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Promoting Independence and Responsibility in the Classroom

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Declaration of Authenticity

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Signed: *Amy O'Dwyer*

Date: 26th August 2019

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Abstract

This thesis examines the question; How can I improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom? I adopted a self-study approach within the action research paradigm to reflect on my practice with a view of learning how to improve it. My epistemological and ontological values underlie the research reported in this thesis. The epistemological value that I focused on was valuing the children and their developmental stage in order to empower them to further enhance their skills of independence and responsibility at differentiated levels. My epistemological stance is based on the constructivist theory, where students gain an understanding of the world through discovery and student-centred learning.

Two cycles of action research were conducted with myself and the children in second class, as co-participants. I implemented routines, tasks and opportunities in which the children could engage in independent tasks and take on responsibilities. Qualitative data were gathered throughout both research cycles. Critical reflection on my practice contributed significantly to the data gathered. Surveys and interviews provided insights into the children's experience of being independent and responsible in the classroom. Through conversations with colleagues, observations and dialogue with my critical friend and members of my validation group, I gained multiple perspectives on my practice. Ethical approval was granted by the school and University and ethical standards were adhered to throughout.

The findings reported in this thesis reveal factors that contribute to the promotion of independence and responsibility in the classroom. Through thematic analysis, three key

factors were identified. These factors include the teacher taking on the role of a facilitator, the impact of children working as active agents in their learning and the value of co-operative learning.

Having engaged in this self-study action research I have come to value creating a collaborative classroom where children are co-creators of knowledge. My research has had a significant impact on my own educational development. There is potential significance of my research in my own educational setting and for the wider educational research community. Through engaging in this self-study action research, I have deepened my own understanding of the value of critical reflection and have an increased desire to engage in further research.

List of Abbreviations

C.A.P.E.R.	Children and Parents Enjoying Reading
D.E.T.	Department of Education and Training
D.E.S.	Department of Education and Skills
F.N.A.E.	Finnish National Agency for Education
N.C.C.A.	National Council for Curriculum and Assessment
S.N.A.	Special Needs Assistant
T.C.	Teaching Council
U.N.	United Nations
V.C.C.A.	Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority
V.I.T.	Victorian Institute of Teaching

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1. Introduction

1.1 Introduction

This thesis is a narrative account of my learning through engagement with self-study action research. The focus throughout the study was on my research question: How can I improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom? This thesis outlines the research I engaged in from August 2018 until August 2019. It highlights my personal learning journey through engaging in self-study action research, the findings that emerged through data analysis and the potential educative influence my research could have.

The context of this self-study action research project was the co-educational primary school in which I work as a second class teacher. There are three streams of second class. The socio-economic status of the school is middle class, in a suburban setting. Research

was conducted on an ongoing basis from January to April 2019 within my classroom environment with all permitted participants.

1.2 Rationale

I chose to focus on improving my practice as, after accruing considerable teaching experience, I rarely challenged myself to critically analyse my pedagogical practice. Having gained experience teaching in the State of Victoria in Australia, I saw independence promoted throughout the primary school. The students took on responsibilities and were given choices, providing them with great ownership and many activities were self-led. Looking critically at my pedagogy, I came to view myself as a 'living contradiction' (Whitehead, 2011, 00:00:07). I asked myself the question; If I value the importance of child-centred education and of children being active agents in their learning, how can I improve my practice to foster these skills? I began by focusing on my philosophy of education which is grounded in the values I hold and hope to see lived out in my practice. "As a self-reflective practitioner, you need to be aware of what drives your life and work, so you can be clear about what you are doing and why you are doing it" (Mc Niff, 2002: n/p).

1.3 Values

Action research involves examining the values underpinning our work (Sullivan et al., 2016). Action researchers in an educational setting look at their philosophy of teaching and learning and strive to improve their teaching to enhance the learning opportunities for their pupils (Sullivan et al., 2016). The moral dimension of self-study action research appealed to me as the practitioner is held morally accountable and 'I' is at the centre of the educational enquiry (Miff & Whitehead, 2011).

Whitehead (2000) suggests that a researcher's individual values underpinning the research process could be used as standards of judgement. The standards of judgement underpinning this self-study action research are based upon both my ontological and epistemological values. Ontology is the study of being and ontological values relate to how we view ourselves in our relationships with others (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). Epistemological values are based on how we understand knowledge and how we come to acquire and create it (McNiff & Whitehead, 2011). My epistemological value underlying this research is based on the constructivist theory which can be situated within Bruner's (1960) learning theory of education. Jerome Bruner (1960) stated the purpose of education is to facilitate a child's thinking and problem-solving skills in order for them to be transferred to a variety of situations. Similarly, my ontological view of myself in an educational setting is that of a facilitator, focusing on child-centred learning. The overall vision underpinning the national primary school curriculum, is that children will be enabled to confidently meet the demands of life, now and in the future (National Council for Curriculum and Assessment (N.C.C.A.), 1999a). In line with this, I value the importance of nurturing independence and responsibility in the children.

1.4 Methodology

I created an action research plan to promote the skills of independence and responsibility in the classroom, which I implemented over a six-week period. This was a cyclical plan with review, reflection and modification throughout. I gathered feedback from the children through survey responses, interviews and transcripts of conversations. Recorded observations from colleagues, conversations with my critical friend and members of my validation group provided different perspectives on my intervention. Taking this data, my own observations and my reflective journal entries, I reviewed the initial cycle and created

a second six-week action research plan. The data from both cycles of research were analysed, presented and compared with the literature to support the development of my personal living theory of education.

1.5 Ethical Considerations

Key ethical considerations in the conduct of this research included treating the participating children as co-researchers in the process, gaining written informed consent from the children, their parents and colleagues and gaining permission from the Board of Management to conduct the research in the school (Shaw, Brady and Davey, 2011). The children were informed about the research study using appropriate language before written informed consent was sought (Cohen, Manion and Morrison, 2007). A letter of explanation with details of the purpose, foreseeable risks and benefits of the research was sent to their guardians with questions about the nature of the research welcomed (Cohen et al., 2007). Participants were informed of their rights to withdraw from the research at any stage.

1.6 Professional Relevance

Through engaging in this self-study action research, I have become a critically reflective practitioner. I have developed agency in my practice and look forward to further enhancing this. Although this is a self-study, my intention is to disseminate my findings as I feel other educators could benefit from implementing similar strategies in their classrooms to promote the skills of independence and responsibility.

1.7 Synopsis of the Following Chapters

This section will provide a synopsis of the chapters that follow in this thesis.

Literature Review

Chapter two will consist of a review of the literature surrounding my research area. To deepen my understanding of fostering independence and responsibility in the classroom, I critically analysed both national and international literature, focusing on the Irish, Finnish and Australian curricula. These are presented in the literature review chapter alongside the theoretical perspectives of Froebel, Freire, Vygotsky and Bruner. Literature surrounding critical reflection will be explored and a review of practice surrounding implementing independence and responsibility into daily routine in the classroom outlined. Through engaging with relevant literature throughout the process of this action research, I aimed to broaden my understanding on the current thinking in my area of research and deepen my understanding of self-study action research and critical reflection.

Research Methods

Chapter three will explain the methodology of this research, highlighting the rationale for action research as the chosen paradigm. The sampling and selection of research participants and potential ethical considerations that may be raised by the research will be discussed. An outline of the instruments used for data collection, storage of this data and how the data were analysed will be provided. An outline will be given of how validity and reliability of the research methods are achieved. I explore my values as standards of judgement and the significance of critical pedagogy throughout the action research.

Data and Discussion

Chapter four will present an analysis and summary of the key findings of the research. Three key themes emerged through data analysis which will be discussed in detail in this chapter; The teacher as a facilitator, the children as active agents and co-operative learning. The significance of my learning and developing a theory of practice will be presented.

Conclusion

Chapter five will draw conclusions based on the literature and findings of the research. The potential for future research, reflection as a life-long process and dissemination of my findings will be outlined.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Introduction

This chapter will provide an overview of promoting independence and responsibility in the classroom through self-study action research with reference to national and international literature. From a theoretical perspective, the work of Friedrich Froebel, Paulo Freire, Lev Vygotsky and Jerome Bruner will be reflected upon. The key rationale for promoting these skills in the classroom within the Irish context will be addressed.

2.2 Theoretical Perspectives

Self-study action research is a deeply values based approach (Sullivan et al., 2016). Having reviewed literature surrounding theories of education, I have now situated my values within the work of Froebel, Vygotsky, Bruner and Freire. In carrying out action research, educators need to be informed by their own values, norms and assumptions (Sullivan et al.,

2016). According to Mc Niff (2002) action researchers begin with establishing their values in order to avoid Whitehead (2011, 00:00:07)'s experience of becoming a 'living contradiction'. I have detailed the work of the theorists whose perspectives resonate with my values.

2.2.1 Friedrich Froebel

My pedagogical practice in the classroom has been influenced by Froebel's understanding of the role of the teacher; "...Because such an expert is aware that children have to do their own learning, she knows that the role of the teacher is no longer that of an instructor, but that of a facilitator and guide (Liebschner, 1992:69). This embodies the overall aim of this study: to guide the children in discovering for themselves and coming to learn independently.

Froebel (n/d cited in Tovey, 2013) identified play as the leading form of development in children and believed this form of first-hand experience is central to learning in the early years. Vygotsky (1978, cited in Tovey 2013:17) later supported Froebel's theory stating "play is the leading form of development in young children". According to Froebel (n/d cited in Tovey, 2013), many factors contribute to developing positive relationships between teachers and students. These include, building on the unique characteristics of each individual child, promoting adults and children learning from each other and educators constantly engaging in reflection, observation and discussion. The underlying principles of the Froebelian approach include respect, play, freedom and guidance and positive relationships (n/d cited in Tovey, 2013). Respect encapsulates being respectful of young children as motivated learners, interested in exploring the world and trying to make sense of it through self-directed efforts.

The Froebelian approach to education is a deeply values-based approach and resonates with my professional values. One of the key values underpinning the Teaching Council Code of Professional Conduct (Teaching Council (T.C.), 2016) is respect. I value respect both in my personal and in my professional life. Respecting my experience and ability as a teacher and my colleagues and students as equals with valuable contributions are of great significance to me. Similar to the Teaching Council Code of Professional Conduct, I strive to “uphold human dignity and promote equality and emotional and cognitive development” (T.C., 2016: 6). Stenhouse (1970) wanted students and teachers to think of learning in terms of enquiry and promoted all members of the school community to share and participate in a democratic culture. These values appear to be commensurate with the Froebelian approach to education. He valued the contributions of all citizens and felt everyone should be trusted with the responsibility of judgement (Stenhouse, 1970). I consistently strive to live out my values of equality and democracy in my educational setting. The children’s best interest is the key motivator in my work. As an educator, it is my responsibility to live out this core value of respect in my practice. By demonstrating how to treat others with respect, I hope to instil this same value in the children.

2.2.2 Lev Vygotsky

One of the main principles underpinning the work of social constructivist Lev Vygotsky (n/d cited in Kozulin, Gindis, Ageyev and Miller, 2003) is the ‘zone of proximal development’. This refers to the distance between a child’s actual development level and their level of potential under guidance from a skilled other. Vygotsky’s (n/d cited in Pollard, 2003) zone of proximal development encourages educators to take the children’s socio-cultural background into account and to take a social constructivist approach to

teaching by scaffolding the children's learning. This social cognition learning process retains the constructivist concern with learning through hands-on experiences and also recognises the importance of social interactions in the learning process (n/d cited in Pollard, 2003). When a child is interacting with people in a supportive environment and co-operating with peers, learning is supported. Vygotsky's theory of education supports my epistemological stance of valuing the children's developmental level, taking into account their background and facilitating their learning. Once learning is internalised, it becomes part of the child's independent development achievement (n/d cited in Pollard, 2011).

Pearson and Gallagher's (1983, cited in Webb, Massey, Goggans and Flajole, 2019) 'Gradual Release of Responsibility Model' was influenced by Vygotsky's concept of scaffolding. The 'Gradual Release of Responsibility Model' has been adapted over the years. Fisher's (2008, cited in Webb et al., 2019) interpretation of the model describes the teacher modelling a given task, the children engaging in guided practice with the teacher's support, the children taking on the responsibility of applying their new knowledge to the task and collaborating with others. This gradual release of responsibility appeals to me as the model is not linear, children have the opportunity to move at their own pace through the stages as they master skills or require additional support. The ultimate goal of the 'Gradual Release of Responsibility Model' is that the scaffolds would be removed as the children gain complete responsibility for a task and learn to engage in self-monitoring (Webb et al., 2019). This is commensurate with my value of guiding and supporting the children at their own level.

2.2.3 Jerome Bruner

Jerome Bruner (1960) stated the purpose of education is to facilitate a child's thinking and problem-solving skills in order for them to be transferred to a variety of situations. The principal educational value I currently hold and hope to see lived out in my practice can be situated within Bruner's (1960) learning theory of education. I value the role of education in preparing children for life. Bruner (1960) viewed students as active learners who construct their own knowledge through discovery learning. Bruner (1960) developed the concept of 'scaffolding', similar to Vygotsky's (n/d cited in Pollard, 2003) 'zone of proximal development', where a helpful, structured interaction between an adult and child can support the child in achieving a specific goal. This resonates with my ontological value of facilitating the children's learning through support, dialogue and collaboration.

Bruner (1960) identified the significance of teaching children skills needed to become autonomous learners. Noam Chomsky (2012: 00:21:22) had a similar outlook on education; he stated that "education is really aimed at helping students get to the point where they can learn on their own". Chomsky (2012) viewed educator's role as inspiring students to discover on their own. In line with this, I value the importance of nurturing independence and responsibility in the children. Stenhouse (1970, cited in McNiff, 2002) believed students should be encouraged to take on more responsibilities. I aim to develop flexible problem solvers who can apply their knowledge to a variety of situations, thus, preparing them for life. Encouraging this independence is consistent with my intrinsic desire to create a positive and safe environment in which children can learn and practice skills they will need for life.

2.2.4 Paulo Freire

Paulo Freire (1970) critiqued the traditional pedagogy he named 'the banking concept of education', where educators viewed students as empty vessels needing to be filled with

ideas and information. He established his own 'problem-posing' concept of education which acknowledges education as democratic and dialogical, taking into account the learner's present interests and experiences (Freire, 1970). Prior to Freire's (1970) 'banking concept' of education, Buber (1958) similarly explored an 'I-thou' relationship where education is merely based on instruction. Character formation, dialogical pedagogies or problem-posing do not take place. In support of humanising forms of pedagogies, Paulo Freire (in Sullivan et al., 2016) stressed the significance of problematising, enquiry and collaborative relationships. Freire (1970) viewed education as a praxis, a combination of action leading to reflection. This view of education resonates with the action research approach.

2.2.5 Conflicting Approaches

Piaget (Piaget and Cook et al., 1952) had a constructivist view of learning whereby children learn through interaction between thinking and experiential learning. They come to sequentially develop more complex cognitive structures. Piaget's (Piaget and Cook et al., 1952) child-centred approach to learning resonates with the views of Froebel, Vygotsky, Freire and Bruner. In my opinion, there is an underestimation of the significance of collaboration in a child's development in Piaget's work. Vygotsky and Bruner acknowledge the role of adults in supporting the child's learning in a collaborative way. Piaget did not explicitly link his theory to the educational process and therefore the role of the educator is not outlined. Piaget (Piaget and Cook et al., 1952) focused on development rather than learning; he believed children move through clear stages of development in his 'Theory of Cognitive Development'. Vygotsky and Bruner view development as a continuous process rather than movement through clearly defined stages. Similar to the other theorists discussed, Piaget (n/d, cited in Pollard, 2011) also emphasized the importance of providing a rich, experiential learning environment appropriate for the stage of development of the child.

2.3 National and International Legislation

2.3.1 The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child

The United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child was developed to outline the right to the full and harmonious development of all children (United Nations (U.N.), 1989). One of the key aims of education is to foster the holistic development of the child and their abilities in order for them to reach their full potential. Education should allow children an opportunity to seek, receive and impart information and prepare them to lead a responsible life in society (U.N., 1989). According to the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (U.N., 1989), developing respect among children should be paramount in an educational setting and the best interest of the child should always come first.

2.3.2 National Primary School Curriculum Introduction

The Introduction to the National Primary School Curriculum identifies the aims and principles of the curriculum alongside the role of the teacher in the child's education (N.C.C.A., 1999a). The aims of the curriculum include nurturing the uniqueness of each child and helping them to develop to their full potential. Using their existing knowledge as a foundation, the curriculum aims to equip children with knowledge and skills to cope with everyday life and to contribute effectively to society (N.C.C.A., 1999a).

The underlying principles of the curriculum include the importance of activity and discovery methods, collaboration and fostering a sense of wonder in the children through creating opportunities for them to be active agents in their own learning (N.C.C.A., 1999a). Children should be provided with a foundation to develop abilities and skills which can be

transferred to a variety of different settings and can be used in problem-solving (N.C.C.A.,1999a). “The curriculum aims to ensure that children’s experience of school will be such that they will come to value learning and develop the ability to learn independently” (N.C.C.A., 1999a: 10).

The curriculum outlines the complex role of a teacher as both a caring facilitator and a guide concerned with the well-being and successful development of the child (N.C.C.A., 1999a). Teachers should create a supportive environment that can facilitate the child’s learning (N.C.C.A., 1999a). It is essential that the teacher develops a trusting relationship with the students and is committed to a process of professional development and reflection (N.C.C.A., 1999a). Assessment should be used as a tool to identify the needs of the child and teachers should then work to fulfil these needs.

2.3.3 Action Plan for Education 2018

Under the Action Plan for Education in Ireland, increasing participation in lifelong learning is a key focus (Department of Education and Skills (D.E.S.), 2018). Using digital technologies to support learning is promoted (D.E.S., 2018). Developing a learning environment which supports children in reaching their full potential is paramount in order to prepare them for the challenges and opportunities they will face in the future (D.E.S., 2018).

2.3.4 International Curricula

The Finnish National Agency for Education (F.N.A.E., 2014) introduced a new national curriculum for basic education in 2014. They wanted to create a curriculum which could be

active and flexible depending on the individual needs of a school (F.N.A.E., 2014). In their new educational model, children are encouraged to take more responsibility for their schoolwork, to set their own learning goals, solve problems and assess their learning based on the targets they identified themselves (F.N.A.E., 2014). The teacher's role is that of an instructor and guide ensuring the children's knowledge and skills will remain strong in the future and to build the foundations for lifelong learning (F.N.A.E.,2014).

A key feature of the Finnish curriculum is the introduction of transversal competencies which are skills to be developed and assessed across all subject areas (F.N.A.E., 2014). These integrated competencies include the development of ICT skills and learning how to take care of oneself through enhancing daily life management skills (F.N.A.E., 2104). In order to promote these skills teachers must engage in pedagogy that supports active learning, exploration, experimentation and play (F.N.A.E., 2014).

The 'Australian Curriculum' is designed to help children become successful learners, to be confident and creative and ultimately active and informed citizens (Department of Education and Training (D.E.T.), 2018). A key feature of the curriculum is the development of knowledge, skills, behaviours and dispositions and the ability to apply these in appropriate circumstances (D.E.T., 2018). The capabilities outlined by the State of Victoria are critical thinking, ethical, intercultural and personal and social (Victorian Curriculum and Assessment Authority (V.C.C.A.), 2018). According to the Victorian Institute of Teaching, teachers influence the shaping of lives (Victorian Institute of Teachers (V.I.T.), 2018).

In contrast to the Irish and Finnish curricula, I found the values underpinning the Australian and Victorian State curricula to be unclear. The rationale and aims prescribed by the Victorian Institute of Teaching are subject based, leading to a lack of clarity surrounding the overall vision of the national curriculum (V.C.A.A., 2018). Both the Irish and Finnish curricula focus on the holistic development of the child across an integrated curriculum, the Australian curriculum has not detailed a similar approach.

2.4 Literature surrounding Independence and Responsibility in the Classroom

Candy's (1991: n/p) definition of independent study reflects the rationale behind developing independence in the classroom in this study; "Independent study is a process, a method and a philosophy of education whereby a learner acquires knowledge by his or her own efforts and develops the ability for enquiry and critical evaluation" (Candy, 1991: n/p). Developing responsibility in the classroom is a key aim of this self-study action research. "Responsibility may be defined as the habit of choosing, and accepting the consequences of the choice of behaviour" (Anderson, 1936:187). The rationale surrounding promoting independence and responsibility in the classroom is based upon my desire to educate the children's whole being so that they develop life-long skills to prepare them for their future. According to Whitebread et al. (2007), in order to successfully educate others, we must enable them to become independent learners.

Gurt Biesta (2017) states that we need to get away from authoritarian education and challenge our students rather than simply leaving them 'satisfied'. With the rapid

development of technology in recent years, children have become accustomed to having problems solved immediately (Sweetland and Stolberg, 2015). A desire for 'instant gratification' leads to frustration as children expect more for less work. According to Sweetland and Stolberg (2015:16), "children have been taught not to think". A key aim of promoting the skills of independence and responsibility in the classroom, is that the children's ability to problem solve independently and not constantly seek instant adult intervention will improve.

Dadds (2011) explored the need to escape the 'hurry-along curriculum' where teacher-centred pedagogies are used to deliver facts and curriculum content whereas a 'wait-a-while curriculum' focuses on meaning-making and understanding in a learner-focused environment (Sullivan et al., 2016). Stenhouse (1970, cited in McNiff, 2002) believed students should be encouraged to take on responsibility for their own learning. Acknowledging children's prior knowledge and giving them a chance to experience ownership, can increase motivation and self-esteem (Williams, 2003).

The literature surrounding enabling children to be more independent and responsible in the classroom will be reviewed under three headings:

- The Teacher as a Facilitator
- The Children as Active Agents
- Co-Operative Learning.

2.4.1 The Teacher as a facilitator

Froebel (Liebschner, 1992)'s concept of 'freedom in education' includes the teacher developing clear structures, engaging in careful planning and guiding the children's learning through active discovery. In support of this, Williams (2003) explored the role of the teacher in promoting independence and responsibility in the classroom, stating that a teacher's role is that of a facilitator who enables the children's learning. Similarly, Robinson (2014) emphasised the role of the teacher in facilitating learning. Children are natural learners with inherent curiosity and creativity. Teachers should foster this curiosity by mentoring, stimulating and engaging the children on their journey of discovery learning (Robinson, 2014). To scaffold the children's learning, a flexible, child-centred and supportive classroom environment should be created (Bruner and Vygotsky, n/d, cited in Williams, 2003). The teacher should also be reflective and critical of their own practice. This idea of the educator taking a mutual role in the learning process is paramount. Teachers must appreciate the prior knowledge of the children and their varying needs and create a supportive environment in which each child can reach their own individual potential. Value should be placed on increased independence, collective responsibility and creating an effective communicative partnership between the students and the teacher. Children should be provided with developmentally appropriate active experiences and adults should intervene tentatively but purposefully to move the children's learning forward (Hohmann and Weikart, 1995). In order for teachers to encourage the development of independence in their teaching, they should set high expectations for their students, provide opportunities for genuine responsibility and set clear learning objectives. allowing them to make mistakes.

Structure

Teachers should take ownership of their own learning with the children by allowing time for the children to engage in self-reflection, encouraging their feedback and developing a

relationship with them based on mutual trust (Williams, 2003). Autonomy in the classroom can be supported by providing children with opportunities to develop their own action plans to organise their time, strategies for organising their finished and unfinished work and developing frameworks for support (Williams, 2003). To establish a classroom environment that is supportive of independence and responsibility among students, teachers should organise the resources effectively and where possible, allow the children to be involved in the classroom organisation (Fisher, 1996, cited in Williams, 2003).

2.4.2 Children as Active Agents

“Children are capable of more than we expect” (Gipps, 1992, cited in Pollard, 2011: 19). Children should explore and investigate, knowing they can ask for help if required. My epistemological values echo the work of Bruner. Bruner (1996, cited in Williams, 2003) states that acquired knowledge is most useful to the learner when it is discovered through their own cognitive efforts.

Williams (2003) provides two views of independence; interactionist independence and isolationist independence. Children engaged in interactionist independence are described as motivated and enthusiastic, they are given responsibilities and collaboration is encouraged. They engage in problem solving and seek help when required. Teachers with an isolationist view of independence, focus on the need to teach and practice strategies for independence, training the children to develop skills for self-sufficiency. According to Williams (2003), a sensitive balance between the two is desired.

In seeking to promote independence in the classroom, the relationship between motivation and independence must be acknowledged. Opportunities for children to engage in activities they plan and initiate themselves should be provided and experiences that help develop autonomy and the disposition to learn should be planned for (Whitebread, Anderson, Coltman, Page, Pasternak and Mehta, 2007). According to Williams (2003: 50), “motivated children have an astonishing ability to work independently”. Students may experience demotivation and little sense of responsibility for their learning if opportunities for experiential learning are not provided (Bennett and Kell, 1989). A fair policy for behaviour that encourages children to be responsible for their actions should be developed.

Active Learning

Active learning is an approach to teaching which promotes the development of independence and responsibility among the students. To engage the children in active learning, teachers must scaffold, model and facilitate the learning (Moyles, 2001, cited in Pollard, 2011). Challenging children to provide their own solutions rather than generating dependency on the teacher and providing children with firsthand experiences are invaluable (Moyles, 2001, cited in Pollard, 2011). Active learning enables children to have a central role in their own learning, the use of such a model should also involve the teachers as learners themselves (Moyles, 2001, cited in Pollard, 2011). Key features of a classroom that promotes independence and responsibility are opportunities for experiential learning, dialogues and shared learning and understanding between adults and children (Williams, 2003). “I wanted to educate men to be free, to think, to take action for themselves” (Froebel, n/d, cited in Lilley 1967:41). Froebel believed the early years lay the

foundation for all later learning. Active learning is in keeping in line with Froebel's belief that children learn best through engaging in self-activity with suitable resources readily available (n/d cited in Tovey, 2013).

Self- Assessment

Self-assessment, a teaching strategy linked to Vygotsky's concept of self-regulation, can be used to encourage the children to independently identify their strengths and areas they could work on (Muschamp, 1991, cited in Pollard, 2011). Bronson (2000) demonstrates how the development of meta-cognitive and self-regulatory processes are fundamental to the whole range of young children's psychological growth. Perry, Vanderkamp, Mercer and Nordby (2002, cited in Whitebread et al., 2007) found the most effective pedagogical elements in promoting self-regulatory learning to be offering choices to children, providing opportunities to select the level of challenge they are to engage with and organising opportunities to engage in self-assessment and peer assessment. The use of self-assessment portfolios includes children in selecting their best work for reflection. Debriefing should be used as a tool for reflecting upon learning, teachers should encourage pupils to ask questions, make them explain themselves and communicate the purpose of lessons to them (Leat and Lin, 2003, cited in Whitebread et al., 2007).

2.4.3 Co-Operative learning

“Cooperative learning is the instructional use of small groups so that students work together to maximize their own and each other's learning. Within co-operative situations, individuals seek outcomes that are beneficial to themselves and beneficial to all other group members” (Johnson and Johnson, 2013). According to Johnson, Johnson and Holubec (2002), there are five key components to co-operative learning; Positive

interdependence, individual accountability, considerable face to face interaction, group processing and interpersonal and small group skills. Positive interdependence refers to all group members being linked, one cannot succeed without the efforts of the whole group. Each member must take accountability for their actions as it is their personal responsibility to contribute to the group achieving the set goal. Members must support, encourage and help each other. Group members must develop appropriate social skills and frequently use these to develop their interpersonal and small group skills. Group processing refers to reflection on the group's current functioning with the aim to identify possibilities for improvement for the future effectiveness of the group. As with all methodologies, co-operative learning can also have disadvantages therefore it is essential that educators set a clear, common goal in order for group members to be explicitly clear on the learning objective they are to achieve.

Pollard (2011:94) discusses a "working consensus" where teachers and children mutually negotiate interdependent ways of coping in the classroom. The contribution of a democratic approach to classroom relationships can create a positive climate for learning and behavior (Withall and Lewis, 1963, cited in Pollard, 2011). Educators must focus on their students' learning and needs while encouraging their contributions (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2011). Ritchart, Church and Morrison (2011) also identified the need to discuss and set clear expectations with the children, focusing on the purpose, goals and nature of the learning.

In encouraging children to be independent in the classroom, teachers must acknowledge the need to support the children as they struggle to understand and make sense of problems they face (Dweck & Leggett, 1988, cited in Pollard, 2011). Kenellwell, Tanner and Parkinson (2000, cited in Pollard, 2011) outline the need for teachers to monitor pupil's work frequently to make decisions about when intervention will be effective. Nelsen, Lott

and Glenn (2000) promote the use of brainstorming and role-playing with the children in order for them to learn effective problem-solving skills. Providing children with the opportunity to practice transferrable skills will allow them to use these competencies with greater confidence in all aspects of their lives.

Collaborative Learning

Collaborative learning places emphasis on student interactions rather than on learning as a solitary activity (Prince, 2004). Collaborative learning takes place when students work together in pairs or small groups to learn or when students work collaboratively with the teacher to solve problems (Prince, 2004). Collaborative learning is grounded in Vygotsky's belief that there is a social element to learning; "What children can do together today, they can do alone tomorrow" (Let Vygotsky, 1962: 104). The use of collaboration and co-operative group work in the classroom are excellent tools in encouraging children to articulate their understanding, evaluate their performances and reflect on their own learning (Ritchart et al., 2011). Opportunities for dialogue and collaboration with their peers should be provided.

2.4.4 Conflicts arising

Moyles (1992, cited in Williams, 2003) questions whether the child's own pragmatic needs can be met in a classroom environment which allows independence or if a certain level of conformity or teacher-led pedagogy is necessary. Some theorists believe that young children are not capable of the complex metacognitive processes involved in self-regulated learning (Perry et al., 2002, cited in Whitebread et al., 2007). In a system which caters for varying needs and levels, it must be questioned whether independence for all children including those with special needs, is a reality. There is a gap in the literature reviewed as

part of this study, as special needs are not exclusively discussed in relation to independence and responsibility in the classroom.

Chaplain (2000, cited in Williams, 2003) explores the idea of learned helplessness and how children with this level of motivation would work in a classroom where independence and responsibility are promoted. Children could experience difficulty transferring their knowledge to self-directed tasks, become uncomfortable when presented with open-ended challenges and feel concerned about outcomes and adult responses to their work (Chaplain, 2000, cited in Williams, 2003). Children have differing needs and some prefer the support provided by an adult (Perry, 2002, cited in Whitebread et al, 2007).

Creating a supportive environment in which independence and responsibility are nurtured can lead to concerns about whether curriculum content will be appropriately covered (Williams, 2003). Teachers face a challenge to shift their focus from real or perceived curriculum constraints to their epistemological values and the holistic development of the child. Pressures perceived by teachers can have the potential to mitigate against the support of independent learners.

Factors such as the level of responsibility and independence children are given at home can impact greatly on how these skills develop (Williams, 2003). With limited knowledge of a child's background, working from their prior knowledge or where they are at could prove challenging. Therefore, teachers are required to know children as learners and be prepared to discover what the children bring with them to each new situation.

Woods (1987, cited in Pollard, 2011) identifies how a lack of adequate resources can hinder teachers in supporting a child-centred approach to learning. In my own educational setting, the use of many of the resources are time-tabled therefore, time constraints have an effect on the use of such resources. When using technological resources, there is always a risk that malfunctions may occur leading to these resources being unused until the problem is rectified.

2.5 Conclusion

A review of the literature nationally and internationally identifies the role of education in preparing children for life, equipping them with the skills needed to live a responsible life in society. Education should support each child in reaching their full potential and lay the foundations for life-long learning (N.C.C.A., 1999a).

The literature reviewed suggests that educators should take on the role of a guide, scaffolding the children's learning and providing them with opportunities to engage in self-directed discovery learning and problem-solving. The significance of learning being a mutual process where communication and democracy are encouraged, is outlined. Learning is most useful when the individual's own cognitive efforts are used. The next chapter will provide an outline on how this study was conducted.

3. Research Methods

3.1 Introduction

In this section, consideration is given to action research as the chosen paradigm for this study. I propose to demonstrate how my epistemological and ontological values have influenced my chosen methodologies and my standards of judgement. The research methods used for data collection, storage and analysis are explored. The research time frame, chosen research instruments and ethical considerations are outlined. I conclude by detailing the validation process for my findings. Action research as a paradigm will be discussed and the role values and critical reflection play in the action research process will be outlined.

3.2 Rationale for Action Research as the Chosen Paradigm

A research paradigm is an intellectual framework that makes research possible (Kuhn, 1970). Cohen, Manion and Morrison (2007) describe a paradigm as a systematic way of

looking at the world that involves observing, reflecting, planning, adapting and engaging in the process again. A research paradigm underpins the researcher's patterns of thinking and their research actions (Bassey, 1990 cited in Pollard, 2011). Action research was chosen as the paradigm for this self-study because it allows the researcher to experience emancipation, challenge assumptions and norms and it can be a transformative experience (Cohen et al., 2007 and McNiff, 2002). Vanassche and Kelchtermans (2015) explore the self-study action research approach in the field of teacher education. They highlight the opportunity this paradigm gives educators to focus on their own practice and experience validation based on trustworthiness.

In the context of action research, the researcher must constantly evaluate what they are doing to establish if they are living to their values (McNiff, 2002). When planning the research, the researcher must focus on identifying a set of issues that need to be addressed and the "fitness for purpose" of the research design (Cohen et al., 2007). McNiff (2002) describes the cyclical process of action research in a focused manner; review current practice, select a specific area of focus to investigate, design an action research plan, implement the plan and evaluate the process. Action research is a cyclical process with practitioners often engaging in several cycles of research. My concern with improving my practice necessitates continuous cycles of reflection. This is commensurate with the self-study action research paradigm.

Action research allows the practitioner to be the 'architect of their own professional development' (Jana Duganzic, Durrant, Finau, Firth and Frank 2009: 00:02:17). Action researchers embrace problems pro-actively with the aim to positively impact children's learning (Mc Niff, 2002). This idea of one being responsible for their own development

resonates with the area of focus for this research project; how do I improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom?

3.2.1 Self- Study Action Research Defined

Self-study action research is an enquiry-based form of self-evaluation conducted 'by the self into the self' (McNiff, 2002: n/p). This form of action research takes place in the practitioner's own workplace and puts the practitioner at the centre of the research as they explore how they might improve their own practice (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006 and McDonagh, Roche, Sullivan and Glenn, 2012). The researcher's own values are drawn upon to guide the process (McDonagh et al., 2012). Action research incorporates the belief that we know through doing and encourages the researcher to take accountability for their practice (Brydon-Miller, Greenwood and Maguire, 2003 and Mc Niff, 2002). Action researchers must demonstrate a willingness to engage in constant self-appraisal and development (Dewey, 1933, cited in Pollard, 2003).

Action researchers in educational settings study their own teaching rather than leaving it to outside researchers (McLaughlin, 2004, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016). Action researchers develop a theory, test it in action and critically reflect on the process in order to enhance their practice (Bassey, 1990, cited in Pollard, 2011). Kurt Lewin (n/d, cited in Adelman, 1993) defined action research as a cycle, alternating between action and critical reflection. Similarly, McNiff (2002) described action research as being open-ended and recommended a cyclical approach to be taken. As it is an evidence-based approach, reflection and data collection are of great significance (Sullivan et al., 2016).

An action researcher must also engage in rigorous analysis, have social awareness and demonstrate an active concern with aims and consequences (Dewey, 1933). Researchers must take accountability for their work, allow for dialogue and criticism from others and be prepared to be wrong (Brydon-Miller et al., 2003). Stenhouse (1970, cited in McNiff, 2002) highlighted the significance of educators having professional autonomy over their self-development through testing theory in practice. Dewey (1933) and Stenhouse (1970) placed great emphasis on using the process of reflective teaching as a form of professional development.

Action research encourages dialogue and collaboration. Hammersley (1993, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016) identifies the need for action researchers to be open to discussing their work with others and allowing for criticism. Contrary to traditional forms of research whose focus is on arriving at a conclusion, action research is progressive and cyclical in its nature. The practitioner reflects on the action taken, creating a new focus for the action plan which sparks a renewal of the research process (Sullivan et al., 2016).

3.2.2 Living Theory

Practitioners engaging in a self-study action research project have the potential to generate their own theory of practice (Whitehead & McNiff, 2006). Living theory is about developing a framework from which people can explain why they do what they do. According to Whitehead (1989), living theory gives meaning and purpose to the lives of individuals. The primary purpose of educators is to improve their pupils' learning, influenced by their embodied values. Whitehead (2011, 00:00:07) placed great value on the significance of inquiry learning in his classroom yet when he critically reflected on his practice, he came to view himself as a 'living contradiction'. This resonates with Brydon-

Miller et al. (2003:12)'s claim that action researchers "have to be willing to be wrong" and have to be open to engaging in action research as a cyclical process where a hypothesis is put into action and reflected upon.

3.2.3 Comparison to Traditional Research

Other research paradigms include positivist and interpretive research. The positivist paradigm is based on realist ontology using scientific, quantitative methods and often the findings of the research are transferrable (Bassey, 1990, cited in Pollard, 2011). The interpretive paradigm is about different interpretations of reality and focuses on subjective, qualitative methods (Bassey, 1990, cited in Pollard, 2011). Traditional researchers can be far removed from their particular area of research whereas action researchers demonstrate commitment, concern, consideration, work collaboratively and take action (Bassey, 1990 cited in Pollard, 2011). Both interpretive and action research encourage dialogue and collaboration.

3.3 Critical Reflection

Reflection is a key aspect of living theory action research. Engaging in action research involves researchers investigating their practice with a view to improving it (Sullivan et al., 2016). "Reflection emancipates us from merely impulsive and merely routine activity, it enables us to direct our activities with foresight and to plan according to ends-in-view or purposes of which we are aware, to act in deliberate and intentional fashion, to know what we are about when we act" (Dewey 1933: 17).

Dewey (1933, cited in Pollard, 2011) explored critical reflection through the development of a hypothesis, taking a stand on the hypothesis and testing it in action. Stenhouse (1975 cited in Pollard, 2011) explained critical reflection as a concern to question and test theory in practice. Both Dewey and Stenhouse encouraged teachers to become researchers of their own practice, to extend their professional development and to gain autonomy of their own self-development (Pollard, 2011). Critical reflection helps develop one's sense of ownership over their work and allows them gain insights and learn how others see them (Brookfield, 2017). Critical reflection allows us to take informed action, develop rationale for practice, keeps us engaged and increases trust.

3.3.1 Why Engage in Critical Reflection?

One of the main reasons why researchers engage in action research is for self-improvement (McDonagh et al., 2012). In order to do this, critical reflection is paramount (McDonagh et al., 2012). A reflective professional has two main areas of focus: a short-term focus on pupil performance and a longer-term responsibility to foster the pupil's personal confidence as a learner (Pollard, 2003). Jean McNiff (2002) explains that action research allows practitioners to gauge whether their everyday practice is as it should be. Brookfield (1995) identifies two distinct purposes of critical reflection; illuminating power and uncovering hegemony. Illuminating power encourages practitioners to become aware of the framing of educational processes and interactions within wider structures of power and ideologies (Sullivan et al., 2016). Action researchers are encouraged to question these sets of beliefs that are accepted as normal. Gramsci (1971) developed the concept of uncovering hegemony as questioning assumptions and practices that are viewed by the

majority as being beneficial but have the capacity to work against our own best interests (Sullivan et al., 2016). When practitioners question their practice, it can be referred to as undertaking praxis or informed action (Carr & Kemmis, 1986, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016).

Engaging in critical reflection provides the practitioner with a sense of ownership of their work, gaining new insights into their practice (Sullivan et al., 2006). Brookfield (2017) found critical reflection allowed practitioners to take informed action, formulate rationale, gain social validation, develop increased trust in the profession and avoided self-laceration. Greene (1995, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016) emphasised the dangers of passivity in the teaching profession and promoted critical pedagogy as it has the capacity to transcend this.

3.3.2 Types

Donald Schön (1983) identified a crisis of confidence where practitioners were experiencing a mismatch between traditional practice and their own beliefs. He found they were “bound to an epistemology of practice” and were not engaged in critical pedagogy (Schön, 1983:20). Schön established different types of critical reflection; reflection in-action, and reflection on-action. According to Schön (1983: 61) as a practice becomes more routine and “as knowing- in practice becomes increasingly tacit and spontaneous”, a practitioner may miss opportunities to reflect on their actions. This is commensurate with my experience as after several years of teaching in the same school, I had become comfortable in my educational setting, my practice had become routine and I rarely challenged myself to engage in critical reflection. Experiencing teaching abroad opened my eyes to different pedagogical approaches, teaching at different levels and working from an unfamiliar curriculum. Moving out of my comfort zone and challenging myself to work

to the best of my ability in a foreign setting made me regularly reflect- in-action on how I was presenting myself, my classroom management, my use of instructional language and my classroom organisation.

Reflection-on-action is described as retrospective reflection where a deeper level of reflection can occur (Schön, 1983). Schön (1983: 20)'s view on the principles underlying our practice resonates with how I was feeling having returned home and reflected upon my experience of teaching abroad; "we are bound to an epistemology of practice which leaves us at a loss to explain the competences to which we now give overriding importance". I realised that my practice was lacking one of the key epistemological values that I want to live by, that is student-centred learning and active discovery. I am engaging in self-study action research in order to see my values being lived out in my practice. I am continuously engaging in critical reflection to inform my teaching as according to Sullivan et al. (2016: 40), "Reflection without action is meaningless".

3.3.3 The Reflective Practitioner

According to hooks, (2010) reflective practitioners should question information, engage with different points of view, keep an open mind and draw conclusions on reflection. Similarly, Schön (1983) previously looked at the concept of problem setting where the practitioner identifies and names aspects of their practice to which they will attend within their context. Reflective practitioners in educational settings should scrutinise their own teaching assumptions. Brookfield (2017) identifies four lenses through which critical reflection should take place; through students' eyes, colleagues' perceptions, personal experiences and through theory and research. Stenhouse (1975, cited in Pollard, 2011)

identified the importance of practitioners engaging in dialogue with others and allowing for criticism of their work.

According to Schön (1983) a reflective practitioner should demonstrate particular qualities: self-knowledge, inquisitiveness, critical thinking and emotional intelligence. Dewey outlined three key attitudes of a reflective practitioner: wholeheartedness, open-mindedness and responsibility (Dewey, 1933 cited in Sullivan et al., 2016).

3.4 Ethical Considerations

As children were participating in this study, ensuring the research was conducted with clear ethical parameters in place was of great importance to me. Prior to engaging in research, an ethical statement was drawn up detailing the ethical considerations for this study and potential ethical issues were addressed. My ethical statement was approved by Maynooth University and made available to all parties involved (See Appendix A). The context of this self-study action research project was the co-educational primary school in which I work as a second class teacher. Permission from the Board of Management to conduct my research in the school was granted in November 2018. Letters of explanation were sent to my critical friend and members of my validation group and consent for their contribution to the data was sought.

Kanpol (1998, cited in Glenn & Roche, 2018) questioned how practitioners could claim to stand for the oppressed when they are coming from culturally different backgrounds. In an effort to minimise power imbalance, the participants were treated as co-researchers in the process and their opinion on the action research was valued (Shaw et al., 2011). By

acknowledging the children as co-researchers in the process and valuing their input in the research, the aim was that the data would give a fair representation of the children and where they are at (Shaw et al., 2011). This epistemological value of acknowledging all members of the classroom as valuable contributors and not having the teacher wielding power, is paramount to me. It was made explicitly clear to the participants that participation was on a voluntary basis and they were entitled to withdraw at any stage of the process. There were no incentives to entice the children to take part and it was made very clear to them that they did not have to participate in order to please the researcher (Sullivan et al., 2016). A letter of explanation regarding the action research project was sent to the parents of all the children in my class. I verbally outlined what would be involved to the children before seeking written consent from their parents and assent from the children themselves. Children were debriefed after engagement in the process.

3.5 Research participants

A purposive sample of co-participants were chosen to participate in the research process. This sample included the seven, eight and nine-year-old children in my class who were permitted to participate in the study and as this is a self-study action research project, the researcher and their learning journey were the main focus (Cohen et al., 2007). When collecting and recording data, pseudonyms were used and participants were guaranteed confidentiality and anonymity unless child protection issues arose (Sullivan et al., 2016). The children's names and allocated pseudonyms were saved in a password protected document and stored in line with ethical practice. I remained true to the voice of the child and transcribed verbatim what each child said. I valued the children as co-researchers and their opinions and contributions were significant throughout the process of data collection (Shaw et al., 2011).

3.6 Data collection

Data were collected for this study as evidence of the situation before my intervention, to show changes in my practice and progression in my thinking (Sullivan et al., 2016). Data collection supported my claim to new knowledge and helped to demonstrate how closely I was living to my values (Sullivan et al., 2016). Throughout the process of data collection, I was aware of the possibility of both anticipated and unanticipated outcomes (Kemmis, Mc Taggart and Nixon, 2014). The data collection tools used included my reflective journal, recorded observations, group interviews, survey responses, engagement with relevant literature and dialogue with others.

Research methods describe the techniques and procedures used to gather data (Cohen et al., 2007). Qualitative refers to observable data and providing insights and interpretations of others (Sullivan et al., 2016). Qualitative methods were chosen over quantitative methods as they resonate with my epistemological value that knowledge can be created and is ever changing.

3.7 Data storage

In line with university guidelines, only data for the purpose of the research study was collected and processed. Data were recorded clearly and accurately. As recommended by Sullivan et al. (2016), all data were signed, labelled and dated. In line with university and GDPR Guidelines, electronic data were secured using password protection. Manual data were placed in a data archive in a locked cabinet with access to the researcher and

authorised university personnel only, for a minimum of ten years following publication (Maynooth University, 2016).

3.8 Research Instruments

Brookfield (2017) outlined how our actions as teachers are based on the assumptions we hold and highlighted the need for these assumptions to be examined regularly. In order to benefit the student's learning, educators must examine their pedagogical approaches and adapt their pre-conceived assumptions. Brookfield (2017) examined these assumptions through four lenses; Students' eyes, colleague's perceptions, personal experience and theory and research. The research instruments chosen for this self-study action research project reflect these lenses and include the use of a reflective journal, group interviews with the children, survey responses, observations and conversations with my critical friend and members of my validation group.

3.8.1: The Lens of Personal Experience: Reflective journal

Our own experience as learners gives us clues as to what hinders and furthers our ability to learn (Brookfield, 2017). As an educator, becoming a student enables you to study your experiences and transfer insights from how you learn to how your students learn (Brookfield, 2017). A reflective journal was kept on a regular basis to enhance the reflective process and to engage in critical thinking, helping to heighten my awareness of teaching and learning in my classroom (Sullivan et al., 2006). Maxine Greene (1997) recommended finding time to pause, reflect and think. Meta-reflection on my journal entries was used as a tool to identify changes in my thinking and pedagogical approaches. Through meta-reflection, the action research process changed from the planned and anticipated direction. Educators engaging in reflective practice investigate their work with

the aim of improving it (Sullivan et al., 2016). Freire (1972, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016) believed that critical reflection is a form of action. He argued that education is a form of freedom and therefore educators should be encouraged to engage in critical reflection in order to further enhance their practice (Sullivan et al., 2016).

Initially, I wrote reflections in my reflective journal without a set structure. Having since been introduced to several reflective writing frameworks, I found the work of Kolb (1984:38) to resonate with my self-reflective process; "Learning is the process whereby knowledge is created through the transformation of experience". Kolb's (1984) four-stage cycle includes having a concrete experience, reflective observation on this experience, abstract conceptualisation and active experimentation. Through meta-reflection, I realise that I had reflected on experiences but was lacking in evaluating and implementing what I had learned. I was reflecting in isolation with no real potential for change. Following on from this realisation, my reflections have become more purposeful and I have become more aware of how I would act if the experience reflected upon was to happen again.

3.8.2: The Lens of Students' Eyes: Group Interviews and Questionnaire Surveys with the Children

I collected data from the students' perspectives to see the different ways in which they interpreted my actions. This form of data collection is the "essence of student-centred learning" and resonates with my epistemological value of respecting the children as individuals and their unique learning journeys (Brookfield, 2017: 62). This approach incorporates "knowing how your students experience learning so you can build bridges that take them from where they are now to a new destination" (Brookfield, 2017: 62). With a view to gaining honest feedback from the children, I worked towards developing a

trusting relationship with them and I modelled a non-defensive gratitude for their criticisms.

When interviewing children, group interviews are optimum as interaction is encouraged and children feel less intimidated (Cohen et al., 2007). I was aware of potential challenges faced when interviewing children as outlined by Breakwell (2000, cited in Cohen et al., 2007). These include the power imbalance between the researcher and the children, the children becoming easily distracted and the possibility of some children dominating the situation. In order to minimise the influence of these factors, I followed the guidelines for interviewing children outlined in the research reviewed. As recommended by Lewis, (1992, cited in Cohen et al., 2007) a group of six or seven children were selected as the optimum size for the group interviews. Group interviews enable children to challenge each other and extend their ideas in a way that may not happen in a one-to-one adult-child interview (Cohen et al., 2007). When I conducted interviews with the children, they took place in a natural surrounding and were as informal as possible (Cohen et al., 2007). The children were encouraged to provide genuine answers and not feel that they had to please the researcher (Cohen et al., 2007). Open-ended questions were asked to the group to avoid single answer responses and to avoid direct questioning (Cohen et al., 2007). Questions for the group interviews were constructed based on topics that emerged while researching the literature.

Child-friendly questionnaire surveys were developed to gain an overall picture from all children participating in the research, while the group interviews were designed for more “fine-grained analysis” (Cohen et al., 2007:97). The children were presented with simple questions aimed at encouraging them to reflect on their learning. I modelled critical

reflection in the classroom on a regular basis with the aim of supporting the children in reflecting on their own experiences. Greene argued that teachers need to engage in their own inquiry-based learning be able to influence others to do the same (Greene, 1995, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016).

3.8.3: Observations

Observations were used as a method of data collection as they allow the researcher to observe the evolution of events over time and explore the classroom dynamics (Cohen et al., 2007). Notes made 'in situ' as well as structured observations were carried out three to four times a week by the researcher and two colleagues were invited into the classroom to record observations at different times during cycle two of the research. This approach was taken in this action research study to systematically record observations and increase their validity (Cohen et al., 2007). Prompt questions developed by Le Compte and Preissle (1993:199-200, cited in Cohen et al., 2007: 406) were used as a focus for observations. I modified my practice, plans and ideas in light of evaluating the observations (Whitehead, 2004).

3.8.4: The Lens of Colleagues' Perceptions: Dialogue

"Talking to colleagues unravels the shroud of silence in which our work is wrapped" (Brookfield, 2017: 66). A colleague of mine who works closely with my class was chosen as my critical friend; someone who provided support throughout the process but also helped to identify inaccurate assumptions I may have made (Sullivan et al., 2016). A validation group was established to comment on the accuracy and reliability of my research. My validation group consisted of fellow practitioners, colleagues and educators in other settings. Brookfield (2017) outlined the role of a critical friend in helping to

debrief and alert you to the positives and negatives in your teaching that you might have missed. Validation groups can offer different perspectives and interpretations on your work. They can help to “check, verify or reframe your assumptions” (Brookfield, 2017: 67). Consent from my critical friend, members of my validation group and colleagues for their contribution to the data was granted. These written permissions have been retained in my data archive.

3.8.5: Theory and Research

I found researching the literature to be helpful in articulating my values and exploring the theoretical perspectives that resonate with these values. William (2003)'s work made me aware of practical ways in which independence and responsibility can be encouraged in the classroom. McNiff (2002: n/p) clarified a systematic approach to the action research process which I followed throughout;

“We review our current practice, identify an aspect that we want to investigate, imagine a way forward, try it out, and take stock of what happens. We modify what we are doing in the light of what we have found, and continue working in this new way (try another option if the new way of working is not right) monitor what we do, review and evaluate the modified action”.

3.9 Research Plan and Time Frame

September and October 2018 The research topic was identified. Critical engagement with relevant literature occurred. Reflective journaling began.

November 2018	Ethical approval from the college and permission from the Board of Management to conduct my research in the school was granted.
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December 2018	Consent from parents, my critical friend and members of my validation group and assent from the children in my class was sought.
Term 2 (January-February 2019 Mid Term Break)	The above action research cycle was implemented over a 6-week period.
The end of February 2019	Data were gathered, analysed and interpreted. A review of the cycle took place including feedback from the children, my critical friend and validation group.
March and April 2019	Following critical reflection on the first action research cycle, I modified my plans and a second cycle was developed and implemented over a 6-week period (Whitehead, 2004) (Appendix A).
The end of April 2019	Data were gathered, analysed and interpreted. A review of the cycle took place using feedback from the children, my critical friend and validation group.
May 2019	The data and findings were finalised.
June 2019	Interim results were presented to a public audience. The findings were compiled, and a summary research article was drawn up.
July 2019	The self-study action research thesis was written.
August 2019	The results of the thesis were published.

Figure 3.1: Research Plan and Time Frame.

The timeframe outlined above was subject to change throughout the process as upon reflection, changes occurred in the direction of my work. Action research does not follow a clear linear trajectory, it is a cyclical process with practitioners often engaging in several cycles of research and is often described as ‘messy’ in its nature (Sullivan et al., 2016). It can therefore be described as a time-consuming process with no clearly defined conclusion (Mellor, 2007). The unplanned and unanticipated findings were recorded throughout the process. Pine (2009) highlights the significance of reflecting on unintended outcomes as

they can be valuable in contributing to the researcher's own learning and can add to the rigour and robustness of the research process (Sullivan et al., 2016).

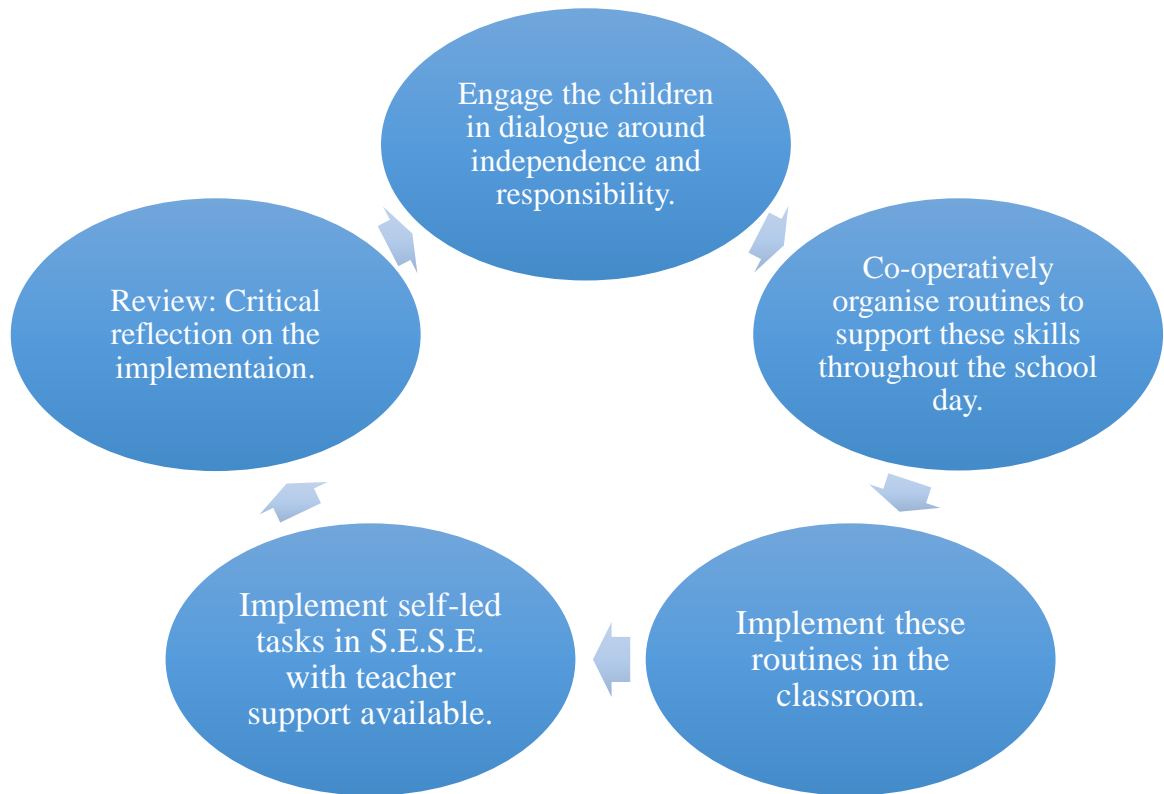


Figure 3.2: Action Research Plan.

Date	Action Plan
<p><u>Week 1</u> 7th January</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the children in dialogue around independence and responsibility and record their answers. • Co-operatively organise routines to support these skills throughout the school day, including routines for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ Going to the toilet ❖ Handing in notes ❖ Taking the roll ❖ Giving out homework ❖ CAPER ❖ The classroom library ❖ What to do when the teacher is otherwise engaged.
<p><u>Week 2</u> 14th January</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to implement the above routines in the classroom and record observations. • Demonstrate how to research project topic on the iPads. Organise the children for independent research on the iPads. • Pre-teach the use of Book Creator and I Movie on the iPads to present project work. • Children organise their project work- 'The Senses' for presentation using Book Creator e.g. through creating their own images, typing up their facts.
<p><u>Week 3</u> 21st January</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children record their project work using Book Creator. • Read the book 'I'll do it' to the children and engage them in a discussion around being responsible.
<p><u>Week 4</u> 28th January</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the implementation of routines to support independence with my critical friend. • Engage the children in a discussion around the implementation of the routines to support independence/ responsibility. Is there scope for more? Introduce 4 drawer unit and discuss potential uses. • Engage the children in independent group tasks in P.E. and maths and group self-evaluation. • Children actively engage in independent research on the iPads based on the new project area-Florence Nightingale .
<p><u>Week 5</u> 4th February</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children organise their project work for presentation using Book Creator e.g. through creating their own images, typing up their facts. • Engage the children in self-assessment: looking back over their work for the month of January, selecting their favourites and writing a note about why they are proud of this work and identifying something they want to work on. • Children research their next project area- China using iPads, library books, workbooks and fact sheets.
<p><u>Week 6</u> 11th February</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children decide how best to present their project work (iMovie, Book Creator, large poster page, hand-made book). • Carry out group interviews with the children in small groups to gain their feedback on the process to date. • Gain feedback from my validation group. • Review the data and feedback and develop a new action plan to implement.

Figure 3.3: Detailed Action Research Plan Cycle One.

The figures above provide an overview of the intervention planned and implemented as part of the initial six-week action research cycle. Throughout the process, I adapted my pedagogical practice to provide opportunities for the children to be independent and responsible. I focused on shared ownership, encouraged feedback, peer support and evaluation and provided the children with choices in their learning and resources to support them. Through critical reflection on my own learning, feedback from the children, dialogue with colleagues, observations from my critical friend and feedback from members of my validation group, I reviewed the above research cycle. I adapted my pedagogical practice based on the feedback gathered and planned for a second action research cycle. The second cycle focused on providing the children with what they deemed important to promote their independence and responsibility (Appendix B). I created a six-week cycle that included opportunities for the children to visit Junior Infant classrooms to use their skills in another setting, tasks to support independence and responsibility in maths and physical education were planned for and project work was given a clear structure, as detailed in Figure 3.4.

Project Work: Space (March 2019)**Research**

The children will rotate from station to station with their partner, spending 10 minutes at each station. They will record facts on a sheet of paper as they go.

- ❖ iPad research: through Safari
- ❖ Fact Book: Chapter on Space
- ❖ Social, Environmental and Scientific Education Book: Chapter on Moon-landing and the Earth, Moon and Sun
- ❖ Library books gathered by the children

Follow-up Tasks

Following on from the research carried out at the stations the children will find out about space and moon-landing through:

- ❖ Engaging in an independent comprehension task based on 'Apollo 11'.
- ❖ Explore videos, historical documents and facts about the first moon landing through information presented by the class teacher on the whiteboard.
- ❖ Prepare three questions about moon-landing for our caretaker and ask him when he comes to visit.

Presenting Research

After a whole class discussion on how their facts could be presented, the children will select how they will present their project:

- ❖ On the iPads: using iMovie, Notes or Book Creator
- ❖ On a large sheet of paper
- ❖ Creating their own book

The children will visit a younger class and present their projects to them.

Figure 3.4 Sample Structure for Project Work.

3.10 Validation process

Action research has been criticised by traditional researchers for the potential of subjective research to be formulated therefore following a process of validation is essential. O'Hanlon (2002) states that educational researchers can present their educational theories from their own forms of valid knowledge. I engaged in a process of validation to support the creation of my own personal living theory (Whitehead & McNiff, 2011).

According to Shipman (2014) reliability and credibility are key criteria in validating quality research. Although action research is not generalisable or replicable it should "have an application elsewhere... action researchers are able to communicate their insights to others with a useful result" (Lomax, 1994:118). Mezirow (1990, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016), states that reflection is highly subjective and is informed by our own beliefs, values and assumptions. Therefore, practitioners must unpack and challenge these assumptions and seek social validity to show what they are doing is fair and accurate (Habermas, 1987). This social validity was achieved in this research through dialogue with colleagues and people outside my educational setting. I followed Habermas' (1976) criteria for social validity by speaking comprehensibly, truthfully, authentically and appropriately. I gathered data throughout my action research cycles to demonstrate how I was trying to live more closely to my values.

To ensure social validity and reliability throughout the process, I chose to use qualitative methods for data collection as they support the researcher as a participant and allow for multiple perspectives, leading to triangulation of data (Cohen et al., 2007). Triangulation allows the researcher to demonstrate the "richness and complexity of human behaviour" by studying it from more than one viewpoint (Cohen et al., 2007: 141). Campbell and Fishe

(1959, cited in Cohen et al., 2007: 141) describe triangulation as a “powerful way of demonstrating concurrent validity, particularly in qualitative research”. Triangulation involves feedback from different perspectives that can provide validation for the researcher’s work (Sullivan et al., 2016).

According to Brookfield (2017), action research has been criticised for being subjective. To challenge this assumption robust and rigorous evidence of my claim was subjected to critique, allowing others to believe my claim to knowledge and authenticate my research claims (Winter, 2002, cited in Sullivan et al., 2016). During the course of this study, my research was scrutinised by multiple perspectives, by outside observers and I engaged in methodological triangulation (Sullivan et al., 2016). I made my research available for scrutiny by others including my pupils, critical friend, colleagues and my validation group, offering the opportunity for them to confirm or challenge the accuracy of my claim (Sullivan et al., 2016). I gained outside observer triangulation through dialogue with my supervisor and three of the members of my validation group who were external to my educational context. Methodological triangulation was adhered to through collecting data from more than one source. All data collected were labelled and dated.

3.11 Conclusion

The literature reviewed acknowledges self-study action researchers as active agents in their own professional development. This resonates with the aim of this study: to enhance my practice in order to develop the skills of independence and responsibility in the classroom. The importance of values laying the foundation for action research was outlined. Critical reflection and the role it plays in the action research process was discussed.

To conclude, my research was conducted within the action research paradigm, with particular focus on self-study and a living educational theory approach. I detailed the specific plan of action for the research, how the data were collected and stored and the purpose of the data collection. I outlined how, during the course of this research, the data were validated in line with ethical protocol. The findings are presented and discussed in the next chapter.

4. Data and Discussion Chapter

4.1 Introduction

This chapter seeks to analyse and explore the qualitative data collected as part of this research process. The data analysis process will be detailed. I aim to discuss my findings in terms of three main themes that emerged in this research: the teacher as a facilitator on the children's journey of discovery, the children as active agents in their learning and the power of co-operative learning in promoting independence and responsibility in the classroom. The validity and significance of my findings and developing a theory of practice will be explored.

As outlined in the previous chapter, self-study action research was chosen as the research paradigm. Action research is a form of self-evaluation and professional development that gives the researcher a sense of ownership and accountability for their work (McNiff, 2002). A key focus of the data collection was on becoming a reflective practitioner. Through gathering data from my reflective journal and gaining insights into my teaching from multiple perspectives, I reviewed my pedagogy, conceptualised new ideas or modified my approaches, actively implemented these and repeated my engagement in a cycle of critical reflection (Kolb, 1984).

4.2 Data Analysis

Data analysis took place throughout the research process with further and deeper analysis occurring at the end. The aim of analysing my data was to look for changes and enhancements in my practice and to identify evidence of my learning. I took a systematic approach to the collection of data and chose to focus on thematic analysis to identify,

analyse and report on emerging patterns. The research question for this self-study action research: 'How can I improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom?' guided the thematic analysis.

Having collected data from a variety of sources, I began by familiarising myself with the data, generating initial codes and collating these codes to search for potential themes (Braun and Clark, 2006). I began with forty-nine codes, I collapsed these into fifteen categories from which three main themes emerged:

- Teacher as a facilitator
- Children as active agents
- Co-operative learning.

The codes, categories and themes are presented in Figure 4.1. I reviewed, refined and developed names for the themes before selecting relevant extracts and writing a comprehensive report on the data (Braun and Clark, 2006).

Codes	Categories	Themes
Teacher input Boundaries Providing opportunities Inspiring Hierarchy Talk and discussion/dialogue Listening Resources Structure Feedback Changes Providing choice Meaningful reflection	Providing Choice Resources Structure Providing opportunities Differentiation Becoming a critically reflective practitioner	Teacher as a Facilitator

<p>Motivation</p> <p>Trust</p> <p>Power</p> <p>Choice</p> <p>Fair</p> <p>Children as co-researchers</p> <p>Initiative</p> <p>Interest</p> <p>Self-governance/regulation</p> <p>Ownership</p> <p>Pride</p> <p>Feeling older</p> <p>Self-esteem</p> <p>Affirmation</p> <p>Questioning</p> <p>Confidence</p> <p>Fun</p> <p>Meaningful reflection</p> <p>Transferrable skills</p> <p>Following instructions</p> <p>Heightened awareness</p> <p>On task/focused</p> <p>Informed</p> <p>Developed language</p> <p>Examples: concentrating spots, giving out sheets etc.</p>	<p>Meaningful reflection</p> <p>Problem-solving</p> <p>Motivation</p> <p>Transferrable skills</p> <p>Self-regulation</p>	<p>Children as Active Agents</p>
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Negotiation	Trust	Co-Operative Learning
Collaboration	Shared ownership	
Conflict	Peer support	
Peer support	Colleague Feedback	
Empathy		
Emotional regulation		
Problem solving		
Adaptability/flexibility		
Helping others		
Communication skills		
Consequences		
Power		

Figure 4.1: Data Analysis: Codes, Categories and Themes that emerged.

4.3 The Teacher as Facilitator

The first theme to be discussed is the teacher as a facilitator in supporting independence and responsibility. The principal educational value I hold and hope to see lived out in my practice can be situated within Bruner's (1960) learning theory of education. Jerome Bruner (1960) stated that the purpose of education is to facilitate a child's thinking and problem-solving skills in order for them to be transferred to a variety of situations. The curriculum outlines the complex role of a teacher as both a caring facilitator and a guide concerned with the well-being and successful development of the child (N.C.C.A., 1999a). As a facilitator, I provided the children with ample resources, clear learning intentions, time structures and set boundaries within which they could become active learners.

As outlined by Bruner and Vygotsky (n/d, cited in Williams, 2003), teachers should scaffold the children's learning by creating a flexible, child-centred and supportive

classroom environment. I structured my lessons to provide clear instructions to the children and to outline the time frame and resources available, after which the children engaged in self-led learning. “Before we start anything you show us and give us examples (Dermot, 2019, Interview 2). My work echoes that of Hohmann and Weikhart (1995, cited in Williams, 2003) when they say children should be provided with developmentally appropriate active experiences and adults should intervene tentatively but purposefully, to move the children’s learning forward.

As part of the research process, I engaged in two action research cycles with my class with time for planning, implementing and reviewing each cycle. I began by introducing the concept of independence and responsibility to the children and engaging them in a discussion around how we could develop these skills in school. I organised weekly homework to allow the children flexibility in when they completed the work and set up an area in the room where they dropped their homework and notes in. At the beginning of the school year I had access to in-class support once a day, four times a week. I set up stations during this time to focus on various skills in literacy. During the year, I lost this in-class support which made me question whether or not I could keep the structure of station teaching with only one teacher involved. The initial input of a second teacher helped to prepare the children to follow the structure of the literacy stations and independently work on given tasks.

“I have been very impressed with the children’s ability to work independently without constant adult support. They have taken on board the instructions and worked on the given tasks with little support. Beginning the stations with a second teacher really helped to get them into the routine of working independently” (O’Dwyer, 2019: 132).

Providing Choices

“I think giving the children choice is very important in developing an environment that supports autonomy” (O’Dwyer, 2019: 133). Providing the children with choice within the classroom was of great significance to me. I set clear learning objectives but allowed the children to be creative in how they presented their findings. Similarly, Perry, Phillips and Hutchinson (2002, cited in Whitebread et al., 2007) found the most effective pedagogical elements in promoting self-regulatory learning to be offering choices to children and providing opportunities to select the level of challenge they are to engage with. Froebel (Tovey, 2013) viewed the role of the adult as being crucial in guiding children within a framework, extending their prior skills and providing them with choices. Observations from my critical friend demonstrate how Froebel’s pedagogical approaches were implemented in the classroom: *“You have a structured framework in place where the children can see how they get on and how they create within this framework. They are compliant and they get on well with this”* (Critical Friend, 2019). Throughout the process my aim was to: *“... give the children choice in their learning to provide them with autonomy and give them a sense of ownership over their own learning...I never used to provide the children with choice before but I don’t know why I wouldn’t have...increases enthusiasm to work”* (O’Dwyer, 2019:158).

Resources

I found that providing ample resources supported the development of the children’s independence and responsibility. Offering choices of resources to use encouraged the children to be autonomous in their learning. To establish a classroom environment that is supportive of independence and responsibility among students, teachers should organise the resources effectively and where possible, allow the children to be involved in the

classroom organisation (Fisher, 1996, cited in Williams, 2003). By giving the children an opportunity to make suggestions about what resources they would like to see in their classroom, shared ownership was established, and I developed greater awareness of the children's needs. One such example of a child's suggestion, increased my awareness of the children's desire to have a safe means through which they could express their worries; "*A worry box. Write your worry on a piece of paper, fold it and write on it if you can read it or not. When the worry goes away, take it out and put it in the bin*" (Katie, 2019, Feedback 1).

One of the challenges I encountered along the research process was getting the resources needed to provide the children with the best opportunities to be independent and responsible. Woods (1987, cited in Pollard, 2011) identifies how a lack of adequate resources can hinder teachers in supporting a child-centred approach to learning. "*It's really frustrating when you're trying to do your best and improve your practice, but you don't have the resources to do it*" (O'Dwyer, 2018: 66).

Structure

Setting clear time structures allowed the children the freedom to decide how they used their time for given tasks while working within a set framework. Similar to the work of Williams (2003), I found that in order to encourage the development of independence in my teaching, I set high expectations for my students, I provided opportunities for genuine responsibility, set clear objectives, encouraged the children to develop their own action plans to organise their time and allowed the children to make mistakes. Providing children with frameworks for support, strategies for organising their finished and unfinished work and developing a fair policy for behaviour that encourages children to be responsible for

their actions will promote autonomy in the classroom (Williams, 2003). Observations from Colleague Three during a maths lesson identified and supported the benefit of using clear time frames; *“The children were engrossed in their work, giving them a time structure helped to focus their attention. A superbly active learning lesson”* (Colleague Three, 2019).

Providing Opportunities

Educators must provide opportunities for children to engage in activities they plan and initiate themselves (Whitebread et al., 2007). Experiences that help develop autonomy and the disposition to learn should be planned for (Whitebread et al., 2007). Although I found organising resources, setting clear time frames and implementing systems to support independence and responsibility to be of great benefit in promoting these life skills, I question whether putting such structures in place hinders the children’s initiative. *“Within the classroom there are systems to help organise and give routine to the children, is this restricting their initiative to just do a job they see needs to be done?”* (O’Dwyer, 2019: 101).

Having questioned this, evidence from the children supports the idea that their initiative has not been hindered. When interviewed as a small group and asked how you can be more independent and responsible in the classroom responses include: *“Doing jobs even when the teacher hasn’t asked already”* (Mick, 2019, Interview 1). *“Working at the library because you never asked us to do it”* (Zoe, 2019, Interview 1).

Differentiation

In contrast to my values, some theorists believe that young children are not capable of the complex metacognitive processes involved in self-regulated learning (Perry et al., 2002, cited in Whitebread et al., 2007). *“As I do with the content of work, I need to differentiate the expectations I have of the level of independence children take on”* (O’Dwyer, 2018:8). In a system which caters for varying needs and levels, it must be questioned whether independence for all children including those with special needs, is a reality. *“All content throughout the day is differentiated but is it possible to differentiate the expectations of children with a special needs assistant (S.N.A.) in developing independence?... are we working towards being able to gradually release control back to the child themselves?”* (O’Dwyer, 2018: 51-52). There is a gap in the literature reviewed, as special needs have not exclusively been discussed in relation to independence and responsibility in the classroom. I took a differentiated approach to the development of these skills and my expectations of all the children in the class including those with special needs. I supported them in developing these skills at their own level and found that as these skills were focused upon, the level of peer support greatly increased and the children began *“showing empathy and heightened awareness beyond their years”* (Critical Friend, 2019). The children’s empathy became particularly apparent in their interactions with peers with special needs. One such example has been Mary’s growing interactions with May: *“Mary has observed CF and myself working with May, noted our actions and mirrored them to also help support her. Talking to her in a calm, clear manner and massaging her shoulders when she becomes agitated”* (O’Dwyer, 2019: 102).

Becoming a Critically Reflective Practitioner

Throughout this self-study action research, I kept a reflective journal which I wrote in on a regular basis to enhance the reflective process and to engage in critical thinking, helping to heighten my awareness of teaching and learning in my classroom (Sullivan et al., 2016). Williams (2003) explores the role of the teacher in promoting independence and responsibility, stating that a teacher's role is that of a facilitator who enables the children's learning and is reflective and critical of their own practice. The use of a reflective journal supported critical reflection and provided data detailing my learning journey throughout the self-study research. Kolb's (1984) reflective framework provided guidance and structure to the reflections.

Although I found becoming a critically reflective practitioner to be of great benefit in documenting, questioning, planning and reviewing my thoughts about my pedagogical practice, I found it to be challenging at times. One of the challenges I faced in engaging in critical reflection was trying to not let my thoughts become all-consuming as evident from my reflective journal entry;

“I find it difficult to draw a line when reflecting stops. As it is a continuous cycle, it's difficult to sign off and draw a line under a cycle of reflection. Is there an option to draw a line? I feel overwhelmed with thoughts...Is cyclical reflection and self-study a never-ending process that influences all aspects of our lives or are there opportunities in which we can choose whether to critically reflect on an event or not?” (O'Dwyer, 2018:18).

4.4 The Children as Active Agents

The second key theme that emerged through data analysis was promoting a classroom that supports the children as active agents. “Children are capable of more than we expect” (Gipps, 1992, cited in Pollard, 2011: 19). This resonates with my philosophy of education which has been formed around respecting and valuing the children as active agents in their learning and supporting their development of skills needed for life. The underlying principles of the ‘Introduction to the National Primary School Curriculum’ include the importance of activity and discovery methods, collaboration and fostering a sense of wonder in the children through creating opportunities for them to be active agents in their own learning (N.C.C.A., 1999a).

Viewing my role as a facilitator, echoes the work of Bruner (1996, cited in Williams, 2003) when he states that children should explore and investigate, knowing they can ask for help if required. My critical friend responded to an observation checklist twice while the children were engaged in co-operative work and was asked: are the children actively engaged? My critical friend responded yes on both occasions adding: “*working effectively in pairs. Sourcing and discussing facts*”. “*Asking questions and forming themselves into working groups and designating tasks*” (Critical Friend, 2019).

Stenhouse (1970, cited in McNiff, 2002) believed students should be encouraged to take on responsibility for their own learning. “The curriculum aims to ensure that children’s experience of school will be such that they will come to value learning and develop the ability to learn independently” (N.C.C.A., 1999a: 10). A small group of children from the class asked if they could organise our class library. They labelled the shelves with authors’ names and created a reservation section for children to request books (Plate 4.1). They

began interviewing each other at lunch time for the role of librarians. “*This concept of running the library in such an organised and independent way came completely from the children themselves, no adult input of intervention...This intrinsic desire to be involved and achieving something worthwhile is exactly what I want to set out to achieve*” (O’Dwyer, 2019: 73-74).



Plate 4.2: Photograph of the Classroom Library Organised by the Children.

Meaningful Reflection

Self-assessment, a teaching strategy linked to Vygotsky’s concept of self-regulation, was used to encourage the children to independently identify their strengths and areas they could work on (Muschamp, 1991, cited in Pollard, 2011). The children selected three pieces of work each month to display in their self-assessment folder and wrote a reflection based on their work that month. I engaged in self-reflection alongside the children, modelling my reflections based on my teaching in order to take a mutual role in the

learning process. This supports the work of Williams (2003) when he states that teachers should take ownership of their own learning with the children by allowing time for the children to engage in self-reflection, encouraging their feedback and creating opportunities for dialogue, collaboration, self-assessment and self-reflection. *“At the end of the lesson feedback is encouraged and suggestions are implemented to ensure the children feel heard and taken seriously”* (Critical Friend, 2019). Following paired project work, the children were encouraged to give feedback on the lesson. Responses from the children included:

“I think it went well because there were simple instructions: you write the title, share the iPad and find facts” (Mary, 2019, Feedback 2).

“I think it went well because if you wanted to use the iPad you can just ask the person; in stations you just have to do the station you’re at. Today we could choose, if you wanted to use the iPad or library book or ‘What a Wonderful World’” (Katie, 2019, Feedback 2).

Active learning enables children to have a central role in their own learning, the use of such a model should also involve the teachers as learners themselves (Moyles, 2001, cited in Pollard, 2011). Throughout the process, I appreciated the honest feedback provided by the children as it allowed me to identify not only strengths but also areas to improve upon in my practice, uncovering significant learning for my teaching. When children are regarded as co-researchers, treated with respect and equality, they often provide frank and honest feedback (Garvis, Ødegaard and Lemon, 2015; Ruddock and McIntyre, 2007 in Sullivan et al., 2016). One such example presented below, heightened my awareness around seeing my epistemological value of acknowledging all members of the classroom as valuable contributors being lived out in my practice. To avoid becoming a ‘living contradiction’, I realised I must focus my full attention on the children when engaged in

dialogue with them (Whitehead, 2011, 00:00:07). When asked if they feel I listen to them, the children's responses included:

"I don't really know. My brain is telling me you're listening but you're looking at my iPad" (Dermot, 2019, Interview 2).

"Yea, but sometimes it doesn't really feel like it because sometimes you're on your laptop because Mr. W told us you have to look at someone when you're listening to them" (Katie, 2019, Interview 2).

Throughout the action research, I developed an appreciation for the value of dialogue based on peer and group evaluation. I had always made use of these assessment for learning strategies however; I had completed them in isolation with little opportunity for the children to provide feedback to their peers. Collin and Karsenti (2011, cited in Beauchamp, 2015)'s point is significant here as they promote reflection as a social process and state that reflection can be supported and facilitated by engagement with others. My critical friend observed several of the group evaluations I organised with the children and highlighted the ability the children have to be open and honest;

"When you engage the children in evaluations, they give very positive intelligent feedback and they're very honest about how they feel...It was profound and inspirational to see the children report their evaluations and feedback so honestly about their co-operation with one another and how well they received criticism. I was engaged in a similar activity with adults and criticism was not taken well at all by the adults. They became uncomfortable when criticised. It was an inspirational piece of work to observe" (Critical Friend, 2019).

Through open discussions about how the children worked independently, in pairs or as a group they identified problems that arose and areas that needed to be addressed when working in such a way again. When evaluating group work for projects the children decided they needed to use their time wisely, sort small fights out amongst themselves so as not to waste other group members and the teacher's time telling tales and avoid sitting next to someone they might mess with. Similarly, when asked for feedback on creating games in groups for physical education they established that there was a lot of fighting, some games did not cater for more than four people and they wasted time reading unclear instructions.

Through engaging in this self-study action research, I found that sufficient time was needed for meaningful reflection to take place. Prior to engaging in this research, I had not always allowed for this. Becoming critically reflective and encouraging the children to do the same supported problem solving, collaboration and shared ownership.

Problem Solving

Froebel (Kuntze, cited in Liebschner, 1992:12) "... did little direct teaching in these early days, but would often present the children with genuine problems and leave children to solve them in their own ways". A key aim of promoting the skills of independence and responsibility in the classroom, is that the children's ability to problem solve independently and not constantly seek instant adult intervention will improve.

"It's great that the children have got to a place where they look to each other, their peers as opposed to going straight to the teacher. It frees up the teacher. The default setting for most children is to put their hand up to ask for help. They now try themselves; they ask someone in their group or they identify someone who is

able to do what they might be struggling with” (Validation Group Member 2, 2019).

The concept of ‘instant gratification’ is challenged and outlined as a problem in modern society (Biesta, 2017). Children should be provided with a foundation to develop abilities and skills which can be transferred to a variety of different settings and can be used in problem-solving (N.C.C.A.,1999a). I engaged the children in pair work in maths. They had to co-operate with their partner to estimate and measure the length of given objects in the classroom. The results of their measurements were recorded through their method of choice. The children had to use many skills to be able to successfully move through each step of the task; Sharing the resources, taking turns, making the choice as to how to present their work, supporting their partner and interacting with their classmate in an appropriate manner. Following on from this task, I extended the collaborative work in maths to include group work. The children worked in groups of four to estimate, measure and record the area of a list of items in the classroom. Similar skills had to be used for this task taking into account additional group members and negotiating the challenges a larger group can bring. *“In this problem solving they were all happy, no rejecting. They realised as part of a group we need to decide. What you’re doing with the children has been so effective, if they have a problem, they think how can we solve it ourselves”* (Critical Friend, 2019).

Motivation

In seeking to promote independence in the classroom, the relationship between motivation and independence must be acknowledged. According to Williams (2003: 50), “motivated children have an astonishing ability to work independently”. Students may experience

demotivation and little sense of responsibility for their learning if opportunities for experiential learning are not provided (Bennett & Kell, 1989).

“I began to recognise the significance of motivation in developing independence. How do I adapt my teaching style to increase intrinsic motivation and therefore independence?”

(O'Dwyer, 2018: 13). By respecting the children, developing a trusting relationship with them and aiming to acknowledge their contributions as valuable, I hoped to develop intrinsic motivation. Throughout the process the class worked to a high standard when engaged in independent work. Similarly, Williams (2003) describes independent children as motivated learners, working to high standards. They became creative and looked for further ways to explore their learning. When learning about penguins, one child created a penguin at home using a toilet roll holder. I asked the child if she would like to show the class how to do this. She demonstrated how to create a penguin and all the children followed. When engaged in play, a few children used the mobilo blocks in the classroom to create penguins. Following the creation of penguins in different forms, a small group of children asked if they could create 'Antarctica' where the penguins could be displayed. Many children also worked on projects at home without encouragement from the class teacher and created work of a very high standard.

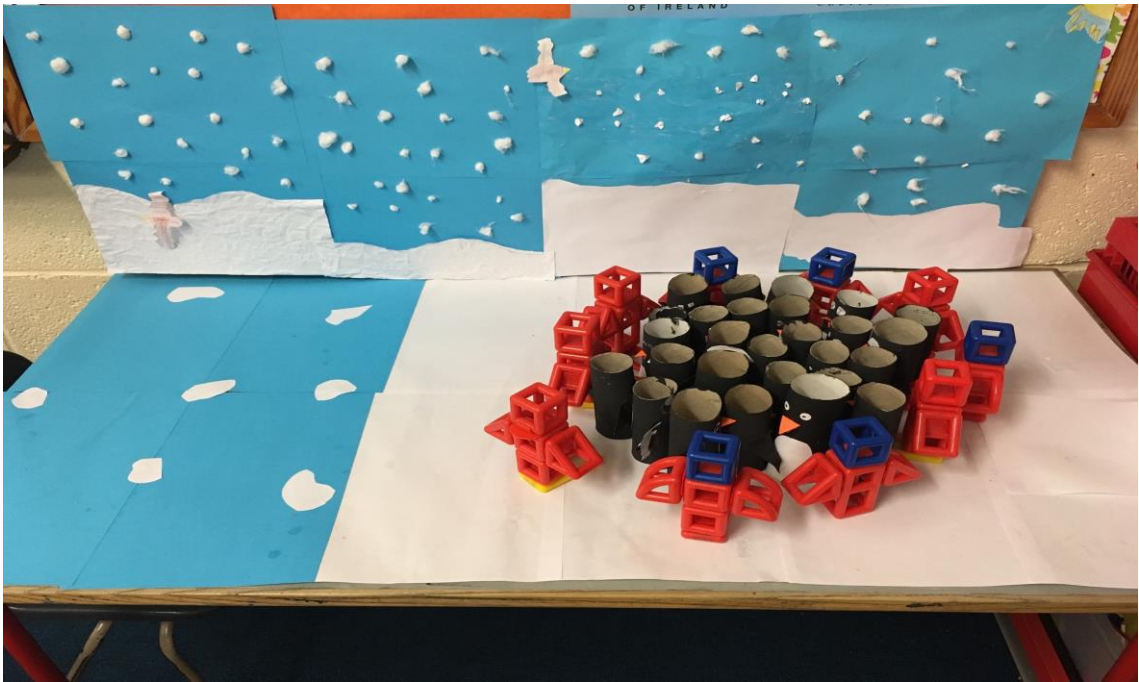


Plate 4.3: Photograph of 'Antarctica' Created by the Children.



Plate 4.4: Photograph of an 'Under the Sea' Display. Mary created this display at home for the projects the children made about sea life.

Transferrable skills

Teachers should create a supportive environment that can facilitate the child's learning and development of life-long skills (N.C.C.A., 1999a). According to Whitebread et al. (2007), to successfully educate others, we must enable them to become independent learners. My aim was to promote independence and responsibility throughout the day in different situations in order for these skills to become transferrable for the children. The children visited Junior Infants in groups of three to help the younger children with Aistear. Colleague One took notes on the children's ability to support the Junior Infants. Mary "*stepped in to re-direct role play group who were messing*", demonstrating an ability to take responsibility when given an opportunity (Colleague One, 2019). "*It's nice to see and observe the children out of context through observations from colleagues ...to show that you're not an influential factor, that you're not prompting their independence. They have gained the skills through prior teaching so they can use these skills when you're not there*" (Validation Group Member Three, 2019).

I created a system in the classroom for the withdrawal and return of C.A.P.E.R. (Children and Parents Enjoying Reading) books on a daily basis. Each table had a 'C.A.P.E.R. librarian' for the week who held the clipboard and checked the books in and out. The children took these skills and transferred their learning to our own classroom library; "*The original librarians are now interviewing other children interested in taking on a role of responsibility in the library. The skills they have learnt from the C.A.P.E.R. system have been transferred to their own system*" (O'Dwyer, 2019: 102-103).

Self-Regulation

“There are so many times when the children argue or get into fights during pair or group work or on the yard and they come to me to sort it out but if I’m truly trying to promote independence and responsibility should I not be trying to support them in sorting it out, should they have a sense of self-regulation? ...I will try to create more opportunities for the children to be self-reflective throughout the day and nurture them in developing this skill through demonstration and by offering support” (O’Dwyer, 2019:137-138).

Reflecting on cycle one of my action research, I realised I had promoted the development of independence and responsibility in an academic capacity. However, a transfer of these skills to the yard had not occurred. Cycle two focused on teaching skills to self-regulate in the yard. The ‘Talkabout for Children, Developing Social Skills’ Programme (Kelly, 2017), ‘Stop, Think, Do Social Skills Training’ (Peterson, 2002), the Social Personal and Health Education Curriculum (N.C.C.A., 1999b), self-reflection and drama were focused upon in the classroom. These tools were used as methods to highlight possible causes of arguments with their peers, engage the children in identifying whether adult intervention would be necessary and how to self-regulate in these situations.

4.5 Co-Operative Learning

The third theme of co-operative learning in this self-study action research included peer support among the children, collaboration between the teacher and the children and feedback from colleagues. The co-operative learning evident throughout the research supports the work of Ritchart et al. (2011). They state the use of collaboration and co-operative group work in the classroom are excellent tools in encouraging children to

articulate their understanding, evaluate their performances and reflect on their own learning. I provided opportunities for the children to engage in dialogue and collaboration with their peers. I experienced first-hand the significant contribution co-operative learning can have in supporting the development of independence and responsibility. Several times throughout the research cycles the children co-operated in pairs and groups to create books on an iPad. One such example of the children's co-operation to design a book about renaming in maths is presented in Plate 4.5.



Plate 4.5: Photograph of 'Renaming' IBook Created by Liam and Mick.

Trust

According to the 'Primary School Curriculum' it is essential that the teacher develops a trusting relationship with the students and is committed to a process of professional

development and reflection (N.C.C.A., 1999a). I aimed to develop a relationship with the children based on mutual trust. The children were incredibly open and honest with their feedback in self, peer and group evaluations and their responses to the surveys and interview questions. Their responses to why should we or should we not be independent or responsible included:

“Because you can trust us” (Hugh, 2019, Interview 1).

“Definitely should be. You feel proud of yourself and lucky. Maybe you used to not be able to do it and now you can” (Mary, 2019, Interview 2).

“Makes you proud of yourself, people will think you’re very good” (Katie, 2019, Interview 2).

“You can show you can be trusted to go places and get things” (Mick, 2019, Interview 2).

The children completed the following sentence; I like feeling independent because... Their responses included: *“I feel trusted.” “It means I’m more trustworthy.” “The teacher relies on you.” “I get a chance to feel important”* (2019, Survey 1). The children’s responses demonstrate the positive impact developing a trusting relationship with the children has had in my classroom.

Shared Ownership

Through becoming a critically reflective practitioner, I have come to realise that my inherent desire to always be in control influences all aspects of my life. I have always found it challenging to let others take the lead. My experience of teaching abroad allowed me to see first-hand how a release of control from the teacher to the children can really transform a classroom. Through this self-study action research, I wanted to improve my

practice to include the children in decision-making and take shared ownership in the classroom. Withall and Lewis (1963, cited in Pollard, 2011) discussed how the contribution of a democratic approach to classroom relationships can create a positive climate for learning and behaviour. This positive element of developing independence and responsibility in the classroom is supported by the data. All children who responded to the survey at the end of cycle one said they liked being independent. A key aim I set out to achieve was for the children to feel valued and respected. When asked in the final group interview if I have changed my teaching Katie responded: *“You’ve got kinder, you understand what it’s like for us, you understand how we feel, like in other classes that didn’t happen. We didn’t learn to be independent in any other class other than second class”* (2019, Interview 2).

Through actively involving the children in decision making and valuing their contributions, I adapted my teaching accordingly with a view to supporting their needs. I regularly engaged the children in circle time to reflect on lessons and how we could approach tasks if we were to do them again. Galton (1989, cited in Whitebread et al., 2007) found that educators who engaged with pedagogical practices aimed at fostering the skills and dispositions involved in independent learning, experienced a sense of ownership among the children for their classroom ethos. A higher level of independent thinking and working became apparent because of this. The data supports this as the children interviewed at the end of the first action research cycle demonstrated an ability to critically analyse how I could support them in being more independent and responsible.

“Trust us a bit more to do bigger jobs like if a teacher was outside and you sent us on a message [to them]” (Ellen, 2019, Interview 1). *“Get us some more stickers for the library. When we’re finished our work, you could have sheets to pick to do like*

gaeilge. Or we could take a blank page or sketch copy and draw" (Katie, 2019, Interview 1).

In order to release control and involve the children in their learning, I talked them through the timetable every morning, shared the learning intention at the beginning of every lesson and welcomed feedback from the children. Educators must focus on their students' learning and needs while encouraging their contributions (Southwest Educational Development Laboratory, 2011). *"The teacher outlined the learning outcome at the beginning of the lesson. Pupil then defined what their task was. Another pupil outlined and illustrated what some pitfalls may be"* (Colleague 3, 2019).

Peer Support

I found peer support helped to foster the skills of independence and responsibility in the children. The children became less dependent on the teacher and relied on each other for support. *"I suggested once or twice that the children could help each other when they have finished work, this has become an automatic response"* (O'Dwyer, 2019: 103). The children completed a survey towards the end of cycle two and were asked to circle yes or no as to whether they had worked independently by themselves, in pairs and in groups this year. The responses are presented in Figure 4.6.

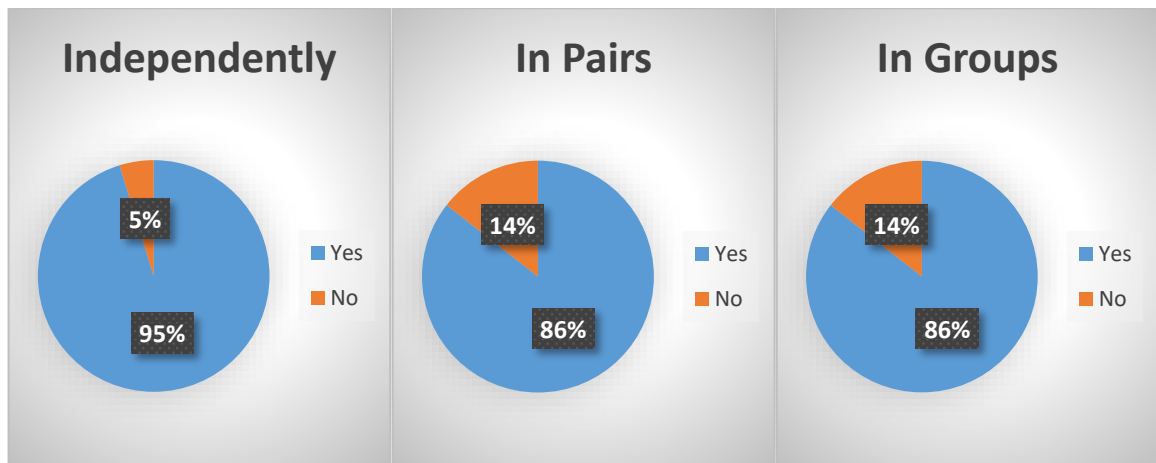


Figure 4.6: Survey Responses. The children's responses to the question: This year I have: Worked Independently by Myself, Worked in Pairs and Worked in groups. Twenty-one participants completed the survey.

Giving the children the opportunity to experience individual, pair and group work on a regular basis was a priority of mine as I felt these methodologies would support the development of independence and responsibility. I also found that the children's ability to co-operate and be empathetic increased. When interviewed at the end of cycle two, the children's responses in relation to peer and group work included;

"The reason why I like being in a group is because we are learning more about each other" (Tom, 2019, Interview 2).

"Compromise with your group members, say maybe next time you can choose" (Mary, 2019, Interview 2).

"...in partners you learn to share with that person and if you weren't friends you get to become better friends...she encourages me... You have to think what it would feel like if you were left out, like you just have to think what it's doing to the other person" (Katie, 2019, Interview 2).

As well as increased empathy towards one another, the children also became critical of their peers. I found there was an increase in the number of times they came to me to help sort out arguments. *“I need to develop a sense of autonomy for their actions and realise that their actions have consequences”* (O’Dwyer, 2019:140). *“I need to bring them back to self-regulation. Worry about yourself and what you can do to be independent and responsible”* (O’Dwyer, 2019:149). During cycle two I placed greater emphasis on the children taking responsibility for their actions and understanding consequences. Engaging the children in self, peer and group evaluations and reflections supported this.

Colleague Feedback

Brookfield (2017) outlined the role of a critical friend in helping to debrief and alert you to the positives and negatives in your teaching that you might have missed. This resonates with my views as having my critical friend in my classroom every day provided great insight and another perspective on my work. Conversations with colleagues in relation to my research helped to raise awareness around my self-study and provided encouragement to keep striving to do my best to promote independence and responsibility.

Mr. W. offered support and insight in relation to my research area. He commented on the reactions of the children during several critical incidents involving a child in my class. *“Your class are very responsible...They have developed a great ability to get on with organising themselves when you are helping Betty...Although it’s not a nice situation to be in... an example of when they have been very independent and responsible”* (Mr. W cited in O’Dwyer, 2019: 122).

From my experience of engaging in self-study action research, I found engaging in dialogue with my critical friend, members of my validation group, colleagues and fellow researchers allowed me to acknowledge different perspectives. I felt part of a network rather than the sense of isolation I had felt at times working independently on the research. Messiou (2012) explores the potential engaging in critical reflection as part of a self-study action research project can have on isolating participants (Messiou, 2012). According to Brookfield (2017), validation groups can offer different perspectives and interpretations on your work. Meeting my validation group at the end of both action research cycles, provided multiple outlooks on my work and made me critically reflect on their suggestions to make changes in my teaching. Their views corroborated my own views and they helped to identify evidence of change in my practice (Sullivan et al., 2016). *“Sometimes it has felt like I’m working in isolation to promote independence and responsibility in the classroom and at times I have questioned whether I am doing all I could be doing to support these skills”* (O’Dwyer, 2019:142). I subjected my work to critique, allowing others to support my claim to knowledge and authenticate my research claims (Winter, 2002 cited in Sullivan et al., 2016).

4.6 Conclusion

Through engaging in this self-study action research and asking myself the question; How can I improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom, I have a new outlook on my pedagogical practice. I agree with Freire’s (1970:110) criticism of the concept of students as recipients of knowledge passed on from their educator and his emphasis on the importance of developing their “knowledge of living experience”. Rather than taking this pedagogical approach, I have focused on respecting the children as motivated learners, interested in exploring the world and trying to make sense of it through self-directed efforts (Tovey, 2013). As outlined in the research methods chapter, the aim of

analysing my data was to look for changes and enhancements in my practice and to identify evidence of my learning. Through data analysis, three key factors supported the promotion of independence and responsibility in the classroom; The teacher as a facilitator and guide, the children as active agents in their learning and providing opportunity for co-operative learning. These factors resonate with the work of Froebel and with my own personal values.

5. Conclusion

5.1 Introduction

This study examines how I engaged in self-study action research to improve my practice and promote independence and responsibility in my classroom. The overall aim of the study sought to develop agency in improving and understanding my own practice. An analysis of the literature provided an overview of educational theorists' perspectives on the promotion of these skills, practical examples of supporting the development of independence and responsibility in the classroom and how national and international curricula value these skills. Qualitative data were gathered to gain data from multiple perspectives. The data collected throughout the process provides evidence that I implemented changes in my teaching in order to improve my practice. Three main themes emerged from the study; The teacher as facilitator, the children as active agents and co-operative learning.

5.2 Significance of my Research

I would now like to discuss the significance of my research. On a personal level, I have come to value critical reflection as a tool to support self-regulation in all aspects of my life and have come to realise the importance of a dialogical relationship in the classroom between teaching and learning and valuing the children's contributions (Sullivan et al., 2016). I agree with Kohonen (2007, cited in Dunne, 2013) that teachers come to view their role as an educator in a different light, having committed themselves to promoting learner autonomy. In line with Dam's (1995:5 cited in Dunne, 2013) work, I have adapted my practice in the following ways:

- I now focus on learning rather than teaching.
- I am engaged in the children's learning process.

- I am open to the children's ideas and suggestions.
- I welcome and support student initiatives.
- I am a co-learner in the learning process.

Having engaged deeply in critical reflection on my practice, reviewed relevant literature and applied my learning to the classroom, I have come to situate my teacher identity within the work of Maxine Greene. Greene (1997) describes 'teaching for wide-awakeness' which she outlines as equipping children to make decisions, act on them, critically reflect and identify alternatives. Greene (1997) highlighted the importance of teaching principles and perspectives by means that allow for interrogation and questioning from the children, encouraging their contribution and views and avoiding passivity. When teachers proactively engage in examining their teaching, a sense of individual fulfilment and agency ensues (Greene, 1997). This resonates with my sense of accomplishment and pride having taken control and become autonomous in my practice. I will continue to engage in critical reflection on my pedagogy and aim to progress the level of agency I gain over my own practice.

At a practical level, I have adapted my teaching to move away from didactic methods and focus on the children becoming active and independent learners. This resonates with Freire's (1970) critique of the traditional pedagogy he named 'the banking concept of education', where pedagogical approaches are based upon filling students with ideas and information. From an educational perspective, I have received great support, interest and enthusiasm from my colleagues throughout. In an action research approach, the practitioner researcher shares emerging ideas with others throughout the process through engaging in dialogue with critical friends, colleagues, validation group members and the children (Sullivan et al., 2016). "Learning is most beneficial when it is shared with others"

(Sullivan et al., 2016: 122). I found this social dimension of action research to be a positive learning experience for me which I will continue to make use of through collaboration with colleagues. I would also like to engage in further research as part of a team of practitioners as I found self-study action research to be quite isolating at times. Through sharing my ideas, several colleagues of mine implemented similar routines to promote independence and responsibility in their classrooms. I look forward to presenting my findings to the staff as a whole at the beginning of the next school year. The findings were disseminated to the children in my class in an age-appropriate format. I have presented my research at my university for further scrutiny by other perspectives in my field and I look forward to presenting a blog online, outlining my findings. This thesis was published in line with the university guidelines.

I would like to further enhance the reliability and credibility of this self-study action research by publicly presenting my claims for further scrutiny by other professionals in my field. I aim to present my work at an educational conference and at colleges of education. I would like to publish my research in an educational journal. The aim of sharing my research with other practitioners would be that similar routines to support the children as active agents in their learning would be implemented in classrooms across Ireland. I would like to involve parents in the promotion of such skills at home as I feel both the children and their parents would benefit from developing the children's independence and responsibility.

5.3 Generalisability and Replicability

In contrast to other research paradigms, the criteria of generalisability and replicability used to analyse traditional research could not be applied to my self-study action research.

Generalisability refers to other practitioners taking a theory and applying it to their practice. Action researchers develop personal living theories and do not claim that these theories are directly transferrable (Sullivan et al., 2016). According to Shipman (2014), research can be defined as replicable if different researchers using the same methods obtain the same results. As this is a self-study action research project, if different researchers used the same methods and cycles outlined above, the results might not be the same in another context. Therefore, action research for teachers researching their own practice is not replicable (Sullivan et al., 2016). Educators engaging in this form of research may develop personal living theories which are not directly transferrable and not generalisable (Sullivan et al., 2016).

Although the evidence generated in this research is not generalisable or replicable in other settings as the data were generated in my context with a focus on my learning, I hope that my study has the potential to have an educative influence on other practitioners. The focus of this research was 'How can I improve my practice in order to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom?'. I critically assessed and reflected upon the data collected with this focus in mind. In order to establish the effectiveness of my action research cycles, I set standards of judgement (Sullivan et al., 2016). I value the children as active agents in their learning and as being capable of taking on responsibilities. I focused on these values as standards of judgement. I chose to focus on critical living standards of judgement because they are "relationally-dynamic and grounded in both improving practice and generating knowledge" and they resonate with my epistemological values (Whitehead, 2008 cited in Sullivan et al, 2016:91). "In terms of criteria for judging action research it seems that the transparency of the research process and the authenticity of the research claims are key criteria" (Lomax 1994:119). In line with the work of Lomax

(1994), the data were analysed rigorously, thoroughly and critically. Engagement with relevant literature provided corroboration of my findings throughout the research process.

5.4 Personal Living Theory

Self-study action research is based on “that belief that we can know through doing” (Brydon- Miller, 2003: 14). Kennelly (2017) linked the act of writing to knowledge creation. This resonates with the values underpinning self-study action research where practitioners actively engage in research, gather data and record their findings in a cyclical approach, gaining new knowledge with the possibility of developing a personal living theory. To develop this theory from practice, I engaged in a process of validation, subjecting my work to the scrutiny of others. “One of the outcomes of critically reflecting on your practice is the development of new knowledge or new learning” (Sullivan et al., 2016: 123). Through engaging in this self-study action research, I have made changes in my practice in order to promote independence and responsibility. I addressed the question: How can I improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom? I now have a new outlook on my pedagogical practice, have realised the significance of grounding my work within my values and being critically reflective of my practice to ensure I am living to these values. Through becoming a critically reflective practitioner and gaining autonomy over my practice, I have developed my own personal living theory: Through acting as a facilitator, valuing the children as active agents and engaging in co-operative learning, the skills of independence and responsibility were promoted in my classroom.

5.5 Conclusion

To conclude, becoming a critically reflective practitioner has heightened my awareness of my practice. I have come to realise the significance of grounding my work within my values. I have enjoyed gaining agency over my practice, designing, implementing and adapting interventions to promote the development of life-long skills in the classroom. The children's engagement with the process has been rewarding. I have benefited greatly from seeing how a release of responsibility to the children can provide them with opportunities they otherwise would not have if a didactic approach were to be taken. Living closely to my values, I have experienced the significance of developing a trusting relationship with the children and creating a co-operative learning environment where children's voices are valued. Through engaging in this process, I have become autonomous in my practice and have come to value that "children are capable of more than we expect" (Gipps, 1992, cited in Pollard, 2011: 19).

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Appendix A: Ethical Statement



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

Ethics Approval for Master of Education (Research in Practice)

(Please read the notes in the module handbook (EDF684) before completing this form)

Student name:	Amy O'Dwyer
Student Number:	18252551
Supervisor:	Tony Sweeney
Programme:	Master of Education (Research in practice)
Thesis title:	Self- Study Action Research

Research Question(s):	How do I improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom?
Intended start date of data collection:	7 th January 2019
Professional Ethical Codes or Guidelines used:	British Educational Research Association (2004) <i>Revised Ethical Guidelines for Educational Research</i> , BERA: Notts. Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012) <i>Guidance for developing ethical research projects involving children</i> , Government Publications: Dublin. Maynooth University (2016) <i>Research Ethics Policy and Research Integrity Policy</i> , Maynooth University: Kildare.

1(a) Research Participants: Who will be involved in this research? (*Tick all that apply*)

Early years / pre-school

Primary school students

Secondary school students

Young people (aged 16 – 18 years)

Adults

<input type="checkbox"/>
<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>
<input type="checkbox"/>

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

[Max 50 words]:

The proposed participants for this study are the 7-8 year old students in the co-educational class I teach who have been permitted to participate. The proposed role of participants in the research

1(b) Recruitment and Participation/sampling approach involved in your research? What type of sampling is used? Describe the informal recruitment processes? Please describe the role of participants? Are there gatekeepers and what is their role?

The proposed participants are the children in the class I have been assigned to teach. A letter of explanation regarding the action research project will be sent to the parents of the children. I will outline verbally what will be involved to the children before seeking written consent from their parents and assent from the children themselves. Participants will be respected as co-researchers and their opinion on the action research will be valued (Shaw et al., 2011). Permission from the Board of Management to conduct my research in the school has been granted. My ethical statement will be made available to all parties involved.

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

The context of this self-study action research project is the co-educational primary school in which I work as a second class teacher. There are three streams of second class. The socio-economic status of the school is middle class, in a suburban setting.

The purpose of this self-study action research project is to investigate how I can improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my students. Critical reflection through the use of a reflective journal and dialogue with my critical friend and validation group will be continuous research activity throughout the process.

Qualitative data will be collected in order to show changes in my practice in promoting independence and responsibility in my classroom. My reflective journal, observations noted, conferencing with participants, questionnaires from parents and feedback from my critical friend and members of my validation group will be

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

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

It is not anticipated that the research process will give rise to any harm to participants or any risks greater than those ordinarily encountered in daily life (DCYA, 2012). As recommended by the Department of Children and Youth Affairs (2012), where issues of harm arise, research will be suspended, the participant's guardian will be informed, school policy will be adhered to and correct protocol will be followed (DCYA, 2011). If there is risk of harm to the researcher throughout the process, research will be suspended and Ethical Guidelines for Educational

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

In an effort to minimise power imbalance, the participants will be treated as co-researchers in the process (Shaw et al., 2011). It will be made explicitly clear to the participants that participation is on a voluntary basis and they are entitled to withdraw at any stage of the process. There will be no incentives to entice the children to take part and it will be made very clear to them that they do not have to participate in order to please the researcher (Sullivan et al., 2016). If a child wishes to withdraw assent, their parental consent will not override this (DCYA, 2012).

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

As recommended by the United States Commission for Protection of Human Subjects (1977), the children's assent

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

Beneficence will be upheld throughout the research process. Maynooth University Research Integrity Policy and Ethic's Policy, Children First: National Guidance for the Protection and Welfare of Children (MU, 2016b and DCYA, 2011) and the school's Child Safeguarding Policy will be adhered to throughout the research process. If unexpected outcomes occur, these guidelines will be referred to and correct protocol will be followed.

It will be made explicitly clear to the children that the research is a self-study project and I will be the focus.

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

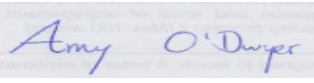
In line with university guidelines, only data for the purpose of the research study will be collected and processed fairly. Data will be recorded clearly and accurately. As recommended by Sullivan et al. (2016), all data will be signed, labelled and dated. In line with university and GDPR Guidelines, data will be secured using encryption and manual data will be placed in a data archive which will be locked in cabinets with access to the researcher and authorised university personnel only, for a minimum of ten years following publication (MU, 2016a). Research

Attachments

Please attach, where available and applicable, information letters, consent forms and other materials that will be used to inform potential participants about this research.

Declaration (Please sign and date)

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

Signed: 

Date: 21/10/2018

Supervisor use only:

Date Considered: _____

Approved

Approved with recommendations (see below)

Referred back to applicant

Referred to Department Research and Ethics Committee

Recommendations:

Signature of supervisor: _____

Department use only: (only where applicable)

Date Considered: _____

Approved by Froebel Department Research and Ethics committee

Approved with recommendations (see below)

Referred back to applicant (changes to be approved by supervisor)

Referred to Maynooth University Social Research Ethics Subcommittee

Recommendations:

Signature of Dept. Ethics Committee Chair: _____

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

Date Considered: _____

Approved

Referred back to applicant and supervisor

Signed:

FSS Research Ethics Committee nominee

Checklist for students

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

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Appendix B: Second Action Research Cycle Plan

Date	Action Plan
Cycle 2 Week 1: 25 th February	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Engage the children in dialogue around their responses to what they need to be more independent and responsible: resources, labels, more jobs: how can we organise these. • Explain to the children they have the opportunity to help out the Junior Infants with Aistear: discuss what skills they will need for this, how to organise this. • Co-operatively discuss how these routines are going throughout the school day and make plans to improve if necessary: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ❖ CAPER ❖ HD2's yard ❖ Cleaning the lunch benches ❖ Taking out the bin ❖ What to do when the teacher is otherwise engaged ❖ Sorting out arguments in group work/on the yard.
Week 2: 4 th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continue to implement the above routines in the classroom and record observations. • Engage the children in independent pair work tasks in maths for measures, record observations and gain feedback from peer self-evaluation. • Engage the children in self-assessment, looking back over their work from February, selecting their favourites and writing a note about why they are proud of this work and identifying something they want to work on. • Children actively engage in independent research on the iPads, from library books, their WAWW book and information sheets based on the new project area- moon landing and record their findings in their copies.
Week 3: 11 th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children record their project work through the use of Book Creator in pairs, record observations. • Children read their Book Creator projects to another class. • Gain feedback from the children on how they worked as a pair, discuss whether group or pair work is preferred and why.
Week 4: 18 th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Discuss the implementation of routines to support independence with my critical friend. • Engage the children in a discussion around the implementation of the routines to support independence/responsibility. Is there scope for more? • Engage the children in independent writing tasks to create fictional narratives, recording their draft in their copy. Peer assessment for suggestions and help with spellings/grammar.

Week 5: 25 th March	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children record their narratives on the iPads using Story Board e.g. creating their own illustrations and typing up their story. • Children present their fictional pieces to their classmates and gain feedback. • Engage the children in an independent artwork task. • Children actively engage in independent research on the iPads, from library books, their WAWW book and information sheets based on the new project area- spring and record their findings in their copies.
Week 6: 1 st April	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Children record their project work through the use of Book Creator. • Carry out group interviews with the children in small groups to gain their feedback on the process to date. • Gain feedback from my validation group. • Review the data and feedback and record findings.

Appendix C: Invitation Letter to Research Participants



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

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

Dear Parent(s)/Guardian(s),

I am undertaking a Master of Education programme at Maynooth University. As part of my degree I am doing an action research project. The focus of my research is how I can improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom.

In order to do this, I intend to carry out research in the classroom by discussing with the children what is meant by independence and responsibility and setting up systems in the classroom to support these skills.

The data will be collected using observations, reflections, questionnaires and conferencing. Through discussions, the children will be asked their opinions on if and how their skills of independence and responsibility in the classroom have developed.

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

All information will be confidential and information will be destroyed in a stated timeframe in accordance with the University guidelines. The correct guidelines will

be complied with when carrying out this research. The research will not be carried out until approval is granted by the Froebel Department of Primary and Early Childhood Education.

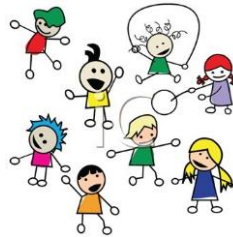
I would like to invite you and your child to give permission for him/her to take part in this project.

If you have any queries on any part of this research project feel free to contact me by email at amy.odwyer.2019@mumail.ie

Yours sincerely,

Amy O'Dwyer

.....



.....

I am trying to find out how I can help children become more independent and responsible. I would like to find out more about this. I would like to watch you and listen to you when you are in school and to write down some notes about you.

Would you be ok with that? Pick a box

 Yes **No**

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

If you are happy with that could you sign the form?

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



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

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

PARENTAL CONSENT FORM

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

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

Parent / Guardian Signature _____

Date: _____

Name of Child _____

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



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

Information Sheet

Parents and Guardians

Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for parents and guardians.

What is this Action Research Project about?

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

What is the research question?

- How do I improve my practice to promote independence and responsibility in my classroom?

What sorts of methods will be used?

- Observations, Reflective Notes, Questionnaires and Conferencing.

Who else will be involved?

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

What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to undertake this study with my class. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines. The thesis will be published in accordance with University guidelines and a copy will be made available to you upon request.

Contact details: Amy O'Dwyer

E: amy.odwyer.2019@mumail.ie



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

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

Child's assent to participate

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

Name of child (in block capitals):



Signature: _____

Date: _____

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



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

Information Sheet

Who is this information sheet for?

This information sheet is for my critical friend and members of my validation group.

What is this Action Research Project about?

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

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What are you being asked to do?

You are being asked for your consent to permit me to use your feedback on the research as data. In all cases the data that is collected will be treated with the utmost confidentiality and the analysis will be reported anonymously. The data captured will only be used for the purpose of the research as part of the Master of Education in the Froebel Department, Maynooth University and will be destroyed in accordance with University guidelines. The thesis will be published in accordance with University guidelines and a copy will be made available to you upon request.

Contact details: Amy O'Dwyer

E: amy.odwyer.2019@mumail.ie



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

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

CONSENT FORM

I have read the information provided in the attached letter and all of my questions have been answered. I voluntarily agree that my feedback on the research can be used as a source of data. I am aware that I will receive a copy of this consent form for my information.

Name: _____

Signature _____

Date: _____

Appendix D: Survey Questionnaires

Ms. O'Dwyer February 2019

I felt independent in Ms. O'Dwyer's class when:

I did not feel independent in Ms. O'Dwyer's class when:

I felt responsible in Ms. O'Dwyer's class when:

I did not feel responsible in Ms. O'Dwyer's class when:

The next time I work independently in a group I would like to work on:

I like / do not like feeling independent because:

I like / do not like feeling responsible because:

Ms. O'Dwyer April 2019

Has Ms. O'Dwyer given me the chance to be independent and responsible in school this year? Yes/ No

Can you give an example or examples:

I do my best learning when:

What should Ms. O'Dwyer know about how I learn?

I like / do not like feeling independent and responsible because:

What have you enjoyed doing in Second class that you would like to continue to do in 3rd class?

This year I have:

Worked independently by myself Yes/ No

Worked in pairs Yes/ No

Worked in groups Yes/ No

Worked with Ms. O'Dwyer Yes/ No

Been given choice in how to do my work Yes/ No

Helped make decisions in the classroom Yes/ No

Appendix E: Interview Schedules

Cycle 1

Interview schedule for group interviews with the children

1. What is independence?
2. What is responsibility?
3. How can you be independent- at home? –in the classroom?
4. How can you be responsible- at home? –in the classroom?
5. Why should we/should we not be independent and/or responsible?
6. When are you independent in Ms. O'Dwyer's class? /Can you think of an example when you have been independent in Ms. O'Dwyer's class?
7. When are you responsible in Ms. O'Dwyer's class? /Can you think of an example when you have been responsible in Ms. O'Dwyer's class?
8. What can Ms. O'Dwyer do to help you be more independent/responsible?
9. What do you need to be independent/ responsible in the classroom? Is there anything that helps you to be independent/responsible in the classroom? (resources)
10. How can you be more independent/responsible in school?
11. When you are working independently and you come across something difficult, what could you do to figure it out?
12. What is the most difficult thing about working independently?
13. What is the most difficult thing about being responsible?
14. Do you enjoy working independently and responsibly as part of a group?
15. When did you feel your group did their best independent and responsible work? (In P.E.? Project work? Maths activities? Etc.)
16. Why did the group you were in work so well together for this task?

Cycle 2

Interview schedule for group interviews with the children

1. Can you think of an example of when you have been independent/ responsible in school this year?
2. Could you be more independent/ responsible in school? How?
3. What is the most difficult thing about working independently/ being responsible?
4. How do you feel when you are independent/ responsible?
5. Why should we/should we not be independent and/or responsible?
6. What has been different about learning in Second Class to the other classes you've been in?
7. What changes have happened in our classroom?
8. Has Ms. O'Dwyer changed her teaching? Can you give an example?
9. What do you do when a task is difficult?
10. How does Ms. O'Dwyer help you with your work?
11. How do your classmates help you with your work?
12. When do you do your best work? By yourself? In a pair? In a group? Why do you think this?
13. Do you feel Ms. O'Dwyer listens to you when you have an idea? Why/why not?
14. Do you ever get to choose how you do your work? Can you give examples of when you've been given a choice in Ms. O'Dwyer's class?
15. What are the things teachers should know about how you learn/ learning?

Appendix F: Observation Checklists

Who is taking part?	
What is taking place?	
What resources are being used?	
How are activities being explained/ organised/ labelled?	
What are the roles of participants?	
How do different participants behave towards each other?	
Who is making decisions and for whom?	
What are the significant issues being discussed?	
What non-verbal communication is taking place?	
How is time used in the event?	
How are changes managed?	
What rules govern the social organisation and behaviour in the event?	
Why is the event occurring in the way that it is?	

Observation Checklist for Colleagues

Are the children actively engaged?	
Is the teacher encouraging students in discovering principles by themselves?	
Are the children engaged in active dialogue?	
Are the children using the resources responsibly?	
Are the children working independently without constant adult guidance?	
Is there evidence of the children working independently/responsibly?	
Are the children co-operating with their partner/group members?	
Are the pupils given the chance to give feedback on the lesson?	
Would you change anything about the lesson?	
Why is the event occurring in the way that it is?	

Appendix G: Selection of Transcripts Referred to in this Thesis

Interview schedule for group interviews with the children

Two group interviews were held with 7 children from my class in each group. Group one on the 11th and 12th February, for half an hour each day, 1.55p.m.- 2.25 p.m. Group two on the 13th and 14th February, for half an hour each day, 1.55p.m.- 2.25 p.m.

1. What is independence?

Group 1

Mick: When you work by yourself. Someone's giving you a chance to be responsible.

Rory: Alone work.

Celine: Don't chat or look at anyone else's work.

Mary: The opposite of group work because you're not supposed to talk.

Group 2

Hugh: Doing it by yourself, no help, no talking.

Gary: Don't talk and you shouldn't need an adult to help you.

Greta: It's peace and you can do your work.

Michael: Not in a group.

Ellen: Don't copy anyone else's ideas, it's what you think, it's not about anyone else.

Bella: You know what to do and you do it on your own.

2. What is responsibility?

Group 1

Mary: Helping out doing things that you don't usually do. If you mess up, you don't get to be responsible.

Carol: Work hard and do something properly.

Celine: Looking after something.

Group 2

Bella: Say if you forgot your toy or you didn't water the flowers, it's your responsibility.

Ellen: Something you take on and have to do it. Like my dog, I have to take care of it, my parents said you have to.

Michael: You have a job and you have to do it and no one else will have to do it.

Greta: When you have a pet/ a baby you have to take care of it and love it or it makes you a bad person.

Gary: If you go to the shops on your own, your parents will trust you.

3. How can you be independent and/or responsible - at home?

Group 1

Katie: Don't disturb brothers or sisters doing their homework.

Mary: Doing something without someone asking.

Zoe: Doing homework yourself

–in the classroom?

Mick: Doing jobs even when the teacher hasn't asked already

Katie: If the teacher is busy for more than two minutes get a book and don't talk.

Zoe: If the teacher asks you to. Working at the library because you never asked us to do it.

Michael: Trust you to do a job.

Group 2

-at home?

Gary: Go to the shops instead of your mum and dad going.

Greta: When your mother and father get older, I will do things like cleaning and cooking.

Tom: When my dad was busy on a phone call it was my responsibility to do things for myself.

Ellen: Looking after my dogs, it is my responsibility to do my dishwasher every day and my chores: set the table, make my bed and tidy my clothes in my room.

Bella: Waling and feeding your dog, getting ready for school yourself, parents on phone call- find something to do and don't interrupt.

Tom: Sorting fights out with your sister yourself.

-in the classroom?

Hugh: Being quiet.

Gary: Trying to help the teacher and try not to talk or copy other people.

Greta: Help someone, be quiet, listen to teacher.

Michael: Cleaning the lunch benches.

Ellen: Not looking into other people's work, try not to ask the teacher for too much help to show you're responsible.

Bella: If you are asked to take the green bin out to the halla, you wouldn't talk or mess.

Tom: You have to do a good job of it like if you get the phone and end up dropping and breaking it you won't be asked to do a job again.

4. Why should we/should we not be independent and/or responsible?

Group 1

Mary: Definitely should be. You feel proud of yourself and lucky. Maybe you used to not be able to do it and now you can.

Celine: You definitely should be or else you'll feel guilty and mean.

Zoe: To work harder.

Katie: Makes you proud of yourself, people will think you're very good.

Mick: If you don't, really bad things could happen to you.

Carol: The world will be a better place if you're responsible because people wouldn't be nice to each other so it would be better if we could all be happy.

Katie: We should be responsible. Help pick up litter, obey all rules.

Group 2

Bella: You should be responsible because technically you wouldn't be able to get a dog, it would be your parents' or brother's dog.

Ellen: You can show you can be trusted to go places and get things.

Tom If you don't, you wouldn't learn anything, you could be fired from your job when you're older.

Michael: It think we should because if we couldn't be independent, we wouldn't get anything done.

Greta: It would be better because you wouldn't annoy someone you need to be responsible it would make you a good person.

Hugh: If you don't, everything you have will be destroyed.

5. When are you independent and/ or responsible in Ms. O'Dwyer's class? /Can you think of an example when you have been independent/responsible in Ms. O'Dwyer's class?

Group 1

Mary: I've got four. When we're doing all our own project work, when we're doing the library- no fights because we have people who organise it and luckily there's no fights.

Carol: When we do our English stations like 'My Spelling Workbook' we don't need you; you tell us what to do on the iPads maybe and you don't need to help us.

Celine: Writing, I like writing and I concentrate really hard on it.

Zoe: Spelling test.

Rory: When I got out your stuff for you, I am independent.

Mick: After maths I tidy the white board and markers. Keeping the doors open on the yard. CAPER librarians.

Zoe: Pairing pencils.

Mary: Lunch bench cleaning that's Michael yea but he's hiring other people to help him.

He's deciding over mid-term who is responsible enough.

Katie: He's told me he's picking people who eat over their lunch boxes.

Rory: I used to be his assistant but now I'm volunteering because he fired me.

Group 2

Hugh: When you picked me for the science.

Gary: When you picked me for the CAPER librarian.

Greta: When I'm doing my Valentine's poem.

Michael: I'll tell you one time when I felt responsible you sent me and Katie on a message and the book fair was on and I felt you trusted me and Katie not to touch the books.

Tom: When you picked me to do the bins, the prayer, the science and I did my own experiment at home.

Ellen: When you picked me to do quizzes because we had to be quiet and science.

Bella: When I was reading a book in the library to the rest of the class, science and the bin.

6. What can Ms. O'Dwyer to do help you be more independent/responsible?

Group 1

Katie: Get us some more stickers for the library.

Rory: Nothing.

Mary: More materials, for China, more paper.

Celine: When we're finished our work and if we start messing, you could give us more work.

Katie: When we're finished our work, you could have sheets to pick to do like gaeilge. Or we could take a blank page or sketch copy and draw.

Celine: You could see if there's any jobs.

Carol: You could tidy the books.

Teacher: Would you like to be able to do projects when finished work early?

All: Yes.

Group 2

Ellen: Trust us a bit more to do bigger jobs like if a teacher was outside and you sent us on a message.

Bella: You don't really trust Jack and Mick, so you could give them four chances because maybe you could trust them to do a job if they don't use up their four chances.

Michael: Oh I found this thing in Validation Group Member 2's room, 3 interrupts a day. I think that would help you to be more responsible, maybe miss a few minutes of golden time, move seats to right up to your desk or last year Validation Group Member 2 had 'the grey group', sit by yourself, extra homework, three thumbs up or a sticker.

Ellen: I don't want to do student of the week again because it's not fair when it's only one person every week.

Hugh: Let us get children from their classes more.

Tom: Spelling test, it's a bit harsh with an X because I found quite and quiet very hard and I saw lots of people looked disappointed when they got their test back so maybe write really well done but you just got ___ wrong.

Teacher: Do you think a dot would be better if you got something wrong?

Tom: Yes.

Ellen: I don't know how to fix this but everyone starts messing when you or critical friend goes out of the room so I'm wondering does anyone have an idea? Last year Validation Group Member 2 gave Michael a pen and he wrote anyone who talks name on the board.

7. What do you need to be independent/ responsible in the classroom? Is there anything that helps you to be independent/responsible in the classroom? (resources)

Group 1

Celine: Less people at your table.

Mick: Just you and your mind.

Mary: Two move apart so that you don't.

Rory: Moving to where no one else is, concentrating spots, they help me concentrate because no one is chatting.

Zoe: Concentrating spots because nobody is chatting in your ear.

Group 2

Michael: Dustpan and brush.

Bella: Doing work quietly and being in a concentrating spot so no one annoys you.

Tom: Me

Ellen: Be you.

Greta: Be quiet

8. How can you be more independent/responsible in school?

Group 1

Rory: Be less bold, put your hand up a lot because Ms. O'Dwyer knows you're listening, don't get in trouble as much.

Mary: You doing more work [Ms. O'Dwyer] means you can't help me doing my work.

Katie: If you [Ms. O'Dwyer] ask a question, always give an answer.

Celine: Play by the rules in the games.

Mick: Don't hurt other people.

Mary: Don't be greedy and take too much equipment.

Katie: If the game's over and you win, say well played to the other team, great sportsmanship.

Carol: Be nice and play on, say played well, try harder next time.

Celine: Don't brag.

Carol: Be fair.

Group 2

Bella: Don't play games that involve fighting so no one gets hurt.

Gary: Try and get a concentrating spot and don't talk when you're being independent.

9. When you are working independently and you come across something difficult, what could you do to figure it out?

Group 1

Mary: Keep going.

Carol: Ignore if people are being mean.

Celine: Ask one other person.

Zoe: Skip it and come back to it.

Katie: Compromise with your group members, say maybe next time you can choose.

Group 2

Greta: Skip and come back to it, think about it.

Ellen: Ask a teacher for help.

Bella: Look around on the page and see and check for the answer.

Greta: Look around for clues.

Michael: Look at your hundred square.

10. What is the most difficult thing about working independently and/ or being responsible?

Group 1

Carol: If you're being independent working on something yourself you can't just look into someone else's.

Celine: Nervous to get something wrong like in the spelling test but if you look at someone else's they might have it wrong.

Mick: Your friends are a distraction because they might want to play or mess with you, but you have to say no because you have to be independent and responsible.

Mary: Ignoring your friends because they might think you don't want to be their friend anymore.

Carol: It's really hard to say to your friends you're distracting me, it might be hurtful and confusing.

Rory: I say sorry I have to concentrate, there's too many people here, I might have to move.

Group 2

Bella: People copying your answer, so keep a low voice.

Ellen: Difficult questions and I've no clue what to do I just skip them and come back to them and I've no clue.

Hugh: It's really hard to not talk to the person about you like talk about your news.

Greta: I find it difficult that I can't ask someone what to do.

11. Do you enjoy working independently and responsibly as part of a group?

Group 1

Rory: Yes, as long as Jasmine's not in the group.

Katie: Most of the time yes if there's no fights.

Carol: Yes, sometimes if you don't know a question you can work it out together independently, if you don't know something the other people in your group might know how to do it.

Greta: I like to help in projects.

Group 2

Michael: I don't really like working in a group because it always turns into a fight especially if Jasmine and Rory are in the group, they should be separated.

Greta: I think we actually should be independent and responsible in a group because we do good work.

Ellen: I don't mind it.

Bella: I think it's nice in a way and not nice in another way, it wouldn't really be fair if we both want to do something.

Ellen: There's good ways and bad ways, one person is in charge and someone just follows orders and things we can also work together and share things.

Hugh: I don't because someone in another group claims your work.

Tom: The reason why I like being in a group is because we are learning more about each other.

12. When did you feel your group did their best independent and responsible work? (In P.E.? Project work? Maths activities? Etc.)

Group 1

Celine: On the projects, mostly China, we worked hard, no noise, tried our best, no fights.

Zoe: Project on the sense. There was no fights we got on with our own work.

Carol: Our project on Florence Nightingale because it was quite a good project we all did our own thing.

Mary: The sense project because we didn't really chat. We did lots more writing for the Florence Nightingale project.

Katie: The China project because there was no fighting, Florence Nightingale project because I worked with children I don't usually play with on the yard.

Rory: China project because I was in a peaceful group.

Mick: Right now, because we are being very responsible and we're having a great time.

Group 2

Gary: The senses project because no one was fighting.

Bella: The senses project. We worked really well together because we didn't have any problems picking the parts.

Ellen: The senses, Florence Nightingale and maths because we worked so well, we got along so well, we picked parts so well.

Hugh: In the weighing in maths, we didn't hate each other so we didn't have any fights.

Michael: The Christmas thing for Irish, Daidí na Nollag. Everybody worked together, I've had a little bit of trouble getting along with Jasmine.

Tom: Weighing.

Greta: The senses project. We all just chose one like I chose touch and we just got along with that, they just agreed, we don't fight.

13. Why did the group you were in work so well together for this task?

Group 1

Mary: No fighting.

Mick: No messing.

Zoe: No chatting.

Carol: We had a good time.

Group 2

Tom: We just did incredible, we just did really good.

Michael: I think you should just pick the parts. I think it's fair because there's no fights.

Greta: Michael and Jasmine I feel really bad for them because they waste all their time and end up fighting.

Cycle 2

Interview schedule for group interviews with the children

Two group interviews were held with 7 children from my class in each group. Group one on the 8th and 9th April, for half an hour each day, 1.05-1.35p.m. Group two on the 10th and 11th April, for half an hour each day, 11.35-12.05 p.m.

Responses

- 1. Can you think of an example of when you have been independent/ responsible in school this year?**

Group 1

Carol: Bringing out the green bin.

Jasmine: When I went on a message, I think with Rory we went looking everywhere

Gary: When I went to colleague 1. and colleague 2's Junior Infants.

Hugh: When we were doing science and I got picked.

Jack: When I went to colleague 1's class.

Group 2

Celine: When I took out the bin.

Betty: When I took out the bin.

Bella: When I was being line leader because it's up to you that no one messes in the line that's behind you.

Dermot: When I was doing 'My Spelling Workbook' because when you're doing English stations and we're doing the spelling station we're on our own being independent and you're teaching other stations.

Katie: When I was holding May's hand. May's able to learn that she can't always be top of the line and she learns to share.

Celine: When I got to do a job by myself.

Emma: 'My Spelling Workbook' you do it by yourself.

Ethan: When I was doing English and writing station, doing iPads and making stories.

Dermot: Yesterday when I was doing my project with Gary, he was busy for a few minutes, so I had to get the scissors and glue and everything by myself.

2. Could you be more independent/ responsible in school? How?

Group 1

Sally: Yes, someone's in charge, whoever messes they write their name up on the board and they get an extra sheet for homework.

Jasmine: I thought of some jobs people could do. Like there's a lunch time monitor and maybe we could have a classroom monitor to write names on the board when you're out.

Carol: Yes, but I don't know how.

Group 2

Bella: I think we should be doing more solo projects.

Celine: Not really asking people for help like spellings just try it.

Dermot: Maybe if we're stuck on a word, we could try it on a whiteboard and you could fix it and not waste time.

Bella: Try to do the best you can.

3. What is the most difficult thing about working independently/ being responsible?

Group 1

Carol: When you're trying to do your work and someone beside you keeps talking.

Jack: When you write too hard and you can't rub it out.

Hugh: When you don't get your work done because sometimes when you're working the nib of the pencil breaks and you have to go off and sharpen it.

Gary: Having to help other people out on the iPads.

Mary: If someone's chatting like it's hard to do your work.

Jasmine: Helping someone when they don't listen.

Sally: If you're doing a maths test or something and you're stuck on an answer you can't ask other people because they're doing their work and you can't help them if they're stuck.

Mary: Or when someone asks you and you can't help them.

Group 2

Betty: When you're stuck on a word and you don't want to waste your teacher's time.

Katie: Not to talk.

Dermot: When you're trying to be independent and people are around you, you might get stuck on a question, but you can't ask them the answer.

Emma: When people are talking on the table and I kind of want to talk to them it's really hard not to.

Katie: Mostly at the spelling station you want to do it with somebody because it's hard like me and Ellen, we like to do the crosswords together, when we get to the word search, we like to challenge each other in a competition. You could get in trouble for talking.

Ethan: To not go to the toilet because it wastes your time and you won't get your project, or anything finished.

Celine: If you're not allowed talk and people ask you a question it's hard not to answer and it's hard when you're stuck, and you can't talk.

4. How do you feel when you are independent/ responsible?

Group 1

Gary: I feel good because I like it, no one's asking me any questions I can do my work alone.

Mary: You feel important because you get to do a job.

Hugh: Happy because you get your work done first.

Carol: Kind of happy, no one's chatting to you.

Jasmine: It can change every time you do it like today I had a really hard picture to do that was hard because there was a lot of colouring to do and that was me being independent and that was hard but when I have a project to do I like to be independent but when I have a project to do I like to be independent.

Sally: Happy because maybe the teacher will be happy with you and you might get a sticker.

Group 2

Ethan: Happy.

Dermot: Responsible.

Celine: Sometimes frustrated if you're on something difficult.

Betty: Excited.

Ethan: Bored because you might have too long to do something.

Katie: I agree with Ethan because sometimes you're not allowed out of your seat.

5. Why should we/should we not be independent and/or responsible?

Group 1

Carol: We should be because it's being responsible, good and not messing and working our self, giving you time to work.

Jack: I think we should because sometimes Ms. Z comes into our classroom and she says we're brilliant.

Hugh: Because you can trust us.

Gary: I think we should because if we keep messing it will waste your time.

Mary: Depends what you're doing because sometimes it's good to be independent and sometimes it's not.

Teacher: Okay, when would it not good to be independent/ responsible?

Mary: Because it's not if something's tricky, it's good to have help because then the next time you'll know how to do it.

Jasmine: Bit of both because there might be fighting.

Sophie: Yes, because if we weren't there would be a lot of messing.

Group 2

Bella: I think we should be independent because then we wouldn't be trusted to do anything if we we're able to be independent.

Emma: We should because if you weren't being responsible and you wanted ot do a job you wouldn't get to do it.

Ethan: I think you should be independent if you do the opposite you could get in trouble.

Katie: I think we should learn to be responsible as early as you can because when you're older you have to be able to make and do lots of things and you will be able to get a job and earn money. If you don't you won't have any money.

Betty: We should be independent because if you weren't independent you won't get your work done.

Celine: We should be independent.

Dermot: I think we should but with one other person if there's more than one there's too much fighting when me and Gary were working together he said we should do drawings and I said I'm not very good at drawing so he did them and I kept going with facts.

Bella: I think it's good to be independent and responsible in a group like we are doing our sea life project at the moment and we all have a part we want to learn about, so I think it's good.

6. What has been different about learning in Second Class to the other classes you've been in?

Cycle 1

Sally: It's a bit harder.

Jasmine: Like last year it's a bit more you have to get ready for second class. It's a bit harder to do your work and things. When you get into second class, you used to look up to people in second class you might be a bit worried because people are looking up to you.

Mary: We get to do more projects which it great.

Gary: It's more of a challenge. We do more work, it's a lot more fun because we do projects.

Hugh: Different. Because we're the oldest in the school.

Jack: It's odd.

Carol: I agree, it's a little bit harder.

Cycle 2

Katie: You let us be more independent, there's a worry box in other classes there hasn't been. You just make us feel independent. If there's people that aren't very friendly to each other, you put us beside each other, and we become friends.

Ethan: You let us do more jobs, like send messages and you let us bring messages to other people.

Dermot: Subjects have got harder like maths.

Celine: When I was younger Jasmine and me used to have fights now we've made friends.

Emma: Me and Celine used to always sit beside each other now we don't.

Betty: We learn Communion hymns.

Bella: We do more artwork.

Kaite: We get to do projects, it helps to learn to be independent like in partners you learn to share with that person and if you weren't friends you get to become better friends.

7. What changes have happened in our classroom?

Group 1

Jasmine: I'm trying to think of last year, it's different from last year. The way some of the teachers teach, say at the start of the year in religion now we do songs for the Communion. Like say in maths we do it differently now to the beginning of the year.

Mary: It hasn't happened yet but we're going to be getting two new girls in our class.

Carol: We have a timetable now and we do projects.

Jack: All the stuff we've been taking down.

Gary: The board.

Carol: The teacher, we changed places.

Mary: Em, CAPER we used to have four people, now we have two. The line leaders organise we put it on the list ourselves.

Hugh: The lunch bench.

Jack: We have the first two helping hands to clean it.

Mary: Our artwork.

Sally: We used to do maths in the classroom, now sometimes we go outside for maths.

Cycle 2

Bella: The worry box.

Betty: We've moved places, not always at the same table.

Celine: Line leader list, we make sure everyone has a go of being line leader.

Dermot: CAPER, we used to have CAPER librarians, now we just go around and tap the next person.

Katie: How kind we're being to each other. In first class we had best friends now you've said to us we shouldn't have best friends because it's not nice to be left out. You have to think what it would feel like if you were left out, like you just have to think what it's doing to the other person.

8. Has Ms. O'Dwyer changed her teaching? Can you give an example?

Group 1

Gary: Yes. Em, maths, we used to do problem solving Friday now we do stations and just do normal maths.

Jasmine: Now we just do fun maths.

Hugh: We do different golden time.

Jack: I don't think you've changed anything.

Jasmine: Now we're getting more of an outdoor class. We do lots of outdoor now, it's not a choice, almost every day we definitely go out. Even if there's no yard we go out for the run.

Group 2

Dermot: You've got stricter, you've got stricter since the first day of school. Well you have to do that.

Katie: I think the opposite. You've got kinder, you understand what it's like for us, you understand how we feel like in other classes that didn't happen. We didn't learn to be independent in any other class other than second class.

Celine: You're stricter with colouring.

Dermot: You're stricter with writing.

Bella: Now it's changed a lot, lots of things to do with Communion.

9. What do you do when a task is difficult?

Group 1

Jack: Just try your best.

Carol: Skip it and come back to it.

Gary: Figure it out and if it takes more than two minutes then move on.

Sally: Tell you for help.

Jasmine: Ask three then me but it's not me it's actually you.

Jack: You don't need to have the right answer.

Group 2

Dermot: Ask three then ask you.

Interviewer: Do you all agree?

All: Yes.

10. How does Ms. O'Dwyer help you with your work?

Group 1

Carol: You explain to us what to do.

Sally: Before we do our maths, you explain. You show us how to do one or two then we do it ourselves.

Jack: Sometimes you do the first one on the board.

Jasmine: Sometimes you say Gaeilge and show on the board.

Group 2

Dermot: Even today when we were doing our maths you were looking in my book and I was looking for a number and you showed me.

Bella: You tell us what to do so we're not like hmmm what do I do here?

Katie: You show us on the white board so we know what to do so you don't just tell us to do it like when we started tens and units subtraction I didn't have a clue but you were showing other children and I listened.

Celine: If we were stuck on a word you would help us.

Dermot: Before we start anything, you show us and give us examples.

Bella: You try to help us.

11. How do your classmates help you with your work?

Group 1

Mary: If you're stuck on a spelling, they'll tell you how to spell it.

Gary: They don't.

Jasmine: It's kind of like I said before. You ask three then Ms. O'Dwyer.

Carol: Same as Jamsine. Ask three then Ms. O'Dwyer.

Jack: Em, so, if you're doing 'My Spelling Workbook' and you asked colleague 4 and critical friend and they didn't know then you could ask your friends.

Mary: If they can't help and they say ask Ms. O'Dwyer.

Cycle 2

Bella: In the reading circle because sometimes I'm sitting beside children and they don't know the word, you help them.

Dermot: Sometimes in 'My Spelling Workbook' Gary helps me with the word search or crossword.

Ethan: When I was doing 'My Spelling Workbook' I didn't know what a word meant so Mary helped me and then I could do the work again.

Emma: Sometimes in the reading circle if you don't know a word your friend can help you.

Celine: Project work if I'm looking something up Emma helps me on an iPad or a book.

12. When do you do your best work? By yourself? In a pair? In a group? Why do you think this?

Group 1

Carol: In a pair because only two people in a group and if you have a fight no one will know and not that many people will get involved. Like one person when you're doing a project like me, I wouldn't get a project done on my own.

Jack: By myself if someone does it wrong, so you can do it right.

Hugh: Group. When you're stuck on something you can ask them. If it's really long you can all do a part.

Gary: Pair, if you're in a group this happened to me, I got no work done in a group with Jasmine and Rory they kept fighting and we couldn't get work done, in a pair less fighting.

Mary: Independent or in a pair.

Jasmine: It depends. I would rather be independent because there's not that many people.

Sally: Alone because you don't get in a fight and if you do get in a fight it might distract you.

Group 2

Betty: I think in a group because then we can help each other.

Ethan: In a pair because if you get stuck on a word, they can help you, if he's nice enough.

Dermot: In a pair with a friend, when I worked with Gary, he found a lot of facts.

Celine: In a pair. When I went with Emma, she helped me so I think it's much easier.

Bella: In a pair and on my own. When I'm on my own it's nice and quiet. In a pair your partner might show you some website that's really good.

Katie: In a pair because when I work with Mary on a project, she encourages me to not do it on an iPad. I rather do it on paper but when I'm by myself I can't stop myself doing it on an iPad because I just love iPads.

Emma: In a pair you can take turns but in groups you can start fighting.

13. Do you feel Ms. O'Dwyer listens to you when you have an idea? Why/why not?

Group 1

Gary: Yes, because you're answering us back.

Sally: Yes, because whenever we ask you a question, you answer.

Jasmine: Yes and no because sometimes you have your hand up and you don't get picked.

Hugh: Yes, because you are listening to us right now.

Jack: Yes, because what we say might not be silly.

Mary: Yes and no because sometimes we're bursting to tell you, but we have to do our work.

Carol: Yes and no, sometimes you pick us and sometimes you don't.

Group 2

Betty: I think you do because you might get an idea from the person.

Bella: Sometimes because in a circle you don't listen to everyone's ideas only someones.

Dermot: I don't really know my brain is telling me you're listening but you're looking at my iPad.

Kaite: Yea, but sometimes it doesn't really feel like it because sometimes you're on your laptop because MR. N told us you have to look at someone when you're listening to them.

14. Do you ever get to choose how you do your work? Can you give examples of when you've been given a choice in Ms. O'Dwyer's class.

Group 1

Carol: Homework.

Mary: Project work. You're allowed to do different things like do it on an iPad and things.

Jack: When I was taking a pencil grip.

Hugh: At golden time.

Jasmine: At golden time. No one is saying you have to do certain work, you're getting to choose.

Mary: You're not demanding.

Carol: You're actually a nice teacher.

Sally: When you put us in a pair, but we get to choose our pair.

Cycle 2

Celine: Yes, because sometimes we get to choose when we're doing a project we can choose if we do work on iPads or on paper.

Bella: Yes, because when we're doing stories, we can choose to do them on iPads or on paper.

Katie: Definitely because you basically say do exactly what you want to do.

Dermot: In golden time we're allowed to do projects on paper, use iPads, do activities, play games.

Celine: You get to choose.

15. What are the things teachers should know about how you learn/ learning?

Group 1

Carol: That I'm smart.

Jasmine: Don't be too nice to kids.

Gary: If there's a certain way you learn your teacher should know. I always do what you ask me to do.

Mary: I don't work well when teachers explain things on the board, I know already I just want to get on with it.

Jasmine: Maybe talk about how you're teaching and how you change the way you teach if we're wondering how to do it.

Group 2

Katie: I like to read books that are older that tell me about sad things sometimes.

Dermot: I like doing projects on a big piece of paper in a pair.

Bella: Sometimes it might take me a while to do something hard.

Celine: You know the way I don't really like working in groups, I don't like fighting.

Katie: It feels better when the teacher tells you to do something.