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(Research in Practice)

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"BUT WHERE ARE YOU *REALLY* FROM?"

CELEBRATING DIVERSITY IN THE CLASSROOM THROUGH VISUAL ARTS,

UNDERPINNED BY A CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE FRAMEWORK

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Abstract

The primary classroom is a space where every child should feel like they belong. As a teacher I feel it is my role to welcome a new group of children every September, get to know them and develop a relationship with them before teaching begins. The purpose of this self-study Action Research project was to enhance my practice and create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity. Visual Art was selected for this subject-based approach to research. The study took place in an Educate Together National School in Leinster with a sample of 23 sixth-class children aged 11-13 years old. A conceptual framework created for this research underpinned by Culturally Relevant Teaching and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. The study took place over a twelve-week period and was divided into three research cycles covering different areas. Methods for data collection were pre and post-intervention questionnaires, samples of children's work, observations, children's reflective journals and a teacher reflective journal.

The findings from this study emphasise the role of the teacher in implementing a culturally responsive framework to create a sense of belonging in an environment that celebrates diversity. The importance of providing children and teachers with time and space to reflect was identified and it was suggested that before children can accept and celebrate others' cultures they should become familiar with their own first. Visual Art was selected for this research as it aligned with my educational values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration* and it was found to provide opportunities for communication, appealing to children with English as an additional language and to those who experience difficulties with literacy. I believe this research has improved my practice and in doing so my educational values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration* will be a principal tenet in my daily practice moving forward.

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I would like to acknowledge and thank the Board of Management, Principal and school leadership members of the research school for allowing me to complete his study. To the younger participants in this research, thank you for your enthusiasm, creativity and hard work at every stage of this process. You were the motivation for this study, thank you for embarking on this journey with me.

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Finally, thank you to my critical friends and the members of my validation group. From the beginning of this project, you have provided me with time and space to discuss, debate and clarify understandings. Our conversions have had a huge influence on this study. I am very lucky to be surrounded by such kind and selfless people.

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LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AR	Action Research
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
GDPR	General Data Protection Regulation
CRT	Culturally Relevant Teaching
CRP	Culturally Responsive Pedagogy
CPD	Continuous Professional Development
RRJ	Researcher Reflective Journal
CRJ	Child Reflective Journal
CSO	Central Statistics Office
DPCF	Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (2020)
BOM	Board of Management
CR	Culturally Responsive

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

"We (educators) can begin to become lazy in our thinking and believe that what we are doing, in our everyday work, is of a good standard, simply because we did it yesterday, last week or last year" (Sullivan, Glenn, Roche & McDonagh, 2016:48)

1.0 INTRODUCTION

As a teacher, I feel that I face the challenge of navigating 'cultural wars' in my classroom. The children in my class are growing up and living through a divisive moment in society and avoidance is not an option for me. In the summer of 2021, images of Black Lives Matter marches that challenged perceptions of racism flooded their social media, restrictions due to the Covid-19 pandemic highlighted the inequalities in our society and the Tokyo 2020 Summer Olympic Games offered a platform to promote discussions around gender inequality. "Schools and teachers face a growing challenge to recognise and respond to this diversity" (Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (DPCF), 2020: 3). I feel that we are currently operating in a system where diversity is something we want to promote and celebrate yet many of us as educators do not feel fully equipped to do so. The purpose of this self-study project is to explore the ways in which the researcher can create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity using Visual Art as a conduit.

In this chapter, I introduce the research study and provide an overview of the subject areas chosen. This is an Action Research (AR) project; its primary focus is on examining and enhancing my practice informed by my values. This study begins by outlining my desire to celebrate all children by improving how I teach Visual Art. Next, I will define my educational values. My educational

values of *Voice*, *Creativity* and *Collaboration* guided my research. They motivated the type of research I conducted, underpinned the rationale and influenced the interventions chosen. I will provide a description of the research context and discuss my role in the study through a personal position statement. Finally, the structure of this thesis is presented, providing an overview and outline of the following chapters..

1.1 RESEARCH QUESTION

How can I use Visual Art to create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity?

1.2 RESEARCH AIMS

The purpose of this AR study is to develop my teaching of Visual Art to create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity using a conceptual framework. Through discussion with my thesis supervisor, critical friends and peers, I established that one of my main goals I sought to achieve in doing this research was to better understand who the children are and how best to acknowledge this when teaching them. Visual Art is a subject area I am very passionate about as it aligns with my personal interests and offers children the opportunities to express themselves creatively. It is a subject that I believe is under-utilised in the Irish classroom and my hope for this research was to highlight the rich potential of Visual Art in children's lives,. Maxine Green (1980: 317), posited that the arts, when invested in, have the ability to 'overcome the either/ors, the separations that exist' and to unite and find a common ground for all. I feel my values are mirrored in her words.

The **four main aims** that guided me through this AR study were as follows:

1. To create a conceptual framework drawing on Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy to underpin my teaching of Visual Art.

2. To live closer to my values of *Voice*, *Creativity* and *Collaboration.*

3. To expand my teaching of Visual Art to include every child.

4. To develop a deeper understanding of who the children in my class are.

Gloria Ladson-Billings and Geneva Gay are two significant figures in cultural-centered education. Their work on Culturally Relevant Teaching (CRT) and Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (CRP) respectively have influenced this study and, as a result, my teaching. In addition, their works have been influential in how I have supported the children during this research and have challenged my perceptions of student learning and academic success, especially for the children from diverse cultural and linguistic backgrounds..

For the purpose of this research, I created a conceptual framework drawing on both Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy. This framework will be referred to as the Culturally Responsive (CR) framework. I will critique both pedagogies' literature and explain my reasoning behind their selection in later chapters. The CR framework allowed me to situate my research within my values and allowed this values-laden approach to research to occur (Sullivan et al., 2016). It is my hope that this research will not only improve my practice and expand my teaching of Visual Art to include all children, but it will also act as a catalyst to inform future development and study in this area.

1.3 INFLUENCE OF VALUES

The influence of values is in the foreground of AR philosophy. Throughout the process of this AR study, my educational values have emerged and developed. This process began during summer school in August 2021. In an extract from my Researcher Reflective Journal (RRJ) (October, 2021) I documented the evolving nature of my educational values. "*I am grateful that I started this reflective process while I was away from the classroom as it brought to light the idealistic view that I can have on my teaching and classroom practice.*" I had just finished the job interview process when I originally wrote about my values in my journal in August 2021. Reflecting on this, I think I was still in the mode of trying to 'sell myself' and as a result, presented an idealistic view of my teaching. Only when I returned to the classroom and continued documenting and reflecting did my values come to the fore. As part of this research, I wanted to identify, affirm and integrate my values. I hoped to develop an understanding of the role they play in who I am as a teacher and their impact on my teaching (McNiff, 2002).

The educational values I determined to be integral to my beliefs and practices are *Voice, Creativity and Collaboration.*

Voice

Student voice is at the forefront of my teaching. I genuinely believe the best thing I can do for the children in is listen to them and I strive to create an environment where students feel heard and respected. My experience of primary education was predominantly didactic, teacher-led methodologies; as a student, very few opportunities to share ideas and opinions were provided. When reflecting on this experience, I feel it may have resulted in an unmotivated student body that lacked curiosity. This strongly influences my teaching as I frequently remind myself of the "Be

who you needed when you were younger" philosophy and place significant importance on student voice in my classroom. Ladson-Billing identifies that from dialectical relationships; knowledge emerges. She further explains that "rather than the voice of one authority, meaning is made as a product of dialogue between and among individuals" (1995: 473).

Creativity

<div align="center">"Do schools kill creativity?" (Robinson, 2007)</div>

The above quote is taken from a TedTalk I watch in late August every year before commencing a new school year. Robinson questions the role of schools in society and their perceived obsession with standardisation. I echo his thoughts when he argues that creativity is the process of imagination (2007). I have spent my entire teaching career working in the senior end of primary education. I fear through the increasingly rigid frameworks and outcome-focused policies that I have experienced, the room for creativity and imagination is rapidly decreasing, especially for older children. The Visual Art Primary Curriculum identifies the importance of creativity in the classroom. It outlines "children to experience the excitement and fulfilment of creativity" in one of the curriculum aims (NCCA, 1999a: 9). The association of "excitement" and "fulfilment" with creativity in the curriculum amplifies the importance of this value to me. Creativity is also outlined in the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (DPCF) 2020. "Being Creative" is one of the seven 'Key Competencies' identified in the framework (2020: 7). The framework acknowledges children's capacity to be creative and the importance of providing children with opportunities for "creative behaviour" (2020: 8). The DPCF (2020) identifies the potential positive impact encouraging creative practices have on motivation, self-esteem and a child's overall development. Robinson (2007) refers to this increase in motivation and self-esteem as 'human flourishing'.

Collaboration

Collaboration is a value that I believe is important in my practice. It was a driving force behind my choice of research methodology for this study as collaboration is regarded as an essential feature of Self-Study AR (McNiff, 2013, 2017). It also influenced the intervention employed as part of the data gathering I completed in Cycle Three. Furthermore, I believe it is an essential element of any classroom as new learning opportunities can be created through collaboration (Figueiredo, 2015). As a learner, I thrive off collaboration, primarily through discussion and debate. Therefore, conversations with my critical friends, supervisors and peers were integral elements in the design of this study. As part of the research, I endeavoured to offer the children opportunities for meaningful collaboration through discussions, hands-on activities and group art projects.

In AR studies, a conflict between your educational values and your practice is not uncommon (Whitehead, 2018; McNiff, 2019). This year, a majority of children were reluctant to share their thoughts and opinions verbally. This was a significant challenge in my research and one of the motivations behind selecting Visual Art as a medium for research and communication. The children who were reluctant to verbally share explored new ways of 'voicing' their thoughts through Child Reflective Journals (CRJ), group work and through the artwork they produced.

1.4 PERSONAL POSITION
1.4.1 *Visual Art*

As someone who is passionate about Visual Art, I embarked on my teaching journey with the goal of sharing my own love and passion with the children I teach and my colleagues. I enjoy participating in Continual Professional Development (CPD) for Visual Art and I actively pursue new knowledge and methodologies in the area. Through CPD I have been able to see the impact new strategies have had on the children. As a result of this positive impact of CPD on my practice I was inspired to engage in an Action Research Master's programme with a focus on Visual Art.

1.4.2 *Diversity*

I grew up always feeling like I was 'fitting in' everywhere I went. I am an Irish, Caucasian, middle-class female. I am a playing member of the G.A.A who obtained a third-level degree and a professional job. In society, the media, school textbooks and imagery I have always identified people who look like me. However, when I began teaching in my current school, I realised this is not a shared experience for many of the children growing up in Ireland today. According to the Central Statistics Office (CSO), in April 2016, 535, 475 people living in Ireland identified themselves as 'non-Irish'. This figure is predicted to increase when the Census 2022 results are released. Therefore, addressing diversity in the classroom and providing a space where everyone feels valued is crucial to my educational philosophy. The DPCF (2020) identifies diversity is increasing in Ireland and is evident in the "rich kaleidoscope of ages, competencies, cultures, ethnicities, family structures and backgrounds, home languages, religions, sexual identities, and worldviews that now characterise many primary classrooms" (2020: 3). A motivation behind the new DPCF (2020) is to respond to this increase in diversity in Irish classrooms and in-turn develop an Irish society that is more inclusive.

1.4.3 *Research Context*

Presently, I am a full-time mainstream class teacher in an Educate Together National School in Leinster. I have spent the past year teaching a sixth class. I felt that this school offered a supportive structure and environment from which I could carry out the research necessary for the purpose of this AR study. Due to its inclusive, multi-denominational and co-educational ethos, the school population is very diverse. I carried out this research with 23 sixth class students. Of the 23 students involved in the study, 18 nationalities were represented by the students and parents. The diverse nature of my class was a significant motivation for this study. Furthermore, of the 23 students in the class, only 12 enrolled as junior infants in this same school and only 10 children identified English as their first language, which I believe are important details for this study. A driving motivation behind the choice of Visual Art as a subject conduit, is the idea that limits of language may not be a limit of cognition (Eisner, 2009). Many children in my class understand more than they can tell (Polanyi, 1964), especially the children who learn English as an additional language.

In conclusion, there is an overlap between my desire to further develop my professional practice in Visual Art and my desire to improve my teaching to include all children represented in modern Irish society. By enhancing my practice, I believe I can create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity using Visual Art and begin to truly live to my educational values.

1.5 THESIS STRUCTURE

This thesis is divided into five chapters. An insight into this AR project is offered in each chapter and a summary of these chapters can be found below:

Chapter One - Introduction

The current chapter provides the reader with an overview for the thesis. The research question and aims of the research are outlined. The influence of my educational values on the research along with a personal position statement are discussed. Finally, I have outlined a brief summation of what the following chapters in this thesis will include.

Chapter Two - A Review of the Literature

An examination of the literature surrounding Visual Art and diversity is presented in Chapter 2. Literature pertaining to CRP, CRT, relevant legislation, multiculturalism and pedagogy is presented and discussed. Seminal theorists Froebel and Eisner provided a theoretical foundation for this study. Their teachings and understanding are also examined in relation to the research question and the aims of this research.

Chapter Three - Research Methodology of the Study

In this chapter I will outline the rationale behind the choice of the AR paradigm for this research study. I provide an overview of the research schedule that was followed and the research cycles that took place. The interventions are presented within the context of the research participants with a focus on the ethical considerations. The data collection tools chosen are motivated by my educational values. Their role in the research will be discussed.

Chapter Four - Findings and Discussion of Data

The emerging themes of 'My role as the teacher', 'Sense of Belonging' and 'Art and Integration' will be presented and discussed in the context of the data and my educational values.

Chapter Five - Conclusions and Recommendations

In this final chapter I will outline the limitations considered as part of this research study. Modifications I would make if completing this research again are provided. Possible recommendations are suggested to the reader and some final thoughts on this research and future research will be considered

1.6 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this Chapter I have endeavoured to acquaint the reader with my research question and the overarching aims of this study. The research is rooted in my educational values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration* along with reflections on my own school experiences as a child. I offered a personal position statement which outlined the rationale behind choosing this area to investigate along with detailing the research contest. I outlined the organisation of the thesis by introducing the chapter titles and their contents. In Chapter Two I will review the relevant literature on Visual Arts, diversity and the seminal theorists in this research area.

CHAPTER TWO

A REVIEW OF THE LITERATURE

2.0 INTRODUCTION

During this research I hoped to create a classroom environment that not only acknowledges diversity but also celebrates it through targeted planned Visual Art lessons. The significant role of Visual Arts in promoting diversity is outlined along with examples of collaborative art projects from around the world. A Culturally Responsive (CR) framework was established for this research drawing on the works of Gay and Ladson-Billings. The literature surrounding CRP and CRT will be examined in this chapter. The understanding of culture in this research emerges from Lee's definition "a set of learned beliefs, values and behaviours, a way of life shaped by members of a society" (2012: 68). Theorists Froebel and Eisner provided a lens for this study; their works and understandings will be outlined. Diversity is a central element of this research, literature and legislation referencing ethnic diversity, multiculturalism and relevant pedagogy are discussed.

2.1 VISUAL ART

2.1.1 *Multiculturalism and Art*

"Learning to work across differences of cultural background and experience is a process

essential to intellectual growth and lifelong learning, and ultimately to building a better world"

(Cultures & Communities, n.d.).

When researching multiculturalism and art education, Banks (1993) identified four misconceptions about multiculturalism and education. These misconceptions include

(a) the belief that multicultural education is for victimised minorities

(b) the claim that multicultural education is against the West

(c) predictions that multicultural education will divide the nation

(d) speculations that multicultural education will pass (cited in Delecruz, 1998:1)

These misconceptions came as a result of lack of education or understanding, unwillingness to change or give up power and privilege and some cases of hidden racism (Banks, 1993)

He likens misconceptions in multicultural education to misconceptions in multicultural art education, identifying statements from congress, media and the thoughts of his colleagues. The misconceptions, identified by Banks, twenty eight years ago can still be seen across the literature. However there are many examples of positive multiculturalism and art education also.

Artists can be described as storytellers and researchers. They take lived or living experiences and produce work to make sense of the experiences. To deepen students' understanding of different cultures and increase their awareness of possible tensions between them, teachers can use Visual Arts and artists' experiences in the classroom. By asking higher-order questions (Ladson-Billings, 2017) and creating a space where children feel safe to engage in challenging dialogue around different cultures, children can develop respect and empathy for others (Woywod, 2017). While working with a class of future teachers, Woywod asked her students to document current events they had heard people talking about or had read about online, how they reacted to the news and how it made them feel as future teacher. When asked about the activity they brought up a range of issues to do with controversies surrounding inequality. One student spoke of not wanting to start these discussions in class although he acknowledged that the news is unavoidable. He then spoke of how he can turn it (his smartwatch) off. Woywod draws on this interaction as it highlights the privilege that many teachers experience. Numerous teachers have the privilege of discussing inequalities without having experienced them personally (Woywod, 2017). Comparable to Souto-

Manning et al.'s (2018) concept of perceived deficits in cultural competence, many teachers can also feel they do not have sufficient historical and contextual information needed to prepare and present lessons of meaningful multicultural value (Kader, 2005).

2.1.2 *Multiculturalism and Visual Art*

Art lessons about Dia de Los Muertos, the Mexican holiday, traditionally consist of children using chalks or paints to create sugar skulls with little dialogue surrounding the cultural significance. This occurs as often the primary objective of the lesson is to create a piece of art within a timeframe. Woywod (2017) used a lesson about Dia de Los Muertos to show the resistance against the forced colonisation that was occurring and the eradication of people. The aim of the lesson was to honour those who had died as a result of systemic inequity. Following the lesson a student stated, "art can also be a way to raise awareness of issues that are occurring in different communities and bring people together to protest racial and cultural injustices" (Anon, 2016: 6). This quote encapsulates the goal of addressing diversity and multiculturalism through art. For children to become more informed, tolerant and independent learners, it is essential for them to explore and discuss societal issues. Woywod argues that art has a special role in this. (2017). Other scholars, for example, Berry & Kalin (1995), state that to manage a culturally diverse society, multiculturalism is paramount. In a perfect world, other cultures would not only be accepted and tolerated but celebrated. Their value would be appreciated and their ability to offer learning opportunities to all would be seen (Parekh, 2002).

2.2 ARTS BRINGING PEOPLE TOGETHER

Across literature there are many examples of Art bringing people together. Through Art, we often see people's deepest values and beliefs portrayed (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Dewhurst, 2010).

This exposure to vulnerability helps people to connect with others and find a common ground. Building diverse learning communities that demonstrate care is one of the five elements of CRT as outlined by Gay (2000). Across the world, the creations of murals have helped to cultivate community, collaboration and inclusion between people with differing identities. In the United States of America, Janelle Turk (2012), a teacher engaged in a mural project with students from her art club. Turk's project involved children with additional needs such as Multiple Sclerosis and Autism Spectrum Disorder along with neurotypical children without disabilities. Due to its subject matter, diversity was both promoted and encouraged from the beginning of the project. Children were also encouraged to work collaboratively with problem-solving. In the project, the marginalised students were given leadership roles and decision-making was done using a democratic process. Empowerment was identified as a result of the collaborative work, the decision-making process and the voluntary nature of this project. Kvam et al. (2018) advocate for providing students with authentic opportunities to practice the skills they have been equipped with and this project is an excellent example of that. Inclusion was the primary focus of the mural project and this activity allowed the children to realise not only their own value and worth but to see the potential in the students they worked with also. By physically painting a mural in their educational environment, a social change occurred within the school also (Turk, 2012). In Ireland, the Schools Link program suggests the arts as an area of potential integration for children from special class settings into the mainstream classroom.

2.2.1 Art for Peace

The Kid's Guernica Peace Mural Project (Anderson, 1997; Kaneda & Fischer, 2010) in Northern Ireland illustrates the important role that Art can play in both social reconstruction and peace

education. The Kid's Guernica Peace Mural Project to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the bombing of Hiroshima was established in 1995. The first mural was directed by Jill Harper in Florida, USA. Together, with a large group of local children and two third-generation survivors from Hiroshima, a theme for the mural was planned and agreed upon. The "*A Gift of Peace*" mural aimed to demonstrate that despite cultural differences, each of us has the same humanity. Harper believed that cooperation through Art has the ability to construct peace both within and between people (Anderson & Conlon, 2013). Adults acted as facilitators who encouraged children to take the lead in exploring these issues and expressing themselves within them. The author then describes his experiences in Belfast. Having received a tour of the murals from a Catholic and Protestant perspective, he visited the Cross Community Garden. The garden is located on a community Arts site. It is described as a shared space where both communities have a common purpose. Dissanayake describes this garden as "Art for peace" stating, "The role of the aesthetic is symbolically central in this beautiful garden, and people take pride in its maintenance, which promotes a social cohesion that less aesthetic tasks might never achieve*"* (1988, Cited in Anderson & Conlon, 2013: 40). Collaborative art projects can help to foster a sense of friendship and build positive neighbourly relationships across divided communities. While the mural itself is significant, Hooks suggests that the process is vital (2004). Hooks proposes that visual and verbal dialogue are central to overcoming stereotypes that lead to difference or alienation in communities (1994). Similarly, Simpson suggests there is greater transformative power in the process than trying to find common ground, and that engaging with others is far more meaningful than trying to meet halfway (2008).

2.3 CULTURALLY RESPONSIVE TEACHING

Culturally Responsive Teaching (CRT) has been defined "as using the cultural knowledge, prior experiences, frames of reference, and performance styles of ethnically diverse students to make learning encounters more relevant to and effective for them" (Gay, 2010: 31). CRT is applicable for Self-study AR as there is a focus on instruction and the role of the teacher is central to this focus (Gay, 2013 in Aronson & Laughter, 2016). Similarly, Hammond (2015) suggests using AR to get the full benefit of implementing CRT in the classroom. Effective implementation of CRT can create a meaningful link between home and school for the child (Gay, 2010)

CRT relies on six dimensions as outlined below:
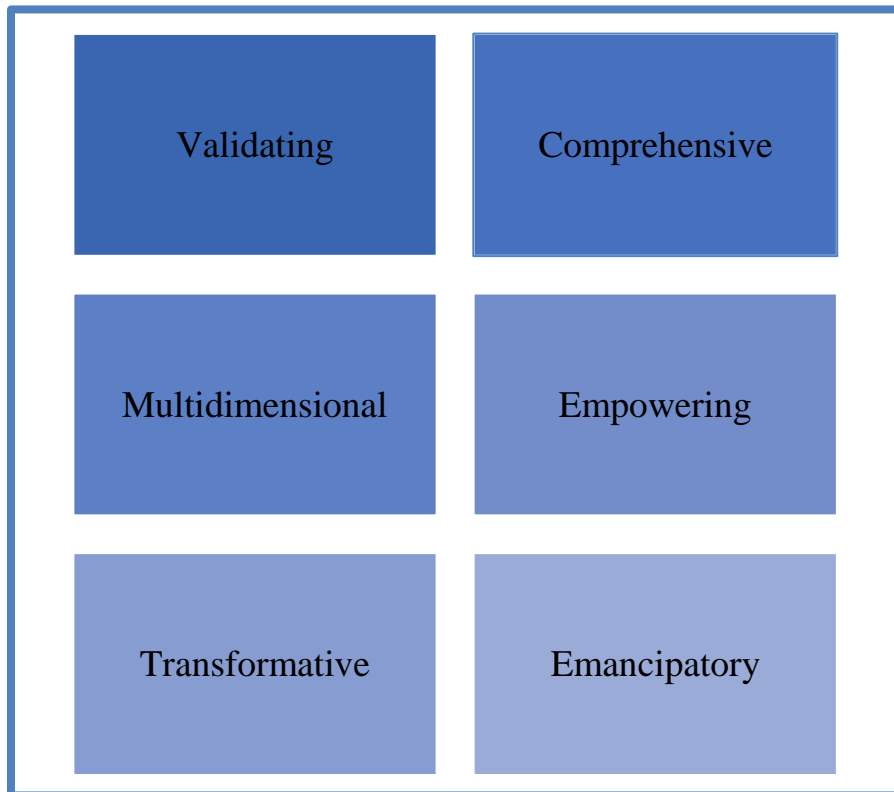
Figure 2.0: Culturally Responsive Pedagogy (Gay, 2003, 2010, 2018)

Validating: Culturally Responsive (CR) Teachers aim to validate every child's culture.

Comprehensive: CR teachers are holistic in nature and educate the whole child.

Multidimensional: CR teachers look at every aspect of culture.

Empowering: CR teachers have high expectations for the children in their classes, both socially and academically.

Transformative: CR teachers start with the child's strengths when framing instruction, lesson outlines and assessment.

Emancipatory: CR teachers are liberating and aim to provide the children with opportunities for autonomy (Gay, 2018: 37).

Souto-Manning et al. (2018) identify a perceived deficit in teachers' 'cultural competence' as a reason for the reluctance of some teachers to engage in CRT. A fear of upsetting children and parents by saying or doing the wrong thing has emerged as a barrier to implementing CRT. Across culturally responsive literature there are several references to Howard (1999)'s book "We can't teach what we don't know". The fears that surround engaging in CRT would also suggest that we can't teach *who* we don't know. This acted as a starting point for this research study and will be outlined in chapter 3.

2.4 CULTURALLY RELEVANT PEDAGOGY

Culturally Responsive Teaching aims to celebrate students' culture whereas Culturally Relevant Pedagogy (CRP) asks the "hard questions" surrounding culture with reference to inequity (Ladson-Billings, 2021: n.p). CRP is a pedagogy that was first implemented byLadson-Billings who is a key theorist when studying critical race theory and diversity. Using CRP, Ladson-Billings highlights the importance of including children' cultural references in all aspects of learning with 'successful children' outlined as the main objective (1994). She further argues that the practice of 'grounding' students in their culture is essential for student development and when implemented

correctly. CRP hopes to establish a "community of learners" (2009: 28). CRP has three important pillars as outlined below:
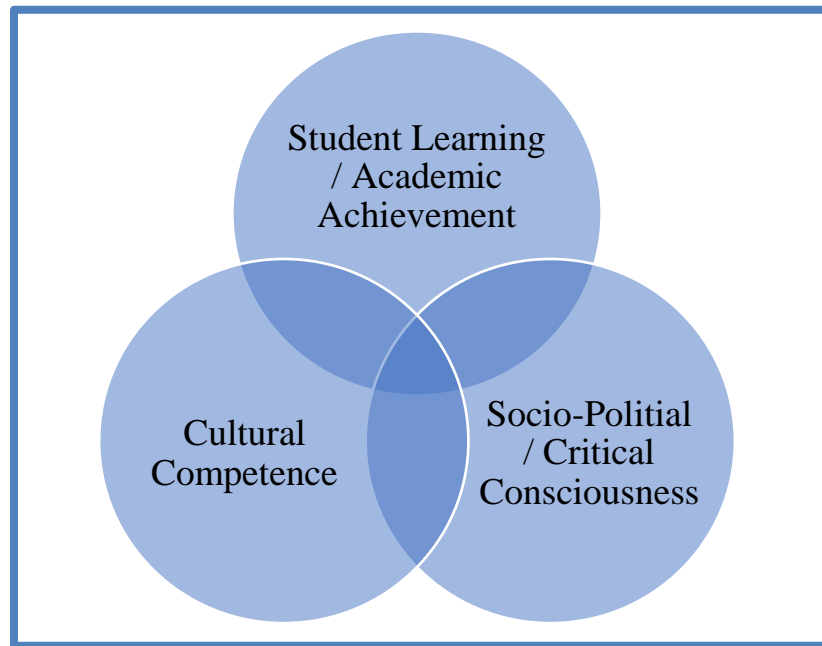
Figure 2.1: Culturally Relevant Teaching (Ladson-Billings, 1994, 2009)

Ladson-Billings argues that all three pillars need to be implemented in order to practice CRP (2019).

Cultural Competence

Aims for children to develop an understanding of their own culture while acquiring at least one other. Ladson-Billings suggests the dominant culture as the other culture to become fluent in, as minority children need to be able to function within the mainstream (2020). DPCF (2020: 7) identifies 'Being an active citizen' as one of its key competencies. If children become culturally competent, it could aid their abilities to "recognise injustice and inequality" as outlined in the attributes for becoming an active citizen (2020: 10).

Student Learning/Academic Achievement

When first referred to as academic achievement there was confusion among educators who equated it with testing. This concept was further developed by Ladson-Billings to 'student learning' and is summarised as "what it is that students actually know and are able to do as a result of pedagogical interactions with skilled teachers" (2006: 34).

Socio- Political / Critical Consciousness

This practice begins when teachers identify and acknowledge the socio-political issues in themselves. These may include issues of class, gender and race. Teachers then help their students to identify the same issues themselves. These issues are critiqued and questioned and children acquire skills and knowledge to make their lives better now (Aronson & Laughter, 2016)

Drawing on Paris' (2012) theory of Culturally Sustaining Pedagogy, Ladson-Billings' changed approach with the focus shifting from a focus on ethnic and racial minorities to a framework that "pushes researchers to consider global identities, including developments in arts, literacy, music, athletics and film" (Aronson & Laughter, 2016:166). Ladson-Billings (2019) fears the misconceptions that arise around CRP. One being the assumption that CRP is "something that can be packaged" (n.p). It is not something that can be implemented using a lesson plan. It is a philosophical outlook teachers have when examining their own practice. For this reason it complements the foundations and aims of Self-study AR and my pre-identified values as a researcher.

Drawing on Gay's focus on teaching, CRT has acted as the methodology in framework for this study. Whereas, Ladson-Billings' CRP focuses on pedagogy and looks to influence teacher attitudes and dispositions. For this reason, CRP has provided the theory for this conceptual framework. While a conceptual framework rooted in CRT and CRP was created for this research, it is "important to differentiate the two for focusing on two separate but complementary types of outcomes: teaching affects competence and practice whereas pedagogy affects attitude and disposition" (Aronson & Laughter, 2016: 167)

2.5 DIVERSITY
2.5.1 *Defining Diversity*

The definition of diversity in this research emerges from examining the disparity between the dominant groups and the non-dominant groups in society. When using this approach to examine identity we consider those in the 'Dominant Group' to be the individuals who conscribe to the social norms and those in the 'Non-Dominant Group' as those who differ from said norms (Allen, 2011). Examining diversity, definitions from Oxford Languages (1989) identify the difference between equality and diversity, highlighting their needs to be individually supported. As a result of this, it is important to note that practising equality in your teaching does not automatically mean that diversity is also being celebrated. The same source states that diversity can be seen as "the practice or quality of including or involving people from a range of different social and ethnic backgrounds and of different genders, sexual orientations, etc" (Oxford Languages, 1989: n/p). For the purpose of this research, I choose to use this definition as it aligns clearly with my focus and my educational values *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration.*

Following research on teachers' perceptions of diversity, MacNaughton & Hughes (2007) express concern for viewing children as 'unique individuals', stating that this practice strips children of any commonality identifying common culture as an example. The effects of this practice are that cultures can be regarded as separate to the child and can be reduced to tokenistic ephemera. This highlights the disparity between 'difference' and 'diversity'. Many scholars use these words interchangeably or as synonyms, often preferring one over the other. However, this literature review identifies a contrast between the two words. The discrepancy centres on individuals and how difference separates individuals whereas diversity is what unites groups in society that contrast to others. MacNaughton & Hughes concluded their research citing lack of "effective professional learning programs" (2007: 199) for both new and current members of the teaching community as an area of concern. They have acknowledged the complexities of the issues themselves, noting the complexities for the reasoning behind the inconsistencies of their findings. In 2004, Diversity at School (Lodge & Lynch) was published and without any subsequent review, remains the core text examining diversity in the Irish context. The document itself focuses on the legalities of diversity as laid out in The Equal Status Acts and The Employment Equality Acts. There are minimal strategies to aid teachers in addressing diversity in their classrooms and celebrating it.

In 2010, psychologist Geert Hofstede created The Cultural Dimensions Index. A 100 point scale was used to evaluate sixty five countries in seven dimensions. One dimension which is noteworthy for this research is the level of individualism. Features of individualism in society include a focus on independence, self-reliance and competition over collaboration (Hammond, 2015). Most European countries scored highly in individualism while collectivism was prominent in parts of

Asia, Africa, the Middle East and Latin America (Hofstede et al., 2010). Ireland featured eleventh on the scale for individualistic countries. While this can be seen as an oversimplified view with individualism and collectivism existing on a spectrum. It can offer educators an insight into the cultural 'norms' and offer a starting point for looking at culture in the classroom and "building on shared culture of your students" (Hammond, 2015: 26).

2.5.2 *Ethnic Diversity in Classrooms*

Changes in Irish society in the last decade have allowed for the emergence of ethical and cultural diversity issues in Irish classrooms. These issues have been highlighted in national policy and brought about conversations in education circles surrounding inclusion and multiculturalism (NCCA, 2005). While many suggest this is a relatively new experience in Irish Classrooms, it can be argued that Non- Dominant groups in society have always existed in our classrooms. The White Paper on Education, *Charting our Education Future*, identified the diverse needs of Irish society, prioritising equality and pluralism as essential elements of educational policy. It stated, "the democratic character of this society requires education to embrace the diverse traditions, beliefs and values of its people" (1995: 6). Ethnic and religious minorities and students without English as a first language are not new to our classrooms. They have been contributing to Irish society for decades as highlighted in this paper. The positives associated with ethnic diversity can be found across literature with Stearns (2004) identifying an increase in friendliness across students from different ethnicities and Geel & Vedder (2010) presenting that friendly interactions in classrooms and positive experience when collaborating during group work activities have the potential to improve multicultural attitudes in adolescents.

When addressing diversity in the classroom, Simpson insists that there is a certain set of skills that students need to be equipped with to address injustice in society and systematic inequality in the aims of creating a more just world (2008). Establishing connections with the children (Gay, 2010) and communication are central when looking at diversity in our classrooms. Allen encourages us to challenge the communication processes and question our interactions with children as teachers. Allen warns that "everyday interactions help to (re)produce knowledge, (re)construct identities, and re(iterate) ideologies" (2011: 108).

2.5.3 *Perceptions of Cultural Diversity and Multicultural Education*

Although this research aims to promote diversity in the classroom and in my own teaching practice, it is important to note that cultural diversity and multicultural education may not be desirable to everyone in all educational settings. Examples of this can be seen in western countries such as England, Germany and Denmark where intolerance towards immigrants is growing (Torney-Purta et al., 2001). Schools can offer children a safe space, yet in the United States of America, schools have also been identified as sites of institutional racism (Rosales, 2016) and harm (National Center for Education Statistics, 2015). While this can be an uncomfortable truth, teachers are encouraged to address injustices by introducing counter-storytelling approaches (McNiff & Whitehead, 2012), engaging in restorative justice practices (Editors of Rethinking Schools, 2014) and implementing CRT (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Simultaneously, educators from dominant cultures must be cautious of 'cultural appropriation' when using different minority cultures as a focus for their lessons (Han, 2018). Banks warns of being hegemonic and argues that casting a 'Western gaze' upon content that originates elsewhere should be avoided (1994, 1995, 1996, 2004, cited in Chin, 2013). However, Banks suggests that differing perspectives on central themes and ideas are to be

encouraged. This highlights the importance of perspective when engaging in Multicultural Education.

2.6 THEORISTS

2.6.1 *Froebel*

Industrial movements across history are often credited with the growth of arts education, however other significant influences receive less attention (Strauch - Nelson, 2012). Froebel's founding of Kindergarten and his child-centred philosophy can be considered important also. According to Froebelian philosophy, arts education can offer children the opportunity to take part in experiences that heighten their physical and sensory functioning. The arts offer scope for self-expression and creativity to flourish and they encourage social cooperation and community (Strauch - Nelson, 2012). Froebel's approach to art education can be seen as structured and regimented. He advocated for the introduction of colour in a systematic manner, primary colours first and expected clear and tidy work when painting. Froebel saw art education as important for the holistic development of the child as well as essential in preparing children to work in industry. Froebel's 'gifts' and 'occupations' were central concepts within his teaching of Art. Originally the gifts were to reflect our physical world for the children and the occupations offered children to demonstrate the skills they got from the gifts. The gifts can be summarised as the concepts of modern art, form, texture, line, colour, tone whereas the occupations refer to the many modes of art such as clay, paint and sewing (Tarr, 1987). Using these gifts and occupations, children were introduced to the many principles of art. Children were given the freedom to explore once the understanding of the gifts and occupations was established. Froebelian philosophy encourages *Collaboration* between children during art and children would develop consideration and empathy for others (Tarr, 1987). Parallels can be drawn from Froebel's gifts with the seven elements of Visual Arts as stated in the

1999 Visual Arts Curriculum (NCCA, 1999) and Froebel's occupations with the stands in the aforementioned curriculum. Froebel believed in starting with the child and in doing so, listing to their *Voice.* He also acknowledged every child and valued their individual difference which could be equated to valuing and celebrating diversity in today's world (Bruce, 2019).

The role of adults can be seen as opposing Froebelian teaching of art and Cizek's approach. In the early 20th century, Cizek has been credited with the development of 'school art' under the premise that art was to be produced in schools under guidance and with the influence of the class teacher. 'School art' is a quick, step-by-step, manual process using simple skills (Efland, 1976). At present, this mode of art instruction in schools is often referred to as 'template art' or adult–directed with a similar focus being put on holiday art and art relating to children's experiences in school. In 1989, Cizek dramatically changed his philosophy for the teaching of art, when he began teaching in Vienna. He then promoted an environment where children were free from teacher influence. This promoted courage and self-motivation within students. Efland (1976) has argued that this approach brought about a shift in focus towards child-centred learning in our schools. This occurred in line with Lowenfeld's (1946) influence in art classes ever since. Even though the role of adults significantly differs in Cizek and Froebel's approaches to drawing instruction, both approaches value the role of art in the holistic development of the child (Tarr, 1987). The same focus on child-centred learning and the holistic development of the child can be seen later in Ladson-Billings' CRP and Gay's CRT. Although Cizek and Mathias' approaches are still to the forefront of art education today, Froebel's art is still ever present as he believed in the value of observational drawing from nature once skills and understanding of line have been developed. This presence is woven through the integration of art in other subject arts, the colouring of boxes in

standardised testing, in the cut and stick exercises in Early Years Education and the promotion of educational games and toys for younger children in society.

2.6.2 *Eisner*

"We seek desperately to tidy up an unkept system. Standardisation has its appeals" (Eisner,

2003).

Education is often linked to that of a business structure with importance being placed on specific and measurable outcomes. For this reason, the arts have been marginalised as they can be seen as difficult to measure (Eisner, 2009). Testing is seen as desirable as it can lead to quantitative data which is easily analysed and compared. The absence of standardised testing in arts-based subjects in the USA is believed to have been a contributory factor in curricular marginalisation. (Eisner, 2003). The same philosophy could be applied in an Irish context where state exams are only mandated for Literacy and Numeracy at primary level. We look at the Literacy being assessed in our schools as the ability to read and write which is prioritised over the ability to create and make meaning. The world we live in is highly visual. Messaris (1994) highlights the importance of Visual Literacy as a result, noting it is important for students to have the skills to analyse and interpret these images. By focusing on the measurable, Eisner (2009) argues that schools are doing a disservice to our children. He suggests that school should cultivate a culture around literacy that values its many forms and that limits in language are not always a limit in cognition. 'Tacit knowing' or 'tacit knowledge' was first introduced by Michael Polanyi in 1958. In his later work, *The Tacit Dimension* (1964), Polanyi famously summarised this idea stating, "we know more than we can tell". In line with this understanding, this research hopes to show that Visual Art could be seen as an outlet for expression and portray understanding in a culturally responsive manner. It

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could be argued that there is a shared rationale underpinning arts-based research and AR. Final discoveries are not the goal of Arts based research, the purpose of arts based research is to raise questions and open conversations in a particular subject area (Barone, Eisner & Eisner, 2011)

2.7 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGISLATION

2.7.1 *The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child*

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child identifies children's voices in two articles (United Nations (U.N.), 1989). Article 13 outlines a child's right to 'freedom of expression' and Article 12 states (the child has the) 'right to express those views freely in all matters affecting the child'. Within this article it also states the child's 'right to be heard' (U.N., 1989). As a teacher, I believe that the most important thing I can do for a child is listen to them and have identified *Voice* as one of my educational values. By actively listening to students, teachers may be better equipped to meet the needs of the children in their care (Murray, 2019)

2.7.2 *Visual Art in the Primary Curriculum*

"Art is a unique way of viewing the world" (NCCA, 1999)

The Visual Art Primary Curriculum encourages diversity in its subject area. The curriculum suggests that children should be encouraged to explore visuals from differing times and cultures. Although it notes that care should be taken when identifying the different times, cultures, highlighting the different forms and functions of Visual Arts (NCCA, 1999). This illustrates the important role of the teacher when choosing artists and visuals to expose the children to. Such a viewpoint aligns with CRT's focus on the role of the teacher during instruction and Gay's (2000) suggestion that teachers should not avoid controversial topics but aid the children to navigate the

difficult areas. The Intercultural Education in Primary Schools (NCCA, 2005) document highlights the important role Visual Arts can have in promoting diversity and understanding the world we are living in. It suggests children pick up images and ideas from the visual environment around them that help them to make sense of their world. The authors suggest that Visual Arts can play a vital role in developing an understanding of the stereotyping of minorities or people from other countries or continents. This implies that if teachers choose to incorporate these subject areas into their teaching and learning, this understanding could influence an environment of respect and tolerance to be fostered in the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009).

'Diversity' is mentioned twenty five times in the DPCF (2020). Educators are asked to "recognise diversity" (2020: 20) and "respect diversity" (2020: 21). 'Inclusive Education and Diversity' are recognised as one of the eight principles outlined in the framework. The framework identifies "inclusive education provides for equity of opportunity and participation in children's learning. Inclusive education celebrates diversity and responds to the uniqueness of every child" (2020: 6). This mirrors the concepts that underpin CRT and CRP as aforementioned and suggests that ensuring inclusion can result in a classroom environment that celebrates diversity. Establishing 'Cultural Competence' with one's own culture is a key pillar of CRP (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Visual Arts can aid children to develop a sense of identity and self-understanding as they can connect with different cultures and societies using Visual Art as an alternative mode of communication (NCCA, 1999a).

2.7.3 *Visual Art Integration*

Integration is not a modern concept. It was identified as one of five principals in the 1971 curriculum. Later, an integrated curriculum was included in a list of learning principles outlined in the 1999 curriculum with one principal stating "learning is most effective when it is integrated" (NCCA, 1999: 13). Visual Art was suggested to be used as a stimulus in other subject areas to contextualise new topics in their introduction (NCCA, 1999; Lucey & Lancey, 2009). Noel offers that Visual Art may allow the learner to explore a topic in more depth than other subjects (2003) for this reason the curriculum suggest that Visual Arts are used in S.E.S.E and Literacy to interpret events in history and to aid with visualisation of characters (NCCA, 1999).

In response to Down's claims that the arts can be used to improve the teaching of other curriculum areas (cited in Smith, 1995), Smith presents his argument against purposeless arts integration (1995). Smith cautions how constant integration can call the seriousness of art as a stand-alone subject into question. He questions if policymakers are prioritising one standard (integration) over other standards of equal importance. Art at its core is a valuable subject, it does not need integration to increase its value. Integrating lessons in subject areas such as maths, geography and science can weaken the importance of art education (Smith, 1995). He offers an accommodation that art can be integrated in other subject area lessons as long as it does not replace an art lesson. He suggests that the focus of art lessons be on the work of art, the process of creating the art and the art work itself. He offers that this lesson could be integrated with other subject areas in line with the meaningful study of art (Smith, 1995). Similarly, Kowalchuk & Stone (2000) identify integration in Visual Art as a popular practice and suggest that pre-service teachers should complete courses on the pedagogies needed to successfully integrate Visual Art with other subjects so that the teaching of art techniques is not lost through integration. Smith (2010) is advocating for art to be

valued as an independent subject. The NCCA Visual Arts Curriculum (1999) highlights seven concepts of arts education, an awareness of line, texture, form, pattern and rhythm, space, shape, and colour and tone. They are taken from the art elements and should be developed in every lesson. Smith warns that the importance of the concepts may be lost or saturated due to an increased level of integration (2010)

2.7.4 *The Learn Together Ethical Education Curriculum*

Educate Together is a registered charity that provides patronage to over 100 schools in Ireland. Schools operate under the umbrella of inclusion, providing multi-denominational education to all. In place of Religious Education and faith formation, Educate Together offers an Ethical Education Curriculum through the Learn Together subject area. This Mission Statement of this curriculum is

> To promote a philosophy of education in which no child is considered an outsider ; which promotes the fullest development of ability irrespective of gender, class or stereotypes and which encapsulates this ethos in a democratic partnership uniquely combining the involvement of parents with the professional role of teachers. (Educate Together, 2011: np)

The curriculum operates under four central principles; Multi-denominational education, co-education providing equal opportunities to all genders, child-centred learning and a commitment to the democratic process. The Mission Statement and the principles that underpin it encapsulates the ethos of Educate Together schools. It showcases Educate Together's dedication to prioritising inclusion and celebrating difference. A holistic approach to learning is also a priority as the philosophy of the curriculum draws on the both the moral and spiritual dimensions of a child's

development and education (Educate Together, 2011). The focus of establishing home-school links and an emphasis on the holistic development of the child align with Gay's six dimensions of CRT (Gay, 2018). Integration is a key element of the Ethical Education Curriculum and when identifying subjects that are best equipped to activate the core values of the curriculum, Visual Arts was highlighted as one of five subject areas (Educate Together, 2011). When discussing diversity the curriculum states, "the curriculum should celebrate difference and provide the knowledge, skills and attitudes that children need to enable them to make informed moral decisions and live in a pluralist society that embraces diversity" (Educate Together, 2011:9). There are 4 main strands of the Ethical Education Curriculum, this research recognises "Equality and Justice" as the most relevant as it contains the strand unit "Activating Equality through Positive Action" which lines with the aims of this proposed research.

2.8 PEDAGOGY

Gail Tremblay outlines a three step process to encourage students to create art that looks at society and challenges injustices. She states,

> First, show students' works by successful artists who make art that challenges social inequality and teach them to use art to communicate.
>
> Second, model ways to create work that is socially engaged and show them how to find sites for exhibiting such work.
>
> Third, raise questions about students' works that suggest directions they might explore that will cause viewers of their art to reflect on social realities and the need for a just society. (2013: 2)

Tremblay's ideas reflect those found in the content of the Primary Visual Art Curriculum (1999), highlighting the importance of children having the necessary fundamental art skills and knowledge of the elements in order to create art for change (2013). An awareness of the injustices that exist in a child's society and a willingness to address them within the classroom must be created before the process of producing art about social justice can commence. This may be a challenge for teachers and children alike, especially those who have never experienced injustice or those who have benefited from social norms. This draws on the CRP pillar of 'critical consciousness'. Teachers must first examine their own experiences both positive and negative, of culture and cultural differences before addressing them within the classroom (Ladson-Billings, 2009). Although Carter & Curtis (2008) argue that even the children in Early Years settings have an awareness of fairness and at any age, children have the ability to engage in conversations around fair treatment. Tremblay (2013) suggests the importance of teaching art as communication and the importance of providing students with examples of artwork that challenge social injustices. It is recommended that teachers facilitate an environment for children to consider the injustices in their world and encourage the children to respond through art and the work they create. This research aims to achieve this by implementing a framework drawing on CRT and CRP.

2.9 ART AS A COMMUNICATION TOOL

Eugène Delacroix identified painting as "the bridge between the mind of the painter and that of the spectator" (cited in Goldwater & Treves, 1958:230). Here Delacroix suggests that when we engage with a piece of artwork we enter into a conversation with the artist. Art can be seen as how people project their innermost thoughts, values and beliefs (Dewhurst, 2010). Human behaviour is grounded in social interactions. Examples of social interactions are exchanges, competitions, cooperation, conflict and coercion. Similar marking and/or receiving art is a social act (exchange).

Krauss & Fussell (1996) classify communication as a social interaction. While art is often considered to be a language in itself, Dolese & Kozbelt (2021) state that despite art and language's ability to communicate thoughts, ideas and emotions, art can go one step further as it has the capacity to express emotional information at a more potent level and goes, the same understanding was found in a study conducted by Takahashi (1995) where nonrepresentational images were more successful in communicating specific images. If meaning-making is the goal, art can be considered a communication tool according to Dolese & Kozbelt (2021). Following a study using art as a language and applying it to the principles of the Gricean model of communication, Dolese & Kozbelf discovered that art can facilitate meaning-making. The chosen theoretical framework demonstrates the viability of art as a mode of communication.

2.10 CHAPTER SUMMARY

A review of the literature was presented under the following headings: the role of Visual Art and its potential and possible limitations for integration, examples of art bringing people together, defining diversity, seminal theorists, national and international legislation, relevant pedagogy and art as a communication tool. The key concepts of CRP and CPT were identified in relation to this study and an overview of the CR framework constructed as part of this research was provided. This CR framework draws on both Gay's CRT and Ladson-Billings' CRP with the aim of celebrating diversity in the classroom. A subject-based approach was selected for this study and a rationale surrounding the choice of Visual Art was provided. There is limited literature surrounding the use of CR frameworks in an Irish context. It is my hope that this self-study AR project will address that gap. In chapter three I will detail the research methodologies used. The

significance of the role of the teacher in CRP and CRT is evident in the above literature. In the

following chapter, I will outline my inside role as a researcher and classroom teacher for this study.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

3.0 INTRODUCTION

"You are not trying to prove something. You are trying to understand something. Your classroom is a living laboratory for your personal understanding of your development, work, and growth as a teacher" (Samaras, 2011:9).

In this chapter I will give a detailed description of the research methods and methodologies used in this study. In the following sections, I will outline the rationale behind using Action Research (AR) as a methodology, a description of the context for the research including the research site and participants, an overview of the ethical considerations taken and the overall research design and instruments will be explored. A range of contrasting data collection tools were carefully selected for this Self-Study AR project; pre and post study questionnaires, researcher reflective journals, children' reflections, children's work samples and class discussions. An analysis of the data and the validation process will also be considered.

3.1 RESEARCH APPROACH

Cohen et al., (2007) describe paradigms as ways of looking at the world around us. They are not simply a methodology (Hammersley, 2013) but a way of investigating phenomena. My intention for this research was to enhance my own practice and live closer to my educational values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration*. The AR paradigm was opted for as it focuses on the researcher's self and their practice (McNiff, 2002). Due to the nature of this research and in-line with my educational value of *Voice*, *Creativity* and *Collaboration*, a qualitative research methodology for

gathering the data was chosen for this study as it can be child centred and does not rely on standardisation.

3.1.1 *Action Research Paradigm*

'Action Research in broad terms concerns the live experiences of people and understanding of the essences of reality' (McIntosh, 2010: 53)

AR is a practical form of research that allows anyone, from any walk of life to enquire into their own work. As a result, AR differs based on the context and settings of the research (McNiff, 2017). This is a Self-study AR project and the primary goal of this type of inquiry is for practitioner researchers to study themselves and their own work to gain a deeper understanding and strive for improvement (Sullivan et al., 2016). AR differs from empirical research as AR researchers enquire into their own lives rather than the lives of others (McNiff, 2002). AR is participatory in nature (Edwards-Groves et al., 2018). This was important to me as the researcher as it allowed me to position myself within the research and act as a researcher and a research participant. This offered me the opportunity to enhance my practice using a research paradigm that is in line with my educational values.

Whitehead (1987) added a living theory approach to the AR paradigm by encouraging Self-study Action Researchers to ask the question, 'How do I improve my practice?' (Whitehead, 2020: 1). This question can often originate from an experience where an educator feels they are not living close to their values (McNiff, 2002). It can take many different conceptions, yet a desire for improvement in practice is what unites the different schools and AR (Kemmis, 2010). Self-study

AR in education appealed to me as a researcher because it requires teachers to look at the world using a critical lens, it challenges teachers to question social 'norms' and the construction of control and power (Schult, 2002: 101).

AR is linked with reflective practice and critical reflection. When teachers critically reflect on their practice they inquire into the validity of their teaching assumptions (Brookfield, 2017). McNiff and Whitehead (2011) describe AR as a method where researchers can learn from their lived experiences. Researchers can then look at and reflect on the learning that occurred. When we reflect, we learn through an experience. Reflection can be utilised within research to make sense and derive meaning from difficult and confusing situations (Dewey, 1933). AR gives the researcher an opportunity to reflect on their practice "in order to enhance the quality of education for (their) pupils and (themselves)" (McNiff, 1988: 1). Glenn et al. (2017) offer that our values provide a foundation for everything we do. This provides a rationale for the choice of the AR paradigm as Sullivan et al. (2016) describe AR as a 'deeply values-based methodology' (28). In this Self-study AR, I lived out my educational values of *Voice*, *Creativity* and *Collaboration*.

3.1.2 *Action Research Cycle*

Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) cyclical model for AR was chosen for this research. The simple four step per cycle model highlights the cyclical nature of AR with each cycle informing the next. The four steps of each cycle are: *Plan, Act, Observe* and *Reflect* and can be seen in the diagram below:
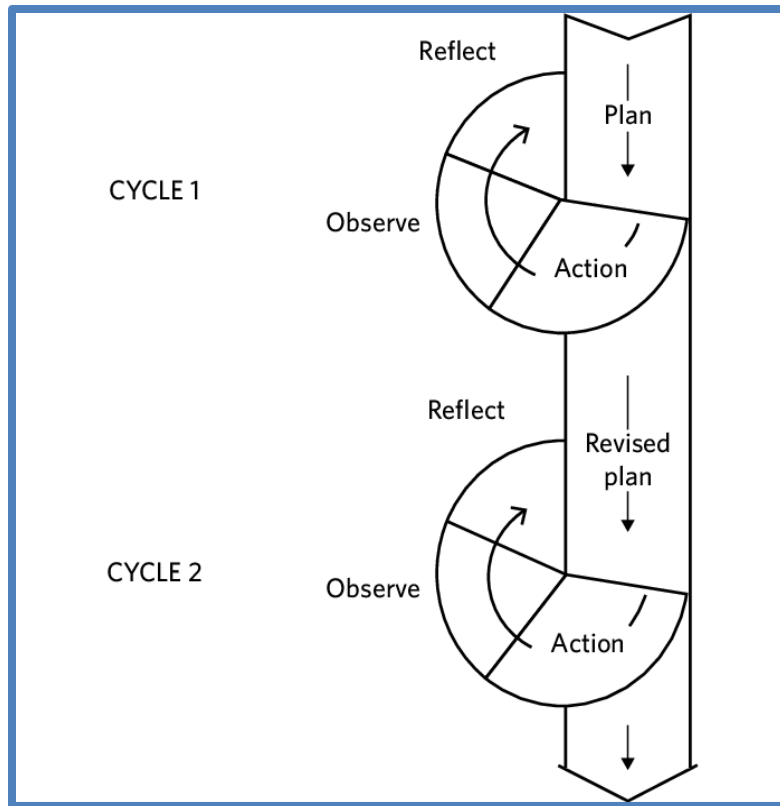
Figure 3.0: Kemmis and McTaggart's (1988) cyclical model for Action Research

It was naive of me to assume that my research would be as straightforward and simple as the above model suggests. While the above model offered direction and focus for my research, action without understanding can be seen as blind (Reason and Branbury, 2013). To understand my practice, the purpose of my everyday actions had to remain clear (Sullivan et al., 2016). The participatory nature of this research encouraged observation and regular reflection. When an educator becomes a student again it provides them with an opportunity to observe and reflect on their own experiences as a learner and create new knowledge surrounding how best they learn. This knowledge can then be transferred to how your children may learn (Brookfield, 2017).

3.2 QUALITATIVE RESEARCH

I chose qualitative research for this study as I felt it best suited my educational value of *Creativity*. Qualitative research acknowledges that 'the social and educational world is a messy place, full of contradictions, richness, complexity, connectedness, conjunctions and disjunctions' (Cohen et al., 2018: 228). As a result, it lends itself to studying people and behaviours over numerical research. The importance of observational data in qualitative research was also deemed relevant for this research. Qualitative research is ideal for researchers who are working with minority groups or those in society whose voices may have been ignored previously (Silverman, 2006). This concept resonated with me as a researcher and appealed to the values that I hold as an educator. The CRT element of the framework used for this study aims to celebrate every child's culture and amplify the voices of the minorities. Qualitative research allowed me the flexibility to work within this framework. Taylor et al., (2016) also highlights the importance of the researcher's familiarity with their research site and participants before posing research questions. As I am the class teacher to the children involved in this research, I believe I have the familiarity needed to conduct this research in a qualitative manner. When examining my research questions, qualitative research also appealed to me as there is an emphasis on participants' voices which echoes my educational value of *Voice* (Cohen et al., 2018).

3.4 DATA INSTRUMENTS

Throughout this research, data were collected to illustrate the situation as it was, to provide evidence of changes that were made both in my practice and in my thinking, to ensure I was living closely with my values and to generate evidence to support my claim to knowledge (Sullivan et al., 2016). I am investigating if using a framework drawing on CRP and CRT in my teaching of Visual Art can encourage and celebrate diversity in my classroom. The choice of data collection

methods were influenced by my research questions, my research participants and my value of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration.* These methods included pre and post- questionnaires, researcher's reflective journal, student reflections, samples of the student's work, critical friends ad validation groups.

Data collection tools	Pre and post study questionnaires
	Researcher's Reflective Journal
	Child Reflections
	Samples of Children's Work
	Critical Friends and Validation

Figure 3.1: Data Collection Tools

3.4.1 *Questionnaires*

A self-selection questionnaire was the first data collection method used with the children as they can facilitate open responses to a range of topics (Cohen et al., 2018). Starting with the child, a pre-intervention questionnaire was used to obtain the children's feelings and opinions on the level of Visual Art education they have received thus far. Children were questioned on their understanding of culture and asked to identify their own cultural traits. Questionnaires were beneficial for this research as they offer open-ended responses to a range of questions (Cohen et al., 2018). This questionnaire was offered to all children participating in the research. In closed questions, children selected their answers by circling the response they agreed with most. Post Cycle 3 another questionnaire was distributed to the children. The children were asked questions regarding their enjoyment of the creation of the class mural. They were asked to use the "Three

Stars and a Wish" assessment strategy when providing feedback as all children were familiar with it.

3.4.2 *Teacher Reflective Journal*

> "One of the key aspects of doing critical thinking as part of an AR cycle is taking
>
> everyday actions, putting them under the microscope of critique and problematising
>
> them." (Sullivan et al., 2016: 46)

Two key principles of AR are reflection and reflexivity (Sullivan et al., 2016). My reflective journal was an essential instrument in my research. As Sullivan et al. (2016) highlighted above, reflection and critical reflection is essential to AR. It encourages the researcher to engage in critical thinking and to examine themselves and their own practice. Using a reflective journal encouraged me to slow down as an educator and examine my own practice. Throughout this process, I prioritised finding time to pause, reflect and think (Green, 1997). This enabled me to identify areas for improvement in my practice and areas where I felt I was experiencing a 'living contraction' (Whitehead, 2020). This occurs when a researcher discovers they are living in line with their values. I documented in my journal twice weekly based on questions set by lecturers, discussions with critical friends, the children and my supervisor, in-class observations, activities and lessons. I also engaged in reflection on action (Schon, 1991) and documented it in the journal during lessons and throughout the day.

3.4.2.1 *The ALACT Model of Reflection*

I drew on a number of theorists and models for reflection throughout my research based on the type of reflection. I utilised the ALACT model of reflection (Korthagen, 2001) regularly as I felt

it was relevant to the nature of my reflections. This model supports the researcher in navigating the reflection process (Korthagen, 2017). The cyclical nature of the model encouraged both reflection and reflexivity. Unlike other established models (Kemmis & McTaggart, 1981 and Kolb, 1984) the ALACT model is not only rational analysis orientated. In phases 2 and 3 there is a focus on the emotional and motivational aspects of reflection also. This model aided me in creating my own theories under the guidance of experts in this area (Korthagen, 2017).
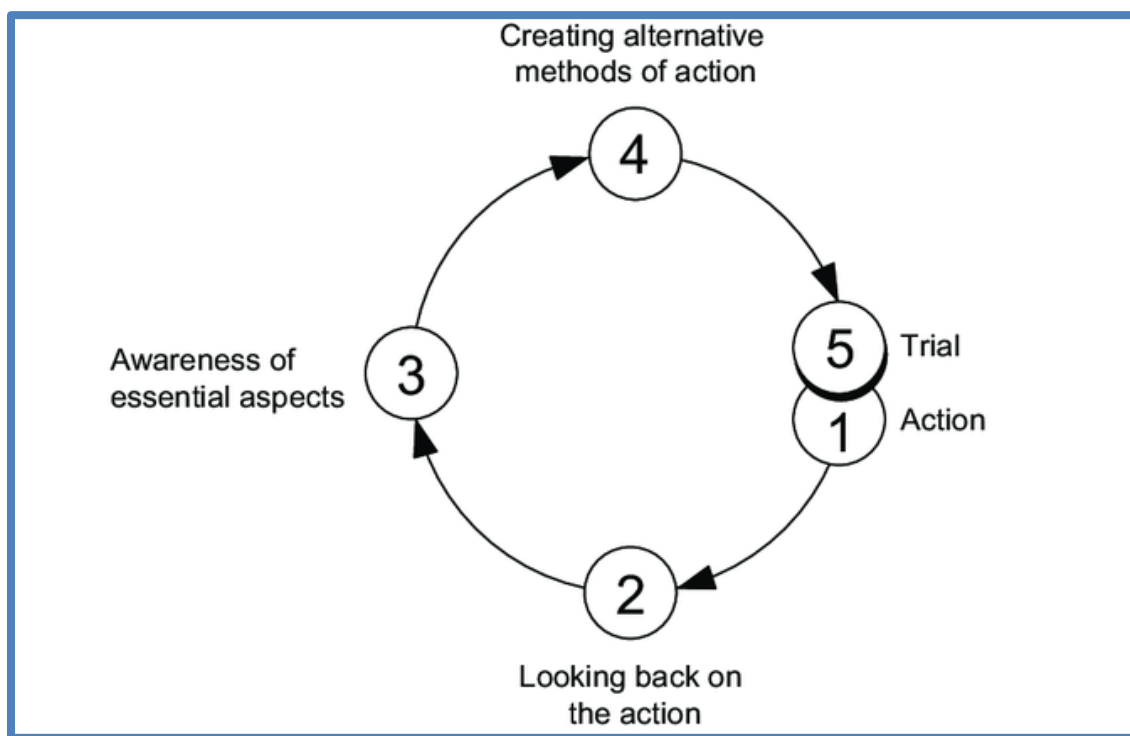
Figure 3.2: The ALACT model of reflection (Korthagen et al., 2001)

3.4.3 *Student Reflections: Child Reflective Journal and Exit Tickets*

Reflective Journaling is a concept that the children taking part in the research were already familiar with. This research developed on this prior knowledge. The choice of this data collection tool was heavily motivated by my value of *Voice*. Children's Reflective Journals (CRJ) offered a window

into the thoughts and feelings of the children as they reflected on their experiences. Often children's experiences of an event or activity can differ greatly from that experienced by an adult (Brookfield, 2017). In this case, the children's feedback provided me with critical feedback on the changing attitudes, development of knowledge surrounding culture and level of enjoyment the children were experiencing throughout the research. I gained insights into how I could improve my planning of the intervention and what was working well through the children's reflections. The feelings and thoughts generated from the CRJs allowed me as the researcher to generate generalisations. These generalisations allowed new situations to be effectively dealt with (Gibbs 1988). Every child had their own personal CRJ which they engaged with during lessons and completed activities after the lesson. In line with my value of *Collaboration,* we curated stimulus questions as a class to encourage the children to reflect on the lesson which also gave children who may have been reluctant to reflect focus. Brookfield (2017) suggests that student anonymity can ensure accurate reflections from students. There was a fear when working with vulnerable groups, in this case, the children, that the power dynamics would lead to the children being less critical in their reflections. For this reason, I set up an anonymous 'Reflection Box' in my classroom for children to offer feedback on how they were experiencing the research. Some children used the box in the beginning stages but this decreased as the research went on and the children became more confident in their reflective practice.

3.4.4 *Children's Work Samples*

The concept behind PhotoVoice was used and adapted for this research. In lieu of taking a photo, the children were invited to draw a picture and illustrate understanding through Visual Art. This gave the children an opportunity to express their thoughts, opinions and respond in a non-

threatening way. Authentic assessment such as portfolios are valued by culturally responsive teachers (Villegas & Lucas 2002). Children were then given an opportunity to explain their drawings as they are true to them (Clark-Ibanez, 2007). This gave the children ownership over their own culture and enabled them to teach others in the classroom, it was practised with the children before the research began. The children were asked to draw pictures or create art to represent different feelings, emotions and how they view the world on several occasions. This gave the children the opportunity to ask questions, try different styles and become familiar with the method. During the study, after engaging with a discrete lesson on an aspect of culture the children were asked to represent the same aspect, for example, food, from their own culture through art. This artwork was then used as a stimulus for conversation in the following lessons. In Cycle 3, the children engaged in a collaborative art project. This intervention was motivated by my values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration.* Using a CPT approach, it was important to offer the children opportunities to engage in inquiry, analysis and evaluation (Gay, 2010)*.*

3.4.5 *Validation Groups and Critical Friends*

As mentioned previously, AR is collaborative in nature and critical friends "who provide support as well as constructively challenge and critique" (Lassonde, Galman & Kosnik, 2009; Sullivan, et al., 2016: 28) are vital. I had two critical friends during this research. Critical Friend A was a colleague and the Special Education Teacher who was linked with my sixth class. As my critical friend was linked with my class and had worked closely with the children over the past three years, she could offer observations, guidance and valuable insights into the children's learning. Critical Friend B was also engaging in a Self-Study AR project in a different school. She offered me guidance and reassurance throughout the research and ensured that my research was in line with

my personal values. My validation group consisted of four members of my school community; a SET who I work with weekly, my partner sixth class teacher who taught the children previously and a fourth class teacher who has a deep interest in Visual Arts education. Sullivan et al., (2016: 53) state that 'dialogue is considered to be a key element of the Action Research process. I regularly met with my critical friends and validation group. We discussed the research and I valued the opinions and insights the members of my Validation Group could offer me. I trusted them to provide feedback that may not have lined with my thinking at the time. Feedback and insights from my critical friends and validation groups also provided insights for my choice of interventions. Particularly in cycle 3 which was curated in a validation group meeting on the basis of reflections I shared in my RRJ.

3.5 RESEARCH DESIGN

3.5.1 The Framework
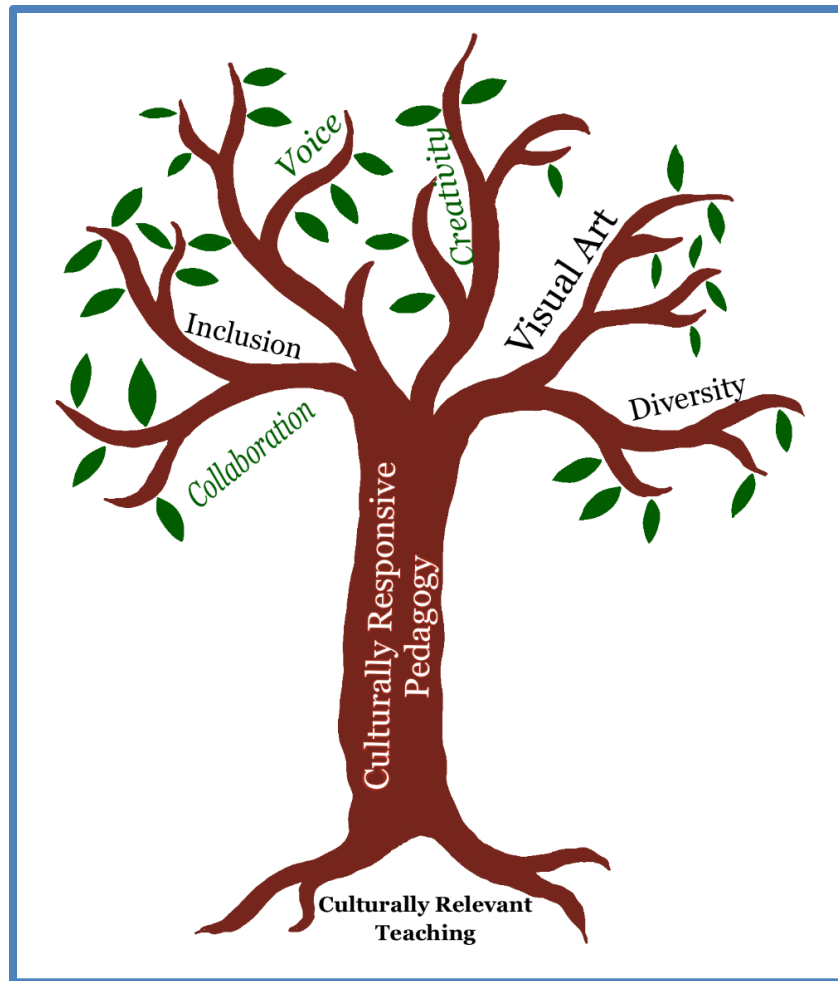
Figure 3.2: Culturally Responsive Framework Visual

Above is an illustrated representation of the CR framework which I created for this study. This research is rooted in Ladson-Billings' CRP. CRP focuses on pedagogy and has influenced my attitudes and informed my planning during this study by providing the theory. CRT provided the methodology. Gay's focus on teaching and CRP's six dimensions offered practical ideas and examples to use in the classroom. Using the CR framework adapted from CRT and CRP, I researched diversity and multicultural education with a focus on improving my inclusive practice and celebrating all children. A subject-based approach was used and Visual Art was selected. This framework was created and implemented under the guidance of my educational values; *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration.*

The following diagrams offer an overview of my self-study AR project.

August - September 2021	October 2021 - Janurary 2022	Feburary - June 2022	June - August 2022
Began Researcher's Reflective Journal.	Sought and obtained ethical approval.	Planned and created research timeline.	Gathered Data
Wrote Reserach Proposal.	Discussed research with BoM and School Leadership.	Undertook research with the class and implemented interventions.	Data Analysis
Began research for Literature Review.	Sought and obtained permission from relevent parties.	Regular meetings with critical friends and validation groups took place.	Full thesis draft completed

Figure 3.3: Research Schedule Overview

Cycle 1
- BOM and Parental Consent. Child Assent.
- Pre-Study Questionnaire.
- Initial converations with critical friends.
- Researcher and Children began their RJs.

Cycle 2
- Examined different elements of culture using diverse artists.
- Elements of culture: Food and Drink, Language, celebrations and traditions.
- Children created artwork based on each element.
- Identity Sculptures.
- Continued use of RJs

Cycle 3
- Discussion and planning of class collaborative art project.
- Small group planning and class vote.
- Designing and Painting of class mural.
- Post-study discussions, reflections and qustionnaire.

Figure 3.4: Outline of Research Cycles

The Interventions

Interventions took place during Cycle 2 and Cycle 3 of the data collection process. Data collection occurred during the 60-minute Visual Art lessons and 30 minutes of discretionary time which was allocated to the study following consultation with the children involved.

3.5.2 Intervention One - Cycle 2 - Culture through art

Gay states "including ethnic and culturally diverse content in the curriculum" as one of the five elements of CRT (2000: 35). During Cycle 2 a conscious effort was made to diversify the artists we examined during Visual Art lessons. As a class, we identified three elements of culture to look at through art. Food and Drink, Traditions and Celebrations and Linguistic Diversity were selected. I sourced ten pieces of art from each element created by a culturally diverse range of artists. I chose artists from cultures that were represented in my class and those who were absent. In groups the children discussed and analysed the artwork using Yenaire's Visual Thinking Strategies (2013) before presenting back to the class.

> What is going on in this picture?
>
> What do you see that makes you say that?
>
> What more can you find?
>
> What else is important to consider?

The children responded by creating a piece of art based on the same element that reflected their lives and cultures which were collected and stored as art portfolios. Each lesson was followed by a reflective task or an opportunity to reflect independently. Drawing on previous learnings, the children created identity towers to consolidate this series of lessons.

3.5.3 *Intervention Two - Cycle 3 - The Collaborative Art Project*

Using the children's previous related knowledge from studying murals as part of our history lessons examining both Northern Ireland and the Berlin Wall, a class mural for graduation was selected for our collaborative art project. As a class a theme for the mural was decided, *'Moving forward together'* was the chosen theme. Individually the children illustrated their ideas for the mural and a classroom vote occurred. A committee from the children whose designs received the most votes was selected. They came together and created a design for the mural. Every child then had a role in painting the mural. Reflection played a large part in this process also. Children completed reflective activities as part of the mural creation process.

3.6 RESEARCH PARTICIPANTS

Convenience sampling was selected for the purpose of this research. This involves choosing the sample from those to who the researcher has direct access to (Cohen et al., 2018). Convenience sampling also appealed to me as a researcher as it does not aim to generalise the findings to the wider population (Cohen et al., 2018). I feel this is appropriate for classroom based research as there is a general understanding within education that there is no 'one size fits all' approach to working with children.

The research site for this research was an Educate Together National School in Leinster. I selected this school as I am currently employed there. I deemed it to be appropriate for this research as I am familiar with the school and the school community. The school community is very diverse in its culture with a high percentage of children coming from households where English is spoken as

a second language. The children in my sixth class acted as the main contributors to my research, they provided me with insights and important data for my research. The research was open to all twenty-six children. Consent to collect data for this study was sought through consent forms which were sent to the children's parents and guardians along with an information sheet outlining the rationale and aims of the research. 23 children agreed to participate in the collection of data. My cooperating teacher and the Special Education Teacher linked to my class acted as my critical friends. A consent form was signed by both parties. Convenience sampling was also used when selecting my critical friends as they were both familiar with the researcher's classroom setting and had an existing relationship with the research participants. I had a similar experience to Brookfield when he argues that conversations about the research with critical friends 'helps us to notice aspects of our practice that are usually hidden to us' (Brookfield 2017: 8). Critical conversations with my colleagues provided insights and new understandings which proved central to my research. The main gatekeepers of this research were the school Principal and the Board of Management. Prior to engaging in this research, I received permission to conduct this research from the Board of Management and my Principal.

3.8 ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

The Maynooth University, School and Safeguarding Children Policies provided the ethical standards for this research, in addition to General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR). From the commencement of this research process I was compliant with the policies and regulations (See Appendix A). The school's Child Protection Policy and Equality Policy also guided this research. At the outset of this study I sought approval from the faculty Ethics Review committee from Maynooth University. My ethical statement was approved and made available to all participants in this research. As the primary school I worked in was the site for this research, I requested

permission from the school's Board of Management and Leadership team. Permission was granted from both parties prior to the beginning of data collection. When seeking parental consent and child assent, a plain language statement and information sheet were sent to the parents. I highlighted this research as being conducted on myself, the class teacher and not the children. I detailed that although every child would be taking part in the research interventions, I was seeking permission to collect data from the children. This information was given to the parents and children as it is essential that researchers provide a clear and straightforward explanation of their research intentions to all parties involved (Cohen et al., 2018). Letters detailing the research were also sent to my critical friends and consent was sought for their contributions to the research to be used and stored as data. It was highlighted that they all had the option of withdrawing consent at any time. A copy of the letters and permission requests can be found in the appendices.

3.8.1 *Child Assent*
As the participants involved in my research were children in sixth class I felt I could explain to them that I was engaging in a master's programme with the aim to improve my practice as a teacher. We read through the plain language statement together and engaged in a class discussion where I answered any questions they had. I reiterated throughout the process that they could withdraw from the research at any time without experiencing any negative repercussions (Bourke & Loveridge, 2014). I also highlighted they could still participate in the classroom activities and lessons even if they were not part of the data collection process. As I have identified *Voice* as one of my educational values, the children were given ample opportunities to discuss and question the research. This was a very enjoyable process and it gave me an insight into the child's lens (Brookfield, 2017) and their thoughts prior to commencing the study. I felt it was essential that the children understood the nature of the research and what their role would be before I sought their

assent. Once written parental consent was received, participating children brought home a children's letter of assent to read and sign with their parents or guardians if they wished to participate. As everyone has the right to privacy (Cohen et al., 2011). I ensured the confidentiality of the children at all times. I allowed the children to select their own pseudonyms to be used in the research. This gave the children a sense of ownership over their data contributions and followed the Froebelian child-centred principle which underpinned my research from the start. As identity became a major theme of this study, if the children wrote or included something in a piece of artwork that broke their anonymity it was disregarded from the data collection process.

3.8.2 *Sensitivities*

As aforementioned, I adhered to the Maynooth University, the School and Safeguarding Children Policies and General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) throughout the study. I understood my role as a mandated person and if a child was to make a sensitive disclosure to me during the research, I followed the school's Child Protection Policy and spoke with the Designated Liaison Person immediately. This data then would not be part of the research project. In my Ethics Statement, I identified possible sensitivities for the children when researching culture and the different power dynamics that were featured during the research. In this statement, a detailed plan and description of procedures that would be followed if this were to become an issue during the research were provided.

3.9 DATA STORAGE

In accordance with university guidelines as set out in the Maynooth Master of Education Student Handbook and GDPR legislation, the data collected as part of this study was anonymous and pseudonymous selected by the children were used. Only data for the purpose of the research study was gathered and processed. All data were signed, labelled and dated (Sullivan et al., 2016). In

line with university and GDPR Guidelines, electronic data is password protected and stored in encrypted files. This information was shared with the participants of the study in line with GDPR Guidelines (British Educational Research Association, 2019). Due to the creative nature of this research, manual data in the form of art work created by the children were gathered. This manual data were placed in a locked cabinet with access to the researcher only. This data is available upon request from my supervisor. It will be stored for a minimum of ten years following publication (Maynooth University, 2016). This information was clearly stated in the letters sent to the research participants.

3.10 VALIDATION PROCESS

> "Self-study research also seek to make explicit and validate their professional expertise
>
> with the explicit intent of advancing the public knowledge base of teacher education"
>
> (Vanassche & Kelchtermans 2015:509)

As replicability is not expected in AR, Shipman (2014)'s '*Four critical questions to check quality research'* are not applicable to AR studies. Instead Sullivan et al., (2016) suggest that reliability and credibility are key criteria for quality research along with the researcher's values. Throughout this research my research validation group used a 'check and comment' approach to my data. Here, accuracy and validation were discussed (Cohen et al., 2007: 106). Triangulation is a frequently used method of 'demonstrating and establishing authenticity' through every step of the research (McNiff, 2017:189). Triangulation was also used to socially validate my research. This involved using multiple perspectives to check my research. In AR triangulation can offer an opportunity to establish deeper meaning to the research (Sullivan et al., 2017). During this research I used a range of triangulation approaches (multi-perspective, methodological and outside observer) to help me

validate the accuracy of my research. I checked my data with my thesis supervisor, my critical friends, my validation groups and the literature. I also presented my data to the children themselves to ensure consistency and maintain the Froebelian child-centred approach I strived for.

3.11 DATA ANALYSIS

Data analysis must be appropriate to the collected data (Cohen et al., 2018). During this study, collected data were analysed using inductive reasoning and reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022). Inductive reasoning was selected due to my position within the research and my familiarity with the research site and participants. The reflexive nature of reflexive thematic analysis deemed this to be an appropriate analysis method. "Reflexivity involves a disciplined practice of critically interrogating what we do, how and why we do it, and the impacts and influences of this in our research" (Braun & Clarke, 2022: 5). This lines with the descriptions of Self-study AR that were provided previously, as two of the key principles of AR are reflection and reflexivity (Sullivan et al., 2016). Braun & Clarke (2022) offers a six-phase analytic process for reflexive thematic analysis. It is a process, not a method which is embedded in a web of values, practices and assumptions. The process can be applied to the method of creating meaning from the gathered data. The six phase process is outlined below.
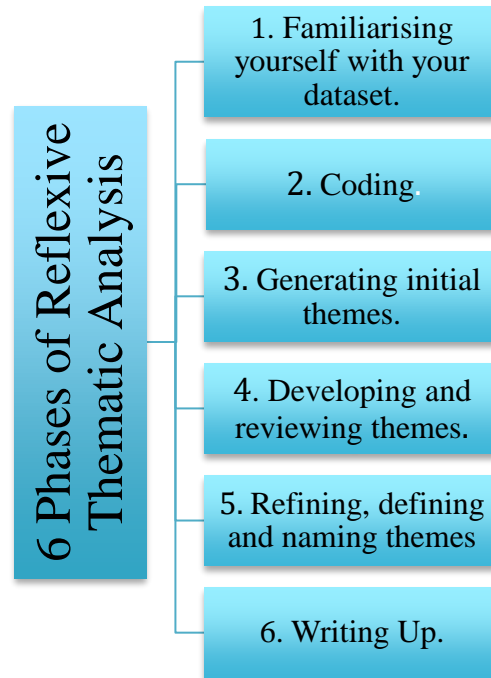
Figure 4.0: Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis

3.11 CHAPTER SUMMARY

The research question for this study is 'How can I create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity using Visual Arts?' My educational values that underpinned this research were identified as *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration.* In this chapter I outlined the rationale behind the selection of the AR paradigm and the motivation behind the choice of qualitative. I presented an overview of the research cycles and the different data collection methods behind this research and provided a justification for my choice. My position as researcher and research participant was detailed along with the self-study nature of the project. A description of the research site and the research participants is also included in this chapter. The research framework and design were presented and a description of the interventions that took place was provided. Ethical aspects have been considered and the sensitivities have been recognised. In this chapter, I identified the children participating in this project as a vulnerable group and the considerations around 'consent' and

'assent' were highlighted. I have provided an outline of the data analysis process used in this study and in Chapter 4 an analysis of the data and the findings following the data analysis will be discussed.

CHAPTER FOUR

DISCUSSIONS OF THE DATA & FINDINGS

4.0 INTRODUCTION

This AR self-study investigated using Visual Arts with a Culturally Responsive (CR) framework to create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity. The primary focus of this research is on enhancing my practice. In this section, I outline the data analyse methods used and I aim to analyse the data collected during the research cycles to present findings. The data analysis process, my research question along with the aims of this study are outlined below.

4.1 ANALYSING THE DATA

Drawing on Braun and Clarke's (2022) phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis I began by familiarising myself with the data, this included transcribing the collected data from observational notes, samples of the children's work, extracts from questionnaires and samples from CRJs. My RRJ also provided insights as I continued to discuss and reflect following the data collection process. Once I became familiar with the data, I generated initial codes using a colour coding system which were simplified into smaller codes before emerging themes were developed. Braun and Clarke (2022) warn that reflexive thematic analysis may not offer linear progression and throughout this study, I referred back to my research question and aims and the values that were embedded throughout this process to offer direction.

4.1.1 *Research Question*

How can I use Visual Arts to create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity?

4.1.2 *Research Aims*

1. To introduce a conceptual framework drawing on Culturally Responsive Teaching and Culturally Relevant Pedagogy in my teaching of Visual Art.

2. To live closer to my values of voice, collaboration and creativity.

3. To expand my teaching of Visual Art to include every child.

4. To develop a deeper understanding of who the children in my class are.

4.2 EMERGING THEMES

In this chapter I will outline the findings of this study. The data collected as part of this research was obtained from Pre and Post-study questionnaires, teacher and children's Reflective Journal entries, samples of students' work, student reflections, empirical observation, critical friends and validation groups. Three main themes emerged from the data analysis:

(i) My role as the teacher

(ii) Sense of Belonging

(iii) Art and integration

4.2.1 *My role as the Teacher*

The conceptual framework used for this study was rooted in Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Culturally Relevant Teaching. To become a CR teacher there is not a commercially available product that can be purchased and made into a lesson plan or support classroom endeavours. It is instead a shift in mind-set that reflects values and the holistic development of the child. The first step as a teacher is to recognise how your own culture and cultural values shape your classroom expectations (Hammond, 2014). Throughout this research, my values of *Voice*, *Collaboration* and *Creativity* have been referred to and underpin all of my intentions for my work. I believed that

these were the characteristics needed by me to fulfil my role in meeting my research aims and objectives and meeting the needs of the children.

From my reflections and classroom interactions, I believe that many of Robert J Walker's twelve characteristics of an effective teacher are needed to implement a Culturally Responsive (CR) framework within the classroom. The characteristics of compassion, being prepared, displaying a personal touch, cultivating a sense of belonging, and being respectful towards students are all the qualities I recognised the children needed to grow, develop confidence and feel like they belong. (Walker, 2008)

I have a specific role to play as a teacher to cultivate a classroom environment that celebrates diversity in my own classroom. As a teacher, I have the necessary resources to be an agent of change. A question I have asked myself daily throughout my practice was "*Have I heard from every child today?*" (Researcher's Reflective Journal (RRJ), 2022). I have taught in my current school for two years now and have not found it as easy to develop relationships with the children in my classes as I had done previously. As a result of this, I outlined "To develop a deeper understanding of who the children in my class are" as one of the main aims of this AR study. What could I do to achieve this? From the outset, I knew using the Froebelian principle of starting with the child was key. Providing the children with opportunities for inquiry into their own cultures was the first step. Providing the platforms to share these insights and creating opportunities for collaborative learning followed. This was an important process when implementing a CR framework. Teacher modelling of this was also an important part of this practice. As aforementioned, Hammond (2014) encourages teachers to identify their own culture and the values

they bring which shape classroom expectations and experiences. Engaging in the intervention activities myself, helped the children to identify and illustrate their own cultures and values. There were three areas I focused on when implementing this as identified in Figure 4.1 below.

My role as the teacher		
Praise and Feedback	Listening and Student Voice	Space and time to reflect

Figure 4.1: Sub-themes of my role as the teacher

1. **Feedback and Praise**

According to Gehl (2020) when teaching Visual Art, teachers spend more of their time giving feedback than anything else. This rings true for my experiences when teaching Visual Art. I often find myself circulating the room offering comments and suggestions as I walk during a Visual Art lesson more than in any other subject. During a conversation with my Validation Group, my comments about the children's artwork were remarked upon. I was made aware of how personal praise is. The examples I had selected to showcase to my peers had similar attributes and I ignored other obvious elements. I later noted in my Researcher's Reflective Journal (2022), "*I think I praise in others what I liked to be praised on*". After I noticed this I began to include the children in the Feedback process and followed a child-centred approach. During Visual Art lessons the children wrote down the verbal feedback I gave during the activity. Over the course of three lessons, it became apparent that I was praising the same aspects of the children's work repeatedly. Following this discovery, I began to share the learning objectives for the lesson from Cycle 2 with the children and they selected a focus area for their work. This ranged from colour selection, to the use of an art element to exactly what was laid out in the learning objective. I then used this focus area to target my feedback noting "*This is a lot harder, I am having to focus as I circulate. I am learning*

a lot about the children though and how they feel during art lessons" (RRJ, 2022). This change in practice helped to achieve the research aim of "to develop a deeper understanding of who the children in my class are." During this process the continued importance of adult intervention in feedback became apparent. This mirrors Gay's focus on instruction and the central role of the teacher when implementing CRT (2013). As this practice progressed I noted that a small group in the class were selecting the same focus area each week or a focus area below their ability. This highlighted to me that while including the children in the feedback process was highly beneficial, I as the teacher still had a role to play. Hammond (2014) warns that providing feedback does not automatically equal change. For feedback to be beneficial, it has to be accepted by the learner and put into practice. "*When giving feedback I need to talk with the children, not at them*" (RRJ, 2022). This extract from my Reflective Journal identifies when giving feedback to the children it is beneficial for them to be involved in the process not only to encourage them to accept the feedback but also to aid the teacher's understanding of the learner. I have gained an increased awareness of the potential impact my language has on the children. The change in my practice was noted by a number of children when completing reflection activities. Sam wrote, *"My favourite part was what teacher said about my painting. She saw that I was working hard to improve my colour tones"* (CRJ, 2022) and Aaliyah stated, *"I don't like collaging because it is hard so I wrote about it on my Post-it. Amy* (the teacher) *really encouraged me to try my best and it helped a bit" (CRJ, 2022).* By including the children in the feedback process the above children received more personal and direct praise which boosted their self-esteem.

2. **Listening and Student Voice**

Student *Voice* was identified as one of my educational values and throughout this research, I had a post-it on the wall beside my teacher's desk that read "Have I heard from every child today?" This was a question I referred back to towards the end of every day. Not only ensuring I had heard from every child but also ensuring I had provided opportunities for the children to communicate with me and their peers. I discovered that once I took a back seat and allowed the children to guide the lessons, greater learning took place. When reflecting on Cycle 2 in my journal I wrote "*starting with who the children are, not what they are able to do is so valuable*" (RRJ, 29th April 2022) This became my working definition for the CR framework, adapted from Lynch's definition that CRP "is a student-centered approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world." (2016: 4). By placing student *Voice* at the heart of my practice and engaging in active listening with the children, a sense of empowerment was established in the classroom. This was evident in Cycle 2, when a child's Reflective Journal entry became the basis for a whole class activity. "*Your name is like a lid you put on your identity*" (Elijah CRJ, April 2022). This statement lead to a whole class discussion on the relationship between names and identity, leading to the creation of identity statues as illustrated below;

**Figure 4.2**: Dillion and Eve's identity sculptures

This sense of empowerment seemed from listening to the children and creating lessons around their thoughts and ideas as their children could identify their influence in practice. *"The best thing I can give to the children in my class is my time"* and *"My practice has changed because I have been listening"* (RRJ, May 2022). The extracts from my RRJ identify a change in thinking and a mind-set change. I began living closer to my educational value of *Voice* and experienced positive feedback as a result. Ladson-Billings (1994) warns us that so many children are sitting in front of nice teachers who are not really teaching their children in front of them. This resonated with me through the above quotes from my RRJ. From my research, I identified that I did not truly start teaching the children until I prioritised student *Voice* and started to listen to them. This practice led to developing an understanding of who they are as people.

3. Space and Time to Reflect

From the data collected as part of this study it is apparent that the children benefited from the opportunity, space and time given to engage in regular reflection. From the onset, several children experienced challenges when reflecting. The unstructured and free nature of the exercise proved daunting for some children who were unsure what to include. From my understanding of the importance of the child's lens in reflection (Brookfield, 2017) and drawing on my educational value of *Voice* I was heavily motivated to aid the children with reflecting. For the children who initially found this experience difficult and in line with my value of *Collaboration* as a class we curated stimulus questions as a class to provide a focus and encourage the children to reflect on the lesson. The below images show the progress a Claire made from relying on the stimulus questions to reflecting independently.
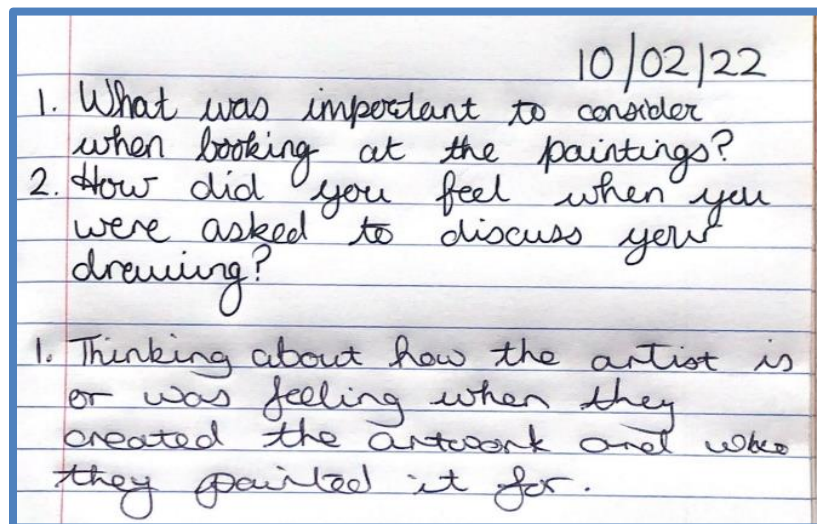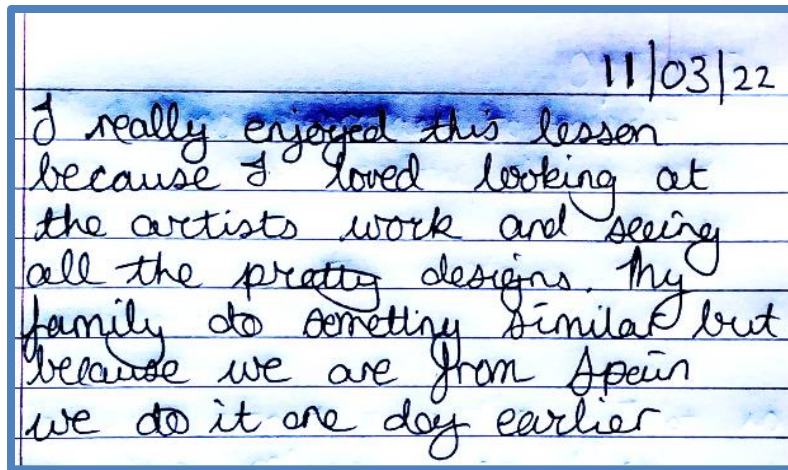
Figure 4.3: Claire's CRJ Extracts one month apart

As the study progressed, the use of the CRJs grew in popularity and on several occasions throughout the interventions the children would ask *"When do we get to use our reflective journals?"* or *"Is it ok for me to take out my journal now?"* (RRJ, 2022). While Brookfield (2017) argues for anonymity in reflection to ensure accuracy, I felt a sense of ownership over the children's journals was also important. For this reason, time was spent at the beginning of the research decorating and adding personal touches to the cover of the CRJs. Here the children were provided with an opportunity for *Creativity* and expression. The children used their journals every week during different activities. They offered the children an opportunity to make sense of their learning and track their ever-changing viewpoint of what culture really means to them. The unprescribed nature of the reflective journals meant that children could reflect using a method of their choosing, the majority selecting written reflection or creating drawings. This promoted the children's autonomy as they were provided with time to reflect freely on their learning. Using an adaption of Photo-Voice, some children preferred to use photos to track their reflections and availed of the classroom tablets to do this. The photos were then printed and included in their CRJ. This was particularly beneficial for children who experience difficulties with literacy or have

English as an additional language. Providing time and space for reflection has positive benefits for both children and teachers as indicated in this research.
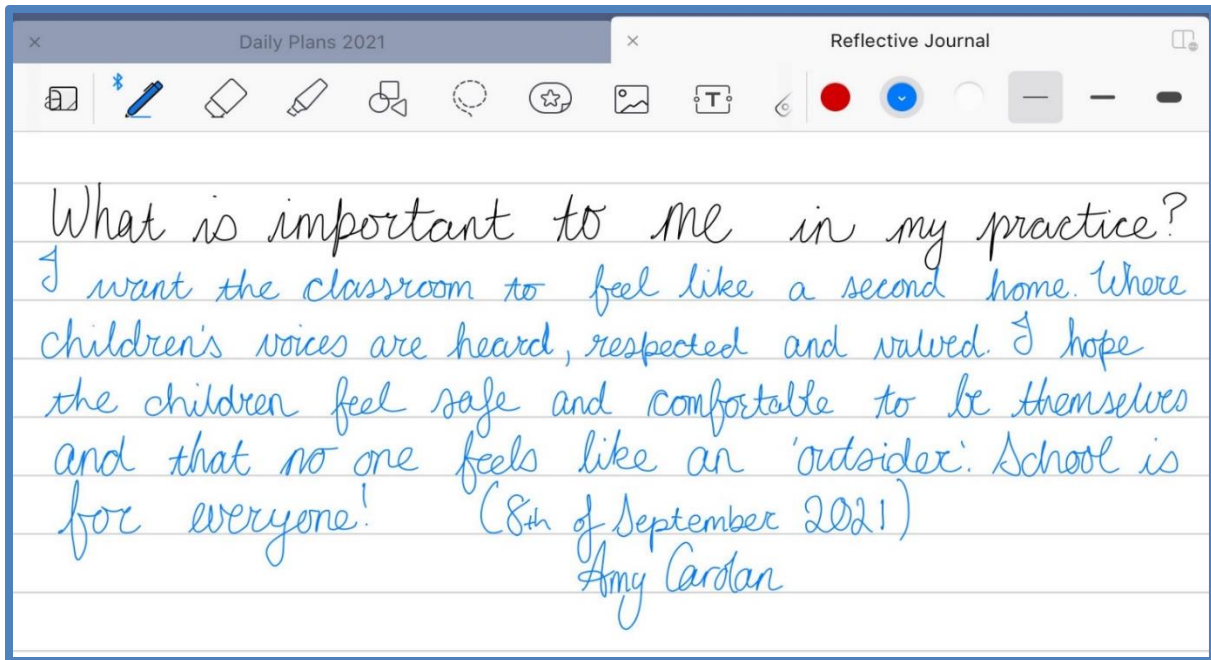
4.2.2 *A Sense of Belonging*

Belonging emerged as a significant theme of this study. Throughout this research, developing a sense of belonging in the classroom was important to me as a researcher. Children who feel like they belong can experience a heightened self-belief in their chances to experience academic success (Verschelden, 2017), this can be seen as similar to Ladson-Billings' CRP pillar of 'student learning / academic achievement' (1997, 2009) as outlined previously. Both value children feeling that they have the potential to succeed over test results and standardised assessments. The theme of belonging can be divided into three sub-themes, these included personal educational value, making connections and classroom community.

Sense of Belonging		
A Personal Value	Making Connections	Classroom Community

Figure 4.4 Sub-themes of Sense of Belonging

1. Researcher's Educational Value

Initially I identified belonging as one of my educational values (RRJ, August 2021). As I developed my understanding of values through reflection and reflective tasks, belonging was replaced by other values that I deemed more important. When reflecting on my motivations for engaging with this Masters program and completing a thematic analysis of the collected data, belonging became the most prevalent code and developed into a key theme of this study.

Figure 4.5: Values Image

Belonging encapsulates my educational values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration*. From my

reflections, I believe a sense of belonging can be developed by respecting children's voices and

providing authentic, deliberate opportunities to share their opinions. *Creativity* is important to me

as it allows children to find a mode that works for them. By allowing children to work creatively,

it offers children the opportunity to find ways to succeed which are personal to them. I have

outlined *Collaboration* as an educational value as I believe it has the ability to feel as though you

are part of a team. In Chapter Two, I provided examples of collective projects that brought people

together, through that collaborative work, barriers that traditionally segregated people were broken

as everyone was working towards a shared goal. The three educational values I have identified

share the same goal of encouraging children to feel like they are valued and to experience a feeling

of belonging in the classroom. As I reflected on this study a deeper understanding of my values

was highlighted in my RRJ, *"Belonging was like an umbrella that framed my values, my three*

values are the elements I think are important to create a sense of belonging" (June, 2022). After

initially identifying belonging as I linked it with Collaboration, Voice and Inclusion before replacing it during the refinement process.

Figure 4.6: Values Image

The significance of creating a sense of belonging in my practice was central to the creation of a class mural. Several research studies have highlighted that participating in collaborative Visual Arts projects can foster a sense of belonging (Parr, 2006).

2. Making Connections

As a class the children found talking and highlighting their cultures both difficult and daunting at first. From the pre-study questionnaire (See Appendices), it was noted that many children believed they did not have a culture or there was not anything that made themselves and their families

'special'. There was a belief that culture was what separated people and made them 'different' from one another. Below are examples of responses to the question, "What is culture?" and "Can you describe your family's culture?"

What is culture?

- *"Is it something to do with cults?"* (Adam, 2022)

- *"When people wear their clothes and stuff from their countries"* (Rebecca, 2022)

- *"Things that make people different to us"* (Colin, 2022)

"Can you describe your family's culture?"

- *"We don't have one"* (Anne, 2022)

- *"No there's nothing special about my family"* (Elaine, 2022)

- "*No we do the same things as other families"* (Oton, 2022)

In Cycle 2 diverse representations of different elements of culture as selected by the children were examined through art. From the activities, children began to explore and identify elements of their cultures. Key learning took place when children began to make connections and identify differences and similarities between their peers and also the artists' work. Phrases such as "*they're like me*" and "*my family would never do that*" (RRJ, 2022) were observed around the classroom during group discussions. Children who experience difficulties when identifying and describing their cultures benefited from this experience as they could make connections with artists and their peers. *"It was easier to figure things out about myself when I saw others showing me"* (Arnav CRJ, 2022). Arnav lives in a very diverse household with three nationalities represented across his

parents and grandparents. He found it difficult to summarise and articulate his culture as a result. During a lesson on Food and Drink, he made connections between his Indian heritage and his Irish nationality. Below are the artwork and reflections based on the testimony Arnav gave about his artwork.

**Figure 4.7:** Arnav's 'Fruit Bowl'

"*Arnav described that when you look at the artwork you immediately see a bright colourful fruit bowl which he correlated with his perceived Indian appearance. He went on to say that if you look deeper into the picture you will see his favourite things about Ireland like popcorn, pizza and chocolate.*" (RRJ, 2022)

Arnav reflected in his journal on this experience;

"People always make assumptions about me based on my appearance but if they actually took the time to get to know me they would see I have lots of layers. I'm a Hindu boy who plays G.A.A for crying out loud!" (CRJ, 2022)

During the same lesson, Michael used the making connections strategy to describe his artwork. He highlighted the similarities and differences he identified from speaking with his peers and looking at their artwork.
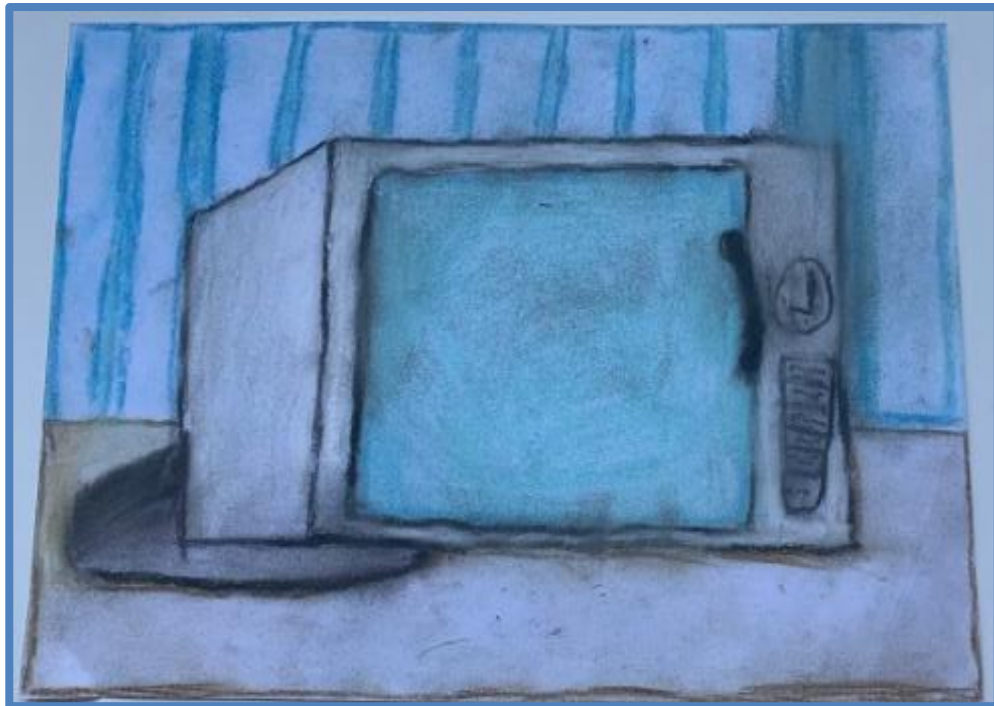
Figure 4.8: Michael's Microwave.

"At first I didn't know what to draw. Everyone at my table was drawing families eating or their favourite restaurants but we don't really do that in my house. I did a microwave because I usually have to heat my dinner up after judo training by myself" (Michael CRJ, 2022).

"I found Michael's drawing very striking. His choice of colour was very deliberate as we have just finished studying colour theory and using colour to convey emotion. From speaking with Michael it is clear he associates dinner time with feeling lonely" (RRJ, 2022)

The intervention in Cycle two gave children the opportunity to make connections with artists, their peers and also connect different elements of their own cultures to develop a deeper understanding of who they are and their identities. I noted this in my RRJ, "*Sometimes offering children a completely different perspective can help them to identify what is true about themselves.*" (March 2022). Through their artwork, they began to build a picture of who they are and identify different elements of their culture. This allowed me as their teacher to gain a deeper insight into who the children are, which was outlined as an aim of this study. The 'share sessions' that followed these lessons provided the children with an insight into their peers' cultural understandings and offered an opportunity for the children to develop their 'cultural fluency' (Ladson-Billings, 2017) in their own culture and the different cultures represented in the classroom.

3. Classroom Community

An aim of this research was to develop a better understanding of who the children were. At first, many children were reluctant to share details about their culture. As a researcher, I had not expected this and was unsure why this was occurring. Through reflective activities and conversations with my critical friends, I identified vulnerability as a barrier to communication. While Visual Art has the potential to show our values and deepest beliefs, allowing people to make connections through this act of vulnerability (Anderson & Milbrandt, 2005; Dewhurst, 2010). It can also be seen as a great act of courage to express this vulnerability. The children who participated in this research were twelve and thirteen years old. Many of them had mentioned that

they did not see themselves in Irish society due to factors such as the colour of their skin, their family situation and the languages they spoke. I did not consider that this was a group of children who had spent years trying to conform and 'fit in'. They did not want to draw attention to who they were as that would highlight what makes them 'different'. This was highlighted when Anna wrote in her CRJ following an identity-based activity, *"It's hard to say 'hey look at me and what makes me different' because you don't know if people will be nice about it"* (CRJ, 2022). It was also noted in a small group discussion that "the cons outweigh the pros" (RRJ, 2022). The children acknowledged that sharing about the culture helps them to make connections and find similarities with friends and there was a level of enjoyment around talking about themselves. However, it would only take one person to be unkind or mock you for being 'different' to erase all the positives (RRJ, 2022). This concept is outlined by Greene (2013) who warns that the quality of the contact when introducing different cultures into society is vital. Poor quality contact can increase pre-existing negative attitudes whereas good quality interaction can lead to a growth in positive attitudes towards diversity (McLaren, 2003 in Greene, 2013). It was my role as the teacher to establish a 'safe space' where children felt comfortable to express who they are and foster a classroom community that supports positive, good quality contact between different cultures.. Following a discussion with my critical friend, I noted,

> *Establishing a sense of community where everyone feels valued and secure is so important, especially in the senior end of the school. Children may not be as comfortable to share as they get older but that doesn't mean I should stop providing opportunities for them.* (RRJ, 2022).

Classroom community and developing a sense of belonging in the classroom are two practices that I will continue to develop and promote after completing this research study.

4.2.3 Integration and Visual Art

Bautista & Ortega-Ruiz (2015), suggest that by allowing an increase in curricular freedom and providing teachers with support for cross-curricular collaboration, meaningful integration can occur. This idea is mirrored in the DPCF (2020) motivation behind a proposed increase in 'discretionary' or 'flexible' time for teachers to explore differing pedagogy, encourage bigger projects and increase interaction with local communities. By increasing my level of integration, I was able to give more time to this collaborative art project. Although integration is often associated with cross-curricular activities, for this research integration has been divided into two sub-themes; communication and collaboration.

Integration and Visual Art	
Communication	Collaboration
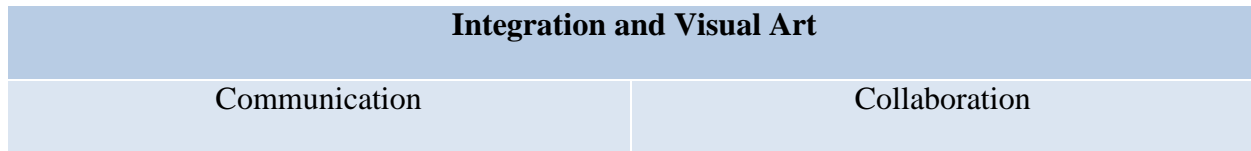
Figure 4.9: Subthemes of Integration and Visual Art

1. **Communication**

Throughout this study many examples of art as communication were collected. Dolese & Kozbelt (2021) argue that art has the ability to communicate emotional information along with thoughts and ideas. Green suggests that in order to connect with the wider world, we must first find a mode of expression that appeals to us (2013). Using creative outlets to convey a message or meaning appealed to the majority of children and not solely the children who experience difficulties with literacy or those with English as an additional language as was an assumption prior to commencing this study. Throughout the year there had been many cross-curricular conversations around myself and my identity with the children. After completing the unit of work in Cycle 2 on diverse aspects of culture, the children created Identity Towers. The children created beautiful artwork which detailed more about their identities than they had ever verbally told me. The children wrote out the

letters of their names in bubble writing across several A4 pages and filled the letters with everything they associated with themselves and their cultures. This ranged from the phrase "Siuuuuuu" in homage to their favourite soccer player, to the flags of their countries their family resides in, to the letter 'o' made into a doughnut to highlight their parent's job as a member of an Garda Siochana and acknowledging their favourite T.V, The Simpsons. These letters were then stacked and made into sculptures.

Figure 4.10: Oton's identify sculpture

Visuals to contextualise learning

When describing their towers to their peers and I, the level of confidence the children spoke with was noted. "*The artwork not only identified different aspects of the children's identity pictorially*

but it also acted as a crutch or scaffold when verbally communicating. It provided the children with context to what they were trying to tell me" (RRJ, May 2022). This complements the curriculum understanding that Visual Art can be used to introduce or contextualise new topics in other subject areas through integration (NCCA, 1999). This research extends that idea to include Art as not only for contextualising understanding but also to demonstrate and communicate understanding.

2. Collaboration

Prior to commencing this study, *Collaboration* was identified as one of my educational values. Gay suggests that CRT can foster a sense of collaboration between learners and children with their teachers (2010). I had always felt that I prioritised collaboration in my practice and this inspired the creation of a class mural in Cycle 3 of this research. When completing a post-study questionnaire, the significance of collaboration to the children became apparent and I also took time to reflect on my own practice. When evaluating the process Elaine wrote, *"It was nice to work together but not be in competition with others, just working together because we all have something to offer"* and Josh outlined *"Doing something together as the whole class was different. Everyone had a job to do and it was awesome to see the result hanging on the wall"* (May 2022). While the mural itself is significant, Hooks suggests that the process is vital (2004). As a teacher, this process challenged me to reflect on the collaborative opportunities I have offered to my class. I had not acknowledged the link I had created between collaborative work and classroom competition with group work often resulting in a winner or 'best project'. Here I identified a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 2018: 131) in my practice. While my intention was to encourage and promote *Collaboration*, an unconscious emphasis had been put on competition.

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Collaboration was at the heart of Cycle 3. After voting for their favourite design, I made a conscious decision to select four winning designs to work together to create the template for the mural. This ensured a team of children could 'take charge' over just one leader. From my observations, the importance of empathy and understanding was highlighted during this process. Child autonomy was at the centre of this process and the design team delegated the workload to their peers. After noticing one of the children make an error on the painting, I questioned Eve, one of the project leaders as to why she did not correct him. She noted that Bryan rarely engages with art projects but he appeared to be enjoying himself and she did not want to ruin that for him. She explained that it was more important for him to feel included than straight lines on a painted hand (RRJ, 2022). This was a very significant learning for me and showed great growth in Eve's character. Here she displayed empathy and understanding beyond her years. This interaction highlights the meta-perspective nature of this research. After reflecting on this event, I took a more reserved role in this project providing the children with the freedom to make decisions and take ownership of the mural. Ladson-Billings (1995) highlights the importance of fluidity in the student-teacher relationship. Children were encouraged to act as though the teacher would while I took the role of a functional learner. This role reversal provided the children with autonomous learning opportunities and allowed children like Eve to develop agency through a leadership role.
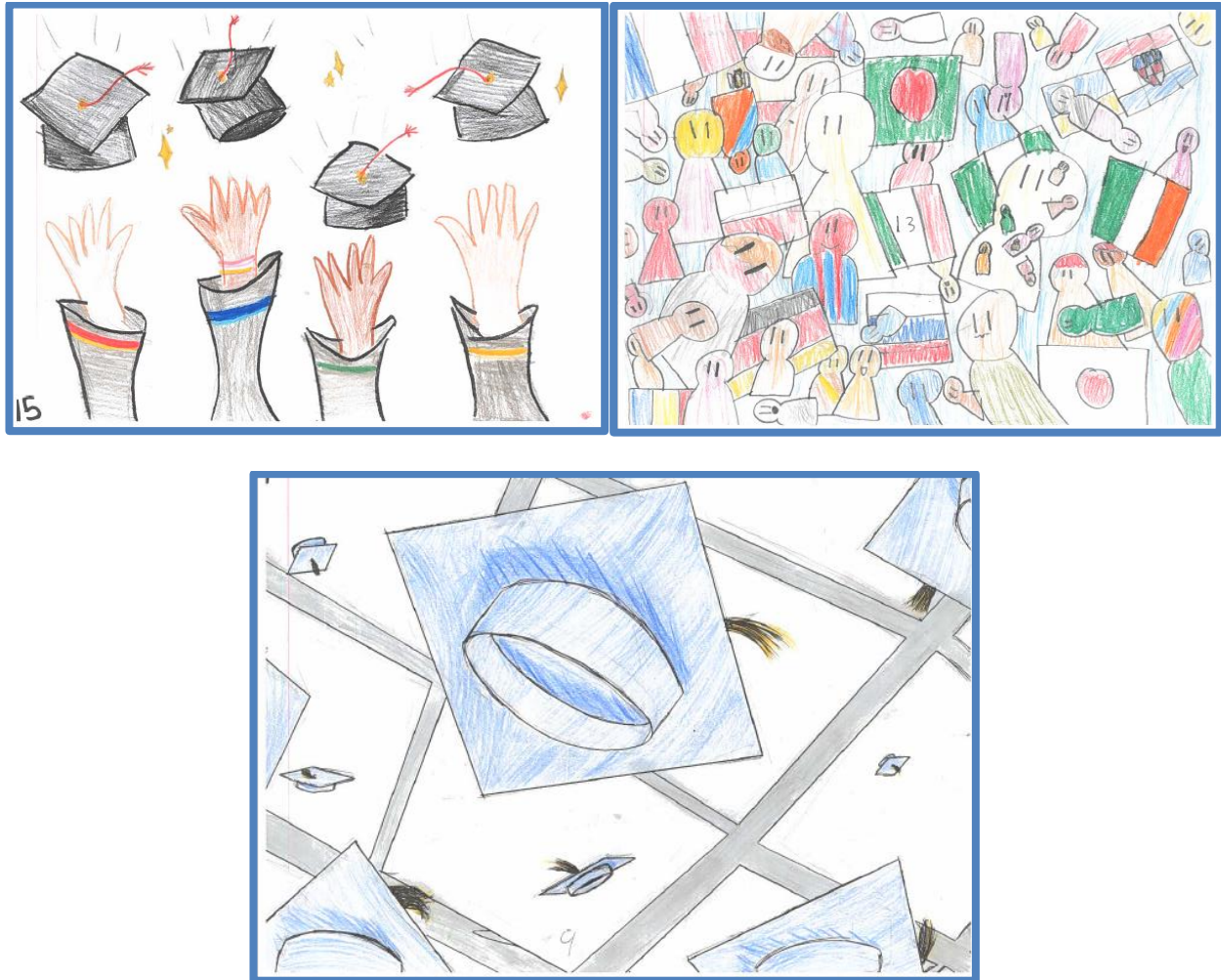
Figure 4.11: Winning mural deigns, as voted by the children

Cross-curricular integration also played a role in the creation of the class mural. I was conscious not to weaken the importance of Visual Art through integration as warned by Smith (1995). Instead, I structured my practice so that Visual Art would be the basis for integration. Through the design, sketch, measure and paint process several other subject areas were included. The children used their skills from the 'Measures' and 'Operations' strands of the Maths curriculum when planning the mural and classroom Geography atlas offered support when research flag deigns and colours. Along with the previously mentioned empathy and understanding which can be found in

the S.P.H.E curriculum and the importance placed on visual literacy from the Primary Language

Curriculum in cycles 2 and 3.

Figure 4.12 Class Mural Plan

Figure 4.13: Class mural *"Moving forward together"*

4.3 SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

My Role as the Teacher		
Praise and Feedback	Listening and Student Voice	Space and time to reflect

1. How teachers approach feedback can be a reflection of what they like to be praised for themselves.

2. Providing deliberate time for students to complete reflective activities can develop a deeper understanding of new learning.

Sense of Belonging		
A Personal Value	Making Connections	Classroom Community

1. Children may find it easier to identify aspects of their own identities by making connections with others.

2. Belonging is an umbrella theme that encapsulates my educational values

Integration and Visual Art	
Communication	Collaboration

1. Visual Art can provide opportunities for effective communication.

4.4 CHAPTER SUMMARY

In this chapter the emerging themes and the main findings with analysed with reference to the collected data. It highlighted the importance of the role of the teacher in creating a classroom environment that celebrates diversity. The role of Visual Art in this study was identified and the positive impact that it made. Using Visual Art allowed an increase in integration to occurred, not only cross-curricular with S.P.H.E and looking at identities but also in terms of collaboration and communication. Visual Art provided a medium for children to express themselves and discover their cultures without relying on literacy skills. The created artwork also contextualised the learning and offered children a starting point when verbally sharing. As a teacher I feel there was merit added to our visual art lessons with Elton stating, *"This year Art was like a real subject"* (RRJ, 2022) and Anna expressing "*I liked it, it was more than just painting yellow umbrellas and cutting out shapes"* (RRJ, 2022). However, it is important to note that not every child enjoyed the

interventions through Visual Art, Bryan remarked *"Sometimes I just want to paint or draw and not think took much"* (RRJ, 2022).

The role of praise and feedback became evident during this study and as a result I have an increased awareness of the potential impact my language has on the children. My practice has changed because I have been listening and providing the children with purposeful opportunities to engage in reflective activities and use express their voices has been highly beneficial. In the final chapter of this thesis I will outline the limitations considered as part of this research, I outline recommendations for future practice and provide an overview of the competed thesis.

CHAPTER FIVE

CONCLUSION

"any scholar who believes that she has arrived and the work is finished does not understand the

nature and meaning of scholarship" (Ladson-Billings, 2014: 82)**.**

5.0 INTRODUCTION

This self-study AR project investigated how I could cultivate a classroom environment that

celebrates diversity. A CR framework was formed based on the work of Gay with CRT and

Ladson-Billings with CRP and Visual Art was selected for this subject-based research. The

primary aim of any self-study AR project is to improve practice. Through this project, I sought to

improve my practice by developing a better understanding of who the children were and expanding

my teaching of Visual Art to include everyone. This was completed under the guidance of my

educational values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration.* The following chapter will identify the

limitations of the research design that were considered, provide recommendations for future

practice and outline a final reflection on this study. The above quote from Ladson-Billings

encapsulates the purpose of this chapter. While the initial research study is deemed complete, it

has opened up many opportunities for further study and change in practice. This research is the

start of the process, not the end.

5.1 LIMITATIONS OF THE RESEARCH DESIGN

Identifying limitations in the AR study, researchers acknowledge possible external deficiencies

that may influence the research. The following limitations were considered following the

completion of this AR study:

1. Attendance issues were a limitation of the study as I often had to repeat things outside of their original context. On many occasions, class discussions offered significant insights into this research resulting in new learning for the children involved. This is very difficult to replicate for absent children. During this research, I experienced a high level of absenteeism in my classroom due to Covid-19 outbreaks and differing circumstances.

2. Conducting this research with older children was identified as a limitation of this study. There will not be an opportunity to conduct a follow-up or further research with the same research participants in the same context due to the age of the research participants and the education system. The children involved in this study were in sixth Class and will be attending several different secondary schools in September 2022. If this research had been conducted with a younger age group, the opportunity to return to the study may have been presented.

3. The data collection process was limited as I had to ensure the anonymity of all participants. As studying children's culture was a primary focus of this research, a significant amount of the artwork produced by the children could not be collected as data as it contained details which would have broken anonymity and did not comply with the ethical considerations outlined in Chapter 3. As a result, much of the data relies on extracts from my RRJ which may not have the same impact as the raw data itself and relies on my interpretations.

5.2 UNEXPECTED FINDINGS

The children were not as forthcoming when speaking about their cultures as anticipated. This surprised me as their teacher and prompted me to re-evaluate my research design and was a motivation behind the choice of Visual Art and a subject-based approach to research. At the end of the intervention, many children still did not enjoy speaking about themselves, although all

children did engage with the art-based activities, visually showing elements of their cultures. As a researcher, this learning sparks further curiosity as to why the children didn't enjoy speaking about themselves and how we can experience difficulties discussing and showing our culture.

When commencing this research I originally jumped straight into examining differing cultures by asking children to compare artwork to their own cultures. I was surprised to learn how many children did not have the cultural knowledge to compare from. As mentioned previously, many children did not believe they had a culture and associated culture with people who they perceived to be 'different'. This lead to a change in the focus of this research. Before inquiring into other cultures, I practiced reflexivity and deemed it necessary to establish a cultural competency with children within their own cultures. I also had to acknowledge my own biases about their cultures, although unintentional, I held assumptions about the children prior to commencing this study. This lead to the designing the intervention in Cycle 2 of this research.

5.3 RECOMMENDATIONS

Throughout this study my educational values have emerged and were constantly refined. I have discovered the emphasis I put on my values and the guidance they provide me within my practice. The findings from this research suggest that by implementing a CR framework in my teaching, I have identified and refined my values and can live closer to those values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration*. The findings also suggest that before addressing diversity in the classroom, it can be beneficial for children to study their own cultures and identity first. Here the children would be encouraged to become 'culturally competent' (Ladson-Billings, 2009). If I were to repeat this study, I would consider commencing the intervention in September at the beginning of the school

year. This would give children ample time to really inquire into their own cultures and begin the process of understanding others'.

There are further research opportunities to be explored with the CR framework created for this study. Ladson-Billings (1994) promotes the idea of including children's cultural differences in every aspect of education. If I were to continue or repeat this work I would love the opportunity to apply this frame across more if not all curriculum areas to create a culturally responsive classroom. Moving forward I will continue my reflective practice which I began as part of this research. Many significant learnings developed from my reflections and discussions surrounding these reflections. Brookfield (1995) offers that teachers take a critically reflective approach in their practice towards continuous, formative evaluations.

Collaboration was at the heart of this research, through my reflections and the children's reflections, I found an unconscious link I had created between competition and collaboration. As I return to the classroom in September I plan to take steps to ensure this practice does not continue.

When examining diversity it is important to note that for this research I focused on culture and ethnicity. As a researcher, I think it is important to emphasise that diversity also includes factors such as gender, sexual orientation, social class and ability (Gay, 2005). As I continue to implement the CR framework, I aim to expand it to include all aspects of diversity to ensure every child feels like they belong.

5.2.1 *Within my school community*

Through this research, I have highlighted the importance of the role of the teacher when creating a classroom environment that celebrates diversity. I plan to present my research and the relevant findings in the first staff meeting in my school and conduct CDP with my staff later in the term. I will identify the role of the CR framework and Visual Arts when celebrating diversity. I hope to encourage all teachers to consider using a CR style framework within their classrooms to ensure all children feel included and celebrated within our school community. I plan to recommend a whole school revamp of our Visual Arts plan from junior to senior cycle. I hope to include a diverse range of artists to represent the diversity in our school community as I have experienced the positive impact this had on the children.

5.2.2 *Continuous Professional Development*

The role of the teacher could not be more important when addressing diversity in the classroom. There is a gap in resources and courses available to teachers in this area with most focusing on wellbeing, curricular areas or behaviour management support. As referred to throughout this thesis, the DPCF (2020) has placed a particular high priority on diversity and culture. This is a welcomed change and my findings support their emphasis on celebrating children's cultures and using "responsive pedagogies to ensure that all children and families feel included, valued and visible" (2020: 20). I am hopeful that relevant support and CPD resources will be made available to teachers following this change.

5.3 SUMMARY OF THE STUDY

In Chapter One, I provided an overview for the thesis and a rationale for this study was outlined. The research question, aims and influence of my educational values were discussed and I offered a description for the organisation of the thesis.

Chapter Two presents an examination of the literature surrounding Visual Art and diversity. Literature pertaining to CRP, CRT, relevant legislation, multiculturalism and pedagogy was discussed.

In Chapter Three, the methodology chosen for this research was outlined. Information about the AR paradigm, the design of the research, the chosen interventions, the data collection tools and my role in the research were discussed.

Chapter Four identified the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2022) of the gathered data. Themes emerged from this analysis and were examined within the context of the collected data.

In this chapter, I have identified the limitations considered as part of this study. I have made recommendations for future practice and offered a review of this research journey.

5.4 CONCLUSION

In this action research study, I set out to see how Visual Art can be used to celebrate diversity in the classroom. The action undertaken to bring about change was the implementation of a Culturally Responsive framework drawing on Culturally Responsive Pedagogy and Culturally Relevant Teaching during Visual Art lessons. In Cycle 2, different elements of culture were explored using artists from diverse backgrounds during the intervention lessons. In Cycle 3 a collaborative art project was undertaken to investigate art's ability to bring people together. Collaboration between the class teacher and participants was important in identifying areas for improvement bring about a positive change in practice. The advantage of AR over other research approaches is that it has the potential to generate genuine improvements and enhance practice (Aveyard & Sharp, 2013). Yet AR was not as straightforward as I thought it would be and I became frustrated at many stages during the research. Here, becoming a critically reflective practitioner was highly beneficial. I

found solace in my reflective practice and comfort in my educational values of *Voice, Creativity* and *Collaboration.* I will continue to embed my values and reflection in my daily practice.

Finally, I have spoken at length about belonging and diversity. While this was a self-study thesis and the aim of the research was to enhance my practice, it has always been about the children in my classroom and it always will be. This study was done in the hope of becoming better equipped to meet the needs of my diverse classroom community and ensure that each and every child feels valued. This understanding is summarised by Ham & Kane, (Self-study) "… is not research because it is "by me, for me"; it is research because it is self-consciously "by me, for us"" (2004:17). I acknowledge that I teach in a very ethnically diverse setting but as I have mentioned previously, diversity in Irish classrooms is not a new concept. As of 2016, 535, 475 people living in Ireland identified themselves as 'non-Irish' (CSO, 2016). If we really want to ensure every child in Ireland feels celebrated and valued we must invest in research and CPD for educators in this sector.

"Although we may have only a yearlong interaction with students, we ultimately have a lifelong impact on who they become and the kind of society in which we all will ultimately live."

(Ladson-Billings, 2006: 40)

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APPENDICES

Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

This year I am engaging in study as part of a Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. This research will commence in January and finish in April 2022. The focus of my research is based on using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in our classroom using Visual Art and my teaching of Visual Art. The research is 'Self-Study Action research', I will be researching myself as a teacher with the goal to improve my practice.

The data will be collected using observations, student work samples, a daily teacher journal and notes from conversations with the children. The children will be asked to share their opinions through facilitated discussions based on our Visual Art lessons.

Your child's name and the name of the school will **not** be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. Your child will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage. If this happens they will not be asked to withdraw from the classroom-based activities.

All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her/them to take part in this project. I have attached a consent form for you, a letter for your child and a child's assent form too. If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me.

Yours faithfully,

Amy Carolan

Child's name: _____ **Date:** _____

I am planning on doing some research during our Visual Art lessons. I would like to learn more about the different cultures represented in our class during our Visual Art lessons. I hope to take notes during some of our conversations during these lessons and use some of the art you produce and your reflections for my research.

| YES | NO |

Would you be ok with that?   Tick a box

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

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

Maynooth University Froebel Department of

Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered.

I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in this study. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Date: _____

Name of Child _____

Child's signature: _____

Date: _____

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Information Sheet - Parents and Guardians

Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

What is this Action Research Project about?

Teachers Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a student teacher. This project will involve an analysis of the teacher's own practice. Data will be generated using observation, reflective notes and questionnaires. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project. In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom using Culturally Responsive Pedagogy. Culturally responsive pedagogy is a student-centred approach to teaching in which the students' unique cultural strengths are identified and nurtured to promote student achievement and a sense of well-being about the student's cultural place in the world.

What are the research questions?

- How can I use Visual Arts to create a classroom environment that celebrates diversity?
- How can I effectively introduce Culturally Responsive Pedagogy in my teaching of Visual Art?

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observation, Reflective Journal, Questionnaires, Work Samples and Conversations with Students.

Who else will be involved?

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

What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to collect data from your child during this study with my class. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost

confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines.

Maynooth University Froebel Department of
Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Child's assent to participate

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

Name of child (in block capitals):

_____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Maynooth University Froebel Department of

Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Declaration by Researcher

This declaration must be signed by the applicant(s)

I acknowledge(s) and agree that:

    a)   It is my sole responsibility and obligation to comply with all Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.
    b)   I will comply with Irish and EU legislation relevant to this project.
    c)   That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy.
    d)   That the research will be conducted in accordance with the Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy.
    e)   That the research will not commence until ethical approval has been granted by the Research and Ethics committee in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

Signature of Student:

Date:

Pre-Study Questionnaire 1

Name: _____

Q.1 How would you define 'culture'?

Q.2 How would you describe your family's culture?

Q.3 What language(s) do you speak at home?

Q.4 Do you see your culture reflected in our classroom and the content of our lessons?

Q.5 What do you think we could do to improve this?

Q.6 Name artists you have learned about in school. (before this year)

Q.7 What more would you like to cover in art education this year?

Q.8 Add any other comments you have here.