***Name*:** Louise Mahon

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***Student number*:** 12302176

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Lecturer: *Bernadette Wrynn*

***Tutor*:** Laoise Ní Chléirigh

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Signature: *Louise Mahon*

Date: 9th of September 2022

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

The 'I Wonder' Curriculum: An Enquiry-Based Approach to History in Junior Infants

Louise Mahon

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 of September 2022

Supervised by: Laoise Ní Chléirigh

Abstract

The aim of this self-study action research project was to enhance my teaching of the Myself strand of the Junior Infant History curriculum so that lessons reflected the lives of the children I teach. The research was conducted in a multi-grade Junior/Senior Infant class in an urban DEIS school.

In line with the principles of self-study action research, my values were articulated and used to highlight times when my values and practice were in tension. To address this tension, an intervention was designed to ensure History lessons were child-centred, democratic and inclusive. This was achieved through use of a dialogic teaching method, I-wonder questions and sharing of historical evidence to encourage children to ask questions about their own lives and the lives of their families. Families became involved when these questions were sent home in children's History Portfolios. Further involvement from families occurred when they were invited into school to work on an art-based Family Tree Project.

A qualitative approach was taken to data collection as this method allowed for a range of voices to be included in my research, including the voice of children, parents/grandparents, colleagues and academics. Data was collected using questionnaires, interviews, work samples, photographs and a teacher reflective journal. The ethical implications were considered and addressed prior to commencing research.

A reflexive thematic analysis approach was taken to data analysis resulting in the emergence of four findings. The findings revealed the central place of parents/grandparents sharing details of the children's histories to help children meet the objectives of the History curriculum. Furthermore, the research found that teacher-sharing of stories, photographs and artefacts from their own history awakens the children's curiosity and acts as a stimulus for historical enquiry. The remaining findings were that children's ability to act agentically

during History lessons is impacted by adult perceptions of agency and children's ability to formulate questions about their lives.

Illustrations have been used in Chapter One to show the research journey and changes to my mindset when teaching History as a result. These images have been included with kind permission from the illustrator, David Mahon.

The self-study research approach has had an impact on the way I teach the Myself strand of the History curriculum. My planning in the future will include participation from parents/grandparents and use of historical evidence. Lessons will be child-led, based on children's questions, so that the objectives of the History curriculum are tailored to each child in my class.

Keywords: self-study action research, values, reflection, History, Junior Infants, families, funds of knowledge, family portfolio, agency, dialogic teaching, I-wonder questions, enquiry, historical evidence

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Declaration of Authenticity

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Signed: *Louise Mahon*

Date: 9/9/2022

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List of Abbreviations

CF1	Critical Friend 1
CF2	Critical Friend 2
CF3	Critical Friend 3
DEIS	Delivering Equality of Opportunity in Schools
EAL	English as an Additional Language
FTP	Family Tree Project
HP	History Portfolio
IPSC	Irish Primary School Curriculum
MU	Maynooth University
NCCA	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
RBPC	Review Body on the Primary Curriculum
RJE	Reflective Journal Entry

Chapter 1: Introduction

1.1 Introduction

Returning to school in September 2021, after two years of disrupted schooling caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, I was overcome by a desire to 'squeeze the most out of every learning minute' (Reflective Journal Entry (RJE), 2/9/2022). This reflection was inspired by the realisation that, for the Junior Infant children I was teaching, the transition into primary school was even more challenging than in previous years as they had such limited experience of 'schedule, curriculum, pedagogy, and peer relationships' (Tao et al., 2019: 638). I felt pressured to be 'more effective at teaching than ever before so that I can somehow compensate for the lost months of pre-school that make up a huge percentage of their little lives' (RJE, 2/9/2022). I examined *Aistear: The Early Childhood Curriculum Framework* (NCCA, 2009), to ascertain the content that children had missed out on and found that many of the principles within this curriculum referred to children's experiences, their uniqueness and their families. Within the context of the *Irish Primary School Curriculum* (NCCA, 1999a), I found that the objectives of the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b) were best suited to the development of content missed during these children's early educational experiences. History was, however, the subject I felt least competent teaching in Junior Infants. This thesis examines the role of values and assumptions in identifying the reasons for my feelings of incompetence, and the interventions that were put in place to enhance my practice in this subject.

This chapter examines the rationale and aims of this self-study action research project. Particular attention is given to the role of value-based research in the development of my research question. The aims, contingent on answering this question, are stated along with the assumptions that impacted my practice prior to this research project. A synopsis of

the research interventions is given. Finally, an overview of the remaining chapters of this thesis is outlined.

1.2 Research Context

This research project took place in a multi-grade Junior/Senior Infant class in an urban, DEIS school. The composition of this class, 'as a result of world-wide human mobility' (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019: 1) was very diverse. The research participants consisted of one teacher-researcher, 12 child-participants (five girls and seven boys), 12 parent participants, four grandparent participants, three Critical Friends and two members of my validation group. It was important to include 'different types of people…to gain multiple perspectives' (Carter et al., 2014: 545) on my practice. In particular, it was important to include the voice of the child, as they are the 'authorities on their own experience of childhood' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64).

1.3 Values Based Research

Self-study action research is 'open about its value-laden base' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 16), encouraging teacher-researchers to articulate the values that 'come to act as the basis of…enquiry' (McNiff, 2014: 53). The initial phase of this self-study action research project required me to identify my professional values, and, although 'every one of us lives according to values' (McNiff, 2002), it was not obvious how to articulate mine. To clarify these, I reflected upon times when I felt most professionally competent and when I felt 'dissatisfaction with some aspect of [my] practice' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 11), adopting Whitehead's view that 'values are embodied in our practice' (2018: 14). I examined my practice to 'deliberately draw meaning out of particular incidents and experiences' (Greene, 1984: 55), allowing values to come to light.

The professional values that 'drive [my] life and work' (McNiff, 2002) are child centrism, agency, democracy and diversity. These epistemological and ontological values recognise the significance of beginning with the children's own lives and experiences. Through reflection, I realised that the tension between values and practice spoken about by McDonagh et al. (2020) existed in my classroom when I taught the 'Myself' strand in Junior Infant History. Enquiry in my classroom mainly occurred through teacher-led, rather than student-led, questioning. My questions were unconsciously biased by my childhood and could hence show limited awareness of the starting point of the children I teach. Furthermore, when I avoided issues that might be culturally sensitive in History lessons, I was 'holding educational values whilst at the same time negating them' (Whitehead, 2018: 13) as I precluded opportunities to explore diversity.

This reflection highlighted the sense of dissatisfaction from which my 'search for a new research practice began' (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 12). I designed a critical question that was 'meaningful *now*, not in some distant, abstract, or imaginary future' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 45). The research question which allowed me to begin 'the process of reshaping my practice for myself' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 12) emerged as: *How can I teach the 'Myself' strand in Junior Infant History so that it is focused on the children's lives?*.

1.4 Aims of the Research

The overarching aim of this research was to allow me to realign my practice with my values when I teach the Myself strand of the Junior Infant History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b). This aim was central as 'practice that is riddled with contradiction is confused practice' (Bruce, 2019: 4) requiring reflection and action. After values were labelled, 'identifying and checking the accuracy and validity of [my] teaching assumptions' was necessary, because 'sometimes they're just plain wrong' (Brookfield, 2017: 3). Therefore, a

further aim of this research was to challenge my assumptions, 'to uncover taken-for-granted understandings about the world of teaching and learning' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 12) that were contributing to my practice. The assumptions I held prior to engaging in this study can be summarised as follows:

> -The limited strands of the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b) constricted opportunities for meaningful historical learning in Junior Infants.
>
> -In DEIS schools, the teacher was best placed to support children's learning across the curriculum.
>
> -Teacher sharing of personal experiences does not align with child-centred pedagogy.

These assumptions led to teaching within the Myself strand of the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b) that was teacher-led and undemocratic. It resulted in teaching that did not 'draw on the resources of the funds of knowledge of the child's world outside the context of the classroom' (Moll et al. in González et al., 2005: 75). Teaching and learning lacked diversity as it did not reflect 'cultural and linguistic histories and practices that are unfamiliar or different from those that the teachers have themselves' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 661). Interrogating my values to find ways of living closer to them led to the final aim of this study: Examining ways of teaching the Myself strand of the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b) so that it focused on the diverse lives of the children in my class. The implementation of interventions concerned with basing lessons on each child's 'own past and that of their immediate family' (NCCA, 1999c: 72) and 'the pedagogical validation of household knowledge with which students come to school' (González in González et al., 2005: 40) through collaboration with families became central to achieving this aim.

1.5 Research Overview

Prior to embracing value-based research I blamed my dissatisfaction with my teaching of History on the curriculum, claiming that 'there are not enough objectives in the curriculum to facilitate even one year of work, not to talk of two' (RJE, 22/8/2022). Illumination of my values revealed the dichotomy between my values and my practice, the true source of my frustration. My teaching was biased by my own childhood, vastly different from the lives of the children I teach, portraying culture as 'homogenous and frozen in time' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 131). My teaching was not child-centred as it was not based on the children who sat in my classroom every day (see figure 1.1).

Figure 1.1: Teaching of History Biased by Teacher's Childhood (Mahon, D., 2022)

To address the contradiction between my values and my practice, dialogic teaching lessons called 'History Talk Time' began so that children could be 'inspired by curiosity' (Cooper, 2018: 615) to learn about their own past and that of their family. Historical evidence was used to stimulate questions from the children and to assist them to learn 'new words in the context of responsive interactions' (Hadley et al., 2021: 4) (see figure 1.2). These

questions were recorded by the teacher and sent home for parents/grandparents to answer in History Portfolios.

Figure 1.2: Use of Historical Evidence to Stimulate Discussion

To further involve parents/grandparents in children's historical learning, they were invited to partake in an art-based Family Tree Project with their child/grandchild in school over the course of three weeks (see figure 1.3). This project aimed to link the Myself strand of the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b) with 'the experiences, skills and local knowledge of students' (Jovés et al., 2015: 69) and their families.

Figure 1.3: Parental/Grandparental Participation in Family Tree Project (Mahon, D., 2022)

Both interventions aimed to place children's 'sense of wonder and curiosity' (NCCA, 1999c: 76) about their lives at the forefront of planning thus allowing me to live closer to my value of child-centred education. The interventions had the intention of celebrating the diversity within my class by allowing for sharing between children and their families. Both interventions endeavoured to make my practice child-centred by focusing on the lives of the children who sat in my classroom every day (see figure 1.4).

Figure 1.4: Teaching of History Informed by the Children's Lives (Mahon, D., 2022)

1.6 Thesis Overview

This thesis consists of five chapters. Chapter 3 (Methodologies) explores the connection between the aims of this study and the choice of methodology. The action-research paradigm is explored with particular focus on the self-study action research approach. Research design is discussed with a detailed description of the two cycles in the study, including the data collection tools employed. Ethical considerations are addressed and attention is given to validity, reliability and credibility.

Chapter 4 (Data Analysis and Discussion) presents and discusses the findings of this study through analysis of the data. The role of Brookfield's 'four lenses of critical reflection' (2017: 61) within this process is discussed. My selection of a 'reflexive thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 589) approach to data analysis is justified. The themes and associated findings of my study are presented with reference to relevant data and academic theory.

The final chapter, Chapter 5 (Conclusion) acts as a reflection on my research project. Limitations of my study, highlighted by my validation group, are addressed. The impact of this study on current practice is discussed and areas for continued research are briefly explored. Opportunities for dissemination of my research are acknowledged before my claims to knowledge are stated.

The next chapter, Chapter 2 (Literature Review) presents an interrogation of the literature pertaining to topics relevant to this study. These include a discussion on History education nationally and internationally, examination of dialogic teaching and exploration of agency for children and parents. The final section of this chapter explores Family Portfolios and Funds of Knowledge Projects as both have been influential in the design of this study.

Chapter 2: Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

2.1.1 Purpose of the Literature Review

The literature review served different purposes at different stages of the self-study action research process. Initially it 'assists the teacher-researcher in finding and refining the critical question for the study' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 52). Later in the research journey the literature offered a 'framework for analysing and interpreting data' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 52). This demonstrates that reviewing the literature 'must be consistent and regular' (Brookfield, 2017: 7) to allow space for reflexivity.

2.1.2 Linking Literature and Self-Study Action Research

A vital element of self-study action research is examining our own assumptions. Brookfield suggests that teacher-researchers should utilise four lenses for examining assumptions; 'students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experiences, and theory and research' (2017: 7). Therefore, engaging with literature is imperative in 'grounding the assumptions, results, and conclusions of… research in the broader context of professional inquiry', allowing us to learn from 'distant colleagues' (Philips and Carr: 2010: 52). This is pertinent in this research project, because as a teacher 'transitioning into the role of research' (Peel, 2020: 1), I have a great deal to learn from other academics.

2.1.3 Aims of this Literature Review

All literature has been examined within the context of my research question: *How can I teach the 'Myself' strand in Junior Infant History so that it is focused on the children's lives?* As this study examines History, literature about the history curriculum has been reviewed to provide context. Particular attention has been given to the use of evidence as

this method is suited to children in Junior Infants. Literature on the topic of dialogic teaching was reviewed to challenge my initial researcher hypothesis and assumptions. Research pertaining to agency has also been appraised as this is one of my core values. The concepts of child and parental agency influenced the focus on family portfolios and funds of knowledge approaches in the final sections of this chapter. The suitability of these approaches have been evaluated with my research question in mind and their suitability for meeting the objectives of the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b).

2.2 The History Curriculum

2.2.1 Past, Present and Future Curricula

The year 1999 saw the introduction of the new *Irish Primary School Curriculum* (NCCA, 1999a) (hereafter IPSC). Prior to its introduction, the 'last major revision of the curriculum for primary schools was Curaclam na Bunscoile (1971)' (NCCA, 1999a: 2). Recommendations from both the Review Body on the Primary Curriculum (RBPC) (1990) and the Education Act (1998) were considered in producing the IPSC. Overall, the RBPC endorsed many of the existing principles of Curaclam na Bunscoile, including the focus on child-centred learning, but recommended 'revision and re-formulation in its aims, scope and content' (RBPC, 1990: 97).

The IPSC was designed to 'cater for the needs of children in the modern world' (NCCA, 1999a: vi) and the need for this is apparent upon reflection of the 1971 History curriculum. Written at a transitional time in Ireland's history, with unrest in Northern Ireland and Ireland's imminent incorporation into the European Economic Community, 'the 1971 history curriculum was quite explicit in its use of history as part of a cultural nationalist project' (Tormey, 2006: 318). Throughout its volumes, the theme of 'patriotic virtue' (Tormey, 2006: 318) is evident, capturing the zeitgeist of this time in Ireland's history. This

stands in stark contrast to the 'balanced appreciation of cultural and historical inheritances from local, national and global contexts' (NCCA, 1999b: 12) of the IPSC. In the intervening years between 1971 and 1999, the national identity changed from one that was 'implicitly defined as 'not-British'' (Tormey, 2006: 318) to an identity encompassing 'different ethnic and cultural groups, social classes and religious traditions' (NCCA, 1999c: 28). The focus of the History curriculum therefore shifted towards the development of historical skills and concepts, a sense of Irish, European and Global identity and an emphasis on 'personal and local history' (NCCA, 1999b: 7). Tormey describes this shift in focus as a 'dramatic comparison between the 'post-colonial' and the "globalised' curricula' (2006: 312).

The IPSC is now undergoing a process of review and redevelopment, recognising 'the extent to which classrooms have changed' (NCCA, 2020b: 1) since 1999. The focus on a globalised Ireland is once again spotlighted in educational debate with the publication of the Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020b). Informed by Growing Up in Ireland (Watson et al., 2014), this country's first longitudinal study of children, as well as the Children's School Lives study launched in 2018, the new curriculum framework aims to 'ensure the curriculum can continue to provide children with relevant and engaging experiences' (NCCA, 2020b: 1). The draft curriculum is explicit that 'know[ing] more about how children learn and what it is like to be a child growing up in Ireland' (NCCA, 2020a: 1) is justification for change. The proposed curriculum would see a huge change to History in junior classes. History as an explicitly taught subject would be absent from the curriculum until 3rd class, giving teachers 'greater choice in planning for, and facilitating coherent and relevant rich learning experiences' (NCCA, 2020b: 11) through an integrated approach. The departure of History from the infant curriculum is a reminiscent of the 1971 curriculum which did not include History as a subject area for junior and senior infants. Given that this research project is based on the teaching of History in Junior Infants, the potential removal

of this discipline from the proposed curriculum may have implications for the relevance and dissemination of my research.

2.2.2 The Infant History Curriculum

History as a subject is excluded from primary school curriculums in many European countries (Cooper, 2000). The presence of this subject in all primary school classes, particularly infant classrooms, in Ireland has led to questions about its relevance given that young children are at a developmental stage where they are 'actively discovering the world around them in the here and now' (Hoodless, 2008: 143). History for infants is an exploration of children's personal histories, their families and their communities rather than 'conventional history' (NCCA, 1999c: 7). This child-centred focus resonates with the teaching that 'the circle of knowledge starts close around a man and stretches out concentrically' (Pestalozzi, 1946).

Developing skills of time and chronology, using evidence and communication (NCCA, 1999b) is central to the infant curriculum. The focus on skills ensures that children "do' history rather than just 'learn about it'' (Hoodless, 2008: 11). This develops understanding as opposed to pure knowledge and equips children with strategies which can be used to 'reconstruct and interpret the past' (NCCA, 1999c: 2).

The inclusion of communication as a skill in the infant History curriculum points towards the significance of developing historical language (NCCA, 1999c; Hoodless, 2008). Children should be encouraged to ask questions about the past in through 'the process of historical enquiry' (Cooper, 2013a: 16). This dialogic approach will be discussed in greater detail in section 2.3.

The infant curriculum is explicit in recognising the importance of co-operation with parents and the community in teaching History. Parents are a child's first educator and

therefore their contribution to a child's historical understanding about themselves is vital (Hoodless, 2008). In effective History teaching in the infant classroom, opportunities for inclusion of parents should be sought whenever possible (NCCA, 1999c).

Although the curricular focus on the family and the self is welcomed, there are moral and ethical considerations which should not be overlooked. As History lessons closely examine a child's own life, issues such as 'family dysfunction, death and bereavement' (Hoodless, 2008: 14) may have to be addressed. Planning should consider the rich kaleidoscope of ages, competencies, cultures, ethnicities, family structure and backgrounds, home languages, religions, sexual identities, and worldviews that now characterise many primary classrooms (NCCA, 2020b: 3) and ensure that particular groups of children are not excluded in the stories and activities which constitute History lessons (Hoodless, 2008).

2.2.3 The Importance of using Historical Evidence with Junior Infants

Given Ireland's decision to teach History at all levels of the primary school, consideration must be given to ways in which this discipline can be made 'accessible and exciting' (Bage, 2010: 23) to the youngest children in our schools. Examination of the literature indicates that use of historical evidence plays a key role (NCCA, 1999b; NCCA, 1999c; Cooper, 2013a; Cooper, 2013b; Moore in Cooper 2017; Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper 2017) in making History accessible to young children. Historical evidence can be described as 'all surviving elements from the past' (NCCA, 1999c: 11) such as 'pictures, artefacts, buildings, maps [and] writing in its multiple forms' (Cooper, 2013a: 16). The curriculum is clear that for infant children, emphasis should be placed on 'making children aware of the wide range of evidence available' (NCCA, 1999c: 13) and that this should include 'simple evidence about their own past and that of their immediate family (NCCA, 1999c: 72). Despite the absence of explicit reference to theories underpinning the focus on

evidence within the IPSC History: Teacher Guidelines (NCCA, 1999c), there is a range of literature to support the benefits of using such an approach.

A key benefit of using evidence is that by its very nature it is a 'hands-on experience' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017: 31) and by handling evidence, children can 'engage with all their senses' (Crawford, 2016: 6) in their exploration of the past. As 'children must actively engage with their learning if it is to be remembered, meaningful and transformative' (Cooper, 2013a: 16) the use of hands-on enquiry can 'engage even the youngest child' (Crawford, 2016: 6). The focus on 'object-based learning' (Rigby, 2022: 40) is particularly suited to infant classes as children may not yet have developed the reading and writing skills required to engage with other forms of historical enquiry (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017; NCCA, 1999c; Crawford, 2016). This makes the focus on historical evidence particularly pertinent to answering my research question.

The literature also suggests a 'link between imagination and fostering historical understanding' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017: 33). As it is not possible to know everything that has happened in the past, the ability to construct accounts of what happened requires imagination (Cooper, 2013b; Bage, 2010; Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper 2013). Use of historical evidence has a role to play in stimulating a 'sense of awe' (Moore in Cooper, 2017: 75) about the past, and showing children that "the story of the past' is…not predetermined but to be discovered for oneself' (NCCA, 1999c: 76). This fosters the children's curiosity (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2013: 39) and allows them to 'generate ideas and hypotheses' (Solé, 2012: 20) necessary for reconstructing elements of the past.

Despite their benefits, teachers often struggle with 'knowing where to find and select artefacts' (Rigby, 2022: 40). In infant classrooms particularly, with focus on 'family photographs, own clothes worn when younger' (NCCA, 1999b: 18) parents and grandparents

are viewed as a source of historical evidence (NCCA, 1999c; Crawford, 2016; Rigby, 2022; Cooper, 2013b, Hume and Sevier, 1991). Harnett and Whitehouse go further when they state that 'using artefacts that belonged to someone helps children with their historical understanding, as it enables them to personalise their learning' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper 2013: 38). This view is reflected in the IPSC History: Teacher Guidelines (NCCA, 1999c), when they claim, in relation to the teacher sharing evidence from their own childhood, 'the teacher can talk about a limited number of incidents of developments in his/her own life' (NCCA, 1999c: 74), focusing the evidence on a person who the children 'find meaningful' (Cooper, 2018: 615).

Links are also made between historical enquiry using evidence and the idea of dialogic enquiry (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper 2017; Cooper, 2018). Use of evidence encourages children to use language 'to observe, to question, think critically and discuss their ideas with others' (Cooper, 2013b: 35) and to 'pool their information' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017: 34) to understand the past more fully. This focus on development of enquiry skills through oral communication (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017: 33) will be developed in the next section about dialogic teaching.

2.3 Dialogic Teaching

2.3.1 Definitions

The pedagogy of dialogic teaching has 'been presented as the antidote to the prevailing recitative discourse that plagues so many classrooms' (Boyd et al., 2015: 272). Drawing on the works of Vygotsky (1978, 1986) and Freire (1972), 'no single agreed definition of the term 'dialogic teaching'' (Alexander, 2018: 562) has been determined. Ironically, there is consensus that this inconsistency has led to 'lack of coherence…with respect to what it is [and] how it should be implemented' (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019: 71).

Indeed, there are a multitude of terms used to describe similar pedagogical interactions to dialogic teaching. Over the years 'dialogic enquiry' (Wells, 1999; Wells and Arauz, 2006), 'sustained shared thinking' (Siraj-Blatchford, 2009), 'guided participation' (Rogoff et al., 1993) and 'interthinking' (Mercer, 2000: 141) are terms favoured by others. Choice of terminology is important as 'differences…have the potential to create confusion, and make it harder to integrate the work of different researchers (who are often seeking to address the same educational issues)' (Howe and Mercer, 2016: 90). This concern has been mirrored by Alexander (2019) and Calcagni and Lago (2018). This research project adopts Alexander's definition of dialogic teaching: 'a pedagogy of the spoken word that is manifestly distinctive while being grounded in widely accepted evidence and in discourse and assumptions that have much in common' (2018: 562).

2.3.2 Features and Frameworks

Amongst the various conceptions, differences can be seen 'in terms of their adherence to epistemological perspectives on dialogue and the extent of considering different ways of talking' (Guzmán and Larrain, 2021). Kim and Wilkinson (2019) argue that Alexander's (2018) approach is currently most influential, as it shares many features with other approaches. Alexander 'acknowledg[es] the uniqueness of each classroom's personalities and circumstances' (2018: 563) and recognises that teachers are best placed to decide the most suitable approach to DT in their setting.

The DT framework advocated for by Alexander consists of four main components; 'justification, principles, repertoires and indicators' (2018: 564). Each of these components will now be discussed.

Justifications

Justifications in Alexander's framework refers to why talk should be given a central role in classroom pedagogy. He suggests seven justifications; 'communicative, social, cultural, political/civic, psychological, neuroscientific and pedagogical' (Alexander, 2018: 564). Talk plays a pivotal role in my research as within the subject of History, dialogue 'allows children to make deductions and inferences, to speculate, to consider possibilities and accept that there may be no single right answer, to discuss cause and effects…. essential for the development of historical understanding' (Cooper, 2013b: 34).

Principles

The 'principles' element of Alexander's model acts as a 'framework for comparing various pedagogical approaches to classroom talk' (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019: 71). Alexander (2018) argues that DT should be collective, reciprocal, supportive, cumulative and purposeful. The principle of collectivity dictates that teachers and students should address learning tasks together (Alexander, 2018). This is evident in Rogoff et al.'s approach to guided participation in that 'it stressed participation in the sense of shared endeavors' (1993: 6). The idea of dialogue as reciprocal is mirrored by Lyle who believes that dialogue has the 'potential to enable student voice to be accessed and legitimated' (2008: 233). Elements of reciprocity can also be seen in Wells' writing that 'learning does not depend on a one-way flow of knowledge from teacher to students' (1999: 308). Alexander's focus on supportive dialogue allows children to express themselves freely without 'risk of embarrassment over 'wrong' answers' (2018: 566). This is a feature of many dialogic frameworks, such as Houen et al. when they write that 'predetermined answers [are] not expected and discussion [is] encouraged' (2016a: 69) in dialogic classrooms. The cumulative principle refers to participants in dialogue building on 'each other's contributions and

chain[ing] them into coherent lines of thinking and understanding' (2018: 566). Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen (2010) describe the process by which individuals question and modify by the sharing of thoughts, experiences and views, leading to the elaboration of one's own original views. The final principle, that of DT being purposeful, is possibly the hardest to achieve. This principle makes us cognisant of the fact that 'classroom discussion though valuable in itself, is also a means to an educational end' (Alexander, 2018: 566).

Repertoires

The term 'repertoires' (2018: 567) in Alexander's framework refers to 'approaches for organising interaction and engaging in talk' (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019: 72). He elaborates that teachers should utilise a range of talk types, including interactive talk, everyday talk, learning talk, teaching talk, questioning and extending (Alexander, 2018). He professes that although student talk must be the 'ultimate preoccupation', teacher talk creates a space to 'mediate, probe and extend' (Alexander, 2018: 563). His approach 'devotes equal attention to the quality of teacher and student talk' (Alexander, 2018: 563). Wells similarly recognises that teachers are responsible for 'structuring moves…reformulations, requests for elaboration and occasional summaries' (1999: 308).

Lefstein (2006) argues that this method is too idealistic. He favours a more 'pragmatic approach' (Lyle, 2008: 229) acknowledging the impact of power imbalances between and teachers. My research supports Alexander's (2018) view regarding repertoires as I place equal value on student talk and teacher talk, recognising that 'when enquiries are child initiated…learning outcomes are often…more varied and adults may need to prompt, cue or question appropriately' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017: 35).

Indicators

Alexander (2017) includes a list of 61 indicators 'intended to serve a heuristic purpose' (Alexander, 2017: 41) rather than act as a checklist for the implantation of DT. This list of indicators promotes 'higher cognitive functions in students' (Sedova et al., 2014: 275 and 'requires students to think, not just report of someone else's thinking' (Nystrand et al. cited in Alexander 2018: 571).

As pedagogy is weaker without the theory underpinning its effectiveness, theoretical perspectives relevant to DT will now be explored.

2.3.3 Theoretical Perspectives

Vygotsky

DT resonates with Vygotsky's (1978) work, which has influenced 'an increasing body of research that supports the view that talk is key to learning' (Lyle, 2008: 223). Vygotsky's theory acknowledges that 'any learning a child encounters in school always has a previous history' (Vygotsky in Pollard, 2014: 39). Houen et al. (2016a) concur that, in classroom dialogue, educators should build on children's previous knowledge and experiences. Vygotsky (1978) describes the zone of proximal development as 'the distance between the actual developmental level... and the level of potential development as determined through problem solving under adult guidance' (Vygotsky in Pollard, 2014: 40). DT, in its reliance on scaffolding, allows for support to be given during dialogical interaction, facilitating students to complete 'task[s] that the student might otherwise not be able to accomplish' (Van de Pol, 2010: 274). Furthermore, Vygotsky believed that activity must be 'relevant to [the] life' (Vygotsky, 1978: 118) of the child and located in 'a social, cultural and historical context' (Lyle, 2008: 223) much like DT. Aligned with Vygotsky's

dialogic theory, my research aims to focus dialogue on the children's lives and the lives of their families as a means of exploring the Myself strand of the IPSC History (NCCA, 1999b).

Freire

Strong links can be found between DT and Freire's 'liberatory pedagogy' (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019: 72). DT provides teacher and students opportunities for reflection, creating the potential to 'act critically to transform reality' (Shor and Freire, 1987: 13). This resonates with Freire's belief that dialogue cannot 'become a simple exchange of ideas to be "consumed" by the discussants' (1972: 89). Freire's view of dialogue as an 'epistemological position' (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019: 73) is also consistent with the principles of 'collectivity, reciprocity and supportiveness' (Alexander, 2018: 566) common in DT.

There are several key areas where Freire's beliefs of dialogue differ from those of the dominant literature on DT. Significantly, Freire 'eschewed the idea of dialogue as technique' (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019: 73) conflicting with Alexander's notion of dialogue as 'a pedagogy of the spoken word' (2018: 562). Furthermore, Freire rejects the idea of DT encompassing varied types of talk to meet educational ends and instead maintains that DT relies on 'the *absence* of authoritarianism' (Shor and Freire, 1987: 16). As was stated in in relation to Alexander's (2018) view on repertoires within DT, my research is 'balanced between teacher input and child-initiated' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017: 35) enquiry and hence rejects Freire's notion that a 'teacher's presumed authority over knowledge…involved the silencing of students' (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019: 73).

2.3.4 Points of Contention

Given the lack of consensus surrounding definitions of DT, it is unsurprising that points of contention are prevalent. The first conflict within conceptions of DT lies in the

emphasis placed on the role of classroom culture, with more prominence placed in some conceptualisations than others (Kim and Wilkinson, 2019). Wells and Arauz acknowledge the role of classroom culture in creating 'communities in which inquiry would provide the stimulus for dialogue' (2006: 380). The role of culture is also apparent in the principles of collectivity, reciprocity and supportiveness espoused by Alexander, as they 'characterise the classroom culture and pattern of relationships within which dialogue is most likely to prosper' (2018: 566). The emphasis on classroom culture is largely precluded from other conceptualisations.

One further contentious issue is on the nature of what can and cannot be considered DT. Nystrand et al. (1997) hold the view that the existence of communication does not automatically make it dialogic. Sedova et al. agree that not 'all communication is dialogical' (2014: 275). They clarify that 'if the teacher steers the dialogue to a previously defined end point' (Sedova et al., 2014: 275) then it is contradictory to dialogic education. Here we see a conflict with Alexander's (2018) notion of purposive dialogue which stipulates that specific learning goals should be planned to meet an educational goal. This relates to one of the barriers of using the DT pedagogy which will be explored in the next section.

2.3.5 Benefits and Barriers

Benefits

Research indicates multiple benefits of engaging in DT in classrooms. Kim and Wilkinson mention benefits to children's 'content knowledge, comprehension, and reasoning' (2019: 71) while Alexander notes that the evidence to support to use of DT stems from 'psycholinguistic, sociolinguistic, philosophical [and] pedagogical' (2018: 562) strands. Three key benefits include cognitive development, child-centred learning and agency.

The link between language and cognitive development has long been explored because of Vygotsky's belief in 'language as the driving force behind cognitive development' (Lyle, 2008: 223. Alexander (2018) notes that psychological research, supported by neuroscience, validates the relationship between language, thought and the resulting development in cognitive development. Kim and Wilkinson attest to the central role of language in 'connecting teaching, learning and cognitive development' (2019: 70).

In line with current best practice, DT is child-centred, allowing children to have 'agency in the learning experience' (NCCA, 2020b: 22). DT affords children 'decision-making opportunities through which they can influence their worlds' (Houen et al., 2016b: 262) and recognises them as 'legitimized and authorized individuals' (Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen, 2010: 150) who have some control over their learning. This benefits not only the children but teachers too. Through engaging in 'unfolding sequences of talk' (Houen et al., 2016b: 262) teachers learn what children think and the ways in which they learn, enabling them to scaffold more effectively and plan lessons and activities which are more 'personally meaningful' (Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen, 2010: 15). This is a benefit for both teaching and learning using this approach.

Barriers

Despite the appeal of DT, literature suggest that teachers experience limited success in its classroom realisation. One reason for this could be insufficient literature detailing classroom strategies for facilitating DT (Muhonen et al., 2016). Two further complications arise in dialogic classrooms; power relations and curriculum pressure.

DT is the antithesis of monologic teaching, a form of teaching which 'precludes genuine dialogue' and 'focuses power on the teacher' (Lyle, 2008: 225). This shift in power focus can be difficult for teachers to navigate as it challenges the 'asymmetrical, pre-existing

and historically constructed power relations' (Guzmán and Larrain, 2021) which exist in many classrooms. Within a dialogic classroom, teachers are positioned in a 'double role' (Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen, 2010: 150), maintaining classroom order rather than replacing it with an 'untenable child-led' (Houen et al., 2016b: 262) order. They must facilitate, monitor and scaffold the unfolding discussion whilst simultaneously being active participants in the enquiry. In answering my research question this balance was achieved through the sharing of historical evidence from my past to focus children's attention, act as a 'useful starting point' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper 2017: 37) for children's enquiry and keep children on task through visual reminders and tactile reminders of the topic being explored.

A second issue is curriculum pressure. In interviews carried out by Sedova et al. (2014) teachers claimed that it was not possible to regularly participate in DT in the classroom as this pedagogy could not guarantee the intended subject matter would be covered. Although Alexander's (2018) model specifies that DT should be purposeful and have specific end goals intended, it is also true that a guiding principle of dialogic teaching is that it should 'facilitate open-ended participatory engagement' (Siry et al., 2016: 15). Siry et al. have named this barrier the 'dance of agency and structure' (2016: 16), a view mirrored by Houen et al. in their discussion of 'choreograph[ing] agency within the bounds of classroom life' (2016b: 262). Curriculum reform is necessary for teachers to have the scope to allow 'children's questions to play a more generative role' (Wells, 1999: 293) in planning and realisation of dialogic teaching and perhaps, the reform suggested in the draft curriculum will facilitate this in infant classes.

2.4 Agency

2.4.1 Definitions of Agency

The concept of agency has received much attention in recent years, nationally and internationally. The Draft Primary Curriculum Framework (NCCA, 2020b) 'acknowledge[s] the importance of teachers' agency' (Biesta et al., 2015: 624) and places greater emphasis on children's agency. Definitions of agency are numerous. In basic terms, human agency can be understood as 'the freedom to make choices about what one does and accepting responsibilities for doing so' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 28) or the 'ability to exert control over and give direction to one's life' (Biesta and Tedder, 2007: 135). These definitions are criticised for being overly simplistic. It is suggested that agency be viewed as 'a family of concepts' (Matusov et al., 2016: 421) rather than a singular construct. In their seminal paper, Emirbayar and Mische (1998) define agency as:

'*the temporally constructed engagement by actors of different structural environments – the temporally relational contexts of action – which, through the interplay of habit, imagination, and judgement both reproduces and transforms those structures in interactive response to the problems posed by changing historical situations'* (Emirbayar and Mische, 1998: 970).

Biesta and Tedder concur with the historical aspect of this definition, stating that 'agency is always located between the past and future' (2007: 136). In this way it is 'motivated' (Biesta and Tedder, 2007: 136) action with the intention of bringing about a future which differs from the past and present.

2.4.2 Children's Agency

Children's agency, associated with child-centred pedagogy, focuses on including children's initiatives and viewing children as active participants in their education (Sairanen

et al., 2020; Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen, 2010; Houen et al., 2016b; Hayes et al., 2017). It may be defined as children's 'autonomy, competence, rational capability and independence' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64) in influencing their lives. The socio-cultural perspective of agency is seen in much of the literature with many definitions incorporating context and relationships (Kajamaa and Kumpulainen, 2019; Poulton, 2020). This connects with Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological model of human development, as children's agency is viewed as being 'influenced by the cultural context in which [it] arise[s]' (Hayes et al., 2017: 84).

The transformative potential of agency is another common thread in the research. Kajamaa and Kumpulainen view agency as 'the capacity of people to act upon, influence and transform their activities [and] circumstances' (2019: 267), while Sairanen et al. note that agency 'creates opportunities for children not only to copy or repeat…but also to transform' (2020: 2). This view of children as 'knowledge-builder[s]' rather than 'knowledge-receiver[s]' (Sairanen et al., 2020: 5) echoes Freire's (1972) discussion surrounding the banking model of education. It views children not as 'adults-in-the -making…not yet having full human status' (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 1) but rather as directors of their own learning journeys and as leaders for mediating personal and social change (Kajamaa and Kumpulainen, 2019).

Sairanen et al. (2020) claim that practitioners must listen and respond to children appropriately to facilitate agency. However, the 'negotiation of children's agency' (Sairanen et al., 2020: 9) through democratic classroom dialogue presents challenges. As practitioners must consider appropriate responses to children's initiations, conversations become 'constructed exchange[s]' (Houen et al., 2016b: 272). Teachers must make 'constant pedagogical decisions' (Sairanen et al., 2020: 10) as conversations unfold which cannot be preplanned. Power-relations also play a role in affording children agency, as educators must

intentionally allow children to have some control over learning situations, giving over some of their power (Houen et al., 2016b; Siry et al., 2016; Sairanen et al., 2020).

Some academics caution against the risks of affording agency to young children. Cavazzoni et al. warn that adults need to 'acknowledge the ways in which children's agency can increase their own vulnerability' (2021: 8). This is caution is mirrored in the question of 'what *kind* of agency is deemed appropriate for children' (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012: 368). Both concerns point to the importance of educators deliberately considering 'ways in which – and reasons why – children…exercise their agency' (Cavazzoni et al., 2021: 2) and creating classrooms cultures which support safe spaces for children to enact agency.

2.4.3 Parental Agency

As per the literature, consideration of educational partnerships is a prerequisite for examination of parental agency. Rautamies et al. define educational partnerships as 'mutually supportive interactions between families and professionals focused on meeting the needs of children and families' (2019: 896). Similarly, Epstein (1995) uses the phrase 'school, family and community partnership' (Epstein and Sheldon cited in Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 401) as this emphasises the shared responsibility for children's learning. Goodall and Montgomery (2014) are keen to distinguish between parental involvement and parental engagement. They focus on a continuum from 'parental involvement with schools, and parental engagement with children's learning' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 399). They argue, parental engagement comprises of greater levels of commitment and increased ownership over action when compared with parental involvement (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014). There is consensus among academics that collaboration between parents and educators creates the best opportunities for children to flourish educationally (Campbell et al., 2016; Rautamies et al., 2019; Koskela, 2021; Thompson et al., 2007).

Campbell et al. go further by stating that parent-school partnerships lead to 'enhanced wellbeing, greater social inclusion and the alleviation of disadvantage for the whole family' (2016: 109).

Barriers to parental engagement cannot be overlooked. Socio-economic factors preclude many parents from engaging with schooling (Harris and Goodall, 2008; Vincent, 2001; Goodall, 2018; Kao and Rutherford, 2007). This view is corroborated by Hannon and O'Donnell who claim that 'parents who live in disadvantaged communities are less likely to be involved in family-school partnerships than middle-class parents' (2022: 242). Goodall and Montgomery (2014) state that difficulties with engagement does not imply a lack of desire to be involved in children's education, with Harris and Goodall adding that 'schools rather than parents are 'hard to reach'' (2008: 227) and can be inconsiderate of parents' schedules and commitments (Campbell et al., 2016; Hannon and O'Donnell, 2022). Others believe that parental agency is a 'prerequisite for, a successful educational partnership' (Rautamies et al., 2019: 896) and could therefore be viewed as a method for overcoming some of the barriers to engagement. Harris and Goodall state that 'parents will get involved if they feel they have the capacity to contribute' (2008: 281) and if they feel positively about 'the school wanting them to be involved' (Campbell et al., 2016: 110). In the context of this study, it is 'difficult to understand agency without taking into account the…social environment, and personal life' (Koskela, 2021: 3) of the parents involved in my interventions. Parents' experiences of school may lead them to 'struggle to establish a positive and active role for themselves' (Koskela, 2021: 3) within a school context. Focusing parental engagement on the lives of their children and family, 'widening what counts as competences when participating' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 660)' was viewed a method of engaging more parents during this research project.

To increase parental engagement and consequently parental agency, Goodall and Montgomery's (2018) continuum is useful. The continuum has three points along it, each

point having implications for both parental and school agency. The first point, 'parental involvement with the school' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 402) is characterised by agency being held by the school in that 'information is given to parents but not sought' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 402). The second point, 'parental involvement with schooling' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 404), 'aims to recognize and exchange 'funds of knowledge' between teachers, parents and children' (Hughes and Greenhough, 2006: 471). This is an important stage as every positive interchange serves to 'increase trust and build stronger relationships' (Graham-Clay, 2005: 124) through inclusion of a 'wide range of parental practices, taking place both as home and in school, to facilitate the development pf children' (Tao et al., 2019: 637). The final point is 'parental engagement with children's learning' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 415). This represents the point when parents have the greatest degree of agency, for although activities, such as homework, may be provided by the school, 'choice of action and involvement remain with the parent' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 405).

Harris and Goodall believe that when parents experience greater degrees of agency, it shapes their views of 'what they feel is important... necessary or even permissible for them to do' (2008, 280) in relation to their children's education. Consideration of Goodall and Montgomery's (2014) continuum has been imperative in the design of this study. To achieve parental engagement, a 'context-specific, customised approach' (Campbell et al., 2016: 110) drawing on a range of influences has been considered. The influence of Family Portfolios and Fund of Knowledge are particularly pertinent to this study and will be discussed in the next sections.

2.5 Family Portfolios – Books About Us

The Continuum of Assessment (NCCA, 2007) places portfolio assessment in the domain of child-led assessment. A portfolio is described as a collection of a child's work

which reflects his/her learning and development over time (NCCA, 2007; Hanson and Gilkerson, 1999). Portfolios may include drawing samples, photographs, writing samples, diagrams, projects, voice recordings and many other examples of activities completed in school (NCCA 2007; Hanson and Gilkerson, 1999). As children are actively involved in creating their portfolios, they can be a 'fun, exciting, and …concrete' (Hanson and Gilkerson, 1999: 82) assessment tool. However, considering Bronfenbrenner's (1986) ecological model of human development, it is important to regard children's development within a 'wider sociocultural context' (Hayes et al., 2017: 5), necessitating exploration of influences such as 'interaction with parents, grandparents, siblings [and] neighbourhood' (Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000: 198). They suggest that portfolios should be expanded 'into a larger, more complete concept of a "family portfolio"' (Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000: 198). Appl et al., use the term 'parent-child portfolios' (2014: 191), while 'Family Assessment Portfolios' (2007: 19) is favoured by Thompson et al. to describe similar methods of documenting children's development in a family-centred approach. Involving both parents and children in the creation of family portfolios affords practitioners a greater understanding of children's 'exosystem[s] and macrosystem[s]' (Hayes et al., 2017: 16), particularly with regard children's home culture and family make-up. Family portfolios provide families with opportunities to share stories about learning, experiences and their lives (Appl et al., 2014). The story aspect of these family portfolios is significant as stories are told to help us 'understand what has happened to us and to create meaning from those experiences' (Appl et al., 2014: 39). This feature is also motivational for children as they have the chance to create, with their families, 'books that are about us' (Appl et al., 2014: 201).

Another noteworthy benefit of using family portfolios is their role in building relationships between families and schools (McKernan et al., 2020; Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000; Thompson et al., 2007). They act as a form of correspondence between home and school, which plays a role in on-going and authentic relationship building (McKernan et al.,

2020). This aligns with Goodall and Montgomery's 'parental involvement with schooling' (2014: 404) stage as previously outlined. Children are actively involved in building these relationships between home and school therefore, their agency is not undermined in the process (McKernan et al., 2020).

Despite the benefits of using family portfolios, obstacles in their implementation exist. In planning for family portfolios teachers need to consider the busy nature of family lives and the possibility that portfolios may be viewed as an unnecessary additional task (Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000). Moreover, parental levels of involvement in the portfolio project may vary along with levels of comfort in sharing pictures, stories and photographs (Appl et al., 2014; Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000). This links with the barriers to parental engagement mentioned in section 2.4.3. Teachers need to ensure that any information or documentation requested for the family portfolio is 'nonintrusive yet informative' (Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000: 198). This requires the building of relationships and is 'a process requiring good faith efforts over time' (Thompson et al., 2007: 19).

2.6 Funds of Knowledge Projects

Funds of Knowledge Projects (Jovés et al., 2015; Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019, Väyrynen and Paksuniemi, 2020: 156) challenge traditional ways in which schools impart knowledge to students' (Breault and Lack, 2009: 156). These projects began in Arizona (Jovés et al., 2015) and are based on the principle that 'all students and families are valuable and accumulate knowledge, skills and cultural resources' (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019: 2) to be used in the classroom. These successful projects take 'the idea of community beyond the walls of the school and actively seek relationships with the learner's families' (Väyrynen and Paksuniemi, 2020: 156) to facilitate 'culture-based teaching' (Jovés et al., 2015: 70). To achieve this, teachers visit the homes of some of their students (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2005; Jovés et al., 2015), 'detecting the families' funds of knowledge in order to link their

curriculum contests with the experiences, skills and local knowledge of students' (Jovés et al., 2015: 69).

By incorporating funds of knowledge into the curriculum, many benefits have been noted (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019). Significantly, through developing 'innovations in teaching that draw on the knowledge and skills found in local households' (Moll et al., in González et al., 2005: 71) children's academic performance is said to improve (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019). Performance is improved by focusing on 'using students' knowledge and prior experience as a scaffold for new learning' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 135), linking with Froebel's child-centred pedagogy (Bruce, 2019). Family-school relationships were also enhanced by working with families, 'combating stereotypes and prejudices' (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019: 3).

Connection can be made between agency and incorporating 'funds of knowledge' (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 1) into the classroom. By recognising and celebrating cultural diversity (Jovés et al., 2015), parents 'authenticate their skills as worthy of pedagogical notice' (González in González et al., 2005: 42). This enables them to 'exercise their voice over education issues' (Vincent, 2001: 360), empowering them with agency so they 'feel they have the capacity to contribute' (Harris and Goodall, 2008: 281).

For students, working with a teacher who takes time to 'understand and connect to [their] daily cultural experiences' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 656) provides opportunities to intentionally become involved in classroom activities (Kajamaa and Kumpulainen, 2019). This positions children as 'actors and authors of their learning' (Kajamaa and Kumpulainen, 2019: 267) and allows them to transform their learning experiences (Sairanen et al., 2020).

Although there are clear benefits to gaining 'firsthand knowledge of our students and their families' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 132), certain constraints emerge from the

literature. The biggest challenge in implementing a Funds of Knowledge project is that due to the time required to 'visit some of their students' households' (Jovés et al., 2015: 69), teachers can only 'focus on a limited number of students and their families' (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019: 3). This is a particular barrier to teachers, who, like me, appreciate the value of inclusive teaching practices promoted by Kozleski and Waitoller (2010).

A second limitation of such a project is the 'lack of specific focus on the learner while so much attention is on the families and their knowledge and abilities' (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019: 3). Although the talking with families helps practitioners to 'gain insight into children's world's (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 2), there is a risk that too much focus on families will result in too little attention being paid to the experiences and competencies of the children themselves (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021). As the aim of this research project is to focus the Myself strand of the History curriculum on children's lives, this limitation raised the question of whether such a project was appropriate for exploring my concern.

However, the literature surrounding these projects prompts educators to question how they can 'make use of these funds of knowledge in their teaching' (Moll et al., in González et al., 2005: 75). Consideration of this question influenced me to think of ways of incorporating the funds of knowledge of families to answer my research question regarding the teaching of the Myself strand in Junior Infant History. Replacing home visits with inviting parents into school meets the objective of allowing teachers and parents 'become real people to each other rather than shadow figures occupying…different niches' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 139). Similarly, designing activities aimed at incorporating the prior knowledge of students and families, 'widening what counts and competences' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 660), leads to many of the same benefits as a 'Funds of Knowledge project' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 135).

2.7 Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this chapter highlights the importance of employing child-centred teaching methodologies to teach History and explore the Myself strand of the IPSC History (NCCA, 1999b). The dialogic teaching pedagogy is student-centred, empowering for children and therefore a suitable methodology for History lessons with Junior Infants who are not yet competent at reading or writing. The literature emphasised the opportunities created for children to act agentically when such a pedagogy is used. Opportunities for collaboration between school and home and the benefits for children of such cooperation were also explored through the examination of the work of many academics. The implementation of family portfolios and funds of knowledge projects can foster agency in children and parents as well as acting as a tool for community relationship building for the benefit of children. The use of dialogic teaching, family portfolios and funds of knowledge to explore my research question will be discussed further in the next chapter.

Chapter 3: Methodology

3.1 Introduction

This chapter makes visible the influence the research aim had on the research design and choice of methodology (Cohen et al., 2018). The methodology and aspects of the research design were evaluated for their suitability to answer my research question: *How can I teach the 'Myself' strand in Junior Infant History so that it is focused on the children's lives?*. Discussion surrounding paradigms illuminates why self-study action research was chosen as the research methodology. The self-study action research methodology is outlined, as are methods used in the research design, data collection and data analysis. Given my 'ethical obligation' (Maynooth University, 2020: 12) towards all people impacted by my research, ethical considerations and how they have been addressed are explained. Finally, methods for ensuring the validity, reliability and credibility of this study are discussed.

3.2 Research Approach

3.2.1 Research Paradigm

Research paradigms are 'ways of looking at the world, different assumptions about what the world is like and how we can understand or know about it' (Cohen et al., 2018: 8). They comprise of 'ontology, epistemology, methodology, and, methods' (Scotland, 2012: 9). Three major research paradigms have come to prominence; scientific, interpretive, and critical' (Scotland, 2012: 9). Each paradigm developed in response to events 'at its own point in history, incorporating its own set of philosophical assumptions and cultural norms' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 18). Educational research, 'has absorbed several competing views of the social sciences' (Cohen et al., 2018: 8).

The 'post-positivist' (Cohen et al., 2018: 23) interpretive and critical paradigms most closely align with my values. The interpretive paradigm is concerned with 'understanding

and becoming educated about human experience and the social world' (Kemmis, 2012: 892), while the critical paradigm focuses on the role of language in power relations (Scotland, 2012). My research falls partially within the interpretive paradigm due to the concentration on 'individual constructs [being] elicited and understood through interaction between researchers and participants…with participants being relied on as much as possible' (Scotland, 2012: 12). Similarly, my research is partially located in the critical paradigm due to the emphasis on language and 'dialogic teaching' (Alexander, 2018: 562). Furthermore, the fact that the research question came about through 'interrogating values and assumptions' (Scotland, 2012: 13) aligns it with the critical paradigm and lead to an examination of the action research methodology.

3.2.2 Action Research

Action research challenges the positivist view that 'research must remain objective and value-free' (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 11). Rather, this approach requires the researcher to 'articulate [their] values, which come to act as the basis for [their] enquiry' (McNiff, 2014: 53). It originates from the "Teacher as Researcher' movement headed by Lawrence Stenhouse' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 27) with a desire 'to enhance, change or improve practice, not just to study it' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 17). Adopting an 'anti-positivist stance' (Hitchcock and Hughes, 1995: 29), action research is 'a small-scale intervention in the functioning of the real world and a close examination of the effects of such an intervention' (Cohen and Manion, 1980: 174).

In the dynamic and changing field of education, Elliott (2015) notes the obligation teachers now face to conduct action research within their settings. He presents teachers with a dilemma; we 'hand responsibility for change over to policy-makers and educational managers' or create the space for 'gathering evidence from different points of view' (Elliott, 2015: 19) to improve practice. This demonstrates the connection between action research

and teacher agency as it is 'linked to the intention to bring about a future that is different from the present and the past' (Biesta and Tedder, 2007: 136). Whilst interested in improvements in practice, the guiding principle of my research is 'deep reflection that leads to individual growth' (Anderson et al., 2007: 31). The focus on personal and professional self-improvement led to the selection of 'a form of action research…called self-study' (Anderson et al., 2007: 31) for this research project.

3.2.3 Self-Study Action Research

Self-study action research is about 'me studying my practice, with a view to improving it – and my understanding of it – and then making that process visible for others' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 16). Stenhouse (1975) describes it as 'the commitment to systematic questioning of one's own teaching as a basis for development' (Stenhouse in Pollard, 2014: 73). Although the focus on my practice necessitates use of the word 'I', it is important to remember that 'the research is not about 'me' so much as 'us'' (McNiff, 2014: 54). My ontological stance has led to a desire to study myself in relation to others (McNiff, 2014) leading to my choice to complete the self-study form of action research.

Although focused on enhancing practice, I do not view self-study action research as a panacea for all challenges in education. The tension between relevance and rigour, between the self and the practice (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015; Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001) are limitations to this paradigm. If I produced a 'solipsistic self-study' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 519), focused on an egocentric concern, it may become 'the study *of* the self *by* the self and *for* the self' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 519). This limits the opportunity for promulgation of my research that McDonagh et al. (2020) claim is central to this approach. A more generalisable concern, risks emerging 'without [the] benefits from [my] efforts' (Vanassche and Kelchtermans, 2015: 519) as I have 'turn[ed] self-study into traditional research' (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001: 15). Equilibrium between relevance and

rigour, between ‘self in relation to practice and the others who share the practice setting’ (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001: 15) was therefore a challenge I had to navigate during this study.

3.3 Research Design

3.3.1 Research Sample and Setting

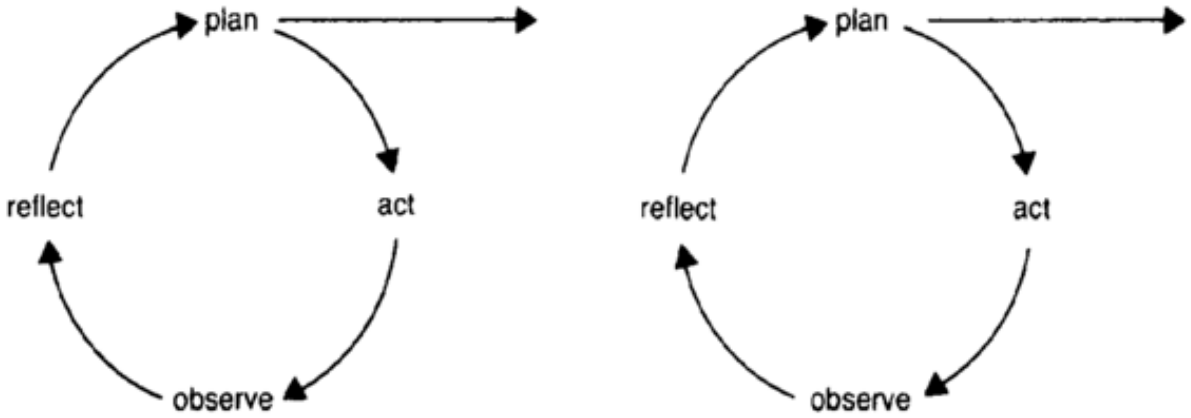
This research was conducted in a multi-grade Junior and Senior Infants in an urban, DEIS school. As this research largely drew on qualitative data collection ‘the sample size [was]… small’ (Cohen et al., 2018: 204). Purposive sampling was employed to reduce the sample size, deliberately selecting children to ‘include in or exclude from the sample’ (Cohen et al., 2018: 214). Sixteen children in Junior Infants and their parents were invited to partake in the research project. The eight children in Senior Infants were excluded from the study.

Convenience sampling also played a role in the sampling process. A multi-grade Junior and Senior Infants was assigned to me by the school principal in September. I have therefore chosen ‘the sample from those whom [I have] easy access’ (Cohen et al., 2018: 218).

3.3.2 Research Schedule

My research schedule included two ‘cycles of planning, acting, observing and reflecting…extended into ongoing action-reflection cycles’ (McNiff and Whitehead, 2013: 56) (see figure 3.1).

Figure 3.1: Action Research Cycles (McNiff and Whitehead, 2013)

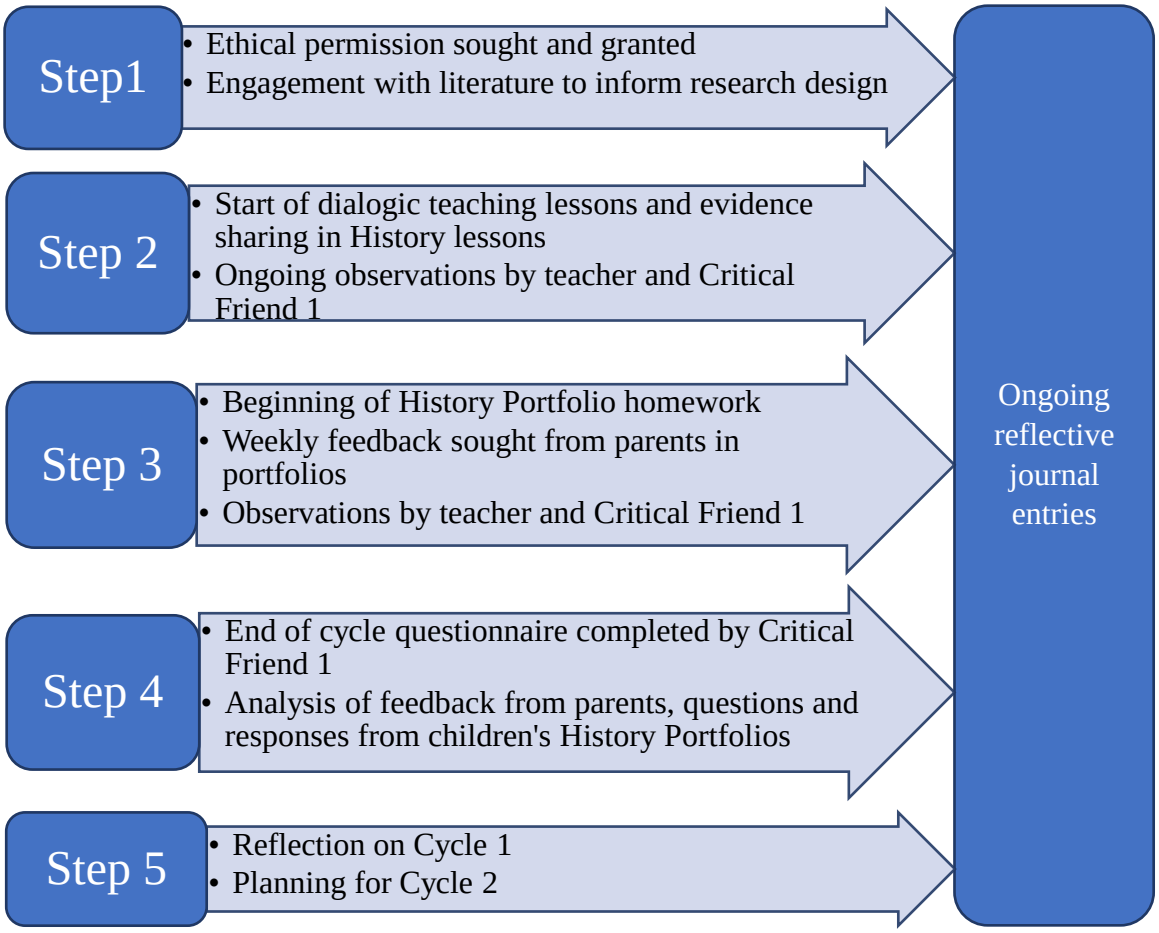


During Cycle 1, a History Portfolio was created with each child and used over six weeks. What began as a classroom History Portfolio was expanded into 'a larger, more complete concept of a 'family portfolio' (Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000: 198) when it was sent home for homework. In class the children engaged in 'dialogic teaching' (Alexander, 2018: 562) History lessons. During lessons sources of historical evidence (photographs and artefacts from the children's lives, from my childhood and my parents' childhoods) were shared as a means of 'engaging children's interest' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017: 31) and to provide 'scaffolding for children's emergent language' (Hadley et al., 2021: 3). Dialogic lessons created space for "wondering' – playing with thoughts, ideas, opinions' (Houen et al., 2016a: 75) about the past. The 'questions for investigation' (Siry et al., 2016: 15) generated by the children about their personal or family history were recorded in their History Portfolios. When the portfolio was sent home, children explored these questions with parents. Children recorded the answers pictorially with parents writing brief explanations underneath. Children's History Portfolios allowed me to embrace families' 'funds of knowledge' (Jovés et al., 2015: 68) and to bring into the classroom the 'lived experiences of [my] students' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 132).

Each week a brief questionnaire for parents, focusing on the activity completed for homework was included (see Appendix Q). At the end of the six-week intervention,

children's questions and responses in History Portfolios were inspected, a questionnaire was completed by Critical Friend 1 (see Appendix O), feedback from parents in History Portfolios was critically examined and conversations took place with all Critical Friends to plan Cycle 2 of the research (see figure 3.2)

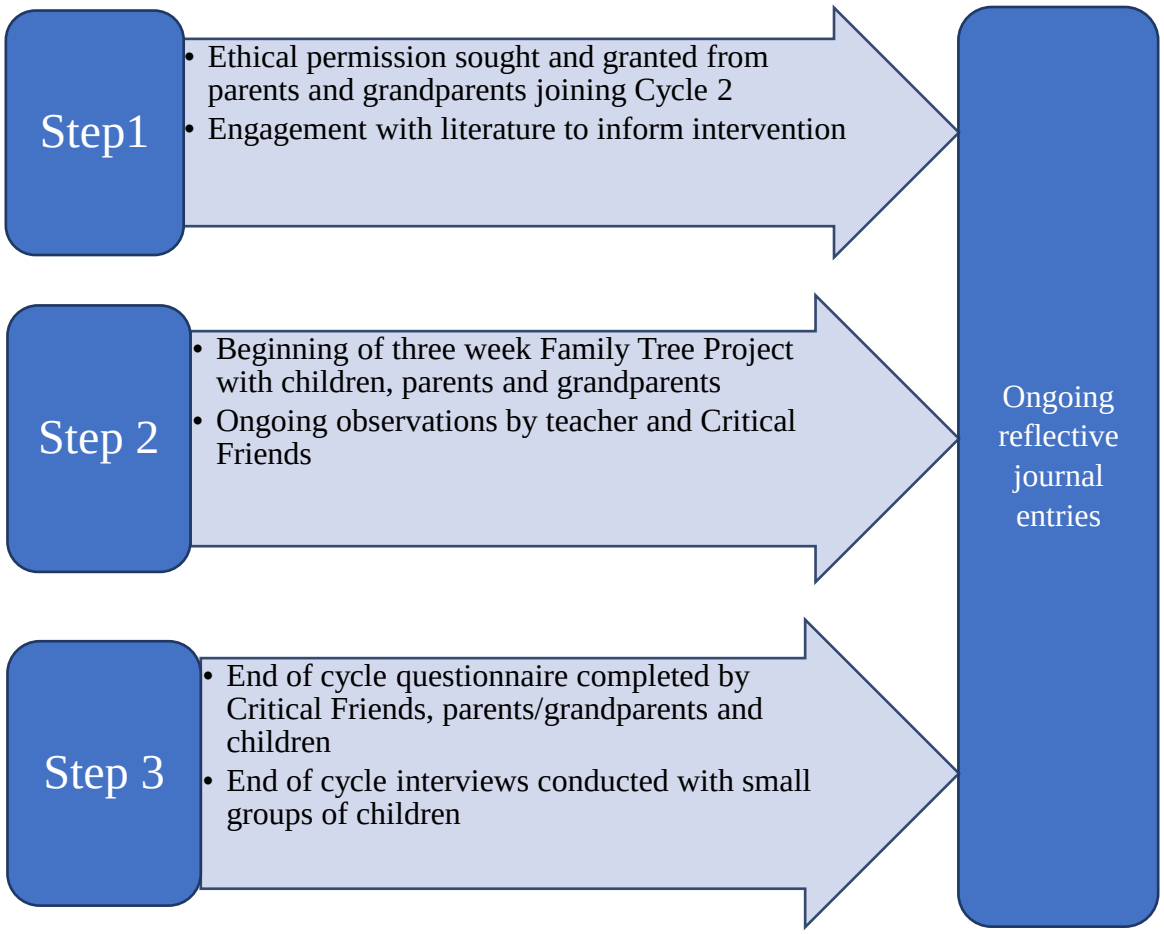
Figure 3.2: Research Schedule for Cycle 1



Cycle 2 involved inviting families into school to work on an art-based Family Tree Project over three weeks. This project aimed to celebrate 'the range and diversity of family groups' (Hume and Sevier, 1991: 17) and ensure that children had the experts on their families present to answer questions that arose as they created their family trees. This approach afforded children agency, as I withdrew 'from total control in [the] pedagogical situation' (Sairanen et al., 2020: 3) as they worked. By designing the project in such a way

that individual help was needed from parents, I provided 'an incentive for participation' (Hensley in González et al., 2005: 150), adding to parental agency as they were viewed as 'a resource…in terms of supporting' (Koskela, 2021: 2) their child (see figure 3.3).

Figure 3.3: Research Schedule for Cycle 2



3.4 Data

3.4.1 Data Collection

Qualitative collection methods were used due to their suitability in generating evidence in cases that 'resist standardization' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 74). By its nature self-study action research is intertwined with 'personal and professional beliefs and actions' (Anderson et al., 2007: 32), making data collection using quantitative methods challenging.

Therefore, despite my personal predilection for quantifiable data, deciding on qualitative methods was 'not a matter of preference, arbitrary or automatic decision making' but rather 'a deliberate process in which the key [was] the application of the notion of *fitness for purpose'* (Cohen et al., 2018: 469).

My reflective journal offered a 'window into [my] own pedagogical thoughts and actions' (Loughran, 2006: 85). This journal was used consistently so that I developed a 'habit of constantly trying to identify, and check, the assumptions that inform [my] actions' (Brookfield, 2017: 5). In this way my journal made my 'values and assumptions open to scrutiny, not as an attempt to control bias, but to make it visible' (Ortlipp, 2008: 698) to me when I looked reflexively at my journal. This aligned the use of a reflective journal with the reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019) approach that will be outlined in Chapter 4.

The literature cautions about the dangers of reflection becoming overly simplified (Thompson and Thompson, 2008; Fook et al. in White et al., 2006; Thompson and Pascal, 2012) due to the subject being 'taken for granted (Fook et al. in White et al., 2006: 3). To achieve critical reflection, practitioners must be reflexive, that is 'not simply to think, but to reflect as a mirror does' (Thompson and Pascal, 2012: 319). We must reflect on our practice in 'specific ways and as part of a broader process' (Thompson and Thompson, 2008: 6). Through application of Brookfield's (2017) lenses of critical reflection, 'integrating theory and practice' (Thompson and Pascal, 2012: 311) informed the reflective process.

Varied work samples from the children's portfolios were used, including homework carried out with parents, to overcome the issue of documenting only what is seen from 'the very narrow perspective limited by our classroom walls' (Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000: 198). The parental questionnaires within the portfolios acted as an 'ongoing venue for parents and children to share stories about their learning experiences' (Appl et al., 2014: 198). Making

it explicit that parents may opt in or out of completing these questions, acknowledged the busy schedules of parents and that 'what works for some parents may not work for others' (Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000: 198). Data collected from portfolios 'not only monitor[ed] children's progress, but also inform[ed] instructional planning' (Appl et al., 2014: 193) for the next phase of the research.

Teacher observations during dialogic teaching lessons also informed future cycles. This data collection tool was appropriate as in 'dialogic classrooms predetermined answers [are] not expected and discussion [is] encouraged' (Houen et al., 2016a: 69). During these lessons observation provided 'first-hand, 'live' data' including 'rich contextual information' (Cohen et al., 2018: 542).

The observations of Critical Friends, present during dialogic teaching lessons and the Family Tree Project, were gleaned through questionnaires (see Appendix P). This data collection tool ensured that the focus of my research was 'still on task and on the right track' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 111). At the post-intervention phase, questionnaires were also carried out with parents/grandparents (see Appendix N) and a simpler version conducted with the children (see Appendix M). Interviews were also carried out with small groups of children (see appendix L) at this stage and transcribed for analysis. These empowered me 'to consider alternatives that are informed by first-hand accounts of learning from a child's perspective, rather than the approximations of adults, steeped in their own pre-constructed beliefs' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 65). By offering children a choice I acknowledged that some may favour the 'anonymity of a questionnaire' (Cohen et al., 2018: 489) while others might prefer the opportunity to 'express how they regard situations from their own point of view' (Cohen et al., 2018: 506).

Two meetings with my validation group took place during this research. Prior to conducting my research, I met with my validation group and sought their feedback on my

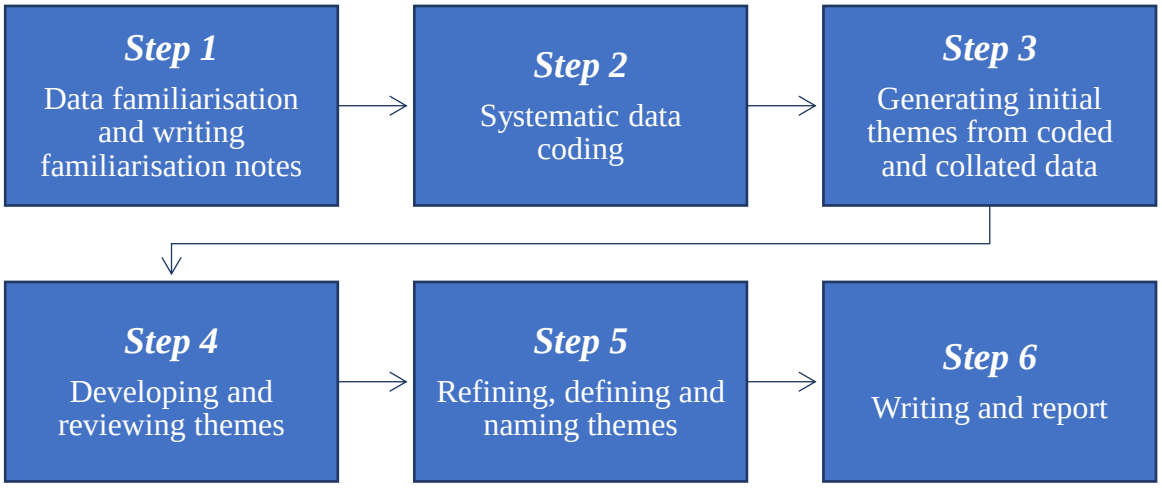
research design. This allowed me to either ‘proceed with [my] research or perhaps to reconsider certain elements and go back and take appropriate action’ (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 197). When I had a claim to knowledge after the data analysis phase we met again as a ‘debriefing group’ (Sullivan et al., 2016: 106) to ‘test the validity of [my] claims against the critical feedback of others’ (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 22).

3.4.2 Data Analysis

Analysis of qualitative data is ‘not straightforward’ (Cohen et al., 2018: 643). Despite the complexities, meticulous analysis of data is required to ‘yield meaningful and useful results’ (Nowell et al., 2017: 1). The process of data analysis involves ‘organizing, describing, understanding, accounting for, and explaining data, making sense of data in terms of the participants’ definitions of the situation…noting patterns [and] themes’ (Cohen et al., 2018: 643).

The method of analysis selected for this study was reflexive thematic analysis, a method that involves ‘immersions in the data, reading, reflecting, questioning, imagining, wondering, writing, retreating [and] returning’ (Braun and Clarke, 2020: 332). Nowell et al. advocate for this method as it ‘provides the core skills for conducting many other forms of qualitative analysis’ (2017: 2). I employed Braun and Clarke’s (2019) six phase model of reflexive thematic analysis for the purpose of this study (see figure 3.4). This method is explained in greater detail in Chapter 4.

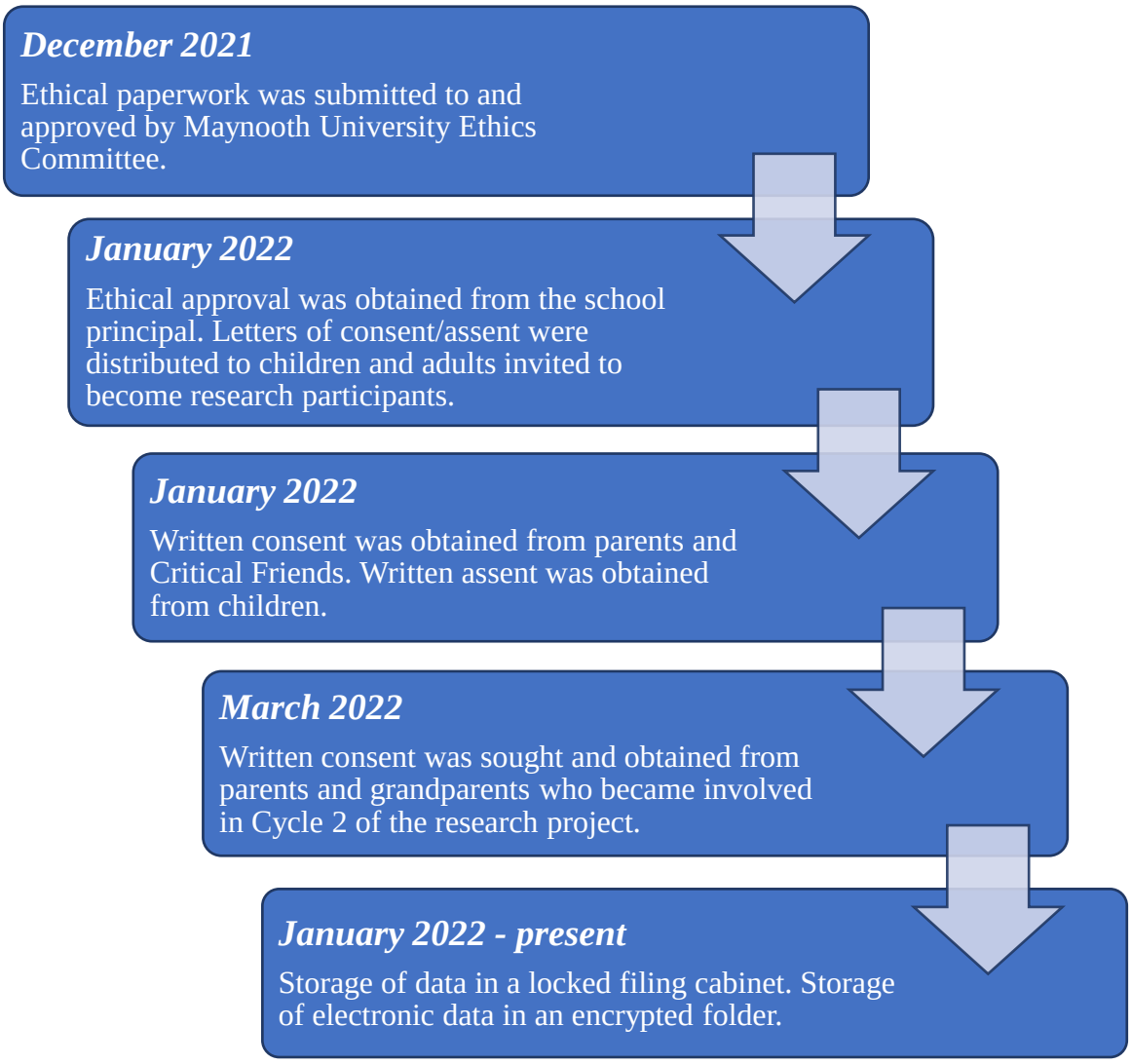
Figure 3.4: Braun and Clarke's (2019) Six Phases of Reflexive Thematic Analysis



3.5 Ethical Considerations

Given that action research is an 'ethical professional enterprise' (Mockler and Groundwater-Smith, 2015: 603), ethical tensions were examined. As this research project involved children, attention was given to informed consent and power dynamics (Dockett et al., 2009). Figure 3.5 illustrates how 'ethical conduct was assured' (McNiff, 2014: 53) prior to and during the research process.

Figure 3.5: Ethical Approval Process



3.5.1 Research Involving Children

As children are identified as a 'vulnerable group' (Farrimond in Wyse et al., 2017: 73), my research adhered strictly to UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, Maynooth University Policy for Child Welfare, Children's First Guidelines, General Data Protection Regulations, my school's Child Protection Policy and Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Policy. Anonymity of participants was upheld by assigning numbers to participants and blanking out names and identifying features on work samples and data collected.

3.5.2 Informed Consent

When planning my research, a key concern was 'what constitutes informed consent in research with young children?' (Dockett et al., 2009: 286). Although legally it is necessary only to have written permission from a parent/guardian (Dockett et al., 2009), The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (1989) highlight the 'importance of involving children in decisions that may affect them' (Cohen et al., 2018: 122). Similarly, Maynooth University Research Ethics Policy states that 'young people should be given the right to informed consent in a manner suited to their age, maturity and competence' (MU, 2020: 15). Therefore, after written consent was sought from parents/grandparents/guardians for the participation of their child (see Appendices E and F), written assent, 'a more appropriate mechanism to assess agreement with younger children' (Farrimond, 2016 in Wyse et al., 2017: 80), was sought from the children after an explanation of their role within the research (see Appendix G). Parents/Grandparents/Guardians gave consent for their own participation separately. Additional permissions were sought from parents/grandparents prior to Cycle 2, as some of these adults were not involved in Cycle 1. All participants were made aware of their right to decline to participate or to 'withdraw from the research without negative consequences' (MU, 2020: 14).

3.5.3 Power Dynamics

Although seeking permissions is important, 'ethics in self-study action research is not just about getting permission' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 44). In schools, 'adults hold a powerful position in relation to children' (Powell et al., 2012: 19). Without acknowledgement, children in my class may have felt pressurised to be part of my research or 'to give the correct answers to research questions' (Powell et al., 2012: 19). Self-study action research addressed this ethical issue to some degree, as the children and families were made aware that I was 'interrogat[ing] [my] own practices' (Anderson et al., 2007: 141). No

incentives or rewards were offered to the children, their families or my Critical Friends. They were also made aware that this research was not sponsored research. These measures contributed to the credibility of this research project.

3.6 Validity, Reliability and Credibility

Validity in self-study action research can be shown through 'dependability, credibility, confirmability and transformability' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 131), deviating significantly from the positivist tests of 'replicability, reliability, credibility and generalisability' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 131).

Credibility involves data collection and analysis being 'believable, trustworthy or authentic' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 131). To demonstrate personal credibility and reliability I ensured 'that all…data [was] dated' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 105), creating a 'research "trail"' (Ortlipp, 2008: 696) of transparent evidence to support my claims to knowledge. Making my research 'public and open to critique' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 106) through validation groups and Critical Friends functioned as a check of reliability by ensuing that my claims to knowledge withstood the 'scrutiny or other knowers' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 108) in the education field.

3.6.1 Validation Group

Validation groups 'pick holes in your research and give you a hard time questioning every assumption you make' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 103) with the overall aim of testing the validity of claims to knowledge (Sullivan et al., 2020; McNiff and Whitehead, 2010; Campbell et al., 2004). In establishing a validation group, I selected a group of people 'whose opinions and capacity for making critical and balanced judgement' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 197) I trust.

The first member of my validation group was selected due to their experience teaching in a DEIS school and his insight into the 'difficulties when raising tricky questions… in the wider context of the school' (Mockler and Groundwater-Smith, 2015: 604). Additionally, he is familiar with self-study action research, understanding the focus on 'one's own personal and professional sel[f]' (Anderson et al., 2007: 31).

The second member of my validation group was selected due to her experience as a primary teacher and parent. Having the perspective of a parent, ensured my research design showed 'consideration for the needs of families' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 400) and that it was 'nonintrusive yet informative' (Gilkerson and Hanson, 2000: 198).

All members of my validation group are primary teachers in different settings. The selection of teachers from different schools was ethically guided. As we do not work together our collaboration did not involve 'rearranging [of my] relationships with those [I am] in contact with daily in [my] site' (Anderson et al., 2007: 139). Additionally, this eliminated any 'hierarchical relationships' (Anderson et al., 2007: 140) that would exist if I chose to collaborate with colleagues.

3.6.2 Critical Friends

Critical Friends provided 'challenge and confrontation for the purpose of development' (Campbell et al., 2004: 107) during the research. This is pertinent in self-study action research, as a key aspect of this approach is 'shar[ing] your thinking with one or more colleagues from the outset and invit[ing] critique' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 73). Throughout my research I sought the 'periodic advice' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 111) of my Critical Friends to 'dislodge any fixed assumptions [I] have around [my] practice and see it through 'new eyes'' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 53).

Critical Friend 1 was the Special Needs Assistant working in my classroom. As she was present while History lessons were conducted, her observations provided 'both support and challenge' (Campbell et al., 2004: 110). Critical Friend 3 was a Special Needs Assistant who worked with my class during the Family Tree Project to offer support to children who did not have a family member present. Just as dialogic teaching can only be considered high-quality if students are 'specifically asked to give reasons and justifications for their conclusions' (Muhonen et al., 2016: 144), dialogue with Critical Friends 1 and 3 following lessons was valuable only if it did 'not become too cosy and that there [was] sufficient challenge…as well as support' (Campbell et al., 2004: 193). By 'negotiat[ing] ground rules' (McNiff and Whitehead, 2010: 61) for our relationship and making explicit the need for 'tough criticism and probing questions' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 74) these relationships allowed me to be reflective about my teaching.

Critical Friend 2 was the Home School Community Liaison Teacher working in my school. As part of her role within the school, she has displayed her 'ability to listen and to ask challenging questions' (Campbell et al., 2004: 109), something I valued as I shared my 'embryonic thoughts and ideas' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 73. Her close working relationship with the parents and families in our school gave her a unique perspective on the research as she was 'more in touch with parents' (Koskela, 2021: 10) and their needs. Additionally, Critical Friend 2 had experience teaching the Junior Infant History Curriculum.

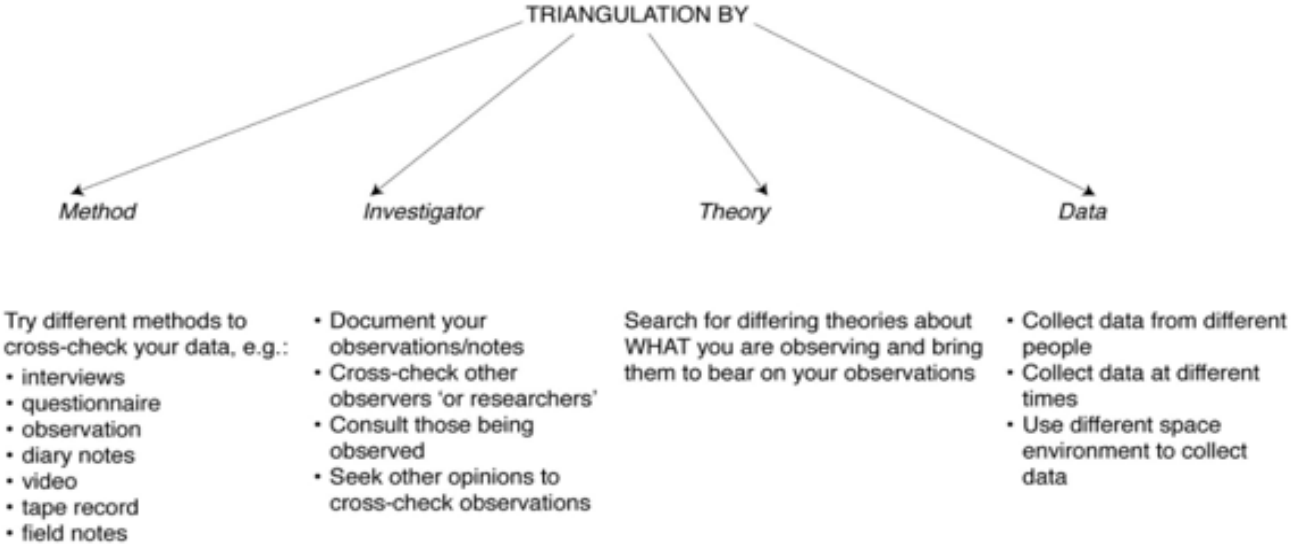
3.6.3 Triangulation

Triangulation refers to the strategy of involving 'multiple methods or data sources' (Carter et al., 2014: 545) to create trustworthiness and credibility (McDonagh et al., 2020; Phillips and Carr, 2010; Denzin, 2012). I acknowledge that my 'cultural and experiential background contains biases, values, and ideologies' (Fusch et al., 2018: 20) that impacted

my interpretation of the data. Although triangulation cannot eliminate these biases, it plays a role in mitigating bias by 'extend[ing] the range of insights and knowledge produced in a qualitative study' (Flick, 2018: 3). Phillips and Carr (2010) claim that to achieve triangulation, a complete data set containing three methods of data collection must be created. These methods must include 'observation, interview, and artifact' (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 77). All three methods are present in my data collection tools.

My data collection tools link to two of the four types of triangulation suggested by Denzin (1970) (see figure 3.6). His conceptualisation of triangulation includes method triangulation, investigator triangulation, theory triangulation and data sources triangulation (Denzin, 1970; Carter et al., 2014; Flick, 2018). As questionnaire data was collected from various voices this is considered data source triangulation, as it 'involves the collection of data from different types of people…to gain multiple perspectives' (Carter et al., 2014: 545). As each of the groups questioned were considered 'valid knowers' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 132), this allowed me to 'reach a maximum of theoretical profit from using the same methods' (Flick, 2018: 13). Method triangulation was also present in this research project through the 'use of multiple methods of data collection about the same phenomenon' (Carter et al., 2014: 545). Utilising data collection tools that adhered to the suggestions of Phillips and Carr (2010) a 'more detailed and balanced picture' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 107) of my practice emerged.

Figure 3.6: Denzin's (1970) Triangulation Model in Campbell et al. (2004: 87)



3.7 Conclusion

The research question; *'How can I teach the 'Myself' strand in Junior Infant History so that it is focused on the children's lives?'* was established through 'critical reflection' (Brookfield, 2017: 3) leading me to articulate my values (McNiff, 2014). This research question and the desire to place critical reflection at the heart of the research, informed my choice of a self-study action research methodology. Based on my ontological stance and desire for personal and professional improvement, my research was examined through the interpretive and critical paradigms. The data collection tools used were selected based on their ability to achieve triangulation and ensure the reliability and credibility of my findings. As the data collected was qualitative, Braun and Clarke's (2019) six phase model for reflexive data analysis was utilised. Detailed discussion surrounding data analysis and the findings of my research will take place in the subsequent chapter.

Chapter 4: Data Analysis and Discussion

4.1 Introduction

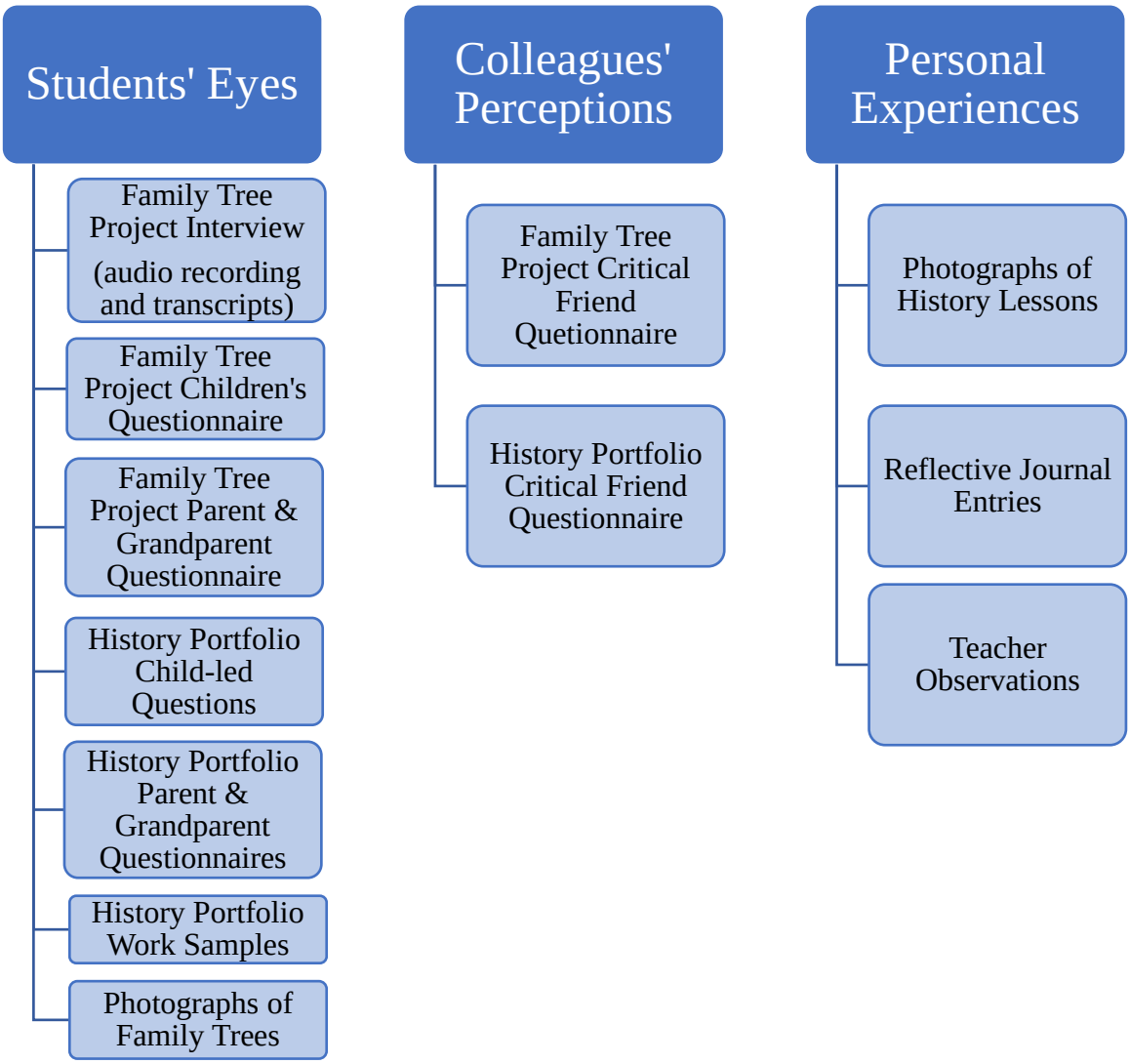
This chapter presents and discusses the findings of my research. Data was collected and analysed between January and May in response to my research question; *'How can I teach the 'Myself' strand in Junior Infant History so that it is focused on the children's lives?'*. Data was collated using Brookfield's 'four lenses of critical reflection' (2017: 61). Therefore, the data set includes the perspectives of children, parents, colleagues, me as a teacher-researcher and relevant theory. The data set has been triangulated to ensure the reliability and credibility of my findings (Carter et al., 2014; Denzin, 2012; McDonagh et al., 2020; Phillips and Carr, 2010) and examined alongside academic theory.

This chapter examines the influence a self-study action research approach had on my selection of a reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 589) method and the reasons this approach is suitable to the analysis of my qualitative data set. The themes that emerged, through application of the 'six phases' (Braun and Clarke, 2020: 331), from this approach are named and discussed in relation to my values. Four findings are explored under these themes.

4.2 Data Set

The initial 'data corpus' (Javadi and Zarea, 2016: 34) was thoroughly analysed using a 'reflexive thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 589) approach. Through the initial stages of analysis, pertinent data was identified and collated into the final data set for discussion during this chapter (see figure 4.1).

Figure 4.1: Data Set for Analysis



4.3 Reflexive Thematic Analysis

As a qualitative data set was gathered it was necessary to employ an analysis method that would 'tell the complicated story' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 93) of my data. A thematic analysis approach was selected as a method for 'identifying, analysing, organising, describing, and reporting themes' (Nowell et al., 2017: 2). This method was appealing as it 'does not require adherence to any particular theory of language, or explanatory meaning framework for human beings' (Clarke and Braun, 2013: 120), with which I have no training as an educator 'adding the hat of researcher' (Anderson et al., 2007: 139) to my role. The

rise in popularity of thematic analysis is largely attributed to Braun and Clarke (2006) (Byrne, 2021) and therefore this work was critically examined.

Braun and Clarke's 'six phases of analysis' (2006: 86) closely link with the process of self-study action research. Thematic analysis involves 'choices' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 81) by the teacher-researcher, and relates to the high 'levels of teacher autonomy and agency' (McDonagh et al., 2020: ix) associated with self-study action research. Similarly, both methods celebrate the role of 'moving back and forward' (Braun and Clarke, 2006: 86) and the centrality of chaos in 'add[ing] to rigour' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 85) to findings.

A criticism of Braun and Clarke's (2006) approach is the degree to which bias influences outcomes. Javadi and Zarea claim that 'one should be unbiased' (2016: 38) in conducting thematic analysis while Braun and Clarke acknowledge the 'analyst-driven' (2006: 84) nature of the task. Furthermore, while Javadi and Zarea criticise that 'themes are made of the researcher's assumptions and not data analysis' (2016: 38), the importance of 'researcher judgement' (2006: 82) is assumed by Braun and Clarke. In my initial reflections I commented that 'qualitative research requires more self-belief and rigorous data collection to show that although nothing can be proven, there is a legitimate claim to knowledge' (RJE, 16/08/2021). The 'unarticulated assumptions' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 590) identified by the authors as a flaw in their 2006 approach, left me feeling unsure about the suitability of this analytic approach in addressing my concern.

Braun and Clarke have since expanded their writing, developing a method called 'reflexive thematic analysis' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 589). Their latest iteration further 'encourage[s] the researcher to embrace reflexivity, subjectivity and creativity as assets in knowledge production' (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 1393) deviating from the views of scholars who interpret these as threats (Boyatzis, 1998). The integral role of the researcher in producing knowledge is supported (Braun and Clarke, 2019; Byrne, 2021). This method also

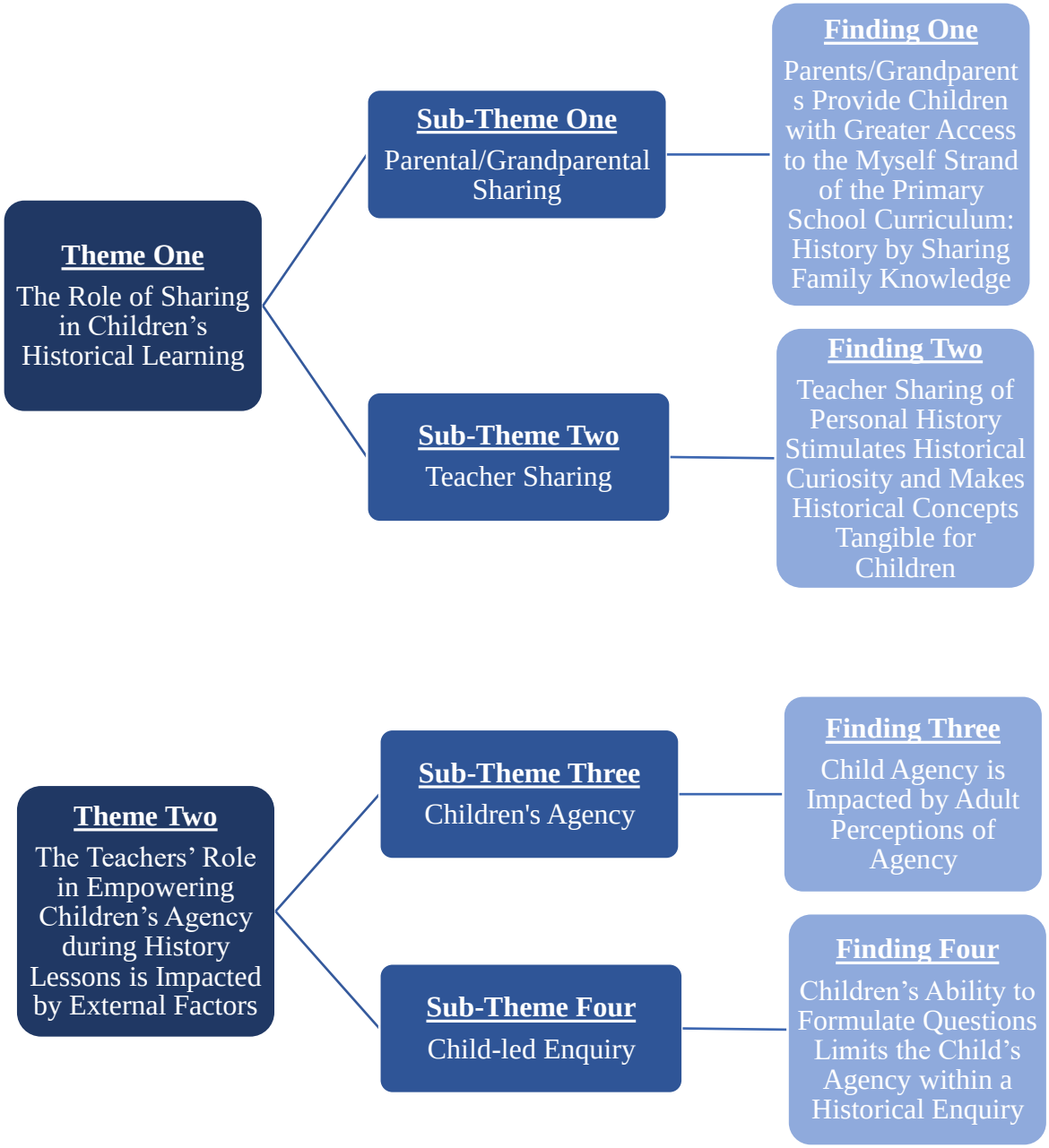
acknowledges that ‘multiple realities are socially and experientially based and are time and context dependent’ (Peel, 2020: 4), supporting the nature of this self-study action research project, conducted ‘in context, over time’ (Bullough and Pinnegar, 2001: 15) and therefore not generalisable to other times or contexts.

The data set has therefore been analysed using the six stages of Braun and Clarke’s (2020) reflexive thematic analysis; ‘1) data familiarisation and writing familiarisation notes; 2) systematic data coding; 3) generating themes from coded and collated data; 4) developing and reviewing themes; 5) refining, defining and naming themes; and 6) writing the report’ (Braun and Clarke, 2020: 331). This analytic method allowed me to weave my values and assumptions through the data analysis by acknowledging the ‘value-laden’ (Peel, 2020: 4) nature of knowledge creation, remaining ‘cognisant of the …theoretical assumptions informing [my] use of’ (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 594) this approach. The flexibility afforded by this approach provided a framework that was ‘an adventure, not a recipe’ (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 592), mirroring the chaos I experienced during data collection and analysis.

4.4 The Naming of Themes

Application of reflexive thematic analysis began with coding (Braun and Clarke, 2019). This initially led to the identification of nine themes that were then reviewed, refined, defined and eventually named (Braun and Clarke, 2020) as: 1) the role of sharing in children’s historical learning and 2) the teacher’s role in empowering children’s agency in History lessons is impacted by external factors. These two themes revealed the four main findings of the research project (see figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2: Themes and Related Findings Revealed by the Data



4.5 Theme One: The Role of Sharing in Children's Historical Learning

Pre-intervention, History lessons in my classroom were best described as 'generic learning about generic people' (RJE, 13/9/2021), based on my biased experience of family, families from picture books and the family members Junior Infant children could name themselves. Stories featured strongly in my planning as 'story is a major means of children's

learning and understanding about the past from their very earliest days' (Hoodless, 2008: 152). The stories I shared were not about diverse groups of children referred to by Väyrynen and Paksuniemi (2020) as heterogenous. Therefore, lessons were 'not based on the children who sit in my classroom every day' (RJE, 18/8/2021). I reflected at the time that the reason I taught in this way was because:

> 'Many of the children have complicated home lives. The questions that might be raised when we focus on the My Family strand if they share information about their own families terrifies me. It is easier to focus on the 'ideal' family in a picturebook who I understand and am prepared to answer questions about' (RJE, 21/9/2021).

Both the History Portfolios (hereafter HPs) and Family Tree Project (hereafter FTP) were initiated to address the lack of connection between the children's lives and the content they were learning in the Myself strand of the IPSC History (NCCA, 1999b) and to incorporate sharing of life histories in school. Lessons recognised 'parents as the child's primary educators' (Hayes et al., 2017: 56) and aimed to support children to share and 'talk about their families and their own experiences' (Hoodless, 2008: 145), upholding my value of child-centrism. All parents/grandparents and children who responded to the intervention survey indicated that they enjoyed working with a family member. Critical Friend 3 (hereafter CF3) noted that family sharing gave children a 'deeper understanding of themselves and their backgrounds' (CF3, 25/5/2022). Parents/Grandparents noted that their presence in school was a positive aspect of the intervention, with one grandparent stating that his grandson 'was excited about us coming to his school and helping him with the project' (Grandparent 1, 29/4/2022). When interviewed the children mentioned many positive aspects of working with their parents/grandparents including the feeling of being 'loved' (Child 4, 20/5/2022).

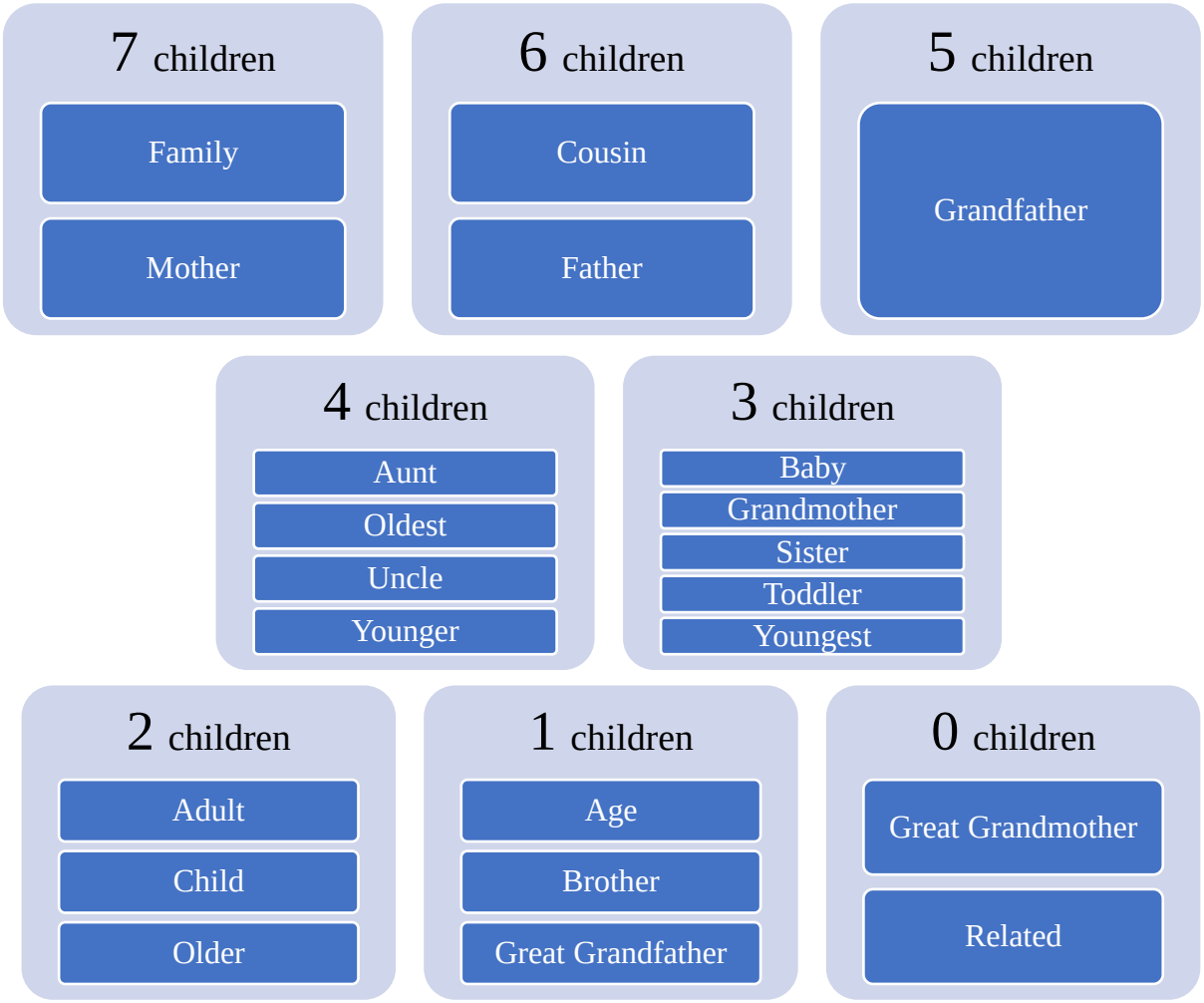
Looking at my original reflection regarding the reason for the way I taught History, I realise that lessons were not actually about 'generic people' (RJE, 13/9/2021) or "ideal' families' (RJE, 21/9/2021). I now realise that lessons were based on people I 'categorise…as similar…to [me] in terms of [my] cultural and social identity', people who I regarded as my 'in-group' (Hannon and O'Donnell, 2022: 242). I questioned the impact of my teaching on 'the children's sense of belonging within the curriculum' (RJE, 11/12/2021) and wondered 'if I am the right person to make them feel included if I fear the consequences of them sharing in class' (RJE, 14/12/2021). The role sharing plays in children's historical learning was present in data from all 'four lenses of critical reflection' (Brookfield, 2017: 61) and named as a theme of the research.

4.5.1 Finding One: Parents/Grandparents Provide Children with Greater Access to the Myself Strand of the Primary School Curriculum: History by Sharing Family Knowledge

Pre-interventions, my lessons lacked any real depth for children to 'explor[e] elements and incidents in their own lives' (NCCA, 1999b: 7). Through reflection and engagement with the literature, I realised that 'when a child first [comes] through the classroom door, we know very little about him or her as an individual' (Gilkerson and Hanon, 2000: 198). Therefore, I could not teach them specific details of their lives before school, such as 'when I took my first steps, as I grew up…places where I have lived' (NCCA, 1999b: 19). Answering these questions, or any of the questions that emerged during History Talk Time lessons (see Appendices H, I, J and K) would not have been possible. The resulting lessons were 'of little real substance' (RJE, 13/9/2021) as they did not give the children a greater sense of understanding of 'their own place in society, how they relate to their immediate family and their locality' (Hoodless, 2008: 11).

Without parental involvement and sharing in the children's HPs, the learning would have been 'thin and single-stranded, as the teacher knows the students only from…within rather limited classroom contexts' (Moll et al. in González et al., 2005: 74). Similarly, although the language of History relating to families would have been taught, beyond parents and some siblings, I would not have been able to name or share details about extended family members and hence would not have been able to effectively 'talk about new vocabulary words' (Hadley et al., 2021: 1). This would result in the teaching of decontextualised language, difficult for children to remember and apply 'as it was of no real relevance to their lives' (RJE, 2/4/2022). There was dissonance between my practice and the value I place on starting with the child. By involving parents/grandparents in the creation of HPs and the FTP, children used language in the context of their own families, allowing for 'joint attention, in which a child and adult attend[ed] to the same…topic of conversation while the adult provide[d] contingent scaffolding for the children's emergent language' (Hadley et al., 2021: 3). Significant adults were present to share the names of family members and explain 'how each person was connected to one another' (Parent 4, 29/4/2022). Figure 4.3 shows questionnaire data from parents/grandparents regarding contextualised Historical language usage during the FTP.

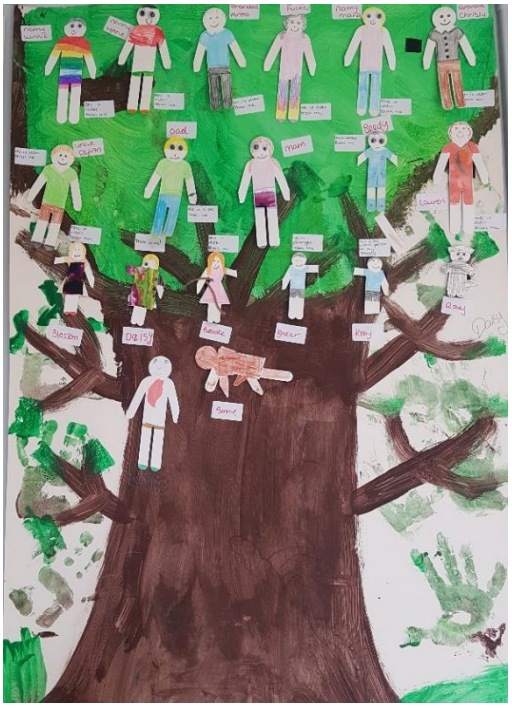
Figure 4.3: Contextualised Historical Language



All three Critical Friends noted that lack of family sharing disadvantaged the children in both interventions. In relation to the HPs, it was noted that lack of 'parental participation for some children' (CF1, 28/4/2022) was a drawback of the intervention. With regard the FTP, it was observed that children who did not have a family member present to answer questions and share information 'didn't get as much accurate information about their family history' (CF3, 25/5/2022) and were at a 'disadvantage… educationally' (CF2, 28/4/2022). Figure 4.4 illustrates the differing numbers of family members Child 1 and Child 2 learned about during the FTP. Child 1 worked with her mother and aunt while Child 2 worked with CF1. Child 1 included 'immediate family, aunts, uncles, cousins, grandparents, great-grandparents and at her insistence even pets!' (RJE, 8/4/2022). Comparatively, Child 2 was

only sure about ‘himself and his parents. He included grandparents too but only after looking at the work of the boy beside him and counting the number of people he had on his tree’ (RJE, 8/4/2022). Without any knowledge of his family, CF1 could support him aesthetically but not historically.

Figure 4.4: Family Trees



Family Tree Created by Child 1, Mother and Aunt (March/April 2022)

Family Tree Created by Child 2 and Critical Friend 1 (March/April 2022)

In response to the question ‘What did you learn?’ during the FTP interview, three children, all of whom worked with family members, commented on having many family members. Child 3 also stated something that would have made the FTP better would be to ‘put their names on it’ (Child 3, 20/5/2022), a task that required parental/grandparental sharing.

By analysing data from ‘multiple perspectives’ (Phillips and Carr, 2010: 92), it is a finding of this study that children have greater access to the objectives in the Myself strand

of the Primary School Curriculum: History (NCCA, 1999b) when they work with parents/grandparents who can share family knowledge. This supports Harris and Goodall's view that 'parental engagement in schooling positively influences pupil achievement and attainment (2008: 278). Engaging parents/grandparents in History lessons in the 'Myself' strand of the curriculum allowed me to accurately teach History based on children's 'own past and that of their family' (NCCA, 1999b: 7). Teaching in this way has allowed me to live more closely in the direction of my value that education should be child centred. By creating opportunities for children to work 'with adult support within their natural environments' (Appl et al., 2014: 192) I started to align my practice with my values. During this intervention adult support was also provided in the form of teacher sharing when I shared aspects of my personal and family history with my class.

4.5.2 Finding Two: Teacher Sharing of Personal History Stimulates Historical Curiosity and Makes Historical Concepts Tangible for Children

Early in my research journey I remarked that during History lessons 'enquiry tends to be based on my questions to the children rather than their questions about themselves and their families' (Values Statement, 10/9/2021) and that the questions I asked were 'unconsciously biased by my childhood' (Values Statement, 10/9/2021). To live more closely in the direction of the value I place on child-centred, inclusive education, I originally believed that lessons should be based on child-led enquiry alone and that 'my childhood and my past had no place within the intervention' (RJE, 8/1/2022). Inspection of the curriculum states that 'at all levels in the primary curriculum, children should encounter a wide range of evidence' (NCCA, 1999b: 12). I emailed parents requesting photographs for use during History lessons.

On the day of the timeline lesson, most children had photographs to work with. However, there were a few who did not. The children who received their photographs 'began to squeal with excitement' (RJE, 25/1/2022) and 'enjoyed looking at themselves in the pictures' (CF1, 21/3/2022). For the children who did not received pictures of themselves, the task was less motivating, as they 'worked with clipart images of babies and toddlers that they had no emotional connection to' (RJE, 25/1/2022).

I became concerned about the use of historical evidence as 'at this age sharing usually required parental support' (Appl et al., 2014: 200). I wanted to be respectful that 'some parents may not have many photographs' (RJE, 18/2/2022) whilst simultaneously ensuring that every child was included in the excitement of lessons. Therefore, as part of the subsequent intervention lessons, each week I shared photographs or objects from my own family history with the children as a stimulus for dialogic-enquiry. After reflexively examining my reflective journal and previous assignments, I realised that 'it is interesting that for the past number of years my History lessons have been biased by my personal history without actually sharing anything about this history with the children' (RJE, 13/2/2022). Children were clearly excited to learn that 'I used to be a baby, a toddler and a child' (RJE, 13/2/2022) and this may have been the 'first time they realise[d] that an adult was once a very young child' (NCCA, 1999c: 74). They were similarly excited to 'ask about my toys and whether I still play with them' (RJE, 1/3/2022). Examples of teacher sharing can be seen in figures 4.5 and 4.6.

Figure 4.5: Teacher's Timeline

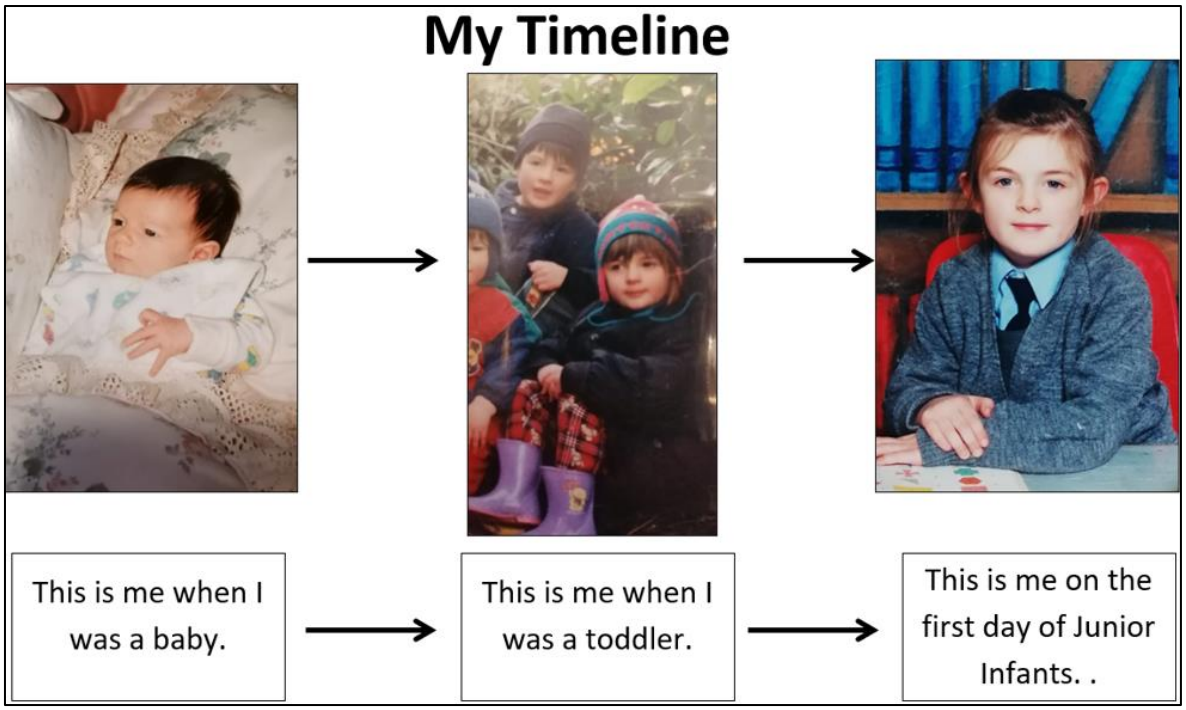


Figure 4.6: Teacher's Parents' Clothes from 1950s and 1960s

Sharing my historical evidence ‘captivated the children as it was tangible with real life objects toys/clothes etc.’ (CF1, 21/3/2022). Using historical evidence gave them opportunities to use ‘excellent historical language like ‘that was a long time ago’’ (RJE, 1/2/2022) in context and did not require parental sharing for all children to be included in the lessons. Many of the topics discussed and questions asked during group wondering aloud about my historical evidence also featured in the children’s HP questions. Some examples of these questions can be seen in figures 4.7 to 4.10. The ‘use of artefacts help[ed] children in making detailed observations…. [and] making inferences’ (Hoodless, 2008: 71), skills promoted in the Primary School Curriculum: History (NCCA,1999b).

Figure 4.7: Child 7’s Question and Teacher’s Observation after Teacher Sharing

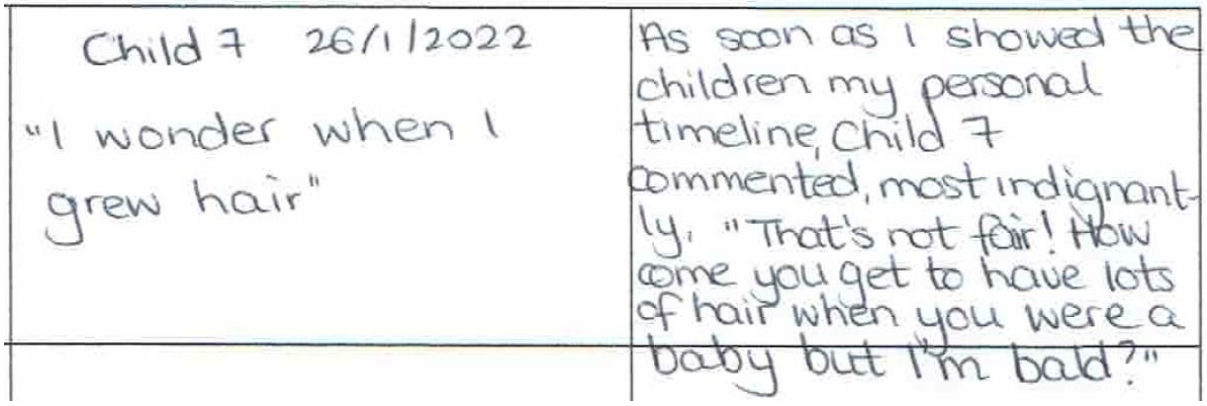


Figure 4.8: Child 1’s Question and Teacher’s Observation after Teacher Sharing

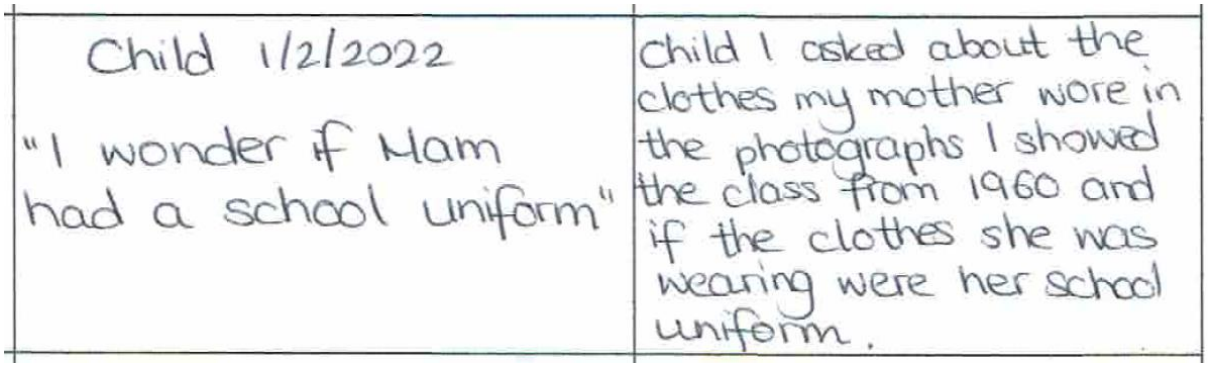


Figure 4.9: Child 4 and 5's Question and Teacher's Observation after Teacher Sharing

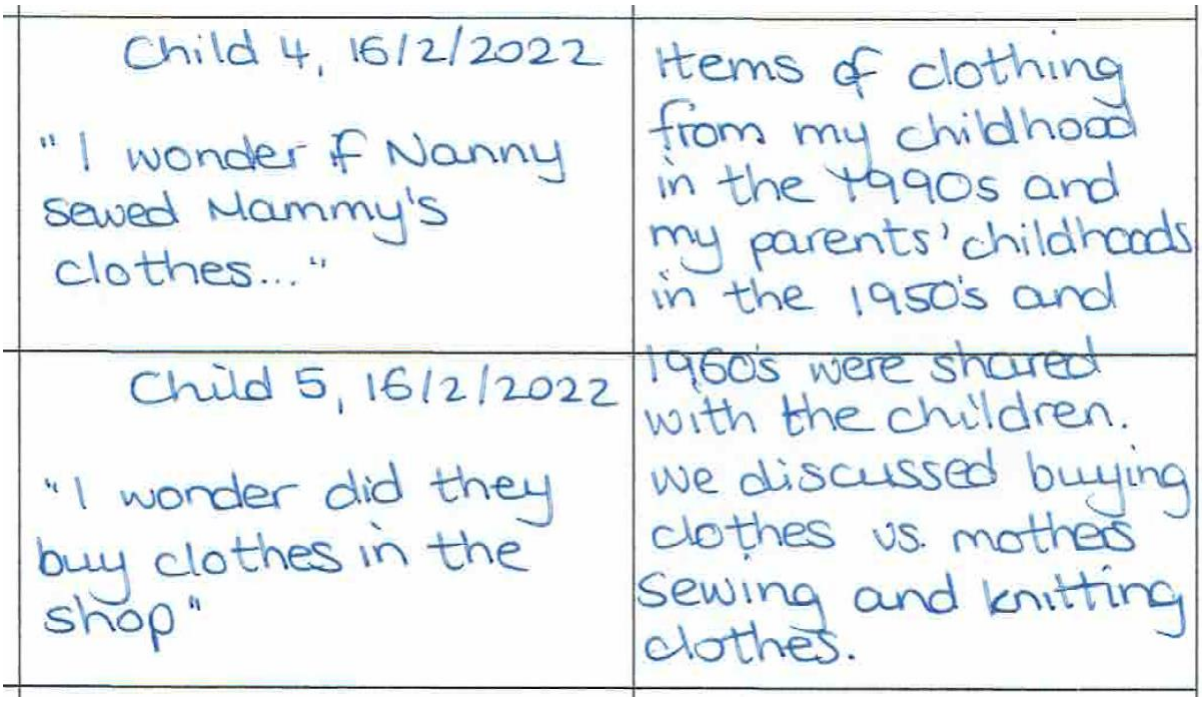
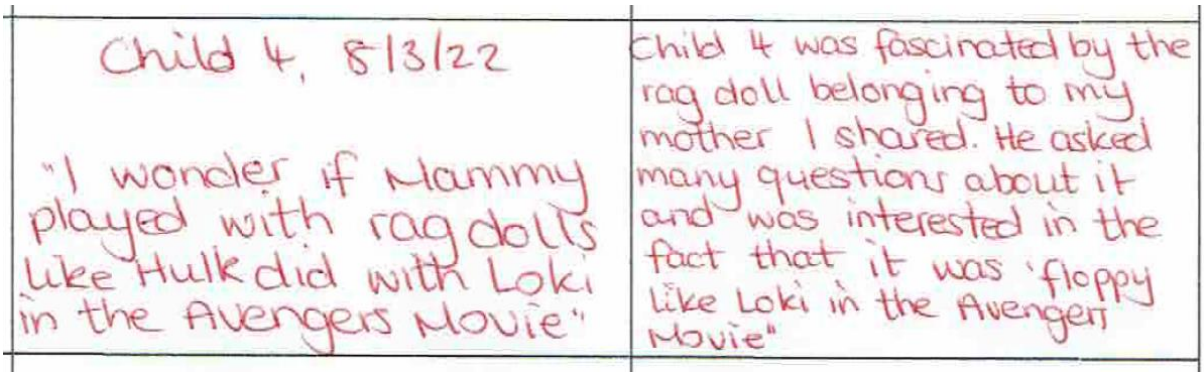


Figure 4.10: Child 4's Question and Teacher's Observation after Teacher Sharing



If it were possible for children to examine artefacts from their own history, greater learning outcomes may have been achieved. CF1 remarked that 'encouraging parents to look at and discuss the picture and topic…prior to the lesson in class might stimulate children to speak more during the discussion' (CF1, 21/3/2022). Similarly, I wrote after sharing a picture of my mother when she was in Junior Infants, 'Seeing how excited and motivated they were to ask questions about my mother made me think about the value of having photographs of their parents/grandparents when they were younger' (RJE, 1/2/2022). However, although I

could have requested artefacts and photographs from parents, and many may have provided them, 'the choice of action and involvement remains with the parent' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 405) and therefore, just as with the baby and toddler photographs, there would inevitably have been parents who chose not to engage in the sharing and children who felt left out.

Sharing of my historical evidence stimulated discussion in Junior Infants History lessons. The NCCA similarly claim that 'one effective way in which the teacher may arouse interest about the past is to tell children something of his/her own childhood' (1999c: 74). My original assumption, that removing my life history from the lessons and focusing solely on child-led enquiry to enhance learning, was misplaced. There is a need however to make the experiences from my past, that have for so long been influencing my lessons, tangible so that the children can learn from them and enquire about them. I now realise that 'including my history doesn't mean that lessons are about me. Including my history helps me to start with the children's curiosity and base lessons on this' (RJE, 10/3/2022). The process of learning to share as a teacher aligns with the educational value I place on democracy. By making sharing a reciprocal process, the scales of democracy in my classroom have been rebalanced.

4.6 Theme Two: The Teachers' Role in Empowering Children's Agency during History Lessons is Impacted by External Factors

The History interventions implemented in my classroom were specifically designed to afford the children and families opportunities to enact agency, as this is one of my core values. Both the HPs and FTP relied on 'dialectical, inquiry-based, and interpretive instructional strategies' (Breault and Lack, 2009: 157). These approaches assisted children in meeting the objectives of the IPSC History (NCCA: 1999b) adopting the view that

interventions should enable children 'to take part in decision-making processes' (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012: 366). Both interventions espoused Kozleski and Waitoller's view of families as the 'experts of their own histories and culture' (2010: 661), acknowledging that parents/grandparents held knowledge that I did not. This addressed my concern that 'when teachers position themselves as experts, families tend to be in the lower position in the hierarchy and discussion' (Koskela, 2021: 2). I assumed that this would allow parents/grandparents and children to act agentically as they would not have a 'secondary place' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2012: 661) in the educational hierarchy. Similarly, I assumed that by using a 'dialogic teaching approach' (Alexander, 2018: 562), agency would automatically be afforded to children through their formulation of I-wonder questions. In both assumptions, I failed to take full account that 'by being positioned in certain ways, individuals may or may not exercise agency' (Kayi-Aydar, 2015: 96) and did not consider the influence of adult perceptions and language skills in affording or denying children opportunities to act agentically. The theme of agency was selected as a principle theme of my research.

4.6.1 Finding Three: Child Agency is Impacted by Adult Perceptions of Agency

The questions asked by children in their HPs gave adults opportunities to listen and 'gain insight into children's worlds' (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 2) and 'an interesting insight into the children's curiosity' (CF1, 21/3/2022). Their questions showed us 'genuine things that the children wondered about themselves and their families' (RJE, 26/1/2022). However, although I understood the purpose of these journals, data suggests that parents/grandparents were initially not clear who portfolios were for. Four of the nine portfolio returned during week one of HP homework contained answers that were addressed to the teacher from the parent/grandparent, rather than to the child. These responses positioned the teacher 'in centre stage' and the children 'on the sidelines' (Kozleski and

Waitoller, 2010: 659). Children whose homework was completed in this way were 'passive about what [was] presented to them' (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 4). Examples of such responses can be seen in figures 4.11 to 4.14. (*Children's names written by parents have been replaced by participant numbers for ethical reasons.)

Figure 4.11: Teacher-focused Response in Child 1's HP (26/1/2022)

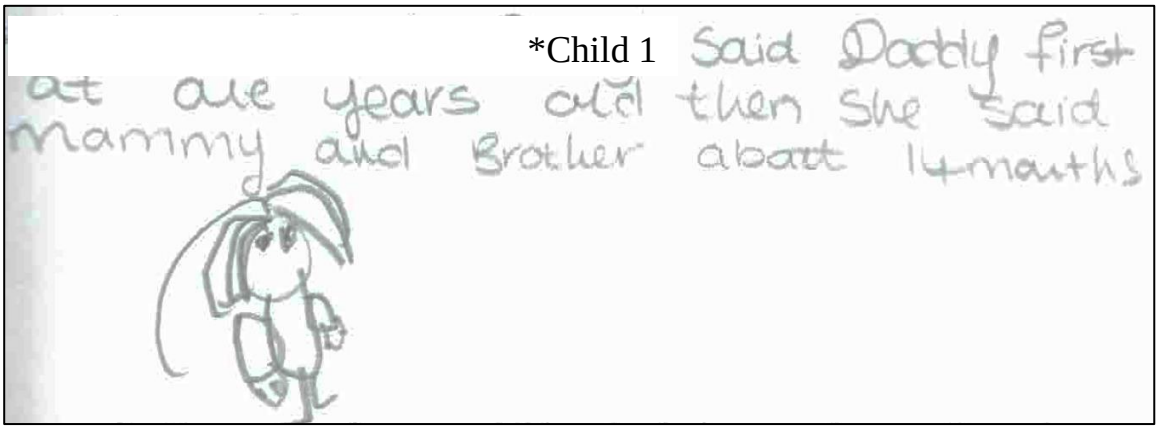


Figure 4.12: Teacher-focused Response in Child 2's HP (26/1/2022)

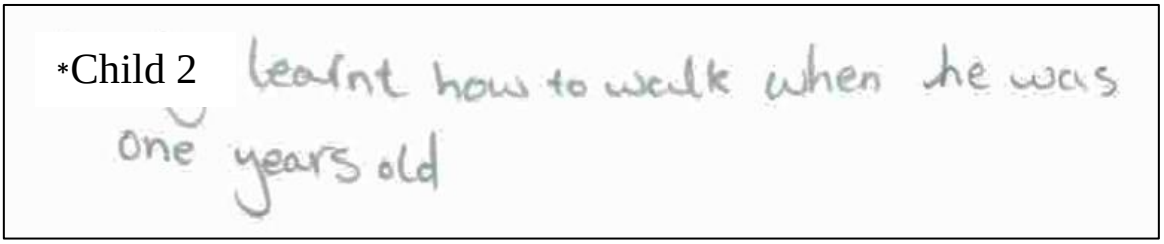


Figure 4.13: Teacher-focused Response in Child 5's HP (26/1/2022)

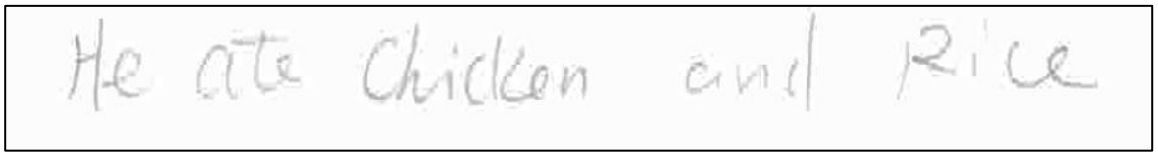
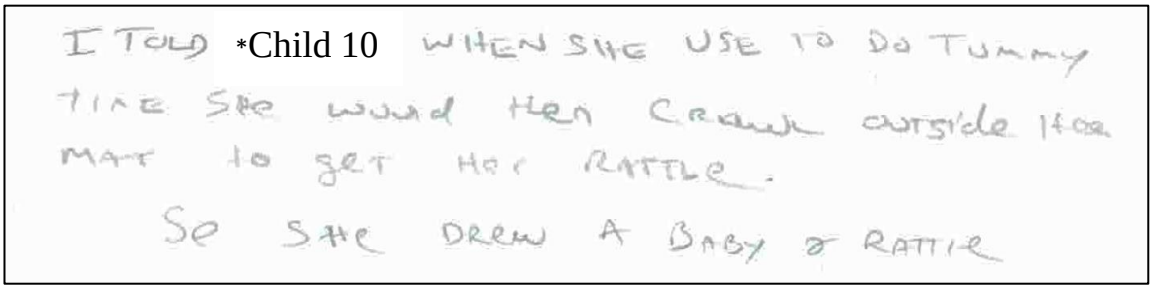


Figure 4.14: Teacher-focused Response in Child 10's HP (26/1/2022)



The other responses received were written by the parents/grandparents from the perspective of the child, acknowledging children as 'first-hand witnesses of their childhood and experiences of learning' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 63). In these responses, children were seen as agentic, 'active participants' (Sairanen et al., 2020: 1) in their learning (see figures 4.15 to 4.19).

Figure 4.15: Child-focused Response in Child 6's HP (26/1/2022)

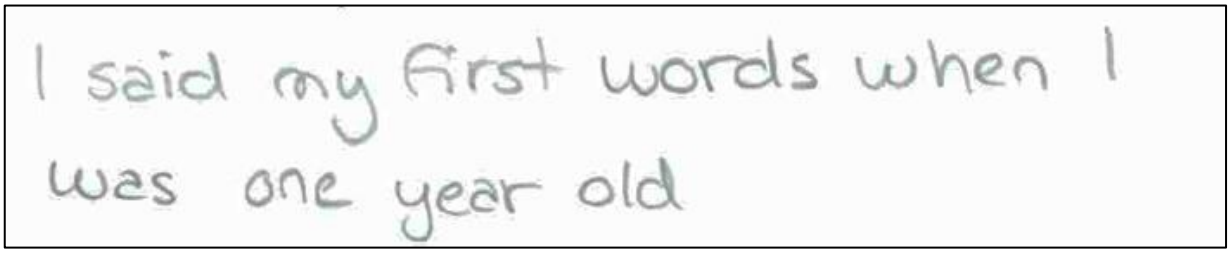


Figure 4.16: Child-focused Response in Child 7's HP (26/1/2022)

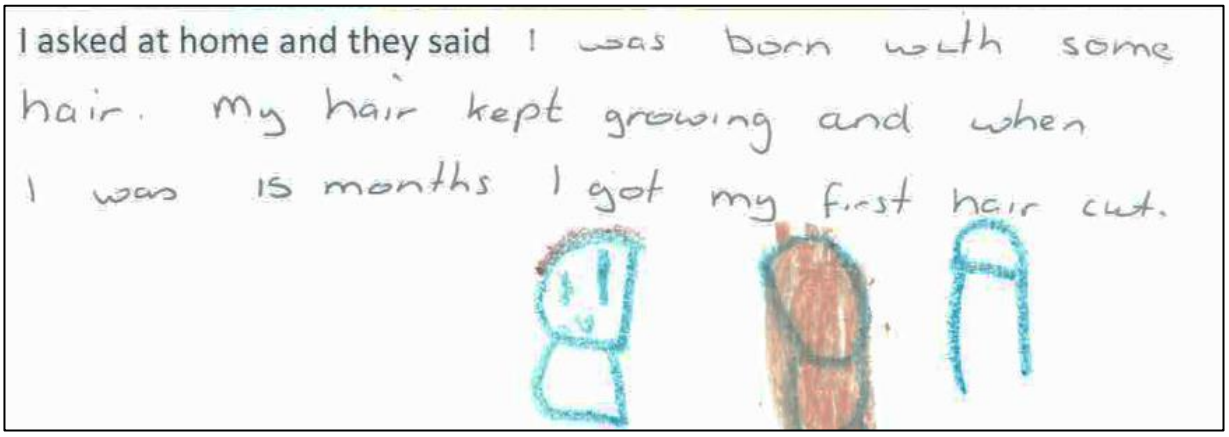


Figure 4.17: Child-focused Response in Child 8's HP (26/1/2022)

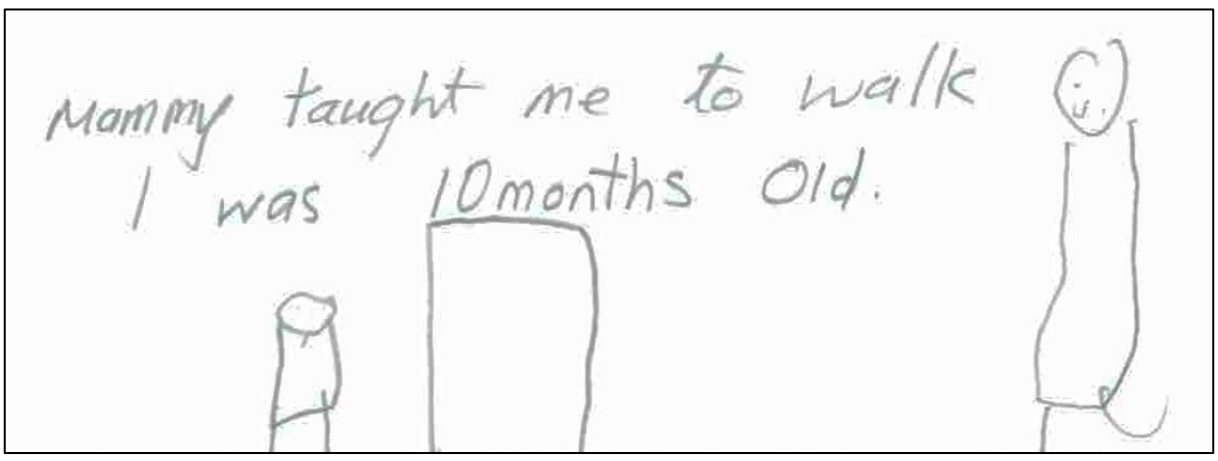


Figure 4.18: Child-focused Response in Child 9's HP (26/1/2022)

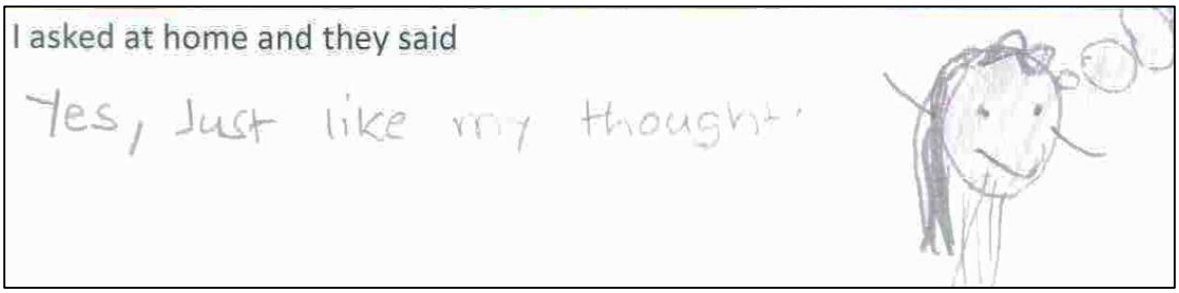


Figure 4.19: Child-focused Response in Child 12's HP (26/1/2022)

The responses received during the subsequent weeks of the HP homework were all written 'from the perspective of the child' (RJE, 17/2/2022). This occurred without me explicitly clarifying to parents/grandparents 'the role of adults in an agentic child-led context' (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 2). It is unclear why the change from teacher-focused to child-focused HPs occurred. However, during History Talk Time lessons, I emphasised to children, "You are the boss of this portfolio. This is not Mammy or Daddy or Nanny or Grandad's, this is yours" (RJE, 4/2/2022). One hypothesis for the shift to child-focused responses could be 'children enacting agency and taking ownership of their learning' (RJE, 24/5/2022). As children began talking to their parents/grandparents about the responses they wanted them to write, they provided 'cues that adults should read and respond to' (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 2). This suggests that children 'influence the structures from which they draw their resources' (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 1). However, identifying the definite reason for this change is beyond the scope of the data gathered.

The FTP also highlighted the different levels of agency that were afforded to children by adults. I designed the project in such a way that children had 'a degree of autonomy and a capacity to mobilize resources' (Cavazzoni et al., 2021: 1) in the family tree they co-created with family members. Aware that when adults hold 'authority over children, the power dynamic presents challenges to a child's agency' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64), I ensured that there were opportunities for children to make meaningful decisions. All parents/grandparents agreed that their child/grandchild 'had opportunities to make decisions during the project' (FTP Parents/Grandparents Questionnaire, 25/4/2022). Nine out of ten children agreed, 'I was allowed to make decisions about my Family Tree during the FTP' (FTP Child Questionnaire, 8/4/2022). The remaining child indicated 'sometimes agree, sometimes disagree' clarifying that 'me and Nanny both did' (Child 4, Questionnaire, 8/4/2022), CF1 observed that 'most children had autonomy over the project, especially when designing and decorating their family members' (CF1, 28/4/2022). Evidence of the decisions made by the children can be seen in the interview responses in figure 4.20.

Figure 4.20: Decisions Made by Children

Significantly, data gathered from other Critical Friends suggested that 'the range in decision making varied' (CF2, 19/5/2022) depending on the family. CF2 stated that 'some parents/guardians were happy to be led by their child whereas some other parents/guardians made the decisions' (CF2, 19/5/2022). CF3 corroborates this when she observed that 'this depended on the families in question…some of the children that I observed lead the activity whilst others were very much guided by their parents' (CF3, 25/5/2022). Evidence that children were sometimes not granted agency by family members can also be seen in interview feedback from children in figures 4.21 to 4.23.

Figure 4.21: Example 1 of Child being Denied Agency

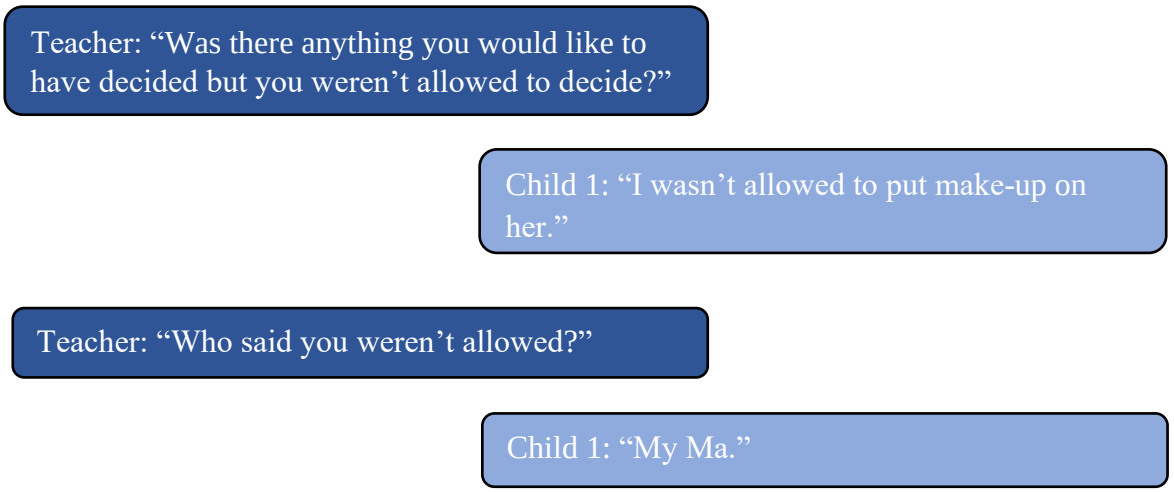


Figure 4.22: Example 2 of Child being Denied Agency

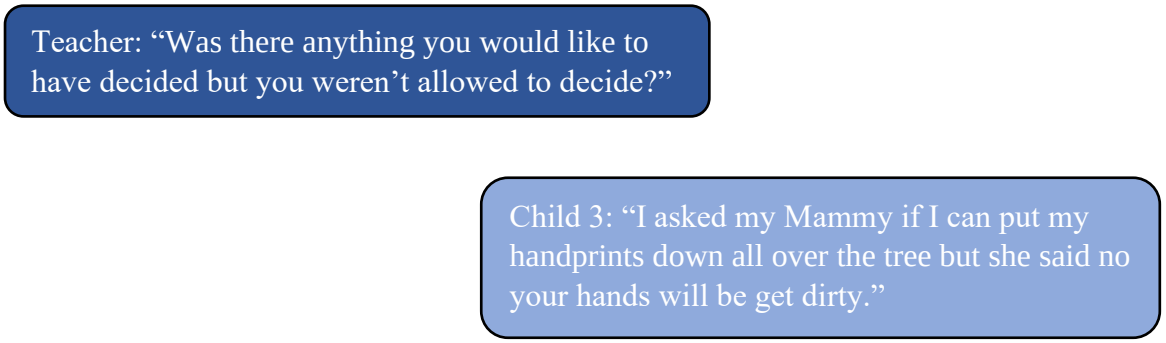
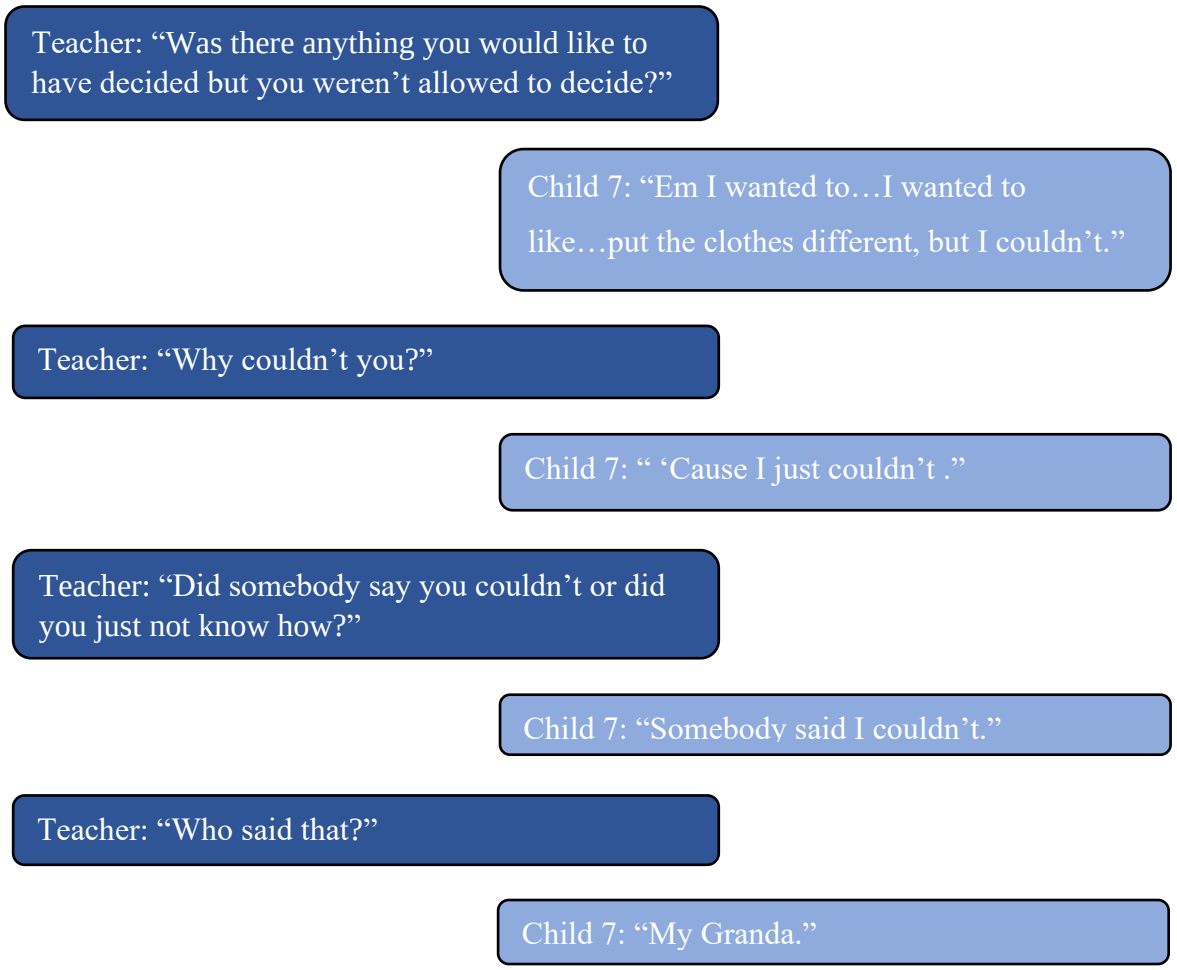


Figure 4.23: Example 3 of Child being Denied Agency



This suggests that although practitioners 'are now accustomed to thinking about children…as 'social agents'' (Bordonaro and Payne, 2012: 365), family members often view them as 'innocent and dependent upon adults to 'know what's best'' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 63). I observed children 'taking the things they needed, bringing them back to their station and not asking me for answers or permission. Back at their stations, many of the parents/grandparents were doing many of the 'tricky' jobs for their child/grandchild without consulting them' (RJE, 25/3/2022). This highlights how parents'/grandparents' perceptions of children's agentic ability is 'far removed from the day-to-day reality that educators face when working directly with young children' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64).

A further influence on the level of agency afforded to the children may be considered in terms of the 'experienced agency' (Koskela, 2021: 2) of parents and grandparents. Biesta and Tedder explore agency 'from a lifecourse perspective' (2007: 135), as something that is 'always located between past and future' (2007: 136). Therefore, views of 'whether it is appropriate for children to inform adults' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64), appeared to be dependent on the levels of agency experienced by parents and grandparents in a school setting. I noted that many parents asked me 'questions in a manner that suggested that they were probably going to do what they wanted anyway but they wanted to do me the courtesy of checking' (RJE, 25/3/2022). Grandparents often sought 'permission or approval from me, asking 'Are we allowed to…' and 'Am I doing a good job?'' (RJE, 25/3/2022). CF3 suggested that it should be 'stressed to the parents that this was to be child-led' (CF3, 25/5/2022), and despite suggesting to parents/grandparents that they should 'ask permission from their child/grandchild as it is their project' (RJE, 25/3/2022) many continued to find this challenging. In a changing educational landscape, 'the level of agency that different generations were used to was clearly very different' (RJE, 25/3/2022). it is not something that people have but 'something that people do' (Biesta and Tedder, 2007: 136), and some of the adults present were not used to doing it.

These interventions sought to 'discover the authentic perspectives of children' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64) and afford them opportunities to enact agency. However, through examining the data, I found that 'I am not completely in control of how much agency the children are afforded even though I set up the activity' (RJE 1/4/2022). In viewing parents/grandparents 'as a resource in terms of solving problems, cooperating, and supporting [my] work' (Koskela, 2021: 2), I assumed that I was 'sharing power with families' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 661). Although I handed over power to families, parity of agency was not achieved for all children, as some families 'were very happy to let their child lead, others were definitely choosing' (RJE, 1/4/2022). It is therefore a finding of

this research that child agency is impacted upon by adult perceptions of agency This supports MacNaughton and Smith's view that 'because adults hold power in the relationship, they also choose what to 'hear' and what to 'silence' (2001: 35). During the intervention, some children were leaders and others were led by their parents/grandparents. Another time during the intervention where some children led and others were prompted was during dialogic teaching lessons.

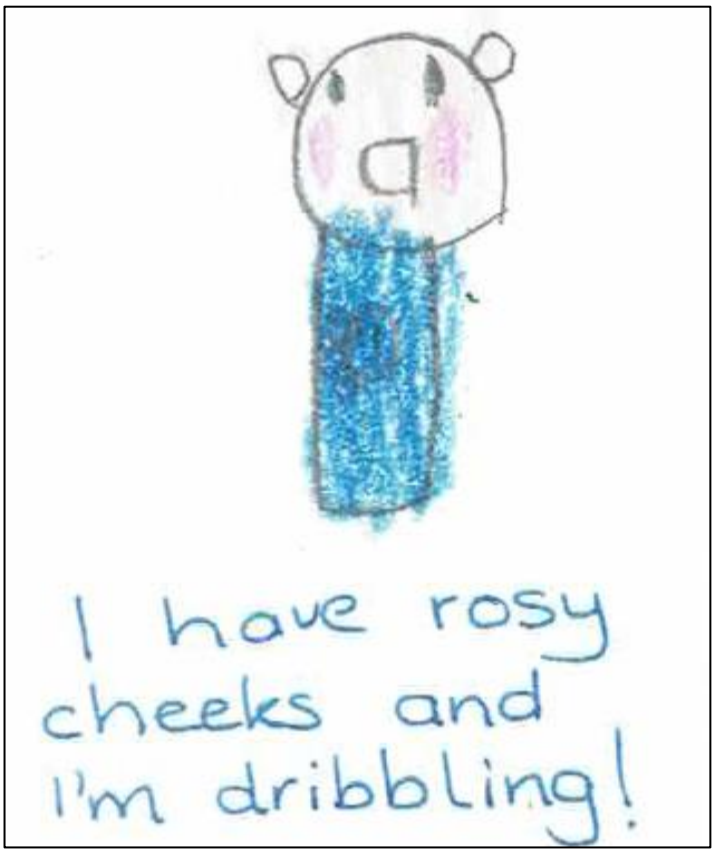
4.6.2 Finding Four: Children's Ability to Formulate Questions Limits their Agency within a Historical Enquiry

The IPSC History Teacher Guidelines state that there are 'close links…between history and language' (NCCA, 1999c: 14) and promote the use of discussion and questioning as methodologies within the subject (NCCA, 1999c). Hoodless adds to this, stating that 'children need to be autonomous in their enquiries' (2008: 68) with an added focus on being able to 'initiate the questioning process' (2008: 68). This became a focus of the HP intervention, when a dialogic teaching approach was utilised for children to ask questions about their lives that 'were not predetermined by the teacher' (Houen et al., 2016a: 71).

Pre-intervention, I became aware that many 'children struggle to formulate questions and cannot distinguish between a question and a statement' (RJE, 5/10/2022). When asked to formulate a question, children frequently 'started with 'I like' and did not request any information' (RJE, 5/10/2022); 'I have rosy cheeks and I'm dribbling' (Child 6, 18/1/2022) (see figure 4.24). As the intention of DT was to give children's questions a 'central place in planning subsequent activities' (Wells, 1999: 293), I was concerned with children's inability to articulate questions. However, by familiarising myself with Alexander's (2018) approach to DT, I knew that there was no one 'right way to maximise talk's quality and power' due to

the ‘uniqueness of each classroom’s personalities and circumstances’ (Alexander, 2018: 563).

Figure 4.24: Example of Child’s Attempted Question



To assist children in verbalising their questions, an ‘I-wonder-prefaced format’ (Curl and Drew, 2008: 147) was selected, to ‘intentionally…afford agency’ (Houen et al., 2016b: 272). This request format proved effective in eliciting questions from many children and gave them ‘the opportunity to take charge’ (CF1, 21/3/2022) of their historical enquiry. It scaffolded children to ‘play with thoughts’ (Houen et al., 2016a: 75) and gave both the teacher and SNA opportunities to ‘listen to their proposals…and [be] interested in their world[s]’ (Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen, 2010: 158) The range of questions the children asked, using the I-wonder format during the intervention can be seen in Appendices H, I, J and K. Although ‘’I wonder…’ requests [were] more successful’ (Houen et al., 2016a: 75), they were not a universal solution for all in my class.

My classroom is multicultural, in that the 'proportion of students with at least one parent who ha[s] migrated across international borders, or who have themselves done so' (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019: 1) is significant. Although English is the second language of many children, most are very fluent and can easily 'negotiate, explain [and] initiate discussion' (Hännikäinen and Rasku-Puttonen, 2010: 150). Other children enter Junior Infants with no English. This was the case for three of the children partaking in my research. Although for most children the introduction of I-wonder questions acted as a dialogic scaffold (Sedova et al., 2014), this was not true for these children learning English as an Additional Language (hereafter referred to as EAL). I questioned 'how can they be facilitated in a more authentic way?' (RJE, 26/1/2022) after the first DT lesson. I wanted to 'find ways to help children feel included' (Väyrynen and Paksuniemi, 2020: 151). CF1 similarly noted that 'coming up with their own questions was the tricky part, some children required a lot more prompting than others' (CF1, 21/3/2022). When prompted to wonder aloud, these children responded with 'silence…and non-answer responses' (Houen et al., 2016a: 73). The questions that arose for other children in the class through 'unfolding sequences of talk' (Houen et al., 2016a: 71), did not arise for these children. CF1 and I both noted the impact that this had on the agency of these three children. I prompted the children through 'a lot of miming, to help them to generate questions but this meant that although they chose their own question, they had to choose from the three questions I generated for them' (RJE, 26/1/2022). CF1 noted that 'some children needed a lot of prompting and that sometimes felt like you had to guide them rather than those children taking charge' (CF1, 21/3/2022). We felt that we were 'steer[ing] the dialogue to a previously defined point…the very opposite of dialogisation' (Sedova et al., 2014: 275). I felt a sense of 'frustration at returning to the point I hoped to deviate from' (RJE, 1/2/2022), as for some children, the learning in History lessons was still being dictated by me.

To overcome the focus on question design, historical evidence was introduced, as I had reflected that 'particularly for children learning EAL, I feel having a photograph would help provide some focus for them' (RJE, 1/2/2022). The introduction of artefacts made the lessons more 'tangible with real life objects toys/clothes etc.' (CF1, 21/3/2022). EAL children had the opportunity to 'select objects or point to specific parts of photographs' (RJE, 8/2/2022) and we helped them to generate questions based on what they indicated was of interest to them. This gave all children some 'influence' (Sedova et al., 2014: 275) over their learning. At home, parents of these three children noted some questions that their child asked while doing their homework (see figures 4.25 to 4.29). This shows that it is 'possible to see the same individual exercising more agency in one context and less in another' (Kayi-Aydar, 2015: 95), as when these children were at home they were able to take greater control of their learning.

Figure 4.25: Question 1 asked by Child 2 in HP at Home

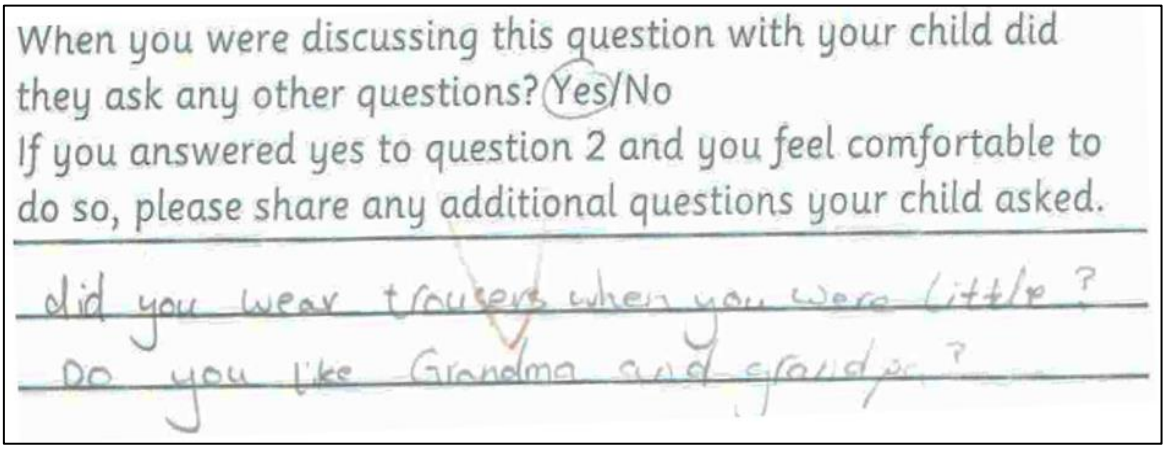

When you were discussing this question with your child did they ask any other questions? Yes/No
If you answered yes to question 2 and you feel comfortable to do so, please share any additional questions your child asked.
did you wear trousers when you were little?
Do you like Grandma and grandpa?

Figure 4.26: Question 2 asked by Child 2 in HP at Home

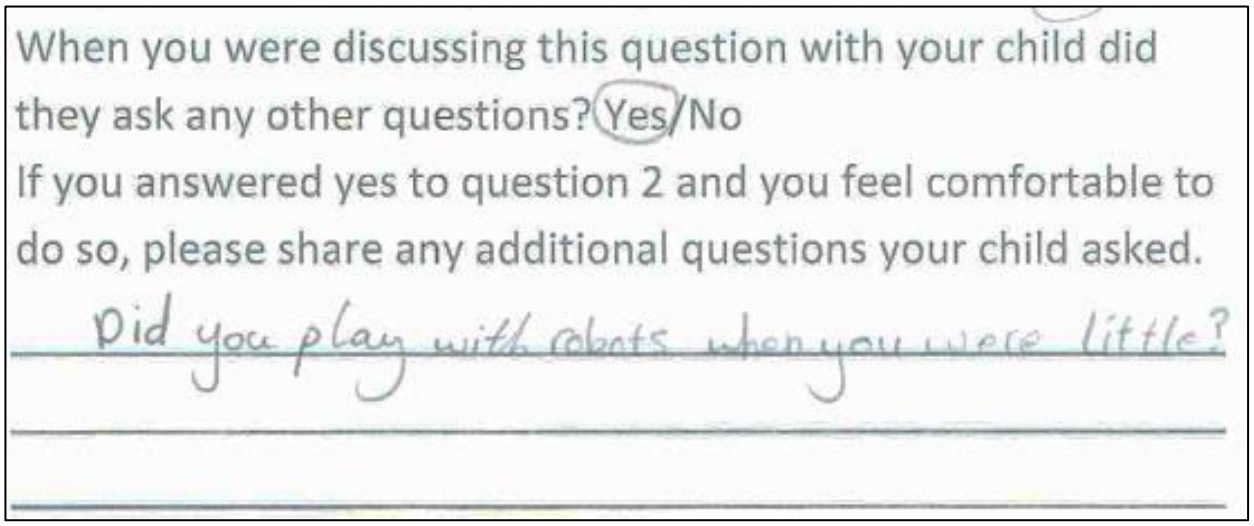

When you were discussing this question with your child did they ask any other questions? Yes/No
If you answered yes to question 2 and you feel comfortable to do so, please share any additional questions your child asked.
did you play with robots when you were little?

Figure 4.27: Question 1 asked by Child 6 in HP at Home

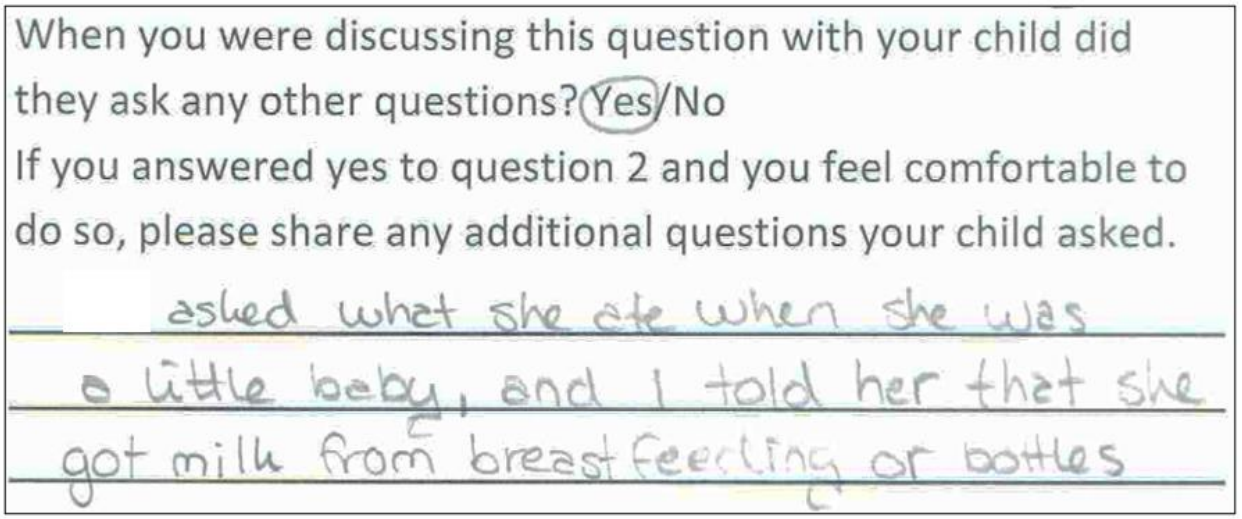

When you were discussing this question with your child did they ask any other questions? Yes/No
If you answered yes to question 2 and you feel comfortable to do so, please share any additional questions your child asked.
asked what she ate when she was a little baby, and I told her that she got milk from breast feeding or bottles

Figure 4.28: Question 1 asked by Child 12 in HP at Home

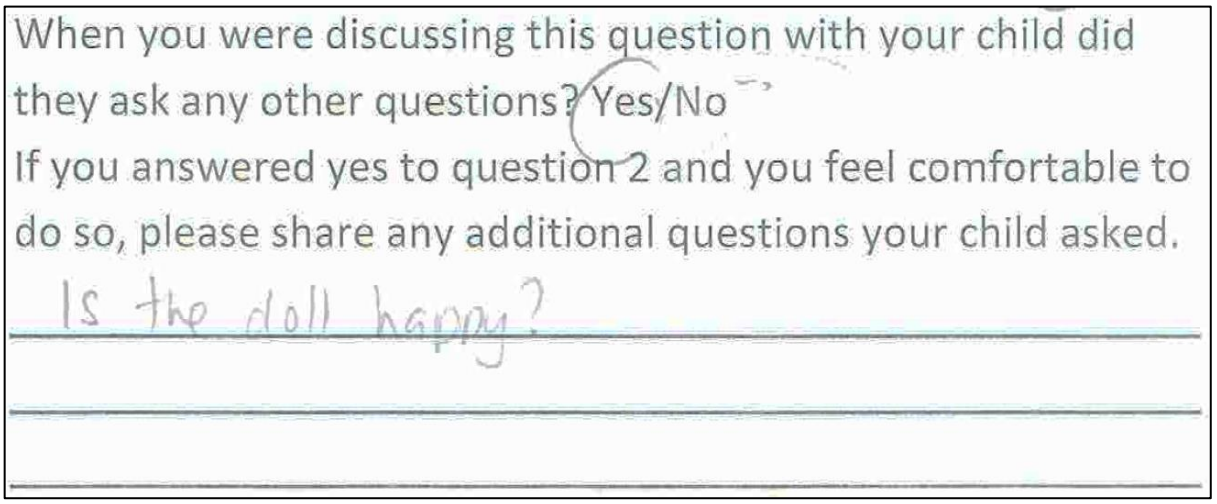
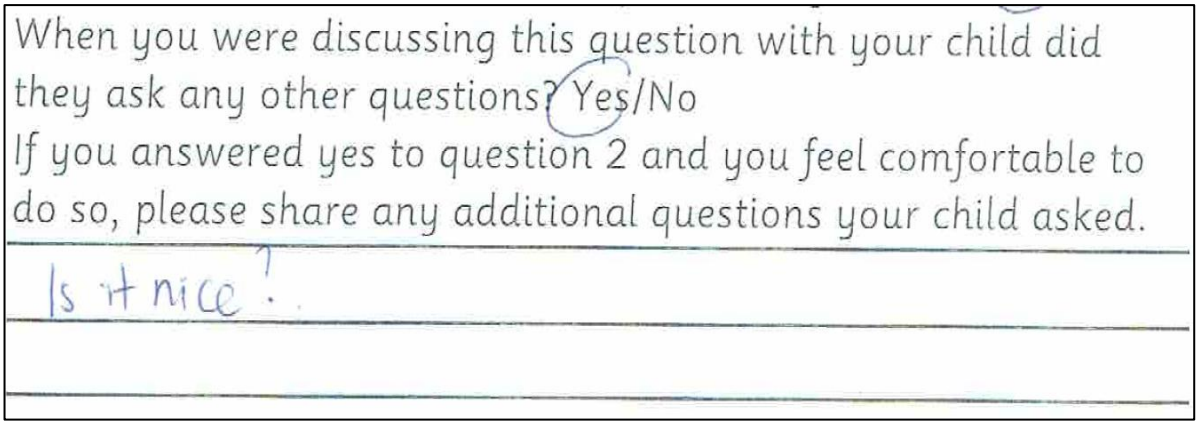

When you were discussing this question with your child did they ask any other questions? Yes/No
If you answered yes to question 2 and you feel comfortable to do so, please share any additional questions your child asked.
Is the doll happy?

Figure 4.29: Question 2 asked by Child 12 in HP at Home



CF1 suggested that we could have gone further by 'prepping the lesson with the parents of these children via dojo/email etc. and perhaps encouraging the parents to start a discussion in a natural by not prescribed way' (CF1, 21/3/2022) so that children would have some prior knowledge of the topic. This suggestion was a contributing factor to the design of the FTP. I invited the families into the hall to take part in the project, creating 'time and space for wondering together' (RJE, 16/3/2022). I felt that this opportunity to 'co-operate with learners' parents' (Väyrynen and Paksuniemi, 2020: 156) and grandparents would give all children 'voices within the relationships' (Clandinin and Connelly, 1990: 4) as they could wonder aloud in whichever language they chose. By consciously placing value on democracy, this project resonated with Kozleski and Waitoller's (2010) belief that learning environments should be collaborative and responsive to the lives of diverse learners.

The parent of one of the children who, when she joined Junior Infants in September had no English, noted that 'it was interesting to hear what questions and thoughts she had about us as children' (Parent 6, 29/4/2022). This child had not asked questions in class but parental participation 'stimulate[d] the children to speak more' (CF1, 21/3/2022). Parents/Grandparents of EAL children stated that 'she asked a lot of questions about our toys and what games we played' (Parent 6, 29/4/2022) and their child asked 'Where is grandma/grandpa/dad/mom? What is he/she wearing' (Parent 12, 29/4/2022). The presence

of family members gave children ‘the opportunity to discuss and explore their family trees’ (CF2, 19/5/2022) and ensured that young children, regardless of their first language, were ‘respected and listened to’ (Glynnis and Ebrahim, 2021: 2). Many children recorded family member’s names in their first language and were ‘excited to tell me how to say grandma, grandpa etc. using the words they really call them’ (RJE, 8/4/2022). Figure 4.30 shows the work of Child 11 who labelled his grandparents using the Egyptian words for Grandma and Grandpa. Family involvement supported a ‘dialogic approach to discourse’ (Houen et al., 2016a: 75) through engaging ‘students’ and families’ funds of knowledge’ (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 660), particularly their language.

Figure 4.30: Labelled Family Members

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter examined the data set through Brookfield’s reflective lenses (2017) to answer the research question, ‘How can I teach the ‘Myself’ strand in Junior Infant History so that it is focused on the children’s lives?’. In attempting to answer this question, two major themes emerged through reflexive thematic analysis (Braun and Clarke, 2019: 589). Theme one explored the relationship between increased sharing from adults and children accessing

the IPSC History (NCCA, 1999b). Theme two examined the teacher's role in creating opportunities for children to enact agency and factors that inhibit this. Using these themes as the basis for answering my research question, as well as uncovering the dissonance between my assumptions, values and practice, I have learned that teaching the curriculum in a child-centred and agentic way can be achieved through a combination of collaboration with families and the use of personal historical evidence. The next chapter will examine some limitations to these findings as well as the impact the findings will have on my practice. Attention will also be given to the potential for others to learn from these findings through dissemination of my research.

Chapter 5: Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This final chapter acts not only as a reflection of my learning journey to date, but also as a map to the future of this research. The limitations of this study are acknowledged with a view to strengthening the validity of my claims to knowledge. The way in which my values were 'realised' and 'transformed into actions that benefitted others' (McNiff, 2014: 54) are explored through discussion of the impact of my research on my practice. As it would be premature to believe that the interventions put in place to answer my research question were an 'unequivocal success' (Brookfield, 2017: 226) the extent to which the aims of this research were achieved is evaluated and areas for further study are identified. Finally, opportunities for disseminating my work so that others can gain 'new insights and understandings' (Goodnough, 2010: 180) are described.

5.2 Limitations of the Research

Dialogue with my validation group to give critical feedback on my findings illuminated two principle limitations of my research. Working with Critical Friends who were also colleagues can be considered a limitation of my research. The purpose of Critical Friends is to 'critique woolly or inconsistent thinking and challenge you when you veer towards it' (McDonagh et al., 2020: 74). My close working relationship with my Critical Friends may have prevented them from engaging in 'challenge and confrontation for the purpose of development' (Campbell et al., 2004: 107). Perhaps if data had been gathered through a group interview rather than individual questionnaires this would have provided a 'two version of events – a cross check – and one can complement the other with additional points' (Cohen et al., 2018: 527).

A second limitation of this study is the power imbalance between the teacher and child participants. It has been stated that 'the power relationship between adults and children poses the greatest threat to the authenticity of what children contribute' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64). Children in my class may have felt 'pressured to give the correct answer to the research questions' (Powell et al., 2012: 19), or may have attempted to 'please or hide views that they may perceive as challenging' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64) for me to hear. Although it was explained to children that 'I am trying to find out how I can improve my teaching of History in our class' (Children's Assent Form, January 2022), the impact this had on mitigating the effect of the power imbalance is unclear.

5.3 Impact on Practice

This self-study action research journey taught me to become more 'attuned to teachings' complexity, its chaos and its contradictions' (Brookfield, 2017: 235). It made me aware of the contradiction between the values I claim to hold and the reality of my practice. Articulating my values was initially a method of 'understanding why I was concerned' (Sullivan et al., 2016: 66) with my teaching of the Myself strand in Junior Infants History. My values later came to 'act as the criteria by which [I] judge[d] the quality of [my] practice' (McNiff, 2014: 53).

I now see clearly that when I taught History in the past, there was 'too little attention…paid to the contexts in which [the] teaching and learning occur[ed]' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 656) and hence too little attention played to child-centred learning experiences that show respect for diversity and democracy. By enduring 'pain, joy, fear, bravery, love [and] rage' (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 22) in search of a way to live closer in the direction of my values, deep professional learning occurred. Just as Jovés et al. view 'students' families, life experiences and practices as basic educational resources from which

to scaffold, support and extend curriculum competences' (2015: 70) in History lessons, I too now consider these as central tenets of my planning and teaching of History. I understand that to teach the Myself strand I need to live out the value I place on the social construction of knowledge by involving families in the process. Building relationships with families is important because 'you can know the academic standards inside and out, and write the most creative lesson plans, but if positive, affirming, and mutually respectful relationships are not the norm…no learning will take place' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 140) that is genuinely focused on the life-histories of the children in my class.

5.4 Recommendations for Further Research

This self-study action research project has taught me that 'messes are complex, multi-dimensional, intractable, dynamic problems that can only be partially addressed and partially resolved' (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003: 21) and to assume that I am no longer a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 2018: 13) in some area of my practice would be naïve. My reflective journal acted as both a 'vehicle and catalyst' (Knowles, 1993: 88) as the many unanswered questions within its pages are areas for further research. Investigating ways to engage parents who did not get involved with the History Portfolios or Family Tree Project is an area of interest as those parents were 'disengaged with the school and I don't know how to overcome this' (RJE, 21/3/2022). Another topic for continued study is agency for both adults and children as I became concerned about this, questioning; 'Is it damaging or overwhelming for adults and children who have never been given choice to suddenly be given opportunities to make choices and decisions?'. Exploring these questions was beyond the scope of this research but may become steppingstones on my 'lifelong learning process' (Kelchtermans, 2017: 13).

5.5 Disseminating the Research

The dissemination stage of self-study action research is 'often over-looked' (Goodnough, 2010: 180) possibly as it often comes at the very end of 'a long incremental haul' (Brookfield, 2017: 225) of research and reflection. Dissemination has an important role to play in allowing others to profit from my research and inspiring them to undertake similar research (McDonagh et al., 2020), adapted to their contexts. Through my role as Assistant Principal II with responsibility for S.E.S.E. in my school, I may present the findings of my research to the whole staff. This may lead to changes to the S.E.S.E. Whole School Plan to include greater use of historical evidence and greater collaboration with parents/grandparents in History teaching. Furthermore, after her involvement with the Family Tree Project, the Home School Community Liaison teacher shared between our school and another school, spoke to me about the possibility of this project becoming an annual initiative run in with Junior Infants parents/grandparents in both schools. Finally, I will share my research through presenting at the autumn Irish Froebel Network Conference to both practicing members of the Irish Froebel Network and future teachers currently undertaking teacher training.

5.6 Conclusion

The aims of this research project were to, 1) realign my values and my practice when I taught the Myself strand of the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b), 2) interrogate my assumptions to ascertain their validity and impact on my practice and 3) answer the question: *How can I teach the 'Myself' strand in Junior Infant History so that it is focused on the children's lives?*. To achieve these aims, I learned by 'drawing from the past and by imagining a future' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 658) where my practice more closely aligned with the value I place on child-centred education, democracy and diversity.

In the past, when planning History lessons, I relied on my 'stereotypic beliefs' (Hannon and O'Donnell, 2022: 242) about what childhood is like, neglecting that 'cultures…change over time' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 131). Acknowledging the dichotomy between my beliefs and reality created space for 'new inclusive assumptions' (Kozleski and Waitoller, 2010: 658) based on the children's actual lived experiences, to come to light. By engaging children in dialogic teaching, I began 'listening to children for the purpose of…enhancing the …practices that directly affect them' (Ruscoe et al., 2018: 64) and was hence able to tailor the History 'curriculum to be contextualized' (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019: 3) for those in my class. Teaching in a contextualised way changed my role to that of 'detecting knowledge and the social, family and community experiences of the students' (Jovés et al., 2015: 70) by asking parents/grandparents for help and 'asserting that local knowledge has a legitimate place' (Amanti in González et al., 2005: 132) in History lessons.

5.6.1 Claims to Knowledge

My claims to knowledge relate to the learning that has taken place from all aspects of this self-study action research project, but predominantly from a revision of my original assumptions stated in Chapter One. My first claim to knowledge is that the limited number of objectives within the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b) for Junior Infants provide time and scope for 'children to observe, to question, think critically and discuss their ideas' (Cooper, 2013a: 35) as there is no pressure of curriculum overload within this subject. The small number of objectives gives teacher the freedom to plan length units of study based on children's 'babyhood, the toys they used when young, their first day at school' (NCCA, 1999c: 7).

My second claim to knowledge is that the teacher is not the best placed adult to support Junior Infant children with their acquisition of the objectives of the Myself strand of

the History curriculum (NCCA, 1999b). To view the teacher in such a way is to dimmish the value of the 'knowledge, skills and cultural resources' (Esteban-Guitart et al., 2019: 2) held by parents/grandparents and their role in teaching this to their children/grandchildren. To successfully teach children about 'their own past and that of their family' (NCCA, 1999c: 7), the teacher must embrace the role of parents/grandparents 'as co-educators' (Goodall and Montgomery, 2014: 401).

Finally, I now claim to know that I can share elements of my life-history without being 'self-obsessed (Brookfield, 2017:1) or 'narcissistic' (Kelchtermans, 2017: 8). Teacher-sharing and child-centred pedagogy are not mutually exclusive, one is not the antithesis of the other. Teacher-sharing has the power to facilitate child-centred learning when it serves 'as a stimulus for the imagination' (Harnett and Whitehouse in Cooper, 2017: 33).

These are my current claims to knowledge based on the assumptions I now hold about education. However, this self-study action research journey has opened me up to 'permanent possibilities for change and development' (Brookfield, 2017: 131) in my practice. Therefore, in a continued effort to live according to my values, sustained evaluation of my values and assumptions will lead to the constant evolution of my practice.

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Appendices

Appendix A: Principal Explanation Letter

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Dear Principal,

I am writing to you to seek permission to commence a self-study action research project in ourschool as part of the Master of Education programme I am undertaking at Maynooth University.I am conducting this research under the supervision of Dr. Bernadette Wrynn and Laoise Ní Chléirigh, lecturers in the Froebel Department of Early Childhood Education.

The focus of my research is based on my teaching of the Junior Infant History curriculum andseeks to find out how I can enhance my teaching of this subject so that it more clearly reflectsthe children's own lives.

In order to do this, I intend to use history portfolios with each child. This approach will allow me to ask each child to wonder about themselves when they were younger and about their families. The questions they have will be recorded in their history portfolios and explored bothin class and at home as part of homework. I wish to send these portfolios home as parents are best placed to answer the questions their child has about their personal history.

The self-study action research may entail the following elements:

-observations of children in the classroom

-collection of work samples

-voice recordings of the children

-interviews with parents

-questionnaires with parents

-feedback from critical friends

-teacher reflections

The data collected with will be treated in confidence. Neither the school nor the participants will be identifiable in any aspect of the research. Participants will be made aware of their

rightto refuse to take part or withdraw from the research at any stage. If this occurs all data from that participant will be destroyed and not included in the data archive.

The data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in our school and will only be accessible to me. Electronic data will be stored in a password protected file. The data will be stored for ten years after the research has taken place, as per University regulations; it will thenbe securely destroyed.

The correct guidelines will be complied with when carrying out this research. The research willnot be carried out until ethical approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education. The results of this study will be presented in my thesis which willbe viewed by my supervisor, the Head of Froebel Department and an external examiner. The study may be published in a research journal or available to future students of the Master of Education course.

I would be grateful if you could give permission for me to seek consent from parents and assentfrom children to participate in this study. No incentives or rewards will be offered to participants to encourage them to take part.

I have attached a Parental and Child consent forms as well as the Principal Consent form for your consideration. I If you give consent for the children to participate in my research please complete this form and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

If you wish to discuss this research further please do not hesitate to contact me by email [redacted] or arrange a face-to-face meeting at a time that is convenient for you.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Mahon

Appendix B: Principal Consent Form

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

PRINCIPAL CONSENT FORM

I give consent for you to approach parents to gain consent for pupils and parents to participate in the given Self-Study Action Research Project. I have read the Letter of Consent explaining the purpose of the research study and understand that:

• The role of the school is voluntary.

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

• The participants will be given informed consent and will understand that they may only participate in the study with this consent.

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

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

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

• Participants may withdraw during any part of the study without consequence. Participants will not receive any incentive to participate in the research study.

I may seek further information about the research study from Louise Mahon [redacted]

_____

Principal's Signature

_____

Date

Appendix C: Critical Friend Explanation Letter

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Dear Critical Friend,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am carrying out a self-study action research project. The focus of my research is based on my teaching of the Junior Infant History curriculum and how I can enhance my teaching of this subject so that it more clearly reflects the children's own lives.

I intend to carry out research in the classroom by beginning history portfolios with each child. This approach will allow me to ask each child to wonder about themselves when they were younger and about their families. The questions they have will be recorded in their history portfolios and completed both in class and at home as part of homework. I wish to send the history portfolios home as parents are best placed to answer the questions their child has about their personal history.

The data will be collected using observations, a teacher reflective journal, voice recordings of history lessons, work samples from history portfolios, interviews with parents and questionnaires. I would like to seek your advice, opinions and critique of my findings and theories also to ensure the validity of my work. The data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in our school and will only be accessible to me. Electronic data will be stored in a password protected file. The data will be stored for ten years after the research has taken place, as per University regulations; it will then be securely destroyed.

Your name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. You will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage.

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. The results of this study will be presented in my thesis which will be viewed by my supervisor, the Head of Froebel Department and an external examiner. The study may be published in a research journal or available to future students of the Masters course.

I have attached a Critical Friend Consent Form for your consideration. If you consent to participate in my research please complete this form and return it to me at your earliest convenience.

Yours sincerely,

Louise Mahon

Appendix D: Critical Friend Consent Form

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

CRITICAL FRIEND CONSENT FORM

I _____ (Critical Friend's Name) have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered.

I voluntarily agree to participation in this study as the role of 'critical friend'. I understand that I am engaging in this study on a voluntary basis and I have the right to withdraw at any stage during the study.

I am happy for my comments, suggestions observations or reference to conversations with the researcher to be included as part of the data archive within the research.

I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Appendix E: Parent Explanation Letter

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

Dear Parent,

I am a student on the Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree, I am carrying out a self-study action research project. The focus of my research is based on my teaching of the Junior Infant History curriculum and how I can enhance my teaching of this subject so that it more clearly reflects the children's own lives.

I intend to carry out research in the classroom by beginning history portfolios with each child. This approach will allow me to ask each child to wonder about themselves when they were younger and about their families. The questions they have will be recorded in their history portfolios and explored both in class and at home as part of homework. I wish to send these portfolios home as you, as parents, are best placed to answer the questions your child has about their personal history.

The data will be collected using observations, a teacher reflective journal, voice recordings of history lessons, work samples from history portfolios, interviews with parents and questionnaires. The data collected will be stored in a locked filing cabinet in our school and will only be accessible to me. Electronic data will be stored in a password protected file. The data will be stored for ten years after the research has taken place, as per University regulations; it will then be securely destroyed.

Your child's name, your name and the name of the school will not be included in the thesis that I will write at the end of the research. You and your child will be allowed withdraw from the research process at any stage without consequence.

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. The results of this study will be presented in my thesis which will be viewed by my supervisor, the Head of Froebel Department and an external examiner. The study may be published in a research journal or available to future students of the Masters course.

I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for you and him/her to take part in this project. Please complete the written consent form attached to allow your son or daughter to participate. Please complete the consent form if you would be happy to participate in interviews/questionnaires.

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

Yours faithfully,

Appendix F: Parent Consent Form

Maynooth University Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education

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

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

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

Child's Name: _____

Parent / Guardian Signature:_____

Date: _____

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

Parent / Guardian Signature:_____

Date: _____

Appendix G: Children's Assent Form

Dear children,

I am trying to find out how I can improve my teaching of history in our class. I want to find out ways that can help you to learn more about yourselves when you were younger and about your family. I would like to work with you, talk to you and use some of your work to help me find out the best ways of teaching you History. I will also write down some notes about how I am helping you learn. This will be my homework. Sometimes we will use voice recordings in the classroom so that I can listen back to my teaching and find ways to be a better teacher.

I have asked your parents to talk to you about this at home. If you have any questions, I would be happy to answer them.

If you would like to take part in my project, please write your name on the line below. If you change your mind after we start that's okay too.

Thank you,

Ms. Mahon

Child Signature: _____ Date: _____

If you ever decide you no longer want to be part of this research that is okay. You can tell me and we can sign this box together.

I no longer want to be part of Ms. Mahon's research project.

Child Signature: _____Date: _____

Appendix H: History Portfolio Questions (26/1/2022)

I wonder about when I was a baby…

Child 1	I wonder when I learned to say Mammy, Daddy, brother…
Child 2	I wonder when I learned to walk…
Child 3	I wonder when my hair grew long…
Child 4	I wonder when I started to walk…
Child 5	I wonder what I had for lunch when I was a baby…
Child 6	I wonder what I ate when I was a baby… I wonder when I started to talk…
Child 7	I wonder when I grew hair…
Child 8	I wonder if I ever had a play date when I was a baby…I wonder when I learned to walk by myself…
Child 9	I wonder if Mammy dressed me? I wonder if I had any friends…I wonder if I cried a lot…I wonder did I like ice-cream when I was small…
Child 10	I wonder when I started to crawl…
Child 11	I wonder when I started to walk…
Child 12	I wonder what toys I played with when I was a baby…

Appendix I: History Portfolio Questions (1/2/2022)

I wonder about when my parents/grandparents were in school…

Child 1	I wonder if Mam had a school uniform…
Child 2	Absent
Child 3	I wonder how Mammy wore her hair for school in Junior Infants…
Child 4	Absent
Child 5	I wonder what Mom and Dad had for school lunch…
Child 6	I wonder what Mom ate for school lunch…I wonder what Dad played with…
Child 7	Absent
Child 8	I wonder if Mammy played on the yard by herself…
Child 9	I wonder if Daddy when to the same school as me…
Child 10	Absent
Child 11	I wonder did Mammy drink orange juice for school lunch…
Child 12	Absent

Appendix J: History Portfolio Questions (16/2/2022)

I wonder about the clothes my parents/grandparents wore…

Child 1	I wonder who bought my Mammy's clothes when she was a baby….
Child 2	I wonder if Mam wore dresses when she was a baby…
Child 3	I wonder did my Mammy wear a dress in the summer when she was a baby…
Child 4	I wonder if Nanny sewed Mammy's clothes…I wonder if both Nannies sewed clothes…
Child 5	I wonder if my Mom wore dresses when she was a baby…I wonder if Dad wore Pikachu and Sonic clothes…I wonder did they buy clothes in a shop…
Child 6	I wonder if my Mom wore a dress when she was a baby…
Child 7	I wonder who bought Granda [redacted]'s clothes when he was a baby…
Child 8	I wonder did my Nanny make my Daddy's clothes when he was a baby because she makes things from wool…
Child 9	I wonder if Daddy had pyjamas when he was a little boy…
Child 10	I wonder what kind of dresses Mammy wore when she was a little girl…
Child 11	I wonder did Tita make Daddy's clothes when he was a baby…
Child 12	I wonder where Mommy got clothes…

Appendix K: History Portfolio Questions (8/3/2022)

I wonder about the toys my parents/grandparents played with…

Child 1	I wonder if Daddy played with Lego…I wonder if my Mammy played with a Barbie house like I have and then gave it to me…
Child 2	I wonder did Mom and Dad play with Lego…
Child 3	I wonder if my Mammy had a toy hover board when she was little…
Child 4	I wonder if Mammy played with rag dolls like Hulk did with Loki in the Avengers movie…
Child 5	I wonder if my Mom had a doll and my Dad had a duck teddy…
Child 6	I wonder if my Mom played with Barbie dolls like me…
Child 7	I wonder if Granda had a dog teddy like me…
Child 8	I wonder if Mammy played with Lego like me…
Child 9	I wonder what toys Daddy played with when he was little…
Child 10	I wonder if my Mom played with the same toys as me…
Child 11	I wonder did Mammy play with a toy bus…
Child 12	I wonder what toys Mommy played with…

Appendix L: Examples of Family Trees

Appendix M: Student Family Tree Project Interview Questions

1. Did you learn anything new during the Family Tree Project?
2. Did you get to make any decisions during the Family Tree Project? What decisions did you get to make? What decisions would you like to have made?
3. Did you ask the adults in your family any questions when you were working together on the Family Tree Project?
4. Do you think your family tree looks different or the same as everybody else's?
5. Did you enjoy the Family Tree Project?
6. Did you feel important when you were working on your family tree?
7. Did you enjoy working with a grown up from your family?
8. What did you like most about the project?
9. What did you like least about the project?
10. What would have made the project better?

Appendix N: Student Family Tree Project Questionnaire

Date: 8/4/2022 Age:

Please answer the following questions by colouring the smiley face of your choice.



1.	I was allowed to make decisions about my Family Tree during the Family Tree Project.			
2.	I learned something new about my family during the Family Tree Project.			
3.	I asked Mammy/Daddy/Nanny/Grandad questions about my family when we were working together.			
4.	My Family Tree looked different than other people's Family Tree.			
5.	I enjoyed the Family Tree Project.			
6.	I felt important when I was doing the Family Tree Project.			
7.	My cardboard family members look like my real family members.			
8.	I enjoyed working with Mammy/Daddy/Nanny/Grandad/ on this project.			
9.	I liked when			
10.	I didn't like when			

Appendix O: Parent/Grandparent Family Tree Project Questionnaire

Family Tree Project Questionnaire

(This is an anonymous questionnaire to be completed by parents/grandparents)

1. Did you enjoy taking part in the Family Tree project with your child/grandchild? Circle your answer:

   Yes No

2. Why did you enjoy/not enjoy taking part in the project?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

3. Do you think your child/grandchild enjoyed taking part in this project? Circle your answer:
   Yes No

4. Why do you think your child/grandchild did/did not enjoy taking part in the project?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

5. What part (if any) of the project do you think was most interesting for your child/grandchild?

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

6. Did your child/grandchild ask any questions about their family members during the project? Circle your answer:

   Yes No

   Give examples of questions if possible:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

7. Did your child/grandchild talk about the project when they went home from school or to other family members? Circle your answer:

   Yes No

   Give details if possible:

   _____
   _____
   _____
   _____

8. Do you think your child/grandchild had opportunities to make decisions during the project? Circle your answer:
   Yes No

9. Did your child/grandchild use any of the following words correctly during the project:
   (circle any words they used correctly)

younger	youngest	older	oldest	age
baby	toddler	child	adult/grown up	family
brother	sister	mother (or similar, example Mam)	father (or similar, example Daddy)	grandmother (or similar, example Nana)
grandfather (or similar, example Papa)	great grandmother (or similar, example great nan)	great grandfather (or similar, example great granda)	aunt	uncle
cousin	related			

10. Is there anything that could have been done to make this project easier for you, or another family member, to take part in?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

11. Do you have any other comments about the Family Tree Project?

    _____
    _____
    _____
    _____

Thank you for taking the time to complete this questionnaire

Appendix P: Critical Friend History Portfolio Questionnaire

History Portfolios Questionnaire for Critical Friends

1. What, if any, do you think were the main benefits of the History Talk Time lessons and History Portfolios?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

2. What, if any, do you think were the main drawbacks of the History Talk Time lessons and History Portfolios?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

3. Tick the History objectives you think were achieved during the History Talk Time lessons and History Portfolios:

- ☐ explore and record significant personal events and dates *(my age, when I was born, when I took my first steps, as a I grew up, first day at school, places where I have lived)*
- ☐ collect and examine simple evidence *(photographs of oneself when younger, first toys, etc.)*
- ☐ compare photographs, clothes worn or toys used at different ages, noting development and things which have stayed the same
- ☐ become aware of and identify the members of the family
- ☐ compare relative ages: old/older, young/younger
- ☐ collect simple evidence *(photographs of family members)*
- ☐ explore and discuss how family members care for each other
- ☐ discuss developments in the life of the family and things which have stayed the same (*living in the same home, getting a new car, trees growing in the garden)*

4. Is there any way that children learning English as an Additional Language could have been better supported to ask questions during the History Talk Time lessons?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

5. Did the sharing of photographs and objects (*photographs, baby clothes, childhood toys etc.)* in the beginning of each History Talk Time lesson influence the questions the children asked about themselves and their families?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

6. Is there any way that physical resources and photographs could have been used more effectively to stimulate conversation and questions during the History Talk Time lessons?

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

7. Did the History Talk Time lessons and History Portfolios allow the children to take charge of the historical learning that took place? Please elaborate if possible.

_____
_____
_____
_____
_____

Appendix Q: Critical Friend Family Tree Project Questionnaire

Family Tree Project Questionnaire for Critical Friends

8. What, if any, do you think were the main benefits of the Family Tree Project?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

9. What, if any, do you think were the main drawbacks of the Family Tree Project?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

10. Tick the History objectives you think were achieved during the project:

- ☐ explore and record significant personal events and dates *(my age, when I was born, when I took my first steps, as a I grew up, first day at school, places where I have lived)*
- ☐ collect and examine simple evidence *(photographs of oneself when younger, first toys, etc.)*
- ☐ compare photographs, clothes worn or toys used at different ages, noting development and things which have stayed the same
- ☐ become aware of and identify the members of the family
- ☐ compare relative ages: old/older, young/younger
- ☐ collect simple evidence *(photographs of family members)*
- ☐ explore and discuss how family members care for each other
- ☐ discuss developments in the life of the family and things which have stayed the same (*living in the same home, getting a new car, trees growing in the garden)*

11. Who do you think got to make the majority of the decisions during the Family Tree Project? Please elaborate if possible.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

12. Is there any way that children could have been given greater decision-making opportunities during the project?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

13. Is there any way that parents/grandparents could have been given greater decision-making opportunities during the project?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

14. Is there any way that children who did not have an adult family member present could have been better supported in learning about their own family?

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

15. Did this project allow the children to learn about the uniqueness of their family? Please elaborate if possible.

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

_____

Appendix R: Sample Blank History Portfolio Page

I Wonder…

I wonder_____

I think…
I asked at home and they said… (Please talk about about write the answer to the question your child/grandchild asked. They should also draw a picture to illustrate the answer to their question.)

Additional Questions for Parents/Grandparents

1. Did your child ever ask you this question before? Yes/No
2. When you were discussing this question with your child did they ask any other questions? Yes/No
3. If you answered yes to question 2 and you feel comfortable to do so, please share any additional questions your child asked.