relation to Tumoideachas	104

5.3.2. Covid-19 Pandemic	105
5.3.3. Resources	105
5.4. Limitations of this SSEPR	105
5.5. Implications of this SSEPR.....	106
5.5.1. Personal and Professional Learning	106
5.5.2. Implications for my Students from their Participation in the Research.....	107
5.5.3. Significance for the Wider Educational Community.....	108
5.6. Recommendations for Future Educational Practice and Research	109
5.7. Research Conclusion.....	110
Reference List	112
Appendices	126
Appendix 1: Letters seeking Consent from Participants of the Study	127
<i>Letter 1: Letter to Parents/Guardians.....</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Letter 2: Letter to Child</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Letter 3: Information Sheet Parents and Guardians.....</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>Letter 4: Parent/Guardian Consent Form</i>	<i>133</i>
<i>Letter 5: Child's Assent Form.....</i>	<i>134</i>
<i>Letter 6: Letter to Principal & Board of Management</i>	<i>135</i>
<i>Letter 7: Information page for principal/Board of Management.....</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>Letter 8: Principal/ Board of Management consent form.....</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>Letter 9: Letter to Colleagues</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Letter 10: Information page for Colleagues</i>	<i>142</i>

<i>Letter 11: Colleague's consent form</i>	144
Appendix 2: Further Reflective Journal Entries indicating Enhancements in my Practice.....	145
Appendix 3: Further Reflective Journal Entries indicating my Epistemological Assumptions adjusting	146
Appendix 4: Child Participants' Pictures and Transcripts of their Voice Recordings (that were relevant to this Study)	147

List of Tables and Figures

Figure 2. 1.: Discussion Topics within Action Research Selection of Literature Review	9
Figure 2. 2.: Self Study Educational Practitioner Research as a Branch of Action Research.....	11
Figure 2. 3.: Critical Reflection and Action as Inextricably Linked	12
Figure 2. 4.: The Formation and Requirements for Teacher Self-Understanding, as adapted from Zembylas (2018: 78 & 84) and Kelchtermans (2018: 236).....	16
Figure 2. 5.: Key Principles, relevant to this Study, that underpin a Froebelian Approach (Tovey, 2013: 2-4 & 34)	19
Figure 2. 6.: Aims of Section 2.3	23
Figure 2. 7.: Features of Canadian Language Immersion Programmes Relevant to Tumoideachas in Gaelscoileanna	28
Figure 2. 8.: Four Levels of Bilingual Teaching in New Zealand (as adapted from May et al., 2006: 3)	30
Figure 2. 9.: Changes to Second Language Teaching because of the Move towards CLT (adapted from Jacobs & Farrell, cited in Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 61)	34
Figure 2. 10.: The Impact of Experiential Lessons on Students (adapted from Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012: 593)	37
Figure 2. 11.: An Adaptation of Hickey's Strategies that lead to Effective Immersion Education (cited in Mac Éinrí, 2007: 21)	42

Figure 3. 1.: Summary of Kemmis' Activities involved in Action Research (adapted from Herr & Anderson, 2005: 5)	45
Figure 3. 2.: Aims of this Research Methodologies Section	47
Figure 3. 3.: Methods of data collection to gain perspectives from different lenses (Brookfield, 2017: 7)	48
Figure 3. 4.: Research Schedule	58
Figure 3. 5.: Research Cycles in this SSEPR Project	59
Figure 3. 6.: Qualitative Primary Data Collection and Uses	60
Figure 3. 7.: Qualitative Secondary Data Collection and Uses	67
Figure 3. 8.: Data Collection Schedule	68
Figure 3. 9.: My Implementation of Winter's 6 Criteria of Rigour (cited in Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 7)	70
Figure 3. 10.: Challenging Assumptions through Reflective Lenses (Brookfield, 2017: 15)	71
Figure 3. 11.: Roles of the Participants in this Study	73
Figure 3. 12.: Ethical Approval Process	77
Figure 3. 13.: Ethical Guidelines followed in this SSEPR Project	78
Figure 3. 14.: Process of Ethical Data Collection and Storage	79

Figure 4. 1.: Division of Data into Themes and Subthemes.....	84
Figure 4. 2.: Data Sets used for Each Theme.....	85
Figure 4. 3.: Themes and Subthemes of Data Analysis with a Focus on Values.....	86
Figure 4. 4.: Outline of Data Items not included in the Findings	88
Figure 4. 5.: Themes of the First and Second Data Collections	89
Figure 4. 6.: CP18's Representations of Themselves as a Language Learner	90
Figure 4. 7.: CP6's Representations of Themselves as a Language Learner	91
Figure 4. 8.: Frequency of Irish Language Use in Child Participants' Depictions of Themselves as Language Learners	92
Figure 5. 1.: Themes and Subthemes that Emerged from Data Collected	103

List of Appendices

Appendices	126
Appendix 1: Letters seeking Consent from Participants of the Study	127
<i>Letter 1: Letter to Parents/Guardians.....</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Letter 2: Letter to Child</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Letter 3: Information Sheet Parents and Guardians.....</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>Letter 4: Parent/Guardian Consent Form</i>	<i>133</i>
<i>Letter 5: Child's Assent Form.....</i>	<i>134</i>
<i>Letter 6: Letter to Principal & Board of Management.....</i>	<i>135</i>
<i>Letter 7: Information page for principal/Board of Management.....</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>Letter 8: Principal/ Board of Management consent form.....</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>Letter 9: Letter to Colleagues</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Letter 10: Information page for Colleagues</i>	<i>142</i>
<i>Letter 11: Colleague's consent form.....</i>	<i>144</i>
Appendix 2: Further Reflective Journal Entries indicating Enhancements in my Practice.....	145
Appendix 3: Further Reflective Journal Entries indicating my Epistemological Assumptions adjusting	146
Appendix 4: Child Participants' Pictures and Transcripts of their Voice Recordings (that were relevant to this Study)	147

List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

AE	Actively Engaged
CEFR	Common European Framework of Reference for Language
CLIL	Content Language Integrated Learning - FCÁT
CLT	Communicative Language Teaching
CP	Child Participant
CPD	Continuing Professional Development
DCYA	Department of Children and Youth Affairs
DES	Department of Education and Skills
FCÁT	Foghlaim Comhtháite Ábhar agus Teanga/cha
HW	Homework
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
OL	Outdoor Learning
PL	Passive Language Learners
PLC	Primary Language Curriculum
SB	School Building
SSAR	Self-Study Action Research
SSEPR	Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research
TBL	Task Based Language Learning
USA	United States of America
WRO	Work Related Objects
ZPD	Zone of Proximal Development

Translations

Aistear	Journey
Cumarsáid	Conversation
Fiontar Froebelach	Froebelian Venture
Gaeilge	Irish Language
Gaelscoil	Irish Medium School
Gaelscoileanna	Irish Medium Schools
Gaeloideachas	Irish Medium Education
Luath-tumoideachas	Early Language Immersion Education
Naíonra	Irish Medium Pre-school
Teanga Iasachta	Borrowed language
Tumoideachas	Language Immersion Education

1. There is ‘fianaise ann go mbíonn tionchar dearfach ag an dátheangachas ar fhoghlaim na matamaitice sa chóras tumoideachas in Éirinn’¹ (Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020: 80)

There is ‘evidence that bilingualism has a positive effect on the learning of mathematics in the immersion education system in Ireland’

2. ‘Mar shlí lán-éifeachtach chun an t-oideachas dátheangach suimitheach a chur chun cinn agus chun sprioctheanga a shealbhú’ (Ó Laoire, 2016: 127).

‘As a fully-effective way to promote the summative bilingual education and to acquire the target language’

3. **‘Má dhéantar ginearálú ar sholáthar an chórais aonteangaigh gan saintréithe an tumoideachais a chur san áireamh go héifeachtach, bíonn baol teip nó laige ann dá thoradh’ (Nig Uidhir cited in Hickey, 2003: 186)**

‘If the delivery of the monolingual system is generalised without immersion education characteristics taken into account effectively, there is a danger that both results will fail or become weak’

4. **‘I gcás na Gaeilge, téann fréamhacha an tumoideachas i bhfad níos doimhne’ (Ó Laoire, 2016: 127)**

‘In the case of the Irish Language, the roots of immersion education go much deeper’

5. **There is ‘rogha agus rochtain ar an ngaeloideachas ar fáil do níos mó páistí ná riamh, páistí ó chúlraí socheacnamaíocha ísle agus páistí le deacrachtaí foghlama san áireamh’ (Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020, 2)**

There is ‘choice and access to Irish-medium education available to more children than ever before, including children from low socio-economic backgrounds and children with learning difficulties’

6. **Gaelscoileanna welcome children ‘ó chúlraí éagsúla teangeolaíoch, eacnamaíoch, cumais, cultúir agus creidimh’ (Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020, 2)**

Irish language schools welcome children ‘from different linguistic, economical, ability culture and spiritual backgrounds’

7. **‘Neart deiseanna bheith gníomhach san fhoghlaim’ (XXX, 2013: 2)**

A lot of opportunities to be active in learning’

8. **‘Tréimhse réamhchumarsáide’, ‘tréimse cumarsáide’ and ‘tréimse iarchumarsáide’ (XXX, 2013: 2)**

Pre-communicative stage, communicative stage and post-communicative stage

9. **‘Próiseas forásach is ea foghlaim teanga a rachaidh an páiste i ngleic leis ar a luas féin’ (An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, 2019: 7)**

‘Language learning is a developmental process that the children will engage with at their own pace’

10. **‘Príomh-mheán cumarsáide inphearsanta agus idirphearsanta atá againn agus is eochair í d’fhorbairt an pháiste mar dhuine’¹⁰ (An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna, 2019: 7)**

‘It is the main medium for personal and inter-personal communication that we have and it is a key component in the development of the child as a person’

11. **‘Caomhnú agus athbheochan teangacha’ (Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016: 134)**

‘To protect and revive languages’

12. **‘Bíonn féiniúlacht chultúrtha go tréan i measc an phobail scoile sna cláir thumoideachais sin’ (Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016: 134)**

‘There is a powerful sense of cultural identity in the school populations with those immersion education programmes’

13. **‘Tá cineálacha éagsúla oideachais dhátheangaigh ann chomh maith’ (Ó Laoire, 2016: 125)**

‘There are many forms of bilingual education also’

14. **‘Aon chomhthéacs oideachais ina n-úsáidtear teanga bhreise mar mheán teagaisc nach í chéad teanga na bhfoghlaimeoirí í go hiondúil’ (Ó Laoire, 2016: 125)**

‘Any educational context that uses an additional language as the medium of instruction that is not the learner’s traditional first language’

15. **‘Roghnaigh formhór na Stiúrthóirí an cúinne baile mar cheann de na gníomhaíochtaí is éifeachtaí ó thaobh múineadh teanga de’ (Hickey, 2003: 195)**

‘The majority of the supervisors chose the home corner as one of the most effective activities in terms of using the language’

16. **‘Is léir gur gá go mbeadh Stiúrthóir nó múinteoir páirteach ann chun úsáid na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn i measc na bpáistí agus iad sa chúinne baile, chomh maith leis an haidhmeanna sóisialta eile a bhaint amach’ (Hickey, 2003: 195) -**

‘It is obvious that there is a need for supervisors or teachers that are involved to promote the use of Irish amongst the children while they are in the home corner, as well as achieving the other social objectives’

17. **‘An gá a bhí le modhanna múinte a chur in oiriúint don tumoideachas, in ionad iarracht a dhéanamh an curaclam céanna a mhúineadh ar an mbealach céanna ach amháin trí mhéan an dara teanga’ (Snow cited in Hickey, 2003: 186)**

‘the need for teaching strategies to be adapted to immersion-education, instead of making an attempt to teach the same curriculum in the same way with the exception of it being in the medium of a second language.’

18. ‘Ghá atá le pleanáil teanga sa luath-thumoideachas, chun na gnáthghníomhaíochtaí a bhaineann leis an luathoideachas a chur in oiriúint chun sealbhú an dara teanga a bhaint amach’ (Hickey, 2003: 195)

‘The need for language planning in early immersion education, so that the normal activities that are involved in early-education are adapted for the acquisition of a second language’

19. ‘Bhí ionadh orm go raibh an méad sin Ghaeilge le chloisteáil sa seomra’

‘I was surprised at the amount of Irish to be heard in the classroom’

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1. Introduction to Study

This thesis outlines a research project that was undertaken as part of a Masters of Education (Research in Practice) in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth University.

This initial chapter begins by providing a brief description of the research focus and aims as well as an introduction to what Values-Based Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021) entails. It then discusses the research background and context as well as a summary of the intervention. It argues the potential contribution of this study for me, for students and for the wider education context. Finally, this chapter provides an outline of topics addressed in each chapter of this thesis.

1.2. Focus and Aims of Study

The purpose of this Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research (SSEPR) (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021) Project was to explore effective language teaching methodologies in a *luath-tumoideachas*, or early immersion education, setting. The purpose of the research was to explore and use active learning strategies for language instruction in order to further align my practice with Froebelian philosophies of teaching, with the aim of facilitating an enhanced, increasingly independent, language learning experience for my students.

1.3. Values-based Self Study Action Research/SSEPR

This research topic originated from the exploration of my ontological and epistemological values and engagement in a critically reflective process through which I identified, questioned, reconsidered, re-narrated and renegotiated my self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2018) both professionally and personally. Critically reflecting on my practice and self-awareness, while engaging with literature, has contributed to the development of a reconsidered narrative related to my perspective on my professional life. This study outlines the professional learning journey that emerged.

Through critically reflecting on my practice and self-understanding as a teacher, I identified a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2011) between my self-understanding as a Froebelian teacher and my language teaching approach in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting. This tension in my practice caused my self-understanding to become somewhat destabilised (McDonagh cited in McNiff & Whitehead, 2002: 145). However, through critical meta-reflection and implementing an intervention, I used my agency to negotiate these tensions through “stepping-up” (Buchanan, 2015), thus adapting my practice in order to live more aligned with my values.

Therefore, as a Froebelian teacher in an Irish language early-immersion context, my research topic aims to explore how I can practice active learning in my setting in order to live more closely to my values and create my own living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 2019). In this regard, I chose to use action research methodologies while engaging in a ‘self-study educational practitioner research’ (SSEPR) project, as advocated by Huxtable and Whitehead (2021: 5). Engaging in this type of research facilitated the exploration of

my educational values and influences and enabled me to enhance my practice so as to live closer to these values.

1.4. Research Context, Background, and Intervention

This SSEPR was conducted in a Junior Infant class of 32 children, in a small *Gaelscoil* (Irish-medium school) located in a large town in the midlands. The children in the classroom had been immersed in *Gaeilge* (Irish Language) from September 2020. However, in January 2021, language instruction took place on online platforms, due to school closures as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic. The children returned to school in March, 2021, when the intervention phase of this research began. The intervention period of this research was restricted to three weeks so that it would not be affected by further school closures. At the beginning of this study, the children were at, or below, Level A1 of CEFR (Council Of Europe, 2020), having little to no Irish, with the exception of the students who attended a *naíonra* (Irish-medium preschool).

As a Froebelian teacher in an Irish language early-immersion context, this Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research (SSEPR) Project aimed to explore how I can practice active learning in my setting in order to live more closely to my values and create my own living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 2019). The epistemological value of learner agency was imperative to the development of the research intervention. Driven by my aspiration for my practice to become more aligned with my Froebelian values, I designed a research-based intervention which I called *Fiontar Froebelach*. This research-based intervention was aligned with the aims of the New Primary Language Curriculum (DES/NCCA, 2019). Through this three-week intervention, I implemented different aspects of Froebelian teaching in my practice, namely: adapting a thematic approach,

integrating language spaces with an active and experiential approach to learning, and incorporating language use in the natural environment.

The data collected in the course of the study consisted of qualitative data from a number of sources. The primary data encompassed my reflective journal and drawings with audio recordings from the children, describing their perceptions of themselves as language learners. Secondary data incorporated analysis of my teacher plans and reflections from Assisting Secondary Partners, including a Learning Partner, Critical Friends and Critical Observers. The inclusion of Assisting Secondary Partners in this research also contributed to the rigour, reliability and validity of the findings and ensured triangulation.

1.5. Potential Contribution of the Study

1.5.1. Potential Contribution of the Study for Me, as the Researcher:

This research has significant potential for the enhancement of my practice. Through this research, I questioned my self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2018) and explored my identity as a teacher (Zembylas, 2018) which resulted in the adaptation of my practice so that my Froebelian values were more evident in my language teaching. This adaptation of my practice also resulted in enhanced confidence in my self-understanding as a Froebelian teacher and facilitated my continued reconsideration, re-narration and renegotiation of my self-understanding and identity as a teacher (Kelchtermans, 2018; Buchanan, 2015).

1.5.2. Potential Contribution of the Study for Students:

This intervention proved effective in assisting the children in my Junior Infant class to actively engage in their language learning. The intervention was designed to specifically cater to the interests and needs of this particular Junior Infant class. As a result of the intervention, the children's understandings of themselves as language learners was enhanced and strengthened. There was a marked improvement in the children's confidence in both using *Gaeilge* and in their language learning abilities. In this way, there is potential for this intervention to positively impact on children's language learning experiences, as well as their understandings of themselves as language learners.

1.5.3. Potential Contribution of the Study for the Wider Education Context:

This research project has the potential to contribute to the Wider Educational Context, particularly within the school, through Assisting Secondary Partners, and within the field of *tumoideachas*, as will be discussed in Section 5.5.3. of this thesis. Section 5.5.3. also outlines the potential impact of this SSEPR project in the realm of *Gaeloideachas* and the contributions it could possibly make to this particular research field.

1.6. Thesis Overview

Chapter 1 briefly introduces the topic of this study and outlines the key concepts of the research project. It conceptualises the background, focus and aims of the study and succinctly introduces the intervention and main themes for the findings.

Chapter 2 of the study explores and discusses literature relevant to action research, *tumoideachas* and active and experiential learning. It depicts my engagement with literature and guides the reader in the formation of my living-educational-theories and design of the intervention used in this SSEPR project. It examines local and national

policies for *tumoideachas*, as well as exploring international perspectives on immersion education.

In Chapter 3, the methodologies used in this SSEPR project are delineated. I discuss how this research and intervention was designed, using relevant and recent literature. I also outline the data collection instruments that were used and argue both the benefits and limitations of their use. Finally, Chapter 3 describes the ethical considerations that were pertinent to this research, and summarises the process of ethical approval.

The findings of this SSEPR project and data analysis process are presented in Chapter 4. It portrays the data analysis process as well as depicting a thematic analysis of the findings. The unexpected findings of this study, as well as the implications for future practice are also examined in Chapter 4.

In conclusion to this study, Chapter 5 argues recommendations for future research and conceptualises the limitations of this particular SSEPR project. Finally, it focuses on the implications of the research on my future practice, as well as the possible contribution of the study to the wider educational community and, potentially, policy development.

1.7. Conclusion to Introduction Chapter

The aim of this SSEPR research project was to explore how I, as a Froebelian teacher practicing active learning in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting, could enhance my practice in order to align more closely with my values and develop my living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 2012). Through critically reflective practice, engaging with literature and implementing a research-based intervention, I have reconsidered and renegotiated my self-understanding as a teacher and have enhanced my practice. This thesis project aims

to depict this professional learning journey through critically analysing the literature pertinent to this study, arguing the choice of intervention, conceptualising the findings of the research and assessing the potential contributions of the study for my own practice, for the students' language learning experiences and for the wider educational community. Chapter 2 assesses current and relevant literature and critically reflects on the impact that they had on my learning journey and the development of the intervention phase of this research.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1. Introduction to Literature Review

Critically engaging with literature is one method of illuminating thinking and assisting in questioning assumptions, according to Sullivan et al. (2016: 77). This assertion is reiterated by McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 3) in that ‘it is important to critique one’s own theory against the wider theories in the literature’. With this in mind, this chapter aims to discuss my critical engagement with literature and theory relevant to this research project, under the topic headings of: Action Research, Froebelian Practices, *Tumoideachas* (or Early Immersion Education) and Active and Experiential Learning Strategies. I aim to locate the theory and literature discussed within my research topic and identify how they impact on the intervention design, results and findings of the project.

2.2. Action Research

Owing to the fact that this research was grounded in the realm of ‘self-study action research’ (SSAR), or what McNiff (2002: 1) would call ‘self-reflective practice’, I feel that it is pertinent to discuss the hallmarks of an action research project. Throughout this section, I examine the literature and theories relevant to action research and how they have impacted both on my own study and on my practice.

In this section, I aim to discuss:

1. Examining Action Research
2. An Introduction to Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research (SSEPR)
3. Critically Reflective Practice in SSEPR
4. Examining Values in SSEPR
5. Praxis and Living Educational Theory
6. Examining Self-Understanding through SSEPR
7. Fluidity of Self-Understanding and Praxis
8. My Self-Understanding as a Froebelian Teacher
9. SSEPR in Partnership with Others
10. Educational Research relevant to <i>Tumoideachas</i> .

Figure 2. 1. Discussion Topics within Action Research Selection of Literature Review

2.2.1. Examining Action Research

Teaching ‘belongs to the practical life’, which Aristotle (cited in Biesta, 2015: 14) refers to as the ‘domain of the ‘variable’ that is, the domain of change and possibilities’. I have come to realise that the outcome of one topic of research in one classroom may be different to the same topic of research in another classroom. Therefore, when discussing educational research, I concur with Schön’s (cited in Roche, 2019: 119) argument that ‘the hallmark of a good research project is not that it provides answers but, rather, that it raises lots of new questions for us to think about.’ This highlights the variable and changing nature of research in education.

Morrison (cited Sullivan et al., 2016: 24) outlines educational research as being both ‘a distinctive way of thinking about educational phenomena, that is, an *attitude*, and of investigating them, that is, an action or *activity*’. Using this criterion for educational

research, I argue that action research is an appropriate method by which to conduct educational research. At its core, according to Koshy (2005: 1), action research is ‘an enquiry, undertaken with rigour and understanding so as to constantly refine practice’. This clearly satisfies the condition of both examining educational phenomena and investigating them or taking action.

However, self-study action research would appear to go one step further as it is values-based. McNiff (2002: 1) emphasises that practitioner-based action research ‘is a term which refers to a practical way of looking at your own work to check that it is as you would like it to be’. She explains that ‘it involves you thinking about and reflecting on your work’ and therefore ‘can also be called a form of self-reflective practice’ (McNiff, 2002: 1). This self-reflective practice, combined with action is an ongoing cycle, which means that ‘the emerging evidence-based outcomes will then contribute to the researching practitioner’s continuing professional development’ (Koshy, 2005: 2). It incorporates the basic meaning of the word re-search, in which one is searching again. Through engaging in the process of self-study practitioner research, I was re-searching for truths in terms of my values, validity, and consistency in my practice.

2.2.2. Introduction to Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research (SSEPR)

Argyris and Schön (cited in Herr & Anderson, 2005: 5) argue that ‘action research takes its cues – its questions, puzzles and problems – from the perceptions of practitioners within particular, local practice contexts’. This focus of the practitioner being at the centre of the study, led me to identify with Huxtable and Whitehead’s (2021: 4) distinction between educational research and education research. Through educational research, I explored my educational influences in learning – i.e. Froebelian influences and my values. However, through education research, I conducted research ‘from within the conceptual

frameworks and methods of validation of disciplines of education’ (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 4). Using this approach to research, I developed my own living-educational-theory, as a Froebelian teacher practising active and experiential learning in an early-immersion context.

As depicted in Figure 2.2., through exploring action research paradigms, I found myself drawn to what Huxtable and Whitehead (2021: 5) refer to as ‘self-study educational practitioner research (SSEPR)’ through which I used methodology of participatory action research to ‘generate my living-educational-theories’ (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 5) of language learning. This particular SSEPR project was grounded in action research methodologies.

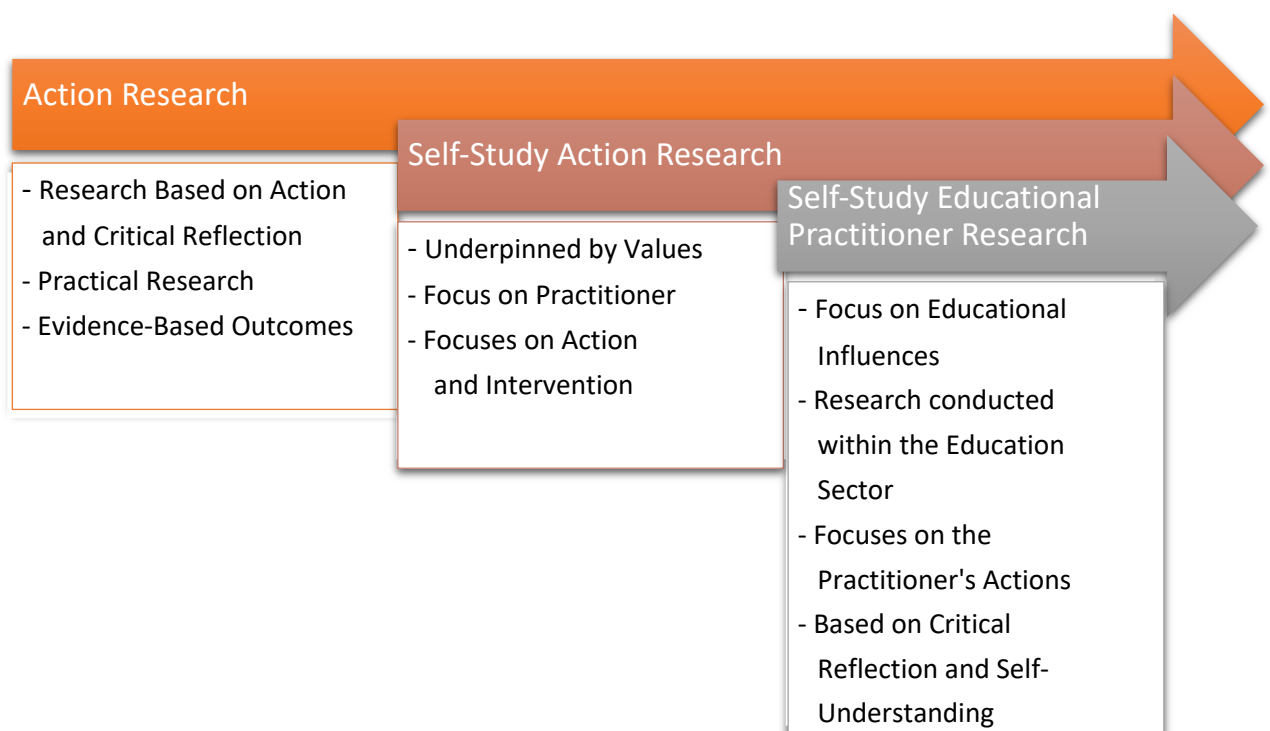


Figure 2. 2.: Self Study Educational Practitioner Research as a Branch of Action Research

2.2.3. Critically Reflective Practice in SSEPR

As referred to by Koshy (2005: 2) in the previous section, ‘action research involves learning in and through action and reflection’ (McNiff, 2002: 15). McNiff and Whitehead (2002: 89) highlight how ‘the two processes of action and reflection are inextricably linked and mutually influential’. However, Sullivan et al. (2016: 24) make the argument that ‘self-study action research, however, depends on the researcher’s ability to be critically reflective’. As demonstrated in Figure 2.3., this need for critical reflection when conducting research or studying a practitioner’s own praxis is reiterated by other theorists, such as Kemmis and McTaggart (1988), Freire (1993), Alsup (2006) Biesta (2015), Buchanan (2015), Brookfield (2017), Feldman and Bradley (2018), Kelchtermans (2018) and Zembylas (2018). This paragraph aims to discuss how critical thinking and reflective practice were fundamental in this SSEPR.

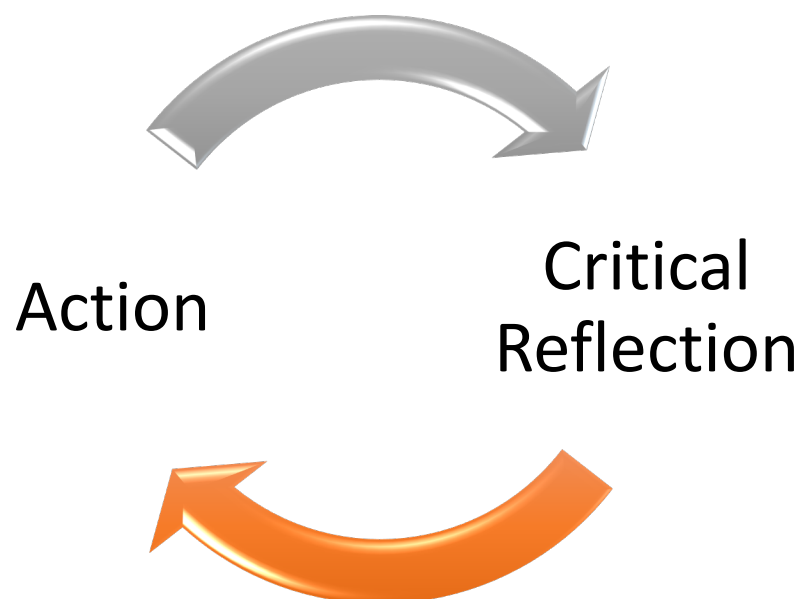


Figure 2. 3.: Critical Reflection and Action as Inextricably Linked

Freire (1993: 66) supported critically reflective practice which constitutes ‘an authentic praxis only if its consequences become the object of critical reflection.’ It is important to

note that a mistake does not have to be made in order to engage in this reflective cycle. Schön (cited in Smith, 2011: 10) argues that ‘unlike Dewey’s, Lewin’s or Kolb’s learning cycle, where one had, so to speak, to make a mistake and reflect upon it ... it is now possible ... to learn by simply reflecting critically upon the theory-in-action’ in which a practitioner can ‘readjust the theory through double-loop learning’.

This readjustment of theory can be associated with Huxtable and Whitehead's (2021: 4) ‘living-educational-theory’, which ‘is generated by the individual to explain their educational influences in learning and cannot be derived from a general conceptual framework’. This expectation of explaining educational influences in learning led me to critically evaluate why I was teaching the way I was teaching and how to improve on it, which resulted in the consideration of my educational values and their impact on my practice.

2.2.4. Examining Values in SSEPR

Kelchtermans (2018: 231) points out that ‘teaching and being a teacher is not a neutral, technical endeavour, but implies value-laden choices, moral considerations, and ethical stances’ and suggests that teachers should seek self-understanding, which is ‘the dynamic *result and outcome* of teachers’ ‘meaningful interactions with their professional contexts’ (Kelchtermans, 2018: 231) as it is in teachers’ ‘actual practices ... where what really matters in their understanding of themselves emerges and becomes apparent’ (Kelchtermans, 2018: 239). This is linked to Kemmis’ (2012: 893) ‘living practice of education’ which is ‘the most important version of practice to connect with, to engage, and to develop if we are to change the world by researching educational practice or praxis’.

Through engaging in action research, I sought to evaluate whether I was living to my values, or experiencing a ‘living contradiction’ (Whitehead, 2011). Action research encourages the examination of this living practice of education and ‘embraces the idea that each researcher is informed by their own values, norms and assumptions’ (Sullivan et al., 2016: 25). Whitehead (2019: 3) reiterates that ‘each living-educational-theory is unique to the individual’ and is ‘distinguished by the unique constellation of values that the individual uses as explanatory principles in their explanation of their educational influence’. Learning through experience and the quest to understand and question our values and beliefs is very strongly reiterated in Froebel’s epistemological theory that ‘by education, man is to be guided to understand himself’ (cited in Liley, 1967: 50). This ‘action through reflection’ ‘with emancipation as its goal’ is what Cohen et al. (2007: 302) refer to as ‘praxis’.

2.2.5. Praxis and Living Educational Theory

Through SSEPR, I examined my own practice and identified how it links to educational theory and my own values. Vygotsky and Piaget (cited in Pascual-Leone, 1996: 85) claim that ‘knowledge is a product of praxis’ and through this research, I critically reflected on this praxis and determined how it was underpinned by my values. This inherently follows the Froebelian ideal of the mind being ‘a spontaneously active, formative agency’ and humans themselves being ‘an organic unity’ (Liley, 1967: 8). Friere (1993: 125) explains that praxis is inherently part of the human condition as ‘human activity consists of action and reflection: it is praxis; it is transformation of the world. And as praxis, it requires theory to illuminate it. Human activity is theory and practice; it is reflection and action’.

In order to examine my own praxis and re-orient it to live more in line with my values, I investigated definitions of praxis. Freire (1993: 51) defines praxis as a process of

‘reflection and action upon the world to transform it’ while Carr and Kemmis (cited in Glenn, 2020: 69) refer to it as when a practitioner makes ‘better decisions which can lead towards committed, informed action’. Kemmis (2012: 894) reminds us that educational praxis is both a product of our past and a way of changing future practices: ‘as educational action that is morally-committed and informed by traditions in a field (‘right conduct’)' and as ‘history-making educational action’ (Kemmis, 2012: 894).

Praxis, Aristotle (cited in Biesta, 2015: 15) writes, is ‘about what sort of things conduce to the good life in general’. Grundy (cited in Cohen et al., 2007: 303) explains that ‘praxis fuses theory and practice within an egalitarian social order’ while Kemmis (2012: 897) reminds us that ‘researching praxis means in the light of individual and collective self-reflection, re-orienting oneself in the practice of the practice, re-orienting one’s understandings of the practice, and re-orienting the conditions under which one practises’. Those who ‘research their own individual and collective praxis are not detached spectators of their own practice, but the ones who are responsible for it as authors and as those who must take responsibility (not solely) for the consequences of their practice’ (Kemmis, 2012: 897). This responsibility and understanding of my practice involved examining who I am as a teacher, i.e. my self-understanding and how this impacts on how I engage in my praxis.

2.2.6. Building my Self-Understanding through SSEPR

Through the quest to live to my values, I questioned my self-understanding (Kelchtermans, 2018), or identity, as a teacher. Zembylas (2018: 78) argues that high-quality teaching requires ‘identity work’: ‘namely, a process of self-reflection on life experiences and classroom practices that provides the necessary awareness of personal and societal values, beliefs, emotions, and understandings for promoting professional

learning in teaching’. Kelchtermans (2018: 236) defines ‘professional self-understanding’ as ‘a dynamic process and product demonstrating teachers’ balancing of agency and structure in their practices while striving for educational goals but having to deal with the structural vulnerability in their job’. Zembylas (2018: 84) agrees that ‘teacher identities are understood as embedded in culture, morality, ideology, and power relations’. However, teaching also requires ‘ethical commitment, personal judgment in particular situations, deliberate choice and purposeful or intentional action’ (Kelchtermans, 2018: 234). Since self-understanding is embedded within these variables, as demonstrated in Figure 2.4., it is important to address the fluidity of self-understanding and praxis.

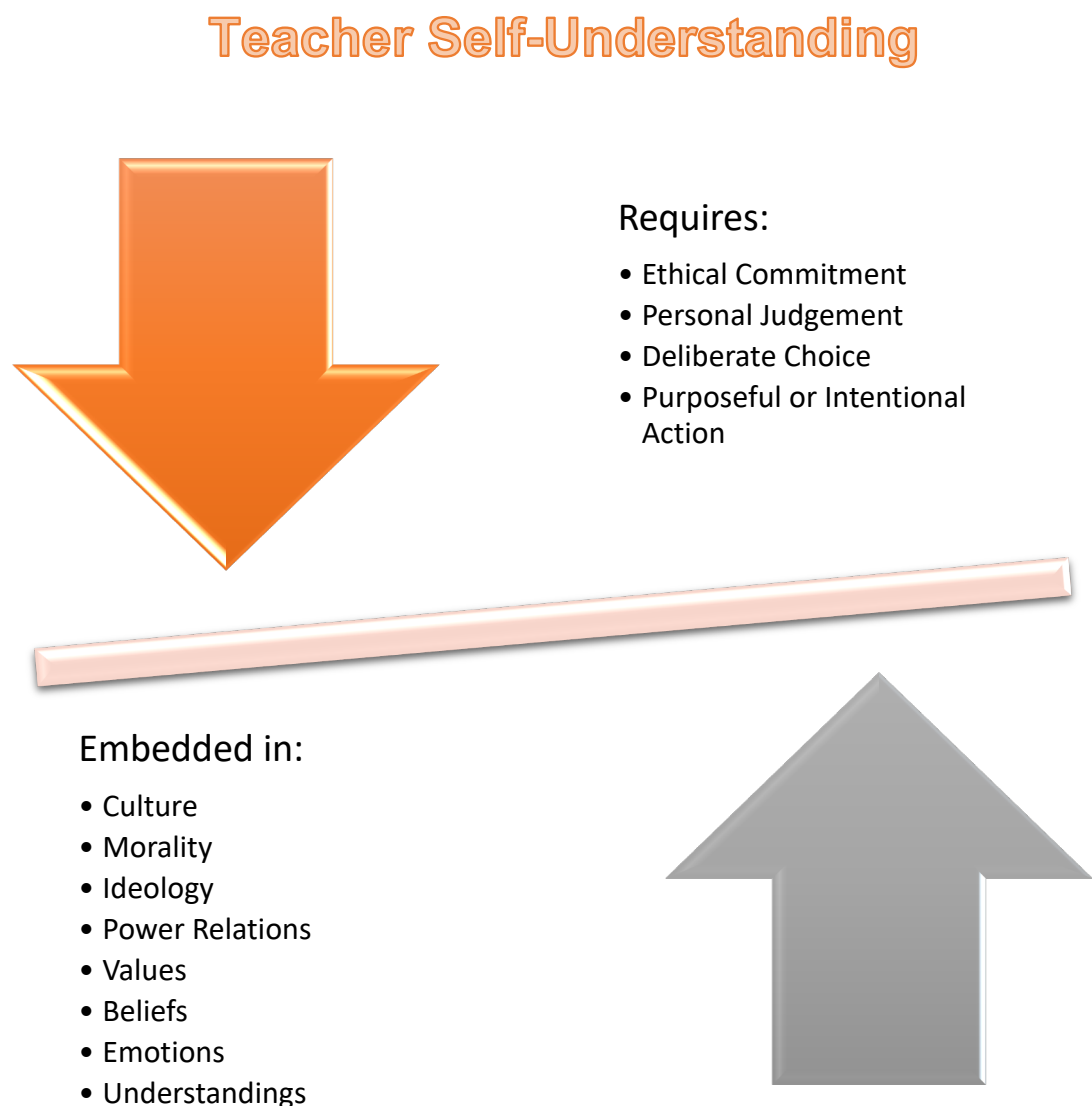


Figure 2. 4.: The Formation and Requirements for Teacher Self-Understanding, as adapted from Zembylas (2018: 78 & 84) and Kelchtermans (2018: 236)

2.2.7. Fluidity of Self-Understanding and Praxis

While ‘society and all of its institutions are in continuous process of transformation’ (Schön cited in Smith, 2011: 6), ‘we must learn to understand, guide, influence and manage these transformations ... in other words, become adept at learning’ (Schön cited in Smith, 2011: 6). This means that ‘our living practice unfolds in a continuous present, shaped by often unseen hands and habits inherited from the past’ (Kemmis, 2012: 893). However, this unfolding living practice presents as a ‘principle medium in which we realise our identities, our self-understandings and ourselves’ (Kemmis, 2012: 893). This correlates with Akkerman and Meijer’s (cited in Zembylas, 2018: 80) definition of teacher identity as ‘an ongoing process of negotiating multiple I- positions in such a way that a more or less coherent and consistent sense of self is maintained throughout various participations and self- investments in one's (working) life’.

This negotiation between educational structures or traditions, and my own understanding of my values caused discomfort and vulnerability. However, I was comforted by Kelchtermans’ (2018: 235) assertion that, when critically reflecting on one’s self-understanding, ‘teachers cannot but feel vulnerable because there is no uncontested basis for their judgment or its justification’ (Kelchtermans, 2018: 235).

This brings me to an awareness of Brookfield’s risks involved in critical reflection, namely: impostership, social suicide, lost innocence and marginalisation (cited in Walker & Oldford, 2020: 287). However, Brookfield notes that the antidote to these risks ‘is partners in the process, particularly in the form of a peer learning group. Although we cannot eliminate risks inherent in reflection, what we can do is support each other’ (cited in Walker & Oldford, 2020: 287). This support of other professionals and peers can be invaluable when conducting SSEPR and is discussed in Section 2.2.9.

2.2.8. My Self-Understanding/Identity as a Froebelian Teacher

While engaging in critically reflective practice, literature and through dialogue, I questioned my teacher self-understanding. Having completed initial teacher training in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education (formerly Froebel College), I found that I strongly identified as a “Froebelian” teacher, i.e., a teacher who teaches in line with Froebel’s teachings. In this section, I wish to discuss what being a Froebelian teacher means to me and how it related to this SSEPR.

Firstly, it is imperative to note that ‘Froebelian practice cannot be standardised into a method’ as ‘if this happened, the practice would not be Froebelian anymore’ (Bruce, 2012: 159). This is because ‘Froebel argued for specialist well-trained kindergarten teachers who are able to reflect on and develop their own practice’ (Tovey, 2013: 110). In line with these principles, my journey to become a more Froebelian teacher is an endless process rather than a product and will continue to be based on continuous critically reflective praxis.

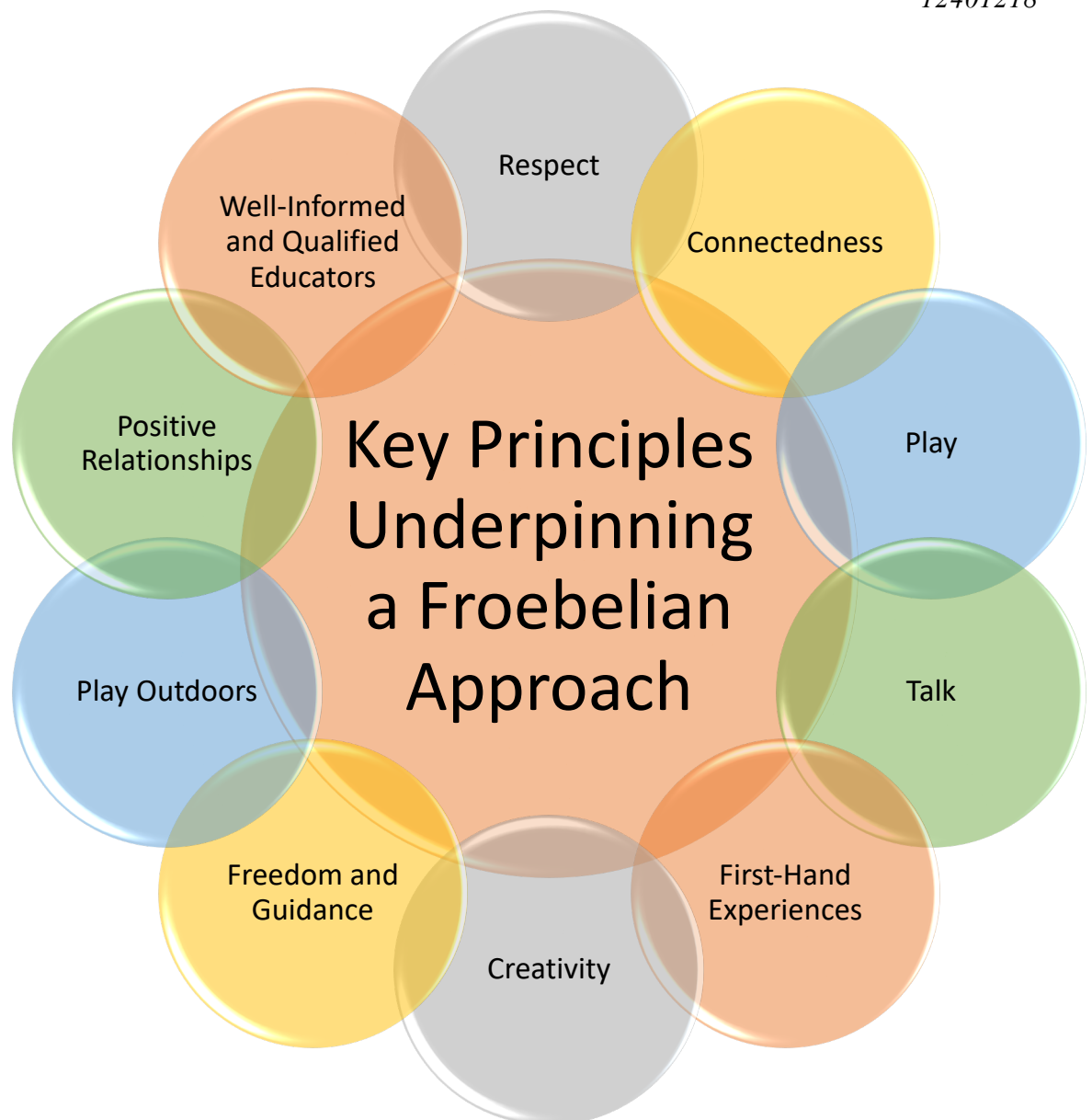


Figure 2. 5.: Key Principles, relevant to this Study, that underpin a Froebelian Approach (Tovey, 2013: 2-4 & 34)

Figure 2.5. outlines some of Tovey's (2013: 2-4) key principles underpinning a Froebelian approach. While 'many of Froebel's ideas are now part of mainstream thinking' (Tovey, 2013: 4), 'there are also aspects of policy and practice today which do not reflect Froebel's principles' (Tovey, 2013: 4), for example 'where learning is driven by outcomes and targets rather than children's powerful urge to learn', and where 'children can be hurried on to the next stage of learning, given activities which have little

meaning to them, spend long periods of time sitting listening to adults or given dull, passive occupational activities’ (Tovey, 2013: 5). Given the pressures in the Irish education system, of achieving certain objectives at certain stages, I was experiencing a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2011) and in conflict between what way I wanted to teach, what ‘content’ I must cover and the added pressures and restrictions of teaching a large class during the Covid-19 pandemic.

Despite this, I acknowledged that I could still strive to create a Froebelian environment within my classroom, underpinned by the key principles in Figure 2.2. Within this environment, I could try to ‘begin where the child [was] in their learning, rather than where they ought to be’ and give children ‘the right help at the right time in the right way’ (Bruce, 2012: 159). Since education is ‘the treatment of man as a creature who is developing in awareness and understanding of himself’ and ‘should stimulate him to this realisation and show him how to achieve it’ (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967: 49), as I engaged in active learning strategies in my *luath-tumoideachas* setting, I became more aligned with my self-understanding of being a Froebelian teacher, as will be discussed in Section 4.3.2.

2.2.9. SSEPR in Partnership with Others

Freire argues that ‘without dialogue, there is no communication, and without communication there can be no true education’ (1993: 92-93). Since educational research ‘aims to change both practitioners’ own practices and the practice traditions’, Kemmis (2012: 894) argues that it should be conducted within the ‘living conversation–space of practice, consciously and deliberately, responsively and reflectively’. Bryk (cited in

McNiff, 2002: 18) agrees that reflection on action alone does not suffice, as it only makes sense ‘when practice is seen as in relation with others, a process of dialogue and encounter’. Therefore, I sought to engage in dialogue with Assisting Secondary Partners, further discussed in Section 3.2.6., to ensure that I was living to my values, which could be seen in practice. Through this partnership, I added validity, rigour and triangulation to my research.

2.2.10. Educational Research in *Tumoideachas*

Having briefly examined SSEPR, I explored educational research conducted in relation to *tumoideachas*. Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011: 77) ‘recognise that [while] high-quality process-product studies focused on primary level are rare, the studies assembled in previous meta-analyses are a promising source of new target studies’. An example of such a study was conducted by Ní Ríordáin and O’Donoghue (cited in Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020: 80) which found that there was ‘*fianaise ann go mbíonn tionchar dearfach ag an dátheangachas ar fhoghlaim na matamaitice sa chóras tumoideachas in Éirinn*’¹ (Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020: 80). While the evidence of positive effect of bilingualism is highlighted here, it does not appear to take the teachers’ practice into account.

King and Fogle (2006: 4) highlight that ‘leading researchers have been careful to identify the benefits of bilingualism in specific areas such as metalinguistic awareness (awareness about language as a system) and cognitive processing’. However, Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011: 78) discuss the need for research into practice: ‘this dynamic aspect of effective practice has not yet been well studied and deserves to be a major focus of future research’. My questioning and exploration of effective active learning methodologies, in a *tumoideachas* setting, therefore, is an area which does not have extensive research published. This study is also unique as it seeks to explore the children’s experiences and

perceptions of themselves as language learners, rather than on results of observations and tests.

2.3. Tumoideachas (Early Immersion Education)

Tumoideachas is one of the most developed forms of bilingual education in Ireland in the last thirty years (Ó Ceallaigh & Ó Laoire, 2016: vi). However, Mac Éinrí (2007: 21) highlights that, ‘in attempting to answer the question “How can teaching best ensure successful language acquisition (and learning)?”, research does not always provide definite and clear-cut answers’. He argues that it is ‘clear that good practice often precedes the research, and research can in turn provide a broad basis for ‘evidence-based practice’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 21), thus supporting SSEPR. Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011: 76-78) also highlight the lack of research conducted in relation to specific language strategies, especially at lower primary level and from the experiences and perspectives of teachers. This section aims to discuss research that has been conducted and apply them to my particular area of study. In this section, I will:

Introduce Tumoideachas and Early Immersion Education

Provide an Overview of the History behind *Tumoideachas* in Ireland

Outline Policies from my School and the Department of Education

Compare Other Country’s Implentation of Immersion Education

Compare Some *Tumoideachas* Strategies

Figure 2. 6.: Aims of Section 2.3

2.3.1. Introduction to Tumoideachas

Tumoideachas is one form of bilingual education and is the most prevalent form in Ireland (Ó Laoire, 2016: 125). Cummins (2009: 2) outlines two forms of immersion in educational discourse, with *tumoideachas* broadly falling into the first, where ‘immersion programs are organized and planned forms of bilingual education in which students are “immersed” in a second language instructional environment with the goal of developing proficiency in two languages’ (Cummins, 2009: 2). Ó Laoire (2016: 127) confirms that *tumoideachas* is recognised ‘*mar shlí lán-éifeachtach chun an t-oideachas dátheangach suimitheach a chur chun cinn agus chun sprioctheanga a shealbhu*’² (Ó Laoire, 2016: 127).

In the Irish context, ‘pupils in immersion, while focussing on classroom instruction and learning the class subject matter, acquire the ability to understand both written and spoken L2 and to produce it with considerable fluency and confidence’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 22). However, It is important to highlight the difference between language ‘*acquisition*, linguistic ability developed as learners focus on meaning in comprehensible input, and *learning*, which involves knowledge about language gained through formal instruction or linguistic analysis’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 22). Therefore, there must be a balance between opportunities to explore and use the language and formal language instruction. Nig Uidhir (cited in Hickey, 2003: 186) concurs that using the target language alone is not enough as ‘*má dhéantar ginearálú ar sholáthar an chórais aonteangaigh gan saintréithe an tumoideachais a chur san áireamh go héifeachtach, bíonn baol teip nó laige ann dá thoradh*’³.

2.3.2. *A Brief History of Tumoideachas in Ireland*

To understand *tumoideachas* in its entirety, it is important to look at the history of *tumoideachas* in Ireland (Ó Laoire, 2016: 127). It is beyond the scope of this research to provide a detailed report, however, I will outline a brief history of the reasons for the use of *tumoideachas* in Ireland. As Ó Laoire (2016: 127) points out, ‘*i gcás na Gaeilge, téann fréamhacha an tumoideachas i bhfad níos doimhne*’⁴ when compared to immersion education in other countries. Corcoran (cited in Ó Laoire, 2016: 127), after the Republic was developed, emphasised the need for immersion in Irish in primary schools ‘to restore our native language’. Ní Chlochasaigh (2020: 2) informs that *Gaelscoileanna* (Irish-medium schools) had a reputation for the education of middle-class families. However, in the eighties, *gaeloideachas* (or Irish-medium education) began to be a popular choice for families from different socio-economic backgrounds. In present times, there is ‘*rogha agus rochtain ar an ngaeloideachas ar fáil do níos mó páistí ná riamh, páistí ó chúlraí socheacnamaíocha isle agus páistí le deacrachtaí foghlama san áireamh*’⁵ (Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020: 2) and *Gaelscoileanna* welcome children ‘*ó chúlraí éagsúla teangeolaíoch, eacnamaíoch, cumais, cultúir agus creidimh*’⁶ (Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020: 2).

2.3.3. *Tumoideachas Policies of the School and the Department of Education*

Having outlined a brief history of *tumoideachas* in Ireland, this section examines my school’s policy* on *tumoideachas* and Department of Education’s guidelines for teaching in a *tumoideachas* setting. I would also include the patron’s policy on *tumoideachas*, however, there is currently no such policy at that level.

* In order to maintain confidentiality of this study, the school is not named in this thesis.

In line with the new Primary Language Curriculum (PLC) (*An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna*, 2019), our school policy states that ‘*cumarsáid*’ (communication) is the objective of each Irish lesson, and that teachers should use subjects that are relevant to the life of the child. It emphasises the need for ‘*neart deiseanna bheith gníomhach san fhoghlaim*’⁷ and outlines how teachers should engage in three stages within our lessons: ‘*tréimhse réamhchumarsáide*’, ‘*tréimse cumarsáide*’ and ‘*tréimse iarchumarsáide*’⁸ (XXX, 2013: 2).

This is reiterated in the PLC (*An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna*, 2019) which emphasises the need for active learning and child-centred teaching. The PLC places emphasis on language learning as a journey or ‘*aistear*’ and states that ‘*próiseas forásach is ea foghlaim teanga a rachaidh an páiste i ngleic leis ar a luas féin*’⁹ (*An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna*, 2019: 7). It highlights the importance of language learning as it is the ‘*príomh-mheán cumarsáide inphearsanta agus idirphearsanta atá againn agus is eochair í d fhorbairt an pháiste mar dhuine*’¹⁰ (*An Roinn Oideachais agus Scileanna*, 2019: 7). The relevance of both policies to this SSEPR is further discussed in the Methodology chapter of this thesis, Chapter 3.

2.3.4. International Perspectives

Having examined policies relevant to my context, I explored international perspectives on immersion education. While there are many countries that use immersion education as a method to teach children a second language, such as English in Hungary, French in Australia, Spanish in the USA and Swedish in Finland (Hickey et al., 2014: 217; Ó Laoire, 2016: 126; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016: 134), the reasons for the popularity of immersion education in such countries are diverse and can ‘include a desire to maintain ties to the

parents' heritage language and culture, to provide children with academic and cognitive advantages, and to promote cross-cultural understanding and communication' (King & Fogle, 2006: 1). However, these examples can be categorised as what Ó Cathalláin et al. (2016: 134) deem to be '*teanga iasachta*' (borrowed language), and the main goal is not 'to maintain or revitalize an endangered language' (Cummins, 2009: 8).

Therefore, *tumoideachas* in Ireland correlates more with other countries that use immersion education to '*caomhnú agus athbheochan teangacha*'¹¹ (Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016: 134), for example Catalan, Basque, Māori and Welsh (Hickey et al., 2014: 217; Ó Laoire, 2016: 126; Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016: 134). In these cases, where the roots of immersion education go deeper (Ó Laoire, 2016: 126), there is usually, '*féiniúlacht chultúrtha go tréan i measc an phobail scoile sna cláir thumoideachais sin*'¹² (Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016: 134). This section aims to briefly discuss immersion education in Canada, New Zealand/Aotearoa and Wales and to situate them in relation to *tumoideachas* in Ireland.

2.3.4.1. Canada

Immersion education is an educational approach that started in Montreal in Canada (Ó Cathalláin et al., 2016: 133; Ó Laoire, 2016: 126). It involved 'innovative programs in which the French language was used as an initial medium of instruction for elementary school students whose home language was English' (Cummins, 2009: 3). Johnson and Swaine (cited in Cummins, 2009: 4) found there to be eight core features in these programmes, which are very similar to that of *tumoideachas* in *Gaelscoileanna*:

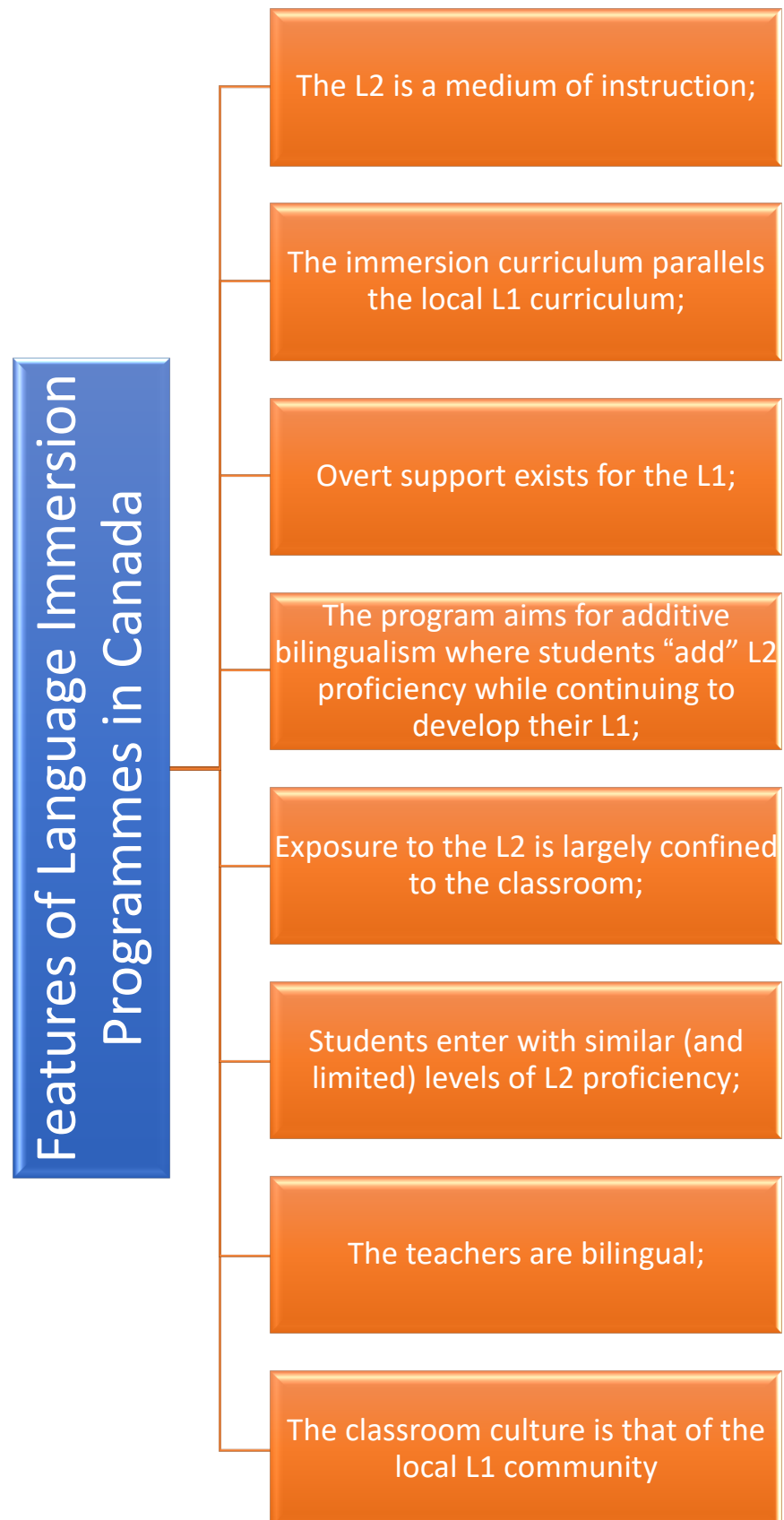


Figure 2. 7.: Features of Canadian Language Immersion Programmes Relevant to Tumoideachas in Gaelscoileanna

Owing to the similarities in these core features, many researchers (e.g.: Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011; Ní Longaigh, 2016; De Paor, 2016; Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2018; Ní Chlochasaigh et al., 2020) refer to research conducted in immersion education in Canada when looking at *tumoideachas* in Ireland.

2.3.4.2. Aotearoa/New Zealand

As with the Irish language, it is the ‘rapid language loss context that framed the subsequent advocacy, establishment and development of Maori-medium education’ (May, 2005: 367). The aim of the development of the Maori-medium schools was to begin what ‘Paulston has described as ‘language reversal’; a process by which one of the languages of a state begins to move back into more prominent use’ (May, 2005: 368). Although the reasons behind the development of Maori-medium schools are similar to those of the Irish-medium schools, it is interesting to note that Maori is one of many indigenous cultures in New Zealand. May (2005) notes that the development and establishment of the Maori language has, in some ways, effected the recognition of other minority groups in New Zealand, for example the Pasifika language.

It is important to acknowledge that ‘these schools were developed as both a resistance to the dominant culture’s disregard for the language and cultural aspirations of the Maori people and to maintain and revitalize the Maori language as an expression of the [self-determination] of the Maori people to establish an education system focused on the centrality of Maori culture’ (Bishop et al., 2002: 44). Therefore, unlike in Irish *tumoideachas* settings, some Maori-medium schools were developed ‘on its own terms,

not on terms determined by the English-medium sector' (Bishop et al., 2002: 45). New Zealand has also developed a four-level system for bilingual teaching:

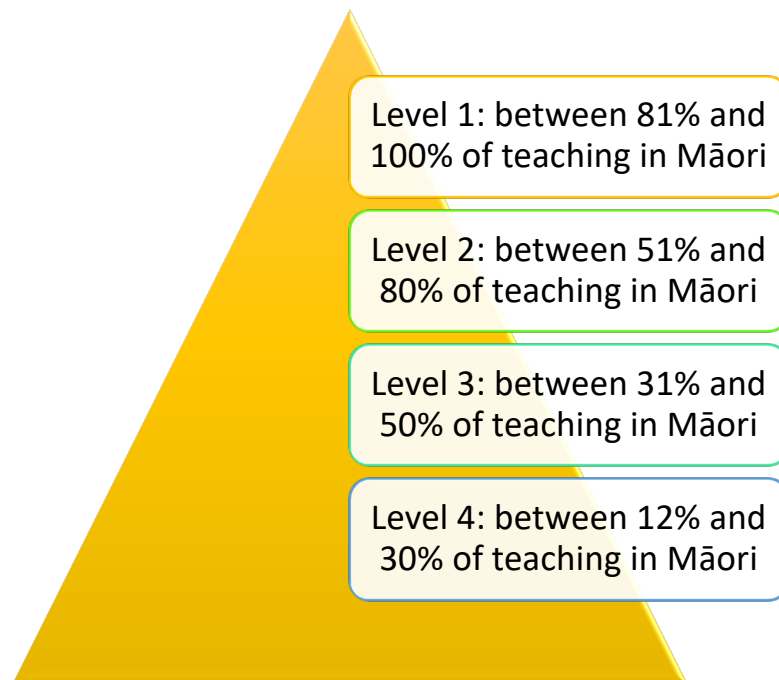


Figure 2. 8.: Four Levels of Bilingual Teaching in New Zealand (as adapted from May et al., 2006: 3)

Therefore, while this system for bilingual teaching is similar to that of *tumoideachas*, the difference is that the curriculum of the Maori-medium schools is not required to be the same as the dominant school system.

2.3.4.3. Wales

When looking at international perspectives, there are 'strong similarities between the problems faced in Irish-medium and Welsh-medium preschools in terms of needing to find a balance between addressing the highly visible language needs of L2 learners, and the less obvious, but equally urgent needs of L1 minority language children for active

language support and enrichment’ (Hickey et al., 2014: 217). As mentioned previously, the aim of both of these immersion programmes are to ‘maintain or revitalize an endangered language’ (Cummins, 2009: 8). Owing to this, when examining methodologies and strategies of *tumoideachas* in the following sections, research conducted in Wales is referred to and the similarities and/or differences between such research and my own is discussed.

2.3.5. Strategies for Tumoideachas

Ó Laoire (2016: 125) argues ‘*tá cineálacha éagsúla oideachais dhátheangaigh ann chomh maith*’¹³. In this section, I seek to outline three such strategies which are relevant to this study and discuss how they can be applied while engaging in *tumoideachas*. The three bilingual teaching strategies that I chose to examine are: Task Based Language Learning (TBLL), Communicative Language Teaching (CLT), and Content Language Integrated Learning (CLIL, or FCÁT). While examining these strategies, 'it is important to bear in mind that communicative language teaching is not a unitary theory or method. It is rather a “fluid and changing body of ideas” which exists in ‘weak ’and ‘strong ’ versions’ (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011, 60). Therefore, none of these strategies are completely isolated, and a combination can be used for effective language teaching.

One strategy for bilingual teaching not included below is Analytic Immersion Teaching which ‘focuses more on the immersion language structures’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 10), i.e. the grammar of the language which can lead to an over-emphasis on ‘accuracy to the detriment of communication (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 10). Upon examining this strategy, while I could see benefits the language development of older students, I felt that it would not

be suitable to the Junior Infant classroom. Therefore, I decided to focus this section on three strategies that I felt are more congruent with Froebelian teaching methodologies.

2.3.5.1. Task Based Language Learning

The first strategy that was examined is Task Based Language Learning (TBLL) which is ‘based on constructivist principles’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 11). ‘The focus in TBLL is on completing the task itself. Learners work at expressing themselves and understanding each other. In so doing, their language system is modified and developed, even if there is no direct instruction’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 11). ‘The role of the teacher during these activities is to monitor the language of the pupils and any intervention needs to be carefully measured’ (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 62). These activities ‘extend beyond language drills, where pupils communicate ideas and feelings to one another about topics of interest to them’ (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 61).

TBLL is based on the idea that students are ‘no longer passive recipients of knowledge, but rather interact with each other and the teacher, and in so doing have the opportunity to hear new language which they can assimilate and then use’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 11). However, Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011: 66) argue that ‘if pupils are to acquire a flexible command of the target language, it is useful to alternate between talk activities focused on confident, fluent expression and those more focused on accuracy of form and meaning; and between activities requiring spontaneous performance and those where performance can be planned and prepared’. This range of activities are useful in different *tumoideachas* contexts and are ‘seen to be facilitative of second language learning’ (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 62). However, Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011: 62) caution that ‘ideally pupils should

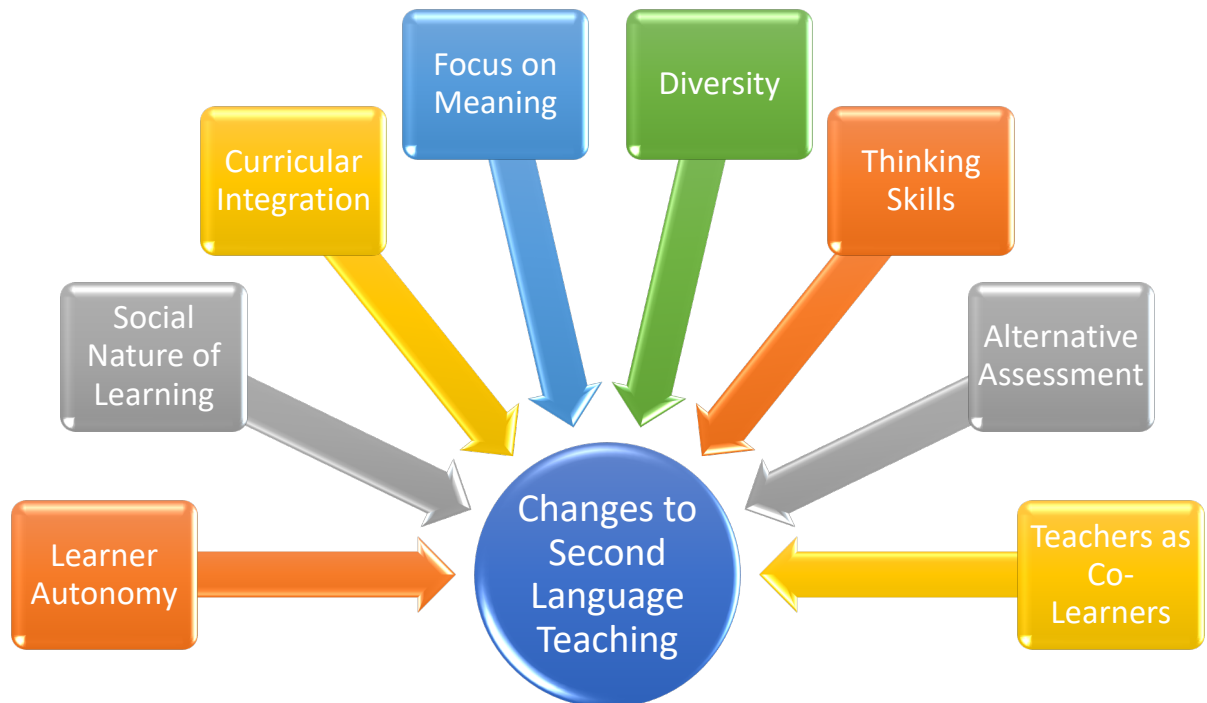
use an interaction strategy which combines both 'bottom-up' and 'top-down' processing'. This means that the students learn language both from the teacher and from interacting with the language themselves.

Looking at this strategy from a Froebelian perspective, and the principle 'that practitioners need to begin where the child is in their learning, rather than where they ought to be' (Bruce, 2012: 159), I question who chooses the content of these activities and if there is a possibility to adapt this approach so as to allow the students to determine what activities to complete and which topics they wish to learn about. I also note the need for the activities to be assigned to meet the children's prior knowledge of the subject matter and their ability to complete the activities. However, TBLL does correlate with the Froebelian principle that 'play and language are part of the integrating mechanisms which help children to transform experience through the senses and their movements onto a more abstract level with symbolic possibilities' (Bruce, 2012: 157), and do appear to give the learner some level of autonomy.

2.3.5.2. Communicative Language Teaching (CLT)

CLT is linked to Krashen's 'Comprehensible Input' (Ó Duibhir & Cummins, 2012: 38) and distinguishes between 'acquisition – a natural subconscious process', and 'learning – a conscious process' and 'argues that conscious learning cannot lead to acquisition' (McKendry, 2007: 38). The focus of this approach is on meaning, not form (structure, grammar). The goal is to provide learners with the means to communicate with speakers of the target language' (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 4). Jacobs and Farrell (cited in Harris & Ó

Duibhir, 2011: 61) highlight eight major changes to second language teaching that have happened because of the move towards CLT, namely:



*Figure 2. 9.: Changes to Second Language Teaching because of the Move towards CLT
(adapted from Jacobs & Farrell, cited in Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 61)*

This focus on learner-centred approaches and the focus on communication rather than accuracy can improve student's confidence in using the language and can be incorporated into *tumoideachas* teaching. I feel that this approach, and the changes that have happened because of it, correlate quite closely with the Froebelian Principles represented in Figure 2.5. as well as the principles of SSEPR.

2.3.5.3. Content and Language Integrated Learning (CLIL/FCÁT)

CLIL (or FCÁT in Irish) can be defined as ‘a dual-focused educational approach in which an additional language is used for the learning and teaching of both content and language’ (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 41). It ‘describes a model of bilingual education where pupils are introduced to new ideas, content, and concepts in traditional curriculum subjects using the target language as the medium of communication’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 17). However, Coyle et al. (cited in Ó Laoire, 2016: 125) outline that it CLIL ‘is not a new form of language education’ nor ‘a new form of subject education’, but rather ‘an innovative fusion of both’.

Like Immersion education, the ‘focus is not on language learning, but on acquiring new information’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 17). While I felt that this approach was most related to this study, it was important to note, that ‘it does not normally go beyond one or two subjects’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 17). Ó Laoire (2016: 125) argues that CLIL refers to ‘*aon chomhthéacs oideachais ina n-úsáidtear teanga bhreise mar mheán teagaisc nach í chéad teanga na bhfoghlaimoirí i go hiondúil*’¹⁴ (Ó Laoire, 2016: 125). It is, therefore, obvious that ‘the CLIL approach to teaching and its resources should be of relevance to ... Irish Medium Education’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 17).

2.4. Active and Experiential Learning

2.4.1. Introduction to Active and Experiential Learning

Having discussed the strategies for *tumoideachas*, I wish to now direct my attention to active and experiential learning and how it can be applied in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting, particularly with Junior Infant Children. Mac Éinrí (2007: 10) advocates experiential learning, which 'is based on a tradition derived from Dewey, Piaget and Vygotsky of learning by doing' or 'active learning' wherein the teacher 'makes the knowledge to be learnt available to the learners, who experiment and make discoveries themselves'. In this section, I wish to examine the definition of active and experiential learning in the context of Froebel; the theories behind active and experiential learning as a strategy for Froebelian teaching; and active and experiential learning in the context of *luath-tumoideachas*.

2.4.2. Definition of Active and Experiential Learning

Upon beginning this research, I was interested in what I deemed to be 'active learning'. However, upon critically reflecting, engaging in readings and dialogue with critical friends, I have come to realise that 'active learning' can encompass a range of different interpretations. As van den Bergh et al. (2013: 343) outline, active learning can 'vary from self-directed learning in which students themselves control their learning process ... to independent learning in which the goals and activities are under the teacher's control'. Even though both definitions differ to what I am able to implement in the context of early immersion education with young children, and with the restrictions of the Covid-19 pandemic, they help to outline my understanding of active learning, in which 'teachers emphasize the development of student skills more than the transmission of information' (van den Bergh et al., 2013: 343). Slavich and Zimbardo (2012: 593) refer to this form of teaching and explain that it 'involves creating experiential lessons that immerse students

in a topic and, often, transcend the boundaries of the classroom.’ These experiential lessons enable students to:

reshape their understanding of a concept
through experience

develop self-confidence and self-efficacy by
applying their capabilities to achieve success

challenge prevailing thoughts and attitudes
through problem-solving and debate

enhance attitudes and beliefs about learning by
experiencing ideas as relevant and meaningful

Figure 2. 10.: The Impact of Experiential Lessons on Students (adapted from Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012: 593)

The outcomes of these ‘experiential lessons’ outline what I believe we seek to achieve through immersion education in Ireland: developing self-confidence and self-efficacy when using the Irish language and, also, falls in line with my epistemological value of enabling the children to become confident and active learners. Since there is a ‘significant relationship between critical thinking and vocabulary learning strategy use’, Boroushaki and Ng (2016: 12) make the argument for the replacement of traditional teaching methods ‘by learner-centered approaches in order to develop students’ critical thinking ability’. These learner-centered approaches and the promotion of learner autonomy correlates with the Froebelian Principles represented in Figure 2.5. and align with the aims of this SSEPR

to enhance both my practice the learner experiences of *luath-tumoideachas* in an active and experiential way.

2.4.3. Theorists promoting Active and Experiential Learning

Having been trained as a ‘Froebelian’ teacher, the philosophies of Froebel have had an impact on my choosing of this research topic. One of Froebel’s most known philosophies is that education should be ‘active, meaningful and engaging’ (Liebschner cited in Tovey, 2019: 9) and that the early years of life ‘are the most powerful and influential and they are the foundation on which all later learning is built’ (Tovey, 2019: 9). It is due to the influence of these philosophies on my teaching that I have decided to investigate how I can adapt my practice to enable the young children in my care to be actively and meaningfully engaged in their language learning.

In the past, active learning, in various forms, was advocated by reformers such as Montessori and Freinet (van den Bergh et al., 2013: 343). This epistemological value of active learning falls in line with both Piaget’s ‘constructivist notion that learning occurs best when students are actively engaged in the discovery process’ (cited in Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012: 577) and Bruner and Vygotsky’s ‘social constructivist notion that educational exercises are more impactful when they involve social interaction’ (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012: 577). While identifying with cognitive constructivism, Piaget (cited in Mac Éinrí, 2007: 8) emphasised that students learned through ‘discovery learning rather than teacher-imparted information’ and ‘hypothesized that language develops through interaction with the physical world’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 8). Concurring with this, Vygotsky (cited in Mac Éinrí, 2007: 8) highlighted that ‘the development of language and

articulation of ideas are central to learning’. However, he cautioned that ‘the learner’s current level reflects the importance of prior influences and knowledge’ (i.e., their Zone of Proximal Development - ZPD) and that ‘the teacher’s role is to locate learning in the ZPD’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 8).

Once a teacher has identified the child’s prior influences and knowledge, it is important to support and guide them in their learning. Vygotsky (cited in Mjelde, 2017: 87) described the support that children ‘get when they are in the process of solving a task with which they can potentially cope’ as “scaffolding”. The aim of supporting through scaffolding is ‘to enable a learner to perform tasks and construct understandings that they would not quite be able to manage on their own’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 9). ‘The goal is to get the learning process underway so as to hand over the accomplishment to the learner’ (Mjelde, 2017: 87-88). Having been influenced by both Piaget and Vygotsky, Bruner ‘saw learning as a process of actively acquiring knowledge in which learners construct new ideas based upon their current and past knowledge’ and theorised that ‘learning how to learn ... and the process of learning is as important as the product, and social interaction is crucial’ (Mac Éinrí, 2007: 8-9). In my view, this is what I seek to accomplish when teaching in an early-immersion education setting: to assist the children to perform tasks and use the language so that they can feel a sense of accomplishment and can begin to do so with increasing independence.

In each of the above theories, ‘the importance of engaging students in learning exercises and activities is highlighted’ (Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012: 593). Mac Éinrí (2007: 35) outlines that, when it comes to language learning, ‘more recent literature and research

recognise the importance of input but recommend approaches such as those that are task-oriented, content-oriented, cognitive, process-oriented and encourage learner autonomy'. The intervention in this SSEPR, as discussed in Chapter 3, aims to fulfil this criterion.

Interestingly, the benefits of engaging students in their own learning have been documented in *tumoideachas* settings, as Hickey (2003: 195) found that '*roghnaigh formhór na Stiúrthóirí an cúinne baile mar cheann de na gníomhaíochtaí is éifeachtaí ó thaobh múineadh teanga de*'¹⁵. However, he notes that '*is léir gur gá go mbeadh Stiúrthóir nó múinteoir páirteach ann chun úsáid na Gaeilge a chur chun cinn i measc na bpáistí agus iad sa chúinne baile, chomh maith leis an haidhmeanna sóisialta eile a bhaint amach*'¹⁶ (Hickey, 2003: 195). This is one study that highlights the need for scaffolding and active and experiential engagement in *tumoideachas* settings. The next section aims to discuss this further.

2.4.4. Active and Experiential Learning in Tumoideachas

As discussed previously, *tumoideachas* in Ireland is structured so that the children learn '*ábhar agus teanga go comhuaineach*' (Ó Cathalláin, 2016: 134). This means that the children study 'other areas of the curriculum through the target language', which is 'associated with significantly higher proficiency in that language' (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 42). However, it is important to note that teacher input and instruction can play a role in this language acquisition, as Mac Éinrí (2007: 22) ascertains that 'while pupils come to know aspects of language without explicit teaching, the evidence also indicates that instruction can further enhance language acquisition'.

Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011: 63) concur that while ‘an early start to L2 language learning can be beneficial for learners as it activates natural language acquisition mechanisms and ultimately provides more time to acquire the L2’, it must at a minimum ‘be accompanied by effective teaching’ (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 63). Snow (cited in Hickey, 2003: 186) also argues this point when discussing ‘*an gá a bhí le modhanna múinte a chur in oiriúint don tumoideachas, in ionad iarracht a dhéanamh an curaclam céanna a mhúineadh ar an mbealach céanna ach amháin trí mhéan an dara teanga*’¹⁷.

When analysing these activities for language acquisition, Hickey (2003: 195) emphasises the ‘*ghá atá le pleanáil teanga sa luath-thumoideachas, chun na gnáthghníomhaíochtaí a bhaineann leis an luathoideachas a chur in oiriúint chun sealbhú an dara teanga a bhaint amach*’¹⁸, which is reiterated by Mac Éinrí (2007: 3) who recommends considerable planning for the use of ‘visuals, realia and hands on activities’.

Mac Éinrí (2007: 3) affirms that ‘successful second language learning emphasizes understanding rather than speaking at beginning stages occurs in a meaningful communicative context and makes use of subject-content instruction, games, songs, rhymes, arts, crafts, sports, etc. is organized in terms of concrete experiences’. Harris and Ó Duibhir (2011: 63), however, caution that ‘it is not enough to concentrate exclusively on ‘fun’ activities based on language use but that teachers need to develop pupils’ meta-language’ which ‘requires a balance between activities to promote fluency and confidence on the one hand with activities to focus on accuracy or form on the other’ (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 63). While promoting fluency, confidence and understanding, Ní Longaigh (2016: 42) warns that teachers must also be conscious not to simplify the

language themselves, as was found in a study in Canada. Hickey (cited in Ní Longaigh, 2016: 42) strongly outlines that such an action is a ‘misunderstanding of the concept of child-centredness, since equal treatment of different children does not necessarily mean the same treatment is given to each child’. Whilst examining *tumoideachas* strategies, it is valuable to remember Hickey’s (cited in Mac Éinrí, 2007: 21) strategies that lead to effective immersion education:

An organised programme of study
Grouping the children in a manner that facilitates opportunities to speak
A weekly plan of work with language targets to ensure progression
Using language-centred activities every day (storytelling, drama, puppets, games, etc.)
Providing clear, appropriate input while the children are at work
Routine and regular use of language with particular activities (card play, roll call, distributing bags etc.) so that the children understand what is coming and what kind of responses the teacher is looking for

Figure 2. 11.: *An Adaptation of Hickey’s Strategies that lead to Effective Immersion Education*
(cited in Mac Éinrí, 2007: 21)

2.5. Conclusion to Literature Review

In conclusion, throughout this section, I have critically engaged with the literature available around my topic of research. I have done this through discussing the literature and theory behind Action Research, Froebelian Practices, *Tumoideachas* and Active and Experiential Learning and located these theories within my research topic. Through engaging with the literature, my thinking was illuminated (Sullivan et al., 2016: 77) and my own theory was critiqued and located within and against the wider theories in literature (Whitehead, 2002: 3).

The following Chapter outlines the methodology used in this SSEPR project. It delineates the modes of data collection and describes the research-based intervention designed and implemented in order to investigate how I, as a Froebelian teacher practicing active and experiential learning in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting, can develop my own living-educational-theories (Whitehead, 2009).

Chapter 3: Research Methods

3.1. Introduction to Methodology Chapter

As discussed in Section 2.2., action research is an approach to research that ‘needs to be teacher-centred and teacher-driven and afford teachers opportunities to engage in knowledge creation’ (Goodnough, 2010: 180). It is a ‘form of classroom research to enhance practice’ and therefore, reflects the ‘complexities of real classrooms and teaching’ (McDonagh et al., 2020: 123). With this approach, of this SSEPR project assisted me in the development of my own living-educational-theory, as a Froebelian teacher practising active learning in an early-immersion context.

Through engaging in critical reflection, I realised my epistemological belief that all learners are knowledge creators and my ontological values of the importance of life-long and active learning, compassion and understanding. Disconcertingly, I also started to query the extent to which there might be a living contradiction (Whitehead, 2019) evident in my approach to teaching and learning. As discussed in Section 2.2., the combination of self-study educational practitioner research with action research methodologies allowed for the development of my own living-educational-theories of language teaching in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting.

Herr and Anderson (2005: 5) explain that action research involves an intervention into one’s own practice. They highlight that these interventions constitute a ‘spiral of action cycles’ in which ‘each cycle increases the researchers’ knowledge of the original question, puzzle, or problem and, it is hoped, leads to its solution’ (Herr & Anderson,

2005: 5). Kemmis (cited in Herr & Anderson, 2005: 5) suggests that the following actions are undertaken by the researcher in forming action research cycles:

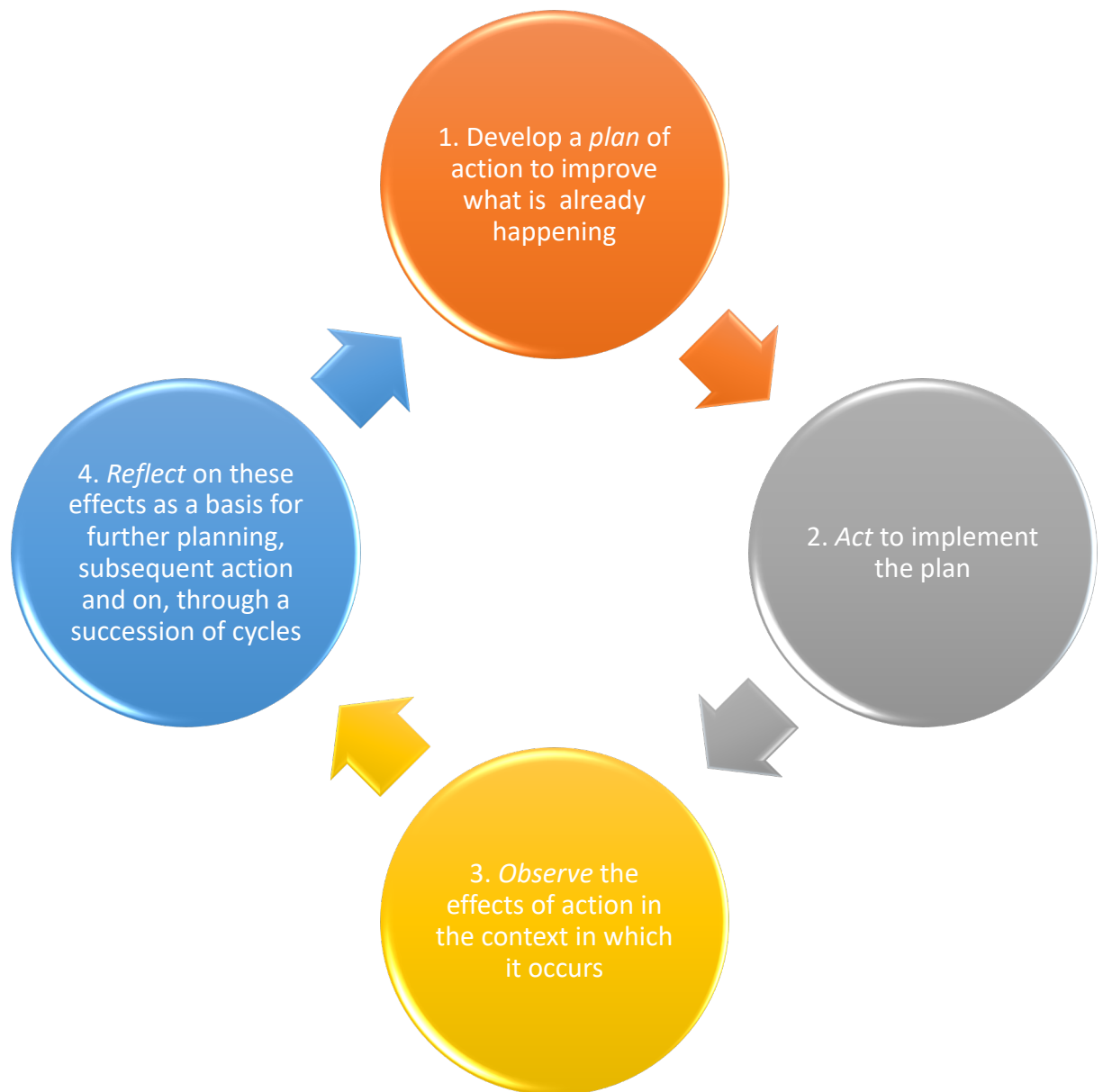


Figure 3. 1.: Summary of Kemmis' Activities involved in Action Research (adapted from Herr & Anderson, 2005: 5)

Through writing this methodology chapter, I engaged in the first activity of this SSEPR project's cycle. In creating a plan of action, I discussed the methodologies used in this

SSEPR project. By methods, I concur with Cohen et al.'s (2007: 47) analysis that this refers to the 'range of approaches used in educational research to gather data which are to be used as a basis for inference and interpretation, for explanation and prediction'. This SSEPR project consisted of techniques that are associated with interpretive paradigms – 'participant observation, role-playing, non-directive interviewing, episodes and accounts' (Cohen et al., 2007: 47). Throughout this chapter, I will provide an overview of the research methodologies used in this SSEPR project; outline the research design; discuss data collection methods and schedule; outline ethical considerations; and consider validity, reliability and judgement in relation to my research topic.

3.2. Research Methodologies

Huxtable and Whitehead (2021: 6) argue that one difficulty when engaging in SSEPR is that practitioners 'generate their living-educational-theory methodology in the course of generating their validated explanation of their educational influences in learning'. Therefore, they recommend that instead of pre-specifying a methodology that is to be "applied", that the researcher 'indicates the 'hallmarks' by which their methodology can be recognised as being a Living Theory research methodology' (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 6). This section aims to outline these hallmarks by which my methodology can be located within Living Theory research.

I drew upon narrative enquiry, self-study practitioner research, action research, dialogue and autoethnography in order to draw insights into the generation of my living-educational-theory. In the first section of this chapter, I aim to describe and explain the methodologies that I used and reflect on how they evolved throughout my research. Through the use of these methodologies, I generated my living-educational-theory of language teaching. In the following section, I will:

1. Give a brief overview of qualitative research
2. Explain my values and self-understanding as a teacher
3. Explain the intervention method to be used in this research (<i>Fiontar Froebelach</i>)
4. Explain my use of autoethnography and critical reflection
5. Outline my use of narrative enquiry, including children as co-researchers and having a learning partner
6. Outline my use of dialogue with assisting secondary partners

Figure 3. 2.: Aims of this Research Methodologies Section

3.2.1. Qualitative Research

McDonagh et al. (2020: 104) advocate the use of qualitative approaches research, ‘meaning unquantifiable information that is about qualities (observable or innate)’. The use of qualitative research and different perspectives inherently follows the Froebelian ideal of the mind being ‘a spontaneously active, formative agency’ and humans themselves being ‘an organic unity’ (Lilley, 1967: 8). Through engaging in research that takes a qualitative approach, I recognise that ‘the environment and the self are in intrinsic relation’ (Froebel cited in Lilley, 1967: 8) and that each person’s perception of the environment can be different, based on prior experiences.

This also is grounded in the interpretivist approach to epistemology (Póvoa, 2016), in which each person’s point of view to social reality is examined, and practitioners examine their own practice through different lenses (McDonagh et al., 2020). Sullivan et al. (2016:

79) argue that statistical analysis alone does not give a ‘a full picture about the processes of learning and teaching that may have occurred’. Therefore, in order to get a more in-depth understanding about my living-educational-theory, this SSEPR project aims to incorporate perspectives from different lenses (Brookfield, 2017: 7) as follows:

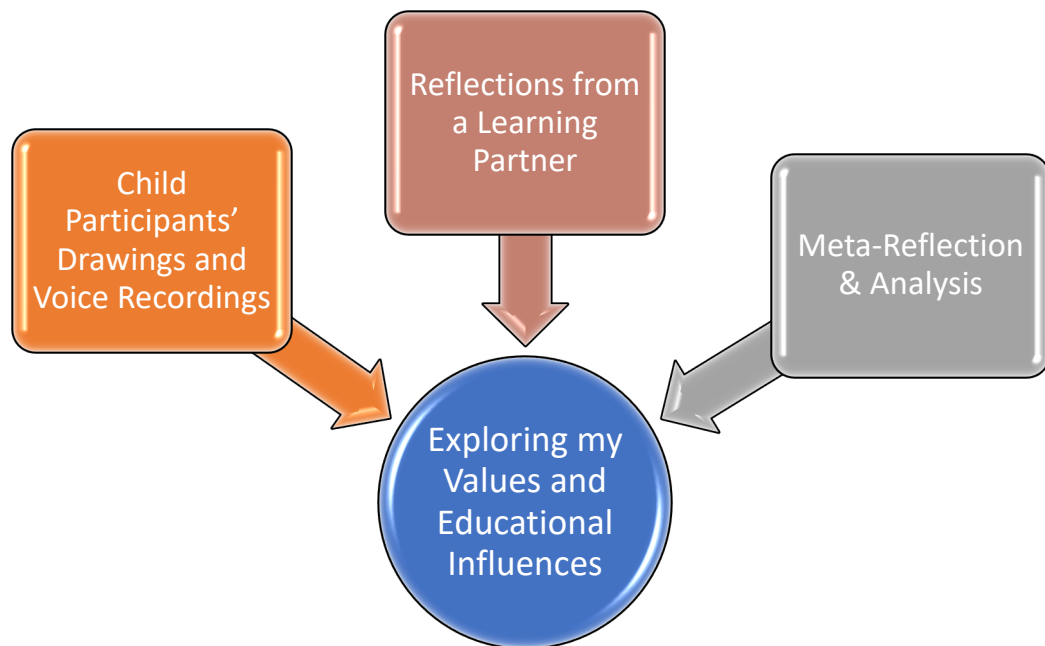


Figure 3. 3.: Methods of data collection to gain perspectives from different lenses (Brookfield, 2017: 7)

3.2.2. Looking at my Values

As discussed in the Literature Review, my values are fundamental to my SSEPR project and that it is through critical reflection on my practice that I have decided to focus on this particular topic. Throughout the course of this research, I reflected on my epistemological and ontological values and how they are lived through my practice. This focus on values, according to Jones (2016: 61) ‘is central to Living Theory research’.

As outlined in Sections 1.4., 2.4.2. and 3.1., my epistemological belief is that all learners are knowledge creators. This epistemological belief is influenced by Friere (cited in Hope & Timmel, 2003) and Froebel (cited in Liebschner, 1992) and is underpinned by the values of life-long and active learning, compassion and understanding. Through engaging in this project, I am living through my values as an SSEPR approach to research provides scope for me, the research practitioner, to document my own learning journey, while also facilitating the learning of my students, and potentially my colleagues. This, in turn, assisted me in the generation of my own living-educational-theory which enabled me to live closer to my values in my practice.

Through adapting a Living-Theory pedagogical approach, I positioned myself ‘not as [a] passive learner but as [an] active partner in generating knowledge to [my] own benefit and that of others’ (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 4). Sullivan et al. (2016: 25) agree that ‘action research can constitute a living, authentic form of continuing professional development (CPD) that has the potential to change both the practice and the practitioner irrevocably’. This method of learning through experience and learners self-directed

activity is one of the key ideas that Pestalozzi put forward (Tovey, 2019: 7), which influenced Froebel's educational theories (Smedly & Hoskins, 2020: 1203).

3.2.3. *Fiontar Froebelach*

Through examining my epistemological and ontological values, and my self-understanding as a teacher (Kelchtermans, 2018), I identified Froebel's teachings as having a significant impact on my pedagogical beliefs and my values. Through critical reflection on my practice, I questioned the presence of these values. While engaging in this SSEPR, I sought to find a way to uphold Froebelian practices in my teaching so that I could live to the values of life-long and active learning, compassion and understanding while generating my living-educational-theory.

This endeavour, combined with dialogue with my supervisor and assisting secondary partners, lead me to the concept of '*Fiontar Froebelach*', which means the Froebelian Adventure. During this intervention, I aspired to incorporate Froebelian principles into the teaching and learning of Irish in my classroom, namely: adapting a thematic approach; focusing on active and experiential learning; and embracing opportunities to use language while engaging in nature and the outdoor environment (Bloch, 2019; Smedly & Hoskins, 2020). This approach to language instruction placed greater emphasis on learner agency and enabled the children 'to make and explore language meaning as well as receive and create it', as recommended in the New Primary Language Curriculum (DES/NCCA, 2019: 4).

This intervention involved my analysis and adaptation of my teaching plans, engagement with the students and dialogue with all assisting secondary partners, further explained in Section 2.2.9. The initial plan for the intervention was to focus on a child-led approach to language learning. However, in the context of the Covid-19 pandemic, with 32 children in the classroom, the flexibility of movement and social groupings was not feasible. Therefore, throughout the course of the intervention, I endeavoured to include as many child-led learning experiences as possible for the students to have more autonomy over their learning (Bruce, cited in Bloch, 2019: 76). This intervention assisted in my mitigation of the living contradiction that I saw in my practice and enabled the children to see themselves as active participants and autonomous learners, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

3.2.4. Autoethnography/ Reflection as a part of SSEPR

Autoethnography, according to Spry, is ‘a self-narrative that critiques the situatedness of self with others in social contexts’ (cited in Jones, 2005: 765). It can be linked to the idea of meta-reflection, or reflection upon reflection. McNiff (2002: 18) advocates that ‘reflection on action is an inherent part of action research methodology’, aforementioned in the literature review, Section 1.2. Kalmbach Phillips and Carr (2010: 41) reiterate that ‘critical reflection must be deliberate and result in transformed practice’. Through engaging in autoethnography, I addressed areas in my practice where I am not living to my values so that I could be congruent with the context in which the teaching and learning of language was occurring.

While generating my own living-educational-theory, I used my reflective journal to ‘follow the process of [my] thinking and learning’ (Sullivan et al., 2016: 80). Through

critically engaging with Schön's concept of reflection-on-practice (cited in Smith, 2011: 11), I began to make my claim to knowledge and analyse whether my values are evident in my practice. I gathered evidence of how I navigated my journey of self-understanding as a Froebelian teacher in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting so that I could live closer to my values.

3.2.5. Narrative Enquiry: Children as Co-Researchers

Kalmbach Phillips and Carr (2010: 41) explain that 'action research is often done in collaboration either informally or formally' and that 'such collaboration is often a way to make the research more credible'. In this SSEPR project, I collaborated with a number of other stakeholders from within my context. This partnership and creation of a community of learners is also a Froebelian principle (Tovey, 2013: 4). This section, and Section 2.2.9., aim to discuss my use of collaboration and dialogue in this SSEPR.

Hitchcock and Hughes (cited in McDonagh et al., 2020: 125) argue that one's 'way of being in the world (ontology) colours your understanding both of knowledge (epistemology) and of who are considered valid knowers'. In line with my Froebelian epistemological assumption that all learners are knowledge creators, I believed that the children involved in this research could provide rich new knowledge and insights into my understanding of language education. The inclusion of the children's perceptions and experiences of language learning in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting is somewhat unique to this study.

Sullivan et al. (2016: 81) concur in that ‘when you are examining your teaching, your pupils are part of the process. Your students’ voices can provide valuable data’. As is explained later in this chapter, I asked the children to depict their understanding of knowledge creation and language acquisition through a drawing and voice recording both before and after intervention to assess if their understanding of themselves as language learners had altered through the course of the research, and to enlighten me in my understanding of language acquisition as a teacher. The inclusion of the impact that a teachers’ practice has on children’s perceptions and experiences of language learning has not been widely included in previous studies in the field of *tumoideachas*.

3.2.6. Assisting Secondary Partners

3.2.6.1. Learning Partner

As outlined in the Section 2, dialogue and collaboration are important aspects of action research methodology. Herr and Anderson (2005: 4) agree that ‘action research is best done in collaboration with others who have a stake in the problem under investigation’. Early in this SSEPR project, while engaging in dialogue with a Critical Friend, I explained my intervention idea. This Critical Friend later came to ask whether she could become a Learning Partner and join in my intervention, but with her own class. This Learning Partner, who has a similar class setting to my own, asked whether she could participate in my research and give feedback on how the intervention worked with her own class and in her own practice. This feedback proved invaluable to my development of my living-educational-theory, provided an added lens (Brookfield, 2017: 7) when challenging my assumptions and added to the validity and triangulation of this SSEPR.

3.2.6.2. Critical Observers and Critical Friends

Sullivan et al. (2016: 82) advocate engaging with others in action research as ‘others can confirm and critique not only what you have done, but also the changes in how you think about your work’. They explain that this person/group of people ‘should be someone you have confidence in as a person who could critique your action and be honest with you’ (2016: 82). Herr and Anderson (2005: 4) further argue that ‘participation or at least ongoing feedback should be sought from other stakeholders in the setting or community in order to ensure a democratic outcome and provide an alternative source of explanations’. In this SSEPR project, I engaged with critical friends in two ways: one group, referred to as my Critical Friends, were engaged in dialogue about my research but did not observe my practice; the second group, referred to as Critical Observers, observed my practice, gave feedback and engaged in dialogue based on my practice.

Brookfield (2017: 8) supports the idea of observation and dialogue. He explains that ‘inviting colleagues to watch what we do or engaging in critical conversations with them helps us to notice aspects of our practice that are usually hidden from us’ and that ‘as they describe their readings of, and responses to, situations that we face, we often see our practice in new ways’ (Brookfield, 2017: 8). This new perspective of my practice added to my understanding and generation of my own living-educational-theory.

3.3. Research Design

3.3.1. My Research Intervention

In line with living-educational-theory, this research aimed to assess ‘how do I improve my practice?’ (Whitehead, 2019). It was therefore essential that the cycles involved in this research were fluid (Sakata et al., 2019) and based on the ideal of living-theory-methodology, in which I learned through my practice and critical reflections. Kalmbach Phillips and Carr (2010: 41) advocate that in this type of research, ‘teaching and research are viewed as involving a continuous cycle or spiral of planning, implementing, and reflecting and/or evaluating’. Through engaging in this living-educational-theory approach to research, my values of life-long and active learning are highlighted and the ideal that all learners are knowledge creators is embraced. Lilley (1967: 10) reminds us that ‘in Froebel’s system of thought everything is regarded as created with an inherent form and purpose, yet not as necessarily resulting in a predetermined style or pattern of growth’ and that ‘the purpose involves effort and struggle, since every individual being is striving to grow to its full development and to manifest its essential nature in a universe which is creative’ (Lilley, 1967: 10). The focus on these values, as well as critical reflections, lead to my realisation of the new value of learner agency, as will be discussed in Chapter 4.

This study, although structured in the form of pre-intervention, intervention and post-intervention for the purposes of this Master of Education degree, it is my view that the cycles of this research will continue beyond the scope of this research and will change and evolve throughout my career. This is mirrored by the Froebelian philosophy of ‘unceasing self-contemplation, self-analysis and self-education’ (Froebel cited in Lilley: 1967: 4) as the fundamental characteristics of his life.

Huxtable and Whitehead (2021: 6) invite readers to examine their educational influences in learning as it is ‘of fundamental importance in the generation of a living-educational-theory and therefore in a Living Theory research approach to Higher Education pedagogy’ (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 6). Having been trained in Froebel College (now Froebel Department in Maynooth University), Froebelian principles played a huge part in the development of my understanding of language education and in my practice. I viewed myself as a Froebelian teacher and strived to include Froebelian principles in my language teaching. However, upon critical reflection, I reluctantly admitted that my ideal of Froebelian principles could not always be seen through my practice, especially in language instruction. I pondered how I could improve my practice and teach in a Froebelian way while also implementing *luath-tumoideachas* in my classroom.

Having discussed this with my supervisor, it was decided to do a small-scale intervention in which I could assess my practice and focus on the Froebelian principles that I wanted to be visible in my practice. Through engaging in *Fiontar Froebelach*, as described above, I hoped to be able to see my values emerging through my practice and began on my journey to generate my living-educational-theory.

3.3.2. Research Sample

This research took place in a Junior Infant Class of 32 children, in a small Irish-medium school (*Gaelscoil*) located in a large town in the midlands. Out of this large class, the children and parents were asked to volunteer to be co-participants in the research. There

were no awards offered for participation and all participants had the option to remove themselves from the research at any point.

The children in my classroom had been immersed in *Gaeilge* from September 2020 and continued with this immersion for the period of this research. In September 2020, the children are at or below Level A1 of CEFR (Council Of Europe, 2020), having little to no Irish, with the exception of the students who attended a *naíonra* (Irish-medium preschool). By the time of intervention, the students had experience with *tumoideachas* and had become familiar with the rules and routines in the classroom, and with me as their class teacher. However, the children's *tumoideachas* experience was interrupted and transitioned online for a period of two months (January and February 2021), affecting their experience of language learning. The effect of the children's experience of language learning online on their perceptions of themselves as language learners is further discussed in Chapter 4.

The teacher who joined me as a Learning Partner in our '*Fiontar Froebelach*' asked for permission to participate. This Froebel-trained teacher had a Senior Infant class of 34 children within the same school and was interested in improving her own practice.

Critical Friends and Critical Observers in this research consist of colleagues and other professionals within and outside of the school. All Critical Friends have experience in education settings, and some have experience with research. Each of the Critical Friends and Critical Observers referred to in this research volunteered to participate with no incentives for participation.

3.3.3. Research Schedule

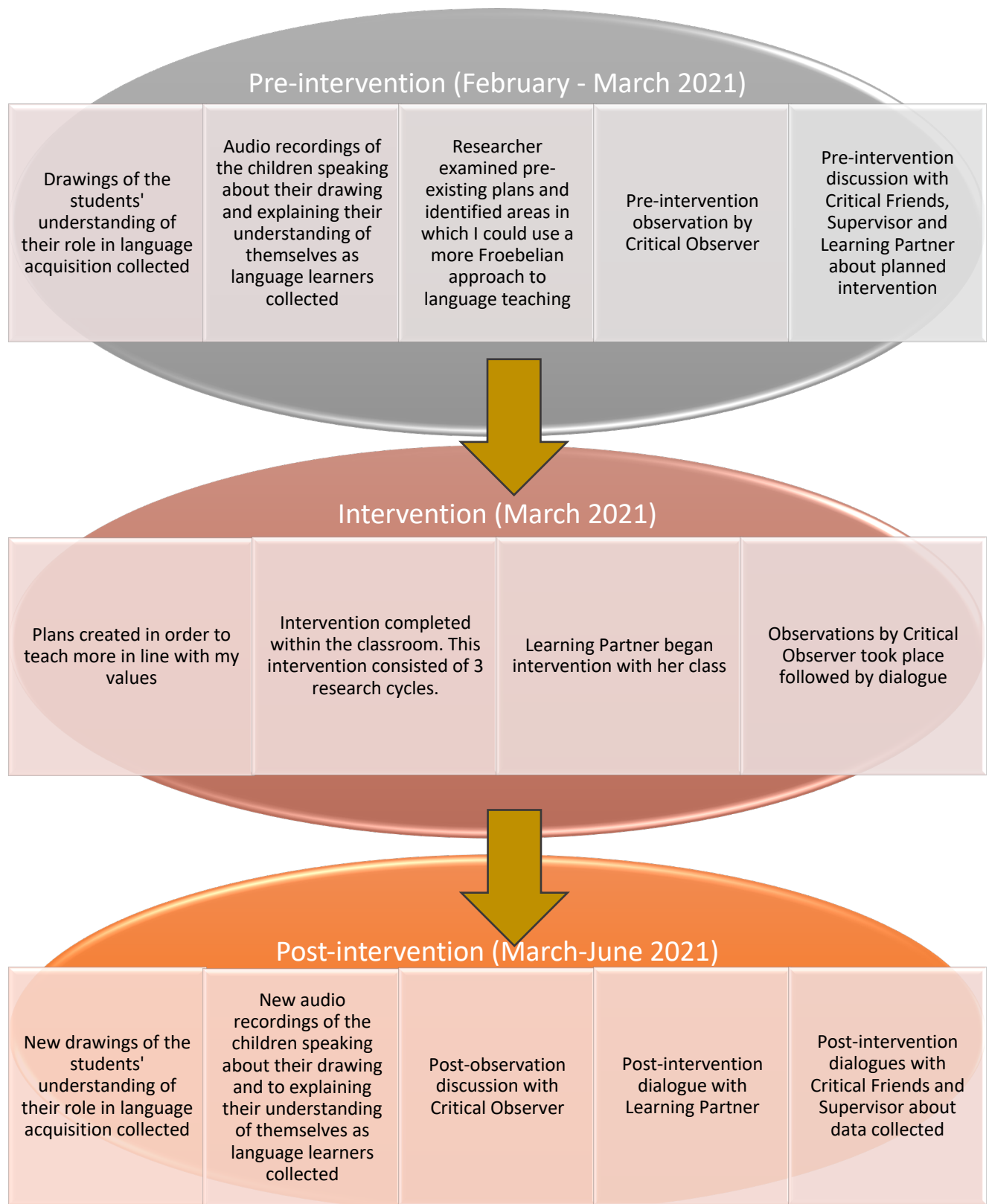


Figure 3. 4.: Research Schedule

3.3.4. Planned Research Cycles

As aforementioned, the cycles in this research were fluid and not rigid in structure (Sakata et al., 2019), in line with living-educational-methodology. Each cycle was dependent and structured upon the critical reflections of the last.



Figure 3. 5.: Research Cycles in this SSEPR Project

3.4. Data Collection Instruments

3.4.1. Data Collection Instruments

As outlined Section 3.2.1., this research used qualitative data in order to assess if my epistemological and ontological values can be seen through my practice. The primary qualitative data that I gathered consisted of the following:

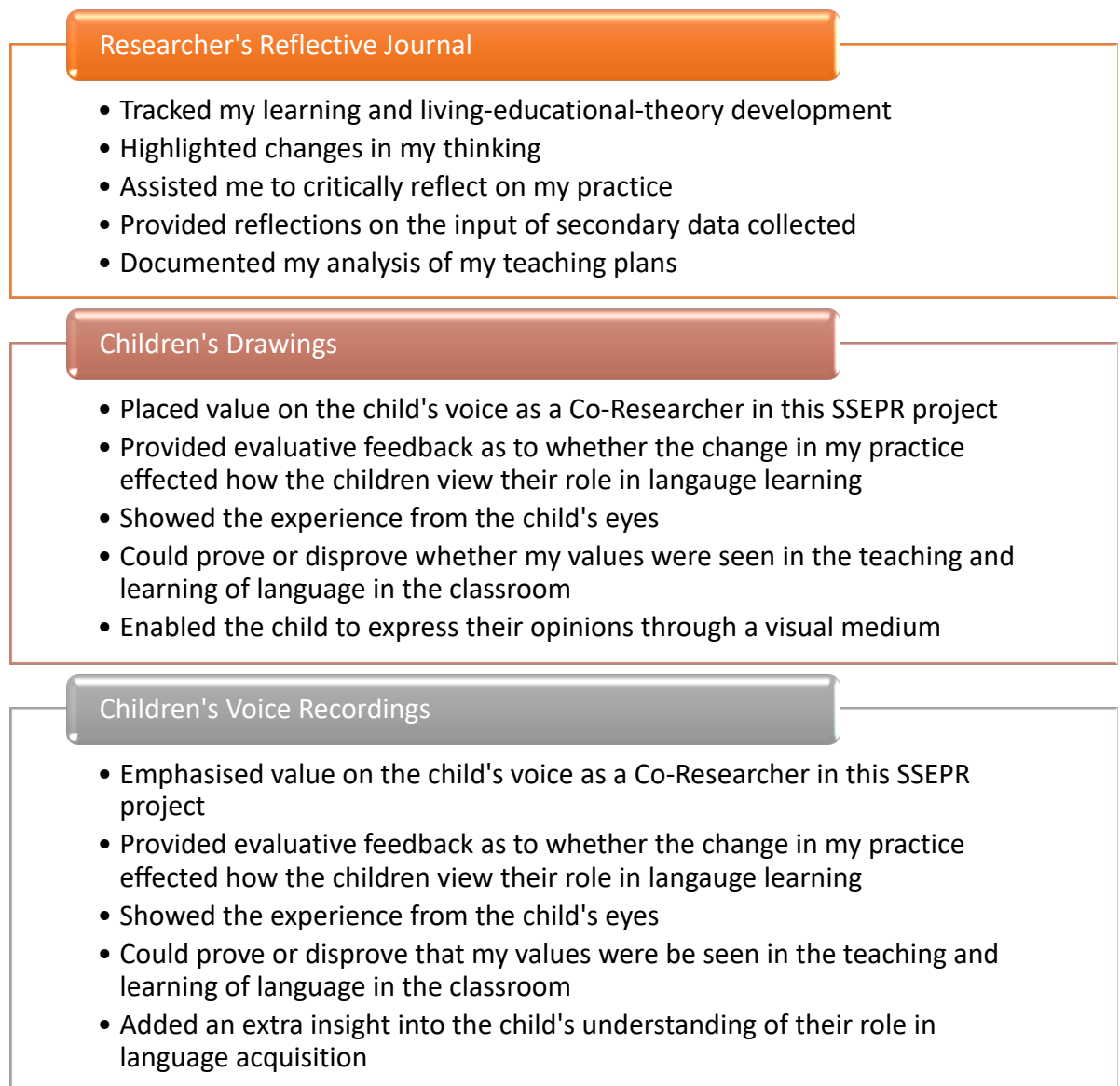


Figure 3. 6.: Qualitative Primary Data Collection and Uses

In the following sections, I discuss each of these methods of primary data collection and the advantages and challenges that they pose.

3.4.2. Primary Data Collection

Cohen et al. (2007: 193) advocate the use of multiple sources in educational research, specifically the use of primary and secondary sources. In this research, I incorporated a range of primary and secondary data collection methods to gain a clear insight into my development of a living-educational-theory of language instruction. Primary sources of data are sources that are ‘intentionally or unintentionally, capable of transmitting a first-hand account of an event’ (Cohen et al., 2007: 193). Within this SSEPR project, I used three primary sources of data collection, namely: my own reflective journal, the children’s drawings and the children’s voice recordings. In this section, I aim to highlight how these methods of data collection assisted my research.

3.4.2.1. Researcher’s Reflective Journal

Roche (2020: 9) promotes the use of a reflective journal as a data source in educational research and as a tool for reflexivity. Cohen et al., (2007: 300) reiterate this concept as they explain that action research ‘involves keeping a personal journal in which we record our progress and our reflections about two parallel sets of learning: our learnings about the practices we are studying . . . and our learnings about the process (the practice) of studying them’. Kinsella (2007: 397) advocates that ‘each practitioner develops a theory of practice, whether he or she is aware of it or not’ and calls on practitioners to reflect-in-action which is ‘susceptible to a kind of rigor that is both like and unlike the rigor of scholarly work and controlled experimentation’ (Schön cited in Smith, 2011: 5).

In striving to create my own living educational theory through this SSEPR, I critically reflected on my practice and examined my self-understanding as a teacher. I am drawn to Greene's (1995: 20) assertion that 'to be yourself is to be in process of creating a self, an identity'. In reflecting upon my self-understanding as a teacher, I found myself in borderlands of practice, which 'are spaces where teachers are engaged in negotiating multiple conceptions of "best practices" within their daily teaching practice' (Delaney, 2015: 374). Through analysing data from my reflective journal, I hoped to explain the development of my living-educational-theory of language instruction and identify the journey that I have taken while engaging with this research. I further discussed the impact that reflection had on both my self-understanding as a teacher and this SSEPR in Section 2.2.3.

3.4.2.2. Gathering data from Children in this SSEPR

In line with Froebelian philosophy (Tovey, 2013; Bruce et al., 2019), the voice of the child played a key role in this research project. Bruce (cited in Tovey, 2013: 111) outlines that 'the essence of the adult role in a Froebelian setting is for the adult to observe, support and extend'. Tovey (2013: 111) further explains that this observation is not limited to watching a child. Observation means 'really taking note of what the child is interested in, thinking and feeling, and striving to understand what the child means or is trying to do' (Tovey, 2013: 111) so that adults can 'tune in to the child, interact in a way which is meaningful and sensitive, and use the observations to support the child's learning and to inform interaction and subsequent planning' (Tovey, 2013: 111) while also reflecting on policies and practice. Greene (1995: 23) supports this ideal as she ascertains that 'the classroom situation most provocative of thoughtfulness and critical consciousness is the one in which teachers and learners find themselves conducting a kind of collaborative search, each from her or his lived situation'. Throughout this research, I observed the

children and adapted my plans to support their language learning in a meaningful way. Through this observation and adaptation, I adapted my practice, in collaboration with the children.

While I aimed to place emphasis on the voice of the child in this SSEPR, I felt that their young age could hinder my ability to interpret the children's views strictly through written or oral feedback. This concern was reiterated in Article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child, in which they advocate adults showing 'patience and creativity by adapting their expectations to a young child's interests, level of understanding and preferred ways of communicating' (cited in Lundy, 2007: 937). In aspiring to gain a holistic insight into the children's understanding of their language acquisition and knowledge creation, I gathered two forms of data from the child participants, namely: children's drawings and children's voice recordings.

3.4.2.2a. Children's drawings

İnözü (2017: 2) advocates the use of drawings to represent children's 'personal experiences of learning language' and explains that 'visualisation can serve as a powerful tool in eliciting subjective experiences and views' (2017: 2). Pianta et al. (cited in İnözü, 2017: 5) highlight that one advantage of using children's drawings is that 'they represent a means of gathering children's self-report data without some of the limitations of questionnaires or interviews'. In order to examine my practice more in-depth and to adjust my living-educational-theory, I sought to gain an insight into the children's own experience and understanding of their learning journey. Section 3.2.5. acknowledges that this is a relevantly new aspect to studies in *tumoideachas* research.

Since the children partaking in this research were young and considering the difficulties that present with structured interviews in a child's second language, I used the children's drawings as one of the modes of data collection in this research. Melo-Pfeifer (cited in İnözü, 2017: 4) support gathering children's drawings as a method of gaining insight into their beliefs as they outline that drawings can be considered as 'reports or narratives of personal understandings, or interpretations, of the learning process which is anchored in experience'.

Dufva et al. (2011: 63) warn, however, that drawings and images can be open to interpretation and that this data 'may be described as an aspect of the person's beliefs' as 'beliefs are not singular entities, but, rather, dynamic clusters of multi-voiced and multimodal conceptualisations' (Dufva et al., 2011: 63). Deguara (2019: 158) reiterates these concerns and outlines that 'children's drawings are impregnated with layers of meaning'. In order to mitigate any bias in my interpretation of the children's drawings, this SSEPR encompassed a multimodal narrative in which the children's drawings were combined with their voice recordings to interpret their understanding of knowledge creation and language acquisition. In aspiring to collect multimodal narratives, I was reminded of Vygotsky's (cited in İnözü, 2017: 2) determination that speech, 'symbols, art, drawing, writing and diagrams' are all possible forms of mediation tools.

3.4.2.2b. Children's Voice Recordings

Guided by the Froebelian principle that 'the children's voice and opinions are important' (Smedley & Hoskins, 2020: 1208), the third data collection instrument that I used in this research was children's voice recordings. In this section, I will discuss the benefits and limitations of the use of voice recordings and outline how I addressed these through the use of multimodal narratives.

Although Cohen et al. (2007: 364) admit that voice recordings may be ‘unobtrusive’, they outline some of the limitations for the use of such data in research. One such limitation is that this mode of data collection ‘might constrain the respondent’ (Cohen et al., 2007: 364) which can be addressed by recording the interview through note-taking and memory. However, Cohen et al. recognise that, when note-taking, ‘the reliability of the data might rely on the memory of the interviewer’ (2007: 364). Therefore, I decided to record the children speaking and to transcribe the recordings after the interview. Mishler (cited in Cohen et al., 2007: 365) outline that voice recordings are selective and filter ‘out important contextual factors, neglecting the visual and non-verbal aspects of the interview’. In order to address these biases and limitations, the voice recordings were combined with the children’s drawings as multimodal narratives in order to gain a holistic interpretation of the children’s understanding of language acquisition.

Owing to the fact that the ‘situated and mediated nature of knowing argues that the materiality of the resources used leaves its trace on the way people conceptualise something’ (Dufva et al., 2011: 63). In this research, I aim to gain a holistic insight into the experienced views of the children in my class in order to enhance my understanding of ‘the process of language learning and development and for further developing teaching practices’ (Dufva et al., 2011: 60). Barkhuizen et al. (cited in İnözü, 2017: 2) advocate the use of multimodal narratives, which are ‘narratives constructed in more than one mode of narration’, in order to gain insight into others’ perceptions. Dufva et al. (2011: 60) also highlight the need to look ‘at both verbal data coming from oral interviews and visual data’ in order to gain ‘multivoicedness, situatedness and dynamicity of beliefs’. Therefore, I felt that it was appropriate to use the children’s drawings (visual) and voice recordings (aural) as multimodal narratives for this aspect of the research.

3.4.3. Secondary Data Collection – Dialogue with Assisting Secondary

Partners

The use of secondary data sources to supplement primary data is strongly advocated by Cohen et al. (2007: 193). They describe secondary data sources as ‘those that do not bear a direct physical relationship to the event being studied’ such as quoted material (Cohen et al., 2007: 194). This SSEPR incorporated assisting secondary partners as a mode of secondary data collection. These assisting secondary partners were people who were not directly involved in the research but could provide valuable insights into their perceptions of the research topic and included a Learning Partner, Critical Observers and Critical Friends. I recorded my reflections of conversations with these assisting secondary partners as a part of my reflective journal in order to analyse the data at the end of my research and achieve triangulation and validity in my findings, which is further discussed in Section 3.4.5. The benefits of the contributions of these assisting secondary partners was previously outlined in Section 3.2.6 and 2.2.9.

The secondary qualitative data that I gathered, which were included in my reflective journal, consist of the following:

Critical Observers

- Added another lens (Brookfield, 2017) to my research
- Could validate whether or not my values can be seen in my practice
- Provided a different perspective and reflection on my practice

Learning Partner

- Tracked the learning of others engaging in my research
- Gave added insight into my approach
- Added another lens (Brookfield, 2017) to my research
- Could discuss difficulties or issues arising that may not present in my classroom

Critical Friends

- Added rigour and validity to my research - triangulation
- Could highlight issues in my research
- Could critically engage with my research and help me to justify what I was doing

Analysis of my Teaching Plans

- Provided proof of difference in teaching methods
- Assisted in the exploration of my practice
- Highlighted my intentions for lessons and evaluated how they differ from what actually happened in the lessons

Figure 3. 7.: *Qualitative Secondary Data Collection and Uses*

3.4.4. Data Collection Schedule

Pre-intervention Qualitative Data Collection

- Collection of children's drawings and aural recording of their descriptions of their picture
- Reflective journal of researcher
- Reflections on discussions with critical friends, critical observers and learning partner
- Pre-existing plans that were created before intervention was planned

Ongoing Qualitative Data Collection

- Reflective journal of researcher
- Reflections on discussions with critical friends, critical observers and learning partner
- New teaching plans to incorporate a thematic approach in this early immersion context
- Reflections on feedback from observations by critical observer and learning partner

Post-intervention Qualitative Data Collection

- Collection of children's new drawings and aural recording of their descriptions of their picture
- Reflective journal of researcher
- Reflections on discussions with critical friends, critical observers and learning partner
- Feedback from learning partner and critical observers
- Reflection on and analysis of plans that were created during the research
- Feedback from critical friends and validation groups about the research

Figure 3. 8.: Data Collection Schedule

3.4.5. Validity and Judgement – Triangulation

Sullivan et al. (2016: 103) argue that ‘it is through dialogue that the validity of your research claims in some educational settings can be challenged’. Through this dialogue with others, we come to make judgements. Biesta (2015: 11-12) explains that these ‘judgements ought to be pragmatic’ and outlines areas of judgement: qualification, subjectification and socialisation. Reflection on these areas of judgement, in conjunction with others is ‘susceptible to a kind of rigor that is both like and unlike the rigor of scholarly work and controlled experimentation’ (Schön cited in Smith, 2011: 5).

Cohen et al. (2007: 49) concur that, when it comes to research, ‘the research community and those using the findings have a right to expect that research be conducted rigorously, scrupulously and in an ethically defensible manner’. Even though Agar (cited in Cohen et al., 2007: 134-135) claims that ‘in qualitative data collection, the intensive personal involvement and in-depth responses of individuals secure a sufficient level of validity and reliability’, I endeavoured to examine other ways of adding validity, reliability and rigour to this SSEPR project.

Huxtable and Whitehead (2021: 1) remind us that ‘Living Theory research refers to the conceptual frameworks and methods of validation that enable a researcher to locate their practice within this approach to research’. Sullivan et al. (2016: 82), reiterate this need for validation and suggest ‘cross-checking your work from different perspectives’ for ‘triangulation’, so that the researcher ‘can show the accuracy and validity of information you gather’. Through collecting data from numerous participants, with different perspectives, in this research, I engaged in triangulation so that it can ‘explain more fully the richness and complexity of the changes’ made and ‘give a more balanced picture’

(Sullivan et al., 2016: 82). Through my data collection methods, I met Winter's (cited in Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 7) six criteria of rigour by:

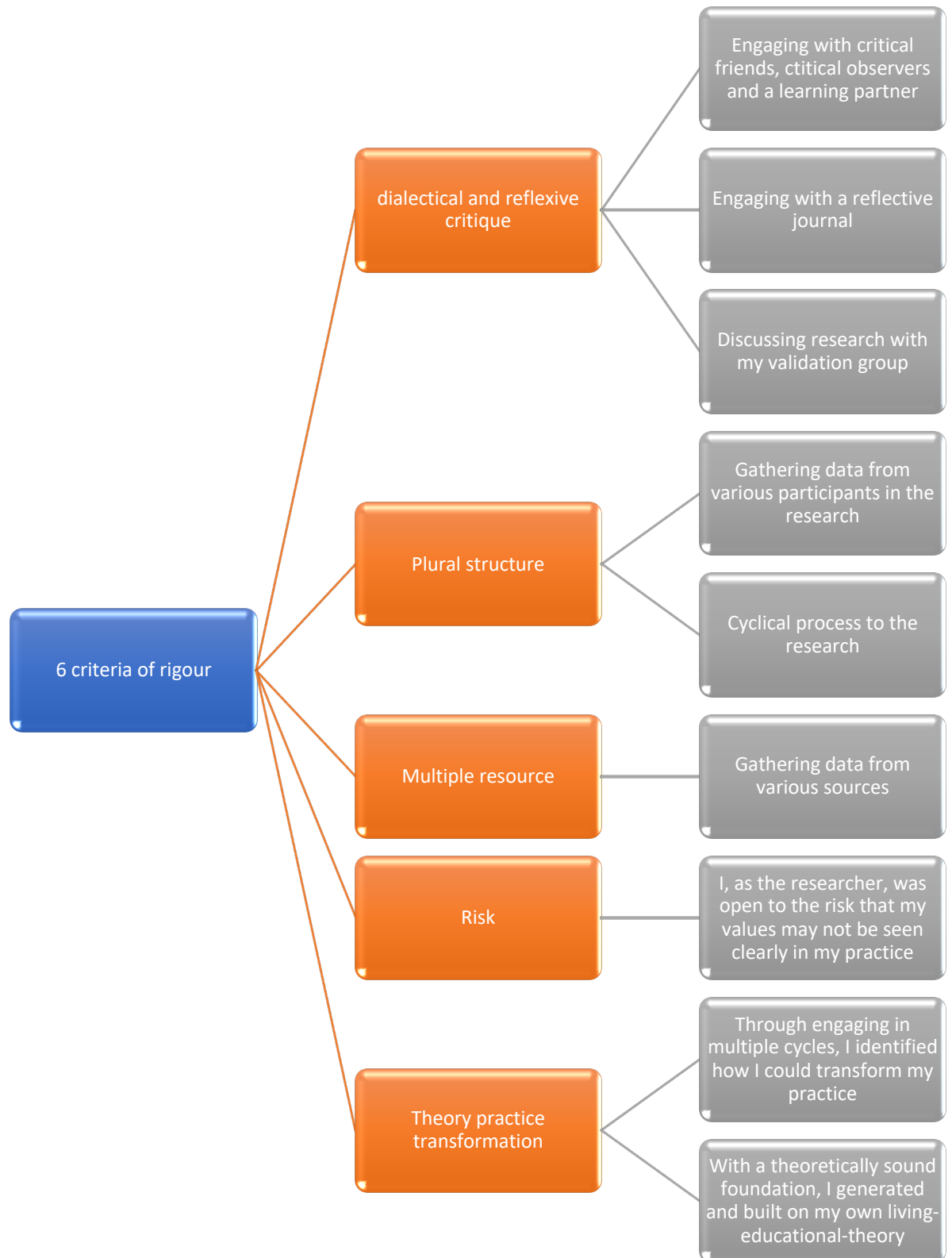


Figure 3. 9.: My Implementation of Winter's 6 Criteria of Rigour (cited in Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 7)

Kalmbach Phillips and Carr (2010: 41) suggest that ‘collaboration is often a way to make the research more credible’. Through engaging various participants in my research, I added to the validity, reliability and rigour of this research and challenge assumptions, through including various lenses (Brookfield, 2017: 15):

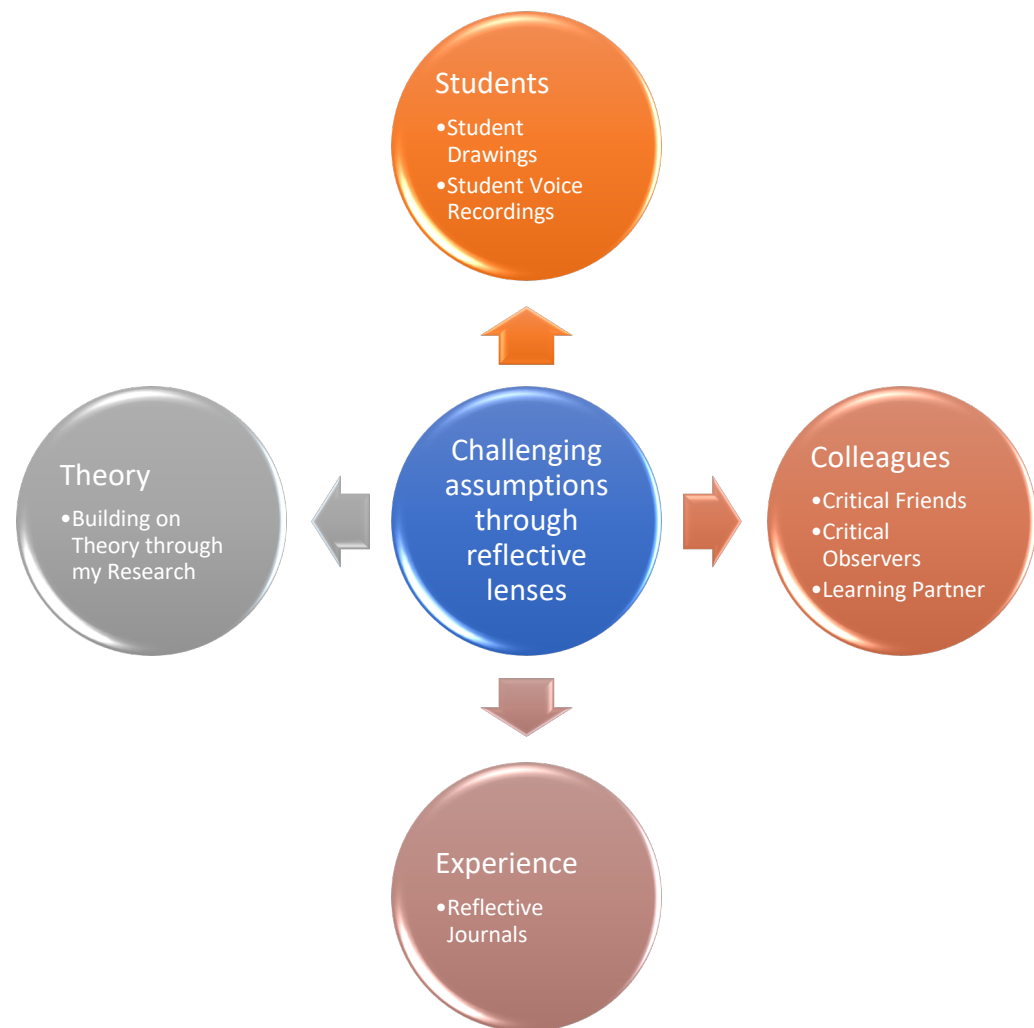


Figure 3. 10.: Challenging Assumptions through Reflective Lenses (Brookfield, 2017: 15)

Another way that I added to the validity of this SSEPR project is through establishing a validation group, consisting of my critical friends, supervisor, critical observers and learning partner. Within this validation group, I could ‘integrate the mutual rational control by critical discussion, with Habermas’ four criteria of social validity, in validation

groups that provide a context for a creative, as well as challenging, educational conversation about the research’ (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021: 7).

3.5. Ethical Considerations

Kelly (cited in Cohen et al., 2007: 69) outlines that ‘the area in qualitative research where one’s ethical antennae need to be especially sensitive is that of action research, and it is here that researchers, be they teachers or outsiders, must show particular awareness of the traps that lie in wait’. Owing to this, I feel it pertinent to include a section discussing ethical considerations that I felt were relevant to this SSEPR project.

3.5.1. Recruitment and Co-Participants

Sullivan et al. (2016: 95) argue that action research consists of ‘research with people, not research on people’. They suggest that the people involved in an action research project are co-participants. Drawing upon this suggestion, I outline the role of my co-participants in this research study.

This research was conducted within my Junior Infant classroom, from which the children could volunteer to participate. There were no incentives or rewards given for participation. My Learning Partner, who began as a critical friend, upon hearing about my intended research, asked if she could participate in the research with her class also. The data from her students was not used in this research, however, the teacher’s own reflections and critical feedback provided another lens to this study as advocated by Brookfield (2013).

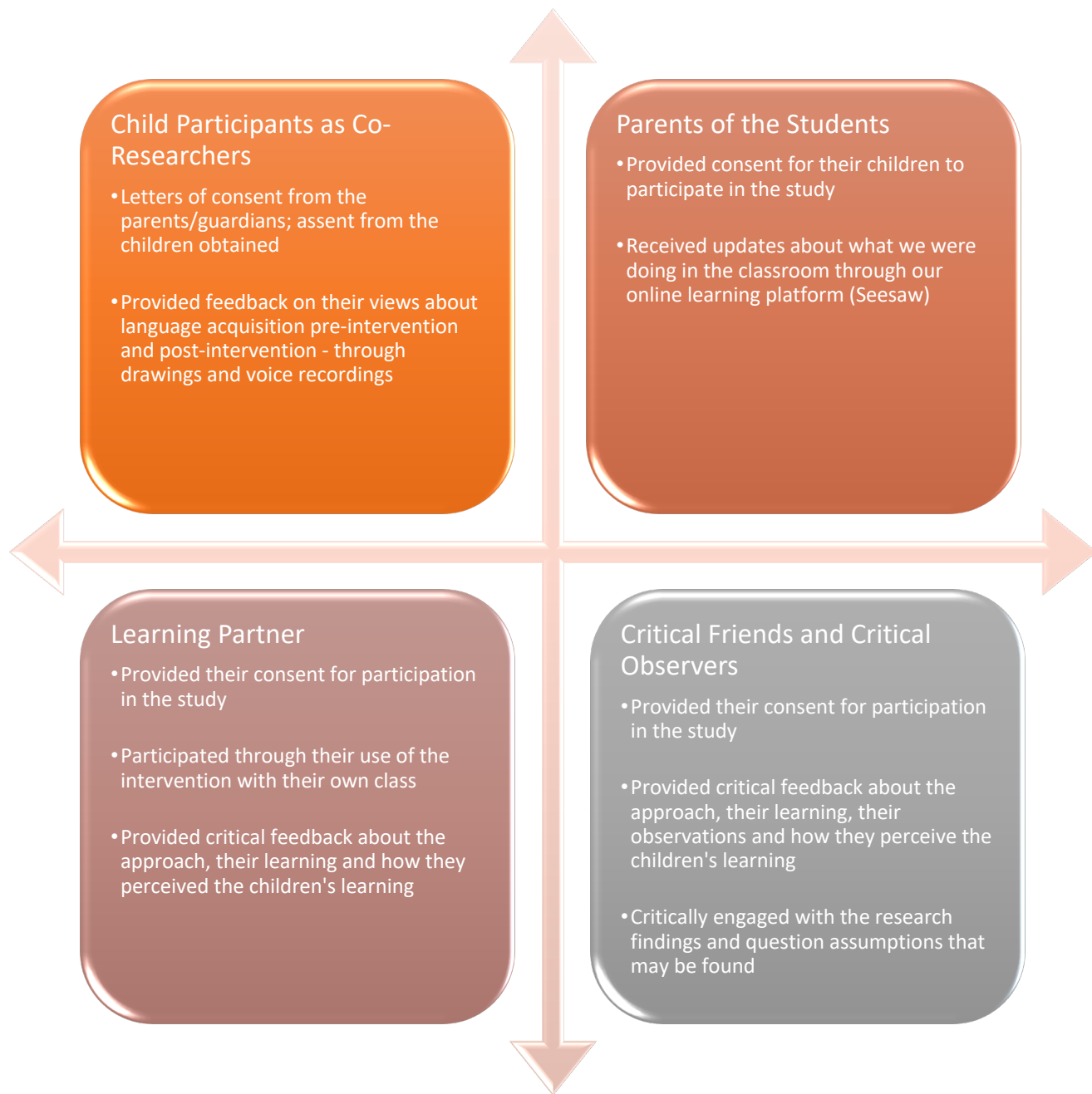


Figure 3. 11.: Roles of the Participants in this Study

3.5.2. Informed Consent and Assent

Written consent of the Board of Management, the principal, the students themselves, other participants and the parents/guardians was sought. I wrote letters to the principal, Board of Management, parents, students and participants outlining my research aim, methodologies and methods of data collection (see Appendix 1). I explicitly discussed

that the research is based on my practice and not on the participants themselves. I assured all stakeholders and participants that the identities of the school and the pupils would remain anonymous, and that all data would be collected and stored in accordance with Maynooth University Guidelines.

Due to the fact that the children may not fully understand the conversation through *Gaeilge*, I requested that the parents/guardians discussed the research with their children before I asked for their assent in the classroom. Their assent was recorded through putting their fingerprints/identification mark/writing their names on the letter (See Appendix 1).

3.5.3. Vulnerability

Owing to the fact that the children in my class are considered a vulnerable group in terms of research, I strictly adhered to the guidelines outlined in my school's Child Protection policy and the 'Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children' (DCYA, 2017).

I ensured that all children in my care felt that they were achieving and that their input and work was valued by both the other children in the class and I.

Owing to the fact that this was a SSEPR project, I was conscious of my own vulnerability and of Brookfield's risks involved in reflecting critically, namely: impostership, social suicide, lost innocence and marginalisation (cited in Walker & Oldford, 2020: 287) and used dialogue and peer support groups in order to navigate these difficulties.

3.5.4. Power Dynamics

The imbalance of power between teacher and student cannot be ignored. The children may have inherently sought to please their teacher with answers that they think would comply with what I wanted to hear. This may have had an effect on the data. Therefore, I used a range of sources (Special Needs Assistants, other teachers, principal, parents, etc) as well as children's input to validate my findings. I also made sure to use the same script when asking the children to provide feedback pre-intervention and post-intervention so that the results were not affected.

Likewise, this power imbalance could be seen when asking colleagues for critical feedback. Taking this into account, I anonymised responses and feedback so that it could be given honestly.

All participants had the opportunity to opt out of the research at any point and it was made clear that there were no consequences for the participation or non-participation in the research.

3.5.5. Sensitivity

In the event of a disclosure during the period of research, I would have followed the school's Child Protection Policy and liaise with the Designated Liaison Person.

In order to avoid situations that were sensitive, intrusive or stressful due to the work collected, I endeavoured to anonymise all work that I used in the research.

Owing to the fact that all children in this research are second language learners, and that the early immersion context can be stressful for the students, I sought to provide

opportunities for success for each child and as many visual cues as possible in order to ensure that the children understood what was happening in the classroom.

The topic of *tumoideachas* can be a sensitive topic as it directly relates to the ethos of the school (*Gaelscoil*). I endeavoured to provide a safe space to have open and honest conversations and ensure anonymity for all participants.

3.5.6. Covid-19

In the 2020-2021 academic year, there was a highly increased chance of school closures due to the Covid-19 disease. As with most aspects of education, there was a hugely increased risk to participants if there were to be a school closure or threat to privacy or anonymity. I reduced these risks through preparation to move online (setting up an online platform, providing online lessons, having a plan in place to conduct my research online, online communication and online questionnaires). As stated above, all data was collected and stored in line with Maynooth University's guidelines.

3.5.7. Process of Ethical Approval

After obtaining Ethical Approval from Maynooth University, I sent letters seeking consent to parents, the Board of Management, my colleagues and to the principal which explained the research and their role in the research, if they chose to engage with it (see Appendix 1). I also had a conversation with the children in the class to ask for volunteers and to confirm assent. Since this conversation took place *trí Ghaeilge*, I requested that the parents discussed the research and their involvement with the children before seeking their consent/assent.

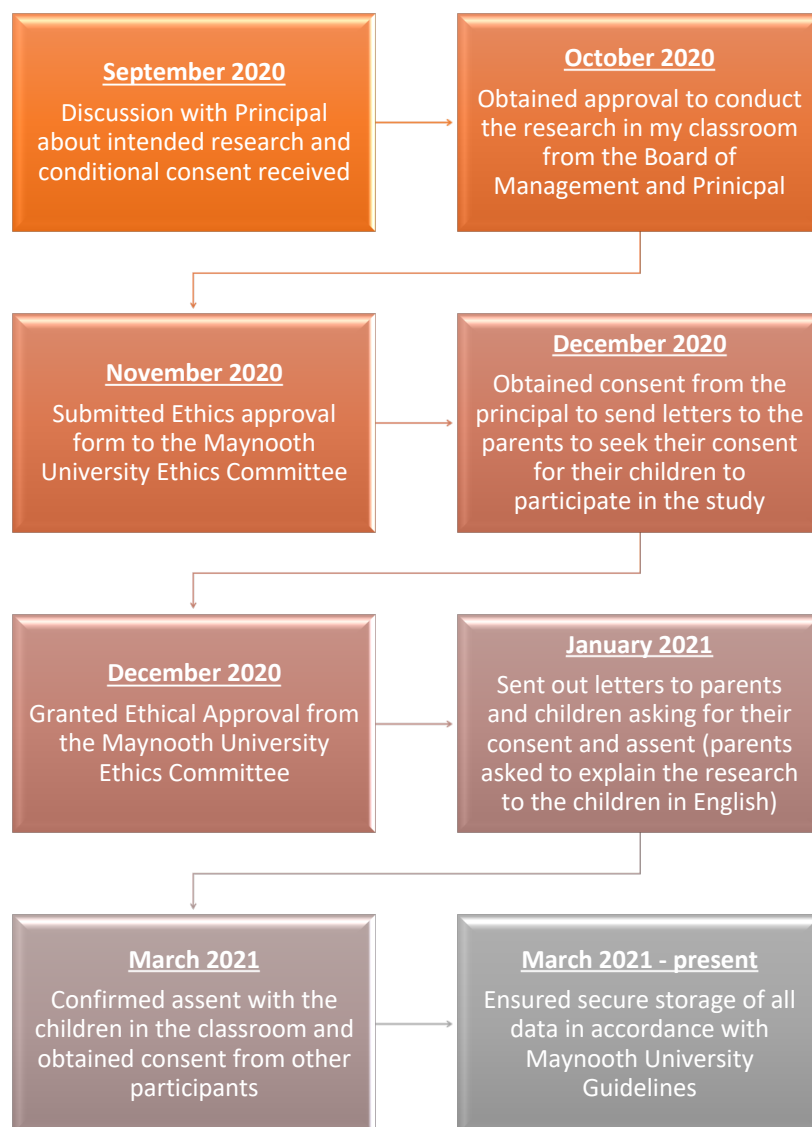


Figure 3. 12.: Ethical Approval Process

3.5.8. Adherence to Guidelines

The following guidelines were adhered to throughout this research:

Ethical guidelines used in this research:	Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2017)
	Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012)
	Maynooth University Research Ethics policy (Maynooth University Academic Council, 2020)
	Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy (Maynooth University Academic Council, 2016)
	Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Ethics Policy (2020)
	Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) Guidelines for developing ethical research projects involving children. Ireland: Dublin
	GDPR (European Parliament and Council of European Union, 2016)
	United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UN Commission on Human Rights, 2010)

Figure 3. 13.: Ethical Guidelines followed in this SSEPR Project

3.5.9. Ethical Data Collection and Storage

Data was obtained and stored in accordance with Maynooth University's Research Integrity Policy (2016), Maynooth University's Research Ethics Policy (2020), Data Protection Legislation and Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Ethics Policy (2020).

Any data collected was:	1. Rendered anonymous
	2. Obtained with consent
	3. Processed fairly
	4. Will be kept safe, secure and accessible for a period of 10 years

Figure 3. 14.: Process of Ethical Data Collection and Storage

All electronic data was secured using passwords/encryption/access logs and backup, with appropriate firewalls, anti-virus software in place. All manual data was kept in a locked press. Data was not stored on mobile devices (as defined by MU's Research Integrity Policy).

All participants were made aware of the right to access his/her personal data and were provided with a copy upon request. Written consent was sought before disclosure to a third party. Data will be destroyed appropriately after the storage period.

3.6. Conclusion to Methodology Chapter

The aim of this research was to explore how I, as a Froebelian teacher practicing active learning in an Irish-language immersion education setting, can develop my own living-educational-theories (Whitehead, 2012) and remain congruent with my values. Having discussed Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research (SSEPR), my research methodologies, design, data collection instruments and ethical considerations, I have provided a clear outline of the research that I undertook in order to gain insight into my living-educational-theories. This chapter has outlined the research design and methodologies that were used in this research, giving justification for their uses. Through using these methodologies and this research design, I engaged in the three kinds of theory in action research, ‘propositional, dialectical and living theories’ (Whitehead, 2009: 96), in order to build on my living-educational-theories and retain ‘the distinguishing uniqueness of the particular constellation of values, understandings and contextual influences’ (Whitehead, 2009: 96) in my own life and research.

The data collection instruments have also been discussed in this chapter with consideration given to both primary and secondary sources. Ethical considerations and the ethical process have been described and an Ethical Approval Form was submitted to Maynooth University as part of this research. The next chapter will outline how the data was analysed and will discuss the key findings following the data collection period of this research.

Chapter 4: Findings and Discussion

4.1. Introduction to Findings and Discussion Chapter

Teacher enquiry, as defined by Cooney (2016: 78) is ‘the combination of theory, reason and research in a systematic and methodologically rigorous way’, the findings of which ‘may be diffused in the general body of knowledge on teaching and learning’. In order to systematically and methodologically combine the theory, reason and research of this SSEPR, I must outline the findings. This chapter aims to outline the data analysis process used for this research; delineate a thematic analysis of the main findings and disclose the unexpected findings of the research.

This Data Analysis Chapter reflects my findings through the SSEPR I completed in my setting. While my findings will impact on my own practice, I am mindful not to address complex issues, such as *tumoideachas*, language-learning and learner agency, with simplistic and decontextualised solutions (Cooney, 2016: 77). Throughout this chapter, my findings are discussed from an emic perspective which has strengthened my professional autonomy, where I had the opportunity to create my own knowledge (Cooney, 2016: 77).

4.2. Data Analysis Process – Rationale

Sakata et al. (2019: 318) emphasise the fluid and changing nature of qualitative research, which ‘generally entails, or even encourages, flexible adjustment of research processes’ and argue the ‘messiness of data analysis’ when it comes to qualitative data (Sakata et al., 2019: 320). Since this SSEPR project is focused on my practice, and with the range of qualitative data collected, I decided to engage with Thematic Analysis for the purposes of this study, as supported by Braun and Clarke (2006).

While this thematic analysis was coded for a specific research question, the process through which the data was coded, was inductive, in that I was not trying to make it ‘fit into a pre-existing coding frame, or the researcher’s analytic preconceptions’ (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 83). However, Braun and Clarke (2006: 84) warn that data is ‘not coded in an epistemological vacuum’ and that a researcher cannot ignore his/her ‘theoretical and epistemological commitments’. Therefore, in taking my theoretical and epistemological commitments into account, I then began to analyse the qualitative data collected to identify themes and subthemes that I recognised throughout my research.

The qualitative data set collected consisted of primary and secondary sources, as outlined in Chapter Three. The primary sources used in this research consisted of: the Researcher’s Reflective Journal, Children’s Drawings and Children’s Voice Recordings. Secondary Data gathered consisted of reflections on dialogues with Assisting Secondary Partners – including, Critical Observers, Learning Partner, Critical Friends and analysis of my Teaching Plans. With the aim of analysing the data corpus at a latent level, I attempted to move beyond the semantic content of the data, and identify and examine the ‘underlying

ideas, assumptions, conceptualisations and ideologies that are theorised as shaping or informing the semantic content of the data' (Braun & Clarke, 2006: 85). Sullivan et al. (2016: 122) concur that it is through this thorough and perceptive analysis, and the development of new knowledge about educational practice that researchers can articulate their findings at a theoretical level. Therefore, I aim to present my analysis of the qualitative data gathered for this SSEPR and argue my findings at a theoretical level.

Each of the data items were analysed for possible relevance to each other and then grouped into a data set. Once identified, I divided the main findings into three themes and subthemes, with a data set used for each analysis. These three key findings will be analysed and critiqued throughout this chapter in the context of the literature discussed in Chapter Two. The tables below outline the separation of data into themes and subthemes, and the data sets used for each.

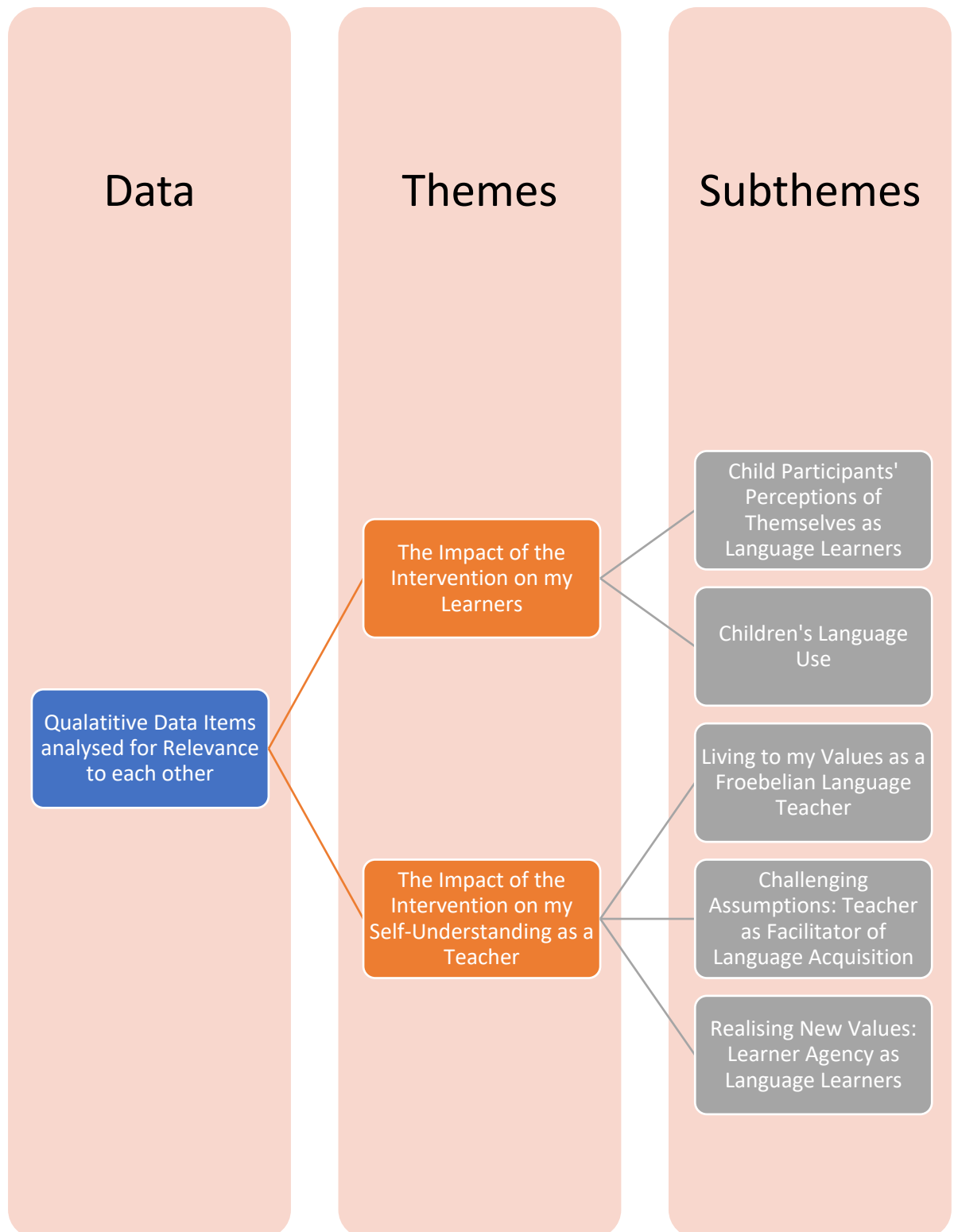


Figure 4. 1.: Division of Data into Themes and Subthemes

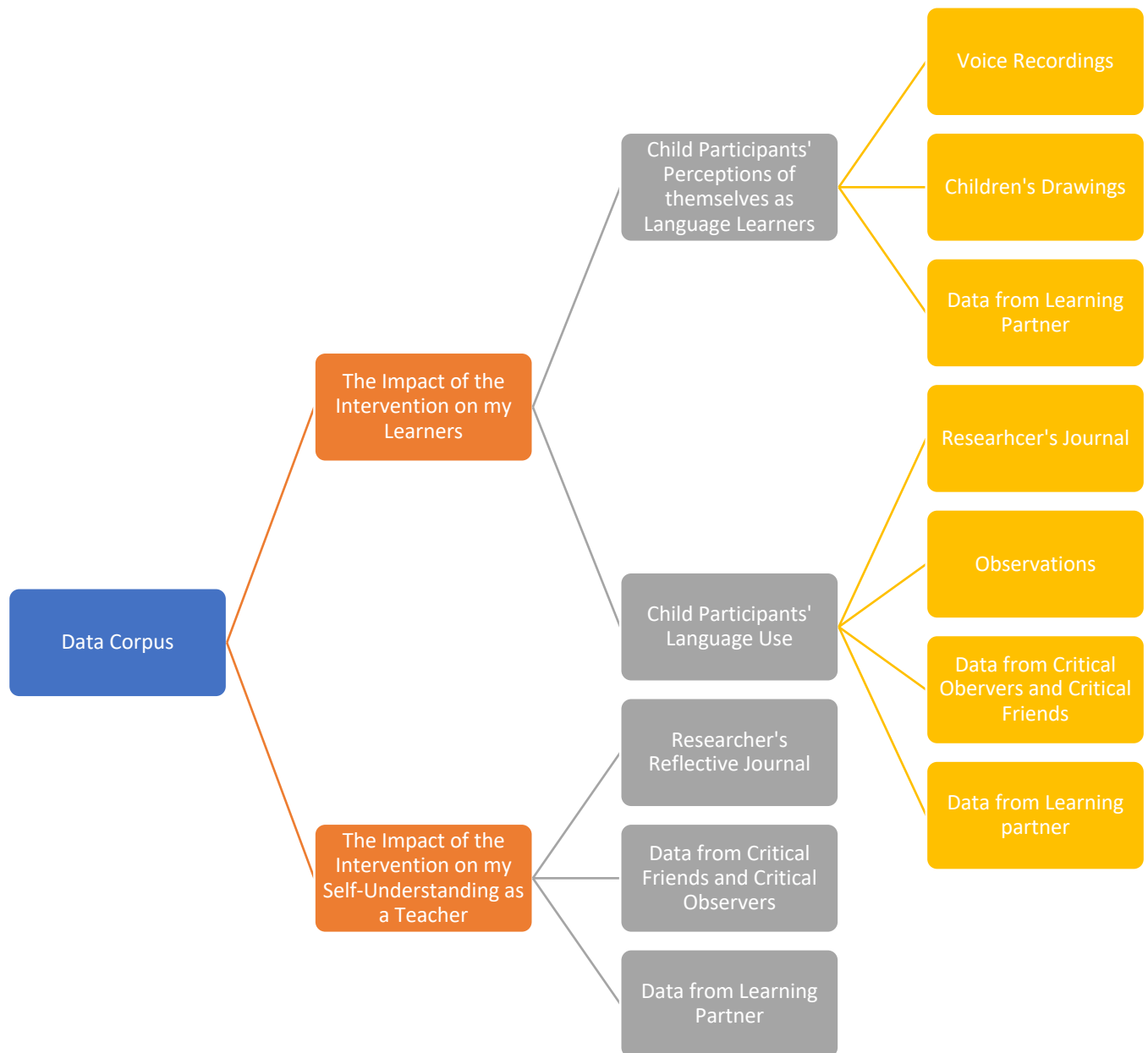


Figure 4. 2.: Data Sets used for Each Theme

4.3.: Thematic Analysis of Findings

The two themes that I feel are most pertinent to this study are the themes of: the Impact of the Intervention on my Learners and the Impact of the Intervention on my Self-Understanding as a Teacher. The graph below outlines the themes and subthemes of my Data Analysis, with my values at the core of my research. In the following section, I present the findings associated with these themes, using evidence from data collected.

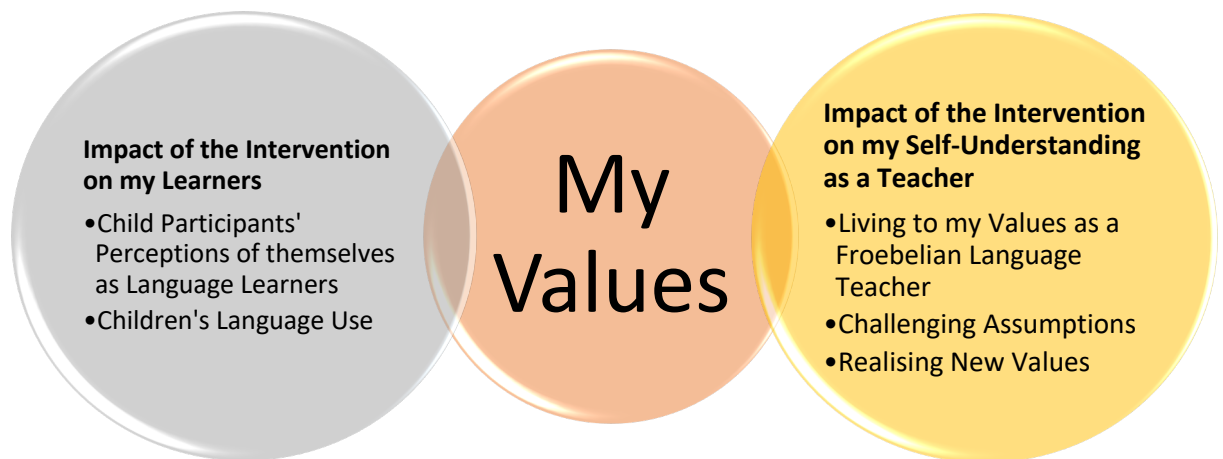


Figure 4. 3.: Themes and Subthemes of Data Analysis with a Focus on Values

4.3.1. The Impact of the Intervention on my Learners

The first theme that emerged from my findings was the Impact of the Intervention on my Learners. As outlined in previous chapters, the aim of this research was to use active learning strategies in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting to improve my practice. However, as the research progressed, I realised that this change in methodology was having an impact not only on the children's learning but also on their perceptions of themselves as learners. Therefore, I decided that it was pertinent to include this as a theme within my findings. I discuss this theme through two sub-themes, namely: Child Participants' Perceptions of themselves as Language Learners; and Child Participants' Language Use.

Subtheme 1(a): Child Participants' Perceptions of themselves as Language Learners

Of the 27 Child Participants (CP) who chose to participate, with parental consent, 19 provided pre-intervention and post-intervention pictures and voice recordings that were used for this research. The other voice recordings and pictures, although stored and analysed, were not relevant to this study. The range of reasons for irrelevance are described in Figure 4.4.:

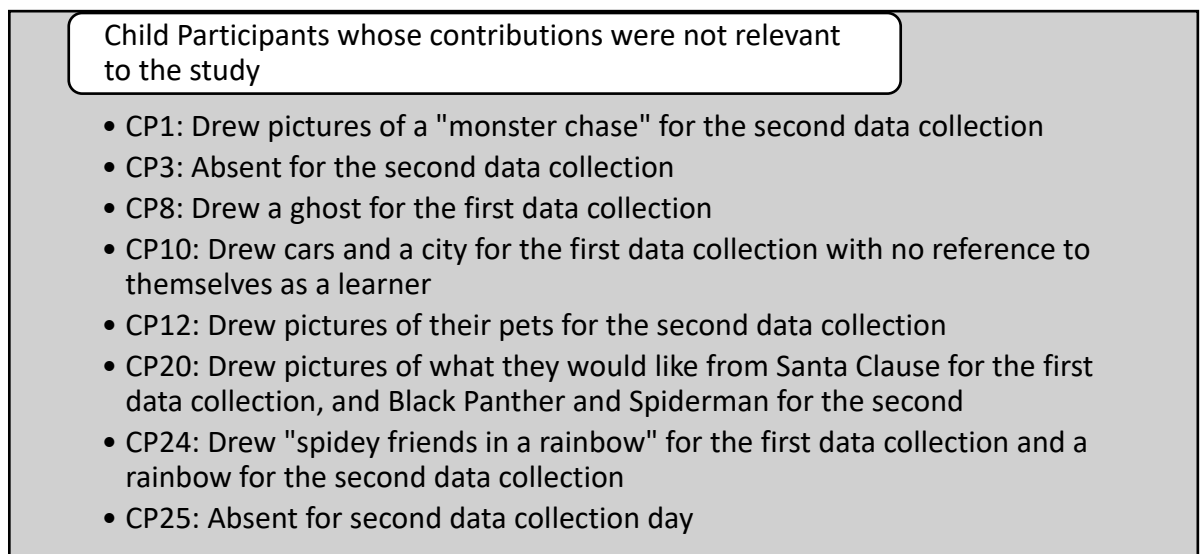


Figure 4. 4.: Outline of Data Items not included in the Findings

Out of the 19 Child Participants whose contributions were relevant to the study, I noted a change towards learner agency in language acquisition. In the initial data collection, many of the children's pictures depicted the school building (SB) or home, work related objects (WRO), the children as passive language learners (PL) completing tasks or homework (HW), often with an adult "teaching" them. However, a contrast can be seen in the final data collection, where 17 of the Child Participants were actively engaged (AE) in their language learning and 8 participants depicted the language learning happening outdoors (OL), as is demonstrated in Figure 4.5. below.

	First Data Collection	Second Data Collection
CP2	PL & HW	Animals & AE
CP4	SB	AE
CP5	SB & PL	AE
CP6	PL & Home	AE
CP7	SB	AE
CP9	WRO	OL
CP11	WRO & SB	AE & OL
CP13	SB	AE
CP14	PL	AE
CP15	WRO & SB	AE & OL
CP16	Outdoor activity & PL	AE & OL
CP17	PL & Home	AE & OL
CP18	WRO & SB	AE
CP19	Outdoor activity & PL	AE & OL
CP21	WRO & SB	AE
CP22	WRO & SB	AE
CP23	Focus on sounds and letters	Focus on sounds and letters
CP26	WRO & SB & PL & Home	AE & OL
CP27	WRO & SB	AE

Figure 4. 5.: Themes of the First and Second Data Collections

Through analysing the data in Figure 4.5., it is clear that the students began to perceive themselves having a more active role in their language learning, and thus began to develop their learner agency. In the second data collection, some of the students spoke about doing the things that they enjoy because they want to learn the language associated with the activity and many of the post-intervention pictures had no adult in them, for example CP18 in Figure 4.6.:



Figure 4. 6.: CP18's Representations of Themselves as a Language Learner

It was encouraging to note that, post-intervention, many of the children did not see my presence, nor any adults' presence, as necessary for their language acquisition, as I was trying to adapt to the role of facilitator of language acquisition. This shows increasing learner independence and is exhibited by CP18 above, and CP6 below:



Figure 4. 7.: CP6's Representations of Themselves as a Language Learner

It is interesting that both CP18 and CP6 identified adults with the main role of language teaching in the pre-intervention pictures, yet did not recognise this role in the post-intervention depictions. The transition from being “passive absorbers” of the language to completing activities through using the language is apparent in these particular examples. This is reiterated in further examples, see Appendix 4.

Through analysis of the Child Participants' contributions to this study, I have found that engaging in this research project enabled the Child Participants' perceptions of themselves as language learners to be adapted and transformed. Instead of viewing themselves as passive participants of language acquisition, as demonstrated in the pre-intervention depictions, the children began to understand that they have an active role to play in their own language learning in the post-intervention depictions. As a result of engaging with *Fiontar Froebelach*, the children's understandings of themselves as active language learners was enhanced and strengthened.

Subtheme 1(b): Children's Language Use

Another theme that emerged from the data corpus was that the children began to use their Irish more frequently and confidently. This was noted in both my own reflective journal and my observation notes. Upon writing about my experience, an excerpt from my reflective journal on the 19/04/21 states that '*bhí ionadh orm go raibh an méad sin Ghaeilge le chloisteáil sa seomra¹⁹*'. My observation notes also document an increase in the amount of Irish that the children had spoken throughout the day. This is reiterated in the children's transcripts as they used more Irish words when describing their post-intervention pictures, as outlined in Figure 4.8.

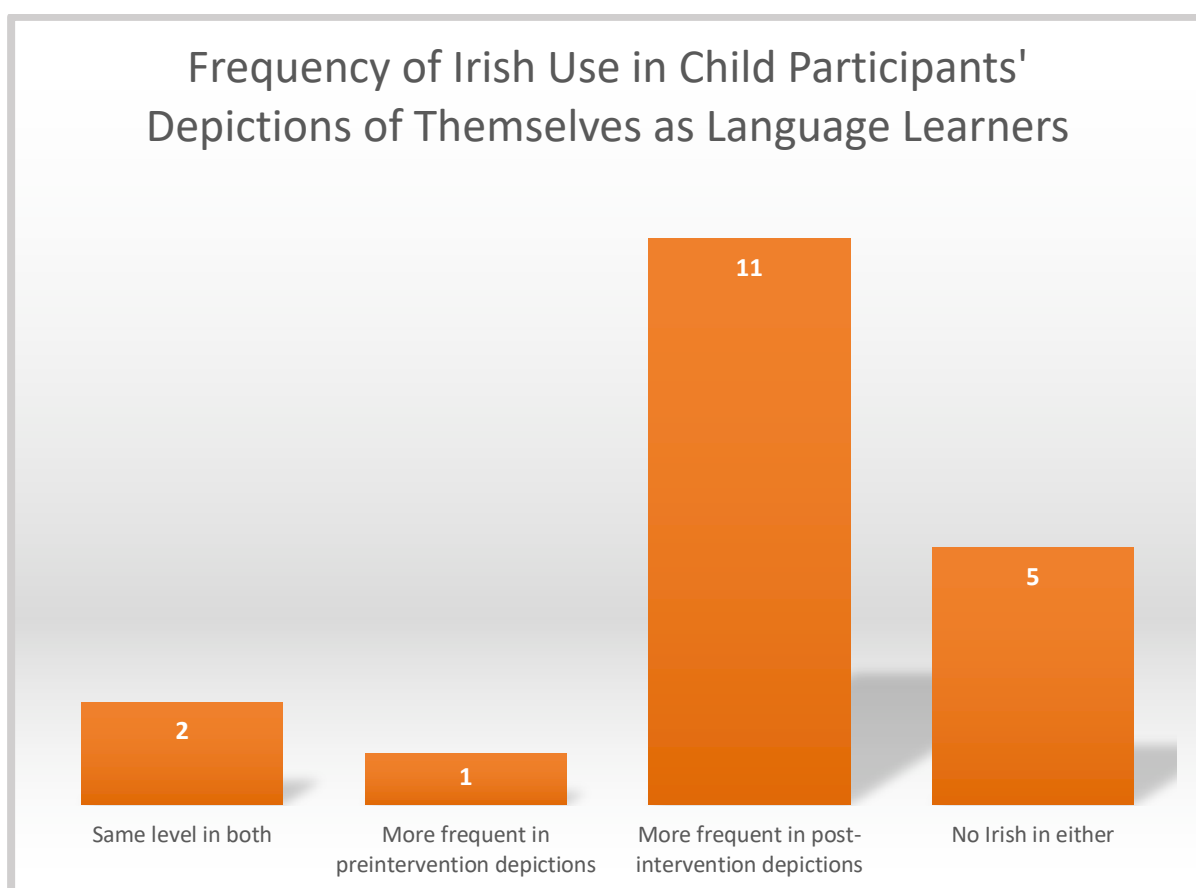


Figure 4. 8.: Frequency of Irish Language Use in Child Participants' Depictions of Themselves as Language Learners

Having first identified this finding, I began to seek validity from other sources, i.e. my critical observers and my learning partner, as discussed in Section 2 and 3.4.5. My critical observers agreed that there had been a marked improvement in the amount of Irish that they heard the children using during the intervention. My Learning Partner felt that the intervention gave her Senior Infant Class the confidence they needed to speak solely in Irish to their peers. My critical friends and validation group then critiqued my findings and evidence of my claims, which added triangulation and validity to my research.

4.3.2. Theme 2: The Impact of the Intervention on my Self-Understanding as a Language Teacher

Critical reflection and meta-reflection have enabled me to realise new knowledge and adapt my self-understanding as a teacher (Kelchtermans, 2018). Sullivan et al. (2016: 123) concur that the most enriching and deep knowledge comes from critical reflection on one's own thinking on their actions. I feel that it is therefore appropriate that my second theme for my findings is directly related to my own learning, based on my critical reflections. Through critically engaging with my reflective journal, meta-reflecting, and analysing and coding the entries, I realised that my practice has enhanced at a practical level and at a personal level. I delineate these findings at three levels: the practical, the personal and the theoretical (Sullivan et al., 2016: 121).

On a practical level, I found that I am living more closely to my values as a Froebelian language teacher which was a result of challenging my own assumptions on a personal level. Both of these levels were both influenced by theoretical knowledge and impacted the building of my own Living Educational Theories (Whitehead, 2019).

Subtheme 2(a): Living to my Values as a Froebelian Language Teacher

As discussed in previous chapters, I identify as a Froebelian teacher. However, when I critically reflected on my practice, I found myself to be experiencing a ‘living contradiction’ (Whitehead, 2019) where I could not identify this educational influence in aspects of my practice, particularly in my teaching of *Gaeilge*. However, after this intervention, on a practical level, I identified an enhancement in my language teaching methodologies, in which, I adapted my practice to incorporate a more Froebelian approach to my teaching of language, as was noted in the following extract from my reflective journal:

“As a result of using a thematic approach, and the integration of language spaces and nature, I have become more comfortable facilitating active and experiential learning opportunities for the children so that they can learn and use *Gaeilge* confidently”

(Reflective Journal Extract, 25/05/2021)

This enhancement in my practice reflects the beginning of my journey towards building my own Living Educational Theory of Language Teaching. This practical enhancement promoted challenges on personal level in which I came to challenge assumptions that I had towards language acquisition.

Subtheme 2(b): Challenging Assumptions – Teacher as Facilitator of Language

Acquisition

Through becoming comfortable in providing opportunities for active language learning, I began to recognise myself as a facilitator of language learning rather than a teacher of language. I challenged my own assumptions of teaching and learning languages and began to meta-reflect on how to address these assumptions in my practice. As mentioned in Section 2, Braun and Clarke (2006: 78-79) encourage researchers to make their epistemological assumptions explicit as well as applying a method to gather data. Through analysing my reflective journal, I realised that one epistemological assumption that I held was that language knowledge was passed on from teacher to student. However, I noticed a shift in my epistemological values:

“I note that in my reflections, I often refer to the children “taking charge” of their learning and situation, with me as the “helper of learning”. I can see that **my epistemological values are shifting from teacher-as-knowledge-creator to children-as-knowledge creators**. The shift towards greater independence sparks an **inquiry approach to language acquisition** within the children as they are beginning to take charge of their own learning”

(Reflective Journal Extract, 01/06/2021)

While I acknowledge the teacher’s role in modelling language, as discussed in Chapter 2, I also realise that the children create their own language knowledge through using and playing with the language themselves. The concept of learning through experience and developing concepts through interaction, previously referred to in Chapter 2, is, on a

theoretical level, in line with Froebel's teachings. Further examples of this shift in my epistemological assumptions can be seen in Appendix 3.

Subtheme 2(c): Realising New Values – Learner Agency as Language Learners

Following from challenging the assumptions of teacher-as-knowledge-creator, a value that has become more apparent to me through assessing my reflective journal is the value of language learner agency. The aim of this research was to use active and experiential learning strategies in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting. However, as the research progressed, I realised that the focus was not simply on 'engaging the students in active language learning' but shifted towards the promotion of learner agency. Although I had initially named this epistemological value "active learning", I now realise my epistemological belief is that all language learners should be provided with the agency to direct their own learning. As referred to in the reflection excerpt above, throughout my intervention, I witnessed an increase in the children's eagerness to learn *Gaeilge* and the learning conversations that arose from the children's interest in their language learning (see Appendix 3 for further examples).

It is also interesting to note that, even though I had not identified this value until I began analysing the data, the children's voice recordings and pictures did represent this focus on learner agency. This is evident in Figure 4.5., where none of the children represented themselves as active in their language learning in the pre-intervention pictures, and all except one represented some level of active learning or outdoor activity in the post intervention representations. Through assisting the children to take an active role in their

learning, I recognised that this was also enabling them to become active participants in their own learning and the learning of others.

4.4. Unexpected Findings of the Research

Sullivan et al. (2016:120) encourage researchers to be aware of the ‘possibility of anticipated and unanticipated outcomes, intended and unintended findings and any side effects’. Throughout this research, I have made unexpected discoveries.

Biesta (2019: 3) claims that educational research is problem-posing rather than problem-solving and is:

‘not just research on or about or for education but is, in a sense, itself a form of education as it tries to change mindsets and common perceptions, tries to expose hidden assumptions and tries to engage in ongoing conversations about what is valuable and worthwhile in education and society more generally’.

This assertion reassured me that it was acceptable, although uncomfortable, to uncover some findings that were not planned for. Greene (2000: 23) concurs with Stenhouse’s (cited in Cooney, 2016: 78) definition that a ‘good classroom is one in which things are learned every day’, including the teacher. Many of the things that I have learned through this research have led to unexpected findings. These findings, which are discussed in this section, include: Post-Lockdown Views of Education; Examining my Self-Understanding as a Teacher; and Collaborative Learning and Problem Solving improvement during the research.

4.4.1. Post-Lockdown Views of Education

As previously mentioned, this research took place during the Covid-19 pandemic and began shortly after we returned to school, following a period of remote learning. It was not surprising, therefore that a number of students included their home environments as a part of their pre-intervention perceptions of themselves as language learners. However, what I did find surprising was that, even with the children learning from family members, some depicted me in the house with them and their parents (for example: CP18 – Figure 4.6.). I found it interesting to note that I was brought into the children’s homes and families through online learning and that the children included this in their self-understandings as language learners. They also appeared to relate “learning from home” as “getting the homework done”, which can be seen in some of the Child Participants’ work (see Appendix 4). The origins of these conceptions of learning from home is a topic to be reflected on and investigated. Although I have a strong desire to research this finding more, it is beyond the scope of this research topic.

4.4.2. Examining my Self-Understanding as a Teacher through Reflections

The second theme of my unexpected findings deals with my deconstruction and reconstruction of my Living Educational Theory. Although I had expected to create my own Living Educational Theory, I had not anticipated the extent to which my critical self-reflection would alter my self-understanding both professionally and personally. I began to question my values and beliefs and began to realise that I had not been aware of some of my core values, or misidentified them. I also found the majority of my initial self-reflections to be negative, which became uncomfortable. The capacity of this SSEPR project to cause problems and generate questions is supported by Biesta et al. (2019) while

Sakata et al. (2019) argue for the messiness and unpredictability of qualitative data analysis. However, this enabled me to challenge my assumption of reflection as negative and expand my reflections to include positive points also. Through engaging in this critically reflective journey, I found my self-understanding as a language teacher adapted and developed.

“Through assessing my reflective journal, I encountered an unexpectedly uncomfortable learning journey in which I continuously questioned my self-understanding as a teacher. Through this meta-reflection, my self-understanding became disjointed. In recognising this disconnect, I explored my agency within my context and analysed how these actions impact on my continuous development of self-understanding (Buchanan, 2015: 704).”

(Reflective Assignment Extract, 25/03/2021)

Owing to the importance of these challenges in the development of my Living Educational Theory of Language Teaching and my self-understanding as a teacher, I include this theme in the unexpected findings section. I have come to agree with Sequeira and Dacey’s (2020: 3) argument that ‘an individual’s identity is neither grounded nor a given, rather it is fluid and situated, intersecting with lived experiences contextually and spatially’. Through engaging with critical self-reflection and literature discussed to in Chapter 2, I have realised that this formation of my self-understanding, or identity, is a life-long journey and, with continued critical self-reflection, will adapt, develop and change throughout my career.

4.4.3. Collaborative Learning and Problem Solving improved within the Classroom

A third unanticipated, but welcome, finding was that the collaborative learning and problem-solving abilities of the children in the class improved over the course of the research. This finding was referred to on a few occasions in my reflective journal, however, it only emerged as a validated finding when my Learning Partner commented on the same improvement in her own classroom. This opened a very beneficial dialogue between myself, my Learning Partner and my Critical Observers. The dialogue resulted in an agreement that the children had improved in these areas. This improvement was perhaps due to the nature of active and experiential learning, and group work that was implemented during the intervention. It would be interesting to conduct a further study on the impacts of *Fiontar Froebelach* on these skills in the future. However, it is unfortunately beyond the scope of this research topic.

4.5. Conclusion to Findings and Discussion Chapter

In conclusion, this chapter has outlined my Data Analysis Process and the theory behind Thematic analysis. I have delineated my findings through two main themes, Constructing my Living Educational Theory and Promoting Learner Agency, with five sub themes and provided evidence to prove these claims. I outlined my validation process and triangulation process. I discussed the unexpected findings of the research under the headings of: post-lockdown views of education, examining my self-understanding as a teacher through reflection, and collaborative learning and problem solving throughout the research. In Chapter 5, I discuss the overall impacts of this research in relation to the literature and theory discussed in Chapter 2. I will also outline limitations to this SSEPR project, recommendations for future research and disclose the implications of this research on my future practice, identifying possible topics of further study.

Chapter 5 – Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1. Introduction to Conclusion and Recommendations Chapter

The aim of this research was to investigate how I could enhance my language teaching in a *luath-tumoideachas* setting to support the children's language learning experiences and enable them to become active in their own learning, in line with Froebelian principles. Chapter 4 conceptualised the findings encountered through this SSEPR project and intervention and highlighted some unexpected findings. This chapter will provide a brief summary of the research findings and outline some challenges of this SSEPR. The limitations of this SSEPR is then discussed and I will disclose the implications of this SSEPR project in terms of my own personal and professional learning, the significance of the research on the students and the implications for the wider educational community. I also identify possible topics of further study as well as delineating my recommendations for future study.

5.2. Summary of Main Findings

My exploration of my self-understanding as a teacher (Kemmis, 2012), through critically reflective practice and critical engagement with literature, resulted in the creation of a small-scale intervention called '*Fiontar Froebelach*', conceptualised in Chapter 3. As a result of teaching using a thematic approach, the integration of language play-stations and nature, the children's language learning experiences and perceptions of themselves as language learners was positively enhanced and strengthened, as discussed in Chapter 4.

Through engaging in this Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research, I aspired to create my own unique living-educational-theory (Whitehead, 2019) of language teaching developed through the new knowledge created on this professional learning journey

(Sullivan et al., 2016: 123). The inclusion of primary and secondary qualitative data afforded triangulation and validity in this SSEPR project (Sullivan et al., 2016). A thematic analysis of the data collected, including my reflective journal, the children's drawings and voice recordings and feedback from critical friends, critical observers and my learning partner, presented two emerging key themes:

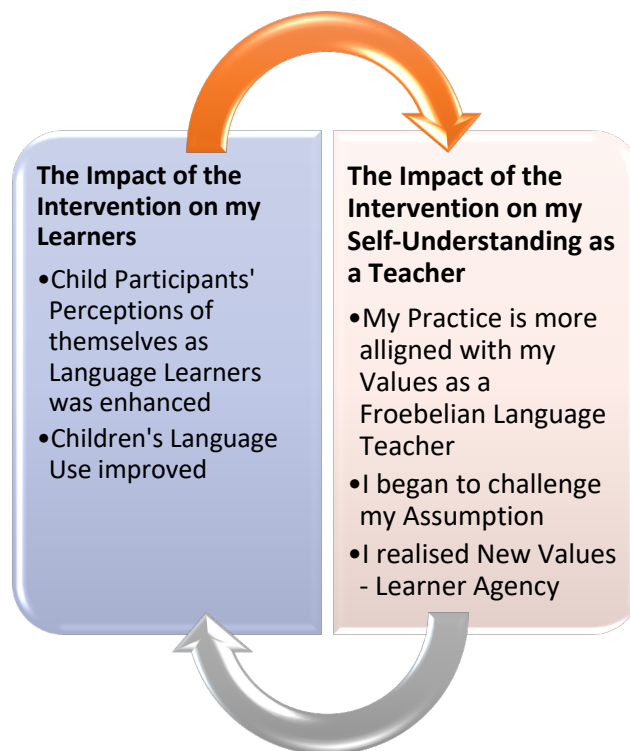


Figure 5. 1.: Themes and Subthemes that Emerged from Data Collected

These themes and subthemes were argued in detail and presented with evidence in Chapter 4. While reflecting on these themes and subthemes, I created new knowledge about my practice and thus generated my own living-educational-theory of language teaching (Whitehead, 2019).

5.3. Challenges of this SSEPR

Throughout this SSEPR project, I encountered a range of challenges such as: a lack of practitioner-led research in relation to *tumoideachas*, particularly in early-years settings (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011); the international Covid-19 Pandemic; and the organisation of resources for effective teaching within my classroom. These challenges are discussed below, however, each challenge contributed to my professional learning journey, and resulted in the adaptation of the intervention, as outlined in Sections 3.2. and 3.5., and facilitated some unexpected outcomes of the SSEPR project, as discussed in Section 4.4.

5.3.1. The Need for more Practitioner-Led Research in relation to Tumoideachas

As highlighted in Chapter 2, there is limited practitioner-led research available in the field of *luath-tumoideachas* (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011). This was a significant challenge in the initial stages of research, especially when designing the intervention. I also identified a limitation of research, conducted in *tumoideachas* settings, that took the children's perceptions and experiences as language learners into account.

However, this challenge was overcome through my research into international early-immersion contexts, such as in Section 2.3.4. I also discussed research in *tumoideachas* that was conducted external to the teaching profession in Section 2.3. These measures enabled the mitigation of this challenge. Through designing and implementing this unique study, and through the dissemination of this SSEPR project, I aim to contribute to this perceived lack of research, as outlined in section 5.5.3.

5.3.2. Covid-19 Pandemic

This SSEPR project took place during the Covid-19 International Pandemic. In January-February 2021, all teaching and educational instruction transferred to an online platform. This transition meant that the children were taken out of the immersion education context but were completing tasks and listening to videos in Irish. The return to school also provided a challenge in that there were many restrictions implemented such as social distance between groups, pods in which the children had to remain and the cleaning and isolation of resources before moving them between groups. Although teaching in a pandemic classroom somewhat restricted my ability to live to my values, I navigated this challenge through creating a more structured and organised environment and adapting the intervention appropriately.

5.3.3. Resources

One significant challenge in this SSEPR, especially with Covid-19 restrictions, was ensuring that the classroom was adequately resourced. The limitations on sharing resources and the cleaning of resources due to Covid-19, further restricted the already limited resources available. However, through creating a timetable for resource sharing and cleaning and adhering to this timetable strictly, I mitigated this challenge.

5.4. Limitations of this SSEPR

This intervention was designed in response to my ontological values of life-long and active learning, compassion and understanding, and my epistemological value of learners as knowledge creators and may therefore not be generalisable (Sullivan et al., 2016; Whitehead, 2019). Owing to the fact that this research is a self-study educational practitioner research project, grounded in action research methodologies, the results of

the research are subjective to that of the practitioner, as supported by Froebel (cited in Liley, 1967; cited in Tovey, 2013). Therefore, through the inclusion of a Learning Partner, and the triangulation process, I aimed to add reliability and validity to the findings (Sullivan et al., 2016). However, this SSEPR project took place in one specific context with three research cycles. It is not a conclusive study that will produce the same results if replicated in another context. The expansion of this research to different classrooms and various contexts would provide a more in-depth analysis of the effects of *Fiontar Froebelach* on language learning.

5.5. Implications of this SSEPR

5.5.1. Personal and Professional Learning

As briefly mentioned in the Chapter 1, this SSEPR project has had a significant impact on my personal and professional learning and has contributed to an enhancement in my practice. Through completing this SSEPR project, I am more aware and confident with my self-understanding as a Froebelian teacher. I have already noted an enhancement in my own practice, see Section 4.3.2., in that I continued to incorporate thematic teaching, outdoor learning and the provision of opportunities for active and experiential learning in my practice after the intervention. This shift in my praxis and teaching methodologies has enabled me to become a facilitator of learning rather than a teacher who imparts knowledge, as advocated by Mac Éinrí (2007: 8).

The marked improvement in the children's language use and perceptions of themselves advocates *Fiontar Froebelach* as a viable intervention for *tumoideachas* in Infant Classrooms. In terms of my own practice, it is a teaching method that I will continue to

use throughout my career. My practice has already adapted as a result of this SSEPR and I have adopted a critically reflective praxis for my future career, as advocated by McNiff (2002). This continuous adaptation of my practice also is aligned with Froebelian practice (Bruce, 2012).

The Literature Review Chapter of this thesis, specifically Sections 2.2.1 and 2.2.7. highlight the fluid and ‘messy’, or unpredictable, nature of praxis, self-understanding and action research (Sakata et al., 2019). The constant cycle of action and reflection is supported by theorists such as Koshy (2005), Kemmis (2012), Froebel (cited in Bruce, 2012; Tovey, 2013), Aristotle (cited in Biesta, 2015), Zembylas (2018) and Schön (cited in Roche, 2019), who argue that action-research is a continuous process throughout one’s career. The unexpected findings, referred to in Section 4.4., have opened a new line of enquiry for me as a researcher. It is my intention that, in the future, I will follow these lines of enquiry which were beyond the scope of this research. One area of particular interest to me is how to promote problem solving and collaboration through my practice. This potential research topic, although beyond the scope of this SSEPR project has the potential to further enhance my future practice.

5.5.2. Implications for my Students from their Participation in the Research

The participants of this study comprised of the students in my Junior Infant Class. Sections 1.5.3. and 4.3.1. allude to the fact that the children’s’ understanding of themselves as language learners was enhanced and strengthened. Through engaging in this SSEPR project, the children were enabled to explore their role in their own learning and begin to explore and use the language as active participants, as recommended by

theorists such as Froebel (cited in Liley, 1967; Bruce, 2012; Tovey, 2013), Piaget (cited in Mac Éinrí, 2007), Bruner (cited in Slavich & Zimbardo, 2012) and Vygotsky (cited in Mjelde, 2017), referred to in Chapter 2. The results of this study indicate that there was an improvement in the children's confidence in using *Gaeilge* and in their language learning abilities. The implications of this SSEPR project for my students, therefore, is the development in their perceptions of language learning and an enhancement of their language learning experiences.

5.5.3. Significance for the Wider Educational Community

The inclusion of Assisting Secondary Partners in this research positively impacted on the dissemination of the findings to my colleagues, thus creating a 'learning community in an educational partnership' (McDonagh et al., 2020) within the school. Through their contributions to the study, some members of staff adapted their practice so as to align with their own values and included active and experiential learning in their language teaching approaches. The school's policy for *tumoideachas* was re-examined during the year. There is also the future possibility of the presentation of this research to both my colleagues and the wider *Gaeloideachas* community.

Owing to the fact that there is limited research published in relation to effective practice in *tumoideachas* settings, from the perspectives of teachers, especially at lower primary level (Harris & Ó Duibhir, 2011: 76-78), this research has the potential to contribute to the research field of early-immersion-education in Ireland, and possibly the wider educational community. This study highlights a need for focus on the children's language learning experiences and perceptions, as well as results of tests in *tumoideachas* settings, in order to ensure a more holistic approach to research and the inclusion of multiple perspectives or lenses (Brookfield, 2017).

5.6. Recommendations for Future Educational Practice and Research

Finally, I wish to outline some recommendations for future educational practice and research, based on this SSEPR. These recommendations include future research topics, the need for collaboration in action research, and the requirement for fluidity in practice.

Firstly, as highlighted in Chapter 4 and Sections 5.3.1. and 5.5.3., this SSEPR project has led to the uncovering of potential future research topics. As a result of this, I plan to undertake future educational research, which would hopefully contribute to the limited practitioner-led research available in the educational field of *luath-tumoideachas*. I would also hope to expand my research into *Fiontar Froebelach* in order to adapt it to different contexts, including more senior classes.

Secondly, as a result of engaging in this SSEPR project, the necessity of collaboration was realised. This need for collaboration is discussed in Section 2.2.9. and is supported by theorists such as Freire (1993), Bryk (cited in McNiff, 2002), Froebel (cited in Bruce, 2012; Tovey, 2013) and Kemmis (2012). Through engaging with multiple partners, different perspectives contributed to the design, results and validity of this research project. When engaging in future study, I plan to collaborate with a wider range of participants, including parents, in order to add a further realm to this research and to create a ‘learning community in an educational partnership’ (McDonagh et al., 2020).

The final recommendation for future educational practice and research that has transpired due to my engagement this SSEPR project is the essential requirement for my practice, and self-understanding as a teacher to be fluid. This understanding of identity as fluid and dynamic is reiterated by Alsup (2008), Buchanan (2015), Zembylas (2018) and Kelchtermans (2018), as highlighted in Chapter 2. Through critical self-reflection and

navigating the living-contradictions (Whitehead, 2011) in my practice, I identified the need for fluidity and flexibility both in my planning and in my praxis, as my self-understanding as a teacher is ‘dynamic and situated, intersecting with experiences contextually and spatially’ (Sequiera & Dacey, 2020: 3). This constantly evolving practice is supported by Froebel (Bruce, 2012) and is a requirement for my future educational research and future praxis.

5.7. Research Conclusion

In conclusion, this SSEPR project has contributed to an enhancement in my practice and self-understanding as a teacher and will impact on my future educational practice. Through implementing the intervention *Fiotar Froebelach*, critically reflective practice and collaboration with other partners, I have formed my ‘living-educational-theory’ (Huxtable & Whitehead, 2021) that through adopting a thematic approach to language learning, facilitating on active and experiential learning opportunities, and embracing language use when engaging with nature and the outdoor environment, my language teaching is more aligned with Froebelian principles of practice. This educational theory is influenced by Freire (1993), Vygotsky (cited in Pascual-Leone, 1996) and Froebel (cited in Tovey, 2013).

This SSEPR project has successfully contributed to the children’s acquirement of their second language and enabled them to explore their role in their language learning. It has inspired both a change in my own practice, and also a change in the practice of my colleagues. Engaging with a Learning Partner, Critical Friends and Critical Observers facilitated triangulation of this research.

This Self-Study Educational Practitioner Research Project has challenged me to critically reflect on my own practice and has resulted in a transformed self-understanding of myself as a language teacher. Upon completion of this research project, I conclude that, through implementing active and experiential learning approaches within a *luath-tumoideachas* setting, I am living more aligned with my values as a Froebelian teacher and aspire to continue to challenge myself to strive to incorporate more Froebelian practices in my future language instruction.

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**Owing to this research being conducted with the promise of anonymity, I have not included the school name in this policy. It can be retrieved, upon request with the school name, etc. redacted.*

Appendices

Appendices	126
Appendix 1: Letters seeking Consent from Participants of the Study	127
<i>Letter 1: Letter to Parents/Guardians.....</i>	<i>128</i>
<i>Letter 2: Letter to Child</i>	<i>130</i>
<i>Letter 3: Information Sheet Parents and Guardians.....</i>	<i>131</i>
<i>Letter 4: Parent/Guardian Consent Form</i>	<i>133</i>
<i>Letter 5: Child's Assent Form.....</i>	<i>134</i>
<i>Letter 6: Letter to Principal & Board of Management.....</i>	<i>135</i>
<i>Letter 7: Information page for principal/Board of Management.....</i>	<i>137</i>
<i>Letter 8: Principal/ Board of Management consent form.....</i>	<i>139</i>
<i>Letter 9: Letter to Colleagues</i>	<i>140</i>
<i>Letter 10: Information page for Colleagues</i>	<i>142</i>
<i>Letter 11: Colleague's consent form.....</i>	<i>144</i>
Appendix 2: Further Reflective Journal Entries indicating Enhancements in my Practice.....	145
Appendix 3: Further Reflective Journal Entries indicating my Epistemological Assumptions adjusting	146
Appendix 4: Child Participants' Pictures and Transcripts of their Voice Recordings (that were relevant to this Study)	147

Appendix 1: Letters seeking Consent from Participants of the Study

Letter 1: Letter to Parents/Guardians



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

A Thuistí/Caomhnóirí,

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

Táim i mbun staidéar do mo mháistreacht san Oideachas (Taighde teagaisc) in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Mar chuid den mháistreacht, táim ag déanamh tionscadal taighde. Beidh mo thaighde dírithe ar an Tumoideachas agus conas gur féidir liom foghlaim ghníomhach a úsáid chun cabhrú leis na páistí an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim agus a úsáid.

I am currently studying for a Masters in Education (Research in practice) at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on Tumoideachas (early immersion) and how I can use active learning strategies to help the children to acquire and use Gaeilge.

Chun é seo a dhéanamh, ba mhaith liom taighde a dhéanamh sa rang trí dheiseanna foghlaim ghníomhach a chur ar fáil i rith na gceachtanna Gaeilge. Beidh breathnóireacht, obair/freagraí na bpáistí, dialann laethúil an mhúinteora ranga agus ceistneoirí in úsáid agam chun sonraí a bhailiú. Úsáidtear obair a dhéanfaidh na páistí ar líne freisin. Cuirfear ceisteanna ar na páistí chun a tuairimí faoin taighde agus na ceachtanna.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by providing active learning opportunities throughout our Gaeilge lessons. The data will be collected using observations, student work, a daily teacher journal and questionnaires. This data includes online work that the children may complete. The children will be asked their opinions through discussing what they think of the research/strategy and the lessons.

Ní bheidh ainm an pháiste nó ainm na scoile luaite sa tráchtas a scríobhfaidh mé ag deireadh an taighde. Beidh cead ag do pháiste éirigh as an tionscadal ag aon phointe, agus a (h)obair a bhaint ón taighde.

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, and can withdraw their work samples from the research also.

Coinneofar gach eolas agus sonraí pearsanta faoi rún agus scriosfar é laistigh den tréimhse ama i gcomhréir le treoirlínte na hollscoile. Cloífead leis na treoirlínte cearta i rith an taighde seo. Ní thosófar an taighde seo go dtí go bhfuil cead faighte ón Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath - Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.

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.

Ba mhaith liom cead a lorg uait agus ó do pháiste cead a ghlacadh sa tionscadal seo. Beidh mé ag caint faoi le bhur bpáistí ar scoil freisin chun a gcead a fháil. Toisc go mbeidh an comhrá as Gaeilge, ar mhiste libh caint leo sa bhaile faoi freisin.

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in this project. I will be talking to the children in class about it as well and will ask for their assent. Due to the fact that this conversation will be in Irish, would you please have a conversation about it at home with the children also.

Má tá aon cheist agat faoin tionscadal taighde seo, tar i dteagmháil liom ag aisling.connaughton.2021@mumail.ie.

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

Yours faithfully,

Le dea-ghuí,

Aisling

Letter 2: Letter to Child



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

Child's name

Tá mé ag iarraidh foghlaim conas gur féidir liom cabhrú leat agus tú ag foghlaim an Ghaeilge. Ba mhaith liom níos mó a fhoghlaim faoi seo. Ba mhaith liom breathnú agus éisteacht leat nuair atá muid ag foghlaim agus nótaí faoi d'fhoghlaim a scríobh agus d'obair a úsáid.

I am trying to find out how I can help you to learn Irish. I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch you and listen to you when we are learning and to write down some notes about your learning and to use some of your work.

An bhfuil tú ceart go leor le sin? Cuir ciorcal timpeall ceann amháin:

Would you be ok with that? Circle one. YES NO

Chuir mé ceist ar Mham nó Daid nó Caomhnóir caint leat faoi seo. Má tá aon cheist agat, bheinn sásta iad a fhreagairt. Má tá tú sásta le seo, an shíneofa an fhoirm a sheol mé abhaile?

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

Má athraíonn tú d'intinn tar éis a tosóimid, tá sé sin ceart go leor freisin.

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

Letter 3: Information Sheet Parents and Guardians



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

Cé atá an leathanach eolais seo le haghaidh? Who is this information sheet for?

Tá an leathanach eolais seo do thuismitheoirí agus caomhnóirí.

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

Cad ar atá an tionscadal taighde gníomhach bunaithe? What is this Action Research Project about?

Nuair a dhéantar an Mháistreacht san Oideachas leis an Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, caithfear tionscadal taighde gníomhach a dhéanamh, iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar a c(h)leachtas féin mar mhúinteoir. Anailís ar chleachtas an mhúinteora atá i gceist leis an tionscadal seo. Cruthófar sonraí tríd breathnóireacht, nótaí machnamhach, agus ceistneoirí. Iarrfar ar an múinteoir tráchtas a scríobh faoin tionscadal taighde gníomhach seo.

Teachers undertaking the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University, are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a student. 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.

Cén modh(anna) a úsáidtear? What sorts of methods will be used?

- Breathnóireacht, obair/freagraí na bpáistí, dialann laethúil an mhúinteora ranga, nótaí machnamhach agus ceistneoirí, srl
- *Observation, Children's work/answers, Teacher's Reflective Journal, Reflection notes, Questionnaires, etc.*

Cé eile a mbeidh bainteach leis? Who else will be involved?

Déanfaidh mé an staidéar seo mar chuid den chúrsa Mháistreacht san Oideachas sa Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Beidh an tráchtas curtha isteach le haghaidh measúnú don cheannaire an modúl, Dr. Bernadette Wrynn agus déanfaidh foireann na Roinne iniúchadh air. Beidh rochtain ar an tráchtas deireanach ag scrúdaitheoir seachtrach freisin.

The study will be carried out by myself 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.

Cad atá á lorg uait? *What are you being asked to do?*

Iarrtar ort do chead a thabhairt dom ionas go bhfuil mé in ann an taighde seo a dhéanamh le mo rang. I ngach cás, beidh sonraí a bhailítear curtha faoi rún daingean agus an anailís déanta go hanaithnid. Ní bheidh aon sonraí bailithe úsáidte ach le haghaidh an taighde seo mar chuid den Mháistreacht san Oideachas sa Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad agus scriosfar é laistigh den tréimhse ama i gcomhréir le treoirlínte na hollscoile.

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.

Má tá aon cheist agat faoin tionscadal taighde seo, tar i dteagmháil liom ag aisling.connaughton.2021@mumail.ie.

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

Letter 4: Parent/Guardian Consent Form



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

Léigh mé an t-eolas atá ceangailte leis an litir seo agus tá mo cheisteanna go léir freagartha. Tugaim cead do mo pháiste páirt a ghlacadh sa staidéar seo go toilteanach. Tuigim go bhfaighidh mé cóip den fhoirm thoilithe seo do m'eolas féin.

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.

Ainm an tuismitheora/caomhnóir

Name of parent / Guardian _____

Síniú an tuismitheora/caomhnóir

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

Dáta/Date: _____

Ainm an pháiste

Name of Child _____

Síniú/ marc aitheantais an pháiste:

Child's signature/identification mark: _____

Dáta/Date: _____

Letter 5: Child's Assent Form



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

Comhaontú an pháiste páirt a ghlacadh

Child's assent to participate

Léigh mo thuismitheoir/caomhnóir an leathanach eolas liom agus aontaím páirt a ghlacadh sa taighde seo.

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

Ainm an pháiste (i gceannlitreacha):

Name of child (in block capitals):

Síniú/Marc aitheantais:

Signature/identification mark: _____

Dáta/Date: _____

Letter 6: Letter to Principal & Board of Management



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

A Phríomhoide, a chara / A Chathaoirleach, a chara,

Mar is eol duit, táim i mbun staidéar do mo mháistreacht san Oideachas (Taighde teagaisc) in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Mar chuid den mháistreacht, táim ag déanamh tionscadal taighde. Beidh mo thaighde dírithe ar an Tumoideachas agus conas gur féidir liom foghlaim ghníomhach a úsáid chun cabhrú leis na páistí an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim agus a úsáid.

As you know, I am currently studying for a Masters in Education (Research in practice) at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on Tumoideachas (early immersion) and how I can use active learning strategies to help the children to acquire and use Gaeilge.

Chun é seo a dhéanamh, ba mhaith liom taighde a dhéanamh sa rang trí dheiseanna foghlaim ghníomhach a chur ar fáil i rith na gceachtanna Gaeilge. Beidh breathnóireacht, obair/freagraí na bpáistí, dialann laethúil an mhúinteora ranga agus ceistneoirí in úsáid agam chun sonraí a bhailiú. Cuirfear ceisteanna ar na páistí chun a tuairimí faoin taighde agus na ceachtanna.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by providing active learning opportunities throughout our Gaeilge lessons. The data will be collected using observations, student work, a daily teacher journal and questionnaires. The children will be asked their opinions through discussing how they felt throughout the process and how they think that their learning could be more active.

Ní bheidh ainm an pháiste nó ainm na scoile luaite sa tráchtas a scríobhfaidh mé ag deireadh an taighde. Beidh cead ag na páistí éirigh as an tionscadal ag aon phoinnte, agus a (h)obair a bhaint ón taighde.

The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. The children will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage, and can withdraw their work samples from the research also.

Coinneofar gach eolas agus sonraí pearsanta faoi rún agus scriosfar é laistigh den tréimhse ama i gcomhréir le treoiríní na hollscoile. Cloífead leis na treoiríní

cearta i rith an taighde seo. Ní thosófar an taighde seo go dtí go bhfuil cead faighte ón Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath - Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.

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.

Ba mhaith liom cead a lorg uait agus ón mBord bainistíochta an taighde seo a dhéanamh sa scoil. Beidh mé ag seoladh litir chuig na tuismitheoirí chun an taighde a mhíniú agus caint faoi leis na páistí ar scoil freisin chun a gcead a fháil.

I would like to ask you and the Board of Management for permission to conduct this research. I will be sending letters to the parents to explain the research and I will be talking to the children in class about it and will ask for their consent.

Má tá aon cheist agat faoin tionscadal taighde seo, tar i dteagmháil liom ag aisling.connaughton.2021@mumail.ie.

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

Yours faithfully,

Le dea-ghuá,

Aisling

Letter 7: Information page for principal/Board of Management



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

Cé atá an leathanach eolais seo le haghaidh? Who is this information sheet for?

Tá an leathanach eolais seo don príomhoide agus an bord bainistíochta.

This information sheet is for the principal and the Board of Management.

Cad ar atá an tionscadal taighde gníomhach bunaithe? What is this Action Research Project about?

Nuair a dhéantar an Mháistreacht san Oideachas leis an Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, caithfear tionscadal taighde gníomhach a dhéanamh, iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar a c(h)leachtas féin mar mhúinteoir. Anailís ar chleachtas an mhúinteora atá i gceist leis an tionscadal seo. Cruthófar sonraí tríd breathnóireacht, nótaí machnamhach, agus ceistneoirí. Iarrfar ar an múinteoir tráchtas a scríobh faoin tionscadal taighde gníomhach seo.

Teachers undertaking the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University, are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a student. 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.

Cén modh(anna) a úsáidtear? What sorts of methods will be used?

- Breathnóireacht, obair/freagraí na bpáistí, dialann laethúil an mhúinteora ranga, nótaí machnamhach agus ceistneoirí, srl
- *Observation, Children's work/answers, Teacher's Reflective Journal, Reflection notes, Questionnaires, etc.*

Cé eile a mbeidh bainteach leis? Who else will be involved?

Déanfaidh mé an staidéar seo mar chuid den chúrsa Mháistreacht san Oideachas sa Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Beidh an tráchtas curtha isteach le haghaidh measúnú don cheannaire an modúl, Dr. Bernadette Wrynn agus déanfaidh foireann na Roinne iniúchadh air. Beidh rochtain ar an tráchtas deireanach ag scrúdaitheoir seachtrach freisin.

The study will be carried out by myself 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.

Cad atá á lorg uait? *What are you being asked to do?*

Iarrtar ort do chead a thabhairt dom ionas go bhfuil mé in ann an taighde seo a dhéanamh le mo rang. I ngach cás, beidh sonraí a bhailítear curtha faoi rún daingean agus an anailís déanta go hanaithnid. Ní bheidh aon sonraí bailithe úsáidte ach le haghaidh an taighde seo mar chuid den Mháistreacht san Oideachas sa Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad agus scriosfar é laistigh den tréimhse ama i gcomhréir le treoirlínte na hollscoile.

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.

Má tá aon cheist agat faoin tionscadal taighde seo, tar i dteagmháil liom ag aisling.connaughton.2021@mumail.ie.

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

Letter 8: Principal/ Board of Management consent form



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

Foirm Thoilithe ón Príomhoide/Bord Bainistíochta

Principal/Board of Management consent form

Léigh mé an t-eolas atá ceangailte leis an litir seo agus tá mo cheisteanna go léir freagartha. Tugaim cead do Aisling an taighde seo a dhéanamh ar scoil. Tuigim go bhfaighidh mé cóip den fhoirm thoilithe seo do m'eolas féin.

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered. I give permission to Aisling to complete this research in the school. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Ainm an Phríomhoide

Name of Principal _____

Síniú an Phríomhoide

Principal's Signature _____

Dáta/Date: _____

Ainm an Cathaoirleach

Name of Chairperson _____

Síniú an Chathaoirleach:

Chairperson's signature: _____

Dáta/Date: _____

Letter 9: Letter to Colleagues



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

A chara,

Mar is eol duit, táim i mbun staidéar do mo mháistreacht san Oideachas (Taighde teagaisc) in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Mar chuid den mháistreacht, táim ag déanamh tionscadal taighde. Beidh mo thaighde dírithe ar an Tumoideachas agus conas gur féidir liom foghlaim ghníomhach a úsáid chun cabhrú leis na páistí an Ghaeilge a fhoghlaim agus a úsáid.

As you know, I am currently studying for a Masters in Education (Research in practice) at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is based on Tumoideachas (early immersion) and how I can use active learning strategies to help the children to acquire and use Gaeilge.

Chun é seo a dhéanamh, ba mhaith liom taighde a dhéanamh sa rang trí dheiseanna foghlaim ghníomhach a chur ar fáil i rith na gceachtanna Gaeilge. Beidh breathnóireacht, obair/freagraí na bpáistí, dialann laethúil an mhúinteora ranga agus ceistneoirí in úsáid agam chun sonraí a bhailiú. Cuirfear ceisteanna ar na páistí chun a tuairimí faoin taighde agus na ceachtanna.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by providing active learning opportunities throughout our Gaeilge lessons. The data will be collected using observations, student work, a daily teacher journal and questionnaires. The children will be asked their opinions through discussing how they felt throughout the process and how they think that their learning could be more active.

Ní bheidh ainm an pháiste, d'ainm nó ainm na scoile luaite sa tráchtas a scríobhfaidh mé ag deireadh an taighde. Beidh cead agat éirigh as an tionscadal ag aon phointe, agus d'obair a bhaint ón taighde.

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

Coinneofar gach eolas agus sonraí pearsanta faoi rún agus scríosfar é laistigh den tréimhse ama i gcomhréir le treoirlínte na hollscoile. Cloífear leis na treoirlínte cearta i rith an taighde seo. Ní thosófar an taighde seo go dtí go bhfuil cead faighte ón Roinn Froebel Don Bhun- agus Luath - Oideachas, Ollscoil Mhá Nuad.

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.

Ba mhaith liom cead a lorg uait d'obair/freagraí/nótaí breathnóireachta a úsáid sa taighde seo.

I would like to ask you for permission to use your work/answers/observations in this research.

Má tá aon cheist agat faoin tionscadal taighde seo, tar i dteagmháil liom ag aisling.connaughton.2021@mumail.ie.

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

Yours faithfully,

Le dea-ghuá,

Aisling

Letter 10: Information page for Colleagues



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

Leathanach eolais - Information Sheet

Cé atá an leathanach eolais seo le haghaidh? Who is this information sheet for?

Tá an leathanach eolais seo d'éinne atá chun páirt a ghlacadh sa taighde seo.

This information sheet is for anyone taking part in this research.

Cad ar atá an tionscadal taighde gníomhach bunaithe? What is this Action Research Project about?

Nuair a dhéantar an Mháistreacht san Oideachas leis an Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad, caithfear tionscadal taighde gníomhach a dhéanamh, iniúchadh a dhéanamh ar a c(h)leachtas féin mar mhúinteoir. Anailís ar chleachtas an mhúinteora atá i gceist leis an tionscadal seo. Cruthófar sonraí tríd breathnóireacht, nótaí machnamhach, agus ceistneoirí. Iarrfar ar an múinteoir tráchtas a scríobh faoin tionscadal taighde gníomhach seo.

Teachers undertaking the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education at Maynooth University, are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a student. 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.

Cén modh(anna) a úsáidtear? What sorts of methods will be used?

- Breathnóireacht, obair/freagraí na bpáistí, dialann laethúil an mhúinteora ranga, nótaí machnamhach agus ceistneoirí, srl
- *Observation, Children's work/answers, Teacher's Reflective Journal, Reflection notes, Questionnaires, etc.*

Cé eile a mbeidh bainteach leis? Who else will be involved?

Déanfaidh mé an staidéar seo mar chuid den chúrsa Mháistreacht san Oideachas sa Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad. Beidh an

tráchtas curtha isteach le haghaidh measúnú don cheannaire an modúl, Dr. Bernadette Wrynn agus déanfaidh foireann na Roinne iniúchadh air. Beidh rochtain ar an tráchtas deireanach ag scrúdaitheoir seachtrach freisin.

The study will be carried out by myself 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.

Cad atá á lorg uait? *What are you being asked to do?*

Iarrtar ort do chead a thabhairt dom d'obair/freagraí/nótaí breathnóireachta a úsáid sa taighde seo. I ngach cás, beidh sonraí a bhailítear curtha faoi rún daingean agus an anailís déanta go hanaithnid. Ní bheidh aon sonraí bailithe úsáidte ach le haghaidh an taighde seo mar chuid den Mháistreacht san Oideachas sa Roinn Froebel don Bhun- agus Luath- Oideachas in Ollscoil Mhá Nuad agus scríosfar é laistigh den tréimhse ama i gcomhréir le treoirlínte na hollscoile.

You are being asked for your consent to use your work/answers/observation notes in my research. 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.

Má tá aon cheist agat faoin tionscadal taighde seo, tar i dteagmháil liom ag aisling.connaughton.2021@mumail.ie.

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

Letter 11: Colleague's consent form



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

Foirm Thoilithe/Consent form

Léigh mé an t-eolas atá ceangailte leis an litir seo agus tá mo cheisteanna go léir freagartha. Tugaim cead do Aisling m'obair/freagraí/nótaí breathnóireachta a úsáid sa taighde. Tuigim go bhfaighidh mé cóip den fhoirm thoilithe seo do m'eolas féin.

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered. I give permission to Aisling to use my work/answers/reflection notes in this research. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Ainm/Name _____

Síniú / Signature _____

Dáta/Date: _____

Appendix 2: Further Reflective Journal Entries indicating Enhancements in my Practice

05/03: “I feel like this approach to teaching involves a lot of preparation work and careful planning. I wonder if it is perhaps too much of a workload to take on daily. How does one plan for the learning when it is supposed to be open-ended? The children are learning a lot from it, but I find myself having to be extremely organised. It feels a little overwhelming.”

25/03: “I have thoroughly enjoyed this intervention, I wonder if I were to try it again after Easter, would there be a different outcome? Both myself and the children are a little more confident planning for and engaging in the activities. I am hoping that I will continue it in the future.”

17/05: “I am happy to report an increase in the amount of time we have spent outdoors recently. I could not believe how many educational activities we could actually do outdoors. I realise now that outdoor learning, along with guided interventions can be of benefit to the students. I am no longer bound to the plans that I have created. I am becoming more comfortable with documenting the learning as we progress. I have learned that the children directing their own learning can be more beneficial than listening to the teacher. Teaching through themes and activity has definitely impacted on the classroom in a positive way. I am more prepared, the children are interested in the learning and there are very few behavioural difficulties. I also find that letting the children lead their learning lends itself to a natural differentiation for varying abilities.”

Appendix 3: Further Reflective Journal Entries indicating my Epistemological

Assumptions adjusting

02/12: “I ponder on the need for all this paperwork. Real teaching is far removed from teaching practice, there is much more to think about than plans and inspectors ... The realisation that I cannot “change the world”, like we were taught we could, is disheartening. I can, however, improve a child’s experiences momentarily ... With all of this paperwork pressure, being Froebelian is difficult. That cannot be all my fault. All I can do is my best for my students. How have I not acknowledged this before?”

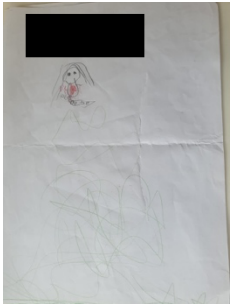



22/01: “Another contradiction that I identify on a micro level is that I like to have plans, the classroom and the presses to be organised ... However, this is a contradiction to child-led and experiential learning, as children’s learning cannot be “organised” in this way.”






01/06: ‘I am beginning to look at my values of child-centeredness, active and experiential learning and life-long learning and realise that they are not what is reflected on most in my journal entries. I have begun to explore learner agency as my main ontological values. I note that in my reflections, I often refer to the children “taking charge” of their learning and situation with me as the “helper of learning”. I can see that my epistemological values are shifting from teacher-as-knowledge-creator to children-as-knowledge creators. The shift towards greater independence sparks an inquiry approach within the children as they are beginning to take charge of their own learning.”

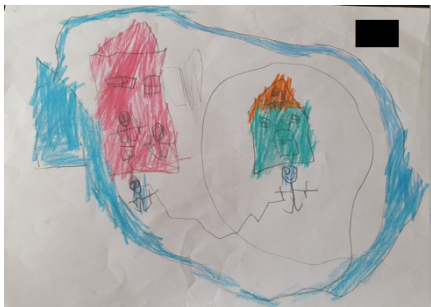
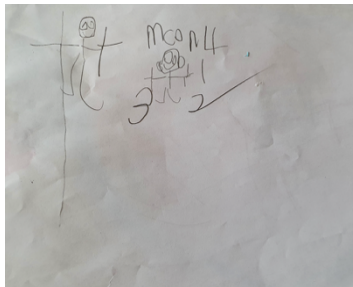

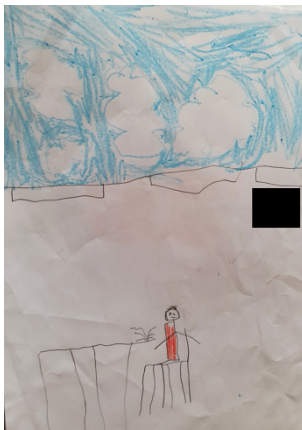


Appendix 4: Child Participants' Pictures and Transcripts of their Voice Recordings


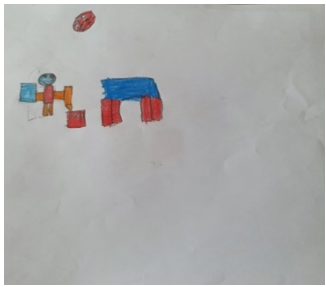



(that were relevant to this Study)






*All of the pictures below were taken by the researcher on the dates below. The drawings were created by the Child Participant (CP) listed in the column.



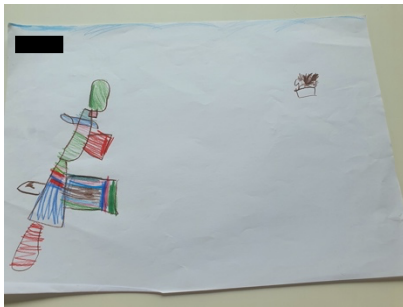


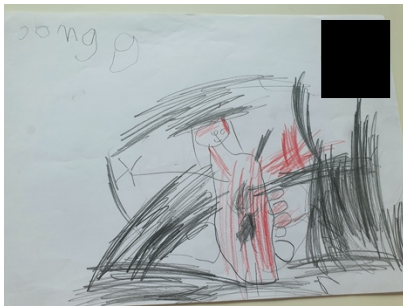
	First Data Collection 03/03/21	Second Data Collection 25/03/21
CP 2	<p>There's my name and then that is the back to school work and there is my homework.</p> 	<p>There me and there's a pig and there's me and [classmate] and them all them eggs and books. We are reading books.</p> 
CP 4	<p>That's me, that's [3 classmates] and that's the class wall and that's the roof and that's my name.</p> 	<p>That is me there and Múinteoir Aisling. There's bord corcra and bord gorm. We're learning about the Feirm. We are ag obair and spraoi.</p> 
CP 5	<p>1. The school and the car park outside ... Me and you in school because we are in Irish.</p>	<p>That's people and its. Us is doing the things for the animals. Me and [3 classmates]. Ostán na bhfeithidí.</p>


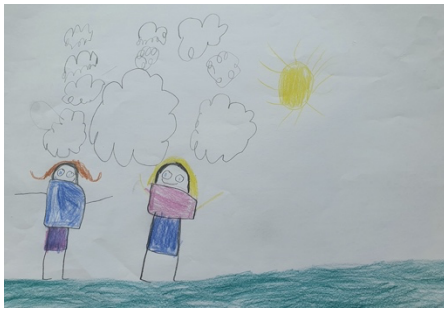
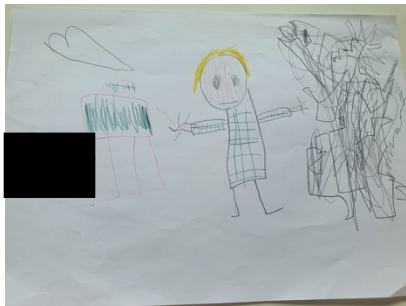



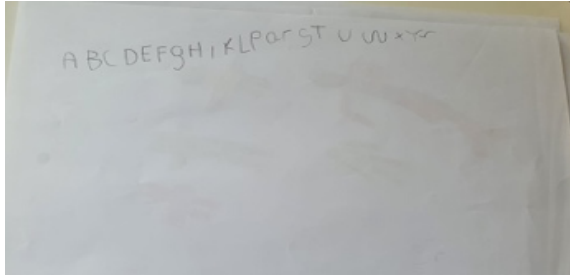
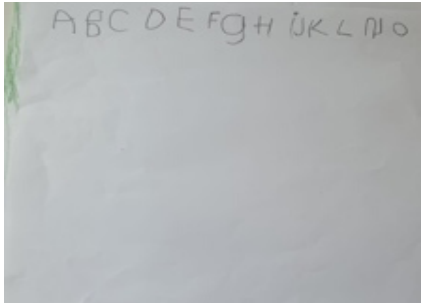
	 <p>2. My nana and me and my nana is teaching me Irish.</p> 	
CP 6	<p>This is my mom and this is me and we are I learn and making me learn Irish and I learn Irish so I do Irish.</p> 	<p>This is my house and a worm and there's worms coming around it. The thing is a worm school and everybody plays.</p> 
CP 7	<p>It's me walking to school and that's [classmate] already at school and that's the teacher and that's my cousin at my school.</p>	<p>Mise learning letters. 9 4 3 2. I am ag spraoi and the letters are anseo. Me and Múinteoir Aisling. You're telling the letters.</p>





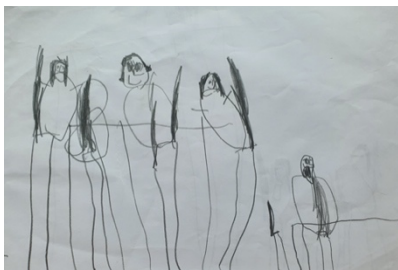
		
CP 9	<p>That's a book and that's me and that's my name.</p> 	<p>This is me with my book and this is the stone and the cloud and the sky. I am doing obair.</p> 
CP 11	<p>Em the shelf, Múinteoir Aisling and the whiteboard and books and a window and me and the door and my name. I'm learning with her.</p> 	<p>Tá mé ag dig-áil for péist. Tá mé ag foghlaim. Mise agus [classmate] sa phictiúir.</p> 
CP 13	<p>Me and that's all. The door and the window.</p>	<p>Me ag foghlaim drawing. Im drawing a dínasaur. That's the bord and the clog.</p>


		
CP 14	<p>I was trying to draw a book but it kind of looks like a butterfly flying away. I am reading because I want to do all my school work. That's a dragon and I drew it. Well, it's actually an octopus (*we had learned about the letter o in the morning – octopus)</p>  	<p>Well I like colouring so I drew me colouring. I'm ag foghlaim faoi litirs. I like litreacha.</p> 
CP 15	<p>Here's a book, here's the desk and here's the chair and here's the lights.</p>	<p>This is a cloud and me and [classmate]. And this is the books on the table. And we are making a drawing on the paper.</p>

		
CP 16	<p>That's you (Múinteoir Aisling) and that's me and that's [classmate] and the fields and that's clouds and the sun and the sky and the grass. Doing stars, níl mé ag caint.</p>  	<p>That's [classmate] and me reading books and those are cookies and chicks are growing chicks. We are reading books about learning.</p> 
CP 17	<p>1. That's mamaí and that's me and that's Múinteoir Aisling on the telly and that's us and that's our new house. We are learning about Róisín [character in the Irish book] and we are doing a obair with Róisín. I am doing obair bhaile so I can learn. That's a picture for Easter and the butterflies.</p>	<p>This is the bug hotel and they have to go up and over with the little with the little chicken feeding singing. Im foghlaiming. It's how I learn.</p>

	 <p>2. That's my mommy and that's me and that's my sister and that's my daddy teaching me how to do Irish.</p> 	 
CP 18	<p>There's you (Múinteoir Aisling) and me and the abc and a flower. We are learning our abc's.</p> 	<p>That's me and that's the school and I'm going upstairs. I'm learning.</p> 
CP 19	<p>This me, this is Múinteoir Aisling, this is [classmate], this is the sun and this is the grass. We are learning Gaeilge. You're in the picture because I learn Gaeilge from you. We are holding hands and ag siúl.</p>	<p>This is an griain this is the cloud. this is me and [classmate]. We are playing tag ag spraoi agus this is the féar.</p>

		
CP 21	<p>That's my bord and agus that's a bookshelf agus a lámh. It's a croí and I'm learning.</p> 	<p>Me and the wall and my clár bán and a marcóir. This is my poster. Im doing bláthanna.</p> 
CP 22	<p>Me, my crayon and the book and my whiteboard. I am doing lines of the stuff as Gaeilge.</p> 	<p>This is me learning from my Gafa le Mata. This is you counting how many sheep there was.</p> 
CP 23	<p>*sings the alphabet (cén fáth atá na litreacha sa phictiúr?) Because I learn my abc's.</p> 	<p>These are the fuaimeanna.</p> 

<p>CP 26</p>	<p>1. That's me and all my friends at bord gorm and that's you just sitting there and there's your ... And I am doing my book ... You're (Múinteoir Aisling) doing work ... It looks like the classroom.</p>  <p>2. That's me and that's my mam and she's teaching me Gaeilge.</p> 	<p>Well that's [3 classmates] and that's me and we are building a house for the feithidí. I learn how to build like that.</p> 
<p>CP 27</p>	<p>That big green thing going upside there is my mokawk and that's my and then that's the table and then that's me and that's it.</p> 	<p>1. Us is learning and me learning That's me and [3 classmates]. We are playing with the puipeád. We are learning.</p>  <p>2. That's one of us running and that's two of us running. That's [2 classmates]. That's the table, an bord.</p>

		
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