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**Teaching with Inclusion: A Self-Study Enquiry Orientated Towards Moving my Special
Education Practice Beyond Deficit-Teaching**

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Declaration

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

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Abstract

The purpose of my self-study action research project was to enhance my practice as a special education teacher beyond deficit-teaching. I previously felt like my teaching did not celebrate the strengths of my students and instead focused on the academic areas which needed improving. I was not showing care to my students as I planned my teaching around deficits, rather than empowering my pupils by building on their skills, talents, and interests. My values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice were not being represented sufficiently in my practice. I wanted to complete a self-study to improve my teaching to live by my values, but also to provide further insight into deficit-focused approaches existing in primary education and how challenge them in my own practice.

This research project outlines the journey of teaching with inclusion, with students in my care who receive additional support, in an urban primary school in Drogheda, Co. Louth. I designed and implemented three classroom-based interventions, 'Circle Time Discussion', 'Two Stars and a Wish', and 'Must-Do, Can-Do' with the aim of tackling deficit-focused teaching within my own practice. Evolving thoughts surrounding my practice and its development, were recorded in my reflective journal. My values acted as standards of judgement as I questioned my practice and my pedagogical thinking in my reflective writing. My teacher identity was constantly scrutinized, and its growth was influenced through Kelchtermans (2009, 2018) literature. Through the progress of my personal and professional identity and their merge, my reflective practice blossomed and correspondingly improved my practice as the project unfolded.

The research unveiled the significance of the provision of student choice and voice, the influence of practicing care, the importance of communication in relationships, and the fact that a one-size-fits-all approach is not acceptable in a special educational environment. My claims to knowledge and the findings from this research have enlightened new ways of thinking. As a self-study process, this research has had a profound effect on my own practice and led to a transformation in my teaching, which has guided me towards using my values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice as morals to live by in the planning of my future teaching and on my reflective practice going forward.

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Abbreviations and Acronyms

CAST	Center for Applied Special Technology
Code of Conduct	The Teaching Council Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers
DES	Department of Education and Skills
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
Draft Curriculum	Primary Draft Curriculum Framework
EAL	English as an Additional Language
EPSEN	Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs
IEF	Inclusive Education Framework
MDCD	Must-Do, Can-Do
M.Ed	Masters of Education
NCCA	Nation Council for Curriculum and Assessment
NCSE	National Council for Special Education
NEPS	National Educational Psychological Service
PAR	Participatory Action Research
PE	Physical and Health Education
RJ	Reflective Journal
SEN	Special Educational Needs
SET	Special Education Teacher
SNA	Special Needs Assistant
SPHE	Social Personal and Health Education
SSP	School Support Plan
TC	Teaching Council
UDL	Universal Design for Learning

UNCRC	United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child
UNICEF	United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund
Wellbeing Policy	Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice

Chapter One: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Special education teaching is a key feature of the movement towards the inclusion of all learners in mainstream settings within the Irish primary education context. The current revised model for the provision of pupils with special educational needs (SEN), launched by the Department of Education and Skills (DES) in 2017, reflects a social model of allocation, based on the needs of pupils within the whole school. This is a change from the previously dominant medical model, which focused on the individual needs of students and included deficit-labels and required formal assessments. Although this revised model has been in operation for five years, deficit-focused teaching and diagnosis labels continue to hold a strong grasp on the influence of special education in Ireland. O’Gorman and Drudy (2010) emphasise the need to shift away from a deficit-focused approach and its focus on the assessment role of the special education teacher (SET), and a reorientation of the role towards transformative pedagogy. This thesis sets out to analyse how deficit-based teaching can be challenged within the special education context, whilst practicing care in relationships with pupils.

1.2 Focus and Aims of the Study

The focus of this study is an exploration of strengths-based teaching and learning in a SEN context. The practice of care is central in this self-study research. Reflecting on my four years of previous practice as a SET, I realised that I was focusing on what the children could not do as I attempted to improve their progress in areas of the curriculum which they struggled with. Echoing Bruce (2020), the importance of Froebel’s belief that “spending time with children should begin with what children can do, and start where the learner is, rather than where you think the learner ought to be (a deficit model), cannot be overemphasised” (p. 252).

Previously, I was fixated on assessment results and I planned my teaching around the areas which needed improving. My values were unclear. I had not yet made the correlation between my values and the influence they could have on my practice. I became lost in a deficit-focused spiralling cycle and forgot the key reason why I became a teacher – to inspire my students. My practice needed re-invigoration. Engaging in enquiry according to Cooney (2016), “has a protective effect against deprofessionalisation and demotivation because of its potential for empowerment and change” (p. 89). The aim of this self-study is to realign my practice with my values through challenging my previous deficit-focused approach to teaching.

Being unsure of my values led me to Korthagen’s (2004) Onion Model of Reflection (p.5). I considered the assumptions I make at each of the six levels of reflection and their hindrance on my practice. Inclusion, care, relationality, and voice were the values which repeatedly appeared as I inspected my assumptions and contemplated acting on them to make a change. Establishing my core values and recognising their significance in my personal and professional life provoked a change in my practice. Aspects such as assessments, results, and diagnoses took a secondary role. My values superseded all other influencing factors within my teaching and learning, and assisted in negotiating and reconstructing my practice. The promotion of inclusion, for all learners with diverse skills and talents, whilst building relationships, prioritising student voice, and practicing care became central to my practice. My values were embedded in my practice and naturally acted as criteria or “standards of judgement” in my reflective journal when critiquing my practice (Whitehead and McNiff 2006: 80). They also served as morals to live by when “narrating, navigating, and negotiating” professional self-understanding through reflective practice (Kelchtermans, 2018: 236).

My research question ‘how can I challenge deficit-based teaching as a SET and practice care through relationships with the pupils before me’, is a feature of my own ongoing commitment to personal development. My connection with the understanding and appreciation of reflection has emerged as a key professional learning during this reflective process. My relationship with reflection has moved my practice away from an authoritative style of teaching to a facilitator of learning. Reflective journaling was a vital data collection tool within my research. I reflected daily to critique and examine my practice and how it could be enhanced. Through self-questioning in my reflective practice and analysing the data collected, the developments necessary to move my practice beyond deficit teaching became apparent.

1.3 Research Context and Interventions

The National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) (2020) Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (Draft Curriculum) advocates teachers as “agentic professionals” (p. 5). Inclusive education and diversity is listed as one of the eight overarching principles in Draft Curriculum (2020) which provides for equity of opportunity and responds to the uniqueness of every child (p. 6). Furthermore the DES (2017) proposes to establish “truly inclusive schools” (p.5). Relevant support is necessary to assist this additional autonomy, if the expectations are met appropriately. There is no mandatory professional learning to fulfil the role of a SET, yet demands are constantly being heightened. The practicalities of schools being ‘truly inclusive’ need to be addressed explicitly in policies and implemented through appropriate supports in order to establish this desired level of inclusion in autonomous learning environments.

Previously, the targets I set for my students in their school support plans (SSPs) were deficit-focused. I wanted to help the children achieve their goals, but I was unaware that my planning was hindering this process. Moon’s (2004) question, “What do you need to do?” (p. 210) began

the process of unfolding how to surmount the oppression of a deficit-focused learning environment. I needed to take the children's voice into consideration and provide more care in the relationships with my students. Through transforming action, I was creating a new situation (Freire, 2000). Engagement with literature and reflection upon my own practice, aided in identifying three interventions to introduce into my practice to foster a caring, strengths-based learning environment, 'Circle Time Discussion', 'Two Stars and a Wish', and 'Must-Do, Can-Do' (MDCD). My values, personal reflections and discussions with my critical friend acted as standards which I judged my practice upon. To compliment my research, five interviews were conducted with educational professionals. The findings emerged through coding and thematically analysing my reflective journal entries and the interview transcriptions.

1.4 Overview of Chapters

In chapter two, the literature reviewed introduces SET practice situated against five themes of inclusion, care, relationality, voice, and identity. In chapter three, the mixed-methods methodology approach is explained, including the research design and data collection tools. Additionally practitioner action research is situated against the ethical considerations and limitations of the study. Chapter four discusses the key findings centring on (1) the provision of student voice and choice, (2) the practice of care in relationships, (3) building relationships through communication and (4) a one-size-fits-all approach is not adequate in SET practice.

1.5 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the research question guiding this practitioner research and the importance of moving beyond deficit teaching. Furthermore the research focus, the structure of the thesis and the preliminary themes and findings were introduced. This thesis identifies opportunities for personal and professional development as a primary school educator and in

particular for SETs. The inclusion of insights, from my personal reflective lens, from my critical friend, and from professionals within the educational spectrum, adds to the authenticity of this self-study which addresses teaching with inclusion and moving SET practice beyond deficit-focused teaching. In the following chapter, SET practice is situated within key themes of the literature.

Chapter Two: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This thesis seeks to challenge deficit-based teaching as a SET through practicing care with my individual students. In this chapter, alternative approaches to SET practice are examined, in addition to contemporary SET practice, and are situated against five themes of inclusion, care, relationality, voice, and identity. The literature discussed motivates the aim of my professional development and connects with my four core values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice.

2.2 Inclusion

2.2.1 Special Education Provision in Irish Primary Schools

Educational provision for pupils with SEN has made significant advances in the Republic of Ireland in the past two decades (Shevlin et al. 2013). Beginning in the 1990's, a change can be noted in the Irish education system towards a more inclusive approach to educating children with various needs (Shevlin & Banks, 2021). The focus has shifted from an emphasis on educational provision for specific categories of disabled children, to an inclusive approach (2021: 1). Legal challenges made by parents prior to the 1990's, due to inadequate educational provision for their children with SEN, added to the call for change in SEN policy and practice (Walsh, 2021). From 2005, the general allocation model was designed for the provision of pupils with SEN to promote 'truly inclusive schools'. Following extensive consultation, the DES launched and implemented a revised model of allocating supports for pupils with SEN in 2017. This new system demonstrated a move from the previously dominant medical model, focused on categories of deficit labels, to a more social model based on the needs of pupils (Walsh, 2021).

2.2.2 Inclusion

The National Council for Special Education (NCSE) was set up to improve the delivery of education services to persons with SEN arising from disabilities with particular emphasis on children. Their Inclusive Education Framework (IEF) (2011) shapes inclusion as a process of “addressing and responding to the diversity of needs of learners through enabling participation in learning, cultures, and communities and removing barriers within and from education through the accommodation and provision of appropriate structures and arrangements to enable each learner to achieve the maximum benefit from his/her attendance at school” (Winter and O’Raw, 2010, cited in NSCE, 2011: 13). The Draft Curriculum (2020) states that “inclusive education and diversity centres on the values and practices that enable children, as individuals, to belong, feel respected, confident and safe so they can engage in meaningful learning and reach their potential” (p. 20). Drudy & Kinsella (2009) argue that inclusion needs to focus on developing the capacity of schools to respond to diversity, including ethnic minorities and disadvantaged communities, in addition to children with SEN. If schools develop the capacity to respond to diversity, the conceptualisation that inclusion only involves students with SEN would be interrogated (Drudy & Kinsella, 2009).

The Draft Curriculum (2020) aims to establish a universally designed curriculum which adheres to an inclusive approach by thinking in terms of variability, competency, and opportunity, and moreover shifting away from thinking in terms of ability and disability. The best interest of every child is the focus of a universally designed curriculum which promotes equal opportunities with meaningful engagement, challenges in learning and positive interactions in the school community (2020: 20). By following The Teaching Council (TC) Code of Professional Conduct for Teachers (Code of Conduct) (2016), teachers must be “committed to equality and inclusion and to respecting and accommodating diversity” (p. 7).

Policymakers and educators are faced with the challenge of ensuring that inclusive practice becomes the norm in Irish schools through re-evaluating their attitudes and practices and being offered opportunities to develop their professional knowledge and skill base (Shevlin et al. 2013). Teachers must respond to change with new and innovative approaches to the challenges presented, but also must be given the tools and resources to react appropriately over a long period of time as change is inevitable (O’Gorman & Drudy, 2010).

2.2.3 Professional Development

Shevlin et al. (2013) identify a need for further professional development for teachers in primary schools who work as SETs. In-career professional development is fundamental for SETs to adequately address their responsibilities, however there is no mandatory requirement for teachers appointed to a SET position in Irish schools to hold an SEN qualification. In addition to the need for professional development, Shevlin et al. (2013) demonstrate the vulnerability present amongst teachers and the issues caused from a lack of time for planning and assessment.

Teachers are reluctant and resistant to adequately address inclusion in their learning environment due to fear (Shevlin et al., 2013). Conflictingly, inclusion is largely determined by teachers’ attitudes and how they interpret inclusion in their own contexts (O’Brien, 2021). According to the IEF (2011) the promotion of inclusion involves actual participation and accommodation to be present, which is difficult to come by from reluctant and hesitant teachers. Perhaps the most important factor in changing teacher fearful attitudes concerning the resistance to inclusion, is success with inclusion itself (Shevlin et al., 2013).

O’Gorman & Drury (2010) argue that a “more revolutionary approach to professional development could be adopted to challenge conventional wisdom and promote a truly inclusive education system in Ireland” (p. 157). A push for a counter narrative, “a story that is told for the purpose of resisting a socially shared narrative used to justify the oppression of a social group” (Lindemann, 2020: 286), of inclusion is required. O’Gorman and Drudy (2010) call for all society’s structures and institutions to adapt their current procedures to equally include everyone, including those with a disability. Additionally, it is crucial that professionals are appropriately prepared and trained to develop inclusive practices sufficiently (O’Gorman & Drudy, 2010). A commitment to diversity should incorporate inclusive counter narratives and could possibly prevent the “fears and perceived inadequacies” experienced by teachers (Shevlin et al 2013: 1131).

2.2.4 Teacher Autonomy

The Draft Curriculum (2020) describes teachers as ‘agentic professionals’. SEN teams have been afforded more autonomy with the revised model of allocation for SEN pupils, allowing for more flexibility at school level (Walsh, 2021). Teachers are being afforded more power through the Draft Curriculum (2020) as they can interpret the children’s learning through broad learning outcomes which allow for variations in children’s learning needs (p. 21). Yet there is a gap in accessing meaningful professional development in inclusion and SET practice (O’Gorman & Drury, 2010). Can SETs, as ‘agentic professionals’ without mandatory requirements for SEN qualifications, confidently follow and adhere to the IEF (2011) which invites schools to individually determine how to use the framework based on their individual set of priorities. The Draft Curriculum (2020) is aiming to provide further autonomy to teachers, but the necessary support must be accompanied in order to follow the guidelines of

the curriculum framework whilst simultaneously promoting inclusion to an appropriate standard.

Walsh (2021) confirms that schools now enjoy enhanced autonomy on SEN provision which has the potential to promote enhanced professional practice, shared learning, and collaborative decision-making, if nurtured and supported through mutual support, trust, and joint action. Despite the positive of receiving further agency, the findings of Walsh's (2021) study indicate the lack of confidence of principals and SEN teams in relation to the additional provision of responsibility.

Confidence within the SEN context comes through experience and by learning from others (Shevlin et al., 2013). Kelchtermans (2018) claims that through agency, teachers enact their confidence and build self-understanding, which eventually is conveyed through their practice. Buchanan (2015) believes that there is choice within agency, but the options to choose from are not freely formed. Personal actions and identity can be "constrained by accountability policies" (2015: 714). The general allocation model provides teachers with greater autonomy, yet "inclusive practice relies to a large extent on teacher knowledge, skills, understanding, capacity and attitudes" (Shevlin et al. 2013: 1121). Teachers are increasingly being granted more agency, but issues including the correct provision of support and the capacity for this large volume of autonomy remain undecided.

2.2.5 Barriers to Inclusion

Time constraints prove to be a barrier of effective inclusive practice (Shevlin et al., 2013). A lack of scheduled time for the planning of SEN provision challenges the development of more inclusive practice (Walsh, 2021). Shevlin et al. (2013) highlight that SETs receive inadequate

time for planning and structured collaboration, in addition to trying to get to know the individual pupils and identifying their strengths and needs. Furthermore, at a whole school level, an insufficient amount of time is dedicated to developing inclusive practice through training days, staff meetings and in-service (Shevlin et al., 2013).

Liaising with outside agencies to complete formal assessments and reports, is challenging for schools due to time constraints which introduces another barrier in preventing the appropriate provision of support and inclusion (Walsh, 2021). Although time delays continue to occur, removing the need for formal assessment and focusing on identifying learning needs rather than on diagnoses for the purpose of resource allocation, has been a positive change (Walsh, 2021). That said minimal collaborative practice is now occurring between schools and health professionals, even though outside agencies make diagnoses and have adequate training (Walsh, 2021). Greater access to professional support from agencies such as the National Educational Psychological Service (NEPS) could assist in creating learning environments which are more inclusive in the long term (Shevlin et al. 2013). As stated in the NCSE (2004) Education for Persons with Special Educational Needs (EPSEN) Act, children with special education needs have the right to be educated in an inclusive environment (p. 7).

2.2.6 Importance of SPHE and Well-Being for Promotion of Inclusion

The NCCA (1999b) Social Personal and Health Education (SPHE) Curriculum amalgamates tackling issues of inclusion in a combination of three ways, through a positive school atmosphere, through specific time allocation and through an integrated approach across a range of subject areas. Teaching SPHE provides opportunities for children to “develop a framework of values, attitudes, understanding and skills that will inform their decisions and actions both now and in the future” (NCCA, 1999b: 2) Additionally it provides opportunities for personal

development, health and well-being, inclusion and diversity (NCCA, 1999b). The Draft Curriculum (2020) now includes well-being as one of the five broad curriculum areas. Physical and health education (PE) and SPHE are elements within the umbrella term of well-being and are the only areas which have not received a reduction in allocated hours. Furthermore inclusive education and diversity is one of the eight overarching principles of the Draft Curriculum (2020) and fostering wellbeing is one of the key competencies.

The IEF (2011) argues that an effective pastoral care system promotes and safeguards pupil well-being. Monitoring attendance, participation, well-being, and performance on a regular basis, promotes the attainment of each pupil's full potential through personal, academic, and social goals. According to the DES (2019) Wellbeing Policy Statement and Framework for Practice (Wellbeing Policy), well-being should be carried out through all aspects of teaching and learning in primary education. Students spend most of their day in classrooms and their daily school experiences greatly contribute to their well-being. Therefore, teaching and learning must be "democratic, inclusive, engaging, differentiated, fostering expectations of high achievement and providing opportunity for success" (DES, 2019: 14). Furthermore, the Wellbeing Policy (2019) addresses the continuum of support guidelines from the Department of Education and Science (2007) in that universal support (for all) in addition to targeted support (for some and few) in schools can effectively prevent and address anxiety and low mood for many students (NCSE, 2011). One of the key approaches to developing inclusive education, according to the Draft Curriculum (2020), is recognising the importance of "valuing that all children are unique and will develop and learn at their own rate" (p. 21).

The IEF (2011) prioritises staff well-being in addition to student well-being, based on a rights-based perspective, which safeguards the welfare of all school staff. Shevlin et al. (2013) express

that a positive ethos and positive attitudes of staff contribute to successful inclusion within a school. The SPHE Curriculum (1999c) makes the ongoing claim that implementing and developing SPHE through a moral and spiritual capacity, is greatly influenced by the “ethos or characteristic spirit of the school” (p. 2). Shevlin et al. (2013) highlight that positive school ethos and positive attitude of staff contribute significantly to the success of inclusion in schools.

2.2.7 Conclusion

This section of the literature review examined the role inclusion plays in the education system of Ireland and the existing barriers, including time and professional development, which impede the successful and effective implementation of inclusion. SPHE and well-being are undoubtedly linked to the provision for inclusion in primary schools and are essential in correctly following the IEF (2011). The well-being of school staff must be catered for in order to promote well-being amongst the pupils in the aim of the promotion of inclusion through a whole school approach. Inclusion in Irish primary schools has greatly developed over the past two decades, yet there is still a long way to go. This section supports my value of inclusion in education and more specifically within my role as a SET. I now turn this chapter to my next value of care and its significance in education, particularly within the SEN environment.

2.3 Care

2.3.1 Defining Care

“Care denotes an approach to personal and social morality that shifts ethical considerations to context, relationships, and affective knowledge in a manner that can only be fully understood if care’s embodied dimension is recognized. Care is committed to flourishing and growth of individuals, yet acknowledges our interconnectedness and interdependence” (Hamington, 2004). Noddings (2013), believes that caring relationships are fundamental to human existence

and that there are two participants in a caring relation, the “one-caring” (p. 28) and the “cared-for” (p. 55). She believes that both parties are obliged, however not in the same demeanour, to meet one another morally and to care reciprocally for one another. Furthermore, Noddings (2005) maintains that “the main aim of education should be to produce competent, caring, loving, and lovable people” (p. 174).

2.3.2 Care in Education

Care is one of the four ethical pillars of the Code of Conduct (2016) which underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct of education (p. 6). A duty of care for all students is paramount in the role of a teacher (NSCE, 2011). The Code of Conduct (2016) states that a “teachers’ practice is motivated by the best interests of the pupils/students entrusted to their care. Teachers show this through positive influence, professional judgement and empathy in practice” (106: 6). Noddings’ (2005) vision of education sees schools as centres of care in which teaching and learning would take place through personal methodologies, addressing aspects of concern which exist amongst those being educated. Noddings (2005) notes that to successfully implement a programme of care in schools, curriculum and instruction must assemble in unity. The cold separation of these features will not work in establishing competent, caring, loving and loveable people, the main aim of education (Noddings, 2005).

Care is embedded into the Draft Curriculum (2020) which declares that “caring relationships within the school community support and impact positively on children’s engagement, motivation and learning” (p. 6). Hayes’ (2008) theory of a nurturing pedagogy integrates the processes of interaction, dialogue and planning. She affirms that this leads to a shared approach, between the teacher and student, in the construction of knowledge in an educational

environment, which is responsive immediately to the child. Noddings (2005) initiates a call to action which aids in developing a programme of care. These actions include, caring for affiliated needs, diminishing the impulse of control, discarding programme hierarchies, developing the themes of care, and finally, teaching that competence is required to care in all domains (2005: 174).

Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) argue that teachers must hold a strong moral purpose in their role and they cannot solely be academically accomplished in their vocation, they must care about the personal development of their students. Noddings (2005) backs a drastic statement, that academic achievement and intellectual development are not the goal of education and that moral life should be embraced as the central goal of education (p. 173). Noddings (2013) deems moral education to be of a higher significance and that its purpose is to provoke an ethical agency in those being educated to meet others morally. She also encloses that the persons preparing and undertaking to teach moral education will morally attempt to encounter the needs of all involved.

2.3.3 Practicing Care to Promote Equality

According to the Code of Conduct (2016), teachers should “acknowledge and respect the uniqueness, individuality and specific needs of pupils/students and promote their holistic development” (p. 7). No child should be perceived as inferior because of personal talents (Noddings, 2005). Encouraging others through confirmation helps to highlight the best in people thus self-development is encouraged from a caring perspective (Buber, 1965, cited in Noddings, 2005). A vision of a better self, through both the lens of the student and the lens of the teacher, is experienced through confirmation (Noddings, 2005).

Critical race theory according to Solórzano and Yosso (2002) aims to eliminate racism as part of a bigger purpose of “opposing or eliminating other forms of subordination based on gender, class, sexual orientation, language, and national origin” (p. 25). Critical race methodology foregrounds race and racism, but also questions individual debates on class, race and gender, which are viewed as origins of strength (Solórzano and Yosso, 2002). Educational environments, as noted by critical race researchers, can be controversial when analysed simultaneously against their power to “oppress and marginalize” and to “emancipate and empower” (2002: 26). Educational inequity is explained, whether explicitly or implicitly, by means of majoritarian stories, which hold layers of assumptions, “through a cultural deficit model and thereby pass on beliefs that students of color are culturally deprived” (2002: 31). The Code of Conduct (2016) places respect as a core value which accentuates the importance of teachers upholding dignity. Critical race theory invites SETs to think about our practice and to question whether we are respectful to students in our SET practice by focusing on strengths rather than deficits.

Counterstories according to Lindemann (2020) justify social groups and provide a voice to the oppressed by uprooting some part of the oppressive story and replacing it with a more accurate one. Furthermore, Solórzano and Yosso (2002) illustrate the counterstory as a means of communicating narratives of those who are on the margins of society, whose anecdotes are not often reported. The new story must be accepted by the dominant group and furthermore, treat the oppressed social group accordingly (Lindemann, 2020). Additional damage can be a result of these narratives. The oppressed social group can be recognised as socially and morally inferior, thus an abusive power can be held against them (2020: 287). The oppressed, “as divided, unauthentic beings”, can only begin to contribute to their liberating pedagogy when they realise, they are “hosts” of the oppressor (Freire, 2000: 48). Members of the oppressed

group may have conceded the “hateful light the story sheds on them” (2020: 290). The challenge for agentic SETs is to support counterstories which challenge the oppressed and seek to find new stories for students to find meaning in.

2.3.4 Importance of Continuity of Care

Noddings (2005) believes that schools are environments of diversity which cannot focus only on achieving academic goals, similar to how in a family the parental role is more than feeding and housing their children. She asserts that fundamental needs of students must primarily be catered for in the learning space before thinking of achieving specific academic goals. The single-purpose view of education and the academic achievements is “practically and technically wrong” (2005: 63). Planning for continuity in educational institutions provides the potential to meet all caring needs of the students and Noddings (2005) asserts that this can be addressed in the following four ways; continuity in purpose, continuity of school residence, continuity of teachers and students, and continuity of curriculum.

2.3.5 Conclusion

In order for children to develop to become “unique, capable and caring individuals” (NCCA, 2020: 5), care must be a central within their educational environment. Children should experience the feeling of being ‘cared-for’ and the action of showing care. The care expressed through relationships and present within a teachers identity should not be influenced by academic capabilities or diagnoses. Caring relationships in the learning environment must be committed and mutual as “we cannot care for ourselves in any meaningful way in isolation from others” (Noddings, 2005: 90). In the next section of the literature review, the focus turns to the importance of fostering relationships to encourage care and inclusion in the primary school context.

2.4. Relationality

2.4.1 Relationships in Education

Relationships are one of the eight overarching principles of the Draft Curriculum (2020). This shows an improvement in comparison to the NCCA (1999a) Primary School Curriculum which does not specifically address relationships in any of its seventeen principles. According to the Draft Curriculum (2020), if caring relationships are fostered, the engagement, motivation, and learning of the children can be positively enhanced. Relationships are central to high quality teaching and learning (2020: 20). Relationships between the teacher and the child are improved through interactions as every interaction is significant and contributes to a child-centred responsive pedagogy (NCCA, 2020). According to the Code of Conduct (2016), relationships are caring and committed on behalf of the teacher. The Draft Curriculum (2020) promotes developing wellbeing in the students as it supports them to value positive and healthy relationships that are balanced and connected with relational and emotional aspects. The uniqueness, individuality and specific needs of pupils are acknowledged within relationships to promote the holistic development of the students (TC, 2016). Additionally the Code of Conduct (2016) recognises the importance of working on improving relationships in the school environment, in hope of building a culture of respect and trust.

2.4.2 Communication in School Relationships

Mutual respect between staff, pupils, parents, and others in the school environment is the basis of communication (NCSE, 2011). The IEF (2011) highlights the importance of being aware that communication between staff and students in the school community can take place in many modes including non-verbal, signing, written, and visual. The power connected with non-verbal communication and body language must be recognised by all staff for the quality of interpersonal relations and inclusion to be contributed to (NCSE, 2011). “Reciprocal, open

lines of communication take into account the needs of pupils with special educational needs” (2011: 28). The fourfold interests which naturally occupy children are communication, construction, expression, and investigation (Dewey, cited in Noddings, 2005: 86). Therefore, it is through these activities which children grow to develop the skills and capacities to tackle developmental tasks as they mature (Noddings, 2005). The Draft Curriculum (2020) raises the significance of communication in that language is consistently being enhanced through interactions with others, as it provides the opportunity to engage “emotionally, socially, cognitively, imaginatively and aesthetically in relationships” (NCCA, 2020: 13). Communication brings me to the next segment of my literature review in which I will discuss the importance of the provision of voice in education.

2.5 Voice

2.5.1 Children’s Right to a Voice

The United Nations International Children’s Emergency Fund (UNICEF) Ireland (2019) declares that “every child has the right to an education. Every child, everywhere, no matter their circumstances, should have that right fulfilled”. Lundy and McEvoy (2009) claim that a children’s rights-based approach to the selection of outcomes for proposed educational interventions should be taken. This practice, mandated by The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (UNCRC) (2010), ensures children’s power and enhances their claims as stakeholders. The UNCRC (2010), have developed a framework which acknowledges education as a fundamental right of children’s human rights. As discussed by Lundy and McEvoy (2009), the UNCRC (2010) raised awareness of the lack of power children have on impacting their own lives and their opinions being earnestly be taken into consideration. Like the opinion of Lundy and McEvoy (2009) today’s society should automatically query how to best adopt a children’s rights-based approach, rather than if this approach should be taken. “In

order to know what will work for children there is no option but to work with children to secure the realisation of their rights” (2009: 58).

2.5.2 Pupil Voice

Lundy (2007) draws awareness to the fact that respecting student’s views is not just good practice but it is a legally binding obligation. She continues by affirming that pupil voice should be firmly located within the framework of children’s rights. This is supported by the issue that adults can find reasons to not give children’s views due weight. Article 12 of the UNCRC (2010), gives children the right to have their views given due weight in all matters affecting them. Lundy (2007) proposes a new model of child participation to successfully implement Article 12 . Her model considers the implications of four separate factors which include space, voice, audience and influence. Figure 2.1 displays Lundy’s (2007) model of conceptualising Article 12.

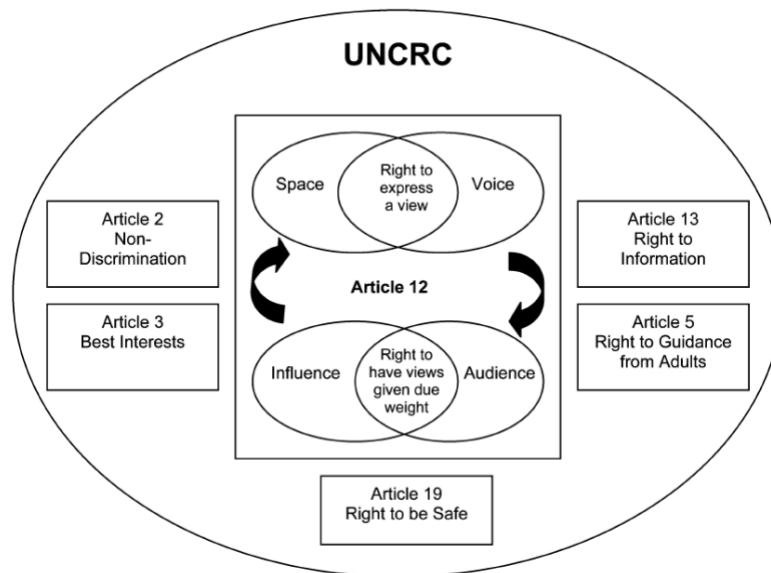


Figure 2.1: Lundy’s (2007) Model of Child Participation (p. 932)

Lundy believes that there is a need for communicating the legal and human rights elements in Article 12 in a new way through this model so that pupils have the right to express their views and for their views to be given due weight. Firstly, pupils must have the opportunity for

engagement and involvement in decision-making in a space which the pupils are encouraged to express their views. Secondly, the children's right to express their views is dependent only on their ability to form a view, whether mature or not, and does not rely on their capacity to express a mature view. Thirdly, pupils should be guaranteed the opportunity to communicate their views to individuals who have the responsibility to listen. Finally, adults must consider the best interests of the children so that their right to have their views given due weight is not overtaken by the ideology that adults in their lives know what is best for them. The challenge to find ways of ensuring that adults not only listen to children, but that they take their views seriously is tackled through following the elements of Lundy's (2007) model. The IEF (2011) states that to fulfil pupil potential schools must listen to the voice of the students, promote self-advocacy and encourage expressing personal experiences and identities. The IEF's (2011) view of promoting student well-being overlaps with Lundy's (2007) model of child participation, both of which aid in the increased involvement of child participation in education through decision-making.

2.5.3 Decision-Making

Lundy's (2007) model for conceptualising Article 12, addresses the obligation to children in terms of educational decision-making, through the right to express their views and for their views to be given due weight. "The practice of actively involving pupils in decision-making should not be portrayed as an option which is in the gift of adults but a legal imperative which is the right of the child" (2007: 931). Children should be made aware that having a voice is a right. Through the research conducted by Lundy et al. (2011), it was agreed that incorporating the children's views into the decision-making process of the project would be beneficial in the quest for high-quality, relevant data on children's lives. Lundy (2007) emphasises the significance of inviting and encouraging the input of the children rather than merely acting as

a recipient of views if they happen to be provided by the children. The Draft Curriculum (2020) addresses the importance of engaging children in decision-making about their own learning (p. 21). Providing opportunities for decision-making is specified in the Draft Curriculum (2020) which links with Lundy's (2007) conception that, "children's perspectives should be viewed as an integral part of school disclosure" (p. 934). The outlook of children speaking out and voicing their opinions, as an attempt to undermine authority, is diminishing in current practice as children are being further encouraged to express their views.

2.5.4 Universal Design for Learning

Universal Design for Learning (UDL), developed by Center for Applied Special Technology (CAST) (2022), is a set of principles for curriculum development which provide individuals with equal opportunities to learn. UDL addresses diverse learners through the proactive planning of engaging and accessible lessons (Brennan, 2022). Brennan (2022) describes UDL as a method of planning that helps teachers create lessons that are effective for the broad range of students in their classrooms, including those with special needs. Additionally, Spencer (2011) adds that UDL is a "valuable tool for the proactive planning of engaging, accessible lessons in today's diverse classrooms" (p. 10). She continues by expressing that it helps educators to develop motivating, accessible instruction that will increase the participation of all learners. Like the UDL, Brennan (2021) describes the provision of differentiation through choice in the aspiration of enhancing the inclusion of all learners without marking any individual as different. The research carried out by Brennan (2021) shows that this pedagogical approach can engage and motivate learners in purposeful and inclusive learning environments by offering choice. UDL and differentiation by choice provide students with a voice in their learning. According to the Wellbeing Policy (2019), meeting the wellbeing needs and the best

interests of children requires us to respect and value the voice of children and foster their belonging and connectedness to the school community (p. 9).

2.5.5 Well-Being and Pupil Voice

Children's well-being can be supported when their own views are taken into account to inform their educational provision (Murray, 2019). Student voice is one of the key in the Wellbeing Policy (2019) and is developed through relationships and partnerships. The fact that children spend most of their day in classrooms, their daily experience of teaching and learning consequently contributes greatly to their well-being (DES, 2019). Therefore teaching and learning must be both "democratic" and "inclusive" (DES, 2019: 14). The Draft Curriculum (2020) also addresses the promotion of well-being through choice, agency, motivation, and engagement. Each of these four elements are positively impacted through effective provision of student voice.

The Draft Curriculum (2020) supports schools in working towards the creation of inclusive learning environments through providing opportunities for feedback and supporting the children to reflect on what and how they learn. It is important to recognise that children express their views in a variety of ways, not all of which are verbal (Lundy, 2007). The need for adults to receive training in the skills of active listening is recognised by Lundy (2007), which would involve taking appropriate account of the range of non-verbal cues deployed by children whilst expressing themselves.

2.5.6 Conclusion

Article 12 and Lundy's (2007) model provide the opportunity to strongly contribute to the creation of children's right culture in schools. The provision of student voice and the proactive

steps taken to encourage children to express their views in primary school builds relationships in the learning environment. Children becoming active stakeholders in decision-making processes and providing opinions, in which their views are not only listened to but taken seriously, adds to developing positive well-being in their education. Promoting inclusion while simultaneously providing student voice must facilitate that communication can occur in a range of ways. The uniqueness of each child must be recognised and interpreted by individual educators in order to positively ensure that each child feels they are being listened to. I will now discuss the final element of my literature review in which I will discuss teacher identity.

2.6 Identity

2.6.1 Teacher Identity

Teacher identity is understood as a “dynamic, career-long process of negotiating the teacher-self in relation to personal and emotional experiences, the professional and social context, and the micro and macro political environment” (Zembylas, 2018: 79). “Identity work” is needed to participate in high-quality teaching (2018: 78). This ‘identity work’ is a means of reflecting on oneself and the experiences, that provide awareness of promoting personal learning in teaching through beliefs, emotions, understandings, and personal and social values (Zembylas, 2018). ‘Identity work’ is a lens used to analyse the process and formation of identities and environments through social and political practices (Zembylas, 2018). Teachers can begin to participate in micro political actions if their self-understanding is constantly being interrogated (Kelchtermans, 2017). Kelchtermans (2017) argues that some teachers may even think about or leave the teaching profession if they are unable to be the teacher they want to be. Identity is also formed within the macro political level however, as a teacher the opportunity remains to establish oneself in a variety of ways (Buchanan, 2015). Teachers are constantly forming and reforming themselves through reflecting on their individualism and their practices, and

additionally by proceeding to find opportunities to complement their self-conceptions (Buchanan, 2015).

Kelchtermans (2009) “personal interpretative framework” (p. 260) gives teachers meaning in their practice and a rationale to follow and act upon in their profession. The framework is a lens which guides their actions and interpretations and provides sense-making of their cognitions. Teachers gain identity and a sense of how they see themselves in their professional practice through this framework (Kelchtermans, 2018). According to Kelchtermans (2009) self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspective are the five components that make up teachers’ self-understanding (p. 230). Furthermore, Kelchtermans (2018) discusses that the course of action through which each individual teacher interprets educational scripts, will depend on their personal sense making of a given document. Each teacher’s method of ‘narrating, navigating, and negotiating’ organisational and institutional documents will vary. Identity emerges and become apparent through this sense-making which influences their practices in the learning environment as, “even when teachers’ understanding of themselves is influenced, informed and to some point determined by the context, there always remains space and leeway for their individual choices, motives, and preferences” (Kelchtermans, 2018: 232).

2.6.2 Teacher Identity and Teacher Agency

The connection between teacher agency and teacher identity is a major implication for undertaking research as a teacher (Buchanan, 2015). Teacher agency establishes the core of self-understanding and can be accepted as “identities in motion” (Buchanan, 2015: 714). The Draft Curriculum (2020) encompasses an agentic teacher as “reflective, competent and capable of exercising professional judgement in response to individual learning needs in a variety of

contexts” (p. 5). Buchanan (2015) adds that agency is more than conducting identity, as professional actions and practices which transpire, influence their identity. Kelchtermans (2018) argues that teacher agency is “not simply a free, voluntaristic construction”, there are always other factors to consider such as social and cultural conditions (p. 237).

An era of accountability has had a ripple effect on teacher identity and agency as demands within the profession have reshaped the professionalism of teaching (Buchanan, 2015). Buchanan (2015) continues by voicing that this demand is not straightforwardly accepted by teachers and that identities are being interfered with because of the pressure to understand and connect with these accountability pressures. Stress is being placed on teachers which affects their self-understanding of their identity, thus their impacting their practice as a professional. Policies and professional guidelines are being weighed up by teachers against their professional and personal identities, which helps to discover relevant, suitable conditions for their personal learning environment (Buchanan, 2015). Identities are formed and reformed through this process of interpretation and evaluation, and professional agency is “carved out” (Buchanan, 2015: 701).

Noddings (2005) questions the fairness of all students equally enduring school and a curriculum which enhances the capabilities of some and not all learners. The paradigm of accountability is likely to become the present episteme of our time, which will shape further professional identities and teacher agencies in a similar manner in the future (Buchanan, 2015). Identities can negatively be shifted if actions are constrained by accountability policies and responding to the increased emphasis on standardised testing in schools (Buchanan, 2015). The feeling of vulnerability (Shevlin & Banks, 2021) and the feeling of inadequacy (Shevlin et al., 2013), discussed above in section 2.2.1, does not positively impact the autonomy and identity

of teachers. Buchanan (2015) declares that professional agency is reciprocally related to professional identity.

2.6.3 Narrative Identity

According to McAdams (2013) “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” (p. 100). Furthermore, identity in narrative terms, is “something composed over time, in relation with others, and with contexts” (Huber et al., 2003: 305). ‘Narrative’ is a word that until the 1980’s was rarely used in educational literature but has now entered the bank of general language in education (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004). The word narrative has lost its meaning as it entered the educational literature as a term and became a “common word” (Clandinin and Connelly, 2004: 580). Narrative identity work, or as Connelly and Clandinin (1999) refer to them as “stories to live by” (p. 592), implies the understanding of connections between narrative conceptions of identity and experience. Children asking questions, of each other and of themselves, engaging playfully with others and metaphorically analysing their stories alongside poems and books, aids in distinguishing their identities (Huber et al., 2003). Critical pedagogy (Giroux, 2013), helps students narrate their identities, through agency, as they participate in their own learning.

2.6.4 Conclusion

The personal identity of a teacher becomes intertwined with the professional identity as personal values divulge into their ‘standards of judgements’ of their everyday practice. The process of a teacher coming to terms with their self-understanding is a necessary aspect within their career if top-quality and meaningful teaching is to occur. Again, the person within the

teacher comes into play here as the agency of each individual teacher impacts their identity and the effectiveness of their practice. Through following the SPHE curriculum, teachers aim to develop student identity and begin their journey of this life-long process. Narrative identity also plays a role in the growth of identity as connections are made between the past and the present, similar to how learning does not begin or end at school. Examining identity as the final point in my literature review was irrefutable. Without the urge and curiosity to refine my identity as a teacher through conducting this research, I would not have made a powerful connection with my values and had the opportunity of enhancing my practice.

2.7 Conclusion

This chapter has provided an insight into the literature encompassing inclusion in the primary school context in Ireland, including the positive progress being made and the possibilities for further improvement. SET practice has been interrogated within the themes of inclusion, care, relationality, voice, and identity. The literature reviewed expands on how practicing care, building relationships, voicing opinions, and scrutinizing identities can aid in the improvement of exercising inclusion as an educator in order to meet the needs of all diverse learners.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology of the Study

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the research approach and design undertaken to enable my practice to move beyond deficit-based teaching as a SET and to practice care in relationships with the pupils before me. I will discuss the research rationale, design, methodology, data collection, ethical considerations, data analysis and limitations of the study. The focus of this self-study research is oriented towards teaching with inclusion and moving the practice of special education teaching beyond deficit teaching. As Goodnough (2010) states, self-study involves “a social practice that has the potential to be improved” (p. 167). I recognise myself as the subject of enquiry, as I aim to increase inclusion, practice care, accentuate student voice, and develop relationships through my chosen methods. I introduced three interventions into my practice, (1) Circle Time Discussion, (2) Two Stars and a Wish, and (3) MDCD. Additionally, five professionals from various academic and professional backgrounds within education participated in interviews as part of the study. I aim to live closer to my values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice in my professional practice through this self-study.

3.1.2 Research Context

This research was carried out in a large, urban, co-educational primary school setting, with over one thousand students who come from a mix of socio-economic backgrounds. There are sixty class teachers, with five bands of each class from junior infants to sixth class, and twenty SETs. As a SET, I provide additional support for a range of pupils with diverse needs, including autism, dyspraxia and dyslexia. This involves delivering support in social skills, speech and language, fine and gross motor skills, literacy, numeracy, and English as an additional language (EAL), in a variety of one-to-one and small group settings. Due to Covid-19 restrictions, SETs

were assigned to only provide support for availing students of all abilities, within two mainstream classes for the academic year. Prior to the onset of Covid-19, students were withdrawn from a mix of classes to avail of support in the best learning environment suited to their needs. This year due to restrictions, I worked solely with a broad range of diverse learners from fifth and second class.

3.2 Self-Study Research

Self-study is an approach used to discover insights, through research, into our own educational practices (Loughran, 2010). It provides the opportunity to examine values of the participants and decipher if these values are being lived up to in their professional practice. The desire to complete self-study action research resonates with having the opportunity to enhance one's professional practice. However, without contribution from others, this process would not be possible (Pithouse et al, 2009). The goal of becoming a critically reflective teacher cannot occur by oneself. Pithouse et al, (2009) maintain that one can only exist and fully understand oneself in relation to another. That said, Loughran (2010) discusses how the focus remains on the self, in relation to others and to one's own professional practice.

The use of diverse methodologies in self-study allows for critical feedback on practice and encourages teacher identity to emerge. In turn, this will aid in positively altering future pedagogic practice. When the "self" we come to see in self-study is not the "self" we think we are, or the "self" we would like to be, it makes us feel uncomfortable (Dadds 1993, cited in Pithouse et al. 2009: 47). In this way, self-study is distinctive as we are discovering attributes of our teaching techniques, whilst analysing the research we are undertaking in our learning environments. Kelchtermans (2018) states that we are in fact gaining further self-understanding as the outcome of the meaningful interactions in our professional contexts. Self-understanding

is subjective in that it “reflects teachers’ understanding of themselves, but at the same time reflects intense processes of intersubjective and contextualized sense-making” (Kelchtermans, 2018: 231).

Dweck’s (2015) theory of a “growth mindset” resonates with my approach of self-study (p. 20). An educator who establishes and aspires towards a ‘growth mindset’, firstly within themselves through self-study, would secondly in turn, be much more capable of promoting and supporting the development of a ‘growth mindset’ in their students through their practice. Pithouse et al. (2009) similarly make the point that if teachers know about themselves, further opportunities for growth are provided. Completing self-study and trying to improve yourself and your practices is a crucial attribute of social action (2009: 48). Self-study and its process can change its participants and their individual circumstances and situations. Things can be seen from a different light and through a distinct perspective, which encourages action taking (Pithouse et al. 2009).

Within the community of self-study practitioners there is an essence of mutual respect and support. Completing a self-study under positive circumstances and with helpful company, has a significant influence on professional learning (Pithouse et al., 2009). Kemmis and Wilkinson (1998) envisage how participatory action research (PAR) is a social process in which people are trying to understand themselves, how they were formed and how they are “formed and re-formed as individuals” (p. 23). Drawing on self-study research, this paper now shifts towards the action research methodologies used in my personal self-study of challenging deficit-focused teaching and practicing care in relationships.

3.3 Self-Study Action Research Methodology

Bassey (1990) asserts that the action research paradigm was designed to improve action. Educational practices may need to be invented and pursued in the classroom to conduct this type of research. A strong ethic of respect in which researchers are aware of issues that can arise in a school context is paramount when carrying out self-study action research (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, April 2012). Action research gives space for open criticism. Observing and reflecting through Brookfield's (2017) "four lenses of critical reflection" (see Figure 3.1), which include, students' eyes, colleagues' perception, personal experience, and theory, all provide a rigorous examination on the research being undertaken (p. 61).

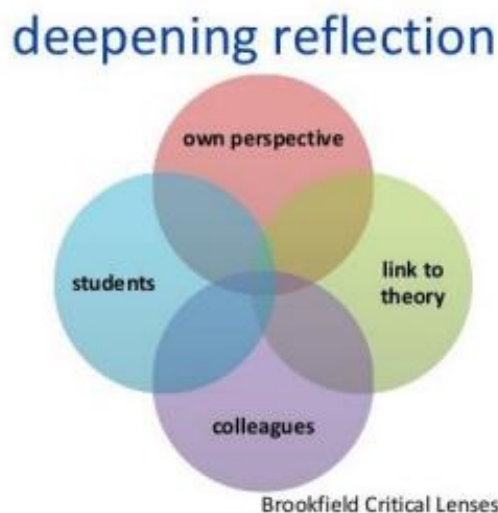


Figure 3.1: Brookfield's Critical Lenses 2017

McDonagh et al. (2019) declare that conflict can arise between these lenses. Outlining your research and how you attempt to resolve any issues of conflict, displays reflection on the limitations of the study. Kelchtermans' (2018) three categories of 'narrating, navigating and negotiating' personal practice, provide the opportunity to develop self-understanding through self-study action research (p. 237).

The process of, and learning from action research speaks directly to my identity and values, and exceeds the relative merit of the outcome. The research may not always be a success, but the learning experienced in meaningful self-study is invaluable. That said, knowledge creation never stops when ‘reflection-on-practice’ is being undertaken (Fook, 2015). It is an ongoing process for any committed practicing professional. Being critically reflective involves self-questioning and self-reflecting on deeply rooted practices and assumptions. Questioning whether you are living by your values becomes a regular thought, in addition to asking if a “living theory” can be generated, be it through a “living contradiction” or a “relationally dynamic awareness” (Whitehead, 2009: 87). Justifying new and established research findings and the impact they have on future practice is paramount.

3.3.1 Ontology and Epistemology

McNiff (2013) declares ontology as a theory of being and the way we view ourselves. Ontological values are “at the heart of the individual’s sense of themselves and their ways of being” (Whitehead, 2009: 94). They are central to educational action research and provide a justified meaning and purpose. Throughout the course of action research, ontological values are clarified and developed (Whitehead, 2009). Inclusion, care, relationality, and voice emerged as my ontological values throughout my research.

Epistemology is a theory of knowledge. It is the view of knowledge and how it is created (McNiff, 2013). Foucault and Gordon (1980) understood knowledge as power. However, Buber (1958) asserted that knowledge is co-constructed and values the contribution of children in the pursuit of learning. My understanding of knowledge is that it is socially created through communication and relationships. One of my reasons for wanting to complete action research was to “generate knowledge that can lead to improved understanding and experience for social

and environmental benefit” as a SET (McNiff, 2013: 27). As I acknowledge the importance of student voice in my learning environment, I can demonstrate greater care for my students and value their contribution to relationships within the school context. Similar to the views of Lundy (2007), all students should be facilitated with the opportunity to express their views. Furthermore, “teachers not only have to create caring relations in which they are the carers, but that they also have a responsibility to help their students develop the capacity to care” (Noddings, 2005: 18). In seeking to improve my professional practice and moving beyond a deficit approach, I am showing care for my students by giving greater value to their voice. By doing so, I am creating a “living-educational-theory” to stand by in my teaching (Whitehead, 1989: 1). As I practice care through relationships with my students, I aim to be a model for my pupils in which they too will practice care with others both at school and at home.

3.3.2 Self-Study Action Research Theory

I initially drew on questions from McNiff and Whitehead (2005) to help develop an action plan appropriate to my concern (Figure 3.2). Through questioning, discussing and reflecting, the plan for undertaking action research continued to become more transparent.

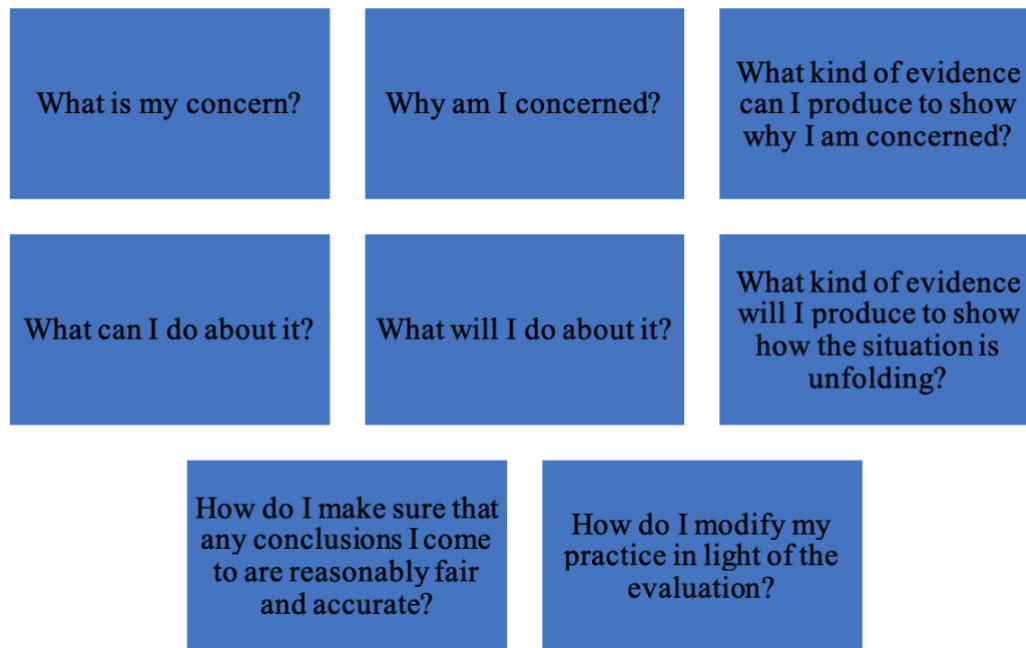


Figure 3.2: Practical questions for action research
 Source: McNiff and Whitehead (2005: 1)

‘PAR’ (Kemmis, McTaggart & Nixon 2014) first came to mind as a suitable approach for completing my research. PAR helps people to “change reality in order to investigate it”, which is what I hope to achieve whilst completing this study (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998: 21). Through conducting PAR, the possibility of questioning educational realities in order to make changes for the benefit of the educator and the students is inevitable.

With further investigation and analysis, I deemed self-study action research to be more suited to my project. Self-study action research (Loughran 2010) is a methodology for studying professional practice. Whereas self-study used by teachers, focuses on their own practice (Vanassche & Kelchtermans, 2015). Self-study has a powerful attachment with teacher education and is undertaken to alter practice. Action research requires investigation into one’s practice and on the self in relation to others (McNiff, 2002). Zeichner (2005) noted that “many teachers greatly benefit from conducting self-study research through improvements in their work as teacher educators and that this visible commitment to self-inquiry provides a model

for their students” (p. 750). Self-study action research was the perfect method for my research of analysing how I can challenge deficit-based teaching as a SET and to practice care in relationships with the pupil before me.

3.4 Research Design

This chapter now turns to the methodologies designed for the research which involves the action research approach, the data collection tools and the significance of my reflective journal. An organised, planned, and systematic approach is necessary when conducting any form of research.

3.4.1 Action Research Approach

In this self-study, the purpose of the research is to enhance my professional SET practice by challenging deficit-based teaching and by practicing care in relationships with my students. My values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice are central in my research. I deny these values when communication is not situated at the forefront of my practice, i.e. when the children do not get a say in their learning activities, I do not share targets and goals achieved with other staff who work closely with the students and I do not listen and respond to pupil voice. My research is oriented towards fostering a learning environment that affords greater importance to student knowledge and agency, in which all students feel ‘cared-for’.

3.4.2 Data Collection

Data collection is integral in any type of research. Using a variety of data collection tools was critical in ensuring triangulation and demonstrating credibility in my claim to new knowledge. Triangulation is a qualitative research strategy which tests the validity of research through the conjunction of information from various sources. Cohen et al. (2007) propose that when

research is studied from more than one viewpoint, the complexity and richness of the research can be reinforced. Table 1 outlines the initial research plan and timeframe.

Date:	Action:
September and October 2021	Research topic identified. Reflective journaling began.
November 2021	Critical engagement with relevant literature occurred.
December 2021	Ethical approval from the college and supervisor granted
January 2022	Permission from the Board of Management, to conduct my research in the school was granted. Consent received from critical friend and colleagues and educational professionals completing interviews
January – March 2022	Data collection takes place. Review of the cycles occur with feedback from critical friend.
April 2022	Data analysed and interpreted.
May 2022	The data and findings finalised.
June 2022	Findings are compiled, and a summary research article is drawn up. Results presented to SET team in school at end of year meeting
July 2022	The self-study action research is written.
August 2022	Draft copy of thesis submitted
September 2022	The self-study action research final copy submitted.

Table 1: Initial Research Plan and Time Frame

This research timeframe was “fluid, open and responsive”, due to on-going reflection and as a result of Covid-19 (Kemmis and Wilkinson, 1998: 21). As a SET, I regularly had to cover mainstream classes due to the substitute crisis caused by Covid-19. The implementation of interventions and consequently the data collection process were interfered with. Action research is most certainly not linear. The messiness involved in action research generates depth and rigour, which must be celebrated (Cook, 2009). As part of my research I introduced three new interventions into my practice which I critically reflected on after each cycle. This is displayed in Figure 3.3.

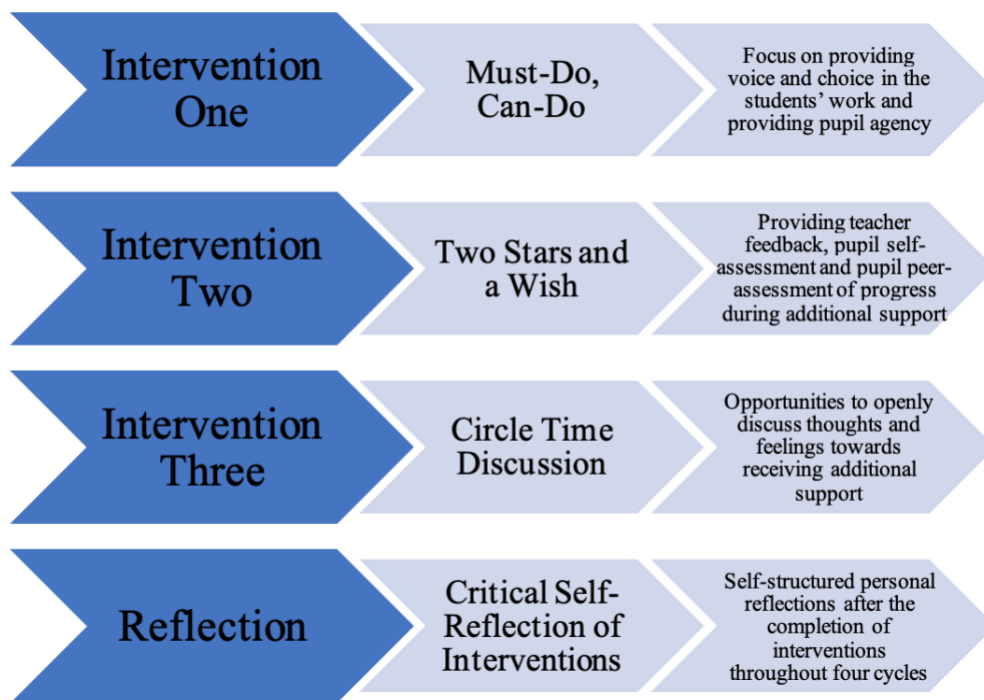


Figure 3.3: Action Research Intervention Focus

3.4.3 Practice One: Circle Time Discussion

Circle Time (Mosley, 1996) is an effective mechanism used to explore children's views as it provides the opportunity for speaking in a "supportive listening environment" (Lundy et al. 2011: 724). A Discussion Circle (Cohen et al. 2018) is another similar intervention, which resonates with bringing forth the chance to partake in discussions and to challenge fellow participants in natural and familiar environments. I decided that blending these two approaches and comprising a 'Circle Time Discussion' was an ideal model for my research. I completed this intervention twice with my fifth class students, to hear their voice on receiving additional support in school and to encourage them to express their concerns and interests. Furthermore, I wanted to promote the importance of speaking out to my students and expressing their voice on what matters to them. The first Circle Time Discussion was carried out at the beginning of cycle one, in which I established a baseline of thoughts and opinions of the participants through a variety of questions (Appendix B.2). The second, completed at the end of cycle four enabled

me to bear witness to further views and changes in opinions through a similar range of questions (Appendix B.3).

3.4.4 Practice Two: Two Stars and a Wish

Care and inclusion were exposed through enhancing my relationships with staff and students, through the introduction of a ‘Two Stars and a Wish’ communication strategy. By providing further insight into how the children progressed in respect of their strengths and needs, greater levels of inclusion, honesty, and openness were evident. Each fortnight, I utilised the ‘Two Stars and a Wish’ structure (Appendix B.4) with second and fifth class pupils to communicate feedback on their learning. This was then shared with the student, the class teacher, and the special needs assistant (SNA), if applicable. The stars outlined two aspects of positive feedback. The wish identified a target which the student is working towards. The targets, developments and achievements of the pupil were clearly expressed to all personnel involved. The class teacher and SNA were aware of the goals the specific students were working towards while receiving additional support. This afforded greater understanding of the support being provided and practiced inclusion to a higher degree in the school environment. With the provision of this awareness, the class teacher and SNA could help the pupil achieve the set goal, the ‘wish’. The aim was that the students would have a better understanding of their own pathways and to become more aware of what is to come in their personal learning journeys.

3.4.5 Practice Three: Must-Do, Can-Do

To facilitate support for my fifth class literacy group in developing agency and student voice, I introduced a MDCD approach. A must-do activity was individually chosen by the students from the template provided (Appendix B.5). This must be completed in order to begin a can-do activity. The idea for this intervention was inspired from a practice I observed when teaching

in New Zealand. A greater level of choice is provided to the students when using this format. Previously in my ordinary practice, I chose all activities for the pupils to complete. The combination of the MDCD preserves the focus of improving and developing specific literacy skills to reach targets in their SSPs while also providing the opportunity for freedom within their learning simultaneously. Comprehension activities, cloze procedures, and sequencing stories were examples of must-do activities. The can-do activities were more creative, open and directed towards the personal interests of the students, yet progress towards achieving the targets of the SSPs was still occurring. Examples of can-do activities included drawing a prediction of what will happen next in a novel, designing an invention or writing a song, story or poem. Such activities offered greater motivation among the students through the provision of choice and voice in their learning activities. The pupils wanted to complete a must-do activity from the list provided, so that they could move onto a self-chosen can-do activity. In turn positive ownership of the completed tasks and their personal strengths were promoted.

3.4.6 Reflections

Reflection became a structured aspect in my data collection process as I contemplated the effectiveness of my interventions after each cycle. Through drawing on the practical questions for action research of McNiff and Whitehead (2005), I generated a personal set of reflective questions (Appendix C.1) which aided in critically reflecting on my school based interventions in a systematic way. Roche (2011) argues that people have an infinite capacity to think critically and that new knowledge is generated for themselves in the process of reflection. Reflection regularly occurred on my interventions, my values, and on dialogue. A combination of Schön's (1983) "reflection-in-action" (p. 50) and "reflection-on-action" (p. 276) were naturally employed. 'Reflection-in-action' includes instant thoughts of reflection that occur as events are unfolding. This can result in plans being influenced on-the-spot. Whereas

‘reflection-on-action’ is more formal. For me, ‘reflection-on-action’ became the focal point of rigorous reflective practice through systematic reflections. I critically reflected on the three interventions introduced into my practice, after each of the four cycles (Appendix C.2, C.3, C.4). Reflection is unavoidable in teaching and teacher development (Kelchtermans, 2009). Through reflection, I have the opportunity to decipher where there is room for further development.

3.5 Interview with Educational Professionals

In addition to the practice component of my research, interviews were conducted with five educational professionals to gather their insights. Interviews were carried out with a child psychologist, a lecturer in inclusive and special education, in addition to three colleagues, a mainstream class teacher, a SET, and a SNA. Each of these individuals have invaluable experience in the field of education. I gained a complex understanding into their views on inclusion, care, relationality, and voice. I carefully generated the questions, based on my values and informed by the literature review, in order to obtain valuable data (Appendix B.9). The interviews support triangulation and provide validation of my research. Before conducting any interviews, ethical guidelines were followed and a plain language statement and an informed consent form were sent to each participant.

3.6 Reflective Journal

I began writing in my reflective journal (RJ) at the beginning of the Master of Education (M.Ed) in August 2021. My journey with reflective journaling has progressed from writing recounts to critically reflecting on my practice scrutinized by my values. I frequently recorded journal entries on events, observations, and interactions in the school environment. Additionally, I reflected on conversations with my critical friend, regarding my research. As Dewey (1933)

reminds us, we do not learn from experience, we learn from reflecting on experience (p. 78). Throughout the course of the research, patterns emerged and became apparent during reflection, when time was taken to stand back and analyse actions within situations (Sullivan et al., 2016). As a result, my values were luminated. Moon's (2004) reflective questions (p. 210), accompanied with Kelchterman's 'personal interpretative framework', aided in my ability to produce deep reflective writing. Combined, they stimulated extensive insight into my understanding of reflection and into my own reflective practice.

3.7 Critical Friend

A critical friend is a "trusted person who asks provocative questions, provides data to be examined through another lens, and offers critique of a person's work as a friend" (Costa and Kallick, 1993: 50). The support of a caring, invested critical friend encourages professional relationships, which are supportive towards and enhance professional learning and development (MacPhail et al., 2021). I conducted formal discussions with my critical friend at two planned points of my research, in addition to the regular informal chats. I was cognizant of Brookfield's 'four lenses of critical reflection' and my personal values whilst reflecting on all discussions.

3.8 Ethical Dimensions of Action Research

Educational action research is no different from any other educational research in terms of ethical considerations. One key feature of action research is the conflict of interest between the role of the teacher as a professional and the role of the teacher as a researcher. Being conscious of bias and the power relations possible between the teacher and students is a mandatory aspect in the role of the researcher. All efforts must be made to remove it from the study. Kerr and Anderson (2005) draw awareness to the "double burden" that authors of action research are

faced with and which must be taken into consideration (p. 5). This ‘double burden’ refers to the concern of the improvement of practice and social change, with the distress of the research and creating valid knowledge about the practice. Other key ethical concerns were related to data protection procedures in light of commitments to privacy and GDPR regulations, the importance of informed consent based on the provision of necessary information, and consideration of the risk and potential risk associated with research. As part of this action research, I submitted an ethics application before commencing research.

3.8.1 Ethics Application

The ethics application (Appendix A.1) was approved on 15th December 2021 by Maynooth University, via the programme chair, following consultation with my supervisor. The application addressed how the following areas were specifically handled whilst following the correct ethical guidelines: recruitment and participation, vulnerability, power dynamics, informed consent, research in a Covid-19 context, sensitivity, and data storage. The risks involved in this study include data protection, confidentiality, and the identity conservation in my research. These exposures were thoroughly addressed when completing this application. See Appendix A for all associated ethical documents.

3.9 Data Analysis

Data analysis is a process which involves evaluating the data collected in a logical manner. I chose to analyse this data using Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six-step thematic analysis method (p. 87). The six phases include the familiarisation of data, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing themes, defining and naming themes and finally, producing the report. The thematic analysis will be presented in chapter four and includes the themes of pupil agency, relationships, communication, and the traditional special education environment.

3.9.1 Action Research Analysis

Values have a major influence on action research. Therefore one’s personal values have an impact on methodological choices and behaviour throughout the process (Cohen et al. 2018). Action research takes a circumstantial route, in which one step enlightens the next. It is important to be “cognizant of the continual interplay between research and practice” within the practice setting when considering how to approach self-study (Loughran, 2007: 15). Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988: 22) “self-reflective spiral” in action research (Figure 3.4) includes the cycles and stages of “planning a change, acting and observing the process and consequences of the change, reflecting on these processes and consequences, and then re-planning, and so forth” (p. 21). I used this ‘self-reflective spiral’ to analyse my actions while heightening my understanding of my practice.

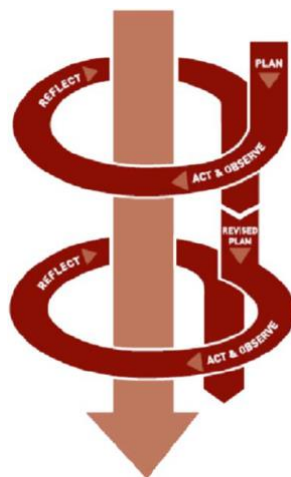


Figure 3.4: Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) ‘Self-Reflective Spiral’ in action research
Source: Reid (2009: 77)

3.9.2 Action Research Cycles

Four cycles of action research were undertaken, the overview of which can be seen in Figure 3.5. Cycle one and four include similar school-based interventions and data collection tools. The main difference in cycles two and three is that the Circle Time Discussion is omitted.

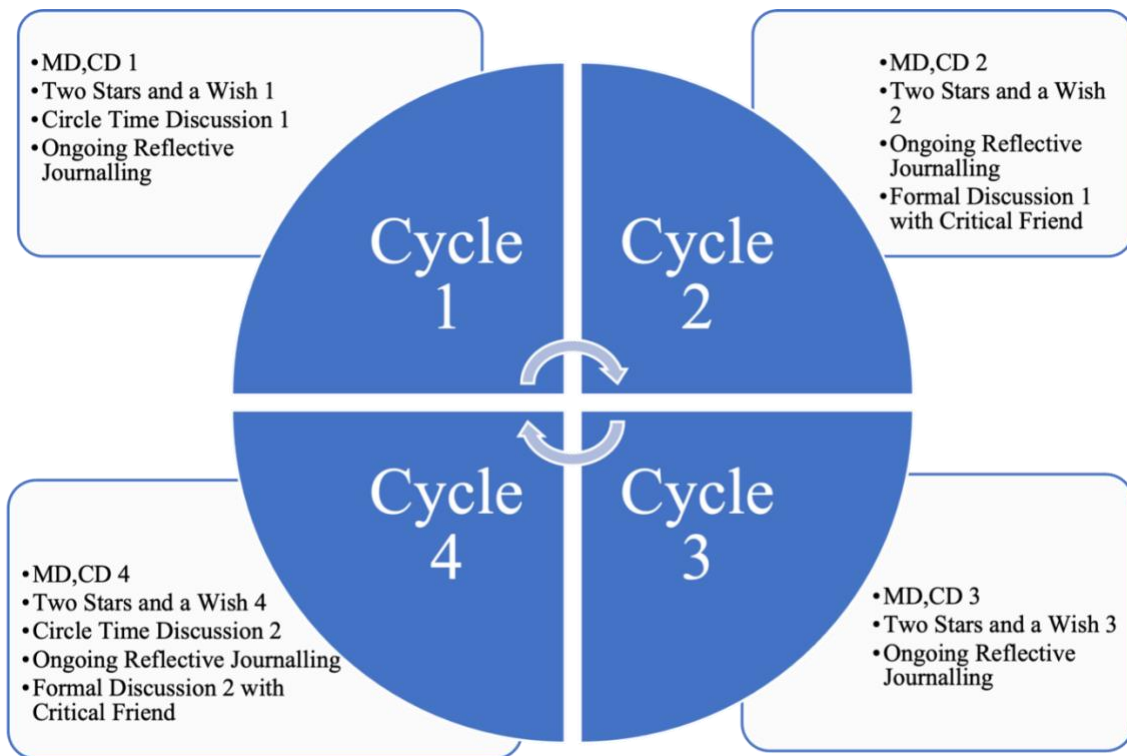


Figure 3.5: Overview of the Action Research Cycles

3.9.3 Interviews

In addition to the above interventions, I completed five interviews with professionals from various academic and professional backgrounds within education. Transcription of the interviews occurred as soon as possible after conducting the interview, in line with ethics protocols to support robust data protection measures. This helped with data analysis to depict the discussions as accurately as possible and remembering tones and pauses during discussion and also themes that may have been forgotten.

3.9.4 Qualitative Data Analysis

Thematic coding analysis was used to analyse the data from my research journal, transcripts from interviews, and reflections on discussions with my critical friend. I utilised Braun and Clarke’s (2006) six phases of thematic analysis in my data analysis process (Table 2).

Step	Description of the Process
1. Familiarisation of Data	Transcribing data, reading and rereading of data, noting initial ideas
2. Generating Initial Codes	Coding interesting features of the data in a systematic fashion across the entire data set, collating data relevant to each code
3. Searching for Themes	Collating codes into potential themes, gathering all data relevant to each potential theme
4. Reviewing Themes	Checking if the themes work in relation to the coded extracts and the entire data set, generating a thematic map of the analysis
5. Defining and Naming Themes	Ongoing analysis to refine specifics of each theme, and the overall story the analysis tells, generating clear definitions and names for each theme
6. Producing the Report	The final opportunity for analysis, selecting vivid, compelling extract examples, final analysis of extracted examples, relating back to the analysis of the research question and literature, producing a scholarly report of the analysis

Table 2: Braun and Clarke (2006) Phases of Thematic Analysis (p. 87)

3.10 Limitations of the Study

Researchers of self-study must be aware and cautious of the limitations involved with undertaking this genre of study. Limitations I predicted included balancing subjectivity and objectivity, Covid-19 restrictions, and the process of action research. I anticipated these difficulties and minimised their hindrance on the research, by planning ahead and addressing them appropriately.

Balancing objectivity and subjectivity refers back to the ethical dimensions of the study, discussed in section 3.8, in which the conflict of interest between the teacher as a professional and the teacher as a researcher is considered. It is important to show personal awareness and responsibility for the decisions being made throughout the research process and how they may

influence the data. Power dynamics also exist in the data collection as equality in qualitative data in self-study research cannot be assumed. Being mindful and open to the data, and letting it unfold naturally to tell its own story without expectations is crucial.

Due to the challenges in education during Covid-19, I pre-planned for a school closure, which would have meant moving my teaching and research to an online platform. Thankfully this did not occur. However as a SET, I have acted as a substitute teacher regularly throughout the pandemic, covering for absent mainstream class teacher colleagues. I often did not experience a full week of teaching and learning with my students. This was an impediment on my data collection process and my daily practice. Meeting my practice with the inclusion, care, relationality, and provision of voice required in my research was implausible. I was denied the opportunity to give full devotion to my practice, to my students, and to my values.

It is pertinent to acknowledge that the action research approach is not suited to everyone and comments of pessimism could arise. Action research is emancipatory (Kemmis & Wilkinson, 1998), meaning its aim is to help its participants to unleash the constraints of social structures which limit their self-development and self-determination. I consciously made an effort to discover the best method of working with these social constraints.

3.11 Validity and Trustworthiness

Proving and displaying validity and reliability in self-study can be a difficult task. McNiff (2002) affirms that having the endorsement of other people constitutes in making a fair and accurate claim to the influence you are having on the situation. Early in the M.Ed Programme I recorded this note in my reflective journal: *I will demonstrate credibility and reliability by critically reflecting on my journal entries and by getting opinions and views of others through*

discussions and interviews' (RJ, 09/11/2021). Many authors (Shipman, 1997; Habermans, 1981; Elliott, 2007, cited in Sullivan & Glenn, 2021) have discussed the importance of validating knowledge with rigour which can be demonstrated through process validity, social validity, academic validity, and methodological validity.

3.12 Conclusion

This chapter has situated the methodological mixed methods approach undertaken to evaluate how I can challenge deficit-based teaching as a SET and practice care in relationships with the pupil before me. The approach demonstrates how I can assess the improvement of my practice through reflective journaling and data analysis whilst adopting my values as 'standards of judgement'. The aim of the interventions introduced and the data collected is to gather information on how to provide my students with better support through a strengths-based perspective, as an inclusive and caring teacher. This research is significant, not just for my own practice, but for confronting the focus imposed on deficits in primary education in Ireland as focusing on strengths provides the pupils with opportunities for additional agency, choice and voice. In the next chapter, I describe the data analysis process and present the key findings of my study.

Chapter Four: Data Analysis and Findings

4.1 Introduction

In this thesis, I explore how I can challenge deficit-based teaching as a SET and how I can enhance my practice of care in relationships with the student before me. This chapter sets out the findings of the qualitative data collected as part of the research process. The data collection tools used for this self-study action research included reflective journaling on; school-based interventions, interviews with colleagues and educational professionals, and professional conversations with a critical friend. This chapter begins with an overview of the action research plan, followed by a discussion of the thematic analysis of the data and the four key findings, and concludes by articulating these findings in association with teacher identity and self-study.

4.2 Action Research Plan

In autumn 2021, the initial plan was to complete three cycles as part of my action research project. However, in February 2022 a decision was made that a fourth cycle would occur. In January 2022, I introduced three new classroom research interventions into my practice. These interventions included Circle Time Discussion, providing feedback through Two Stars and a Wish, and using a MDCD choice approach. Each research cycle was undertaken in a two-week block, which involved carrying out the interventions, reflecting on the practices, and making necessary adjustments for the following cycle. Many changes naturally occurred throughout my data collection process. Table 3 conveys the conducted school-based action research timetable. When contrasting this final timetable with the timetable I had initially planned (Appendix B.1), many amendments can be seen. This shows the fluidity and messiness of the action research process.

Date: Week of..	Intervention:
17/01/22	Circle Time Discussion no. 1 & reflection
31/01/22	Must-Do, Can-Do no. 1 (introduction & trial with fifth class students) Two Stars and a Wish no. 1 (introduction & trial with all pupils)
07/02/22	Reflect on Must-Do, Can-Do no. 1 and make any necessary changes Reflect on Two Stars and a Wish
14/02/22	Must-Do, Can-Do no. 2 Two Stars and a Wish no. 2 Discussion with critical friend & reflection
21/02/22 (midterm 24 th & 25 th Feb)	Reflect on Must-Do, Can-Do no. 2 and make further changes needed Reflect on Two Stars and a Wish no. 2
28/02/22	Must-Do, Can-Do no. 3 (students create can-dos) Student completion no. 1 of Two Stars and a Wish Observation from Critical Friend
07/03/22	Reflect on Must-Do, Can-Do no. 3 and make final changes Two Stars and a Wish no. 3 (teacher completion)
14/03/22	Must-Do, Can-Do no. 4 (students create can-dos) Student completion no. 2 of Two Stars and a Wish Reflect on cycle 3 of Two Stars and a Wish (student & teacher completion)
21/03/22	Reflect on Must-Do, Can-Do no. 4 Circle Time Discussion no. 2 & reflection Peer completion of Two Stars and a Wish Two Stars and a Wish no. 4 & reflection on cycle 4 Final discussion with Critical Friend & reflection

Table 3: Action Research Timetable

4.2.1 Circle Time Discussion

Two Circle Time Discussions were completed with my fifth class students, the first in January 2022, at the beginning of cycle one and the second in March 2022, at the end of cycle four. The questions discussed in the first Circle Time Discussion (Appendix B.2) were reflected upon and amended for the second Circle Time Discussion (Appendix B.3). I eliminated a number of questions from the first discussion as I deemed them invalid to be asked again at the end of cycle four.

4.2.2 Two Stars and a Wish

Cycles one and two of the Two Stars and a Wish intervention involved providing personalised teacher-feedback every fortnight for each of my individual students. I used the template (Appendix B.4) to complete my comments before printing it out to give to each child. The pupils felt ‘cared-for’ as they received their personalised feedback. Upon reflection of cycle two, I decided that I wanted the pupils to use this intervention in a self-assessment format, to think positively about their learning and to focus on their positive achievements.

“It is important for your own well-being to acknowledge the little-wins and to appreciate your personal achievements. In order to generate their own two stars, the students will have to reflect on their learning and their own efforts. They will realise their individual efforts and I hope this may help them to appreciate their hard work and to not be so tough on themselves.” (RJ, 23/03/2022).

I believe that children and adults alike, can naturally fixate on aspects that they cannot do and forget about all the things they can do. Introducing this self-assessment provided the opportunity to switch their focus. Hereafter in the two week blocks of cycle three and four, the self-assessment was completed at the end of week one and the teacher-feedback was provided at the end of week two. This bi-weekly approach can be clearly identified in Table 3. Each child filled out a laminated version of the Two Stars and a Wish template using a whiteboard marker with their own feedback comments. The completed self-assessments were displayed, with student consent, in my learning support room. The laminated templates were wiped clean and re-used in cycle four. Another change occurred in cycle four with the addition of oral peer-feedback. The children who were withdrawn in groups completed peer assessments orally, using the Two Stars and a Wish format.

“It was nice to bear witness to the pupils giving each other compliments on their learning and on what they think their fellow peers are progressing well with at school. The students were very humble and polite when providing the two stars for one another.”
(RJ, 23/03/2022).

The peer feedback idea stemmed during a discussion with my critical friend after she observed my interventions in progress with my students. Upon reflection I decided to add this approach to my intervention in the final cycle as it would provide the opportunity for further communication and another lens of validation to assess the impact of this practice.

4.2.3 Must-Do, Can-Do

The MD CD intervention was completed with my fifth class literacy group as a choice and voice based approach to completing their learning activities. This practice provide pupils with the opportunity of working in an independent manner at their own pace, whilst also providing the freedom to list can-do activities based on personal preference, at a level suitable for each individual student. Literacy support was provided for these students four days per week, from Monday to Thursday. The students had the choice of a must-do activity to complete each day, in a self-chosen order. After completing the must-do to an appropriate standard, they could then independently choose a can-do activity from the list provided. This approach was taken in cycles one and two (Appendix B.6). Upon reflection of these two cycles, I decided to amend this intervention,

“For the next cycle, I am going to let the students choose their own can-do activities. I think this will provide them with further ownership and agency within their learning. I mentioned that I was thinking of doing this to the students and they were thrilled. They almost could not believe that they would be allowed to choose their own activities for completion. I hope they are realising the trust I have in them and that I feel confident in doing this.” (RJ, 22/03/2022)

In cycle three, I decided to trial giving the students the autonomy to make their own list of eight can-do activities to choose from in the template provided (Appendix B.7). After using this approach in cycle three, the realisation became clear that one more cycle was necessary to ensure validity. I wanted to bear witness to the students writing a second set of can-do activities, after being familiarised with the process. Another cycle would aid in reflecting on the true effectiveness of this approach. In cycle three, the children expressed that creating eight can-do activities was challenging and that they would not have time to attempt all eight options. Listening to their voice resulted in changing the template layout for cycle four to only included six spaces to write up can-do activities (Appendix B.8).

4.3 Interviews with Professionals

Five interviews were carried out with educational professionals. This included an educational psychologist and a lecturer in inclusive and special education, in addition to three colleagues including a mainstream class teacher, an SNA and a SET. Each participant brought a unique perspective to the research. Through drawing on the participants knowledge and experience, the interviews strengthened the validity of my project and aided in developing and informing my school-based interventions to nurture a greater level of inclusion in my practice. This chapter now turns to presenting the data analysis process, which involves identifying codes and themes emerging from the data, which are then arranged into four key findings.

4.4 Thematic Analysis of Data

Following the transcription of my interviews (Appendix D), Braun and Clarke's (2006) six-step framework (p. 87) was utilised in thematically analysing my whole data collection.

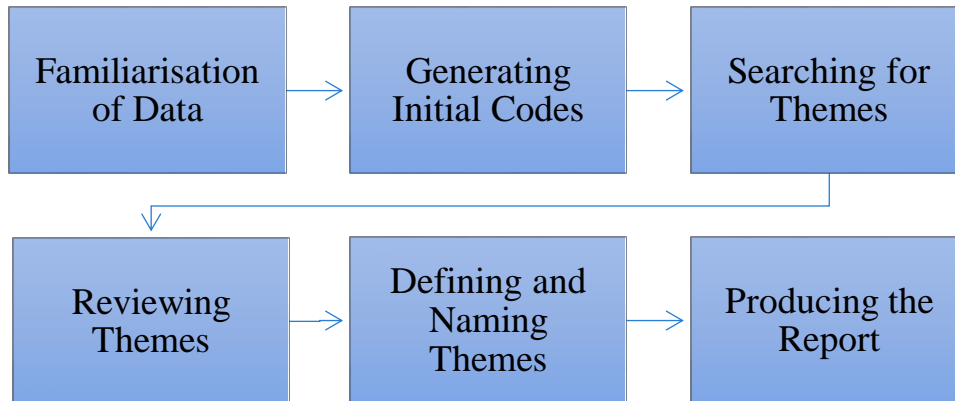


Figure 4.1: Phases of Thematic Analysis of Data

Source: Braun and Clarke (2006: 87)

See Table 2 for a more detailed description of the six-step framework.

4.4.1 Coding of Reflections

After each of the four cycles, I reflected on the three interventions introduced into my practice, based on self-constructed reflective questions. This meant I had four sets of reflections from the Two Stars and a Wish and the MDCD interventions along with two sets of reflections from the Circle Time Discussions and on formal discussions with my critical friend. I started by familiarising myself with the data collection and analysing it by identifying initial codes. From these codes I assembled three themes; (1) pupil agency, (2) relationships and (3) challenging the traditional view of SET practice. These themes highlighted the findings from my school-based data collection. The codes, themes and findings are presented in Table 4.

Data Analysis of Reflections on: → Practice: Three Interventions → Reflections of Discussions with Critical Friend			
Codes	Voice, choice, strengths-based, freedom, fun, personal interests, decision-making, motivation, confidence boosting, self-esteem, potential, active learning, talents, independence, pride, opportunities for growth, maturity, challenging capabilities, enhanced engagement, stimulating activities, trust	Valuing opinions, inclusion, trust, relationships, care, assessment (self, peer, teacher), feedback, discussions, circle time, feelings, right to form views, ideas taken into consideration, freedom of expression, collaboration, group decisions, empathy, respect, showing an interest, compliments	Policy, expectations, paperwork, trust in teachers, targets, diagnoses, support, SSPs, deficit-based, withdrawal, assessment, covid restrictions, oppression, negative comments, strengths vs needs, questioning policy, time allocation, reflection, teacher agency, inclusive environment
Themes	Pupil agency	Relationships	Challenging traditional view of SET practice
Findings	Higher levels of engagement, enjoyment and motivation are present when students are given a voice in their learning	Relationships among teachers, pupils and colleagues are enhanced through open communication	A one-size-fits-all approach will not cater for the individual pupils of each special education environment

Table 4: Coding of Reflections

4.4.2 Coding of Interviews

I coded the interview transcriptions using the same six phases of thematic analysis. I began by familiarising myself with the data and detecting initial codes. Four themes were then identified (1) student choice and voice, (2) communication, (3) relationships with pupils and (4) pros and cons of the SEN model. The themes informed four findings which emerged from the interviews. The codes, themes and findings are presented in Table 5.

Data Analysis of Transcripts from: → Interviews with Colleagues → Interviews with Educational Professionals				
Codes	Journey of inclusion, student agency, motivation, voice, enjoyment, change, reflection -on-practice, empowering pupils, strengths-based approach, teacher agency, choice (activities & presentation), integration, likes vs dislikes, ownership	Two-way communication, open to opinions, constructive feedback, student voice, patience, talked-based solutions, appropriate views, student surveys, modes of representing voice, open-ended questions, debating, emotions, praise	Building relationships, duty of care, understanding and reasoning, involving child in planning, happy, comfortable, emotional well-being, trust, respect, mindful of individual circumstances, relationship with parents, connect with pupils	School structures, support for teachers, CPD, funding, class sizes, paperwork, expectations, general allocation model, staffing limitations, time allocation, deficit model, flexible curriculum, multidisciplinary approach, inclusion, language of SEN
Themes	Student choice and voice	Communication	Relationships with pupils	Pros and cons of SEN model
Findings	Providing the opportunity of differentiation by student choice promotes greater inclusion in SEN environment	Honest and open communication among teachers, students and colleagues is inevitable to provide adequate support to each individual child	Practicing and showing care towards students does not change in respect of their academic abilities or individual diagnosis	The development of SEN policies and models in Ireland could provide great benefit for students and staff

Table 5: Coding of Interviews

4.4.3 Findings from Reflections vs Findings from Interviews

The final three steps of the six phase analysis process revealed that the themes from the reflections and the themes from the interviews overlapped significantly. The findings established informed by each of these themes merged together to result in four key findings.

The connecting themes and findings are displayed in Table 6.

Themes	Findings
Pupil agency	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Differentiation through student voice and choice can promote higher levels of engagement, enjoyment, motivation, and inclusion. 2. The practice of care should not be influenced by academic abilities or individual diagnoses. 3. Communication among teachers, pupils and colleagues can develop relationships and aids in providing adequate support to individual pupils. 4. Developments of policies and models can benefit students and staff, as an one-size-fits-all approach does not cater for the needs of individual pupils in all learning environments
Student choice and voice	
Relationships/relationships with pupils	
Communication	
Challenging traditional view of SET practice	
Pros and cons of SEN model	

Table 6: Initial Themes and Findings from Data Analysis

Table 6 displays six themes which overlap and merge to produce four key findings. At this stage, the themes informing the findings did not appear concise enough, so I went a step further.

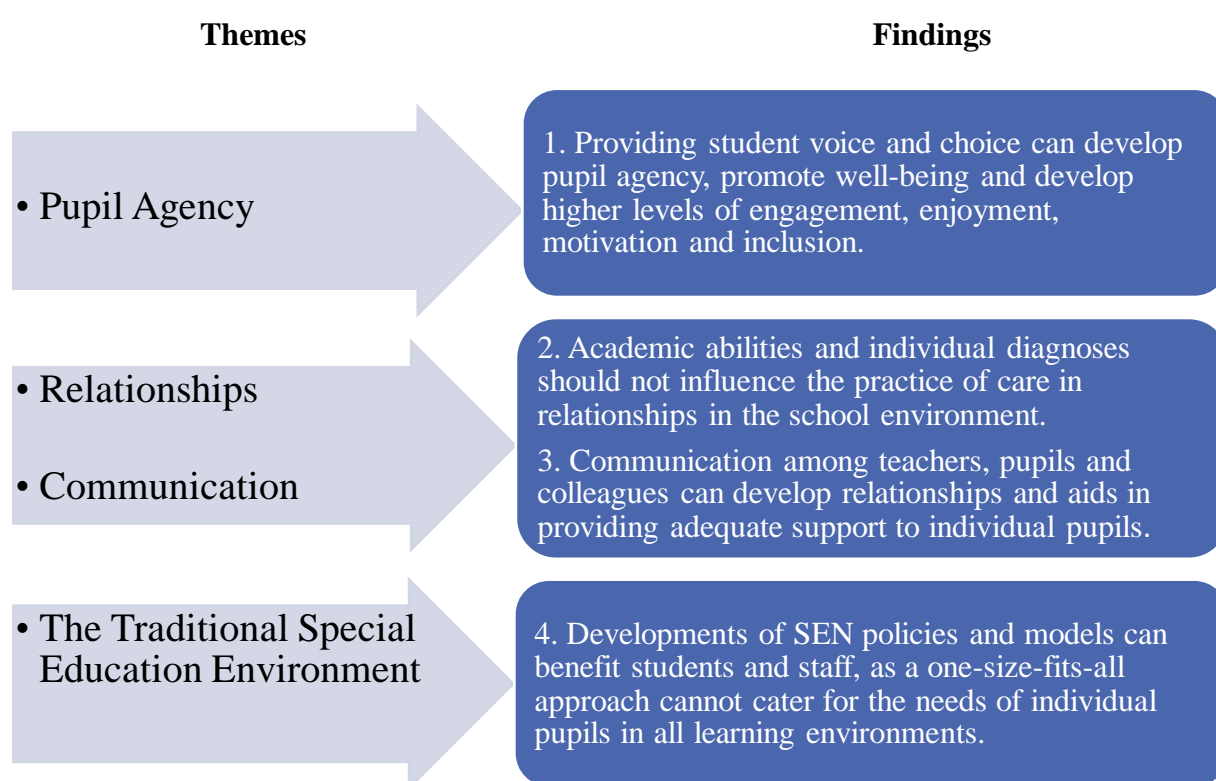


Figure 4.2: Final Themes and Findings

Figure 4.2 shows the four themes (1) pupil agency, (2) relationships, (3) communication, and (4) the traditional special education environment, in addition to the finalised findings which emerged from these themes. I will now continue by discussing each of the four findings in detail.

4.5 Finding One: Provision of Student Voice and Choice

The first finding states that providing student voice and choice can develop pupil agency, promote well-being, and develop higher levels of engagement, enjoyment, motivation, and inclusion. The Draft Curriculum (2020) emphasises that the pedagogical approaches and strategies used by teachers to tailor learning experiences, promote wellbeing through “engagement, motivation, choice and agency in the learning experience” (p. 22). The research interventions introduced prompted the development of autonomy for my pupils and their abilities to voice their opinions and their personal choices, thus enhancing their well-being. Further engagement, enjoyment, motivation and inclusion were observed in the learning environment as a result.

As a SET, to give my students a voice in their education meant that the provision of individual choice in their learning activities was unquestionable. My value of voice is situated in Lundy’s (2007) Model of Child Participation (see Figure 2.1) which Conceptualises Article 12 of the UNCRC (2010). Lundy’s model focuses decision-making on space, voice, audience and influence. Children should have the right to express their views which should be given due weight (Lundy, 2007). By introducing the MDCD intervention into my practice, the students were enabled to have a say in their learning. Additionally they experienced choice when creating their can-do activities. Providing these opportunities promotes a pupil-centred environment which “fosters the development of the skills, knowledge and confidence of pupils

with special educational needs, affirms their range of abilities and responds to their diverse academic and personal needs” (NCSE, 2011: 30). They gained further agency as they became facilitators of their own learning by creating and making adequate differentiated choices.

Naturally, I differentiate my teaching and learning to enable each pupil to actively participate in all activities, whilst simultaneously challenging each individual child. The NCCA (1999a) Primary School Curriculum recognises that there are distinct types of learning and that it is important to take each individual child into account as they all learn in diverse ways. Similarly the Draft Curriculum (2020) acknowledges that the Irish society is more diverse than ever before as classrooms are mirroring society by becoming more dynamic. Teachers must support and respond to a greater diversity of learners, helping each to grow and develop (2020: 3). The planning approach taken by a teacher in addition to the instruction and representation of lessons should provide adequate differentiation to ensure motivation is present amongst learners.

The MDCD format provides pupils with the opportunity to establish and compliment their own unique learning styles. The voice of the students is recognised and trusted. Choice is provided, through the creation of can-do activities. Within this practice, pupils had the agency to incorporate topics of personal interest within their literacy-based activities. I noticed this enhanced motivation and enjoyment levels within their learning.

“Perhaps providing students with the opportunity to develop their strengths and personal interests, should be an equally important element to their educational development, regardless of their needs/diagnoses/academic abilities. More often than not, future careers are naturally based on something which one enjoys and is passionate about. Maybe this needs to be taken into account to a higher degree in our learning environments, particularly for SETs.” (RJ, 22/03/2022)

I witnessed higher levels of motivation in the students as they had the opportunity to choose their must-do learning activities. The DES (2020) states that “engagement is enhanced when schools listen to and build on pupils’ interests, aspirations and strengths when developing educational interventions” (p. 24). I observed determination amongst the pupils as they eagerly completed the must-do activity prior to beginning the chosen can-do activity, which often involved their interests and strengths. The idea of focusing on student’s proficiencies was validated in my interviews, two examples include;

“I would focus very much on their strengths and adopt a strengths-based approach”

(Interview EP2, 23/03/2022)

“Get to know, like I said, their strengths, their likes, what motivates them, what their desires are for their own targets, their learning outcomes and taking all of that and taking a strengths-based approach to the planning for them. And like we’ve talked about, not that deficit-chasing or deficit-focused approach to planning their targets”

(Interview SET, 18/02/2022)

The confidence instilled in the students relates back to the opportunity provided to voice their opinions when creating their can-do activities. I noticed that the children included personal interests, where possible, in their can-do lists. Furthermore they had the choice of the order they would complete their must-do activities in throughout the duration of the week.

In an interview conducted with a lecturer in inclusive and special education, the provision of choice through the presentation of learning arose, while discussing how to provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in primary education. The interviewee stated,

“offering them choices at every level, you know, from showing how they demonstrate the learning. So do you want to write an essay on it? Or do you want to draw a picture or do a podcast?” (Interview EP2, 23/03/2022).

Previously, I would not have considered providing choice within my teaching and learning activities as a means of allowing student voice. I had not made the significant correlation between the effectiveness of providing choice with student voice and its impact on engagement, enjoyment, motivation, and inclusion.

4.6 Finding Two: The Practice of Care in Relationships

The second finding declares that the practice of care in schools should not be influenced by academic abilities or individual diagnoses. As previously discussed in the literature review, these factors should not have an influence on the caring relationships experienced in any learning environment. Care must be a central within a child’s educational environment with the aim to develop each individual to become “unique, capable and caring” (NCCA, 2020: 5).

Care and relationality have a pivotal role in my philosophy of education. Through the interventions introduced, I discovered first-hand how important it is to build relationship foundations in a school environment through the practice of care. It was not until I made a vital attachment with relationality and care as two of my core values, that I became aware of their importance and noticed their implications in my everyday practice. It was Noddings (2005) who states that caring is “the strong, resilient backbone of human life” (p. 175). Furthermore, caring in every domain implies competence. Personal competences must be continuously developed so that the recipient of care is enhanced (Noddings, 2005). Through my self-study

my personal competences were studied and scrutinized as I attempted to improve my practice whilst living by my values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice.

Throughout the interviews, it became apparent that care and relationships go hand in hand. Often, one would not be mentioned without the other. To build any solid relationship, care must initially be conveyed by all. Furthermore, to maintain a strong relationship, care must remain present. In Figure 4.3, I present relevant data quotations from the interviews conducted with educational professionals. Quotations are extracted from the interview audio-transcripts with educational professional (Appendix D.2).

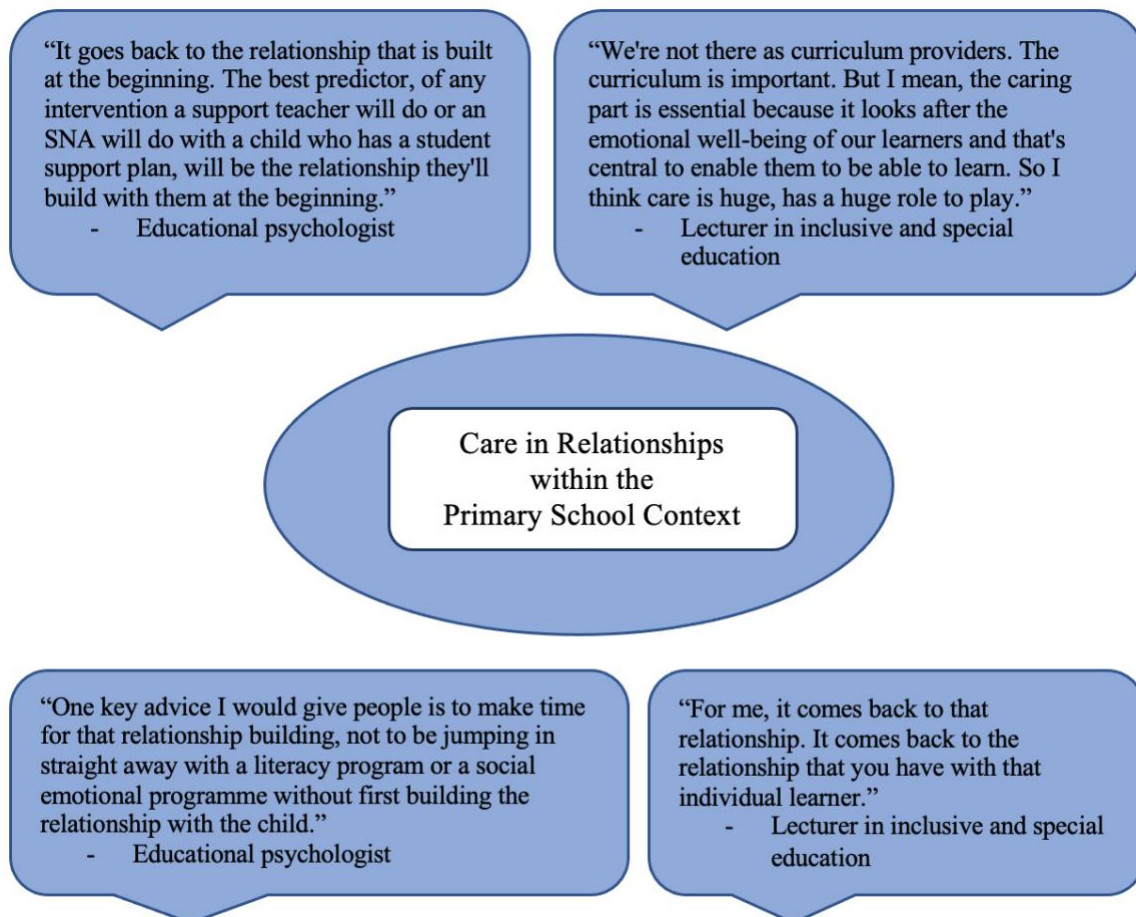


Figure 4.3: Quotations Extracted from Interviews with Professionals

The correlation between care and relationships in an educational environment is evident from these data extracts. Additionally, the Circle Time Discussion provided the opportunity to

strengthen relationships with pupils in an honest and open environment. Care was being practiced in the group discussion as they listened and responded to personal elements of each other's lives. The students were aware that they could express themselves freely without judgement, in a safe environment. Upon reflection I observed,

“I think the circle time discussion has helped in building greater relationships with my students. The pupils are happy to give their opinions and want to give them in order to help me with my learning and to improve my teaching. It is a chain-reaction cycle in which if they help me to improve my teaching, their learning will too be improved. Further opportunities for relationships to grow and develop would continue. I notice that greater relationships amongst the children have blossomed and they are no longer shy to share their honest opinions in a group setting. I have found that I have gotten to know my students on a much deeper level through this circle time discussion.”

(RJ, 23/03/2022).

A domino effect of the practice of care can be seen here between students and the teacher. As I gained the opportunity of getting to know my pupils further, I practiced care to a greater degree. By becoming aware of the children's likes and dislikes, both personally and within an educational context, I included this knowledge into the planning of targets in their SSPs. Additionally, I used this information as I wrote up the can-do activities for the first two cycles of the MDCD intervention. The pupils made a stronger connection to their learning activities when they were interested in the content and when they enjoyed the medium through which they were completed, for example presenting work through art, digital technology or games. This links with CAST (2022) and its core principle of expression through the UDL, which explores the various ways pupils can develop and demonstrate learning. I will now move onto the third finding of my data analysis process.

4.7 Finding Three: Building Relationships through Communication

Communication is another element which aids in building strong positive relationships. The third finding from my data analysis states that communication among teachers, pupils, and colleagues develops relationships and aids in providing adequate support to individual pupils. If nurturing, committed relationships are present among all participants, there is a positive influence on the support provided to the students. All three interventions aided in improving the level of communication in my own relationships in the school environment with students and colleagues alike. Communication is one of the ten themes identified as fundamentally important in the IEF (2011) which states that “reciprocal, open lines of communication take into account the needs of pupils with special educational needs” (p. 28). Additionally, communication and using language is one of the seven key competencies of the Draft Curriculum (2020) which emphasises the importance of children having the ability to share their experiences to communicate and connect with others and develop new knowledge. Through my research, I discovered that I could provide greater support for my pupils when clear communication existed with my caring colleagues who worked closely with my pupils, their mainstream class teacher and their SNA, if applicable.

The Two Stars and a Wish intervention in particular, significantly improved communication in my relationships with students and colleagues. This practice involved opinions being shared. The template acted as a stimulus and conversations with my pupils naturally developed. Several students were eager to share the feedback I provided with their class teacher and SNA as they were proud of their achievements. *“I witnessed one fifth class boy who skipped into his classroom in the direction of his class teacher to show her the feedback he had received. He was over the moon and just so proud of himself.” (RJ, 23/03/2022).* Experiencing this moment conveyed how important it was for this pupil to share his feedback with his class teacher. Their

relationship had the opportunity to flourish due to the communication of this student's successes, being communicated outside of the SEN context.

Sharing this regular feedback improved communication levels with my students and so relationships were strengthened. I realised how "*capable my students are in acting upon constructive feedback*" (RJ, 11/03/2022). I was underestimating the abilities of my pupils and their resilience. By making these assumptions, I was in fact a 'living contradiction' as I was "holding educational values whilst at the same time negating them" (Whitehead, 2018: 13). This reminded me how important it is to have an open-mind towards all pupils' abilities, regardless of their academic abilities or their individual diagnoses. Without introducing this intervention, I may have continued to use a deficit-focused approach and I may not have provided the opportunity to challenge my pupils to reach their full potential. Regular opportunities for the students to self-assess and discuss their personal development were also provided. It is important to take the pupils' personal interpretations of their learning into account. I may not notice the same progress or determination, as to what the student deems as being significant to them.

Peer-feedback through the Two Stars and a Wish communication system provided another lens for the students to use to assess their personal progress. It provided a structured way for the pupils to communicate opinions and observations with their peers in a respectful manner. I was pleasantly surprised with how well the students participated in this activity and especially the sensitivity and consideration conveyed within the group.

“My pupils were more than happy to take the feedback from their peers on board and they agreed with the ‘wishes’ that their peers had created for them. I do not think all students would be as adaptive to peer feedback. I think this feeling of sensitivity and apprehensiveness surrounding this peer-assessment would diminish in time through repetition. If the children completed this peer assessment on a regular basis, they would not be shy and nervous about writing the ‘wish’. All new interventions introduced take time to iron out before they begin to run smoothly.” (RJ, 25/02/2022)

Witnessing the children taking the feelings and anxieties of others into consideration through their gentle and caring approach of the peer-assessment, was wonderful to experience. I discovered through the implementation of my interventions, being patient is vital in order to observe the true benefit of the practice. It is also important to remember that an intervention which runs smoothly and effectively with one group of children, could result differently with another group of children. Peer-feedback, used in appropriate situations, provides the opportunity for honest communication in the learning environment. These interactions provide genuine child-led feedback, which can then be considered during self-assessment. Relationship building through open lines of communication is an outcome of the intervention.

The Two Stars and a Wish strategy highlighted the importance of communication through body language and emotions. As I reflected on how several students responded to the intervention, it became clear that changes had to be made. One specific child who has acute learning needs, did not respond well to the teacher-led feedback. He thought that he would receive additional stars each week as the cycles progressed. He became fixated on the intervention. It was causing him stress in his learning environment. This pupil struggled to orally convey his opinion of the intervention. Thankfully as I had already formed a strong relationship with him, I could see

how upset he was becoming. I discussed this matter with my critical friend to get a second opinion on what to do going forward. We decided that stopping the teacher-feedback and continuing only with the student's self-assessment would be best practice to avoid further disappointment and confusion for this child. He responded well to the scaffolded, self-assessment aspect of the intervention. It provided him with *“the opportunity to evaluate [his] own work and progress, from [his] own viewpoint”* (RJ, 16/02/2022). He liked thinking about and discussing his ‘little wins’.

Overcoming this challenge resulted in significant learning in my professional development. I realised how impactful asking for professional advice can be, in addition to the positives of discussing it with a critical friend. Having another lens to assess this situation, from an outsiders perspective, added a layer of additional confidence in my decision-making. I experienced first-hand how important it is to acknowledge when something is not working and to stop completing certain activities if the students are not benefitting from them. Without having already established a strong relationship with this child, I may not have been as quick to realise the negative impact this intervention was having on him. The Code of Conduct (2016) recognises the importance of working on improving relationships in the school environment, in hope of building a culture of trust and respect. Furthermore, the uniqueness, individuality and specific needs of pupils are acknowledged within relationships to promote the holistic development of the students, as previously voiced in the literature review (TC, 2016).

4.8 Finding Four: A One-Size-Fits-All Approach is not Adequate in SET practice

The fourth finding from my research declares that developments of SEN models and policies can be beneficial to students and staff. A one-size-fits-all approach does not serve the needs of various learners in a SEN context. Aspects such as smaller class sizes, additional professional

development and support for staff, funding, and the use of the general allocation model can have a positive impact on catering for the needs of SEN pupils in primary schools. However there are limitations in every school environment which hinder the provision of support for SEN pupils. Staffing, school buildings, time allocation and SEN resources are to name a few of the restraints posed which affect the support provided. Whilst completing interviews with colleagues, the opportunities and restrictions of SET practice cropped up through the discussion of the commitment to inclusion in primary schools. Quotations in Figure 4.4 are extracted from the interview audio-transcripts with colleagues (Appendix D.1).



Figure 4.4: Quotations Extracted from Interviews with Colleagues

This data highlights the strengths and limitations in the education system encompassing the commitment to inclusion. The consensus of this data is that there could not be a one-size-fits-all SEN model which would sufficiently respond to the extensive range of needs and strengths in all environments of education. SEN provision needs to be catered for on a case by case basis. According to Shevlin and Banks (2021), “Ireland has undergone a considerable transformation

in a relatively short time regarding the establishment of legislative and administrative structures designed to support students with special educational needs in mainstream schools” (p. 161). Progress has been made but there is still plenty of room for further improvements.

As discussed in the literature review, SETs cannot be asked to be autonomous whilst promoting inclusion, if they are not adequately supported. The well-being of the teacher must be considered as demands multiply within the education system. Simply talking about policies and providing teachers with more agency is not enough, support must be given and action must be taken. This aspect cropped up in an interview whilst discussing whether Irish primary schools practice inclusion appropriately, the interviewee proclaimed that;

“there is always the difference between having a policy and then actually seeing it in practice every day. It requires effort, it takes proper effort by people all the time to insure that a school is highly inclusive” (Interview SET, 18/02/2022).

The three interventions introduced into my practice address a portion of the needs of the variety of learners within my special education environment. I cannot imagine that there could ever be enough support to cater for the needs of all students in Ireland’s primary education system. Motivation undoubtedly exists among policymakers to review existing provision and to create a model which facilitates for the additional needs of pupils within mainstream schools, whilst challenging the traditional mindset (Shevlin & Banks, 2021), but the relevant supports must be provided. This chapter now turns to the discussion of how I connect my research and findings with my teacher identity.

4.9 Teacher Identity

In this section of chapter four, I will discuss the ‘negotiation’ of my teacher identity throughout this project. I notice how I am thinking differently as I focus on my values. I am being more mindful and considerate of the perspectives of others in my everyday actions. Following the 2017 revised allocation model for special education in mainstream schools, the DES (2020) released a new document entitled: *Guidelines for Primary Schools Supporting Pupils with Special Educational Needs in Mainstream Schools*. These guidelines offer greater autonomy for schools to cater for the needs of the pupils in their schools, without the requirement for a diagnosis (p. 4). I can relate this with Buchanan (2015) as I draw on my professional identity to interpret the “new norms” and how my identity has been reformed in the process (p. 713). Trialling out new interventions, whilst ‘narrating, navigating and negotiating’ my self-understanding has aided in the realisation of what works with my individual students. Coming to terms with self-understanding is necessary for top-quality and meaningful teaching to occur, as previously discussed in the literature review.

The Two Stars and a Wish and the MDCD interventions adapt a strengths-based approach to teaching and learning which offers room for further inclusion. As the Code of Conduct (2016) states, teachers should be committed to equality and inclusion and should respect and accommodate diversity (p. 7). Shevlin et al. (2013) discuss the significance of Irish schools ensuring that inclusive practice becomes the norm and that this involves teachers “reappraising their attitudes and practices and being offered opportunities to develop their professional knowledge and skill base” (p. 1131). By undertaking a M.Ed I have provided myself with the opportunity of improving my practice, knowledge, and skill base within the field of special education.

I can relate to Palmer (1997) who believes that if you do not know yourself, how can you know your subject. Reflective practice became infused into my regular routine, as I distinguished my values and mindfully incorporated them into my teaching methodologies. One personal reflective question I regularly addressed in my journal read, *“Is this activity inviting me to challenge/affirm my own narrative or inner thoughts/perspectives?”* (RJ, 2022). I reflected on how to improve my practice and the activities I could instigate to challenge deficit-based teaching and practice greater care with my students. The data collected and analysed provided four key findings which I can share, along with the positives and negatives of the research, in both my school environment and in the wider field of education.

4.10 ‘Reflection-on-Action’

My self-study enquiry which is orientated towards teaching with inclusion, has moved my practice away from an authoritative style of teaching, to a facilitator of learning. I provided my students with additional voice, choice and independence in their individual learning journeys. By conducting careful analysis of my data collection, I have noticed how my practice has been informed by mindful decisions and reflective practice, which have advanced my teaching beyond a deficit-focused approach. Examples of these include providing my students with a voice in their SSPs, giving my pupils a choice in their learning activities and providing assorted options of how to present and communicate their learning. As I use my professional judgement in response to my students, agency has been promoted in their learning environment through the provision of additional opportunities to thrive, flourish and reach their full potential as individuals.

Positive developments in communication, pupil choice, pupil voice, relationships, and agency have been facilitated as part as of my self-study. Echoing Buchanan (2015), the correlation between teacher agency and teacher identity has become one of the key implications of my

research. Full devotion to my values has informed my teacher identity and teacher autonomy through living by my values in my practice. Critical reflection made me aware of the changes I could make to enhance my practice and to positively improve the education of my students. Like the opinion of Pithouse et al. (2009), I believe that “knowing more about ourselves as teachers and teacher educators changes us, provokes growth, jolts us out of complacency” (p. 48). The sense of urgency to flourish as a teacher, aroused an urge to undertake self-study research, which according to Clandinin and Connelly (2004) holds the highest possible potential for improving education and revealing knowledge of the educational landscape.

4.11 Conclusion

This chapter analyses the data collected and discusses the findings which emerged during the research process. The findings have significant implications for challenging deficit-focused teaching, promoting inclusion, and practicing care through relationships. These findings have enabled new learning regarding my previous assumptions and have changed my pedagogical thinking. I aspire to continue to challenge these assumptions whilst affording due weight to student voice and student agency, which will aid in nurturing higher levels of inclusion. In the next chapter I will conclude by clarifying the new understanding this thesis has contributed to, within my teaching and for the provision of SET practice further afield.

Chapter Five: Conclusion and Recommendations

5.1 Introduction

This thesis examines the consequences of deficit-focused teaching in the special education context and the impact of the practice of care on individual pupils in the school environment. Undertaking strengths-based teaching methodologies and practicing care, without focusing on academic abilities or diagnoses, was the focus of this self-study action research project. My classroom-based research involved the introduction of three values based interventions; Circle Time Discussion, Two Stars and a Wish, and MDCCD. I implemented these interventions in a series of four cycles, which I critically reflected upon and made any necessary changes as the research progressed. My values, reflective journaling, and discussions with my critical friend acted as standards which I judged my practice upon. Additionally, I conducted five interviews with educational professionals, which provided another outlook to critique my research with. This chapter will critically discuss the limitations of the study, a summary of the research and findings, recommendations for future practice, and finally a personal statement.

5.2 Limitations of the Study

The first limitation I encountered in my research included balancing subjectivity and objectivity between the role of the teacher and the role of the teacher as researcher. The second limitation involved SETs being regularly employed as substitute mainstream class teachers, due to the impact of Covid-19. To no fault of the school, additional absenteeism of teachers occurred during the pandemic and substitute teachers were scarce. Furthermore due to restrictions, classes could not be separated up for supervision. The implementation of my interventions did not run as smoothly as expected. For example, there were sporadic times in each cycle when I could not execute my research interventions as planned in my SET role, due

to staffing issues. The final limitation I experienced was that action research is not suited to all researchers and all students within their care. It is important to be mindful and clear of your role as a teacher and to not get fixated on trying to achieve the aims of your research. Considering these limitations adds to the credibility of the self-study as the researcher is aware of the possible influence they can hold on its discoveries.

5.3 Summary of Key Findings

Chapter four of this thesis presented the data analysis process and the findings which emerged from the coding of my qualitative data and the thematic analysis. This section reviews and situates the findings in context. I will discuss what the findings offer, firstly to the understanding of my individual practice, secondly to general SET practice and policy, and ultimately how they affect my identity as a teacher. This project was guided by my research question, ‘how can I challenge deficit-based teaching as a SET and practice care through relationships with the pupils before me’.

This study sets out to enhance my personal practice, as conventional action research has a clear focus on the ‘I’, as I aimed to live closer with my values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice. This research reviews and responds to where I was in my teaching journey and ensued personal growth and development in my individual professional practice. Undoubtedly a similar replication would be different for other participants. Like Kelchtermans (2018) belief, coming to terms with understanding myself, as both a teacher and a reflective practitioner, was the result of my professional practice and moreover a significant determinant of future practice.

5.3.1 Finding One: Provision of Student Voice and Choice

Analysing my findings and distinguishing how they resonate with literature has aided in making a claim to knowledge that providing students with opportunities to voice their opinions and make choices in their learning, can develop pupil agency and promote well-being. Furthermore, higher levels of engagement, enjoyment, motivation, and inclusion are observed.

As I adjusted my SET practice and provided more opportunities for pupil voice and choice, I noticed a change in my students. They were happier within the special education environment and were more motivated and engaged in their learning activities. As declared in my literature review, receiving additional support should not impose the right to provision of voice. Murray (2019) specifies that when children's views are used to inform educational provision, their well-being can be enhanced. This includes the provision of those in special education environments. Tailoring learning experiences through pedagogical approaches and strategies, according to the Draft Curriculum (2020) promotes wellbeing through 'engagement, motivation, choice and agency'. A shift in my intentions and adapting my methodological approaches to build the self-confidence of my students through offering choice and listening to their views, created a motivating, pupil-centred learning environment which promoted the inclusion of all diverse learners. The following extract from my reflective journal displays the response towards the MDCD intervention;

“During the second cycle, the students were already familiar with how this practice works and so they were excited to immediately dive into it. The pupils commented on how they enjoy working independently, as that is what classmates do in the whole-class environment. They also stated that they prefer the weeks that we complete the Must Do, Can Do, in comparison to the weeks when we do not follow this practice. It was wonderful to hear this positive feedback and to realise that the children appreciate this intervention. They mentioned that they find the can-do activities fun and relaxing however learning is still taking place.” (RJ, 22/03/2022)

If providing choice and voice was mandatory in all learning environments, there could be astonishing impacts on the well-being of pupils. Furthermore, teaching in a special education setting should not impact the level of choice and voice being provided for the students.

5.3.2 Finding Two: The Practice of Care in Relationships

The second finding conveys that the practice of care in schools should not be influenced by academic abilities or individual diagnoses. By reflecting on my journal entries, through a reflexive lens, I can make a claim to knowledge about the realisation of the value of care throughout my classroom practice. As I look internally at my practice and externally on the social conditions of my practice, I have realised that without holding care as a value, it would not be possible to implement my three other values of inclusion, relationality, and voice. Teaching implies finding oneself in a relationship of responsibility with the students that are entrusted to one’s care (Kelchtermans, 2011). Through investigating the response to promoting strength-based teaching, care was evidently central to the three interventions introduced.

Being critically reflexive on the initial entries in my reflective journal, I can now declare that I was not clear of my values. I previously wished to instil a ‘growth mindset’ in my students. I was focused on changing my students rather than enhancing my own practice and my self-understanding. I thought I was aware of my teacher identity and the values I held. As Zembylas (2018) expresses “it is important that teachers challenge narratives of the self” (p. 83). Through reflective practice my values became clear. I made sense of my self-understanding as a teacher, which resulted in professional development and enhancement of my future practice (Kelchtermans, 2018). My practice and identity have developed greatly throughout this self-study. I want my identity as a teacher to be exposed through the relationships with my students entrusted in my care and to be treated as unique human beings (Kelchtermans 2011). Every child is different, and I respect their individual identities.

With particular regards to the practice of care in relationships, I can draw on Noddings (2012) who claims that the relation between two people is ontologically basic and the caring relation is both ethically and morally basic. Similarly during my interview with a lecturer in inclusive and special education, the importance of care in primary education was discussed;

“Our care and nurturing role is really, really important. We're not there as curriculum providers. The curriculum is important. But I mean the caring part is essential because it looks after the emotional well-being of our learners and that's central to enable them to be able to learn. So I think care is huge, has a huge role to play.” (Interview EP2, 23/03/2022)

Throughout this self-study, I scrutinized my practice in hope of enhancing it to positively affect the students in my care. I want all students, particularly those who receive additional support at school, to feel ‘cared-for’, accepted, and included. To experience a caring and inclusive

learning environment, relationships must be built with the students. It is through relations that a human individual emerges as every child's life begins in relation (Noddings, 2012). Implementing Circle Time Discussions, the Two Stars and a Wish, and the MDCD aided in promoting the voice of my students, building relationships, and being more included in the school environment. As a SET, I aspire for my students to encounter the feeling of being accepted for who they are and to have a voice in their education, without reference to academic abilities or diagnoses. I want this as I care for each of my unique pupils. I believe that care must be a core value for teachers, as genuine care being present in the relationships with the students, can result in the well-being of the students being positively influenced. The students will hopefully feel 'cared-for' and may be happier and more motivated in their learning environment.

5.3.3 Finding Three: Building Relationships Through Communication

My third finding declares that communication among teachers, pupils, and colleagues develops relationships and aids in providing adequate support to individual students. Through relating the significance of this finding to relevant literature, I can confidently claim that the themes and key competencies surrounding communication in the IEF (2011) and the Draft Curriculum (2020) have been encountered in this research and "the uniqueness, individuality and specific needs of pupils" have been met within relationships (TC, 2016: 7). Meaningful communication was developed in my own relationships with students, colleagues, and professionals in the field of education, through the introduction of my interventions and through carrying out interviews.

The 'My Thoughts About School Checklist' (Department of Education and Science, 2007: 11) is completed where applicable, as part of our SEN school policy at the beginning of the academic year, with individual students who receive additional support. This checklist helps to

get to know the pupils on a one-to-one basis. It entails the pupil providing their general opinions of school and their views on receiving additional support. In my future SET practice, I plan to complete Circle Time Discussions with groups of students where appropriate, to get a further insight to their views on receiving additional support and how it could be improved. In the Circle Time Discussions I heard profound, authentic opinions during the group conversations in comparison to the opinions provided in the individual discussion of the 'My Thoughts About School Checklist'. The Circle Time Discussion provides an additional approach to developing reciprocal, open lines of communication with students who receive additional support and aids in taking the needs of SEN pupils into account from their personal viewpoint (NCSE, 2011). I questioned my practice in my reflective journal asking, "Is this practice consistent with my values as a teacher or do I still experience a living contradiction?" To which I responded on two separate occasions stating that;

"I no longer see myself as a living contradiction, as communication is now being experienced openly and honestly in this trusting environment. In my opinion, bringing open and honest communication into my practice on a regular basis can only deepen the relationships and provide for further positive developments." (RJ, 21/01/2022)

"This practice is particularly consistent with my value of care. I am listening to the students and taking their voice, feelings and opinions into consideration. Through providing the children with this safe, open environment in which they are free to share their honest opinions, shows the children that I care about them. I want to hear what they have to say and to act upon it. The children are happy that I am carefully listening to them and respecting their opinions." (RJ, 23/03/2022)

Introducing the supplementary practice of Circle Time Discussion, supports existing school policy, while adding another dimension of valuable knowledge about the specific children.

Deeper student-teacher relationships can be developed when the teacher is aware of additional information about the child. Consequently, stronger relationships in the school environment can have positive knock-on effects such as a happier learning environment, teaching to meet the needs of the pupils, and setting achievable and compelling student goals.

5.3.4 Finding Four: A One-Size-Fits-All Approach is Not Adequate in SET Practice

The final finding holds that there is no one correct way to foster a SEN learning environment which adequately serves the needs of all diverse learners. The needs of each individual child who receives support must be taken into account and responded to in order to promote an inclusive learning environment. The range of needs and strengths which must be catered for through SEN provision is undoubtedly vast. Expectations can be daunting for SETs, who are deemed the experts in responding to the needs of the pupils with SEN. Developing inclusive provision within schools requires increased expertise and an integrated service model involving a high degree of collaboration between education and health professionals (Shevlin et al. 2013).

The needs of the pupils who receive special education provision will not stay static year on year, “change is inevitable, and teachers must be given the tools to respond appropriately over a long period of time” (O’Gorman and Drudy, 2010: 164). This literature resonates with my claim to knowledge that the professional development needs of teachers working with children with SEN, must be appropriately supported to promote inclusion. SEN support and professional development provided in schools was discussed in an interview with a lecturer in inclusive and special education. The following comment was made in response to the question; “Do you think special education provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format?”

“When that model came out in 2017 and the policy advice on it was that there was to be significant professional learning needed for teachers and schools – that didn't follow. So I think in the pilot schools where it happened and schools were supported in how to do it, that it worked quite well. So in some schools, the new model is working well, but in a lot of schools it's very similar practice but just tweaked.”
(Interview EP2, 23/03/2022)”

This data displays that the revised allocation model is working well when support is provided. However, the fact that this is not the case in all schools is simply not good enough. Schools are doing their best to cater for the needs of all pupils whilst following the revised allocation model. The inconsistencies in supporting the implementation of the new model means that the same services are not being provided for all and some pupils are at an advantage over others, depending on the school for example in test schools and sample schools. This begs the question for equality of service and can have an influence on the inclusion of the pupils. Equal supports should be provided and all staff who collaborate with children who have SEN should feel confident in their role.

5.4 Future Practice and Recommendations

5.4.1 Future Practice

In my future practice, I will provide my students with choice in their learning to continue on my journey towards teaching with inclusion. I aim to implement the principles of the UDL within my practice through multiple means of engagement, representation, and expression. UDL proactively helps to accommodate all learners by leveraging pupils individuals strengths, which can increase confidence and reduce anxiety (Brennan, 2022). With hindsight, I realise that during the creation of my classroom interventions, my pedagogical knowledge of UDL

was limited. I was unaware of the positive effects of UDL on creating engaging lessons, accessible to all diverse learners. Brennan (2022) asserts that “every pupil can be an expert in something and UDL principles can facilitate this” (p. 36). Although not a focus of my self-study action research, the significance of neurodiversity was brought to my attention during my research. Neurodiversity refers to the “variation in neurocognitive functioning” of individuals whose brain functions differ from those who are neurotypical (Hughes, 2016: 3). The neurodiversity movement values the full spectra of differences and rights such as inclusion and autonomy (Kapp, 2020), which significantly links with my project.

Choice and flexibility are vital within UDL in order to respond to the strengths of the students. The Draft Curriculum (2020) addresses the importance of engaging children in decision-making about their own learning (p. 21). Going forward, I aim to give my students a greater input into the planning of their SSPs. Critical reflection has helped me to recognise that I stand by Lundy’s (2007) perspective which affirms that involving pupils in decision-making is a legal and human right imperative of the child (p. 931). The need to involve SEN pupils in the planning of their learning was discussed in the interview with my SET colleague;

“the only thing I'd add for the additional support for student voice is that simple thing and we aren't the best at doing it, and we'll all admit it, is that the child is involved in the school support plus process...it was always envisaged that the child will be present, the child would have a voice...people are uncomfortable sometimes talking about the child with the parents, with the child present...a lot of that stems from the fact that we go with a very deficit-focused approach to our planning and because we're constantly highlighting all the things the child doesn't know. That makes it uncomfortable for us to have the child present. Where if we had a more strengths-based approach...to help bring you on in this area and that area and the other area. But it's a total, it's a huge mindset change” (Interview SET, 18/02/2022)

Taking a strength-based approach when writing up SSPs would bring a positive outlook to the personalised plan and to the meeting held with parents to discuss its contents. Having the child present and providing them with a say in their individual plan would promote higher levels of inclusion in this process.

Going forward I can confidently disclose that my practice will not be deficit-focused. I am no longer fixated on assessments and planning my teaching around areas which need improving. My teacher identity has transformed and my commitments have shifted. My focus now is on how I can bring my values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice into my practice. Taking a strengths-based approach to motivate and engage my learners, and to build their self-confidence is the ongoing future goal of my practice. Critical reflection will continue to ensure that I hold myself accountable to my practice and decision-making in the future, through “wholeheartedness, open-mindedness and intellectual responsibility” (Dewey, 1933: 33).

5.4.2 Recommendations

I would recommend that the provision of choice is introduced slowly in a step-by-step process which can continuously be built on. In my research I suddenly introduced my students to too much freedom in a short space of time. The change went from providing a teacher-designed list of can-do activities which the pupils could choose from in cycles one and two, to the students independently writing up a full list of can-do activities independently in cycle three. I thought the students would be thrilled with the independence, however they were overwhelmed with being provided this much freedom at once. I reflected on this in my journal and provided an example of a structure to how I would introduce choice in the future;

“Going forward, I would assess how much freedom my students are familiar with at the beginning of the school year and base my activities around this. Some children may be more accustomed to freedom, choice and student voice than others, depending on past experiences. I think introducing freedom in small steps over a longer period of time would provide the children with more of a scaffold for their freedom of choice. Perhaps this would mean going from receiving no choice, to choosing between two activities. This could then progress to choosing activities from a list provided by the teacher. The students could then help the teacher in writing up a list of activities to choose from. And finally the children could independently write up their own list of activities and choose whichever they want to complete. I think doing this approach in a phased rollout approach would not shock the children as much.” (RJ, 25/03/2022)

It is important to acknowledge that certain methods of practice will work with some children and not with others. Nothing is static in education and being prepared to be wrong helps with being able to handle a certain degree of chaos, uncertainty and messiness (Brydon-Miller et al. 2003).

Another recommendation I would give is to provide enough time to trial interventions to fully inspect their true impacts. This recommendation is relevant both for teachers trialling new practices in the classroom environment or for future participants of research in practice. Specifically with regards to the Two Stars and a Wish intervention, I found that my data collection could have been different and possibly improved, if I provided a longer period of time to execute the interventions. Further opportunities for reflecting, analysing and discussing with my critical friend would have materialised. I only decided to introduce the peer feedback element of this intervention during the final cycle of my research after reflecting on a discussion with my critical friend. Unfortunately my timeframe would not allow for another cycle. I think it would have been beneficial to have implemented this practice numerous times to ensure credibility of its effectiveness.

5.5 Personal Statement

Reflection has been a consistent, vital element in my practice throughout this study and has made a noticeable difference to my identity. I see myself now a contrastingly different person in respect to who I was starting out this journey as a traditional SET. My self-image, self-esteem, job motivation, task perception and future perspectives have all been developed (Kelchtermans, 2009). My identity has made critical headway professionally and personally. I am open and willing to base my practice around my students. I intend to capitalise on their strengths and opinions.

My identity has been greatly influenced by Kelchtermans (2009, 2011, 2018) literature. Kelchtermans' 'personal interpretative framework' (2009) has helped to make sense of my teacher identity and my professional self-understanding. I have gained a self-understanding and a realisation that my identity has changed to a facilitator of learning. Developing caring

relationships with my students, which are centred around voice and inclusion, is now central to my practice. “Who I am in how I teach” (Kelchtermans, 2009: 257), would not have been a captivating statement to me in the past. It is now evident that my values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice depict “who I am in how I teach”.

Giving my students a voice is a major element of my negotiated practice. I consider their valuable opinions to be on par with my own and take them into thorough consideration. This has altered my practice as my pupils’ views influence the writing up of fortnightly plans and setting targets in SSPs. The idea of involving children in decisions would previously have had to be “sold” to me (Lundy, 2007: 940). The teacher I am now, wants to take the views of my pupils on board for planning purposes and consequently enhancing the teaching and learning activities encountered.

With the aid of reflective questions from McNiff and Whitehead (2005: 1), I designed interventions which I could bring into my practice as I lived by my values. I no longer wanted to teach in an power-driven, dictatorial environment. I see a link in critical pedagogy between the reflective questions of McNiff and Whitehead (2005) and Moon (2004), with Kemmis and McTaggart’s (1988) self-reflective spiral. Merging these theorist’s viewpoints and using them to critically reflect on my personal learning journey has provided the validity of the transformation in my practice.

I have travelled a meandering path and have moved my practice away from the traditional, authoritarian teacher, in the direction of being a facilitator to my students in their own learning journeys. I aim to provide an authentic vision of myself to my students, which assists them to use their strengths and to share their voice. This makes me think about how I can provide

further opportunities going forward. A learning environment I aspire to foster, will involve equal weight-bearing stakeholders, in which the children have a right to engage in decision-making (Byrne & Lundy, 2019).

5.6 Conclusion

Through critically reflecting on my findings I can claim that I did enhance my teaching through taking a strengths-based approach and moving my practice as a SET beyond deficit-focused teaching. My values of inclusion, care, relationality, and voice became the ‘standards of judgement’ in this transformational process. Adopting my values throughout my self-study, empowered my reflective practice to question my former deficit-focused methodology and to make justified decisions to generate my own ‘living theory’. I am confident that I have achieved the aim of my research, as my practice has been realigned with my values and I am no longer a ‘living contradiction’. I have assessed the prospect of utilising a strength-based approach in teaching and learning situated within the scope of the SEN environment. Like the opinion of McNiff (2002), it might be true that I cannot change the world, but I have certainly changed my bit of it. My research has opened up the understanding of the impact of; providing choice and voice, practicing care in relationships, building relationships through communication, and assessing each SEN environment on a case by case basis. These aspects add to the provision of teaching with inclusion and practicing care with all diverse learners. Action research is driven by our need to know in order to create desired change (McNiff, 2016). A journey of transformation has occurred as my practice has moved from an authoritative style of teaching to a facilitator of learning. The intentions and commitments for my practice are now orientated towards living by my values and making agentic decisions as a reflective practitioner.

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Appendix A: Ethical Documents

Appendix A.1 Ethics Application



Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education Master of Education (Research in practice) (MEd)

Ethics Approval for Master of Education (Research in Practice) (Please read the notes in the course handbook before completing this form)

Student name:	Ellen Butterly
Student Number:	21251716
Supervisor:	Dr David Gibson
Programme:	Master of Education Research in Practice
Thesis title:	Teaching with Inclusion: A self-study enquiry orientated to SET practice beyond deficit teaching
Research Question(s):	How can I challenge deficit based teaching in SET and practice care in relationships with the child/student before me (not the diagnosis)
Intended start date of data collection:	January 2022
Professional Ethical Codes or Guidelines used:	National University of Ireland Maynooth's Ethical Guidelines

1(a) Research Participants: Who will be involved in this research?

Participants/group (*tick all that apply*)

Early years / pre-school	
Primary school students	
Secondary school students	

Young people (aged 16 – 18 years)	
Adults – professional colleagues, professionals in education, parents	✓

Provide a brief description of the individuals and their proposed role in your research below

[Max 50 words]:

In my role as a Special Education Teacher (SET), I plan to introduce three new practices which will be examined as part of my research:

Providing 5th class students with agency and ownership of their learning through ‘Must do, Can do’ activities.

Enhancing communication and relationality through fortnightly communication via Seesaw with parents of 2nd class students through the structure of ‘Two Stars and a Wish’.

Conducting a circle time group discussion with 5th class students on their thoughts and feelings towards receiving additional support in school and how it affects them

There are two groups I wish to carry out research with:

i) Professional Colleagues

-Interviews with mainstream teacher, SET teacher and SNA practitioners about inclusion, voice, relationality and care in primary education.

-Discussion with my critical friend, after observing my practice, on the ‘Must do, Can do’ and circle time activity.

ii) Professionals in education (academics, staff of the NCCA, NEPS or Teaching Council)

-A selection of professionals (provisionally four) will be invited to individual interviews to discuss inclusion, voice, relationality and care in primary education.

1(b) Recruitment and Participation/sampling approach: *How will these participants become involved in your research? What type of sampling is involved? Please describe the formal and informal recruitment processes? Please describe the type of participation and level of engagement of participants? Are there gatekeepers and what is their part of sampling process? [Max 100 words]*

i) **School based Research** – Once ethics approval has been granted, I will formally contact the Board of Management and the Principal requesting permission to carry out research. I will provide the Board of Management and the Principal with a Plain Language Statement and Informed Consent Document to carry out research in the school. They will be given the opportunity to approve or reject the four elements. Each element will have a separate plain language and informed consent document,

a) Permission to interview colleagues about three new practices (Plain Language and Informed Consent Documents for interviewees). Interviews will be audio recorded.

b) Permission to approach a colleague to act as critical friend (Plain Language and Informed Consent Documents for critical friend) – Hard copy or online

ii) **Educational Professionals** - Potential participants are adults and will be contacted directly with an invitation to participate in the research. If they are interested in taking part, a plain language and informed consent document will be shared with them. The questions for the interview will be provided to participants a few days in advance. If requested, they will be included with the plain language statement and informed consent document. If required, further information about the general study will be provided to the organisation if required.

2. Summary of Planned Research (please indicate anonymised location type, purpose and aims of research, research questions and design, methods to be used and time frame, process of analysis) [250 words]

Research Plan:

As a Special Education Teacher, in accordance with my values I will commence a self-study which involves researching the inclusion of SPHE specific practices in my learning environment.

I plan to introduce three new practices which will be examined as part of my research.

Providing 5th class students with agency and ownership of their learning through ‘Must do, Can do’ activities.

Enhancing relationality through fortnightly communication via Seesaw with parents of 2nd class students through the structure of ‘Two Stars and a Wish’.

Conducting a circle time group discussion with 5th class students on their thoughts and feelings towards receiving additional support in school and how it impacts them

Data Gathering

I will keep a reflective journal throughout this process, with specific reference to my values of care, relationality, inclusion and teacher identity.

There will be three components of data collection associated with this change in practice. This research will take place between **January – May 2022**

i) Professional Colleagues

-Interviews, which are audio recorded, with mainstream teacher, SET teacher and SNA practitioners about inclusion, voice, relationality and care in primary education.

-Discussion in person on school premises with my critical friend, after observing my practice, on the ‘Must do, Can do’ intervention. Handwritten notes will be taken during this discussion.

ii) Professionals in education (academics, staff of the NCCA, NEPS or Teaching Council) – A selection of professionals (provisionally four) will be invited to individual interviews, either in person or via Microsoft Teams to discuss the inclusion of SPHE specific interventions into the environment of a special education teacher. These interviews will be audio recorded.

Data Analysis (February 2022 – August 2022)

I will analyse the data through two methods:

Thematic analysis

Coding

3. Ethical Issues: Please outline the main ethical issues which may arise while undertaking this research. *Outline the nature of consent and assent about participants. (You should discuss these concerns and outline the responses/supports you will provide in the boxes below)*

All research is being carried out with adults.

Research with Adult Participants

-In advance of research, communication with adult participants will set out clearly what is involved in the research, the risks associated with the research, etc. The question for interviews will be shared in advance.

-The interviews with adult participants is a basic form of enquiry process. It is not considered to generate any risk or discomfort and relates to their professional domain.

-In the midst of research, adult participants will be permitted to pause, skip questions or stop the interview at any time. In the event that a participant experiences discomfort or upset, the interview will be paused, and the participant given the opportunity to stop.

Risk of contraction of Covid-19 due to interviewing in person. Due consideration will have to be taken of the NPHET guidelines as well as directions from the Dept. of Education. All current public health guidelines will be followed.

Vulnerability (*minimising risk, discomfort, coping with unforeseen outcomes, can any aspect of the research give rise to any form of harm to participants, including the researcher?*) [Max 100 words]

Research Interviews: questions will be approved in advance by supervisor, for school interviews approved by Board of Management / Principal before commencement. Questions will be provided in advance. All participants can pause, skip or end interviews at any time. I wish to minimise the risk of conflict arising amongst participants and I by adhering to the anonymity of their responses to my research. I hope to develop my own professional growth through this self-study, however I must remember that circumstances may not unfold as planned and disappointment could be experienced.

Outline the potential for increased risk to participants considering changing circumstances in the school environment because of immediate closure or threat to privacy or anonymity. Consider implications for a change or changes in methodological tools (virtual formats). [Max 50 words]

Power dynamics (between researcher-participants, amongst participants, insider-research, reflexivity, gatekeepers, working with your colleagues, working with students, etc): [Max 100 words]

I will remind all willing participants that this research is about my own practices and not theirs. I want all involvement to be honest, open-minded and whole-hearted .

There are considerable power dynamic tensions here:

i) Teacher as professional vs teacher as researcher (relevant related permission by the principal and board of management and the agreement for participation of colleagues and parents)

ii) Insider research – As I have a direct involvement and connection with the research setting, I will remain aware of the power dynamics that exist (SET vs research). This will be negotiated with my colleagues through the explanation that this is a self-study action research process focusing on my practice as an educational professional and not the judgement or analysis of their participation and contribution to the study. At all times my duty of care to children will be paramount and if the research is hindering student engagement or the development of the students, I will pause my research and seek immediate guidance from my principal or assistant principal and my supervisor.

iii) This ethics process vs requirement to get consent from the BOM

Informed consent and assent (for participants - and guardians where appropriate. Please also note any other approvals that may be required from other bodies (i.e. Board of Management.): [Max 100 words]

For Research in School

- a) Principal / Board of Management – Plain Language Statement + Informed Consent Document
- b) Interview participants – Plain Language Statement + Informed Consent Document
- c) Critical Friend - Plain Language Statement + Informed Consent Document

For Research with Professionals

Educational Professionals – Plain Language Statement + Informed Consent Document

If required for employers of educational professionals - Plain Language Statement + Informed Consent Document

Consider if consent of participants may need to include a list of any new scenarios/situations that may be required for data collection activity in light of school closures or short-term illness of school members (teachers/SNA) and how this may impact the research. Outline below; [max 50 words]

If permitted, all interviews with professionals will take place in person. Full adherence to National, Public, Health, Emergency Team (NPHE), the Department of Education and Maynooth University guidance will be followed where appropriate i.e. interviews taking place in an education institution or campus. If not permitted, individual interviews will take place with four professionals and one critical friend online via Microsoft teams, which will be audio-recorded.

Sensitivity (topics that may be potentially sensitive, intrusive or stressful, have you considered what to do in relation to dealing with the aftermath of a sensitive disclosure? how do you intend to deal with unexpected outcomes?) [Max 100 words]

The questions for the interview will be shared with professionals in advance. The interview questions are not considered to generate any significant risk of disclosure. In the event of a disclosure or unintended outcomes, participants will be given the opportunity to pause, skip or end the interview and withdraw consent. I will adhere to The Children's First Act (2015) at all times. If I'm unsure of any issue that arises, I will seek guidance from my supervisor and course co-ordinator.

All survey questions by nature will be reviewed by my supervisor and provided in advance. Participants will be informed that they can skip any question and or chose to withdraw by not submitting their survey.

As my reflective journal is focused on my own practice as a professional, these will not contain any sensitive data.

Data storage (where will the findings be stored; will they be potentially published in future? And by whom?) [Max 100 words]

Findings will be stored in an encrypted Maynooth University Microsoft OneDrive folder. This password protected folder will contain all data from the research. Contents in this folder will be dated and items will be recorded on an index which can easily be checked.

Audio from professionals

The audio will be stored on a secured Maynooth University (MU) Microsoft OneDrive and will be transferred from the device immediately after the interviews. Once transferred to the drive successfully it will be deleted from the recorder. Only I will have access to the recording as it is stored on a password protected Maynooth University drive. The audio recording will be transcribed, by me, within a week of the interview. The participants will have an option to remain anonymous or if they chose to have their name included with their contribution. If a participant chooses to remain anonymous, there will be two transcriptions made. The first transcriptions will include pseudonyms and a removal of any identifying information, so individual participants will not be identified. The second transcript will include the participant's name but securely stored in a password protected file. Only I will have access to this file. The purpose of this file is in the event where a participant wishes to withdraw from the research. This transcript will be used to identify their contribution in the anonymised transcript and will be removed effectively. This file will have a different set of passwords to the anonymous data set document. Once I have these transcriptions the audio recording will be deleted from the OneDrive. The audio recording will be destroyed after one week.

These anonymous transcripts or transcripts with permission to be named, will be used in the thesis with participant's consent. Participants will be given opportunity to view the transcription and retract any statement made, as they wish, if they consent for the transcript to be included. Data may possibly be used for presentations on this topic, future papers, or a research presentation in a conference. Transcripts from participants will be in an anonymised form so there will be no personal data from anonymised sources.

The anonymised data set will be saved for ten years. The data from this set may be used for presentations on the topic, future papers or research presentations in education conferences by the researcher only.

The second data set which links pseudonyms and participants, along with consent forms, will be destroyed by February/March 2023 at the end of my masters studies.

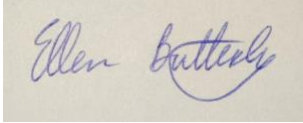
Hard copies of the anonymous data set will be stored securely and will only be accessible to the researcher and supervisor. They are kept in the event of a personal data request or for the purpose of withdrawal from research and where instructed by a Legal Court.

In the event that online interviews are required in place of in person interviews, all university guidance on carrying out online research via Microsoft Teams will be followed. Before proceeding, I will consult with my research supervisor. The same procedures concerning transcription, destruction, storage and anonymisation will be followed.

The overall research findings may potentially be published in the future and this will be noted on all plain language statements and informed consent forms. All participants will remain anonymous if there is future publication through academic journals or books. Approval by Maynooth University and my supervisor must be granted before any future publications.

Declaration *(Please sign and date)*

'I confirm that to the best of my knowledge this is a full description of the ethical issues that may arise in the course of undertaking this research.' If any of the conditions of this proposed research change, I confirm that I will renegotiate ethical clearance with my supervisor.



Signed:

Date: 15/12/2021

Supervisor use only:

Date Considered: _____

Approved	
Approved with recommendations (see below)	
Referred to applicant	
Referred to Department Research and Ethics Committee	

(Tick as appropriate)

Recommendations:

Signature of supervisor: _____

Date: _____

Department use only: *(only where applicable)*

Date Considered: _____

Approved by Froebel Department Research and Ethics committee	
Approved with recommendations (see below)	
Referred to applicant (changes to be approved by supervisor)	
Referred to Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Subcommittee	

(Tick as appropriate)

Recommendations:

Signature of Dept. Ethics Committee Chair: _____

Approved by Froebel Department Research and Ethics committee	
Referred to applicant (changes to be approved by supervisor)	

(Tick that apply)

Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Subcommittee use only *(only where applicable)*

Date Considered: _____

Signed:

FSS Research Ethics Committee nominee

Checklist for students

<p>Please complete the checklist below to confirm you have considered all ethical aspects of your research.</p> <p>(Note that the consent form/s, assent form/s and information sheet/s that must accompany this application will be scrutinised and any omission or inadequacy in detail will result in a request for amendments).</p>	<p>Please tick</p>
<p>I have attached (an) proper consent form/s, assent form/s and/or information sheet/s</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Each form and sheet is presented to a high standard, as suitable work carried out under the auspices of Maynooth University</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Each consent form has full contact details to enable prospective participants to make follow-up inquiries</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Each consent form has full details, in plain non-technical language, of the purpose of the research and the proposed role of the person being invited to participate</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Each consent form has full details of the purposes to which the data (in all their forms: text, oral, video, imagery etc) will be put, including for research dissemination purposes</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Each consent form explains how the privacy of the participants and their data will be protected, including the storage and ultimate destruction of the data as appropriate</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Each consent form gives assurances that the data collection (questionnaires, interviews, tests etc) will be carried out in a sensitive and non-stressful manner, and that the participant has the right to cease participation at any time and without the need to supply a reason</p>	<p>✓</p>
<p>Please include here any other comments you wish to make about the consent form(s) and/or information sheet/s.</p>	



Appendix A.2 Plain Language Statement For Principal / Board of Management

Date:

Dear Principal and Board of Management,

Purpose of the Study.

My name is Ellen Butterly (ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie), a Masters student in the Froebel Department in Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for a 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 title of the study is 'Teaching with Inclusion: A self-study enquiry orientated to SET practice beyond deficit teaching'. This study is an opportunity for me to explore how I can challenge deficit based teaching in SET and explore how care can be practiced in relationship with the children/students I teach and support. As part of this research I intend to introduce new elements in my SET practice, interview colleagues in St. Mary's Parish Primary School, and to engage in conversations with a critical friend who is a colleague in the school.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve the introduction of three new elements to my SET practice. In my SET practice with 5th class students, I want to facilitate a 'Must do, Can do' approach to learning activities to support agency and ownership of learning. In SET practice with 5th class students, I want to conduct a circle time group discussion with students to provide an opportunity for their voice to be heard and specifically to invite discussion on their thoughts and feelings about receiving additional support in the school. Finally, I want to model an enhanced communication process through regular communication via Seesaw with parents, class teacher, SNA and students, of 2nd class students who receive additional support, via a 'Two Stars and a Wish' layout.

Furthermore, I want to carry out interviews with colleagues about voice, care, inclusion and relationality in primary education (See interview questions attached). I plan to interview one mainstream teacher, one SET teacher, and one SNA in April 2022. The interviews will last approximately 20 minutes each and will be audio recorded. I would like to carry out the interviews after school, on site but can switch to teams if required by School Authorities or Public Health Guidance.

This study will also involve a colleague acting as a critical friend. Their role will be to observe lessons, listen, and provide honest feedback. I want to have informal conversations about my practice and intentions at four points in the term. No data will be taken from these conversations. I will use the conversation as a stimulus for reflection.

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 provided by the Board of Management and Principal as the research involves my practice, interviewing colleagues, inviting a colleague to act as a critical friend and carrying out research on the school premises.

Guidance is also being sought about the appropriate form of communication to follow when inviting colleagues to participate in research for interviews and for the role of critical friend.

Do you have to grant permission?

For research to be carried out on school property and with school staff, the permission from the Board of Management and Principal is required. It is up to the Board of Management 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. You are recommended to keep a copy of the consent form and this Plain Language Statement for your own records. If you decide to grant permission, this can be withdrawn at any time without giving a reason. 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?

No data on children will be recorded for this project. There are two types of data to be collected:

- i. Colleague – Interview (adult) Role: Mainstream Teacher, SET and SNA. Individual semi-structured interviews with three colleagues will provide staff, in three different roles, with the opportunity to discuss care, voice, inclusion and relationality in primary education. If participants are willing, the interview will be audio recorded
- ii. Reflections on your practice – reflective journal – a focus on methods and overall success, with no reference to specific children. The focus is on my practice. Stimulus for some of these reflections may be drawn from conversations with the critical friend. No data will be taken from the critical friend, rather I will be reflecting on the conversation about my practice and intentions.

Will participation in this study be kept confidential?

The identities of participants in this study will not be contained in the submitted Dissertation of this research (which will be held in NUI Maynooth Library).

Data collected from interviews will only be accessed by myself and my research supervisor, Dr David Gibson. Once the interview is over I will transfer the audio file to a secure Maynooth OneDrive and delete the original

from my hard drive/recording device. Within a week of the interview I will transcribe the interview and at that time a pseudonym will be inserted in place of the staff member's name. Any data that would allow for staff to be identified will be removed from this transcript (anonymisation). Once the transcript of the interview is complete, the audio recording will be deleted.

Notes taken from conversations and reflections on conversation with my critical friend will be anonymised at source. The notes and observations about my teaching and reflections on my practice, and reflections prompted by conversations with the critical friend, will be stored securely on my Maynooth OneDrive account.

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.'

It is possible that staff members or members of the community familiar with the school may, based on a reading of my thesis in Maynooth Library, be able to identify participants engaged in the research. Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity, to prevent this from happening. As my place of employment is on public record, readers of the thesis will be able to identify the school this research is carried out in.

What will happen to the information provided by participants?

Throughout the research process, data will be stored with secure protocols in place. All data from interviews (audio recording and anonymised transcripts) will be stored on Maynooth OneDrive which is encrypted.

Informed Consent Documents for interview participants and from the Principal/Board of Management are considered personal data from Data Protection/GDPR perspectives. These documents will be kept on my personal laptop in a password protected folder. This is done to ensure that the identifiers for participants taking part in the study are separate from the site containing data. A breach of either will not allow for data to be linked to participants.

Once the research is complete, the anonymised data (interview transcripts and reflective notes) will be stored at Maynooth University. This information will be stored in such a way that it will not be possible to identify participants. The data will be retained on the Maynooth University server. Audio recordings from interviews will be destroyed after one week. Personal data and identifying information data sets will be kept securely and deleted on completion of the masters. Anonymous data sets will be kept for 2 years. All data will be destroyed by me.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a Master's degree thesis. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What if there is a problem?

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>.

Due consideration will have to be taken of the NPHEt guidelines as well as directions from the Department of Education and Government of Ireland on the permissibility of research in person. The intention is to carry out research interviews with colleagues on the school site but outside of lesson times.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie

If you are happy for research to take place in your school, please see the attached informed consent document.



Appendix A.3 Plain Language Statement for Interview Participants & Critical Friend

Date:

Dear Primary School Teacher, SET Teacher and SNA Practitioner,

Purpose of the Study.

My name is Ellen Butterly (ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie), a Masters student in the Froebel Department in Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for a 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 title of the study is 'Teaching with Inclusion: A self-study enquiry orientated to SET practice beyond deficit teaching'. This study is an opportunity for me to explore how I can challenge deficit based teaching in SET and explore how care can be practiced in relationships with the children/students I teach and support. As part of this research I intend to introduce new elements in my SET practice, interview colleagues in our school, survey parents of children who I support/teach and to engage in reflective conversations with a critical friend, who is a colleague in the school.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve the introduction of three new elements to my SET practice. In SET practice with 5th class students, I want to facilitate a 'Must do, Can do' approach to learning activities to support agency and ownership of learning. In SET practice with 5th class students, I want to conduct a circle time group discussion with students to provide an opportunity for their voice to be heard and specifically to invite discussion on their thoughts and feelings about receiving additional support in the school. Finally, I want to model an enhanced communication process through regular communication via Seesaw with parents, class teacher, SNA and students, of 2nd class students who receive additional support, via a 'Two Stars and a Wish' layout.

In addition to my own practice, I want to carry out interviews with colleagues about voice, care, inclusion and relationality in primary education (See Interview Questions attached). I plan to interview one mainstream teacher, one SET teacher, and one SNA in April 2022. The interviews will last approximately 20 minutes each and will be audio recorded. I would like to carry out the interviews after school, on site but can switch to Microsoft Teams if required by School Authorities or Public Health Guidance.

This study will also involve a colleague acting as a critical friend. Their role will be to observe lessons, listen, and provide honest feedback. I want to have informal conversations about my practice and intentions at four points in the term. No data will be taken from these conversations. I will use the conversation as a stimulus for reflection.

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.

This study has (pending approval) from the Principal and Board of Management of this School.

Why have you been asked to take part?

You have been asked to take part as you are a primary school teacher, SET Teacher or SNA Practitioner working in either a mainstream classroom or learning support room. I would like to know if you would be willing to participate in interviews to discuss my values of voice, care, inclusion and relationality in primary education or to act as my critical friend.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation to 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 researcher/colleague, or Maynooth University. 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 2022. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You are recommended to keep a copy of the consent form and this Plain Language Statement for your own records. If you decide to grant permission, this can be withdrawn at any time without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationship with me as a colleague.

Interview Questions

The questions for the interview are attached below. Please read the questions in advance of the interview and before agreeing to take part in the research. You are not required to answer any question you do not wish to.

Vulnerability / Risk Management

- i) In advance of research, communication with adult participants will set out clearly what is involved in the research, the risks associated with the research, etc. The question for interviews will be shared in advance.
- ii) The interviews with adult participants is a basic form of enquiry process. It is not considered to generate any risk or discomfort and relates to their professional domain.
- iii) In the midst of research: adult participants will be permitted to pause, skip questions or stop the interview at any time. In the event that a participant experiences discomfort or upset, the interview will be paused, and the participant given the opportunity to stop.

In the Event of Restrictions

In the event of immediate closure due to Covid-19 level restrictions, all interviews may be carried out online via Microsoft teams as recommended by Maynooth University. All meetings will be planned and organised in advance with all consenting participants receiving the questions prior to the interview. Consenting participants will be informed that the interview may be audio-recorded for data collection purposes, and they may withdraw from the interview at any stage of the research process.

Will participation in this study be kept confidential?

The identities of participants in this study will not be contained in the submitted Dissertation of this research (which will be held in NUI Maynooth Library). Data collected from interviews will only be accessed by myself and research supervisor, Dr David Gibson. Once the interview is over I will transfer the audio file to a secure Maynooth OneDrive and delete the original from my hard drive/recording device. Within a week of the interview I will transcribe the interview and at that time a pseudonym will be inserted in place of the staff member's name. Any data that would allow for you to be identified will be removed from this transcript. Once the transcript of the interview is complete, the audio recording will be deleted

Notes taken from conversations and reflections on conversation with my critical friend will be anonymised at source. The notes and observations about my teaching and reflections on my practice, and reflections prompted by conversations with the critical friend, will be stored securely on my Maynooth OneDrive account.

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.'

It is possible that staff members or members of the community familiar with the school may, based on a reading of my thesis in the Maynooth Library, be able to identify participants engaged in the research. Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity, to prevent this from happening. As my place of employment is on public record, readers of the thesis will be able to identify the school this research is carried out in.

What will happen to the information provided by participants?

Throughout the research process, data will be stored with secure protocols in place. All data from interviews (audio recording and anonymised transcripts) will be stored on the Maynooth OneDrive, which is encrypted.

Informed Consent Documents for interview participants and from the Principal/Board of Management are considered personal data from Data Protection/GDPR perspectives. These documents will be kept on my personal laptop in a password protected folder. This is done to ensure that the identifiers for participants taking part in the study are separate from the site containing data. A breach of either will not allow for data to be linked to participants.

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. The data will be retained on the MU server. Recordings of students will be deleted after one week, personal data and identifying information data sets will be kept securely and deleted on completion of the masters. Anonymous data sets will be kept for two years.. All data will be destroyed by me.

What will happen to the results?

The research will be written up and presented as a Master's degree thesis. A copy of the research findings will be made available to you upon request.

What if there is a problem?

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>.

Due consideration will have to be taken of the NPHEt guidelines as well as directions from the Department of Education and Government of Ireland on the permissibility of research in person. The intention is to carry out research interviews with colleagues on the school site but outside of lesson times.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie

If you are happy for research to take place in your school, please see the attached informed consent document.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie

If you are happy for research to take place in your school, please see the attached informed consent document.

Thank you for taking the time to read this



Appendix A.4 Plain Language Statement for Educational Professional

Date:

Dear _____

Purpose of the Study.

My name is Ellen Butterly (ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie), a Masters student in the Froebel Department in Maynooth University. As part of the requirements for a 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 title of the study is ‘Teaching with Inclusion: A self-study enquiry orientated to SET practice beyond deficit teaching’. This study is an opportunity for me to explore how I can challenge deficit based teaching in SET and explore how care can be practiced in relationships with the children/students I teach and support. As part of this research I intend to introduce new elements in my SET practice, interview colleagues in our school, survey parents of children who I support/teach and to engage in reflective conversations with a critical friend, who is a colleague in the school. This research will take place between January 6th and April 30th, 2022.

What will the study involve?

The study will involve the introduction of three new elements to my SET practice. In SET practice with 5th class students, I want to facilitate a ‘Must do, Can do’ approach to learning activities to support agency and ownership of learning. In SET practice with 5th class students, I want to conduct a circle time group discussion with students to provide an opportunity for their voice to be heard and specifically to invite discussion on their thoughts and feelings about receiving additional support in the school. Finally, I want to model an enhanced communication process through regular communication via Seesaw with parents, class teacher, SNA and students, of 2nd class students who receive additional support, via a ‘Two Stars and a Wish’ layout.

In addition to exploring my own practice, I am carrying out interviews with educational professionals within the school as well as from outside.

Purpose of the Interviews

The purpose of this part of the research is to investigate the views and attitudes of educational professionals in relation to inclusive education in primary education with a specific focus on SET. It is intended that a total of four academics or educational professionals will be interviewed.

Interviews with educational professionals will occur between January and April 2021. These interviews will occur at the convenience of the participants. Each interview will be guided by a set of specific questions. The interview questions are attached.

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.

Do you have to take part?

No, you are under no obligation to 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 researcher/colleague, or Maynooth University. 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 2022. If you decide to do so, you will be asked to sign a consent form. You are recommended to keep a copy of the consent form and this Plain Language Statement for your own records. If you decide to grant permission, this can be withdrawn at any time without giving a reason. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision not to take part, will not affect your relationship with me as a colleague.

Interview Questions

The questions for the interview are attached. Please read the questions in advance of the interview and before agreeing to take part in the research. You are not required to answer any question you do not wish to.

Vulnerability / Risk Management

- iv) In advance of research, communication with adult participants will set out clearly what is involved in the research, the risks associated with the research, etc. The question for interviews will be shared in advance.
- v) The interviews with adult participants is a basic form of enquiry process. It is not considered to generate any risk or discomfort and relates to their professional domain.
- vi) In the midst of research: adult participants will be permitted to pause, skip questions or stop the interview at any time. In the event that a participant experiences discomfort or upset, the interview will be paused, and the participant given the opportunity to stop.

In the Event of Restrictions

In the event of immediate closure due to Covid-19 level restrictions, all interviews may be carried out online via Microsoft teams as recommended by Maynooth University. All meetings will be planned and organised in advance with all consenting participants receiving the questions prior to the interview. Consenting participants will be informed that the interview may be audio-recorded for data collection purposes, and they may withdraw from the interview at any stage of the research process.

Will participation in this study be kept confidential?

The identities of participants in this study will not be contained in the submitted Dissertation of this research (which will be held in NUI Maynooth Library). Data collected from interviews will only be accessed by myself and research supervisor, Dr David Gibson. Once the interview is over, I will transfer the audio file to a secure Maynooth OneDrive and delete the original from my hard drive/recording device. Within a week of the interview I will transcribe the interview and at that time a pseudonym will be inserted in place of the interviewer's name. Any data that would allow for you to be identified will be removed from this transcript. Once the transcript of the interview is complete, the audio recording will be deleted

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.'

It is possible that staff members or members of the community familiar with the school may, based on a reading of my thesis in the Maynooth Library, be able to identify participants engaged in the research. Every effort will be made to ensure anonymity, to prevent this from happening. As my place of employment is on public record, readers of the thesis will be able to identify the school this research is carried out in.

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 Maynooth University OneDrive will be secured by a password protected password. Once the research is complete, all information will be stored at Maynooth University. You will have an option to i) remain anonymous and your profession not named, ii) have a pseudonym and your profession named or iii) for your name and profession to be named in the research. You will also have the option as to whether a transcript of your interview is to be included as an appendix in the research. If you choose to remain anonymous, this information will be stored in such a way that it will not be possible to identify participants. The data will be retained on the Maynooth University OneDrive server. The anonymous data sets will be kept for ten years. All data will be destroyed by me. Manual data will be shredded confidentially, and electronic data will be deleted by the researcher in Maynooth University. Any data with identifiable information will be deleted by September 2022.

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?

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>.

Due consideration will have to be taken of the NPHEt guidelines as well as directions from the Department of Education and Government of Ireland on the permissibility of research in person.

Any further queries?

If you need any further information, you can contact me: ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie

If you are happy for research to take place in your school, please see the attached informed consent document.

Thank you for taking the time to read this



Appendix A.5 Informed Consent Document for Principal and Chairperson of Board of Management

Research Title: Teaching with Inclusion: A self-study enquiry orientated to SET practice beyond deficit teaching

Researcher: Ellen Butterly (ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie)

Supervisor: Dr David Gibson (david.gibson@mu.ie)

Clarification of the Purpose of Research

The aim of this research is to explore opportunities to challenge deficit based teaching in SET through self-study action research and qualitative research by Ellen Butterly. The research is being carried out as part of Masters in Education.

Confirmation of requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

School teachers, SET teachers and SNA practitioners will be interviewed by Ellen Butterly on themes of inclusion, voice, care and relationality in primary education. A SET teacher will be invited to act as a critical friend for Ellen Butterly and discuss aspects of Ellen’s SET practice. Ellen Butterly will contact and invite potential participants to take part in the research in a format approved by the Chairperson of the BoM or the Principal.

Confirmation that Involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

The school can withdraw from participation in this study at any time. A decision to withdraw at any time, or a decision to limit that type of research activity, can be made without any reason

Confirmation of Arrangements to protect Confidentiality of Data

Arrangements to protect anonymity and confidentiality of data have been explained to me. I am aware that the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Please tick the Yes or No box for each statement below:

	NO	YES
I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me).	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand the information provided	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study.	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions	<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Signature: _____

Name in BLOCK CAPITALS: _____

Date:

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 A.6 Informed Consent Document for Interviews with School Staff

Research Title: Teaching with Inclusion: A self-study enquiry orientated to SET practice beyond deficit teaching

Researcher: Ellen Butterly (ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie)

Supervisor: Dr David Gibson (david.gibson@mu.ie)

Clarification of the Purpose of Research

The aim of this research is to explore opportunities to challenge deficit based teaching in SET through self-study action research and qualitative research by Ellen Butterly. The research is being carried out as part of Masters in Education.

Confirmation of requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

I will participate in one interview in person or via Microsoft Teams that will be audio recorded.

Confirmation that Involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I know that participating in the research is voluntary. I can withdraw from the research process at any stage. During the interview I may pause, skip, stop or withdraw from the research also.

Confirmation of Arrangements to protect Confidentiality of Data

Arrangements to protect anonymity and confidentiality of data have been explained to me. I am aware that the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Please tick the Yes or No box for each statement below: **NO** **YES**

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

I understand the information provided

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

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Signature: _____

Name in BLOCK CAPITALS: _____

Date: _____

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 A.7 Informed Consent Document for Critical Friend

Research Title: Teaching with Inclusion: A self-study enquiry orientated to SET practice beyond deficit teaching

Researcher: Ellen Butterly (ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie)

Supervisor: Dr David Gibson (david.gibson@mu.ie)

Clarification of the Purpose of Research

The aim of this research is to explore opportunities to challenge deficit based teaching in SET through self-study action research and qualitative research by Ellen Butterly. The research is being carried out as part of Masters in Education.

Confirmation of requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

I will act as a critical friend for Ellen Butterly and discuss her practice, at four different times during the research project.

Confirmation that Involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I know that participating in the research is voluntary. I can withdraw from the research process at any stage. During discussion I can avoid, pause or withdraw from the conversation without providing a reason.

Confirmation of Arrangements to protect Confidentiality of Data

Arrangements to protect anonymity and confidentiality of data have been explained to me. I am aware that the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Please tick the Yes or No box for each statement below: **NO** **YES**

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

I understand the information provided

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

I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I consent to take part in this research project

Signature: _____

Name in BLOCK CAPITALS: _____

Date: _____

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 A.8 Informed Consent Document for Interviews with Educational Professionals

Research Title: Teaching with Inclusion: A self-study enquiry orientated to SET practice beyond deficit teaching

Researcher: Ellen Butterly (ellen.butterly.2022@mumail.ie)

Supervisor: Dr David Gibson (david.gibson@mu.ie)

Clarification of the Purpose of Research

The aim of this research is to explore opportunities to challenge deficit based teaching in SET through self-study action research and qualitative research by Ellen Butterly. The research is being carried out as part of Masters in Education.

Confirmation of requirements as highlighted in the Plain Language Statement

I will participate in one interview in person or via Microsoft Teams that will be audio recorded.

Confirmation that Involvement in the Research Study is voluntary

I know that participating in the research is voluntary. I can withdraw from the research process at any stage. During the interview I may pause, skip, stop or withdraw from the research also.

Confirmation of Arrangements to protect Confidentiality of Data

Arrangements to protect anonymity and confidentiality of data have been explained to me. I am aware that the confidentiality of information provided is subject to legal limitations.

Please tick the Yes or No box for each statement below: **NO** **YES**

- | | | |
|--|--------------------------|--------------------------|
| I have read the Plain Language Statement (or had it read to me). | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand the information provided | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| It has been explained to me how my data will be managed and that I may access it on request. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I understand the limits of confidentiality as described in the information sheet | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have had an opportunity to ask questions and discuss this study. | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |
| I have received satisfactory answers to all my questions | <input type="checkbox"/> | <input type="checkbox"/> |

I have read and understood the information in this form. My questions and concerns have been answered by the researchers, and I have a copy of this consent form. Therefore, I

consent to take part in this research project

Signature: _____

Name in BLOCK CAPITALS: _____

Date: _____

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 A.9 Research Questions for Interview Participants with School Staff

Relationality

The Teaching Council seeks to develop positive relationships within the school community, that are characterised by professional integrity and judgement.

1. In regard to the teacher/SNA-student relationship, what importance do you place on the type of relationship between a teacher/SNA and student.
2. How important is the student-teacher/SNA relationship in your role in primary education?
3. Can you think about what is a good type of relationship between teacher/SNA and student? Please, describe.
4. What are the risks in primary education if the relationship between teacher/SNA and student is poor?
5. What are your thoughts on power and or power dynamics between teacher/SNA and students in primary education?

Care:

The Teaching Council places care as one of the four ethical values which underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct in their Code of Professional Conduct.

1. What are your thoughts on the importance of care in primary education?
2. What practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care in primary education?
3. What does care look like in your professional practice?
4. In respect of students who receive additional support (have a school support plan or school support plus plan), what practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care?
5. Do you think there are any further opportunities for care in the primary school classroom and or additional support?

Voice:

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity.

1. Do you agree that children should have this right? Do you think it is respected in primary education?
2. What activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in primary education?
3. What activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in additional support education?
4. What importance, if any, does student voice have in your practice?
5. Do you think there are any further opportunities to value, encourage, support or foster student voice in the primary school classroom and or additional support?

Inclusion:

1. Based on your experiences in primary education, do you think Irish primary schools practice inclusion appropriately?
2. Do you think special education provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format? What are the strengths and limitations of special education?
3. What does a commitment to inclusion in primary education ask of you
 - a. In respect of the relationships between you and your students?
 - b. In the way you practice care?
 - c. In the importance you afford to student voice?

Appendix A.10 Research Questions for Education Professionals

Relationality

The Teaching Council seeks to develop positive relationships within the school community, that are characterised by professional integrity and judgement.

1. In regard to the teacher/SNA-student relationship, what importance do you place on the type of relationship between a teacher/SNA and student.
2. Can you think about what is a good type of relationship between teacher/SNA and student? Please, describe.
3. What are the risks in primary education if the relationship between teacher/SNA and student is poor?
4. What are your thoughts on power and or power dynamics between teacher/SNA and students in primary education?

Care:

The Teaching Council places care as one of the four ethical values which underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct in their Code of Professional Conduct.

1. What are your thoughts on the importance of care in primary education?
2. What practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care in primary education?
3. In respect of students who receive additional support (have a school support plan or school support plus plan), what practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care?
4. Do you think there are any further opportunities for care in the primary school classroom and or additional support?

Voice:

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity.

1. Do you agree that children should have this right? Do you think it is respected in primary education?
2. What activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in primary education?
3. What activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in additional support education?
4. Do you think there are any further opportunities to value, encourage, support or foster student voice in the primary school classroom and or additional support?

Inclusion:

1. Based on your experiences in primary education, do you think Irish Primary schools practice inclusion appropriately?
2. Do you think special education provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format? What are the strengths and limitations of special education?

Appendix B: Research Instruments

Appendix B.1 Initial Action Research Timetable

Date:	Intervention:
Week of 17/01/22	Circle Time Discussion no. 1 & reflection
Week of 31/01/22	Must Do, Can Do (introduction & trial with 5 th class students)
Week of 07/02/22	Reflect on 'Must Do, Can Do' and make any necessary changes Complete Two Stars and a Wish no. 1 Interview no. 1 with colleague (class teacher)
Week of 14/02/22	Must Do, Can Do no. 1 Reflect on Two Stars and a Wish no. 1 Discussion with critical friend Interview no. 2 with colleague (SNA)
Week of 21/02/22 (midterm 24 th & 25 th Feb)	Reflect on 'Must Do, Can Do' no. 1 and make further changes needed Interview no. 3 with colleague (SET)
Week of 28/02/22	'Must Do, Can Do' no. 2 Observation from Critical Friend and discussion afterwards
Week of 07/03/22	Reflect on 'Must Do, Can Do' no. 2 and make any final changes Complete Two Stars and a Wish no. 2
Week of 14/03/22	Must Do, Can Do no. 3
Week of 21/03/22	Reflect on Must Do, Can Do no. 3 Complete Two Stars and a Wish no. 3 Final discussion with Critical Friend
Week of 28/03/22	Interview with two educational professionals
Week of 04/04/22	Interview with two educational professionals

Appendix B.2 Circle Time Discussion Rules and Questions Cycle One

Circle Time Rules

Only one person to speak at a time

You must be holding the speaking object when talking

Respect everyone's opinions

Listen carefully when others are speaking

There are no right or wrong answers

Do not laugh at what someone else says

Everyone has the right to pass

Prompting Questions

1. How do you feel about coming to my room for literacy/maths support?
2. What is your favourite/least favourite thing about it?
3. Do others in your class ever ask you about it?
4. Do you like coming out in a group/on your own? Why/why not?
5. Could you give any tips on how I could improve learning support?
6. Are there new/different types of activities you would like to do with me?
7. Do you like having two teachers at school? Why/why not?

Appendix B.3 Circle Time Discussion Rules and Questions Cycle Four

Circle Time Rules

Only one person to speak at a time

You must be holding the speaking object when talking

Respect everyone's opinions

Listen carefully when others are speaking

There are no right or wrong answers




Do not laugh at what someone else says

Everyone has the right to pass

Prompting Questions

1. How do you feel about coming to my room for literacy/maths support?
2. Has your opinion about this changed? Why/why not?
3. What do you think of the new activities we have been doing? - Two Stars and a Wish, Must-Do, Can-Do?
4. Do you prefer the weeks when we do these activities or the weeks when we do not?
5. How does it impact your learning?
6. Do you like being able to give your opinions on your learning through Two Stars and a Wish?
7. What do you like/dislike about the Must-Do, Can-Do activities
8. Have you told any of your friends/anyone at home about the new activities we are doing?
9. Do you think there are any other ways I can improve my teaching?
10. Do you have any other suggestions or anything else you would like to say?

Appendix B.4 Two Stars and a Wish Template

Two Stars and a Wish




Appendix B.5 Must-Do, Can-Do Blank Template

Must-Do	✓	Can-Do	
1.		A.	B.
2.		C.	D.
3.		E.	F.
4.		G.	H.

Appendix B.6 Must-Do, Can-Do Cycles One and Two

Week of 31/01/2022

Must-Do	✓	Can-Do	
1. Cloze procedure 'Strange Sea Creatures' -use the words at the bottom to fill in the blanks		A. Reading <u>Eggspress</u> on tablet	B. Spellings game 'Sparkle'
2. Questions (1.1-2.5) on 'Strange Sea Creatures' pg. 17		C. Design a poster called 'Under the Sea' -label the sea creatures	D. Choose a PM book at your level to read
3. Sequencing Stories 'A Sausage Story' -insert numbers to put sentences into the correct order -cut and stick into copy		E. Write -a story of choice (fiction) -recount of a something strange or funny that has happened to you	F. Draw a prediction of what will happen in the next chapter from 'In the End'
4. More Write Reasons -Make 5 sentences for 'What are they drinking?'		G. Write a song/poem about Sea Creatures	H. Board game 'Junior Scrabble'

Week of 14/02/2022

Must-Do	✓	Can-Do	
1. Cloze procedure 'Braille' -use the words at the bottom to fill in the blanks		A. Reading <u>Eggspress</u> on tablet	B. Spellings game 'Sparkle'
2. Questions (1.1-2.5) on ' <u>Braille</u> ' pg. 20		C. Imagine you are an inventor and design your own invention	D. Choose a PM book at your level to read
3. Sequencing Stories 'A Rabbit Tale' -insert numbers to put sentences into the correct order -cut and stick into copy		E. Write a message to a friend in Braille	F. Draw a prediction of what will happen in the next chapter from 'In the End'
4. Ticking Texts 'Amazing Insects' - all questions		G. Write a fact file about an inventor of your choice	H. Board game 'Junior Scrabble'

Appendix B.7 Must-Do, Can-Do Cycle Three

Week of 28/02/2022

Must Do	✓	Can Do	
1. Cloze procedure 'Early Cave Dwellers' -use the words at the bottom to fill in the blanks		A.	B.
2. Questions (1.1-2.5) on 'Early Cave Dweller'		C.	D.
3. Sequencing Stories 'Waiting for Rain' -insert numbers to put sentences into the correct order -cut and stick into copy		E.	F.
4. Sentence Maker 'Where are they putting things?'		G.	H.

Appendix B.8 Must-Do, Can-Do Cycle Four

Week of 14/03/2022

Must Do	✓	Can Do	
1. Cloze procedure ‘Tutankhamen’ -use the words at the bottom to fill in the blanks		A.	B.
2. Questions (1.1-2.5) on ‘Tutankhamen’			
3. Sequencing Stories ‘Missing Mobile’ -insert numbers to put sentences into the correct order -cut and stick into copy		C.	D.
4. Sentence Maker ‘What are the pets eating?’		E.	F.

Appendix B.9 Interview Questions for Colleagues and Educational Professionals

Mainstream class teacher, SNA, SET

Relationality

The Teaching Council seeks to develop positive relationships within the school community, that are characterised by professional integrity and judgement.

1. In regard to the teacher/SNA-student relationship, what importance do you place on the type of relationship between a teacher/SNA and student.
2. How important is the student-teacher/SNA relationship in your role in primary education?
3. Can you think about what is a good type of relationship between teacher/SNA and student? Please, describe.
4. What are the risks in primary education if the relationship between teacher/SNA and student is poor?
5. What are your thoughts on power and or power dynamics between teacher/SNA and students in primary education?

Care:

The Teaching Council places care as one of the four ethical values which underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct in their Code of Professional Conduct.

1. What are your thoughts on the importance of care in primary education?
2. What practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care in primary education?
3. What does care look like in your professional practice?
4. In respect of students who receive additional support (have a school support plan or school support plus plan), what practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care?
5. Do you think there are any further opportunities for care in the primary school classroom and or additional support?

Voice:

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity.

1. Do you agree that children should have this right? Do you think it is respected in primary education?
2. What activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in primary education?
3. What activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in additional support education?
4. What importance, if any, does student voice have in your practice?
5. Do you think there are any further opportunities to value, encourage, support or foster student voice in the primary school classroom and or additional support?

Inclusion:

1. Based on your experiences in primary education, do you think Irish primary schools practice inclusion appropriately?
2. Do you think special education provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format? What are the strengths and limitations of special education?
3. What does a commitment to inclusion in primary education ask of you?
 - a. In respect of the relationships between you and your students?
 - b. In the way you practice care?
 - c. In the importance you afford to student voice?

Relationality

The Teaching Council seeks to develop positive relationships within the school community, that are characterised by professional integrity and judgement.

1. In regard to the teacher/SNA-student relationship, what importance do you place on the type of relationship between a teacher/SNA and student.
2. Can you think about what is a good type of relationship between teacher/SNA and student? Please, describe.
3. What are the risks in primary education if the relationship between teacher/SNA and student is poor?
4. What are your thoughts on power and or power dynamics between teacher/SNA and students in primary education?

Care:

The Teaching Council places care as one of the four ethical values which underpin the standards of teaching, knowledge, skill, competence and conduct in their Code of Professional Conduct.

1. What are your thoughts on the importance of care in primary education?
2. What practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care in primary education?
3. In respect of students who receive additional support (have a school support plan or school support plus plan), what practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care?
4. Do you think there are any further opportunities for care in the primary school classroom and or additional support?

Voice:

Article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity.

1. Do you agree that children should have this right? Do you think it is respected in primary education?
2. What activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in primary education?
3. What activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in additional support education?
4. Do you think there are any further opportunities to value, encourage, support or foster student voice in the primary school classroom and or additional support?

Inclusion:

1. Based on your experiences in primary education, do you think Irish Primary schools practice inclusion appropriately?
2. Do you think special education provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format? What are the strengths and limitations of special education?

Appendix C: Reflective Data

Appendix C.1 Personal Reflective Questions

Circle Time Reflective Lens: (two reflections completed after the circle time discussion: cycle 1 and cycle 4)

1. What did the students invite me to understand, acknowledge and respond to? (relational, care, voice)
2. Did this allow me to hear or bear witness to new experiences or perspectives that I otherwise would not encounter? (voice, deficit focused)
3. What does this practice allow me and my students to resist/challenge? (agency, counterstories)
4. Is this activity inviting me to challenge my own narrative or inner thoughts/perspectives?
5. Is this practice consistent with my values as a teacher or do I still experience a living contradiction?
6. What worked well? How would I change this going forward? For the next cycle?

Must-Do, Can-Do Reflective Lens: (bi-weekly reflections: cycle 1, 2, 3 & 4)

1. What does this activity invite me to understand, acknowledge and respond to?
2. Did this allow me to hear or bear witness to new experiences or perspectives that I otherwise would not encounter? (voice, deficit focused)
3. What does this practice allow me and my students to resist/challenge? (agency, counterstories)
4. Is this activity inviting me to challenge my own narrative or inner thoughts/perspectives?
5. Is this practice consistent with my values as a teacher or do I still experience a living contradiction?
6. What worked well? How would I change this going forward? For the next cycle?

Two Stars and Wish Reflective Lens: (fortnightly reflections: cycle 1, 2 & 3)

1. What does this activity invite me to understand, acknowledge and respond to?
2. Did this allow me to hear or bear witness to new experiences or perspectives that I otherwise would not encounter? (voice, deficit focused)
3. What does this practice allow me and my students to resist/challenge? (agency, counterstories)
4. Is this activity inviting me to challenge/affirm my own narrative or inner thoughts/perspectives?
5. Is this practice consistent with my values as a teacher or do I still experience a living contradiction?
6. What worked well? How would I change this going forward? For the next cycle?

Appendix C.2 Critical Reflections on Circle Time Discussions

Circle Time Discussion Reflection Cycle One – 21/01/2022

1. What did the students invite me to understand, acknowledge and respond to? (relational, care, voice)

I was invited to understand, acknowledge and respond to the children's views on receiving learning support at school and how it makes them feel. I was delighted to discover that the pupils are happy to be withdrawn from class for additional support and that they enjoy it. Hearing their reasons for enjoying learning support was a breath of fresh air. It reminded me that my effort within my practice, in align with my values are making a difference. I acknowledged the positives which included working in a small group and in a calmer environment, having more space and time to complete work, and receiving additional help to make their schoolwork easier. Less distractions, less pressure, and not experiencing the feeling of self-consciousness were also mentioned.

I thought it was interesting to discuss the children's favourite and least favourite elements of receiving additional support. This data aids in improving my future planning and how I can engage the pupils to a higher degree, by including more of the activities they find stimulating. Similarly, I found hearing their views on how to make learning support better was beneficial feedback to take into account. I hope to add more choice and agency to their work going forward, as well as the addition of more educational games.

2. Did this allow me to hear or bear witness to new experiences or perspectives that I otherwise would not encounter? (voice, deficit focused)

I noticed an authentic tone amongst the group during this activity. Before its completion, I did not have a specific conversation with the children their about thoughts and experiences on receiving additional support at school. After reflecting on this activity and its success, I want to bring this practice into my role as a SET going forward. It helped me to bear witness to the students' emotions and voice. I am now asking myself how have I not thought of doing this activity sooner? It is policy in our school that in September, SETs must complete an individual interview with each student who they will be withdrawing for additional support in the academic year ahead. For me, completing this activity in the first two weeks of school, when you do not know the child properly and have not developed a relationship with them,

seems detached. I would recommend this circle time discussion approach to other SETs as it is a great way to get to know the students in a caring, safe, open environment. Going forward I think I would complete this activity before the October mid-term break, when a student-teacher relationship has already been established. It is an effective way to review the practices being completed, and build a deeper relationship with the students through hearing their views and assessing their feelings.

3. What does this practice allow me and my students to resist/challenge? (agency, counterstories)

This practice provides the students with the opportunity to challenge the counter narrative of receiving additional support at school. They are being given the freedom to express their views and to oppose the oppression of students with additional needs. A higher level of inclusion is being promoted by taking these students' opinions into thoughtful consideration. A move away from a deficit-based approach to SEN is also evident, through the level of agency which the children are experiencing.

Directing a circle time discussion provided me with the chance to challenge the similarities and differences on how I thought the children would respond to various questions. I was shocked to discover that a student received a nasty comment from a classmate about being withdrawn for literacy support. I assumed in a large school, with students of all abilities and twenty support teachers, would mean that these negative judgements would not exist. I think counterstories could be used beneficially here to end the oppression of needing additional help at school. We are all different and everyone has different talents. Are academic talents focused on so much in our society?

4. Is this activity inviting me to challenge my own narrative or inner thoughts/perspectives?

"You are too hard on yourself", is something which I have heard time and time again from educators who have worked with me throughout my life. I guess I have always been tough on myself and think that what I am doing is not enough. This is a natural tendency of mine but perhaps it is something I need to address? I suppose I feel that when I have the potential to do something, that I should push myself to reach my full potential in my academic achievements. I am beginning to wonder whether this trait is trickling into my teaching practice. Am I being too hard on my students? I only want my students to reach their potential and work to the best of their abilities. The students did not mention this during the

circle time discussion and yet it has come to mind when reflecting on this activity. Maybe the care I show for my students and the relationships I build with them, surpasses the element of being “hard” on the children. Then again, if I want them to reach their potential, is there an element of care in the back-burner?

I have worked as a SET for over three years now however I have never personally experienced receiving additional support at school. I wonder what it feels like to be withdrawn from class in a small group/one-to-one setting? Is it something the children look forward to? The children of this circle time group are happy to receive additional support and like the calm, quiet and helpful environment that it is provided in. Do these children feel as though they stand out from the crowd? I think the older children in primary school are aware of their differences however the younger students are not. I want to help all children feel equal and included no matter how much support they receive. Nobody should be judged or classified depending on their academic ability. I hope that by providing these children with greater ownership and agency of their work through the ‘Must do, Can do’ intervention, and by boosting their confidence through the ‘Two Stars and a Wish’ intervention that I will help towards achieving this. Helping my students towards taking even the smallest step towards a teaching environment with greater inclusion would be a huge achievement for me.

5. Is this practice consistent with my values as a teacher or do I still experience a living contradiction?

This practice is consistent with my values of care, relationality, inclusion and voice. I am drawing on these values through this meaningful activity and I think I will only become closer to my students, and build a better student-teacher relationship as a result. I could tell that the pupils were delighted to have their opinions being taken into consideration in a serious, mature manner. I noticed that the pupils felt a sense of importance as they took part in the activity. A few days later, they were asking would any more activities similar to this be happening in the future. I was delighted to hear this response as I could tell it was genuine, it being a few days after the circle time discussion took place.

I no longer see myself as a living contradiction, as communication is now being experienced openly and honestly in this trusting environment. In my opinion, bringing open and honest communication into my practice on a regular basis can only deepen the relationships and provide for further positive developments.

6. What worked well? How would I change this going forward? For the next cycle?

Having clear rules set out at the beginning of the circle time discussion worked extremely well. The students were aware from the start of what would happen during this intervention and the kind of behaviour that would be expected throughout. I think passing the speaking object, in no particular order, amongst the group worked well and I would continue to use this approach in the next circle time discussion. Completing this activity with children who know each other well and who are comfortable in each other's presence also provided an element of security and trust. However, I wonder would the children have responded any differently if they were speaking in a group of children they did not know or individually with me. Due to Covid-19 restrictions in school, I could only complete this activity with students from the same class or "bubble", and so completing this activity with a mix of students from a variety of classes was not an option. I think that in this group situation, the children were bouncing ideas off one another which provided to be an extremely beneficial stimulus. That's being said, maybe I should give the children the opportunity to have a discussion with me privately if they wish to talk further about any of the matters discussed. Going forward, I think providing the children with time at the end of the circle time discussion to chat freely amongst themselves would be a good idea. It could open other avenues of conversation and to allow deeper reflection on their own views and experiences of learning support. I will factor in a greater time allocation during my next circle time to provide free discussion at the end of the activity. I will also provide the opportunity for individual discussion with me after the activity is complete.

Circle Time Discussion Reflection Cycle Four – 23/03/2022

1. What did the students invite me to understand, acknowledge and respond to? (relational, care, voice)

The students invited me to respond to their feedback on the Must Do Can Do and the Two Stars and a Wish interventions. Particularly, the students have aided in the realisation that I definitely have provided a much greater level of choice and further opportunities for student voice in my practice throughout my data collection. The students mentioned how their own thoughts and opinions became a vital role in both interventions and that they enjoyed having their say.

The circle time discussion completed at the beginning of cycle 1 allowed me to get a deeper insight into the students' thoughts about learning support. I was unaware of some of the opinions they had and I was so glad that the children felt comfortable to share these with me. Through doing so, I was able to make changes to my practice to address certain areas which were highlighted in this discussion ie. confidence, motivation, personal interests. Through the MDCCD intervention and the Two Stars and a Wish, opportunities for confidence and motivation building were provided. Today I could see that these have been positively impacted as a result. The students commented on how they are happy to get stuck into their work - through the must dos - straight away as a result of the MDCCD and then they can begin the can dos. They mentioned how they see the can dos as fun early finisher activities which helps their learning and that they can begin and complete in their own time and they do not need to rush them. Improvement of motivation can easily be seen here. Furthermore the Two Stars and a Wish has helped boost the confidence of the students in that it helps them to notice and appreciate their learning achievements.

2. Did this allow me to hear or bear witness to new experiences or perspectives that I otherwise would not encounter? (voice, deficit focused)

This circle time discussion allowed me to bear witness to the opinions of the students in an open, trusting environment. The students were aware that I wanted to hear their honest opinions, regardless of if I was in agreement with their opinions or not. The students were confident to give their opinions honestly and felt safe to do so.

The children were very happy to be part of this circle time discussion for the second time. I could easily see that they enjoy giving their opinions as they know that I care about their responses and take them into consideration. They knew this from previous experience as I

took their views into consideration at the beginning of cycle 1 and I used their opinions to steer my data collection process.

Without completing this second circle time discussion, I would not have realised the impact the interventions were having on my students from their point of view. Sometimes I think children need to be formally asked to give their opinion in order for them to speak out and say what is on their minds. I would constantly ask my pupils their thoughts and opinions in an informal manner, but often I would not receive much feedback. Today, through this activity, thoughts, feelings and honest opinions were openly being shared of the children's own accord. I particularly noticed the impact of the Two Stars and a Wish intervention. The pupils mentioned how they liked to get regular feedback from me so that they knew they were making progress with their learning and that it gave them confidence and motivation in their learning going forward. Furthermore, the students mentioned how they show their parents and their class teacher the Two Stars and a Wish. I loved hearing this as it shows that they are proud of their achievements. It also makes the parents and class teacher aware of their progress too. It helps them to focus on the wish we are working towards. All individuals who care about the students can then contribute to helping the children work towards achieving their wish. This in turn builds on the relationships students have with their teachers and parents about their school-life and the relationship between the support teacher and the parents/class teacher.

A greater level of communication is established through a simple assessment feedback practice. One boy particularly mentioned how he loved seeing that his wish in one cycle became a star in a future cycle, and so he knew his hard work was paying off and that he was on the right track with his progress. They liked completing this independently too, so that I could get an insight into their opinions individually. I was glad that they realised that I want their opinions and that I value them. I did not think the students would have come to this realisation but I was proved wrong. Self-completion of this intervention proved to be more difficult according to the students. They often found it difficult to think about their own learning and what they are doing well with and what they need to improve on. I think this shows room for further development in that if the children continue with this practice, they will gain the confidence and ability to give themselves positive and critical feedback of their learning - something which they could then continue for the future to assess their learning.

3. What does this practice allow me and my students to resist/challenge? (agency, counterstories)

This practice allowed for my students and I to speak in an open, caring environment in which all opinions are respected. It allowed me to take my students' opinions, regarding learning support and regarding the new interventions which were introduced, into consideration. Therefore this practice allows me to resist not giving students enough of a voice in their learning environments. This activity focuses on the voice of the children. Giving students who receive additional support a voice should not be seen as any different to giving students in the mainstream class a voice. I do not think either situation provides children with enough voice, but particularly in learning support environments student voice can often be overlooked.

4. Is this activity inviting me to challenge my own narrative or inner thoughts/perspectives?

This activity invited me to challenge my inner thoughts regarding inclusion. Inclusion is one of my core values and yet I am questioning whether this activity provides opportunities for inclusion in my practice. Through gaining the thoughts and opinions of the children through this circle time discussion, I have realised that students in 5th class care a great deal about what their peers think and they do not want to miss out on anything exciting that happens in the classroom while they are receiving additional support. The pupils are at an age when they care deeply about the opinions of their peers and they do not want to be seen as different. The additional support they are receiving is benefitting their academic needs, but is it impacting their own inner narratives of themselves as young adolescents. Are the children more worried about what others think of them at this age than their academic achievements? Going forward, I would like to address this further and perhaps use this intervention in a whole class environment to have a discussion about additional support. I think some children see it as a taboo. I think if all students in the class had a greater understanding of what learning support is, then this generalising opinion could be minimised and so the feeling of being “different” because of receiving additional support could be diminished.

I think it is important to try to put yourself in the student's shoes and think about how they are feeling. If I was receiving additional support at school I would not want to miss out on activities such as art or PE. I have previously always tried my best to work in conjunction with the class teachers when making up my timetable so that the children would not miss out on these activities. Covid-19 has influenced this somewhat due to school restrictions over the

past two years. Yet going forward, I wish to develop an open, caring relationship in which the children feel comfortable with asking if they could return to class early so they would not miss out on something happening in class, or on a certain day to not be withdrawn as a last minute activity has cropped up. On these days I could provide in-class support during these activities, where appropriate, to give these students the opportunity to be more included in whole class activities.

5. Is this practice consistent with my values as a teacher or do I still experience a living contradiction?

This practice is particularly consistent with my value of care. I am listening to the students and taking their voice, feelings and opinions into consideration. Through providing the children with this safe, open environment in which they are free to share their honest opinions, shows the children that I care about them. I want to hear what they have to say and to act upon it. The children are happy that I am carefully listening to them and respecting their opinions. I think the circle time discussion has helped in building greater relationships with my students. The pupils are willing to give their opinions and want to give them, in order to help me with my learning and to improve my teaching. It is a chain-reaction in which if they help me to improve my teaching, their learning too will be improved. Further opportunities for relationships to grow and develop would continue. I notice that greater relationships amongst the children have blossomed and they are no longer shy to share their honest opinions in a group setting. I have found that I have gotten to know my students on a much deeper level through this circle time discussion and also in conjunction with my other interventions. I have gained insights into their preferred methods of learning, their interests, their strengths and their opinions, which has helped in the growing of these majorly significant relationships. Without a strong foundation of any student teacher relationship - teaching and learning will not flourish in accordance with its potential.

Appendix C.3 Critical Reflections on Two Stars and a Wish

Two Stars and a Wish Reflection Cycle One – 11/03/22

1. What does this activity invite me to understand, acknowledge and respond to?

This new practice has made me aware of how well my students respond to both praise and to critical feedback. Each child was happy to receive positive feedback through the ‘two stars’ and they took ‘the wish’ on board as something they would try really hard to work on and improve over the next two weeks. Two children in particular immediately acted on ‘the wish’ and made changes in order to try to improve the wish. One child made an immediate effort to improve his wish by taking out his materials and getting ready to begin his work much more promptly. The second student asked his class teacher for help when something was annoying him. These two children orally made reference to their wish and that they hope to improve on their individual ‘wish’ as best as they can. This activity has helped me to realise the effectiveness of visual representation. Teachers often give praise and feedback orally, which the children can take on board, but they may forget about it soon afterwards. The visual recording of the Two Stars and a Wish, provides the pupils with the opportunity to look back on their feedback and to reflect on it by themselves. They also understand its importance as I spent time and effort creating the assessment feedback for each individual, making them feel cared about and important. Visual learners are also very common in school and so this type of representation of feedback is worth putting time and effort into.

2. Did this allow me to hear or bear witness to new experiences or perspectives that I otherwise would not encounter?

I do not think I would have realised how capable my students are in acting upon constructive feedback if I had not completed this intervention. Perhaps I took for granted that they would have the skills to take this on board and to amend their actions in order to try and improve this wish. This has helped me in learning a personal lesson that I should never take my students abilities/capabilities for granted and assume that they may not be able to do something. I was pleasantly surprised by how well the children took the feedback on board. There were no negative circumstances as a result and I only received positive feedback from the students, class teachers and the SNA.

3. What does this practice allow me and my students to resist/challenge? (agency, counterstories)

This activity allows me to challenge the capabilities of the children and their ability to take feedback on board, and to respond to it for future activities at school. As I said above, I think I underestimated some of my students' abilities. Upon reflection, I am disappointed in myself that I made this assumption and so my own perceptions are being challenged. I think this is an eye-opening discovery for me. As a SET, I should never take my students' abilities for granted or assume what they can or cannot do. I always want to help my students reach their full potential and so I need to be more aware of making further assumptions in the future. I also need to be more open-minded towards the capabilities of my students and provide them with the opportunities to show their potential. This is especially important at the beginning of the school year when I am getting to know my students and building a relationship with them. This activity, and how the students respond to it, is the perfect example of a counterstory. The abilities of children who receive additional support at school can be perceived to be lower than their actual ability and they can be capable of achieving much more than what is anticipated.

4. Is this activity inviting me to challenge/affirm my own narrative or inner thoughts/perspectives?

As previously mentioned, this activity has helped me to challenge what I think some of my students are capable of. On the other hand, I think this activity has backed up my belief in the importance of confidence, self-esteem and motivation in the minds of the students. This activity is making the children aware of the mini-wins and the achievements in their learning whilst receiving additional support. I think some of my students, especially my 5th class students, can be self-conscious about being withdrawn for learning support. Through this intervention, the students are gaining confidence and have become aware that I am noticing their progress and their efforts. I think individual praise is important in helping these children understand their importance at school. It is wonderful to see the smiles on the children's faces as they read the positive feedback of the 'two stars' – it makes it all worthwhile.

5. Is this practice consistent with my values as a teacher or do I still experience a living contradiction?

This practice is consistent with my values of inclusion, relationality, care and voice. Inclusion is being practiced by giving each child this feedback, which they then share with their

teacher, and SNA, if applicable. The teacher and SNA are being personally involved in a systematic manner with the progress of the students during learning support. It is easy for them to clearly see their progress and they too can provide the children with praise on the two stars. Furthermore, with the class-teacher and SNA being aware of the wish, they are being included in the process towards achieving this wish and they can help the individual children in a whole class environment and outside at playtime to try to achieve and work towards the wish.

I think this practice promotes building strong relationships, both with the students and with colleagues. Communication is key in developing relationships. Completing this activity helped me to clearly express my opinions with the children and with other colleagues. This visually represented, written feedback provides further opportunities for conversations amongst participants. Trust and honesty are also being practiced through this intervention, which provides further opportunities for relationships to blossom and flourish.

I hope that my students will realise that this activity is an action of care. I want my students to know that I am proud of their progress and their achievements. I also want them to reach their potential and to work on areas which they can improve and develop upon. Each child is being taken into account individually through this intervention. I hope that additional self-esteem will be developed in my students through this intervention. I sometimes notice self-confidence is lacking in a number of my pupils and I hope this will help in improving this going forward as this can be something which they are proud of.

After having received the feedback, I gave the children time to read and reflect upon it. I gave the children a voice by asking them what they thought of the feedback and if it was accurate. Discussions accelerated as a result and the pupils provided their views and opinions, both of the comments of the feedback and of the 'Two Stars and a Wish' practice as a whole. All children were delighted to receive this individual feedback and enjoyed receiving it and sharing it.

6. What worked well? How would I change this going forward? For the next cycle?

I think this activity worked well and I was happy with how it unravelled. A big hindrance for this activity was that various children were absent due to covid-19 and so they did not receive their feedback until they returned to school. By this stage, some students had forgotten some of the activities which the feedback related to. However, the students still enjoyed receiving praise for their efforts and took constructive feedback on board.

Going forward in the next cycle, I will add to the feedback on an ongoing, regular basis, when I notice various elements of the students' efforts and progress, and not to complete the feedback during the last two days of the fortnight. I think this will provide a better-informed representation of the children's efforts on a daily basis and on better-suited 'wishes' to work on in the future. It is also important to consider and take into account any absences for this intervention, especially long absences due to covid-19, and how this may impact the comments of this feedback.

I am beginning to think about the possibility of letting the children write their own two stars and a wish of what they think they have worked well on in the past two weeks during support with me. I think that the children personally completing this will help them to notice their individual wins more often and will give them further confidence and motivation going forward. I think the children self-assessing themselves in addition to feedback in the same format from myself, would provide more opportunities for growth and confidence building. Maybe I will get the children to complete this intervention personally on the opposite week to when I complete it, to avoid confusion. I will discuss this with my critical friend to get a second opinion on this.

Two Stars and a Wish Reflection Cycle Two – 23/03/22

1. What further learning emerged during cycle 2 of this intervention?

During cycle two of the Two Stars and a Wish intervention, the confidence and motivation which transpired in my pupils became even more apparent than in cycle one. I witnessed one 5th class boy who skipped into his classroom in the direction of his class teacher to show her the feedback he had received. He was over the moon and just so proud of himself. I love witnessing these moments, it makes it all worth it! During this second cycle, the children were familiar with how this intervention works. I think this helped them to resonate with the feedback to a further degree and to take it in. During the first cycle, I think the children had a lot to digest with this new activity. I noticed this with some of the second class students in particular and especially with a second class boy I teach who has ASD. During the first cycle he was more concerned with the stars, the smiley faces and the magic wand on the feedback sheet. This week I noticed both himself and other students engaging more with the particulars of the two stars and the wish. This has helped me to realise that children of all abilities must be given adequate time to come to terms with new changes and practices at school. Some children may not bat an eyelid, however for others this is not the case.

2. Did I bear witness to any new/further experiences or perspectives?

This week I noticed that certain children need this intervention more than others. It provides them with a focus and with positive feedback which reminds them of their efforts and that they are being noticed. It also gives them an achievable target to work on and helps to keep them on task with this. Upon reflection of this week's practice, I have decided that I will complete this teacher-led feedback weekly, during cycle three, with two particular students of mine. I think this would benefit them further. One of these students has ASD and the other student is in the process of being assessed for the potential diagnosis of ADHD. I think this would benefit these students, it would benefit my teaching and it would benefit my colleagues who work closely with these particular two students (class teacher and SNA) in the learning environment. These two pupils have a lot of needs, however that said, I do not want to completely take away their right to form their own views and to freely express their opinions. For cycle four, I may complete this feedback in conjunction with the students and get their personal opinion about their self-assessment. This will be a challenge for these two children, more so in particular with the boy who has severe ASD, but I think it will be a

rewarding task and prove to be very beneficial for them.

3. Has there been a change in the response towards this activity on its second cycle?

The response toward this activity has been extremely positive again in cycle two. As I previously said, I think the pupils have connected further and engaged with the specifics of the intervention to a greater degree in this cycle. I hope that this will continue to develop to a deeper level in cycles three and four.

I think two of the 5th class pupils did not seem to engage with their stars, their positive feedback, and they are fixated on their wish. They stated that they like knowing exactly what they need to work and improve on. This constructive feedback is providing the students a clear focus for their future learning which is positive. However, I think maybe they are being too hard on themselves. They are not recognising the importance of their positive feedback and that I am proud of their efforts and progress. This is something which I can connect and empathise with, as this is something which I have done throughout my own life. I have been told many times that I am too hard on myself. I want students to change their outlook and make the shift in their mindset. Yes, this can be a natural tendency which would be difficult to amend and yes, being hard on yourself consequently means you want to always be making improvements, but it is important for your own well-being to acknowledge the little-wins and to appreciate your personal achievements. In order to generate their own two stars, the students will have to reflect on their learning and their own efforts. They will realise their individual efforts and I hope this may help them to appreciate their hard work and to not be so tough on themselves, especially for the two students mentioned in particular.

4. What worked well? How would I change this going forward for the next cycle?

I think the second cycle of this worked better than the first in that I have learned more about my students from it. As it was no longer a brand new practice for the pupils, it was easier to read the students and how they responded to the feedback. The students definitely took the details of the feedback into account to a greater degree. The novelty of the intervention is beginning to wear off and so its benefits (messages behind the two stars and a wish) are becoming more apparent to the students.

For cycle three, I am going to complete this intervention on a weekly basis. Some students will personally complete this practice in the second week after receiving feedback from me in the first week. For some other students, I will complete this practice and provide them with feedback in both weeks. I may change this for cycle four, but I will fully make this decision

upon reflection after the completion of cycle three and through discussion with my critical friend.

Two Stars and a Wish Reflection Cycle Three – 18/03/22

1. What further learning emerged during cycle 3 of this intervention?

During cycle 3 of this intervention, the students completed their own Two Stars and a Wish. It was interesting to see the children's thoughts and opinions of their learning. It was great to get an insight into what the students think of their own learning progress. The children's views of their learning sometimes came from a different stance than what I had expected. For example, one boy formed one star and one wish about his handwriting - how it has improved and what he can do to further improve it. His handwriting is very clear and legible and so I would never have engaged with using it in this intervention. But clearly it is something which he thinks is important and so he included it in his self-assessment.

I enjoyed noticing how the students were happy to complete the student feedback. They are proud of their work and all have their own opinions about their learning. They immediately knew the areas they would write down for the feedback. This shows that they are engaging with their learning and are realising their efforts. It is lovely to witness the confidence which is being built within the students through this intervention - both the student and teacher completion is adding to their confidence.

2. Did I bear witness to any new/further experiences or perspectives?

In this cycle, I had to stop completing the teacher-feedback for one particular boy who has ASD. He was becoming too fixated on the intervention and the positive feedback was not resonating with him. He was only focusing on the wish, which he thought was a bad thing about him which he needed to change. He also stated that he wants to get more than two stars and that he is not doing well at school. He did not fully understand the intervention and that the layout would stay the same in every cycle. During the first cycle I knew that this new intervention would be difficult for him to take on board. I was anticipating that he would like the stars and not the wish. I persevered with the intervention. I thought that perhaps after another cycle he would begin to understand how it works. After trying this with him for two cycles I know that I am making the right decision to stop completing the teacher-feedback activity for this particular child.

I think it was the right call to stop completing the teacher feedback of this intervention for this specific child as it was not benefitting his learning in any way. He was not engaging with the positive feedback and it was making him feel annoyed and anxious. This boy now only completes the student edition of the intervention, with my help. We talked together first about

two things which are going well in school, the stars - which he gives his input for. However, for the wish, he was still unsure about what a wish would be. I gave him my opinion and he said that he agreed, before I wrote this down. I will reflect again about the wish after the completion of cycle 4.

I enjoyed noticing that one of my 5th class students immediately agreed with the wish I wrote for him in the teacher's completion of the feedback. He said that he too thinks he is able to complete all of his spellings the following week for his homework and that he would try this. He was taking my opinion on board. I think he realised that I had noticed his wonderful efforts previously and that I had confidence in him to do this going forward. In turn I think this boosted his self-esteem and he was willing to try all of his spellings the following week for his homework. It was nice to hear him expressing this out loud in front of the other children. He seemed proud of himself and confident in his ability. Perhaps he was already thinking this about himself and he just needed that extra push and affirmation to grasp the opportunity. I think this gave him the confidence which he already had inside of him but was not willing to engage with.

3. Has there been a change in the response towards this activity on its third cycle?

I think the response to this activity has progressed even further in a positive manner in its third cycle. The students thoroughly enjoyed being given the chance to share their voice on how they think their learning is progressing through two things that are going well/they are working hard at, and one thing that they can try harder to improve.

I noticed that the students were beginning to resonate more with the intervention as they bear witness to the teacher-feedback changing and progressing. Particularly, one pupil noticed that one of the stars I wrote for her was a wish in previous weeks. She noted this and realised that she must have improved in order for this change to occur. I think for the students to see that a wish can become a star was important for them. I am noticing their efforts and I want to convey this to them.

It is fantastic to see the students smile as they read their stars. They are happy to read the positive feedback and they are proud of themselves. I want the students to realise that teachers are proud of everything their students attempt - be it something big or something small. I also like how the students are excited to share their 2 stars and a wish with their class teachers immediately when they return to class. I prompted this in the first cycle that they could show their class teacher if they wished, but I have not repeated this since or put an emphasis on sharing it - it is something they want to do as they are proud of it and they want

to share their positive feedback. Some students also mention bringing it home with them to show their parents, something which I did not promote for them to do.

4. What worked well? How would I change this going forward for the next cycle?

I think it was good for the students to complete this intervention independently after having experienced the teacher completion twice prior to this. They understood the intervention and how it works. I think the 5th class students liked conveying what they are doing well at and what they could work on. They had ideas which they were passionate about that they wanted to make me aware of.

I think going forward for the next cycle, I will not complete the teacher feedback for the boy with ASD who I mentioned above. This particular pupil will complete the student feedback with help and scaffolding, at the end of each week. I hope that completing this every week will help him to come to terms with the meaning behind it and will help him to understand its positivity towards his learning and progress.

I think it worked well for the 5th class students to complete this intervention independently and for them to write their own two stars and a wish. I will continue with this in the next cycle. For my 2nd class students, I listened to their opinions and what they thought would be adequate to write down for the two stars and a wish. I was able to take their ideas and form them into clear, concise sentences before writing them down. I think it was beneficial and less stressful for the students, for me to write down their opinions into the Two Stars and a Wish template. I think for them to personally write these down would take away from the focus of this intervention - to realise the learning they are engaging with and the efforts they are making. I do not want the writing of the task to take away from this important voice sharing, confidence building activity.

Two Stars and a Wish Reflection Cycle Four – 25/03/22

1. What further learning emerged during cycle 4 this intervention?

In this cycle it occurred to me how much the children have grown and developed through practicing this intervention, in comparison to how they previously reacted at the beginning of cycle 1. Everything successful takes time to form and build and I am thankful that I started this meaningful and worthwhile practice, which I can see is positively influencing my students. It became apparent to me that children love receiving compliments, no matter how big or small. It is important to remember to give children compliments for all their small goals and achievements, especially in a special education environment. One small step of progress can be huge for these children and so it is important that this does not go unmissed. This intervention makes it easy for this practice to be implemented regularly through a formal way of assessing the children, be it self-assessment, peer-assessment or teacher-assessment. All of this feedback provides the children with both motivation on their progress and provides food for thought going forward on areas that can be improved to better their learning experience and process. Informal feedback is also just as necessary as this, but often I find children can forget oral feedback which they receive. As this intervention is written down it makes the feedback more concrete. The children can look back on it whenever they wish, they can show it to others and share their achievements. The students love sharing their teacher-led feedback with their class teachers as they are proud of it. Many students have also mentioned how they show it to their parents at home.

2. Did I bear witness to any new/further experiences or perspectives?

In this cycle the students who I take in groups had to complete the two stars and a wish activity for their peers. It was nice to bear witness to the pupils giving each other compliments on their learning and on what they think their fellow peers are progressing well with at school. The students were very humble and polite when providing the two stars for one another. I noticed that the pupils were more reluctant when they were devising the wish for one another. I could sense a type of awkwardness amongst the 5th class students especially as they were hesitant to share their wish with their peers. I guess they did not want to say anything which would hurt their peers' feelings. I enjoyed witnessing this as I realised the empathy and respect the students have for one another. They were taking one another's feelings into consideration by being sensitive towards them. Power dynamics has a role to play here as the students do not mind receiving critical feedback from their teachers. But

receiving it from their peers is a different story. Some children may not react appropriately to critical feedback from their peers. It is a sensitive activity which needs to be addressed correctly. However that said, my pupils were more than happy to take the feedback from their peers on board and they agreed with the 'wishes' which their peers had created for them. I do not think all students would be as adaptive to peer feedback. I think this feeling of sensitivity and apprehensiveness surrounding this peer-assessment would diminish in time through repetition. If the children completed this peer assessment on a regular basis, they would not be shy and nervous about writing the 'wish'. All new interventions introduced take time to iron out before they begin to run smoothly.

3. Has there been any further change in the response towards this activity on its fourth cycle?

I noticed the students engaging with their self-completed two stars and a wish which I display in my learning support room. I strategically place each one in the eyeline of the children so that they can easily see it and make connections with it. I want the students to be reminded of their progress and what they are trying to improve on. I think having the visuals of this practice in an area where the students can constantly see them is effective for their learning. A lot of these children are very hard on themselves and are unaware of the amazing progress they make on a regular basis. I think by seeing this feedback everyday helps the students to remember this and boost their confidence and motivation.

4. What learning would I take away from completing this intervention? Would I change it for future use?

From this intervention, I would deem that the completion of Two Stars and a Wish from a variety of viewpoints makes the practice more accountable. When I first started this intervention in cycle 1, I was completing the teacher feedback on a fortnightly basis. By the end of cycle 4, the students were self-completing the intervention, they were completing peer-assessment of the intervention and they were receiving feedback from their teachers. I think getting critical feedback from all areas makes the activity much more well-rounded. Triangulation is being provided through the completion of the intervention from three different angles. The students seemed to like the variety of the intervention being completed from a number of viewpoints. It made the activity much more fun, interesting and well-rounded.

Another learning I would take away is that this intervention needs time before it begins to make sense to the children and before it begins impacting their learning. After the children had been exposed to this practice for 4 cycles, I could see that they understood the reasoning behind completing it. Even the child with ASD who struggled to understand how this intervention worked and who became anxious over only receiving two stars, had made headway by the end of cycle 4. At this stage he was happily completing the assessment with my help on a weekly basis. One of the stars we wrote together was that he is always too hard on himself and that he always tries his best no matter what. I saw a light switch flick on when I wrote this down for him. I think repetition of this teacher-led assessment would give this student wonderful feedback which he understands and which he can improve on. He had a moment of realisation - the wish is not something bad, but that it is something that can be changed and improved upon.

Appendix C.4 Critical Reflections on Must-Do, Can-Do

Must Do, Can Do Reflection Cycle One – 11/02/2022

1. Did this activity allow me to bear witness to new experiences or perspectives that I otherwise would not encounter? (voice, deficit focused)

This activity let me bear witness to the autonomy of the children who I withdraw for additional support. Often I think, as the children are in a small group or one-to-one setting, the majority of learning activities can be teacher-led. In this practice, there is freedom to choose which of the four ‘must do’ activities the students want to complete each day, from Monday to Thursday, followed by a can-do activity of their choice each day from eight options. It was interesting to observe which activities the children picked and the order in which they did so.

Through the ‘Must do, Can do’ intervention, it was refreshing to witness the children working independently. They were excited to immediately get stuck into their work and a great degree of agency was evident. I also witnessed profound motivation among the children, which I previously had not experienced to this level in a learning support environment. This motivation showed a greater level of productivity within the timeframe allocated to this 5th class literacy group.

2. What does this activity invite me to understand, acknowledge and respond to?

Providing the children with a choice in their work demonstrated independence and agency among the children, both independently and as a group. Some days, the children worked by themselves and others they collaborated when completing the various activities. It was nice to see a variety of this occurring. Equally, both approaches worked for the pupils. It was nice to be a by-stander as the children selected a must do activity to complete, before agreeing on a can do activity which they would do together ie. playing the games ‘Junior Scrabble’ or ‘Sparkle’. The children expressed that they enjoyed the games and found them fun.

It is much easier now for me to realise that the children have the ability to work independently when motivation is present and when choice is provided. Providing more choice is something I wish to address in my teaching going forward. I am realising that power dynamics in school are still very evident today and that I too play an active part in this. Going forward, an ongoing self-reflective question for me would be – how can I give the children

more choice/voice/independence/autonomy in their learning? I think providing choice in a clear and coherent manner acknowledges the potential of the children. It also shows that you trust your students, whilst taking their maturity into account, to ensure that their work is completed independently but to an appropriate standard.

3. What does this practice allow me and my students to resist/challenge? (agency, counterstories)

This practice allows me to challenge my earlier views on education from when I was at school. Back then, the teacher detained a lot more power and authority. Students went to school and did exactly what they were told without having much of a say in their day-to-day activities. In saying that however, I loved school and I had inspiring teachers who aided my desire in pursuing a vocation as a teacher. However, I think education has grown and developed majorly since then. I think I was lucky to have inspirational teachers, however this was not the case for everyone. Through providing my students with agency, voice and choice in their learning, I am challenging my prior perspective of education and proving that the change in education has definitely been warranted.

Having said this, there is still a long way to go in the Irish education system. This activity and other practices involving choice, voice and freedom, provides students with the opportunity to challenge learning environments which are purely surrounded by the notion of the ‘teacher rules all’ and ‘what the teacher says goes’. I think students being given a voice provides the opportunity for a happier learning environment, in which they feel valued and their ideas are taken into consideration. Perhaps students are also not aware of the right they have to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity. This intervention also provides students who receive additional support the opportunity to have a say in a learning support environment. I think that it can be additionally challenging to foster agency, voice and choice among the students in special educational settings. Finding the right balance, depending on the student or group, must be established, in a manner which is beneficial for the selective students and their needs, and also for the targets in their school support plans which they are trying to achieve. When support is being provided with students of a variety of needs, caution must be taken. However the literacy group who I am completing this intervention with, are proving their independence and agency in their learning, which is wonderful to experience.

4. Is this activity inviting me to challenge my own narrative or inner thoughts/perspectives?

I think as a support teacher, a big goal of mine is to help the students with areas of their academic abilities with which they need an extra boost and support in a small group/one-to-one environment. This is an extremely important part of my professional role, however, through this practice I am challenging my own narrative of what a support teacher “should” do. Perhaps providing students with the opportunity to develop their strengths and personal interests, should be an equally important element to their educational development, regardless of their needs/diagnoses/academic abilities. More often than not, future careers are naturally based on something which one enjoys and is passionate about. Maybe this needs to be taken into account to a higher degree in our learning environments, particularly for SETs. The opportunity for skills/interests to be flourished could materialise, and inspiration could be developed in these various areas. Teachers showing an interest in what the children deem to be significant aspects of their lives, would also help in establishing and developing strong, caring, and trusting relationships with their students.

5. Is this practice consistent with my values as a teacher or do I still experience a living contradiction?

This practice is consistent with my values of voice and inclusion. I am providing the students who receive additional support with a choice in their learning. Perhaps these students may not be given this choice very often, either in school or at home, and it is showing them that they are capable of doing so. I hope that motivation, confidence and engagement continue to be positively enhanced as a result of this intervention. I have already noticed an eagerness among the students when they conveyed their enthusiasm and asked if we would be completing the ‘Must Do, Can Do’ approach again.

6. What worked well? How would I change this going forward? For the next cycle?

I thought this activity worked very well. The children were happy and motivated throughout this intervention. I think introducing the activity to the children for a trial week in cycle one worked well, especially as the children became familiar with it. I considered the ideas suggested by the children for future implementation of this intervention. One idea was the continued inclusion of various games on the can-do list. Another suggestion was the inclusion of one of their favourite literacy activities, ‘Ticking Texts’, which could be added in exchange for a different activity on the must-do list,

The layout design of this intervention worked well. It is in a grid format, with space included to tick completed items. It is concise, accessible, and comprehensible for the students. The children could clearly see what they had already completed and what options remained for completion. I think I will keep the layout and options in the next cycle the exact same as this trial run. However, for the third and fourth cycles, I am considering letting the children choose their own can-do activities. This would be going a step further and giving the children further voice and agency in their learning. I am not sure if this will work smoothly, however I think it would be worth trying. Before doing this, I want to experience another week of the intervention with the children during cycle two, to evaluate if this will be possible and suitable for their learning and for the individuals involved. I also want to give them time to familiarise themselves further with the activity and to provide the opportunity to give more feedback on a deeper level. Upon reflection after cycle two, I will make my final decision on if I think this would prove to be beneficial for the students going forward.

Must Do, Can Do Reflection Cycle Two – 22/03/22

1. What further learning emerged during cycle 2 of this intervention?

During the second cycle of this intervention, I have noticed, more than ever, the want that my students have in being independent and agentic in their learning. They enjoy deciding when they will do the various literacy activities on certain days and the order in which they will complete them. The children are gaining ownership and independence of the planning of the completion of their work. I think this is a useful skill for the children to develop, especially in 5th class as this skill will be needed in the transition to secondary school. Having the confidence to take on learning activities independently is an important skill which has been brought to my attention through the completion of this intervention.

2. Did I bear witness to any new/further experiences or perspectives?

I noticed that the time-slot allocation this group has at the moment is limiting the possibility of skills being enhanced further, as a result of this practice. Team teaching has recently been re-introduced in our school, for the first time since March 2020, due to Covid-19. The completion of daily co-teaching with my 5th class group was scheduled and planned throughout the whole school by the SEN coordinator. Since the return to school in January 2022, the time I spend with this group has been shortened by 10 minutes due to this co-teaching in-class practice taking place. I also no longer work with this literacy group on Fridays either. This time limitation is out of my hands and something which I cannot currently change. Team teaching with 5th class will end on the 4th March 2022 and so from then on, the time allocation for this group will go back to the duration of 45 minutes per day, 5 days per week. I think this additional time will have a positive effect on the implementation of this intervention. I hope that the students will resonate with the practice to an even deeper level with the additional time. During cycle two, one of the students thought about choosing Can Do Activity G: Write a fact file about an inventor of your choice. After she had completed her can-do activity on that particular day, she looked at the clock in my room and decided independently that there would not be point in starting this activity in the timeframe remaining. The additional time the students will have for this intervention in cycle 4, after the 4th March, will be interesting to observe and reflect upon.

3. Has there been a change in the response towards this activity on its second cycle?

During the second cycle, the students were already familiar with how this practice works and so they were excited to immediately dive into it. The pupils commented on how they enjoy working independently, as that is what classmates do in the whole-class environment. They also stated that they prefer the weeks that we complete the Must Do, Can Do, in comparison to the weeks when we do not follow this practice. It was wonderful to hear this positive feedback and to realise that the children appreciate this intervention. They mentioned that they find the can-do activities fun and relaxing however learning is still taking place.

4. What worked well? How would I change this going forward for the next cycle?

Again this intervention worked well during this cycle. The students worked confidently and independently to complete their must-dos before beginning their can-dos. Greater relationships are being built amongst the pupils in the group as they communicate together about what work they are going to do in their weekly plan. They are collaborating in completing some of the must-dos and can-dos, which naturally became a by-product of this intervention.

For the next cycle, I am going to let the students choose their own can-do activities. I think this will provide them with further ownership and agency within their learning. I mentioned that I was thinking of doing this to the students and they were thrilled. They almost could not believe that they would be allowed to choose their own activities for completion. I hope they are realising the trust I have in them and that I feel confident in doing this. One pupil asked if a can-do activity could be practicing their weekly spellings homework. Another child asked if they could use some of the same can-do activities as they had on their plan this week. Their curiosity in writing their own can-do activities was evident during this discussion. I think the relationships I have with their students will get stronger as a result. Communication will flourish among the group as they are forming their own can-do plan. I am excited to see how this will go in cycle 3.

Must Do, Can Do Reflection Cycle Three – 12/03/22

1. What further learning emerged during cycle 3 of this intervention?

During cycle 3 of this intervention, I realised that it is difficult for the children to come up with eight can-do activities independently. One of the children only got as far as writing six can-do activities and so I realised that this would need to be changed going forward. The children were losing focus on the importance of the freedom of choice being provided to them, as they were unable to independently come up with eight literacy-based academic can-do activities. Some children did write eight can-do activities but some of the activities listed seemed like they were just writing them down to fill in the box and they did not intend on actually completing the activity - which defeats the purpose of this student voice-led activity. I learned a lot about both myself and my students by giving them the freedom to write their own can-do activities. I realised that I was initially anxious about letting the children come up with their own can-do activities. I am not familiar with the feeling of giving the children this level of control. I have not experienced giving my students this type of freedom before. It was a scary but liberating experience, which I want to bear witness to more of in the future. I also learned that my students are not used to this type of learning approach. They are more accustomed to being told what they have to do. Day-in-day-out they oblige and do not question why they have to do what their teacher tells them. Are we not past this in today's modern society? Should there not be a better approach to teachers in today's world?

2. Did I bear witness to any new/further experiences or perspectives?

During this cycle, the children were given the opportunity for the first time to create a list of their own 'can-do' activities. I no longer provided these for them. The children freely wrote up their own list. To my surprise, the children independently wrote down literacy-based academic activities which would help in their learning. I'm not sure if this is what they wanted to write down as their can-dos or what they thought they *should* write down. Did they want to please me? - I guess most students want to please their teachers! Do power dynamics come into effect here? If I wasn't present, would the children have written down completely different can-do activities? Nevertheless, it was wonderful to see the children creating their list of can-do activities independently. The children wrote some can-do activities together as a group, for example literacy-based games which they could play together. They also wrote down their own independent activities based on their own likes and interests. It was interesting to get a deeper insight into the personalities of the students through this as I could

see what they like and what they are not interested in.

3. Has there been any further change in the response towards this activity on its third cycle?

I think the children have become completely immersed in this intervention and how it works. They are familiar with it and want to get stuck into the activities immediately. I have noticed a greater sense of urgency among the group as a result. Individually creating the can-dos has promoted this urgency even further. The pupils are enjoying the freedom they are being given. They are noticing the trust I am instilling in them and that I am treating them maturely.

The children seemed shocked to realise that they were given the freedom to create their own can-do activities. I think freedom in learning is something which I have previously not provided enough of to my students and this is something I want to change going forward. The children enjoyed this freedom. They liked that they could choose their own activities and link them with their personal likes.

4. What worked well? How would I change this going forward for the next cycle?

Again this activity worked well as the children independently began their work with motivation. They have begun to realise that if they work hard on their must-do activities, they will be rewarded through their self-chosen can-do activities.

Going forward for the next cycle, I will only leave six empty boxes for the children to fill in for the can-do activities. I think this will help them to focus on choosing six good activities which they actually want to do, which will help them with their learning. I think it will decrease anxiety around coming up with eight activities independently, as this is not what we want to come of the intervention. I want this intervention to be a fun academic activity which the children look forward to being part of.

Must Do, Can Do Reflection Cycle Four – 25/03/22

1. What further learning emerged during cycle 4 this intervention?

During cycle 4 of this intervention I changed the layout of the must do, can do template. The template four must-do activities, which I wrote up, one for each day and six can-do activities for the children to draw up themselves. I changed this because in cycle 3 I noticed that the children struggled to create eight can-do activities. Most days, the children only get to complete one can-do activity so I also did not feel that there was a need to spend time writing 8 can-do activities. I think this new template was better suited to the children and for their learning. One child even commented on how she thought having only six can-dos was better as it made the choice easier and it did not take as much time. This made me realise that perhaps I was providing the children with too much freedom, choice and voice through this intervention.

2. Did I bear witness to any new/further experiences or perspectives?

Week on week I can see the children progressively becoming more motivated and independent with their work. The must do, can do activity stimulates them to get their work complete in order to move onto their can-do activities which they choose independently. One of the can-do activities that the children wrote down this week was the game 'Boggle'. In this game the children have a limited amount of time to form words using the letters in the game. I noticed how much the children enjoyed learning through fun games. I am going to try and include games, where appropriate, with these children going forward as I know that this stimulates their learning.

3. Has there been any further change in the response towards this activity on its fourth cycle?

The children commented on how they thought that coming up with 6 can-do activities was much more manageable than 8. They were capable of independently writing the six activities and it did not take time away from their learning. Again the children positively responded to the activity. They immediately began their must do work before moving on to their self-chosen can-do activities.

4. What learning would I take away from completing this intervention? Would I change it for future use?

I learned that the children need to be given choice and freedom in baby steps. I learned that children who went from getting not much freedom, to being given a lot of freedom was a big change for them. They found it hard to manage this immediate sense of freedom and choice and they were unable to utilise it properly.

Going forward, I would assess how much freedom my students are familiar with at the beginning of the school year and base my activities around this. Some children may be more accustomed to freedom, choice and student voice than others, depending on past experiences. I think introducing freedom in small steps over a longer period of time would provide the children with more of a scaffold for their freedom of choice. Perhaps this would mean going from receiving no choice, to choosing between two activities. This could then progress to choosing activities from a list provided by the teacher. The students could then help the teacher in writing up a list of activities to choose from. And finally the children could independently write up their own list of activities and choose whichever they want to complete. I think doing this approach in a phased rollout approach would not shock the children as much. I noticed that if the children are not accustomed to freedom of choice at school that they can be taken aback at first. If this type of practice is introduced slowly in simple steps, the children would not notice the freedom and they would be apprehensive about it.

Appendix D: Transcript of Interviews

Appendix D.1 Transcript of Interviews for Colleagues

**Note: some sections have been blacked out to protect the identities of participants under the guidance of my supervisor.

Master of Education (Research in Practice)
Ellen Butterly 21251716

Audio Transcript for Interview CT
Recorded: 9th of February 2022
Time: 18:12
Duration: 29:40

E: Ellen
CT: Class teacher colleague

E: OK, so. In regards to the teacher student relationship, what importance do you place on the type of relationship between a teacher and a student?

CT: Em, I think it's so important to develop a really good relationship with all your students. One where they respect you, where they, they respect you and your role, but also you know, they trust you, they're happy to come into the classroom, they're in a happy environment, but finding that line between, you know, keeping a professional but a relationship where they're, you know, that they're happy to come into class, they're happy to be coming into school. But you know, still having that respect level there and keeping it professional.

E: Yeah, I agree. And then, how important is the student teacher relationship in your role in primary education?

CT: Em well, I think it's really important that you, as I said, develop a good relationship with the children, build a rapport, getting to know the children individually. Em, I think that it helps it really helps to engage with them as well. Like if you develop a good relationship with them, they're going to be more engaged, they're happier in school. You can you relate stuff, relate the topics, relate the work back to them personally as well, and make it more em, kind of more eh targeted to them specifically as well. So for example, if you were teaching a maths lesson and relating it back to their real lives. If one is really interested in football, let's say, relating it to that, and that could kind of help to kind of reinforce the material little bit more.

E: Yeah, yeah. And can you think about what is it good type of relationship between a teacher and a student? And can you describe what you think that would be like?

CT: So I think one where, you know, your role is clear, you're their teacher, they that you've, you have gained their respect, that you they, respect you and your role, but I think as well finding as I said, finding the balance. So that you're not just going in and telling them what to do, when to do it. That you guide them as much as you can, but also building them to kind of gain their own independence and sometimes take charge of their own learning as well. So

more of a guide rather than just constantly telling them what to do when it and kind of give them a voice as well.

E: Yeah I agree. And what are the risks in primary education if that relationship between the teacher and the student is poor?

CT: Well, I think if there's a poor relationship between teachers and students, they're not going to be happy in school. They're not going to be willing to learn. They're going to be less engaged. They may not, kind of, you know, trust you as much. They're spending 6 hours a day, five days a week with you, like it's so important for them to have a good relationship with you. And that's going to affect their relationship and their opinion and feelings towards learning and education that could kind of stay with them, so it's so important. If you think there's, there's a poor relationship there, that's going to completely effect their learning journey for them.

E: Yeah, that's such a good point. Em and what are your thoughts on power or power dynamics between the teacher and students in primary education?

CT: Em, I think. Showing them that, you know, that they know, they know your role. They know that, you know, what's expected of them. They know what, what you expect of them, what they should be doing, and they know kind of the consequence of that. That they respect you, they listen to you. But also, as I said, still acting as a guide that it's not constantly telling them what to do, when to do it, but they, they have a voice as well that they feel that their points are valid, that they can express their views, that they can gain a little bit more independence that it's not constantly being told what to do 24/7. Again, trying to guide them.

E: Yeah yeah, I agree. I think giving them like the voice and independence there, it's so important.

CT: Yeah.

E: OK, the next questions are based on care, so the, care is one of the four ethical values, eh underpinned in the professional code of conduct of the Teaching Council. So what are your thoughts on the importance of care in primary education?

CT: Well, as I said, we spend 6 hours a day, five days a week with them like we have a duty of care to look after them. We, in some cases, we could be seeing, spending more time with the children than with their own parents during the week, if they're going to creche after school, maybe only seeing the parents for an hour or two in the evenings, that we have such a pivotal role in looking after them, making sure all their needs are being met as much as we can. To try and observe and as much as we can, see and look after them. But as I said, spending so much time with them, we're such a primary figure in their lives during the school year, so trying our best to kind of, you know, spot things, maybe irregularities and anything, you know, kind of have a lookout for anything that maybe, stands out, to see are they being properly cared for.

E: Yeah, and what actions or practices do you think demonstrate or reflect care in primary education?

CT: Eh, well I suppose you know we'd, we we, you know, you spend your time, you're looking after them, making sure that they're OK. You spend, you know, we take up the role of the nurse if they've fallen and leave hurting themselves. If they want you to listen to them,

if they have their problems, you help them work through them. You know, teaching them how to deal with their, express their emotions, and deal with their feelings. Eh and yeah, I mean if there is any issues going on with them, being there as someone to listen. To have someone, that we're someone there to listen to them, to their problems and help them talk through it and as well, just highlighting that their feelings are valid that they feel they have a voice and they have a trusted person that they can speak to, which might not always be the case. There might not always be someone. If there is something going on, that they feel that they can trust and come to you. So being you know, trying as much to be that person for them.

E: Yeah, it's so important, and then I suppose that kind of leads into the next question, it's probably kind of similar. What does care look like in your professional practice? So what this might overlap a little bit.

CT: Em yeah, I suppose kind of similar to what I said. I suppose, just making sure that you know, physically and emotionally, that they're kept safe and you know, that they're OK emotionally as well. You know, you can, as I said, taking up that role nearly of a nurse if they've hurt themselves and looking after that. But again, you know, talking through their feelings. If there has been issues or if there is something maybe going on at home, that they disclose to you or something that's been worrying them. So just being that person that's there to listen to them, to help guide them through it, give advice or just to be someone there to listen to. As as I said, they you know we're spending 6 hours a day with them so.

E: Yeah.

CT: In some cases, more than what their parents are. So if there's something really bothering them, we're spending a lot of time, then we need to be that person they feel they can trust to come and speak to us about.

E: Yeah, definitely cause I think then we notice it, when we spend so much time with them, maybe we notice stuff like that more at school than someone at home might.

CT: Absolutely and you notice that change in behaviour hugely. You know if, if there is something bothering your child, you can, a lot of times spot it if they're out of character. If, if some slight change you can notice it and just try kind of get to the bottom of that.

E: Uh-huh. And in respect to students who receive additional support at school, so the students who are on a school support plan or school support plus plan, what practices or actions, do you think demonstrate or reflect care for those students?

CT: Well I think, you know, similar to what I've mentioned before, the same kind of things. Being there, making sure they're OK physically, emotionally, that they're feeling safe in everything they're doing, everyone that they're around. And think having really good communication between all members, involved so you know, between the learning support teacher, the class teacher, the SNA. It's so important to have really good communication there and a good relationship between those members as well to make sure that the child is looked after to the best of our abilities. So again, making sure that all their needs are being met and by having good communication between class-teacher, SNA, learning support teacher, you can kind of ensure that those needs are being met. That you're, any concerns are shared, and that it can be dealt with. And then I suppose having that as well, is good to, kind of, have other people there who are spending.. You know the class teachers, they're spending the day, six hours a day with them, but the SNA is there with them 24/7, for you know, for the whole day, they're right there with them. So it's so important to have that good relationship there to ensure you can fully care for the child and make sure all their needs are met.

E: Yeah, I think the, the relationships between the staff working with the children is so important and then as you said the communication as well.

CT: Absolutely.

E: Eh and, do you think that there are further opportunities for care in the primary school classroom or in, when they're receiving additional support?

CT: Em, so I think for opportunities in the primary school classroom, eh I suppose, working in a non-deis school, mainstream school, there could be certain things that I think can be missed. In a deis school children are provided with lunches and there can often be breakfast clubs, so you know, the children aren't going hungry. If they are going home and they're not getting, they're not going to get fed breakfast in the morning, they can come in and they can get their breakfast. They got their lunch, you know, they're meeting their nutritional needs. They're getting food with good nutritional value, they're being fed. Whereas I think that that can be missed in a, in a non-deis school, a non-deis setting. If a school is in a non-disadvantaged area I think that could be easily missed.

E: Yeah.

CT: And there could be children who are, you know, who are going home, they're hungry or they're not being fed proper food. Their food has no nutritional value. So I think that is something that could definitely be *easily* missed and you know, would go easily missed in a mainstream setting, sorry, in a non-deis setting. But I suppose, that could be an opportunity for further...

E: Yeah, yeah definitely, I agree. OK, and the next two questions are about voice, so the first question; do you agree that children should have.. Oh sorry, I probably should have read this part first. So article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child States that children have a right to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity. So, do you agree that children should have this right? And do you think it's respected in primary education?

CT: Yeah, I definitely do think they should have the right to freely express their views, eh to a certain extent. I mean, I think if it's... You know, they definitely have the right to express their views once it's not impeding on other people. You know, once it's respectful of others, it's appropriate, you know for their age and for you know, completely respectful of other people, then yes, absolutely! I think, you know, it kind of ties back into what I saying earlier about giving them a voice and a chance to express their views and more independence, but it's to a certain extent. It's within reason, you know, you have to facilitate that, but there has to be boundaries. And again, like of course express your views, but having, it must be appropriate and respectful.

E: Yeah and relevant.

CT: Yeah and relevant, absolutely.

E: And what activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in primary education?

CT: Well, I think having whole class discussions em, incorporated in lessons is a great opportunity for children to express their views. It's something I always try to incorporate, if, where, em when we're learning a new topic. It encourages them to give their opinion on a topic. Em I also, I think debating, like even the likes of just a small walking debate activity, whether, you know, you could have it set up that they either walk to a side that they agree or disagree with a statement and this is allowing them to express their views, even if it's a

quieter child who doesn't feel as comfortable speaking out in front of the class. This is, give them the opportunity to give their opinion, saying whether they agree or disagree with a statement and also gives them a chance to speak up and give a reason why, if they feel comfortable.

E: Yeah, that's such a good idea. And what em activities or practices, if any, provide students em with, provides students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities, in additional support education. So just it's the same but not in the classroom, just as they're receiving additional support.

CT: Em well, I suppose that you know, if you're chatting to them with how they're getting on with it, how they're finding it. If they're comfortable, if they're happy going. Em, even doing like a, uh, what's the word I'm looking for, how they feel, a survey! Just to find out how they feel about school. And you could incorporate questions about that, about, if they are attending additional support, incorporate questions into that to see how they feel about it, their opinion on it, what they like about, maybe what they would change, so that they feel they have kind of a choice and can express their views on it and have a say I suppose.

E: Yeah, and I think that's something we kind of, maybe overlook, that we don't take their opinions into consideration enough.

CT: Yeah, I suppose it can often just be, it's usually just between the teacher, and learning support teacher, and the parents, whereas it's deciding with the children... But yeah, I suppose, there is opportunity definitely to give them more of a voice in that and to express their views on it.

E: Yeah. And what importance, if any, does students voice have in your practice?

CT: Em again, I suppose, just asking, getting their feedback on the things and if you're incorporating whole class discussion, that can help guide the lesson. It can take the lesson in a completely different direction than you expected.

E: Yeah.

CT: Totally based on their, kind of, views and opinions on a topic, and I suppose if children, if I was to do an activity that, and they really loved the way it was done. For example, doing using the tablets and doing maybe a 'Kahoot' quiz on their tablets and they really, really loved that and they'll be asking me, can we do that again? They really enjoyed it.

E: Yeah.

CT: That's really engaging for them, they're enjoying it. They're asking to do it again, so I'll incorporate that again. So maybe I did it with an Irish lesson first and then I'll maybe incorporate it with maths lesson. So they're, you know, they're getting their voice, they're telling me what they've enjoyed, that they, they're communicating to me, they've enjoyed it, but I can see they find it very engaging so then I can use that in my teaching. Then I know this is something that works well with them. It's very engaging, but it's still incorporated in the topic. I'm still achieving my learning objectives, so it allowed them to kind of have a say as well.

E: Yeah, great, perfect! And do you think there are any further opportunities to value, encourage, support or foster student voice in the primary school classroom and or in additional support?

CT: Uh, yeah, no, I definitely think there is. Even from what we were saying there before about sometimes things can get overlooked, and look, maybe to look for opportunities more

so for them to give their say. I suppose we have, you know, we've the curriculum to follow and we have our objectives to be completed and I suppose that they can get overlooked because we've so much to get done, we want to get it completed. But I suppose sometimes to give them that opportunity more so and help use that to, to guide the lessons, giving them an opportunity more so to give their say and yeah, so I suppose, just like what we said before, it may be doing more surveys about how they feel about school, and maybe what would they change, or if they were a teacher for a day, what would they do, to get their ideas.

E: Oh yeah!

CT: And maybe incorporate that in a little bit more.

E: Uh-huh. Well, I think em like, they're developing the new em, the new primary curriculum, and I think it is going to take into account more like, like agency for the teachers to kind of decide what works well with their class and to kind of give them more ownership. And I think that'll be good going forward, if that does happen.

CT: Yeah, definitely.

E: OK, and last section is on inclusion. So, based on your experiences in primary education, do you think Irish primary schools practice inclusion appropriately?

CT: Yeah, I do think that Irish primary schools try very hard to be inclusive. Em I think especially for children with special educational needs, the fact that, eh you know, it is so common for, for children with special educational needs to be in mainstream classes, I think more so now. I know when I was a child it was very rare for there to be a child with special educational needs in the school with an SNA. But now it's so common, which is amazing, because I, you know, special educational schools are great as well, but I suppose it just depends on the circumstances. It depends on the child and their individual needs. But the fact that more and more children with special educational needs are able to be more so integrated into society, attend mainstream schools, you know, make friends that would be living in their area, I think it will hugely help them to integrate into society more so. So I do think that Irish primary schools really do practice inclusion appropriately. The fact that this opportunity is there for children to attend.

E: Yeah, I completely agree, yeah.

CT: It's not always, you know, it's not always necessary maybe for them to attend a special educational school, so that kind of facility.

E: And do you think special education provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format? And what are the strengths and limitations of special education?

CT: Em well, I suppose again, it's similar point with the special, special educational schools versus a child with special education needs attending mainstream school. I suppose again, it's down to the individual child and their needs. But I suppose, it's finding that balance between what is best for the individual child, you know, it might be the case where it could be more beneficial for them to, to attend a special educational school. And maybe for lessons to be more so focused on, you know, life skills and things that might kind of, help them a little bit more to integrate into society. Or, it could be a case where, again based on the individual child, it could be best for them to be in a mainstream setting and to, you know, it might help them to integrate into society better. But I suppose, you know, the limitations of that are staff. With, you know, having an SNA support and having the hours. A child qualified to get an SNA, you know, it could be a case where a child has kind of, has missed out on that opportunity and could have really benefited from that and maybe would struggle a lot more in school, for not having that extra support. So I suppose that's where the limitations would come in.

E: Yeah, and that's, it's not down to the child's fault. That's just down to the, like the, the like kind of resources that are available in the school that they want to go to.

CT: Yeah.

E: And what does a, a commitment to inclusion in primary education ask of you? First of all, in respect of the relationship in respect, of the relationship between you and your students?

CT: Em well, I suppose, you know teaching children, it's so important to teach children to have respect for all, to be inclusive of everyone. Everyone is different and maybe some children's differences stand out more than others. But it's just about teaching the children to have respect for each other. And you know, for them to be as inclusive as possible.

E: Yeah exactly.

CT: I've always, I feel like you can always notice a difference between. Maybe a class who has, maybe if there's a child in a class with special educational needs, maybe has quite a lot of needs. A child, children seem to be a lot, in those classes, tend to be a lot more kind of respectful and aware and...

E: Kind of accepting, aren't they?

CT: Accepting, that's the word I'm looking for, thank you. Accepting. Whereas you know, and listen, if there's a difference, if there's a standard difference, children are going to look, it's natural curiosity. They're going to look, they're going to, it's going to catch their attention. They're going to be curious. But I think you can always notice a class, children in a class who have, children who have grown up in a class with a child with special educational needs. They just seem to be a lot more accepting and respectful of people with, you know, different needs and different abilities, so I think it's all about...

E: Yeah. That's a good skill for them, it's not even a skill, but it's a good like, kind of, social element to have in in themselves growing off. I think it's so important.

CT: Yeah, teaching them just to be accepting of everyone, for people, for their differences and yeah.

E: Yeah. And then, what does a commit, a commitment to inclusion in primary education ask of you in the way you practice care?

CT: So again, I suppose. Making sure all their, their needs are met and maybe it could be if a child is, you know, has maybe additional needs or something, something like that, ensuring that, it could be a social thing or an emotional thing or element, where you need, they need, you know, that more specific extra care and then ensuring that they're feeling accepted, ensuring their feeling respected, they're valued. If they are, you know, if they do feel that there is that little difference there, they feel.. You don't want them feeling... That's gonna have a huge impact if they feel different, if they feel inferior at all. If there is any, in any way that inclination there, that's going to have an effect on the child. So again ensuring all their emotional needs, or if that's right word or way to phrase it, needs are met as well.

E: Yeah, yeah, yeah. And last question, em so what does a commitment to inclusion in primary education ask of you in the importance you afford to student voice?

CT: Eh so, again, you know, making sure the children feel heard, that they feel valued. They feel that their voice and their opinions are valid. But again, in respect to others so, you know, it's making sure that they're respectful to others and inclusive to others and making sure that, you know, it's not going to be offensive to anyone, that it's appropriate, that it won't it, again, it's going to be inclusive to everyone. And I suppose as well with the child, you know, if your child has quite severe additional needs, you know making sure though that you'd still, to the

best of your ability, try to give their child a voice, you know, rather than you know asking the adult beside them. Try your best for them to, 'cause, I have, I think that can be an easy habit for people to fall into. You know, asking the parent or asking the adult that's with them rather than asking them when they could be completely capable of answering the question. So just making sure they feel they have a voice as well, giving them the time and the attention to actually express those views and to say how they feel.

E: Yeah, I think that's so important. OK, well that is all the questions, so if you have nothing else to add, em, that's it.

CT: Perfect, yeah, no, I think that's everything.

Master of Education (Research in Practice)
Ellen Butterly 21251716

Audio Transcript for Interview SET

Recorded: 18th of February 2022

Time: 14:13

Duration: 39:24

E: Ellen

SET: Special education teacher colleague

E: OK, so I'm in regards to the teacher or SNA student relationship. What importance do you place on the type of relationship between the teacher or SNA and the student?

SET: OK, so with that one then, so that's relationship between the teacher, with the student focus, as opposed to the teacher and SNA, is it?

E: Yeah. So either the teacher or the SNA with the student.

SET: OK, so I would see that there's like a huge importance on that relationship, OK, because it's particularly, any of the children that have SNAs like they, I would see it that they would have an integral role on how the children are going to like help settle into their learning environment and achieve their learning outcomes. So it's it's a really, you know, it's a really precious relationship and one that has to be kind of handled very well. And I think that's where the next questions kind of go into that then, do you know?

E: Yeah. So then the next one is, how important is the, the student teacher or SNA relationship in your role in primary education? So I suppose for you, it's the the student teacher relationship.

SET: So the student teacher. So who, what is the student teacher relationship?

E: So the relationship like you'd have your students.

SET: With my SNA, yeah?

E: No, with your students. So how important is, is the student teacher relationship in your role in primary education.

SET: Oh right. Oh yeah. OK, so as a special ed teacher with the students again, I think you play a really important role because you get to, you know, I feel like you get to know them so much better than maybe even the own class teacher due to the amount of time...

E: Yeah.

SET: You spend with them maybe in a one-to-one or small group situations, so em I would very much think that you know, you have an opportunity to get to know about their likes and their dislikes, their interests, what kind of motivates them. And that's why I think it's kind of key to using that information. Do you know to try and uh build on their strengths and to help them with their areas they're finding difficult, you know, so yeah.

E: OK. And then, uh, can you think about what a good type of relationship between a teacher and a student? And can you describe that please?

SET: OK, so I would find the most, for teacher, students like there must be that kind of like, mutual respect has to be there. So we'd like we always assume the children will have respect for the teachers, but the teachers must have a huge amount of respect for the children and

particularly the children with additional learning needs. I find that, you know, you really have to be cognizant, that they have their own views on their learning as well and take them on board. Em that you need to consult them in the maybe planning process as well to ask them, you know, what are their goals or targets for the year? What would they like to achieve? Where do they feel they need help? You know, that and that is kind of your role in, as the SET to help them vocalize that as well. You can't always just take their targets on, but they definitely need to be used to inform your own.

E: Yeah, yeah, I'm actually trying to do that more now through the masters to kind of take their point of view into consideration more. And what are the risks in primary education if the relationship between the teacher and the student is poor?

SET: In sorry, that's why I'm now emm, but yeah, so sorry. Initially I thought the question was going to be a good relationship between the teacher and the SNA and the student. DO you know that kind of way? But it's grand, sorry so.

E: No you're OK. Maybe it's the way I have it written down so it's if I was doing the interview with either an SNA or teachers.

SET: Alright, I understand. Yeah, I get you. Em so that was that, so what about the risks, is that the next one, number four?

E: Yeah, yeah.

SET: For the risk of primary education and the relationship between the teacher and the students are poor. OK, so if the relationship is poor like ultimately, that's probably going to lead to poor learning outcomes for the child because you know a child who isn't having a decent relationship with their teacher is not going to thrive or succeed. I think we could take that as given, em it also leaves room for potential conflict or triggering or anything with students. So I think, em ultimately it's it's a bad scenario if the relationship is poor, like the outcomes of the children are going to be poor.

E: Yeah, I agree. And then what are your thoughts are power or power dynamics between the teacher and student in primary education?

SET: Yeah. Again, I think it's a very like there's a big shift from the way it used to be. So I don't think, children don't assume that their teacher is this big authoritarian person in their lives like it would have been maybe even 10 or 15 or 20 years ago, you know? So I think children come in now, they expect to be treated, you know, with the level of respect that will be afforded, you know, to anybody. They don't expect to be talked down to it. They don't expect to be in any way, you know, made to feel bad. And it is, so let me read that part again. So teachers like they're in a position, they do hold a position of power by virtue of the fact that they're in charge of the children, but they need to handle that very carefully and not to be, you know, depressing the children with their authority. You know, you need to work your, work around situations if needs be. Like, if you're having a conflict with this child, you know you're going to have to try maybe a talked-based solution.

E: Uh-huh.

SET: To get in on how they think they could help solve it as well. Do you know, like more problem solving take on it as opposed to just, I'm here, I'm right I'm boss, that's it, you know.

E: Yeah, absolutely.

SET: But yeah, but like if we want, you know, if in a learning environment where children are going to succeed and do well, it's normally one, that's built on that feeling that everyone is more of an equal than there being one very powerful person in the room, dictating what has to be done.

E: Yeah. And then I'll just move on to the next question about care. So the Teaching Council places care as one of the four ethical values which underpin the standards of teaching. And what are your thoughts on the importance of care in primary education?

SET: Yeah so, I was thinking of the word care. So it's, it's quite an open term like I, so I took it to mean like just kind of care around, the basics like. Maybe like making sure that they're physically cared for it, you know that they're coming in, you know, so as a trusted adult in their lives, you would identify to who is obviously not being cared for in a sense at home. If there was any kind of neglect in there, you know how they're presenting. Like if they're not clean, if they're not, you know, if their clothes are tattered or they're a bit dishevelled or, you know, there's that that kind of element of care. But then I think more so, cause that's not what we would say, it's often, that doesn't crop up as much here, as you would say in a school like ours. But then, I think what we really need to look at would be their emotional well-being as well. And you know, a child that looks stressed or depressed or exhibiting any you know, uh, outward signs of being unhappy. I think that's the kind of care where we step up and maybe just simply interviewing, on a simple level by starting, which is just asking them, are they OK and is there anything that's bothering them and maybe leave it open for them, for them to tell you what's going on. Em so that's probably some of the answers for some of the other then is it?

E: Yeah, in the next is what practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care, so that kind of yeah..

SET: Yeah, looking out for them, you know, and just taking notice and then maybe some students are normally kinda happy go lucky, or do you know? And then suddenly they're off and off maybe, maybe not just for a day, but for a little prolonged period, you might want to inquire to see if something has happened? You know, that they wish to discuss. Is there something going on? Like we don't need to know, we've no right to know every in and out of what goes on in their lives. But it's just to give them an opening to tell somebody, to make that available. I I find the thought about school checklists really good. Like it's informative and it's like, you know it's always recommended for the children in support, and we do it. But I, I think it's something that every, like that should be done really for all the children in the class. If it was just done once a year, ideally maybe in the first term, 'cause finding out what's wrong at the end, you know, there's not a whole lot the class teacher can do. Well they can obviously send the information forward the following year. But I do think if, if every child could have it, one carried out each year, it would be great you know 'cause the questions are quite.. And the thing is it can be, amended. That's what we were told on our course. Like, you know, that document, you can take some of the questions out or you could slightly reword it or you know, if you have a child with.. I find, things I find hard at school are ___? That you can just change it to a simple question you know, what do you find hard at school? To make it easier for the child to answer it 'cause sometimes that sentence finishing can be tricky to know, so em yeah so that's one of the main things.

E: Thinking about that, a question that's not on that, just in regards to the thoughts about school checklist, I actually was thinking about it 'cause I did a circle time with em my 5th class and it was just about asking them about support and I was just kind of thinking about the, the thoughts about school checklist and I think yeah, I agree. I think it should be done on like every child, but I think maybe I I think we do it nearly too early in the year and it's hard to kind of take on board what they're saying when you haven't built the relationship with the child yet.

SET: True. Yeah, very much so.

E: So when you hear things, then it doesn't really resonate with you as much as when, maybe

when you know them for a few weeks and then it kind of makes more sense.

SET: Yeah, very much. Well, that's it, so maybe then ideal time is that, like even in towards November, I think in advance of a parent teacher meeting or something 'cause like really and this is, I don't mean to be off topic, but like that is the thing like as a parent myself like when you have a parent teacher meeting you're not really as bothered about how the child is getting on in his spelling, phonics and maths. You're actually more you know, want to know are they happy at school, have they friends? Are they OK? Who did they play with? Who are their friends? And this has come up regularly. People have, you know, colleagues, talking about it like that is what they're asked. People don't really care, parents aren't that taken with what's, how often they get 10 out of 10 in their the spellings, you know, like it really is about, so I think having that information is is key like it's a really important piece of knowing the children, do you know?

E: Em OK and then the next question here is eh, it's kind of a similar one again, what does care look like in your professional practice?

SET: Yeah. So again, I probably have kinda answered, but yeah. I would be very much like em, like that getting a baseline with that thoughts about school, kind of having a look at it and using their responses to inform my planning. Do you know what I mean? So if a child says to me like, I find maths really difficult and that sometimes the things they can say, they say, or often when you say is something a teacher can do? I notice this year sometimes they say things like em slowdown, speak slower, do you know. There are a lot of, you know, it's quite informative and that's why, like I said another, you know, you've the ups and downs of finding it out early. But like if you find out that they're having difficulty keeping up with the speed of your speech, or the speed of your class teachers speech, you know, that's something that's nice to be flagged early in the year, so that you can make accommodations. And like there is a lot of that, that children find it difficult to identify. They find it hard to say what they find difficult.

E: Yeah.

SET: Sometimes it comes out differently. They mightn't be able to say, yeah, I find Starlight really tricky, but then they can say, you know "big words are hard" or you know they they, so it's just kind of getting a handle on that em, and then also like that just keeping an eye on their demeanour their behaviour just you know, if there's anything off it simply, you know, they're acting kind of out of sorts or differently, like, just to kind of keep an eye on that. And to touch base with the parents as well, because obviously we're all joined stakeholders in the education of the child. So, like, care is also being in touch with the parents.

E: Yeah, definitely. And em, in respect of students who receive additional support, what practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care? I suppose that one for you, it's kind of the same seeing as you actually are working with those who receive additional support.

SET: Yeah, so there will be it. So what it looks like for us, like in the plans, so if there is an SNA role, having that very much defined, 'cause they are that that care need, like in the physical care, they are the primary person responsible for that. If if there is an SNA delivering any kind of physical care needs, that's all em in there. But then another thing that I, when I thought about that, that's really important is that you know, as SEN teachers, like drawing up these documents, were proving to an awful lot of information. But there is a responsibility on us, then, to disseminate that information to the other teachers.

E: Yeah.

SET: Make sure the class teacher has the full picture, make, and then even maybe the following year. Or it like sometimes, like if you have a child that's really, you know, has maybe anger management or some kind of like conflict issues or whatever, it might be important that a few teachers know that. So the teachers that are out in the yard duty know that look, you know, if you're going to challenge this child in a really heavy way, then it's going to automatically trigger a big melt down, you know. Like so depending on the nature of some of the difficulties, their needs, like some of that information, may need to be disseminated to more than just you and the class teacher, you know and the SNA. So and it's not about, it's a, it's a fine balance. It's not about going off telling everyone what's going on with each child, but certain if it, if said, like giving this knowledge can help offset some of the challenging behaviours or that, then it's it's important that that information is shared, you know. So that's one thing.

E: And then do you think there are any further opportunities for care in the primary school classroom or additional support?

SET: Like there's always, always room for more care. Like, I just don't think they'll ever be enough, do you know what I mean? And I think well-being is a great kind of buzzword at the minute and you know, with Covid, everyone, it's all about it, the department's all about it, all the SSE they want well-being done by 2025, like it's all there. But sometimes and we see it even among staff or whatever like it can be a nod to it, or it can feel a bit tokenistic sometimes so. And you just have to make sure that it's actually being delivered to, do you know what I mean, in the classroom as well, that like it's not just ticking boxes or like that. There is an actual programme being delivered to that kind of care aspect of the children, you know, that's one of the things. But mainly I think the most important thing is that you are that trusted adult and that every child in that classroom knows that they can come to you and they're not going to be afraid to come to you if they need to speak to a trusted adult things.

E: Absolutely. And then the next few questions are about voice. So uhm, article 12 of the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child states that children have a right to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity. So do you agree that children should have this right? And do you think it's respected in primary education?

SET: Yeah. So they absolutely should, because if, the better children are at a young age at expressing themselves, the better they'll be as adults, you know, to mean. In the better, and that'll only lead to better outcomes for them I think, going on into future workplaces and, you know, if they're able to express their thoughts and question things. So it's it's a proper life skill. Em is it respected in primary education? Again, more than it used to be. Like, I mean, I think children have way more voice than they ever, than they had, but they could have more. Like everything, there's always there's more room to it. And again, you know, kind of, I know this question is going to come up again, like as in what activities and practices, so kind of this might be answering number two but like. When you look at something like a student council and it's brilliant like it is, it's it's really super. But again it's it's quite limited to the voices. So you know there is that whole election process and then it's like who's been put forward, how did they select the candidates? Like, do we see enough children, you know, do we see children with additional learning needs or with physical disability or, you know, children like em newcomer children? Like, there's all different, you know, like or is it just the same children? That you nearly could guess before you, they come out the door. Who's coming out, you know? So there has, there is a responsibility that comes with that process as well and not that you're going to be, you know, indirectly discriminating then against others. But you just

need to find a balance. And there has to be, you want a council to reflect your school community. So if your school community is made up of multicultural, diverse, multiple need ability, then your student council, should somewhat reflect that you know. Instead of having fifteen white, Irish, able-bodied children just all on a council you know. So it is it's it's it's tricky but it I think it is it's important you know.

E: Yeah, I agree.

SET: Efforts need to be made to, you know 'cause it's that kind of "can't see, can't be" that the GAA would talk about, you know, that is what's really important for our kids in special ed, like you know. They need to *know* that this is very much within their grasp, they're every reason to believe that they will be on that student council, that they will be chosen by their peers. Do you know?

E: Yeah.

SET: But then the other thing then on like, the student council is only a small, niche thing then because there's only so many they can put on it. But I actually think just uhm in in in like in the more, once you start going up to the more senior classes, but like debating is a real skill that should be harnessed in primary school, 'cause they have plenty of opinions. I think they've way more opinions than they've ever had you know. So debating is a real opportunity and like, it has all that lovely cross curricular link that they can get in, oral language, and get in with SESE or whatever, all the different topics, but that just it gives them the confidence to speak out and it teaches them how to, you know, argue in a mannerly way, to disagree with respect, you know, like that is like.

E: Yeah it's like something they have to learn nearly.

SET: Yeah, exactly. So I think it's one of the ways that you can give children that voice. Em and again like it says, in accordance with their age and maturity, the topics you pick obviously would..

E: Yeah. That kind of, em like question two and three so, what activities or practices em provide the right, provide the opportunity to express their views, firstly it says in primary education and then secondly in additional support. So I guess you know it's kind of overlapping.

SET: So in the additional support, the only thing I'd add for the additional support for student voice is that simple thing and we aren't the best at doing it, and we'll all admit it, is that the child is involved in the school support plus process. Like in the IEP process as well, it was always envisaged that the child will be present, the child would have a voice, the child would be very aware that everyone is here, everyone talking about it we're all, it's a joint venture with everybody. And that, because people, you know, people are uncomfortable sometimes talking about the child with the parents, with the child present.

E: Yeah.

SET: And that comes, and this is more about what maybe your next section on inclusion and a lot of that stems from the fact that we go with a very deficit-focused approach to our planning and because we're constantly highlighting all the things the child doesn't know. That makes it uncomfortable for us to have the child present. Where if we had a more strengths-based approach to all of these things, so if we were looking, it's like, it would be much easier to have a child present if you were going "you are so good at this" "you are so good at that" "you were so good at this", now we're going to use those skills to help bring you on in this area and that area and the other area. But it's a total, it's a huge mindset change so.

E: Yeah, absolutely.

SET: It's going to take something bigger than just saying this, you know, like that is a massive shift in a school and in a group. So like, it's not an easy answer I guess. So just you

can delete that from recording [laughs] but depending. But that would be the opportunity in an ideal world.

E: Yeah, no, well that's kind of, my my whole masters is kind of, what would you say, topic or question, is how can I make my practice eh less deficit-focused and that's kind of what I want to like achieve.

SET: And that is what I've, we had to do for our whole first term in college. So we had to build these profiles, but like she, she's amazing, the lady who does all the stuff, [REDACTED] her name, she's in DCU. But it is all about strength-based approach, to everything. This chasing deficit and deficit focused, but like she said it's it's just that everyone, like you could especially, it's nearly worse the longer you're in support. Like saying if you've been if you've been chasing the deficits for 10 years like it's nearly harder to break from it than, em you know if you're only one or two years in support. and you're, you know, like it's easier to go, yeah that makes total sense. Just gonna completely change the way I do everything. So but I've started to try and do it now because of this and then obviously, and like it took like, you know, sometimes you feel like, oh my God, have I been doing it all wrong, all the time? [laughs].

E: I know [laughs]

SET: You know, it seems so fundamentally right that you would say, yes why am I still hammering spellings to a child who can't spell them? Like, we'll just do something that they can enjoy and succeed in, you know? So em but that, yeah, the, their voice in the IEP I think would be a big one there.

E: Yeah. Yeah. And then, uh, so what importance if any does student voice have in your own practice?

SET: So yeah, more so now than ever before. I would be kinda talking, talking with them about their their targets or the learning outcomes for their support. What would you like to do, you know. Like so what do you feel you need help with? You know, how do you think, can you think of any ways that I could help you? Obviously the younger kids find that difficult 'cause they don't know how you're going to help them read or help them, you know? So it's just then talking that through with him but trying to get them to tell you what you're going to do.

E: Yeah, yeah, that makes sense.

SET: Sometimes that needs some prompting, you know? They might say I'm fine, I don't need any help. And then you're like OK, we need to, you know, so you talk about different things or what kind of resources, maybe asking them what kind of resources they like, what are their preferred, you know, teaching approaches? Do they like, you know, using magnetic letters? Do they like using the tablets? Do they like using, you know, and finding out what they like and trying to use those then as motivators for their learning, so yeah.

E: And then last question on voice, em do you think there are any further opportunities to value encourage support or foster student voice in the primary school classroom and or in additional support?

SET: Yeah. So again kind of tying in with that again, there's always, always, always room for improvement. And then em like that, I suppose, I don't know if you've done anything on that universal design for learning, you know the UDL?

E: Yeah.

SET: So it talks a lot about, you know, children maybe having more voice in the learning. So

if you were saying right for this, you know, next week we're going to be learning about World War One, or whatever it is. What would you like to learn and let the children have some voice into what they would like to learn around the topic. Instead of it being this is what we're doing in World War One, this is what we've decided for the last three years in sixth class. And this is exactly what we're doing. And it just, you know that kind of and that you can see how that totally happens because it's just so much easier for everyone to roll out the stuff. But if the children *have* some input into what they want to learn from the topic, then they're way more likely to be engaged. Then you might have your learners who are a bit disengaged or who are struggling, and then there's suddenly, they've come up with something that they would really like, you know, like this is if you teach what they want you to teach, then they're definitely going to be more motivated and more engaged. You know, so that that's part of it. So yeah, so I suppose, well, what would the further opportunity would be, if teachers could somewhat let the children know what topics you're going to, they're going to be covering, and maybe let them have some input into what they would like to learn about that topic. Where it lends to it, you know, some topics don't lend to the occasion or the intervention, but you know?

E: Yeah, yeah. What came to mind there for me was, you know, the the KWL chart, what they know, what they want to know...

SET: Yeah.

E: You know, and you could kind of take that on board more, but I know it's not all the time...

SET: There's WILF and WALF, isn't that the other one as well. I can't remember what that acronym is, but I think it's, what we want to find out, what we did find out. You know there's kind of the, is that WILF AND WALF?

E: Eh yeah, so WALT is what, we are learning to and then WILF is what I'm looking for, isn't it?

SET: Yeah, so you know, but it's just getting them, but it's all of that em, you know all of that thinking around it. Instead of just like today we are doing this, and now doing this and it's just, you know.

E: Yeah definitely.

SET: You know, em yeah.

E: Yeah and then we'll move on to the last part about inclusion?

SET: Sure.

E: So I'm based on your experiences in primary education, do you think Irish primary skills practice inclusion appropriately?

SET: Emm [pause] yes, they I think there's been a great push on schools in recent years to have to really, you know, stand up and have a look at their policies around inclusion. Em I think there's a lot of work to be done even in a lot of schools. I think we're we're good here. We're progressive. But like, there's always the difference between having a policy and then actually having seeing it in practice every day, do you now? So it's one of those areas that like it's it's, it's difficult, it requires effort like, it takes proper effort by people all the time to insure that a school is highly inclusive, do you know? But I would always say, would say about this school is that, you know, we have taken children in here that other schools would have said no. We are not, that child, their needs are too complex, they won't fit, they won't suit. Like in fairness to like [REDACTED], whoever like they took we've had children here you know who who, we often ourselves talk. [REDACTED] but we've always managed. And the kids have done really well. And you know, the impact for the other children in their classes, to grow up and the kind of empathy that they

will learn that children like, and not to deviate, but like my son goes to a school in a village where the nineteen children in his class are all white, all from the village all typically developing, [REDACTED]. Like it's just, you know, it's like the antithesis to diversity. The problem is it's just a snapshot of his community, but it's not a snapshot of the real world. Where at least I find when we look in our classrooms it, you can see diversity and you can see the real world, you know. So when these children go on to secondary school and go to the workplace, you know they're going to encounter people with disability, they're going to counter people of different ethnicity. And they have had an experience growing up with that. So it's nothing new. And that's what it is. It's about normal, that's what inclusion is, is like you know, it's getting rid of that difference.

E: Yeah, definitely.

SET: Not seeing difference or not like it, just not caring about difference. And that is a big change and it's a massive cultural shift. You know, it's it's a generational shift, it's huge. But at least in big schools like ours, children are getting that when, you know they are growing up, their classrooms reflect variety at large.

E: Yeah, I think..

SET: Which is a very positive thing. Yeah, in an ideal word, every classroom would represent, but that said, now. Which is your next question coming up I think. Or one of the questions is when you're looking at, you know, the special schools and that you know, and it's like 'cause, which question was is it? Question two. So when looking at, you know the special education provided in Ireland, appropriateness, current format, whether there's strength and limitations of special ed. So a new strength would be, this general allocation model. It means that we can have the children with the greatest need, getting the greatest support. As opposed to those with having reports, like moving away from that medical model of, you have a diagnosis of X, therefore you get all the allocation of hours. Where now you can have a diagnosis, but if you're doing fine and need very little support, then you will get, your support will be appropriate. Where we could have a child that needs a lot of support, has no diagnosis. In the old model they'd be getting nothing. They're putting the responsibility back in the hands of the people who know the children best and that is a real strength. So that's something I think is, is really good. But, again on our course and a lot of the talk around inclusion and that the special schools for all the good work they're doing, it is just, it's almost the opposite to inclusion. Its exclusion. It's grouping children together by their difference. And saying on foot of this, you are now together, away from everybody else. So there is talk like, I'm not just in Ireland, but on a greater kind of like European level that there's going to be a move back, like that special schools and things are going to be waning now and there will be a look at integrating all children into the mainstream school. That's what they're talking about. But the problem with that is, that's wonderful in theory, but most of the school buildings in Ireland aren't fit for purpose, so if all of a sudden you had, you know, people in who need a sensory room or need wheelchair ramps or need, you know. So there is an awful lot to do to allow that to be a reality. But the point is, that's where the kind of mindset seems to be going.

E: Yeah.

SET: Is that this segregated education isn't, it's the absolute antithesis of inclusion and really needs to be looked at.

E: Yeah. Just when you said that, automatically I thought of some of the like, the children in our school, who I'd say if they were in a special school or in a special class, probably wouldn't have made as much progress as they're making.

SET: No. [in agreement]

E: You know, and they have.

SET: Yeah.

E: That way it kind of...

SET: And it's very difficult, as the class teacher. Like if you're gonna say to class teacher, OK come September now you're gonna have two children with down syndrome, one child with autism, you're going to have your another 20 children who are normally developing.

E: Yeah.

SET: But then you're gonna have two with social emotional behavior difficulties like. And if you're having that year on year, like everyone kind of goes I'm having this year, I have this group, oh my God next year, I'll have a uh a handier number.

E: Yeah.

SET: But this is what she could be looking at year on year.

E: I know yeah.

SET: But if you had the right supports in place, you know if you have enough SNAs. If you have enough SET teachers who are offering maybe in-class support instead of withdrawal as well. You know, like it's all about. But like none of these things happen overnight, and God knows it might not happen in my career, but like. Yeah, but that seems to be the talk of it. It's it's having that shift, you know.

E: Yeah.

SET: Em, so that will be with regard that end. What was three? What does the commitment to..

E: Yeah, so what does the commitment of inclusion in primary school, ask of you firstly in respect of the relationships between you and your students?

SET: Yeah. So what it asks me as the teacher, I think is that it's to be committed to inclusion, that I need to get to know that pupil really well. Get to know. Like I said, their strengths, their likes, what motivates them. What their desires are for their own targets, their learning outcomes and taking all of that and taking a strengths-based approach to the planning for them. And like we've talked about. Like not that deficit-chasing or deficit-focused approach to planning their targets, you know what I mean? So em that will be one of the main things as well. And then in the way that we practiced care for inclusion as well, you have to be very mindful of kind of family circumstances that whole set up as well. You know, where you have maybe children with additional learning needs or additional health needs, you know there can be a lot of pressures and that at home. Like you need to be very mindful of how you're going to families with suggestions and you know, like what might seem like an easy fix for you may not be an easy fix at all for the families so. Em you know, so so by practicing care for the child, I would look at it as a whole unit, you know and looking at the, and in and round and deciding the best way to to tackle anything. On that care issue again, like if you have families maybe from different countries, you know there are a lot of different traditions different em you know, ethos around things. So you just need to, be careful with it and mindful of it.

E: Yeah.

SET: So and then.

E: And then the last one is uh, in the importance you afford to student voice, what commit, what does a commitment to inclusion in primary education ask of you?

SET: Yeah, well, that would be that every voice is equal and every voice is valued. So that the, and that the voice of your, for me in special ed that the, the voice of my child, that (a) that I am listening, (b) that I'm making sure that everyone else is listening and if I need to do something to help the pupil you know, articulate their opinions or their views, or you know, if

they feel like they're in class, but they feel like they cannot contribute, or they feel like they can't or whatever is holding them back. Then it would be, I would feel it's my job to try to look at how could I help them.

E: Yeah.

SET: To overcome that, to help *make* offering their opinion, or their voice like how to make that easier. So it might be in a pre-recording, it might be via a video, it might be through seesaw, it might. You know, there are other ways! Like it's to move away from that traditional, but you have to stand up and tell, like top of the class with your show and tell or you have to put your hand up to be heard. You know like, 'cause some of these children will never do these things, you know. And if they feel that that's, if that's the only way they were afforded an opportunity to express their opinion or show their work or represent themselves, then that's pretty closed and that's not great like. So again, that would tie a lot with the UDL and that kind of modes of representation, and you know, that kind of thought that some.

E: Yeah, just providing different ways to do share their voice.

SET: Yeah, exactly. And normally it's that, 'cause I don't, I always very heavily look at things through a SET lens like, but I mean normally what can help our kids here can help at least five or six or ten more in the class who aren't coming out to SET, but could really do with another way, you know? And so yeah, that would be it.

E: Yeah.

SET: Ellen, I feel like I'm blabbering. I hope it's OK.

E: No, absolutely not. No, thanks so much. I think, uh, if, do you have anything else you want to add or?

SET: No. Uh, no. I think it's great. I think your topic is really brilliant and very worthwhile and very in tying very, I don't mean on trend for want of a..

E: [laughs]

SET: But it is what it's all about now.

E: Yeah.

SET: Like that masters or the post-grad masters that I'm doing is all, that is, it doesn't matter what we do. It all stems around kind of inclusion and em that strength-based model that's where it's all at you know. So there is a lot of em, there is a lot of literature out there on it, I'm sure you have no problem.

E: Too much [laughs]

SET: Em ut yeah the UDL was a big thing that they're into as well on this. Em I don't know, but again it will be looking, it's very much for the class as well, more so than just SET. You know what I mean? It's more like bringing everyone along. [REDACTED]

E: Yeah. Yeah, I'll, you know what, I'll stop recording.

SET: Yes.

E: One sec.

Master of Education (Research in Practice)
Ellen Butterly 21251716

Audio Transcript for Interview SNA

Recorded: 22nd of February 2022

Time: 14:09

Duration: 18:32

E: Ellen

SNA: Special needs assistant colleague

E: OK. So in regards to the teacher, SNA, student relationship, what importance do you place on the type of relationship between a teacher or SNA and the student?

SNA: In my opinion, the type of relationship between a teacher, SNA, student is of the utmost importance for various reasons. It is very important for the teacher and SNA to communicate with each other on a regular basis regarding their views and how the student is progressing in class and also to discuss any problems he or she may be having, in a relaxed, cordial professional relationship. The SNA usually gets to spend up to four years with her students, so she will know the student very well. And will be able to pass on to the teacher a lot of information that, previous information about the student, which will be helpful to all concerned. If all three share their experiences then this helps everyone involved. They can discuss various things about the student, how well he is interacting with other children on the yard, if he is playing with different children, that he, that he can or cannot call them by name. If there are particular problems on the yard, these can be discussed if everyone works together that everything runs smoothly.

E: Uh-huh. And then number 2, em how important is the student, teacher or SNA relationship in your role in primary education? So for you, as the SNA.

SNA: It's really repeating myself again

E: Yeah, a lot of them are, do repeat yourself. Yeah, that's fine.

SNA: Yeah. It's just the same thing. It's important to discuss what what you are doing with the child with the teacher and vice versa? And to make note of any problems that the student might be having, so that every everybody can work together to sort them out.

E: Yeah. And can you think about what is a good type of relationship between between the teacher/SNA and student? Please describe.

SNA: Em, a good type of relationship between teacher SNA and student is one where all three come together for the students benefit. With the teacher, the support-teacher, and the SNA explain all instructions to the student clearly and slowly and repeat if necessary. Reassure the student if he or she becomes upset. Be patient, use small cues, etc. to help the student. The SNA is a non-teaching role. They provide guidance to the student and support them in the classroom. The student and the SNA get to know each other very well because of their close proximity and time spent together. This in turn creates a trust between them, yeah.

E: Yeah. And what are the risks in primary education if the relationship between the SNA and the student is poor?

SNA: If the relationship is unpure between teacher, SNA, student, then the student is the one who will lose out the most as he or she is not getting the health care and attention they deserve. A bad atmosphere in any working environment creates a stress among the workers, which in turn results in little being achieved or round. Absolutely yeah, a friendly cooperative working environment is essential in order to get the best results.

E: Uh-huh.

SNA: Both parties, if they, both parties interact and liaise with each other to, to keep teacher SNA and student aware of progress and also of problems.

E: Okay and then what are your thoughts on power or power dynamics between the SNA, the teacher or the SNA, and the students in primary education?

SNA: In a primary school setting with SNA and a student, teacher, etc. em the teacher, of course, is the person who holds the most power, as she is the person, he or she is the person, who is responsible for teaching the students, getting their work done, and helping the students to achieve good work, results to the best of their ability. However, it is very important for the teacher to include *everyone* in the classroom, which makes for a great working professional relationship, while at the same time the SNA should also respect the teacher and know that the SNAs role is a non-teaching role and follows the teachers instructions. That's it.

E: OK. And then so the next few questions there about care. So the first one is, uh, what are your thoughts on the importance of care in primary education?

SNA: Uh, my first thought would be that in order to do any job where children are involved, you need to have a caring nature. You need to be empathetic, kind, understanding and patient, to name a few. You need to be able to listen, to have good communication skills in order to help the student to the best of your ability. An SNAs primary role is to be there for the care needs of the students.

E: And then what practices are actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care in primary education?

SNA: I think inclusion in the classroom, good communication skills, being able to listen. Again, empathy, patience and understanding, and adaptability. Loving what you do.

E: Uh-huh.

SNA: That's it.

E: Yeah. And then, what does care look like in your professional practice?

SNA: Em to put it this way in words.

E: Yeah.

SNA: It means to be patient, to be a good listener, to be able to connect with the students, helping children to learn educationally, emotionally and personally. Teaching children life skills like zipping up their coats, doing up their laces, consoling them if they fall. Children learn to trust people that they know care about them and care for them.

E: And then in respect of students who receive additional support, what practices or actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care? So it's, this is probably going to overlap similarly .

SNA: So really, yeah well, yeah, yeah. As I have stated earlier, loving working with children, taking time to include children with special needs in the classroom and activities, and in the classroom activities and outside of it. Taking the time to listen to the child, students showing empathy and understanding, organising visual charts to enable the student to communicate his or her feelings, using audio cues and tactile cues to reassure the student, being patient and kind.

E: And then do you think there are any further opportunities for care in the primary school classroom or in additional support?

SNA: I do, yes, and this one I'm going to use an example.

E: Yeah.

SNA: There's always room for improvement. And on my first day with a small child on the autistic spectrum some years ago, he ran into a corner and wanted to stay there. He was very unhappy. I bent down beside him and asked him what was wrong. He said in frustration, gesturing with his little hands and arms. Why does nobody ever listen to me? He was not yet six years old, I told him I was listening and he started to talk. I told him, I understand, and I could see the relief in his little face.

E: Aww.

SNA: It's true. Children, children need to have the time to listen to them and to understand and to understand how they are feeling. We worked together for four years. It wasn't all plain sailing, far from it. But he knew and I knew that we understood each other and I never felt that we couldn't work out whatever was bothering him.

E: Yeah.

SNA: We talked about it, we compromised and we just got on with it. I personally think that anyone involved with children with special needs should educate themselves about their condition. So that they can understand more how to approach certain situations.

E: Absolutely.

SNA: There's a right way, and there's absolutely a wrong way. And knowing which is right and which is wrong is what will decide the outcome of that particular episode.

E: Uh-huh, brilliant. And then the next ones are about voice. So em I'll just read the, article 12 of the United Nations, of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child States that children have a right to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity. Do you agree that children should have this right? And do you think it's respected in primary education?

SNA: Yes, I absolutely think children should have this right. Children are very clever little beings. They understand a lot more than we give them credit for and are entitled to their own opinion. I'm not so sure that it is respected *enough* at times.

E: Uh-huh, yeah.

SNA: But that's the second, second.

E: No. Yeah, it yeas yeah, yeah. Do you think it's respected in primary education? Yeah.

SNA: And then there's another.

E: Oh, sorry, two. So what, yeah, what em what activities or practices, if any, provide students with the opportunity to form and express their views in accordance with their abilities in primary education?

SNA: Unfortunately, as far as I am aware, I don't really know that many eh situations. Other than, if they're having debates.

E: Yeah.

SNA: And and and and maybe when there's an assembly that they you know, can speak up. But it's not enough. They need, children need to be able to get confidence and learn how to do public speaking. Eh, the old saying when we were children, we we were not, not only were we not encouraged to speak up, we were told not to speak up. And the old saying "children should be seen and not heard", was the attitude that there was usually.

E: Yeah.

SNA: Now I think it's a great thing to try and instill confidence into young children at an early age because it means so much in life, to be able to get up there and just give your opinion or speak in public.

E: Uh-huh, yeah.

SNA: It's a huge asset in life.

E: Yeah and then, eh so number three, is kind of, it's, it's

SNA: Same again

E: Similar, but it's just about additional support yeah.

SNA: I said, I said same, more or less the same again I think children might not like to speak out in case of any repercussions.

E: OK. Yeah.

E: And then what importance eh if any, does student voice have in your practice?

SNA: Again [sighs], I don't think this opportunity arises very often, if at all. I do think that students, if students had the opportunity to voice their own, their opinions, it would be a great thing. Eh why not. They're children, they're little adults and they have as much a right to their opinion as as we have to ours.

E: Uh-huh. And then do you think there are any further opportunities to value, encourage support or foster student voice in the primary school classroom or in additional support?

SNA: This is a very short answer because I absolutely do. I think there's lots and lots. But again, this would all have to be encouraged from the top.

E: From the top down yeah.

SNA: Because you wouldn't want to be seen to be interfering. It would be something that should be organised to help with, a lot more debates, a lot more of still children up front and, you know.

E: Yeah.

SNA: Talking out, not just from behind the microphone where we only hear their voice, but right in front of, of a public audience.

E: Yeah.

SNA: To give them confidence, they need confidence in life.

E: And then are we OK to move onto the ones about inclusion?

SNA: Yeah.

E: So based on your experiences in primary education, do you think Irish primary schools practice inclusion appropriately?

SNA: Well, eh [pause]. They do practice inclusion, to a certain degree. But children with special needs well, where they do practice it is, children with special needs can now attend main, mainscreen, mainstream schools.

E: Yeah.

SNA: With help from SNAs, from resource teachers etc.

E: Yeah.

SNA: But to me this only scratches the surface.

E: Yeah

SNA: It's great. It's great for wheelchair users to be able to go to mainstream schools. But lots of schools, if not the majority, don't have proper wheelchair access.

E: Yeah.

SNA: Parents of children with special needs fight a constant battle and their children what they need to be properly included in the mainstream.

E: Yeah, yeah definitely um-hum. And do you think special education provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format and what are the strengths and limitations of special education?

SNA: OK, again, there is inclusion to a degree, but it has a long way to go. We still have people who believe that children with special needs should be in a "special school" [uses finger gestures]. So until this idea is no longer held, we still have work to do.

E: Yeah.

SNA: Phrases like "I never signed up for this", will hopefully have gone away by then.

E: Uh-huh. And then eh what does a committed, what does a commitment to inclusion in primary education, ask of you? So firstly, in respect of the relationships between you and your students?

SNA: Yeah, I may have left out a piece there about the strengths and limitations.

E: Oh, do you want to say them now? Yeah.

SNA: Yeah. Thanks. The strengths is, there is ongoing eh work in government circles providing SNAs in the mainstream setting for children with special needs to get an education that they deserve. But there are limitations regarding access to SNAs, long waiting lists for children waiting to be assessed. Huge waiting list to access resources such as OTs, speech therapy, special equipment, etc.

E: Yeah.

SNA: And then there's number three

E: Yeah, that's definitely huge em limitation.

SNA: Yeah.

E: Yeah. So then number three. What does a commitment to inclusion primary education ask of you? Firstly, in respect of the relationships between you and your students?

SNA: To ensure that every child in your care has equal access to a good education, and to achieve to the best of their ability. First to be aware of specific needs of each individual child in the class. Displayed clearly timetables and visual timetables.

E: Yeah.

SNA: Clear rules of the classroom to be displayed. Be consistent. Praise when praise is due. Create a happy, calm classroom where children are ready and willing to learn.

E: Yeah. And then what does a commitment to inclusion in primary education ask of you in the way you practice care?

SNA: It is important for students to feel free to voice their opinions. It makes them feel more a part of the community or the class. It develops self-esteem, and in turn teachers will have a greater understanding and knowledge of their students, their views, their culture, and it will create, it will promote discussions in the classroom, which in turn will develop their engaging skills with people, taking part in debates or public speaking. Overall the student will be more confident in themselves and their abilities.

E: Um-hum, and then finally em.

SNA: [ruffles through her notes] is that everything?

E: Eh no, you're OK. Eh, well, it kind of, it probably overlaps again. It's just the last one. What does a commitment to inclusion in primary education ask of you in the importance you afford to student voice?

SNA: Oh, student voice. I had that somewhere didn't I?

E: Yeah you did.

SNA: I'll go back to voice, because I did have it here [looks through notes]. It's, it's repeating myself.

E: Yeah, no a lot of them overlap yeah.

SNA: Yeah they do, I do believe that students should have their voice heard.

E: Yeah.

SNA: Because after all, they're human beings like us.

E: Yeah.

SNA: They understand *a lot more*.

E: Definitely.

SNA: Than we give them credit for. And they're entitled to have their own opinion heard. I'm not so sure that it is respected enough at times because children are probably afraid to say too much in case of repercussions. And you know the only thing really, as I say before it's not true nowadays. Thanks be to God, children do seem to be able to give their opinions anyway, thanks be to God. But we were never encouraged to give our opinions. We were encouraged to stay quiet.

E: There's definitely a more, a change!

SNA: My God. Yeah. So we, stay quiet, the children can be. You'd often hear it dictated, "children should be seen and not heard".

E: Yeah.

SNA: "Spare the rod and spoil the child" was another one that came from hierarchy. Spare the rod and spoil the child, so you know. I mean, so you come into these schools now and I, as an adult from when I was at school. And it's just a pleasure [smiles] to see what they have, the all these things that the children have.

E: Yeah.

SNA: From from the smallest little thing, to all the colours, the crayons, the books, they, everything.

E: Just seeing them enjoy school, yeah.

SNA: It's just a joy.

E: Yeah.

SNA: And and and they love it. And I watch them. And you know, they they they are very children are happy at school.

E: Yeah. And that's the main thing, isn't it?

SNA: That's the main thing.

E: Yeah.

SNA: They're happy, and they're in a lovely happy, happy learning environment. In a lovely classroom. So colourful and so everything.

E: Yeah.

SNA: It's just gorgeous.

E: Yeah.

SNA: You know, I think it's huge improvements in 50 years.

E: Awh yeah, definitely!

SNA: Huge!

E: Yeah. OK. That's all. Then I'm going to stop.

Appendix D.2 Transcript of Interviews for Educational Professionals

Master of Education (Research in Practice)
Ellen Butterly 21251716

Audio Transcript for Interview EP1
Recorded the 2nd of February 2022
Time: 14:00
Duration: 38:46

**Note: The transcript for this interview has not been included as an appendix in accordance with their personal preference. Quotational data included in the thesis from the transcript of this interview was checked and approved by the individual prior to its addition to the thesis.

Master of Education (Research in Practice)
Ellen Butterly 21251716

Audio Transcript for Interview EP2
Recorded the 23rd of March 2022
Time: 14:03
Duration: 24m 43s

E: Ellen

P: Lecturer in inclusive and special education

E: OK, so the first question, em the Teaching Council seeks to develop positive relationships within the school community that are characterised by professional integrity and judgment. In regard to the teacher or SNA/student relationship. What importance do you place on the type of relationship between the teacher or SNA and a student?

P: Well, I suppose it's the cornerstone of everything. Umm. No matter what content knowledge you have, no matter what knowledge of things like DEIS or additional needs or, no matter what knowledges you have, everything still comes back. The starting point is always the relationship with students.

E: Yeah.

P: So the better the relationship you have. The more successful learning environment that you are creating in terms of you getting to know the learner and the learner trusting and feeling comfortable to learn.

E: Yeah, I agree. And can you think about what is a good type of relationship between a teacher or SNA and a student? And can you describe that please?

P: Well, uh. I suppose for me personally as a teacher, when I was in the classroom and even, well, there's less opportunity to do it now in higher education, but certainly as a teacher in the classroom, and more specifically as a resource teacher at the time. My starting point at the beginning of the year, or when working with the new child was taking the time to get to know what they like, what they don't like and not necessarily related to learning, literally what makes them tick. So is it who their friends are, what they like to watch on TV, what they do outside of school. Because I think you can teach through all of that. I would focus very much on their strengths and adopt a strengths-based approach.

E: Yeah.

P: So for me, you know, students often say to me as a teacher educator now, but you know, I'd like to know more about autism or I'd like to know more about, you know, dyslexia or whatever. And I have concerns about that because while that information is relevant it's generic to a group that are not eh, homogeneous. So um when you know one child with autism, you know one child. So for me, it comes back to that relationship. It comes back to the relationship that you have with that individual learner.

E: Yeah, and that's interesting you said that because I'm I'm trying to make my practice, like, less deficit-focused and trying to change more towards the the strengths-based focus. That's what I'm trying to kind of research at the minute.

P: OK, OK. And and so therefore the starting point has to be to know their strengths, hasn't it? [laughs]

E: Yeah, exactly. [laughs]

P: Yeah, yeah.

E: And the next question, what are the risks in primary education if the relationship between the teacher or the SNA and the student is poor?

P: Ohh [gasps] risks are huge. I mean, you know, people often say that, you know, doctors hold lives in their hands. I think teachers hold futures.

E: Yeah, absolutely.

P: And [sighs] I think the relation, if the relationship is the cornerstone, then you know we have, we are responsible for young people's futures so. It's absolutely detrimental if that relationship is not good.

E: Uh-huh.

E: And what are your thoughts on power or power dynamics between a teacher or an SNA and the students in primary education?

P: I mean, they're there. Power exists in every, you know, you could argue that power exists between the teacher and the SNA. I mean, you know, between the teacher and the principal between, you know, power is is there. Em I think it's, how that is is used em, I mean, I would be a huge advocate of student voice. An empowering students to take ownership and control of their own learning and having a voice in what they learn and how they learn. Em so I suppose I would focus more on empower rather than power. But it's naive to say that power doesn't exist because it does.

E: Yeah I agree. OK, em the next few questions are about care. And the teaching council places care as one of the four ethical values which underpin the standards of teaching knowledge, skill, competence and conduct in their code of professional conduct. So what are your thoughts on the importance of care in primary education?

P: Well, again, I suppose you know, care is a central part. It's kind of back to the relationship piece nearly, isn't it? I mean, you know, we have the teaching role and we have care as a huge part because it has that relationship. I mean, how often do we recognise a child that comes into school, maybe in bad form, you know, we don't know what has happened before they come in. We don't know what they've had to deal with. So our care and nurturing role is really, really important. We're not there as curriculum providers. The curriculum is important. But I mean the caring part is essential because it looks after the emotional well-being of our learners and that's central to enable them to be able to learn. So I think care is huge, has a huge role to play.

E: I agree yeah. And then what practices are actions do you think demonstrate or reflect care in primary education?

P: Showing an interest in the child, showing an interest in their strengths, in their concerns in em wanting the best for them.

E: Yeah.

P: Helping them to reach their potential in the broader sense, not just academically.

E: Yeah.

P: Em, yeah that we put their welfare first. That we, that we know every child and that we know their strengths. We know what makes them [pause] tick. And I think it's probably one of the biggest things you can do as a teacher. Certainty of former principal of mine. I admired her hugely because I used to always say she knows every single child and can get the best out

of them cause she actually she cares about them individually. Not just as a group, but it's not just about covering the curriculum.

E: Yeah. And then in respect of students who receive additional support, what practices or actions, do you think, demonstrate or reflect care for those students?

P: I don't think it's any different than other students. I mean it's it's the same thing, it's, you know, if they have physical care needs, obviously, em you know that those needs may be additional to some other learners, but no more than you know, a learner without diagnosed additional needs, may have a broken leg at one point or whatever, and so they need additional care. But em, no, I think it's the same starting point em, probably of more importance when it comes to learners with additional needs would be eh being involved in a multidisciplinary approach, reaching out, and so getting to know the parents, involving them, getting to know any other professionals involved with the child.

E: Yeah.

P: And em ensuring, like being proactive in that and making sure I understand the child. And em what supports are needed em. So that's probably slightly different than those without additional needs.

E: Yeah. And do you think there are any further opportunities for care in the primary school classroom or in additional support?

P: Further opportunities for care?

E: Yes.

P: Eh [pause] I think it has to be at the core of everything eh we have to put it as a priority like em there's no point in the students knowing how to do long division, but actually not caring about themselves and others and not just those in their class, in school and community, but internationally, so I think care is a central, central components depend depends how you're defining care I suppose, but I would see it as supporting their, enabling them to become active citizens and be empathetic and develop empathy. Em and I and I do think the curriculum allows for that em, but it needs to be prioritised I suppose.

E: Yeah, absolutely. And the next few questions are about voice. So em article 12 of the United Nations Convention of the Rights of the Child states that the child, states that children have a right to form their own views and to freely express their views in accordance with their age and maturity And so the 1st question is, do you agree that children should have this right? And do you think it's respected in primary education?

P: I absolutely do think it's a right. Em I think it's fully respected? Not always, em no. Em again, I think our curriculum is flexible enough that it allows teachers to be able to focus on student voice. Now we could argue that it could go a step further, but I think as teachers we have the scope to do that. Em I think there can be a bit of fear, maybe sometimes with teachers, that if they give over that voice too much to students, then how would they control or move, move forward. Em but you see some great examples in schools in terms of student councils now, meaningful student councils. Em, how students get to choose em how they demonstrate their learning through differentiation by choice. Em I think it's getting better.

E: Yeah.

P: Lots of room for improvement, but I 100% believe in it, yeah.

E: And so what activities or practices, if any, provides students with the opportunity to form an express their views in accordance with their abilities in primary education?

P: Yeah, I mean that's how long is a piece of string having? [laughs] I mean it goes from everything like, offering them choices at every level, you know em, from showing like a, as I mentioned, showing how they demonstrate the learning. So do you want to write an essay on it? Or do you want to draw a picture or do a podcast? Or you know, so by giving that choice, em even choice in terms of being involved and where they might go on a school tour, choice in the type of uniform that should be in a school. Choice in, I think we can give choice with a lot of things. And again, I think it's something that teachers are a little bit fearful of. I think it needs to start small, if students aren't used to being given choice. Em so we can give them a choice between X&Y, whereas then we would hope to broaden that where they would have further choices or even suggested choice, suggest an option. Em, yeah I'm not sure if that answers what you've asked me, does it?

E: Yeah no it does yeah. And em, so then it's kind of similarly, what activities or practices provide students with the opportunity to form an express their views in accordance with their abilities in additional support education?

P: OK em [gasps] again, it can include things like differentiation by choice, it can include lots of use of visuals, too, for nonverbal children to be able to, em that they have a voice. That they can choose, just because they can't speak doesn't mean they can't choose. Em, em [pause] sorry, I lost track of my trail of thought em, I think there's always a way to give a student choice and voice. And if we're talking about students with severe and profound needs, then we, we empower them through their advocates. So maybe as a teacher or an SNA were an advocate, or maybe it's through the parents, and we empower the parents and the families to enable, to enable the student to make a choice. Eh because no matter how severe the need, it's usually possible to find out what the child or young person likes and doesn't like. I mean that can be as simple as music, they're reaction in their eyes em you know, so I think it's using multi-sensory approaches to, to access their voice. Em, but there's there's always a way to access voice and uh and again, OK, it might take a little bit more time, but once you get used to the practice, I think it em, I think it becomes quicker and certainly more meaningful.

E: Yeah, I agree. And em do you think there are any further opportunities to value, encourage support or foster student voice in the primary school classroom or in additional support?

P: Absolutely. I mean, I think while there are some good pockets of practice and we've student councils in some schools em certainly a lot more could be done. Em and I think it starts with a conversation around whether we value it well, first of all, ensuring that people know that students have a right, as you said under Article 12, but also how we can foster that and create a culture of it, and how some professional learning within schools could focus on em giving students a voice. Em so no, I definitely think a lot more could be done em and probably even taking something like Laura Lundy's model of student voice and kind of looking at the various ways of how voice can be given Em and kind of working with teachers to understand that to enable them to to do it with with their learners could be very powerful.

E: Yeah. And then the last few questions are on inclusion. So based on your experience in primary education, do you think primary schools practice inclusion appropriately? So in Irish schools sorry.

P: Ohhh, that's a tricky one. Em again, I suppose it goes back to how we defining inclusion. Does it mean that the children are just physically present in school? Or does it mean that they feel like they belong and that they're achieving, that they participate in their outcomes? Em I

think we've moved a long way in terms of children being physically present. Whether children feel like they belong, I don't think we can give a black and white answer to that in terms of generally across primary schools. I think there's huge variety em, across schools and context em I definitely think we've made huge improvements. But I think there's room for improvement.

E: Yeah, I agree. And do you think em special education provided, provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format?

P: Hmmm [laughs]. Well, we've supposedly moved from the deficit model em in 2017 em where it's students can now get support without having a label. I'm not sure how far the practice on the ground has moved from that. Em, policy certainty have. Em, sorry, just say that question again for me Ellen, please?

E: So do you think special education provided in Ireland is appropriate in its current format?

P: Yeah, I, umm, you know when that model came out in 2017 and the policy advice on it was that there was to be significant professional learning needed for teachers and schools – that didn't follow. So I think in the pilot schools where it happened and schools were supported in how to do it, that it worked quite well. So in some schools, the new model is working well, but in a lot of schools it's very similar practice but just tweaked. So em, so it's still quite deficit in its approach. Umm but I, I mean it's huge, I mean, we don't have multidisciplinary teams, we don't have access to those services in schools. Again we have a pilot going on at the moment in that but em no! For the amount of money that we spent on special education. It would be lovely to take that budget, keep the same budget and re-envision what's happening, to better meet the needs.

E: Yeah.

P: Of those, uh, with additional needs. Em yeah.

E: And final question, what are the strengths and limitations of special education in its current format in Ireland?

P: Yeah, I suppose similar to whatever I've said there. I suppose strengths there is a recognition of some learners needing additional support. The money is being spent. And a lot of money is being invested in it. The challenges, I don't necessarily think it's being invested appropriately. I still think we have a deficit approach to a lot of it. Em so for example, if I was principal in a school I'd kind of like to be given a budget and to use it the way that I would want to use it, so I would prioritize professional learning for teachers and I would also have access to multidisciplinary teams. As distinct from the current system where you're just looking for more resource teachers and more SNA's and I'm not sure, I'm not convinced that that is the right way forward. Em and I think our resource teachers could be better utilized than they are currently being utilized. Em so they could be working with teachers more with a focus on professional learning around it, so enhancing capacity within the school rather than most, if not all in some cases, all of their time being spent in direct teaching with those with additional needs. I think our classrooms could be more inclusive. And we could have maybe more flexible pull out classrooms, rather than all the special classes we have for autism. The growing number of those, I'm certainly not convinced of the merit of that. And that's not to say that learners with autism and don't have specific needs, but arguably, if teachers were supported better and we had flexible withdrawal classrooms for all learners, it just may be a better way to go. And and we're seeing examples of that in other jurisdictions such as Canada, New Brunswick, em where there's been working with it for a while. And I'm not saying their system is perfect. Em, but it's certainly more inclusive than ours is.

E: Yeah. OK, well that's that's all uh, questions that I have have to ask you. I don't know if there's anything else you want to add or say?

P: No, eh don't think so, I think while, maybe while I've talked about the negative side of it there, I think we've come a long way and it is journey. Inclusion is a journey and it's a process. So there'll always be challenges. Like we get a new model, it solves some issues and there'll be, it'll create new challenges so while we are continuing to invest and support em we continue to have problems. I think that's just the nature of any system really, but em yeah so, well done on researching it.

E: Thank you for taking the time for doing the interview with me.

P: No problem at all, Ellen.

E: Thank you. Bye bye.

P: OK. Take care. Bye.