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Title Page

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Teaching with and through Stories: Exploring Identities with Children using Narrative Approaches

Thomas James Cunningham

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: 24th of September 2021

Supervised by: Dr David Gibson

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Abstract

The purpose of this self-study action research project (ARP) was to improve my teaching about identities, with identities and for identities while working with children using narrative interventions. I felt my teaching was pitched at a passive or deductive level and did not reflect my values of inclusion, student voice and identity representation within education. I was a student who received an education where not all identities where represented. In fact, many identities were discouraged and forced to be silenced. I truly believe that the vision for education has changed and with the right attitude, hard-work and correct teaching methods, the classroom can become a more inclusive and safe learning environment.

Stories and narratives have long been used as a method to develop a young child's imagination, engagement, and language and that is why I decided to apply it to my teaching of identity. This approach allowed me to critically reflect on identity development through the idea of the situated self. It enabled me, and the children to engage critically with the concept allowing us to recognise ourselves as individuals shaped by experiences, beliefs, and understandings not only in education, but in the wider world in which education is situated. Therefore, the notion of narrative identity provided the backdrop to my critical reflections.

This research was conducted online with various educational professionals and academics as well as in person in an urban, co-educational Educate Together national school in Ireland which places a strong emphasis on inclusion. The twenty-eight 2nd class children in my care, various educational professionals and academics, as well as my critical friend all acted as participants in the research, with me and my practice as its focus.

My chosen methodology was self-study action research as it is a form of educational research that allows the researcher to put himself at the forefront of the study. I adopted a qualitative approach to data-gathering including student interviews post interventions, interviews with academics and professionals from various educational backgrounds, daily observations and recording my evolving thoughts, opinions, and mindset in my reflective journal. I conducted the research in accordance with ethical research principles in mind while maintaining a commitment to validity and reliability demonstrated within the process of triangulation. My narrative interventions were influenced by Hegarty (2007, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016,), Jenny Mosley's (1996) and Winslade & Monk's (1999) work on narrative approaches to childhood development. It used a story-telling or narrative approach to explore the various identities children may express. There was a focus on open dialogue, questioning and creating professional links with academic involvement.

The findings revealed the importance of affirmation, teacher identity and power as central in the negotiation of identities and its representation in classroom settings. A clear desire to enhance the teaching about and with identities from the Social Personal Health Education, better known as the S.P.H.E. (1999) curriculum was evident from the professional interviews as well as emerging evidence of the effectiveness of using narratives throughout the school day. I concluded that through my practice of using narrative approaches I can increase meaningful engagement in learning about identities for students and teachers alike. Further to this, the research highlighted the opportunity of using narrative interventions to learn more about the students beyond their role as a learner.

As a self-study process this research has had a profound effect on my own practice and understanding as I am more committed to teaching for, with and about identities with children.

How I now teach for, with and about identities aligns more closely with my personal and pedagogical values of inclusion, student voice and identity representation as I am now committed to providing time and spaces where children's stories can be articulated, heard and responded to throughout their educational journey.

Acknowledgments

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ARP	Action Research Project
S.P.H.E.	Social Personal Health Education
CC	Critical Colleague

Chapter One: Introduction

1.0 Introduction

This chapter discusses the motivation and objectives of this self-study ARP. I will clarify and explain the primary aims for undertaking this study by examining and reflecting on my own values and self, as well as explaining the specific narrative or story-telling interventions I introduced to my classroom and teaching practice. The terms 'narrative' and 'story-telling' are used interchangeably in the context of this research and is discussed in greater detail later in this chapter. An overview of the following chapters accompanies this introduction to the research which permits me to structure and navigate my self-study ARP in a clear and concise manner.

1.1 Focus and Aim of the Study

The objective of this research was to ultimately enhance and transform my teaching so that I was living in accordance with my values of inclusion, student voice and identity representation within education. By exploring the concept of identities through the Social Personal Health Education curriculum, commonly known as the S.P.H.E. curriculum (NCCA, 1999) and Learn Together Ethical Curriculum (1990) a research project was designed and implemented. My main concern was on enhancing my teaching for, with and about identities to provide enjoyable experiences in my teaching and the students' learning. This concern had resulted from my observations in class since I graduated in 2019 where I noted how children have become highly influenced by the external factors of our modern world in which we live including the influence of media, peers, and technology (Paediatrics & Child Health, 2003).

Where I had assumed the education was preparing children for these challenges, I was reminded that the current S.P.H.E. (1999) curriculum which focuses on identity was published twenty-two years ago and does not reflect the society and its challenges in which we live today. Furthermore, I have noticed that there is often a reduction of identity from 'who we are' to 'what we are' in both curricula and policy. For example, the current S.P.H.E. curriculum (1999) states that children should be enabled to "discuss and appreciate all the features that make a person special and unique - name, size, hair colour, sex." (NCCA, 1999:9). This objective is stated under the self-identity strand unit within the curriculum and conveys how there is an emphasis on 'what we are' (size, hair colour, sex) as opposed to 'who we are' (a person who is negotiating multiple identities). This inconsistency exists as we compare this quote from the S.P.H.E. (1999) curriculum and compare it against the NCCA (2012) Report 'Priorities for Primary Education' which states that "children will have strong self-identities and will feel respected and affirmed as unique individuals with their own life stories." (NCCA, 2012: 63). It is evident that the enactment of curricula in practice is at odds with the aspirations of the Department of Education. The NCCA endorses a view of identity that is storied, multiple and negotiated. The approach in the SPHE is describes identity in a more reductive way.

Furthermore, within the introduction of the primary school curriculum (1999) the NCCA states that its "key issues in primary education are to develop a sense of Irish identity." (NCCA, 1999: 9). I believe that this direct quote reflects the attitudes and beliefs of a past society where diversity and multicultural education was yet to be acknowledged and identity was seen in a very singular and narrow sense.

Through reflection I identified how I have been addressing identity in the classroom since I first graduated in 2019. I concluded that my engagement with the topic was not the most

effective or enjoyable way, nor however had I adapted a more nuance understanding of identity as multi-storied and fluid. I have always had a passion and interest in teaching about sensitive topics including race, orientation, inclusion, and yet I felt as though I had been inadequately engaging with them. I address these issues as aspects of identity through a belief of respect for diversity (as per the S.P.H.E. 1999 curriculum), but I was not actually valuing the identities of the children, I was merely acknowledging them. My commitment to inclusion, representation and voice left me feeling compromised as my approach to identity was inadequately developed. As a result, by focusing my attention on improving my classroom approach towards 'identities' for this research was an instinctive decision.

The decision to use narrative approaches to enhance my teaching of and with identity stemmed from an incredibly impactful module taken during my undergraduate degree in 2016. The learning that occurred in a module entitled 'Social Construction of Identity' facilitated by Therese Hegarty in The Froebel Department will resonate with me for as long as I teach. On this course I learned about three key ideas i) Identity – How it is multi-storied and fluid. ii) Teacher impact – How language and discourse shapes identities of the children. iii) Re-authoring of stories – recounting actions I had taken in the classroom to re-author children's stories guided by narrative practice. Additionally, I also believed that "making use of stories in the classroom makes educational sense" (Leicester, 2005: 11) and I reasoned that using narrative approaches to teach with and for identities could potentially transform my own professional practice.

The **three primary aims** of this research include:

1. Examining how the use of narrative approaches when exploring identity with children could incite enjoyment and enthusiasm in my teaching and the students' learning and educational experience.

2. Developing three narrative interventions with emphasis on the teaching for and with identities in a specific young class group.

3. Enhancing and transforming my teaching with, for and about identities to live more closely in the direction of my values of inclusion, student voice and representation within education.

Once clear objectives had been established, I began reflecting on various questions pertinent to me as a practitioner engaging in a self-study process. With the support of my critical colleague (CC), I identified **three self-study reflective questions** to guide me.

- How can I develop a greater awareness of my teaching practice so it is more inclusive of the children's experiences and insights?

- How can I become more aware of the influencing actions I have as a teacher on children's identities?

- How can I enhance my teaching and explain these improvements to contribute to the ethos of an educate together school?

These three questions complemented by my objectives were the foundation of my research and enabled me to maintain a clear structure and approach throughout.

1.2 Research Background

The professional and personal reasons for conducting this research were countless, however, one of the main motives was to enhance my practice of teaching about and with identity to a standard that I knew was in line with my values, expectations and my Froebelian training. Beginning this research in August 2020, I began reflecting on my core values, both in education and life. I was faced with what the literature refers to as "insider researchers' dilemma" (Elliot,

2005: 58). This coincides with Whitehead's (1989) living contradiction theory whereby my current practice was not in line with my epistemological or ontological values. For someone who claimed to appreciate and value identity representation student voice and inclusion in the classroom, my approach towards identity did not sufficiently achieve this. I concluded that I was not teaching in line with my values and a change needed to occur. Thus, the self-study journey begun.

As an adult I believe I am fortunate that I can recall my childhood favorably. Being surrounded by incredibly caring and inspirational people, the days of being young have always seemed sunny. Amongst these inspiring individuals was my thirty-one-year-old uncle. He was always patient and calm with us, spending most of his time playing outside while all the other adults discussed politics inside. It wasn't until I was in 4th class that I was officially made aware of his diagnosis of severe autism and epilepsy. Non-verbal and dependent his entire life he had never attended formal schooling. Additionally, as it was described to me, society and the culture of those times did not permit a person with such 'inabilities' to make too many public appearances. Due to his 'indifferences', contact with visitors and children especially, was to be avoided, hiding him in his room until they had left. My uncles spent most of his life in the shadows of society, nobody ever really knew him. His story was never told.

I wrote in my values statement in August 2020 that;

"I ask children to shorten their stories to progress through lessons quicker. I sometimes ignore a hand up to finish a teaching point. This isn't the practitioner I set out to be. When did I become my granny's gaze to send my uncle to his room, so stories become untold? I find not only my practice in conflict with my values, but also my own philosophy of education."

(Cunningham, 2020)

Reflecting on my own teaching prompted me to consider changing my methods when addressing identity exploration with students and adopt practices I believed in, with the hope of enhancing my teaching, my student's learning, and the wider school community.

1.3 Context

This ARP was conducted both online with five educational professionals and academics, as well as in person in an urban, Educate Together National School. My study involved a 2nd co-educational class with twenty-eight eager pupils. The research site and its relevance to this study is discussed in greater depth in Chapter Three, Narrative Research Methodologies.

1.4 Intervention

The interventions employed in this study were conducted with consideration of the literature on the teaching of identity, identity development in childhood, narrative identity and reflecting on my current educational practice and the elements I wanted to enhance. The narrative interventions were inspired by Hegarty (2007, 2010, 2012, 2014, 2016) and are based on using narratives as a tool to explore identities with children. The conceptual underpinnings of the interventions include:

- Story is the primary frame we use for making sense of our lives.
- Identity is a social achievement and with each relationship, identity changes and develops.
- Narrative approaches seek to find other stories and support the person in finding alternative identities.

- The way we make meaning is shaped by language and conversations available to us within our family and culture.

- Narrative approaches creates spaces to hear more of the children's values, dreams, hopes and commitments so they become more aware of them themselves.

(White and Epston, 1990)

The three selected narrative interventions allowed me to teach about and with identity in a way that I am proud of and thus live more closely to my values of hearing the voice of the child as they share their story of 'who they are' and not 'what they are' and in doing so demonstrates inclusion and a commitment to identity representation. Critical reflection remained on-going as reflection allows us "to understand our practice and our contexts and the values that inform us, as we seek to improve what we do so as to maximise the learning opportunities for our pupils" (Sullivan et al, 2016: 22). The process of reflection on my teaching and values allowed me to select interventions that I truly believed would increase the learning experiences and opportunities for my students. Chapter Three, Narrative Research Methodologies discusses the narrative interventions in greater detail.

1.5 Overview of Chapters

The following section provides an overview of the content found in each chapter.

In chapter Two, Literature Review is divided into three distinct sections whereby I critically evaluate the informing literature related to childhood and identity, narrative identities and the implications for theory and research.

Chapter Three: Narrative Research Methodology outlines the research approach employed and gives an outline of the research deign and plan. Attention is drawn to the narrative interventions adopted to aid the teaching for, with and about identities and qualitative data was collected for the purposes of thematic analyses.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis describes the process employed to code qualitative data so that thematic analyses could occur. Emerging from that data were three key findings which answer the questions outlined above. These emerging themes and findings are discussed with consideration given to the various challenges the ARP faced along the way.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations offers a summary of the main findings and discusses how that relate to my evolving values and personal and professional practice. The chapter concludes with a proposal of recommendations and future plans.

1.6 Conclusion

This chapter set out to provide a clear and concise approach by outlining the main objectives of the research and three personal self-study questions about my practice. As I embarked on this research journey, I was excited by the prospect of discovering alternative ways to explore identities with children. I remained optimistic that this project would transform my thinking and teaching, allowing me to become more accountable for my professional practice, and in doing so create an exciting and memorable learning experience for the students in my care. This thesis identifies opportunities for practice and insights from classroom students and professionals across the educational spectrum about the importance of how we understand identity and how narratives can aid that understanding.

Chapter Two Literature Review

2.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out to enhance and inform my current thinking by allowing me to assess, critique and evaluate a myriad of appropriate literature, educational initiatives and research that has been conducted around the topic of identity with children and narratives in exploring identity development. I have structured this chapter into three distinct sections, each presented with subheadings. The sections are presented in the order of Childhood and Identity, Narrative Identity and finally, Implications for Theory and Practice. This structure allows the chapter to be presented from a broad perspective and refines the literature down to focus on my practice. In each of the three sections the relevant literature is examined, critiqued, and linked to my research topic in question.

2.1 Childhood and Identity

2.1.1 Introduction

How a child's identities develop over the course of their childhood is a heavily researched topic that many authors (Aries, 1960, McLean, 2007, Burman, 2008) have examined. Academic discussion in the last twenty years has focused on the modern conceptualisation of childhood in which the child is "conceived of as a person, a status, a course of action, a set of needs, rights or differences - in sum, as a social actor" (James, Jenks & Prout 1998:207). Despite this call to recognise childhood agency, there is limited research on how individual children see and understand their overall identities. "Assigning an identity to childhood as a social structure tells us about the identities of individual children. Undeniably, identifying how we view children may form part of how children's identities are constructed" (Thomas, 2005:14). As my research

question focuses on the enhance of my teaching about and for identities with children, I felt it was important to research and critique relevant literature associated with how identities form, develop and are explored within childhood.

2.1.2 Childhood as a Social Construct

This research is placed within a social constructivist view of childhood and considers how discourses of childhood are constructed culturally at the macro level of society, and how personal identities are further accomplished via interpersonal interactions between individuals and groups. Aries (1960) claims that childhood is a relatively recent social phenomenon and asserts that only through the passage of time and interaction a discourse has evolved into what we may now recognise as 'modem childhood' (Aries, 1960:68). Aries' work had a profound influence on how childhood was conceptualised, particularly his view that childhood was not an essential part of human experience, thereby challenging the populist and intellectual understanding of that time (Goldson, 1997:18). However, there has been much debate as to the reliability of Aries' (1960) methods. As contended by Gittens (2004), Aries' main source of data is subjective. Such representations of children are representations created by adults. Therefore, they offer a "potential insight into what children and childhood mean to adults, what they have meant to them over time, and how those meanings have changed and varied" (Gittens 2004: 37). However, this understanding is adult created, thus excluding the experiences, thoughts, and feelings of the children subject of the adult perspective. That said, Aries undoubtedly brought the nature of childhood into theoretical scrutiny as never before.

Similarly, it is the understanding of this study that childhood and identities are socially constructed. Expanding on Aries' (1960) theory, at the macro level, social constructionism draws attention to the constructive force of temporally and culturally available discourses and

their power to shape or restrict identities. At the micro level, this perception studies the construction and accomplishment of personal identities and meanings resulting from everyday interpersonal experiences.

I now draw attention to the discourses existing in the social construction of childhood, and the implications of these discourses on the construction of identities in and for childhood identities. Often such discourses of childhood are put forward in chronological order, as can be seen in the work of Steedman (1990), Butler (1996) and Hendrick (1997). However, in the spirit of narrative enquiry, the next section of this chapter attempts a more nuanced exploration of discourses of childhood and identities by focusing on them as being thematically illustrated rather than chronologically driven.

2.1.3 Kehily's (2004) Theory of Childhood and Childhood Identities

In assessing the previous work of childhood and identities, I have endeavoured to identify theoretical perspectives that closely a line to the viewpoint of childhood as a socially constructed phenomenon. This section of the literature review looks at the work of Kehily (2004). In his work, Kehily (2004) proposes a way in which childhood and identities may be understood in modern discourses and the consequences in how childhood identities may be formed and shaped. This contrasts to the work of James, Jenks and Prout (1998), who suggest discourses of childhood in relation to a narrower conceptual discourse. Additionally, it is important to recognise that not all theoretical overviews of childhood accept a social constructivist position. James, Jenks and Prout (1998) undoubtedly discriminate the socially constructed child as one certain way of understanding and interpreting childhood but also take into consideration other ways of how childhood may be constructed. This research is an investigation of how teaching practice may be utilised in supporting identity work with children

in a social school context. Therefore, it is the social construction of childhood identities within primary education teaching and learning, very much a localised context, which is the focus of this research. In this respect, teaching is seen as a socially constructed enterprise (Payne, 2005:18).

2.1.3.1 Kehily's Innocent Child Discourse

The innocent discourse of childhood proposes the most common understanding of childhood and childhood identities. As Goldson (1997) reasons "the dominant and prevailing western representation of childhood conceptualises an idealised world of innocence and joy: a period of fantastic freedom, imagination and seamless opportunity" (Goldson, 1997:1). Within this understanding children are viewed as playful and loving individuals, who are trusting, hopeful and turn to adults for guidance and direction. That said, Kehily (2004) argues the validity of this discourse as it depends on the conception of adults. According to Kehlig (2004) this understanding informs us what adults would like children to be but tells us little of what it means to be a child. Kehlig (2004) continues by arguing that the notion of childhood innocence is a social construction. "Innocence is not necessarily a given for childhood and cannot be seen as a key feature of children or childhood. ... childhood innocence is an adult ideal, something which adults would like childhood to be. Thus, this discourse presents us with a 'deficit model' of childhood" (Archard, 1993:42). In this sense, the innocent discourse constructs childhood as an adult ideal, the childhood identities from within this discourse are most likely to be defined by adults and controlled. "Children are seen as vulnerable, naive, ignorant with these characteristics acting to reinforce a very particular identity for children" (Kehlig, 2004:81).

2.1.3.2 Kehily's Puritan Discourse

In sharp contrast to the innocent discourse where childhood is viewed as innately good, the puritan discourse considers that children in childhood are potentially wicked and/or evil, requiring adult supervision to ensure that they remain on the path to goodness (Kehlig, 2004:26). This discourse features as one of the three components of Kehlig's (2004) theory and takes a more cynical look at the phase of childhood. In his work Kehlig (2004) builds the puritan discourse on the idea on genetic inheritance. Kehlig (2004) continues to reason that the adults 'responsible' for children and childhoods like this are constructed from potentially wicked means. Parents described as holding degrading and morally reprehensible characteristics such as indulging in short-term relationships with several partners (Felsman, 1984), abuse and/or alcohol (Connolly 1990; Dallape 1996) and illicit drugs (Dallape 1996), thereby 'confirming' the case that 'unusual' children are spawned by 'unusual' and primarily irresponsible parents (Armstrong, 1983:101). Hall et al (2006) demonstrates how such practices exist within the role of the teacher and education, highlighting how professional assessments of the moral character of parents are employed within Child Protection cases, enabling practitioners to construct the identities of the parent(s) and categorise the case, for example as child protection or family support. Parton et al (1997) similarly note a professional preoccupation with the morality of mothers. It is important to note however that to this extent Kehlig (2004) pairs the puritan discourse (the construction of 'unusual' children) with the irreversible loss of innocence or stolen childhood. It may be assumed that this discourse of childhood is more closely aligned with that of the past rather than contemporary societal perspectives on childhood, yet this discourse saw popular resurgence in Ireland when, in 2018, fourteen-year-old Ana Kriégel was lured and murdered by two thirteen-year-old boys. As noted by Rummery (2019:45) 'the case and its aftermath was a tragedy of national proportions.'' With the judgement in place sections of the media and society felt comfortable to assign the two

boys the identity of wicked non-children (Rummery, 2019). In this case, blame was placed on the 'inadequate parenting' that was deemed to have failed to identify the true, dangerous potential of the boys (Cotter, 2019:1). Here lies the point of the Puritan child discourse; As far as societal perspective is concerned, adults are seen to have control over, and are responsible for, all children (Kehig, 2004). Thus, it is the adults who are the judges of the Puritan child, and despite the agency afforded to children in their childhood, adults have the ability to shape the identities acquired by children. Thus children, and childhood identities, within this discourse are, again, subject to adult control (Kehlig, 2004). While I, the author of this research refuse to believe that childhood and children in general are "capable of violence, of rape, muggings and even murder" (Hendricks, 1997: 322), my thinking has been challenged as I now consider the ideals I hold about childhood. This is extended further in the following section where Kelig (2004) tabula rasa discourse describes the idea of a child being born with a clean sheet.

2.1.3.3 Kehily's Tabula Rasa Discourse

In contrast to the previous sections, the childhood discourse of Kehily's tabula rasa tells us little of the nature of childhood. Within this discourse children are presented as empty vessels, as 'humans becoming' rather than a human beings (Lee 2001; Christensen 2004). Influenced by the studies of Locke (2006) and his idea that children begin their lives as blank slates that can, with education and guidance, develop into rational human beings, this discourse clearly distinguishes children from adults (Hendrick, 1997). Nasman (1994) agrees with this idea reasoning that schooling is a process in the institutionalisation of childhood: the school, facilities have become the special 'islands', or refuges, of contemporary childhoods (Zieher 2001). James, Jenks and Prout (1998) view childhood education as a central social enterprise in the situating of the 'social structural' child; education provides the 'social structural' child

with a place and purpose in society. Via this situating of the child, they state 'children can claim a strong sense of identity with each other; they are recognisable internally and can experience the solidarity that derives from a recognition of a shared location in the social structure' (James, Jenks and Prout 1998: 209-210). Hendrick (1997:46) too argues this point, stating that the school 'further institutionalised the separation of children from society, confirming upon them a separate identity'. However, similar to the two previous discourses, "the identity of child in school is primarily an adult constructed identity often imposed upon children by their instructors" (Kehily, 2004:73).

In his work MacNaughton (1997) maintains that it is not disputed that children change, grow and develop over time, and that within this development parents, carers and professionals are enabled to identify children who may be in need of services and/or protection (McNaughton, 1997:87). Engaging critically with this, it is my assertion that caution is necessary when employing the 'developmental gaze' (McNaughton 1997) for children, like adults, are individuals who learn, grow and develop at different levels and in different timescales. Furthermore, portraying childhood as a stage in the process to adulthood objectifies children by concentrating on what the child is to become as opposed to considering their lived and experienced childhood (Beckett and McKeigue, 2007). Thereby, positioning children in a uniform order of 'age', 'stage' and 'development' can act to minimise the subjectivity and individuality of children thus reducing the possibilities of considering childhood identities with depth and scope (Winter 2006). Children are therefore construed as lacking in 'adult capacities' such as autonomy, rationality and responsibility (Alderson 2000; Walkerdine 2004) and are assigned identities constructed from adult knowledge from which children are excluded.

2.1.4 Conclusion

This section of the literature review outlined how there exists little knowledge of children as social actors, with agency and autonomy. Unquestionably, features of the three discourses of childhood as outlined by Kehlig's (2004) theory on childhood and childhood identities reveals that while some children may be granted agency, there remains the need for adult regulation of these children. Nevertheless, this chapter and study set out to emphasise the necessity to acknowledge my values of inclusion, student voice and identity representation within education, and I now turn this discussion to ways of concepting childhood and childhood identities that place greater emphasis on children as social agents through a concept known as narrative identity.

2.2 Narrative Identity

2.2.1 Introduction

Having reviewed a range of literature associated with theory on childhood and identities, I would now like to review literature based on the topic of narrative identities and how knowledge of this concept may be utilised into a school context. In this section I evaluate whether narrative approaches to identity exploration may adhere to the theorist's suggestions mentioned in the previous section when teaching for, with and about identities in the primary school classroom.

2.2.3 Narrative Identities: A Definition

From my reading of both Erikson's (1963) concept of ego identity and Murray's (1938) personological approach to the study of lives the definition employed in this research understands narrative identity as;

> *…an internalized and evolving story of the self that provides a person's life with some semblance of unity, purpose, and meaning. Complete with setting, scenes, characters, plots and themes, narrative identity combines a person's reconstruction of his or her personal past with an imagined future to provide a subjective historical account of one's own development, and a moral justification of who a person was, is and will be.*

(McAdams, 2013: 100)

This definition of narrative identity is fitting for this study as it begins to situate approaches of narrative identities as emerging in a variety of ways and means. It also acknowledges the relationship between experience, selves and stories which is of high interest to this research. Furthermore, McAdams' (2013) understanding of narrative identities compliments the work of Bruner (1994) who emphasises the constructed nature of narratives, holding that they represent the pulling together of parts of a self that is then known within that social environment.

To critically engage with this explanation, McAdams' (1993) definition informed by Erikson's (1963) and Murray's (1938) work, it may be noted that McAdams' draws attention towards narrative identities as a product, and I question, if the product of identity exploration in the context of this study is a story about the self, then how might narrative approaches and interventions be analysed? To answer this question, I referred to the work of Murray (1938) for his analytic framework. Murray (1938) understood narrative identity as an integrated and continuously evolving whole which may be explored by asking people to produce narrative response autobiographical vignettes. By considering McAdams (2013) and Murray's (1938) work, an understanding of narrative identity was clarified to assist the progression of this study.

With this definition and understanding of narrative identities informed by the work of Erikson (1963), Murray (1938) and McAdams (2013) accompanied with Kehlig's (2004) theory on childhood and childhood identities, a narrative understanding of childhood identities emerged from the literature.

2.2.4 Narrative Applications in Practice

The use of narratives in professional practice is recognised in research (Manning 1986; Hall 1997; Taylor and White 2000). This section of the literature review highlights three educational applications of narrative approaches in schools including dominant stories, the influential power of the teacher, and teacher expectations. Crucially, this section makes the relevant links to the previous two sections and includes an analysis of the approaches in relation to the understanding of narrative theory and childhood identities. As will be discussed, narrative applications can be applied to teaching practice when addressing dominant stories, the influential power of the teacher, and teacher expectations in the classroom. These concepts are particularly relevant in the context of identity exploration with children when teaching with, for, with and about identities.

2.2.4.1 Dominant Stories

Deficit identity stories are powerful, in that they do not simply describe reality, but produce it (White, 2001:18). If for instance a student in a class is identified by his or her teacher, peers or family as 'the Class Clown', it can become the agenda of that child to live up to this expectation and make it a reality. Labels like this offer one narrow account of identity and edit out hopeful threads (Freedman et al., 1997). This notion of a singular identity contradicts all theory proposed thus far in this literature review. In examining the primary S.P.H.E. (1999)

curriculum it can be noted that the term 'identities' occurs only once in the entity of the curriculum. The singular understanding of identity, as opposed to its plural form of identities, encourages students to affirm one facet or label of their identity of 'what they are' as opposed to 'who they are'. Indisputably, the NCCA (1999) curriculum choses singular language and fails to acknowledge the fluid and multi-storied dimension of identity. In her work, McLean (2007) notes how most dominant problematic stories of identity can emerge in an individual's childhood, and that this concept of carrying a dominant story is often associated with problematic labeling. In the case where one story dominates a person's identity, particularly if this is a problem story, a problem-saturated identity may be created (McLean, 2007:115).

By examining two school-based approaches, that have successfully used narratives to explore different areas of identities with students, one may note the importance of avoiding the trap that is, the danger of a dominant story. The two case studies that have acted as a source of literature for this chapter include: No Outsiders Project (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009) and Winslade and Monk's (1999) narrative counsellor approach.

The No Outsiders project established by DePalma and Atkinson (2009) is a programme that aims to teach children about the characteristics protected by the Equality Act, such as sexual orientation. The relevance of this project is the way in which the teacher participants used stories featuring characters of varying identities to investigate and challenge heteronormative processes in primary schools. The project discusses identities that are silenced and rendered invisible in the school environment and deem it unacceptable" (DePalma & Atkinson, 2009: 839). This project disrupted the seamless nature of such consensual silence and opened the ground up for the exploration of this under-recognized area within primary schools.

In the second case study, a similar theme can be noted in the work of Winslade & Monk (1999) who discuss the role of narratives in childhood therapy. In their work Winslade & Monk (1999) describes narrative counselling as

> *"… a simple therapy. It's based on the idea that we generate stories to make sense of ourselves. However, we're not the sole authors of our stories. Many of the dominant stories that govern our lives were generated in early experiences of childhood. Some of these dominant stories regularly influence what we think of ourselves. Thus, constructing, guiding and informing the expression of identities"*

(Winslade & Monk, 1999:6)

Within this definition Winslade & Monk (1999) propose that we live our lives according to the stories we tell ourselves and the stories that others tell about us. What is most important to note here is that narrative counselling does not aim to identify and create a new identity with the client, it is about identifying an identity that has always been there in the shadows and brings that to the forefront (Winslade & Monk, 1999).

Winslade and Monk (1999) continue to discuss the issue of a dominant story in further depth stating that if a child is located within a story line as a "bad egg" there is a tendency for this student to live their lives according to the contours of the problem story laid out before them (Winslade & Monk, 1999:189). The practitioner works at not assuming too much about their client's world of meaning. "Respectful curiosity is used to explore both the effects of the problem on the client and how the client is taking action to reduce the impact of the problem" (Winslade & Monk, 1999: 6). They conclude with the weight of the written word. "Statements written on our school record keep a reputation alive. "A letter that documents the changes clients have been making strengthens the significance of the changes in their own and other's eyes" (Winslade & Monk, 1999:18). This approach to narrative counselling aims to support and prevent the emergence of a negative dominant story in a client's life.

2.2.4.2 The Influential Power of the Teacher

As stated by Adichie (2009), a single story is a one-sided point of view of someone and has the power to tell false interpretations of the actual story in question. In explaining the concept of 'The Consequences of the Single Story' (Adichie, 2009:12) Adichie believes that stories matter, but that all too often in our lives we operate from the perspective of hearing and knowing a single story, and that people often operate from the perspective of the single story unconsciously. Adichie (2009) continues to discuss the risk of the single story and how it can lead people to default assumptions, conclusions and decisions that may be incomplete, and may lead to misunderstanding. Operating from the perspective of a single story can prevent us from a more complex, nuanced view of a situation (Fivush, 2001: 8). Adichie (2009) also makes a connection between single stories and the impact of power in our lives. In any situation, who tells the story, how and when, can impact situations greatly. The way we make sense of situations leads to narratives that may be harmful if left unexamined. Power enables some to define individuals and situations from a particular lens. When employing narrative counselling and therapy with children, the power ultimately lies with the counsellor and how they approach each identity conversation. They can determine what stories are given the room to be heard and listened to, and those that are not. As Adichie (2009) says, single stories can have significant negative impact. They can rob people of their dignity and emphasise how we are different rather than how we are similar. At its core, this talk encourages educators to recognise how much stories matter (Winslade & Monk, 1999: 5). And that by giving space to hear a multitude of stories we can help to empower and humanize others (Adichie, 2009:8).

2.2.4.3 Teacher Expectations

As explained here, teacher expectations influence the identity exploration and development of children in school. As a key source, this section draws primarily on the work of Volman (2019).

In his report, Volman (2019) examines how schools and teachers unintentionally impact students' identities by communicating messages concerning who they should be through differentiation and selection, teaching strategies, teacher expectations, and peer norms. This sentiment is echoed as many theorists agree with Volman (2019) stating that teachers may have rather persistent expectations of student through which certain identity positions are made available or unavailable (Rubin 2005; Vetter, 2010; Wortham, 2006). Heyd-Metzuyanim (2013) discusses how teacher expectations inform identities and development even when these expectations are communicated implicitly. This resonates with this study as it aims to explore the concept of identities with the student in my care. An awareness that even outside of the perimeters of this research, teaching practice sends messages of identity affirmation through teacher expectations is important to remain aware of.

2.3 Implications for Theory and Research

2.3.1. Introduction

According to Healy (2005) throughout the time as practitioners, teachers may note moments where they learn through reflections ways in which they may enhance their individual teaching practice, creating a living theory (Healy 2005: 94). Many of the theories discussed below that hold implications for this research and practice may be considered as primarily psychological or sociological in nature and not specifically 'theories of teaching'. However, the concepts contained within these different perspectives may be of use to educators when considering children's identities as socially constructed. When identifying theoretical ideas for this section I became acutely aware of the myriad of psychological and sociological

conceptualisations on the development of identity. The scope of relevant literature is vast, and this discussion is necessarily selective. Therefore, I have attempted to include theoretical perspectives that relate to the enhancement and transformation of my practice when speaking to the concept of childhood identities and identity exploration. This is intended to aid the reader in acknowledging the relevance of identity theory to teaching and learning.

It can be argued however, that there is currently no readily available unifying narrative inquiry methodological approach that would assist researchers attempting to employ a narrative inquiry approach across disciplines. Thus, more recent studies attempt to fill the gap by proposing just how such a critical event narrative inquiry approach could work (Fivush, 2001)

It is important to note at this point that this research paper holds the view that identities, particularly those prevalent in childhood are socially constructed (by our parents, friends, teachers etc.) and some we negotiate by the decisions we make in everyday life. The perspective remains that children are not born with predetermined identities but with a culturally and historically given set of relationships that ascribe both who they are and allow space for them to achieve who they will become from the experiences and opportunities that they encounter. This position relates back to Kehily's (2004) Theory of childhood identity and what he describes as the tabula rasa discourse.

2.3.2 Multiple Identities? The concept of a multiplicity of selves

The idea that a person can hold more than one identity emerges from both sociological and psychological theories of identity development. It is greatly dependent on how an individual interacts with one another and how they may construct their understanding of the world in which they live. In essence, the macro level of society often conveys a power to shape or restrict identities, and within the micro level, one may consider personal identities emerging

from everyday experiences and interactions. Within this perspective Dunn (1998) reasons that a person may construct their reality inter-subjectively and as no set of social interactions are alike, this opens the possibility for the existence of multiple versions of the self. Therefore, social constructivists such as Henriques (1984) and Butler (1990) tend to use the term 'identities' to that of the singular 'identity' (Henriques, 1984:117), understanding identities as complex and multi-layered.

Cooley (1902) discusses how an individual may come to understand by how others view them. As the argument states, "we are in very great part what we think other people think we are' (Pajares and Schunk 2002:10). In simpler terms, who a person may think they are is in actual fact a mirrored reflection of the judgements others makes of them. This idea is highly pertinent for educators when teaching with and for identities, for they are the very mirror that reflects the identity the child understands to be theirs.

Reflecting on Cooley's (1902) idea of multiple identities, Sen (1999) put forward that a person may have distinct multiple identities that cannot be deductible to only one notion or idea of a fixed identity. For Sen (1999), an individual not only has 'non-competing' identities (such as being Irish and being an accountant) but can also have identities, which are competing (being Catholic and homosexual). In a similar fashion, Hall (1997) recognises this multiplicity of self:

> *The subject assumes different identities at different times. Within us are contradictory identities, pulling in different directions so that our identifications are continuously being shifted about...The fully unified, completed, secure and coherent identity is a fantasy...[W]e are confronted by a bewildering multiplicity of possible identities, any one of which we could identify with - at least temporarily.*

> (Hall, 1997: 277)

The idea of multiple identities recognises the importance of socialisation in how we come to expand our sense of self, and it is the appreciation of the importance of socialisation in identity formation that is essential to the second concept I wish to discuss, that of identities and social interaction.

2.3.3 Identities and Social Interaction

From a sociological perspective, Mead's (1934) theory of self and society has been highly influential in understanding identity. Underlying Mead's ideas is the view that identity is formed through our daily interactions with others, with identity constructing bridges between the individual and society. Throughout his work Mead (1934) contemplates an essential element of the self to be the capacity to take on board the attitude of the other - an idea not dissimilar to Cooley's (1902). Following this perspective Berger and Luckmann's (1966) social constructionist viewpoint, observed people as born into a pre-existing world created by our ancestors but to be acted upon and changed by action and language which constantly creates new meanings within specific cultural and historical consequences. Such a perspective suggests that language is a pre-condition for thought; our ability to make sense of our world derives from our use of language to explain the world (Burr, 2003:82). In this sense, an individual's ability to define identities and others is changeable and dependent on the social interactions in which they interact and engage. Thus, our identity, as constructed through language, is dynamic and multi-faceted and must be considered as incremental, developing alongside our language and comprehension skills.

Thus, it is evident from these perspectives that children's development of identities is dependent upon their developing language skills and ability to respond to others. Such a view appears to be reinforced within the NCCA (2009) Aistear Framework that reminds practitioners

to consider the child's growing sense of identities as "children develop a sense of who they are. Relationships play a key role in building their identities." (NCCA, 2009:3).

2.3.4 Conclusion

Within this section of the literature review I have attempted to highlight the main theoretical concepts about identity development that may be useful to educators when teaching. I discussed how practitioners may draw from concepts from psychology and sociology in their practice, and have questioned the current literature on the multiple nature of identities, and the social construction of identities. Yet, what has become evident from this exploration is that there is no one theoretical perspective that can be viewed as preferable in the teaching of, with and about children's identities. In this sense, I return to a previous point, that the appreciation and awareness of a combination of theoretical concepts may be best in aiding educators in their teaching of, with and about the multiple and complex identities of children. These core themes of drawing on process and product, and knowledge in grasping the fluid nature of children's identities lies at the heart of this self-study ARP.

2.4 Conclusion

This literature review has interrogated the concepts of childhood and identity, as well as narrative identity. An understanding of both concepts made clear the implications for theory and research, with a newfound knowledge of identities as multiple and identities as socially constructed. This in turn allowed for an examination of 'teaching for and with identities' and the perceptions about the importance of identities in primary education. In the next chapter, I draw on the literature from the literature review to inform my narrative research methodologies which seeks to devise a self-study ARP.

Chapter Three: Narrative Research Methodologies

3.0 Introduction

This chapter sets out to introduce the research approach employed in this process as *a self-study action research project*. Following this, the research design outlines an explanation of the three narrative interventions or cycles utilised in the class to teach for and about identities with students. This ARP was designed as a three-fold plan with data emerging from the researcher, the students, and others. Over the course of this study data was gathered from lesson plan evaluations and reflective journaling, student interviews post intervention, conversations and observations from a CC, and finally, interviews with academics and professionals within the field of education. Reference to my ontological and epistemological commitments are made throughout. The chapter concludes with an outline of the limitations and ethical considerations given over the course of this study.

3.1 Self-Study Action Research Approach

My selected research methodology was self-study action research. There was a myriad of reasons as to why I selected this specific approach with the main one being that the focus was on my teaching practice and how I could enhance aspects of that. Self-study action research was unknown to me prior to this course. Initially, I had learned that at the beginning of a self-study ARP I am merely reflecting on aspects of my practice with the hope of enhancing them. I was at the centre of the research, and I was concentrating on my own teaching. The participating primary school students were facilitators in my research, and through critical reflection, data gathering and conversations with my CC I navigated my way through the numerous conflicts I confronted along the journey.

My research study entitled "Teaching with and through Stories: Exploring Identities with Children using Narrative Approaches" was phrased in a such a way that enabled me to place the focus on my own teaching. Through this research title I examined ways in which I could explore identities with children by teaching with stories, teaching through stories, and teaching about stories The students were participants in my research and the data that I gathered from them allowed me to reflect on my teaching with the hope of transforming and enhancing my practice. Self-study action research is a form of research that focuses on the practitioner rather than the participants (Sullivan et al, 2016: 22). I was the regulator of how I explored identities in the class with the children and I was the only one with the power to change and enhance my practice, therefore, reflecting and researching my own teaching seemed like the rational approach to take.

3.1.1 What is Self-Study Action Research?

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) state that self-study action research is a relatively new term named by a group of like-minded individuals who thought it was not enough to focus merely on researching data or participants. To bring about meaningful change and enhancement in practice we must turn the lens inwards and research our own teaching practice. Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) reason that "self-study research refers to educators researching their practice with the purpose of improving it, making explicit and validating their professional expertise and, at the same time, contributing to the knowledge base of teacher education" (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 508). McNiff (2010) supports this claim, but also draws attention towards the necessity of self-reflection. Through a process of self-reflection, a practitioner begins to compete against the traditions of research whereby the researcher reflects on data obtained from the other. Described by Bassey (1981), this form of research refers to empirical research. A self-study ARP is mostly associated with creative research as creative

research is about "the devising of new systems, the development of novel solutions, and the formulation of new ideas, by systematic and critical enquiry" (Bassey, 1981: 5). Self-Study ARPs seek to bring about change rather than just reflecting and analysing on past practice. Therefore, Bassey (1981) concludes that self-study ARPs are for those who aim to transform and enhance their practice. By engaging in a self-study ARP you are "conducting an enquiry by the self into the self" (McNiff, 2010: 1) and attempting to establish how and why you teach the way you do.

3.1.2 Why I Chose Self-Study Action Research?

3.1.2.1 Values
According to McNiff "action research begins with values" (McNiff, 2010: 12). Within the self-study ARP approach, the values of the researcher play an integral role. In my experiences, reflecting on one's own values has the potential to cause a shift or change in professional practice at an accelerating rate as these are the values that have informed my thinking and actions in the classroom. To enhance or transform an aspect of my teaching practice, it was rational to begin by examining the values I hold closest.

Through the critical interrogation of my values, I learned of my ontological belief that the strength, progress and the future of our society relies on the diversity and acceptance of its population. It was therefore clear to me that the focus of my teaching for identity was one aspect of my practice that I could enhance. Additionally, I valued the representation of identities not only in our society, but within education. Growing up with an uncle whose identity was silenced because of the conventions and traditions of society, I learned that I value the importance of a space where individual identities can be shared, listened to, and affirmed. Therefore, I decided to engage with self-study ARP approach, to reflect on my teaching and

engagement with identities in the classroom context. This was an aspect of my practice that I was connected to and had a passion for and allowed me to make focused efforts so that I was "living more fully in the directions of my values" (McNiff, 2010: 12).

3.1.2.2 Narrative Approaches

In 2006, the Central Statistics Office released the census of population report which detailed the ever-growing, diverse population expanding across Ireland. I reason that the time for identity exploration and affirmation in primary schools has never been more prominent. This is evident as the population and demand for places in educate together schools across Ireland continues to rise each September. It is emergent even in my own school and classroom with the diverse set of students progressively increasing each year. As examined in the previous chapter, recent years have witnessed a growing interest in narrative approaches and therapy. I believe and have an interest in engaging and developing upon narrative approaches in educational practice to explore these diverse identities with children. By using narratives to explore identities in the classroom, nearly all children can engage, whether it's through the written word, illustrations, or the tone in which the story is told. Narrative approaches to identity exploration ensure most children can access the lesson and share their stories of how they have 'become' with their peers. Narrative approaches within educational settings can operate as effective tools for exploring the structure and process of mean making with students (McAdams, 1993).

3.1.2.3 Collaborative Process

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) highlight the necessity of having a CC stating that as "social interactions in self-study have been framed as a way to avoid the pitfalls of individualism and navel-gazing" (Vanassche and 31 Kelchtermans, 2015: 516). Brookfield (2017) supports this perspective as he reasons that despite critical reflection being an individual

journey, it is also a collective enterprise and that through dialogue colleagues can offer multiple perspectives and opinions and help unearth and check assumptions regularly.

3.2 Research Design

When conducting any type of research, a systematic and organised approach is required. The approach I selected for the research design was founded on Whitehead's (1989) four stages as outlined by Mertler (2006): the planning stage, the acting stage, the developing stage, the reflecting stage. These questions were in turn translated into a list of questions the researcher could pose to create a definite action plan (see Appendix 2.1)

While having a plan and a direction aided the induction of this research, consideration was given to Mertler's (2006) point that action research does not occur in a linear process and at no stage is an endpoint guaranteed. In this spirit I remained aware that I was not aiming to create a 'victory narrative' (Maclure cited in Sullivan et al, 2016: 69). I have found that I have learned just as much from the challenges and barriers as I have from the positive aspects of this process.

3.3 Research Plan

The diagrams that follow outline the schedule of my self-study ARP. This plan occurred from January to June 2021. By using diagrams, I was able to visualise and interpret the plan I aimed to execute within this given timeframe.

September - October 2020	November - December 2020	January - June 2021	July - August 2021
Write up of proposal.	Sought permission from various parties.	Began planning stage and methodology chapter.	Data Analysis.
Research and Write up of literature review.	Obtained ethical approval.	Research was undertaken in the class, and with academics and professionals.	Findings written up.
Sought ethical approval.	Obtained permission from various parties.	Data was gathered.	Draft completed.

Figure 3.1: Schedule Outline

March
- Narrative intervention employed in class - Football A Metaphor for Life.
- Interview with primary school teacher.
- Reflective Journal write up daily.

March
- Narrative lessons refined.
- Lesson plans evaluated.
- On-going reflective journaling.
- Critical colleague observation and meeting.

March
- Narrative lessons 'Football - A Metaphor for Life' refined and concluded.
- Interview with Primary Education Officer for Educate Together Ireland.
- Next Narrative intervention 'Maps of Narrative Practice' refined for cycle two.

Figure 3.2: Outline of Cycle One

April
- Narrative intervention employed in class 'Maps of Narrative Practice.'
- Interview with child psychologist.
- Reflective Journal write up daily.

April
- Narrative lessons refined.
- Lesson plans evaluated.
- On-going reflective journaling.
- Critical colleague observation and meeting.

April
- Narrative lessons 'Maps of Narrative Practice' refined and concluded.
- Interview with Creative Associate for Creative Schools Ireland.
- Next Narrative intervention 'Questioning - Dialogue - Questioning' refined for cycle three.

Figure 3.3: Outline of Cycle Two

May
- Narrative intervention employed in class 'Questioning - Dialogue – Questioning'
- Interview with lecturer in initial teacher education.
- Reflective Journal write up daily.

May
- Narrative lessons refined.
- Lesson plans evaluated.
- On-going reflective journaling.
- Critical colleague observation and meeting.

May
- Narrative 'Questioning -Dialogue – Questioning' refined and concluded.

Figure 3.4: Outline of Cycle Three
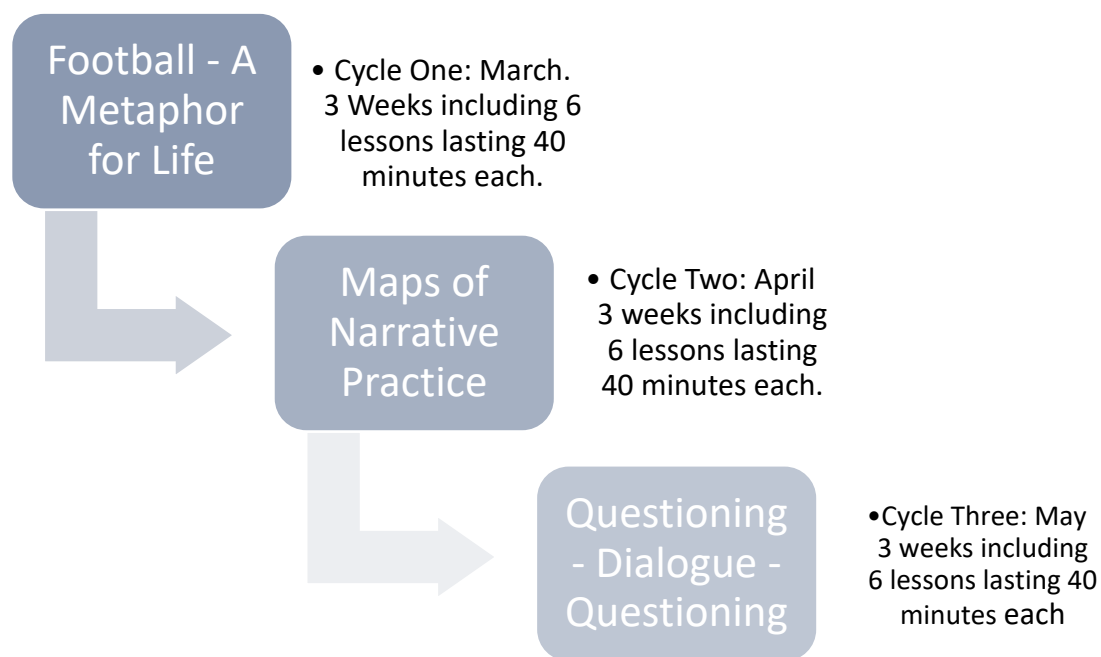
Figure 3.5: Classroom Narrative Intervention Cycles

3.3.1 Research Participants

The participants that took place in this research included twenty-eight primary school students, as well as five professionals coming from various academic and professional backgrounds within education.

The narrative interventions employed in the class involved twenty-eight 2nd class students comprising of both boys and girls, aged between 7 – 9 with a range of abilities. The participants were required to engage in weekly lessons around the concept of identities through the means of narrative methodologies. The teaching of identities is already covered in the school as part of the Learn Together (2004) Ethical curriculum, however the focus in this research was on the narrative approach by teaching with, through and about identities.

A set of questions were also sent out to five professionals and academics in the field of education, making them participants in this study too. These included a child psychologist, a primary school teacher, Creative Associate for Creative Schools Ireland, a lecturer in initial teacher education, and the Primary Education Officer for Educate Together Ireland. This enabled me to gain a broader perspective and provided a context for different professional discussions around identity to take place. These conversations ultimately questioned whether the exploration of identity through stories and narrative approaches with children had any place in the primary school classroom.

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

3.3.2 Research Site

The ARP took place in an urban middle class primary school as well as online with academics and professionals.

Research was conducted in an expanding Educate Together ethos school that placed high value on inclusion and diversity. The school had a positive attitude towards identity representation and was constantly seeking new ways to enhance inclusive education. This enabled me to conduct my research with ease as I knew that there was a positive attitude surrounding my research.

Additionally, research was conducted online via zoom with five academics and professionals whom all held various experience within the field of education and lasted approximately 40 to 90 minutes each.

3.4 Intervention

The interventions employed for this ARP compelled me to alter my approach when addressing the topic of identities in the classroom, and to adopt a narrative approach to enhance my overall teaching practice. This story-telling approach took time to plan, consider and research. However, commitment to the intervention ensured lessons were of high quality and engaging for both me and the students in my class. That said, there is always room for growth and improvement, and so I am confident that I will continue this line of narrative enquiry as a teaching methodology in my future practice.

3.4.1 The Narrative Lessons

As can be noted from Chapter Two, I chose to adopt and adapt popular narrative approaches into my teaching practice to explore the concept of identities with children. These narrative approaches were adapted and developed by White (2007), Hegarty (2012) and Jenny Mosley (2005). After consulting the literature, I chose three approaches that allowed me to facilitate the exploration of identities with the children in my class. These narrative approaches included 'Football – A Metaphor for Life', 'Maps of Narrative Practice' and 'Questioning – Dialogue – Questioning.' (See Appendix 2).

Narrative intervention one 'Football – A Metaphor for Life' (adapted from Hegarty, 2007) involved a five-step process whereby the children used a football pitch template as a blank landscape for their thinking. First, asking the children questions about their interest in the sport, football. Secondly, the participants were invited to think of their life as a football match. Using a menu of questions, the children were encouraged to identify who the players or people are that have always supported them, backed them, defended them? Thirdly, Conversations with the children about their goals in life was discussed. What goals have they achieved in the past?

Was there a process in achieving these goals or did they happen spontaneously? Who helped them achieve their goals?

Part four involved identifying an opposition in life. What have they had to tackle in the past and how did they overcome it? Finally, part five required the student participants to examine the conditions. What conditions make a football match harder to play, and what conditions have made our lives in the past harder? (see Appendix 2.2).

Narrative intervention two 'Maps of narrative practice' (adapted from White, 2007) required the participants to explore some of the main storylines occurring in their lives. The idea was to use 'maps' to guide narrative practice (White, 2007). This intervention focused on mapping the influence of a main storyline, or a main identity occurring in the children's lives. In a really engaging way, the children mapped out experiences of a dominant story in their life and explored how it had come to be.

For example: A child in the class identified as a footballer. She explained how they had just won an important match at the weekend and her family are still talking to her about it. She told the story of the most recent match and then we asked her about other football matches (a time she lost, was injured, was a substitute). As she spoke and answered questions, I noted the social construction of a narrative identity and connected this experience with the literature discussed in Chapter Two. In this example the student effectively mapped out the identity of 'footballer' through personal experiences and stories while referencing relationships (mum and daughter, coach and player) as well as the other identities occurring in the background (team member, student, daughter).

In this respect, maps of narrative practice were used to tell the experiences of a dominant story in a child's life and how that story came to be. In essence, this intervention looked at asking questions to generate conversations whereby the participants told stories in a reverse chronological order. Questions focused on how the main identity in their life influenced how they act in different social situations, and what the benefits and deficits of having a dominant story are for a person. Through this process the students began identifying themselves as authors and co-authors of their own stories. This narrative approach allowed the participants to explore labels the children had placed on themselves and explore their own understanding of their own identities. Through a mapping experience the children mapped the effects of their stories throughout each domain of their life (see Appendix 2.4).

Narrative intervention three, 'Questioning – Dialogue -Questioning' was informed by two key sources. Jenny Mosley's (2005) circle time framework, as well as Hegarty's (2012) explanation of a narrative approach known as 'The Care Team'. This intervention involved the children coming together to discuss stories that have help shape who they are today (see Appendix 2.3).

For example, a child in the class described how they once went to the park and remembered how they felt while feeding the ducks. This student concluded that being an animal lover was part of their identity, and through Mosley's (2005) framework, discussed with others in the class the stories and memories that reinforced this claim. This intervention focused on affirming student identities by creating a space for stories to be heard. This coincides with Hegarty's (2012) work around care teams where the primary aim is to highlight positive stories and share them with others. By sharing these stories and memories, the participants became

more aware of their dreams, values, hopes and commitments. For the participants, it was an opportunity to tell stories of who they are and highlight how identity is multi-storied and fluid.

While I felt that questioning was a very effective method of assessing engagement for all three interventions, I do think the plan I employed requires some adaptations depending on various factors including class ability, vocabulary used, dialogue coupled with active tasks.

Intervention One	Focus on identifying influencing people and relationships on our identities	Using stories to discuss challenges we've overcome
Intervetion Two	Mapping the experiences of a dominant storyline or identity	identifying alternative identtities within a main storyline
Intervention Three	Finding stories or identities previously unrecognised	Use of questioning throughout circle time

Figure 3.6: Narrative Intervention Focus

3.5 Data Collection

The following section outlines the data collection methods used to undertake this research. The data collected was used as evidence to allow me to reflect on and analyse my findings both pre-implementation and post-implementation of the narrative interventions. Sullivan et al (2016) states that researchers gather data for various reasons, but primarily to identify changes or

alterations in our practice, to demonstrate the progression of our thought process and to identify if we are living and practicing in line with our values. I adopted a qualitative approach to data-gathering including student interviews post interventions, interviews with academics and professionals, daily observations and recording my evolving thoughts, opinions, and mindset in my reflective journal. This approach allowed me to "gather information from a variety of perspectives and also show how our pupils, ourselves and others can have a part in this process" (Sullivan et al, 2016: 79).

3.5.1 A Qualitative Approach

Recognised by Check and Schutt (2012), qualitative data prioritises the views of the participants or subject rather than that of the researcher. While this remained a self-study ARP, with my practice as its focus, the opinions of the students, CC, professionals, and academics towards identity exploration through narrative approaches remained central to my development. This type of data provided valuable insight and allowed for changes and enhancements to be made to each action cycle. Due to the nature of qualitative data, the evidence gathered remained open to criticism and interpretation, which may be perceived as a limitation of the data. However, as contended by Atkins and Wallace (2012), qualitative data is optimum in educational research as education itself requires the involvement of people, stating that people are not predictable, or static. Conclusively, qualitative data provided more insightful information from participants especially when researching such a deeply abstract and complex concept like identities. The qualitative data gathered allowed me to be reflexive in my teaching and was an approach that aligned with my values of student voice and inclusion as the participants' experiences and opinions impacted the terms and design of the study.

3.5.2 Data Collection Tools

As stated by Sullivan et al (2016) collecting data from various sources, all of which provide multiple perspectives allows for triangulation. These sources often include gathering data from oneself, from our students and from others.

3.5.2.1 Reflective Journal

One of the most important pieces of data gathered over the course of this study was documented within my reflective journal.

> *a reflective journal provides data about changes in your thinking, your work and how you go about it. These changes are important because they track the story of one's learning, which is at the heart of generating theory from practice.*

(Sullivan et al, 2016: 79)

The reflective journal was used prior to, during and after each of the narrative interventions. I also used this data tool to record my thoughts after conversations with academics, professionals, and my CC. My reflective journal was then used as a form of meta-reflection throughout the second and third cycle of my action research to gain a more comprehensive understanding of why I teach the way I do. It also assisted me in keeping a record of my thinking and enabled me to state an accurate claim to knowledge from the extracts of my learning.

3.5.2.2 Lesson Plan Observations and Evaluations

Notably, data was also obtained from informal conversations with student participants. For this reason, I ensured to make continuous observational notes on the students' engagement, statements, behaviours, and attitudes throughout the intervention cycles.

Each narrative lesson was evaluated against Bloom's Taxonomy framework (1994). This enabled the activities the student's engaged with to be evaluated and whether factual, conceptual, procedural, metacognitive or a combination of thinking occurred. This framework of evaluation was successful in encouraging insightful reflections during teacher journaling and informed the next cycle of research (see Appendix 2.5).

3.5.2.3 Post-Intervention Interviews with Students

Initially, it was intended to conduct focus groups with participating students on site after school hours. However, in accordance with Covid-19 safety measures, an executive decision was made to shift the focus groups to individual online interviews after school hours with GDPR in mind.

Stringer (2008) reasons that interviews provide opportunities for research participants to explain their viewpoint in their own words and this can lead to new insights and directions for the researcher to consider. The interviews conducted with student participants enabled me to go into greater depth than was possible with some of the other data collection tools used such as lesson plan evaluations. These interviews allowed for conversations to be explored and clarified in real time.

When conducting interviews reference to Feldman's (2018) work on how to use interviews in action research was beneficial. This guide aided the research by identifying semi-structured interviews as best practice whereby a set of questions with an open format was established so that participants could provide more details. The questions asked during these interviews began with an initial question, before progressing onto content questions while probing when appropriate. The interviews were concluded with a final closing question (see Appendix 3.1).

All interviews were audio-recorded for the purposes of data collection and analyses (see Appendix 3.4).

3.5.2.4 Interviews with Professionals and Academics

Interviews with academics were scheduled to take place in-person, however due to Covid-19 safety measures all interviews were moved to online spaces and occurred from March to May of 2021. Each interview followed a similar format as that discussed above and involved five different participants. These interviewees included: a practicing primary school teacher, the Primary Education Officer for Educate Together Ireland, a child psychologist, Creative Associate for Creative Arts Ireland, and finally a lecturer involved with initial teacher education. Each interview contributed significantly to the study, capturing a broad range of perspectives.

At the beginning interviewees were made aware as to why the interviews were being conducted, an estimation of how long they would last for as well as assurances of confidentiality and anonymity. An initial question was asked to generate conversation before content questions were asked with probing from the researcher where appropriate. The interviews were concluded with a closing question and any questions the interviewees had in relation to the research were addressed then (see Appendix 3.2). Each interview was audio-recorded and transcribed for the purpose of data collection (see Appendix 3.3).

3.5.3 How to Ensure Validity?

In order to generate findings that were reliable it was important to me as a researcher to gather data that was valid. I ensured my study was of high standard by implementing the following:

3.5.3.1 Critical Colleague

Throughout the process my CC acted as a gatekeeper. I consulted with her in relation to any issues I encountered or any dilemmas I faced. Brookfield (2017) implies that through conversations colleagues can provide various perspectives and opinions and assist us in unearthing and checking our assumptions regularly. Brookfield maintained that "the presence of critical friends is at the heart of the critically reflective process" (Brookfield, 2017: 66).

3.5.3.2 Triangulation

I ensured to cross check all my data with my CC, thesis supervisor and the literature. This process ensured consistency of findings obtained through the various data collections tools and allowed for the assessment of limiting and influencing factors on my findings.

3.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical permission to conduct this research was requested from the Maynooth University's Ethics Committee, the school principal, and the Board of Management. The key ethical issues considered in this study included anonymity, confidentiality, power dynamics and acquiescence. Information letters and consent forms were sent out to parents, students, professionals, academics, principal and board of management prior to research commencement (see Appendix 1). Consistent with The British Educational Research Association, "the best interest of the child" was the foundation of the key ethical considerations of this research (BERA, 2018:6). I ensured to take in all ethical considerations while conducting this study and carried out the appropriate steps such as:

3.6.1 Information and Consent

Permission was received from both the school principal and board of management to conduct this ARP. Letters detailing all aspects of the study were forwarded and all questions were answered prior to commencement. Once consent had been granted, I spoke to the student participants and their parents/guardians about the ARP and sought written approval. My CC also granted consent for their contribution as gatekeeper throughout the study.

Through regular correspondence I ensured the parents, guardians and children were fully aware of what the ARP entailed. This was achieved by sending home information letters explaining what this research involved. The letters addressed to child participants were written using child appropriate language and illustrations while explaining what my research study was prior to implementation.

3.6.2 Data storage

Data gathered was stored in a locked cabinet in my classroom in accordance with my ethical commitments and GDPR legislation. This data remained available upon request for my supervisor. At no stage of the research was data shared with any third party. This information was stated clearly in the consent forms sent to participants and parents/guardians. If this data were to be published in the future, it will only be done so for educational purposes and prior consent is given. All pieces of data are signed and dated in the interest of credibility and reliability. All files were password protected and stored on a secure device.

3.6.3 Sampling Approach

As my focus was on my practice, and as the topic of identity is a compulsory component of both the S.P.H.E. (1999) curriculum and the Educate Together Ethical Curriculum Learn

Together (2004), all twenty-eight students were involved in the research interventions. The sampling approach allowed me to take a non-biased approach and included all children in the research. Data obtained for this study was gathered from participating students only.

3.6.4 Right of withdrawal and sensitivity

Part of this research was to create a safe, comfortable, and confidential space where identities could be spoken about comfortably. In support of this, the students were mindful that they could take part, or disengage from any conversation whenever they wanted to. This applied to the overall research too. When exploring identities with the children I remained mindful of its sensitive nature and avoided intruding into the children's' lives and memories. While no incidences of sensitive disclosure occurred, I was prepared to deal with this in the strictest confidence while adhering to all BERA (2018) ethical guidelines. If I was unsure at any stage, I sought advice from my supervisor and CC. Communication remained a key aspect of the research process.

3.7 Conclusion

This methodology chapter began by introducing and justifying the research approach employed in this study as *a self-study action research project*. This chapter then highlighted the research design, as well as the three narrative interventions used to explore the concept of identities with children. Furthermore, the data collection tools emerging in the form of a three-fold action plan was discussed whereby data was collected from the *researcher* in the form of lesson plan evaluations and reflections, from the *students* during post-intervention interviews, and finally from *others* which included CC conversations and online interviews with professionals and academics. An account of the ethical considerations was provided with emphasis placed on

informed consent, data storage, and confidentiality. In the next chapter I outline the data

analysis approach as well as stating the findings which emerged from the various data sources.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis

4.0 Introduction

This chapter formally presents and analyses the qualitative data gathered from the various data collection tools. All data collected for the purpose of this self-study ARP originated from reflective journaling, lesson evaluations, interviews with students, professionals and academics, and conversations with my CC. The first section of this chapter identifies the themes and patterns emerging from these various data sources. These themes and patterns are then synthesised into my three key findings which relate back to my research question 'Teaching with and through Stories: Exploring Identities with Children using Narrative Approaches.' Finally, the various challenges are discussed in detail including school closure and measurable data. By overcoming these challenges, I noted a shift in my thinking and pedagogical enhancement which is elaborated later in this chapter.

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4.1 Data Analysis

Information collected from lesson evaluations, teacher journaling, student, professional and academic interviews, as well as CC observations and conversations were analysed as part of my exploration into the importance of children's identities and the possibilities of narrative approaches. An intricate data analyses technique known as coding was used to identify reoccurring themes before categorising this information into data bits. Each data bit was assigned a code and a process of thematic analysis occurred. (Scott & Morrison, 2006: 31). This process of thematic analyses was guided by Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework.

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┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐      ┌─────────────┐
│  "Become    │  →   │ "Generate   │  →   │ "Search for │
│ Familiar    │      │  into       │      │  Themes"    │
│ with the    │      │ Initial     │      │             │
│  Data"      │      │ Codes"      │      │             │
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│  "Review    │  →   │  "Define    │  →   │ "Write Up"  │
│  Themes"    │      │  Themes"    │      │             │
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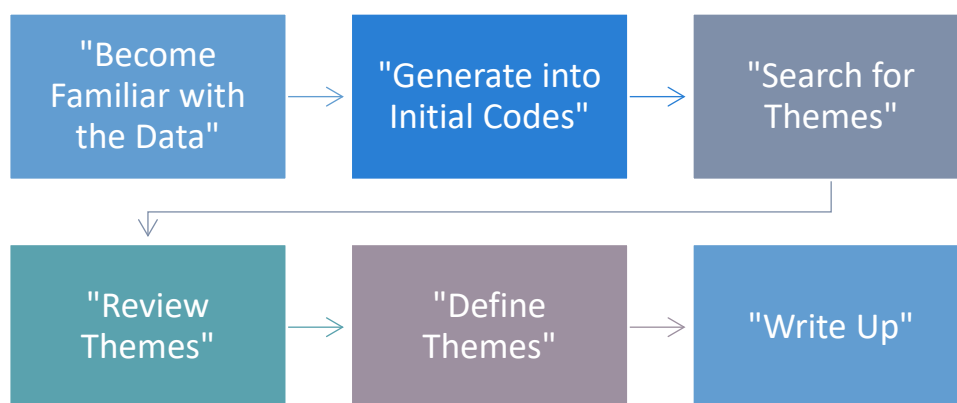
Figure 4.1: Thematic Analysis

Source: Developed by author; adapted from Bassey, 1990).

As introduced in chapter one, the three primary aims of this research included:

1. Examining how the use of narrative approaches when exploring identity with children could incite enjoyment and enthusiasm in my teaching and the students' learning and educational experience.

2. Developing three narrative interventions with emphasis on the teaching for and with identities in a specific young class group.

3. Enhancing and transforming my teaching with, for and about identities to live more closely in the direction of my values of inclusion, student voice and representation within education.

Taking these objectives into account, the data collected from the qualitative research instruments were "organised and explored for patterns, themes and regularities" (Cohen et al., 2011). As the data was analysed it was anticipated that an emerging story would unfold, revealing the findings of the research (Braun & Clarke, 2006). Thematic analysis was selected for this research project due to its flexibility and interpretive nature, consistent with the

qualitative approach. In this respect, it is excused for lacking clarity and consistency as it supports the self-study objectives of action research (Braun & Clarke, 2006).

4.1.1 Interviews with Academics and Professionals

Interviews with academics and professionals occurred from March to June 2021. These interviews occurred prior to, during and after the narrative interventions had been employed into the class. Interviews were conducted on a one-to-one basis for GDPR purposes and required interviewees to reflect on a set of questions they received five days in advance (see Appendix 3.2). These interviews were designed with the purpose of providing a context for different professional discussions to take place around the topic of child identity exploration and development.

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The data is presented through the media of quotation banks (Black, 2006). As per standard interview style, the questions posed during the interviews had a narrative running through them informed by the relevant literature. The questions were based around two ideas 'The Role of Stories and Narratives in Identity Exploration' and 'The Teacher's Role in Identity Exploration' (see Appendix 3.2). This made it possible to create quotation banks illustrating how the different interviewees spoke to the different aspects of this study but also how the different interviews evolved and spoke to each other, highlighting the patterns within the data. The profession of each interviewee were as follows:

- Child Psychologist

- Primary School Teacher

- Primary Education Officer for Educate Together Schools Ireland

- University Lecturer involved in Initial Teacher Training

- Creative Associate for Creative Schools Ireland

Each of these interviewees brought a different lens to the research, drawing on their unique knowledge and experience to address the questions. Quotations are extracted from the interview audio-transcripts (see Appendix 3.3).
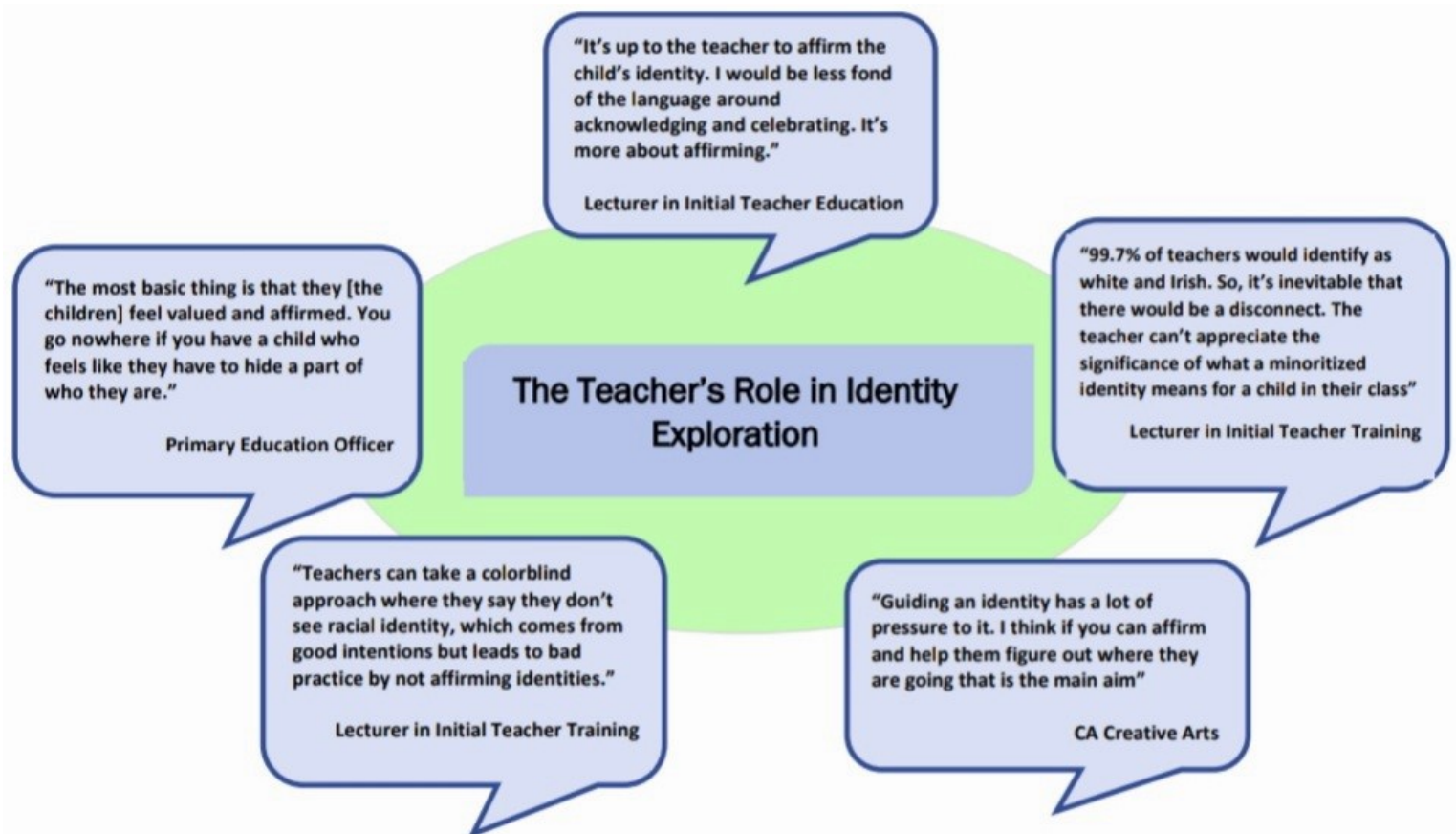
Figure 4.2: Quotations Extracted from Interviews with Academics and Professionals

As can be noted from figure 4.2 above, the five interviewees contributed in a way that spoke to their unique knowledge and expertise. The patterns which emerged from the interview transcripts were many but taking the objectives of this study into consideration the data bits were narrowed down to just three findings using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analyses method. The first emerging findings referred to the significance of identity affirmation in a classroom. Secondly, what it means to 'celebrate' identities in a school environment. Finally, the relationship between identity representation and the teacher's identity. These data bits or

themes enabled the qualitative data to be labelled, separated, compiled, and organised and is discussed further in the findings section of this chapter.

"Allowing the children to tell stories of who they are is crucial. Children identify with stories; they are the world of the child from the very start."

Child Psychologist

Classrooms can stereotype, but these stereotypes are only one part of the story. 'It's not that stereotypes are wrong, they are only one part of the story. Classes can do damage when they put forward one way of being"

Primary School Teacher

"I learned that it is not enough to represent one type of one identity in the class. If you are representing an identity, it is crucial to tell and hear more than one story."

Primary Education Officer

The Role of Narrative/Stories in Identity Exploration with Children

"Children may not have the language needed to share their story of who they are, they may have a voice inside their head saying that this is a part of themselves that the can't or shouldn't share."

Primary Education Officer

"The stories that children choose to tell about themselves is their identity. These stories must be respected, recognised and affirmed"

Primary School Teacher

"Teacher expectations is research proven. The expectations, labels and impressions teachers have of their students would have influence of the narrative of that child."

Child Psychologist

"So, I am a big fan of stories. I think the teacher has a lot of power in what stories are told or not told and what stories are given the space to be heard by others"

Primary School Teacher

Figure 4.3: The Role of Narratives/Stories in Identity Exploration with Children

As part of the research enquiry, I did not believe that focusing on the teacher's role in identity exploration alone was sufficient in obtaining the data I required to formulate intentions on how I could enhance my practice. I decided to expand the questions so that the methodology of narratives and stories in identity exploration was considered and discussed. Following thematic analysis of these questions, three consistent patterns which related to the title of this

study emerged. Firstly, the idea of power in story telling became prevalent. Strong reference to who decides when a story is told, how it is told and by whom was discussed. Secondly, labels in the school context was discussed with interviewees speaking of reputations as a form of identity labels. Finally, teacher expectations and language seemed to be a key aspect in how identity narratives are communicated within the classroom. These emerging findings are discussed in greater detail later in the chapter.
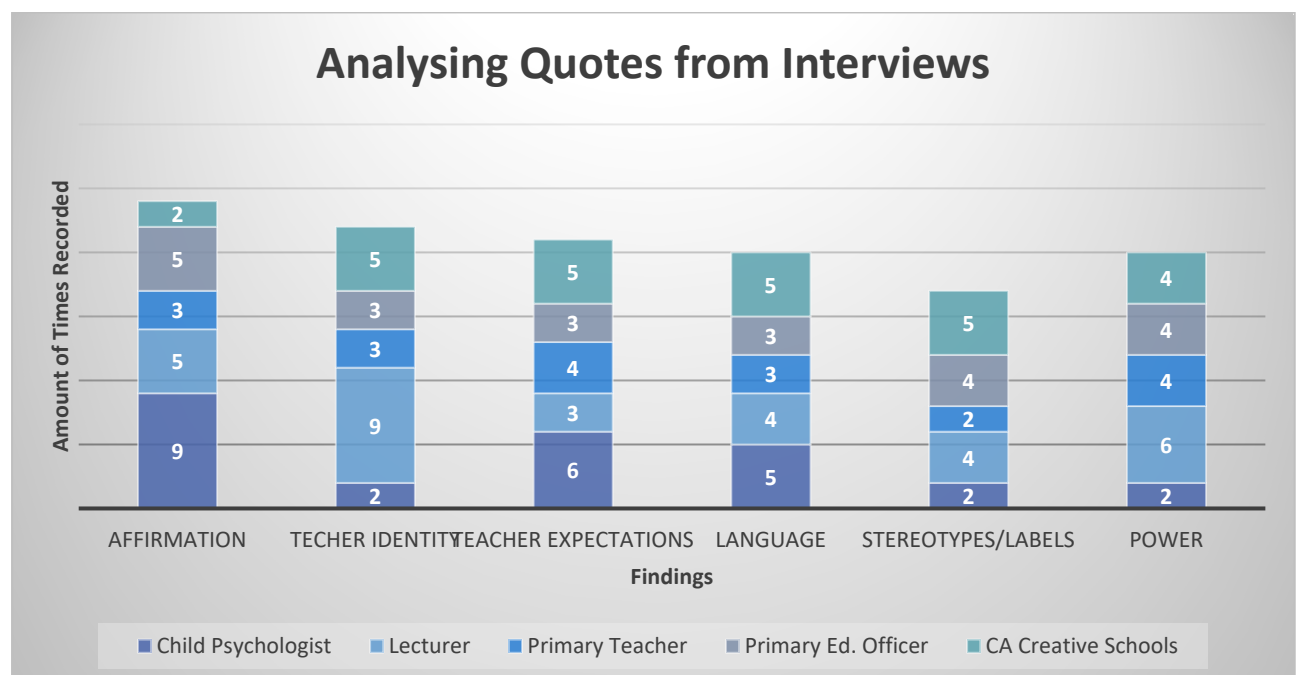
Figure 4.4: Analysing Quotes Taken from Interviews with Academics and Professionals

Extracted from the transcripts are the key concepts, phrases and terms used by the academics and professionals when answering the interview questions. It is evident from figure 4.4 above that each interviewee discussed the different themes in varying detail. Nonetheless, this graph presents the patterns which exists within the transcripts and shows how affirmation, teacher identity, teacher expectations, language, stereotypes/labels and power all relate back to 1) the teacher's role in how identity is explored with children, and 2) how narrative approaches can be used in the classroom context.

As highlighted above, these semi-structured interviews were conducted prior to, during and after the implementation of the narrative interventions. Naturally, each interview was guided by the researcher who followed lines of inquiry within the interview process. This may have in some instances guided the interviewee to discuss a mentioned theme in further detail increasing its occurrence in the transcripts. As can be seen from figure 4.4 above, reference to 'identity affirmation' was mentioned 24 times across the five interviews, 'teacher identity' was referenced 22 times, 'teacher expectations' 21 times, 'language in sharing identities' 20 times, 'stereotypes/labels' 17 times and 'power' occurring 20 times. Although not outlined above, the understanding of identity as being thought efficiently in and from a curricular perspective was challenged by the interviewees in all five interviews and coincides with my initial assumption that identity is being engaged with through the S.P.H.E. (1999) curriculum in a very reductive way.

Analysing and reflecting in depth on these quotes has provided me with a detailed insight into the approach my practice must take to enhance my practice and maximise learning opportunities in my classroom.

4.1.2 Student Perspective

Individual online interviews with nine participating students occurred post-interventions between March and May inclusive of 2021. These interviews were audio-recorded and transcribed for the purpose of coding and thematic analysis (see Appendix 3.3). Interviews included a set of child friendly questions which were used across all nine interviews and were framed through Kehily's (2004) theory of childhood identity as discussed in chapter two. This made it possible to present a matrix diagram outlining the data analysis process that took place

under the three narrative interventions i) Football – A Metaphor for Life, ii) Maps of Narrative Practice, and iii) Questioning – Dialogue – Questioning. The quotations taken from the interviews post intervention are explained below, with each intervention appearing in the centre of the diagram.

"If I was in trouble for being mean I wouldn't want them to hear about that, but if I did really great work or scored a goal I'd like them to know. That's what we were talking about and listening to people telling stories."
Participant A

"If you're used to seeing things that way, and then when you tell a story you're actually telling the story to yourself too."
Participant B

Football
A Metaphor for Life

I think sometimes stories help you learn new things, but I think that mostly stories just refresh some things that you've already thought about before but just forgot."
Participant B

"We retold our stories in a little bit different way, so people get to know you better and if you're playing and you or they don't know what to play, you can think back on that story and then they could play that."
Participant C

Figure 4.5: Student Quotes Post Intervention 'Football – A Metaphor for Life'

As illustrated in figure 4.5, the participants made references to stories throughout. That said, each quote speaks to a different way in which stories were used in the context of identity exploration. Participant A refers to stories that may give a positive or negative reputation and brings in the idea of an appreciative audience. Participant B makes two contributions, firstly identifying stories to affirm self-identity, and secondly discusses elements of the consequence of the single story (also discussed by Adichie (2009) in Chapter Two). Finally, participant C identifies ways in which stories can help share elements of a person's identity to connect and relate with others.

Participant D	Participant E
"I like how we could be somebody different. Like I told so many people about how I love horse riding since I was a toddler and didn't have to worry about reading or writing"	"It makes you think about when you were younger and how you were back then. Not that I forgeot or anything, but just revised some stories in my own mind."
"I don't worry about it really, but it gets boring doing all those things that I'm not good at. At least I seemed smart like 'X' for a change"	"I'm really happy we got to do this today, telling stories is really fun and I like getting to know everyone better too. Can we do it again tomorrow?"

Figure 4.6: Student Quotes Post Intervention 'Maps of Narrative Practice'

As can be seen from figure 4.6, both participants made interesting comments in relation to the Maps of Narrative Practice intervention. Both participants refer to issues outside the scope of this research including literacy difficulties and peer comparison. However, their contributions highlight different features of narrative and identity. Participant D talks about being someone 'different', moving away from her literacy difficulties and towards an identity that she is more comfortable in sharing. This use of narrative approaches to bring alternative stories forward compares to the No Outsider's project (2009) discussed in Chapter Two. Participant E links narratives to the 'remembering' of self. Additionally, the idea of power in identity exploration is also brought forward as Participant E looks for permission to engage again with the approach. These ideas are discussed in greater detail later in this chapter.

- **Participant F**: "It's nice sitting down and listening to people's stories. I thought it was funny listening to people and I like how you let us tell our own stories too"

- **Participant G**: "Can we please do this again!? I only got to tell one story about soccer and I really want to tell other stories too because now I'll keep being picked for soccer matches at break"

- **Participant H**: "My favourite part was listening to you tellling your stories about the farm....because I just thought you were a teacher but you're like my grandad who has animals too"

Figure 4.7: Student Quotes Post Intervention 'Questioning -Dialogue – Questioning'

As outlined in chapter three this narrative intervention was informed by two key sources. Jenny Mosley's (1996) circle time framework, as well as Hegarty's (2010) explanation of a narrative approach known as 'The Care Team'. This intervention involved the children coming together to discuss stories that have shaped who they are today. By sharing these stories and memories with one another, the participants became more aware of their dreams, values, hopes and commitments. For the participants, it was an opportunity to tell stories of who they are and highlight how identity is multi-storied and fluid. The quotes illustrated in figure 4.7 above also bring other aspects of identity to attention. Reference to power is exemplified through the children's quotes including "you let us tell our stories "And "can we please do this again?" Unexpectedly, I also noted how elements of teacher identity transpired through as participant H describes her enjoyment in getting to know my identity beyond the role of a teacher.

4.1.3 Critical Colleague

Throughout the research process my CC acted as a trusted person who asked provocative questions and provided constructive criticism at each stage of the study. My CC and I met countless of times over the past twelve months, mainly after school and discussed how the research was progressing. In accordance with safety measures some meetings were conducted by email as we maintained a safe distance by staying in our classrooms. It became evident that these regular meetings encouraged accountable for the steady progression of the self-study ARP. To demonstrate how my critical friend supported and challenged my thinking, I have included a brief conversation that took place by email after schooling following the introduction of the first narrative intervention in this paper (see Appendix 3.5).

This brief insight into the professional conversation that took place between my CC and I demonstrates how they remained an advocate for the success of the work at all times. Their constant involvement and provocative questions ensured validity and rigour as I proposed each emerging finding. The notes and reflections I have from our meetings have acted as a resourceful source of clear professional development and their involvement in the validity process is highlighted later in this chapter.

4.1.4 Reflective Journaling Over the Year

As stated by McDonagh (2016) keeping a reflective journal can enhance the reflective process and explore the importance of critical thinking.

Journal Entry 15/03/2021

> *Received email from parent today. Informed me that his daughter is enjoying the stories about themselves so much that she's started making scrapbooks at home with all the stories about herself that she wants to share in class. She even told her little brother that it's important to*

learn about who we are and how we got here. This prompts me to consider creating identity portfolios as a year-long project next September. I will follow this line of inquiry.

(Journal Entry recorded 15th March 2021)

I wanted to discuss this specific journal entry further as it was in this moment, I truly recognised the transformational power of action-research that McDonagh et al (2016) speaks so passionately about. Up to this point I worked diligently with the hope of some enhancement in my practice. Alas, the moment arrived, and I really saw how what I was doing in this study was effective and becoming a reality. This entry gave me the motivation to continue my committed efforts in using stories to explore identities in the classroom. If it were not for this email, this study may have taken an entirely different path, and I am therefore, forever grateful that I took the time to note and reflect on it for some time after. This highlights the importance and significance of keeping a teacher reflective journal. Furthermore, it begins to address one of the three aims outlined in chapter one. That is to 'enhance and transform my teaching of identity to live more closely in the direction of my values'.

4.2 Synthesising of the Findings

This chapter thus far has allowed me to clearly present and analyse the data by laying the emerging themes out in an appropriate manner. This section defines those themes further and has enabled me to compare them against the literature studied as part of this project as well as the objectives of this research. In this section, I want to bring the information extracted from the data together and outline a summary of my main findings. These findings include how the teacher's identities allow for identity representation in the classroom, teacher expectations and language demonstrate the influential power held by teachers, and finally, how identities should be affirmed in schools and not necessarily celebrated. These findings are discussed in the following sections with a particular focus on my practice, values, and teaching.

4.2.1 Finding One: Teacher's identities allow for identity representation

Founded on my engagement with the literature and my research in class, I can confidently claim that an awareness of my identities as a teacher can allow for identity representation in the classroom. As alluded to in the professional and academic interviews, I draw on a specific quote from a university lecturer in initial teacher training **"**99.7% of teachers would identify as white and Irish. It's inevitable that there's a disconnect. The teacher can't appreciate the significance of what a minoritized identity means for a child in their class". As stated by McDonagh et al (2016) Action research can often leave the researcher with more questions than what they initially had. Consequently, this finding has forced me to ask myself "As a teacher, am I aware of my multi-storied and fluid identities?" In my school setting I am the member of the majority. I have at times naively perceived my identity and experience as being shared by all and approached lessons with children from what is considered in the literature as an 'acultural' position (Billings, 2006:141). I have come to realise that this in turn has separated me from the experiences of my non-majority students. This is particularly relevant as I teach and work in an Educate Together primary school where an ethos of diversity is celebrated.

Despite my compassionate and caring approach since entering the profession, I now realise that I have not fully appreciated or understood the diverse situations that my students have come from. Only by listening to their stories of who they perceive themselves to be, have I caught a glimpse of the children I teach. This is exemplified in the quote extracted from a student interview whereby one child says, "I like how I could be myself in class by telling my stories from when I was younger". A reflective journal entry inspired by a 'CC question' prompted me to look more deeply into this as they asked, "Do you reckon some of your students may think that you don't understand or care about their situation?" This encouraged me to consider the various situations or identities my students are coming from including "ethnoculturally,

socioeconomically, geopolitically or spiritually" (Henzel, 2008: 413). In the past, I have made efforts to address the needs of all the students in my care and have realised that in doing so there have been times where I have addressed none as I continued to teach from a dominant social position.

This research has set me on a journey where I have become more aware of my own teacher identities to the point that I am comfortable in my own skin. This statement prompts me to remain mindful of the possibility of assimilating to the mainstream at the expense of my own individuality. Conclusively, as important as my teacher identities are in the process of teaching and learning, I believe that the relationships I form with my students are far more important. As long as there is diversity in society, there will be a minority, however, if I can create an authentic environment where acceptance and care is established, the diversities of identities of the children can strengthen the classroom community for the benefit of all.

4.2.2 Finding Two: Teacher expectations and language demonstrate the influential power held by educators

The first half of this chapter presented the data, allowing it to speak for itself. This section speaks more directly to the professional learning that has occurred and how my thinking has been expanded. This learning has emerged because of focused efforts to teach in accordance with my personal and professional values of inclusion, student voice and identity representation within education.

As discussed in chapter two, Adichie (2009) discusses how she found her authentic cultural voice through stories and warns of the danger of a single story. In this research I noted times when this concept occurred in the three-fold action plan. In the professional interviews a

primary school teacher commented that "classrooms can stereotype, but these stereotypes are only one part of the story". In the interviews with children post intervention one boy stated that "At least I seemed smart like (his friend) for a change". These occurrences integrated into conversations with my CC which prompted me to reflect on in my teacher-journal. What has emerged as a finding, however, is not the notable occurrences of single stories in education, but rather the power the teacher has in creating and reinforcing dominant narratives of a child. As stated by one of the professionals interviewed "I think the teacher has a lot of power in what stories are told or not told and what stories are given the space to be heard by others". The data suggests that there are two primary ways in which the teacher can unknowingly abuse this power creating labels and stereotypes in the class. i) through teacher expectations and ii) through teacher language. These two actions demonstrate the power teachers hold by deciding how the children's stories of their identities are told, who tells them, when they're told, and how many stories are shared.

4.2.2.1 Teacher Expectations

Drawing on the knowledge and experience of a child psychologist interviewed as part of this study, she proposes that **"**Teacher expectations is research proven. The expectations, labels and impressions teachers have of their students would have influence on the narrative of that child." This relates back to chapter two where I examined how teachers form expectations for student performance and tend to treat students differently depending on these expectations. The same can be said about teacher expectations and children's identities in the classroom. A quote extracted from the interviews with children demonstrated to me that her identity in class orbited around her ability in literacy "I like how we could be somebody different. Like I…. didn't have to worry about reading or writing for a change". This participant was correct. My perception of her and her performance in literacy largely took up my time in the evenings as I planned and

prepared lessons that were differentiated for her future learning. To a large extent, my commitment to her progression in literacy became a set label in my mind, and I have come to learn through this study that once set, teachers' expectations change very little, and children remain aware of these expectations. The issue with expectations in this instance is that children feel as though they need to live up to these expectations. This becomes a problem when that expectation becomes the dominant story of the child. Noted in my teacher journal I refer to the power my perceptions have had on the children's behaviour and actions in the class "I too am guilty of overestimating my high achievers and underestimating my low achievers" (Cunningham, 2020). Having examined the data of this research and engaging with the literature I have noted that when teachers treat all students as high achievers, providing them with similar academic content, similar praise, and similar feedback – students perform and live up to the expectation for their teacher. I also believe it to be a courageous disclosure of my own ignorance. My thinking has changed as I now recognise the power and influence of teacher expectations.

4.2.2.2 Teacher Language

Drawing on the data obtained from professional interviews it was made clear that the teacher plays an important role in giving students messages of respect, love, encouragement, and approval which allows them to develop a positive sense of who they are. The language the teacher uses in the classroom can allow a child to feel that they have important contributions to make. As discussed in chapter two, the Aistear framework (2009) encourages teachers to express positive messages about families, backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and language as this can help children develop pride in who they are. By analysing the data obtained from the interviews, discussing them with my CC, and reflecting on this in my teacher journal, I have learned that the language I use as a teacher can also give children the confidence to voice their

views and opinions, to make choices and to help shape and share their own identities. Through narrative interventions I was encouraged to embrace difference as the children shared their stories of who they are and not just what they are. I learned and continue to learn that the language I use both informally, and while addressing identity purposefully in the class can affirm or discourage certain identity expression from the children. This insight has helped me develop the self-awareness and skills that are needed to help children develop a stronger sense of self.

The two points illustrated here exemplify my learning as I discovered the consequence of power, as the teacher not only has the potential to tell the story of the children, but to make it the definitive story of that child through teacher expectations and language.

4.2.3 Finding Three: Identity Affirmation, not Celebration

The third and final finding emerging from the data and grounded in the literature from chapter two is the importance of affirming identities in the classroom. This resonates with my practice as I have in the past placed great significance in the celebration of identities. For instance, I would have always discussed Black History Month with my students, celebrated Pride at assembly and helped in the planning of multicultural dinners annually. What has shifted in my thinking is how in these cases the 'celebration' of identities was quite shallow. My awareness of this was heightened when a professional mentioned in our interview that "Teachers can take a colorblind approach where they say they don't see racial identity, which comes from good intentions but leads to bad practice by not affirming identities". What I thought was identity work by celebrating was in fact a practice of devaluing identities of some students while overvaluing others. As stated in an interview with a university lecturer in initial teacher education, "It's up to the teacher to affirm the child's identity. I would be less fond of the

language around acknowledging and celebrating. It's more about affirming". This echoes the message of another professional, the Primary Education Officer for Educate Together Ireland who stated, "The most basic thing is that they [the children] feel valued and affirmed". This tells me that if I am to be an effective teacher, particularly in relation to identity work with children of all backgrounds, I need to be respecting and affirming who they are.

I am only beginning to understand that to become more focused on affirming identities as opposed to celebrating them is to undergo a profound shift in my beliefs and attitudes to teach more in line with my values around diversity and inclusion. Additionally, and this coincides with my first finding, the importance of relationships between student and teacher are important when affirming identities. Challenges may arise when the teacher (coming from the majority identity) finds it difficult to relate to a student (coming from a minority identity). The teacher is bound to have difficulty affirming identities when they have little understanding of the students' families and communities. I have learned that narrative interventions to explore the identities of children in a diverse class is one way to increase the identity affirmation of non-mainstream children and to become more informed of the students who sit in front of me. I reason that the narrative interventions employed over the course of this study have enabled me to build positive relationships with my students and in doing so established an identity safe environment.

4.3 Challenges

In this segment, I intend on outlining the various challenges I encountered while conducting this ARP. There has been numerous positives and untiring encouragement and engagement from various parties including my colleagues, supervisor, my critical friend and the

participants; the children and professionals. Without their ongoing support and invaluable contributions, it would have been impossible to overcome the challenges.

4.3.1 School Closure

The unanticipated closure of schools and suspension of research commencement was the greatest challenge this research had to overcome. Due to the global pandemic incited by the virus Covid-19, the Taoiseach of Ireland alongside the Department of Education made the executive decision to close all schools with a shift to online learning from January to February 2021. As the narrative interventions focused on the topic of identities, I made the decision to postpone the intervention until in-person learning resumed. Fortunately, I was able to progress with the interviews with academics and professionals online. This ensured progression of the research as I waited in anticipation for the reopening of schools.

As specified in Chapter Three, I understood the nature of action research and how it was not a linear process. At no stage of the research was I attempting to produce a victory narrative and was reassured by my supervisor that this was all part of the learning process. The programme leader was open in her communication with us as I adhered to the guidelines set out by Maynooth University.

Despite being a barrier to the research intervention, I do reason that the closure of schools only assisted me in deepening my reflections in relation to my values and transforming my practice. This experience enabled me to rely more on the data generated from self-evaluations, and self-reflections despite the late introduction of the research intervention. This, in my opinion, encapsulates the true nature of what a self-study approach entails.

4.3.2 Vulnerable Group

Working with participants considered to be a 'vulnerable group' posed various challenges while collecting data. Firstly, due to the age and ability of the participants with whom I was working with, I was limited in my data collection methods as the children were only emerging as independent readers and writers. To overcome this barrier, and at the same time to ensure I collected valid data essential to the process of this research, I decided to conduct one-to-one interviews post intervention online after school hours. Naturally, this demanded a great deal of time, but as mentioned above, this not only allowed me to gather the data needed, but also gave the participants a better understanding of what the research was about. This in turn informed and enhanced my teaching and practice.

4.3.3 Measurable Data

Over the course of the data collection phase, I worried that I would fail in conveying how the children engaged successfully with the narrative interventions. It was obvious to me that the class's engagement in class had increased, however I was concerned that I was not collecting enough quantitative data. This challenge prompted me to reflect once again on the purpose of this journey; was my intention to effectively measure the children's engagement levels with narrative approaches to identity? Or was it to allow me to enhance my teaching when working on the concept of identity with children? The focus had to remain primarily on myself and my practice and reminded myself that the children were the research participants acting as co-researchers in the process. It reminded me that the data I was collecting was not being used to measure their level of engagement or learning, but to allow me to reflect on my teaching and how I could expand my thinking. Conclusively I focused more on my reflective journal to collect data rather than on quantitative, measurable information.

4.4 Conclusion

In conclusion, this chapter reviewed and analysed the themes of affirmation, labels, power, teacher identity, expectations and language, and identity celebration as emerging from the interviews with students, professionals, academic, journaling, lesson evaluations and CC conversations. These themes enabled me to formulate findings which satisfied my three key questions set out at the beginning of the chapter and is discussed in more detail in the following chapter – Chapter Five, Conclusion. That said, the biggest finding, and perhaps the most important, was the personal and professional development this journey took me on.

Chapter Five – Conclusion and Recommendations

5.0 Introduction

This final chapter concludes with a concise summary of the main findings that emerged from this self-study project entitled 'Teaching with and through Stories: Exploring Identities with Children using Narrative Approaches.' Within this chapter an overview of the findings is provided with attention drawn to my evolving values, and personal and professional development. Recommendations for my future practice is provided as well as the implications of this study within the field of education.

5.1 Summary of Main Findings

Chapter Four, data analyses presented, analysed and critiqued the emerging findings obtained from the qualitative data sources. This following section reviews the findings and establishes how they relate to my future practice and praxis. A discussion on how these findings will have an impactful impression on my practice, values and teaching is presented and how they ultimately affect my identity as a teacher.

This ARP outlined three main questions;

- How can I develop a greater awareness of my teaching practice so that it is more inclusive of the children's experiences and insights?

- How can I become more aware of the influencing actions I have as a teacher on children's identities?

- How can I enhance my teaching and explain these improvements to contribute to the ethos of an educate together school?

In the true nature of action research, these three questions embody the 'I' as this research set out to improve and enhance my practice as I aimed to live more in line with my values of inclusion, student voice and identity representation within education. If this study was replicated, serious adaptations and flexibility would be required in another classroom. The study reflects where I was in my teaching journey, where the children were with their learning and reflects an environment in a post-pandemic society.

5.1.1 Finding One: Teacher's identities allow for identity representation in class

After analysing my findings and considering the literature studied, I can confidently claim that by using narrative approaches to explore identity with primary school children, the S.P.H.E. (1999) content objectives could be the basis for improving or challenging the reductive approach to teaching identity.

In this study I reflected on how, as a teacher I often teach from my personal knowledge, experiences, and understandings. In this sense, my teacher identities were the foundation for lesson plans, learning activities, resources utilised and as a result encouraged my students to express certain behaviours, attitudes and responses that ultimately impacted their classroom learning and identities. While in the past this has notably been the cause for some of my most successful and enjoyable lessons, this study forced me to consider the consequences of teaching from such a disposition. Through critical reflection I have learned what it means to teach from a dominant social position. This idea is imbedded in an understanding of how identity development for children can work in a classroom environment as their identities are not only represented in the posters, stories, toys and images of the school, but also in the teacher that stands before them. By developing an awareness of my own teacher identities, by not adhering to the conventional and outdated teacher image and staying true to my values and experiences,

I allow for the exposure of more identities and representations in the class and in doing so, enhancing the teaching of identities from the S.P.H.E. (1999) curriculum. This awareness of teacher identity creates a more comfortable classroom environment and allows the children to learn not just who they are as a learner, but who they are as growing, thinking, and critical citizens.

Having reflected on the work of Adichie (2009) and the No Outsiders Project (2009), and considering the information extracted from the data, I believe it consolidates my claim that the teacher's identities allow for identity representation within the classroom. This primarily addresses my first question of "how can I develop a greater awareness of my teaching practice so that it is more inclusive of the children's experiences and insights?" An awareness of my identity as I step into the role of a teacher increases the children's chances in identifying and recognising themselves in the curriculum and classroom context.

5.1.2 Finding Two: Teacher expectations and language demonstrate the influential power held by educators

The second question addressed in the introduction of this paper was "how can I become more aware of the influencing actions I have as a teacher on children's identities? I have no doubt that this question is at the forefront of many teachers' practices, but what did this mean for my practice? From observations in class, and analysis of the data generated I have found that (my) teacher expectations and the language used by (me) the teacher can demonstrate the power held by teachers when learning about identities in class. I have found these two key elements to be crucial in establishing an identity safe environment where the children feel comfortable using narrative approaches to learn about their identities.

5.1.2.1 Teacher Expectations

Over the course of this study the impact of teacher expectations in shaping childhood behaviour and identities was clarified. Expectations from the teacher can affect student's motivation, attitude, self-confidence and as a result personality development (Gundogdu, 2007:264).

The previous chapter saw the thematic analysis of the student and professional interviews, which indicate that teacher expectations is a noteworthy factor when exploring the concept of identities with students. However, the professional and students talk about expectations in two very different ways. The professionals seeing teacher expectations in a similar way as described by Kehily (2004), to create labels and stereotypes in childhood identity development. As stated by a child psychology "Teacher expectations is research proven, the expectations, labels and impressions teacher have of their students would have influence on the narrative of that child." This coincides with a primary school teacher's view who stated that "classrooms can stereotype" and in doing so, influence the personality and identity development of that child.

The students, however, speak to teacher expectations as something that is desired to live up to "it's when you know you need to try better because your teacher says you can, so then you just try" (Student Participant B) and further reinforced by another comment recorded in my teacher journal during an observation "we need to work harder on this because teacher thinks we are smart so we need to get this done quickly." While teacher expectations were both spoken about in different ways in the student and professional interviews, the conclusion that teacher expectation highlights the on-going 'power' held by teachers in the classroom is undeniable.

I outlined in Chapter Three how the narrative approaches orbited around dialogue and discussion. The narrative intervention 'Questioning – Dialogue -Questioning' was informed by

Jenny Mosley's (1996) circle time framework. This was key in achieving an environment where both teacher and students' voices met at an equal level. Teacher expectations, while impossible to erase altogether, were reduced as the students led the lesson and activities. With all students willing to participate in the narrative intervention, I found the experience to be highly encouraging, highlighting to me that as their teacher I was doing something right.

5.1.2.2 Language

From analysing the data from the student and professional interviews, examining it against my observations and evaluations, and reflecting on this with my CC, I found that the teacher's everyday language plays an important role in how the students view themselves and speak about the different facets of their identity. This further highlights to me the importance of giving students messages of respect, love, encouragement, and approval which allows them to develop a positive sense of who they are. The language we choose to use about children can make a child feel that they have important contributions to make. As discussed in Chapter Two, the Aistear framework (2009) encourages teachers to express positive messages about families, backgrounds, cultures, beliefs, and language as this can help children develop pride in who they are. I found that the children were excited when they learned that we were starting another identity lesson and often asked when the next lesson would be "Can we please do this again!?" and "I like how you let us tell our own stories too." These statements are evidence and further reinforce of the power held by teachers as the children ask for permission to share who they are. It highlights how schools and classrooms can become an identity regulated environment with the potential to encourage or discourage certain identities form children. I believe that the language I use both informally, and while addressing identity purposefully in the class can influence children and how they speak about and share their identities. It can make them more aware of their own values and what aspects of their identities they want to learn more about.

This insight has helped me develop the self-awareness and skills that are needed to help children develop a stronger sense of self.

The two points illustrated here exemplify my learning as I discovered the consequence of power, as the teacher not only has the potential to tell the story of the children, but to make it the definitive story of that child which relates back to the work of Henriques (1984) and Butler (1990) and their concept of multiplicity of selves.

5.1.3 Finding Three: Identity Affirmation, not Celebration

My final question, "how can I enhance my teaching and explain these improvements in order to contribute to the ethos of an educate together school?" This was a difficult to address as there were two components I was seeking to answer. The first which focuses on my individual practice, and the second in the larger context of the school. Based on my analysis of the data I concluded that identity exploration with children should be about affirmation, and not necessarily celebration. This resonates with my practice as I have in the past placed great significance in the celebration of identities. What has shifted in my thinking is how 'celebration' is quite shallow. What I thought was identity work by celebrating was in fact a practice of devaluing identities of some students while overvaluing others. This tells me that if I am to be an effective teacher, particularly in relation to identity work with children of all backgrounds, I need to be respecting and affirming who they are and not just celebrating a specific identity.

I have learned that by using narrative interventions to explore the identities with children in a diverse class is one way to increase identity affirmation of non-mainstream children. I reason that the narrative interventions employed over the course of this study have enabled me to build

positive relationships with my students and in doing so established an identity safe environment. This is in line with the educate together ethos and Learn Together Curriculum (2004) and has allowed me to contribute to the school's learning environment by introducing narrative interventions as a recognized methodology to teaching in my school.

5.1.4 Conclusion

In summary, the main findings of this study allowed me to formulate answers to my three main questions I set out to answer at the start of the academic year. That said, the most significant finding was the personal and professional development that occurred over the course of this journey which I will now discuss.

5.2 Evolving Values and Personal and Professional Development

In this segment, I wish to reflect entirely on me, my values and my practice and analyse and reflect upon the changes and evolving thoughts and opinions I have had since starting this research journey in August 2020. I draw upon my original value statement that I composed at the start of the academic year and the reflections that have contributed to this change.

5.2.1 Values

McNiff (2010) states that we all live our lives according to the values we hold. As our personal and professional values develop and change, so does our actions, thinking and decisions throughout our lives. Prior to the self-study ARP, I never saw the need to confront or analyse the values I held. As an induction into action research, I was forced to interrogate my values. I learned quite quickly that all I was required to do was reflect honestly and critically on my own practice as the "everyday choices we make when planning lessons, in relation to teaching

strategies, resources, assessment tools, all draw on our assumptions and values" (Sullivan et al, 2016: 17).

Stated in my original values statement I noted how I valued inclusion, student voice, and representation of identity within education and society. Fast forward to today and that is indisputably still the case, alongside a few additional values that have subtly emerged. I also observed my practice as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 1989). This caused me to outline the areas in which I noted my values were being contradicted by my actions in class. The following sections reflect on whether I have noted an enhancement or transformation in my teaching practice and whether "I am living more fully in the directions of my values" (McNiff, 2010: 12).

I recorded in my values statement (August 2020) that "I realise that my values are being denied in my practice when I….

> *concentrate on the demands of the curriculum and timing of each subject. My values get clouded by the policies and the forms of assessment as I attempt to adhere to the various programmes being implemented.*

(Cunningham, 2020)

I am proud to state that I have not used any of the programmes, such as weaving wellbeing or walk tall as an individual source of ideas since beginning this research study. I have noted the various programmes value as a resource to be drawn upon, but no longer recognise them as programmes to be implemented without critique. Undoubtably, these optional programmes are certainly a convenient alternative, however, I am committed now more than ever to ensure my practice tends to my students and how they learn about their identities in a way that is inclusive, puts their voice at the centre and ensures identities are represented and affirmed.

I recorded in my Values Statement (2020) "*that I realise my values are being denied when I:*"

- Employ teaching methods that don't attend to the specific objectives. Since early 2021 I have noted a transformation in how I approach the primary S.P.H.E. (1999) curriculum, particularly in relation to my choice of teaching methodology. I was not satisfied in how I was encouraging children to explore the concept of identities beforehand. I knew something needed to change. The knowledge obtained from Chapter Two, accompanied with the qualitative data all contributed and facilitated the adoption of new approaches into my teaching. I am satisfied with how these narrative approaches have given me a completely new way of engaging my students with identity.

- Introduce topics at a reductive level and don't take time to reflect on how I could enhance the lesson. This study has afforded me the opportunity to critically reflect on myself and my practice and has provided me with the skills to improve my reflection and meta-reflective abilities.

- Conform to a system for convenience. After dedicating a significant amount of time to address how I can approach identity exploration with children has indisputably forced me to take a leap outside of my comfort zone. Narrative approaches were previously unheard of at our staff meetings and were not being employed in the school setting. Following a series of professional conversations with fellow staff, and anticipation to begin the new year using narrative interventions to welcome my new class, I have introduced a new way of teaching to the school and shared my professional learning with others. Finally, completing this master's degree, meeting like-minded people, and engaging with various research are ways in which I have stepped outside my comfort zone with the interest of developing my professional practice.

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5.2.2 Evolving Teacher Identity

According to Palmer (1997) we teach with and from whom we are. For this research this meant, to teach and explore identities with the children I had to remain aware that I was teaching, at least in part of who I am. Palmer (1997) continues to state that educators must know oneself as an individual to understand how they teach and what they teach. He reasons that an effective educator is not defined by what content they teach, but of who they are and the personal elements of their personality that they bring into the classroom. In his work Palmer (1997) reasons that a "good teacher joins self, subject, and students in the fabric of life because they teach from an integral and undivided self; they manifest in their own lives, and evoke in their students, a capacity for connectedness." (Palmer, 1997: 3). My appreciation for Palmer's (1997) work is on-going. Through a process of meta-reflection on journal entries, it is evident of my apprehension to try something new in my teaching due to the lack of self-belief and fear of being judged as a Newly Qualified Teacher. I have acknowledged and am proud of myself for undertaking this study and enhancing the way I teach, as I am ultimately the only one who has the power to do this. My confidence has developed, and I am much more reassured of my abilities in teaching abstract concepts with children. I embraced the challenge to educate myself on the most effective way to teach and explore identities with children and I believe I am a better teacher for it.

5.3 Future Practice and Recommendations

This section outlines my intentions for future practice and the areas of my self-study I wish to continue to employ in my class in the many years ahead. Recommendations are proposed and critically reflected upon. I also review the breakdown of my research and how I intend to prompt others to adopt a similar approach to the teaching and exploration of identities with children.

5.3.1 Future Practice

Despite this research journey coming to an end, I am certain that my involvement with action research as an approach to professional learning and development has only just begun. To revert to my original approach to teaching identity would not only go against my values but would also be highly hypocritical of the ARP. At this stage of my development, I must remind myself of my responsibility to myself and my students to use my new knowledge and all I have learned on this journey and bring it to the classroom next year to teach high quality identity lessons with and through narrative approaches.

After taking the time to reflect critically on all aspects of my ARP, the following paragraphs outline the elements I intend on adopting into my teaching practice.

- Teacher Observations: Throughout the school day I am intuitively observing the students in my class. How they respond to planned activities, interact with one another, how they problem solve, and how engaged they are. This ARP has encouraged me to formally note and record these observations and date them. I was unaware of the benefit of this prior to my research journey. I have learned so much from individual children and how they learn based solely on fleeting moments of observation. Through a process of analysis, I noted patterns and trends emerging in my notes. These undoubtably allowed me to understand my students as individuals a lot more and reflected the nature of what this study was examining. Conclusively, I have no doubt that ongoing teacher observation followed by note taking will become an everyday classroom practice in my room.

- Reflective Journaling: Journals always seemed unnecessarily to me. Time consuming and irrelevant are two terms that came to mind when deciding to use them in this study. The idea of anything that was worth writing down would be too important to forget was

my attitude. However, throughout this study I was encouraged to keep a reflective journal to capture my thoughts and general ideas I had throughout the day. I can admit that as I wrote my observations out, I failed to see how the practice could reap any true benefits for me. It was a reflective module on this course that allowed me to engage with a form of meta reflection that I began to understand the benefits of reflection. It was the shift in perspective and thought process that was perhaps one of the most valuable and richest sources of data I retrieved as I noted the transformation I was going through. I learned a great deal about myself as a professional and how to constructively critique areas of my practice based entirely on meta-reflection. I have no doubt in my mind that this is a practice I will take forward with me.

- Finally, the adaption of narrative approaches to learning will become a primary teaching methodology as I set out to become a more inclusive teacher that places the voice of the child at the centre of their learning. As highlighted in previous chapters, narrative interventions require adaptation and flexibility depending on the students in front of me. I remain aware that what worked for this class this year may not work for my class next year. Informed by the literature in Chapter Two, the complexity of identity increases the older the individual, insinuating the value of narrative approaches in the senior end. Introducing narrative approaches as a method with my class this September will be one of my main priorities and I remain hopeful of the positive effects the intervention may potentially have on their learning.

5.3.2 Recommendations

Despite feeling successful in the implementation of narrative approaches to explore the concept of identity with the children, I reason that there is always room for enhancement. This was an unprecedented year with the shift to online learning and the expectation for curricular

objectives to be met every step of the way. Not everything went to plan while conducting my research, but it was never my intention to create a victory narrative. My intention was to share and tell my action research story. Arising from my conclusive findings outlined above, the next section includes comprehensive recommendations for myself and fellow professionals.

- Choice of narrative intervention: As stated in previous chapters, the three narrative interventions employed in this research are only three of thousands of approaches. This study has demonstrated to me the importance of selecting age appropriate and suitable narrative approaches which address a specific area of identity. The three selected for this study focused on the idea of multiple identities and how they are fluid in nature. However, if I were to examine identity in the context of self-care and self-awareness I would opt more for 'The Care Team' approach.

- The needs of my students: As stated by Heacox (2002) the one size does not fit all, and that has been clear throughout this research and in relation to a teacher's approach to teaching identities from the S.P.H.E. (1999) curriculum context. What may work for one class, may not work for another. The research focused on identity exploration with students using narrative approaches. To do so, however, I reason the same interventions can be used to teach many other topics across many other subjects. I therefor propose that the needs of the students should remain the focus.

- The importance of informally affirming identities throughout the school day. An unpredicted finding of this study was the importance of affirming identities. Despite my research being based primarily on exploring identities in the classroom, this finding has encouraged me to consider ways in which I can affirm identities informally and without addressing it directly in the future.

5.3.3 Dissemination of my Research

I reason that the submission of this thesis is only the beginning of my action research journey. In matter of fact, the way I progress from this moment onwards will be a clear indication of how transformative this self-study has been. By putting myself at the centre of this study I am left with thechoices of how I progress forward. My first plan of action is to share my findings, thoughts, and ideas with others. After spending the past few months examining the research of others, I now see why academic research deserves to be shared with the world. I value this research enough to recognise its potential contribution to the educational field. Brookfield (2017) stated that through dialogue with others, multiple perspectives and opinions can be offered which in turn can help us unearth and check our assumptions regularly. By discussing my research with others, I may obtain additional feedback, information, and recommendations that I may have alternatively overlooked. I am committed and passionate about how identity is being delivered and explored with children in primary schools and therefore am excited to share my research on an educational forum with the hope that it could inspire others to consider their approach to teaching identity effectively. I also believe that "the communication of your research through a public forum can secure the endorsement of your ideas by others and thus has the potential to add considerably to the significance of the research" (Sullivan et al, 2016: 127).

Using narrative interventions to facilitate identity exploration was my primary research question, however, as patterns and findings emerged, I found myself in a web of questions such as "why should I be affirming identities and not necessarily celebrating them?" and "What are the consequences of teaching from an acultural perspective?" These would be potential areas for further study and investigation which would be of great interest to me.

5.4 Overall Conclusion

Firstly, after analysing the data and reflecting on the findings I reason that I did enhance my teaching of identities using narrative interventions. The transformation emerged because of ongoing critical reflection on myself and my practice alongside my primary objectives being achieved. One of my main objectives this year was to "enhance and transform my teaching of identities in order to live more closely in the direction of my values." I can say with confidence that I am now living more in line with these values by working diligently to create safe and engaging identity environments. This ultimately reflects my values of inclusion, the voice of the child and the importance of representation within education.

Secondly, I intended on implementing narrative interventions with a focus on the teaching for, with, and about identities catered for the students in my care. As outlined above, I believe that there is a constant need for enhancement and room for improvement. I am satisfied overall with how I engaged the children with narratives and how the research unfolded. I am excited by the potential of including this approach into my teaching next year and reflecting on its effect. Through action research I have realised that there is a myriad of ways to explore identities with children, and there is certainly a gap in knowledge with what is available in the educational field. This research has sparked an interest in me, to perhaps one day design a programme that focuses on the process of identity exploration as opposed to the product of a direct lesson.

Finally, my main objective was to identify "how I can develop a greater awareness of my teaching practice so that it is more inclusive of the children's experiences?" I can state with confidence that I am more content in my teaching and the children's engagement with identities using narrative interventions. I believe that this is the case as each intervention was designed

to reflect the needs and abilities of my class and students, designed and created by me, their teacher, and an approach I advocated for.

In one of my concluding journal entries, I noted

> *The children's engagement has increased with more personal and specific questions being asked. I admit I'm tired and feel like I've reached a benchmark, but it's certainly more motivating to teach this way than previously. There's a sense of eagerness and enthusiasm in the class as we discuss various aspects of our identities and the conversations the children have shared with each other has brought a smile to my face.*
> (Cunningham, 2021).

I reason that this entry demonstrates the objectives of this project and the various aspects of my professional practice I was attempting to enhance. Despite the submission of this thesis being the ending of this study, I am remaining optimistic that I will continue to learn, transform, and reflect on my continuous professional development. I am more aware of my influence, my thought processes and my practice and am certain I will carry this learning forward into my practice next year and beyond. With this sentence my thesis has come to an end, however, my story has not finished as "this book is an unfolding story. We authors are in the process of learning about learning communities and action research, and learning through them" (Glenn et al, 2017: 1).

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Appendix 1: Sample Consent Forms and Letters

Appendix 1.1: Copy of Parents' Consent Letter

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s).

Purpose of the Study. I am Thomas (Tommy) Cunningham, a master's student, in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for Master of Education (Research in Practice) I am undertaking a research study` under the supervision of Dr. David Gibson (David.gibson@mu.ie)

The study is entitled 'The Exploration of Identity with Children through Narrative Practices'. The study involves interviews with educational professionals from outside the school and evaluation and analysis of my teaching on identity.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve exploring the concept of identity with children through stories. Through three different approaches, the children will learn more about the theme of identity as per the SPHE and Educate Together Ethical Curriculum, Learn Together. All students will be taking part in these classroom activities.

Following each approach in class, a series of individual interviews will be organised with assenting children, once parental/guardian consent has been given. The research interviews with the children will not interfere or disrupt the school timetable and so must take place on zoom after 02.10 pm. Each individual interview will last approximately twenty minutes with two adults present at all times. These interviews will be audio-recorded for the purpose of data collection.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it. The research has also been approved by the Board of Management and Principal.

Why have you been asked to take part? You have been asked because the students in 2nd class are specifically suitable to the exploration of identity through narrative interventions as part of their S.P.H.E. and Learn Together education as outlined in the relevant curricula. As parents you have the right to give consent, before your child aged 7/8/9 partakes in this teacher self-study action research project.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation whatsoever to have your child take part in this research. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and be given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with the classroom teacher, Kildare Town Educate Together National School, or The National University of Maynooth. You are free to withdraw at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are submitted in my thesis in September 2021.

What information will be collected?

The individual interview discussions will provide a space for students to discuss the lesson on identity. Individual interviews will be audio recorded. The information collected here will examine how children respond to a space where identity has been engaged with through a narrative lens. These audio recording will be transcribed one week after the focus group and the audio recordings then deleted.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?

Yes, all information that is collected from your child during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the school, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by myself (Thomas Cunningham). Although the name of the school will not be included in the dissertation or research, anyone familiar with me will be able to identify the school I work in. As such the location of the research will be identifiable albeit not directly identified.

'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which your child gives?

Throughout the research process, data will be stored with secure protocols in place. All data recorded and stored on MU one drive will be secured by a password protected password. Once the research is complete, all information will be stored at Maynooth University. This information will be stored in such a way that it will not be possible to identify participants or the research setting. Anonymous data sets will be kept for 10 years. All data will be destroyed by the PI. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be deleted by the researcher in Maynooth University.

Furthermore, anonymous data and information from this research may possibly be used in the future for presentations on this topic, future papers, or a research presentation in educational conferences.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a masters degree thesis. Additionally, anonymous data and information from this research may possibly be used in the future for presentations on this topic, future papers, or a research presentation in educational conferences.

A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What if there is a problem?

There are two forms of processes to minimise risk and the experience of vulnerability for children:

i) In advance of research, communication with Principal/Board, Parents and Children will set out clearly what is involved in the research, the risks associated with the research, etc.
The research intervention with children is a basic reflection on the process of engaging with identity through narrative. It is not considered to generate any risk or discomfort.

ii) In the midst of research: Children will be permitted to pause, skip questions or stop the individual interviews at any time. In the event that children experience discomfort or upset, the interview will be paused, and all children given the opportunity to stop.
In the event that there are any disclosures, the researcher will follow Children's First, all relevant legislation and school policies.

Due consideration will have to be taken of the NPHET guidelines as well as directions from the Dept. of Education.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: thomas.cunningham.2016@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.

Thank you for taking the time to read this

Appendix 1.2 Copy of Parents' Consent Form

Consent Form

I………………………………….agree for my child to participate in Thomas (Tommy) Cunningham's research study titled 'Using Narrative Practices to Explore Identity with Children'

Please tick each statement below:

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me). ☐

I understand the information provided ☐

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study via email. ☐

I have received satisfactory answers to all the questions I have asked. ☐

It has been explained to me how my child's data will be managed and that I may access it on request ☐

I give permission for my child's interview contribution with Tommy to be audio recorded. ☐

I understand that I can withdraw my child from the study, without repercussions, at any time, whether that is before it starts or while my child is participating right up to September 2021. ☐

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet ☐

I understand that my child's data, in an anonymous format, may be used in further research projects and any subsequent publications if I give permission. ☐

I agree to anonymized quotation/publication of extracts from my child's interview ☐

I do not agree to quotation/publication of extracts from my interview ☐

Signed………………………………….	Date……………….

Participant Name in block capitals ……………………………………………...

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed………………………………….	Date……………….

Researcher Name in block capitals ……………………………………………...

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given

have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Appendix 1.3 Parental Guardian Consent Form with Child Assent

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

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

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Parent / Guardian Signature_____
Date: _____

Name of Child _____

Child's signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 1.4 Copy of Childs' Consent Letter

Hello,

I am trying to find out how children learn about who they are by telling stories in primary schools. I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch you and listen to you when you are in school and to write down some notes about you.

Research – helps us to find out new information and Examine new ideas. I am doing research in Maynooth University to examine how important storytelling is for our identity.

I am looking for some of you to take part in a short discussion after school on a zoom call to talk about some of your school lessons.

I will record you talking about the lesson on a recording device and afterwards I will examine what you have to say.

If you do not feel comfortable taking part, you can stop immediately. If you don't want to answer any questions, that is okay. If you want to pause the discussion at any time, that is okay.

I will write about the discussions in my project but I will never use your name.

I will keep all of the information in a safe place and no one else will be able to see what you've said.

I will keep the private information until February 2022 and will delete it then. After that I will keep information that contains no names or information about you.

Would you be ok with that? **Circle** a box

Yes   No

I have asked your Mum, Dad or Guardian to talk to you about this. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

If you are happy with that could you sign the form that I have sent home?

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

Appendix 1.5: Copy of Childs' Consent Form

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Child's assent to participate

I have had this research explained to me.	
I have been able to ask questions and have them answered.	I would be happy to talk to another person if I have any big concerns.
I understand what is expected of me.	I am happy to have the meeting tape recorded
I can stop being involved at any stage of this project	I agree to take part in this project.

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

Name of child (in block capitals):

_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix 1.5 Request of Consent of School Principal and Board of Management

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

Information Sheet – Plain Language Document
for Principal and Board of Management

Purpose of the Study.

I am Thomas (Tommy) Cunningham, a masters student in the Froebel Department in Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for Master of Education (Research in Practice) degree, I am undertaking a research study` under the supervision of Dr. David Gibson (David.gibson@mu.ie)

The aim of this study is to examine the importance of identity in the primary school classroom. I will
carry out interviews with Educational Professionals from the NCCA, Teaching Council, NEPS and a University lecturer about the importance of identity in education. I also wish to carry out research on my own practice in teaching about identity through narrative. I aim to introduce students to identity through three narrative lenses. The aim of the classroom research is to examine children's experience of these narrative approaches as it relates to identity.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve the introduction of three narrative interventions into S.P.H.E. and Learn Together curricular lessons on identity. Each cycle will consist of a different narrative intervention to explore identity (Maps of Narrative Practice, Questioning -Dialogue - Questioning, and Football – A Metaphor for Life). Following each intervention, individual interviews will occur with assenting children from the class over zoom. A zoom meeting will be scheduled with a password to enter as well as participants using their forename as their screen name. This will only take place with parental/guardian permission. The individual interview conversations will be audio recorded and transcribed and subsequently analysed.

This study will also involve a colleague acting as a critical friend. Their role will be to observe lessons, listen, and provide honest feedback. Their involvement will also involve one arranged interview with this consenting critical colleague. A prescribed list of interview questions will be provided in advance of this interview. Their engagement as a critical colleague will provide triangulation within the research.

Finally, the study will also involve arranged interviews with consenting academics outside of the school. A prescribed list of interview questions will be provided in advance of the interview also.

Who has approved this study? This study has been reviewed and received ethical approval from Maynooth University Research Ethics committee. You may have a copy of this approval if you request it.

Why have you been asked to take part?
Permission to carry out the research must be sought with the Board of Management and Principal. As I am seeking permission to carry out individual interviews with students of the school permission is required.

Guidance is also being sought about the appropriate form of communication to parents and children about this proposed research. Are you happy for me to write directly to parents about the research or should the request to participate be communicated through another means?

Guidance is also being sought as to whether the Principal and Board are happy for a colleague to act as a critical friend for the purpose of this research.

Do you have to grant permission?
For research to be carried out with students and/or on school property, the permission of the Board and Principal is required. It is up to the Board and Principal to decide whether or not this research should take place. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form and given a copy and the information sheet for your own records. If you decide to grant permission, this can be withdrawn at any time without giving a reason and/or to withdraw your information up until such time as the research findings are. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationships with me as a staff member.

What information will be collected?
Students (children)
Three series of individual zoom discussions with students are planned for after an in-class narrative interventions exploring identity. The information collected here will examine how children respond to a space where identity has been engaged with through a narrative lens. The children will be audio recorded.
Colleague (adult)
Arranged interviews with a colleague will provide a view of identity and the curriculum to see if they are having the same concerns as I am and what are their thoughts on identity and curriculum. The interview will be recorded.

Will your participation in the study be kept confidential?
Yes, all information that is collected about participants during the course of the research will be kept confidential. No names will be identified at any time. All hard copy information will be held in a locked cabinet at the researchers' place of work, electronic information will be encrypted and held securely on MU PC or servers and will be accessed only by the researcher and supervisor.
No information will be distributed to any other unauthorised individual or third party.
'It must be recognised that, in some circumstances, confidentiality of research data and records may be overridden by courts in the event of litigation or in the course of investigation

by lawful authority. In such circumstances the University will take all reasonable steps within law to ensure that confidentiality is maintained to the greatest possible extent.'

What will happen to the information which you give?
Throughout the research process, data will be stored with secure protocols in place. All data recorded and stored on MU one drive will be secured by a password protected password. Once the research is complete, all information will be stored at Maynooth University. This information will be stored in such a way that it will not be possible to identify participants or the research setting. The data will be retained on the MU server. Recordings of students will be deleted after 1 week, transcripts with personal data and identifying information will be kept securely and deleted on completion of the masters. Anonymous data sets will be kept for 10 years. All data will be destroyed by the PI. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be deleted by the researcher in Maynooth University.

Furthermore, data and information from this research may possibly be used in the future for presentations on this topic, future papers, or a research presentation in educational conferences. This will only be from the anonymous data set.

What will happen to the results?
The research will be written up and presented as a masters degree thesis. Additionally, data and information from this research may possibly be used in the future for presentations on this topic, future papers, or a research presentation in educational conferences.
A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What if there is a problem?
There are two forms of processes to minimise risk and the experience of vulnerability for children:
i) In advance of research, communication with Principal/Board, Parents and Children will set out clearly what is involved in the research, the risks associated with the research, etc.
The research intervention with children is a basic reflection on the process of engaging with identity through narrative. It is not considered to generate any risk or discomfort.

ii) In the midst of research: Children will be permitted to pause, skip questions or stop the individual interview at any time. In the event that children experience discomfort or upset, the interview will be paused, and all children given the opportunity to stop.
In the event that there are any disclosures, the researcher will follow Children's First, all relevant legislation and school policies.

Due consideration will have to be taken of the NPHET guidelines as well as directions from the Dept. of Education.

Any further queries? If you need any further information, you can contact me: thomas.cunningham.2016@mumail.ie

If you agree to take part in the study, please complete and sign the consent form overleaf.
Thank you for taking the time to read this

Appendix 1.6: Request of Consent of Board of Management

Consent Form

I……………………………………agree to give Thomas (Tommy) Cunningham permission to conduct the proposed research titled 'Using Narrative Practices to Explore Identity with Children'.

Please tick each statement below:

I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me). □

I understand the information provided □

I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study. □

I have received satisfactory answers to all the questions I have asked. □

It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request. □

I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet □

I agree for the data to be used for further research projects □
I do not agree for the data to be used for further research projects □

Signed…………………………………….   Date……………….

Name in block capitals …………………………………………...

I the undersigned have taken the time to fully explain to the above participant the nature and purpose of this study in a manner that they could understand. I have explained the risks involved as well as the possible benefits. I have invited them to ask questions on any aspect of the study that concerned them.

Signed…………………………………….   Date……………….

Researcher Name in block capitals …………………………………………...

If during your participation in this study you feel the information and guidelines that you were given have been neglected or disregarded in any way, or if you are unhappy about the process, please contact the Secretary of the Maynooth University Ethics Committee at research.ethics@mu.ie or +353 (0)1 708 6019. Please be assured that your concerns will be dealt with in a sensitive manner.

For your information the Data Controller for this research project is Maynooth University, Maynooth, Co. Kildare. Maynooth University Data Protection officer is Ann McKeon in Humanity house, room 17, who can be contacted at ann.mckeon@mu.ie. Maynooth University Data Privacy policies can be found at https://www.maynoothuniversity.ie/data-protection.

Appendix 2: Research Instruments

Appendix 2.1 Metler's 2006 Action Plan Questions

<div style="border:1px solid black; padding:1em;">

<center>Mertler's (2006) Action Plan Questions</center>

What is my concern?

Why am I concerned?

How do I show the situation as it is and as it develops?

What can I do about it? What will I do about it?

How do I test the validity of my claims to knowledge? 32

How do I check that any conclusions I come to are reasonably fair and accurate?

How do I modify my ideas and practices in light of the evaluation?

<div style="text-align:right;">(Adapted from McNiff and Whitehead, 2011: 3)</div>

</div>

Appendix 2.2: Football A Metaphor for Life

Part One -What Football means to You
What does football mean to you?
What do you like/dislike about it?
Where did you get you like or dislike for football from? People, incidences

So listening to you it seems that….. is important to you. Have I picked that up correctly? Is this also important to you in other parts of your life? Can you tell me how?

Part Two – The Team
I invite you to think of your life as a game of football. It is not a solo sport but a team game. Can you think of people who have been on your team as it were during your life?
Have there been forwards? People who have pushed you forward in life.
Have there been defenders? People who have protected you or protected what is important to you.
Who has been your goalie?
Are there subs in your life? People who have come on when needed.
If you could have a dream team, who would you want in your life and why?
Who have been your coaches in life? Who have you learned most from?
Who have been your supporters in the stand?
Where is your home ground?
What has it been like to think of your life in this way?

Part Three – Goals
Thinking about your life now, what sort of events in your life have felt like you reached a goal?
How long were you preparing for that?
Did you ever feel you would not reach the goal?
What kept you going at those times?
What is your goal at the minute?
What will it mean for you when you reach that goal?
Are there people you would like around to help you reach that goal?
How would you celebrate?

Part Four -The Opposition
Thinking again about your life as a football match, what oppositions do you experience to achieving your goals?
What are you up against?
Who would be aware of problems in the past that you have tackled?

Part Five – The Condition
Now I would like you to think about the conditions in which a football game is being played. It is not always a level playing field. Can you think of some of the conditions that make it difficult to play a match?
In terms of your own life, do you think the conditions are fair?
Do people with similar goals have better or worse playing conditions?
We are coming to the end of this activity. What has it been like to talk like this? Has it been useful?

Part Six – Witnessing
As I listened to ….. talk about football as a metaphor for life, what stood out for me was ………
I got the sense that …. Was really important for…..
I think the reason this drew my attention was that in my own life/work I ….
Having heard…. Share these ideas about his/her life, it will now be possible for me to ……

Adapted from Hegarty (2007)
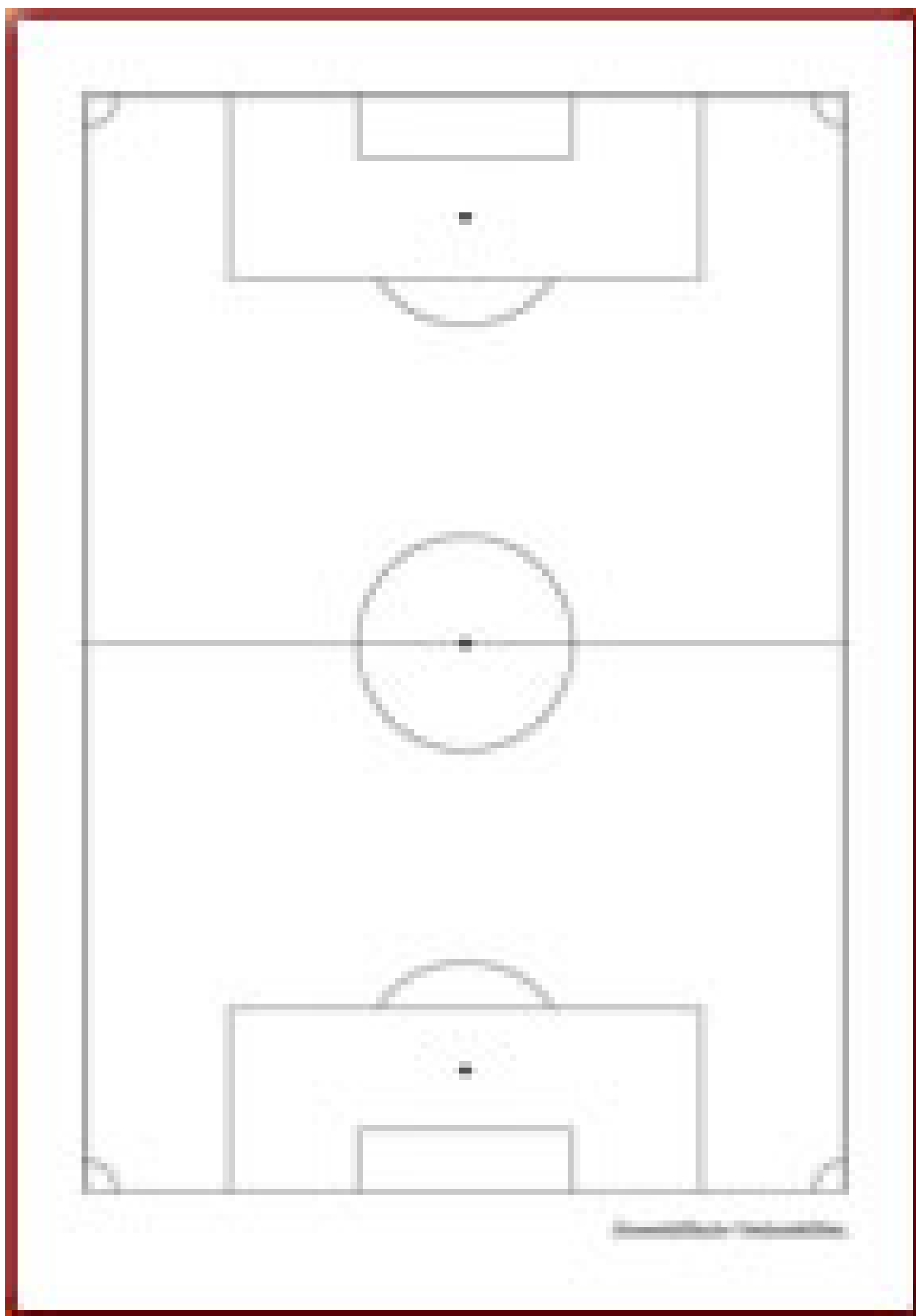
Appendix 2.3: Maps of Narrative Template for Children

(Adapted from Winslade & Monk, 1999)

Appendix 2.4 Questioning – Dialogue – Questioning

Name
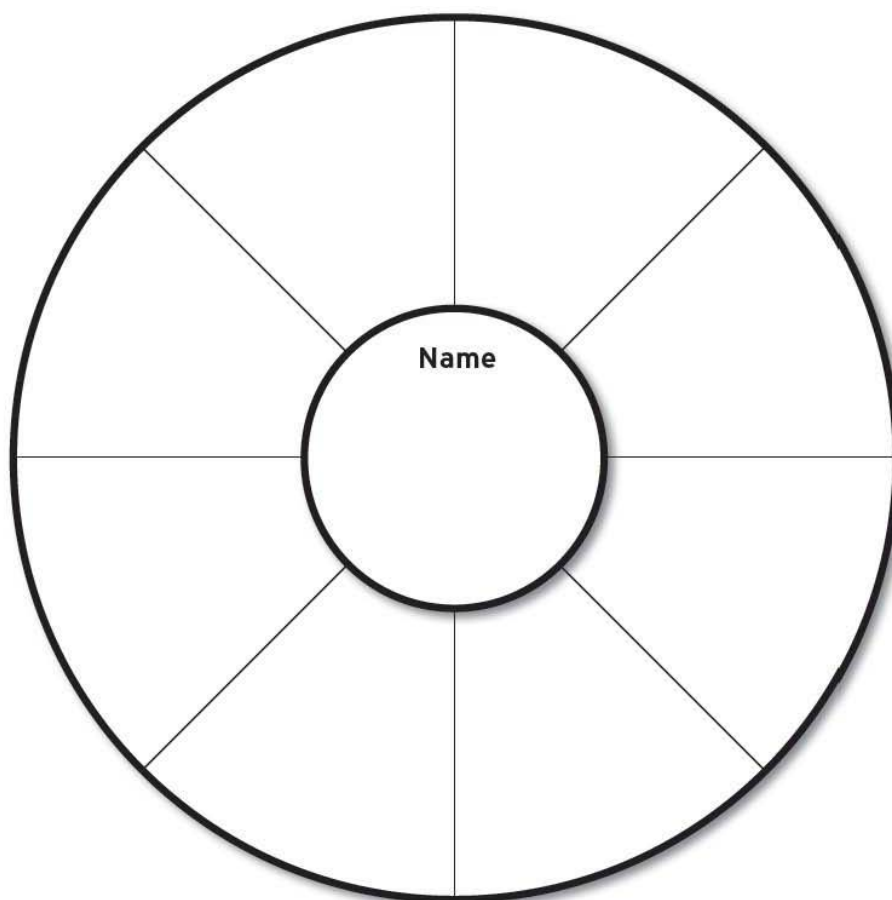
(Adapted from Hegarty, 2012 The Care Team)

Appendix 2.5: Bloom's Revised Taxonomy for Lesson Evaluation

Bloom's Taxonomy Lesson Plan Evaluation Framework

Evaluation Notes

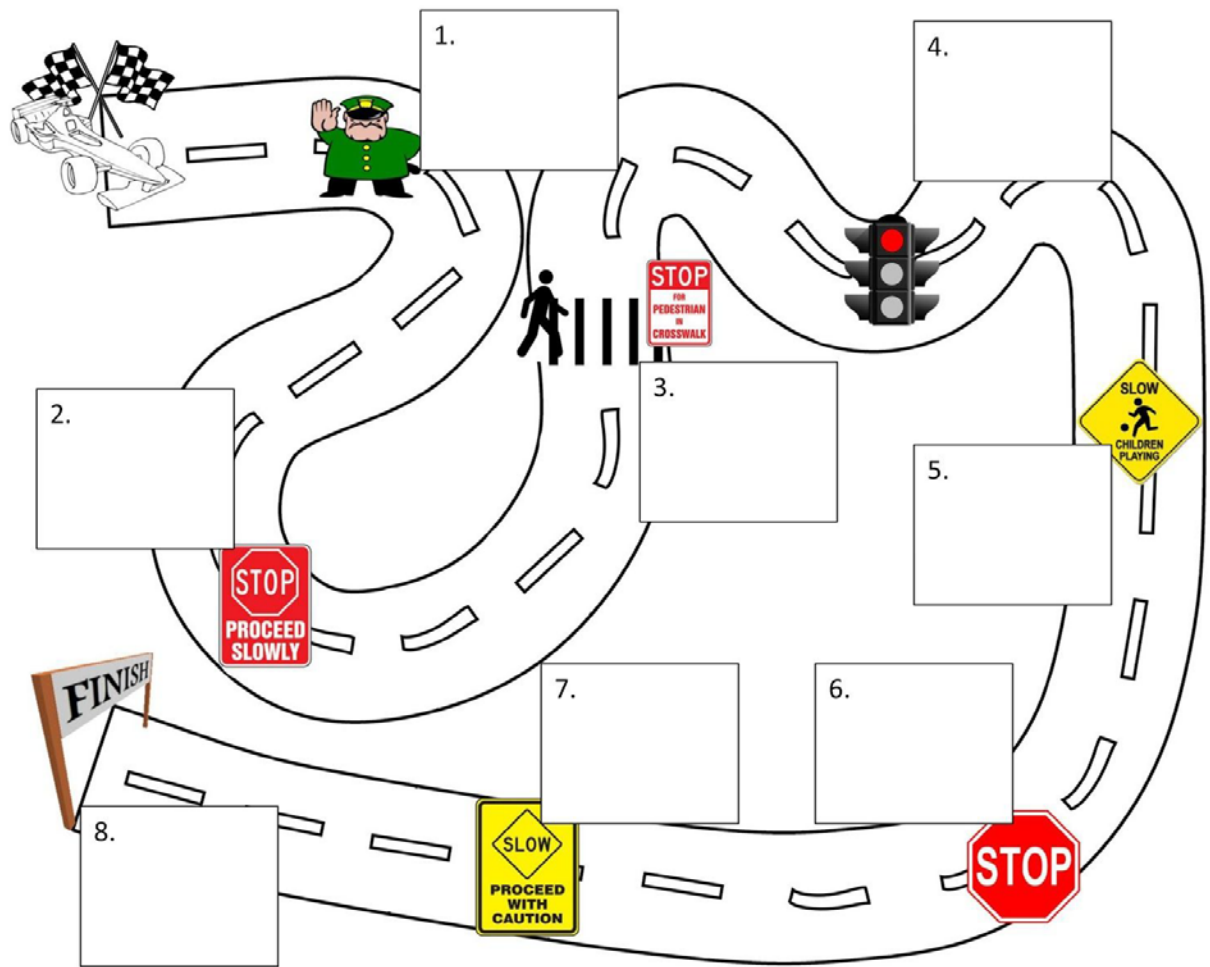Remembering   Can the learner recall or
                            remember the
                            information?

Understanding   Can the learner explain
                            ideas or concepts?

Applying   Can the learner use the
                            information in a new way?

Analysing   Can the learner distinguish
                            between different parts?

Evaluating   Can the learner justify a
                            stand or decision?

Creating   Can the learner create a
                            new product or point of
                            view?

Appendix 3: Interviews

Appendix 3.1 Student Participant Questions

1. *Would you like to answer some questions about the lesson we did in SPHE/Learn?*

2. *Together?*

3. *Did you enjoy those activities? Why?*

4. *Was there any part that you did not enjoy? Why?*

5. *What was your favourite/most memorable part of the lesson? Why?*

6. *Did you feel like you learned something?*

7. *Has this changed anything for you?*

8. *Has this changed the way you think about anything? Tell me more.*

9. *What did we do with stories in that lesson?*

10. *Did you like this way of learning with stories?*

11. *Do you think these stories helped you learn anything else about yourself in these lessons?*

Appendix 3.2 Professional and Academic Interview Questions

1. *What are your thoughts on the importance of teaching children about identity?*

2. *What are your thoughts on the importance and place of identity in the curriculum and the primary school classroom?*

3. *What do you think of the definition of identity in the context of the primary SPHE curriculum and/or the Educate Together Ethical Curriculum, Learn Together?*

4. *Do you think the national curriculum and the national teacher guidelines encourage children in primary school to engage with identity critically?*

5. *Do you think children in primary school across Ireland enjoy learning about identity and/or their identity?*

6. *Do you think the curriculum and/or classroom practice sufficiently engages with the issue of identity in children?*

7. *How do you think identity should be taught in the context of the primary school classroom?*

8. *Do you think stories should be included in the teaching of identity? If so, how?*

Appendix 3.3 Professional and Academic Transcripts

Master of Education (Research in Practice)
Thomas Cunningham
15309466
Audio Transcript for interview MO
Recorded the 7th of April 2021
Time: 15:30
Duration: 41:21:29 minutes

Interview: So, I've just started the recording. Can I ask if you got the questions?

okay?

Interviewee: I got the questions, yes. Thank you so much.
Interviewer: Brilliant, so to jump right in, the very first question on the list asks if
identity is being taught in primary schools. What do you think?
Interviewee: Yes, I do think it is being taught in primary schools. Like even my
middle guy is in junior infants and the first week in school he came
home with his little booklet with his photo on the front and I am special,
I am me, and his teacher right at the very start of the year jumped right
into what makes each child unique and what their interests are. So up
through the classes teachers can build on how children's interests form
their values, so I do think it is being taught in the classroom and I do
think it is hugely important it is being taught. In classrooms especially,
like your school and all schools nowadays. I think it is important for all
schools to create identity safe classrooms, which are classrooms that
foster belonging and value for children from all different kinds of
backgrounds, and I think it is really important to encourage children to
learn and respect various different styles of identity and knowing what
makes them unique, and then themselves then they can learn about
the uniqueness or maybe differences of other children in the classroom
as well and to learn to see similarities between themselves and others,
and also differences but in a very respectful way.

Interviewer: Absolutely, and you have mentioned three or four interesting things
already. Based on previous interviews with other professionals and
comparing already to what you have said there seems to be prevailing
messages in relation to identity, which is reassuring to see,
environment and support and respect being some of the arching
themes. So, going back to the questions, do you have anything you
would like to add to the importance of teaching identity?

Interviewee: Yeah like I think because identity is at the very core of who we are as
humans you know, from birth, how we are treated, how we are cared
for by others influences our identity and our sense of self and I think
because children spend so much time in the classroom that the way
that they are treated and cared for by their teachers will influence their
sense of self and their sense of identity especially the whole way
through their education, primary and secondary. So, I think for teachers

to be aware of their role in influencing a child's identity is hugely important. I also think that children should learn from an early age the importance of their own way that children speak to themselves about their sense of self. We should really be aware of the language we use to talk about ourselves and the language we use to talk about our others. Every word, every thought that we have is linked to an emotion

and it is very important that children learn positive affirmations and positive self-thoughts so that when they think and talk about themselves the feeling positive emotions, and I suppose as a psychologist I am really into the fact that the brain is a novel entity and it grows and develops depending on the thoughts that we have. So, if we can stop and ignite positive sense of self and positive sense of identity in a child through the language that we use and importantly I would feel the language that they use about themselves as they talk about themselves and think about themselves, I think we can develop a positive sense of self-worth in children. So, yeah, I think it is a great topic to focus on in the classroom.

Interviewer: Already what you are saying is striking me as gold, and we're only into

the interview five minutes so thank you so much.

Interviewee: Oh, thanks.
Interviewer: Now, there is a bit of discrepancy between teachers taking on this teaching of holistic identity themselves, some have described it as a lesson embedded into the hidden curriculum as opposed to something that is taught directly in a lesson as part of a programme. It is acknowledged that identity is in the curriculum, but is it emphasised enough that teacher's grasp the necessity of teaching children about identity development, fluidity?

Interviewee: Yeah I think it has to be taught in the curriculum, and obviously

teachers' role should be to just facilitate the whole topic of self-identity because the teacher is not going to have the whole cultural

background, or even the same mother language as the children that they are teaching always, but they can still act as a facilitator and I think children can learn from the other when they are teaching identity in the classroom. Obviously in SPHE it is coming under the strand of myself and then the unit of myself and self-identity, but I think that it is something so huge and so integral to the core of a child that it can be targeted through almost all subject area like English, Art expressing themselves, through PE when you're thinking of core values of teamwork and cooperation, through drama self-expression through religion where there may be several different religions within one classroom, so, and even I think even for a teacher to be mindful and for a teacher to have a background in it themselves so that when they are teaching subjects like Geography and homes come up, that they can

consider different types of homes and children that might be from a travelling background include different type of homes such as mobile homes as well as static homes and if it is Christmas to be culturally sensitive to the children that may not celebrate in the same way as a lot of the children in the class would. So Yeah, I think it is huge and it can't be ignored or thought that it is the role of home exclusively and I do think it needs to be taught in a classroom, but that is just my opinion.

Interviewer: Of course, and I would say we are on the same page with that opinion. Now, the next question is directed towards the SPHE and Learn Together curriculum. As a child psychologist I would be interested to offer you this question and collect any thoughts or opinions you may have on it. If you do, however, have no interest in answering the question that is of course no problem too. So, what do you think of the definition of identity in the SPHE curriculum and or the learn together curriculum?

Interviewee: Well, the definition that I would be familiar with, and now this might not be, I would be thinking of when I think of identity and the curriculum would be through self-identity where children are encouraged to see themselves as individuals with different abilities and who have an important role and have important contributions to make so I wouldn't be familiar with the Learn Together curriculum. What is the definition of identity there?

Interviewer: Great question. So, the Learn Together curriculum objectives for teaching identity to children say that we should begin discussing what makes a person special and unique. Two things that you have already mentioned in this interview already. Teachers are then expected to explore how individual identity and sense of belonging are shaped through specific groups like family, friends, school and so on. Once the children have experience discussing and exploring this, the curriculum talks about describing the different elements that combine to make up a person's identity, acknowledging that identities are complex and layered and that we may have varying identities or roles in different life contexts. Now in addition to that, there are also guidelines in the teacher supporting documents, but I query if every teacher has read those documents or are aware that they even exist.

Interviewee: [laughs] of course, yeah, I know. It is interesting because I mean as a psychologist with everything, we ever do we always start with the definition and I suppose by the sounds of the Educate Together curriculum, the definition sounds more holistic and it brings in more of that identity in its true sense. I think the definition of anything, the definition of identity is hugely important. And even when you mentioned the different roles they can influence an identity, like you said family and friends but also the role of media, the role of affirmations but it reminded me again of another piece of research about how teacher expectations in a class and that is research proven

that how a teacher expects a student to achieve will actually influence their attainment in the classroom. So similarly, I think the thought processes teachers would have on children and the children's values would have an influence on how children perform in the classroom. So, it is really interesting area.

Interviewer: No absolutely. I have read something very similar on teacher expectations and children's performance in maths, but I wouldn't have made that connection prior to the conversation so that is really an interesting lens. Thank you so much. Just to move forward to the next questions, and to look more specifically at the second half of the question. Do you think the national curriculum and national curriculum guidelines offer enough room for children to engage with identity critically?

Interviewee: I wouldn't have seen a huge, kind of huge critical thinking framework on identity like are children's core values, questions within the classroom, and understandably there may be some nerves too because identity is so personal to each child and they are so easily influenced like we said by their language, by their culture, by their religion. I wouldn't have seen a lot of encouragement for a critical thinking framework on the topic of identity personally Tommy, but I may have missed something there.

Interviewer: Not necessarily. I wouldn't say you've necessarily missed something. And I find it interesting the depth different professionals read into the word of being critical. For some being critical is simply being able to ask a question, but for others it involves an interrogation of belief systems, so it appears that there is an entire spectrum in itself of what it means to engage with identity critically. The next question I was hoping to ask is, do you think children in primary schools across Ireland enjoy learning about identity, and more specifically their identity?
Interviewee: Yeah. And that is the amazing thing about children. They are naturally so curious and especially when they are very young at primary school, they don't have that huge influence say from social media, so they are just naturally curious, and especially young children. I think they are naturally accepting about difference and diversity amongst the classmates, so I think it is a brilliant time to start learning about identity and differences in identity and encouraging a sense of acceptance in different identities within the classroom. So, I think yeah, they love it and as they get older it is so interesting for them to learn about their sense of self and what makes them unique and make their classmates unique and there are so many wonderful ways that this can be done in a classroom and you know I think obviously there should be a lot of active learning and think, pair, share and all those things. I think so much of these children can learn from each other because children are experts, each different ethnic group, or minority group or culture they are the expert on that culture, so rather than a teacher teaching directly from the curriculum, that the child themselves can bring so much to the learning of identity in the classroom, hugely enjoyable. Probably one of the most

enjoyable parts of the curriculum if it is done well.

Interviewer: Absolutely, and usually as I say around this question, even as adults we enjoy talking about ourselves, our own experiences.

Interviewee: Absolutely, I agree, and others. I think to start with children is such a great starting point to foster that sense of acceptance and that safe space for children. I think it is brilliant. And I remember actually Tommy when you first, when first saw your research topic and I was thinking about identity it reminded me of one of the, and I haven't taught in over a decade to be honest, but when I was in a classroom and I did teach as part of our training for this course that ended up doing, but at the time I was teaching 2nd class and one day I decided to do a lesson outdoors with them, and there were two picnic benches outside and there was roughly an even split of say 28 so 14 boys and 14 girls in the class, and I said, there were two big huge picnic tables outside and I said right all the girls on this one, and all the boys on this one and all the boys sat on one bench, except for one boy and then that boy sat with all the other girls on the other picnic bench, and I remember that boy got upset that the boys wouldn't let him sit at their bench, you know, and it was something we definitely hadn't talked about, the whole topic of gender, and that part of identity, explicitly definitely at that point that was obviously a decade ago but it just was one of those really poignant moments where I thought the children had identified this particular boy as not having fitted in with the rest of the boys and they done that themselves without any obvious parental influence or teacher influence but they do have a sense of identity already and they have a sense the identity of the other children which is why I remember that moment was resonating with me so deeply because the little boy was upset that he wasn't accepted by the other boys and I thought that was something that really needs to be taught, you know the whole sense of what makes us unique and the label of gender and how boys can be different and that is okay. They don't act the same way, but they are still boys if they want to identify as a boy.

Interviewer: Absolutely. and I just love that story. I was picturing it all as you told it and predicting as you told it. I think that story really puts it into context that children do themselves already have this awareness of identity, and you know, they know how to be included and excluded based on different features of identity.

Interviewee: And they can if there are not, and they weren't taught at that point anything about gender, what that means and what it doesn't mean. So, I guess it was something that hadn't been touched in a classroom situation, and sometimes I know as teacher you can stay away from topics that are a little bit sensitive, but they need to be taught because whether you say them or not, children have their own sense of gender and their own sense of what boys and girls should act like. Just thinking of that impact on that child it must have been, because he was at that point where they were in 2nd class, they were eight years old,

they were going to remember that, so that is why I thought of that straight away and thought of your research: what an important subject matter to research and to teach.

Interviewer: Absolutely, and thank you so much for sharing that story, it was a really

great story and has given me food for thought. I mean, the methodology of this research is looking at how stories can be used to teach identity, so in a way you have even illustrated your point of your understanding of identity in childhood through the use of a story. I suppose it illustrates how stories bring forward these identities that can be brushed under the carpet in a classroom situation. So, I am going to move onto the next question, and you can say pass if you think you have already answered it, or you can give any response that comes to mind. Do you think the curriculum and/or classroom sufficiently engages with the issues of identity?

Interviewee: Again, I suppose yeah it's introduced in infants, I have seen that myself first hand from my own kids and it is revisited in other years. My senior infant, I have a boy in senior infants and that it is revisited. I suppose because I am not in the classroom situation, I can't say whether or not it sufficiently engages with the issues of identity in children, because I think it very much depends on the needs of the children within that classroom. I think teachers have to take a flexible approach so that they can appropriately deal with the level of needs, the maturity even within the classroom and sometimes things like that, like that story I told you, that little anecdote, sometimes something like that will come up so I remember speaking to the parents of the children afterwards, so you know a sensible approach is definitely required based on the different identities in the classroom based on whether something comes up. You would like to think that the teacher, I am sure they would deal with it effectively. I don't know though if it is sufficiently engaging with the issues of identity just because I am not in the classroom.

Interviewer: Of course. Understandably so. I may just say that you are after giving insight into some of those questions that has been fresh. Seriously though, your profession has brought a completely different lens which I am really appreciative of. Okay number 7. How do you think identity should be taught in the context of the primary school classroom?
Interviewee: Yeah, so I am so into children developing a positive sense of self. I think it is so important in the world that we are bringing our children into. they have to be more resilient really because they have so much external pressure from social media and that is very much prevalent even answering who you are within the primary school. Classroom children already have access to social media, and you know that is going to influence their sense of self, so I think within the classroom situation. So, I think children need to know how to deal with any external influences that comes their way so developing a sense of pride and acceptance through, you know things like getting the other

children to colour their positive attributes, they write down positive affirmations on the other children, developing little books where they

have a book of their own positive values, the values other children see in them as being really positive. I think you can use drama and art and you know even programs like the 'Friends for Life' program, there's lovely parts in that about identity, and the 'Walk Tall' program there's a lot of self in that. because as identity is revisited it needs to be positive, because this allows you to engage with it more efficiently, making reference to your question earlier, and you would like to think, certainly in the senior classes would be able to question. I think up to the age of eight, children are very much in that receiving information mode, where they are taking in information all the time and taking in information from parents and family, but after eight they can definitely begin to start thinking more critically so I suppose as they get older that that would be something that they would be braver to do, asking questions in a more critical way. And there are topics that are difficult to teach and to touch on but even though your family might have certain values, you may not want to take them on as your values.

Interviewer: Exactly. Okay and now the last questions and this is kind of core to the research. Do you think stories should be included in the teaching of identity?

Interviewee: Absolutely, I think children identify with stories and that is the world of

the child from the very start. I think it is a really natural and child-centred way to start teaching identity. You know, even for children that

have social difficulties, social stories are brilliant to introduce ways of acting appropriately in different situations, and even for children without social difficulties, so I think stories are a wonderful way to start teaching identities. I think they are something that are easy for the children to relate to, they're accessible, children are used to them, so they are going to be able to engage in a really meaningful way which I think is crucial.

Interviewer: I agree completely, it is so true. Now there are some follow up questions, but I am aware that I have already taken up 30 minutes of your time. Would you be interested in looking at those questions briefly?

Interviewee: You can of course, yeah.
Interviewer: Brilliant! As they say, if you find some gold, keep digging. When teaching identity what do you think is the first statement or question that educators begin with.

Interviewee: Okay I always think the first thing is the definition. So, I think the first place to start is with a workable definition of identity. What does identity cover. your gender, your ethnicity, your culture, your values. I think the

first question is, the first starting point, even to begin with is a workable definition.

Interviewer: Excellent. And would you believe every answer to that question has

been different.

Interviewee: really? that is really interesting, isn't it. I suppose I am coming from a psychological perspective. When we are doing anything, we are starting with the definition.

Interviewer: And even my own answer to that question, I thought every educator or teacher would ask the same, that I thought the answer in my head was so obvious, but no. The answers to that question are brilliant. Do you think the classroom environment determines what parts of a child's identity is being expressed?

Interviewee: Absolutely, and as soon as I would be in schools doing observations some schools that would allow children to bring medals from home, child that might not necessarily excel academically but are brilliant Irish dancers or brilliant at sports, they would let the child go around to the different classes with their trophies so they are encouraging that sportsmanship part of the child's personality, so I think the classroom environment that encourages a child's interests and abilities and let children all the children grow to appreciate the differences and similarities within the classroom, it is hugely important in forming a child's identity.

Interviewer: I think the answers you are giving are fantastic. You open with a statement and while I am thinking and reflecting on that you continue with this fountain of perspective that is so rich! Do you think children should be encouraged to identify labels for themselves?

Interviewee: Yeah, that is a really interesting one isn't it. Yes, I do think so. I think even in the NEPS 2007 questionnaire, I might have the year wrong on that, but it is the 'My Thoughts about the School' checklist. I think everybody uses it at this stage. I think the two most interesting questions on that are "what are my thoughts about school questionnaire" are the last two where it says "how do you think your teacher would describe you?" and then the next question is, "how do you think your parents would describe you?" and I think it gives such insight into a child's identity, I mean they might have their own sense of self but also their sense of how they are perceived by others, how their identity is being perceived by their educators and by their teachers is fascinating. It is always labelling that they use, and by labels, I mean they are more values like I am kind, smart, clever, children will use their labels and I don't think there is any harm once the labels are positive. If, and you will have kids saying I am a Messer, and I am loud, and I don't think those labels are anyway positive because again jumping back to what we chatted about at the start about teacher expectations,

and student expectations, if they perceive themselves as being a
Messer then they are going to possibly, you know the brain favours

familiarity, it doesn't favour the new or anything different, if you keep
doing the same thing you're going to get that shot that's opening and
feel better about things, so I think if you keep seeing yourself as a
messer, it is not positive, but positive labels I don't see any harm in
them possibly.

Interviewer: That is true and again that connection you just made, if the child
embraces that label of a messer, even if it is said once in passing they
almost have that pressure to live up to that expectation and that label
and that is shaping their identity, big time.

Interviewee: Absolutely, and it is not what you want for them at all, because what
are they missing out on when they are messing all the time.
Interviewer: Okay the last question that I am going to ask, what identities are
usually displayed or encouraged in the Irish primary school
classroom?

Interviewee: Okay, like I think there is generally a sporty child, I think children will be
able to tell you, especially primary school children who the sporty child
is in the class. And children will talk, in class or even out in the yard
they will talk about the funniest child, the cleverest child and often it is
the child who is a confident reader and not always the child who is
competent in different areas. The children will have heard these labels
and they will use them, and I know myself and I would do the NEPS
questionnaire a lot and children will often identify themselves as clever
as well so that is one that seems to be in primary school classes, or
maybe they are hearing it from home 'they are clever' so children will
often describe themselves as clever or smart.

Interviewer: That is really interesting. Can I just say a massive thank you and I
mean that. You know, it is often said in a fleeting email that the
interview will have an impact in the education field, and while I can't
speak to that extent I can say that the conversation we've had today
will have an impact on my practice within the classroom and has given
me a lot to reflect on. So, I really appreciate it, and your flexibility and if
there is ever a way that I can support your practice please just let me
know.
Interviewee: Oh thank you so much! and best of luck with the research. I know it is hard
going, I remember my own, but it will be worth it.

Interviewer: I hope so, but if the learning keeps emerging as quick as the interviews
happen, like what you said about it is not so much the label, but more
the value attached to the label. I love that. So what I will do is, I'll stop this transcript now.
Audio recording terminated

Master of Education (Research in Practice)
Thomas Cunningham
14309466

Audio Transcript for interview 1P
Recorded the 18 th of March 2021
Time 16:00
Duration 46:36:03

Interviewer: What are your thoughts on the importance of teaching children about

identity?

Interviewee: It is kind pf a given that it is so important. My thoughts on identity, I
tend to think of identities because obviously we tend to have more than
one identity and I do think it is also important to teach the fact that
identities are not always fixed, that as we move through life. We may
well change aspects of our identity. I feel strongly that that needs to be
taught, you know we change and adapt as we get older and yes I think
you could argue that some aspects are fixed and some are not for
instance your age obviously is fixed at a certain time. We begin at a
given number and then changes as we get older in a fixed way but then
gender is very fluid. So yeah, I would feel it is being affirmed for
any child in the classroom that they are affirmed of who they are, I
mean Wow that is the absolute aim of your class.

Interviewer: Do you think that teachers in schools teach to that, teach to the idea
that there are many identities happening at the same time, unfolding at
different rates, or do you think it is a matter of assigning labels?
Interviewee: I think it is something that I have come to late in life in understanding, I
have come to learn in my 50s. In my professional career, I don't know
but my instance is that most teachers wouldn't do that, and most
teachers would hear that one word 'identity' and even with reviewing
the learn together now at the moment and at one point I was saying to
a group about it is very important with regard to teaching belief
systems, it is very important that you would make it clear that religious
belief is not necessarily fixed as you move through life, you might right
well change and it can be very fluid and children need to be aware that
it is okay to change your mind, and I think that was news to the people,
and I think that they absolutely accepted it and took it in but I think
these are new concepts out there, and I am in no way claiming to know
all about them, you would know more about them Tommy than I would
but I, no I don't think it is out there as identities as a concept.

Interviewer: Not yet anyway
Interviewee: [laughs] No, not yet.
Interviewer: what are your thoughts on the importance and place of identity in the
curriculum and classroom? You kind of touched on this but if there is
anything else you would like to elaborate on.

Interviewee: Yeah, just like I said it is huge I mean it is a classic thing Tommy, you often hear 'A Happy Child Will Learn' and then we must ask how do you make a child happy? the most basic things that they feel valued and affirmed and that is it, you go nowhere if you have a child who feels like they have to hide a part of themselves or should be ashamed

of a little part of themselves or they may not even have the language in their head, saying that this is something they need to keep a little bit quieter in their head.

Interviewer: Yeah absolutely, and you know, even the more I am reading about this and reflecting on my own teaching practice that I think what you have said is absolutely so true, that children, that is a big problem, that if a child has an area or sector of their identity that they are trying to hide, but I think you know even the space to explore identities and come to realise that they have this other side of their identity that they want to share or not share, I don't want to lead this now, but one of key findings so far for me as a teacher and I am not sure if this will come into the research but for myself is 'am I giving the children enough space to explore more of their identities and let them realise that there could be an area of their identity that could be encouraged or discouraged in an environemnt or in an alternative identity?', and ask, are the children aware of their different identities in my classroom.

Interviewee: Wow, I mean that is huge. I mean that is a huge responsibility to take on Tommy. I mean yeah, it totally makes sense. I mean of course you don't want to do it, and you're not consciously trying to inhibit children but of course your classroom can do it without you being aware of it, you can be sending signals very clearly. It is a huge issue, and it is scary. And I do think teaching can be scary, as in the responsibility attached to teaching can be scary.

Interviewer: What do you think of the definition of identity in the context of the

S.P.H.E. and Learn Together Curriculum?

Interviewee: Yeah, I think with the Learn Together Curriculum, and look I am not familiar enough with the S.P.H.E. curriculum because I am out of the classroom too long Tommy but I know that the Learn Together would have supporting documents like identity is in there I just think it needs to be teased out more and I definitely think in the supporting documents there will be material on the concept of identity, the fluidity, the fluid nature of them, and giving examples exactly like you know of course we all change as we get older and you know we change perspective, we may change sports that we like, we may change teams that we support, changing is typically just part of human nature, so of course you can change part of your identity..... so would it be there in the curriculum, it will be there, it will be there I think more so in supporting documents to flag that that is the way it should be taught.

Like in the curriculum itself like obviously it is there in the different sections of the curriculum beliefs, certainly in the equality, justice and that those sections. the LGBT isn't mentioned in the current curriculum and I mean it is there under the legislation for the older classes, the equality legislation for the older classes.

And I think there are other aspects of identity as well that are very clear. I am very interested in ability and with the 'dis' in the brackets, and I think this is an area that gets overlooked often. I think we are getting better with dealing with ethnicity. I mean you look at anti-racism stuff and you know there is a whole other issue there, but anyway It is a huge area.
I don't know if I have answered your questions there, I think I have just rambled.

Interviewer: Oh the 'rambeling' as you have just called it is all part of the process. That is where the gold lies so, please just think of the questions as a starting point and speak freely then. So, do you think the national curriculum, the national core curriculum and the teacher guidelines encourage children in primary schools to engage with identity critically?

Interviewee: I mean what does that mean. I was looking at that earlier and thinking what that means to engage with identity critically. So, go for it Tommy, what does that mean?

Interviewer: I suppose for the context of this research I was perceiving it as acceptance from the children. So, when we are teaching children, we want them to accept certain facts in maths, we want them to accept grammar rules in Irish and English. When it comes to identity, do we want them to accept what the teacher is saying. Are children encouraged to be critical when it comes to this topic? Are children encouraged to ask questions? or do you think it is a topic that teachers shy away from with fear of what questions children may come up with on the theme of identity? Are there a teaching culture there that fears issues of race, gender equality, sexual orientation etc. Are children encouraged to engage in more open conversations and asked to think at a deeper level that goes beyond direct teaching.

Interviewee: Sure, I suppose in relation to the critical nature of that in relation to identity. In relation to anything I would hope that children feel comfortable that they can ask a question and would be able to say I have a question or I think you have that wrong or whatever, you would certainly hope the children would have the confidence to say that in class. But just in regard to identity, I'm just trying to think how they would question it. I suppose if you were to read them a story, the children could question the characters' motivation or where the character is coming from or that. I mean, you would hope the children would be literature in identities and would be able to see certain stereotypes and would be able to see or identify a narrow way of

thinking, and if they can do that, that would be wonderful. More specific to the national curriculum, I think it is getting there. I think the draft primary curriculum document. I think it is a lot broader, i think the new

curriculum is going to open up a lot of areas, and in fairness to the NCCA they are trying to do a good job, they have to walk a fine line., just in relation to the patronage of schools, you know, it is an issue. I think it is a good document. Yeah, I think it is a good document. Of course, there are some people who think it is insufficient in parts, like me who had certain issues with some parts. Well, 'issues' is maybe incorrect, but we had some feedback on some parts of it and some comments, but I think it is getting there. Of course, the issue is if it's supported but they know that the NCCA know that there has to be a rake of support for there to make sure that it is implemented. So, are we there yet? Are we ever there? I do think we are getting there with that new document; we are getting there. And at least it is a step in the right direction. You know that it is being reviewed and that we are trying to make progress. That is more important. Like there are two sections in that document that refers to the sexual identity of the child and relevance to it and even that, like I know that is only one aspect of identity, but even to see that that is fantastic.

Interviewer: Yeah, I suppose even coming from a teacher training perspective, to get them comfortable with those ideas because there are teachers that come out of teacher training and are not even comfortable thinking about that topic in the context of a primary school classroom. So even to see that in a document by the NCCA shows that there is a professional standard, and that this is part of the teaching profession to start considering.

Interviewee: Exactly and yes, it is great to see it.
Interviewer: Okay, so yeah this is a nice question. Do you think children in primary school enjoy learning about identity? So just to put the focus back on children and do you think they gain any enjoyment from it?

Interviewee: I think they love talking about identity. I think we all love talking about ourselves, you know so especially younger children. It is great being a younger child because the whole world and sun revolves around you, it's fantastic. So, when you think people are interested in you, and who you are and what you like and what you do, they love it!

Interviewer: Absolutely, that is very true. So how do you think identity should be taught to children in the context of the primary school classroom?
Interviewee: Okay so see what I love is picture books. So, I am a big fan of classroom libraries having books there that just have a range of characters that come from many different backgrounds, and I just love different types of families and girls playing football and boys knitting or sewing or whatever they would like to do. And so, if you are to ask what is my favourite way, that is my favourite way I think. I am so keen on the fact that these are just the ordinary books that you would just

pick up and read whenever you have 5 minutes to read, or the books
you might send home for them to read, so like they're not the learn
together books that come out of the secret press that come out you
know for the lessons or whatever. But I think that is very powerful. But
you know of course the other powerful factor is the teacher, I mean if
the teacher's on board you're fine. I mean if the teacher has those
kinds of books in the library, you're fine anyway so that the teacher is
just affirming identities.

Interviewer: Yeah, and representation, I think you're touching off of that now too.
That is massive in a class too. That usually comes back to respect,
respect in the sense that the teacher respects the different identities
enough to ensure they are represented in some form in the classroom.
Interviewee: Oh totally and displays. I think people are more aware about displays,
even with regard to ability and disability. We need to move away from
the idea that you might have kids playing and you have children from
clearly different ethnic backgrounds, and then you have this child who
is a wheelchair user, and yes that is representation there, but what
about children wearing glasses? What about children with hearing
aids? Like we just have to broaden it out a bit and beware of those. We
have to see ourselves. The kids have to be able to see themselves.
Interviewer: Yes absolutely, but something that is resonating with me now is that
time I studied in Finland. I attended a University where I was the only
student from Maynooth, and I was the only Irish student attending that
university for the five months I was there. And then every time Ireland
came up in conversation, or on a PowerPoint or whatever way it was
being represented, I felt like I was being looked at as the
representation for Ireland, everything I did is what was interpreted as
what an entire country did. Every word that I mispronounced was
mispronounced by every Irish citizen back at home. So that for me was
like, okay so if I am representing one certain type of child as a
wheelchair user, then I need to be sure to represent different types of
children who are wheelchair users. So, I learned that if your
representing an identity within a class, it is important to tell more than
one story.

Interviewee: Absolutely. I think that is a fundamental point.
Interviewer: If it's okay I can progress onto the next question?
Interviewee Oh please, yes, continue.
Interviewer: Great. Question 8. Do you think stories should be included in the
exploration of identity with children? And I suppose we have already
discussed the relevance of picture books now, but I would now like to
hear more about the importance of stories from the children

themselves as a means of discussing how they view and have come to
interpret their own identity.

Interviewee: Oh yes, sure the stories that the children are talking about themselves,
the children are talking about themselves and that is their identity. You

know, the children must be allowed to talk about it. And it is interesting when you think about it. If a child of age 8 is only playing football for two years, that is a huge part of their life, you know, so yeah, I think even things like supporting teams. You can do a lot of work around teams. You can talk to children about how a lot of different people support teams and that is fantastic, but you know you can also change, and you can also support more than one team and whatever, and again these things are not set in stone.

Interviewer: Oh completely. And once we reinforce the belief that you are changing who you support because of your own reasons, or beliefs or because you know you have changed your mind about something, that that is okay. It is a lesson of self-discovery to a certain degree. That we do not change our thinking because our best friend supports a different team, but rather you change your mind because you're inspired by a player on a different team, you have a new role mode that you aspire to be more like and you have your own reasons, and beliefs about your change.

Interviewee: Yes, and it is hard. Peer pressure even for adults is a hard thing like

with peer pressure and that so yeah that exactly.

Interviewer: So, when teaching identity what do you think is the first statement or

question educators begin with?

Interviewee: Well usually when you are doing something about identity it is usually the name, they will start off with the name. Yeah, just even now I have so many people who still cannot spell my name correctly, and I am like 'really?' it's such a traditional Irish name, yeah, I know all about names. I mean Tommy, you know yourself as well, it is so important that names are even pronounced correctly and there is none of this nonsense for a child to have a nickname because a nickname is going to be easier for everyone to pronounce. I think if you want a starting place you have to start with the name and then maybe after that have them write down five things and quite quickly you find out what is very important for the child, which is usually family, friends, sports whatever their interests are.

Interviewer: Absolutely. Do you think the classroom teacher has an impact on how

a child's identity is shaped and guided?

Interviewee: Oh gosh yes. It is huge. Guiding an identity has a lot of pressure to it. I think if you can affirm and help them figure out where they are going. I

think you said this at the beginning is to try and avoid the labels and affirm that we are all different and that we can all figure out life in our own way and we are not hurting anybody else, and that the classroom

is a safe space for people to express their identity/identities and then after that I am not sure about guiding. I can't even guide myself, so I guess the main thing is safety and that the child feels safe there in the classroom to express whatever facets of their identity that they want to express.

Interviewer: This is all so relevant. Even within the literature I am reading now it stresses the importance of an environment where the child feels comfortable to engage with identity is vital. So then, do you think the classroom environment determines what parts of identity is expressed in school?

Interviewee: I think it can happen. I mean schools that are very sporty can sometimes be a pressure there to adhere to sports, you know sport is wonderful and the healthy life-style that comes with it and getting girls involved in sports absolutely, but I suppose if that is done to the detriment to everything else there is only one way for you to succeed or for you to feel like you're achieving something, so I mean schools, yeah it's all about stereotypes and that stereotype is only one part of the story. I mean there is that quote that they say, 'it's not that stereotypes are wrong, it's just that they are only one part of the story.' So yeah, schools and classes can do a lot of damage, when they obviously don't mean to when they put forward one way of being or some ways of being, it's just trying to get that message across that there is not only one way of being, but none of us have also figured that out.

Interviewer: That is true, it is true. In the primary school classroom, what areas of a

child's identity is encouraged? to be expressed?

Interviewee: I would argue that, well I would hope that all, that there is no part of a child's identity that can't not be expressed. Like again, it is just once they're not hurting anyone else. Once it is a safe environment and people are of course, feel like they can express themselves, and that is where the human rights framework can come into it, you know that people can express themselves, but outrageous things can't be allowed like racism, homophobic misogyny

Interviewer: Okay so that is interesting. Tell me, if you were to walk into a primary school classroom, and were to examine that environment, like you said earlier the displays, human rights declaration, and the books in the classroom library, is there any other ways in which a teacher could ensure identities are being represented to the children in a safe way.
Interviewee: I suppose to emphasise the displays, what is written around the room is very important, the type of posters on display around the school and

classroom. If the children were there you would look to see if they can engage in open dialogue and seem happy and safe within themselves to express their thoughts and ideas. Even their copy books and see what the children are able to write about in their own work, and their

own pictures and what they have done.

Interviewer: I agree. And do you think it is possible for a teacher's beliefs to be so
strong they prevent them from seeing the unique identities of children?
Interviewee: Oh yeah sure. But I think we can all do that. I mean none of us are, we
can all do that without thinking. And I am not condemning teachers at
all. I think we can all, like I look back on some of the things I said and
did in the classroom and I just hold my head, so we can of course
make a mess of things and this can happen inadvertently, but as the
saying goes, the road to hell is paved with good intentions.

Interviewer: I agree again that it is true. That we can all as teachers pick moments
from our practice where we stand back and question something we
said or did, but what I am coming to learn already is that teachers are
often their own worst critics sometimes, and the fact that we remember
those moments it shows what kind of teachers we are, where we hold
ourselves accountable by remembering those moments and finding
ways to negotiate it within our own mind and to learn for the future.
Interviewee: I know, and it just reminds me of those movies where the teacher is all
smiley and the children go off to change the world and I just think to
myself, oh god I hope those kids are just happy. Like I do not
necessarily want to be this big inspirational teacher, I just want them to
be happy and that's it. Sometimes the goal isn't to be this glorified
inspiring teacher, you just don't want to screw anybody up.

Interviewer: [Laughs] It's true, it's true. Now I am conscious of your time and I
don't

want to take up too much of your evening either.

Interviewee: It's fine Tommy, it's fine I have nothing scheduled this afternoon

anyway.

Interviewer: Well still I'm wary of how much time you've already given me. I
don't
want to keep you too long. What labels do you think children inherit in
the primary school classroom most easily?

Interviewee: Oh yeah, very quickly I think a lot of them are assigned by gender. I
think gender roles are very, are very strong, they're in the air really. I
think it depends on the school and then the classroom too. I mean you
may also come across ethnicity too. See I suppose if children are in the
classroom early enough and there are kids from different ethnicities in
the classroom then it is just accepted and there won't be an issue.

Hopefully, I think if there was one, I would say gender, I think gender is
huge.

Interviewer: Yeah, and it is difficult as well. Because you could have the best of

intentions in the world, and have the safe environment, and have all those different identities represented in the class but I suppose when you have so many different children coming from different households, different backgrounds and different experiences which are all valid in their own respect, they are going to come with their own prejudices and judgements, it is going to be hard to say this is a safe zone and then have a child come out with a story and want to share that another child has always been led to believe was wrong, or led to believe isn't right. Do you see where I'm going with this?

Interviewee: Oh absolutely and I agree with you. The child can easily get caught between the culture of the school and the culture at home and yet you have to challenge, but then you need to remember that you have to challenge not the child, but what the child is saying and to try and tease out the argument the child is making. And be clear that there are rules in the class, and the school and the country and that we adhere to and respect all of those issues. I mean, I have no right answer for you here. It is very tricky; it is very hard and the child is the one who suffers in the end because the child learns to navigate both worlds almost. The child learns to navigate, and that is not an ideal situation where a child needs to adapt who they are to the world that they are in at that time. But as a teacher, the class needs to be a safe space and you have to challenge when stuff is said in the classroom.

Interviewer: Yes again it is true, absolutely. Do you have any thoughts on how identity should be taught in the primary school classroom? And the reason why I ask this is because I am in the middle of implementing my first intervention of identity with the children in the class, I am going down a narrative approach with all three interventions and I am just curious to hear if anyone has any other ideas. What methodology should teachers use to teach identity.

Interviewee: Yes, I suppose we would be back to the books, back to the stories. The books and stories lay the groundwork, so once the stories are out there, different forms of identity are normalised and I suppose you can still with younger children have them write different things that are important to them. Whatever it is I think it has to come from the children. Take it from there. and then for the older children you could take a picture and begin looking at political issues with them.
Interviewer: Do you think the children's questions on identity are being satisfied in

the primary school classroom?

Interviewee: I mean you are hoping they are, but you never know. There are too

many classes out there.

Interviewer: I think that is a very fair point and there is no need to generalise an answer for every classroom in the country. Do you think children are capable of posing questions on the topic of identity?

Interviewee: Oh absolutely. Children are capable of posing questions on the topic of anything I would say. Like genuinely a child could ask a question that is in connection with physics. Children are capable of asking the most profound questions. So absolutely they are totally capable of taking your breath away with some of their questions.

Interviewer: Yes. yes, it has happened. Do you think children should be encouraged

to identify label for themselves when exploring identity?

Interviewee: To identify labels, well labels is a very negative term, you know they can be proud of who they are and the different aspects of who they are. A label sees very fixed and insinuates that it can't be changed so maybe it is worth teasing that out a little bit more, like earlier when we talked about fluidity and all of that. Labels, like none of us like labels so it is what is important right now and what is part of us right now.

Interviewer: Yes, and maybe for now, based on what you just said for myself maybe a term more like community is a more accurate word. At least with a community you can join or leave at any stage, you can be a part of several communities, and you have the choice to surround yourself with different people from those communities. Yeah, so do you think children are assigned labels prior to school and if so, by whom?

Interviewee: Oh yes, I think gender is a big one and practically in the air. Even the words used to describe babies like 'princess' and 'warrior' and I think oh wow, look at all this pressure on these babies already and they have only just come into this world. So yes, I think we do, I think parents and I don't think they are doing it to make life difficult, so it isn't just parents, it's in the air, but I think we just need to be careful with all the different facets of identity with regard to say a child who may be a little bit vicarious. I have seen that where a child may come out with some smart comments and the parents were using phrases like she's going on 60, and I was trying to get them off that and say to them oh no no she's just a little girl and let her figure that out. I suppose what I am saying is, don't impose that role that she has to be this, because if you laugh and give attention to that she may think that she has to be this smart, savvy person, she doesn't have to be that she can be whatever she wants. So, I was just trying to lead them off of that path.

Interviewer: Yes, and what you're saying makes sense, because then all of a sudden, we have children trying to live up to these roles they've been

assigned. And feel that pressure to live up to those expectations of making people laugh and get the reaction, because children are brilliant at sussing out how to get that affirmation and get that reaction.

Interviewee: So yeah, for a lot of issues it is in the air and I do think by the time children start school they have these ideas and labels ready to assign and ready to live up to.

Interviewer: Okay so I just want to thank you so much for your incredible

contribution to this study. I know you mentioned once or twice that you felt like you were rambling, or you feel like you weren't answering the question, but I can promise you the highlighter will be out for this transcription. There is gold here and I can already see some of the learning that is emerging for me.

Interviewee: Ah yes, but Tommy it is so easy for me because I am out of the classroom for quite some time now, so it is easy for me to be the hurler on the ditch, so I really enjoyed it and loved the questions.

Interviewer: Ah I am delighted with that and thank you so much. If you ever need to contact me, you have my details.

Appendix 3.4 Student Interview Transcripts

Tommy: Okay so we have started recording now. So, would it be okay for you to answer some questions about the lesson we did when learning about identity?

Student A: Yes I would like to answer some questions.

Tommy: Super, thank you. So, did you enjoy the activities we did today during our SPHE lesson?

Student A: I did, I think it built up some awareness, you know of who is there and who you can go to.

Tommy: That was a brilliant answer. So, I have your football pitch here displayed on the screen. Displays Child's Work on the screen. So, this was your metaphor for life. Do you want to talk to me about the people you have written down and what they mean to you?

Student A: Uhm alright. So, I obviously wrote down my Mom and Dad because they are like the ones that are mostly responsible for me. yano. And then I wrote down you because you're always pushing me forward, like in a football team. The other person who is pushing me forward is Gerry, and Cathal, my football coach.

Tommy: Brilliant, and talk to me about Gerry. Why did you include his name on your pitch?

Student A: Well he is ensuring a place for me to learn. And yeah...

Tommy: and what about your coach.

Student A: My coach, well he is pushing me forward because he is making me better at Gaelic.

Tommy: Brilliant. And now, was there anything in this lesson that you didn't enjoy? Anything that you think I could change to make the lesson better for next time?

Student A: Uhm no. pause ....No

Tommy: Okay, so, what was your favourite part, or your most memorable part of that lesson?

Student A: Uhm, well thinking about the people who are in America right now. Like one of aunts right now and my grandpa living in America. It was nice to remember that they are there too. Like I might not see them everyday, but it is good to know that they are pushing me forward by just wanting the best from me.

Tommy: That is amazing. So even that you don't see them, you know that they are there for you. So some days when you are feeling really down and don't feel yourself, you know there are these people in your life that really believe in you and want the best for you.

Student A: Yeah...remember I said it was a good awareness, that is what I meant.

Tommy: Brilliant. So, did you feel like your learned something.

Student A: Well....uhm...I don't think I learned something; I think it was kinda a reminder that there are people there for me.

Tommy: What a great, honest answer. thank you for sharing your thoughts with me. Okay, has this lesson changed anything in your mind?

Student A: Not really. I mean, I don't think so.

Tommy: That is perfectly fine. So, there were a few children out today. If those children were to come back into school tomorrow, what would you tell them we learned today in that lesson that they missed?

Student A: Pause....I would say how we talked about how people are there for you and they like to know when we are doing good. Like if I was in trouble for being mean on the yard I wouldn't want them to hear about that day. but if I did really great work or scored a goal I would like them to know. That is what we were kinda talking about and listening to people telling stories.

Tommy: Really great answer. Do you remember any of the stories you told today?

Student A: Yeah I said I was a leader and I told the story about how my mum and dad always say it to me and I believe in it as well. I told a boy in our class to have a bit of courage when he kept saying he was not very good in school. He kept saying that he was not good at learning.

Tommy: And that was a really great thing you said. I think he was a bit confused that day because all of those things he said about himself were false. It was really nice that he had somebody sitting at his pod reminding him to have courage and to be brave, so you did a really great thing and you are a leader. You supported somebody when they were feeling down. Now, do you think it is important to use stories for people and children to share more about themselves?

Student A: Yes. It will improve your sight of things. The way you, the way, if you are use to seeing things that way, and then when you tell a story you're actually telling the story to yourself too.

Tommy: This is an incredible answer. Do you have anything else you would like to add to this?

Student A: Like you might think you are bad at math. Then you do a question and get it wrong, and then you do another one and get it wrong so you tell yourself you are bad at math. But then my aunt asked me to put the candles on the cake for mum's birthday and when I put the correct amount on the cake my aunt said I was really great at math. So I told that story to my parents and I learned that I am not bad at math.

Tommy: Incredible. And you know that I think you are great at maths because you never give up! You always try your best and that is more important than getting the answers right all the time. Do you think these stories helped you learn anything else about yourself?

Student A: I think sometimes stories help you learn new things, but I think that mostly stories just refresh some things that you've already thought about.

Tommy: Do you think there is anything else you would like to say or anything you would like to ask?

Student A: No, I think I'm good.

Tommy: Okay, thank you so much for answering all my questions. You really did an amazing job. Now I am going to stop this recording in 5...4....3....2....1...

END OF INTERVIEW

Tommy: Okay, now that we are recording, would it be okay if I asked you some questions about the lesson we did today on identity?

Student B: Yeah.

Tommy: Brilliant. Thank you. Did you enjoy the activities we did today as part of our identity lesson?

Student B: Yeah.

Tommy: Me too. Do you have any reasons why you enjoyed them?

Student B: Because they were fun and I liked doing them. because it felt better than doing reading work and we had lots of time to do it.

Tommy: Thank you. Was there any part of the lesson that you did not enjoy?

Student B: No.

Tommy: Are you sure?

Student B: Yeah.

Tommy: And that's okay. What was your favourite part of the lesson? What was your most memorable part of the lesson?

Student B: When writing people down on the football pitch.

Tommy: And what people did you write down?

Matthew: My dad, my mum, my friends, My Grandad, my Nana and my other granddad and parents, my friends and that's all.

Tommy: Brilliant, and I have that right here. Do you see your football pitch on the screen now? [displays child's work].

Student B: Yeah, but I can't see the names.

Tommy: That is right. It is hard to see the names when they're written in pencil. What great names. Can I ask, why did we write these people down on our pitch? What makes these people special?

Student B: because we were finding out who are forwards, who push us forward, and defender like who someone defending you that keeps you safe in life.

Tommy: Excellent. And do you feel like you've learned anything from that lesson?

Student B: No

Tommy: and that is perfectly fine to say. Thank you for being so honest. If you could imagine that someone in our class were absent today, what would you say to them you learned today that they missed?

Student B: We learned about defenders and forwards, but not like in P.E. we were drawing them on a page and people that push us forward.

Tommy: Amazing. You have a great memory. Is there anything else you remember from that lesson?

Student B: Oh yeah, and I remember the bus stops too. It was funny when we were on a bus with the women's football team. I don't even know how that happened. I thought it was a men's football team, so I got on that bus because I thought it was a famous soccer team, like a men's team.

Tommy: Excellent. Do you remember the word identity we used a lot today too . Can you remember what we thought this word meant?

Student B: It was like saying things about yourself. Not about things that we have like shoes and things, but it's like all about you and your family. Like I have soccer training on Tuesday, and I like sports, so I told everyone about soccer training.

Tommy: I remember that. That was a really great story you told us today about soccer training. I enjoyed hearing that story from you and getting to know you a bit better. Did you like using stories to tell us about you.

Student B: Yeah... it was good because my friend didn't know training was coming back soon and we talked about soccer then.

Tommy: Amazing! I am really glad the two of you got the chance to catch up together. Can I ask if you felt like the stories you told today taught you anything about yourself that you didn't already know?

Student B: Ehm, yeah .

Tommy: What did you learn about yourself?

Student B: Yeah.... be kind.

Tommy: That is super. Can I ask how you learned about being kind by using the stories you have inside your memory?

Student B: Because when you go to soccer you have to play good to score goals but you have to be kind and not be rough. and in school we have to be kind too. so, I was thinking of being kind.

Tommy: Amazing. thank you so much for answering my questions. Do you have any other questions, or anything else you would like to say before we finish our conversation?

Student B: No

Tommy: Okay, I am going to stop recording in 5....4....3....2....1..

END OF INTERVEIW

Tommy: Okay we are recording now. Now that we have that started, I have your football pitch here on the screen for you to look at again. Do you remember this?

Student C: Yeah.

Tommy: Brilliant. Well would it be okay if I asked you some questions about this activity?

Student C: Yes.

Tommy: Brilliant. Well, I would love to know if you enjoyed that activity today? Can you tell me some reasons also?

Student C: Yes. Because I got to draw and I really like to draw.

Tommy: I like to draw too. It seems we have that in common. Can you remember anything else from that lesson?

Student C: Yeah when we were kinda going on the bus with kinda different people. It was kinda exciting when you said that it wasn't exactly a girl who was on the bus it was a boy. So that was kinda unexpected.

Tommy: oh brilliant. So that is what you remember and enjoyed. Can you remember anything about the football pitch we used today?

Student C: It was really smart to think about people on our team and I really enjoyed it. It was cool for the people that like to do football and they were also learning about identity so...yeah.

Tommy: Brilliant. And can I ask now that you have mentioned it? What do you think the word identity means?

Student C: Kinda personality.

Tommy: Super. Will I go on to the next question if you are ready?

Student C: Yeah

Tommy: Suer. Was there any part that you did not like about the lesson?

Student C: No.

Tommy: So you enjoyed it all?

Student C: Yeah.

Tommy: So, there was nothing that you would change? Anything that you think would make it better.

Student C: [Child laughing says] No.

Tommy: Laughs. Thank you.

Tommy: Right, what was your favourite or most memorable part of the lesson?

Student C: When we got to tell what our personality is kind of.

Tommy: And why did you like that part?

Student C: Because like, you get to, people get to know you more and what you like and that means if you ever get to go on a play date with them they will know what you like and they can do that with you.

Tommy: Amazing. So that was something I didn't know, so I have just learned something. from you right now. Thank you

Tommy: Our next question. Do you feel like you've learned anything from our lesson?

Student C: Yes!

Tommy: Brilliant. What do you think you've learned about?

Student C: That, kind of like about other people and about identity and about like when they were going on a bus. and how some people like soccer, and some people like fashion so that is what I learned.

Tommy: Brilliant. So, has this changed anything for you? So let us say someone was absent from our class today. What would you tell them you learned today while they were out?

Student C: Ehmmmm.Like, ehhhh, ehmmmmm, can we move to the next question?

Tommy: Absolutely. Has this changed about the way you think about anything?

Student C: Uhm I would say we learned about different things about people and their personality and their identity. Some people told stories about the time they realised they really liked animals and they really liked what they were doing.

Tommy: Exactly. And how did you find telling the story? Do you think it helped?

Student C: I think it helped to get people to know me more kind of.

Tommy: Excellent. If you are ready, I will move onto the next question.

Student C: Yeah.

Tommy: What did we do with stories in that lesson? Did we just say them and forget about them or what did we do with the stories?

Student C: We kind of thought about them. I don't know and we then retold the story in a little bit shorter way. As I said, so people get to know you better and if you are playing and you or they don't know what to play, you can rethink back on that story and then they could think that we could play that we are going to the zoo or something.

Tommy: Amazing. What a great answer. Okay are you ready for our last question?

Student C: Yeah

Tommy: Do you think these stories helped you learn anything else about yourself in these lessons.

Student C: Not really. Uhm Like other people learn but sometimes I don't feel like I learn anything about me because I kinda already know about me.

Tommy: Brilliant. And it is great to hear that you feel like you already know about who you are, and all your stories attached to your life. well done.

Tommy: Well, that's the end of the questions. Thank you so much for taking the time to answer the questions. Is there anything else you would like to say about the lesson.

Student C: No thank you.

Tommy: okay, I am going to stop this recording in 5....4....3....2....1...

END OF INTERVIEW

Okay and now we are recording.

So, would you like to answer some questions about the lesson we did today in class when we used Maps (displays a child's map on the screen). Would you like to answer some questions?

Student D: Okay

Tommy: Brilliant

Tommy: Did you enjoy doing this lesson today?

Student D: Yes.

Tommy: Why?

Student D: Because I really like when we were doing the activity with the football.

Tommy: It was a fun activity. What did you find enjoyable about it?

Student D: When we were learning about the people in our lives and how they are a good team to have as we get older. I don't know. I like it when we talk about families. I don't know. It is a lot of fun to talk about our families and hear about everyone else's families too.

Tommy: That is a really great point. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Student D: Not really

Tommy: That's no problem. Our next question is if there was anything in the lesson that you didn't enjoy.

Student D: Nope.

Tommy: Okay. That's okay too. And if there was it is okay to say so. It will teach me what I can do differently next time I am teaching children about using football to talk about our lives. If you think of anything I can do to learn for next time, will you be able to let me know?

Student D: okay.

Tommy: Thank you, question number 3. What was your favourite part of the lesson? or what do you remember the most?

Student D: I don't know. I just know that I enjoyed that lesson. I just liked how we did the maps so it was really fun and I like drawing and that is why.

Tommy: I love drawing too! We have that in common. And do you remember why we used drawing and maps in our learning today?

Student D: Yes, well we were learning about identity. That I remember. That means kind of how you look, and how you act and stuff like that about you.

Tommy: Oh amazing. Is there anything else you would like to add?

Student D: Nope

Tommy: Okay. we're almost halfway through now. Did you feel like you learned something today doing that lesson?

Student D: ehhhmm. Actually no, but I really enjoyed it.

Tommy: Well, that is okay too. Thank you for being so honest so well done. Question 6. Has this changed anything for you?

[Long pause. The child looked slightly confused. raised eyebrows arms folded sitting very still].

Tommy: What I mean by this question is, say if someone was out absent today from school and missed that lesson. If they came in tomorrow, what would you say they missed?

Student D: I don't know. Maybe that we used maps to tell some things about our family and friends. That some of us had a lot of people and some people only had a few players.

Tommy: And what do you think that could mean? That some children had a lot of people to put onto their football team, while some other children only had a few team players.

Student D. I don't know. They could have smaller families. Or maybe they do not see family so often. I have no brother or sister so I could not draw like the others at my table. I don't know. But it was okay because I drew a lot of other people that some did not have.

Tommy: That is a really good point. (pause) Would you like to keep going with some more questions?

Student D: Yes.

Tommy: Super. Only 3 more questions. Now, what did we do with stories in the lesson today?

Student D: long pause.

Tommy: So, do you remember when we were talking about how we love animals.

Student D: oh yeah. Some children said they loved animals and you asked them to tell a story of sometimes I don't know when but when they had a story of when they knew they loved animals.

Tommy: Exactly. Did you like using stories to talk about who you are?

Student D: Yes. I just like telling stories. I feel okay when I tell them and I like telling stories, so I liked that lesson.

Tommy: Amazing. Now for our last question for today. Do you think these stories helped you learn anything else about yourself?

Student D: No.

Tommy: And that is perfectly okay. Because that is an honest answer. Thank you, we have answered all ten questions now. How do you feel.

Student D: good.

Tommy: great. Is there anything else you would like to say or ask.

Student D: nope.

Tommy: Thank you so much for taking the time this evening to answer my questions. I won't take up any more of your time. I will see you tomorrow.

Student D: Yes, okay. I will see you tomorrow too. Byeee.

Tommy: Slán

Appendix 3.5 Conversation with Critical Colleague

*Researcher***:** "Today I introduced the first narrative intervention and I think it went well. The children engaged well and there was evidence that stories were being used to share elements of their lives*"*

*Critical Colleague***:** "That's great to hear. What evidence was there?"

Researcher: "Well I recorded the language they used, the level of engagement from the children was higher than usual, and the class worked collaboratively"

Critical Colleague: This sounds great from a teaching perspective. As a researcher though, do you think you've noted anything that address the aims of your study?

Researcher: Well, I suppose the fact that they were using stories to share aspects of their identity comes into the way my practice has adapted. But I think I was caught up with excitement by the fact that the intervention had begun. I think I was overwhelmed and started jotting down notes on collaborative learning, child autonomy and forgot to focus on the aims of the study.

Critical Colleague: Absolutely, and I say it was a great feeling seeing your intervention taking off. What do you think you will do next time that could focus your observations more?

Researcher: Perhaps writing out the aims of the study before I begin the next lesson or finding an observation framework to help me stay more focused during the interventions could help.