# Assignment Cover Sheet

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# Title Page


**OLLSCOIL NA HÉIREANN MÁ NUAD**

**THE NATIONAL UNIVERSITY OF IRELAND MAYNOOTH**

Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

M.Ed. (Research in Practice)
2021 – 2022

Historical Escape Rooms: Unlocking the potential for communication and collaboration in History lessons.

Kevin Maher

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

Date: 9th September 2022

Supervised by: Dr Bernadette Wrynn

# Abstract

The purpose of this Living Theory action research project was to identify how I can change my practice in History lessons to live closer to my values of social-constructivism and democracy. I explored ways in which Educational Escape Rooms could be used during History lessons to create opportunities for communication and collaboration between students in a mixed gender, urban, disadvantaged school with a 5th class group.

This research documents my professional learning journey, captured from multiple perspectives to negate some of the shortcomings of the Living Theory approach. Data was collected from my reflective journal, lesson observations and discussions from Critical Friends, and through questionnaires, feedback loops and interviews with children. By navigating the ethical considerations carefully, placing the child's voice at the centre of this research allowed me to live closer to my value of democracy.

The research was conducted across two research cycles, each consisting of a different teacher-made, History-based, Educational Escape Room. Children completed History lessons on a topic over four weeks and entered the Escape Room on week five. Puzzles were based on History content and skills developed during class lessons and children worked collaboratively to solve these and escape before the time expired.

This self-study found that the Educational Escape Room provided opportunities for collaboration, affected by the degree of choice children had in choosing their own teams. The Escape Room also created opportunities for meaningful communication between students within the game and for communication between the teacher, students and colleagues. Evidently, children applied historical content knowledge from lessons in the new situation of the Escape Room and children utilised higher order historical skills without even realising it. The research unearthed two unexpected findings on the topic of engagement.

Children found physical, tactile puzzles and locks more engaging than digital ones. Additionally, children found Escape Rooms that demanded players to move around and use the room more engaging than those that did not require as much movement.

The findings declare that Educational Escape Rooms are a social-constructivist teaching approach that will allow me to live closer to my values in History lessons. Given the infancy of the teaching approach, a lacuna in literature pertaining to Educational Escape Rooms in primary schools does exist. This study has the potential to contribute to the body of research that exists and has encouraged me to look for creative and innovative teaching methods that can continue to challenge my assumptions.

**Keywords:** Self-study action research, Living Theory research, values, reflection, History, collaboration, communication, historical skills, higher-order thinking, problem-solving, Educational Escape Rooms, games-based learning, gamification.

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I would like to express my thanks my school principal and the Board of Management for supporting this research. I would also like to thank the parents for allowing their children to participate. The support from the school community for this research was invaluable and much appreciated.

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# Table of Contents

# Declaration of Authenticity

***Declaration of Authenticity***

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# List of Tables and Figures

**Figures**

**Tables**

# List of Abbreviations and Acronyms

| | |
|---|---|
| **NCCA** | National Council for Curriculum and Assessment |
| **DOE** | Department of Education |
| **CnB** | Curaclam na Bunscoile |
| **EER** | Educational Escape Room |
| **DEIS** | Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools |
| **TRJ** | Teacher Reflective Journal |
| **CF** | Critical Friend |
| **IPSC** | Irish Primary School Curriculum |
| **INTO** | Irish National Teacher's Organisation |

# Chapter 1: Introduction

## 1.1 Introduction

The future of History education in Ireland in under threat. Discourse surrounding the topic has taken a significant turn. At the time of writing, the Department of Education is considering restructuring History in the Junior Certificate cycle, recommending 'that History should not be restored as a core, compulsory Junior Certificate subject' (Ferriter, 2019: N.P.). Whilst the National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (NCCA) maintain that 'the optional nature of the Junior Cycle History… should be maintained' (2019: 36) they cannot hide from the 'strong views about what [educators] perceive as a diminution of the importance of the subject' (NCCA, 2019: 29). Limiting students' exposure to History limits opportunities for students to develop the critical thinking skills that are central to historical enquiry (Cooper, 2000). By constricting access to these skills in secondary school, further pressure will be felt by primary school teachers to find innovative and child-friendly ways of developing these skills earlier. This is made more challenging as the turbulence caused by the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020) complicates how History will be approached as a subject. Teachers must now enact their agency and actively contribute to shaping the future of History education through innovative new approaches (Biesta et al., 2015).

This chapter outlines the purpose and aim of my research. Particular attention is given to the assumptions that emerged from critical reflection, pivotal in shaping the research approach. The context of the research is explained before attention is given to Whitehead's (2018) Living Theory approach, utilised throughout my research. My values are named and areas where they conflict with my practice are identified, leading to the development of my research question. An overview of the research is given before the structure of this thesis paper is outlined.

### 1.2 Purpose and Aims of Research

The aim of this research was to investigate ways in which I could further align my practice in History lessons with my educational value of social constructivism. To do that, this research explored whether Educational Escape Rooms can be utilised as a teaching method to create opportunities for meaningful communication and collaboration between students during History lessons. Two secondary aims emerged throughout the research process through 'unexpected events which informed actions' (McDonagh et al., 2020: xiii). One aim was to investigate ways in which I could practice the skills of collaboration and communication, the skills I wished to foster in the children, with my colleagues. The second aim was to elevate dialogic discussion surrounding my practice with the children, thus making my classroom practice more closely aligned to my emerging value of democracy.

### 1.3 Challenging Teaching Assumptions as a Catalyst for Change

An essential component of this research was an ongoing engagement with critical reflection, a 'sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions' (Brookfield, 2017: 3). It was through this critical engagement that my hidden value of democracy emerged much later in the research project. Challenging my teaching assumptions, those beliefs that give purpose to who we are, what we do and why we do it (Brookfield, 2017) became central to my research. The assumptions that I identified in my practice were as follows:

-Social constructivist teaching methods are the best way to engage children in the learning process.

-Teacher selected groups are more effective during groupwork than student selected groups.

-The children's ability to comment on my teaching practice would be too heavily influenced by power dynamics to be authentic and useful.

By acknowledging my assumption that social constructivism was the best way to engage children, I was able to reflect on whether this was *'merely a construct of my Froebelian indoctrination'* (TRJ, 05/11/2022) or a justified tenant of my educational philosophy. This resulted in an unpacking of the elements of collaboration and communication. I emerged with a more thorough theoretical understanding of why I had been teaching this way for so long, further reinforcing that this assumption was 'justified and accurate' (Brookfield, 2017: 3).

Groupings in my classroom had always been teacher-dominated. I reflected that it seemed like *'every in-class social interaction is micro-managed by me to give optimal engagement and concentration'* (TRJ, 11/05/2022), later noting the lack of consideration given to *'student choice and educational outcomes'* (TRJ, 19/05/2022). By recognising this assumption and having found no real justification for it outside of classroom management concerns, I was more open to reframing it (Brookfield, 2017). In Cycle Two, when the children asked to choose their own teams, I was able to embrace this challenge to my assumption with an openness that emerged from reflection.

Power-dynamics are an unavoidable aspect in education. Despite efforts to dismantle teacher-student inequality, the structures of most primary schools promote 'hierarchical relationships… where one typically has institutional power over another' (Anderson et al. 2007: 140). I assumed that these structures would inhibit children's ability and willingness to talk freely about elements of my practice. Upon deeper reflection, I realised that my concerns were *'rooted in my desire to maintain control'* (TRJ, 16/02/2022), and a fear of *'laying my values out in the open'* (Maher, 'Reflective Task One': 09/09/2021). I feared what the children might say about my practice more than I valued the contribution they could

make to its improvement. By recognising this, I was able to overcome these fears and elevate the voice of the child throughout this research piece.

### 1.4 Research Context

This research was conducted in a 5th class setting in an urban, disadvantaged school. The research participants consisted of 22 children of mixed gender aged between 10 and 12, four Critical Friend participants, a two-member validation group and me, the teacher-researcher. The research was conducted over a period of twelve weeks, broken into two cycles. Data was gathered by applying Brookfield's (2017) multiple lenses, with a strong consideration of child voice. This allowed me to live more closely to my emerging value of democracy whilst showing 'support for the evolving capacities of children to voice opinions of significance and to participate in translating those opinions into constructive action' (Hart, 2002: 255)

### 1.5 Living Theory Research

This research adopts a self-study action research approach, with the core belief that 'it is not enough that teachers' work should be studied; they need to study it themselves' (Stenhouse in Pollard, 2014: 73). All self-study research starts when the teacher asks themselves how they can enhance what they are doing (McDonagh et al., 2020). The entire approach is rooted in the belief that the teacher has the capacity 'to improve [their] practice and explain how and why [they] have done so' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 6). To give justification for the 'why' that McNiff (2010) refers to, a values-based element was added to this research, aligning it with the Living Theory approach to self-study action research proposed by Whitehead (2018).

Living Theory demands engagement with clarifying the values that the researcher holds 'as they emerge and inform my efforts to improve my educational practice' (Whitehead, 2018: 2). When I engaged in this difficult process, I identified the educational value of social constructivism as core to answering the reflective question of 'how should teaching be done?' (McDonagh et al. 2020: 20) in my classroom. This belief I held strongly, that knowledge is socially constructed through communication and collaboration (Vygotsky, 1978), came into conflict with the reality of my practice in History lessons. Through a process of critical reflection, I realised that I was a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 2018:13), espousing the benefits of communication and collaboration whilst limiting opportunities for children to do so during History lessons. Even more significantly, I noticed that I was asking the children to *'do as I say, not as I do'* (TRJ, 09/09/21), as I did not practice the skills of communication and collaboration with colleagues. This led to the research question of *'How can I create opportunities for meaningful collaboration and communication in History lessons?*

**1.6 Research Overview**

Prior to the commencement of this research, my History lesson planning had limited opportunities for children to collaborate and communicate meaningfully. Group work in History lessons frequently consisted of research-based activities. I noted that '*my methodologies for collaboration seem to be numerous at the lower order thinking and thin out to "project work" when it comes to the higher order thinking'* (TRJ, 13/09/2021). When I placed this reality in front of my illuminating values, I noticed my practice was casting a shadow on the value of social constructivism that I claimed to value.

To address this contradiction, I dug deep into my teacher identity and rooted out solutions that suited who I was as a teacher. With creativity central to the way I operate, I

sought experimental teaching methods that could help me stop conflicting with my values. I began investigating the possibility of using Educational Escape Rooms in my History lessons to create meaningful opportunities for collaboration, communication and higher order thinking. The research consisted of two research cycles, with two separate History-based Escape Rooms built.

Children were first taught a block of four lessons on the topic of *The Romans*, utilising an integrated approach. At the end of this block, the children were spilt into teacher selected teams of four. A spare classroom was utilised, and divided into two playing zones, with a divider down the middle obstructing each team's view of one another. In the centre of the room was the Escape Box. This was a long wooden box with six compartments, each locked with a different combination lock (see appendix E). Inside each compartment was a history-based puzzle that revealed the code to the next lock when solved. Solving these puzzles demanded knowledge of historical content covered during History lessons. They also demanded application of historical skills developed during class lessons, such as chronology and examining evidence. A fictional narrative was created based on being left behind in a museum at closing time with an unusual Roman artefact that had the power to transport the players to different places in Ancient Rome.

After all groups completed the first Escape Room, Critical Friend observations and my own reflections were summarised and presented to the children in an anonymised manner. Children engaged in a Feedback Loop (Baumfield, 2013), in which they shared their opinions on the first room and made suggestions on how it could be improved in the second iteration. These changes were applied, and a second Escape Room was built based on the theme *The Great Hunger*.

## 1.7 Thesis Structure

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter One, previously read, is the Introduction, which introduces the research questions and explains the context of the research. It also outlines the value-based, self-study approach that drives this research throughout.

Chapter Two is the Literature Review. This section critically reviews current literature pertaining to the teaching of History skills. The theoretical underpinning of our History Curriculum is explored, as is the role historical skills play in developing historical understanding. The concepts of collaboration and communication and their role in a social constructivist class are critiqued before current literature on the effects of Escape Rooms in Education is examined.

Chapter Three is the Methodology section. In this chapter, an overview of the research approach and procedure is outlined. The self-study research approach is explained and action research cycles are discussed. Data collection tools are justified, with their limitations recognised and planned for accordingly. Ethical considerations and the reliability, credibility and validity of the research are discussed in detail.

Chapter Four is the Data Analysis section. This chapter presents and discusses data gathered during the study. Utilising Braun and Clarke's (2020) reflexive thematic analysis four themes were identified and the resulting findings are discussed through the data and literature.

Chapter Five is the Conclusion section. This chapter summarises the professional and personal learning gleaned from this research. Limitations of the study are outlined and recommendations for future research are identified. Methods of dissemination are noted and the degree to which this research has realigned my practice with my values is explored.

# Chapter 2: Draft Literature Review

## 2.1 Introduction

This chapter examines the current thinking on History instruction, tracing the origins of its instructional elements. The changing purpose of History education in Ireland, from a national identity formation tool to a skills-based curriculum will be the initial areas for discussion. The degree to which the NCCA utilised social constructivist theory as the foundation for the skills-based curriculum will be explored before looking at current best practice for teaching historical skills in primary schools.

This chapter will then examine the role of motivation in the learning and teaching of History. A more detailed examination of the role of collaboration in student motivation and educational outcomes will echo the social-constructivist foundations of the *Irish Primary School Curriculum* (NCCA, 1999b) (hereafter ISPC) for History. Communication in the classroom will be examined and its implications for the teaching of History discussed. A brief examination of the role clear communication of historical content knowledge plays in effective History education will be examined through the lens of Freire's (1970) 'banking model', before an overview of where these individual elements lie within the current best practice for teaching History is outlined.

Finally, the concept of Educational Escape Rooms (hereafter EER) and their viability as a motivating teaching method that fosters communication and collaboration will be explored. This chapter will provide a brief overview of the origins and relevant elements of an EER before reviewing appropriate case study research to determine what constitutes effective EER design. This section will conclude with a cumulative review of the impact EERs have on learning outcomes, student motivation to engage with lesson content and on communication and collaboration.

## 2.2 The Role of Literature in Living Theory Action Research

This literature review seeks to provide an additional lens through which the researcher can critique their assumptions and claims to knowledge. Brookfield recognises the impact literature plays in 'unsettling the groupthink that sometimes emerges in collegial reflection groups' (2017: 74). At different points during living-theory research, the role and purpose of theory metamorphoses, from helping with 'finding and refining the critical question' in the early stages, to a 'framework for analysing and interpreting data' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 52) at the latter stages. This chapter reflects the evolving nature of the researcher's claims to knowledge, operating as a living document throughout the research process.

## 2.3 A Brief Overview of Irish History Education

Emerging from the ashes of post-colonisation, the Irish Free State found itself in a precarious position. As dust settled on ambush sites nationally, a fresh battle brewed in minds of Irish scholars. The country had plunged into a state of 'identity insecurity' (Trovão, 2012: 267), that was 'implicitly defined as 'not-British'' (Tormey, 2006: 318). The inevitability of this narrative infiltrating education in the Free State is highlighted in the work of Durkheim (1956) and later Kincheloe (2008). The belief schools should stimulate political and cultural transformation (Finkelstein, 1984) was commandeered by the nationalist agenda in Ireland, determined to reinforce Irishness as 'Catholic, white, settled and Gaelic/Celtic' (Tovey and Share, 2003: 330). History, due to its links to 'notions of cultural transmission, heritage and national identity' (Phillips et al.,1999: 153), played a key role in maintaining this concept of nationhood. Through this lens, *Curaclam na Bunscoile* (hereafter CnB) (Department of Education, 1971) can be viewed as a statement of intent from the Irish State, in which the 'lesson to be learnt is one of moral and patriotic virtue' (DoE, 1971:89).

CnB (DoE, 1971) was explicit in how History education would fportray the Irish *us* as an opposition to the English colonial power of *them* (Tovey and Share, 2003). Curricular content reinforced the concept that the child's 'own people were the sufferers' (DoE, 1971: 88). However, the practical implementation of such idealisms was limited (Waldron, 2003). This disparity, between intention and practice, was noted by Sugrue (1997), Walsh (1980) and the Irish National Teachers Organisation (1988).

Whilst CnB (DoE, 1971) was born in a time of transitional national identity, the IPSC (NCCA, 1999a) emerged when Ireland was undertaking a 'questioning of hegemonic understandings of Irishness' (Doak cited in Tormey, 2006: 319). Ireland was embracing an openness to others through the European Economic Community and increasing connectivity due to changing immigration patterns (Department of Justice Equality & Law Reform, 2002). Within this context the IPSC (NCCA, 1999a) was born, with a noticeable shift from identity formation to 'a balanced appreciation of cultural and historical inheritances from local, national and global contexts' (NCCA, 1999a: 12). The emphasis on History education being 'true to the facts' (Tormey, 2006: 320) was replaced with a skill-based approach to History, where the guiding principles note that History 'can be interpreted in different ways' (NCCA, 1999a: 13).

### 2.3.1 Curriculum Approaches in the 'new' History Curriculum

Prioritising historical skills shifted the IPSC for History (NCCA, 1999b) towards the humanist approach of curriculum development. This approach was not without its critics. Advocates of the behavioural approach, which emerged from the work of Bobbitt (1924) and Tyler (1949), argued that the humanist approach lacks the 'idea of efficiency' (Hunkins and Ornstein, 2013: 2). The humanist approach derives strongly from the child-centred philosophies of Froebel (1967) and Pestalozzi (1894), as well as developmental theories

established by Maslow (1943), Erikson (1963) and Havighurst (1953). Whilst the IPSC (NCCA, 1999a) draws upon the teachings of such humanist advocates, it is not a simple replication of other systems.

In many ways, the IPSC is progressive. Placing the child at the core is a prevalent theme. It was a noticeable deviation from the 'historical absence of a theoretical underpinning' (Walsh, 2018: 5) in History education to date. The verbalisation of the value of historical enquiry that 'places a very strong emphasis on the study of personal and local History' (NCCA, 1999b, 7) resonates with Froebel's concept to always start with the child (Froebel cited in Liebschner, 1992). However, considering Froebel's core teachings related to the early childhood setting in the 19th century, it is difficult to ascertain how influential his concepts were on Irish curriculum development. Concepts such as the *kindergarden,* an educational garden where children could 'learn through play, with great freedom of movement' (Murcia and Ruiz-Funes, 2020) did not feature prominently in the 1999 Social Environmental and Scientific Education curricular aims or teacher guidelines (NCCA, 1999c).

The IPSC (NCCA, 1999a) was similarly selective regarding the philosophies of Pestalozzi (1894). On some matters the NCCA fully embraces Pestalozzi's concepts, focusing on 'the importance of play and social development in addition to academic achievement' as well as 'a commitment to developmentally appropriate activities matched to each child's unique interests' (Sellars and Imig, 2021: 1154). These philosophies are mirrored in the IPSC's (NCCA, 1999a) broad aims. On other matters, the philosophical concepts underpinning curricular decisions are ambiguous. The NCCA rejects Pestalozzi's arguments 'for keeping separate, rather than integrating, subject areas' (Tovey in Bruce et al, 2019: 8) by encouraging 'effective implementation of an integrated curriculum' (NCCA, 1999a: 4). Within the same document, the NCCA mandates examination of extremely

subject specific content which echo the narrative of suffering which dominated CnB (DoE, 1971), such as ‘O’Connell and Catholic Emancipation’ (NCCA, 199b: 55).

More obvious is the influence of Dewey’s progressive educational principles developed in the early 20th century. The context of the IPSC for History (NCCA, 1999b) has parallels with the context of Dewey’s (2018) seminal work *Democracy and Education*. The Irish State was emerging as a developing society on the global stage. There was an appetite for skilled workers in emerging sectors, and as in Dewey’s America, the ‘battle between industrial and educational ideals was really a conflict between rival philosophies’ (Kett, 2017: 500). This battle is reflected in the broad aims of the curriculum, claiming to ‘celebrate the uniqueness of the child’ (NCCA, 1999a: 6) whilst reflecting ‘the economic aspirations and concerns of Irish society’ (NCCA, 1999a: 6). Dewey urged for History education not to resign itself to ‘a listing of dates with an appended inventory of events, labelled “important”’ (2018: 224). Rather, he argued that ‘the true starting point of History is always some present situation’ (Dewey, 2018: 227). This language is reflected in the History curriculum’s desire to create ‘a deeper understanding of past and current social, political and economic interactions’ (NCCA, 1999b: 6).

Alarmingly, despite these influences, the IPSC for History (NCCA, 1999b) cites no references or evidence-based theory to underpin its aims. Instead, our History curriculum appears to be heavily based upon publications and curricula from other nations, particularly Northern Ireland and the United Kingdom. Considering how the History curriculum outlines that education ‘not only reflects a society but is an influence in shaping its development’ (NCCA, 1999b: 6) in is visionary statement, it is concerning that further due diligence has not been taken in the theoretical underpinning. Hannan and Shortall summarise this concern by noting how the aims of education in Ireland ‘seem to be so taken for granted, or its values so deeply institutionalised, as not to require articulation or justification’ (1991: 16).

### 2.4 Social Constructivism in a Skills-Based History Curriculum

Whilst it never explicitly states so, the IPSC (NCCA, 1999a) is undoubtably a product of Vygotskian (1978) influences. The elements of social constructivism are prevalent throughout the document, particularly in the Introduction to the Curriculum document. Rather than encouraging a solitary development of skills the document explicitly outlines the role of collaborative learning, noting its capacity to 'broaden and deepen individual children's understanding… [and] facilitates the child's social and personal development' (NCCA 1999a: 17). This resonates with Vygotsky's belief that 'individuals learn most effectively in groups' (Overall, 2007: 74). The NCCA agree, claiming that 'collaborative learning should feature in the learning process' (NCCA, 1999a: 9).

#### 2.4.1 Discourse Examination within the IPSC History Curriculum

There is a significant disconnect between the aims and principles outlined in the IPSC (NCCA, 1999a) and those outlined in the Introduction to the History Curriculum (NCCA, 1999b). There is only one mention of the term *collaborative* in either the History Curriculum (NCCA, 1999b) or in the Guidelines for Teachers (NCCA, 1999d). Upon closer inspection of these documents, it is unclear whether they lean towards the social formation of knowledge, as proposed by Vygotsky (1978), or whether they are endorsing a solitary constructivist approach as proposed by Piaget (1962). The shift away from earlier ideas of 'merely being "exposed" to slabs of content' (Counsell in Arthur and Phillips, 2000: 54) towards the idea of 'developing important skills and attitudes appropriate to their individual stages of development' (NCCA, 1999a: 2) is clear. The objectives outlined in the *Synthesis and Communication* and *Empathy* skills of the IPSC for History (NCCA, 1999b) are rooted in social constructivist theory, as they rely on dialogue. However, whether this dialogue is

student-teacher or student-student is unclear. The *Draft Primary Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2020) seeks to clarify this by encouraging collaborative learning that 'enables children to support and extend each other's learning' (NCCA, 2020: 24) This has implications on the manner and type of knowledge that is constructed, as power-dynamics play a significant part in social constructivism.

### 2.4.2 Current Best Practice for Teaching History

In the 20th century, History lesson pedagogy was dominated by a 'question and response format' (Harnett in Arthur and Phillips, 2000: 28), favouring fact acquisition over interpretation. This format had the plausibly intentional consequence of passive acceptance of the facts rather than critical engagement with content. At the turn of the century, the consensus amongst those writing about teaching History was that it was better for the children to "do' History rather than just learn about it' (Hoodless, 2008: 11). However, Stolare (2017) argues that teaching of the subject has remained 'about dates and events, linked through a narrative structure' (Stolare. 2017: 36), to the detriment of historical skills development.

Current research into effective History teaching highlights the need for both skills development and knowledge acquisition, despite scholars, such as Counsell (2000), arguing that there is only a 'conceptual distinction' (Counsell in Arthur and Phillips 2000:70) between these two. At primary level, Stolare (2017) highlights that teachers' broad but shallow understanding of History content leads to overreliance on textbooks and digital resources. When combined with the previously highlighted political domain of national identity, it could be 'hard to change the orientation of the History subject' (Storale, 2017: 37) from narrative methods to methods that support higher-order thinking in children.

An alternative approach suggests that it is more beneficial to focus 'attention on the quality of children's thinking rather than simply on fact acquisition' (Cooper in Bourdillon, 2012: 104). History lessons should provide opportunities 'to compare facts and compose information that lead, in combination, to logical results' (Rammos and Bratitis in Liapis et al., 2019: 458). This language is somewhat reflected in the IPSC History Teacher Guidelines (NCCA, 1999d), wherein it states that learning experiences should 'encourage discussion and a questioning, critical attitude to accounts of the past' (NCCA, 1999d: 64). Education should focus on improving students' abilities to think and solve problems rather than reproduce facts (Intaros et al., 2014). Cooper extends this concept by discouraging a 'single perspective of the past' (2000: 1), favouring an approach that encourages children to 'make inferences which are probabilistic' while tolerating 'that which can never be known' (2000: 3). Any History curriculum which diminishes the role of critical engagement and interpretation should be treated with suspicion given 'the intrinsic contribution of a historical knowledge to citizenship' (Ferriter, 2015). When the value of History education is examined through this lens, it raises further questions about policies which impact the teaching of History.

### 2.5 Student Motivation in Teaching and Learning

Woven deep within the complicated web of the nebulous term "teaching", is student motivation. Motivation plays a pivotal role in student academic success, with some scholars noting that motivational constructs 'contributed to the prediction of school success beyond intelligence' (Spinath and Steinmayr, 2009: 87). Whilst Carignan-Belleville argues that motivation is linked to 'successful first experiences' (1989: 57), a more contemporary understanding of motivation views it as multi-faceted, comprising of 'several related components' (Troia, 2012: 18). A number of these components in the context of motivation to write, are outlined by Hidi and Boscolo (2006). However, there is general applicability of

their findings as they believe that motivation should be examined 'from the theoretical perspectives of interest, self-efficacy, self-regulation and the social and cultural nature' (Hidi and Boscolo, 2006: 145). A more detailed summary of the elements of motivation is provided by who classifying them as 'motivational values, expectancies and motivated behaviours' (2013: 195).

Motivational values encapsulate a broad range of components. including 'intrinsic motivation, task value, interest and goal orientations' (Hornstra et al., 2013: 195). Interest and motivation are intrinsically linked, as a lack of interest in a topic can be 'identified as one of the root causes that diminishes the enthusiasm and motivation of a child' (Halloluwa et al., 2020: 47). Research conducted by Noels disputes the importance of interest in improving motivation to learn, claiming that only the psychological needs of autonomy, competence and social relatedness are essential components to improve motivation (Noels cited in Dörnyei, 2001). Ozturk (2013) and Kozikoglu (2014), similarly concluded that student's competency is 'closely related with self-perceptions' (Ozturk, 2013 :352), negating the impact of interest. However, Katz et al. (2006) argue that interest plays a supplementary role to the aforementioned elements, claiming that having interest in a topic can act as a buffering factor, helping students cope with less than ideal learning environments and conditions.

Motivational expectancies have been defined as one's own perceived academic competence (Wigfield and Eccles, 2002). Motivational expectancies, those predictions for future outcomes, are distinct from competence beliefs, focused on present abilities (Pajaras and Graham, 1999). Closely linked with the concept of motivational expectancies is the concept of academic self-efficacy, best described as the 'mediating mechanism of personal agency, acting between other determinants of competence' (Hidi and Boscolo, 2006: 188). Essentially, this outlines self-efficacy as a complicated construction of student's confidence in their own ability. Spinath and Steinmayr recognise that expectations of future success and

thus motivation to engage with a task are 'largely determined by ability self-perceptions' (2009: 81).

### 2.6 The Impact of Collaborative Learning on Student Motivation

One domain that is neglected in the Hornstra et al. (2013) elements of motivation is the socio-cultural domain. Hidi and Boscolo (2006) recognise the value of this in the context of learning to write, however, Tran (2019) argues that this socio-cultural element is applicable in a wide variety of learning environments. The value of collaborative learning as a motivational tool has been highlighted in the work of Anderson and Palmer (2001) and Johnson and Johnson (2009).

Collaborative learning methodologies not only resulted in higher academic attainment but also noted how 'peer motivation can be used effectively in the classroom to increase both student cognitive learning and affective growth' (Andereson and Palmer, 2001: 59). These findings are rooted in the theoretical work of Slavin (1984), who argued that successful collaborative learning environments are characterised by the positive motivational influence they have on members of the group. Nichols and Miller (1994) conducted quantifiable research into the effects that collaborative learning groups have on ability perception, academic achievement and goal orientation. They found that 'students in the cooperative learning class were more learning goal orientated and had higher perceptions of ability than students in traditional classes' (Nichols and Miller, 1994: 175). Considering the link between these elements and motivation discussed previously, if collaborative learning positively effects these domains, it must also positively affect student motivation. The NCCA summarises it's view on collaborative learning with one sentence: 'children's learning experiences in History should develop historical skills and wider skills of co-operation, communication and problem-solving' (NCCA, 1999d: 64).

The benefits of collaborative learning are not without dichotomy (Jarvela et al., 2010). Whilst the benefits of learning with others are well documented (Blumenfeld et al., 2006), groups can also face challenges which 'interfere with the social process of learning and task completion' (Jarvela et al., 2010: 16). Related research on challenges that arose during collaborative learning tasks found a wide range of challenges emerged including differences in priorities and expectations and the tendency of some individuals to rely on others (Arvaja et al., 2007). Social dynamics can add tension to collaboratively orientated tasks, especially if there are cultural differences in the groups (Volet and Karabenick, 2006). Add to these conflicts on finding common ground (Makitalo et al., 2002), issues surroundings complex concepts (Feltovich et al., 1996), practical challenges that limit full engagement (Volet and Mansfield, 2006) and the idealist view of collaborative learning as a silver bullet begins to lose its favour.

For collaborative learning to be more fruitful than 'working against each other (competitively)… [or] working by oneself (individualistically)' (Laal and Ghodsi 2012: 486), Johnson and Johnson (1994) recommend five conditions be met. Of these five, positive interdependence and individual accountability are most universally accepted in other collaborative frameworks (Kagan and Kagan, 2009; Asakawa et al., 2016).

Participants in collaborative work must have 'clearly perceived positive interdependence' (Johnson and Johnson, 1994: 3). This refers to the student's perception that they cannot succeed unless their groupmates do, and an understanding of the reciprocal benefits individual contributions make towards the group's success (Johnson and Johnson, 2018). It is a collective 'sink or swim feeling among group mates' (Kimura, 2009: 13). Positive interdependence is reinforced when the collective actions of the individuals within a group result in positive outcomes for the group (Gully et al., 2002).

Participants also need ‘considerable promotive (face-to-face) interaction’ (Johnson and Johnson, 1994: 3), with this element relying on individuals encouraging and promoting other’s efforts to complete tasks and contribute to the group. Promotive interaction aims to reduce incidents where ‘children sit in groups, but rarely work together as groups’ (Baines et al., 2015: 15).

Group participants must clearly understand ‘individual accountability and personal responsibility’ (Johnson and Johnson, 1994: 3) in achieving group targets. This may include equal work delegation and embodying democratic group work values (Johnson and Johnson, 2018). Individual accountability and personal responsibility urge all members to participate, ensuring that there is no ‘free-riding and social loafing’ (Laal and Ghodsi, 2013: 287), with individuals succeeding despite having failed to participate in group tasks.

Whilst partaking in group work, participants must make ‘frequent use of the relevant interpersonal and small-group skills’ (Johnson and Johnson, 1994: 3) required to complete tasks. Complicated interpersonal skills, such as conflict-management and decision-making, must be explicitly taught and practiced with participants so that they can utilise them during group work (Johnson and Johnson, 2018). These skills equip children with the tools to work cooperatively with others (Asakawa et al., 2016). Jacobs and Liu (1996) outline the range of communicative skills needed for group work alone, listing thirty-three skills in a non-extensive list.

Finally, group participants must exhibit ‘frequent and regular group processing of current function to improve the groups future effectiveness’ (Johnson and Johnson, 1994: 3). Through a process of ongoing examination of the group’s strengths and weaknesses, the group can identify individual member’s effectiveness in different roles (Johnson and Johnson, 2018). By doing so, the group can identify helpful and unhelpful actions which can contribute to effective working relationships (Gillies, 2016).

Given the integral role of Johnson and Johnson's (1994) five elements of collaboration in scaffolding class-based activities, their findings are integral to interrogating my research question.

## 2.7 The Role of Communication in Collaborative Tasks

Language is central to Johnson and Johnson's (1999) guiding principles for successful collaborative work. Both Vygotsky (1978) and Halliday (1975) argue for the centrality of language, not only in human development, but also as 'the principal mode of meaning-making' (Wells, 2007: 244). Through language students can 'participate with others in collaborative activities with shared goals and intentions' (Tomasello et al., 2005: 675). Vygotsky (1978) views language as dual-functioned, with both functions integral to collaborative activities. He notes how language is beneficial for the development and sharing of knowledge in society and as a tool for structuring the processes and content of individual thoughts (Drummond and Mercer, 2003: 101). However, within the context of the primary school classroom, research by Galton and Williamson (1992) found that the educational potential of dialogic interaction in classes was being wasted. More recent research by Hardman et al. (2003) found that teachers tend to use a high frequency of closed questioning in dialogic interactions with students, squandering opportunities for children to be 'encouraged and enabled to take an active and proportionally significant role in classroom talk' (Mercer and Dawes, 2014: 437). When Drummond and Mercer's understanding that 'education is seen as taking place through dialogue' is adopted, then 'educational success, and failure, may be explained by the quality of educational dialogue' (2003: 101), rather than strengths of individual teachers or students. Consideration of the types of communication occurring in my classroom became central to responding to the research question of

*How can I create opportunities for collaboration and communication in History lessons using Escape Rooms?*

### 2.7.1 Teacher Communication in the Classroom

Teacher-student dialogue is often negatively characterised by closed questioning in research (Hardman et al., 2003; Wood, 1992), with teacher questioning becoming 'an uninspiring quiz called 'guess what's in the teacher's mind'' (Drummond and Mercer, 2003: 101). Whilst modern researchers of classroom communication favour *dialogic teaching,* an approach wherein students take an active and sustained part in discussing ideas (Alexander, 2006), the reality of talk in History lessons is more nuanced.

Even powerful advocates of modern History education pedagogy, such as Cooper (2016), acknowledge the essential role that historical content knowledge plays in History education. The NCCA places parity on the child acquiring knowledge and skills in the IPSC for History (NCCA, 1999b). By accepting that there is a role for the transfer of knowledge from class teacher to student through dialogic interaction, the teaching of History resigns itself to at least some form of Freire's Banking Model of Education (1972), in that children will be evaluated 'against the teacher's expert knowledge and pedagogic agenda' (Drummond and Mercer, 2003: 101). In Freire's seminal work, *The Pedagogy of the Oppressed* (1972), he uses the metaphor to describe how students are empty vessels to be filled with knowledge. In the 'banking model' of learning, knowledge is viewed as 'a commodity to be transferred as efficiently as possible from sender to receiver' (Alam, 2013: 27), characterising it as a non-interactive/authoritative communicative approach (Mortimer and Scott, 2003). It is hard to see how this is not applicable to the way in which national identity politics is passed down from generation to generation through History content. In

addition to this, the technical nature of some historical content knowledge demands that the teacher takes an authoritative role in disseminating knowledge.

Falling within the non-interactive/authoritative communication approach is not inherently negative, as Mercer and Dawes note ‘any specific lesson or series of teaching sessions might include episodes of each of the four communicative approaches and be considered dialogic overall’ (2014: 438). It is a reality of History teaching that there will be times when children have to sit and listen to direct teaching, however for ‘consolidated learning and development to take place, it is essential that the child articulates what they are thinking’ (Dawes, 2004: 682).

### 2.7.2 Peer Communication in the Classroom

There is some disagreement amongst academics regarding ‘the educational value of putting children into small groups to work and talk together’ (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2010: 224). Some researchers have highlighted the value of collaborative talk in problem-solving (Light and Littleton, 1999) whilst others have reported that most talk witnessed during group work was unproductive, distracted and of little educational value (Alexander, 2004). One explanation for this apparent dichotomy is that children have not been explicitly taught the skills to effectively think and communicate collectively (Drummond and Mercer, 2003). Barnes (1976) recognised the need to teach these skills and proposed exploratory talk as a means of exploring them.

Exploratory talk is classified as a dialogic approach ‘in which partners engage critically but constructively with each other’s ideas’ (Drummond and Mercer, 2003: 103). Barnes further argues for the use of exploratory talk as it ‘provides a ready tool for trying out different ways of thinking and understanding’ (2008: 7). During exploratory talk, children can present ideas and interpretations for group consideration, opening their

individual understanding up to challenges and counterchallenges from the group. This process of dialogic exchange makes knowledge 'publicly accountable and [ensures] reasoning is visible in the talk' (Mercer, 2000: 98). Teaching the skills of exploratory talk and implementing it in the classroom is deemed a valuable tool in improving dialogue in the classroom (Rojas-Drummond and Mercer, 2003). Exploratory talk was found to be 'particularly effective in promoting group and individual reasoning, as well as argumentation abilities in primary school children' (Rojas-Drummond et al., 2010: 226), skills that the NCCA deem valuable 'to the nature of historical enquiry' (NCCA, 1999b: 6) and will be fundamental to this present research.

### 2.7.3 Motivation, Collaboration and Communication in History Lessons

The NCCA recognises the role that interest and motivation play in the teaching of History, listing development of 'an interest in and curiosity about the past' (NCCA, 1999b: 12) as the first aim of the curriculum. The History Teacher Guidelines provide further examples of the value of interest in motivating children to learn, recognising that the content chosen should suit 'the range of interests and aptitudes of the pupils' (NCCA, 1999d: 12). In the early years this is achieved primarily by appealing to the ego-centric nature of this developmental stage, focusing on 'an event or object which is the centre of their attention at a particular moment' (NCCA, 1999d: 6). However, the way this is achieved with the older children is ambiguous. As there are indications that student motivation is in consistent downward trajectory as they progress through primary school (Jacobs et al., 2002), Cooper (2016) argues that teachers and students need to engage with creativity to maintain engagement. By doing this, teachers begin to move away from the narrative communicative approach and start 'identifying and asking open questions to investigate problems, which may raise new questions' (Cooper, 2016: 4). This effect is then replicated in the students through teacher-designed tasks and lesson planning.

Creativity alone is not enough. Craft (2005) argues that engagement with this process should happen collaboratively and the type of task set is of significance. A collaborative task should 'not inhibit ideas but stimulates them because it encourages us to fully engage with the ideas of others' (Nemeth and Ormiston cited in Cooper, 2016: 8). Therefore, the tasks designed should encourage candid communication and a differing of opinions or interpretations. Additionally, Cooper suggest that problem-solving and the making of connections between 'disparate and apparently unconnected elements' (2016: 17) are at the highest levels of student creativity.

Effective and highly motivating History teaching methods seek to harness some or all elements outlined above, as espoused by Cooper (2016). Teachers engage in creative lesson planning, whereby they minimise the non-interactive communicative approach to teaching History, encourage risk-taking and connectivity and embrace social construction of knowledge.

### 2.8 Escape Rooms as a Teaching Method and the Lacunae in Scholarship

Originating in Japan in 2007 (Corkill, 2009), Escape Rooms have emerged as a globally popular recreational activity. Definitions of Escape Rooms have been proposed by Taraldsen et al. (2020) and Vidergor (2021), however Nicholson (2018) is most frequently cited in literature pertaining to Escape Rooms. He defines Escape Rooms as 'live-action team-based games, where players discover clues, solve puzzles and accomplish tasks in one or more rooms in order to accomplish a specific goal in a limited amount of time' (Nicholson, 2018: 44). In recent years, Educational Escape Rooms (hereafter EERs) have emerged as an experimental teaching method. Fotaris and Mastoras' (2019) systematic review of current research pertaining to EERs concluded that 'the target audience for most studies was higher education' (Fotaris and Mastoras, 2019: 239). They further deduced that only five peer-

reviewed studies had taken place in primary schools. Taraldsen et al. (2020) disputed this conclusion by claiming only two studies qualified under their rigorous research parameters. Considering the small data sample within the primary school context and the debatable transferability of findings found in other educational settings, any conclusions regarding the educational outcomes of EERs require scrutiny. Given the lacuna in literature specific to the Irish primary classroom, there is an opportunity for further research into the effectiveness of this approach within this context.

### 2.8.1 The Purpose of Escape Rooms

Escape Rooms are primarily a game. The concept of utilising games to conduct 'playful work' (Csikszentmihalyi & Schneider cited in Vidergor, 2021: 2) is not a modern concept. Piaget (1962) noted the value of games in helping children to 'master their environments' (Piaget cited in Martí-Parreño et al., 2016: 682). The assumption that 'play is the best way for children to learn' (O'Gorman and Ailwood, 2012: 266) is ingrained in western educational philosophy, forming central tenants of the work of Froebel (1967), Dewey (1916) and Montessori (1912). Despite its assimilation into western-thinking, there are those who argue in favour of monologic teaching styles (Radovic, 2012).

EERs borrow elements from games-based learning methods, which create structured opportunities for play with defined learning outcomes (Shaffter et al., 2005). EERs must attempt to balance the 'need to cover the subject matter' (Plass et al., 2015: 259) with the desire to create an engaging game (Plass et al., 2010). This element of EERs attempts to use the game to develop specified outcomes while students engage with problems with a playful attitude (Schell, 2008). Whilst Wilkinson and Little (2021) view Escape Rooms as a game-based learning tool, Vidergor (2021) contests that their value lies within the realms of gamification.

Gamification changes the purpose of the game elements in the activity. Rather than attempting to teach content through games, gamification adopts aspects of games and uses them 'to motivate players to engage in a task they otherwise would not find attractive' (Plass et al., 2015: 259). EERs utilise gamification elements and act as a games-based learning tool. Whilst Fotaris and Mastoras (2019) found that escape rooms produced high levels of enjoyment, engagement and motivation across the 68 studies they reviewed, they also noted that students reported high levels of 'learning gain' in 21 studies. The understanding of EERs as both gamification and games-based learning has been adopted as a core focus, recognising the motivational potential to develop specific historical skills and content knowledge.

### 2.8.2 Effective Game Design in EERs

Not all escape rooms are created equal. A well-designed escape room 'forces interdependence among multiple individuals who share a goal' (Cohen et al., 2020: 444). The EER's design must 'ensure quality, educational capacity and a positive learner experience' (Eukel and Moreell, 2021: 19). Theming the physical space of an EER can help 'the players to find meaning in their activities' (Nicholson, 2016: 15). This immersion is the process where a player is lured into a story or puzzle (Douglas and Hargadon, 2001). In the EER, it is used to 'get a player engaged: solving challenges and finishing the game' (Veldkamp, 2020: 1222).

Significantly, Nicholson (2016) stresses that puzzles in EERs must not become simple barriers to completing the game. Instead, he suggests that rooms should create a sense of immersion by locating puzzles within a broader narrative (Nicholson, 2015). This concept of imaginative engagement with historical content connects closely to the *Synthesis and Communication* skills of the IPSC for History (NCCA, 1999b: 61), providing an interesting avenue for exploration.

### 2.8.3 EERs for History Lessons

At their core, EERs are concerned with 'engaging students in learning environments, encouraging collaboration, cultivating soft skills of the 21st century and their intellectual development' (Makri et al., 2021: 6). Regardless of their purpose, EERs in non-primary contexts were found to improve the student's learning experience, motivation to engage with content and problem-solving skills (Cain, 2019; Gómez-Urquiza et al., 2019). If educators are interested in developing specific abilities or skills then 'the challenges of the room should reflect such abilities in their task demands' (Cohen et al., 2020: 447). Therefore, to be an effective teaching method in primary History lessons, historical learning outcomes must be built into the design of the room by developing puzzles that require historical skills or content knowledge.

Cognitive puzzles are most prevalent in EERs, requiring players to utilise skills of searching, observation, correlation, memorisation, (logic) reasoning, mathematics, reading and pattern recognition (Wiemker et al., 2015) all while avoiding extensive guesswork (Selinker and Snyder, 2013). These cognitive puzzles align themselves with the middle levels of Marzano and Kendall's revised Taxonomy for Educational Objectives (2007), thus placing them closer to the high-order historical skills I wish to develop.

A crucial element of effective escape room design is the role of the Games Master. In recreational escape rooms, this person monitors and guides teams through challenges by video monitoring (Nicholson, 2015). However, in the educational context, it is more appropriate for the teacher to guide teams from within the same room (Cain, 2019). The challenge for the teacher as Games Master, is to maintain a 'balance between the teacher's guidance and the learners' feeling of autonomy during the escape room gameplay'

(Veldkamp et al, 2020: 1224). Mismanaging this role, may result in sabotaging opportunities for student-student collaboration, communication and problem-solving.

### 2.8.4 The Impact of Escape Rooms on Learning Outcomes

Given the emergent nature of this teaching method and the saturation of case-study research in the current literature, it is difficult to conclude the effectiveness of EERs within primary schools. Initial research conducted by Huang et al. (2020) suggests that 'there was no remarkable difference in science learning performance' (Huang et al., 2020: 13) between the control group and those who took part in the EER. This claim is validated by research conducted by Hainey et al. (2014) who concluded that other games-based learning methods resulted in mixed outcomes when compared to control groups. However, by Huang et al.'s own admission, 'a traditional test that focused on the low-level thinking' (2020: 14) was used to assess this learning performance. This fails to capture 'the collaboration and critical thinking skills required to complete the games' (Rouse, 2017: 554). Huang et al's. (2020) quantitative data does not capture the higher-order skills that my research wishes to explore. From this limited data set, it could be concluded that current research does not support the effectiveness of EERs as a games-based learning method to increase content knowledge in primary classrooms, as it thus far has failed to conclusively improve attainment of defined content-based learning outcomes (Shaffer et al., 2005). However, the benefits of EERs in the classroom extend beyond lower-order learning outcome progression.

### 2.8.5 Impact of Escape Rooms on Motivation

In contrast, both studies conducted in primary settings (Huang et al., 2020; Videgor, 2021) concluded that the EER method was able to 'intensify the learning motivation of students and give them positive perceptions' (Huang et al., 2020:14) towards the learning

content. Videgor reported a 'strong connection between the students' perceptions of the gameful experience…and motivation' (2021:11). This claim is consistent with findings by Sailer and Homner who report 'significant, positive effects of gamification on… motivational, and behavioral learning outcomes' (2020: 106). This is significant as I value engagement in my classroom as part of my social constructivist epistemology. Despite these reported conclusions, there are limitations and concerns to be highlighted. Boulet (2012) notes the complex and multi-faceted nature of motivation, claiming that people are not all motivated by the same things, raising concerns about the long-term effectiveness of EERs. The most frequently reported challenge across EER research studies was poor evaluation techniques, where most studies 'lacked a control group and resorted to surveys addressing students' perception of the escape room' (Fotaris and Mastoras, 2019: 241). This conclusion, devaluing the voice of the child, strongly conflicts with the core belief of self-study action research and my personal value of democracy.

### 2.8.6 Impact of Escape Rooms on Collaboration and Communication

The aforementioned lacuna in primary school based EER research makes it challenging to draw conclusions from the existing literature regarding collaboration and communication. Pan et al. concluded that EERs 'may be valuable environments for… training that involve collaboration' (2017: 1361). They recognise the role of EERs in dissolving leadership dynamics that existed outside of the game. In their research, they note how emergent leadership relied more on 'puzzle solving experience' (Pan et al. 2017:1361) than on social hierarchies. However, the degree to which their findings apply to the primary classroom are debatable. Pan et al. (2017) conducted research on young adolescents with developed conflict management and social skills. The degree to which a younger cohort would replicate these findings is unknown. Despite the literature gap in the primary setting, metadata gathered from other educational settings indicates that EERs can have a positive impact on student collaboration and communication. The systematic review of EERs

conducted by Fotaris and Mastoras, notes how 41% of studies reviewed highlight how EERs 'were found to promote teamwork and collaboration' (2019: 7). They further emphasise how social interaction and communication was a beneficial feature of 27.9% of EERs reviewed. They concluded that EERs are 'innovative, active, collaborative and constructivist instructional approaches that can shape learning more powerfully than conventional teaching' (Fotaris and Mastoras, 2019: 7). It should be noted that the two EER case studies that were conducted within the primary settings reinforce the findings of Fotaris and Mastoras (2019) and of Pan et al. (2017). They noted that EERs played a role in 'promoting teamwork' (Huang et al., 2020: 14), and how the EER method was more effective for group collaboration than simple digital games (Videgor, 2021). This suggests that the EER teaching method may be a suitable choice to provide opportunities for collaboration and communication within 5$^{th}$ class History lessons.

## 2.9 Conclusion

The aims of History education in Ireland have shifted dramatically in the last 50 years, from playing its part in stabilising the fragile patriotic identity of the emerging nation to a curriculum heavily built upon foundations of Vygotsky's social-constructivist theory. The NCCA were progressive in their embracement of Pestalozzi and Froebel inspired play-based learning across the curricula, placing skills development and critical discussion of the past at the core of the IPSC for History (NCCA, 1999b). Having pinned its colours to the concepts of social-constructivism and a skills-based curriculum, the 1999 History Curriculum, tackled issues surrounding student motivation by choosing to begin with the child (Froebel cited in Liebschner, 1992).

The role that motivation plays in current History teaching and learning was explored and deemed pivotal to student success. Collaboration and its link to student motivation was

examined and found to be a positive influence. Communication was examined through the lens of teacher-student and peer dialogue. Johnson and Johnson's (1999) principles of communication were considered integral to the research question. The literature examined in this review suggests that learning activities that encourage peer-collaboration and communication have positive impacts on student motivation and engagement.

EERs are proposed as a teaching methodology that seeks to harness the social-constructivism of the curriculum and the motivational aspects of peer-collaboration in developing the skills of criticality need for historical enquiry. Whilst the effectiveness of this methodology in primary settings is under-researched, initial case-study research and EER research from other educational settings suggests that the methodology is highly motivating for students and effective in providing authentic opportunities for collaboration and communication.

The next chapter will examine methodologies used in answering the research question. In this chapter EER design and opportunities for facilitating peer collaboration and communication are discussed in relation to the intervention put in place to answer my study question.

# Chapter Three: Methodology

## 3.1 Introduction

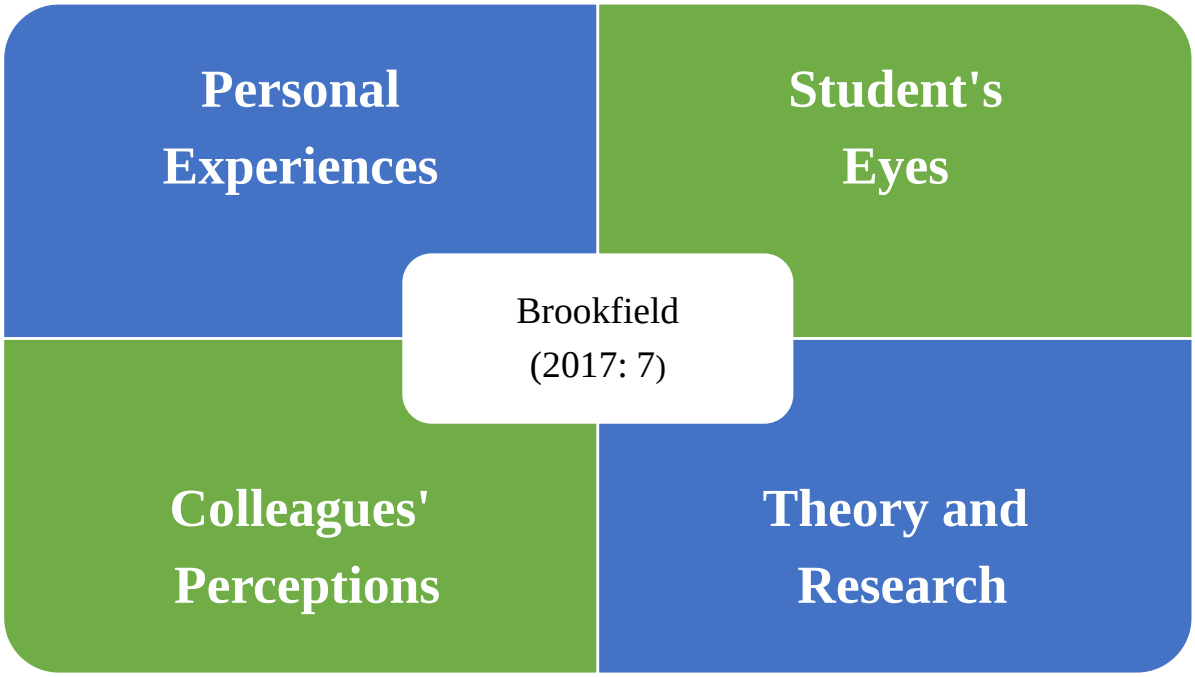
This chapter provides an overview of this study's 'way of conducting research' (McNiff, 2014: 39). The role of reflection in forming a research question is outlined initially. The significance of reflection is further discussed when I justify selecting a self-study action research methodology. The chosen research paradigm is discussed, revealing the 'set of ideas and attitudes that inform the research' (McNiff, 2014: 39) with an explanation of research design. Data collection tools are justified, ensuring that they 'provide the needed evidence and context for understanding' (Hamilton and Pinnegar, 1998: 240), while highlighting their limitations. The process of analysing this data is examined briefly and ethical considerations are discussed. To conclude, this chapter addresses the concern that self-study action research could become a 'pseudonym for rationalisation or self-justification' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 510) by discussing the concepts of validity, transferability and credibility.

## 3.2 Research Question

My research began with a seemingly innocuous reflection. When identifying my educational values, I asked myself *'Do I even live by any values?'* (TRJ, 18/08/2021). To reconnect with my values, I adopted Whitehead's definition, wherein values are the 'human goals which we use to give our lives their particular form' (2018: 14). Initially, I identified agency and creativity as values which 'are embodied in [my] practice' (Whitehead, 2018: 14). Upon deeper reflection, I identified with the educational and epistemological values of communication and collaboration as reasons 'for why [I] do what [I] do' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 12). Much later, as the data emerged and my findings became clear, I added another value that had been harder to unpack; *'the value of democracy in my class'* (TRJ, 07/06/22).

By applying a conceptual framework that incorporated Brookfield's (2017) multiple lenses (see figure 3.1), I realised I am 'a living contradiction, holding educational values whilst at the same time negating them (Whitehead, 2018: 13). Whilst I value and foster communication and collaboration between children, I do not live these values with colleagues. Through reflexivity, I questioned this dichotomy in my practice; *'do as I say, not as I do'* (TRJ, 09/09/21). This question of 'what might be at the root of that sense of dissonance' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 11) informed the direction of my research. My research provided motivating opportunities for the children to collaborate in History lessons, whilst challenging me to enhance collaborative relationships with colleagues.

*Figure 3.1: Organisation of Data Collection Methods*



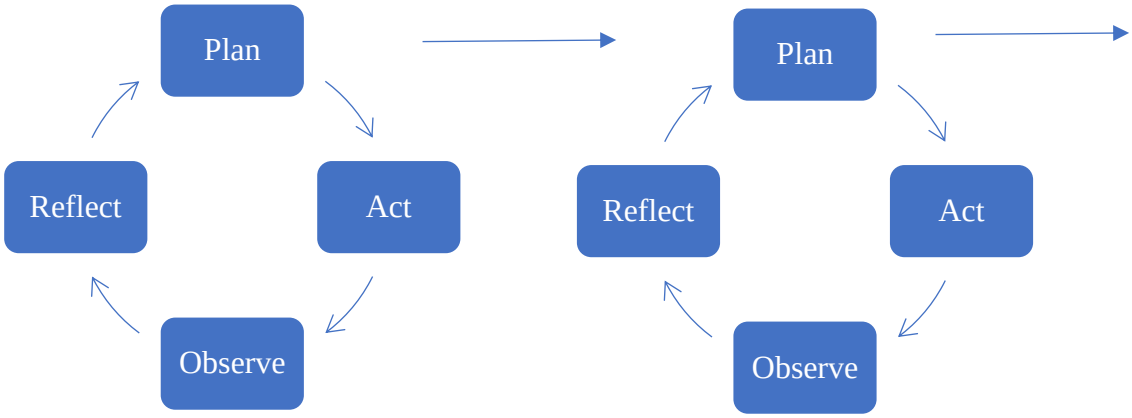

### 3.3 Research Approach

#### 3.3.1 Action Research

Action research (hereafter AR) is defined as 'a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such intervention' (Cohen and Manion, 1980: 174). It is concerned with an 'improvement of the

understanding of the practice… [and] of the situation in which practice takes place' (Carr and Kemmis, 2004: 162). This required me to 'think and act critically' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 237) through a process of praxis (Freire, 1970), with the intention of 'creating new knowledge about practice' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2005: 5). I adopted an AR model proposed by Whitehead and McNiff, which recommends a 'cycle of planning, acting, observing and reflecting…extended into ongoing action-reflection cycles' (2013: 56), see figure 3.2.

*Figure 3.2: Action Research Cycle Model (Whitehead and McNiff, 2013)*




As enhancing my practice and the centrality of personal, 'critical reflection' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 2) were important to me, self-study AR was the most appropriate for my research.

### 3.3.2 Self-Study Action Research

Self-study AR involves 'studying my practice, with a view to improving it and my understanding of it' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 16). Whilst Pring claims that this research 'aims not to produce new knowledge but to improve practice' (2000: 75), it can also lead to a 'construction of meaning and knowledge' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 518).

Self-study AR can 'find itself operating in the tension between relevance and rigour' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 518), balancing the enhancement of the researcher's practice with a contribution to furthering the teaching profession. Without sharing insights in 'some publicly accessible form' (Elliott, 2015: 14), self-study AR remains confined to the study site. Conversely, by moving too far towards rigour, the researcher can become a victim of 'generalising beyond his or her own experience' (Stenhouse in Pollard, 2014: 73). By seeking a victory narrative through generalisation, self-study AR makes 'concessions to methodological technicalities and reduced conceptualisations in order to allow proper measurement' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 519).

To avoid a research approach that was a 'study *of* the self *by* the self and *for* the self' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 519), I adopted Whitehead's (2018) 'Living Theory' approach. Whitehead places the researcher as the focal point for inquiry, demanding that 'individuals generate their own explanations of their educational influences in their own learning' (2009: 87). Using their epistemological, ontological and axiological values as a starting point for reflection, the researcher questions 'who they are within their school and professional context' and whether their actions 'align with that construction' (Buchanan, 2015: 700).

Through this critical reflection I uncovered the paradoxical conflict between my values and practice, leading to the formation of a research question which I believe 'consists of a quest for virtue in action' (Elliott, 2015: 6).

### 3.3.3 Research Paradigm

Self-study AR opposes the scientific paradigm in its epistemology of objectivism and ontology of realism (Scotland, 2012). Living theory AR does not seek validations, 'predictions and generalisations' (Scotland, 2012: 10). Complex concepts such as

communication and collaboration cannot be reduced to ‘simplifying and controlling variables’ (Scotland, 2012: 11), characteristic of scientific paradigms. Reliance on quantitative data to ‘identify causes which influence outcomes’ (Creswell, 2009: 7) does not capture the ‘elusive and intangible quality of social phenomena’ (Cohen et al., 2018: 9) of this research project.

My research is not located within the critical paradigm as outlined by Scotland (2012) either, characterised by its epistemology of subjectivism and its ontology of historical realism. Whilst my research draws on elements from the critical paradigm, namely the concept that ‘we come to inhabit a pre-existing system and to be inhabited by it’ (Crotty, 1998: 53), there are areas of fundamental deviation. The critical paradigm is concerned with 'exposing hegemony and injustice’ (Scotland, 2012: 13) which is not the focus of this research project.

Rather, my research straddles the critical and interpretive paradigms. The concept of ‘value neutral’ (Scotland, 2012: 10) research is incompatible with the living theory AR approach. Rather, Brookfield advocates for a method that starts with an ‘intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of our teaching assumptions’ (2017: 3). This axiological understanding of relativism and subjectivism should place this research within the interpretive paradigm, however, some conflicts exist. My values align with the belief that ‘meaning is not discovered; it is constructed through interaction’ (Scotland, 2012: 11). Further, the interpretive paradigm’s rejection of ‘a foundational base to knowledge’ (Scotland, 2012: 12) is problematic when contrasted with self-study AR’s purpose of ‘contributing to the professional development and the improvement of practice’ (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 519).

In reality, this self-study AR is an amalgamation of paradigms. It seeks the external validity of the scientific paradigm, aligns itself with the constructionism of the interpretive

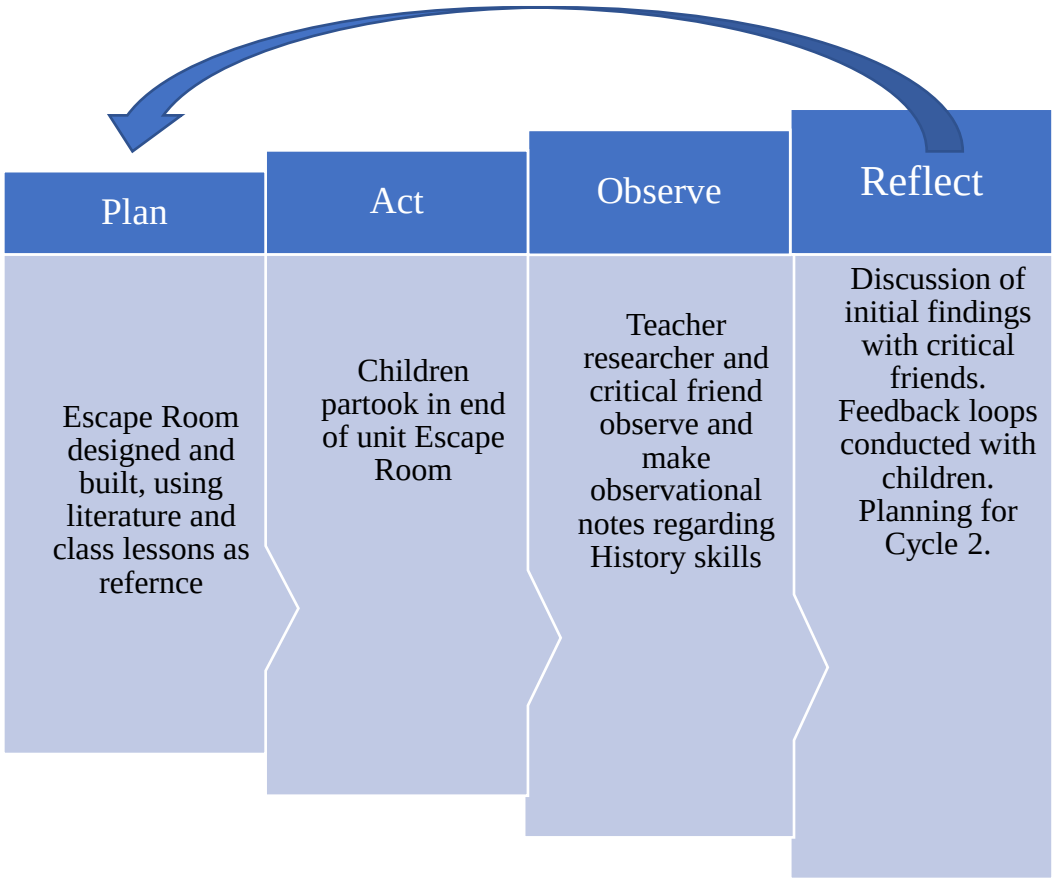
paradigm while acknowledging the historical realism (Scotland, 2012) of the critical paradigm. In truth, this self-study AR 'constitute[s] a paradigm in its own right' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 27).

## 3.4 Research Design

### 3.4.1 Research Schedule

The research schedule was a malleable aspect of the research. The time allocated to both research cycles was originally set at twelve weeks, however, flexibility in amending this timeline was planned for. Ongoing reflection-in-action (Schon, 1995), through reflective journaling, informed adaptations to the schedule. The research design consisted of four phases, which together formed a cycle. This phased, cyclical approach in outlined in Figure 3.3 below.

*Figure 3.3: Research Cycle Phase based on Whitehead and McNiff (2013)*



### 3.4.2 Sample and Recruitment

The research was conducted in a 5th class, urban, DEIS school. A sample of participants was drawn from a mixed gender class of 23 children. I was allocated this class by the school principal. 'Purposeful sampling' (Cohen et al, 2018: 218) was used with those who opted into the research, as this technique allowed for the 'most effective use of limited resources' (Palinkas et al., 2016: 2). Random sampling was discounted as the 'generalisability of findings' (Palinkas et al., 2016: 2) was not a focus of my research. Children were grouped in pods of four, mixed ability and gender, organised by behavioural and social criterion. In Cycle One, these groupings formed the teams for the Escape Rooms. This was amended by the children's suggestion in Cycle Two, to self-selected groupings.

### 3.4.3 Intervention

Having gathered baseline data from a student questionnaire (see appendix B), the first cycle of this research project commenced. The cycle consisted of a four-week unit of study on the Romans in History, taught using mixed teaching approaches. These lessons consisted of an exploration of the topics in the Early People and Ancient Societies strand unit within the History Curriculum (NCCA, 1999b), detailed in appendix C.

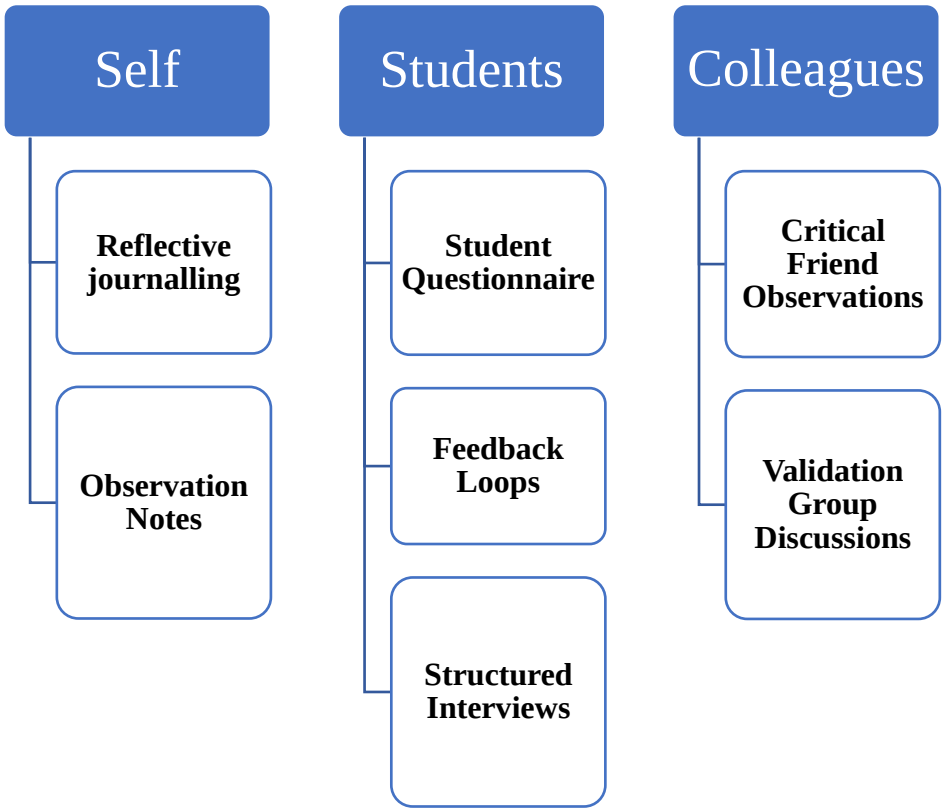
At the end of the unit, children completed a teacher-designed hybrid Escape Room (see appendix E), drawing upon historical content knowledge and skills developed during lessons. The children's familiarity with the theme and topic ensured opportunities to practice the application of higher-order skills, explored in the literature review, while harnessing the motivational aspect of immersion in Escape Room's noted by Nicholson (2015).

### 3.5 Data

#### 3.5.1 Data Collection

All data collected during this research was qualitative, allowing me 'to map out, or explain more fully, the richness and complexity' (Cohen et al., 2000: 12) of communication and collaboration. The qualitative methods utilised included my reflective journal, student questionnaires, teacher and Critical Friend observations and structured interviews. The organisation of each of these methods in outlined in figure 3.4 below.

*Figure 3.4: Organisation of Data Collection Methods*




These qualitative collection methods provided a robust data set that allowed me to 'capture the complex reality under scrutiny' (Denscombe, 2007: 45) and evaluate how changes in my teaching of History could affect student communication and collaboration.

### 3.5.2 Ongoing Data: Reflective Journaling

'Critical reflection' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 1) is integral to the Living Theory approach. Reflection acted as a 'way of making my history, values and assumptions open to scrutiny' (Ortlipp, 2008: 698). Daily reflective journaling entries 'provide data about changes in how [I] think, about [my] work and how [I] go about it' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 79).). Reflective journals are not without their critics, with some claiming that there is a tendency for them to be used 'thoughtlessly and in an undiscerning manner' (Fook et al. in White et al., 2006: 3). Without the element of reflexivity, 'a key part in making sure that reflective practice is *critically* reflective practice' (Thompson and Pascal, 2012: 319), reflective journaling can become an oversimplified 'matter of pausing for thought' (Thompson and Thompson, 2008: 6). A larger concern is Zembylas' warning of the self-inflicted 'violence against ourselves' (2018: 81) that can emerge from value-laden reflection linked to our identities. Undoubtably, authentic reflective journaling 'interrupts essentialist claims' (Zembylas, 2018: 81) we make about our values and our identity, but without the agency to enact change this can become disabling for the reflector. Considering this research asked, 'how do I improve what I am doing?' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 2), the methodology was agentic by design and therefore reflective journals remained an essential data collection tool.

### 3.5.3 Initial Phase Data: Questionnaires and Journaling

Student questionnaires illuminated which activities children found motivating, attitudes towards collaborative groupings and History. Questionnaires were selected as a collection tool as they gather 'rich and personal data' and allow 'participants to write a free account in their own terms' (Cohen et al. 2007: 321) Questions were age-appropriate and open-ended to 'catch the authenticity, richness, depth of response' (Cohen et al. 2007: 330). To negate the bias associated with questionnaires, I included questions perceived as

negative, as advised by Cohen et al. (2007), such as 'The hardest things about working with others is…', (see Appendix B) The questionnaires were anonymous to limit the influence of 'the power relationship between [me] as the researcher and the respondents' (Munn and Drever, 1990: 11).

### 3.5.4 Cycle One Data: Conferencing and Observations

Data was gathered by Critical Friends in-situ using a structured observational grid (see Appendix D). This ethnographic approach was chosen as it facilitated 'taking notes and collecting unstructured data to produce an account of the situation being studied' (Cotton et al., 2010: 465). The risks associated with this approach, namely observer 'selectively…memory limitations…[and] post-hoc rationalisation' were recognised and planned for by co-designing an observational grid with my Critical Friends to be completed as they observed. It was intended that both teacher-researcher and Critical Friends would adopt the role of peripheral membership (Adler and Adler, 1994). In this role observers maintain a balance between 'insider and an outsider, between participation and observation' (Baker, 2006: 176), allowing both observers to conduct short informal interviews and provide support to children who need it. It became clear that '*the level of support the children needed from the teacher was higher than anticipated'* (TRJ, 14/04/2022) in Cycle One, therefore only the Critical Friends present gathered observational data during each Escape Room. This data collected was discussed and analysed with Critical Friend when the Escape Rooms concluded. I used my reflective journal to note observations and contribute data after each Escape Room.

At the end of Cycle One, after consultation with Critical Friends, I engaged the children in a feedback loop, (Baumfield et al., 2013). The intention of using the children's voice to 'make sense of information from various sources and use it to enhance

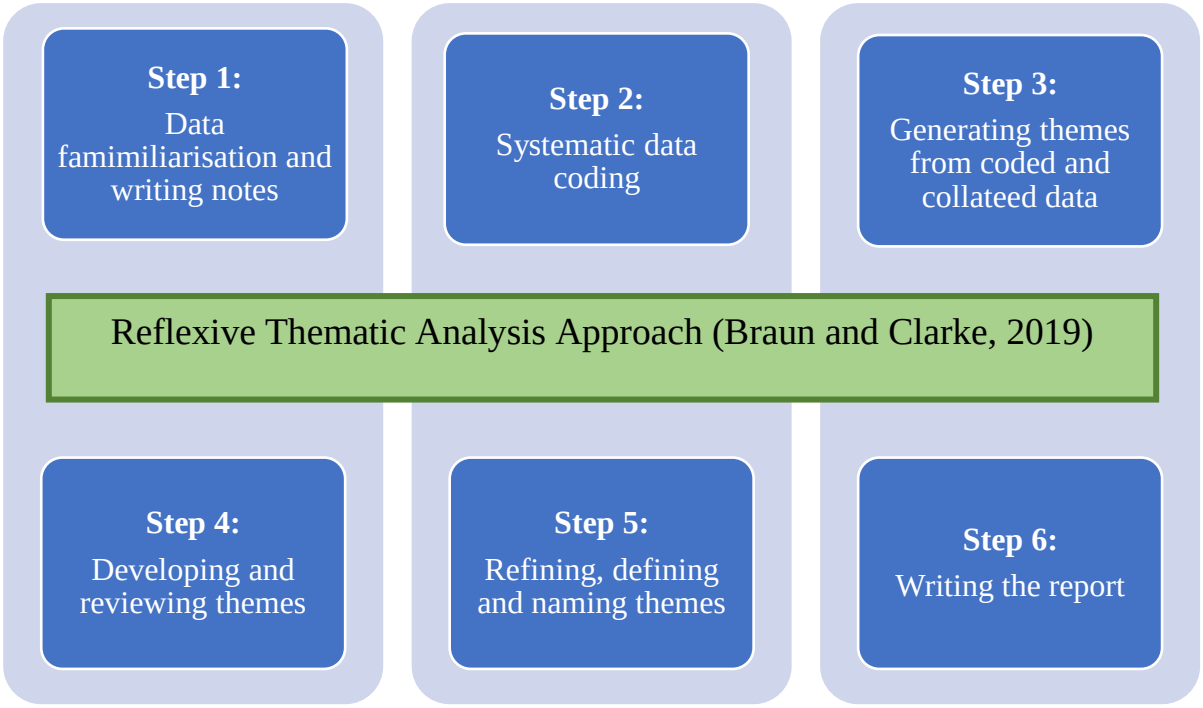
their…learning' (Carless, 2016: 1) was integral my aim of living closer to my value of classroom democracy. A challenge associated with such dialogic feedback is the 'large class sizes which would impede teacher-intensive forms of feedback' (Carless, 2016: 4). To overcome this challenge, children used the anonymous online survey tool Mentimeter to share their opinions on a range of issues that emerged from consultation with Critical Friends and their perceptions of how the Escape Room went. Data gathered from these feedback loops informed changes made for Cycle Two.

Following Cycle Two, conferencing, an organised 'meeting between the child and his/her teacher' (NCCA, 2007: 24), was utilised to capture the child's voice. The use of oral communication enabled evaluation of 'the students' general feelings' (Pierce 1997: 9). I used a schedule of questions to ensure the conference remained 'informal and non- threatening' (NCCA, 2007: 24), yet informative and reliable. All interactions were audio-recorded and transcribed for later analysis to ensure my judgement was not 'affected by [my] close involvement in the group' (Cohen and Manion, 1980: 105). The purpose of the conferencing was multi-faceted as it ensured the 'focus… [is] on the learners' (Baleghizadeh and Zarghami, 2012: 132) while enabling the researcher to 'collect from multiple and complementary sources' (Phillips and Carr, 2006: 76) to make an informed deduction. A purposeful sample was selected from the children who opted to take part in recorded interviews.

### 3.5.5 Data Analysis

The data collected was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2019) reflexive thematic analysis approach. This approach proposes a six-stage process for analysing data (Braun and Clarke, 2019), allowing me to fully utilise the 'rich and personal data' (Cohen et al. 2007: 321) gleaned from the quantitative research methods, see figure 3.5.

*Figure 3.5: Process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis Applied*

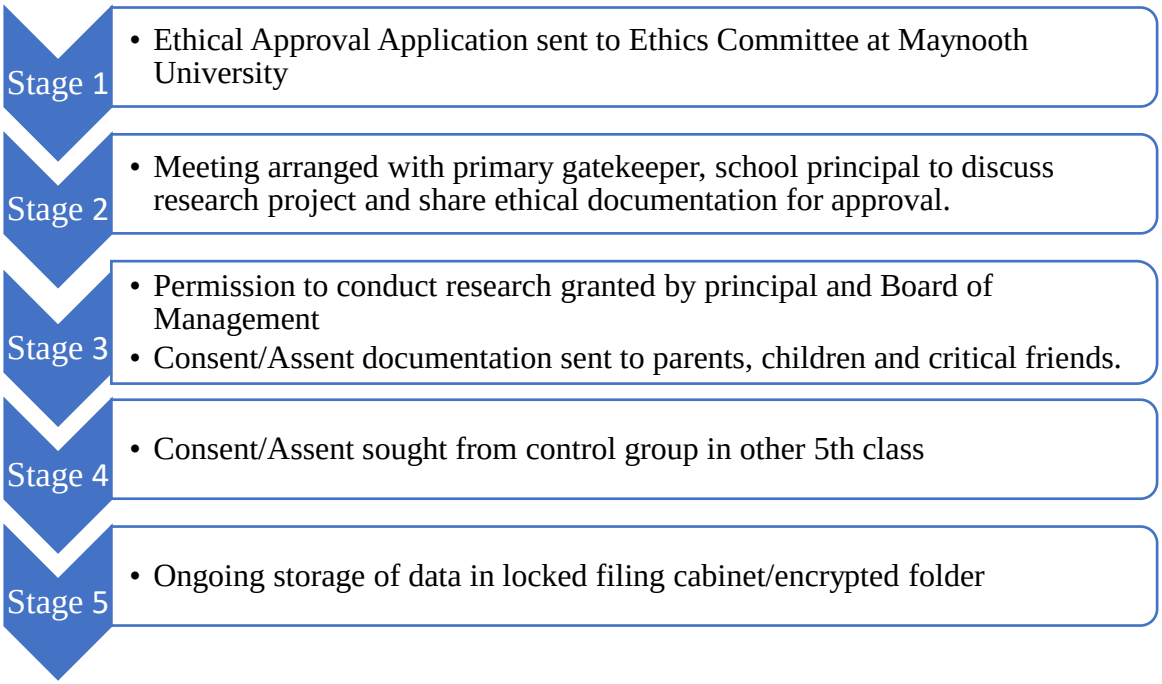



Nowell et al. advocate for this approach, claiming that it should 'be a foundational method for qualitative analysis' (2017: 2). This approach to thematic analysis was utilised to 'make the process of data analysis as visible and transparent as possible' (Ortlipp, 2008, 697) and was favoured over similar approaches due to its 'clear set of steps… particularly helpful for the beginner' (Terry et al., in Willig and Stainton, 2007:34). Javadi and Zarea (2016) outline six steps to engage with thematic analysis, which closely mirror the work of Braun and Clarke (2006). The principles for qualitative data analysis (Denscombe, 2010) could be applied as a thematic analysis approach, however this was discounted due to the lack of a clear structure in how to engage with each principle. Finally, Braun and Clarke's (2006) earlier model of thematic analysis was examined due to its saturation throughout the literature pertaining but was found to lack significant acknowledgement of the integral role that researcher bias plays in the knowledge creation (Braun and Clarke, 2019).

### 3.6 Ethical Considerations

Given the site of the research and the participants involved, various ethical considerations were explored prior to commencing the ethical approval process. The process of acquiring ethical approval is outlined in figure 3.6.

*Figure 3.6: Process of Acquiring Ethical Approval*




#### 3.6.1 Research Involving Children

The 23 students in my class are classified as vulnerable participants due to their age. To ensure ethical compliance, full parental consent and child assent was obtained for willing participants (see Appendix A). Additional consideration was be given to children with special educational needs and those from an EAL background. As English is not the first language of some parents in my class, I offered a copy of the ethical permissions letter in their native language if requested (see Appendix A). Collection of voice recordings, approved by Maynooth University Ethics Committee, strictly adhered to General Data Protection Regulations and my school's Child Safeguarding and Data Protection policies. I also ensured all data collection and research methodologies followed the 'minimal risk standard' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012: 2) and adhered to the Children's

First Policy. Research participants were anonymised using a numbering system, ensuring anonymity. All participants were given the option to opt out of the research at any point or to opt out of a specific data collection activity without repercussions (Silverman, 2010).

### 3.6.2 Power Dynamics

Consideration was given to power dynamics. No incentives or consequences were tied to participation in the research. The intervention was integrated into History lessons, with all children taking part, ensuring it did not appear as a reward. As my principal was a Critical Friend, I remained aware of the potential of seeking a victory narrative (Stronach and McLure, 1997) to impress. The potential for 'power disparities' (Powell et al., 2012: 2) to arise during the evaluation process with Critical Friends was overcome by constructing an observational grid to focus on elements of the intervention rather than on me.

### 3.6.3 Informed Consent

Written consent was obtained from parents, teachers and school management. Whilst not sufficient in isolation, 'informed assent' (Department of Children and Youth Affairs, 2012: 2), was sought from the children, with an opt-out clause (see Appendix A). A letter of consent was given to parents so that they could give consent, after an explanation of the research project was presented (See Appendix A). Additional letters of consent were presented to the school principal and Critical Friends. All forms of data collection were explained in the letter, as was the concept of anonymity (See Appendix A).

### 3.6.4 Interpreting Data

Children being involved in 'analysing information and benefiting from the research' (Creswell, 2009: 9) is a challenge in the critical paradigm. However, as a teacher who claims to value democracy, I was determined to give the child's voice equal value throughout my research. Researchers tend to use their own perspective to interpret data, diminishing the true potential of the child's voice (Dockett et al., 2009). To overcome this challenge, I used feedback loops, as proposed by Baumfield et al. (2013), discussing anonymised trends that emerged from Critical Friend discussions giving children an active role in validating the research findings. The children's role in interpreting the data played a key role in the emergence of findings, discussed in further detail in Chapter Four.

## 3.7 Validity, Transferability and Credibility

As claims to knowledge emerge from the experiential basis of lived practice (Pinnegar and Hamilton, 2009) during Living Theory research, challenges arise authenticating their validity. Self-study action researchers build the notion of exemplar-based validation, wherein 'members of a relevant research community can judge for themselves… the validity of observations [and] interpretations' (La Boskey in Lyons and LaBoskey, 2002: 20), into their research approach. Small-scale AR can suffer from a 'lack of objectivity and rigour' (Campbell et al., 2004: 85). This researcher utilised social validity, to 'make the process of data analysis as visible and transparent as possible' (MacNaughton cited in Ortlipp, 2008: 3).

The lacuna of literature pertaining to the use of the EERs in primary schools, dictated a need to further understand their impact on student collaboration and communication. The subjective stance adopted by the AR approach limits the transferability of any claims to knowledge made. However, details pertaining to research context, research sample and

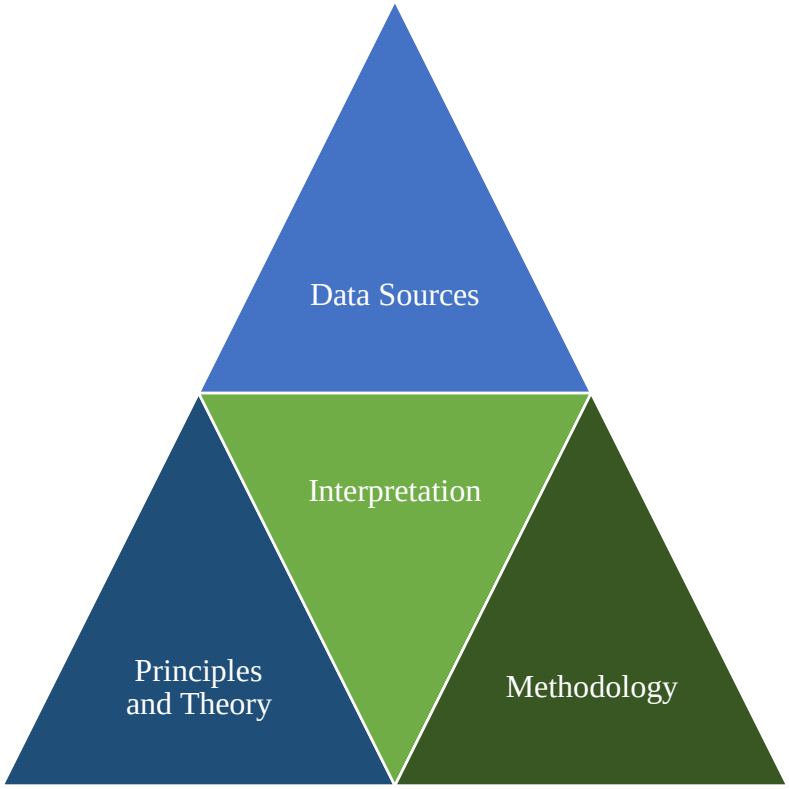
research methodologies employed aimed to give insight into the potential transferability of my intervention.

I acknowledged the presence of bias in a self-study AR and the impact this can have on credibility. Furthermore, I was aware of the 'pitfalls of navel-gazing' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 516) in pursuit of victory narratives. The need to interpret what the data revealed, even if it did not reinforce what I want to hear (Javadi and Zarea, 2016) was upheld.

### 3.7.1 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the process of 'getting other perspectives on qualitative data so as to show its credibility by cross-checking' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 17). With effective use of triangulation, the multiple perspectives that 'are foundational in creating trustworthiness' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 92), can be obtained. The role of triangulation is particularly pertinent in Living Theory AR, in negating personal bias and subjectivity by including 'others not directly involved in the research' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 148). Phillips and Carr argue that in classroom AR, data should be collected 'via three methods: *observation*, *interview* and *artifact*' (2010: 77). However, Flick counter-argues that a less definitive approach should be taken, with the 'combination of several qualitative methods' (2018: 2) sufficient in adding to rigour. My research adopts the four approaches to triangulation proposed by Denzin (1970), outlined in Figure 3.7 below.

*Figure 3.7: Four Approaches to Triangulation from Denzin (1970)*




Qualitative data was collected using 'multiple methods of data collection' (Carter et al., 2014: 545) thus ensuring robust methodological triangulation. Qualitative data from reflective journals was compared with data from participant feedback forms, critical friend observation rubrics, validation group discussions and structured interview audio recordings. Investigator triangulation was achieved by forming validation groups, utilising feedback loops and recruiting four Critical Friends. This allowed me to 'minimise biases coming from the individual researcher' (Flick, 2018: 13) by comparing my claims to knowledge with those of other participants.

To maintain the integrity of the theory triangulation, this research used reflections and meta-reflections, reflecting upon previous reflections (Schon, 1995). The literature review section of this research was ever-evolving informed by the 'messy and complex' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 57) nature of the AR process.

Data was collected from ‘different sources’ (Denzin, 1970: 301) as distinct from methods used in producing data (Flick, 2018: 12). The voice of the practitioner-researcher was gathered through reflective journaling and observational notes. The voice of critically engaged colleagues was gathered through observation rubrics and feedback. The child’s voice was gathered through participant surveys, feedback forms, feedback loops and structured transcribed interviews.

This multi-faceted approach to triangulation provided a triad of advantages over a singular approach. This approach added ‘robustness to the validity’ (McDonagh et al., 2020: 163) of the research and provided a richer and more ‘complete data set’ (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 77), all while presenting ‘innovative ways to analyse’ (Sullivan et al., 2016: 107) new claims to knowledge.

### 3.7.2 Validation Groups

A validation group was established with two other teachers, who agreed to ‘give critical feedback…about the validity of knowledge claims’ (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 197). Careful consideration and explicate explanation were given to highlighting the role of the validation group, to ‘comment fairly but critically’ (Campbell et al., 2004: 110). Two meetings were held with the validation group, with the initial meeting taking place before the research was initiated. During this first meeting, the purpose and focus of the research was explained and approaches to data collection were discussed. In the final meeting, claims to knowledge that emerged from the data were shared. Members of the validation group tested ‘the validity of those claims’ (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 47) through questioning and feedback, to strengthen the new knowledge created.

### 3.7.3 Critical Friends

McDonagh et al. note that a key aspect of Living Theory research is that 'you share your thinking with one or more colleagues from the outset and invite critique' (2020: 73). During the research cycles, my four onsite Critical Friends observed the EER teaching approach, using an observational rubric. This data was discussed and used to critically assess my claims to knowledge, noting whether I achieved the desired '*untangling of my idealistic, philosophical foundations from the reality of my teaching'* (TRJ, 09/11/21). Two Critical Friends were initially selected to 'provide support as well as constructively challenge and critique' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 27) my claims to knowledge. Critical Friend One was selected due to their availability to observe and interest in the area of study, enabling me to share my 'most embryonic thoughts and ideas' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 73). Critical Friend Two was a Special Education Teacher assigned to the 5$^{th}$ class stream with a deep knowledge of the children in my class. Her personal knowledge of the children in my class allowed her to 'discuss [my] work sympathetically but critically' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 61). A further two Critical Friends, other 5$^{th}$ class teachers, were recruited during Cycle One because they expressed an interest in observing my area of study.

### 3.7.4 Feedback Loops

If Living Theory AR is to stay true to its democratic quest in the uncovering of 'unwelcome truths' (Kemmis, 2012), the voice of the child is essential. My research rejects Becker's (1967) concept of a hierarchy of credibility, and instead recognises the value of the child's perspective as 'a catalyst for teacher professional learning through the seeking and embracing of unwelcoming truths' (Mockler and Groundwater-Smith, 2015: 604). To structure the process of using the child's voice in the validation process, I adopted the model of feedback loops proposed by Baumfield et al. (2013) which allowed me to share interpretations drawn from the data with the students for validation through regular

formative dialogue. The children's voice was used in conjunction with the reflections of the researcher and Critical Friend, to inform the second cycle and develop a robust guide for further exploration of the practice in focus.

### 3.8 Conclusion

The role of critical reflection runs through this chapter as it does through the research process. My research question of

*'How can I create opportunities for meaningful collaboration and communication in History lessons?*

emerged from deliberate reflection on and in my practice. The Living Theory approach adopted placed reflection and qualitative data collection at its core. Two AR cycles were conducted to gather a rich tapestry of data from multiple perspectives, through multiple methods. Data collection methods selected promoted the equal validity of student voice, collegial voice and researcher voice, to dismantle the hierarchy of credibility (Becker, 1967) prominent in other AR projects. Considering this elevation of student voice, ethical considerations concerning the role of children were discussed and potential tensions were identified. Efforts to ensure robust validity, transferability and credibility were discussed to alleviate 'the tension between relevance and rigour' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 518). Finally, Braun and Clarke's (2019) model of reflexive thematic analysis was discussed and its application to my research highlighted. Analysis of the gathered data will be discussed in Chapter Four.

# Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion

## 4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents and discusses the core data set collected during this self-study action research. The data collected will offer insight into my research question of;

*'How can I create opportunities for meaningful collaboration and communication in History lessons?*

The data captures the voice of the child, of colleagues, of the teacher-researcher and the literature to re-construct Brookfield's 'four lenses of critical reflection' (2017: 61). This depth of perspectives allows for the triangulation of the data, thus adding to its reliability and credibility (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin, 2012; McDonagh et al., 2020; Phillips and Carr, 2010). The sources of data will be briefly outlined before the process of thematic analysis in the context of this research is unpacked. The four themes and correlating findings that emerged from this analysis will guide the discussion throughout this chapter. The impact of these themes on my own practice and continuous professional learning will be considered throughout the analysis, before concluding the chapter.

## 4.2 Data Set

Utilising the wide range of data collection tools outlined in Chapter Three, a broader 'data corpus' (Javadi and Zarea, 2016: 34) was condensed into a more refined data set through the process of 'reflective thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 589). The final data set utilised for discussion throughout this chapter is illustrated in table 4.1.

*Table 4.1: Final Data Set for Reflexive Thematic Analysis*

| **Students Voice** |
|---|
| -Opinions on History Survey |
| -Feedback Loop Survey |
| -Audio Recordings and Transcripts of Post Escape Room interviews |
| -Written Feedback forms Post Escape Room |
| **Colleagues Voice** |
| -Lesson observation grid |
| -Escape Room Critical Friend Questionnaire |
| **Teacher-Researchers Voice** |
| -Teacher Reflective Journal Entries |
| -Teacher Observation grid |
| -Photographs of Escape Room |

### 4.3 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

The data set was analysed using Braun and Clarke's (2020) revised method of reflexive thematic analysis. This approach encourages researcher 'reflexivity, subjectivity and creativity as assets in knowledge production' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 589) rather than as fatal flaws (Boyatzis, 1998). Reflexive thematic analysis acknowledges that meaning making from data sets are 'experientially based and are time and context dependant' (Peel, 2020: 4), thus making the researcher and their bias foundational in the production of knowledge (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2021). Whilst Javadi and Zarea claim that the researcher 'should be unbiased' (2016: 38), Braun and Clarke's reflexive thematic analysis model embraces this bias by making the researcher the 'witness and also a translator of experiences and understandings' (Drisko cited in Peel, 2020: 4).

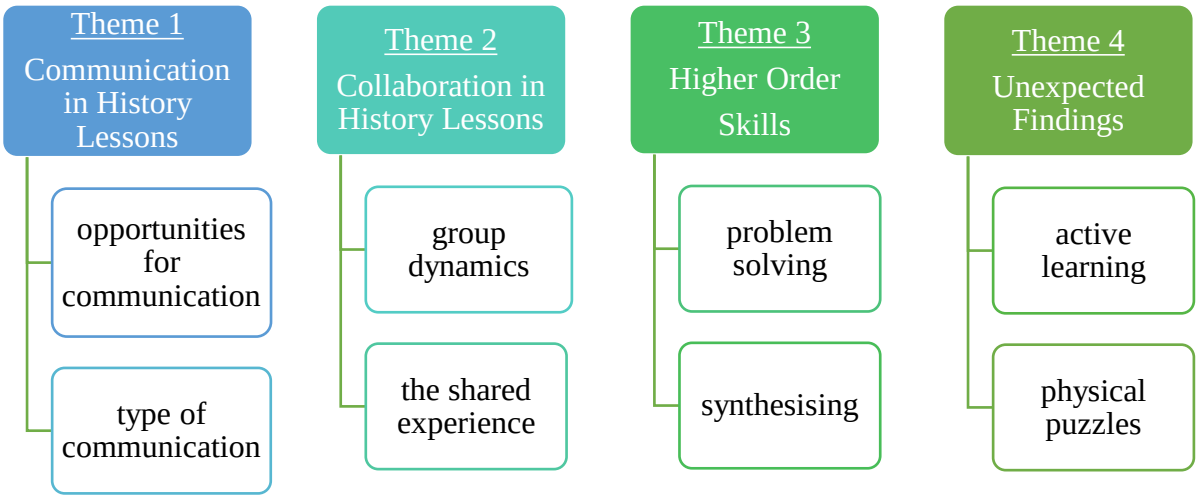
The data set in this self-study has been analysed using the six stages of Braun and Clarke's (2020) reflexive thematic analysis, outlined in table 4.2.

*Table 4.2: Process of Reflexive Thematic Analysis Applied*

| | |
|---|---|
| Step 1 | Data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes |
| Step 2 | Systematic data coding |
| Step 3 | Generating themes from coded and collated data |
| Step 4 | Developing and reviewing themes |
| Step 5 | Refining, defining and naming themes |
| Step 6 | Writing the report |

This thematic approach, when paired with the 'theoretical assumptions' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 594) that are intertwined with such a 'value-laden' (Peel, 2020: 4) approach to research, uncovered four reoccurring themes. Byrne acknowledges the highly subjective nature of these themes, noting that there should be 'no expectation that… themes interpreted by one researcher may be reproduced by another' (2021: 1393). By acknowledging that these themes are 'inter-related and value-laden, rather than objective truths' (Peel, 2020: 4), this approach provided the freedom to 'capture something important in relation to the overall research question' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 82). The themes that emerged from this data set, and which will form the basis for discussion throughout this chapter are outlined in figure 4.1.

*Figure 4.1: Emergent Themes and Sub-Themes for Discussion*




**4.4 Theme One: Communication in Escape Rooms**

Prior to the implementation of the Escape Room teaching method, teacher-created tasks in History lessons were characterised by *'attempts to make heavy content objectives more engaging for the children in my class'* (TRJ, 14/9/2021). Teacher assigned pairs or groups were utilised for a wide range of activities, *'from drama-based methodologies to develop empathy with those in the past, to station-based explorations of aspects of ancient societies'* (TRJ, 14/9/2021).

With the knowledge that 'when children are enjoying what they are doing… it is more likely that learning will take place' (Griffiths and Clyne cited in Ranathunga et al., 2014: 55), History lessons were planned with active learning and high interest activities at the forefront. A particular focus was placed on developing 'an interest in and curiosity about the past' (NCCA, 1999b: 12). Data gathered from the children on their perception of my teaching of History seemed to reinforce that belief with a significant majority noting that they '*get to do hands-on activities during History lessons'* (Anonymous Child, 'Student Questionnaire': 21/03/2022), at least most of the time, see appendix B. Furthermore, a significant majority of respondents noted how I make History lessons interesting either always or most of the time.

Student responses forced me to 'become more conscious of and thoughtful about aspects of [my] teaching practice… previously not noticed' (Pithouse et al., 2009: 54). This cognitive dissonance, a state where 'one's actions [are] not reflecting one's actual beliefs' (Kelchtermans, 2017: 969), served to shake my foundational understanding of myself as a teacher of History. Children highlighted a noticeable trend in interpersonal communication within my History lessons, noting that '*my teacher talks a lot during History lessons'* (Anonymous Child, 'Student Questionnaire': 21/03/2022), see Appendix B.

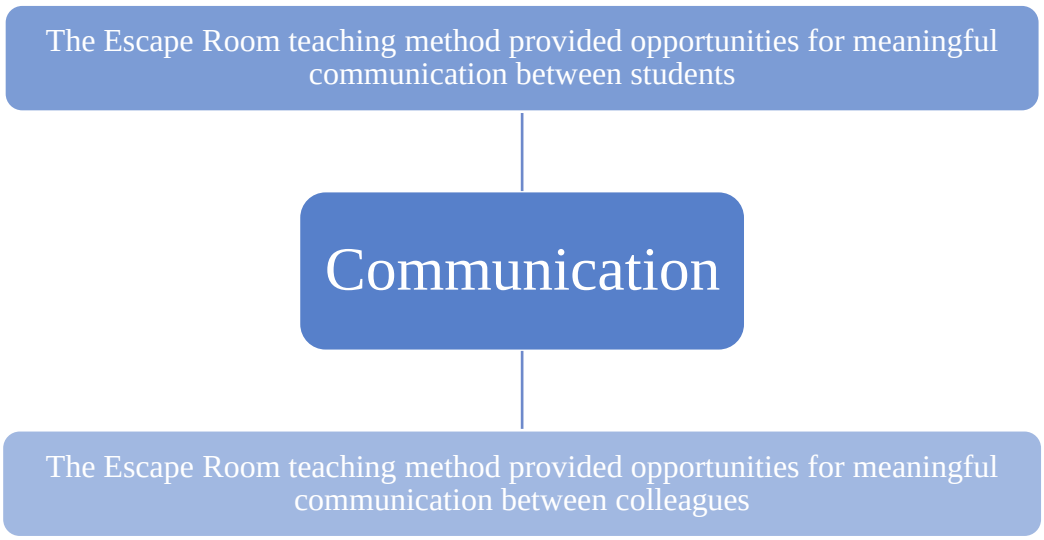
The voice of the child resonated with earlier reflections I had conducted, in which I worried about how *'my passion for the subject, makes the slippery slope to sage on the stage a seamless slide rather a staggered stumble'* (TRJ, 04/10/2021). Challenging the unequal distribution of communication opportunities, to shift conversations in History lessons, from student and teacher to between student and student, became a primary focus of my research intervention which resonated with my underlying values discussed in earlier sections.

*Teaching Method Adaptations*

My adaptation of the Escape Room teaching method was designed in such a way as to encourage maximum communication between students and minimal student-teacher communication. Puzzles were deliberately varied, drawing upon a wide range of skill sets and historical content knowledge from lessons. In Cycle 1, students could ask for help from the teacher in role if they stalled on a puzzle. This was a team decision that had to be actively discussed out loud. Whilst this encouraged good levels of communication, I observed that children *'were surprisingly reluctant to ask for help'* (TRJ, 07/04/2022). This was corroborated by CF3, who noted how children remained *'reluctant to look for help'* (CF3, Lesson Observation 1: 07/04/2022) when solving puzzles. To increase opportunities for student-student communication in Cycle 2, I adjusted the hint system to include an on-screen

hint option. This gave students a cryptic clue that reduced the frequency with which the teacher had to intervene and interrupt student-student communication. The value of communication within the Escape Room teaching method will be discussed under two findings, outlined in figure 4.2.

*Figure 4.2: Emergent Findings from the Theme of Communication*




### 4.4.1 Finding One: The Escape Room teaching method provides opportunities for meaningful communication between students

The Escape Room was constructed in such a manner as to *'reduce the active role of teacher talk'* (TRJ, 29/3/2022), so most communication within the activity would be between students. A wide range of contextualised communication methods were utilised by students when they *'whispered, shouted, pointed, nudged, read instructions aloud [and] checked in with team to make sure they were on the right track'* (CF2, Lesson Observation 1: 04/04/2022). Pan et al. (2017) found however, that in Educational Escape Rooms 'verbal communication was often louder, more direct and sometimes reflected little patience with others' (Pan et al., 2017: 1359). The puzzles naturally encouraged children to engage in a range of communication functions as outlined by Halliday (1975), from the regulatory

function, *'he was like I know the answer to this just do it'* (C6, Interview 5: 26/04/2022), to the informative functions, *'incidental questions of curiosity, like what's that?'* (TRJ, 08/04/2022), to the heuristic function *'CB asks CL how did you get that minus?'* (CF1, Lesson Observation 1: 06/04/2022). The emergence of this wide range of communication types reflects the findings of Fotaris and Mastoras (2019), when they note how social interaction and communication was a beneficial feature in 27.9% of Educational Escape Rooms reviewed.

Initially I was hesitant about the unstructured nature of the Escape Room approach, with the teaching method seemingly *'a living contradiction of its own when compared to the overly structured world of teacher-made rubrics'* (TRJ, 17/11/2021) that dominated my other History lessons. I was concerned that without clear directions on what they had to do, the children would struggle, disengage and give up. Rather, children showed signs of replacing the voice of the teacher with the voices of one another by *'asking questions and verbalising possible solutions'* (CF4, Lesson Observation 1: 05/04/2022), with children recognising how they, *'talked about everything every second of it'* (C1, Interview 4: 26/04/2022).

The children recognised the value in trying to 'fully engage with the ideas of others' (Nemeth and Ormiston cited in Cooper, 2016: 8), unanimously noting how removing the opportunities for oral communication would make the activity '*harder'* (Multiple Children, Interview 1, 4 and 5: 26/05/2022). In addition to this, the competitive nature of the Escape Room, attempting to escape in the quickest time, challenged groups to communication in different ways. One group recalled how they *'had to whisper it'* (C22, Interview 5: 26/04/2022), to ensure the other teams could not hear them, demonstrating unexpected problem-solving and strategizing.

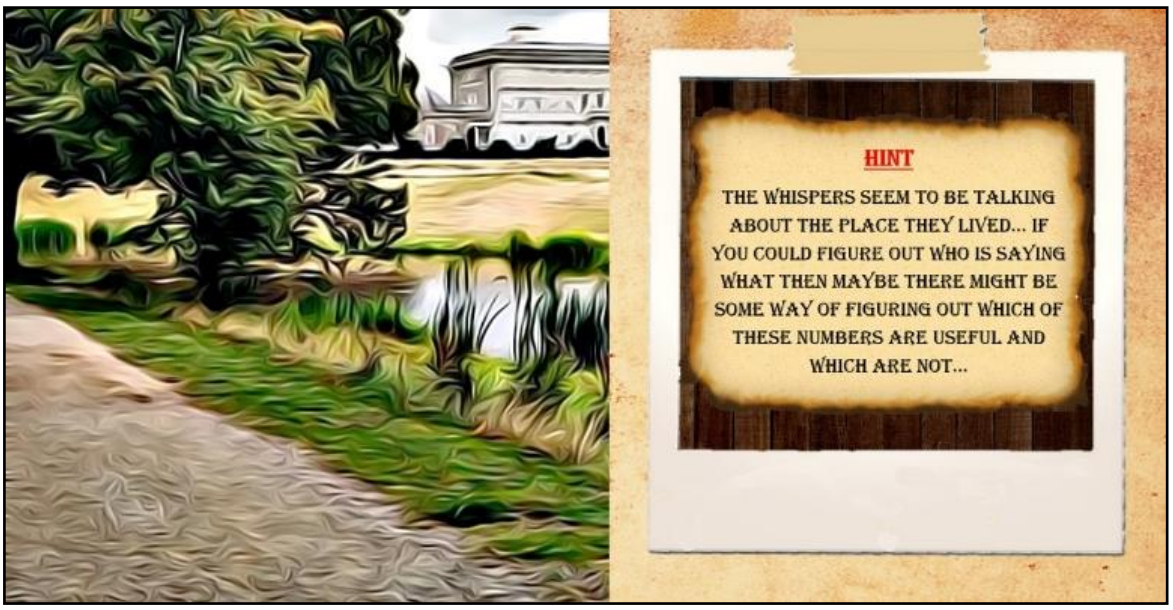
*Challenge and Change*

In Cycle 1, I struggled to find the 'balance between the teacher's guidance and the learners' feeling of autonomy' (Veldkamp et al., 2020: 1224). I felt as though *'children were at times more interested in interactions with the teacher-in-role as Mercury than with one another'* (TRJ, 11/04/2022). Observational data gathered by a Critical Friend further highlighted how children *'really bought into the role of 'Mercury''* (CF3, Lesson Observation 1: 07/04/2022).

In cycle 2, the hint system was changed to diminish the frequency of student-teacher communications and increase the quality of student-student communication. To further encourage peer to peer communication, when children got stuck on a puzzle in cycle 2, they could use on-screen prompts to gain additional hints. These largely replaced the teacher's hints from cycle 1. This change led to increased incidents of children communicating new ideas with one another, *'I understand more what she was trying to do 'cause I read the hint with it'* (C3, Interview 5: 26/04/2022). Upon reflection, I noted how *'adding a single extra slide to each puzzle seemed to significantly reduce the children's dependence on the teacher'* (TRJ, 27/05/2022). An example of these changes to the hint system can be seen below in figures 4.3 and 4.4.

*Figure 4.3: Example of new on-screen hint system to replace teacher hints*

*Figure 4.4: Example of the more explicit hints given to replace teacher hints*




Analysis of this data set revealed to me that with careful puzzle design and an in-built hint system, the Escape Room approach can promote student-student communication within the context of History lessons. This shift to student-centred dialogue was more closely aligned with my value of social constructivism as a more consistent underpinning teaching philosophy.

### 4.4.2 Finding Two: The Escape Room teaching method provided opportunities for meaningful communication between colleagues, students, and teacher-researcher

The nature of the Escape Room teaching method made clear communication with my three Critical Friends essential. Whilst the focus of this research was explicitly directed on enhancing my understanding and use of the Escape Room teaching method in History, an inexplicit development of my professional interactions with colleagues evolved. My concerns regarding opportunities for collaboration and communication in History lessons emerged from a process of reflective journaling that uncovered an unsettling cognitive

dissonance (Festinger, 1957). I claimed the epistemological and educational values of communication and collaboration *'as cornerstones of my teaching philosophy'* (Maher, Reflective Task 1: 28/08/2021), yet avoided opportunities to live these values in my practice with colleagues. The Escape Room teaching method and the active participation of my Critical Friends and students in the cycles of praxis challenged this mind-set.

*New Directions and New Learning*

At the end of Cycle 1, I was unsure which direction to take the research project in. I relied on the input from my Critical Friends to direct the next stage. CF1 suggested *'investigating whether the outcomes would be similar with a class that had not experienced the same teaching of the topic'* (TRJ, 21/04/2022). I asked another 5th class teacher to join my validation group and sought additional ethical permissions from a group of students in her class to investigate this suggestion further. Embracing the 'messy method' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 58) of action-research, we conducted a small-scale investigation with two groups of four from this additional class group. Through a process of reflexive thinking, I noted in my journal how I felt '*that in jumping through loops to try and justify this new avenue of investigation, I seem to have lost the self in my self-study action research'* (TRJ, 05/05/2022). After discussing this with my supervisor and Critical Friends, it was agreed that refocusing the research on my own practice with my own class was more closely aligned with the 'value-laden' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 16) approach I wanted to undertake.

Data collected from the children in the format of feedback loops, opened channels of communication about my practice with the children in ways I deemed *'too risky'* (TRJ, 30/10/2021) previously. I asked them for their opinions on the first cycle of the Escape Room and on what changes they would make if we were to run another room. Data collected from the feedback loops provided insight into aspects of the Escape Room puzzle that I had given

very little thought to. Children expressed their positive attitudes towards the physical, tactile nature of the puzzles and locks, *'[I liked that] it was physical you could open boxes'* (Anonymous Child, Feedback Loop Data: 04/05/2022) and their desire to include a visual timer to track their progress, '*we should just add a timer'* (Anonymous Child, Feedback Loop Data: 04/05/2022). This student-teacher communication about my practice impacted the second cycle, in a way that would not have been possible had I not actively sought opportunities for the children to talk about my practice critically. This insight would not have been gained with another research methodology, as within self-study action research is 'a certain degree of chaos, uncertainty and messiness' (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 21). This uncertainty gave me the flexibility to '*allow the child's voice to guide the direction of the research*' (TRJ, 25/06/2022), thus forming a valuable assessment for learning tool to observe my practice through.

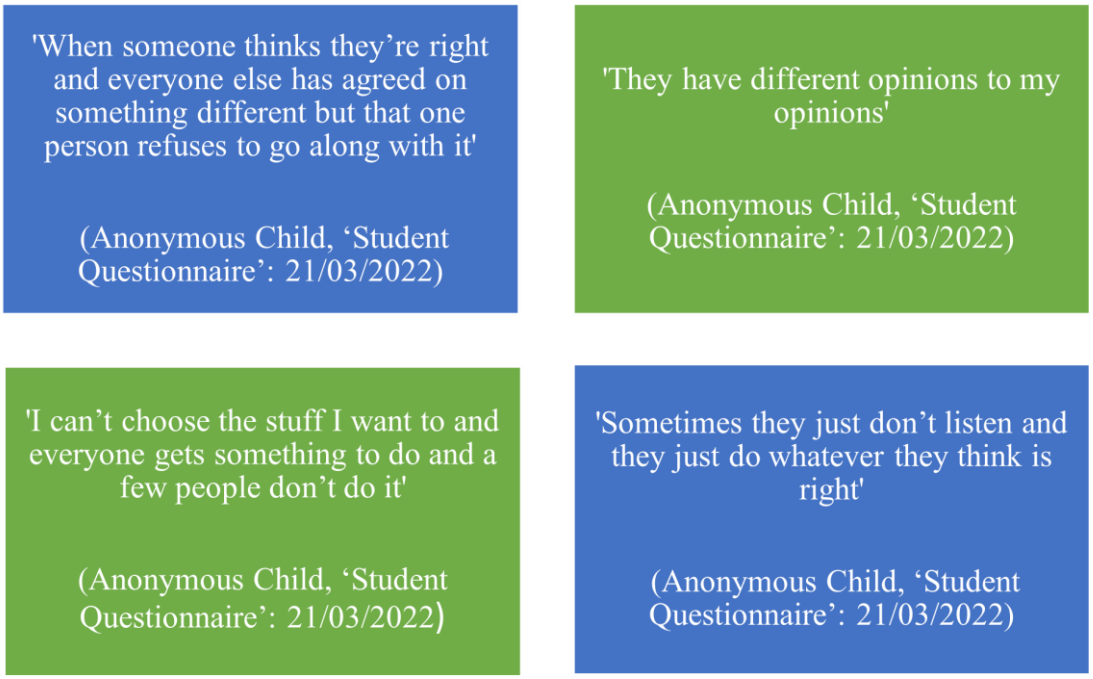
When constructing my research question, *Can a History-based Escape room teaching method promote communication, collaboration and problem-solving in my 5$^{th}$ class setting?,* my intention was to encourage the children to communicate with each other. However, an unexpected consequence of this approach resulted in increased student communication with me through their engagement with the Feedback Loops about my practice. It also opened the door to professional communications between my colleagues and I in a way that I had '*deliberately shut off'* (TRJ, 11/09/2021) in the past.

### 4.5 Theme Two: Collaboration and Escape Rooms

Prior to the implementation of the Escape Room teaching method, teacher assigned tasks in History lessons were dominated by paired work activities, in teacher-assigned groupings. My Froebelian, social-constructivist educational values permeated through my lesson planning, aiming to utilise peer motivation 'to increase both student cognitive learning

and affective growth' (Anderson and Palmer, 2001: 59). Data gathered from student questionnaires reinforced my perception of how frequently collaborative learning took place in History lessons. The majority of children stated that they '*get chances to work with others during History lessons'* (Anonymous Children, Student Questionnaire: 21/03/2022) either most of the time or always and expressed a preference for paired or group work activities during History lessons, (see Appendix B). A number of children articulated how they found these kinds of activities challenging. The children's responses to the statement 'The thing I find most difficult about working with others is…' (Maher, Student Questionnaire: 21/03/2022) are shown in figure 4.5 below.

*Figure 4.5: Example of student responses to the statement 'The thing I find most difficult about working with others is…'*




*Social Complexities*

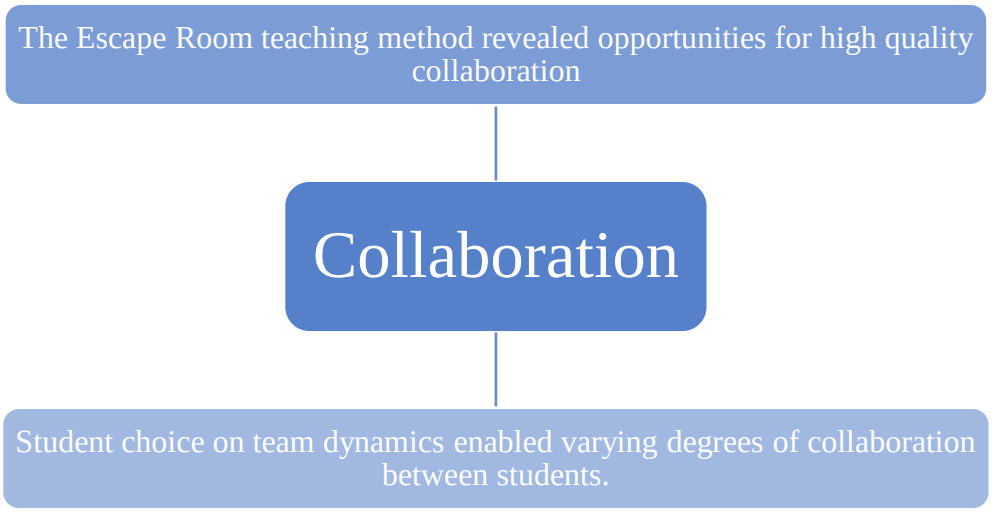
The complexity of social dynamics, within the context of collaborative tasks, that emerged from this data reflects Volet and Karabenick's (2006) finding that social dynamics can play a role in adding tension to co-operatively orientated tasks. Children noted how they *'only enjoy working with my friends and… don't like when teachers pair us'* (Anonymous

Child, Student Questionnaire: 21/03/2022). This awareness of social dynamics was absent from any of my initial reflections regarding collaboration in my classroom. Rather, I focused on how *'my methodologies for collaboration seem to be numerous for lower-order thinking tasks and thin out to "project work" when it comes to the higher-order thinking tasks'* (TRJ, 13/09/2021).

Whilst the concerns of the child regarding social dynamics eventually became a key finding within this theme of collaboration, *'at the time I let my own voice overpower that of the children, assuming teacher knows best'* (TRJ, 30/05/2022), and instead focused on ways I could change my practice to incorporate more opportunities for higher-order, collaborative activities.

The Escape Room teaching method was designed to 'to promote teamwork and collaboration' (Fotaris and Mastoras, 2019: 7) between students. A variety of puzzle types were included so that the room 'force[d] interdependence among multiple individuals who share[d] a goal' (Cohen et al., 2020: 444). The emergence of collaboration and the impact team dynamics had on teamwork within the Escape Room teaching method will be discussed under two findings, outlined in figure 4.6.

*Figure 4.6: Emergent Findings from the theme of Collaboration*



### 4.5.1 Finding Three: The Escape Room teaching method revealed opportunities for high quality collaboration between students

The puzzles and structure of the Escape Room teaching method ensured that all children *'at various stages during both lessons contributed to knowledge needed to come to a solution'* (CF1, Escape Room Questionnaire: 30/05/2022). Children noted how they were forced to *'put our minds together'* (C6, Interview 4: 26/04/2022), ensuring that *'all students contributed to their team in order to solve the clues'* (CF3, Lesson Observation 1: 07/04/2022).

*Problematising the Approach*

In a reflection post cycle 1, I wondered *'if there were ways to design puzzles in such a way as to 'force' collaboration from the start, i.e a puzzle that requires more than one person rather than favours more than one person'* (TRJ, 14/04/2022). Returning to that entry at a later point I recognised this as a sign of my *'over-managing tendency to try make things unreasonably perfect'* (TRJ, 25/05/2022). Nonetheless, I was interested in experimenting with such a forced collaboration puzzle type, to see whether initial successful collaboration would lead to successive improvements to collaboration within the Escape Room. These changes were incorporated into Cycle 2 of the study.

Children showed an awareness of skills or knowledge deficit, *'I wasn't in for the Gods, you have to do it'* (CF4, Lesson Observation 1: 07/04/2022), and were able to delegate and support each other when this occurred. Furthermore, they showed an awareness of the strengths and weaknesses of individual team members, *'I think [Child 22] helped more with the potatoes one… She's very creative, so she knows what to do. I'm like 'How did you do that?''* (C6, Interview 5: 26/04/2022) and compensated accordingly in the best interests of the team.

Significantly, levels of collaboration fluctuated over the course of the activity with some children, *'trying random numbers rather than focusing on the task'* (CF4, Lesson Observation 1: 07/04/2022), whilst others expressed frustration, *'I felt like I was going to kill someone if someone came up near what I was doing'* (C6, Interview 4: 26/04/2022).). The possibility that team social dynamics could 'interfere with the social process of learning and task completion' (Jarvela et al., 2010:16) emerged as a key area for further investigation at this point. Children expressed that picking their own teams would be *'better for working together'* (Anonymous Child, Feedback Loop Data: 04/05/2022). The children's recommendations were further explored and informed the basis of Finding Four.

### 4.5.2 Finding Four: Student choice on team dynamics impacted levels of collaboration between students

For the Cycle 1 Escape Room children were grouped by the teacher, as per the classroom seating plan. Whilst I originally claimed that this decision was made for *'convenience and ease of organisation'* (TRJ, 04/03/2022), upon further reflection I realised that my decision to restrict the children's choice of teams was shaped by a fear of 'the loss of control, increased noise, disruption and off-task behaviour' (Baines et al., 2015:16) that could accompany child-selected groups. During the post-Cycle 1 feedback loop discussion with the children, the group expressed a strong desire to be given the opportunity to choose their own teams in Cycle 2, *'I think we should go in groups that we pick [because] it would be better for working together'* (Anonymous Child, Feedback Loop 1: 04/05/2022). This change was implemented in Cycle 2.

*Tentative Encouragement of Group Choice*

Despite suggesting the change, children initially shared my apprehension about self-selecting teams, noting how they *'expected it to be harder'* (C1, Interview 4: 26/04/2022). The degree to which team dynamics affected collaboration varied from group to group, with some noting how working in self-selected teams felt *'kinda the same'* (C4, Interview 4: 26/04/2022) whilst others found comfort in knowing *'that you're gonna work with them well'* (C20, Interview 1: 26/04/2022). One explanation for this perceived improvement in collaboration could be the role of choice as highlighted by Patall et al., noting how 'students spend more time and effort on the learning task if they are offered choices' (2010: 896). Whilst this may have played a role in improved collaboration, it is also possible that social dynamics played a role.

` In Cycle 1, I noted how some of the less confident children seemed to *'slip into place on some invisible social hierarchy within the group'* (TRJ, 27/05/2022). Even when these children had the knowledge or skills required to solve the puzzle, they seemed 'reluctant to get involved in group work… because of the possible negative impact on peer relations' (Baines et al., 2015:16). The role of social dynamics changed in Cycle 2. With children now working with their friends, the emotional and communicative boundaries were clearer, thus allowing them to be more effective in their collaboration. One child noted the difference in how she communicated more abruptly with a close friend in Cycle 2, *'you don't feel bad if we're like screaming at someone you know'* (C8, Interview 1: 26/04/2022), and with an acquaintance in Cycle 1, *'but if I said that to… someone [else] I'd be like oh sorry I didn't mean it like that'* (C8, Interview 1: 26/04/2022).

In Cycle 2, all teams were singularly gendered bar one. This is not unusual considering the homogonous nature of friend groups within this class. Interestingly, the team which completed the Escape Room in the quickest time and collaborated most effectively was the one mixed-gender team. Whilst this was *'not an aspect I had ever acknowledged as*

*an impacting factor on collaboration'* (TRJ, 30/05/2022), this group was determined to discuss it during the structured interviews. They noted how *'girls have different opinions than the boys'* (C3, Interview 5: 26/04/2022) and how having a mixed gender team *'gives them a different like mindset'* (C6, Interview 5: 26/04/2022) which corroborates research work by Bear and Woolley that suggests 'group collaboration…is greatly improved by the presence of women in the group (2011: 147).

### 4.6 Theme Three: The Use of Higher Order Skills

A prominent focus of this research from the beginning was to find ways in which *'the children can take what they have learned in History lessons, content or skills, and apply it in a new scenario'* (TRJ, 11/09/2021). Historical Escape Rooms were chosen as a teaching method that aimed to 'encourage pupils to grasp a topic at a deeper level than simply recalling information' (Vass, 2004: 112). Higher-order skills application use became a recurring theme in my reflective journal entries, with my reflections demonstrating a deep frustration *'between what I know I should be doing and what I am currently equipped to do'* (TRJ, 05/10/2021). To address this lacuna in my teaching methods, I aimed to create puzzles that would require the children to use the historical skills of 'chronological awareness…using evidence…synthesis and communication' (NCCA, 1999b: 6).

*Figure 4.7: Emergent Findings from the theme of Higher Order Skills*


### 4.6.1 Finding Five: The Escape Room teaching method provided opportunities for children to apply content knowledge gained in class in a new scenario

The puzzles designed for both research cycles specifically drew upon content or skills developed in the block of class lessons. The intention was to move the individual child from level one of Marzano and Kendall's Taxonomy for Educational Objectives (2007), relying on recall, towards level four, with more use of 'knowledge utilization' (2007: 62). Children highlighted the significance of studying the topic prior to entering the escape room, recognising that, without prior exposure to the skills and content needed to solve puzzles, *'you would never find that one out'* (C8, Interview 1: 26/05/2022). In some instances, children drew on content knowledge from outside of the class lessons to assist with puzzles, with one child noting *'I knew what a cottier was before…I watched the film Black 47 before with my Granda'* (C1, Interview 4: 26/05/2022).

All groups from my class showed a good ability to recognize opportunities to apply content from class in the puzzles, with one Critical Friend noting how the groups *'knew the Tali game, story of Romulus and Remus, various Gods…prior knowledge important to clues'*

(CF1, Lesson Observation 1: 07/04/2022). During the Romulus and Remus chronology puzzle, outlined in Exemplar One, one child *'who took longer to engage'* (CF1, Lesson Observation 1: 07/04/2022), with the Escape Room was observed having a 'critical a-ha moment' (Nicholson, 2016: 13), where she recalled content covered in class. With her being *'the only one in her group who was actually in that day'* (TRJ, 09/04/2022), the rest of her team realised that 'acknowledging [they] needed the help of others was another key to successful game play' (Rouse, 2017: 556).

*Appropriate Timing of the Method*

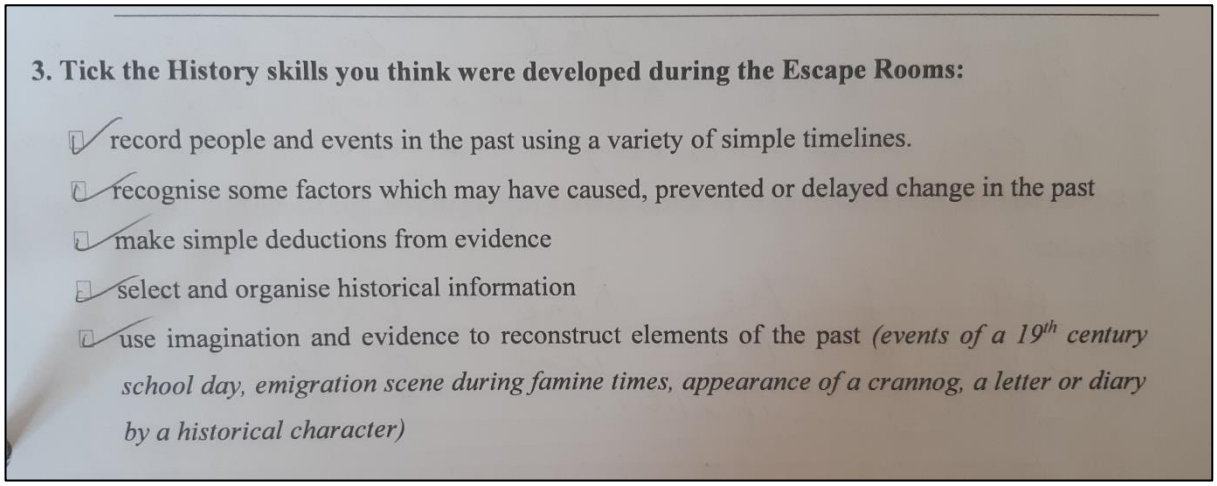
Significantly, children who had no exposure to the topics prior to study felt they would not have been able to complete puzzles without classroom coverage. One child commented how she *'never heard of the famine…[her] ma didn't learn about the famine in Polish school…'* (C22, Interview 5: 26/05/2022). To corroborate this data, a randomised group was selected from another class who had not completed the lessons on the topic, thus leaving them with limited historical skills and content to draw upon in the room. It was noted how this group *'needed significantly more help from the teacher-in-role and often were completely lost as to what they should be doing'* (TRJ, 12/05/2022) and how *'they used their own general knowledge and problem-solving skills'* (CF4, Lesson Observation 1: 10/05/22) to progress in the Escape Room. This data raised an interesting question around *'when an Educational Escape Room can be used in the sequence of learning'* (TRJ, 29/05/2022). Nicholson (2016) noted how only 11% of recreational Escape Rooms surveyed utilized any puzzles that required knowledge of fact not provided in the room, thus suggesting this is not a common practice. This insight provides an interesting avenue for further research into whether Escape Rooms could be used as an alternative form of assessment, coming at the end of a unit of historical study. Considering the NCCA are concerned with assessment tools

that assess 'how the child learns as well as what the child learns' (NCCA, 2007: 7), this finding suggests that Escape Rooms would fit those criteria.

### 4.6.2 Finding Six: The Escape Room teaching method provided opportunities for children to practice higher order historical skills developed in class

The Escape Room aimed to provide opportunities for the children to use the historical skills of 'chronological awareness…using evidence…synthesis and communication' (NCCA, 1999b, 6)' by introducing them 'to the process of history as inquiry and the tools that historians use' (Rouse, 2017: 559). Children demonstrated repeated use of these higher-order historical skills during both Escape Rooms, with a Critical Friend recording the historical skills observed in the figure 4.8 below.

*Figure 4.8: Critical Friend Questionnaire Data*



**3. Tick the History skills you think were developed during the Escape Rooms:**

- ☑ record people and events in the past using a variety of simple timelines.
- ☑ recognise some factors which may have caused, prevented or delayed change in the past
- ☑ make simple deductions from evidence
- ☑ select and organise historical information
- ☑ use imagination and evidence to reconstruct elements of the past *(events of a 19th century school day, emigration scene during famine times, appearance of a crannog, a letter or diary by a historical character)*

Some puzzles were specifically designed to challenge the children to recognise and apply these historical skills developed in class. I was acutely aware 'that chronological awareness is not fostered by rote memorisation of dates' (NCCA, 1999b: 9) and therefore sought other ways to allow the children to apply their chronological skills whilst making memorisation of dates negligible. An exemplar of a puzzle that does this is illustrated in Exemplar One below. Children were using the skills of chronology *'without even being*

*aware they were applying learning'* (CF1, Lesson Observation 2: 26/05/2022) making the *'Romulus and Remus chronology puzzle one of the most straight forward and least scaffolded puzzles in the game'* (TRJ, 29/04/2022).

*Figure 4.9: Escape Puzzle Exemplar One*

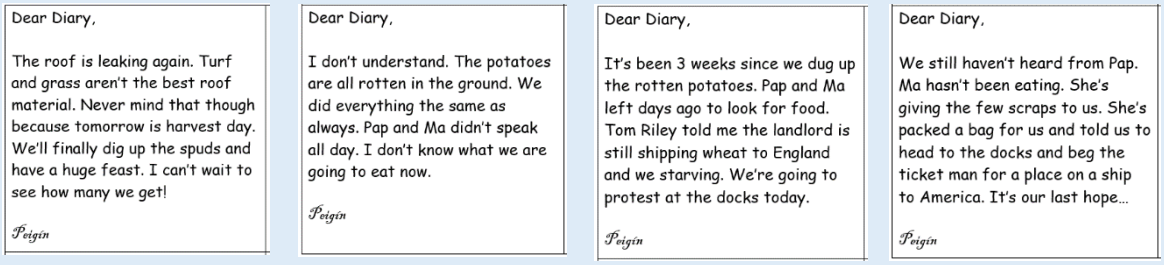
This puzzle is from the Ancient Roman themed Escape Room. The puzzle was based on the myth of Romulus and Remus, covered in class. The children received a set of captioned picture cards that outlined the myth.


The puzzle demanded children to recall the story and use the skill of chronology to sequence it. When completed correctly, a hidden number code was revealed in the captions.

Other puzzles were designed to encourage children 'to make interpretations and deductions from the available evidence' (NCCA, 1999b: 12). Children were presented with evidence and were forced to start 'making inferences and arriving at a potential solution to a set problem' (Hoodless, 2008: 71). Children were observed *'thinking out loud, letting potential solutions and suggestions linger in the air'* (TRJ, 29/04/2022) with every child able to *'help in the problem-solving regardless of ability'* (CF1, Lesson Observation 1: 26/04/2022). An exemplar of one such puzzle is shown in figure 4.10.

*Figure 4.10: Exemplar Two*

This puzzle is from the Great Famine Escape Room. Children receive a set of diary entries from a fictional character who lived during famine times. Each card was laminated. They also received a flashlight.




The puzzle demanded children to use their knowledge of the famine to sequence the diary entries in a plausible order. The entries also directly correlated with the puzzles they had solved in the narrative to this point. When ordered correctly, children had to figure out that when the flashlight was shone through some of the cards it revealed a code.

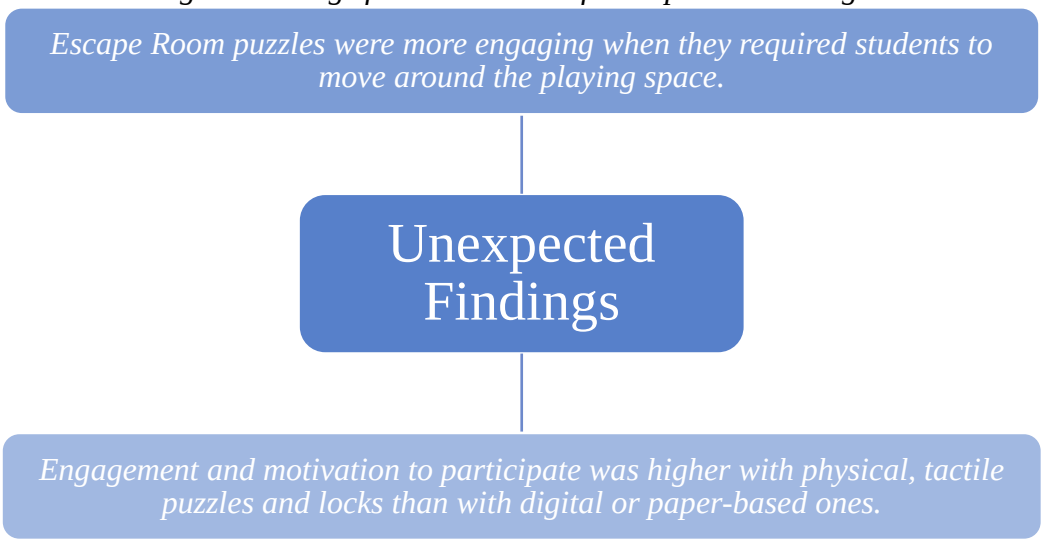
Whilst all children were actively involved in the problem-solving process, the distribution of incidents of higher-order skills usage was uneven. Some groups were *'dominated by the strongest personality in the group'* (TRJ, 01/06/2022), limiting group members' confidence in making suggestions aloud. Other groups *'basically did it as a team'* (C1, Interview 4: 26/05/2022), allowing for a more even distribution of incidents of higher-order skills. This suggests that regarding the more socially dependent historical skills of the curriculum, social dynamics within the class or group can 'interfere with the social process of learning' (Jarvela et al., 2010:16).

### 4.7 Theme Four: Unanticipated Findings

Motivation to engage with History lessons was already high in my class, with most students answering positively to the survey question *'I look forward to History lessons'* (Maher, Student Questionnaire: 21/03/2022) (see appendix B). This is in part due to *'my personal passion for the subject matter'* (TRJ, 20/08/2021) and partially due to my belief

that the 'child's sense of wonder and natural curiosity is a primary motivating factor in learning' (NCCA, 1999d, 8). My efforts to make History interesting and engaging is reflected in the voice of the child, with many children answering either 'always' or 'most of the time' to the statement *'My teacher makes History lessons interesting'* (Maher, Student Questionnaire: 21/03/2022). Motivation and engagement were not an aspect of my practice that I felt dissatisfied with, nor did they cause any major conflicts with my values. Considering this, motivation and engagement were not areas I had planned on researching with this teaching method. Nonetheless, unexpected insight related to these topics emerged from the data and formed the final two findings of this study.

*Figure 4.11: Emergent Findings from the theme of Unexpected Findings*




### 4.7.1 Finding Seven: Escape Room puzzles were more engaging when they required students to move around the playing space

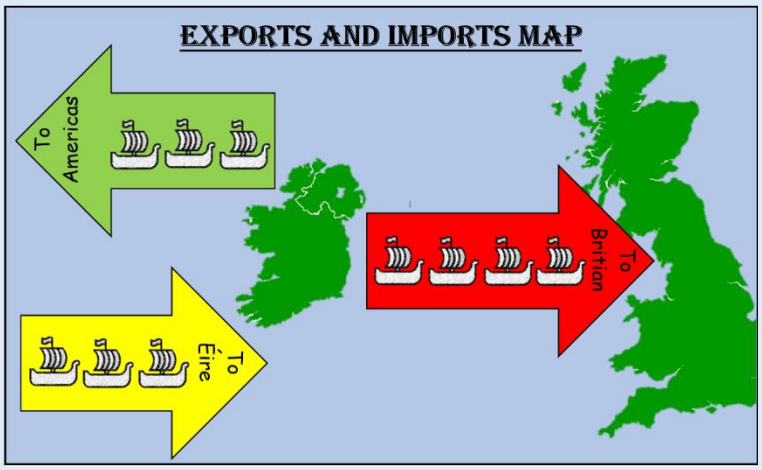
In Cycle 1, the Escape Room was lightly themed with posters and the Escape Box was placed in the centre of the room on a table with four chairs around it. It was not necessary to interact with the room to solve the puzzles. Everything the children needed to complete the Escape Room was in the Escape Box. As the children entered to room, I noted how *'all groups gravitated towards the chairs and table, each pulling a chair and sitting down as they would in any other* lesson' (TRJ, 08/04/2022). The unintended consequence of this

organisational decision was that children spent most of their time in the Cycle 1 Escape Room sitting around a table. There were therefore no puzzles 'that required multiple players to complete' (Nicholson, 2016: 16). Schell states that the 'ultimate goal of game designers is to create an experience' (2008: 21), and the experience I had created was 'stationary and lethargic' (TRJ, 14/04/2022).

To rectify this, and provide further opportunities for communication and collaboration, structural changes were made to the Cycle 2 Escape Room. I sought to *'create puzzles that forced children to interact with the room they were in'* (TRJ, 23/04 2022). The light theming became part of the puzzles, with posters replaced by maps and important documents. Information was hidden under props or sometimes the props themselves were part of a puzzle. An example of this kind of puzzle can be seen in Exemplar Three below.

*Fig 4.12: Example Puzzle Exemplar Three*

This puzzle is from the Great Famine themed Escape Room. The puzzle was based what was leaving and entering Ireland during Famine times. The main map was hanging on the wall in a frame as a prop. Small ship tokens were hidden in the Escape Box and around the room.





The puzzle demanded the children find all ship tokens. Then they had to realise the map was not a prop and the ships could stick onto it. When the children place all the ships in the correct spot, based on what was being exported and imported, a code was revealed.

From these changes, engagement and motivation to explore the room increased significantly, with children *'visibly excited and anxious to get started'* (CF2, Lesson Observation 2: 26/05/2022). When comparing the two Escape Rooms children noted how *'in the last one you could literally just sit at the table, walk over to the laptop and finish it. And this one we were like sliding all over the place'* (C13, Interview 4: 26/05/2022). This increased movement around the room during Cycle 2 resulted in increased enjoyment and engagement, adding to Ratey's conclusion that physical activity has a "positive influence on memory, concentration, and classroom behavior" (2008: 22). Bringing more movement into the Escape Room may 'enhance brain functioning, helping students to be more alert and better able to do the complex mental tasks required' (Reilly et al., 2012: 66). This finding provides generalisable insights into the inclusion of movement in my other History teaching methods.

### 4.7.2 Finding Eight: Engagement and motivation to participate was higher with physical, tactile puzzles and locks than with digital or paper-based ones

Each Escape Room consisted of seven historical-based puzzles for the children to solve. Out of these seven puzzles, six puzzles were locked inside the Escape Box *'a long wooden box, with six compartments, each locked with a different combination lock'* (TRJ, 05/04/2022). It is important to note that these 'tasks are not simply there to be barriers to winning the game, but each challenge has a purpose and is tied into the larger narrative' (Nicholson, 2016: 6), based on the History topic under study. All the puzzles locked in the Escape Box were tactile puzzles. This type of 'puzzle requires the manipulation of real-world artifacts to overcome the challenge' (Wiemker et al., 2015: 6) An example of one of these puzzles can be seen in Exemplar Four below.

*Figure 4.13: Example Puzzle Exemplar Four*

This puzzle is from the Great Famine themed Escape Room. The puzzle was based on the sensory characteristics of blight covered in class. The children received one rotten potato from the Escape Box. The others were hidden in the room.


The puzzle demanded the children to read accounts from farmers on the morning of the potato harvest, matching the blight accounts to with the correct blighted potato and the non-blight accounts with the correct non-blighted potato. When done correctly, it revealed a number code.

In both Escape Rooms, the final puzzle included a digital puzzle and lock, which were solved and inputted on-screen on a Chromebook. This was included for practical, organisational reasons but also with the assumption a digital puzzle would 'engage digital natives in the learning process' (Rouse, 2017: 555).

*Differences for Learners in Use of Puzzles*

In post-intervention interviews, one child brought up the topic of physical puzzles and digital puzzles, noting how they *'loved doing the locks. I just love figuring it out and it's better than doing it online'* (C8, Interview 1: 26/05/2022). Selinker and Snyder (2013) highlight the importance of puzzles having clear solutions. The combination locks being colour-coded and the visual clue of how many numbers they were looking for in each puzzle, made the physical locks much clearer to operate than the digital locks.

*Fig 4.14: Example of Digital Locks*

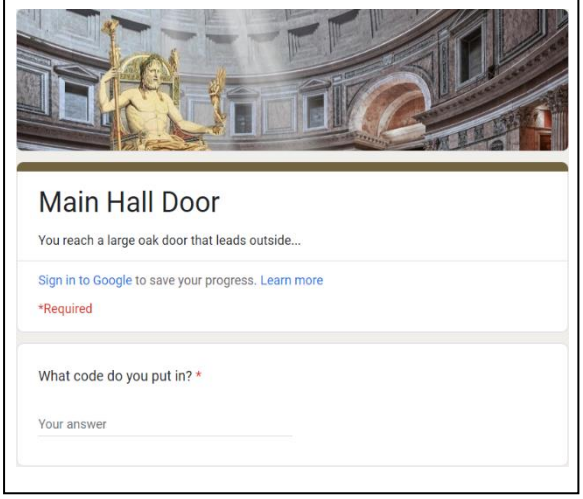



*Fig 4.15: Example of Coloured Physical Locks*

This child's comment spurred further discussion around the difference between digital Escape Room puzzles and physical puzzles, with children noting how *'online you're not actually doing anything'* (C20, Interview 1: 26/05/2022) and how *'you're basically just on the computer. Like it's not an Escape Room'* (C8, Interview 1: 26:05/2022). Significantly, the children were able to identify why they felt differently about both types of puzzles, highlighting how physical puzzles are *'more interactive'* (C20, Interview 1: 26/05/2022) and how *'if you're on the Chromebook you wouldn't feel as achieved'* (C8, Interview 1: 26/05/2022). This data reflects findings from Nicholson, who noted how 'unlike screen-based games, live-action games bring the players in face-to-face contact with each other and immerses them directly into the game world' (2015: 45). It is unclear whether it was the face-to-face nature of the physical puzzles, the clarity that accompanied the colour-coded combination locks or some other unseen factor that contributed to the increased engagement with the physical locks and puzzles.

### 4.8 Conclusion

This chapter explored the eight major findings that emerged when all sets of data were examined and analysed. Theme one explored the opportunities that Escape Rooms provided for meaningful communication between students and subsequent opportunities for student-teacher and teacher-teacher communication. Theme two examined the opportunities that Escape Rooms create for collaboration between students, the value of student choice on team selection and the degree to which social dynamics impact collaboration. Theme three focused on the degree to which children applied content knowledge and skills from History lessons during the Escape Room. Theme four highlighted the unexpected findings under the umbrella of engagement and motivation. The importance of introducing active and interactive spaces was found to be significant, as was the inclusion of physical locks and tactile puzzles. By examining the contradiction between my values and my practice, I have been able to identify a new teaching method that encourages the children in my class to communicate and collaborate in a meaningful way, utilising higher-order historical skills. In addition to equipping me with a new teaching method, this research has enabled me to improve professional relationships with colleagues and students by practicing the communication and collaboration skills I wished the children to embody.

# Chapter 5: Conclusion

## 5.1 Introduction

This concluding chapter explores how my research has resulted in personal and professional learning, that will impact my practice and allow me to teach more closely to my values. The limitations of the study are highlighted, illuminating areas of concern and caution for future researchers. Recommendations for further study are made to further the learning of both myself and of the education community before methods of dissemination of this research are noted. The chapter concludes with my new claims to knowledge and a summary of how I have realigned my practice with my values.

## 5.2 Personal and Professional Learning

Whilst on the surface this research sought to find ways of improving opportunities for student collaboration and communication, parallel to that was my desire to improve my collaboration and communication with my colleagues. Further unpacking of my original concern *'that students were not getting opportunities to collaborate meaningfully in History lessons'* (TRJ, 11/10/21), I realised that my concern stemmed from a recognition *'that I did not possess these very skills to use with colleagues'* (TRJ, 22/02/22). Engagement with colleagues, as espoused by Stenhouse (1975), through the Critical Friend structure, initiated conversations about professional practice in a way I had not experienced before. This positive experience increased collaboration with colleagues and contributed towards an emerging dialogue within the professional context.

This research provided the opportunity to stop and evaluate why I was concerned in the first place (Whitehead and McNiff, 2005). Engagement with the self-study action research process allowed me to align my practice closer with the values I claimed to hold in Chapter 1. Making the child's voice central to the research, 'seeing [my] practice through

students' eyes' (Brookfield, 1995: 35) whilst enabling and elevating their criticisms of my practice, has created a more equal and democratic classroom wherein the child's voice really does matter. Applying elements of this learning to my practice will further align my teaching with my value of democracy. By reducing the frequency of teacher-talk during History lessons and creating opportunities for the children to construct knowledge together, I further aligned my practice with my educational value of social constructivism.

This research has given me a greater understanding of the potential Educational Escape Rooms have in primary education, particularly as a highly engaging History methodology. Given the demanding nature of the methodology and '*time-consuming nature of the teaching method, from construction to implementation'* (TRJ, 01/06/2022), I have concluded that Educational Escape Rooms, in the format this research explored, are best suited for the educational departments of History Museums or similar organisations. This would make them more accessible to a wider range of people.

## 5.3 Limitations of the Study

During the final meeting of my validation group, critical feedback was sought to help me 'to feel confident about the validity of [my] knowledge claims and [my] research in general' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 197). I asked the group to focus on limitations of the study that I may have overlooked. We identified two areas of concern, both relating to power dynamics.

### *The Question of Bias*

Considering the close professional relationships between my Critical Friends and I, it is possible that bias impacted upon their observations and professional conversations with me. Whilst their role and the importance of being critical was explained prior to commencing

the research and efforts were made to 'negotiate the ground rules' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 61), they may have felt an obligation to be positive in the feedback they gave me, as it was in a one-on-one format. Their feedback may also have been influenced by previous lesson feedback experiences during a school-wide initiative focused on lessons studies. This feedback was positively framed and may have influenced the feedback given on this research. In future studies, this could be overcome by allowing Critical Friends to have time to meet together and compare their observations before meeting with me, as teacher-researcher. It may also have been helpful to have more than one Critical Friend observing the intervention at a time as a 'cross-check' (Cohen et al., 2018: 527). Unfortunately, staffing arrangements made this impossible for this process.

*Child Voice*

Similar power-dynamic related limitations may have occurred whilst capturing the child's voice. Power-imbalances were recognised, given that I am the class teacher of these children, and steps were taken to limit their impact. Regardless, children who chose to partake in the interview may have felt 'subtle social pressure to conform' (Farrimond in Wyse et al., 2017: 82), given that I was asking the questions. It is also important to note that the children who chose to opt out of the interviews may have offered another perspective on some of the findings of this research or perhaps even raised new avenues for exploration. By living closer to my value of democracy, giving the children choice, I may have limited the findings of this research in part.

### 5.4 Recommendations for Further Study

Given the lacuna of international research on Educational Escape Rooms in the primary school setting, significant additional research is needed to further our understanding

of their application in classrooms. This self-study recommends three key areas of further exploration that emerged from the findings. One area for further scope is an exploration of the differing levels of motivation, communication and collaboration that occur in Digital Escape Rooms verses Physical Escape Rooms, *'pitting the hands-on philosophies of the 19th century against the native digitalisation of the 21st'* (TRJ, 15/07/2022). This is particularly pertinent as Digital Escape Room methodologies become more prevalent in education through resources like BreakoutEDU.

A comparative study that investigates the role the gender make-up of teams plays in fostering collaboration, communication and problem-solving in Educational Escape Rooms would be another worthwhile avenue to explore. This direction of further study emerged from the child's voice in my research, with one group noting how they felt *'girls and boys should mix…for girls have different opinions than the boys'* (C3, Interview 5: 26/04/2022).

Finally, an examination of how communication, collaboration and problem-solving are affected when team members do not know each other before entering the Educational Escape Room would provide valuable data for Museums and other organisations interested in using this methodology in workshops and camps. This question emerged from a discussion I had with the Resident Historian in a local History Museum who wondered *'whether this would work if the children weren't even in the same school, as part of a summer camp or standalone workshop'* (TRJ, 05/07/2022).

### 5.5 Disseminating the Research

All forms of action research seek to add the existing body of literature on the chosen topic. This study aims to add to the significant gap in the literature surround EERs in primary classrooms. It is the first study conducted in the Irish primary classroom and it lays the foundation for further research into the feasibility of EERs as a History teaching method.

Whilst this research is a self-study action research project, the research 'is not about 'me' so much as 'us'' (Brookfield, 1995: 54). It is not enough for me to claim that I have aligned my values with my practice unless there is some benefit to both my students and the wider context (Brookfield, 1995). Therefore, I plan on disseminating my research in numerous different ways for different audiences.

Considering my recommendation that Educational Escape Rooms should be explored as an engaging historical activity in museums, I have started to share my research findings and intervention methods with a local, national History Museum. It is my intention to work closely with the education team in the museum to explore the feasibility of Educational Escape Rooms as an educational workshop option for children. To reach larger audiences, I will share my research freely on my personal education website, including examples of puzzles and the intervention method. This will be accompanied by a series of short videos detailing specific elements of the EERs, such as setting up QR locks and how to build puzzles. To engage further with the academic community, I hope to publish a journal article outlining the main features of my research in an appropriate research journal to encourage other teacher-researchers to engage with the process of self-study action research and its transformative potential.

### 5.6 Conclusion

My Educational Escape Rooms created opportunities for children to collaborate and communicate with one another in a meaningful way during History lessons. By constructing Escape Rooms that were based on the historical content and skills developed in class, children were afforded opportunities to apply these skills and knowledge in a new situation. Children were presented with multiple opportunities to problem-solve and verbalise their thinking with teammates. Student choice on team dynamics had some effect on the levels of

collaboration between students as did the gender make-up of teams. Surprisingly, children expressed a preference for puzzles that were tactile and required physical manipulation rather than those that were digitally based. The physical space also contributed to engagement with the Escape Room, with children expressing a preference for more interactive props and theming. These findings have significant implications for both my practice and the lacuna in the literature surrounding Educational Escape Rooms in primary schools.

I now claim to know how to create opportunities for meaningful communication and collaboration in History lessons by using Escape Rooms. Significantly, I also understand why this is of value and the practicalities of implementing this approach as a class teacher. More importantly for the purposes of self-study action research, I can claim that by engaging in transformative dialogue with the children in my class and by seeking opportunities to collaborate professionally with colleagues, that I am truly practicing what I preach, '*practicing the values of collaboration and communication rather than just teaching them'* (TRJ, 25/06/2022). Not only is my practice more closely aligned with my values of social constructivism and democracy but so too are my personal interactions with colleagues and students. I will continue to engage in a 'sustained and intentional process of identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of [my] teaching assumptions' (Brookfield, 2017: 23) and recognise the influence of both on my educational practice.

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# Appendices

## Appendix A: Ethical Documents regarding Consent and Assent

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

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

### Appendix A1: Letter of Consent for Parents

***R.E: Masters of Education Research Study:*** *A study examining how 'escape rooms' can be used to encourage communication and collaboration in History lessons.*

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am currently undertaking a Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing an action research project. The focus of my research is on using a popular leisure-time activity called 'escape rooms' in History lessons to see if this leads to an increase in communication and collaboration between students.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by designing and running a series of history-based 'escape room' challenges as activities during lessons. I will be focusing on the 'Ancient Peoples' part of the history curriculum with these activities. The data will be collected using teacher observations, student feedback and a daily teacher journal. The children will be asked their opinions on how they felt the activities went through a structured interview. This will be recorded on a voice recorder and completely anonymous.

The child's name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. Your child will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage. Strict research and data protection guidelines will be followed while carrying out this research. The focus of this research is not on your child or their performance. Rather, the focus is on how I can improve my practice through this new method of teaching.

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 will be adhering to the school's, Maynooth University's and legal data and privacy policies throughout the research. Only children whose parent give their informed consent to the study will have data collected from them. Participants may withdraw from the study at any time.

All data obtained will be kept confidential and secure for the duration of the study. Upon completion of the thesis, this data will be securely stored for a further ten years and will then be destroyed. The results will be presented in the final thesis in an anonymised fashion. The results of the study will be available to both you and your child upon completion.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Your permission to allow your child to participate will be greatly appreciated and will help me develop my skills as a teacher further.

**Please complete the written consent form attached to allow your son or daughter to participate.**

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at *[redacted].*

Kind regards,

Kevin Maher

Kevin Maher 12356501

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

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

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

## PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (PARENT'S NAME) 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.
- I understand that participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw my child from the study at any time without consequence.
- I understand that there is no reward for participating in this study.
- I understand that neither my child nor their performance are the focus of this study.
- I understand that all information will be kept anonymous and that I can access data collected on my child if I wish.
- I understand that if the class moves to remote learning, additional permissions will be sought to collect data from my child.

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Date: _____

Name of Child _____

Date: _____

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

## Appendix A2: Letter of Consent for Principal/Board of Management

***R.E: Masters of Education Research Study:*** *A study examining how 'escape rooms' can be used to encourage communication and collaboration in History lessons.*

Dear _____,

As you are aware, I am currently undertaking a Masters of Education Degree in Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth. As part of this degree, an action research study is to be submitted which involves the researcher carrying out qualitative or quantitative analysis in the form of an action research study. This research is being conducted under the supervision of Dr. Bernadette Wrynn, Lecturer in Froebel Department of Early Childhood Education, Maynooth.

My topic of research aims to explore the extent to which the 'escape room' methodology can be utilised in History lessons to encourage meaningful communication and collaboration. In addition to this, I hope to examine the opportunities this methodology provides for application and synthesis of information within the 'Ancient Peoples' strand unit. I wish to obtain your permission to invite pupils to participate in the study. Only those whose parents give their informed consent to the study will participate.

The information needed to complete the study will include anonymised audio recordings of student feedback, written observations and recordings of teaching staff and teacher observations and assessments. All information collected will be

treated in confidence and neither the school nor the participants will be identifiable in any aspect of the research project. Participants will be informed that they may withdraw from the study at any time. On condition of receiving your consent to approach the pupils and parents to participate in the study, I will arrange for informed consent to be obtained from the parents of participants.

All data obtained will be kept confidential and secure for the duration of the study and thereafter. On completion of the thesis, the data will be kept for a further ten years, as per University regulations and then will be securely destroyed. The results will be presented in the thesis. They will also be viewed by my supervisor, the Head of Department and an external examiner. The study may be published in a research journal, presented at approved conferences and made available to future students on the course through the Maynooth University Library Murals database.

I have attached parental, child and participant consent forms for your consideration, in addition to a consent form for your approval.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any further queries regarding this topic, please do not hesitate to contact me at *[redacted]* or an in-person meeting could be arranged to discuss this further.

Yours Sincerely,

Kevin Maher

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

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

## School Principal/Board of Management Consent Form

I/We give consent for you to approach parents to gain consent for pupils to participate in the given Research Project.

I have read the Letter of Consent explaining the purpose of the research study and understand that:

***The School***

• The role of the school is voluntary.

• I may decide to withdraw the school's participation at any time.

• The school will not be identifiable in any part of the study in order to preserve confidentiality and anonymity of all participants

***Participants***

• Participants will give informed consent and will understand that they may only participate in the study with this consent.

• All information obtained will be kept confidential, and will be treated in strictest confidence.

• The participants' names will not be used and individuals will not be identifiable throughout the study.

• Participants may withdraw during any part of the study without consequence.

• Participants will not receive any incentive to participate in the research study.

_____ _____

Signature Date

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

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

## Appendix A3: Letter of Consent for Critical Friends

***R.E: Masters of Education Research Study:*** *A study examining how 'escape rooms' can be used to encourage communication and collaboration in History lessons.*

Dear _____,

As you are aware, I am currently undertaking a Masters of Education Degree in Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education, Maynooth. As part of this degree, an action research study is to be submitted which involves the researcher carrying out qualitative or quantitative analysis in the form of an action research study.

My topic of research aims to explore the extent to which the 'escape room' methodology can be utilised in History lessons to encourage meaningful communication and collaboration. In addition to this, I hope to examine the opportunities this methodology provides for application and synthesis of information within the 'Ancient Peoples' strand unit.

I wish to formally invite you to participate in this study in the role of critical friend. Within this role, you will observe lesson activities and record observations using a pre-designed rubric. You will also be asked to challenge any claims to knowledge I have to ensure the integrity of my conclusions.

The anticipated benefit of your participation in this role, is the opportunity to share your observations of a new methodology and work collaboratively to shape future learning experiences.

Several steps will be taken to protect your anonymity. Any data collected from you, in any format, will not contain your name or any other identifying information. Your voice will be kept anonymous throughout the process and will not be revealed in the final publication of this study. Your participation in this research is completely voluntary. Should you choose not to involve yourself in this research as a critical friend, there will be no explanation required or consequence suffered. You may withdraw consent and cease participation in the study at any point without prejudice. If requested, all information from you will be destroyed in a secure manner. You also have to right to refuse to answer any questions or discuss any matters you are not comfortable with.

All data obtained will be kept confidential and secure for the duration of the study and thereafter. On completion of the thesis, the data will be kept for a further ten years, as per University regulations and then will be securely destroyed. The results will be presented in the thesis. They will also be viewed by my supervisor, the Head of Department and an external examiner. The study may be published in a research journal, presented at approved conferences and made available to future students on the course through the Maynooth University Library Murals database.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. If you have any further queries

regarding this topic, please do not hesitate to contact me at *[redacted]* or an in-person meeting could be arranged to discuss this further. If you do wish to take part in this study, please complete the written consent form attached.

Kind regards,

Kevin Maher

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

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

## Consent Form for Critical Friend

I, _____ (name; please print clearly), have read the information outlined in the letter above.

I understand that:

• I freely give consent to participate in the given Research Project.

• My participation is voluntary and that I am free to refuse to participate in the study without reason or prejudice.

• I am free to refuse to answer any question or discuss any topic that I do not wish to discuss.

• Any data collected from me will be securely stored and destroyed if requested.

• My comments, responses and observations will be kept anonymous.

• I may seek further information about the research study from Kevin Maher at the above email address.

_____ _____

Participants Signature Date

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

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

## Appendix A4: Information Sheet: FAO -School Personnel, Parents and Guardians

### Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for school management, parents and guardians.

### What is this Action Research Project about?

Teachers undertaking the Master of Education in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood, Maynooth University are required to conduct an action research project, examining an area of their own practice as a teacher. This project will involve an analysis of the teacher's own practice. Data will be generated using teacher observations, audio recordings, reflective notes, interviews and surveys. The teacher is then required to produce a thesis documenting this action research project.

### What is the research question?

How can I use 'escape rooms' to create learning experiences in 5th class History lessons, that promote communication and collaboration?

### What sorts of research methods will be used?

Research methods may include, continuous teacher observations, interviews/discussions with colleagues, reflective journaling and student audio recordings. Audio recordings and work samples obtained from participants will be anonymised and kept securely in accordance with GDPR guidelines and the Maynooth University ethical standards.

**What if the class has to move to online learning?**

In the unlikely event that the class has to restrict their movements due to COVID-19, the collection of data will take place digitally on Zoom. Additional permissions will be sought from all participants to record the audio from interviews and discussions on Zoom. Participants will not be asked to turn on cameras to ensure anonymity and privacy. Special care will be taken to ensure data collected in this way is stored securely and in a manner that does not reveal any participant's identity.

**Who else will be involved?**

The study will be carried out by Kevin Maher, as part of the Master of Education course in the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The proposed research participants are my current fifth class. In accordance with course requirements, some colleagues may be involved in a voluntary, anonymous capacity as participants in the research also. 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 will happen to the data and the results?**

All data obtained will be kept confidential and secure for the duration of the study and thereafter. On completion of the thesis, the data will be kept for a further ten years, as per University regulations and then will be securely destroyed. The results will be presented in the thesis. They will be viewed by my supervisor, the Head of Department and an external examiner. The study may be published in a research journal or available to future students on the course.

**What am I being asked to do?**

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with the students in my class. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of

Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines.

***Contact details:***

Kevin Maher

Email: *[redacted]*

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

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

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

## Appendix A5: Letter of Consent for Parents (Remote Learning)

***R.E: Masters of Education Research Study:*** *A study examining how 'escape rooms' can be used to encourage communication and collaboration in History lessons.*

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

As you are aware, I am undertaking a Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing a research project. The focus of my research is on using a popular leisure-time activity called 'escape rooms' in History lessons and whether this leads to an increase in communication and collaboration between students.

Unfortunately, our class has been advised to restrict movements under the current COVID-19 guidelines. As we are no longer able to meet face-to-face, the planned student interviews will have to change format.

With your permission, I will be conducting online interviews with the children on Zoom. This will take place in a secure room with an additional adult, as per our school's Remote Learning policy. Children will not be asked to turn on their cameras for this interview to ensure their identities are kept private. The audio from the interviews will be recorded and transcribed as part of the research data. All of this data will anonymous and stored securely. All of the guidelines outlined in the original consent form still apply, including your right to withdraw your child at any point. If you need an additional copy of the original consent form, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Thank you for taking the time to read this letter. Your permission to allow your child to participate will be greatly appreciated and will help me develop my skills as a teacher further.

**Please complete the written consent form attached to allow your son or daughter to participate in the digital interviews.**

If you have any queries on any part of this research project, feel free to contact me by email at *[redacted].*

Kind regards,

Kevin Maher

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

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

## PARENTAL 'REMOTE LEARNING' CONSENT FORM

I, _____ (PARENT'S NAME) have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered.

I understand that:

- I voluntarily agree to the participation of my child in online interviews.
- I am free to withdraw my child from the study at any time without consequence.
- I understand that audio from my child's interview will be recorded and transcribed for this study.
- All information will be kept anonymous and that I can access data collected on my child if I wish.
- My child will not be asked to turn on their camera for this interview.
- That the interview will take place in a group setting and with another member of staff present.

Parent / Guardian Signature_____

Date: _____

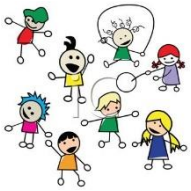
Name of Child _____

Date: _____

Maynooth University
National University of Ireland Maynooth

## Appendix A6: Child-friendly Assent Form

**Child's name** _____



I am trying to learn more about how we can use team work in History lessons. I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch you take part in different History activities and listen to how you are getting on with them. I might write down some notes about what is happening in the activity too. Afterwards, we will have a chat about the activities and I will record your answers so I can listen to them later.

Would you be ok with that?

Circle a box

| YES | NO |
|---|---|

There are few things you should know too:

- If you change your mind after we start, that's ok too. You can ask me to stop at any time!

- You don't have to take part in the research at all! You will still get to do the same activities as everyone else.
- There are no punishments if you decide you don't want to be part of the research. There are also no rewards for people who do want to be part of the research.
- This research is not about you! It's all about how I can learn how to teach History in a different way!

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

If you would like to take part in this research and share your opinions with me tick the box and sign your name below.

**I want to take part** ☐ **Signature: _____**

**I don't want to take part** ☐ **Date: _____**

**Opt Out Box**

If you ever want to stop taking part in the research that is absolutely no problem. We will sign this box together if that happens.

I do not want to take part in the research anymore.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

# Appendix B: Compiled Data from Baseline Student Questionnaire

## Appendix B1: Sample Student Questionnaire Survey

**What I think about History:**

1. I enjoy history lessons:

☐ a lot ☐ a bit ☐ don't mind it ☐ not much ☐ not at all

2. I look forward to history lessons:

☐ a lot ☐ a bit ☐ don't mind it ☐ not much ☐ not at all

3. I get chances to work with others during History lessons:

☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ not often ☐ never

4. I enjoy the following ways of working in History:

☐ paired work ☐ group work ☐ individual work

**Working with Others**

1. I enjoy working with others:

☐ a lot ☐ a bit ☐ don't mind it ☐ not much ☐ not at all

2. I get chances to work with others during class:

☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ not often ☐ never

3. I find it hard to work with others during paired work:

☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ not often ☐ never

4. I find it hard to work with others during group work:

☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ not often ☐ never

5. The hardest thing about working with others is…

_____

_____

_____

**My Teacher and History lessons:**

1. My teacher makes history lessons interesting:

☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ not often ☐ never

2. My teacher talks a lot during History lessons:

☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ not often ☐ never

3. I get to do hands-on activities during History lessons:

☐ always ☐ most of the time ☐ sometimes ☐ not often ☐ never

4. My favourite history lesson this year was

_____

_____

_____

.

5. This was my favourite lesson because:

_____

_____

_____

Are there any other comments or opinions about History lessons or working with others you would like to share?

# Appendix B2: Compiled Data on Student Questionnaire Responses

*Figure B2.1: Children's Responses to the question 'My teacher makes History Lessons interesting'*

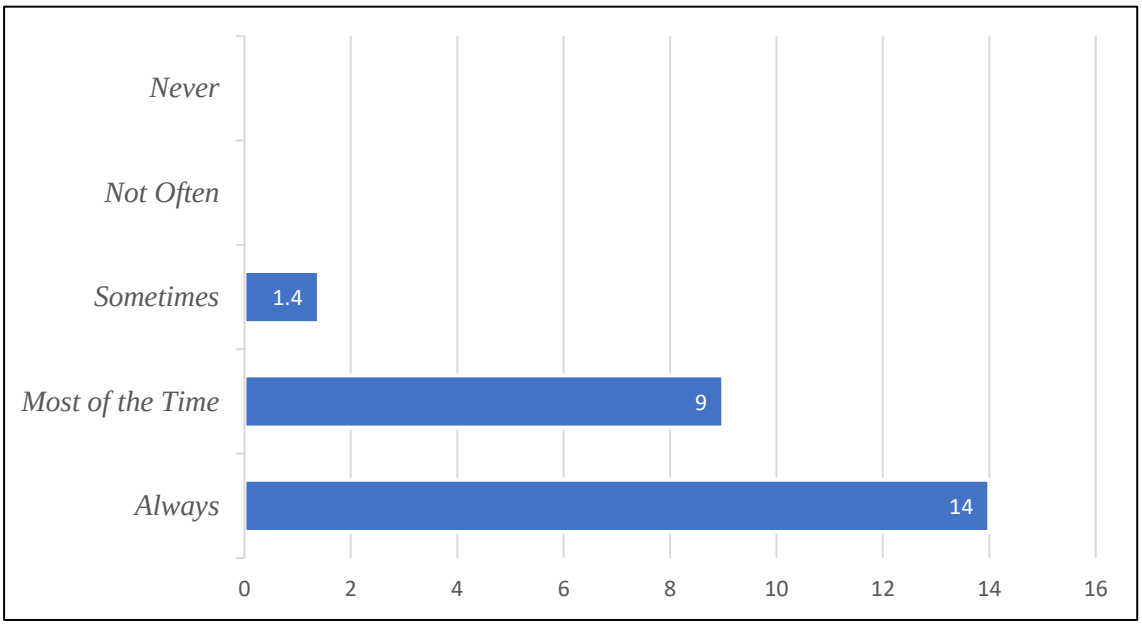



*Figure B2.2: Children's Responses to the question 'My teacher talks a lot during History lessons'*

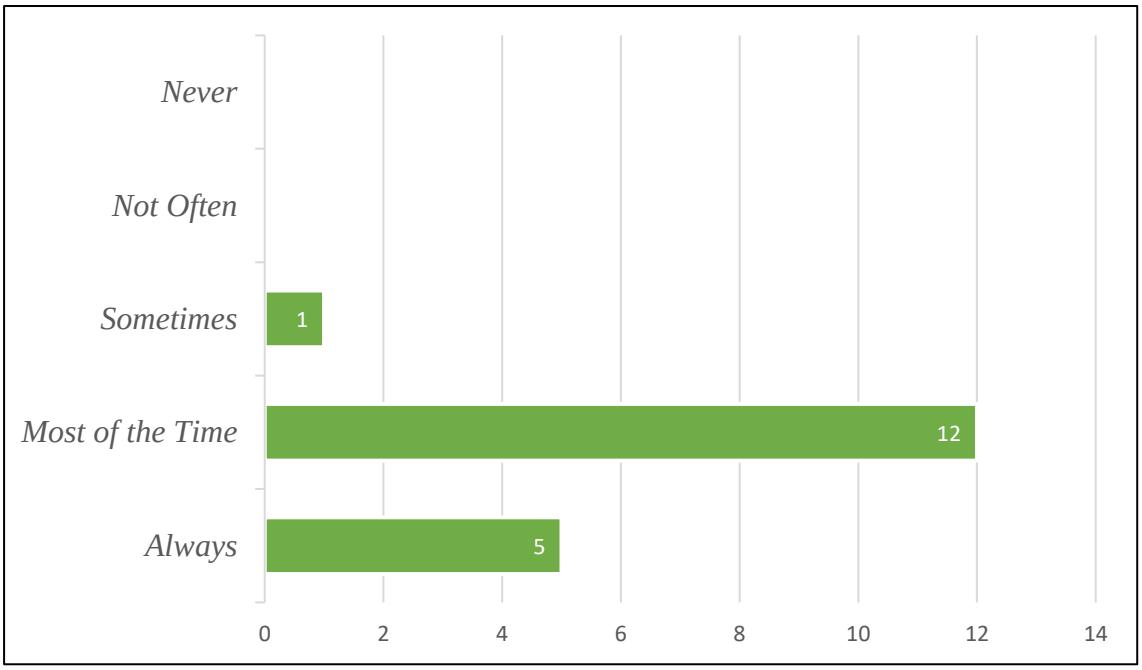


*Figure B2.3: Children's responses to the statement 'I get chances to work with others during History lessons*

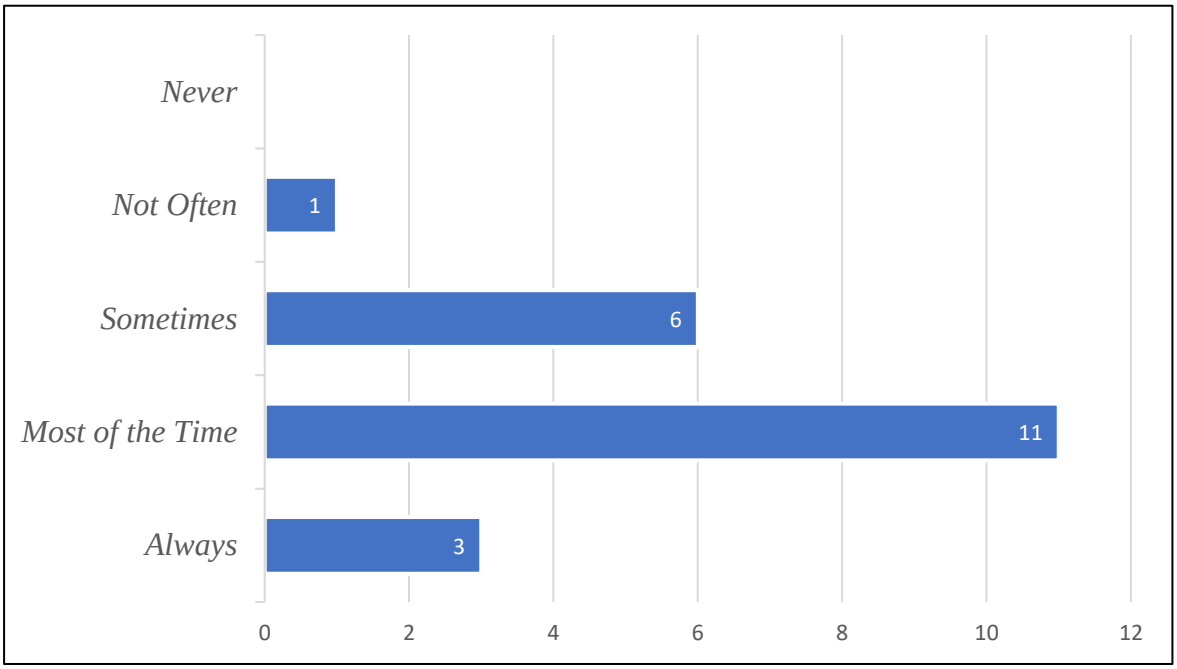



*Figure B2.4: Children's responses to the statement 'I get chances to work with others during History lessons*

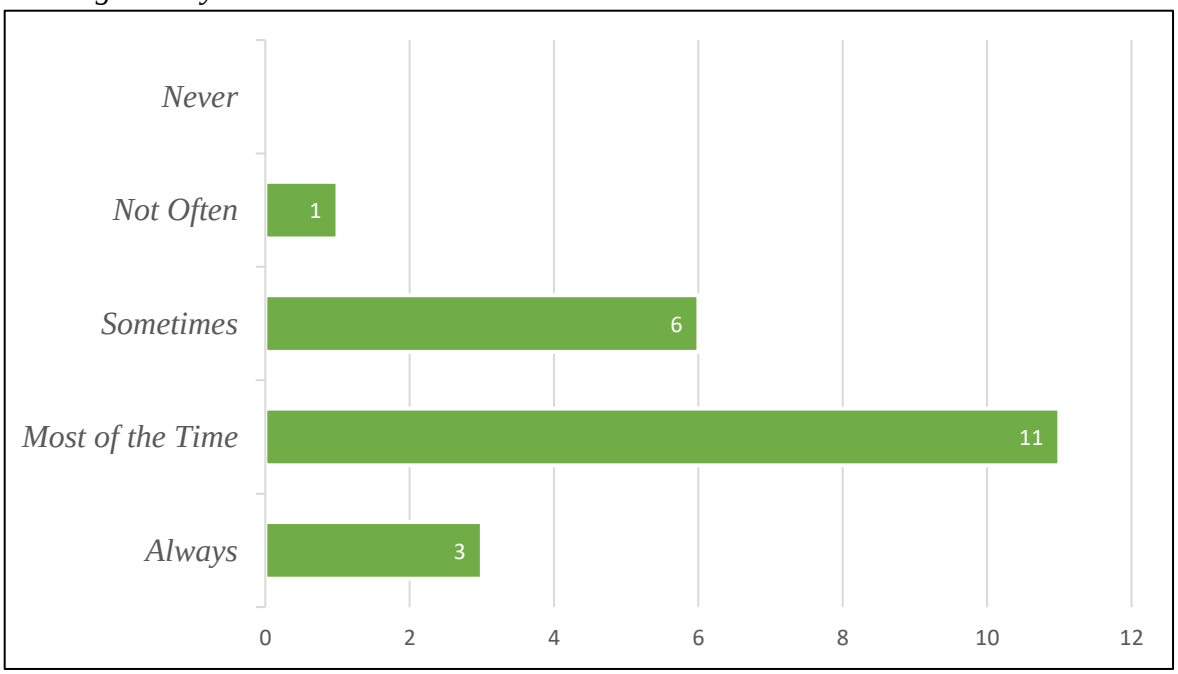
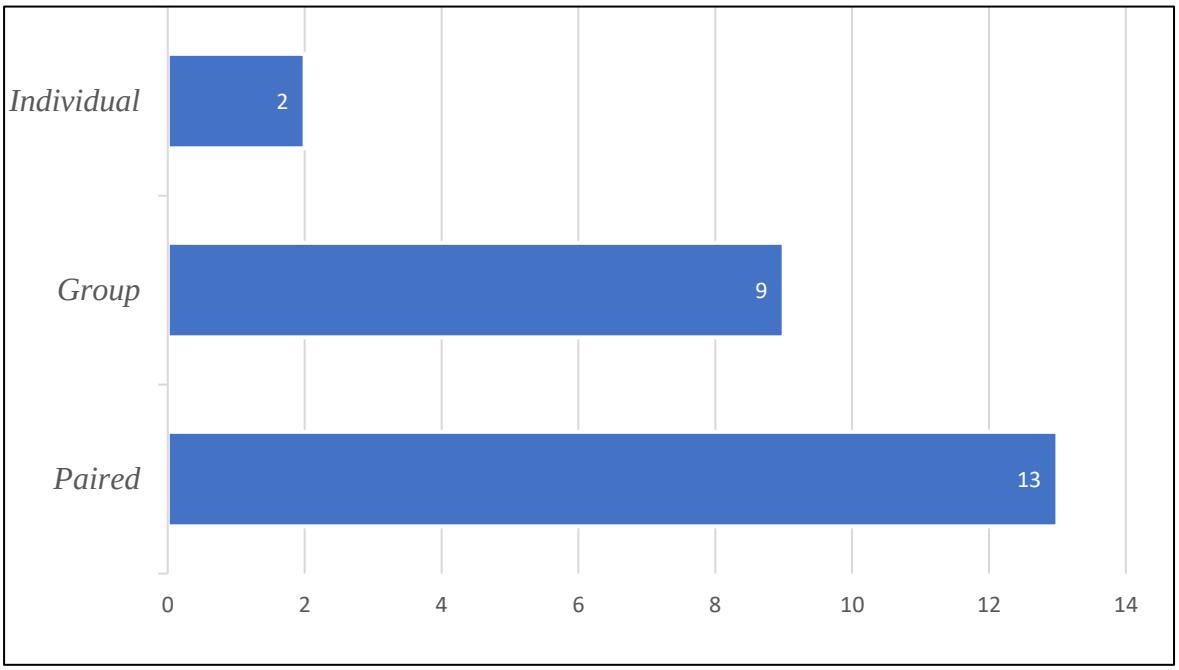


*Figure B2.5: Children's responses to the statement 'I enjoy the following ways of working during History lessons'*



# Appendix C: Curriculum Planning Documentation

## Appendix C1: Primary History Curriculum Objectives for Ancient People and Societies (The Ancient Romans)

### Strand: Early peoples and ancient societies

**Strand units**

*A selection from:*

- Stone Age peoples
- Bronze Age peoples
- Early societies of the Tigris and Euphrates valleys
- Egyptians

*and a selection from:*

- Central and South American peoples
  *e.g. Aztecs*
- Asian peoples
  *e.g. peoples of the Indus valley, Ch'in and Han empires of China*

- Greeks
- Romans
- Celts
- Early Christian Ireland
- Vikings

- African peoples
  *e.g. Benin peoples*
- North American peoples
  *e.g. Native American peoples*
- Australasian peoples
  *e.g. Maori*

*The child should be enabled to*

- become familiar with some aspects of the lives of these peoples
  - *origins*
  - *homelands and migrations*
  - *homes, settlements and urban developments*
  - *food and farming*
  - *clothes*
  - *work and technologies*
  - *tools and weapons*
  - *cultural or artistic achievements*
  - *language(s), myths and stories*
  - *leisure and pastimes*
  - *faith, beliefs and religious practices*
  - *burial practices*
  - *links these people had with Ireland or Europe (as appropriate)*
  - *arrival, settlement and life of these people in Ireland (as appropriate)*
  - *relationship of these people with other civilisations*
  - *long-term contribution of these people*
- examine critically, and become familiar with, evidence we have which tells us about these people, especially evidence of these people which may be found locally and in Ireland, where appropriate
- record the place of these peoples on appropriate timelines.

Content for fifth and sixth classes

*History Curriculum* 67

**Appendix C2: Primary History Curriculum Objectives for Eras of Conflict and**

## Strand: Eras of change and conflict

Strand units *A selection from:*

The Renaissance

The Reformation

Traders, explorers and colonisers from Europe

The Great Famine

The Industrial Revolution

Changing land ownership in 19th-century Ireland

Changing roles of women in 19th and 20th centuries

World War I

Modern Ireland

*The child should be enabled to*

- become familiar with aspects of these periods
  - *ways in which the everyday lives of people changed*
  - *changes and conflicts in people's thoughts and beliefs*
  - *reasons for these changes and conflicts*
  - *people, organisations and events involved in bringing about change or adapting to change*
  - *local evidence of changes and conflicts*
  - *the reactions of people to changes and issues which they experienced*
  - *the long-term effect of changes and conflicts*
- examine and become familiar with evidence which informs us about the lives of people in the periods studied, their thoughts and concerns, especially evidence which may be found locally
- record the place of peoples and events on appropriate timelines.

Content for fifth and sixth classes

*History Curriculum* 69

## Appendix C3: Sample Lesson Plans from Great Famine Unit

| **Subject: History** | **Class: 5th Class** | **Month: April** | **Teacher: K. Maher** |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Theme:** The Great Famine<br><br>**Strands:** Eras of Conflict and Change<br>**Strand Unit:** The Great Famine<br><br>***Content Objectives:**<br>*See Long-Term plans for detailed content objectives | | ***Skills and Concept Development:**<br>*See Long-Term plans for detailed Skills and Concepts Development<br><br>*Time and Chronology*<br>*Change and Continuity*<br>*Using evidence*<br>*Synthesis and communication* | |
| **Differentiation: C.A.R.P.E.T**<br>*Week 1: Product*: Differentiated character-building sheet demanding different levels of research and imagination.<br><br>*Week 2: Resources:* ICT resources and information cards to support those who struggle to enter character for town meeting<br><br>*Week 3: Resources:* Variety of support types to assist with diary writing e.g. audio tracks, pictures, ICT resources, sample diary entries etc. | | **Linkage and Integration:**<br>*SPHE*: Myself and the Wider World (Famine, Drought and Inequality)<br>*Geography*: Human Environments (Comparing counties to Dublin)<br>*Visual Arts*: Fabric and Fibre, Construction (Famine Homes, Ships, Clothing)<br>*Language 1*: Writing diary entries for their characters, describing scenes for a partner during a sensory walk, explain how their character is feeling during Babysteps activities. | |

## Week 1

**Learning Outcomes**
**(What will they know / be able to do?)**

-develop and use the language of history: famine, social class, absentee landlord, land agent, farmer, cottier.
-discuss and compare the features of a 19th century town during the photo reveal.
-sort and classify social groups from 19th century Ireland on a social hierarchy.
-create a freeze frame that shows how the potato was used in 19th century Ireland.
-create an imaginary character using information and sources from the 19th century.

**Theme: Setting the Scene**

-Assessing Prior Knowledge: The children will think, pair, share with a partner what they already know about the Great Famine.

-Photo Reveal: The children will gradually be shown an image from a typical Irish town in the 19th century prior to The Great Famine. They must discuss what they are seeing and guess what the event is. If necessary, ask prompting questions to elicit information and observations about the clothes, transport, social classes and shops and businesses.

-Book Extract: To further set the scene about life in the 19th century in Ireland, the teacher will read aloud from Under the Hawthorn Tree by Marita Conlon-McKenna. Compare and contrast the setting with our area now.

-Social Hierarchy: Children are given a social hierarchy for the time to complete. Following this, they will be taught the people who made up the social hierarchy in 19th century Ireland.

-Freeze Frames: The children will work in groups and must think of the various ways potatoes would have been used in 19th century Ireland. Once they have thought of the various ways potatoes would have been used, they must create a freeze frame for each of these uses.

-Character Building: The children will be divided into three groups (tenant farmers, Irish landowners, and British landowners). Each group will go to a different station. They will use the various scaffolds on the table to create a character profile for their character within 19th century society.

-Babysteps: All children will stand on the back of the classroom. Statements will be read out. If the statement is true for their character, they may take one step, if not they remain where they are. When all statements have been read, the children must remain where they are and look around at the placement of other people. They must they guess the roles of others within society.

Talk and Discussion: To develop empathy, the children must discuss how they felt throughout and after the Babysteps activity and how this relates to the feelings of people in 19th century Irish times.

**Assessment**
**(How will I know they know?)**

-Teacher Observation
-Teacher Designed Tasks

-Teacher Questioning:
• Can the children compare modern times to 19th century times, with reference to clothes, transport, buildings etc.
•Can the children enter and maintain an imaginary role of a worker during the 19th century?
•Can the children sort and classify the different social classes in 19th century Ireland?

## Week 2

**Learning Outcomes**
**(What will they know / be able to do?)**

-develop and use the language of history**:** export, import, maize, relief, blight, fungus.
-create an export map for 19th century Ireland prior to the Famine.
-create a short scene that shows the export process in 19th century Ireland.
-create a short scene that captures the emotions of the morning farmers discovered blight.
-recreate the exports map for 19th century Ireland during Famine times.

**Learning Activities (How will they learn or practise?)**

**Theme: Disaster Strikes**

-Social Hierarchy: The children will be asked what the word hierarchy means. Following this, they will be taught the people who made up the social hierarchy in 19th century Ireland.

-Direct Teaching: The children will be asked what the word 'export' means. Following this, the teacher will explain that during the 19th century in Ireland, cereal and crops were almost all exported to Britain, as the British were the landowners. Only the potatoes remained in Ireland.

-Map Work: The children will help to create an export map using a map and wool of what was exported and left in Ireland prior to the Great Famine in 19th century Ireland.

-Export Role Play: The children will act in role as the characters they created during the previous week. They will use cereal, scoops and bags to role play the process of exporting prior to the famine. Draw attention to what is left so that the children realise the dependence on the potato crop.

-Book Extract: To introduce the discovery of blight in in the 19th century
in Ireland, the teacher will read aloud chapter one from Under the Hawthorn Tree by Marita Conlon-McKenna.

-Revisiting Export Role Play: Replay the role play, but this time with diseased potatoes left. Allow the children to role play what they think would happen to their characters.

-Teacher in Role: The teacher will act in Role as Sir Peel at a town hall meeting. The children will act in role as concerned tenant farmers. They may ask any questions about their concerns. Sir Peel will explain that the Americans will export corn to Ireland to assist with the hunger. Play audiobook 2:11 minutes in to encourage the children to act as town members angry that the food is being exported.

-Map Work: The children will help to create a second map of exports and imports during The Great Famine in the 19th century in Ireland.

**Assessment**
**(How will I know they know?)**

-Teacher Observation
-Teacher Designed Tasks

-Teacher Questioning:
• Can the children identify which food products were exported from Ireland during the 19th century?
•Can the children capture the emotions of farmers who discovered the blight on their farms through drama?
•Can the children draw conclusions about the impact exports had on Irish people during the 19th century?

## Week 3

**Learning Outcomes**
**(What will they know / be able to do?)**

-develop and use the language of history**:** eviction, workhouse, blight, famine roads, soup kitchen.
-create a sensory journey for a walk to the workhouse during Famine times.
-create a drama piece that captures an element of life in the Workhouse
-write a fictional diary entry using support material for a person who has entered the workhouse.

**Learning Activities (How will they learn or practise?)**

**Theme: The Workhouse**

-Book Extract: To demonstrate for the children what life was like for people 19th century in Ireland who had to leave their homes because of The Great Famine, the teacher will read aloud an extract from Under the Hawthorn Tree by Marita Conlon-McKenna.

- Sensory Journey: The children will call out words to describe the smells, sounds, sights and things they could feel at the time of the famine, travelling from their homes to another location. The children will then work in pairs. They must act in role as the character they wrote a character profile for during the previous lesson. One child will close their eyes as the other child walks them around on a sensory journey, describing everything they come across. They will then swap roles.

-Direct Teaching: Teacher will explain the role and conditions within the workhouses. The rules within the workhouses and living conditions will be explored through talk and discussion.

-Life in the Workhouse: Each group is given a fictional extract from a resident in the Workhouse. They must bring this scene to life through a drama piece. One person will sit at a desk pretending to write and the others will show the scene.

-Diary Entries: The children must use the supports on the table to help them write the next stage of their character's journey. These supports will include images, written information, audio tracks (e.g. sounds of the work house), etc. The children must use this information to write a diary entry about leaving their homes and ending up in the workhouse.

**Assessment**
**(How will I know they know?)**

-Teacher Observation
-Teacher Designed Tasks

-Teacher Questioning:
• Can children imagine the kinds of smells, sounds and sights that people walking to a workhouse may have experienced?
•Can the children show what life was like in a workhouse through a drama piece?
•Can the children write about life in the workhouse?

## Week 4

**Learning Outcomes**
**(What will they know / be able to do?)**

-develop and use the language of history: famine ships, first class, steerage, cholera, typhus.
-use historical evidence to hypothesis information about a person on a Famine ship.
-enter character as a passenger onboard a Famine ship.
-use their knowledge of Famine times to problem-solve with peers during the whole class role play.

**Learning Activities (How will they learn or practise?)**

**Theme**: **The Famine Ship**

-Book Extract: To introduce the new lives of people in in the 19th century in Ireland who were forced to leave their homes, the teacher will read aloud chapter one from Under the Hawthorn Tree by Marita Conlon-McKenna.

-Suitcase Evidence: Suitcases will be placed on various tables. Each table will contain evidence about a different journey and a different class of person. This evidence will help the children to understand what happened to their characters in the aftermath of The Great Famine.

-Whole Class Role Play: Children will take part in a whole class role-play journey on a Famine Ship across the Atlantic Ocean. Along their journey they will experience some of the hardships and difficulties experienced by Irish people who had to make the difficult journey across to America during the Famine.

-Diary Entries: The children must use the supports on the table to help them write the final stage of their character's journey. These supports will include images, written information, audio tracks (e.g. sounds of the ship journey), etc. The children must use this information to write a diary entry about leaving Ireland and moving to America.

**Assessment**
**(How will I know they know?)**

-Teacher Observation
-Teacher Designed Tasks

-Teacher Questioning:
• Can children enter role and problem-solving with peers during the whole class role play?
•Can conclude the story of their 19th character through a diary entry?

## Appendix D1: Critical Friend Observational Grid

| | |
|---|---|
| Date: | Pods: |
| Lesson Observed: | Class Level: |
| Action Research Cycle: | Observer: |

| **Research Aspect** | Observed | Not Observed | Notes: |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Motivation**: Children wanted to complete challenges and progress through the story. | | | |
| **Engagement**: Children were actively engaged in the problem-solving process, offering ideas and possible solutions. | | | |

| **Research Aspect** | Observed | Not Observed | Notes: |
|---|---|---|---|
| **Communication**: Children were using verbal and nonverbal communication to explain their thinking and solve problems. | | | |
| **Collaboration:** Children were working together as a team to solve problems and progress the story. | | | |
| **Synthesising:** Children were applying content knowledge from History lessons in the problem solving process. | | | |

# Appendix E: Photographs of Escape Room Elements

## Appendix E1: Photograph of Physical Space in Escape Room 1

## Appendix E2: Photograph of Physical Space in Escape Room 2 (Great Hunger)

## Appendix E3: Photograph of locked Escape Box